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# Bede, Irish computistica and Annus Mundi

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*Bede's decision to diverge from the mainstream chronological tradition, based on the* Septuagint, in favour of the Vulgate for chronology has generally been explained by his *concerns about contemporary apocalypticism. This essay will argue that Bede's choic*e of Annus Mundi was also greatly influenced by Irish computistica. These texts incorporate a chronological framework – *influenced by Victorius of Aquitaine's Easter* Table – that was implicitly and explicitly apocalyptic and provided a date for the Passion that Bede objected to. Bede was greatly indebted to Irish computistica but adopting the Vulgate Annus Mundi allowed him to assert his own views on chronology.

The Venerable Bede wrote two chronicles of world history which were included in his works on time: the shorter chronicle (Chronia minora) was contained in De temporibus (Chapters 16–22), completed in AD 703, and one of Bede's earliest works; the greater chronicle (Chronica maiora) is Chapter 66 of De temporum ratione, which was completed in AD 725, and was one of the great works of Bede's maturity.[1] Bede's

[1] De temporibus, ed. C.W. Jones, CCSL 123C (Turnhout, 1980), pp. 585–611 (Chronica minora, ed. T. Mommsen, pp. 601–11); tr. F. Wallis, in C.B. Kendall and F. Wallis, Bede: On the Nature of Things and On Times (Liverpool, 2010), pp. 107–31 (pp. 117–31) [hereafter DT]. De temporum ratione, ed. C.W. Jones, CCSL 123B (Turnhout, 1977), pp. 263–544 (Chronica maiora, ed. T. Mommsen, pp. 463–535); tr. F. Wallis, Bede: The Reckoning of Time (Liverpool, 1999), ch. 66, at pp. 157–237 [hereafter DTR].

computistica were written in support of the Dionysian Easter, and discuss the units of time, from the smallest to the largest, including Easter cycles. The sequence culminates in the chronicles, which present the reader with the scope of universal history from creation to the present day. The short chronicle concludes DT, while Bede added five chapters on eschatology after the Chronica maiora in DTR (Chapters 67–71).

It has long been observed that Bede was indebted to the Irish for his computistical understanding. Charles W. Jones determined that the Sirmond computus was a copy of the computus exemplar used by Bede, and showed a definite Insular background.[2] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín subsequently demonstrated that this exemplar was compiled in the south-east region of Ireland, in the mid-seventh century, from where it was transmitted to Northumbria and Jarrow.[3] Though contained within his computus, Bede's chronicles have been considered separately,[4] and their models located in the Mediterranean world of late antiquity, especially the chronicles of Eusebius-Jerome and Isidore.[5] John Morris and Daniel P. Mc Carthy have conversely argued that Bede's

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[2] The 'Sirmond manuscript' (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodleian 309) was the eleventh-century Vendôme codex owned by the French Jesuit scholar, Jacques Sirmond (1559–1651). It disappeared shortly after Sirmond's death but had made its way to the Bodleian Library at Oxford, where C.W. Jones discovered it. On Bede's debt to the Irish for his knowledge of computus, see: C.W. Jones, 'The "Lost" Sirmond Manuscript of Bede's "Computus"', EHR 52 (1937), pp. 204–19, repr. with omission of the important final pages in idem, Bede, the Schools and the Computus, ed. W.M. Stevens (Aldershot, 1994), article X. See also C.W. Jones, Bedae opera de temporibus (Cambridge, MA, 1943), pp. 105–13; E. Graff, 'The recension of two Sirmond texts: Disputatio Morini and De divisionibus temporum,' in I. Warntjes and D. Ó Cróinín (eds), Computus and its Cultural Context in the Latin West, AD 300–1200: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on the Science of Computus in Ireland and Europe, Galway, 14–16 July, 2006 (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 112–142.

[3] D. Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', Peritia 2 (1983), pp. 229–47, repr. in idem, Early Irish History and Chronology (Dublin, 2003), pp. 173–90; and Ó Cróinín, 'Bede's Irish Computus', in Early Irish History and Chronology, pp. 201–12.

[4] T. Mommsen excerpted Bede's chronicles from their computus texts in his edition of minor chronicles, see: MGH Auctores antiquissimi 13, Chronica Minora 3 (Berlin, 1898), pp. 247–321. In his Corpus Christianorum editions of Bede's works on time, C.W. Jones reused Mommsen's versions of the chronicles, see n. 1. In his influential Bedae Opera de Temporibus, from 1943, Jones did not publish either chronicle or the last five chapters of DTR.

[5] See Kendall and Wallis, Bede: On the Nature of Things and On Times, pp. 178–9; Wallis, Bede: The Reckoning of Time, pp. 358–9; R.W. Burgess and M. Kulikowski, Mosaics of Time: The Latin Chronicle Traditions from the First Century BC to the Sixth Century AD, Vol. 1, A Historical Introduction to the Chronicle Genre from its Origins to the High Middle Ages (Turnhout, 2013), p. 206.

chronicles were greatly influenced by an unacknowledged source that was transmitted

to him through Ireland and also underlies the presentation of universal history in the

Irish Annals.[6]

Bede is generally credited with two innovations in his world chronicles. He is

regarded as the first to incorporate a full world-chronicle in a computus, thereby

solemnizing the link between computus and chronology;[7] and he presented a shorter

span of world history than was usually represented in universal chronicles. Bede took

his chronological data from Jerome's Latin translation of the Hebrew Old Testament

(known as the Vulgate), which is considerably shorter than the chronology of the

Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that had been the traditional

source for Christian chroniclers. The discrepancy is due primarily to the differing ages

given for the patriarchs in both traditions.[8] The difference significantly affects the date

of the Incarnation: by Bede's time the traditional date in the west was Anno Mundi (AM)

5199, whereas Bede's chronicles place the Incarnation in AM 3952, a difference of 1,247

years. Theodor Mommsen, in his critical edition of Bede's chronicles, suggested that

using Vulgate chronology for a chronicle of world history was Bede's innovation, and

his view has been accepted by the majority of scholars since.[9] Bede strenuously

defended using the 'Hebrew truth' (Hebraica veritas) for chronology in his Epistola ad

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[6] J. Morris, 'The Chronicle of Eusebius: Irish Fragments', Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies 19 (1972), pp. 80–93. D.P. Mc Carthy, 'The Status of the Pre-Patrician Irish Annals', Peritia 12 (1998), pp. 98–152; and idem, 'The Chronology and Sources of the Early Irish Annals', EME 10 (2001), pp. 323–41.

[7] Wallis, Bede: The Reckoning of Time, pp. lxviii–lxix and 353–4.

