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## Procopius and Thucydides

### Defining the Gothic War Year

**ABSTRACT:** Modern understanding of the emperor Justinian’s protracted war against the Gothic regime in Italy and Sicily is based almost entirely on the account of Procopius of Caesarea from 535 to 552. The chronology of the war therefore depends on the interpretation of Procopius’s narrative in the fundamental books by J.B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (1923) and E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* (1949), which underpin all modern accounts. Both Bury and Stein presumed that Procopius’ Gothic war year ran uniformly from the end of June of one year to the end of June of the next. This paper aims to demonstrate that the Procopian Gothic war year did not run at a fixed time from June to June each year, but from the beginning of the annual campaign season (normally March) to the end of the following winter, in clear imitation of his model Thucydides. Also explored are the implications for redating key episodes of the Gothic War.

**KEYWORDS:** Belisarius, Narses, Justinian, Totila, Witiges, Thucydides, Procopius, Cassiodorus, Jordanes, Agnellus, Continuator of Marcellinus, Rome, Ravenna, Goths, Slavs, siege, war year.

## I. Introduction

Procopius of Caesarea’s chronology was not designed for the demands of modern scholarship. His Constantinopolitan audience in the sixth

century and beyond was primarily interested in his narrative flow and his capacity to describe the great events and characters of his day. Like all ancient historians, he strived to create a story worth hearing and telling, and worth hearing and telling again. By education and practice Procopius was a rhetorician. Consciously imitating the example of Thucydides, who wrote almost a millennium before him, and the imitators of Thucydides down to his own time, he used very few chronological markers throughout his *Wars*. The resulting imprecision of his chronology has frustrated modern historians, so that one of the most accomplished students of Procopius was moved to comment that ‘even the driest and most infantile chronicles surpass him in chronological accuracy’,<sup>1</sup> while another lamented his ‘real phobia for dates’.<sup>2</sup>

Setting events in chronological order and clarifying the precise chronological relationship between them may be prerequisites for a modern historian, but they were never an ancient historian’s main concern.<sup>3</sup> Procopius was no exception. In an era that now accords scholarly priority to exploring how an author constructed an explanatory narrative in literary terms, it is easy to forget that the traditional use of Thucydides, or Procopius, as a source of reliable, or ‘truthful’, historical information has not been superseded.<sup>4</sup>

Accurate chronology was always a difficult task for an ancient historian. Any attempt to establish a date beyond one’s familiar local system required some sort of synchronism across different official years that began and ended at different times, often cutting across seasons. That is why the one common year, namely the solar year of nature and its changing seasons, particularly summers and winters, was attractive to historians. Such a structure naturally accommodated the annual movement and action of armies, a focus for most Greek and Roman

<sup>1</sup> Rubin 1957: 356.

<sup>2</sup> Trisoglio 1978: 487. Modern scholars are invariably forced to make chronological sense of Procopius and other sources for events in Italy from the 530s to the 550s, e.g., Vitiello 2014: 67, 96–98, 129, 159–160, 179, 247, 267, 287 and Vitiello 2017: 15, 19, 128–129, 144, 157, 245.

<sup>3</sup> A modern limitation well expounded in Feeney 2007: 7–20, and Rubincam 2021: 17–19. See also Grafton, Swerdlow 1988: 14–42.

<sup>4</sup> Modern study of Procopius typifies the issue of reconciling new and traditional purposes of a text, as explained by Kaldellis 2004: 5–13 and Brodka 2007b: 465–476.

historians. A further challenge lay in defining the sequence of these years. Moreover, any such sequence of years required a clear starting point. Thucydides organised his sequential years of the war between Athens and Sparta by the seasonal method. He was at pains to establish the starting point for his narrative of the Peloponnesian War by synchronising the Athenian, Spartan and Argive years: ‘In the fifteenth year [of the 30-year truce], in the 48<sup>th</sup> year of the priesthood of Chrysis at Argos, and when Aenesias was ephor at Sparta and with still two months for Pythodorus to become Archon at Athens, in the sixth month after the battle of Potidaea, just at the beginning of spring’.<sup>5</sup>

For the 21<sup>st</sup>-century West, this starting date correlates to the spring of the year 431 BC. Unlike Thucydides, however, Procopius was not so punctilious about establishing a date when the Emperor Justinian’s war against the Gothic regime in Italy began. Instead, it has to be inferred. But how secure is this?

Historians such as Procopius, who consciously wrote in the Thucydidean mold, treated their chronologies as simply a means of giving shape and sequence to the narrative. However, in the veritable explosion of recent scholarship on Procopius and his works, his chronological methods and models have not received any systematic attention.<sup>6</sup> Nor is there yet a modern commentary on the *Gothic War* comparable to that of Geoffrey Greatrex on Procopius’ *Persian War*, which grapples with the vagueness, for modern purposes, of the Procopian chronology.<sup>7</sup> Procopius’ challenge, as for Thucydides and many others in the near millennium between them, was to coherently present the course and outcomes of a war over successive years.

Today’s audience expects events described by Thucydides, and Procopius, to be at least datable in modern terms. This is not such an easy task, although Procopius’ account of the *Persian War* (Books 1 and 2) and the *Vandal War* (Books 3 and 4) actually present relatively few chronological problems, because much of what they describe can

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<sup>5</sup> Thuc. 2.2.1, cf. Thuc. 5.20.2, reiterating the significance of calculating events by summers and winters, rather than a range of synchronisms based on local office holders.

<sup>6</sup> Principally Lillington-Martin, Turquois 2018; Greatrex, Janniard 2018; and Meier, Montinaro 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Greatrex 2022: 43, 65, 106, 214, 297, 302, 308 (chronology is always subject to the narrative structure), 623.

be corroborated from other extant documentation. By contrast, for Procopius' books on the *Gothic War* (Books 5–7, part of 8), especially for the period from the early 540s to the end of his narrative (552/553), the text of Procopius stands practically alone and uncorroborated.<sup>8</sup>

Potentially, the Gothic War should present even fewer problems than the Persian War and Vandal War because in the Gothic War Procopius was more careful and thorough in his dating strictly by successive years of the war. In other words, by imitating his literary and lexical model, every event and every episode described by Procopius in the Gothic War can at least be fitted within a given war year. Certainly, the modern chronology of the Gothic War and its associated events for the mid-530s to the early 550s is based on a firm and established understanding of the Procopian war year, but when did the Procopian Gothic war year begin and end?

Most modern research and narrative accounts still depend on the reconstructions of J. B. Bury (1923) and E. Stein (1949).<sup>9</sup> For all 18 years of the Gothic War Bury and Stein dated the Procopian war year rigidly and consistently, not, as Thucydides had done, from the spring of one year (generally March) to the spring of the next, but from the summer solstice of one year (late June) to the summer solstice of the following year. In contrast, this study aims to demonstrate that Procopius' war year cannot be dated uniformly from June to June throughout his account of the Gothic war (535–552/553), but that it consciously followed the pattern of Thucydides after all.

Further, the demands of narrative unity led to occasional inconsistency in Procopius, just as it did in his model Thucydides (Appendix 1). Consequently, for most years the Roman war year used by Procopius began at the opening of the Roman army's campaign season in March/April (or slightly earlier or later in any given year) and ran to the end of winter/beginning of spring in the following March (or slightly earlier or later), not invariably from June of one year to June the next (Appendix 2). This unremarkable conclusion has immediate implications

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Kouroumali 2013: 972.

<sup>9</sup> Bury 1923; Stein 1949. For their enduring importance to the modern historian: Whately 2013: 132. For recent use of a June to June Procopian war year: Cristini 2020: 779–780.

for redating certain events in the war against the Goths in Italy (itemised in Appendix 3). Uncritical, but understandable, reliance on Bury and Stein means that in most accounts, including the most authoritative work on (A) Procopius, (B) the Gothic War and (C) Justinian,<sup>10</sup> as well as all the relevant entries in the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*,<sup>11</sup> some events are misdated by several months, sometimes by more. This, in turn, makes it more difficult to understand and explain the connection between events. The chronology of the Gothic wars demands more clarity primarily because, as the great German historian and Nobel Prize winner Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903) used to remind his students, ‘If we are to have some hope of understanding history the most accurate possible knowledge of the sequence of events is of the utmost importance’.<sup>12</sup>

## II. Thucydides’ Seasonal Dating and Its Imitation

A common education and a common literary culture were shared by Procopius and his audience, the civic and imperial officials of Constantinople and the local aristocracies of the Greek cities of the East Roman provinces. Wherever they were, wherever they were educated, they knew their Thucydides. He was, for example, the most popular

<sup>10</sup> The detailed chronology found in Bury 1923 and Stein 1949, reinforced by Rubin 1957, is naturally relied on by all subsequent major works on (A) Procopius, for example: Evans 1972, and Cameron 1985; (B) the Gothic War in Italy: for example, most recently, Vitiello 2014 and Vitiello 2017, and Whitby 2021; and (C) Justinian and his era: for example, Moorhead 1994; Evans 1996; Gauthier 1998; Maraval 1999; Noethlich 2001: 668–763, Meier 2003 and Leppin 2011. It is particularly required and argued for in Sarantis 2016: 315–320. Otherwise, dating issues tend to be ignored or perhaps taken for granted, to judge from the diverse and detailed chapters in Arnold, Bjornlie, Sessa 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Many of the entries in PLRE 3 are detailed narrative accounts in themselves which only adds to their significance, cf. Barnish 1994: 171–177.

<sup>12</sup> Mommsen 1996: 419. From his earliest scholarly endeavours, Mommsen was aware of the challenge of securing correct synchronous chronology from the extant writers and contemporary documents, especially inscriptions and coins. It was the twin spurs of his *History of Rome* (Mommsen 1854–1856) and his own brother’s work on Greek chronology, which gave rise to the positions taken in his *Die Römische Chronologie bis auf Caesar* (Mommsen 1859), especially 117–121 and 195–201.

historian among the papyri uncovered at Oxyrhynchus, so many of which are contemporary with the life of Procopius.<sup>13</sup> In Gaza, where Procopius himself may have studied, Thucydides was equally familiar, at least to judge from authors linked to the city.<sup>14</sup> There is no indication that this preferred pattern of literary formation was substantially different elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> The life of Thucydides, by a certain Marcellinus, which reflects material and judgments of various authors of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>16</sup> is perhaps contemporary with Procopius. So, too, it is likely that at least one Thucydidean scholium, in which the Spartan general Brasidas is compared with the contemporary Roman general Belisarius, dates to the same period.<sup>17</sup> Procopius and his generation were merely the latest to have experienced what had long become a traditional exposure to Thucydides as a model for prose writing in Greek, as well as for the writing of history in particular.

As an imitator of Thucydides separated by almost a millennium, Procopius derived his own mission and reputation from his capacity to describe events of his own day in recognizably Thucydidean terms.<sup>18</sup> In so doing he was following in the steps of earlier historians who had been successful in similar ways. Research in recent years has begun to uncover the intimate and subtle imitation of Thucydides by the historians of late antiquity closer to Procopius' era. As a self-identified 'former soldier and a Greek', it is hardly surprising that Ammianus, who was educated at Antioch, had absorbed the history of Thucydides and that this should be reflected occasionally in his late fourth-century

<sup>13</sup> Krüger 1990: 214–215. The Thucydidean papyri are itemised in Pack 1965: 88–89, with update in Bouquiaux-Simon, Mertens 1991: 198–210. Complete and up-to-date details are conveniently available online at *Thucydides*, <https://papyri.info/dispatch/search?AUTHOR=Thucydides>.

<sup>14</sup> Proposed by Haury 1896: 13–15 and assumed by Downey 1958: 314–315, cf. Downey 1963: 99–116; but doubted by Veh 1951: 4 and Cameron 1985: 6; cf. most recently Greatrex 2018: 15–38.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson 1983: 18–20. Use of Thucydides by later writers can be partly traced through the testimonia to each chapter that are included in the edition of Thucydides by Hude 1898.

<sup>16</sup> Maitland 1996: 538–558.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Luschnat 1954: 19, with Pazdernik 2000: 149–187.

<sup>18</sup> For specific intertextual influence of Thucydides on the Procopian narrative in the *Gothic Wars* see especially Pazdernik 2018: 137–154 and Pazdernik 2015: 207–218.

*Res Gestae*, written in Latin.<sup>19</sup> Similar familiarity with the Thucydidean narrative and the capacity to imitate it can be found in the 5<sup>th</sup>-century historians Olympiodorus and Priscus. It would doubtless be detectable in the other fourth- and fifth-century historians too, had their works survived in more than fragmentary form.<sup>20</sup>

Procopius was in many ways an exemplary follower of Thucydides. His narrative of the wars of the emperor Justinian in the East, Africa, Italy and the Balkans is fundamentally influenced by that of Thucydides, so that it possesses ‘a distinctly Thucydidean look overall’,<sup>21</sup> with its author wearing a ‘Thucydidean mask’.<sup>22</sup> Among Procopius’ borrowings from Thucydides was the very organization of the narrative. Thucydides resolved to organise his narrative seasonally, that is, he dates events ‘by summers and winters’.<sup>23</sup> He may well have been the first Greek historian to employ such a dating system, although it was already in common use for other purposes. A seasonal arrangement could be made to work because the events of war, especially in mainland Greece, were conditioned by the annual movement of the seasons. Each year campaigning would begin at the commencement of spring and cease at the end of summer, more or less. For Thucydides, this was a more stable and reliable chronology than using Athenian ar-

<sup>19</sup> A feature brought out by Barnes 1990: 68–71, and Barnes 1998: 32–33. See also Matthews 1989: 59 (with n. 20) and 463 (with n. 27); Schepens 2007: 39–55 and Nobbs 2012: 81–90. Ammianus’ claim is elucidated by Kelly 2007: 474–480.

<sup>20</sup> In general: Blockley 1972: 18–27, and Meszaros 2012: 225–234; Priscus: Thompson 1945: 92–94; Benedicty 1964: 1–8; Hunger 1969: 26–27; Baldwin 1980b: 53–55 (siege of Plataea), and Brodka 2007a: 149–158; Olympiodorus: Baldwin 1980a: 227. In general, Luschnat 1971: 1307–1308. For a cautionary note against overrating the impact of literary form on historical description, see Whitby 2000: 708–709 (referring to Priscus).

<sup>21</sup> Cameron 1986: 54–55; Cameron 1985: 36–46. Fundamental is Kaldellis 2004: 7–16 and *passim*, focussing on the ‘mind of Thucydides’ (9). See also Bornmann 1974: 138–150, and Treadgold 2007: 216–218.

<sup>22</sup> Evans 1972: 129–130, who refers to Procopius’ ‘Thucydidean mask’, further considers that Procopius knew Books 2–5 of Thucydides in more detail than the other books (1, 6–8), but this surely reflects the fact that the most likely parts of Thucydides’ work for imitation in a history of wars in Persia, Africa and Italy is the Archidamian war and its aftermath (431–416 BC), rather than the events described in the other books.

<sup>23</sup> Thuc. 2.1.1 (κατὰ θέρος καὶ χειμῶνα), 5.20.3 (κατὰ θέρη δὲ καὶ χειμῶνας ἀριθμῶν).

chon dates or some other city-state's eponymous system, let alone having to constantly synchronise them. Moreover, he was directly and deliberately repudiating the eponymous chronology of his contemporary Hellanicus.<sup>24</sup> For a detailed account of a war fought over several years, a division by summers and winters was far less clumsy and potentially more accurate than one based on complex and variable synchronisms of local officials for different dating systems.<sup>25</sup> It was also, perhaps, even a deliberate mnemonic device to facilitate the telling of the story.<sup>26</sup> Historians after Thucydides, including Procopius in his *Gothic War*, regularly followed this model.<sup>27</sup> Hence the need to elucidate in detail the dating mechanism of Thucydides before moving to that of Procopius.

Since Thucydides' summers and winters are expressed as the boundaries of campaign seasons it meant that his narrative had no absolutely fixed calendrical starting point from year to year. Instead, the precise starting point in a given year was dictated by a combination of weather, strategy and politics. Seasonal considerations always influenced military activity, especially the marching and feeding of armies, so generals needed intimate knowledge of time and the seasons, as Polybius emphasised.<sup>28</sup> Their capacity to both hinder an enemy by destroying ripened crops and feed themselves off the same crops meant that May/June was the ideal time to reach enemy territory, especially in Attica, but they could begin their campaign in March/April with stored food.<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding the need for some flexibility and variability in linking the beginning of summer to the opening of the war year, in most years the campaign season (or beginning of summer) was March/April, while winter began in November and lasted until February/

<sup>24</sup> Thuc. 1.97.2, with Smart 1986: 19–35, esp. followed by Hornblower 1987: 39, 83–84.

<sup>25</sup> Gomme 1945: 1–8.

<sup>26</sup> Argued by Shrimpton 1997: 189ff. (with a tabular outline of Thucydides' history: 266–286).

<sup>27</sup> There does not appear to be any consideration of subsequent use of Thucydides' dating system in the several recent studies of his impact on writers from his own day to the present, including Procopius: Fromentin, Gotteland, Payen 2010; Meister 2013. Covering Procopius in particular: Reinsch 2006: 755–778; Whately 2017: 691–708; Jeffreys 2019: 15–26.

<sup>28</sup> Polybius, *Hist.* 9.9.

<sup>29</sup> Hanson 1998: 32–41.



March. Further, it is evident that Thucydides and his audience did have a mutual understanding of when this would normally occur. That is, there was in Thucydides, as in much in other contemporary literature, an accepted point in the solar year which was taken to constitute the normal beginning of summer, even though, for practical purposes, the opening of the campaign season might be slightly later or earlier in any given year, depending on the prevailing weather and crop conditions, or overall strategic considerations. Exactly when this standard point occurred has long been contested and remains unresolved. In effect, it was located either in early March<sup>30</sup> or later in the month (the equinox of 21 March). By any reckoning, therefore, the Thucydidean summer did not normally commence later than 21 March. It is more likely to have normally begun around 6-8 March. This has direct implications for Procopius' chronology in *The Gothic War*.

To understand Procopius' narrative structure, as well as its various literary constituents, it is essential to consider that, in applying his avowed chronology, Thucydides was able to use seasonal dating in several ways by describing events which (A) covered part or the whole summer ('throughout this summer'<sup>31</sup>; 'in this/the summer'<sup>32</sup>) or (B) occurred at unspecified points within the season ('in the same summer'<sup>33</sup>;

<sup>30</sup> The whole issue of Thucydides' seasonal chronology is clearly set out by Luschnat 1971: 1132–1146 and Gomme 1962: 699–715 ('Appendix: Note on Thucydides' Summers and Winters') but modified by Gomme, Andrewes, Dover 1981: 19–21; followed by de Ste Croix 1972: 323–328; Pritchett 1986: 205–211 and Pritchett 1995: 173–204. Others remain disinclined to believe that Thucydides had a fixed calendar date in mind for the start and finish of seasons (notably Meritt 1962: 436–446; Hunter 1982: 317; Hornblower 1996: 490–493).

<sup>31</sup> Thuc. 5.35.2 (καὶ τὸ θέρος τοῦτο πᾶν). Thucydides' references can be conveniently checked through Schrader 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Thuc. 2.68.9 (ἐν τῷ θερεί ἐγένετο); 3.88.1 (θέρους); 4.27.1 (ἐν θερεί); 4.88.2 (ἐν τῷ θερεί τούτῳ ἐγένετο); 5.35.7 (ἐν τῷ θερεί τούτῳ); 5.35.8 (τὸ μὲν οὗ θέρος τοῦτο); 5.49.1 (τοῦ θερούς τούτου).

<sup>33</sup> ἐν τῷ θερεί/τοῦ δ' αὐτοῦ θερούς; Thuc. 2.28.1; 2.29.1; 2.58.1; 2.66.1; 2.67.1; 2.79.1; 2.80.1; 3.7.1; 3.51.1; 3.52.1; 3.86.1; 3.90.1; 3.91.1; 3.94.1; 3.100.1; 4.42.1; 4.53.1; 4.58.1; 4.66.1; 4.75.1; 4.76.1; 4.84.1; 4.133.1; 4.133.2; 5.33.1; 5.34.1; 5.35.1; 5.52.2; 5.53.1; 6.95.2; 6.96.1; 7.9.1; 7.27.1; 7.27.3; 8.22.1; 8.24.1; 8.25.1; 8.80.1; 8.87.1; 8.99.1. Similar instances: 'in a single summer' (3.17.2: ἐν ἐνὶ θερεί); 'the summer passed' (5.55.4: καὶ τὸ θέρος οὕτω διήλθεν).

‘about the same time in the summer’<sup>34</sup>); or (C) occurred at different particular phases of the season, whether at the beginning,<sup>35</sup> middle<sup>36</sup> or end<sup>37</sup> of summer. Prospective events in the Thucydidean narrative were datable to the following summer.<sup>38</sup> Winter was a shorter season, the non-campaign season, so Thucydides has fewer references to winter, but they follow the same pattern. The Thucydidean winter is utilised to date events which (A) covered part or the whole extent of winter,<sup>39</sup> or (B) occurred at unspecified points within the winter season<sup>40</sup> or (C) occurred at different particular phases of the season, whether at winter’s beginning<sup>41</sup> or end.<sup>42</sup> Prospective events were datable to the following winter.<sup>43</sup> In dividing his history into just two seasons (summer and winter), Thucydides had also to accommodate the remaining seasons of spring and autumn. This he did by appropriating both seasons to summer, which was the usual practice in his day. So the year was divided into a lengthy summer (March to November) and a short winter

<sup>34</sup> κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον/τοὺς αὐτοὺς χρόνους τοῦ θέρους: Thuc. 2.68.1; 3.7.1; 3.52.1; 4.78.1; 5.12.1; 5.32.1; 6.105.1; 8.99.1.

<sup>35</sup> Thuc. 2.47.2. (τοῦδὲ θέρους εὐθὺς ἀρχομένου).

<sup>36</sup> Thuc. 2.19.1 (θέρους καὶ σίτου ἀκμάζοντος), 6.30.1 (θέρους μεσοῦντος).

<sup>37</sup> τὸ θέρος ἐτελέυτα: Thuc. 2.92.7; 3.86.5; 3.102.7; 4.49.1; 5.12.2; 5.50.5; 5.75.6; 5.82.6; 5.115.46.62.5; 7.9.1; 8.1.4; 8.28.5; τοῦ θέρους τελευτῶντος: 2.32.1; 2.67.1; 2.68.1; 3.86.1; 4.49.1; 4.133.4; cf. 1.30.4.

<sup>38</sup> τοῦ ἐπιγυνομένου θέρους: Thuc. 2.71.1; 3.1.1; 3.26.1; 3.89.1; 4.1.1; 4.52.1; 4.117.1; 5.1.1; 5.40.1; 5.52.1; 5.57.1; 5.82.1; 5.84.1; 6.8.1; 6.94.1; 8.2.2; 8.7.1; 8.61.1.

<sup>39</sup> ἐν τῷ χειμῶνι/χειμῶνος ὄντος κ.τ.λ.: Thuc. 1.30.4; 2.47.1; 2.70.4; 2.102.2; 3.22.5; 4.27.1; 4.103.1; 4.108.6; 4.116.3; 5.17.2; 5.56.4; 6.7.1; 6.21.2; 6.34.6; 6.71.2; 6.72.1; 6.75.1; 6.88.5; 6.104.2; 7.19.5; 7.31.3; 8.3.1; 8.5.1 8.6.1; 8.34.1.

<sup>40</sup> τοῦ αὐτοῦ χειμῶνος: Thuc. 2.70.1; 2.102.1; 3.20.1; 3.25.1; 3.88.1; 3.104.1; 3.105.1; 3.115.1; 4.51.1; 4.102.1; 4.109.1; 4.135.1; 5.83.4; 6.1.1; 8.30.1; 8.35.1; ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ χειμῶνι: 2.34.1; 5.39.1; 8.4.1; 8.39.1; 8.44.2; 8.55.1; 8.57.1.

<sup>41</sup> Thuc. 2.93.1 (ἀρχομένου δὲ χειμῶνος); 2.95.1 (τοῦ χειμῶνος τούτου ἀρχομένου); 3.18.5 (ὁ χειμῶν ἤρχετο γίνεσθαι).

<sup>42</sup> Thuc. 3.25.1 (τοῦ αὐτοῦ χειμῶνος τελευτῶντος); 3.115.6; 4.116.3; 5.20.1; 5.39.3; 5.56.5; 5.81.2; 8.3.2; 8.60.1.

<sup>43</sup> τοῦ ἐπιγυνομένου χειμῶνος Thuc. 2.33.1; 2.69.1; 3.87.1; 3.103.1; 4.3.1; 4.6.1; 4.50.1; 4.89.1; 4.134.1 (ἐπίοντι χειμῶνι); 5.13.1; 5.36.1; 5.51.1; 5.56.1; 5.57.1; 5.76.1; 5.83.1; 5.116.1; 6.63.1; 7.10.1; 8.2.1; 8.29.1.

(December to February), although he still occasionally retained a separate identification of spring and autumn.<sup>44</sup>

Sometimes he complements or substitutes his date by referring to the state of timing of the annual crop, that is, early summer (ripening of the crop<sup>45</sup>) or late summer (harvest).<sup>46</sup> Occasionally, more precisely datable astronomical references, such as the winter solstice<sup>47</sup> and solar eclipses,<sup>48</sup> are also used. Of particular interest, because it is so clearly reflected in Procopius' *Gothic War*, is the way Thucydides systematically indicated the end of each year of the war at the conclusion of the winter with 'Winter ended, and so finished the first [second, etc.] year of the war'.<sup>49</sup> This was a linguistic and chronological pattern taken up by later writers, including by Procopius throughout his *Gothic War*, for example: 'and the winter drew to a close, and the seventeenth year ended in this war, the history of which Procopius has written'.<sup>50</sup> Otherwise, unlike Thucydides, Procopius took for granted the internal placement of events within a war year without having to specify a particular point of the year or season. Only rarely did he feel the need to link specific events to a seasonal date: winter, spring or solstice (summer or winter).

<sup>44</sup> For autumn, events are dated no more precisely than 'towards autumn': *περὶ δὲ τὸ φθινότερον τοῦ θέρους τούτου/πρὸς τὸ μετόπωρον ἤδη ὄντος* (Thuc. 2.31.1; 3.100.2; 7.79.3; 8.108.2) or 'at the beginning of autumn' (*περὶ τὸ φθινότερον ἤδη ἀρχομένῳ*, 3.18.3). As for spring, Thucydides dates events to 'beginning of spring' (*ἄμα ἤρι ἀρχομένῳ*, 2.2.1; 7.20.1), 'about the time of spring' (*ἄμα ἤρι* 6.71.2; 6.74.2; 6.88.6; 7.15.2; 7.17.1; 7.50.1; 8.2.3), 'in spring' (*ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦς αὐτοῦς χρόνους τοῦ ἤρος*: 4.2.1; 7.21.1 cf. 4.135.1; 5.17.2), 'the same spring' (6.95.1), and 'the following spring' (7.19.1) or 'the spring of the following summer' (4.117.1; 6.88.1; 6.94.1; 8.61.1).

<sup>45</sup> Thuc. 2.19.1; 2.79.1; 3.1.1; 4.1.1; 4.2.1; 4.6.1.

<sup>46</sup> Thuc. 3.15.2.

<sup>47</sup> Thuc. 7.16.2; 8.39.

<sup>48</sup> Thuc. 2.28; 4.52.1.

<sup>49</sup> Thuc. 2.47.1 (1<sup>st</sup>) *ἐν τῷ χειμῶνι τούτῳ, καὶ διελθόντος αὐτοῦ πρώτων ἔτος τοῦ πολέμου τοῦ δε ἐτελεύτα*; 2.70.4 (2<sup>nd</sup>); 2.103.2 (3<sup>rd</sup>); 3.25.2 (4<sup>th</sup>); 3.88.4 (5<sup>th</sup>); 3.116.3 (6<sup>th</sup>); 4.51.1 (7<sup>th</sup>); 4.116.3 (8<sup>th</sup>); 4.135.2 (9<sup>th</sup>); 5.20.3 (10<sup>th</sup>); 5.39.3 (11<sup>th</sup>); 5.51.2 (12<sup>th</sup>); 5.56.5 (13<sup>th</sup>); 5.81.2 (14<sup>th</sup>); 5.83.4 (15<sup>th</sup>); 6.7.4 (16<sup>th</sup>); 6.93.4 (17<sup>th</sup>); 7.18.4 (18<sup>th</sup>); 8.6.5 (19<sup>th</sup>); 8.60.3 (20<sup>th</sup>); 8.109.2 (21<sup>st</sup>). See Appendix 1 (below) for further detail.

<sup>50</sup> Proc., *Wars* 8.25.25 (17<sup>th</sup>): *καὶ ὁ χειμῶν ἔληγε, καὶ τὸ ἑπτακαιδέκατον ἔτος ἐτελεύτα τῷ πολέμῳ τῷ δεῶν Προκόπιος ξυνέγραψε*.

