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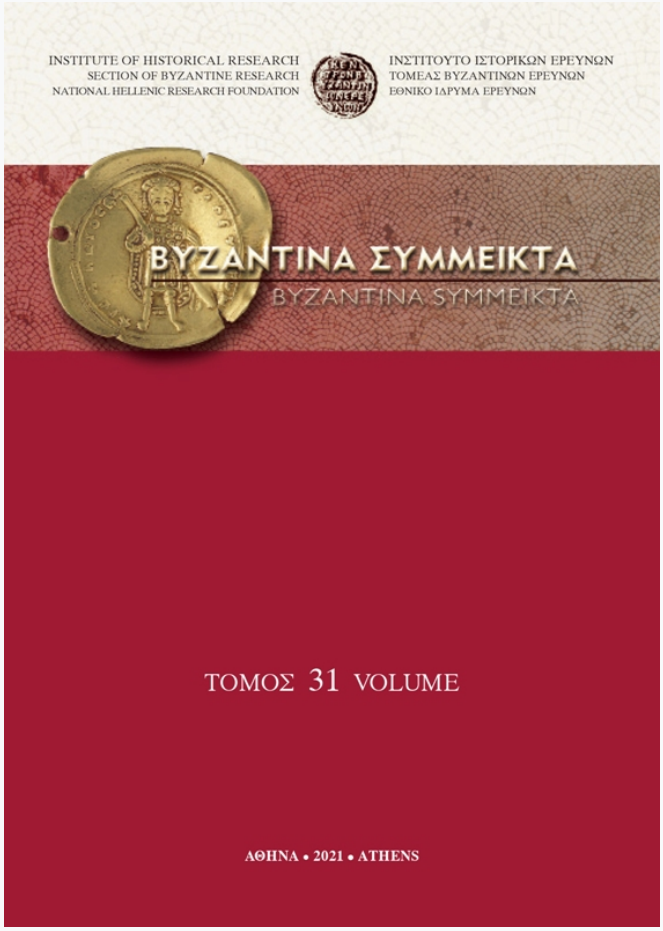

Turning Traitor: Shifting Loyalties in Procopius' Gothic Wars

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Turning Traitor: Shifting Loyalties in Procopius' *Gothic Wars*

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Christopher Lillington-Martin – Michael Edward Stewart

Turning Traitor: Shifting Loyalties in Procopius' *Gothic Wars*

In 548 CE, the East Roman garrison protecting Rome from the resurgent Goths murdered their commander, Konon, evidently because he had deprived them of their proper pay and provisions[1]. According to the sixth-century East Roman historian of these campaigns, Procopius, the soldiers then sent some priests as their envoys to the emperor Justinian in Constantinople with a warning that, if they were not exonerated for the murder and given all the back pay owed to them, they would switch sides to the Goths. Suggesting the desperate military situation faced by Justinian's forces in Italy at the time, Procopius records that Justinian complied to the soldiers' demands[2]. That soldiers' grievances against their commanding officers might escalate to homicide is not too shocking since we have other examples from antiquity of similar murders of commanding officers by troops when they were not paid or properly fed[3]. Blackmailing the emperor 850 miles away in Constantinople to forgive them for their "crime" and having him accept their offer was rarer. It contradicts typical modern portraits of Justinian as an inflexible

1. Although Procopius used the term "Byzantine" when referring to someone from the city of Constantinople, or at times "Greek", to describe the East Romans, the historian's preferred term was "Roman". We therefore employ "East Roman" and "Roman" to describe Justinian's soldiers.

2. Procopius, *Bella,* ed. J. Haury – G. Wirth, v. 1-2, Leipzig 1963 [hereafter cited as Procopius, *Wars*, ed. Haury – Wirth], 7.30.7-8, v. 2, 427. Cf. Procopius, *Wars,* ed. – transl. H. B. Dewing, LCL 81 (5 vols.) Cambridge Mass. 1914-1940.

3. A. D. Lee, Food Supply and Military Mutiny in the Late Roman Empire, *Journal of Late Antiquity* [hereafter: *JLA*] 12 (2019), 277-297.

and all-powerful despot[4]. Some modern readers might also find Procopius' ambivalence towards the Roman garrison's actions unexpected. Though it was a trademark of ancient historians to maintain neutrality and tell both sides of the story, by examining instances of desertion and treason in Books 5 to 8 in the *Wars*, this article proposes that such an even-handed posture reveals Procopius' generally benign opinion about soldiers who deserted. This forgiving attitude stood in stark contrast to the harsh penalties in the Roman law provisions concerning soldiers who deserted to the enemy[5]. When discussing military loyalties, Procopius recognised that soldiers would naturally switch sides if the expected rewards were provided by the enemy, or, in certain circumstances, if the opponent's commander was a charismatic and/or fair leader like the Goth Totila or the Roman Belisarius.

As Shane Bjornlie has recently observed, "Procopius' history is replete with episodes in which Goths, Italians and eastern imperial representatives change allegiance during the course of the war"[6]. Moreover, parties on both sides could desert to one side and then desert back to the other side. Procopius describes an episode where a young East Roman soldier Martinianos feigns desertion to the Goths. Earning the trust of the Gothic king Totila, Martinianos then convinces fifteen former Roman deserters to join a plot to betray the key Gothic town of Spoleto to the Romans. The plot succeeds, and the deserters re-joined Belisarius' army[7].

This is not to say that Procopius always perceived desertions by Roman soldiers as honourable. At the close of the *Wars* (8.33. 10-12), Procopius describes how a detachment of the Roman army is sent to capture a Gothic garrison at Perugia commanded by two Roman deserters, Meligedios

4. For negative assessments of Justinian, see T. Honoré, *Tribonian,* London, 1978, 28-30; P. Heather, *Rome Resurgent: War and Empire in the Age of Justinian,* Oxford 2018, 203. For Justinian's more conciliatory side, see D. Parnell, Justinian's Clemency and God's Clemency, *ΒυζΣύμμ* 30 (2020), 11-30.

5. On the recommendation of the death penalty for acts of treason and/or desertion in the Justinianic law codes, see A. Paolo, Treason and Crimes against the Emperor and State in the Byzantine Juridical Compilations, *Teoria e storia del diritto privato* 8 (2015), 1-27, here 8-9.

6. M.S. Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition Between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople: A Study of Cassiodorus and the Variae, 527-554*, Cambridge 2013, 148.

7. Procopius, *Wars*, 7.23.1-7, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 399-400.

and Ulifus. According to Procopius, when Ulifus had deserted he had "treacherously" murdered his commander, Kyprianos. On the one hand, when the Romans arrived at Perugia, Ulifus refused to surrender, which leads to his death in the subsequent battle–Procopius then tellingly declares that Ulifus' demise was a direct "retribution from god" (*τίσις ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ δηλονότι περιπεσοῦσα*)[8]. On the other hand, Meligedios –who, Procopius explains had originally wanted to deliver the fortress to the Romans– and was forced to fight against his will, ends up surrendering honourably, and was likely reintegrated back into Narses' army.

We might then ask what can these and other examples of "traitorous" behaviours and such desertions by both sides tell us about dissent in the age of Justinian[9]? In this article we submit that these and other acts of dissidence by soldiers suggest that units of Justinian's army –at least during the western wars– had some level of freedom of speech and action that sometimes allowed them to dictate terms to either their commander or to the central government in Constantinople. So too may Gothic resistance, in Italy, be interpreted as an act of nonconformity by a polity and/or individuals who rejected imperial visions of them as barbarian others, with no rightful claim over Italy. In addition, this article seeks to demonstrate the necessity of appreciating Procopius' literary aims, which are often just as critical to understand as his historical purpose. So, rather than use Procopius' writing largely as a "database" for the investigation, as much previous scholarship on the issue of desertions and treason in the Gothic war has done, this paper seeks to demonstrate how Procopius deploys his many vignettes on these topics as a literary tool by which to serve his larger didactic purpose[10].

