A New Fragment of the
Narratives of Conon

Andy Hilkens

IT WAS COMMON PRACTICE among ancient and medieval historians to update the writings of their predecessors who had failed to mention or elucidate certain events by supplementing information from additional sources. It is therefore no surprise that the Syriac Chronicle of the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Michael I (1126–1199) is a treasure-trove of historiographical and non-historiographical material from a wide array of Greek, Syriac, and Arabic sources.[1]

Like their Greek predecessors Eusebius of Caesarea and John Malalas, Syriac chroniclers continued to incorporate mostly

---

[1] An in-depth study of Michael's Chronicle and all its sources remains a desideratum, but a lot of ground has already been covered in this area. See e.g. D. Weltecke, *Die "Beschreibung der Zeiten" von Mor Michael dem Großen (1126–1199). Eine Studie zu ihrem historischen und historiographiegeschichtlichen Kontext* (Leuven 2003), "Les trois grandes chroniques syro-orthodoxes des XIIᵉ et XIIIᵉ siècles," in M. Debié (ed.), *L'historiographie syriaque* (Paris 2009) 107–135, and "A Renaissance in Historiography? Patriarch Michael, the Anonymous Chronicle ad a. 1234, and Bar ʿEbrōyō," in H. Teule et al. (eds.), *The Syriac Renaissance* (Leuven 2010) 95–111; J. J. Van Ginkel, "Making History: Michael the Syrian and his Sixth-Century Sources," in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII* (Rome 1998) 351–358, and "A Man is not an Island," in *The Syriac Renaissance* 113–121; A. Hilkens, "Andronicus et son influence sur la présentation de l'histoire postdiluvienne et pré-abrahamique dans la Chronique syriaque anonyme jusqu'à l'année 1234," in P. Blaudeau and P. Van Nuffelen (eds.), *L'Historiographie tardo-antique et la transmission de savoirs* (Berlin 2015) 55–81, "Syriac Ilioupersides: The Fall of Troy in Syriac Historiography," *Le Muséon* 126 (2013) 285–317, and *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle up to the Year 1234 and its Sources* (forthcoming), which also covers many of Michael's sources.

Greek, but also Roman mythographical material into their writings.[2] One noteworthy illustration is a narrative on the Amazons that was introduced into the Syriac chronicle tradition by the sixth-century chronicler, ethno-geographer, and astrologer Andronicus. Andronicus' chronicle has not come down to us, but fragments of this text survive in a wide array of historical, exegetical, and epistolary sources, ranging from the seventh to the thirteenth century and written by Syrian Orthodox and Melkite authors as well as members of the Church of the East.[3] Judging from the evidence preserved in the Arabic chronicle of Agapius, the Melkite bishop of Mabbug (fl. ca. 942),[4] the Chronicle of Michael,[5] and the Anonymous Syriac Chronicle up to the Year 1234,[6] Andronicus integrated the myth of the Amazons into his pre-Christian narrative by identifying the Amazons as "the house of Sheba" and king Samirus of Chaldea and king Sanus of Egypt as their and their ancestors' adversaries.

A particularly popular event from the rich world of Greco-

[2] On Malalas' and other Greek chronographers' use of mythographers see P. Van Nuffelen, "Malalas and the Chronographic Tradition," in M. Meier et al. (eds.), *The Sources of John Malalas* (Stuttgart forthcoming), which the author very kindly allowed me to consult.

[3] On Andronicus' work and his dependants see Hilkens, in *L'Historiographie tardo-antique* 55–81, and *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*. For an earlier study, predominantly based on the evidence if the eleventh-century East-Syrian chronicler Elias bar Shenaya of Nisibis and the Chronicle of Michael, see D. Serruys, "Les Canons d'Eusèbe, d'Annianos et d'Andronicos d'après Élie de Nisibe," *BZ* 22 (1913) 1–36.

[4] Agap. *Chron.*: A. A. Vasiliev, *PO* 5.614.

[5] *Chron.* 2.3: J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien* I–IV (Paris 1899–1910) IV 10; G. Y. Ibrahim, *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex of the Chronicle of Michael the Great* (Piscataway 2009) 11; transl. Chabot I 21–22). Worth noting is Michael's source reference to Aristoboulos, presumably Aristoboulos of Cassandrea (fourth/third century B.C.E.), who was a biographer of Alexander the Great (*FGrHist* 5).

[6] J.-B. Chabot *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens* (Paris 1916) I 50, transl. 37.

