

The Introduction of the Antiochene Olympics: A Proposal for a New Date

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SYRIAN ANTIOCH, one of the great *metropoleis* of the Roman Empire, had a lively entertainment sector with both Roman-style spectacles and Greek-style athletic and artistic *agones*, the most famous of which are the local Olympic games. This *agon* has a special position in the scholarship on Greek athletics, because it continued until A.D. 520, which was, so far as we know, considerably longer than any other of the numerous athletic games of the Roman Empire.

The Olympics were of course not the only Greek-style games in the city. The second and third century are justly called a period of “agonistic explosion” by Louis Robert.¹ In Antioch, the *agon* of Eukrates is attested by nine inscriptions from the mid-second century on. Perhaps it can be identified with an unnamed contest from the first century. Two other contests, the *Hadrianeia* and the *Kommodeios agon*, were obviously founded under Hadrian (117–138) and Commodus (180–192). It is generally accepted that the Olympic games were introduced in the reign of Commodus as well. Downey argued that they were first held in A.D. 181, Petit opted for 180.² Two more recent articles, by Millon and Schouler and by Bru, leave both possi-

¹ L. Robert, “Discours d’ouverture,” in *Actes VIII Congr. internat. épig.* (Athens 1984) 35–45, esp. 38.

² G. Downey, “Malalas on the History of Antioch under Severus and Caracalla,” *TAPA* 68 (1937) 141–156, esp. 148–149 n.22, and *A History of Antioch* (Princeton 1961) 231; P. Petit, *Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche au IV^e siècle* (Paris 1955) 123–144, esp. 130 n.4.

bilities open.³

The main source for this date under Commodus is the chronicle of John Malalas (born ca. 490). The reigns of Commodus to Constantine are discussed in Book 12, entitled “On the time of emperor Commodus and the provision (*παροχή*) for the Olympics.” The accounts of each reign are largely centered on events in Antioch. This focus reflects Malalas’ own attachment to the place and his main source, the otherwise unknown Domninos, fourth- or fifth-century author of a work on Antiochene history.⁴

In his account of the reign of Commodus (which he extends to 22 years instead of 12), Malalas mentions the introduction of the Olympic games twice. He starts by saying that the emperor built a public bath and a *xystos*, a covered running track (12.283). This is a typical note, as Malalas discusses new buildings in Antioch for each successive emperor.⁵ Immediately after this he mentions a petition of the citizens of Antioch complaining that the agonistic funds were not properly used. According to the chronicler, Commodus reacted positively to this petition and gave the Antiochenes Olympic games (284):

καὶ εὐθέως ὁ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Κόμμοδος διὰ θείας αὐτοῦ
κελεύσεως προσεκύρωσε τῷ δημοσίῳ τὰς προσόδους, θεσπίσας
τὰ Ὀλύμπια ἐπιτελεῖσθαι καὶ ἀφορίσας ἐκ τοῦ δημοσίου
παρέχεσθαι εἰς λόγον ἀναλωμάτων τῶν ὑπουργούντων τῇ τῶν
Ὀλυμπίων ἱερᾷ καὶ κοσμικῇ ἑορτῇ φανερά χρήματα, νομο-
θετήσας κατὰ τετραετῆ χρόνον ἐπιτελεῖσθαι ἀμέμπτως ἐν ταῖς
ἑορταῖς τῶν ἀναθημάτων, ἧτοι θυσιῶν τῶν ἐξ ἔθους, τουτέστι τῷ

³ C. Millon and B. Schouler, “Les Jeux Olympiques d’Antioche,” *Pallas* 34 (1988) 61–76, esp. 62; H. Bru, “Les concours grecs dans les provinces syriennes,” *Stadion* 33 (2007) 1–28, esp. 7 (preferring 180 “une année divisible par quatre,” to conform with the quadrennial cycle known from the third century onward) and 8 (mentioning 181 as one of the “célébrations attestées”).

⁴ E. Jeffreys, “Malalas’ Sources,” in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Studies in John Malalas* (Sydney 1990) 167–216, esp. 178–179, 203–205.

⁵ A. Moffatt, “A Record of Public Buildings and Monuments,” in Jeffreys, *Studies* 87–109, esp. 88.

πανέμω ἥτοι ἰουλίω μηνὶ καὶ τῷ λῶω τῷ λεγομένῳ ἀγούστῳ
μηνὶ ἐπὶ ἡμέρας μὲ εἰς ἑορτὴν τοῦ Ὀλυμπίου Διός.

Immediately the same emperor Commodus by a sacred command of his confirmed that the revenues were for the public treasury and decreed that the Olympic festival be celebrated. He determined that specific funds had to be provided from the public treasury on account of expenses of those rendering assistance in the sacred and universal festival of the Olympics, and he made a law that the festival be celebrated properly every fourth year during the festivals of the votive offerings, or traditional sacrifices, that is, in the month Panemos or July and in Loos also called August, for 45 days as a festival of Olympian Zeus.⁶

With the rest of the revenues Commodus reorganized the whole entertainment sector of Antioch. Malalas mentions the introduction of horseraces, as well as a spectacle called *Maiouma* and *venationes*, the nomination of the first syriarch (an official of the *koinon* responsible for, among other things, these *venationes*),⁷ and the provision of funds for mimes and dancers (284–286). After this list of innovations, Malalas returns to the Olympics to discuss them in more detail (286):

ἐπὶ οὖν τῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλείας πρώτοις ἐπετελέσθη τὰ Ὀλύμπια
τοῖς Ἀντιοχεῦσι Σύροις ἀπὸ θείας αὐτοῦ, ὡς προεῖρηται, κε-
λεύσεως ἔτους σξ' ἡρηματίζοντος κατὰ τοὺς αὐτοὺς Ἀντιοχεῖς
Σύρους ἐν τῷ παρ' αὐτοῦ κτισθέντι ξυστῶ.

So during his reign the Olympic festival was celebrated for the first time by the Syrian Antiochenes, in accordance with a sacred command of his, as mentioned above, in the year 260 according to the era of the same Syrian Antiochenes; it was held in the *xystos* built by him.

Then Malalas gives a description of the ceremonial garb and customs of the alytarch, the official presiding over the games,

⁶ Ed. I. Thurn, *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia* (Berlin 2000). Translations adapted from E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of John Malalas* (Melbourne 1986).

⁷ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, “The Syriarch in the Fourth Century,” *Historia* 8 (1959) 113–126.

and of his assistants, the *grammateus* and the *amphithales*, followed by information on the participants and the events (286–289).

