A Hitherto Unknown Universal History of the Early Eighth Century: Preliminary Notes on the *Maronite Chronicle of 713*

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This research note introduces the *Maronite Chronicle of 713*, a hitherto unknown Christian world chronicle in Arabic, recently identified by the author in the collection of manuscripts at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai. Extant in a single thirteenth-century manuscript (Sinai Ar. 597), this Arabic chronicle is a translation of a lost Syriac work, originally composed in 712-713 CE, probably in a Syriac Monothelete milieu with close ties to the Monastery of Mar Maron. The chronicle covers the history of the world from Adam to 692-693 CE and exhibits numerous parallels with the so-called »eastern source«, which informed the chronicles of Theophanes, Michael the Syrian, Agapius of Mabbug and the anonymous Syriac *Chronicle of 1234*. To demonstrate the links between these sources and the new chronicle, the note analyses, as a case study, a passage discussing the main events of the year 633-634 CE. The author argues that the *Maronite Chronicle of 713* provides an alternative chronology of events for this year and thus represents an independent source for the early stages of the Arab conquests. A more detailed study and a critical edition and annotated translation of this new chronicle are in preparation.

Keywords: Syriac historiography, Christian world chronicles, Syriac-Arabic translations, Christian Arabic manuscripts, Maronites, St. Catherine's Monastery Library, early Arab conquests, comet of 634 CE

Introduction: The Arabic Collection of Manuscripts on Mt. Sinai

The library of the Greek Orthodox Monastery of St. Catherine's on Mt. Sinai houses the oldest and one of the largest collections of Christian Arabic manuscripts in the world. Currently, the collection holds more than 750 items, including 155 Arabic manuscript fragments belonging to the so-called New Finds, a large group of manuscripts in several languages discovered in a walled-up room at the monastery in 1975.[1] The Sinai Arabic collection remains poorly catalogued. Existing catalogues and checklists by Margaret Gibson (1894), Aziz Atiya (1955),

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1 For a report on the discovery of the new finds, see Archbishop Damianos, Chronicle of the Recovery.

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Murad Kamil (1970) and Yiannis Meimaris (1985) only contain brief (and often incomplete) descriptions.[2] A more detailed catalogue was published by Atiya in 1970, but it only covers the first three hundred items.[3] Fortunately, access to the Sinai collection has significantly improved in the last decade, first through the digitization of the microfilms produced by the American and Israeli Sinai expeditions,[4] and, more recently, thanks to the *Sinai Palimpsests Project* and the *Sinai Manuscripts Digital Library*.[5] The increased access to the Sinai manuscripts, including its numerous palimpsests, has already led to several groundbreaking discoveries that are rapidly changing our understanding of ancient and medieval history, theology, literature and science.[6]

The aim of this research note is to introduce another new discovery among the Sinai manuscripts: a hitherto unknown Arabic translation of a lost, and equally unknown, universal chronicle composed in Syriac in the early eighth century CE. For reasons I will explain below, this anonymous text can be designated as the *Maronite Chronicle of 713* (henceforth *Chron713*). The Arabic translation is extant in Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, Arabic 597, an overlooked thirteenth-century manuscript of the Old Sinai Collection. I will provide a short description of the manuscript, present the contents and main features of *Chron713* and highlight, by way of one case study, the significance of this newly discovered chronicle for the history of the Eastern Mediterranean in the late antique and early Islamic periods. A more detailed study and a critical edition and translation of the text are in preparation by the present author.[7]

The Manuscript Sinai Ar. 597

In its present state, Sinai Arabic 597 is bound together from two codicological units, both measuring c. 250 × 162 mm. The first part (henceforth Sinai Ar. 597/I, fols. 1-83, paper) was copied in the tenth century.[8] This part contains Arabic translations of the *Book of Daniel* (fols. 1r-37r) and the *Book of Proverbs* (fols. 38v-83r), based on the Syriac Peshitta.[9] The

2 Gibson, *Catalogue of the Arabic Mss.*; Atiya, *Arabic Manuscripts*; Clark, *Checklist*; Kamil, *Catalogue of All Manuscripts*; Meimaris, *Κατάλογος* (Katalogos). Note should also be made of the earlier checklist prepared during the visit of the Russian bishop Porfirij Uspenskij (1804-1885) to Sinai in 1850. See below, n. 15.