As scholarly work on Thucydides' history has highlighted, the role of his narrative sequence is to develop meaning by engagement between author and reader, playing on their expectations and reactions, but in the context of a coherent narrative in which the author's own interventions are fully integrated.<sup>51</sup> Exactly where Thucydides locates events in his narrative is shaped by his own way of telling the story and is therefore more attune to where, rather than precisely when, something occurred within a process.<sup>52</sup> His account should not be judged, therefore, by where modern scholars would prefer to locate events. Rather, the narrative itself constitutes the explanation by defining ends and beginnings, and by making links between events. Thucydides' history possesses, in its organisation by summers and winters, a 'considered narrative design'.<sup>53</sup> This consisted essentially in connecting a succession of episodes, with or without speeches, and digressions within a disciplined chronological structure. He achieved his narrative coherence primarily through a variety of simple chronological connectives: 'not long after this' (χρόνω οὐ πολλῶ ὕστερον), 'a little later' (ὀλίγω ὕστερον), 'then/at that time' (τότε/ἐνταῦθα), 'a little before' (ὀλίγω ἔμπροσθεν), 'afterwards' (μετὰ), 'meanwhile'/'at this time' (ἐν τούτῳ), 'at about the same time' (ὕπὸ τοὺς αὐτοὺς χρόνους) and so on. Similarly, the transition between one episode and another was often formally marked.<sup>54</sup> Like Thucydides, and those who imitated him over the intervening centuries, Procopius employed a similar narrative technique throughout his *Wars*, including the *Gothic War*, as will be evident from individual war years analysed below.

Detailed consideration of Thucydides' narrative of the war between the Athenians and their allies and the Spartans and their allies leads to the conclusion that he correctly judged the value of seasonal dating.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Hornblower 1987: 71; Rood 1998: 54–55; Gribble 1998: 41–67, and the useful overview in Marincola 2001: 73–103.

<sup>52</sup> Hunter 1982: 43, 166–168, cf. 237–264 on time.

<sup>53</sup> Rood 1998: 286, cf. 110–111.

<sup>54</sup> The formal marker being a phrase such as, to take just three examples, 'such was the funeral that took place that winter' (Thuc., 2.47.1), 'such was the history of the plague' (2.54.5) and 'such were the events which took place in Lesbos' (3.50.3).

<sup>55</sup> Within the seasonal chronology he built an episodic narrative, as explained in Dewald 2006: 43–46.

In most years, where it is possible to otherwise deduce or corroborate Thucydides' dates for the beginning of summer and the end of winter, they can be seen to be located in early-mid March.<sup>56</sup> Yet there are some exceptions which highlight the inevitable flexibility of the date. For instance, in the second (430/429), third (429/428) and fourth (428/427) years of the Peloponnesian War it appears that campaigning did not commence until late April or mid-May.<sup>57</sup>

So, too, campaigning did not automatically cease with the onset of winter. Where conditions obviously permitted, much military activity took place in the winter months and is dated accordingly by Thucydides.<sup>58</sup> In brief, it appears that throughout Thucydides' history he is not always consistent,<sup>59</sup> nor is Procopius.

From Thucydides (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) to Theophylact (7<sup>th</sup> century CE) at least, historians were regularly faced with the problem of utilising a consistent chronological framework for the events they recorded. The Thucydidean arrangement by summers and winters proved pervasive and useful, although Dionysius of Halicarnassus found fault with Thucydides' division of his history, claiming that this chronology was 'wrong and ill-suited to history', leading only to greater obscurity rather than clarity.<sup>60</sup> Still, most writers of history found seasonal dating useful if not indispensable.<sup>61</sup> It was certainly preferable to any kind of calendrical rigidity.

The point of concentrating on detail here on Thucydides' war year and its construction is because the Thucydidean imprint was demonstrated by historians in the Roman Empire closer to Procopius' day, although their fragmentary survival in many cases has mainly stripped

<sup>56</sup> Thucydides begins his account of the first year of the war (431/430) in the spring of 431 (2.2.1). For the commencement of other war years, e.g., seventh (425/424), eighth (424/423), ninth (423/422), eleventh (421/420), nineteenth (413/412) and twentieth (412/411) can definitely be dated to mid-March: cf. Hammond 1967: 662.

<sup>57</sup> War years 2: Gomme 1956: 145; 3: Gomme 1956: 204; and 4: Gomme 1956: 252.

<sup>58</sup> Thuc. 3.20–25; 4.50–51; 89–116, 134–135; 5.13, 56, 83; 6.7; 8.60.

<sup>59</sup> Meritt 1962: 445.

<sup>60</sup> Dion. Hal., *de Thuc.* 9.

<sup>61</sup> Dionysius' critique did not go unchallenged. One attempt to defend Thucydides' practice of dating by summers and winters forms part of a commentary on Thucydides preserved only in a late second-century papyrus: *POxy* 853 = Hude 1927: 107–109. More detail in Pulice 2022: 79–114, esp. 110–112.

away their dating context. Even so, there are some traces of seasonal dates in the 5<sup>th</sup>-century narrative excerpts of both Priscus<sup>62</sup> and Malchus.<sup>63</sup> Following Procopius, the Thucydidean dating system continued. Agathias, as the conscious continuator and imitator of Procopius, used similar chronological phraseology which has vitiated modern attempts to date events such as the earthquake which destroyed Beirut in 551.<sup>64</sup>

Generally, Agathias employed conventional seasonal dating, including marking the opening of each year with ‘at the beginning of spring’.<sup>65</sup> His dates include autumn, spring, summer and winter.<sup>66</sup> Menander, continuing Agathias, clearly followed the same pattern,<sup>67</sup> as did Theophylact, continuing Menander.<sup>68</sup> Theophylact used seasonal dating for autumn, winter, summer and spring.<sup>69</sup> In particular, he followed Thucydides and Procopius, as well as Agathias and Menander, in normally indicating the commencement of each new campaign season with ‘at the beginning of spring’.<sup>70</sup> There is therefore no reason to believe that Procopius and his audience, especially given their familiar-

<sup>62</sup> Priscus, fr. 39 (= *Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 14, Blockley 1972: 342–343).

<sup>63</sup> Malchus, fr. 20 (= *Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 1, Blockley 1972: 446–447).

<sup>64</sup> Cameron 1970: 138–139, 143–144 and McCail 1967: 241–247, noting (241) that Agathias had no clearly arranged source for chronology and judging that ‘Agathias is guilty of sleight-of-hand in not making clear that he has regressed four years in his time-sequence’ (242)! In general: Cameron 1964: 33–52; Adshead 1983: 82–87. For the tension between the demand of following Procopius and providing necessary contemporary perspectives: Cesa 1993: 1171–1180.

<sup>65</sup> Agathias, *Hist.*, 1.19.3; 2.1.1; 3.15.1; 4.13.1; 5.10.1.

<sup>66</sup> Autumn: Agathias, *Hist.* 1.19.2; 2.4.3; 5.3.2; spring: 2.2.1; summer: 2.4.3; 2.15.1; 4.13.5; 4.15.4; winter: 2.14.1; 3.8.3; 3.28.6; 5.9.1; 5.11.6.

<sup>67</sup> Even though the majority of his text has not survived, there are clear indications in the extant fragments, including the formulaic ἤρως ἀρχομένου, to introduce a new year: Menander, fr.18.4 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 12 = Blockley 1972: 162) and fr. 23.8 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 17 = Blockley 1972: 208), cf. fr. 23.9 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 18 = Blockley 1972: 206), with Cresci 1981: 63–96.

<sup>68</sup> Whitby 1988: 342–343. Two other historians of this period may also have dated events in the tradition of Thucydides and Procopius, although it is impossible to tell because so little of their works survives: Theophanes of Byzantium (*FHG* 4, 270–271) and John of Epiphaneia (*FHG* 4, 272–276).

<sup>69</sup> Autumn: Theoph. Sim., *Hist.* 1.8.1; 1.9.11; 1.13.4; 6.6.1; 8.5.5; 8.6.2; winter: 1.12.12; 2.18.26; 3.4.6; 3.15.2; 3.16.2; 3.17.5; 8.4.8; 8.6.2; summer: 3.17.5; 7.7.7; 8.4.8; 8.5.5; 8.5.8; spring: 1.12.8; 1.15.1; 2.10.6; 3.15.2; 8.4.8.

<sup>70</sup> Theoph. Sim., *Hist.* 1.11.1; 3.1.3; 3.4.6; 3.12.3; 3.16.7; 4.13.3; 5.3.1; 6.6.1; 7.7.1.

ity with Thucydides, would have had any different understanding of Thucydides' chronology and would deviate from that model.

Procopius and his audience were certainly familiar with Thucydides. So, on noting that Procopius was following the Thucydidean pattern for a war year in deploying seasonal dating for an historical narrative, the audience understood that the dates for the beginning of summer normally corresponded to early March. Moreover, as we are reminded by the 'spring offensive' in modern wars, they understood that over a period of years it is likely that in some years the seasonal dates would be earlier or later, depending primarily on the weather or the state of conflict at the time. So, too, winter may not necessarily prevent military or diplomatic activity. The variability of weather and the state of conflict in any war were translated into narrative by Thucydides as inconsistency in defining the beginning and end of each war year, notwithstanding a common and stylised linguistic pattern. So much for Thucydides.

### III. Chronology in Procopius' *Wars*

In 550/551, Procopius of Caesarea put into circulation his history of the wars against the Persians (2 books), Vandals (2 books) and Goths (3 books). By the time he came to write an additional book in 553 his histories were already popular over a wide area.<sup>71</sup> Surprisingly little has been written on Procopius' literary technique. There has been much discussion about his purpose and 'bias', the date of his different works (*Wars*, *Secret History*, *Buildings*) and the relationship between them, but little on how he actually put it all together, especially *Wars*.<sup>72</sup> However answerable, most of the immediate questions have hardly been

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<sup>71</sup> The dates of Procopius' works remain a matter of dispute. The preferred chronology here is that of Greatrex 1994: 101–114, clarified further in Greatrex 2022: 61–69: *Wars*, Books 1–7 (550/551), Book 8 (553), *Secret History* (550/551), *Buildings* (550/551 [first edition] and 554). There are also indications that *Wars* 8 was completed in a hurry not long after the last events described.

<sup>72</sup> The essential starting point is Rance 2022: 70–120, and earlier studies on the panegyric aspects of Procopius' picture of Belisarius: Cresci 1986: 247–276; see also Trisoglio 1976: 388–433 and Trisoglio 1979: 96–136.

studied: how early he had decided to write, whether he kept notes with a view to an ultimate history, presented sections or whole books publicly and precisely how he structured and executed his narrative.<sup>73</sup>

From the outset, in accompanying Belisarius on campaign, Procopius probably kept a diary of experiences and descriptions of events he witnessed or heard about. So, too, he may have copied or extracted official correspondence and other documents for his own purposes. It is clear that much of the history depends on such records.<sup>74</sup> In addition, he was able to rely on his own memory. Faulty memory is the best explanation for certain errors, such as confusing the Cornelian and Aurelian gates of Rome at one point (*Wars* 5.19.4, 22.12). Precisely when he decided to write his history and how it developed over time is unknown. It seems that he was writing separate parts simultaneously and working on them progressively through the 540s.<sup>75</sup> The draft of Book 6 was evidently completed by 546 because he tells the story of the iron tip of the arrow which penetrated the face of Trajan in a skirmish outside Rome in the late summer of 538: the intruded tip began to disgorge itself after five years and that was three years before the time of writing (*Wars* 6.5.26–27). Individual episodes, such as the siege of Rome in 536/537, may have been written up and presented (orally, in writing, or both) as self-contained stories.<sup>76</sup> Further, Procopius clearly developed and changed his viewpoint and tone between the beginning and end of the history without troubling to revise it in the interests of consistency.<sup>77</sup> Taking the books on the *Persian War*, for example, it appears that there are three discernible stages in their composition: (1) recording all the events witnessed by the author himself, from 527 to 550; (2) dividing this extended memoir into Persian, African and Gothic events; and (3) adding other material, such as the chapter on John the Cappadocian, which was originally intended for another work, the *Secret History*.<sup>78</sup> Part of this narrative development within the Thucydidean framework was the systematic division of the history of the Gothic War into clearly

<sup>73</sup> Treadgold 2007: 176–187.

<sup>74</sup> Cameron 1985: 8, 13, 148, 236.

<sup>75</sup> Haury 1891: 5–9.

<sup>76</sup> Evans 1972: 71.

<sup>77</sup> Cameron 1985: 8, 140, 238.

<sup>78</sup> Greatrex 1995: 1–13.



delineated war years. Indeed, it has always been observed that in his *Gothic War* books Procopius followed Thucydides in using a seasonal chronology, but the issue has never been explored in detail.<sup>79</sup>

For the most part, Procopius had not employed a seasonal chronology in those books covering the wars against the Persians (*Wars* 1 and 2) and in Africa (*Wars* 3 and 4), where he frequently dates events by the year of the emperor Justinian's reign.<sup>80</sup> In doing so he may have been conscious of Justinian's own expectations, codified formally in 537,<sup>81</sup> that events should be dated by the year of his reign (beginning 1 April 527). In addition, we find a variety of specific mechanisms for dating particular events: (1) the length of sieges, which may indicate an underlying diary or similar daily record (e.g., the 80<sup>th</sup> day of the siege of Amida: *Wars* 1.7.29); (2) the length of usurpations, both at Dara (4<sup>th</sup> day: 1.26.8) and by Gontarith (36<sup>th</sup> day: 4.28.41); and (3) the years since a particular truce was struck (2.28.16; 2.30.48). These books also evince seasonal dating on the Thucydidean model. Procopius marks the end of both winter and summer, and he locates the opening of the campaign season 'at the beginning of spring'.<sup>82</sup> In brief, in the books on the Persian and African wars he mainly preferred regnal years to war years, but generally offered few concrete dates beyond some annual markers and general time signifiers.<sup>83</sup> These wars were episodic and iterative rather than continuous, as was the Gothic War.

Turning to the campaigns against the Goths in Italy and Sicily, Procopius' account stretches across books 5, 6 and 7 of the *Wars*, written progressively over several years, with Book 7 compiled and circulating not long after the last events described in 550/551 (*Wars* 7.40.45). It is then continued in Book 8, somewhat of an afterthought produced late in 553. Throughout these books Procopius offers a scattered number

<sup>79</sup> Parks 1893: XL–XLII.

<sup>80</sup> Years of Justinian: 4<sup>th</sup> (*Wars* 1.16.10); 6<sup>th</sup> (1.22.17); 7<sup>th</sup> (3.21.1); 10<sup>th</sup> (4.14.6); 13<sup>th</sup> (2.3.56; 4.19.1); 17<sup>th</sup> (4.21.1); 19<sup>th</sup> (2.28.11; 4.28.41); 23<sup>rd</sup> (2.30.48). Imperial years are also used in the final book (21<sup>st</sup> [8.4.12]; 25<sup>th</sup> [8.15.12]; 26<sup>th</sup> [8.33.26]).

<sup>81</sup> *Nov. Just.* 47.

<sup>82</sup> End of winter: *Wars* 1.16.10; 4.7.1; end of summer: 2.13.29; beginning of spring: 1.17.1; 2.3.55; 2.14.8; 2.20.1; 3.5.10; 4.5.1; 4.13.40; 4.14.7.

<sup>83</sup> E.g., *Wars* 2.26.1 ('in the following year'); 4.25.1 ('two months later').

of astronomical dates,<sup>84</sup> but his prime method of dating events is the war year (see Appendix 2). As in Thucydides, so in Procopius (at least in the *Gothic War*), the summers and winters mark the beginning and end of successive campaign seasons. As in Thucydides, along with his imitators and successors, Procopius' narrative technique consists of connecting a succession of episodes and digressions with only the most general chronological indicators. Procopius aims to locate events within a particular war year, not necessarily more precisely, although he consistently links episodes, later and earlier, with the main thread of his narrative. The lack of precise dates in Procopius' *Gothic War* is mainly due to literary style, not ignorance.<sup>85</sup>

#### **IV. Procopius in Italy: 535/536 to 540/541 (War Years 1–5)**

Procopius formed part of the expeditionary force which sailed from Constantinople in mid-535. As the assessor, secretary, in effect, of the commander-in-chief Belisarius, he was in a position to know, understand and experience the planning and strategy of the expedition. For the next five years until the surrender of Ravenna in 540, as he criss-crossed Italy with Belisarius and occasionally going on separate assignments for his leader, Procopius directly observed the unfolding of events in the war against the Goths. He also had direct access to the communications and conferences between Belisarius and the other commanders. He read, probably at times composed, the documents. He heard the speeches and the exchanges between generals. In writing his account of these years over a decade later he had his memory to draw on, as well as his notes. He could also access the memory and notes of other principal participants, including Belisarius himself, then passing his time in Constantinople in enforced retirement. Human memory may be fallible at times, but Procopius was in a good position to locate

<sup>84</sup> E.g., *Wars* 5.24.19 ('at about the winter solstice'); 6.2.1, 6.3.1 ('spring equinox'); 6.13.1 ('summer solstice'); 6.20.1 ('winter solstice').

<sup>85</sup> Veh 1966: 998.

events accurately in his narrative.<sup>86</sup> Even though the Thucydidean convention, which he was following, minimised the use of precise dating mechanisms, Procopius was careful to link the various episodes he narrated and to provide an indication of their chronological relationship with each other, however loose. How these links shaped the course of the Procopian narrative deserve closer scrutiny.

Procopius's account of the war against the Gothic regime in Italy commences, as he indicates (*Wars* 5.1.1), with a background history of how the Gothic regime came to replace that of the emperors by 476, then the usurper Odoacer. The course of Gothic power under kings Theodoric (493–526) and Athalaric (526–534) comes next, then the conflict between King Theodahad (534–536) and Amalasuintha, daughter of Theodoric, mother of Athalaric and cousin of Theodahad.<sup>87</sup> When Justinian became emperor in 527, Amalasuintha was effectively ruling the Goths on behalf of her young son Athalaric, but she was soon under pressure as both a woman exerting power and a mother bringing up her imperial son with scant regard for martial Gothic customs. In response to such pressure she allowed her son to be led astray by older Gothic boys and expelled three of her most vociferous opponents.<sup>88</sup> In addition, she contacted Justinian to see if he would agree to her relocating to Constantinople.

On being offered a splendid mansion in Dyrrachium to occupy before setting out for the imperial capital, Amalasuintha loaded up a ship with provisions and treasure as well as her most trusted allies. The ship reached Epidamnus safely. When Justinian heard this news he despatched his envoy Alexander, accompanying the bishops Hypatius from Ephesus and Demetrius from Philippi, who were already being sent to meet with the pope in Rome on theological matters. Alexander left

<sup>86</sup> For Procopius's sources: Brodka 2016: 108–124 and Mecella 2022: 178–193. For the influence of Procopius' experience on his narrative: Kaegi 1990: 53–85; Liebeschuetz 1996: 230–239; Gatto 1998: 31–58, and Croke 2021: 23–28. For oral sources of information: Gantar 1979: 29–38 (with English summary). Less than compelling is the unproven notion that in the *Gothic Wars* Procopius resorted to 'archival documents' (whatever they be, wherever located, however accessible), as proposed by Colvin 2013: 594.

<sup>87</sup> *Wars* 5.1.1ff.

<sup>88</sup> *Wars* 5.2.23–29.

them in Rome and proceeded to Ravenna to meet with Amalasuintha. Meanwhile, in Rome Theodahad met Hypatius and Demetrius secretly and requested they convey to Justinian his offer to surrender Tuscany, over which he exerted control.<sup>89</sup> Before long, the young king Athalaric was approaching death, so his mother Amalasuintha struck a sort of power-sharing arrangement with her cousin Theodahad, whereby he would become the regnal successor to Athalaric.<sup>90</sup> For almost all of this background in 534 Procopius provides the only record.

To inform the emperor of this new arrangement, letters were despatched with unknown envoys from Ravenna.<sup>91</sup> On 10 October 534, Athalaric died. By now Alexander, Hypatius and Demetrius had arrived back in Constantinople. Their combined intelligence would have assured Justinian that, between Amalasuintha and Theodahad, most of Italy would soon be peacefully surrendered to the emperor. While Justinian may still have been looking forward to a peaceful transfer of authority in Italy from the Goths to the Roman emperor, Theodahad was pressured by some of the Goths to imprison Amalasuintha at Ravenna, then transfer her to an island (Martana) in the crater, Lake Bolsena. All this happened before the Gothic envoys arrived in the imperial capital to announce the joint rule of Amalasuintha and Theodahad. Meanwhile, Justinian had sent Peter the Patrician to Ravenna to facilitate the offers of Amalasuintha and Theodahad on terms agreeable to both Goths and Romans. By now Theodahad had imprisoned Amalasuintha and was fearful of Justinian's reaction, so he sent a distinguished senatorial legation (Liberius and Opilio) to Constantinople. Along the way they happened to cross paths with Justinian's envoy Peter, heading for Italy. When they reported the imprisonment of Amalasuintha, Peter was alarmed and awaited advice from Justinian before proceeding. Before long he had a letter to convey to the incarcerated Amalasuintha but with instructions to make its contents public. Either before Peter arrived (if May 535) or after (if earlier in 535), the imprisoned Amalasuintha was

<sup>89</sup> *Wars* 5.3.3–5.

<sup>90</sup> *Wars* 5.3.5–9.

<sup>91</sup> Probably Cassiodorus, *Variarum* 10.1 (from Amalasuintha) and 10.2 (from Theodahad), with envoys who would supply a fuller account mentioned in 10.3 (Amalasuintha) and 10.4 (Theodahad).

put to death.<sup>92</sup> Peter lost no time in making clear to Theodahad and his associates that there would be only one response to their actions when news reached the emperor in Constantinople – war (*Wars* 5.4.30).

The Gothic War began, so Procopius notes, immediately (εὐθὺς) Justinian heard of the murder of Amalasuintha in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (commencing 1 April 535).<sup>93</sup> Since the murder probably occurred on 30 April 535,<sup>94</sup> and would have taken around seven days for the news to reach Constantinople by public post,<sup>95</sup> it must have been no later than in the middle of May 535 that Justinian resolved on war. Immediately, he gave orders to his generals Mundo to march to Dalmatia and Belisarius to prepare and lead the expedition to Italy. War had been threatened, if not planned, for some time, so an imperial mobilisation was no surprise and not necessarily large or lengthy in preparation. Justinian had been

<sup>92</sup> *Wars* 5.4.20–31, with the chronology in Stein 1949: 338–342. For a detailed modern analysis of these events and the perspective of Procopius, giving novel weight to the *Variae* of Cassiodorus: Vitiello 2014 and Vitiello 2017. However, the attempt of Vitiello 2014: 97–104; Vitiello 2017: 129–132 to ignore Procopius’ statement here (*Wars* 5.4.25) in preference to his accusation in the *Secret History* that a jealous Theodora had Peter advocate the murder of Amalasuintha on behalf of the empress Theodora gives rise to a labyrinth of speculative argument and hypothesis, which is interesting, but ultimately unconvincing and unnecessary. A century ago, Bury 1923: 164–167 made much the same case but concluded (167) that ‘this evidence would, of course be far from sufficient to procure her [Theodora’s] conviction in a legal court. No public prosecutor could act on it’.

<sup>93</sup> *Wars* 5.5.1 (βασιλεὺς δὲ τὰ ἀμφὶ Ἀμαλασοῦνθη ζυνενεχθέντα μαθὼν εὐθὺς καθίστατο ἐς τὸν πόλεμον, ἕνατον ἔτος τὴν βασιλείαν ἔχων), cf. 5.4.30. Despite Procopius’ explicit statement, the beginning of the first war year is usually dated, instead, to the departure of Belisarius’ army from Constantinople at the end of June 535: Bury 1923: 169 n. 2; Rubin 1995: 221 n. 238. Vengeance for the death of Amalasuintha was the publicly proclaimed reason for the war, as evident from both the Gothic perspective (Vitigis, in the words of Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.32–33) and the imperial perspective (reflected in Jordanes [*Getica* 307] and the *Continuator* of Marcellinus, s.a. 534 [‘Iustinianus ut doluit, sic est et ultus’] with Croke 1995: 127).

<sup>94</sup> Bury 1923: 164 n. 3, which anticipates and answers the contention of Vitiello 2017: 157–164, that 30 April was the day Amalasuintha was imprisoned on the island of Martana. But that she was actually murdered there a couple of weeks later (early-mid May).

<sup>95</sup> As calculated by Scheidel, Meeks for a spring journey between Ravenna and Constantinople by public post (*Orbis: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World*, <https://orbis.stanford.edu/>).

in communication with both Amalasuintha and Theodahad, as envoys carried messages and letters back and forth between Italy and Constantinople. At one stage it looked like both Amalasuintha and Theodahad were disposed to a peaceful return of Italy to the jurisdiction of Justinian. The murder of Amalasuintha, followed by Theodahad's unforeseen change of mind, suddenly transformed everything. Italy would have to be returned to the emperor's realm by force.

## Year 1 (535–556)

As described by Procopius, the first war year of Justinian's Gothic War began around mid-April/early May 535, with the news reaching Constantinople of Amalasuintha's murder, that is, 'in the ninth year of his reign' (1 April 535 to 31 March 536).<sup>96</sup> The chronology of the next few months is uncertain because there are no real indicators in Procopius' history. Within his account of the first war year, Procopius is obliged to correlate and recount developments on three fronts: (1) imperial forces in Dalmatia; (2) imperial forces in Sicily; and (3) diplomatic negotiations between the courts of the Gothic king Theodahad and Justinian. Although Procopius was in Constantinople when the Dalmatian expedition was being prepared, he was in Sicily with the army of Belisarius from July 535 and would have heard there about ongoing events in Dalmatia, as well as the embassies to and from Constantinople. Of course, in preparation for his history a decade or more subsequently (late 540s), he had the opportunity of talking with others and consulting documents, such as the diplomatic correspondence between the Roman and Gothic courts, which he cites. Irrespective of Procopius' sources of information, the narrative sequence for the first war year is as follows:

- 5.5.1 'Meanwhile' (Ἐν τούτῳ) Justinian begins war 'immediately' (εὐθὺς) on hearing of the death of Amalasuintha;
- 5.5.2 Justinian commands Mundo on the one hand (μὲν) to invest Salona in Dalmatia and Belisarius on the other (δὲ), to set off by sea for Italy;

<sup>96</sup> Wars 5.5.1.

- 5.5.3–5 Details of the expedition (commanders of the army, composition of troops, etc);
- 5.5.6–7 Justinian advises Belisarius to claim to be heading for Africa but to seize Sicily if circumstances look favourable;
- 5.5.8–10 Letter and money to the Franks seeking support against the Goths;
- 5.5.11 On the one hand (μὲν) Mundo defeats the Goths at Salona and captures the city;
- 5.5.12–17 On the other (δὲ) Belisarius captures Catania, Syracuse and then Palermo;
- 5.5.17 As a result, the whole of Sicily is now held tribute to Justinian;
- 5.5.18–19 ‘At that time’ (τότε) Belisarius had reconquered the whole of Sicily for the Romans, returning to Syracuse on the very day (ἐκείνη τῇ ἡμέρᾳ) he completed his consulship (31 December 535);
- 5.6.1–5 When Peter ‘learned’ of the conquest of Sicily (Ἐπεὶ δὲ ταῦτα Πέτρος ἔμαθεν) he steps up pressure on Theodahad in Rome, and they enter a private agreement whereby Theodahad would do a range of things, including (1) give up Sicily, (2) arrange for the Roman people to shout first the name of Justinian in all acclamations and (3) that no statue of Theodahad would be erected except alongside one of Justinian – ‘after Theodahad had written in confirmation of this agreement he dismissed the ambassador’;
- 5.6.6–11 ‘A little later’ (Ὀλίγω δὲ ὕστερον), petrified that Justinian might not concur with the agreement and actually pursue war, Theodahad summons Peter back to Rome from Albano and new terms are prepared; Peter warns the king that Justinian was within his rights to reclaim Italy and would not stop at war; Theodahad agrees to surrender his realm to the emperor;
- 5.6.12–13 Rusticus is assigned to accompany Peter, with letters;

- 5.6.14–21 Peter and Rusticus in Constantinople; read Theodahad’s letter to Justinian;
- 5.6.22–25 Reply of Justinian;
- 5.6.26–27 Justinian sends Peter back to Italy with Athanasius, Belisarius to come from Sicily later; writes to Belisarius to go when the envoys summon him, having secured agreement with Theodahad;
- 5.7.1 ‘But meantime’ (ἐν ᾧ δὲ) ‘while the emperor was engaged in these negotiations and these envoys were travelling to Italy’, the Gothic army moves into Dalmatia;
- 5.7.2–10 Romans defeat the Goths, but Mundo and son killed, Romans retreat;
- 5.7.11 Theodahad hears of the Roman retreat when Peter and Athanasius (ἤδη) arrive;
- 5.7.12–25 Theodahad revokes the agreement, detains Peter and Athanasius;
- 5.7.26–37 When Justinian ‘heard what had taken place in Dalmatia’ he sends Constantianus to recapture Salona; Constantianus assembles an expedition at Epidamnus and sails to Salona via Epidaurus; Goths reoccupy Salona but depart on arrival of Constantianus, who reoccupies Salona immediately (‘the next day’), and on the ‘seventh day’; afterwards the Goths retreat to Ravenna; the first war year ends.

