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### A re-approach of Procopius' ethnographic account on the early Slavs

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ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΤΟΜΕΑΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ



# BYZANTINA ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ

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A RE-APPROACH OF PROCOPIUS' ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT  
ON THE EARLY SLAVS

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GEORGIOS KARDARAS

A RE-APPROACH OF PROCOPIUS' ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT  
ON THE EARLY SLAVS\*

The ethnographic account (*excursus*) of Procopius in his *Wars* on the early Slavs (the Sclaveni and the Antes), dated to c. 551/52, is the first “structured” information about the morals and customs of those peoples. A second account, even more detailed, comes about half a century later, in the emperor Maurice’s *Στρατηγηκόν*. Although the credibility of Procopius as a historical source is generally not disputed, R. Benedicty attempted some decades earlier an approach to the testimonies provided on the early Slavs. Benedicty put under scrutiny the relationship between the ancient forms and the historical reality as the Greek and Roman authors, describing the “barbarian” peoples, used common places in historiography, poetry etc. According to his view, Procopius –as well as other Byzantine authors– uses in his account models of the ancient Ethnography, where real and mythical elements are intermingled in order to present the image of a certain people to the public<sup>1</sup>. However, Benedicty, along with other scholars, believes

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\* It has to be noted that the research for the present paper has been implemented at the Institute for Advanced Study at Moscow State Pedagogical University, 1/1, M. Pirogovskaya St. Moscow 11991, Russian Federation.

1. R. BENEDICTY, Prokopios’ Berichte über die slavische Vorzeit. Beiträge zur historiographischen Methode des Prokopios von Kaisareia, *JÖBG* 14 (1965), 51-53, who assumes that Procopius followed the model of Thucydides to his description. On the influences of ancient literature to Procopius see also A. CAMERON, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, Berkeley – Los Angeles 1985, 218-219. S. A. IVANOV – L. A. GINDIN – V. L. TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, in: *Svod drevneishikh pis’mennykh izvestii o slavianakh*, ed. L. A. GINDIN et al., v. 1, Moscow 1991, 171, 226 n. 87. F. CURTA, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500-700*, Cambridge 2001, 36. On the Early Byzantine Ethnography and

Procopius' account to be credible as the latter was either an eye-witness, e.g. with the Slavic mercenaries in Italy, or he had access to written sources and oral information from people of his era<sup>2</sup>.

Procopius' information results from the appearance of the Slavs north of the Lower Danube at the beginning of the sixth century and their raids into the Balkan provinces of Byzantium. Starting from the first attack by the Antes in 518<sup>3</sup> the Slavic attacks became more intense after 530, when they coincided with those of other peoples living north of the Lower Danube. During the first two decades of the reign of Justinian (527-565), a great number of invasions were carried out by the Slavs (Sclaveni and Antes) as well as the nomadic peoples. The sources mention inroads by the Sclaveni in 529/30 and 545<sup>4</sup> and by the Antes probably in 545/46 (Thrace)<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, the nomadic tribes launched attacks in 530 and 535 (Lower Moesia and Thrace)<sup>6</sup>, in 538 (Scythia Minor, Lower

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its emphasis on the difference between Romans and barbarians see A. KALDELLIS, *Ethnography after Antiquity. Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature*, Philadelphia 2013, 1-25.

2. See BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 59-60, 68-69, 71-78. CAMERON, *Procopius*, 188-189, 261-266. IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 171-172. CURTA, *Slavs*, 37-38, 71, 332.

3. Procopius, *Wars*, ed. J. HAURY – G. WIRTH, *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*, v. 1-2 (*De Bellis*), Leipzig 1962-1963, VII, 40. 5, 476 (Engl. transl. by H. B. DEWING, *Procopius of Caesarea*, v. 1-5, *History of the Wars*, LCL, London 1961-1962. See also *The wars of Justinian. Prokopios, Translated by H.B. DEWING, Revised and Modernized, with an Introduction and Notes, by A. KALDELLIS*, Indianapolis 2014). J. IRMSCHER, Die Slawen und das Justinianische Reich, in: *Rapports du IIIe Congrès International d'Archéologie Slave, Bratislava 7-14 Septembre 1975*, ed. B. CHROPOVSKÝ, v. 1-2 (Bratislava 1979-1980), v. 2, 158 (in 525); V. VELKOV, Der Donaulimes in Bulgarien und das Vordringen der Slawen, in: *Die Völker Südosteuropas im. 6. bis 8. Jahrhundert, Symposion Tutzing 1985*, ed. B. HÄNSEL, *Südosteuropa Jahrbuch* 17 (1987), 157. CURTA, *Slavs*, 75. G. TH. KARDARAS, *Oi Άντες. Ιστορία και πολιτισμός (4ος-8ος αι.)* [EIE/ΠΕ, Μονογραφίες 16], Athens 2016, 83.

4. Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon*, ed. TH. MOMMSEN [MGH AA 11, *Chronica minora* 2], Berlin 1894, a. 530, 103. *Procopius, Wars*, VII. 13, 24-25, 353. IRMSCHER, Justinianische Reich, 161-162. VELKOV, Donaulimes, 160. CURTA, *Slavs*, 82-83. KARDARAS, Άντες, 86.

5. Procopius, *Wars*, VII, 14. 11, 357. CS. BONEV, Les Antes et Byzance, *EtBalk* 19/3 (1983), 113. CURTA, *Slavs*, 79. KARDARAS, Άντες, 87.

6. Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon*, a. 530, 103. Ibidem, a. 535, 104. BONEV, Les Antes, 112. VELKOV, Donaulimes, 159. O. MAZAL, *Justinian I. und seine Zeit. Geschichte und Kultur des Byzantinischen Reiches im 6. Jahrhundert*, Köln – Weimar – Wien 2001, 186. D. ZIEMANN,

Moesia and Thrace)<sup>7</sup> and twice in Illyricum (539 and 545)<sup>8</sup>. According to Procopius, almost every year after Justinian's ascent to the throne, the Balkan provinces suffered the invasions of the Sclaveni, the Antes and the nomads and the areas invaded were a *Scythian wilderness*<sup>9</sup>. Raids of the Bulgars, the Antes and Sclaveni are mentioned also by Jordanes<sup>10</sup>.

Up until recent years, the oldest testimony on the early Slavs was often considered to be a passage by Pseudo-Caesarius, a Monophysite monk in the monastery of *Ἀκοιμήτων*, which some scholars dated to c. 540<sup>11</sup>. However,

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*Vom Wandervolk zur Grossmacht. Die Entstehung Bulgariens im frühen Mittelalter (7.-9. Jh.)*, Köln – Weimar – Wien 2007, 91. KARDARAS, *Ἀντες*, 86.

7. Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, ed. I. THURN [CFHB 35], Berlin 2000, 18, 21, 366. BONEV, Les Antes, 112. VELKOV, Donaulimes, 159. MAZAL, *Justinian I.*, 183. ZIEMANN, *Entstehung*, 89-90. KARDARAS, *Ἀντες*, 86.

