

## REVIEW–DISCUSSION

TOWARDS A NEW APPRECIATION OF  
MALALAS AND THE *CHRONOGRAPHIA*

Mischa Meier, Christine Radtki, and Fabian Schulz, edd., *Die Weltchronik des Johannes Malalas. Autor—Werk—Überlieferung*. Malalas Studien 1. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016. Pp. 310. Hardback, €58.00. ISBN 978-3-515-11099-0.

This volume is the first instalment of a series which is intended to showcase the outcome of an ongoing research project on John Malalas at the University of Tübingen, and presents the proceedings of a conference held in Tübingen at the beginning of 2014. It is accompanied by an introductory chapter, which gives an overview of the editions of Malalas, the previous research done by the authors, and the ongoing research at the University of Tübingen with its ambitious programme of establishing the first scientific commentary on the work of Malalas, along with a series of monographs. The volume centres on three issues: the context of the author, the position of the text within the genre landscape of the sixth century, and the question of the transmission of the text.

**I. Malalas—Person, Werk und Umfeld**

§J. M. Thesz, ‘Die christliche *Paideia* des Johannes Malalas’.

The first section, which is devoted to the life and background of the author, is opened by a contribution of Thesz (henceforth T.). He states that, in the light of the longstanding previous negative judgements on Malalas’ education and chronicle, there is a serious need to assess Malalas’ schooling and its position in the cultural landscape of the sixth century. T. discusses the two diverging positions of recent scholarship: whereas W. Treadgold considered Malalas a member of the lower echelons of the bureaucracy, and saw evidence for that in his low level of style, B. Croke argued that Malalas was part of the higher bureaucracy and enjoyed a rhetorical education. Next T. posits his thesis, namely that Malalas did not enjoy a classical rhetorical training. On the one hand, Malalas’ use of a colloquial style does not comply with the educated demands for writing in Atticising Greek. On the other hand, Malalas does not display the knowledge of the literary canon which a classical rhetorical education would entail. According to T., Malalas’ education was a Christian one.

This Christian *paideia* stemmed from a tradition that included a strong Syriac undercurrent—other exponents of this tradition were Tatian, Romanus the Melodist, and John of Tella. This strand also had contemporary parallels in the politics of Justinian. Proponents of traditional *paideia* such as John of Lydia and Procopius illustrated that this traditional *paideia* was no longer standard. Malalas was the exponent of a Christian *paideia* that set out to offer a serious alternative to the traditional model of education.

This contribution raises a number of questions. One cannot simply infer the author's conscious rejection of traditional *paideia* from a lowly stylistic register. On the contrary, being able to vary in style and adapt a lowly style is part of the rhetorician's prowess. An example of this practice can be found in Malalas' contemporary Cassiodorus. In the preface to his collection of letters, the *Variae*, he muses on the significance of the title (*Var. Pref.* 15–16):

Now, as to the title of the books, that tell-tale of the work, herald of the contents, summary of the whole treatise, I have assigned the name of *Variae*; for, since I had various persons to admonish, I had to adopt more styles than one. For in one manner you must address and persuade men glutted with much reading; in another those titillated with a small taste; in another those who are starved of the savour of letters, so that it may sometimes be a kind of art to avoid what would please the learned ... For no one can be called eloquent unless he is armed with this threefold style, and equipped like a man for any case that may arise.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, T. mentions the antiquarian use of anachronisms to denote places and peoples as a marker of the classicizing style, which implies that Malalas did not use such labels. However, Malalas is as generous in dispensing anachronistic names such as 'Scythians' and 'Persians', as, for instance, Procopius is.

Thirdly, T. focuses on Malalas' apparent lack of knowledge of Homer in order to argue that he did not exhibit an intimate knowledge of the classical tradition. T. mentions, for example, how book 5 of the *Chronographia* contains deviations from the Homeric narrative. However, deviating from Homer does not imply not knowing Homer. On the contrary, one could say that Malalas was well aware of the Homeric tradition and the different variants of the Homeric mythology. An example in this sense is his treatment of the Palladium:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Trans. S. J. Barnish, *The Variae of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator*, vol. 12 (Liverpool, 1992) 4.