The only explicit date in this whole account is Belisarius’ official relinquishing of his consulship, which occurred in Syracuse on 31 December 535 (5.5.19). The relative position of the rest of the events described by Procopius, even though he took part in many of them himself, can only be inferred or guessed from the way they are connected. For example, the linking of Belisarius’ departure from Constantinople with that of Mundo, presumably from Naissus, his headquarters as *magister militum per Illyricum*, implies that Salona was captured by Mundo in summer 535.<sup>97</sup> Then Belisarius’ expedition set off for Sicily, probably in June/July 535, and since the sea journey from Constantinople to Sic-

<sup>97</sup> Bury 1923: 170 n. 1 – August or September.



ily would normally take around 14 days, he would have arrived there in early/mid-July at the latest. The main eastward-facing cities of Sicily, Catania and Syracuse, capitulated immediately, with the only delay occasioned by the need to lay siege to Palermo in the northwestern sector of the island. Palermo quickly surrendered too. Thus, Sicily was tribute to Justinian.

The final event, described before the end of December 535, namely the siege and capture of Palermo (5.5.17), may have occurred only shortly before the end of December, allowing 3–4 days sailing time for Belisarius to travel from Palermo to Syracuse, but this need not be the case at all. In fact, it could have been the situation as early as September/October 535, with Belisarius receiving major places, such as Messina and Catania, on his way back to Syracuse. In any event, all of this took place before Belisarius' celebration in Syracuse of the completion of his consulship on 31 December. Weeks later, Justinian was claiming possession of Sicily and Africa and aspiring to yet greater conquests.<sup>98</sup>

The exact date, in 535, of the capture of Palermo and the final subjugation of Sicily is important in so far as it provides the bridge to the next section of Procopius' account. He tells us that the envoy Peter the Patrician, then in Rome with the Gothic king Theodahad, swung into diplomatic action as soon as he learnt of the conquest of Sicily (5.6.1).<sup>99</sup> Since news could travel between Rome and Sicily within a few days, Peter would have begun to pressure Theodahad before the end of December 535 at the latest, but perhaps a month or two before. A date as early as October, or even September, is perfectly plausible. As Procopius, who was in Sicily at the time, tells the story, Peter and Theodahad agreed on terms to put to Justinian; then Peter set off for Constantinople, but 'a little later' (5.6.6) Theodahad had second thoughts about what to say to Justinian and recalled Peter, who had by now reached Albano, just two stations from Rome (about 12 miles). Peter was now given fresh instructions, amounting to a surrender to Justinian, so Procopius

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<sup>98</sup> *Nov. Just.* 30.11.2 (18 March 536).

<sup>99</sup> For the importance of claiming the whole of Sicily: Chrysos 1981: 436–437. Chrysos also discusses the other terms of the agreement Peter made with Theodahad (5.6.2–5).

continues with a companion bishop Rusticus. They reached Constantinople and Theodahad's original letter was read to Justinian, then the second letter, whereupon the emperor prepared a reply and entrusted it to Peter and his new companion, Athanasius, for the return journey.<sup>100</sup> Allowing at least three to four weeks to travel to Constantinople, and considering the journey could have taken longer, it could have been October/November 535 when they reached it, and November/December, certainly no later than January 536, when they returned to Rome.<sup>101</sup>

Procopius resumes his account by linking the period of Justinian's negotiations (October–December 535/January 536) with the arrival of the large Gothic expedition at Salona, then occupied by Mundo and his forces, followed by the Gothic defeat, as well as the deaths of both Maurice and his father Mundo. The leaderless Illyrian army now retreated home (ἔπ' οἴκου), that is, to Naissus, while the Goths withdrew to local Dalmatian strongholds. By the time the news of the Roman losses and retreat reached Theodahad in Rome, Justinian's envoys, Peter and Athanasius, had already arrived with the news that the emperor was mobilising against Theodahad's regime in Italy (5.7.11). In other words, the defeat of Mundo must have occurred in December 535/

<sup>100</sup> It is possible that the letters entrusted to Peter and Rusticus on this occasion are those preserved in Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10, 19–24 as discussed in Antonopoulos 1990: 65ff. If so, the actual letter noted by Procopius must have been excluded from the *Variae* by Cassiodorus himself (Hodgkin 1886: 47). The precise dating of these letters has remained disputed. In any event, it seems unlikely that they belong in the context of the embassy of Pope Agapetus. Bury 1923: 168 n. 1 thinks that they all belong to summer 535; Stein 1949: 353ff. splits them up.

<sup>101</sup> While it is not possible to be definitive, a working notion of the time required can be extracted from Scheidel, Meeks.

An autumn journey from Rome to Constantinople by the fastest mode, horse relay along the *cursus publicus*, would take nine days but would not allow for overnight rests. The envoys most likely travelled by horse or fast carriage, stopping each night. Assuming a land journey from Rome to Brundisium (eight days), then a sea crossing of the Adriatic (Brundisium to Dyrrachium in Epirus), then travelling overland along the via Egnatia from Dyrrachium to Constantinople, the whole journey would take 18–20 days. In other words, around two months travel time would be required for a return journey from Rome to Constantinople, allowing for rest and turnaround time in Constantinople. Hodgkin 1896: 15 n. 1 considered that these exchanges took place in October–November 535.

January 536, when Peter and Athanasius were travelling to Italy or just as they arrived there.<sup>102</sup>

The final episode of the first war year began when the emperor Justinian heard of the defeat of Mundo. Again, news would have reached Constantinople by end-January 536, but possibly a month earlier. Thereupon the emperor ordered Constantianus, *comes sacri stabuli*, to proceed to Salona and Belisarius to advance from Sicily into Italy. Constantianus would have hastened overland along the Via Egnatia to its terminus at Dyrrachium, a winter journey normally taking about 14 days from Constantinople. There he gathered an army and transported it to Epidaurus (Ragusa), 200 kilometres further up the Dalmatian coast. From there he eventually reached Salona, the Goths having retreated at the news of his coming, and reoccupied it. How long it took from Constantianus' arrival in Dyrrachium to the occupation of Salona can only be guessed, although the sailing time from Dyrrachium to Salona was only a matter of three to four days (cf. 5.15.19).<sup>103</sup> The Goths had left Salona by the time he arrived, and he reoccupied it immediately (5.7.34–35). Then the end of the first war year is marked by Procopius in perfect Thucydidean style – ‘and the winter drew to a close and thus ended the first year of this war, the history of which Procopius has written.’<sup>104</sup> When was this?

In these latter events the two greatest points of uncertainty are episode (A): precisely when Peter heard of Belisarius' claim on Sicily; and episode (B): the interval between Constantianus' arrival in Dyrrachium and his securing of Salona. Both compel further consideration. Traditionally, Procopius' narrative has been considered to imply a much later chronology. Bury dated episode (B) to May–June 536 on the assumption of Procopius' first war year, extending it a full calendar year from Belisarius' departure from Constantinople; that is, since he

<sup>102</sup> For the reaction of Theodahad: Antonopoulos 1985: 52–53. For the strategic background of the Roman thrust into Dalmatia: Kaegi 1995: 79–99.

<sup>103</sup> According to Scheidel, Meeks, the journey would have taken just over three days sailing by the coast, but eight days if the army was travelling overland by ‘rapid military march’. For the background and significance of these encounters between the Romans and Goths: Sarantis 2009: 25–26.

<sup>104</sup> *Wars* 5.7.37: καὶ ὁ χειμὼν ἔληγε, καὶ πρῶτον ἔτος ἐτελεύτα τῷ δεῶν Προκόπιος συνέγραψε.

left the capital in June/July 535, the end of the first year must be June/July 536, so that the last event recorded by Procopius (the Roman reoccupation of Salona and the Gothic retreat) should be dated then, with previous events spaced out accordingly.<sup>105</sup> Stein also dated episode (B) in June 536.<sup>106</sup> Most other accounts have simply followed Bury and Stein, including all the relevant entries in PLRE 3.<sup>107</sup> More recently, for no apparent reason, Schwarcz extended the first year to March 537.<sup>108</sup>

Since, for their chronology of the war, both Bury and Stein relied entirely on a 1913 thesis of Oskar Körbs,<sup>109</sup> the chronology of Körbs requires prior inspection. The starting point for Körbs is episode (A). He assumes that the conquest of Sicily reported in Italy was only signalled by Belisarius' completion of his consulship in Syracuse on 31 December 535. It was only after that, that is, no earlier than January 536 that Peter was first despatched by Theodahad.<sup>110</sup> Körbs then goes on to date subsequent events following the chronology of Procopius thus:<sup>111</sup>

January 536	Peter hears of the conquest of Sicily; Theodahad sends Peter to Justinian.
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<sup>105</sup> Bury 1923: 175, n. 1.

<sup>106</sup> Stein 1949: 346.

<sup>107</sup> PLRE 3.334–335 ('Constantianus 2'); 995 ('Petrus 6'); 854 ('Mauricius 1'); 904 ('Mundus').

<sup>108</sup> Schwarcz 1994: 119.

<sup>109</sup> Körbs 1913, followed by Bury 1923: 169, n. 2 ('the years of the war as reckoned by Procopius run from summer solstice to summer solstice ... the end of the winter and the end of the war year are not coincident, and the former is only introduced to remind the reader of Thucydides'), and Stein 1949: 339 n. 3 ('[Körbs] a prouvé de façon définitive ... que dans Procope les années de la guerre gothique se renouvellent à la fin juin'), cf. 715. The dependence on Körbs is noted without question by Vitiello 2014: 282. However, Cristini 2022: CVIII notes that, a century later, Körbs' dating argument has still not been convincingly refuted. The hypothesis of the end-June to end-June war year in Procopius, at least for the period 535–537 was originally advanced by Leuthold 1908, but was critically reviewed by Haury 1909: 206–207, not least because Leuthold (A) failed to take account of Thucydides' practice, which Procopius was following, and (B) insisted on separating the end of winter from the end of the war year, which neither Thucydides nor Procopius ever do. While Körbs 1913 takes issue with Haury's objections, he is far from compelling.

<sup>110</sup> Körbs 1913: 21.

<sup>111</sup> See table in Körbs 1913: 106.

First half of February	Theodahad recalls Peter, concludes second proposal.
Mid-February	Peter and Rusticus sent to Justinian (along with Pope Agapetus).
End of March	Mundo and the Romans defeated at Salona.
End of March/early April	Peter and Athanasius return to Italy.
Mid-April	Peter and Athanasius held by Theodahad.
Beginning of May	Constantianus in Dyrrachium.
June 536	Constantianus captures Salona, winter, and first war year ends.

This means that episode (B), Constantianus' journey from Dyrrachium to Salona, is consigned to early May 536 and took around six weeks, so as to fill the period to the end of the war year towards the end of June 536,<sup>112</sup> that is to say, a year after the departure of the expedition of Belisarius from Constantinople in the summer of 535, not Justinian's decision for war in May (5.5.1), which led to the preparation of the expedition to Italy in the first place.

While Körbs has carefully plotted the sequence of events reported by Procopius and the intervals between them, based on his best estimate of travel times, which now require refinement,<sup>113</sup> the weakness in his chronology is his very starting point. It is not necessary to assume (as does Körbs) that news of the conquest of Sicily could not have reached the Gothic court, then at Rome, and the ears of the Roman envoy, Peter, before January 536.<sup>114</sup> Certainly, Procopius (5.5.17) appears to link the final conquest of Sicily with Belisarius' laying down of his consulship, but only weakly through a simple 'then' or 'at that time' (τότε). Moreover, as Bury observed, when Procopius says, 'when

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<sup>112</sup> Körbs 1913: 24–25.

<sup>113</sup> The modern and up-to-date calculator of Roman travel times, and the one used here, is Scheidel, Meeks, *Orbis: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World*, <https://orbis.stanford.edu/>.

<sup>114</sup> Körbs 1913: 21.

Peter learnt about these things,’ he may well ‘mean loosely the progress of Belisarius in Sicily’.<sup>115</sup> Procopius does not mean that the two events were immediately sequential. Elsewhere he explained that Sicily had been secured with minimum effort (πόνω οὐδενί, 4.14.1). It is more likely that there was some distance, a few weeks even, between the two events. The Continuator of Marcellinus, writing in Constantinople shortly after Procopius, notes that Catania and Syracuse were occupied ‘without delay’ (*sine mora*),<sup>116</sup> and Totila was later to remind the Romans that in 535 there had been hardly any resistance in Sicily. In fact, most Sicilian towns had received Belisarius’ troops with open arms (7.16.19). Since Belisarius’ contingent arrived in Sicily no later than July, and both Catania and Syracuse were captured immediately, it is not impossible that the Romans claimed the surrender of the whole island (that is, principally, the most powerful towns of Syracuse, Catania and Palermo) as early as October. So if one assumes a different starting point for episode (A), say, October or November 535, then a different terminus results.

In addition, there are four other problems with Körbs’ attempt to spread the events of Procopius from January to June 536: (1) coalescing the legation of Peter with that of Pope Agapetus (never mentioned by Procopius)<sup>117</sup>; (2) unduly stretching out the departure and recall of Peter across January and February 536, when Peter was only a day away from Rome at the time (5.6.6) and quickly resumed his mission; (3) placing the arrival of Peter and Athanasius in Rome as late as April 536,<sup>118</sup> which necessarily puts the Roman defeat in Dalmatia

<sup>115</sup> Bury 1923: 172, n. 2.

<sup>116</sup> *Cont. Marc.* 535.1 (MGH.AA. XI, 104): ‘rectoque navigio Siciliam [Belisarius] properat, Catinam Syracusam sine mora, immo omnem pervadit Trinacriam.’

<sup>117</sup> Körbs 1913: 66–78 arguing at length on the basis of Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.19–24. Agapetus left Rome in 535 (*Cont. Marc.* s.a. 535) but sometime after 15 October (Bury 1923: 172, n. 1 and Vitiello 2014: 129). Less certain is when he arrived in Constantinople. The ‘21 April’ (‘X kl. mai’) of the *Liber Pontificalis* has long been considered chronologically and textually impossible. Often assumed to be a mistake for ‘20 February’, it is actually an interpolation repeating the date of Agapetus’ death on 21 April 536 (Duchesne 1886: 288), although it may have been earlier. Agapetus’ legation was triggered by the proximity of Belisarius’ expedition (Liberatus, *Breviarium* 21), but had nothing to do with that of Peter (cf. Veh 1966: 1017 and Vitiello 2014: 128–129).

<sup>118</sup> Körbs 1913: 23.

later still, because Procopius clearly implies that the defeat occurred, and news of it had reached Theodahad, after the envoys' arrival (5.7.1, 11); and (4) allowing two months between the defeat of Mundo and the arrival of Constantianus' troops in Salona,<sup>119</sup> when it is unlikely that news would have taken too long to reach Justinian, nor would he have waited so long before despatching Constantianus. If there was time to be spent, it was at Dyrrachium assembling and provisioning his expedition. Yet again, this need not have taken more than two to three weeks at the most. Procopius' *χρόνον τινὰ διατρίψας* (5.7.27) does not imply a lengthy period. All in all, the events described by Procopius appear to be stretched out by Körbs to ensure they culminate in June 536, that is, exactly twelve months after the expedition of Belisarius left Constantinople (June/July 535), not twelve months after Justinian decided on war (May 535). In any event, with the inconsistency of Thucydides in mind, there is no need to assume that Procopius must necessarily be calculating exactly twelve months, rather than nine months, for this initial war year.

Hence, assuming that the chain of events described by Procopius commenced in October 535 rather than January 536 (Körbs), the following chronology results:

October 535	Peter hears of the conquest of Sicily; Theodahad sends Peter to Justinian.
October/November	Theodahad concludes a second proposal with Peter; he and Rusticus reach Constantinople.
November	Goths advance to Salona; Romans lose their leader and return to Naissus.
November/December	Peter returns to Rome with Athanasius; news of the Gothic withdrawal reaches Rome and Constantinople.
January 536	Constantianus in Dyrrachium.
[February	Pope Agapetus' embassy to Constantinople]
February/March	Occupation and refortification of Salona, end of winter and the first war year.

<sup>119</sup> Körbs 1913: 24.

This means that the first war year runs to the end of winter, just as Procopius says, or the beginning of the normal campaign season, in March/April 536. If, alternatively, November is taken as the point of Peter's departure for Constantinople, that still puts the reoccupation of Salona no later than March/April 536. Given the continuity of Procopius' narrative, and his systematic employment of a seasonal dating, the fact that he can be shown to conclude his first war year at the end of winter 536 (καὶ ὁ χειμῶν ἔληγε, 5.7.37) strongly suggests that subsequent years will follow a similar pattern. Moreover, Procopius' dating would make most sense if his audience understood that he was following the common Thucydidean calculation of when summer and winter began and ended, rather than some arbitrary invention of his own which he never explains, and which clearly differs from the understanding evinced in the previous four books covering the wars against the Persians and Vandals. Procopius nowhere says in his *Gothic War* that his winter ends in the middle of summer (June/July), let alone eighteen winters in a row, that is, for the duration of the Gothic War that he describes.

## Year 2 (536/537)

When Theodahad reneged on his agreement with the emperor earlier in 536, Belisarius was instructed by Justinian to move his forces from Sicily into Italy. Justinian had issued his orders simultaneously to Constantianus and to Belisarius. Procopius describes Constantianus' movements under his first war year but leaves Belisarius to the second war year. That does not mean, however, that Procopius always started his war year in June, as Körbs argued,<sup>120</sup> nor that he must necessarily have ended the previous war year immediately prior. Like Thucydides, Procopius saw no need to be absolutely consistent from year to year. The simple reason for this starting point, in June 536, Belisarius' crossing from Messina to Rhegium, is that is exactly when it took place. Procopius chose to report nothing earlier in the Gothic War. He therefore chose to ignore the overtures already made by the Gothic com-

<sup>120</sup> Körbs 1913: 26.



mander Ebremuth, son-in-law of Theodahad, to surrender his garrison at Rhegium, or not to obstruct the Roman crossing there. It is possible that Ebremuth actually crossed into Sicily to meet Belisarius in order to seal the surrender, as implied by the *Continuator* of Marcellinus.<sup>121</sup> In any event, negotiations with Ebremuth, followed by the progress of the Roman army from Syracuse to Messina, and then the crossing of the narrow straight to Rhegium, are the first events covered by Procopius in the second war year. This chain of events most likely took place in the period May/June 536, but Belisarius and his troops were active well before that.

Certainly, Belisarius had been advised by Justinian over the winter of 535/536 to move into Italy as soon as possible (5.6.26–27). He was probably on the verge of departure for Italy in March; however, he was detained by a rebellion in Africa which required his direct intervention (4.14.7ff). Procopius was clearly in Africa himself early in 536 (4.14.37–42) and returned with Belisarius to put down the rebellion against the Roman governor Solomon, which broke out in late March 536 (4.15.9–49). So, for the period April/May Belisarius was in Africa, Procopius too. He later returned to Sicily with Belisarius to plan the delayed crossing into Italy. For Procopius in particular there was nothing to report in his *Gothic War* before Belisarius' crossing from Messina in May/June 536, that is, nothing since Constantianus' occupation of Salona in March. It was not a conscious striving to ensure that his second war year would not begin before June 536, as Körbs implies.<sup>122</sup>

Procopius' account of the second war year is the longest in the whole of the *Wars*. The main explanation for its relative length would appear to be his direct observation and recording of the relevant events. The coverage of the second war year is as follows:

- 5.8.1–10.48 Belisarius crosses to Italy, surrender of Ebremuth; progress through Italy and successful siege of Naples after 20 days (5.10.36);
- 5.11.1–29 Goths overthrow Theodahad and install Vitigis as king;

<sup>121</sup> *Cont. Marc.* 536.1; 'Ebremud Theodati gener relicto exercitu regio in Brittios ad Belisarium in Siciliam convalavit' (MGH.AA. XI, 104).

<sup>122</sup> Körbs 1913: 26.

- 5.12.1–13.29 Digression on Franks and their relations with Goths;  
 5.14.1–17 Belisarius marches to Rome, its capture and refortification;  
 5.15.1–30 Surrender of Samnium, also Apulia, Calabria and elsewhere;  
 5.16.1–4 Capture of Narnia, Spoleto and Perugia;  
 5.16.5–7 Constantine defeats the Goths at Perugia;  
 5.16.8–18 Gothic expedition to Dalmatia, besieges Salona;  
 5.16.19–17.20 Vitigis hastens to Rome from Ravenna, bypassing Perugia and Narnia, Bessas challenged and retreats to Narnia;  
 5.18.1–43 Skirmish outside Rome, Belisarius nearly killed;  
 5.19.1–29 Vitigis and Belisarius prepare for siege;  
 5.20.1–21.22 Belisarius rejects request to surrender, then Vitigis and Belisarius prepare siege machinery;  
 5.22.1–23.27 Goths attack the walls of Rome, beginning on the 18<sup>th</sup> day, but are repulsed with heavy losses – outside the Salarian Gate, at the Cornelian Gate, at Vivarium and again at the Salarian Gate – all in one day;  
 5.24.1–37 Belisarius requests reinforcements, Valerian and Martin despatched ‘at about the winter solstice’ (24.19) and were still wintering in Greece, omens (picture of Theodoric, Sibylline oracle);  
 5.25.1–26.19 Evacuation to Naples ‘the following day’ (25.2), deposition of Pope Silverius, Goths regroup, Roman aristocrats at Ravenna executed, Goths capture Portus ‘on the third day after they were repulsed in the assault on the wall’ (27.1);  
 5.27.1–29 ‘Twenty days’ later (27.1) Valerian and Martin arrive; ‘on the following day’ (27.4). Trajan’s successful sally; ‘a few days later’ (27.11) three more successful sallies; Bessas defeats Gothic attack and ‘three days later’ (27.21) Vitigis sends out fresh contingents;

- 5.28.1–6.1.20 ‘Later on’ Romans decide on full-pitched battle, Goths prepare, battle confrontation beyond Salarian Gate and on the Plain of Nero, Romans retreat, ‘after this’ (1.1) cavalry sorties, then ‘not many days later’ (1.10) Peranius’ sally; ‘next’ (1.20) single combats.
- 6.1.21–34 ‘A little after this’ Chorsamantis’ solo and futile attack on the Goths on the Plain of Nero;
- 6.2.1–24 Euthalius arrives at Tarracina, ‘around the summer turning’ (ἄμφι θερινῶς τροπᾶς), that is, the ‘spring equinox’, with soldiers back-pay; escorted by troops to Rome; battles outside the Pincian Gate and on the Plain of Nero in a day; Euthalius arrives at night;
- 6.2.25–38 Aftermath of battle on both sides, Procopius then summarises (67 skirmishes in all) and concludes second war year.

Procopius’ lengthy account of the second war year is basically constructed around two set pieces, replete with exchange of speeches: (A) the Roman siege of Naples and (B) the Gothic siege of Rome. Both episodes are full of colour, emotion and human interest. They abound with graphic firsthand description, suspense, personal observation and reflection. It is the recounting of a conflict of ideals and societies, with the episodes separated by a digression on the Goths in Gaul. It is not clear when the first episode, the siege of Naples, began and ended, except that it was preceded by a series of preliminary negotiations and assessments (5.8.42), perhaps lasting for weeks (5.8.5–41). The siege was calculated by Procopius at 20 days (5.10.36), possibly on the basis of his own diary. Belisarius became concerned it was taking too much time and was fearful of not reaching Rome before winter, that is, December 536 (5.9.9).<sup>123</sup> In the end that is what happened. Naples and Cumae were garrisoned (5.14.1), the army and its seaborne support packed up and the march continued onto Rome (5.14.6), which Belisarius entered by invitation on 9 December 536 (5.14.14).

<sup>123</sup> Bury 1923: 177 n. 1, is probably correct: Naples fell in early November 536.

Of particular importance is to determine when in 537 the Gothic siege of Rome commenced. While Procopius himself says, speaking generally, that it began ‘at the beginning of March’ (5.24.31) the ‘21 February’ of the *Liber Pontificalis*, a week earlier, is more precise and is generally held to be accurate in this respect.<sup>124</sup> The final episode recorded for this war year is the arrival in Rome of Euthalius with the army’s overdue pay and the simultaneous battles outside Rome. Procopius explains in detail how Belisarius secured safe passage for Euthalius and his cargo of bullion from Tarracina through the Gothic lines outside Rome and into the city. These events took place over a couple of days (6.2.1–37). Now, Procopius dates the arrival of Euthalius ‘around the spring equinox’ (6.2.1). This is usually taken, however, to mean ‘around the time of the summer solstice’<sup>125</sup>, that is, 21 June, so this whole episode is automatically dated to June 537. In fact, on this reckoning the final entry of Euthalius must have been around the last day or two of June.<sup>126</sup> It is thereby cited as decisive support for the notion that the Procopian Gothic war year always ran from June to June, actually summer solstice to summer solstice.<sup>127</sup> Earlier events are then spaced out retrospectively in a strictly sequential order.

To determine where Procopius ends this war year, it is necessary to examine the chronology of the previous episodes recorded for the war year. We can begin with the Goths moving unsuccessfully against several different parts of the walls of Rome on 10 March 537 (the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the siege: 5.22.1) and the actions of ‘the following day’, 11 March (5.25.2): the removal of women and children to Naples, and the replacement of Pope Silverius with Vigilius around 11 March

<sup>124</sup> PLRE 3.198 (‘Belisarius’), with Hildebrand 1922: 239–242. The siege lasted for one year and nine days (*Wars* 6.10.13). Bury 1923: 183 n. 2 noted that it is very difficult to reconcile the difference in dates. Rubin 1957: 442 argued that 21 February was the date Vitigis left Ravenna. It is surely more likely that the dates in the *Liber Pontificalis* are local, hence signifying his arrival at Rome. In any event, Procopius makes plain that the Goths approached Rome from the East and mainly out of sight (Bury 1923: 182 n. 1).

<sup>125</sup> PLRE 3.474 (‘Euthalius’).

<sup>126</sup> E.g., PLRE 3.200 (‘Belisarius 1’).

<sup>127</sup> Körbs 1913: 27–28.

(5.25.13)<sup>128</sup>. ‘On the third day after the assault on the wall’ (5.27.1), that is, 14 March, the Goths captured Portus and ‘twenty days later’ (2/3 April) Martin and Valerian arrived. They had left Constantinople in late December 536 (5.24.19) and had been sheltering inside the Ambracian gulf (5.24.20), but since Apulia and Calabria had already surrendered to Belisarius (5.15.3) they could quickly have arrived at Brindisi, or possibly Bari further north.

‘On the following day’ (3/4 April), occurred the sally of Trajan (5.27.4), then ‘a few days later’ (5.27.11), say 7/8 April, there were three further successful sorties. ‘Later on’ (5.28.1), Belisarius and Vitigis mobilised for a full encounter involving most of their troops (5.28.2–29.50). This must have taken place around mid-April, followed ‘not many days later’ (6.1.10) by Peranius’s sortie, then ‘a little after this’ by the foolhardy confrontation by the Massagetic warrior Chorsamantis (6.1.21–34). By now the narrative is probably located towards the middle of April 537. Procopius concludes this war year with the arrival of Euthalius at Tarracina, and the plans to secure the passage of himself and his precious freight into Rome. Among other things this involved an attempt to keep the Goths fully occupied by a day in battle. Before formally recording the end of the second war year, Procopius notes that there were 67 separate skirmishes in the conflict around Rome over the first period of the siege. His precision stems from living through them, given his close observation and involvement with Belisarius, and from having access to the official record.

Leaving aside for a moment the arrival of Euthalius, the latest datable event described by Procopius (6.1.34) occurred no later than the middle of April 537. If he was following a clear sequence in his account, as he had been up to that point, then the Euthalius episode and the related skirmishes outside Rome must have been spread over the entire eight weeks from middle April to end June, if (according to Körbs) the Euthalius episode is to be dated to the summer solstice in June. It would mean, however, that Procopius would have otherwise reported

<sup>128</sup> The deposition of Pope Silverius can be independently dated. Vigilius was installed as bishop of Rome on 29 March 537, with Silverius deposed sometime before, probably on 11 March (Duchesne 1886: 294, n. 17).

nothing of events between mid-April and late June, even though he was in Rome with Belisarius the whole time.

