

Procopius, Belisarius and the Goths

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This paper will discuss an odd alliance of 540, which forms an episode within the Eastern Roman Empire's re-conquest of Italy and North Africa, until then ruled by Gothic and Vandal kings respectively. Military forces were sent west by the Eastern Roman Emperor, Justinian, and led by General Belisarius from 533. The origins of the alliance will be explained as will its consequences and their significance. The methodological approach for the study of this odd alliance will consist of the analysis of a main primary textual source: Procopius of Caesarea¹ who modelled his history writing on that of Thucydides.² A discussion of a small part of Procopius' use of the rhetoric, which he employed during his anti-tyrant speeches, purportedly made by Belisarius, will follow. Then a concern for the dates of composition of the accounts by Procopius will be considered in relation to the then contemporary events before presenting a conclusion.

The origins of the alliance can be found in Justinian's wars in the East and West. The superpowers of Rome and Persia had most recently been at war (since 502) and this continued (until 532 and then from 540) after Justinian's accession to the imperial throne in 527.³ The war consisted of mutual raiding in force resulting in significant battles at Dara⁴ and Satala in 530 (both in eastern Turkey) and Callinicum in 531 (in Syria). At

¹ Procopius was an eyewitness to many of the events described and, as an adviser who accompanied Belisarius on campaign, was able to access other reliable sources. Procopius wrote the *History of the Wars*, *The Secret History* and the *Buildings*, vols. I-VII, trans. H. B. Dewing, (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge Mass., 1914-40). Hereafter, references to *History of the Wars* will be by book, chapter and line (e.g. *History of the Wars*, Book VI, ch. 28, lines 14-15 will be *Wars*, VI.28. 14-15).

² Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) p. 9.

³ Geoffrey Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War, 502-532* (Liverpool, 1998).

⁴ Christopher Lillington-Martin, 'Archaeological and Ancient Literary Evidence for a Battle near Dara Gap, Turkey, AD 530: Topography, Texts and Trenches' in Ariel S.

Dara, Belisarius inflicted a heavy defeat upon the invading Persians, as did the Roman General Sittas at Satala later that summer. The Persian response ended in a tactical, if not strategic, victory over Belisarius at Callinicum the following Easter, 531. However, neither superpower had a realistic prospect of attaining a complete victory over the other. Both the Roman Emperor and the Persian Shah had domestic issues to consider, which led them to negotiate. After the brutal suppression of the 'Nika' rebellion in Constantinople in early 532, Justinian concluded the 'Endless Peace' treaty with Sassanian Persia that same year, which was to last until 540. Peace on the eastern frontier allowed Justinian to prepare and then send an army from Constantinople, led by Belisarius, westwards to re-conquer North Africa from the Vandals, 533-4. For this skilful yet lucky and quick victory, in which the Vandal King Gelimer was captured and brought to Constantinople along with his royal treasure, Justinian rewarded Belisarius two Roman imperial triumphs. One in 534 and another when awarded the Consulship for the year 535.⁵ Belisarius was even permitted to distribute gold coin on both occasions.⁶ The Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy became Justinian's next target.

Once again, Belisarius was entrusted to lead a Roman army westwards. Whilst in Sicily, a report arrived, around Easter 536, that the Roman army garrisoning North Africa had mutinied, which meant he had to alter his plans to suppress it. The mutiny provided Procopius with an opportunity to deploy rhetoric within an anti-tyrant speech, purportedly made by Belisarius, which will be discussed below. Later that year, whilst

Lewin and Pietrina Pellegrini (eds.), *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 299-311.

⁵ The triumph in 534 was the first celebrated in Constantinople, and the first awarded to a subject since the reign of Tiberius. The treasures displayed included items that had been taken to Rome from the temple of Jerusalem after Titus Flavius Vespasianus sacked it in 70. They had then been taken from Rome to Carthage by the Vandal King Gaiseric in 455. George Cedrenus, *Historiarum Compendium* (Bonn edn, I. p. 370) is cited to suggest medals were struck in Belisarius' honour, with his head on the reverse [in William Smith (ed.), *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman biography and mythology*, (Boston, 1867), vol. 1, p. 479 (available at <http://www.ancientlibrary.com/smith-bio/0488.html>).] On 1 January 535, Belisarius was appointed Consul and held a second triumph (Procopius, *Wars* IV. 9.1-16).