Although the chronicle of Malalas contains “glaring chronological errors and obviously absurd elaborations” and the author is known as a poor writer and researcher,⁸ who habitually projected early Byzantine situations onto earlier periods,⁹ the information on the Olympics is considered “basically sound.”¹⁰ At first sight, the story about the petition and the emperor’s support is indeed credible. The abuse of agonistic funds was a recurring problem in the imperial period and petitioning the emperor the normal solution.¹¹ It would certainly not be surprising if Commodus received such a petition from the Antiochenes in the early years of his reign. Marcus Aurelius abolished the games of the city in A.D. 175, as a punishment because Antioch had sided with the usurper Avidius Cassius (*HA Marc.* 25). Both the *agon* of Eukrates and the *Hadrianeia* were supposed to be held in 176, so the abolition may indeed have led to the misuse of the funds set apart for this year. Since the inscriptions show that the games were flourishing again in the reign of Commodus, imperial support ca. 180 is likely indeed.

⁸ W. Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke/New York 2007) 235–256, esp. 244.

⁹ For examples see E. Jeffreys, “Malalas’ World View,” in Jeffreys, *Studies* 55–66, esp. 61; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, “Malalas on Antioch,” in B. Cabouret, P.-L. Gatiér, C. Saliou (eds.), *Antioche de Syrie. Histoire, images et traces de la ville antique* (*Topoi* Suppl. 5 [2004]) 143–153.

¹⁰ B. Croke, “Malalas, the Man and his Work,” in Jeffreys, *Studies* 1–25, esp. 8. J.-Y. Strasser, “Inscriptions grecques en l’honneur de pantomimes,” *Tyche* 19 (2004) 175–212, esp. 212, is more doubtful (“un complexe échec de données exactes et d’inventions pures et simples”), but he too accepts the general chronological frame offered by Malalas. The most critical scholar is Liebeschuetz, in *Topoi* Suppl. 5 (2004) 144–147.

¹¹ Hadrian, for example, had to deal with similar problems in a number of cities. See the first letter in G. Petzl and E. Schwertheim, *Hadrian und die dionysischen Künstler* (*Asia Minor Studien* 58 [2006]). See *Cod.Iust.* 11.42.1 for an example from the reign of Diocletian.

This paper, however, will argue that Malalas' information is in fact unreliable. In three steps, I will show that we cannot trust his claim that the Olympics were introduced under Commodus. The first section focuses on the large-scale reorganization of the entertainment sector with which the Olympics were supposedly connected. I will argue that several reforms are anachronistic. The chronicler made a thematic compilation of entertainments, disregarding chronology. This also makes the attribution of the first Olympics to Commodus uncertain, the more so because one of the sources compiled by Malalas places the first celebration in 212, a date that is confirmed by internal details.

In the second section I will examine whether the image of the Antiochene games that we can form on the basis of the inscriptions confirms the traditional (180–181) or the alternative date (212). Unlike for the other contests, there is in fact very little information on the Olympics in inscriptions of the late second and early third century. This lack of references, which would be strange for games introduced in 180–181, supports the hypothesis of a later introduction. The most likely candidate for the contest that Malalas places in the early years of Commodus is the better-attested *Kommodeios agon*.

The last section will examine why Malalas calls this other contest the Olympics. I will argue on the basis of all references to athletic games in Books 10–12 that Malalas used the name Olympics for several different games, all of which he identified as one contest. This mistake led to a number of misunderstandings, several of which unfortunately found their way into modern scholarship.

1. *A large-scale reorganization of the entertainment sector under Commodus?*

According to Malalas, the citizens of Antioch petitioned Commodus about the misuse of agonistic funds. Agonistic funds normally consisted of land, often donated by benefactors, the revenues from which were used to present games. Commodus ensured that the revenues were no longer appropriated by corrupt magistrates, but made over to the public treasury.

He fixed for what purpose the money was to be used: the Olympic games, horseraces on Sunday, the *Maiouma* festival, *venationes* (supervised by the syriarch, now appointed for the first time), mimes and dancers, and “other entertainments.”

The response of Commodus is not taken over literally from the original letter. Liebeschuetz has already pointed out that Malalas used sixth-century constitutional terms.¹² The element of interpretation may, however, be considerably bigger than is generally assumed. Apart from the fact that such a systematic reorganization of the entertainment sector of one city would be unique, there are also several other reasons for suspicion. The first problematic element is that the horseraces are said to have been held on Sundays. This is odd for the reign of Commodus. Although the days of the week were known by the literate upper class in the second and third centuries, the week was not yet an officially recognized or common timeframe.¹³ In the late third and the fourth century, however, the week, with Sunday as its preeminent day, gained popularity. Constantine was the first to mention Sundays in imperial law.¹⁴ We do not expect horseraces—which were, moreover, uncommon in the East before the fourth century¹⁵—to be held regularly on Sundays in the reign of Commodus. The races discussed by Malalas most likely took place in the fourth century. Around 400, horseraces on Sunday were forbidden by law.¹⁶

The second problem is the nomination of the first syriarch: Artabanios (12.285). The syriarch was originally an official of the *koinon* of Syria, which existed before Commodus and which

¹² Liebeschuetz, in *Topoi* Suppl. 5 (2004) 144–147.

¹³ M. R. Salzman, “Pagan and Christian Notions of the Week in the 4th Century CE Western Roman Empire,” in R. M. Rosen, *Time and Temporality in the Ancient World* (Philadelphia 2004) 185–211.

¹⁴ *Cod. Theod.* 2.8.1 (A.D. 321). Cf. K. M. Girardet, “Vom Sonnen-Tag zum Sonntag. Der dies solis in Gesetzgebung und Politik Konstantins d. Gr.,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 11 (2007) 279–310.

¹⁵ Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions* (Oxford 1976) 201–214.

¹⁶ *Cod. Theod.* 2.8.20 (A.D. 392) and 15.5.5 (A.D. 425).

appointed its own officials.¹⁷ It is possible that Artabanios was syriarch under Commodus, but it is certainly unlikely that he was the first syriarch or that he was appointed by the emperor. This nomination cannot have been an element of a large-scale reorganization by the emperor.

Situating this man under Commodus, however, was probably not a mistake, since the same man, now called Artabanes, figures again further along in Malalas' account of Commodus' reign¹⁸ and is mentioned under the same emperor in the *Chronicon Paschale*.¹⁹ These two passages are very similar. Both state, in almost the same words, that Artabanes received a statue for his benefactions, most importantly for the distribution of free bread. The *Chronicon Paschale* dates this statue in A.D. 181–182.²⁰ It is on the basis of this more precise dating of Artabanes

¹⁷ For the Syrian *koinon* in the second century see *Iaph2007* 12.716.12–13 (CIG 2810). *Iaph2007* is the on-line edition of the Aphrodisias inscriptions (at <http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007/index.html>). An early syriarch is mentioned in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 26. The comparable function of asiarch is attested from the late first century A.D. on. Cf. S. J. Friesen, "Asiarchs," *ZPE* 126 (1999) 275–290.

