

# Time and Again: Early Medieval Chronography and the Recurring Holy First-Created Day of George Synkellos

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Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν  
In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth

GENESIS 1,1

Ἐγὼ τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος  
I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end

APOCALYPSE OF JOHN 22,13

Near the beginning of the ninth century, while residing in the environs of Constantinople, George Synkellos began composing a grand synthesis of the passage of all time—a chronography—from the Creation of the world up to his present day. Though the work, thus described, would seem to be an ideal candidate for a “Byzantine view of time,” the absence of even a sketch of the author’s life and career makes it particularly difficult to set George Synkellos and his text in context, let alone to posit the *Chronography* as representative. Still, we do what we can with what we have.

The little that is currently known about our author’s life is extrapolated from a few fragments of data buried in the *Chronography*.<sup>1</sup> Many of these clues link George Synkellos to Syria-Palestine, but the only sure information is George’s epithet, Synkellos.<sup>2</sup> Though scholars usually refer to George Synkellos as

1 Alexander Kazhdan, “George the Synkellos,” *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford, 1991) (hereafter *ODB*). The most comprehensive assessment of Synkellos’ biography has just appeared in Warren Treadgold’s *Middle Byzantine Historians* (New York, 2013). I am indebted to the author for advance consultation.

2 Synkellos spent significant time in Syria-Palestine; Synkellos originating from the region remains plausible. See William Adler and Paul Tuffin, *The Chronography of George Synkellos: A Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation* (Oxford, 2002), pp. lxxviii–lxxix, lxxxii–lxxxiii; and most recently Robert Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle* (Liverpool, 2012), p. 11 n. 30. The key passage is Synkellos’ statement: “In my journeys between Jerusalem

simply Synkellos, the word is not a name but an office. Between the fifth and the ninth centuries the office of *synkellos* (σύγκελλος) had developed within the Christian communities of the Eastern Mediterranean from a senior monk's attaché (the word literally means "cell mate") into an imperially appointed liaison to a patriarchal bishop. We know that the monk George Synkellos was *synkellos* to Tarasios, the patriarch of Constantinople from 784 to 806.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, attempts to further pin down Synkellos' career have resulted in little more than a series of educated guesses. In fact we only have a vague idea of the duties of late-eighth or early-ninth-century *synkelloi* in general.

To illustrate the point: on the basis of his office we might consider George Synkellos a part of the civil bureaucracy. As the *synkellos* of Tarasios, George would have attained his position through appointment by either Irene (regent 780–795; empress 797–802) or her son Constantine VI (r. 780–797). Mid-ninth-century sources on palace ceremonial rank the *synkellos* as one of the highest officials in the entire imperial hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> As a semi-regular at the imperial table with intimate access to his rulers, George must have been one of the most known figures in the palace. But George's office could just as well identify him as an integral part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. According to the same ninth-century sources the *synkellos* only attended the imperial feasts for the twelve days of Christmas as a member of the *patriarch's* entourage.<sup>5</sup> George

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and Bethlehem and what is known as the Old Laura [monastery] of blessed Chariton, I personally have passed by there frequently and seen [Rachel's] coffin lying there [in her tomb] on the ground." AT 153/M 122. I use this citation form throughout to refer to the *Chronography*—AT {page number}/M {page number}—with "AT" referring to Adler and Tuffin's translation of George Synkellos' *Chronography*, and "M" referring to Mosshammer's critical edition (Alden Mosshammer, *Ecloga chronographica* [Leipzig, 1984]).

- 3 The surest piece of information about George is found in a preface repeated in several surviving manuscripts: he was a monk and was *synkellos* under Patriarch Tarasios. 'Ο μὲν μακαριώτατος ἀββᾶς Γεώργιος, ὁ καὶ σύγκελλος γεγονῶς Ταρασίου, τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (Theophanes' *Preface* in Carl de Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia* (Leipzig, 1883), pp. 3.8–3.9); 'Εκλογὴ χρονογραφίας συνταγείσα ὑπὸ Γεωργίου μονάχου συγγέλλου γεγονότος Ταρασίου πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (*Preface* to the *Chronography* at Mosshammer, *Ecloga*, pp. 1.1–1.6); Γεωργίου τοῦ εὐλαβέστατου μονάχου καὶ συγγέλλου γεγονότος Ταρασίου τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως σύνταξις ἢ τοῦ χρονογραφία (The second *Preface* at *Ecloga*, pp. 360.1–360.4).
- 4 Philotheos, "Kletorologion," in N. Oikonomides, *Les Listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles* (Paris, 1972). See p. 163.10 and Footnote 129 for clarification.
- 5 Philotheos, "Kletorologion," p. 185.21. Aristeides Papadakis, "Synkellos," *ODB*. Constantine VII's tenth-century *Book of Ceremonies* documents the ritual appointment of these officials (11.5) and their very high rank (11.52). See J. Reiske, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae* (Bonn,

Synkellos would have been important, but exactly when, and within which spheres of influence, we cannot say.

Even identifying Synkellos with major contemporary events is nearly impossible. If George Synkellos was in Constantinople towards the beginning of patriarch Tarasios' reign, he would have been present for an extremely significant council of the Christian churches in 787 (later canonized as the Seventh Ecumenical Council). Could George have been the *synkellos* at this time even though there is no "*synkellos* of Constantinople" mentioned in the council's acts?<sup>6</sup> Alternatively, was George included among the patriarchal clergy as the "deacon George" who read out an excerpt from a homily?<sup>7</sup> Even if one accepts that George was present for the event in one of these roles, was he returning to Constantinople for the summit or making his very first visit to the empire's capital? This, and every other proposal, remains a speculation.

We are left to elucidate the historical George Synkellos from what we can find in the *Chronography*, his one surviving work. Here, mercifully, we do find a reliable bit of biography to stand on. With a splendid piece of inductive reasoning, Richard Laqueur proposed that George Synkellos began writing his

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1829), pp. 530.6–532.4, 713; 727. From the fifth through the ninth centuries the office's occupants were usually monks and deacons; they acquired enough influence to occasionally attain the patriarchal throne themselves. Due to our lack of specific knowledge we do not know what George's promotion signified or entailed. An audit of the Jerusalem patriarchate around 808/9 by *missi* of Charlemagne mentions a single *synkellos* of the Patriarch of Jerusalem "who manages everything under the patriarch" (*sincolo qui sub patriarcha omnia corrigit*). See Michael McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey of the Holy Land* (Dumbarton Oaks, 2011), p. 200 ("Document 1" Inn. 7–8). According to Ignatios the Deacon's mid-840s *Life of the Patriarch Tarasios*, emperor Constantine VI appointed two *synkelloi* in approximately 796 to restrict access to the Patriarch (Chap. 47). How does the career of our George Synkellos relate to this situation? See the comments on p. 237 in Stephanos Efthymiadis, *The Life of the Patriarch Tarasios* (Birmingham, 1998). For discussion and further bibliography, see Warren Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Histories* (New York, 2007).

6 In the 870s the Roman Anastasius Bibliothecarius also assumed George Synkellos was at the Council of Nicaea in 787, though this seems to be Anastasius' own deduction based on Synkellos' association with patriarch Tarasios. See Anastasius' letter to John the Deacon, "Epistle 7," eds. E. Perels and G. Laehr, "Anastasio Bibliothecarii Epistolae sive Praefationes," in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae* VI, 2 (Berlin, 1928) pp. 420.5–420.11.

7 From the *Acta* of the Council of Nicaea in 787 "George, the most God-loving deacon and notary of the holy patriarchal residence" (Γεώργιος ὁ θεοφιλέστατος διάκονος καὶ νοτάριος τοῦ εὐαγγέλιου (sic.) πατριαρχείου) read from a sermon by Bishop Antipater of Syrian Bostra: J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio* v. 13 (Florence, 1767), col. 13D–E.

chronography in AD 808 and stopped merely two years later in AD 810.<sup>8</sup> In this short time Synkellos managed to accomplish a great deal: he covered nearly six thousand years of the past: from the Creation of the world on Day 1 in the first “Year of the World” (conventionally written “AM 1” for the Latin *anno mundi*),<sup>9</sup> up to the reign of the Roman Emperor Diocletian in AD 284 (by Synkellos’ reckoning AM 5777, or 5,777 years from the Creation). There is good evidence that Synkellos bequeathed the completed portion of his proposed master work, along with drafts, notations, or excerpts of what still remained to be written, to the abbot Theophanes the Confessor.<sup>10</sup> Theophanes stated that Synkellos did so because he was physically incapable of fulfilling the original plan; he was dying.

Theophanes disseminated a continuation of the *Chronography* under his own name as the *Chronicle* (believed to have been completed by AD 814).<sup>11</sup> The *Chronicle* of Theophanes completed Synkellos’ project, recording the period from the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine the Great (AD 284 or AM 5777) up to his present day (AD 814 or AM 6305). It is worth comparing, for a moment, the reception of these two halves of what was intended as a single work. Theophanes’ *Chronicle* has received a great deal of scholarly attention as arguably the single most important surviving source for the early medieval past; without it we would not possess any continuous contemporary account of East Mediterranean events from the mid-seventh century to the late eighth.<sup>12</sup> The *Chronicle*’s perceived importance is also due to the fact that it was composed of excerpts from an array of unattributed sources, many of which would

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- 8 Richard Laqueur, “Synkellos,” *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie* (Stuttgart, 1932), col. 1398. Synkellos quite possibly retained his position through the death of Tarasios until he began writing his *Chronography* in AD 808. In 810 Synkellos appears to have updated some but not all of all the references to “the current year” in his work. See AT 3/M 2 (dating the present as both AD 808 and AD 810), AT 8/M 6 (dating the present as AD 808), and AT 301/M 244 (dating the present as AD 810).
- 9 Though scholarly convention demands the Latin “AM,” Synkellos calculated by Κόσμου ἔτη (“in the year of the universe”).
- 10 Theophanes was abbot of Megas Agros near Constantinople in Bithynia. Alexander Kazhdan, “Theophanes,” *ODB*. Theophanes stated that Synkellos “both bequeathed to me (who was his close friend) the book he had written, and provided materials with a view to complete what was missing” (Mango and Scott, *Chronicle*, p. 1).
- 11 The argument dating the work’s completion is tidy: the chronicle ends with March 813 and seems to give a positive view of the Emperor Leo V (r. 813–820), who in 815 would re-impose iconoclasm. Theophanes, a supporter of the use of icons, was unlikely to portray the emperor positively unless the ban was not yet official.
- 12 See the representative comments in George Ostrogorsky’s textbook, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. Joan Hussey (New Brunswick, 1969), pp. 87–89.

otherwise be unknown. Scholars have spent decades on retracing the author's steps in compiling the work. The attention currently being devoted to whether one of these sources is the lost *Chronicle* of Theophilos of Edessa gives an idea of the importance of this task to the common historical record.<sup>13</sup> The *Chronicle* of Theophanes remains a bottomless well for scholarly curiosity.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of Theophanes' *Chronicle* for the early medieval history of the Eastern Mediterranean stands in stark contrast to the relative neglect of Synkellos' *Chronography* among historians. While Synkellos' *Chronography* also contains excerpts from many texts that would otherwise be lost, these texts are primarily of interest to classicists and students of chronography.<sup>15</sup> With the exception of an article by Ihor Ševčenko, the *Chronography* has never been studied for its relevance to the ninth century milieu in which it was composed.<sup>16</sup> There are now two compelling reasons to rectify this imbalance.

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- 13 If the "Eastern Source" behind Theophanes' narration of events in the Near East is Theophilos' account, produced by a Christian community under the Umayyad rulers of Damascus, we can reconstruct much more of the text than otherwise. For an early discussion see Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993). See now Robert Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* (Liverpool, 2011) and an opposing point of view in Maria Conterno "Palestina, Siria, Costantinopoli: la «Cronografia» di Teofane Confessore e la mezzaluna fertile della storiografia nei «secoli bui» di Bisanzio" (Ph.D. dissertation, Università di Firenze, 2011).
- 14 Jakov Ljubarskij warned that critical analysis of the text, especially under the gaze of P. Speck, would destroy any possibility of reading the text as a composite whole. See his "Quellenforschung and/or Literary Criticism: Narrative Structure in Byzantine Historical Writings," *Symbolae Osloenses* 73/1 (1998), 10–11. Nonetheless, work on Theophanes as an author continues: Panayotis Yannopoulos, *Theophané de Sigraine* (Bruxelles, 2013).
- 15 For a recent example, see Luca Arcari, "Are Women the *aition* for the Evil in the World? George Syncellus' Version of 1 Enoch 8:1 in Light of Hesiod's Theogony and Works and Days," *Henoch* 34 (2012), 5–20. Joseph Scaliger set the modern precedent of using Synkellos' *Chronography* to get at his sources: Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship II* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 580–591. The ongoing work of Alden Mosshammer and William Adler is indispensable for assessing Synkellos' accuracy as a compiler and adjudicator between ancient sources. Besides Mosshammer's edition and Adler's translation (with Paul G. Tuffin), see also Adler's *Time Immemorial* (1989) and Mosshammer's recent "The Christian Era of Julius Africanus with an Excursus on Olympiad Chronology," in *Julius Africanus und die Christliche Weltchronistik*, ed. M. Walraff (Berlin, 2006), pp. 83–112; and *Ibid.*, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era* (Oxford, 2008).
- 16 Ihor Ševčenko, "The Search for the Past in Byzantium around the Year 800" *DOP* 46 (1992), 279–293; see also George L. Huxley, "On the Erudition of George the Synkellos," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 81c (1981), 207–217. Adler and Tuffin discuss the issue on pp. lxxxii–lxxxiii.

