

## Article

---

### "Procopius of Caesarea and the Emperor Justinian"

J. A. S. Evans

*Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, vol. 3, n° 1, 1968, p. 126-139.

Pour citer cet article, utiliser l'information suivante :

URI: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030693ar>

DOI: 10.7202/030693ar

Note : les règles d'écriture des références bibliographiques peuvent varier selon les différents domaines du savoir.

---

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter à l'URI <https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

---

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche. Érudit offre des services d'édition numérique de documents scientifiques depuis 1998.

Pour communiquer avec les responsables d'Érudit : [info@erudit.org](mailto:info@erudit.org)

## PROCOPIUS OF CAESAREA AND THE EMPEROR JUSTINIAN

J. A. S. EVANS  
*McMaster University*

Justinian, who succeeded his uncle Justin as emperor at Constantinople in 527 A.D., probably never intended to mark an epoch. Not, at least, the epoch which the modern historian must assign him, for he intended to renew the Roman Empire, whereas in fact he was a transitional figure, who more than anyone else marks the beginning of the Byzantine world. Writers of standard textbooks on mediaeval history are inclined to give Justinian a few kind words on the one hand for his law code, and the architectural triumph of Haghia Sophia, and with the other hand to subtract the praise by noting severely that he overextended the empire's resources, and spent too much time on religious disputes. Justinian as a theologian was supremely unsuccessful; neither the church tradition in the east nor in the Catholic west has been generous to him on this score. His wife Theodora has fared somewhat better; Slavonic tradition presented her as not only the most beautiful but the wisest of women, and the Monophysite church in Syria by the twelfth century had evolved a legend whereby her father was not a bearkeeper but rather a pious old senator, who made Justinian swear, when he asked for her hand in marriage, that he would never force her to accept the accursed doctrines of the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>1</sup> Catholic tradition, however, always viewed her as somewhat the opposite of a saint, and when Procopius' *Secret History* was disinterred from the Vatican Library and published in 1623 with all its lurid detail about Theodora's early life, its first editor, Nicholas Alemannus, remarked that it was not worthwhile to seek evidence to confirm Procopius, for nothing was too execrable to be believed of a woman who tried to overturn the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>2</sup> Up until this century, judgments on the reign of Justinian have rarely been free of religious or anti-religious prejudices.

About the general verdict, however, there can be no doubt. The reign of Justinian was disastrous, and was recognized as such by those who lived through it and rejoiced when it ended. Taxes became

<sup>1</sup> Charles Diehl, *Théodora, Impératrice de Byzance* (Paris, 1904), pp. 65-66.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. E. Mallet, "The Empress Theodora," *English Historical Review*, vol. 2 (1887) pp. 1-20.

intolerable, the treasury was emptied, and the army left under strength.

"Although there ought to have been a total strength of 645,000 fighting men," wrote Agathias, Procopius' continuator, "... the number stood barely at 150,000. And of these some were stationed in Italy, some in Libya, some in Spain, some among the Colchians, some in Alexandria and the district of Egypt about Thebes. A few were stationed too on the boundaries of Persia to the east."<sup>3</sup>

Agathias refers here to the time of the invasion of the Kotrigur Huns, one of the last catastrophes of the reign. Not all these disasters, of course, can be attributed to Justinian, or to his policies which it is too easy to label overambitious. In fact, at the beginning of his reign, his *renovatio* of the old Roman Empire looked like a feasible policy, and the ease with which it was carried out in its early stages would suggest that it was not beyond the resources of the empire. The unexpected calamity which upset these expectations was the outbreak of bubonic plague, which began in Egypt, reached Constantinople by 542, and eventually spread over the empire.

To our knowledge, this was the first time that bubonic plague had appeared in Europe.<sup>4</sup> It was to recur a number of times during the sixth century and then to disappear until its reappearance as the Black Death of mediaeval Europe. There had, of course, been earlier plagues in the Roman Empire, particularly in the second century under Marcus Aurelius and again in the third century, and conceivably these plagues may have contributed to the decline of the Empire in the west. This is a question which is still *sub iudice*.<sup>5</sup> In the eastern part of the Empire, however, except for Egypt and some areas in Greece, population figures seem to have been relatively stable from the first century of our era up until the time of Justinian, these earlier plagues notwithstanding.<sup>6</sup> Demographic studies show that ordinarily, in time of plague, the death rate increases sharply, but at the same time, so does the marriage rate, and since in earlier generations at least, children were usually pro-

<sup>3</sup> Agathias, 5. 13-14. On the effects of the plague on Justinian's army, see John L. Teall, "The Barbarians in Justinian's Armies," *Speculum*, vol. 40 (1965) pp. 294-322.

