# **Chapter 3: The Apostolic and Prophetic Church according to Iulius Africanus, Origen and Tertullian**

## **Iulius Africanus and his chronicle**

We have already discussed the general meaning of “chronicles” in the previous chapter on Eusebius, who wrote his own *Chronicle* before the *Church History*  and thus developed the basis for his chronological conception of the beginnings of Christianity. This provided him with the framework for his picture of the development of early Christianity. One of Eusebius’ most important forerunners was Iulius Africanus (160–240?), author of the *Chronographiae*.[[1]](#footnote-2) This is evident from the fact that many of the fragments of this otherwise largely lost Christian text have come down to us through Eusebius and Georgios Synkellos, the Byzantine chronicler discussed below.

Eusebius and Synkellos were not the only ones who relied on Julius Africanus. Among those who did were, in particular, the younger Alexandrian chroniclers of the late fourth and early fifth century, such as Panodorus, author of the now unfortunately lost *World Chronicle—*men who clearly did not make uncritical use of the works of Iulius Africanus (or Eusebius).[[2]](#footnote-3) Also worthy of mention is Panodorus' contemporary, Annianus, who criticized Panodorus for relying too little on the biblical and too much on extra-biblical sources for his time calculations, as had Iulius Africanus and Eusebius.[[3]](#footnote-4) Synkellos drew long passages from Annianus’ text, though he too was witness to Eusebius’ importance to chronicling and Iulius Africanus’ importance for Eusebius. In his *World Chronicle*, which he wrote in the early ninth century, Synkellos referred to the valuable earlier work of the aforementioned Panodorus, which he viewed as a successor to the *Chronicle* of Eusebius and the writings of Iulius Africanus.

The chronistic tradition continued, which speaks to its outstanding importance to later church historiography and demonstrates the creative constructivism with which new, contemporary challenges were tackled through recourse to earlier periods and the recording of recent events in a corresponding time structure. Here, I mention only a few examples to show the importance of the form of chronicle texts. Coming from Alexandria, for example, is the *Chronica Alexandrina*, based not on Eusebius, but on Iulius Africanus, and which, thanks to an anonymous Latin translation and adaptation entitled *Excerpta Latina Barbari,*had an influence on the Merovingian West by establishing a connection between the Merovingian family and the ancient Trojans—an idea subsequently disseminated through the *Liber historiae Francorum*.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Other chronicles showing recourse to Eusebius and Julius can be found in Antioch (Malalas, John of Antioch, *Excerpta Salmasiana*), Constantinople (the widely popular chronicle of Symeon Logothetes as well as its rival, which has survived in only one manuscript, that of Theophanes Continuatus),  and Syria (the detailed, universal *Kitab al-'Unwan*[*The Book of History*] of the Melkite Bishop Agapius of Hierapolis or Mahbūb ibn-Qūṣṭānṭīn, who died circa 941/942).[[5]](#footnote-6) Additional authors and texts are known as well (Ps.-Eustathius of Antioch, the *Chronicon Paschale*, the *Anonymous Matritensis*).

The decisive impact of Eusebius and Iulius’ idea to structure time and harmonize different time calculations while placing Christianity at history’s core should not be underestimated. Chroniclers such as Iulius and some of his successors were not merely time travellers; they also visited different countries to learn about the conditions of other peoples, their history, and earlier time calculations. We know, for example, that Iulius visited Palestine (he may even have been born there), spent time in Edessa at the court of Abgar VIII (we may recall the importance of this court in Eusebius’ *Church History* and his discovery of the correspondence between Christ and King Abgar V). In his *Chronographiae,* Iuliustried to mesh different historical calculations from various places and countries with the information in the Bible. One of the sources that he relied on for the period under discussion was again Josephus Flavius.[[6]](#footnote-7)

How did Iulius Africanus perceive the history of Christianity’s origins? Given the amount of information that he provides on the six days of creation in Genesis—from the creation of the cosmos to that of Adam in year one[[7]](#footnote-8)—and on the following six millennia down to the year 5726 or 221/222 CE,[[8]](#footnote-10) his treatment of the first two centuries of Christianity, which amounts to a few paragraphs, is rather cursory.

Unlike Eusebius, who perceives Christianity as originating in a pre-existing Logos, Iulius Africanus begins his history of Christianity with the Resurrection of Christ, a view favored by modern church historians. Nonetheless, the final part of his *Chronographiae*highlights the importance of Christianity within universal history. Classical antiquity and the Jews ultimately paved the way for Christianity, which came to dominate history, an idea that anticipates the Constantinian turn, about which Orosius would later speak. Iulius discusses in detail the correct date of the Incarnation and Resurrection, and as a Christian scholar, shares the perspective of the scholarship of the second and early third centuries, the “era of the ‘new’ or ‘second’ sophistry,” as his contemporary Philostratus termed it.[[9]](#footnote-12) Philostratus distinguishes the new from the older form of sophistry by the greater weight it places on history, so that authors no longer cover “philosophical topics” in a general or abstract form, but focus instead on “specific topics” viewed from a historical perspective.[[10]](#footnote-13)

If we look at the 100 preserved fragments of Iulius’ *Chronographiae,* a work of considerable length that once extended over five books, and if we also take into account that only about 10-20% of the entire work has survived in these fragments,[[11]](#footnote-14) then we may find it surprising that 87 of the 100 fragments deal with the period from the Creation to the time of Christ, and that the beginnings of Christianity are referenced only in the fifth and final of the books.[[12]](#footnote-15)

