The Significance of Eusebius in the Byzantine Chronographic Tradition

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An important shared question was introduced in Christopher Bonura's reflections on Chapter 3 of Michael Hollerich's *Making Christian History* and returns here as a throughline in our response to Chapter 5, "Eusebius in Byzantium." Did Eusebius's great generic invention of ecclesiastical history disappear as a genre during the Byzantine period? As Bonura has pointed out, Hollerich's starting point in his chapter on Byzantium is the absence of works entitled *Ecclesiastical History* between the sixth and fourteenth century.[52] While this is a tantalizing hook to the investigation, it turns out that isolated generic histories are not an accurate means of tracking the reception of Eusebius in the East Roman Empire. If ecclesiastical history as a distinct genre at first glance seems to have gone into hibernation after late antiquity, a slower examination finds that it was incorporated into new ways of making a common or universal history. Our conversation with Hollerich's study will ask: to what extent did these new histories continue to draw upon the oeuvre of Eusebius of Caesarea?

Eusebius was of course not only the author of an *Ecclesiastical History* but also of the *Chronicle*—often called a "universal chronicle" but perhaps better discussed as a "chronography" since Eusebius wrote (ἔγραψε, *egrapse*) his own historical time (χρόνος, *chronos*). Appropriately, Hollerich's discussion of how Eusebius *made* Christian History is therefore concerned with not only the *Ecclesiastical History* but also the *Chronicle*, the reception of which is given a prominent place throughout the book.

What we might call a "Christian Time" had been incorporated into the long-standing Hellenistic chronicle tradition by Julius Africanus in the early third century. Eusebius built on Julius Africanus's work not only by re-writing his chronology but by re-inventing the *appearance* of the resultant chronography. Eusebius's chronography *displayed* (rather than narrated) chronological synchronizations in a format quite likely derived from Origen's third-century *Hexapla*—which presented the Hebrew scriptures in parallel columns with a Greek transliteration and four distinct Greek translations.[53] We find this display of Eusebius's new historical time in the *second* part of his *Chronicle* (known as the *Chronological Canons* or simply *Canons*) where different successions of rulers are displayed in the same way Origen had laid out different texts to be compared: distinct dynastic successions of the historical kingdoms of the known world, presented in descending parallel columns across facing pages.

Eusebius began this second part of the *Chronicle* not with the Creation (or Adam and Eve) but with what he held to be the first event in comparative chronology, the first historical figure he believed could be securely synchronized across multiple

[52]Hollerich, *Making Christian History*, 171. Bonura notes the parallel situation in the Syriac literary tradition "with a sixth-century boom of ecclesiastical histories followed by the near disappearance of the genre." See Hollerich, *Making Christian History*, 101–102.

[53]A. Grafton and M. Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

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historical traditions: Abraham. Later chronographers would not follow this philosophical premise, insisting instead on beginning chronology with time itself, with planetary motion and the creation of the first humans. There was a narrative at stake in this debate over chronological premises: Eusebius's *Canons* emplotted the passage of time with a story about the kingdoms of the world. As its chronology progressed through the years of human time, the columns of the *Canons* gradually consolidated until only the single column for Rome remained. Eusebius timed this consonance of providence and empire to the Incarnation of the Christ. With this overview in mind, it is possible to recognize how closely the project of the *Chronological Canons* in Eusebius's *Chronicle* was connected to the project of his *Ecclesiastical History*. The *Canons* crafted a historical time that defined ultimate chronological universality as submission to Roman dominance, even as it subsumed the time of *Imperium Romanorum* into the narrative of *Ekklesia*.