Further, it would mean that in this particular war year Procopius includes, or projects forward, events through to June because his narrative allowed or required it. The siege of Rome, a centrepiece of Procopius's account in terms of detail and directness, needed to have its own sense of narrative closure, thereby preserving the episodic unity of his narrative. Procopius was describing events in which he was a participant and close observer. He was well-placed to determine the appropriate point to divide his narrative across successive war years. Like Thucydides, who on occasion chose to take the story of a particular war year beyond the normal end of winter in March, Procopius' termination of the second war year in mid-late April does not necessarily mean that throughout his history the war year invariably reached the end of June, following the summer solstice.

Finally, in the habit of Procopius, following that of Thucydides, as we have seen, the calendar year was divided into two seasons for the purpose of the narrative: a 'winter' generally comprising the months from November to March/April and a 'summer' from March/April to October. In the course of a year there were two solstices, when the sun reached its highest point (summer solstice) and lowest point (winter solstice), before turning back again, hence the Greek phrases 'summer turning' and 'winter turning'. Besides the solstices there were other annual astronomical turning points, namely the spring equinox (March) and autumn equinox (September). These days of equal night and day, a turning to greater length of night or day, could also be described as 'turnings' (τροπαί). In terms of Procopius' narrative structure, there were potentially three 'turnings' in summer (March to October) and one in winter (November to February). So when Procopius speaks of the 'summer turning' he could mean any one of three points in the year, not exclusively the summer solstice in June.

Which 'turning' is being indicated is determined by the context of Procopius' account. Each separate case needs to be treated carefully.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>129</sup> The departure of Belisarius' expedition to Africa in 533 (*Wars* 3.12.1) is also put by Dewing at the 'spring equinox', although this too seems impossible to Körbs 1913: 84, 102 and Stein 1949: 312. In this case of ἀμφὶ θερινᾶς τροπᾶς, however, Procopius is

The ‘summer turning’, used to date the Euthalius episode, is translated by Dewing as ‘the spring equinox’.<sup>130</sup> While Dewing does not cite any reasons for preferring the spring equinox over the summer solstice or autumn equinox, he presumably considered it self-evident that at this point Procopius meant the spring ‘turning’, in March. He possibly assumed this because, as frequently with Procopius’ episodic structure, the narrative is not sequential, so having finished his major account of the battle for Rome in March/early April 537, he turns back to finish off with the Euthalius episode.

Certainly, Procopius does not provide a chronological link by leaping forward to the summer solstice towards the end of June. In other words, having reached mid-April, he then reverts to the end of the previous month and describes other events over the ensuing time, that is, from late March to early April, by his reckoning, introduced by his conventional signal for a new episode (δὲ, 6.2.1). In that case, Procopius’ ‘summer turning’ would indeed be the spring equinox of March 537, as Dewing obviously realised. The time required for the news to get from Tarracina to a blockaded Rome and back, for Belisarius to make special plans for safe passage to Rome of Euthalius and his treasure (presumably crates of coins), and for the battles against the Goths to be planned, would have taken only a few days at most.<sup>131</sup> While Martin and Valerian only arrived on 2 April there is no reason why they could not be deployed outside Rome a couple of days later, as Procopius suggests (6.2.8). Indeed, some of their troops were in action the day after they arrived in Rome (5.27.4).

One certainty, however, is that the involvement of Martin and Valerian in the diverting battle, which enabled Euthalius to enter Rome (6.1.2), means that it did not take place before their arrival in Rome

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drawing on his own firsthand experience (3.12.3). On the other hand, Dewing translates τροπὴς θερινῆς as ‘vernal equinox’ (Procopius, *Wars*, vol. 1, p. 403) for the time of Belisarius deliberating on negotiations at Dara in the summer of 541 (*Wars* 2.16.18).

<sup>130</sup> Dewing 1924: 299. In his revision of Dewing’s translation, Kaldellis retains ‘spring equinox’, but in a note explains that Procopius’ term ‘could also indicate the summer solstice in June’ (Kaldellis 2014: 322, n. 569).

<sup>131</sup> According to Scheidel, Meeks, the fastest route for news to travel the 90 km from Tarracina to Rome in March, by the public courier system, would be half a day, while a military expedition would take one and a half days to cover the distance.

on 2 April. This might suffice to indicate that Procopius cannot have meant the spring equinox by his phrase the ‘summer turning’ but only the ‘summer solstice’ (5.27.1), that is, June. Yet at this point Procopius’s chronology defeats the precision modern scholars seek. It all depends on what is meant by the phrase ἀμφὶ θερινῆς τροπᾶς. If the spring equinox, as Dewing saw and reinforced here, then it falls within the broad Thucydidean limit for recording the ‘end of winter’ in a particular year and suggests the inconsistency of a narrative mandate, not necessarily the rigid paradigm for all other years.

### Year 3 (537/538)

There is an immediate chronological link between the second and the third war year, expressed as the ‘summer turning’, so that it is clear that one begins exactly where the other ends.

- 6.3.1–32      ‘Already at the beginning of the summer turning’ the Romans, oppressed by famine and plague, approach Belisarius;
- 6.4.1–20      Procopius to Naples, joined ‘not long afterwards’ (6.4.20) by Antonina, reinforcements and grain for Rome;
- 6.4.21–30     Vesuvius rumbles, Procopius’ description;
- 6.5.1–27      ‘At this time’ John, nephew of Vitalian, and other troops arrive in Italy, deployed by Belisarius;
- 6.6.1–36      Goths decide to negotiate, send three envoys, including ‘a Roman of note among the Goths’ (Cassiodorus?); details worked out ‘during the ensuing days’;
- 6.7.1–25      ‘While these negotiations were in progress’, John’s forces arrive in Rome and supplies are offloaded in Ostia for Rome ‘about the winter turning’ (6.7.12); ‘afterwards’ (6.7.13) there is an armistice for three months to allow Gothic envoys to go to Constantinople and back; Goths challenge the Roman recapture of Portus, Centumcellae and Albano;



- 6.7.26–34 ‘Later’ (6.7.26), John’s army is off to Picenum;
- 6.7.35–38 ‘At about the same time’ bishop Datius of Milan is in Rome ‘during the winter season’;
- 6.8.1–18 Constantinus, who purloined two daggers, is killed because of disobedience to Belisarius;
- 6.9.1–23 ‘Not long after’ the Goths recommence attack on Rome, explore broken aqueduct but are foiled; ‘later on’ plan an open attack;
- 6.10.1–12 ‘While these things were happening’ John captures Rimini and opens contact with Matasuentha, wife of Vitigis, in Ravenna;
- 6.10.12–20 Gothic reaction – the three months had expired, no word from Gothic envoys in Constantinople about the spring equinox; the siege is one year and nine days old (6.10.12-13);
- 6.11.1–12.25 Goths retreat to Rimini; Ildiger and Martin are sent on to beat the Goths back to Rimini; Goths arrive ‘not long afterward’ (6.12.1) and blockade John;
- 6.12.26–35 Mundilas leads a Roman contingent sailing from Rome to Genoa, cross the river Po and defeat the Goths outside Pavia, but the Goths retreat and the city is too strong to capture; they move on to Milan;
- 6.12.36–41 Romans under Mundilas fortify Milan, and Goths under Uraias blockade it immediately; end of the third war year.

Military action in the summer of 537 was minimised by the Romans’ defeat in open battle, awaiting reinforcements plus the need to conserve supplies. Again, the chronology is not clear. Procopius was away from Rome for several months, so his narrative, compared to the previous war year, loses some immediacy and completeness. It is not clear when Procopius was sent to Campania. His account suggests July 537, but it was probably not before September.<sup>132</sup> That the war year can only begin in July is taken by Körbs to be stated by Procopius’ phrase ‘already at the beginning of the summer turning’ (6.3.1). The similarity of phra-

<sup>132</sup> Bury 1923: 188 n. 1.

seology with the last episode in the previous war year (6.2.1) is taken to be decisive, but they could both, as Dewing presumed, mean ‘the spring equinox’ rather than the ‘summer solstice’.

Be that as it may, according to Procopius, who clearly kept a detailed diary and utilised it for his account of the siege of Rome, it lasted ‘one year and nine days’ (6.10.13). Consequently, the siege ended with the Goths departure from Rome around 1 March 538, that is, 374 days from its commencement on 21 February 537 and ‘around the time of the spring turning’ (ἄμφι τροπὰς ἔαρινᾶς, 6.10.13), that is, the spring equinox. Obviously, Procopius uses this phrase very broadly to denote a time of year without having to use month and day dating, and to indicate the passing of three months since the armistice was agreed ‘about the time of the winter turning’ (ἄμφι τροπὰς χειμερινᾶς, 6.7.12). As Körbs notes, Procopius might be expected to mark the end of his war year at this point, but his narrative continues.<sup>133</sup>

Following the lifting of the siege of Rome, Procopius has further episodes to recount before noting the end of the war year, and their chronology needs careful scrutiny: (A) the Gothic leader Vitigis marches from outside Rome to Rimini, which was held by John (6.11.1–3); (B) ‘immediately’ the siege of Rome was lifted (around 1 March 538) and Belisarius sent Ildiger and Martin to Rimini via Petra and Ancona to beat the Goths there (6.11.4–22) – a journey taking nine days in all,<sup>134</sup> so they would have reached Rimini in mid-March 538; (C) ‘not long afterwards’, i.e. end-March at the latest, Vitigis arrives in Rimini and begins a siege but is attacked by John (6.12.1–25); (D) Belisarius sends an expedition to Milan, under Mundilas, in response to a request from Bishop Datius, who had been detained in Rome for the winter. Sailing from Portus to Genoa in early March and then journeying overland via Pavia, the troops occupy Milan, then garrison the neighbouring towns of Bergamo, Como and Novara, whereupon Uraias and Goths are sent to besiege Milan, as well as a contingent of Burgundians sent by the

<sup>133</sup> Körbs: 1913: 29.

<sup>134</sup> The travel time between the various Italian towns was calculated carefully in Hodgkin 1896: 257–266, and were confirmed by Scheidel, Meeks. On the other hand, it has been argued that Procopius grossly underestimates the travelling time required, which was 15 km per day for an encumbered army (Rubin 1957: 459 n. 1, and 461, n. 1).

Frankish king (6.12.26–41). It is at this point that Procopius marks the end of the third war year.

The ending of the third Gothic war year is especially problematic. It turns on the dating of episodes (C) and (D), recognising that they are not sequential. Procopius clearly separates them chronologically. As for (C), it is clear that the Goths were outside the walls of Rimini no later than end-March 538. Procopius then marks off this episode as complete – ‘Such were the course of events here’ (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἐγένετο τῆδε, 6.12.26). But as for (D), introduced as a new episode with the usual δὲ, the contingent to support Milan was doubtless fully prepared to leave Rome immediately when the siege was lifted at the beginning of March 538, presumably even earlier given the time they had to prepare.<sup>135</sup> Bishop Datius had arrived in Rome with a request for support in December 537. While Belisarius had agreed to provide such support, notwithstanding the siege of Rome, he had persuaded Datius to spend the winter within the safety of the city (6.7.35–38). In Procopius’ day it would take around nine to ten days to travel from Rome to Milan, depending on mode of transport.<sup>136</sup> If the contingent left Rome early in March, when the siege was over, though it could have been earlier, they would have reached Milan no later than mid-March 538. The news of Milan’s occupation and the arrival of Uraias and his Gothic troops, who were only one day’s march away at Pavia, would take events up to late March. The assembling of the blockade of Goths and Burgundians, and its visible impact inside Milan, may have taken events into April at the latest.

Bury dated the departure of the Romans for Milan in April,<sup>137</sup> Stein in the spring.<sup>138</sup> That is, both dated this event a month or more after the end of the siege rather than earlier. Both were following Körbs, who needed to place Datius’ departure from Rome as late as possible in or-

<sup>135</sup> Körbs 1913: 29 considered it highly likely that the expedition was only sent to Milan after the siege of Rome was lifted. He does not entertain the possibility of it being earlier.

<sup>136</sup> Calculations from Scheidel, Meeks for a military expedition (10 days), travelling overland from Milan to Rome. This Roman group of 1,000 troops took the coastal route by boat to Genoa (5 days), then overland to Milan via Pavia (Proc., *Wars* 6.12.26–36).

<sup>137</sup> Bury 1923: 202.

<sup>138</sup> Stein 1949: 354.

der to stretch events out to the end of June, so he claimed that it would have taken three months (April–June) for the expedition to reach Milan and for the Goths and Burgundians to react.<sup>139</sup> This appears totally unlikely on any reckoning, noting that an army travelling from Rome, via Genoa, to Milan in spring would take around 10 days. The Gothic troops deployed against Milan were close-by at Pavia, which the Romans had tried but failed to capture en route to Milan, quickly discovering the overwhelming superiority of the Gothic army there. While Procopius relied on others for events in Milan, he did have constant access to all the reports and bulletins to and from Belisarius, presumably from Mundilas. Procopius was well-informed. His account would appear to cover developments up to April at the latest, but maybe earlier. Neither episode (C) nor (D), the final two recorded for this war year, need be dated beyond 31 March, although events in Milan may have spilt over into April. In other words, the narrative of Procopius' third war year shows some of the inconsistency of Thucydides by carrying events in a given year a little beyond the normal winter's end in March, but definitely not as far as the end of June.<sup>140</sup>

## Year 4 (538/339)

The narrative of the fourth war year may be summarised thus:

- 6.13.1–5            Belisarius departs Rome 'at about the time of the summer turning', fortifies Todi and Chuisi;
- 6.13.5–15        'Meanwhile' Goths are in Ancona but Romans manage to resist them;
- 6.13.16–18      'At that time' (τότε) Narses' troops (5,000) enter Italy, including 2,000 Heruli;
- 6.14.1–15.36    Digression on Heruli and Thule;

<sup>139</sup> Körbs 1913: 30.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Kaldellis 2014: 344, n. 602 explaining Procopius' third war year as '(roughly) from spring 537 to spring 538'.

- 6.16.1–24 Armies of Narses and Belisarius combine at Firmum, conference of generals, urgent letter from John in Rimini;
- 6.17.1–11 The goat that tended an abandoned baby;
- 6.17.12–24 Belisarius moves to Rimini; Goths flee to Ravenna;
- 6.18.1–29 Narses and Belisarius – their different strategic approaches to finishing the war;
- 6.19.1–22 Peranius captures Orvieto, Belisarius Urbino; John, Forum Corneli;
- 6.20.1–14 Belisarius captures Urbino ‘at about the winter solstice’, plans to blockade Auximum;
- 6.20.15–33 Digression on the dire impact of famine, ‘as time went on and brought again the summer season’ (20.15);
- 6.21.1–42 Martin and Uliaris sent to Milan but stalled at the Po ‘for a long time’ (21.2); request to approach Milan, still long delay (21.12); seek support from John and Justin; Mundilas eventually surrenders Milan;
- 6.22.1–8 Belisarius heard the outcome of events in Milan as he was moving into Picenum ‘since the winter was now coming to an end’ (22.2), Narses recalled, Heruli retire but repent;
- 6.22.9–17 Goths hear that Belisarius will advance upon them ‘at the beginning of spring’ (22.9), approach Lombards unsuccessfully, then decide on persuading Chosroes to provoke the Romans;
- 6.22.18–20 Goths request support from Chosroes;
- 6.22.21–25 Justinian returns detained Gothic envoys and promises a settlement, envoys guarded by Belisarius until Peter and Athanasius are released by the Goths, ‘and the winter drew to a close, and the 4<sup>th</sup> year ended’.

Procopius’s account of Year 4 begins with the departure of Belisarius from Rome in June 538, as he specifies ἀμφὶ θερινὰς τροπὰς (6.13.1). The context here implies that the ‘summer turning’ is, as Dewing translates it, the summer solstice. Yet again, that does not mean that the previous war year ended immediately beforehand. The narrative is not

seamless and sequential, nor is it meant to be. Just as it is absolutely clear that Procopius inevitably begins his account of the first war year with the departure of Belisarius' expedition from Constantinople in the summer of 535 and the second war year with Belisarius' arrival on Italian soil, in June 536, so the fourth year also begins in June with Belisarius' departure from Rome. Procopius departed with him. In each year when he accompanied Belisarius (535–540) Procopius marks the beginning of action for himself. In any event, although ignored by Procopius, before withdrawing his army from Rome, Belisarius needed time to prepare, equip and plan.<sup>141</sup>

There are few chronological markers in these chapters of Procopius, but together they point to a year end in March 539. Having captured Urbino and Orvieto in December 538, Belisarius (and presumably Procopius) spent the winter months back in Rome, as the *Continuator* of Marcellinus reports.<sup>142</sup> It was from there that he moved his whole army back to Picenum towards the end of the winter season (6.22.1), probably February 539. The Goths clearly expected Belisarius to advance on Ravenna 'at the beginning of spring', which can only mean spring 539, so they had envoys despatched to the Lombard king Vaces for help. They were refused on the grounds that the Lombards were an ally of the Romans. It is surprising that the Goths were not aware of such a fact in advance. Be that as it may, the journey there and back in winter would have taken the Gothic envoys the best part of four weeks.<sup>143</sup> With time at a premium, they are likely to have undertaken their failed mission to the Lombards in January 539. On their return, the Goths decided to send a delegation to the Persian king Chosroes, with a request to resume hostilities against the Romans on the eastern frontier in order to force Justinian to withdraw troops from Italy. The most recent events recorded by Procopius before the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> war year are the release of the Gothic ambassadors detained in Byzantium and the Roman ambassadors (Peter and Athanasius), who had already been detained for three years by the Gothic kings, first Theodahad, then

<sup>141</sup> Veh 1966: 1041.

<sup>142</sup> *Cont. Marc.* 538.7 (MGH.AA. XI, 106): 'accedens Romae ad exhiemandum', cf. Körbs 1913: 30.

<sup>143</sup> Scheidel, Meeks, cf. Körbs 1913: 32.

Vitigis, that is, from January 536 to early 539. Apart from obvious projections beyond the end of winter (6.20.15), there is simply no indication, implication or necessity for a date later than March 539 for any event in this war year.<sup>144</sup> It is virtually impossible to construe Procopius as equating the end of this particular war year with the summer solstice in late June 539.

To maintain his thesis that the war year ends with the summer solstice in late June, however, Körbs argued that the Gothic legation to the Persian king Chosroes did not leave Ravenna until March 539 and met with Chosroes at the end of May.<sup>145</sup> Consequently, the reaction of Justinian to events on the Persian frontier, and the return of Gothic envoys from Constantinople, occupied the period to late June/early July 539. This is a rather forced interpretation. Four considerations would appear to count against it:

(1) It is unlikely that the departure of the Gothic envoys to the court of Chosroes took place as late as March 539. Procopius outlines the deliberations of the Goths under the cloud of expectation that Belisarius would move on Ravenna at the beginning of the next campaign season (6.22.9), that is, spring 539, more or less immediately. To forestall, or prematurely terminate, a spring onslaught by Belisarius, the Goths would have made their plans in the winter months and despatched their envoys to the Lombards (Vaces) and then the Persians (Chosroes), accordingly. The original aim of the exercise was to prevent Belisarius mobilising in March 539, not March 540, or at least to minimise his impact thereafter. Hence the need for haste and the need for an immediate Persian response.

(2) In recounting the Persian War, to which Procopius makes retrospective reference here (*Wars* 6.22.18–20), he actually says that when Chosroes finally decided to reopen hostilities it was the culmination of a drawn-out process ending in ‘late autumn season in the thirteenth

<sup>144</sup> Bury 1923: 205 dates the surrender of Milan to late March, also Stein 1949: 360.

<sup>145</sup> By careful calculation from his chosen starting points, Körbs 1913: 31–37, followed by Bury 1923: 206 n. 2; Stein 1949: 362, and Rubin 1957: 462, argued that the failed embassy to the Lombards took up to four weeks, reaching to the end of February/beginning March, and only subsequently did the Persian option emerge, whereupon the Gothic envoys met with Chosroes in May 539 (according to Körbs 1913; Rubin 1957: 381).

year of the reign of the emperor Justinian' (2.3.56), that is, October/November 539. He had been moving towards this decision for some time, beginning with the dispute over the contested area south of Palmyra, the so-called *Strata* (2.1.1–11). In the course of settling this dispute between the Ghassanid leader Arethas (the client-king of Justinian) and the Lakhmid leader Alamundarus (the client-king of Chosroes), the Persian king found the pretext for war in the claim that Justinian had violated the treaty of 531 by offering to bribe Alamundarus to switch allegiances (2.1.12–13). So Chosroes had more or less resolved on another war by the time the Goths arrived (2.2.1). They only confirmed his intention (2.2.12), and 'a little later' it was reinforced further by the Armenians (2.2.13).

It appears that, while the Goths may have been aiming to provoke Chosroes into action in the spring of 539, he spent most of the period 538/539 moving to a decision and then planning to resume hostilities in 540, independently of any Gothic suggestion.<sup>146</sup> Even if Justinian had decided before April 539 that Belisarius needed to be withdrawn from Italy and sent against the Persians (6.22.20–21), it could not occur immediately. It happened nearly a year later. Again, it is part of Procopius' retrospect in *Persian War*. He is simply projecting forward here (to spring 540) events which he has treated elsewhere. They belong way beyond even Körbs' date for the end of the fourth war year. All in all, it looks like the Goths set out from Italy in the late winter/early spring of 538/539 and found themselves to be only a small part of a more complex set of political and strategic calculations and manoeuvres on the part of Chosroes. They eventually achieved what they wanted but not before the capture of Ravenna in 540. Chosroes' time was not that of the Goths.

(3) Procopius was with Belisarius the whole time, yet it is strange that, if his narrative of this war year actually carried through to June/July 539, as Körbs supposed, he reports nothing of Belisarius'

<sup>146</sup> For this episode, including its record in Persian documents, see Shahîd 1995: 209–225 with discussion of the date at 210. If, as Körbs 1913: 35–36 conceded, the Goths were at Chosroes' court in late autumn 539 (that is, the following war year), rather than May, then this would make his chronology impossible. In any event, Procopius' narrative is misleading in crediting the Goths with Chosroes' decision to invade in the spring of 540 (cf. Shahîd 1995: 233).



movements or actions after March 539, except for the remote Gothic legation to Chosroes. It is most unlikely that Belisarius' army would have simply sat in Rome, where it had been wintering, through most of March, April, May and June and only embarked on its summer season in late June/early July, especially when the capture of Auximum was recognised to be so urgent.

(4) Even if all this were possible, the fact remains that Procopius does not say, or even imply, that the Gothic envoys had reached the court of Chosroes, let alone negotiated with Chosroes and returned to Italy within the fourth war year. He only says that they had departed from Italy, leaving the rest to a back reference to his narrative in *Persian War*. There he makes clear that the envoys remained in Persia and never actually returned to Italy at all, with the one posing as a bishop dying there (2.14.11). The Gothic envoys which Justinian had been detaining for some time were those sent earlier to negotiate with Justinian. These envoys returned to Ravenna with a proposal from Justinian to end the war in Italy (6.22.22). Already in early 539, therefore, Justinian was offering the Goths a negotiated settlement beneficial to both sides.

Hence, if we follow the Körbs chronology here, we are asked to accept that the Goths' envoys set out on a lengthy and uncertain journey to the Persian court, arriving in May 539, while Belisarius and the Romans did nothing worth reporting for April, May and June at a time when they held the initiative and were keen to press it. Only after that does the exchange of ambassadors detained years earlier occur. The Gothic envoys are sent back to Italy but are guarded by Belisarius until the Goths release Peter and Athanasius, whom they have been holding captive for three years. Later, probably in the summer of 539, Athanasius was made Praetorian Prefect of Italy by Justinian (6.22.24).<sup>147</sup>

The more likely explanation is simply that Procopius marks the end of the winter and the fourth war year in March 539 so that the events of the ensuing days and weeks are taken up in his account of the fifth war year, beginning in March/April 539.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. PLRE 3.142 ('Athanasius 1') – 'around midsummer 539'.

## Year 5 (539/540)

The outline narrative of the fifth war year is as follows:

- 6.23.1–8 Belisarius sets out for Auximum occupied by Goths; Cyprian and Justin sent to Fiesole, Martin and John in Dertona;
- 6.23.9–24.17 Siege of Auximum; Procopius advises on using the infantry trumpet to signal retreat;
- 6.24.18–24 Romans besiege Fiesole;
- 6.25.1–24 ‘Meanwhile’ the Franks, led by Theudebert, attack the Goths at Pavia, who retreat to Ravenna, and Romans in Dertona, who also retreat; Franks succumb to dysentery; letter of Belisarius to Theudebert leads to the withdrawal of Franks, Martin and John reinforce the siege of Fiesole;
- 6.26.1–27.24 Siege of Auximum continues, help sought from Vitigis, Romans try to destroy outside cistern;
- 6.27.25–26 Fiesole surrenders; Roman troops arrive at Auximum;
- 6.27.27–34 Goths surrender; siege of Auximum concluded;
- 6.28.1–27 Roman army blockades Ravenna; Franks try to win over the Goths but Romans dissuade;
- 6.28.28–35 Control of Alpine forts falls to the Romans; John and Martin capture Goths there;
- 6.29.1–31 Envoys arrive from Justinian with treaty terms and an imperial letter; the Goths accept the terms; Belisarius disinclined but agrees; the Goths offer him kingship; he feigns agreement; Ravenna captured.
- 6.29.32–34 Procopius’ reflection on victory;
- 6.29.35–41 Impact of occupation on Ravenna, submission of other towns;
- 6.30.1–2 Hostility to Belisarius, arrangements for generals;
- 6.30.3–29 Goths offer kingship to Uraias, who proposes Ildebad; again the Goths offer kingship to Belisarius, who declines and returns to Constantinople – ‘winter drew to its close’ ... ‘end of fifth year’.

In the course of the whole narrative of the fifth war year, most of which he witnessed himself, Procopius offers not a single concrete date, although Bury dated the Goths' offer of power to Belisarius to January/February 540.<sup>148</sup> His opening chapter, which summarises the disposition of the different Roman contingents, presumably signifies the commencement of the campaign season. This surely indicates that the 5<sup>th</sup> war year begins in March/April 539, as even Körbs conceded.<sup>149</sup> Assuming, therefore, that the war year began in March/April, Belisarius would have been in Auximum in late March/mid-April, since it would have taken up to two weeks to transport his whole army and its supplies from Rome to Auximum. The siege of the city lasted into its seventh month, according to the *Continuator* of Marcellinus, writing just a few years later.<sup>150</sup> Hence, the siege of Auximum lasted from March/April to September/October 539. The army of Belisarius was therefore outside Ravenna by October 539. The Goths made no concerted attempt to resist, nor did the Romans seek to attack. The ensuing winter months, during which Belisarius may have been back in Rome (as in the previous year), were taken up mainly with negotiations and discussions on the future of the city, the Goths and the administration of Italy. Procopius describes the imperial envoys Domnicus and Maximinus as travelling back and forth to Ravenna (6.29.3, 5), and this may well have been from Rome. Belisarius had to deal with contradicting the peace settlement of Justinian, conveyed by his senatorial envoys and agreed

<sup>148</sup> Bury 1923: 212. This was also the time when Justinian's envoys Domnicus and Maximinus arrived in Ravenna, which is dated by Hodgkin 1886: 330 to 'probably early in the year 540'. They may even have arrived in late 539. According to Cristini 2020: 779–780, they would not have travelled from Constantinople in the winter months so could only have arrived around April 540. Yet, the mainly overland route was often travelled in winter months, especially by envoys and their small parties. The new Praetorian Prefect Athanasius would also have arrived in February 540 (6.29.30).

<sup>149</sup> Körbs 1913: 37 (notwithstanding his insistence that the previous war year ended in June 539) with Stein 1949: 360, cf. PLRE 3.204 ('Belisarius 1').

<sup>150</sup> *Cont. Marc.*, 539.2 (MGH.AA. XI, 106): 'Belisarius obsidens Auximum septimo mense ingreditur, similiterque et Faesulam'. The siege of Fiesole finished shortly before that of Auximum, but presumably lasted around the same duration, if that is what the *Continuator* means to say here: Bury 1923: 207, n. 1.

to by Vitigis.<sup>151</sup> All of this occurred against a backdrop of increased starvation and desperation inside Ravenna. By February or March 540, Belisarius and his commanders were camped outside the city, where the terms of surrender were still being debated.

This brings us, finally, to the surrender of Ravenna and the return of Belisarius to Constantinople, along with the Gothic king Vitigis, his wife Matasuentha and his entourage. Procopius offers no dates for all these events, even though he lived through them himself. Instead, there is a solitary statement of the timing of the fall of Ravenna in the later *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, composed in Ravenna sometime between 830 and 845 by Agnellus, a local priest. It occurs in a passage which connects a series of events over several years and concludes with ‘And in the month of March of that year [540] Lord Belisarius entered the city of Classe, and he entered Ravenna’.<sup>152</sup> It would mean that Procopius’ account of the siege and occupation of Ravenna covers the period from October 539 to March 540. Consequently, if Belisarius

<sup>151</sup> *Wars* 6.29 1–18, with Chrysos 1985: 41–48. More recently it has been claimed, on the basis of an acute philological argument, that Justinian was not interested in control over any part of Italy, just access to tribute payments (Cristini 2021: 1001–1112).