Finally, one must differentiate between large scale mutinies and coups, such as the ones that afflicted Justinian's army in North Africa in the 530s and 540s (involving upwards of 8,000 soldiers) with the smaller scale defections or threatened desertions (like that of the East Roman garrisons in Italy) of individual soldiers and units that plagued the imperial and Gothic

8. Procopius, *Wars,* 8.33. 10-11, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 663.

9. Procopius' preferred term for "betrayal or treason" was the Greek word *προδοσία* and for a "betrayer" or "traitor" the Greek noun *προδότης*. The historian's preferred term for a "deserter" was *αὐτόμολος*.

10. See, e.g., P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554*, Cambridge 1997; Heather, *Rome Resurgent*, 2018.

armies throughout the two decades of Justinian's struggle to eradicate Gothic resistance in Italy[11]. Procopius details the Roman high-command's rivalries and near constant bickering throughout the 540s, as well as Belisarius' frustration with what Procopius describes as a lack of support from the central government in Constantinople (without any allowance for the effects of the plague from 542)[12]. However, there was never a large-scale rebellion in mainland Italy, as there had been in Africa at Easter 536, which led to an uprising in Sicily that Spring[13].

11. For the differing political aims of the rebels in North Africa, see J. Conant, *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439-700*, Cambridge 2012, 216, who contends reasonably that Stotzas in 536 and the former *Dux Numidiae*, Gontharis in 545, had each hoped to claim the imperial title. A. Merrills, Contested Identities in Byzantine North Africa: in *The Routledge Handbook of Identity in Byzantium*, ed. D. Parnell – M. E. Stewart – C. Whately, London & New York (forthcoming), however, suggests that in the case of Stozas, "his aspirations may have been more local".

12.The 540s had seen deadly waves of a variant of bubonic plague [*Yersinia pestis*] devastate every corner of the empire–Justinian, in fact, had nearly succumbed to the sickness during the first and most virulent wave in 542. K. Harper (*The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of Empire,* Princeton 2017) posits that the plague led to the East Roman population declining by as much as half. See, however, the caveats in K. Sessa, The New Environmental Fall of Rome: A Methodological Consideration, *JLA* 12 (2019), 211-255, here 235-236. Cf. L. Mordechai – M. Eisenberg, Rejecting Catastrophe: The Case of the Justinianic Plague, *Past and Present* 244 (2019), 3-50.

13. For the web of social networks amongst Justinian's officer corps, see D. A. Parnell, *Justinian's Men. Careers and Relationships of Byzantine Army Officers, 518-610*, New York 2017. On Justinian's relationship with the military, see C. Koehn, *Justinian und die Armee des frühen Byzanz,* Berlin, 2018. On Justinian's reign more generally see J. Moorhead, *Justinian*, London 1994; M. Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians. Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewaltigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Ch.,* Goettingen 2003; O. Mazal, *Justinian I. und seine Zeit. Geschichte und Kultur des byzantinischen Reiches im 6. Jahrhundert*, Köln – Weimar – Wien 2001; T. C. Lounghis, *Ιουστινιανός Πέτρος Σαββάτιος*, Thessalonica 2005.

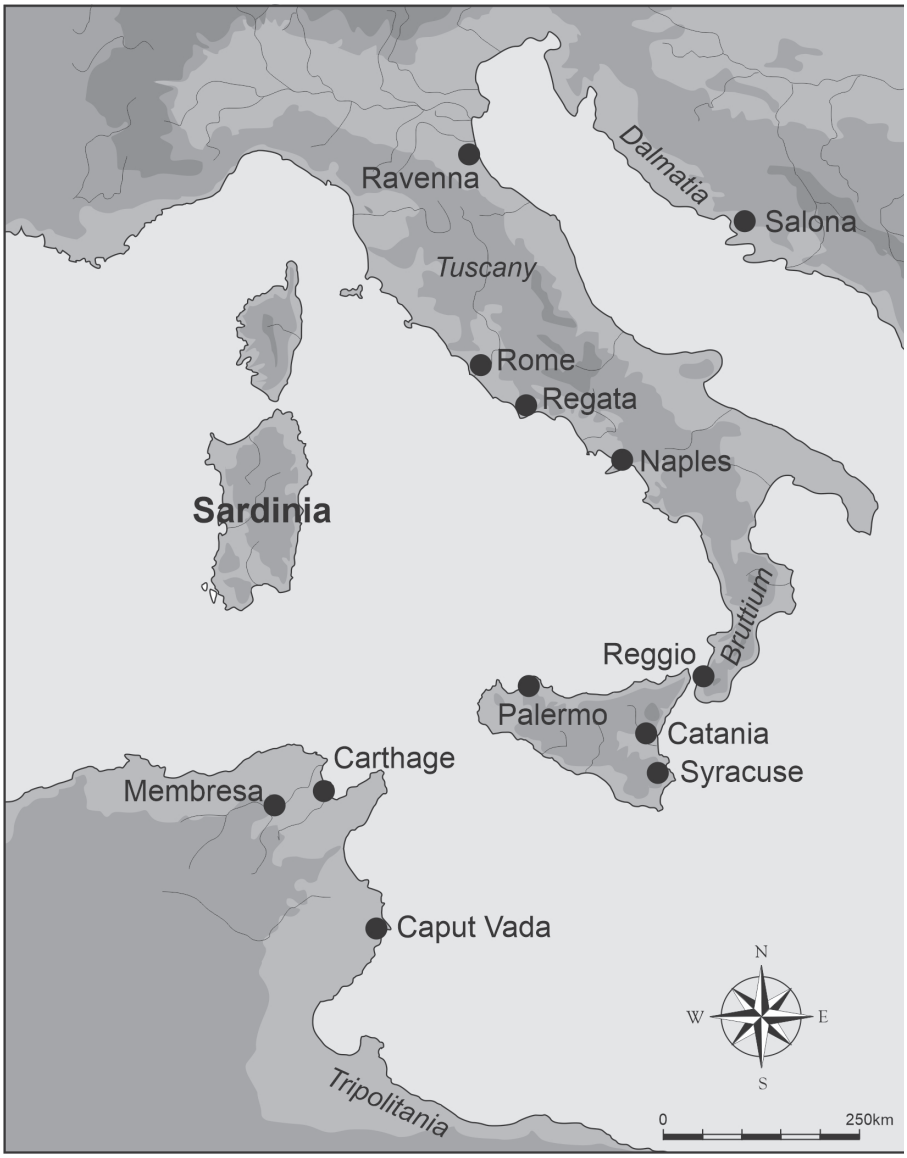

Figure 1. Principal cities and areas discussed (©Lillington-Martin).

TO THE VICTOR THE SPOILS

Momentum is key to any military campaign's success and it was clearly on the imperial army's side when it landed in southern Italy in mid-536. Belisarius was fresh from a series of spectacular victories against the Vandals in North Africa in 533-4 and over the Goths in Sicily in 535, when he arrived to mainland Italy, so it must have seemed to many native Italians, in a politically divided Ostrogothic Italy, that the total collapse of Gothic rule was at hand. Hence, it is not surprising that in the early days of the Italian campaign, Procopius and other contemporary sources record numerous instances whereby those considered Italians or Romans and those labelled Goths chose to join Belisarius' army rather than stand and fight[14]. Part of the reason for the ease with which a Goth might desert to the Romans and vice versa was the relative social commonalities between the two sides. As Guy Halsall remarks, "The similarities between the armies certainly facilitated the changing of sides. Soldiers in the opposing forces could be barely distinguishable from each other"[15]. That might be an exaggeration, given the distinct fighting styles of spear-armed Gothic cavalry and bow-armed Roman cavalry, but they had a great deal in common regarding most equipment. Indeed, these defections by both sides have attracted a great deal of attention from recent scholars, especially those interested in questions of identity concerning those within Justinian's heterogeneous army and those described by contemporary sources like Procopius as Italians/Romans and Goths/barbarians[16]. Though it is vital to consider the ways the *Wars* provides a simplified binarism of an Ostrogothic Italy divided neatly into Gothic and Italian sides, Procopius, who accompanied Belisarius' army during the early years of the war and witnessed many of the events he describes, offers an

14. For Belisarius' thrust into Italy and Theodahad's failed attempts to counter, see M. Vitiello, *Theodahad, A Platonic King at the Collapse of Ostrogothic Italy*, Toronto 2014, 148-155; for a more positive assessment of Theodahad's response, C. Lillington-Martin, Is the charge that "Theodahad did nothing" to defend Gothic Italy a fair assessment of the military campaigns of 535-6?, Unpublished MSt dissertation. Univ. of Oxford 2012: www.academia.edu/1786911/Theodahad_King_of_the_Goths_and_Italians_534 536._Ac_Edu.

