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Alexander the Great's Liberation of Rome and an
Idiosyncratic Model of World History in the
Chronicle of John Malalas, the Excerpta Latina Barbari,
and Fulgentius' De aetatibus

Summary – In two sixth-century chronicles, the Greek original of the Excerpta Latina Barbari and the Chronographia of John Malalas, the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians are said to have been freed by Alexander from a combination of eastern peoples including the Assyrians, Chaldaeans, and Persians. The statement is, without a doubt, unhistorical; nevertheless, such deviations from the received historical record rarely represent simple mistakes, but more often purposeful and meaningful manipulations. In this case, Alexander's liberation of the Greeks and Egyptians can be accounted for with reference to the Alexander Romance, a legendary account of his career, but the principal source on Alexander in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. But the Romans remain a puzzle. The notice on Nebuchadnezzar in the Excerpta, however, says that he conquered the Romans. This notice, moreover, seems to intentionally parallel a brief description of Alexander in the Excerpta. Some examination of the details seems to reveal a model of history that placed more emphasis on symmetry and symbolism than on accuracy. The eastern peoples under Nebuchadnezzar and the western nations under Alexander successively achieve dominion over the world, that is, they each establish a world kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar plays the role of the conqueror and Alexander that of the liberator. Thus, there is demonstrable recourse to the rhetoric employed to describe the Persian Wars and other conflicts with eastern powers that goes back to Herodotus and the beginnings of Greek historiography. The broader circulation of this model seems to be evident in echoes of it that can be found in the contemporary De aetatibus mundi of Fulgentius.

The events of history may appear to occur at random, but we can reasonably expect the record of history to proceed according to a certain logic. This logic may be of the historian's own devising or one he has borrowed from a revered authority and thoroughly internalized, but we demand some consistency of it. A failure of consistency, however, need not indicate a weakness in logic. When a history is largely patched together from ill digested sources it may hold together overall, more or less, but still present scattered inconsistencies. There will be jarring points, events and characterizations that remain inexplicable on the basis of the history in which they appear. When we encounter these inconsistencies we ought not to blame the muddled

thinking and sloppy writing of the historian too severely. They disclose to us the logic of his sources, the pattern of another work that lies just below the surface. I would like to examine one such incongruity in the chronicle of John Malalas, a patchwork history if ever there was one: Alexander's liberation of Rome from a conglomeration of eastern peoples.¹ By tracing the background of this purported event through the *Excerpta Latina Barbari*, which provides a parallel preservation of Malalas' source, and to an apparent corroboration in the *De aetatibus* of Fulgentius we will uncover a lost model of world history which contrasted Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander as conqueror and liberator.

The Liberation of Rome

Malalas' chronicle covers the period from Adam to his own day (i. e., the death of Justinian in 565), but its coverage, especially of remote antiquity, is rather uneven. Some periods or events are discussed in great detail, while others are merely noted or ignored altogether. The career of Alexander the Great receives considerable attention, but in many ways unfolds differently from what we read in the more reliable historical records. At least one instance of this divergence from the historical record can be seen in the statement of the consequences of Alexander's campaign:

καὶ νικήσας τὸν Δαρεῖον, βασιλέα Περσῶν, τὸν Ἀσσαλάμου, παρέλαβεν αὐτὸν καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν χώραν Ἀσσυρίων καὶ Μήδων καὶ Πάρθων καὶ Βαβυλωνίων καὶ Περσῶν καὶ πάσας τὰς βασιλείας τῆς γῆς, καθὼς Βόττιος ὁ σοφώτατος συνεγράψατο, ἐλευθέρωσας ὁ αὐτὸς Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ τὰς πόλεις καὶ τὰς χώρας καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν τῶν Ῥωμαίων καὶ Ἑλλήνων καὶ Αἰγυπτίων ἐκ τῆς Ἀσσυρίων καὶ Περσῶν καὶ Πάρθων καὶ Μήδων ὑποταγῆς καὶ δουλείας, ἀποδοῦς Ῥωμαίοις πάντα ἃ ἀπώλεσαν.²

"Once he had defeated Darius, the king of the Persians, the son of Assalam, he captured him and his whole kingdom and the whole territory of the Assyrians and Medes and Parthians and Babylonians and Persians and all the kingdoms of the earth, as the most learned Bottios has written, and this Alexander freed the cities and the territories and the whole country of the Romans and the Greeks and the Egyptians from subjection and slavery to the Assyrians and Persians and Parthians and Medes, returning to the Romans all that they had lost."

¹ A recent scholarly effort which emphasizes the composite nature of Malalas' chronicle and attempts to exploit the sources embedded in it is Wood, *Multiple Voices*, 298–314. On the work of John Malalas in general, see Jeffrey et al., *Studies*; Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, 235–256; Beaucamp et al., *Recherches sur la Chronique I*; Augusta-Boutarot et al., *Recherches sur la Chronique II*.

² Malalas 8, 1, ed. Thurn, 146/147.

There are two unhistorical, but decidedly intriguing assertions here. First, that Alexander defeated not just the Persians, but a remarkably orientalizing – in a very modern sense of the word – assembly of peoples including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and Parthians. Second, that Alexander not only conquered them, but also freed the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians, who had been subject to them.

Much of this, the liberation of the Greeks and Egyptians from the Persians at the very least, can be explained with reference to the Alexander Romance, a source for the account of Alexander in Malalas' chronicle. The dependence of the passage in Malalas on the Romance in general is evident in the ascription of Alexander's true paternity to Nectanebo, the apparent course of events, which sets the foundation of Alexandria before Alexander meets the Persians in battle, and the inclusion of the story of Alexander's encounter with Candace, the queen of Ethiopia.³ The influence of the Romance on the odd sentence we have noted in particular can also be detected. The Romance begins with an account of the conquest of Egypt, and the conquerors are not simply the Persians, but a huge assembly of "all the great peoples of the East", although the list does not include most of those peoples noted in Malalas.⁴ Egypt, at any rate, is rendered a conquered land in need of a liberator. Alexander's conquest of Egypt, which might seem – to our post-colonial perspective, at any rate – to be the transfer of a subject province from one foreign conqueror to another, becomes in the Romance the liberation of Egypt by her legitimate king, since the Egyptians recognize Alexander as the son of Nectanebo.⁵ The Romance likewise presents Alexander as the liberator of the Greeks, as unhistorical as this might be. In the earliest versions of the Romance Alexander's role as liberator of Greece is largely implicit; he refuses to render the tribute customarily paid to the Persians and Darius rebukes him by saying, "you did not consider yourself fortunate to rule Macedonia unnoticed under my command."⁶ The implica-

³ Malalas 7, 17; 8, 1, 3; cf. *Al. Rom.* 1, 3–7, 31–33; 34, 9–35, 1; 41, 3, 18–23. In the later β recension (1, 28), it is true, Alexander defeats the Persians at the Granicus and conquers the coastlands of Asia Minor, but he breaks off and circles the Mediterranean before entering Persian territory again, from Egypt, and actually defeating Darius and conquering the Persian Empire. This material on the preliminary foray across the Hellespont was either omitted from the earlier α recension or added to the later β recension; see Stoneman, *Il Romanzo I*, 516; Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses*, 261–263.

⁴ *Al. Rom.* (α) 1, 2, 2.

⁵ *Al. Rom.* (α) 1, 3, 4–6; 34, 3–6.

⁶ *Al. Rom.* (α) 1, 23, 2–4; 1, 40, 3; ed. Kroll, 45: οὐ μακάριον ἡγήσω λανθάνοντά σε βασιλεύειν Μακεδονίας χωρὶς τῆς ἐμῆς ταγῆς.

tion is elaborated and made explicit in the later (c. AD 500) β recension of the Romance, in which Alexander rallies the Greeks and Macedonians by calling on them to “mount an expedition against the barbarians and free ourselves from slavery to the Persians, since, being Greeks, we ought not to be enslaved to barbarians.”⁷

The Alexander Romance seems to account for the idea that Alexander freed the Greeks and Egyptians from the Persians. But, while the Romance does narrate contact between Alexander and Rome, it cannot explain why Malalas says that the Romans were liberated from the Assyrians and the other eastern powers. According to the Romance, Alexander began his campaign by making a circuit of the western Mediterranean, going from Sicily to Italy, where he met the emissaries of Rome. He received the submission of the Romans, along with their contribution of men and money to his army.⁸ There are grounds in the Romance, then, for the inclusion of Rome in Alexander’s realm, as the passage in Malalas would, quite unhistorically, suggest. But there is no indication in the Romance that Alexander freed the Romans from the Persians, as he is supposed to have done with the Greeks and the Egyptians, or indeed that the Romans were subject to anyone when they met Alexander.

