CHAPTER 3

Chronicles, Histories, and Letters

Jesse W. Torgerson and Mike Humphreys

What are the surviving historical and epistolary sources for Byzantine iconoclasm, and what are the problems with them? Cyril Mango's cautionary statement has aged well:

> the historian of Iconoclasm, like any other historian, has to work within the limits of his source of material. … we must, therefore, reconcile ourselves to the fact that this material is and will remain pretty scrappy, and that the inferences that may legitimately be drawn from it are necessarily limited.[1]

More recent scholarship has gone further, emphasizing our sources' constructed nature and often highly polemical stance towards the iconoclasts.[2] While endorsing that approach, this chapter will argue there is still a great deal left to discover by working with the materials that survive. There is need for creative re-reading, and even expansion of the apparent limits on "inferences that may legitimately be drawn." But to honestly answer the initial question we must first be honest about where "the problems" come from. Many of our problems arise because we would like the sources to do something that they do not do, or only do problematically. That is, in the present case we would like the sources to tell us *about iconoclasm*. What actually happened, when, where, why, by whom, and to whom? But this is not really what these sources set out to do. How, then, should a scholar make responsible arguments about the history of the iconoclast controversy from such sources as still survive?

1 Cyril Mango, "Historical Introduction," in *Iconoclasm*, ed. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham: 1977), 1–6, 6.

2 This is a recurring theme of Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Period (ca. 680–850): The Sources* (Aldershot: 2001), and *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: A History* (Cambridge: 2011). These in turn are highly influenced by the copious works of Marie-France Auzépy—see, inter alia, *L'histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris: 2007) —and especially Paul Speck; see, inter alia, *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen: Die Legenden vom Enfluss des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus* (Bonn: 1990). For a more traditionally empiricist account of the relevant historical texts see Warren Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke: 2013).

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Furthermore, beyond the particular ideological problems of our sources for Byzantine iconoclasm, there are the problems common to reading *all* ancient things. When we encounter a source in a critical edition or modern translation we tend to see this as *the* text, the unfiltered work of a particular author at a particular time. What we actually possess, and what the Byzantines really read, were manuscripts, material realia that were copied and recopied over centuries. In each manuscript the "text" is different, both in content and the context of what else was in that manuscript. Ideally, every text should be read through the lens of each of its manuscripts.[3]

Moreover, every text is written within and shaped by a genre. By genre we refer to shared "markers" which can "distinguish one type of communication from another."[4] Genre is an indelibly social act of communication that occurs when a reader encounters a text in time and space as a historical-material phenomenon.[5] Genre, thus, involves historical description of the way categories of texts operated and were perceived in their world. How a text was written and read differed depending on whether it presents itself as a chronicle, history, or letter. Texts are also fundamentally shaped by their mode of transmission. For instance, how one reads a letter is shaped by whether it survives on its own, as part of a collection, or embedded in another sort of text.

Given the constraints of space, this chapter cannot provide detailed commentary for every chronicle, history, and letter produced in the period. Rather, we shall set out the overall problems of each genre, and then describe and comment upon those texts that have been fundamental to scholarship on Byzantine iconoclasm. However, each section shall conclude with a more in-depth examination of a particular text or moment from a text, offering a reading that demonstrates the problems of interpretation that face a scholar of the subject, and how careful attention to the material reality and generic context can help.

1 Chronicles and Chronographies

It is not news to note that historical sources from our period are primarily chronicles and chronographies, which organize their historical material under

3 For an excellent example of this approach, see Stratis Papaioannou, "Byzantine *Historia*," in Kurt Raaflaub (ed.), *Thinking, Recording, and Writing History in the Ancient World*, (Chichester: 2014), 297–313, 303–6.

4 Ralph Cohen and John Rowlett, *Genre Theory and Historical Change* (Charlottesville: 2017), 86.

5 John Frow, *Genre* (London: 2006).

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year-by-year headings. However, it is a new claim to state that the dominance of this genre matters for how we read our sources: Byzantinists largely acknowledge the above point only to make little of it.[6] Such nonchalance is worrisome. It very nearly implies the Byzantines were not fully self-aware, using the title "chronicle" when they meant "history."[7] Alternatively, our discussion begins with the assumption that the Byzantines were fully aware of the nature and implications of *historia*, and chose instead to write and work primarily within the generic landscape of *chronikon*.[8] What should we make of this choice?

First, chronography or chronicle-writing is not a uniquely medieval genre but a continuous practice from antiquity.[9] When authors of the 8th and 9th centuries entitled a chronicle, they were situating that work within centuries of incremental generic development.[10] Second, chronography did not only dominate historical writing in Greek during this period, but also historical writing in Arabic and Latin. Acknowledging this shared phenomenon allows us to pursue important comparative questions and contextualize our readings.[11]

Third, we should approach these sources with caution. Chronicles—however we might want to define them—were ubiquitous in 8th- and 9th-century Byzantium but are all but absent from 21st-century historical

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6 Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 165–67, asserts that whether a work is entitled "chronicle" or "history" matters little to how we actually *read* texts: "… the distinction between 'history' and 'chronicle,' or, more exactly between 'annals' and 'chronicles' … is of little value except in the crudest terms."

7 Ann Christys has similarly argued for retaining indigenous nomenclature in her analysis of Arabic texts, for otherwise we find ourselves inventing "a category that their authors would not have recognized, for even the designation 'history' (*ta'rīkh*) is anachronistic." Ann Christys, "Universal Chronicles in Arabic before c. 900," *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015), 61–70.

8 For the importance of genre in shaping how medieval scholars wrote and interpreted different forms of history, see Justin Lake, "Current Approaches to Medieval Historiography," *History Compass* 13 (2015), 89–109.

9 Richard Burgess and Michael Kulikowski have argued that examples of a consistent chronicle genre persist from Babylonian tablets to our 9th-century Byzantine chronicles: Richard Burgess and Michael Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time: The Latin Chronicle Tradition from the First Century BC to the Sixth Century AD: Volume I. A Historical Introduction to the Chronicle Genre from Its Origins to the High Middle Ages* (Turnhout: 2013).

10 For discussion on whether medieval chronicles should be read in comparison to a static generic definition, or as the latest instantiation of a continually modified one, see Torgerson's review article on Burgess and Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time*, and the authors' response: Jesse Torgerson, "Could Isidore's Chronicle Have Delighted Cicero? Using the Concept of Genre to Compare Ancient and Medieval Chronicles," *Medieval Worlds* 3 (2016), 65–82; and Richard Burgess and Michael Kulikowski, "Could Isidore's Chronicle Have Delighted Cicero? A Response," *Medieval Worlds* 5 (2017), 46–53.

11 Maria Mavroudi and Simon Franklin, "Byzantino-Slavica and Byzantino-Arabica: Possibilities and Problems of Comparison," *Byzantinoslavica* 65 (2007), 51–67.

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literature.[12] Since we so rarely produce texts in this genre, we cannot claim to possess an intuitive sense of what the Byzantines meant chronicles to do. As Ian Wood recently summarized concerning study of early medieval Latin chronicles, when scholars read these texts too much from the lens of "history," we miss the centrality of the very concept of time itself to what these works sought to communicate.[13] When we read a medieval chronicle we tend to see it as encyclopaedic in nature: a collection of "facts" in order of occurrence. For us, the organizing principles of time and chronology are given, not constructed. We see chronology as simply providing a stable order for a universal reckoning of "years" in which "facts happen." But Byzantines and other medieval and ancient authors do not seem to have viewed chronographies in this way, for to compose a new chronography was to make the amorphous past into years, to actively construct the annual sequences which we take for granted as a stable historical time. By starting from the advent of the material universe, chronicles made the very activity of reckoning time a central outcome of the work.[14]

How does this apply to our goal of establishing the facts about iconoclasm? To produce *our* historical facts we must attune ourselves to what we are reading, bringing our own agendas to these texts with caution, for the Byzantines did not write chronicles to provide us with "facts" about anything. We need to pay close attention to the appearance, context, and self-descriptions of these works.[15] If in practice their generic designations turn out to be a rather loose, it nevertheless does not follow that because "chronicle" or "chronography" is a capacious genre, entitling a work as such is a null-value communicative act. Giving credence to the Byzantines' generic choices reminds us that people of the past were not interested in answering the same questions about the past as we are. As we will see, investigating how and why chronicles were crafted allows us to open up wider spectrums for historical study by contextualizing our "facts" within the political or "social logic" of these texts.[16]

12 Forms comparable to the chronicle are utilized today when attempting to represent the history of the universe, such as in Wilson Alvarez' *Chronozoom*. http://www.chronozoom.com/.

13 Ian Wood, "Universal Chronicles in the Early Medieval West," *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015), 47–60.

14 Jesse Torgerson, "Time and Again: Early Medieval Chronography and the Recurring Holy First-Created Day of George Synkellos," in Nancy van Deusen and Leonard Michael Koff (eds.), *Time: Sense, Space, Structure*, (Leiden: 2016), 18–57.

15 See, and compare: "Historiography" and "Chronicle" in Alexander Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: 1991).

16 Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography.* (Baltimore: 1999).

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1.1 *Theophanes and George the Synkellos*

By far the most important source for the period 602–813 is what is usually called the *Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor.[17] Theophanes was born to a rich family and his father served under the iconoclast Constantine V. In ca. 780 Theophanes abandoned his budding secular career, instead founding a monastery in Bithynia and becoming its abbot. A committed iconophile, he refused to submit to the reintroduction of iconoclasm in 815, was arrested, and died in prison. Due to this, and above all to his hugely influential and distinctly anti-iconoclast *Chronicle*, Theophanes was celebrated as an iconophile martyr, a Confessor for the faith.[18]

While most scholars are content with attributing the *Chronicle* to the historical figure of Theophanes the Confessor, questions about this attribution remain.[19] It is without debate, however, that regardless of who he was, the *Chronicle* was not conceived by Theophanes. Rather, the *Chronicle* is the latter part of the *Chronography*, a world or "universal" chronicle planned by George, a monk and former *synkellos*—a very high-ranking advisor to the patriarch. From this point forward we will use the title *Chronography* to refer to the combined work of both authors.

We know far less about George than we do about Theophanes.[20] George was either born in Syria-Palestine or spent time there. As a *synkellos* he would have been well-educated and connected. He served Tarasios, the patriarch who presided over the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, underscoring the connection between this work and the iconophile cause. Possibly George was exiled in 808 for conspiring against Nikephoros I, maybe even to Theophanes' monastery. Around this point he began compiling his *Chronography*, but on his deathbed in ca. 810–13 he had only completed the project up to 283/84.[21] There is little else that can definitively be said about George.

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17 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. Carolus de Boor, 2 vols (Leipzig: 1883–85). Volume 1 is translated into English in Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor* (Oxford: 1997). Volume 2 is the Latin version of Theophanes produced in ca. 871–74 in Rome by Anastasius Bibliothecarius. Given Theophanes' importance, the scholarly literature is understandably vast. For a starting point, see Marek Jankowiak and Federico Montinaro, *Studies in Theophanes*, TM 19 (Paris: 2015) and Leonora Neville, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing* (Cambridge: 2018), 61–71.

