

Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 23 (2013)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 23



Procopius of Caesarea: A Case Study in Imperial Criticism

James Michael GILMER

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.1091](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.1091)

Copyright © 2014, James Michael GILMER



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

GILMER, J. M. (2013). Procopius of Caesarea: A Case Study in Imperial Criticism. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 23, 45–57.
<https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.1091>

JAMES M. GILMER

PROCOPIUS OF CAESAREA: A CASE STUDY IN IMPERIAL CRITICISM

Edward Gibbon once said of Procopius that the man “successively composed the *history*, the *panegyric*, and the *satire* of his own times”¹. Consequently, it has been a subject of much debate what Procopius actually thought of the events that he narrates. At first glance it seems impossible that the same man should have written so differently about the same events; Procopius is at once both a critic and an admirer of his employer, the Emperor Justinian I (r. 527 – 565)². He is the author of three major historical works: the *History of the Wars* (550), the *Anecdota* (550), and *Buildings* (554)³. The world of Justinian and Procopius was one of rapid, unsettling change as the Roman Empire evolved into something new. The old ways, the classical traditions, the customary laws, even the borders of the Empire itself were in a state of constant flux and turmoil⁴. Procopius provides an ample record for the historian, narrating the momentous events of Justinian’s reign: however, his

1. E. GIBBON, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, v. 4, University of Virginia, 1905, 149. Cf. A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, 3.

2. A. CAMERON, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1985, 3.

3. CAMERON, *Procopius* 5-11. Current editions in use: *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia*, ed. J. HAURY – G. WIRTH, v. 1-4, Leipzig: Teubner 1963 [hereafter: *Procopii opera omnia*] and *Procopius, with an english translation by H. B. DEWING, in seven volumes*, Cambridge Ma.: Harvard University Press 1914-1935 [hereafter: *Procopius*]. For an up-to-date bibliography see A. KARPOZIOLOS, *Βυζαντινοὶ ἱστορικοὶ καὶ χρονολόγοι 4ος-7ος αἰ.*, v. 1, Athens 1997, 369-419.

4. G. OSTROGORSKY, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. J. HUSSEY, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009, 78.

voice is inflected by his antiquarianism and a disapproval of innovation verging on the reactionary.

Procopius (fl. 527 – 554) was born in the city of Caesarea in Palestine. Caesarea had been one of the pre-eminent centers of learning in the Roman Empire during the fourth century: by the time of Procopius' birth, however, the city had declined but still boasted a considerable library. Procopius was born into the land-owning, Christian upper class from which the Roman Empire drew its administrators and magistrates and consequently received a thorough education in law, rhetoric, and classical studies almost as a matter of course. Our first mention of Procopius is in 527, as the newly minted legal advisor to Belisarius. The historian was attached to Belisarius during the latter's campaigns, and consequently was an eye-witness to many of the events he narrates throughout his works. Procopius was also present in Constantinople during the Justinianic Plague of 541-542, and recounts that event with the gripping horror of an eyewitness. Procopius would remain in the employ of the Roman government through at least 554, at which point the historian fades from the historical record⁵.

When Procopius began to write he had before him an immediate choice: whether to write in the older, classical style, following in the tradition of Herodotus (484–425 B.C.) and Thucydides (460–395 B.C.); or, whether to instead write a universal chronicle in the monastic tradition of Eusebius (263–339), Jerome (347–420), and John Malalas (491–578)⁶. Procopius chose the former, writing in the classical tradition. In doing so he chose consciously to emulate both the style and purpose of Herodotus and Thucydides, writing deliberately for the enlightenment of posterity in the classical language that had already endured the passage of time⁷.