<sup>2</sup> In *Chron.* 5.12–15, Malalas recounts the quarrel between Ajax Telamonius, Diomedes, and Odysseus over the Palladium. The Palladium is an image of Pallas, given by the wonder-worker Asios to Tros when building Troy. Tros gives the name Asia to his lands in honour of Asios. During the siege of Troy, the Palladium is stolen on advice of Antenor by Odysseus and Diomedes during a festival. The Palladium is claimed by Ajax, and Odysseus

Malalas shrewdly combines different variants of the myths surrounding the Palladium in order to create a Leitmotiv that structures his *Chronographia*, and couples the city of Troy to Rome and Constantinople. Clearly Malalas knew very well the importance of mythology and shrewdly remoulded it to fit his narrative of the Roman Empire, culminating in a Christian Constantinople. Next, inaccuracies in referring to Homer or not mentioning the name of Homer are not a sign of not knowing Homer. The force of a learned allusion resides in the fact that the one making the allusion does not refer to its source—we cannot blame Malalas for not being so pedantic as to mention all sources of his allusions. Moreover, not referring to Homer but to Vergil and Dictys of Crete does not imply ignorance of Homer either. Malalas, as the case of the Palladium illustrates, is only interested in Homeric myth in function of its contribution to the narrative of the foundation of Rome and the Roman Empire, which is the main focus of his *Chronographia*. To conclude the case of Homer: overt criticisms on Homer do not have to be a symptom of a Christian *paideia*; calling Homer a liar is a *locus* from classical rhetoric and features, for instance, in Dio Chrysostom's second oration, the *Troicus*.

In conclusion, the opposition between a traditional 'pagan' and an exclusively Christian *paideia* is in my view artificial. Cassiodorus provides again an illuminating comparison with Malalas. During his term as praetorian prefect (533–40) he and Pope Agapetus unsuccessfully tried to raise funds for a Christian school of higher learning in the city of Rome. After his political career, he pursued his didactical aspirations in his newly founded monastery at Vivarium. Yet, Cassiodorus did not reject the classical *paideia* that was conceived as a neutral, common, universal element of education and heritage.

#### § V. H. Drecoll, 'Miaphysitische Tendenzen bei Malalas?'

The question of whether Malalas advocated a pro-miaphysite position in his *Chronographia* has been subjected to much scholarly debate for the past century. Modern scholarship inclines to argue in favour of Malalas' general disinterest

pleads in favour of him receiving the statue. Because the Greeks do not attain an agreement on the question, the Palladium is taken into custody by Diomedes. Ajax is murdered the same night and riots occur against Odysseus. Diomedes sets off from Troy with the Palladium (*Chron.* 5.22). In book 6 (*Chron.* 6.24), Diomedes meets Aeneas and hands him over the statue therefore complying with an oracle from the Pythia to give the Palladium to the Trojans. Thereafter Aeneas founds the city of Albania and deposits the Palladium there. Ascanius Iulus, son of Aeneas and Creusa, builds the city of Lavinia, and transfers the Palladium from Albania to Lavinia (*Chron.* 6.25). At the end of book 6 (*Chron.* 6.29) Albas transfers the Palladium from Lavinia to Silva. At the beginning of book 7 (*Chron.* 7.1) the two brothers Romulus and Remus take the Palladium to their newly founded city of Rome. The account of the Palladium comes to an end in book 13, which digresses on the dedication of Byzantium by Emperor Constantine (*Chron.* 13.7). Constantine took in secret the Palladium from Rome and buried it under the column at the centre of his forum.

in theological questions. However, two articles by F. N. Alpi and P. Blaudeau have argued in favour of Malalas adapting a mildly pro-miaphysite position. In his contribution, Dreccoll takes issue with these two studies and revives the case for the *communis opinio* of a theologically disinterested Malalas. He does so by analysing the theological passages in the accounts of each emperor (Zeno I, Anastasius I, Justin I, Justinian I), after making three important theoretical points: 1) the concept of miaphysitism is a post-factum creation, which does not imply a closed set of theological doctrines, 2) the basis for making any statements on the work of Malalas is by necessity the epitome of Malalas—further work on the Slavonic and Syriac parallel traditions could clarify further this otherwise confused state of the evidence, and 3) the structural element of the books in which the theological controversies appear in Malalas are the reigns of the emperors. The evidence at hand therefore has to be considered in this framework.

