

ENVISIONING BYZANTIUM:
MATERIALITY AND VISUALITY IN
PROCOPIUS OF CAESAREA

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Envisioning Byzantium

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Caesarea***

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by

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ABSTRACT

The three works of Procopius of Caesarea, the *History of the Wars*, the *Buildings* and the *Secret History*, form a corpus which can be profitably studied as a whole. My thesis is a typology of the visual in Procopius' corpus, which is embedded in a study of narrative technique. It concerns itself with the representation of material reality and the complex relationship between materiality and the text. It utilises the digressive and the descriptive as an indirect entry point to expose Procopius' literary *finesse* and his use of *poikilia*.

In the first half of this thesis, the main object of my study is the representation of the material world in Procopius. The first chapter is devoted to the first book of the *Buildings* as it depicts the city of Constantinople. The second chapter moves to the representation of space and the third chapter to that of objects of all sizes and kinds. From these three different angles, I demonstrate how the visual is deeply charged with both ideological and meta-textual intentions.

The second half of the thesis goes beyond materiality to examine what I discuss as the *imaginaire* of Procopius. The fourth chapter examines the way violence is depicted in a material and spectacular manner as well as its meta-textual implications, and the fifth and final chapter addresses the omnipresence of the supernatural in the corpus as well as Procopius' self-representation as narrator and character.

While preoccupied to some extent with ideological and political concerns, this thesis is first and foremost centred on the text itself and how its relationship to the description of material culture throws light on a crucial author on the cusp between the classical and the medieval *imaginaire*, one of the most significant authors in Byzantine literary culture.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This thesis is primarily a study of materiality in the three works of Procopius of Caesarea; the *History of the Wars*, the *Buildings* and the *Secret History*. It relies on close scrutiny of the Greek text, and endeavours to show its richness of texture. The literature of the late antique and early Byzantine period has, in my opinion, not yet received enough attention. This appears somewhat paradoxical as the period itself has been a very dynamic area of scholarship, particularly since the publication of Peter Brown's *World of Late Antiquity*¹. However, the types of approaches to the period – and its literature – have been mainly historical, archaeological and theological. Thankfully there has seemed to be a recent growth of interest in the literary and rhetorical qualities of prose authors belonging to this later period, and my thesis aims to contribute to this movement. A good example for this is the scholarship on Ammianus Marcellinus, which has embraced more literary readings of his work², and one can only hope that the same will happen for Procopius.

Issues of biography

Before addressing the problem of Procopian scholarship, it is necessary to mention what we know about Procopius himself – which is, not very much. Most of

¹ Brown (1971).

² This progression towards a more literary and nuanced reading of Ammianus is obvious between Matthews (1989) and Barnes (1998). Another ten years saw Kelly (2008), which examines allusive techniques in order to demonstrate the subtlety of Ammianus' writing.

what we know about his life is extracted from his works, and very little from external sources. Procopius was probably born around the year 500 C.E., and came from Caesarea in Palestine³. As for his family background, it is mostly unknown to us. Evans discusses the possibility that his father was Procopius of Edessa, a governor of Palestine to whom Procopius refers in the *Buildings*⁴, particularly as he held that position at the time of the writer's birth. Another possible father, according to Greatrex, is Stephanus, another resident of Caesarea and governor of Palestina Prima⁵. As far as his mother, siblings and the rest of his family are concerned, there is nothing in his text or other sources which could support further speculation. Another theory may be mentioned in passing, that of Treadgold, who imagines that Procopius was unhappily married, a conjecture based on some comments of the author about women and wives, and his famous claim at the beginning of the *Secret History* that he could not trust anyone, even very close relatives⁶.

As far as his social class is concerned, and again these are just hypotheses and extrapolations from his work, there are two different positions. The first and most commonly accepted is to see Procopius as a member of the land-owning elite, basing this assumption on the fact that he must have received an excellent traditional education in order to write in his painstakingly classical Attic Greek, indicating his family could afford it, and secondly his apparent sympathy for the land-owning class in the *Secret History*, appearing to indicate his belonging to this class. Sarris even goes as

³ Wars I.i.1, *Secret History* xi.25.

⁴ Evans (1972) 30, *Buildings* V.vii.14.

⁵ Greatrex (1996).

⁶ Treadgold (2007), 188, *Secret History* xvii.24-26 on adulterous wives, I.2 on distrusting his relatives.

far as to say he must have been a senator⁷. Howard-Johnston comes, quite provocatively, to the opposite position (mainly on the basis of Procopius' mention of a merchant friend whom he met coincidentally in Syracuse and from his interest in economic matters, as evident particularly in the second half of the *Secret History*) that his family belonged to the merchant class.⁸

His education is perhaps of more interest to this study. Indeed, the literature Procopius studied, as well as his rhetorical and legal training, is very likely to have had an impact on his writing. One can assume that he received the typical education that was to be expected in the eastern part of the Roman Empire⁹. Without going into a very detailed description of this education, it would have entailed reading classical Greek authors and practising writing in Attic Greek, as well as the use of rhetorical handbooks, and flexing his rhetorical muscles by the means of various rhetorical exercises and the composition and delivery of speeches¹⁰. The question of Procopius' reading is closely connected to that of his education, although it is safe to assume that his reading is not limited to that which occurred in school. The main classical authors read in schools at the time were Homer, Euripides, Menander and Demosthenes. Other authors studied included Aristophanes, Pindar, Sophocles, Callimachus, Aeschylus, Thucydides, Hesiod and Isocrates. A way to investigate the breadth of Procopius' reading is through his quotations of ancient authors, although quoting does not

⁷ Sarris (2006), 5-7. This theory is interesting if one thinks about the fascinatingly dual picture Procopius gives of the Senate; in the *Buildings* I.x.18, the senators are blooming with joy on a mosaic, and in the *Secret History* xiv.8, they are sitting as in a picture, devoid of any power.

⁸ Howard-Johnston (2000), 23; his argument for Procopius' being of the merchant class relies on an anecdote where the author meets a merchant friend in *Wars* III.xiv.7.

⁹ An excellent overview of education in Antiquity remains Marrou (1948). For a study of education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, see Cribiore (2001), and for an in depth study of the school of Libanius, Cribiore (2007). Of a related interest is also Johnson (2010), which exposes the culture of reading in the elite of 2nd Century imperial Rome.

¹⁰ This is particularly important for Chapter 1, which is centred on ekphrases where I will go into further details on the *Progymnasmata*.

necessarily mean he has read the author in question extensively (and, on the other hand, it should not be concluded that because he does not quote some authors he has not read them). The classical authors that he quotes, or to whom he refers or alludes, include Homer, Pindar, Aristophanes, Aeschylus, Plato, Xenophon, Herodotus and Arrian¹¹. Compared to other historians of his period such as John the Lydian and John Malalas, Procopius appears to use fewer direct references to classical authors. But there is little doubt he was well read and had an intimate knowledge of many ancient texts, particularly in order to write such a classicizing history. An interesting question regarding his literary background is whether he knew Latin and read Latin authors. This is difficult to prove but I would be inclined to think he did¹².

His profession and expertise are another source of controversy in Procopian scholarship. The main fact on which there is strong agreement and which is fairly well attested is that Procopius joined Belisarius as his assessor in 527¹³. He remained at his side, with some breaks in Constantinople, potentially until 542, and was a witness to the events on all three fronts which he narrates in his *History of the Wars*, in the East, in Africa and Italy. His expertise however is more contentious. On the one hand, some evidence points towards him having had some training in law¹⁴. Many sources refer to him as a *rhetor*: Agathias, Evagrius and the Suda¹⁵. The amount of discussion of legal

¹¹Homer: *Wars* I.i.6-17, I.xii.21, V.xi.2, V.xi.4, V.viii.1, *Secret History* xii.14, ix.24, *Buildings* I.ii.10, *Buildings* IV.vii.3. Pindar: *Wars* VIII.xvi.27, *Buildings* I.i.19. Aristophanes: *Wars* II.iii.43, VIII.vii.11, *Secret History* i.13, ix.50, xiii.3, xiii.11, xiv.11, xvi.7, xviii.29, xx.22. Aeschylus: *Wars* VIII.vi.15. Plato: *Wars* V.iii.1, V.vi.10, *Secret History* xiii.10, xiii.11, xx.22, *Buildings* I.i.22, V.viii.4. See Kaldellis (2004) for more on Platonic intertextuality. Xenophon: *Wars* I.iv.17, IV.xvi.12-25, *Buildings* I.i.13, IV.i.16. Also, see Pazdernik (2006) for parallels between Pharnabazus and Belisarius. Herodotus: *Wars* VIII.vi.12, VIII.vi.14. Arrian: *Wars* IV.xiv.48

¹² In chapter 2, I will discuss his interest in etymology and other languages, with examples of Latin etymologies he provides for his readers. In support of Procopius knowing some Latin, see Treadgold (2007), 177. Against it, see Börm (2007), 47.

¹³ *Wars* I.xii.24.

¹⁴ In favour of this, see Greatrex (2001).

¹⁵ Agathias poem. 22, Evagrius *Church History* iv.12, iv.19, v.24, Suda II.2479.

issues in the second half of the *Secret History*, and his apparent ease with Latin, may also indicate some legal training. On the other hand, Howard-Johnston argues, based on Procopius' obvious interest in matters of engineering and architecture, that he possesses a technical expertise, and that he worked alongside Belisarius in this capacity. Lastly, there is a mention in John of Nikiu of a Procopius who was both a patrician and prefect and whose work was renowned¹⁶.

Furthermore, in Malalas and Theophanes, a certain Procopius is prefect of Constantinople in 562¹⁷. It would be intriguing if this were the same Procopius as this was the year when Belisarius was arrested for conspiracy. But there is not much in support of this, particularly as Procopius was a common name at the time, especially in Palestine. Finally it is his literary career that is of greatest interest, and in this case there is also some debate, particularly regarding dates. The first of his works to have been published are books 1-7 of the *History of the Wars*, probably in 550 or 551. This is perhaps the least contested issue in the dating of his works¹⁸. The eighth book belongs to either 553/554 or 557¹⁹. The dating of the *Secret History* is particularly contentious, and the problem is focussed on a statement of Procopius saying that at the time of writing Justinian had been emperor for thirty-two years²⁰ but it is not clear whether he meant to start Justinian's reign when he came to power in 527 or from the beginning of Justin's reign. Most scholars have agreed on the latter, and therefore dated the *Secret History* to 550 or 551, but Croke recently argued for a later dating of 558 or 559²¹.

¹⁶ John of Nikiu 92.20.

¹⁷ Malalas, xviii.141, Theophanes, *Chronicles*. p238 de Boor (1965).

¹⁸ See Rubin (1957), 354, Cameron (1985), 9, Evans (1996), 301, Treadgold (2007), 189.

¹⁹ For 553/554, see Rubin (1957), 354, Greatrex (2003), 55-56, Treadgold (2007), 189-190. For 557, see Evans (1996), 312.

²⁰ *Secret History* xxiv.29.

²¹ For the earlier date, see Rubin (1957), 356, Cameron (1985), 8-9, Treadgold (2007), 187. For the later, see Croke (2005) – Scott (1987) had also argued for the later date.

Kaldellis then refuted his whole argument very aptly²². The date of the *Buildings* is no less contested, and the choice is between an early date of 554 and a later one of 560²³. Once more there are arguments in favour of both dates, and it should be noted that some of those in favour of the earlier one are centred on omissions in Procopius' narrative; but one might counter that these omissions are deliberate. It is also worth mentioning while discussing Procopius' literary career that he mentioned the project of writing an ecclesiastical history, but since there is no evidence that he did so, we can only speculate about this work²⁴.

Procopian scholarship

As this introduction has highlighted so far, there is an ample scholarship on biographical issues regarding Procopius, particularly to do with dating²⁵. It says a lot about Procopian scholarship that so much has been said about his life, considering we know so little about it. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to write up a complete history of the scholarship on Procopius but in order to situate my study in its context a brief overview is required. In terms of texts, without going into too many details, the

²² Kaldellis (2009). He argues that the 32 years is the period Procopius himself refers to as when Justinian was "administering the state" and then when he was "holding sole imperial command". This is further clarified by the fact many of the factional episodes appear to have happened during Justin's reign. Furthermore, Kaldellis argues that there are no episodes in the *Secret History* that can be positively proved to have happened after 550, whereas there are many places where, had Procopius been writing after 550, he ought to have mentioned further developments (for example with Peter Barsymes' return to the praetorian prefect's office). It also would not have made sense for Procopius to state that Justinian had never given a general cancellation of tax arrears when he did do so in 553 (*Secret History* xxiii.1).

²³ For the earlier date, see Cameron (1985), 9, Greatrex (1994), 107-113, Croke (2005), 424-430, Treadgold (2007), 190-191. For the later, see Whitby (1985), Evans (1996), 303-306, Roques (2000), 43.

²⁴ Mentioned in *Secret History* I.14, XI.33, xxvi.18. For speculations on the nature of this work, see Kaldellis (2009), 606-615.

²⁵ I have had to be selective in terms of how much I included in the footnotes regarding this issue, and they are by no means exhaustive.

edition of the text used by most is Haury, the edition followed by Dewing's Loeb²⁶. As far as general overviews of Procopius and his work are concerned, Dahn and Haury in the nineteenth century are crucial, as well as Rubin in the middle of the twentieth century²⁷. In English, there is the short survey by Evans, but the work which lays the foundation for a different approach to Procopius is Cameron's book which proposed a more complete vision of his work as a whole and warned against the dangers of using him as the main evidence for his period without considering the fact that his text was a work of literature²⁸. Other general studies of Procopius include ones embedded within surveys of several historians in his period, such as Brodka and Treadgold, and those which are part of surveys of literature in the Justinianic period, such as Flusin and Rapp²⁹.

One area of Procopian scholarship, which is particularly abundant, is that of military historiography. Many articles have been written on the subject; both Greatrex and Whitby have produced a plethora on these issues³⁰. An interesting article viewing Procopius as an excellent military historian was written by Kaegi³¹. Other scholars have also written focusing on a particular theatre of the *Wars*, such as the East in Börm and Italy in Kouroumali³². Other recent works have included a study of artillery as a classicising device in Procopius and Ammianus, and a survey of the description of battles by Whately³³. The other area of Procopian scholarship that has also been very productive recently is the archaeological approach, which uses his text in conjunction with archaeological evidence. An example of this is the volume of *Antiquité Tardive*

²⁶ Haury (1905-1913). Dewing (1914-1940).

²⁷ Dahn (1865). Haury (1891). Rubin (1957).

²⁸ Evans (1972). Cameron (1985).

²⁹ Brodka (2004). Treadgold (2007). Flusin (2004). Rapp (2005).

³⁰ See for example Greatrex (1995), (1998) and (2007), Whitby (1986), (1989), (1994) and (1995).

³¹ Kaegi (1990).

³² Börm (2007). Kouroumali (2006).

³³ Kelso (2003). Whately (2009).

devoted to the study of Procopius' *Buildings*: the second half, entitled "les réalités", is made up of articles of this type³⁴.

To return to more literary approaches, some of them have concerned themselves with Procopius' literary ancestry and the issue of intertextuality in his works.

Pazdernik, for example, has written about Procopius' relationship with Thucydides, as well as on parallels between him and Xenophon. The issue of Thucydidean imitation is another much visited *topos* of Procopian scholarship³⁵.

One approach that stands alone is that of Kaldellis, who examines closely the Platonic references in Procopius' work. Kaldellis' book is unique not only in this but also in the general picture it paints of the author as a non-Christian and the worthy heir of Thucydides in terms of his thinking on political theory³⁶.

Finally, the part of Procopian scholarship that I hope this study will complement the most is that which looks at the rhetorical aspects of his work closely. This approach has been limited somewhat to the *Buildings* because of its panegyric nature³⁷.

Aims, method and outline

This thesis is first and foremost a literary reading of Procopius' whole work. My first aim has been to pay close attention to its language and the texture of the text, as it appeared that a good portion of scholarship neglects the Greek in its pursuit of the

³⁴ See Feissel, Gregory, Belke, Palmer, Ulbert, Tsafir, Grossmann and Reynolds, all (2000).

³⁵ Pazdernik (1997) and (2000) on Thucydidean intertextuality, and (2006) for Xenophon. See also Adshead (1990) for more on classicising, and Kouroumali (2006).

³⁶ Kaldellis (2004), as well as articles on more specific issues, such as his relationship to John Lydus (2004)b and a study of the structure of the Persian war narrative (2010).

³⁷ In the volume of *Antiquité Tardive* previously mentioned, see both Mary and Michael Whitby's articles, as well as Webb. See also Elsner (2007).

socio-political context. In terms of finding an angle for this reading, I found it interesting, as well as being something which had not been done extensively in previous scholarship, to examine the relationship of Procopius' s writing with the idea of materiality, since the material as a theme concerns Procopius very much; what is more, there is a material "feel" to his text. A word of warning, however: this way of engaging with materiality is from the point of view of the text only (I am not an archaeologist, an art historian or an anthropologist). The problems of visuality and the use of the descriptive and digressive within Procopius' narrative are a main concern here. I have found scholarship on the ancient novels particularly useful, predominantly two books which deal with ekphrases in the novels; those of Bartsch and Morales³⁸. As far as the novel is concerned, I found it striking that the relationship of Procopius with authors closer to him in time such as the authors of these novels (particularly Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius), as well as masters of rhetorical play like Lucian, Philostratus and Aelius Aristides, or Libanius, has mostly been ignored, as if Procopius' s relationship with authors of classical antiquity like Thucydides or Xenophon could be examined without taking into account the hundreds of years of literature between them. I found approaches to later literature like Johnson's book on the *Life and miracles of Thekla*³⁹, which considers that text within the uninterrupted history of paradoxographic literature, whether religious or secular, very fruitful ones. So much has been said on the classicising aspects of Procopius, but instead of looking at his work in a direct relationship with classical texts, I have thought it necessary to see this relationship as taking into account the literature which happened between the

³⁸ Bartsch (1989), Morales (2004).

³⁹ Johnson (2006).

classical and Byzantine period, and to see Procopius as part of a dynamic and ever-evolving literary tradition, rather than painting him as an antiquarian historian.

I should also clarify the fact that this thesis has no interest in Procopius the historical character or the “real” person. What matters here is Procopius as a literary entity; a construct and product of his own narratives. It is not so much that I model my approach on modern literary theory claiming the “death of the author”, but rather that instead of focussing on mining biographical nuggets from the text, my interest is in seeing the way he has represented himself as author – as well as narrator and occasionally even character⁴⁰. This thesis is not focussed on Procopius himself but on his books and what they achieve aesthetically and artistically (and I will therefore not concern myself with his political or religious agenda).

While considering Procopius the author as a rhetorical and literary creation, I will try to think from a different standpoint from previous Procopian scholarship regarding issues like his educational background, his expertise or interests, and instead of being preoccupied for example with what books he has actually read, examine instead what he chooses to appear to have read, and this obviously will be particularly salient when touching the construction of technical material in his work and what it means for his literary persona. To go even further than Procopius himself, this approach extends to his representation of the world of Justinianic Byzantium, I shall aim to study everything from historical characters to monuments, rivers and objects as literary constructs, and as rhetorically-determined fictions. While I am aware that none of his works technically belong to the novelistic genre, or other genres considered as “pure” fiction (if there is such a thing), I will take as one of my main strategies to try

⁴⁰ Barthes (1984) 63-69 (originally published in 1967), as well as Foucault (1969).

and limit my discussion of historical, political, social and economical realities to cases where it will appear relevant in order to appreciate Procopius's text in terms of its literary quality – rather than solely his faithfulness to a “reality” attested by other sources, literary and documentary or archaeological evidence, something which has already been done to the extreme. Of course the topics of reality and realism are unavoidable while dealing with Procopius, particularly when dealing with issues of materiality. Materiality, as a trope in his works, seems to achieve an effect of giving the text a density of texture and a power of evoking a world as represented physically. By bringing his story before the reader's eyes, Procopius gives his whole text an ekphrastic quality. Perhaps it is then no wonder that his vision of Justinian, Theodora, Belisarius, and sixth-century Constantinople seem to have been burned indelibly into the retinas of countless generations of historians and continues to be quoted and reused indiscriminately on all things Justinianic, even after many works of scholarship have exposed his less than reliable qualities. I hope that this thesis might show how the *imaginaire* of Procopius has shaped our vision of sixth century Byzantium drastically, in the same way one cannot think of the Trojan War without seeing it through Homer's text or the Peloponnesian War through Thucydides'. And I would like to think that one of the reasons for this is the material quality of his text and the sense of vividness (or *enargeia*). To be more specific, the emphasis on *visuality*⁴¹ touches Procopius's text on various levels; it is not only a quality of his set-pieces but imbues the whole text with an evocative *visuality* underpinned by representations of the act of viewing and an emphasis on the audience's reactions and emotions – such as wonder. Two scholars

⁴¹ *Visuality* in Antiquity is a rich subject and its bibliography is large and ever-growing. See Elsner (1995) on art and Roman viewers, Frontisi-Ducroux (1994) on Greek art and *visuality*, Goldhill (1994) on the Hellenistic viewer and (1996) on changes in viewing cultures from the classical period to the Second Sophistic, and Simon (1988) on the ancients and optics. More specifically on the gaze, see Bryson (1994), Elsner (1996), Frontisi-Ducroux (1996), Goldhill (1998) and all the essays in Fredrick (2002).

have argued for a similar phenomenon of ekphrastic vividness bolstering a whole text as opposed to remaining within the confine of specific set descriptions; one of Ovid⁴², the other of Heliodorus⁴³. When Whitmarsh claims that ‘the broader definition of ekphrasis raises the possibility of a broader contagion for this ontological anxiety and play, which may infect *all* descriptions’⁴⁴, I think this applies very well to Procopius, not only in his descriptions, but in all of his narrative, as well as his style.

Because of my focus on materiality, I found Michael Roberts’ book on what he refers to as the *jewelled style* very useful, although the texts studied were Latin poems by authors such as Ausonius or Sidonius, as I found many of the characteristics of this style, for example its density of texture, its use of *poikilia/varietas* and colours, can be found in Procopius⁴⁵. And while Roberts’ focus was on poetry, he believed that prose authors like Ammianus could have been included in his study. While Procopius is a prose writer, I hope to demonstrate that his prose is rhetorically crafted, and that the construction of his text and of his sentences has a material and architectural feel, which is very sophisticated. I have been especially concerned with aesthetics, and while this jewelled and perhaps over-wrought aesthetic can be seen to be particular to the late antique period, as I have just argued with the comparison to later Latin poets, there is also a trans-historical aspect to it. For example, the use of enumeration and the aspects of cataloguing, could be seen to fit into a general aesthetic of listing, which Eco has seen as reflected both in literature and the visual arts from Antiquity to our times⁴⁶. The abundance of technical descriptions and their intensely descriptive quality is a literary

⁴² Hardie (2002), particularly chapter 5 and 6 dealing with Narcissus and Pygmalion, and the illusionist aesthetic predominant in ancient art criticism.

⁴³ Whitmarsh (2002).

⁴⁴ *Idem*, 112.

⁴⁵ Roberts (1989).

⁴⁶ Eco (2009). Also see Foucault on the organisation of information in classical and modern *episteme* (1966).

device which fits into Procopius' agenda, but could be said to work similarly in the texts of French writers of the twentieth century like Zola or Verne. Comparing Procopius to modern novelists might seem a bit far-fetched, but the point here is to recognise the need for scholarship on Byzantine historiography to engage with the texts as literature, and stop reading the texts solely as sources, picking apart what is attested or not. This need to engage history as literature has been addressed by a volume edited by Ruth Macrides, which offers some very fruitful approaches to Byzantine historians, envisaging the texts on their own terms, as opposed to positivist approaches⁴⁷. My thesis proposes to treat Procopius as literature. Whether his text belongs to what we think of as high or low literature, or somewhere in the middle, is not a judgment I will be making. The first objective of this thesis will be to discuss the material aspects of Procopius' prose, and the second will be to go beyond the material and access Procopius' corpus from a new angle, that of his *imaginaire*. Jacques Le Goff, in his work on the medieval *imaginaire*, defined his work as a study of mental images as opposed to the study of real, material images, which would be iconography⁴⁸. I am interested in exploring the powerful literary images in Procopius, which have conditioned the way we now envision Byzantium in the reign of Justinian. In a similar way to that in which Jamie Masters articulated his re-evaluation of Lucan around the striking images in his text, I hope that my study of Procopius' lexicon of images will contribute to opening up a new approach his work⁴⁹.

In the first three chapters that make up the body of this thesis, I will envisage materiality in Procopius' corpus in relation to three different categories. The first chapter will deal solely with book I of the *Buildings* in order to see how the ekphrasis

⁴⁷ Macrides (2010).

⁴⁸ Le Goff (1985), iv.

⁴⁹ Masters (1992).

of Constantinople is constructed and composed of descriptions on various scales and of a varied nature. I will discuss the use of *poikilia* and the concept of aesthetic *aporia* and start posing the question of the function of materiality within Procopius' literary agenda. The second chapter will look at the construction of space in the text, both in the way geography is dealt with, and the way the text itself represents issues of spatiality, as well as the use of landscapes as more than just settings for the narrative, but expressive in themselves. The third chapter is devoted to the study of objects in Procopius' text, looking again at how their descriptions are constructed, particularly regarding the issue of technicality as a rhetorical pose, as well as dealing with objects as icons charged with meaning. The second part of my thesis will attempt to move beyond the representation of material reality in order to deal with more abstract issues. The fourth chapter will approach the topic of violence in Procopius' text, and again it will be apparent that violence is a concept expressed in material and visual terms. I will show amongst other things the spectacular aspects of its representation. It can also be said that the representation of bodily violence, such as mutilation, is a reflection on the integrity of the text itself. Finally, my fifth chapter looks at the paradoxical, which enables us to examine Procopius' play on the ideas of credibility and verisimilitude, and presents not only many examples of his strong narrative persona, but also representations of him as a character. The great variety of images represented by fabulous tales, omens and dreams, genuinely exposes the richness of the literary texture of his work and its evocative power.

CHAPTER 1

THE BUILDINGS OF CONSTANTINOPLE: MONUMENTAL EKPHRASIS OF A CAPITAL

It might seem counter-intuitive to open this thesis with a study of the *Buildings*. Indeed, this work has often been regarded as marginal in Procopius' corpus and its intertextuality with his other two works less fruitful for scholars than that between the *Wars* and the *Secret History*. The latter two have appeared to form their own corpus somehow. As Treadgold put it: "In the broadest sense, all of Procopius' histories form a single great work, because the *Secret History* is cast as a supplement to the *Wars* and the *Buildings* cannot really be considered a history"⁵⁰. Because of its nature as an imperial panegyric, it has been accused of insincerity⁵¹. The crux of the problem appears to be the difficulty of an ideological reconciliation between a work of classical history, an invective, and a panegyric. Which is why the *Wars* and *Secret History* have appeared to form an ideal balance, the latter building up on the elements of criticism already present in the first. This balance would then be ruined by the apparent flattery of the emperor in the *Buildings*, particularly as it uses identical themes and language to that used while Procopius criticized him in the other two works⁵². However, to begin with questions of genre, at least in terms of the classical theory of genre, it appears that Procopius considered all his three works to be histories. In the preface of the *Buildings*,

⁵⁰ Treadgold (2007), 213.

⁵¹ Kaldellis (2004), 51, 56-58. For references to previous scholars who share this opinion, see *ibid.* 51 n.111.

⁵² For an excellent review of some of the themes of the *Secret History* reversed in the *Buildings*, see *ibid.* 45-61.

the author introduces the work in a manner which would fit perfectly a classicizing work of history:

ἀλλά μοι πολλάκις ἔννοια γέγονεν ὅπως τε καὶ πηλίκων ἀγαθῶν αἴτιον ἱστορία ταῖς πόλεσι γίνεσθαι εἶωθε, παραπέμπουσά τε εἰς τοὺς ἐπιγόνους τῶν προγεγενημένων τὴν μνήμην, καὶ ἀνταγωνιζομένη τῷ χρόνῳ κρυφαῖα ποιεῖσθαι διατεινομένῳ τὰ πράγματα...⁵³

This work fulfils one of the aims of historiography: recording deeds that might otherwise be forgotten, in this instance, the buildings of Justinian.

The first book of the *Buildings* offers the perfect gateway into Procopius' work and into the first part of this thesis which deals with the material world because it concerns itself solely with material history, as it depicts Constantinople both in terms of the imprint the imperial constructions have left on the landscape, but also in terms of its natural landscape. It allows us to begin scrutinising the treatment of materiality in Procopius' work, and to start questioning this omnipresent concern for the material in his corpus by looking at a place where it is in its most potent concentration. In terms of narrative texture, materiality enables us to look at the status of digressions and their relationship to the more traditional passages of straightforward narrative and the general plot. In the case of this work, the descriptions of buildings and landscapes, which would usually be digressive and interrupt the plot, end up being the central plot and argument, and the narrative passages appear digressive in their interruption of this agenda of the material. One could go as far as to say *Buildings* I appears to be a monumental ekphrasis of Constantinople, itself made up of a multitude of smaller ekphraseis. Furthermore, not only does *Buildings* I present a high concentration of Procopian idiosyncrasies, which will be encountered repeatedly and examined from various angles

⁵³ Yet the thought has many times occurred to me, how many and how great are the benefits which are wont to accrue to states through history, which transmits to future generations the memory of those who have gone before, and resists the steady effort of time to bury events in oblivion. All translations of Procopius are adapted from Dewing (1940).

throughout this thesis, such as the pose of technical expertise, a concern for aesthetics, a style marked by exaggeration and enumeration, metaphors drawing parallels between nature and art or technique, but it also erects a glorious frontispiece to his work. As he himself puts it in the introduction, quoting Pindar, ‘At the beginning of our work we must place a far-shining front’⁵⁴. This is how he explains his decision to start with Byzantium, as he refers to Constantinople⁵⁵, setting up his panegyric of the buildings of Justinian by putting the capital of the Empire front and centre. The Constantinopolitan setting also implies strong ties to the *Secret History*, whose main stage happens to be the capital of the Empire, as opposed to the *Wars* which are set at its periphery.

Another reason to look at *Buildings* I on its own, apart from the unity it possesses due to its setting, is that it is a highly structured and rather finished product, as opposed to the whole work itself which appears not to have been finished⁵⁶. Like Justinian in this panegyric, Procopius is an architect who constructs literary discourse with skilful rhetorical craftsmanship. He plays with different types of ekphraseis, on different scales of description, from a single column to the overall geographical appearance of the city, in order to construct a picture simultaneously of the city of Constantinople and its buildings, and also the emperor who lies behind them as builder. On an ideological level, the depiction of the capital of the Empire may be seen as a paradigm of the ideal capital within the panegyric that presents Justinian himself as a paradigm of the ideal sovereign through his buildings. This text also provides some leads in articulating Procopius’s conception of himself in the history of classical and post-classical literature, placing him at a crossroads between multiple literary lineages.

⁵⁴ *Buildings* I.i.19, Pindar, *Olympians*, VI.4.

⁵⁵ *Buildings* I.i.18: *And with good reason the buildings in Byzantium, beyond all the rest, will serve as a foundation for my narrative.*

⁵⁶ Cameron (1984), 84-85.

His representation of the buildings of Constantinople is highly influenced by models inherited from the Second Sophistic in particular, which place Procopius at the end of a vast, diverse and long-lived literary tradition that extends from rhetorical textbooks to the ancient novel, from *periegesis* to scientific treatises and from Platonic dialogues to epigrams, as well as reaching back chronologically to Homer's ekphrasis of Achilles' shield in *Iliad* XVIII. In this chapter, I will first look at the technical aspects of Procopius's prose which show his deep-seated interest in matters of construction, from floor-planning to choosing the right materials.

Technical descriptions

A feature of Procopius' prose that appears strikingly throughout his work, and particularly in his descriptions of monuments in the *Buildings*, is an emphasis on the technical⁵⁷. This manifests itself principally through the use of specific, technical vocabulary, an abundance of minute details, and an overall impression of complexity. The technical descriptions may be seen, from a rhetorical perspective, as means to avoid the tendency to vagueness that the trope of buildings within imperial encomium often displays⁵⁸. They are part of a rhetorical strategy at least as much as a didactic discourse on architecture.

⁵⁷ On the problem posed by technicality in Procopius as a rhetorical pose, see the study of siege-engine descriptions in chapter 3.

⁵⁸ As argued in Elsner (2007), 36-37.

According to most of the *Progymnasmata*, the two qualities required of an ekphrasis are *σαφήνεια* and *ἐνάργεια*; clarity and vividness⁵⁹. These are said in a Byzantine commentary on Aphthonius to function in the following manner:

ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων ἐναργῶς τὸ δηλούμενον. ἀντι τοῦ φανερὸν ποιῶν, ἐκ τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἐναργῶς εἰς ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ ὑποκείμενον· ἢ γὰρ τοῦ λόγου σαφήνεια νοεῖν καὶ βλέπειν ποιεῖ τὰ λεγόμενα τοὺς ἀκούοντας...⁶⁰

The detailed aspect (*κατὰ μέρος*) of a technical description hence allows in conjunction with clarity of expression (*ἢ [...] τοῦ λόγου σαφήνεια*) – although the fact that parts of the architectural depiction of Saint Sophia might be called ‘clear’ in actuality is debatable – to bring forth the object described so that it is both imagined and seen (*νοεῖν καὶ βλέπειν*) by the listener or reader. In the case of his ekphrasis of constructions, one of Procopius’ strategies in order to achieve this rhetorical feat of bringing them before the eyes is to show them, not from an immediately visual or phenomenological perspective, in a kind of overview or snapshot, of the monument in question, but by emphasizing the way they are built, especially on a much smaller scale. For example, in I.ii.1 he describes the base of the column supporting Justinian’s statue as:

ἐνταῦθα ξυνδῆκται λίθων οὐχ ἥσσον ἢ ἑπτὰ ἐν τετραγώνῳ πεποιήνται, κατὰ μὲν ἀπόθασιν ξυγκείμεναι πᾶσαι, τοσοῦτον δὲ ἐκάστη τῆς ἔνεργεν οὐσης ἔλασσομένη καὶ ἀποδέουσα, ὥστε δὴ τῶν λίθων ἕκαστον τῇ ἐμβολῇ προὔχοντα βαθμὸν γεγονέναι τῶν τε ἀνθρώπων τοὺς ἐκείνη ἀχειρομένους ἐπ’ αὐτῶν ὥσπερ ἐπὶ βάρων καθῆσται.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Aelius Theon 7.31 ed. Patillon (1997): Ἄρεται δὲ ἐκφράσεως αἶδε· *σαφήνεια* μὲν μάλιστα καὶ *ἐνάργεια* τοῦ σχεδὸν ὁρᾶσθαι τὰ ἀπαγγελλόμενα. Passages on ekphrasis in later *Progymnasmata*: Hermogenes *Progymnasmata*, ed. H. Rabe (1913), 10.47-50 (pp.22f.); Aphthonius *Progymnasmata*, ed. H. Rabe (1926), 12.46-49 (pp. 36-41); Nicolaus *Progymnasmata*, ed. J. Felten (1913), pp.67-71. For an English translation of these passages, see Kennedy (2003), Theon p45-47, Hermogenes p86, Aphthonius p117-120, Nicolaus p166-168. On ekphrasis in the *Progymnasmata*, see Bartsch (1989), 7-10; Becker (1995), 24-31; Webb (1999), 11-15, Webb (2009), 39-59. On rhetorical education and the *Progymnasmata*, see Cribiore (2001) and Webb (2001), 289-316.

⁶⁰ Ioannes Sardonios, *Commentarium in Aphthonium*, ed. Rabe (1928) 216-217, *bringing the thing shown vividly before the eyes: instead of making manifest, bringing the subject vividly before the eyes by detailed presentation; for the clarity of the speech makes the listeners imagine and see the subject*. Translation adapted from Webb (2009), 206.

⁶¹ *In that place there is a structure of stones, which is made up of not less than seven courses, laid in a rectangle, all fitted to each other at their ends, but each course being narrower than that beneath, and set*

This description strikingly appears to be more complicated than what it actually represents. Indeed, Procopius chooses not to describe the base as it appears at first sight, but to build its representation gradually by showing how it is actually made. He starts by mentioning that there are seven courses of stones, attracting the attention of the reader to the layered aspect of the structure, and then continues by saying how they are attached and how each one recedes from the one it is laid on. He could have said from the beginning that the base of the column resembles steps, but he does not use the word *βαθμὸν* until he has finished explaining how the stones were laid. It appears that Procopius refuses to give his reader the overall picture straightaway, but instead takes him through the layers of the structure progressively, providing more information with each step so that the overall picture finally emerges at the end.

This attention to the structural and layers is accompanied by a concrete, and yet rhetorical, concern for the way stones are cut and fitted together, in the following passage where he describes the column itself (I.ii.2):

*οὐ μονοειδῆς μέντοι, ἀλλὰ λίθοις ἐν περιδρόμῳ εὐμεγέθεισιν σύνθετος, ἐγγωνίοις μὲν τῇ ἐντομῇ οὖσιν, ἐς ἀλλήλους ἐμπειρία τῶν λιθοδόμων ἐναρμοσθεῖσι.*⁶²

The column, as the base he just described, is not monolithic but layered, and information is provided not only on the stones and their size (*εὐμεγέθεισιν*), but also on the way they are set (*σύνθετος*), in a circle (*ἐν περιδρόμῳ*), and the way they are cut (*τῇ ἐντομῇ οὖσιν*), at an angle (*ἐγγωνίοις*), and assembled together (*ἐς ἀλλήλους [...] ἐναρμοσθεῖσι*).

The abundance of details can be taken from different perspectives. On the one hand, it shows a concern for technical aspects (for example the craftsmanship of the masons,

back, with the result that each of the stones becomes, from the way it is set, a projecting step, so that people assembled there sit upon them as upon seats.

⁶² *not a monolith, however, but composed of large stones in circular courses, cut so as to form angles on their inner faces, and fitted to one another by the skill of the masons.*

ἐμπειρία τῶν λιθοδόμων), and it also allows the reader to paint himself a detailed picture of the column, not just seeing it from the outside, but with a knowledge of how it is constructed on the inside (as he would not know about the angular cut of the inside faces of the stones if he had not been told). This concern for stones and seemingly aestheticising appreciation of them could be seen as reminiscent of Pausanias, who does not, however, show as much concern for construction in itself, in his description of the Propylaea at Athens:

τὰ δὲ προπύλαια λίθου λευκοῦ τὴν ὄροφὴν ἔχει καὶ κόσμῳ καὶ μεγέθει τῶν λίθων μέγρι γε καὶ ἐμοῦ προεῖχε...⁶³

It is interesting that the Greek καὶ κόσμῳ καὶ μεγέθει τῶν λίθων here could be understood in two ways, as it could be said to be unrivalled for both its own beauty and also the size of its stones, or for the beauty and size of the stones themselves. No matter whether the beauty is that of the Propylea or of the stones, there seems to be a direct relationship between beauty and size of stones.

Another earlier work which concerns itself directly with stones is that of Posidippos' *Lithika* epigrams⁶⁴, where he describes gems, paying attention to their colour, origin, and the way they are cut and carved. This emphasis on the *making* of objects was already a feature in earlier ekphraseis such as the Homeric shield in *Iliad* 18⁶⁵. Procopius could be seen therefore to be drawing on both high literary tradition, epic and Hellenistic epigrams, and on the periegetic traditions of description which

⁶³ 1.22.4, *The gateway has a roof of white marble, and down to the present day it is unrivalled for the beauty and size of its stones.* Translation Jones (1918).

⁶⁴ For main editions and translations see Austin and Bastianini (2002), Acosta-Hughes, Kosmetatou and Baumbach (2004) and Gutzwiller (2005) and articles such as Kosmetatou and Papalexandrou (2003), 53-58, Lelli (2004), 127-138, Petrain (2005), 329-357, Fuqua (2007), 281-291. For an example of the concern for stones' texture, see for epigram 14 in Austin and Bastianini on jasper, a gem which is described as cloudy and ethereal.

⁶⁵ See Dubois (1982), 13-18, 19-21; Becker (1995), 48, 88-92, 96-98. The emphasis on the artist's making is mostly conveyed by the use of the verbs ποιέω at 18.478, 482, 490, 573 and 587, τεύξω at 483, 609 and 610, and τιθῆμι at 483, 541, 550, 561 and 607.

insist, to some extent, on precise technical aspects within their rhetoric⁶⁶. This way of describing a monument stone by stone, part by part, also provides descriptions with a sense of movement, even if it is just the movement of the eye running along the layers of stone. This periegetic style of ekphrasis which guides the reader throughout the building allows the orator, in Ruth Webb's words, to "turn an account of a static object into an account of a journey, representing space through the passage of time"⁶⁷. The ekphrasis is actually described in the *Progymnasmata* as a *λόγος περιηγηματικός*⁶⁸. The orator acts almost as guide in his description, guiding the audience's gaze, taking it on a *tour* as the term *periegetic* implies. Suzanne Dubel describes *periegesis* as a "discours géographique qui repose en partie sur l'efficacité représentative du langage et met en œuvre toute une stratégie d'autopsie partagée"⁶⁹. This movement in the description and this idea of a shared autopsy are crucial in the effectiveness of Procopius' ekphrasis.

The description of Hagia Sophia, the literary *tour de force* of *Buildings* I, shows a rather high level of precision, in its technical vocabulary and in its complexity. Procopius even claims to choose to use the vocabulary of those who are skilled in such matters, in I.i.32 when he uses first the expression *κατὰ ἥμισυ τὸ στρογγύλον* (half a circle), and then adds that the expression used by the specialists, *οἱ περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα σοφοί*, is actually *ἡμικύλινδρον* (half-cylinder). By this correction, he shows not only that he is one of these *σοφοί*, but also that he is interested enough in matters of accurate technical language to use the correct word⁷⁰. In I.i.37 too, he first uses the term *λόφοι* (elevations), and then uses the technical term, *πεσσούς* (piers). This precision goes so far in some

⁶⁶ For a bibliography of periegetic writing, see next chapter.

⁶⁷ Webb (1999b), 65.

⁶⁸ Hermogenes 22.7, Aphthonius 36.21. On the ekphrasis as periegetic discourse and *enargeia* see both Webb (1997), 229-248 and Dubel (1997), 249-264.

⁶⁹ Dubel (*ibid.*), 257.

⁷⁰ So much so that Howard-Johnston (2000), 19-30, claims that Procopius was an engineer. This question will be discussed in chapter 3.

parts of his description of Hagia Sophia that it is hard to follow without looking at a plan of the church or without having the church in front of our eyes (perhaps, part of the text could have been performed orally in or near the monument described). For example in I.i.44 where he describes the famous pendentives, Procopius says:

καί ἡ μὲν τριγώνου ἐκάστη κρηπίς πεπιεσμένη τῇ ἐς ἀλλήλας τῶν ἀψίδων ἐνέρσει ὀξεῖαν ποιεῖται τὴν κάτω γωνίαν, συναναβαίνουσα δὲ τὸ λοιπὸν εὐρυνομένη τῇ μεταξὺ χώρᾳ ἐς τὸ κυκλοτερές τελευτᾷ, ὃ ταύτη ἀνέχει, γωνίας τε τὰς λειπομένας ἐνταῦθα ποιεῖται.⁷¹

This description, seemingly obscure at first sight, resonates with a high level of precision and complexity. The pendentives enable him to consider questions of geometry, as he tries to represent the way a circular shape, the dome, rests on a square one formed by the four pillars. But the description could be considered slightly redundant, stating for example that the lower point of the triangle is an acute angle, when triangles commonly only have acute angles. It is difficult to determine whether Procopius is purposefully trying to make his description too complicated or if this reflects a didactic concern that aims to educate the reader as thoroughly as possible about the plan of Hagia Sophia. Perhaps this approach would be more at home in a treatise on architecture, such as that of Vitruvius, than in a panegyric text. Indeed, this discourse of precision reminds one of other genres preoccupied with material objects, such as technical writing and periegesis. For example, one may think of Pausanias' account of a Sauromatic breastplate that leads him to discuss the Sauromatae's customs, the materials used in their weapons and the way their breastplates are assembled⁷². The relations between technical knowledge and rhetorical performance must also be taken

⁷¹ *And while each supporting end of a triangle, having been contracted to a point by the coming together of each pair of arches, makes the lower point an acute angle, yet as the triangle rises and its width is extended by the intermediate surface, it ends in the segments of a circle which it supports, and forms the remaining angles at that level.'*

⁷² I.21.5-7.

into account. It can be shown, in the case of such sciences in the Second Sophistic as astrology, physiognomics and medicine, that it is possible ‘to look at these ancient *scientiae* as rhetorical and to see the practitioners as attempting to persuade their audiences that they offer knowledge’⁷³. These *τέχναι* were political weapons used in a rhetorical *ἀγών*; for example, physiognomics were principally used in the encomiastic or polemical game of praise and blame⁷⁴. Our modern categories of science and technique may not be applicable to the cultural context of the late Roman Empire.

Procopius provides information on the building of Hagia Sophia that not only includes its structure but also the materials that were used in its construction. For example in I.i.53 he informs the reader that the stones were not held together by lime, *τίτανος*, nor by asphalt, *ἄσφαλτος*, but by lead, *μόλιβδος*⁷⁵. Nonetheless, these technical concerns in describing edifices are not part of a dry and dull discourse on architecture; rather, by giving the precision needed by these ekphraseis, they are fully integrated in a genuine poetics of monuments. We cannot help but notice that Procopius never mentions precise dimensions, as do some of his predecessors like Strabo or Pausanias, but seems to be more interested in the impressions created by these monuments, and aside from technical precision, uses other rhetorical tropes to produce *enargeia* and make his descriptions vivid.

⁷³ Barton (1994), 170.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 111-131. On physiognomy and Polemo, see Swain (2007).

⁷⁵ This is probably incorrect, as it appears that the mortar was made of sea-sand, lime and ground bricks, Emerson and van Nice (1943), 403-436.

Poetics of monuments

In classical culture, ekphraseis were the place for rhetoricians to demonstrate their skills by playing with the relationship between art and text, visual and verbal, and sometimes altering the barrier between those media⁷⁶.

In the *Buildings* there is obviously a conscious play on the mirror-relationship between the artist who cuts stones and makes them fit skilfully and the author who does the same with words and sentences, as well as the emperor-builder who is at the centre of all this. A striking example of the architecture of Procopius' language can be seen in I.v.2-4 where he uses a broad rhythm to describe the sea with long cola and regular paired *clausulae*⁷⁷, using what Hörandner calls 'akzentuierenden daktylischen Dipodie'⁷⁸, as we can see for example with *χρείαν ευδαίμονα* and *ἤδιστοι ἅπαντες* which present a double accentuated dactyl - that is to say two times one syllable accentuated followed by two not accentuated.

But the example above is part of one of very few descriptions of a natural landscape; in the *Buildings* the attention is largely focused on man-made, or more precisely, Justinian-made items. The descriptions of monuments tend to use a number of *topoi* such as the bright and light-reflecting quality of the stones, the variety of their colours or the impressive size of buildings. The treatment of light is crucial in the ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia, as part of this strategy of vividness accomplished through representing the impressions provoked by the church in a manner which counter-balances the objective - and therefore less impressionistic - technical descriptions. Procopius describes the formidable light in the great church in two stages, first with an

⁷⁶ On ekphrasis and media see Mitchell (1994) and on intermediality see Rippl (2005).

⁷⁷ For prose rhythmicity in rhetorical Byzantine texts, see Hörandner (1981).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 27.

objective statement: φωτι δὲ καὶ ἡλίου μαρμαρυγαῖς ὑπερφυῶς πλήθει⁷⁹. This only states that there is an abundance of light in the church, whose two sources are the direct daylight, and the reflection of the sun's rays bouncing off the marbles. But this objective statement is supplemented by the impression which henceforth affects the viewer:

φαίης ἂν οὐκ ἔξωθεν καταλάμπεσθαι ἡλίῳ τὸν χῶρον, ἀλλὰ τὴν αἴγλην ἐν αὐτῷ φύεσθαι, τοσαύτη τις φωτὸς περιουσία ἐς τοῦτο δὴ τὸ ἱερόν περιέχεται...⁸⁰

The fact that this is an impression is indicated by the optative φαίης, and the impression itself is created by the antagonism between what one expects, that is that the sunlight would come and light up the church from outside (ἔξωθεν), and what one actually feels, which is that this radiance (notice the use of αἴγλη⁸¹) is actually growing from inside the church. The use of the verb καταλάμπεσθαι in the first half corresponds to the expected vocabulary of light, whereas φύεσθαι seems less expected and provides this phenomenon with an organic quality and a mystic aspect, as the light has no source but rather is self-produced. The light also has a liquid quality which is emphasised by the last clause, introduced by the intensive τοσαύτη, whose verb περιέχεται renders both the abundance and fluidity of the light. This abundance of light in the church is later explained in I.i.41-43 by the fact that the dome is perforated at regular intervals. The daylight is said to come through those openings by the use of a metaphor: ὄθεν αἰεὶ διαγελαῖ πρῶτον ἡ ἡμέρα⁸².

⁷⁹ I.i.29, *it abounds exceedingly in sunlight and in the reflection of the sun's rays from the marble.*

⁸⁰ I.i.30, *Indeed one might say that its interior is not illuminated from without by the sun, but that the radiance comes into being within it, such an abundance of light bathes this shrine.*

⁸¹ Procopius uses αἴγλη multiple times in his descriptions in *Buildings* I, at ii.10, iv.5, iv.25, vi.6, xi.3, xi.6. He only uses it once outside the *Buildings*, in *Wars* IV.xiv.5 when describing a solar eclipse.

⁸² '[...] it is through this that the light of day always first smiles.' The same metaphor can also be found in Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*, I.1.1: Ἡμέρας ἄρτι διαγελώσης, and after Procopius, in Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Oratio de translatione Chrysostomi*, p314 l.27, ἡμέρας γὰρ ἄρτι διαγελώσης and in Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, I.ix.1, ἡμέρας δὲ ἄρτι διαγελώσης and VIII.v.4, ἡμέρας δὲ ἀπαρτὶ διαγελώσης.

The gleam of stones is another trope used in this poetics of monuments. In Hagia Sophia the gleam of the stones shines out in rivalry with a gold-covered ceiling:

*Χρυσῷ μὲν ἀκιβδηλῶ καταλήλειπται ἢ ὄροφῇ πᾶσα, κεραννῦσα τὸν κόμπον τῷ κάλλει, νικᾷ μέντοι ἢ ἐκ τῶν λίθων αὐγῇ ἀνταστράπτουσα τῷ χρυσῷ.*⁸³

The strategy used here to reinforce this gleam is to compare it to the shine of the gold overlay on the ceiling, a comparison which uses *νικᾷ* and *ἀνταστράπτουσα* in a manner which seems to personify the stones, giving them a purpose of rivalling the gold with their gleam. The gold itself is part of another agenda in the ekphrasis which we will see later when treating the panegyric content of descriptions. Another description which includes a comparison of gleaming stones to another light source is the one in I.iv.5 of the church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus and the shrine adjoining it which are said to outshine the sun by the gleam of their stones: *ἐκάτερος τῇ αἴγλῃ τῶν λίθων ὑπεραστράπτει τὸν ἥλιον*. Bringing light seems to be part of the building and renovating strategy of Justinian which is well summarised by this mention of his work on the church of Saints Cosmas and Damian: *κάλλει τε καὶ μεγέθει τὸν νεῶν κατελάμπρυνε καὶ φωτὸς αἴγλη*⁸⁴. The three pillars of his building strategy are beauty, size and light. The use of the verb *κατελάμπρυνω* seems to further emphasize the importance of light, not to mention the almost redundant combination of *αἴγλη* and *φωτὸς*.

The treatment of light is closely connected to that of colour⁸⁵, as can be seen in I.iv.25 in the short description of the church of Acacius where the extreme whiteness of stones make the church look as if it is covered in snow: *καὶ δόξαν παρέχεσθαι ὅτι δὴ χιόσιν ὁ νεὸς ἅπας κατάρρητός ἐστι*. The white light that gleams from the marbles is also evoked

⁸³ I.i.54, *The whole ceiling is overlaid with pure gold, which adds glory to the beauty, yet the light reflected from the stones prevails, shining out in rivalry with the gold.*

⁸⁴ I.vi.6, *he made the church resplendent with its beauty, size and radiance.*

⁸⁵ For the treatment of light and colours in Byzantine art, see James (1996), particularly the chapter on the vocabulary of colours pp.69-90.

in the description of the Arcadianae in I.xi.6: ὧν ἡ αἴγλη ὑπεράγαν λευκή τις ἐστὶ. But white is not the only colour which appears in the *Buildings*' ekphraseis. In fact, the stones seem to put on an infinite variety of colours, so much so that the marbles of Hagia Sophia are compared in colours to those of a meadow with its flowers in full bloom: λειμῶνι τις ἄν ἐντετυχηκένοι δόξειεν ὠραίῳ τὸ ἄνθος (I.i.59). There are some purple (ἀλουργόν), green (χλοάζον), crimson (φοινικοῦν) and white ones (λευκόν), colours which lead to the parallel between Nature and a painter: ὥσπερ τις ζωγράφος ἢ φύσις, showing that a man-made piece of art can have as much variety in colours as nature itself (I.i.60). This analogy recalls the proem of Philostratus' *Imagines* I.1, where the sophist relates the invention of painting to nature because of the variety of designs painted on meadows by the seasons: ὅποσα τοὺς λειμῶνας αἱ Ἔρραι γράφουσι. The meadow, as well as the whole universe, is also frequently used to symbolize an anthology or collection⁸⁶. The variety of colours is strikingly employed in the description of the Chalke in I.x.20 which has beautifully coloured mosaics as well as marbles of different hues, the green ones that rival the emerald (σμαράγδῳ), the red ones whose brightness is compared to fire (πυρὸς φλόγα), and the white ones that are not of a plain white but have wavy lines of blue mingling with it: λευκόν [...] οὐ λιτὸν μέντοι, ἀλλ' ὑποκυμαίνει κυανναυγεῖ ὑπογεγραμμένον μεταξὺ χρώματι. Procopius throws into relief the great variety of marbles and stones in general in a work which manifestly uses *poikilia* to keep his description of buildings from being tiresome and repetitive⁸⁷. One cannot also but remark that the verb *ποικίλλω* occurs three times in *Buildings* I. The first occurrence, already mentioned, is the one that compares Nature to a painter while describing the

⁸⁶ For example see Plato, *Phaedrus* 248c.

⁸⁷ An article which deals with the notion of literary *varietas*, particularly in medieval aesthetic, is Carruthers (2009).

contrasting colours of the marbles: *καὶ οὐς ταῖς ἐναντιωτάταις ποικίλλει χροιαῖς ὥσπερ τις ζωγράφος ἢ φυσίς*⁸⁸. He then uses it again to evoke the columns of the church of the Archangel Michael in Byzantium: *καὶ αὐτῆς ἐφ'ἐκάτερα μὲν ἀνέχουσι τὸν νεῶν κίονες χροιαῖς τισι ποικιλλόμενοι φύσει*⁸⁹. The same verb also occurs when he depicts the other church of the Archangel Michael, this time in Anaplus: *ἐπὶ μέσης τὸ ἱερὸν χρώμασι μυρίοις πεποίκιλται λίθων*⁹⁰. This repetition of the verb seems particularly relevant in so far as it throws into relief the variety of colours of the stones in a literary work in which variety of rhetorical colours can be seen as programmatic and structural, and not only as a topos.

As important as abundant light and varied colours in the *Buildings* is the theme of the massive size of edifices. It is developed at considerable length in the description of Hagia Sophia in particular. The church is said in I.i.27 to rise to a height that matches the sky: *ἐπῆρται μὲν γὰρ ἐς ὕψος οὐράνιον ὅσον*.⁹¹ This height gives the church a special place in the city's landscape:

*ὥσπερ τῶν ἄλλων οἰκοδομημάτων ἀποσαλεύουσα ἐπινένευκεν ὑπερκειμένη τῇ ἄλλῃ πόλει, κοσμοῦσα μὲν αὐτήν, ὅτι αὐτῆς ἐστίν, ὠραιζομένη δέ, ὅτι αὐτῆς οὔσα καὶ ἐπεμβαίνουσα τοσοῦτον ἀνέχει ὥστε δὴ ἐνθένδε ἢ πόλις ἐκ περιωπῆς ἀποσκοπεῖται.*⁹²

The church appears to be personified here in the way it displays mannerisms with the verbs *ἀποσαλεύω* and *ἐπινεύω*. Procopius tries to convey in this sentence how the church is both integrated into the landscape, adorning the city (*κοσμοῦσα μὲν αὐτήν, ὅτι αὐτῆς ἐστίν*), but also stands out in its own beauty (*ὠραιζομένη δέ, ὅτι αὐτῆς οὔσα*), because of its

⁸⁸ I.i.60, *the ones which Nature, like a painter, varies with the most contrasting colours.*

⁸⁹ I.iii.18, *on either side of this rise columns of naturally varied hues which support the church.*

⁹⁰ I.viii.13, *in the centre stands the church, adorned with stones of an infinite variety of colours.*

⁹¹ This idea of a soaring height which matches the sky is something that is very common in Procopius' descriptions of natural landscapes, cf. Chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁹² '[...] as if surging up from amongst the other buildings it stands on high and looks down upon the remainder of the city, adorning it, because it is a part of it, but glorifying in its own beauty, because, though a part of the city and dominating it, it at the same time towers above it to such a height that the whole city is viewed from there as from a watch-tower'.

height, allowing it to watch over (*ἀποσκοπεῖται*) the whole city. There is a play here on the gaze, with this image of the church looking down on the city, and it seems that Procopius offers different viewpoints to the city's landscape; one from the ground that sees Hagia Sophia surging up from the horizon, and one from the top of the church which looks over a panoramic (*ἐκ περιωπῆς*) view of the city. This is all the more striking as it seems to reflect itself on the textual landscape of *Buildings* I. Indeed, Hagia Sophia has a special place not only in the city but also in this work, being the first monument to be described, so that it dominates both with its great size (as a building and as an ekphrasis) and adorns both the city and the text. This massiveness of buildings surging up from the rest of the city also seems to recall Ammianus' description of Rome as Constantius enters the city and sees:

*Iouis Tarpei delubra, quantum terrenis diuina praecellunt; lauacra in modum prouinciarum exstructa; amphitheatri molem solidatam lapidis Tiburtini compage, ad cuius summitatem aegre uisio humana conscendit; Pantheon uelut regionem teretem speciosa celsitudine fornicatam; elatosque uertices qui scansili suggestu consurgunt, priorum principum imitatenta portantes...*⁹³

This great height leads here to a reference to the limits of human gaze '*uisio humana*' which cannot even reach the top of the building. However the aporia of the gaze in the descriptions of Justinian's constructions is a rich topic, which shall be discussed in the last part of this chapter.

