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The Age of the World. Early Modern Chronology in the Western and Eastern Churches

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In Early Modern times the account of *Genesis* furnished scholars with information about the oldest history, the Creation, the Flood, and the fate of the Noachides. Early Biblical history became an important field, since the material could be used by learned men in order to construe a glorious past of various nations. Johannes Magnus, the last Catholic Arch-Bishop of Sweden (d. 1544), is a representative historiographer of this kind. There were in Western Europe different competing chronological systems, and the Eastern churches relied on a system of their own. I shall try to describe these various traditions. My focus will be on the Western historiography, with

examples from Johannes Magnus and from a number of Italian and German historians belonging to the same period. At the side of nationalistic and fanciful historiographers, there were all the time scholars who wanted to know *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*. I shall give some examples of that, as a healthy contrast to the less truthful but more glorious tales.

I shall also mention how, in the course of the 17th century, the account of *Genesis* began to be questioned in many ways, by historians as well as by natural historians. The time-span of the traditional chronological systems appeared to be too short and generally quite problematic. Some scholars attempted to save the text by ingenious new interpretations. But the area was extremely dangerous, since theologians of all confessions were on the alert. Nevertheless doubts were voiced – cautiously, to begin with –, until in the 18th century, during the Enlightenment, the belief in the authority of *Genesis* collapses.