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Bruno Bleckmann: *Die letzte Generation der griechischen Geschichtsschreiber. Studien zur Historiographie im ausgehenden 6. Jahrhundert.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2021 (Historia-Einzelschriften 267). 186 p. € 48.00. ISBN: 978-3-515-13085-1.

Bruno Bleckmann, who is already known for his careful studies of historians from the fourth centuries BC and AD, here turns his attention to writers of the late sixth century AD, in particular to the fragments of Menander Protector, of which he is preparing a new edition and annotated translation in collaboration with his Düsseldorf colleague, Markus Stein.¹ The discussions in this volume outgrew the constraints of this volume, and so are presented separately in the form of seven self-contained but connected studies. There is inevitably some overlap and repetition in the discrete discussions, for example about the long tradition of secular historiography, but these are not so intrusive as to cause offence.

The detailed and authoritative study of Menander (chapters 3–5) is preceded by an introductory survey of ancient historiography (“1. Einleitung: Zum Ende der antiken Geschichtsschreibung”, pp. 9–38) that sketches the evolution of the tradition from its first exponents, Herodotus and Thucydides, a millennium before: this points to the various breaks in the sequence, in both Greek and Latin writing, though these gaps did not affect the sense of a continuum, and considers explanations for the end of ancient historiography after about 630 in the context of evolving concepts of what was relevant material for secular historiography.² Although secular Latin historiography is often held to have ended with Ammianus Marcellinus in the late fourth century, Bleckmann reviews the various authors who provided some form of continuation down to the early seventh century. A particular issue

- 1 Bleckmann uses the traditional numbering of fragments in C. Müller (ed.): *Fragmenta historicorum Graecorum IV.* Paris 1851, pp. 200–269, but also supplies the distinctive numbering of R. C. Blockley: *The History of Menander the Guardsman. Introductory Essay, Text, Translation, and Historiographical Notes.* Liverpool 1985 (Arca. Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 17). On occasion a line reference in the Blockley citations would have been helpful in addition to the fragment number.
- 2 Substantially the same material is presented in B. Bleckmann: *Historiography in Late Antiquity Before Procopius.* In: M. Meier/F. Montinaro (eds.): *A Companion to Procopius of Caesarea.* Leiden/Boston 2022 (Brill’s Companions to the Byzantine World 11), pp. 155–177.

with sixth-century writers in Greek is the apparent encroachment of religion, namely Christianity, into what might be seen on the basis of Thucydidean practice as a non-religious literary form, but it is pointed out that this privileges a minority practice, in which Thucydides was only followed by a few writers, including the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia and Polybius, against the majority who, in the tradition of Herodotus, rightly recognised that aspects of religion could have a profound impact on people and events and so deserved mention in historical accounts. Just because we esteem the non-religious approach of a handful of historians does not mean that this was the best way for an ancient writer to capture the full range of relevant historical factors. It was possible for historians such as Menander and Theophylact Simocatta to include relevant religious material without crossing over into matters of doctrine and Episcopal succession, which remained the stuff of ecclesiastical history: these distinctions were recognized by Evagrius in his list of historical predecessors (Evagr. Schol. hist. eccl. 5.24) and John of Ephesus when introducing the secular material in his final book (Ioh. Eph. hist. eccl. 6.1).

The second prefatory chapter (“2. Die Nachfolger Prokops: Agathias und Menandros”, pp. 39–46) considers Agathias and Menander as authors working in the substantial shadow of Procopius and under considerably different conditions. Agathias and Menander emerge as very different practitioners, though attention to language links them. Agathias’ *Histories* can be treated as a series of discrete sections, some devoted to narrating military action in Lazica, Italy, and Thrace, others to digressions on foreigners or natural disasters. Menander by contrast appears to have produced an integrated narrative, in which there was a strong focus on international diplomacy; even though this is accentuated by the dominance of fragments from Constantine Porphyrogennitus’ *Excerpta de legationibus*, the richness of this material is still striking. It is not possible to say what Menander’s approach to digressions might have been, since these would not have contributed material to the diplomatic excerpts, and the other main source of material, the *Excerpta de sententiis*, provides much shorter extracts. One might speculate that Menander included a digression on some religious matters, with the fate of the former Zoroastrian Isaozites perhaps belonging to a discussion of Persian Christians, but there can be no certainty. It is easy to elevate the qualities of authors who are substantially lost, for example the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia for its continuation of Thucydides or Hieronymus of Cardia for his account of the Diadochi, since survival of the complete work might have revealed

flaws and inconsistencies. In the case of Menander, however, there are good grounds for supposing that as a historian he would have rivaled and quite possibly surpassed Procopius as an analytical reporter, unlike Agathias and Theophylact who did not come close, even though Procopius undoubtedly had the advantage in the grandeur of the events he was able to narrate.