From this perspective, one could argue it was Eusebius himself who set the terms for the eventual (and sustained) disappearance of ecclesiastical histories as a distinct genre by merging the narratives of the church ("ecclesiastical histories") and the ultimate empire ("universal chronicles"). This is evident, for example, in the first Greek historical project (some would call it a chronicle, but that terminology is debated[54]) discussed by Hollerich under the topic of "Eusebius in Byzantium." This was a historical project attributed to John Malalas or John "the *rhetor*," as Evagrius seems to know him (the authorship of the transmitted text is uncertain, but we will use the name Malalas here for convenience). Hollerich perfectly grasps the specific structure of Malalas's project, where predominantly thematic books are arranged in a roughly chronological order until the coming of the Christ and the beginning of the Roman Empire—a very different kind of narrative in comparison to the Eusebian columnal system, but a similar view of the evolution of world history. That is to say, while this text presents striking differences with Eusebius's chronographic works in terms of the scope, narrative technique, and overall design, there are some clear elements pointing toward the intention of its author to follow a Eusebian tradition, not the least being the inclusion of Eusebius as the second authority named in the introduction just after Julius Africanus.[55]

But when Malalas referred to Eusebius, to which Eusebius did Malalas refer? As Hollerich rightly points out, it is doubtful that Malalas had a complete text of Eusebius's history and his chronicle.[56] We cannot make a clear identification of the different steps of transmission and reception that would have connected Eusebius's works to Malalas's since numerous of the other historical authorities named by the latter are merely names for us. It is, however, very probable that the Eusebian inheritance reached Malalas in an already altered form, although still associated with Eusebius's name: Eusebius's reception in sixth-century Constantinople must undoubtedly be considered

[54]Hollerich, *Making Christian History*, 173. See R. W. Burgess and M. Kulikowski, "The Historiographical Position of John Malalas. Genre in Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Middle Ages" in *Die Weltchronik des Johannes Malalas. Autor – Werk – Überlieferung*, Malalas Studien 1, ed. M. Meier, Chr. Radtki, and F. Schulz (Franz Steiner Verlag: Stuttgart, 2016), 93–117; and R. W. Burgess, "The Origin and Evolution of Early Christian and Byzantine Universal Historiography" in *Millenium* 18 (2021), 53–154, with our remarks: O. Gengler, "Der Chronist als Zeithistoriker: Eine Einleitung" in *Johannes Malalas: Der Chronist als Zeithistoriker*, Malalas Studien 4, ed. O. Gengler and M. Meier (Franz Steiner Verlag: Stuttgart, 2022), 9–12.

[55]The introduction is transmitted with the first book independently of the rest of the work but is quite securely identified. See Gengler, "Der Chronist als Zeithistoriker."

[56]Hollerich, *Making Christian History*, 174–175.

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from a cumulative point of view, with many relays and small changes along the way. Due to the happenstance of historical survival, some of these stages may have paralleled what we know to have occurred in the more clearly discernable Latin reception of Eusebius, such as in the translation, slight adaptation, and continuation of Eusebius's *Canons* by Jerome under the title *Chronica*. At the same time, Malalas criticized Eusebius even as he clearly drew on him (whether directly or indirectly). For instance, in the transmitted version of Book X chapter 2 of Malalas's chronicle, Eusebius seems to play the role of a straw man for speculations connected to Christ's birth in the year 5500 after Adam, opposed to the consensus view of "Clemens, Theophilus and Timotheus" that Christ was born in the year 6000.[57] Considered from the perspective of the reception of Eusebius' works, what Malalas's work reveals to us about changes in historical writing is how, within two centuries, the desire to reconcile profane time and Christian time in a unified narrative had evolved.

Interestingly, most of the references to Eusebius in Malalas's chronicle are not related to chronology and, when they can be traced, concern the *Church History* or exegetical works.[58] Eusebius's works also appear in palimpsest, in the background of narratives where he is not explicitly mentioned. The story of Veronica analyzed by Hollerich is a remarkable example.[59] Although both texts retell similar stories, there are considerable dissimilarities between Eusebius's and Malalas's versions, the latter being more developed and giving the name of Veronica for the first time, as Hollerich rightly underlines. For other details, Malalas seems to tacitly update and complete Eusebius's account, while using similar literary devices to build the authority of their testimony (autopsy, and reference to the present).

Drawing on Eusebius for the purpose of critique and then replacement is explicitly the goal of the ninth-century *Chronographia* of George the Synkellos and Theophanes the Confessor (called the *Chronographia* here to distinguish it from Eusebius's similarly named *Chronicle*).[60] George and Theophanes sought to carry Eusebius's linkage of church and empire into their own day and beyond, and to do so they had to reckon with the crisis (and opportunity!) of a new condemnation of Eusebius at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787—on the basis of an inauthentic letter—as an iconoclast heretic.

