

The anonymous author of *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* had three potential purposes of writing: to respond to the abbot's request, to admonish future generations, and to atone his sins to God.

The elusive scribe behind *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* harbored a trifold impetus for his literary endeavor: a responsive accord with the abbot's plea, an earnest admonishment destined for generations yet unborn, and a solemn endeavor to seek expiation for his transgressions before the divine presence.

I am skeptical about the authenticity of the request from Sergius the abbot, for commission letter was a common form in historical literature. One can argue that the request might be a fictitious device to start the writing. Nevertheless, to complete my analysis, I shall assume that the request did exist. Therefore, the main purpose of this text is to fulfill the request of Sergius, as stated in the preface of the work: "Sergius, most excellent of men, priest, and abbot: I have received the letter of your pious Holiness, in which you direct me to write for you, as it were, the memorial of (the time) when the locusts came, the sun was dimmed, there was an earthquake, famine, and plague..."(page1)

I believe that the anonymous writer's main purpose is to warn and guide future generations. Also in the preface, he wrote: "By means of writings, you wish, in your care (for them), that you may be able to write for the future. Wish, in your care (for

them), to leave behind memorials of the punishments inflicted in our times on account of our sins, so that when they read and see what happened to us, they may guard against our sins and escape our punishments.”(page1) The repeated reference to “they”, namely, future generations, emphasizes the author’s urgent wish to deliver his message. It can be inferred from the author's later critique of the sin of humanity and the caveat at the end of the work that giving future generation admonishment is the most plausible motive.

In his epilogue to Sergius, the author indicated his wish for God’s forgiveness. The author straightforwardly makes his plea: “So now I may urge you to fulfill the promise in your letter to intercede constantly with God for my sinful self. ”(page118) Although some scholars doubted this part as an insertion, this particular purpose aligns with the author’s religious belief.

I would like to analyze the author’s method as a historian from three aspects: narrative device, causal relationships, and source selection.

The author of *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* incorporate different narrative device in each section, according to their different themes and context. The whole text can be divided into five parts, in chronological order: Prooemium, Pre-history of the war, Chronicle of Edessa, History of the war, and Epilogue. Except the use of epistolary format in the first and last parts, the author utilizes continuous narrative,

chronicle, and combination of both in the rest of his text. This is by no means unintentional; in fact, he meticulously writes in such a way to showcase the subtle connections between historical incidents across spacetime. To clarify his shift of narrative, the author explains: “In order that the narrative may not become confused, I shall set down the years separately one after another and describe what happened in each one of them by itself.”(page22) When writing the Pre-history of the war, the author uses continuous narrative to highlight the relationships between countries and events happened to individuals. His method changes to a combination of both chronicle and continuous narrative in the History of the war because of the long duration and high complexity of the entire event. His changing narrative device maximizes the text’s clarity and fluency.

As a pious Christian and a dedicated historian, the author narrates his work from both macro and micro perspectives, through the religious and political lens. This combination is evident in the opening section of the work, where he says “For even though this war was stirred up (by God) against us on account of our sins, nevertheless the cause arose on account of political circumstances...” (page7) This quote points to the essence of his writing logic: using the Christian way of thinking as the framework for causal analysis and its historic political content. From a macro point of view, the author takes the side of the Edessa, the Roman Empire, and sees disease, famine, locusts, and wars as the “chastisement of God”. In contrast, he describes the Persian Empire as “the rod of anger...”(page5). The entire work

revolves around the religious cycle of crime, suffering, atonement, and at last, salvation by God. The two most important parts of the work, the chronicle of Edessa and the history of the war, are, according to the author, caused by religious factors. The former is triggered by paganism and the anti-christian system of pantomime, which is subject to God's warning and judgment, while the latter is apocalyptic and is supported by Edessa's patronage by Christ. The author continues to adopt the same train of thoughts when interpreting relatively microscopic events. For example, when Edessa's basilikai and bathing rooms unexpectedly collapsed, the author argues that "God in his mercy openly revealed to them his concern for them", while he interprets the zero casualties as "the Grace of God". In addition, when the Tayy Nu'man insisted on attacking Edessa, he explains the infection of his wounds as the result of "Christ exhibited a manifest sign in him".