18 For biographical details and their sources, see Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 63–67.

19 Constantin Zuckerman, "*Theophanes* the Confessor and *Theophanes the Chronicler*, Or, A Story of Square Brackets," TM 19 (2015), 31–52.

20 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 38–51.

21 George the Synkellos, *Chronography*, ed. Alden Mosshammer, *Ecloga Chronographica* (Leipzig: 1984); trans. William Adler and Paul Tuffin, *The Chronography of George Synkellos* (Oxford: 2002). For a starting point, see Neville, *Historical Writing*, 56–60.

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What is clear from the *Chronography* is that George's aim was to create a narrative from Creation to his present, organized by reckoning the *Annus Mundi*. The *Annus Mundi* ("Year of the World") chronological system ran from Creation, which was dated in George's computation to the equivalent of 25 March 5492 B.C.[22] According to the *Preface* of Theophanes, George entrusted Theophanes—his "good friend" (γνήσιος φίλος)—with the project's completion, though the exact form of the *Chronography* which George bequeathed to Theophanes remains an open question.[23] Scholars largely agree that Theophanes made his final additions at some point between the last entry on the accession of Leo V in 813, but before Leo's reintroduction of iconoclasm in 815, for this staunchly iconophile text has nothing but praise for the iconoclast emperor.

This complex genesis has left scholars with many interpretative difficulties. The first is the modern practice of reading George and Theophanes' contributions separately, reflected in the fact they have separate critical editions and English translations. However, the manuscript tradition makes clear that Byzantines usually read the *Chronography* as a single work.[24] Exactly how this context affected the narrative of iconoclasm is as yet unclear. It does, however, reinforce just how much George/Theophanes were concerned with time. Apart from the rigid adherence to the *Annus Mundi* architecture, most manuscripts contain an elaborate rubric under each *AM* date listing the regnal years of the Roman emperor, the Persian shah and then the caliphs, and (far less completely) the five patriarchs. Despite, or perhaps because, of such dedication to chronological exactitude, many events are not placed under the correct *AM* date. Indeed, Theophanes systematically dates events one *AM* entry too early from 609/10–684/85 and 725/26–772/73. Fortunately, Theophanes often includes an indiction date, a 15-year cycle beginning 1 September and linked to the tax system, which is usually to be preferred to the *AM* date.[25] Most such errors have now been shown to be the remnants of Theophanes' significant achievement: to place a variety of sources that employed different dating

22 For the various systems of universal annual reckoning used over the course of the Byzantine period see: Venance Grumel, *Traité d'études byzantines, Vol I: La Chronologie* (Paris: 1958).

23 Marek Jankowiak, "Framing Universal History: Syncellus' Canon and Theophanes' Rubrics," *TM* 19 (2015), 53–72.

24 Filippo Ronconi, "La première circulation de la 'Chronique de Théophane': Notes paléographiques et codicologiques," *TM* 19 (2015), 121–148; Torgerson, "From the Many, One? The Shared Manuscripts of the *Chronicle* of Theophanes and the *Chronography* of Synkellos" *TM* 19 (2015), 93–120.

25 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, lxiii-lxxiv; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 75–76.

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systems (if they gave precise dates at all) into a strict *Annus Mundi* framework while avoiding the "major chronological discrepancies that would have invalidated his chronological framework."[26] However, as we shall see below some "misdating" is better read as deliberate, serving a specific narrative purpose.

Considerable scholarship has been devoted to the problem of delineating the extent to which George rather than Theophanes was responsible for the entirety of the text.[27] Fortunately for the historian of iconoclasm, it makes little difference which was more responsible. Both were iconophiles, whose text in part sought to demonstrate how orthodox rulers prospered and heretics were punished. Both were monks and belonged to a privileged echelon of Byzantine society. Thus, it is not surprising that the iconoclasts are blasted for their ignorance, while they were resisted by monks and men "prominent by birth and culture."[28] The *Chronography* was also written in a particular and relatively short timeframe, ca. 808–13, that is right at the end of the iconophile intermission. This might explain why it contains more detail and invective against the iconoclasts than the other prime source for first iconoclasm, namely the *Short History* of Nikephoros probably composed in the 780s, despite clearly sharing many of the same sources. Most obviously, the Isaurian dynasty was no more and so there was no downside to attacking it. Moreover, revisionists argue that a flurry of anti-iconoclast stories developed during the intermission that George/Theophanes could add to the balder narrative of Nikephoros, such as the story of the destruction of the Chalke icon. Finally, George/Theophanes were writing during a period of political turmoil and military defeat that was undermining the legitimacy of icon-veneration as a path to divine favour. Notably, one of the last events recorded in the *Chronography* is of iconoclasts praying at the tomb of Constantine V to "Arise and help the State that is perishing!"[29] The political status quo that had arisen after the iconophile victory in 787 was clearly under threat. Both George and Theophanes were keen to undercut the iconoclasts by presenting Leo III and Constantine V in as unflattering a light as possible.

26 Jankowiak, "Framing Universal History," 72.

27 Most recently: Andrzej Kompa, "In search of Syncellus' and Theophanes' Own Words: The authorship of the *Chronographia* Revisited." *TM* 19 (2015), 73–92; and Andrzej Kompa, "Gnesioi Filoi: The Search for George Syncellus' and Theophanes the Confessor's Own Words, and the Authorship of Their Oeuvre," *Studia Ceranea* 5 (2015), 155–230. See also: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, xliii-lxiii; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 38–77.

28 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 405, trans. Mango and Scott, 560.

29 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 501, trans. Mango and Scott, 684.

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Nevertheless, for all the *Chronography*'s invective against the Isaurian emperors, its denunciation of the iconophile Nikephoros I (r. 802–811) is even more implicitly vitriolic, depicting that emperor as a new coming of the Egyptian Pharaoh of Exodus. We must keep in mind that such prominent figures as George and Theophanes would also have been fully invested in more recent political upheavals, none of which split on iconophile vs. iconoclast lines. Those which the *Chronography* itself takes a stance on include: the Moechian controversy of the 790s, the controversial election of Patriarch Nikephoros I (r. 806–815), and the failed revolt of the *quaestor* Arsaber against emperor Nikephoros I in 808, which revolt the *Chronography* presents in a very favorable light.

While the question of the *Chronography*'s authorship might make little difference to the scholar of iconoclasm, the extent to which either George or Theophanes merely reproduced their sources, many of which are now lost, does significantly affect interpretation. Many detect a light editorial hand, Treadgold declaring that "even more than most Byzantine Chronicles, Theophanes' *Chronography* is a pastiche of its sources."[30] Unfortunately, because so much of his source-base is lost any interpretation of whether what appears in the *Chronography* is the work of Theophanes, George, or the source they were excerpting from can never be more than educated guesswork. On the other hand, although only preserved in a text composed ca. 808–13, much of the text was created earlier and closer to the events it purports to record, which for some increases its reliability.[31] At the very least it is clear there was some re-editing, re-arrangement, and above all selection of material.[32] This was inevitable if for no other reason than trying to fit material into the *Annus Mundi* structure.[33] Moreover, the sources available to George/Theophanes did not of themselves create a neat, coherent narrative. The authors had to make choices in what to select and how to include it. In each case historians must make their own decisions about whether details and rhetoric are more the creation of these sources than George/Theophanes.

Take for instance the presentation of Leo III. When he first appears defending Constantinople in 717 Leo is described as "the pious emperor."[34] Yet noting

30 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 68.

31 See for instance Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 17–27.

32 Jakov Ljubarskij, "*Concerning the Literary Technique* of *Theophanes* the Confessor," *Byzantinoslavica* 56 (1995), 317–22; Alexander Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature, I: 650–850* (Athens: 1999), 205–34.

33 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, lxxiv-xcv; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 68–75.

34 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 396, trans. Mango and Scott, 545.

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the birth of Constantine V in 718 suddenly Leo was "the impious emperor," the father of the even more impious Constantine, whose future heresy was foretold by his defecating in his own baptismal font.[35] One solution for this sudden shift would have Theophanes mechanically copying his sources. The long-noted frequently close concordance between Theophanes and Nikephoros' *Short History* is proof that both used a common Byzantine source covering the period 668–ca. 720, identified by some as the work of Trajan the Patrician. This is supposed to have been a pro-Leo text composed before iconoclasm, hence being able to describe Leo as "pious." It was then continued, perhaps up to ca. 780, by an iconophile.[36] Perhaps this iconophile continuation actually began here, and included the "impious" description? An almost identical line sans the attack for impiety is found in Nikephoros, who also does not include the story of Constantine befouling the font.[37] Did Theophanes relate the full story, while Nikephoros' more concise and less strident account only offered the bare facts? Or was the original text essentially that relayed by Nikephoros to which Theophanes added the "impious" tag and the moralizing tale? If so, was the "pious" description a deliberate contrast, Leo III wining victories when he was orthodox, while condemned as "impious" as a foreshadow of his and his son's future iconoclasm?

The *Chronography* of George and Theophanes is for all these reasons a difficult text. Yet it remains our single most important source. Indeed, it more than any other text set the historical understanding of the period, not only for modern scholars, but for subsequent generations of Byzantines.

1.2 *The Successors of George the Synkellos and Theophanes*

Another "universal chronicle" following in the mould of George and Theophanes is that of George the Monk, running from Creation till the restoration of icons in 843.[38] Mostly composed under the reign of Michael III (842–67), it was probably finished after 867 or 870.[39] George's style is generally denigrated, along with his factual accuracy. Largely reliant on Theophanes for the 7th and 8th centuries, George is even more vituperative towards the iconoclasts.

35 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 399–400, trans. Mango and Scott, 551.

36 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, lxxxvii-lxviii; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 17–27.

37 Nikephoros, *Short History*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango (Washington, DC: 1990), 56.

38 George the Monk, *Chronicle*, ed. Carolus de Boor and Peter Wirth, *Georgii Monachi Chronicon* (Stuttgart: 1978). For overviews of the text, see Dmitry Afingonev, "The Date of *Georgios Monachos* Reconsidered," *BZ* 92 (1999), 437–47; Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 172–73; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 114–120; Neville, *Byzantine Historical Writing*, 87–92.

39 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 115–116.

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Nevertheless, George's account is the only directly transmitted, relatively contemporary account of the whole Second Iconoclast period. Indeed, iconoclasm shaped his text directly, the entire history of the world emplotted to conclude with the Triumph of Orthodoxy. George writes from a monastic perspective, but not that of the important Studite monastery in Constantinople. Though clearly not as influential as Theophanes, the large number of surviving manuscripts speaks to George's relatively substantial readership.[40]

Apart from George, our principal sources of historical information for the period of Second Iconoclasm and its aftermath are four continuators of Theophanes, namely Symeon *Logothetes* (or *Magistros*),[41] Pseudo-Symeon Magistros,[42] Joseph Genesios,[43] and Theophanes Continuatus.[44] All were written from a much later perspective, that of the mid-to-late-10th-century Macedonian dynasty, during a period when iconoclasm had become a largely settled part of Byzantine historical memory, remembered and condemned as an imperial heresy. All four start where Theophanes left off, namely the reign of Leo V the Armenian. Furthermore, all four texts stand in close and complex relation to each other.[45] Most relevant for the history of Second Iconoclasm is the general scholarly agreement that the works of George the

40 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 490 lists 20 complete manuscripts and 33 fragments.

