

Mischa Meier, Christine Radtki, Fabian Schulz (eds.),  
*Die Weltchronik des Johannes Malalas. Author – Werk –  
Überlieferung (Malalas Studien 1)*, Franz Steiner Verlag,  
Stuttgart 2016, 310 pp., ISBN 879-3-515-11099-0

Owing to the large amount of valuable information it contains on the history of Antioch on the Orontes in the Hellenistic and Roman period, the *Chronographia*, a historical work written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE by John Malalas, who came from this city, is a popular work among scholars. Yet this does not prevent it from having become the target of a number of uncomplimentary comments. These have been common since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when German philologists were critical about the work – judgments, incidentally, which were not based on any thorough research. Although attempts to verify these opinions followed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to date no fundamental changes to them have ensued. However, scholars' interest in Malalas' work has resulted in more systematic studies on it, as well as a translation into English<sup>1</sup> and German,<sup>2</sup> and a new critical edition of the Greek text.<sup>3</sup> Many indications suggest that research on Malalas' *Chronographia* has entered a new phase, thanks to the founding in 2013 at the University of Tübingen of a centre for research on Malalas led by Mischa Meier. The centre's ambition is to conduct systematic and in-depth studies on his work and to hold annual conferences at which their results will be presented. The first of these took place in 2014 in Tübingen, with papers presented by participants from eight countries. These papers have been published in the first volume of the series *Malalas Studien. Schriften zur Chronik des Johannes Malalas*.

The Introduction (*Einleitung*), written by the conference organisers (M. Meier, C. Radtki, F. Schulz, *Zur Entwicklung der Malalas-Forschung – einige Orientierungslinien*, pp. 7–23), provides a concise overview of the current state of research on the *Chronographia*, the problems associated with the author himself, determining the time when his work was written and the fate of his text. This presentation is concluded by a bibliography of the previous publications concerning Malalas and his work (pp. 20–23).

The conference took as its subject several selected issues. These are clearly displayed in the book's format. The first part refers directly to topics concerning Malalas' biography and intellectual background, but also to the values of his historical work (I. Malalas – *Person, Werk und Umfeld*). It comprises four articles: J.M. Thesz, *Die christliche Paideia des Johannes Malalas*, pp. 27–43); V.H. Drecoll, *Miaphysitische Tendenzen*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, a translation by E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, and R. Scott, Melbourne 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes Malalas, *Weltchronik*, übersetzt von J. Thurn und M. Meier, Stuttgart 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, recensuit Ioannes Thurn, (*Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae*), Berlin – New York 2000.

*bei Malalas?*, pp. 44–57; C. Saliou, *Malalas' Antioch*, pp. 59–76; P. Blaudeau, *Malalas and the Representation of Justinian's Reign: a Few Remarks*, pp. 77–89). The reflections in these texts suggest that, contrary to previous opinions, Malalas did not possess education based on a classical teaching programme, but rather one based on Christian values, which was quite popular in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. The way that Malalas presents the theological disputes of the day leads us to assume that he did not participate in them himself. The sections referring to the history of Antioch suggest that his image of the city's past, despite the many valuable details it contains, is neither coherent nor fully credible. Many of the historical references are interjections, used to add details from past incidents to narratives on the characteristic elements of his description of Antioch's topography. The most valuable part of this is the picture of the city painted in books XV–XVIII. The period in question here is c. 475–c. 530 CE, i.e. the years when Malalas was living in the city. Meanwhile, his positive portrait of Justinian's rule results from his emphasis of those characteristics of the monarch that allowed him to present him as the most pious Christian king.

The second, smaller part of the book (II. *Die Gattung der "Chronik"*) contains only two articles: R.W. Burgess, M. Kulikowski, *The Historiographical Position of John Malalas. Genre in Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Middle Ages*, pp. 93–117; A.-M. Bernardi, E. Caire, *John Malalas: from Computation to Narration*, pp. 119–136). Both concern the problem of the *Chronographia's* literary genre. The type of narrative employed by Malalas, which differs from the formats of other similar historical works, results in disagreement over how to define his work, and this contention is the subject of Burgess and Kulikowski's discussion. They conclude that the characteristic narrative style and construction mean that the *Chronographia* defies the standard classifications, representing an entirely new quality in itself (cf. pp. 104–112).<sup>4</sup> The authors of the second article also point to the unique narrative structure of Malalas' work. In an attempt to find an explanation, they suggest that it might have been based on the construction of Eusebius' *Chronicle*. The originality of the *Chronographia* comes from combining into one whole of elements drawn from other sources, whose origin, incidentally, it does not provide. As a result, it cannot be classified in any known writing genre. Without doubt it is the consequence of Malalas' intellectual interests and his view of the past, in which legends and historical facts blend to form a whole that is difficult to separate.

The third part (III. *Zur Überlieferung der Malalas-Chronik*) takes up over half of the entire book. The articles of which it is composed are of a philological nature. The authors of two of these discuss issues concerning the history of the *Chronographia's* handwritten transmission, as the only complete manuscript dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century – that is several hundred years after it was written. This causes problems with determining the original form of the work, but also with understanding the author's actual views, since later copyists did not respect the principle of integral transmission of Malalas' work, and included their own contents in the copy of the *Chronography* (E. Jeffreys, *The Manuscript Transmission of Malalas' Chronicle Reconsidered*, pp. 139–151; F. Schulz, *Fragmentum Tusculanum II und die Geschichte eines Zankapfels*, pp. 153–166). The authors of the

<sup>4</sup> "From the perspective of the ancient historian, Malalas did not write a chronicle or anything the ancient world would have recognized as such. He wrote a long *breviarium* that drew on chronicle sources in a very few places, while largely failing to handle chronological complexity with any skill" (p. 111).

remaining seven articles analyse the style and content of various fragments of Malalas' work, endeavouring to ascertain the source he could have drawn from while writing it, or which authors might have used his work or modelled their own on his (G. Greatrex, *Malalas and Procopius*, pp. 169–185; C. Gastgeber, *Die Osterchronik und Johannes Malalas. Aspekte der Rezeption*, pp. 187–224; E. Juhász, *Die Indikationsangaben bei Johannes Malalas und in der Osterchronik*, pp. 225–237; P. Carolla, *John Malalas in the Excerpta Constantiniana de Insidiis (EI): a Philological and Literary Perspective*, pp. 239–252; S. Mariev, *John of Antioch Reloaded: a Tutorial*, pp. 253–265; U. Roberto, *John Malalas as a source for John of Antioch's Historia Chroniké. The evidence of the Excerpta historica Constantiniana*, pp. 267–286; D. Brodka, *Die Weltchronik des Johannes Malalas und die Kirchengeschichte des Nikephoros Xanthopoulos Kallistos*, pp. 287–310).

Although the subject matter of most of the texts in the book is philological, it is also very interesting for historians interested in Malalas' work. Its new findings concerning the historian's biography and writing mean that it is easier to understand the *Chronographia's* unique historical value. There is no doubt that these conclusions make it easier to make use of the information it contains and to assess their credibility appropriately. Solely on the basis of the results of the first conference organised by Mischa Meier, one can hope that further studies carried out by scholars gathered around him will contribute to presenting an appropriate perspective on Malalas and his work.

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