<sup>152</sup> Agnellus, *Lib. Pont. Rav.* 62 (Ursicinus), transl. D. Mausekopf Deliyannis 2004: 178. In his edition, Holder-Egger noted the particularly lamentable state of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript of Agnellus and the difficulty of differentiating the mistakes of the author from those of the scribe; in the final analysis, he thought it best to stick to the reading of the manuscript as much as possible (*MGH. Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI–IX*: 266–267, 322). Yet the manuscript reading ‘Madio’ (construed as ‘May’) is unsatisfactory but preferred by Körbs 1913: 38 with n. 36), followed by Bury 1923: 213; Stein 1949: 367; Rubin 1995: 133; PLRE 3.207 (‘Belisarius’) and others who have simply relied on them, most recently Cristini 2020: 779–780. ‘March’ is the preferred reading and was advocated long ago by other serious students of the Gothic wars in Italy, notably Hartmann (RE 3.228) and Hodgkin 1896: 335 n. 1). The form ‘Madio’ is used nowhere else in the manuscript of the *Liber Pontificalis*, while the other seven references to a date in May take a form of ‘Mai’ (Maio, Maias, Maiarum). It is therefore legitimate to see ‘Madio’ as a palaeographic misreading of ‘Martio’, either by Agnellus, by the 13<sup>th</sup>-century copyist, or by the 15<sup>th</sup>-century copyist. It is therefore emended to ‘Martio’ in the modern edition of Agnellus, and the translation reads, ‘March’, accordingly (Mausekopf Deliyannis 2004: 178, with n. 2). Even those who insist that Agnellus wrote, ‘May’ note that there are clear errors in other parts of his account of the fall of Ravenna that may have a palaeographical explanation (Holder-Egger 1876: 366 note *apud* 540, cf. PLRE 3.207).

entered Ravenna in early March, the following events have to do with the collection of its wealth and the recall and return to Constantinople, having provided for the ongoing security of Italy and the accession of Ildebad as Gothic king, which could have taken up the period to late March/early April. Procopius' fifth war year cannot be extended to the end of June 540 (as required by Körbs' chronology),<sup>153</sup> even if, as for other years, he extends his narrative in order to bring it to a logical and literarily satisfactory point of closure. The formulaic need, of the chronology of Körbs, to find a natural break in the narrative at end of June leads to the assumption that events moved more slowly than they actually did.

To sum up, a systematic consideration of the first five years of the Gothic War, the most detailed and direct accounts of the whole war, shows that Procopius' chronology is not as firm as Bury and Stein would have it, following the chronology of Körbs. These are the years when Procopius is at his clearest and most detailed, as a direct participant, and with access to other key figures in his narrative. In no war year, however, does Procopius employ any narrative device to signal the formal commencement of a war year.<sup>154</sup> In other words, the first episode recorded in the Procopian narrative did not necessarily occur at the chronological commencement of the war year. By contrast, he does formally mark the end of each war year at the end of winter, which makes it reasonable to suppose that the latest event recorded for a war year must have occurred recently. The first war year can be shown to have ended around March 536, so too the third and fourth, in March/April 538 and March 539, respectively. In the second and fifth war years the narrative may have continued to late April (of 537 and 540, respectively) or beyond, in order to bring an episode to narrative closure. Only by insisting that Procopius' phrase 'summer turning' always means 'summer solstice', rather than sometimes the 'spring equinox', can the second war year be extended to late June. Even so, it cannot be concluded from the pattern of these five years that Procopius always dated his war year from the end of June in one year to the end of June in

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<sup>153</sup> Accepted by Bury 1923: 214, n. 1, and Rubin 1995: 134.

<sup>154</sup> An exception may be the beginning of the first war year, as noted by Procopius (*Wars* 5.5.1).

the next. Generally, he marks the end of each successive war year at the end of winter/beginning of spring, while recognising, like Thucydides, that the precise calendrical date may vary from year to year, normally depending on weather and strategy.

## **V. Procopius in Constantinople: 541/542 to 552/553 (War Years 6–18)**

After the surrender of Ravenna in March 540, Procopius returned in the entourage of Belisarius to Constantinople, and it is unclear if he ever ventured back to Italy. In any event, after March/April 540 he no longer had firsthand access to discussions and documents at the military headquarters prosecuting the war, and he no longer had his own personal records and recollections to utilise. Instead, he was obliged to rely on the memory of others he knew, plus whatever notes and documents they could provide. In particular, he again had the experience of Belisarius and Antonina for part of the period, as well as that of other generals and Italian aristocrats who now lived in Constantinople. Even so, all this was no substitute for firsthand experience. As a result, compared to the narrative scale of the first five years of the war, in the following years Procopius devotes roughly a quarter of the number of pages per war year, and there is a discernible change of tone.<sup>155</sup>

### **Year 6 (540/541)**

The sixth war year can be summarised thus:

- 7.1.1–24 Eulogy of Belisarius as general and dismissal of his senior colleagues;
- 7.1.25–27 Ildebad builds Gothic forces in Italy;
- 7.1.28–33 Alexander's mistreatment of soldiers' pay and its effect;
- 7.1.34–36 Ildebad defeats Vitalius in Venetia, resonates in Constantinople;

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<sup>155</sup> Cameron 1985: 189.

7.1.37–49 ‘After a time’ (ὕστερον δὲ) the rivalry of Uraias and Ildebad leads to the murder of Uraias for ignoring Ildebad’s wife, then of Ildebad at a banquet; end of sixth year.

The change of focus from participant to secondhand recorder, reflected in Procopius’ relocation from Italy to Constantinople, is immediate. He describes the reception of Belisarius in Constantinople and the way his victory over the Goths was treated in the capital in 540. So too, he records the Roman general Vitalius’ defeat and the near death of Mundo’s grandson as news of these events reached the imperial capital (7.1.36). Throughout this narrative, there are no firm chronological indicators. Accordingly, there was no discussion by Körbs of this war year. Since it is normally assumed that Procopius was following a June to June war year, the death of Ildebad is placed in June 541 because it is the most recent event described by Procopius before the end of the war year.<sup>156</sup> Yet there is no reason this war year could not have ended in March 541.

## Year 7 (541/542)

Events of the seventh war year are described by Procopius as follows:

- 7.2.1–14 A Rugian, Eraric, becomes king of the Goths and rules for ‘five months’; Totila negotiates surrender of Treviso, accepts offer of Gothic kingship pending murder of Eraric;
- 7.2.15–18: Eraric sends envoys to Justinian offering to surrender part of Italy; Eraric murdered;
- 7.3.1–22 When Justinian heard of events in Italy he upbraids the Roman generals, who march against Verona but retreat to Faenza;

<sup>156</sup> PLRE 3.614–615 ‘Ildibadus’ (‘probably in May or June’, 615); Bury 1923: 228 (‘about May’); Stein 1949: 567. Rubin 1957: 467 comments that the dramatic murder of Ildibad emerges from the war narrative ‘with a chronologically colourless “ὕστερον”’. Although he does not discuss the date, Körbs 1913: 108, lists the death of Ildebad as June 541.

- 7.4.1–32 Totila, ‘upon learning what had taken place at Verona’, challenges and defeats Romans at the Po;  
 7.5.1–6 ‘Not long after this’, Totila attacks Justin at Florence but retreats as Roman reinforcements arrive;  
 7.5.7–19 Romans decide to attack the Goths but flee on false report of John’s death; end of seventh war year.

For the events of this war year Procopius appears to be relying on a local informant, probably someone in the Roman army.<sup>157</sup> Again, there are no concrete chronological indications anywhere in the narrative, just a series of loosely connected episodes spread across the year. The one key item, however, is the passing of the Gothic kingship from Eraric to Totila. First of all, Procopius says that Eraric ruled for ‘five months’. The *Continuator* of Marcellinus puts his proclamation in the fourth indiction (1 September 540–31 August 541) and his death in the following indiction (1 September 541–31 August 542),<sup>158</sup> which would make possible a reign from April to September 541, or May to October 541.<sup>159</sup> There is no need to assume that the five months must be counted from July 541 at the earliest, as the Körbs model would require.<sup>160</sup>

Similarly, with the accession of Totila. Both Procopius (7.2.18) and the *Continuator* of Marcellinus (s.a. 542) report that Totila became king immediately on the death of Eraric. Modern dates vary,<sup>161</sup> but there is no reason not to put Totila’s accession to the Gothic kingship in precisely September 541. What follows from a September 541 date for the transition from Eraric to Totila is the attribution of the surrounding events described by Procopius to the period before March/April 542 whereas Bury put events at Faenza in spring of 542, while Stein

<sup>157</sup> Rubin 1957: 468.

<sup>158</sup> *Cont. Marc.* 541.2 (MGH.AA, XI 106, with comment by Croke 1995: 49).

<sup>159</sup> Hodgkin 1896: 387 (May to October 541); Bury 1923: 229.

<sup>160</sup> Thus PLRE 3.448 (‘Erarichus’): ‘Procopius narrates his accession immediately after the sixth year of the war in Italy ended (in June 541); Erarich may therefore have been king from July to November/December 541’. Again, Körbs 1913: 108 puts the accession of Eraric in June 541.

<sup>161</sup> Hodgkin 1896, ‘autumn of 541’; PLRE 3.1329 (‘Totila’): ‘late 541’; Bury 1923: 229 (‘September or October’); Körbs 1913: 108, merely assumes a date ‘around November’.



put Totila's attack on Florence in June 542,<sup>162</sup> but in both cases on the unjustified assumption of a uniform June to June war year throughout Procopius' account, although the chronology of this war year is not considered at all by Körbs.

## Year 8 (542/543)

The eighth war year follows this outline:

- 7.6.1–8 Totila captures Cesena, Petra, then through Campania and Samnium to Beneventum and besieges Naples, as well as reclaiming Bruttium and Lucania, Apulia and Calabria;
- 7.6.9–12 'Upon hearing of these things' Maximinus appointed as Praetorian Prefect of Italy;
- 7.6.13–19 'Later on' Demetrius resupplies in Sicily and sails to Naples;
- 7.6.20–26 'Later' fleet captured by Totila at Naples;
- 7.7.1–7 Maximinus' contingent arrives in Naples, 'the winter season already being very close upon them', but a storm prevents them from landing and ships are captured by Goths and sunk;
- 7.7.8–20 Naples surrenders to Totila soon after he allowed them three months grace, end of the eighth war year.

At least this year has one clear chronological anchor point. The storm which destroyed and dismayed the Roman reinforcement of Naples occurred in November/December 542 or, as Procopius put it, 'the winter season already being very close upon them' (7.7.3). The events following that point are to do with the negotiations between Totila and the Neapolitans, which led to their eventual surrender after a period of three months grace. Not only is it impossible to stretch out these events from December 542 to end-June 543, as required by the Körbs chronology, it is clear that the end of this war year cannot have been

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<sup>162</sup> Bury 1923: 230, n. 1; Stein 1949: 573.

any later than March and may well have been earlier.<sup>163</sup> Körbs himself obviously recognised this problem by placing the surrender of Naples at the end of March, followed by Bury ('March or April') and Stein ('in the spring').<sup>164</sup> Nonetheless, Körbs considered this year end as only an exception to the June/June war year,<sup>165</sup> postulating further that events were misplaced by Procopius because of faulty information provided to him!

## Year 9 (543/544)

For the ninth war year Procopius sets down the following narrative:

- 7.8.1–5 Totila provides for the starving population of Naples;
- 7.8.6–9 Conon and men are allowed to depart to Rome;
- 7.8.10–11 Totila demolishes the city walls of Naples;
- 7.8.12–25 Totila punishes a Goth who violated a girl and lectures his army on moral fibre;
- 7.9.1–6 'While Totila was thus engaged ... meantime,' the Roman generals and army becoming dissolute, Constantianus advises Justinian of his reluctance to carry on;
- 7.9.7–21 Letter of Totila to Roman senate promising not to harm them, then a number of shorter ones; Arians accused of being couriers;
- 7.9.22–23 Totila, 'upon hearing this', blockades Otranto and marches to Rome, Justinian 'embarrassed' and reappoints Belisarius, end of ninth year.

There is no indication of precise dates for this narrow sequence of events, and no reason to date any portion of it after March 544. Even Körbs conceded that the war year commenced in March 543, just as the previous war year ended in March.<sup>166</sup> While Körbs does not discuss

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<sup>163</sup> Rubin 1995: 239 n. 468; Veh 1966: 1057 offers 'about May'.

<sup>164</sup> Körbs 1913: 39; Bury 1923: 233; Stein 1949: 575.

<sup>165</sup> Körbs 1913: 55 and 108.

<sup>166</sup> Körbs 1913: 39.

its end point, just listing Totila's seizure of Rome to May/June 544,<sup>167</sup> Bury and Stein assume a terminus in June 544 so that the approach of Totila to Rome is dated in the spring by Bury<sup>168</sup>, although Stein insisted on June.<sup>169</sup>

## Year 10 (544/545)

Procopius' account of the 10<sup>th</sup> war year may be summarised as follows:

- 7.10.1–4 Belisarius recruits in Thrace and, together with Vitalius and 4,000 troops, arrives at Salona;
- 7.10.5–12 'Meanwhile', Romans are still besieged in Otranto, about to surrender when Valentinus' fresh garrison arrives; Goths flee and Valentinus returns to Salona;
- 7.10.13–18 Totila's ruse to establish the size of Belisarius' army gathered at Pola;
- 7.10.19–23 'Meanwhile' Totila captures Tibur, spares nobody;
- 7.11.1–31 Belisarius arrives at Ravenna, rallies troops; Illyrians in Bononia, with Vitalius, leave for home, 'then at length' (11.19) Belisarius reinforces Auximum, is defeated by the Goths and retreats to Rimini;
- 7.11.32–39 Romans secure Pesaro and rebuild the walls; Goths besiege Firmum and Asculum, end of the 10<sup>th</sup> war year.

Procopius appears better informed about this year than its immediate predecessors, but that does not mean he was back in Italy with Belisarius, that is, as an eyewitness.<sup>170</sup> He presumably had the advantage of Belisarius' recollection and notes, plus his own staff, and possibly learnt much from John, who was recalled to Constantinople the following year. There is insufficient chronological detail in these sections to precisely date any of the episodes. However, the exodus of the Il-

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<sup>167</sup> Körbs 1913: 108.

<sup>168</sup> Bury 1923: 234.

<sup>169</sup> Stein 1949: 577 n. 1.

<sup>170</sup> Rubin 1957: 470–471; Cameron 1985: 189.

lyrians was precipitated by the Hun raids, otherwise dated to late 544, which threatened their own families and property.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, the final events described before the end of winter, namely the sieges of Firmum and Asculum, actually began in 544, as reported by the contemporary *Continuator* of Marcellinus.<sup>172</sup> Presumably they continued into the early months of 545. By any reckoning there is no reason to consider that any of these events in this war year, including the very latest (of Asculum and Firmum), which are to be dated later than March 545. Even so, the year was naturally assumed by Bury and Stein to run from June 544 to June 545,<sup>173</sup> although it was not considered by Körbs.

## Year 11 (545/546)

The 11<sup>th</sup> year of the war as described by Procopius runs thus:

- 7.12.1–11     John, nephew of Vitalian, returns to Constantinople and spends a long time there (12.11); Belisarius paints a difficult picture to Justinian, requests money and men;
- 7.12.12–20   John is married in Constantinople; ‘meanwhile’ Asculum and Fanum surrender to Totila; he besieges Spoleto and Assisi; both surrender, but Perugia holds out;
- 7.13.1–7     ‘After this’ Totila besieges Rome, famine ensues because the Goths intercept corn ships from Sicily;
- 7.13.8–11    Totila besieges Piacenza;
- 7.13.12–21   ‘At that time’ Cethegus flees Rome; Belisarius decides to leave Ravenna, leaves Justin in charge, travels to Epidamnus to meet with John and a new army;
- 7.13.22–26   Narses recruits Heruls in Thrace, plan to winter there, defeats invading Slavs;

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<sup>171</sup> For the date: Stein 1949: 522, followed by Rubin 1957: 474; detail in Sarantis 2016: 240–247.

<sup>172</sup> *Cont. Marc.* 544.1 (MGH.AA. XI, 107).

<sup>173</sup> Bury 1923: 234–235; Stein 1949: 576–577.

- 7.14.1–36 Digression on Chilbudius and his impersonator; ‘mean-time’ (14.32) Justinian sends envoys to Antae; Narses meets him en route from Constantinople;
- 7.15.1–8 ‘While the emperor was taking such measures as have been described’, Valentinus and Phocas join the garrison at Portus, make raids on the Goths but fail to secure Bessas’ support from Rome, but Valentinus and Phocas are betrayed and killed;
- 7.15.9–16 ‘At this time’ Pope Vigilius organises a grain shipment from Sicily for Rome, but the Goths capture it and kill all except Bishop Valentinus; end of the 11<sup>th</sup> war year.

The only clear date in this war year is the arrival in Thrace of the Heruli, who planned to winter there and join Belisarius’ new army in the spring of 546 (7.13.22).<sup>174</sup> As it happened, having defeated the Slavs, the Heruli remained in Thrace (7.33.13), but Procopius records the departure of Belisarius’ expedition from Epidamnus under the next war year (7.18.1ff). This is surely an indication that his account of the 11<sup>th</sup> war year ended in March 546, not June. Further, the 11<sup>th</sup> war year concludes with Pope Vigilius organising the grain he knew was needed in Rome. This must have taken place after his arrival in Sicily in late November 545.<sup>175</sup> Possibly, he made arrangements over the winter months and organised the departure of the ships in March 546 when sailing was easier, despite the distance to Rome being relatively short and safe. Again, there is no discussion of this year by Körbs, although Bury and Stein assume a war year from June 545 to June 546.<sup>176</sup> There is every likelihood, however, that the end of winter of the 11<sup>th</sup> war year is dated by Procopius to March 546, not the end of June.

<sup>174</sup> Detail in Sarantis 2016: 248–253.

<sup>175</sup> *Lib. Pont.* ‘Vigilius’, 61.

<sup>176</sup> Bury 1923: 236–237; Stein 1949: 578 n. 3. Körbs 1913: 109, does, however, list certain events within the framework of his June-to-June war year: summer 545 – John’s despatch to Justinian; winter 545/546 – Totila besieges Rome; July 546: Pope Vigilius leaves Sicily for Constantinople.

## Year 12 (546/547)

Given the length of Procopius' account of this war year, and his frequent resort to speeches and letters, it has often been taken as an indication that the author was once again in Italy himself.<sup>177</sup> He may well have been, but the narrative displays no characteristic signs of Procopius' firsthand experience of Italy. Rather, he probably had access to reliable witnesses on their return to Constantinople, Belisarius foremost among them. In particular, the deacon Pelagius, the envoy of Totila and well-known in the court in Constantinople, may have provided Procopius' detailed information on Pelagius' exchange with Totila, the Gothic king's occupation of Rome and the deacon's subsequent mission to Constantinople.<sup>178</sup>

- 7.16.1–3 Pope Vigilius arrives in Constantinople from Sicily after a 'considerable time' there; 'about this time' besieged Romans surrender Piacenza;
- 7.16.4–32 Rome is hard pressed, Pelagius' unsuccessful meeting with Totila seeking an armistice;
- 7.17.1–25 Famine worsens, Romans approach Bessas and Conon, promised that Belisarius would arrive soon, detailed impact of famine;
- 7.18.1–29 John and Isaac join Belisarius in Dyrrachium, Belisarius sails to Portus via Otranto, where Goths fled; 'meanwhile', still at Epidamnus (18.11), John crosses over, captures Brindisi, delays challenging Capua and meeting up with Belisarius;
- 7.19.1–34 Belisarius attempts to resupply Rome, Bessas delays, progress upriver, Isaac is captured, Belisarius loses initiative, Totila kills Isaac;
- 7.20.1–31 Isaurians betray Rome to Totila, aristocrats flee, few others left; Totila is moderate in protecting Roman women;

<sup>177</sup> First floated by Haury 1891: 9, cf. Körbs 1913: 39.

<sup>178</sup> Bury 1923: 243 n. 1; Veh 1966: 1066, 1069; Cameron 1985: 195.

- 7.21.1-17 'On the following day', Totila's speeches to the Goths and the Senate; Pelagius pleads with Totila;
- 7.21.18-25 'Next' (ἔπειτα), embassy of Pelagius and Theodorus sent by Totila to Justinian; he had already (ἤδη) heard about the capture of Rome, envoys dismissed immediately;
- 7.22.1-19 'But while these envoys were travelling to Byzantium and returning to Italy', events in Lucania: John blocks the pass, Totila razes one-third of Rome's walls and threatens to burn buildings, Belisarius sends envoys to Totila to intervene and agrees to spare Rome and leaves it deserted;
- 7.22.20-24 Totila enters Apulia; John retreats to Otranto;
- 7.23.1-7 'At this time' (ἐν τούτῳ δέ) Martinianus and the capture of Spoleto;
- 7.23.8-11 'Shortly after this' (ὀλίγῳ δέ ὕστερον) Belisarius defeats the Goths outside Rome and withdraws to Portus;
- 7.23.11-17 John garrisons Otranto and occupied Tarentum, secures Calabria;
- 7.23.18 Totila leaves garrison in Campania and heads for Ravenna;
- 7.24.1-34 Belisarius reoccupies Rome, reconstructs wall in 25 days and wards off Totila, finally sending the keys of the city to Justinian; end of 12<sup>th</sup> war year.

Procopius begins the 12<sup>th</sup> war year with a securely dated event towards its end, namely the arrival to Constantinople of Pope Vigilius on 25 January 547, which illustrates that he does not always begin at a fixed point, that is, late June/early July, according to Körbs' chronology.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, according to Körbs' chronology, this event would fall in the middle of the war year. Moreover, it shows Procopius's priority for literary coherence by keeping the beginning and end of the same story as close together as possible (Vigilius' journey to Constantinople), even when it disrupts the chronology. Most of the war year (7.16.4-20.31),

<sup>179</sup> Except that Körbs 1913: 40 gives priority to Vigilius' departure from Sicily, which he calculates retrospectively as July 546. The link to the siege of Piacenza is not clear. Rubin 1995: 174, following the Körbs chronology, dates it to mid-546.

the period from March to December 546, is taken up with events in Italy and Dyrrachium as Roman reinforcements, led by Belisarius, seek to defend an increasingly beleaguered Rome from Gothic capture. To determine when the war year ended, however, the key point is Totila's entry into Rome because it provides us with a fixed date – 17 December 546.<sup>180</sup> The problem then is to examine the chronology of the subsequent events, identify the connections between them and the relative chronology Procopius offers. More particularly, since the last event described is the forwarding of the keys of the city to Justinian, preceded by the reoccupation of Rome by Belisarius and his troops and the immediate but failed challenge of Totila, the overriding question is to measure the lapse of time between Totila's occupation (17 December 546) and these later events.

Not long after his occupation of Rome, say, before the end of December 546, Totila despatched Pelagius and Theodorus to Constantinople. Although Procopius does not record their return to Totila, they would have taken around six weeks for the return journey, but, in view of both Totila's urgency and Justinian's instant dismissal of them, they may have taken less time.<sup>181</sup> Justinian had already heard about the capture of Rome and had time to formulate his reaction. According to Procopius, it was during this period, roughly late December 546 to mid-February 547, when the Goths occupied Rome, that many of the other events he describes took place. Most of the episodes in the latter part of the war year (7.22.1–24.34) are linked closely by Procopius and suggest they should be dated in the period from the end of December 546 to mid-February 547. The chronology is very compact. As for the reoccupation of Rome, we know from the *Continuator* of Marcellinus that Rome had been empty for 40 days when Belisarius reoccupied it.<sup>182</sup> What is not known is the day the Goths finally withdrew and left it desolate of people. Procopius does not say exactly when the 40 days can be counted

<sup>180</sup> *Cont. Marc.* 547.5 (MGH.AA. XI, 108): 'Totila dolo Isaurorum ingreditur Roma die XVI kal. Ianuarias, muros evertit, domos aliquanta signi comburens ac omnium Romanorum res in praedam accepit'.

<sup>181</sup> Bury 1923: 243 n. 1 notes that the envoys would have been back in Italy by mid-February.

<sup>182</sup> *Cont. Marc.* 547.5 (MGH.AA. XI, 108): 'postquam devastationem quadraginta aut amplius dies Roma ita fuit desolata, ut nemo ibi hominum nisi bestiae morarentur'.



from. Still, it seems unlikely that, having destroyed a significant part of its walls and torched the houses of the nobility, Totila would have remained in the city for long. The Roman army was still nearby. Two to three weeks was surely the maximum, that is, from 17 December 546 to (say) 10 January 547, so Belisarius would have entered the city in mid-late February and immediately secured its defences.<sup>183</sup>

The remainder of the Procopian narrative for this war year involves the Goths' return to challenge Belisarius in Rome, which occupied several days but no more. They were camped only a day's march away at coastal Alsium to the west of Rome, or at Mt. Algidus in the Alban Hills to the southeast of Rome.<sup>184</sup> Further, the Goths were alerted as soon as Belisarius occupied Rome, if not before (7.23.9). This confrontation presumably occurred during the 25 days it took the Roman army to rebuild the walls of Rome (from mid-late February), but not the gates. In fact, the gates had to be specially manned to resist Totila (7.24.8–10). Procopius concludes with sending the city's keys off to Justinian, which does not carry the story much beyond the end of March, at the latest. It is very difficult to see how it could be stretched to the end of June.

Nonetheless, Körbs proposed exactly that, by supposing that Totila stayed in Rome for six to eight weeks before deciding to partially destroy the city and leave it empty, that is, from 17 December 546 to end-February 547. Moreover, he only decided to do this on receiving the reply of his envoys to Justinian, who would have taken six to seven weeks for their mission. So, Totila left Rome at the end of February 547, and thereafter it remained empty for 40 days. Belisarius then reoccupied it in mid-April and the Goths returned around the end of April or even later, even though their forces were settled only a day away from

<sup>183</sup> Hodgkin 1896: 505 n. 1 may not be far wide of the mark: 'we may probably put its recapture by Belisarius about the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, 547, allowing fourteen days for Totila's occupation of the City' (cf. Hartmann 1897: 235).

<sup>184</sup> While Procopius would appear to clearly indicate Mount Algidus (7.22.18) by his 'Algedon', it is not west of Rome, as he says, in which case he may mean Alsium, an old Etruscan town but the site of several Roman aristocratic villas (Huelsen 1894: 1639–1640). Alsium would afford a better opportunity for the Goths to keep a watchful eye on Belisarius just down the coast at Portus. Both places are roughly equidistant from Rome.

the city. Further skirmishes occurred, the defences held and the keys were sent off to Justinian later in June. So much for Körbs.<sup>185</sup>

As usual, the narrative sequence of Procopius is not absolutely clear. In the episodic mode characteristic of the Thucydidean historiographical tradition and employed consistently by Procopius, he says: ‘But while these envoys were travelling to Byzantium and returning to Italy, the following events took place in Lucania’ (7.22.1). He then goes on to itemise the events, including Totila’s evacuation of Rome and his march ‘against John and the Lucanians’ (7.22.18). Finally, Procopius concludes with a summary of what happened to those in Rome: some (μὲν), namely the senators, Totila took with him; all the others (δὲ), including the wives and children of the senators, he sent to Campania ‘refusing to allow a single soul in Rome, but leaving it entirely deserted’ (7.22.19). In short, there is no justification for presuming that Procopius’ account of the 12<sup>th</sup> war year extended beyond March 547.

## Year 13 (547/548)

For the 13<sup>th</sup> war year Procopius sets out the following:

- 7.25.1–24      ‘Long before this’ (πολλῷ πρότερον), involving Totila’s siege of Perugia and his major speech beforehand;
- 7.26.1–14      ‘While these events were taking place’, John’s unsuccessful siege of Acherontis (mod. Acerenza), defeats the Goths at Capua, frees senators and wives, sends them to Sicily;
- 7.26.15–28    Totila leaves Rome to challenge John in Lucania and drive him back to Otranto;
- 7.27.1–11      Reinforcements arrive, Verus at Otranto, threatened by Totila’s Goths at Brindisi but other troops arrive in time; John to Tarentum;

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<sup>185</sup> Körbs 1913: 42, 109. Bury 1923: 245 followed this reconstruction, as did Stein 1949: 586 n. 3; and Rubin 1995: 178.