First, according to recent reassessments of the manuscript evidence, the *Chronography* and its continuation, the *Chronicle*, were originally placed back-to-back in the same codices: they circulated together and so would have been read together, apparently just as Synkellos had intended.<sup>17</sup> If medievals did not read Theophanes' *Chronicle* apart from Synkellos' *Chronography*, neither should medievalists.

Second, despite how little we know about his life and career, there is enough circumstantial evidence to insist that Synkellos' *Chronography* cannot be set aside as the faint ivory-tower whispers of an obscure antiquarian. According to the account of AD 808 in the *Chronicle* of Theophanes—the same year that Laqueur deduced Synkellos had begun the *Chronography*—the *synkellos* of the Patriarch of Constantinople was accused of conspiracy against the emperor and was punished with “lashes, banishment, and confiscation.”<sup>18</sup> It remains most likely that this was a subtle reference to none other than Theophanes' “close friend,” our own George Synkellos.<sup>19</sup> This supposition, combined with what we do know of the office of *synkellos* in the ninth century, strongly suggests Synkellos was very active politically and that his work was composed in the aftermath of a high-stakes political gamble. If, upon his exile, Synkellos immediately turned to writing the *Chronography*, it would appear that he believed there was present meaning to the archaic past, that the study of time mattered a great deal.

My analysis of Synkellos' *Chronography* takes this premise—and this premise only—from our scanty knowledge of Synkellos' biography: Synkellos wrote because he sought to communicate something of import to his contemporaries. What was his message? With biography failing to illuminate the issue, we must turn to the text itself. In the following argument, I focus in particular on the conceptual clues and generic cues in Synkellos' programmatic statements,

17 Filippo Ronconi, “La première circulation de la « Chronique de Théophane » : Notes paléographiques et codicologiques,” and Jesse W. Torgerson, “From the Many, One? The Shared Manuscripts of the Chronicle of Theophanes and the Chronography of Synkellos,” in *Colloque Théophane: Travaux et mémoires* 19 (Paris, forthcoming).

18 “In the month of February (808) many officials planned a revolt... [Nikephoros] punished [them] with lashes, banishment, and confiscation, not only secular dignitaries, but also holy bishops, and monks, and the clergy of the Great Church, including the *synkellos*, the *sakelarios*, and the *chartophylax*, men of high repute and worthy of respect.” Trans. Mango and Scott, *Chronicle*, p. 664 from de Boor *Chronographia*, pp. 483–484.

19 The other possible known historical figure is John, who would become metropolitan bishop of Sardis. See Stephanos Efthymiades, “John of Sardis and the *Metaphrasis* of the *Passio* of St. Nikephoros the Martyr,” *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neellenici* 28 (1991), 25–26.

especially in the first pages of the *Chronography*. In doing so I suggest how Synkellos might have communicated the significance of his ideas about time to his ninth-century audience. I ground my argument in a brief survey of two late antique texts to which Synkellos explicitly referred: Eusebius' *Chronological Canons* and Ptolemy's *Handy Tables*. Synkellos' *Chronography* held a number of premises in common with these texts, such as the centrality of Aristotelian logic to the analysis of time and the close relationship between the present political order and the organization of past time.

I argue that the uniqueness of Synkellos' *Chronography* derives from its transgression of strict generic boundaries, setting up a dialogue between astronomical handbooks, the canonical scriptures, logic textbooks, theological and philosophical treatises, homilies, and liturgical commentaries. Synkellos used his *Chronography* to investigate the relationship between a timeless God and a time-bound Creation. His investigation produced the hypothesis that humanity experienced the Trinitarian God's direct interventions into linear time as a recurring "First-Created Day." It is not immediately apparent what Synkellos meant by the neologistic term he used for the idea, but it amounts to his most original contribution. I hope that what follows will not only serve as an argument for the intellectual milieu of George Synkellos, but will also contribute to cross-disciplinary interest in what early medieval elites throughout the Mediterranean world might have expected their chronographies to do.

### Synkellos' *Chronography* as an Early Medieval Universal Chronicle

Since the popularity of chronicles in general is unique to the middle ages, it is important to define the genre. Modern scholars use the designation "chronicle" to describe texts ranging from multivolume masterworks of all past time (chronographies) to a couple of pages devoted to brief historical notices in order of occurrence (annals).<sup>20</sup> Thanks to forward-thinking studies by a number of scholars, it has become increasingly accepted that chronicles had direct political implications in the social and cultural contexts in which they were written,

20 There are of course many exceptions. For instance, see Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory* (Cambridge, 2004), esp. pp. 97–99 on distinguishing generic differences in the Carolingian context; for what a chronicle is not, see Karl F. Werner's contextualized description of medieval *historiae*: "L'Historia et les rois," *Religion et culture autour de l'an Mil*, eds. D. Iongra-Prat and J.-Ch. Picard (1990), pp. 135–143.

copied, and disseminated.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, function alone cannot define form; if we are more willing to accept that chronicles mattered, we do not completely agree on a definition of the subject. Issues of genre, terminology, and audience are (rightly) topics of strong disagreement among those trying to decipher a form of literature we no longer read or write.<sup>22</sup>

Textbooks and dictionaries tell us that an inquiry into causation is considered the primary goal of history, and so we routinely distinguish “proper histories” from chronicle-type texts.<sup>23</sup> Having been denigrated for lacking narrative history’s critical inquiry into causation, chronicles are (perversely) defined not by the nature of their own inquiry, but by the nature of their structure.<sup>24</sup> The structure of a chronicle, annal, or chronography is characterized by short narratives covering relatively brief time periods, most often one year, which give the appearance of independence from one another. This structure, *prima facie*, directly inhibits the pursuit of causal connections between past events. We tend to read chronicles disingenuously, as though they are trying to be histories but happen to have this annalistic structure in the way. We could excuse ourselves—in a field plagued by a dearth of source material, the

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- 21 Sarah Foot surveyed the foundational impact of Hayden White in “Finding the Meaning of the Form: Narrative in Annals and Chronicles,” in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. N. Partner (London, 2005), pp. 88–108. For ground-breaking monographs on chronicles’ socio-political contexts see Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text* (Baltimore, 1999) and Brian Croke, *Count Marcellinus and His Chronicle* (Oxford, 2001). Recent work has trended towards incorporating the manuscript tradition, such as Simon MacLean’s study of the twelfth-century English afterlife of a tenth-century Frankish chronicle, “Recycling the Franks in Twelfth-Century England,” *Speculum* 87 (2012), 649–681.
- 22 See R.W. Burgess and M. Kulikowski, “Medieval Historiographical Terminology: the meaning of the word *Annales*,” *The Medieval Chronicle* VIII (2013), pp. 165–192. One contemporary equivalent could be Wilson Alvarez’s Chrono-Zoom project (<http://www.chronozoom.com/>), created by researchers at U.C. Berkeley, and Moscow State University as an interactive visualization of time’s order from the formation of the universe.
- 23 See Neville Morley’s perceptive discussion in *Writing Ancient History* (1999), pp. 50–52, distinguishing “history” as the past in general from the professional historian’s particular “way of talking about the past.”
- 24 The Oxford English Dictionary reflects the entrenchment of chronicles’ subjugation: “*Chronicles, or annals*, are simpler or more rudimentary forms of history in which the events of each year, or other limited period, are recorded before passing on to those of the next year or period, the year or period being the primary division; whereas in a *history*, strictly so called, each movement, action, or chain of events is dealt with as a whole, and pursued to its natural termination, or to a convenient halting-point, without regard to these divisions of time.”



temptation to extract “facts” for a basic historical narrative is beyond endurance—but is it possible to read chronicles more responsibly? Could medieval authors yet suggest to us how they supposed their texts would be read and interpreted? There is not space to be comprehensive, but I will attempt to sketch a paradigm, and contextualize my own approach to Synkellos’ ninth-century *Chronography*.

The chronicle that exerted the most influence in the early middle ages was the fourth-century two-volume *Chronological Canons* of Eusebius of Caesarea, originally written in Greek and completed ca. 325.<sup>25</sup> By the end of the century the work’s first volume, a discussion of “pre-history” before the birth of Abraham, was declining in popularity, while the second volume was widely read across the Mediterranean world. The second volume of the *Canons* presented, in a single codex, all known history from Abraham to the First Ecumenical Council under Constantine I. These post-Abrahamic *Canons* were translated into Syriac and Armenian anonymously and into Latin by St. Jerome (ca. 382).<sup>26</sup> For the early medieval world, both East and West, Eusebius’ *Canons* were both paradigmatic and definitive. Medieval readers would have approached Synkellos conditioned by reading Eusebius. Synkellos anticipated this situation, carrying on an explicit methodological debate with Eusebius throughout the *Chronography*.<sup>27</sup>

Though it is clearly pertinent to determine how Eusebius’ project was understood, we have few sources that can establish this context. Rather than

25 On the history of chronicle writing to Synkellos see Adler *Time Immemorial*, and Alden Mosshammer, *The Chronicle of Eusebius and the Greek Chronographic Tradition* (Lewisburg, 1979). See the survey of Western early medieval universal chronicles in Michael I. Allen “Universal History 300–1000: Origins and Western Developments,” in *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. Deliyannis (Leiden, 2003), pp. 17–42; and for specific studies Erik Kooper’s *The Medieval Chronicle* (currently to Volume VIII) is now essential reading.

26 Eusebius’ *Canons* consisted of two books, both making use of the graphic potential of a codex, as opposed to papyrus. In the first book, not discussed here, Eusebius laid out a large horizontal table of the various accounts of this period of the past. Besides the fragments preserved by Synkellos, this work survives in an Armenian recension. See Mosshammer, *Greek Chronographic*, pp. 65–66. For the layout, see Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book* (Cambridge MA, 2006), pp. 136–146; and on the reconstruction of Eusebius’ *Canons*, see Brian Croke, “The Originality of Eusebius’ Chronicle,” *American Journal of Philology* 103/2 (1982), 195–200. St. Jerome copied the second book and seems not to have substantially altered Eusebius’ text, though he added a preface and a continuation of the chronicle up to AD 378 (likely for the Roman Synod of 382: Mosshammer, *Greek Chronographic*, pp. 67–68).

27 There are many examples but see esp. AT 222/M 180; AT 244/M 197–198; and AT 333/M 271.

using Synkellos' reading of Eusebius to interpret Synkellos, I will draw upon the seventh-century Latinate polymath Isidore of Seville to function as our Virgilian guide to the expectations early medieval *litterati* might have brought to chronicles. In Book I of his encyclopedic work the *Etymologies*, Isidore clearly distinguished *chronica* from *historia*; he did not discuss the more common later medieval term—the singular form *chronicon*—at all. Book I of the *Etymologies* described *historia* as a broad category for *all* narrative accounts of the past: “*historia* is a *narration* of deeds accomplished; through it what occurred in the past is sorted out.”<sup>28</sup> Isidore did not only conceptually distinguish *chronica* from *historia*, but he also physically separated them, placing his description of *chronica* in Book v, “On the Laws and Times.” Isidore placed the chronicle-like annals (*annales*) in Book I along with *historia*. Though a perplexing decision from our point of view, Isidore associated annals and histories based on their similar scope: annals organized an account of a particular time and place by temporal units, as opposed to narrative coherence; neither annals nor histories attempted to account for the *entire* past.<sup>29</sup>

Isidore's *chronica* must be separated from the mass of annalistic texts we loosely call “chronicles.” Isidore's *chronica* was a very specific group of texts we call “universal chronicles,” or less often, “chronographies.” In other words, it is necessary to translate Isidore's *chronica* as “*universal* chronicles,” since Isidore's *annales* are what modern scholars usually mean by “chronicles.” For Isidore, only *chronica* discussed the entire past from the creation of the world, and the most widely circulating example of this sort of text would have been Eusebius' *Chronological Canons*. In terms of scope, Isidore's definition also fits Synkellos' *Chronography*. If Eusebius' *Canons*, Isidore's *Chronica*, and Synkellos' *Chronography* are identical in terms of scope: does this similarity extend to purpose and method?

To answer this question we might note that Isidore's discussion of *chronica* proceeded didactically. He first explained how to order gradually increasing amounts of time: from moments and hours, days and nights, to weeks, months, solstices, equinoxes, seasons, years, Olympiads, Jubilees, and finally to eras and

28 Emphasis mine. *Historia est narratio rei gestae, per quam ea, quae in praeterito facta sunt, dinoscuntur* (I.xli.1) in Wallace M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum* (Oxford, 1911); trans. Barney, Beach, Berghoff, and Lewis, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, 2006).

29 While “*historia* is of those times that we have seen,”...“*annales* are of those years that our age has not known” (Ibid., I.xliv.4). Isidore places *historia* among rhetorical works within his explication of an education in the *trivium* of Grammar, Rhetoric, and Dialectic, after laying out types of literature in a series of contrasting pairs (that is, prose vs. verse at I.38–I.39), Isidore has *historia* (I.41–I.44) oppose fable (I.40).

ages (*saecula et aetates*).<sup>30</sup> Isidore then stated that a *chronica* was the organization of “the succession of times” (*successio temporum*), where “times” denoted all measured lengths, from passing instants to ages of the world. He concluded with an example: his own epitome of time’s six ages, from the Creation to his present day.<sup>31</sup> Isidore’s chronographer could not assume, as did the diarist, calendrist, historian, or annalist, that the correct reckoning of time was a given. In Isidore’s potentially representative view, the composition of a *chronica* was the conclusion of a scholar’s categorization of time itself, a philosophical and scientific investigation into the nature and division of time.<sup>32</sup> Even if the genres of *historia* and *chronica* shared the same basic material—past events—a *historia*’s logic was plausible narrative, while a *chronica*’s logic was the order of events in time. Causation was not relevant to the organization, reckoning, and periodization of events in *chronica*; the chronographer investigated *when* an event occurred, not *why*.<sup>33</sup>

If this is a valid reading then, at least for Isidore, the more natural sister science to early medieval chronography was not history but astronomy: the measuring of time’s passage by the motions of the heavens.<sup>34</sup> In fact, this supposition can be supported with additional evidence.<sup>35</sup> The parallels between

30 Ibid., V.xxviii–xxxviii.

31 Sam Koon and Jamie Wood. “The *Chronica Maiora* of Isidore of Seville: An Introduction and Translation,” *e-Spania: Revue interdisciplinaire d’études hispaniques médiévales et modernes* 6 (2008), 3–5 (accessed 3-6-12).

