

# **Medieval Syriac Historians' Perceptions of the Turks**

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## Preface

This thesis examines how the Turks were perceived in three medieval Syriac chronicles: the *Chronicle* of Michael the Great, the *Anonymous Chronicle to AD 1234*, and the *Chronicle* of Bar ‘Ebroyo (Bar Hebraeus). **Chapter 1** gives an overview of Syriac historiography, **Chapter 2** focusses on the medieval Syriac chronicles and **Chapter 3** looks at the Turks in the medieval Syriac chronicles in general. Because of its integral importance to this subject, **Chapters 4-7** focus on Book XIV of Michael’s *Chronicle*, including extensive excerpts from my translation of the Syriac text (with reference to the French translation made by Jean-Baptiste Chabot). This is the first time this text has been translated into English, to my knowledge.

I am thankful to many people who helped me significantly while writing this thesis, especially my supervisor, Dr. Erica Hunter, who suggested the topic and guided both my translation of the Syriac text and the overall progress of the thesis from its infancy to its final state.

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## Abbreviations and Conventions

The three chroniclers this thesis focusses on are referred to throughout as Michael, the Anonymous Chronicler<sup>1</sup> and Bar 'Ebroyo. Corporately, they are called 'the three medieval Syriac chroniclers' and their works are referred to as 'the medieval Syriac chronicles.' The following abbreviations are employed in the footnotes:

1. *Michael* = Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*
2. *Chron. 1234* = Chabot & Abouna, *Chronicon Anonymum ad A.C. 1234 Pertinens*
3. *Chronography* = Budge, *Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*<sup>2</sup>
4. *Chron. Eccl.* = Abbeloos & Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*
5. *CSCO* = *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*<sup>3</sup>
6. *EI: Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition<sup>4</sup>

Apart from Book XIV of Michael's *Chronicle*, Syriac texts referred to or quoted from are the French, German or Latin translations available. Bible quotations other than translations from the Peshitta are from the New International Version (NIV).

Dates given are BCE or CE, although SE is used for the Greek (Seleucid) era<sup>5</sup> and AH for the Muslim era. CE equivalents of SE dates are those found in standard reference works such as the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.<sup>6</sup>

Personal names, place names, and ethnonyms are usually spelled according to accepted norms in academic literature (e.g. Qipchaq). However, names with well-established spellings are not changed to reflect pronunciation (e.g. Samarkand). Dynastic and individual names are generally spelled according to Bosworth, *New Islamic Dynasties*. 'Türk' refers to the Turkic group ruling in Mongolia in the sixth-eighth centuries, whereas 'Turk' refers to all Turks up to modern times. 'Turkic' is used in relation to all Turkic groups, whereas 'Turkish' is only used to describe the Seljüks and their successors. 'Seljük,' reflecting Turkic pronunciation, is used rather than Arabic 'Saljuq.'

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<sup>1</sup> The author of the *Anonymous Chronicle to 1234* (sometimes just called 'the Chronicler').

<sup>2</sup> All references to the *Chronography* are to the English translation in Vol. I.

<sup>3</sup> Unless noted otherwise, the *CSCO* volume numbers given are for the overall series, followed by the Syriac series (e.g. 121/66). See the Bibliography for details of *CSCO* volumes cited.

<sup>4</sup> A list of all other abbreviations used in footnote references can be found in the Bibliography.

<sup>5</sup> Beginning in either spring 311 BCE (Babylon) or autumn 312 BCE (Macedonia) (*Cambridge Ancient History*, 175, n. 1).

<sup>6</sup> Due to errors made by some Syriac writers, SE dates employed in different sources for the same event are not always consistent.

# Introduction

## Medieval Syriac Chroniclers

The eleventh through thirteenth centuries were eventful times in the Middle East, marking the end of exclusive Arab dominance in the heartland of Islam and the beginning of Turkish rule, which continued until the demise of the Ottoman Empire in 1922. The period was characterized by a series of major invasions: the Seljūk Turks in the mid-eleventh century, the Crusaders from the late eleventh to late thirteenth centuries, and the Mongols in the mid-thirteenth century. These incursions from the East and the West significantly affected the religious, political, and cultural climate of the Middle East during the medieval period.<sup>7</sup>

Numerous chroniclers recorded the events of these tumultuous times. Arab and Persian writers prepared Muslim histories of the Seljūks and later the Mongols. Christian histories were composed in Greek, Latin, Armenian, Georgian, and Syriac. Many of these chronicles, as official dynastic histories, understandably presented their patrons much more favourably than their opponents. The Syriac-speaking Christians, both West and East Syrians,<sup>8</sup> were in many ways an exception to this trend, possibly because they had limited political power.

In particular, the Syrian Orthodox Church (the West Syrians) produced several important chronicles that give us valuable insight into the times. These were written by men who shared the linguistic and cultural milieu of their Muslim neighbours, but were *dhimmi*s who, although members of an officially-tolerated non-Muslim religion and therefore protected by the Muslim state, were effectively politically impotent. With no vested political power, the Syrian Christians living in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Palestine provide a different outlook to their Muslim and European counterparts. As J.B. Segal notes:

To the student of history... their homely respectability... is of advantage, rather than a defect. It is our best guarantee of the trustworthiness of their narrative. Our Syriac chroniclers were simple men, but they were men of good sense and integrity. They were all, it is true, devout, even doctrinaire, sons of the Church, and they make all the affairs of human kind conform to a certain larger pattern drawn by the guiding hand of Providence. But they tell their

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<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, 'medieval' is defined as "the four centuries after A.D. 1000" (*Shorter OED*, 1321).

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this thesis, West Syrians are usually referred to as 'Syrian Orthodox,' although occasionally the adjective 'Jacobite' is used. Members of the Church of the East are usually called 'East Syrians' (though not all were ethnic Syrians), although the adjective 'Nestorian' is also used. Usage of the terms 'Jacobite' and 'Nestorian' does not imply any association with connotations of heresy.

story without guile or affectation, without conceit and without cynicism... these Syriac chroniclers were sincere men.<sup>9</sup>

## Steppe Invaders

The Seljūk Turks were not the first steppe dwellers to invade the West, although they were the first to rule over the Middle East. Prior to their advent, the Pontic Steppe and the Caucasus were ruled by the Iranian-speaking Cimmerians (c.1250-700 BCE),<sup>10</sup> Scythians (c.700-346 BCE), Sarmatians (346-100 BCE), and Alans (100 BCE-CE 371), followed by the Altaic Huns (CE 371-453), Sabirs (463-557) and Avars (557-626).

Turkic power on the steppe was inaugurated by the establishment of the First Türk Empire (552-659), which split into Eastern and Western Türk Qaghanates in 603. Western Türk power on the Volga steppe and in the Caucasus was inherited by the Khazars (c.630-965), a confederation of Turkic and Hunnic elements who were key allies of Byzantium and instrumental in thwarting Arab attempts to expand north of the Caucasus Mountains.

Meanwhile, the Second Türk Empire (682-742) was re-established in Mongolia and Central Asia, to be succeeded by the Uighur Empire (744-840) and the Qarluq Qaghanate, (766-c.943), from which the Qarakhanid dynasty emerged to rule north of the Amu Darya (c.943-1089). About the same time, the Turkic Ghaznavid dynasty (962-1040) was founded in Afghanistan by Alptigin and then expanded under Sebüktigin. These were the first two Turkic dynasties to rule in the Muslim world.

On the northern steppe, power passed to the Oghuz Turks (Arabic *Ghuzz*),<sup>11</sup> who had migrated to the steppe north of the Syr Darya in the late eighth century and then into Khazar territory, where they played a key role in the Rus' defeat of the Khazars in 965. After the Oghuz, the steppe was ruled by two other Turkic groups, the Pechenegs (tenth-eleventh centuries) and the Qipchaq-Cumans (eleventh-thirteenth centuries).

The Seljüks were originally a group of Oghuz that took their name from Seljūk, who served either the Khazar *qaghan*<sup>12</sup> or the Oghuz *yabghu*.<sup>13</sup> Seljūk fled from his overlord in

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<sup>9</sup> Segal, "Syriac Chronicles," 246.

<sup>10</sup> The transitions between these groups were usually more gradual than the dates imply.

<sup>11</sup> The word *oghuz* probably originally meant "tribe" or "tribal organisation," implying political affiliation, but not necessarily ethnic relationship.

<sup>12</sup> The title *qaghan* (also transliterated as *kaghan* or *khagan*) essentially means "supreme ruler." The later title *khan* (or *qan*), used by the Mongols and successor states, is a derivation of *qaghan* (see Clauson, *Etymological Dictionary*, 612, 630).

<sup>13</sup> "The title *yabghu* was one of the highest dignities of the Turkic world. It implied, usually, membership in the charismatic Ashina clan in whom the 'heaven-mandated' right to rule resided and command over a large tribal grouping or wing of the state" (Golden, *CHEIA*, 349; see also Clauson, *Etymological Dictionary*, 873).

985 to Jand on the lower Syr Darya, where he converted to Islam. From this time on, Oghuz and Qarluq Turks who were Muslim came to be known as Türkmen.

After the Seljüks defeated the Ghaznavids at the Battle of Dandanqan (1040), Seljük's grandson Toghril Beg proclaimed himself *amir* of Khorasan, while his brother Chagri Beg began to rule at Kirman in southern Iran. When Toghril Beg entered Baghdad in 1055, overthrowing the Shi'a Buyid (or Buwayhid) dynasty and assumed the title of *sultan* (the official protector of the *caliph*),<sup>14</sup> the Seljüks became the most powerful state in the Middle East. This was the historical context in which the medieval Syriac chroniclers wrote about the Turks.

### Structure of the Thesis

In light of the importance of Syriac historical sources for this period, this thesis will look at the extant works of three medieval West Syrian chroniclers: Michael I the Great (also called Michael the Syrian), Syrian Orthodox Patriarch, 1166-99; the author of the *Anonymous Chronicle to AD 1234* and Bar 'Ebroyo (commonly known as Bar Hebraeus), Syrian Orthodox *maphrian*,<sup>15</sup> 1264-86.

The period in question, from the Seljük invasion to the end of each chronicle, takes up a major portion of these three chronicles: 23% of Michael's *Chronicle*,<sup>16</sup> 45% of the *Anonymous Chronicle to AD 1234*,<sup>17</sup> and 64% of Bar 'Ebroyo's *Chronicon Syriacum*.<sup>18</sup> These medieval Syriac chronicles are frequently cited as important primary sources for reconstructing the history of the Seljüks and the Mongol Il-khanid realm.<sup>19</sup> However, little attention has been paid to how these invaders, in particular the Turks, were perceived by the three medieval Syriac chroniclers and why they wrote about them as they did.

Amongst the few articles that touch on this theme, Károly Czeglédy, citing Mihály Kmoskó, summarizes what both Michael and Bar 'Ebroyo wrote about the Turks, but the broad scope of this article, covering references to 'the peoples of the North' in Syriac sources

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<sup>14</sup> Toghril Beg did not adopt the title *qaghan*, since "the Seljuqs did not aspire to be masters of the Turko-nomadic world, but of the Perso-Arabian, Islamic empire" (Golden, "Imperial," 67).

<sup>15</sup> Second only to the Patriarch, he was responsible for the Syrian Orthodox living in the traditional territory of the Church of the East.

<sup>16</sup> 172 out of 738 pages, not including tables.

<sup>17</sup> 310 out of 691 pages.

<sup>18</sup> 382 out of 599 pages.

<sup>19</sup> Claude Cahen, in his numerous articles on the Seljüks (e.g. "Première penetration," "Malik-nameh," "Seljukides," "Historiography"), frequently cites Michael and Bar 'Ebroyo, and Bar 'Ebroyo is also acknowledged as an important source for Mongol history (e.g. Grousset, *Empire*, 362, 367, 377, 396).

as a whole, does not permit an in-depth analysis of the material on the Turks.<sup>20</sup> Two other articles are more in-depth, but focus on earlier steppe nomads, not the Seljüks.<sup>21</sup> Of the three articles concerning the Seljüks in Syriac chronicles, two only address a few short passages from the chronicles of Michael and Bar ‘Ebroyo (albeit important passages for the topic of this thesis)<sup>22</sup> and a third is a summary of Book XIV of Michael’s *Chronicle*, with little analysis of the content.<sup>23</sup>

This thesis seeks to address the general lack of research into this area by answering the following questions:

1. What did the three medieval Syriac chroniclers write about the Turks?
2. What do their writings tell us of their perceptions of the Turks?
3. Besides their perceptions, what other factors motivated their writing about the Turks?
4. What ultimately was conveyed to their readers about the Turks?

Book XIV of Michael’s *Chronicle*, which he devoted to the Turks, is the focus of much of this thesis. The text is unique in the Syriac chronicle tradition; rather than recounting historical events that occurred at specified dates involving specific individuals (as with the other 20 books of his *Chronicle*), Book XIV is Michael’s attempt to explain the new political realities the Seljük Turks introduced into the Middle East. He does this by giving his readers information about their origins and their transition from being nomads in the remote north-east to supreme rulers in the Muslim heartland. As such, it reveals much about how Michael viewed the Turks and sought to justify their rule, as non-Christians, over his Christian audience.

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<sup>20</sup> Czeglédy, “Monographs.”

<sup>21</sup> Czeglédy, “Pseudo-Zacharias” and Alheim & Stiehl, “Michael.”

<sup>22</sup> Husseynov, “Terme” and Husseinov, “Sources.” A third article by the same author, Guseinov, “Azerbaidjan,” only mentions the subject very briefly.

<sup>23</sup> Suermann, “Turks.”



# Chapter 1: Syriac Historiography

## Syriac Chronicles

Christian historiography has its roots in the historical books of the Old and New Testaments, but it was Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260-340) who developed the world chronicle into an important literary genre for Christendom. Eusebius' *Chronicle* (published c.303 and updated c.326) became the blueprint for all subsequent Christian chronicles, whether Latin, Byzantine, Armenian or Syriac.<sup>24</sup> These chronicles tend to “exhibit certain common features: all begin from some point in the remote past, most often Creation; they arrange their material in chronological order and attempt to date at least major events; they record both secular and ecclesiastical affairs and treat the history of other nations besides the Christian ones.”<sup>25</sup> Christian chronicles contained history with a purpose, driven by the need to show how the Divine Will directed human destiny.

Syriac historical writings do not comprise a large corpus compared to Arabic sources, since they were essentially theologically and ecclesiastically motivated: “Syriac literature was cultivated by monks and thus intended for a comparatively small group of readers, in sharp contrast to Arabic literature which... is an essentially lay literature.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, largely as a result of the vicissitudes of history, most of the extant Syriac chronicles are West Syrian.<sup>27</sup> Very few substantial East Syrian chronicles are left, apart from that of Elia, metropolitan of Nisibis (1008-46).<sup>28</sup> This dearth of East Syrian manuscripts is particularly unfortunate, since the Church of the East had far more contact with the peoples of the steppe than the Syrian Orthodox Church.

However, the West Syrian tradition produced some vibrant chroniclers, including the bishops John of Ephesus (558-88)<sup>29</sup> and Jacob of Edessa (684-87/88), the Patriarchs Dionysius of Tell Mahre (818-45) and Michael I (1166-99), and the *maphrian* Bar 'Ebroyo (1264-86). For these writers, writing chronicles was as theological as writing a homily. As Dorothea Weltecke comments, the chronicler “was a writer of *time*. Hence, he produced *time-*

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<sup>24</sup> On the development of the Universal Chronicle in the Christian tradition, see Croke, “Origins” and Witakowski, *Syriac Chronicle (SSU 9)*, 59-75

<sup>25</sup> Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 389.

<sup>26</sup> Czeglédy, “Monographs,” 25.

<sup>27</sup> “The literary remains of the Jacobites were preserved in those few monastery libraries which escaped destruction because of location in far-away corners” (*Ibid.*, 30).

<sup>28</sup> Although his *Chronography*, dating from 1018, technically fits into the medieval period, he wrote prior to the rise of the Seljüks and so is not a major focus in this thesis.

*writing... maktbônût zabnê... This was done within a theological framework of thoughts about the nature of timeliness, eternity, createdness, and the Creator. The result would be a universal chronography.*"<sup>30</sup>

Apocalyptic texts also played an important role in Syriac historiography. Sebastian Brock notes that "the division between these two genres [chronicles and apocalyptic texts] is not always as clear-cut as one might have expected."<sup>31</sup> Many of these works originated with the advent of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries and they are, as such, "the first writings to deal specifically, rather than incidentally, with the Muslim challenge."<sup>32</sup> Several also address the theme of Gog and Magog, explored below.

### **Changing Dynamics in Syriac Historiography**

During the period in which the three medieval Syriac chroniclers were writing, several important changes were taking place that influenced their writing. Discussing Syriac historiography, Jean-Maurice Fiey poses an important question: "Do the Syriac chroniclers have a critical sense?"<sup>33</sup> Fiey notes that, although Syriac chroniclers are usually motivated by a desire to edify their readers, leading to an overly credulous reporting of past miracles, they are also concerned about truth, a quality which in particular the Anonymous Chronicler recognized is not always straightforward:

Truth is hidden and it is also misused by the passions of the soul and evil desires... by the rod and the compelling hand, by the matter of gold, by the language of merchants, by the pride of ignorant people without knowledge, by the rudeness and ignorance of those of an unjust way... wanting to strengthen the truth, they do it harm and lose it due to their ignorance.<sup>34</sup>

A theocentric view of history usually led most Syriac chroniclers to be fatalistic about historical events, especially natural disasters and other tragedies. However, this view was challenged during the time of Michael I by John, bishop of Mardin, who maintained that evil, accidents, misfortune, and temptation did not take place by the will of God, but rather as a result of human factors, a radical suggestion viewed as heresy by most clerics of the time. The crisis was resolved by Michael's friend Dionysius Bar Şalibi, who proposed that there were two modes of divine intervention, the directive will of God and the permissive will of

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<sup>29</sup> Referred to as John of Asia in this thesis.

<sup>30</sup> Weltecke, "Originality" [11], [14].

<sup>31</sup> Brock, "Syriac Views," 10.

<sup>32</sup> Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 257.

<sup>33</sup> Fiey, "Chroniqueurs."

<sup>34</sup> *Chron. 1234*, II, 258-59.

God.<sup>35</sup> This compromise position, although never adopted by Michael (who continued to use traditional formulae of divine intervention in human affairs), did influence Bar ‘Ebroyo and might have continued to influence subsequent chroniclers, had the Mongol Il-khanate not disintegrated into anarchy.<sup>36</sup>

Linguistic changes were also taking place. Over the years, “Syriac gradually lost its position as a spoken language in Syria and Mesopotamia, becoming instead a written *Kultursprache*... This new situation drastically limited the role and scope of Syriac literature,”<sup>37</sup> but it also formed the background to the Syriac literary revival of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Faced with the eclipse of their mother tongue as a spoken language by Arabic, Persian or Turkish, the three medieval Syriac chroniclers were strongly motivated to preserve their literary tradition for future generations. As a result of this and their practice of incorporating large portions of earlier chronicles into their works (abridging, editing, and supplementing as they went), many chronicles that are no longer extant have been partially preserved in the medieval chronicles.

The interaction between East and West Syrian writers was also in flux. As a result of the deep divisions that emerged in Syriac Christianity after the Christological controversies of the fifth century, contact between the two branches was often strained. Although both traditions esteemed writers such as Mar Ephrem (c.306-73), there was limited intellectual exchange, since each viewed the other’s Christology as suspect. Where borrowings occurred, they were usually from west to east. Thus, Timothy I, Patriarch of the Church of the East (779-823), sought out and used Syrian Orthodox writings<sup>38</sup> and Solomon of Basra’s *Book of the Bee* borrowed greatly from the earlier Syrian Orthodox author of the *Book of the Cave of Treasures*.<sup>39</sup> However, some borrowings from east to west also took place. Thus, the mystical writings of the influential East Syrian writer Isaac of Nineveh (late sixth century) were read by both Greek Orthodox and Syrian Orthodox and Bar ‘Ebroyo used East Syrian historical sources, such as Mari ibn Suleiman, in his *Chronicle*.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Recounted in *Michael*, III, 263-74.

<sup>36</sup> Fiey, “Chroniqueurs,” 264.

<sup>37</sup> van Rompay, “Perceptions,” [48], [49].

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, [38]-[41]. Apart from the occurrence of Timothy’s name in Michael’s list of Nestorian Catholicoi (*Michael*, III, 522), none of the three medieval Syriac chroniclers mention him.

<sup>39</sup> Budge, *Cave*, 14-15.

<sup>40</sup> van Rompay, “Perceptions,” [51]-[52].

## Chapter 2: Medieval Syriac Chronicles

### Michael the Great<sup>41</sup>

Michael I, also known as Michael the Great and Michael the Syrian, was born in 1126 in Melitene (modern-day Malatya, Turkey). As a young man, he joined the celebrated monastery of Bar-Sauma (located near Melitene), becoming the archimandrite (abbot) by 1156. When the Patriarch Athanasius VIII died in 1166, Michael was elected to succeed him. The church, weakened by the involvement of bishops in simony, nepotism and other practices contrary to ecclesiastical law, was in need of reforms, which Michael set about introducing after his election, as well as travelling throughout Syria and Palestine to visit Syrian Orthodox communities.

During his time in office, Michael had good relations with important secular and church leaders, including the Armenian Catholicoi Nerses and Gregory IV, the Latin Patriarchs Aimery of Antioch and Amaury of Jerusalem, the Seljūk Sultan of Rum Qilīch Arslan II, and Baldwin IV, King of Jerusalem. Despite living during turbulent political times, his greatest trials came from within the church. Several of these were the result of his own nepotism, such as consecrating his nephew as *maphrian*, in opposition to the wishes of the eastern bishops. Conflict reached a climax when one of his disciples, Theodore Bar Wahbun, turned against him and had himself elected as antipatriarch (1180-93). Michael spent his last years at his beloved monastery of Bar-Sauma, where he died in November 1199.

### Michael's *Chronicle*<sup>42</sup>

Michael wrote a number of other ecclesiastical works,<sup>43</sup> but his *Chronicle* (Syriac *Makṭbānūt Zabnē*) is his major contribution to Syriac literature. The longest Syriac chronicle, it covers human history from the origin of the world up to 1195. The Syriac text consists of 21 books, called *memrē*,<sup>44</sup> each divided into chapters.<sup>45</sup> Although the preface to Jean-Baptiste Chabot's translation has been supplied from the abridged and adapted Armenian translation

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<sup>41</sup> Outlines of Michael's life are given in *Michael*, I, i-xvi; BarAbraham, "Patriarch Michael," 34-38; Healey, "Michael I"; Tisserant, "Michel"; Weltecke, *Beschreibung*, 54-126 and Wright, *Short History*, 250-54.

<sup>42</sup> I am indebted to Dorothea Weltecke for clarifying numerous issues related to Michael's *Chronicle*. The most extensive treatment of Michael's *Chronicle* to date is her *Beschreibung*. The most important works in English are her "World Chronicle" and "Originality."

<sup>43</sup> See *Michael*, I, xvii-xxii.

<sup>44</sup> The singular form, *memrā*, is glossed as "a discourse, sermon, homily, esp. a metrical homily; a treatise, a division of a book" (Payne Smith, *Syriac Dictionary*, 247). Following Chabot's example, I call them 'books.'

