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A Tangled Web

Marriage and Alliance in the Shadows of the Plague, 542–548

ABSTRACT: Few debates in modern academia are as heated as the one among scholars who consider the arrival of bubonic plague in Constantinople in the spring of 542 as a demographic and social disaster and those who argue for less tumultuous outcomes. Whatever side one stands on in the current discussion, the pandemic's immediate impact on the administration, economy, politics, society and religious culture within Constantinople and the wider empire seems clear. In this article I will suggest that increased competition amongst Constantinople's elites for a shrunken pool of suitable brides and grooms for their sons and daughters was one hitherto underappreciated result of the pandemic. The sixth-century eastern Roman historian, Procopius of Caesarea, offers ample evidence not only about the devastation wrought by the bubonic plague but also its impact on the political alliances in Constantinople. His digressions in *Secret History* concerning marital politicking amongst Constantinople's elites provide evidence of this impact. Capitalizing on advances in our knowledge about Procopius both as an author and historical figure, I will analyze his writings on three levels: as history, literature and propaganda. By pondering what motivated Procopius to focus on these marital alliances and, moreover, pondering links between them, the paper offers some revisionist takes on these digressions, both as literary devices and as actual events.

KEYWORDS: plague, marriage, alliance, Germanus, Theodora, Justinian, John the nephew of Vitalian, Justina

Procopius has never been more popular. In the past five years alone, several monographs, edited volumes, translations, commentaries, and a companion have appeared, as well as an ever-growing mountain of articles examining his writings – *Wars (Bella)*, *Buildings (De aedificiis)*, and *Secret History (Anecdota)* – from a vast variety of methodological angles and themes.¹ Procopius' digressions in *Secret History* concerning the marital politicking amongst sixth-century Constantinople's elites have, in general, received only minimal attention. When scholars do discuss them they are usually a sidebar, wielded to ponder wider connections with previous or future imperial dynasties or as splinters of information wielded to shed light on other events and/or chronologies or to construct biographical portraits of key individuals.²

One goal of this article, then, is to give these digressions the attention they deserve. Capitalizing on advances in our knowledge of Procopius, both as an author and historical figure, I will analyze the material on three levels – as history, literature, and propaganda. By asking what motivated Procopius to focus on these marital alliances and, moreover pondering possible links between them, the paper offers some revisionist takes on these digressions, both as literary devices and as actual events.

We are handcuffed, at times, by our dependence on Procopius for a great deal of what we know about these marriages and the tangled webs of alliances in mid-540s Constantinople. As has long been understood, our primary source for these episodes, *Secret History* – which was never published in Procopius' lifetime – dramatizes the actions and personalities of well-known individuals.³ The portrayals of Antonina/Belisarius and Theodora/Justinian, and even the more minor players,

¹ For a recent survey and discussion of this work, see Cristini 2021.

² Al. Cameron 1978; Garland 1999; Evans 2002; Foss 2002; Potter 2015; Parnell 2023.

³ This problem is not limited to *Secret History* but applies to *Wars* and *Buildings* as well; see Brown 2010.

such as the generals John and Germanus, are crude caricatures.⁴ Additionally, his reliance on genre and classical tropes may mean that Procopius' accounts do not always reflect sixth-century East Roman conditions or people as they were.⁵ Despite recent attempts to focus on finding commonalities across his writings in both Procopius' political agenda and even literary genre, *Secret History*, *Wars*, and *Buildings*, at times, provide dramatically different pictures of individuals like Belisarius and events such as Justinian's wars of Roman restoration in Italy and North Africa. Later Byzantine writers appreciated the differences between the more sober *Wars* and the vitriolic *Secret History*.⁶ The tenth-century *Suda*, for example, alerted its readers that *Secret History* was an 'invective' (ψόγος) and a 'satire' (κωμωδία), and hence contained 'abuse and mockery of the emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora, and indeed of Belisarius himself as well, and his wife.'⁷ We need to continue to take similar precautions with *Secret History* – and *Wars* and *Buildings* as well – carefully separating fact from fiction or, at times, the probable from the improbable.