32 Correct chronology was also the focus of Bede the Venerable’s (d. AD 735) *De Temporum Ratione* though he was more motivated by didactic concerns: his “World Chronicle” is buried as Chapter 66 within his instruction on the calculation of Easter. See Faith Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool, 1999).

33 Sarah Foot, “Finding the Meaning,” p. 90, blames narrative demands: histories describe events as “one thing *because of* another”; a chronicle places “one thing *after* another...a conjunction of non-causal singular statements.”

34 There is convincing evidence of continued interest in astronomy between the seventh and the ninth centuries. See Anne Tihon, “L’Astronomie à Byzance à l’Epoque Iconoclaste (VIII–IX<sup>e</sup> Siècles),” in *Science in Western and Eastern Civilization in Carolingian Times*, ed. P. Butzer (Basel, 1993), esp. on the Solar Diagram in *Vat. gr. 1291*, pp. 193–201. See also the survey on astronomy in this period in Paul Magdalino, *L’Orthodoxie des astrologues: La science entre le dogme et la divination à Byzance (VII<sup>e</sup>–XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris, 2006), pp. 17–32.

35 Scholars continue to uncover just how central the *Handy Tables* and other astronomical texts were to the enterprise of early Byzantine chronography. Besides *Vat. gr. 1291*, the *Chronographeion Suntomon* or Abridged Chronography (*Vat. gr. 2210*, AD 854/5) is another manuscript that contained texts from both genres. See Mossman Roueché, “Stephanus the Alexandrian Philosopher, the *Kanon* and a Seventh Century Millenium,” *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 74 (2011), pp. 11–17. Paul Magdalino discussed two surviving

chronography and astronomical handbooks are both conceptual and codicological.<sup>36</sup> As we shall see, Eusebius alluded to astronomical works via his arrangement of the text on the page; Synkellos directed his readers to the period's most important astronomical handbook on multiple occasions.

We can elucidate both the explicit and the allusive by examining the astronomical text to which Synkellos referred. The polymath known as Ptolemy (Claudius Ptolemaeus, fl. AD 146–170) had composed his masterwork in second-century Alexandria: the *Μαθηματικὴ Σύνταξις* (most commonly known by its Latinized Arabic title, *Almagest*). Ptolemy excerpted and reassembled tables charting astronomical data and calendrical cycles from the *Almagest* into a collection called the *Handy Tables* (*Πρόχειροι Κανόνες*).<sup>37</sup> The work was considered essential for centuries: One surviving eighth-century manuscript—*Vaticanus graecus 1291*—was used through Synkellos' lifetime.<sup>38</sup>

Ptolemy's tables did not only convey information, they depicted a method. In the excerpted image from *Vat. gr. 1291* (Fig. 1.1), Ptolemy's synchronization of daily calendars exemplifies both his system of organization, and its implicit hierarchization of the content. Here Ptolemy coordinated the Nones of the Roman month of May with (left to right) the calendar of the Hellenes, of the cities of Alexandria and Tyre, then the calendar of the Arabs, and those of Sidon, Gaza, Askalon, Heliopolis, Lycia, Cappadocia, Bythinia, Seleucia, Asian Pamphylia, Cyprus, and Crete. The Roman calendar (far left) was the constant to which the others were normalized. The order communicated the message: Rome had long since conquered the Hellenistic kingdoms and so Ptolemy's table subjugated Hellenistic calendars to a universal Roman time as kingdoms

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anonymous astronomical manuscripts, and whether Synkellos could be the author (*L'Orthodoxie des astrologues*, p. 55); Magdalino thinks not, suggesting that Synkellos was not, so to speak, a *hapax legomenon* (p. 56).

- 36 See Synkellos' direct citation at AT 381/M 314–315 (in discussing Alexander the Great).
- 37 G.J. Turner. "Ptolemy: Claudius Ptolemaeus," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* 3rd rev. ed., eds. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (Oxford, 2003). The *Handy Tables* are preserved today as in Byzantium: with the commentary of Theon of Alexandria (fl. AD 364). See Adler and Tuffin on Synkellos' use of, but relative independence from, these sources (pp. lxiv–lxix), and Synkellos' reference to Ptolemy's *Almagest* and *Handy Tables* in his discussion of Nabonasar (AT 73–75, 299–300).
- 38 Based on its list of Roman-Byzantine Emperors, David H. Wright proved that this manuscript was compiled under Constantine V (r. 741–775), "The Date of the Vatican Illuminated Handy Tables of Ptolemy and of its Early Additions," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 78 (1985), 355–362. Based on the variation of hands in the list of Roman Emperors it was likely in active use for well over a century through the reign of Basil I (d. 886).

under the empire.<sup>39</sup> If Ptolemy's work is representative, then an astronomer's synchronization of calendars conveyed political content via its system of organization. What would it tell us if this conceptual paradigm was shared between chronography and astronomy? If an astronomer's synchronization of local calendars with a universal calendar is similar to a chronographer's synchronization of local historical events with universal time, did chronographies also convey overt political content in their system of organization? Synkellos' own direct references to the *Handy Tables* would seem to confirm this hypothesis.

Though Synkellos' method relied on following the Septuagint's record, as the *Chronography* approached the Incarnation, Synkellos increasingly turned to Ptolemy's *Handy Tables* and specifically to the *Handy Tables*' lists of kings.<sup>40</sup> These king lists were occasionally transmitted independently as a "Royal Canon" (Κανὼν Βασιλέων).<sup>41</sup> The lists were relevant to Ptolemy's astronomy because astronomical cycles and specific events, such as the appearance of a comet, were always dated by the reign of a local king who, when synchronized with his contemporary kings, served to cross-reference and confirm the observations. These harmonized observations in turn rendered the synchronized king lists, as a collective whole, the authority of a universal political-historical time. The "Royal Canon" is the textual go-between that instantiates the conceptual link between the sciences of astronomy and chronography: the political narrative embedded in both means of ordering time.<sup>42</sup>

Eusebios' *Canons* presented synchronized regnal successions with a political message even more explicit than that identified in Ptolemy's table (Fig. 1.1). The *Canons*' organization of time on the manuscript page also visualized

39 See A.E. Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronography* (Munich, 1972), pp. 186–188 on an "Eastern" Julian calendar.

40 Synkellos needed to establish the concurrent rulers of the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Latins both at the conquest of Troy, and at the death of Alexander the Great, but would not accept the histories of the Maccabees as having the authority of older scriptures: "Written by Josephus (sic), this book does not belong to divinely inspired scriptures; it is, however, extremely useful" (AT 398/M 329). A. Mosshammer, *Easter Comptus*, pp. 17–18; 25–26.

41 Mossman Roueché explains: "the *Royal Canon* is a table whereby historical data (the commencement and length of a ruler's reign) are correlated with the time series underlying the mathematical tables" of the *Handy Tables*. "Stephanus," 11. I am extremely grateful to the author for sharing this research prior to publication.

42 Ptolemy's "Royal Canon" was authoritative. "Just as the mathematical *Handy Tables* could be used to calculate the positions of heavenly bodies for a given date, they could also be used to check the accuracy of chronological information in the Royal Canon, by reference to the same celestial phenomena" (Roueché, "Stephanus," 14).

political hierarchy. Eusebius synchronized the regnal chronologies of multiple kingdoms by aligning them with Olympiads and a tally of years from the life of Abraham. The appearance of Eusebius' original Greek manuscripts must be imagined on the basis of its anonymous Armenian translation and of St. Jerome's Latin translation. While specific details in the layout may be only tenuously original, surviving copies all testify to the same overall concept. The ninth-century Latin manuscript *Merton College 315* provides an example synchronous with Synkellos' composition of his *Chronography*, giving us an idea of the text's visual appearance during his milieu. For the pre-Incarnation period, Eusebius stretched multiple columns across both pages, each filled with the history of a different kingdom or people group. The scribe of the tri-colored ninth-century copy replicated this intent by stretching the text across both pages of the codex, with each horizontal row indicating a passing year, and each vertical column a different kingdom (Fig. 1.2). In Eusebius' *Canons*, plotting time meant synchronizing the rulers of particular kingdoms with each other.

In Fig. 1.2, featuring the life of Moses, a reader would have reckoned down the far left column, where Eusebius used decades from Abraham as a baseline for his universal chronology. Column 1 identifies decades 460 (CCCCLX) and 470 (CCCCLXX) with green ink. Column 2 notes the Assyrians (red ink), Column 3 the Jews (black ink), and Column 4 Sikyonian Greeks (red ink). On this folio Column 3 also initiates Eusebius' second objective chronological tally in green ink: the number of years since God's covenant with the seventy-three year-old Abraham. The right hand page in this opening continues with the Argives (black ink) in Column 5, introduces the Athenians (red ink) half way down Column 6, and ends on the far right with the Egyptians (black ink) in Column 7. Like Ptolemy, Eusebius created a universal time by organizing diversity. Unlike the astronomer, however, the chronographer's visual multiplicity followed a plot: Eusebius made seven columns dwindle down to one. To organize time was to structure political power, but to calculate time's passing was to give political power a plot.

Just as Isidore had described, Eusebius organized the succession of kingdoms into eras and epochs. As time advanced line-by-line down each page of the *Canons*, the format gradually simplified: the multi-column two-page spread of separate kingdoms (Fig. 1.2) ultimately devolved into a single column of prose under a single empire, the Roman *imperium* (Fig. 1.3). Imperial Roman time was not only political but religious. The unity of reckoning achieved through Roman political universality was enumerated with a Christian formula: years from the Incarnation. The *Canons* made the triumphs of Roman hegemony and of the Incarnation essentially co-terminus. The scribe of our

ninth-century copy of the *Canons'* Latin translation presented this unification symbolically: a bold Christogram stretching from margin to margin (Fig. 1.3). Eusebius' system of reckoning made time's progress teleological. The succession of years led inevitably to a universal temporal order under Christ and Rome; the Incarnation was the goal of the ancient past and the *raison d'être* of the Roman Empire.<sup>43</sup>

### The Structure of the Chronography of George Synkellos

The manner in which astronomers and chronographers arranged and organized the progression of time stemmed from their view of the relationship between past time and the present moment. The tabular grid created by Eusebius for his *Canons* illustrated a progression from diversity to universality that reflected the contemporary political ideology under his lord, the Emperor Constantine I (r. 306–337). Synkellos did not present his readers with a systematic tabulation of time in an immediately comprehensible visual format. In fact just the opposite: medieval readers of the *Chronography* looking for ordered synchronicity between past figures and events, as achieved so elegantly by Eusebius, may well have been overwhelmed by the great mass of chronological and historical information compiled by Synkellos, much of it in lists.<sup>44</sup> That is, while Eusebius integrated various kingdoms' systems of reckoning, Synkellos separated each kingdom's records into distinct subsections whose dates often did not even match.

Consider the layout of the *Chronography* in our oldest nearly-complete manuscript, *Paris BnF Grec 1764* of the tenth century. The pages in the reproduced image contain Synkellos' discussion of the nineteenth and twentieth Generations of the Patriarchs: those of Abraham's grandfather, Nachor, and his

43 History's division into periods progressing towards the apocalyptic has a long history and a vast literature. Common eschatological frameworks include the "Four Kingdoms" of the prophet Daniel and the "Six Days of Creation." The most popular early medieval apocalyptic, the apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius (extant in Syriac, Latin, and Greek), divided history into seven epochs. See the still-essential work by Paul Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley, 1985), translation and commentary by Benjamin Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo Methodius and an Alexandrian World Chronicle* (Washington, 2012). On the relation between eschatology and history see Paul Magdalino, "The history of the future and its uses: prophecy, policy, and propaganda," *The Making of Byzantine History*, eds. R. Beaton and C. Roueché (Aldershot, 1993), esp. pp. 3–5.

44 So, in solidarity, Daniel J. Thornton: "...endless (to the casual reader at least) tables of monarchs, emperors, bishops, and the years of their reign." *BMCR* 2004.10.27.

father, Terah (Fig. 1.4). According to Synkellos, the lives of these two patriarchs covered 150 years—from AM 3163 to AM 3313—from the birth of Nachor to the birth of Abraham.<sup>45</sup> The entry reproduced here grouped Generation Nineteen and Twenty together and brought Synkellos' chronology up to the time of the birth of Abraham's Generation Twenty-One (AM 3313).<sup>46</sup> After stating the dates he assigned to Nachor and Terah—AM 3163 to AM 3313—Synkellos provided the lists of rulers for four different kingdoms.

One might expect that each of these groups would contain the kings who were exactly contemporaneous with Nachor and Terah. On the contrary, the chronological information provided by Synkellos is eclectic at best: despite the neat hierarchical appearance of the manuscript (Fig. 1.4), the actual years covered in each kingdom's short list of rulers do not align with each other. Under "The Egyptians" Synkellos noted rulers for the years AM 3117–3315; under "The Assyrians" Synkellos listed rulers for the years AM 3216–3403; under "The Sikyonians" Synkellos recorded the reigns of the first Sikyonian-Greek rulers as AM 3239–3290; and, finally under "The Thebans" Synkellos enumerated kings for the years AM 3053–3231.