3 Atiya, *Catalogue raisonné.* An initiative by the *Centre de Documentation et de Recherches Arabes Chrétiennes* (CEDRAC) in Beirut to continue Atiya's cataloguing project has not been brought to completion.

4 For the Library of Congress, see: https://www.loc.gov/collections/manuscripts-in-st-catherines-monastery-mount-sinai/about-this-collection/ [last accessed 29 October 2025]; for the National Library of Israel, see: https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/saint-catherine [last accessed 29 October 2025].

5 See: https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/ [last accessed 29 October 2025]; https://sinaimanuscripts.library.ucla.edu [last accessed 29 October 2025], registration required.

6 For a recent collection of studies, see Rapp *et al.*, *New Light*.

7 See Pirtea, Syro-Chalcedonian historiography. More than a year after my discovery of the text in January 2024 (and independently of my work), Alexander Hourani also examined the manuscript in April-May 2025 and provided a first draft transcription of the text on his academia.edu profile page: Hourani, Chronicle. I wish to thank Habib Ibrahim for drawing my attention to Hourani's research. See also below, n. 18.

8 A reader's note on fol. 83v is dated Ḏū l-Qaʿda 1, 392 AH, i.e. September 11, 1002 CE, which provides a *terminus ante quem*; see Treiger, From Theodore Abū Qurra, 39-40, n. 120.

9 One folio is missing at the beginning. Fols. 37v-38r are empty.

second part (Sinai Ar. 597/II, fols. 84-160, paper) is of later date and contains *Chron713*, to be discussed below. This second part can be dated palaeographically to the thirteenth century.[10] The final folios contain short texts by later hands (thirteenth-fourteenth centuries?): the beginning of the *Book of Rolls* (*Kitāb al-majāll*) on fol. 156v,[11] followed – in a different hand – by an incomplete calendar of Christian feasts (fols. 157r-160r).[12] The manuscript lost its binding, and there are no indications about when or how it reached Sinai. The second part suffered significant water damage, resulting in many of its leaves being stuck together. Some of these leaves had been opened already before the recent digitization campaign, causing further damage and making the script on these leaves almost illegible.[13]

So far, scholarship on Sinai Ar. 597 has focused exclusively on the first part, either on the *Book of Daniel* or, more generally, on the script.[14] The content of Sinai Ar. 597/II is only briefly mentioned in the catalogues.[15] Gibson describes the contents as a universal history (ἱστορία τοῦ κόσμου), but she provides no further details.[16] Atiya's *Handlist* mentions a historical treatise entitled »Book of the History of Years and Times«, adding that this part was defective and therefore not microfilmed.[17]

The Maronite Chronicle of 713

Although both Gibson and Atiya correctly identified the text in Sinai Ar. 597/II as a work of historiography, neither scholar undertook a detailed analysis of its contents. As a result, they

10 As Alexander Treiger has informed me, the script is very similar to Sinai Ar. 268, copied by the prolific scribe Poimen, active c. 1223-1237 CE (on which see Ibrahim, Poimen al-Sīqī). However, further research on the palaeographical features of the manuscript is needed in order to establish the identity of the scribe who copied Sinai Ar. 597/II.

11 On this text, also known as the Arabic *Apocalypse of Peter*, see Roggema and Burke, Book of the Rolls.

12 The calendar begins (fol. 157r) with the commemoration of St. Amphilochius of Iconium (23 November).

13 See folios 88v-89r, 89v-90r, 91v-92r, 98v-99r, 101v-102r, 104v-105r, 105v-108r (stuck together), 109v-110r (stuck together), 111v-112r (stuck together), 112v-113r, 113v-114r (stuck together), 115v-118r (stuck together), 119v-120r (stuck together), 121v-123r (stuck together), 124v-127r (stuck together), 128v-129r (stuck together), 131v-132r, 133v-134r, 134v-135r, 137v-138r, 138v-139r, 141v-142r, 145v-146r, 146v-147r, 147v-148r, 149v-150r, 151v-152r, 152v-153r and 154v-155r. On some of these folios, more than 50% of the text can be read; on others. only a few lines can be discerned. A digitized version of the manuscript is available in the Sinai Manuscripts Digital Library: https://sinaimanuscripts.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:%2F21198%2Fz1w10qj5 [last accessed 29 October, 2025, registration required].