8. Procopius, *Wars*, II, 4. 4-6, 163 and VII, 11. 13-15, 342. VELKOV, Donaulimes, 159 (in 540). CURTA, *Slavs*, 78-79. Mazal, *Justinian I.*, 187-188. ZIEMANN, *Entstehung*, 92. KARDARAS, *Ἀντες*, 86-87.

9. Procopius, *Historia Arcana*, ed. J. HAURY – G. WIRTH, *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*, v. 3, Leipzig 1963, 18. 20-21, 114-115 (Engl. transl. by H. B. DEWING, *Procopius of Caesarea*, v. 6, *Anecdota*, LCL, London 1960): Ἰλλυριοὺς δὲ καὶ Θράκην ὅλην, εἴη δ' ἂν ἐκ κόλπου τοῦ Ἰονίου μέχρι ἐς τὰ Βυζαντίων προάστεια, ἐν τοῖς Ἑλλάς τε καὶ Χερρονησιωτῶν ἡ χώρα ἐστίν, Οὐννοὶ τε καὶ Σκλαβηνοὶ καὶ Ἄνται σχεδόν τι ἀνὰ πᾶν καταθέοντες ἔτος, ἐξ οὗ Ἰουστινιανὸς παρέλαβε τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχήν, ἀνήκεστα ἔργα εἰργάσαντο τοὺς ταύτη ἀνθρώπους. Πλέον γὰρ ἐν ἐκάστη ἐσβολῇ οἶμαι ἢ κατὰ μυριάδας εἴκοσιν εἶναι τῶν τε ἀνηρημένων καὶ ἠνδραποδιομένων ἐνταῦθα Ῥωμαίων, <ὥστε> τὴν Σκυθῶν ἐρημίαν ἀμέλει ταύτης πανταχόσε τῆς γῆς ξυμβαίνειν <εἶναι> See also, Procopius, *Wars*, VII, 14. 2, 353-354. IRMSCHER, Justinianische Reich, 158. VELKOV, Donaulimes, 158. CURTA, *Slavs*, 78-79. P. M. BARFORD, *The Early Slavs. Culture and Society in Early Medieval Eastern Europe*, New York 2001, 50. KARDARAS, *Ἀντες*, 85.

10. Iordanes, *Romana*, ed. TH. MOMMSEN [MGH AA V/1], Berlin 1882, 388, 52: *Hi sunt casus Romanae rei publicae preter instantia cottidiana Bulgarum, Antium et Scлавinorum...* CURTA, *Slavs*, 79. KARDARAS, *Ἀντες*, 85-86.

11. See I. DUJČEV, Le témoignage du Pseudo-Césaire sur les Slaves, in: I. DUJČEV, *Medioevo Bizantino-slavo 1* (Saggi di Storia Politica e Culturale), Rome 1965, 35-38, 42 (530-558). L. WALDMÜLLER, *Die ersten Begegnungen der Slawen mit dem Christentum und den christlichen Völkern vom 6. bis 8. Jahrhundert. Die Slawen zwischen Byzanz und Abendland*, Amsterdam 1976, 13-14. PH. MALINGOUDIS, *Ελληνισμός και σλαβικός κόσμος*, Thessaloniki 2006, 221-235. Idem, *Σλάβοι στη Μεσαιωνική Ελλάδα*, Thessaloniki 2013, 47-48. See also R. RIEDINGER, *Pseudo-Kaisarios. Überlieferungsgeschichte und Verfasserfrage*, München 1969, 250-251, 254-255, 259-261, 305 (c. 550).

newer approaches discern traces of Procopius' testimonies in the account of Pseudo-Caesarius and date it a few years after the *Wars*, in c. 560<sup>12</sup>. The fragment under consideration makes reference to extreme barbarian customs (infanticide, devouring of women's breasts, eating of wild animals, imitation of the wolves' howl etc.) which the author attributes to the *Sclaveni*<sup>13</sup>.

In our view, the excerpt from Pseudo-Caesarius' account has no value in the study of the early Slavs and any correlation of his testimony with their cultural features should be rejected. Regarding the *Sclaveni*, Pseudo-Caesarius uses *common places* related mainly to Herodotus' account on the Scythians. Considering the wolves' howl, namely lycanthropy, a *common place* can be seen occurring in many sources (Herodotus, Pomponius Mela, Pseudo-Caesarius etc.)<sup>14</sup>. Disputing the reliability of Pseudo-Caesarius, I. Dujčev noted that his testimonies are a variant of Bardesanes' account (154-222 AD) of the Indians and the Persians, which records the cannibalism of the former, and that Pseudo-Caesarius adapted the testimonies of Bardesanes to the Slavs. As I. Dujčev points out, the testimonies of Pseudo-Caesarius on the Slavs "are nothing more than a variant of the ancient myths about the Getae, the Thracians and the Dacians"<sup>15</sup>.

The account of Procopius concerns the Slavs approximately from 530 until 550, when the *Sclaveni* and the *Antes* invaded the Balkan provinces and, simultaneously, they served as mercenaries or federates in the Byzantine army (a possible source for the account). Procopius describes both peoples as having, among others, the same language and customs, common way of life and art of war as well as cults related to the nature:

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12. CURTA, *Slavs*, 43-44. On Pseudo-Caesarius' work see also, S. A. IVANOV, Pseudo-Kesarii, in: *Svod drevneishikh pis'mennykh izvestii o slavianakh*, [as in n. 1], 251-259. *Fuentes griegas sobre los eslavos, Part I: Expansión y establecimiento de los eslavos en la Península Balcánica*, ed. M. MORFAKIDIS FILACTÓS – M. CASA OLEA, Granada 2009, 47. KARDARAS, Άντες, 64.

13. Caesarius, *Dialogue Four*, ed. J. P. MIGNÉ [PG 38], Paris 1895, II, 110, 985. DUJČEV, *Témoignage*, 29-30. MALINGOUDIS, *Ελληνισμός*, 223-225. CURTA, *Slavs*, 325-326. MORFAKIDIS – OLEA, *Fuentes griegas*, 48. KARDARAS, Άντες, 63-65.

14. On the consideration of the testimony as *commonplace* to ancient sources see B. PANZER, *Quellen zur slavischen Ethnogenese: Fakten, Mythen und Legenden (Originaltexte mit Übersetzungen, Erläuterungen und Kommentaren)* [Heidelberger Publikationen zur Slavistik / Linguistische Reihe 14], Frankfurt 2002, 13. KARDARAS, Άντες, 65-67.