<sup>45</sup> For an overview of the 21 books, see Weltecke, *Beschreibung*, 127-28. The manuscript reproduced in Vol. IV of Chabot's edition is 741 pages long, with an additional 36 pages of appendices, for a total of 777 pages.

and is therefore not the original, it nonetheless gives an idea of Michael's purpose: "In assembling writers both ecclesiastic and profane, I have compiled that which is useful and appropriate, in order to awaken the deadly idleness of many and to clear up the darkness of ignorance..."<sup>46</sup>

Thus Michael was concerned with awakening his readers (primarily clerics) from apathy, urging them to pursue knowledge as an antidote to ignorance. He realised that the survival of the Church was dependent on its leaders understanding the times in which they were living. As a result, Michael was interested in "*change of power*, and the reasons for that change... He reflected on the existence of war, emphasised the importance of the beginning of earthly rule..."<sup>47</sup> At the same time, like Syriac chroniclers before him, Michael had a firm conviction in God's direction of human affairs, although he steadfastly avoided apocalyptic speculation.

The structure of Michael's *Chronicle* is one of its most interesting aspects.<sup>48</sup> The Eusebian mechanism of parallel columns is used throughout the text. Most pages have three equal columns, although some have two columns, either equal in width or with a wider outer column, and a few pages have only one column. Usually, when there are three columns, one deals with ecclesiastical history, one with secular history, and a third with miscellaneous events, including miracles, earthquakes, famines, and food prices.<sup>49</sup>

As Weltecke notes, this graphical arrangement of 'aesthetic devices' is important: "In Michael's chronography *everything* matters, not only the letters of the text."<sup>50</sup> However, since Chabot was never able to compare his copy with the original to determine how accurate it was, it is impossible to know how closely his copy resembles Michael's original layout. Based on photographs of the Edessa manuscript, Weltecke suggests the arrangement of the columns has almost certainly changed since Michael wrote his autograph.<sup>51</sup>

Michael was influenced in his arrangement of columns by the chronicles of Jacob of Edessa (692) and Dionysius of Tell Maḥre (842/43),<sup>52</sup> although he modified their approach. In order to differentiate between secular and sacred history, Dionysius of Tell Maḥre divided his *Chronicle* into two parts, an ecclesiastical history and a secular one, a practice that both

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<sup>46</sup> *Michael*, I, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Weltecke, "Originality," [49], [50].

<sup>48</sup> On the structure of the *Chronicle*, see *Michael*, I, xxiii-xxiv; Weltecke, *Beschreibung*, 153-96; Weltecke, "Originality" and Weltecke, "World Chronicle," 24-30.

<sup>49</sup> On some of the events covered by this third column, see Morony, "Economic."

<sup>50</sup> Weltecke, "Originality," [17].

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, [20]-[33].

the Anonymous Chronicler and Bar 'Ebroyo continued. Michael, however, combined church history and profane history into one chronicle. As Weltecke notes, "this system of historical representation is Michael's own invention."<sup>53</sup> His juxtaposition of sacred and secular history side by side enables the reader to reflect on events that were happening concurrently in 'the kingdom of God' and 'the kingdom of men.'

### **Manuscript History and Sources**<sup>54</sup>

Until the 'discovery' in 1887 of the Syriac manuscript of Michael's *Chronicle* in the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Urfa (Edessa) by Ignatius Ephrem II Rahmani, the future Syrian Catholic Patriarch of Antioch, it was thought to exist only in an abbreviated and adapted Armenian version dated 1248 and an Arabic version dated 1759.

Chabot traces the history of the manuscript as follows:<sup>55</sup> Michael's autograph of 1195 (A) was the source of the Armenian version of 1248 (B), from which other copies were subsequently made (C). The autograph (A) was copied by Moses of Mardin in 1560 (D). This copy (no longer extant) was then copied by Michael bar Barsauma in 1598 (E). Barsauma's copy was the source of the Arabic version of 1759 (F), from which other copies were later made (G).<sup>56</sup> After Rahmani discovered Barsauma's copy (E) in 1887, Chabot had a copy made from it in 1899 (H), reproduced in Vol. IV of his *Chronique de Michel le Syrien* and accompanied by three volumes of his French translation.<sup>57</sup>

In his introduction and the reconstructed preface to the *Chronicle*, Chabot lists numerous sources that Michael used.<sup>58</sup> Of special note to the topic of this thesis are the chronicles of John of Asia (588), Jacob of Edessa (692), and Dionysius of Tell Maḥre (842/43), since Michael mentions all three in Book XIV of his *Chronicle*. Unfortunately, the latter two are only extant in fragments. The chronicles of Ignatius of Melitene (d. 1095); Iwannis of Kaysum (d. 1171); Dionysius Bar Ṣalibi (d. 1171) and Basil of Edessa (d. 1172) are also relevant, since they covered events roughly contemporaneous with the final books of

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, [38], [46].

<sup>53</sup> Weltecke, "World Chronicle," 27.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the history of the manuscript and the versions, see *Michael*, I, xxxvii-li and Weltecke, "World Chronicle," 6-10.

<sup>55</sup> See his diagram, *Michael*, I, li.

<sup>56</sup> On the Arabic manuscript in Karshuni script which Chabot refers to in his translation (BM Or. ms. 4402), see Nau, "Notice." On a later Arabic chronicle that comprises abridged excerpts from Michael's *Chronicle*, see Ebied & Young, "Extracts."

<sup>57</sup> Published between 1899 and 1910. The most recent translation of the *Chronicle*, into Arabic, is Gregorios, *General Chronicle*.

<sup>58</sup> *Michael*, I, xxiv-xxxvii, 1-2. See also Weltecke, *Beschreibung*, 127-52.

Michael's *Chronicle*, but all four are completely lost. However, excerpts from all of these chronicles can be found in the works of all three medieval Syriac chroniclers, particularly Michael. Indeed, in addition to the insights that it gives us into events in the Middle East during the medieval period, Michael's *Chronicle* has been extremely useful in reconstructing earlier lost or mutilated texts.

However, the incorporation of earlier chronicles into later ones like Michael's "did not always preserve the entire older chronicle. They had to reduce it in size so that the chronicle would still be manageable after the addition of a new layer [of events from the chronicler's own time]." <sup>59</sup> The selection and adaptation of material from earlier chronicles often served a very specific purpose: "They [Syriac historiographers] present themselves as objective analysts, but... they compiled or composed their texts in retrospect to serve moral, religious, and political purposes." <sup>60</sup> Michael himself acknowledged in the preface to his *Chronicle* that he "compiled that which is useful and appropriate [to his particular aims]" from the earlier chronicles.

Michael quotes his sources extensively and usually tells his readers which sources he is using, indicating the beginning and end of each excerpt. His overall method is consistent with the medieval approach to historiography: "Creation of a new text by the collection and compilation of sources... and referring to these in order to support one's own representation." <sup>61</sup> In contrast to his written sources, Michael gives little information about his oral sources, which presumably contributed significantly to reporting events during his lifetime. Regarding his knowledge of languages, Weltecke comments, "It is difficult to know about Michael's language skills, because he does not talk about them," but besides Syriac and Arabic, he probably knew Armenian. Whether or not he was proficient in Greek is open to question, although he knew Greek terminology, as well as Latin and French words, but he communicated with the Franks in Arabic. His knowledge of Turkish words was probably through translation, since he used an interpreter to discuss theology with Qilich Arslan II. <sup>62</sup>

### **The Anonymous Chronicler**

Although we do not know who wrote the *Anonymous Chronicle to the Year 1234*, it is apparent from statements he makes that he was acquainted with Michael's brother

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<sup>59</sup> van Ginkel, "Making History," 351.

<sup>60</sup> Palmer, *West-Syrian chronicles*, xxviii-xxix.

<sup>61</sup> Weltecke, "World Chronicle," 23.

<sup>62</sup> Dorothea Weltecke, personal correspondence, 4 July, 2004; see Weltecke, *Beschreibung*, 117-118 and *Michael*, III, 391.

Athanasius, metropolitan of Jerusalem,<sup>63</sup> and Michael's nephew Gregory, *maphrian* of the East.<sup>64</sup> There are numerous references to Michael in the *Chronicle*,<sup>65</sup> but it is unclear whether the author knew him personally.

The chronicler was an eyewitness to the capture of Jerusalem by Salah ad-Din in 1187<sup>66</sup> and noted in the margin of his *Chronicle* the first incursions into Persia of the 'Tatars' in 1220.<sup>67</sup> This initial report was filled out at the end of the *Chronicle*, which relates their conflict with Khwarazmshah Jalal ad-Din in 1231<sup>68</sup> and their invasion of 1232.<sup>69</sup> The manuscript breaks off shortly afterwards, in the year 1234.

Although Grousset calls the *Chronicle* "a malevolent source,"<sup>70</sup> Segal describes it as "a fine account... The wealth of intimate detail and the familiarity of the author with the topography of Edessa show that he must have been contemporary to those events and probably an eyewitness of some."<sup>71</sup>

### **The Anonymous Chronicle**

The *Chronicle* is composed of a longer 'civil history' and a shorter 'ecclesiastical history,' the latter written before the former. The civil history extends up to 1234<sup>72</sup> and the ecclesiastical history covers events up to 1207.<sup>73</sup> The author's purpose, as expressed in his introduction, is to record information about "patriarchs, famous kings, governors, and judges of the Jews... the holy prophets and... the divine apostles... the well-known archbishops and bishops... the learned Orthodox and the synods... illustrious men and philosophers... and individual famous events that have taken place in the world."<sup>74</sup> This straightforward approach is followed throughout the *Chronicle*, with little attention paid to embellishment or editorial comment.

The sole manuscript of the *Chronicle*, dated possibly to the end of the fourteenth century, was discovered by Rahmani in Constantinople in 1899. He published the first and second

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<sup>63</sup> *Chron. 1234*, II, 150.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, II, 238.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, II, 230-50.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, II, 149.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, II, 170.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, II, 175.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, II, 177.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, II, xi.

<sup>71</sup> Segal, "Syriac Chronicles," 254.

<sup>72</sup> *Chron. 1234*, I and II, 1-241.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, II, 243-350.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, I, 17.



fascicules of the text in 1904 and 1911 at Charfeh-Beirut<sup>75</sup> (the third fascicule was never published). A French translation of selected passages by François Nau appeared in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* in 1907-08.<sup>76</sup>

As a result of the work of Chabot and Ephrem Barsaum, a new edition of the Syriac text of the *Chronicle* was published in 1916 in the *CSCO* series, Part I (CSCO 81/36) and Part II (CSCO 82/37). Chabot translated Part I into Latin in 1937 (CSCO 109/56) and Albert Abouna translated Part II into French in 1974 (CSCO 354/154). Chabot also published portions of Part II in 1924<sup>77</sup> and an English translation of the portion of the *Chronicle* concerning the First and Second Crusades (covering the years 1098-1164, sections 242-443 in Part II) appeared in 1933.<sup>78</sup> These translations, with their emphasis on the history of the Crusades, were extensively used by scholars such as Grousset, Runciman, and Segal.<sup>79</sup>

Like all Syriac chroniclers, the author copied whole passages from earlier chronicles, including John of Asia, Dionysius of Tell Maḥre, Basil of Edessa, and the *Chronicle up to 846*. Surprisingly, however, he did not use Michael's *Chronicle* as a source. As Fiey notes, "If one compares the dates, the figures and many details of the two contemporary authors, one realises quickly that they are independent and frequently different."<sup>80</sup> However, he did have access to official church correspondence<sup>81</sup> and he may have used several Arabic works and an Armenian source, possibly the *Chronicle* of Matthew of Edessa (d. 1136).<sup>82</sup>

### **Bar 'Ebroyo<sup>83</sup>**

Bar 'Ebroyo (*Arabic*, Abu'l Faraj Ibn al-'Ibri; *Latin*, Bar Hebraeus)<sup>84</sup> has been described as "one of the most learned and versatile men that Syria ever produced."<sup>85</sup> Born in 1225/26 in Melitene and baptized as Yoḥannan, his father taught him philosophy, theology, and

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<sup>75</sup> Rahmani, *Chronicon*.

<sup>76</sup> Nau, "Traduction."

<sup>77</sup> Chabot, "Episode."

<sup>78</sup> Tritton & Gibb, "Anonymous."

<sup>79</sup> *Chron. 1234*, II, vi.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, II, ix.

<sup>81</sup> Including letters Michael wrote to other church leaders.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, II, x-xi. On the chronicler's use of Arabic sources, see also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 419.

<sup>83</sup> Summaries of Bar 'Ebroyo's life are given in *Chronography*, xv-xxxi; Healey, "Barhebraeus"; Lane, "Account," [10]-[40]; Murphy, "Bar-Hebraeus"; Nau, "Bar Hébraeus"; *El*, "Ibn al-'Ibri"; Teule, "Ebn al 'Ebri" and Wright, *Short History*, 265-68.

<sup>84</sup> On the use of Bar 'Ebroyo instead of Bar Hebraeus and the meaning of this name, see Fathi-Chelhod, "L'origine" and Moosa, "Studies," 322-23.

<sup>85</sup> Wright, *Short History*, 265.

medicine during his youth. Later, he studied rhetoric and medicine under a Nestorian teacher in Tripoli.

Bar 'Ebroyo took the name Gregory when he was consecrated bishop of Gubos near Melitene in 1246. He was appointed metropolitan of Aleppo in 1253, but due to a church schism had to retire shortly afterwards to the monastery of Bar-Sauma, where he was able to view the autograph copy of Michael's manuscript. Returning to Aleppo in 1258, he witnessed the capture of the city by the Mongols two years later, after which he spent some time at the Il-khanid court, attending Hülegü as a physician in 1263.

In 1264, Bar 'Ebroyo was consecrated *maphrian* of the East, with his residence in the monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul. He was the perfect man for the job, "unusual in his openness toward Christians of all denominations and toward Muslims."<sup>86</sup> During his time as *maphrian*, he was on good terms with three successive Patriarchs of the Church of the East, Makhikha II (1257-65), Mar Denha I (1266-81), and Yaballaha III (1281-1317).

Bar 'Ebroyo also had good relations with the Mongol Il-khanid rulers of Persia, often visiting them in their capitals of Tabriz and Maragha.<sup>87</sup> He wrote warmly of those amongst the Mongol nobility who were Christians or favourable to Christians, including Hülegü and his wife "Dâkuz Khatûn, the believing queen"<sup>88</sup> and spoke of Kublai Khan as "the just and wise king, and lover (or friend) of the Christians,"<sup>89</sup> a far cry from the attitude of the Anonymous Chronicler towards the Mongols, who described them as "accursed and barbaric."<sup>90</sup>

In addition to the constant travelling required to visit the Syrian Orthodox who lived in his large territory, Bar 'Ebroyo also found time to write extensively and oversee numerous building projects.<sup>91</sup> After a short sickness, the beloved *maphrian* died in Maragha, Azerbaijan, in July 1286. His funeral was attended by Armenians, Greeks, Jacobites, and Nestorians and Yaballaha III "commanded that no man should go to business in the bazaar."<sup>92</sup>

Bar 'Ebroyo was a prolific writer, perhaps the most prolific and diverse in the history of Syriac literature. According to his brother Barsauma, he wrote at least 31 works, mostly in

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<sup>86</sup> Teule, "Ebn al 'Ebri," 13.

<sup>87</sup> On his relations with the Mongols, see Lane, "Account" and Fiey, "Ādarbāyġān," 416-19, 424-34.

<sup>88</sup> *Chronography*, 444. See also *Chron. Eccl.*, III, col. 440.

<sup>89</sup> *Chronography*, 439.

<sup>90</sup> *Chron. 1234*, II, 178.

<sup>91</sup> *Chronography*, xxx.

Syriac, but some in Arabic.<sup>93</sup> In addition to his own literary output, he also translated Greek works into Syriac and Arabic, and Arabic works into Syriac. His writing was motivated by a desire to stimulate the interest of his Syriac-speaking brethren in their own history, language, and literature, as well as to help them realise the benefits of Greek and Arab learning, without which they would remain an insignificant religious sect in the changing world of the Middle East. As Takahashi notes, with the advent of Mongol rule, the *maphrian* realised that “a new world order was being established... a multi-religious, multi-national order which was not dominated by Islam and in which the Syriac-speaking Christians too were given the opportunity... to compete with the other races for positions of prominence... In order for the Syriac-speaking peoples to assert themselves in the new situation, there was a need to update their scientific literature,”<sup>94</sup> including their knowledge of history.

### **Bar ‘Ebroyo’s *Chronicles***

Bar ‘Ebroyo wrote two chronicles.<sup>95</sup> His Syriac chronicle (Syriac *Maktbānūt Zabnē*, Arabic *Tāriḥ al-Zamān*) was written at Maragha and is divided into a universal history (*Chronicon Syriacum*) and an ecclesiastical history (*Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*). The latter is further divided into a sacred history from the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament through the apostolic period up to the Patriarchs of the Syrian Orthodox Church and a history of the eastern Syrians from the apostle Thomas to Bar ‘Ebroyo’s time, noting both the Jacobite *maphrians* and the Nestorian Patriarchs. Thus, his Syriac chronicle is referred to as either one chronicle in two or three parts or two separate chronicles. Both works cover events up to his death in 1286. His brother continued the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* up to 1288, followed by an anonymous author who updated it to 1496. Another anonymous writer continued the *Chronicon Syriacum* up to 1297.

Bar ‘Ebroyo arranged the *Chronicon Syriacum* around successive dynasties that ruled over the Middle East: the Hebrew patriarchs, judges, and kings, followed by the Chaldeans (Assyrians and Babylonians), Medes, Persians, pagan Greeks, Romans, Christian Greeks, Arabs, and Mongols. However, the majority of the *Chronicle* is devoted to the last two dynasties. Aware of the need to communicate in a manner accessible to lay people, his “intention was... to instruct his ‘people’... both the old and the young, the educated and the

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, xxx.

<sup>93</sup> On his works, see *ibid*, xxxii-xxxvi; Fiey, “Esquisse” and Wright, *Short History*, 268-80.

<sup>94</sup> Takahashi, “Simeon” [45]-[46].

<sup>95</sup> See Bualwan, “Histories.”

uneducated... he supplemented [mere chronological data] with a great mass of interesting and arresting facts, which would please the young and uneducated, and at the same time appeal to the scholar.”<sup>96</sup> His second chronicle was an Arabic adaptation<sup>97</sup> of the *Chronicon Syriacum* entitled *Al-Muhtaşar fil-duwal*,<sup>98</sup> not addressed in this thesis.

### Manuscript History and Sources<sup>99</sup>

The *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* was published with parallel Syriac text and Latin translation in three volumes by J.A. Abbeloos and T.J. Lamy (1872, 1874 and 1877),<sup>100</sup> followed by the Syriac text of the *Chronicon Syriacum*, published by Paul Bedjan in 1890.<sup>101</sup> An English translation from Bedjan’s text was prepared by E.A.W. Budge in 1932 (Vol. I), along with a negative facsimile of Bodleian MS Hunt No. 52, a fourteenth century manuscript of the *Chronicon Syriacum* written in two columns in Serto script (Vol. II). Bedjan’s text was prepared using the Nestorian script and vocalization, presumably since it was “intended for the use of Nestorian pupils and students, for Bedjan added notes in which he warns his readers against accepting everything which he finds in the book, and exhorts him to remember that Bar Hebraeus was a Jacobite.”<sup>102</sup>

Although Bar ‘Ebroyo mentions other chronicles in his preface, it is obvious that his main source for events up to 1195 was “the blessed old man Michael, the deceased Patriarch.”<sup>103</sup> Due to his location in Il-khanid Persia, he had access to sources that Michael never saw, not only for events after 1195, but also for Seljûk history. As he states in his preface, “I, having entered the Library of the city of Mârâghâh of Âdhôrbîjân, have loaded up this my little book with narratives which are worthy of remembrance from many volumes of the Syrians, Saracens (Arabs) and Persians which are [preserved] there.”<sup>104</sup> According to Claude Cahen, his primary Arab source was Ibn al-Athir (1160-1233), but he was also familiar with the

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<sup>96</sup> *Chronography*, vii.

<sup>97</sup> On the adaptation process, see Conrad, “Arabic Chronicle,” 324-28.

<sup>98</sup> Or *Muhtaşar Tārîḥ ad-Duwal* (*ibid*, 324-25; Samir, “Trois manuscrits.”).

<sup>99</sup> For a full description of the publishing history of the Chronicles, see *Chronography*, xxxviii-xliii.

<sup>100</sup> Section I on the Patriarchs of Antioch is in volumes I-II, section II on the eastern Syrians in volume III.

<sup>101</sup> A re-edition of the Syriac text of *Chronicon Syriacum* by Julius Y. Çiçek was published in 1985 (Holland: Lossler).

<sup>102</sup> *Chronography*, viii.

<sup>103</sup> Although he usually follows Michael’s account, he also questions it in several places (e.g. *ibid*, 196, 222, 249, 252, 274, 280).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

*Malik-nāma*, a Persian account of Seljūk origins,<sup>105</sup> and incorporated material from the *Diwān* by the Persian writer Juvayni (d. 1283) into his *Chronicle*.<sup>106</sup>

Again, we do not know exactly which languages Bar ‘Ebroyo spoke, although Budge suggests that “he knew Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, and Persian well, and that he had some knowledge of Greek, and more than a mere ‘bowing acquaintance’ with Armenian and with some of the dialects of Turkestan, Mongolia, and Western China.”<sup>107</sup> Interestingly, in the same way that the *Anonymous Chronicle* did not use Michael, Bar ‘Ebroyo did not use the *Anonymous Chronicle*.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Cahen, “Historiography,” 63-64, 78 and Cahen, “Malik-nameh.” The work is preserved in references in Gardizi, Mirkhwand, Ibn al-Athir, and other Muslim historians.

<sup>106</sup> *Chronography*, 473.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, xlvi.

<sup>108</sup> Tritton & Gibb, “Anonymous,” 304.

## Chapter 3: The Turks in Medieval Syriac Chronicles

### General Overview

Syriac chroniclers (along with their Arab, Byzantine, Latin, Armenian, and Georgian counterparts) did not use ethnonyms as specifically as modern scholars do. As Czeglédý notes, “some sources... use the ethnonyms of the various steppe-peoples, in particular those of the Scythians, Huns and Türks, in the generic sense of ‘nomads.’”<sup>109</sup> Thus, Michael, in Book X, Chapter 21, relates the origins of the Bulghars and the Khazars from three ‘Scythian’ brothers journeying from ‘Inner Scythia’ with 30,000 ‘Scythians.’<sup>110</sup> The Anonymous Chronicler describes the invading Mongols as “the people of the Huns, who are called today the Tatars,”<sup>111</sup> and “the Turks who are called Tatars in the Turkish language and Huns in Syriac.”<sup>112</sup> Bar ‘Ebroyo calls the Seljük Turks a people “from the Hûnâyê (Huns) who were called ‘Ghûzzâyê’”<sup>113</sup> and describes the advent of Mongol rule as “the eleventh dynasty which passeth from the Arab kings to the kings of the Huns.”<sup>114</sup>

This ambiguity in the use of ethnonyms must be kept in mind when considering the references to ‘the Turks’ described in this chapter; they may refer to the early Türks (or possibly Hephthalites<sup>115</sup>), the Khazars (often referred to as ‘Turks’ in Byzantine, Georgian, and Syriac sources),<sup>116</sup> the Seljüks or some other Turkic group.