14 See Hjälm, *Christian Arabic Versions*, 56-57, 84-86, 393-395; see also Hjälm, Paleographical study; Posegay, Early Arabic Translation.

15 It is possible that the manuscript was seen by the Russian bishop Porfirij Uspenskij (1804-1885) as early as 1850, since in the checklist prepared by his collaborators Nikolai Krylov and Faḍlallāh Ṣarrūf (1826-1903), one Arabic manuscript is described as »a book of history in old script with its pages stuck (*mulṣaq*) to one another«. See Syrku, *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum*, 349 (cod. Porph. Ar. 312).

16 Gibson, *Catalogue of the Arabic Mss.*, 127. The same Greek title (ἱστορία τοῦ κόσμου) is provided on the library label on fol. 160v. Given the short amount of time Gibson and her sister, Agnes Smith Lewis (1843-1926), stayed at the monastery, the manuscript could only be examined in a cursory fashion, as Gibson herself admits (*ibid.*, vii).

17 Atiya, *Arabic Manuscripts*, 24. The second part of the manuscript is not mentioned at all in Clark, *Checklist*, 37. Kamil, *Catalogue of All Manuscripts*, 13, simply repeats Atiya's description. It is unclear if Atiya examined the manuscript in detail when preparing the second volume of his *Catalogue raisonné.*

were not in a position to appreciate the true significance of the find. Since my discovery and initial analysis of the text in January-February 2024, it has become increasingly clear that this was a previously unknown Christian universal chronicle, and the longest such text of the first millennium CE to come to light in decades.[18] As such, *Chron713* will be of utmost importance for Syriac and Arabic historiography and, more generally, for our understanding of the political and religious history of the late antique and early Islamic Near East.

1. The Title

The *Maronite Chronicle of 713* is a conventional title that can be assigned to the text, based on several distinguishing elements. In the manuscript, the work is introduced as follows:

> تاريخ السنين والازمنة المسمّا يوناني خرونيقون ويبتدى من انشا العالم بمعونة المسيح الإله الذي فوق الكل.
>
> The history of years and times, called in Greek *Chronikon*. It begins from the creation of the world, with the help of Christ, God who is above all.[19]

As the title already makes clear, the work stands in the tradition of Greek world chronicles established by early Christian authors such as Sextus Julius Africanus (third century) and Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339 CE). In Syriac historiography, such works are often titled *maḵtaḇ* (or: *maḵtḇūṯ*) *zaḇnē*, which is possibly also the expression behind the Arabic title used here (*kitāb al-sinīn wa-l-azmina*).[20] With regard to the time of composition, the anonymous author fortunately provides an exact date. When mentioning that Seleukos I Nikator introduced the »era of the Greeks«, the chronicler adds that, according to this era, the *present day* (*al-yawm*) is the year 1024, which corresponds to October 712 – September 713 CE.[21] Although the chronicle ends abruptly on fol. 155v with the year 692-693 CE, it is preferable to refer to the work by the (latter part of the) year in which it was composed, i.e. twenty years after the last events described.

Several features of the Arabic text indicate that it is the translation of a lost Syriac model.[22] Although the Arabic version is not dated, we can reasonably posit a translation during the

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18 I first discovered the text in January 2024 while examining Arabic saints' calendars and synaxaria in the Sinai collection. I presented the discovery on three occasions: at the conference »The Other Narratives of Early Islam. Contemporary Sources and Critical Readings« (University of Frankfurt, 22-23 March, 2024, organized by Hagit Nol); in the framework of the Tübingen Byzantine and Near Eastern Seminar (TBNES), University of Tübingen (10 July, 2025, organized by Federico Montinaro), and as part of the Gotha Manuscript Talks series (Gotha Research Library, 26 November, 2025, organized by Feras Krimsti and Konrad Hirschler). I would like to thank the organizers for the opportunity to present this discovery. I also wish to thank all the colleagues who were present on these occasions and with whom I discussed several aspects of the chronicle.

19 Sinai Ar. 597/II, fol. 85v. Transcriptions follow the orthography of the manuscript.

20 For the most comprehensive study of Syriac historiography to date, see Debié, *L'écriture de l'histoire*.

21 Sinai Ar. 597/II, fol. 100v.

22 A detailed analysis of the features indicating a translation from Syriac would require a separate study. To mention only one telling example, the Syriac particle *d-* in *d-ywsyps* (»of Josephus [Flavius]«) is misunderstood as part of the name: ذيوسيفس (fol. 101r).

eleventh century, an active period of Maronite translations into Arabic.[23] Given the long interval between the work's original composition (713 CE) and the surviving manuscript (thirteenth century), later expansions or modifications of the text remain a distinct possibility. While I have not found any evidence of such later interventions yet, future research on *Chron713* will certainly need to take this possibility into account.