41 The text exists in two versions. Judging from the manuscripts, the distinctly more popular version is edited by Staffan Wahlgren, *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae chronicon*, CFHB 44.1 (Berlin: 2006). For Version B one is still reliant on Immanuel Bekker, *Leonis Grammatici Chronographia* (Bonn: 1842), 3–331. Apart from the critical edition, see Warren Treadgold, "The Chronological Accuracy of the Chronicle of Symeon the Logothete for the Years 813–845," *DOP* 33 (1979), 157–97.

42 Edited as "Symeon Magister" in Immanuel Bekker, *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus*, CSHB 43 (Bonn: 1838), 603–760. See also Francois Halkin, "Le règne de Constantin d'après la chronique inédite du Pseudo-Syméon," *Byzantion* 29–30 (1959–60), 11–27.

43 Joseph Genesios, *On the Reigns of Emperors*, ed. Annie Lesmueller-Werner and Hans Thurn, *Iosephi Genesii Regum Libri Quatuor* (Berlin: 1978); trans. Anthony. Kaldellis, *Genesios on the Reigns of the Emperors* (Canberra: 1998). See also Athanasios Markopoulos, "Genesios: A Study," in. Sofia Kotzabassi and Giannis Mavromatis (eds.), *Realia Byzantina* (Berlin: 2009), 137–150.

44 Edited and translated Michael Featherstone and Juan Signes-Codoñer, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur Libri I-IV* (Berlin: 2015). See also Juan Signes-Codoñer, "The Author of *Theophanes Continuatus* I-IV and the Historical Excerpts of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus," in Laszlo Horvath und Erika Juhasz (eds.), *Investigatio Fontium II: Griechische und lateinische Quellen mit Erläuterungen* (Budapest: 2017), 17–42.

45 On the relationship between these, the precise and clear discussion in Featherstone and Codoñer, *Chronographiae*, 20*-28*, is essential.

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Monk, Pseudo-Symeon, and Symeon the Logothete all drew upon some kind of historical "epitome" covering the period from Leo V's accession in 813 to Theophilos' death in 842. The information provided by all four continuators should be compared to that of the 11th-century *Synopsis Historion* of John Skylitzes.[46] This is because Skylitzes appears to have had access to versions of either the "Common Source" that all four drew upon, or better manuscript versions of the four than those that survive today.[47]

Another important 9th-century work is the so-called *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio*, the "unidentified writer on Leo [V] the Armenian." This abruptly begins in December 811 and breaks off in February 816. Clearly penned by an iconophile, it has become probably the most important text for the rise of Leo V and the reintroduction of iconoclasm. Crucially, it contains details unknown to Theophanes or his continuators, the latter of whom do not seem to have been aware of the *Scriptor*'s existence. It thus provides an independent account of this critical period. Another fragment that probably comes from the same chronicle describes Nikephoros I's disastrous campaign against the Bulgars in 811, the shock of which was a major factor in the return of iconoclasm.[48]

1.3 *Syriac and Arabic Chronicles*

While Byzantinists of all eras gain from studying sources produced beyond Byzantium, the particular difficulties of the iconoclast period make this a necessity. In the realm of chronicles that means especially engaging with those produced in the Caliphate, mostly in Syriac. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that the Syriac historiographical tradition is as well preserved—and in many senses better preserved—than the Greek.[49] In variety and scope of

46 Hans Thurn (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, CFHB 5 (Berlin: 1973) (Berlin: 1973); trans. John Wortley, *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811–1057* (Cambridge: 2010).

47 Featherstone and Codoñer, *Chronographiae*, 20*-28*.

48 Francesca Iadevaia, *Scriptor Incertus* (2nd ed., Messina: 1997). We await the updated edition of Athanasios Markopoulos, *Scriptor Incertus de Leo Armenio* (Berlin: forthcoming). See Athanasios Markopoulos, "La Chronique de l'an 811 et le *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio*: Problèmes des relations entre l'hagiographie et l'histoire," *Revue des études byzantines* 57 (1999), 255–62.

49 Scott Johnson and Jack Tannous maintain an annotated bibliography on Syriac studies at the website syri.ac, hosted by the University of Oklahoma. See also Sebastian Brock, "Syriac Historical Writing: A Survey of the Main Sources," *Journal of the Iraq Academy, Syriac Corporation* 5 (1979), 1–30; Robert Hoyland "Arabic, Syriac, and Greek Historiography in the First Abbasid Century: An Inquiry into Inter-Cultural Traffic," *ARAM* 3 (1991), 211–33; and Maria Conterno, "Christian Arabic Historiography at the Crossroads between the Byzantine, the Syriac, and the Islamic Traditions," in Aaron Butts and Robin

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contemporary voices it is richer than the Greek texts in its coverage of the 8th century. Moreover, while inevitably more detailed about events in the Near East, their notices on Byzantium are far from negligible. And the overall picture of the Isaurian emperors in particular is notably different from our Byzantine sources. Take for instance the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, composed in 775/76 in the monastery of the same name in northern Mesopotamia.[50] This has a very positive message about Leo III and Constantine V, the former called "courageous, strong, and warlike" as well as "of Syrian extraction."[51] Not only does their iconoclasm not bother the author, it is not even mentioned. The only iconoclast ruler is Yazid II.[52]

The most influential Syriac chronicle, however, is no longer extant. Indeed, of the many now lost works referred to in our surviving sources, none were as influential as the *Chronicle* of Theophilos of Edessa.[53] Composed in the mid-to-late-8th century, it provided an account of events, largely in the Near East, up to ca. 750. Although lost, an indication of what it said can be gained from a comparison of events given in the four chronicles most indebted to it, namely by the Greek Theophanes, the Arabic Agapius of Manbij (fl. 940s),[54] and two Syriac chronicles by Michael the Syrian (d. 1199),[55] and the *Chronicle of 1234*,[56] who were both also relying on the chronicle of Dionysius of Telmahre (d. 845). Robert Hoyland has gathered and translated these notices, and although the

Darling Young (eds.), *Syriac Christian Culture: Beginnings to Renaissance* (Washington DC: 2020).

50 Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum* I & II, CSCO 91 and 104 (Louvain: 1927–33); trans. Amir Harrak: *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn Parts I and II: From the Creation to the Year 506/7 AD* (Piscataway, NJ: 2017).

51 Harrak, *Zuqnīn*, 151.

52 Harrak, *Zuqnīn*, 155.

53 There has been a flourishing of recent work on Theophilos. The starting point is Robert Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: 2011). For a more limited take on Theophilos as a source for Theophanes, see Maria Conterno, "Theophilos, 'the more likely candidate'? Towards a reappraisal of the question of Theophanes' Oriental source(s)," *TM* 19 (2015), 383–400; and "Historiography across the Borders: The Case of the Islamic Material in Theophanes' *Chronographia*," in Hagit Amirav and István Perczel (eds.), *Christian Historiography Between the Empires (4th to 8th centuries)* (Leuven: 2019).

54 Agapius, *History*, ed. A. A. Vasiliev, 'Kitab al-'Unvan: Histoire universelle écrite part Agapius (Mahboub) de Menbidj', Part 2.2, *Patrologia Orientalis* 8 (1912).

55 Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *La Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche*, 4 vols (Paris: 1889–1924); trans. Robert Bedrosian, *The Chronicle of Michael the Great, Patriarch of the Syrians* (Long Branch, NY: 2013).

56 *Chronicle to 1234*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad A.C. 1234 pertinens*, CSCO 81 and 82 (Paris: 1916–20), and Albert Abouna, CSCO 354 (Louvain: 1974).

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reconstructed text of Theophilos can never be more than hypothetical, this provides a handy comparison and English translation of large portions of these four significant texts, covering the period 590–767. What is notable for the scholar of Byzantium is the good press the Isaurians generally receive in Agapius, Michael the Syrian, and the *Chronicle of 1234*, in marked contrast to Theophanes. Moreover, the issue of Byzantine iconoclasm in particular has distinctly less saliency, though both its origins under Leo III and the convocation of Hiereia in 754 are mentioned.[57] This divergence reflects not only the different editorial choices of these authors, but also those of the Greek translator of Theophilos, who also extended the text up until 780. Indeed, it has been plausibly suggested that the translator was none other than George Synkellos, who either came from Palestine or spent time there.[58]

1.4 *Case Study: The Latins and the Origins of Iconoclasm in the Chronography*

The historical origins of Byzantine iconoclasm are, of course, a matter for continuous debate. If there is one moment in Theophanes that can be said to be the "start" of iconoclasm, it is the story of Leo III ordering (in the aftermath of the eruption of Thera) the removal of the icon from above the Chalke gate to the palace, usually preserved under the entry for *Annus Mundi* 6218, i.e. 725–26 A.D. Scholars have demonstrated reasons to doubt whether this event ever took place.[59] We are not concerned here with the historical reality of this famous moment. Rather, we shall focus on how Theophanes (more particularly the different manuscript traditions) locate this event within the narrative in order to frame the moment and so give it meaning.

To begin with, the information contained under this one *Annus Mundi* year includes material from indictions 9 (725/26) and 10 (726/27).[60] Whether intended or not, this has the result of embedding the singular action of removing the Chalke icon into an extended narrative of destruction, resistance, and persecution, including the purportedly iconophile revolt in Hellas and the Cyclades, and the Arab siege of Nicaea, where an errant soldier was supposedly killed by the Virgin for destroying one of her icons.

57 Hoyland, *Theophilus*, 224–25, 292–93.
58 Hoyland, *Theophilus*, 10.
59 Marie-France Auzépy, "La destruction de l'icône du Christ de la Chalcé par Léon III: Propagande ou réalité?" *Byzantion* 40 (1990), 445–92; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 128–35.
60 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 561, n. 2.

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Furthermore, while all manuscripts agree on the substantive content of this entry, the earliest Greek manuscripts do not actually date these events to the *Annus Mundi*.[61] The rubricated Greek manuscripts (i.e., the recension of *Wake Greek 5* and *VG 155*) use the tenth year of the Emperor Leo III to date the entry. The non-rubricated Greek manuscript (*PG 1710*) simply heads the entry with the formulaic phrase "in this year." This leads to a subtle but nonetheless interesting point. The start of iconoclasm in Theophanes is "dated" in both Greek recensions by indiction and Leo's reign, not in terms of a year of the world or of the incarnation. In other words, 9th-century chronographers thought of this event in terms of when it occurred in the Emperor Leo's reign. In a sense, the first iconoclast acts were plotted outside the timeline of the world proceeding from Creation and were rather the offshoot of a heretical emperor. In what follows we will, nevertheless, continue the established practice of referring to entries in the *Chronography* by the *Annus Mundi* under which they are placed in scholarly editions and translations.