<sup>4</sup> J. C. Russell, *Late Ancient and Mediaeval Population*, *Trans. of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s., vol. 48, pt. 3 (Philadelphia, 1958) pp. 37-42.

<sup>5</sup> Any study of this problem should start with A.E.R. Boak's *Manpower Shortage and the Fall of the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1955) and M. I. Finley's brilliant and devastating review in *Journ. of Roman Studies*, vol. 47 1958, pp. 156-164.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-83.

duced in the first year of marriage, the birth rate also spurted. The result is that wherever the effects of plague can be measured, it is usually the case that the population shows a sharp decrease for a few years, but unless other factors are at work, the long-term effects are not great.

The exception is bubonic plague, to which pregnant women are particularly vulnerable.<sup>7</sup> Thanks to this characteristic, the marriage rate does go up wherever the pandemic is bubonic plague, but the birth rate shows a decrease, and the population does not easily recover from the long-term effects of the disease. In the case of the Byzantine empire, one modern scholar has estimated that the population had stabilized itself by 600 A.D. at about 60% of its total before 541.<sup>8</sup> What this meant in terms of lost revenue for the empire, and recruits for the army is something which modern scholars are only now beginning to put into a proper perspective.

It must be confessed that Justinian's reign was particularly prone to what insurance writers define as "acts of God." Not only was there the plague, which, it seemed to Agathias,<sup>9</sup> had been continuous since the fifth year of Justinian's rule, but there were earthquakes and floods, and before his death new invaders threatening on the frontiers. Between 526, the year before Justinian became sole emperor, and 557, there are recorded nine earthquakes of varying intensity; the last of these so weakened the structure of the new church of Haghia Sophia that it partially collapsed on May 7th of the following year.<sup>10</sup> Antioch, the most splendid city of Syria with a history going back to the Seleucid kings, suffered severely from earthquake in 525 and 526, and in 540, the Persians sacked it. Procopius was to praise the magnificence with which Justinian rebuilt the city, but archaeology has shown how exaggerated the praise is.<sup>11</sup> The law school at Berytus was terminated by a tidal wave, thereby quite effectively centralizing legal education at Constantinople. The empire was to begin a dark period of its history within a few years of Justinian's death; in fact, it had already begun before he died.

My purpose is to examine how Justinian appeared to one contemporary observer, the historian Procopius of Caesarea, and the

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> 5.10.

<sup>10</sup> Glanville Downey, "Earthquakes at Constantinople and Vicinity," *Speculum*, vol. 30 (1955) pp. 596-600.

<sup>11</sup> Glanville Downey, *Ancient Antioch* (Princeton, 1963), pp. 253-254; cf. G. Downey, "Procopius on Antioch; A Study of Method in the *De Aedificiis*," *Byzantion*, vol. 14 (1939), pp. 361-378, where the author argues that Procopius' description of Antioch reflects the panegyric purpose of the work.

study is of some importance, first because Procopius was a great historian whose treatment of Justinian and Theodora has a way of reappearing at first- or second-hand in all studies of the period, whether learned or popular, and second, because his productive life as far as we know anything of it, almost coincides with Justinian's reign. He was appointed *assessor*, that is, legal secretary to Justinian's commander in the east, Belisarius, in 527, and his last work, an unfinished panegyric on Justinian's building program, dates, as I hope to show, to between 558 and 560. Before he entered the pages of history himself, he had had a good education in the Greek classics, and the legal training necessary for a career as an *advocatus*: that is, at least four years and more probably five at a recognized law school.<sup>12</sup> Where he received his education we cannot say; there was a flourishing school for the study of the classics at Gaza in Procopius' youth,<sup>13</sup> and there was a famous law school at Berytus, and conceivably Procopius attended both of these, for they were not far from his home in Caesarea, Herod the Great's old capital city in Palestine. It is probable that with the example of Thucydides in mind, he conceived his plan to write a history of the wars of Justinian soon after he was appointed to Belisarius' staff, and began early to make notes, quite possibly with the full knowledge of his commander. In addition to his *History of the Wars*, he was to write a treatise on Justinian's building program at the instigation of the emperor, and his famous *Secret History* which is mentioned nowhere until the late Byzantine lexicon called the *Souda* attributes it to Procopius. As I have already said, it was unknown to western scholars until a copy was exhumed in the Vatican Library in the early seventeenth century. Procopius several times indicates that he intended to write a work on Christian heresies, but as far as we know, he never did, and so he is one of the few authors of antiquity who have come down to us in their entirety. But before we examine Justinian as portrayed in the pages of Procopius, we must first determine the order in which the works were written.