Amongst the numerous Syriac historical sources covering the seven centuries from pre-Islamic times to the Mongol period,<sup>117</sup> ‘the Turks’ are mentioned in a variety of works:

1. *Ecclesiastical History of John of Asia, Part III* (588)<sup>118</sup>
2. *Anonymous East Syrian Chronicle* (650-660)<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Czeglédý, “East to West,” 43.

<sup>110</sup> *Michael*, II, 363-64

<sup>111</sup> *Chron. 1234*, II, 170.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, II, 175.

<sup>113</sup> *Chronography*, 195.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 433.

<sup>115</sup> Considered by some scholars to be Huns and sometimes referred to as ‘Turks’ in Arab and Syriac sources (Czeglédý, “Monographs,” 59; Frye & Sayılı, “Turks,” 205), they invaded Central Asia c.466, establishing an empire that included Afghanistan and northern India, and were subsequently defeated by a Türk-Persian alliance in 565.

<sup>116</sup> The Khazars are mentioned as ‘Khazars’ in *Michael*, II, 381, 409, 450-51, 501, 522.

<sup>117</sup> See lists in Brock, “Historical Writing”; Chabot, “Littérature historique”; Czeglédý, “Monographs,” 41-50, 53-63; Duval, *Littérature syriaque*, 187-224; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 390-422; Segal, “Syriac Chronicles”; Weltecke, *Beschreibung*, 45-46 and Witakowski, *Syriac Chronicle (SSU 9)*, 76-89.

<sup>118</sup> Payne Smith, *Ecclesiastical History*, 387-91, 405, 424-28.

<sup>119</sup> *CSCO 2/2*, 15-16, 28-29.

3. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (685-92)<sup>120</sup>
4. *Chronicle of Jacob of Edessa* (692)<sup>121</sup>
5. *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius/Zuqnin Chronicle* (c.775)<sup>122</sup>
6. *Anonymous Chronicle to 819*<sup>123</sup>
7. *Ecclesiastical History of Dionysius of Tell Maḥre* (842/43)<sup>124</sup>
8. *Anonymous Chronicle to 846*<sup>125</sup>
9. *Chronography of Elia of Nisibis* (1018)<sup>126</sup>
10. *Chronicle of Michael the Great* (1195)
11. *Anonymous Chronicle to 1234*
12. *Chronicle of Bar 'Ebroyo* (1286)

The relevant portions of all of these works are extant, except for the chronicles of Jacob of Edessa and Dionysius of Tell Maḥre, whose mention of the Turks is recorded only in Book XIV of Michael's *Chronicle*. It is unclear if any of the three medieval Syriac chroniclers had access to the *Anonymous East Syrian Chronicle*<sup>127</sup> or Elia of Nisibis' *Chronography*,<sup>128</sup> but both Michael and Elia quote from common sources, including Dionysius of Tell Maḥre, Jacob of Edessa, and John of Asia.<sup>129</sup> All three were presumably familiar with the popular *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and probably knew the work of Pseudo-Dionysius and the *Anonymous Chronicles to 819 and 846*, since these three works mention events involving the Turks that one or other of the three medieval Syriac chroniclers also records.

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<sup>120</sup> CSCO 541/221, 39.

<sup>121</sup> Extant fragments published in CSCO 5/5 & 6/6 and Brooks, "Chronological Canon."

<sup>122</sup> Harrak, *Zuqnin*, 159-60, 174, 206.

<sup>123</sup> CSCO 109/56, 12.

<sup>124</sup> Extant fragments published in CSCO 84/39 & 88/42.

<sup>125</sup> CSCO 4/4, 178.

<sup>126</sup> Delaporte, *Chronographie d'Élie*, 101-03, 109.

<sup>127</sup> Their omission of the two stories involving Turks in that chronicle (the rebellion of Bahram Chobin against Hormizd IV in 590 and the conversion of a Turkic ruler and his troops by Eliyah, Metropolitan of Merv, c.644) suggests not.

<sup>128</sup> Michael does not mention him or his *Chronography* anywhere in his *Chronicle*.

<sup>129</sup> Witakowski, *Syriac Chronicle* (SSU 9), 33, 80, 132. This is further evidence of the use of West Syrian sources by East Syrian writers.

## The Turks in Michael's *Chronicle*

Michael mentions 'the Turks' 12 times in Books I-XIII, but gives few geographical details and uses the term to designate several different Turkic groups, including the early Türks, the Khazars, and possibly the Oghuz or Pechenegs. Most of these references are either repeated or referred to in Book XIV, where Michael weaves them into his explanation of the advent of Turkish rule. The remaining five occurrences describe:

1. The Avar attack on Constantinople in CE 567 and their subsequent flight upon hearing that the Türks were pursuing them (Book X, Chapter 21).<sup>130</sup>
2. The first report of Arab raids into Khazar territory ("the country of the Turks") in CE 715<sup>131</sup> under the Arab general Maslama (Book XI, Chapter 18).<sup>132</sup>
3. Another Arab invasion in CE 725 of "the country of the Turks," again referring to the Khazars (Book XI, Chapter 19).<sup>133</sup>
4. An unsuccessful Arab raid into Khazar territory under Maslama in CE 727, together with the Khazar invasion of Arab territory in CE 730-31, referring to the destruction of an Arab army south of Azerbaijan by the Khazars, after which they advanced as far south as Mosul (Book XI, Chapter 21).<sup>134</sup>
5. The pillaging of Melitene by the Turks and the ransoming of "15,000 souls" by "the aged Abu Salim."<sup>135</sup> Although Michael does not give a date, Bar 'Ebroyo dates it to AH 380 = CE 990 (Book XIII, Chapter 7).<sup>136</sup>

The first reference is to the expansion of the Western Türk Empire into the Caucasus, but "the country of the Turks" invaded in 715, 725 and 727 is Khazar territory (as in earlier Syriac chronicles).<sup>137</sup> The identity of the Turks in Book XIII is unclear, being well before the Seljüki invasion, but after the Rus' defeat of the Khazars in 965. If not remnants of the Khazars, they may have been Oghuz or Pechenegs that had penetrated deep into Arab territory.

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<sup>130</sup> *Michael*, II, 363.

<sup>131</sup> Some sources date this raid to 713/14.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, II, 483.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, II, 490.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, II, 501.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, III, 146.

<sup>136</sup> *Chronography*, 177-78.

<sup>137</sup> Czeglédy, "Khazar Raids," 82 suggests that Michael's source on the Arab-Khazar conflict is probably Dionysius of Tell Maḥre.



With the inauguration of Seljūk rule described in Book XV, the term ‘Turks’ is used primarily to designate the Seljūks. Although most references in the last seven books of the *Chronicle* are to individual Turkish rulers, there are also many to ‘the Turks’ including those that describe:

1. The rise to power of Toghril Beg in 1042 and the pillaging of Michael’s hometown Melitene by the Turks several years later,<sup>138</sup> in which they “began to massacre without pity” and “to torture the men that they might show them hidden things; and many died in torment... The Turks stayed at Melitene for ten days, devastating, and pillaging. Then they burnt the wretched city, devastating the surrounding area... and burning the whole country” (Book XV, Chapter 1).<sup>139</sup>
2. The Cumans as “a group of Turks,” a passage to be considered below (Book XV, Chapter 12).<sup>140</sup>
3. The Turks as “the sons of Magog,” also to be addressed below (Book XVI, Chapter 1).<sup>141</sup>
4. The Turks in relation to the Divine Will: “For we must understand that if God has permitted, because of our sins, the Arabs or the Turks to reign over us, in his compassion, at no time and in no way has he abandoned us or will he abandon us, but, by his providence, he will guard us and deliver us from all our enemies, because of his great love for his Church” (Book XIX, Chapter 8)<sup>142</sup>

Although many of Michael’s references to the Turks after Book XIV mention the suffering of the Syrian Orthodox people as a result of Turkish ‘pillaging, devastation, and burning,’ the Greeks (who had renewed efforts to persecute non-Chalcedonians)<sup>143</sup> and the nomadic Türkmen (whom the Seljūks found it nearly impossible to control)<sup>144</sup> are also presented as a major cause of suffering for the Syrian Christians.

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<sup>138</sup> Michael’s dates are inaccurate here; he gives the beginning of the reigns of Toghril Beg and Constantine IX Monomachus as SE 1361 or CE 1031, but Constantine began to rule in 1042, approximately the same time as Toghril Beg’s rise to power.

<sup>139</sup> *Michael*, III, 158-59.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, III, 206-07.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, III, 221-22.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, III, 345.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, III, 166. The term ‘Chalcedonian’ denotes Christians who accepted the decision of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon of 451 which denounced Monophysitism as a heresy, as opposed to the Oriental Orthodox (the Syrian Orthodox, Copts and Armenian Orthodox, often referred to as Monophysites), who opposed the decision of the Council.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, III, 400-02. Even in the writings of Nizām al-Mulk, Persian *wāzīr* to the Seljūks, it is understood “any derogatory remarks were meant to refer to the Turkomans and not to the Seljūq ruling circles” (Ismail, “Mu‘taşim,” 22).

Michael is generally a reliable source for geographical and historical information related to Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor, but his knowledge of places and events further away is marginal. The only geographical place names from Central Asia that occur in his *Chronicle* are Bactria, Bukhara, Herat, Kabul, Kashgar, and Merv, most of which occur only once. Michael makes no reference to any Turkic ethnic groups or dynasties that arose to the east of Sassanid Persia or the Caliphate. The paucity of references to Central Asia perhaps reflects his essentially westward-orientation; prior to the Seljüks, most of his references to ‘Turks’ are actually to those in the Caucasus.

Book XIV plays a crucial role in connecting Books I-XIII (pre-Seljük history) and Books XV-XXI (Seljük history), describing the major change that took place with the advent of Turkish rule, and thus is addressed in the following chapters.

### **The Turks in the *Anonymous Chronicle to 1234***

The *Anonymous Chronicle to 1234* only mentions the Turks six times prior to the appearance of the Seljüks. Two episodes (the virgins of Dara and the siege of Amorium) are mentioned below in the analysis of Book XIV of Michael’s *Chronicle*. The other four describe:

1. An Arab invasion of “the region of the Turks” (again referring to Khazar territory) under al-Jarrāḥ b. ‘Abdallah al-Ḥakami in SE 1034, probably referring to a raid in CE 724 (Section 163).<sup>145</sup>
2. A Khazar invasion of Azerbaijan and Armenia in CE 726 in which Jarrāḥ was killed and the Khazars pillaged his camp. The Arabs under Maslama responded by invading Khazar territory the following year CE 727 and “the Khazars and the numerous population of Turks who lived near them were arrayed against him” (Section 164).<sup>146</sup>
3. The Arab emir Abu Ja’far in Armenia in CE 752, “dwelling near the boundary of the Turks” (Section 183).<sup>147</sup>
4. The aggression of ‘the Turks’ against the Arabs “in the time of Harun son of Abu Isḥaq” (Caliph al-Wathiq, 842-47), the peace that was concluded with them “because they had embraced the Muslim religion and occupied some regions” and the subsequent reign of

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<sup>145</sup> *Chron. 1234*, I, 240. This appears to be the same event referred to by Elia of Nisibis under SE 1033.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, I, 241.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, I, 263.

Caliph al-Mu‘tawakkil (847-61), who was “king in name only [because] the kingdom was in the hands of the Turks that we have just mentioned” (Section 228).<sup>148</sup>

The first three excerpts refer to the Khazars, but in the fourth extract, the Anonymous Chronicler seems to have confused the Khazars (“When the Turks came out of their country”) with the increasing role of Turkic slave-soldiers under the Abbasid rulers (“they had embraced the Muslim religion”). The Anonymous Chronicler’s brief reference to the beginning of Seljūk rule stands in sharp contrast to Michael’s extensive and highly-stylized presentation in Book XIV:

The Turks prepared themselves to come out from the north and take their kingdom to the Arabs... In 1356, [CE 1045] the king of the Turks called Sulayman, son of Saltuq [Alp Arslan, 1063-73, the great-grandson of Seljūk<sup>149</sup>], came out of the north, because the kingdom of the Arabs had begun to weaken and the Romans were retaking the cities of the Arabs... At that time [SE 1369 = CE 1058], the Turks came out and reduced Melitene to captivity, because it did not have ramparts.<sup>150</sup> They killed tens of thousands of people. 3000 Turks, sent by Sulayman, king of the Turks, came to attack... In 1380 [CE 1069], Romanus Diogenes [1067-71] came to power. He took soldiers and went away to make war with Sulayman, king of the Turks. This Turk Sulayman was of the great race of Turkish kings. When he came to power, he left his territory, came to the country of the Persians and he took the kingdom of the Arabs. That is why he is called sultan. As for the king of the Arabs, he began to call himself caliph, that is to say, the successors of the Prophet.<sup>151</sup>

Notably, Toghril Beg is not mentioned anywhere in the *Chronicle*. Writing as he was from Edessa or nearby, the Anonymous Chronicler was primarily concerned with the impact of the Turks on Anatolia and northern Syria, not Baghdad or Persia. His other references to the Turks (as well as the Türkmen) in the *Chronicle* concern their conquest of cities like Melitene and their involvement in the First and Second Crusades,<sup>152</sup> followed by an insightful summary of the role of the Turks in the Muslim world, noted in the analysis of Book XIV of Michael’s *Chronicle* below.

The Anonymous Chronicler’s references to the Turks are generally much more matter-of-fact than Michael’s. Unlike Michael, he omits any references to the Turks as the offspring of Magog, limiting himself to simple historical facts. As with Michael, several of his references

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, II, 28-29.

<sup>149</sup> The Chronicler calls Seljūk ‘Saltuq.’

<sup>150</sup> See also *Michael*, III, 158-159.

<sup>151</sup> *Chron. 1234*, II, 33-34.

<sup>152</sup> The part of the *Chronicle* translated in Tritton & Gibb, “Anonymous.”

to the Turks are actually to the Khazars and he calls the Tatars both ‘Turks’ and ‘Huns’,<sup>153</sup> referring to them in much more negative terms than he uses to describe the Seljüks: “the pagan Tatars and assassins... the accursed and barbaric people of the Tatars... Ah! What crimes these evil Turks committed, exterminating the world by the sword without mercy and plundering a great booty!”<sup>154</sup>

The Anonymous Chronicler knows even less than Michael about Central Asian geography and history, mentioning Merv only once, but he does devote several pages at the end of the *Chronicle* to Jalal ad-Din, the last Khwarazmshah, recognizing that he was of Turkic background and commenting that his clash with the Tatars was a battle of Turk against Turk.<sup>155</sup>

### **The Turks in the *Chronicon Syriacum***<sup>156</sup>

Most of the references to the Turks in the *Chronicon Syriacum* repeat what Michael wrote on the subject, including the Arab invasions of Khazar territory in 715, 725 and 727, the Khazar counter-invasion of 730-31 (again, the Khazars are throughout called ‘Turks’),<sup>157</sup> and the story of Abu Salim.<sup>158</sup> Presumably based on Arabic documents he had access to, Bar ‘Ebroyo also relates the actions of Turkic slave-soldiers during the Abbasid era, including their assassination of Al-Muntasir (861-62), Al-Musta‘in (862-66), Al-Mu‘tazz (866-69), and Al-Muhtadi (869-70),<sup>159</sup> their support for the Ghaznavid ruler Sebüktigin against the Shi‘a Buyids,<sup>160</sup> and the inability of Al-Qa‘im (1031-75) to pay them, because “there was nothing in the Treasury of the Khalifah.”<sup>161</sup> These references reflect the increasing influence of Turkic *mamluks* in the Caliphate, a trend that found its ultimate realisation in the Ghaznavid dynasty under the slaves-turned-rulers Alptigin and Sebüktigin.

Bar ‘Ebroyo’s introduction of the Seljüks is a synthesis of material from Michael and the *Malik-nāma*, the official history of the Seljüks which he found in the library of Maragha:

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<sup>153</sup> *Chron. 1234*, II, 170, 175-78.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, II, 177-78.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, II, 175.

<sup>156</sup> References to the Turks in the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* are limited to the mention of individual Seljük rulers and so are not discussed here.

<sup>157</sup> *Chronography*, 107, 109-110. Not included are the numerous places where Budge has mistranslated **تورک** (Thrace) as ‘Turkey’ (*ibid*, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 73, 76, 79, 85).

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 178.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 145-47.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

In this year... (A.D. 1036), a people went forth from the Hûnâyê who were called ‘Ghûzzâyê’, with Amîrs of the Saljuks from Hyrcania, which is the land of the Khazârs in the north. Concerning them... Mâr Michael, the holy patriarch, wrote at great length... [this is followed by a quotation from Ezekiel 38:3-8, thus equating the Turks with Gog and Magog] Now I, the feeble one, have seen that the writer thereof saith in a certain Persian book, which is called ‘Mulk-nâmah’... When the Khakân of the Khazârs burst forth, he had with him in his service a certain warrior whose name was Tûkâk... There was a son born to this man and he was called by the name of Saljûk. And after a short time, the Amîr Tûkâk died, and Khakân took Saljûk, and he was reared in the palace and he loved him greatly... [this is followed by an account of how Seljûk eventually fled from the Khazars] And he went forth from the land of Tûrân, that is to say of the Tûrkâyê to the land of Îrân... And when they saw that Persia was flourishing with Islâm, they took counsel together and said, ‘If we do not enter the Faith of the people of the country in which we desire to live and make a pact with them... no man will cleave to us, and we shall be a small and solitary people’.<sup>162</sup>

The account continues with a description of how Toghriï Beg and Chagriï Beg “gathered together a numerous army of Turkomans” and invaded Khorasan and Armenia. This is followed by an extended description of the interaction between the Seljûks, the Caliphate, the Ghaznavids, the Daylamites (Buyids) and the Turks in the caliphal armies that ultimately resulted in the capture of Baghdad in 1055.<sup>163</sup> Throughout, Bar ‘Ebroyo calls the Seljûks *Ghuzz*, presumably to distinguish them from the Abbasid slave-soldiers of Turkic origin, whom he calls *Turks*.

Bar ‘Ebroyo’s knowledge of Central Asian geography and history is much greater than Michael’s. In addition to the Central Asian cities mentioned by Michael, he also speaks of Almaliq, Balkh, Besh Baliq, Ghazna, Karakorum, Khan Baliq (Peking), Khojent, Khotan, Khwarazm, Qayaliq, Samarkand, Tangut, Tibet, Utrar, and possibly Siberia. Furthermore, due to living a century later and having access to sources Michael never saw, Bar ‘Ebroyo also refers to the Ghaznavids, Qarakhanids, Qarakhitai, and Khwarazmshahs. He calls the Oghuz and the Seljûks by name (whereas Michael only calls them ‘the Turks’) and gives us valuable information on two Turkic groups amongst whom Christianity had spread, the Kerait and the Uighurs.<sup>164</sup> This is a reflection of Bar ‘Ebroyo’s eastward-orientation, the result of his location as *maphrian* and his regular contact with Mongols and others from Central Asia, as well as the political changes that had occurred over the century since

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, 195.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 198-209.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 184; *Chron. Eccl.*, III, col. 280-82; 452-54. Bar ‘Ebroyo took the story of the Kerait conversion from the twelfth century Nestorian writer Mari ibn Suleiman. Hunter, “Conversion” suggests that the tribe in question may have been the Oghuz, not the Kerait.

Michael had written. Whereas the Turkic homeland was little understood in Michael's time and West Syrian writers were more aware of Turks in the Caucasus, by Bar 'Ebroyo's time, there was much more awareness of Turkic origins in Central Asia.

## Chapter 4: Establishing the Biblical Credentials of the Turks (Book XIV, Chapter 1)

### The Place of Book XIV in Michael's *Chronicle*

Book XIV,<sup>165</sup> the shortest of the 21 books in Michael's *Chronicle*<sup>166</sup> abandons the pattern found in the other 20 books of describing the events of a specific period of time. The reason for this lies in the massive political changes brought on by the advent of the Seljūk Turks, as Michael says at the outset: "And because at this time<sup>167</sup> the Turks<sup>168</sup> began to rule and to seize cities and places, we are composing this fourteenth book about them." [1]<sup>169</sup> As the longest treatise on the Turks in extant Syriac literature, Book XIV is an extremely valuable source for understanding how they were perceived in the twelfth century, at least by Michael.

Whereas in times past the Turks had been a distant nation with whom the Syrian Orthodox had very little contact, they had come to dominate the political landscape by the late twelfth century. Upon the death of Malik Shah I in 1092, the Great Seljūk Sultanate had begun to dissolve into several smaller sultanates. By the time Michael finished his *Chronicle*, Seljūk power had ended in Syria (1123), southern Iran (c.1188), and western Iran (1194), along with the Seljūk Great Sultanate itself (1157), but other Turkish dynasties were still ruling throughout the Middle East, including the Zangids in Syria and southern Mesopotamia, the Artuqids in northern Mesopotamia and the Türkmen Danishmendids in eastern Anatolia, along with the sole Seljūk dynasty to survive, the Sultanate of Rum (Anatolia).<sup>170</sup>

Thus, the Turks impacted the Syrian Orthodox in every sphere of life. Presumably, Michael felt compelled to demystify them in the minds of his readers, to show that they were real people with a real history. Michael's motivation was partially theological; perhaps in response to John of Mardin's controversial idea that evil was the result of human factors, rather than the will of God, Michael wanted to demonstrate that the Almighty was truly in

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<sup>165</sup> *Michael*, IV, 566-71 (Syriac text); III, 149-57 (French translation).

<sup>166</sup> 5 chapters and 5 pages in the Syriac text, whereas the average length of each book is 13 chapters and 35 pages.

<sup>167</sup> Just prior to Book XV, which begins with the reign of Constantine IX Monomachus (1042-55).

<sup>168</sup> Michael uses two Syriac spellings for 'Turks': ܛܪܟܝܘܬܐ and ܛܪܟܝܘܬܐ, both of which (along with two others used by Syriac writers: ܛܪܟܝܘܬܐ and ܛܪܟܝܘܬܐ) are clearly synonyms, with no difference in meaning.

<sup>169</sup> *Michael*, III, 149; page numbers refer to Chabot's French translation, but quotations are from my translation, with numbers in square brackets referring to paragraphs in that translation. In excerpts from my translation, words inside parentheses are not in the Syriac text, but are added for clarification (especially pronoun referents). Words inside square brackets are scribal omissions or are required in English.

<sup>170</sup> 1081-1307.

control of history, despite the tumultuous times in which the Syrian Orthodox were living. “To see history without God would have meant losing the very basis of the Christian view of the world and hence the identity of a social minority based on Christianity.”<sup>171</sup>

At the same time, Michael may also have been motivated by the political context as it had unfolded during his lifetime, during which Edessa was captured by Zangi (1144), the Second (1147-48) and Third (1189-92) Crusades took place, the Great Seljūk Sultanate broke up (1157), the Fatimid dynasty and Zangid Empire ceased to exist (1171 and 1174, respectively), and Salah ad-Din captured Jerusalem (1187). In the middle of the chaos which accompanied these changes, many Syrian Orthodox may have been tempted to abandon their faith, in the hope that conversion to Islam would preserve them from the ravages of warfare in which they so often found themselves. Michael would obviously have been deeply concerned about the possibility of widespread apostasy. At the same time, given his location in northern Mesopotamia, he may also have wished to show his public support for the Seljūk Sultanate of Rum, especially after their conquest of the Danishmendids (1174-78) and Michael’s subsequent meeting with Qilich Arslan II in Melitene (1182).