[8] See Jerome's discussion of the difference in his Liber Hebraicarum quaestionum in Genesim, ch. 5, PL 23, cols 935A–1010A, at 946B–947B: tr. C.T.R. Hayward (Oxford, 1995), pp. 35–6, and commentary on p. 127. Bede, Epistola ad Pleguinam, ch. 7, ed. C.W. Jones, CCSL 123C, pp. 617–26, at p. 620: tr. Wallis in Bede: The Reckoning of Time, pp. 405–15, at pp. 408–9.

[9] Mommsen, Chronica Minora 3, p. 230. See: C.W. Jones, 'Some Introductory Remarks on Bede's Commentary on Genesis', Sacris Erudiri 19 (1969–70), pp. 115–98, at pp. 194–5, repr. in Bede, the Schools and the Computus, article IV; Wallis, Bede: The Reckoning of time, p. 358; P.N. Darby, Bede and the End of Time (Farnham, 2012), pp. 31–4. Kenneth Harrison wrote that Bede's calculation did not prevail, despite his authority: The Framework of Anglo-Saxon History, to AD 900 (Cambridge, 1976), p. 54.

Pleguinam and in the preface to DTR, which has lent support to this belief.[10] However, the consensus has recently been challenged by Daniel Mc Carthy, who has argued that the source Bede shared with the Irish Annals (mentioned above) used the Vulgate chronology, which Bede copied from it.[11]

This essay will examine Bede's reasons for adopting Vulgate chronology in his chronicles: the relationship between Bede's chronicles and the Irish Annals will be addressed in a subsequent publication. The traditional view is that Bede diverged from the Septuagint's chronology because of his concerns about contemporary apocalypticism.[12] In Bede's time the evidence suggests that the view that the world would last for 6,000 years was widespread, and the early eighth century was very close to the end of time: following the Septuagint chronology of Eusebius-Jerome, AD 703 (when Bede composed DT) is equivalent to AM 5901, leaving only ninety-nine years until AM 6000. This belief was influenced by the theory of Six World Ages – based on the six days of Creation and six stages of human life – first formulated by Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) and fused to universal chronology by Isidore of Seville (c.560–636).[13] This was linked to an earlier tradition, which interpreted Psalm XC.4 and II

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[10] Epistola ad Pleguinam; DTR, praef. For discussion, see Darby, Bede and the End of Time, pp. 35–64. Bede referred to the Vulgate as 'the Hebrew Truth' in Epistola ad Pleguinam, ch. 15 (line 300) and the preface to DTR (lines 13–14).

[11] See D.P. Mc Carthy: The Irish Annals: Their Genesis, Evolution and History (Dublin, 2008; repr. 2010), esp. pp. 118–58; D.P. Mc Carthy, 'Bede's Primary Source for the Vulgate Chronology in his Chronicles in De temporibus and De temporum ratione', in Warntjes and Ó Cróinín (eds), Computus and its Cultural Context in the Latin West, pp. 159–89; and D.P Mc Carthy, 'The Irish Annals: Their Origin and Evolution, V to XI sec.', L'Irlanda e gli Irlandesi nell'alto Medioevo, Spoleto, 16–21 aprile 2009, Settimane (Spoleto, 2010), pp. 601–17. See also Morris, 'The Chronicle of Eusebius'.

[12] See: R. Landes, 'Lest the Millennium be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography 100–800 CE', in W. Verbeke, C. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen (eds), The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages (Leuven, 1988), pp. 137–211; P.N. Darby, 'Bede's Time Shift of 703 in Context', in V. Wieser et al. (eds), Abendländische Apokalyptik. Kompendium zur Genealogie der Endzeit (Berlin, 2013), pp. 619–40.

[13] Augustine, De Genesi contra Manichaeos, libri duo, PL 34, cols 173–220. Isidore, Etymologiae, Book V, ch. 39, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911); tr. S.T. Barney et al., The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 130–3. Isidore, Chronica, ed. J.C. Martin, CCSL 112 (Turnhout, 2003). See Burgess and Kulikowski, Mosaics of Time, pp. 199–200.

Peter III.8 in a literal sense, as both suggest that for God one day equals one thousand years, thereby implying the world would end in AM 6000.[14] Bede explicitly rejected such speculation in his Epistola ad Pleguinam.[15] The short Vulgate chronology allowed Bede to remove the annus praesens from its close proximity to AM 6000, and he also attempted to deflect apocalyptic speculation by ending the Chronica minora with the line, 'The rest of the Sixth Age is known to God alone.'[16] When he wrote De temporum ratione, over twenty years later, Bede reinforced his argument that the world would end at a time that is unknown and unknowable by including five chapters on eschatology after the Chronica maiora.[17] Contemporary apocalypticism was undeniably a concern for Bede when writing his chronicles. This essay will argue that his concerns were heightened when linked with a novel chronological framework that he received from Irish computus sources, and that these texts greatly influenced his decision to follow the Vulgate chronology in his world chronicles.

**Irish computistica and the age of the world**

The identification of the Sirmond computus as a copy of the computus exemplar known to Bede has been widely accepted.[18] In examining what C.W. Jones termed the 'computistical bits' in this computus,[19] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín discovered a dating clause,

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[14] See: S. Muhlberger, The Fifth-Century Chroniclers: Prosper, Hydatius, and the Gallic Chronicler of 452 (Cambridges, 1981; repr. 2006), pp. 12–13; Burgess and Kulikowski, Mosaics of Time, pp. 114–16; Wallis, Bede: The Reckoning of Time, pp. 356–8; and Darby, Bede and the End of Time, pp. 29–30.

[15] Epistola ad Pleguinam, chs 14–15.

[16] DT, ch. 22, l. 80, p. 611; tr. Wallis, p. 131: 'Reliquum sextae aetatis Deo soli patet.' Cf. Isidore, Etymologiae, Book V, ch. 39.42, lines 17–18: 'Residuum sextae aetatis tempus Dei soli est cognitum.'

[17] DTR, chs 67–71. On Bede's eschatology, see Jones, 'Some Introductory Remarks on Bede's Commentary on Genesis', pp. 191–8; and Darby, Bede and the End of Time, esp. pp. 95–143.

[18] See Jones, 'The Lost Sirmond Manuscript of Bede's Computus'; and Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', and 'Bede's Irish Computus'.