Procopius shows another concern with buildings' dimensions, namely that they are well proportioned. This harmony of proportions (*τῆ ἀρμονία τοῦ μέτρου*) is a salient point in the description of Hagia Sophia in I.i.29, a harmony reflected by the rhythm of the sentence, which alternates regular even clausulae of 2 or 4 syllables between

⁹³ *History* XVI.10.14 'the sanctuaries of Tarpeian Jove so far surpassing as things divine excel those of earth; the baths built up to the measure of provinces; the huge bulk of of the amphitheatre, strengthened by its framework of Tiburtine stone, to whose top human eyesight barely ascends; the Pantheon like a rounded city-district, vaulted over in lofty beauty; and the exalted heights which rise with platforms to which one may mount, and bear the likenesses of former emperors [...]' translation from Rolfe (1935).

accents⁹⁴. The church of Mary in the Blachernae in I.iii.5 is also said to be free from bad taste: τοῦ ἀπειροκάλου ἐλεύθερον. These monuments, in spite of their massive size, keep an elegant harmony of proportions. This greatness of size is one of the main features of Justinianic monuments in general, and most of the edifices which were rebuilt in his reign, such as the shrine of the Archangel Michael in I.iii.14 and the church of the Apostles in I.iv.10, are said to have been enlarged by Justinian⁹⁵. Greatness is also represented on a smaller scale, not only in the general view of a monument but also in its details. For example, the Senate House is said to have the largest columns in the world: μέγεθος δὲ πρώτοι τῶν ἐν γῆ, οἴμαι, κίωνων τῇ πάσῃ⁹⁶. It is fitting, in the description of an official building, to use such a hyperbolic superlative. Indeed, the strategy here is a slide from glorifying the building to glorifying what it represents, that is the Roman Empire and one of its institutions, the Senate. But the main receptacle of the praise of buildings is the builder, the emperor Justinian.

From the buildings to the builder

The *Buildings* is a unique example of a panegyric which relies solely on what would have usually been one of many themes used in praising one emperor. It is fascinating to see how Procopius still manages to produce variety in a work which has such a restricting theme as imperial constructions, which goes to show his rhetorical craftsmanship. Furthermore, using mainly descriptive words in order to convey

⁹⁴ τῇ ἀρμονίᾳ τοῦ μέτρου : two syllables between accents, ἀμέτρου κοσμιωτέρα : four syllables between accents.

⁹⁵ This is a theme running all the way through the *Buildings*, eg. IV.vi.25, *making very small places large*, V.iii.6, *Justinian planted another bridge there of such height and breadth, that the previous bridge seemed to have only been a fraction of the new one in point of size*.

⁹⁶ I.x.8.

ideological concepts is another rhetorical accomplishment in this work. Ekphrasis could be pleasant and offered needed pauses in panegyrics, as Nicolaus in the late fifth century perhaps implies by saying in his *Progymnasmata*:

καὶ μέντοι καὶ ἐν πανηγυρिकाῖς ὑποθέσεσιν ἰκανὸν τὸ τῆς ἐκφράσεως ἡδονὴν ἐμποῖησαι τοῖς ἐν θεάτροις καθήμενοις.⁹⁷

This seems to indicate that ekphrases were an expected part of a panegyric. However, in this instance, the ekphrasis are themselves the panegyric and it seems that buildings might function as icons of the Emperor's several virtues. It is, of course, more difficult to see these in the passages that are purely descriptive than in the ones that include embedded narratives. For example the interruption of the description of Hagia Sophia in I.i.66-78 which relates how Justinian, inspired by God, came to the rescue of his architects who were at a loss about the way to keep an arch from falling before it was completely built⁹⁸. We can, however, still see several encomiastic themes developed in the ekphrastic passages of this work.

Particularly striking is the theme of extravagant expenditure⁹⁹. For example, in Hagia Sophia, Procopius mentions that the ceiling is covered with pure gold: *Χρυσῷ μὲν ἀκιβδηλῶ καταλήλειπται ἡ ὀροφή πᾶσα*¹⁰⁰, and that the thysiasterion itself is embellished with forty thousand pounds' weight of silver: *θυσιαστήριον, λιτρῶν ἀργύρου μυριάδας ἐπιφέρεται τέτταρας*¹⁰¹. This theme of richness of dedications recalls Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* in III.40 where the church of the Holy Sepulchre is said to be adorned with

⁹⁷ Cf. ed. J. Felten (1913) 70, l. 13-15. *And indeed, in panegyric subjects the element of ekphrasis is adequate to create pleasure for the audiences in theatres.*

⁹⁸ Another of these passages is the design of a dam by Justinian and Chryses of Alexandria in a dream sequence in *Buildings* II.iii.1-15 which I will look at in the last chapter of this thesis.

⁹⁹ All the more interesting as it is one of the main grounds for criticism of the emperor in the *Secret History*.

¹⁰⁰ I.i.54.

¹⁰¹ I.i.65.

untold beauties in innumerable dedications of gold and silver and precious stones set in various materials:

ἐκόσμηι δ' αὐτὸν ἀδιηγῆτοις κάλλεσι πλείστων ὄσων ἀναθημάτων, χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργύρου καὶ λίθων πολυτελῶν ἐν διαλλαττούσαις ὕλαις...

Part of Justinian's building agenda seems to be the adornment of churches with as many riches as possible. In *Buildings* I.iv.5, the two shrines of Saints Sergius and Bacchus are said to be adorned with plenty of gold and to be teeming with offerings: *ὁμοίως δὲ χρυσοῦ περιουσία πανταχόθι κατακορῆς ἐστὶ καὶ κατακομῆ τοῖς ἀναθήμασιν*. The shrine of the martyr Anthimus is also said to have gold covered stones: *λίθων εὐπρεπεῖα καὶ χρυσοῦ κατακεχυμένω*¹⁰². As for the church of the Archangel Michael in Anapulus, it is said to have a great amount of gold applied to it (*χρυσοῦ πλήθος*), so much so that it looks as if it had grown upon it: *καθάπερ αὐτῷ πεφυκὸς περικέχεται*¹⁰³. The word *πεφυκὸς* here furthers the image of how human technique and art can mimic the artistry of nature, as previously seen in the example of the coloured marbles. The convent, which was designed by Justinian and Theodora for the use of reformed prostitutes, is also said to have been endowed with a lot of wealth:

*καὶ πολλαῖς μὲν χρημάτων προσόδοις οἱ βασιλεῖς οὗτοι τὸ μοναστήριον δεδώρηται τοῦτο, πολλὰ δὲ οἰκία κάλλει τε καὶ πολυτελείᾳ διαφερόντως ἐξαισία, ταῖς γυναιξὶ παραψυχὴν ἐσόμενα, ὠκοδομήσαντο.*¹⁰⁴

The imperial couple does not appear to hesitate here to spend significant sums for the good of their subjects; furthermore, there is a direct connection between their building action, *ὠκοδομήσαντο*, and the well-being of their people, here the women of the convent.

We may assume the theme of expenditure that runs through most of the descriptions of

¹⁰² I.vi.13.

¹⁰³ I.viii.14.

¹⁰⁴ I.ix.10, *and these Sovereigns have endowed this convent with an ample income of money, and have added many buildings most remarkable for their beauty and costliness, to serve as a consolation for the women.*

monuments in the *Buildings* is an emblem of Justinian's generosity towards his subjects and his extreme selflessness in spending the wealth of the Empire for the good of his people, even those who happen to be repentant prostitutes. The intertextuality of this passage with *The Secret History* is particularly striking, as the same convent is mentioned there but treated in opposite terms, as Procopius writes that Theodora collected over five hundred prostitutes and shut them up in that same monastery, with the result that some of them committed suicide¹⁰⁵. In addition to this, the fact that Theodora herself started as a prostitute before she married Justinian is mentioned multiple times in the *Secret History*¹⁰⁶.

However, the two ekphraseis that are most charged with panegyric content are that of Justinian's statue and that of the Chalke's mosaics, since both do actually represent the Emperor. The description of Justinian's statue comes immediately after that of Hagia Sophia, and competes with its ekphrastic virtuosity. We have already looked at the way Procopius described the fitting of the stones in the base as well as the column supporting this statue earlier in this chapter. It is also worth mentioning the extraordinary size of the column: *κίων ἐπανέστημεν ἑξαίσιον ὅσον*¹⁰⁷, as well as the bronze which adorns it:

χαλκὸς δὲ ἄριστος ἔν τε πίναξι καὶ στεφάνοις διαχυθεὶς περιβάλλει πανταχόθι τοὺς λίθους, ἐν μὲν τῷ βεβαίῳ συνδέων, ἐν κόσμῳ δὲ αὐτοὺς συγκαλύπτων, καὶ τὰ τε ἄλλα σχεδὸν τι πάντα καὶ διαφερόντως τὰ τε ἄνω καὶ τὰ κάτω ἐς τοῦ κίονος τὸν τύπον ἀπομιμούμενος...¹⁰⁸

The bronze is, of course, of excellent quality (*ἄριστος*), and seems to serve two functions. The first is to decorate the column (*ἐν κόσμῳ*), particularly in its garland form

¹⁰⁵ *Secret History*, xvii.5-6.

¹⁰⁶ See for example, *Secret History* i.12, ix.10, ix.29. For more on the ambiguous images of Byzantine empresses; see James (2001), McClanan (2002) and Garland (1999).

¹⁰⁷ I.ii.2, *there rises a column of extraordinary height*.

¹⁰⁸ I.ii.3, *and finest brass, cast in panels and garlands, covers the stones on every side, both serving to bind them securely, and covering them with adornment, and giving the shaft throughout, but particularly at the base and the capital, the appearance of a column*.

(στεφάνοις), but there is also a functional side to this as the bronze binds the stones securely (τῷ βεβαίῳ συνδέων) as well as providing the appearance of a column (ἐξ τοῦ κίονος τὸν τύπον ἀπομιμούμενος). Procopius therefore appears to show a concern for both cosmetic and functional aspects in constructions. Furthermore, to return to the description of the fitting of the stones in the column (as we now know this is covered by the bronze) it demonstrates again that he seeks not only to show what things look from the outside, but on the inside as well.

The bronze itself is described in striking terms both for its colour, softer than pure gold (χρυσοῦ ἀκιβδηλοῦ πραότερος), and its worth, as much as silver: τὴν δὲ ἀξίαν οὐ παρὰ πολὺ ἀποδέων ἰσοστάσιος ἀργύρω¹⁰⁹. Between the exceptional size of the column and the quality of the bronze, this description already makes this monument superior to other imperial statues such as those of Theodosius, Arcadius, Eudoxia, Honorius or Helen, Constantine's mother, and the superiority of the statue might be a way of making Justinian superior to the former sovereigns¹¹⁰. It is also interesting to remark, even if it is not actually mentioned in Procopius' text, that the horse he is sitting upon is the one that used to be Theodosius', as we can see in the inscription 'Gloriae perennis Theodosii' on a Renaissance drawing of Justinian's statue in Budapest University Library¹¹¹. As far as the statue itself is concerned, it is full of symbols. First, the fact that the horse seems about to move forward conveys the idea that this statue has the

¹⁰⁹ I.ii.4.

¹¹⁰ See also Statius's description of Domitian's statue in *Silvae* I.1, and Newlands (2002), 46-73. In *Secret History* viii.21, Justinian's appearance is, interestingly, compared to that of Domitian's statue which had been dismembered and put back together.

¹¹¹ Another possible interpretation is to attribute the statue depicted on the drawing with Theodosius, although most scholars believe it to represent Justinian's equestrian statue. In favour of the Theodosius interpretation see Lehmann (1959), in favour of Justinian, Mango (1959), and proposing Heraclius, Vickers (1976).

attitude of a conqueror¹¹². The statue of the emperor itself is colossal and also made of bronze, although no more details are given about the material, which we can assume is the same type used in decorating the column.

As far as the depiction of Justinian is concerned, his clothing is described first: ἔσταλται δὲ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἢ εἰκῶν· οὕτω γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα καλοῦσιν ὅπερ ἀμπέχεται¹¹³. This Achillean attire is not described entirely but Procopius gives details of his footwear; half-boots (ἀρβύλας), and of his leg-wear as his ankles are said not to be covered by greaves (κνημίδων χωρίς). To continue the parallel with Achilles, the emperor is also said to be wearing a breastplate in a heroic way (ἡρωϊκῶς τεθωράκισται) as well as a helmet (κράνος), both contributing to his representation as a warrior, although he is said later on not to be sporting any kind of weapon: οὔτε ἄλλο τῶν ὅπλων οὐδεν¹¹⁴. Yet he is carrying a globe on which stands a cross, an object that symbolizes the universality of his reign – as the intention of the sculptor is revealed here to be that he signifies the whole earth and sea with this globe (παραδηλῶν ὁ πλάστης ὅτι γῆ τε αὐτῷ καὶ θάλασσα δεδούλωται πᾶσα¹¹⁵) and at the same time the fact that his reign was god-given. This is a very powerful symbol, as Procopius states that it is through this that he has been victorious in war: δι' οὗ δὴ μόνου [...] τὸ τοῦ πολέμου πεπόρισται κράτος. He is also looking and gesturing in a threatening way towards the Orient, which the author identifies as a command to τοῖς ἐκείνη βαρβάροις¹¹⁶ to remain at home. This evocation of the barbarians at the periphery of the Empire provides intertextuality with both the rest of the *Buildings* which deals largely with the building of defences on the edges of the Empire,

¹¹² For more on the way the impression of movement is provided in this description, and others, see further in this chapter.

¹¹³ I.ii.7, and the statue is attired like Achilles, for the costume in which he is dressed is called that way.

¹¹⁴ I.ii.11.

¹¹⁵ Notice the use of the verb δουλόω which seems to play on a tyrannical subtext.

¹¹⁶ I.ii.12.

and with the *Wars* which deals with the wars with these peripheral enemies themselves. Justinian's severe gaze may remind us of other colossal statues such as the Colossus of Barletta and his stern gaze. On the whole, the vision of the Emperor provided here is that of a victorious Christian general.

Justinian's depiction in the Chalke mosaic has a similar general theme of the victorious emperor, but it is an ensemble piece and features him at the centre of a triumphal composition. This part of the work is an interventive ekphrasis of the same type as the Homeric shield. The intertextual relation in the shield between the narratives of the text as a whole and those of the work of art offered a thematic opposition between peace and war. In the Chalke, there is some intertextuality within Procopius' works that creates both a thematic and generic contrast by evoking his historical work in the *Wars*. In the introductory passage which precedes the description of the vestibule mosaic¹¹⁷, Procopius gives an account of the structural aspects, describing in detail how the vestibule is built. These details include a few of his usual architectural concerns, such as walls rising sky-high (*οὐρανομήκεις*)¹¹⁸, harmony in proportions (*τῇ τοῦ ἐμφοροῦς ἀρμονίᾳ*)¹¹⁹, and stone craftsmanship (*λίθων εὖ μάλα εἰργασμένων*)¹²⁰. Naturally, Procopius' first concern with the mosaic is how it is made:

*ἐναβρύνεται δὲ ταῖς γραφαῖς ἡ ὀροφή πᾶσα, οὐ τῷ κηρῷ ἐντακέντι τε καὶ διαχυθέντι ἐνταῦθα παγεῖσα, ἀλλ' ἐναρμοσθεῖσα ψηφίσιν λεπταῖς τε καὶ χρώμασιν ὠραῖσμέναις παντοδαποῖς...*¹²¹

Initially it is interesting to see that he uses another verb which would suit a person more than a building, *ἐναβρύνομαι*¹²², to express the ceiling's sense of pride. The mosaic is

¹¹⁷ I.x.11-14.

¹¹⁸ I.x.12.

¹¹⁹ I.x.13.

¹²⁰ I.x.13.

¹²¹ I.x.15, *the whole ceiling boasts of its pictures, not having been fixed with wax melted and applied to the surface, but set with tiny cubes of stone beautifully coloured in all hues.*

referred to as *ταῖς γραφαῖς* which might lead to confusion as this term would often entail a pictorial representation, but he clarifies the definition by first mentioning that it is not fixed with wax – as a painting would be – but fitted (*ἐναρμοσθεῖσα*) with minute tesserae (*ψηφῶσι λεπταῖς*). The tesserae themselves are described as adorned with various colours: *χρώμασιν ὠραῖσμέναις παντοδαποῖς*. The varied colours and the use of *ὠραῖζω* tie this in with the idea of natural *poikilia* treated earlier in this chapter. The description of the picture represented by the mosaic follows, and Procopius decides to start at the periphery of the mosaic rather than the centre:

ἐφ' ἑκάτερα μὲν πόλεμος τέ ἐστι καὶ μάχη, καὶ ἀλίσκονται πόλεις παμπληθεῖς, πῆ μὲν Ἰταλίας, τῆ δὲ Λιβύης. καὶ νικᾷ μὲν βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς ὑπὸ στρατηγούντι Βελισαρίῳ...¹²³

The narrative pictured on each side here seems to be that of Procopius' own work, the *Wars*, as it deals with wars and battles, and cities being taken in Italy and Libya.

Although Justinian is mentioned, the real protagonist here is his general, Belisarius, which again seems to fit as a parallel to his own work, seeing as it rarely represents Justinian himself but rather centres around his general. Indeed, Belisarius seems to be the most important character here as he is represented in an active posture:

ἐπάνεισι δὲ παρὰ τὸν βασιλέα, τὸ στράτευμα ἔχων ἀκραιφνὲς ὅλον ὁ στρατηγός, καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτῷ λάφυρα βασιλεῖς τε καὶ βασιλείας, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν ἀνδρώποισι ἐξαίσια...¹²⁴

Belisarius is acting the part of the triumphant general who is not only bringing back his army intact (*ἀκραιφνὲς ὅλον*) – something which seems a slight exaggeration – but also spoils, again described in hyperbolic tones with the anaphoric *βασιλεῖς τε καὶ βασιλείας*

¹²² Actually, Procopius uses this verb only twice for men, once in *Wars* VII.xxiv.25, when a fallen soldier's hand is cut so that the enemy could not take pride in his bracelet, and once in *Buildings* I.viii.11, where the strollers revel in the sea breeze. It is also used to express the Apostles' pride stemming from the emperor's piety in *Buildings* I.iv.17.

¹²³ I.x.16, *on each side there is war and battle, and many cities are being captured, some in Italy, some in Libya, and the emperor Justinian is winning through his general Belisarius.*

¹²⁴ I.x.16, *and the general is returning to the emperor, with his whole army intact, and he gives him spoils, both kings and kingdoms and all things that are most prized among men.*

and the use of the intensive πάντα τὰ ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἐξαΐσια. He also seemed to be depicted in movement somehow, as he is returning to the emperor, from the periphery of the composition where he was depicted waging war. On the other hand, the imperial couple is represented at the centre of the mosaic in a very cursory manner, the only details being given pertain to their mood as they are pictured smiling and celebrating the victories: εὐοικότες ἄμφω γεγηθόσι τε καὶ νικητήρια ἐορτάζουσιν¹²⁵. The participle εὐοικότες seems to somehow emphasise the illusion of the picture, as the couple *appear* to smile, as if their smile was not static but expanding in front of our eyes. Close to the imperial couple are represented the king of the Vandals and the king of the Goths, previously announced as a part of Belisarius' spoils, who are approaching them as prisoners of war. However the most striking representation is that of the senators. First, they are represented as surrounding the emperor and empress, with the verb περιέστηκε, and they are also in a festive mood, as described by the same verb used previously for Justinian and Theodora, ἐορτάζω. Procopius cares once more about how an impression is produced as he describes the detail of their expression: τοῦτο γὰρ αἱ ψηφιδες δηλοῦσιν ἐπι τοῖς προσώποις ἰλαρὸν αὐτοῖς ἐπανθῶσαι.¹²⁶ This is not just about the expression of joy on the senators' faces, but about how this is rendered by the mosaic's tesserae. The use of the verb ἐπανθῶ ties this again to the idea of natural *poikilia*. This lively depiction of joy is also a very strong encomiastic feature in the picture of a triumphant Justinian, as it represents the Senate rejoicing in unison with him¹²⁷. It also demonstrates a real concern for the way objects are constructed and how stones are cut and fit together, here in the minute details of tesserae. From these two examples of the statue and the mosaics,

¹²⁵ I.x.17.

¹²⁶ I.x.18, *this is shown by the tesserae which are blossoming in joy over their faces.*

¹²⁷ There is a striking intertextuality here with the *Secret History* once more where the senators are said to be sitting around the emperor, as in a picture, showing how powerless they were. (*Secret History* xiv.8).

we can consider the ekphraseis of monuments in *Buildings* I as part of an iconic programmatic depiction of the ideal sovereign, a mirror of the prince, but only through his construction work. But if this work is an imperial panegyric, its first book can also be seen as a city praise of Constantinople.

Building Constantinople in discourse

There is something extremely architectural and pictorial in the way book I of the *Buildings* is built. True, it has the unity of being about only one city, Constantinople, but the treatment of its buildings is not done in an exact topographical order. However it can be said to have a periegetic structure, as Pausanias may be said to ‘both evoke his Greece as a set of ideals in literary form and preserve the geographic particularity of the topography he walked through’¹²⁸. The structure of *Buildings* I is interesting in the way it combines ideological and topographical organisation¹²⁹. This is particularly striking as one looks at a map of Constantinople in Justinian’s time while reading the work. It appears that the first half has a more ideological plan, whereas the second half seems more concerned with the topography of the capital and its different neighbourhoods. The first half, from I.i to I.iv, uses an ideological hierarchy and deals mainly with churches, aside from Justinian’s statue, described in I.ii.1-12, and the hospices of Samson and Arcadios in I.ii.14-17. The hierarchic order operates in a decreasing manner; it starts with the churches of God, with Hagia Sophia (I.i.20-78) and Irene (I.ii.13-14), then the churches of Christ (I.ii.18-19), then those of the Virgin, in the Blachernae (I.iii.3-5), Pege (I.iii.6-8), in the Hieron (I.iii.10), those of female saints

¹²⁸ Elsner (2001), 20.

¹²⁹ See Appendix I for the plan of *Buildings* I.

related to the Virgin, Anna (I.iii.11-12), Zoe (I.iii.13). This hierarchy of saints continues as the church of the archangel Saint Michael is described (I.iii.14-18), and the apostles Peter and Paul and Saints Sergius and Bacchus (I.iv.1-8), as well as the Holy Apostles church (I.iv.9-24), followed by diverse martyria; those of Plato, Marcius, Thyrsus, Thekla and Theodota (I.iv.25-30). The description of the sea in chapter v forms a rupture in this order of description, as the descriptions which follow will then seem less scattered on the map but instead are grouped in different neighbourhoods. It starts with the description of the different churches in the Blachernae in I.vi, then those of the Golden Horn in I.vii, and the descriptions continue with the churches in the Brochoi as well as the Anaplous in I.viii. It then goes to the right bank of the Bosphorus going towards the Black Sea (I.ix.1-13), describing the convent called Metanoia there, as well as the church of the Martyr Panteleimon, and the refuge for lepers, before moving on to the Hieron with the church of Michael (I.ix.14), and then back into the city with Saint Tryphon's shrine (I.ix.15), the shrines of Menas and Menaesus in the Hebdomum (I.ix.16) and a little further near the Golden Gate, the shrine of Saint Ia (I.ix.17). The final two chapters I.x and I.xi are devoted to the description of secular buildings, with various palaces, ports, baths and a cistern. The other point of interest aside from the order of descriptions is the amount of space and time devoted to each, which varies from a brief mention amongst a list to an extensive description – the longest being that of Hagia Sophia at the beginning of the work. Procopius seems to have chosen to write only one great iconic ekphrasis in every genre. That is why for example he only describes Justinian's statue and not Theodora's or the others in the Arcadianae. There is one great church ekphrasis, Hagia Sophia, one great statue ekphrasis, Justinian's, and one great pictorial description, the Chalke. They seem to work as an iconic triptych

standing out on the background of tiny colourful cubes that the other buildings' descriptions constitute. Constantinople itself appears as a mosaic in this work, with its variety of colourful monuments and its fragmented representation that focuses on edifices. The order of progression between the three set-pieces is also relevant ideologically and within the whole of the *Buildings*' narrative strategy. Elsner shows that it 'mirrors the text's overall balance of a more sacred centre and a more profane, in the sense of defensive, periphery to the empire'¹³⁰. There is a wider picture to see in *Buildings* I, which is the depiction of Constantinople, with a sense of topography and natural landscape, which the buildings themselves complements – but the opposite is true, as the natural beautifies the man-made.

This feature has perhaps not received much attention as one cannot help but notice the elements of natural landscapes in the *Buildings* have barely been considered. The long ekphrasis of the sea, a natural description that strikingly contrasts with the background of buildings and other man-made objects, has also received very little attention in Procopian scholarship. The function of this passage describing the bay of Byzantium should be closely examined, amongst other reasons because it is located at a pivotal place in *Buildings* I, as we have seen previously that the organisation of the descriptions changes after I.v. It certainly has a place in the collection of rhetorical *topoi* as a part of the city praise: the praise of a bay, such as Menander Rhetor describes it¹³¹. The description of the sea is the only natural description of major importance in the narrative. First, it is in the middle of book I, in chapter v, and it is also fairly long, as a whole chapter is devoted to it. It refers for the first time to the city's blessing, in

¹³⁰ Elsner (2007), 42.

¹³¹ See *Treatise* I 346.26 on 'how to praise a city', 351.20 on 'how to praise harbours' and 352.6 on 'how to praise bays'. Menander's advice on how to praise bays : *κόλπους ἐπαινέσεις εἰς μέγεθος καὶ εἰς κάλλος καὶ εὐουδμίαν καὶ εἰς εὐλιμενότητα καὶ πολυλιμενότητα*.

typically rhetorical terms of city-praise: *Πρὸς τῆ ἄλλῃ εὐδαιμονίᾳ καὶ ἡ θάλασσα ἐν καλῷ τίθεται ἀμφ’αὐτο μάλιστα*¹³². This passage is also essential because it provides the first general topographical viewpoint to the reader without which he would not be able to imagine Constantinople and place the monuments that are being described, particularly as the organisation of the descriptions of churches afterwards will follow the different shores and therefore necessitates a good knowledge of the Bosphorus. One can therefore say it functions as a backbone for the whole description of Constantinople. In this central passage which could have been merely utilitarian in its topographical function, the author displays a wide range of rhetorical skills. There is a calm and confident beauty in the large cola and the wide rhythms we already mentioned before, quiet as the harbours providing shelters to the navigators: *σκέπας λιμένων ἡσύχιον τοῖς ναυτιλλομένοις παρεχομένη*¹³³. In the same sentence, we get a variety of images in the three different patterns formed by the sea: curving into bays (*ἐγκολλουμένη*), narrowing into straits (*εἰς πορθμοὺς ξυναγομένη*), and spreading into an open sea (*χεομένη ἐς πέλαγος μέγα*). From this variety – *poikilia* again – of patterns derives the city’s beauty: *ταύτη τε τὴν πόλιν εὐπρόσωπὸν τε διαφερόντως ἐργαζομένη*. Beauty is paired with usefulness as, aside from the harbours, it provides the city with the necessities of life and makes it rich in useful things: *τά τε εἰς δίαιταν εὐπορον καὶ τὰ ἐς τὴν χρείαν εὐδαίμονα*. This concern for the usefulness of a bay is quite commonplace in city-praises. However, the aesthetic of the description of the way the Aegean and Euxine Sea beautify the city, by surrounding it with the strong currents that oppose each other, is striking in its violence which contrasts with the aesthetic of quietness prevailing in the work:

¹³² I.v.2, *Besides the city’s other blessings the sea is set out most beautifully all around it.*

¹³³ I.v.2.

πελάγη γὰρ δύο ἀμφ' αὐτὴν ὄντα, ὃ τε δὴ Αἰγαῖος καὶ ὁ Εὐξείνος καλούμενος Πόντος, ξυνίασιν ἀλλήλοις ἐς τὰ πρὸς ἑω τῆς πόλεως καὶ ξυγκρούμενα τῇ τοῦ ῥοθίου ἐπιμιξία, ταύτη τε τὴν ἥπειρον τῇ ἐσβολῇ βιάζομενα, καλλωπίζουσι κύκλῳ τὴν πόλιν...¹³⁴

The mixing of the two seas is what beautifies the city, but this is not a peaceful image of water gently washing the shores, there is a violence in the stream expressed with the verb *συγκρούω* and the noun *ῥοθίος*, a violence such that it invites a military undertone with the verb *βιάζω* and the noun *εσβολή*. This depiction of the currents assailing the shoreline drastically contrasts with the idea of the peace and quiet of the gentle wash of the sea which seems to represent the peacefulness of Justinian's empire¹³⁵, an important element of propaganda throughout this panegyric. After this, Procopius goes back to the idea of the combination of beauty and usefulness as he states that the three straits both adorn and serve the city in their disposition: *ἐς κάλλος δὲ αὐτῇ διατεταγμένοι καὶ χρεῖαν*, and also attributes three qualities to the three straits, creating a tripartite structure, as they are said to be pleasurable for sailing (*περιπλεῖσθαι μὲν ἥδιστοι*), desirable to watch (*ἀποσκοπήσασθαι δὲ ποθεινοί*), and endowed with very good harbours to drop anchor in (*ἐνορμίσασθαι δὲ λίαν εὐλιμένες*)¹³⁶. These attributes are again fairly commonplace in a praise of a city, but it is interesting to see the combination of the idea of desire, *pothos*, and gaze with the verb *ἀποσκοπέω*, which is somewhat of a recurring theme in Procopius' work.¹³⁷ Another striking image is used in the description of the Bosphorus, which is represented driving a chariot whose horses are Europe and Asia and giving itself airs:

¹³⁴ I.v.3, *For there are two seas around it, on one side the Aegean and on the other the one called the Pontos Euxine; they flow into each other to the east of the city, and rushing together with the mixing of their waves, and pushing back the land with their invasion, they beautify the city as they surround it.*

¹³⁵ Landscapes often have the function of providing a certain mood and atmosphere in Procopius, as we will see in the next chapter on space.

¹³⁶ I.v.4.

¹³⁷ See for example in the anecdote of the shark and the pearl (*Wars* I.iv.17-31) where the animal longingly gazes at the pearl, an anecdote studied in the last chapter of this thesis.

ὣν δὴ ταῖς ὄχθαις πεπίεσται, ἐπιφρίττων τε καὶ γαυρουμένῳ εἰκῶς ὅτι δὴ ἐποχούμενος τῇ τε Ἀσίᾳ καὶ τῇ Εὐρώπῃ προσβαίνει τῇ πόλει...¹³⁸

The use of the verb ἐπιφρίττω is interesting in itself as it is not the most common verb, and it is also not attested in any text earlier than the 2nd century with Dionysius Periegetes¹³⁹, but as for the verb γαυρόω, it is only used one other time in Procopius' work in the description of the expression of Justinian and Theodora's faces at their triumph over the Vandals and the Goths. This representation of the Bosphorus mounting Asia and Europe like a two-horsed chariot also recalls the *Phaedrus* with the chariot of the soul and its two horses representing good and bad.

Another device used by Procopius to give more depth and texture to his description of the bay is a *mise en abime* in the only picturesque part in this passage:

ὁ δὲ δὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀριστερᾷ θλίβεται μὲν ἐκατέρωθεν ἐπὶ μακρότατον ταῖς ἀκταιῖς, τὰ τε ἄλση καὶ λειμώνων κάλλη καὶ τὰ ἄλλα τῆς ἀντιπέρας ἡπείρου ἐνδεικνύμενος ὑποκείμενα τῇ τῆς πόλεως ὄψει...¹⁴⁰

This passage is interesting on several levels; first, the mention of woods and meadows not only creates an idyllic landscape, but the meadow (λειμών) itself is meaningful in its meta-textual implications as we have seen earlier. Also, the fact that this landscape is described from far away, as being seen from the city (τῇ τῆς πόλεως ὄψει), attracts once more the attention to the act of seeing. The idea of the blessing of the city as the explanation for the quietness of the current in the bay is then developed. Within this theme, another striking image is that of the ship entering the bay and anchoring without a pilot:

¹³⁸ I.v.6, *And it is pressed in by their banks, so that it ripples and seems to plume itself because it approaches the city mounted upon both Asia and Europe.*

¹³⁹ Dionysius Periegetes, *Orbis descriptio*, l. 443.

¹⁴⁰ I.v.7, *And the strait which lies on the left of this is confined by its shores on either side for a very great distance, displaying the woods and the lovely meadows and all the other details of the opposite shore which lie open to view from the city.*

χειμῶνος δὲ, ἂν οὕτω τύχη, καὶ ἀνέμων σκληρῶν τοῖς τε πελάγεσι καὶ τῷ πορθμῷ ἐπιπεσόντων, ἐπειδὴν ἐς τὴν εἴσοδον ἴκωνται τοῦ κόλπου αἱ νέες, ἀκυβέρνητοί τε τὸ λοιπὸν ἴασι καὶ ἀπροβουλεύτως ὁρμίζονται...¹⁴¹

There is almost a magical aspect in this, with the rupture between the two parts of the sentence, the first half with the genitive absolute ἀνέμων σκληρῶν [...] ἐπιπεσόντων, expressing the violence of the winter winds, and then the image of the ship entering the bay easily, with the two words starting with a privative prefix, ἀκυβέρνητοί and ἀπροβουλεύτως. The image of a ship without a pilot also somehow reminds us eerily, although with a completely opposite treatment, of the demonic Justinian in the *Secret History* pacing in his palace without a head to guide him¹⁴². There is another personification of the sea and the land at the end of the description where they are said to compete with each other in order to give the greater service to the city: ὁπότερον ἂν αὐτοῖν δύναιτο μᾶλλον τὴν ἐς τὴν πόλιν ἐνεργολαβεῖν ὑπουργίαν¹⁴³. This ends the description of the bay of Constantinople with an iteration of its natural blessings. In the whole of the *Buildings*, there is a running theme of the natural elements either yielding to Justinian's power or willingly serving him in his building enterprise. Overall, this ekphrasis of the sea around Constantinople not only fits within the panegyric agenda, keeping within the themes of imperial propaganda, but also fits a purpose in the structure of book I as it gives the topographical elements needed to follow the order of the description in the second half of the book, and also deals with themes with an intra-textual resonance within Procopius' work.

¹⁴¹ I.v.12, *In winter, even if violent winds happen to fall upon the open spaces of the sea and upon the strait, as soon as ships reach the entrance to the bay, they proceed for the rest of the way without a pilot and are anchored without precautions.*

¹⁴² XII.20-22. The ship without a pilot is also reminiscent of the ship in *Odyssey* X.

¹⁴³ I.v.13, *as if the two elements [land and sea] contended with each other to see which of them would be able to render the greater service to the city.* On personification of rivers as part of a city's Tyche, see Huskinson (2005), 246-261.

Aesthetic experience

By means of ekphraseis, Procopius provides a commentary on aesthetic experience as evoked by monuments or landscapes, and specifically the feelings that aesthetic experience gives rise to such as *aporia*, and being overwhelmed by a sight. The description of Hagia Sophia in particular offers a plethora of different impressions to the viewer. The impression of insecurity and danger in I.i.33, which is caused by the sight of the dome, is clearly a source of fear since the author uses the expression *φοβερόν ὄλωσ*¹⁴⁴. This impression is then given an explanation, which is that the dome seems actually to float in the air without being firmly attached: *δοκεῖ γάρ πη οὐκ ἐν βεβαίῳ ἐπρωρῆσθαι, ἀλλ' ἐπικινδύνως τοῖς ἐνθάδε οὔσι μετεωρίζεσθαι*. This is what the inexperienced viewer feels at the sight of the dome, because those who know about architectural matters know that it is actually securely built: *ἐν τῷ βεβαίῳ τῆς ἀσφαλείας ἐστήρικται*. The Procopian poetics of danger in the sublime can be understood in relation to James Porter's suggestion that "sublime and its freedoms exist only in the context of threatened or real loss", and that it is "based on an aesthetics not of perfect wholes but of ruptured wholes"¹⁴⁵. In this example, we see the author engage in a precise dissection of aesthetic impression by saying first how the viewer feels, then by explaining what artistic device provides this feeling, and then by explaining how the object is actually made. We therefore have three levels of experience: emotional, artistic and technical. In short, here the emotion is fear; the artistic device is the floating dome; and the technical reality is that it is firmly braced.

¹⁴⁴ On fear, see the beginning of chapter 4 on violence.

¹⁴⁵ Porter (2001), 81.

However, the most frequent reaction to art in *Buildings* I is related to the idea of *thauma*. In Procopius, *thauma* can be the marvelling at a sight because of its supernatural, curious, strange or paradoxical aspect, something which I will address in the last chapter of this thesis, but in the *Buildings* it is an aesthetic impression provoked by artistic devices. This impression of a marvel can be caused by sights on different scales. In the case of the martyria of Plato, Mocius, Thyrsus, Theodore, Thecla and Theodota, for example, it is the overall sight of the martyria which provokes an unlimited admiration: *θαυμάζεσθαι δὲ ὄψει κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἀμήχανα*¹⁴⁶. The idea of *thauma* is very rhetorically combined with that of impossibility and *aporia* here. It is a device whereby Procopius avoids going into the detail of an ekphrasis for each of the martyria. There can also be marvelling at a specific aspect of a building, like the church of Acacius in I.iv.25 which is said to be marvellously big: *μέγεθος περιβεβλημένον θαυμάσιον ἠλίκον*¹⁴⁷. Or a building can be said more vaguely to be generally marvellously beautiful, like the shrine of the Archangel Michael: *ἐς κάλλος μεταβιβάζει θαυμάσιον οἶον*¹⁴⁸. It is interesting to note that in both cases, the marvellous quality is the result of Justinian's taking down of the previous building and then rebuilding from the foundations. The marvelling therefore does not come strictly from the viewing of the end product, but a viewing which bears in mind the previous incarnation of the building and takes into account the process of rebuilding. On a much smaller scale, the marvelling can be caused by some details of an edifice, like the example mentioned earlier in this chapter of the abundance of contrasting colours in the stones of Hagia Sophia that Nature skillfully painted (*θαυμάσειε γὰρ ἂν εἰκότως [...] ὡσπερ τις ζωγράφος ἢ*

¹⁴⁶ I.iv.29, *one cannot admire them sufficiently when they are seen.*

¹⁴⁷ I.iv.25, *so as to make it a building of marvellous size.*

¹⁴⁸ I.iii.16, *he transformed it into a marvellously beautiful building.*

φύσις)¹⁴⁹. *Thauma* can also be more precisely the appreciation of a particular artistic device, for example the way the statues enhance the beauty of the Senate House's roof: ἀγαλμάτων δὲ πλήθει ὑπεράνω ἐστῶτων θαυμασίως ὡς ὑπογέγραπται¹⁵⁰. Finally, it is interesting to see this marvelling contrasted with an irrational feeling, to go back to the example of the fear provoked by the floating dome of Hagi Sophia: τῇ μὲν εὐπρεπείᾳ θαυμάσιον, τῷ δὲ σφαλερῷ τῆς συνθέσεως δοκοῦντι εἶναι φοβερόν ὅλως¹⁵¹. The marvelling at the beauty of the dome is contrasted with the irrational fear that it might collapse. Therefore this term, despite its irrational connotation, is used generally in the *Buildings* in a very rational and objective pattern, since it implies identifying which artistic device provides the impression.

Another theme that runs throughout *Buildings* I is that of the quietness of the sea, providing a certain unity in Procopius' construction of Constantinople. Of course, the quietness of the sea is a common topos in city-praises, harbour-praises and land-praises in general. Michael Whitby has argued that it was part of the panegyric strategy because the quietness of the sea echoes the quietness of the Emperor and of the Empire freed from trouble by Justinian¹⁵². We can agree with this proposition to a certain extent. While describing Anaplis, Procopius mentions that the quietness of the sea makes possible trading with the land: ἡσύχιος γὰρ ὑπεράγαν ἢ θάλασσα οὔσα τῇ γῆ ἐπικοινωνοῦται συναλλαγᾶς¹⁵³. Quietness seems to go hand in hand with prosperity here. The direct responsibility of Justinian as regards this quietness is obviously stated as he is depicted building a sheltered harbour in I.xi.18-19. This sheltered harbour enables the

¹⁴⁹ I.i.60.

¹⁵⁰ I.x.9, and the roof is wonderfully set off by a great number of statues which stand upon it.

¹⁵¹ I.i.33, marvellous in its grace, but by reason of the seeming insecurity of its composition, utterly terrifying.

¹⁵² Whitby (2000), 59-66.

¹⁵³ I.viii.8, for the sea at that point is very calm, and makes possible trading with the land.

water between the walls to remain calm, even in the event of a severe storm in the winter: *καὶ ἀνέμου χειμῶνος ὄρα καταβάντος σκληροῦ, διαμένει τὰ ἐντὸς ἡσυχῆ ἅπαντα τῶν τοίχων*¹⁵⁴. Nonetheless, the quietness of the sea here is part of a very visual combination of images in the latter example, since it contrasts with the pounding of the waves: *ὣν δὴ πρὸς τοῦ ῥοθίου ἀρασσομένων, ἀποκρουομένων τε τὴν τοῦ κλυδωνίου ἐπίθεσιν*¹⁵⁵. In the description of the Arcadianae as well in I.xi.1-9, there is the same use of the quietness of the sea for both aesthetic and panegyric reasons. It is said to enable those who are promenading to actually converse with those who are sailing by: *ὥστε καὶ προσδιαλέγονται τοῖς περιπλέουσιν οἱ τοὺς περιπάτους ποιούμενοι*. This quietness is also described in extremely visual terms with the image of the quiet stream circling the court: *ταύτην ἢ θάλασσα περιορεῖ ἀτρεμῆς ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ περιχεομένη τῷ ῥείθρῳ, ποταμοῦ τρόπον ἐκ Πόντου ἰούσα*¹⁵⁶.

Water in *Buildings* I frequently adds charm to a monument. This is particularly obvious in the description of the shrine of the martyr Anthimus. First, Procopius depicts the foundations of the shrine being gently washed by the sea:

*καὶ τὰ μὲν κράσπεδα τοῦ ἱεροῦ πραῦνομένη ἐπικλυζόμενα τῇ τῆς θαλάσσης ἐπιροῇ τὸ εὐχαρι ἐπεικῶς ἔχει...*¹⁵⁷

This gentle wash is then described in two movements, first by saying how it is not, in quite a long description of a tumultuous flow:

*οὐ γὰρ ξὺν θορύβῳ τὸ κλυδώνιον ἐπανεστηκὸς εἶτα εἰς τοὺς ἐκείνη λίθους ἀράσσεται, οὐδὲ μεγάλα τὸ κύμα ἠχῆσαν, οἷα γε τὰ θαλάττια, καὶ σχιζόμενον ἀποκρίνεται εἰς εἶδος ἀφρωδῆς...*¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ I.xi.20, *and even when a severe storm comes down in the winter, the whole space between the walls remains calm.*

¹⁵⁵ *Which are pounded by the surf and beat back the force of the waves.*

¹⁵⁶ I.xi.3, *and the unruffled sea flows quietly about this court, encircling it with its stream, coming in from the Pontus like a river.*

¹⁵⁷ I.vi.10, *the foundations of the shrine are washed by the caressing flow of the sea in an altogether charming manner.*

¹⁵⁸ I.vi.11, *for the incoming waves do not rise up with a roar and break on the stones there, nor do the breakers thunder aloud like those of the sea and divide and break up in a foaming mass.*

This description is immediately contrasted by the following passage which emphasizes the gentleness of the stream: *ἀλλὰ πρόεισι μὲν προσηνές, σιωπηλόν δὲ ὃν ἐπιψαύει τῆς γῆς, ἀναστρέφει δὲ μόνον*¹⁵⁹. By using this device of opposition, Procopius takes advantage of the situation to offer an elaborate and quite striking description of a violent current and at the same time enhances the impression of calm by contrast. Furthermore, the aesthetic experience here includes sounds in addition to sights, as he contrasts the roaring noise of waves created by the noun *θύρβος* and the verb *ἠχέω* with the silence of the gentle wash expressed by the adjective *σιωπηλός*. The natural environment of a building is therefore considered as part of the whole aesthetic experience when encountering an edifice. The church of the Virgin in Pege cannot be fully experienced without its surroundings, and as its name implies, its spring, whose stream is described as gently bubbling: *πηγὴ ἀψοφητὶ βλύζουσα γαληνόν τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ πότιμον*¹⁶⁰. This example shows how the use of a theme like the quietness of a stream provides the description of a building with a new dimension and more depth in that it conveys a sense of movement and sound that makes an ekphrasis more vivid. The aesthetic experience of buildings in Constantinople therefore seems to be multidimensional as well as synaesthetic.

A further way of expressing aesthetic impressions is to use comparisons and metaphors to compare the impression felt while seeing two different kinds of visual objects. In his description of Hagia Sophia, Procopius compares the sight of the receding columns to that of a choral dance:

*τούτων δὲ δὴ ἐφ' ἐκάτερα κίονες ἐπ' ἐδάφους εἰσίν, οὐδὲ αὐτοὶ κατ' εὐθύ ἐστῶτες, ἀλλ' εἴσω κατὰ σχῆμα τὸ ἡμίκυκλον ὡσπερ ἐν χορῶν ἀλλήλοισι ὑπεξιστάμενοι...*¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ *but the water comes forward gently, and silently touches the land and then quietly draws back.*

¹⁶⁰ I.iii.6, *and a spring bubbling silently forth with a gentle stream of sweet water.*

¹⁶¹ I.i.35, *on either side of this are columns arranged on the pavement; these likewise do not stand in a straight line, but they retreat inward in the pattern of the semicircle as if they were yielding to one another in a choral dance.*

Here Procopius starts with depicting this phenomenon in technical terms – as we have seen earlier that the expression *ἡμίκυκλον* was part of what he presented as technical vocabulary – but he uses a metaphor to convey the actual impression provided by this placement of the column. This impression of movement and image of the choral dance recalls that of Philostrates' *Imagines* II.34, where the seasons seem to be dancing: *δοκεῖ γάρ μοι χορευούσαις ταῖς Ὁραῖς*. The impression that a monument is about to move or is moving also occurs in the description of Justinian's statue which depicts the horse in such a lively way that it seems about to move (*ἔοικε δὲ βαδιουμένῳ καὶ τοῦ πρόσω λαμπρῶς ἐχομένῳ*). This impression of movement is then explained by a very detailed account of the exact position of the horse's limbs:

*ποδῶν τῶν προσθίων ἀμέλει τὸν μὲν ἀριστερόν μετεωρίζει, ὡς ἐπιβησόμενον τῆς ἐπίπροσθεν γῆς, ὁ δὲ δὴ ἕτερος ἐπὶ τοῦ λίθου ἠρήρεισται οὗ ὑπερδέν ἐστιν, ὡς τὴν βάσιν ἐκδεξόμενος· τοὺς δὲ ὀπισθίους οὕτω ξυνάγει ὡς, ἐπειδὴν τὸ μὴ ἐστήξειν αὐτοῖς ἐπιβάλλοι, ἐν ἐτοίμῳ εἶεν...*¹⁶²

In this sentence, it seems again that Procopius is painstakingly concerned with depicting in the minutest details how an impression is produced by a certain work of art. He manages to make us feel that we really have this bronze horse about to move right in front of our eyes. He is also seemingly self-aware of this phenomenon of *trompe-l'oeil* in his writing, and when he describes the Bosphorus seemingly coming towards the onlooker, it is not clear whether it is the real onlooker or the reader who has this impression: *δόξαις ἂν ποταμὸν τεθεᾶσθαι ἐπίπροσθεν προσσηεῖ τῷ ρείθρῳ ἰόντα*¹⁶³. This undetermined onlooker could very well be the reader watching the Bosphorus slowly winding towards him from the page. Above all, this way of depicting monuments in a

¹⁶² I.ii.6, *indeed he holds his left fore foot in the air, as though it were about to take a forward step on the ground before him, while the other is pressed down upon the stone on which he stands, as if ready to take the next step; his hind feet he holds close together, so that they may be ready whenever he decides to move.*

¹⁶³ I.v.7, *and you might think that you were looking at a river moving towards you with its soft stream.*

lively way, as if they were moving, shows that descriptions of static objects can have as much ἐνάργεια as scenes in motion –for example a hunt or a battle.

Another common element in the descriptions of *Buildings* I, as we have already seen, are comparisons with natural elements, like that of the meadow in Hagia Sophia. In the description of Justinian’s statue in I.ii.10 there is also a natural comparison, astronomical to be more precise, since the light flashing from the helmet of the statue is compared to that of Sirius, the star of the end of summer (εἶναι τὸν ὀπωρινὸν ἐκεῖνων ἀστέρῳ). This is a classical literary image that can be found in both Homer and Hesiod¹⁶⁴. Perhaps there is an attempt there to show Justinian as a Homeric hero, which would be in keeping with the expression Ἀχιλλεύς ἢ εἰκῶν. But Kaldellis argues convincingly that this could be a veiled element of criticism as the simile is used in the *Iliad* with negative connotations¹⁶⁵. Another natural comparison is that of the snow-like whiteness of stones in I.iv.26, but this is a fairly self-explanatory one, more of a *lieu commun* than a meaningful image. This tendency to draw parallels with nature culminates when Procopius uses the word φύσις, in the description of the columns in the shrine of the Archangel Michael in Byzantium: τὸν νεῶν κίονες χροιαῖς τισι ποικιλλόμενοι φύσει, and that of the gold that seems to have grown naturally on the shrine of the Archangel Michael in Anaplus: καθάπερ αὐτῷ πεφυκὸς περικέχεται¹⁶⁶.

Conversely, when he describes a natural landscape, he compares it to a man-made object. In the description of the bay of Constantinople, the land boundary is said to bind the crown that the sea forms around the city, as if tying a half-crown or tiara:

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Iliad* V.5, *Works and Days* 415.

¹⁶⁵ Kaldellis (2004), 53, *Iliad* XXII.26-31.

¹⁶⁶ I.iii.18 and I.viii.14

οὕτω μὲν οὖν στεφανοῖ τὴν πόλιν ἢ θάλασσα, ἐκδέχεται δὲ ἀνὰ τὸ λειπόμενον ἡ γῆ, μεταξὺ τοσαύτη οὔσα, ὅσον τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάττης στεφάνην ἐνταῦθα ξυνδείσθαι...¹⁶⁷

The natural elements seem to be concurring here to adorn the city, as it is the combination of the sea and the land which forms the tiara. This comparison to jewellery is then echoed further on by the image of the necklace of churches built by Justinian on the land about the gulf:

ἀντιφιλοτιμούμενος γὰρ τῇ θαλάσῃ ἀμφὶ τοῦ κόλπου τῆ εὐπρεπείᾳ, ὥσπερ ὄρμω περιφερεῖ ἔγκαλλώπισμα τὰ ἱερὰ ταῦτα ἐντέθεικεν...¹⁶⁸

This image of a necklace recalls the description of Smyrna by Aelius Aristides where he compares it to a pearl necklace¹⁶⁹.

Aporia

The danger that threatens the reader and viewer, when faced with marvellous sights, is of being left speechless. This can be seen as well at the writer's level, for several times Procopius expresses his concern at the impossibility of his task (*ἀμύχανα*)¹⁷⁰ as well as at the incredibility (*ἄπιστον*)¹⁷¹ of his account of the buildings. He even qualifies Hagia Sophia's beauty as impossible to describe (*ἀμυθήτω*)¹⁷². This rhetorical topos of the *ἀμυχανία* of the rhetorician writing a panegyric is frequent in fourth to sixth century writers such as Libanius, Julian or Eusebius¹⁷³ and is a means to

¹⁶⁷ I.v.10, *thus the sea forms a crown about the city; the remainder of the city's boundary is formed by the land which lies between the two arms of the sea, and is of sufficient size to bind together there the crown of waters.*

¹⁶⁸ I.vii.2, *for seeking to rival the sea in lending beauty to the land about the gulf, he set all these shrines, as in an encircling necklace, round about it.*

¹⁶⁹ Aelius Aristides, *Or.* XVII.10.

¹⁷⁰ E.g. I.i.3, I.ii.18.

¹⁷¹ I. i.27, I.i.72.

¹⁷² I.1.28.

¹⁷³ See Whitby, Ma. (2000), 60-61 for a comparison of rhetorical *aporia* in *Buildings* and other panegyrics.

create a “contrast between the magnitude of the honorand and the incompetence of the speaker”¹⁷⁴. Several times Procopius affirms his incapacity; in I.i.50, it is both hopeless for him to understand all the devices used by the builders to secure the stability of Hagia Sophia, τὰς μὲν ἄλλας ἀπάσας ἐμοὶ εἰδέναι τε ἄπορον, and impossible for him to explain them in words, καὶ λόγῳ φράσαι ἀμήχανον. In I.i.64, he deems it impossible to give a precise account of all the dedications made by Justinian in his rebuilding of Hagia Sophia: ξύμπαντα μὲν φράσαι ἀκριβολογουμένῳ ἀμήχανον ἄπερ Ἰουστινιανὸς βασιλεὺς τῆδε ἀνέθηκεν. This *aporia* is related to problems of accuracy and precision; for example, the number of sacred edifices built throughout the Empire makes it impossible to enumerate them all:

τὰ δὲ ἀνὰ πᾶσαν διαπεπονημένα τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ἕκαστα διαριθμεῖσθαι χαλεπὸν
τέ ἐστι καὶ λόγῳ παντελῶς ἄπορον...¹⁷⁵

There is a rhetorical dramatisation here in the gradation between *χαλεπὸν* and *παντελῶς ἄπορον*, not only because of the respective strength of the adjectives but the hyperbolic adverb combined with the second one. This sentence is also interesting because it states the goal of the whole of the *Buildings* as an aporic one from the start. The mention of simple enumeration, *διαριθμεῖσθαι*, is fitting as listing is one of the devices used by Procopius in his work, even if he does not do it as much in the first book. The list seems to be part of a certain aesthetic of exhaustiveness which we will encounter time and time again across his corpus. The so-called incompetence of the speaker is directly proportionate to his purpose of accuracy, and his will to do justice to the edifices, as with the church of Michael at Anaplus:

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 60.

¹⁷⁵ I.ix.17, *but to enumerate each of the sacred edifices which he built all throughout the Roman Empire is a difficult, or rather a completely insurmountable task.*

τί ἂν τις διαριθμισάμενος ἐπαξίως τοῦ ἔργου φράσαι τὰς ἠωρημένας στοάς, τὰς ὑπεσταλμένας οἰκοδομίας, τὸ τῶν μαρμάρων ἐπίχαρι, οἷς δὴ οἱ τε τοῖχοι καὶ τὰ ἐδάφη παντάπασι περιβέβληται...¹⁷⁶

The adverb *ἐπαξίως* highlights this concern to give buildings a treatment in proportion to their worth. This rhetorical question also enables him to mention the various elements he could have articulated an ekphrasis around without going into details, that is, its stoas, the sheltered structures and the charm of its marbles. This rhetorical concern to do justice to a building goes to such length that Procopius does not even attempt to describe the Palace in I.x.10, because it is impossible to describe in words: *φράσαι δὲ αὐτὰ λόγῳ ἀμήχανά ἐστιν*. However he does eventually offer an elaborate ekphrasis of its entrance, which he affirms should suffice as an account of this building, according to the saying that “we know the lion by its claw”, *τὸν λέοντα ἐξ ὄνυχος ἴσμεν*¹⁷⁷. The proverb feels like an easy justification for his narrative choice of only describing the entrance of the palace at length, which suits his strategy of writing only one extensive ekphrasis of each type of subject, and the major architectural ekphrasis was covered by Hagia Sophia. There is also an *ἀμηχανία* of the builder, experienced by Anthemius and Isidoros who are said to be despondent (I.i.70, *δυσέλπιδες*) and to be dismayed (I.i.76, *ἄθυμοι*); soon, however, this difficulty is overcome with the help of Justinian.

