Although scholars bemoan the loss of Tyconius’ commentary on the Apocalypse, they have managed to console themselves with isolated fragments and partial reconstructions on the basis of subsequent authors, who knew the lost commentary and used it in their own writings. Perhaps the most ingenious accomplishment was the recovery of the original structure of the lost commentary. The commonly accepted theory in this regard was first proposed by Traugott Hahn and later enshrined by Paul Monceaux in his monumental literary history. No scholar has ever seriously questioned the theory, which is generally accepted in most quarters as plain and simple fact. Unfortunately the theory is based upon an erroneous presupposition.

The commonly accepted theory

The commonly accepted theory concerning the structure of Tyconius’ Apocalypse commentary is profound in its simplicity. On the basis of literary evidence one must, first of all, posit three premises: First premise: Gennadius asserts that Tyconius’ commentary encompassed the entire book of the Apocalypse. Second premise: The Venerable Bede indicates that Tyconius’ commentary contained three books. Third premise: Beatus of Liebana unwittingly discloses the contents of Book II by mechanically copying Tyconius’ title after having written his own title to the same book.

The structure of the lost commentary flows quite spontaneously from these three premises. Tyconius’ title of Book II, recorded by Beatus, indicates that his second book encompassed Apoc. 4:1–8:1. Since the lost commentary was complete in three books and since the contents of the second book are known, one may readily conclude that Book I covered Apoc. 1:1–3:22 and Book III Apoc. 8:2–22:21.
The error

The flaw is not in the reasoning process but rather in the second premise, which is false. The Venerable Bede does not state that Tyconius' commentary contained three books! The pertinent passage is ripe for misunderstanding if one does not read it carefully.

In his Epistola ad Eusebium, which serves as the introduction to his Explanatio Apocalypsis, Bede proceeds in three steps. First, he presents his opinion that the book of the Apocalypse ought to be divided into seven sections. Second, he expounds on the seven rules of Tyconius. Third, after mentioning Tyconius' commentary on the Apocalypse, Bede goes on to explain the sources and disposition of his own Apocalypse commentary.

The last section of the letter is critical. Although he expresses some reservation in regard to Tyconius' Donatist leanings, Bede does confess that he followed Tyconius in writing his own work: Cujus quidem auctoris et nos in hoc opere sensum secuti, nonnulla quae extrinsecus posuit, breviandi causa omisimus, plura vero ... superadajicere curavimus. The tense (omisimus etc.) is important. In the Epistola Bede is writing about the Explanatio, which he had already completed. After considering his chief source and his method of dealing with that source, Bede then presents the structure of his own commentary: Cumque opus memoratum in tres libellos relevandae mentis gratia findi placuisset, ... With this sentence the stage was set for the erroneous interpretation. It was generally assumed that the opus memoratum, which may be translated "the previously mentioned work", referred to Bede's source, namely Tyconius' Apocalypse commentary. The verb placuisset in the pluperfect seemed to confirm the assertion. Most deceptive, however, was the use of the letter as an introduction to the commentary. When the prefatory letter discussed "the previously mentioned work," one would hardly have concluded that "the previously mentioned work" was identical with the commentary which followed. Nevertheless, Bede is clearly referring to his own Apocalypse commentary, which he obviously had completed before he wrote the letter to Eusebius, which he had already explicitly mentioned with the expression in hoc opere and which, by the way, does contain three books. Bede even justifies having divided his Explanatio into three books by citing Augustine, who says, "for some reason the attention of a reader is refreshed by the end of a book in the same way as the