15. DUJČEV, *Témoignage*, 31-33, 40. IVANOV, Pseudo-Kesarii, 252. KARDARAS, Άντες, 67.

τὰ γὰρ ἔθνη ταῦτα, Σκλαβηνοὶ τε καὶ Ἄνται, οὐκ ἄρχονται πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἑνός, ἀλλ' ἐν δημοκρατία ἐκ παλαιοῦ βιοτεύουσι, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο αὐτοῖς τῶν πραγμάτων ἀεὶ τά τε ξύμφορα καὶ τὰ δύσκολα ἐς κοινὸν ἄγεται. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὡς εἰπεῖν ἅπαντα ἐκατέροις ἐστὶ τε καὶ νενομίσται τούτοις ἄνωθεν τοῖς βαρβάροις. θεὸν μὲν γὰρ ἓνα τὸν τῆς ἀστραπῆς δημιουργὸν ἀπάντων κύριον μόνον αὐτὸν νομίζουσιν εἶναι, καὶ θύουσιν αὐτῷ βόας τε καὶ ἰερεῖα πάντα εἰμαρμένην δὲ οὔτε ἴσασι οὔτε ἄλλως ὁμολογοῦσιν ἐν γε ἀνθρώποις ῥοπήν τινα ἔχειν, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴν αὐτοῖς ἐν ποσὶν ἤδη ὁ θάνατος εἴη, ἢ νόσῳ ἀλοῦσιν ἢ ἐς πόλεμον καθιστάμενοις, ἐπαγγέλλονται μὲν, ἢν διαφύγωσι, θυσίαν τῷ θεῷ ἀντὶ τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτίκα ποιήσιν, διαφυγόντες δὲ θύουσιν ὅπερ ὑπέσχοντο, καὶ οἴονται τὴν σωτηρίαν ταύτης δὴ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῖς ἐωνῆσθαι. σέβουσι μέντοι καὶ ποταμούς τε καὶ νύμφας καὶ ἄλλα ἄττα δαιμόνια, καὶ θύουσι καὶ αὐτοῖς ἅπασι, τὰς τε μαντείας ἐν ταύταις δὴ ταῖς θυσίαις ποιοῦνται. οἰκοῦσι δὲ ἐν καλύβαις οἰκτραῖς διεσκηνημένοι πολλῶ μὲν ἀπ' ἀλλήλων, ἀμείβοντες δὲ ὡς τὰ πολλὰ τὸν τῆς ἐνοικήσεως ἕκαστοι χῶρον. ἐς μάχην δὲ καθιστάμενοι περὶ μὲν ἐπὶ τοὺς πολεμίους οἱ πολλοὶ ἴασιν ἀσπίδια καὶ ἀκόντια ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοντες, θώρακα δὲ οὐδαμῆ ἐνδιδύσκονται. τινὲς δὲ οὐδὲ χιτῶνα οὐδὲ τριβώνιον ἔχουσιν, ἀλλὰ μόνας τὰς ἀναξυρίδας ἐναρμοσάμενοι μέχρι ἐς τὰ αἰδοῖα, οὕτω δὲ ἐς ξυμβολὴν τοῖς ἐναντίοις καθίστανται. ἔστι δὲ καὶ μία ἐκατέροις φωνὴ ἀτεχνῶς βάρβαρος. οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ τὸ εἶδος ἐς ἀλλήλους τι διαλλάσσουσιν. εὐμήκεις τε γὰρ καὶ ἄλκιμοι διαφερόντως εἰσὶν ἅπαντες, τὰ δὲ σώματα καὶ τὰς κόμας οὔτε λευκοὶ ἐσάγαν ἢ ξανθοὶ εἰσιν οὔτε πη ἐς τὸ μέλαν αὐτοῖς παντελῶς τέτραπται, ἀλλ' ὑπέρυθροὶ εἰσιν ἅπαντες. δίαιταν δὲ σκληρὰν τε καὶ ἀπημελημένην, ὥσπερ οἱ Μασσαγέται, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔχουσι, καὶ ῥύπου ἥπερ ἐκεῖνοι ἐνδεδεχέστατα γέμουσι, πονηροὶ μέντοι ἢ κακοῦργοι ὡς ἠκιστα τυγχάνουσιν ὄντες, ἀλλὰ κὰν τῷ ἀφελεί διασώζουσι τὸ Οὐννικὸν ἦθος. καὶ μὴν καὶ ὄνομα Σκλαβηνοῖς τε καὶ Ἄνταις ἐν τὸ ἀνέκαθεν ἦν. Σπόρους γὰρ τὸ παλαιὸν ἀμφοτέρους ἐκάλουν, ὅτι δὴ σποράδην, οἴμαι, διεσκηνημένοι τὴν χώραν οἰκοῦσι. διὸ δὲ καὶ γῆν τινα πολλὴν ἔχουσι τὸ γὰρ πλείστον τῆς ἐτέρας τοῦ Ἰστρου ὄχθης αὐτοὶ νέμονται. τὰ μὲν οὖν ἀμφὶ τὸν λεῶν τοῦτον ταύτη πη ἔχει<sup>16</sup>.

16. Procopius, *Wars*, VII, 14. 22-30, 357-358. BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 53-54. WALDMÜLLER, *Begegnungen*, 22-23. PANZER, *Quellen*, 25-26. G. SCHRAMM, Venedi, Antes,

Comparing the testimonies of Procopius and Jordanes on the early Slavs we notice a wide range of discrepancies between the two sources. Procopius does not relate the origin of the Slavs to Venethi, but quotes that the Sclaveni and the Antes were previously called *Sporoi*<sup>17</sup>. Other differences can be seen in the way of life or the settlement space (nomadic, according to Procopius, living in forests and swamps in the words of Jordanes), but also in their political system (*democracy*, contrary to Jordanes' reference to a king and higher officials among the Antes in the fourth century)<sup>18</sup>. Regarding the latter, some scholars reject the testimony of Procopius as they do not accept the Slavic origin (or the Slavisation) of the Antes. But even if the ethnic relationship between the Antes and Sclaveni is accepted, their cultural identification has been disputed, as the Antes are considered "culturally superior" and incompatible with the image of the "wild and unruly", a description most likely fitting the Sclaveni. Therefore Procopius' description is considered inadequate since it does not record the specific characteristics of the Antes<sup>19</sup>.

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Sclaveni, Sclavi: Frühe Sammelbezeichnungen für slawische Stämme und ihr geschichtlicher Hintergrund, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 43 (1995), 170, 172. BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 59, 141, 193. E. M. REVANOGLU, *Γεωγραφικά και εθνογραφικά στοιχεία στο έργο του Προκοπίου Καισαρείας* [Κέντρο Βυζαντινών Ερευνών. Βυζαντινά κείμενα και μελέται 39], Thessaloniki 2005, 240-241, 244. T. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Forging Unity. The South Slavs between East and West: 550-1150*, Belgrade 2007, 51. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 53-54, 58-59, 62.

17. REVANOGLU, *Γεωγραφικά*, 242. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 59. MALINGOUDIS, *Σλάβοι*, 45. The etymology of the name *Sporoi* is debated; probably it comes from a Proto-Slavic word for "multitude" and it was known to Procopius by oral tradition. See BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 77. BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 36. Other views correlate the name with meanings such as "descendants" or "numerous". See IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 227-228, n. 94.