———————

Roman mythology was the Trojan war, for which Syriac historians quarried a wide array of sources, presumably because Eusebius was too succinct on the matter.[7] The anonymous author of the Chronicle of 1234, for instance, not content with an account of the Trojan war that was based on John Malalas' summary of Dictys of Crete,[8] opted instead for a long literary narrative which appears to be based on books from the Epic Cycle.[9] Equally peculiar are adaptations and reinterpretations of five entries from the chronological canons of Eusebius' *Chronicle*, which are extant only in the Chronicle of Michael and reveal one of his sources' knowledge of Androgeus, an obscure figure from Vergil's *Aeneid*.[10]

Similarly popular was the myth of Romulus and Remus, for which the main sources were Eusebius and Malalas.[11] But a peculiar account of the childhood of Romulus and Remus is extant in the Chronicle of Michael,[12] which I was unable to attribute to a specific source in 2013. The fragment in question appears immediately after a brief entry from Eusebius' *Chrono-*

---

[7] On this see Hilkens, *Le Muséon* 126 (2013) 285–317.

[8] Compare Jo. Mal. *Chron.* 5 (transl. Jeffreys al., 45–79) with Agap. *Chron.* (*PO* 11.15) and Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 4.7 (Chabot IV 33, Ibrahim 36, transl. Chabot I 57). Agapius refers to Homer as his source, Michael mentions a certain Distys. Chabot suggested emending Distys to Damastes (Troas), the Greek chronicler from the fifth or fourth century B.C.E. who is said to have written about the Trojan war (*FGrHist* 5). In actuality, Distys is an error for Dictys of Crete. On this material see Hilkens, *Le Muséon* 126 (2013) 297, esp. n.82.

[9] Chabot, *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234* I 66–78, transl. 50–59, with Hilkens, *Le Muséon* 126 (2013) 301–310.

[10] Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 4.7 (Chabot IV 33, Ibrahim 36, transl. Chabot I 56), with Hilkens, *Le Muséon* 126 (2013) 294–296.

[11] For some remarks on Syriac historians' discussions of the foundation of Rome and their sources see C. Lange, "Rom wurde von Romulus gegründet. Einige anmerkungen zur Darstellung der Gründung Roms in syrischen Geschichtswerken," in D. Bumazhnov et al. (eds.), *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient: Festschrift für Stephen Gerö* (Leuven 2011) 279–290.

[12] Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 4.15 (Chabot IV 48, Ibrahim 51, transl. Chabot I 80).

logical Canons on the birth of Romulus and Remus to Ares and Ilia.[13] An unknown post-Eusebian chronicler must have felt that Eusebius had not offered enough information on this subject and must have added material from an entirely different source. I give the Syriac text of the fragment, as found in Michael's Chronicle, together with an English translation:

ܐܡܪ ܩܘܡܘ ܒܬܫܥܝܬܗ ܕܥܠܝܗܘܢ ܕܐܝܠܝܐ ܒܪܬܗ ܕܢܡܛܘܪ ܐܚܘܗܝ ܕܐܡܘܠܘܣ ܗܘܐ܀

Qūmūn says in his story about them (Romulus and Remus) that Ilia (MS.: Ilion)[14] was the daughter of Nemetor, the brother of Amulius (MS.: Amulus).[15] After Amulius had killed Nemetor, he reigned in his stead. He violently imprisoned Ilia and her two

[13] Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 4.15 (Chabot IV 47, Ibrahim 50, transl. Chabot I 79), "At that time Remus and Romulus were born to Ares and Ilia," with Hier. *Chron.*, transl. Helm 87ᵈ, *Remus et Romulus generantur Marte et Ilia*, and the anonymous sixth-century Armenian translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle*, transl. Karst 181, "Romos und Romilos wurden geboren dem Ares und der Ilia."

[14] The Syriac text is 'Ilion' rather than 'Ilia', but elsewhere in this narrative Ilia's name is written correctly. The Syriac reading, which is also the Greek name for Troy, could reflect (a corruption of) the Greek accusative form of Ilia, Ἰλίαν, but this is mere speculation at this point.

[15] Throughout this fragment Amulius is referred to as Amulus.

twin sons, who were (born) to her from Ares. (Amulius) gave them to a certain one of his shepherds in order to destroy them. (This shepherd) felt sorry for them, placed them in a small boat and sent them away on the river Tiber. And after the small boat had been held fast on the riverbank, it turned over and threw the young lads on the mud. A certain cowherd called Faustulus found them (and) raised them. When he encountered the shepherd who had sent them away on the river, he learnt whose sons they were. He raised them with the milk of a female wolf. When they had grown taller in stature, Faustulus revealed to them whose sons they were and what had happened to them. They became strong, came (to Amulius), killed Amulius and began to rule themselves. They released Ilia from prison and built Rome near the river Tiber in the field of the cowherd Faustulus where they were raised. All of the people of the Latins were called Romans after them.