⁶ Michael F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c.300-1450* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 195 and note p. 205.

Belisarius led one army northwards from Sicily and up the west coast of Italy, Justinian sent General Mundus with another army through the Balkans to attack the Ostrogothic kingdom from the east. That November, Belisarius reached Naples, which his army besieged and then took by storming the walls. Early in December, he took Rome, and parts of Tuscany, by surrender. Belisarius then led a small garrison to withstand the Ostrogothic siege of Rome by the newly elected King Vitigis from March 537 to March 538. Towards the end of the siege, Vitigis opened negotiations with Justinian to seek peace terms. These broke down because of devious actions on both sides during the time it took for envoys to travel between Italy and Constantinople. The Goths lost the initiative so abandoned the siege of Rome to defend their settlements in central and northern Italy 'concentrated in Picenum' as shown by Heather.⁷ Forces sent north by Belisarius, led by John, the nephew of Vitalian, marched as far as Rimini and threatened such Gothic settlements.

Procopius reports that Vitigis sent envoys to the Persian Shah Khusro proposing he attack the Roman Empire from the east. This was in the hope that Justinian would redeploy, or at least not reinforce, the Roman armies advancing northwards through Italy. Vitigis' Persian directed diplomacy came too late to save his own throne (but possibly contributed to the Persian decision to invade Roman territory). Justinian sent a reinforcing army to Italy under General Narses who was recalled after interfering with Belisarius' strategy. The Franks invaded Italy from the north and attacked both Roman and Gothic armies in 539. By 540 events reached a critical point. The Persian Shah led an invasion into Syria in person (breaking the peace treaty of 532) and reached Antioch. Belisarius initiated a siege of the Ostrogothic capital, Ravenna. This was a well-fortified city in a nearly impregnable position. It was in this context that Procopius describes how an odd alliance developed between Belisarius and the Goths. However, we should take into consideration that aspects of this portrayal might reveal a potentially odd alliance of a literary nature between Procopius and the Goths.

During the siege of Ravenna in 540, the Ostrogothic king, Vitigis, received ambassadors from both the Franks and from Justinian to discuss potential treaties. The

⁷ Peter J. Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford 1996), p. 238, Figure 8.1

Franks offered military support to the Goths in return for a share in the rule over Italy. Procopius pens a Frankish speech describing the Romans as, ‘the most hostile of all men’ and, ‘altogether untrustworthy toward all barbarians, by nature hostile to them’.⁸ Given what was to follow, Procopius may have intended his readers to consider these remarks to have been aimed at Belisarius. Procopius then pens a Roman ambassador speech. This effectively summarised events and stated that the Emperor had more soldiers than the Franks, who had already received both ‘vast sums of money’ and the ‘territory of Gaul’ from the Goths but had provided ‘no assistance’ to them and had instead ‘actually taken up arms’ against them.⁹ These arguments convinced Vittigis and his Gothic nobles to dismiss the Frankish envoys and give, ‘preference to the proposed treaty with the Emperor’.¹⁰ Negotiations continued whilst Belisarius prevented food supplies getting into Ravenna by sending troops to control the River Po and Venetia.

Procopius reports that Ravenna’s grain stores then burned down and offers three possible explanations, perhaps in the style of Herodotus. He states that the stores may have been struck by lightning, or have been set alight for a bribe from Belisarius or because of a plot by Vittigis’ unhappy wife, Matasuntha. Vittigis had married her on his accession in 536 ‘much against her will, in order that he might make his rule more secure by marrying into the family of Theoderic’.¹¹ Theoderic had established the Gothic kingdom in Italy from 493–526. Previously Matasuntha had ‘opened secret negotiations with...’ the general sent north by Belisarius, John the nephew of Vitalian, when he reached Rimini ‘... concerning marriage and the betrayal of the city’ (Ravenna).¹² Whatever the real cause of the burning of the grain stores, the result was a severe shortage of provisions in the besieged Gothic capital.