18. R. WERNER, Zur Herkunft der Anten. Ein ethnisches und soziales Problem der Spätantike, in: *Studien zur Antiken Sozialgeschichte. Festschrift F. Vittinghoff*, ed. W. ECK – H. GALSTERER – H. WOLFF, Köln – Wien 1980, 578-579; C. GOEHRKE, *Frühzeit des Ostslaventums* [Erträge der Forschung 277], Darmstadt 1992, 8. F. CURTA, Hiding Behind a Piece of Tapestry: Jordanes and the Slavic Venethi, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 47 (1999), 326-327; BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 36. F. E. SHLOSSER, The Slavs in Sixth-Century Byzantine Sources, *BSI* 61 (2003), 77. M. V. GRATSIANSKII, O proiskhozhdenii etnonima «Anty», *Vizantiiskii Vremennik* 71/96 (2012), 34.

19. N. ŽUPANIĆ, Boz, rex Antorum. Historično-etnološki donesek k prvemu zgodovinskemu dejanju Slovanov, *Situla* 4 (1961), 117. SCHRAMM, Venedi, 172. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 59-60.



According to R. Werner, the information given by Procopius on the physical characteristics of the Slavs is a common place related to the testimony of Ammianus Marcellinus on the Alans<sup>20</sup>. The same scholar focuses on the references associated with nomadic peoples (the *Huns* or the *Massagetae*), and characterizes the way of life of the Sclaveni and the Antes as semi-nomadic and they themselves as hunters and shepherds. In R. Werner's view, the two Slavic peoples formed for the Byzantines part of the nomadic migrations from east to west<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand, R. Benedicty claims that Procopius uses ancient tropes about the northern barbarians, namely the light colour of their skin and hairs and the fact that they are tall. The testimony about the light ginger hair of the northern barbarians occurs first in a poem of Xenophanes in the sixth c. B.C., while Herodotus' description of Budinoi is similar to that of Procopius on the Goths and the Slavs. The light ginger colour or the blond is also used to describe the Germans by other authors. Such characteristics concern the northern barbarians and they are in accordance with the climate theory that held by Procopius<sup>22</sup>. R. Benedicty also notes elements of the ancient literature in the description of the dress, e.g. the *ἀναξυρίδες* (trews) a kind of felt trousers, probably of Persian origin and known from depictions of Antiquity, a typical dress of the northern barbarians. The wool *τιβώνιον* (cloak) was a dress of the lower social class and its mention by Procopius, along with the trews, aims at underlining the wild character of the Slavs. The *χιτῶν* (shirt) was a linen dress worn under

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20. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, ed. W. SEYFARTH, *Ammianus Marcellinus Römische Geschichte*, v. 1-4, Berlin 1970-1975, XXXI, 2.21, 248: *Proceri autem Halani paene sunt omnes et pulchri, crinibus mediocriter flavis, oculorum temperata torvitate terribiles et armorum levitate veloces, Hunisque per omnia suppare verum victu mitiores et cultu, latrocinando et venando ad usque Maeotica stagna et Cimmerium Bosphorum, itidemque Armenios discurrentes et Mediam*. WERNER, *Herkunft*, 587. See also WALDMÜLLER, *Begegnungen*, 30. SHLOSSER, *Sources*, 76. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Forging Unity*, 33. KARDARAS, *Άνρες*, 60.

21. Procopius, *Wars*, VII, 14. 24, 358. WERNER, *Herkunft*, 575, 580. IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 227, n. 91-93. CURTA, *Slavs*, 332. SHLOSSER, *Sources*, 76-77.

22. BENEDICTY, *Prokopios' Berichte*, 57-59, 75 who quotes two similar testimonies from later Arabic sources. IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 226, n. 87-89, who assume that Procopius can not clearly classify the Slavs in the "northern" or "eastern" type of the barbarians. REVANOGLU, *Γεωγραφικά*, 205-207.

the *τριβώνιον*, typical to the Greeks<sup>23</sup>. For the Slavs too, Procopius uses characterizations that apply overall to the peoples of the north: brutality, military capacity, barbaric simplicity, bellicose and unreliable, yet he does not consider the Slavs cunning and evildoers. Correspondingly harsh is their way of life<sup>24</sup>.

The common places concern too the information on the weaponry and the military organization of the early Slavs, as Procopius seems to follow the “military stereotype” of the Antiquity: the western barbarians are fighting on foot and the eastern on horseback. The testimony that the Slavs are fighting on foot and carry shields is related to a common place for the Germans, as well as the Venethi, known from Tacitus. Similar information was provided earlier by Julius Caesar concerning the Nervii. Tacitus mentions also that the Peucini, Venethi, and Fenni “are all dirty” and the Venethi “have contracted many Sarmatian habits”<sup>25</sup>. In another point of the *Wars*, in his description of the capture of the Thracian city *Topeiros* by the Slavs in 550, Procopius provides additional information on the Slavic weaponry, mentioning the use of bows by them as well as clubs for the murder of the captives inhabitants of the city<sup>26</sup>.

23. BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 56, 74. IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 225-226, n. 85-86. BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 116, 141. REVANOGLU, *Γεωγραφικά*, 222-223.

24. See REVANOGLU, *Γεωγραφικά*, 208-210, 218, 223.

25. Tacitus, *Germania*, ed. M. HUTTON, Cornelii Taciti, *De Origine et situ Germanorum* [LCL, Tacitus 1], London 1970, XLVI, 1-2, 210-212: *Hic Suebiae finis. Peucinorum Venethorumque et Fennorum nationes Germanis an Sarmatis adscribam dubito, quamquam Peucini, quos quidam Bastarnas vocant, sermone cultu, sede ac domiciliis ut Germani agunt. sordes omnium ac torpor procerum; conubiis mixtis nonnihil in Sarmatarum habitum foedantur. Venethi multum ex moribus traxerunt; nam quidquid inter Peucinos Fennosque silvarum ac montium erigitur latrocinii pererrant. hi tamen inter Germanos potius referuntur, quia et domos figunt et scuta gestant et pedum usu et pernecitate gaudent: quae omnia diversa Sarmatis sunt in plaustro equoque viventibus*. BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 55-56. IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 224, n. 83. SHLOSSER, *Sources*, 76. G. TH. KARDARAS, Η πολεμική τέχνη των πρώιμων Σλάβων (Στ' - Ζ' αι.), *Βυζ Σύμμ* 18 (2008), 186, n. 2. IDEM, *Άντες*, 60-61. REVANOGLU, *Γεωγραφικά*, 217-218.

26. Procopius, *Wars*, VII, 38. 17, 469: ἔπειτα δὲ αὐτοὺς πλήθει βελῶν οἱ βάρβαροι βιασάμενοι ἐκλιπεῖν τε τὰς ἐπάλξεις ἠνάγκασαν καὶ κλίμακας τῷ περιβόλῳ ἐρείσαντες κατὰ κράτος τὴν πόλιν εἶλον. Ibidem, VII, 38. 21, 470 ... εἶτα ῥοπάλοις αὐτοὺς κατὰ κόρρης

According to T. Živković, the simplistic image of the Slavs soldiers with poor weaponry and limited military capacity seems contradictory to another testimony by Procopius himself in the *Wars*, where victories of Slavs over the Byzantines in open battle or the conquest of fortified cities, like Topeiros, are mentioned<sup>27</sup>. A plausible explanation of these contradictions is that the Byzantine authors, having a negative attitude towards the barbarians, either did not sufficiently understand or did not want to convey the reality, namely the good standard of the art of war and the military organization of the early Slavs<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, a widely accepted view is that the early Slavs followed only the methods of guerilla warfare by attacking and retreating from the Byzantine provinces in order to gather booty<sup>29</sup>. In military conflicts, where the Byzantines declared the main features as being the bravery of the Antes and the great number of Sclaveni, is assumed that the Antes were leading the great mass of Sclaveni to war<sup>30</sup>.