[57]This contradicts however other passages (mostly Malalas, II 10 and XVIII 8 in J. Thurn, *Iohannis Malalae Chronographia*, p. 2 and 357–358) and later alteration of the text seems likely since the text available to us, transmitted in a unique 10th-11th c. manuscript, gives numbers that are incoherent with each other and/or different than the ones appearing in parallel traditions—Hollerich rightly warns that the text is unsure at various points.

[58]For example, Malalas, I 4 ll. 20–23 in Thurn, p. 7 ll. 89–90 and Eusebius, *Onomasticon* in E. Klostermann, *Das Onomastikon der biblischen Ortsnamen* (Eusebius Werke 3.1), p. 2, l. 23–p. 4, l. 25 or Malalas, X 35, ll. 10–12 in Thurn, p. 193 ll. 2–4 and Eusebius, *HE*, III, 2, 1. Similarly, as noted by Hollerich, *Making Christian History*, 177, the *Paschal Chronicle*, though conceptually and technically nearer to the *Canones*, borrows also narratives from the *HE*. On Eusebius and the *Paschal Chronicle*, see now Chr. Gastgeber, "Weltchronik und Zeitgeschichte im *Chronicon Paschale*" in *Der Chronist als Zeithistoriker*, 243–277.

[59]Hollerich, *Making Christian History*, 175–176. Malalas X 12 in Thurn, p. 180–181.

[60]Traditionally studied as two separate works, as in the critical translations of George by W. Adler and P. Tuffin in *The Chronography of George Synkellos: A Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Theophanes by C. Mango and R. Scott in *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 213–813* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). We have made the case for their being read through the middle ages in combination as a single chronography in J. W. Torgerson, *The Chronographia of George the Synkellos and Theophanes: The Ends of Time in Ninth-Century Constantinople* (Brill: Leiden, 2022).

Hollerich briefly touches on this condemnation,[61] but here we will consider what happens if we read George and Theophanes's engagement with Eusebian histories, as contextualized above all by the rhetorical opportunities afforded by Eusebius' new condemnation.

Let us start with George, who composed the universal chronicle from Adam to the reign of Diocletian. Hollerich mentions George's dismissal of Eusebius's *Chronicle*—though the work was truly essential to George's project. When assessing the dates Eusebius assigns to the life of Moses, George takes the opportunity to call him not only wrong but "deranged."[62] Now, consider how foregrounding Eusebius's new identity as an iconoclast changes how we read George's stunningly critical comments. As Hollerich shows, authors in many diverse contexts, including in the East Roman Empire, had to come to terms with Eusebius's association with Arianism—but since Eusebius was *also* now an iconoclast, George needed to devise new means of convincing his readers that they were reading a fully non-Eusebian chronography, even as Eusebius continued to be recognized as the author of the still-standard chronography. This explains another of Hollerich's examples. George used direct and extended citations of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* to make his ninth-century readers choose between two figures—Origen and Dionysius of Alexandria—both of whom Eusebius had happily praised.[63] In this light, the central issue is not so much how George read Eusebius as his need to translate Eusebian content into a new rhetorical and polemical context.

Similarly, we enthusiastically emphasize Hollerich's point that Theophanes' portion of the *Chronographia* (from Diocletian's reign up to the year 813) developed Eusebius's work to make the reign of Constantine I an epochal moment in the Roman *imperium*.[64] Hollerich's key example of this point in fact shows this was true not only for the authors of the *Chronographia* but also for their contemporary readers.[65] Hollerich quotes an extended aside on whether Constantine was baptized on his deathbed by the bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, or whether this had occurred decades earlier in Rome by Pope Silvester. This passage discreetly implies Eusebius held the former opinion (whereby the emperor was baptized an Arian heretic), while the *Chronographia* authorized the Silvestrian baptism. Consider now that this explicit engagement with Eusebius's work is in fact a later addition, a *scholion*.[66] In other words, not only can we see George and Theophanes wrestling with how to update the reception of Eusebius, a now doubly condemned heretic, but their later readers—asked to help with George's task of "completing what was missing" in the *Chronographia*[67]—were still turning to Eusebius's extant texts as authoritative enough that even when they believed he was *wrong*, he could not simply be ignored but needed to be cited and either disputed, corrected, or refuted.