¹⁸ Malalas 12.289–290: ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ αὐτοῦ Κομμόδου κτήτωρ τις καὶ πολιτευόμενος Ἀντιοχείας τῆς μεγάλης ὀνόματι Ἄρταβάνης, ἀλυτάρχης, μετὰ τὸ πληρῶσαι τὸ στεφάνιον τῶν Ὀλυμπίων ἐν Δάφνῃ ἐφιλοτιμήσατο ρίψας ἐν τῇ ἱερᾷ Δάφνῃ τῷ δήμῳ καλαμίων συντόμια πολλὰ ἄρτων διαιωνίζόντων, καλέσας τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἄρτους πολιτικούς διὰ τὸ τῇ ἰδίᾳ αὐτοῦ πόλει τούτους χαρίσασθαι, ἀφορίσας ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων χωρίων πρόσοδον ἀναλογουμένην εἰς λόγον τῶν αὐτῶν ἄρτων. καὶ ἀνήγειραν αὐτῷ οἱ Ἀντιοχεῖς στήλην ἐν Δάφνῃ μαρμαρίνην, ἐπιγράψαντες, Ἄρταβάνης αἰωνία μνήμη.

¹⁹ *Chron.Pasch.* 490: ἐπὶ τῶν προκειμένων ὑπάτων κτήτωρ τις ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τῇ μεγάλῃ ὀνόματι Ἄρτάβανος φιλοτίμως ἔρριψεν ἐν τῇ καλουμένῃ Δάφνῃ τοῖς δήμοις καλάμια συντόμια πολλὰ ἄρτων διαιωνίζόντων, καὶ ἐκάλεσεν τοὺς ἄρτους πολιτικούς διὰ τὸ τῇ ἰδίᾳ πόλει τούτους δωρήσασθαι, καὶ ἠφόρισεν ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων αὐτοῦ χωρίων πρόσοδον ἀναλογοῦσαν εἰς λόγον τῶν αὐτῶν πολιτικῶν ἄρτων. καὶ ἀνήγειραν αὐτῷ οἱ τῆς Ἀντιοχείων πόλεως ἐν τῇ Δάφνῃ στήλην μαρμαρίνην, ἐπιγράψαντες Ἄρταβάνει αἰωνία μνήμη.

²⁰ It is placed by the chronicle in the second year of Olympiad 240 (A.D. 182) and when Commodus was consul for the third time and Burrus for the

that Downey and Petit dated the first Olympics in 181 and 180 respectively. Other passages of Malalas or Libanius always place the Olympics in a year that is divisible by four, e.g. 212 or 364.²¹ Downey accepted the date of the *Chronicon*, although he was aware that this was not an Olympic year for Antioch, because there was not enough time between Commodus' accession to the throne and the summer of 180 to organize the games. Petit opted for the nearest year divisible by four. Both used this passage of the *Chronicon Paschale*, which in fact does not mention the Olympics, as a source to date the introduction of this contest because Malalas, in his second reference to the man, calls Artabanes no longer a syriarch, but an alytarch, i.e. the official presiding over the Olympic games.²² In the past, this inconsistency has led to the assumption that both officials were responsible for the Olympics, until Liebeschuetz firmly established that the syriarch had a different function.²³ Another problem with the identification of Artabanes as the alytarch of the games of 180–181, supposedly the first Olympics, is that Malalas already mentioned a certain Afranius as the first alytarch. As only Malalas calls Artabanes alytarch—this is the only element not shared by the *Chronicon Paschale*—and not even consistently, one cannot at all be certain that this is correct. The more precise date in the *Chronicon Paschale* is problematic as well. Malalas (or his source) was one of the main sources for the later chronicle. The close resemblance between the two passages suggests that also in this case Malalas (or his source) was used. As Malalas does not give a precise date, the later chronicler may have made it up. Therefore, this passage cannot be used to date the Olympics.

The third odd element in the reorganization described by

second time (A.D. 181).

²¹ For 212 see below; for 364 see Lib. *Or.* 1.139, *Ep.* 1180.

²² S. Remijsen, “The *alytarches*, an Olympic *agonothetes*,” *Nikephoros* 22 (2009) [forthcoming].

²³ Liebeschuetz, *Historia* 8 (1959) 113–126.

Malalas is in the second, more detailed, passage on the Olympics. Here he dates the first Olympics to year 260 of the Antiochene era. The different dating system indicates a different source. This source obviously was not discussing the reign of Commodus, for year 260 is A.D. 212, in the reign of Caracalla. The discrepancy between the two dates has always troubled scholars. The later date, 212, has usually been treated as an error of Malalas, his source, or a later copyist.²⁴ The fact that this date is given according to the local era suggests, however, that the information is based, probably with the intermediate stage of a local chronicle, on city archives, and this can be taken as an argument for its reliability. This date is also repeated implicitly later in the chronicle (17.417): when the Antiochene Olympics ended in A.D. 520, or year 568 of the Antiochene era, there had been 77 alytarchs. As the Olympics were quadrennial, this figure implies that the games existed for 308 years, i.e. since A.D. 212.

Thus in Malalas' description of the reorganization under Commodus one can identify several anachronisms. The story of the petition apparently induced him to give a full picture of the whole entertainment sector of the city, without regard for chronology. He had information on the Olympics under Caracalla and on the fourth-century horseraces, and to fit these in he advanced their introduction to the reign of Commodus. Artabanes did probably belong to that reign, but his story was also adapted to the context: he became the first syriarch nominated by the emperor. As half of the list can be exposed as an anachronistic compilation, the other innovations (the funds set

²⁴ For a short *status quaestionis* see Downey, *TAPA* 66 (1937) 149. Since the publication of that article, the question has not received much attention. One of the examples given by Downey is the explanation of Müller: Malalas counted back 77 alytarchs x 4 years from A.D. 520 without considering possible interruptions and thus calculated the date A.D. 212. This is not convincing since Malalas mentioned the result of this supposed calculation in Book 12, while discussing the total of 77 alytarchs in A.D. 520 only in Book 17.

aside for the *Maiouma* festival, for *venationes*, and for the mimes and dancers) may be anachronistic as well. For the *Maiouma*, one could again suppose a fourth-century introduction, as all the other sources for this festival date from the late fourth to the early sixth century.²⁵

The conclusion is that none of the innovations can be dated to Commodus on the sole ground that Malalas mentions them under his reign. Only the construction of the *xystos* can be attributed to Commodus on Malalas' testimony, because this is mentioned before the petition. The petition itself may be historical too, as we have argued in the introduction. Moreover, there would have been no reason for Malalas to date all these supposed innovations under Commodus, if the petition had not served as the perfect occasion to discuss the whole sector. The list of reforms, however, was compiled by the chronicler, who selected his information on thematic grounds, disregarding the actual dates. Although it remains attractive to date the Olympics to the reign of Commodus, as they are the first innovation mentioned, its position in the anachronistic list can in itself not prove that the games were indeed founded under this emperor and no details in this passage confirm the date. Quite the contrary, several details (the date according to the Antiochene era and the number of alytarchs) indicate that the games were in fact introduced in 212. The petition to Commodus may indeed have led to the introduction of new games, but these were not necessarily the Olympics.