The name of Michael's source can be read in several ways, including Cymon[16] but given the close parallels with the extant fragments of the *Diegeseis*, this *Qūmūn* must be none other than Conon, the Greek mythographer of the Augustan period. Conon's *Diegeseis* or *Narratives*, a collection of fifty Greek and Roman myths, has not come down to us in its entirety: all that remains are the end of the 46th and the beginning of the 47th narrative in a second-century papyrus fragment (*P.Oxy.* LII 3648), and the summary by Photius (mid-ninth century).[17] This makes the appearance of this fragment in a twelfth-century Syriac historical source all the more surprising and important.

Photius offers us a glimpse of the historical and political background of Conon and his work. According to the patriarch, Conon dedicated his *Narratives* to Archelaus Philopater. Presumably this is an error for Archelaus Philopatris, the ruler of Cappadocia between 36 B.C.E. and A.D. 17.[18] Unlike other

[16] This translation was suggested by Chabot. Other possible renderings are Comon or Cumun.

[17] M. K. Brown, *The Narratives of Konon. Text, Translation and Commentary of the Diegeseis* (Munich/Leipzig 2002) 27.

[18] *Bibl.* cod. 186 (p.141); cf. Brown, *The Narratives of Konon* 1.

---

mythographers such as Pseudo-Apollodorus who "refused to contaminate Greek myths with later Roman elaborations,"[19] Conon included the legend of Romulus and Remus in his *Diegeseis* and even referred to Aeneas' connection to Rome. According to Malcolm Brown, this "scrappy" evidence suggests that Conon "must be reckoned among those realists (such as Nikolaos, Dionysios, and Strabo) who accepted the fact of Roman world domination."[20] While that may be the case, Conon's attention to Roman mythology may also reflect his recognition and celebration of the Romans who backed his *maecenas* Archelaus' rule over Cappadocia.

Conon's versions of some of these myths diverge from the traditional versions that have come down to us. In the 48th narrative, devoted to the childhood of Romulus and Remus, Amulius kills his brother Nemetor, the father of Ilia and grandfather of Romulus and Remus. Traditionally, however, Amulius is said to have simply deposed him. This adjustment required the alteration of one other aspect of the myth: after the twins learn about their heritage from Faustulus, they do not meet their grandfather and restore him to the throne, but kill Amulius and assume power themselves.[21] Given that the same untraditional information with the attribution to *Qūmūn* is available in Michael's Chronicle, we cannot but conclude that Michael is dependent on Conon. The hard part, however, is determining how this material ended up in the chronicle of a twelfth-century Syrian Orthodox patriarch who did not know Greek. That Michael had access to a Syriac translation of Conon or Photius seems highly unlikely, since there is no indication that any other Syriac Christian had knowledge of these writings. Although it is theoretically possible that Michael found this fragment of Conon in a Syriac collection of extracts from mythographical texts, the most likely solution is that this

---

[19] Brown, *The Narratives of Konon* 27.

[20] Brown, *The Narratives of Konon* 27.

[21] Brown, *The Narratives of Konon* 336.

material was introduced into the Syriac chronicle tradition at an earlier time, possibly by Michael's source. This late ancient or early medieval Syriac chronicler probably drew on Conon directly or on a collection of translated excerpts from Greek mythographical texts. Given that there is no trace of Conon in the Greek chronicle tradition, the involvement of a Greek chronicle seems unlikely.

Comparison of Michael's and Photius' accounts does not allow us to draw any conclusions regarding the path of transmission of this fragment from Greek into Syriac. The Syriac text is certainly not a literal translation of Photius' summary. There are in fact two noteworthy discrepancies between Photius' account and the Syriac text. First, the Syriac account adds an etymological explanation of the term 'Romans': Michael connects it to the names of Romulus and Remus. Second, the supernatural claim, in Conon as well as Photius, that a she-wolf found Romulus and Remus and nourished them with her milk until they were found by Faustulus has been rationalized. According to Michael (and probably also his source), the cowherd Faustulus raised the twins with wolf's milk. This method of rationalization is very different from that found in Malalas, for example, who says that a shepherdess called Lykaina found and suckled Romulus and Remus. According to Malalas, the term *lykaina*, "she-wolf," was applied to "the country-women who graze sheep (…) because they spend their whole life among wolves."[22]

Michael also offers Malalas' interpretation of this episode immediately after the fragment of Conon, albeit in a slightly altered version.[23] I include a discussion of this material in this

[22] Jo. Mal. *Chron*. 7.7, transl. Jeffreys et al. 95.