## II

The work which made Procopius' reputation as an historian, his seven books on the wars of Justinian, was published about 550. The last event mentioned in them dates to 550, so that they cannot be earlier; on the other hand, they cannot be much later, for within a few years, probably about 554, Procopius added an eighth book

<sup>12</sup> H. F. Jolowicz, *Historical Introduction to the Study of Roman Law* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 509-512.

<sup>13</sup> On the schools in Gaza at this time, see G. Downey, *Gaza in the Early Sixth Century* (Norman, Okla., 1963), pp. 99-116.

dealing with the period up to 552, and in his introduction to this last book, he explains that his first seven books had already been published.

As they stand, the seven books of the *History of the Wars* fall into three sections: the first two books dealing with operations on the eastern frontier, then two on the war in Libya, and finally three on the campaign against the Ostrogoths in Italy. He knew himself to be especially qualified for writing his history because, as he says, writing as usual in the third person (l.l.) "he happened to be chosen advisor to the general Belisarius and to have been present at practically everything which was done." This is, of course, an exaggeration; Procopius was with Belisarius on the eastern frontier until late 531, when he left with his commander for Constantinople.<sup>13a</sup> He may have returned ten years later, for by then Belisarius had been reappointed commander in the east, but we do not know. In any case, he was in the capital in 542, and there witnessed the outbreak of bubonic plague in that year. Between 533 and 536 he was in Libya, but he probably never returned there. Again we cannot be certain. He witnessed the campaign against the Ostrogoths in Italy until the surrender of Ravenna in 540, but what personal knowledge he had of events there after that date is pure conjecture; it is likely, however, that he was in Italy for some portion of time between 540 and 550. But it is fairly clear that his history was founded in the first instance on personal first-hand knowledge: that is, he started to write the history of the war against the Persians up to 531, then the history of the expedition against the Vandals, followed by the campaign in Italy against the Ostrogothic kingdom. In fact, he may even have produced a first draft written from his own notes and personal observations which would include most of the first book of the Persian Wars, followed by an account of the expedition to Libya until 536, followed by the Gothic war up to 540.

But the final draft followed a different plan. Procopius belonged to the great Byzantine school of secular historians, or "profanhistoriker"<sup>14</sup> to borrow a label from German scholars, and like their classical models, particularly Thucydides and Xenophon, these writers started with one fixed date, ended with another and dealt fully with the period in between. So the three sections of the *History* as they now stand end roughly at the same date. Another reason is that the

<sup>13a</sup> For a brief account of the life of Procopius, see O. Veh, *Zur Geschichtsschreibung und Weltauffassung des Prokop von Caesarea* (Bayreuth, 1951), I, pp. 3-7.

<sup>14</sup> For their general characteristics, see A. and A. Cameron, "Christianity and Tradition in the Historiography of the Late Empire," *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 14 (1964), pp. 316-328.

wars of Justinian went on and on, and Procopius found himself in somewhat the same situation as a graduate student whose dissertation never seems to come to an end. But I think that we can still see elements of his first draft in the final version. In the first book of the *Wars*, which would be the earliest portion, the tone is optimistic, and the hero is Belisarius. In the books which must come later, there is a perceptible note of foreboding. In the second book of the *Persian Wars*, which would be relatively late and written from information gleaned largely at second-hand, Procopius bursts out bitterly as he describes the sack of Antioch in 540: "But I grow dizzy when I write of such suffering and pass on to future times its memory, and I cannot understand why it is the will of God to exalt on high the fortunes of a man or a place, and then cast them down and destroy them for no cause that we can see. For it is wrong to say that with Him (God) all things are not always done according to reason, though He then endured to see Antioch brought to the ground at the hands of a most unholy man."<sup>15</sup>