These four lists of rulers do not coordinate for even a single year, and in fact the Thebans and Sikyonians do not even overlap at all: there is an eight-year gap between the last Theban ruler (who died in AM 3231) and the first Sikyonian (who ruled from AM 3239). It must have been truly cumbersome for the early medieval, no less twenty-first century, reader to make cross-references between lists. Anyone interested in identifying rulers synchronous with Nachor's birth, for instance, would have had to flip back and forth through other entries in the *Chronography* in order to hunt down all relevant figures. Presuming that the surviving arrangement of the text was both original and intentional, Synkellos' ambivalence suggests that his central argument did not depend on making connections between historical figures.

Let's zoom out from the manuscript page and consider the work as a whole. Since Synkellos never completed his *Chronography* we cannot be entirely sure of his overall vision for its organization. We are fairly certain that Synkellos originally divided his *Chronography* into two portions: one leading up to, and

45 At the mention of tangible "dates" by Synkellos, it is tempting to check how "accurate" our author was. Synkellos' dates largely followed what might be called the "Alexandrian school" of chronography, synthesized by the fifth-century chronographer Annianos (see below, pp. 39–40). Comparing these and other efforts would miss the point. In chronography all dates are basic additions and subtractions from "fixed points" (such as the Incarnation): the dates are necessitated by the pre-determined hierarchy of sources.

46 AT 129/M 104.



the other following from, AM 5434 (63 BC), Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> The portion before AM 5434 was revised and is relatively polished and coherent. If we focus on this portion of the text, it appears to have been planned out as four distinct periods, or epochs.<sup>48</sup> My reader should be aware that these divisions are *not* explicitly indicated in the text as such. Nevertheless, I believe there are enough clues to indicate Synkellos intended his own attentive medieval readers to deduce them.<sup>49</sup> Each of Synkellos' epochs synchronized the royal successions of a distinct set of neighboring kingdoms with the records of the leaders of the Hebrew people (whether patriarchs, prophets, priests, judges, or kings); each epoch displayed its chronological data distinctively, forcing a reader to approach the text in a different way; each epoch was both initiated and completed by comprehensive summaries and editorial discussions; and, each epoch was unified by one or two key synchronizations between

- 47 J.W. Torgerson, "From the Many, One?" Synkellos divided all time at AM 5434 to emphasize a prophecy concerning the end of the rule of Jewish priests and the rule of a non-Jew over Judea: "At that time also, the 'anointed ones who rule' prophesied by Daniel came to an end" (M 373,24-25/AT 446); and "Herod, being an Idumaeen Arab, was the first Jewish ruler of foreign stock" (M 383,16/AT 457). Nevertheless, Roman triumphalism is not absent from the *Chronography*: "The first to be monarch, [Julius Caesar] proved by far the most humane of all the kings who have ever ruled" (M 365,8-9/AT 436).
- 48 I use the term "epoch" here in its general English sense, "a period of time." The Greek word ἐποχή has the more technical meaning of "a fixed point," which in chronology, astronomy, or *computus* is the past point from which one calculates years and dates. I use "epoch" to refer to these periods of time because today Byzantine historians conventionally use the term "era" in the technical sense just described (ἐποχή). Thus an "era" refers to a particular dating system that calculated the "Year 1" from a distinct point (*ODB* s.v. "Antiochene Era," "Byzantine Era," or "Alexandrian Era"). Synkellos, for instance, largely adopted the "Minor Alexandrian Era," basing his calculations upon the "fixed point" (ἐποχή) set by the fifth-century Alexandrian Annianus who dated the Incarnation to March 25th, 5500 (on whom see below, pp. 39–40).
- 49 To prevent misunderstanding: though Synkellos must have at very least *planned* his chronicle with something resembling these epochs, he never explicitly referred to them as distinct "sections" of the work. Their existence is contingent upon the reader's acceptance of my analysis of the text and manuscripts. Synkellos provided summaries between the first and second epochs (AT 111–125/M 87–101), and between the second and third (AT 160–177/M 128–142). Between the third and fourth epochs there is a treatise but no chronological summary (AT 318–339/M 259–278). An early marginal note (σχόλιον) did correct this "omission," and by the tenth-century this σχόλιον had been incorporated into the text proper (*Paris BN Grec 1764*; see AT 318/M 259). The dramatic parallel between Nebuchadnezzar leading Jechonias to Babylon (AT 319–320/M 260) and Pompey leading the Jewish prisoners to Rome (AT 429–431/M 357–359) at least suggests a planned division.

particular figures or events for which it was essential to establish chronological congruence.<sup>50</sup>

Synkellos' division of the past into four evenly spaced epochs presumed that the past was equally knowable. Synkellos used his first epoch to demonstrate this point explicitly, arguing that time was quantifiable from the first moment of Creation. The years of the first epoch could be tallied just as well as those of the fourth, and so all of time could be analytically divided into overarching historical periods. This agenda perhaps explains Synkellos' ambivalence towards detailed organization, as noted above (Fig. 1.4).

The division of *all* time into epochs distinguishes the *Chronography* from the *Canons*. Eusebius began the *Canons* proper at the point when he could compare multiple historical records from Abraham on. Eusebius' temporal system presumed that, for the chronographer, time in the early history of the world was dissolute and amorphous. As it came to be calibrated by fewer and fewer kingdoms, time truly "came together" at the Incarnation; universal time finally emerged with the conjunction of Augustus and Christ.

The first portion of Synkellos' *Chronography*, his first epoch, covered the ancient period which Eusebius had left unorganized. This portion introduced Synkellos' method and clarified his thesis. I will focus on the method first, and then return to the philosophical basis for his reckoning below. A key premise of Synkellos' approach was the compatibility between traditional chronological methodology and a literal reading of the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Synkellos linked his use of the Septuagint for chronology to the text's authority as scripture in the tradition of the Greek-speaking Church.<sup>51</sup>

Synkellos pointed out that the most respected chronographers of Late Antiquity—Julius Africanus (d. ca. 240) and Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339/40)—agreed with him: for the world's earliest period, the Septuagint's record of 2,242 years from Adam to the Flood was more accurate than either the Hebrew scriptures themselves or their Samaritan translation.<sup>52</sup> Even though the Septuagint

50 Unfortunately, Adler and Tuffin treat the organization of the *Chronographia* as a constant (p. lvii). Against Scaliger's assertion that our manuscripts of Synkellos represent the work of dishonest scribes who "piled the historical entries indiscriminately in a random heap" (*librarii vero eas historias σποράδην in tumultuarium congeriem concesserunt*, as quoted in Grafton, *Scaliger*, II, pp. 540–542), I affirm the premise, as I understand Mosshammer, too—that Synkellos' alternating and evolving format was intentional.

51 Sacred tradition: ἱερὰ (or ἱερατικὴ) παράδοσις. See Adler and Tuffin, *Chronography*, pp. liii–lv.

52 AT 27/M 20. Adler and Tuffin note Synkellos' preference for the Septuagint, but do not explain it as a key methodological principle (*Chronology*, pp. xxxvi and xlix). Africanus actually tallied 2,262 but, as Synkellos explains, this is only because he was working

was a late Greek translation from the Hellenistic period, “the LXX [Septuagint] translation was translated from, so it would seem, an ancient and a strictly accurate Hebrew text of scripture.”<sup>53</sup> Synkellos further exalted the Septuagint by refuting the non-Scriptural records of Egyptian and Chaldaean kings claiming to predate Noah’s Flood.<sup>54</sup> No other text was a viable alternative.

Synkellos then turned and sailed into the wind, demonizing the authorities he had just cited: Africanus and Eusebius. The venerable late antique chronographers had attempted to harmonize these same non-Scriptural sources with the Septuagint. At moments of apparent discrepancy they had even abandoned the Septuagint in favor of the other records: they had reneged on their own principles. Africanus and Eusebius were unreliable dissemblers.<sup>55</sup> The conclusion is clear: only Synkellos could be consistently relied upon to defend canonical chronology from the definitive text of the Septuagint. The argument had the rhetorical impact of all but equating Synkellos’ chronological schema with the canonicity of Holy Scriptures.

This discourse sets Synkellos’ *Chronography* apart: it was not primarily a reference, but an apology for a particular method of chronography. Synkellos was far more bent on proving his authority to order time than on synchronizing the lives of historical figures for his readers to consult, as in the *Canons*. The *Chronography*’s original titles seem to support this conclusion. “Selection of Chronography” (Ἐκλογὴ χρονογραφίας) and “Abridged Chronography” (Σύντομος Χρονογραφία),<sup>56</sup> evoke Synkellos’ mode of argumentation via quotation and then refutation.

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with a faulty manuscript that stated Methuselah was 187 years old when his son Lamech was born; the more accurate reading is that he was 167 years of age. The Hebrew scriptures and their translations in Greek and Samaritan were wildly divergent, with the Hebrew falling 586 and the Samaritan 935 years short of the Septuagint reckoning. See AT 118/M 94.

- 53 Πανταχόθεν τοιγαροῦν τῆς τῶν ὁ ἔρμηνείας ἐκ παλαιᾶς, ὡς ἔοικε, καὶ ἀδιαστρόφου Ἑβραίων γραφῆς μεταβεβλήσθαι συνισταμένης (AT 125/M 100).
- 54 Esp. Manetho’s second or third-century B.C. Ptolemaic *Aegyptica* and Berossus’ *Babyloniaca* (from the same period, though likely written under the patronage of the Syria-based successors to Alexander, the Seleucids). For a discussion of Synkellos’ access to these, see Adler, *Time Immemorial*, pp. 148–157. If Manetho is taken literally, he recorded 11,985 years before the Flood; Berossus proposed 432,000 years. See Gerald Verbrugghe and John Wickersham, *Berossos and Manetho, Introduced and Translated* (Ann Arbor, 1996).
- 55 AT 95/M 74.
- 56 Adler and Tuffin, *Chronography*, p. xxix. In the chronicle’s first half Synkellos describes his work as a *χρονογραφία*, the classical Greek term for a chronological record. Not incidentally this is also the term for a method of reckoning in an astronomical treatise (See AT 125/M 100). In a presumably intentional linguistic switch Synkellos used the variants

Why was Synkellos so eager to make an authoritative claim about time's order? What was the ideological payoff if a reader granted Synkellos' assertions about chronological method? Eusebius had shown a progression in time—from the dissolution of the ancient past, to the clarity of chronology at the Incarnation of Christ under the Romans—to make a connection between Empire and Church. By contrast, Synkellos began his reckoning of time from the very first moment of Creation, which he insisted was a chronological point fully accessible to a chronographer's investigations. Synkellos argued from the same premise as Eusebius—the events of Christ's life were the primary fixed points of chronography—but built up his own unique hypothesis of the Creation as a chronological event.

### Synkellos' First-Created Day as a Date

Synkellos argued that since the entire temporal order of the universe stood on the chronological point (ἡ ἐποχή) of Christ's Resurrection, the temporal event of the Creation was knowable. Synkellos' argument is paradoxical, but not illogical. Synkellos held that the Resurrection occurred on the day that in contemporary solar calendars was the twenty-fifth of the Roman month March and the twenty-ninth of the Egyptian month Phamenoth. Synkellos also claimed that in the year the Resurrection occurred (AM 5534), this day was marked by the date 1 Nisan, an apparent reference to the Jewish lunar calendar. Near the end of the *Chronography*, Synkellos succinctly stated the implications of precisely dating the day God rose from the dead:

And after his burial, [Christ] arose on the third day, on 29 Phamenoth, that is 25 March, when the Lord's day, the first day of the week, was dawning, on the eighth day before the Kalends of April, the first day of the first-created Hebrew and Christian month of Nisan, concerning which it was said: 'In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth' (Gen. 1.1.), and again, 'This is the book of the creation of the heaven and the earth, on which day God created.' (Gen. 2.4)<sup>57</sup>

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χρονογραφειον and χρονογράφιον, the *koine* and Byzantine Greek terms for a chronicle in charts and in the second portion of the text (AT 115/M 91; AT 118/M 94; AT 121/M 96 and AT 473/M 396).

57 και ταφεις ανίσταται τη γ' ημέρα, Φαμενωθ καθ' ἡτοι Μαρτίου κε', επιφωσκούσης κυριακῆς μιᾶς σαββάτων, πρωι καλανδῶν Ἀπριλλίων, α' τοῦ πρωτοκτίστου μηνὸς Νισάν παρ' Ἑβραίοις και Χριστιανοῖς, περι ἧς εἶρηται· “ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν και τὴν γῆν,” και πάλιν· “αὕτη ἡ βίβλος γενέσεως οὐρανοῦ και γῆς, ἧ ἡμέρα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός” (AT 463/M 389).

Note that Synkellos did not restart his sentence when the subject transitioned from the day of the Resurrection to the day of the Creation. He did not even restate the subject noun “day” (ἡ ἡμέρα), but he conjoined a statement about the First-Created Day in AM 5534 and the First-Created Day in AM 1 with the relative clause “concerning which” (περὶ ἧς); the day was single. If the days were identical, then, according to classical logic, statements about the day of Creation were statements about the day of the Resurrection. If the day of the Creation and the day of the Resurrection was the same day, then March 25 in AM 5534 was both the date of the Resurrection, and the date from which the Resurrection was tallied. For Synkellos’ *Chronography*, the Resurrection would be both the premise and the conclusion.