Finally, the use of the term »Maronite« to describe the chronicle is justified by the fact that the anonymous author is (1) a Syriac Chalcedonian who (2) sympathizes with Monotheletism and (3) is close to the monks of the monastery of Mar Maron.[24] The monks of Mar Maron were well known as defenders of the Council of Chalcedon in their disputes with the Miaphysites, but also as advocates of Monotheletism during the seventh century.[25] Writing in the early eighth century, the chronicler probably belongs to the same intellectual circle(s) that produced other known Syriac Monothelete texts in this period, such as the *Syriac Maronite Chronicle* (which also features the monks of Mar Maron), the Syriac *Life of Maximus* and a number of shorter theological and polemical treatises.[26]

2. The Contents

As already noted, *Chron713* is a chronicle covering the history of the world from Adam until 692-693 CE, when the truce (*hudna*) between the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685-705 CE) and the Byzantine emperor Justinian II (r. 685-695, 705-711 CE) was broken.[27] Entries for each year are usually short and simply list the main political and religious events. Longer narrations or anecdotes related to specific events are exceptionally rare. Following a short preface (fols. 85v-86r), the chronicle rushes through biblical and ancient history (fols. 86r-99r), with occasional references to Greek mythology (e.g. fol. 91r). After summarizing Alexander the Great's conquests (fol. 99r-v), the chronicler lists the Seleucid, Ptolemaic, Hasmonean and Roman rulers (fols. 99v-108v). With the brief mention of Christ's Passion in the nineteenth year of emperor Tiberius (fol. 108v) the chronicle shifts its focus towards the history of the Church, while also following the political and military history of the Roman and Persian empires (fols. 108v-145r). The final part of the chronicle deals with the Byzantine-Persian war of 602-628 (fols. 145r-147v), Muḥammad's preaching and the appearance of Islam, the Arab conquests and the ensuing Byzantine-Arab wars (fols. 148r-155v). Church

23 See Graf, *Geschichte*, II, 94-102; Breydy, *Geschichte der syro-arabischen Literatur*, 151-178. However, nothing precludes a somewhat later dating of the Arabic translation (twelfth or early thirteenth century).

24 See Sinai Ar. 597/II, fols. 133r, 144v.

25 On Syriac Monotheletism in the seventh-eighth centuries, see Tannous, In search of Monotheletism.

26 See Brock, Early Syriac life; Brock, Monothelete Florilegium; Brock, Two sets; Conterno, Three unpublished texts. On the Syriac Maronite Chronicle, see Debié, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, 546-548. The links between *Chron713* and this source need further research, but a preliminary comparison already shows that *Chron713* is not an Arabic translation of the *Syriac Maronite Chronicle*. For a discussion of *Chron713* in the context of Monothelete and Maronite history writing, see my forthcoming study: Pirtea, Syro-Chalcedonian historiography.

27 This was mistakenly interpreted by Atiya as referring to a peace treaty between the Fatimids and the Byzantines (Atiya, *Arabic Manuscripts*, 24). Atiya probably mistook the *anno Graecorum*/Seleucid era dating in the text (»the year 1004«) for an *anno Domini*/Common Era dating.

history remains a concern for the seventh century, as shown by the references to the pressing theological disputes of the time, i.e. Monotheletism and the Council of Constantinople in 681 (fols. 153v-154r).

One of the most striking characteristics of *Chron713*, especially its last part, is the fact that it exhibits substantial parallels to a group of Greek, Syriac and Arabic chronicles that have long been known to depend on a common (now lost) »eastern« (i.e. Greek or Syriac) source. These are (1) the *Chronography* of Theophanes Confessor (d. 818), (2) the *Kitāb al-ʿunwān* of Agapius of Mabbug (tenth century), (3) the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) and (4) the anonymous Syriac *Chronicle to the year 1234* (= *Chron1234*).[28] Several scholars have identified this »eastern source« with the equally lost *Chronicle* of Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785 CE), but this view has been repeatedly challenged in recent years.[29] While the precise nature of the links between *Chron713*, Theophilus and the »eastern source« remains to be determined by future research, there is an undeniable and systematic intertextual connection between Theophanes, Agapius, Michael, *Chron1234* and the new chronicle. This is especially evident for the seventh century, as exemplified by the following case study.