Nor is there anything in the preceding books of Malalas’ chronicle to account for the idea that Rome was conquered and needed a liberator. The Romans are not said to be subject to any foreign power. On the contrary, even when the whole earth is supposed to have been subject to the Assyrians, Persians, Medes, and Parthians under Ochus and Darius, the Romans are said to have expanded their territory through the conquest of their neighbours, which would hardly be appropriate to a conquered nation.⁹ It is true that Malalas presents, in much earlier times, the so-called gods Cronos and ‘Picus who is also Zeus’ as Assyrian kings who set up kingdoms in the West, specifically Italy, but this does not explain Rome’s subjection to the Assyri-

⁷ Al. Rom. (β) 1,25,1; ed. Bergson, 37: καταστρατευσόμεθα τοῖς βαρβάροις καὶ ἑαυτοὺς ἐλευθερώσωμεν τῆς τῶν Περσῶν δουλείας ἵνα μὴ Ἕλληνες ὄντες βαρβάροις δουλεύωμεν. Cf. Al. Rom. (β) 3,32,4, where Alexander is told at his death that he made Macedonia free.

⁸ Al. Rom. (α) 1,26,4–6; (β) 1,29,2/3; cf. Julius Valerius 1,29; Al. Rom. (γ) 1,27. See Garstad, *Rome in the Alexander Romance*, 467–507.

⁹ Malalas 7,9, ed. Thurn, 145: οἱ δὲ Ῥωμαῖοι ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλείας περιγεγόμενοι προσελάβοντο τὴν περιοχὴν τῆς αὐτῶν γῆς· καὶ προβαλλόμενοι δυνατοὺς ὑπάτους χώρας ἀπέσπων “In his (Darius the Mede’s) reign the Romans excelled and expanded the compass of their land; they elected strong consuls and were detaching territory.”

ans and the other eastern powers.¹⁰ Both Cronos and Picus-Zeus are said to abandon their kingdom in Assyria, each leaving his son in his place, before setting out for the West, so that they are not extending Assyrian power to Italy, that is, conquering Italy, but rather establishing a separate realm in Italy. Nevertheless, their careers suggest that in the conception of Malalas and his sources Asia and Italy were in the same orbit of political action.

Malalas may not explain how the Romans came to be conquered by hostile eastern powers, but he is not alone in asserting that Rome was subject to the Assyrians and other eastern peoples. The *Excerpta Latina Barbari*, an eighth-century Latin translation of a lost Greek chronicle compiled in the early sixth century,¹¹ includes a brief account of the career of Alexander, closely parallel to that in Malalas, at the close of the list of the kings of Rome:

*Post haec tradidit dominus deus regnum terrae Romanorum in manus Assyriorum, Chaldaeorum, et Persarum, et Midorum. Et tributaria facta est terra illa Assyriis, et mansit Roma sine regnum, usque dum suscitavit deus Alexandrum Macedonem et conditorem. Iste quidem pugnavit contra regem Persarum et superavit eum. Et tradidit dominus in manum eius regnum Assyriorum, et introivit in potestate regnum eorum, et concussit civitates Persarum et Medorum, et liberavit omnem terram Romanorum et Grecorum et Egyptiorum de servitute Chaldaeorum, et leges posuit mundo.*¹²

“After these things the Lord God delivered the kingdom of the land of the Romans into the hands of the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Persians, and Medes. And this land was made tributary to the Assyrians, and Rome remained without dominion until the time when God raised up Alexander of Macedon, the Founder. He fought against the king of the Persians and defeated him. And the Lord delivered into his hand the kingdom of the Assyrians, and he entered into power over their kingdom, and he overthrew the cities of the Persians and the Medes, and he freed the whole country of the Romans and the Greeks and the Egyptians from slavery to the Chaldeans, and he gave laws to the world.”

In addition to the subjection of the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians to the Assyrians, Persians, Medes, and here Chaldaeans and their liberation by Alexander, this passage also mentions God raising up Alexander and Alexander imposing laws on the territory he conquered, both of which details likewise occur in Malalas' account of Alexander.¹³ Although the narratives of Alexan-

¹⁰ Malalas 1, 9; 10.

¹¹ See Garstad, *Barbarian interest*, 3–42.

¹² ELB 1, 6, 6, ed. Garstad, *Apocalypse. World Chronicle*, 194.

¹³ *Suscitavit deus Alexandrum Macedonem et conditorem. Iste quidem pugnavit contra regem Persarum et superavit eum*; cf. Malalas 8, 1: ἐξάνεστησεν ὁ θεὸς τοῖς Ἀσσυρίοις

der in the Excerpta and Malalas share many features, each is in some aspects fuller than the other, and rather than one depending on the other it seems fairly clear that the two texts share a source in regard to Alexander.¹⁴

This source has not been integrated into the overall structure of the Excerpta in the same manner as it has been into Malalas' work. Whereas Malalas only mentions the liberation of the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians in his main narrative of Alexander in Book Eight, the Excerpta draws its Roman king list to a close with an indication of the conquest of Rome by the Assyrians, Chaldaeans, Persians, and Medes and of Rome's subjection to these eastern powers until the rise of Alexander, and an anticipation of Alexander's efforts to free the Romans, along with the Greeks and Egyptians, from the inimical combination of eastern powers. By contrast, Malalas ends the time of the kings in Rome with a fairly traditional account of Tarquinius Superbus being expelled from Rome and deprived of the kingdom and says that consuls ruled the city until the time of Julius Caesar.¹⁵ And while Rome is included in his domains in the Excerpta's main narrative on Alexander, Rome is not said there to have been freed by Alexander.¹⁶ There is a recognition in the Excerpta that Alexander's liberation of the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians has a bearing on Roman history, indeed, that it may be even more relevant to Roman history than to the history of Alexander.

The conquest of Rome

The Excerpta Latina Barbari indicates that Rome was subject to the eastern powers, but does not offer a narrative account of the conquest of Rome by the Assyrians and the others any more than Malalas does. But

καὶ Πέρσαις καὶ Πάρθοις καὶ Μήδοις Ἀλέξανδρον τὸν τῆς Μακεδονίας τοπάρχην, ἦτοι βασιλέα, τὸν Φιλίππου. *Et leges posuit mundo* (cf. ELB 1, 8, 4); cf. Malalas, Chron. 8,3: καὶ ἐνομοθέτησεν ὁ αὐτὸς Ἀλέξανδρος τὴν χώραν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐβασίλευσεν αὐτῶν.

¹⁴ See Garstad, *Tyche Sacrifices*, 92/93; Garstad, *Barbarian interest*, 26–29.

¹⁵ Malalas, 7, 8/9; 14.

¹⁶ ELB 1, 8, 4, ed. Garstad, *Apocalypse. World Chronicle*, 214–216: *Tunc Alexander Macedo et conditor, postquam legem poneret in Ellada et omnem Romanorum terram Syriam quoque et Egyptum et partes Lybiae, tunc venit in partes orientales et expugnans omnes civitates et oppida gentium obsedit regem Persarum Darium. Et tradidit dominus deus in manus eius Darium et omnem fortitudinem eius disperdit et omnem domum eius scrutavit*, “Then Alexander the Macedonian, the Founder, after he bestowed law upon Greece and all the land of the Romans and Syria as well and Egypt and parts of Libya, then he went into the eastern regions and storming all the cities and towns of the nations he besieged Darius, the king of the Persians. And the Lord God delivered Darius into his hands and wrecked all his strength and searched out his whole house.”

perhaps we can tease out something of an implicit account of Rome's conquest. Rome is included amongst the lands ruled over by Nebuchadnezzar in the Excerpta's description of his domains:

*Vixit vero Nabuchodonosor iudicans omnem terram a Caspianas portas usque in Eracliae finibus et Aegyptum et omnem Iudeam, subiectos sibi faciens Pontum et totam Asiam et omnem terram Romanorum annos XVIII.*¹⁷

"While Nebuchadnezzar lived he judged the whole earth from the Caspian Gates up to the Pillars of Hercules and Egypt and all of Judea, and made subject to himself Pontus and the whole of Asia and all the land of the Romans for nineteen years."