[19] Transcribed by D. Ó Cróinín in 'Bede's Irish Computus', pp. 209–10.

which indicates that the exemplar was compiled in AD 658 in the southern part of Ireland.[20] The famous clause reads:

> In truth, there are 631 years from the Passion of the Lord until the Easter of Suibine mac Commáin, which has [just] transpired. Furthermore, there are 141 years from the above mentioned Pasch until the precise time when the world ends, that is once 6,000 years elapses.[21]

This computus provided Bede with much of his knowledge of the Dionysian Easter but, notably, the dating clause incorporates the Annus Passionis, the chronological system used by Victorius of Aquitaine in his Paschal Cycle, completed in AD 457, which used Christ's death at the first Easter to mark the beginning of the sequence of years. Sirmond also contains a full Victorian Easter table. Bede rejected Victorius's 532-year Easter cycle, and preferred the work of Dionysius Exiguus, who compiled his 95-year Easter table in AD 525 to begin in AD 532. Bede's works on time were written in support of Dionysius's Easter calculations.[22]

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[20] On the dating clause, see Ó Cróinín: 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', pp. 177–83; 'Early Irish Annals from Easter Tables: A Case restated', Peritia 2 (1983), pp. 74–86, repr. in idem, Early Irish History and Chronology, pp. 76–86, at pp. 83–4; 'The Date, Provenance and Earliest Use of the Works of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus', repr. in Early Irish History and Chronology, pp. 191–200, at pp. 193–7; and 'Bede's Irish Computus', pp. 209–10.

[21] Ó Cróinín, 'Bede's Irish Computus', section 8, pp. 209–10: 'Ex domini uero passione usque in pascha quod secutum est Suibini filii Commanni anni sunt DCXXXI. A pascha autem supradicto usque ad tempus praefinitum consummationis mundi, id est sex milibus consummatis, anni sunt CXLI.'

[22] Victorius and Dionysius both followed Alexandrian rules in creating their Easter tables. However, Victorius attempted to compromise with the old Roman Easter practice: he followed the Roman lunar limits of 16–22, rather than the Alexandrian limits of 15–21 that Dionysius advocated. Victorius also allowed the Easter full moon, luna xiv, to fall as early as 20 March, whereas the Alexandrians (followed by Dionysius) ensured that luna xiv was never earlier than 21 March to ensure that Easter Sunday always fell after the vernal equinox on 21 March. One of the great attractions of Victorius's Easter table was its cyclical nature, which repeated the solar and lunar data exactly after 532 years; Dionysius's table needed to be continued after 95 years. Bede attacked Victorius by name in DTR, ch. 51 and implicitly criticized his work elsewhere in the text.

Victorius's chronological choice was influenced by his compatriot, Prosper of Aquitaine (c.AD 390–c.455) who began a new count of years from Christ's death, known as the Passion, in his world chronicle.[23] Victorius adopted Prosper's Annus Passionis (AP) and equated AP 1 with the first year of his Easter cycle.[24] The clause in Sirmond provided dates of AP 631, and 141 years from the end of the world; it linked Easter in that year with a figure called Suibine mac Commáin, which allowed Ó Cróinín to determine a plausible location for the origin of the text.[25] We can easily convert the dating clause to AD reckoning: AP 1 equals AD 28, therefore AP 631 equals AD 658 (631+27). From the Annus Mundi part of the clause, we can calculate a date of AM 5859 (AM 6000–141). If we subtract AP 631 from AM 5859, the result is AM 5228 (5859–631) or AM 5229 (5859–630), as it is unclear whether our sources counted inclusively or exclusively. The preceding paragraph of the 'computistical bits' also presents a Passion date of AM 5228/9.[26]

Several Irish texts, to be discussed below, dated the Passion to AM 5228 or AM 5229, and the evidence indicates that they followed Victorius of Aquitaine in doing so. Victorius received his date for the Passion, along with his Annus Passionis and consular years, from Prosper's chronicle, within which Prosper noted that from Adam to the fifteenth year of Tiberius there were 5,228 years.[27] Prosper's year of the Passion differed from Eusebius-Jerome's chronicle, which was the most influential in the Christian west: Eusebius wrote in Greek and completed his chronicle in AD 325; Jerome

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[23] Prosper of Aquitaine, Epitoma Chronicon, ed. T. Mommsen, MGH AA 9, Chronica Minora 1 (Munich 1981), pp. 385–485, at pp. 410ff.

[24] Cyclos Victuri, ed. B. Krusch, Studien zur christlich-mittelalterlichen Chronologie: Die Entstehung unserer heutigen Zeitrechnung (Berlin, 1938), pp. 27–52, at p. 27 [hereafter Studien II].

[25] Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', pp. 178–80.

[26] Ó Cróinín, 'Bede's Irish Computus', section 7, p. 209. The ambiguity is because our texts frequently state that there were 5,228 years from the Creation to the Passion, which could provide a Passion date of AM 5229.

[27] Prosper, Epitoma Chronicon, pp. 409–10. On Prosper's chronicle, see Muhlberger, The Fifth-Century Chroniclers, pp. 55–135.

later translated it into Latin and extended it to AD 378.[28] Eusebius-Jerome had

synchronized the fifteenth year of Tiberius with 5,228 years from Adam, but dated the

Passion to the eighteenth year of Tiberius.[29] The discrepancy is due to the debate

concerning the length of Jesus's public ministry. The only clear date in early Christian

chronology is Luke's statement that Jesus was baptized in the fifteenth year of Tiberius,

when he was about thirty (Luke III.1 and III.21–3), which is regarded as the beginning

of his public ministry.[30] The synoptic Gospels imply that his public ministry lasted a

matter of months, while John's Gospel suggests a minimum of three years. Eusebius

had discussed this problem and argued for the longer ministry, placing Jesus's death in

the eighteenth year of Tiberius.[31] Prosper followed Eusebius-Jerome's chronology, but

he and Victorius supported the short ministry hypothesis.[32] Victorius stated: 'It is

revealed in the chronicles that our Lord Jesus Christ suffered after 5,228 years had

elapsed from the beginning of the world.'[33] Victorius dated the Passion to AM 5229, but

does not explicitly give this date.[34] The majority of those following the Victorian Easter

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[28] Eusebius's original work was in two books and has been lost: Jerome translated the second book, which contained the chronicle, while the first book, which discussed problems in chronography, has survived in an Armenian recension. For an overview of the chronicle tradition, see most recently Burgess and Kulikowski, Mosaics of Time, esp. pp. 119–31 for Eusebius-Jerome.

[29] Eusebius-Jerome, Chronicon, Book II, PG 19, cols 533–4. Eusebius-Jerome counted the years from Abraham, rather than the Creation, but included a running total of years up to the fifteenth year of Tiberius that adds up to 5,228.

[30] Alden Mosshammer has argued that the fifteenth year of Tiberius could fall anywhere from 1 October AD 27 to 31 December AD 29 in our calendar: The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era (Oxford, 2008), p. 18.