- 7.27.12–20 Belisarius is advised of reinforcements; winter solstice delays Valerian; sends men to John with a promise to come ‘at the beginning of spring’;
- 7.28.1–18 Belisarius sets sail for Tarentum but storms drive him into Croton; army spreads out; at Rossano he encounters the Goths, put to flight; Belisarius retreats to Messina in Sicily;
- 7.29.1–20 Digression – ‘at about this time’ Slavs invade and Romans fail to resist them; ‘then’ earthquakes in the winter in Byzantium and elsewhere; ‘then’ the Nile overflows; ‘then’ Porphyry, the white whale, appears;
- 7.29.21 Totila blockades starving Romans at Rossano; end of the 13<sup>th</sup> war year.

Procopius begins this war year (547/548) with a series of events commencing the previous war year (546/547). This is yet another indication that the first event in the narrative of a particular war year is not necessarily in chronological order, and that coherence of the narrative often dictated the location of a particular episode. The latest recorded event in this war year is the Gothic blockade of Rossano, while the only dated event is that Belisarius sent troops to John in late December 547 (winter solstice). It was not long afterwards that he set out for Tarentum and then was thwarted in his attempt, retreating to Messina. Although this year is not discussed at all by Körbs, Bury and Stein assumed a June to June war year.<sup>186</sup> Yet there is nothing to take the narrative beyond February 547 or so. The invasion of the Slavs, described by Procopius, is placed towards the end of this war year (‘at about this time’), but in a digression he says it occurred early in 548.<sup>187</sup> The other portents in the same digression are not sequential and are only summarily linked. The Nile overflowed every year from August through November, but this would have been one of the high flood years, presumably 547. Hence, it seems that this war year, like most, concluded no later than March 548.

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<sup>186</sup> Bury 1923: 247; Stein 1949: 588. Körbs 1913: 110, lists Totila’s blockade of Rossano as beginning only in June 548.

<sup>187</sup> Stein 1949: 523; Rubin 1957: 496.

## Year 14 (548/549)

Procopius' narrative for the 14<sup>th</sup> year runs thus:

- 7.30.1–4 Justinian sends further reinforcements to Belisarius in Sicily, asks Valerian to rendezvous with them in Otranto; departure of Antonina 'at about this time' (ὕπο τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον) to see Theodora in Constantinople; death of Theodora;
- 7.30.5–6 'Meanwhile' (ἐν τούτῳ) the Romans are under siege in Rossano and agree to surrender if help does not arrive by 'the middle of the summer season' (μεσοῦσης μάλιστα τῆς τοῦ θέρους ὥρας);
- 7.30.7–8 'At that time' (τότε) Conon is killed in Rome; soldiers seek back pay from Justinian, is granted;
- 7.30.9–14 Belisarius, John and Valerian assemble at Otranto for an assault on Rossano, arrive with agreed day 'close at hand' (10); storm scatters them, then they regroup at Croton and are repelled from Rossano by Goths, again return to Croton;
- 7.30.15–18 Romans decide to draw off Totila by departing to Rome (Belisarius) and Picenum (John and Valerian); Totila sends contingent into Picenum;
- 7.30.19–24 Rossano surrenders; soldiers are conscripted to the Goths, except for 80 who go to Croton disarmed;
- 7.30.25 Antonina arrives in Constantinople after the death of Theodora, requests summons of Belisarius, to which Justinian readily agrees with the Persian War so pressing;
- 7.31.1–32.46 Beginning of digression: plot of Artabanes and others against Justinian at Constantinople uncovered, Justinian detains conspirators;
- 7.32.47–51 Justinian's anger against Germanus assuaged by Marcellus; Artabanes forgiven;

- 7.33.1–14 ‘At about this time in the war’ – digression on Procopius’ view that the war was now lost for the Romans (1–9); then he focuses on the original settlement of Gepids and Lombards (10–14);
- 7.34.1–47 End of digression; ‘later on’ Gepids and Lombards vie for Justinian’s alliance against each other; he assembles a large contingent to support the Lombards;
- 7.35.1–8 Belisarius returns to Constantinople, fails to have any impact on Italy in recent years; alliances built with the Gepids and Lombards sometime previously;
- 7.35.9–11 ‘Such was the fortune of Belisarius’; Vigilius and Cethegus urge Justinian to recapture Italy;
- 7.35.12–22 ‘Such was the situation in Byzantium. Meanwhile’ ... the Lombard ruler Vaces had tried to arrange succession of his own son instead of his nephew Risiulphus (c. 540), but his nephew’s son Ildiges flees to the Slavs and becomes a pawn in a trade between Gepids and Lombards;
- 7.35.23–30 ‘While these events were taking place’ Indulf, the bodyguard of Belisarius, who had changed sides and was causing havoc at Salona, captures Roman boats and returns to Totila; end of the 14<sup>th</sup> war year.

In contrast to all the previous war years, the events recorded by Procopius for this one are extensive and geographically disparate. He does include a considerable amount focussed on Constantinople as well as the Balkans. The narrative is rather abrupt. Most of it is taken up with two lengthy episodes, both of which occurred in Constantinople, so Procopius was relatively well-informed about them. There is nothing about Italy itself after Belisarius’ return. As a result, the chronology of this year is complex with so many episodes loosely connected by Procopius. He begins the year in the spring of 548 with the dispatch of Valerian from his winter stopover in Dyrrachium. It had been agreed that Valerian’s army would move to Italy, in the Thucydidean phrase, ‘at the beginning of spring’ (7.27.15 ἀμα ἤρι ἀρχομένῳ), which Justinian now enforced (7.30.1). This event is then linked to the departure

of Antonina for Constantinople ‘at about this time’, which probably means the time Valerian had arrived in Otranto to link up with Belisarius, following a two-day journey. So, it was probably late March/early April 548 (or later still) when Antonina set off for Constantinople to meet the empress Theodora (7.30.3).

Acknowledging that, according to Procopius, the year begins in early spring with the departure of Valerian for Otranto, and that Antonina left Italy ‘about the same time’, Körbs concluded that since Antonina arrived in the capital after the death of Theodora (28 June 548) she must have left Belisarius in mid-late June, that is, before news of Theodora’s passing had reached Italy. Given her status, news of Theodora’s death in late June would have spread instantly; hence there was only a short interval between Antonina’s departure from Sicily and her arrival in Constantinople to find Theodora deceased. What Procopius meant, according to Körbs, is that Valerian arrived in Otranto at the same time Antonina left Rome, so both events, the first of the year, must belong to late June, which was what Procopius meant by the ‘beginning of spring’.<sup>188</sup> In other words, Körbs’ supposition reverses the order and customary pattern of Procopius’ narrative and chronological linking of different episodes. Both Bury and Stein repeat the claim.<sup>189</sup> However, there is no need to construe Procopius at the ‘beginning of spring’ (7.27.15) as anything other than March/April 548.

Procopius merely writes, at least in *Wars*, that Antonina was sent to the empress to seek extra support for the war but that the empress was ill and then died (νοσήσασα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἠφάνιστο, 7.30.3–4). The agenda changed and the priority became the recall of Belisarius to Constantinople. If, as Procopius plainly implies in *Wars* 7.30.3, Antonina did not know that Theodora was already dying of cancer when she left Otranto, but she only arrived after the death of the empress in June, then she must have either been delayed at some point on her way or have left much later than suggested by Procopius, ‘about the same time’, that is, March/April. Certainly, she had motivation to drag out her journey. Perhaps conscious of her impending death, Theodora was anxious to secure the marriage of her grandson to Belisarius’ daughter.

<sup>188</sup> Körbs 1913: 43–44. Haury 1909: 207 had already answered this point.

<sup>189</sup> Bury 1923: 248, and Stein 1949: 589.

The marriage was resisted by both Belisarius and Antonina, who were also stalling on Theodora's request for them to return to Constantinople.<sup>190</sup> It is also just possible that Antonina dallied outside Constantinople until Theodora's death, knowing she was seriously ill. Indeed, Theodora's cancer must have made her extremely ill long before she died. Antonina moved immediately to dissolve the relationship between their families, which Theodora had schemed to create.<sup>191</sup>

Procopius then moves his narrative of 548/549 from the army at Otranto to the siege of Rossano, and from Rossano to Rome, before coming back to Otranto and tracing the movements of the Roman army from there. Once the generals had decided to split up and Rossano had surrendered, the narrative moves beyond Italy, first to Antonina's arrival in Constantinople, which led to the recall of Belisarius from Rome. The recall then prompted a lengthy reflection by Procopius on the Romans' mishandling of the war. The remainder of this relatively long account is taken up with a conspiracy against Justinian in the imperial capital and the development of alliances with the Lombards and Gepids, in both cases probably relying on direct testimony.<sup>192</sup> The war year concludes with the story of the defection to the Goths of Indulf and how he defeated the Roman leader Claudian in Dalmatia.

There is no date for the episode involving Belisarius' guardsman Indulf, the latest before the end of the war year, except that it is linked (7.35.23) to that of the Lombard Ildiges and his various alliances over the years. Since there is no other indication, it is traditionally dated to June 549, but on the mere assumption of a June to June war year,<sup>193</sup> although Körbs was rather hesitant in insisting on it for this particular year. In fact, it is very difficult to date the final few episodes of this war year, beginning with the arrival of Belisarius in the imperial capital. Procopius would at least have been certain about the time of Belisarius' arrival in Constantinople from Italy. Since Justinian's nervousness about the security of events in the east resolved him to recall Belisarius,

<sup>190</sup> Procopius, *Anekdotia* 5.18–22.

<sup>191</sup> Procopius, *Anekdotia* 5.23–24.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Veh 1966: 1073.

<sup>193</sup> PLRE 3.619 'Indulf (qui et Gundulf)', 'midsummer 549'; 316 'Claudianus' – no date, 1350; 'Vaces', no date. For the same reason Stein 1949: 589–590 with n. 4, dates Belisarius' return to Constantinople to early 549, that is, several months too late.

it must have been in time for Belisarius to prepare for the new campaign season on the Persian frontier, commencing in the spring of 549. Although Belisarius was made *magister militum per Orientem* once more, the five-year truce held, and no such expedition was required. Indeed, he never travelled eastwards again. We might therefore assume Belisarius' recall from Italy sometime in the late summer of 548, although it could have been even later, but not as late as early 549, as Bury and Stein would have it.<sup>194</sup>

Procopius follows Belisarius' return with a series of discrete episodes: the pressure of Vigilius and Cethegus on Justinian to vigorously attack the Goths (7.35.9–11), then Vaces (7.35.12–22) and finally Indulf (7.35.23–30), which is linked temporally to the previous episode (7.35.23). Given the loose connections between all these episodes, and the fact that Procopius reports nothing else after Belisarius' return in the summer of 548, it is difficult to see how Procopius' narrative of the war year can be stretched to the end of June 549. Körbs felt ambivalent, claiming that there is no decisive evidence for or against the war year ending in either March or June, but he argues for June.<sup>195</sup> The end of March 549 makes better chronological and narrative sense.

## Year 15 (549/550)

This war year required Procopius to find new sources of information. Belisarius was back in Constantinople and Procopius was already well-advanced on his history of the war in Italy. To bring it up-to-date, however, he would have needed recent information immediately. Probably his best source for this was recent arrivals in Constantinople, the military and aristocratic refugees from the war, including Paul, whose escapades are recounted in detail (7.37.16–29).<sup>196</sup> The narrative of this war year clearly lacks the detail of many previous ones and, like the 14<sup>th</sup> war year, there is a good deal of information more local to Constantinople:

<sup>194</sup> Bury 1923: 249; Stein 1949: 589 n. 4, apud 590.

<sup>195</sup> Körbs 1913: 44.

<sup>196</sup> Cameron 1985: 194–196; Rubin 1957: 500; Veh 1966: 1077.



- 7.36.1–3 Totila besieges Rome for a long time, captures Portus but Rome holds out;
- 7.36.4–6 ‘As soon as the emperor saw Belisarius returned to Byzantium’, he appoints Liberius as his replacement, but changes his mind;
- 7.36.7–15 ‘After the siege of Rome had continued for a long time’ Isaurians, in Porta Ostiensis, negotiate with Totila and betray the city;
- 7.36.16–29 Roman commander Paul and others decide to attack the Goths during capture of the city, but Totila offers them either safe journey to Byzantium or to join the Gothic army; Paul chooses Byzantium; others join the Goths;
- 7.37.1–18 ‘Not long before this’, Totila, spurned by Frankish king, resettles in Rome, prepares fleet to invade Sicily; envoy Stephen to Justinian seeking peace rejected immediately; Totila besieges Centumcellae, date set for surrender;
- 7.37.19–23 Rhegium holds out against Totila but captures Tarentum, and Rimini is betrayed to the Goths;
- 7.37.24–25 ‘When the emperor Justinian heard this’, he appointed Germanus to lead an army against the Goths in Italy – encourages troops in Italy;
- 7.37.26 Justinian appoints Liberius instead;
- 7.37.27 Liberius makes preparations for immediate sail but his appointment is revoked;
- 7.37.28 Verus confronts Goths near Ravenna and is killed;
- 7.38.1–8 ‘At about this time’ 3,000 Slavs invade and defeat *magistri militum* of both Illyricum and Thrace;
- 7.38.9–23 Slavs capture Topirus and retreat with thousands of prisoners;
- 7.39.1–5 ‘After this’ the Goths besiege Rhegium and Romans surrender;
- 7.39.6–8 ‘When the emperor heard these things’ he appointed Liberius with soldiers and dispatches them to Sicily, then appoints Artabanes and recalls Liberius;

- 7.39.9–20 To lead the army into Italy, Justinian again appoints Germanus, who spends heavily on recruitment and marries Matasuntha; expedition includes 1,000 Lombards (20);
- 7.39.21–24 ‘When these things were reported in Italy’ there was a positive reaction by Roman troops there;
- 7.39.25–28 ‘Then’ Diogenes advises Totila’s messengers that he refuses to surrender Centumcellae on the agreed date because Germanus’ army is not far away;
- 7.39.29 15<sup>th</sup> war year ended.

Procopius begins this war year by noting that Totila arrived in Rome but then he immediately reverts to the previous year, the time when Belisarius made arrangements for the security of Rome. There is no reason to assume, or to argue, that this war year necessarily begins any later than the opening of the campaign season of 549, that is, spring. Procopius concentrates on the Gothic siege and seizure of Rome, then the blockade of nearby Centumcellae (mod. Civitavecchia) and its agreed period of relief (7.37.18). The war year ends with the expiry of the agreed period of relief but with its commander Diogenes refusing to yield (7.39.25–28). Within these two episodes at Centumcellae, and spread across the agreed period, occurred a number of other episodes described by Procopius: Goths in southern Italy and Sicily, including the capture of Rhegium, Goths in Aemilia, including the capture of Rimini and the death of the Roman general Verus at Ravenna; the invasion of the Slavs; the appointment of Germanus to Italy and Liberius to Sicily. According to Procopius, all of these events which took place during the period allowed for the relief of Centumcellae. So, the first issue is to determine how long that was. Procopius does not tell us, but it is unlikely to have been more than three months. It may well have been much shorter.

Since the period from Totila’s negotiations with Diogenes outside Centumcellae until the expiry of the grace period takes the narrative to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> war year, the key issue becomes the date of their encounter. There is very little to go on, except to infer its position relative to the Gothic capture of Rome. Despite some doubt about the quality of

the testimony, it is generally agreed that Totila's entry into Rome can be dated to 16 January 550.<sup>197</sup> If so, that would mean that the majority of the war year, from April 549 to January 550, was taken up with the Gothic siege of Rome, even though it does not occupy proportionate space in Procopius' account. Still, there are sufficient hints of its duration: (1) specifying that it was a long time (7.36.2, 7) and (2) explaining that the Romans had sufficient food supplies because they had grown their own crops inside the city (7.36.2), that is, there was time enough for crops to grow, be harvested and prepared for consumption. By January 550 the Romans were still well-provided from their own harvest.

The chronological key, therefore, becomes the lapse of time between the capture of Rome on 16 January 550 and Totila's moving over to Centumcellae. There are two considerations: (1) allowing time for Totila to consolidate in Rome; (2) waiting for the envoy Stephanus to return from Constantinople. These events were mainly simultaneous. Resupplying and refortifying the city was carried out in great haste, according to Procopius (διὰ σπουδῆς ... ταχίστα, 7.37.2), presumably in a matter of days. Since Stephanus was dismissed out of hand by Justinian he presumably returned immediately to Rome, whereupon Totila left to lay siege to Centumcellae. This was probably late February. If the designated period of grace given to Centumcellae was two months, then it would have been late April 550, at the latest, when Totila discovered that Diogenes had been heartened by the expectation of Germanus' appointment and had decided, hostages notwithstanding, to revoke the agreement.

A different chronology is provided by Körbs,<sup>198</sup> who places Diogenes' resistance at Centumcellae in late June 550 with the appointment of Germanus in late May/early June. Accordingly, Körbs allows seven weeks for Stephanus' journey to Constantinople and back, three

<sup>197</sup> The date derives from a list of portents and other events contained in a 9<sup>th</sup> century manuscript known as the *Excerpta Sangallensia*: 'p.c. Basillii VIII eo anno ingressus est Vadua rex in Romam XVIII kl. Februarias' (MGH.AA. IX, 334). Assuming the month and day are correct, the year (549) cannot be, so it is amended to 'p. c. Basillii VIII', that is, 550. Hence: Körbs 1913: 44, followed by Bury 1923: 250 n. 3, and Stein 1949: 593 n. 2.

<sup>198</sup> Körbs 1913: 45–48, followed by Bury 1923: 252; and Stein 1949: 594–597, then by PLRE 3.401 ('Diogenes').

months for the agreed period of grace for Centumcellae, which would put its original blockade by Totila at the end of March, and six to seven weeks for the Goths to march from Centumcellae to Rhegium. To do this he allows a month between the arrival of Stephanus back in Rome (early March 550) and Totila's agreement with Diogenes at Centumcellae. This is a very generous spacing of events. However, it does not appear justified on the basis of the Procopian narrative because: (1) once Totila heard about the result of Stephanus' mission, presumably but not necessarily from Stephanus himself,<sup>199</sup> he immediately set about moving on Centumcellae (7.37.8); (2) Procopius links Stephanus' despatch to Constantinople with Totila readying ships for the expedition to reclaim Sicily (7.37.6); (3) the period of grace agreed between Diogenes and Totila at Centumcellae was described by Procopius as being simply 'for some time' but concluding on an agreed day (ἐς χρόνον ... τινὰ ... τακτὴ ἡμέρα, 7.37.17), which does not mean it must necessarily have been for three months, as Körbs insisted,<sup>200</sup> but rather two months, or even one month; (4) Germanus was appointed by Justinian after the surrender of Rimini and during the siege of Centumcellae (7.37.24). Further, as part of his appointment he was deliberately married to the former wife of Vitigis, Matasuentha, who had spent the last decade in Constantinople. Since their offspring Germanus was born in late 550/early 551,<sup>201</sup> they must have been married early in 550, no later. In brief, there is no reason why the narrative of Procopius cannot be interpreted to imply that his 15<sup>th</sup> war year terminated at the end of winter rather than June 550.

<sup>199</sup> Procopius does not say that Stephanus returned to Totila but only that Totila heard of the outcome of his legation. Hence, Stein 1949: 594 with n. 2 argued that Stephanus did not return at this time but stayed in Constantinople and continued to put his case over the ensuing months. To maintain this, he assimilates this description of Procopius with one from the following year (8.24.4–5). Even so, there is no reason to think that Procopius is not referring to separate legations in each year.

<sup>200</sup> Körbs 1913: 47–48.

<sup>201</sup> PLRE 3.528 ('Germanus 3').

## Year 16 (550/551)

The 16<sup>th</sup> war year straddles two separate books (7 and 8) written by Procopius years apart. When the original history was published it reached only to the end of 550. In resuming the story again in 553, in Book 8, Procopius simply summarises recent events highlighting the status of Belisarius and concluding with the wintering of John's army at Salona, preceded by three sections (8.18, 19 and 20), which actually form a digression on events in Europe.<sup>202</sup> Procopius is here relying on local Byzantine knowledge of the Kutrigur Huns invasion of Illyricum in 551 and the subsequent negotiations of Justinian with them and their hostile neighbours, the Utigurs (8.18 and 19), as well as what had given rise to the complicated marriage dispute between the Varni/Varini and Brittia (20).

Then Procopius turns once more to events in Italy, with the war year covered thus:

- 7.40.1–3            While Germanus is at Serdica organizing his army Slavs invade Naissus and Justinian orders Germanus to postpone his expedition; he takes up the challenge;
- 7.40.4–7            Hearing Germanus is in Serdica, Slavs fear him because of his previous defeat of the Antae [520s] and remove to Dalmatia;
- 7.40.8              Germanus orders a march to Italy in two days' time;

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<sup>202</sup> *Wars* 8.18.12–17: Gepids fear Romans in their war with neighbouring Lombards, so invite support from Kutrigur Huns, who arrive when 'the truce still had a year to run' (18.16, i.e. 549), and they are ferried across the Danube to plunder Roman territory; 8.18.18–21: Justinian provokes Utigurs to invade Kutrigur territory in their absence; 8.18.22–24: under Sandil they cross Tanais, are confronted by Kutrigurs and defeat them and depart; 8.19.1–2: Roman prisoners escape; 8.19.3–5: Aratius sent to tell Kutrigurs of their homeland defeat and bribes him to depart but with some provisos; 8.19.6–8: Huns defeated by Utigurs enter empire and settle in Thrace, Sandil protests and sends envoys; 8.19.9–22: in a long letter, envoys of Utigurs complain to Justinian and sent home with gifts; 8.20.1–41: 'at about this time' – battle between Varni and soldiers from Brittia, over Radigis, who had married his Frankish stepmother while betrothed to a British princess; captured and reconciled; 8.20.42–46: 'long wall' but death to those who cross it; 8.20.47–58: digression on journey of men's souls.

- 7.40. 9 Death of Germanus, character summary;  
 7.40.10–11 John, nephew of Vitalian, and Justinian, son of Germanus, appointed to lead the army, decide to winter in Salona (550/551);  
 7.40.12–16 Liberius, unaware of his appointment being withdrawn, arrives in Syracuse;  
 7.40.14–17 Artabanes, ‘not long after this’, follows Liberius, survives shipwreck;  
 7.40.18 Liberius withdraws to Palermo;  
 7.40.19–29 Totila plunders Sicily and then decides to return to Italy because he hears of Germanus’ death, promising to return ‘at the beginning of spring’ (551); the assembly of the expedition at Salona, ‘such was the course of these events’;  
 7.40.30 John and army prepare to winter in Salona;  
 7.40.31–45 New invasion of Slavs (incorporating previous contingent), divide into three; ‘*afterwards*’ army confronts them near Adrianople but defeated, advance to Long Wall; ‘*not long afterwards*’ the Roman army defeats section of Slavs;  
 8.21.1–3 Belisarius returns (mid-549) and is honoured by Justinian;  
 8.21.4 John winters at Salona while commanders in Italy await him; end of 16<sup>th</sup> war year.

The long-drawn out 16<sup>th</sup> war year begins with Germanus assembling his expedition in the spring of 550 (7.40.1) and ends with his successor John and the new Roman army passing the winter months of early 551 in Salona (8.21.4). Between them, Procopius offers a series of discrete episodes only loosely linked, usually by no more than the particle δὲ. He begins with Germanus, his preparations, his challenge to the Slavs, then his unexpected death, events covering the middle months of the year 550. Then he covers the appointment of the general John and his movement to Salona before reverting, without any chronological indication, to earlier events: first, Liberius and Artabanes in Sicily, followed by a summary account of Totila’s activities throughout the summer of

550<sup>203</sup> before returning once more to later events, namely the wintering in Salona of John's army and the Roman campaign against the Slavs in Thrace in late 550. At this point Procopius finishes his account of the *Gothic War*. When he resumes it two or three years later in an extra book (Book 8), he begins by completing the events of the 16<sup>th</sup> war year – 'And the Gothic War continued as follows' (8.21.1). Immediately, with John wintering at Salona, he wraps up the war year. Despite the chronological looseness of Procopius' narrative in these sections, there is really no doubt about the extent of this war year. It manifestly commenced in spring 550 and ended with the end of winter in March 551, if not earlier, as Procopius records, and as Körbs conceded.<sup>204</sup>

Nonetheless, it has been claimed by Sarantis that Procopius' account in Book 7 alone covers the whole of the winter of 550/551, even though he does not mark the end of winter and the end of the war year until the following book, written later (8.21.4), with a section of Book 8 covering the months beyond the end of winter 550/551. The chronology of Procopius on the Slavic invasions listed under the 550/551 war year is not absolutely clear, but he provides the only witness to the events. The internal chronology is all there is to go on, yet more could be made of it. Procopius describes two separate but related Slavic invasions:

(A) A posse of Slavs, 'unprecedented' in number, crossed the Danube and reached Naissus, where some wandered off from the main group and were captured by Romans. On being interrogated they admitted their target was Thessalonika and nearby cities. This information was relayed immediately to Justinian, who instructed Germanus to halt their path (7.40.1–3). Fearful of Germanus' reputation, the Slavs abandoned their plans and were defeated by him. They then retreated into Dalmatia instead (7.40.4–7).

(B) Germanus died not long after and was replaced by John, nephew of Vitalian, but with the year now too advanced for an invasion of Italy, he aimed to spend the winter months at Salona. 'But the Sclaveni now reappeared', says Procopius, 'both those [from Dalmatia]

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Bury 1923: 256 n. 1; PLRE 3.129 ('Artabanes 2'), for the date of late 550 for his progress into Sicily.

<sup>204</sup> Körbs 1913: 49. Veh 1966: 1094 was surprised to find the year ending apparently too soon.

who had previously come into the emperor's land and those who had crossed the Ister not long before' (7.40.31). How late in the year (550) this coordinated Slavic attack took place cannot be verified, except that it appears to be vaguely connected with John's army settling down for the winter at Salona. Indeed, John's movement into Dalmatia may have encouraged displacement of the Slavs from Dalmatia. This could have been as early as September 550. The Slavs divided into three groups and Justinian assembled a formidable army against them. It was now winter (7.40.33), and the Romans spent 'a long time' (7.40.39) at Adrianople watching the Slavs. So, when urged by the troops to an engagement with the enemy they lost on the battlefield, whereupon the Slavs proceeded as far as the Long Wall west of Constantinople, a four-day march from Adrianople. 'Not long afterwards' (7.40.44) Roman forces put the Slavs to flight. On close consideration, there is no reason why the whole episode above (B, the later Slavic incursion) could not have been concluded by the end of 550, with the main action in the period from October to December 550.

Sarantis, however, argues that 'Procopius makes clear that the Sklaveni raiders, who appeared in 550, interrupting Germanus' recruitment drive (A, above), subsequently spent the winter in Dalmatia before reappearing and combining with other raiders in an invasion of the Balkans (B, above), which must have been in spring 551.<sup>205</sup> Sarantis has simply misconstrued Procopius. The historian does not say that the Slavs who retreated to Dalmatia spent the winter there and only joined the other Slavs in 551. All he says is that the two groups joined, that it was already winter when they were active and that 'afterwards' they encountered the Romans at Adrianople. Hence, no need to posit a mid-551 ending of the 16<sup>th</sup> war year.

<sup>205</sup> Sarantis 2016: 237 n. 49. For present purposes, the further proposition of Sarantis 2016: 238, that the final eight chapters (i.e. 7.33–7.40) were only added in 551 to a draft of the *Gothic War* already complete in 548, an unlikely and unnecessary hypothesis in itself, can be set aside. The fact is that Procopius did not continue and concluded the 16<sup>th</sup> war year at end of winter 551 until 8.21.4, which was written and circulated later (late 553).



## Year 17 (551/552)

Procopius now resumes the continuous narrative of the war, covering very recent events (12 to 18 months prior to writing), probably relying not only on oral memory but also on more detailed reports reaching Constantinople, perhaps from Frankish or Gothic envoys:

- 8.21.5–19 ‘When the following year opened’, John was ordered by Justinian to stay at Salona to await Narses – he surmises why Narses was appointed – and recounts a story he picked up in Rome in 530;
- 8.21.20–22 Narses receives money and an army, departs Constantinople but is halted at Philippopolis by invading Huns – some march to Constantinople and Thessalonika, and then Narses carries on;
- 8.22.1–16 What Totila was doing at this time – return of captives to Rome, which is largely intact, including the ship of Aeneas – is described in detail and familiar to Procopius from his time in Rome in the 530s;
- 8.22.17–22 Totila mans 300 ships and they set off for Greece but, as Procopius knows from experience, there are no islands until Corfu;
- 8.22.23–29 Odysseus’ ship is at Phaeacia and with its inscriptions;
- 8.23.30–32 Totila’s fleet captures Roman ships, including supply ships for Narses en route from Greece;
- 8.23.1–3 ‘Long before this’ (πολλῶ πρότερον), Totila provided an army under Indulf with 47 ships to besiege Ancona, with the besieged racked by hunger ‘after a long time’;
- 8.23.4–9 ‘When this was learned by Valerian’, at Ravenna, he sought support by letter from John at Salona and, despite instructions from Justinian, John proceeds. First, John and Valerian meet up at Scardona (mod. Skradin, Croatia) and sail across to Senigallia with the 38 warships of Valerian and the 12 ships from John.