Nebuchadnezzar's domination of Rome implies a conquest at some time, even if it is not described.

Nebuchadnezzar, moreover, seems a likely candidate to be the leader of the motley conglomeration of eastern peoples who conquered Rome according to the Excerpta. Nebuchadnezzar is not only the king of Babylon in the Excerpta, he is also said to be the king of the Assyrians.¹⁸ In Malalas Nebuchadnezzar is likewise referred to as the king of the Assyrians, but not as the king of Babylon, although he does deport the defeated Jews to Babylon.¹⁹ The identification of Nebuchadnezzar as the king of the Assyrians in the Excerpta and Malalas may be derived from their common source, but may also be part of the broader background of the two works. In the Book of Judith Nebuchadnezzar is consistently called the king of the Assyrians and rules from Nineveh, the Assyrian capital,²⁰ but his realm further reflects the combination of oriental nations found in the Excerpta and Malalas since he conquers the Medes and absorbs them into his kingdom²¹ and demands earth and water as signs of submission from his opponents, following a custom Herodotus ascribes to the Persians.²²

It should be easy to confirm whether or not Nebuchadnezzar is supposed to have conquered Rome since the Excerpta gives a date from Adam for practically all of the events and reigns that it mentions, but on this score the

¹⁷ ELB 1, 8, 1, ed. Garstad, *Apocalypse. World Chronicle*, 208.

¹⁸ ELB 1, 7, 5/6.

¹⁹ Malalas 6, 1; 3.

²⁰ Jdt 1, 1; 1, 7; 1, 11; 1, 16; 2, 1; 2, 4; 4, 1; 12, 13. Cf. 2, 14; 5, 1; 6, 1; 7, 18; 7, 20; 7, 24; 9, 7; 10, 11; 13, 15; 14, 2; 14, 12; 14, 19.

²¹ Jdt 1, 1; 1, 13–16.

²² Jdt 2, 7; cf. Hdt. 4, 126; 5, 17, 1; 5, 73, 2/3; 6, 48; 7, 32; 7, 131–133; 7, 138, 2; 7, 163, 2. Apparently there were supposed to be both Medes and Persians in the army of Holofernes, since in the final victory ode (16, 10) Judith is said to terrify both of these peoples.

Excerpta's chronography actually presents confusion. The reign of Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome, after which the land of the Romans falls prey to the Assyrians and the others, ends in the year 5071 from Adam.²³ The reign of Nebuchadnezzar ends more than a hundred years earlier in the year 4911 from Adam and his final conquest of Jerusalem occurs in the year 4892 from Adam.²⁴ There is an inconsistency here since Rome is supposed to be free up to the reign of Tarquinius Superbus, but Rome is also said to be subject to Nebuchadnezzar well before then. The end of the Roman kingdom falls in the reign of the Persian king Artaxerxes II Mnemon (5056 to 5098 from Adam), but the Excerpta offers no indication that he conquered Rome or conducted any military campaigns at all.²⁵ The chronology of the Excerpta, as Gelzer noted, descends into hopeless confusion after the Babylonian Captivity and this certainly seems to be the case with this irreconcilable tangle of dates.²⁶ So the Excerpta's chronology does not preclude the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar conquered Rome, but it does indicate that the conquest of Rome by the easterners was rather clumsily grafted onto the basic chronography of the Excerpta without any real attempt at integration into its overall scheme.

A better indication of whether or not Nebuchadnezzar is supposed to have conquered the Romans is found in the cumulative similarities between the descriptions of what he famously did do and what he might have done. For readers of the Bible Nebuchadnezzar was best known as the king who sacked Jerusalem, overthrew the Jewish kingdom, and led the Jews into captivity.²⁷ And until the rediscovery of the cuneiform tablets, the Bible was the best and fullest source available on Nebuchadnezzar. The Excerpta certainly sees Nebuchadnezzar largely through this lens. His role in the fall of the Jewish kingdom is mentioned repeatedly and, apart from the brief notice on his reign quoted already, this is the only role in which Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned in the Excerpta.²⁸ Immediately between the Excerpta's account of the fall of Jerusalem and its notice on Nebuchadnezzar's reign there is an epitaph for the Jewish kingdom:

²³ ELB 1, 6, 5.

²⁴ ELB 1, 7, 6; 8, 1.

²⁵ ELB 1, 8, 3.

²⁶ Gelzer, *Sextus Julius Africanus*, 2, 320.

²⁷ On the significance of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem in its full historical context, as well as some of its modern resonances, see Cline, *Jerusalem Besieged*, 36–66.

²⁸ ELB 1, 7, 5/6.

*Illi vero reges qui in Israhel et in Iudea et in Samaria finierunt, et tunc tradedit dominus deus regnum terrae in manus Assyriorum et Chaldeorum et Persarum et Midorum, et tributaria facta est eis omnis terra.*²⁹

“These kings who were in Israel and Judea and Samaria came to an end, and then the Lord God delivered the kingdom of the earth into the hands of the Assyrians and Chaldeans and Persians and Medes, and the whole earth was made tributary to them.”

The points of comparison between this and the notice on the end of the Roman kingdom are remarkable. In both cases there is an end to a line of kings, God delivers the kingdom into the hands of the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Persians, and Medes, and the land is made tributary to them. Malalas also speaks, in regard to the conquest by Nebuchadnezzar, of the kingdom of the Jews being delivered into the hands of the Assyrians (καὶ λοιπὸν παρεδόθη ἡ βασιλεία τῶν Ἰουδαίων εἰς χεῖρας Ἀσσυρίων).³⁰ The strikingly similar terms might suggest that just as the same powers are responsible for both conquests, so the same potentate is likewise responsible for both conquests, that is, Nebuchadnezzar not only ruled the land of the Romans, he also brought it into subjection.

Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander

The Excerpta also draws an unmistakable parallel between Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander.³¹ This is especially apparent in a passage which sets the same limits to Alexander's realm which had been indicated for Nebuchadnezzar's:

*In diebus vero quibus regnavit Alexander Macedo et conditor, postquam superavit Darium regem Persarum, et Porum regem Indorum et omnes gentes subiugavit a Caspiacas portas quae sunt in ortu solis usque in exteriores terminos Eraclii qui iacent in exteriores occidentis partibus contra Garirum.*³²

“In the days when Alexander the Macedonian, the Founder, reigned, after he defeated Darius the king of the Persians, he also conquered Porus the king of the Indians and all the peoples from the Caspian Gates which are at the rising of the sun all the way to the outer Pillars of Hercules which are in the outer regions of the west opposite Gadeira.”

²⁹ ELB 1, 8, 1, ed. Garstad, Apocalypse. World Chronicle, 208.

³⁰ Malalas 6, 1, ed. Thurn, 117.

³¹ See Garstad, Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander, 75–100.

³² ELB 1, 8, 5, ed. Garstad, Apocalypse. World Chronicle, 216.