### § C. Saliou, ‘Malalas’ Antioch’.

The chapter by Saliou (henceforth S.) investigates the modalities and functions of the appearance of (parts of) the city of Antioch in the chronicle of Malalas. The short introduction rightfully points to the relevance of Malalas for research on the city of Antioch; as the archaeological exploration of the city is ongoing, any inquiries would benefit from a close interaction between the results yielded by excavations and the data collected from historical texts such as Malalas’ *Chronographia*. This section would have benefited from a map of the city as a reader’s guide into the rest of the paper.

The first part of the article maps out the different modes of appearance of the city. S. differentiates between ‘incidental’ and ‘focused occurrences’ of the urban landscape—the former have mentions of buildings in order to locate narrated events whereas in the latter the buildings are the focus of a narrative of imperial or regal activity. As regards to the appearance of the buildings, S. divides the chronicle in three parts. The first part (books 1–9) has some early but sporadic references to the city. In the second part (books 10–14) the city of Antioch is the focal point of the narrative which is structured around the reign of successive rulers and their building activities in the city. In the third part (books 15–18), the city receives less attention and is mostly subjected to incidental references. In spite of this tripartite division, S. focuses on the different elements of continuity to plead in favour of a coherent presentation of the city throughout the chronicle, which is the product of a single author.

S. analyses the last part of the chronicle (books 15–18) in the second section, in order to approach the first and second parts (books 2–14) in the last section. Malalas’ references to buildings in books 15–18 are considered to be as a whole genuine, and therefore rich and valuable, sources. This factual correctness of Malalas in books 15–18 is contrasted with some inconsistencies and errors in

books 2–14. These contradictions in historical accuracy prompt S. to some important programmatic reflections on future topographical explorations of Malalas' chronicle—of which her contribution presents only the preliminary results. S. pleads for a collective effort in determining the historical value of each topographical reference, which requires, in addition to an analytical enquiry, also a synthetic, contextual and literary approach. She continues her study of books 2–14 with an interesting example of the literary approach, by tracing several structuring cycles of references to buildings. This structural analysis is a promising approach to tracing the different parts of the architecture of the chronicle as a whole, which is, in my opinion, indeed more intricate and complex than would appear at first sight. S. concludes by weighing the factual accuracy of Malalas against his remoulding of the factual material for structural, etiological, and ideological reasons: Malalas is both a genuine source of the development of the city of Antioch and a testimony to late antique modes of narrative structuring.

§ P. Blaudeau, 'Malalas and the Representation of Justinian's Reign: A Few Remarks'.

In his contribution, Blaudeau conducts a close reading of two passages of Malalas which were not retained in the principal version of the *Baroccianus* in order to ascertain whether Malalas' depiction of Justinian undergoes any changes between the first redaction of the chronicle under Justinian, and the second redaction after the demise of said emperor. These changes in the depiction of the emperor could be brought about by the changes in the climate of historiographical production prompted by the death of the emperor, which B. also sketches. He argues in favour of a retained consistency of Malalas' imperial portrait. After a short overview of the possible reasons for Malalas' second redaction, B. continues with the close reading of the two passages mentioned above. An important element in Justinian's portrayal and in the consistency of this portrayal is his capacity to repent his unjust actions, notably the transgression of the protection granted by sacred buildings. The emperor's capability to repent places him on a par with the ancient exemplum of Cyrus and his proverbial repentance towards Daniel.

## II. Die Gattung der 'Chronik'

§ R. W. Burgess and M. Kulikowski, 'The Historiographical Position of John Malalas. Genre in Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Middle Ages'.