[31] Eusebius-Jerome, Chronicon, Book II, cols 535–6. Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica, Book I.10, PG 20, cols 107–114. See Mosshammer, Easter Computus, pp. 336–8; G. Declercq, Anno Domini: The Origins of the Christian Era (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 14–15.

[32] Muhlberger notes that Prosper's Passion date was influenced by his consular list, which dated the Passion to XV Tiberius: The Fifth-Century Chroniclers, pp. 63–5.

[33] Prologus Victorius, ch. 9, ed. Krusch, Studien II, pp. 17–26, at p. 24: 'Passum autem dominum nostrum Iesum Christum peractis ab ortu mundi quinque milibus ducentis viginti et octo annis, eadem chronicorum relatione monstratur'.

[34] Bartholomew Mac Carthy clearly demonstrated by a number of calculations that AM 5229 was the Passion year of Victorius's reckoning: The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus, No. 830 (Dublin, 1892), pp. 365–7. See also C.P.E. Nothaft, Dating the Passion: The Life of Jesus and the Emergence of Scientific Chronology (200–1600) (Leiden, 2012), p. 74 and n. 12. Victorius attempted to connect the Easter

placed the Passion in AM 5228/9. The 'computistical bits' from the computus exemplar represented by Sirmond reveal the compiler followed Prosper-Victorius in matters of chronology.[35]

The influence of Victorius on the Irish understanding of chronology is most apparent in ps-Augustine's De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae, which is dated to AD 654, and was also from southern Ireland.[36] The text presents an explanation of the miracles in scripture beginning with Creation. It is clear that the author was familiar with the Victorian Easter table in his discussion of Joshua commanding the sun and the moon to stand still (Book II, ch. 4; Joshua X.12–14). Ps-Augustine correlated the 532-year Easter cycles of Victorius with the long Septuagint Annus Mundi, beginning in the fifth cycle after Creation, which he noted started 114 years before the Flood and ended 418 years after.[37] The first four 532-year cycles add up to 2,128, which means the fifth cycle began in AM 2129 and ended in AM 2660 (see Table 1). This placed the Flood in AM 2242 (2128+114): the traditional date of the Flood following Septuagint chronology, and the end of the First World Age. In Bede's chronicles the Flood also marked the end of the First World Age, but, following the Vulgate, this was dated to AM 1656.[38]

| Cycle | Long AM | Events in each cycle according to ps-Augustine |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1–532 | N/A |
| 2 | 533–1064 | N/A |
| 3 | 1065–1596 | N/A |
| 4 | 1597–2128 | N/A |

Computus to universal chronology using AM years: he placed the first day of Creation on Sunday, 25 March, which is compatible with his Easter cycle only if Year 1 is equivalent to AM 5229.

[35] He also followed Victorius in counting the years from the first pasch in Egypt to the passion of the Lord, 1,539 years: cf. Prologus Victorii, ch. 9; and see I. Warntjes, The Munich Computus: Text and Translation, Irish Computistics between Isidore of Seville and the Venerable Bede and its Reception in Carolingian Times (Stuttgart, 2010), notes on ch. 64, pp. 298–9.

[36] Ps-Augustine (Augustinus Hibernicus), De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae, PL 35, cols 2149–200. On the date of the text, see Warntjes, Munich Computus, pp. lxxviii–lxxix.

[37] De mirabilibus, Book II.4, col. 2175. Correlating 532-year Easter cycles with universal time was more common in the eastern church than in the western, see Nothaft, Dating the Passion, pp. 58–64.

[38] See: Prologus Victorius, ch. 7, ed. Krusch, Studien II, p. 22. Isidore, Etymologiae, Book V, ch. 39.26; Chronica, line 17. Bede, DT, ch. 17; DTR, ch. 66, lines 8–10.

| 5 | 2129–2660 | 114 years before the Flood to 418 years after: i.e. Flood = AM 2242 |
| 6 | 2661–3192 | Ends in 8th year of the 3rd Age, called the Age of Abraham: i.e. 2nd Age = 942 years |
| 7 | 3193–3724 | Ends in 35th year after the Exodus and 5 years before the death of Moses: i.e. Moses' death took place in AM 3729 |
| 8 | 3725–4256 | Begins in 36th year after the Exodus and ends in 31st year of Asa, king of Judah: contains the sign of the Sun and Moon standing still (Joshua X.12–14) |
| 9 | 4257–4788 | Ends in 108th year after the Restoration of the Temple |
| 10 | 4789–5320 | Ends in 92nd year after the Passion: i.e. the Passion = AM 5228 |
| 11 | 5321–5852 | Ends with death of Manchianus |
| 12 | 5853 ... | Annus Praesens is AM 5855 |

Table 1: Ps-Augustine's great cycles and universal time

Ps-Augustine listed successive cycles, from the fifth to the twelfth, dating each to events in biblical history and noted that the tenth cycle ended in the ninety-second year after the Passion, i.e. AM 5320.[39] This provides a Passion date of AM 5228. Ps-Augustine ended the eleventh cycle with a local notice, that of the death of Manchianus, in AM 5852.[40] His annus praesens is the third year of the twelfth cycle, AM 5855, which provides AD 654.[41]

The short ministry hypothesis and a Passion date of AM 5228/9 also appear in other Irish computistica from the seventh and early eighth centuries. The Victorian Prologue of AD 699 was recently discovered by Immo Warntjes in a manuscript that can be classified as a member of the Sirmond group.[42] The Prologue of AD 699 follows Victorius's original prologue in the manuscript and explains alterations made to the

[39] De mirabilibus, Book II, ch. 4, cols 2175–6.
[40] For Manchianus, see J.F. Kenney, Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical: An Introduction and Guide (New York, 1929), p. 276.
[41] De mirabilibus, Book II, ch. 4, col. 2176. On calculating the annus praesens, see Warntjes, Munich Computus, pp. lxxviii–lxxix.
[42] I. Warntjes, 'A Newly Discovered Prologue of AD 699 to the Easter Table of Victorius of Aquitaine in an Unknown Sirmond Manuscript', Peritia 21 (2010), pp. 255–84.