But the use of *aporia* in the context of aesthetic experience is quite innovative because the *aporia* is spatial, being related to buildings, and it is both subjective and objective. This aesthetic *aporia* is described at great length in *Buildings* I when it seizes the viewers of Hagia Sophia. In the first sentence of the description of the church, the

¹⁷⁶ I.viii.13, *how could any man do justice to the work in describing the lofty stoas, the secluded buildings within the enclosure, the charm of the marbles with which both walls and pavements are everywhere arranged?*

¹⁷⁷ I.x.11.

author says it is *τοις μὲν ὀρῶσιν ὑπερφυῆς*¹⁷⁸, overwhelming to those who see it, but he does not explain what he means by that precise term until much further into the description. He does give a partial explanation immediately afterwards: *ἐπῆρται μὲν γὰρ ἐς ὕψος οὐράνιον ὅσον*¹⁷⁹.

The word *γὰρ* implies that it explains the expression, but the explanation does not relate to this overwhelming experience, but rather to the impression of greatness provided by the general aspect of the church in the city. When Procopius eventually develops his description of this feeling, it is with ideas very close to those used by the ancient novelist Achilles Tattius at the beginning of book V of his novel when he describes the city of Alexandria¹⁸⁰. We can compare the way the narrator of Achilles Tattius says that his gaze was dragged from one thing to another, *ἐκράτει τὴν θέαυ τὰ ὀρώμενα, εἶλκε τὰ προσδοκώμενα*¹⁸¹, to how Procopius presents the spectator's attention as drawn to every detail, *ἀλλὰ μεθέλκει τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν ἕκαστον, καὶ μεταβιβάζει ὅᾳστα ἐφ' ἑαυτὸ*¹⁸², and the way that in Achilles Tattius, the gaze is always unsatisfied, *θεατῆς ἀκόρεστος ἤμην*¹⁸³, to the very strong affirmation in Procopius, with two negative terms, that no one has ever had enough of this spectacle, *τούτου κόρον οὐδεὶς τοῦ θεάματος ἔλαβε πώποτε*¹⁸⁴. Both use the themes of shifting vision and the inability to satisfy one's eyes. In Achilles Tattius, the narrator exclaims: *Ὀφθαλμοί, νενικήμεθα*¹⁸⁵, accepting his failure to impose his will on his sight, an idea that can be compared to the expression used by

¹⁷⁸ I.i.27.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., see earlier in this chapter for the whole sentence, its translation and a comparison with Ammianus Marcellinus.

¹⁸⁰ Oddly enough, this ekphrasis of Alexandria has not been studied closely by any of Achilles Tattius' critics, apart from a few pages in Morales (2004), 100-106.

¹⁸¹ V.i.5, *that which I actually saw kept my gaze fixed, while that which I expected to see would drag it on to the next*. Translation Gaselee (1917).

¹⁸² I.i.47, *but each detail attracts the eye and draws it on irresistibly to itself*.

¹⁸³ V.i.4.

¹⁸⁴ I.i.63.

¹⁸⁵ V.i.5, *Ah, my eyes, we are beaten*.

Procopius of an *ἀμηχανία ἐς τὴν ὄψιν*¹⁸⁶. This passiveness of the viewer may bring to mind that of Constantius in Ammianus, gaping at Rome because he is dazzled on every side by the array of marvellous sights¹⁸⁷. The fact that both Achilles Tatius and Ammianus are referring to the sight of cities as a whole shows that Hagia Sophia – a single building – provides the same aesthetic effect as a whole city, just as the Pantheon was compared by Ammianus to a city-district.

Indeed, several themes used in depicting the experience of aesthetic *aporia* in Hagia Sophia draw on *topoi* of city-praise¹⁸⁸; for example Aelius Aristides had already used the idea of a shifting gaze in his praise of Smyrna:

*καὶ οὐδεὶς οὕτως ἐπείγεται ὅστις ὁρᾷ τὸ πρόσω τῆς ὁδοῦ καὶ οὐ μεταβάλλει τὸ σχῆμα, τὰ μὲν κατ'ὀφθαλμούς δεξιὰ ποιούμενος, τὰ δὲ ἀριστερὰ πρὸ τῆς ὄψεως...*¹⁸⁹

This is another representation of the uncontrollable gaze which cannot be kept straight ahead, even when one is in a hurry, but instead shifts. As for the trope of the unsatisfied desire in the gaze, it is present in two different passages of his praise of Smyrna:

*ὅντε γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεος τὰ προάστια ὁρῶντι κόρος, εἴ τε τις ἔξωθεν προσορῶη τὴν πόλει, ἀεὶ τοῦ ἴσου δεῖ τὸ μὴ ἰκανῶς ἔχειν...*¹⁹⁰

Aristides uses the same word as Procopius to express the impossible satiety in gazing, *κόρος*, and he reinforces his statement in the second half of the sentence, in a similar manner as when Procopius uses *οὐδεὶς* and *πώποτε*, with the combination of *ἀεὶ* and *μὴ*. There is an emphasis on viewing as a desire which is obvious in the other passage from his praise of Smyrna:

¹⁸⁶ I.i.49.

¹⁸⁷ *History*, 16.10.13.

¹⁸⁸ On *Buildings* I and city-praise see Whitby, Ma. (2000).

¹⁸⁹ XVII.17, and no one is in such a hurry that he stares straight ahead at the road and does not change his view, shifting that before his eyes to his right, and what was to his left before his gaze. Translation Behr (1981).

¹⁹⁰ XVII.17, you never have enough of gazing on the suburbs from the city, and if one should view the city from without, there is, even more, always an absence of full satisfaction.

τὸ δὲ οὔτε λόγῳ ῥητὸν οὔτε ὄψει βεβαίως καταληπτόν, ἀλλ' ἐκφευγόν οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως,
ἐπιθυμίαν δὲ τοῦ συλλαβεῖν αὐτὸ παριστὰν ἀεὶ δῆποτε τὸ ὅπερ πάσης τῆς πόλεως
ἑστηκὸς γάνος...¹⁹¹

This passage takes this *aporia* a step further, as it is not just about the act of viewing, but the act of trying to understand, τοῦ συλλαβεῖν. There is a difficulty in grasping everything at the same time, an impossibility in seeing all accurately which is also particularly emphasised in Aristides' praise of Rome:

περὶ ἧς μὴ ὅτι εἰπεῖν κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἔστιν, ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἰδεῖν ἀξίως αὐτήν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἀληθῶς Ἄργου τινὸς πανόπτου, μᾶλλον δὲ τοῦ κατέχοντος αὐτήν πανόπτου θεοῦ δεῖ. τίς γὰρ ἂν το σάσδε ὄρων κορυφὰς κατειλημμένας ἢ πεδίων νομοῦς ἐκπεπολισμένους ἢ γῆν τοςήνδε εἰς μιᾶς πόλεως ὄνομα συνηγμένην, εἶτα ἀκριβῶς κατεθεάσατο; ἀπὸ ποίας τοιαύτης σκοπιᾶς...¹⁹²

The impossibility of viewing everything accurately κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν is first related to a rhetorical claim of ineptitude of the writer in telling everything accurately. He then proceeds with two rhetorical questions, on the impossibility of seeing the whole city with its many hills and pastures, and on the impossibility of finding a place where one could see it all. He even, in his praise of Corinth, formulates the idea that the eyes of all men would not be enough to take everything in:

καὶ περὶ μὲν τοῦ εἶδους τῆς πόλεως τί ἂν τις καὶ λέγοι, ὅ γε οὐδὲ οἱ πάντων ὀφθαλμοὶ χωρεῖν εἰσὶν ἱκανοί...¹⁹³

Experiencing architectural space so large it overwhelms its beholder makes the viewer or reader experience *aporia*; it makes him realize the limits of his capacity to analyse what he sees. Procopius affirms, through description, the fact that aesthetic experience

¹⁹¹ XVIII.4, *there was that which cannot be expressed in words or firmly grasped by seeing it, but is somehow elusive, yet ever afforded us the desire to comprehend it, the splendour which rose over the whole city.*

¹⁹² XXVI.6, *far from being able to speak properly about it, it is not even possible to view it properly, but truly some all-seeing Argos is required, or rather the all-seeing god who holds the city. For who upon viewing so many occupied hills or the urbanized pastures of the plains, or a territory so extensive brought together into the name of a single city, could accurately observe all these things? Where would be his lookout point?*

¹⁹³ XLVI.25, *and what would one say about the appearance of the city? Not even the eyes of all men are sufficient to take it in.*

has an innate irrational aspect, like the fear that takes hold of the viewer when he sees the dome of Hagia Sophia, even though he might know that it is not going to fall, at least for the moment. If one defines this as parallel to experiencing the sacred through a religious monument¹⁹⁴, Procopius' use of the theme in Hagia Sophia could perhaps be approached as a Christian type of *aporia*, an experience that lifts the viewer's mind as described in I.i.61: ὁ νοῦς δὲ οἱ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἐπαιρούμενος ἀεροβατεῖ¹⁹⁵. This experience of the sublime has been defined by James Porter, as "any confrontation with 'a positive, material object elevated to the status of [an] impossible Thing'¹⁹⁶ that, simultaneously fascinating and fearful, both invites and resists integration into symbolic frameworks of understanding"¹⁹⁷. Needless to say, Hagia Sophia resists all attempts at analysis.

However, *aporia* is more than a simple topos in this text: it is programmatic and structural. The problem that faces the viewer of Hagia Sophia is directly comparable to that of the reader of the *Buildings*. There is in fact a conflict between two ways of seeing Hagia Sophia and of reading the *Buildings*, and it is a conflict of scale. This feature may be described as 'two possible and contradictory responses' in seeing Hagia Sophia, the first one is 'to be caught in "a single and most extraordinary harmony"' and the second 'to be confused' and have our 'attention drawn from side to side by an overwhelming and bewildering plethora of riches'¹⁹⁸. The reader can either cast his sight on the infinite number of coloured tesserae or try to have a global vision of the whole work. It is nonetheless quite difficult to have that general vision when one's eyes are attracted and dazzled by a plethora of vivid details - Procopian *poikilia* at its best.

¹⁹⁴ On the sacred in church ekphraseis, see Webb (1999), 59-74.

¹⁹⁵ *And so his mind is lifted up toward God and exalted.*

¹⁹⁶ Porter quotes Zizek (1989), 71.

¹⁹⁷ Porter (2001), 65.

¹⁹⁸ Elsner (2004), 308-309.

Chapter Conclusion

The richness of this monumental ekphrasis of Constantinople can put us in a state of critical *aporia* like the viewers of Hagia Sophia. One may see this as an ever-regenerating *aporia* that makes the spectator feel as if it is always the first time he sees the church¹⁹⁹ or the first time he reads the *Buildings*. There is an overwhelming pleasure, a genuine *jouissance du texte*²⁰⁰ in experiencing the extent of Procopius' rhetorical skills, in trying to make out the architecture of his text as he tries to make out the technical complexity of Hagia Sophia, that make us bloom in tiny colourful mosaic cubes just like the senators of the Chalke mosaic. Indeed, Procopius could quite rightly give himself airs in riding his chariot, like the Bosphorus²⁰¹, a chariot whose horses might be word and sight, art and nature, imperial panegyric and self-sufficient ekphrasis, easy pun and elaborate metaphor. On a large scale, the way Procopius uses descriptions of buildings to build his panegyric can also be seen in the rest of his work as he constantly uses material objects to construct his history of the world of Justinian's reign, which will be seen in chapter 3. As for the constant concern for the natural landscape that is being built and impacted on by Justinian in *Buildings I*, it is another salient aspect of Procopius's work which the following chapter addresses. The ekphrastic and periegetic aspects of Procopius's prose are not just anecdotal features but they are structural to his whole text as he takes us on a *Grand Tour* of Justinian's world. In the introduction to this chapter, I defended the choice of starting a study of Procopius with the *Buildings*, a choice which might seem odd because it is often considered a marginal text in his corpus. Some of the issues covered here will appear again, such as

¹⁹⁹ I.i.62.

²⁰⁰ Barthes (1973).

²⁰¹ I.v.6.

the technical aspects of his prose, the idea of literary *poikilia*, the omnipresent exaggeration and the desire for exhaustiveness. Book I of the *Buildings* appears like a high concentration of Procopian idiosyncrasies, and because my thesis focuses so much on the digressive, it manifests itself as the apogee of that, as the digressive and descriptive turns into the main event and the traditional narrative becomes peripheral. If one asks the question: “why materiality?” I would like to think the answer is to some extent the same as to the question “why ekphrasis?”. As Valentine Cunningham has argued, the answer is because of its *thereness*:

Fundamentally, I suggest that *thereness* is what’s in question. Writing is always tormented by the question of real presence, by challenges to knowability, by the problematics of truth and validity, the difficulty of being sure about what it might be pointing to outside of itself, by its deictic claims and desires, by what its grammar of pointing, its this and that and there might be indicating, by what if anything is actually made present to the reader when the text says, with Jesus at the Last Supper and the priest at the eucharistic table, Hoc est . . . , this is The ekphrastic encounter seeks, I think, to resolve this ancient and continuing doubting by pointing at an allegedly touchable, fingerable, thisness. It lays claim to the absolute *thereness* of an aesthetic object, the *thereness* writing is (rightly) so doubtful about, and seeks to corral that evident (or claimed) empirical, real, truthfulness for itself and its own doings²⁰²

Procopius is constantly over-describing, over-qualifying, and some might think that the purpose of this might be an *effet de reel*, which is very true in some instances, but this brings everything back to the conception of Procopius the reporter who is merely providing accounts of *real* things, based on his own autopsy or adapted from sources. Procopius does seem obsessed with material reality, or rather the illusion of reality, the illusion of presence created by his writing. His descriptions are brimming with self-awareness and self-consciousness for that reason. The illusion of *thereness* is such in his work because it feels so material, and even sensual, as seeing and feeling are two main axes of this materiality.

²⁰² Cunningham (2007), 61.

CHAPTER 2

THE MARGINAL SPACE: NATURE AND GEOGRAPHY AT THE EDGE OF THE EMPIRE

The description of Constantinople, although mostly centred on the built landscape, still showed a certain concern for the natural backbone of the city, something particularly obvious in the description of its bay. Procopius is writing a material history of the world under Justinian's reign; he chooses to write his history in space, in a three-dimensional manner, and one could argue that his work presents three facets: the *Wars* which travels to the warfronts on the edges of the Empire, the *Buildings* as a travel-guide of the built landscape which reads at times like a companion to the first work, and the *Secret History* which covers the backstage and hidden corners of the Imperial court. The representation of space and the natural landscape is also a fundamental link between the *Wars* and the *Buildings*.

The choice of writing a history rooted so deeply in space is entirely self-conscious and argued for in the *Wars* as a necessity for its readership, who cannot fully comprehend events without knowing about their geographical context²⁰³. Furthermore, space appears to be a peri-textual device in the way its segmentation can be seen in parallel to that of the text. Similarly the different textures and contour lines of the landscape are mirrored by different textures in the fibre of the text.

²⁰³ *Wars* VIII.i.7 'At this point in my narrative it has seemed to me not inappropriate to pause a moment, in order that the geography of Lazica may be clear to those who read this history and that they may know what races of men inhabit that region, so that they may not be compelled to discuss matters which are obscure to them, like men fighting shadows'. This methodology can be applied to the overall writing of the wars and Procopius' descriptive style in general.

The descriptions of landscapes are particularly effective in the way they not only offer backdrops to the narrative, providing it with various atmospheres, but even influence the reading of events. At opposite ends of the spectrum of geographical moods, we find idyllic gardens with bubbling springs on one side and wild, deserted mountains on the other. In a typically Procopian way, the same themes or words can be used for completely opposite literary, generic and ideological purposes, as one can see with natural elements such as water, which can be a blessing – for example in Constantinople, but also a destructive evil when it is the cause of floods and shipwrecks. Nature and the elements are ambiguous concepts in the whole of Procopius' work, and they function within a complicated dialectic relationship with the idea of culture, for example in the relationship between art and nature – as seen in *Buildings* I²⁰⁴ – and the impact of men on the landscape, particularly in terms of wars and the imperial imprint of Justinian.

In the narrative of the *Wars*, geographical content is also the space for picturesque excursions that provide a feeling of escapism and put the reader in the place of a tourist travelling along with the author. This periegetic aspect may lead one to compare Procopius' work to that of historians like Diodorus of Sicily, Polybius and Josephus, and authors of specifically geographical works like Strabo, Pausanias, Dionysius Periegetes and the *periploi* writers. One cannot help but notice that dealing with geography enables Procopius to throw himself into precise technical accounts aimed at explaining natural phenomena and digressions on the etymology of place-names, showing once more his wide range of apparent knowledge, as certainly

²⁰⁴ See chapter 1, pages 33, 51 and 58.

knowledge is power in the world of rhetoric²⁰⁵. Indeed, digressions are an essential element in the construction of the author's narrative persona, and geographical ones allow him to present himself as the holder of knowledge and distance himself from the poets with his rationalising stance. The notion of space itself appears like a cornerstone in approaching Procopius' work because it takes on many of the ambiguities and tensions that exist in the scope of his three texts, but it also seems to be one of the major elements that make a cohesive and coherent world spring out of them.

Noms de pays: le nom

Mais si ces noms absorbèrent à tout jamais l'image que j'avais de ces villes, ce ne fut qu'en la transformant, qu'en soumettant sa réapparition en moi à leurs lois propres [...]. Ils exaltèrent l'idée que je me faisais de certains lieux de la terre, en les faisant plus particuliers, par conséquent plus réels. Marcel Proust²⁰⁶

In this extract from Proust, the narrator shows the power of names and their effect on his memory and his imagination. He claims that the names evoked a specific image to him of the places they referred to, and contributed to making these places more real to him. I would like to show that in Procopius's work, names of places work similarly, and that he uses their power of evocation to make the places he mentions more real and tangible to his reader. In a way, names function almost as shortcut ekphrases for the places they refer to.

²⁰⁵ On knowledge as an instrument of power in imperial culture, see Barton (1994) and König and Whitmarsh (2007).

²⁰⁶ Title and quote from *Du côté de chez Swann* III. 'But if those names assimilated for ever the image I used to have of those cities, it was only by transforming it, only by subjecting its reappearance in me to their own laws [...]. They exalted the idea I had of some places on earth, by making them more particular, and therefore more real'.

Procopius's interest in names is stated as part of his methodology in treating geographical objects, since in his account of the Euxine Sea in book VIII of the *Wars* he claims he did not use myths but proceeded in the following manner:

ἄπερ μοι διαμετρήσασθαι ἀναγκαιότατον ἔδοξεν εἶναι, οὐ τὰ μυθώδη περὶ αὐτῶν ἀπαγγέλλοντι ἢ ἄλλως ἀρχαῖα, οὐδὲ ὅπη ποτὲ Πόντου τοῦ Εὐξεινοῦ δεθῆναι τὸν Προμηθεῖα ποιηταὶ λέγουσι· μύθου γὰρ ἱστορίαν παρὰ πολὺ κεχωρισθαι οἶμαι· ἀλλ' ἐς τὸ ἀκριβὲς διεξίοντι τὰ τε ὀνόματα καὶ τὰ πράγματα, ὅσα δὴ τανῦν ἐπιχωριάζει τῶν τόπων ἐκείνων ἐκάστῳ.²⁰⁷

Both names and facts are of equal importance, as the expression τὰ τε ὀνόματα καὶ τὰ πράγματα indicates. As for the use of διεξίοντι, in its meaning of going through in speech (as opposed to physically), it is common in Herodotus²⁰⁸ and appears with a different prefix but a similar meaning in Pausanias (δεῖ δέ με ἀφικέσθαι τοῦ λόγου πρόσω, πάντα ὁμοίως ἐπεξίοντα τὰ Ἑλληνικά²⁰⁹). The verb ἐρχόμαι brings the imagery of journey to these texts, establishing a parallel between travelling lands and travelling in the text. Within this journey through places, names appear to be of particular importance. It is also worth noticing that in this sentence, Procopius constructed an opposition between myths on one hand, and names and facts on the other, when in fact, his etymological explanations of names do sometimes have a connection to mythology.

Procopius appears to have an interest in etymology and strives to explain the relationship between the name and the place whenever he can. More often than not, the names denote a visual quality of the place in question. In the *Buildings*, the city of Euroea in Epirus is presented with an explanation of its name:

²⁰⁷ *Wars* VIII.i.12-13, *these things it has seemed to me very necessary to investigate, not relating the mythological tales about them nor other antiquated material, nor even telling in what part of the Euxine Sea the poets say Prometheus was bound (for I consider that history is widely separated from mythology), but stating accurately and in order both the names of each of those places and the facts that apply to them at the present day.*

²⁰⁸ See for example I.116, VII.77.

²⁰⁹ Pausanias I.xxvi.4, *but I must proceed onwards with my narrative, as I will be going through all Greece in my descriptions.*

ἦν δὲ τις ἐνταῦθα πόλις ἀρχαία, ὕδασιν ἐπιεικῶς κατακορῆς οὖσα, ὀνόματός τε τῆς τοῦ χωρίου φύσεώς ἀξίου ἐπιτυχοῦσα· Εὐροία γὰρ ἀνέκαθεν ὀνομάζετο...²¹⁰

The relationship between the name and the place is here made obvious by the expression ὀνόματός τε τῆς τοῦ χωρίου φύσεώς ἀξίου as it emphasises the fact that a name should be fitting to the place with the adjective ἀξίος. The name Euroea, well-flowing, is fitting as it brings to the reader's mind the visual or physical qualities of the place it designates. Procopius sets up his etymology of the name by describing the city first, using the expression ὕδασιν ἐπιεικῶς κατακορῆς. He gives another etymological explanation of a name having to do with water later on in the *Buildings*, where the name of the river Dracon is explained by the winding aspect of its stream which evokes that of a snake:

ταύτης δὲ ῥεῖ τῆς πόλεως ἄγχιστα ποταμός, ὅνπερ ὁμωνύμως τῷ σχήματι Δράκοντα καλοῦσιν οἱ ἐπιχώριοι. περιστρέφεται γὰρ ἐλίσσόμενος ἐφ' ἑκάτερα καὶ ἀπ' ἐναντίας αὐτῷ ἀντιπεριάγων τὰς δίνας, σκολιῶν τε τῷ ῥοθίῳ, πῆ μὲν ἐν δεξιᾷ, πῆ δὲ ἐν ἀριστερᾷ προσιών...²¹¹

It appears that Procopius took the opportunity offered by the name Dracon, snake, to launch into a description of the river's stream which gives an impression of its lively movement. There is something very fluid about this sentence, perhaps due to the alliteration of sibilant fricative consonants, and the shorter periods contribute to represent on the page the many changes in the course followed by the river. The comparison between the river and a snake is expressed by the similarity in movement, and use of verbs such as ἐλίσσω, which could be used to describe the coiling of a river as

²¹⁰ *Buildings* IV.i.39, there was a certain ancient city in this region, abundantly supplied with water and endowed with a name worthy of the character of the place; for it was called Euroea from ancient times.

²¹¹ *Buildings* V.ii.6, Close to this city flows a river which the natives call Dracon from the course which it follows. For it twists around and coils from side to side, reversing its whirling course and advancing with its winding stream, now to the right, now to the left.

well as that of a snake²¹². This type of etymological explanation can also be found in the *Wars*; for example in VI.xiii.6 the place named Ancon is described as a pointed rock, *πέτρα ἐγγώνιος*, very similar to an elbow: *ἀγκῶνι γὰρ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐμφερέης*. The use of *ἐμφερέης* points out the fact that names seem to function as metaphors or similes for the actual location²¹³.

However, it is not only etymology itself which interests Procopius. He also presents himself as a linguist curious about what things are called in other languages, particularly Latin. In book II of the *Wars*, the Latin name of the place Strata is explained by Procopius, saying that it means a paved road in Latin, and is also used by a character, Arethas, to claim that it belongs to the Romans:

*Ἀρέθας μὲν οὖν Ῥωμαίων ἰσχυρίζετο εἶναι τὸν χώρον, ὀνόματι τεκμηριούμενος οὗ δὴ πρὸς πάντων ἄνωθεν ἔτυχε (Στραῖτα γὰρ ἢ ἐστρωμένη ὁδὸς τῆς Λατίνων καλεῖται φωνῆ) καὶ μαρτυρίαις παλαιοτάτων ἀνδρῶν χρώμενος...*²¹⁴

On this occasion, Procopius has a character use etymology in a strategic context, as Arethas uses the name as a proof, *ὀνόματι τεκμηριούμενος*, to claim both its Latin origin and ownership. Procopius also uses this passage to educate his reader as to the meaning of Strata in Latin, that is a paved road, *ἐστρωμένη ὁδός*. There is indeed a didactic aspect to these explanations of names in other languages. There are some other examples of Latin names which he explains for his reader; for example, Caputvada in book III of the *Wars*: *ὁ δὲ Κεφαλὴν Βράχους τῆς σφετέρᾳ γλώσση καλοῦσι Ῥωμαῖοι. Καποῦτβαδα γὰρ ὁ τόπος προσαγορεύεται*²¹⁵. There is no explanation as to why it is so named, although one assumes this is another descriptive name, as it is the name of a cliff. There is also the

²¹² For example, in *Iliad* xxii.95 it is used to describe a snake coiling himself inside his lair waiting for his prey.

²¹³ Another example is in *Wars* VIII.ix.19 where a rough gorge is literally called Rough, *Τραχέα*.

²¹⁴ *Wars* II.i.7, now Arethas maintained that the place belonged to the Romans, proving his assertion by the name which has long been applied to it by all (for Strata signifies “a paved road” in the Latin tongue), and he also adduced the testimonies of men of the most ancient times.

²¹⁵ *Wars* III.xiv.17, the Romans call it in their own language “Shoal’s Head”. For the place is called Caputvada.

river Decennovium in book V of the *Wars*: *ῥεῖ δὲ καὶ ποταμός, ὃν Δεκεννόβριον τῆ Λατίνων φωνῇ καλοῦσιν οἱ ἐπιχώριοι, ὅτι δὴ ἔννεακαίδεκα περιῶν σημεῖα*²¹⁶. This is another example of a descriptive name, as it provides information on the length of the course of the river, measured with mile-stones.

The meaning of names is something which appears to be invested with a particular power in another example in the same book of the *Wars*, which sees a digression on the origin of the name Beneventus. Initially, Procopius discusses the change of name from Maleventus to Beneventus:

*Ἐν τοῖς καὶ Βενεβεντός ἐστιν, ἣν πάλαι μὲν Μαλεβετονὸν ὠνόμασαν Ῥωμαῖοι, τανῦν δὲ Βενεβεντόν καλοῦσι, τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ προτέρου ὀνόματος διαφεύγοντες βλασφημίαν· βέντος γὰρ ἄνεμον τῆ Λατίνων φωνῇ δύνεται...*²¹⁷

The Romans appear to have given a great deal of importance to the name of this city as they changed the ominous sounding Maleventus into Beneventus²¹⁸. Procopius translates *ventus* into Greek for his audience who may not know Latin. He then proceeds to a digression on the strong wind which gave the city its name with a shocking description of how the wind would seize a man and his horse, whirl him around in the air for a while before throwing him down and killing him.

Another example which refers to the Latin name of a place is in book VII of the *Wars* and interestingly provides the names of two passes:

*δύο μόνως εἰσόδους στενὰς μάλιστα ἐνταῦθα ποιεῖται, ὧν ἀτέρα μὲν Πέτρα Αἵματος τῆ Λατίνων φωνῇ κέκληται, Λαβοῦλαν δὲ τὴν ἑτέραν καλεῖν οἱ ἐπιχώριοι νενομίκασιν...*²¹⁹

²¹⁶ *Wars* V.xi.2 and a river also flows by the place, which the inhabitants call Decennovium in the Latin tongue, because it flows past nineteen milestones.

²¹⁷ *Wars* V.xv.4, among these towns is Beneventus, which in ancient times the Romans had named Maleventus, but now they call it Beneventus, avoiding the evil omen of the former name, “ventus” meaning wind in the Latin language.

²¹⁸ Beneventus’ famous change of name is also reported by Pliny the Elder(III.xi.16).

²¹⁹ *Wars* VII.xxviii.7, they form there only two extremely narrow passes, one which has received the name of “Rock of Blood” in the Latin language, while the natives are used to calling the other one Lavula.

Although Procopius does not give the exact name of the pass in Latin, he provides its Greek translation, *Πέτρα Αΐματος*. However, when he provides the name of the other pass in the language of the indigenous people, he does not translate it. It is clear that Procopius does not have a systematic method when referring to names, their translations and etymologies, but rather provides what he thinks might be of interest on each occasion. The other reason why all these Latin names and their explanations are of interest for us is because of the question whether Procopius read Latin authors. It is difficult to determine from a few examples his actual knowledge of the language, but it is undeniable that he had at least a solid interest in it.

Another aspect which names can offer in the narrative, aside from their descriptive and linguistic aspects, is their relationship with mythology. Even if Procopius claims not to use myths²²⁰, he uses them to explain some names. An example of this is his explanation of the name of the mountain called Mt. Circaeum, which he explains while distancing himself with this opinion:

ἧς ἀγχιστα ὄρος τὸ Κίρκαιόν ἐστιν, οὗ τὸν Ὀδυσσεὶα τῇ Κίρκῃ ξυγγενεσθαι φασίν, ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐ πιστὰ λέγοντες, ἐπεὶ ἐν νήσῳ Ὅμηρος τὰ τῆς Κίρκης οἰκία ἰσχυρίζεται εἶναι...²²¹

At first, Procopius states his scepticism, with *οὐ πιστὰ*²²², and bases his incredulity on the fact that Homer clearly identified Circe's dwelling as an island, *ἐν νήσῳ*. But he does not stop here, and offers a theory which goes towards confirming Mt. Circaeum as the location of Homer's Circe:

²²⁰ *Wars VIII.i.12-13, these things it has seemed to me very necessary to investigate, not relating the mythological tales about them nor other antiquated material, nor even telling in what part of the Euxine Sea the poets say Prometheus was bound (for I consider that history is very widely separated from mythology) [...].*

²²¹ *Wars V.xi.2, very near is Mt. Circaeum, where they say Odysseus met Circe, though the story seems untrustworthy to me, for Homer declares the home of Circe an island.*

²²² This expression is used repeatedly by Procopius when dealing with mythical or paradoxical content; see the last chapter of this thesis for this strategy of distancing himself from this type of material.

ἐκεῖνο μέντοι ἔχω εἰπεῖν, ὡς τὸ Κίρκαιον τοῦτο, ἐπὶ πολὺ τῆς θαλάσσης διήκον, νήσω ἔμφορές ἐστι, καὶ τοῖς τε πλέουσιν ἄγχιστα τοῖς τε ἐς τὴν ἐκείνην ἡϊόνα βαδίζουσι νῆσος δοκεῖ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον εἶναι. καὶ ἐπειδὴν τις ἐν αὐτῷ γένηται, τότε δὴ μεταμανθάνει ψευδοῦναι τῆς δόξης τὰ πρότερα...²²³

Procopius' theory is based on the appearance of Mt. Circaeum, which, because it advances into the sea, is similar to an island, *νήσω ἔμφορές*. What he describes then, is the impression that both people sailing close to it and those walking on its shore have, which is that it appears completely like an island with the emphasis of *ἐπὶ πλεῖστον*. What transpires is that Mt. Circaeum has a deceptive appearance, as the infinitive *ψευδοῦναι* indicates. Procopius finishes his explanation by stating that this might be why Homer called it an island. This example is a fascinating take on rationalising the geography of Homer²²⁴. This story of a deceptive mountain which looks like an island and would have also tricked the famous poet into referring to it as an island might be a play around the fact that its eponymous character was herself deceiving. As for Procopius' pose of distancing himself from poets, it is only partially effective as the conclusion of his explanation is to justify Homer.

There are other names of places which are explained by mythical and literary background in the *Wars*. For example in *Wars* VIII.ii.10 where he claims Athenae is not called this because it is an Athenian settlement but because a woman called Athenae used to rule it²²⁵, and in *Wars* VIII.ii.11-14 the city Apsarus is supposed to have been originally called Apsyrtus after the character in the *Argonautica*²²⁶, a theory that he

²²³ *Wars* V.xi.3, *However I am able to say this, that this Mt. Circaeum, extending very far into the sea, is similar to an island, and to those sailing close to it and those walking the shore there, it looks just like an island. And when one gets on it, he then realises that he was deceived in his impression formerly.*

²²⁴ Something which Strabo and the mostly fragmentary Eratosthenes both do in their geographical works.

²²⁵ In Arrian, *Periplus Ponti Euxini* 4.1 (ed. Silberman) the name of the town is explained by a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena.

²²⁶ *Ibid.* 6.3, Arrian uses the same etymological explanation and mentions the tomb. It is possible that Procopius read and used Arrian in his account of Apsarus. On Procopius having read and used Arrian, see particularly Cameron (1985), 216-217.

backs up with the observation that Apsyrtus' tomb is supposedly situated nearby. But what is interesting with many of the examples is their relationship to the paradoxical. For example, in *Wars* VII.xxvii.17-20, Procopius dismisses the claim that Scylaeum was named after the mythological monster Scylla, but instead he argues that it was called Scylaeum on account of a fish called 'scyllax', and then proceeds on a long digression that gives other examples of incorrect – and paradoxical – explanations which have been given to names of places. The island called 'Dog's head' for example, led people to think it was inhabited by people with dogs' heads, and similarly a mountain called 'Wolf's helmet' led to the same confusion about its inhabitants having wolves' heads²²⁷. These examples allow him to reflect on names which are originally appropriate to what they describe, until people start entertaining false opinions and start rumours that poets give fuel to, as is expected from their art. It is quite obvious here that Procopius does not want to be associated with poets and myths, and instead is intent on a rational stance towards anything paradoxical. But some of his own explanations of names can seem doubtful, such as his explanation of the river Acampsis' name in *Wars* VIII.ii.7-8 which he takes to mean ἄκαμπτος, unbent, which would be fitting to its strong current. It seems that ancient authors with an interest in etymology were just as interested in the different interpretations that could be given to names, even if erroneous²²⁸.

Sometimes, the name of the place is a pretext for further etymology, as in the example of Sardinia in *Wars* VIII.xxiv.38-39. He derives from Sardinia's name the name of a plant which gave the expression 'sardonic laughter' because, when eaten, it

²²⁷ *Wars* VII.xxvii.19 and VII.xxvii.20.

²²⁸ Heliodorus in particular is another literary author fond of etymology (cf. *Aethiopica* II.xxiv etymology of Hypata, II.xxv names of hero and heroine, III.xii the name Homer, V.xiii amethyst, VIII.xi the pantarbe ring, IX.xix relationship between word for arrow and bone and IX.xxii the Nile). See Bowie (1995), 269-280 for his names, as well as Jones (2006), 548-562, particularly 549 on incorrect etymology.

makes one die in convulsions similar to laughter. The relationship between name and place here is made complicated by adding another layer of etymology. In this example, it is not a particular quality of the place which engenders its name but its name which is used to qualify something, and from there derives another expression.

Procopius' interest in names of places therefore is not only related to his predisposition for the visual and the way names can evoke visual qualities, and thereby be visual as much as objects, but it is also deeply related to linguistic issues and the fundamental problem of the arbitrary relationship between words and what they represent; a problem which applies to his own work and its relationship with the material world it evokes.

The segmentation of space

This problem of the relationship between the material world and the text is particularly apparent in the general treatment of space. Just like a text, space can be cut, broken down and divided into pieces. Through this segmentation it is organized and made sense of, instead of remaining as a block²²⁹. Obviously, this editing process is important in terms of narrative strategy, but also because of its political and ideological connotations²³⁰. Furthermore, it appears that historical and geographical writing go hand in hand as both spatial and temporal concerns found their place in ancient historiography.²³¹

²²⁹ On how ancient geographers divided and organised space, see Geus (2004) 11-26 on Eratosthenes.

²³⁰ Nicolet (1991) remains an authority on how the representation of space is suffused with political ideology, in the case of the early Roman Empire, looking at the *Res Gestae* and Agrippa's map.

²³¹ This appears to be particularly the case of late antique historians as per Merrills (2005) which examines this phenomenon in three late antique authors; Orosius, Jordanes and Isidorus of Seville. In the

Firstly, the way geographical space is divided in Procopius' three works needs to be examined if one is to look at the representation of material reality in his writings. The order in which places are treated is not random but has a purpose which is sometimes even expressly claimed by the author. In the *Secret History* the author announces his plans for the work in terms of the geographical situation of the action in opposition to the *Wars*:

τὰ δὲ ἐνθάδε οὐκέτι μοι τρόπῳ τῷ εἰρημένῳ ξυγκείσεται, ἐπεὶ ἐνταῦθα γεγράφεται πάντα, ὅποσα δὴ τετύχηκε γενέσθαι πανταχόθι τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς...²³²

The books of the *Wars* – that is, not including book VIII – are organised depending on where the action is set, whereas by contrast this work covers everywhere all at once. There appears to be a form of deliberate organization in the way the narrative always comes back to Byzantium in a very centralised manner which parallels the organisation of the text around the imperial couple as its nucleus. It also reflects their inescapability, which is a theme explored by the narrative, for example with Photius and his desperate attempts to flee Theodora's persecution²³³.

In the *Buildings*, Procopius refers several times to a geographical order. In I.i.19, he explains his decision to start with Byzantium:

εἴη δ' ἂν εἰκότως τὰ ἐν Βυζαντίῳ παρὰ πάντα τῷ λόγῳ κρηπίς. ἀρχομένου γὰρ ἔργου, κατὰ δὴ τὸν παλαιὸν λόγον, πρόσωπον κρητὴ θέμενα τηλαυγές...²³⁴

His choice is presented as obvious with the adverb *εἰκότως*, and he uses both an architectural metaphor, with the word *κρηπίς*, and a quote from Pindar (*Olympians* VI.4) to support it. In II.i.2-3, he presents his plan to pursue describing the fortifications built

case of Orosius, he states that 'this deliberate emphasis upon the exotic kingdoms of the east, north and south demonstrated Orosius' own escape from Romano-centric models of history' (ibid, 98).

²³² *Secret History* I.i.1, from here onwards, this plan of composition will no longer be followed by me, since I will write here everything as it has happened in every part of the Roman empire.

²³³ *Secret History* iii.22-25.

²³⁴ And with good reasons the buildings in Byzantium, beyond the rest, would serve as a foundation to my narrative. For "at the beginning of a work", as the ancient saying goes, "one must set a front that shines afar".

on the limits of the Roman territory after he has dealt with the buildings in Constantinople and to start with the Persian frontier: ἐκ δὲ ὁρίων τῶν Μηδικῶν ἄρξασθαι οὗ μοι ἀπὸ τρόπου ἔδοξεν εἶναι²³⁵. Procopius appeals both to his own judgment here with μοι ἔδοξεν but also to custom with τρόπου. But it is not common for geographers to start with Persia; for example Strabo's geography starts at the columns of Hercules and does not get to Persia until book XV. The obvious reason why Procopius would start with Persia is that it self-referentially corresponds to the order of his own work, the *Wars*, which starts with the Persian wars. In *Buildings* III.ii.1, he refers to proceeding in geographical order again with Mesopotamia in continuation to his previous account (ἄρξομαι δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν Μεσοποταμίᾳ χωρίων, ὅπως δὴ ὁ λόγος τοῖς ἔμπροσθέν μοι δεδιηγημένοις προσεχῶς ἄγοιτο...) ²³⁶.

As for the *Wars*, their geographical organization is presented as polarized around East and West²³⁷ in the opening line of the work:

Προκόπιος Καισαρεὺς τοὺς πολέμους ξυνέγραψεν οὗς Ἰουστινιανὸς ὁ Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς πρὸς βαρβάρους διήνεγκε τούς τε ἐώους καὶ ἐσπερίους, ὡς πη αὐτῶν ἐκάστω ξυνηέχθη γενέσθαι... ²³⁸

This is reminiscent of Herodotus in the polarisation between East and West (τούς τε ἐώους καὶ ἐσπερίους) and the contrast between Greeks and barbarians. Procopius follows this plan by treating the Persian wars in book I and II, the Vandalic wars in book III and IV, and the Gothic wars in book V, VI and VII. These three different theatres appear to be both the backdrop and the main object of the narrative.

²³⁵ And it seemed to me that starting from the Persian border was not against the custom.

²³⁶ I will start from the places in Mesopotamia, so that I may take my account forward, continuing in order from the places I have described earlier.

²³⁷ For an interesting study of east-west and north-south polarization in Antiquity, see Bowersock in Harris (2007), 167-178.

²³⁸ 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.

There are very few passages which are set in Constantinople itself aside from major events like the Nika riots and the plague; it seems that Procopius kept all the action set in the capital for the *Secret History*. The *Wars* appear to revolve around the periphery of the Empire and often focus on the peripheral and even paradoxical aspect of these spaces. As for book VIII, it deals with what happened after the publication of the previous books on all fronts. The introduction of book VIII reflects on the method used in the previous books as well as their diffusion:

ὅσα μὲν ἄχρι τοῦδὲ μοι δεδιήγηται, τῆδε ξυγγέγραπται ἥπερ δυνατὰ ἐγγερόναι ἐπὶ χωρίων ἐφ' ὧν δὴ ἔργα τὰ πολέμια ξυνηνέχθη γενέσθαι διελόντι τε καὶ ἀρμοσαμένῳ τοὺς λόγους, οἵπερ ἤδη ἐξενεχθέντες πανταχόθι δεδήλωνται τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς...²³⁹

It is striking here that Procopius' work, which dealt with what happened in every corner of the empire, is then said to have been diffused everywhere – πανταχόθι, literally 'in all directions'. Space seems to be a literary concept which reflects the state of the text itself.

It is therefore not surprising that Procopius is so concerned with the organisation and division of space and writes lengthy digressions on the division of the continents in particular. This controversial geographical issue is tackled by him in three different passages, one in the *Buildings* and two in the *Wars*. In *Wars* III.i.4, Procopius offers an introduction to world geography in order to explain the distribution of the Empire between Arcadius and Honorius:

Περιλαμβάνει μὲν κύκλῳ τὴν γῆν ὠκεανὸς ἢ ζύμπασαν ἢ τὴν πολλήν· οὐ γὰρ πω σαφές τι ἀμφ' αὐτῷ ἴσμεν· σχίζει δὲ αὐτὴν δίχα ἐς ἡπίρους δύο ἐκροή τις ἀπ' αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐσπέριον εἰσβάλλουσα μοῖραν καὶ ταύτην δὴ ποιουμένη τὴν θάλασσαν, ἀπὸ Γαδείρων μὲν ἀρξαμένη, ἐς αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν Μαιῶτιν διήκουσα λίμνην...²⁴⁰

²³⁹ 'The narrative which I have written up to this point has been composed, as far as possible, on the principle of separating the material into parts which relate severally to the countries in which the different wars took place, and these parts have already been published and have appeared in every corner of the Roman empire'.

²⁴⁰ Now the earth is surrounded by a circle of ocean, either entirely or for the most part (for our knowledge is not as yet at all clear in this matter); and it is split into two continents by a sort of outflow

The way the earth is divided does not seem to be much of a problem here even though Procopius admits not knowing for sure how much ocean there is surrounding the earth. The two continents' division is described precisely with two landmarks, Gadira and the Maeotic lake. Procopius then goes on to discuss how far those continents extend and even provides various distances in his account (eighty-four stades between the continents at the southern Pillar of Hercules and ten stades at Hieron, two hundred and eighty-five days' journey between the two Pillars etc.)²⁴¹. The choice of placing this long digression at this stage of the narrative is explained by Maria Cesa as a way of visually marking the hinge between the different narratives of the Persian and the Vandalic war²⁴².

Nevertheless, this division of the continents is presented in a much more problematic way in *Buildings* VI.i.6-8, and in *Wars* VIII.vi a whole chapter is solely devoted to this matter. The passage in the *Buildings* does not provide explanations but states that the question is a source of conflict and refers to his passage in the *Wars* devoted to it (τούτων γὰρ δὴ ἔνεκα διαμάχονται πρὸς ἀλλήλους οἱ ταῦτα σοφοί, ἥπερ ἐν λόγοις μοι τοῖς ὑπὲρ τῶν πολέμων δεδήλωται περιηγουμένῳ τὸν Εὐξείνῳ καλούμενον πόντον)²⁴³. The subject is presented as particularly sensitive with the expression διαμάχονται and one cannot help but be curious as to who those σοφοί people are. Indeed, *Wars* VIII.vi sees a lot of references to various literary authorities such as Herodotus,

from the ocean, a flow which enters at the western part and forms this Sea which we know, beginning at Gadira and extending all the way to the Maeotic Lake.

²⁴¹ On the concept of distance in Procopius' work, see next part of this chapter.

²⁴² Cesa (1982), 195, « e mi sembra notevole il fatto che Procopio abbia sentito il bisogno di inserire un excursus di questo genere (in cui appunto tale distinzione risulta in modo quasi visivo), proprio all'inizio di quella sezione dei *Bella* in cui tratta la politica occidentale di Giustiniano, quasi per tracciare con maggior chiarezza uno stacco tra la prima e la seconda fase delle guerre dell'imperatore ».

²⁴³ In regard to this question those who are learned in these matters are in conflict with one another, as has been made clear in the books of the *Wars* in the course of my description of the sea called Euxine.

Aeschylus and Aristotle; interestingly enough a historian, a poet and a philosopher, perhaps as a heavy-duty *captatio benevolentiae*.

In VIII.vi.12-14, he quotes Herodotus' *Histories* IV.45 on the opinion that the earth is separated into three continents, Libya, Asia and Europe, and on the problem of the dividing line between Europe and Asia being either the river Phasis or the Tanais²⁴⁴. He also refers to the poet Aeschylus in VIII.vi.15, stating that the opening of *Prometheus unbound* mentions the Phasis river as the limit of Asia and Europe. Interestingly, Arrian uses the same passage of Herodotus in *Periplus* 19.1, and quotes the same line from Aeschylus in *Periplus* 99.22.²⁴⁵ As for Aristotle, he claims in VIII.vi.19-20 that he was so worried about the question of the current in the Euripus strait that he worried himself to death. All these references justify Procopius's own interest in these questions of land division that drive him to devote this whole chapter to it. But this also offers the occasion for him to give us a general reflection on his methodology in VIII.vi.9-11 where he states not only that usually when men discover an argument backed up by the ancients, they do not make the effort to find out the truth or learn about modern theories, but that with rivers and lands one simply has to see for oneself. Procopius' method on the other hand can then be described as an autopsy backed up by literary sources²⁴⁶.

The division of lands is evoked in many instances in Procopius' work, with different ways of approaching how this division is done. The ethnographical approach, for example, consists of dividing the lands on account of where different nations live. In *Wars* I.xix.1-35, Procopius describes the lands of Palestine, Egypt and Ethiopia, in

²⁴⁴ Jordanes *Getica* V.45 sets the Tanais as the boundary between Asia and Europe – however *Getica* V.32 gives the Rhipaeian mountains instead, following Orosius.

²⁴⁵ See Cameron (1985), 216-217 on the fact that Procopius seems to have used Arrian's *Periplus* but never refers to the work explicitly or acknowledges his use of it.

²⁴⁶ On the opposition between autoptic and literary constructions of the world, see Elsner (1994).

order that his readers may know where Ethiopians and Homeritae live and therefore understand the alliance between those people in the war against the Persians. In *Wars* V.xv.16-20, he explains how Italy is divided among its inhabitants, citing a great number of them²⁴⁷. He gives the situation of all these people and of the main cities of Italy. But conventional limits between people are not fixed, as one can see in *Buildings* II.viii.3 where Procopius says that when the Romans and Persians share a border, they usually try to push out of their respective territory (*γειτονοῦσιν ἑκατέρων ἀλλήλοισ χωρία, ὁρμώμενοί τε ἀπὸ τῶν οἰκείων ἀμφοτέρω*)²⁴⁸. Interestingly enough, there is a personification in *Buildings* IV.viii.12 of a lake in Rhegium and the sea which are said on the contrary to respect the limits they have fixed:

*ἐπειδὴν δὲ ὡς πλησιαίτατα ἴκωνται, ἀναχαιτίζουσι τὴν ἐπιρροήν, ἐφ' ἑαυτὰς ἐπιστρέφουσαι, ὥσπερ ἐνταῦθα τὰ ὄρια σφίσι πηξάμεναι...*²⁴⁹

This image of the two flows controlling themselves appears quite striking with the use of the verb *ἀναχαιτίζουσι* which is usually used to talk about a rider controlling his horse. The natural elements are presented as more controlled than men. One cannot help but make the distinction between natural boundaries and cultural boundaries; the former being stable (although not undisputed, as the example of the limits of Europe and Asia showed) and the latter by essence of a more fluid type.

There is one example where a boundary is ambiguous, both natural and artificial: the wall separating Brittia, in *Wars* IV.xx.42-46. Procopius states that men of ancient times (*οἱ πάλαι*) built a wall cutting the island into two parts. He remains mysterious on who those ancient men were and why they built this wall. He then

²⁴⁷ I.e. Calabrians, Apulians, Samnites, Piceni, Bruttii, Lucani, Campani, Locrians, Thurii, Epirotes, Siscii, Suevi, Carnii, Norici, Dacians, Pannonians, Ligurians, Albani and Tuscans.

²⁴⁸ *The territories of the two peoples are adjacent to each other, and both people push out from their own territory.*

²⁴⁹ *But when they come very close, they check their flow and turn upon themselves, just as if they had fixed their limits there.*

proceeds to describe how different the lands on either side are; the east side with fertile land abundant in good things like crops and springs of water, and with a temperate climate, the west side the exact opposite – he goes as far as to say that a man could not survive half an hour there with all the wild beasts and the pestilent air. Sadly, Procopius does not explain whether the wall was constructed because of this problem or if the problem came from the fact that men never crossed the wall and left the other side wild and untouched. The wall is more interesting as a literary device that permits him to show his great descriptive skills in drawing the picture of two drastically opposite environments²⁵⁰.

The segmentation of space in Procopius works within different concerns common in his work. The division of his own text according to geography can be seen as self-referential in the case of the *Buildings* which mirrors the organisation of the *Wars*, as well as nodding towards earlier writers in the case of the *Wars* where East/West polarisation evokes historians such as Herodotus. Procopius's interest in the division of continents and lands also allows him to refer to various earlier authorities and present his history as informed and learned as far as geography is concerned. Last but not least, his representation of boundaries is often articulated around the opposition of natural and cultural – or political – boundaries. This provides him with the occasion to write evocative descriptions where natural elements are represented as clear physical boundaries.

²⁵⁰ Britain (if it is indeed what Procopius's Britia is supposed to be) has a tradition of being represented in ancient literature as a marvellous/paradoxical land. For representations of Britain and the North Sea as antipodean, see Romm (1992), 140-149.

Travelling in the text

The obvious way to experience space and landscapes is by travelling, and this travelling through space mirrors in some ways the journey of the reader through the text. Travelling seems to be a primary concern in Procopius' work, and it is represented in many ways, for example with the army travelling in the *Wars*²⁵¹ or with persecuted characters fleeing the imperial couple in the *Secret History*.

One of the main notions at stake in travel is that of distance, a notion which is crucial in the representation of space. Procopius uses the stade as unit of measurement in order to provide his reader with accurate distances (sixty-six times across his work²⁵²), but he also alternatively uses days of journey to measure distances (fifty-three occurrences²⁵³). This alternative way of expressing distances presents distance as an experience instead of using stades - which can seem less concrete²⁵⁴.

This hodological approach to space, based on the paths and means of communication, draws a dynamic map of the Byzantine *oikoumene* in Procopius' text, particularly in the *Wars* where it draws a constant movement towards the periphery. Mapping space in terms of itineraries as opposed to topography is a salient aspect of

²⁵¹ For a perspective on military travel in Late Antiquity, in the particular case of Cilicia, see Elton (2004). The difficulties caused by the mountains in the area (Taurus and Amanus) particularly resonate with Procopius' own presentation of military travel.

²⁵² *Wars* I.viii.10, I.ix.14, I.x.4, I.x.14, I.xv.9, I.xvii.4, I.xvii.7, I.xix.3, I.xviii.4, I.xxi.6, I.xxi.9, II.v.29, II.xi.1, II.xii.4, III.i.7, III.i.12, III.i.17, III.xiv.4, III.xv.15, III.xvii.2, III.xvii.3, III.xvii.7, III.xvii.8, III.xvii.16, III.xvii.17, III.xviii.11, III.xviii.12, III.xix.1, III.xix.23, IV.ii.4, IV.xiii.32, IV.xiii.32, IV.14.40, IV.xv.12, IV.xix.9, V.i.15, V.i.16, V.i.17, V.xi.1, V.xi.2, V.xiv.4, V.xvii.6, V.xvii.13, V.xxvi.4, V.xxvi.6, VI.iii.4, VI.iv.7, VI.iv.8, VI.iv.9, VI.iv.22, VI.vii.19, VI.xiii.7, VI.xvi.18, VI.23.6, VI.xxiv.22, VII.iii.22, VII.xviii.19, VII.xxvi.4, VII.xxviii.2, VII.xxviii.18, VIII.ii.22, VIII.xx.5, VIII.xxix.4, VIII.xxxii.27, *Buildings* I.v.13, VI.iii.3

²⁵³ *Wars* I.viii.10, I.xv.2, I.xv.27, I.xix.13, I.xix.27, I.xix.28, II.v.4, II.vii.4, II.xix.2, II.xxiv.13, II.xxv.1, II.xxix.19, III.i.9, III.i.10, III.i.12, III.i.13, III.i.14, III.i.15, III.i.16, III.i.17, III.i.18, III.viii.5, III.x.14, III.xiv.17, III.xv.8, III.xvi.9, III.xxiii.5, IV.xiii.23, IV.xiii.33, IV.xiii.42, V.xiv.6, V.xv.20, VI.vii.38, VI.xi.5, VI.xxiii.6, VII.xxiii.12, VII.xl.8, VII.xl.36, VII.xl.44, VIII.ii.3, VIII.ii.21, VIII.iv.10, VIII.v.29, VIII.v.33, *Secret History* xxx.3, xxx.5, *Buildings* II.iv.1, III.ii.5, III.iii.9, IV.ix.17, IV.x.9, V.iii.15, VI.iii.4

²⁵⁴ However in *Wars* III.i.17, he does give the equivalent measurement between stades and days, stating that 'one day of journey extends to two hundred and ten stades, as far as from Athens to Megara'.

ancient and medieval cartography²⁵⁵, as with the Peutinger Table which represents the road network of the Roman Empire²⁵⁶. Using days as opposed to stades also gives a special importance to the journey; a notion that seems to tie together Procopius's three texts, since the word *ὁδός* is used a hundred and ninety times homogeneously throughout his work. This interest in the journeys of the characters in Procopius's text expresses itself by giving an important place to the act of travelling in the narrative, putting it centre stage as opposed to treating it as a mere travelling interlude between the battle narratives²⁵⁷.

Procopius provides a lot of information on the means used to travel, whether on foot, on horse or by boat, and the difficulties associated with different terrain²⁵⁸. In *Buildings* II.iv.1 for example, he mentions that the territory extending from Daras to Rhandios cannot be crossed by waggons and horses (*ἀναμάξευτός τε καὶ ἄφιππος ὄλως*), but will take two days for someone unencumbered (*εὐζώνω ἀνδρῶν*). Procopius's interest in the different means of travelling also ties in to his interest in making and engineering²⁵⁹. In fact, travelling by sea provides him with the opportunity for technical digressions on boats and the way they are made. For example in *Wars* I.xix.23-26 he goes on an ethnographical as well as technical digression where he explains how Indian

²⁵⁵ Brodersen (2001) refutes the common idea that the Romans had scaled maps, and demonstrates the importance of itineraries in the representation of geographical knowledge in the Roman world. On Greek and Roman maps, see also Dilke (1998) for a general overview.

²⁵⁶ On the Peutinger Table, see Levi and Levi (1967) with a good reproduction of the table, and recently Talbert (2010). Another interesting ancient example of a map is the one in the "Artemidorus papyrus", for which, see Talbert (2008).

²⁵⁷ Travelling was a central narrative feature in the ancient novels, as shown in Morgan (2007). Morgan demonstrates that travelling has a symbolical aspect in both Chariton with the journey from West to East, and in Heliodorus with the spiritual ascent from Greece to Egypt to Ethiopia. In Xenophon, there is no symbolical meaning, but a real interest in travelling itself – as it constitutes much of the plot.

²⁵⁸ It is worth mentioning that travel literature in the form of itineraries was popular in the ancient – as well as late antique – world. Examples of itineraries include the Bordeaux itinerary; on which, see Elsner (2000), the Antonine itinerary; on which, see Talbert (2007), Theophanes' journey (P.Ryl. IV.627-38), on which; Matthews (2006) and Egeria's travels; on which, see Wilkinson (1999).

²⁵⁹ On technical descriptions in Procopius, see chapter 1 of this thesis for architectural ones and chapter 3 for siege-engines.

boats are different, proceeding to demonstrate how they are built and why they are made of different materials, assembled by cording rather than iron because Indians do not have iron and it is forbidden for them to buy foreign materials.