### **The Turks in Genesis 10**

Therefore, Chapter 1 of Book XIV focusses on “what kind of people these Turks are... and in which region they were living.” [2]<sup>172</sup> The logical place for a medieval cleric to start a treatise on an important subject was obviously the Bible. Thus, in order to establish the credentials of the Turks, Michael begins his *memrā* by introducing a biblical theme that recurs throughout Book XIV: “This nation<sup>173</sup> of Turks... is found to be from the sons of Japheth, for they are the sons of Magog. Even as the great Moses has written, ‘Magog [was] the son of Japheth, the son of Noah.’” [3]<sup>174</sup>

Michael’s statement is based on the ‘Table of Nations’ in Genesis 10:1-2,<sup>175</sup> which describes how Noah’s descendents repopulated the earth, resulting in the diversity of nations surrounding Israel. It identifies the sons of Japheth as Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal,

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<sup>171</sup> Weltecke, “World Chronicle,” 30.

<sup>172</sup> *Michael*, III, 149.

<sup>173</sup> ‘Nation’ is used throughout this translation for the Syriac word ܢܘܨܐ, referring to an ethnic group, not a geopolitical state.

<sup>174</sup> *Michael*, III, 149.

<sup>175</sup> On which, see Dhorme, “Peoples”; Ross, “Genesis 10–Structure”; Ross, “Genesis 10–Content”; Simons, “Table” and Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 495-530.



Meshech, and Tiras and the sons of Gomer as Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah, many of whom are identified with ethnic groups living in or near Asia Minor.<sup>176</sup>

Christian writers, including Syriac authors, expanded the Table of Nations to include peoples that appeared later in history,<sup>177</sup> but prior to Michael, no extant West or East Syrian sources explicitly mention the Turks as descendants of either Japheth or Magog.

Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* (fourth century) mentions that fifteen nations came from Japheth, but gives no names.<sup>178</sup> The *Book of the Cave of Treasures* (sixth century) lists "37 peoples and kingdoms" descended from Japheth, including the Huns, Scythians, Avars, and 'Barbarians.'<sup>179</sup> Rather than a list of Japheth's descendants, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (685-92) enumerates the "22 nations enclosed beyond the Northern Gate."<sup>180</sup> One of the nations listed is the *Tarqāyē*, but this refers to the Thracians, not the Turks, as Budge also notes regarding a similar list in the *Book of the Bee* (c.1222).<sup>181</sup>

That the connection between the Turks and Japheth or Magog was not made by the three West Syrian works, all written before the Turks were well-known to Syriac speakers, is understandable. However, even the later East Syrian works, written by those who were closer to the Turks, do not mention them as descendants of either Japheth or Magog. Theodore Bar Koni's *Book of Scholia* (c.791/792) lists the descendants of Magog as the Caspians and Persians.<sup>182</sup> The anonymous *Commentary on Genesis-Exodus 9* in Manuscript (Olim) Diyarbakir 22 (early eighth century) and Išō'dad of Merv's *Commentary on Genesis* (c.850) both give them as the Carpians, probably a corruption (*Qarpayē*) of Caspians (*Qazpayē*), and the Franks.<sup>183</sup> *Peoples After the Confusion of Languages* (ninth century?) only mentions 'Gog and Magog' as nations living in the north<sup>184</sup> and *About Families of Languages* (ninth century?) gives the Carpians and Phoenicians as Magog's descendants.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> On the identification of these peoples, see Dhorme, "Peoples" and Yamauchi, *Foes*, 23-27. On their interrelationship, see *ibid*, 49-56.

<sup>177</sup> Witakowski, "Division," 653.

<sup>178</sup> CSCO 153/72, 52.

<sup>179</sup> CSCO 487/208, 72-73.

<sup>180</sup> CSCO 541/221, 24-26.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, 26, n. 23; Budge, *Bee*, 128, n. 9, who notes "*Therkāyē*, the Thracians, Θράκες."

<sup>182</sup> CSCO 431/187, 128.

<sup>183</sup> CSCO 484/206, 83-84 and CSCO 156/75, 142, respectively.

<sup>184</sup> CSCO 6/6, 279. The date of composition is unknown (according to Wright, *Catalogue*, 1066, the manuscript is dated 1709-10).

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 282. The date of composition is unknown (according to Wright, *Catalogue*, 1040, the manuscript is ninth century). On the relationship between all these works, see Levene, "Observations"; van Rompay, "Unknown"; van Rompay, "Commentaire" and Vosté, "Table." Two other works, the "Anonymous Commentary" (c.900) (Levene, *Early*) and the *Selected Questions of Isho bar Nun on the Pentateuch* (d. 828)

Thus, based on Syriac commentaries on Genesis, Michael's authority for calling the Turks descendents of either Japheth or Magog is unclear. The commentary of Michael's friend Dionysius Bar Šalibi (who, along with Bar 'Ebroyo, was influenced by Išo'dad)<sup>186</sup> would be a valuable contemporary source to consult, but most of it unfortunately remains unpublished (including Genesis 10).<sup>187</sup> The slightly later East Syrian *Book of the Bee* (c.1222) by Solomon of Basra, written well after the Seljūk invasion, has essentially the same list as the earlier East Syrian commentaries for the children of Japheth, with no mention of the Turks.<sup>188</sup>

As with much of the material in this chapter, Michael here repeats and adapts things he has already written earlier in his *Chronicle*. In Book II, Chapter 2, we read that “the children of Japheth... had the following countries: the country of the Alans and the Turks...”<sup>189</sup> In Book II, Chapter 8, he produces his own Table of Nations, which shows the Celts, Galatians (or Gauls), Turks and Alans as descendents of Magog.<sup>190</sup> By contrast, the Anonymous Chronicler does not mention the Turks in relation to Japheth.<sup>191</sup> Bar 'Ebroyo lists the sons of Japheth in two places, once omitting the Turks<sup>192</sup> and once including them.<sup>193</sup>

Interestingly, there is a tradition amongst the Turkic peoples that they are descended from Japheth (though not from Magog). This is specifically noted by Mahmud al-Kashgari, author of the *Diwan lughat at-Turk* (1074), as well as in the Khazar ‘Letter of King Joseph’ (960).<sup>194</sup> Amongst Muslim authors, Japheth is “usually regarded as the ancestor of Yadjudj and Madjudj [Gog and Magog], often of the Turks and the Khazars, more rarely of the Slavs.”<sup>195</sup>

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(Clarke, *Questions*), make no mention of Japheth's ancestors at all. The Arabic commentary on Genesis by Ibn at-Ṭaiyib (d. 1043) (CSCO 274/Arab 24 & 275/Arab 25), like Ephrem, only mentions 15 ‘families’ living in the north and the west descended from Japheth, but gives no names.

<sup>186</sup> CSCO 156/75, ii.

<sup>187</sup> Amir Harrak, personal correspondence, 17 August, 2004. Dionysius's commentary on Genesis was the subject of a 1930 University of Chicago thesis: Boyes, *Commentary* (not accessible to me). Bar 'Ebroyo's commentary on Genesis was published as Sprengling & Graham, *Barhebraeus' Scholia* (also not accessible to me).

<sup>188</sup> Budge, *Bee*, 38.

<sup>189</sup> *Michael*, I, 18.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, I, 31. As Witakowski points out, there are several lists in Book II of Michael's *Chronicle*, each different from the others (Witakowski, “Division,” 635-39).

<sup>191</sup> *Chron. 1234*, I, 31.

<sup>192</sup> *Chronography*, 6 (copied from a list in *Michael*, I, 15).

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>194</sup> Peter Golden, personal correspondence, 11 June, 2004, referencing Dankoff, *Mahmūd al-Kāshgharī* and Kokovtsov, *Evreisko-khazaraskaia*. See also Stang, *Naming*, 149. In the letter of Joseph, the Khazar *qaqhan* claims to be descended from Togarmah, son of Japheth (Golden, “Khazaria,” 150).

<sup>195</sup> *EI*, “Yafith,” 236. See also Leslie, “Japhet”; Stang, *Naming*, 128-36; Minorsky, “Tamim,” 288 and Martinez, “Two Chapters,” 117.

In light of this, one wonders if Michael, who knew Arabic, may have picked up the notion of the Turks as descendents of Japheth from Arabic sources.

### **The Turks in Ezekiel 38-39**

Having established that the Turks have a place amongst the sons of Japheth, Michael now focusses on their status as ‘the sons of Magog.’ He speaks of them as “a great and mighty people whose habitation was in the north-east region” about whom “the glorious prophet Ezekiel”<sup>196</sup> prophesied “that they would invade the inhabitable earth and would reach Jerusalem.” [3]<sup>197</sup>

Here Michael expands his core theme by referring to the most important passage on Magog in the Bible: Ezekiel 38-39. Although the whole passage takes up 43 verses in Ezekiel, Michael is selective in his use of these two chapters.<sup>198</sup> The first quotation, Ezekiel 38:1-8, is Yahweh’s initial address to Gog and ‘the land of Magog’ through the prophet:

“[Behold, I am against/upon you, Gog, ruler and chief] of Māshāk [and of Tubeyl].<sup>199</sup> I will gather you and put bridles on your cheeks and I will bring you forth from your place, you and all your army, horses and mounted warriors... Get ready, you and the entire horde that is gathered with you and be a guard for them. From ancient times you have been commanded and in the latter years, you will come.” [4]<sup>200</sup>

This is followed by quotations from Ezekiel 38:17 and 39:1-2:

“You are the one about whom I have spoken through my servants, the prophets of Israel, in ancient times... Thus says the Lord of lords, Behold, I am against/upon you, Gog, ruler and chief of Māshāk and of Tubeyl and I will pacify you and gather you and bring you up from the uttermost parts of the north.” [5]<sup>201</sup>

Michael also mentions the Turks as the descendents of Magog in Book XVI, Chapter 1, where we read this most interesting comment in relation to the events of 1123-24:

Calm and tranquility reigned in our Orthodox Church, because of this: While the Greek Chalcedonians were confined on the other side of the Sea of Pontus [i.e. in Constantinople, as a result of Seljūk gains in Anatolia], the sons of

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<sup>196</sup> See *Michael*, I, 93-95.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, III, 149.

<sup>198</sup> Michael’s quotations from Ezekiel 38-39, apart from scribal errors and variant readings, are very close to the Peshitta text of Ezekiel. All references to the Peshitta text are to the editions prepared by the Peshitta Institute, Leiden (on which see Mulder, “Remarks”).

<sup>199</sup> Here, the words in square brackets are missing in Chabot’s copy and are supplied from the Syriac text of Ezekiel in the Peshitta. Transliteration of *Māshāk* and *Tubeyl* is according to the vocalization indicated in Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, col. 2244, 4403. Most English translations have ‘Meshech and Tubal.’

<sup>200</sup> *Michael*, III, 149.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, III, 149.

Magog reigned, by the permission of heaven, who dashed down the heretical persecutors in anguish, in order that they should no longer compel the Orthodox, according to their cruel practice, to corrupt themselves in their [Chalcedonian] heresy... For their part, the Turks, who occupied most of the country in which the Christians live, who have no notion of the sacred mysteries and, for that, consider Christianity an error, do not have the practice of inquiring about professions of faith or of persecuting someone for his profession of faith, as do the Greeks, a wicked and heretical people.<sup>202</sup>

Thus Michael's identification of the Turks as 'the sons of Magog' is no mere passing remark; it is a badge of honour he bestows on them, for they are the ones ordained by heaven to rule, the defenders of the Orthodox, in contrast to the wicked Greeks.

The Anonymous Chronicler does not mention Magog, but Bar 'Ebroyo does, introducing the Seljüks by quoting Michael's introductory remarks: "These are the children of Mâghôgh, the son of Japhet, the son of Noah," followed by a condensed form of the prophecy in Ezekiel 38:3-8.<sup>203</sup> Later in his *Chronicle*, Bar 'Ebroyo refers to the Mongols several times as "the House of Mâghôgh."<sup>204</sup> The positive sense in which he uses this term was presumably inspired by Michael.

Ezekiel 38-39<sup>205</sup> "introduces Gog as the leader of worldwide forces that would attack restored Israel when she is prospering... The prophet shows Gog, both impelled by God and acting on his own initiative, rushing to his own destruction."<sup>206</sup> In the absence of a clear historical reference,<sup>207</sup> Gog and Magog may be intended as "a cipher for a legendary great ruler who rules over the multiplicity of threatening northern powers on the edge of the then-known world and as such is the exemplary representative of the 'foe from the north.'"<sup>208</sup> The ultimate message of the passage is that there will be "a final, decisive confrontation which will directly reveal God's victory over the 'powers.'"<sup>209</sup>

Ezekiel 38-39 presents two conflicting themes. Although he is "directed by Yahweh to assemble and advance for conquest" (38:1-9), "Gog himself devises the evil scheme to attack

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, III, 221-22.

<sup>203</sup> *Chronography*, 195.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, 473, 478, 494, 498-500.

<sup>205</sup> On which, see Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 197-211; Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 179-91; Block, *Ezekiel*, 424-93; Block, "Gog"; McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 114-22; Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 283-95; Yamauchi, *Foes and Zimmerli*, *Ezekiel 2*, 282-324.

<sup>206</sup> VanGemeren, *NIDOTTE*, 686.

<sup>207</sup> Gog is often identified with king Gyges of Lydia (683-652 BCE), but there are other theories (Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 300-02).

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 302.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, 323. The difficulty in identifying Gog and Magog has led commentators over the centuries to equate them with the Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans, Goths, Celts, Parthians, Huns, Khazars, Arabs, Moors, Magyars, Turks, Rus', and Mongols (Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, 3-14 and Stang, *Naming, passim*).

defenseless people to amass spoil” (38:10-14).<sup>210</sup> The passage points out that he is particularly motivated by the possibility of great booty (38:12-13). However, whether impelled by divine direction, self-initiative or both, there can be no doubt Gog is an enemy of God, deserving of the judgment described in chapter 39, where Ezekiel prophesies that he will fall “on the mountains of Israel” and become “food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals,” after which Yahweh will send fire from heaven on Magog, and the people of Israel will spend seven months burying the corpses and seven years using their weapons for firewood (39:4-16). The chapter concludes with Yahweh summoning birds and wild animals to a “great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel” where they will “eat flesh and drink blood,” feasting on the fallen “horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers of every kind” (39:17-20).

Reading Ezekiel 38-39 *in toto* clearly shows that Michael is involved in some ‘creative hermeneutics’ as he adapts the biblical text to suit his purposes. Thus, he quotes only from verses that affirm Yahweh’s direction of Gog, not those that speak of the latter’s wicked intentions. The sentences “From ancient times you have been commanded and in the latter years, you will come” and “You are the one about whom I have spoken through my servants, the prophets of Israel, in ancient times” convey the impression that Gog is primarily a tool for the accomplishment of the divine purpose; there is no hint of the adversarial role revealed by reading the whole context of Ezekiel 38-39.

Michael’s sanitized excerpt communicates little of the judgment inherent in Ezekiel 38-39 when read as a whole (especially 39:3-20). He has very carefully selected verses to quote, lifting them out of their original context and ignoring the general tenor of the passage, omitting any verses that communicate the judgment of Yahweh. This conclusion is reinforced by Michael’s failure to mention a third biblical passage, Revelation 20:7-10, which clearly shows Gog and Magog as agents of Satan, not Yahweh, who will attack Jerusalem and be consumed by fire from heaven, as in Ezekiel 38-39.

Michael’s efforts are helped by the Syriac language in several ways:

1. In the phrases “I am against/upon you” and “I am against/upon Gog,” Syriac ܐܘܢܐ can be translated as “upon” or “against.”<sup>211</sup> Considering the overall context of Ezekiel 38-39, the meaning is clearly “against” (as most English translations render it), but Michael’s selective quotation leaves open the possibility of “upon,” implying a much more benign

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<sup>210</sup> Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 284.

<sup>211</sup> Payne Smith, *Syriac Dictionary*, 413.

relationship. Understood this way, the sole judgmental phrase in Michael’s excerpt is transformed into an expression of sovereign oversight.<sup>212</sup>

2. Although the phrase “bridles on your cheeks” could also be translated as “bridles in your jaws” (since Syriac ܦܗܘܘܢ can mean both “cheek” and “jaw”),<sup>213</sup> the image is still much less violent than the “hooks in your jaws” found in most English translations.
3. “I will pacify you” reflects the Peshitta reading of ܦܘܨܘܢܐ (from the root ܦܘܨ “to make peace, conciliate, reconcile, appease”),<sup>214</sup> rather than the Hebrew “I will turn you around.”<sup>215</sup> Again, the former implies Gog is now ready to do the bidding of Yahweh.

Thus, according to Michael’s interpretation, God has brought Gog and Magog not to judge and destroy them, but to pacify and use them for his purposes, a theme he elaborates in the rest of Book XIV.

### **Michael’s Interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39**

The following questions arise: What is the basis for Michael’s identification of Gog and Magog with the Turks and his radical re-interpretation of the biblical text? Is there a precedent for either in Syriac literature or is he simply innovating? Biblical commentaries do not provide any answers; Gog and Magog are neither identified with the Turks nor treated in a positive light in the commentaries on Ezekiel attributed to Mar Ephrem (fourth century)<sup>216</sup> and Išo‘dad of Merv (ninth century).<sup>217</sup> Theodore Bar Koni’s *Book of Scholia* (c.791/792) mentions Gog and Magog, identifying them with “Mysia and Bithynia” and the Scythians, but not the Turks.<sup>218</sup> The same is true of the few historical works that allude to Gog and Magog—the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius* (775),<sup>219</sup> Thomas of Marga’s *Book of Governors*

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<sup>212</sup> In addition to the three occurrences in Chabot’s manuscript, there are three other occurrences of this phrase in the verses that Michael quotes that have to be supplied from the Peshitta text of Ezekiel. Although they appear to have been omitted by scribal error, there is no way of knowing if they were in Michael’s autograph.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, 445.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, 575.

<sup>215</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 306.

<sup>216</sup> Ephraem, *Opera Omnia*, t. II, 196-98. Bas Romeny notes that the Old Testament portion is based on “a compilation of a compilation” of the work of Jacob of Edessa and Ephrem. Thus, it is difficult to determine how much can be attributed back to either Jacob or Ephrem. “For Ezekiel, all we can say is that it cannot be fully ruled out that there is some Ephrem in Severus’ work...” (posting to *Hugoye* discussion list, 6 July, 2004)

<sup>217</sup> CSCO 329/147, 106. I am not aware of any other published Syriac commentaries on Ezekiel from before Michael’s time. Again, Dionysius Bar Šalibi’s commentary on Ezekiel unfortunately remains unpublished.

<sup>218</sup> CSCO 431/187, 248, 267; CSCO 432/188, 213. Interestingly, Dionysius Bar Šalibi does not mention Gog and Magog in his commentary on Revelation (CSCO 60/20, 20-21).

<sup>219</sup> CSCO 121/66, 34.

(840),<sup>220</sup> the *Chronicle to the year 846*,<sup>221</sup> and *Peoples After the Confusion of Languages*<sup>222</sup>—none of which give clues to Michael’s perspective.

Gog and Magog play a key role in the Syriac literature spawned by the *Alexander Romance* (*Pseudo-Callisthenes*). The *Christian Legend Concerning Alexander* (628-36),<sup>223</sup> the *Metrical Discourse on Alexander* (628-37),<sup>224</sup> Pseudo-Ephrem’s *Sermon on the End Times* (after 636),<sup>225</sup> and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (685-92)<sup>226</sup> (referred to corporately hereinafter as the *Syriac Alexander Legend*) all describe their detestable practices, including their diet of raw flesh and human blood and the way that “they render their weapons invincible by smearing on their swords the blood of human embryos which they acquire under abominable circumstances.”<sup>227</sup> In response to this, Alexander built an iron gate to contain them behind the mountains, the origin of the myth of the ‘enclosed nations.’

Except for the *Metrical Discourse*, each work gives a list of 22 or 24 ‘unclean nations’ associated with Gog and Magog, but none include the Turks. Pseudo-Ephrem’s *Sermon* lists the *Trūqâyē*, which Lamy translates as *Turcae*<sup>228</sup> and Beck suggests (in a footnote) “probably should read *Turqâyē* (Turks),”<sup>229</sup> but this seems odd, given the early date of the *Sermon* (c.636) and the understanding of Budge and G.J. Reinink, that this ethnonym refers to the Thracians when it occurs in *The Book of the Bee* and Pseudo-Methodius, respectively.<sup>230</sup> Furthermore, Gog and Magog are portrayed with unequivocally negative terms in these texts; they are “hateful and terrible, cruel and bitter and warlike... tumultuous, evil, sinful, excitable, proud, unclean, filthy, haughty and full of woe and great judgment.”<sup>231</sup> God’s judgment on “the cursed children of the great family of Japhet” and “the house of Mâgôg” (the term Bar ‘Ebroyo used) is well-deserved.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Budge, *Governors*, 393-95.

<sup>221</sup> CSCO 4/4, 135.

<sup>222</sup> CSCO 6/6, 279.

<sup>223</sup> Budge, *History of Alexander*, 144-58.

<sup>224</sup> CSCO 454/195 & 455/196; Budge, *History of Alexander*, 163-200.

<sup>225</sup> CSCO 320/138 & 321/139; Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem*, t. III.

<sup>226</sup> On all four works, see Anderson, *Alexander’s Gate*, 16-27, 44-48; Czeglédý, “Monographs,” 31-39 and Czeglédý, “Syriac Legend.”

<sup>227</sup> Czeglédý, “Syriac Legend,” 243. For descriptions of these detestable eating practices, see Budge, *History of Alexander*, 151, 178; CSCO 321/139, 86-87; CSCO 541/221, 21-22. Some of these equate Gog and Magog with the Huns. This tradition was continued by Solomon of Basra in his *Book of the Bee* (c.1222) (Budge, *Bee*, 127-29).

<sup>228</sup> Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem*, col. 198.

<sup>229</sup> CSCO 321/139, 85, n. 7.

<sup>230</sup> Budge, *Bee*, 128, n. 9; CSCO 541/221, 26, n. 23.

<sup>231</sup> Budge, *History of Alexander*, 192.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, 197, 199.

Thus, there are no apparent precedents in extant Syriac literature prior to Michael for either identifying the Turks with Gog and Magog or viewing Gog and Magog in a positive light. The source of Michael's interpretation of the Gog-Magog theme is again unclear. He was obviously familiar with the legends about Alexander, probably both the Syriac version of *Pseudo-Callisthenes* and the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. As Fraser notes, "his account of Alexander's conquests, though based essentially on [Eusebius], shows signs of considerable influence from the *Alexander Romance*."<sup>233</sup> However, although Michael follows the tradition of identifying various 'barbarians' with Gog and Magog, he does not follow earlier Syriac writers who identify Gog and Magog with the 'unclean nations' that are opposed to God and his people. Michael's interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39 indeed seems to be without precedent in Syriac literature.