From the Caspian Gates to the Pillars of Hercules is as unhistorical an extent for Alexander's domains as it is for Nebuchadnezzar's, but it points all the more clearly to a deliberate comparison being made between the two great rulers. There might be further hints of this parallelism if we read the *Excerpta* and Malalas' chronicle together. The terms of the *Excerpta*'s notice on the end of the Jewish kingdom are recalled in a passage very shortly before the opening of Malalas' account of Alexander:

τότε δὲ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ τὸ ἔθνος ὅλον φόρους ἐδίδουν Ἀσσυρίοις. ὑπτιώθησαν δὲ τότε οἱ Ἀσσύριοι καὶ ὁ Ὀχος, βασιλεὺς αὐτῶν· καὶ ἐτυράννησαν πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν καὶ παρεδόθη ἡ βασιλεία εἰς χεῖρας Ἀσσυρίων καὶ Περσῶν καὶ Μήδων καὶ Πάρθων.³³

“At that time the high priests of the Jews and the whole people paid tribute to the Assyrians. The Assyrians and Ochus, their king, were haughty then; and they exercised a tyranny over the whole earth and the kingdom was delivered into the hands of the Assyrians and Persians and Medes and Parthians.”

The whole earth, we are reminded, has been delivered into the hands of the Assyrians and the other eastern peoples and the Jews pay tribute to these same powers. The tributary status of the Jews was initiated by Nebuchadnezzar, as both the *Excerpta* and Malalas tell us. Neither text relates that Alexander freed the Jews, as he did the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians, or relieved them of this tribute. But the *Excerpta* does say that Alexander went to Jerusalem and acknowledged the Lord God:

*Ut enim condidit Alexander Alexandriam contra Egyptum, veniens in Hierusolima domino deo adoravit dicens: Gloria tibi, deus solus omnia tenens, qui vivis in saecula. Fuit autem tunc in Hierusalem princeps sacerdotum Iaddus.*³⁴

“For once Alexander founded Alexandria by Egypt he came to Jerusalem and worshipped the Lord God, saying, ‘Glory to You, Only God, grasping all things, Who liveth unto the ages.’ The high priest in Jerusalem was Jaddus.”

This note is repeated later in the *Excerpta*'s list of the high priests at Jerusalem.³⁵ It is severely abbreviated, but it alludes to a more elaborate narrative of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem, the definitive version of which was found in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*.³⁶ The matter of tribute looms large in

³³ Malalas 7, 18, ed. Thurn, 145.

³⁴ ELB 1, 8, 4, ed. Garstad, *Apocalypse*. World Chronicle, 216.

³⁵ ELB 2, 6, 4.

³⁶ Joseph. AJ 11, 8, 3–7 (313–347). See Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 42–50; Momigliano, *Flavius Josephus*, 442–448; Delling, *Alexander der Grosse als Bekenner*,

Josephus' story. Alexander's demand that the high priest transfer to himself the tribute he had rendered to the Persians and the high priest's refusal brings Alexander to Jerusalem in high dudgeon.³⁷ But after meeting the high priest, Alexander amiably remits the tribute of the Jews in the sabbatical year.³⁸ With an intertextual reading of Malalas and the *Excerpta*, Alexander does seem to liberate the Jews, who had been tributary to the easterners and whose city he visited (on which occasion, according to Josephus, he remitted the tribute of the Jews), just as he is explicitly said to liberate the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians. What is significant, though, is that Alexander appears to free, in some sense, a people obviously conquered by Nebuchadnezzar.

A picture begins to emerge from the parallel presentations of Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander and the close verbal similarities in the descriptions of the conquests of the Romans and the Jews. Behind all of the passages we have drawn out there seems to be a narrative of world history, of conquest and liberation, in which famous kings loom large. The peoples of the West, the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians – the very peoples the Alexander Romance identifies as the proper subjects of Alexander – as well as the Jews, are opposed to the exotic peoples of the East, the Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Parthians, and Persians. First one side is dominant and then the other. Each side has its champion in a great conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar for one and Alexander for the other, and each in its time engages in a career of conquest. A certain symmetry seems to be the chief concern of the author, rather than any kind of chronological precision. A balance is achieved in the broad sweep of the world's history, but the treatment is not evenhanded. The dominance of the easterners is characterized as subjection, while the dominance of the westerners is described in terms of deliverance. This indicates a western orientation, unsurprising in Greek and Latin historiography. The addition of the Jews to the western peoples conquered by the eastern powers, moreover, suggests a Christian authorship and a later date.

1–51; Cohen, *Alexander the Great and Jaddus*, 41–68; Nadich, *Jewish Legends*, 37–44; Bammel, *Der Zeuge des Judentums*, 1 279–287; Goldstein, *Alexander and the Jews*, 59–101; Wirth, *Der Weg in die Vergessenheit*, 20–23; Stoneman, *Jewish Traditions*, 37–53; Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses*, 378–381; Amitay, *From Alexander to Jesus*, 119/120, 127; Jouanno, *Alexandre à Jérusalem*, 75–95.

³⁷ Joseph. AJ 11, 8, 3 (317–319).

³⁸ Joseph. AJ 11, 8, 5 (338).

Sources and precedents for a distinct model of world history

This model of world history could have arisen from a number of commonplace elements in both Graeco-Roman and Biblical materials. As early as the preamble to Herodotus' Histories relations between East and West, between Greeks and barbarians, had been presented as a succession of unremitting hostilities, marked at first by kidnapping forays and then open warfare, but always by an alternation of success and failure, of aggression and victimhood.³⁹ In this passage, as well, the Persians are supposed to presume to stand for all the barbarians of Asia, all of the opponents of Greece, just as we find a vast combination of easterners in Malalas and the Excerpta.⁴⁰ The other eastern peoples mentioned by the Excerpta and Malalas in the company of the Persians, moreover, are not relegated by Herodotus to the past or to idle obscurity; the Assyrians, Medes, Chaldaeans, and Parthians are, for Herodotus, active participants in the Persian Empire, appearing in the tribute list of Darius' kingdom and the army list of his expedition against Greece.⁴¹ And throughout his Histories Herodotus speaks of the Persian Wars as a contest to determine the freedom (ἐλευθερία) or slavery (δουλεία) of Greece.⁴² Quintus Curtius Rufus also has a later Darius remark on the remarkable turns of fortune in the lengthy conflict between the Greeks and the Persians; whereas the Persians had once brought the war to the Greeks, they were now compelled to withstand an invasion of their own homes.⁴³

Megasthenes, writing shortly after the death of Alexander the Great in 323, claimed that Nebuchadnezzar had led an army as far as the Pillars of Hercules and conquered vast swaths of territory in Africa and Iberia, and so extended the narrative of East-West enmity and territorial ambition into the western Mediterranean in the person of Nebuchadnezzar, just as we find it in

³⁹ Hdt. 1, 1–5. For recent analyses of this passage, see Węcowski, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, 149–155; Sansone, *Herodotus on Lust*, 1–36.

⁴⁰ Hdt. 1, 4, 4.

⁴¹ Hdt. 3, 92, 1. 93, 3; 7, 62, 1. 63. 66. On these lists in general, see Laird, *Persian Army and Tribute Lists*, 305–326. While Herodotus was practically their sole conduit to Mediterranean readers and writers throughout antiquity, these lists probably reflect the actual arrangements of the Persian Empire; see Briant, *Histoire* 399–410.

⁴² Hdt. 5, 49, 2; 6, 102, 3; 8, 142, 3; 9, 60, 1.

⁴³ Curt. 4, 14, 21, ed. Lucarini, 92: *Modo Graecis ultro bellum inferebamus, nunc in sedibus nostris propulsamus inlatum: iactamur invicem varietate fortunae. Videlicet imperium mutuo adfectamus, quia una gens non capit.*

the Excerpta and – in an attenuated form – in Malalas.⁴⁴ Several later writers cite Megasthenes on Nebuchadnezzar's western expedition, indicating that the account enjoyed wide distribution and general acceptance.⁴⁵

The opposition of East and West is also articulated in the Alexander Romance. The Romance identifies the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians as the proper subjects of Alexander who contribute to his campaign against the Persians.⁴⁶ The Persians are depicted in the Romance as inimical eastern foreigners who, as we have seen, hold the Greeks, as well as the Egyptians, in thrall. But not the Persians alone; it is "all the great peoples of the East" who conquer Egypt,⁴⁷ just as the Persians are part of a combination of eastern peoples in Malalas and the Excerpta. In the Romance Alexander sets out to free his supporters as much as to conquer his enemies. The subjection of the Romans to the eastern powers could very well have been an extrapolation from the basic opposition and the overarching narrative of the Alexander Romance. The Romans, along with the Greeks and the Egyptians, were on Alexander's side against the Persians. And so, it might have been reasoned, the Romans, like the other nations on Alexander's side, must also have been subject to the Persians before Alexander arose to defeat the Persians and free them. The Assyrians, Chaldaeans or Babylonians, and Medes are added to the oppressive Persians because the subjection of the Romans is supposed to have gone back to the time of Nebuchadnezzar.