The different means of travelling can appear polemical when the movement of an army is concerned²⁶⁰. In *Wars* VII.xviii.1-2, he represents Belisarius and John discussing whether it is better to go by land or sea in order to reach Rome, Belisarius arguing that going by land would take longer (πεζῆ γὰρ ἰούσι χρόνον τε σφίσι τετρίψεσθαι πλείω). The difference in the length of journey is rather important as sailing with a favouring wind (πλέουσι μὲν ἀνέμου τε σφίσιν ἐπιφόρου) would take them to Rome on the fifth day as opposed to marching by land (στρατῶ [...] πεζῆ) which would take at least forty. The difference between the two modes of travelling is even more crucial because of the Romans' perilous situation, while they are suffering a siege, the shortest delay could ruin the situation irremediably (βραχυτάτην τριβὴν τὰ ἀνήκεστα λυμανεῖσθαι τοῖς πράγμασι). Indeed, in the context of a war, a lot is at stake in travelling and the wrong choice of road can ruin the outcome. An example of a bad itinerary choice is the one for which Procopius reproaches Belisarius in *Secret History* ii.24-25. He chooses the longest road to Sisauranon which would have taken half the time if only he had gone via Nisibis, and ventures that the general could have plundered the whole of Assyria and rescued the prisoners from Antioch. Making the right choice of itinerary therefore seems to be one of the things that makes one a good general.

Travelling is not represented as an easy thing in Procopius's work; on the contrary, there are abundant expressions used to convey its difficulty. On the other

²⁶⁰ Perhaps this is even more interesting when one thinks of Howard-Johnston's (2000), 19-30 claim that Procopius was working for Belisarius as a structural engineer whose expertise would include roads, bridges and dams. Even though I do not believe it to be the case, one cannot deny Procopius's interest in means of communication.

hand, the idea of accessibility is strikingly uncommon in his texts, the word *εὐπρόσδοος* for example only appears five times, out of which two are combined with the negative *οὐ*²⁶¹ and two others are used to characterise people, one time as a quality of Belisarius²⁶² and another time as a flaw of Justinian²⁶³, in an interestingly reversed mirror-image. Inaccessibility however is everywhere, with nine *δύσδοος*, nine *δυσπρόσδοος*, twenty *ἄβατος*, twelve *ἀπορευτός*, and thirty *ἄπορος*. Furthermore, travelling is not only difficult, or impossible sometimes, but it is also dangerous. In *Secret History* v.38, Solomon is said to disappear on his journey home, taken away from this world by the will of god (*ἢ δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ τίσις ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ὁδῷ καταλαβοῦσα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων αὐτὸν ἀφανίζει*). This death is not explained, even if the punishment of God is given as a cause, but a death while travelling is not so surprising that it needs to be explained. Solomon's mode of travel is not given either, contributing to the overall mystery around his disappearance.

There are some ways of travelling that appear particularly dangerous, such as sailing. Indeed, the sea presents dangers like the storm and whale mentioned in *Secret History* xv.37:

*τῶν τε ἀναγκαίων γὰρ ἐσπάνιζον καὶ θαλαττίοις ἀμίλουν κινδύνοις, ἄλλως τε καὶ χειμῶνος, ἂν οὕτω τύχη, ἐπιπεσόντος, ἢ τοῦ κήτους ἐνταῦθά ποι ἐπισκήψαντος...*²⁶⁴

These natural dangers contrast with those in the *Secret History* which come partly because of Justinian, for example in xxx.8-9, where he compels the couriers to go from Byzantium to Helenopolis by sea in small boats which are not safe in the danger of a storm. In the *Wars* and the *Buildings*, these dangers at sea provide an occasion for

²⁶¹ In *Wars* IV.xii.8 and *Wars* V.xxiii.2.

²⁶² In *Wars* VII.i.7.

²⁶³ In *Secret History* xv.11.

²⁶⁴ *They had a scant supply of provisions and they were exposed to the dangers of the sea, particularly when a storm came down, as often happened, or when the whale made a descent somewhere in the neighbourhood.*

Procopius to write one of his favourite type of digressions: long, rationalising explanations of mysterious phenomena like frightening whirlpools. In *Buildings* VI.iii.1-8, he devotes a long digressive passage to the infamous Syrtes. This explanation includes an interesting etymological explanation of the name Syrtes, which he claims derives from its drawing action on boats:

ἀλλὰ συρομένη τὸ λοιπὸν ἔοικε, καὶ διαφανῶς ἐπίπροσθεν αἰεὶ ἐλκομένη. καὶ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, οἶμαι, τὸν χῶρον οἱ πάλαι ἄνθρωποι τοῦ πάθους τῶν νεῶν ἕνεκα Σύρτεις ὠνόμασαν...²⁶⁵

This is an example of a doubtful etymology as it is quite unlikely that the origin of the name is Greek and that it comes from the verb *σύρω*. He also includes in his account a description of the shore as a crescent-shaped gulf (*κόλπον δὲ μηνοειδῆ*) and gives the distances with two different units of measurement; the crescent's chord in stades (*πλευρᾶς διάπλους ἐς τετρακόσιους διήκει σταδίους*) and its perimeter in days of travel (*τοῦ δὲ μηνοειδοῦς τὸ περίμετρον ἐς ἡμερῶν ἕξ ὁδὸν κατατείνει*), perhaps in order to avoid being repetitive. Another famous sea danger, Charybdis, is explained in a rational manner in *Wars* VIII.vi.22-24. First, Procopius presents the problem as impossible to explain:

ἀλλὰ καὶ ἰλλιγοὶ ἔξαπιναίως ἐνταῦθα συχνοὶ ἀπ' οὐδεμιᾶς ἡμῶν φαινομένης αἰτίας τὰς ναῦς διαχρῶνται...²⁶⁶

The term *ἰλλιγοὶ* is used as a rational explanation of the mythical phenomenon and the use of the adverb *ἔξαπιναίως* and the locution *ἀπ' οὐδεμιᾶς ἡμῶν φαινομένης αἰτίας* emphasise the fact that this happens out of the blue and without a visible explanation. Procopius then evokes the poets' reports of this phenomenon as the monster Charybdis

²⁶⁵ But it [the ship] seems from that moment to be drawn and appears distinctly to be dragged steadily forward. From this fact, I suppose, the men of ancient times named the place Syrtes because of what happened to the ships.

²⁶⁶ But there are numerous whirlpools which appear there suddenly from no cause apparent to us and destroy ships.

(οἱ ποιηταὶ λέγουσι πρὸς τῆς Χαρούβδεως ῥοφεῖσθαι τὰ πλοῖα). He then finally offers a rationalizing explanation:

οὔτοι δὲ ταῦτα δὴ ἅπαντα οἴονται τὰ πλείστω **παραλόγω** ἐν πᾶσι ξυμβαίνοντα τοῖς πορθμοῖς, ἐκ τῆς ἀγχιστα οὔσης ἐκατέρωθεν ἠπειροῦ ξυμβαίνειν· βιαζόμενον γὰρ **φρασι** τῇ στενοχωρίᾳ τὸ ῥόθιον ἐς **ἀτόπους** τινὰς καὶ λόγον οὐκ ἐχούσας ἀνάγκας χωρεῖν...²⁶⁷

The οὔτοι here are those who hold the second opinion which Procopius presented earlier in this passage in VIII.vi.20, where he deals with different views on the current²⁶⁸

(where he evokes Aristotle's death which was caused by worrying over this matter).

The vocabulary of strangeness here – in bold – contrasts with the simple explanation which is that of the narrowness (*στενοχωρία*) which exercises a pressure (*βιαζόμενον*) on the flow (*ῥόθιον*). This explanation seems to satisfy Procopius' method expressed earlier as that of an autopsy of natural phenomena such as rivers and lands, with the visible narrowness of the strait the main cause for the mysterious current.

Finally, one can see that travelling in Procopius is not always pictured in negative terms. Indeed, travelling as sightseeing can be seen in a positive light as a way to allow the reader to discover the wonders of this world²⁶⁹. Arguably, reading the *Buildings* can be seen as taking an architectural tour of the Empire, complete with lovely gardens and water washing the shores adorned by garlands of churches, and the *Wars* as a more exotic and picturesque tour of dangerous wild countries with delightfully scary inhabitants. This periegetic aspect is even represented in one vignette in *Wars* II.xi.4-6 where Chosroes is shown doing a kind of tour:

²⁶⁷ *But the advocates of the second view think that all these exceedingly strange phenomena which present themselves in all straits come about in consequence of the two sides coming very close to each other; for the water, they say, being constrained by the narrow space, is subject to some strange and unexplainable forces.*

²⁶⁸ Previous literary accounts of this current include Macrobius *Saturnalia* VII.xii.36.

²⁶⁹ On tourism and sightseeing in the ancient world, see Casson (1974), 229-329, on which sights people wanted to see (famous monuments, natural curiosities etc) and on practical considerations involved with sightseeing. Pilgrimage is also an important side of tourism, particularly in Late Antiquity, on which the bibliography would take many pages, but see for example part III (111-158) of Ellis and Kidner (2004).

τότε μὲν οὖν ἐς Δάφνην ἀνέβη, τὸ Ἀντιοχείας προάστειον. ἔνθα δὴ τὸ τε ἄλλος ἐν
θαύματι μεγάλῳ ἐποιήσατο καὶ τὰς τῶν ὑδάτων πηγὰς· ἄμφω γὰρ ἀξιοθέατα ἐπιεικῶς
ἔστι...²⁷⁰

It is amusing for the reader to see Chosroes, the epitome of the barbarian, acting like a tourist, marvelling (ἐν θαύματι μεγάλῳ) at a grove and some springs – an idyllic landscape better suited for a pastoral. Procopius seems to agree with him on the value of these sights (ἀξιοθέατα²⁷¹ ἐπιεικῶς) and it was apparently the thing to visit in sixth century Daphne. But Chosroes is not an ordinary visitor and does not leave without burning the sanctuary of Michael and other buildings, reverting back to his barbarian persona. The combination of aesthetic pleasure and the act of burning the source of pleasure is particularly uncomfortable here.

Sightseeing is a major element in Procopius's work²⁷² and it is interesting to see what the author's personal taste in the matter is. In *Wars* V.xiv.6-11, he offers us some observations on what seems like one of his favourite sights: the Appian Way. He begins by introducing it with its length, a five days' journey, and the two cities at its extremities, Rome and Capua. He then goes on to present its breadth as admirable:

εὖρος δὲ ἔστι τῆς ὁδοῦ ταύτης ὅσον ἀμάξας δύο ἀντίας ἶναί ἀλλήλαις, καὶ ἔστιν
ἀξιοθέατος πάντων μάλιστα...²⁷³

There is a direct relationship here between the breadth of the road and its quality of being a worthy sight. The visual effect of this breadth is provoked here by the

²⁷⁰ Accordingly he first went up to Daphne, the suburb of Antioch, where he expressed great wonder at the grove and at the springs of water; for both of these are very well worth seeing.

²⁷¹ ἀξιοθέατος is a particularly Herodotean adjective, for example in II.176, II.182, III.123, IV.85, IV.162 etc. Herodotus is the ultimate model for autopsy and sight-seeing.

²⁷² See chapter I on the ekphrasis of Constantinople constructed around the sightseeing of its buildings and seaside landscapes.

²⁷³ And the breadth of this road is such that two wagons going in opposite directions can pass one another, and it is one of the noteworthy sights of the world. It is worth noting the linguistic similarities between this and Thucydides I.xciii.5 'δύο γὰρ ἄμαξαι ἐναντία ἀλλήλαις τοὺς λίθους ἐπήγον', where Thucydides also uses the image of the two wagons to give an indication of the breadth of the Piraeus wall.

representation of two wagons in movement²⁷⁴. The wonderful qualities of this road do not stop here, and Procopius goes on to describe its stones which cannot be found anywhere else in this district (*ταύτης γὰρ δὴ τῆς γῆς οὐδαμῆ πέφυκε*). Not only are those stones rare and exotic, but they are also fitted in a special way: smoothed first (*λείους καὶ ὀμαλοὺς ἐργασάμενος*), then cut in a polygonal shape (*ἐγγωνίους τε τῆ ἐντομῆ*) and assembled without concrete (*οὔτε χάλικα ἐμβεβλημένος*)²⁷⁵. This special process provides the road with a very organic aspect:

*οἱ δὲ ἀλλήλοις οὕτω τε ἀσφαλῶς συνδέθενται καὶ μεμύκασιν, ὥστε ὅτι δὴ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἠρμωσμένοι, ἀλλ' ἐμπεφύκασιν ἀλλήλοις, δόξαν τοῖς ὁρῶσι παρέχονται...*²⁷⁶

The height of craftsmanship for the builders here seems to be the way they provided the road with an organic appearance, as if it had grown naturally. It is very interesting that the most valued quality for a construction is to imitate nature²⁷⁷. Finally, Procopius marvels at the resistance of the stones which have not worn out (*οὔτε τινὶ αὐτῶν διαφθαρήναι*), grown thin (*ἢ μείονι γίνεσθαι ξυνέπεσεν*) or lost their polish (*οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ τῆς ἀμαρυγῆς τι ἀποβαλέσθαι*). This ekphrasis of the Via Appia seems to concentrate many of Procopius's interests: in the means of travelling with the two wagons, the attention to the making of the built landscape with the fitting of stones, and finally Art and Techne as the imitation of Nature. It is therefore no wonder he deems the sight of this road so wonderful. It also forms a circular pattern that takes us all the way around the theme of

²⁷⁴ The wagons also echo the four-horse chariot that provides an impression of the breadth of the fortification wall in Herodotus's description of Babylon in I.179. Even if this is not a linguistic parallel, the comparison with the waggon or chariot to provide a visual representation of size as well as the use of *ἀξιοθέατος* give this a Herodotean flavour.

²⁷⁵ Notice again the parallel with Thucydides I.xciii.5 *ἐντὸς δὲ οὔτε χάλιξ οὔτε πηλὸς ἦν, ἀλλὰ ξυνφθοδομημένοι μεγάλοι λίθοι καὶ ἐντομῆ ἐγγώνιοι.*

²⁷⁶ *And they were fastened together so securely and the joints were so firmly closed, that they give the appearance, when one looks at them, not of being fitted together, but of having grown together.*

²⁷⁷ For example, see the meadow of colours in the marbles of Hagia Sophia and the gold that looked as if it had grown naturally on the church of St Michael in *Buildings* I.

travelling; travelling as sightseeing and here, the means of travelling – a road – worthy of sightseeing.

One of the ways travelling shapes Procopius's text is in the way it presents the space in a hodological manner, which is how many ancient geographers and cartographers represented space. Rather than space being presented using arbitrary measuring units, this approach considers space in its relationship with time and with its experience through travelling. Travelling also introduces more material concerns such as the means used for this purpose, such as ships, wagons, and roads. Furthermore, it is a source of tension in the narrative because of the dangers involved in journeying particularly by sea, such as storms or sea-monsters. But the other aspect of travelling which makes it a salient theme in the study of materiality and visibility in Procopius's work is in the context of sightseeing, where it is linked to the idea of aesthetic pleasure²⁷⁸.

The call of the wild

Another facet of the representation of space in Procopius is explored through his depictions of natural landscapes. The descriptions of wilderness in particular are abundant throughout his work, especially in the *Wars*. There is a specific word which he uses repeatedly in order to refer to bad lands: *δυσχωρία*. A few earlier historians had used this word to refer to lands difficult for an army to cross.²⁷⁹ Among the thirty-nine

²⁷⁸ One extreme representation of aesthetic pleasure – or even *hubris* – is the anecdote of the shark and the pearl in *Wars* I.iv.17-31, which I study in chapter 5 of this thesis.

²⁷⁹ The TLG enumerates 12 occurrences of the word in Xenophon, 27 in Polybius, 47 in Diodorus Siculus, 14 in Josephus, 14 in Plutarchus, 13 in Arrian and 9 in Appian.

occurrences in Procopius, there is only one in the *Buildings* and one in the *Secret History*²⁸⁰. Most of the time in the *Wars*, *δυσχωρία* is used to evoke lands that are generally said to offer difficulties to armies²⁸¹. These difficulties can be more specific, for example in IV.xx.1 where the roughness of the land makes it impossible to camp, in VIII.vii.7 where it does not allow interference with a river's course or in VII.x.24 and VIII.xxix.19 where it makes horses stumble. The qualities associated with the *δυσχωρία* are often a rugged texture²⁸², steepness²⁸³ and the providing of means to hide or ambush²⁸⁴. The only time this type of land is described as being a clear advantage to anyone, it is to the barbarian Antae who are used to their roughness, in *Wars* VII.xxii.3-5.

Indeed, these types of landscapes are the realms of the barbarians, and they help to draw the remote and picturesque image of the Byzantine *oikoumene*'s periphery. First and foremost, wild places are deserted, such as the long and deserted road to get silk in *Wars* I.xx.12 (*χώραν ἀμειψαμένοις ἔρημόν τε καὶ χρόνου πολλοῦ ὁδόν*), the Etna region in *Wars* III.xiii.22 (*ἐς χῶρον ἔρημον*), mount Bourgaeon in *Wars* IV.xii.10 (*ἐν χωρίῳ ἐρήμῳ*) and Libya in *Wars* IV.xiv.19 (*ἐν χωρίῳ ἐρήμῳ*). At times, Procopius uses intensive adverbs to emphasize this deserted aspect, for example the land beyond the Moors' in *Wars* IV.iii.19 (*γῆ ἔρημος ἐπὶ πλεῖστον*) and Libya in *Wars* VIII.xvii.22 (*ἔρημος ἀνθρώπων ἢ χώρα ἐκ τοῦ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον*). But the work of Procopius that represents lands deserted by men with the most insistence is the *Secret History*. Indeed, part of chapter xviii could be

²⁸⁰ In those works, the word is used to serve different ideological agendas; in *Buildings* III.vi.11 the author represents Justinian's smoothing of the rough land in Armenia as part of his panegyric and in *Secret History* ii.26 he attributes the destruction of a lot of the Medes' army to the impracticable aspect of the land.

²⁸¹ I.xv.30, IV.xix.18, IV.xx.11, IV.xx.21, VIII.ix.17, VIII.ix.23, VIII.xxxv.16.

²⁸² II.xv.34, VII.xxii.3, VIII.xiii.12, VIII.xiii.15, and VIII.xv.34.

²⁸³ II.iii.19, II.xxv.5, II.xxv.18, V.viii.44, VI.xxvii.16, and VIII.xiii.5.

²⁸⁴ I.iii.11, I.xii.12, II.viii.20, IV.iv.4, and VII.xxxviii.10.

described as geography of destruction in Justinian's empire. In xviii.13, he states that Italy has become even more deserted than Libya:

Ἰταλία δὲ οὐχ ἦσσαν ἢ τριπλασία Λιβύης οὖσα ἔρημος ἀνθρώπων πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἔτι ἢ ἐκείνη πανταχόθι γεγένηται...²⁸⁵

The exaggerated style here is quite heavy, in keeping with the hyperbolic numbers used by Procopius in this chapter to refer to number of men destroyed by Justinian²⁸⁶. He goes on to mention all the regions affected by this depopulation and finally concludes by referring to the desolation of the land as a Scythian wilderness²⁸⁷: τὴν Σκυθῶν ἐρημίαν. This representation of Italy as a *locus horridus* – in complete opposition to the traditional *laus italiae* – might seem exaggerated if one thinks in positivist terms, but it is in keeping with the paradoxical tone of the *Secret History*. If we think of the *Buildings* as the dreamscape of the *Wars*, the *Secret History* is its nightmarish counterpart²⁸⁸.

This aesthetic of bareness and ruggedness can be seen in many geographical notations throughout Procopius' work. In *Buildings* II.ii.3, he mentions cliffs that are extremely rugged: σκοπέλω δύο ἀνέχετον ὑπεράγαν σκληρώ. This emphasis (ὑπεράγαν) on the rugged texture contrasts visually with the following description of the Cordes river flowing between the two cliffs. In *Buildings* II.iv.4 he actually uses the adjective wild in his account of Rhabdios:

τὸ μὲν οὖν Ῥάβδιος ἐπὶ πετρῶν οἰκεῖται ἀποτόμων τε καὶ ὄλως ἀγρίων αἵπερ ἐνταῦθα ἐπανεστήκασι δαυμάσιον ὅσον...²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ And as to Italy, which has not less than three times the area of Libya, it has become everywhere even more destitute of men than Libya.

²⁸⁶ For example in xviii.22, it will never be possible, I think, for any human being to discover by enquiry the numbers of those who perished in this way.

²⁸⁷ Herodotus uses this expression to refer to Eastern Russia in *Histories* IV.15 and it served as a proverb, for example in Aristophanes *Acharnians* 704.

²⁸⁸ For a study of the *locus horridus* as a reversal of the *locus amoenus*, see Petrone (1998), especially 191-193. Edwards (1987) examines how the early Church made classical depictions of the *locus horribilis* (desert, storm-wracked sea) into positive representations of sacred ground.

²⁸⁹ Rhabdios stands on precipitous and completely wild rocks, which rise there to a marvellous height.

The adjective *ἀγρίων* is accentuated by the use of the intensive adverb *ὄλως* and the height of the rocks is allegedly marvellous, *θαυμάσιον*. Wilderness is also attached to the idea of sterility, as we can see in *Buildings* V.i.4 where Procopius describes the land around Ephesus as completely infertile and rough:

χώρον τινα πρὸ τῆς Ἐφεσίων πόλεως ἐν ὄρει κείμενον ξυνέβαινε εἶναι, λοφώδη οὐ γεώδη οὐδὲ δυνατὸν ἀφεῖναι καρπούς, εἴ τις πειρώτο, ἀλλὰ σκληρὸν τε καὶ τραχὺν ὄλως²⁹⁰.

Dryness and sterility are also elements of his description of the region called Third Palestine in *Buildings* V.viii.1:

χώρα μὲν ἔρημος ἐπὶ μακρὸν κατατείνει, καρπῶν τε καὶ ὑδάτων καὶ πάντων ἀγαθῶν ἄφορος...²⁹¹

This sentence is striking for the bareness of its beginning, which contrasts with the triple genitive, emphasizing *ἄφορος* in its second half. But because the *Buildings* is a panegyric work this particular description of an awe-inspiring wilderness is tied into an ideological agenda, as it is the location for some of Justinian's religious constructions. Indeed, this wild landscape is also said to have a divine aspect as Procopius claims that crashes of thunder and other terrifying manifestations of divine power could be heard from mount Sinai (V.viii.7).

Wild landscapes are also inaccessible, such as Mount Aurasius in *Wars* IV.xiii.23 which is said to be difficult to access and terribly wild (*δύσοδόν τέ ἐστι καὶ δεινῶς ἄγριον*). Therefore, mountains in general can be seen as the wild landscape *par excellence*. Impassable mountains are plentiful in Procopius' work. In *Wars* II.xxix.25, he mentions the jagged mountains of Lazica which result in extremely narrow passes. In

²⁹⁰ There chanced to be a certain place before the city of Ephesus, lying on a steep slope hilly and bare of soil and incapable of producing crops, even if one attempted to cultivate them, but altogether hard and rough.

²⁹¹ A barren land extends for a great distance, unwatered and producing neither crops nor anything of any good.

Wars IV.iv.27, the mountain Papua in Numidia is said to be exceedingly precipitous and therefore very difficult to climb. As for Narnia in *Wars* V.xvii.8, its height renders it difficult to access. The height of mountains is an element that is rendered visually in the text to create picturesque descriptions. The impression of the soaring of a mountain is rendered beautifully in *Buildings* II.iv.15:

ἐνταῦθα ὄρος οὐρανόμεγες ἀποκρέμαται, ἀπόκρημνόν τε καὶ προσελθεῖν ἀμήχανον ὄλως...²⁹²

This soaring of the mountain is depicted with the adjective *οὐρανόμεγες*, which is reinforced by the visual chiasmus created by the use of two words derived from the same root, *ἀποκρέμαται* and *ἀπόκρημνόν*²⁹³. The image of a peak so high it soars into the clouds is a classical representation of mountains²⁹⁴. In *Wars* I.xv.20, the description of the Taurus uses this model, showing the mountain as perpetually concealed by clouds and snow ([...] ὄρη ἀποκρέμαται λίαν ἀπότομα νεφέλαις τε καὶ χιόσι κεκαλυμμένα τὸν πάντα αἰῶνα²⁹⁵). The description of the Caucasus in *Wars* VIII.iii.1 shows a slight variant to that model:

τοῦτο δὲ τὸ ὄρος, ὃ Καύκασος, ἐς τοσόνδε ὕψος ἀνέχει, ὥστε δὴ αὐτοῦ τῶν μὲν ὑπερβολῶν οὔτε ὄμβρους οὔτε νιφετοῦς ἐπιψαύειν ποτέ· τῶν γὰρ νεφελῶν αὐτὰς ἀπασῶν καδυπερτέρας ξυμβαίνει εἶναι...²⁹⁶

²⁹² *In that place there is a lofty mountain towering to the sky, exceedingly steep and altogether inaccessible.*

²⁹³ It is worth mentioning that the adjective *οὐρανόμεγες* appears several times in the *Buildings* (I.x.12, II.iv.15, II.v.10, III.vi.2, IV.iii.11, IV.x.26, V.vi.11, V.vi.15, VI.vii.3), pertaining sometimes to mountains, other times to trees. This adjective appears as early as Homer, describing a fir-tree (*Odyssey* V.239), and in Herodotus (II.138.4), describing the trees near a temple of Hermes. Both Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Roman Antiquities* XX.xv.1) and Athenaeus (*Deipnosophists* I.45) use it to refer to a fir-tree. The first to use it to describe a mountain is Philostratus in *Imagines* I.ix.1 (he also uses it to describe a representation of the Nile divinity in I.vi.2). This adjective is also commonly used to refer to abstract ideas like glory and piety, particularly in religious texts and it is used for that purpose many times by John Chrysostom (e.g. *Saints Bernice and Prosdoco* vol 50 *Patrologia Graeca* p.632 l.54).

²⁹⁴ See for example Homer *Iliad* XVI.297-300. The mountain reaching into the clouds is also very common in biblical texts, cf. *Exodus* XIV.xv.2.

²⁹⁵ [...] and it is overhung by exceedingly precipitous mountains, concealed forever by clouds and snow.

²⁹⁶ This mountain range which composes the Caucasus rises to such a great height that its summits are in fact never touched either by rain or by snow; for they are indeed above all clouds.

The Caucasus is depicted here as so high that, contrary to the Taurus, it is not even touched by snow, since it is higher than any cloud²⁹⁷. This description shows once more the rhetorical skill of exaggeration mastered by Procopius.

Wilderness is not only depicted as desolate and bare, but can also be seen on the contrary as an extreme density of unruly vegetation in the text. Procopius insists visually on this dense vegetation and the way it hides the lands by covering them, as in *Wars* VIII.xvii.22, where the land is said to be ὕλαις τε οὕτως ἀμφιλαφέσι καλυπτομένην, concealed by forests of wide-spreading trees. In a few occurrences, the adjective ἀμφιλαφέσι is intensified by the use of another adjective, συχνοῖς, for example in *Wars* I.iii.8 with συχνοῖς τε καὶ ἀμφιλαφέσιν ἐς ἄγαν καλυπτόμενα δένδροις, in *Wars* II.xv.32 with δένδροις συχνοῖς τε καὶ ἀμφιλαφέσιν ἐπὶ μακρότατον συνεχομένην and in *Wars* II.xvii.1 with συχνά τε καὶ δεινῶς ἀμφιλαφῆ. Procopius also combines the image of the density with that of height. In *Buildings* III.vi.2, the mountains of Tzanica are represented soaring into the sky and covered in trees (ὄρεσι δὲ οὐρανομήκεσί τε καὶ ἀμφιλαφέσι). In the description of Centauropolis in *Buildings* IV.iii.11, it is the trees that are sky-high (οὐρανομήκεσιν ἀμφιλαφῆ δένδροις). Finally, another interesting combination of an adjective with ἀμφιλαφῆ is the use of δασεῖαν in the description of the forest near the Aborrhas River in *Buildings* II.vi.15. Indeed, δασύς is often used to refer to hair or facial hair and it emphasizes therefore the bushiness of the vegetation.

The wild and rough lands at the edges of the Byzantine empire serve different purposes in the Procopian project; their roughness is smoothed by Justinian in the *Buildings* showing the emperor's imprint on the landscape in another way than just by

²⁹⁷ The Caucasus' great height is also mentioned by Herodotus at I.203.8, although in less hyperbolic terms.

building upon it, and they provide obstacles for the Byzantine army to overcome in the *Wars*. The spaces at the periphery also have an extreme quality, both exotic and paradoxical, and there the landscapes described by Procopius present a variety of facets around the theme of wilderness: desolate and bare like the desert, high and impenetrable like the mountain, and dense and unruly like the forest.

Idyllic landscapes²⁹⁸

The idyllic descriptions of gardens²⁹⁹ and fertile lands are the exact opposite of those unruly or bare representations of natural landscapes. This fertility is the counterpart of the *δυσχωρία* theme. In *Buildings* IV.iii.28-29, Procopius describes the land around the river Rhechius as level with ploughed fields and good pastures (ἡ γῆ χθαμαλή, ἀρώματα πολλά, ἔλος εὖνομον) which leads him to call the country full of blessings, εὐδαιμονίας. Similarly, in *Wars* I.xv.26 there is a canyon that sees grapes and other fruits grow plentifully (ἄμπελός τε καὶ ἡ ἄλλη ὀπώρα διαρκῶς φέεται). Fruits are a common emblem of fertility, especially when they are large as in *Wars* IV.xiii.24, where the fruits and crops on top of the Aurasius are said to be twice the size of those in the rest of Libya (καὶ ὅ τε σίτος ὅς ἐνταῦθα φέεται ἢ τε ὀπώρα ἐκάστη διπλασία τὸ μέγεθος

²⁹⁸ The original form of the idyllic landscape – or *locus amoenus* – in ancient literature was the *paradeisos*, an enclosed garden; for example, see Homer *Odyssey* VII.114-131, Xenophon *Anabasis* V.iii.7-11 (modelled on the Persian garden), Xenophon *Oeconomicus* IV.13-14. On the Persian garden, see Moynihan (1979). For Roman examples, see for example Pliny the Elder *Natural History* XXV.116-117, Vitruvius *On Architecture* VII.v.2, or Pliny the Younger *Letter* V.vi.7-13, VIII.viii, and IX.xxxix. In the Greek novels, see Achilles Tatius *Leucippe and Cleitophon* I.xv, and Longus *Daphnis and Chloe* prologue 1-2, and for the Roman novel, Petronius *Satyricon* 131.8. For studies of the *locus amoenus* in ancient literature, Schonbeck (1964) is a solid general survey; see also Snell (1976), 257-274 and 320-321, and Curtius (1993), 191-209 for influence of classical literature on medieval culture and 202-206 on ideal landscape and *locus amoenus*.

²⁹⁹ For a study of gardens in Byzantine literature, especially novels, see Barber (1992).

ἐστιν ἢ ἐν τῇ ἄλλῃ ἀπάσῃ Λιβύῃ γίνεσθαι πέφυκεν³⁰⁰). Grain is another commonplace sign of fertility, such as the ripe grain that covers the plain around the city of Tamugadi in *Wars* IV.xix.20 (πεδία σίτου ἀκμάζοντος ἔμπλεα). In *Wars* VI.iii.10, the fertility of the Roman land³⁰¹ is described as transcending the seasons:

βοτάνη γὰρ γῆν τὴν Ῥωμαίων οὔτε χειμῶνος ὥρα οὔτε ἐς ἄλλον τινὰ ἐπιλείπει καιρόν, ἀλλ' ἀνθεῖ τε ἀεὶ καὶ τέθνηλεν ἐς πάντα τὸν χρόνον...³⁰²

Roman fertility is described here as eternal, unsurprisingly in the context of the glorification of the Italian conquests. Interestingly enough it is not fruit or grain that is represented as flourishing in this passage, but natural vegetation, βοτάνη.

A well-watered land is also appreciated in the representation of ideal lands. In *Wars* I.x.4 for example, the plain extending from the Caspian Gates is described as suitable for riding and well-watered (πεδία τέ ἐστιν ἱππήλατα καὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν ἀτεχνῶς ἔμπλεα), making it perfect for horses' pasture. But the work of Procopius that is the most 'well-watered' is certainly the *Buildings*. Water plays an essential part in drawing the idyllic built landscapes of this panegyric³⁰³. Springs are particularly present, and more often than not they are represented bubbling with the verb ἀναβλύζω³⁰⁴. This water is usually drinkable water (ποτίμων ὑδάτων) as in *Buildings* II.xi.5, or warm (θερμῶν) in *Buildings* V.iii.16. Water makes landscapes more beautiful, adorning them like the river circling and beautifying Larissa with its gentle stream in *Buildings* IV.iii.7:

³⁰⁰ And the grain which grows here, and every kind of fruit, is double the size of that produced in all the rest of Libya.

³⁰¹ The *laus italiae* is a common literary theme, which goes back to Vergil *Georgics* 136-176.

³⁰² 'For the land of the Romans is never lacking in vegetation either in winter or at any other season, but it always flourishes and grows luxuriantly at all times'.

³⁰³ See chapter 1 for the central representation of the Bosphorus in *Buildings* I.

³⁰⁴ *Buildings* III.vii.20, IV.ii.18 and V.iii.19.

ῥεῖ μὲν ἐξ ὄρους τοῦ Πηλίου πρῶν τῶν ῥείθρων ὁ Πηνειός, ὠραίσται δὲ αὐτῶν
περιρρομένη πόλις ἢ Λάρισσα³⁰⁵.

Idyllic landscapes typically include gardens, groves and parks and more generally organized forms of vegetation, civilized and man-made as opposed to the wild and unruly forests in the barbarian mountains. There are even a few *παράδεισοι* in the *Wars* (in III.xvii.9-100, IV.vi.9 and IV.xiii.23). Two specific descriptions of idyllic landscapes in the *Buildings* appear particularly striking in the way they use several Procopian motifs. In *Buildings* II.v.10, Procopius describes an idyllic place outside Constantina:

τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐκτός, ὅσον ἐκ σημείου ἑνός, πηγαί τε εἰσι ποτίμων ὑδάτων καὶ ἄλλος
ἐνθένδε φύεται ἐπεικῶς μέγα, οὐρανομήκεσι κατὰφυτον δένδροις...³⁰⁶

This description combines the image of the spring of sweet water with that of the grove, but also uses the adjective *οὐρανομήκεσι* to describe the trees' height. This adjective has been seen several times before to qualify the impressive mountains of the *Wars* – as well as trees – when part of descriptions of wild, awe-inducing landscapes, but it is surprising to see it used in the case of an idyllic grove as it gives its description a slightly more unusual, overwhelming quality. However, the absolute climax in terms of idyllic landscapes in the *Buildings* is the description of Mount Aurasius in VI.vii.3-6.

First, Procopius evokes the enchanting land that can be found at its top:

ἄνω δὲ γενομένῳ γεώδῃς τε ἡ χώρα καὶ ὀμαλῇ τὰ πεδία καὶ ὁδοὶ προσηνεῖς, λειμῶνες
εὐνομοί, παράδεισοι κατὰφυτοι δένδροις, ἀρόματα πάντα...³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ *The Peneus flows from Mt. Pelion with a gentle stream which encircles and beautifies the city of Larissa.*

³⁰⁶ *'Outside the city, about a mile away, there are springs of sweet water and then a very large grove planted with trees which reach to the sky'.*

³⁰⁷ *'But after one gets to the top there is deep soil and level plains and easy roads, meadows good for pasture, parks full of trees and plough-lands everywhere'.*

Nearly every single representation of the ideal landscape is present here with good soil, plains, roads, meadows, parks and plough-lands – all of which showing the influence of man on nature. But the description would not be complete without bubbling springs and miraculous crops:

καὶ πηγαὶ μὲν ἀποβλύζουσαι τῶν τῆδε σκοπέλων, γαληνὰ δὲ τὰ ὕδατα, καὶ ποταμοὶ
πλήθει ῥοθίου ἐπικυρτούμενοι, καὶ τὸ δὴ πάντων παραδοξότατον, τὰ τε λήϊα καὶ τὰ
δένδρα ἐν τούτῳ τῷ ὄρει διπλάσιον μεγέθους πέρι τὸν καρπὸν φέρουσιν ἢ ἐν Λιβύῃ τῆ
ἄλλῃ πέφυκε γίνεσθαι...³⁰⁸

It is striking to see the mixing of elements belonging to descriptions of idyllic landscapes as well as wild ones, such as the *σκοπέλων*. This description therefore seems particularly idyllic and utopian in the way it combines the representation of the soaring mountain with that of the calm garden adorned by springs. Like the gigantic fruits, this description is unquestionably paradoxical, *παραδοξότατον*³⁰⁹.

Idyllic landscapes in Procopius play with literary commonplaces, ideas of fertility echoing the *laus italiae* in the Gothic wars, serene and well-watered gardens in the *Buildings* which are another tribute to Justinian's imperial power, and of man domesticating nature. In some ways, the description of Constantinople itself could be seen as an idyllic city landscape (see chapter 1). Nevertheless, idyllic places not only play into the panegyric programme in Procopius's work but are also part of the paradoxical representation of the exotic lands at the periphery of the empire, showing that those remote lands are not all terrifyingly wild but can also be pleasant – even if they always keep an element of the strange and paradoxical.

³⁰⁸ 'Springs bubble out from the cliffs there, their waters are placid, there are rippling rivers which flow chattering along, and strangest of all, the grain-fields and the trees on this mountain produce crops which are double in size compared with those which are wont to grow in the rest of Libya'.

³⁰⁹ This paradox of Mount Aurasius is also present in its description in *Wars* IV.xiii, where it is said at the same time to be particularly wild and difficult to climb, but to have lovely gardens and plough lands at its top.

Chapter Conclusion

One cannot but admire the way Procopius conjures up different landscapes and atmospheres while using very few words and ideas by varying the way he combines them, in addition to using different levels of intensity through his use of exaggeration or hyperbole. The same themes can be used to serve different ideological agendas and somehow they seem to create even more cohesion between Procopius' works. Space and landscapes tie his corpus to the material in manifold ways. His concern for the etymology of place-names for example is directly connected to the problem of the relationship between names, and by extension, the textual world, to the places they are attached to, and therefore the material world. Oftentimes these names appear to be powerfully descriptive and evocative, though in a highly condensed manner. Space in its geographical expression, and in its textual expression, is also segmented and organised in meaningful ways. In a similar manner, the travelling done by the characters and narrator in the text can be mirrored by the reader's own path through the text, and it is perhaps ironic when one thinks of how difficult travelling is said to be in the corpus; although it is also sometimes associated with aesthetic pleasure.

Finally, because the *History of the Wars* is a history set at the periphery of the Empire, it allows Procopius to explore the many different ways that a landscape can be exotic and different, whether it is a frightening oddness like a rugged desert or a utopian one like the paradises he describes. But the fact that the *Buildings* are also very much focused on the description of the lands which have seen Justinian's impact ties it to the *Wars* and makes it much less of a marginal work in the corpus than it has often been

deemed. It is very much a companion to the *Wars* because of its supplementary details on places common to both works, just as the *Secret History* is another companion which focuses on what happens in the capital, as opposed to the periphery.

CHAPTER 3

OBJECTS: CUNNING DEVICES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

On a smaller scale than buildings and landscapes, the way objects shape the work of Procopius can be seen at a variety of levels. Aesthetically, objects provide colour, texture and shape to the world created by the writer: the weapons and siege-engines add an edge to the text with their sharpness³¹⁰, and the clothes' and jewellery's colours and precious materials³¹¹ brighten it up. Objects also perform different functions in the text, since they can be part of the main narrative, and even serve as pivotal plot elements in it – for example the daggers stolen from a soldier which lead Belisarius to take action and show his fairness³¹² – or they can be part of a description and provide the occasion for a technical digression – such as with siege-engines – or for another parallel narrative articulated around a specific object, such as the story of the pearl of Perozes³¹³.

Objects can be studied for their narrative functions but they also have a strong rhetorical role in that they are often employed to embody ideologies, something that can

³¹⁰ E.g. the ram's head in *Wars* V.xxi.8, the triboloi in *Wars* VII.xxiv.16-18, the stakes in *Wars* VII.xxxviii.20.

³¹¹ E.g. the white, silver and gold of the symbols in *Wars* III.xxv.7, the purple worn by emperors and kings in *Wars* III.ii.28, *Wars* IV.ix.12, *Wars* V.xxix.5, *Buildings* I.vii.15, the emeralds adorning Solomon's treasure in *Wars* V.xii.42, Totila's magnificent gold and purple armour in *Wars* VIII.xxxi.18. For an exhaustive survey on the treatment and vocabulary of colour and light in Byzantine art, see James (1996).

³¹² *Wars* VI.viii.2-18.

³¹³ *Wars* I.iv.17-31.

be seen particularly with clothes, jewellery, and other symbolical objects. The distribution of different types of objects in Procopius is not homogeneous; the *Wars* have the greatest variety of objects, whereas the *Buildings* have the fewest objects, and some of them are only used as similes within descriptions. As for the *Secret History*, it deals with objects more often than not for their ideological content rather than their material aspect, which is not surprising because of its concentrated rhetorical quality as a sustained exercise in *psogos*.

Indeed, what is at stake with these objects is how Procopius apprehends them and creates them as textual objects, using specific vocabulary, choosing to offer close-ups on parts of objects, deconstructing them into parts to show how they are made and what they are like on the inside. Procopian objects manifest themselves on different scales: some appear bigger in order to be dissected into smaller parts, whereas others are smaller and used only as emblems to gauge other things. Therefore, within the textual world constructed by Procopius, there seems to be a macrocosm and a microcosm of objects, and objects hide like matriochkas inside each other. On the one hand, the objects that are being broken down into parts are accounted for in terms of their making and using. On the other hand, there are objects that function through symbolism as little units, just like icons, throughout the work.

I. A teleology of objects in Procopius: the making of ‘cunning devices’

οὕτω μὲν ἡ ναῦς ἤδη πεποιημένη κρείσσω παρέχεται τοῦ λόγου τὴν ὄψιν, ἐπεὶ τῶν ἔργων τὰ πλείστω παραλόγω συμβαίνοντα οὐκ εὐδιήγητα τίθεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἀεὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἢ φύσις, ἀλλὰ ταῖς ἐπινοίαις τὰ ξυνειδισμένα νικῶσα καὶ τοῦ λόγου κρατεῖ.³¹⁴

³¹⁴ Wars, VIII.xxii.15, *this ship thus constructed makes an impression when seen which transcends all description, for the nature of things always makes those works which are most cunningly built not easy*

This statement of Procopius regarding the difficulty of description and the powerlessness of speech faced with cleverly built objects (in this case, a ship) is both a sort of *captatio benevolentiae* on the part of the *faux*-humble orator, and a real concern, if one takes into account the many places where he grapples with descriptions of a technical nature. There is no denying Procopius' interest in the way things are built. It is obvious in his presentation of Justinianic constructions in the *Buildings*, but it also appears in his treatment of objects throughout his other works of different genres. But he is also preoccupied with the purpose of objects and the way they are used – although this also intersects with the problem of making.

Ladders

The object that appears most often in Procopius' work is the ladder. The word *κλίμαξ* occurs twenty four times in the *Wars* and three times in the *Buildings*. It is indeed used to storm walls and therefore its use by the Romans and the barbarians is mentioned in many of the sieges in the *Wars*³¹⁵. It is also an object that occurs in classical works mentioned by Procopius, in Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*³¹⁶ and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*³¹⁷. However, those ladders are just mentioned briefly in most cases. The one time Procopius does more than just mention them is because they had not been built properly and therefore allow him to discuss engineering issues. Indeed, in

for men to describe, but by means of their innovations so prevail over our usual habits of mind as to check even our power of speech.

³¹⁵ I.vii.21,25: Amida, II.vii.9: Beroea, II.viii.20: Antioch, II.xxvii.18,21,29,39: Edessa, V.x.21,22,24,27: Naples, V.xxi.5: Rome, VI.ix.12:Rome, VI.xiii.11,14: Rome, VI.xix.19: Caesena, VI.xxii.11,19,22: Rome, VII.xxxviii.17: Topirus, VIII.xi.39: Petra, VIII.xxxiii.21,22: Rome.

³¹⁶ E.g. *Peloponnesian War* III.xx.3-4, III.xxii.3, III.xxiii.1, IV.cxxxv.1, and V.lvi.5.

³¹⁷ E.g. *Cyropaedia* V.iii.12, V.iii.15, and VII.ii.2.

the siege of Naples in *Wars* V.x, none of the ladders managed to reach the parapet (τῶν δὲ κλιμάκων οὐδεμίαν διήκειν ἄχρι ἐς τὰς ἐπάλξεις ξυνέβαινε). This incident allows him to discuss the making of ladders used in sieges, which requires the workmen to see the wall that they are about to storm in order to make a proper measurement. This problem is solved by binding the ladders two by two (δύο ἐς ἀλλήλας ξυνδέοντες). Procopius does not say how exactly they are bound together; his sole concern here is to account for the measuring of the walls and ladders³¹⁸.

It is not surprising how many ladders appear in Procopius because of the plethora of his references to walls and heights of walls throughout his work. The ladders in the *Buildings* are used most often as instruments for the measuring of walls, and in that case they only exist in relationship to them. In *Buildings* II.v.2, the ladder is used to describe how low the walls of Constantinian were before Justinian's improvements (ὁ Κωνσταντινῆς περίβολος τό τε ὕψος κλίμακι ἀλωτὸς). Then, in IV.x.5, the wall built for the isthmus of Chersonese is criticized for its ridiculously low height that permitted its capture by use of a ladder (διατείχισμα κλίμακι ἀλωτόν). It seems to Procopius that the builders here were building a kind of wall that would be proper for a garden: κῆπον γὰρ πού τινα εἰκῆ κείμενον αἰμασιᾶ περιβάλλειν οἴομενοι.

The use of the ladders in the *Buildings* is paradoxical in its relationship to the *Wars* because it defines walls that can be taken with a ladder as walls of an improper height, even though the many ladders of the *Wars* have stormed walls of a considerable height. True, sometimes ladders had to be bound together to be high enough, but they are part of the usual apparatus of sieges, and not only of gardeners. The last ladder used

³¹⁸ In *Peloponnesian War* III.xx.3-4, Thucydides gives an account of how ladders were made by the Plataeans to escape their siege by measuring roughly the walls considering the number of layers of bricks that made them.

in the *Buildings*, in V.vi.2, functions as a literary instrument, as a simile. It is not the height of the ladder that is used to measure a wall, but its property of being a ladder, which is to have rungs, that is used to try to convey the impression provided by the streets of Jerusalem. The topographical reality of the city, whose hills are said to be devoid of soil (οὐ γεώδεις) and to rise with rough and precipitous sides (ἐν τε τραχεῖ καὶ ἀποκρήμνῳ ἐπανεστήκασι) is evoked by the use of an everyday object, the ladder. This is one of several other comparisons of a landscape to a man-made object, and it is important to note that this is an urban landscape, because city landscapes are the ones that Procopius is most interested in within the *Buildings*; and ladders would not appear if walls were not discussed, nor walls without cities. Interestingly, the ladder is also a particularly symbolically charged object, both as the ladder of life in Stoic philosophy³¹⁹ and the *scala amoris* in Plato's *Symposium*³²⁰, and as evoking a spiritual ascent in diverse religions and cults, from Jacob's ladder in Christianity³²¹, to Masonic and Mithraic ladders.

Even if the ladder might appear a rather mundane object with not much interest to offer, its use in Procopius does show some variety. In the *Wars*, it allows the author to put a focus on the material reality of war and of sieges, which also links into concerns with building, walls and stones, as well as military engineering. In the *Buildings*, the ladder is often used in a derisive manner to poke fun at fortifications which Justinian had to rebuild, which ties to the panegyric programme of the work. Finally our last example in the latter work used the ladder as simile in the process of describing the city of Jerusalem. The choice of this object makes sense not just because of the fact it works

³¹⁹ See amongst others Bees (2008) and Benatouil (2002).

³²⁰ Plato *Symposium* 210a-211b. On which, see Blondell (2006).

³²¹ John Klimakos in the 7th century made the ladder a lasting metaphor in Byzantine monasticism with his work the *Ladder*, building on the theme of Jacob's ladder and describing the thirty degrees of ascent towards an ascetic life.

well as an image, but also because it happens to appear many times in the *Wars* as well as the *Buildings*. Furthermore, the fact that the ladder is charged with rich symbolism in both pagan and religious thinking makes sense in the context of a city such as Jerusalem, rich herself with religious significance.

Machines and the status of technical digressions

The ladder is not the only object that bring up concerns of military engineering. Siege engines were the objects of many treatises in Antiquity by various authors such as Athenaeus Mechanicus, Aeneas Tacticus and Hero. Procopius himself demonstrates a keen interest in these machines as shown in his complicated and seemingly detailed accounts of siege engines, which have led some to think he was an engineer³²². To some readers, it might indeed seem surprising that technical considerations should be included in a literary work, and when they are, they seem to indicate some kind of expertise on the author's part³²³. This also poses the question of the relationship between rhetoric and technical writing, which is particularly interesting in the context of the Second Sophistic and Late Antiquity³²⁴. In the same manner, Procopius' engines are principally literary and rhetorical creations. His descriptions force us to question his seeming professionalism and while it can be demonstrated that his approach is definitely not that of an engineer, the literary strategy behind them needs to be examined. To this effect, a close scrutiny of his description of siege-engines used in the

³²² Howard-Johnston (2000), 19-30. I do not share this opinion and hope that my study of Procopius' descriptions of siege-engines will contribute to refuting it.

³²³ MacKail (1920), 103-118, extrapolates from Ammianus' digressions on artillery that he was an artillery officer.

³²⁴ This has been examined particularly well by Barton (1994), a study of writings on astrology, physiognomics and medicine that shows how those writings were heavily concerned with creating effective rhetorical persuasion rather than laying out scientific theories.

siege of Rome in *Wars* V.xxi will expose how this faked professionalism oscillates between vagueness and inaccuracies on the one hand, and painstakingly detailed accounts that border on the redundant on the other.

Before that, the first thing to consider in Procopius' accounts of siege-engines is the way he refers to them. Indeed, his choice of words is rarely innocent, as he expresses interest in etymology and quoting in other languages like Latin³²⁵, and generally insists on using the proper technical term whenever he can³²⁶. The one word used by him to refer to these engines is usually ἡ μηχανή. He does not systematically name the machines mentioned. If more than one type of machine is mentioned, he names one and then follows the name by 'and other machines' and sometimes just refers to the engines as 'machines' without specifying which kind. In *Wars* I.vii.12, 'the machine named a ram' (κρίον τὴν μηχανήν) is used to besiege Amida. In the siege of Petra, he refers again to 'the machine named a ram' in *Wars* II.xvii.9 (κρίων τε τῆ μηχανῆ), then to 'machines' used by the Romans to defend themselves in xvii.15 (ταῖς τε μηχαναῖς), and again to 'a ram or another machine' in xvii.22 (κρίων ἢ μηχανῆ ἄλλῃ). The machines used for the siege of Edessa or also vaguely referred to in *Wars* II.xxvii.29 as generic 'machines' (μηχανάς), and then in xxvii.39 more precisely as 'towers and other machines' (τούς τε πύργους καὶ τὰς ἄλλας μηχανάς). In *Wars* II.xxix.1 Chosroes orders timbers to make 'machines' (μηχανάς). The same word is used again in *Wars* V.xxiii.17 and xxiv.4 to refer to the machines used by Vittigis to besiege Rome. In *Wars* V.xxvii.6, the machines used by the Romans to defend themselves are referred to as 'τῶν τε τοξευμάτων τὰς μηχανάς', an expression which gives us the information that the machines shoot arrows. In *Wars* VIII.xxxv.9, the Goths place wooden towers (πύργους τε

³²⁵ See for example names of places in chapter 2.

³²⁶ See for example the technical vocabulary used in Hagia Sophia's description in chapter 1.

ξύλινους) upon which are mounted various engines including the ones called ballistae (μηχανὰς τε ἄλλας καὶ τὰς βαλλίστρας). This tendency to not always name machines gives the impression that there are more machines than the ones he actually names, but that he somehow chose not to name them or describe them.

Even if they are briefly mentioned before, Procopius does not go into details about any of the machines until book V of the *Wars*, the first book of the Gothic wars, and more precisely the siege of Rome in chapter xxi. Machines used both to attack and to defend walls are described. He starts with the machines built by Vitigis to attack Rome; towers and rams. In a second account, he describes the building of the machines used by Belisarius to defend Rome. These machines are the ballistae, the ‘wild asses’ and the ‘wolves’. I shall now look closely at Procopius’ account of these five machines, following the order of the text by starting with the towers:

πύργους τε ξυλίνοὺς ἐποίησατο ἴσους τῷ τείχει τῶν πολεμίων, καὶ ἔτυχε γε τοῦ ἀληθοῦς μέτρου πολλάκις ξυμμετροησάμενος ταῖς τῶν λίθων ἐπιβολαῖς. τούτοις δὲ τοῖς πύργοις τροχοὶ ἐς τὴν βάσιν ἐμβεβλημένοι πρὸς γωνία ἐκάστη ὑπέκειντο, οἳ δὴ αὐτοὺς κυλινδούμενοι ῥᾶστα περιάξειν ἔμελλον ὅπη οἱ τειχομαχοῦντες βούλοιντο, καὶ βόες τοὺς πύργους ξυνδεδεμένοι εἴλκον.³²⁷

The construction of the towers is described within two axes, their height and the way they are moved. Their height is proportioned to the enemy’s wall, a result attained through calculations made according to the layers of stone in the wall. Here, we can observe two themes that appear frequently in *The Buildings*: the height of walls and the way stones are fitted to make them, here in layers that can be differentiated. As a general rule his descriptions tend to deconstruct objects in order to show their structure and the different parts that make it. However, the fact that the calculations involved are

³²⁷ *Wars* V.xxi.3-4. *He constructed wooden towers equal in height to the enemy’s wall, and he discovered its true measure by making many calculations based upon the courses of stone. And wheels were attached to the floor of these towers under each corner, which were intended, as they turned, to move the towers to any point the attacking army might wish at a given time, and the towers were drawn by oxen yoked together.*

not explained shows that this is not technical writing; a technical treatise would give those equations (as can be seen in Hero's treatise on siege-engines for example). The second phase of the description referring to the towers' mobility gives further details which create an overall view of how the towers move; we know that they have four wheels, one at each corner, to permit movement in different directions and that they are drawn by oxen attached together. It is quite a selective description and it does not give any information on the structure of the tower itself, nor how soldiers get inside it, nor how many, and indeed Procopius does not even mention that it is supposed to transport soldiers at all. The only thing that seems to interest him is that the towers can move in all directions and that they are moved by animals, a strategic detail in the narrative of the siege because of an episode slightly later where Belisarius laughs at the barbarians coming with their towers and orders his puzzled soldiers just to shoot the oxen³²⁸. The description of this machine, as well as the ones that will follow, provides evidence to refute James Howard-Johnston's claim that Procopius' role as Belisarius' assessor was as a structural engineer. Even if this description of a tower does give partial details, its seeming precision is limited as it only provides an impression of a tower, with a general idea of its proportion and the way it moves, rather than giving us exact figures or calculations, an account of its capacity or even just its function, which is not evoked at all. It seems that, even if Procopius had more knowledge than that given the reader, he chose to write a description that only gave a vague idea of the machine, and provided details which would be of use in the narrative at a later time (the mention of the oxen).