The perfunctory conclusion with which Procopius ends his *De Bello Vandalico*<sup>16</sup> states that peace in North Africa was slow in coming and hard to achieve, and there were few Libyans left to enjoy it. But it is in the final book of the *History of the Wars*, written as a continuation of the first seven books and published about 554, that the note of disillusion becomes strong. To give one example only, in the first books of the *Gothic Wars* which are still relatively early, Procopius is at pains to give an exaggerated notion of the size of the Ostrogoth armies which Belisarius faced, and whenever the Romans were defeated, he omitted any mention of the size of the opposing armies: a practice he followed generally. But in book eight, all pretences are dropped, and if we examine the statistics Procopius gives us, it would appear that there was not much disparity in size between the Gothic and Byzantine forces in 550-552,<sup>17</sup> possibly because during this period Theodora's old protégé, Narses, won the victory which had eluded Belisarius earlier. In any case, at the beginning of his *History*, Procopius spoke with the voice of the military Establishment; at the end, he betrays disillusion, greater pessimism, and perhaps a greater devotion to accuracy.

Procopius' two other works, his treatise on Justinian's building program and his *Secret History* present special problems. In the first

<sup>15</sup> *Wars*, 2, 10, 4-5.

<sup>16</sup> *Wars*, 4, 28, 52.

<sup>17</sup> This is the conclusion of Knud Hannestad, "Les Forces Militaires d'après la Guerre Gothique de Procope," *Classica et Mediaevalia*, vol. 21 (1960), pp. 136-183. John L. Teall, *Speculum*, vol. 40 (1965), pp. 308-315, stresses the effects of the plague as the cause of Byzantine lack of initiative in Italy in 542-549; Procopius, however, ignores the plague as a military factor.

place, they put forward diametrically opposed pictures of Justinian. The *Buildings* (to give it a convenient title) presents Justinian as vicegerent of God on earth, ruling with divine inspiration which guides him even in problems of architecture, for according to Procopius he was twice able to solve engineering problems for the architects of the great church of Haghia Sophia thanks to his direct connection with God.<sup>18</sup> The concept of monarchy presented here goes back to Hellenistic origins; it was Christianized by Eusebius of Caesarea for his patron Constantine the Great, and became the standard ideal concept of the Byzantine emperor.<sup>19</sup> The Justinian of the *Secret History*, on the other hand, is a tyrant rather than a true king; he is the prince of the Devils, that is, the AntiChrist,<sup>20</sup> and he is responsible for the natural calamities which have fallen on his subjects as well as the misfortunes which even we attribute to our governments, such as high taxes.

The question of how we should date these two works is one which I have attacked in another paper soon to be published,<sup>21</sup> and I shall only summarize my arguments here. The *Buildings* must have been completed in their present form by 560, for Procopius refers in this treatise to a bridge under construction which was completed by that date.<sup>22</sup> However, the first book, the only part which was written with any artistry, may well be earlier, for it seems to have been a panegyric intended, perhaps, for oral delivery before the imperial court.<sup>23</sup> Whatever the truth of that, however, it is quite clear that Procopius wrote this work at Justinian's command, and it was no doubt part of a propaganda program which the ageing emperor initiated on his own behalf. One would not expect Procopius to dwell on anything which might draw attention to the shortcomings

<sup>18</sup> *Buildings*, I, 1, 67-78.

<sup>19</sup> This point was first made by Norman Baynes, "Eusebius and the Christian Empire," *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales*, vol. 2 (1933-1934), pp. 13-18, reprinted in his *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1955). For a recent study of the late Roman concept of kingship, see Francis Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy, Origins and Background*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* no. 9 (Washington, D.C., 1966).

<sup>20</sup> For the argument that Procopius, in naming Justinian the prince of demons, had in mind the AntiChrist, see B. Rubin, "Der AntiChrist and die 'Apokalypse' des Prokopios von Kaisareia," *Zeit. der deutsche Morgenland Gesellschaft*, vol. 35 (1960), pp. 55-63, and by the same author, *Das Zeitalter Iustinians* (Berlin, 1960), pp. 441-454.