Another key way the Chalke icon incident was framed is in the material immediately preceding it. The first mention of any form of iconoclasm comes under *AM* 6215, or 722/23 A.D. There one finds the fantastical story that the Caliph Yazid II instituted iconoclasm within the Caliphate on the urgings of a Jewish magician.[62] The reader is thus primed to associate iconoclasm with Jews and Muslims, the enemies of the Church. Should we fail to take the point, we are told "the emperor Leo partook of the same error, a grievous and illicit one."[63] This version of the origins of Byzantine iconoclasm first circulated at Nicaea, though there Leo is not mentioned, the blame falling entirely on Constantine of Nakoleia.[64]

Probably thanks to Theophilus of Edessa, Theophanes also had access to another account of iconoclasm's origins, which dated it ca. 724–26. This is the version in Agapius:

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61 We possess three major early transmissions of the *Chronicle*, all of which are from the last half of the 9th century (that is, between 35 and 85 years from the date at which it seems to have been first completed): two in Greek and one in Latin. These three versions would be: (1) a Greek version of the *Chronicle* dated to around 842–875 and exemplified by the manuscript *PG 1710* alone; (2) a Latin version of the *Chronicle* dated to around 870 and exemplified by the manuscript *Pal. Lat. 826*; and, (3) a second Greek version of the *Chronicle* dated to around 870–900 and exemplified by the manuscripts *Wake Greek 5* and *Vat. Gr. 155*.

62 For the evolution of this story, evidently designed to discredit the iconoclasts, see Speck, *Ich bin's nicht*.

63 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 402, trans. Mango and Scott, 555.

64 *Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea*, ed. Erich Lamberz, *ACO* 2.3, 3 vols (Berlin: 2008–16), 594.

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> Leo ordered the images of the martyrs to be effaced from churches, residences and monasteries. When Gregory, patriarch of Rome, learned of that, he was angry and forbade the inhabitants of Rome and Italy to pay Leo taxes.[65]

Theophanes placed a different version under AM 6217:

> This year the impious emperor Leo started making pronouncements about the removal of the holy and venerable icons. When Gregory, the Pope of Rome, had been informed of this, he withheld the taxes of Italy and of Rome and wrote to Leo a doctrinal letter to the effect that the emperor ought not to make pronouncements concerning the faith nor to alter the ancient doctrines of the Church which had been defined by the holy Fathers.[66]

Leo III is now explicitly branded as "impious." "Images of martyrs" has become (all?) "the holy and venerable icons." Pope Gregory (II) not only withholds Italy's taxes, he also reproves Leo through a letter which establishes icon veneration as an ancient doctrine defined by the fathers. Moreover, to fit with the narrative that iconoclast action began in AM 6218, in AM 6217 Leo only "started making pronouncements" (λόγον ποιεῖσθαι), rather than explicitly ordering the removal of icons.

There are a number of slippery details in Theophanes' account.[67] Most regard the letters supposedly sent by Gregory II to Leo as early 9th-century forgeries.[68] If so, this would be an example of Theophanes embroidering one source with another fictitious one, though that is not to say that Theophanes did not believe the letters to be genuine. Even if the letters did exist in some earlier form, they cannot on internal evidence have been written earlier than 732, and so could not have been sent in 724/25. Furthermore, the *Liber Pontificalis* makes it clear that the tax revolt happened before any imperial demands concerning iconoclasm. Theophanes also conflates Gregory II and III. Judged as a repository of "facts," Theophanes scores lowly. However, Theophanes seems to have been doing something else. By incorporating all these elements into his story Theophanes gave a full political context to his condemnation of the

65 Agapius, *History*, 506, trans. Hoyland, *Theophilos*, 225.
66 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 404, trans. Mango and Scott, 55.
67 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 559, nn. 2–3.
68 Jean Gouillard, "Aux origines de l'iconoclasme: Le témoignage de Grégoire II?," TM 3 (1968), 243–307.

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iconoclasts. In the narrative of the *Chronography* it made sense for the withholding of Roman and Italian taxation to come about as a result of imperial declarations against icons, for the popes would stand up against both.

The final element in this framing is also the most complex, for the manuscripts offer two very different versions of events in *AM* 6216 (A.D. 723/24), the entry which is set between Yazid's iconoclasm and Leo's. In both of the Greek manuscript traditions (followed by de Boor in his critical edition of 1883 and in Mango and Scott's translation of 1997) the entry for *AM* 6216 highlights the story of Pope Stephen I (752–57) fleeing from the Lombards to the Franks, and crowning Pippin—celebrated as victor of the battle of Poitiers over the Arabs—as the first Carolingian king of the Franks.

Quite oddly, and unremarked upon by scholars, the first line of the entry for *AM* 6216 in the Greek manuscripts begins with a phrase that is completely unique to the entire chronicle. Every other annual entry in the entire work begins with "In this year …" But here the text begins in the first person: "Now I come to speak. …" In all three of the earliest Greek manuscripts this odd beginning to the entry is also made to stand out palaeographically: it is written in one or more lines of majuscule script. No other entry in the entire work receives this treatment. Quite clearly, this entry has been modified. Before offering any further analysis of this sequence's appearance in the manuscripts, or any interpretation of the text, let us examine the alternative. The Latin version of the *Chronography*—the ca. 870 translation by Anastasius Bibliothecarius—puts the same papal-Frankish alliance at the end of the entry for *AM* 6234 or A.D. 741/42, rather than the beginning of A.D. 722/23. In that placement it is not awarded any sort of unusual script.[69]

It is worth noting that neither of these dates for the coronation of Pippin are "accurate." The current consensus date for this event is 754. Moreover, it was not Pippin, but his father Charles Martel who defeated the Arabs at Poitiers in 732. This kind of accuracy is not the point. Both the Latin and the Greek versions of the *Chronography* offer an interpretation of iconoclasm through their respective framing, and it is essential to take this into account before we decide what we want to do with the "data." The *Chronography* in either of the versions just mentioned framed the advent of iconoclasm in part through the empire's changing relations with the papacy. The difference between the two options available is significant enough that either one or both of these must constitute an editorial intervention at some time.

69 This is edited by de Boor as volume 2 of his edition of Theophanes, 272-273.

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If one wanted to argue which version more likely represented the original, the Latin has the better claim. As mentioned above, the break in the language used to introduce the entry and the use of majuscule set the passage apart in the Greek version, while there is no such disturbance in the Latin. The narrative also is more "natural." In the Latin manuscripts, the flight of Pope Stephen to the Franks comes as the culmination of gradually souring relations with the East, driven by both iconoclasm and taxation: the Pope finally had it with the Roman emperors and sought a new protector. In contrast, in the Greek manuscripts the northward flight of the pope seems to come out of nowhere. Furthermore, in the Latin version the episode occurs at the end of the entry, after notices about Constantinopolitan affairs. This is a much more standard sequence for the *Chronography*'s entries, while the Greek version's placement of the story as the first event of 723/24 is odd.

Thanks to the fact that we only possess manuscripts from the mid-9th century onwards it is impossible to be certain what was the order in the original. All we can say is that already by the late 9th century two different versions of events were circulating within what we usually think of as a single source. What is the significance of the two different versions? In the Greek version, the effect of the arrangement is to put the story of the pope's alliance with the Carolingians *just* before iconoclasm began. This is to say, iconoclasm at least in part reads as a response to the pope's move that forced the emperor Leo III to seek to re-win God's favour (though he made a terrible decision in *how* to do so). Thus, in the Greek version the pope is, at least partially, to blame for iconoclasm. On the other hand, in the Latin version, the story of Pope Stephen does not come until 742. Popes resist iconoclasm and Leo III's repeated attempts to exact resources from Italy. It is only after the pope has suffered Leo's predations that he finally flees for protection to the Carolingians. The effect of *this* dating is to make iconoclasm part of a series of imperial policies (all demonstrating an overweening imperial power) that eventually drive the pope (now the arbiter of orthodoxy) away from the Eastern empire and into the arms of the Franks. Thus in short, the Latin version—which we suggest reflects the original arrangement—claims that the iconoclast controversy was the fault of the emperors of Constantinople, while the Greek version claims that it was at least in part the fault of the Pope in Rome. At stake is whether papal betrayal, or imperial deviousness, is to blame for the rise of a heresy that would dominate the empire. Deciding which one the *Chronography* actually proposes as historically accurate determines what one thinks the *Chronography* has to say about the advent of iconoclasm.

Pausing to consider how different surviving manuscripts wrote the advent of iconoclasm into the *Chronography*'s unique sequence of universal time thus opens up new ways of thinking about what iconoclasm was and meant. Instead

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of using the text of the *Chronography* to explain why George/Theophanes thought iconoclasm arose, we might admit that what has actually survived are multiple different historical explanations of it. What the original version might have looked like can remain an open question, for our manuscripts contain a multitude. Rather than attempt to accurately record facts in time, each version altered time and facts to point out different truths, answering the questions of who was responsible for iconoclasm.

2 Histories

We have already stated that the most common approach to deciding what to read as a history is to label every work which describes past events in any sort of narrativized, linear fashion a "history."[70] However, as discussed in the previous section, most works from this period that 21st- century historians regularly label histories, actually call themselves chronicles. For this reason, most of what are normally called "histories" we placed under the previous section as "chronicles." There is even a good argument to be made that the works named *historia* from this period actually set themselves up to be read as chronicles and so also belong in the previous section. Nevertheless, by the terms of our own definition of chronicles we believe these and several others should be read as belonging to a distinctly different genre than the chronicle.

Thus, we begin by asking: what is a history? Stratis Papaioannou has offered a formulation for history-writing over the entire Byzantine period that is worth quoting in full:

> Byzantine histories may navigate between myth-making and myth-breaking. They aim at the former through encomium or teleological views of time. They gesture to the latter by alerting the reader to the impact of rhetoric on history-writing, by their consciousness of the limitations of earlier sources, or by deconstructing the aura of imperial power.[71]

Papaioannou is concerned with the entire Byzantine millennium, and as a result has a much more ecumenical idea of "history" than we articulate here—he pursues the concept of "historical memory" insisting that if we wish to

70 For the practice of framing all writers or investigators of past things as "historians" see for example: Warren Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke: 2007); and Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*.

71 Papaioannou, "Byzantine *Historia*," 302.

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capture this subject we must think through how to incorporate "images" both "narrative" and "material."[72]

In looking at the sources concerning the iconoclast period that might best be thought of as "histories" we will be more specific in our generic definition. First in keeping with the previous discussion, we will respect works that call themselves *historia* as such. This category includes the (Greek) *Historia Syntomon* of the Patriarch Nikephoros I, the (Latin) *Historia Tripartita* of Anastasius Bibliothecarius; and the (Armenian) *History* of Łewond/Ghevond. Second, since *historiae*— unlike *chronika*—do have a continuous tradition as a genre up to the present day, we believe one does have some leeway in asking what works might we ourselves want to categorize as a *historia* even if they do not call themselves this? In this second category we include the (Greek) *Parastaseis Syntomai Chronikai* of unknown authorship, and the (Latin) *Liber Pontificalis*. We hold that these two works (read as a collection of anecdotes and a collection of *vitae*, respectively) deserve to be studied *as history* despite not being conventionally classed and read as such. To read the *Parastaseis Syntomai Chronikai* and *Liber Pontificalis* in this way we must set aside the desire for "a proper history" to be written by a single author and to exemplify elevated levels of prose. Granting that for certain eras such as the Ancient, Hellenistic, and even Komnenian the above criteria *are* accepted characteristics of *historia*, we seek to allow the iconoclast period to speak on its own terms. We propose that we allow "history" in our era to be defined simply as an account of the past that is: (1) not a chronicle (i.e., which narrates "events in fairly strict chronological order"),[73] but that instead (2) focuses its narrative(s) on experiences and oral accounts of a particular place, and (3) explicitly aims to persuade readers of how to understand the relationship between the present locality and its past. Granting this definition, we place both the Greek *Parastaseis Syntomai Chronikai* and the Latin *Liber Pontificalis* in the category of history.