If his identification of the Turks with Gog and Magog did not come from a Syriac source, was Michael influenced by another literary tradition? The Latin writer Aethicus Ister, in his *Cosmography* (mid seventh to early eighth-century), referring to the Khazars as 'Turks,' says: "They are people... from the stock of Gog and Magog... In the times of the Antichrist, this people shall wreak much devastation and be called the god of the days. Along with their offspring, the very worst, they are a race pent in behind the Caspian Gates."<sup>234</sup> However, since Michael probably did not know Latin, his direct use of Aethicus Ister is unlikely.

A more probable source can be found in several Arab writers prior to Michael who connected the Turks with Gog and Magog, including Ibn al-Faqih (c.903) who "explained the word Turk as being derived from the Arabic verb *taraka* 'to leave behind'... because they were left behind the wall of Alexander."<sup>235</sup> Qudāma ibn Ja'far (d. 922) gives an account of Alexander's expedition to China "and thence to the Turks... against whom he builds a Rampart... the one mentioned in the *Qur'ān*."<sup>236</sup> Given Michael's knowledge of Arabic, he may have been influenced by these writings. Alternatively, his equation of the Turks with Gog and Magog, as well as his reinterpretation of the biblical text, may be simply an innovation.

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<sup>233</sup> Fraser, "Syriac *Notitia*," 103.

<sup>234</sup> Aethicus Ister, *Cosmography*, chapter 32, quoted in Stang, *Naming*, 100. Stang also cites the French monk Christian of Stavelot, writing c.864, who equated Gog and Magog with the Khazars, although he did not call them 'Turks' (149). I am indebted to Kevin Brook for this information.

<sup>235</sup> Ismail, "Mu'tašim," 12.

<sup>236</sup> Wilson, "Wall," 585, 597. See the rest of this article for other connections between the Turks and Gog and Magog in Arabic writings. *EI*, "Yadjudj wa-Madjudj," 232-33 also mentions this theme in the works of aṭ-Ṭabari, al-Idrisi, al-Bukhari, and Ibn Ḥajar.



Interestingly, Michael perceives the Turks as fulfilling biblical prophesy elsewhere in his *Chronicle*. In Book XX, Chapter 1, he quotes from Jeremiah 17:5-6 in reference to a campaign of Qilich Arslan II against the Danishmendid dynasty after the death of Nur ad-Din, the Zangid ruler of Syria and Egypt (1147-74), who had supported the Danishmendids against the Rum Seljüks. Thus Michael says of Qilich Arslan's enemies, "Cursed is he who relies on man, who makes his fellow-creature his support, and turns aside his trust from the Lord; he will be like a root without water."<sup>237</sup> Notably, Michael here says that it is not just Turks in general who are the agents of God's purposes, but specifically the Seljük dynasty that ruled over Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia during his lifetime. To oppose them is to oppose God and rely on man.

As Michael moves on from biblical to other references, he says, "The prophetic Spirit has shown us these [things] and many other [things] like them about this nation. Two times he repeated the word, indicating about the second invasion. However, because the interpreters inspired by the Spirit only spoke about the first invasion, we are following their footsteps." [6]<sup>238</sup>

The meaning of this statement is unclear. Michael may be referring to the two commands to Ezekiel to prophesy that he has quoted (Ezekiel 38:2 and 39:1), but there is a third command to prophesy in Ezekiel 38:14 that Michael has not quoted. As we have seen, Michael is less concerned with exegesis of the biblical text than with using it to support his interpretation of history.

Although he acknowledges that previous interpreters and commentators only spoke of one invasion, Michael's schema of history requires two, the first occurring either 510 years before or after the coming of Christ<sup>239</sup> and the second at the time of the Seljüks. Thus, his challenge is to find biblical backing for his theory of two invasions. By stating that both

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<sup>237</sup> *Michael*, III, 357.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, III, 149-50.

<sup>239</sup> In Chapter 1, Michael speaks of the first invasion taking place "510 years before the manifestation of our Lord" [8] (*Ibid*, III, 150). Chabot's text actually has the number 8 here, but he notes that the Armenian version has the correct number 510 (*Ibid*, III, 150, n. 3). At some point, a scribe must have misread *nun-yodh* (ω = 510) for *heth* (ω = 8), an easy mistake to make. Michael only ever speaks of two invasions. However, he also refers to the invasion of Margiana in Chapter 3 that took place "100 years before the invasion of the Arabs" [26] (*Ibid*, III, 153) and "the last invasion of the Turks" in Chapter 4, obviously referring to the Seljüks [28] (*Ibid*, III, 154). Since he does not speak of three invasions, I suspect that the invasions in Chapters 1 and 3 are identical and that an additional scribal error is responsible for the reference to 510 years before Christ, rather than after Christ, which would make it roughly "100 years before the invasion of the Arabs." This could refer to either Sabir raids through the Darial Pass in 503, 515 and 531 or the Hephthalite invasion of Persia through the Caspian Gates in 484, since both groups were referred to as 'Turks.'

invasions were prophesied by Ezekiel, he assures his readers that the advent of the Turks resulted from divine knowledge and direction.

### **The Turks in the Book of Judith**

Having cited the biblical texts to make his case, Michael goes on to add evidence from the Apocrypha, quoting Jacob of Edessa's comments on Judith 2:4-6:<sup>240</sup>

On account of this nation of the Turks, Ezekiel said that they are Gog and Magog, who went out in the days of Cambyses, king of Persia [Cambyses II (530-521 BCE)], he who is called Nebuchadnezzar II by the Hebrews, who sent his commander Holophernes, as the book about Judith demonstrates, which says thus: "And it came to pass that when his judgment was completed, king Nebuchadnezzar [of Assyria] called Holophernes [his commander, because he was second (in command)] and said [to him, 'Thus says the great king, the lord of all the earth,] Behold, you will go forth from my presence and you will lead with you [strong men,] 120,000 [foot soldiers] and a multitude of horses and 12,000 horsemen. And go up over the face of the whole western world [against] those who have rejected the decree of my mouth.'" [7]<sup>241</sup>

The book of Judith, written after the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes (167-143 BCE), probably reflects the war between the Seleucid general Nicanor and the Judeans c.161 BCE.<sup>242</sup> Michael's identification of the antagonists with the Turks contrasts with both Jewish rabbinical writers, who uniformly equated Holophernes and Nebuchadnezzar with the Greeks,<sup>243</sup> and patristic authors, who identified them with Rome's arch-enemy Persia.<sup>244</sup>

Michael's statement here repeats his earlier mention of "Holophernes, who was of the people of Magog, that is to say, the Turks" (Book IV, Chapter 21), which Bar 'Ebroyo copies *verbatim*;<sup>245</sup> in contrast, the Anonymous Chronicler mentions neither Judith nor the Turks in relation to Nebuchadnezzar II.<sup>246</sup> In order to back up his statement, Michael invokes Jacob of Edessa, but does not give his specific source; if from Jacob's *Chronicle*, it is not from extant portions and therefore cannot be verified. Writing in the late seventh-century, Jacob was probably aware of the nascent Khazar kingdom and may have been referring to them if he

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<sup>240</sup> On the place of the Apocrypha in Syriac literature, see Desreumaux, "Apocryphes."

<sup>241</sup> *Michael*, III, 150. Words in square brackets are those in the Syriac text of Judith (de Lagarde, *Apocryphi Syriace*, 105-06) that are omitted in Michael's quotation. A more recent edition of the Syriac text (van der Ploeg, *Judith*) was not accessible to me. As the author notes in another article, "Judith Syr has not been the subject of any special study, which makes it difficult to judge its textual problems" (van der Ploeg, "Remarks," 127).

<sup>242</sup> Enslin, *Judith*, 29-30.

<sup>243</sup> Dubarle, "Mention," 515-38.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, 538-47.

<sup>245</sup> *Michael*, I, 103; *Chronography*, 33.

wrote of the Turks. Thus, Jacob may be the ultimate origin of Michael's equation of the Turks with Gog and Magog.

However, the identification of Holophernes with Gog and Magog can be traced back to Ephrem's *Commentary on Ezekiel*.<sup>247</sup> Commenting on Ezekiel 32:24-26, Ephrem notes that "the Elamites and the nation of Gog, who made war against Jerusalem under the leadership of Holophernes, were slain in Judea and were buried, having been beaten by the marvelous strategy of Judith."<sup>248</sup> Further on, regarding Ezekiel 38:3-8, he says, "It has been published that Gog and Magog were those who harshly treated the Jews who had just returned from Babylon. However, other interpreters have believed that Gog was the person called Holophernes in sacred history and he was master of the army of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Nineveh."<sup>249</sup> The identity of the 'other interpreters' that Ephrem mentions, and hence the ultimate origin of Holophernes' connection with Gog and Magog, is unclear.<sup>250</sup> Michael presumably includes this story to show how Ezekiel's prophecy was fulfilled, but the association of the Turks with an enemy of 'God's people' seems to contradict his overall message thus far.

### **The Turks in Historical Sources**

Michael now supplements his biblical data with historical references:

For their remembrance was cited in the third book of John of Asia, where it is written, "In the seventh year of Justin, king of the Romans (Justin II, 565-78), he sent an ambassador unto the people of the Turks. They (i.e. the ambassadors) went forth and returned to the rendezvous point after three years, saying that they had seen the Turks, innumerable as the locust and the crawling locust, and that they had nine kings. And when the king of the Turks saw the ambassadors of the Romans who came unto him, he wept. And when it was inquired of him what the reason for the weeping was, he said 'We have learned from our fathers that when ambassadors come to us from the kings that are in the west, the time has arrived for us to go forth over all the earth and to destroy it.'" [9]<sup>251</sup>

The source of Michael's quotation, which he also deals with in Book X, Chapter 10,<sup>252</sup> is Part III of the *Ecclesiastical History* of John of Asia, written in 588. Although John dates it to "the seventh year of Justin" (571-72), the embassy described probably took place "near to the

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<sup>246</sup> *Chron. 1234*, I, 76.

<sup>247</sup> See Bas Romeny's remarks in an earlier footnote.

<sup>248</sup> Ephraem, *Opera omnia*, t. II, 193.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*, 196-97.

<sup>250</sup> On Ephrem's interpretation of Judith, see Dubarle, "Mention," 541.

<sup>251</sup> *Michael*, III, 150.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*, II, 314-16. Neither the Anonymous Chronicler nor Bar 'Ebroyo recounts this story.

end of the fourth year of Justin's reign" (569), according to the Byzantine historian Menander Protector.<sup>253</sup> Led by Zemarchus, it was one of five Byzantine embassies dispatched to the Türks in the late sixth-century, during which time the Türks were both advancing into the Byzantine sphere of influence in the north Caucasus and seeking to ally with them against their common enemy Persia.

John's account is particularly valuable because he wrote it shortly after the embassies took place, but his source for the story is unclear. His reference to "our historian"<sup>254</sup> may be to an official account of the embassy, an oral report, or the *History* of Menander Protector, who was John's contemporary.<sup>255</sup> Menander's account<sup>256</sup> provides many fascinating details of Zemarchus' journey and meeting with Sizabul (or Silziboulos), *qaghan* of the Türks,<sup>257</sup> whose opulent tent full of silk, silver, and gold he describes in detail.<sup>258</sup> Although it is difficult to identify most of the individuals and geographical place names in Menander's account, the cultural details generally accord with descriptions of the early Türks from other sources. John's account, however, differs significantly from Menander, suggesting that he either used another source or radically adapted Menander to his purposes. Particularly striking is his transformation of the king of the Türks from the "shrewd and intelligent" Sizabul described by Menander<sup>259</sup> into a noble savage who wept from the knowledge that "the whole world was passing away, and... all mankind would destroy one another."<sup>260</sup>

In the same way that John has adapted his Byzantine source, Michael has also adapted John's account for his own purposes, omitting, reducing, adding, and re-interpreting it.<sup>261</sup> Thus, Michael's description of the Türks as "innumerable as the locust and the crawling locust" conjures up biblical images of invading armies (Cf. Joel 1-2) that fit well into the theme of Book XIV. His version of the king's words also differs from John's; he weeps because "the time has arrived for us to go forth over all the earth and to destroy it." Michael has changed the account in Book XIV to reflect the fact that the Türks were the ones doing

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<sup>253</sup> Blockley, *Menander*, 117.

<sup>254</sup> Payne Smith, *Ecclesiastical History*, 424.

<sup>255</sup> Whitby, *Emperor Maurice*, 243-44. Menander's *History* covers the period 557-82. The Byzantinist Ralph Johannes Lilie believes "there is absolutely no connection between the two accounts of Menandros and Michael (or, John of Asia)... I am inclined to think of them both as two independent accounts, based on different sources, at least for this embassy" (personal correspondence, 23 August, 2004).

<sup>256</sup> Blockley, *Menander*, 117-27.

<sup>257</sup> On the identity of rulers mentioned in Menander's account, see Sinor, *CHEIA*, 304-05.

<sup>258</sup> Blockley, *Menander*, 119-21.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 47, 115, 121, 123.

<sup>260</sup> Payne Smith, *Ecclesiastical History*, 426.

<sup>261</sup> This process is outlined in van Ginkel, "Making History," 354-56. See also Harvey, "Theodora" on how Michael re-worked John of Asia's material on Justinian and Theodora.

the destroying, although retaining the sense that they were unwilling accomplices in what Providence had ordained for them.

Michael concludes Chapter 1 by highlighting the important role the Turks played in Middle Eastern history prior to the Seljüks. He relates how “Yazdegird, the last king of the Persians (Yazdegird III, 632-51), when he was conquered by the Tayyayē,<sup>262</sup> hid himself in Merv, the city of the Turks, and was killed by a Turk in a mill,” [10]<sup>263</sup> an abridged version of Michael’s accounts of Yazdegird’s flight to “the border of the Turks, in the region of Margiana” in 642 (Book XI, Chapter 7)<sup>264</sup> and his subsequent death there in 651 at the hands of a Turk who “sent his head to the *marzban* [local governor] of the city” (Book XI, Chapter 8).<sup>265</sup> The Anonymous Chronicler, in telling it, does not mention the Turks,<sup>266</sup> but Bar ‘Ebroyo, again drawing on Michael, does.<sup>267</sup>

Michael mentions Margiana, the Greek name for the Achaemenid province of Margush (modern Turkmenistan) several times in his description of the advent of the Turks.<sup>268</sup> The main city of Margiana was Merv, a “bastion of the Iranian world against the barbarians from the Inner Asian steppes”<sup>269</sup> from the Achaemenid era onwards. The Turks Michael refers to were presumably connected with the ailing Western Türk Qaghanate.<sup>270</sup> However, he does not mention that Yazdegird’s body was buried by Eliyah, the ‘Nestorian’ metropolitan of Merv who converted a Turkic ruler c.644.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Michael uses both *Arabayē* and *Tayyayē* to refer to Arabs: *Arabayē* means Arabs in general, whereas *Tayyayē* can mean either Arabs in general or Muslims in general (Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, col. 366, 1460). *Tayyayē* originally referred to the Ṭayyi tribe of Arabs, which “played an important role in pre-Islamic times... its name became the generic one for the Arabs in the Syriac sources” (*EI*, “Ṭayyi” or Tayy,” 402).

<sup>263</sup> *Michael*, III, 150.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*, II, 424.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid*, II, 430. Contrary to Michael’s version, the Muslim historian aṭ-Ṭabari states that it was the *marzban* himself who killed Yazdegird in 651, shortly before the Arabs captured the city (*EI*, “Marw al-Shahidjan,” 620).

<sup>266</sup> *Chron. 1234*, I, 213.

<sup>267</sup> *Chronography*, 95-97.

<sup>268</sup> Interestingly, Bar ‘Ebroyo does not use the name Margiana when referring to this region.

<sup>269</sup> *EI*, “Marw al-Shahidjan,” 618.

<sup>270</sup> “Chinese sources of the time say that the western boundary of the Turks extended beyond Balkh to Merv in 630 A.D. Baladhuri also mentions Merv as the last outpost of the Sassanians against the Turks at the time of the Arab conquests” (Frye, “Khurasan,” 313).

<sup>271</sup> As described in CSCO 2/2, 28-29. In a second anecdote, Michael relates the use of 4,000 Turks during the siege of the Byzantine city of Amorium in 838 by Abu Ishaq (Caliph al-Mu‘taṣim b. Harun, 833-42). During his rule, the *mamluk* institution, utilizing Turkic slave-soldiers from the Oghuz steppe, developed into an indispensable part of the Caliphate (see Ismail, “Mu‘taṣim”). Michael gives his source as “the second book of Dionysius of Tell Maḥre” [11] (*Michael*, III, 150), unfortunately, no longer extant. The story is told in greater detail in Book XII, Chapter 20 (*Ibid*, III, 94-100). Both the Anonymous Chronicler (*Chron. 1234*, II, 24) and Bar ‘Ebroyo (*Chronography*, 136-38) also mention the Turks in connection with this event.

## Chapter 5: Establishing the Ethnography of the Turks (Book XIV, Chapter 2)

### The Homeland of the Turks and the Gates

Having demonstrated the biblical pedigree of the Turks in Chapter 1, Michael now focusses Chapter 2 on “the customs of these Turks,” [12] beginning with a description of the “homeland of the Turks, who are Gog of Magog... in the north-east.” [13]<sup>272</sup> With this section, Michael starts to bring in other sources, some identified, some anonymous: “This we have learned not only from the word of prophecy, but from those [things] that we and our forefathers have heard and seen, [namely] that they poured forth and came out from there and they are continually coming out.” [13]<sup>273</sup>

The homeland of the Turks is described as a massive area extending along “the northern boundary [of the world]” from “where the sun rises” to “the vicinity of the western region”: “It is surrounded by impassable mountains and only two places are found in them like gates by which those who are there can leave and those who want to can enter. One is in the eastern region, beyond Persia. The other is in the north, within Iberia (i.e. eastern Georgia).” [14]<sup>274</sup>

This statement points out Michael’s restricted geographical knowledge beyond his immediate environment, reflecting the general situation with Syriac chroniclers, most of whom spent their time either in monasteries or attending to the demands of ecclesiastical administration, unlike Muslim writers, who travelled to the places they wrote about or had access to the reports of Muslim traders and merchants who had done so. Thus, works such as the anonymous *Hudud al-‘Ālam* (982), Gardizi’s *Zainu’l-Akhbar* (eleventh century) or the account of Tamim ibn Baḥr’s journey to the Uighurs (821) preserved by several Muslim geographers, contain far more detailed and accurate geographical descriptions of the steppe regions than most Syriac works, despite the difficulties in deciphering some place names or ethnonyms.<sup>275</sup>

Michael then describes the two gates. The northern gate “is fortified with buildings and a gate which is said to have been built by the command of Alexander the Great, that

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<sup>272</sup> *Michael*, III, 151.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*, III, 151.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*, III, 151.

Macedonian, in order to prevent the nations who are there from leaving, and that gate is today in the jurisdiction of the Iberians.”<sup>276</sup> The eastern gate “is a narrow way of two days’ journey and at the end of that pass, fortresses have been built in which guards have been placed to prevent that vast nation, so that the barbarians should not leave.” [15]<sup>277</sup>

Finally, Michael gives us information about how the eastern gate is guarded, a theme he will develop in the next chapter: “In ancient and former times, guards were appointed by the kings of the nations that are in the east, but in the time of the kingdom of the Arabs who ruled after them, it was guarded by those Turks who swarmed out from there and who are living in the land of Margiana.” [16]<sup>278</sup>

These statements reflect the situation in Michael’s time, when Georgian expansion under Davit’ II (1089-1125) had resulted in the northern gate being “in the jurisdiction of the Iberians,” but the Seljüks had captured Bukhara and Samarkand (and hence the eastern gate) from the Qarakhanids (1073-74).

Michael mentions the northern gate elsewhere in his *Chronicle*. In Book V, Chapter 3, in his description of the career of Alexander, he notes that “he built the Gate of Iron to prevent the Huns from coming out: it was twelve cubits high and eight wide.”<sup>279</sup> This is taken directly from the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. In Book X, Chapter 21, he relates the journey of three ‘Scythian’ brothers from ‘Inner Scythia’: “one of them, called Bulgarios, took 10,000 men and separated from his brothers” eventually settling down in the Danube region and becoming the Bulgars. “The two other Scythian brothers came to the country of the Alans that they call Bersalia, whose cities had been built by the Romans, which is Caspia, that they named the Gate of the Ṭurayē... When a foreign people ruled in that country, they were called the Khazars, the name of the elder brother who was named Khazarig.”<sup>280</sup> While the Anonymous Chronicler does not mention either of the gates, Bar ‘Ebroyo includes both

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<sup>275</sup> Minorsky, *Hudud*; Martinez, “Two Chapters”; Minorsky, “Tamim.” Despite errors and inconsistencies in these works, they are generally based on the accounts of travellers, rather than legend and myth.

<sup>276</sup> Chabot makes an error in his translation here, glossing *إبريا* (‘Iberians’) as ‘Arabs’ (Syriac *ܐܪܒܝܐ*).

<sup>277</sup> *Michael*, III, 151.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*, III, 151.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*, I, 113.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, II, 363-64

stories,<sup>281</sup> but instead of Michael's "Gate of the Ṭurayē," he has "Gate of the Ṭurqāyē (Turks)."<sup>282</sup>

By mentioning two gates, not one, Michael adds an interesting variation to the story of the enclosure of Gog and Magog by Alexander behind 'the Iron Gate.' In fact, there are four gates that relate to the text here, two in the north and two in the east. Chabot identifies the northern gate as "the famous pass of Derbent or *The Gate of Iron*,"<sup>283</sup> (Arabic *Bab al-Abwab*, "Gate of the Gates," Persian *Darband*, "Barred Gate"), a narrow defile between the Caucasus foothills and the Caspian Sea. Fortified against invaders from the north under the Sassanids, it was later held by the Arabs and then the Seljūks. However, before Darband, the Darial pass in the Caucasus Mountains (Arabic *Bab al-Lan*, Persian *Dar-i-Alan*, both meaning "Gate of the Alans") was identified as Alexander's Gate.<sup>284</sup> Traditionally under the control of the Alans or the Georgians, the Arabs placed a garrison there c.727, but it did not develop into a fortress-city like Darband.

Chabot calls the eastern gate "the gate of Balkh,"<sup>285</sup> referring to *Dar-i Āhanīn*, Persian for "Iron Gate" (Arabic *Bāb al-Ḥadīd*, Turkic *Temir Qapigh*), located in the Baysuntau mountain range on the old road between Samarkand and Termez in modern-day Uzbekistan. The other eastern gate, which Chabot does not mention, is a pass in the Elburz Mountains near Tehran called the Caspian Gates. Although neither gate involves a man-made structure, Alexander passed through both, the Caspian Gates in 330 BCE while pursuing Darius III and *Dar-i Āhanīn* while en route to capturing Samarkand in 329/328 BCE.<sup>286</sup> However, he was never in the Caucasus and therefore never involved with either of the northern gates.

Apart from the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, the northern and eastern gates are mentioned several times in Syriac literature. The *Ecclesiastical History* of Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor (569) describes the invasion of the Hephthalite "Huns" in 484 through "the gates that were

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<sup>281</sup> *Chronography*, 39, 84.