15. G. Halsall, The Ostrogothic Military: in *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, ed. J. Arnold – M. S. Bjornlie – K. Sessa, Leiden 2016, 173-199, here, 193.

16. Amory, *People and Identity*; Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition*; Halsall, Ostrogothic Military.

unquestionably rich source with which to investigate instances of desertion and treason during the two-decade long war[17].

During the first six months of Belisarius' Italian campaign, however, defections were largely one-way traffic with Italians and Goths fleeing in droves to the East Romans. When Belisarius had swiftly conquered Sicily in 535[18], Procopius records (*Wars* 5.5. 12-17) that the imperial army took Catania, Syracuse and the other cities by surrender and was only resisted briefly by a Gothic garrison in Palermo, which suggests that Theodahad had ordered minimal defensive preparations such as garrisons, given that Gothic population settlements were concentrated north of Rome[19]. This conquest culminated in a rapturous reception from the native Sicilians at Syracuse in late December, upon Belisarius' "triumph" in Syracuse (31st December 535), but this may have been induced by his "throwing golden coins to all" *καὶ νόμισμα χρυσοῦ ῥίπτων ἅπασιν* (*Wars* 5.5. 18-19). Marcellinus follows Procopius and only Jordanes names a Gothic commander, Sinderith[20].

Nevertheless, the Goths on the Italian mainland had not given up hope. Seeking to thwart Belisarius' expected landing of his army on the Italian peninsula in Bruttium, at the Straits of Messina, the king of the Goths and Italians, Theodahad (r. 534-536), had sent his son-in-law Ebremud/ Ebrimuth with an army of an unspecified size. The date this army arrived in Bruttium is uncertain. A letter from Cassiodorus (*Variae* 12.5.3) indicates that a Gothic army (probably Ebremud's) had been in the area for some time, annoying the locals by ravaging their lands for supplies; recent

17. For Procopius' service and duties under Belisarius, see now C. Lillington-Martin, Procopius, πάρεδρος / quaestor, Codex Justinianus, I.27 and Belisarius' strategy in the Mediterranean: in: C. Lillington-Martin – E. Turquois, *Procopius of Caesarea: Literary and Historical Interpretations*, London 2018, 157-185.

18. For the Italians' attitudes towards the Goths and the East Romans, see M.E. Stewart, The Danger of the Soft Life: Manly and Unmanly Romans in Procopius's *Gothic War*, *JLA* 10.2 (2017), 473-502.

19. P. Heather, *The Goths,* Oxford 1998, 238, Fig. 8.1. Cf. G. P. Brogiolo, Dwelling and Settlements in Gothic Italy: in *The Ostrogoths. From the migration period to the sixth century. An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. S. J. Barnish – F. Marazzi, Woodbridge – UK, Rochester – USA 2007, 113-133.

20. Jordanes, *Getica* 60.308, *Romana* 369, ed. Th. M. Mommsen, *MGH*, AA, 5/1, Berlin 1882 [repr. 1961]; Marcellinus, *Chron.* s.a. 535, ed., trans. & comm. B. Croke [ByzAus7], Sydney 1995.

scholarship links this poor behaviour with the unwillingness of the locals to resist Belisarius' invasion[21]. The Gothic troops were not much better at resistance. Rather than contesting Belisarius' landing, shortly after the East Roman forces set their first feet on shore, Ebremud surrendered, apparently cowed by the might of Belisarius' army, thus setting an example of treachery. A contemporary of Procopius, Jordanes, provides the best details of the betrayal, recording *Nec mora deterioratam causam cernens suorum ad partes victoris paucis et fidelissimis famulis consciis movit, ultroque se Belesarii pedes advolvens Romani regni optat servire principibus.* ("He (Ebremud) soon saw that his side was the weaker. Coming over with a few close and faithful followers to the side of the victor and willingly casting himself at the feet of Belisarius, he decided to serve the rulers of the Roman Empire")[22]. Procopius reports that once the Goth surrendered, he accepted a move to Constantinople, whereupon Justinian granted him the rank of patrician and rewarded him with gifts and money[23]. This last detail should raise our suspicions that the East Romans had had Ebremud's ear for some time prior to the landing–all the more likely since his father-in-law Theodahad had spent much of 535 and early 536 negotiating a peaceful transition of power. According to Procopius, once Sicily fell to Belisarius, Theodahad wanted to accept Justinian's offer to abdicate and cede his kingdom to Justinian and afterwards bask in a luxurious retirement in Constantinople[24]. However, before a diplomatic agreement could be reached, two events intervened that, at least in the short term, turned the tables to the Goths' favour. In late 535 or early 536 the Goths earned a hard-fought victory over an army sent by Justinian to Dalmatia and killed its commander Mundus (*Wars* 5.7). This victory was followed by Stotzas' rebellion in North Africa just before Easter 536, which forced Belisarius to leave Sicily and rush to Carthage to suppress the mutiny, for which Procopius offers three main causes[25].

21. Vitiello, *Theodahad*, 149.

22. Jordanes, *Getica* 60.30-9 (trans. Mierow, 100).

23. Procopius, *Wars*, 5.8. 1-3, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 39. Cf. Marcellinus, *Chron* s.a. 536, where the author describes Ebremud's deserting and then fleeing to Belisarius in Sicily.

24. For Justinian's similar offer to Amalasuintha to abdicate in his favour, see M. Vitiello, *Amalasuintha: The Transformation of Queenship in the Post-Roman World*, Philadelphia 2017.

25. 1. Some Roman "soldiers" demand to retain land which had belonged to their Arian

Belisarius' departure, in turn, led to an uprising amongst the imperial army in Sicily[26], which provided Theodahad with a window of opportunity to steel his nerves, regroup and prepare his defences to resist the impending invasion[27].

It is possible that Theodahad provoked the Roman mutiny in Sicily, when Belisarius was dealing with the one in Carthage, partly because Procopius, the only source to mention it, is entirely silent about the reasons for its occurrence, even though he offers three reasons to explain the North African mutiny. Even though Procopius naturally knew more about the African mutiny, since he was present in Carthage, he could easily have ascertained and provided reasons for the cause of the Sicilian mutiny. The porosity of Mediterranean lines of communication means it must have been at least feasible for Theodahad to have directed agents in the area. He will have heard, from 534 onwards, possibly through Arian priests, of the Arian grievances, and may possibly have incited Arians in Africa from at least 535 when motivated by Belisarius' invasion of Sicily. Had Belisarius been less successful at Membresa, or on his return to Sicily (Procopius is also silent about how Belisarius quelled the mutiny there), the invasion of Italy would have been further delayed, if not postponed. If we were to conclude that the reasons Procopius provides for the African mutiny are sufficient without any involvement from Theodahad, we can equally suspect that, by not providing any explanation for the Sicilian mutiny, Procopius may have avoided recording inconvenient truths. Even if Theodahad played no role in the insurrection in Sicily, what we do know is that these mutinies gave him more time to prepare his defence of mainland Italy.