The topic of the third chapter (“3. Reden bei Menandros Protektor: Die Rede Justins II. bei der Einsetzung des Tiberios Caesar”, pp. 47–63) is speeches in Menander, with most attention devoted to a speech that is not in fact preserved in the extant fragments, namely that delivered by the deranged Justin II in 574 when appointing Tiberius Constantine as Caesar to manage affairs. The basis for the attribution to Menander is that Theophylact’s version of the speech (Theophyl. Sim. hist. 3.11.5–12.1) did not originate in John of Epiphaneia, his primary source at this point in his narrative, and Menander is an obvious supplementary provider since Theophylact knew his work, which may also have contributed specific details that Theophylact adds to John’s military narrative.³ There is, however, room for uncertainty. With regard to military information, the lost work of Theophanes Byzantinus provided an account in ten books of the eastern events of 572–582 that Theophylact might have known, even though he does not refer to him (just as he does not acknowledge John of Epiphaneia either), and different versions of Justin’s speech are preserved in the ecclesiastical histories of Evagrius Scholasticus in Greek (5.13) and John of Ephesus in Syriac (3.5), the latter noting that the speech was transcribed by notaries. Theophylact might have used a transcript of the speech, or found it from the city chronicle that provided him with other information, where the public reaction to the speech might well have been noted.⁴ Economy of possible sources, however, supports attribution to Menander. Bleckmann speculates about the structural role of the speech in Menander’s work as the division between

3 As suggested by T. Olajos: *Les sources de Théophylacte Simocatta historien*. Leiden 1988 (*Byzantina Neerlandica* 10), pp. 22–26.

4 Olajos (n. 3), pp. 23–24, identified the official transcript as Theophylact’s source, though also conceded that he might have used this through the intermediary of Menander. Michael Whitby/Mary Whitby: *The History of Theophylact Simocatta. An English Translation with Introduction and Notes*. Oxford 1986, p. 90 n. 56, suggested a chronicle as the probable source because of the precise date for the event. For Bleckmann (pp. 58–59), Theophylact’s comment on the ceremony (hist. 3.12.1) supported Menander as the source, but a chronicle might have noted the applause of those present and Theophylact himself added his assessment of the occasion.

criticism of Justin II and approbation of Tiberius Constantine and Maurice, with the possibility that Menander, like Theophylact, also marked the adoption of Maurice by the dying Tiberius in 582 with another discourse on leadership. This idea is interesting and plausible, but it must be remembered that the thesis is purely speculative. A minor regret in this chapter is that more is not said about Menander's overall approach to speech, both direct and indirect, and to letters. Although some speeches and letters were excised from the *de legationibus* extracts, on the grounds that there were different collections for such material, the extant excerpts preserve evidence for the diversity of Menander's practice: this ranged from the traditional set-piece confrontation of secular historiography, through the question and answer of an imperial audience, to brief sentences that attempt to capture the immediacy of particular exchanges. Such a range is not found in Procopius, Agathias, or Theophylact, where balanced orations tend to predominate.

The fourth chapter ("4. Christentum bei Menandros: Reliquien, antizoroastrische Polemik und Kreuzzugsidee", pp. 64–94) treats the issue of Christian elements in Menander, a topic that loomed large in discussions of sixth-century historians when their religious affiliation and respect for alleged generic constraints were under scrutiny. There is no doubt that Menander was prepared to use terminology accurately for Christian institutions and feasts, for example Epiphany, usually without the circumlocutions to which Procopius, Agathias, and even Theophylact tended to resort. Attention is then devoted to the fragment about the relic of the True Cross at Apamea and its transfer to Constantinople at Justin II's behest; this was published by François Halkin, and printed by Roger C. Blockley as fragment 17, although the latter doubted its authenticity on stylistic grounds.⁵ However, even Blockley accepted that the fragment had been rewritten, at least in part, and I regard it as a paraphrase of material from Menander, perhaps from a digression, since, for example, the historian is unlikely to have referred to Zemarchus, who was well-known from his involvement in embassies, as "a certain man, Zemarchus by name" (fr. 17.13, Blockley) without allusion to his other actions. Bleckmann rightly accepts the fragment as genuine and attends to the

5 F. Halkin: Un nouvel extrait de l'historien byzantin Ménandre? In: Zetesis. Album amicorum, door vrienden en collega's aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. E. de Strycker, gewoon hoogleraar aan de Universitaire Faculteiten Sint-Ignatius te Antwerpen, ter gelegenheid van zijn vijfenzestigste verjaardag. Antwerp/Utrecht 1973, pp. 664–667; Blockley (n. 1), pp. 154–157.

prosopographical identification of the two main agents in the relic's two-stage transfer, Zemarchus and Magnus (the latter is also not identified in the fragment as a significant figure in the empire).