Regarding the weaponry of the early Slavs, the archaeological finds of the cultures Prague, Penkovka and Kolochin in Eastern Europe show a variety of weapons either for wider or more limited use, attributed to professional soldiers or members of a higher class. The first category includes spearheads (20-25 cm.), javelins (at least 15 cm.), arrows (10-13 cm.) and harnesses. The second category includes swords, ring armour, spurs and decorated belts<sup>31</sup>. In Romania “nomadic type” arrowheads and small iron knives came to light

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ἐνδεδεχέστατα παίοντες, ὡς δὴ κύννας ἢ ὄφεις ἢ ἄλλο τι θηρίον διέφθειρον. IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 225, n. 84. SHLOSSER, *Sources*, 78. KARDARAS, Πολεμική τέχνη, 187. IDEM, *Άντες*, 61. A light spear of Slavic origin (*λαγκίδιον Σκλαβινίσκιον*) is referred in *Strategikon* of Maurice (ed. G. T. DENNIS – E. GAMILLSCHEG, *Das Strategikon des Maurikios* [CFHB, Series Vindobonensis 17], Wien 1981), XII B5, 422. See T. G. KOLIAS, *Byzantinische Waffen: ein Beitrag zur byzantinischen Waffenkunde von den Anfängen bis zur lateinischen Eroberung*, Wien 1988, 188. Ibidem, 214, 223 for the Slavic bows and arrows.

27. Procopius, *Wars*, VII, 14. 5, 354. Ibidem, VII, 38. 6, 468.

28. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Forging Unity*, 51, 55-56.

29. BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 139-140. KARDARAS, Πολεμική τέχνη, 194.

30. WERNER, *Herkunft*, 574, 580. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 61.

31. O. M. PRIKHODNIUK, *Pen'kovskaia kul'tura. Pen'kovskaia kul'turno-khronologicheskii aspect issledovaniia*, Voronezh 1998, 37-38. M. KAZANSKI, L'armement Slave du Haut Moyen-Age (Ve-VIIe siècles). Á propos des chefs militaires et des guerriers professionnels chez les anciens Slaves, *Přehled Výzkumů* 39 (1995-1996), 199-204. CURTA, *Slavs*, 333-334. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 72-73.

in the Slavic cemetery of Sărata Monteoru. Similar finds were found in early Slavic sites in northwestern Bulgaria<sup>32</sup>.

Taking into account the archaeological material, as well as the written testimonies of the sixth century, it is assumed that the Sclaveni and the Antes mercenaries of Byzantium in the 530's were professional soldiers, while the references to cavalry show the formation of a military aristocracy. Some scholars believe that such an evolution dates back to the mid-seventh century while earlier semi-professional soldiers existed who formed permanent military units. M. Kazanski assumes that the finds of weapons, harnesses and decorations, although limited, testify to the existence of a military aristocracy from the sixth century onwards. In addition, the decoration of the belt, as to other peoples (e.g. the Avars or the Longobards) was indication of a social hierarchy<sup>33</sup>. Also, based on the ethnological point of view concerning the social and political organisation of the ancient (pre-state) societies, M. Kazanski assumes that the appearance of the soldiers as a social class means for the Slavs the end of the primitive society and the beginning of the so-called chiefdom (chefferie)<sup>34</sup>.

Regarding their tricks in war, Procopius describes a method the Slavs used to avoid the attention of the enemies and to approach them taking advantage of the soil conditions<sup>35</sup>. Probably under the influence of the nomads, the feigned retreat with inversion passed into the Slavic art of war and is mentioned at the siege of Topeiros<sup>36</sup>. The use of siege engines by the

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32. Ž. VĀZĀROVA, Slawen und Protobulgaren (nach archäologischen Angaben), in: *Berichte über den II. Internationalen Kongress für Slawische Archäologie, Berlin 24-28. August 1970*, ed. J. HERRMANN – K. H. OTTO, Berlin 1970, 39-41. U. FIEDLER, *Studien zu Gräberfeldern des 6. bis 9. Jahrhunderts an der unteren Donau*, v. 1, Bonn 1992, 75-76, 85-86. See also BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 140. KARDARAS, Πολεμική τέχνη, 193.

33. KAZANSKI, L'armement Slave, 197-198, 207.

34. KAZANSKI, L'armement Slave, 212. See also CURTA, *Slavs*, 326: "According to current anthropological views, chiefdoms are regionally organized societies with a centralized decision-making hierarchy coordinating activities among several village communities". BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 126-127.

35. Procopius, *Wars*, VI, 26. 18. 268.

36. Ibidem, VII, 38. 12-14, 469. KARDARAS, Πολεμική τέχνη, 195. On the nomadic art of war, see G. TH. KARDARAS, *Το Βυζάντιο και οι Άβαροι, ΣΤ'-Θ' αι. Πολιτικές, διπλωματικές και πολιτισμικές σχέσεις* [EIE/IBE, Μονογραφίες 15], Athens 2010, 199-207, 212-229.

early Slavs is known from subsequent sources, but in Procopius' testimonies we can only distinguish what are probably indirect references to such a case. During the great invasions around 550/51, the invaders occupied many fortresses, without any mention of siege engines<sup>37</sup> while at the siege of Topeiros they used ladders to scale on the walls<sup>38</sup>.

One issue into the early Slavic art of war not systematically approached, and of greater importance than is usually believed, is the use of horses and the formation of cavalry units. In the account under discussion there is no mention of horses. The lack of cavalry among the Varnoi and the Franks is mentioned by Procopius and Agathias respectively<sup>39</sup>. According to P. Barford, during the invasions in the era of Justinian, the speed of the movements of the Slavs was due to their horsemen, for whom Procopius employs also the term *στράτευμα*<sup>40</sup>. From Procopius we know that during the Ostrogothic war cavalry from the Sclaveni, Antes and Huns took part in the conflicts in the year 536/37<sup>41</sup>. The first account of an attack by Slavic cavalry dates back to 517 and is likely related to mercenary troops of the usurper Vitalian, who revolted in Thrace against the emperor Anastasius<sup>42</sup>. On the other hand, independent Slavic tribes participated in raids along with nomadic peoples

37. Procopius, *Wars*, VII, 38. 7, 468.

38. See above, n. 26. KARDARAS, *Πολεμική τέχνη*, 199.

39. Procopius, *Wars*, VIII, 20. 29-30, 594. Agathias, *Histories*, ed. R. KEYDELL, *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum libri quinque* [CFHB, Series Berolinensis 2], Berlin 1967, II, 5. 4, 46. BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 56. KARDARAS, *Πολεμική τέχνη*, 198-199.

40. BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 143.

41. Procopius, *Wars*, V, 27. 1-2, 130: ... *Μαρτίνός τε καὶ Βαλεριανὸς ἦγον, ἔξακοσίους τε καὶ χιλίους στρατιώτας ἰππεῖς ἐπαγομένω. καὶ αὐτῶν οἱ πλεῖστοι Οὐννοὶ τε ἦσαν καὶ Σκλαβηνοὶ καὶ Ἄνται, οἱ ὑπὲρ ποταμῶν Ἰστρου οὐ μακρὰν τῆς ἐκεῖνῃ ὄχθης ἴδρυνται.* BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 73. IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 224, n. 83. CURTA, *Slavs*, 78. BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 143.

42. Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon*, a. 517, 100: *duae tunc Macedoniae Thessaliaque vastatae et usque Thermopylas veteremque Epirum Getae equites depraedati sunt.* VELKOV, Donaulimes, 157. CURTA, *Slavs*, 75. KARDARAS, *Πολεμική τέχνη*, 202-203. IDEM, *Ἄντες*, 84. Procopius, *Wars*, For the revolt of Vitalian, see S. PATOURA-SPANOU, *Η επανάσταση του Βιταλιανού της Θράκης και οι πολιτικοί ελιγμοί του Αναστασίου*, στο: PATOURA-SPANOU, *Η μεθόριος του Δούναβη και ο κόσμος της στην εποχή της μετανάστευσης των λαών (4ος-7ος αι.)* [IBE/EIE, Ερευνητική Βιβλιοθήκη 6], ed. G. TH. KARDARAS, Αθήνα 2008, 181-193. G. GEORGAKAKIS, *Το κίνημα του Βιταλιανού (513-515). Μια πρόταση ερμηνείας των στόχων του επαναστάτη*, *Βυζαντικά 31* (2014) (Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη της καθηγήτριας Βασιλικής Δ. Παπούλια), 87-105.

between 518 and 558/59, and we could assume that from those common operations they became more familiar with the formation of cavalry units<sup>43</sup>.

Considering the early Slavic society, the Marxist historiography promoted the model of the *military democracy*, where the tribes were organized into military units of tens and hundreds<sup>44</sup>. According to T. Živković, the Sclaveni and the Antes were living in a *primitive democracy*, a tribal system without developed structures of property, as free farmers-soldiers, under the rule of chieftains<sup>45</sup>. Furthermore, from Procopius' description on the Slavs mercenaries and Agathias' of certain Antes officers, it emerges that the Slavs formed special units for the cavalry or naval operations in the Byzantine army and they were professional soldiers<sup>46</sup>. As an indication of the formation of tribal aristocracy among the Slavs before (or about) 560, R. Benedicty, M. Kazanski and F. Curta consider the testimony of Pseudo-Caesarius about the murder of the leaders by their escort<sup>47</sup>. Taking into account the testimony of Jordanes on the king Boz and his seventy *primates* in c. 375, as well as certain finds from the Kiev culture, M. Kazanski shares the opinion that the influences of the Goths during the fourth century transformed the small *chefferies* into great tribal unions, a proceeding interrupted by the Hunnic invasion of Europe<sup>48</sup>.

According to Ph. Malingoudis, the Slavic society of the sixth century was *acephalus*, namely no central power (monarchy) or social hierarchy existed, but it was divided into many tribes, politically autonomous under the leadership of chieftains (*ἡγεμόνες, ἄρχοντες, οἱ ἐν τέλει, ῥήγες* etc.),

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43. KARDARAS, Πολεμική τέχνη, 203.

44. See F. CURTA, Feasting with 'Kings' in an Ancient Democracy: On the Slavic Society of the Early Middle Ages (Sixth to Seventh Century A.D.), *Essays in Medieval Studies* 15 (1999) 19-20. IDEM, *Slavs*, 311-319. SHLOSSER, *Sources*, 77, 79-80. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 74.

45. ŽIVKOVIĆ, Forging Unity, 46-47. SHLOSSER, *Sources*, 77. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 74. On the tribal organisation to the early Slavs see also GOEHRKE, *Frühzeit*, 152-153.

46. ŽIVKOVIĆ, Forging Unity, 52-53, 57-59. SHLOSSER, *Sources*, 79-80, who notes that the mention on the Sclaveni and Antes horsemen in Italy in 536 arises questions as the formation of a higher social class and selected military units. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 74-75.

47. BENEDICTY, Prokopios' *Berichte*, 65-66, 68, who assumes that this escort was a military *druzina*. KAZANSKI, L'armement Slave, 211. CURTA, *Slavs*, 326, 332-333. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 76.

48. M. KAZANSKI, Les relations entre les Slaves et les Goths du IIIe au Ve siècle: l'apport de l'archéologie, *Revue des Etudes Slaves* 65/1 (1993), 7-20, 13-15. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 77.

and with the institution of *věče* for common affairs. In addition, the early Slavic language does not contain terms such as *state* or *territory* or *monarch/king*, terms that appear after the ninth century and as language loans<sup>49</sup>. The main social unit was the so-called *zadruga* (gens or clan), “in which several generations lived together under the same roof in a patriarchal social order”<sup>50</sup>. Another view supports the model of the *segmentary society* for the early Slavs, taking into account the testimonies of Maurice Στρατηγικὸν on the lack of union and the conflicts between the tribes<sup>51</sup>. In any case, as M. Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou points out, “the Slavs were mainly occupied with agriculture and stock-raising and they had not developed trade, an activity which requires economic organization, nor did they have urban life, which is a social development stage”<sup>52</sup>.

A long discussed topic concerns the word *democracy* that Procopius uses for the political organization of the Slavs. Probably its meaning was linked to the Slavs' way of living, the *sporadic fashion* in small tribes without central power, or, in a broader sense, the *un-ruled* way of life in *barbaricum*, contrary to the institutions of *civitas Romanorum* and the monarchy<sup>53</sup>. In R. Benedicty's point of view Procopius uses the word taking into account testimonies of ancient authors (such as Hippocrates and Aristoteles) about the lack of monarchy and political institutions of “barbarians”, and, on the other hand, the reality of his era, linking the *democracy* with the Byzantine δῆμοι and their riots. In other words, the term *democracy* describes the Byzantines' impression about the “freedom” (or even the “chaos”) of the early Slavic society, fragmented into tribes and local leaders and without central authority, the rules and the discipline of

49. MALINGOUDIS, *Σλάβοι*, 42, 49-57. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 77-78.

50. SHLOSSER, *Sources*, 77.

51. See CURTA, *Ancient Democracy*, 21-22. IDEM, *Slavs*, 319-325. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 78-79.

52. M. NYSTAZOPOULOU-PELEKIDOU, *Σλαβικές εγκαταστάσεις στη Μεσαιωνική Ελλάδα. Γενική επισκόπηση* [Όψεις της βυζαντινής κοινωνίας 8 - Ίδρυμα Γουλανδρή-Χορν], Αθήνα 1993, 23.