<sup>21</sup> In *Classical Philology*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Procopius*, vol. 7 (Loeb Classical Library), edited by H. B. Dewing and G. Downey (Cambridge, Mass., 1940), p. ix; cf. E. Stein (*Histoire du Bas-Empire*, Paris-Bruxelles-Amsterdam, 1949, vol. 2, p. 837), who argues for a date before July, 555.

<sup>23</sup> As argued by G. Downey, "Notes on Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, Book I," *Studies Presented to David M. Robinson* (St. Louis, 1953), vol. 2, pp. 719-725; G. Downey, *Constantinople in the Age of Justinian* (Norman, Okla., 1960), pp. 156-159.



of the regime. There is, however, one point we should not overlook. In the first book, Procopius describes the church of Haghia Sophia as the crowning glory of Justinian's building program; its dome stood as proof of the emperor's divine inspiration, for had not he solved engineering problems which the engineers Anthemius and Isidorus could not? This was the dome which collapsed on May 7, 558. Of course, we cannot expect scrupulous accuracy in panegyrics, and Procopius would never have climaxed his story of how Haghia Sophia was built with the assistance of divine inspiration by saying that it fell down. But neither do we expect irony in panegyrics. In 559, Haghia Sophia was in ruins virtually outside the palace windows. If Procopius produced the first book of his *Buildings* then, could he have ignored this fact and cited the construction of this dome as an example of Justinian acting as vicegerent of God? I think not, and if I am right, then the first book of the *Buildings* at least should be placed before May of 558.<sup>24</sup> The work must be unfinished, for after the first book it grows increasingly perfunctory, degenerating at times into lists of building projects, and although it purports to cover the whole empire, it does not; Italy is omitted entirely. Since this was a commissioned work, I think we can account for its unfinished state by one of only two alternatives: either Procopius died or the emperor lost interest. I suspect myself that his death should be placed not later than 560.

As for the *Secret History*, the date which has received general acceptance is 550,<sup>25</sup> in other words, virtually synchronous with the first seven books of the *History of the Wars*. On four occasions, Procopius speaks of Justinian as having had the administration of the empire in his hands for thirty-two years, and since he clearly regarded Justinian as having administered the empire for his uncle Justin, the argument runs that we should count thirty-two years from Justin's accession in 518. Hence 550.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 837, argues that Procopius (*Bldgs.*, 3, 6, 6) represents the Tzani as completely pacified whereas after 557 they returned to brigandage, and that he does not mention the second revolt of the Samaritans in July, 555 (*Bldgs.*, 5, 7, 16); therefore the work should be dated before July, 555. However, both the Tzani and the Samaritans were a comfortable distance from Constantinople and could be comfortably overlooked by a panegyrist. The dome of Haghia Sophia was in a different category; not only was its ruin apparent to all in the capital, but Procopius represented its erection as evidence for the emperor's divine inspiration. Downey (*Constantinople in the Age of Justinian*, pp. 156-159), holds to the date of 559-560 for the *Buildings*.

<sup>25</sup> This date was first argued by J. Haury, *Procopiana* (Augsburg, 1891), pp. 9-11; cf. J. Haury, "Zu Prokops Geheimgeschichte," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 34 (1934), pp. 10-14, for a defense of his position. Earlier commentators, such as Felix Dahn (*Prokopios von Caesarea*, Berlin, 1865, p. 52) had dated the *Secret History* to 558-559.

Of course, the *Secret History* could not have been published in 550, or for that matter, at any time while Justinian was still alive. In fact, how it became known at all is something of a puzzle, for if Procopius died before the emperor, as I think likely, the *Secret History* must have fallen into the hands of a trusted literary executor who saw to it that it was preserved. By the time of the *Souda* it was attributed to Procopius and known under the name of the "Anekdotia" or "Unpublished Works." But for the moment we are concerned about the date when it was written. If we are to take Procopius literally, he wrote his *Secret History* thirty-two years after Justin's accession, that is, in 550 just as the history which made his reputation was being published. In this lively but libellous little document, Procopius put down all the information which he did not dare include in his published history. Or so he says. However, the argument that he had to paint a favourable picture of the imperial couple, and Belisarius and his wife, has its force somewhat weakened by the fact that in 554 he was able to publish a continuation of his *History* in which his tone was considerably more critical.