Bleckmann then continues to consider the issue of holy or sacred war, since the words *ἱερός πόλεμος* occur in the Apamea fragment in a message that Justin II sent to Zemarchus when the latter reported the opposition he encountered from the city's inhabitants when he attempted to remove their relic, "so that there should not be removed the most holy wood among them, they undertook a holy war" (fr. 17.19–21, Blockley). Menander made clear his hostility to Zoroastrianism in the epigram he composed for the death of Isaozites, a Persian who was crucified for converting to Christianity. He recognised, indeed highlighted, the role that religion played in international dealings, especially between Rome and Persia, and used this as one analytic tool for assessing the behaviour of leading individuals: for example he presents a contrast between Justin II, who scorned the plea of the Persian ambassador Sebukht in 571/572 that the Fifty-Year Peace should not be broken since this would involve the Romans in attacking the substantial Christian population of Persia, whereas Maurice when laying siege in 578 to the city of Chlomarion in Arzanene respectfully refused to accept the gift of Christian religious vessels with which the Persian garrison commander attempted to buy off his attack. Although the religious aspect of the war was important for Menander, there is, to my mind, a clear difference between the campaigns of the 570s, and indeed 580s, and the crusading rhetoric that Heraclius desperately exploited when attempting to raise Roman morale and attract support in Transcaucasia in the 620s.⁶ Theophylact, writing his *Histories* under the influence of the rhetoric of the 620s, composed speeches for the general Justinian and Bishop Domitian that reflected the contemporary perception of a sharp divide between Romans, who fought for the true religion, and the Persians, whereas accurately Menander presented the messy reality of sixth-century campaigns. The occurrence of the words 'holy war' in Justin's message to Zemarchus relate back to the 'most holy' cause of the disturbance,

6 Cf. J. Howard-Johnston: *The Official History of Heraclius' Persian Campaigns*. In: E. Dąbrowa (ed.): *The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East. Proceedings of a Colloquium Held at the Jagiellonian University, Kraków in September 1992*. Krakow 1994, pp. 57–87, at pp. 84–85; also id.: *The Last Great War of Antiquity*. Oxford/New York 2021, pp. 200, 240, 365–366.

and it is unsafe, to my mind, to use them in support of a wider thesis about Roman attitudes to war in the 570s.

The fifth chapter (“5. Menandros und die rivalisierenden Historiker seiner Generation: Theophanes von Byzanz und Johannes von Epiphania”, pp. 95–113) examines Menander in the context of his contemporaries as secular historians, John of Epiphaneia and Theophanes Byzantinus. Only the first five chapters of John’s history are preserved, with its subsequent account having to be reconstructed from its use by Theophylact, while even less is known about Theophanes, for whom a summary of part of his long work by Photius is our only information (Phot. bibl., cod. 64). It is perhaps curious that, of the two late Roman historians who came from Constantinople as opposed to the majority who were provincials, Photius knew Theophanes but not Menander whereas information from Menander was extracted for Constantine Porphyrogennitus but not from Theophanes. Bleckmann carefully scrutinizes the respective versions of the outbreak of war in 572, bringing in as well the evidence of Evagrius and John of Ephesus, both of whom included significant secular material towards the end of their ecclesiastical histories, the former relying on information he picked up in Antioch in the service of the Patriarch Gregory, the latter most probably using a lost written account in Syriac. As Bleckmann observes, the existence of five independent accounts of these events makes this one of the best-recorded incidents from the whole of ancient history, with problems similar to those in the accounts of Alexander the Great, and the detailed differences are meticulously teased out. The extent to which these different authors knew any of the alternative versions is uncertain, and to present them as rivals does not advance our appreciation of their approaches. Evagrius may well have known something about the account being written by his cousin, John of Epiphaneia, and discrepancies over the treatment of Turks in Menander and Theophanes suggest that one writer was responding to the other, though priority cannot be established. My guess is that Menander probably received his imperial encouragement to write history early in Maurice’s reign and that he, like Theophanes and John of Ephesus, composed his work before the Persian civil war of 590 allowed Maurice to bring two decades of conflict to a surprisingly successful conclusion when the opportunity to restore the young Khusro II in 591 allowed the Romans to obtain substantial territorial concessions. Evagrius was probably working on his history in the late 580s, but did not draw it to a conclusion until after the Roman triumph, while for