As kings whose realms are said in the Excerpta to stretch from the rising of the sun at the Caspian Gates to the setting of the same at the Pillars of Hercules, Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander seem to be presented as world rulers. As such they belong to a tradition about world kingdoms which held

⁴⁴ Megasthenes FGrH 715 FF 1, 11a. See Kuhrt, *Berosus' Babyloniaka*, 56; Sherwin-White-Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis*, 97; Bosworth, *Historical Setting of Megasthenes*, 121–123; Bosworth, *Augustus 4 and n. 23*; Kosmin, *Land of the Elephant Kings*, 270/271.

⁴⁵ Strabo 15, 1, 6; Joseph. *AJ* 10, 11, 1 (227), *Ap.* 1, 20 (144); Abydenus FGrH 685 F 6; Euseb. *Chron.* 19, 23, 32 (ed. Karst), *Praep. evang.* 9, 41, 1.

⁴⁶ The Greeks and the Macedonians are included in the roll call of Alexander's expeditionary force, which is enumerated before he sets out on his campaign; *Al. Rom.* (α) 1, 26, 1/2. The Romans make a contribution of men and money to the army he leads against the Persians; *Al. Rom.* (α) 1, 26, 6, cf. (β) 1, 29, 3. The Egyptians recognize Alexander as the rightful heir to their departed king, Nectanebo, and volunteer to march on the Persians with him, while Alexander enters Egypt in peace and conducts himself as a king, not a conqueror, by expending the tribute the Egyptians pay him on 'their own' city of Alexandria; *Al. Rom.* (α) 1, 3, 4–6; 34, 3–6. 9; 2, 4, 5–8.

⁴⁷ *Al. Rom.* (α) I, 2, 2.

wide currency in both Graeco-Roman and Jewish literature.⁴⁸ There was supposed to have been a succession of four or five kingdoms which, one after the other, ruled over vast stretches of land and held sway in the affairs of the world. There might be some variation in the list of the world kingdoms, but it usually included the Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar (often assimilated with the kingdom of the Assyrians, who were supposed to have had their capital at Babylon) and the Macedonian Empire of Alexander. Indeed, as the tradition of world kingdoms developed Nebuchadnezzar came to be seen as the original world ruler and was often associated with Alexander.⁴⁹ The conglomeration of the various eastern peoples seems to put paid to the canonical list of world kingdoms, which distinguished between the successive kingdoms of Assyrians, Medes, and Persians, but the alternation of conquest and submission and the worldwide extent of the realms of Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander in our model of world history seem to owe something to the tradition of world kingdoms. And, while it was often conceded that the world kingdoms fell short of a domination of the whole earth and rather enjoyed a preeminence among the nations,⁵⁰ an absolute conception of world kingdom, that is imperium over all the world – as is suggested by the limits of Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander’s kingdoms at the sunrise and sunset – would explain the inclusion of Rome in the empire of Nebuchadnezzar as unavoidable if his realm were an absolute world kingdom, encompassing the whole world.

⁴⁸ Graeco-Roman authors: Hdt. 1,95,2. 130,1/2; Aemilius Sura in Vell. Pat. 1,6,6; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 1,2,2–4; Pompeius Trogus in Justin Epit. 1,3,6; 6,17; 8,1; 10,3,6 (et passim); Tac. hist. 5,8; Plut. de fort. Rom. 317F–318A, cf. 326A–C; App. Praef. 9, Pun. 132 (attributed to Polyb. [38.22]); Aelius Aristides Panathenaic Discourse 335, Roman Oration 91; Claud. Cons. Stil. 3,159–166; Rut. Namat. 83–86; Jewish authors: Dan. 2,31–45; 7,2–18; 8,3–25; 2 Bar. 39,3–7; 2 (4) Ezra 12,11–15; Oracula Sibyllina 4,49–114; cf. Tobit 14,4. See Trieber, *Idee*, 321–344; Swain, *Theory*, 1–21; Eddy, *The King is Dead*, 20–22; Flusser, *The four empires*, 148–175; Mendels, *Five Empires*, 330–337; Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, 93/94; Momigliano, *On Pagans*, 31–57; Alonso-Núñez, *Herodotus’ Ideas*, 125–133; Burstein, *Agatharchides of Cnidus*, 19; Caragounis, *History*, 387–397; Koch, *Europa*, 39–44; Millar, *Hellenistic History*, 89–104; Inglebert, *Interpretatio Christiana*, 342–369; Gleßmer, *Die “vier Reiche”*, 2 468–489; Depreux, *Translatio Imperii*, 947/948; cf. Holm, *Of Courtiers and Kings*, 392–394; Newsom, *Daniel*, 80/81. The idea of world empires seems to have continued to exert an influence in the intellectual life of the Byzantine Empire, and it has been plausibly suggested that the succession of kingdoms dictated Photius’ selection of material on ancient history as found in the *Bibliotheca*; see Mendels, *Greek and Roman History*, 196–206.

⁴⁹ Kampers, *Alexander der Grosse*, 9/10, 26, 98/99, 105/106, 137.

⁵⁰ Polyb. 1,2,1–7; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 1,2/3; App. Praef. 9; Thdt. Dan. 2,31–33.

Perhaps the most famous and widely read version of the series of world kingdoms was in the Book of Daniel, and Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander figure prominently in this Book. This is especially true of Nebuchadnezzar, whose conquests bring Daniel and his friends to Babylon, whose decisions bring them to prominence and position, whose dreams elicit Daniel's prophecies, and whose missteps bring about much of the action in the first chapters of the Book.⁵¹ Indeed, it is Nebuchadnezzar's dream that occasions the first articulations of the sequence of four world kingdoms.⁵² Alexander is not named in the Book of Daniel, but, as the four-headed beast like a leopard or the he-goat from the west or the mighty prince of Greece who overthrows the kingdom of Persia, he or his kingdom is the subject of several fairly unmistakable references in Daniel's visions.⁵³ These visions make it clear that all of the subsequent kingdoms, including Alexander's, will succeed Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom and decline from the apex he represents.⁵⁴ If the model of a series of kingdoms is discarded and several of the distinct kingdoms combined with one another, it might be possible to see this succession in terms of an alternation from one identifiable figure to another. The model of the kingdom of the easterners gaining dominance under Nebuchadnezzar only to be displaced by Alexander could thus be derived from the Book of Daniel.

The Babylonian and Macedonian kingdoms in Fulgentius

This historical model has been seen to have a cumulative coherence and a demonstrable pedigree, but can we find any corroboration for it outside of Malalas' chronicle and the *Excerpta Latina Barbari*? There are signs that this model might have exerted some influence on the *De aetatibus mundi et hominis* of Fulgentius, a work of perhaps the mid-sixth century and an incomplete world history; the *De aetatibus* is also a bravura piece of literary showmanship employing the lipogrammatic form in which one letter of the alphabet is sequentially omitted from each chapter and comparing the history of the world to the growth of an individual man.⁵⁵ In two consecutive

⁵¹ Dan. 1–4.

⁵² Dan. 2, 31–45.

⁵³ Dan. 7, 6; 8, 5–8. 21/22; 10, 20; 11, 2–4. See Wirth, *Der Weg in die Vergessenheit*, 23–26, cf. 58–68.

⁵⁴ Dan. 2, 37–39.