3. A Case Study: The Events of the Year 633-634 CE

In his account of the aftermath of the Byzantine-Sasanian war of 602-628 (fols. 146r-148r) and the early Arab conquests of the 630s, the chronicler lists the following three events for the year 945 AG (October 633 to September 634 CE):

وفي سنة تسع ماية وخمسة واربعين، ومن ملك هرقل سنة اربعة وعشرين، اتوا لصوص العرب ووقعوا في ارض القبلة. وانكوا بها نكاية عظيمة بالسيف والسبى.

حينيذ ثاوذوركي اخو الملك اخذ جيش الروم وسار للقا العرب فنلبوا30 الروم وانهزموا بين ايديهم ، وظهرت آية مذهلة في السما توضح عن الغضب الذي يحل بالارض على ايديهم.

And in the year nine-hundred forty-five and the twenty-fourth year of Heraclius's reign, the Arab robbers arrived and fell upon the land of the *qibla* [i.e. Palestine/the Holy Land],[31] inflicting great damage to it by sword and by enslavement.

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28 Literature on these works and their connection to the eastern source is extensive. To mention only a few recent publications: Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa*; Conterno, *Descrizione dei tempi*; Jankowiak and Montinaro, *Studies in Theophanes*; Hilkens, *Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*. See also next note.

29 See, e.g., Conterno, *Descrizione dei tempi*; Conterno, Theophilos; Hilkens, Before the eastern source; Debié, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, 27-31; Debié, Theophanes' »oriental source«; Hoyland, Agapius, Theophilus and Muslim Sources; Hoyland, Agapius of Manbiǧ.

30 The manuscript quite clearly reads فنلبوا, but the root *n-l-b* is, to the best of my knowledge, not attested in classical Arabic. One might conjecture a mistake for فنُكبوا (»they were afflicted/they suffered misfortune«) or فنُكوا (»they were harmed«), where the scribe forgot to add the horizontal stroke in *kaf* (which he does occasionally, cf. fol. 143v, 144v). Another possibility is فغُلبوا »they were defeated« (confusion of غـ and نـ), which would be a Qur'anic echo (Q 30). In any case, the context makes clear that the verb refers to the Byzantines' defeat.

31 The expression *arḍ al-qibla* is, to my knowledge, not a common designation for Palestine/the Holy Land in this period. However, from the overall context, this is clearly the region the chronicler refers to (a few lines later, the chronicler speaks of the *jihat al-qibla* in the same sense, fol. 148v). One possible explanation is

> Then, Theodoric, the emperor's brother, took the Roman army and marched against the Arabs, but the Romans were afflicted/defeated(?) and fled before them.
>
> And a marvellous sign appeared in the heavens, signifying the wrath that would befall the land at their hands.[32]

This passage follows immediately after Abū Bakr's dispatching of the four generals and precedes the note on Heraclius's assembly of the Byzantine army under the command of Bahnas/Baanes and Theodore the *sakellarios*, which led to the battle of Jābiya/Yarmūk in 636 CE. The entries are admittedly short and provide few details, but the passage is highly relevant in at least two respects: on the one hand, it shows clear parallels to the dependants of the »eastern source«, with the same events, including the preceding and following notes on Abū Bakr and Heraclius, appearing – sometimes with similar wording – in Theophanes, Agapius, Michael the Syrian and *Chron1234*.[33] On the other hand, there are some discrepancies, especially with regard to the *order of events*, which strongly suggest that *Chron713* represents an independent strand of the historiographic tradition linked with the »eastern source«.