2. *Antiochene games in the epigraphic record*

Analysis of the purported reforms has shown that there are no arguments for an introduction under Commodus ca. 180 and that the first Antiochene Olympics most likely took place under Caracalla in 212. This preliminary conclusion should now be checked against a different type of source. Inscriptions listing the contests in which an athlete or artist was victorious

²⁵ Cf. C. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods* (London 1993) 188–189.

can give us a reliable picture of the agonistic life of Antioch in the first three centuries A.D.

Most of the inscriptions referred to in this section are dated only vaguely by their editors, but the names of the contests can serve as a useful instrument for narrowing this date. Inscriptions from before the reign of Hadrian refer only to the best-known games with their proper name. For other games, they mention the city where it took place, sometimes with the generic description *pentaeterikos agon*, or the organizing *koinon*. Because very few cities had more than one contest with an international catchment area, the name was of little importance. From the reign of Hadrian onward, many cities celebrated more than one athletic contest and so victory inscriptions often name both the games and the city. In general, second-century inscriptions list fewer games than third-century inscriptions, but relatively more games organized by *koina*. Contests named after emperors, such as *Hadrianeia* or *Severeia*, offer a useful *terminus post quem*. In third-century inscriptions the *terminus post quem* for the end of a victor's career, namely the date of the most recent contest, is often close to the actual date of the victories, since many names of contests disappeared quickly, because the emperor to whom the games were dedicated had fallen into disgrace or because the games had been renamed for yet another emperor. The length of a career can usually be determined from the number of victories. Athletes rarely competed at the top festivals for more than ten years in the adult category. If they started competing in the boy categories, they could compete up to almost twenty years. Artists could compete longer at the highest level; careers of more than twenty years were no exception.²⁶

These general criteria help to date the inscriptions attesting games in Antioch. I have collected the following texts, adding the dates of the inscription (I) and the competitor's career (C):

²⁶ For example Valerius Eklektos, a herald who competed at least from about 240 until the early 260s: Moretti, *I.agon.gr.* 90.

1. *Suppl. Epig. Rodio* 66a (I: 1st c. / C: 1st c.):
Καισάρεια ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τῆς Συρίας Πυθικοῦς] παῖδας δόλιχον²⁷
2. *IGUR I* 249 = *I.agon.gr.* 65 (I: ca. 60 / C: ca. 40–60):²⁸
ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τῆ π[ατριδὶ] Πυθικῶν πάλην καὶ τῷ ἐχομένῳ [πενταετη]ρικῶ ἀγενείων καὶ ἀνδρῶν πάλ[ην ἐφεξῆς?] τρίς
3. *I.Napoli I* 50 = *I.agon.gr.* 67 (I: ca. 90 / C: ca. 75–90):²⁹
κοινὸν Συρίας Κιλικίας Φοινείκης ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ β' ἀνδρῶν πανκράτιον
4. *I.Napoli I* 51 = *I.agon.gr.* 68 (I: ca. 110 / C: ca. 90–110):³⁰
τὸν ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ ἱερὸν πεν[ταετηρικὸν ἀγῶνα] Ἀκτιακῶν παίδων παγκράτιον καὶ τῆ ἐξῆς πενταετηρίδι ἀγεν[είων πάλην καὶ πυγ]μῆν καὶ τῆ ἐξῆς ἀνδρῶν παγκράτιον καὶ τῆ ἐξῆς ὁμοίως ἀνδ[ρῶν παγκράτιον] πρῶτον ἀνθρώπων
5. *I.Sinope* 105 = *I.agon.gr.* 69 (I: Traj.-Hadr. / C: Traj.):³¹
*- Ἀντιόχειαν γ' πρῶτος καὶ μόνος τῶν ἀπὸ αἰῶνος ἀγενείων καὶ ἀνδρῶν ἡμέρα μιᾷ ἀνδρῶν
 - Πύθια ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ*
6. *I.Aph2007* 12.711 (I: 2nd c. / C: (early?) 2nd c.):³²
[Ἀντιό]χειαν τῆς Συρίας [?]Πύθ[ι]α πρὸς Δάφνην πανκράτιον³³

²⁷ The editor reads: (Col. C 7–8) *Καισάρεια ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τ[ca. 15] παῖδας δόλιχον*. It is not impossible that these games took place in a one of the smaller Antiochs. However, since the victor is known to have travelled as far as Sidon (cf. line 5), *τῆς Συρίας Πυθικοῦς*] is a logical supplement.

²⁸ Tiberius Claudius Patrobios competed in the categories of boys, adolescents, and adults and was honored by Nero after his retirement.

²⁹ Titus Flavius Artemidoros won the pankration in the adult category in the first *Kapitolia* in A.D. 86. He also mentions contests in the adolescent category.

³⁰ Titus Flavius Archibios won at the Olympics in 101 and 105 and at the *Kapitolia* in 94 (as an adolescent), 98, 102, and 106. He started his career in the category of boys.

³¹ Marcianus Rufus started his career as a boy. As his long list of victories contains no games founded by Hadrian, he probably retired at the latest in the early years of that emperor.

³² The inscription is dated in the second or third c. on palaeographical grounds. The type of inscriptions placing victories in bas-relief crowns was more common in the second century (cf. *IGUR I* 252–262) and none of the games mentioned was founded later than the early second century.