The alternative is to assume that Procopius wrote his *Secret History* later, but since he intended it as a kind of commentary on the *History of the Wars*, he confined it to the period covered by that work, and presented it as if it were a sequel to that work, written when it appeared. This is the solution I should prefer, all the more so since there is a curious cross-reference to the *Buildings* in the *Secret History*,<sup>26</sup> which must indicate that when he wrote the latter work, he knew at least that the *Buildings* was forthcoming. Now he wrote the *Buildings* about 558 at the request of the emperor, using official sources, obviously, and it is hard to believe that eight years earlier, he knew he was going to write this work, much less was able to make a cross-reference to it. By coincidence, if we count thirty-two years from Justinian's own accession as sole emperor inclusively, we reach 558, the year in which the *Buildings* was being written, and this raises the interesting possibility that the two works were written at the same time. The cross-reference I have referred to would be most easily understood if this were true, although it does involve a small textual problem of the sort which invites a great deal of ink-spilling among textual critics.

Let us accept, then, the dates of c. 550 for the first seven books of the *Wars*, c. 554 for Book 8 and c. 558 for the last two works, the *Secret History* and the *Buildings*. In the portion of the *Wars* which is earliest, the tone is optimistic and there appears to be general acceptance of Justinian's program. In the portion which

<sup>26</sup> *SH*, 18, 38, to *Bldgs.*, 2, 7, 2-16.

is later, there is a perceptible note of foreboding, and in the eighth book there is veiled criticism. Even in the seventh book there is the suggestion that Justinian did not pay sufficient attention to affairs in Italy <sup>26a</sup> and there is a lack of appreciation of the plague as a military factor. Then at 552, Procopius breaks off, leaving the *History of the Wars* for Agathias to carry on. Towards the end of his life, we have two more works, a panegyric written at the imperial command, indicating that he still enjoyed some degree of imperial favour, and the *Secret History*, full of bitterness against Belisarius and his wife, and Justinian and Theodora. It is his treatment of Justinian which concerns me here.

### III

The types of criticism levelled at Justinian in the *Secret History* fall roughly into two categories. First, there are what we may call self-interested criticisms of the sort we might expect from a man who identified himself with the propertied classes and was clearly conservative in his outlook. Justinian was an innovator who made changes for the sake of change; <sup>27</sup> he plundered the wealthy; <sup>28</sup> he allowed everyone to approach him, even men of the lower classes; <sup>29</sup> he allowed himself to be overcome with sexual passion for Theodora <sup>30</sup> who was below his station, and he crushed the large landowners with taxes. <sup>31</sup> When plague was sweeping the empire, far from lightening the tax burden, he made proprietors of estates responsible for the taxes of their deceased neighbours. <sup>32</sup> With a certain piquancy, Procopius, who was himself a *rhetor* or professional pleader in the courts, tells how a *rhetor* from his own Caesarea made a little money and used it to purchase a village on the seashore, whereupon Justinian expropriated the village and gave the *rhetor* only a fraction of its value. <sup>33</sup> Here we have echoes of the long and somewhat obscure struggle which Justinian carried on with the large landowners in the empire: a struggle which in the end the emperors lost. However, I want to direct your attention to another type of criticism which is found in the *Secret History*.

<sup>26a</sup> *Wars*, 7, 36, 4-6; where Procopius suggests that the emperor lost an opportunity in Italy by showing lack of interest in affairs there; cf. *Wars*, 7, 32, 9, where he puts into the mouth of Arsaces the statement that Justinian sat up to late hours, unguarded, arguing theology with aged priests.

<sup>27</sup> *SH*, 11, 2.

<sup>28</sup> *SH*, 11, 40.

<sup>29</sup> *SH*, 15, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *SH*, 9, 30.

<sup>31</sup> *SH*, 12, 13.

<sup>32</sup> *SH*, 23, 20.

<sup>33</sup> *SH*, 30, 18-20. Cf. *SH*, 26, 2, where he complains of the decreased importance of *rhetoires* as a result of Justinian's legal reforms.