The emperor had authorised his ambassadors to offer a treaty to the Goths. The terms were that the Goths would retain Italian lands north of the River Po in exchange for half the Ostrogothic royal treasure and acceptance of the return of Italy south of the Po to

⁸ Procopius, *Wars*, VI.28.14 -15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, VI.28.16ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, VI.28.23

¹¹ *Ibid.*, V.11.27

¹² *Ibid.*, VI.10.11

the Roman Empire. Procopius informs us that the Goths did not trust the Franks to honour any treaty and had dismissed them as mentioned above. He portrays the Goths as deciding to accept the Emperor's proposal gladly but only on the condition that Belisarius himself ratified it. Perhaps the Goths were so keen because Belisarius' troops were already taking control of lands north of the Po. For example, Belisarius had sent Vitalius north into Venetia and Thomas into the Cottian Alps.¹³ In any case, this Gothic condition leads Procopius to a description of his odd alliance between Belisarius and the Goths.

According to Procopius, Belisarius refused to sign the agreement. This may have been because, in the time taken by the ambassadors to arrive from Constantinople with Justinian's offer, the position had changed significantly. Apart from a lack of grain in Ravenna, Belisarius was tightening his grip around the city including territory north of the Po. Belisarius may also have wanted to lead a second barbarian king to Constantinople to enhance his reputation as a king breaker, if he was not aiming for a greater prize. Alternatively, Procopius might have had another motive such as to demonstrate ostensibly the importance of Belisarius for reasons linked to the year of composition and publication of different parts of *Wars*, which will be discussed below.

This left the Goths in an awkward position until, according to Procopius, the 'best of the Goths' who were 'hostile to Vittigis' but 'reluctant to yield to the emperor', emerged with an unusual proposal for a very odd alliance. They '...decided to declare Belisarius Emperor of the West.' In secret they, 'begged him to assume the royal power' as they would 'follow him gladly' but, Procopius continues, Belisarius was 'unwilling to assume the ruling power against the will of the emperor'.¹⁴ This may partly explain Procopius' deployment of anti-tyrant speeches discussed below. Perhaps, in the Ravenna episode, Procopius is implying that Belisarius would have been willing to assume power, if the emperor were to agree, as a junior co-ruler. Procopius' record of Belisarius' position may represent either his unshakable loyalty to Justinian or conceivably, his posturing for a greater prize. As he was there and on the general's staff, Procopius was probably in a good position to evaluate Belisarius' ambition at the time. However, when

¹³ Ibid., VI.28.24 and VI.28.28-30

¹⁴ Ibid., VI.29.18-19

he published the record, about eleven years later, he probably needed to do so ambiguously because his protagonists were still in power.

By some means, Vittigis also learned of the secret negotiating. Justinian's ambassadors could have also heard of the offer to Belisarius just as Vittigis had. Perhaps Belisarius was hoping that the ambassadors were in a position to agree to his becoming a junior ruler in Italy on behalf of Justinian. Whatever the case may have been, Procopius records Belisarius calling a meeting of his commanders and the emperor's ambassadors where he, '...asked them whether it seemed to them a matter of great importance to make all the Goths with Vittigis captives, and to secure as plunder all their wealth, and recover the whole of Italy for the Romans'.¹⁵ Procopius could have written, 'for the emperor' but chose 'Romans' instead which could also be ambiguous. Procopius asserts that the Roman commanders and ambassadors 'begged him to bring it about as quickly as possible, by whatever means he could'.¹⁶ Belisarius then communicated to Vittigis his willingness for them to '...carry out what they had promised.'¹⁷ Procopius asserts that the Gothic nobles and Vittigis were driven to this decision because the Goths were suffering from the food crisis caused by the burning of the grain stores and being under siege, after five years losing a war. Gothic envoys arrived with Vittigis' agreement to a second proposal. Perhaps he knew his support had faded and the alternatives may have been Gothic civil war or his own assassination. The second proposal was that the Goths surrender Ravenna and that Vittigis abdicate in favour of Belisarius, as long as he promised not to harm the Goths as well as accepting the crown to 'be king of the Goths and Italians'.¹⁸ Procopius explains how Belisarius agreed to swear oaths regarding the former promise but insisted, disingenuously, on waiting until he had entered the city to officially accept the royal crown. This was accepted by the Goths and Procopius personally observed the Roman army marching into Ravenna, during May 540, to occupy the capital and the dispatch of grain ships into its harbour to relieve the famine. Procopius