⁵⁵ The fundamental study of the *De aetatibus* remains Helm, *Fulgentius*, 253–289. See also Hays, *Date and Identity*, 163–252, on the oeuvre of Fulgentius as a whole and especially the relation of the mythographer to the bishop of Ruspe. Manca, *Fulgenzio*, provides an

chapters, Nine and Ten, Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander are respectively the most prominent figures, the only gentile kings whose deeds are narrated, and practically the only ones named.⁵⁶ But there is more to it than mere proximity. The Babylonian kingdom that conquered Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar is overcome and immediately succeeded by the Macedonian kingdom of Alexander. The Babylonians, the chastisement of the wayward Jews, were themselves punished by Alexander:

*... tamen tam diu Babylonia fermentum suae potentiae tenuit, donec divini populi templique dominici saporem praedae toxic(at)um degustavit statimque cum propriis abortivit quicquid ex sacratissima praeda avidior transvoravit. Fuit enim illa Israhelitici vindex sceleris, tamen vae illi qui flagellum eligitur malis; et sicut Hierusalem suas deflet reliquias toto orbe dispersas et nullatenus usque in hodie redituras, ita Babylonia cum alienis etiam suas aborsa est pereundo divitias. Ea igitur tempestate fortuna quodam aestu turbulentiae gravidata in parvo Macedonum regno clarissimum peperit nefas. Namque Alexander dubia sub opinione Philippi Macedonis filius incerti patris crimine maculatus exsurgit.*⁵⁷

“... so long, nevertheless, did Babylonia contain the ferment of her own power, until she tasted a poisoned morsel of the plunder of the holy people and the Lord’s temple, and at once she gave untimely birth to whatever of that most hallowed plunder she had so greedily devoured along with her own things. For she was the avenger of Israel’s sin, but woe to him who is chosen as the scourge of evils; and just as Jerusalem weeps for her relics, scattered over the whole world and even to this day hardly about to return, so Babylonia in perishing miscarried her own riches, along with those of others. And so at this time Fortune, impregnated by a hot surge of restlessness, gave birth to the most renowned wickedness in the little kingdom of the Macedonians. For indeed Alexander, by doubtful repute the son of Philip the Macedonian, arose, stained by the crime of his uncertain father.”

When Alexander set out on his career of conquest, according to Fulgentius, he first laid hold of the kingdom of Babylon, which had been bolstered by a thousand years of rule and a great store of victories over the whole world: *Et primum quidem Babilonicum regnum arripuit mille annorum dominatu fulcitum, tot triumphis ac totius orbis victoriis enthecatum.*⁵⁸ There

introduction, an annotated text and an Italian translation of the *De aetatibus*. See also Manca, Nabuzaradan, 491–498; Manca, La Bibbia, 165–187. Hays, *Date and Identity*, 243/244, proposes a date of shortly after 550 for the *Mitologiae*, at least. Manca, *Fulgencio*, 45–53, prefers a date of around 480 for the work of Fulgentius.

⁵⁶ On the treatment of Alexander in the *De aetatibus*, see Stöcker, *Alexander der Grosse*, 55–75; Hays, *A Second Look*, 204–207.

⁵⁷ *Fulg. aet. mund.* 10, ed. Helm, 164.

⁵⁸ *Fulg. aet. mund.* 10, ed. Helm, 164/165.

seems to be here the same alternation between the kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander, the domination of the one succeeded by that of the other, that we observe in Malalas and the Excerpta.

The succession of the world kingdom of Babylon by that of Macedon may seem to have been suggested by Orosius, Fulgentius' principal, though unnamed, source for the *De aetatibus*. Orosius traces a sequence of four kingdoms preeminent in the world:

*si autem regna diversa, quanto aequius regnum aliquod maximum, cui reliquorum regnorum potestas universa subicitur, quale a principio Babylonium et deinde Macedonicum fuit, post etiam Africanum atque in fine Romanum quod usque ad nunc manet.*⁵⁹

"If, however, there are different kingdoms, how much fairer it is if one kingdom should be the greatest, to which the common power of the rest of the kingdoms is subjected, just as the Babylonian kingdom was at first, and then the Macedonian, and afterward the African kingdom and finally the Roman, which remains up to the present."

Orosius does indicate that the Macedonian was the next world kingdom after the Babylonian, but he does not suggest, as Fulgentius insists, that there was any direct conflict between Macedon and Babylon. On the contrary, Orosius relates the overthrow of the kingdom of Babylon, which he traces back to Ninus and Semiramis, by the Medes and the capture of Babylon by the Persians under Cyrus.⁶⁰ There are thus other kingdoms, though ones recognizable from the conglomeration of oriental peoples in Malalas and the Excerpta, intervening between the dominion of Babylon and the rise of Macedon. So the influence of Orosius does not account for the immediate alternation between the power of Babylon and the power of Macedon that we find in Fulgentius, although a careless reading of Orosius might serve to corroborate it.

The passages from Fulgentius we have noted also seem to discount the Persian conquest of Babylon, although it was recorded in both Classical and Biblical sources, and apparently consider the Babylonians, who conquered Jerusalem, the Persians, who were conquered by Alexander, and the Assyrians, with the millennial endurance of their kingdom, to be one and the same people or kingdom.⁶¹ There is further evidence of a confusion of these

⁵⁹ Oros. 2, 1, 4, ed. Zangemeister, 35.

⁶⁰ Oros. 2, 2, 2/3. 6–9.

⁶¹ The Persian capture of Babylon is related by Herodotus (1, 188–191; cf. 3, 150–159 on the second Persian capture of the rebellious Babylon), Xenophon (*Cyr.* 7, 5, 1–36), and Daniel (5, 30/31); the story is also found in Orosius (2, 6, 2–12, cf. 2, 3, 2), who appears to

people on the part of Fulgentius: Nebuchadnezzar is opposed by the Maccabees, properly enemies of the Syrians (often identified with the Assyrians); there is a relatively lengthy retelling of the story of Judith, whose source, as we have seen, identified Assyrians and Babylonians, and in which Holofernes' troops are called Persians; and Alexander is supposed to wreck devastation upon the Parthian realm.⁶² This confusion of nations corresponds to the conglomeration of eastern peoples in Malalas and the Excerpta; it may well owe something to the same source.

There is likewise an extension of the domination of Babylon westward, well beyond her historical borders, in Fulgentius. The thousand-year kingdom of Babylon that Alexander conquered had subdued not only the Jewish kingdom and Egypt, but also Sparta and Athens, as well as the Scythians: *Illuc etenim et Israhelitica confluxerat gloria et Aegyptiaca olim famosa conmigrarat potentia, illuc Spartana, illuc Athenaica atque insuperabilis virtus devoluta cesserat Scytica.*⁶³ The conquest of Rome, which distinguishes the narrative in Malalas and especially the Excerpta, is not here, but Fulgentius also stretches the ambit of Babylonian conquest – perhaps on the basis of the identification of the Babylonians and Persians, perhaps because he had a source which spoke of Nebuchadnezzar's conquests in the west – further to the west than the warrant of standard history would allow. Fulgentius also seems to suggest that the conquests of Alexander reached as far as the Atlantic Ocean, as does the Excerpta in its description of the extent of Alexander's empire. Fulgentius says that there was not a remote island off the Atlantic coast which did not fear Alexander as master, dread his sudden appearance, or discover him a plunderer: *nulla Oceani semotior insula Atlantei marginis aestu roriflua, quae non Alexan-*

have been Fulgentius' principal source for the *De aetatibus*. Both Diodorus Siculus (2,28,8) and Eusebius in his *Chronological Canons* (*ad annum Abraham* 1198) note that the Assyrian kingdom lasted for more than a thousand years, as do Augustine (*civ.* 4,6; 12,11; 18,21) and Orosius (23,2, cf. 1,4,1; 1,19,1); all of these authors quite naturally associated the Assyrians and Babylonians, since, following Ctesias, they considered Babylon the capital of the Assyrian kingdom. Helm, *Fulgentius*, 261, and Stöcker, *Alexander der Grosse*, 62, both remark on Fulgentius' discrepancy with the historical record in this regard, as well as the confused nomenclature of the eastern peoples, but neither assays an explanation.

⁶² Fulg. *aet. mund.* 9: *gens parvula Machabea totum Nabuchodonosor adventante pondus non solum reluctando sustentat; facta est una puella Hebreorum salus, fuga Persarum; 10: aerumnae locus Partiaci non paruit regno.*

⁶³ Fulg. *aet. mund.* 10, ed. Helm, 165.