2.1 *The* Short History *of Nikephoros*

After Theophanes, the single most important source for Byzantine history in the 7th and 8th centuries is the *Historia Syntomos*, the "Short/Concise History," also known as the *Breviarium*, of the future patriarch Nikephoros.[74] The son of

72 Ibid., 298.

73 Roger Scott, "Byzantine Chronicles," in Erik Kooper (ed.), *The Medieval Chronicle, Vol. 6* (Leiden: 2009), 31–57, 39.

74 Nikephoros, *Short History*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango (Washington DC, 1990); Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 171–72; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 26–31.

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a bureaucrat, Nikephoros also joined the imperial administration, serving as an imperial secretary at Nicaea II. In 806 he succeeded Tarasios as patriarch. After resisting Leo V's attempt to reintroduce iconoclasm, he resigned in 815. He remained in exile in a monastery until his death in 828. There he penned several anti-iconoclast treatises, in the process becoming one of the principal theological defenders of icons.

The *Short History* is a fitting title. The work is a concise narrative, covering the years 602–769. As befitting the standards of classicizing history, Nikephoros wrote in Attic Greek intended to sound good to the Byzantine ear. However, he seems to have based his history on remarkably few sources. Indeed, comparison with Theophanes reveals that they shared a common source ca. 668–720, which was in turn continued perhaps to ca. 780, but, while Theophanes also wove in other material, Nikephoros seems merely to have abridged and rewritten this chronicle into a history. There is no explicit date for the *Short History*, but most have followed Mango's suggestion that the work was an "*oeuvre de jeunesse*," composed in the 780s.[75] Certainly, the lack of theological knowledge displayed at points would sit oddly with the theological sophistication of the latter patriarch. Moreover, stopping in 769 with the marriage of Irene (the future convener of Nicaea II) to Leo IV was an opportune strategy for someone writing in the 780s. It acted as a nod to Irene's position as regent, while avoiding the danger of wading into recent politics.

Compared to Theophanes, the *Short History* is both less detailed and less vehement, lacking the more lurid anti-iconoclast tales, while still explicitly condemning Leo III and Constantine V for iconoclasm. For instance, rather than the complex framing of iconoclasm's origins that we saw in Theophanes, Nikephoros succinctly has Leo reacting to the eruption of Thera in 726.[76] This relative moderation might be in part a function of style and the sheer succinctness of the text. However, it might well reflect the fact that many of the more virulent stories had yet to be generated. Certainly, the anti-iconoclast treatises Nikephoros wrote decades later in exile contain many more anti-iconoclast tales than the *Short History* and might be said to outdo Theophanes in invective.[77]

2.2 *The Armenian Tradition*

While on the whole the Armenian historical tradition only infrequently comments on Byzantium during the iconoclast period, there are some interesting

75 Mango, *Nikephoros*, 12.
76 Nikephoros, *History*, 60.
77 For examples of the differences, see Mango, *Nikephoros*, 9–11.

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snippets.[78] In particular, there is the *History* of Łewond or Ghevond.[79] This covers the period 632–788, and from the 660s is the only substantial Armenian historical narrative for the period. Thanks largely to its end-date, it is traditionally dated to the late 8th century, around the same time Nikephoros was composing his history. However, Greenwood has recently argued that it is more likely a work of the late 9th century, though admits that the evidence can never be conclusive.[80]

Łewond is of particular interest to scholars of Byzantine iconoclasm for two reasons. First, he purports to record a letter exchange between Leo III and Caliph Umar II (on which see more below under "Letters"). Second, in what is a text generally hostile to Byzantium, both Leo III and Constantine V, when mentioned, are given startingly good press.[81] Whether genuine or not, the letter of Leo III served to establish the emperor in the text as a staunch defender of the Christian faith against Muslim critiques. This was then followed by accounts of Leo's physical defense of Constantinople against the Arabs.[82] This culminated in Leo performing a miracle by striking the Bosporus with a cross, causing a storm that wrecked the Arab fleet. So positive is this version of Leo, that Stephen Gero went so far as to call it "iconoclastic hagiography," reasoning that Łewond probably had access to an originally Byzantine pro-Leo text.[83] Later on, Constantine V is recorded as leading a successful campaign against Theodosiopolis, taking great booty and a fragment of the True Cross. Many locals begged to be freed from the Ishmaelites, and to join "the pious emperor's side."[84] In contrast, the only iconoclasm mentioned is that of Yazid II.[85]

78 An overview of Armenian historical texts referencing Byzantium in the iconoclast era is in Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 197–98. Though occasionally speculative about dating, see also Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain: 1973), 35–47, 132–71.

79 Łewond, *History*, ed. and Fr. trans. Bernadette Martin-Hisard and Alexan Hakobian, *Lewond Vardapet: Discours historique avec en annexe La Correspondance d'Omar et de Léon* (Paris: 2015). The most recent English translation is by Robert Bedrosian, and only available online: https://archive.org/details/GhewondsHistoryOfArmenia. Still useful is: Zaven Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond, the Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians* (Philadelphia: 1982).

80 Timothy Greenwood, "A Reassessment of the History of Łewond," *Le Muséon* 125 (2012), 99–167.

81 Greenwood, 'Łewond', 137–40.

82 Łewond, *History*, 19–20.

83 Gero, *Leo*, 36–37.

84 Łewond, *History*, 29; trans. Bedrosian.

85 Łewond, *History*, 16.

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2.3 *The Latin "Histories"*

While the Latin West produced many historical texts that occasionally mention Byzantium, usually in the context of diplomatic relations, only two "histories" provide significant information on Byzantine iconoclasm.[86] The first is the *Historia Tripartita* of Anastasius Bibliothecarius.[87] Papal librarian and envoy, Anastasius was a prolific writer and translator, acting as key conduit between Constantinople and Rome in the late 9th century. This included translating into Latin the Acts of Nicaea II, and the three texts that compose his *Historia Tripartita*, namely: (1) the lists of rulers known as the *Chronographikon Syntomon* of the Patriarch Nikephoros I;[88] (2) the *Chronographia* of George Synkellos; and, (3) the *Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor (recalling the latter two were discussed, above, as a single text).

How we might read Anastasius' work of translation, editing, and organizational reframing by giving the summative title of "tripartite history" to his renaming a list of rulers and a chronicle remains a task for scholarship. Even with Anastasius' heavy editing in translation, the annalistic format was retained and would seem to mean the edited works remained a chronicle. Nevertheless, there is Anastasius' title. The title of Anastasius' *Historia Tripartita* is fairly clearly an echo of Cassiodorus' 6th-century *Historia Tripartita* (a Latin translation of the works of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret). Anastasius' translation's claim to Cassiodorus' title communicates *imitatio* of Cassiodorus' authorial persona—such a self-presentation evokes the two authors' achievements in diplomacy and translation for the service of *Latinitas*. Does Anastasius' choice of the title *Historia* denote historical homage, or historical genre? For now we would propose that Anastasius Bibliothecarius transformed these works into a history insofar as he turned the focus to Rome, for he changed the annalistic headings to entries by noting only years of the: world, incarnation, emperor, and pope of Rome. It is this and the changes to the narrative of Theophanes (an example of which we explored above) which are of principal interest to the scholar of Byzantine iconoclasm.

The *Liber Pontificalis* is probably the most consulted and debated non-Greek text in the entire history of Byzantine iconoclasm.[89] This is hardly surprising.

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86 For a general overview, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 184–85.

87 This is edited by de Boor as volume 2 of his edition of Theophanes, 46-346.

88 Nikephoros, *Chronographikon Syntomon*, ed. Carolus de Boor, *Nicephori Archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani Opuscula Historica* (Leipzig: 1880), 1–77.

89 *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Louis Duchesne, 2 vols (Paris: 1886–92), trans. Raymond Davis, *The Book of the Pontiffs* (Liverpool: 1989); *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes* (Liverpool: 1992); *The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes* (Liverpool: 1995). For this fascinating text see several recent studies by Rosamond McKitterick, including "The Papacy and Byzantium in

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It is the most important source for the early medieval papacy and the city of Rome. In that context, it frequently narrates the complex relationship between Rome and Constantinople, including several passages that touch directly on Byzantine iconoclasm. It is most frequently described as a series of biographies of the popes. But what does this mean? The *Liber Pontificalis*, through all its *Lives*, has a focus on the city of Rome and the office of the papacy and so its accumulation of the lives of its successive popes in the end provides a fairly continuous narrative of both city and office. Indeed, one of its purposes was to elide the two, Rome becoming through its narrative presentation a papal city. It is in effect a "semi-official" history of the papacy.

The process of composition of this "text" is famously complex and remains an active research question for scholars of early medieval Europe. The only safe conclusion as to whom authored it is that they were members of the papal administration. Likewise, while it seems that the usual pattern from the late 7th century onwards was for a life to be composed shortly after its subject's death, some were definitely begun and even disseminated while the pope was still alive. Moreover, the huge number of surviving manuscripts demonstrate that the text evolved, with some lives being substantially revised at a later moment, where, when, and why all being matters for debate. Though supportive of the general power of the papacy, especially vis-à-vis Byzantium and as the defender of orthodoxy, the individual lives are not bound to be uncritical of their subjects. This is because its opinions are likely to be those of officials working for a pope's successor.[90]

Byzantinists interested in incorporating evidence from the *Liber Pontificalis* for studies on the period of Byzantine iconoclasm need to be aware of these debates. At all costs, Byzantinists should avoid the temptation to haphazardly "mine" this work for information, and should take the time to familiarize themselves with the complexity of the work, not least because, as Rosamond McKitterick argues, at least a portion of the *Liber Pontificalis* seems to "represent the pope in a particular way both in relation to Byzantium in theological and political terms, and as the successor to Saint Peter in Rome."[91] In other words, it is neither a straightforward nor a "stable" text. Yet, that in itself makes it a fascinating work, which combined with its relative contemporaneity to the

the Seventh- and Early Eighth-Century Sections of the Liber Pontificalis," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 84 (2016), 241–73. For the problems of the 8th-century lives and a detailed examination of how one recension of the manuscripts created a different version of the *Liber Pontificalis*, see Clemens Ganter, "The Lombard Recension of the Roman Liber Pontificalis," *Rivista di Storia del Cristianesimo* 10 (2013), 65–114.

90 McKitterick, "The Papacy," 245.

91 McKitterick, "The Papacy," 241.

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events it describes, and its importance in reflecting the actions and presentation of the popes, make it an indispensable one.