¹⁵ Ibid., VI.29.23

¹⁶ Ibid., VI.29.24

¹⁷ Ibid., VI.29.24-25

¹⁸ Ibid., VI.29.26

reports that the Gothic women ‘spat upon the faces of their husbands’ in disgust which suggests they certainly considered this to be an odd alliance.¹⁹

Belisarius guarded Vittigis and sent home any Goths from south of the Po where Roman forces controlled the cities. This left the Romans in Ravenna with numerical superiority over the Goths. The city was spared from being plundered although Belisarius took charge of the royal treasure. Gothic forces from Treviso and Venetia sent envoys to Belisarius ‘...craving permission to submit themselves by surrender...’.²⁰ However, the Gothic commander of Verona, Ildibadus, stayed at his post despite his children being under Belisarius’ control in Ravenna. He was the nephew of Theudis, King of the Visigoths in Spain, so could hope for support. Belisarius then prepared to return to Constantinople as he had been recalled by Justinian who needed him to deal with the Persian invasion of Syria.

The Goths were surprised that Belisarius was passing up the opportunity to rule them and they were especially scared that they would be deported to the East to fight on the Persian front. Therefore, some sent to Uraias in Liguria stating that they would prefer to fight the Romans than be deported. Uraias suggested that Ildibadus might be able to gain support for a new war from his uncle, Theudis, king of the Visigoths in Spain. Ildibadus came from Verona and was ‘clothed in the purple’ and declared ‘king of the Goths’. This could be seen as a rebellion as Vittigis had surrendered, albeit on the understanding that Belisarius would become king. Ildibadus suggested attempting to persuade ‘Belisarius to the earlier agreement’ and Gothic envoys were sent to Ravenna to remind him of the agreement and an offer from Ildibadus to ‘lay down the purple at his feet’ as ‘king of the Goths and the Italians’.²¹ This was the third and final time that the Goths offered Belisarius the crown but Procopius records ‘never while emperor Justinian lived, would Belisarius usurp the title of king’.²² This may relate to other episodes penned by Procopius recounting events of 536 and 544 with his portrayal of Belisarius’ view of usurping power, which are discussed below.

¹⁹ Ibid., VI.29.34

²⁰ Ibid., VI.29.40

²¹ Ibid., VI.29.22

²² Ibid., VI.29.28

Belisarius took the envoys, Ildibadus' children, Vittigis, many Gothic nobles, warriors and the entire Gothic royal treasure to Constantinople. Belisarius' rejection of Ildibadus' attempt to convince him to accept the Gothic crown meant Ildibadus remained as king of the Goths. Thus, Ildibadus stayed in Italy with power when his children were taken away. Therefore, he made a similar decision to Agamemnon in Aeschylus' tragedy that resulted in the 'sacrifice' of a child in return for power. This is just one episode that Procopius offers to show how complicated the decisions were that various Goths had to make regarding their loyalties and which odd alliances they were obliged to make in order to survive. Conversely, a part of Belisarius' decision not to become king of the Goths and Italians may have been because his daughter, Joannina, was probably in Constantinople.