53. WALDMÜLLER, *Begegnungen*, 26-27. WERNER, *Herkunft*, 579. ΜΑΛΙΓΚΟΥΔΗΣ, *Σλάβοι*, 46-47. NYSTAZOPOULOU-PELEKIDOU, *Σλαβικές εγκαταστάσεις*, 24. BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 49-50, 59. CURTA, *Ancient Democracy*, 19. IDEM, *Slavs*, 311. REVANOGLIOU, *Γεωγραφικά*, 220, 243. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Forging Unity*, 32, 46. MALINGOUDIS, *Σλάβοι*, 48. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 79.

a “normal” state<sup>54</sup>. The main feature of that *democracy* was an assembly, known as *věče*, equivalent to the Greek *ἀγορά* or the Latin *conventus* or in modern terms, a “parliament”. At this institution, part of the common law of the Slavs that prevented the concentration of power in one person, the important decisions were made. The institution of *věče* survived up to the establishment of the medieval kingdoms in the Slavic world<sup>55</sup>. A similar negative meaning of *democracy* has the word *anarchy* that Maurice uses for the early Slavs<sup>56</sup>.

Regarding the terminology of the Byzantine sources referring to the political and social organisation of the Slavs, Menander Protector mentions leaders (*ἄρχοντες* or *ἐν τέλει*) in the Antes and rulers/chiefs (*ἡγεμόνες*) in the *nation of the Sclaveni*, e.g. Daurentius/Dauretas, testimonies interpreted as formation of a chiefdom or a tribal union in the Sclaveni and the Antes<sup>57</sup>. Particularly the testimony on Daurentius is considered as indication for a *primus inter pares* among the Sclaveni who co-decided with the rest of the chieftains on peace or war within the context of the so-called *military democracy*<sup>58</sup>. Maurice uses in his *Στρατηγικὸν* the word *ῥῆγες* for the Slav leaders while Theophylactus Simokatta does not clarify the political or social organization of the Antes, whom he characterizes as *ἔθνος* (nation). However, making reference to the *nation of the Sclaveni*, Simokatta gives the names of certain chieftains (Ardagastus, Musocius

54. BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 54-55, 68-71. IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 220, n. 65. REVANOGLOU, *Γεωγραφικά*, 219.

55. BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 61, 63-64, 68. WALDMÜLLER, *Begegnungen*, 27. IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 220, n. 66. NYSTAZOPOULOU-PELEKIDOU, *Σλαβικές εγκαταστάσεις*, 24. MALINGOUDIS, *Ελληνισμός*, 174-175. IDEM, *Σλάβοι*, 48-49, 51, 56-57. KARDARAS, *Ἄντες*, 79-80.

56. T. LOUNGHIS, *Ιουστινιανός Πέτρος Σαββάτιος. Κοινωνία, πολιτική και ιδεολογία τον 6ο μ.Χ. αιώνα*, Thessaloniki 2005, 294. KARDARAS, *Ἄντες*, 81.

57. Menander, *History*, ed. R. C. BLOCKLEY, *The History of Menander the Guardsman* [ARCA: Classical and Medieval Texts 17], Liverpool 1985, fr. 5.3, 50: Ὅτι ἐπεὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες Ἀντῶν ἀθλίως διετέθησαν καὶ παρὰ τὴν σφῶν αὐτῶν ἐλπίδα ἐπεπτώκεσαν ... ibidem fr. 21, 194: ἔστειλε γὰρ ὡς αὐτὸν Δαυρέντιον καὶ τοὺς ὅσοι ἐν τέλει τοῦ ἔθνους ... Δαυρήτας δὲ καὶ οἳ γε ξὺν αὐτῷ ἡγεμόνες ... WALDMÜLLER, *Begegnungen*, 27-28. KAZANSKI, *L'armement Slave*, 211. CURTA, *Ancient Democracy*, 23. IDEM, *Slavs*, 47. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Forging Unity*, 48-49. MALINGOUDIS, *Σλάβοι*, 49.

58. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Forging Unity*, 47.



and Peiragastus), using titles such as ῥῆξ/*rex*, φύλαρχος/*chieftain* and ταξίαρχος/*brigadier*<sup>59</sup>. The references of the Byzantine authors to chieftains' names and their "titles" are likely a good indication of the social transformations among the Slavs during the second half of the sixth and, mostly, the seventh century<sup>60</sup>.

Procopius provides the first information on the religious beliefs of the Slavs. Probably under the influence of Antiquity, he presents the God of the sky/lightning as well as various demons. Certain scholars believe that Procopius had good information on the religion of the Slavs while others assume that the Byzantine author created a model according to the Greek pantheon and Zeus, namely another *Interpretatio Graeca* of his narrative model on the early Slavs. The God of lightning in Procopius' account is Perun, "the mythological personification of natural phenomenon that strikes the earth from heaven". A cult object was also the oak, symbol of Perun on earth. However, Perun seems not to have held the position of the highest God in a Slavic pantheon, similar to the Greek one<sup>61</sup>.

The early Slavs had a polytheistic religious system and their religion is considered as *animistic* (worship of natural forces, nymphai, demons etc.). On the other hand, they practiced sacrifices and divination. The Slavs personified their Gods and gave them forms related to nature and fertility. Mostly, they worshiped the sun which they considered the creator of life. Some wooden or stone figurines of deities known from the Middle Ages are associated with the cults of the Slavic deities, which met in sacred groves. The name of the most known deity (Perun), was not identical among all

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59. Maurice, *Strategikon*, XI, 4, 380. Theophylactus Simokattes, *History*, ed. C. DE BOOR, *Theophylacti Simocatae Historiae*, Leipzig 1887, I, 7, 52-53; VI, 7.1-5, 232-233; VI, 9.5-6, 237 (Ardagastus); ibidem VI, 9.1-6, 236-237 (Musocius); ibidem VII, 4.13, 252 and VII, 5.4, 253 (Peiragastus); CURTA, *Ancient Democracy*, 24-25. IDEM *Slavs*, 326-333. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Forging Unity*, 47-50. On the use of the title ῥῆξ/*rex* for the barbarian leaders see L. M. WHITBY, Theophylact's knowledge of languages, *Byz* 52 (1982), 425-428. BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 128.

60. BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 66-68. KAZANSKI, L'armement Slave, 211. CURTA, *Slavs*, 333. See also MALINGOUDIS, Σλάβοι, 49-51. KARDARAS, Άντες, 81-82.

61. BENEDICTY, Prokopios' Berichte, 55, 71-72. IVANOV - GINDIN - TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 221-222, n. 70-72, 75. BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 193-194. MALINGOUDIS, *Ελληνισμός*, 89-93. E. R. LUJÁN, Procopius, De bello Gothico III 38. 17-23: a description of ritual pagan Slavic slayings?, *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 11 (2008), 105-106. KARDARAS, Άντες, 62.

Slavs, but differed from region to region (e.g. Svedovid in the Baltic and Dabog for Southern Slavs). Many other deities were identified with the sky (Svarog), war (Jarovit and Rigevit), Spring (Vesna), health (Ziva) etc. The early Slavs also believed in fortune-telling and performed sacrifices<sup>62</sup>.