Synkellos then went on to argue that Christ’s Incarnation—the archangel Gabriel’s announcement of the descent of the Holy Spirit into the womb of the Mother of God—had also taken place on the exact same calendrical alignment, the exact same day, in the year AM 5500:

We have committed all our labour on this work to demonstrate the premise that this First-Created Day corresponds with the day of the divine proclamation and the miraculous conception of the only-begotten son of God from the holy Virgin; and with the day of the life-bringing Resurrection from the dead, a day which for those made worthy to celebrate it in spirit and truth is both more divine than the other days and the source of all light.<sup>58</sup>

Synkellos linked three events—the Creation, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection of Christ—with a formulation that is, so far as I can ascertain, unattested before the *Chronography*: the First-Created Day (ἡ ἀγία πρωτόκτιστος ἡμέρα).<sup>59</sup> Synkellos later included a fourth day of divine intervention, bringing the instances of 1 Nisan, 29 Phamenoth, and 25 March to a total of four: (1) the Creation in AM 1; (2) the post-Flood drying of the earth in AM 2243; (3) the Incarnation of Christ in AM 5500; and, (4) the Resurrection of Christ in AM

58 Περὶ ταύτης καὶ ἡμῖν ὁ πᾶς τοῦδε τοῦ γράμματος πόνος καταβέβληται, δεῖξαι τὴν αὐτὴν καὶ μίαν πρωτόκτιστον ἡμέραν σύστοιχον τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελισμοῦ καὶ τῆς ὑπερφουδῆς ἐξ ἀγίας παρθένου συλλήψεως τοῦ μονογενοῦς υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμέρα καὶ τῇ τῆς ζωοποιοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστάσεως θεοειδεστέρα καὶ ὀλοφώτῳ τοῖς ἀξίοις ἐορτάζειν αὐτὴν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ (AT 463–464/M 389.20–25).

59 Supported by searches in the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae ([www.tlg.uci.edu](http://www.tlg.uci.edu)). George Monachos, Synkellos’ successor in universal chronicle writing who wrote around the 840s, used the phrase, though it did not play a central role in his conception of time. C. de Boor, *Georgii monachi chronicon* (Leipzig, 1904), pp. 129.3, 177.27.

5534.<sup>60</sup> Synkellos was explicit: the alignment of the *dates* indicated recurrences of the *same day*: the First-Created Day.

What does it mean to date the “First-Created Day”? Presumably Synkellos was drawing on the chronographic tradition, and so we dutifully turn to earlier works in the genre. Synkellos presented the *Chronography* in the tradition of the fifth-century Alexandrian Annianos who had, in turn, positioned himself as heir to Julius Africanus, the third-century godfather of Christian chronography.<sup>61</sup> Annianos’ calculation of years is nearly the same that we find reproduced in Synkellos, for Annianos reckoned that both the Incarnation and the Creation had occurred on a 25 March, the latter exactly 5500 years after the former.<sup>62</sup> Synkellos expressed complete agreement with the calculations of Annianos, reproving Annianos only for his attempt to synchronize the records of Babylonian and Egyptian kings with pre-Flood chronology.<sup>63</sup>

Synkellos did, however, add to Annianos. His fourth First-Created Day—the earth’s drying while Moses was in the Ark in AM 2243—was his own invention. In his discussion of this fourth day, Synkellos distanced himself from Annianos’ chronological claims in subtle but profound ways. Synkellos specified that all four recurrences of the First-Created Day were not only 25 March and 29 Phamenoth, but also the first day of the week (Sunday) and 1 Nisan.<sup>64</sup> In describing this day, Synkellos went beyond the already specific Genesis narrative by adding “lunar days” (κατὰ σελήνην), stating, in particular, that the water subsided on “Luna 12.”<sup>65</sup> It is not possible, however, for a day to be the moon’s

60 Creation: AT 4/M 3; Ark on dry earth: AT 32/M 23–24; Incarnation: AT 449–450, 454–455/M 376–377, 380–382; Resurrection: AT 462–463, 465/M 388–389, 390 and AT 472–473/M 394–395.

61 On Annianos and his relationship to his scholarly predecessors, see Victor Grumel, *Traité d'études byzantines I: La chronologie* (Paris, 1958), pp. 92–94.

62 On the development of the importance of 25 March, see Grumel, *Chronologie*, pp. 27–30. Synkellos closely adheres to Annianos’ calculations, and likely simply copied statements from his works and the now-lost works of Panodoros (AT 46–48 & 474/M 35–36 & 396). These chronicles were, unlike the *Chronography*, interspersed with calculations and Paschal Tables. Synkellos also consulted Maximus the Confessor on the computation of Easter (AT 455/M 382), and an “Ecclesiastical Computation” related to the “Astronomical Tables” (AT 301–304/M 245–247). This maybe have been “Annianos’ attempt to bring Panodoros’ Astronomical Canon into conformity with biblical chronology and the traditional dating of Christ’s Incarnation” (Adler and Tuffin, pp. lxiv–lxix; see AT 455/M 381–382 and AT 46–47/M 35–36).

63 Grumel, *Chronologie*, p. 95. AT 46–47/M 35.

64 See Grumel, *Chronologie*, p. 93 n. 1.

65 The Septuagint version of Genesis relates that Noah entered the Ark on the twenty-seventh day of the second month, Iyar (the Hebrew text states the seventeenth). Nearly a

twelfth (Luna 12) and also the first day of a particular lunar month, 1 Nisan. 1 Nisan is, by definition, Luna 1.<sup>66</sup> Synkellos then generalized this new and problematic idea: these additional dating specifications were also true of the First-Created Day of the Resurrection, which he now dated as 25 March, 29 Phamenoth, and 1 Nisan.

The application of the idea to the Resurrection created yet another chronological impossibility. Though the Jewish lunar calendar at the time of Christ was not intercalated to ensure that Passover (14 Nisan) fell after the vernal equinox (21 March), it usually did so; theoretically 1 Nisan of AM 5534 could have also been 25 March.<sup>67</sup> However, the *historic* Resurrection could not possibly have occurred on 1 Nisan. As recounted by all four canonical gospels, Christ's historical *passio* occurred during the celebration of Passover, his Resurrection just after. Passover might fall on a range of solar calendar dates, but in the Jewish calendar Passover was always 14 Nisan.<sup>68</sup>

Before we attribute these apparent problems to Synkellos' ignorance, note that elsewhere he correctly defined the date of Passover as "the fourteenth of the first month at evening."<sup>69</sup> Thus, the contradiction just elucidated does not

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year later on 1 Nisan the flood waters finally dried up, and exactly one year after embarkation, the Ark was emptied on 27 Iyar (Genesis 8, 13–19).

- 66 As the Venerable Bede succinctly explained to his students: "Whenever Holy Scripture... indicates a day of the month on which something was said or done, it signifies nothing other than the age of the Moon." *De Temporum Ratione* 11.313, trans. Faith Wallis, *Bede*, p. 42.
- 67 Sacha Stern, *Calendar and Community* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 34–46.
- 68 The key passage is Exodus 12, 18: "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening." Nisan was kept generally in the springtime by the occasional addition of a thirteenth lunar month (Adar 11) but ranged across the Roman solar months March, April, and May. It was not until the tenth century that Jewish lunar reckoning was universally "fixed" to the solar calendar so that the first full moon after the vernal equinox always belonged to Nisan. On the repeating 19-year cycle of the lunar calendar, see Grumel, *Chronologie*, 31–56, in particular pp. 41–48. Sacha Stern has shown convincingly that the "fixed" Jewish lunisolar calendar became accepted only very gradually over the course of the fourth to ninth centuries, and not universally until the tenth (*Calendar and Community*, pp. 155–181, 197–200).
- 69 AT 207/M 168. As this passage continues, Synkellos gives even more specific information, stating that based on a tradition dating back to the year of the Resurrection: "even to this day one can see in Jericho at the vernal equinox new grain being harvested early in the warmer locations. From this grain, the most holy church in Jerusalem customarily offers the bloodless offering [the Eucharist] during the anniversary of the life-bringing Resurrection of Christ our God."

alert us to Synkellos' incompetence, but to the fact that by "Nisan" he must have meant something other than what we assumed. Indeed, when Synkellos referred to dates using months of the Jewish calendar, he was in fact referring to a calendar entirely distinct from the rabbinic lunisolar calendar in all respects save for the month names: "Let anyone who reads this [chronography] reckon the first of the first Hebrew month of Nisan as the beginning of every year in this chronicle, and not the first of the Egyptian month Thoth, or the first of the Roman month of January, or some other beginning-point used by some other nation."<sup>70</sup> Synkellos went on to define a 365-day solar calendar that matched Hebrew month names with the Roman and Egyptian solar calendars: "Nisan" was a 30-day month, from "25 March up to 23 April, and from 29 Phamenoth up to 28 Pharmouthi," and so on.<sup>71</sup>

In other words, Synkellos was using a Hebrew *solar* calendar. Synkellos' calendar has been recognized as a distinct system of reckoning,<sup>72</sup> and merits further study in the context of "Romanizing" calendars created and used by various local cultures in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine.<sup>73</sup> Synkellos' apparent coordination of multiple calendars to the First-Created Day was, rather, a translation of the date March 25 into three different (but parallel) solar calendars.<sup>74</sup>

Synkellos' innovative tripartite dating of the First-Created Day was not a claim to chronological synchronization so much as it was a statement of cultural universality. Synkellos' statement of the dates for the First-Created Day played the same unifying role in his conceptualization of time as the visual presentation of the Incarnation did in Eusebius' *Canons*. If Eusebius used a graphic depiction of the dawn of universal time under Roman rule to *show* Christian providence coordinated a universal chronology, Synkellos used chronological terminology to *state* the same idea in regards to his First-Created Day.

The chronographer Annianos does not seem to have employed anything like this concept, and it remains unclear what Synkellos meant by calling this universally dated day "First-Created." We could compare the *Chronography* with the Byzantine universal chronicle closest in scope and date of composition, the

70 AT 8/M 6.

71 AT 9–10/M 6–7.

72 Jürgen Tubach, "Synkellos' Kalendar der Habräer," *Vigilae Christianae* 47 (1993), 379–389.

73 Discussed as the *hemerologia* by Samuel, *Chronology*, pp. 172–178, 186–188. See also Stern, *Calendar and Community*, pp. 211–275; and the recent work of Jonathan Ben-Dov who suggests discussing these surviving texts in the context of a regional culture of exchange and influence, *The Head of All Years* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 266–270.

74 See Tubach's table of the three in "Synkellos' Kalendar," p. 381.



seventh-century *Chronicon Paschale*.<sup>75</sup> The *Chronicon Paschale*'s influence is questionable since it only survives in one tenth-century manuscript (*Vat Gr. 1941*).<sup>76</sup> Even if we grant that Synkellos had read this text, the anonymous chronicler's "paschal" focus is very different from his own. The paschal chronicler's achievement was to comprehensively bring together a chronographer's reckoning by annual increments, with a computist's reckoning by solar and lunar cycles. The *Chronicon Paschale* unlocked the chronological potential of the 19-year lunar cycle, the 28-year solar cycle, and their product the 532-year paschal table, to project days and dates into the past when the sources had not recorded such specificity.<sup>77</sup> To this end, the paschal chronicler made precise calculations that relied on a strictly linear conception of time, never stating that days with the same date were in any way the same day.<sup>78</sup>

### Synkellos' First-Created Day as a Concept

Synkellos' idea was unprecedented in chronography: a day that cinched up the linear thread of time like a drawstring, gathering together temporally disparate historical events as though through a loophole in the fabric of time itself. Synkellos had no actual chronological need for his assertion: the thesis that God first set matter in motion on March 25 was not *chronologically* significant for any of the calculations or synchronizations in the *Chronography*. Synkellos' use of terminology from multiple calendars does not indicate an interest in

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- 75 Analysis and recent bibliography in Mary Whitby, "The Biblical Past in John Malalas and the *Paschal Chronicle*," *From Rome to Constantinople*, eds. H. Amirav and H. Romeny (Leuven / Paris, 2007), pp. 279–302. *Chronicon paschale ad exemplar vaticanum* 11, ed. Ludwig Dindorf (Bonn, 1832), trans. Mark Whitby and Mary Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale: 284–628 AD* (Liverpool, 1989).
- 76 Passages similar to those in Synkellos or Theophanes seem to have come from a common source, rather than from Synkellos' reading the *Chronicon Paschale* directly (see Whitby and Whitby, *Chronicon*, p. xiv).
- 77 For instance, under AD 609: "And so from the death of Constantine until now there are 272 years, while from his twentieth anniversary, 284 complete years. Easter indeed fell on the third of April 272 years ago in year 13 of the moon's cycle, in the second year of Olympiad 279." Whitby and Whitby, *Chronicon*, pp. 147–148; Dindorf, *Chronicon*, p. 698. The anonymous paschal chronicler seems to have suggested subtle typologies in correspondence between days of the week, such as Christ's baptism occurring on a Wednesday, the same day God created the waters. See Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, p. 343, for other examples.
- 78 The paschal chronicler adhered to a strictly historical and linear time even in the entry for AD 562, at the completion of the first 532-year cycle on a date that was demonstrably the same astronomical day as Christ's resurrection (see Dindorf, *Chronicon*, p. 684; Whitby and Whitby, *Chronicon*, pp. 134–135.)

cross-cultural chronology: Synkellos' equation of 25 March, 29 Phamenoth, and 1 Nisan was in fact simply an equivalence of three different, but compatible, solar calendars. As such one would have to presume that those dates would align *every* year.

Synkellos' chronological arguments, such as his dates for Abraham and Moses, were limited to harmonizing the *years* of various rulers' reigns. Synkellos did not attempt to prove that his *dates* aligned with celestial events, such as the appearances of comets, and he hardly mentioned days of the week. The idea of the First-Created Day was clearly central to Synkellos' ambitions. The meaning of this phrase, however, remains far from apparent. How might Synkellos have expected his readers to understand his novel formulation? What did it mean?

Work in critical theory has pointed out that generic expectations are communicated from author to reader through a series of cues or references which "make present...the text's presence in the world," a presence shared within the community of author and audience.<sup>79</sup> That is, textual cues do not simply alert a reader to a single genre and then step aside: they continue to negotiate with the reader's expectations and so situate the text in relationship to multiple genres.<sup>80</sup> Synkellos' project is not entirely comprehensible as pure chronography. If we seek to take Synkellos on his own terms and to trace the experience of his medieval readers, we must follow his generic cues, line by line.