Victorian table that originally accompanied it but which is not extant. The most significant alteration is that the writer reduced the table from 532 years to 100. The other structural changes are that he omitted Victorius's original consular list, as it no longer applied (because the Victorian table was in its second course), and he included columns for AD and the Septuagint AM alongside Victorius's AP. This would allow the reader to easily compare the years according to AM, AD and AP.[43] The author followed the Septuagint AM chronology, as did Victorius in his original prologue, and gave the lengths of the first two world ages as 2,242 and 942 years respectively, and dated the Passion to 5,228 years from the beginning of the world.[44]

De ratione conputandi,[45] also from southern Ireland, is the only text of this group that cannot be securely dated, but it is generally placed between the mid-seventh and early eighth centuries. The text's editor Dáibhí Ó Cróinín argued that it belongs to the mid-seventh century, while Immo Warntjes has recently dated it to AD 719–27, making it later than the Munich Computus.[46] The text is in support of the Dionysian Easter and regards Victorius as an authority. The author used the long AM chronology for dating the first pasch in Egypt and dated the Passion to 5,228 years from the beginning of the world.[47]

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[43] Warntjes, 'A Newly Discovered Prologue of AD 699', ch. 3, pp. 272–3.
[44] Warntjes, 'A Newly Discovered Prologue of AD 699', ch. 2, pp. 272.
[45] Ed. D. Ó Cróinín, in M. Walsh and D. Ó Cróinín (eds), *Cummian's Letter* De Controversia Paschali and the De ratione conputandi (Toronto 1988), pp. 115–213.
[46] Ó Cróinín, 'A Seventh-Century Irish Computus from the Circle of Cummianus', Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy 82 C 11 (1982), pp. 405–30, repr. in Early Irish History and Chronology, pp. 99–130; Warntjes, Munich Computus, pp. lv and cxci–cxcvi. In addition, Marina Smith dates it to the late seventh century, see Understanding the Universe in Seventh-Century Ireland (Woodbridge, 1996), p. 156; and Wesley Stevens to the mid-ninth century, see 'Ars computi quomodo inventa est', in Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger and Meta Niederkorn-Bruck (eds), Zwischen Niederschrift und Wiederschrift. Hagiographie und Historiographie im Spannungsfeld von Kompendienuberlieferung und Editionstechnik (Vienna, 2010), pp. 29–65, at pp. 50–1.
[47] De ratione conputandi, ch. 85, lines 4–5, p. 193 for the first pasch; ch. 89, lines 5–7, p. 196 for the Passion, and cf. ch. 62, line 2, p. 171. Cf. Prologus Victorii, ch. 9.

The final text to be considered is the Munich Computus, dated to AD 718/719, and available in an impressive new edition with extensive commentary by Immo Warntjes.[48] Along with De ratione conputandi it was written in support of the Dionysian Easter, but frequently referred to Victorius and saw him as an authority. It has long been argued that a now lost 'Victorian computus of AD 689' was an important source for this text.[49] In Chapter 41, on the bissextile day, the compiler noted that there are 133 bissextile days in a Victorian cycle of 532 years, a year of bissextile days (i.e. 365 bissextile days) would take 1,460 solar years, and that four 'years full of bissextile days' (i.e. 5,840 years) have passed from the beginning of the world to the present, which he gives as the consulship of Berus and Bardoa.[50] These consuls, given by Krusch as Vero and Bradua, equate with Year 130 of the Victorian cycle, and equal AP 662 in the second running of Victorius.[51] This corresponds to AM 5889 and AD 689, and was taken directly from the lost 'Victorian computus of AD 689'.[52] The annus praesens as the year of the consuls Berus and Bardua and equivalent to AD 689 is again given in Chapter 62, on the Saltus.[53]

The Munich Computist again used the long Septuagint chronology in Chapter 44: '(The period) from the beginning of its creation to the Passion is reckoned as 5228

[48] The computus text now known as the Munich Computus was composed in an Irish region in c.AD 719, and copied in St Emmeran in Regensburg in the first two decades of the ninth century – the only copy known to have survived. The manuscript was transferred to the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich in the early nineteenth century, from where it received its modern name: the text can be found at Clm 14456, fols 8r–46r. On the text's transmission, see Warntjes, Munich Computus, pp. lxxvii–cvi.

[49] See Warntjes, Munich Computus, pp. lvii–lviii and cxxiv–cxxvi.

[50] Munich Computus, ch. 41, lines 107–10, pp. 140–1.

[51] Cyclos Victuri, Krusch, Studien II, p. 33. See Munich Computus, ch. 41, notes on lines 107–10, p. 140.

[52] See Munich Computus, ch. 41, notes on lines 107–10, p. 140. Cummian also calculated the number of bissextile days in the Victorian cycle, see M. Walsh and D. Ó Cróinín (eds), De controversia paschali, in *Cummian's Letter* De Controversia Paschali and the De ratione conputandi, pp. 56–97, at pp. 88–89, lines 225–6.

[53] Munich Computus, ch. 62, lines 64–7, pp. 278–9, and see Warntjes's notes on lines 64–7.

years.'[54] This again followed Prosper-Victorius, not Eusebius-Jerome. He returned to this once more in Chapter 64, stating that the first pasch in Egypt was celebrated 3,688 years after the Creation, and there were 1,540 years between this pasch and the first pasch of the Resurrection, again providing AM 5228/9 as the date of the Passion.[55] The Munich Computus concludes with an outline of the twelve cycles of the world, which is very similar to that already discussed in ps-Augustine.[56] This version begins with the first cycle, but for the first four he only provides the number of years from Creation following the Septuagint chronology. The fifth cycle is correlated to the Flood, and from then on it follows ps-Augustine, though occasionally the terminology varies and Munich gives a little less information.[57] The only chronological differences, as observed by Warntjes, are that the sixth cycle ends in the first year of the Third Age, rather than the eighth year, and the twelfth cycle lacks a dating clause.[58] Warntjes suggests that this chronicle outline was part of the lost 'Victorian computus of AD 689', and proposes that the final six chapters of Munich (Chapters 63–8), were taken directly from the Victorian exemplar.[59]

The sources discussed above represent the computistical tradition of southern Ireland, which followed the Victorian Easter from the early 630s until the second half of the seventh century.[60] Bede received his computistical knowledge from this area and

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[54] Munich Computus, ch. 44, lines 11–12, pp. 142–3: 'Rimari ab initio huius creaturae per annos VCCXXVIII usque ad passionem.'

[55] Munich Computus, ch. 64, lines 2–6, pp. 298–9. Cf. De ratione conputandi, ch. 85, lines 4–5, p. 193.

[56] Munich Computus, ch. 68, pp. 314–17. See Table 1.

[57] For example, in the sixth cycle, ps-Augustine calls the Third Age the Age of Abraham, while the Munich computist refers to it as the age from the ark.

[58] Munich Computus, ch. 68, notes on lines 2–39, p. 315. Warntjes points out that the sixth cycle ending in the first, rather than the eighth, year of the Third Age may be a copying error or may indicate that the author believed the Second Age was 949 rather than 942 years.

[59] Warntjes, Munich Computus, p. cxxiv.