In some Slavic settlements north of the Lower Danube (e.g. in Moldova) decorated iron knives came to light, dating back to the eighth century, that were probably used for magic-religious purposes. In the same area (Hanska, Trebujeni, Dănceni) many clay anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figurines for cultic use were found, dating from the seventh to the tenth century, that have similarities with finds in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>63</sup>. Procopius' detailed account of the murder of the inhabitants of Topeiros, initially by impaling them on stakes, then with blows to the head with clubs and finally burning them along with their animals is seen as a reflection of the pagan rituals of the Slavs<sup>64</sup>.

The approach we attempted to Procopius' account provides an opportunity for some remarks on its credibility. As mentioned at the beginning, scholars dealing with Procopius, despite the notes on the *τόποι* of the ancient historiography or the *interpretationes Graecae*, accept as credible and authentic the *excursus* for the early Slavs. According to R. Benedicty, "the *τόποι* and the theories of ancient origin influenced the form and the style but not the context of the testimonies"<sup>65</sup>. In E. Revanoglou's view, "Digressions which contain all or at least the key elements of a classic description of nations are rare. The prime example of integrated ethnographic description by Procopius is that concerning the Sclaveni and

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62. See WALDMÜLLER, *Begegnungen*, 29. WERNER, *Herkunft*, 580. IVANOV – GINDIN – TSYMBURSKII, *Prokopii Kesariiskii*, 223, n. 76-80. T. CAPELLE, Zur Bedeutung slawischer Menschenförmiger Holzfiguren, *Folia Praehistorica Poznaniensia* 9 (1999), 219-229. BARFORD, *Early Slavs*, 193-199. REVANOGLU, *Γεωγραφικά*, 200-201, 243. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 62.

63. D. GH. TEODOR, Éléments slaves des VIe-VIIIe siècles ap. J.C. au nord du Bas Danube, in: *Trudy VI Mezhdunarodnogo Kongressa Slavianskoj Arkheologii, Novgorod. 26-31 Avgysta 1996/Works of the VIth International Congress of Slavic Archaeology, Novgorod. 26-31 August 1996*, ed. V. V. SEDOV (Moscow, 1997-1999), v. 3, 304-305. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 62-63.

64. LUJÁN, *Ritual*, 107-110. KARDARAS, *Άντες*, 63.

65. BENEDICTY, *Prokopios' Berichte*, 77. See also above, n. 2.

the Antes, which includes almost all the ethnographic features constituting the criteria for their difference from other peoples ... This digression is particularly significant as it contains the key elements of a classic description of a nation ... A study however of the digression concerning the Sclaveni and the Antes shows that apart from his personal experience, the historian was also able to use ethnographic commonplaces from ancient literature. Procopius' use though of these *τόποι* does not detract from the reliability of his information, which was probably gained primarily from his personal inspection and contact with these peoples"<sup>66</sup>.

From the approach of the *excursus*, we could raise some questions on the credibility of Procopius' testimonies and the purpose of his account. Noting first that details are missing from the account about the daily life or burial rites, or even if with the word *καλύβαι* (hovels) Procopius means the typical sunken huts of the early Slavs or other constructions, the main problems are the fragmentary information on some topics and, on the other hand, the presentation of the Slavs as almost similar to the steppe nomads. In the first category we could note the Slavic dwellings but mostly the art of war, as Procopius did not include in his *excursus* all the information he provides in the *Wars* on that issue. Furthermore, and it also applies to *Στρατηγικόν*, although the *excursus* of Maurice is more detailed and credible, there are certain differences between the Sclaveni and the Antes despite their common Slavic identity. The second problem seems even greater, as some phrases the author uses show a nomadic way of life not equivalent to the Slavic one. Such cases concern the rapid change of their settlement (*every man is constantly changing his place of abode*) and the examples of nomadic peoples (the *Huns* or the *Massagetae*), regarding the way of life and the morals of the Slavs. In addition, elements on the physical characteristics and the art of the war also apply to the Germanic peoples.

The impression given from the *excursus* is that it seems "isolated" from the rest of the *Wars*, it is more a kind of "general guide for the northern barbarians" than a pure *excursus* for the Slavs, with information often contradicting other fragments of the *Wars*. In Procopius' description we can also distinguish elements of oral tradition, such as the fact that the Sclaveni and the Antes were previously called *Sporoi*. Furthermore, the overall reliability of the excerpt

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66. REVANOGLOU, *Γεωγραφικά*, 224-225, 241, 244.

under discussion can be assessed through the accounts provided by Procopius' contemporary, Jordanes, in his work *Getica*, relating both to the origin of the early Slavs and to their way of life and political organization. Although we could not attribute to Procopius a deliberate misrepresentation of the reality, we draw the conclusion that, despite having direct contact with the early Slavs, he followed the literary tradition with many *τόποι* in order to present another barbarian people from the north, mixing information about the nomads or the Germanic peoples. In our opinion, Procopius' account affects the context of the testimonies and should be used with reservations, taking into consideration the aforementioned.

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Η ΕΘΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΗ ΔΙΗΓΗΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΠΡΟΚΟΠΙΟΥ ΓΙΑ ΤΟΥΣ ΠΡΩΙΜΟΥΣ ΣΛΑΒΟΥΣ.  
ΜΙΑ ΕΠΑΝΑΠΡΟΣΕΓΓΙΣΗ

Στο έργο του *Ἐπερ τῶν πολέμων*, ο βυζαντινός ιστοριογράφος Προκόπιος παραθέτει μία σύντομη εθνογραφική διήγηση για τους πρώιμους Σλάβους (Σκλαβηνούς και Άντες), η οποία είναι η πρώτη χρονικά ως προς αυτό το θέμα. Μισό αιώνα αργότερα, εμφανίζεται η δεύτερη, και διεξοδικότερη, στο *Στρατηγικόν* του Μαυρικίου. Αν και η γενικότερη αξιοπιστία του Προκόπιου ως ιστοριογράφου δεν αμφισβητείται, το συγκεκριμένο απόσπασμα εμφανίζει πλήθος κοινών τόπων και πληροφοριών οι οποίες σχετίζονται με την ευρύτερη φιλολογική-εθνογραφική παράδοση για τους βόρειους βαρβάρους. Ορισμένα από τα αναφερόμενα στοιχεία αφορούν στην πραγματικότητα νομαδικούς ή γερμανικούς λαούς, ενώ ο ίδιος ο Προκόπιος σε άλλα σημεία του έργου του παραθέτει συμπληρωματικές πληροφορίες, π.χ. για την πολεμική τέχνη των Σλάβων, οι οποίες απουσιάζουν από την εθνογραφική του διήγηση. Αν και ο Προκόπιος υπήρξε αυτόπτης μάρτυρας της παρουσίας των Σλάβων στον βυζαντινό στρατό, η εθνογραφική του διήγηση μάλλον δεν προσφέρει μία αυθεντική εικόνα γύρω από τους Σλάβους στα μέσα του 6ου αιώνα, καθώς προσάρμοσε τη σχετική με αυτούς περιγραφή στα παραδοσιακά εθνογραφικά πρότυπα για τους βόρειους βαρβάρους.