In this substantial contribution, which opens the second section of the book devoted to the literary position of the *Chronographia*, the two authors provide insight into the intricate question of the genre of Malalas' *Chronographia*. The authors start with somewhat of a paradox; whereas the authors from antiquity

and late antiquity in practice observed strict genre divisions in their literary productions, they did not develop a similarly circumscribed vocabulary to denote these genres. This paradox underlies the confusion in the genre designation of Malalas' historiographical work; the designation *Chronographia* for Malalas is not based on any manuscript evidence, and *Chronographia* is a general term that precludes any specific genre designation. This terminological elusiveness prompts the authors to try a different approach. On the basis of a diachronic study of the chronicle genre over a long period of time before Malalas—from the Neo-Babylonian period onward—they distil two essential characteristics: 1) the primacy in a chronicle of time over event and 2) the brevity which this primacy elicits. Judged by these two characteristics, the work of Malalas is not a chronicle. A survey of related works in late antiquity shows that Malalas' deviation away from the chronicle genre is the rule instead of the exception. After the chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea, only a few exceptional cases can aspire to the characteristics of the chronicle genre. The authors provide an alternative designation of Malalas' work by placing him in the late antique secular tradition of *breviaria*. Instead of a universal chronicle, the work is a universal *breviarium*. As the example of Malalas shows, a thorough analysis of the textual characteristics of Byzantine historiography can provide insights into genre divisions beyond the Byzantines' own muddled vocabulary. The contribution ends with a proposed classification of Byzantine historiographical genres.

§ A.-M. Bernardi and E. Caire, 'John Malalas: From Computation to Narration'.

Bernardi and Caire compare Malalas' work with the work of Eusebius of Caesarea to ascertain the structural influence of the latter on the former. This comparative analysis shows that until book 7 of his *Chronographia* Malalas faithfully follows Eusebius. After book 7, Malalas follows Eusebius on a loose basis, which allows him to omit and expand his narrative at will. Some case studies show the proclivities of Malalas underlying these omissions and expansions, namely an erudite ambition to upholster his account with hermetical and miraculous material juxtaposed to local lore centred on the city of Antioch.

### III. Zur Überlieferung der Malalas-Chronik

#### III.1 Handschriften

§ E. Jeffreys, 'The Manuscript Transmission of Malalas' Chronicle Reconsidered'.

The third section of the volume deals with the intricate transmission history of the *Chronographia*. In this chapter, Jeffreys lists some of the problems involved in the manuscript transmission of Malalas' *Chronographia* in order to formulate

some remarks on the context of the publication of Malalas in the sixth century, the notion of authorship in the Middle Ages, and what these observations can contribute to improving editorial practices of Malalas. She pleads for a digitally enhanced acceptance of the textual fluidity, which is a result of the fluid concept of authorship in the Middle Ages. Although this chapter does not make any claims to being a comprehensive overview, the discussion could have benefited from the theoretical advancements of recently published databases in the field, such as the *Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams* (Ghent University), and the light which these metrical paratexts shed on the relationships between authors, scribes, and sponsors in the Byzantine period.

§ F. Schulz, ‘*Fragmentum Tusculanum II* und die Geschichte eines Zankapfels’. A famous anecdote in Byzantine chronicles is the story of how an apple presented as a gift to an empress became a source of tragic discord. In this contribution, Schulz uses the testimony of Malalas from the *Tusculan Fragments* to prove that this anecdote in Malalas was initially used to promote a view of the emperor which was informed by a miaphysite agenda. Only in the later versions of Malalas’ chronicle was this anecdote reworked to suit a more Chalcedonian agenda. Schultz points to the parallel with the apple of Eve in the Garden of Eden. However, an analysis of possible parallels between the anecdote and the judgement of Paris could have provided a more rounded view of the tragic allusions surrounding this anecdote, especially as Malalas devotes much attention to the Trojan War in the fifth book of his *Chronographia*. Furthermore, this contribution seems to contradict the hypothesis of a theologically disinterested Malalas as advocated by V. H. Drecoll earlier on in this volume. We could therefore wonder whether a theological agenda is the sole motivation of Malalas’ use of the anecdote, which can otherwise be explained as a tragic reflection on ill-fated gifts and discord within the context of classical precedents, such as the Trojan War (*Chron.* 5) and the Theban cycle (*Chron.* 2).