[60] See Cummian, De controversia paschali, for an account of the southern Irish acceptance of the Victorian Easter. The provenance of the Munich Computus is debatable. It was traditionally located on Iona because it is dated to 718/19, shortly after the Ionan community accepted the Dionysian Easter in AD 716: see, for example, Ó Cróinín, 'A Seventh-Century Irish Computus'. However, Immo Warntjes has

was therefore exposed to a chronological framework that was significantly shaped by Victorius and presented the short view of Jesus's public ministry. When Bede came to write De temporibus, he was influenced by these sources, but noticeably did not follow their AM dates. This overt rejection of Victorian computus and chronology is significant when considering Bede's engagement with chronography.

## Victorian chronology and Bede

Bede's decision to look to the Vulgate for chronology when writing De temporibus is usually explained in relation to contemporary apocalypticism, especially the proximity of AM 6000, as noted above. Richard Landes has argued that there was a long-standing tradition of revising universal chronology downwards to forestall AM 6000. He pointed out that the Incarnation was generally dated to AM 5500, when there was a widespread belief that the world would endure for twelve cycles of 500 years; later, the Incarnation was dated to c.5200, to move away from the impending end of the world; and the Vulgate chronology in Bede's chronicles, what Landes called AM III, is a further example of removing the present from imminent apocalypse.[61] Speculation about the end of the world was commonplace in the seventh and eighth centuries, as can be seen in dating clauses that count back from the end of the world.[62] Bede's Epistola ad

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argued that it more closely resembles texts from southern Ireland and that the date of 718/19 has misled scholars into assuming the text has a northern provenance: Munich Computus, pp. lxxvii–xcvi. For present purposes, it will perhaps suffice to say that Munich represents an Irish computus tradition distinct from the traditional practices on Iona, most probably influenced by sources from southern Ireland, such as the 'Victorian Computus of AD 689'.

[61] Landes, 'Lest the Millennium be Fulfilled'.

[62] For example, the Sirmond computus, and see Landes, 'Lest the Millennium be Fulfilled', pp. 169–70 (nn. 128 and 129) and 190–1; Darby, Bede and the End of Time, pp. 39–64; J. Palmer, 'Calculating Time and the End of Time in the Carolingian World, c. 740–820', EHR 126 (2011), pp. 1307–31.

Pleguinam revealed his disapproval of attempts to calculate the end of the world and his disdain for those who engaged in such activities, whom he labelled as rustici.[63]

Bede wrote the Epistola ad Pleguinam in response to accusations that the short chronology followed in his chronicles, which placed the Incarnation in the fourth millennium of historical time, rather than the sixth, was heretical. Since Augustine of Hippo propounded his theory of Six World Ages, it was generally accepted that the Sixth Age was marked by Christ's actions in the world, and began either with his birth or the beginning of his ministry.[64] Bede's detractors, following the belief that each world age should last one thousand years, accused Bede of placing the Incarnation in the Fourth, not the Sixth World Age. Bede rejected their view of history: the Vulgate chronology allowed him to break the link between world ages and one thousand years of historical time, as well as removing the annus praesens from its close proximity to AM 6000. The apocalypticism of his contemporaries could undoubtedly have influenced Bede in creating his world chronicles. However, this attitude is best attested in the texts Bede wrote after the Chronica minora, rather than in De temporibus itself. There was an inherent apocalypticism in Bede's Irish computus sources that may have drawn Bede's attention to alternative chronologies when creating his first chronicle.

The influence of Victorius of Aquitaine on Irish computistica is apparent, and we have seen that the long Septuagint chronology of Prosper-Victorius was married to the Victorian Easter cycle to create a universal chronicle of sorts in the Insular world. The earliest known example of this Irish interest in linking computus with chronology is ps-Augustine's De mirabilibus. The twelve cycles of 532 years, as presented in ps-Augustine and the Munich Computus, are reminiscent of the earlier belief that the world

[63] Epistola ad Pleguinam, ch. 15. See Darby, Bede and the End of Time, pp. 35–64.
[64] See Augustine, De Genesi contra Manichaeos, libri duo, PL 34, cols 173–20; Wallis, Bede: The Reckoning of Time, p. 357; Darby, Bede and the End of Time, pp. 29–30.

would last for twelve cycles of 500 years, and this older tradition may have influenced ps-Augustine and his imitators. The belief, loosely based on the parable of the workers in the vineyard, where the workers hired at the eleventh hour will only work for one hour (Matthew XX.1–16), was singled out for particular criticism by Bede in his Epistola ad Pleguinam. Charles Jones suggested that Bede's target was the 'Cologne Prologue', and Faith Wallis has endorsed this identification.[65] The synchronism between the long AM chronology and the 532-year cycle ensured that the twelfth cycle began in AM 5853 (AD 652) and, if it were to run to completion, would end in AM 6384. There is an implicit suggestion that this cycle may be the last, however, as ps-Augustine and the Munich Computus both note that the end of the twelfth cycle is unknown to us.[66] If the twelfth cycle were to be succeeded by the thirteenth, its end would be similar to the end of the preceding eleven: the uncertainty expressed about the end of the twelfth suggests its end will be unlike its predecessors, and chimes with the apocalypticism of the time.[67]

The implied apocalypticism of the twelfth cycle would, no doubt, have registered with Bede, and is the type of speculation that drew his ire in the Epistola ad Pleguinam. Bede's shorter Vulgate chronology negated the effect of these cyclical chronicles, as, in addition to dating the Incarnation to the fourth millennium of historical time, he placed it in the eighth cycle of the world and located the annus praesens in the relatively inconsequential ninth cycle of 532 years. This Victorian framework of

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[65] Epistola ad Pleguinam, ch. 14. See Jones, Bedae opera de temporibus, p. 91; Wallis, Bede: The Reckoning of Time, pp. lxxii (n. 171) and p. 413 (nn. 33 and 36); Darby, Bede and the End of Time, pp. 48–9; Darby, 'Bede's Time Shift', pp. 626–8. See Cologne Prologue, ed. B. Krusch, Studien zur Christlich-Mittelalterlichen Chronologie: Der 84Jährige Ostercyclus und Seine Quellen (Leipzig, 1880), pp. 227–35.

[66] Ps-Augustine, De mirabilibus, Book II, ch. 4, col. 2176: 'Et duodecimus nunc tertium annum agens ad futurorum scientiam se praestans, a nobis qualem finem sit habiturus ignoratur.' Munich Computus, ch. 68, lines 38–9, pp. 316–17: 'Duodecimus sua tempora nunc agens a nobis qualem finem habuerit ignoratur.'