The second machine is the ram, evoked several times in the *Wars*. Its description is the longest of all these machines and is quite complicated, surprisingly, as a ram is

³²⁸ VIII.xxii.2-9.

arguably simpler than other machines such as a ballista or an onager. Its complexity is reminiscent parts of the architectural description of Hagia Sophia in *Buildings* I. Details are given on its different parts, the material used to make it, how many men are needed to draw it, how it is activated and why it has this name:

κίονες ὄρθοι ξύλινοι τέσσαρες ἀντίοι τε καὶ ἴσοι ἀλλήλοις ἐστᾶσι. τούτοις δὲ τοῖς κίοσι δοκοὺς ὀκτὼ ἐγκαρσίας ἐνεύροντες τέσσαρας μὲν ἄνω, τοσαύτας δὲ πρὸς ταῖς βάσεις ἐναρμόζουσιν. οἰκίσκου τε σχῆμα τετραγώνου ἐργαζόμενοι προκάλυμμα πανταχόθεν ἀντὶ τοίχων τε καὶ τείχους διφθέρας αὐτῶ περιβάλλουσιν, ὅπως ἢ τε μηχανὴ τοῖς ἔλκουσιν ἑλαφρὰ εἶη καὶ οἱ ἔνδον ἐν ἀσφαλεῖ ὦσιν, ὡς πρὸς τῶν ἐναντίων ἤμιστα βάλλεσθαι. ἐντος δὲ αὐτῆς δοκὸν ἑτέραν ἄνωθεν ἐγκαρσίαν ἀρτήσαντες χαλαραῖς ταῖς ἀλύσει κατὰ μέσην μάλιστα τὴν μηχανὴν ἔχουσιν. ἣς δὴ ὀξεῖαν ποιοῦμενοι τὴν ἄχραν, σίδηρῶ πολλῶ καθάπερ ἀκίδα καλύπτουσι βέλους, ἢ καὶ τετράγωνον, ὥσπερ ἄκμονα, τὸν σίδηρον ποιοῦσι.³²⁹

The account starts with a progressive description of the frame of a ram, first, the four beams that constitute the frame, their size and how they are placed. The use of the word *κίονες* is interesting here because it is a word used often in the *Buildings* to mean a stone column. The material and the proportions of the beams are also taken into account here. The second step refers to the timbers used to bind the beams together and where they are situated. The details provided here allow us to visualize the place of the wooden shafts binding the beams, which finally leads to an overall appreciation of the structure of the engine. The word used here for the structure is striking because it usually refers to a small building or room ‘οἰκίσκου’. As for the word *σχῆμα*, it is used several times in the *Buildings* in particular and frequently refers to a costume or garment, for example that of Justinian in the description of his statue³³⁰. As for the adjective ‘four-sided’, it

³²⁹ Wars V.xxii.5-8. *Four upright wooden beams, equal in length, are set up opposite one another. To these beams they fit eight horizontal timbers, four above and an equal number at the base, thus binding them together. After they have thus made the frame of a four-sided building they surround it on all sides, not with walls of wood or stone, but with a covering of hides, in order that the engine may be light for those who draw it and that those within may still be in the least possible danger of being shot by their opponents. And on the inside they hang another horizontal beam from the top by means of chains which swing free, and they keep it at about the middle of the interior. They then sharpen the end of this beam and cover it with a large iron head, precisely as they cover the round point of a missile, or they sometimes make the iron head square like an anvil.*

³³⁰ *Buildings* I.ii.8

provides a visualization of the structure in a three-dimensional space. Overall, it can be said that this approach is more that of an amateur architect than that of an engineer, because of the choice of words and the construction of the description. The impression is strengthened by the following passage that describes the walls of this structure, walls which are made of hides in order to be light to carry and to protect those inside it. Here again, the vocabulary used would be more appropriate for an edifice than for an engine, with the words *τοιίχων* and *τείχους* because they usually refer to walls of stone-built constructions, and they also seem redundant. The description then moves to the centre of the structure with the inner beam: the important element here is the fact that the chain attaching the beam in the centre of the machine is hanging loose, which explains its mobility. The next part described is the tip of the central beam: the description of the end of the weapon here provides the material it is made of as well as the possibilities for its shape, either pointed or square, which enables a simile by comparing it with an anvil. In the second half of this description of the rams, Procopius offers us a view of the engine in order to represent how it is moved:

καὶ τροχοῖς μὲν ἡ μηχανὴ τέσσαροι πρὸς κίονι ἐκάστω κειμένοις ἐπῆρται, ἄνδρες δὲ αὐτὴν οὐχ ἦσσαν ἢ κατὰ πεντήκοντα κινουῦσιν ἔνδοθεν. οἱ ἐπειδὴν αὐτὴν τῷ περιβόλῳ ἐρείσωσι, τὴν δοκὸν ἣς δὴ ἄρτι ἐμνήσθην μηχανῆ τινι στρέφοντες ὀπίσω ἀνέλκουσιν, αὐδὴς τε αὐτὴν ξὺν ῥύμῃ πολλῇ ἐπὶ τὸ τεῖχος ἀφιᾶσιν. ἡ δὲ συχνὰ ἐμβαλλομένη κατασεῖσάι τε ὅπη προσπίπτει καὶ διελεῖν ῥᾶστα οἷα τέ ἐστι, καὶ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ταύτην ἡ μηχανὴ ἔχει, ἐπεὶ τῆς δοκοῦ ταύτης ἡ ἐμβολὴ προὔχουσα πλήσσειν ὅπου παρατύχοι, καδᾶπερ τῶν προβάτων τὰ ἄρρενα, εἴωθε.³³¹

The number of wheels – four – and of men to draw the engine – at least fifty – are given, and once more Procopius used the word ‘column’ to describe the vertical wooden

³³¹ Wars V.xxi.9-11. *And the whole structure is raised upon four wheels, one being attached to each upright beam, and men to the number of no fewer than fifty to each ram move it from the inside. Then when they apply it to the wall, they draw back the beam which I have just mentioned by turning a certain mechanism, and then they let it swing forward with great force against the wall. And this beam by frequent blows is able quite easily to batter down and tear open a wall wherever it strikes, and it is for this reason that the engine has the name it bears, because the striking end of the beam projecting as it does, is accustomed to butt against whatever it may encounter, precisely as do the males among the sheep.*

shafts. Finally, the description turns to the mechanism used to activate the engine and here, the description falls short. The mechanism that activated the engine was where we were expecting Procopius to get into details since he is so fascinated by the way things work and the springs that activate the whole machine. Could he have found an expression more vague than *μηχανῆ τινι*? First, he uses the same word for the whole engine and the mechanism that makes it work, and second, the use of *τινι* does not provide any more precision to the noun it is attached to but makes it even more elusive. An engineer would have known what this mechanism was. Perhaps Procopius has the information, but the fact that his description includes this central hole is quite striking. Indeed, he does give a sense of the way the engine moves, with expressions that denote different types of movement; *στρέφοντες* that gives the idea of twisting, *ἀνέλκουσιν* the impression of drawing back, *ρύμη* of giving an impulse and *ἀφιᾶσιν* of sending forward. Those clues make us picture this mechanism as spring-like and make the description a lively one because of its motion.

The final part of the description goes back to the name of the engine and its actual effect on walls. Procopius' interest in names (*ἑπωνυμίαν*) closes this description by explaining why this siege-engine is called a ram and comparing the motion of the engine with that of the animal. To begin with he shows the ram in action with its repetitive blows (*ἢ δὲ συχνὰ ἐμβαλλομένη*), and the way it throws down (*κατασεῖσαι*) and destroys the walls so easily (*διελεῖν ῥᾶστα*). Then, he goes on to the comparison with the animal: the engine is said to usually strike, *πλήσσειν[...] εἴωθε*, wherever it happens to be, *ὅπου παρατύχοι*. The comparison between the animal and the engine does not only draw on the similarity of their projecting (*προΰχουσα*) movement, but also on the randomness of this action which is emphasized by the use of the optative here. The ram

is said to behave the same way among sheep (τῶν προβάτων τὰ ἄρρενα); Procopius seems here to have used this image in a special way, instead of just comparing the similar aspect of the head of the animal and the engine, he decided to compare the randomness and frequency of their attacks, the animal against the flock and the engine against the walls. The fact that the description of the ram is the longest and most complicated when the engine is arguably not the most complicated – when one thinks of the ballista for example – is not that surprising perhaps because its name permits a comparison with an animal. Indeed, Procopius often compares man-made creations with natural things, such as the coloured marbles of Hagia Sophia to a meadow; as if art and mechanics imitated nature.

The second part of this technical digression is devoted to the description of defensive engines used by the Romans. The first one, the ballista, has been studied closely and compared to accounts in other authors like Ammianus by Marsden³³². He notes ‘various vague and apparently contradictory hints’, and goes so far as to conclude that:

‘it appears that Procopius thought that some part of the stock travelled forward when the trigger was released, and then stopped, allowing the missile to continue its course. Now, whatever sort of ballista Procopius has in mind, one thing is absolutely certain: neither the slider, nor any other portion of the stock, moves when we pull the trigger. Procopius’ erroneous conception of the ballista’s action inevitably reduces our confidence in the rest of his account.’

Procopius’ description of the ballista is as follows:

τόξου δὲ σχῆμα ἔχουσιν αἱ μηχαναὶ αὗται, ἐνεργεῖν τε αὐτοῦ κοίλη τις ξυλίνη κεραία προὔχει, αὐτὴ μὲν χαλαρὰ ἤρτημένη, σιδηρᾷ δὲ εὐθείᾳ τινὶ ἐπικειμένη. ἐπειδὴν οὖν τοὺς πολεμίους ἐνθένδε βάλλειν ἐθέλουσιν ἄνθρωποι, βρόχου βραχέος ἐνέρσει τὰ ξύλα ἐς ἄλληλα νεύειν ποιοῦσιν ἃ δὴ τοῦ τόξου ἄκρα ξυμβαίνει εἶναι, τὸν τε ἄτρακτον ἐν τῇ κοίλῃ κεραίᾳ τίθενται, τῶν ἄλλων βελῶν, ἅπερ ἐκ τῶν τόξων ἀφίᾳσι, μῆκος μὲν ἔχοντα ἥμισυ μάλιστα, εὖρος δὲ κατὰ τετραπλάσιον. περὶ μὲντοι οὐ τοῖς εἰωθόσιν ἐνέχεται, ἀλλὰ ξύλα λεπτά ἐς τῶν περῶν τὴν χώραν ἐνείροντες ὅλον ἀπομιμοῦνται τοῦ βέλους τὸ σχῆμα, μεγάλην αὐτῷ λίαν καὶ τοῦ πάχους κατὰ λόγον τὴν ἀκίδα

³³² Marsden (1971), 246-248.

ἐμβάλλοντες. σφίγγουσί τε σθένει πολλῶ οἱ ἀμφοτέρωθεν μηχαναῖς τισι, καὶ τότε ἡ κοίλη κεραία προιοῦσα ἐκπίπτει τὸ βέλος ὥστε ἐξικνεῖται μὲν οὐχ ἥσσον ἢ κατὰ δύο τῆς τοξείας βολάς, δένδρου δὲ ἢ λίθου ἐπιτυχὸν τέμνει ῥαδίως. τοιαύτη μὲν ἡ μηχανή ἐστιν ἐπὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος τούτου, ὅτι δὴ βάλλει ὡς μάλιστα, ἐπικληθεῖσα.³³³

Marsden appears to be right in presuming that Procopius might not actually understand the way the ballista works, as he refers once more to the mechanism that makes it work with the same vague expression used for the ram, in the plural this time: μηχαναῖς τισι³³⁴. Procopius' account is not that of an engineer, and his pose of technical knowledge is obvious here. What he does in this passage, is mainly to compare how a ballista works to how a bow works in order to give his readership an impression of the engine, with the use of terms such as 'the form of a bow' (τόξου δὲ σχῆμα) or 'they reproduce the general form of the arrow' (ἀπομιμοῦνται τοῦ βέλους τὸ σχῆμα), and compares its reach to that of a bow: namely, twice its reach (οὐχ ἥσσον ἢ κατὰ δύο τῆς τοξείας βολάς). The indication of proportions regarding the size of the missile, that is one and a half as long and four times as wide as a normal arrow, gives an impression of relative precision. The details on different materials used like the iron base and the wooden pieces instead of feathers also contribute to drawing the picture of the ballista. This whole description based on the comparison of the ballista with a bow that presents it as a bigger and more powerful version of a bow leads up to his etymological explanation of the term 'ballista' as a combination of βάλλω and μάλιστα.

³³³ Wars V.xxi.14-18. Now these engines have the form of a bow, but on the under side of them a grooved wooden shaft projects; this shaft is so fitted to the bow that it is free to move, and rests upon a straight iron bed. So when men wish to shoot at the enemy with this, they make the parts of the bow which form the ends bend toward one another by means of a short rope fastened to them, and they place in the grooved shaft the arrow, which is about one half the length of the ordinary missiles which they shoot from bows, but about four times as wide. However, it does not have feathers of the usual sort attached to it, but by inserting thin pieces of wood in place of feathers, they give it in all respects the form of an arrow, making the point which they put on very large and in keeping with its thickness. And the men who stand on either side wind it up tight by means of certain appliances, and then the grooved shaft shoots forward and stops, but the missile is discharged from the shaft, and with such force that it attains the distance of not less than two bow-shots, and that, when it hits a tree or a rock, it pierces it easily. Such is the engine which bears this name, being so called because it shoots with very great force.

³³⁴ xxi.17.

After this account of the bow-like machine, he goes on to mention machines called ‘wild asses’, onagers (ὄναγροι), which are defined very succinctly as adapted for throwing stones (ἐς λίθων βολὰς ἐπιτηδείας³³⁵) and of a sling-like appearance (σφενδόνη δὲ αὐταί εἰσιν ἐμφορεῖς³³⁶). This straightforward account does not provide any information on the way the onagers work. He then goes on to describe in more detail other machines called with an animal name, the ‘wolves’:

δοκοὺς δύο ἰστᾶσιν ἐκ γῆς ἄχρι καὶ ἐς τὰς ἐπάλξεις ἐξικνουμένας, ξύλα τε εἰργασμένα ἐπ’ ἀλληλα θέμενοι τὰ μὲν ὀρθά, τὰ δὲ ἐγκάρσια ἐναρμόζουσιν, ὡς τῶν ἐνέρσεων τὰ ἐν μέσῳ εἰς ἀλληλα τρυπήματα φαίνεσθαι. ἐκάστης δὲ ἀρμονίας ἐμβολή τις προὔχει, κέντρον παχεῖ ἐς τὰ μάλιστα ἐμφορῆς οὔσα. καὶ τῶν ξύλων τὰ ἐγκάρσια ἐς δοκὸν ἐκατέρωθεν πηξάμενοι, ἄνωθεν ἄχρι ἐς μοῖραν διήκοντα τὴν ἡμίσειαν, ὑπτίας τὰς δοκοὺς ἐπὶ τῶν πυλῶν ἀνακλίνουσι. καὶ ἐπειδὴν αὐτῶν ἐγγυτέρω οἱ πολέμοι ἴκωνται, οἱ δὲ ἄνωθεν ἄκρων δοκῶν ἀψάμενοι ὠθοῦσιν, αὐταὶ δὲ ἐς τοὺς ἐπιόντας ἐκ τοῦ αἰφνιδίου ἐμπίπτουσαι τοῖς προέχουσι τῶν ἐμβολῶν, ὅσους ἂν λάβοιεν, εὐπετῶς κτείνουσι.³³⁷

The description is quite complicated, once again, when Procopius is trying to explain the structure of the machine, even though there is little by way of mechanics involved. The description of the criss-cross structure is, perhaps, unnecessarily complicated, stating that beams are placed upright and crosswise and therefore have holes between them. He also uses another word of shepherd’s vocabulary, in keeping with his previous mention of rams and wolves, when he compares the projecting beaks of the machine to a thick goad (κέντρον παχεῖ). Procopius does not feel the need to explain the reason why wolves are given this name, which is because of their resemblance to a wolf’s jaw, full of sharp teeth, falling on the enemy.

³³⁵ xxi. 18.

³³⁶ xxi. 19.

³³⁷ Wars V.xxi.20-22. *They set up two timbers which reach from the ground to the battlements; then they fit together beams which have been mortised to one another, placing some upright and others crosswise, so that the spaces between the intersections appear as a succession of holes. And from every joint there projects a kind of beak, which resembles very closely a thick goad. Then they fasten the crossbeams to the two upright timbers, beginning at the top and letting them extend half way down, and then lean the timbers back against the gates. And whenever the enemy come up near them, those above lay hold of the ends of the timbers and push, and these, falling suddenly on the assailants, easily kill with the projecting beaks as many as they may catch.*

There is only one siege-engine mentioned in the *Buildings*, but it is quite interesting because of its hybrid nature and the way it is treated. The engine here is half-machine, half-animal and the way it is described is quite redundant:

καὶ ὁμιλος μὲν αὐτοῖς ἐλεφάντων ἔφεται, οἷσουςι δὲ ξυλίνους ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων οἱ ἐλέφαντες πύργους, οἷς ὑποκείμενοι ἀντὶ θεμελίων ἐστήξουσι...³³⁸

The structure of the passage is clearly that of a chiasmus here with the wooden towers resting on the elephants' shoulders, and the elephants themselves supporting the towers as foundations. The term foundation, *θεμελίων*, itself is also interesting because it is another word of architectural vocabulary, which continues to show that Procopius approaches objects in terms of architecture, just like edifices.

After looking at these machines, one gets the impression that Procopius deliberately creates an impression of technicality, which distracts from his actual lack of expertise – particularly regarding mechanics. The descriptions appear complicated and technical at first because of his methodology which builds up objects in the description part by part, overwhelming the reader with minute details. But they are not a manual that would give instructions on how to make them and they rarely employ vocabulary that his audience would not understand. These passages tell us how to see the engines, controlling the process by delivering the information gradually and only allowing us to visualize the whole at the end. They also pose the problem of the status of technical digressions. Ian Kelso³³⁹ argued that Ammianus and Procopius' descriptions of siege-engines were classicizing, basing his argumentation on Lucian's recommendations for

³³⁸ *Buildings* II.i.11, and that a great number of elephants would come with them, and these would bear wooden towers on their shoulders, under which they would stand, supporting them like foundations.

³³⁹ Kelso (2003), 122-125.

writing history³⁴⁰, which he says requires the reader to understand the soldier's battle drills, to know their arms and some machines. One cannot but agree with him on the fact that Ammianus and Procopius do not appear to have been technically trained; however, his simple explanation for their digressions by the need to fulfill a classicizing agenda popular at the time seems too dismissive and simplistic. Indeed, technical digressions and treatises need to be examined by literary critics as well as by archaeologists and historians; talking about Frontinus' *On Aqueducts* Alice König argues that 'Practical manuals are seen as maybe of interest for specialist historians but as having little to recommend them to a wider audience'³⁴¹. Beyond lack of interest, there seems to be a literal fear of technical descriptions for some, as an abundance of details can sometimes leave the reader disheartened.

In the case of Procopius's descriptions of siege engines, there is really not much to be scared of. At any rate, when looked at closely, they do not display much of what one would think as strictly technical; such as the use of expert vocabulary foreign to the reader, difficult calculations, or complicated mechanical principles. Instead, these descriptions use simple vocabulary familiar to the reader, words that Procopius also uses in the *Buildings* when describing constructions, and they rely on the same devices we have seen in the ekphrases of chapter 1 to keep his audience attentive, such as *enargeia* – for example with the dynamic description of the ballista's movement – and the use of visually evocative similes – for example with the image of the ram compared to the animal that gave it its name striking at random amongst a herd. As for the abundance of details and importance given to each part that makes a whole machine, it helps to give Procopius's work its material quality and a rich texture, and just as with

³⁴⁰ Lucian *How to write history* 37.

³⁴¹ König and Whitmarsh (2007), 177.

his dazzling description of Hagia Sophia, it takes the reader on a visual journey through the minute details, as opposed to leaving him overwhelmed by the whole.

Cunning devices

Before the building of an object can take place, there is a necessary design. Design is what Procopius celebrates in the case of the special rams made by the Sabiri, which he gives a particular account of in *Wars* VIII.xi.29-34. This unique type of ram is emphasized because of its innovations. Procopius could not be more emphatic about how innovative it is and how clever the barbarians who created them were since he introduces the special ram with a heavily hyperbolic statement:

*μηχανὴν τινα ἐπετεχνήσαντο, οἷα οὔτε Ῥωμαίων οὔτε Περσῶν τινί, ἐξ οὗ γεγόνασιν ἄνθρωποι, ἐς ἔννοιαν ἦλθε· καίτοι τεχνιτῶν μὲν πολὺς ὄμιλος ἐν ἑκατέρῃ πολιτείᾳ γέγονέ τε ἀεὶ καὶ τανῦν ἔστιν...*³⁴²

First, he accentuates the fact that none of the Romans or Persians had thought of this before with the very classical hyperbolic proposition (*ἐξ οὗ γεγόνασιν ἄνθρωποι*), and then he adds the paradoxical second proposition that accentuates the number of good engineers among both countries with the redundant ‘a great throng’ (*πολὺς ὄμιλος*), and feels the need to specify ‘always and now’ (*ἀεὶ καὶ τανῦν*). His admiration of the Sabiri is pretty obvious by now, but he still goes on at length again about how odd it is that having been in the need of something like this, no one had thought of it before:

ἐς χρείαν δὲ πολλάκις ἐς τὸν πάντα αἰῶνα κατέστησαν τῆς μηχανῆς ἑκάτεροι ταύτης, ἐς ἑρύματα τειχομαχοῦντες ἐν χωρίοις σκληροῖς καὶ δυσβάτοις τισὶ κείμενα· ἀλλ’

³⁴² They devised a contrivance, such as had never been conceived by anyone else of the Romans or of the Persians since men have existed, although there have always been and now are great numbers of engineers in both countries.

αὐτῶν οὐδενὶ τὸ ἐνδύμημα τοῦτο γεγένηται ὅπερ τούτοις δὴ τοῖς βαρβάροις ταυῶν
 γέγονεν...³⁴³

He insists once more through the means of adverbs like *πολλάκις* (many times), strengthening adjectives like *πάντα* in the locution ‘throughout their *whole* history’ and antithetic expressions like *ἀλλ’* and *οὐδενί*, which again build up the emphasis. But what one cannot help but remark here is the vocabulary of designing and inventing with terms such as *ἐπετεχνήσαντο*, *ἔννοϊαν* and *ἐνδύμημα*, which all stress the creative part of the process. Without the creation, there is no object, and the interest of Procopius in objects seems to revolve a lot around how from the need, *ἐς χρείαν*, then comes the design to create something as the fulfilment of this need. The structure applied to the construction of the Sabiri’s rams is very clear to see: first comes the problem, which creates the need, then someone thinks about a device to solve the issue, and finally the object is made. This tripartite structure can be seen more or less obviously in the autopsy of the making of several devices in the *Wars*.

The emblematic example of Procopius’ method is that of the device built by the Romans in II.viii.9. Initially, there is a problem with the narrowness of the structure they are going to stand on to fight:

ἐνταῦθα Ῥωμαῖοι (στενοτάτη γὰρ ἡ οἰκοδομία ἐτύγχανεν οὕσα ἐφ’ ἧς ἰστάμενοι
 πολεμεῖν ἔμελλον)³⁴⁴

The editors of the text added brackets here to throw into relief the clause that is introduced by the superlative *στενοτάτη* - a word which is highlighted by its position right after the first bracket. Brackets were not necessary because of the explanatory particle *γὰρ*, which indicates that the clause is separate from the main part of the

³⁴³ *And though both nations have often been in need of this device throughout their history, in storming the walls of fortresses situated on any rough and difficult ground, yet not to a single one of them has come this idea which now occurred to these barbarians.*

³⁴⁴ *Thereupon the Romans, since the structure on which they were to stand when fighting was very narrow [...].*

sentence which goes on after being interrupted with *ἐπενόησαν τὰδε*. Here, we find another form of the verb *νοέω*, this time with the prefix *ἐπί*, which accentuates the idea of contriving. As for *τὰδε*, it makes the structure of the exposition even more obvious with its introductory use as demonstrative. It points out to the reader that there is something important in the following passage, the making of the device:

*δοκούς μακρὰς ἐς ἀλλήλους ξυνδέοντες μεταξύ τῶν πύργων ἐκρέμων, οὕτω τε πολλῶ
εὐρυτέρας δὴ ταύτας τὰς χώρας ἐποίουν, ὅπως ἔτι πλείους ἐνθένδε ἀμύνεσθαι τοὺς
τειχομαχοῦντας οἴοι τε ᾧσιν...*³⁴⁵

The making phase of the object here is focused on the effect and the resolution of the problem with the comparative terms *εὐρυτέρας*, larger, and *πλείους*, more, and the conjunction *ὅπως*, ‘so that’. Procopius’ account of this ‘cunning device’ appears to have a very clear and methodological aspect that makes it as simple as the three steps: problem, design, and solution. Other examples of ‘cunning devices’ can be found in the text, which respect this structure fairly strictly. During the siege of Edessa, in II.xxvi.28-29, exactly the same structure is used when the Romans attack with missiles workmen erecting the artificial mound. In a first stage, Procopius states the situation and then uses a transition highlighting the design process (*διὸ δὴ οἱ βάρβαροι ἐπενόουν τὰδε*³⁴⁶), using the same verb and demonstrative as in our first example. The building of the screens used to protect the workmen follows: they are made of goat’s hair, which is attached to wooden planks already set up. One cannot but remark here the appearance of another animal that belongs to a pastoral scene in the context of a siege. Finally, the screens perform their function and block the missiles.

³⁴⁵ *Binding together long timbers they suspended them between the towers, and in this way they made these spaces much broader, in order that still more men might be able to ward off the assailants from there.*

³⁴⁶ *Wherefore the barbarians devised the following plan.*

In III.xiii.23-24, it is Antonina who has an ingenious idea and saves the water that was getting spoilt on the boat. Procopius mentions that while the expedition was being delayed during its crossing of the Adriatic Sea, the water supply was completely spoiled, aside for that of Belisarius and his table-companions, thanks to Antonina who had had the forethought of protecting it from the sun. This time, the transition between the problem and the solution (τοῦτο γὰρ διεσώσατο μόνον ἡ Βελισσαρίου γυνὴ τροπῶ τοιῶδε) uses the verb *σώζω*, save, instead of a verb of mind. The building part of the device is interesting because it shows Antonina as a resourceful woman who can construct something structured, as the word *οἰκίσκον*, little room, implies, which puts her in a very different light than in the *Secret History*. This flattering portrayal of Antonina as ingenious and helpful during the expedition may very well not be historically accurate, but it is in keeping with the positive slant to Procopius's representation of Belisarius at this early stage of the *Wars*.

Another example of a cunning device invented by a character is that of Artasires' defensive sleeve in IV.xxviii.10.11 once more introduced in the terms: ὃ τε Ἀρτασίρης ἐπενόει τάδε. The structure of this passage is slightly different however, since the purpose of the sleeve is explained after its building phase. Arrows are tied to his wrist and hidden under his sleeve to serve in defending him in case someone should attempt to strike him with a weapon. And indeed in IV.xxviii.31-32, when Artasires is attacked by Ulitheus with a sword, the defensive sleeve manages to protect him from the blow and saves his life.

Finally there is a long passage in V.xix.19-26 which explains how Belisarius found out another way to make a mill work. This is introduced after stating the problem (with the aqueduct broken there was no way to make the mill work, even with animals

because they were scarce) by another version of the same type of introductory clause (*Βελισάριος ἐξεῖρε τόδε*). All of the aforementioned examples show us that Procopius does not apprehend objects as things without origins, but considers them from the beginning of their elaboration, always stating what problem or need solicited their design and putting the focus on whoever invented them. From this stage he goes on to the building stage, and in most cases, objects are not described as the result product but as parts assembled together to throw into relief their progressive elaboration.

There is another example of a cunning device, which is both interesting and amusing. In the *Secret History*, Justin is described as illiterate (*ἀμάθης δὲ γραμμάτων ἀπάντων*³⁴⁷), which turns out to be problematic in the conduct of his office, as emperors need to write and sign letters carrying their orders. This motivates his entourage to contrive a clever little contraption, a sort of stencil, made in the following way:

ξύλω εἰργασμένῳ βραχεῖ ἐγκολάψαντες μορφὴν τινα γραμμάτων τεττάρων, ἅπερ
‘ἀναγνῶναι’ τῇ Λατίνων φωνῇ δύναται...³⁴⁸

This device is, literally, a literary object. The carved wood used with ink imitates a written word, a signature of the emperor. Its duplicity goes further than imitating writing, since the word written, *legi*, I have read, is a lie itself as Justinus cannot read. There is an undeniable underlying contempt in this passage on Procopius' part, as an illiterate emperor surely does not correspond to his ideal of the perfect sovereign. This is another function of objects, as they can embody ideological or symbolical content. In the case of a *psogos*, an object can function as an element of the blame. Indeed, objects are integral in the construction of identity, which is something I will address in the rest of this chapter.

³⁴⁷ *Secret History* vi.11.

³⁴⁸ *Secret History* vi.15. *Taking a small strip of prepared wood, they cut into it a sort of pattern of the four letters which mean in the Latin language 'I have read'.*

The few examples of cunning devices I have examined thus far have shown that not only is Procopius interested in the fabrication of objects, but he also devotes some of his narrative to showing how the idea behind the design of these objects come to life, and his descriptions of the process of designing objects appears to praise human ingenuity and creative impulse. This praise can apply to a whole people like the Sabiri, but also to characters like Belisarius and Antonina. In some ways, the *Buildings* themselves could be said to be a praise of Justinian's creative force, as well as that of his master-builders. The last device mentioned however seems to focus less on emphasising the ingenuity of those who made it rather than the lack which created the need for the device, that is Justin's illiteracy.

II. Objects as vessels of identity: the purple and the gold³⁴⁹

Some objects in Procopius are represented as a whole – as opposed to being dissected part by part or shown as they are being made – and are used as such because they have a strong symbolical or ideological content. Therefore, they function as icons and emblems throughout Procopius' work. Clothes, for example, can embody a character's social rank, legitimacy, or even personality³⁵⁰. Some objects can influence history and be driving forces in the narrative, like standards in a war, treasures that provoke cupidity and sacred relics that produce a miracle. Other objects even have such

³⁴⁹ For a discussion and bibliography of purple in Byzantine culture, see James (1996), 121.

³⁵⁰ Clothing as a mean to express social status was very important in Late Antiquity. See Delmaire (2003) and Baratte (2004). Tougher and James (2005) even argue that it was even more important for clothing to express status than gender (for example in the case of the eunuchs and Theodora in the Ravenna mosaics). The Theodosian code included prescriptions on dress (e.g. X.xx.18, X.xxi.3 and XIV.x.1). Peter the Patrician who was master of offices during Justinian wrote about imperial etiquette regarding dress (reproduced in Constantine Porphyrogenitus *Book of ceremonies* 84-96)

a great importance in Procopius' work that he goes so far as to build extensive digressions and narrations solely around them.

Dressing the part

Clothes, jewellery, even weapons, in short every object that is part of someone's appearance, provide information on the character wearing them, they also, as Kaja Silverman puts it, 'make the human body culturally visible'³⁵¹. They can differentiate people according to their culture; the barbarians from the Romans, and different tribes of barbarians from each other. When Procopius goes into an ethnographical excursus he does not forget to mention and compare the different style of clothes worn by the tribes³⁵². Clothes can point out flaws in a character's personality, as we can see in the example of Theodora's clothing that embodies her depravity. In the *Secret History*, Theodora is first depicted in ix.9 in her youth dressed in the following attire:

*Θεοδώρα δὲ ἢ μετ' ἐκείνην χιτωνίσκον χειριδωτὸν ἀμπεχομένη δούλω παιδί πρέποντα
τά τε ἄλλα ὑπηρετοῦσα εἶπετο καὶ τὸ βάλθρον ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων αἰεὶ ἔφερεν ἔφ' οὕπερ
ἐκείνη ἐν τοῖς ξυλλόγοις καθῆσθαι εἰώθει...*³⁵³

The clothing and the behaviour here seem to be deeply connected since her servile (δούλω παιδί πρέποντα) short sleeved tunic (χιτωνίσκον χειριδωτὸν) reflects her servile behaviour which consists of 'serving' (ὑπηρετοῦσα) people as a slave does and carrying her sister's stool on her shoulders at all times. Therefore Theodora's clothes and

³⁵¹ Silverman (1986), 47. Silverman uses psycho-analysis (especially Lacan and Kristeva) to approach the history of vestimentary self-fashioning. She observes that clothing and ornamentation map the shape of the ego and make apparent the complicated visual exchange of the psyche: seeing/voyeurism and being-seen/exhibitionism.

³⁵² In IV.vi.5-14, his comparison of Vandals and Moors include the luxury in the clothing of the first as opposed to the roughness of the second. In VII.xiv.22-26 when he compares the Sclaveni and Antae and in VIII.xix.17, he mentions how the Cutrigurs wear gold and fine clothes as opposed to the Utrigurs.

³⁵³ *And Theodora, the next in order, clothed in a little sleeved frock suitable to a slave girl, would follow her about, performing various services and in particular always carrying on her shoulders the stool on which her sister was accustomed to sit in the assemblies.*

accessories seem to be part of her character and express her personality as much as her actions. The depravity of her attire in the following passages consists in undressing, *ἀποδυσαμένη*, in public in ix.14, in drawing up her dress in a shameless way (*ἀνασύρασά τε τὰ ἱμάτια οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ*) in ix.17 and in finally just wearing a girdle on her private parts (*ἀμφὶ τὰ αἰδοῖα καὶ τοὺς βουβῶνας διάζωνα ἔχουσα μόνον*) in ix.20. The final example may be the most shocking one; the girdle here appears to emphasize her nudity even more than not wearing anything at all – and Procopius also states that were it not illegal, she would have not worn the girdle at all and been completely naked³⁵⁴.

Clothing depicted in an erotic and shocking situation can also be seen in Theodosius' example in the *Secret History* i.20. When Belisarius catches his wife cheating on him with Theodosius, the latter's attire is in the following state:

καίπερ τῷ Θεοδοσίῳ ἐκλελυμένον τὸν ἱμάντα ὄρων τὸν ἀμφὶ τὰ αἰδοῖα τὰς ἀναξυρίδας
ξυνδέοντα...³⁵⁵

The belt here, *ἱμάντα*, is the element that permits to hold things together and hide the 'shameful parts' (*τὰ αἰδοῖα*). Losing the belt for a man is similar to losing his dignity as a further example can prove, still in the *Secret History*, when men who are unfit or too old to serve in the army in xxiv.8 are treated in this manner:

καὶ αὐτῶν τινὰς μὲν ἅτε ἀχρεῖους ὄντας ἢ γεγηρακότας ἀφαιρεῖσθαι τὰς ζώνας
ἐτόλμων...³⁵⁶

The expression may be a symbolical one since the translator, Dewing, adds as a footnote "i.e. 'discharged in disgrace'". However, we cannot but wonder whether the expression reflected an actual reality and was to be understood literally, as opposed to

³⁵⁴ This last example is analysed by Webb (2008), 4-6 as a means to de-humanise Theodora and make her a non-person.

³⁵⁵ *Though he could see that the belt which supported the drawers of Theodosius, covering his private parts, had been loosened.*

³⁵⁶ *And they dared to strip the belts from some of these as being unfit or too old.*

what Dewing thinks, which would make sense because of the humiliation of being stripped of their belts in public.

Clothing in Procopius is a lot about ‘dressing the part’; wearing something that is appropriate for one’s status and social rank, which makes dressing highly codified. However, there are many examples of characters not dressing the part in Procopius and actually trying to pass as someone else in a sort of medieval carnival where the masters and the slaves exchange their clothes. A first example of this situation could be that of the barbarians who dress in a manner inferior to their rank in the *Wars*. In IV.xxvi.26, Areobindus dresses in the following way:

*Ἀρεόβινδος [...] ἱμάτιον ἀμπεχόμενος οὔτε στρατηγῶ οὔτε ἄλλω στρατευομένῳ ἀνδρὶ ἐπιτηδείως ἔχον, ἀλλὰ δούλῳ ἢ ἰδιώτῃ παντάπασι πρέπον...*³⁵⁷

The structure of this proposition is quite redundant with the use of two segments built in a parallel way: the first stating that his outfit was not proper for a general or soldier articulated around the adverb *ἐπιτηδείως* and the second that it was appropriate for a slave or someone not in the army articulated around the adjective *πρέπον*. The use of these two words stresses the importance of dressing appropriately to one’s station. Totila is another barbarian who chooses to wear an outfit not appropriate to his status, but this time with dramatic consequences because it will lead to his death. The extreme discrepancy between his two different war attires is very striking. His armour is described in VIII.xxxi.18 as extremely beautiful:

*τήν τε γὰρ τῶν ὀπλῶν σκευὴν κατακόρως τῷ χρυσῷ κατειλημμένην ἠμπίσχετο καὶ τῶν οἱ φαλάρων ὁ κόσμος ἔκ τε τοῦ πύλου καὶ τοῦ δόρατος ἀλουργός τε καὶ ἄλλως βασιλικὸς ἀπεκρέματο θαιμαστὸς ὅσος...*³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ *Areobindus [...] clad in a garment which was suitable neither for a general nor for any one else in military service, but altogether appropriate to a slave or one of private station.*

³⁵⁸ *For the armour in which he was clad was abundantly plated with gold and the ample adornments which hung from his cheek-plates as well as from his helmet and spear were not only of purple but in other respects befitting a king, marvellous in their abundance.*

The description here evokes the material used in the armour, gold (*χρυσῶ*), the colour of the ornaments, purple (*άλουργός*), and the impression conveyed, awe (*θαυμαστός*), elements which make it the proper war attire for a king (*βασιλικός*). The fact that he then proceeds to dance between the two armies in his heavy armour adds to the impression of awe in this passage. It contrasts greatly with the passage where he is wearing a simple soldier's attire in xxxii.34. The attire is not even described, but simply referred to as *ἐν στρατιώτου λόγῳ ὀπλισμένους*, which defines it as not even worthy of being described. The purpose of Totila here was not to be noticed (*οὐ βουλόμενος τοῖς πολεμίοις ἐνδηλὸς εἶναι*) which fatefully leads him to die with no design on the part of the enemy (*οὐκ ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς τῶν πολεμίων*³⁵⁹).

A further example of the lack of appropriate dress is Romans dressing as barbarians. In *Buildings* III.ii.6, it is Theodorus who wears the clothes of a satrap (*τῆς σατραπείας ἐνδιδυσκομένῳ τὸ σχῆμα*). However, in this example he is wearing the robes of office because he is assuming the function of a satrap and needs to dress the part, whereas in the *Secret History* xiv.2, Justinian is accused of behaving like a barbarian, an accusation which includes his clothing choices: *ἀλλὰ τήν τε γλῶτταν καὶ τὸ σχῆμα καὶ τήν διάνοιαν ἐβαρβαρίζειν [...]*³⁶⁰. This sentence is a perfect example of the rhetoric of *psogos* because of its tripartite form, the favourite of many orators, with the three forms of polemic: acting like a barbarian in language, clothing and thinking. The importance of clothing places it in a central position in this attack. Indeed, the *Secret History* is the place for disguises of all sorts with its gallery of villains and victims all trying to hide something with their borrowed costumes. In i.38, Antonina adopts the shocking costume of a widow even though her husband is still alive. She is actually mourning her

³⁵⁹ xxxii.36.

³⁶⁰ *But in speech and in dress and in thinking he played the barbarian.*

sexual life because her lover enrolled himself as a monk and she behaves in the following manner:

τότε δὴ κατ' ἄκρας ἐμάνη καὶ τὴν ἐσθῆτα ξὺν τῇ διαίτῃ ἐς τρόπον μεταβαλοῦσα τὸν πένθειμον περιήει συχνὰ κατὰ τὴν οἰκίαν κωκύουσα, ὀλολυγῆ τε κεχηρημένη ὠλοφύρετο οὐκ ἀπολελειμμένου τάνδρός...³⁶¹

The most important word here is ἐμάνη, because Antonina seems here to have completely lost her mind to act in such a way. Not only does she adopt the dress code (ἐσθῆτα) and lifestyle (διαίτη) of a widow, but she also acts as one with her wailing (κωκύουσα), crying (ὀλολυγῆ) and lamenting (ὠλοφύρετο). She dresses the part so well there that she is actually a believable widow, although she is doing all of this in front of her husband. Acting can become a matter of survival in the world of the *Secret History*, as the example of Photius in iii.30 shows. His persecution by Theodora has no limits since she does not respect holy places and does not hesitate to drag him away from the sanctuaries that should protect him. He finally succeeds in escaping her in the following way:

οὗ δὴ ἀποθριξάμενός τε καὶ τῶν μοναχῶν καλουμένων τὸ σχῆμα περιβαλλόμενος τὴν ἐκ Θεοδώρας κόλασιν διαφυγεῖν ἔσχε...³⁶²

Altering his appearance was the only way to escape Theodora, both with his outfit (τῶν μοναχῶν καλουμένων τὸ σχῆμα) and his haircut (ἀποθριξάμενός) which makes Theodora look like a pagan goddess whose wrath makes her follow her victims all around the earth, like Hera with Zeus's lovers. Tyranny, like any form of government that provokes disorders, does have an effect to the way people dress, which can be seen in particular

³⁶¹ Antonina thereupon became utterly frantic, and changing her dress together with the routine of her life to the mourning mode, she went about through the house moaning constantly, weeping and wailing even when her husband was close at hand.

³⁶² There he shaved his head, and by clothing himself in the garb of the monks, as they are called, he succeeded in escaping the punishment of Theodora.

with the example of the fear inspired by the Factions that influence the way people dress in vii.18:

καὶ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ χαλκαῖς τὸ λοιπὸν ζώναις τε καὶ περόναις καὶ ἱματίοις πολλῶ ἔλασσόνως ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ὡς πλεῖστοι ἐχρῶντο, ὅπως δὴ μὴ τῷ φιλοκάλῳ ἀπόλωνται...³⁶³

Because of the factions' persecution, the upper middle class of Constantinople now wears bronze (*χαλκαῖς*) jewellery and clothes much inferior to their status (*ἀξίαν*).

Procopius here seems to defend the right of his class to have a taste for fine clothes (*φιλοκάλῳ*) without attracting trouble. Indeed, dressing in a nice way is enough to attract the attention of the factions, as in the example of the elegant woman abducted because of her good taste in dress, who then commits suicide so that she would not be raped in vii.37. There is something highly symbolic in clothing that makes people believe they can have the lifestyle the clothes evoke if they can get the clothes. The perfect example for this is that of John the Cappadocian's crazy ambition that leads him to misunderstand an oracle in the *Wars* II.xxx.52-54. In a very ironic way, marvel-mongers predict that he will wear Augustus' garment: ὡς χρῆν αὐτὸν τὸ τοῦ Αὐγούστου ἀμπίσχεσθαι σχῆμα. John understands that he is meant to wear the garment of emperor, which is what he wishes for. But when the premonition fulfils itself it is because he is being compelled to become a priest and the people in charge of this compel him to wear a cloak and a tunic belonging to a priest called Augustus who was present at this time (τούτου δὴ τοῦ Αὐγούστου, ἐγγύς πη ὄντος, τὸν τε φαινόλην καὶ τὸν χιτῶνα ἐνδιδύσκεσθαι πρὸς τῶν τῷ ἔργῳ ἐφεστῶτων ἡνάγκαστο).

³⁶³ The result of this was that thereafter most men used girdles and brooches of bronze and mantles much inferior to their station, in order that they might not be destroyed by their love of beautiful things.

In Procopius, objects function as symbols of power, especially jewellery. In the *Wars* I.xxiv.24, the masquerade of Hypatius' nomination as emperor by the people is thrown into relief by his coronation:

(οὐ γὰρ ἦν αὐτοῖς οὔτε διάδημα οὔτε τι ἄλλο ὃν βασιλέα περιβάλλεσθαι νόμος)
στρεπτόν τινα χρυσοῦν ἐπὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ θέμενοι βασιλέα Ῥωμαίων ἀνεῖπον...³⁶⁴

This ceremony looks as if it could belong in a carnival, it is a make-believe coronation, as the clause that the editors put in between parentheses emphasizes: Hypatius' crown is not a real diadem but some kind of golden necklace, *στρεπτόν τινα χρυσοῦν*, which the indefinite article *τινα* exposes as a random object that does not hold the ideological potency of a real tiara. This potency of objects is shown by the fact that stripping someone of the symbols of their office causes them to actually lose the office itself. In the *Wars* I.xvii.26-28, the mirranes receives a bitter punishment, *ποινῆς πικρᾶς*, from the king Cabades. His head-ornament is taken away from him as a punishment for his defeat in the battle, and it is a remarkable piece of jewellery for its beauty because it is wrought of gold and pearls (*ἔκ τε χρυσοῦ καὶ μαργάρων πεποιημένων*). A similar example of a barbarian humiliated by the stripping of the symbols of his office is Gelimer during the triumph of Belisarius whose purple coat is ripped from him in IV.ix.12: *τὴν πορφυρίδα περιελόντες*. This potency of symbols might be the reason why Procopius thoroughly describes symbols of office for two different barbarian nations, in the *Wars* and in the *Buildings*. In the *Wars* III.xxv.7 it is the Vandals' tokens that are described in the following order; first the staff and the cap:

ῥάβδος τε ἀργυρᾶ κατακεχρυσωμένη καὶ πῖλος ἀργυροῦς οὐχ ὅλην τὴν κεφαλὴν σκέπων, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ στεφάνῃ τελαμῶσιν ἀργυροῖς πανταχόθεν ἀνεχόμενος...³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Then since they had neither diadem nor anything else with which it is customary for a king to be clothed, they placed a golden necklace upon his head and proclaimed him Emperor of the Romans.

³⁶⁵ A staff of silver covered with gold, and a silver cap, not covering the whole head, but like a crown and held in place on all sides by bands of silver.

followed by the cloak, the tunic and the boot:

καὶ τριβώνιον τι λευκὸν ἐς χρυσῆν περόνην κατὰ τὸν δεξιὸν ἄμων ἐν χλαμύδος σχήματι
Θετταλῆς ξυνιόν, χιτῶν τε λευκὸς ποικίλματα ἔχων, καὶ ἀρβύλη ἐπίχρυσος...³⁶⁶

These symbols are defined by their preciousness evoked by the silver and gold, their bright white colour, and their detail shown by the embroidery³⁶⁷. Furthermore, they need to imply power through the use of precious materials, colours and great craftsmanship.

The symbols described in *Buildings* III.i.18-23 are those of the Armenians. Procopius deems them worthy of a description because they are never going to be seen by men again (ἄξιον δὲ τὰ σύμβολα ταῦτα δηλῶσαι λόγῳ, ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι ἐς ἀνθρώπου ὄψιν ἀφίξεται), giving with this assertion even more value to his account. The first item is a woollen cloak (χλαμύς ἢ ἐξ ἐρίων πεποιημένη), however its wool does not come from a sheep but from a sea-creature called πίννος and the part where officials usually have purple is here overlaid with gold (χρυσῶ δὲ ἢ τῆς πορφύρας κατηλήλειπο μοῖρα). The cloak is fastened by a very finely designed brooch, which is made of gold and has a precious stone in its centre (λίθον ἐπὶ μέσης περιφράττουσά τινα ἔντιμον) from which hang three sapphires by loose gold chains (ἀφ' οὗ δὴ ὑάκινθοι τρεῖς χρυσαῖς τε καὶ χαλαραῖς ταῖς ἀλύσεσιν ἀπεκρέμαντο). There is also a silk tunic with adornments of gold that are called πλούμια. Finally the knee-length boots (ὑποδήματα μέχρι ἐς γόνυ) are of a red colour (φοινικοῦ χρώματος) and of a sort that is proper only for the Roman emperor or the Persian king.

³⁶⁶ A kind of white cloak gathered by a golden brooch on the right shoulder in the form of a Thessalian cape, and a white tunic with embroidery, and a gilded boot.

³⁶⁷ The use of ποικίλματα calls to mind passages of descriptions in *Buildings* I (e.g. I.i.60, I.iii.18 and I.viii.13) where Procopius uses the verb ποικίλλω to emphasize both the plethora of colours and the rich rhetorical texture of the text.

Procopius undoubtedly has an aesthetic interest in jewellery, just as for any thing that is finely crafted. Therefore, it is not surprising at all when in the *Buildings* he compares the sea adorning Constantinople to a tiara, and when he compares the disposition of the churches built by Justinian along the coast to a necklace. He does not specify what kind of necklace they bring to mind, but one would guess a pearl one because of the brightness of their white stones and because of Procopius' fascination with pearls. His story of Perozes' pearl in the *Wars* I.iv.14-31 is truly riveting not only for its description that emphasises its brightness and size (*λευκώτατόν τε καὶ μεγέθους ὑπερβολῆ ἔντιμον*) but also for the wonderful tale it tells³⁶⁸.

It appears that clothing in Procopius is used very often to refer to character's inappropriateness and inadequacy. From Theodora's scandalous attire in her youth to the various disguises of characters posturing as fake widows or fake monks, the *Secret History* represents a society turned upside down. This can also be seen in the way the middle class of Constantinople is oppressed by the Factions so that they cannot wear clothes appropriate to their social status lest they might be attacked. Dressing inappropriately to one's rank can have disastrous consequences as well, in the *Wars* as Totila's death shows. Finally, jewellery is a particular sign of status and power, but also the occasion for Procopius to write lengthy descriptions, such as with the symbols of office of the Armenians.

³⁶⁸ For a close study of this passage, see Chapter 5 on the supernatural.

Miraculous artefacts

One cannot but notice how miracles seem to happen around objects in Procopius. Things happen to those objects, things that are out of the ordinary and that can be read as omens or miracles. The omens themselves are the keys to understanding or predicting events that are about to happen. Omens are particularly significant in the context of wars and battles because they can determine the outcome. An object that seems to be of a particular significance in battles is the standard or banner that appears so often in the *Wars*³⁶⁹. It is then not surprising if they indicate the outcome of a battle before it happens, such as in II.x.1-3 in the case of Antioch. However, Procopius does not mention the omen until after the city has been burnt by Chosroes and its fate is already known. He introduces the miracle in the following way:

*Τούτου τοῦ πάθους χρόνῳ τινὶ πρότερον τέρας ὁ θεὸς ἐνδειξάμενος τοῖς ταύτη ὠκημένοις ἐσήμηνε τὰ ἐσόμενα...*³⁷⁰

This introduction puts this miracle from the beginning in the divine category since it is god who shows (ὁ θεὸς ἐνδειξάμενος) and provides the sign (ἐσήμηνε) which represents the things to come (τὰ ἐσόμενα). From this introduction, the reader infers that the inhabitants of Antioch should have known what was going to happen since god had given them a sign. The sign itself is then described:

*τῶν γὰρ στρατιωτῶν, οἵπερ ἐνταῦθα ἐκ παλαιοῦ ἴδρυνται, τὰ σημεῖα πρότερον ἐστῶτα πρὸς δύοντά που τὸν ἥλιον, ἀπὸ ταύτομάτου στραφέντα πρὸς ἀνίσχοντα ἥλιον ἔστησαν, ἐς τάξιν τε αὖθις ἐπανῆκον τὴν προτέραν οὐδενὸς ἀψαμένου...*³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ Different standards can be found in I.xiv.10, I.xv.15-16, II.viii.29, II.x.1-3, II.xviii.22, 26, II.xxx.44, IV.xii.17, IV.xvii.17, IV.xxvii.29, IV.xxviii.46, VII.xxiv.23-24, VIII.xiv.43 and appear once in *Buildings* III.iv.16.

³⁷⁰ *A short time before this calamity God displayed a sign to the inhabitants of that city, by which He indicated the things which were to be.*

³⁷¹ *For the standards of the soldiers who had been stationed there for a long time had been standing previously toward the west, but of their own accord they turned and stood toward the east, and then returned again to their former position untouched by anyone.*

The miraculous aspect of this event here is thrown into relief by the insistence on the fact that the standards moved by themselves (*ταύτομάτου*) and without being touched (*οὐδενὸς ἀψαμένου*) and the adverb *αὐθις* that emphasizes the change³⁷². Nevertheless, the sign is not interpreted:

*ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὡς ἔγνωσαν οἱ τὸ τέρας τοῦτο ἰδόντες ὡς δὴ ἐκ βασιλέως τοῦ ἐσπερίου ἐπὶ τὸν ἑῷον τὸ τοῦ χωρίου ἀφίξεται κράτος...*³⁷³

The event here is clearly called a miracle (*τέρας*) but its meaning is not understood (*ἔγνωσαν*), however evident it seems. The interpretation is finally given by Procopius who relates the movement of the standards to that of the power (*κράτος*) moving from west to east.

A further example of an omen before a battle is the one that is given to the Romans while they are bivouacking before a battle with the Vandals in IV.ii.5-7. The prodigy, which is there called *τέρας* from the beginning happens in the middle of the night (*πύρρω ἦν τῶν νυκτῶν*) a time propitious for extraordinary things to happen. The miracle happens in the Roman camp as follows:

*τῶν δοράτων αὐτοῖς τὰ ἄκρα πυρὶ πολλῷ κατελάμπετο καὶ αὐτῶν αἱ αἰχμαὶ καίεσθαι ἐπὶ πλεῖστον σφίσιν ἐδόκουν...*³⁷⁴

The objects affected by this miracle are another usual element of the soldier's apparatus, the spears, and parts of them in particular; their tips, *τὰ ἄκρα*, and points, *αἱ αἰχμαὶ*. The prodigy itself is conveyed by the use of the vocabulary of fire, a fire which is not an ordinary fire since it is so considerable (*πυρὶ πολλῷ*) that it lights (*κατελάμπετο*) the spears' tips and burns their tip intently (*καίεσθαι ἐπὶ πλεῖστον*). The intensive words

³⁷² This miraculous self-animation of an object recalls other examples in classical history like the statue of Juno in Veii that nods when asked if she wants to go to Rome in Livy, *History of Rome*, V.22.

³⁷³ *But even so those who saw this sign did not recognize that the mastery of the place would pass from the western to the eastern king.*

³⁷⁴ *The tips of their spears were lighted with a bright fire and the points of them seemed to be burning most vigorously.*

πολλῶ and ἐπὶ πλεῖστον make this fire a miraculous one. Nevertheless, this prodigy is too frightening to be understood by the soldiers: ὀλίγους δὲ τοὺς θεασαμένους κατέπληξεν, οὐκ εἰδότες ὅπῃ ἐκθήσεται. Indeed, the first reaction to a prodigy is fear (κατέπληξεν), but once they know what the sign means they can use their experience to interpret it the second time around; when it happens again, the Romans know that this sign is a symbol of victory (νίκης ξύμβολον). Procopius here seems to be offering a meta-textual reference by showing the soldiers reading an object as a symbol, symbols which he uses and abuses.

One figure who receives his own personal miracle is the general Belisarius in VII.xxxv.5-8. The objects that produce the miracle are very ordinary ones, jars of wine stocked in his cellar, but the extraordinary in Procopius often springs from the things of everyday life. The prodigy seems to suggest an evident symbolic meaning, the jars suddenly burst out, covering his cellar in a pool of wine, in an image of abundance. Belisarius shows the miracle to his friends who interpret it, of course, as a blessing upon his house: οἵπερ τῷ ξυμβόλῳ τεκμηριούμενοι ἐς ταύτην δὴ τὴν οἰκίαν μεγάλα προὔλεγον ἀγαθὰ ἔσεσθαι VII.xxxv.8. It is interesting that Belisarius disappears from the narrative after this episode for many pages, until his return in VIII.xxi, where he is given a triumphal welcome – literally – in Constantinople. It is then clear that the good fortune foretold by the miracle of the jars was his acclaim in the Capital for his success in Italy.

Finally, the artefacts that are bound to provoke a miracle are sacred ones imbued with divine powers. In the *Wars* II.xi.14-20, it is a particularly holy relic, a portion of the cross, which is touched by a miracle. Procopius describes in the first instance how it is kept, in a beautiful wooden chest adorned with gold and precious stones in the city of Apamea, and tells about the procession that happens once a year when it is brought out in order to be worshipped by the population. Later on, in the context of the war, the

people are afraid and want to worship the relic for one last time in case they should die, and then the miracle happens: *τότε δὴ θάμα ξυνηνέχθη λόγου τε καὶ πίστεως κρεῖσσον ἐνταῦθα γενέσθαι...*³⁷⁵. In his usual rhetorical ways Procopius refers to the miracle as something that goes beyond his powers of speech and belief, which does not stop him from describing it thereafter:

*τὸ μὲν γὰρ ξύλον ὁ ἱερεὺς φέρων ἐδείκνυεν, ὑπερθεν δὲ αὐτοῦ σέλας πυρὸς ἐπεφέρετο καὶ τὸ κατ' αὐτὸν τῆς ὀροφῆς μέρος φωτὶ πολλῷ ὑπὲρ τὸ εἰωθὸς κατελάμπετο...*³⁷⁶

Once more, as with the spears, the miraculous element is the extraordinary flame that provides supernatural light. But to the miraculous fire is added the element of motion this time:

*βαδίζοντος τε τοῦ ἱερέως πανταχῇ τοῦ νεῶ συμπροήει τὸ σέλας, φυλάσσειν αἰεὶ τὴν ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τῆς ὀροφῆς χώραν...*³⁷⁷

The fire seems to be animated by a design because it follows the priest, *συμπροήει*, bearing the cross everywhere, *πανταχῇ*, in a protective manner as the verb *φυλάσσειν* shows, to look after or guard. This miracle, for once, is interpreted immediately by its witnesses, who then feel confident of their safety (*ἤδη τε ἅπαντες ὑπὲρ τῆς σωτηρίας τὸ θαρσεῖν εἶχον*).

The potency of sacred relics is another way of embodying ideological concepts in objects. In the case of the panegyrics in the *Buildings*, there is an example that conveys the idea of the Emperor's divine protection through a miracle operated by holy relics. In I.vii.4-16, Justinian is healed by the oil pouring from the chest containing the remains of the soldiers of the Twelfth Legion. The interesting thing in this example is not really the miracle itself, which is a very typical Christian topos of miraculous

³⁷⁵ II.xi.17, *Then indeed it befell that a sight surpassing both description and belief was there seen.*

³⁷⁶ II.xi.17, *For while the priest was carrying the wood and showing it, above him followed a flame of fire, and the portion of the roof over him was illuminated with a great and unaccustomed light.*

³⁷⁷ II.xi.18, *And while the priest was moving through every part of the temple, the flame continued to advance with him, keeping constantly the place above him in the roof.*

healing, but the fact that from this miracle another relic is made — since Justinian’s purple tunic, which has been soaked in this same oil, is then conserved for two reasons: to act as a testimony of what happened (*μαρτύριον μὲν τῶν τηλικάδε γεγενημένων*) and to be a remedy for the people who will suffer from incurable disease in the future (*σωτήριον δὲ τοῖς ἐς τὸ ἔπειτα πάθεσι περιπεσομένοις τισὶν ἀνηκέστοις*)³⁷⁸. It is fascinating here how the ideological content of an object can be transferred to another one, making symbols spring out of symbols.

It could be said that most of the miraculous objects in Procopius fulfil a similar agenda: they are propitious for whoever they are manifest to and embody the fact that they are special and chosen by the divine, whether clearly Christian or not. The standards and burning spears in the *Wars* show that the Roman army has a supernatural advantage against its enemies. In a more overtly Christian manner, it is the same with the cross of Apamea protecting its inhabitants, and the relics of the saints healing Justinian.