Let us return to the beginning. Synkellos began the *Chronography* by quoting the Septuagint's first sentence, the instantiating moment of Creation ἐν ἀρχῇ:

In the beginning (ἐν ἀρχῇ) God created the heaven and the earth.<sup>81</sup>

With his next words, Synkellos provided commentary on his first noun:

The beginning (ἡ ἀρχή) of all chronological movement of the visible creation subject to time...<sup>82</sup>

One reason to begin with the same words as the Septuagint might have been to set up the argument that absolute adherence to the canonical translation set

79 John. Frow, *Genre* (London / New York, 2006), p. 109, citing Gérard Genette's *Seuils* (Paris, 1987).

80 *Ibid.*, pp. 114–123.

81 AT 1/M 1. "Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν."

82 ἀρχὴ πάσης χρονικῆς κινήσεως τῆς ὑπὸ χρόνον ὁρατῆς κτίσεως ἐστίν. *Ibid.*, though substituting the more literal "all chronological movement" for Adler and Tuffin's "whole chronological process."

the *Chronography* on a pedestal of canonicity. In the immediate context, however, Synkellos used the first line from the Book of Genesis to introduce a philosophical discussion and a distinction. Synkellos' prologue argued that, properly speaking, the beginning (ἡ ἀρχή) must be temporal, the beginning of matter, of motion and, therefore, by definition, of time. "It is abundantly clear" that "heaven and the earth, the light and the darkness, the spirit and the abyss"—all created matter—came into existence with "the first-created 24-hour day itself...this no one of sound mind will oppose."<sup>83</sup> Then:

Moses, the beholder of God, learnt naturally and through divine instruction that it was also the first day of the first month of Nisan and commenced his narrative from it, saying 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.' For it is abundantly clear that a day is at the head of every monthly and yearly chronological cycle.<sup>84</sup>

According to Synkellos, Moses, as the author of Genesis, must have meant the "beginning" of Creation as the beginning of a (solar) calendrical cycle.

In his gloss Synkellos avoided discussion of both the equinox and the plenitude of the moon by asserting that, inductively, Moses must have meant time to be reckoned from (solar) 1 Nisan. Synkellos was not concerned with the astronomy or historicity of the matter, but the principle.<sup>85</sup> Synkellos added a philosophical proof. If, as had all other chronographers, he were to reckon the beginning of time from the Creation of the moon on the fourth day there would be two beginnings: one "of the heaven and earth earlier in time" and, then, a second, "later, during which the First-Created Day began its existence." This is "opposed to divinely inspired-utterances and to the natural order of things." Creation and time must be co-terminus: "This Holy First-Created Day is incontrovertibly proved to be a chronological beginning."<sup>86</sup> What were the stakes in making this claim?

83 πρόδηλον γάρ ὅτι...ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ καὶ τὸ φῶς καὶ τὸ σκότος τὸ πνεῦμά τε καὶ ἡ ἄβυσσος καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ πρωτόκτιστον νυχθήμερον ὅπερ ἀρχὴ τῆς χρονικῆς κινήσεως πέφυκεν...οὐδεὶς ἀντιφράσσει τῶν εὖ φρονούντων (AT 2/M 2).

84 οὐ χάριν καὶ πρώτην τοῦ πρώτου μηνὸς Νισάν φυσικῶς αὐτὴν καὶ θεοδιδάκτως ὁ θεόπτης Μωϋσῆς παραλαβὼν ἐξ αὐτῆς ἤρξατο τῆς συγγραφῆς λέγων "Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν." πρόδηλον γάρ ὅτι παντὸς μηνιαίου καὶ ἐνιαυσιαίου χρόνου (AT 2/M 2).

85 Grumel, *Chronologie*, pp. 87–88, 95.

86 εἰ γὰρ μὴ τοῦτο δῶμεν, ἔσται μὲν ἄλλη τις ἀρχὴ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς κατὰ τὸν χρόνον πρεσβυτέρα καὶ ἄλλη νεωτέρα, καθ' ἣν ἡ πρωτόκτιστος ἡμέρα τοῦ εἶναι ἤρξατο, ὅπερ ἐναντιοῦται ταῖς θεοπνεύστοις φωναῖς καὶ τῇ φυσικῇ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀκολουθίᾳ. ...ἀναγκαίως οὖν ἐκ πάντων δείκνυται χρονικὴ ἀρχή. AT 3/M 2.

To my knowledge no previous chronographer had attempted to defend the assertion that the creation of matter on the very first day meant the beginning of time. Christian chronographers and computists ubiquitously began their calculations from the “fourth day,” the day on which the Book of Genesis had said God created the sun and the moon.<sup>87</sup> Synkellos confidently asserted that no one of sound mind could continue to propose this premise without offending basic logic. This was a cue to Synkellos’ readership that his reasoning was based on Aristotle’s standard definition of time: while time is not equal to motion, time is the measure of motion.<sup>88</sup> By referring to Aristotle in the context of a discussion of the Creation, Synkellos not only grounded his argument in textbook logic, but also placed himself in line with widely accepted philosophical and theological treatises on the world’s origins.<sup>89</sup>

Using Aristotle’s logic to ground an exegesis of Genesis 1 resonates with the philosophical work of Synkellos’ near-contemporary, John of Damascus (d. 749–754).<sup>90</sup> The Damascene was a theologian-philosopher who, like Synkellos, wrote in Greek and had ties to Umayyad Syria.<sup>91</sup> John of Damascus had begun his magnum opus, the *Fount of Knowledge* (Πηγὴ Γνώσεως), with an excursus—the *Dialectica*, or “Philosophical Chapters” (Κεφάλαια Φιλοσοφικά)—on the Aristotelian terminology he would apply to his theology of the Trinitarian God.<sup>92</sup> Synkellos could have read John’s text while in Palestine or Constantinople; the

87 See Grumel, *Chronologie*, p. 88, on Panodoros’ argument for this position (presumably repeated in Annianos’ lost works). For most chronographers, the creation of matter fell on the (theoretical) 19th of March, the 21st being then the “fourth day,” the beginning of astronomical time, the vernal equinox, and the eventual date of the Resurrection.

88 It is this definition that lends time its universality. As Aristotle put it: “Every change and every motion is in time” (πάσα μεταβολὴ καὶ πάσα κίνησις ἐν χρόνῳ ἐστίν: *Physics* 4.14: 223a.14–15). Translation from Glen Coughlin, *Aristotle: Physics or Natural Hearing* (South Bend, 2005), p. 92.

89 Through the early middle ages Aristotelian logic never lost its position in Greek pedagogy. See Klaus Oehler, “Aristotle in Byzantium,” *GRBS* 5 (1964), 133–146; and Mossman Roueché, “A Middle Byzantine Handbook on Logical Terminology,” *JÖB* 29 (1980), 71–98.

90 Alexander Kazhdan, “John of Damascus,” *ODB*.

91 John of Damascus belonged to a family, the Mansūr, who were native to Syria and had likely headed the Umayyad financial administration into the eighth century. See Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 3–7. Louth argued that the monastery John of Damascus retired to was Mar Chariton, which Synkellos visited many times, as above p. 18, n. 2, “St. John Damascene: Preacher and Poet,” *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics*, eds. P. Allen and M. Cunningham (Leiden, 1998), pp. 248–249.

92 Louth, *Damascene*, pp. 38–46. Louth notes the works’ lasting import as “[scholastics] principle resource for the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines defined by the

chronographer's use of Aristotle may well have been in imitation of the *Fount of Knowledge*.<sup>93</sup> John of Damascus' work explicitly relied upon the same standard Aristotelian definition of time—"time is the measure of motion"—so key to Synkellos' reasoning.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, Synkellos' chronological assertion was in part the harmonization of an accepted philosophical commonplace with the practice of chronography. This conceptual cross-pollination supported the controversial assertion that the beginning of time was coterminous with the creation of matter. In working out his harmonization, Synkellos' chronological rendering of time's beginning went where no philosopher had. As we have seen, Synkellos not only asserted this basic relationship between matter and time, but his First-Created Day was a claim that dates thousands of years apart were a single day. Where did he get this idea, and how did he expect his readers to understand it?

### Synkellos' First-Created Day as a Revelation of Grace

Another philosopher-theologian, the fourth-century bishop Basil of Caesarea, known in patristics as one of the three great fourth-century "Cappadocian Fathers," also wrote a work on the Creation, but framed his account, the *Hexaemeron*, as a series of homilies.<sup>95</sup> In Homily 2 on the phrase "the earth was

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Oecumenical Synods of the early Church, and continuing up through the Reformation era and the period of Protestant scholasticism, ...[into] systematic theology" (p. 3).

- 93 Scholars have found evidence of familiarity with the Damascene's writings in Constantinople in the early decades of the ninth century during debates over the religious use of icons at very the time Synkellos was working on his *Chronography* (808–810). See Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, XIII, cols. 356C–364E, trans. in Daniel Sahas, *Icon and Logos* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 168–175; and Louth, *Damascene*, pp. 13; 197–198. It was becoming customary to cite Aristotle in ninth-century debates over the religious use of icons. See Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine iconophile thought of the eighth and ninth centuries* (Leiden, 1996) esp. pp. 19–20; 56–63; and the careful correctives in Thalia Anagnostopoulos "Object and Symbol: Greek Learning and the Aesthetics of Identity in Byzantine Iconoclasm" Ph.D. dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 2008), esp. pp. 77–81.
- 94 Χρόνος ἐστὶ μέτρον κινήσεως. P. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* I: Dialectica (Berlin, 1969), Chap. 68, ln. 18 (p. 141). For further discussion, see also *Ibid.*, Chap. 62, lnn 45–51 (p. 131), and Kotter, *Schriften* II: Expositio Fidei (Berlin, 1973), Chap. 15, lnn 9–13 (p. 43). On the importance of Aristotle to John of Damascus, see Klaus Oehler, "Aristotle in Byzantium," *GRBS* V (1964), 143–144.
- 95 Synkellos mentions that a manuscript attributed to Basil of Caesarea (d. 379) solved "the question of chronological agreement between the two kingdoms of the Hebrews (Israel and Judah)" (AT 295/M 240).

invisible and unfinished,”<sup>96</sup> Basil demonstrated that God was not merely a craftsman who arranged pre-existing matter, but that He created all matter from this first moment, which included the beginning of time.<sup>97</sup> Basil located this issue in a discussion of scripture’s use of “one day” (ἡμέρα μία) as opposed to the “first day” (πρώτη ἡμέρα).<sup>98</sup> Though there was no sun, the point of specifying a twenty-four hour day-and-night period was “in order that through the term it might be related (τὸ συγγενές) to eternity.”<sup>99</sup> Basil turned to an idea strikingly similar to the First-Created Day to explain that this meant the day was *both* eternal and temporal: “In order that you might carry the idea on to the future life, [Scripture] specifies [this] icon of eternity as “one,” the first-fruit (ἀπαρχή) of days, equal-in-age to light, the Holy Lord’s Day, which has been honored by the resurrection of the Lord.”<sup>100</sup> Basil’s concept is similar to Synkellos’, but still maintained the line between theological typology and historical chronology.<sup>101</sup>

Basil’s choice to communicate these ideas through sermons suggests that Synkellos could also have intended that his First-Created Day invoke the context of liturgical worship. In fact, we have already seen Synkellos make this same generic reference himself. Synkellos did not defend his idea of a First-Created Day mathematically, by providing, for instance, extensive tables charting five-and-a-half millennia of calendrical cycles. Rather, Synkellos claimed that his knowledge of universal time was a prerogative shared by those who were within the fold of Christian orthodoxy, who were granted access to divine grace. This claim was initially made in the conclusion of his first statement of the thesis:

It is abundantly clear *for those deemed worthy of divine grace* that the first Pascha of the Lord also began on this holy first-created day.<sup>102</sup>

Only one “worthy of divine grace” could know or perceive that this alignment of dates occurred on the Holy First-Created Day. Divine grace provided

96 Homily 2: “Περὶ τοῦ ἀόρατος ἦν ἡ γῆ καὶ ἀκατασκευάστος,” in Stanislas Giet, *Basile de Césarée. Homélie sur l’hexaéméron*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1968), pp. 138–187.

97 Ibid., sec 2, 33A, lnn 2–6 (p. 148).

98 Ibid., sec 8, 49A, lnn 9–10 (p. 178).

99 Ibid., sec 8, 49C, lnn 10–11 (p. 182).

100 “Ἴνα οὖν πρὸς τὴν μέλλουσαν ζωὴν τὴν ἔννοιαν ἀπαρχῆς, μίαν ὠνόμασε τοῦ αἰῶνος τὴν εἰκόνα, τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τῶν ἡμερῶν, τὴν ὁμήλικα τοῦ φωτὸς, τὴν ἁγίαν κυριακὴν, τὴν τῆ ἀναστάσει τοῦ Κυρίου τετιμημένην. Homily 2, 8.74–8.77.

101 See the treatment of Byzantine chronicles in a cultural and literary context, by Alexander Kazhdan, *Byzantine Literature I–II* (Athens, 1999, 2006).

102 Πρόδηλον δὲ ἔστι καὶ πρῶτον κυριακῶν πάσχα τοῖς καταξιωθείσι τῆς θείας χάριτος κατὰ ταύτην ἤρξατο τὴν ἁγίαν πρωτόκτιστον ἡμέραν. AT 2/M 2 (emphasis mine).

Synkellos with the date of the Resurrection; the same grace gave him the date of the Creation, of the opening of the Ark, and of the Incarnation.

Following his prefatory discourse on creation and time Synkellos emphasized the relevance of his First-Created Day to Christ's life:

On this day also (έν ταύτη [ήμέρα] και)  
 Gabriel foretold the divine conception...  
 on this day also (έν ταύτη [ήμέρα] και)  
 the only begotten Son arose from the dead...  
 on this same holy day (κατά την αύτην άγιαν...ήμέραν)  
 of the life-bringing Resurrection,  
 the 5534th year from the creation of the universe commenced.<sup>103</sup>

Synkellos capitalized on the ambiguity of the word day (ή ήμέρα) as both "date" and "present day" in order to make the assertion that when these dates align this is, somehow, a recurring now, "this same holy day." The poetic syntax smooths the conceptual paradox.