The classical tradition embraced by Procopius was marked by several distinctive characteristics: a tendency to use deliberate omission as a method of conveying controversial messages covertly; a preference for a specific form of Greek, notably the Attic dialect; a focus on wars and politics; a tendency to include ethnographic, etymological and anecdotal diversions; and a tendency to employ long speeches, reported as historical

5. CAMERON, *Procopius*, 5-11.

6. KALDELLIS, *Procopius* 17-18.

7. KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 19.

fact, to address the reader directly⁸. Likewise, the chronological layout of Procopius' principal work, the *History of the Wars*, is based closely upon that of Thucydides' primary work, the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Both are arranged thematically, rather than strictly chronologically. Events and details are presented as they become relevant, preventing the reader from being overwhelmed by irrelevant details⁹.

The *History of the Wars* is Procopius' most enduring work, and betrays the greatest debt to Procopius' classical education. Unlike the *Anecdota*, the *History of the Wars* was written with the intention of publication. Throughout the *History of the Wars*, Procopius makes consistent use of criticism by omission as well as the archaic language typical of the classical tradition; likewise, he liberally intersperses anecdotes and ethnographic digressions into the work. The very organization of the *History of the Wars* demonstrates Procopius' deep commitment to the classical tradition, organized as it is around a thematic, roughly chronological scheme of events and replete with examples of the "pre-battle speech" used so often by Thucydides.

Προκόπιος Καισαρεὺς τοὺς πολέμους ξυνέγραψεν, οὗς Ἰουστινιανὸς ὁ Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς πρὸς βαρβάρους διήνεγκε τοὺς τε ἑώους καὶ ἑσπερίους, ὥς πη αὐτῶν ἐκάστω ξυνηέχθη γενέσθαι, ὥς μὴ ἔργα ὑπερμεγέθη ὁ μέγας αἰὼν λόγου ἔρημα χειρῶσάμενος τῇ τε λήθῃ αὐτὰ καταπρόηται καὶ παντάπασιν ἐξίτηλα θῇται¹⁰. Thus Procopius began his narrative of the wars of Justinian. He proceeded to answer an argument against the gravity of the events he was about to recount based upon the classical disdain for the archer as a warrior. There are some, according to Procopius, who belittle the feats of arms of his own day because Roman soldiers have become archers, a class of warrior held in low esteem for cowardice and lack of efficacy by Homer and the Greeks. Procopius then presents a counterargument defending the efficacy of this new breed of cavalry-archers favored by the Romans of his own day¹¹.

8. KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 19, 23-24, 26.

9. KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 33.

10. *Procopii Opera omnia: Wars* I.i.1: v. 1, 4. = *Procopius*, v.1,3: "Procopius of Caesarea has written the history of the wars which Justinian, Emperor of the Romans, waged against the barbarians of the East and of the West, relating separately the events of each one, to the end that the long course of time may not overwhelm deeds of singular importance through lack of a record, and thus abandon them to oblivion and utterly obliterate them".

11. *Procopii Opera omnia: Wars*, I.i.6, v.1, 5-6 = *Procopius*, v.1, 5-9.

On the surface, Procopius presents a decent case for the efficacy of the soldiers of his own day vis-à-vis the “bowmen” of Homeric epic. However, a classical history often presents controversial arguments through omission: this is precisely what Procopius has done in comparing Homeric bowmen to the soldiers of his own day. The comparison is weak, and deliberately seeks only to prove that contemporary soldiers are better warriors than the Homeric *bowmen*, *not* that contemporary soldiers are better warriors than the *heroes* of Homeric verse. Viewed in this light the argument set forth by Procopius is deliberately lacking in force: the implication is that Procopius viewed the soldiers of his own day as better than the worst of the classical era, but hardly worthy of any great praise. Although presented as a vindication of the greatness of the deeds he is about to recount, Procopius’ actual intent is instead to cast doubt onto that perception by manufacturing an argument against imagined critics and then willfully losing that argument¹².