On this necessity, most Procopian scholars would agree. Yet the degree of dramatization in *Secret History* is hotly contested. On one side, scholars assert that given its polemical nature and heavy reliance on gender tropes, *Secret History* 'is useless as a source about what really happened.'⁸ Others take a more optimistic stance, contending that while '*Secret History* is by no means a straightforward confession of its author's political or religious beliefs,' it can be profitably read as

⁴ For Procopius' exaggerations about the extent of Antonina's and Theodora's political alliance, see Av. Cameron 1985: 72–73. For the simple inversions used in Procopius' contrasting portraits of Belisarius in *Wars* and *Secret History*, see Stewart 2022. On the 'ridiculous' portrait of Belisarius and Antonina's relationship, see Pfeilschifter 2021: 130. And for tropes in Procopius's portrait of Theodora and Justinian, see Ziche 2012–2013; Grau, Febrer 2020.

⁵ Brubaker 2005.

⁶ Greatrex 1995; Signes Codoñer 2017; Av. Cameron 2017; Croke 2021.

⁷ *Suda* (II 2479) in the online version: www.stoa.org/sol-entries/pi/2479. Adler 'Procopius' ὅτι τὸ βιβλίον Προκοπίου τὸ καλούμενον Ἀνέκδοτα ψόγους καὶ κωμωδίαν Ἰουστινιανοῦ βασιλέως περιέχει καὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς Θεοδώρας, ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ αὐτοῦ Βελισσαρίου καὶ τῆς γαμετῆς αὐτοῦ.

⁸ Brubaker 2004, 2005; Harvey 2001; Constantinou 2013.

‘an esoteric supplement to *Wars*.’⁹ Others take a more middle ground, believing that behind even the most sensationalized episodes there is usually an informative kernel of ‘truth.’¹⁰ As Brian Croke recently put it, ‘The *Secret History*, as often acknowledged, did not so much invent facts as distort or invert them.’¹¹

Nevertheless, even minor differences in degrees of trust in *Secret History*’s veracity can lead to significant changes in our views. For example, Brubaker and others distrust Procopius’ account concerning Theodora’s youthful sexual escapades, interpreting it as rhetorical exaggeration, which tells us nothing about the ‘real’ Theodora.¹² Evans and Potter, however, submit that as an actress Theodora may have prostituted herself prior to marrying Justinian.¹³

Where do I stand on these issues? As I have delved more deeply into Procopius’ world and literary tactics, I have become convinced that even those historians (including myself), who have taken a critical eye to *Secret History*, both as literature and history, have not gone far enough. We continue to be deceived by aspects of Procopius’ account. Consequently, many recent narrative approaches to this material, if you might pardon a modern reference, tell us as much about Justinian’s and Theodora’s world as does the Netflix series *The Crown* about the British monarchy in the second half of the twentieth century. Of course, each scholar must make their own choices about what to accept and what to discard or modify. In this article, I seek to peer further into the foggy narrative world of Procopius’ polemical creation to construct a clearer picture of these marriage alliances and the intense politicking by elites, both as Procopius wanted his reader to see them and, through some vetting and informed speculation on my part, a bit closer to what they really were—complex and nuanced negotiations between households seeking the best outcomes for their young male and female relatives.

⁹ Kaldellis 2004: 48–49; Foss 2002: 163.

¹⁰ Evans 2011; Parnell 2023.

¹¹ Croke 2021: 53, n. 124.

¹² Brubaker 2004: 94–100; Heather 2013: 89.

¹³ Evans 2002: 15; Potter 2015: 36–43.