Iulius starts this fifth book[[13]](#footnote-16) by referring to the importance of the Edessa archive, which we have already encountered several times, and from which, according to Moses Chorenensis, he “transcribed everything.” Indeed, Moses claims that not only had Eusebius and others vouched for its existence, but he himself had seen it with his own eyes. Obviously, the fact that Iulius speaks about this archive in Book Five was of interest to Eusebius. But it also fascinated Moses since he began his *History of the Armenians* with King Abgar, who, due to an ailment, appealed to Jesus and, after inviting him to Edessa, received the aforementioned written reply. This correspondence is also the first piece of documentary evidence that Moses cites in his *History* and is thus further indication of the importance that historiographers ascribed to the Edessa archive. Unfortunately, no fragment has survived to enlighten us on whether or not Iulius, who does refer to Abgar, already knew of the correspondence between Abgar and Jesus.[[14]](#footnote-17) The information offered by Eusebius discussed above suggests that it was he who found this testimony and that Moses drew it from him and not from Iulius.

According to Iulius, the origins of Christianity lay firmly in the history of the Roman occupation and the Jewish resistance to Herod, who had been appointed by the Romans.[[15]](#footnote-18) The canonical Gospels seem to have served him as the starting point for his chronology of early Christianity as he is concerned with the date of the Incarnation[[16]](#footnote-19) and the details of Christ’s family tree in Matthew and Luke. He also makes use of a “Letter to Aristides,”[[17]](#footnote-20)and says that the arrival of the Magi occurred when Jesus was seven years  old.[[18]](#footnote-21) Like the synoptic gospels, he estimates that Christ’s public ministry lasted one year, hence rejects John’s claim that it continued for three.[[19]](#footnote-22) The Resurrection too plays a role in Iulius’ numerical calculations.[[20]](#footnote-23) Little further information is preserved in the sparse remaining fragments.[[21]](#footnote-24)

Iulius clearly showed Eusebius the way to the archive of Edessa, which was important to both, but also provided a chronological model that spoke for the fundamental reliability of documents and data, which, however, Eusebius did not use uncritically in his *Church History*.

1. On this with additional literature, see Wallraff and Iulius Africanus, Iulius Africanus: Chronographiae. The Extant Fragments (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Gelzer, Sextus Julius Africanus und die byzantinische Chronographie. Die Nachfolger des Julius Africanus (1885); Adler, Time Immemorial: Archaic History and its Sources in Christian Chronography from Julius Africanus to George Syncellus (1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Wallraff and Iulius Africanus, Iulius Africanus: Chronographiae. The Extant Fragments (2007), xxxv-xxxvi; Adler, Time Immemorial: Archaic History and its Sources in Christian Chronography from Julius Africanus to George Syncellus (1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See the introduction in Wallraff and Iulius Africanus, Iulius Africanus: Chronographiae. The Extant Fragments (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Vassiliev, Kitab al-'Unvan. Histoire universelle (1910, 1911, 1912, 1915). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See Hardwick, Josephus as an Historical Source in Patristic Literature through Eusebius (1989), 34-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Iulius Afric., *Chron*., F14 in Wallraff and Iulius Africanus, Iulius Africanus: Chronographiae. The Extant Fragments (2007), 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Iulius Afric., *Chron*., F14 in Wallraff and Iulius Africanus, Iulius Africanus: Chronographiae. The Extant Fragments (2007), 23. On the calculation of the years, see n. 4 in ibid. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
9. Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* I 481. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
11. Wallraff and Iulius Africanus, Iulius Africanus: Chronographiae. The Extant Fragments (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
12. See Iulius Afric., Chron., T88 in ibid. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
13. The evidence on where Book V begins is not entirely conclusive as the fragments rarely make direct reference to which book they belong. Nevertheless, the last fragment that clearly belongs to Book IV is T64e ibid. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
14. So Iulius Afric., Chron., F96 in ibid. 290. For Iulius and his relation to Edessa and the court of Abgar VIII (176 – 213 CE), see also his work *Cesti* 1,20, on this ibid. 261 Anm. 261. See, for example, Iulius, *Cesti*, F12 Iulius Africanus and Wallraff, Cesti. The extant fragments (2012), 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
15. Iulius Afric., Chron., F89 in Wallraff and Iulius Africanus, Iulius Africanus: Chronographiae. The Extant Fragments (2007), 262-268. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
16. Iulius Afric., Chron., T92 in ibid. 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
17. See Iulius Afric., Chron., F90 in ibid. 270-272. The *Letter to Aristides* (CPG 1693) shows Iulius’s concern with exegetical questions as also does another *Letter to Origen*, in he discusses the story of Susannah in the Book of Daniel (CPG 1692). On these and on Origen’s response, see Ibid. xvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
18. Iulius Afric., Chron., T91 in ibid. 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
19. Iulius Afric., Chron., F22 und T93b in ibid. 46-48. 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
20. See, for example, Iulius Afric., Chron., F93 und F94 in ibid. 288-290. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
21. For example, the short note about the unknown late life of John after he retired from teaching and his service as a bishop, Iulius Afric., Chron., F95 in ibid. 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)