Despite Theodahad's volte-face, his close relatives like Ebremud probably knew of the Gothic king's earlier plan to cede Italy to Justinian,

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Vandal wives (*Wars,* 4.3.24, 4.3, 14. 8-10 and 15.47). 2. Justinian's discriminatory religious policy against the 1,000 "Arian" soldiers in his army (*Wars,* 4.14. 15, 4.15. 17-20). 3. 400 Arian Vandal prisoners of war, who had been assigned to cavalry squadrons, mutinied en route from Constantinople, at Lesbos. On arrival, they emboldened the Roman mutineers in Carthage (*Wars* 4.15. 17-20).

26. Procopius, *Wars*, 4.15. 48-49, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 1, 495.

27. Procopius, *Wars,* 4. 14-15, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 1, 482-496; Jordanes, *Romana* 369–370; Marcellinus, *Chron.* s.a. 535.

and therefore they may have been working on an escape plan for themselves[28]. Hence, it is possible that Ebremud and his inner-circle's desertion was not as impulsive an act as the East Roman sources would want us to believe, but rather the result of on-going negotiations. Whatever the truth of the matter, it could not have helped Theodahad's cause. Jordanes (*Getica* 60.309) indeed claims that Ebremud's desertion raised the suspicions of the jittery Gothic elites, who may well have heard of Theodahad's earlier negotiations with Justinian.

Procopius also describes the propensity for the "locals" in southern Italy to allow Belisarius' army to establish an Italian foothold unhindered. Procopius indicates that the natives' reluctance to resist stemmed from two primary factors: first, the towns since ancient times lacked walls and thus were indefensible, and, second, because of what Procopius describes as their natural hostility toward the Goths, and their particular dissatisfaction with the current regime[29].

FIRST SIEGE OF NAPLES

With Sicily and southern Italy largely pacified, Belisarius and his army and navy then slowly advanced on Naples[30]. At the well-fortified Naples, for the first time since arriving to Italy, the imperial forces ran into some stubborn resistance from both the Neapolitans and a significant detachment of Gothic soldiers. On learning of Ebremud's desertion, Theodahad's next order to defend Italy had been to garrison Naples. As with his first line of defence with the Roman senate, Procopius indicates that Theodahad discouraged the Gothic troops from ideas of defection by holding their families hostage[31]. Making such a claim against Theodahad may have furthered Procopius' literary purpose by implying a degree of desperation in his orders and a faltering will to resist by Gothic armed forces. That this is likely, is supported by his subsequent report that the Gothic garrison

28. Amory, *People and Identity*, 373.

29. Procopius, *Wars,* 5.8.1-3, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 39.

30. For the possibility that the imperial army may have been slowed down by limited cooperation from Italians, concerned for their own sustenance, which created more time for Theodahad to prepare for the defence of Naples, see C. Lillington-Martin, Is the charge... [as in n. 14].

31. Procopius, *Wars,* 5.8.8, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 40.

"was" ready to allow Belisarius to enter the city if the Neapolitans decided so, which would then mean that they were seemingly forgetting the fate of their wives and children in the hands of Theodahad[32]. Even if true, this measure by Theodahad may not be as drastic as Procopius tries to make it. Judging by the rest of Procopius' history, it was common practice for both the Goths and the East Romans to hold soldiers' and civilians' relatives hostage as a means to ensure loyalty, or at least cooperation[33]. Moreover, Procopius paints a picture of a feeble and servile native Italian population torn between loyalty to their "fellow" Romans from Constantinople and their present "masters" the Goths[34], often forming garrisons, especially south of Rome. When Procopius crafts a series of paired speeches amongst the Neapolitan aristocrats and between Belisarius and a Neapolitan envoy, Stephanus, he relies heavily on rhetorical notions of freedom, identity, and the links between loyalty, desertion, and treason. Belisarius opens by offering a carrot in his first speech to Stephanus, given before hostilities open. He promises the Neapolitans financial rewards as well as their freedom. To prove his noble intentions, Belisarius relates the happiness of the Sicilians, *οἷς δηλαδὴ τετύχηκεν ἔναγχος βαρβάρων τυράννων τὴν Ἰουστινιανοῦ βασιλείαν ἀλλαξαμένοις, ἐλευθέροις τε εἶναι καὶ ἀπαθέσι δυσκόλων ἁπάντων* ("who had exchanged their barbarian tyrants for the imperial authority of Justinian, and as a result were not only free but untroubled by any difficulty")[35]. Procopius explains that Stephanus and the majority of the delegation were then prepared to accept Belisarius' offer, but when they returned to the city, two Neapolitan nobles, Pastor and Alclepiodotus, objected and demanded to address the people before any final decision was made (*Wars* 5.8. 29-40). Themes of loyalty, betrayal, and desertion again

32. Procopius, *Wars,* 5.8.28, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 43. This reference is from M. Cristini (Pers. Comms).

33. See, e.g., Procopius, *Wars*, 5.26.1-3, 7.23.1-7, 8.34.7 and 8.34.9-14, ed. Haury –Wirth, v.2, 127-128, 399-400, 667, 668.

34. Stewart, Danger of the Soft Life, 491-492.

35. Similar sentiments are found in Agathias, *Histories*, preface, 1-18, ed. R. Keydell, *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum libri Quinque* [CFHB 2], Berlin 1967, 30; John Lydus, *De mag.* 3.55. Procopius inverts this topos in his unpublished *Secret History,* 6.24-25, 18.30, ed. Haury – Wirth, *Procopius Historia Arcana*, Leipzig 1963, 42, 116-117 [=ed. trans. H.B. Dewing (LCL 290), Cambridge Mass. 1935].

take centre stage. Before a packed house of Goths and Neapolitans, the two polished orators berated Stephanus' faction for their eagerness to "betray [*καταπροδιδόναι*]" Naples to Belisarius. They then warn the audience of poor consequences whether the Goths or Belisarius emerged victorious: *ἢν γὰρ τῷ πολέμῳ Γότθοι τῶν δυσμενῶν περιέσονται, ὡς πολεμίους ὑμᾶς καὶ τὰ δεινότατα σφᾶς αὐτοὺς εἰργασμένους κολάσουσιν. οὐ γὰρ ἀνάγκῃ βιαζόμενοι, ἀλλὰ γνώμῃ ἐθελοκακοῦντες ἐς τὴν προδοσίαν καθίστασθε. ὥστε καὶ Βελισαρίῳ κρατήσαντι τῶν πολεμίων ἴσως ἄπιστοί τε φανούμεθα καὶ τῶν ἡγουμένων προδόται, καὶ ἅτε δραπέται γεγενημένοι, ἐς πάντα τὸν αἰῶνα φρουρὰν πρὸς βασιλέως κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἕξομεν.*

("If the Goths defeat their adversaries in war, they will punish you as enemies who did them the vilest wrong. For you are committing treason, not from necessity, but out of deliberate cowardice. So that even to Belisarius, if he overcomes his enemies, we will appear faithless and as betrayers of our rulers, having shown ourselves runaways, we will in all likelihood have a garrison set over us permanently by the emperor")[36].

Because of this— and other arguments based on similar appeals to the Neapolitans' debt of loyalty to the Goths, as well as the sentiment that Belisarius should not be attacking them, but rather Theodahad in Rome— the Neapolitans chose to join the Goths in resisting Belisarius' siege. Protected on one side by the sea, on the other by rough terrain, and the other points by Naples' mighty walls, at first the defenders easily beat back several attacks by the East Roman army, which leads to Belisarius losing many of his finest fighters. However, events shift dramatically back to Belisarius' favour, when an Isaurian soldier in the Roman army stumbles upon a secret entrance into the city via the aqueduct, which Belisarius' men had cut earlier in the siege.