This task is not easy. Take, for example, the hostile characterization of Antonina and Belisarius found in *Secret History*. Procopius had spent extended time with the couple, so he would have been familiar with the basic dynamics of their relationship. Nevertheless, many of the interactions and some of the events Procopius describes, such as the private communications between Belisarius and Antonina, are not just exaggerations but completely made up – even though they are meant to seem real (e.g., *Anec.* I 14–18).¹⁴ So, for instance, David Potter, in his fine book on Theodora, which offers a much richer and flattering portrait of the empress than the one that appears on the pages of Procopius, still must rely on *Secret History* to recreate the mental worlds and temperaments of key players. To take just one notable example, Potter depends largely on one problematic episode from *Secret History* – the digression about Germanus’¹⁵ daughter Justina’s marriage to the general John in 545, to conclude that Theodora disliked Justinian’s cousin Germanus ‘intensely.’¹⁶ Procopius certainly wanted the reader to believe this; it is questionable, however, that he knew much, if anything, about the pair’s ‘true’ feelings about one another.¹⁷ And even if he did, he would have few qualms in distorting the truth if it served his literary and political purposes.

Here and elsewhere, we are being led down a narrow path of Procopius’ choosing.¹⁸ Moreover, if, as some have suggested, Procopius had composed *Secret History* to ingratiate himself to Germanus and his social network while distancing himself from his old patrons – Justinian and Belisarius – then we have another reason to be wary.¹⁹ Even if such political positioning was not his aim,²⁰ Procopius’ admiration for Ger-

¹⁴ Brubaker 2005: 432.

¹⁵ Germanus 4, PLRE 2: 505–507.

¹⁶ Potter 2015: 201; cf. Garland 2004: 198.

¹⁷ The literature on Theodora is vast and ever growing. Good places to start are Beck 1986; Evans 2002; Harvey 2001; Potter 2015; Ravegnani 2016; Becker 2017; Grau, Ferber 2020.

¹⁸ For recent discussions on the difficulty of ever finding the ‘real’ Procopius, see Van Nuffelen 2017: 40; Stewart 2020: 31–67; Croke 2021: 30–34.

¹⁹ Signes Codoñer 2000: 48–53, 65–67; 2003; 2005.

²⁰ For the notion that *Secret History* was meant to appear only after the death of all the main protagonists, Theodora, Justinian, Antonina, and Belisarius, see Croke 2021: 47. On the further contention that *Secret History* was meant to be a supplement to

manus features prominently in *Wars* and *Secret History*.²¹ So, wherever we stand on the issue of context, we need to tread carefully when Procopius discusses episodes involving Germanus or, conversely, individuals like Theodora, about whom he concocts caricatures of depravity.

In certain instances what Procopius produces for the reader are not just embellishments added for dramatic flair but more sinister fabrications constructed with a particular literary and political purpose. This is the case with aspects of Procopius' implausible depiction of the circumstances surrounding the betrothal in 543, marriage in 547, and separation in c. 548/549 involving Belisarius' and Antonina's daughter Ioannína to Theodora's grandson Anastasius. *Secret History* then is a dramatized version of events that had happened and some complete fabrications. It is up to the individual scholar, through intelligent speculation, to separate one from the other. This does not mean we should discount everything Procopius says about such matters – invective is most effective when it contains elemental truths.²² That Theodora took a keen interest in the marriage prospects of her close family members and blocked the marriages of potential rivals is indisputable and, moreover, not unusual for matrons from Constantinople's competitive aristocracy.²³ Nevertheless, the omnipotent Theodora found on the pages of *Secret History* is largely a creation of Procopius' imagination.²⁴

One must also remain mindful of the differences between Theodora's world and our own. Kate Cooper submits astutely that the influence of the enlightenment and the modern 'conception of individual autonomy' has hindered scholars' attempts to comprehend the experience of Roman men and women, stressing that 'the notion of a private sphere divested of public significance would have seemed impossible

Book VIII of *Wars*, see Croke 2021: 51–52; Meier 2003a: 437–438. My views, which are closer to those of Signes Codoñer and Börm, are laid out in Stewart 2020: 64–67.