John of Epiphaneia Maurice's success and his involvement in subsequent diplomacy were the reasons for constructing his account of the whole war, so that he would inevitably have focused on its climax. Thus John's perspective was probably different from that of Menander, and this should be born in mind in any comparison of their approaches.

The sixth chapter ("6. Die Konkurrenz der Historiker und der Militärpatrone", pp. 114–140) looks at the background to the various historians, all of whom were lawyers with the exception of the Syriac writer John of Ephesus, a monk from near Amida who became titular bishop of Ephesus, and in particular their connections with specific generals as possible military patrons. Here Procopius' service in Belisarius' entourage, which resulted in an account of his actions that is favourable at least down to the mid-540s, might be a prototype. No subsequent historian, however, seems to have had such privileged access to a serving general or to have had personal experience of campaigning. The closest that any comes is Evagrius, who made clear his liking for Philippicus (Evagr. Schol. hist. eccl. 6.3), whom he probably met on various occasions when the latter was passing through Antioch on his way to or from the eastern frontier; Evagrius presented his actions favourably, but expected that other unidentified historians might be less positive. Evagrius presumably obtained information directly from Philippicus, as Agathias might have from the general Martin for his account of the Persian defeat outside Phasis in 556.⁷ An alternative source of information, one that would not entail such close links between historians and generals as patrons, is that historians had access to some of the reports that commanders will have regularly had to create when informing Constantinople about their activities in the field. Bleckmann considers the different accounts of the actions of the general Marcian in 572/573, who is variously presented in the sources as doing his best with limited resources and initiating a serious siege of Nisibis, or not posing any threat to the city at all, with Theophanes, John of Epiphaneia, and John of Ephesus being much more positive than Evagrius and Menander, for whom the chance to criticize Justin's inadequate military preparations may have led them to reshape Marcian's activities. All

7 Justin son of Germanus, the other general whose actions are highlighted in Agathias' account (3.19–25), had died in 566 and so would not have been available when Agathias was working on his history in the 570s; Martin would certainly have been an old man by then as well, but distant memories might account for some of the implausibilities in Agathias' account.

authors are, unsurprisingly, positive about the military achievements of both Tiberius and Maurice, even when they were less than successful: Tiberius was defeated by the Avars after Justin II rejected his advice about agreeing terms with them, Persian successes in early 578 when Maurice was not ready to oppose their raids are blamed on Persian anticipation of the end of the three-year truce, and the failure of Maurice's ambitious, perhaps over-ambitious, march on Ctesiphon in 581 is attributed to the treachery of the Jafnid al-Mundhir.

Chapter seven ("7. Die Historiographie unter Herakleios: Bemerkungen zu Theophylakt", pp. 141–152) turns to Heraclian historiography with some remarks on Theophylact Simocatta. He does not receive the in-depth treatment of specific topics that has been accorded to Menander and this short survey essentially goes over familiar ground, albeit with the intriguing suggestion that Theophylact might have contemplated a twenty-book work that would have brought the account up to Heraclius' triumph over Persia and re-establishment of peace in 629/630. However much we might want to know more about the course of the reigns of Phocas and Heraclius, Theophylact's failure to complete this project is likely to cause less regret than the loss of Menander's complete history. There is also a brief consideration of the sort of historical information available to Theophanes that may have originated in George of Pisidia, but little is said about the *Chronicon Paschale* and less on the intractable problem of the fragments of John of Antioch, or the continuation of John of Antioch if that name is to be attached to the creator of the early-sixth-century version of this chronicle. Forty years ago it was provocative to identify anything of interest in Theophylact's approach to historiography, whereas now the fashion is to see contemporary relevance in many of his narrative choices. My view is that the pendulum has swung too far, and it would have been good to have had Bleckmann's thoughts on this issue, but the analysis of Stephanos Efthymiadis, which pushes the thesis of Theophylact as contemporary commentary, is not in the bibliography.⁸ The identification of Heraclian allusions can be taken too far. For example,