<sup>282</sup> Chabot notes, however, "the reading of Michael corresponds better to Greek Τζουρ"(found in Procopius) (*Michael*, II, 364, n. 3). Bar 'Ebroyo narrates two other stories about the gate not found in Michael's *Chronicle*, one relating to the northern gate, "the gates against the Huns" (*Chronography*, 73; see also Hamilton & Brooks, *Zachariah*, 206) and one relating to the eastern gate (*Chronography*, 204-05; see also Pritsak, "Migratory," 162-63).

<sup>283</sup> *Michael*, I, 151, n. 1.

<sup>284</sup> Anderson, "Caspian Gates." On the later 'movement' of the Iron Gate beyond the Caucasus to the Eurasian steppe, see Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, 87-104.

<sup>285</sup> *Michael*, I, 151, n. 2.

<sup>286</sup> As Yusuf Ali notes in his commentary of Surah 18 of the Qur'an ('Ali, *Holy Qur'an*, 740).



guarded by the Persians.”<sup>287</sup> The geographical appendix in the same chronicle speaks of the nations which dwell beyond “the Gates in the land of the Huns”<sup>288</sup> and relates the Armenian mission to the Huns in the early sixth century, which took place after Monophysite Christians captured by the Persians were “sold to the Huns and went beyond the gates and were in their country more than thirty years.”<sup>289</sup> The “Gate of the Turks” is also mentioned in the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius*, Part IV, in the context of the eighth-century conflict between the Arabs and Khazars.<sup>290</sup>

After discussing the eastern gate, Michael briefly mentions a second Byzantine embassy that took place in 576, during the time of Tiberius Caesar, later emperor Tiberius II Constantine (578-82). He recounts how the king of the Turks asked the ‘Roman’ ambassadors if they were under the jurisdiction of the Persians:

And they replied that they were not, but that at many times the Persians were subject to the Romans, so that even Trajan, king of the Romans (CE 98-117), set up an image [of himself] in the land of the Persians and they (i.e. the Romans) made them worship his image. And when he heard these things, the king of the Turks drove out the Persians from Margiana, because they (i.e. the Persians) were covering up these things. [17]<sup>291</sup>

According to the account of John of Asia (Part III, Book VI, Chapter 23), reflected in Michael’s account in Book X, Chapter 10, this event actually occurred during the mission of Zemarchus in 569. Why Michael places it here during the mission of 576 is unclear.<sup>292</sup> The reference to the second Byzantine embassy here implies that the meeting between the Byzantines and Turks took place near the eastern gate, which it probably did not; the Byzantines likely met the king closer to the Türk heartland, in light of the journey they made to mount Ektel,<sup>293</sup> thought to be either in the Altai Mountains or the Tien Shan.<sup>294</sup>

### **Encounters with the Barbarians**

As further evidence of the Turks moving into Margiana, Michael relates the following anecdote:

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<sup>287</sup> Hamilton & Brooks, *Zachariah*, 151-52.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, 328.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*, 329.

<sup>290</sup> HARRAK, *Zuqnin*, 159, 174.

<sup>291</sup> *Michael*, III, 151.

<sup>292</sup> On the mission of 576, see Blockley, *Menander*, 171-79. On the statue of Trajan, see Olajas, “Monument.”

<sup>293</sup> Blockley, *Menander*, 179.

<sup>294</sup> Blockley suggests that Zemarchus visited “only the western Turks, whereas Valentinus [in 576] also visited the eastern branch” (*Ibid*, 277, n. 232).

When the city of Dara was destroyed by Shapur the Persian, he separated young women from the captives and sent them to the king of the Turks. These threw themselves in a river<sup>295</sup> in the region of Margiana. And from these [things] and [things] like them, it is known that part of the nation of the Turks had indeed migrated from that remote land in which they were living, inside the mountains that are called the ‘Breasts of the Earth.’<sup>296</sup> [18]<sup>297</sup>

Like the story of the Byzantine embassy, this also comes from John of Asia (Part III, Book VI, Chapter 7) and Michael has abbreviated it from his longer account in Book X, Chapter 10.<sup>298</sup> The Anonymous Chronicler, presumably also drawing on John’s account, includes an abridged version of the story, beginning as follows: “King Chosroes ordered that 2000 pretty virgins be chosen to be decorated with golden and silken clothing and to be sent as a gift to the kings of the nearby barbarian Turks.”<sup>299</sup> Bar ‘Ebroyo’s account is nearly identical to Michael’s version in Book X.<sup>300</sup>

Again, the historical context is the convoluted sixth-century relations between the Persians, Turks, and Byzantines. Dara was located near Nisibis, in northern Mesopotamia. Originally a Parthian town, it was in Byzantine hands during much of the Sassanid era. The king responsible for the capture of Dara in 573 after a four-month siege was not Shapur, but rather Khosro I Anushirvan (531-79). Interestingly, Michael identifies him correctly in Book X, but incorrectly here. Beyond this, Michael gives us the additional information in Book X that Khosro “sent them as a gift to the Barbarians, that is to say to the Turks beyond Persia, in order to win them over to a war against the Romans” and that the virgins “were in cruel

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<sup>295</sup> Possibly a reference to the Diyāla (Sirwan) River in eastern Iraq. A bridge dating from Sassanid times near the village of Warda, close to the Iranian border, is still called *Bard Kīnağan*, ‘Bridge of the Virgins,’ in Kurdish (Fiey, “Médie” 359-60). However, John’s description of the location as “within fifty leagues [about 150 miles] of the barbarous people” (Payne Smith, *Ecclesiastical History*, 389) would place their territory in the western highlands of Iran, near Hamadān, which did not happen until Seljūk times.

<sup>296</sup> This is a corruption of the original ‘Breasts of the North,’ which occurs as Μαζοί Boppa in III.26A of the γ version of the Greek text of *Pseudo-Callisthenes* (Stoneman, *Alexander Romance*, 186) and *Ubera Aquilonis* in the *Cosmography* of Aethicus Ister, chapter 39 (Stang, *Naming*, 100), both in the context of describing the nations shut in by Alexander. *Pseudo-Methodius* (685-92) is undoubtedly the origin of its occurrence in *Pseudo-Callisthenes* (Stoneman, *Alexander Romance*, 29, 185-87; Gero, “Legend,” 8). Less certain is the relationship between *Pseudo-Methodius* and Aethicus Ister. “It is possible that both texts (which are roughly contemporary) got their Alexander’s Gate material from a common source, though some scholars argue that ‘Aethicus’ (Ps. Jerome) relied on Ps. Methodius” (Michael Herren, personal correspondence, 10 August, 2004). By virtue of the association with Alexander, they were originally considered to be somewhere in the Caucasus Mountains. See Anderson, *Alexander’s Gate*, 43, 51; CSCO 541/221, 23, n. 1; Gero, “Legend,” 8 and Trumpf, “Alexander.” I am indebted to Witold Witakowski and Michael Herren for clarifying the origin of this term for me.

<sup>297</sup> *Michael*, III, 151-52.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid*, II, 315-16.

<sup>299</sup> *Chron. 1234*, I, 162.

<sup>300</sup> *Chronography*, 78.

anguish (thinking) that they would lose their Christianity and that their bodies would be defiled by the impurity of the Barbarians.”<sup>301</sup>

John’s more extensive and poignant account leaves no room for thinking of the Turks as anything but cruel savages, as expressed by the virgins: “When, in company with the heathen, we have polluted ourselves with their heathen ways, and impure meats, and horseflesh, and things that have died or been strangled, and have lost our Christianity, we must still finally all die and go to the judgment of doom.” Thus they formed their suicide pact, “before our bodies are defiled by the barbarians, and our souls polluted, and death finally overtake us.”<sup>302</sup> Again, Michael has edited his sources to fit in with his sanitized presentation of the Turks.

At this point, Michael’s account suddenly adopts a much more negative tone:

But about their barbarity and the vileness of their customs, it is said about them that in their remote land, they do not have a law to distinguish food, but they eat and kill everything that creeps over the earth—beasts, wild animals, reptiles, vermin and birds. They eat dead corpses. They eat the afterbirth that descends from those who have given birth. They even eat the flesh of the dead. And if a stranger is found in their midst who does not have a guide from them, they pierce [him with arrows] like in hunting and they eat [him]. And these [things] and [things] like them have been told about them by the Iberians who are nearby and who guard the gate. [19]<sup>303</sup>

Previously in Book XIV, the Turks have been portrayed in generally favourable terms, but suddenly we have a report on “their barbarity and the vileness of their customs” which calls to mind all the stereotypes about the ‘barbarians’ found in classical literature; the ‘noble savage’ has become a ‘nasty cannibal.’ Thus, it is unclear why Michael has included this in his otherwise positive treatise on the Turks. The report provokes us to ask “Which Turks are being referred to?” and “What are Michael’s sources?” Finally, we may consider whether there is any basis in fact to these charges of moral degradation.<sup>304</sup>

Iberian (eastern Georgian or K’art’velian) writers, like their Syriac counterparts, used the terms ‘Hun’ and ‘Turk’ to describe a variety of different groups they came into contact with in the Caucasus.<sup>305</sup> Those who played the most significant (and negative) roles in Georgian history were the Khazars and the Seljüks. Frequent Khazar raids into Caucasian Albania and their capture of Tiflis in 628 (in which all the inhabitants were slaughtered), along with

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<sup>301</sup> *Michael*, II, 315.

<sup>302</sup> Payne Smith, *Ecclesiastical History*, 389.

<sup>303</sup> *Michael*, III, 152.

<sup>304</sup> I am indebted to Peter Golden and Stephen Rapp for their assistance in answering these questions.

<sup>305</sup> For an excellent overview, see Golden, “Caucasia.”

incursions of the ‘North Caucasian Huns,’ subjects of the Khazars,<sup>306</sup> resulted in a very negative view of the Khazars in Caucasian historical writings.<sup>307</sup>

The Seljüks, under Alp Arslan, attacked Armenia in 1064 and Georgia three years later. This policy continued under his successor Malik Shah I, when Transcaucasia was incorporated into Seljük territory.<sup>308</sup> The Armenian chronicler Aristarkes Lastivertc’i (late eleventh-century) described how they “fell on the Christians like hungry wolves.”<sup>309</sup> Hence the ‘Iberian report’ of the ‘Turks’ that Michael quoted was probably based on memories of both groups, supplemented by traditional images of ‘Scythians’ and ‘Huns.’

Stephen Rapp suggests that the source “ultimately can be traced to a single medieval Georgian tradition which is manifest in two different texts... *The Life of the Kings*... [and] *The Primary History of K’art’li* [PHK].”<sup>310</sup> The relevant passage in the latter text speaks of Alexander’s expedition into the Caucasus: “He found the savage tribes of the Bunt’urk’s... They ate every sort of meat [indiscriminately] and [because they] consumed their dead they did not employ graves.”<sup>311</sup>

Once again the influence of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* recorded in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*<sup>312</sup> is evident, albeit mediated through an Iberian source. Apparently, “some K’art’velian seems to have remembered this tradition and passed it along—eventually reaching Michael the Syrian.”<sup>313</sup> Although the identity of the ‘Bunt’urk’s’ is uncertain,<sup>314</sup> Georgians in the eleventh century would have connected them with the Turkic peoples that they had encountered in the Caucasus, especially the Khazars and Seljüks. Since the *K’art’lis C’xovreba*, which *The Life of the Kings* is part of, can be dated to c.800 and the PHK‘ was

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<sup>306</sup> “It is not entirely clear whether these ‘Huns’ were actually a Khazar tribe or separate people joined to the Khazar state” (Golden, *Khazar Studies*, 93).

<sup>307</sup> Dowsett, *History*, 83-84, 94-95.

<sup>308</sup> See Cahen, “Campagne.”

<sup>309</sup> Quoted in Golden, “Caucasia,” 54. See also Thomson, *Rewriting*, 309-13 on the view of the Seljüks in Georgian chronicles.

<sup>310</sup> Stephen Rapp, personal correspondence, 12 July, 2004.

<sup>311</sup> Rapp, *Studies*, 257. The parallel account (in *The Life of the Kings*) reads: “He found all the Georgians (living) by the most foul religion of all nations. For in marriage and fornication they paid no attention to family relationship, they ate everything that was living, they ate corpses like wild beasts and animals; the description of their way of life is inexpressible. He saw that these wild heathen peoples which we call ‘real’ Turk and Kipchak were settled on the river Mtkuari” (Thomson, *Rewriting*, 23).

<sup>312</sup> CSCO 541/221, 21-22.

<sup>313</sup> Stephen Rapp, personal correspondence, 12 July, 2004.

<sup>314</sup> Rapp, *Studies*, 264-68.

written sometime between the seventh and tenth centuries, Michael could easily have encountered this tradition, possibly even in an Armenian translation.<sup>315</sup>

Michael's observations of the customs of the Turks, especially their diet and the practice of murder and cannibalism, are not unique. The eating habits of Altaic peoples have occasioned censorious comments from European and Arab writers for centuries. The thirteenth century traveller Plano Carpini described Mongol eating habits graphically: "They consume everything which can be eaten – dogs, wolves, foxes, horses and, in an emergency, human flesh... They also eat the afterbirth of mares; we even saw them eating lice; and with our own eyes we saw them consume mice."<sup>316</sup> Reports of barbarity amongst the nomadic Turks were not limited to Christian writers. Ibn Faḍlan, secretary for an embassy dispatched in 921 by Caliph al-Muqtadir (908-32) to the Volga Bulgars,<sup>317</sup> speaks of the Bashkirs as "most inclined to kill"<sup>318</sup> while the *Hudud al-ʿĀlam* (982) calls the Kirghiz, "lawless and merciless" and another tribe subservient to them "man-eaters."<sup>319</sup>

### **Culture, Technology, and Religion**<sup>320</sup>

Michael concludes Chapter 2 with a description of the personal qualities of the Turks, as well as more information on their culture, technology, and religious background. Of their personal and moral qualities, he notes, "They are guileless and straightforward about deceit, but they are wise and cunning [in] the organisation of their lives, for they are circumspect about adultery and fornication is lacking amongst them, because they do not have a law that prohibits second and third marriages or polygamy." [20]<sup>321</sup>

Michael's description is echoed in Menander's account of the second Byzantine embassy, when the ruler Turxanthus<sup>322</sup> says, "To lie is foreign and alien to a Turk,"<sup>323</sup> as well as by certain Arab writers. "Jāḥiz credited the Turks with some of the attributes of the noble savage, such as their freedom from hypocrisy and intrigue and their imperviousness to

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<sup>315</sup> "Internal evidence has been adduced by some scholars to demonstrate that the [Armenian translation of the *K'art'lis C'xovreba*] was translated in the first half of the twelfth century" (Thomson, *Rewriting*, xlv). Michael could probably read Armenian.

<sup>316</sup> Quoted in Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 12.

<sup>317</sup> The Volga Bulghar Qaghanate was the most northerly Islamic state at the time.

<sup>318</sup> Canard, *Ibn Fadlān*, 49.

<sup>319</sup> Minorsky, *Hudud*, 96-97.

<sup>320</sup> I am indebted to Peter Golden for information in this section.

<sup>321</sup> *Michael*, III, 152.

<sup>322</sup> "Turxanthus was apparently not a name, but a rank (Türk-šad) below the Khagan" (Blockley, *Menander*, 276, n. 221).

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid*, 175.

flattery.”<sup>324</sup> Michael’s observations about adultery and polygamy accord with the reports of Muslim writers like Ibn Faḍlan, who described both the punishment for adultery amongst the Oghuz and the 25 wives of the Khazar king.<sup>325</sup>

Speaking of their culture, Michael states, “They do not have intellectual knowledge or a corpus of the wisdom of learning, and they are not aware of Moses or any of the prophets, nor of the advent of our Saviour, our Life-giver, Christ our God. Therefore, it is thought that no apostle or evangelist has gone to them.” [20]<sup>326</sup>

It is obvious from this statement that Michael is unaware of both the intellectual and religious milieu of the pre-Seljūk Turks, a reflection of his general ignorance of Turkic culture. He knows nothing of the intellectual accomplishments of the Qarakhanid or Ghaznavid dynasties, which produced works such as Gardizi’s *Geography* (1050); Yusuf Khasnaji’s *Kutadgu Bilig* (1069/70) and Mahmud al-Kashgari’s *Diwan lughat at-Turk* (1074).

Michael’s lack of awareness of the presence of the monotheistic religions amongst the Turks is also striking. Moses and other Jewish prophets were known to many Turkic peoples prior to the Seljūks, including the Jewish Khazars, those tribes amongst whom Nestorian Christianity had spread, and the Turks who converted to Islam prior to the Seljūks (especially the Qarakhanids and Ghaznavids). Even Seljūk himself, prior to his conversion to Islam, gave biblical names to all his sons—Mika‘il, Arslan-Isra‘il, Musa, and Yunus—reflecting his contact with the Judeo-Christian worldview. Again, Michael’s restricted knowledge of the Turkic world has shaped his perception of the Turks’ religious background.

Michael is correct in stating that none of the apostles went to the Turks, since they had not yet appeared in history during apostolic times, but incorrect in stating that they had remained unevangelized. In particular, Michael’s apparent ignorance of the spread of Christianity amongst Turkic peoples due to the missionary work of the Church of the East in Central Asia is striking, given that he was a Patriarch.<sup>327</sup> Rather than a manifestation of rivalry between ‘Nestorians’ and ‘Jacobites,’ this is probably again due to his general lack of knowledge of both the Turkic world and ‘Nestorian’ missions in the east.

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<sup>324</sup> Bosworth, “Barbarian,” 7.

<sup>325</sup> Canard, *Ibn Fadlān*, 39, 85. Gardizi also described the punishment for fornication or adultery amongst the Toquz Oghuz (Uighurs) (Martinez, “Two Chapters,” 135).

<sup>326</sup> *Michael*, III, 152.

However, Michael also gives no information on Christian work carried out by the Syrian Orthodox in the east, even though there were three bishoprics in Sijistan and Khorasan (Zarang, Aprah, and Herat), all of which were near the territory of the Turks,<sup>328</sup> and a Jacobite presence in Gurgan (Hyrkania), also close to Central Asia.<sup>329</sup>

In contrast, Michael's commentary on the clothing of the Turks has a ring of authenticity: "They are not even accustomed to the manufacture of clothing from linen or byssus,<sup>330</sup> but their garments and their tents are [made] from the wool of sheep and the hair of goats. And principally for them (i.e. that which they excel in) is the experience with which they subdue wild animals and livestock." [21]<sup>331</sup> Indeed, most traditional Turkic clothing and dwellings were made from felt and animal hides, but silk from China and quilted Khwarazmian garments were also common, especially amongst the aristocracy, as Gardizi reported of the Toquz Oghuz.<sup>332</sup>

Returning to the topic of religion, Michael introduces a theme which he elaborates in Chapters 4 and 5: "They proclaim one God of the heavens, without knowing [him], thinking that that which is the visible firmament is God and they are not conscious of another thing (i.e. anything else) and they do not perceive or understand [anything else]." [21]<sup>333</sup>

Michael portrays Turkic religion as a primitive monotheistic system, but it was actually more complicated. Denis Sinor summarizes the religion of the Türk Empire, closely tied to the ruling Ashina clan, thus:

Heterogeneity characterized Türk views of the supernatural. A "national" religion... centered on Tängri, the Sky (or Heaven) ... At least some Türks... had the wolf for totem... Numerous spirits were honored and shamans were used to communicate with them. The cult of the female spirit of goddess

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<sup>327</sup> Important sources on Syriac Christianity in Central Asia include Gillman & Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia*, 205-62; Hunter, "Syriac Christianity"; Hunter, "Church of the East"; Hunter, "Converting" and Mingana, *Early Spread*.

<sup>328</sup> Michael lists their bishops in Appendix III of his *Chronicle*, but no more (*Michael*, III, 496, 499, 502). See also Fiey, "Horāsān," 96-102. Herat became a Syrian Orthodox metropolitanate under Patriarch Dionysius of Tell Mahre (818-45).

<sup>329</sup> Hunter, "Syriac Christianity," 366. This is the furthest east that historically-verifiable Syrian Orthodox communities could be found. A.C. Moule and Paul Pelliot's *Marco Polo: the Description of the World* (1938) refers to 'Jacobites' in China (Dauvillier, "L'Expansion," 82-83), but other versions of Polo's *Travels* mention only 'Nestorians' there (e.g. Latham, *Marco Polo*, 82, 89). If there were Syrian Orthodox Christians in China while Michael were Patriarch, 100 years before Polo wrote, one might expect him to say so in his *Chronicle*.

<sup>330</sup> "An exceedingly fine and valuable textile fibre and fabric known to the ancients; it denoted properly a kind of flax, but was used also of cotton, silk, etc." (*Shorter OED*, 261).

<sup>331</sup> *Michael*, III, 152.

<sup>332</sup> Martinez, "Two Chapters," 135.

<sup>333</sup> *Michael*, III, 152.

Umay... testifies to the presence of a Mongol component in the body of Türk religious beliefs.<sup>334</sup>

*Tängri* is the Türk word for both heaven and God: “It seems originally to have meant ‘the physical sky’, but very early acquired religious overtones and came to mean ‘Heaven’ as a kind of impersonal deity... It was the normal word for ‘God’ in [Turkic] Manichaeism and Buddhist texts and was retained in this sense in the Moslem period.”<sup>335</sup> Along with *Umay* and *Yir-sub* (the spirits of earth and water), *Tängri* is mentioned on the Orkhon inscriptions (usually in order to signify divine approval of the actions of the ruler) in phrases such as “because heaven above and the earth below ordained.”<sup>336</sup> Various world religions were at different times adopted by Turkic groups, including Buddhism (early Türks), Manichaeism (Uighurs), Christianity (some Uighurs, Qarluqs, Qipchaqs, and others), Judaism (Khazars) and Islam. However, the shamanistic core remained, albeit modified and adapted to the demands of the new religion.<sup>337</sup>

Thus, Michael’s account of the moral qualities, intellectual knowledge, religious background, and clothing and dwellings of the Turks is a mixture of verifiable facts and fanciful perceptions. In contrast, Bar ‘Ebroyo’s description of Mongol laws, religion, and coronation ceremonies reflect his access not only to more sources on the Central Asian conquerors, but presumably also to those who knew the culture intimately, either members of the Mongol royal family or court administrators.<sup>338</sup> However, inaccurate as it is, Michael’s description of Turkic culture, with his emphasis on their humble origins and their lack of cultural sophistication, serves to prepare the way for his assertions in Chapters 4 and 5 that God granted them rulership over the ‘kingdom of men’ precisely because of their humility.

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<sup>334</sup> Sinor, *CHEIA*, 314. See also Sinor, “Umay.”

<sup>335</sup> Clauson, *Etymological Dictionary*, 523.

<sup>336</sup> Golden, “Imperial,” 45. See e.g. Tekin, *Orkhon Turkic*, 288. These inscriptions were written in the 730’s.

<sup>337</sup> For an excellent overview of religion amongst the Turkic peoples, particularly the Qipchaqs, see Golden, “Religion.”

<sup>338</sup> *Chronography*, 354-56, 393-94, 410-11.



## Chapter 6: The Emigrations and Invasions of the Turks (Book XIV, Chapters 3-4)

### Leaving the Homeland

Having familiarized his readers with the historical and cultural background of the Turks, Michael then describes how they came to rule over the Muslims. Chapter 3 of Book XIV describes how the Turks “began to emigrate from the remote lands in which they were living,” [22]<sup>339</sup> which prepares the way for the last invasion of the Turks that Michael describes in Chapter 4.