Collins has discussed Belisarius' refusal to ratify Justinian's terms of peace and his rejection of the Ostrogothic crown.²³ He suggests that 'a much reduced Kingdom under Wittigis... would have created a valuable military buffer in the north... the best possible outcome for both sides'.²⁴ However, this judgement assumes that the Goths, with their king, army and half their royal treasure intact, would have remained peaceful towards the Romans after Belisarius returned to the east. Such a peaceful outcome must have seemed improbable to Belisarius at the time, especially as the Persians had just broken the 'Endless Peace' of 532. In fact, even after Belisarius had transported their king, many nobles, warriors and the entire royal treasure to the east, the Goths were still powerful enough to resume the war. With their newly chosen king, Ildibadus, they embarked on a military campaign against the Roman army in Italy that lasted, under Totila, for a further 13 years. Besides, after having succeeded in taking the Vandal King Gelimer and his treasure to Constantinople in 534, Belisarius may well have limited his ambition to bringing a second Germanic king and royal treasure to Justinian, along with warriors to serve on the Persian front.

²³ Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe*, Palgrave History of Europe (London, 1999), pp. 131-4

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 131

Collins states that Belisarius ‘failed to take the western imperial title himself, which might have been the next best thing.’²⁵ This judgement considers Belisarius may have, ‘found that he lacked the support needed amongst his own officers and men’²⁶ but does not consider the probable consequences such a decision would have instigated. Considering he had suppressed the Nika riots, in 532, and a mutiny in North Africa, in 536, Belisarius would have known that, even with full support from his officers and men, had he accepted the throne in Ravenna, the Roman Empire would have been thrown into turmoil. At best it would have left him ruling a possibly rump Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy with subjects of dubious loyalty, antagonistic Franks to the north, and Justinian’s Roman armies to the east and south. Such a situation could easily have led to a protracted Roman civil war, which the Goths could have gained from easily. That would have put Belisarius into a very awkward situation. Whatever his thoughts may have been, Belisarius, aged under 40 at the time, had significant vested interests in Constantinople (probably including his only child, Joannina, as well as property) and, if he had had any imperial ambitions, a reasonable prospect of becoming emperor after Justinian who was then almost 60.

To turn to the episodes mentioned above where Procopius recounted events of 536 and 544 and his portrayal of Belisarius’ view of usurping power, I will now examine some of what Belisarius is portrayed, by Procopius, as having said in anti-tyrant speeches. Rather than allude to Procopius and Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides or Plato or discuss Procopius’ imitation of classical Greek, this examination will discuss what Procopius portrays Belisarius as saying in certain pieces of rhetoric. This occurs in some speeches and I shall question why at least one such piece might be lacking. This is because, when cross referenced to certain other pieces of rhetoric, they possibly reveal more about Procopius’ own political views which may amount to an odd alliance of a literary nature with the Goths. The circumstances surrounding the pieces I have selected relate to Belisarius’ suppression of the army’s mutiny in Africa, 536, and the commencement of his second Italian campaign in 544. The latter can also be seen as a

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 134

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 131

suppression of another mutiny by part of the Roman army, which had joined the Ostrogothic rebellion after 540.

In 536, Procopius has Belisarius deliver a speech to his Roman soldiers before a battle against Stotzas' mutineers. This took place at the River Bagradas near Membresa in modern Tunisia.²⁷ As indicated above, a large part of the army in Africa had mutinied, around Easter 536, against their commander Solomon. He, together with Procopius, narrowly escaped from Carthage to reach Sicily and report to Belisarius in Syracuse. Solomon '...begged him to come with all speed to Carthage and defend the emperor...'.²⁸ Then '...the mutineers, after plundering everything in Carthage, gathered in the plain of Boulla, and chose Stotzas, ..., as tyrant (τύραννον) over them ...'.²⁹ Stotzas armed his 8,000 strong Roman force, recruited at least 1,000 Vandals (who had escaped deportation in 534) and 'a great throng of slaves'. He then returned to besiege Carthage, which considered surrendering.³⁰ Belisarius sailed immediately in one ship, with just 100 guardsmen and Solomon, from Syracuse arriving into Carthage at dusk. The unexpected news of Belisarius' sudden arrival caused 'the besiegers' (οἱ πολιορκοῦντες) to break camp and retreat.³¹ We should note the translation to besiegers (οἱ πολιορκοῦντες) rather than mutineers (οἱ στασιώται).³² At this point, we might have expected Procopius to pen a full Belisarian speech to the Romans and Libyans in Carthage along the lines of the example purportedly delivered at Ravenna in 544 to be quoted later. Instead, Procopius merely writes:

'And Belisarius gathered about two thousand of the army and, after urging them with words to be loyal to the emperor and encouraging them with large gifts of money, he began the pursuit of the fugitives (τούς φεύγοντας).' *Wars*, IV.15.9

Whilst we must avoid reading too much into a source's intentions to ascertain whether he is intending to deploy literary style, political sympathies or historical

²⁷ Procopius, *Wars*, IV.15.17-29

²⁸ *Ibid.*, IV.14.42

²⁹ *Ibid.*, IV.15.1

³⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.15.2-8

³¹ *Ibid.*, IV.15.9

³² *Ibid.*, IV.15.1 & 40

objectivity, Procopius' use of 'besiegers' and 'fugitives' rather than 'mutineers' may be significant. The words '...after urging them with words to be loyal to the emperor and encouraging them with large gifts of money ...' could almost be described as preliminary notes for the Ravenna speech of 544 to which we will return. However, we might ask why Procopius did not include a full speech at this point. Perhaps he considered it unnecessary at the time of composition, as in 536 Belisarius had been successful in boosting morale at Carthage in stark contrast to subsequent events described as occurring at Ravenna in 544 (published two years later). Alternatively, it is possible that Procopius wanted to keep his readers in suspense for the Membresa speech he has Belisarius deliver to his Roman soldiers before his victory in battle against Stotzas' mutineers.³³ However, there may be another reason as Procopius offers us, via Belisarius, his description of a new tyranny towards the end of the speech before his victorious battle of Membresa:

'For when a tyranny is newly organised and has not yet won that authority which self-confidence gives, it is, of necessity, looked upon by its subjects with contempt. Nor is it honoured through any sentiment of loyalty, for a tyranny is, in the nature of the case, hated: nor does it lead its subjects by fear, for timidity deprives it of power to speak out openly. And when the enemy is handicapped in point of valour and of discipline, their defeat is ready at hand. With great contempt, therefore, as I said, we should go against this enemy of ours. For it is not by the number of combatants, but by their orderly array and their bravery, that prowess in war is wont to be measured.' *Wars*, IV.15.26-28

We shall revisit the ideas expressed within this quote but first we need to turn to later events. In Book VII, Procopius has Belisarius deliver a speech to the loyal Goths and Roman soldiers on his arrival at Ravenna in 544.³⁴ This could almost be an expansion on Procopius' representation of what Belisarius is supposed to have said on arrival in Carthage in 536.³⁵ Between 540 and 544, the Goths had rebelled against Roman rule at least in part because Belisarius declined to become their king as explained above. They had gained the upper hand in Italy under a new king, Totila. After dealing with the Persian threat, Belisarius was transferred from the eastern front back to Italy by an

³³ *Ibid.*, IV.15.17-29

³⁴ *Ibid.*, VII.11.2-9

³⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.15.9

‘embarrassed’ emperor Justinian.³⁶ Belisarius could not ‘detach his troops from the army in Persia’ because of the Persian threat, so he travelled west via Thrace ‘by offering money, to gather fresh volunteers’.³⁷ There he met Vitalius, the General of Illyricum. Belisarius, Vitalius, the fleet and 4,000 men travelled to Ravenna via Salona and Pola (on the eastern Adriatic coast) ‘putting the army in order’.³⁸