2.4 *Case Study: The* **Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai** *and Constantinople's Topography of Images*

Our final "history," and the one we shall examine in greatest depth, is a peculiar work called the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*.[92] It has often been disregarded because of the nature of the material included. It is a melange of notes on the monuments of Constantinople, with a particular interest in statuary. It is easily dismissed for being "full of mythical and legendary explanations and tales."[93] When the work has been given a genre, it has been placed under "comic discourse,"[94] or the neologism "patriography."[95] However, the fact is the *Parastaseis* is a prose narrative of a particular locality based on experiences of past events that still fall within active memory or living oral tradition; it certainly fulfilled the role of a local history of the city of Constantinople. This makes it a *historia* for all intents and purposes, though scholars have heretofore ignored the *Parastaseis* as a history. Not only that, but we have viewed it so poorly so as to nearly leave it out of survey discussions entirely.[96]

The *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* has a complex tradition of reception and transmission. In addition to its "own" manuscript, the 8th- or 9th-century *Parastaseis* is included in nearly complete form within the 10th-century *Patria Konstantinopoleos*.[97] One could discuss *Parastaseis* and the later *Patria* as either two editions of one work, or as two separate works, but for our purposes the

92 *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, ed. and trans. Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The* Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai (Leiden: 1984).

93 Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 301. Even its most recent translator scales back his positive assessment with the caveat that he recommends the text "… despite its massive problems of historical reliability …" Albrecht Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria* (Cambridge MA: 2013), xviii.

94 Kazhdan, *Byzantine Literature*, 295–314.

95 Benjamin Anderson, "Classified Knowledge: The Epistemology of Statuary in the Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 35 (2011), 1–19, 2.

96 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, leaves the work entirely out of his survey of historical works. In Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 301, the *Parastaseis Syntomai Chronikai* makes a short, odd appearance under the section "Itineraries and 'Geographical' Literature" within the chapter "Official and Related Documents."

97 *Patria*, ed. Theodrus Preger, *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, 2 vols (Leipzig: 1901–07), vol. 2. The essential work is: Gilbert Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: Études sur le recueil des Patria* (Paris: 1984). Berger dates the compiler to 989/90 in Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople*, xvi.

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point stands regardless: this (or these) must be carefully studied for a history of iconoclasm. First, with a *historia*'s characteristic concern with the present locale, the *Parastaseis* focuses entirely on the place in which the compilers reside in the contemporary moment in which they reside there: Constantinople.[98] Secondly, the *Parastaseis*, uniquely, accomplishes this focus by orienting the reader to the space of the city. The *Patria*'s rewriting of the original material from the *Parastaseis* takes this topographical conceit even further, rearranging the material to conform more accurately to the present geography of the city.[99] Thus, for studies of the fundamentally Constantinopolitan phenomenon of iconoclasm (a statement especially true for the Second Iconoclast period), scholars must make sense of the rise of iconoclasm within a local history of Constantinople: its people, politics, culture, and landscape. The *Parastaseis* and *Patria* give us just that: contemporary historical perspectives on the landscape and topography in which iconoclasm was played out. As Albrecht Berger puts it in his introduction to the *Patria*:

> Only the *Patria* … presents a more or less complete and coherent picture of the city as it was in the middle Byzantine period … the most complete source about the monuments of the city that has come down to us.[100]

Why does such a picture of the city and its monuments matter? The current scholarly consensus understands this work as the product of the class of educated “civil professionals” or “bureaucrats” that is credited with the revival of learning, education, and written culture of this period. Benjamin Anderson has recently argued these “members of the imperial bureaucracy” were also “members of old Constantinopolitan families, who opposed ‘new men’ in the imperial service.”[101] In this reading, the text is a part of a claim to ownership over the city through a command of the city's past, specifically the power of the past embedded in local statuary, inscriptions, and the prophetic implications

98 Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople*, i.

99 See Berger, ix–xii. A core of the *Parastaseis* passed into the *Patria*. The *Parastaseis*' historical notes “On Statues”—composed by a number of anonymous authors beginning with second reign of Justinian II (705–711) and into the iconoclast period of Leo III and Constantine V—consists of eighty-nine chapters. More than half of the content of the *Patria*'s Book II (with 110 distinct entries) come from these. This, combined with a smattering of 6th-century material forms about two-thirds of the content of Book II of the *Patria*, while its arrangement and the remaining one-third of the content gives us a late 10th-century perspective.

100 Berger, xvii.

101 Anderson, “Classified Knowledge,” 2.

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of both for the present. More directly applied to the concerns of this present volume, these are the settings in which the debates and political intrigue over "iconoclasm" took place. The *Patria* gives us a vision of the centuries-long controversy over images playing out in a city of monasteries, churches, shrines, and fora each filled with paintings and statues. When local elites told and preserved the local history of their city, they told that history—their history—through an account of the power of images and statues and the authors' understanding of that power. If we neglect or disparage this evidence when we tell the story of iconoclasm, it is surely to our detriment.[102]

Studying the history of this text is not only a way of studying the topography of iconoclasm, but potentially the impact of iconoclasm upon the changing social role of images in general. The *Parastaseis* was compiled and composed starting with the second reign of Justinian II (705–711). It was then completed through the first iconoclast period, up to about 790. It was read and transmitted through the change from iconoclasm, back to iconophilism in 787, from iconophilism back to iconoclasm in 815, and from iconoclasm back to iconophilism in 843.[103] The 10th century compilers of the *Patria* then doubled down on the topographic image-based historical logic of this text by not only copying it, but expanding it and rationalizing its organization. Furthermore, the *Patria*'s authors' expansions on the *Parastaseis* give us material to consider how the memory of the iconoclast period was retold during the era that follows.

What is the relative weight of this text as a "historical source"? In part it has been possible for scholars to disregard the *Parastaseis* as obscure since it survives in only one manuscript. However, if we view the *Parastaseis* and the *Patria* as belonging to a single tradition, that tradition becomes impossible to ignore: the 10th-century version of the *Patria* exists in more than 60 manuscripts. We neglect these to our great loss. This work is not only a history of Constantinople, but it is a uniquely *visual* history in an age where the visual—the image and the statue—are the specific issues in which we are interested.

To give some concrete examples, the *Parastaseis* is full of occasions that demonstrated the power invested by the Byzantines in material representations. For instance, we are told that two of the text's researchers were studying

102 On this point concerning what we are willing and not willing to accept from our historical sources as "true," see Robert Bartlett's illuminating discussion on "Beings Neither Angelic, Human, nor Animal" in Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings: 1075–1225* (Oxford: 2006).

103 Similarly, about ninety years after the 10th-century compilation of the *Patria* (ca. 1080), someone further rearranged Books 2 and 3 topographically "into three sightseeing tours." Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople*, xvi.

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the pagan statues in the *Kynegion*, a disused amphitheatre on the ancient acropolis that had become a site for criminal executions.[104] Suddenly one of the statues, of its own accord, fell down and killed one of them. The malevolent statue had to be buried at the spot, and the passage ends by giving a warning against looking at old statues, especially pagan ones. A world where statues could kill, necessitating a physical response, was also one where icons could wield power, again necessitating a response.

There are several direct references to Leo III and Constantine V. For instance, we are told:

> In the time of Leo the Isaurian, many ancient monuments were destroyed because the man was irrational. At that time the Trizodon, as it is called, was removed. It was in the hollow place below St Mokios. Up to that time many people used to perform astronomical calculations by it. And the tombs of pagans and Arians are buried there, and many other corpses.[105]

Later on we find Constantine V criticized:

> Many murders and evils took place in the Hippodrome, and especially in the times before us; among these in our own day too, Anastasius the monk was burned for contradicting the emperor in the cause of truth.[106]

Yet overall, there are very few direct recorded instances of iconoclasm. Even the above story about Leo is overwhelmingly reconstructed from the *Patria*. We cannot be certain it was originally in the *Parastaseis*. Even if it were, Leo is recorded destroying things connected to astronomers, pagans, and heretics, not images of holy Christian figures. Elsewhere, we actually find the *Parastaseis* praising the Isaurians, such as when "Leo the Great and Pious" restored Constantinople's walls.[107]

Finally, differences between the *Parastaseis* and the *Patria* reveal the growing accretion of negative tales about the iconoclasts. For instance, the *Patria* includes stories about Leo closing a famous school and burning 16 monks alive inside it.[108] Meanwhile Constantine slanderously changed the name of

104 *Parastaseis*, 27–28.
105 *Parastaseis*, 5; *Patria*, 2.90–91.
106 *Parastaseis*, 63.
107 *Parastaseis*, 3, trans. Cameron and Herrin, 59.
108 *Patria*, 3.31, 3.

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a monastery from "of perfume oil" to "of fish oil," an impressive feat given that said monastery was founded almost two centuries later.[109]

The *Parastaseis* and the *Patria* are complex, difficult texts. Read as a repository of "facts" it/they will always prove elusive. But read as a shifting testament to the myriad of testimonies and perceptions that formed the evolving historical memory of Constantinople they are vital.

3 Letters

There are a number of important but difficult questions to overcome in approaching letters as historical sources.[110] As Peter Hatlie succinctly put it:

> Discussions about the 'essence', 'nature', and 'function' of the letter have often been difficult to reconcile with the task of garnering historical information from it.[111]

In their introduction to the sources Haldon and Brubaker wonder whether subcategories are actually better divisions than thinking of letters as a whole. The authors list such possibilities as theological tracts, letters concerning personal and "private" matters (on matters of career, friendship, etc.), official correspondence relating to ecclesiastical or imperial policy, and even the work of later redactors who take a text composed in a different genre entirely and edit it to make it appear to be a "letter." But these are modern classifications on the basis of content, purpose, form, or style. Following this line of thought, "letter" devolves into merely:

> a convenient way of bringing together a number of somewhat disparate and miscellaneous texts which would otherwise be difficult to accommodate under a different rubric.[112]

109 *Patria*, 3.134, trans. Berger, 197. For the date of the monastery's foundation, see Berger, 197, n.135.

110 See as an introduction to the topic: Roy Gibson, "On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 102 (2012), 56–78; and Alexander Riehle (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantine Epistolography* (Leiden: 2020). The foundational 20th-century studies on Byzantine epistles are Nikolaos B. Tomadakes, *Byzantine epistolografia: Ekdosis trite* (Athens: 1969); Herbert Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur Der Byzantiner* (Munich: 1978), 278–79.

111 Peter Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996), 213–48, 222.

112 Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 276.

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A truer representation of the ancient or medieval reality might be to organize letters based on the projected mood of the author, such as good humour, seriousness, exhortation, lamentation, or jest.[113]

A more productive approach seems to start with the prior question: is the value of a letter inherent in the "epistolary genre" or is it of value for what it provides to historical inquiries, "a literary source with documentary value for historians"?[114] The generic approach to epistles is sensible, is not a new suggestion, and does not preclude using letters as historical sources. As Giles Constable succinctly put it in 1976: "their worth as historical sources must always be evaluated in the light of their literary character."[115] More recently Littlewood and Mullett have "made a point of trying to wrest the letter from the grip of historical analysis and examine it primarily in terms of its literary value."[116] There is reason to be sympathetic to this approach, not least because the epistle surely *was* a genre—in the sense of having established, recognized models to follow—in our period.