The implication of Procopius’ imagined argument against the critics of the greatness of contemporary events and Procopius’ willful loss of that argument is that the “critics” were right: the deeds of the men of old were somehow greater than those of contemporaries. Procopius’ choice of the classical style in preference to the contemporary chronicle implies that Procopius himself was probably among the critics he argues against so poorly. The historian’s deliberate use of archaic language throughout the *Histories* provides added force to this interpretation. Procopius deliberately used an archaic form of Greek in his writings, imitating the language used by Herodotus and Thucydides. Use of this archaic form presented problems for the author as Greek had evolved considerably as a language over the intervening ten centuries between the writings of Procopius and Herodotus. This is most noticeable when Procopius is forced to incorporate neologisms into his writings: monks, who did not exist in classical Athens, are awkwardly referred to as *τῶν Χριστιανῶν οἱ σωφρονέστατοι ...οὔσπερ καλεῖν μοναχοὺς νενομίκασι*¹³. Likewise, battle formations are universally called by the classically proper but archaic “phalanx”, while Constantinople is universally referred to by the ancient Greek name of “Byzantium”¹⁴.

12. KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 21-24.

13. *Procopii Opera omnia: Wars*, I, vii, 22: v. I, 34 = *Procopius*, v. 1, 57: «to those of the Christians, whom they call monks».

14. KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 26-27.

Use of the Attic dialect is one feature of the classical tradition; another feature of classical histories is the use of anecdotes to make general points on the permanence of the nature of men¹⁵. Consequently, before Procopius began to narrate the events of his chosen topic – the wars of Justinian – he spent several chapters in a series of digressions detailing the rise of the Persian King Cabades, the principal antagonist of much of the first book of the *Histories*. Particularly interesting is the fate of Cabades' father, Peroz: the Persian king involved himself in a disastrous war with the Ephthalite Huns and nearly destroyed the Persian Empire. The Persians, led by their reckless king, were drawn into a cunning trap by the Ephthalites. Heedless of their danger, they plunged headlong into the trap and destroyed themselves¹⁶.

Procopius chose very deliberately to begin his narrative of the events of Justinian's wars with an anecdote about Persian history; one is left to wonder, why? The answer, perhaps, is that Procopius intended to demonstrate that perfidiousness was simply the nature of the Persians, ethnography of this sort being a customary component of the classical tradition. The Persian King Peroz simply could not resist making war again upon the Ephthalite Huns in spite of the oaths he had sworn to the contrary and the state of peace that otherwise existed between the two neighboring powers. This behavior was exemplified by the fallen king's grandson, Chosroes, Justinian's Persian equivalent and arch-nemesis. Procopius recorded that Chosroes was: *Ἦν γὰρ δεινότατος ἀνθρώπων ἀπάντων τὰ μὲν οὐκ ὄντα εἰπεῖν, τὰ δὲ ἀληθῆ ἀποκρύψασθαι, καὶ ὧν αὐτὸς ἐξημάρτανε τὰς αἰτίας τοῖς ἡδικοημένοις ἐπενεγκεῖν ἔτι δὲ ὁμολογῆσαι μὲν ἑτοιμος ἅπαντα καὶ ὄρκῳ τὴν ὁμολογίαν πιστώσασθαι, λίαν δὲ τῶν ἑναγχος αὐτῷ ξυγκειμένων τε καὶ ὁμωμοσμένων ἐτοιμότερος ἐς λήθην ἀφίχθαι, καὶ χρημάτων μὲν ἔνεκεν ἐπὶ πᾶν ἄγος καθεῖναι τὴν ψυχὴν ἄοκνος ...*¹⁷.

15. KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 12.

16. *Procopii Opera omnia: Wars*, I.iv.1-16, v.1, 14-15 = *Procopius*, v.1, 21-27.

17. *Procopii Opera omnia: Wars*, II.ix.8, v.1, 191 = *Procopius*, v.1, 337-339: "The cleverest of all men at saying that which was not, and in concealing the truth, and in attributing the blame for the wrongs which he committed to those who suffered the wrong; besides he was ready to agree to everything and to pledge the agreement with an oath, and much more ready to forget completely the things lately agreed to and sworn by him, and for the sake of money to debase his soul without reluctance to every act of pollution".

