



Agathias

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Life

After a period of study in Alexandria, Agathias (ug-GAY-thee-uhs) spent most of his life in Constantinople, where he supported himself by practicing law. Agathias's real love, however, was literature. His poem *Daphniaka* has been lost, but much remains of his *Cycle* (sixth century c.e., preserved in part in *The Greek Anthology*, twelfth century c.e.; English translation, 1848). The *Cycle*, Agathias's collection of contemporary epigrams on erotic, funerary, and other theme, includes epigrams by Agathias as well as by Paul the Silentiary and other prominent men who belonged to Agathias's literary circle. Agathias wrote the preface to the *Cycle* as a panegyric to Justin II in the hope of gaining the emperor's support but failed to win imperial patronage.

Agathias also wrote *Histories* (c. 580 c.e.; *History of the Reign of Justinian*, 1975), a continuation of Procopius's *Polemon* or *De bellis* (550-553 c.e.; *History of the Warres*, 1653, better known as *History of the Wars of Justinian*). Although he intended to continue his narrative up through the 570's c.e., he died before he could complete the work, which covers only the years from 553 to 559 c.e. Like his epigrams, his historical writing imitates the style of classical Greek historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides. Agathias's narrative focuses on wars in Italy and the Caucasus region but includes ethnographic digressions on the Franks and the Persians.

Influence

Agathias's works exemplify the Byzantine devotion to earlier models of classical literature. His works were well received: Much of the *Cycle* was preserved in the *Greek Anthology*, and subsequent secular historians imitated Agathias's practice of beginning their historical narrative where the previous historian had stopped.

Additional Resources

Cameron, Alan. *The Greek Anthology*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Cameron, Averil. *Agathias*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1970.

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