Michael returns to the theme of the impassable mountains and the gates and introduces information about the relationship between the Turks from within and “the kings from without.” Whenever the latter were in need of the former as mercenaries, they would let the Turks out, before returning them to their land when they no longer needed them. [23]<sup>340</sup>

Whereas in Chapter 2 the gates were built “to prevent the nations who are there from leaving,” here the rulers outside the gate have occasion to let out those dwelling within it. What is even more surprising is that Michael identifies these rulers as “the kings of the Persians, Medes, and Assyrians,” since the latter two ruled long before the appearance of either the Turks or Alexander! Just as he adapted the biblical data, so too he adapts the historical data to give the Turks a role going back to Old Testament times.

Michael presents these mercenary sorties outside the gate as the ultimate motivation behind the emigration from the Turkic homeland: “When they returned, they entered their [own] land and they made known about the goodness of the land and the [different] kinds of fruit and even brought back beautiful vessels/garments.<sup>341</sup> When the people saw these [things], they got ready to go out and to dwell [there].” [23]<sup>342</sup>

He then relates the event that set off the emigration:

And one of the times when the Persians called them and they went forth and accomplished that for which they went forth and were commanded to return to their land, they came up to the place where the fortresses and the guards were. Then they killed the Persians who were there as legates with them and they attacked the fortresses lest the guards that were in them go and inform the

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<sup>339</sup> *Michael*, III, 152.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, III, 152-53.

<sup>341</sup> Syriac *ܠܫܢܐ* can mean both “vessel” and “garment” (Payne Smith, *Syriac Dictionary*, 247).

<sup>342</sup> *Michael*, III, 153.

king. And they sent for their companions who were inside and, as agreed beforehand, they prepared to pour forth and they attacked the fortresses, as they had learned from the Persians. And thus they had dominion over that gate. [24]<sup>343</sup>

From the following paragraph which mentions Margiana, Michael is presumably referring to the eastern gate:

And from there they went up and ruled over that land as far as Margiana, which they made into a kingdom, and those nine Turkish kings to whom the ambassadors of the Romans came in the days of King Justin were there. These [Turks] were outside the land which had formerly been their homeland. Those who went forth guarded that exit and held back all of the remnant [inside], lest they go out, except when they (i.e. those already outside) wished. [25]<sup>344</sup>

Michael dates this invasion of Margiana “at the end of the last kingdom of the Persians, 100 years before the invasion of the Arabs, that is to say, more or less 600 years before the present time.” [26]<sup>345</sup> This would place it sometime in the mid-sixth century, during the early years of the First Türk Empire (552-659). Although this might be a reference to the 484 invasion of Persia by the Hephthalites (often referred to as ‘Turks’ in Arabic and Syriac sources), the reference to the “nine Turkish kings” and the Roman embassy “in the days of king Justin” suggests that Michael has the Türks in mind here, not the Hephthalites. If so, it may be a reference to the Türk invasion of Persia in 569 or merely the gradual southward expansion of the Türks into Central Asia and northern Afghanistan.

The story of the Turks returning from their mercenary work for the Persians and overpowering the guards at the gate is obviously fictional, but it may be rooted in the Hephthalite invasion of Persia, as a result of which they would definitely have had dominion over the eastern gate (*Dar-i Āhanīn*). In addition, the remnant left inside may be a reference to the Türks who dwelt north of the Hephthalites and eventually overthrew them. Due to confusion over the relationship between the two, it is likely that Michael joined elements from the history of both peoples. However, neither the Türks nor the Hephthalites were ever at the mercy of the Persians to let them out from their ‘imprisonment’ behind the eastern gate.

### **Miraculous Guidance by the Grey Wolf**

Chapter 3 concludes with a fascinating account of the miraculous guidance of the Turks to their new homeland:

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<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, III, 153.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid*, III, 153.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid*, III, 153.

It is said about them that when they were travelling and coming, as it were, from the east to the west, they saw a beast that resembled a dog. It was going before them and they did not know what it was or even where it was from, and they were not able to approach it, but at the moment which was suitable to break camp, it called to them in their language, saying “Get up!” They got up and went after it, wherever it went, and they travelled as far as it went. And they followed after it towards the region that it was heading to. And when it stopped, they pitched camp, until they arrived at those places in which they ruled. And when the guide no longer appeared to them, they did not depart from there. [27]<sup>346</sup>

As Chabot notes,<sup>347</sup> Bar ‘Ebroyo questions this story, saying, “Now the story of the dog which the blessed old man said directed (or, led) them when they went forth from their country we have not found anywhere. It is possible that he wrote it down from hearsay, or from some book which we have not read, for we have not met with it in any book.”<sup>348</sup> However, Michael seems so convinced of this story that he mentions it again in Chapter 4 with reference to the Seljūk invasion, vigorously justifying his inclusion of it in the *Chronicle*.

Bar ‘Ebroyo is correct in speculating that Michael wrote it down from hearsay, for the story can be found in the *Oghuz-nāma*, an epic poem claimed by both the Uighurs and the modern Turks as part of their literary heritage.<sup>349</sup> The poem contains the following passages:

When it began to be day in the tent of Oghuz Khagan, a ray appeared similar to a sunray. Out of this ray came a large wolf with a grey mane. The wolf addressed itself to Oghuz Khagan and said to him, “O Oghuz! You want to leave for Uruma. O Oghuz, I will march with you, in front.” And behold, after Oghuz Khagan had put away his tent, he went a little way and he saw in front of the army which was marching an enormous wolf with a grey body and mane... After several days, the immense wolf with the grey body and mane stopped. And the army of Oghuz stopped also... After that Oghuz Khagan saw the wolf with the grey body and mane. This wolf said to Oghuz Khagan, “Now, march with the army, Oghuz Khagan. Lead the people and the nobles (*begs*) there and I will show the way.” And when daybreak had come, Oghuz Khagan saw that the wolf was already in front of the army that was marching and he rejoiced and he went off in front. When the wolf with the grey body and mane no longer marched in front, he stopped. And Oghuz Khagan also stopped and set up his camp.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> *Ibid*, III, 153.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid*, III, 153, n. 2.

<sup>348</sup> *Chronography*, 196.

<sup>349</sup> I am indebted to Husseinov, “Sources” for the source of this story.

<sup>350</sup> Husseinov, “Terme,” 392. See also May, *Oguz-name*, 19, 23-25, 27, 29-31.

Although the epic, reflecting the important role the wolf plays in early Turkic folklore,<sup>351</sup> was not written down until after Michael's time, he must have heard an oral version of it at some time when he was in the company of the Turks, perhaps even when he visited Qilich Arslan II.<sup>352</sup> Thus, despite Bar 'Ebroyo's (and Chabot's) scepticism, Michael has preserved a genuine piece of Oghuz folklore connected with one of the most enduring symbols of Turkic culture. More importantly for Michael, it demonstrates the divine intervention in leading the Turks from their original homeland, as he specifically states at the end of Chapter 4.

### **The Final Invasion of the Turks**

Having dealt with the initial emigration of the Turks in Chapter 3, Michael devotes Chapter 4 to "the last invasion of the Turks, through which they ruled over Persia, Assyria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Syria, Palestine, Cilicia, and up to the Sea (i.e. the Mediterranean) and even over Egypt." [28]<sup>353</sup>

Before describing this invasion, Michael again goes to great lengths to justify his schema of two invasions:

Just as the former invasion of the Turks took place as Ezekiel had prophesied, so too that second invasion was because of it (i.e. Ezekiel's prophecy). Doubtless, the prophet repeated the saying about them. Therefore, he who reads will understand that just as their former invasion took place by the command of God—and because of this, the divine Spirit showed the prophet beforehand to prophesy about them—so too their second invasion took place by the command of the Lord. [29]<sup>354</sup>

Michael wants his readers to understand that both invasions were a result of Ezekiel's prophecy and thus the Turks have come "by the command of God." He explains this last invasion in terms of the interactions between the Arabs, Persians, Greeks, and Turks:

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<sup>351</sup> One legend of the origin of the Türks relates how a boy is nurtured back to health by a she-wolf, who later becomes pregnant by him and gives birth in a cavern to ten boys who take the name Ashina and "in front of the gate to the camp the Türks placed a standard with a wolf's head on it, so as to show that they had not forgotten their origins" (Sinor, "Legendary Origin," 224-25, see also 233-35 and Golden, "Imperial," 42-43). A Russian chronicle records how in 1096, prior to battle, the Qipchaq khan Boniak, "arose when it was midnight and rode away from his army. He began to howl like a wolf and a wolf answered him and many wolves began to howl," as Peter Golden notes, "obviously a shamanic rite... by which Boniak hoped to divine the future" (Golden, "Imperial," 70). On the role of wolves and dogs in Turkic religious systems, see Golden, "Wolves, Dogs" and Golden, "Religion," 186-92.

<sup>352</sup> It would not have been amongst the sources that Bar 'Ebroyo consulted in Maragha and he would not have heard it living in Mongol-dominated Persia.

<sup>353</sup> *Michael*, III, 154.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*, III, 154.

For thus the Arabs ruled and they completely brought to an end the pagan Persians and likewise the Greeks,<sup>355</sup> who were persecuting the Christians, fled. And their kingdom (i.e. the Arabs) prospered so much that kings who were just and did not persecute the believers were ruling over it. [30]

But after [some] years of being in it (i.e. the kingdom), the advantage departed from them and the Greeks rose up again and ruled over Syria, Palestine, Armenia and Cappadocia. And along with [their] ruling, they quickly renewed [their] wicked behaviour and they began cruelly persecuting the believers in these places. Then God was justly angry with them and because of this, he stirred up and brought forth the Turks [and] thus this second invasion took place. [31]

But when the Arabs... were weakened and the Greeks ruled over many places, the [Arabs] needed to bring the Turks to their aid and they (i.e. the Turks) were travelling with the Arabs as subjects, not as rulers. Everywhere that they went, they conducted themselves honestly, but with victory they changed and little by little they became accustomed to victories. And they were loading up and carrying the good things of the land to their [own] country and showing [them] to the many [others there] and they enticed them to go out with them and to dwell in the good land that was full of good things like this. [32]<sup>356</sup>

Michael's description of the "just" Arabs who "did not persecute the believers" contrasts starkly with the "wicked" Greeks, who "began cruelly persecuting the believers." The historical situation referred to here is presumably the reconquest of Syria (though not Palestine) by the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (976-1025). Ultimately, God's anger was provoked by the Greeks, resulting in the Turks being "stirred up and brought forth," a central theme in Book XIV. Thus, the coming of the Turks to rule in the Middle East was not an impersonal response to biblical prophecy, but the result of God's concern for the Syrian Orthodox and his wrath against the Chalcedonians.

Of interest is a similar statement that the Anonymous Chronicler makes in summarizing the advent of the Turks:

The reign of the Arabs began in the year 933 of the Greeks [CE 622]... The Muslims having dominated for 423 years, then the people of the Turks came out, as we have shown above, from the outer borders of the world; they mingled with the Muslims and followed their religion...

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<sup>355</sup> Michael uses two different Syriac ethnonyms relevant to the Roman/Byzantine Empire. Syriac *yawnāyē* refers to the Greeks in general, whereas *rumāyē* refers to the Romans in general. Both terms can be applied to the Byzantine Empire, although there is usually a difference in connotation. In Michael's time, the former term was often used in the phrase *yawnāyē bishe*, "the evil Greeks," due to their persecution of the non-Chalcedonian Oriental Orthodox (Dorothea Weltecke, personal correspondence, 2 June, 2004).

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid*, III, 154.

When the Turks appeared and the kingdom of the Arabs was weakened, they needed the Turks to help them against the Christians. Thus, the power of the Muslims was strengthened by the Turks. Little by little, the Turks gained territory and dominated, having begun by removing the cities and the countries from the realm of the Romans. After that, they also took it from Muslims. Thus, at the end of 130 years, that is to say, up to the time near to us, the kingdom of the Arabs completely ceased in the entire universe and the Turks dominated from the outer borders of the East up to the sea of Pontus [the Black Sea].<sup>357</sup>

The Turks are described as aiding and travelling with the Arabs, all the while “conducting themselves honestly,” but also becoming “accustomed to victories.” Although Michael is probably referring primarily to Turkic slave soldiers in the Abbasid armies, he may also be thinking of Turks living in Mawara’n-nahr or Khorasan who, having converted to Islam, aided the Arabs in bringing the area under submission to the Caliphate. This may even be a reference to the Qarakhanids or the Ghaznavids (although Michael nowhere mentions them by name), who solidified Muslim rule in Central Asia, but were quite independent of the Caliphate.<sup>358</sup>

Michael’s next anecdote seems at odds with his general emphasis on the divine leading behind the invasion of the Turks up to this point. As with the aforementioned Iberian report, we are once again faced with a portrayal of the Turks that, in opposition to the generally positive picture that Michael has been painting, is more typical of the usual reaction to ‘invading barbarians’: “People were seen in many places, especially in Edessa, men and women who seemed mad, and they were wailing and calling in the markets of the city and saying, ‘Behold a new and barbarous nation pours forth and is coming against you from the region of the east, those who have the faces of men and the hearts of dogs. O Christians, take heed!’” [33]<sup>359</sup>

Michael tells us neither the source for this story nor his motive in telling it.<sup>360</sup> Regardless, like the Iberian report, the passage portrays the Turks less favourably than the rest of Book XIV.

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<sup>357</sup> *Chron. 1234*, II, 129-30.

<sup>358</sup> It probably does not refer to the Seljuks themselves, who (until their victory at Dandanqan) were largely concerned with surviving attacks from either the pagan Oghuz or the Ghaznavids.

<sup>359</sup> *Michael*, III, 154.

<sup>360</sup> Dorothea Weltecke (personal correspondence, 25 June, 2004) suspects the source is “either Dionysius [of Tell Mahre] or Basil [of Edessa], but just on inner evidence.”

## Divine Direction by a Turkic Totem

Michael now returns to a theme he alluded to earlier, the rivalry between the Turks who came out first and those who followed later:

When the nation of the Turks poured forth, they covered the land and those former Turks were oppressed by them (i.e. the latter Turks), because the land was not deemed to accommodate all of them and they drove them<sup>361</sup> to move on and when they began to move forward, that one which had led the former ones and which resembled a dog appeared to them. And it went ahead of them, but they were not able to approach it. But indeed when it wanted to get up, it cried out, saying “Guš,” that is to say “Get up!” And they got up and moved forward after it until it sat down and directed them to pitch camp. [34]<sup>362</sup>

In this context, the “latter Turks” are presumably the Seljüks, but who are the “former Turks”? According to Michael’s account, they must be those who came out in the invasion of Chapter 3, as is evident from his description of the wolf as “that one which had led the former ones.” Michael assumes that those who had come out “100 years before the invasion of the Arabs” were still present when the Seljüks invaded, but the earlier Hephthalites and Türks had long since vanished or been absorbed into subsequent empires, the Ghaznavids and the Qarakhanids (both enemies of the Seljüks) had no direct historical connection with the “former Turks,” and the Turkic *mamluks* in caliphal armies (despite being their Oghuz kinsmen) were the Seljüks’ contemporaries, so the two cannot be described as “former” and “latter.”

Michael returns to the story of the grey wolf, repeating the information he recounted earlier, but with the interesting addition of the word which the wolf used to speak to the Turks. Chabot suggests that “Guš” is a Syriac approximation of the imperative form of the Turkic verbal stem *köč-* or *göč-* (depending on the Turkic language in question),<sup>363</sup> which he glosses as “to raise the camp.” Actually, the meaning is “to change one’s abode, migrate.”<sup>364</sup>

However, R.A. Husseynov maintains that the verb in question is indeed *koš-/goš-* “which existed in the past and still exists in certain Turkic languages, especially in the Western Hunnic group<sup>365</sup> ... a special word used to give an order and indicate the start of a march.”<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> The pronoun referents in Syriac are unclear here. Chabot translates this as “the latter [meaning the later Turks] drove back the former [meaning the former Turks]” which makes sense in light of the first statement that the former Turks were oppressed by the latter Turks, but not in light of the subsequent contrast between the group moving towards the West and “the former ones.”

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid*, III, 155.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid*, III, 155, n. 1. Since Syriac does not have a letter for the sound č, Michael uses ܫ (šin).

<sup>364</sup> Clauson, *Etymological Dictionary*, 694.

<sup>365</sup> Presumably he means the south-west Oghuz group of Turkic languages.

In its most essential meaning, the verb means “to conjoin, unite (two things).”<sup>367</sup> Reflexes of the verb in various Turkic languages can mean “gather together,” “camp, army,” “assembly,” or “team,” leading Husseynov to conclude that “the variants of the term *goš* have... the sense of military displacement.”<sup>368</sup> Either way, whether the word describes nomadic migration or military organisation, Michael has again accurately recorded an important part of the folklore of the Oghuz, and hence the Seljüks.

And when for many days it had directed them, it withdrew and we have not read or heard [about it] again. Nor even have we decided [what it was], other than if it was that [kind of] sign which was only for the nations that were used to it, [then] it directed and led those which it was helping, in the [same] way that [it led] the Hebrews with sacrifices of sheep and calves and the Magi by the star. And thus these [Turks were guided] by means of the form of a living beast to which they were accustomed. We do not assert [anything] but that which took place. [35]<sup>369</sup>

Although Michael is unclear on the exact identity of the beast that led the Turks, he is clear that it was a sign from God, on a par with the star that guided the Magi and “the sacrifices of sheep and calves” amongst the Hebrews.<sup>370</sup> In the same way that God guided the Children of Israel and the wise men by something they were familiar with, he used the totemic animal of the Turks to lead them to their new home. This moves the Seljük invasion out of the realm of mere secular history and into the realm of sacred history, equating it with the Exodus of the Old Testament and the Incarnation of the New Testament, two pivotal events in the Bible and a far cry from the traditional understanding of the invasion of Gog and Magog!

### **Casting Lots for Territory**

Michael tells us that:

When their guide withdrew and they saw that they had reached the midst of kings (i.e. the land ruled over by the Persian monarchs and other kings) and the land was not sufficient for their dwelling, they divided into three parts, so that those from each part would go to one region: to the south, to the north and to the centre. [36]<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Husseynov, “Terme,” 390.

<sup>367</sup> Clauson, *Etymological Dictionary*, 670.

<sup>368</sup> Husseynov, “Terme,” 391.

<sup>369</sup> *Michael*, III, 155.

<sup>370</sup> Although a better example would have been the pillar of fire/cloud that guided the Hebrews out of Egypt mentioned in Exodus 40.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid*, III, 155.



The text then describes something similar to the Old Testament practice of ‘casting lots,’ perhaps with overtones of traditional Turkic shamanism:

And they took three staffs and inscribed them and threw them towards heaven, that is to say, to where they expect that God is and when they fell on the ground, those whose staff [fell] towards the south went to the regions of upper India, because beforehand all of them had promised that each of the camps that received that region was permitted to worship the God that was worshipped by the inhabitants of that land and to adhere to the faith that was found amongst the people there. [37]<sup>372</sup>

This is not the only time that Michael mentions throwing staffs in the air as a means of decision-making. In Chapter 5, the same method is used to elect a leader for the Turks who went to the West (i.e. the Seljüks). Once again, Michael is relating an oral legend prevalent amongst the Turks at the time of the Seljük conquest. In this case, it is a Sufi legend in which “the disciple of a ‘head derwish’ is ‘appointed’ ... to ‘Islamize’ the groups mentioned; but not necessarily to rule over them.” This ceremony included the practice of throwing staffs in the air.<sup>373</sup> Again, perhaps Michael heard an oral account from someone familiar with this legend and interpreted it as historical fact. By including it here, he gives yet another ‘proof’ of how the Turks were led to rule over ‘the kingdom of the Arabs.’

Michael describes the three groups of Turks and the religious implications of their destinations:

And because of this, those who went to the south found Christians and pagans there and they went forth to them. And up to our day, they have amongst them Christians and pagans, worshippers of idols. And again, those whose lot was the region of the north, they are on the border of the kingdom of the Greeks, to the north of them, and they are called Cumans, from the name which that land bears, for they are adhering to the nation of Christians that are found in the land at present. Nevertheless, their customs are confused. But those [whose staff fell] towards the west, in the middle of the inhabitable earth, their lot and journey was in the kingdom of the Arabs. They united [with them], adhered to their faith and embraced [it]. [38]<sup>374</sup>

The identity of those who went “to the regions of upper India” is unclear. The only Turks to have moved into northern India were the Ghaznavids, who were always staunchly Muslim, and Seljük-Ghaznavid relations, culminating in the Battle of Dandanqan (1040), hardly fit Michael’s account of cooperation and agreement between the three groups. His statement that

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<sup>372</sup> *Ibid*, III, 155.

<sup>373</sup> H.B. Paksoy, personal correspondence, 29 July, 2004 (to whom I am indebted for supplying the origin of this story).

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid*, III, 155.

“they have amongst them Christians and pagans” is curious. Although he is familiar with the tradition of St. Thomas preaching in India,<sup>375</sup> Michael does not mention Christians in India anywhere else in his *Chronicle*. Perhaps he confused reports that he heard of Christians in India with other reports of Christians amongst the pre-Seljūk Turks.<sup>376</sup>

Michael’s information on “those whose lot was the region of the north” is more accurate, although he is mistaken in seeing a common origin for the Cumans and the Seljūks. The Qipchaq-Cumans, known as *Cumans* to Greeks and Romans, *Qipchaqs* to Muslims, Georgians and Armenians, and *Polovtsy* to Russians, were an important power on the steppe who later contributed to both the Golden Horde (the Qipchaq Khanate) and the Mamlūk dynasty in Egypt.

The Muslim writer al-Marwazi, writing c.1120, speaks of a significant chain reaction of migrations set off around 1017-18 in which the ‘Qun’ people, considered by many scholars to be an element of the later Qipchaq-Cumans, played an important role: “They were Nestorian Christians, and had migrated from their habitat, being pressed for pastures.”<sup>377</sup> The Oghuz, initially pushed westward by the Qun, were supplanted by the Qipchaqs on the south Russian steppe in the mid-eleventh century. There was never any formal cooperation between these two Turkic groups, only conflict and competition for territory.

Michael states that “they are adhering to the nation of Christians that are found in the land at present. Nevertheless, their customs are confused.” This is presumably a reference to the Nestorian faith of at least some of the Qipchaqs.<sup>378</sup> However, there were also Qipchaqs who took refuge from the Rus’ in Georgia in the late eleventh century who converted to Orthodox Christianity; Michael would also have considered these as ‘confused.’ Michael relates that the Turks who went north were called Cumans “from the name which that land bears.” He has presumably picked this up from either Byzantine or Arabic sources, based on Pliny, who speaks in his *Historia Naturalis* of “the pass [of Darial] as being defended by a fortress called Cumania.”<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> *Ibid*, I, 147, 258.

<sup>376</sup> The source for both of these would have been the Church of the East, but since he says nothing about either of these subjects elsewhere in his *Chronicle* and generally reveals little knowledge of ‘Nestorian’ missionary efforts, this is doubtful.

<sup>377</sup> Quoted in Golden, “Migration,” 81. See also Pritsak, “Migratory,” 157. Al-Marwazi’s report is corroborated by the Armenian chronicler Matthew of Edessa (d. 1136).