The opening anecdote provided by Procopius thus becomes an attempt to explain the actions of Chosroes: he is a Persian, of the family of Peroz, and thus untrustworthy. One detects more than a hint of sarcasm in Procopius' description of the peace treaty arranged with Chosroes in 532 as the "endless peace"¹⁸; how could any treaty be endless with such men?

War, therefore, tended to be the natural state of affairs prevailing between the Roman Empire and its Persian counterpart. Another major episode of the *History* is the Siege of Dara (530). The narration of this battle provides an excellent example of another element of the classical tradition employed by Procopius, the pre-battle speech.

On the first day of the battle, both the Roman and the Persian armies waited tensely for the other to make a move. When neither did, champions from both sides engaged in skirmishes, the Romans prevailing in these individual struggles. On the next day both commanders addressed their troops, the content of their speeches being nothing more than the inventions of Procopius; an approximation of what the generals *could* have said, and a deliberate foreshadowing of the action to come. The pre-battle speech is a stylistic element favored by Thucydides (I.22), who tended to "put into the mouth of each speaker the views that, in my opinion, they would have been most likely to express, as the particular occasions demanded, while keeping as nearly as I could to the general purport of what was actually said"¹⁹. Speeches were useful to set the stage and to demonstrate motive or causation²⁰.

Procopius' description of the battle itself, in keeping with the classical tradition of Thucydides, is limited: Procopius presents nothing but the bare facts, leaving the explanation for why the battle unfolded in the manner described to the speeches that precede the battle. For the speeches themselves are nothing more than a literary construct; they serve simply to involve the reader in the action and inform the reader of what will come to pass.

18. Τὴν τε ἀπέραντον καλουμένην εἰρήνην: *Procopii Opera omnia: Wars*, I.xxii.17,v. 1, 117 = *Procopius*, v. 1, 209.

19. Thucydides I.22: ὥς δ' ἂν ἐδόκουν ἔμοι ἕκαστοι περὶ τῶν αἰὲ παρόντων τὰ δέοντα μάλιστ' εἰπεῖν, ἐχομένῳ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων.

20. E. Breisach, *Historiography Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, 17.

Generals make stunningly accurate predictions, informed as they are by the author's advantage of hindsight²¹.

Victory at Dara brought the Romans one step closer to peace with Persia, finally attained in 532 with the inauguration of the "endless peace". That same year, however, brought the perils of civil war to Constantinople. Procopius records that the fans of the circus factions organized in that year and raised a rebellion in the capital. As the mob approached the palace Justinian and his court prepared to flee for the safety of Anatolia just across the Hellespont, but Theodora checked their flight. The Empress declared that she "approve[d of] a certain ancient saying that royalty is a good burial-shroud (ἐμὲ γάρ τις καὶ παλαιὸς ἀρέσκει λόγος, ὥς καλὸν ἐντάφιον ἡ βασιλεία ἐστὶ)²². Justinian, bolstered by his wife's commitment, ordered Belisarius with a small force of loyal soldiers to storm the hippodrome. The mob was unarmed: thirty thousand were slaughtered as the armored soldiers stormed the hippodrome and granted no quarter. The rising was over²³.

Procopius records the Nika Riot with dispassionate calm, at least on the surface. One is led *at first* to approve the Emperor's resolve, disdain the lawlessness of the mob, and be scandalized by the complicity of the senate. However, Procopius has carefully constructed a subtext into his narrative of the Nika Riots, one which was meant to be perceived by contemporary men of learning: chiefly, by the men of the senate and classical learning. For Procopius has incorporated a barbed reference into the narrative of the riots, a reference designed to be lost upon the Emperor and his associates but not upon men of classical learning. Theodora, or at least Procopius' rendering of Theodora, misquotes the "ancient saying" drawn from the *Library of History* of Diodorus Siculus (60 – 30 B.C.). According to Diodorus Siculus, «Καλὸν ἐστὶν ἐντάφιον ἡ τυραννὶς»²⁴, a piece of advice given to Dionysius

21. KALDELLIS, Procopius, 29-31.

22. *Procopii Opera omnia*: Wars I.xxiv.37, v.1, 130 = *Procopius*, v.1, 233. On this saying see S.I.KOUROUSIS, Καλὸν ἐντάφιον, *Ἀθηνᾶ* 81 (1996), 442 and 522. IDEM. Δεξιὸν ἐντάφιον, *ΕΕΒΣ* 50 (1999-2000), 316.