- 8.23.10–13      Goths advance;
- 8.23.14–22      John and Valerian address the troops onboard ships, stressing the unique importance of capturing Ancona to the future of the Gothic War;
- 8.23.23–28      Speech of Gothic commanders characterising the enemy as unmanly ‘Greeklings’;
- 8.23.29–42      Battle of Senigallia; inexperience of the Goths at sea battles; they flee to Ancona, then to the safety of Auximum; Romans seize Ancona; Valerian returns to Ravenna; John goes to Salona; the Goths’ spirit is broken and the power of Totila and the Goths is weakened;
- 8.24.1–3        ‘At about this same time’ in Sicily Artabanes replaces Liberius, who was summoned back to Constantinople; Artabanes defeats demoralized Goths in Sicily;
- 8.24.4–5        Totila’s fails his envoys, an offer of surrender of Sicily and Dalmatia is rejected by Justinian;
- 8.24.6–10      ‘Not long before’ Theudibert died (actually 547) after earlier occupying Venetia by agreement with the Goths;
- 8.24.11–24     Theudibald succeeds and Justinian proposes an alliance with the Franks against Totila; Leontius, as envoy, addresses Theudibald and berates the loyalty of the Franks to Justinian;
- 8.24.25–30     Theudibald replies, claiming friendship with the Goths as neighbours;
- 8.24.31–39     Totila, covetous of Corsica and Sardinia, attacks, occupies both; Romans set out from Carthage but are repulsed at Caranlis; they return to Carthage for the winter, planning to return at the beginning of spring (552);
- 8.25.1–6        Slavs invade Illyricum, are ferried across the Danube by Gepids; Justinian sends an army to confront them, plunder and retreat. Justinian wishes a treaty with Gepids to stop a recurrence;

- 8.25.7–9 ‘Meanwhile’ Gepids and Lombards move against each other and Gepids strike a treaty with Justinian;
- 8.25.10–13 ‘Not long after this’ – Romans send an army to support the Lombards but not Gepids, who had broken a treaty by facilitating the Slavs across the Danube; Romans are detained at Ulpiana by Justinian, except for Amalfridas;
- 8.25.14–15 Lombards battle Gepids – large number killed, ‘they say’; Lombards advise Justinian and note Roman reinforcements are not there, ‘although such a host of Lombards had recently been sent to march with Narses against Totila and the Goths’;
- 8.25.16–23 Earthquakes and a tsunami in Greece;
- 8.25.24 In Italy, a siege of Crotone by Goths, threatens to surrender;
- 8.25.25 End of 17<sup>th</sup> war year.

As with the 16<sup>th</sup> war year, Procopius’ narrative of the 17<sup>th</sup> war year makes it clear enough to discern where he begins and ends the war year. In fact, it is really the only time that Procopius specifically begins his narrative by marking the opening of the war year – ‘when the following year opened’ (8.21.5). It begins with the planned movement of John and his army out of Salona at the very beginning of the campaign season, that is, March/April 551. While they were wintering in Salona Justinian had replaced John and his nephew Justinian as commanders of the army with Narses. John remained at Salona, but the young Justinian was recalled to Constantinople. John and the army were compelled to wait for their commander Narses, who was expected around the end of April.

Then Procopius’ account ranges back and forth across the ensuing months, in a strictly episodic fashion and formally indicating the end of each episode before concluding with the desperation of the Romans under siege in Crotone in the spring of 552. There was a particular shortage of information for this year because there was no Roman commander-in-chief in Italy, Germanus having died en route, while Justinian had requested John to stay put at Salona. In fact, there was hardly

any military activity except for that of Totila in Sicily and southern Italy. In other words, there was little to report and doubtless little information available to Procopius when he came to write up this year of the war just 12 to 18 months later.

Instead, Procopius provides a series of discrete and clearly distinguished episodes but organised successively by separate geographies: Constantinople (8.21.5–22); Italy (8.22.1–23.42); Sicily (8.24.1–5); Gaul (8.24.6–25); Corsica/Sardinia (8.24.31–39); Illyricum (8.25.1–23); Italy again (8.25.24–5). In other words, Procopius is here describing events that are simultaneous and overlapping, not strictly sequential. He begins with the readiness of John and his army to depart from Salona, followed by the request to await the army of Narses (8.21.5–9). This gives Procopius the opportunity to include an anecdote he picked up himself when he had been in Rome around 20 years previously, which prophesied the rise of a eunuch (such as Narses) to challenge Rome (21.10–17). Then he explains the support for Narses and how he had been delayed (21.18–22). Having linked John and Narses, Procopius then goes on to explain the movements of Totila at the same time, first at Rome and then the successful expedition he launched in the Adriatic (22.1–32). Procopius introduces this section with his usual ‘meanwhile’ (ἐν τούτῳ, 22.1) and concludes it with the equally familiar ‘thus then did these things take place’ (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν τῆδε ξυνηνέχθη, 22.32). In the course of this account he includes two carefully marked digressions: one on the ship of Aeneas at Rome (22.9–16) and the other on the ship of Odysseus near Phaeacia (22.23–29).

Having established the activities of John, Narses and Totila in the spring and summer of 551, Procopius then leads his reader back in time (πολλῶ πρότερον, 23.1) to Totila’s siege of Ancona, which lead to the relief provided by John from Salona and the significant naval encounter off Senigallia (23.1–42), also in the summer of 551,<sup>206</sup> whereupon John returns to Salona to await Narses. Having disposed of that episode, Procopius then turns his attention to events in Sicily, which he dates to ‘around the same time’ (ὕπὸ δὲ τὸν χρόνον, 24.1), that is, spring/early summer 551. So, he recounts the movements of Liberius and Artabanus

<sup>206</sup> Stein 1949: 598. For an explanation of the significance of this battle and Gothic naval strategy: Thompson 1982: 86–87.

(24.1–5), concluding with the customary, ‘thus then did these events take place’ (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν τῆδε ξυνηνέχθηγενέσθαι, 24.5). Procopius then takes us back in time again (οὐ πολλῶ ἔμπροσθεν, 24.6) to the death of Theudibert four years previously (547), followed by the negotiations between the new Frankish king Theudibald and the Byzantine envoy Leontius, then the arrival of the Frankish envoys in Constantinople (24.6–30).

Again, in the contents of the speeches Procopius has detail that he probably acquired from Leontius himself, then embroidered with his own critique of current policy.<sup>207</sup> Next, Procopius returns to Totila’s naval expedition to secure Corsica and Sardinia and how it was unsuccessfully challenged by the Roman general John from Africa (24.31–39). For once, Procopius provides the hint of a date, saying that the Roman fleet returned to Carthage for the winter and planned to make another attempt in the spring (24.37). This must refer to the winter of 551/552 and the spring of 552. As with previous episodes, this has a formal closure – ‘so much for this’ (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν τοιαῦτά ἐστι, 24.39). Moreover, it takes us to the very end of the war year in chronological terms.

It is only at this point that Procopius includes coverage of events in Illyricum over the 551/552 war year, highlighting the Slavic invasions. First, there is the invasion of the Slavs into the Balkans, facilitated by the Gepids, and the limited success of the Romans against them (25.1–6); then ‘meanwhile’ (ἐν τούτῳ, 25.7) comes another Slavic invasion, followed by a major battle between the Gepids and Lombards, in which the Romans support the victorious Lombards. Procopius concludes with ‘such was the course of these events’ (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἐφέρετο τῆδε, 25.15), followed by earthquakes in parts of Greece (24.16–23), which occurred ‘at the same time’ (ἐν τούτῳ δὲ τῷ χρόνῳ 25.16).

Now, in this war year Procopius makes reference to two Slavic invasions (8.25.1 and 10), fairly close together. Both times the Slavs were helped across the Danube, for a price, by the Gepids in Illyricum. Originally opposing them was a Roman army led by Justin and Justinian, sons of Germanus (8.25.1). These two invasions were separated by a treaty made between the Romans and Gepids (8.25.8–9). As

<sup>207</sup> Cameron 1985: 212.

a consequence of the latter Slavic invasion, the Romans fought alongside the Lombards against the Gepids to achieve a bloody victory, the treaty having failed because the Gepids had assisted the Slavs to cross the Danube once more (8.25.10). Again, the Roman army was led by Justin and Justinian, although only a part reached the Lombards by the time of the battle. Given that the location of these Slavic invasions towards the end of Procopius' episodic account of this war year is no guide to their chronology within the war year, when were these two invasions, precisely?

The most substantial consideration is provided by Sarantis, who argues that both the first and second Slavic invasions took place in 551 (Procopius' 17<sup>th</sup> war year), while the major battle between the Gepids and Lombards (described by both Procopius and Jordanes) could only have taken place in mid-552 (18<sup>th</sup> war year).<sup>208</sup> In doing so, he is entirely dependent on his interpretation of Procopius' chronology by resorting to the June-to-June war year, expounded by Bury and Stein, but disregarding their common dependence on the suppositions of Körbs. This chronology is what Sarantis calls 'traditional arguments', that is, Stein's presumption that every Gothic War year of Procopius ran from the same time the first one began, that is, with the departure from Constantinople of Belisarius' army in June 535.<sup>209</sup> Apart from the untenable nature of the 'traditional arguments', in this case the special pleading of Sarantis on the chronology of the war year, is unconvincing. Following Procopius, both the Slavic invasions and the Gepid/Lombard battle therefore took place in 551 (the traditionally preferred date), or possibly as late as March 552 (end of the 17<sup>th</sup> war year). In addition, Procopius placed only a short timespan ('not long after this': 8.25.10) between the finalisation of a Roman treaty with the Gepids (8.25.9) and the second Slavic invasion, which gave rise to the Gepid/Lombard battle (8.25.10).

<sup>208</sup> First 551 invasion of the Slavs: Sarantis 2016: 310–312; second 551 invasion: Sarantis 2016: 312–313; 552 Gepid/Lombard battle: Sarantis 2009: 36: 'Although Procopius compresses these events into a relatively brief passage, it is clear that the Gepid-Lombard battle took place at the tail end of a period spanning mid-551 to mid-552'; Sarantis 2016: 315: 'in 552, following or at approximately the same time as Narses' invasion of Italy'.

<sup>209</sup> Sarantis 2016: 315.

As Sarantis notes, the battle between the Gepids and Lombards occurred before Narses set out on his expedition to Italy, which Procopius places at the beginning of the next (18<sup>th</sup>) war year (spring 552 to winter 553). Before the battle with the Gepids, the Lombard contingent that had been promised to Justinian as part of Narses' expedition had already been sent separately to Salona to rendezvous with Narses (8.25.15). Again, however, Sarantis mistakenly follows the notion of the June-to-June war year and necessarily places the departure of Narses in 'summer 552'.<sup>210</sup> This cannot be so.

First of all, Sarantis was obliged to discount the plain statement of Theophanes, that Narses led his forces out of Constantinople on 1 April 551 because of Theophanes' 'tendency to misdate events'.<sup>211</sup> In this case, however, Theophanes is most likely copying the contemporary chronicle of John Malalas, thereby preserving a correct date, missing in the otherwise abbreviated version of Malalas.<sup>212</sup> 1 April 551 was also the *dies imperii* of the emperor Justinian, a day of celebration in the imperial capital. Such a day would be appropriately capped by the ceremonial *profectio* of Narses as head of an expedition designed to bring glory to the emperor and his realm.

But that is only half the problem for Sarantis' interpretation. In 552 Narses was departing not from Constantinople but from Salona in Dalmatia. By the summer of 552 he and his army were well-advanced in Italy and about to take on the Gothic king Totila at Taginae/*Busta Gallorum*. Finally, Sarantis argues against the specific proposition that there was only a short interval between these two invasions of the Slavs and the intervening treaty negotiated between the Gepids and Justinian. 'Bearing in mind the sluggishness of pre-industrial communication', says Sarantis, 'it is very hard to believe that all these developments occurred in one month'.<sup>213</sup> He may be right about that, that is, that they occurred over a period longer than one month. Yet, assumptions about 'the sluggishness of pre-industrial communication' are no substitute for

<sup>210</sup> Sarantis 2016: 317.

<sup>211</sup> Sarantis 2016: 317, n. 410.

<sup>212</sup> For the connection of this section of Theophanes to Malalas: Jeffreys 1990: 258; Scott 1996: 20–34; Scott 2006: 29–46; and Scott 2015: 239–260. For the date, 1 April 551: Brodka 2018: 129 n. 378.

<sup>213</sup> Sarantis 2016: 316, cf. Sarantis 2009: 36.

the best possible calculations for mode and route (*Orbis*). Even so, the fact remains that all these events took place within the same war year (spring 551 to winter 552) by a writer describing events of very recent memory. The Slavic invasions, the treaty with the Gepids and the battle between the Gepids and the Lombards are all part of a chain of events which began in March 551. On any reckoning, Sarantis' date of summer 552 for the Gepid/Lombard clash cannot be sustained. According to Procopius, the summer of 552 falls not in the 17<sup>th</sup>, but in the subsequent 18<sup>th</sup>, war year.

Where does that leave us? In the first place it should be reaffirmed that Narses' expedition, that is the Roman part of it, left Constantinople on 1 April 551. Seven days later it reached Philippopolis, where its progress was interrupted by an encounter with invading Kotrigur Huns. In the end, by the time Narses' army reached Salona, where the promised contingents of Lombards, Heruli and others, not to mention John and his troops, safely returned from their naval victory at Senigallia had been waiting, it was too late to launch an invasion of Italy in 551. The same thing happened the previous year, when the Romans were interrupted in the Balkans not only by the death of Germanus and the need to replace him as commander of the expedition to Italy, but also by the complexity of assembling the full army in Salona. So they wintered there in 551/552, some for the second successive winter, and finally left Salona in March/April 552.

Accordingly, the notion that a contingent of Lombards sent up to 12 months earlier would not have spent time in Salona, awaiting Narses<sup>214</sup>, just as the other elements of the army were obliged to do, can be challenged. Indeed, John and his army had been in Salona since mid-550 and, except for the expedition to Senigallia in mid-551, were still there

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<sup>214</sup> Sarantis 2009: 36: 'Since Narses' force did not set out for Italy until spring 552, this would have meant that the Romans accommodated the Lombard contingent in Dalmatia for over a year. It is unlikely that they would have considered this given the Lombards' violent and unpredictable behaviour on Narses' subsequent Gothic campaign and the impracticality of leaving an important military resource to tarry for over a year in Roman territory without seeing action. Procopius's discussion of the Lombard embassy to Justinian subsequent to the attack on Gepid territory is the decisive piece of evidence for the later dating. It suggests that the Lombards had sent their force to join Narses' campaign prior to the battle with the Gepids'.



when Narses arrived to take charge in the late summer of 551. Sarantis argues that the Lombards, sent to support the Roman army, only appeared later, perhaps in 552, when Narses was leaving on his march to Italy. Rather, they were surely there months earlier, as the army of Narses was melded, exercised and trained to take on the Goths in Italy. Sarantis makes this event contemporary with the Gepid/Lombard battle, but it must have been much earlier. In fact, the original Slavic invasion, for instance, could have taken place early in 551, as Stein insisted.<sup>215</sup> The net result is that the Gepid/Lombard battle may have occurred in 552, but according to the Procopian chronology it would have to be in the early, generally noncampaign part of the year (before end-March). A date in 551 remains more likely.

As for the time of the earthquakes in Greece ‘at this time’, there was clearly a considerable amount of seismic activity throughout the Mediterranean in 551. What Procopius describes is a localized quake and tsunami covering the areas around the Corinthian and Maliac gulfs. It is listed in the relevant scientific catalogues as occurring in the spring of 551.<sup>216</sup> In other words, they occurred close together in spring 551, the invasion of the Slavs, the Lombard/Gepid battle and the earthquake in Greece just as Procopius intended to indicate by his loose connection of all three events. Finally, Procopius concludes this war year with a return to events in Italy – ‘In Italy the following took place’ (25.24) – in particular the pressing siege of Crotona (25.24–25).

From this detailed analysis of the structure of the 17<sup>th</sup> war year, it is evident that Procopius at least sought to link the last event described, the siege of Crotona, with the chronology of his war year. Moreover,

<sup>215</sup> Stein 1949: 523. Evidently followed by Sarantis 2016; PLRE mistakenly places both invasions in 552 in its entries on the sons of Germanus, who led the Roman armies sent against the Slavs and Gepids: Justinian (PLRE 3.744 [‘Iustinianus 3’]) and Justin (PLRE 3.751 [‘Iustinus 4’]).

<sup>216</sup> Antonopoulos 1980: 165–167 and Ambraseys 1962: 900, both citing Procopius *Wars* 8.25.25 and Evagrius, *HE* 4.23, which cannot be considered independent testimony since Evagrius was merely copying Procopius at this point (Allen 1981: 186). This quake is also listed (without a month date) as occurring at 38.60N/22.60E in the catalogue of Tzanis, *University of Athens: Faculty of Geology: Department of Geophysics & Geothermics*, <http://www.geophysics.geol.uoa.gr/>. For some of the seismic background (with useful maps): Ambraseys 1996: 23–36.

since he clearly began the war year in the spring of 551 there is no good reason to avoid the logic that his war year concluded at the end of the following winter, that is, March 552, with the siege of the Romans in Crotona. Körbs offered little discussion of this particular war year and at least conceded that it was possible that Procopius was using a March-to-March war year.<sup>217</sup>

## **Year 18 (552/553)**

Following the arrival of the large expedition of Narses in Italy in 552, the Romans quickly reasserted their military advantage. There were also now more, and fuller, sources of information available for Procopius. For the final and very recent war year, Procopius' story unfolds as follows:

- 8.26.1–4        'But the emperor learning of the situation in Crotona' orders the garrison of Thermopylae to transfer to Crotona, the Goths are surprised and flee, the Goths Ragnaris (Tarentum) and Moras (Acherontia) seek to surrender at Otranto; Roman commander Pacurius travels to Constantinople to ratify an agreement;
- 8.26.5–13      Narses leaves Salona with a large army after careful preparations, forces and leaders are itemised;
- 8.26.14–17     Narses' generosity is well founded, former soldiers attracted to him now when he is commander against Totila; Heruli well-disposed;
- 8.26.18–21     Heruli, 'when close to Venetia', seek free passage from the Franks, are refused because of the Lombards in the Roman army, and told that Theia occupied Verona;
- 8.26.22–25     Theia's preparations to obstruct progress of Romans, Narses confused, John advises him to use the coastal road; shows him how to cross rivers; the army reaches Ravenna;

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<sup>217</sup> Körbs 1913: 49–50.

- 8.27.1–5 ‘While these things were going on’, Ildigisal escapes the Lombards and comes to Justinian, followed by 300 warriors demanded by Audoin, Justinian refuses to give up Ildigisal;
- 8.27.5–8 ‘Later on’ Ildigisal complains at being undervalued by Justinian, is incited by Goar, who’s expelled to Antinous but returns, persuades Ildigisal to leave, joins the Lombards at Apri, plunders imperial horse pastures;
- 8.27.9–18 ‘But when the emperor learned of this’ advises all troops in Illyricum and Thrace to confront them; Kutrigurs are defeated; then Roman commanders rest by a river; Goar and Ildigisal flee to Gepids;
- 8.27.19–29 ‘Now it so happened’ that Ustrigothus had fled from the Gepids to the Lombards when they were at war; when treaty with Justinian worked out he and Audoin are sent to Gepids to reclaim Ildigisal, are forbidden to yield him by Lombard nobles, so Gepids ask for Ustrigothus, which is declined; both decide to kill secretly their refugees (Ildigisal and Ustrigothus), but Procopius declines to explain the outcome because of varying accounts;
- 8.28.1–13 At Ravenna, Narses is joined by Valerian and Justin; after nine days there sends a letter to Valerian from Usdrilas at Rimini challenging the Romans; Narses moves on Rimini, delayed by river crossing; Eruli ambush and kill Usdrilas, then Narses moves towards Petra Pertusa;
- 8.29.1–10 Totila departs Rome, hears of events near Rimini and camps close to Taginae, Romans arrive at *Busta Gallorum*; Narses sends envoys to encourage Totila to prefer peace over war; Totila proposes a battle in eight days; Narses prepares for the next day, armies to draw up ‘not more than two bowshots apart’;
- 8.29.11–32.21 Battle at *Busta Gallorum*, including speeches before the battles of Totila and Narses;

- 8.32.22–28 Totila flees the battle, is pursued wounded, dies and is buried, is reported to Narses;
- 8.32.33–36 Alternative version of Totila’s demise – ‘but let each speak according to his knowledge’;
- 8.33.1–5 Lombards are sent home; Valerian abandons siege of Verona under pressure of the Franks;
- 8.33.6–27 Theia becomes king of the Goths at Pavia; Narses captures Narnia and Spoleto and marches on Rome; a short siege; the Goths flee to Portus; reflection on fortune; Rome captured ‘in the 26<sup>th</sup> year of the emperor Justinian [beginning 1 April 552]’ (26); Narses sends keys of Rome’s gates to the emperor;
- 8.34.1–8 Some Roman aristocrats return from Campania; others killed by Goths, including children held hostage north of the Po;
- 8.34.9–16 ‘On hearing that Theia had become king over the Goths’, Ragnaris at Tarentum deceives Pacurius but is beaten in battle and flees to Acherontis; ‘not long afterwards’ Romans take Portus, Nepa and Petra; Theia reaches Campania;
- 8.34.17–24 Theia calls for support from the Franks; Narses in Rome sends forces to Centumcellae and Cumae; Theia avoids Romans led by John and Philemuth and reaches Campania, whereupon Narses marches there;
- 8.35.1–19 Digression on Mt. Vesuvius (1–6); Armies confront each other near Nocera for two months (11); Goths retreat to Mons Lactarius and prepare for battle;
- 8.35.20–38 Battle over two days, Theia killed; Goths sue for peace, are allowed to leave; Indulf refuses and retreats to Pavia; Cumae captured; end of 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Gothic War.

The first recorded event in this war year is the relief of the siege of Crotona on the arrival of Roman reinforcements, which instantly forms a link back to the previous war year and implies a date in spring 552. This is reinforced by the next episode, which is the departure of Narses’

army from its winter quarters in Salona. This would definitely have occurred in the early spring of 552.<sup>218</sup> It surely indicates this war year started in March/April. While Körbs agrees with this date for Narses, he does not consider that Procopius intended to begin his war year then. Instead, Körbs insists that the relief of Crotona (8.26.1–4) must have taken place in June/July 552, precisely because Procopius would appear to be deliberately linking the two episodes (the last of war year 17 and the first of 18).<sup>219</sup>

Since, according to Körbs, the last event of war year 17 must have occurred at the end of June, then the first of the ‘true’ war year 18 must also be at the end of June/beginning of July. It therefore indicates the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> Procopian war year at that point. Further, Körbs sought to argue that the relief of Crotona (8.26.1–2) is closely linked chronologically with the attempt of the Gothic leader Ragnaris at Tarentum to seek terms of surrender from the Roman general Pacurius at Otranto (8.26.4). This involved Pacurius travelling to Constantinople and back to have the terms ratified. Meanwhile, Ragnaris changed his mind in light of Theia assuming the Gothic kingship which, in Körbs’ view, dates this whole episode to July 552.<sup>220</sup> The link with the relief of Crotona is Procopius’ statement that it inspired fear in the remaining Gothic strongholds such as Tarentum (8.26.4). Hence, this relief must itself have occurred shortly before the journey of Pacurius to Constantinople, that is, in early July. Therefore, according to Körbs, since the relief of Crotona is the first event recorded for the 18<sup>th</sup> war year, it must have begun in early July 552.

From Procopius, Körbs assumes a close and neat sequence of events: relief of Crotona; negotiations at Tarentum; Pacurius departs for Constantinople and returns at the end of July/early August, when Theia had been king for over a month. Yet, as elsewhere, this is to interpret the Procopian narrative too strictly. Certainly, Procopius does link the relief of Crotona with Ragnaris’ opening of negotiations with Pacurius (8.26.4), but the chronology thereafter is not specified. It is

<sup>218</sup> Brodka 2018: 134.

<sup>219</sup> Körbs 1913: 53, 81 (leaves Salona in April 552) and 87 (‘die wahre Kriegsjahresgrenze’), followed by Bury 1923: 260 and Stein 1949: 599 with n. 3.

<sup>220</sup> Körbs 1913: 87–89.

no less possible, perhaps even more likely, that there was a significant interval between the relief of Crotona and Pacurius' departure for Constantinople, as well as his arrival in the capital and his return to Italy. While it was the advent of Narses' forces which triggered Ragnaric's impulse to surrender, along with Moras, at the eminently defensible Acherontia, he changed his mind after Theia had succeeded Totila as king of the Goths, that is, in late-June 552. The journey of the Iberian prince Pacurius, acting as a military commander in Italy, could have taken weeks. In any event, Procopius does not indicate how long it took between his return and Ragnaric changing his mind. The fact remains that Pacurius had returned from Constantinople and finalised surrender terms with Ragnaric before Theia became king, and Ragnaric demanded the hostages back (8.34.9–10).

There is also an important literary consideration in that Procopius treats as a complete episode the relief of Crotona and its impact on Tarentum, closing with Pacurius' departure for Constantinople. He carries the story forward from its starting point in Justinian's despatch of the garrison from Thermopylae to Crotona (8.26.1). To carry elements of a story forward and then go back to earlier events is very common in Procopius' literary construction. Further, in returning to Ragnaric much later in the narrative (8.34.9–15), it is clear that a significant interval of time had elapsed since the departure of Pacurius for Constantinople (8.26.3–4). Indeed, Procopius explicitly links this back to the earlier event (8.34.9) and explains that Ragnaric had secured an amnesty with Justinian at a cost of six hostages. To break the agreement now was a considered risk.

At this point, the more obvious difficulty with Körbs' interpretation, however, is that Procopius then goes on to describe the movement of Narses' army from Salona, which clearly took place in spring 552. Körbs duly acknowledges this fact but explains it as being deliberately deferred from war year 17 (assuming a terminus in late June) in order to enable the siege of Crotona to be completed.<sup>221</sup> The more likely interpretation is to follow the plain sense of Procopius. That is, the 17<sup>th</sup> war year ended with the siege of Crotona not in June but in the late winter of 552, as we have seen, and the 18<sup>th</sup> began with the lifting of the siege

<sup>221</sup> Körbs 1913: 87.

not long after. Therefore, the exit of the Roman army from Salona in spring 552 is placed at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> war year because that is when it occurred, in a war year calculated from the beginning of spring 552 to the end of winter 553.

The remainder of this war year is concentrated on events in Italy, especially the two decisive battles at Taginae (or *Busta Gallorum*), in Umbria, and Mons Lactarius, in Campania. However, for neither major battle does Procopius offer a date. As for *Busta Gallorum*, the date of late June/early July 552 can be inferred. That is to say, Narses left Salona early in April and reached Ravenna, where he spent nine days (8.28.1).<sup>222</sup> From there he moved his army on to Rimini. Meanwhile, hearing that Narses had reached Rimini while on his way from Rome, Totila readied his forces for battle in the vicinity of Taginae, which Narses reached ‘not long afterwards’ (8.29.4). The battle, resulting in the defeat and death of Totila, occurred immediately. Allowing 10 days for Narses’ army to march from Salona overland via Aquileia to Ravenna, they would have been there by the end of April.<sup>223</sup>

From Ravenna via Rimini to Fanum would take the best part of four days, or fewer if marching inland before Fanum.<sup>224</sup> Rimini to Taginae would take another three to four days. Thus, the Roman army would comfortably have reached Taginae by June, certainly by early July.<sup>225</sup> The decisive battle must therefore have taken place no later than the end of July but probably early in July, perhaps on the first Thursday (4 July). A little over a week later Narses occupied Rome after a brief siege, and was sending the city’s keys to Justinian, along with

<sup>222</sup> The route and its vicissitudes can be traced in Brodka 2018: 134–142, and earlier in Körbs 1913: 86–89.

<sup>223</sup> Calculations taken from Scheidel, Meeks. Körbs 1913: 80, allows two months for this distance, which is far too lengthy.

<sup>224</sup> Calculations taken from Scheidel, Meeks.