Chapter Conclusion

Objects are evidently central in the representation of material reality. Just as we saw in chapter 1 with the treatment of architecture, there is a definite emphasis on the technical throughout the corpus. However, this has nothing to do with a hypothetical professional expertise. On the one hand, the technical appears to be something of a rhetorical pose at times in some of the overly-complicated and very detailed description,

³⁷⁸ I.vii.16.

but there is no doubt that Procopius shows a certain care for how objects are made and even marvels at technical *thaumata* and the people behind their existence. The insistence on material qualities of objects also provides the text with a certain depth and texture. As far as the ideological content of objects is concerned, it appears interesting for the construction of identity. An example of this is clothing and jewellery, and other elements of personal appearance. The idea of a world turned upside-down which is omnipresent in the *Secret History* is expressed in material ways by the inadequacy of characters' attire. Finally, miraculous objects demonstrate the concern for the way symbols are made and material objects are charged with religious content.

CHAPTER 4

VIOLENCE: FEAR, MUTILATION AND MENTAL TORTURE

This second half of the thesis sees a transition from the representation of the material world, with buildings, landscapes, and objects, to the realm of the *imaginaire*. However, this is still very much within the study of materiality and visuality in Procopius. Indeed, looking at the *imaginaire* in his work implies studying mental images, or rather literary ones. These are powerfully evocative images, which imprint themselves on the reader's mind, shaping his vision of the reign of Justinian. One way in which images do this is through shocking and provoking its audience. Because of this, the theme of violence appears to be particularly fruitful in creating those types of images. It is also particularly striking in the way it shapes parallels and echoes between the *Wars* and the *Secret History*. Procopius' world is definitely a violent one, or at least that is the way he paints it. Violence can take different aspects in his work, from an all-pervading atmosphere of fear to very clinical spectacles of physical mutilation and gratuitous violence, especially that in which the imperial couple revels.

However, violence not only ties Procopius' work together, but also links it to a considerable earlier tradition that goes as far back to Homer. In this long literary continuity, or apparent continuity, the problem is to determine where Procopius places himself, if anywhere in particular, or a bit of everywhere. It is therefore absolutely imperative to keep in mind what kind of ideological and philosophical background lies

behind his text, with elements borrowed from Platonism³⁷⁹, Stoicism and Christian ideology. In terms of literary trends, one cannot but notice that Procopius seems to have inherited from the Imperial and Second Sophistic trends towards depicting violence on bodies in a way which attracts attention to the integrity of the text itself. As always with metatextual questions, it is difficult to determine how aware Procopius is of this phenomenon. But as a modern critical reader, one cannot help but notice with how much vividness Procopius emphasises his own rhetorical devices, manipulating the reader's reactions while at the same time making him aware of being manipulated³⁸⁰.

A climate of fear

'For since there have been human beings there has never been such fear of any tyrant'
Secret History, xvi.13

It is undeniable that there is an atmosphere of fear in Procopius' work. This is particularly striking in the case of the *Secret History*. As the prologue opens, he sets the tone of the work in a manipulative and rhetorical exposition of the reasons why he did not write the book earlier and why he concealed information in the *Wars*. The reasons he exposes are the following:

*οὔτε γὰρ διαλαθεῖν πλήθη κατασκόπων οἷόν τε ἦν οὔτε φωραθέντα μὴ ἀπολωλέναι
θανάτῳ οἰκτίστῳ...*³⁸¹

The danger of Procopius' situation is expressed through devices of exaggeration with *πλήθη* and the superlative *οἰκτίστῳ*, as well as with the parallel structure repeating *οὔτε*

³⁷⁹ On violence as a trope for the criticism of tyrannical regime in Platonic terms in Procopius, see Kaldellis (2004), especially chapters 3 and 4.

³⁸⁰ Please note that I do not use the term manipulation with negative connotations, but consider rhetoric as persuasion to be intrinsically manipulative. In a way most fiction is manipulative, even if this phenomenon can be more or less discreet. Booth (1961) 16-20 shows how the author's voice never disappears, even if it takes different disguises in different literary forms.

³⁸¹ *SH* i.2, *For neither was it possible to elude the vigilance of multitudes of spies, nor, if detected, to escape a most cruel death.*

and the antonyms *διαλαθεῖν* and *φωραθέντα*. He then adds: *οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐπὶ τῶν συγγενῶν τοῖς γε οἰκειοτάτοις τὸ λαθεῖν εἶχον*.³⁸² Once more, he resorts to the use of a superlative, *οἰκειοτάτοις*, to convey the extremity of his situation, and this mention of his relatives being less than trustworthy is what made one scholar think he was referring to his wife or his wife's family here³⁸³. Indeed, this prologue functions to set up the tension in the text by emphasizing the danger of the situation and making the book a work written under pressure. Therefore, it creates a mood of fear which is sustained throughout the whole text; it can be seen through the use of the vocabulary of fear which is omnipresent in this work. The words denoting fear can be broken down into three categories; the words of the family of *δέος*, of *φόβος* and of *ὄρωδία*. The first is the most common in the *Secret History*; we find *δέος*³⁸⁴ as well as other forms such as *ἀδέεστερον*³⁸⁵, or *περιδεῆς*³⁸⁶, different forms of the verb *δεῖδω*³⁸⁷, and the word *δειμάτων*³⁸⁸. As for forms of *φόβος*, they appear four times³⁸⁹. Finally, *ὄρωδία* appears twice³⁹⁰, as well as the verb *κατορωδέω*³⁹¹. This last family of words denoting fear is different from the others in that it suggests intense fear, or terror. But the words *δέος* and *φόβος* seem quite similar. Nonetheless, the grammarian Ammonius makes a distinction between them in that *δέος* is more of an intellectual fear linked to the idea of apprehending something whereas *φόβος* is similar to panic and implied alarm³⁹². It is interesting that Procopius principally uses the intellectual kind of fear and only turns to the more

³⁸² i.2, *Indeed, I was unable to feel confidence even in the most intimate of my kinsmen.*

³⁸³ Treadgold (2007), 188.

³⁸⁴ i.13, i.17, ii.16, iii.26, v.14, v.26, vii.28, ix.50, xvi.3, xvi.13, and xxvi.39.

³⁸⁵ i.14, xx.6, and xxi.21.

³⁸⁶ vii.29, xiii.12, and xxviii.15.

³⁸⁷ ii.12, ii.31, v.14, vii.38, xvi.1, xvii.21, xix.5, xxii.1, and xxiii.4.

³⁸⁸ ix.52.

³⁸⁹ iv.22, vi.27, vii.32 and xxvi.35.

³⁹⁰ iv.22 and v.2.

³⁹¹ iv.36 and xvii.42.

³⁹² *δέος καὶ φόβος διαφέρει. δέος μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶ πολυχρόνιος κακοῦ ὑπόνοια, φόβος δὲ παραυτικά πτόησις.* Ammonius *De Adfinium Vocabulorum Differentia*, ed. K. Nickau (1966), 33.

visceral kind of fear in a few passages of the *Secret History*, possibly to stress the intensity of the fear in question³⁹³.

A passage that stands out with its intense representation of fear is in iv.20-31 where Belisarius is depicted in an extreme state of terror. This terror is described very precisely with all of its symptoms and in two phases. A first phase would be the paranoia that affects the general on his way home from the palace, depicted in iv.21:

συχνά τε περιστρεφόμενος ἐν τῇ ἀναχωρήσει ταύτη καὶ πανταχόσε περισκοπούμενος, ὁπόθεν ποτὲ προσίοντας αὐτῷ τοὺς ἀπολλύντας ἴδοι.³⁹⁴

The symptoms here are evoked by verbs that imply a certain agitation, *περιστρεφόμενος* and *περισκοπούμενος* with the same prefix *περι*, and by the adverbs *συχνά* and *πανταχόσε* that emphasize the frantic aspect of Belisarius' behaviour. As for the optative *ἴδοι*, it suggests that his opponents, the *ἀπολλύντας*, are imaginary. The second phase is introduced in the following way in iv.22:

ξὺν ταύτῃ τε τῇ ὀρρωδίᾳ ἐς τὸ δωμάτιον ἀναβὰς ἐπὶ τῆς στιβάδος καθῆστο μόνος...³⁹⁵

It is not surprising that the word used to refer to Belisarius' fear is *ὀρρωδία* here and not *δέος*. The second phase of the terror is then described with a plethora of details:

γενναῖον μὲν οὐδὲν ἐννοῶν, οὐδὲ ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐγεγόνει ἐν μνήμῃ ἔχων, ἰδρῶν δὲ ἀεὶ καὶ ἰλλιγιῶν καὶ ξὺν τρόμῳ πολλῷ ἀπορούμενος, φόβοις τε ἀνδραποδώδεσι καὶ μερίμναις ἀποκναιόμενος φιλοψύχοις τε καὶ ὄλωις ἀνάνδροις.³⁹⁶

This terror has effects both on the body and the mind. As far as the body is concerned, the symptoms are perspiration (*ἰδρῶν*), dizziness (*ἰλλιγιῶν*) and shaking (*ξὺν τρόμῳ πολλῷ*). It is interesting that the idea of *aporia* (*ἀπορούμενος*) is associated with these

³⁹³ On fear, see Konstan (2006), 129-155.

³⁹⁴ *often turning about as he walked away and looking around in every direction from which he might see his would-be assassins approaching.*

³⁹⁵ *In such a state of terror he went up to his chamber and sat down alone upon his couch.*

³⁹⁶ *Thinking not one worthy thought nor even remembering that he had ever been a man, but perspiring constantly, with his head swimming, trembling violently in hopeless despair, tortured by servile fears and apprehensions which were both cowardly and wholly unmanly.*

physical symptoms, even if it seems more of a mental affliction. As for the mental symptoms, they are all articulated around the opposition of the noble man and the servile one. Belisarius is said not to have any noble thoughts left (*γενναίον μὲν οὐδὲν ἐννοῶν*), then not to remember having ever been a man (*οὐδὲ [...] ἔχων*) and finally he is said to be worried to death (*ἀποκναιόμενος*) by fears (*φόβοις*) which are qualified as servile (*ἀνδραποδώδεσι*) and by worries (*μερίμναις*), which demonstrate an attachment to life (*φιλοψύχοις*) and are completely unmanly (*ὄλως ἀνάνδροις*). Here, one cannot but notice the great variety of vocabulary used to describe fear as well as the very visual aspect of its physical description. The topos of the coward who is too attached to his life is a classical trope with deep roots in Roman ideology, especially in relation to the value of honour³⁹⁷. Of course, this depiction of a terrified Belisarius contributes to the ridiculous and cowardly version of the general, which contrasts with his representation in the *Wars*, especially in the rest of this episode when he is prepared to die when the Empress's messenger comes (iv.25) and when he licks his wife's ankles in gratitude (iv.30).

But fear is not only present in the *Secret History*; it pervades all of Procopius' work, even if it does not dominate the mood of the *Buildings* and the *Wars* to the same extent. In the *Buildings*, it is naturally edifices which provoke different types of fear. In I.i.33-34, it is the dome of Hagia Sophia which is qualified by the phrase 'completely terrifying' (*φοβερόν ὄλως*), for reasons that are then explained: it is the fact that it seems to be floating in the air with no secure basis (*οὐκ ἐν βεβαίῳ*) and dangerously for those inside (*ἐπικινδύνως τοῖς ἐνθάδε οὔσι*). Fortifications can also inspire fear as can be seen in II.v.i, where the circuit-wall of Theodosiopolis terrorizes its inhabitants (*ἅπαντας*

³⁹⁷ About honour and Romans see Barton (2001).

ἐξέπλησσε) for fear that it might fall on them (δεδισσόμενος ὅτι [...] αὐτοῖς ἐμπεσεῖται). But fortifications are mostly designed to scare off opponents, and not inhabitants, for example in II.vi.13 where walls previously made of loose stones are rebuilt by Justinian to make them truly scary to assailants (φοβερά τε τανῦν [...] τοῖς ἐπιούσιν). As for the *Wars*, its most common type of fear is quite similar to that governing the *Secret History* in that it is a fear provoked by violence or the idea of potential violence. There is a passage strikingly similar to that where Belisarius is terrorized by Theodora in the *Secret History* in *Wars* I.xxv.6-7, where it is John the Cappadocian this time who is terrified (ἐν δείμασι μεγάλαις) by Theodora and adopts the same paranoid behaviour, not sleeping at night and thinking assassins are going to come and kill him in his bed. As for Belisarius in the *Wars*, he is the one that others fear, actively taking measures to scare the barbarians in IV.i.8 when he impales a barbarian as an example, which results in making others experience an irresistible fear (ἐς δέος τι ἄμαχον). Indeed, it seems that inspiring fear is one of the strategies employed in psychological warfare. In fact, the amount of mental violence depicted in Procopius's writing is quite unsettling.

Fear functions in Procopius in an almost atmospheric manner; it suffuses the *Secret History* with its vocabulary, showing subtle variations in its representation of different types of fears. Procopius talks of his own fear in the prologue, but also goes into an elaborate description of the physical and mental symptoms of fear in the case of Belisarius. Fear is also present in the *Buildings* and the *Wars*, even if to a lesser extent. The last example discussed, in the *Wars*, is particularly important in the way it shows violence as a spectacle aimed at inspiring fear. This spectacular quality of displays of

violence is striking and contributes to giving the theme of violence an undeniably visual aspect.

Mental torture and forms of psychological warfare

Procopian violence makes just as much impression on the reader when it is mental and not physical. Mental violence is presented in various ways with different intensity, from simple humiliation to dehumanization and driving someone insane. It can be inflicted as a punishment or as a mean of manipulation, or just ‘for fun’ – in the case of Theodora, where often no explanation is given for the violence she inflicts, aside from her implied perversion. Humiliation is typical as a punishment, especially in the context of wars in which the ethos of *victor* and *victus* is carefully codified. In a triumph, the vanquished are usually humiliated publicly in one way or another. During Belisarius’ triumph, it is Gelimer who finds himself publicly humiliated³⁹⁸. The feeling of humiliation here comes mostly from seeing one’s pitiful state in the eyes of others; Gelimer is said to realize (ἔγνω) his situation by looking around (περισκοπῶν). The verb used here emphasises the spectacular aspect of his humiliation as he looks around him at the audience surrounding him. However, he does not yield to the mental pressure and cry (οὔτε ἀπέκλαυσεν) or scream (οὔτε ἀνώμωξεν). This emphasis on Gelimer’s courage and pride with the repetition of οὔτε is to be understood within a representation of the triumph of Belisarius as it shows him as a worthy opponent of the general. When Gelimer finally arrives in front of the Emperor, he is stripped of his purple cloak (τῆν πορφυρίδα περιελόντες) and then compelled to prostrate himself on the floor and do

³⁹⁸ Wars IV.ix.11-12.

obesance to Justinian (*πρηνῆ πεσόντα προσκυνεῖν Ἰουστινιάνον βασιλέα κατηνάγκασαν*).

Stripping someone of the symbol of his authority is typical in the treatment of captive enemies. This stripping of someone's symbol of authority can also be seen in *Wars* I.26-28 where the mirranes is punished by the king Cabades, who takes away his head-ornament³⁹⁹.

Humiliation in Procopius entertains a relationship with ideas of dignity and social rank. In the *Secret History* Theodora takes a particular pleasure in humiliating members of the senatorial class and in degrading people in general. In xvii.7-14, it is two girls of noble extraction who are mistreated by the Empress. Their aristocratic origins are clearly emphasized by Procopius when he introduces them:

Δύο δὲ κόραι ἐν Βυζαντίῳ ἀδελφαὶ ἦτην, οὐκ ἐκ πατρός τε καὶ τριγονίας μόνον, ἀλλ' ἀνέκαθεν αἵματος τοῦ πρώτου ἐν γε τῇ συγκλήτῳ βουλῇ γεγονυῖαι...⁴⁰⁰

This emphasis on their noble lineage is in sharp contrast with the description of the men whom Theodora forces the girls to marry:

αὗται μὲν οὖν ἀνδράσι πτωχοῖς τε καὶ ἀπερριμμένοις πολλῶ ἀπὸ τῆς σφετέρας ἀξίας ἀκούσiai ξυνφίσησαν, καίπερ εὐπατριδῶν σφίσι παρόντων μνηστήρων.⁴⁰¹

The violence here is done by acting against the women's will, 'ἀκούσiai', and by inflicting an offence on their dignity, τῆς σφετέρας ἀξίας. The husbands to be are simply qualified as ἀνδράσι πτωχοῖς τε καὶ ἀπερριμμένοις, men who are neither as rich or well born as the two women, but are in fact rejects of society. In xvii.32-37, Theodora creates another union against nature by marrying Saturninus, son of a *magister*, to a

³⁹⁹ For more details see chapter 3 on objects.

⁴⁰⁰ *There were two girls in Byzantium who were sisters; they were not only the offspring of a consular father and of three generations of Consuls, but drew their lineage from men who from remote times were of the foremost blood of the whole Senate.*

⁴⁰¹ *'So these women, against their wills, were united in marriage to men who were beggars and outcasts, much beneath them in standing, although noble suitors were at hand for them.'*

courtesan. When he complains that the girl has been ‘tampered with’ (*οὐκ ἄτρητον*), Theodora proceeds to give him a humiliating punishment:

τοὺς ὑπηρέτας ἐκέλευεν ἅτε ἀποσεμνυμένον τε καὶ ὀγκωθέντα οὐδὲν αὐτῷ προσῆκον, μετέωρον αἴρειν, οἷα τὰ ἐς γραμματιστοῦ φοιτῶντα παιδία, ξαίνουσά τε κατὰ τῶν νώτων πολλάς ἀπεῖπεν αὐτῷ μὴ φλυάρω εἶναι.⁴⁰²

What is important here is not only the actual physical punishment (*ξαίνουσά τε κατὰ τῶν νώτων*), but the whole ceremonial around it which turns it into a sort of representation where the victim is theatrically hoisted up (*μετέωρον αἴρειν*) a punishment appropriate for a schoolboy (*οἷα [...]παιδία*), and deemed to be a babbler, *φλυάρω*.

Procopius takes the ceremonial of humiliation at the court of Justinian and Theodora to new heights, as can be seen in *Secret History* xxx.21-26. First, the prostration of the senators and patricians in front of the Emperor and Empress is described in terms similar to the posture of classical supplication⁴⁰³. The position is described in the following terms:

ἐπιπτον μὲν εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος εὐθύς ἐπὶ στόμα, χειρῶν δὲ καὶ ποδῶν ἐς ἄγαν σφίσι τετανυσμένων τῷ χεῖλει ποδὸς ἑκατέρου ἀψάμενοι ἐξανίσταντο...⁴⁰⁴

This description is undeniably visual and insists on the extremeness of the position with the expression *πίπτειν ἐπὶ στόμα*, to fall on one’s face, and the intensive *ἐς ἄγαν*. The juxtaposition of the terms *χεῖλει* and *ποδός* emphasizes visually on paper the fact that lips and feet are in contact, *ἀψάμενοι*. Touching and kissing is also very typical of supplication in antiquity; but Justinian and Theodora go further in humiliation because they turn this ceremonial of supplication into a linguistic humiliation as well. Their power extends to the words used by the magistrates to refer to the imperial couple and

⁴⁰² ‘she commanded the servants to hoist the man aloft, as one does children who go to school, because he was putting on airs and assuming a lofty dignity to which he had no right, and she gave him a drubbing on the back with many blows and told him not to be a foolish blabber.’

⁴⁰³ For a study of supplication in antiquity, see Naiden (2006).

⁴⁰⁴ xxx.23, [They] would prostrate themselves to the floor, flat on their faces, and holding their hands and feet stretched far out they would touch with their lips one foot of each before rising.

to themselves. They have to refer to the Emperor and Empress, not by *βασιλέως* and *βασιλίδος*, but by *δεσπότην* and *δέσποιναν*. As for themselves and their peers, they have to use the word *δούλους*. Forcing magistrates to use this vocabulary of slave ownership is truly humiliating intellectually as it negates their status of free citizens. This is of course part of the representation of the Justinianic regime as tyrannical, something that Kaldellis demonstrates very efficiently in his book⁴⁰⁵.

More than humiliation, mental violence can be used as a way of torturing individuals and pressuring them. Theodora uses mental conditioning to manipulate senators in the *Secret History*. In xv.13-16, after describing how easy it was to have access to Justinian's company, Procopius provides us with a contrasting and highly comical depiction of the senators waiting for Theodora to summon them. Approaching Theodora involves both a lot of effort and of time (*χρόνω τε καὶ πόνω πολλῶ*). The setting of this comical scene is described as *ἐν δωματίῳ στενῶ τε καὶ πνιγηρῶ*, a small and stuffy room. Once more, the attitude of the magistrates is described as that of slaves, with their servile assiduity (*ἀνδραποδώδη τινὰ προσεδραεῖαν*). The interesting part of this account is the physical description of the senators' attitude, which is depicted in the following terms:

*ἴσταντο δὲ διηνεκὲς ἐπ' ἄκρων δακτύλων, αὐτὸς καθυπέροτρον ἕκαστος τῶν πέλας διατεινόμενος τὸ πρόσωπον ἔχειν, ὅπως αὐτὸν ἔνδοθεν ἐξιόντες εὐνοῦχοι ὀρῶεν.*⁴⁰⁶

The physical expression of servility here consists in the physical effort made by the senators to be seen by Theodora's eunuchs. Their ridiculous posture, standing on the tips of their toes and extending their heads as high as possible, shows them rivalling

⁴⁰⁵ Kaldellis (2004), especially 128-141 on despotism and imperial ceremony.

⁴⁰⁶ 'And they stood there constantly upon the tips of their toes, each one straining to hold his head higher than the persons next to him, in order that the eunuchs when they came out might see him.'

each other to get her attention. As for their physical posture when they finally get summoned in Theodora's presence, it is once more one of supplication:

*προσκυνήσαντες μόνον καὶ ταρσοῦ ἑκατέρου ποδὸς ἄκρῳ χεῖλει ἀψάμενοι.*⁴⁰⁷

The humiliation of the senators continues here with their prostration and the kiss they implant on Theodora's feet with the tip of their lips. By making the magistrates wait for days in a little room, competing for her attention in a very uncomfortable position, Theodora manages to mould them into obedient slaves. Indeed, the depiction of Theodora in the *Secret History* is that of an expert at mental torture who goes to great lengths to destroy her enemy's mind and morale. One of the punishments she usually inflicts is detention in very bad conditions. In the case of Photius in iii.21, who interfered in Antonina's affair and therefore displeased the Empress, he is confined in the following conditions:

*ἦν δὲ οἰκίδια τῆ Θεοδώρα ἀπόκρυφα μὲν καὶ ὄλως λεληθότα ζοφώδη τε καὶ ἀγείτονα, ἔνθα δὴ οὔτε νυκτὸς οὔτε ἡμέρας δῆλωσις γίνεται. ἐνταῦθα τὸν Φώτιον ἐπὶ χρόνου μῆκος καθεύξασα ἐτήρει.*⁴⁰⁸

Procopius insists here on two factors: isolation and time. The rooms that Theodora uses for detaining prisoners are qualified by four predicative adjectives. Three of them redundantly emphasize the secret and isolated aspect of these rooms: ἀπόκρυφα, λεληθότα and ἀγείτονα, and one of them indicates their darkness, ζοφώδη. If this isolation was not clear enough yet, Procopius uses a hyperbolic adverb, ὄλως, to stress λεληθότα. But what is rather particular in this passage is the treatment of time. Photius is said to have been imprisoned for a long stretch of time (ἐπὶ χρόνου μῆκος), but what Procopius draws the reader's attention to in this passage is the perception of time by someone

⁴⁰⁷ 'having simply done obeisance and having touched the instep of each of her feet with the tips of their lips'

⁴⁰⁸ 'Now Theodora had concealed rooms which were completely hidden, being dark and isolated, where no indications of night or day could be observed. There she confined Photius and kept him under guard for a long time.'

imprisoned in one of these rooms. The perception of time is altered by their darkness and isolated aspect so that it is impossible to tell if it is night or day (*οὔτε νυκτὸς οὔτε ἡμέρας δήλωσις*). Mental torture is represented here by the loss of spatio-temporal perceptions. Another passage in iv.7-12 illustrates Theodora's method of confinement and evokes those same rooms in the Palace again. This time they are described as *ἀσφαλές*, secure, *λαβυρινθῶδες*, labyrinth-like and *οἶον Ταρτάρου*, like Tartarus. Theodora confines Bouzes in one of them in this passage and his experience is described in detail. As in the representation of Photius's imprisonment, the confinement of Bouzes makes him lose track of time. Indeed he is said to be forever unaware of time (*ἄγνωστος αἰεὶ τοῦ παρόντος καιροῦ*). This unawareness of time is then explained in the following terms:

*οὔτε γὰρ αὐτὸς ἐν σκοτῶ καθήμενος διαγινώσκειν οἷός τε ἐγεγόνει πότερον ἡμέρας ἢ νύκτωρ εἶη...*⁴⁰⁹

The darkness, *σκοτῶ*, makes it impossible to tell night from day *διαγινώσκειν [...]* *ἡμέρας ἢ νύκτωρ*. But this passage also includes another refinement in this punishment in that Bouzes is kept from communicating with anyone (*οὔτε ἄλλω τῷ ἐντυχεῖν εἶχεν*). The encounter with the person who brings him food every day is described in this way:

*ἄνθρωπος γὰρ ὅσπερ οἱ ἐς ἡμέραν ἐκάστην τὰ σιτία ἐρρίπτει, ὅσπερ τι θηρίον θηρίῳ ἄφωνος ἄφωνῳ ὠμίλει...*⁴¹⁰

The construction of the sentence here is very striking with the parallel of the repeated *θηρίον* and *ἄφωνος* which assimilate men who do not talk to beasts. Confinement is indeed represented as a way for Theodora to reduce her opponents to the state of animals who cannot talk nor make sense of time by dividing it into days and nights. In both Photius and Bouzes' case, imprisonment is shown to be akin to dehumanisation.

⁴⁰⁹ For as he sat there in the darkness, he could not distinguish whether it was night or day.

⁴¹⁰ For the man who threw him his food for each day met him in silence, one as dumb as the other, as one beast meets another.

In the *Wars*, the violence is usually physical, even though there is one passage that shows another way to provoke fear and torture mentally with the mere suggestion of physical violence. In this instance, the idea of potential violence is crystallized in an object without it being a weapon or device of torture. This object is the iron tripod in *Wars* I.xxiii.27-29. Procopius mentions it in the case of the punishment of Mebodes by Chosroes. Chosroes orders Mebodes to go to the tripod, which allows Procopius to then introduce his explanation in the following manner: ὅ τι δὲ τοῦτό ἐστιν, αὐτίκα δηλώσω⁴¹¹. Indeed, the symbol behind the object is unknown to his reader. The object itself is not described particularly precisely, as it is only said to be made of iron (*σιδηροῦς*) and to stand next to the palace (*πρὸ τῶν βασιλείων*). The potency of this object is in its suggestiveness, because the punishment associated with the tripod is that of sitting on it and waiting for the king to come and give the actual punishment. In the case of Mebodes, he had to wait for many days (*ἡμέρας πολλάς*) before he was seized and killed (*λαβὼν ἔκτεινεν*). The use of the object can here be seen as similar to that of words in a language, words whose symbolical content can be determined by the context (in what Saussure would call a linguistic ‘système d’opposition’). In a way, the tripod is metatextual, in that it represents the punishment symbolically, as it provides an even more formal aspect to the public punishment by pointing out that it is not the real punishment, death, but a spectacular and very artificial one⁴¹². Therefore this tripod seems to embody the idea of ‘symbolic violence’⁴¹³ that pervades all the representations of ideological violence and mental torture in Procopius.

⁴¹¹ *Now as to what this is I shall explain forthwith.*

⁴¹² On the spectacular aspect of public punishments in Rome, there is a great amount of literature, especially on gladiatorial spectacles. See in particular Barton (1994) and Coleman (1990).

⁴¹³ As defined by Bourdieu (1991).

Mental violence is expressed through a variety of striking images in Procopius' work. Humiliation is represented as a spectacle, both in the case of Gelimer's exhibition in the triumph of Belisarius, as well as in examples of court ceremonial in the *Secret History* which depict the regime as tyrannical. In the latter work, examples of imprisonment of characters by the empress show how the deprivation from sensorial stimulation and communication are used to dehumanise the prisoners and contribute to Theodora's characterisation as sadistic, cruel, and inhuman. Finally the example of the tripod in the *Wars* represents the anticipation of violence as somewhat worse than violence itself.

Mutilation: body parts and intrusive objects

Needless to say, there is an impressive amount of physical violence in Procopius. In the context of wars and of the representation of a tyrannical regime, it is not surprising that there would be such huge volume of violent images, ranging from torture to slaying to suicide. But there is one characteristic of this physical violence that makes it very interesting in its literary tradition: the mutilation of the human body⁴¹⁴.

Mutilation is a common topos of classical literature, and is present in epic poetry like the *Iliad* or in plays like Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae*. However, our aim here is to see how it functions in the economy of Procopius' work. The relation between bodily violation and literature has been studied in many authors of different periods⁴¹⁵, and the parallel between the visual deconstruction of the body and that of the text is

⁴¹⁴ For conceptions of the classical body, the volume edited by Porter (1999) is extremely useful, particularly the chapters by Edwards, 252-268, and King, 269-286, both on pain, and Gleason, 287-313 on truth contests.

⁴¹⁵ See for example Most (1992) on Neronian poetry, Gleason (2001) on Josephus, Rimell (2002) on Petronius, as well as König (2008) on the Greek and Roman novels.

often seen as a highly self-conscious literary trope. We can therefore wonder what the abundance of dismemberments, amputations, impalements and other types of physical mutilation can draw the attention to in Procopius's text itself. In terms of ideological background, this perpetual demonstration of gratuitous violence seems to be there mostly for entertainment value, which makes us relate the *Wars* and the *Secret History* to literary genres such as colourful histories, mythography, and ancient novels.

In order to look at the mutilated bodies that populate Procopius' work, we can use Most's typology of different wounds; cuts, amputations, punctures and crushing blows⁴¹⁶. Amputations and punctures are particularly often represented in the *Wars* and the *Secret History*. These wounds seem to show a certain fascination with the reduction of a body to pieces and for the intruding of a foreign object into a body. In *Wars* VII.i.47-49, a scene of decapitation is represented in very vivid terms. The king Ildibadus is at a banquet when he is suddenly decapitated by Velas:

ὁ μὲν οὖν τὴν χεῖρα ἐπιβαλὼν ἐς τὰ βρώματα ἐπὶ τῆς στιβάδος προηγῆς ἔκειτο, Οὐέλας δὲ αὐτοῦ ἄφνω τῷ ξίφει τὸν τράχηλον παίει...⁴¹⁷

The movement in the description is very visual here as one can see the king extend his hand towards the food (τὴν χεῖρα ἐπιβαλὼν ἐς τὰ βρώματα) and the imperfect ἔκειτο seems to make this action last, as if in slow motion, which is quickly interrupted by the brief adverb ἄφνω which denotes the swiftness of the decapitation. The resulting image is presented as a true spectacle with an audience:

ὥστε, τῶν βρωμάτων ἔτι ἐχομένων ἐν τοῖς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου δακτύλοις, ἡ κεφαλὴ εἰς τὴν τράπεζαν καταρραγεῖσα ἐξέπληξέ τε καὶ ἐς θάμβος τι μέγα τοὺς παρόντας ἠνεγκεν ἅπαντας...⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ Most (1992), 398.

⁴¹⁷ *Wars* VII.i.47, so when he had stretched out his hand to the food as he lay reclining upon the couch, Velas suddenly smote his neck with his sword.

⁴¹⁸ VII.i.48, and so, while the food was still grasped in the man's fingers, his head was severed and fell upon the table, and filled all those present with great consternation and amazement.

This decapitation results here in a separation between the body, with the hand still active and clutching its food, and the head rolling on the table with a will of its own. What is typically Procopian here, apart from the shockingly visual representation of violence, is how he depicts an audience in awe, with the expression ‘ἐς δάμβος τι μέγα’, which is reinforced by the use of the adjective ἅπαντας, and invites the reader to join all the spectators in awe.

Further than decapitation, it is bodies cut into pieces that attract our attention in Procopius. In *Wars* III.v.2, Maximus is first stoned to death by the Romans (λίθοις βαλόντες διέφθειραν), before his head and his other limbs are cut off (τὴν τε κεφαλὴν τῶν τε ἄλλων μελῶν ἕκαστον ἀποτεμόμενοι). This dismemberment is represented as executed with a lot of minutiae in that the members are cut one by one (ἕκαστον) and the soldiers take the parts away with them (διειλόντο). Similarly, in *Wars* VI.xxi.40, a prefect called Reparatus is cut into small pieces (ἔκοψάν τε κατὰ βραχὺ) and his flesh is thrown to the dogs (αὐτοῦ τὰ κρέα τοῖς κυσὶν ἔρριψαν). Those two examples show how a body once cut is disposable; indeed, without unity, it is mere chunks of flesh. The *Secret History* has its own share of dismemberments as well. In *Secret History* I.27, Antonina is shown dismembering people – a servant and her children – in a shockingly graphic manner:

οὐς δὴ ἅπαντας πρῶτα τὰς γλώττας, ὥσπερ λέγουσιν, ἀποτεμοῦσα, εἶτα κατὰ βραχὺ κρεουργήσασα καὶ θυλακίαις ἐμβεβλημένη ἐς τὴν θάλατταν ὀκνήσει οὐδεμιᾶ ἔρριψε...⁴¹⁹

It is not clear in this passage whether the reader is meant to think the tongues were cut off while they were still alive, but one would assume so. It does not say either precisely whether Antonina did it herself or had her henchmen do it, but it is nonetheless described with pretty ghastly terms such as the colourful verb κρεουργήσασα which

⁴¹⁹ ‘And they say that she first cut out all their tongues, and then cut them up bit by bit, threw the pieces into sacks, and then without ado cast them into the sea’

makes us picture her as a butcher cutting meat (the usual meaning in which *κρεουργέω* is used). This scene paints the portrait of Antonina in the *Secret History* as a pendant to the character of Theodora in terms of sadism and inhumanity.

A famous assassination of an emperor is that of Domitian, as reported by authors such as Suetonius⁴²⁰ and Cassius Dio⁴²¹. Procopius offers his own version of it, with a strange anecdote that he is the only one to report: the statue of the dismembered Domitian. In *Secret History* viii.13, Procopius states that Justinian looked like Domitian who had been dismembered (using the expression *κρεουργήσαντες ὅλον* with the same verb, to butcher). One can wonder whether Justinian looked like Domitian dismembered, since Procopius insists so much on the deconstructive quality of Justinian's body as in *Secret History* xii.20-23. This impression is confirmed in the following passage that states pretty clearly that Justinian looked like a dismembered Domitian. Procopius tells the anecdote of Domitian's wife sewing her husband's body back together so that sculptors could make a statue of him in this state:

τὰ Δομετιανοῦ ξυλλεξαμένη κρέα, ξυνθεῖσά τε αὐτὰ ἐς τὸ ἀκριβῆς καὶ ἐναρμοσαμένη ἐς ἄλληλα κατέραψε μὲν τὸ σῶμα ὅλον, τοῖς δὲ πλάσταις ἐνδείξαμένη ἐν εἰκόνι χαλκῇ τὸ πάθος ἀπομιμεῖσθαι τοῦτο ἐκέλευεν...⁴²²

There is something almost obscene in the way Domitian's wife collects the pieces of his flesh and then displays them to the sculptors. There seems to be a particular effort in accurately putting back the pieces together, as the very cold-blooded adverb *ἐς τὸ ἀκριβῆς*, precisely, and the technical verb *ἐναρμοσαμένη*, assemble, convey. It is not surprising when Procopius finally announces that Justinian looked exactly like the statue modelled on Domitian's corpse. For an author who has a strong tendency to

⁴²⁰ Suetonius *Life of Domitian*, 23.

⁴²¹ Cassius Dio *Roman History* LXVII.16-18.

⁴²² *Collecting the flesh of Domitian, and putting the pieces accurately together and fitting them one to the other, she sewed up the whole body; then, displaying it to the sculptors, she bade them represent in a bronze statue the fate which had befallen her husband.*

organize and rationalize everything, trying to make sense of the pieces that make a building a whole, as one can see in his description of Hagia Sophia in the *Buildings*, or in his compulsive lists of places in the same world, the fact that his vision of true evil is that of a patchworked emperor comes as quite natural. The texture of his work might be rather similar to a patchwork in the way it puts together different genres, but that is another problem.

The other type of wound that appears a lot in Procopius is the puncture, represented especially by an abundance of words evoking impalement (nineteen in the *Wars* and two in the *Secret History*⁴²³). Impalements are common in Greek historiography that evokes barbarian warfare, such as in Herodotus⁴²⁴. But they also appear in the context of novels such as in Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*⁴²⁵ and in Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*⁴²⁶, novels which are obviously playing on the spectacular aspect of impalement. In Procopius, it is not only the spectacular aspect of impalement that draws attention to itself, but the fascination with the penetration of a body by a foreign object.

In *Wars* VII.xxxviii.20-21, it is said that the Goths do not use swords or spears (οὔτε ξίφει οὔτε δόρατι) to kill their victims but stakes (σκόλοπας). These stakes are said to be made extremely sharp (ὄξειζ τε αὐτοὺς ἐς τὰ μάλιστα ποιησάμενοι). The way they are used is described in terms which evoke violence, such as the expression ξὺν βία πολλῇ, and in a particularly graphic way:

⁴²³ The verb ἀνασκολοπίζω appears in *Wars* II.xi.37; II.xi.38; II.xvii.11; II.xvii.13, III.iii.33; III.xii.10; III.xii.22; IV.i.8; IV. xviii.18 and in *Secret History* xvii.4 and xxvii.19, the verb σκολοπίζω in *Wars* V. x.48, and the noun σκόλοψ in *Wars* III.xv.33; III.xxiii.19; V.xix.11; VII.xxiv.5; VII.xxiv.16; VII.xxiv.17; VII.xxiv.18 and two times in VII.xxviii.20.

⁴²⁴ See for example *Histories* I.128; III.132; III.159; IV.43; IV.202 and IX.78 for some impalements.

⁴²⁵ See *Chaereas and Callirhoe* III.IV.18 and VIII.vii.8, the same verb is used as in Procopius; however the translator (Georges Molinié) translates it by 'crucify'.

⁴²⁶ See *Aethiopica* IV.xx.2.

τὴν τε σκολόπων ἀκμὴν γλουτῶν κατὰ μέσον ἐνείροντες ὠθούντες τε ἄχρι ἐς τῶν ἀνδρώπων τὰ ἔγκατα...⁴²⁷

This description illustrates the violence of this mode of torture by referring to the body parts it mutilates; *γλουτῶν κατὰ μέσον* and *τὰ ἔγκατα*. The anatomical precision can evoke that of medical texts by Galen which show spectacular mutilations in the context of public dissections⁴²⁸ - Galen who also uses a lot of the words for impalement in his text⁴²⁹. Procopius also gives an alternative way of using stakes by planting four thick ones in the ground (*ξύλα δὲ παχέα τέτταρα ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐς γῆν κατορύξαντες*) and then, binding captives to them by their hands and feet (*ἐπ' αὐτῶν τε χεῖράς τε καὶ πόδας τῶν ἡλωκότων δεσμεύοντες*) before beating them persistently over the head (*καρὰ κόρρης ἐνδελεχέστατα παίοντες*) like dogs, or snakes, or any other animal (*ὡς δὴ κύνας ἢ ὄφεις ἢ ἄλλο τι θηρίον*). The violence here is emphasized by the treatment of the victims that is compared to that of animals.

Torture being one of the *topoi* associated with tyrants, it is not surprising that Theodora is shown herself using an instrument of torture in *Secret History* xvi.26. The object in question is a leather strap (*νευρὰν βοείαν*) which is used to force a young man called Theodore to lie about one of his friends, Diogenes, whom Theodora is said to be displeased with. The strap is wound on Theodore's head around the ears (*τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀμφὶ τὰ ὦτα περιελίξαντας*) and then twisted and tightened (*τὴν νευρὰν στρέφειν τε καὶ σφίγγειν*). Once again the torture is described very graphically and details are given about how Theodore felt:

καὶ τοὺς μὲν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὺς Θεόδωρος ἐκπεπηδηκέναι τὴν οἰκείαν λιπόντας χώραν ὑπώπτειν...⁴³⁰

⁴²⁷ *Driving the point of the stake between the buttocks and forcing it up into the intestines.*

⁴²⁸ On the spectacular and gruesome aspect of those demonstrations, see Gleason (2007).

⁴²⁹ A search on the online TLG revealed 52 occurrences of such words.

⁴³⁰ *And Theodore believed that his eyes had jumped out of his head, leaving their proper seats.*

One cannot deny the visual qualities of this description of the eyes popping out of their orbits, which make for a rather haunting picture. A further example of an object used on the eyes to torture someone is that of the iron needle in *Wars* VIII.x.20-21. Chosroes is shown here mutilating his own son, Anasozadus, so that he cannot become king. The iron needle (περόνην σιδηρᾶν) is heated (πυρακτώσας τινά) and then used to sear the outside of Anasozadus' eyes (ταύτη μύοντοιν τοῖν τοῦ παιδὸς ὀφθαλμοῖν τὰ ἔξω χρίσας). The aim of this mutilation is to disfigure the young man by distorting the upper and lower lids in a very disgraceful way (βλέφαρά τε ἄνω καὶ κάτω ἀκοσμίᾳ πολλῇ ἀντιστρέψας). It is interesting in a work that is often concerned with the act of seeing, that both examples with Theodore and Anasozadus depict ocular torture.

Mutilation and disfigurement are recurring themes in Procopius' work; the most obvious example for this being Justinian walking headless in the palace and his facial features disappearing when his head is back on in *Secret History* xii.20-23, which is used as proof of his inhuman, or rather demonic, nature. There is a particularly striking example of objects causing mutilations in *Wars* VI.ii.14-18 where two soldiers get wounded by a javelin and an arrow. The first one, Cutilas, is struck in the head by a javelin; however he keeps riding with the javelin in his head waving about (κραδαινόμενου οἱ ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ τοῦ ἀκοντίου), a sight which Procopius judges worthy of many accounts (θέαμα λόγου πολλοῦ ἄξιον). The second one, Arzes, is hit by an arrow between the nose and the right eye in the following manner:

καὶ τοῦ μὲν τοξεύματος ἡ ἀκὴς ἄχρι ἐς τὸν αὐχένα ὀπίσω διήλθεν, οὐ μέντοι διεφάνη, τοῦ δὲ ἀτράκτου τὸ λειπόμενον ἐπὶν τε τῷ προσώπῳ καὶ ἵππευομένου τοῦ ἀνδρώπου ἐσεῖετο...⁴³¹

⁴³¹ 'And the point of the arrow penetrated as far as the neck behind, but it did not show through, and the rest of the shaft projected from his face and shook as the man rode.'

This is, once more, a very visual description with the precise depth of the wound, and the movement of the arrow stuck in Arzes's face while he rides. The sight of Cutilas' and Arzes's wounds are said to make the other Roman soldiers marvel (*ἐν θαύματι μεγάλῳ ἐποιοῦντο Ῥωμαῖοι*). Nevertheless, these descriptions of weapons stuck in heads and faces, waving about, can seem quite ridiculous and provoke the readers' laugh. This Bergsonian laughter is caused by the visual comedy in the representation of a mechanical body, with the shaking and waving of the soldiers' ridiculous appendices. Similarly in *Wars* VI.xxiii.35-39, a Moor is struck by a javelin while dragging away a Goth's corpse to pillage him. Consequently, his legs are pinned together by the javelin (*ἐνέρσει τοῦ ἀκοντίου ἄμφω τῶ πόδε ξυνέδησεν*), but he keeps holding onto the corpse by the hair (*τῶν τριχῶν ἐχόμενος τὸν νεκρὸν εἴλκεν*) so that the Roman soldiers end up having to carry the whole package in a very comical image.

Images of mutilation abound in Procopius and represent the many ways a human body can be violated and made to lose its humanity. There is something very graphic about those descriptions and what one could almost call an *enargeia* of physical violence, for example in the scene of the decapitation of Ildibadus, or whenever bodies are cut into pieces in both the *Wars* and the *Secret History*. An extreme example of visual grotesque is the patchwork made with Domitian's dismembered body, which is used to describe Justinian. This is part of the process of representing his inhuman and demonic nature, just like his disfigurement. Finally, the depiction of foreign objects violating bodies in images of impalement or with the representation of weapons jutting out of wounds can provoke both laughter and unease at the sight of a mechanical body, which has lost its humanity.

The fragmentation of bodies and their loss of integrity could be said, on a first level to reflect a certain concern with identity and its self-representation – a topic which we already saw with the use of apparel – perhaps even an anxiety about the fragility of identity. On another level, the many fragmented bodies could be said to reflect that of the text; particularly in the case of the *Secret History* which is definitely not a monolithic work in its themes and literary texture, as it goes from what Adshead refers to as a sort of ‘Milesian tale’ to a legal pamphlet in a very abrupt way⁴³². Even the *Wars* and the *Buildings* could be said at the least to be hybrid texts. Finally even if the *Buildings* does not represent human bodies threatened with fragmentation, it could be said that its descriptions of buildings are concerned with fragmentation at the level of each stones, not to mention that it discusses the theme of ruin often, from the danger of collapse in Hagia Sophia’s dome to the many fortifications falling apart before Justinian’s intervention.

Between terror and laughter: the spectacle of violence

Humour can be quite a potent form of violence in Procopius in the way it can publicly ridicule someone, as in the case of Peter in *Wars* II.xviii.26. The Persians humiliate him in the following way:

οἱ δὲ Πέρσαι τῇ ἐπιγινομένη ἡμέρᾳ ἐν πύργῳ τινὶ ἔστησαν ἀντὶ τροφαίου τὸ Πέτρου σημεῖον, ἀλλάντάς τε αὐτοῦ ἀποκρεμάσαντες τοῖς πολεμίοις ξὺν γέλῳτι ἐπετώθασον...⁴³³

⁴³² Adshead (1993), 6 actually argues that the *Secret History* is in fact three separate opuscula put together many centuries later by a compiler, but this is not a view shared by other Procopian scholars, myself included.

⁴³³ *The Persians on the following day set up on a tower instead of a trophy the standard of Peter, and hanging sausages from it they taunted the enemy with laughter.*

Here, the Persians take an object extremely strong in ideological content, Peter's standard, and ridicule it by attaching food to it, associating high values of honour in war and lower vices like gluttony. It is a highly symbolical gesture in that the standard embodies the idea of the pride of an army and capturing and mutilating it is a very strong way of unsettling the enemy. This grotesque spectacle could be seen as a sort of comic relief as it comes after a Roman defeat and serves to lighten the tone, turning the incident of Peter's failure into a joke and ridiculing him by way of his standard.

A character who is depicted as fond of humiliation in the *Secret History* is Theodora⁴³⁴ and she can be found using the comical means of a spectacle with props in order to humiliate a senator in *Secret History* iii.9. The props in question are a manger (φάτνης), and the rope that she uses to tie Theodosius by the neck to it (τινὸς βρόχον οἱ τοῦ τραχήλου ἀναψαμένη ἐς τοσόνδε βραχύν). The scene of Theodosius' humiliation is then described in the following terms:

ἐσθηκῶς ἀμέλει διηνεκὲς ἐπὶ ταύτης δὴ τῆς φάτνης ὁ τάλας ἤσθιέ τε καὶ ὕπνον ἤρεϊτο, καὶ τὰς ἄλλας ἤνυεν ἀπάσας τῆς φύσεως χρείας, ἄλλο τέ οἱ οὐδὲν ἐς τὸ τοῖς ὄνοις εἰκάζεσθαι ὅ τι μὴ βρωμᾶσθαι ἐλέλειπτο...⁴³⁵

The allusion to 'the needs of nature' and the comparison with the ass⁴³⁶ cannot but make this scene both horrible and funny. The sentence could be said to start off as fairly pathetic with the word *τάλας*, but then takes a turn to the grotesque with the scatological allusion as well as with the comical-sounding *βρωμᾶσθαι*. Theodora's fondness for theatrical humiliations is also quite blatant in *Secret History* 24-35 which first relates a patrician's long and pathetic complaint to which Theodora answers in a song where she

⁴³⁴ Sometimes in the case of her own humiliation, which she is always keen to display in pornographic spectacles (e.g. ix.14).

⁴³⁵ *So the poor wretch stood there continuously at this manger, both eating and sleeping and fulfilling all the other needs of nature, and nothing except braying was needed to complete his resemblance to the ass.*

⁴³⁶ The ass which evokes all the ass narratives and an interesting parallel could be drawn between the woman having sex with a donkey in public to the image of Theodora using other animals, geese, to grab grains displayed on her genitals (ix.20-22).

is singing the lead and her eunuchs are the chorus, a song whose lyrics are simply ‘It is a large hernia you have!’ (*μεγάλην κήλην ἔχεις*). This passage is obviously a reminder of Theodora’s past as an actress and it also hints at her lack of *gravitas* as an empress as she makes one of her duties, which is to listen to her subjects’ complaints, into a mockery. Comedy in the *Secret History* often comes from everything that is low and relates to the body, like food, drink and sex. As for the use of humour in the context of violent scenes, it cannot help but make the reader uneasy as in *Wars* IV.iv.17-19 when Uliaris, a drunken soldier, kills John the Armenian while trying to shoot a bird. Instead of being tragic, the irony of the accident makes it a comical passage.

Chapter Conclusion

Violence is not monolithically shaped in Procopius; like the column supporting Justinian’s statue, it is made of layers of genres which come in an incredible variety mortised by the ambiguity of the moods and tones on which the author is playing, sewing meticulously together comic and tragic like a patchwork, as meticulously as Domitian’s wife sewing chunks of flesh back together. There is a genuine joy for the modern critical reader in witnessing Procopius butchering and sewing back together different literary commonplaces. Perhaps his literary qualities reside mostly in his ability to mix and match different literary textures from lower and higher literary genres, with parallels in technical texts such as the anatomy lessons of Galen, pure entertainment like novels, and ethnography like Herodotus. Some of the examples of the spectacles in the *Secret History* even evoke comedy or mime. By putting this emphasis

on violence as visual and performative, Procopius creates a catalogue of striking images which will haunt his reader and shape his vision of the world of Justinian.

CHAPTER 5

THE SUPERNATURAL: WONDERS, OMENS, ORACLES, DREAMS AND VISIONS

The omnipresence of paradoxical digressions and occurrences of the supernatural in Procopius' work invites us to consider these passages as more than mere respite from the narrative but as central focal points in his work. Paradoxography, which consists in recording wonders/*thaumata*, is represented as a genre by various authors, Greeks such as Phlegon of Tralles, Apollonius and Heraclitus the paradoxographers, and in Latin, the very respectable Varro and Cicero are said to have written such works, as well as Christian authors writing collections of miracles. But it also pervades different types of literature from historians such as Herodotus, sophists like Lucian, and the ancient novelists. An excellent volume edited by Philip Hardie also examines the paradoxical aspect of Augustan literature and culture, an aspect which might seem in contradiction to its usual perception as highly classical⁴³⁷. The latter allows the paradoxical to be considered a main issue in classical literature, as opposed to a marginal phenomenon limited to low-brow literature.

Furthermore, the sheer abundance of digressions in Procopius, whether paradoxical, scientific or technical, demands that the digressive form and its function themselves be examined, as Morales says that:

⁴³⁷ Hardie (2009).

much of interest [...] should be said about how ‘digressions’ function in a narrative, or indeed about what constitutes the digressive and whether temporal and thematic continuity should be our main criteria for assessing a novel’s value⁴³⁸

Even though Procopius was not writing a novel, it surely seems that thematic continuity might be the worst criterion by which to judge his work which possesses a seemingly extravagant level of *poikilia*. Paradoxography also introduces some essential questions such as the author’s self-representation in his work, particularly in regards to reliability and rationality, but also the relationship between visual and verbal language, and the notions of truth, history and fiction. The question of paradoxical material being included mostly for entertainment should also be addressed. The variety of this material is extremely rich but could be divided, perhaps artificially, into the following categories: animals, omens, oracles, and dreams and visions which are two sides of the same problem.

Fabulous animals in the *Wars*

In the *Wars*, Procopius includes many anecdotes in his narrative. These colourful *vignettes* serve multiple purposes in the narrative, such as ethnographical digressions, flashbacks and *mises en abime*. Some of these tales include strange and marvellous animals. Paradoxical and exotic animals are obviously commonplace in natural historians such as Pliny, but they are also extremely abundant in the ancient novels, for example, just in Achilles Tatius we find an Egyptian ox, a phoenix, a crocodile, a hippopotamus and an Indian elephant. Wonderful animals can be seen to fulfil various objectives in Procopius’s narrative strategy; first, they offer a deliberate

⁴³⁸ Morales (1995), 40.

focus on visuality and *thaumata*, but also a way of introducing an oblique commentary on his own work and persona as a historian. The use of animals to comment on human life plays on their recognisability at the same time as their strangeness which allows the comment to operate on an ‘*oblique level*’⁴³⁹. This is particularly the case in fables. Van Dijk’s great survey on fables states that fables are not very common in historiography and that all of them are part of, or even constitute, a speech delivered by a leader to a larger audience⁴⁴⁰. There is one occurrence of a fable⁴⁴¹ in the *Wars*, at the beginning of book I (I.iii.13). This fable is immediately identifiable as such as it is introduced by the author as *μυθολογία*. It is told by Eusebius to the king Perozes as a covert way to dissuade him from attacking the Huns. The fable itself represents a lion attracted by a goat tethered on a mound surrounded by a ditch, a trap which turns the lion from hunter to hunted. The story is successful at persuading Perozes and dissuading him, demonstrating the efficiency of adopting the oblique and figurative way. Now we will consider four examples of animals; a she-goat, some circus animals, a shark and a magic doe, and see if they fulfil the same agenda and what they say about Procopius’ narrative persona.

The evil-bringing doe

Tales of wonderful animals are not just digressions from the narrative of the *Wars* but can be an integral part of it, as in *Wars* VIII.v where a magic animal is used to explain the change in foreign policy of the Cimmerians. In VIII.v.4, Procopius insists on the reluctance of the Cimmerians to cross the Maeotic Lake:

⁴³⁹ See previous note.

⁴⁴⁰ Van Dijk (1997), 285.

⁴⁴¹ For a close analysis of this fable, see Van Dijk (1994), 376-379.

οὔτοι μὲν ἅπαντες τῆδε ὄκοντο, κοινὰ μὲν τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα ζύμπαντα ἔχοντες, οὐκ ἐπιμιγνύμενοι δὲ ἀνθρώποις οἱ δὴ τῆς τε Λίμνης καὶ τῆς ἐνδένδε ἐκροῆς ἐς τὰ ἐπὶ θάτερα ἴδρουντο, ἐπεὶ οὔτε διέβαινόν ποτε τὰ ὕδατα ταῦτα οὔτε διαβατὰ εἶναι ὑπόπτειον, πρὸς τὰ εὐκολώτατα περίφοβοι ὄντες, τῷ μὴδὲ ἀποπειράσασθαι αὐτῶν πώποτε, ἀλλ' ἀμελέτητοι τῆς διαβάσεως παντάπασιν εἶναι...⁴⁴²

He uses a parallel structure with οὔτε to stress that not only did the Cimmerians not cross the water (διέβαινόν), but they did not even think about crossing (διαβατὰ εἶναι ὑπόπτειον). The juxtaposition of εὐκολώτατα and περίφοβοι also reinforces this insistence with the use of a superlative and a prefix of insistence (περί). The use of the adverbs μὴδὲ πώποτε and παντάπασιν contributes to adding another layer of insistence. This strategy of insistence sets the scene for the supernatural anecdote that follows and finally sees the Cimmerians cross the waters. The story is introduced with a conditional clause allowing some doubt: εἴπερ ὁ λόγος ὑγιῆς ἐστί (if the story is sound)⁴⁴³. This is a good example of Procopius' narrative stance which often warns the reader that there might be some amount of untruthfulness in the tales he reports, and allows him to protect his textual authority. The story itself starts as fairly straightforward and anecdotal: some young Cimmerians were hunting and a single doe escaped by leaping into these waters. The hunters' reaction which is to follow the doe across those forbidden waters, is itself given three possible explanations:

τούς τε νεανίας, εἴτε φιλοτιμία εἴτε φιλονεικία τινὶ ἐχομένους, ἢ καὶ τι δαιμόνιον αὐτοὺς κατηνάγκασε, τῇ ἐλάφῳ ἐπισπένθαι ταύτην, μηχανῆ τε μεδίεσθαι αὐτῆς οὐδεμίᾳ, ἕως ξὺν αὐτῇ ἐς τὴν ἀντιπέρας ἀκτὴν ἴκοντο.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² All these now continued to live in this region, associating freely in all the business of life, but not mingling with the people who were settled on the other side of the lake and its outlet; for they never crossed these waters at any time nor did they suspect that they could be crossed, being fearful of that which was really easy, simply because they had never even attempted to cross them, and they remained utterly ignorant of the possibility.

⁴⁴³ VIII.v.7

⁴⁴⁴ VIII.v.8, and the youths, either moved by a thirst for glory or in some sort of competition, or perhaps it was really some deity which constrained them, followed after this doe and refused absolutely to let her go, until they came with her to the opposite shore.