23. *Procopii Opera omnia*, Wars I. xxiv, 1-58 = *Procopius*, v. 1, 219-239.

24. "Tyranny is a fair-winding sheet": Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, trans. C. H. OLDFATHER, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954.), Book XIV. viii. 4. Lacus Curtius. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/14A*.html#8 [accessed November 9th, 2011].

to bolster the tyrant's resolve to remain ruler of Syracuse against the will of the city's citizenry.

Through allusion to the writings of an earlier historian who would not be well known in imperial circles, Procopius managed to record his own feelings of hostility toward Justinian and his government. This anecdote, typical of the classical style in its evocation of earlier works, becomes a concealed barb at the tyranny the regime represents, made all the more damaging in that Procopius has the object of his hatred voice his own criticisms for him²⁵.

The Nika Riots help to establish, in a subtle way, Procopius' opinion of Theodora as a tyrant. The testimony against Justinian is less damning, but certainly not flattering. However, the Emperor is not spared the wrath of Procopius' pen. Procopius' account of the Plague of Constantinople (532) demonstrates both his hatred of Justinian and the historian's deep debt to classical models, Thucydides in particular: Ὑπὸ δὲ τοὺς χρόνους τούτους λοιμὸς γεγονεν, ἐξ οὗ δὴ ἅπαντα ὀλίγου ἐδέησε τὰ ἀνθρώπεια ἐξίτηλα εἶναι ...²⁶. Procopius' account of the Plague of Constantinople is deeply influenced by Thucydides' account of the Plague of Athens, as the above juxtaposition of the beginning of the two authors' accounts reveals. Both proceed to relate that the plague they recount is so terrible, so horrendous, that they cannot even begin to speculate upon a reason for its descent upon man. The Plague of Athens, according to Thucydides, first began "in the parts of Ethiopia above Egypt"²⁷ – a rather close parallel to Procopius' assertion that the Plague of Constantinople ἤρξατο μὲν ἐξ Αἰγυπτίων οἱ ὄκνηται ἐν Πηλουσίῳ²⁸. Both authors then proceed to describe, with

25. KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 36-37.

26. *Procopii Opera omnia*, Wars II.xxii.1, v.1, 249 = *Procopius*, v.1, 451 "During these times there was a pestilence, by which the whole human race came near to being annihilated ..."; Cf. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, II. 47.3: οὐ μέντοι τοσοῦτός γε λοιμὸς οὐδὲ φθορὰ οὕτως ἀνθρώπων οὐδαμοῦ ἐμνημονεύετο γενέσθαι (trans. Richard Crawley, Book II.xxxvii.1 – II.lv.1. http://www.livius.org/pb-pem/peloponnesian_war/war_t05.html [accessed November 14th, 2011]: a pestilence of such extent and mortality was nowhere remembered).

27. ἤρξατο δὲ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον, ὡς λέγεται, ἐξ Αἰθιοπίας τῆς ὑπὲρ Αἰγύπτου. Thucydides, II.48.1.

28. *Procopii Opera omnia*, Wars II.xxii.6,v.1, 250 = *Procopius*, v. 1,453: "It started from the Egyptians (sic) who dwell in Pelusium".

clinical detachment, the symptoms of the disease as they themselves had witnessed, in the stated hope of informing posterity²⁹.