What makes a letter a letter, and how does one read collections? Margaret Mullett's brilliant studies work from readings of epistles as complex, multilayered items: "intimate and confidential and intended for publication and one might also add, for performance—that is, we are dealing with real but literary letters."[117] For Peter Hatlie, viewing the literary letter as first a "work of art" forces us to pay attention to "its fitness before the laws of rhetoric and atticism."[118] In fact, there is good reason to read the epistle as a rhetorical act before it is a messaging act. Byzantine epistles are not a "documentary" work of literature, but a rhetorical one.[119]

113 Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections* (Turnhout: 1976), 21.
114 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 225.
115 Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, 11–12.
116 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 226.
117 Margaret Mullett, "The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter," in Roger Scott and Margaret Mullett (eds.), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham: 1981), 75–93, 77. Quoting Adrian Morey and Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot and His Letters* (Cambridge: 1965), 13.
118 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 227.
119 "Byzantine letters often preserve only part—the written part—of the intended message conveyed by the sender, and indeed even this message is often purposely obscured." Hatlie, 221. Or Jakov Ljubarskij: "… the Byzantine epistolographer never went so far as to open his entire self in a letter. Following the universal law of rhetoric—accommodation (*ymestmosti*)—he, on the contrary, adapted not only his words, but also his choice of thoughts and feelings to the addressee … Through the course of different letters it is more easy to judge the character of their addressees than that of their author." As translated in Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 223.

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As Giles Constable claimed: "the essence of the epistolary genre, both in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, was not whether a letter was actually sent but whether it performed a representative function."[120] Identifying the letter's "representative function" means following its "cultivation of a *persona*."[121] By treating letters as rhetoric first, we still open up important historical conclusions, even if they are not the ones we are used to finding. Describing *persona*, subjectivity, or "representative function" matters a great deal if we are to use an epistle to write history. It matters because the letter functioned as a "quasi-presence," a "way of removing distance" between friends.[122] The key word is "friendship."[123] To study letters is to study how relationships were made and maintained through rhetoric's ability to bridge temporal and spatial distances by creating bonds of affection.[124]

First, the constructed *persona* of the letter in question matters, regardless of how much that might map onto the actual historical psychological sense of self held by a "real person." We have in these *personae* the radical distinction between fully socio-political "public" *personae*—whose words had indirect if not direct legal implications—and politically "private" *personae*—whose words did not. That is, we might distinguish collections of: (a) epistles with legal implications (imperial and patriarchal epistles), from (b) epistles with autobiographical implications (all other epistles).

120 Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, 13.

121 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 227.

122 M. Monica Wagner, "A Chapter in Byzantine Epistolography: The Letters of Theodoret of Cyrus," *DOP* 4 (1948), 119–81, 131–34.

123 Building on Gustav Karlsson and Herbert Hunger, Peter Hatlie pointed out a common conclusion: that within the "formulaic and ceremonial nature of Byzantine epistolography" its "function—far from sending a message—was essentially to bridge distance between friends." Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 220. Thus Mullett's argument that a major emphasis should be looking at "subtle ceremonial formulae … more seriously … and thus [as] possible evidence for the social status of and the relationship between correspondents." We must also remember that each epistle would have arrived with not only an accompanying messenger bearing an oral message, but a gift for the recipient. Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 228; Mullett, "The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter," 182–83.

124 Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, 14–15. As Margaret Mullett puts it, the event of the letter itself was a literary delight: "A Byzantine intellectual would have had little understanding for this kind of criticism [that 'Byzantine letters tend to be conventional and impersonal and … terribly boring']. For him the letter was something supremely precious, rare, and longed for. It was dew in a desert, a lantern in the dark, a lyre calming the spirit, the song of Orpheus or the temptation of the Sirens. It was an emanation of the spirit, a mirror of the correspondent, the icon of the soul. It was honey, fragrant flowers, the first birds of spring." Mullett, "The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter," 77.

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Second, if we focus again on the material context, we can develop an interpretative agenda based on the context of a letter's survival which gives us access to, instead of *one* "original" authorial *persona*, a new "constructed" *persona* for each surviving compilation or act of transmission. This approach may also be the best way to avoid obvious errors. To again quote Peter Hatlie:

> … scholarship stays better informed when it takes account of the nature of the unified collection it is dealing with (where possible) and the peculiar generic properties of letters (where discernible). Not doing so can and does lead to incomplete or mistaken readings.[125]

As Jakob Ljubarskij proposed: uncovering the nature of the collection must be a priority for interpretations of any kind:

> The issue is not merely how many letters are included or lost and why, but also whether letter writers or the editors of their works shaped a collection for this purpose or that, effectively distorting our image of its literary or historical value.[126]

Byzantinists will find productive models for approaching these issues in recent guides covering the epistolography of the ancient and late antique periods.[127]

3.1 *Letter Collections, Byzantine and Modern*

Two relatively massive collections dominate Byzantine epistles from the iconoclast era: that of Theodore the Studite has 564 letters on record;[128] that of Patriarch Photios 299.[129] After these two, sixty-four epistles of Ignatios of Nicaea survive, and no one else is credited with more than a half dozen.[130]

125 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 247.

126 As translated in Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 247.

127 Ruth Morello and A. D. Morrison (eds.), *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography* (Oxford: 2007). Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, and Edward J Watts (eds.), *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide* (Berkeley, CA: 2019).

128 Georgios Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 2 vols, *CFHB* 31 (Berlin: 1992). The surviving collected epistles were written between 797 and 826.

129 B. Laourdas and L.G. Westerink, *Photii Patriarchae Constantinpolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, 3 vols (Leipzig: 1983–85). For a partial translation, see D.S. White, *Patriarch Photios of Constantinople* (Brookline MA: 1981). The surviving collected epistles of Photios were written between 859 and 886.

130 Cyril Mango, *The Correspondence of Ignatios the Deacon*, with the collaboration of Stephanos Efthymiadis, *CFHB* 39 (Washington, DC: 1997). The letters were written from

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This means that, of all the letters surviving from our period, two individuals account for about 85 per cent of the total. Not only that, but the volume of the surviving letters from Theodore alone dominates Byzantine epistolography *as a whole*. It is no easy task to confront this massive archive and ask: what is the value of the letters of Theodore the Studite for study of iconoclasm? Surely we must start by reading these collections for what they are: not so much as individual documents as much as portraits of the intellectual and cultural life of the *constructed* authorial persona to whom they testify.[131]

By contrast, there is a vast difference between these personal collections and the individual epistles listed in Franz Dölger's register as imperial letters.[132] The three epistolary collections mentioned above stand apart as literary achievements in their own right; the imperial letters are almost entirely catalogued traces of a tiny fraction of the work of the imperial notarial departments. Arranging these into an "archive" is the reconstructive work of modern scholars. Most of the imperial "letters" are either: (1) reconstructions of the basic content of a letter from a historical source; (2) simply noting the fact of an epistle having been sent (e.g., to accompany a known embassy); (3) reconstructions of a letter based on a surviving reply (e.g., when preserved in the archives of papal letters). That is, our register of imperial letters primarily indicates we know a communication was sent, rather than that the document in question may be retrieved and read.

Only a scant few of these letters have any direct bearing on the question of iconoclasm. This is in itself suggestive. Iconoclasm was an element of the period, important undoubtedly, but not the be-all and end-all. The most discussed letters concerning iconoclasm are either embedded in the *acta* of Nicaea II (in particular the letters of Germanos) or are most likely iconophile tracts written long after their purported timeframe (such as the letters of Gregory II to Leo III), and as such are considered in the following chapter. Besides these we are left with two "imperial" letters to discuss.

ca. 820 to ca. 845, covering the author's time as bishop and then the latter period of his life as a monk.

131 For an example of this approach see: Bradley K Storin, *Self-Portrait in Three Colors: Gregory of Nazianzus's Epistolary Autobiography* (Christianity in Late Antiquity) 6 (Berkeley, CA: 2019).

132 Franz Dölger, Johannes Preiser-Kappeller, Alexander Riehle, and Andreas Müller, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Rechts von 565–1453*, 2 vols (Munich: 2003–09). Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 281–82 provide a summary of all extant imperial letters, though the recent update to Dölger's register mean that several of the dates have changed.

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One was sent in 824 by Michael II to Louis the Pious.[133] The first two-thirds recounts Michael's accession and the prolonged civil war with Thomas the Slav. The last third explains to the Frankish emperor Byzantium's icon policy at the time. It is, therefore, that rarest of things for this period: an essentially unfiltered iconoclast document. As such, it has a starring role in scholarship of Second Iconoclasm. What is striking is the relative mildness of the iconoclasm. Only icons low down in a church should be removed, while those higher up could be maintained. It also provides a list of "abuses" caused by easily accessible icons: they had replaced crosses; candles and incense were lit before them; some clergy scraped material from them and added it to the Eucharist; some were using them as sponsors for their children at baptism; some were using icons as altars.

The second is, like most "imperial" letters, embedded in another text, in this case the aforementioned *History* of Łewond.[134] The *History* purports to give an exchange between Leo III and Umar II. While Łewond's version of Umar's letter is evidently a reconstruction from the points made in Leo's, a fuller and potentially "original" version has been reconstructed from other texts.[135] These are complex texts that likely went through several stages of editing and interpolation. Indeed, many scholars argue that both letters were created in the late 8th or early 9th century as part of ongoing Muslim-Christian debate, the authors simply putting their arguments into the mouths of famously pious rulers.[136] However, the most recent analysis by Greenwood argues that there was most likely a genuine core.[137] It is a fact that an exchange is mentioned in our surviving narrative sources, including those that were heavily influenced by Theophilos of Edessa. Yet again these sources give us different spins on the same information. While Agapius has Leo making clear Islam's falsity and Christianity's truth, Theophanes only mentions that Leo received a letter from Umar that attempted to convert him, slyly leaving the impression that Leo was already "Saracen-minded."[138] More important is Leo's argument, for

133 Michael II, *Epistula ad Ludovicum Imperatorem*, ed. Albert Werminghoff, *MGH, Leges* III, *Concilia* II.2 (Hanover: 1908), 475–80; partially translated by Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire: Sources and Documents* (London: 1986), 157–58.

134 Łewond, 14. For a translation and commentary, see Arthur Jeffery, 'Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III', *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), 269–332.

135 J.-M. Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar: 'Umar's Letter Rediscovered?', *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984), 109–57.

136 Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it* (Princeton: 1997), 490–501.

137 Greenwood, 'Łewond', 154–64.

138 Agapius, *History*, 503; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 399.

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he supports religious figural imagery, while giving it distinctly less significance and textual space than other Christian symbols such as the cross. If this does reflect Leo's self-presentation before iconoclasm it is significant evidence for the context of his later actions. If not, it at least is an example of how the historical memory of the Isaurians was distinctly different and more positive outside Byzantium than within.

3.2 *Case Study: The Letters of Theodore Studites as a Collection on Iconoclasm?*

Opinions on how to use the epistles of Theodore Studites vary greatly. In his 2015 translation of select works of Theodore, Thomas Cattoi included only one of Theodore's letters, from Theodore to his uncle Plato. Cattoi's goal was to "offer to an English-speaking public *all* [our emphasis] the writings of Theodore that were devoted to the question of the veneration of sacred images."[139] While from the theologian's perspective, only one letter of the surviving 564 may be truly "devoted to the question," historians have tended to see the letters of Theodore as originating out from the controversy over icons, making iconoclasm the collection's central concern. On the other hand, historians have also put the works of Theodore Studites to an array of other ends. Patricia Karlin-Hayter argued that the early epistles of Theodore were not so much about iconoclasm as about the power of monks *vis-à-vis* the bishops.[140] Ihor Ševčenko used the same corpus to ask what the levels of persecution and their geographic contexts, as revealed in Theodore's surviving letters, could tell us about the extent of the power of the Byzantine state.[141] Similarly, Paul Alexander used the letters of Theodore to look at the means, extent, and justification for persecution of disempowered groups in general.[142] On the other hand, Stephanos Efthymiadis has emphasized the prosopographical value of Theodore's letters, the possibilities of using his addressees to further describe other historical individuals, and piece together snippets of their biographies.[143] Finally, recent studies have turned the corpus to gender studies, looking at Theodore's correspondence

139 Thomas Cattoi, *Theodore the Studite: Writings on Iconoclasm* (New York: 2015), 1.

140 Patricia Karlin-Hayter, "A Byzantine Politician Monk, St Theodore Studite," *Jahrbuch Der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 44 (1994), 217–32, 218–19.