The concept of a recurring "same holy day" appears in the homilies of John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople at the turn of the fifth century. Chrysostom's recurring holy day would have been familiar to Constantinopolitan churchmen of the ninth century from copies of his homilies on the feast of the Resurrection.<sup>104</sup> In Chrysostom's paschal homilies Christ's Resurrection and the yearly feast celebrating that event partook of the same present moment:

This is the very day (Αύτη ή ήμέρα)  
 on which Adam was freed,  
 on which Eve was released from grief,  
 on which brutal death shuddered,  
 on which the power that burst from the mighty stones was let loose,  
 and the barriers of the tombs which were torn asunder were undone, ...

103 AT 1/M 1. I have arranged the text to highlight the repeated phrases.

104 Chrysostom was one of the most emulated homilists throughout the Byzantine period. Synkellos cites his commentary on Matthew in relation to his discussion of the Creation (AT 5/M 4). The surviving manuscripts indicate interest in his paschal homilies in the ninth and tenth centuries in particular: ninth century: Moscow, Gosudarstvennyj Istoričeskij Musej (GIM) *Cod. Sinod. Gr. 284* (Vlad. 215); Escorial, Real Biblioteca, *Cod. Chi IV.6* (Andrés 401); tenth century: Athens, Mouseio Benaki, *Cod. T A 319, (110)*; Jerusalem, Patriarchikê bibliothêkê, *Cod. Panagiou Taphou 6*; Oxford, Bodleian Library, *Cod. Barocci 174* and *Cod. Barocci 199*.

on which grew the abundance and fruitfulness of the resurrection,  
 as in the garden inhabited by the race of men,  
 on which the lilies of the newly-illuminated were made to spring up...  
 on which the multitude of the Jews was put to shame,  
 on which the ranks of the faithful are made glad,  
 on which the wreaths of the martyrs are made afresh.  
 "This, then, is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad  
 in it."<sup>105</sup>

In a strictly chronological sense these events did not all occur on the actual date of the Resurrection, for there were as yet no newly-baptized neophytes when Christ exited the tomb, nor were Jews yet feeling any shame. Synkellos, too, put grammar at the service of theology.

At the mention of "the faithful" in the above quotation, a grammatical shift from the past into the present tense occurs without a break in the syntactical cadence (*are* made glad; *are* made afresh).<sup>106</sup> A historical treatment of Christ's resurrection would render these phrases in a past tense, denoting those faithful to Christ at that time, perhaps the faithful group of disciples huddled in the Upper Room. Chrysostom was well aware that at the Resurrection the martyrs could not yet have testified to their faith. In these temporal contradictions, Chrysostom seems to have sought to enjoin the "ranks of the faithful" gathered with him at the close of the fourth century to consider these acts in the past as part of the present reality. Chrysostom's point was that all of the events he described were called into being by the act of Resurrection. Embedded in the grammar of the rhetorical flourish was the assertion that in the subsequent liturgical life of the church, specifically at the yearly celebration of the Resurrection, these past events existed in a unified present, "this very day."

105 One example among many. "In resurrectionem domini" in M. Aubineau, *Homélies pascals* (Paris, 1972), p. 324. Translation mine. Ἀὕτη ἡ ἡμέρα ἐν ἣ ὁ Ἀδὰμ ἠλευθερώθη, ἐν ἣ ἡ Εὐὰ ἀπηλλάγη τῆς λύπης, ἐν ἣ ὁ ἀνήμερος θάνατος ἔφριξεν, ἐν ἣ τῶν κραταιῶν λίθων ἡ δύναμις παρελύθη ῥαγεῖσα καὶ τὰ τῶν μνημείων κλειῖθρα διασπασθέντα ἀνέθη... ἐν ἣ τὸ τῆς ἀναστάσεως εὐθαλὲς καὶ εὐκαρπὸν ὡς ἐν κήπῳ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ τῷ γένει τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐβλάστησεν, ἐν ἣ τὰ τῶν νεοφωτίστων ἀνεφύησαν κρῖνα... ἐν ἣ τὰ τῶν Ἰουδαίων κατησχύνθησαν πλήθη, ἐν ἣ τὰ τῶν πιστῶν εὐφραίνονται τάγματα, ἐν ἣ τὰ τῶν μαρτύρων ἀναθάλλουσι διαδήματα. "Ταύτην τοῖνον τὴν ἡμέραν ἐποίησεν ὁ κύριος, ἀγαλλιασώμεθα καὶ εὐφρανθώμεν ἐν αὐτῇ." Interestingly, Synkellos concluded a key passage with the same citation: "Concerning which [day] it was said: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, on which day God created.' Concerning this, David the ancestor of God, as a prelude to universal salvation, has sung: 'This is the day that the Lord created; let us rejoice and be glad in it.'" (AT 463/M 389).

106 I am grateful to Alexandre M. Roberts for first bringing this shift to my attention.



A supra-chronological salvific time had been described as an experiential aspect of not only yearly but daily worship in a surviving text written much closer to Synkellos' own milieu: the *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation* (Ἱστορία Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ καὶ Μυστικὴ Θεωρία) attributed to Patriarch Germanos (r. 715–730).<sup>107</sup> Like John of Damascus, Germanos was an iconophile condemned by the iconoclast Council of 754. He had then been posthumously exonerated by the iconophile Council of 787; this council had been led by patriarch Tarasios of Constantinople, the very patriarch under whom Synkellos himself eventually served. Though this connection is intriguing, it cannot be assumed that Synkellos would be familiar with writings attributed to a patriarch from an earlier era simply because of their doctrinal agreements.

Fortunately there is a direct textual connection between Synkellos' *Chronography* and the *Ecclesiastical History*: the texts share a ninth-century translator.<sup>108</sup> Anastasius Bibliothecarius, an emissary for the Carolingian Louis II, visited Constantinople in 870 and there selected a number of works for translation into Latin. Besides translating excerpts from Synkellos' *Chronography* and Theophanes' *Chronicle*, Anastasius also made a translation of Germanos' *Ecclesiastical History* for the Carolingian Charles the Bald.<sup>109</sup> It is entirely plausible to suppose that Anastasius found these two texts in close physical proximity.

Of all the texts we have surveyed, the liturgical commentary of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* offers the closest conceptual parallels to Synkellos' claim that a cosmos bound by linear temporality experienced the action of the timeless eternal God as a recurring First-Created Day. The author of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* also dissolved the line between human temporality and divine eternity in his description of the liturgical experience of the Church.<sup>110</sup>

107 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, pp. 563–565; de Boor, *Theophanis*, pp. 407–409. Germanos (Patriarch of Constantinople from 715–730) fought against imperial religious policies: he opposed Philippikos' revival of monotheletism in 712, and then Leo III's ostensible iconoclastic policies in the 720s. Germanos was deposed by the emperor in 730.

108 Liturgical variants place the commentary no earlier than the eighth century, and not much later than the early ninth (thus, inclusive of Synkellos' time as the *synkellos*). Germanos is only the most likely candidate for authorship of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. See René Bornert, *Les Commentaires Byzantins de la Divine Liturgie* (1966), pp. 132–160; and Robert Taft, "The Liturgy of the Great Church" *DOP* 34/5 (1980/1), 47–58.

109 See Anastasius' dedicatory letter, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Epistolae VII* (Munich, 1978), pp. 434–435. A ninth-century manuscript of the translation survives as Codex 711 at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Cambrai.

110 See Paul Magdalino's discussion of the text as part of a dialogue that intertwined iconoclasm, eschatology, liturgy, and politics in "The History of the Future and Its Uses:

The church is earthly heaven (ἐπίγειος οὐρανός), in which the heavenly (ἐπουράνιος) God dwells and walks about, typifying (ἀντιτυπούσα) the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Christ.<sup>111</sup>

In the act of performing the liturgy, the celebrants and the people became a part of the whole of salvation history, spanning the Old and New Testaments, as they assembled with the saints in the “kingdom of Christ.”<sup>112</sup> The priest did not merely contemplate figures and symbols of Christ, but actually entered the heavenly kingdom and divine splendor:

Then the priest, leading everyone into the heavenly Jerusalem, to His holy mountain exclaims: Behold, let us lift up our hearts! ...Then the priest goes with confidence to the throne of the grace of God and...speaks to God. He converses...with uncovered face seeing the glory of the Lord... ‘one-to-one’ he addresses God...contemplating the heavenly liturgy, [he] is initiated even into the splendor of the life-giving Trinity.<sup>113</sup>

Finally, the congregation was invited to partake of the Eucharist, “so that it might be fulfilled that “Today I have begotten you.”<sup>114</sup> They join fully in this experience and become “eye-witnesses of the mysteries of God, partakers of eternal life, and sharers in divine nature.”<sup>115</sup> By this participation in the divine life and reality,

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prophecy, policy and propaganda,” in *The Making of Byzantine History: Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol on his Seventieth Birthday*, eds. R. Beaton and C. Roueché (Aldershot, 1993), pp. 22–23.

111 Ed. and trans by Paul Meyendorff, *St. Germanus of Constantinople On the Divine Liturgy* (Crestwood, NY, 1984). Sec. 1, p. 56. Slightly altering Meyendorff’s translation of: Ἐκκλησία ἐστὶν ἐπίγειος οὐρανός, ἐν ᾧ ὁ ἐπουράνιος Θεὸς ἐνοικεῖ καὶ ἐμπεριπατεῖ, ἀντιτυπούσα τὴν σταύρωσιν καὶ τὴν ταφὴν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν Χριστοῦ.

112 *Ibid.*, Sec. 41, pp. 100–101.

113 *Ibid.*, Sec. 41, pp. 90–91. Εἶτα πάντας ἀναβιβάζων ὁ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὴν ἄνω Ἱερουσαλὴμ εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ ἅγιον αὐτοῦ καὶ βοᾷ· Βλέπετε ἄνω σχῶμεν τὰς καρδίας...Εἶτα πρόσεισιν ὁ ἱερεὺς μετὰ παρρησίας τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ...ἀπαγγέλλων τῷ Θεῷ...ἀλλὰ ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν Κυρίου κατοπτέων...καὶ μόνος μόνῳ προσλαλεῖ Θεοῦ...τε καὶ λαμπρότητα τὴν ἐπουράνιον λατρείαν νοερώς ὁρῶν καὶ μυεῖται καὶ τῆς ζωαρχικῆς Τριάδος τὴν ἔλλαμψιν τοῦ μὲν Θεοῦ καὶ Πατρὸς τὸ ἀναρχον καὶ ἀγέννητον.

114 *Ibid.*, Sec. 41, p. 96. καὶ πληρωθήσεται τό· “Ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε.”

115 *Ibid.*, Sec. 41, pp. 98–99. Ὅθεν γενόμενοι τῶν θείων μυστηρίων αὐτόπται καὶ μέτοχοι ζωῆς ἀθανάτου καὶ κοινωνοὶ θείας φύσεως.

the souls of Christians are called together to assemble with the prophets, apostles, and hierarchs in order to recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the mystical banquet of the Kingdom of Christ. ...We are no longer on earth but standing by the royal throne of God in heaven, where Christ is.<sup>116</sup>

In the *Ecclesiastical History* the “very day” of the Resurrection captured the experience of the eternal present moment of divine life bestowed through grace upon the gathered faithful. The idea that a reality joining earth and heaven was revealed on the basis of faith resonates with Synkellos’ claim that on the First-Created Day “the new creation begun in Christ ushered from death to life all those with a correct belief in Him.”<sup>117</sup> The paradigm in which Synkellos constructed his *Chronography* is incomprehensible apart from the *Ecclesiastical History*’s ecclesiology.

Synkellos claimed that the orthodox believer knew the eternal God through his experience of divine grace in faith. In the same way Moses, not present at the moment of the Creation, could know the date of the creation of the world because of his experience of God’s grace. Furthermore, Synkellos too, though not present at the Creation or during Moses’ vision, had been “deemed worthy of divine grace” through his correct belief. Synkellos could use authoritative tradition concerning the date of the Incarnation and the Resurrection to interpret Moses’ vague statements with chronological exactitude. Synkellos’ philosophically and theologically astute vision of time, encapsulated in his First-Created Day, was a claim to objective knowledge of a universal chronology through subjective experience of divine truth.

## Conclusion

A chronographer’s conception of time was the same as a philosopher’s: the measure of motion. Nevertheless, chronographers did not pursue an “objective” or an apolitical tally of time. How could they when the established chronological method was to reckon past time by the successions of kingdoms? So long as

116 Ibid., Sec. 41, pp. 100–101. και συγκαλούνται μετὰ προφητῶν και ἀποστόλων και ἱεραρχῶν τῶν χριστιανῶν αἱ ψυχαὶ συνελθεῖν και ἀνακλιθῆναι μετὰ Ἀβραάμ και Ἰσαάκ και Ἰακώβ ἐν τῇ μυστικῇ τραπέζῃ τῆς βασιλείας Χριστοῦ. ...οὐκ ἔτι ἐπὶ γῆς ἔσμεν ἀλλ’ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῷ βασιλικῷ παρεστηκότες· ἐν οὐρανῷ ἔπου ὁ Χριστός ἐστι.

117 πρωτόκτιστος ἡμέρα τοῦ πρωτοκτίστου μηνὸς ὑπάρχουσα, καθ’ ἣν ἢ ἐν Χριστῷ καινὴ κτίσις ἀρξαμένη πάντας εἰς ζωὴν ἐκ θανάτου μετήγαγε τοὺς ὀρθῶς εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύοντας. AT 465/M 390.

chronology meant ordering time according to the rise and fall of kingdoms, every chronographer would find a plot embedded in his methodology. In the post-Constantinian Empire, that historical plot was perforce providential, an imperial providence dominated by the simultaneity of imperial Rome's rise and Christ's birth.