There is one substantial point of divergence in Procopius' account of the Plague of Constantinople vis-à-vis Thucydides' account of the Plague of Athens: the effect of each upon society. Thucydides records a society in which order and custom broke down: customary funerary rites were abandoned; those free from the symptoms of the plague lived for the moment, and abandoned all pretense of morality³⁰. Procopius, however, records a different reaction to the ravages of the plague. In sixth century Constantinople, the plague induced instead a deep reverence for religion and social order as all began to fear for the state of their souls. Even the wicked assumed a moral life, if only for the duration of their illness. Indeed, according to Procopius it was the *wicked* members of society whom the disease most often spared³¹. This detail is a deliberate barbed syllogism, of a type favored among contemporary authors. For it would be well known to Procopius' contemporaries that Justinian himself had contracted the plague and survived³².

Hidden allusions, barbed syllogisms: such was the language of criticism in the sixth century under an absolute ruler such as Justinian whose "multitude of spies" guaranteed a "most cruel death" for those caught in opposition to the regime³³. Criticism had to be hidden from the authorities, either by making allusions in classical language that would be lost on the authorities – a dangerous tactic, but successful as we have seen from a closer inspection of Procopius' *History of the Wars* – or by making barbed syllogisms, logical constructions which invite the reader to conclusions held by the author which cannot be stated outright for fear of repercussions. One such example from a contemporary writer and close friend of Procopius is the treatment of the consulship in John the Lydian's *Magistracies of the Roman State* (551). John notes of the consulship that the office "is incompatible with tyranny, so that

29. *Procopii Opera omnia*, Wars II.xxii.12-39, v. 1, 251-256 = *Procopius*, v.1, 457-465.

30. Thucydides, Book II.53, 1-4.

31. *Procopii Opera omnia*, Wars II.xxiii.14-16, v. 1, 258-259 = *Procopius*, v.1, 469-471.

32. *Procopii Opera omnia*, Wars II.xxiii.20, v. 1, 259 = *Procopius*, v.1, 473.

33. A. KALDELLIS, Identifying Dissident Circles in Sixth-Century Byzantium: The Friendship of Prokopios and Ioannes Lydos, *Florilegium* 21, 2004, 2. <http://kaldellispublications.weebly.com> [accessed November 14th, 2011.]

when the former has power the latter does not exist”³⁴. The contemporary reader would be well aware that the consulship no longer existed in the Roman Empire, having been abolished by Justinian in 541: John implies that only a tyrant would abolish the consulship; by logical syllogism, Justinian must be a tyrant. This is exactly the same literary device that Procopius uses to criticize Justinian in the account of the Plague of Constantinople: only the wicked are afflicted by the plague and survive; Justinian survived a bout of plague; by logical syllogism, Justinian, therefore, must be wicked.

That Procopius views Justinian as a tyrant is not immediately apparent in *History of the Wars*. Indeed, as this work was intended to be made public, Procopius was obliged to restrain his invective to subtle, veiled comments and attacks by omission, as we have seen. The *Anecdota*, however, is an entirely different kind of work. The *Anecdota* was never intended for publication: consequently, Procopius is under no restrictions in his abuse of the Emperor and his consort. In the *History of the wars*, Chosroes was lambasted as a man with an “unruly mind” because he was fond of innovation; the connection between the innovating Persian King and Justinian is left to the reader. In the *Anecdota*, Procopius’ disdain for the novelties of the reign of Justinian was unrestrained. The Emperor earned from Procopius the scurrilous epithet of “arch-destroyer of well-established institutions (μέγιστος δὲ οὗτος <ἦν> διαφθορεὺς τῶν εἰ καθεστώτων³⁵). Procopius also explained why he was able to covertly incorporate a veiled reference to Justinian’s tyranny through an allusion to Diodorus Siculus: Justinian and his court are “uncouth” and although the Emperor insisted upon delivering many of his own speeches, the impression he formed in so doing was not favorable in the slightest³⁶.