Preparing to launch his clandestine assault, Belisarius offers Stephanus one final chance to surrender Naples. This time Belisarius uses stick rather than carrot, warning Stephanus that their shared Roman and Christian identity would do the Neapolitans little good if the imperial army took the city by storm. The warning Procopius has Belisarius recite is ominous: *πόλιν δὲ ἀρχαίαν καὶ οἰκήτορας Χριστιανούς τε καὶ Ῥωμαίους ἄνωθεν ἔχουσαν ἐς τοῦτο τύχης οὐκ ἂν εὐξαίμην, ἄλλως τε καὶ ὑπ᾽ ἐμοῦ Ῥωμαίων στρατηγοῦντος, ἐλθεῖν, μάλιστα ἐπεὶ βάρβαροι πολλοί μοι τὸ πλῆθος ἐν*

36. Procopius, *Wars* 5.8. 34-35, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 44 (Stewart trans.).

τῷ στρατοπέδῳ εἰσίν, ἀδελφοὺς ἢ ξυγγενεῖς πρὸ τοῦδε ἀπολωλεκότες τοῦ τείχους: ὧν δὴ κατέχειν τὸν θυμόν, ἢν πολέμῳ τὴν πόλιν ἕλωσιν, οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην.

("I pray that an ancient city, which for ages has been inhabited by Christians and Romans, may not meet with such a fate, especially while I am commanding the Roman army, not least because my army contains many barbarians who have lost brothers or relatives before the wall of this city. I will be unable to restrain their wrath if they take the city in war")[37] Devastated, Stephanus returns to Naples and relates Belisarius' threat; however, as Procopius records: *οἱ δὲ (οὐδὲ γὰρ <χρ>ῆν Νεαπολίτας ἀθῴους βασιλεῖ κατηκόους γενέσθαι) οὔτε ἔδεισάν τι οὔτε Βελισαρίῳ προσχωρεῖν ἔγνωσαν* ("But it was not fated that the Neapolitans become subject of the emperor scot-free, so they neither feared nor decided to yield to Belisarius")[38]. Sneaking into the unsuspecting city via the aqueduct well on in the night, the East Romans caught the city's defenders unaware shortly before dawn, and what followed –as many contemporary sources tell us– was a horrific slaughter of Gothic soldiers and both armed and unarmed civilians–whom Jordanes describes coldly as the *Romanis rebellantibus* ("Roman rebels")[39].

Even though he was there, we should not accept uncritically everything that Procopius tells us, though he probably did not stray too far from the basic truth. His highly literary speeches likely record far less accurately the actual negotiations between Belisarius, the Neapolitans, and the Goths, or relate the actual attitudes of either side towards Justinian's ideological claims to sovereignty. So too might Procopius' further detail concerning

37. Procopius, *Wars,* 5.9. 27, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 49 (Stewart trans.).

38. Procopius, *Wars,* 5.9. 30, ed. Haury –Wirth, v. 2, 50 (trans. in *Prokopios, The wars of Justinian*, transl. by H. B. Dewing. Revised and modernized by A. Kaldellis, Indianapolis 2014, 274).

39. Jordanes, *Romana* 370, ed. Th. M. Mommsen, MGH, AA, 5/1, Berlin 1882 [repr. 1961). This carnage is corroborated by *Liber Pontificalis*, *Vita Severius* 61.4: [...] *interfecit et Gothos et omnes cives Neapolitano*; Marcellinus, *Chron.* s.a. 536.3. Procopius (*Wars* 5.10. 30-7, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 55-56) on the, otherhand, downplays the carnage somewhat, on which see G. Del Mastro, Belisarius' repopulation of Neapolis: Troccla in Landolfus Sagax' Roman History, Naples: in *Apolline Project Vol 1: Studies on Vesuvius' North Slope & the Bay of Naples*, ed. G. De Simone – R. Macfarlane, Naples 2009, 254-262.

the native Jewish population within Naples and its enthusiastic support of the Gothic cause, provoke our suspicions that we are being manipulated by Procopius to see the opposition in Naples as something other than "Roman"[40]. Or, as he differentiates Jews from "barbarians," perhaps he is subtly critiquing Justinian's policy of persecution against religious minorities[41]. Justinian unquestionably enacted harsh measures against his Jewish population, whereas the Gothic sovereigns generally protected their Jewish communities[42]. As we will discuss in further detail below, the issues raised in these speeches concerning the complex web of identities and loyalties amongst the citizens of Naples in 536 prepares the reader for a further debate of these questions of identity and loyalty later in *Wars*, when Totila and the Goths turn the tables on the East Romans and besiege and then retake Naples seven years later.

Whatever the true circumstances of local resistance, this catastrophe proved to be the final straw for the Gothic "hardliners" within the army, who at Regata elected a new king, the *dux* [general] Vitigis,[43] who had served previously as Theodahad's *spatharius* [head bodyguard] and had been spearheading Gothic resistance to Belisarius' advance, while Theodahad remained safely behind the walls of Rome.

One could argue that Theodahad's instinct to defend Rome was correct but, with the fall of Naples, he had lost the confidence of the Gothic warriors. He behaved like an emperor, sending his armies to do battle, but his troops wanted a traditional warrior king to lead them. Massimiliano Vitiello supposes that some physical impairment had prevented Theodahad from the "prerequisite" Gothic military education[44]. It seems more plausible that, as their hold on Italy grew more secure, a distinct minority of Gothic

40. Procopius *Wars,* 5.8. 41, 5.10. 24-26, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 45, 53-54.

41. E.g., Procopius, *Secret History*, 11. 14-30,13. 7-8, 18. 34-35, ed. Haury –Wirth, 72-75.

42. For the tolerant attitudes of the Goths to minority religious groups in Italy, see Arnold, *Roman Imperial Restoration,* 73. And for Justinian's harsh measures towards the Jews, Bjornlije, *Politics and Tradition*, 70.

43. Vitigis *PLRE* III: 1382-1386 [Vitigis]. Vitigis had earned his military reputation with an important victory over a combined Gepid and Herul army in 530 rather than in 504-505, as Procopius suggests in *Wars* 5.11.5, on which see H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. T. Dunlap, Berkeley 1988, 340-341.

44. Vitiello, *Theodahad,* 27-29.

elites would have willingly abstained from military training. So too since the days of Theoderic, as part of their polyphonic ideology, the Gothic kings had draped themselves in Roman imperial virtues. As John Moorhead once commented, "The Romans could have been forgiven for seeing in Theoderic an emperor"[45]. Jonathan Arnold has recently gone further, stressing that Eastern sources served an imperial agenda by painting Theoderic "as a savage and heretical king". Even Procopius' sympathetic portrait (*Wars* 5.1. 26-29), which recognised Theoderic's civilised imperial qualities, still needed to depict him "as a sub-Roman ruler who had technically been a tyrant". (*Λόγῳ μὲν τύραννος, ἔργῳ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἀληθής*). In his intriguing –yet controversial– interpretation, Arnold insists that from a Western perspective Theoderic "was a *princeps Romanus*, or Roman emperor, acknowledged as such by his own subjects and presented as such, though in a deferential and conciliatory manner to those in the East"[46]. How sincerely the Italo-Romans accepted such imperial rhetoric on behalf of the Goths is open to debate[47]. Yet, it is clear that Theodahad was defined by contemporary sources as someone who desired to rule like a civilised Roman emperor, but who failed to display the martial qualities expected from a Gothic king[48].

BETRAYALS

Upon hearing the news of the coup, Theodahad had escaped Rome with a small cadre of loyal followers, perhaps hoping to finally accept Justinian's offer and flee to Constantinople[49]. However, Optaris, a Goth bearing a grudge against Theodahad, caught and executed Theodahad a few miles short of Ravenna. Meanwhile, Vitigis had retreated to the safety of Rome[50].

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45. Moorhead, *Justinian*, 188.

46. J. Arnold, *Theoderic and the Roman Imperial Restoration,* Cambridge 2014, 72, 90.

47. This thorny question is addressed by M. Devecka, White Elephant Gifts: Classicism in Ostrogothic Policy and in *Variae* 10.3, *JLA* 9.1 (2016), 195-217.