<sup>225</sup> The statement of Agnellus, *Lib. Pont. Rav.* 62 (bishop Ursicinus) that Narses arrived in Ravenna on a Thursday in July, the same month that Theodora died in 548, then killed Totila, who was replaced by Theia, suggests that the Roman victory at *Busta Gallorum* took place in July 552. Yet Bury 1923: 263 n. 4, followed by Stein 1949: 601, put the battle on 6 June by amending Agnellus’ ‘July’ to ‘June’. Although Agnellus might have misremembered the month of Theodora’s death (actually June), he needn’t necessarily be wrong about the month of Totila’s defeat (July). Körbs 1913: 81 puts the date of the battle as the ‘end of June’, cf. Brodka 2018: 138 n. 419.

the official announcement of victory over Totila and his bloodstained clothes<sup>226</sup>, then despatching a contingent to Cumae, where the Goths had stored their valuables.<sup>227</sup> As for the battle of Mons Lactarius, there is the statement of Agnellus that the battle took place on 1 October 552. Agnellus' statement cannot be simply ignored or amended away, as Stein did.<sup>228</sup> In fact, it makes sense as it stands. Procopius says that the army of Narses spent two months in Campania jousting with the Goths of Theia across the river Sarno (8.35.11). Although they took a roundabout route, the army of Theia was trying to thwart the Roman contingent harassing Cumae and would have arrived in the vicinity of the Mons Lactarius by mid-August.<sup>229</sup> It would have meant that, while the Goths relied on provisions being transported by sea until the Romans cut off their access, the Roman army would also have been able to feed itself off the land in Campania (June/July to end-September) because it coincided with the harvest season.<sup>230</sup> The only dated event provided by Procopius for the 18<sup>th</sup> war year, and very loosely at that, is Narses' capture of Rome (July 552), which he dates to Justinian's 26<sup>th</sup> year (8.33.26), that is, between 1 April 552 and 31 March 553.

There is no doubt, nor any confusion claimed, about where the 18<sup>th</sup> Procopian war year concludes, namely, towards the end of 552. In doing so it is to be noted that, unlike the previous 17 war years, Procopius does not here indicate that the end of the war year coincides with the end of winter. He omits that part of his formulaic phrase (ὁ χειμῶν ἔληγε). Instead, he confines himself to just the end of the war year but adding, for the first time, that it is the 'Gothic War-year' καὶ τὸ ὀκτοκαίδέκατον ἔτος ζυνέτελευτα τῷ Γοθικῷ πολέμῳ τῷ δεῶν Προκόπιος ζυνέγραψε

<sup>226</sup> *Wars* 8.33.27 (keys of Rome), with Körbs 1913: 81, dating the capture of Rome to 'beginning or mid-July', cf. Brodka 2018: 135. The victory bulletin arrived in Constantinople in August (Joh. Mal., *Chron.* 18. 116 [ed. Thurn 415]), with discussion in Brodka 2018: 154–156.

<sup>227</sup> *Wars* 8.34.19, with Körbs 1913: 82 (reaching Cumae by end July) and Brodka 2018: 157–158.

<sup>228</sup> Stein 1949: 604 n. 1 sought to amend the 'in kal. Octobris' (on 1 October) of Agnellus, *Lib. Pont. Rav.* 79 (bishop Maximianus), to 'III kal. Novembris' (30 October) simply to make it conform better with Körbs' theory. Whitby 2021: 248, follows Stein. Note also Bury 1923: 272 n. 3, and Brodka 2018: 159 with n. 501.

<sup>229</sup> *Wars* 8.34.22–24, with Körbs 1913: 82.

<sup>230</sup> A sound point I owe to Philip Rance.



(8.35.38). The omission of the seasonal marker at this juncture would appear to imply: (1) that Procopius deliberately disconnects the end of his narrative from the end of winter, that is to say, his narrative finished earlier than the end of winter 552/553; and (2) that by including both narrative markers elsewhere he does actually mean to indicate the simultaneous closures of the season and the war year.

Even so, Procopius' concluding remarks indicate that he saw his history as being brought to closure by the capture of nearby Cumae, no more than a day's march from Mons Lactarius, and other unspecified operations: (οὐτῶ τε καὶ Κὺμην καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ πάντα ἐξείλον Ῥωμαῖοι, 8.35.38). Procopius may have heard what was expected in late 552, namely, that Narses was blockading Cumae, having bolstered the contingent he had earlier sent there from Rome. Its capture looked imminent.<sup>231</sup> Otherwise, he has here included a retrospective statement after the final surrender of Cumae to Narses in 553.<sup>232</sup> In that case, Procopius simply added these few words here to round off his narrative, having recorded the much earlier despatch of Roman forces there (8.34.20). It is clear that when Procopius was finishing his history in the second half of 553 he was only intending to provide a detailed account as far as the defeat of Theia in October 552, or had only reached that point, or just after, when he considered he had finished.

By the time Procopius came to circulate the eighth book of his histories, however, he was able to conclude his account of the Gothic War with the very recent capture of Cumae without needing to explain or describe the events of the intervening months. It was left to Agathias to

<sup>231</sup> Agathias, *Hist.* 1.8.1–9.5.

<sup>232</sup> Exactly when in 553 the Gothic commander Aligern quit Cumae and went to Ravenna to surrender to Narses can only be inferred. At that stage, the Romans had been besieging Cumae for a year (Agathias, *Hist.* 1.20.3–6), so its capture could have been in July, a year after the first Roman military contingent arrived there in July 552 (Proc., *Wars* 8.34.20), or it could have been late autumn (Brodka 2018: 165), that is, a year after Narses joined the siege in the wake of the Battle of Mons Lactarius. December 553 (Korbs 1913: 91) is too late. In either event, Procopius finished Book 8 of his *Wars* shortly after. The argument that he was here merely displaying a rhetorical flourish to secure a smooth ending, as proposed by Körbs 1913: 96 is scarcely credible, although Procopius certainly rose to his crescendo in literary terms (cf. Brodka 2018: 160–162).

fill that particular lacuna in detail in his sequel to Procopius.<sup>233</sup> When Agathias took up his history he explained that Procopius had left off at the end of the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Justinian, that is, no later than 31 March 553, so that he would begin with the 26<sup>th</sup> year (commencing 1 April 553).<sup>234</sup> Agathias did not consider that Procopius' 18<sup>th</sup> war year continued to late June 553, the preferred end of the war year according to the Körbs chronology and insisted on even for this year by Rubin<sup>235</sup>. Rather, he chose to take up the story of the Gothic War at the point where Procopius left it, namely the defeat of Theia at Mons Lactarius in October 552. While to Procopius writing a few months after the defeat of King Theia the war looked to be over and the Goths overwhelmed in October 552. This was not to be the case for either the Romans or the Goths, as Agathias later pointed out.<sup>236</sup> The war against the Gothic regime in Italy dragged on until 562, just as did other conflicts in other parts of the Roman world described by Procopius.<sup>237</sup> Even Narses was quick to warn his troops against complacency, thinking the job was finished.<sup>238</sup> Having the advantage of twenty years of hindsight, Agathias was able to say that the war did not end when everyone, especially Procopius, expected it would, that is, after the defeat of Theia at Mons Lactarius and its aftermath at the end of 552.

<sup>233</sup> Agathias, *Hist.* 1.8.1–10.9; 11.5; 20.1–7, with notes in Maraval 2007: 275–277.

<sup>234</sup> Agathias, *Hist.* praef. 32, cf. Procopius, *Wars* 8.33.26.

<sup>235</sup> Rubin 1957: 527.

<sup>236</sup> Agathias, *Hist.* 1.1, with Schmidt 1923: 444: 'Agathias stellt in unausgesprochener Polemik gegen Prokop, offenbar auf Grundgenauerer Kenntnis', and Brodka 2018: 163: 'Mit der Überlieferung Prokops stimmt aber sein Fortsetzer Agathias von Myrina nicht überein ... Es scheint also, dass die Version des Agathias glaubwürdiger als diejenige des Prokop ist'.

<sup>237</sup> Book 8 of the *Wars* is a composite covering other ongoing wars on several fronts: Persia and Caucasus (8.1.1–15.19), Africa (8.15.20–22), and Europe (8.18.1–20.59). The latest datable event seems to be Procopius' reference to the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Justinian (1 April 552 – 31 March 553) at 8.15.12.

<sup>238</sup> Agathias, *Hist.* 2.11.3–5.

## VI. Redefining Procopius' Gothic War year

The foregoing detailed analysis of the chronology of the Gothic War, as described by Procopius in his continuous narrative from 535/536 to 552/553, leads to the unsurprising conclusion that more often than not Procopius' Gothic war year ended where he said it ended, that is, at the end of winter (mid-late March generally). Hence, the new war year began at the commencement of spring (late March/early April generally). In this respect, Procopius' usage merely follows that of his model Thucydides. For subsequent histories focused on military events, both the logic and pattern of the Thucydidean example were inescapable. Further, this analysis suggests that Procopius' narrative deserves more subtle and careful consideration than the assumed rigid adherence to a June-to-June war year, as argued by Körbs in 1913 and accepted ever since. Procopius witnessed or heard about, directly and freshly, almost all that he recounted. As Belisarius' secretary, he was able to draw on his own diaries, notes and the memory of others when he set about writing the earliest years of the Gothic War (535–540), while for the later years (541–552/553) he continued to rely on the recollections of Belisarius and other generals, legates and participants as well as official correspondence, announcements and bulletins available to him in Constantinople. As a result, Procopius normally knew exactly when events occurred and in what chronological order. In accommodating this knowledge to the literary constraints of a narrative structure and the scrupulous Thucydidean organisation by war year, however, he was obliged to make regular literary decisions: about where to place events, how to relate them to each other, where to begin and end them, where to directly intrude himself. Above all, he had to decide where to draw the conclusion of the winter marking the end of each successive war year. In all these respects, his challenge was no different to that of any ancient historian before him writing about a war.

The logic of the Thucydidean war year, that is, to begin one's narrative of a war year where most campaign seasons necessarily begin, must have carried some force in the account of someone so closely attuned to the organisational and planning rhythms of the Roman army as Procopius was. So too, to end a war year at the end of the noncampaign

season (October to March), rather than three months into a new campaign season, as Körbs saw it, has its own inner logic.<sup>239</sup> Procopius could not have ignored the practical advantage of using a dating device which had been imitated by so many other historians over the millennium between Thucydides and his own day. Besides this practical expectation, there is the purely literary consideration that, even if Procopius deliberately chose to date his war year from June to June, it must have seemed a trifle odd to his audience that he would insist, year after year, in calling the end of June ‘the end of winter’, especially since he nowhere hints at this deviation from the pressing weight of tradition. His readers would have been well aware that Thucydides and his many imitators had manifestly meant ‘the end of winter’ to indicate sometime in March, not a point so far into summer as the end of June, when the course of ongoing campaigning made it both more problematic and more arbitrary to mark a dividing line between one war year and the next.

Körbs certainly recognised this problem but explained it away by postulating a philological distinction in Procopius’ formulaic phraseology, implying a chronological gap between the way he describes the end of winter (ἔληγε) in March and the way he refers to the end of the war year (ἔτελεύτα) in June.<sup>240</sup> Körbs notes, however, that this is such a fine distinction that it could only be appreciated and utilised by a philological pedant such as Procopius. Moreover, according to Körbs, it is such a subtle construction that one needs time to appreciate it. Most would miss it altogether. Rather than insist on such subtlety, with a three-month chronological distinction between Procopius’ use of λήγειν and τελευτᾶν, it is more natural to assume the obvious point that, while they represent verbal variety in a formulaic phrase, together they mark the same chronological point. It is also more natural to assume that Procopius was again being mindful of Thucydides, who appears to use λήγειν and τελευτᾶν interchangeably to represent both the end of winter and the simultaneous end of the war year.<sup>241</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Cf. Veh 1951: 13.

<sup>240</sup> Körbs 1913: 57–59.

<sup>241</sup> Gomme, Andrewes, Dover 1981: 149 on 5.81.2 λήγοντος, cf. Gomme 1956: 704 only once elsewhere (7.6.2).

Unlike Thucydides, who normally refers to the ‘following spring’ or ‘the summer of the following year’ (Appendix 1), Procopius does not provide a specific seasonal indication for the commencement of each war year. He does so only for its end, that is, at the end of winter (Appendix 2). Instead, he simply resumes the narrative by describing the first event of the campaign season, which he deemed worth recording. Only once, in fact, does Procopius precisely link an event to the actual commencement of the war year (*Wars* 8.21.5: war year 17). Otherwise, most of the year commencements cannot be more precisely dated, so we have to assume that they were the first events of a normal campaign season in Roman times. Sometimes it is possible to verify this by inference, such as leaving winter quarters, or from other extant documents. Occasionally an event is clearly located at the beginning of the war year, that is, March/April, because it involves the recruitment or readying of troops (war years 5, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18). Sometimes the earliest event is later, as Belisarius began his Italian campaign in June 536 (war year 2), having been detained in Africa, and his expedition from Rome in 538, having spent the winter in the city (war year 4). On other occasions the earliest recorded event may not have actually occurred until much later: for example, the first event in the 12<sup>th</sup> war year is actually Vigilius’ arrival in Constantinople the following January (*Wars* 7.16.1–3). Or it could have occurred much earlier, such as war year 12, which commences with events in the previous one (*Wars* 7.25.1). For others, it is simply not easy to tell (war years 3, 7, 9, 15). Taken together, however, Procopius’ pattern for commencing each new war year does not justify the generalisation that the whole of his narrative is based on a June to June war year.

The foundation of the traditional chronology of Procopius’ Gothic War is the detailed study of Körbs, and it has been examined closely at the particular points above. Analysing year by year the various elements of Körbs’ argument exposes its overall fragility more starkly. In the first place, Körbs himself directly admitted that in several instances Procopius plainly did end a particular war year (years 8, 9, 16) or began another (years 5, 9, 17) just as Thucydides did, that is, with the end of winter/beginning of spring (March/April). Further, he was inclined to explain these examples away by claiming that events which occurred

in spring were deferred to after June in the narrative so as to allow an earlier event to be completed (year 18). In other cases, he claims that there were simply no events worth reporting between March and end-June.<sup>242</sup> This is an untidy solution. It means that many years are unnecessarily uneven. They are either truncated (beginning in June and ending in March: only 9 months), or they are elongated (beginning in March and ending in June the following year: 15 months). In one case, Körbs has two years overlapping, by ending war year 4 in June 539, but having the next war year commence the previous March.<sup>243</sup> Secondly, Körbs simply ignored many years altogether (war years 6, 7, 11, 13) on the grounds that for those years it was too difficult to date events accurately from Procopius or other sources.<sup>244</sup> Yet in each of these war years the Procopian narrative suggests that the year ended no later than March. Thirdly, it is perhaps natural to think that an author might date successive years of his account from the original commencement date of his narrative. In Procopius's case, according to Körbs, the story of the Gothic War necessarily began in June 535 with Belisarius' departure from Constantinople, so the first full year was not concluded until June 536, and so on. Körbs notes that this is probably the explanation for what he considers a June to June war year.<sup>245</sup> To do so, however, means ignoring the powerful influence of literary tradition which elevated the model of the Thucydidean war year, specifically linking the rhythm of military life to the seasons, above the particular chronology of any subsequent conflict. It also ignores Procopius' own statement that the war began when the news of Amalasuintha's murder reached Justinian in April 535 (*Wars* 5.5.1).

In the final analysis, the focus of Körbs' case rests on just a handful of the 18 war years in Procopius' account: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 12 and 18. More particularly, the insistence on the June-to-June war year is heavily reliant on Procopius' 'summer turning' as being the summer solstices (war years 2/3, 3/4) and that their accuracy is verified by the fact that these are the years of direct knowledge by Procopius. Even if, by 'summer

<sup>242</sup> Körbs 1913: 54.

<sup>243</sup> Körbs 1913: 36–37.

<sup>244</sup> Körbs 1913: 21.

<sup>245</sup> Körbs 1913: 61.

turning', Procopius exclusively means 'summer solstice' in all these cases, it would only mean that in those years Procopius' narrative extends beyond the usual March/April terminus to a later one, which is at least explicable on literary grounds. In each case, however, that the 'turning' is the summer solstice of late June, this is not necessarily the case. The demands of the narrative produce inconsistency, as they did in Thucydides.

This does not mean that every war year necessarily ran from end-June to end-June, and that we must read such a structure into Procopius' narrative and make untenable assumptions in some years for the sake of rigidly sustaining such a chronology. On the other hand, in some cases, by 'summer turning', the author may mean not 'summer solstice' but 'spring equinox', in which case there is perfect consistency.

In each of these cases, however, we have seen that detailed analysis of the chronology of the particular year demonstrates that either the war year in fact ran from March/April to the 'end of winter', on the Thucydidean model, or it extended beyond that period in a given year in order to meet the demands of narrative unity and coherence. In the case of the first war year, it obviously began when Justinian declared war on news of the death of the Gothic queen Amalasuintha (Procopius), in May 535, or when Belisarius' expedition left Constantinople in June/July 535 (Körbs) and took up less than a full calendar year, while the final war year concluded at the beginning of winter 552/553 (around November 552), which explains why Procopius does not link the end of that war year to the end of winter. The second war year begins in June 536 because that is when the campaign season began, with Belisarius' crossing into Italy, not because it was the anniversary of his leaving Constantinople.

To maintain the dating system postulated by Körbs, and followed inflexibly by Bury, Stein and Rubin above all, plus more recent historians inevitably dependent on them, as well as the relevant entries in the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* requires a number of questionable assumptions. It also predisposes one to expect that Procopius' concern was chronological accuracy, that he naturally reported events in chronological order, that the first event in the narrative was always the first in the year and the last event recorded was the last for

the year. Like Thucydides, Procopius was far less consistent, far less rigid. For the first five years he had an abundance of material from firsthand experience and mainly did record events in order, or at least enable his reader to follow the chronological links. For the later years of the *Gothic War*, however, when relying on second-hand information in Constantinople, where he was writing, his approach was less systematic and less structured. In order to produce a series of self-contained episodes, the demands of the narrative prevailed. He did not always know the chronological connection between them. By using a war year, and marking the end of the war year at the end of winter, he was not entirely free to choose his own system, nor was he expected to be absolutely rigid. The traditional rigid dating system (June to June) pays little attention to the internal construction and coherence of the narrative of Procopius, least of all that the narrative construction is modelled on a long tradition initiated by Thucydides and reinforced from generation to generation.

By taking each year separately and analysing it closely, Procopius' literary method is brought into focus. The war year as a narrative organiser is designed to provide shape and sequence to the story, not a detailed chronological almanac for the creation of other chronologically accurate stories. Procopius' Gothic war year is no exception.

Finally, it has to be noted that, by linking the end of a war year with the end of the winter season in the *Gothic War*, Procopius was only being internally consistent. Twice in the *Persian War*, even though he did not methodically reckon the successive years, as he did in the *Gothic War*, he marked the end of winter in the Thucydidean manner. In both cases, however, he went further and linked the end of winter with the passing not of a war year but of an imperial year.<sup>246</sup> Since Justinian's imperial year ran from his inauguration on 1 April 527, at the time Procopius was writing the imperial year was the prime public method of dating. Hence, he uses it often.<sup>247</sup> When Procopius linked the end of

<sup>246</sup> *Wars* 1.16.10–17.1; 2.5.1, with Greatrex 2022: 623.

<sup>247</sup> *Wars* 1.16.10 (year 4); 1.22.17 (year 6); 2.3.56 (year 13); 2.5.1 (year 13); 2.28.11 (year 19); 2.30.48 (year 23); 3.12.1 (year 7); 4.14.6 (year 10); 4.19.1 (year 13); 4.21.1 (year 17); 4.28.41 (year 19); 5.5.1 (year 9); 5.14.14 (year 11); 8.15.12 (year 25); 8.33.26 (year 26), with Greatrex 2022: 503, 623.



winter with the passing of an imperial year it is clear that the imperial year more or less coincided exactly with the end of winter and the beginning of the campaign season, that is, more or less in line with the Thucydidean winter. Similarly, in the books on the *Vandal War* winter turns to spring in March, for instance, three months after the blockade against Gelimer, in December 533.<sup>248</sup>

There is no need to think that Procopius' more deliberate and consistent chronological method in the *Gothic War* involved dating the end of winter to a different point than in the *Persian War* and the *Vandal War*; let alone three months later, that is, in March for the *Persian War* and *Vandal War* and June for the *Gothic War*. The various books of the wars across all fronts form a unified literary product. As one might expect, Procopius was perfectly consistent in his chronology. In the *Persian War* and *Vandal War*, he dates the end of winter to the end of March, which happens to coincide with the passing of another year of the reign of Justinian. Similarly, in the *Gothic War* he dates the passing of winter to the end of March, which coincides with the passing of another war year. Procopius' immediate successor, Agathias, clearly understood where the Procopian war year began and ended, that is, it followed the received pattern of the Thucydidean war year. Hence Agathias' own war year followed suit, and so it continued.<sup>249</sup> Procopius is no exception to this tradition after all.

## VII. Redating events of the Gothic War

The most significant implication for reclaiming the Procopian Gothic War year as essentially Thucydidean is the need to reexamine the modern dates for events during the Gothic War, from 535 to 552. Nearly all modern narratives and other accounts of the Gothic War of Justinian are dependent on the chronology of Procopius' *Wars*, as formulated by Körbs and endorsed by Bury and Stein in the first instance. That chronology depends on each war year of Procopius running from June

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<sup>248</sup> *Wars* 4.2.1.

<sup>249</sup> Agathias, *Hist.* 1.19.2; 1.19.3; 2.1.1; 2.2.1; 2.4.3; 2.14.1; 2.15.1. Details in Cameron 1970: 143–144.

of one year to June of the next. When events can only be dated within a war year, or in relation to other events within a war year, then the span of the war year provides an important foundation for dating all events in the period from 535 to 552/553.

If, as argued here, the chronology of Körbs is unsustainable, and Procopius simply follows the example of Thucydides and those writing history in the intervening centuries, then there are clear implications for the redating of several events. The most immediate consequences for redating specific events are set out in Appendix 3. They include, for example, the accession dates for successive kings, Eraric and Totila, in 541, but for the most part the events requiring redating are those at the beginning or end of a particular war year. They have traditionally been placed in June because they are the last event in a given year, or the beginning of July because they are the first event of the following war year. Further research and detailed commentary on Procopius' *Gothic War* will doubtless refine the chronology of all the years of the war he covered (535–553).

## VIII. Conclusion

Modern readers look for chronological accuracy and consistency in any historian, assuming it must always have been the historian's essential motivation and habit. Greek and Roman historians operated on rather different assumptions. They understood history as primarily a literary activity. They were conscious of telling a story, however complex and ambitious, as stylishly and alluringly as possible. While writers of history were self-consciously motivated by accuracy and truth as they saw it, they did not regard it as essential to ensure that events were all in strict chronological order, nor that events could be precisely located and dated by the audience. It simply was never a priority. The reputation and success of writers of history depended, instead, on being judged against their predecessors. So they felt compelled to imitate their revered models as best they could. For anyone writing in Greek in late antiquity and the ensuing millennium the main historiographical models were Herodotus and Thucydides. Procopius felt the pull

of Herodotus and Thucydides, and their influence is imprinted on his *Wars*. For Procopius, as for Thucydides, the author systematically set out his account of Justinian's war against the Goths according to a war year, formally marking the end of each of the 18 war years in his account from the first (535/536) to the last (552/553). The reality is that in using a stylised literary history such as that of Procopius' *Wars* for our own particular purpose, we need to recognise its inevitably inconsistent or elastic chronology and work around that, rather than continue to force the narrative into a modern chronological straitjacket, especially when Procopius provides the only testimony available.<sup>250</sup>

## Abbreviations

MGH.AA. = Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores Antiquissimi*, Berlin.

PLRE 3 = J.R. Martindale, 1992, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 3, A.D. 527–641, Cambridge.

RE = A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, W. Kroll, *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart.

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<sup>250</sup> This paper was first drafted in the 1990s in conjunction with Croke 1995, and the chronology presented here underpinned the case made for dating Jordanes' *Romana* and *Getica* to 551, as set out in Croke 2005: 473–494. Although they do not necessarily agree with everything argued here, I am grateful to Anthony Kaldellis for comments on an early version, and especially to Dariusz Brodka, not only for critical comments long ago, but also for encouraging, then facilitating, its eventual publication.

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## Appendix 1: Thucydides' war years for the Peloponnesian War

War Year	Calendar Year (BCE)	Beginning	End
1	431/430	2.2.1	2.47.1
2	430/429	2.47.2	2.70.4
3	429/428	2.71.1	2.103.2
4	428/427	3.1.1	3.25.2
5	427/426	3.26.1	3.88.4
6	426/425	3.89.1	3.116.3
7	425/424	4.1.1 (~4.2.1)	4.51.1
8	424/423	4.52.1 (~4.51.3)	4.116.3
9	423/422	4.117.1	4.135.2
10	422/421	5.1.1	5.20.3 (~5.25.2)
11	421/420	5.21.1	5.39.3
12	420/419	5.40.1	5.51.2
13	419/418	5.52.1	5.56.5
14	418/417	5.57.1	5.81.2
15	417/416	5.82.1	5.83.4
16	416/415	5.84.1	6.7.4
17	415/414	6.8.1	6.93.4
18	414/413	6.94.1	7.18.4
19	413/412	7.19.1	8.6.5
20	412/411	8.7.1	8.60.3
21	411/410	8.61.1	8.109.2

## Appendix 2: Procopius' war years for the war against the Goths in Italy

War Year	Calendar Year (CE)	Start of War Year in Proco- pius' Wars	End of War Year in Procopius' Wars
1	535/536	5.5.1	5.7.37
2	536/537	5.8.1	6.2.38
3	537/538	6.3.1	6.12.41
4	538/539	6.13.1	6.22.25
5	539/540	6.23.1	6.30.30
6	540/541	7.1.1	7.1.49
7	541/542	7.2.1	7.5.19
8	542/543	7.6.1	7.7.20
9	543/544	7.8.1	7.9.23
10	544/545	7.10.1	7.11.39
11	545/546	7.12.1	7.15.16
12	546/547	7.16.1	7.24.34
13	547/548	7.25.1	7.29.21
14	548/549	7.30.1	7.35.30
15	549/550	7.36.1	7.39.29
16	550/551	7.40.1	8.21.4
17	551/552	8.21.5	8.25.24–25
18	552/553	8.26.1	8.35.38

### Appendix 3: Redating specific episodes in the Gothic War, 535-553

<b>Event (Reference in Procopius' Wars)</b>	<b>Conventional Date (Based on June/ June War Year)</b>	<b>Revised Date (Based on c. March/c. March War Year)</b>
Capitulation of Sicily (5.6.1)	End December 535	October/November 535
Embassy of Peter from Theodahad to Justinian (5.6.12–13)	Early February 536	November 535
Roman defeat at Salona (5.7.2–10)	End March 536	October/November 535
Peter and Athanasius return to Theodahad (5.6.26–27; 7.11)	Early April 536	January 536
Roman expedition in Dalmatia (5.7.12–25)	May/June 536	January/March 536
Euthalius arrives in Rome (6.2.1–24)	June 537	April 537
Roman contingent to relieve Milan (6.12.26–41)	April/June 538	March 538
Goths embassy to Lombards (6.22.9–17)	January 539	November 538/January 539
Narses recalled by Justinian (6.22.5)	June 539	March 539

Gothic embassy to Chosroes (6.22.18–24)	March to June 539	February 539
Release of Peter and Athanasius by Goths	End June 539	March 539
Siege of Auximum (6.23.9-24.17)	July 539–February 540	March–October 539
Capture of Ravenna (6.29.1–31)	May 540	March 540
Accession of Ildebadus (6.30.17)	May/June 540	March/April 540
Death of Ildebadus (7.1.48)	June 541	March 541
Accession of Eraric (7.2.1)	June/July 541	March/April 541
Death of Eraric (7.2.8)	June/July 541	September 541
Accession of Totila (7.2.18)	Late 541	September 541
Totila attacks Florence (7.5.1–6)	June 542	March 542
Totila marches on Rome (7.9.22)	June 544	March 544
Siege of Asculum and Firmum (7.11.30)	Mid-545	February/March 545
Totila captures Asculum and Firmum (7.12.12)	July/August 545	April 545
Totila leaves Rome empty (7.22.19)	End February 547	Mid-January 547



Belisarius occupies Rome (7.24.1–15)	April/May 547	Mid-late February 547
Belisarius sends keys of Rome to emperor	June 547	March 547
Blockade of Rossano (7.29.21)	June 548	March 548
Antonina in Constantinople (7.30.3)	July 548	May 548
Belisarius recalled (7.35.1–3)	Early 549	Late summer 548
Gothic defection to Indulf (7.35.23)	June 549	March 549
Appointment of Germanus (7.39.9)	Late May/early June 550	March 550
Diogenes at Centumcellae (7.39.25–28)	Late June 550	Late April 550
Slavic incursion (7.40.31)	Spring 551	October–December 550
Death of Germanus (7.40.9)	October/November 550	Summer 550
Lombards/Gepids battle (8.25.14–15)	June 552	Late 551/early 552
Earthquakes in Greece (8.25.16–23)	July 551	March 551
Siege of Crotona (8.25.24)	June 552	March 552