The *Anecdota*, however scurrilous its contents, is also written in the same classicizing high style of the *History of the Wars*. Procopius liberally weaves allusions to other classical works into his invective, deliberately invoking the authority of the timeless classical past in his invective. Procopius records that Justinian compelled his uncle, the Emperor Justin, to revise the laws on marriage to allow Justinian to marry Theodora although the latter was a courtesan and the law forbade marriage between senators and

34. KALDELLIS, Identifying Dissident Circles, 8.

35. *Procopii Opera omnia: Anecdota* I.vi.21-28, v. 3, 42 = *Procopius*, v. 6, 75-77.

36. *Procopii Opera omnia: Anecdota*, I.xiv.1-6, v.3 ,89-90 = *Procopius*, v. 6, 167-169.

courtesans³⁷. The narrative presentation of this historical fact is structured in the same style as Herodotus' account of the Persian King Cambyses similar alteration of the marriage laws of the Persians, and is meant to draw parallel by allusion between Justinian and the Persian Kings³⁸. Similarly, Procopius' attacks on the promiscuity of Theodora are modeled on classical precedent: Procopius' account of Theodora's insatiable sexual appetite is closely based upon Demosthenes' *Against Neaira*, altered in detail alone to be even more sensational than the original³⁹.

If Procopius was a critic of the reign of Justinian, where then does that leave the panegyric, *On Buildings*? Procopius lamented the destruction of war, particularly those prosecuted by Justinian, in the *Anecdota*; *On Buildings*, then, was intended to serve as a stark contrast, to show what Justinian and the Roman Empire was capable of accomplishing for the public good. Additionally, the choice of topic is interesting: Procopius could have written a panegyric about a great many things: Justinian's person, the character of his rule, the reformed law code promulgated by the emperor, even his successes in war. Instead, Procopius chose a relatively minor aspect of Justinian's reign to praise. Justinian himself would probably have preferred to be remembered for his law-giving, or the expansion of the empire. Both are praised by the emperor himself in the preface to the *Novella* (535)⁴⁰. Procopius, then, rather perversely chose to praise the Emperor for an aspect of his reign that was secondary in importance, as if to say that the accomplishments of Justinian's wars and law-making are unworthy of praise. Procopius again employed the classical tradition of criticism by omission to censure the Emperor safely.

Procopius of Caesarea wrote three very different works of history: at least, at first glance. However, an understanding of the classical tradition which Procopius sought to utilize in his writings has demonstrated that Procopius was markedly consistent in his criticisms of the regime of Justinian. Though

37. *Procopii Opera omnia, Anecdota* I.ix.51, v. 3,65 = *Procopius*, v. 6, 119.

38. A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius: The Secret History with Related Texts*, Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Company, 2010, xxxvi.

39. KALDELLIS, *Procopius: The Secret History*, liv.

40. C. F. PAZDERNIK, Procopius and Thucydides on the Labors of War: Belisarius and Brasidas in the Field, *The American Philological Association*, 130 (2000), 154-155. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/284309> [accessed September 7th, 2011].

subtle in his published works, Procopius' invective against the Emperor and the innovations of his reign explodes violently across the pages of the *Anecdota*. His historiography reveals that the classical ideal was still alive and well in the transition period between the Roman Empire of old, which the reign of Justinian marked the twilight of, and the medieval Byzantine Empire that was to come. Through the invective, veiled and otherwise, we can glimpse a portrait of the Empire in a state of flux, standing on the brink of a transition into a new order, if only we dare to look beyond what Procopius has written.

PROCOPIUS OF CAESAREA: A CASE STUDY IN IMPERIAL CRITICISM

This paper seeks to analyze the methods of Procopius of Caesarea and reconcile the apparent contradictions the historian presents in his treatment of the reign of the Emperor Justinian. To that end, the tone of each work is considered and compared to similar works of Late Antiquity. This paper endeavors to demonstrate that the attitudes of Procopius toward the Emperor Justinian and many elements of his reign were universally hostile, veiled only by the conventions of the genres in which Procopius chose to write.