[67] See above, and Warntjes, 'A Newly Discovered Prologue of AD 699', pp. 278–81.

universal time may have been a significant factor in encouraging Bede to look to the Vulgate chronology for his universal chronicles. The link between Victorian chronology and computus in Irish computistica may also have influenced him in embedding chronicles within his computistical texts.

Bede is generally credited with innovatively fusing chronology and computus by including world chronicles in his works on time. While the 'twelve cycles of the world' in the final chapter of the Munich Computus is on a substantially smaller scale, it plays a similar role to that of Bede's chronicles in his computus, especially the Chronica minora in De temporibus. The Victorian character of the 'twelve cycles' suggests that it was transmitted to Munich through the lost 'Victorian Computus of AD 689', and if this is correct, then this work (or another like it) may have been the first to include an overarching framework of historical time – though not a world chronicle – in a computus.

It is notable that Bede's Chronica minora is very different to the Chronica maiora, and the variations are far greater than just length. The shorter chronicle is explicitly structured on the Six World Ages, with each age receiving its own chapter. The long chronicle, in contrast, is several times the length but is presented as one unit, in Chapter 66 of DTR, and is internally structured on AM years.[68] There are very few precise dates in the Chronica minora: only the Incarnation is dated to a definitive AM year – indeed it is dated to two, as Bede counted the years from Creation according to the Vulgate (3952) and the Septuagint (5199).[69] Bede's short chronicle has often been

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[68] Charles Jones noted that in the Patrologia Latina editions of Bede's works on time the Chronica Minora occupies just less than five columns, while the Chronica Maiora extends to fifty full columns: *Saints' Lives and Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY, 1947) p. 17.

[69] DT, ch. 22, lines 3–4. Wilhelm Levison was very critical of Bede's short chronicle, see 'Bede as Historian', in Bede: His Life, Times and Writings, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (Oxford, 1935), pp. 111–51, at p. 116; a view shared by Harrison, The Framework of Anglo-Saxon History, p. 76.

likened to Isidore of Seville's chronicle in his Etymologiae, which is also structured on the ages of the world. However, Isidore's chronicle presents explicit AM years throughout and in that sense is most unlike Bede's. In its attitude to actual dates Bede's Chronica minora is more reminiscent of the 'twelve cycles' as found in Irish sources. Bede's short chronicle is considerably longer and more detailed, and better reflects the chronicle tradition than ps-Augustine et al., but the structure of each – twelve cycles or six ages – and the link between computus and chronology suggests a vibrant Insular context for the development of Bede's chronicles in his computistica.[70]

Bede's concern about using the Victorian cycle as a framework for universal time, and the implicit apocalypticism of the 'twelve cycles', provides further context for his decision to deviate from the standard chronological tradition, based on the Septuagint, to use Vulgate chronology in his chronicles. However, there is one other element of this Victorian chronology that could have encouraged Bede to look for alternatives.

**Annus Mundi and the year of the Passion**

As we have seen, Irish computus texts used the Septuagint chronology and followed Prosper-Victorius in dating the Passion to 5,228 years after Creation and the fifteenth year of Tiberius, rather than Eusebius-Jerome, who placed the Passion in Tiberius's eighteenth year. As noted above, the difference is because of the debate concerning the

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[70] If chronicles based on twelve cycles were introduced to Insular computistics in the 'Victorian computus of AD 689', that De ratione conputandi does not contain such a chronicle perhaps indicates an earlier date (i.e. pre–AD 689) for this text? However, the Computus Einsidlensis, which is dated to the late seventh century, also does not have a chronicle (see I. Warntjes, 'A Newly Discovered Irish Computus: Computus Einsidlensis', Peritia 19 (2005), pp. 61–4). Chronicles may have been linked to Victorian tradition, as the concept of the twelve cycles in Munich is copied from an older source and its Victorian perspective is unchanged. If, in Irish tradition, chronicles were not normally combined with the Dionysiac computus, the presence or absence of a chronicle is not a suitable tool for determining the relative chronology of these texts. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

length of Jesus's public ministry, which began after his baptism: the synoptic gospels imply this lasted a few months, while John's gospel suggests it was in excess of three years. The only securely dateable event in early Christian chronology is Jesus's baptism, which took place in the fifteenth year of Tiberius when he was about thirty (Luke III.1 and III.21–3). The date of the Passion is, therefore, directly dependent on the length of Jesus's ministry. Isidore of Seville, writing in the first half of the seventh century, grappled with these chronological complexities and dated the Passion to 5,228 years from the beginning of the world in his Chronicon and AM 5233 in his Etymologiae.[71] However, in both cases he placed the Passion in the eighteenth year of Tiberius, thereby following Eusebius-Jerome who argued that Jesus's ministry had lasted for more than three years. In equating 5,228 years from Creation with the eighteenth year of Tiberius in the Chronicon, Isidore perhaps attempted to synchronize Prosper-Victorius's AM date with the belief in Jesus's long ministry.

Bede advocated that Jesus spent over three years in active ministry, and he addressed the date of the Passion twice in his De temporum ratione. In the Chronica maiora, he dated Jesus's baptism to the fifteenth year of Tiberius and AM 3981, noting that, according to Eusebius' chronicle, there were 5,228 years from Creation. He then dated the Passion to the eighteenth year of Tiberius and AM 3984.[72] In Chapter 47 of the DTR, entitled 'The Years of the Lord's Incarnation', he discussed the date of the Passion and asserted that the faith of the church is that Jesus lived in the flesh for a little over thirty-three years, and preached for three and a half years after his baptism. Bede supported his view by reference to the gospels of Luke and John, the book of

[71] Isidore, Chronica, line 239; Etymologiae, Book V, ch. 39.26.
[72] DTR, ch. 66, lines 997–1006.

Revelations, and Daniel.[73] He also referred to the tradition of the Paschal candles at Rome, which each year had the Annus Passionis inscribed on them. As is well known, brethren from Bede's monastery were in Rome in AD 701 and copied the inscription on the paschal candle in a church dedicated to Mary, which read: 'From the Passion of our Lord there are 668 years.'[74] Bede noted that Rome's paschal candles were always thirty-three years less than the Dionysian era, which proved that the Roman church believed in the long ministry.

Immo Warntjes has argued that Bede had to respond to texts such as the Victorian Prologue of AD 699, which implicitly challenged the chronology used by Dionysius Exiguus. This Prologue compared the Septuagint AM with Victorian AP and Dionysian AD, which placed AP 1 in AM 5228/9 and AD 28. This was in line with Prosper-Victorius, as it follows the short chronology of Jesus's public ministry, but it also implied that Dionysius believed that Jesus was less than thirty at his death, in contradiction of Luke's evidence for his age at baptism.[75] Bede's discussion of the date of the Passion in DTR, Chapter 47, may have been inspired by works such as the Prologue, but the ubiquity of a universal chronology that implied that Jesus's active ministry in the world lasted for only a few months may also have been of concern to Bede, and this tradition would also have been highlighted in the Victorian Prologue.