### III.2 Literarische Beziehungen

§ G. Greatrex, ‘Malalas and Procopius’. Greatrex starts his useful contribution by emphasizing an obvious, yet often overlooked, point: the text of Malalas, as we have access to it today, is a poor witness to the original. Later redactions of the text most possibly omitted Malalas’ coverage of the Western conquests of Justinian, which would imply that the original Malalas had interests more closely related to those of Procopius. Data from the *Excerpta Constantiniana* indeed confirm parallels between Malalas and Procopius in their negative judgement of contemporary politics. G. pursues this point of similarity between Procopius and Malalas, who were part of the same bureaucratic milieu, just as, for instance, John the Lydian was. Both

authors use the same type of military and diplomatic dispatches. Malalas' extensive treatment of some events even explains the otherwise enigmatic omissions in Procopius, who chose not to reproduce the material already presented in the *Chronographia*. G. concludes that both Malalas and Procopius wrote for a shared audience with closely similar erudite historiographical predilections—a conclusion which, in my view, invalidates the hypothesis of an exclusively Christian education proposed by Thesz.

§ C. Gastgeber, 'Die *Osterchronik* und Johannes Malalas'.

Although the *Chronicon Paschale* is a valuable testimony to the first redaction of Malalas' *Chronographia*, scholars have until today relied on the outdated edition by Dindorf (1832). In his contribution, Gastgeber compares relevant sections from Malalas and the *Fragmenta Tusculana* with the *Chronicon Paschale* in order to shed further light on the transmission history of Malalas.

§ E. Juhász, 'Die Indiktionsangaben bei Johannes Malalas und in der *Osterchronik*'.

In this chapter, the reckoning of *indictiones* in the *Chronicon Paschale* is compared to the time reckoning in Malalas, the main model of the *Chronicon*. This comparative analysis shows how the *Chronicon* misinterpreted and supplemented the reckoning of Malalas or of a common source.

§ P. Carolla, 'John Malalas in the *Excerpta Constantiniana De Insidiis* (IE): A Philological and Literary Perspective'.

This essay provides the reader with a contextual and technical study of the sixteenth-century manuscript material surrounding the *Excerpta Constantiniana* and Malalas' presence in it. In spite of the technical meticulousness of the analysis, its conclusions could have benefited from a thorough assessment of literary dynamics in Malalas. Carolla seeks to explain the stylistically elevated level of a specific passage, which is seemingly at odds with Malalas' presupposed low literary abilities, by hypothesizing a very learned allusion to the *Froschmäusekrieg* in order to mock the circus factions. Trying to explain away the elevated literary style of an author by hypothesizing a learned literary allusion is not a convincing strategy. This contribution seems to have undergone sloppy editing, as a sentence explicitly designates the presented material for an on-line publication instead of a paper volume. In this chapter, the reader is first confronted with the *Excerpta Constantiniana* without a short introduction, which does appear later on, however, in the chapter by U. Roberto.



§ S. Mariev, 'John of Antioch Reloaded: A Tutorial'.