8 S. Efthymiadis: *A Historian and his Tragic Hero: a Literary Reading of Theophylact Simocatta's Ecumenical History*. In: R. Macrides (ed.): *History as Literature in Byzantium*. Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, April 2007. Farnham 2010 (Publications of the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies 15), pp. 169–186. This would also have been relevant to discussion of Justin II's speech to Tiberius.

a high point in Theophylact's account is the restoration to Persia of Khusro II, which Maurice undertook on the basis that legitimate sovereigns ought to support each other, but which was at odds with Heraclius' decision in 629 to support the usurpation of Shahvaraz, who briefly interrupted the legitimate succession of Sasanids. Theophylact highlighted Maurice's concern for legitimacy in a way that would have been embarrassing if contemporary allusions have to be sought everywhere. The case of Philippicus illustrates the complexities of pursuing contemporary relevance: different views were held about his generalship in the East in the 580s, with some negative commentary apparently associated with the actions of the elder Heraclius, father of the emperor; in the 590s Peter, Priscus, and Comentiolus were preferred as commanders of armies in the Balkans, which probably helped to ensure that Philippicus survived the bloodbath of Maurice's closest supporters in 602; at the start of Heraclius' reign he returned to favour and was appointed to command in Asia Minor with some success. Theophylact's varied treatment of Philippicus, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, might reflect views from either Maurice's or Heraclius' reign, or indeed from both.

Bleckmann accepts the identification of Theophylact's patron as the emperor Heraclius, citing a 2001 paper by Joseph David Frendo, but examination of Frendo's case reveals the fragility of the argument.⁹ Frendo asserted that this identification was 'demonstrated' by Agostino Pertusi in his edition of George of Pisidia, though actually Pertusi did no more than state it as fact without discussion.¹⁰ The main reason for the identification, as noted by Herbert Hunger,¹¹ lies in the reference in Theophylact's introductory Dia-

9 J. D. C. Frendo: Three Authors in Search of a Reader. An Approach to the Analysis of Direct Discourse in Procopius, Agathias and Theophylact Simocatta. In: C. Sode/S. Takács (eds.): *Novum Millennium. Studies on Byzantine History and Culture*. Dedicated to Paul Speck. Aldershot 2001, pp. 123–135. Frendo's case was first made in J. D. C. Frendo: *History and Panegyric in the Age of Heraclius: The Literary Background to the Composition of the Histories of Theophylact Simocatta*. In: *DOP* 42, 1988, pp. 143–156, at pp. 144–145 n. 11.

10 A. Pertusi (ed.): *Giorgio di Pisidia. Poemi I. Panegirici epici*. Ettal 1959 (*Studia patristica et Byzantina* 7), p. 12 n. 2, citing L. Bréhier: *Le monde byzantine*, vol. 3: *La civilisation byzantine*. Paris 1950 (*L'évolution de l'humanité* 32), pp. 461–462, who, in a brief discussion of legal education, elides the distinction between the Heracleidae's restoration of the palace and the means of History's salvation.

11 H. Hunger: *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. 1: *Philosophie – Rhetorik – Epistolographie – Geschichtsschreibung – Geographie*. Munich 1978 (*Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft* 12.5.1), p. 315.

logue between Philosophy and History to History's saviour as an evil-averting Heracles who rescues an Alcestis. The connection of this reference with the emperor Heraclius is understandable, but is at odds with other elements in the Dialogue, which needs to be considered sequentially. Philosophy first identifies her own rescuer as the returning Heracleidae, who saved the state and removed pollution from the palace. This clearly points to Heraclius, who had overthrown the 'tyrant' Phocas, the Thracian Anytus who had destroyed Philosophy's Socrates. Philosophy then asks History who was her saviour, to which History replies by asking Philosophy "My queen, do you not know the great high priest (ἀρχιερεύς) and president (πρόεδρος) of the entire inhabited world?" Philosophy responds that the person is an old and treasured friend (Theophyl. Sim. hist. Dialogue 8). This exchange would make little sense if it was referring to the person whom Philosophy had only just identified as her own saviour, but clearly introduces a new individual into the discussion.¹² It is in this context that the following reference by History to a Heracles rescuing Alcestis has to be understood: here the standard parallel of Heraclius and Heracles (e.g. George of Pisidia, *Heraclius* 1.71–79) is extended to embrace his key supporter, Patriarch Sergius.¹³ History's rescuer is then praised for his virtuous ascent to sit on the summit of divine wisdom or theology (θεολογία), an incorporeal philosopher on earth and incarnation of contemplation (Theophyl. Sim. hist. Dialogue 11), accolades that are more applicable to a cleric,¹⁴ than to an emperor better known for his campaigning.¹⁵ Language offers further support to Sergius, since, apart from being

12 Frendo, *History* (n. 9), pp. 144–145 n. 11, suggested, somewhat patronizingly, that proponents of Sergius as Theophylact's patron, who included Peter Schreiner in his German translation of Theophylact, as well as myself, had been misled by an entry in Carl de Boor's index to his edition of Theophylact. This is certainly not true in my case, since the crucial factor, not considered by Frendo, is History's presentation of her saviour as someone different from Philosophy's.

