A RECORD OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND MONUMENTS

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Malalas’ chronicle is an important source for the study of the buildings and monuments of ancient cities, especially for Antioch and Constantinople. The material, however, was recorded selectively. Consequently for a proper use and appreciation of the material the factors influencing Malalas’ selection and presentation should be considered. At the same time an examination of this aspect of the chronicle can illustrate the value a sixth-century chronicler, and to some extent his predecessors, placed on recording the construction and repair of public buildings and amenities in a city. It can also illustrate the way he himself looked upon the history of his city and its monuments.

Scope of the chronicle

This chronicle from the time of Adam is presented essentially in terms of generations of family history for the Old Testament and legendary period (Books I-V) and thereafter with reference to rulers, first to the most prominent of the Assyrian, Persian and Seleucid rulers, and then, from Book IX on, to Julius Caesar and ostensibly all the Roman emperors in turn down to Justinian (cf. chapter 1, pp. 1-2). References to buildings and monuments throughout the first part in particular are linked to accounts of the foundation of cities, to religious cults and festivals. From the time of Alexander the Great on, building enterprises are most frequently attributed to the initiative of the ruler, often in response to disasters: earthquakes, flood or fire, riots or Persian attacks. Buildings are also mentioned incidentally, to establish a location. There is a marked interest throughout the chronicle in the setting up of statues, some of them with apotropaic powers. This preoccupation with the symbolism of statues is also reflected in his account of the origins of idolatry (II §43 - III §1, Bo 53-57). Reference to other works of art such as ceremonial carriages and dress, silver plate, and even an elaborate gold bridle, can arise either in the context of anecdotal material or in small-scale ekphrasis.

The context in which the works are mentioned has largely shaped the selection of material. Most of it concerns Antioch and its suburb of Daphne and their immediate environs, but buildings in Jerusalem and Caesarea Maritima are mentioned several times, especially in connection with Jewish and Samaritan revolts. Some specific buildings are also noted in Laodikeia, down the coast from Antioch, and in Nikomedia, the largest city in the vicinity of Constantinople. However, in its time the city of Constantinople attracts attention almost comparable to that given Antioch. Beyond these horizons the
material often seems to have been included as a news item, reporting on major earthquake
damage, for example. Other references are to subjects of general knowledge, like the
'seven wonders' (the Colossus of Rhodes, the lighthouse at Alexandria, the temple of
Hadrian at Kyzikos and the temple of Zeus at Heliopolis/Baalbek), or topics of learned
interest like the explanation of the symbolism of the hippodrome (VII §4, Bo 175), or the
name of the sculptor Pheidias appearing in a list of famous ancient Greeks. This
chronicle, which goes back to the time of Adam, is thus fundamentally a 'city chronicle',
but set in a framework of a sixth-century Antiochene's view of history and of Antioch's
place in the late Roman empire. This explains its focus on Antioch and on the capital of
the empire.

There are two major shifts in the work affecting references to buildings and
monuments. The first is at the end of Book VIII at the point where Antioch and the old
Seleucid kingdom came under direct Roman rule as the province of Syria, after Pompey's
successful campaigns against Mithridates of Pontos and Tigranes of Armenia. From
Julius Caesar on the building achievements are generally listed for each ruler, following
the practice of the genres of biography and encomium, but limited to the eastern part of
the empire, with only an occasional reference to Rome. The second shift occurs in the
last book. The last detailed reference to Antioch is the description of the earthquake of
526 which left about a quarter of a million dead (XVII §16, Bo 419-21), while the Persian
sack of 540 (XVIII §87, Bo 480) is treated cursorily. Indeed the chronicle proceeds in only
summary form after the description of the Nika riot in 532 and the establishment of the
Endless Peace with Persia (XVIII §76, Bo 478). It seems that Malalas completed the first
version of his chronicle at this point and moved shortly afterwards to Constantinople
(chapter 1, p. 22 and 7, p. 211). Although there is evidence of the chronicle continuing
to at least the death of Justinian in A.D. 565 it does not, in its present form, refer to the
rebuilding of Antioch after the sack of 540. Malalas' contemporary, Prokopios, on the
other hand, devoted considerable attention to this rebuilding (Buildings, II, 10. 19-25). In
those last pages it ceases to be a chronicle of the city of Antioch and the focus moves to
Constantinople.

When we ask why specific material is included in the chronicle and the form it takes
we are brought immediately to the questions, dealt with in other chapters, of the nature of
Malalas' sources (see chapter 7), his own circumstances (see chapter 1), and the
components underlying the genre of the world chronicle, first developed by Eusebius (see
chapter 2).

The legendary period

For the legendary period the buildings Malalas refers to are temples and tombs
closely associated with Greek myths, such as the temple of Artemis at Aulis where
Agamemnon left Iphigeneia before sailing for Troy (V §8, Bo 98, following Diktys'
account) and Zeus's tomb on Crete (I §13, P 16; Evans, 1901, 119-122; cf. chapter 7, p.
177), both existing in historical times, constructed because of the legends. Others, such
as the temple of the Sun on Kirke's island of Aiaia are completely mythical, like the
island itself (V §50, Bo 117, again following Diktys). Two temples built by the