³³ There is space for only four letters in the second lacuna, so only *Pythia*

7. *FD III.1 547* (I: mid-2nd c. / C: Hadr.):³⁴
Ἀντιόχειαν τὴν ἐπὶ Δάφνης σ'
8. *Suppl. Epig. Rodio 67* (I: mid to late 2nd c. / C: mid 2nd c., *t.p.q.* Hadr.):
ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ [ca. 15? τὸ]ν Εὐκράτους ἰσάκτιον
9. *IGUR I 256* (I: mid to late 2nd c. / C: mid 2nd c., *t.p.q.* Hadr.):
Ἀντιόχε[αν] τὸν [Εὐκρά]τους [ἀγῶνα]
10. *I Aph2007 12.716 = CIG 2810* (I: mid to late 2nd c. / C: mid 2nd c., *t.p.q.* Hadr.):
κοινὸν Συρίας ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ δις κατὰ τὸ ἐξῆς
11. *SEG XLI 1407* (I: mid to late 2nd c. / C: mid 2nd c., *t.p.q.* 138):
Ἀντιόχειαν τρίς
12. *I.Smyrna 662* (I: 2nd c. / C: 2nd c.):³⁵
τὸν Εὐκράτους ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τῆς Συρίας
13. *I.Tralles 117 = I.agon.gr. 78* (I: Com.-Sev. / C: M.Aur.-Com.):³⁶
- Ἀντιόχειαν τὸν Εὐκράτους παίδων δόλιχον ... Ἀντιόχειαν β'
- τὸν Εὐκράτους ἀνδρῶν δόλιχον
- Κομόδειον ἀνδρῶν δόλιχον
- τὸν Ἀδριάνειον ἀνδρῶν δόλιχον
14. *I.Anazarhos 25* (I: Sev. / C: Com.-Sev.):³⁷
- Ἀντιόχειαν κατὰ τὸ ἐξῆς τὸν Ἀδριάνειον
- καὶ τὸν Κομόδειον
- καὶ τὸν Εὐκράτους

and *Aktia* are theoretically possible. Since only *Pythia* are attested, this is the most likely restoration.

³⁴ He won the first *Olympia* of Athens, founded by Hadrian.

³⁵ In *I.Smyrna* Agathopous' victory in Antioch is dated to 197/8 (expedition of Septimius Severus and Caracalla) on the basis of the very uncertain reading: *στεφανωθείς ὑπὸ [τῶν κ]υρίων ἡμῶν [αὐτοκρατόρων]*. The fact that very few games are mentioned by name suggests, however, that the inscription was erected earlier in the second century.

³⁶ The *Kommodeios agon* is the most recent contest in the list. The athlete mentions only one victory in this contest, as an adult, although he travelled to Antioch once as a child and thrice as an adult.

³⁷ The most recent games are the *Kommodeia* of Ephesus and the *Kommodeios agon* of Antioch. After his athletic career, the man was appointed xystarch by the emperors; the plural suggests Septimius Severus and his sons. The inscription was erected before 212, since the athlete (Demetrios son of Demetrios from Salamis) does not yet have a Roman name.

15. *FD III.1 550 = I.agon.gr. 81 (I: Sev.-Car. / C: Com.-Sev.):*³⁸
 - τὸν Εὐκράτους ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ β'
 - Ἀδριάνεια ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ
 - τὸν Κομόδειον ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ γ'
16. *I.Side 130 (I: t.a.q. 212 / C: Sev.):*³⁹
 - Ἀδ[ριά]νεια ἐν Ἀντιοχε[ί]α τῇ π[ρὸς] Δάφνην
 - καὶ τὸν Εὐκράτους
17. *IGLSyrie IV 1265 = I.agon.gr. 85 (I: 214 / C: Com.-Sev.)*
 Ἀντιόχειαν (under heading *ταλαντιαῖοι*)
18. *TAM II 587 (I: Car.? / C: Com.-Car.):*
 ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ Ὀλύμπια τᾶ? β'
19. *SEG XXVII 843 (I: ca. 220 / C: Sev.-Car.):*⁴⁰
 - Ἀδριανέον ἐν Ἀντι[ο]χείᾳ πρὸς [Δ]άφνην,
 - Εὐκράτους ἐν Ἀντιοχε[ί]α [πρ]ὸς Δάφνην⁴¹
20. *FD III.1 555 = I.agon.gr. 87 (I: ca. 250 / C: 220–250):*⁴²

³⁸ Name and specialty of the competitor are not preserved, but as he was *periodonikes* without winning in the Olympics, he must have been an artist. The most recent games mentioned are the Antiochene *Kommodeios agon* and the *Severeia* of Kastabala.

³⁹ The most recent games are the *Severeia* of Kastabala. As the *agonothetes*, who set up the monument, does not yet have a Roman name, the inscription must predate 212.

⁴⁰ The most recent games are the *Kommodeios agon* of Cappadocian Caesarea, *Severeia* at an unknown location, and *Alexandreia Pythia* at Philippopolis. Coins show that the name *Alexandreia* was added to the old Pythian contest in 214 for the visit of Caracalla and is attested only during his reign. Cf. E. Albanidis and S. Giatsis, “Athletic Games in Thrace during the Imperial Era,” *Nikephoros* 20 (2007) 177–197, esp. 182.

⁴¹ The inscription mentions also Aktian games at Ἀντιο[χεί]α — — (what follows is not preserved)—named separately from the games of Antioch πρὸς Δαφνήν, which suggests that the *Aktia* took place in a different Antioch.

⁴² As this man won four times in several contests (not all held in the same year), we can assume a career of ca. fifteen years at the least and probably longer. In his own city (unknown) he won *Kommodeia* (four times), *Severeia* (four times), and *Philippia Aktia* (once). The *Philippia Aktia*, otherwise unattested, were probably named for Philip the Arab (244–249). Cf. J.-Y. Strasser, “Quelques termes rares du vocabulaire agonistique,” *RPhil* 75 (2001) 296–304. He may have won these after his actual career. Competitors were sometimes asked to take part in games in their hometown after their retirement to lend more prestige to a new contest, e.g. *IGUR I 240.38–41*.

- Ἀδριάνια ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ
 - Εὐκράτους ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ γ'

In the first century A.D. there seems to have been only one international contest in Antioch, held every four years at Daphne. Text 1 calls the games *Kaisareia*—a common name for games founded under Augustus—but mostly they remain nameless. In the mid-first century, they seem to have been isopythian, since they used the age-category of the Pythian boys (text 2). This does not mean that they were also named *Pythia*. Around A.D. 90, however, they were using the category of the Aktian boys (text 4), which suggests that they were isaktian. In the late first century the *koinon* of Syria-Cilicia-Phoenicia organized athletic games in Antioch as well (text 3). This large *koinon* was succeeded by smaller *koina*. The *koinon* of Syria also organized games in Antioch in the second century (text 10).

From the reign of Trajan, who visited Antioch in 115, the inscriptions record two different contests. The first remains nameless and the other is called *Pythia*. There are two possibilities. Either both games existed before Trajan, the *Pythia* being the unnamed contest with Pythian boys, the other the contest with Aktian boys, or only one nameless contest existed in the first century and the *Pythia* were introduced in the reign of Trajan.