As often happens in Procopius, the first two reasons are rational and the third supernatural. The first two are human motivations, *φιλοτιμία*, the love of glory, and *φιλονεικία*, the love of emulation. The third refers to some supernatural being, ‘*τι δαιμόνιον*’, exercising control over them. Procopius expresses doubts over the nature of the animal *τὸ μὲν διωκόμενον ὃ τι ποτ’ἦν* (‘the quarry, whatever it was’), who suddenly vanished, *εὐθὺς ἀφανισθῆναι*. This sudden disappearance of the animal allows him to introduce his opinion which relies on the supernatural explanation:

*δοκεῖν γάρ μοι οὐδὲ ἄλλου του ἔνεκα ἐνταῦθα ἐφάνη, ὅτι μὴ τοῦ γενέσθαι κακῶς τοῖς τῆδε ὠκημένοις βαρβάροις...*⁴⁴⁵

This opinion is clearly presented as Procopius’ own (*δοκεῖν γάρ μοι*). The reason he gives for the appearance of the doe is that it came to bring evil (*τοῦ γενέσθαι κακῶς*) to the barbarians. He then goes on to describe the Cimmerians’ invasion and plundering of the land beyond the lake in VIII.v.10-12. This example further demonstrates that even if there is an element of hesitation, Procopius handles an episode of what could be straightforward military history as a supernatural tale, blending the boundaries between the military narrative and the paradoxical digressions.

Procopius and the nursing-goat

In *Wars* VI.xvii, the anecdote of the nursing goat allows Procopius to represent himself as an audience, since he tells the anecdote as an eye-witness. The act of seeing is emphasized from the beginning in VI.xvii.1 where he introduces the digression in the following terms: *Ἐνταῦθά μοι ἰδεῖν θέαμα ξυνηνέχθη τοιόνδε*. He then goes on telling the story of an infant abandoned by his mother in the confusion caused by John’s army and

⁴⁴⁵ VIII.v.9, *for in my opinion it appeared there for no other purpose than that evil might befall the barbarians who lived in that region.*

consequently nursed by a she-goat. The weird aspect of the incident is demonstrated by the reaction of the women of Picenum who find the infant in VI.xvii.7:

τὸ γεγονός ξυμβάλλειν οὐδαμῇ ἔχουσαι ἐν θαύματι μεγάλῳ ὅτι δὴ βιώη
πεποιήνται...⁴⁴⁶

The emphasis on the surprise of the women is interesting here because it can hardly be mirrored by the reader's reaction. Indeed, the reader possesses the knowledge that the women are lacking in order to explain this sight. Usually when Procopius represents an audience inside the text it is to manipulate the reader's impression; for example by representing the viewers of Hagia Sophia in awe, he invites the reader to be in awe of the church as well – and of the description of the church. But what makes this anecdote special is the fact that Procopius is actively involved in it. After describing the women's attempt and failure at nursing the baby, Procopius represents himself encountering the baby and his goat in VI.xvii.10:

καὶ ἤνικα μοι ἐπιδημεῖν ἐνταῦθα ξυνέβη, ἐπίδειξιν τοῦ παραλόγου ποιούμενοι παρά τε τὸ
παιδίον ἦγον καὶ αὐτὸ ἐξεπίτηδες, ἵνα βοᾷ, ἐλύπουν.⁴⁴⁷

Interestingly enough, Procopius is seen by the locals as someone who would be interested in such a strange sight and they therefore make a display out of it. The placement of ἵνα βοᾷ between ἐξεπίτηδες and ἐλύπουν emphasizes the theatricality of this cruel display. The result is a comic scene with the goat bleating and standing over the infant to defend him. This sentence can also be seen to echo Lysias:

μετὰ δὲ τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ παιδίον ἐβόα καὶ ἐδυσκόλαιεν ὑπὸ τῆς θεραπεαίνου ἐπίτηδες
λυπούμενον, ἵνα ταῦτα ποιῇ...⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ They were utterly unable to comprehend what had happened and considered it very wonderful that the infant was living.

⁴⁴⁷ And when I happened to be sojourning in that place, by way of making a display of the strange sight they took me near the infant and purposely hurt it so that it might cry out.

⁴⁴⁸ Lysias I.xi.

Procopius finishes the story by saying: *τὰ μὲν οὖν ἀμφὶ τῷ Αἰγίσθῳ τούτῳ τοιαῦτά ἐστι,* only using the infant's name at the end to close the narrative with a pun⁴⁴⁹. The name Aegisthus also evokes the mythical character of the same name, who was involved in adultery, the theme of Lysias' speech which this passage was reminiscent of. This anecdote presents Procopius as the audience for a weird spectacle; however, it does not provide any direct information on what his reaction was. Indeed, although this anecdote presents elements that could invite a discussion of the relationship between sadism, voyeurism and entertainment, it is not however exploited, and appears rather as an opportunity for Procopius to represent himself as this worldly traveller in exotic places where the indigenous people recognise him as this amateur of curiosities.

Augarus and his menagerie

The depiction of wonderful animals also allows Procopius to discuss the rhetorical efficiency of visual *thaumata* which is exemplified by the story of Augarus in the amphitheatre in *Wars* II.xii. This is a historical flashback, as the expression *ἐν τοῖς ἄνω χρόνοις* in earlier times indicates⁴⁵⁰. Augarus was a king of Edessa whose conversation was so delightful that the emperor of Rome would not let him leave his side. Procopius introduces the anecdote by emphasizing how impossible it was for him to persuade Augustus to let him go:

*καί ποτε ἐς ἡθῆν πάτρια ἐθέλων ἰέναι πείθειν τε τὸν Αὔγουστον μεθεῖναι αὐτὸν ὡς ἡμιστὰ ἔχων, ἐπενόει τάδε...*⁴⁵¹

Normal persuasion, *πείθειν*, does not seem to work on Augustus, so Augarus has to devise a different plan to get what he wants. He first goes to hunt for animals around

⁴⁴⁹ VI.xvii.11.

⁴⁵⁰ II.xii.8.

⁴⁵¹ II.xii.10, *and one day when he was wishing to return to his native land and was utterly unable to persuade Augustus to let him go, he devised the following plan.*

Rome and also picks up earth from all the different regions where he found them. He then has Augustus sitting in the hippodrome and watching as he puts the earth in different parts of the arena and then releases the animals all at once. When the animals instinctively go to stand where the earth from their natural habitat is, Augustus is quite struck and has to watch intently (ἐπὶ πλεῖστον τὰ ποιούμενα ἐς τὸ ἀκριβὲς ἔβλεπε) and is surprised (ἐθαύμαζε) that the animals naturally miss their homeland without being taught⁴⁵². His performance having achieved its aim, Augustus then proceeds to ask the emperor how he thinks he feels when he has a family and kingdom in his native land. Augustus is then said to be overcome by the truth of this speech (τῷ ἀληθεῖ τοῦ λόγου ἠσσηθεῖς τε καὶ βιασθεῖς) and finally lets him leave⁴⁵³. This story proves once more that visual language is sometimes more powerful than rhetoric. It also shows that inducing wonder/*thauma* can be a useful rhetorical tool in persuasion; another reason, perhaps, for Procopius to display an array of *thaumata*.

The shark and the pearl

This reflection on visibility and *thaumata* as rhetorical instruments is further elaborated in the story of the shark and the pearl in *Wars* I.iv. This digression is woven into the narrative of the Persian wars, introduced by the episode of Perozes' death in I.iv.14-16. About to die, the Persian king throws away his pearl earring. His motivation, according to Procopius, is to keep it from being worn by anyone else (ὅπως δὴ μή τις αὐτὸ ὀπίσω φοροίη)⁴⁵⁴. The story does not seem all that believable for the author (ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐ πιστὰ λέγοντες)⁴⁵⁵, who finds it more likely that his ear was crushed and the pearl

⁴⁵² II.xii.15.

⁴⁵³ II.xii.17.

⁴⁵⁴ I.iv.14.

⁴⁵⁵ *idem*.

disappeared (οἶμαι τό τε οὖς αὐτῷ ἐν τούτῳ ξυγκεκρόφθαι τῷ πάθει καὶ τὸ μάργαρον ὅπη ποτὲ ἀφανισθῆναι)⁴⁵⁶. However, this thesis too is subsequently contradicted by another report (φασί) that the Ephthalitae found it and sold it to Cabades⁴⁵⁷. Whatever happened to Perozes' pearl after his death is therefore dubious. This strategy of instilling doubt sets the scene for the introduction of the story of the pearl: Ὅσα δὲ ἀμφὶ τῷ μαργάρῳ τούτῳ Πέρσαι λέγουσιν εἰπεῖν ἄξιον [...]⁴⁵⁸. First, it is interesting to see how Procopius shrugs off all authorial responsibility in this story from the start. The story of the pearl that is worth telling (ἄξιον) is the one told by the Persians (Πέρσαι λέγουσιν). The adjective ἄξιον is then explained in the following clause: ἴσως γὰρ ἂν τῷ καὶ οὐ πανταπασιν ἄπιστος ὁ λόγος δόξειεν εἶναι [...]⁴⁵⁹. This sentence embodies Procopius' play on credibility at its best. He formulates his idea in such a roundabout way that one wonders if he means one thing or the complete opposite. The use of the adverb ἴσως, from the beginning, informs the reader that this statement is only hypothetical. The use of ἂν and the optative δόξειεν reinforces this aspect, but the climax of doubtfulness resides in the central expression οὐ πανταπασιν ἄπιστος. The worth of the tale resides in the very slight possibility that it is not *completely* incredible. One can wonder here if what Procopius is getting at is that it is actually mostly incredible. So the quality of the story would therefore reside in its quality of being a story, and not a credible historical account.

The telling of the actual tale then starts with a λέγουσιν οὖν Πέρσαι, emphasizing again the fact that the Persians are responsible for this report⁴⁶⁰. First comes the geographical location of the oyster and its pearl; the sea that washes the Persian coast

⁴⁵⁶ I.iv.15, but I suppose that his ear was crushed in this disaster, and the pearl disappeared somewhere or other.

⁴⁵⁷ I.iv.16.

⁴⁵⁸ I.iv.17, the story of this pearl, as told by the Persians, is worth recounting [...].

⁴⁵⁹ *idem*, for perhaps to some it may not seem altogether incredible [...].

⁴⁶⁰ I.iv.18.

(ἐν θαλάσση ἢ ἐν Πέρσαις), and more precisely, not far off the shore (τῆς ταύτης ἡμόνος οὐ πολλῷ ἄποθεν)⁴⁶¹. The focus then zooms closer to the oyster whose valves are opened (ἀνεωγένοι τε αὐτοῦ ἄμφω τὰ ὄστρακα) in order to display the pearl in its centre (ᾧν κατὰ μέσον τὸ μάργαρον εἰστήκει) like an organic jewellery-case⁴⁶². The pearl itself is described as a ‘θέαμα λόγου πολλοῦ ἄξιον’⁴⁶³. This expression is blatantly rhetorical and the pearl does not get a particularly extensive description – even if the narrative of the pearl in itself is rather extensive. There is only one sentence dedicated to its physical appearance, which uses a negative construction, not telling what the pearl is like but rather stating that no oysters could ever compare in terms of size and beauty, a statement emphasized by the hyperbolic ‘οὐδαμῆ [...] ἐκ τοῦ παντὸς χρόνου’⁴⁶⁴. No wonder that no historical pearl could ever compare since our pearl here is outside of history and time. The shark himself is also an extreme type of shark, both in its hyperbolic qualities ‘ὑπερφυᾶ τε καὶ δεινῶς ἄγριον’ and its excessive behaviour⁴⁶⁵. First, he’s in love with a sight (θέαμα), following it days and nights (οὔτε νύκτα ἀνιέντα οὔτε ἡμέραν), taking the least possible amount of time to eat (ἐσθίειν μὲν ὅτι τάχιστα)⁴⁶⁶. Kaldellis’s analysis of this tale centres on the concept of *eros* and *pathos* as tyrannical attributes, drawing parallels with the *Secret History* and the characterisation of Chosroes, Justinian and Theodora⁴⁶⁷. Amusingly enough, the reader can see that the shark presents qualities of both Procopius and Justinian: the interest of the author in sights and visual qualities (which this thesis has tried to point out so far) and the extreme business and disregard for food of the Byzantine emperor in the *Secret History*. The account of the shark’s

⁴⁶¹ I.iv.18.

⁴⁶² *idem.*

⁴⁶³ *idem.*

⁴⁶⁴ I.iv.18.

⁴⁶⁵ I.iv.19.

⁴⁶⁶ *idem.*

⁴⁶⁷ Kaldellis (2004), 75-80.

attitude around the pearl, at any rate, starts with the sight he falls in love with (*ἐραστήν τοῦ θαλάσσιου τούτου γενόμενον*) and finishes with him sating himself with this sight (*θαλάσσιου αἰθέρος τοῦ ἐρωμένου ἐμπίπλασθαι*)⁴⁶⁸. Procopius emphasizes this aesthetic appreciation which, for me, indicates that this passage is more than a political criticism of tyranny. Indeed, even though tyrants are sometimes depicted as aesthetic connoisseurs in literature, Justinian however is never said to appreciate art particularly, even in the *Buildings*, and the appreciation of art is definitely a positive category in Procopius' work.

The fisherman character finally appears at this point in the tale; he's said at first to recoil from danger (*ἀποδειλιάσαντα*⁴⁶⁹ δὲ τὸ θηρόν ἀποκνήσαι τὸν κίνδυνον) but then he proceeds to tell Perozes what he saw, and the king subsequently falls in love with the pearl himself⁴⁷⁰. The fisherman's account must have been very powerful to provoke this longing in the king, which makes us wonder about this fisherman who surely must not know rhetoric but still manages to make an impression on the king. The fisherman's speech, which is then quoted, is not very elaborate and does not elicit a reaction from Perozes. This fisherman seems to have that in common with our author that he can make people long for a sight (such as Hagia Sophia) but his speeches leave their audience cold. The scene of the capture of the pearl is then described, the fisherman observing the shark for his moment (*καιροφυλακῶν*) and as soon as the latter has gone to catch food, he seizes the pearl and hurls it to the shore before being eaten by the monster⁴⁷¹. This episode is very vivid and the atmosphere of urgency well rendered with

⁴⁶⁸ I.iv.19.

⁴⁶⁹ Interestingly enough, the same verb is used by Procopius in the prologue of the *Secret History* about himself: *οὐκ ἀποδειλιάσω τὸν ὄγκον τοῦ ἔργου, I shall not flinch from the immensity of the task, Secret History*, i.5.

⁴⁷⁰ I.iv.20.

⁴⁷¹ I.iv.27-29.

adverbs such as *τάχιστα*, *εὐθύ*, *κατὰ τάχος* and expressions such as *ταύτη [.] τῆ ὑπουργία*, ‘with all his might’, and *σπουδῆ πολλῆ*, ‘with great speed’⁴⁷². Some men that were on the beach then find the pearl and bring it to Perozes as well as reporting to him what happened. Procopius tells us that the men’s report is the account he has just given us, once more insisting on shrugging off all authorship of this passage. We never end up finding out if the king did in the end reward the fisherman’s children. This digression is overall very puzzling; at first, it could appear to be a sort of exotic digression in the Herodotean style, a Persian tale inserted in the account of the wars to entertain the reader with a picturesque piece. Perhaps it was an actual Persian tale whose source we have lost. But even if pearls are indeed common in Persian and Syriac literature (for example in the *Hymn of the Soul* where a pearl is protected by a dragon⁴⁷³), this passage does not seem particularly Persian, or even remotely exotic. The absence of moral at the end also keeps it from resembling a folkloric fable, even if a few moral generalities are mentioned in the fisherman’s speech. I would tend to think that this is a pure fabrication of Procopius, which is befitting since it seems to be about storytelling. What we get from this tale is the power of attraction of images, but also the power of a good, vivid description, which can be more effective than a speech.

Animal narratives in Procopius’s work appear to serve different purposes, but all have in common the quality of being visual and of inviting the reader to ponder the efficiency of the language of images. Procopius appears to make his paradoxical digressions blend seamlessly with the political and military narrative, as he does with the tale of the war-causing doe. Furthermore, oftentimes the paradoxical episodes are

⁴⁷² I.iv.28.

⁴⁷³ Translation by Bevan (1897).

set up like spectacles, for example when Procopius represents himself as the audience for a comic scene with the nursing goat and her human baby, but also when Augarus uses the amphitheatre to set up a performance to persuade the emperor to let him go. This last example demonstrates the efficacy of the visual over plain speech, as Augarus managed to achieve with a visual performance what he had failed to do with verbal entreaties. Finally, the tale of the shark and the pearl developed the same idea of the power of the visual and descriptive, going a step further as it was not just the image of the pearl itself that appeared to have power but its description as well. This story also played up aesthetic pleasure as extremely potent and even dangerous.

Deciphering omens

Supernatural events seem to provoke Procopius' interest in as much as they necessitate interpretation. That is the case of omens in particular which can announce events. They generally function as visual items that need to be deciphered in order to predict the future. However, the interpretative work seems to work the other way around in the context of history, as it seems the omens are interpreted retrospectively in the light of subsequent events. Omens indeed allow Procopius to discuss the process of interpretation, and especially the different techniques employed and the different interpreters. Procopius' self-representation as knowledgeable and rational historian is also at stake here. First, we will look at cosmological omens, then, more particularly at portents in the context of wars and finally at some difficulties in the interpretation process.

Cosmological omens

In *Wars* II.iv.1-3, Procopius mentions the appearance of a comet. He gives information on its size; saying it was at first the size of a tall man (*ὅσον εὐμήκης ἀνὴρ μάλιστα*), and then much larger (*ὑστερον δὲ καὶ πολλῶ μείζων*)⁴⁷⁴. He appears to choose a rational approach to this phenomenon; he then gives its situation with one end towards the west (*πρὸς δύοντα ἥλιον*) and the other towards the east (*πρὸς ἀνίσχοντα*), following the sun (*αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ ἡλίῳ ὀπισθεὲν εἶπετο*)⁴⁷⁵. He even states that the sun was in Capricorn and the comet in Sagittarius, although it might not mean much to his readership unless it is well versed in astronomy. He then provides us with the different names for this comet: first the swordfish (*ξιφίαν*), a name he explains by its size and pointy aspect (*ὅτι δὴ ἐπιμήκης τε ἦν καὶ λίαν ὀξεῖαν*), and the bearded start (*πωγωνίαν*) which he does not feel the need to explain⁴⁷⁶. He also notes the period during which the comet was seen; that is, during more than forty days (*ἡμέρας τε πλείους ἢ τεσσαράκοντα*). This rationalizing pose is kept throughout this passage since Procopius then proceeds to evoke the interpretation of this omen with as much distance as he can. He starts with reporting what the specialists said:

*οἱ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα σοφοὶ ἀλλήλοις ὡς ἤκιστα ὁμολογοῦντες ἄλλος ἄλλα προὔλεγον πρὸς τούτου δὴ τοῦ ἀστέρος σημαίνεσθαι [...]*⁴⁷⁷

The juxtaposition of *ἄλλος* and *ἄλλα* and the use of *ἀλλήλοις* emphasize the disagreement between the specialists while keeping the discourse vague and not mentioning what their different theories actually are. This is to give the reader the

⁴⁷⁴ II.iv.1.

⁴⁷⁵ *Idem*.

⁴⁷⁶ II.iv.2.

⁴⁷⁷ II.iv.3, *now those who were wise in these matters disagreed utterly with each other, and one announced the comet meant one thing, another that it was another thing[...]*.

impression that he has the possibility of forming his own opinion, an impression which is then further imposed on him:

ἐγὼ δὲ ὅσα γενέσθαι ξυνηέχθη γράφων δίδωμι ἐκάστω τοῖς ἀποβεβηκόσι
τεκμηριοῦσθαι ἢ βούλοιτο⁴⁷⁸

Procopius keeps his stance of impartial narrator here by saying that he told things as they happened (ὅσα γενέσθαι), leaving the reader to draw conclusions with the verb τεκμηριοῦσθαι which furthers this impression that things are left open by introducing the indefinite clause ἢ βούλοιτο. The use of the optative in this case reinforces the illusion that nothing is set in stone. The reader's judgment is obviously predetermined since the passage which follows this introduces the historical events that followed the comet as extremely bad. The abrupt transition between the previous assertion of the reader's free judgment and the events themselves is effectuated with the adverb εὐθύς, which further emphasises the switch. Unsurprisingly, the crossing of the Danube by the Hunnic army is described in hyperbolic terms ([...] γεγονὸς μὲν πολλάκις ἤδη, τσαῦτα δὲ τὸ πλῆθος κακὰ ἢ τοιαῦτα τὸ μέγεθος οὐκ ἐνεγκὸν πώποτε τοῖς ταύτη ἀνθρώποις⁴⁷⁹) with the opposition of πολλάκις and οὐκ [...] πώποτε and the parallel structure with τσαῦτα δὲ τὸ πλῆθος and τοιαῦτα τὸ μέγεθος. In the passage which follows from II.iv.4 to II.iv.11, Procopius proceeds to describe the damage done by the Huns to people in Illyricum, Chersonesus, Thessaly and generally most of Greece apart from the Peloponnese. One has no choice but to conclude the comet was a very bad omen. There actually does not seem to be any ambiguity about this, however strongly Procopius insists on the specialists' difficulty in agreeing.

⁴⁷⁸ *Id.*, but I only write what took place and I leave to each one to judge by the outcome as he wishes.

⁴⁷⁹ II.iv.4, [...] a thing which had happened many times before, but which had never brought such a multitude of woes nor such dreadful ones to the people of that land.

Cosmological omens appear several times in the *Wars*, and most often they announce doom quite unequivocally. Such is the eclipse⁴⁸⁰ in *Wars* IV.xiv.5-6; it is immediately referred to in negative terms as *τέρας* [...] *δεινότατον* with a superlative adjective that immediately sets the hyperbolic tone. Procopius then proceeds to explain the eclipse in detail. It is not actually an eclipse, but very much like one (*ἐκλείποντί τε ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἔωκει*) since the sun shone without brightness (*χωρὶς τὴν αἴγλην*) and its beams were not clear (*τὴν ἀμαρυγὴν* [...] *οὐ καθαράν*). This description adds to the atmosphere of doom and gloom with its darkness and dullness. The following sentence sums up the explanation of the eclipse as a portent of doom:

*ἔξ οὗ τε ξυμβῆναι τοῦτο τετύχηκεν, οὔτε πόλεμος οὔτε λοιμὸς οὔτε τι ἄλλο ἐς θάνατον φέρον τούς ἀνθρώπους ἀπέλιπε...*⁴⁸¹

The transition *ἔξ οὗ* is very succinct and throws into relief the direct relation between the eclipse and the following events both temporally and causally. The events themselves are described in a triple structure repeating *οὔτε* three times and giving the catastrophes gradually with first the war, *πόλεμος*, then the plague, *λοιμὸς*, and finally the indefinite ‘anything’ else that leads to death (*τι ἄλλο ἐς θάνατον φέρον*). This passage is not only rhythmically structured but the alliterations and assonances with the repetition of the consonants *τ* and *λ* and the vocalic sounds *ο* and *ου* contribute to the dark mood by creating a melody which is both repetitive and dull. It is striking to see how Procopius uses the tones of his language to express the darkness and doom surrounding the eclipse.

Strange natural phenomena are common in the *Wars*, particularly earthquakes and floods. In *Wars* VIII.xxv.16-23, Procopius evokes different natural catastrophes

⁴⁸⁰ An example of a famous eclipse in historiography is Herodotus VII.37.

⁴⁸¹ IV.xiv.6, and from the time when this thing happened men were free neither from war nor pestilence nor any other thing leading to death.

that happened in Greece. He first refers to extraordinary earthquakes (*σεισμοί* [...] *ἐξαισιοί*⁴⁸²) touching particularly Boeotia, Achaea and the Crisaean Gulf. The consequences of the earthquakes are then described with the destruction of numerous cities⁴⁸³ and the creation of chasms which made contacts between people difficult⁴⁸⁴. Another consequence is the deluge in the towns of Echinus and Scarphea⁴⁸⁵ which is said to have made it possible for people to walk to the islands whereas the mainland was covered with water as far as the mountains. But the consequence of this flood that interests us is the fact that it left fish on the ground which, since their sight was not familiar to the men of this country (*ἡ ὄψις ἀήθης παντάπασι οὔσα τοῖς τῆδε ἀνθρώποις*), were seen as prodigious (*τερατώδης*)⁴⁸⁶. The oddness of the fish could be only due to the ignorance of these men, but it is actually further explained by the following anecdote which states that once the men tried to boil them, their body was reduced to an unbearable liquid putrefaction (*ἐς ἰχθῶράς τε καὶ σηπεδόνας οὐ φορητάς*)⁴⁸⁷. However weird this natural phenomenon is, Procopius does not try to use it to explain future events. He does not offer an explanation for the fish's putrefaction either, but his description of the fish is vivid and haunting in and of itself.

Nevertheless, there is one example where Procopius actually offers his point of view on the explanation of omens. In *Wars* VII.xxix.4-20, he dedicates an extensive digression to some extraordinary natural phenomena. First, in VII.xxix.4-5 he refers to severe earthquakes that happened in Byzantium and other places, but did not do much harm. Then, in VII.xxix.6-8, he describes the rise of the Nile which flooded all Egypt

⁴⁸² VIII.xxv.16.

⁴⁸³ VIII.xxv.17.

⁴⁸⁴ VIII.xxv.18.

⁴⁸⁵ VIII.xxv.19-20.

⁴⁸⁶ VIII.xxv.21

⁴⁸⁷ VIII.xxv.22.

and made the seeds rot, creating a lack of sustenance for both men and animals. Finally, in VII.xxix.9-16 he devotes the longest part of this digression to the story of the whale Porphyrius, telling both all the damage it did and the way it was finally captured. All these examples of natural catastrophies introduce the following passage in VII.xxix.17-20 which provides Procopius' opinion on the interpretation of such events. First, he describes how the Byzantines, upon observing those events – the earthquakes, the rise of the Nile and the capture of the whale – started prophesying. These prophecies are contradictory: [...] *προὔλεγον αὐτίκα ξυμβήσεσθαι ὅσα δὴ αὐτῶν ἐκάστῳ ἤρесеκε...*⁴⁸⁸. There does not seem to be a logic behind their prophecies but rather personal whim (*ὅσα [...] ἐκάστῳ ἤρесеκε*). This fact provides him with the occasion to offer a generalization on the process of interpreting prodigies in order to prophesy:

*φιλοῦσι γὰρ ἄνθρωποι τοῖς παροῦσι διαπορούμενοι τὰ ἐσόμενα τερατεύεσθαι, καὶ τοῖς ἐνοχλοῦσιν ἀποκναιόμενοι τὰ ξυμβησόμενα λόγῳ οὐδενὶ τεκμηριοῦσθαι...*⁴⁸⁹

This habit of uttering prophecies seems to be a general human tendency, as the opening *φιλοῦσι γὰρ ἄνθρωποι* points out. The absence of rational reasoning behind this process is emphasized by the use of the participle *διαπορούμενοι* which shows that these men are at a loss when faced with those supernatural events, and the dative *λόγῳ οὐδενὶ* which implies that their predicting of the future has no foundation. Procopius finally gives us his personal strategy:

*ἐγὼ δὲ μαντείας τε καὶ τεράτων δηλώσεις ἄλλοις ἀφιεῖς ἐκεῖνο εὖ οἶδα ὡς ἢ μὲν τοῦ Νείλου ἐπὶ τῆς χώρας διατριβὴ μεγάλων αἰτίᾳ ἔν γε τῷ παρόντι συμφορῶν γέγονε, τὸ δὲ κῆτος ἀφανισθὲν πολλῶν ἀπαλλαγῆ κακῶν διαδείκνυται οὕσα...*⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ VII.xxix.17, [...] *they began straightway to prophesy that such and such things would take place, according to the taste of each.*

⁴⁸⁹ VII.xxix.18, *for men are inclined, when present events leave them puzzled, to utter terrifying prophecies about the future, and, distracted by occurrences that trouble them, to infer, for no good reason, what the future will bring.*

⁴⁹⁰ VII.xxix.19, *but as for me, I shall leave to others prophecies and explanation of marvels; still, I know well that the lingering of the Nile on the fields did prove a cause of great calamities at that time at any rate, while the disappearance of the whale, on the other hand, unquestionably provided an escape from many troubles.*

There is a rupture here between the first part of the sentence up to *ἀφειῖς* and the second part after it. The tension resides in the fact that even if he wants to leave the explanation of prophecies to others, he still acknowledges (*εἶ οἶδα*) that the rise of the Nile caused great torment (*μεγάλων [...] συμφορῶν*) and that the capture of the whale on the other hand was a relief from many evils (*πολλῶν ἀπαλλαγῆ κακῶν*). This is slightly confusing, especially since he adds subsequently that some say that the whale captured was not Porphyrius in VII.xxix.20 and then concludes the digression abruptly, saying he needs to return to his previous narrative now. One wonders what it is exactly that Procopius thinks of those that prophesy and explain prodigies (*τεράτων δηλώσεις*). His pose is not consistent at any rate and oscillates between the will to rationalize and see the cause of events (*αἰτία*) as any good classical historian and empiricist⁴⁹¹, and his need to include all these strange prodigies for different reasons, one of them being the fear of passing as ignorant of what happened. When he says he leaves the interpretation of omens to others, it contradicts the fact that he does offer interpretations repeatedly throughout his history.

Portents in the context of wars

Omens are somehow unavoidable when writing history, particularly in the context of wars and battles. In *Wars* III.iv.1-11, we hear of an episode about Marcian from when he was a captive of Gizeric, before he came to assume the imperial power. This episode also appears in Theophanes' *Chronographia*⁴⁹², which was written later however in the eighth and ninth century, and there are a few differences between the

⁴⁹¹ Note the use of the verb *τεκμηριῶ* in various cases, for example with the comet in *Wars* II.iv.3 and in men's irrational predictions in *Wars* VII.xxix.18.

⁴⁹² *Chronographia* ed. De Boor (1883), 103.33-104.19.

versions⁴⁹³. In Procopius' version, Marcian is brought out amongst other captives of Gizeric so that the latter can look at them and decide which master to assign to each one of them. The scene is described from Gizeric's perspective, it seems. We learn that the captives were gathered under the summer sun at midday and that they were distressed (*ἀχθόμενοι*) by it and sat down (*ἐκάθηντο*)⁴⁹⁴. The context of the scene is interesting in its difference from Theophanes' version which states the episode happened while Marcian was hunting in Lydia. Here, he is pictured as a captive and in a seriously uncomfortable position, which provides the scene with more tension. Marcian is also presented from Gizeric's point of view as anonymous, one amongst other: *ἐν αὐτοῖς δὲ καὶ Μαρκιανὸς ὅπου δὴ ἀπημελημένως ἐκάθευδε*⁴⁹⁵. The use of the adverb *ὅπου* and the participle *ἀπημελημένως* lend a quality of vagueness to this sentence, highlighting the fact that Marcian was not standing out before the omen. The omen itself is depicted quite briefly:

*καὶ τις αὐτοῦ ἀετὸς ὑπερίπτατο, τὰ πτερά, ὡς λέγουσι, διαπετάσας, αἰεὶ τε μένων ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ τοῦ ἀέρος χώρῃ μόνον τὸν Μαρκιανὸν ἐπεσκίαζεν...*⁴⁹⁶

It is interesting that in the midst of a brief description of the eagle flying over Marcian in order to cast a shadow over him only, Procopius takes the time to point out that *τὰ πτερά [...] διαπετάσας* is an expression, by means of the clause *ὡς λέγουσι*. Even if he often shows interest in languages and idioms, this expression in particular is quite self-explanatory and does not seem to require the need to be pointed out. But what interests Procopius in this story is not the omen particularly in itself but the process of its

⁴⁹³ Theophanes writes concerning the emperor Marcian, *When he went to fight the Persians, delayed in Lycia by illness, Marcian was received in the home of two brothers of Sidema, Julius and Tatian. On a hunting expedition, Tatian saw a great eagle sheltering the future emperor from the sun whilst he slept. When pressed, Marcian said that if he became emperor (as the brothers deduced,) he would proclaim them fathers.* For a study of the different versions of the legend in Byzantine literature, see Scott (2007).

⁴⁹⁴ III.iv.4.

⁴⁹⁵ *Id., and somewhere or other among them Marcian, quite neglected, was sleeping.*

⁴⁹⁶ III.iv.5, *then an eagle flew over him spreading out his wings, as they say, and always remaining in the same place in the air he cast a shadow over Marcian alone.*

interpretation by Gizeric which he deals with in III.iv.6-8. First, he situates Gizeric in this scene as watching from the upper-storey (*ἐκ δὲ τῶν ὑπερώων*). Then, he refers to him as a particularly perceptive person (*ἀγχίνους τις ὧν μάλιστα*) before saying that he suspected the thing to be a divine manifestation (*θεῖόν τε εἶναι τὸ πρᾶγμα ὑπόπτεισε*). In this manner, Procopius presents as a quality of Gizeric the fact that he understands that the eagle flying over Marcian is not a coincidence. Gizeric then proceeds to interrogate Marcian who says he is an advisor of Aspar, and Procopius takes this opportunity to provide the name of this position in Latin, ‘domesticus’. This answer introduces the conclusion of Gizeric’s reflexions:

*ταῦτα Γιζερίχῳ ἀκούσαντι καὶ ξυμβαλλομένῳ μὲν τοῦ ὄρνιθος ἔργον, τὴν δὲ Ἄσπαρος δύναμιν ἐν νῶ ἔχοντι ὅση ἐν Βυζαντίῳ ἐχρῆτο, καταφανὲς ἐγένετο ὡς εἰς βασιλείαν ὁ ἀνὴρ ἄγοιτο...*⁴⁹⁷

Gizeric’s interpretation of this omen is the sum of both his analysis of the bird’s action and of Marcian’s answer that he is Aspar’s *domesticus* combined with his knowledge of Aspar’s power in Byzantium. This interpretation therefore required from him different intellectual actions which are pointed out by different expressions for the different stages, first *ἀκούσαντι* and *ξυμβαλλομένῳ*, then *ἐν νῶ ἔχοντι*, which are all dative participles, and finally the resulting verb *καταφανὲς ἐγένετο*. Omens provide Procopius with the opportunity to highlight the process of interpretation.

In *Wars* III.iv.30-35, another historical character, Attila, is represented as interpreting an omen in the context of a war. The episode happens during his siege of Aquileia and it is introduced in the following terms: *τοιόνδε φασὶν εὐτύχημα*

*ξυνεχθῆναι*⁴⁹⁸. The term *εὐτύχημα* announces the fact that this episode is a stroke of

⁴⁹⁷ III.iv.8, and when Gizeric heard this and considered first the meaning of the bird’s action, and then remembered what a great power Aspar exercised in Byzantium, it became evident to him that the man was being led to royal power.

⁴⁹⁸ III.iv.30.

luck for Attila. The use of *φασίν*, denoting the fact that this is a second-hand story that Procopius is telling, is echoed by *λέγουσι* introducing the following sentence which sets the scene, saying that after failing to capture Aquileia by any means, Attila had decided to abandon the siege and leave at sunrise on the following day (*τῇ ὑστεραία ἐνθένδε ἅπαντες ἐξανιστῶνται ἅμα ἥλιῳ ἀνίσχοντι*)⁴⁹⁹. It is at that precise time, the following day at sunrise (*ἡμέρα δὲ τῇ ἐπιγινομένη ἀμφὶ ἡλίου ἀνατολᾶς*) that the omen happens. The repetition of the precise time at which it happened is redundant, obviously emphasizing the conditions of the event as significant. This timing makes it more dramatic, as if it had happened before Attila gave up the siege or after he left, it would not have been significant at all. Furthermore, the barbarians are said to already be starting to leave⁵⁰⁰.

The omen itself is the departure of a male stork with its little storks from their nest on a tower of the city wall. This departure is described in an endearing way with the little storks either sharing their father's flight (*τὰ μὲν αὐτῷ μετέχειν τῆς πτήσεως*) or riding his back (*τὰ δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ νώτου τοῦ πατρὸς φέρεσθαι*)⁵⁰¹. Attila's interpretation of the phenomenon is then presented in several stages. First, he commands his army to stay put, which Procopius explains by his great ability at understanding and interpreting things (*ἦν γὰρ δεινότατος ξυνεῖναι τε καὶ ξυμβαλεῖν ἅπαντα*)⁵⁰². Attila then tells his soldiers that the bird would not have fled from his nest at random (*εἰκῆ*) but that he must have been prophesying (*ἐμαντεύετο*) some future evil (*φλαῦρον*)⁵⁰³. Both this example and the previous one depict two barbarian kings interpreting omens and being praised for their

⁴⁹⁹ III.iv.31.

⁵⁰⁰ III.iv.32.

⁵⁰¹ III.iv.33.

⁵⁰² III.iv.34.

⁵⁰³ *Id.* Notice the use of the ionic form of the word *φάυλος*.

interpretational skills⁵⁰⁴. They also have in common the presence of birds announcing the future by their behaviour. Finally, in III.iv.35, Procopius says the part of the wall where the stork's nest was fell down, validating the bird's ominous departure and Attila's interpretation.

In *Wars* VI.xiv.18-22, an omen happens as the Lombards and Eruli prepare to meet in battle, announcing the outcome of the fight. This is partially announced by the previous passage in VI.xiv.13-17, where the Lombards keep sending envoys to the Eruli asking them to provide them with the reason why they want to go to war against them and warning them that god will be on their side if they do not have a valid reason. The armies are represented as they are about to fight:

*ἤνικα δὲ ἀμφοτέροισι ἄγχιστά πη ἀλλήλων ἐγένοντο, τὸν μὲν ὑπερθεῖν Λαγγοβαρδῶν ἀέρα ξυνέβαινε μελαίνην τινὶ νεφέλῃ καὶ ἐς ἄγαν παχεῖα καλύπτεσθαι, ὑπὲρ δὲ τοὺς Ἐρούλους αἰθρίαν ὑπερφυῶς εἶναι...*⁵⁰⁵

This description of the sky above both armies is striking in its vivid antithesis. On the Lombards' side, there is a visible exaggeration of darkness, with a black cloud (*μελαίνην τινὶ νεφέλῃ*) which is also said to be extremely opaque (*ἐς ἄγαν παχεῖα*), this opacity emphasized even more with the verb 'καλύπτεσθαι'. On the Eruli's side, the description is very brief and the sky is only said to be particularly clear (*αἰθρίαν ὑπερφυῶς*). The interpretation of this dichotomy in the sky's appearance is presented as obvious, since Procopius says that one would draw the conclusion from this (*τεκμηριούμενος*) that some evil (*πονηρῶ*) would befall the Eruli. This can seem surprising for the reader, because a perfectly clear sky does not seem particularly more ominous than a dark cloud but Procopius explains that it is the worst portent for barbarians (*οὐ γὰρ τι τούτου πικρότερον*

⁵⁰⁴ Even if Procopius represented the interpretation of omens in a very different light as we have seen earlier in VII.xxix.17-20.

⁵⁰⁵ VI.xiv.18, *and when the two armies came close to one another, it so happened that the sky above the Lombards was obscured by a sort of cloud, black and very thick, but above the Eruli it was exceedingly clear.*

βαρβάρους τέρας [...] οἷόν τε εἶναι)⁵⁰⁶. Unsurprisingly, the author then goes on to describe how terribly the Eruli got eliminated by the Lombards, even though they were more numerous.

In *Wars* VIII.xiv.38-40, Procopius reports an omen that happened at Edessa before the Persian war. He introduces it into the narrative, saying that since he is mentioning Edessa (ἐπειδὴ Ἐδέσσης ἐμνήσθη) he cannot be silent about the following portent (οὐ σιωπήσομαι τὸ ἐκείνη τέρας). Obviously, this is a rhetorical way of justifying his inclusion of this omen. The omen itself is described in few words:

ἠνίκα γὰρ ὁ Χοσρόης λύειν ἔμελλε τὰς ἀπεράντους καλουμένας σπονδάς, γυνή τις ἐν πόλει βρέφος ἐκύει τὰ μὲν ἄλλα ἐπιεικῶς ἀνθρωπόμορφον, δύο δέ τοι κεφαλὰς ἔχον...⁵⁰⁷

The timing of the event seems important, since half of the sentence is devoted to it, stating that it happened when Chosroes was about to break the peace treaty which Procopius refers to in the ironic terms τὰς ἀπεράντους καλουμένας σπονδάς. The portent himself is an infant born from a woman of Edessa, who is said to be absolutely normal as a human being (ἐπιεικῶς ἀνθρωπόμορφον) apart from having two heads (δύο δέ τοι κεφαλὰς⁵⁰⁸). The meaning of this supernatural birth is explained in the light of the following events: ὁ δὴ τοῖς ἀποβεβηκόσι φανερόν γέγονεν, since Edessa and most of the Roman empire were fought for subsequently by two sovereigns (βασιλεῦσι περιμάχητος δυοῖν γέγονε)⁵⁰⁹. Obviously the infant's two heads stand for the two powers at stake in this war. However, this is a perfect example of how omens are explained by historians

⁵⁰⁶ VI.xiv.19.

⁵⁰⁷ VIII.xiv.39, when Chosroes was about to break the so-called endless peace, a certain woman in the city gave birth to an infant which in other respects was a normally formed human being, but had two heads.

⁵⁰⁸ Two-headed babies, as well as generally multi-headed or multi-limbed humans were common in paradoxography; for example in Phlegon of Tralles' *Book of marvels*. On deformity in Antiquity, see Garland (1995).

⁵⁰⁹ VIII.xiv.40.

in the light of following events, which is different from their interpretation in the heat of the moment.

Difficulties of interpretation

The interpretation of omens interests Procopius in the way these portents act as visual codes that need breaking. But the breaking of these codes is far from obvious sometimes. In *Buildings* VI.iv.6-9, the author uses once more the first person to refer to an event he cannot pass over in silence (ὡς ἤκιστα σιωπήσομαι), an event which happened in his time (ἐν χρόνῳ τῷ καθ' ἡμᾶς)⁵¹⁰. This seems to point out that he is a first-hand source for the anecdote, however he does not allude to himself again after this. The actors in this event are the Moors, and more specifically the Leuathae who emptied Leptis Magna of its inhabitants after attacking the Vandals. They are the ones who see the portent from a hilly spot (ἐν χώροις δὲ λοφώδεσι)⁵¹¹. The portent itself is the sudden apparition of a flame in the middle of the city (φλόγα πυρὸς ἑξαπιναίως ἐν μέσῃ τῇ πόλει τεθέανται)⁵¹². The reactions of the Moors to this apparition is to run back to the town, thinking there were enemies there, when in fact there were none. As a result, they had to take the matter to the specialists:

ἐπὶ τοὺς μάντεις τὸ πρᾶγμα ἤγον, οἳ δὴ τῷ ξυμβεβηκότι τεκμηριούμενοι τὴν Λεπτιμάγναν οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν οἰκισθήσεσθαι προὔλεγον...⁵¹³

The specialists are those μάντεις that Procopius seemed to despise in *Wars* VII.xxiv⁵¹⁴, and their technique of interpretation is phrased as ‘τῷ ξυμβεβηκότι τεκμηριούμενοι’⁵¹⁵, which is very interesting since it combines the idea of inferring which usually requires a

⁵¹⁰ VI.iv.6.

⁵¹¹ VI.iv.7

⁵¹² *Idem.*

⁵¹³ *They took the matter to the soothsayers, who, by an inkling of what has since happened, predicted that Leptis Magna would soon be inhabited again.*

⁵¹⁴ Discussed previously in this chapter at the end of the part entitled **cosmological omens**.

⁵¹⁵ VI.iv.9.

basis on which to infer with future events that one can only guess. Their prediction (*προϋλέγον*)⁵¹⁶ is correct however since Leptis Magna was inhabited shortly after – as well as renovated by Justinian, as the *Buildings* describes.

In *Wars* VIII.xxi.10-18, Procopius seems to hold a different view on the interpretation of omens, a view that completely contradicts what he said in *Wars* VII.xxiv. He tells about a story told to him by a Roman senator – ie. a respectable source – when he was visiting the city. The event happened during Atalaric's reign in Italy. He mentions a bronze bull statue by a fountain in the forum, which allows him to go into a digression about the abundance of beautiful statues in Rome and their famous sculptors, Phidias and Lysippus. The omen itself is depicted in near-comical terms; a steer leaves its cattle to mount the fountain and stands over the bronze bull. The interpretation of the omen itself is offered courtesy of a Tuscan passerby who is described as quite rustic (*κομιδῆ ἄγροικον*)⁵¹⁷. His nationality is not coincidental, as Procopius explains that Tuscans have always been gifted with prophecy down to his day (*εἰσὶ γὰρ μαντικοὶ καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ Τοῦσκοι*)⁵¹⁸. The prophecy itself is that one day a eunuch will undo the ruler of Rome – predicting Narses' march against Totila; which earns the Tuscan only laughter (*ὅ τε Τοῦσκος ἐκεῖνος καὶ ὁ παρ' αὐτοῦ λόγος γέλωτα ὤφλε*)⁵¹⁹. This fact leads Procopius to conclude that men are used to laugh at prophecies before they turn out to be true and see them as ridiculous myths, which is possibly exactly the opposite position from the one he previously exposed in *Wars* VII.xxiv. Furthermore, he goes so far as to show men as vanquished by the arguments provided by the subsequent events: *Νῦν δὲ δὴ ἅπαντες τὸ ξύμβολον τοῦτο τοῖς ἀποβεβηκόσιν ὑποχωροῦντες*

⁵¹⁶ *Idem.*

⁵¹⁷ VIII.xxi.16.

⁵¹⁸ *Idem.*

⁵¹⁹ VIII.xxi.17.

θαυμάζουσι[...]⁵²⁰. His choice of terms is interesting with the juxtaposition of ὑποχωροῦντες and θαυμάζουσι which are both strong verbs that show how irresistible this omen is, and also the use of ξύμβολον which emphasizes for us the visual aspect of the omen.

There is an example in the *Wars* where Procopius represents himself as a character doing the interpretation. In *Wars* III.xv.34-35, Belisarius commands his troops to dig a trench in Byzacium in order to establish their base there. While they were digging, something amazing happened (ἔνθα δὴ καὶ τι τοῖς τὴν τάφρον ὀρύσσουσι τετύχηκε θαύμασιον ἠλίκον). The miracle itself is water springing from the trench:

ὔδατος πολὺ τι χρῆμα ἢ γῆ ἀνήκεν, οὐ γεγονὸς τοῦτο ἐν Βυζακίῳ πρότερον, ἄλλως τε καὶ τοῦ χωρίου ἀνύδρου ὄντος...⁵²¹

The miraculous aspect of this phenomenon is explained in three ways, first, by the vast quantity of water springing forth (ὔδατος πολὺ τι χρῆμα), then by the fact it never happened in Byzacium before (οὐ γεγονὸς [...] πρότερον), and finally by the fact the earth there was completely dry (τοῦ χωρίου ἀνύδρου). The water is also said to have been enough for both men and animals. Then, Procopius represents himself telling what he thinks about it to Belisarius:

καὶ συνηθόμενος τῷ στρατηγῷ Προκόπιος ἔλεγεν ὡς οὐ διὰ τὴν χρεῖαν τῆ τοῦ ὔδατος περιουσία χαίρει, ἀλλ' ὅτι οἱ ξύμβολον εἶναι δοκεῖ νίκης ἀπόνου καὶ τοῦτο σφίσι προλέγειν τὸ θεῖον...⁵²²

This passage is obviously interesting for many reasons, not only because Procopius represents himself interacting with Belisarius as his advisor. He says the water made

⁵²⁰ VIII.xxi.18, but now all men, yielding to the arguments of the actual events, marvel at this sign. (VIII.xxi.18)

⁵²¹ III.xv.34, a great abundance of water sprang from the earth, a thing which had not happened before in Byzacium, and besides this the place was altogether waterless.

⁵²² III.xv.35, and in congratulating the general, Procopius said that he rejoiced at the abundance of water, not so much because of its usefulness, as because it seemed to him a symbol of an easy victory, and that Heaven was foretelling a victory to them.

him rejoice, not because of its usefulness (οὐ διὰ τὴν χρείαν), but because of its worth as a symbol (ὅτι οἱ ξύμβολον εἶναι). This is obviously a case where Procopius finds it acceptable to interpret a symbol; he even deems it to be sent from god (προλέγειν τὸ θεῖον). The confirmation of his interpretation of this event as a sign of victory is briefly mentioned in the conclusion of this episode (ὅπερ οὖν καὶ ἐγένετο)⁵²³. This episode serves multiple purposes, such as showing Belisarius in a good light, since he chose the place to dig a trench which provided them with water, and presenting Procopius as a wise advisor versed in the meaning of prodigious signs, as well as implying divine protection of the Roman army. One could see this type of interpretation as wishful-thinking, which recalls the passage in Tacitus' *Histories* where Tacitus mentions how reports were circulating on how Vespasian was sent to Judaea to be adopted by the emperor, and this rumour was based on several things, amongst which were random occurrences interpreted as omens: [...] *praesaga responsa, et inclinatis ad credendum animis loco ominum etiam fortuita*⁵²⁴.

Procopius's persona in the *Wars* is always changing, swaying between accepting supernatural or rational interpretations. In *Wars* VIII.xv.21-25, he shows his rationalising side when an environmental prodigy happens. This prodigy presents different characteristics; first, although it was late autumn (τοῦ μὲν γὰρ ἔτους μετόπωρον ἤν), it was both hot and dry (ἀύχμὸς δὲ καὶ πνιγμὸς) just like in the middle of summer (ὡσπερ θερούς μέσου) which Procopius qualifies as very surprising (θαυμαστόν ὄσον)⁵²⁵. These weather conditions in turn have surprising effects on the environment, such as

⁵²³ III.xv.36.

⁵²⁴ Tacitus, *Histories* II.i (translation Fisher 1906), [...] *from the prophetic responses of oracles, and even from accidental occurrences which, in the general disposition to belief, were accepted as omens.*

⁵²⁵ VIII.xv.21.

bringing forth a great quantity of roses (ρόδων μὲν πλῆθος)⁵²⁶, as well as new fruits on all the trees (καρπὸς δὲ τὰ δένδρα σχεδὸν τι ἅπαντα νέους), and finally grapes on the vines (ταῖς ἀμπέλοις οὐδὲν τι ἦσσαν ἐγένοντο βότρυες)⁵²⁷. Procopius then writes about the interpretation of this phenomenon in three stages, first giving the specialists' opinion, then his own idea on what happened, and finally concluding in a way that leaves the interpretation open. The specialists, as per usual, find it difficult to agree:

οἷς δὴ οἱ ταῦτα δεινοὶ τεκμηριούμενοι προὔλεγον ἀπροσδόκητον μέγα τι ἔσεσθαι, οἱ μὲν ἀγαθόν, οἱ δὲ τούναντίον...⁵²⁸

Once more, the interpretation process consists of the combination of 'τεκμηριούμενοι' and 'προὔλεγον'. The specialists agree on the fact the future event which this extraordinary phenomenon announces will be both big and surprising (ἀπροσδόκητον μέγα τι) but they cannot agree on whether it will be good (ἀγαθόν) or the opposite (τούναντίον). It is interesting that Procopius used 'τούναντίον' instead of saying κακόν, since it stresses the antagonism between the specialists' judgment. As far as Procopius' opinion on the matter is concerned, he has a more rationalizing view of things and tries to explain it as a coincidence (κατὰ τι ξυμβεβηκὸς γεγονέναι), a result of the long action of the south winds (νότων ἐπὶ πλείστον ἀνέμων) which resulted in heat (θέρμης)⁵²⁹. However, he does not rule out the possibility that this natural phenomenon foreshadows a future event and he finishes this process of interpreting the omen in an open manner:

εἰ δὲ τι, ὡσπερ οὔτοι φασι, καὶ σημαίνει παρὰ δόξαν ἐσόμενον, βεβαιότατα ἐκ τῶν ἀποβησομένων εἰσόμεθα...⁵³⁰

⁵²⁶ *Idem.*

⁵²⁷ VIII.xv.22.

⁵²⁸ VIII.xv.23, *from these things, those that are versed in such matters drew conclusions, predicting that something great and unexpected would happen, some saying that it would be good, others saying the opposite.*

⁵²⁹ VIII.xv.24.

⁵³⁰ VIII.xv.25, *but if it really does, like they say, indicate that some unexpected event will happen, we shall know most certainly from the future outcome.*

Procopius' wisdom about the interpretation of this omen is simple common sense; that we will understand it more certainly (*βεβαιότατα*) after the things predicted have happened (*ἐκ τῶν ἀποβησομένων*). This is symptomatic of his approach to omens as a historian, which is that he can explain them after events have happened, a completely different process to that of decrypting the omen when it is happening.

Omens in Procopius appear on a first level as vivid and striking images – sometimes as shocking as a two-headed infant or disgust-inducing putrid fish – which are represented as thought-provoking in that they require interpretation. The process of interpretation is shown as the deciphering of symbolic images with various levels of difficulty; sometimes simple images such as an eclipse or a comet are presented as very obviously ominous and fearsome, but other times the interpretation requires more thought. A variety of characters are represented going through this process, including Procopius himself, and it is also sometimes implied that a degree of professionalism or expertise is required for it. As for Procopius's position on omen-interpreting, it wavers according to how he wants to present himself as a narrator. His most detailed explanation of this is given at *Wars* VIII.xv where he shows how a rational historian looks at omens long after the events have passed and reads them in a different light. It is also worth noticing that many omens appear in the Gothic wars, perhaps emulating classical Roman historians, for example with the bird omens that are reminiscent of classical augury, such as the famous geese of the Capitol.

Oracles and prophecies: word-play and role-play

Oracles and prophecies are instances of human attempts to learn about the future through divination. In Procopius' work, they operate in such a way that they can both be plays on words – ie. puns – but also plays as visual enactments, or role-play. An example of a traditional oracle is in *Wars* IV.viii.12-17 and its outcome in IV.xii.28. The Moors decide to consult their oracles, worrying about the future as the emperor was about to make an expedition to Libya. The oracles themselves are said to be women (*γυναίκες*) who become possessed (*κάτοχοι*) and make predictions (*προλέγουσι*)⁵³¹. Their talents for prediction are said not to be inferior in any way to the ancient oracles (*τῶν πάλαι χρηστηρίων οὐδενὸς ἥσσον*)⁵³². The oracle itself is phrased in the following manner:

*στρατὸν ἐξ ὑδάτων, Βανδίλων κατάλυσιν, Μαυρουσίων φοροράν τε καὶ ἤτταν, ὅτε Ῥωμαίοις ὁ στρατηγὸς ἀγένειος ἔλθοι...*⁵³³

There are several elements to this oracle, posing various amounts of difficulty. The army coming from the sea (*στρατὸν ἐξ ὑδάτων*) is quite obviously the Romans. The Moors then remained quiet and waited until the Vandals were defeated by the Romans (*Βανδίλων κατάλυσιν*) which is the second element of the oracle. The third element, finally, announces that the general who will bring destruction (*φοροράν*) and defeat (*ἤτταν*) to the Moors will come unbearded (*ἀγένειος*). The Moors therefore made enquiries to find out whether there was anyone who did not have a beard amongst the Roman army and holding an office, which was not the case. This fact led them to draw the following conclusions as to the women's oracle and its potential meaning:

*ἐπεὶ δὲ ἅπαντας πώγωνος ἐώρων ἐμπιπλαμένους, οὐ χρόνον τὸν παρόντα τὸ μαντεῖον σημαίνειν σφίσιν ᾤοντο, ἀλλὰ πολλαῖς γενεαῖς ὕστερον, ταύτη τὸ λόγιον ἐρμηνεύοντες, ἢ αὐτοὶ ἤθελον...*⁵³⁴

⁵³¹ IV.viii.13.

⁵³² *Idem*.

⁵³³ IV.viii.14, *there shall be a host coming from the waters, the overthrow of the Vandals, destruction and defeat of the Moors, when the general of the Romans shall come unbearded.*

The Moors make the mistake of interpreting the oracle as they wish (*ἢ αὐτοὶ ἤθελον*) and they decide that surely the event in question is not supposed to happen in their time (*οὐ χρόνον τὸν παρόντα*) but that it will happen several generations later (*πολλαῖς γενεαῖς ὕστερον*). This is obviously not the case and the outcome of this suspenseful oracle comes a few chapters later, when after Solomon beats them, the Moors remember the oracle:

καὶ τότε Μαυρουσίων τοὺς ὑπολειπομένους γυναικῶν τῶν σφετέρων τὸ λόγιον ἐσήει, ὡς ἄρα τὸ γένος αὐτοῖς πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἀγενείου ὀλείται...⁵³⁵

This second retelling of the oracle functions as a reminder for the reader, in case he'd forgotten about it like the Moors did. Procopius does not explain that the Moors' mistake in interpreting this oracle was to think Belisarius was the general in question before realizing he had a beard, whereas Solomon, being a eunuch, did not have a beard, but by this time, they'd forgotten about the oracle.

Mistakes in the interpretation of oracles can even be comical, as in the example in *Wars* II.xxx of Augustus' clothes, which were mistaken by John as the emperor's garment, in blatant wishful thinking, when they were just the clothes of some man named Augustus⁵³⁶. Both the example of the Moors' prediction and of John the Cappadocian demonstrate the linguistic difficulties involved in the deciphering of oracles and that just one word can change a whole meaning.

Indeed, the interpretation of oracles can be difficult as one can see in the climactic example of a confusing oracle in *Wars* V.xxiv. 28-37. The oracle in question

⁵³⁴ IV.viii.17, and when they saw all wearing full beards, they thought that the oracle did not indicate the present time to them, but one many generations later, interpreting the saying as they wished.

⁵³⁵ IV.xii.28, and then the remainder of the Moors recalled the saying of their women to the effect that their nation would be destroyed by a beardless man.