The first event mentioned in the cited passage refers to the earliest Arab-Byzantine military encounters in southern Palestine in the first months of 634 CE.[34] For the same year, Theophanes, Agapius, Michael and *Chron1234* mention a battle between the Arabs and the patrician Sergius, although no precise location of the encounter is given.[35] Like *Chron713*, Theophanes mentions that the Arabs took numerous captives on this occasion.[36] The same battle is alluded to in the contemporary *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*, which mentions a Byzantine official (the *candidatus*, usually identified with Sergius) being killed in battle.[37] Further details are provided by another contemporary Syriac source, the composite *Chronicle of 640 (Chronicle of 724)*, which locates the battle twelve miles east of Gaza and dates it to Friday, 4 February 634 CE. The same source also mentions the massacre of 4000 villagers and the »devastation of the entire region«, an expression that echoes the »great damage by the sword« in our text.[38] This confrontation is usually identified with the battle of Dāthin

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that the author (or the Arabic translator?) alludes to the notion that Jerusalem was the original *qibla* of the Muslims. Alternatively, it may refer to Jerusalem as the central destination of (Christian) pilgrimage (I owe this suggestion to Bishara Ebeid).

32 Sinai Ar. 597/II, fol. 148v.

33 For a translation of the relevant passages, see Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa*, 92-98.

34 On these early stages of the conquest of Syria, see: De Goeje, *Mémoire*, 1-63; Caetani, *Annali dell' Islam*, II/2, 1119-1192; Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 111-148; Kaegi, *Byzantium*, 88-97; Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 39-49.

35 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa*, 93-94 (with references).

36 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 336: πολλοὺς αἰχμαλώτους λαβόντες.

37 On this passage in the *Doctrina Iacobi*, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 55-61; Shoemaker, *A Prophet has Appeared*, 37-44.

38 *Chronicon ad 724*, ed. Brooks, 147-148. On this chronicle, see Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 59-66; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 118-120; Debié, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, 543-545, with further bibliography.

(al-Dāthina) known from Islamic sources.[39] We can thus very plausibly date the first event in *Chron713* to early February 634 CE and place it in the vicinity of Gaza.

The second battle, involving the brother of Heraclius Theodoric, also finds parallels in Theophanes, Agapius, Michael and *Chron1234*, as well as in the Armenian *History* of Sebeos and the Latin *Chronicle* of Fredegar.[40] Most scholars identify this encounter with the battle of Ajnādayn, c. 9 km north-east of Bayt Jibrīn (Eleutheropolis) in Palestine.[41] This was the first major confrontation between the Arabs and the Byzantines, in which the Arab commanders were joined by Khālid ibn al-Walīd and his troops, who had marched from Iraq to Syria in spring of the same year.[42] The presence of Heraclius's brother at Ajnādayn is confirmed by Muslim historians (e.g. Ibn Isḥāq, Sayf b. ʿUmar, cited by Ṭabarī), who moreover provide a variant of his name very similar to *Chron713*, i.e. *Taḍāriq* (Theodoric) rather than Theodore.[43] According to most Muslim sources, the decisive battle occurred on 28 Jumādā I, 13 AH/ 30 July 634 CE, shortly before the death of Abū Bakr in Jumādā II/August of the same year.[44]

While similar, the accounts in Theophanes, Michael, Agapius and *Chron1234* are unclear on the date of this battle.[45] Agapius mentions a battle between Theodoric and Khālid b. al-Walīd, but places it in the second year of ʿUmar (635-636 CE).[46] Similarly, Theophanes and Michael place the battle after the death of Abū Bakr and during ʿUmar's reign.[47] *Chron1234* notes that Theodoric's army and the Arabs »were encamped side by side between May and October«, but no year is mentioned and it is not clear from where the author draws this information.[48] It is thus difficult to reconcile the different accounts, and it may well be that Theophanes, Michael, Agapius and *Chron1234* conflate and/or confuse several confrontations between the Byzantines and the Arabs.[49]

Further insights into the chronology of events may be gained from the third element listed in *Chron713*, the »heavenly sign«, which almost certainly refers to a comet. *Chron713* places

39 See Kaegi, *Byzantium*, 88-97.

40 For the parallels, see Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa*, 96-98. On the relevant passages in Sebeos, see: Thomson, *Armenian History*, 240-243 (historical commentary by James Howard-Johnston). On Fredegar, see Kaegi, *Byzantium*, 98; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 216-219.

41 On the battle of Ajnādayn, see Caetani, *Annali*, III, 24-81; Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 128-148; Kaegi, *Byzantium*, 98-100.

42 On Khālid's march from Iraq, see Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 119-127.

43 al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, ed. de Goeje *et al.*, I/4, 2125: تذارق اخو هرقل لابيه وأمّه »Theodoric, the full brother of Heraclius«. On Theodore/Theodoric, see Martindale, *Prosopography*, 1279-1277. While Theophanes refers to Heraclius's brother as Theodore (Θεόδωρος, Theodorus), Syriac and Arabic sources agree on the form *Theodoric* (*Tawdūrīqī*, *Ṭāwuḍūrikī* or *Taḍāriq*).