48. M.E. Stewart, Contests of *Andreia* in Procopius' *Gothic Wars*, *Παρεκβολαὶ* 4, 21–54, here, 26-35.

49. Vitiello, *Theodahad*, 155, makes the plausible, yet unsubstantiated suggestion, that Justinian's legates, Peter and Athanasius –whom Theodahad had had arrested in the previous summer– were in his party as well.

50. Procopius, *Wars,* 5.11. 10-11, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 60, Jordanes, *Getica,* 310, *Romana,* 372, Marcellinus, *Chron.,* s.a. 536.

Procopius' account of Vitigis' short sojourn in Rome centres on the Gothic king's vain appeal for those in the city to remain loyal to the Gothic cause: *μετὰ δὲ Σιλβερίῳ τε τῷ τῆς πόλεως ἱερεῖ καὶ Ῥωμαίων τοῖς τε ἐκ βουλῆς καὶ τῷ δήμῳ πολλὰ παραινέσας Οὐίττιγις, καὶ τῆς Θευδερίχου ἀρχῆς ὑπομνήσας, ἐνεκελεύετο ἅπασιν ἐς Γότθων τὸ ἔθνος εὐνοϊκῶς ἔχειν, ὅρκοις αὐτοὺς δεινοτάτοις ὑπὲρ τούτων καταλαβών, ἄνδρας τε ἀπολέξας.* ("After this Vitigis exhorted at length Pope Silverius (536-537) the senate and the people of the Romans, reminding them of the rule of Theoderic, and he urged them all to be loyal to the nation of Goths, binding them by the most solemn oaths to do so")[51]. Vitigis then selected a garrison of four thousand to stay behind to protect Rome. Shortly after giving this speech –with a large number of aristocratic Italo-Roman hostages in tow– Vitigis abandoned Rome for Ravenna, where he began rallying a segment of the Gothic nobility that was viscerally opposed to the rule of Italy from Constantinople. Nothing went according to plan for the Gothic king; each of the groups that Vitigis appealed to in Rome went on to betray him. It is likely that Procopius expected his readers to detect the folly of the Gothic king in believing that master/servant relationships would trump the long ties of shared *Romanitas* amongst the East Romans and the Italians. So too did he underestimate the Gothic garrison's willingness to die for his cause. A few days later (*Wars* 5.14. 4-5) Belisarius received assurances from papal legates that Rome would open its gates to him, and, at the same time, the East Roman general had been negotiating with the Gothic garrison in Rome as well (*Wars* 5.14. 12-13). We would further suggest that this and other discussions of their shifting allegiances by Procopius, moreover, served to underline for the East Roman readership the Italo-Romans' and Goths' fickle natures and hence the dangers of trusting either.

In fact, Belisarius later deposed Silverius (*Wars* 5.25.13) for allegedly colluding with the Goths. In *Secret History*, Procopius implicates Belisarius' wife, Antonina, and the empress Theodora in Silverius' dismissal and subsequent death. The *Liber Pontificalis* relates a vivid scene in Rome from 537 where Antonina has Pope Silverius deposed after giving him a tongue lashing while Belisarius sits by. Another source, Liberatus, attempts to

51. Procopius, *Wars*, 5.11. 26, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 62 (trans. Dewing [modified], 115).

exonerate Silverius, insisting that a letter which the pope had purportedly written to the Goths during Vitigis' siege of Rome in 537 was a forgery[52].

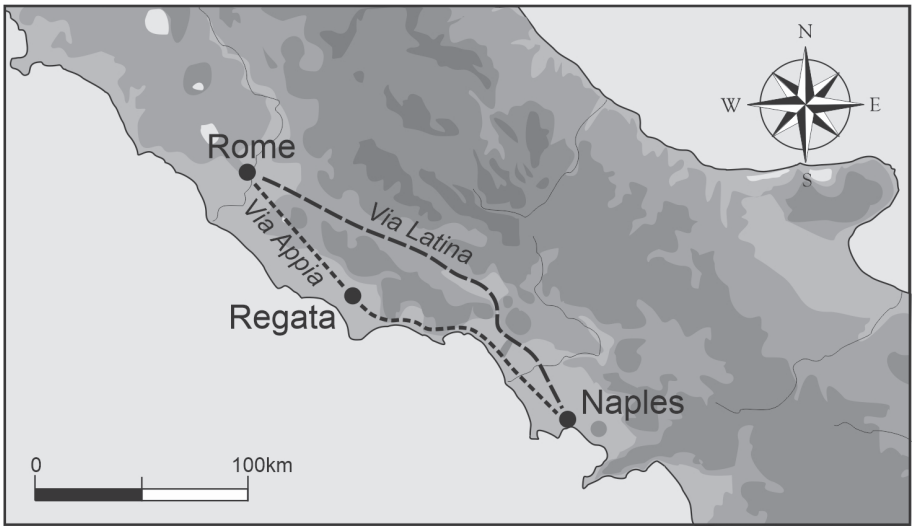

Figure 2: The Goths assemble at Regata (*Forum Appii*) and then retreat to Rome, along the Via Appia, under Vitigis. The East Roman army is led, along the Via Latina to Rome, from Naples by Belisarius (©Lillington-Martin).

So, unopposed on 9 December 536, Belisarius captured Rome from the Goths[53]. As the East Roman army, through a prearranged agreement, marched triumphantly through the Asinarian Gate located to the southeast of the city, in the northwest the 4,000 soldiers of the Gothic garrison fled through the Flaminian Gate to Ravenna. Belisarius then ordered Leuderis to deliver the keys to Rome's gates to Justinian in Constantinople[54]. That Procopius expected his readers to see the Gothic garrisons' evacuation and Leuderis' surrender as yet another betrayal, is confirmed by the earlier

52. Cf. Procopius, *Secret History,* 1.14,26, ed. Haury – Wirth, 8, 10; *Liber Pontificalis* (*Vita Silverius* 60.8) and Liberatus, *Breviarum* 22, ed. E. Schwartz: in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 2/5, Berlin 1936, 98-141.

53. *Liber Pontificalis,* (*Vita Silverius* 60.4) assigns it to 10 December.

54. Procopius, *Wars,* 5.14. 14, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 77.

speech he has Vitigis give in Rome, in which the Gothic king reassures his audience that Leuderis and the 4,000 man garrison would be more than enough to protect Rome from Belisarius' advancing army[55].

Assisted once more by the failure of yet another Gothic army to stand and fight, Belisarius had triumphed again. Yet a reader of the *Wars* soon discovers that the above declaration by Procopius was a tease: although Rome had fallen, the real fighting between the Goths and the East Romans had just begun. What appeared initially to be the relatively rapid collapse of Gothic power in Italy quickly proved illusory.

Belisarius' capture of Rome, in fact, appears to have stiffened some of the Goths' resolve to resist. According to Procopius, part of the reason for the Goths' reluctance to yield was Justinian's policy –as we saw in the example of Ebremud– to deport Goths "to Byzantion" and make them "settle there"[56]. This reluctance to depart Italy on the part of the Goths should not be too surprising, since most had been born in Italy and developed social bonds with their local communities[57]. As Guy Halsall remarks, "It would be yet more mistaken to see the soldiers facing Belisarius' troops, let alone those who confronted Narses, as shaped by anything other than late antique Italian, Provençal or Dalmatian culture". So, considering this generational blurring of "familial and genealogical distinctions",[58] perhaps we should see the "stubborn" two decades of Gothic resistance as a form of dissidence against Justinian's draconian resettlement measures and his court's ideological propaganda that sought to create a sharp oppositional division between two well-defined groups: Goths—and those perceived in Procopius and other contemporary writers to be "native" Italians and/or Romans of old.