[23] Mich. Syr. *Chron*. 4.15 (Chabot IV 48, Ibrahim 51, transl. Chabot I 80). This material from Malalas is followed by another passage from Malalas' seventh book, on the beginning of Romulus' reign after the murder of his brother and the origin of the tradition of the majestic plural. This piece of information is also extant in Agap. *Chron*. (*PO* 11.51–52) and *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234* (Chabot I 110, transl. 86–87).

article because it concerns the same subject and because there is a possibility that it was passed on to Michael via the same Syriac source. Michael refers to "others" when he claims that the twins' grandfather (not the brother of their grandfather) Aremulius—possibly a corruption due to confusion between Romulus and Amulius—ordered the twins to be thrown into the river. Despite the claim of their mother Ilia, priestess of Ares, that they had been begotten by Ares himself, Aremulius had realized that she had committed adultery. The passage continues with the statement that "a certain shepherdess found them and raised them." Some words are missing from the last three lines of the passage, but the identification of women who herd sheep as "she-wolves" is still readable.[24] In spite of the lacunae in the manuscript and the absence of a clear source reference, the remaining fragments allow us to conclude that Michael is reliant on Malalas here. Both chroniclers say that the brothers were born from adultery rather than divine intervention, that A(re)mulius was their grandfather, that a shepherdess found the twins, and that shepherdesses were called she-wolves. However, there are a few discrepancies between the Greek and the Syriac narratives, including the statement that the twins were left on the Tiber (Michael) rather than in a forest (Malalas) and the attribution to Ilia (Michael) rather than the myth itself (Malalas) of the claim that the twins were fathered by Ares. Michael's source appears to have included Malalas' narrative as an alternative to the traditional

---

[24] Not only is the passage corrupted and lacunary, there are some discrepancies between the copy of the manuscript that Chabot had made (and on which he based his translation) and the *Vorlage* of this copy, the sixteenth-century Edessa-Aleppo codex. Although the Edessa-Aleppo codex is also lacunary at this point (Ibrahim 51), we can make out the following words:

ܚܠܡ [ܘܘܘ] ܡܢܠܗܐ ܂ ܘܩܕܡ ܂ ܘܐܘܪ ܐ ܐܪܡܘܠܝܘܣ ܂ ܡܠܟ [ܘܘܘ] ܡܗ

ܘܒܪܗ ܗ ܕܐܪܐܬ ܂ ܐܬܝܕܥ ܂ ܕܗܘ [ܘܘܘ] ܕܪܥܝܢ ܥܢܐ ܂ ܐܪܟܡܝ ܗܘܘ.

view that the god Ares was the father of Romulus and Remus. Ironically, the Roman tradition is embodied here by Conon whose version of the myth was far from traditional.

Whether it was the same Syriac chronicler who used Malalas and Conon cannot be determined. However, the tenth-century Arabic chronicle of Agapius, whose dependence on Malalas was determined by Vasiliev, could offer some clues in that regard. Agapius also identifies Amulius as the twins' grand-father and even preserves Malalas' claim that the children were left in a forest (*PO* 11.50–51). Agapius' narrative, however, also has several interesting features. First, he mentions the statue of Romulus and Remus and the wolf in Rome, which is mentioned neither by Malalas nor Michael. Second, he refers to Ilia as Helen and equates Ares with his Latin counterpart Mars. Third, rather than referring to the myth for the claim that Ares had fathered the twins, as Malalas had done, Agapius refers to "Roman wise men and poets." Fourth and last, despite stating that it was a shepherdess who found and suckled the twins, Agapius Latinized and masculinized the term *lykaina* to *licunius*, a non-existent Latin word (*PO* 11.50).

In spite of these smaller discrepancies between the narratives of Malalas, Agapius, and Michael, I have suggested elsewhere that Agapius and Michael are reliant on Malalas through the same Syriac chronicle, written between ca. 565 and ca. 942.[25] This Syriac common source featured a substantial amount of mythological material from Malalas, including an entry on the burial of Zeus on Crete from Malalas' first book, the previously mentioned synopsis of Dictys' account of the Trojan war from the fifth book, and longer narratives on early Roman myth and history from the seventh book. Malalas was probably not the only source for this Syriac chronicler. Interlaced within the materials from Malalas' seventh book in the chronicles of Agapius and Michael, we find one other entry, taken from an unknown source, which mentions Romulus' organization of a

---

[25] Hilkens, *Le Muséon* 126 (2013) 297, esp. n.82.

banquet for the nobility and his distribution of consular largess (*hypateia*).[26]

