MODERN STUDY OF MALALAS
Brian Croke

Even though the text of Malalas continues to defeat scholars a great deal of critical labour has been devoted over the years to the chronicle itself, that is, to identifying the author and his era and to how the chronicle may be used as a source of historical information for the vast period it covers. Considerable use has been made of this scholarship in the previous chapters. Yet this very scholarship has itself been shaped by the state of the text, so that vital questions have been overlooked and the answers to others distorted or invalidated by deficient understanding of the text and its tradition. It is therefore important and helpful to explain how modern study of the chronicle has developed, for such explication provides not only a critical guide through the labyrinthine study of Malalas but also indicates some of the likely ways ahead.

In modern times the chronicle of Malalas first became known to the learned public in 1634 when Henri de Valois, otherwise known as Henricus Valesius (1603-1676), published the collection of excerpts compiled for Constantine Porphyrogenetos in which John of Antioch was distinguished from John Malalas. A few years before, however, John Gregory at Oxford had demonstrated that the chronicle contained in Ba was the chronicle of John Malalas which had been used by John of Damascus and Tzetzes (Oxford, Rawlinson D 1083; see chapter 10, p. 316). Gregory and Edmund Chilmead assumed as self-evident that Malalas had written not long after the apparent end of the chronicle, that is, some time after the death of Justinian. While the Oxford edition suffered its protracted delays in publication, the chronicle was not widely known and therefore not widely discussed and analysed, although read and quoted from selectively by a small group of Oxford scholars, including Dodwell, as mentioned earlier (see chapter 10, p. 319). So when the French Jesuit Antoine Pagi (1624-1699) came to produce the first volume of his Critica Historico-chronologica (1689), a correction of errors in the Annales Ecclesiastici of Cardinal Baronius (1538-1607), he published the opinion that he had originally received from the learned student of Biblical chronology Bishop William Lloyd (1627-1717), that Malalas was writing in the time of Justinian. Just before the Oxford edition was finally prepared for the press and Humphrey Hody compiled his introduction, William Cave (1637-1713), sometime chaplain to Charles II and a formidable patristic scholar, published the first part of his Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Historia Literaria (1688) in which he dated Malalas to the turn of the seventh century (p. 568).

Hody brought to his introduction (1691) an extensive knowledge of classical and Byzantine literature, both Christian and pagan. His command of this literature enabled him to provide the first detailed analysis of the issues involved. Unfortunately, however,
his classicism had conditioned him into considering that a work of such stylistic inferiority as the chronicle of Malalas could not have been written in the sixth century (Hody, 1691; = Bo lv-lvii). He was therefore able to persuade himself that the various dating and other discrepancies and apparent omissions for the reign of Justinian must mean that Malalas was writing much later (Bo xl-xlvii). Consequently he was then obliged to explain the correspondences with the seventh-century Chronicon Paschale by presuming that this work was used by Malalas (Bo lxiii-lxiv). Hody also emphasised that 'Malalas' was simply the Syrian for 'rhetor' or 'scholastikos' (Bo xiv) although he did not consider the implications of this fact for the education and literary culture of the author.

Hody's preface was a significant piece of scholarship even if it was overshadowed by Bentley's letter to Mill. His arguments for a late date for Malalas convinced some but not everyone. The sixth-century date to be found in Pagi and Cave was preferred in what came to be the most scholarly and respected handbook of Greek (and especially Byzantine) literature in the seventeenth century, the Bibliotheca Graeca of J.A. Fabricius (1668-1736). Yet Fabricius said little about Malalas himself, except to claim that he was a church official ('scholastikos') at Antioch (BG V, 446). No other scholar of the early or mid-eighteenth century paid close attention to the chronicle except the ecclesiastical historian and critic John Jortin (1698-1770) who argued against Hody in favour of a date of composition just after Justinian; Jortin used the epithets θειότατος and εὐσεβεστάτη applied to Justinian and Theodora in Book XVIII to 'shew that Malalas lived in those times, and much earlier than some Critics have imagined' (Animadversiones IV, 383). So when Edward Gibbon came to write his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire in the 1770s and 1780s, based on his command of the great antiquarian works such as those of Pagi, Cave and Fabricius, he was able to cast his critical eye over Hody's case and declare his preference for Jortin (Gibbon, in Bury, 1898, 209, note 11). Gibbon was really the first scholar to make serious use of Malalas as an historical source, even though he considered 'the authority of that ignorant Greek is very slight' (Gibbon, in Bury, 1897c, 338, note 72).

Another decisive contribution to the dating of Malalas was provided by the Leipzig Orientalist J.J. Reiske (1716-1774) in his edition and commentary of the De Caerimoniis of Constantine Porphyrogennetos 'without doubt one of the greatest events in the history of Byzantine studies' (Ostrogorsky, 1968, 5) although it remained unpublished for over half a century. Reiske pointed out that Malalas' use of the comparative μετέξωτερος for μείζων was not a later usage but was common in the sixth century. More significantly, he noted that the presence of the very name Malalas as a Syrian word denotes an era when Syriac was in use, which was not the case after its virtual displacement by Arabic in the seventh century (1830, 855). When Dindorf executed his edition of Malalas' chronicle for the Bonn Corpus in 1831 (preface dated October, 1830), he therefore had little to offer about the chronicler and his times except what could be gleaned from Hody, Gibbon and the newly published work of Reiske. In the final analysis all that he added was the observation, in support of Reiske, that there is no trace in the chronicle of the Arabic