The following two papers deal with a debate that has grown to be a *Froschmäusekrieg* on its own within the field of late antique and Byzantine studies: namely the question of how to edit the surviving fragments of John of Antioch, one of the most important witnesses to Malalas. In his chapter, Mariev (henceforth M.) gives a much needed synopsis of the debate over the past decades and the interrelated problems which constitute this intricate question. Before going to a short overview of the different hypotheses formulated in the past, M. tries to refute the difference between the *Maximalbestand* (i.e. all possibly attributable fragments) and the *Minimalbestand* (i.e. all certainly attributable fragments by virtue of the mention of the name of the author). This last conceptual term had been relaunched by P. Van Nuffelen in his sensible critique of the recent editions made by both contributors—to which title the title of this chapter also alludes.<sup>3</sup> In my opinion, M. gives a rather unsatisfactory reason for doing away with the *Minimalbestand*: as the name 'John of Antioch' happens to be the same name of John Malalas, namely, 'a John from Antioch', establishing the *Minimalbestand* risks becoming an exercise in confusion. Although this is indeed the case for this specific pair of authors, this *coincidence* does not refute the *theoretical principle*: if John of Antioch happened to be called, say 'Eugen Von Flegelhaft' instead of 'John of Antioch', the exercise of drawing up a *Minimalbestand* would be carried out without much further ado. A closer look at the extant material also reveals that there is less confusion between the two names than M. would like to see. For instance, in the *Excerpta Constantiniana*, John Malalas is called John Malalas and is distinguished from John of Antioch. The drawing up of a *Minimalbestand* is in fact more feasible than M. believes. The problem is that M. believes that there was a great confusion between the two, and that all the fragments of John of Antioch containing material from Malalas are wrongly attributed to John of Antioch, whereas it is clear that John of Antioch did use Malalas.

After the discussion of the *Minimalbestand* and the *Maximalbestand*, M. guides us through the hypotheses of E. Patzig, G. Sotiriadis, and the deadlock between them, which was broken by the discovery of a new fragment of John in the Monastery of Iviron. Next, M. discusses three interrelated problems that have to be taken into account by any new editor of John of Antioch; the final sections of the *Excerpta Constantini*, the *Excerpta Salmasiana* I and II, and the relationship between the two authors who are also inconveniently namesakes. Before coming to a conclusion, M. also devotes a short section on why he included in his own edition some lemmas from the *Suda*.

All in all this contribution succeeds in providing a comprehensive, clear, and manageable introduction to the Johannine Question—the colour tables

<sup>3</sup> P. Van Nuffelen, 'John of Antioch, Inflated and Deflated. Or: How (Not) to Collect Fragments of Early Byzantine Historians', *Byzantion* 82 (2012): 437–50.

at the end of the chapter greatly enhance the usefulness of this chapter. Yet the somewhat unsatisfactory rebuttal of Van Nuffelen's fundamental methodological remarks, which go back to the theoretical groundwork of Jacoby,<sup>4</sup> seems to suggest that a truly objective overview to the *Froschmäusekrieg* of John of Antioch is better off when being written by somebody who is not personally involved in the matter, such as M., who recently made an edition of John. In the battle between frogs and mice the gods also decided not to intervene, but only to watch.

§ U. Roberto, 'John Malalas as a Source for John of Antioch's *Historia Chroniké*. The Evidence of the *Excerpta historica Constantiniana*'.

In this second contribution on John of Antioch, Roberto discusses how John of Antioch used John Malalas and how he deviated from his model. These deviations are elicited by the specific context of the publication of John of Antioch's work in the wake of Emperor Heraclius' overthrow of the usurper Bardas Phocas; in this period of political reformation of the Empire, John focuses on Constantinople and on the Roman Republic to provide the new emperor with examples of genuine Roman rule. The contribution also has a useful appendix, listing the *Excerpta Constantiniana* that derive from the Malalas-based section of the first and second books of John of Antioch.

§ D. Brodka, 'Die *Weltchronik* des Johannes Malalas und die *Kirchengeschichte* des Nikephoros Xanthopoulos Kallistos'.

The volume ends with an overview of the passages and influences of Malalas on the fourteenth-century Church history of Xanthopoulos, showing how this author had at his disposal the same text of Malalas that we can access today.



All in all, this volume is a very promising start to the ambitious Tübingen project, which will provide a much-needed exploration of the work of Malalas—a key testimony to the cultural, literary, and political context of the equally pivotal period of Justinian's rule.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin and Leiden, 1923–58).

<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank Kasey Reed (Ghent University) and Federico Santangelo (Newcastle University) for their useful comments on drafts of this review.