[61]Hollerich, *Making Christian History*, 186.

[62]Succinctly illustrated in ibid., 179–180.

[63]Ibid., 180–181.

[64]Ibid., 177. As we have argued elsewhere: Torgerson, *The Ends of Time* (2022), chapters 5 and 6.

[65]Hollerich, *Making Christian History*, 185–186.

[66]Our earliest (mid-9c) manuscript (*Paris Grec 1710*) does not contain this passage (see ff. 26v-27r), while the next extant (late-9c) recension does (*Christ Church Library* & *Wake Greek 5* on ff. 75v-76r and *BAV Vat. Gr. 155* on ff. 79r-79v).

[67]Theophanes claims George gave him this injunction (trans. Mango and Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, p. 1 of K. de Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia*, p. 4.2), which he then implies is similarly the responsibility of any subsequent reader who "finds aught that is wanting" (trans. Mango and Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, p. 2 of K. de Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia*, p. 4.19–20). See our more extended discussion in J. W. Torgerson, *The Chronographia*, pp. 149–177.

In sum, Eusebius's surprising eighth-century condemnation as an iconoclast heretic makes it necessary to be particularly nuanced in tracking his reception into ninth-century Byzantine historiography and beyond. Eusebius's transformation into a double outsider to the very communities that he helped to define and make possible—the Christian *ecclesia* and the Roman *oikumene*—meant that subsequent authors not only *could* but actually *needed* to set their works in some opposition to his own. Relying directly upon previous scholarship, which one nevertheless also feels bound to criticize, is of course a dramatic irony with which all of us academics are profoundly familiar.

We conclude our comments on the evidence from the Byzantine period with an example of reality not being as simple as the absence of ecclesiastical history in the East Roman Empire would suggest. Circa 870 Anastasius Bibliothecarius—envoy for Louis II to the Council of Constantinople—used some of his time in the capitol to excise and translate George and Theophanes' *Chronographia* into Latin. He entitled his translation not *Chronica* but *Historia Tripartita*, a clear reference to the sixth-century Latin translation of the ecclesiastical histories of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret by Cassiodorus—to whom Anastasius seemed to see himself as a successor. In other words, when Anastasius considered how to translate the *Chronographia* of George and Theophanes into Latin, he did not frame the work as the successor to imperial Latin *chronicles* but to the great ecclesiastical *histories* of the fourth centuries. Curious. It would seem that into the ninth century sufficient generic fluidity existed between ecclesiastical histories and chronicles to allow structures and contents to be blended and re-mixed, depending on specific contexts and contemporary concerns.

As Bonura has pointed out already, the perspective Hollerich takes in his work allows us to note an important point about change over time in historical genres: even in the absence of works in an explicit "ecclesiastical history" tradition, authors in the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East interwove histories of their churches into their chronicles and chronographies. We affirm this point and would use it as a premise to make a few observations that might initiate further studies. In future investigations on the reception of Eusebius in the Greek speaking societies of the Middle Ages, it will surely be productive to continue to intertwine reflections on Eusebius's own changing status vis-à-vis new orthodoxies with the use (both explicit and implicit) of his works and ideas. In addition, more overarching studies will find points such as those made by Gilbert Dagron decades ago in *Emperor and Priest* essential, intertwining shifts in imperial ideology with reflections on shifts in genre.[68] The sixth through ninth centuries in the East Roman empire saw conceptual, ideological developments in *imperium* and *ecclesia* such that we must think of them not as distinct polities but as inseparable aspects of the Greek-speaking Roman *oikumene*. We can see parallels to this social and cultural development in shifting historical genres of the same era. *Making Christian History* has thus given readers a number of carefully researched and articulated starting points to pursue these and many other ideas back into the surviving materials; and so we celebrate the accomplishment while awaiting the productive critiques and expansions that these ideas will go on to generate.

[68]G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, trans. J. Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). This point has since been greatly nuanced by studies such as M. Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era c. 680-850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).