There was considerable chronological uncertainty concerning the significant events in Christian history – the Creation, Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection – in

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[73] See Luke III.23; John XIII.1; Revelations XII.6 and 14 (cf. XI.3); and Daniel VII.25 and XII.7. See Nothaft, Dating the Passion, pp. 85–6.

[74] DTR, ch. 47, line 77, p. 431; tr. Wallis, p. 128: 'A passione domini nostri Iesu Christi anni sunt dclxuiii.' See M. Ohashi, 'The Annus Domini and the Sexta Aetas: Problems in the Transmission of Bede's De temporibus', in Warntjes and Ó Cróinín (eds), Computus and its Cultural Context in the Latin West, pp. 190–203; and L. Holford-Strevens, '"If you find it, give thanks": A Problematic Chapter of De temporum ratione', in I. Warntjes and D. Ó Cróinín (eds), Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the Science of Computus in Ireland and Europe, Galway, July 2012 (Brepols, forthcoming). I am grateful to Dr Holford-Strevens for allowing me to read his essay prior to publication.

[75] Warntjes, 'A Newly Discovered Prologue of AD 699', pp. 281–2.

this period. Bede's discussion of the date of the Passion in the Dionysian table served to highlight the improbability of Dionysius's chosen year of AD 34.[76] If one followed Bede, the most likely date for the Crucifixion is AD 31, which contradicts his arguments that Jesus's public ministry lasted for three and a half years.[77] Philipp Nothaft has noted that, as a result of Bede's contribution, 'the chronological discussion concerning the dates of Jesus' birth and death had reached a painful cul-de-sac', although this proved an incentive for subsequent computists to engage in new research.[78] Faith Wallis has argued that Bede urged his readers to be sceptical about chronography, and place absolute faith instead in the Gospel.[79] His conclusion to Chapter 47 of DTR is significant in this context:

> But if you are looking for such a year, and you are unable to find it in that place you thought [it would be], blame the carelessness of the chronographers, or better yet, your own slowness, being very wary lest in defending the text of the chronicles you do not appear boldly to impugn the testimony of the Law and the Gospel by saying that our Lord and Saviour underwent the most holy mystery of the Cross in either the fifteenth or the sixteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius Caesar, or in either the twenty-ninth or thirtieth year of his age, when the Gospels plainly indicate that the

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[76] See DTR, ch. 47; and Holford-Strevens, 'If you find it, give thanks'.

[77] See DTR, ch. 47 and the preface to ch. 66. In Bede's discussion of the date of the Passion following Dionysian Easter tables, he noted that AD 566 in the table corresponded to the year of the Passion following the 532-year luni-solar cycle (implying that Christ had died in AD 34). Bede suggested, when consulting a Dionysian table, the reader should be thankful to the Lord for showing them what they were looking for. His comment has frequently been regarded as ironic, because the Dionysian table does not present the western church's traditional calendrical and lunar data for the Crucifixion and Resurrection in AD 33 or 34: Wallis, Bede: The Reckoning of Time, pp. 337–8; Nothaft, Dating the Passion, p. 88; and Holford-Strevens, 'If you find it, give thanks'.

[78] Nothaft, Dating the Passion, p. 88.

[79] Wallis, Bede: The Reckoning of Time, p. 338.

forerunner of our Lord began to preach in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, and

that this same [forerunner] subsequently baptized (amongst others) Jesus,

who was then at about the beginning of his thirtieth year (Luke III.23).[80]

Bede recommends dismissing chronographers when they disagree with the Bible. The

certain date for him was that Jesus was baptized and began his public ministry in the

fifteenth year of Tiberius, at the beginning of his thirtieth year. In his view anyone that

argued for the Passion occurring in the fifteenth or sixteenth year of Tiberius, when

Jesus was in the twenty-ninth or thirtieth year of his age, goes against the Law and the

Gospel. This charge could be levelled at Victorius, which may have given Bede another

reason to dismiss his work, and the Irish texts discussed above, including Bede's

computus source.

Bede was familiar with the work of Eusebius-Jerome and Isidore, all of whom

believed in the long chronology for Jesus's public ministry: however, by the time he

came to write his chronicles, the fifteenth year of Tiberius and 5,228 years after

Creation, as advocated by Prosper-Victorius, appear to have become the recognized

dates for the Passion. Isidore adopted this in his Chronicon, though diverged from

tradition to call it the eighteenth year of Tiberius. Bede's objections to the short

chronology of Jesus's life, which produced a Passion date of AM 5228/9, may have led

him to look for an alternative to the long Annus mundi when compiling his world

chronicles. Using the Vulgate – the 'Hebrew Truth' – for chronology, reflected Bede's

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[80] DTR, ch. 47, lines 113–23, p. 433; tr. Wallis, p. 129: 'Sin uero annum qualem quaerebas, in loco quem putabas inuenire non poteris, uel chronographorum incuriae uel tuae potius tarditati culpam adscribe, tantum diligentissime cauens ne chronicorum scripta defensando intemerabile legis uel euangeli testimonium uidearis impugnare, dicendo dominum saluatorem uel xv aut xvi imperii Tiberii Caesaris uel xxviiii aut xxx suae aetatis anno sacrosanctum crucis subisse mysterium, cum euangelia manifeste significent xv anno Tiberii praecursorem domini praedicare coepisse, ipsumque mox inter alios baptizasse Iesum incipientem iam fieri quasi xxx annorum.'

belief in the primacy of the biblical text over chronography, and allowed him to present the long view of Jesus's public ministry without having to directly challenge contemporary opinion, while undermining the chronological arguments of his rivals.

**Conclusion**

The traditional view that Bede adopted Vulgate chronology in his chronicles because of his concerns about apocalypticism seems well founded but may not have been his sole motivation. The influence of Bede's Irish computus sources on his decision to look for an alternative to the mainstream chronological tradition has not been considered, because Bede's chronicles are generally examined in isolation from the rest of his computus. The surviving evidence indicates that the Septuagint Annus Mundi of Prosper-Victorius, transmitted to Bede through Irish compustistica, was both implicitly and explicitly apocalyptic, and supported the short view of Jesus's public ministry. This framework of time was objectionable to Bede, as he rejected speculation about the end of the world and arguments that Jesus had preached for only a few months. Bede's decision to place chronicles in his works of computus may have been influenced by Irish computistica, but his adoption of the Vulgate Annus Mundi in these chronicles allowed him to break with the chronology of his Irish computus sources.

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