On arrival at Ravenna, Procopius has Belisarius deliver a speech in an attempt to console his listeners (or Procopius' readers) and mention the ‘wickedness’ and ‘depravity’ of ‘persons of the basest sort’. This could be referring to the enemy Roman soldiers who had deserted, the previous Roman commanders (for their questionable treatment of both Goths and Roman soldiers during the years 540-544) and possibly others. Procopius has Belisarius appeal for the Goths and Roman soldiers to, ‘summon’ any ‘relatives or friends with the usurper (tyrant) Totila’ (**Τουτίλα τω τυράννω**). In exchange, Procopius has Belisarius offer ‘...both the blessings which flow from peace and those which fall from the hand of the mighty emperor.’ Immediately after the speech, Procopius comments: ‘But not one of the enemy came over to him, either Goth or Roman’.³⁹ Totila is referred to as a ‘usurper / tyrant’ (**Τουτίλα τω τυράννω**) in exactly the same way that Stotzas had been described during the army's mutiny in Africa in 536. Therefore, Procopius may have intended his readers to notice a parallel between the speeches associated with the two ‘tyrants’ and Belisarius.

Now we should revisit Procopius' description of a new tyranny (*Wars*, IV.15.26-28, quoted above). If the description is inverted and applied to describe Totila's ‘tyranny’, it can perhaps help explain Procopius' own view as to why Belisarius was not successful in boosting morale sufficiently at Ravenna in 544, in order to persuade the Goths and Roman soldiers to summon their friends and relatives to join him. Perhaps Procopius was expecting some of his readers to infer and conclude that Totila's ‘tyranny’ was essentially: established and having won authority through self-confidence; looked upon by its subjects with respect; honoured through sentiments of loyalty; loved rather than

³⁶ *Ibid.*, VII.9.23

³⁷ *Ibid.*, VII.10.1

³⁸ *Ibid.*, VII.10.13

³⁹ *Ibid.*, VII.11.10

hated, with the power to speak out openly, possessing valour and discipline; difficult to defeat, orderly and brave. If so, Procopius has put into the mouth of Belisarius two speeches in order to address the question of new tyrannies. The comments that Belisarius is portrayed as saying actually do apply to the two situations (Carthage in 536 and Ravenna in 544). However, we should perhaps read these speeches against the background of the events they explain as well as against each other.

I propose that we apply the speech of 536 to the situation of 544, and therefore arrive at a positive conclusion about how Procopius wants the careful readers of his speeches to see the ‘tyranny’ of Totila. To the extent that Belisarius failed to rally support against Totila, he cannot be understood as a rebel or tyrant on the model of Stotzas. In fact, if the speech of 536 is applied to the situation of 544, a favourable picture of Totila emerges and an odd alliance of a literary nature emerges between Procopius and the Goths. This means that the 536 speech was probably written by Procopius with later events in mind, and therefore cannot represent the actual words of Belisarius, except to the degree that those words are plausible for the situation at hand. The 544 speech was more probably written with both the earlier speech and later events in mind. Therefore, Procopius seems to have used Belisarius to express his own political views through his dextrous deployment of rhetoric.⁴⁰ Furthermore, whilst Procopius has presented an account of how the Goths offered an alliance to Belisarius in 540, it is perhaps Procopius himself who changes his literary allegiance. He uses his characterisation of Belisarius to represent his own views. This suggests that Procopius had as much or more respect for the Goths as for the Romans and disguised his views within a literary construct. This leads us to a discussion on the dates of composition and publication of *Wars* by Procopius.⁴¹

Now we can consider the significance of events contemporary to likely publication dates in relation to the events portrayed within *Wars*. Sarris offers a basis for

⁴⁰ Procopius was known as a *rhetor* by Evagrius Scholasticus: ‘It has been written by Procopius the rhetor in composing his history concerning Belisarius ...’, Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book IV, 12, trans. Michael Whitby (Liverpool, 2001), p.212

⁴¹ G. Greatrex, ‘The Dates of Procopius’ Works’, *BMGS* 18 (1994), 101-114 and ‘Recent Work on Procopius and the Composition of Wars VIII’, *BMGS* 27 (2003), 45-67.