13 Cf. George of Pisidia, *In Bonum patricium* 1–13, for imagery of Heracles being extended to include Bonus: see Mary Whitby: *Defender of the Cross: George of Pisidia on the Emperor Heraclius and his Deputies*. In: ead. (ed.): *The Propaganda of Power. The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*. Leiden/Boston/Cologne 1998 (Mnemosyne-Supplements 183), pp. 247–273, at p. 264.

14 Cf. George of Pisidia, poem XLVI (Sternbach) for an epigram in praise of Sergius' library, with Mary Whitby: *The Patriarch Sergius and the Theotokos*. In: *JÖByz* 70, 2020, pp. 403–425, at p. 404.

15 Heraclius, however, was certainly pious and approached Constantinople in 610 with images of the Virgin affixed to his ships. George of Pisidia, in his early poem *In Heracliam ex Africa redeuntem* 6–13, referred to the emperor's divinely-inspired mind

called high priest (*ἀρχιερεύς*) and leader (*πρόεδρος*) of the entire inhabited world, an allusion to the contentious use of the title of ecumenical by Patriarchs of Constantinople's, he is also referred to as *ιεροφάντης*. Although these words might be applied to an emperor, in the case of *ἀρχιερεύς* and *ιεροφάντης* this is unusual, and occurs in contexts where it is already clear that an emperor is being denoted;¹⁶ such is not the case in Theophylact's Dialogue. For a writer or speaker in Constantinople in the 620s, for example Theodore Syncellus, the word *ἀρχιερεύς* without qualification or explanation denoted Patriarch Sergius.

The book is rounded off with a brief chapter ("8. Zusammenfassung", pp. 153–158) that summarizes the discussions of the previous seven chapters, followed by a bibliography, Index of People and Places, and an Index of passages discussed.

My only serious concern with this study is the title. As the back cover states, the book focuses on the historiography of the reign of Maurice, the 580s and 590s, with Menander Protector centre stage. These authors, however, were not the last generation of Greek historiography, since that accolade belongs to the Heraclian writers of the late 620s. Although Theophylact constitutes a bridge between the two periods through his use of John of Epiphaneia and narrative of events from the 570s as well as Maurice's actual reign, he did compose his work more than a generation after John and Evagrius. His contemporaries in a circle whose centre was the Patriarch Sergius were the author of the *Chronicon Paschale*, George of Pisidia, and Theodore Syncellus. These writers had probably received their education in the late sixth century, like Archbishop John of Thessalonica, another author who produced a quasi-historical account of some recent events in his city, but their vision was shaped by the extraordinary upheavals of the first quarter of the seventh century. Menander and his contemporaries had lived in a different world, of which there may have been little detailed recollection in the late 620s: Theophylact seems to have relied overwhelmingly on written sources, while the author of the *Chronicon Paschale* was content to ignore most events of the

and his knowledge of the Scriptures, but at this early point in the reign there was a shortage of other material to select for praise.

16 Bréhier (n. 10), p. 462, connected *ἀρχιερεύς* to Heraclius on the basis that it is common as an imperial title, but Theophylact's Dialogue is not dealing with imperial titles where the application of the word would be clear.

reigns of Justin II, Tiberius, and Maurice, with the exception of the change of emperors and one patriarchal succession at Antioch.

What emerges most forcefully from this excellent study is the diversity and dynamism of Greek historiography during the reign of Maurice, a conclusive demonstration that debunks the thesis that the writing of history suffered a long, slow decline from its Thucydidean peak as generic expectations stifled creativity. Menander emerges as an author of rare talent, one who found authoritative source material, who subjected imperial policy both externally and internally to critical analysis, and who presented this elegantly and clearly. In the detailed discussions there are inevitably points where scholars will disagree with Bleckmann's conclusions, but this study places the investigation of both Menander and the events of the early 570s on a much more secure footing, for which he deserves heartfelt thanks and commendation.

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