The author's use of sources contributes to the credibility of his text. For the evidences and details in the article, the author combines variable primary sources as well as his own, observations and findings as an Odessense, which overall collect diverse materials and opinions. In the opening paragraph of the chronicle of Edessa section, the author lists his sources: "I found some of (the information) in old books, some of it I learnt about from meeting men who had been on embassies with the two sovereigns, and other things (I discovered) from those who had been present at the events." (page23) The author combines former official or popular sources with the accounts of those who had been present at the events. There is considerable debate as to whether

"old books" are an archival source; therefore, it is very difficult to assess its credibility. However, as a primary source, the accounts of those who lived through the events are usually more unbiased and vivid than those secondary sources, in which some inaccurate assumptions and interpretations lie. In addition to the macroscopic overview of the cited sources mentioned above, the author would also mention which specific source his evidence is from. For example, in the author's citation of a Roman decree, he provides the readers a specific name: "The edict of the emperor Anastasius arrived this year, remitting the gold which tradesmen paid every four years. gold which tradesmen paid every four years and freeing them from the tax."(page30) It is worth noting that this edict was promulgated not only to Edessa, but also to other cities under Roman rule at the time. Typically, general public were able to access this type of public edict for confirmation, so this type of traceable citation, which could be found twice in the writings, is highly credible. Moreover, as Partricius leads the march of the Roman army, the author describes, vicariously through the epistles of others, a sign from God that foretells success. "... they were given a certain sign from God to encourage them and make them confident of victory. It was made known to us by a letter from the people of the church It was made known to us by a letter from the people of the church of Zeugma"(page85). Similar to the public edict posted by the emperor Anastasius, this letter, which is equally likely to be a public source, has an undoubted existence of its own. However, the letter's owner, the author of the writings, and the content of the letter all have a strong religious tendency, mixed with elements that now seem to be imaginary and fictional. Therefore, from the point of

view of historical research, these written sources can reflect the development of Christianity at that time and people's strong level of dependence on Christianity but cannot be viewed as a solid historical event. It is interesting to note that, again, as a source relayed by others, the author sometimes personally affirms its credibility. For example, when describing the collapse of the city of Nicopolis, he mentions that "This is what a certain faithful brother told me.", before quoting what the man said.

Most of the details throughout the book come from the author's own observations and even personal experiences, which I would argue, are the most credible parts of his book. As a resident of Edessa at the time of the book, he gives a very detailed description of the city life and the war, which gave me a more comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural context of the time. It is worth noting that the author uses a variety of perspectives to unfold the conditions of the time during the narrative. From the time of the epidemic to the time of the war, the author consistently reports the price of the crops in his writing. This economic detail can directly reflect changes in the city's population, whether due to casualties or migration, as well as the scale of the epidemic and the war, and even to climatic conditions. For example, when the first disease of lesser magnitude, as God's warning to a sinful world, erupted in Edessa, "thirty modii of wheat were being sold for a denarius, as were fifty of barley." (page24) After a series of catastrophic events such as earthquakes and severe plague of locusts, the price of crops skyrocketed exponentially: "Wheat was being sold at this time at four modii a denarius, barley at six; a kab of chickpeas cost five hundred d

nummi, a kab of wheat cost five hundred d nummi, a kab of wheat cost five hundred d nummi. hundre d nummi, a kab of beans four hundred nummi, and a kab of lentils three hundred and sixty nummi."(page39-40) His consistency for using one type of crop as reference facilitates data comparison and inferences making for historians. Unlike some historical works, the authors were also keen to make notes and comment on cosmic changes. Often these accounts had a religious purpose, the most distinctive being the reference to natural changes as signs of the God. "... a Saturday, the sun was dispossessed of its light at dawn and its optical disc became like silver. it was without its visible rays and our eyes could easily look at it without difficulty, for it had no brilliance, splendour, or radiance to prevent them gazing at it." (page35) Surprisingly, this account has been proven to be accurate by other historical sources. These records, while not directly related to the subject of war, reflect the civilizational and scientific development of the Roman Empire, contextualizing it from multiple perspectives.

In conclusion, the author of *The Chronicle of Joshua* the Stylite has three main purposes in writing this piece. Adopting a variety of methods, such as different narrative devices, use of credible sources, and concrete analysis, the author construct a credible narrative that vividly unfolds the Mesopotamian history for us.