Of course, the East Romans had some practical and legitimate reasons for removing former enemy combatants from what was still an active front. The Goths deported from Italy were being treated in a similar manner to other foreign units. In Justinian's military it was common practice to

55. Procopius, *Wars*, 5.11. 25, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 61.

56. Procopius, *Wars,* 6.29. 17, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 284-285 (trans. Dewing).

57. Amory, *People and Identity*, 1997, 170-171.

58. Halsall, Ostrogothic Army, 193-194. Other scholars argue for less integration amongst Goths and Italians, e.g., B. Swain, Goths and Gothic Identity in the Ostrogothic Kingdom: in Arnold *et al.* [as in n. 15], 203-233.

assign soldiers or units that had either deserted willingly or been defeated in battle to foreign postings to cut down on betrayals or defections[59]. For instance Vandal, and later, Gothic POWs, were assigned to the Persian campaigns[60], while we find Persian POWs in Italy.[61] Moors also served within the Roman army in Italy[62], as allies like the Heruls and the Huns fighting in North Africa and Italy. Yet removing Roman allies, like the Huns from their homeland could lead to increased defections and in some instances betrayal in the lead up to battle, such as when the Huns nearly betrayed Belisarius at the battle of Tricamarum in 533[63], or the uprising by the Vandal cavalry unit in North Africa in 536 discussed above.

QUAGMIRE

Likely knowing that he needed to drive Belisarius and his small army out of Rome before reinforcements and resupplies from Constantinople could arrive, Vitigis either left Ravenna or arrived outside of Rome with a significant army in late February 537[64]. The speed and scale of Vitigis' counter-attack seems to have caught even the usually well-prepared Belisarius off guard. From Procopius' perspective, the Romans had held the upper hand in these initial skirmishes, but the Goths' sheer numbers overwhelmed them and Belisarius. It is during this time that we see a shift, in which soldiers from the East Roman army begin deserting to the Gothic side.

Vitigis' part-encirclement of Rome was greatly aided by deserters from Belisarius' army who abandoned the guard tower at the Salarian Bridge[65]. Procopius observed: *ἦλθον δὲ αὐτοῖς αὐτόμολοι δύο καὶ εἴκοσι, βάρβαροι μὲν γένος, στρατιῶται δὲ Ῥωμαῖοι, ἐκ καταλόγου ἱππικοῦ οὗπερ Ἰννοκέντιος ἦρχεν* ("But twenty-two deserters came to them [the Goths],

59. Parnell, *Justinian's Men*, 78.

60. Vandals (*Wars* 4.14.17-18) and Goths (2.18.24-25) [ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 1, 484, 231].

61. Persians (*Wars* 2.19. 24-25 and 7.3. 11, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 1, 235 and v. 2, 310).

62. Moors (*Wars* 5.5. 4, 5.25. 9, 6.23. 36-9; 7.18. 26-8, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 25, 124, 256-257, 377-378).

63. Procopius, *Wars,* 4.1. 5-7, 4. 37, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 1, 419- 420.

64. Liber Pontificalis, *Vita Silverius* 60.4.

65. C. Lillington-Martin, Procopius on the struggle for Dara and Rome: in: *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity: Current Perspectives,* ed. A Sarantis – N. Christie, Leiden 2013, 599-630, here 616-619.

men who were barbarians by race, but Roman soldiers, from the cavalry units of Innocentius")[66]. Here, Procopius clarifies that the Roman soldiers who deserted were barbarians, as was often the case. This might give us confidence that when he says a "Roman" soldier deserts he specifically means a Roman, though of course we cannot be certain that he did this consistently.

Despite an auspicious start, Vitigis proved to be only nominally a more successful leader than Theodahad. His return to Rome led to an unsuccessful year-long siege. In 538 he retreated to Ravenna and, after two more years of war, he abdicated in 540 in favour of Belisarius. So Vitigis effectively defected, and Belisarius' scheme bordered on treachery towards Justinian, as he had no authority to accept the Gothic throne. Yet, in one of the most famous double-crosses from Late Antiquity, Procopius reveals this was just subterfuge on Belisarius' part[67]. Belisarius refused to double-cross Justinian, and instead used his acceptance of the throne as a ruse to capture Vitigis and Ravenna. Even after Vitigis' submission, the Goths continued to send envoys to the obstinate Belisarius, promising that if he accepted their offer, they would recognize *καὶ βασιλέα Βελισάριον Γότθων τε καὶ Ἰταλιωτῶν* ("Belisarius as emperor of the Goths and Italians")[68]. Belisarius, however, still refused to betray Justinian. Instead, he took Vitigis to Constantinople, where Justinian rewarded the former Gothic king with a luxurious, albeit short-lived, retirement (he died in 542).

The year 540 was a significant turning point in Justinian's reconquest of Italy. The close of Book 6 lays the foundation for Totila's rise in Book 7 and the decline of the East Romans' fortunes. Procopius spends much of the first half of Book 7 discussing how Totila's adept and moral leadership had quickly reinvigorated the Gothic army's fighting spirit. Conversely, on the Roman side, a lack of support from the central government, combined with protracted internal conflicts and what Procopius describes as the

66. Procopius, *Wars,* 5.17.17, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 89.

67. Heather, *Rome Resurgent*, 178-179 is only one of the most recent to discuss Belisarius' rejection of the offer. For a full treatment of the topic, see C. Lillington-Martin, Procopius, Belisarius and the Goths. *Journal of the Oxford University History Society: Odd Alliances*, ed. by H. Ellis – G. Iglesias Rogers (2009), 1-17.

68. Procopius, *Wars* 6 .30.26, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 293 (trans. Dewing). In a sixth-century context βασιλεύς could simply mean "king".

moral decline of the Roman high command undermines the morale of the entire Roman army, which led to a rapid rollback of many of the Roman gains achieved under Belisarius. Now that the tide had turned in the Goths' favour, so too do we see a steady wave of desertions from the Roman side to the Goths. We should not find this too surprising since, as Patrick Amory explains, "Defections, of course, also followed the success of an army, and now Totila's army was in assent"[69].

SECOND SIEGE OF NAPLES

In Procopius' vision of 540s Italy, momentum shifted in the Goths' favour as, on the one hand, the East Roman generals and administration succumb to jealousy, avarice, bickering, and injustice, while, on the other hand, the Goths –ruled with an iron fist by Totila– unite and treat the Italo-Romans and defeated East Roman enemy with a firm but fair adherence to justice and honour[70].

Totila's siege of Naples in 542-543 offered Procopius a further opportunity to probe these subjects. Here, a mere seven years after the city had fallen to Belisarius, what Procopius described as Totila's proper moral conduct and ability to correctly balance sternness and magnanimity leads to the Goths' recapture of Naples and the surrender of its 1,000-strong East Roman garrison commanded by the general Konon, the commander we met at the opening of this article. Like Belisarius before him, to achieve his goal Totila wields both stick and carrot. To intimidate the Roman garrison, he mutilates a Roman captive who had insulted him and then displays the victim to the Roman soldiers (mainly Isaurians) manning the walls– somewhat ironic, given that it was an Isaurian soldier who had discovered the passage into the city during Belisarius' siege in 536. As Totila and his army slowly starve the city into submission, Procopius crafts a set speech, in which, recalling their loyalty at the first siege of Naples, the Gothic king addresses the citizens of Naples in a friendly manner as a political tactic: *Μετὰ δὲ καὶ Τουτίλας αὐτοὺς ξυγκαλέσας ἐς τὰς ἐπάλξεις ἔλεξε τοιάδε: 'Οὐδεμίαν αἰτίαν ἢ μέμψιν ἐς ὑμᾶς ἔχοντες, ἄνδρες Νεαπολῖται, τανῦν ἐς*

69. Amory, *People and Identity*, 177.

70. M. Stewart, *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics in the Age of Justinian: A Study of Procopius*, Amsterdam 2020, 93-196.