Synkellos created an innovative vision of the arc of providence by applying the epistemological implications of the Incarnation to the earliest periods of human history. This essay has argued that his project resulted in a unique conception of time itself. In Synkellos' *Chronography* time was not only the measure of motion, the ordering of the ages, and the progress of kingdoms, but time also bore witness to the relationship between mankind and Divinity through the experience of its rupture: the past in the present and the present in the past. Synkellos took the theological principle that the Incarnation was *the* truth event and embraced its chronological paradox in a way no previous Christian chronographer had ever attempted.

How significant was this achievement? Is Synkellos' struggle with the idea that the key to linear time was the intervention of a timeless Divinity also a revelation of "a Byzantine" contemplating man's experience of time in general? Caveats and cautions are easy to muster. Synkellos' system of reckoning never gained widespread currency, whether because of, or in spite of, its sophistication. We have pointed out at length that Synkellos' obscure biography makes it very difficult to understand him as a historical figure. Furthermore, it is unclear whether we should associate Synkellos, his work, and his ideas with Constantinople or with the intellectual milieu of Greek learning outside the Roman Empire. If Synkellos is "byzantine," how are we defining Byzantium? Does Synkellos, if he permits us any generalities, in fact tell us something about Syria-Palestine whence he gathered much of his material and perhaps received his intellectual formation?<sup>118</sup>

Even if we are left with only these ambiguities and the marvel of the surviving text, it is impossible to ignore Synkellos' authorial voice. Synkellos' all-encompassing goal was to defend and promote his chronological thesis: the date of the Resurrection in AM 5534 and the Incarnation in AM 5500 was the same First-Created Day as the Creation in AM 1. To this end Synkellos argued for two central ideas concerning time's order. First, Synkellos believed that a truly universal calendar should reflect the philosophical beginning of universal

118 On the Syrian milieu in relationship to Constantinople, see Marie-France Auzepy, "De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIIIe–IXe siècles): Étienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène," *Travaux et Mémoires* 12 (1994), 183–218. On the Syrian milieu in relationship to Baghdad, see Sidney Griffith, *Christianity under Islam* (Princeton, 2008), pp. 40–48; and Dimitri Gutas, *Greek thought, Arabic Culture* (New York / London, 1998) esp. pp. 22 and 155.

time: the movement of matter from the moment of creation ἐν ἀρχῇ.<sup>119</sup> Second, knowledge of the earliest period of time was possible, but only via the inspired scriptures as interpreted by those with access to a supra-temporal divine grace, itself accessible through the liturgical worship of the Church. There “those deemed worthy” experienced the Creation, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection of Christ as the ever-present “life-giving Trinity.” The *Chronography* of George Synkellos aimed to prove that a true reckoning of all time, the entire past and present, unfolded from a Holy First-Created Day of and for the People of God, the Church of Christ.

Several years ago the medievalist Rosamond McKitterick suggested that to “examine time and its functions in the early middle ages may yield something very specific about the perception of the past, present, and even future on the part of any group.”<sup>120</sup> Thus, it may not be too grandiose to claim that in the foregoing discussion we have glimpsed an early medieval culture actively thinking about time in terms of the experience of worship, even as it held to a rigorous philosophical and historical time. In this way can George Synkellos serve as a *homo byzantinus* set to thinking about the nature and meaning of time?<sup>121</sup>

Having made an effort to underscore Synkellos’ creativity, it seems disingenuous to argue that we should make a generalization out of him. Synkellos, however, is not the only character in this story. George Synkellos created an ecumenical and therefore canonical measure of time that gave present meaning to the past, to knowledge of the stars, planets, the successions of kings, and the very temporal progression of the universe from the celestial to the quotidian. He claimed time universal and eternal for the Church of Constantinople where all was in the present as it was in the beginning and ever would be. For Synkellos, to experience God was to know time unto the ages of ages. If Synkellos intended his readers to follow his hypothesis of the First-Created Day, then it is in the cultural logic attributed to these imagined Byzantines that we can posit our larger cultural group. Synkellos may not have been a *homo byzantinus*, but he was writing for one.

119 Similarly, since the invention of the atomic clock (TAI) we have discussed whether to disassociate the reckoning of time from the movement of the earth in space. See D. Feeney, *Caesar’s Calendar* (Berkeley, 2007), p. 294 n. 120.

120 McKitterick, *History and Memory*, p. 86.

121 On Alexander Kazhdan’s *Homo Byzantinus*, see *People and Power* (1991) and *Homo Byzantinus: Papers in Honor of Alexander Kazhdan: DOP* 46 (1992), especially J. Ljubarskij, “Man in Byzantine Historiography,” pp. 177–186, and Ihor Ševčenko, “The Search for the Past in Byzantium around the Year 800,” pp. 279–293.

ΡΟΜΑΙΟΣ	ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ	ΑΡΑΒΩΝ	ΕΒΡΑΙΩΝ	ΑΙΓΥΠΤΙΩΝ	ΑΡΓΕΙΩΝ	ΣΙΚΥΟΝΙΩΝ	ΑΘΗΝΑΙΩΝ	ΕΒΡΑΙΩΝ	ΑΙΓΥΠΤΙΩΝ	ΑΡΓΕΙΩΝ	ΣΙΚΥΟΝΙΩΝ	ΑΘΗΝΑΙΩΝ	ΕΒΡΑΙΩΝ	ΑΙΓΥΠΤΙΩΝ	ΑΡΓΕΙΩΝ	ΣΙΚΥΟΝΙΩΝ	ΑΘΗΝΑΙΩΝ	ΕΒΡΑΙΩΝ	ΑΙΓΥΠΤΙΩΝ
ΜΑΙΟΣ	Α	Σ	Α	Α	Α	Σ	Σ	Η	ΕΒΡΑΙ	ΚΑ	Φ	Α	Η	Φ	Φ				
Σ	Ε	Ζ	ΙΕ	ΙΒ	Β	Ζ	Ζ	Φ	Α	ΚΒ	Ι	Β	Φ	Ι	Ι				
Ε	Γ	Η	ΙΣ	ΙΓ	Γ	Η	Η	Ι	Β	ΚΓ	ΙΑ	Ρ	Ι	ΙΑ	ΙΑ				
Δ	Δ	Θ	ΙΖ	ΙΑ	Δ	Φ	Φ	ΙΑ	Γ	ΚΔ	ΙΒ	Δ	ΙΑ	ΙΒ	ΙΒ				
Γ	Ε	Ι	ΙΗ	ΙΕ	Ε	Ι	Ι	ΙΒ	Δ	ΚΕ	ΙΓ	Ε	ΙΒ	ΙΓ	ΙΓ				
Α	Σ	ΙΑ	ΙΘ	ΙΣ	Σ	ΙΑ	ΙΑ	ΙΓ	Ε	ΚΣ	ΙΑ	Σ	ΙΓ	ΙΑ	ΙΑ				
ΝΟΟΝ	Ζ	ΙΒ	ΚΑ	ΙΖ	Ζ	ΙΒ	ΙΒ	ΙΑ	Σ	ΚΖ	ΙΕ	Ζ	ΙΑ	ΙΕ	ΙΕ				
Η	Η	ΙΓ	ΚΑ	ΙΗ	Η	ΙΓ	ΙΓ	ΙΕ	Ζ	ΚΗ	ΙΣ	Η	ΙΕ	ΙΣ	ΙΣ				
Ζ	Φ	ΙΑ	ΚΒ	ΙΘ	Φ	ΙΑ	ΙΑ	ΙΣ	Η	ΚΘ	ΙΖ	Φ	ΙΣ	ΙΖ	ΙΖ				
Σ	Ι	ΙΕ	ΚΓ	Κ	Ι	ΙΕ	ΙΕ	ΙΖ	Φ	ΚΑ	ΙΗ	Ι	ΙΖ	ΙΗ	ΙΗ				
Ε	ΙΑ	ΙΣ	ΚΔ	ΚΑ	ΙΑ	ΙΣ	ΙΗ	Ι	Α	ΚΒ	ΙΑ	ΙΦ	ΙΑ	ΙΘ	ΙΘ				
Α	ΙΒ	ΙΖ	ΚΕ	ΚΒ	ΙΚ	ΙΖ	ΙΦ	ΙΑ	Β	ΚΓ	ΙΒ	ΙΑ	ΙΑ	ΙΕ	ΙΕ				

FIGURE 1.1 Synchronization of various calendars from around the Hellenistic world to the Roman month of May (left-hand side) as in the copy of Ptolemy’s Handy Tables in Vaticanus graecus 1291 (s. viii), f. 12r  
COURTESY OF BIBLIOTHECA APOSTOLICA VATICANA

Column 1 Column 2 Column 3 Column 4 Column 5 Column 6 Column 7  
Decade of – Assyrians – Hebrews – Sicyonian – Argives – Athenians – Egyptians Abraham  
Greeks

<p> <b>ΑΣΥΡ</b>          4000          3000          2000          1000          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>	<p> <b>ΕΒΡ</b>          3000          2000          1000          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>	<p> <b>ΑΙΓΥ</b>          2000          1000          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>	<p> <b>ΑΡΓ</b>          1000          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>	<p> <b>ΑΘΗ</b>          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>	<p> <b>ΕΒΡ</b>          3000          2000          1000          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>
<p>         4000          3000          2000          1000          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>	<p>         3000          2000          1000          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>	<p>         2000          1000          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>	<p>         1000          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>	<p>         0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>	<p>         3000          2000          1000          0          1000          2000          3000          4000       </p>

FIGURE 1.2 Layout of the Chronicle of Eusebios-Jerome synchronizing Moses and Cecrops the Athenian Merton College MS 315, ff. 30v-31r  
COURTESY OF THE WARDEN AND FELLOWS OF MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD



FIGURE 1.3 *The Incarnation of Christ as the kingdom of the Jews comes under the Roman Empire as in the copy of Eusebius-Jerome's Chronicle in Merton College 315, f 125v*  
COURTESY OF THE WARDEN AND FELLOWS OF MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD



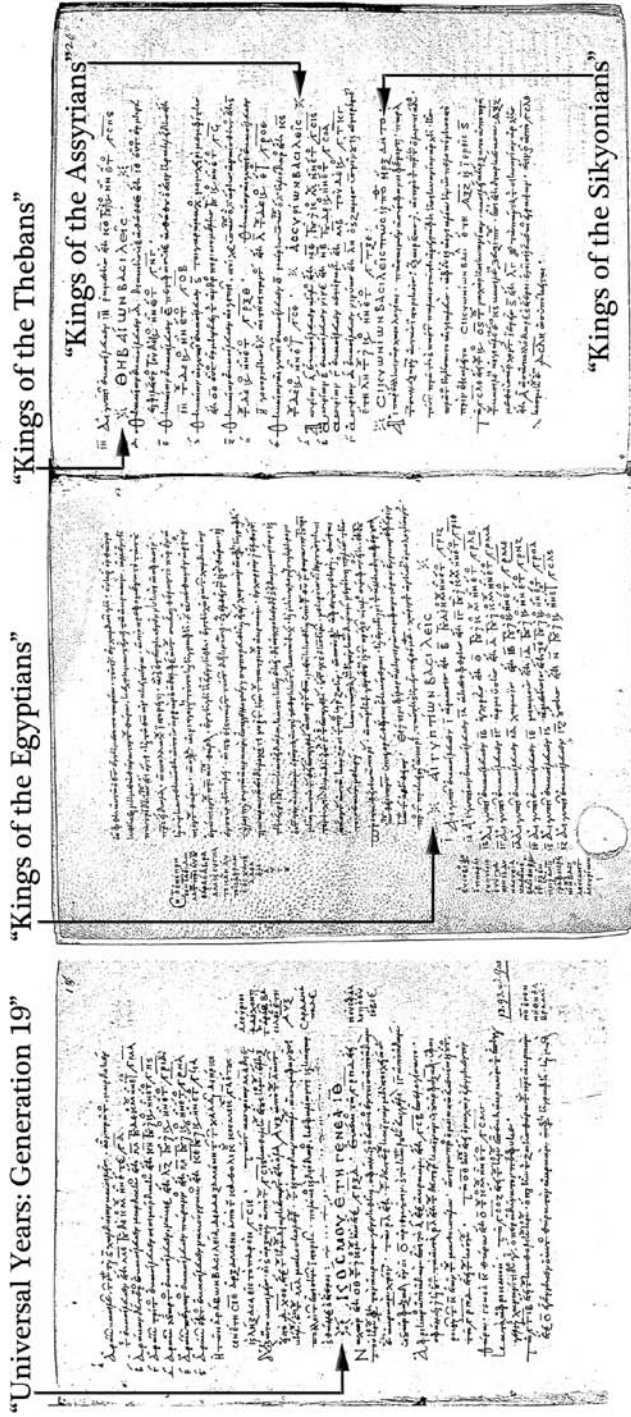


FIGURE 1.4 BnF Parisinus Graecus 1764 (left: f 187; center: f 190; right: f 201)  
 COURTESY OF BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

Organizational scheme for an entry in the "second epoch" of George Syntellos' *Chronographia* as in *BnF Parisinus Graecus* 1764. Here the entry is initiated by "Universal Years: Generation 19 (and 20)" (left: f 187) which is paleographically emphasized by block capitals. This heading is followed by several pages of prose narrative and discussion of the nineteenth and twentieth Biblical generations (not shown: ff 18v and 19r). The entry concludes with headings (in regular capital script) of lists of the kings of the Mestraia Egyptians (center: f 190), Thebans, Assyrians, and Silyonian Greeks (right: f 201). Each organizational division is also marked by a pair of line-and-dot asterisks.