*drum aut dominum timuit aut repentinum expavit aut praedonem invenit.*⁶⁴ We may suspect the influence of a deviant source which imagined the march of Babylonian and Macedonian arms as far as the Pillars of Hercules.

There might be some further affinities between the accounts of Alexander in Malalas and Fulgentius that could point to a common source. Malalas calls Alexander “the *toparch* or king of Macedonia” (τὸν τῆς Μακεδονίας τοπάρχην, ἦτοι βασιλέα) and while he does not elaborate on the point, the title of *toparch* suggests that Alexander was only the local ruler of a petty kingdom before he set out to conquer the Persian Empire.⁶⁵ Fulgentius also refers to the size of the Macedonian kingdom before Alexander’s conquests. In a neat juxtaposition he says that a much-heralded wickedness was produced in the “little kingdom” of the Macedonians (*in parvo Macedonum regno clarissimum peperit nefas*).⁶⁶ And although he inherited an enlarged kingdom (*ampliatum Macedonum regnum*) from his supposed father, his insatiable lust for conquest and empire drove Alexander to the ends of the earth.⁶⁷ Both Fulgentius and Malalas remark on the original size of Alexander’s realm, although Fulgentius makes much more of this as the starting point of Alexander’s ambition and its bloody consequences. Fulgentius also uses a remarkable phrase of Alexander’s ambition, referring to his “swift inclinations to the desire of ruling” (*rapidos regnandi ad cupiditatem animos*).⁶⁸ It is not altogether clear why Alexander’s thoughts or passions in this regard should be “swift”, but Malalas speaks of Alexander rushing out forthwith on his conquests, like a leopard (καὶ εὐθέως ὡς πάρδαλις ἐκεῖθεν ὀρμήσας ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος).⁶⁹ It was the swiftness of his conquests, according to the Christian exegetes, that caused Alexander to be represented by a leopard in the vision of Daniel.⁷⁰ The word Fulgentius uses for Alexander’s first arrival on the scene, *exurgit*, moreover, might recall Malalas’ turn of phrase here: ἐκεῖθεν ὀρμήσας. There might be some connection, then,

⁶⁴ Fulg. aet. mund. 10, ed. Helm, 166. Fulgentius’ notion may also owe something to Orosius (3,20,8) saying that the Spaniard and the Morinus (from Belgic Gaul on the North Sea) came to Alexander to beg him not to regard them as enemies, seeking him throughout Assyria and India and so, to their misfortune, coming to know both Oceans.

⁶⁵ Malalas 8, 1, ed. Thurn, 146.

⁶⁶ Fulg. aet. mund. 10, ed. Helm, 164.

⁶⁷ Fulg. aet. mund. 10, ed. Helm, 164.

⁶⁸ Fulg. aet. mund. 10, ed. Helm, 165.

⁶⁹ Malalas 8, 1, ed. Thurn, 146.

⁷⁰ Hipp. Dan. 4, 3, cf. antichr. 24; Aphrahat Dem. 5, 18; Jerome Comm. in Dan. 2 (7, 6), cf. Comm. in Hieremiam 1, 95, 3 (5, 6); Thdt. Dan. (7, 6); cf. Aug. civ. 20, 23.

between the *rapidos animos* of Fulgentius and the imagery of the leopard in Malalas.

The juxtaposition of Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander and the succession of the Babylonian kingdom by the Macedonian in Fulgentius are certainly reminiscent of the idiosyncratic model of world history found in Malalas and the Excerpta. The confusion of eastern peoples, the westward advance of Babylonian conquests, and the resemblance of stray words strengthen the impression of a shared source. The similarities between Fulgentius and the two other texts might have resulted from a coincidental exploitation of the well-known tradition of successive world kingdoms, as well as the influence of the Alexander Romance. Fulgentius exhibits an interest in the succession of world kingdoms when, at the opening of the eleventh chapter of the *De aetatibus*, he speaks of the power of Rome following hard on the heels of the broken kingdoms of the Persians and the Macedonians.⁷¹ And several elements in Fulgentius' narrative of Alexander are taken from the Alexander Romance, although these are not limited to the borrowings from the Romance also found in Malalas and the Excerpta, and so suggest an independent knowledge.⁷² The coincidence, however, would be tremendous. Fulgentius, moreover, might offer an explanation for the confusion which arose from the attempt to integrate a narrative including Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Rome into the fuller chronology of the Excerpta when he announces that with the end of Jewish history, occasioned by the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, he will turn to a treatment of Gentile history.⁷³ If this program were also derived from the same source as the historical model he seems to share with Malalas and the Excerpta, we might understand why in the Excerpta the chronology, which had not been systematically built up for extra-Biblical events, should be so vague and imprecise and why there seems to be such a consistent emphasis on the conquest of the Jews (and perhaps the Romans) by Nebuchadnezzar.

The author of the idiosyncratic model of world history

If Fulgentius did depend on some source for his material and its arrangement, specifically, the prominence of Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander, and the direct succession of Macedon upon Babylon, but does not credit that

⁷¹ Fulg. aet. mund. 11, ed. Helm, 167: *Fracto ergo Persico Macedonicoque imperio ecce parvum adhuc ex increpundiis Roma subrigit verticem turpi admodum criminosoque mancipata principio.*

⁷² Stöcker, Alexander der Grosse bei Fulgentius, 61–75.

⁷³ Fulg. aet. mund. 10, ed. Helm, 163.

source, we should not be surprised. In the *Mitologiae* Fulgentius cites a great number of sources, well known and otherwise unknown, some he was familiar with, some he knew by reputation, and others he may very well have invented out of whole cloth.⁷⁴ But in the *De aetatibus*, apart from the poet Xenophon, who is offered in the preface as an exponent of the lipogrammatic style, there are no references to other authors.⁷⁵ Once again, this should not cause surprise. Fulgentius' purpose in the *De aetatibus* is not the composition of a comprehensive survey of world history, with a careful working out of chronological progression and an identification of the assembled sources, but an impressive literary display in the form of a theological and philosophical reflection on the course of history. The ancient equivalent of footnotes was neither necessary nor desirable.

Fulgentius may not identify the source we suspect he might have exploited, but we can still venture a guess as to the name of the author who offered an idiosyncratic model of history to Malalas and the Greek original of the *Excerpta*. When Malalas says that Alexander conquered the Assyrians, Medes, Parthians, Babylonians, and Persians and freed the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians from subjection to them, he cites the authority of "the exceedingly wise Bottios" for this statement.⁷⁶ This Bottios, or Bouttios, is practically unknown outside of Malalas and his chronicle, and even there he is cited only three times.⁷⁷ Each of these citations, however, exhibits a certain consistency with the historical narrative that sets Nebuchadnezzar against Alexander and traces an alternation of dominion from the East to the West. Malalas first refers to Bouttios in order to contrast his rationalizing historical account of the hero Perseus with the mythological version of Euripides.⁷⁸ The account of Perseus in Malalas, which is on the whole

⁷⁴ Baldwin, *Fulgentius and his Sources*, 37–57.

⁷⁵ *Fulg. aet. mund. praef.*, ed. Helm, 130. See Baldwin, *Fulgentius and his Sources*, 57; Manca, *Fulgenzio*, 14–16.

⁷⁶ Malalas 8, 1, ed. Thurn, 146: καθὼς Βόττιος ὁ σοφώτατος συνεγράψατο.

⁷⁷ See Jeffreys, *Malalas' sources*, 174; Garstad, *Tyche Sacrifices*, 86–93; Garstad, *Barbarian interest*, 26–28; Levick-Rich, *Bruttius*, 1 593–595, 2 1090–1095, 3 629–631; Garstad, *Euhemerus and Malalas*, 913–920.