πολιορκίαν τήνδε κατέστημεν, ἀλλ ὅπως ἐχθίστων ὑμᾶς ἀπαλλάξαντες δεσποτῶν οἷοί τε ὦμεν τάς τε χάριτας ὑμῖν ἐκτιννύναι, ὧνπερ ἡμᾶς δεδρακότες ἐν τῷδε τῷ πολέμῳ τὰ χαλεπώτατα πρὸς τῶν πολεμίων πεπόνθατε'.

("Men of Naples, it is not because we have any accusation or reproach to bring against you that we have undertaken this siege, but so we may be able, by freeing you from most hated masters, to repay you for the service you have done during this war, due to which you have been treated with the utmost severity by the enemy")[71].

Procopius here links the debates concerning freedom/slavery and loyalty/honour begun in his account of the first siege of Naples to this second siege in 543. While Belisarius in 536 sought to rescue them from the "yoke" of the Goths, here the "hated masters" are the East Romans. The Neapolitans had paid the price for their loyalty to the Goths and refusal to surrender to Belisarius. As with many of his "true" views, Procopius' personal attitude to the Neapolitans' dire situation is open to interpretation. On one level, it could be argued that Procopius strove to show his contemporary readers that the Neapolitans' stubborn refusal to submit to Belisarius' original offer to surrender directly contributed to their present plight. Interpreted on another level, however, it might reflect the historian's growing disenchantment with the miserable state of Justinian's Western campaigns at the time he published the first seven Books of the *Wars*, around 550[72]. Lastly, it may be a commentary on the servility of the Italo-Romans who were torn between two martial peoples: the Goths and the Romans from Constantinople[73]. Only by looking at the bigger picture and following the threads of the depictions of the two sieges seven years apart from beginning to end can the reader absorb the lessons that Procopius sought to impart. Though the Roman soldiers tried to hold out, hunger gets the better of them and they open the gates to Totila and his Goths. The parallels to the first siege continue when Totila's compassionate behaviour– depicted by Procopius as an astute

71. Procopius, *Wars,* 7.7. 11, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 326-327 (trans. in *Prokopios, the Wars of Justinian* [as in n. 38], 395).

72. On the difficulty of pinning down Procopius' "true" views, see P. Van Nuffelen, The Wor(l)ds of Procopius: in Lillington-Martin and Turquois [as in n. 17], 40-55.

73. Stewart, Danger of the Soft Life.

political tactic– in this peaceful second "sack" cannot help but bring to the reader's mind the devastation Belisarius wrought when his army took the city. In contrast to events in 536, in the words of Procopius: *Ἐπειδὴ δὲ Νεάπολιν Τουτίλας εἷλε, φιλανθρωπίαν ἐς τοὺς ἡλωκότας ἐπεδείξατο οὔτε πολεμίῳ οὔτε βαρβάρῳ ἀνδρὶ πρέπουσαν.* ("Once Naples fell to Totila, he showed kindness to his captives that was to be expected neither from an enemy nor a barbarian")[74]. His first step was to assuage the hunger of the besieged. Fearing that the starving Roman captives might die by overindulgence, Totila only gradually increased their rations to help them slowly restore their strength. Rather more surprising to Procopius, Totila gives the Roman commander Konon and his soldiers the choice to join his side or peacefully return to Roman held territory–Totila even provides them with money and supplies for their journey. Totila's ability to pay his soldiers and his humane conduct caused many Roman soldiers to switch sides, which tellingly drew no criticism from Procopius[75].

In sharp contrast to his discussion of Totila's munificence, Procopius condemns the Roman high command for its immoral sexual conduct and plunder of the Italo-Romans' lands[76]. Konon is one of the misbehaving generals. Procopius accuses him of hoarding grain and then profiting from its sale to Rome's starving citizens[77]. Procopius connects Justinian's failure to pay the Roman soldiers to a string of failures against Totila's Goths in the 540s. Clearly blaming Justinian, Procopius lamented in his *Secret History*: *ὥστε πάντων τοὺς στρατιώτας ἅτε τρόποις ἐκνενευρισμένους πολλοῖς πτωχοτέρους τε γεγονέναι καὶ οὐδαμῇ ἐς τὸ πολεμεῖν προθυμεῖσθαι ξυνέβη* ("that soldiers were demoralised in so many ways, became poorer than other classes, and no longer cared for fighting in war")[78]. What could they be expected to do under such dire conditions? Ultimately, as we saw in our opening, the commander's rapacious behaviour leads the desperate East Roman soldiers to murder Konon. Episodes like this and others concerning desertion in the *Wars* functioned to remind those from the political and

74. Procopius, *Wars,* 7.8.1, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 326 (trans. in *Prokopios the Wars of Justinian* [as in n. 38], 396).

75. Parnell, *Justinian's Men,* 177.

76. Procopius, *Wars,* 7.9. 1, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 332-333].

77. Procopius, *Wars,* 7.17. 10, ed. Haury – Wirth, v. 2, 371.

78. Procopius, *Secret History,* 24.8, ed. Haury – Wirth, 147. Cf. *Wars,* 7.12. 7-8.

military elite from Constantinople –who were the *Wars*' primary audience– that soldiers must be properly paid, fed, and led or they could be expected to desert to the enemy. Moreover, joining Totila's army was not largely an "ethnic" but a political choice for these deserters from the East Roman army. Unquestionably, the Gothic and, especially, the East Roman armies were made up of soldiers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Tellingly, near the close of the *Wars* (8.28.2), Procopius has a Gothic commander describe Narses' army as a "heterogeneous horde of barbarians" (*βαρβάρων δὲ παμμίκτῳ ὁμίλῳ*).

In certain circumstances, soldiers and civilians could switch sides without facing wider social recrimination. As we saw with the example of Meligedios and Ulifus, Procopius differentiated between what he interpreted as cases of honourable and dishonourable desertion. It is these subtle nuances in degrees of desertion that led one down the road to treason or else a return to honour. By paying close attention to the lessons Procopius imparts, we can see that the Roman garrisons' murder of Konon and subsequent threat to desert to the Goths, were likely not seen by Procopius –and one suspects most of his contemporary readers– as treasonous, but as justifiable acts of dissidence by soldiers, whose loyalty could be wielded both as a commodity and a weapon, even against an emperor as powerful as Justinian.

Αλλαζοντας Παραταξεις στους *Γοτθικους Πολεμους* του Προκοπιου

Η αφήγηση του ιστοριογράφου Προκοπίου για τον πόλεμο εναντίον των Γότθων στην Ιταλία περιέχει πολλές περιπτώσεις Γότθων, Ιταλών και Ανατολικών Ρωμαίων που αλλάζουν παρατάξεις κατά τη διάρκεια της μακράς σύγκρουσης. Η συστηματική εξέταση του θέματος δείχνει ότι ο Προκόπιος γενικά αντιμετώπιζε με συγκατάβαση τους στρατιώτες που λιποτακτούσαν, στάση, που αντικατοπτρίζει τις ευρύτερες μεσογειακές αντιλήψεις του 6ου αιώνα. Τί μπορούν να μας διδάξουν τα παραδείγματα των «προδοτικών» συμπεριφορών σχετικά με τη διαφωνία στην εποχή του Ιουστινιανού; Παρόμοιες και άλλες πράξεις διαφωνίας από στρατιώτες υποδηλώνουν ότι μονάδες του στρατού του Ιουστινιανού –τουλάχιστον κατά τη διάρκεια του δυτικού πολέμου– είχαν κάποιο επίπεδο ελευθερίας του λόγου και της δράσης, που μερικές φορές τους επέτρεπε να υπαγορεύουν όρους είτε στον διοικητή τους είτε στην κεντρική κυβέρνηση στην Κωνσταντινούπολη. Με τον ίδιο τρόπο και η γοτθική αντίσταση στην Ιταλία, μπορεί να ερμηνευθεί ως μια πράξη μη συμμόρφωσης προς την πολιτική που τους αντιμετώπιζε ως βαρβάρους, χωρίς νόμιμη αξίωση για την Ιταλία.