<sup>378</sup> On the later success of Catholicism amongst the Qipchaqs, see Salaville, “Les Comans” and Golden, “Codex Cumanicus.”

<sup>379</sup> Anderson, “Caspian Gates,” 143. An alternate perspective is given by Peter Golden, who deals with this subject in his forthcoming “Shaping” (personal correspondence, 15 June, 2004).

Michael mentions the Cumans in two other places.<sup>380</sup> In Book XV, Chapter 12, he says of emperor Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118) that “by his wisdom, he delivered their city [Constantinople] from the Franks, the Cumans, the Serbs, and the Baloqayē (Turks).”<sup>381</sup> This is actually not a reference to the Cumans, but rather to the Pechenegs, whose power in the Balkans was broken by a Byzantine-Cuman alliance in 1091.

The second reference describes how, in 1122, “John [John II Comnenus, 1118-43], emperor of the Greeks, made war against the Cuman people and since then they have been in submission to the Greeks.” Michael includes a description of the Cumans:

These Cumans are a group of the Turks; their language is Turkish, but they know neither Moses, nor the prophets, nor Christ our Lord, nor Muḥammad. Everywhere they go, they have with them their women, their children, and their baggage, and they shelter themselves with wooden chariots, with which they form a wall about their camp. At that time, they came up the banks of the River Danube and came to seize Constantinople, until the time when this emperor won a great victory over them, and since then, they have been in submission to the empire of the Greeks.<sup>382</sup>

Again, as Chabot notes, “the author has here confounded the Cumans with the Pechenegs.”<sup>383</sup> Thus, the people that Michael calls ‘Cumans’ in two other places are actually the Pechenegs, leading one to wonder if his reference in Book XIV is also to that group, although the only efforts to Christianize the Pechenegs, by Bruno of Querfurt in 1007, were unsuccessful,<sup>384</sup> which does not accommodate Michael’s statements about the status of Christianity amongst “those who went north.”

The third group, “those [whose staff fell] towards the west” are obviously the Seljüks, but the way Michael tells the story here implies that the Seljüks were already in the process of moving west to seize the “kingdom of the Arabs” before they adopted Islam. However, Seljük converted in 985, followed by his sons over the next two decades,<sup>385</sup> 50-70 years before Toghril Beg captured Baghdad, by which time they were already staunch defenders of Sunni Islam. Again, Michael’s interpretation does not align with the historic facts, but it fits into his overall purpose of showing how God led the Turks “from the east to the west.”

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<sup>380</sup> However, they are mentioned by neither the Anonymous Chronicler nor Bar ‘Ebroyo.

<sup>381</sup> *Michael*, III, 204.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid*, III, 206-07.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid*, III, 206, n. 8.

<sup>384</sup> Pritsak, “Pečenegs,” 24.

<sup>385</sup> Cahen, “Malik-nameh,” 44.

## Praise for the Divine Will

Michael concludes Chapter 4 by praising God for guiding the Turks to the Middle East:

And therefore, it is right to praise the divine will that leads all at all times and in every way and to say with the prophet, “The Lord does whatever he wants in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and in all of their depths” (Psalm 135:6). Truly, “Great is our Lord and mighty is his power” (Psalm 147:5)<sup>386</sup> and he alone “rules over the kingdom of men. He gives victory to whom he wants and establishes humble men in it,” (Daniel 4:17)<sup>387</sup> as it is written in the divine prophet. The End. [39]<sup>388</sup>

This is Michael’s main point: the Turks have not come of their own will, but have been brought by God himself, who directed and guided them by shamanistic elements they were familiar with: talking wolves and staffs thrown in the air. Furthermore, he has done this because of their humble origin and lack of sophistication. Michael specifically quotes from Daniel 4:17, which records the words that king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon heard in the dream that foretold his humbling. This verse, with its emphasis on humility, is quoted by both Michael and the Anonymous Chronicler in near-identical passages describing the advent of the Arabs:

Heraclius [610-41] did not allow the Orthodox<sup>389</sup> to present themselves before him, and he refused to hear their complaints about acts of vandalism committed on their churches [by Chalcedonians]. This is why the God of vengeance, who has power over the kingdoms of men on earth, giving it to whom he wants and raising up to it the lowliest of men, seeing the overflowing measure of the wickedness of the Romans—how they used every means to destroy our people and our church, so that our community was almost annihilated—[this is why] he roused up and brought the Ishmaelites from the land of the South—the most despised and insignificant of the peoples of the earth—to effect through them our deliverance. In this we gained no small advantage, in that we were saved from the tyrannical rule of the Romans.<sup>390</sup>

By referring back to this verse, Michael reinforces his main message: world events are governed by Providence. Just as God had earlier brought the lowly Arabs to rule over the

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<sup>386</sup> The wording in both quotations is identical to the Peshitta.

<sup>387</sup> This differs somewhat from the Peshitta (where it is 4:14), which I have translated as “The ruler is exalted amongst the kingdom of men. He gives it to whom he wants and he establishes humble men over it,” suggesting that Michael chose to abridge and adapt the Peshitta text.

<sup>388</sup> *Michael*, III, 156.

<sup>389</sup> Referring to the Syrian Orthodox (Monophysites), not the Greek Orthodox (Chalcedonians).

<sup>390</sup> Brock, “Syriac Views,” 11, translated by him from two parallel passages: *Chron. 1234*, I, 185 and *Michael*, II, 412-13. Its reproduction in nearly identical form in both chronicles indicates a common source (probably the *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tell Maḥre), since the Anonymous Chronicler did not use material from Michael’s *Chronicle*.

Syrian Orthodox, so he has now raised up the humble Turks and handed over to them ‘the kingdom of men.’<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> By stating this, Michael was on common ground with “Sunnī writers [who] sought an ideological and theological justification for the near-universal domination of the Turks in the Middle East” (Bosworth, “Barbarian,” 15). This is in contrast to a fellow Monophysite, the Armenian chronicler Matthew of Edessa (d. 1136), who wrote of “the savage nation of infidels called Turks,” “those wicked and abominable children of Ham,” and “the crazed and pernicious nation of the Turks” (Dostourian, *Matthew*, 44, 49, 59, 101).

## Chapter 7: The Conversion of the Turks to Islam (Book XIV, Chapter 5)

### Three Reasons for Converting

Michael devotes the final chapter of Book XIV to “the union in faith of the nation of the Turks with the Arabs.” [40]<sup>392</sup> He focusses most of the chapter on three reasons that the Turks “were easily united to the Arabs and accepted the faith that they possessed.” [41]<sup>393</sup> The first reason, as Michael has already mentioned, is the underlying monotheism of the Turks: “those Turks always proclaimed one God, even in the remote land where they dwelt, albeit supposing the visible firmament is God.”

Here, Michael supplies the name of the God that the Turks worshipped: “Qan Tangri, because *Qan* is sky-blue in their language and *Tangri* [is] God and it is supposed by them that heaven is the only God.” As a result, “when they heard about the one God of which the Arabs spoke, they adhered to their faith.” [42]<sup>394</sup>

Chabot notes that “in the place of  $\text{قن}$  [*qn*] (which is also found in the Arabic version), it should read  $\text{قك}$  [*qk*]<sup>395</sup>, Turkish  $\text{گök}$  *gök*, a word which signifies, in Turkish and Mongol, ‘the blue colour of the sky’. Moreover, the Armenian translator has read it thus.”<sup>396</sup> However, the phrase *kök* (or *gök*) *tängri* often means just “the blue sky,” without any religious connotations.<sup>397</sup> In addition, the phrase *tängri qan* (or *xan*)<sup>398</sup> is recorded by Movsēs Daxuranci in a description of the ‘North Caucasian Huns’ prior to their conversion to Christianity by the Albanian bishop Israyel in 681: “Using horses as burnt offerings they worship some gigantic savage monster whom they invoke as the god T‘angri Xan.”<sup>399</sup> Peter Golden notes, “in the nineteenth century... Altay shamanists in their prayers still called on

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<sup>392</sup> *Michael*, III, 156.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid*, III, 156.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid*, III, 156.

<sup>395</sup> Since Chabot’s manuscript is not vocalized, it is impossible to know what the vowels are in these two words. Reading final *kāph* for *nun* in an unknown word is an understandable scribal error.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid*, III, 156, n. 4.

<sup>397</sup> Clauson, *Etymological Dictionary*, 523-24, 708-09.

<sup>398</sup> On the alternation between *q* and *x* in different Turkic dialects and the use of *x* in place of original *q* in translations from Turkic into other languages, see Golden, *Khazar Studies*, 124-25, 196.

<sup>399</sup> Dowsett, *History*, 156.

*Xan Tengere*.”<sup>400</sup> Thus, this form may actually be what Michael wrote, but without his autograph we cannot know for sure.<sup>401</sup>

The process of conversion to Islam was more complex than Michael’s simplistic statement here. As noted above, the underlying belief system of the Turks was not exclusively monotheistic and Islamization did not remove the foundation of Turkish religion, especially for the semi-nomadic Türkmén: “Although the Turks had accepted Islam a century before they arrived in Anatolia, their conversion, because of their nomadic way of life, was still very superficial, and under the veneer of Islam their old shamanistic traditions and beliefs survived.”<sup>402</sup> However, Seljük’s probable contact with monotheistic Jews or Christians (reflected in the names of his sons) may have laid a foundation for his later conversion to Islam.

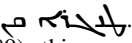
Michael gives as his second reason the relationship between the former Turks and the latter Turks, namely that the latter adopted the religion of the former: “When these new Turks, who emigrated later, met their kin and fellow speakers of their language, because of this they found that they prevailed and they also adhered to these [things], according to their declarations.” [43]<sup>403</sup>

Again, the identity of the “kin and fellow speakers” is unclear, since the Ghaznavids were mortal enemies of the Seljüks and the Qarakhanids were located in Central Asia and hence not ‘on the outside.’ The most likely explanation is that Michael means the Turkic *mamluks* in the service of the Caliph who, after the Seljük conquest, would have been absorbed into their armies. Since these were mostly fellow Oghuz, they can truly be described as “kin,” although, again, they had no relationship to the Turks described in Chapter 3 who had come out “100 years before the invasion of the Arabs” and the Seljüks were already solidly Muslim by the time they came into contact with the *mamluks*, so there is little chance that the Turks in the caliphal armies had much religious influence on them.

Michael explains the third reason for converting to Islam as follows:

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<sup>400</sup> Golden, *Khazar Studies*, 92.

<sup>401</sup> Interestingly, an Arabic manuscript consisting of excerpts from Michael’s Chronicle says of the Turks that “[in] their ancient faith they had known only Heaven, i.e. God, and they referred to it as ‘The Azure of God’. ‘Qan’ [means] ‘blue’” (Ebied & Young, “Extracts,” 195-96). The Arabic text reproduced in the article inserts the Syriac words  (*tangri qan*) (*ibid*, 188). Due to the late date of the manuscript that the authors worked with (1889), this source cannot help us in determining which of the two options, *qan tangri* or *kök tangri*, was the original.

<sup>402</sup> *CHI*, 256.

<sup>403</sup> *Michael*, III, 156.

When the Arabs were taking the Turks with them as mercenaries for war against the Greeks, they entered prosperous countries and provisioned themselves by pillaging. They were hearing from the Arabs and accepting the word of Muḥammad, who had said that when foreigners renounced the worship of images and such things and confessed his faith, a good and plentiful land would be given to them and they would rule over it. [44]<sup>404</sup>

As a result of this, they adopted circumcision and the Muslim ablutions before prayer. Thus, the promise of “a good and plentiful land” for those who adopted Islam played a significant role in their conversion. The words of Muḥammad quoted here are found earlier in Michael’s *Chronicle*, as well as the *Anonymous Chronicle to AD 1234* and are possibly from Dionysius of Tell Maḥre.<sup>405</sup> Again, the reference may be to the *mamluks*, but these would have converted to Islam as part of their training process, before participating in warfare; the Arabs rarely employed pagan mercenaries, since war usually had a religious component which required the troops to be committed Muslims.<sup>406</sup> In contrast, Michael presents the conversion taking place as a result of involvement with the Arabs in military expeditions. Given the fact that Michael is here referring to the “later Turks,” he must have the Seljüks in mind, but they too converted to Islam long before they “entered prosperous countries and provisioned themselves by pillaging” (prior to Seljük’s conversion, the Oghuz operated primarily on the steppe, alternately fighting or allying with groups such as the Khazars, Pechenegs, Rus’ and Volga Bulgars).

Thus, of Michael’s three stated reasons for conversion, Turkic monotheism (although not as pure as he implies) may have played a role, but kinship with Turks who had previously converted is not borne out by the historical facts. However, the promise of “a good and plentiful land” that “they would rule over” may reflect the primary motivation behind the Seljük conversion to Islam. Bar ‘Ebroyo, referring to the *Malik-nāma*, suggests as much: “If we do not enter the Faith of the people of the country in which we desire to live and make a pact with them... no man will cleave to us, and we shall be a small and solitary people.”<sup>407</sup> Without converting, the Seljüks probably would never have gained the political power they did. Interestingly, Michael does not deal with the question of why the Turks converted to Islam, rather than Christianity. For him, peace under Muslim rule was far preferable to persecution under Byzantine rule.

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<sup>404</sup> *Ibid*, III, 156-57.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid*, II, 403; *Chron. 1234*, I, 178 and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 130.

<sup>406</sup> See *EI*, “Mamlūk,” 317 and Ayalon, “Mamlūk Novice.”

<sup>407</sup> *Chronography*, 195.



## Casting Lots for a Leader

In discussing leadership amongst the Turks, Michael notes, “The Tayyayē (Arabs) [also] accepted the Turks, that whoever rises up from them and rules would be called and proclaimed ‘king of the Muslims’ [but] only the chief of their faith was to be called ‘Caliph.’ He (i.e. the Turkish Sultan) would be declared king by him (i.e. the Caliph).” [45]<sup>408</sup>

By referring to the offices of ‘Caliph’ and ‘Sultan,’ Michael alludes to the tensions that eventually developed between the Arabs and the Turks, especially as the Turkish Sultan gained increasing power at the expense of the Arab Caliph. This tension is described by Bar ‘Ebroyo, who relates the ‘open enmity’ which developed between the two rulers when Toghril Beg asked for the hand of the Caliph’s daughter in marriage.<sup>409</sup>

Michael’s description of how the Turks chose a leader again incorporates the shamanistic practice of staff-throwing mentioned in relation to their emigration:

And when they entered the countries of the Persians, they began to seize the cities over which they wanted to establish a king. And the chiefs of the tribes assembled together, one man from each tribe, 70 men from 70 tribes, the great and honourable worthies that were amongst them, and they stood in a circle, [each] with only his staff in his hand. And they made a circular mark, that is to say a round form, on the ground and all of them agreed and affirmed that the one whose staff fell in the middle of the mark would rule. And each one threw his staff upwards, as high as he was able. All of them fell outside of the mark, but one alone fell in the middle of it and stuck into the ground upright. And it was [the staff] of one from a humble tribe and he ruled. [46]<sup>410</sup>

Several interesting points arise from this anecdote. According to H.B. Paksoy, Sufi legends only mention the practice of throwing staffs in connection with dividing up territory, not choosing a leader.<sup>411</sup> Furthermore, the “70 men from 70 tribes” reflects the Judeo-Christian worldview, not Turkic history. Groupings of Turkic tribes such as the *Üch Oghuz* (“three Oghuz”), the *Toquz Oghuz* (“nine Oghuz”), and the *On Oq* (“ten arrows”) are attested in the Orkhon inscriptions,<sup>412</sup> but the number 70 has no special significance in Turkic culture. It does, however, symbolize wholeness in the Judeo-Christian tradition and is reflected in the number of names in the Table of Nations.<sup>413</sup> Perhaps Michael is making a subtle connection

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<sup>408</sup> *Michael*, III, 157.

<sup>409</sup> *Chronography*, 215. Michael does not mention this event.

<sup>410</sup> *Michael*, III, 157.

<sup>411</sup> H.B. Paksoy, personal correspondence, 6 August, 2004.

<sup>412</sup> Tekin, *Orkhon Turkic*, 261, 263, etc.

<sup>413</sup> There were also 70 descendents of Jacob (Gen. 46:27), 70 elders of Israel (Ex. 24:1), 70 scholars who prepared the Septuagint, and ‘the 70’ sent out by Jesus (Luke 10:1).

with his initial theme, namely the place of the Turks in redemptive history, due to their putative place in that original group of 70 nations.

Michael mentions neither Seljūk nor Toghrīl Beg in the context of choosing a leader (in fact, Seljūk is not mentioned anywhere in his *Chronicle*, either as a personal or dynastic name). In contrast, in their introductions to Seljūk rule, the Anonymous Chronicler mentions ‘Saltuq,’ but not Toghrīl Beg,<sup>414</sup> while Bar ‘Ebroyo mentions Seljūk, his sons, and his grandsons Toghrīl and Chagrī.<sup>415</sup> In addition, he recounts the story of Toghrīl Beg in detail,<sup>416</sup> but Michael only mentions him twice by name in Book XV.<sup>417</sup> It is as if Michael’s account in Book XIV is intended to be read and interpreted separately from the straightforward history of the Turks that unfolds from Book XV on.

Finally, the idea that a leader would be chosen from amongst representatives of the various Turkic tribes in this semi-democratic way is at odds with the Turkic tradition of absolute political power being centralized in the leader of the dominant group, usually connected in one way or another with the regal Ashina clan.<sup>418</sup> Again, it seems that Michael is trying to keep the Turks he has manufactured in Book XIV separate from the Turks mentioned in the rest of the *Chronicle*, where they are involved in raiding, pillaging, and destroying cities, towns, and monasteries in which the Syrian Orthodox faithful lived. This is borne out by Michael’s reference to the one chosen to rule being “from a humble tribe,” an echo of his quotation from Daniel 4:17 at the end of Chapter 4. Although Turkic culture has traditionally valued strength in leadership more than humility, Michael’s schema requires the opposite and this story effectively proves his point.

### **The Providence of God**

Michael closes Book XIV with an affirmation of the providence of God in guiding and directing the affairs of humanity: “And none of these [things] happened without the all-powerful Providence overseeing at all times these [things] that are required. For those who assembled together to cast lots and those who submitted to bow down to one (i.e. the one who became their leader), [did so] through the finger of God, to whom alone is due praise, world without end, forever and ever, Amen. The End.” [47]<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> *Chron. 1234*, II, 33-34.

<sup>415</sup> *Chronography*, 195-96.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid*, 198-216.

<sup>417</sup> *Michael*, III, 158, 170.

<sup>418</sup> On the structure of Turkic clans, tribes, and tribal confederations, see Golden, “Imperial,” 49-52.

<sup>419</sup> *Michael*, III, 157.

Thus, Michael ends where he started, affirming the role of the Turks in working out God's purposes. The physical arrangement of columns in the Syriac manuscript helps to underscore this theme, since both Chapter 4 (the last chapter in the outer column of the Syriac text) and Chapter 5 (the last chapter in the inner column) end with references to the sovereignty of God in establishing the reign of the Turks. Thus, at the end of the book, in both columns, the eye of the reader is drawn to the same message; the advent of the Turks has been the result of God Almighty directing human affairs to accomplish his will.

## Conclusion

The three chroniclers lived in changing political situations which are reflected in the foci of their writings. Turkish dynasties still dominated the Middle East during the lifetime of Michael, although the Ayyubids were beginning to capture Zangid territory. The Seljūk Sultanate of Rum, ruling over areas where many Syrian Orthodox lived, was a major power in the area, having recently defeated the Danishmendids (1174-78). However, Turkish power was clearly on the wane when the Anonymous Chronicler wrote and by the end of his *Chronicle*, Mongol incursions had already begun (1221). During Bar 'Ebroyo's lifetime, the Mongols reigned supreme in the Middle East and even the Rum Sultanate had become their vassals after the Battle of Kösedagh (1243).

Due to their different circumstances, the three chroniclers differ in their presentation of the beginning of Seljūk rule. Michael devotes an entire book of his *Chronicle* to them, a theological treatise justifying the rule of the Seljüks to his readers by demonstrating how God led them from their distant homeland and delivered to them the 'kingdom of men.' He supports his arguments by drawing on biblical and apocryphal sources, earlier Syriac chronicles, the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, unnamed Iberian sources, and Turkish oral traditions.

By contrast, the Anonymous Chronicler is much more straightforward, adhering to the historical facts as he understands them and omitting 'mythical elements' like the connection with Japheth, Magog, Holophernes, or Alexander's Iron Gate. He focusses on dates, facts, and figures, reserving his polemic for vilifying the Mongols, whose initial invasions he witnessed.

Bar 'Ebroyo combines a very brief summary of Michael's account, including a quotation from Ezekiel 38, with material from the *Malik-nāma* and other Muslim sources. On the whole, he accepts Michael's identification of the Turks with Gog and Magog, along with his positive interpretation of this biblical theme. Bar 'Ebroyo's mention of the Turks in connection with Japheth, Holophernes, the death of Yazdegird, and other episodes is usually a *verbatim* repeat of Michael.

From his influential position as Patriarch, Michael exhorted his readers to appreciate the benefits of Turkish rule as being preferable to life under the 'wicked and heretical' Greeks, stating that, "if God has permitted, because of our sins, the Arabs or the Turks to reign over

us, in his compassion, at no time and in no way has he abandoned us or will he abandon us, but, by his providence, he will guard us and deliver us from all our enemies, because of his great love for his Church.”<sup>420</sup>

Michael’s theological persuasions played a major role in his writing about the Turks. He was driven by the need to demonstrate the sovereignty of God in bringing the Turks to rule over the Middle East. Unswayed by John of Mardin’s suggestion that evil was the result of human actions, rather than the will of God, he was able to present the Turks in Book XIV of his *Chronicle* as divinely directed to rule over the Middle East, despite following this with a description in Book XV, Chapter 1 of their attack on his hometown Melitene which resulted in great suffering for the Syrian Orthodox living there.

Book XIV establishes the Turks’ divine right to rule by giving their biblical and historical credentials; rather than reviling them, his innovative use of the term ‘sons of Magog’ honours them. His description of their customs demonstrates their humble origins, which qualifies them to rule over the ‘kingdom of men,’ according to Daniel 4:17. God himself backs this up with signs from heaven: wolves that talk and staffs that divine the future. In fact, Michael equates this divine direction with the star that led the Magi, elevating the Seljūk invasion to near-sacred status. Throughout, he asserts that Providence is in control of human history and the Turks have a God-ordained role to play in it. His readers are not to question the sovereign will of the Almighty, but to accept it humbly.

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<sup>420</sup> *Ibid*, III, 345.

## Bibliography

### Abbreviations used in Bibliography and Footnotes

*AEMA: Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*

*BJRL: Bulletin of the John Rylands (University) Library*

*BSOAS: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*

*CHEIA: The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*

*CHI: The Cambridge History of Islam*

*CSCO: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*

*EI: Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*

*EncIran: Encyclopaedia Iranica*

*IUUAS: Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series*

*JAAS: Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*

*JAOS: Journal of the American Oriental Society*

*OCA: Orientalia Christiana Analecta*

*OLP: Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*

*PdO: Parole de l'Orient*

*ROC: Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*

Subs: Subsidia

Syr: Scriptores Syri

T: Textus (Syriac text)

V: Versio (translation)

*ZDMG: Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*

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