discussion by presenting arguments that Procopius began writing before 545 composing *Wars* I-IV by 548-9, *Wars* V-VII by 551 and *Wars* VIII by 553.⁴² At *Wars* II.3.32-53, Procopius represents some Armenians, recently defeated by the Romans, as supposedly addressing the Persian Shah Khusro in 539. He has them outline Justinian's achievements, which threaten Persia, in order to convince Khusro to break the treaty of 532 and attack Syria in 540. He makes the Armenians end their persuasive speech by suggesting that opposition in Syria would be minimal because, '...Belisarius will never again be seen by Justinian. For disregarding his master, he has remained in the West, holding the power in Italy himself.'⁴³ That this, and other, speeches are inventions, and that Belisarius did not disregard Justinian or remain in the West at Ravenna in 540, or in 549, when he was finishing his second Italian campaign, is not the point. To make most sense, this speech was probably composed, with at least the intention of publication, before Belisarius returned from his second Italian campaign (544 until 549). However, when finishing *Wars* II, Procopius did not know when Belisarius would return because he was not with him. Was he intending his readers to interpret something on publication, c. 549, about Belisarius that never happened and, if so, why? Perhaps Belisarius' return from Italy in 549 led Procopius to compensate by emphasising Belisarius' triple refusal of the Gothic crown in 540 within *Wars* VI finished and doubtless published within two years (*Wars* V-VII were published c.551). This would support Belisarius at a time when his career had stalled. This would suggest Procopius embellished his account in response to contemporary events at the different times of publication of parts of *Wars*.

In conclusion, there were several significant consequences of the odd alliance between Belisarius and the Goths as portrayed by Procopius. Firstly, it achieved the surrender of Ravenna and nearby forts together with their garrisons. Belisarius achieved his aim of taking King Vittigis, Gothic leaders, warriors and royal treasure to Constantinople. This enriched the Roman state, as well as Belisarius' reputation, and provided the eastern frontier Roman army with experienced recruits. Hendy has compared the financial gain with that achieved by the Emperors Heraclius in 628,

⁴² Procopius' *Secret History* trans. by Williamson, G.A. and Peter Sarris with an introduction and notes by Peter Sarris (London, 2007), ix; xiii and 128 with notes

⁴³ Procopius, *Wars* II.3.52

Nicephorus in 811 and Basil II in 1018 that seized the Sassanian and two Bulgarian royal treasures respectively.⁴⁴ This odd alliance avoided leaving a potentially bitter Vittigis in charge of an Ostrogothic buffer kingdom in northern Italy, who could have easily broken a treaty just as the Persian Shah Khusro broke the 'Endless Peace' in 540 and ravaged Syria (sacking Antioch). In 541, Belisarius led Goths, as part of the Roman army and forced Khusro to withdraw from Syria without a battle, which also added to his reputation. Vittigis was made a Senator and retired in Constantinople. Matasuntha was later widowed and then married Justinian's nephew Germanus. The Goths selected a new king in Italy whose power spread so war continued into the 550s. The Romans used Lombard mercenaries in the war, some of whom returned to seize Italian lands from 568. East Roman outposts survived in coastal parts of Italy until the eleventh century. Ravenna remained under control from Constantinople until 751. In a fragmented Italy, the Papacy rose in power and the peninsula remained disunited from the sixth to the nineteenth centuries. This paper has examined a very brief and odd alliance between Belisarius, an East Roman General, and the Ostrogoths, which had disproportionately significant consequences for Italy. The approach to the study of this alliance has analysed some of the dates of composition of the accounts by Procopius in relation to the events explained after a discussion of Procopius' use of rhetoric, which he employed to communicate his own political views.

Ends

⁴⁴ Hendy, M.F., *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c.300-1450* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 280-281 with notes pp. 151-155.



Part of the imperial panel mosaic from San Vitale, Ravenna, 540-46 reproduced from Irina Andreescu-Treadgold and Warren Treadgold, 'Procopius and the Imperial Panels of S. Vitale', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (Dec., 1997), pp. 708-723. This illustrates the Emperor Justinian on the right with two patricians, possibly including Belisarius, in the centre and a group of guardsmen on the left. If read from the left it could be seen as a representation of Belisarius' career as he started in the imperial guards, rose to the rank of patrician and was offered a royal crown by the Goths in 540 (but declined it).

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