⁵³⁶ See chapter 3 on objects for a study of this passage.

is a Sybilline oracle on which the Roman patricians have difficulties agreeing⁵³⁷. This is rendered even more difficult by the fact that there is a lacuna in the manuscript – in a strange case of life imitating art – and all we have of the actual oracle is this: *Quintili mense * * rege nihil Geticum iam **. Thankfully, Procopius paraphrases the oracle:

χεῖναι γὰρ τότε βασιλέα Ῥωμαίοις καταστῆναί τινα, ἐξ οὗ δὴ Γετικὸν οὐδὲν Ῥώμῃ τὸ λοιπὸν δεήσειε...⁵³⁸

This paraphrase does not include the crux of the problem though, which is the date at which this should happen. The fifth month (*Quintili mense*) is then explained in two different ways by the patricians, first, as the fifth month since the siege began in March, and then as the fifth month in the old calendar dating from Numa's time. These two methods both produce July as a result of their calculations. These predictions turned out to be false, which leads Procopius to explain why he thinks the Sibylline oracles cannot be understood by mortal men. He first indicates that he is experienced in this matter, having read all of them (*ἐκεῖνα ἀναλεξάμενος ἅπαντα*). His reason for that is the way the Sibyl structures her discourse:

ἡ Σίβυλλα οὐχ ἅπαντα ἐξῆς τὰ πράγματα λέγει οὐδὲ ἀρμονίαν τινὰ ποιουμένη τοῦ λόγου...⁵³⁹

His reproaches are mainly the lack of chronological order (*ἐξῆς*) and organization (*ἀρμονίαν*). He then goes on to complain that she goes from Libya to Persia, to Rome, to the Assyrians to the Romans again and then the Britons. Somehow it seems that Procopius would want the Sibylline oracles to be arranged in the same way his *History of the Wars* is composed with a combination of geographical and chronological organization. He finishes his discussion of the impossibility of understanding the

⁵³⁷ Earlier in this book, Procopius mentioned the shrine of the Sibyl (V.xiv.3).

⁵³⁸ V.xxiv.29, *for it was fated that at that time someone should be appointed king over the Romans, and thenceforth Rome have no longer any Gothic peril to fear.*

⁵³⁹ V.xxiv.35, *the Sibyl does not invariably mention events in their order, much less construct a well-arranged narrative.*

Sibylline oracles with the fact he mentioned in other previous examples that the interpretation of their words comes with time and experience:

ἢ μὴ ὁ χρόνος αὐτὸς ἐκβάαντος ἤδη τοῦ πράγματος καὶ τοῦ λόγου ἐς πείραν ἐλθόντος ἀκριβῆς τοῦ ἔπους ἐρμηνεύς γένοιτο...⁵⁴⁰

Indeed, the words of the Sibyl can only be interpreted in the light of subsequent events, rendering them slightly useless in terms of predicting the future, but much more entertaining for the historian who, like Procopius, is in possession of the knowledge needed to interpret them. The fact that Procopius claims to have read all the Sibylline oracles is also an interesting aspect in this self-fashioning as an authority as it not only hints at his erudition, but perhaps also at his knowledge of Latin (unless he had access to a translation, but he does nevertheless quote the oracle in Latin).

The most entertaining occurrence of prophesying in Procopius' work has to be the enactment of prophecies which happens twice in *Wars* V. The first example in *Wars* V.ix.2-7 is presented by Procopius with as much distance as possible, saying he gives it no credit (ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐ πιστὰ λέγοντες). In this anecdote, Theodatus is said to ask one of the Hebrews to prophesy about the outcome of the present war. The Hebrew proceeds with placing in different huts three groups of ten pigs that represent the Goths, the Romans and the soldiers of the emperor. All the 'Goth' pigs apart from two die, almost all of the 'Roman soldier' pigs survive and as for the 'emperor's soldiers' pigs, they all lost their hair but half of them survived. This is explained as meaning that the Romans would defeat the Goths without too much loss for their army but with a loss of their possessions as represented by their loss of hair. As a result, Theodatus does not feel prepared to enter a struggle with Belisarius. This enactment with pigs seems quite comical and less traumatic than the other example in *Wars* V.xx.1-4 where children are

⁵⁴⁰ *It is only time itself, after the event has already come to pass and the words can be tested by experience, that can show itself an accurate interpreter of her sayings.*

enacting a prophecy. The children in question are Samnites who are pasturing flocks and decide to play a game of ‘pretend wars’, surely inspired by the ongoing war. Two of the children, who are particularly strong, engage in a wrestling game. One is chosen to represent Belisarius and the other one stands for Vittigis. The ‘Belisarius’ boy wins and as a punishment, the other children decide to hang the ‘Vittigis’ boy from a tree.

However, a wolf arrives and the children all flee, leaving the boy to die. The Samnites are said to understand the meaning of this event: [...] τὰ ξυμπεσόντα ξυμβαλόντες νικήσειν κατὰ κράτος Βελισάριον ἰσχυρίζοντο...⁵⁴¹. Procopius does not comment at all on the cruelty of the game, nor does he try to explain the extraordinary aspect of the event as an omen. This type of enactment reminds us of one in Tacitus’ *Germania* where the Germans pick a prisoner from the tribe with which they are at war and make him fight in order to find out the outcome of the war:

*Ejus gentis cum qua bellum est captivum quoquo modo interceptum cum electo popularium suorum, patriis quemque armis, committunt. Victoria hujus vel illius pro praejudicio accipitur.*⁵⁴²

With both the example of the Hebrews and their pigs, of the Samnite children, as well as with the *Germania* example, there is also an element of ethnographical interest in representing barbarian customs of prophesying which appear to be different from the Roman ones (mentioned earlier in the discussion of omens).

Oracles as word-play show the linguistic difficulties of interpretation, with expressions like the ‘unbearded general’ or the ‘clothes of Augustus’ causing

⁵⁴¹ V.xx.4, [...] *divining the meaning of the incident, they declared that Belisarius would conquer decisively.*

⁵⁴² Tacitus, *Germania* X (translation Church and Brodribb, 1942), *having taken, by whatever means, a prisoner from the tribe with whom they are at war, they pit him against a picked man of their own tribe, each combatant using the weapons of their country. The victory of the one or the other is accepted as an indication of the issue.*

misunderstanding. The Sibylline oracles go further in showing the difficulties of interpretation as it does not appear solely on a linguistic level but also on a greater scale as its narrative is shown to be deficient in its organisation. Prophecies as role-playing, presented as very simplistic forms of divination – and perhaps barbaric, even more than barbarian, in the case of the Samnite children sacrificing one of their own in their game – also form a type of narrative told through play-acting, performed visually without words.

Dreams and visions

One could say that dreams are spectacles themselves, and that in itself makes them part of Procopius's narrative strategy which prioritises visual representation above all. Dreams also seem to always appear as if surrounded by a margin, detached from the narrative in space and time, as a sort of floating icon. In an article considering the evolution of dreams in ancient historiography, Pelling⁵⁴³ uses the classification between ancient and modern dreams established by Simon Price and Freud himself which states that ancient dreams were practically equivalent to visions and were often a message coming from outside, whereas modern dreams were coming from inside the individual, reflecting his psychological state. He states that there is a progression in ancient historiography between the two, with on one side Herodotus, and Livy in Latin, with dreams revealing something objective about the cosmos, and on the other side, when the focus shifts to the humans later, and psychology plays a greater part with authors like Tacitus, Virgil or Plutarch. But in those later dreams, the role of the psychological remains hesitant and enigmatic, an aspect which allows him to compare this hesitation

⁵⁴³ Pelling (1997), 197-213.

to the one hesitation inherent to the fantastic genre as described by Todorov⁵⁴⁴. With that in mind, let us see some Procopian dreams, whether they seem to come from inside or outside, and whether they show that same hesitation.

Prophetic messages and epiphany dreams

In *Wars* II.xiii.22, during the siege of Dara, an anthropomorphic figure appears outside the walls to taunt the Romans. Procopius refers to it as *εἴτε ἄνθρωπος ὃν εἴτε τι ἄλλο ἀνθρώπου κρεῖσσον*. He or it collects the weapons which the Romans had discharged outside the walls (*τὰ βέλη ξυλλέγοι ἅπερ ἐκ τοῦ τείχους Ῥωμαῖοι ὀλίγω πρότερον ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐνοχλοῦντας βαρβάρους ἀφῆκαν*), then seemed as if mocking and laughing at those on the parapets (*ἐρεσχελεῖν τε τοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἐπάλξεσι καὶ ξὺν γέλωτι τωθάζειν ἐδόκει*). Finally the mysterious figure delivers its serious message to the Romans, warning them to be watchful and to take great care for their safety (*εἶτα φράσας αὐτοῖς τὸν πάντα λόγον ἐρηγορέναι πάντας ἐκέλευε καὶ ὡς ἔνι μάλιστα τῆς σωτηρίας ἐπιμελεῖσθαι*). This is obviously a vision that comes from an external source to deliver an important message, but the origin of the message remains unknown as Procopius does not provide any more information on this figure, and where it came from. Even though this belongs to the classical type of external vision, it seems as if it could have to do with divine and Christian providence, as the Romans, who were encouraged to dig a trench by this event, end up discouraging Chosroes who abandons the siege.

This divine providence is nothing surprising as Procopius's text presents many examples of miracles of seemingly divine origin. In this case, we have a new Christianised version of the ancient model of prophetic dreams. This is the case in *Wars*

⁵⁴⁴ Todorov (1970), 29-30.

III.xxi.21 where Cyprian⁵⁴⁵ appears repeatedly in the dreams of the Libyans and tells them not to worry after the destruction of his temple in Carthage by the Vandals, and that he would get his revenge:

φασὶ τὸν Κυπριανὸν ὄναρ ἐπισκήψαντα φάναι ἀμφ' αὐτῷ μεριμνᾶν τοὺς Χριστιανούς
ἥκιστα χρεῖναι· αὐτὸν γάρ οἱ προϊόντος τοῦ χρόνου τιμωρὸν ἔσεσθαι...⁵⁴⁶

Indeed, the Vandals are defeated in Decimum during the festival called the Cypriana. The instant when the dream's fulfilment appears clearly to the inhabitants - while they are performing the service for the saint's festival - happens at the same time as the Vandals are being defeated:

τά τε λύχνα ἔκαιον ἅπαντα καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ἐπεμελοῦντο ἥπερ αὐτοῖς τελεῖσθαι ταῦτα νόμος, οὕτω τε ἅπασιν ἃ δὴ προὔλεγεν ἢ τοῦ ὀνείρου ὄψις ἐγνώσθη...⁵⁴⁷

This example seems to be a very straightforward prophetic dream, with the message delivered in a dream by a divine figure, a saint, and then events, which confirm the message. This is a completely passive dream which does not involve any sort of interpretation process or activity solicited from the dreamers (as opposed perhaps to the dream previously mentioned where the Romans were encouraged to reinforce their defences in the siege after a prophetic dream).

Another prophetic or epiphany dream which combines different generic and ideological agenda is the one in *Buildings* II.iii.1-23. This work, as has been stated in the first chapter of this thesis, presents a fascinating mixture of technical and encomiastic writing. The passage itself is structured in the following way: first, a short introduction followed by the account of the dream of the master-builder Chryses of

⁵⁴⁵ Cyprian (died September 14, 258) is himself associated with dreams as he recalls a man's dream in the *De Mortalitate* XIX, and his biographer Pontius gives an account of Cyprian having a dream himself foreshadowing his death happening a year later exactly from the dream in his *Life of Cyprian* XII. Cyprian also mentioned his dreams in several letters (e.g. *Letters* 57, 16 and 39).

⁵⁴⁶ *Cyprian, they say, often sent them a dream saying that there was not the least need for the Christians to be concerned about him; for he himself as time went on would be his own avenger.*

⁵⁴⁷ III.xxi.23, *and they burned all the lamps and attended to the sacred festival just as is customary for them to perform this service, and thus it was known to all what the vision of the dream was foretelling.*

Alexandria in II.iii.1-5, then, the simultaneous events at the palace, with Justinian hearing of the disastrous flood in Dara, his discussion with the master-builders and his own solution to the problem in II.iii.6-9, then the decision made by Justinian and the builders after hearing of Chryses's dream in II.iii.10-15 and finally the building of the device described in an extensive technical excursus in II.iii.16-23. The psychological state of Chryses as he goes to bed is described as *περιαλγήσας*⁵⁴⁸, a participle with an intensive prefix, which sets up a tense atmosphere before the epiphany dream. The latter is a message delivered by something bigger and in other respects too great to resemble a man (*τις ὑπερφυῆς τε καὶ τὰ ἄλλα κρείσσων ἢ ἀνθρώπων εἰκάξεσθαι*)⁵⁴⁹. This creature then proceeds to give him prescriptions on how to build a certain device that would prevent the river from flooding Dara again. Chryses immediately identifies this dream as a message from God (*καὶ ὁ μὲν αὐτίκα θεῖον ὑποτοπήσας τὸ πρᾶγμα εἶναι*)⁵⁵⁰, then sketches the device and sends it to the emperor. Justinian in the meantime has received similar news of the flooding and is just as upset and perturbed (*ξυνταραχθεὶς καὶ περιώδυνος*)⁵⁵¹ as Chryses was. He then summons the master-builders Anthemius and Isidorus and debates with them on how best to solve this problem. And this is where this passage gets even more paradoxical:

*βασιλεὺς δὲ, θείας δηλονότι ἐπινοίας αὐτῷ γενομένης τινός, οὕτω τὰ Χρύσου ἰδὼν γράμματα, ἐπενόει τε καὶ ἐσκιαγράφει αὐτογνωμονήσας ἐκ τοῦ παραδόξου ὃ δὴ τοῦ ὀνείρου ἐκτύπωμα ἦν...*⁵⁵²

The emperor does not receive a dream like Chryses, but has instead a sort of divine inspiration (*θείας ἐπινοίας*) which makes him sketch the same device. The supernatural

⁵⁴⁸ II.iii.3.

⁵⁴⁹ II.iii.4.

⁵⁵⁰ II.iii.5.

⁵⁵¹ II.iii.7.

⁵⁵² II.iii.8, *but the Emperor, obviously moved by a divine inspiration which came to him, though he had not yet seen the letter of Chryses, devised and sketched out of his own head, strange to say, the very plan of the dream.*

aspect of this inspiration is further emphasised by the use of the term *παραδόξου*. Three days later, the emperor receives the letter and again summons the master-builders.

When he recounts what Chryses's letter said, they are visibly astonished (*κατεστήσατο αὐτούς ἐν θαύματι μεγάλῳ*)⁵⁵³. This is obviously an appeal to the reader to identify with the builders and share their amazement, but it goes even further as the result of this *thauma* is to make them consider the emperor's special relationship with God:

*ἐν νῶ ποιουμένους ὡς ἅπαντα ὁ θεὸς συνδιαπράσσεται τῷ βασιλεῖ τούτῳ τὰ τῆ πολιτεία ξυνοίσοντα...*⁵⁵⁴

The repetition of the prefix *συν/ξυν*, highlights this relationship between God and the emperor and the demonstrative *τούτῳ* further points out how special this particular emperor, Justinian, is. Finally the building of the dam is described in a very technical excursus which educates the reader in how dams work. This example could perpetuate the hypothesis that Procopius had been trained as an engineer⁵⁵⁵, or rather that he was an avid reader of technical treatises, which is another possibility as he appears to be well read. This dream seems to serve the rhetorical agenda of the *Buildings* perfectly as it is an encomium based on Justinian's building feats, which repeatedly points out his special relationship with God. It is a fascinating example of political and religious propaganda, which also demonstrates surprisingly detailed engineering and even physical rules as it explains how forces apply themselves on a dam.

⁵⁵³ II.iii.13.

⁵⁵⁴ Idem, as they considered how God becomes a partner with this Emperor in all matters which will benefit the State.

⁵⁵⁵ As claimed by Howard-Johnston (2000) and discussed by me in chapter 3.

Hallucinations and visions

The distinction between dreams and visions can seem blurred sometimes, particularly in the case of epiphany dreams⁵⁵⁶. But in Procopius, visions do not seem to belong to the epiphany or external type of dreams, but rather to the internal type which pertains to the dreamer's psychological state, rather than an external authority figure conveying a message. Procopius's account of the plague in Constantinople in *Wars* II.xxii is renowned as a first-hand report of the disaster, a report which has been seen to emulate Thucydides' own account of the plague in Athens during the Peloponnesian war. But Procopius, as opposed to Thucydides, talks at length on the hallucinations and dreams, which very often preceded the illness. He first describes the visions of the sick in II.xxii.10:

*φάσματα δαιμόνων πολλοῖς ἐς πᾶσαν ἀνθρώπου ἰδέαν ὤφθη, ὅσοι τε αὐτοῖς παραπίπτειεν, παίεσθαι ᾗοντο πρὸς τοῦ ἐντυχόντος ἀνδρὸς ὅπη παρατύχοι τοῦ σώματος, ἅμα τε τὸ φάσμα τοῦτο ἐώρων καὶ τῇ νόσῳ αὐτίκα ἠλίσκοντο.*⁵⁵⁷

The apparitions are referred to as *φάσματα δαιμόνων*, and this clearly attracts our attention as the *Secret History* is centred around the idea that Justinian is the prince of demons (this part of the *Wars* was probably written well before the *Secret History* however). This vision is interesting because of its physical aspect, as not only do the sick see the demons, but they also feel themselves hit by them in their bodies, and this is felt locally as *ὅπη* suggests. This vision is not the usual type of external vision and these

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. Veyne (1987) 385, *C'est dire que certains messages (la présence d'un dieu rendue sensible par son aspect, ses paroles, ou par le miracle qu'il accomplit en son épiphanie) sont tels, qu'il n'importe plus de savoir si le médium est un rêve, ou des yeux et oreilles de chair; si l'on est éveillé ou si l'on dort. Dans l'ordinaire des rêves quotidiens, on ne se soucie pas de distinguer le contenant et le contenu, au contraire : le rêve n'étant pas la veille, ce que l'on y voit est irréel ; en revanche si l'on rêve d'un dieu, le rêve n'est plus qu'un contenant, par lequel pénètre le dieu en personne, une sorte de canal de télévision, comme le pensaient les épicuriens.*

⁵⁵⁷ II.xxii.10, *apparitions of supernatural beings in human guise of every description were seen by many persons, and those who encountered them thought they were struck by the man they had met in this or that part of the body, as it happened, and immediately upon seeing this apparition they were seized also by the disease.*

demons are not messengers, but they seem more to reflect the psychological and physical state of the sick. Procopius does make a distinction between dream and vision however, as he later describes in the dream variant of this:

τισὶ δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ὁ λοιμὸς ἐπεγίνετο, ἀλλ' ὄψιν ὀνείρου ἰδόντες ταῦτο τοῦτο πρὸς τοῦ ἐπιστάντος πάσχειν ἐδόκουν, ἢ λόγου ἀκούειν προλέγοντος σφίσιν ὅτι δὴ ἐξ τῶν τεθνηξομένων τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἀνάγραπτοι εἶεν...⁵⁵⁸

This time the demonic creatures not only do the same as the ones appearing in visions, but they also address themselves (*προλέγοντος*) to the sick and announce to them that they are about to die. This, on the other hand, could be seen as prophetic, and the plague demons could be some sort of messengers, but one wonders whom they could have been sent by. It is clear that the focus here is really on the psychological aspect of the dream, as the reaction of the people affected by these hallucinations is described in a very pathetic manner as they either turn to superstition and exorcism, or isolate themselves, growing paranoid when their friends and families knock at the door, taking them for the demons. Overall, one cannot deny that these visions give a supernatural aspect to Procopius's account of the plague, but they also allow him to depict the fragile state of mind of people affected by sickness, between terror and paranoia. This is also a way of materialising the idea of the disease by representing it as an evil entity, and of 'giving it a face'.

Indeed, paranoia is a direct factor of hallucinations as we can see in another example of a vision which expresses an internal anxiety⁵⁵⁹. In *Wars* VIII.xx.13-14, the king of the Varni has a strange encounter with a bird:

⁵⁵⁸ II.xxiii.13, but in the case of some the pestilence did not come on in this way, but they saw a vision in a dream and seemed to suffer the very same thing at the hands of the creature who stood over them, or else to hear a voice foretelling to them that they were written down in the number of those who were to die.

⁵⁵⁹ On anxiety dreams, see Lucretius III.1020-1025 for a classical perspective and for modern typologies of dreams, see Busink and Kuiken (1996), Greenberg, Katz, Schwartz and Pearlman (1992), 531-550, and Revonsuo (2000), 877-901.

εἴτε δὲ τοῦ ὄρνιθου τῆς φωνῆς ξυνεῖς εἴτε ἄλλο μὲν τι ἐξεπιστάμενος, ξυνεῖναι δὲ τοῦ ὄρνιθου μαντευομένου τερατευσάμενος, τοῖς παροῦσιν εὐθὺς ἔφασκεν ὡς τεθνήξεται τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέραις ὕστερον.⁵⁶⁰

This could seem like a prophetic vision, the bird being a messenger delivering knowledge to the king - Procopius even refers to the bird as τοῦ ὄρνιθου μαντευομένου, giving the bird oracular abilities. But he offers two possibilities (εἴτε ... εἴτε); the first one accepting the king's claim of understanding the bird, the second being that he had some other knowledge which allowed him to predict his death. The choice is left to the reader as no more information is provided to point in either direction, whether supernatural or rationalising. This tension between the two possibilities creates a particular atmosphere in Procopius's work. As for the conclusion of this supernatural episode, the king then proceeds to give a speech announcing to all his last wishes, that is for Radigis to give up on his betrothed and marry his stepmother. The king dies of disease exactly forty days after the bird's prophecy and the jilted betrothed of Radigis launches into a vengeance expedition against the Varni. The fact that the death of the king comes from a disease allows us to compare this vision to that of the plague demons announcing death, and to see this as another anxiety vision associated with illness.

Aside from illness, one major source of anxiety dreams – a category which extends to visions here – was guilt, particularly in the case of the apparition of the dead⁵⁶¹. This feeling of guilt, even if latent perhaps at first, is quite apparent in the vision of Theoderic in *Wars* V.i.35-37. Theoderic has two men, Symmachus and Boetius put to death on the basis of some unfounded slanders. Some days later he is

⁵⁶⁰ VIII.xx.14, and whether he really comprehended the bird's voice, or, possessing some other knowledge, simply made a mysterious pretence of comprehending the bird's prophecy, he at any rate immediately told those with him that he would die forty days later.

⁵⁶¹ On guilt and dreaming of the dead, see Harris (2009), 59-60. He remarks that some of the great classical depictions of dreams of the dead express feelings of guilt which are more or less latent in the dreamer; starting with the example of Patroclus in *Iliad* XXIII, and providing many examples, from the theatre (the *Eumenides*, Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Alceste*), to poetry (Propertius IV.7, Lucan *Pharsalia* III.8-35) and even Augustine *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* X.

presented with the head of a great fish as he is dining. This head looks to him like the head of the dead Symmachus (*αὕτη Θεουδερσίχῳ ἔδοξεν ἢ κεφαλὴ Συμμαχίου νεοσφαγοῦς*)⁵⁶².

The use of the term *νεοσφαγοῦς* here makes the picture even grimmer as this idea of newly-slain can only evoke a disturbing picture. But this is not left to our imagination as the head is then described with a great attention to detail:

*καὶ τοῖς μὲν ὀδοῦσιν ἐς χεῖλος τὸ κάτω ἐμπεπηγόσι, τοῖς δὲ ὀφθαλμοῖς βλοσυρόν τι ἐς αὐτὸν καὶ μανικὸν ὀρώσιν, ἀπειλοῦντί οἱ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἔῳκει...*⁵⁶³

The expressiveness of the fish head is conveyed by its mouth and more specifically its lips (*ὀδοῦσιν ἐς χεῖλος*) as well as its eyes (*ὀφθαλμοῖς*). The resulting expression is described strikingly with a pair of evocative adjectives, *βλοσυρόν* and *μανικόν*⁵⁶⁴.

Theoderic is then said to be terrorised by this prodigy (*τέρατος*)⁵⁶⁵ and goes to hide in his bed, dying shortly thereafter. This vision could be seen as a psychological manifestation of extreme guilt, an explanation which Procopius seems to point towards as he depicts Theoderic weeping in guilt after this event: *τὴν ἐς Σύμμαχόν τε καὶ Βορέτιον ἀμαρτάδα ἔκλαιεν*⁵⁶⁶. But it could also be seen as some sort of divine retribution for his crimes, which could explain the supernatural or prodigious aspect of this vision. Indeed, there is more often than not that hesitation, described by Todorov in the case of fantastic narratives, between the rational and the supernatural explanations. The fantastic resides in the fact that this hesitation and tension cannot be solved. This tension is a striking aspect which we will see in the final two examples of dreams.

⁵⁶² V.i.35.

⁵⁶³ V.i.36, *indeed, with its teeth set in its lower lip and its eyes looking at him with a grim and insane stare, it did resemble exceedingly a person threatening him.*

⁵⁶⁴ This insane stare is used again to describe the faces of people suffering from starvation in *Wars* VI.xx.25: *ἀεὶ δὲ δεινῶς τι μανικὸν ἔβλεπον.*

⁵⁶⁵ V.i.37.

⁵⁶⁶ V.i.38.

The boat of the dead and a banquet of flowers

There are two dreams which particularly stand out for us in Procopius's *History of the Wars*. The first one is the legend of the boat of the dead in *Wars* VIII.xx.47-58. According to this legend, the men living on the coast opposite the island of Brititia are woken up in the middle of the night to row across to this island boats, which seem to be empty, although they appear to be carrying some invisible burden. When they reach the coast, a voice recites the names of the dead, and they depart back with lighter boats. They also seem to be able to do the journey in one hour as opposed to a night and a day as they usually would. From the beginning, the author points out the very unbelievable aspect of the story:

Ἐνταῦθα δὲ μοι γενομένῳ τῆς ἱστορίας ἐπάναγκές ἐστι λόγου μυθολογία ἐμφερεστάτου ἐπιμνησθῆναι...⁵⁶⁷

It is interesting that he presents his telling of the story as a necessity, *ἐπάναγκές*, but also that he qualifies it of '*μυθολογία ἐμφερεστάτου*'. Myths are typically what he claims that he wants to avoid, particularly in the *Secret History*'s prologue⁵⁶⁸. Procopius even goes as far as to say it seemed to him to be entirely unbelievable (*μοι οὔτε πιστὸς τὸ παράπαν ἔδοξεν εἶναι*), with the substantive *παράπαν* clearly emphasising this lack of trustworthiness in this clause. To counterbalance this, his decision to include the story is then justified by the fact that it was constantly (*ἀεὶ*) being told by countless men (*ἀνδρῶν ἀναρίθμων*) as if repetition and quantity of sources gave value to it. These many men are first-hand sources who have done the thing themselves (*αὐτουργοί*) and heard the words with their own ears (*αὐτήκοοι*). Finally, his most important motivation is that he did not

⁵⁶⁷ VIII.xx.47, since I have reached this point in the history, it is necessary for me to record a story which bears a very close resemblance to mythology.

⁵⁶⁸ *δέδοικα μὴ καὶ μυθολογίας ἀποίσομαι δοῦσαν*. I fear that I will earn the reputation of being even the narrator of myths, *Secret History* i.4.

want to seem ignorant: ἀγνοίας τινός τῶν τῆδε ξυμβαίνόντων διηγεκῶς ἀπενέγκωμαι δόξαν⁵⁶⁹.

His detachment from this story is further emphasised by his use of these men as narrators of the story, which is introduced with λέγουσιν⁵⁷⁰ and then concluded similarly with the sentence ταῦτα μὲν οὖν οἱ τῆδε ἄνθρωποι ξυμβαίνειν φασίν⁵⁷¹. He also ventures an explanation for the supernatural story in VIII.xx.48, attributing it to some power of dreams (ἐς ὀνείρων δὲ τινα δύναμιν). It is all the more interesting since Bachelard explains the attraction of this legend of the boat of the dead by what he calls ‘l’unité onirique’⁵⁷². This folkloric tale seems to be historically attested, and also seems to have had a considerable literary progeny, at least according to Bachelard. The French philosopher argued for its universal interest, but that would be too easy a way to explain Procopius’s choice in recounting this legend, particularly at significant length. There is an obvious tension here between his pseudo-rationalist pose – as in his attested refusal to record myths - and how easily he includes legends like this one, simply resolving his narratorial torment by using external narrators and professing his disbelief. As part of his narrative strategy, the interest of this tale can be seen on different levels. As part of the digression on Brittia, it provides a respite from the narration of the Gothic wars, and also brings an element of mystery, which adds to the exoticism of his depiction of

⁵⁶⁹ VIII.xx.47, *lest I gain a lasting reputation for ignorance of what takes place there.*

⁵⁷⁰ Wars VIII.xx.48.

⁵⁷¹ VIII.xx.58, *this, then, is what the men of this country say takes place,.*

⁵⁷² *Tel est le cas de la légende du bateau des morts, légende aux mille formes, sans cesse renouvelée dans le folklore. P. Sébillot donne cet exemple: ‘La légende du bateau des morts est l’une des premières qui aient été constatées sur notre littoral: elle y existait sans doute bien avant la conquête romaine, et au Sixième siècle Procope la rapportait en ces termes: Les pêcheurs et les autres habitants de la Gaule qui sont en face de l’île de Bretagne sont chargés d’y passer les âmes, et pour cela exempts de tribut. Au milieu de la nuit, ils entendent frapper à leur porte; ils se lèvent et trouvent sur le rivage des barques étrangères où ils ne voient personne, et qui pourtant semblent si chargées qu’elles paraissent sur le point de sombrer et s’élèvent d’un pouce à peine au dessus des eaux; une heure suffit pour ce trajet, quoique, avec leurs propres bateaux, ils puissent difficilement le faire en l’espace d’une nuit.’ Emile Souvestre a repris ce récit en 1836: preuve qu’une telle légende sollicite sans cesse l’expression littéraire. Elle nous intéresse. C’est un thème fondamental qui pourra se couvrir de mille variations. Sous les images les plus diverses, les plus inattendues, le thème est assuré de sa consistance parce qu’il possède la plus solide des unités: l’unité onirique. Bachelard (1942).*

Brittia. Its mention of the power of dreams also links it to the many occurrences of dreams in his work. But as a dream itself, it is special because it affects numerous people at once, when a dream is essentially a personal experience, and because of its life-like quality, which paints it as a sort of vivid vision, maybe a sort of mass hallucination.

It is very rare in ancient texts for an author to describe his own dreams. Very few occurrences exist⁵⁷³, the most famous example perhaps being those of Aelius Aristides⁵⁷⁴. Procopius describes one dream of his in *Wars* III.12, which he had shortly before he was about to embark on an expedition with Belisarius against the Vandals.

From the beginning, this dream is presented as an auspicious sign:

πρότερον μὲν καὶ μάλα κατορρωδήσας τὸν κίνδυνον, ὅψιν δὲ ὀνειρώτων ἰδὼν ὑστερον ἢ αὐτὸν θαρσῆσαι τε ἐποίησε καὶ ἐς τὸ στρατεύεσθαι ὤρμησεν...⁵⁷⁵

Procopius provides us here with his original state of mind before this dream, using the adjective *κατορρωδήσας* reinforced by the adverb *μάλα*, emphasising strongly his fear, as this adjective is stronger than other adjectives of fear used by Procopius⁵⁷⁶. The use of *ὅψιν* is also interesting as it might point out the vivid quality of his dream which seems to have been seen by him physically, with his own eyes. As for the propitious aspect, it is announced by the verbs *θαρσῆσαι* and *ὤρμησεν*, which show a complete change in the author's attitude, contrasting his previous hesitation with their energy and dynamism.

The narrative of the dream then follows, starting with the setting: he seemed to be in

⁵⁷³ Plato *Phaedrus* IV.60e-61b, Pliny *Letters* III, V and IV.

⁵⁷⁴ Aelius Aristides describes many of his dreams, some in his *Orations* (e.g. xxvii.2), and many in his *Sacred Tales*. On Aelius Aristides, see Harris and Holmes (2008), Downie (2009), 263-269 and Petsalis-Diomidis (2010).

⁵⁷⁵ III.xii.3, *now previously he had been exceedingly terrified at the danger, but later he had seen a vision in his sleep which caused him to take courage and made him eager to go on the expedition.*

⁵⁷⁶ Refer to the first part of chapter 4 for a study of the vocabulary of fear in Procopius.

Belisarius' house (ἐδόκει γὰρ ἐν τῷ ὄνειρῳ εἶναι μὲν ἐν τῇ Βελισσαρίου οἰκίᾳ)⁵⁷⁷. Then, one servant comes in announcing some men who have come bearing gifts. These men are not provided with an identity and simply referred to as 'τινες δῶρα φέροντες'⁵⁷⁸. There is no clue that could provide a lead on their identity, nor is there anything that could lead us to think they are supernatural entities. Procopius represents himself as being rather active in this dream as he then depicts Belisarius giving him the order to go and investigate the nature of these gifts (Βελισάριον διασκοπεῖσθαι κελεύειν αὐτὸν ὁποῖά ποτε εἴη τὰ δῶρα)⁵⁷⁹. Up until now, everything seems fairly normal in the dream, as this could just be an ordinary scene of everyday life with Belisarius, aimed perhaps at showing the author's privileged relationship to the great general. Procopius does indeed investigate and witness the following:

[...]καὶ αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ μεταύλῳ γένονμενον ἄνδρας ἰδεῖν οἱ ἔφερον ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων γῆν αὐτοῖς ἄνθεσι[...]⁵⁸⁰

This dream continues to be very life-like and following normal rules in terms of space and time, with Procopius now being found in the courtyard (ἐν τῇ μεταύλῳ). The fact that there is no confusion or strangeness so far could perhaps signal that this is not a *real* dream⁵⁸¹. Again, Procopius stresses the autoptic quality of this dream with the infinitive ἰδεῖν. And we finally find out what these gifts are, that is, some earth with its flowers. The fact that this is carried on the men's shoulders sounds perhaps fairly impractical, but the striking element here is the flowers, ἄνθεσι. Flowers are an important part of the Procopian *imaginaire* and they appear to serve several purposes.

⁵⁷⁷ III.xii.4.

⁵⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁸⁰ *Id.*, [...] and he went out into the court and saw men who carried on their shoulders earth with the flowers and all.

⁵⁸¹ Harris (2009), 101-107, debates this problematic lack of confusion and strangeness in some ancient narratives of dream, pointing to their fictitiousness.

There are the metaphorical flowers which the marbles in Hagia Sophia evoke, as they are compared to a meadow in full bloom⁵⁸². Meadows themselves are also represented in landscapes both in the *Buildings* and the *Wars*⁵⁸³. There is also the idea of *poikilia* which appears repeatedly⁵⁸⁴. The choice of the flowers is therefore interesting here because of its metatextual implication as the flowers can be literary flowers, as in an anthology, and the *poikilia* can be that of the meadow but also that of the rich and varied style of Procopius. The dream then continues in the same naturalistic manner, as the author, or rather the character Procopius, gives orders for the men to come into the house and deposit the earth in the portico (*ἐν τῷ προστώῳ*), continuing with the precise spatial continuum of the dream⁵⁸⁵. This is when Belisarius reappears, accompanied by some guards (*δορυφόροις*) and the dream itself lurches into strange territory:

[...] αὐτόν τε κατακλίνεσθαι ἐν τῇ γῆ ἐκείνῃ καὶ τὰ ἄνθη ἐσθίειν, τοῖς τε ἄλλοις αὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο ποιεῖν ἐγκελεύεσθαι[...]⁵⁸⁶

Belisarius is represented reclining (*κατακλίνεσθαι*) as if at a dinner-party or banquet, except he is lying on a pile of dirt, and he is eating flowers. Not only that, but he encourages the others to do the same. The others, presumably including Procopius, comply and these are their impressions:

[...] κατακλινομένοις τε σφίσι καὶ ἐσθίουσιν ὥσπερ ἐπὶ στιβάδος ἡδεῖαν κομιδῇ τὴν βρωσιν φανῆναι[...]⁵⁸⁷

The earth appears to be comfortable as it is compared to a couch (*ὥσπερ ἐπὶ στιβάδος*) and as for the flowers, they are now being referred to as food (*βρωσιν*) and even said to taste sweet (*ἡδεῖαν*.) This strange natural banquet closes the dream, of which Procopius

⁵⁸² See chapter 1 on the ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia.

⁵⁸³ See chapter 2 on idyllic landscapes.

⁵⁸⁴ E.g. *Wars* III.xxv.7, *Wars* VIII.i.2, *Buildings* I.i.60, *Buildings* I.iii.18.

⁵⁸⁵ III.xii.5.

⁵⁸⁶ *Id.*, [...] and he himself reclined on that earth and ate of the flowers, and urged the others to do likewise.

⁵⁸⁷ *Id.*, [...] and as they reclined and ate, as if upon a couch, the food seemed to them exceedingly sweet.

does not offer an explanation, nor why it gave him courage. It is fairly obvious considering its narrative aspect – as opposed to a *real* dream with no spatial or temporal cohesion - that this is either completely fictitious or at least that it has been remodelled to form a coherent narrative. The fact that it features floral imagery, as well as showing Procopius as very close to Belisarius, and its overall agenda of validating the Vandalic expedition clearly demonstrate that this is a well thought-out and elaborate narrative embedded within the *Wars*, which echoes other crucial passages in his entire work, particularly with the mention of flowers. The inclusion of the dream may also point to the interest for dreams and dream-interpretation in late antiquity⁵⁸⁸.

I treated dreams and visions together in this part as the ancients did, and instead tried to use a classification based on whether they were coming from an outside source, such as some divinity, or from the inside, from the characters' psyche. Prophetic dreams and apparitions represented the special relationship between the Roman army and god in the example of the siege of Dara, as well as between the inhabitants of Cypriana and their patron saint. Both examples showed a kind of Christian providence. Similarly in the case of Justinian and Chryses' dream in the *Buildings* there is an insistence on the special relationship between the emperor and god. Although Christian, these examples all function like classical epiphany dreams, where a divine entity appears to deliver a message to the dreamer. There are however occurrences of one might call 'modern' psychological dreams in Procopius; for example the demons of the plague could be said to embody the anxiety caused by illness, or the prophetic bird appearing to the Varni king could also be related to anxiety. The hallucination of Theoderic with its morbid

⁵⁸⁸ For the interpretation of dreams in late antiquity, see Miller (1994)

fish head is stemming from murderous guilt – a classical trope. These visions are all striking images and add another layer to the representation of visuality and viewing in Procopius. Viewing is not all about aesthetic and intellectual pleasures – such as with sightseeing – but it can also be a chilling and ominous experience. Finally, the last two examples in this chapter stand apart in that they perhaps do not fit either the prophetic or psychological categories. The boat of the dead stands apart thanks to its eeriness, and its anthropological interest; because of the fact that it affects a whole people, it could be seen as a study of the *imaginaire* of their culture. As for Procopius's dream, its function seems particularly interesting. Indeed, it does not particularly contribute to the narrative of the *Wars* but it is essential in the author's self-representation. The fact that Procopius talks about himself and his psychological state is very non-classical, but it creates a climate of intimacy with the reader, as well as representing his own intimacy with Belisarius. The dream itself is very unlikely to be a real dream, as it is not fragmented and follows a logical narrative pattern. The image of the banquet of flowers is interesting because of its – perhaps metatextual – symbolism.

Chapter Conclusion

The collection of *thaumata* in Procopius' corpus features a great variety of wonders of all kinds; some ethnographical, some natural phenomena, and many apparitions of mysterious figures. As for omens and oracles like the Sibyl, they attract attention to linguistic importance in their textual manifestation, and in their visual manifestation they seem to produce a vocabulary of images, even a repertoire. It is in the different expressions of the supernatural and marvellous that we get closer to

grasping the *imaginaire* of Procopius. Indeed, while reading him one feels at times like touring a cabinet of curiosities which shows his debt to authors like Herodotus and periegetic writers, but there is something to be said about some of the unique, vibrant images which populate his work. There is something equally eerie in the depiction of the boat entering the bay and anchoring on its own in *Buildings* I, similar to the boat of the dead in *Wars* VIII, and Justinian pacing in his palace at night without his head. There is really no rupture in the imagery of the demonology of the *Secret History* and the rest of the work with its various occurrences of the supernatural. That is not to say, however, that Procopius believed in demons, as some scholars have affirmed⁵⁸⁹, but it is true that the supernatural seems to be the place where he chooses to represent himself; at times as a sceptic narrator reluctant to believe in the irrational, at other times as an enthralled spectator of exotic curiosities, and finally as an actor in a strange paradoxical vision where flowers offer sustenance. Whether Procopius is any of them, none of them or a mixture, it is up to the reader to see.

⁵⁸⁹ Most recently, Treadgold (2007), 224.

CONCLUSION

The first half of this thesis has shown Procopius's interest in representing all things material, from buildings, to gardens, to jewellery. Through this he painted a detailed and vivid picture of the Byzantine emperor during Justinian's reign. This representation has been taken rather seriously by modern scholarship, even if it appears that it is a literary image first and foremost, drawing often from earlier literature as opposed to aiming for constant realism. The emphasis on the technical appears to be principally a source of *enargeia* in Procopius's descriptions of buildings or siege-engines, as they provide many details to help the reader see the thing described, but are not so technical that the words or concept explained are not easily understood by him.

There is also an encyclopaedic aspect to the representation of the material world, which stems from the details given as well as the variety of objects and themes broached as well as the use of lists, which create the appearance of a 'world' of knowledge. Through this, Procopius's own rhetorical representation as a man of expertise and knowledge is also efficiently conveyed. Furthermore, there is a material texture, or even a tangibility or tactility, to the text itself, which I aimed to demonstrate by looking closely at the language of Procopius. In the first chapter, I discussed the idea of 'thereness' which materiality provides this work with. This idea also questions the relationship between image and text, as well as the efficiency of language as a mode of representation.

The idea of representation segues into the importance of visuality and viewing in Procopius. This is not something that Procopian scholarship has ever focussed on, as

one major scholar once argued that ‘his mind did not naturally turn to the visual’⁵⁹⁰. There is an emphasis on the autoptic at times, as often Procopius represents himself watching something or insists on getting knowledge from sources who saw it first-hand, which could be said to echo Herodotus⁵⁹¹. The act of viewing itself is represented in a variety of ways in this text, but it is its performance or spectacular aspect, which are particularly striking. Viewing is not monolithic in Procopius but is a very rich and ambivalent concept. On the one hand, there is a mode of viewing which is presented in very positive terms as a cultivated, sophisticated, and intellectual activity. This is the case of looking at art, or technology, but also of looking at symbolic images. It is a very active way of viewing, involving a level of knowledge and mastery.

At the opposite end of the spectrum there is the act of viewing in its *hubris*, like with the shark in love with the sight of the pearl who neglects the necessities of life, just as with Justinian watching over the Empire and neglecting food and sleep. This is an all-consuming and erotic gaze. There are also modes of viewing which provoke negative feelings such as fear, unease or disgust, provoked by images of mutilated bodies or unnatural fish (the putrid fish of bad omen and the fish head resembling the dead Symmachus). Procopius uses images to set off a reaction from the reader, perhaps even some thinking. An example of this could be the way in which clothes and bodies are represented in ways that question ideas of self-presentation and the fragility of human identity. Finally, there is one last type of viewing which is interesting in Procopius: aporetic viewing. It is a passive way of viewing where one is overwhelmed and fails to control his eyes.

⁵⁹⁰ Cameron (1984), 231.

⁵⁹¹ Hartog (1988), 261 shows how autopsy works as a marker of truth in Herodotus.

In the introduction, I mentioned how Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Heliodorus' novel could be said to show an extension of the ekphrastic vividness from set-pieces to the whole work themselves, and that something similar was at play in Procopius. I demonstrated in the first half of my thesis how the singular descriptions of the material world – ranging from many pages like Hagia Sophia, or a line for a mountain or river – were made to bring the objects described in front of the reader's eye, using a variety of means, such as precise technical details, evocation of movement and use of metaphor, in order to produce *enargeia*. In the second half, I looked at the themes of violence and the supernatural as contaminated by this aesthetic of hyper-vividness and spectacularity.

Another aspect of Procopius' style that appears prominent throughout the examples discussed in this thesis is his use of *poikilia* and variety. *Poikilia* can be seen as the dazzling richness in minute details competing for the reader's attention, and I pointed out that Procopius himself uses this word in some of his descriptions, often to refer to variety in colours. There were also many examples of comparisons between art and nature as well as floral imagery. As for the way Procopius uses variety, it appears as a combination of iteration with variation, and play on combinations of words and ideas in various ways. This can be seen in particular in his descriptions of landscapes and the way he plays with similar ideas and words to create a variety of different images, but it could be said of buildings or omens. This dissertation has often presented examples in the shape of lists in a way that aimed to mirror Procopius's own aesthetic. Indeed, his style often turns to enumeration, as well as exaggeration, particularly when trying to persuade his audience or instill emotions – such as when he lists the evils caused by Justinian in the *Secret History*.

Another aim of this dissertation was to try to read Procopius with attention to authors writing closer to him in time in the imperial period, and particularly authors of the Second Sophistic. This was partly a reaction to previous scholarship which presented him as classicising to the extreme and that often read him alongside Xenophon and Thucydides. It is undeniable that Procopius has a great debt towards them, as well as Homer and Herodotus, but there are many authors who wrote between them and the Sixth century who might have influenced him and his style. As this was only a secondary aim, I am aware that I did not fully do justice to this programme and that there are still probably many parallels between Procopius and Second Sophistic authors in particular that could be found. On a thematic level, there were many concerns of Procopius that seemed to reflect that of authors of that period, for example, the use of technical knowledge as a rhetorical tool and the importance of constructing an image of expertise, which is something that appeared in chapters 1, 2, and 3, regarding subjects such as architecture, geography and engineering. I also found that the representation of violence as a spectacle, particularly in gruesome anatomical details, was reminiscent of Second Sophistic concerns with the violation of the body and its relationship with identity. These depictions could be put in parallel with Galen's vivid performances, but also with Neronian literature's emphasis on bodily violence. Closer to Procopius in time, there is also a wide range of Christian literature which represents the spectacle of physical martyrdom.

On a smaller scale, there were also stylistic echoes, whether using exactly the same expression, or the same image in slightly different terms which might or might not have been accidental. Some of this can be attributed to issues of genre, and a good example of this would perhaps be the comparison of the coastline to a necklace echoing

Aelius Aristides' praise of Smyrna, or reminiscences of Pausanias when discussing stones. There are also many similarities to Arrian, whom Procopius had visibly read and potentially taken as a source. Another author who might or might not have been read by Procopius is Philostratus, and there were at least two images that were found in both writers, one was the choral dance and the other the mountain reaching into the sky. It is difficult to draw conclusions from many of the parallels I have seen linguistically.

One author whose relationship to Procopius would be an interesting one to pursue is Heliodorus. Procopius and Heliodorus appear to have a few things in common; for example, the ethnographical flavour of some of their writing and their inspiration from Herodotus, but also the interest in etymology. I also found some linguistic parallels, for example the same expression was used when Procopius mentions the first daylight smiling through Hagia Sophia's dome and at the beginning of Heliodorus' novel. Another novel author whom I compared to Procopius was Achilles Tatius and I compared in quite a detailed manner how both of them described the feeling of aesthetic *aporia* induced by the sight of Hagia Sophia and the city of Alexandria. I would like to think that Procopius knew of the novels and had read at least one, and he must have known the format well enough, as it is arguable that chapters 1 to 5 of the *Secret History* follow the "travel-adventure-love formula"⁵⁹² with themes inherited from the novel of separations, trials, near-death and reunion.

I am not in a position where I can state with certainty which Second Sophistic authors Procopius might have read or not. But by focussing on the visual qualities of his prose, it appears obvious that Procopius is not just a conservative classicising Byzantine author who looked to his classical models as if there had been no literature between

⁵⁹² Adshead (1993), 7 as well as Evans (1975)105-109.

their period and his, but that his work reflects trends in literature like *poikilia* that started to pick up particularly during the Hellenistic period⁵⁹³ and onwards. Furthermore, his classicising is not strict imitation, but rather a play with classical tropes, in a similar way to which Second Sophistic authors played with those same tropes. Many aspects of his text distinguish him as late antique, from themes and topics – like demons, Christian miracles, and imperial propaganda – to more structural phenomena – such as his strong narratorial presence as a historian which goes as far as recalling his own dream, as well as the hybridity and generic exuberance of his works. The latter are typical of late antique and Byzantine literature and its rich texture and could be said to be a feature of material culture as well. One may think for example of the cup in the treasury of San Marco with its flesh-toned classical figures on a dark glass background which evoke red-figure vase painting on a cup typical of Byzantine glassware of this period (10th to 11th century)⁵⁹⁴.

⁵⁹³ On the strive for *poikilia/polueideia* as literary diversity in Hellenistic literature, see Gutzwiller (1981) 8.

⁵⁹⁴ See Kalavrezou-Maxeiner (1985).

CODA:

BYZANTINE LITERATURE, EKPHRASIS AND *POIKILIA*

The textured and colourful style used by Procopius which this dissertation has aimed to expose continued to be adopted by Byzantine writers long after him. Indeed, other writers of sophisticated prose come to mind for their use of *poikilia* and their interest in creating powerful, vivid, literary images. Anna Comnena, writing an epic history of the reign of her father Alexius Comnenus, offered throughout her text a genuine gallery of portraits; ekphrases of characters who appeared to be described in the manner of paintings or statues. A particularly striking instance is that of Maria of Alania, the mother of her betrothed Constantine Ducas:

καὶ γὰρ ἦν εὐμήκης μὲν τὴν ἡλικίαν καθαπερὲς κυπάριττος, λευκὴ δὲ τὸ σῶμα ὡσεὶ χίων, πρόσωπον κύκλον μὲν οὐκ ἀπαρτίζον, τὸ δὲ χρῶμα δι' ὅλου ἄνδρος ἡρινὸν ἢ ῥόδον ἀντικρυσ. τὰς δὲ τῶν ὀμμάτων αὐγὰς τίς ἀνθρώπων ἐξεΐποι; ὄφρῦς ὑπερανεστηκυῖα καὶ πυρσὴ, βλέμμα χαροπόν. ζωγράφου μὲν οὖν χεῖρ τὰ τῶν ἀνδῶν πολλάκις ἐμιμήσατο χρώματα, ὅποσα ὤραι φέρειν εἰώθασι, τὸ δὲ τῆς βασιλίδος κάλλος καὶ ἡ ἐπιλάμπουσα αὐτῇ χάρις καὶ τὸ τῶν ἡδῶν ἐπαγωγόν τε καὶ εὐχαρὶ ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ τέχνην ἐφαίνετο· οὐκ Ἀπελλῆς, οὐ Φειδίας οὐδὲ τις τῶν ἀγαλματοποιῶν τοιοῦτόν ποτε παρήγαγεν ἄγαλμα. καὶ ἡ μὲν τῆς Γοργοῦς κεφαλὴ λίθους ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τοὺς ὀρῶντας ἐποίει, ὡς λέγεται, τὴν δὲ ἰδὼν ἂν τις βαδίζουσαν ἢ αἴφνης ὑπαντιάσας ἐκεχῆναι τε καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτου σχήματος, ἐφ' ᾧ ἔτυχεν ὦν, ἴστατο ἐννεός, ὡς ἀφηρῆσθαι τηνικαῦτα δοκεῖν καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ διάνοιαν. ἀναλογίαν γὰρ τοιαύτην μελῶν καὶ μερῶν, τοῦ ὅλου πρὸς τὰ μέρη καὶ τούτων πρὸς τὸ ὅλον, οὐδεὶς οὐδέπω τοιαύτην ἐν ἀνθρώποις φιλοκάλοις ἐράσμιον. ἄγαλμα ἔμφυχον καὶ ἀνθρώποις φιλοκάλοις ἐράσμιον.

For her stature was as willowy as a cypress, her complexion white as snow, and her face both oval and its colouring truly that of a spring flower or a rose. As for the sparkle of her eyes, what mortal could describe it? Her eyebrows were arched and of a fiery colour, her eyes of a blueish grey. Certainly the hand of a painter has imitated many times the colours of flowers which grow in various seasons, but the beauty of the empress, her dazzling grace and the allure and charm of her manners appeared beyond art and speech; neither Apelles or Phidias, nor any sculptors ever produced a statue of such superiority. The Gorgon's head is said to have turned its spectators to stone, but anyone who saw the empress walking or encountered her unexpectedly, he would stare at her open-mouthed, rooted on the spot, dumbfounded, so much so that it he appeared to have been deprived of mind and intelligence. And such harmony there was to her limbs and each part of her, and from the whole to the parts, and from these to the whole, that has never been seen so perfect in a mortal body. She was a breathing statue, a ravishment for lovers of beauty.⁵⁹⁵

There is much of interest which could be discussed in this passage, but to look only at themes and techniques which have been examined in this dissertation, a few in particular stand out. There is obviously the use of colours and play on lights – with *αὐγάς* and *ἐπιλάμπουσα* – and the many comparisons to nature, with the cypress, the snow, and the flowers. Another layer is added to the natural metaphor by referring to the painter who copies the variety of colours in flowers; an actual painter as opposed to Procopius' image of nature as a painter painting flowers in many colours⁵⁹⁶. The whole ekphrasis is a constant play between art and nature, as Maria of Alania's beauty is beyond what painters and sculptors can achieve, but she is also said to be a breathing statue and her description has a definite pictorial and sculptural tone. The Gorgon comparison is also particularly vivid; first, because this is not one that is expected, as the Gorgon can be said to be equally repulsive, particularly with her mane of snakes, as she is enthralling, whereas Maria of Alania was a famous beauty in her time. But the parallel between the two is organised around the idea of aesthetic *aporia* just as the one

⁵⁹⁵ Anna Comnena III.ii.4. Translation is mine.

⁵⁹⁶ *Buildings* I.i.60.

Procopius uses in his description of Hagia Sophia. It is also a powerful depiction of *aporia*, taking into account both its literal meaning, as the viewer cannot seem to move, as well as a more rhetorical meaning, as he cannot speak or even think. The rhetorical trope of the object of a description being impossible to describe is itself used several times in the description of Maria, for example in the rhetorical question asking who could ever describe the brilliance of her eyes, or the simple statement that her beauty and overall demeanour were beyond speech, as well as art.

And finally, there is what could be almost an architectural or structural concern in the description of the harmony of her parts, and the relation between those parts and the whole. This harmony is a very common concern of rhetoric whereby a speech is like a body, requiring harmony between its various parts, and obviously also one of architecture and art. But in Procopius and Anna Comnena, the harmony of parts strives not to be artificial or too geometrical, and due to their use of *poikilia* and a style full of amplification, there is an organic quality to their works which appear like meadows of various literary flowers. There are many more ekphraseis in Anna Comnena's text, and outside of those set-pieces, her text presents the same ekphrastic feel as Procopius's, and takes a similar aesthetic of hyper-visibility to the next level.

There is much which still remains to be said about Byzantine prose literature, and in a period which saw such a wealth of fascinating art and architecture, it seems that looking at the depiction of material reality in texts and the complex relationship between visibility and textuality can only be a worthwhile and rewarding endeavour.

APPENDIX: A PLAN OF *BUILDINGS I*

- I.i: Hagia Sophia (20-78).

- I.ii: The statue of the Augustaeum (1-12); Saint Irene (13-14); the hospices of Samson of Isodorus and of Arcadios (14-17); countless churches dedicated to Christ (18-19).

- I.iii: Churches of the Virgin: The Blachernae (3-5) Pege (6-8); their situation (9), the church of the Virgin at the Hieron (10); Saint Anne of the Deuteron (11-12); Saint Zoe at the Deuteron (13); Saint Michael (14-18).

- I.iv: Apostles: Saints Peter and Paul of Hormisdas, Saints Sergius and Bacchus (1-8); the Holy Apostles, with discovery of the relics (9-24); several martyria (25-30).

- I.v: Constantinople and its bay.

- I.vi: Saint Lawrence; the Blachernae (previously described); Saints Priscus and Nicholas; Saints Cosmas and Damian (5-8, with healing of the emperor); Saint Anthimus (9-14).

- I.vii: Saint Irene, at the Golden Horn, and the relics of the XL Martyrs, with healing of Justinian (1-16).

- I.viii: After the Horn, the other two straits: the two churches of Saint Michael, at the Anaplous (2-17 with a reference to the recently built Saint John the Baptist at the Hebdomon) and on the other side at the Brochoi (18-19); another church of the Virgin near Saint Michael of the Brochoi.

- I.ix: Not far from there, on the right bank of the Bosphorus going towards the Black Sea, the palace transformed into the monastery of the Metanoia for repenting prostitutes (1-10); Saint Pantelaemon (11); hospice for lepers (12-13); Saint Michael of the Hieron (13-14); Saint Tryphon in the city (15); the martyria of Menas and Menaeus; Saint Ia (16); conclusion on Justinian's work on sacred buildings and mention of the sanctuaries in the rest of the Empire (17-18).
- I.x: Secular buildings: introduction (1-2), propylaea of the Palace, Bronze Gate, Baths of Zeuxippus and adjoining area (3), house of Hormisdas (4), Augustaeum (5), Senate House (6-9), the Palace (10), the Chalke and its mosaics (11-20).
- I.xi: The Arcadianae, its statues, including Theodora's (1-9), work on water supplies (10-15), palaces at Hieron and Jucundianae (16-17), harbours at Hieron and Eutropius (18-22), conclusion and mention of the hospice at Stadium (23-27).

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