This type can be labelled apocalyptic. In one telling passage<sup>34</sup> Procopius says that he, like most of his contemporaries, never felt that Justinian and Theodora were human, but rather a pair of demons, for their power to create destruction went beyond anything that any human being, however terrible, had possessed in the past. This was because *tyche* cooperated with them in their destructive aims, by bringing plague, earthquakes and floods. *Tyche*, which we translate not altogether adequately by "chance" has had a long history since Polybius. It was never purely blind even among the pagan historians, and for Procopius it had been brought within the Christian historical vision. It is the apparent cause of historical action, but behind *tyche* there was always divine power,<sup>35</sup> that is, the *logos* of God. So *tyche* was not senseless, and if it cooperated with an evil emperor to bring disaster on the empire, there had to be a reason for it.

Procopius goes on. A man who was in conference late at night with Justinian saw the emperor's head disappear as he walked about the room, and after the headless trunk had perambulated about for a while, the head reappeared.<sup>36</sup> Headless demons have a place in eastern apocalyptic literature, and they are associated with violent death.<sup>37</sup> Finally, Procopius raises the possibility that Justinian is the prince of the devils, that is, the AntiChrist.<sup>38</sup>

Scholars have always recognized a certain schizophrenia in Procopius' attitude towards Justinian, but it was not easy to produce an explanation. One reason for the difficulty was the general acceptance of the date of 550 for the *Secret History*: a date which was established in the late nineteenth century by the German scholar Haury who edited the Teubner text of Procopius. In other words, the *Secret History* was made virtually coincident with the first seven books of the *Wars of Justinian*; and it was followed by a more critical eighth book which somewhat diminished the force of Procopius' claim that he had to suppress criticism in his first seven books. Scholars who accepted the 550-date for the *Secret History* had to assume that Procopius had always been hostile to Justinian, but as long as he was part of the imperial command structure, his public voice was that of the military establishment, and he gave vent to his feelings only in a private tract which we had to believe was in existence for the last fifteen years of Justinian's reign. Berthold

<sup>34</sup> SH, 12, 13-17.

<sup>35</sup> SH, 4, 44-45; cf. G. Downey, "Paganism and Christianity in Procopius," *Church History*, vol. 18 (1949), pp. 89-102.

<sup>36</sup> SH, 20, 22.

<sup>37</sup> K. Gantar, "Kaiser Justinian als Koploser Dämon," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 54 (1961), pp. 1-3.

<sup>38</sup> SH, 20, 22.

Rubin, who is writing a monumental work on Justinian, *Das Zeitalter Iustinians* and has thus far produced the first volume, has suggested that Procopius was a member of a secret cell hostile to the regime,<sup>39</sup> and this view deserves some consideration. I have already pointed out that Procopius' attacks on the emperor's innovations and high taxes represent the viewpoint of the large landowners, and when he laments the treatment of the *rhetoires*, it is hard to ignore the fact that he was one himself. However, it is one thing to show that Procopius' feelings were shared by others, and another that he belonged to a subversive group. His home was Caesarea in Palestine, and this eastern origin has suggested to one scholar that he was a heretic,<sup>40</sup> thus accounting for his hostility to Justinian, but no evidence supports this view. Procopius planned a work on Christian heresies, but as far as we know he never wrote it, and his attitude towards theological disputes seem to have been that they were not worth any personal discomfort. As an easterner, Procopius probably found no real emotional appeal in Justinian's planned *renovatio* of the Empire, especially when the Persians took advantage of the Ostrogothic War to attack Syria and bring destruction on the east, particularly Antioch, a city Procopius knew, and probably loved.

However, if we follow the view which I believe is correct, that the *Secret History* dates to about 558, and was a pamphlet written for the relief of the historian's own personal feelings at a time when he was working on a commissioned propaganda piece in praise of Justinian, we can trace a certain development in Procopius' attitude. He always maintained a facade of loyalty. However, even in the period before 550, his feelings had changed from optimism to foreboding and disillusion, and after 550, he was no longer at pains to present the military command in a favourable light. He broke off his history at 552, and wrote again for publication only at the instigation of the emperor. This last work presents Justinian as the vicegerent of God, and his building program illustrated the typical virtues of a late Roman emperor, among which piety and *philanthropia* bulked large. At the same time, Procopius was presenting Justinian as the Antichrist in his *Secret History*.