Identifying this common source with certainty is impossible, but one suitable candidate is John the Stylite of Litarba (d. 737). His is the only now-lost Syriac chronicle of which we know that it was written after the completion of the Chronicle Epitome of Malalas, that it covered pre-Christian times, and that it was used by Michael. Agapius never identifies John's Chronicle as one of his sources, but there are several indications that he used this work as well. First, Agapius and Michael both identify Ahimelech as the high priest who succeeded Zadok:[27] Michael identifies John as his source, and this theory is not attested elsewhere. Second, both preserve an account of the martyrdom of Shamuni and her seven sons in Jerusalem

[26] For an overview of this material see Hilkens, *Le Muséon* 126 (2013) 300–301. Parallels to Malalas' mythological information can also be found in the fragmentarily preserved and anonymous Chronicle on Antiquity, which relates the myths of the partition of Syria, Phoenicia, and Cilicia among the sons of king Agenor of Tyre, Hercules' invention of the colour purple, and an account of the foundation of Rome. On this text see M. Debié, "Jean Malalas et la tradition chronographique de langue syriaque," in J. Beaucamp and S. Agusta-Boularot (eds.), *Recherches sur la chronique de Jean Malalas* (Paris 2004) 147–164, at 150–155, where she suggests that this information came from a common source with Malalas. This is certainly plausible, but the additional suggestion that Michael the Syrian was dependent on Malalas through the Syriac History of Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene (ca. 569) is incorrect. The appearance of the mythographic material from Malalas in the Chronicle of Agapius, who did not use Pseudo-Zachariah, suggests that Agapius' and Michael's common source must be a now-lost Syriac chronicle. This common source cannot have been the Chronicle on Antiquity either, because their versions of the foundation of Rome, for instance, differ considerably. For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned here that the Syriac church historian John of Ephesus (d. 589) also quarried Malalas, but only for information on the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries: see W. Witakowski, "Malalas in Syriac," in E. Jeffreys et al. (eds.), *Studies on John Malalas* (Sydney 1990) 299–310, and Hilkens, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*.

[27] Agap. *Chron.* (*PO* 11.31) and Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 4.11 (Chabot IV 37, Ibrahim 85–86, transl. Chabot II 64).

during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes:[28] in spite of a few discrepancies—probably due to these medieval chroniclers' differing approaches to the selection, extraction, and adaptation of material from their sources —their reliance on a common source is evident from word-for-word agreements between the Syriac and Arabic accounts. Agapius does not identify his source, but Michael refers to "the book of Maccabees, Josephus, the Theologian [= Gregory of Nazianzus], and John the Stylite" for this information. Presumably John—who may have mentioned these other sources—was Michael's direct source. Third and last, their common reliance on John the Stylite is also suggested by their dating of the events from the story of Esther: Agapius places them during the reign of Artaxerxes I.[29] Agapius' testimony is eerily similar to Michael's remarks about John's opinion on this matter, in spite of Michael's dating of the story to the reign of Artaxerxes III instead of Artaxerxes I.[30]

In the end, even if we could determine that John was the intermediary between Malalas on the one hand and Agapius and Michael on the other, we still need to ascertain if the fragment of Conon was part of the same text. Unfortunately, Agapius does not mention Conon, nor does he provide any details that can undeniably be attributed to Conon's *Narratives*. Yet, Agapius might have refrained from copying Conon's version of the myth of Romulus' and Remus' childhood because he preferred Malalas' rationalized version. There is one minor indication that Agapius had access to the passage of Conon: he refers to Ilia as Helen. This discrepancy could reflect the rendering of 'Ilia' as 'Ilion' in the fragment of Conon in Michael's

[28] Agap. *Chron.* (*PO* 11.113) and Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 5.7 (Chabot IV 81–82, Ibrahim 85–86, transl. Chabot II 126–127).

[29] Agap. *Chron.* (*PO* 11.80). Interestingly, Agapius also has a short entry on the story of Esther during the reign of Xerxes (*PO* 11.76), presumably taken from another chronographic source.

[30] Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 5.1 and 5.3 (Chabot IV 66 and 69, Ibrahim 69 and 72, transl. Chabot I 106 and 110).

Chronicle, which Agapius could have misinterpreted as a (corrupted) reference to Helen of Troy. Unfortunately, all of this remains conjecture at this point. What we can conclude from this brief study, however, is that more than a century after their edition and translation, Syriac and Arabic Christian chronicles still offer a wealth of new information about the transmission of Greek and Roman culture and literature in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.[31]

September, 2016   Department of History
                                     Universiteit Gent
                                     UFO – Sint Pietersnieuwstr. 35
                                     9000 Ghent, Belgium
                                     andy.hilkens@ugent.be