⁷⁸ Malalas 2, 11, ed. Thurn, 25: περὶ ἧς ἐμυθολόγησεν Εὐριπίδης ὁ σοφώτατος ἐν τῇ συντάξει τοῦ αὐτοῦ δράματος ἐν κιβωτίῳ τινὶ βληθεῖσαν καὶ ῥιφείσαν κατὰ θάλασσαν τὴν Δανάην, ὡς φθαρεῖσαν ὑπὸ Διὸς μεταβληθέντος εἰς χρυσόν. ὁ δὲ σοφώτατος Βούττιος, ἱστορικὸς χρονογράφος, ἐξέθετο ὡς ὁ αὐτὸς Πίκος ὁ καὶ Ζεὺς οὖσαν ταύτην ἐν κουβουκλείῳ παρακειμένῳ τῇ θαλάσσει πολλῶν χρυσῶν πείσας ἠδυνήθη προτρεψάμενος "The exceedingly wise Euripides told the tale concerning her in the narrative of his drama, that Danae was thrown in a little chest and cast upon the sea, since she had been ravished by

consistent with Bouttios' apparent intention of turning myth into history, culminates in Perseus slaying Sardanapallus and his conquest of the Assyrian kingdom.⁷⁹ As with Alexander's defeat of his enemies, we have here a western champion (Perseus' grandfather, Acrisius, is said to come from the land of the Argives) overcoming his eastern foes and establishing his rule over them. There is here, moreover, some explanation for the odd conglomeration of eastern peoples which marks the account of Alexander, since Perseus is supposed to have called the conquered Assyrians 'Persians' after himself and, after he taught them the rites of the head of the Gorgon Medusa, which he used as a battle talisman, he called their land 'the land of the Medes'.⁸⁰

Malalas' second citation of Bouttios is in the passage on Alexander and the third, which seems to be corroborated by various texts ultimately dependent on an early, but modified version of the Chronological Canons of Eusebius of Caesarea, gives Bouttios as a source for the persecution of the Christians under Domitian.⁸¹ This would seem to make Bouttios himself a Christian, which is consistent with the observation above that the author who aligned the Jews with the western nations of Rome, Greece, and Egypt over against their oriental opponents and modeled the conquest and subsequent liberation of Rome on those of the Jews must have been a Christian.

Zeus after he was changed into gold. The exceedingly wise Bouttios, the historical chronographer, however, set out that this Picus who is also Zeus prevailed upon her with a great deal of money when she was in a chamber beside the sea and managed to 'change' her mind."

⁷⁹ Malalas 2, 11. On the account of Perseus in Malalas, see Garstad, *Perseus*, 171–183.

⁸⁰ Malalas, *Chron.* 2, 11, ed. Thurn, 27: καὶ ἐπ' ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτοὺς Πέρσας, ἀφελόμενος ἀπὸ Ἀσσυρίων τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὸ ὄνομα ... ἐδίδαξεν δὲ καὶ τοὺς Πέρσας τὴν τελετὴν τοῦ μυσεροῦ καὶ ἁθέου σκύφους τῆς Μεδοῦσης· ὄντινων ἐκάλεσεν τὴν χώραν Μήδων διὰ τὸ μάθημα "and he called them Persians after his own name, depriving the Assyrians of the kingdom and their name for his own sake ... And he taught the Persians the initiatory rite of the abominable and godless *skyphos* of Medusa, and he called their land the land of the Medes because of this teaching."

⁸¹ Malalas 10, 48, ed. Thurn, 199: πολλοὺς δὲ ἄλλους χριστιανοὺς ἐτιμωρήσατο, ὥστε φυγεῖν ἐξ αὐτῶν πλῆθος ἐπὶ τὸν Πόντον, καθὼς Βώττιος ὁ σοφὸς χρονογράφος συνεγράψατο κατ' αὐτῶν "He (Domitian) punished many other Christians, so that a multitude of them fled to Pontus, as the wise chronographer Bōttios wrote of them". Cf. Jerome *Chron.*: ann. Abr. 2112; George Syncellus *Chron.* 650; Eusebius, *Armenian Chronicle*, ed. Karst, 218.

Conclusion

Certain problems still remain. For instance, if Fulgentius knew of Bouttios' history, how did he know of it? Was there a Latin version in circulation in the West? If so, there is no other evidence for such a Latin rendering; indeed, there is no sign of material from Bouttios in Latin until the eighth-century translation of the *Excerpta Latina Barbari*. Or are Fulgentius' claims to a working knowledge of Greek more than learned posturing?⁸² We need not assume Fulgentius had a very extensive knowledge of Greek. The remains of Bouttios' work suggest it was a simple and straightforward text, which would not have demanded more than an elementary knowledge of Greek from the reader. If Fulgentius could read Greek, we are still left to wonder how he had access to the Greek text of Bouttios, a text which does not seem to have circulated all that widely. Turning to a rather different matter, how can we square the image of Alexander as liberator, which is so fundamental to the historical model we have perceived to be at work, an image which is, on the face of it, decidedly positive, with the essentially negative portrayal of Alexander we find in Malalas? Malalas depicts Alexander not only as the liberator of the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians, but also as a perpetrator of virgin sacrifice, a man duped and overcome by a woman, the Ethiopian queen Candace, and as one associated with a mad imposter.⁸³ If Bouttios is the source for all of this, why

⁸² On Fulgentius' claims to be familiar with Greek literature and the real extent of his knowledge of Greek, see Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers*, 221–223; Hays, *Date and Identity*, 189/190.

⁸³ Malalas 81, ed. Thurn, 146: ὅστις καὶ τὴν μεγάλην Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἔκτισεν, τὴν πρόην λεγομένην κόμην Ῥακοῦστιν· ἦν αὐτὸς ἐκάλεσεν εἰς ἴδιον ὄνομα Ἀλεξάνδρειαν, θυσιάσας κόρην παρθένον, Μακεδονίαν παρ' αὐτοῦ κληθεῖσαν "It was he who founded Alexandria the Great, which had previously been a village named Rhakoustis. He called it Alexandria after his own name, and sacrificed a virgin girl, called Macedonia by him." Malalas 8, 3, ed. Thurn, 147: γνωρίσασα οὖν αὐτὸν ἐκ τῶν συσσημάτων, συνέσχεν αὐτὸν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Ἀλέξανδρε βασιλεῦ, τὸν κόσμον ὅλον παρέλαβες· καὶ γυνή σε μία παρέλαβεν" "She knew him by his features and arrested him, and she said to him, 'King Alexander, you have captured the whole world, but a single woman has captured you.'" The recounting of the Candace incident takes up a disproportionately large amount of space in Malalas' brief account of Alexander. According to Malalas (8, 1), Alexander crossed into Asia not over the Hellespont, but from Byzantium to Bithynia; this route is unhistorical for Alexander the Great, but it is the route Cassius Dio (79, 18, 1–3) says was followed in A. D. 221 by the so-called *daimon* who assumed the appearance of Alexander and led hundreds of followers in Bacchic rites, being entertained at public expense, until he suddenly disappeared; see Millar, *Cassius Dio*, 214–218.

would he augment the achievements of a figure whose reputation he seems to have been determined to undermine?

We may, nevertheless, advance a few observations. From what might appear to be a simple error in historical fact, the liberation of Rome by Alexander, we can follow the faint traces of an idiosyncratic model of world history. There is the inclusion of Rome in the realm of Nebuchadnezzar, and the description of Rome's conquest in terms very similar to those in which Nebuchadnezzar's famous conquest of the Jewish kingdom is described. What seems to result is a picture in which the oppressive and domineering conquests of a motley assembly of easterners under Nebuchadnezzar are followed by Alexander's liberation of the nations of the West and conquest of the nations of the East. The author of this historical model seems to have been more concerned with clarity and meaning in the broad sweep of history than with precise historical accuracy; the model deviates rather significantly from the received historical record and it seems to have been difficult to integrate it into a comprehensive chronology. The author, by aligning the Jews with the nations of the West, also seems to disclose a Christian orientation. This author appears to have been the Bouttios who is cited by Malalas in close connection with the liberation of the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians from the Assyrians, Persians, Medes, Parthians, and Babylonians. There are also signs that Fulgentius might have been aware of the work of Bouttios. In the *De aetatibus Nebuchadnezzar* and Alexander are juxtaposed as the most prominent figures in two successive chapters and the Macedonian kingdom conquers the Babylonian kingdom and follows it immediately in the domination of the world.

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