Pagan writers on the concept of kingship in the Hellenistic world had put forward the view that the king was the *logos* incarnate, and therefore as the embodiment of natural law, was the source of

<sup>39</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 204-237.

<sup>40</sup> P. Bonfante, "Il movente della Storia arcana di Procopio," *Rend. dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di Scienze morali*, 1932, pp. 381-385.

<sup>40a</sup> Cf. *Wars*, 1, 3, 6, where Procopius states that he thinks it absurd to want to know the nature of God.

all laws. This could hardly do for the Christian world, for did not the first verse of the Gospel of St. John state that Christ was the *logos* made flesh? So Eusebius had explained in his panegyric on the Tricennalia of Constantine that the Christian emperor was not himself the *logos* but the friend of the *logos*, and that his rule on earth was an imitation of that in Heaven, and with this minor adjustment, the ancient concept of kingship did very well for the new order. So by virtue of his position, Justinian was the friend of the *logos*, which was the real explanation of historical action, even though the apparent cause might be *tyche* or chance. But for Procopius, looking back over a reign of disasters, what explanation could there be for a situation in which not only the emperor brought hardship on his subjects, in particular that stratum of society to which Procopius belonged, but *tyche* seconded his efforts by bringing earthquake, pestilence, and flood? His answer was to set the concept of Byzantine kingship on its head. Justinian was not the vicegerent of God but the prince of the devils. He was the AntiChrist bringing disaster on the people, and the proper rôle of the Byzantine *basileus* was somehow reversed.

I cannot document here the stages by which Procopius arrived at this conclusion. But I would direct your attention to his description of the sack of Antioch in 540 by the Persian king, Chosroes, a "most unholy man." His unholiness Procopius illustrated by putting into his mouth a sentiment taken from Herodotus, except that in Herodotus it had passed for wisdom rather than wickedness: "Not far from the truth, I think, is the ancient saying that God does not give blessings unmixed, but He mingles them with troubles and then bestows them on men . . ." <sup>41</sup> Procopius goes on to express his bewilderment at the *logos* of God which allowed Antioch to fall into the hands of such a man. <sup>42</sup>

The passage is a relatively late one in the *History of the Wars of Justinian*. I suspect that it may have been reworked shortly before the work was published as a whole about 550. <sup>43</sup> It is one place where Procopius speaks as a Christian of the sixth century A.D., for in common with other writers who make up the great Byzantine school

<sup>41</sup> *Wars*, 2, 9, 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Wars*, 2, 10, 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> Procopius' description of the sack of Antioch betrays an unmistakable desire to minimize the shortcomings of the Byzantine general in charge of Antioch's defense, who was Justinian's cousin, Germanus (cf. G. Downey, "The Persian Campaign in Syria in A.D. 540," *Speculum*, vol. 28 [1953], pp. 340-348). As long as Theodora was alive, Germanus' influence was kept in check, but his star was rising after 548. Note the conclusion of Jordanes' *Getica* which was published about the same time as *Wars*, 1-7. Procopius may well have felt after 548 that it was wise to minimize Germanus' rôle in the fall of Antioch.

of secular historians, he usually followed the practice of writing for a imaginary audience in Periclean Athens. If Procopius was in the east in 541 and saw Antioch in its ruined state, or if he only learned about it at second-hand, in either case I suspect that the sack of Antioch marked an important stage in the intellectual journey which led him to his final conclusion about Justinian.

That conclusion was that Justinian was the opposite of a true *basileus*, and that the explanation for the disasters of his reign could be found in the Apocalypse of St. John. It was hardly a conclusion worthy of an historiographical tradition which went back to Herodotus and Thucydides, but it was in the spirit of the age. Agathias of Myrrhina, Procopius' continuator, writing of the fresh outbreak of plague in 558, said that certain people attempted to explain the disasters of the age by pointing out that the oldest oracles of Egypt and Persia stated that good periods naturally altered with evil ones; others said that they were caused by the wrath of God. Agathias, remembering his Herodotus, said that he would not take sides in the dispute; he would keep to the laws of his history and say merely what happened.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Agathias, 5, 10.