In the inscriptions from Hadrian onward, the unnamed contest and the *Pythia* are succeeded by “the *agon* of Eukrates” and the *Hadrianeia* (or *Hadrianeios agon*). The *agon* of Eukrates was probably the name for the old unnamed contest, as both were isaktian games held at Daphne. It is not clear whether this was an old name, now used for the first time in inscriptions to distinguish these games from the *Hadrianeia* held in the same year, or whether the contest had received a new name at some point in the first half of the second century because a benefactor had made a large donation for the celebration of the games. Although this contest was named for a benefactor—unusual for sacred games—it should not be identified with the Antioch talent-games, which were an international and rather prestigious type of prize games (text 17), since some texts men-

tion the *agon* of Eukrates among the *agones hieroi* (12 and 13). The other games in these inscriptions are the most important of Italy, Greece, and the East, which suggests that the *agon* of Eukrates was very prestigious as well. In A.D. 175 Marcus Aurelius punished the city for siding with Avidius Cassius by abolishing its games (*HA Marc.* 25). This means that the *agon* of Eukrates and the *Hadrianeia* planned for the summer of 176 could not be held.

Under Commodus, however, the two games were reestablished and a third contest was added: the *Kommodeios agon*. To bring the inscriptions into accord with Malalas, Bru identifies this new contest with the Olympics and calls it the *Olympia Kommodeia*.⁴³ Although the combination of two names for one contest was indeed common, this particular identification is nowhere attested in the sources. Moreover, *Olympia* are usually referred to by the plural form. If *Olympia* were part of the name, left out in the inscriptions, one would expect the rest of the name to be plural too. The new contest is, however, systematically called *Kommodeios* in the singular, with an article. It could theoretically be isolympic, but there is no indication of this.

The combination of the *agon* of Eukrates, the *Hadrianeia*, and the *Kommodeios agon* is attested in three texts (13, 14, 15). They all occurred in years divisible by four and belonged to a Cilician-Syrian tour for professional athletes and performers.⁴⁴

⁴³ Bru, *Stadion* 33 (2007) 7.

⁴⁴ Many agonistic inscriptions list the games in chronological order. This enables us to reconstruct the travel schedule of athletes, which they repeated each Olympiad. For each year of the Olympiad, there were one or two geographical clusters of games. A good example is *I.agon.gr.* 78 (text 13). First mentioned, after unnamed games at Tarsos and Anazarbos, are the *Hadrianeia* of Ephesos and the Isthmian games, held in the summer and the autumn of the third year of the Olympiad. Then follow the three games of Antioch and a contest at Damascus. They are followed by the *Olympia* and *Pythia* of Tralleis, the *Augusteia* of Pergamon, and the *Ephesia*, held in the first year of the Olympiad. The inscription ends with the *Kapitolia*, the games at Puteoli and Naples, and the *Aktia*, all held in the second year. This suggests that the games in Antioch and Damascus were held in the fourth year of the

In 196, none of the Antioch games took place because of a temporary abolition by Septimius Severus.⁴⁵ Later inscriptions (16, 19, 20) give only the combination of the *agon* of Eukrates and the *Hadrianeia*. The *Kommodeios agon* seems to have been abolished after the *damnatio memoriae* of Commodus.⁴⁶ The triple victor of text 14 probably won in the summers of 184, 188, and 192.⁴⁷

Only one inscription mentions a victory—a double victory in fact—at the Antiochene Olympics (text 18). Since the upper part of the stone is missing, we do not know the name of the competitor, his specialty, and some of his victories. He won twice at games named for Commodus: the *Kommodeia* at Miletus and the *Artemisia Kommodeia* at Ephesus. The games at Miletus were no doubt the *Didymeia Kommodeia*, which are still attested in the third century⁴⁸ and therefore not very useful for dating purposes. For the *Artemisia* of Ephesus, however, the title *Kommodeia* is attested only once, which suggests that the name

Olympiad. Several inscriptions mention the Antiochene games among other contests in Syria, such as the *Sebasmia* of Damascus (text 16) and the *Aktia* of Tyre (20), and in Cilicia, such as the *Severeia* of Kastabala (15, 16) and the *Olympia* of Adana (15, 19), which suggests that athletes made a Cilician-Syrian tour in the fourth year of the Olympiad. Cf. P. Gouw, *Griekse atleten in de Romeinse Keizertijd. 31 v. Chr. – 400 n. Chr.* (diss. U. Amsterdam 2009) 83–86.

⁴⁵ Herodian 3.6.9; *HA Sev.* 9.

⁴⁶ The *damnatio memoriae* of Commodus after he was murdered on 31 December 192 influenced at least some of the festivals. Cf. E. Miranda, “Testimonianze sui Kommodeia,” *Scienze dell’ antichità* 6–7 (1992–1993) 69–88, esp. 87; R. Ziegler, *Städtisches Prestige und kaiserliche Politik. Studien zum Festwesen in Ostkilikien im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Düsseldorf 1985) 73.

⁴⁷ A first celebration in A.D. 180 would be early, because there was not enough time for preparations between the beginning of Commodus’ sole reign in the spring and the games in the summer, but it cannot be excluded, as the preparations may have started during his co-regency, as was, for example, the case for the *Didymeia Kommodeia* of Miletus. Cf. Miranda, *Scienze dell’ Antichità* 6–7 (1992–1993) 70, 79.

⁴⁸ E.g. *I.agon.gr.* 87; *I.Didyma* 156, 375.

was only briefly used and that at least part of the competitor's career fell under Commodus or soon after. This does not necessarily mean that he won the Olympics under Commodus, because he had a long career. He won in the "Shield of Argos" four times, which suggests that he competed for at least thirteen years on the highest level. Moreover, he won the *Prota Koïna Asias* in Smyrna, and the name of these games implies that Smyrna had the title "first" at the time they were introduced. This title is attested for Smyrna only from the third century and is probably connected to the grant of a third *neokoria* by Caracalla in 214.⁴⁹ The title, therefore, shows that the man was still active in the 210s. This supposes a career of more than twenty years, but if he was an artist, that is not unlikely.

That the unknown artist was still active under Caracalla does of course not prove that he won his victories at the Antiochene Olympics in these years. The strongest argument in favor of A.D. 212 as the date of the first Olympics is in fact the silence of the other texts. The Olympics were held in the same years as the other Antiochene games, namely in years divisible by four. They did therefore belong to the same Syrian tour. We have five texts of athletes active on this tour in the reigns of Commodus and Septimius Severus (texts 13, 14, 15, 16, and 19). These give in total 8 victories at the *agon* of Eukrates, 5 at the *Hadrianeia*, and 5 at the *Kommodeios agon*, and represent at least 9 trips to the region. One expects that at least some of these successful competitors would have won the Olympics as well, had they already existed. The absence of the Antiochene Olympics from these victory lists can best be explained by a later date of introduction, such as A.D. 212.

⁴⁹ B. Burrell, *Neokoroi. Greek Cities and Roman Emperors* (Leiden/Boston 2004) 48–49, 351–354. On the *Prota Koïna Asias* see W. Leschhorn, "Die Verbreitung von Agonen in den östlichen Provinzen des römischen Reiches," *Stadion* 24 (1998) 31–57, esp. 51.