44 See Caetani, *Annali*, III, 22-23; Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 129-130; Athamina, Ajnādayn.

45 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa*, 96-98 (with references).

46 Agapius, *Kitāb al-ʿunwān*, ed. Vasiliev, 454, 469. Agapius apparently summarizes or conflates here a series of events between 634 and 636.

47 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 336-337; Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, 11.5, ed. Chabot, IV, 414.

48 *Chron1234*, ed. Chabot, 242-244. *Chron1234* is clearly dependent on Islamic sources for this section. See Hoyland, Arabic, Syriac and Greek.

49 Hoyland seems to place the battle between Theodoric and the Arabs in the region of Damascus-Emesa, thus regarding it as distinct from the battle of Ajnādayn (*Theophilus of Edessa*, 93, n182; 96, n191).

the comet immediately *after* the battle fought by Theodoric, interpreting it as an indication of God's wrath.[50] A comet is also mentioned by Theophanes and Agapius, while Michael also provides September 634 CE as the date of its appearance.[51] However, unlike *Chron713*, all these sources place the comet some time *before* the battle between Theodoric and the Arabs, which complicates the attempt at establishing an exact chronology. Fortunately, the comet can be dated with precision thanks to independent accounts in the Chinese historical records of the Tang dynasty (*Jiu Tang shu*, *Xin Tang shu*, *Tang Huiyao*) and the eighth-century Japanese imperial chronicle *Nihon Shoki*. These records all mention a comet (彗孛 *xingbei*, or 長星 *changxing* »long star«) visible in the southern sky in late August/September 634 CE,[52] thus confirming the date provided by Michael the Syrian.

Taken together, the evidence discussed above suggests that *Chron713* provides a coherent and plausible chronological framework for the main events between October 633 and September 634 CE, one that is corroborated by other sources:

(1) early Arab raids in Southern Palestine (battle of Dāthin) – early February 634 CE

(2) the battle of Theodoric and the Arabs (battle of Ajnādayn) – late July 634 CE

(3) the appearance of a comet – September 634 CE

This sequence differs from Theophanes, Agapius, Michael the Syrian and *Chron1234*, who reverse the order of (2) and (3), or – in the case of *Chron 1234* – omit the latter altogether, and are unclear on the dating of Theodoric's battle against the Arabs. While this does not necessarily mean that *Chron713* offers the »correct« timeline of what »actually happened«, it does indicate that the new source proposes an alternative (and perhaps better informed) chronological sequence to the events of 633-634 CE than the later chroniclers.

Conclusions and Future Research

As this case study shows, *Chron713* represents a valuable independent source for the main events of the 630s and provides additional insights into the complicated chronology of the early Arab conquests in Syria-Palestine. Given that *Chron713* covers the history of the world until 692-693 CE, the same type of comparative research into the relevant historical sources will certainly prove illuminating for all the other events mentioned therein, especially for the sixth and seventh centuries CE. Therefore, the planned publication of an edition and annotated translation of the complete chronicle will open up several promising avenues for research: it will hopefully encourage new studies on the sources of Theophanes, Michael, Agapius and *Chron1234*, and potentially lead to a re-evaluation of the problematic »eastern source« and the lost chronicle of Theophilus. Moreover, *Chron713* can shed light on the early

50 A few lines later, *Chron713* states that Heraclius's decision to leave Syria was also influenced by this heavenly portent (fol. 149r). This may be an oblique reference to Heraclius's interest in astrology, a trope that is already found in Fredegar's *Chronicle* (Fredegarius, *Chronicarum Libri IV*, IV, 65, ed. Krusch, 153) and other sources.

51 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa*, 94-95. *Chron1234* does not mention a comet at all.

52 Ho, Ancient and medieval observations, 168; Pankenier *et al.*, *Archaeoastronomy*, 70-71; Sicoli *et al.*, *Medieval Comets*, 103-106.

history of Syriac Monotheletism and the emergence of a Syro-Chalcedonian identity in the early Islamic period, on the earliest interactions between Christian and Muslim historiography, and on the history of Syro-Arabic translations in the medieval Maronite context.

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