141 Ihor Ševčenko, "Was There Totalitarianism in Byzantium? Constantinople's Control over Its Asiatic Hinterland in the Early Ninth Century," in Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron (eds.), *Constantinople and Its Hinterland* (Aldershot: 1995), 91–105.

142 Paul J. Alexander, "Religious Persecution and Resistance in the Byzantine Empire of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Methods and Justifications," *Speculum* 52 (1977), 238–64.

143 Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Notes on the Correspondence of Theodore the Studite," *Revue des études byzantines* 53 (1995), 141–63.

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with Irene the Patrician,[144] or Kassia the abbess, hymnographer, and poet to find that "in ninth-century Byzantium there was some window of opportunity for women of Kassia's calibre."[145] Clearly there is a great deal of creative and productive work that remains to be done by exploiting the potential in Theodore's letters for social history.

However, our goal here is to suggest productive new avenues of research by now considering the manuscript context, asserting that attention to both the material reality of survival and the generic context of a letter collection can better inform our studies. Over the course of his life Theodore Studites wrote not merely the 564 letters which scholars have been able to recover but over twice that number, at least 1,146 letters.[146] We cannot be completely sure as no manuscripts agree on the number of letters, let alone the actual corpus. As we have just seen, work on medieval epistolography holds that the material context of preservation matters: we should not extract these letters from their context and reduce them to individual "documents." Thus, before diving into any one of those 564 letters, how—in what form—did these epistles of Theodore Studites survive?

The great majority are best preserved in collections or anthologies. The largest of which—the 15th-century manuscript *Parisinus Coislinianus 94*—contains 543 unique letters.[147] But their original form was not in such an anthology. According to the *Vita* of Theodore Studites we can assert that in the monastery of St. John in Stoudios there was a collection of his letters in five books.[148] According to the authority of George Fatouros, we can furthermore assert that Theodore had copies made of each letter he wrote before he sent it; Fatouros calls this collection—the sender's archive of the letters—the *Copybook*. The no-longer-extant five codices in question at St. John in Stoudios had been made by recopying together this loose *Copybook*. Fatouros calls this recopying the *Archetype* of the letter corpus. Granting this—and assuming (which is likely) that the original *Copybook* had collected the letters in

144 Jason Adashinskaya et al., "English Translation of the Letters of Theodore the Stoudite to Eirene the Patrician," *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 21 (2015), 162–76; Alexander Riehle, "Theodore the Stoudite and His Letters to Eirene the Patrician: An Introductory Essay," *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 21 (2015), 154–61.

145 Anna M. Silvas, "Kassia the Nun c.810–c.865: An Appreciation," in Lynda Garland (ed.), *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200* (Aldershot: 2006), 17–39, 19.

146 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 44.

147 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 52.

148 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 43. Citing: Vita B 24 (264d): "αἱ δ᾽ ἔτι τῶν ἐπιστολῶν αὐτοῦ βίβλοι πέντε μὲν ἕως τοῦ παρόντος σωζονται παρ᾽ ἡμῖν."

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essentially the order in which they were written—the order of letters in the five-codex *Archetype* would have been a roughly chronological order.[149]

Sometime after the death of Theodore Studites, his successors created an *Anthology* out of less than half of the letters in the *Archetype*. This "original" *Anthology*—now lost—dominates the tradition of preserving the letters. For our purposes it is essential to understand where it stands in relationship to the original epistles. Though some later manuscript anthologies consulted a version of the *Archetype* and so preserved letters that were not included in the original *Anthology*, in the end all surviving manuscripts essentially stem from that first anthologizing process undertaken by the 9th-century Studites. When we study the letters of Theodore, we cannot "return" to the original corpus, the *Archetype*. Instead, we can only seek to recover a sense of what it might mean to read Theodore's epistles as anthologized by his successors and disciples. This is a meaningful historical moment to return to but is not the actual moment we might desire most. Nevertheless, it is a fate we should accept.

Thirty-six manuscripts bear witness to at least one of Theodore's letters. However, only seven of these codices are devoted to preserving either the letters as distinct texts or as a significant part of the works of Theodore Studites. Together these seven manuscripts contain nearly every preserved letter, and as anthologies in their own right, their transmission and reception can testify to the *Anthology* created just after the death of Theodore.[150] The other twenty-nine manuscripts must be studied under a different paradigm, as they preserve small numbers of epistles for different purposes, such as creating a collection on canon law, or a selection of writings on iconoclasm. The seven anthology manuscripts also had their own governing purposes, none of which was to give us the comprehensive picture of Theodore Studites' correspondence that we now desire. Two manuscripts are devoted entirely to Theodore's letters alone: a selection of his letters anthologized as a collection. These are "C" (*Parisinus Coislinianus 269*) with 507 letters and "S" (*Parisinus Coislinianus 94*) with 547 letters. On the other hand, "M" (*Patmiacus 113*) with 237 letters and "v" (*Vaticanus Graecus 1432*) with 266 letters along with the latter's copy "Z" (*Atheniensis 298*) are collections of Theodore's works *in general*. In these contexts, the letters are a significant portion of the whole, but only a part. These are different kinds of anthologies. Similarly, "P" (*Parisinus Graecus 894*) with 272 letters anthologizes the works of Theodore (with those of a few others such

149 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 42–43. This is unusual in the ancient world, see Gibson, "On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections," 70–71.

150 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 43.

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as his disciple Naukratios) but has a specific focus on his works against the iconoclasts.

There is an additional great difficulty for the historian wishing to use the letters of Theodore Studites as documentary evidence. Though the (lost) *Archetype* would have preserved the chronological order of Theodore's letters, the anthologies derived from it were not interested in preserving this order. Our knowledge of the chronology of the letters is a hypothesis based on readings of the only two surviving anthology manuscripts which give us information on how to date the letters. The earliest surviving copy of any letters is the 9th-century codex "C" (*Parisinus* Coislinianus 269). This copy depends directly on the original *Anthology* and a section of it preserves the order of the *Archetype*.[151] This internal section (fols. 97–286) was copied by Nicholas Studites himself. It seems that Nicholas was overseeing selecting letters from the *Archetype* for the first *Anthology*. For the letters therein numbered 71 through 380, Nicholas copied them himself directly, and in order, from *Archetype* to this *Anthology*.[152] These 309 can thus be taken to be in chronological order. Additionally, the 14th-century manuscript "P" (*Parisinus Graecus 894*) gives us further evidence of the numbering (and thus dating) of the *Archetype*. This codex must have been copied in consultation with not only a copy of an anthology, but also with a copy of the original *Archetype*. It preserves two numbering systems for its 272 letters: a "continuous" numbering system for its own unique selection and ordering of letters, as well as the original chronologically-based numbering system of the *Archetype*.[153] These 272 epistles can thus be placed in chronological order. For his critical edition, George Fatouros took the entire corpus of the surviving letters of Theodore Studites and, using this information, set what survives into a reconstructed chronology. Fatouros then brought order to the chaos by renumbering these surviving letters in this order. This is a monumental scholarly achievement in the historical-critical method and deserving of sincere praise. But we must also recognize that Fatouros' work is also a reconstruction which masks a historical, material reality: these epistles were transmitted piecemeal, and in anthologies whose order demonstrates their own readings of the epistolary corpus.

What difference does this make? Consider one example. In the manuscript *Coislinianus 269*, the Studite monks Abbot Nicholas and Athanasios made

151 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 43.: "… bis auf einen Teil von C, der direkt aus dem ursprünglichen Briefcorpus stammt."

152 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 43–46. Note: the rest of the manuscript (fols. 1–96 and 287–457) was copied by the Studite Athanasios.

153 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 43–44.

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the first two epistles in their anthology those numbered 1 and 9 by Fatouros. When these monks made this selection, there were likely many more epistles between these two in the *Archetype*, but there were at least the seven that Fatouros has been able to recover. Nicholas and Athanasios thus *wished* their reader to jump from "Epistle 1" to "Epistle 9." They skipped (among others) a letter of immense historical and political significance, from Theodore to the Empress Irene. Why?

Though Theodore addressed Epistle 1 to his uncle Plato, he closes by addressing his brother Euthymios, who was imprisoned with Plato at the time. His words are an encouragement to Euthymios to value the suffering he is currently undergoing for the sake of Christ. The next entry that the reader of the anthology *Coislinianus 269* would read ("Epistle 9") then presents the reader with a direct contrast: Theodore chides the monk Gelasios for leaving his monastery. Theodore urges him to return and persist in the monastic vocation, which Theodore praises. A reader of Nicholas' anthology would be immediately confronted with the glory of suffering for Christ, and then chided to persist in that vocation of voluntary suffering for the heavenly glories it brings. This editorial intervention into the order of the *Archetype* obviously serves a rhetorical purpose. It is also a rewriting of the historical-chronological order of Theodore's epistolary corpus. But it is more as well. This anthology puts its own message into the "mouth" of Theodore's letters by its new arrangement. It makes the "whole" of the letters it chooses to present about something that no single letter so obviously communicates, and which certainly would be obscured in a truly complete collection. The anthology of Nicholas and Athanasios frames its "Theodore" as a character speaking directly and in a focused manner to concerns of monks in particular: in the case of these two letters, of monks who are struggling with the monastic vocation. When we extract individual letters from manuscript collections, we lose such authorial or rather editorial agendas; we lose the chance to study the whole rhetorical purpose which might have governed the preservation of the epistles, and in doing so deprive ourselves of another source on this past world.

4 Conclusions

An element common to all of the texts discussed in this chapter is the concept of selection.[154] All of these types of text—chronicles, histories, and letters—have

154 Jason König and Greg Woolf, *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: 2013).

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been selected and arranged and then passed on to us through a repitition of that kind of a process. It is essential to keep this in mind when reading all of these "secular" narratives. For instance, consider Rosamond McKitterick's comment that the *Liber Pontificalis* "engineers the formation of perceptions of Byzantium and the papacy." It accomplished this as much through the device we are used to looking for—narrative emplotment—as through selection and organization. Again, McKitterick's comments may serve as a starting point for any of the texts and fragments considered here:

> The text makes better sense indeed if it is seen not as a passive record but as active persuasion and a pointed presentation of select incidents, so that the strangely imbalanced and laconic text becomes significant in its very selectiveness.[155]

We have argued here that following the traces of this selectiveness, especially as preserved in the surviving manuscripts, may well offer more traces of the curious persons, events, and places of Byzantium than we have yet noticed, and so offer to us as yet unstudied attempts to make sense of that world.

155 McKitterick, "The Papacy," 255.

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