3. *Malalas' use of the word "Olympics"*

The inscriptions confirm that 212 is more likely than 180–181 as the date of the first Antiochene Olympics. The games introduced early in the reign of Commodus must then be the *Kommodeios agon*. John Malalas, however, calls both contests “Olympic games” in his chronicle. Our preliminary conclusion that the Antiochene Olympics were founded in 212 supposes, in other words, that Malalas used that name incorrectly. This last section will examine the instances in which the chronicler writes about athletic games in Books 10–12 to discover how he uses the term “Olympics.”

The first time games are mentioned is in the account of the reign of Augustus (10.224–225): Sosibios, a councilor from Antioch, left land to the city to hold quadrennial games with artistic, athletic, and equestrian events for thirty days in the month Peritios (February).⁵⁰ Since we know from the inscriptions that there were games in the first century, there is no reason to doubt this information.

Under Claudius, Malalas returns to the subject of games (10.248–249). The landowners and citizens of Antioch petitioned the emperor for permission to buy the Olympic games from the Pisceans in Greece. Permission was granted in year 92 of the Antiochene era, A.D. 43/4. These quadrennial games took place from the time of the new moon in the month of Hyperberetaios (October). Malalas connects this to the bequest of Sosibios and repeats that story, now in more detail, adding that the annual revenue from Sosibios' lands was fifteen talents. He now also places Sosibios' original games in Hyperberetaios instead of Peritios. This confusion is obviously caused by the Claudian games.

This passage is very suspect. A small part seems historical, because the Antiochene era suggests that the information came

⁵⁰ Malalas calls him a Roman senator, which is obviously an anachronism. Cf. Liebeschuetz, in *Topoi* Suppl. 5 (2004) 144–147.

from city archives, no doubt indirectly.⁵¹ Apparently Claudius made a decision concerning games in Antioch that were held in Hyperberetaios. Most other details, however, seem to have been Malalas' own interpretation. The decision is described in sixth-century constitutional terms, awarding an important role to the *κτῆτορες*.⁵² The idea that the original games at Olympia were sold to the Antiochenes is absurd—they are attested at their original location until the late fourth century.⁵³ Therefore, it is generally assumed that what Malalas meant is that the Antiochenes bought the right to hold local Olympics.⁵⁴ However, Olympic games are not attested in Antioch in the reign of Claudius, nor in the following century. Moreover, there is no indication whatever in classical, Hellenistic, or imperial literature that the right to hold local Olympics had to be bought. And even if that were true, it could not be bought from the Piseans (*τῶν Πισαίων*). Pisa was a small town near Olympia that originally organized the games, but in the sixth century B.C. the bigger city Elis took over. Pisa became a synonym for the site, first in poetry and later more generally. In inscriptions of the imperial period the original Olympics are called *τὰ Ὀλύμπια τὰ ἐν Πίσῃ* to distinguish them from local games.⁵⁵ Piseans did not become a synonym for Eleans, however. If

⁵¹ Malalas' main source on the Olympics (cf. 12.287) was Dominos (fourth or fifth century). For Sosibios, Malalas refers to Pausanias (*FGrHist* 854), a second-century author of an Antiochene history which Malalas knew only indirectly through Dominos. Cf. Jeffreys, in *Studies* 178–179, 188–189, 203–205.

⁵² Liebeschuetz, in *Topoi* Suppl. 5 (2004) 144–147.

⁵³ See J. Ebert, “Zur neuen Bronzeplatte mit Siegerinschriften aus Olympia,” *Nikephoros* 10 (1997) 217–233, for a recent late-fourth-century find.

⁵⁴ E.g. A. Schenk von Stauffenberg, *Die römische Kaisergeschichte bei Malalas* (Stuttgart 1931) 413: “Es leuchtet ein und ist schon lange erkannt, daß es sich hier um ein den Eleern abgekauftes Recht handeln muß, eine olympische Festfeier in Antiochien abhalten zu dürfen, und die lächerliche Annahme einer Verlegung der Olympien bedarf selbstverständlich keiner Widerlegung.”

⁵⁵ E.g. *IGUR* I 240.19.

someone were to sell the Olympics, it would have been the latter. It is clear that the Antioch Olympics were not bought. Therefore, we should also doubt the association with Sosibios' bequest, which according to Malalas was used for this purpose. It is more likely that the link between this money and whatever happened under Claudius was Malalas' own idea. This whole passage should be regarded with extreme caution. It shows only that in the reign of Claudius, there was some kind of problem related to games and that there were now games held in the autumn.

Directly afterwards, Malalas added that the games were not held regularly, but because of wars, earthquakes, and fires only every fifteen or twenty years, until they were reinstated by Commodus. Such disasters could indeed cause a temporary disruption of games, but inscriptions show that the chronicler exaggerated. Particularly the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, who both visited the city, seem to have been a period of bloom for the athletic games.

Early in the reign of Commodus, the citizens of Antioch again petitioned the emperor, according to the chronicler. Revenues were made over to the public treasury and games were organized for forty-five days in the months Panemos (July) and Loos (August). Once more Malalas adds that these revenues were donated by Sosibios, but this might again be his own interpretation. As pointed out above, this petition makes sense given the abolition of games under Marcus Aurelius, but only during the first years of Commodus. The *Kommodeios agon* was founded in this period.

The second time that Malalas mentions the Olympic games under Commodus, unaware that his date actually refers to the reign of Caracalla, he is certainly dealing with the actual Antiochene Olympics, for he mentions the alytarch, an official exclusively connected to Olympic games. The first celebration is dated to A.D. 212.

According to Downey's generally accepted interpretation,

the Olympics were not established but only reestablished in 212, after they had been abolished by Septimius Severus.⁵⁶ In 194, this emperor had indeed punished Antioch for supporting the usurper Pescennius Niger. The city was demoted to the status of *κώμη* and lost all its games.⁵⁷ In 196, therefore, none of the Antiochene games were held. Around 198, however, Antioch was rehabilitated.⁵⁸ This means that, if the Olympics had existed before the degradation of the city, 212 would have been about twelve years later than expected for the reintroduction.

Downey's theory is based largely on the next passage on the Olympics in Malalas' chronicle, which discusses Diocletian's activities in Antioch (12.307):

ἔκτισε δὲ καὶ τὸ στάδιον τὸ λεγόμενον ἐν Δάφνῃ διὰ τοὺς Ὀλυμπικοὺς καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἀγωνιστάς, ὥστε μὴ ἀπιέναι ἐν Κοτρίγαις καὶ στεφανοῦσθαι ἐν τῷ Ἀργυρῷ ποταμῷ, ἀλλὰ μετὰ τὸ ἀγωνίσασθαι πάντας ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τῇ μεγάλῃ ἀνιέναι αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ λεγομένῃ Δάφνῃ, καὶ ἵνα μὴ τοσοῦτον διάστημα ὁδοῦ ἀπέρχωνται ἐν τῷ Ἀργυρῷ ποταμῷ ἐν Κοτρίγαις τῆς Κιλικίας, καὶ οἱ Ὀλυμπικοὶ καὶ οἱ Ἀντιοχεῖς ἀπιόντες κατὰ τὰ Ὀλύμπια.

He also built what is known as the stadium at Daphne for the Olympic and other competitors so that they should not go out to Kodrigai and be crowned at the river Argyros; but after everyone had competed in Antioch the Great, they should go up to the place known as Daphne, to prevent their going out such a distance by road to Kodrigai on the Argyros river in Cilicia—both the Olympic competitors and the Antiochenes coming out for the Olympic festival.

Kodrigai was where Septimius Severus had won the decisive victory in the war against Pescennius Niger. At this place in the Cilician mountains, he founded *Severeia Olympia* to celebrate his

⁵⁶ This is the main thesis of Downey, *TAPA* 66 (1937) 141–156.

⁵⁷ Herodian 3.6.9; *HA Sev.* 9.

⁵⁸ R. Ziegler, “Antiochia, Laodicea und Sidon in der Politik der Severer,” *Chiron* 8 (1978) 493–514, esp. 493–500.

triumph. Malalas thinks that these games replaced those of Antioch.

It makes no sense that almost a century after the punishment by Septimius Severus the competitors of the Antioch Olympics had to go to Cilicia to be crowned. Downey (143–144) rightly pointed out that Malalas was conflating information from his sources here. His source on Diocletian mentioned that Diocletian built the stadium at Daphne. As there had been a stadium at Daphne since the Hellenistic period, this obviously meant that Diocletian restored the stadium.⁵⁹ Malalas, however, did not understand this—one of his typical mistakes⁶⁰—but connected the construction of the “new” stadium with the abolition of the Antiochene games under Septimius Severus, which he knew from a different source, which apparently also mentioned the introduction of the *Severia Olympia* at Kodrigai. Malalas thus wrongly concluded that the games at Kodrigai had replaced the Antiochene games and that they returned completely only under Diocletian. Although there was constant competition between cities to have the most and the most prestigious games, it was not normal that a contest was taken away from one city and given to another.⁶¹ The Olympics at Kodrigai were organized by the Cilician *koinon*. They are attested on coins of Tarsos and Anazarbos from Septimius Severus to Valerian. The earliest coins are from 198/9 and 199/200. This suggests that they were first held in the summer of 199. Only during the reign of Septimius Severus do the coins place the games at Kodrigai in the Cilician mountains; they probably moved to Tarsus under Caracalla.⁶² This was only a relocation of the games; they continued to be organized by the

⁵⁹ J. Martin, *Libanios. Discours II* (Paris 1988) 217 n.3.

⁶⁰ Croke, in Jeffrey, *Studies* 7.

⁶¹ Ziegler, *Städtisches Prestige* 67–120, gives a good picture of this competition to have the most prestigious titles and games.

⁶² Ziegler, *Städtisches Prestige* 22–25 (coins of Tarsos), 33–34 (Anazarbos), 75–85 (Septimius Severus and Caracalla).

Cilician *koinon*. At the time of the first *Severea Olympia* in Cilicia, Antioch was already rehabilitated. In 200, Antioch celebrated its own games again. The existence of the Olympics is only certain from A.D. 212 onward.

This passage clarifies Malalas' earlier mistakes. As we have noted, the chronicler incorrectly called the games under Claudius and Commodus Olympic games. He also ignored all other games that existed besides them. In this last passage, he identified the games of Antioch and those of Kodrigai as one contest. Malalas had a rather linear way of thinking and tended to simplify complex situations. One of his famous mistakes concerns the reigns of emperors. Assuming that there was always only one emperor at a time, he records sequentially emperors who reigned together. After the death of Marcus Aurelius, for example, he adds a reign of eight years of Lucius Verus. Similarly, he extends the 53 years between the accession of Diocletian and the death of Constantine to a period of 95 years by placing all reigns sequentially.⁶³

With respect to the games, he was also confronted by a complex situation. Born in the late fifth century, he had grown up in a world where the Antioch Olympics were the only existing athletic games. In the second and third century, however, every large city in the eastern and central Mediterranean, and many of the more modest towns, had at least one contest, but usually several. Confused by all the games in his sources, he chose to deny the multitude and radically assumed there was only one contest. The first signs of his confusion and misinterpretation appear in his account of Claudius. He learned from his source that Claudius introduced new games, and in his linear interpretation, these had to be the same games as those founded by Sosibios and the same as the Olympic games he knew from his own youth, which had to be the same as the Olympic games of classical literature. There was only one way to fit all these games into one story: the money of Sosibios was used to buy

⁶³ Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* 249.

the Olympic games—and not the right to hold Olympic games as is usually suggested to diminish the absurdity of Malalas' account—and move them to Antioch. Under Commodus new games were introduced, which Malalas again explained as the reestablishment of the same Olympic games. The first celebration of the actual Antiochene Olympics under Caracalla was moved to the reign of Commodus as well, since in Malalas' understanding they had moved to Kodrigai under Septimius Severus, only to return under Diocletian.

This radical simplification explains most of the absurd notions in Malalas, such as the purchasing of the Olympics, the multiple “first celebrations,” and the relation with Kodrigai. Malalas' misunderstanding, however, influenced all his information on athletic games. His smaller mistakes have confused scholars as well. That Antioch bought the right to hold local games, that the syriarchy was related to the alytarchy, or that there were contests between gladiators at the Antioch Olympics,⁶⁴ ideas commonly found in standard works on the Antioch Olympics, can all be traced back to unique and therefore suspect details in the sixth-century chronicle. The information on the Olympics is far from “basically sound,” but many errors were not recognized as such because of the unusual position of the Antioch Olympics. As they continued long after the other well-known games, they have generally been studied by scholars of Late Antiquity, who tried to make sense of their late antique sources without looking at imperial age athletic practices. Although the Antiochene Olympics no doubt had their own peculiar evolution, they were originally modeled after the

⁶⁴ Gladiatorial contests are mentioned in Malalas 10.248 as an event at the games of Sosibios in addition to the traditional events at Greek-style games: artistic, athletic, and equestrian contests. In 10.225, the first discussion of the games of Sosibios, only the traditional events are mentioned. Even in 10.249, where Malalas repeats 10.248, now discussing the new/reformed games under Claudius, he also does not mention gladiators. As two passages reflect the normal practice of Greek-style games and only one passage adds gladiatorial contests, this last passage should be doubted.

other local Olympics of the early third century and all information on the third- and fourth-century celebrations should be compared to the normal athletic practices of this period.⁶⁵

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