²¹ Av. Cameron 1985: 7, where in Books VII and VIII Cameron senses Procopius' growing disillusionment with Belisarius and an increasing admiration for Germanus. For Germanus as the 'white' in *Secret History* and 'Justinian the Black'; see Signes Codoñer 2003: 78; cf. Rance 2021: 102.

²² Börm 2015: 330; Stewart 2022; Croke 2021.

²³ Cooper 2007.

²⁴ Moorhead 1994: 40; Av. Cameron 1985: 73–74.

(and undesirable) to the ancient mind.²⁵ There are other anachronisms we should be on the lookout for, such as differing gender norms in Procopius' world than in ours. Procopius' views on gender – especially in *Secret History* – have received particular attention by historians in recent decades.²⁶ This scholarship has demonstrated that gender norms are fluid and ideals can and do shift over time. So, a trait or action considered as a positive one, such as the famous instance during the Nika Revolt (*Bella I* 24, 33–37) when Theodora convinced Justinian in a dramatic speech not to flee the city but to stand and fight may have been read quite differently in a sixth-century world that limited women's power. Many sixth-century readers would have wondered why it was the woman Theodora and not the man Justinian who had made the manly decision to stand and fight.²⁷ Put simply, in instances in Procopius' writings when a woman acts 'manly' there is usually a man nearby behaving unmanly.²⁸

Finally, I have another overarching aim for this article. I would like my reader to ponder whether the intense competition between elites for suitable brides and grooms for their children found in Procopius' writings might indicate a wider social and demographic crisis exacerbated by the arrival of Bubonic Plague in the spring of 542. Of course this was not monocausal or unique to the period, so some caution is needed. Kristina Sessa has rightly warned against 'creating a linear chain of causation' to blame a Justinianic plague for any social or political development one chooses.²⁹

There is, however, some intriguing evidence that the pool of potential brides and grooms in Constantinople had been impacted by the plague between 542 and 545. One finds a significant increase in the number of dynastic marriages after 542. Most of the marriages described in Procopius and in other sources date to the period shortly before or after Justinian contracted Bubonic Plague, in 542, when at the

²⁵ Cooper 1996: 11–14.

²⁶ For just a small sample, see Herrin 1983; Av. Cameron 1985; Garland 1999; James 2001; Brubaker 2004: 83–10; Ziche 2012–2013.

²⁷ Neville 2019: 15–19.

²⁸ Stewart 2014.

²⁹ Sessa 2019: 242.

very least six marriages with dynastic implications occurred within five years of one another.

Here is just a partial list:

1. C. 542–545: Justinian’s nephew Justin (the future emperor Justin II),³⁰ the son of Justinian’s sister Vigilantia,³¹ marries Theodora’s niece Sophia,³² probably the daughter of Komito (though another of Theodora’s sisters Anastasia is a possibility) and the general Sittas (not discussed by Procopius).
2. C. 543/544: Justinian’s nephew Marcellus, Justin’s younger brother, marries Juliana (possibly alluded to in *Secret History*).
3. 543–547: Theodora’s grandson Anastasius is engaged in 543 and then marries Belisarius and Antonina’s daughter Ioannína. We are told that Antonina and Belisarius severed the marriage after Theodora’s death in 548, but some dispute this (long digression in *Secret History*).
4. C. 544–545: The daughter of Vigilantia, Praeicta, marries the general Areobindus, likely a scion of Adraborii and Roman Anicii (discussed in *Wars*).
5. [Year?] Justinian’s cousin Germanus’ daughter Justina marries general John, the nephew of the former consul and rebel Vitalian (discussed in *Wars* and *Secret History*).
6. C. 547: After Areobindus’ death in 545, Praeicta marries John, a scion of the imperial House of Anastasius (discussed in *Wars*).
7. C. 548: After Theodora’s death, Germanus marries the former Gothic Queen Matasuentha (discussed in *Wars*).³³

As these marriages demonstrate, by 543 Justinian and Theodora were invested in the process of shoring up the social positions of their close kin.³⁴ If I may speculate a bit further, likely shaken by his near-

³⁰ Iustinus 4, PLRE 3: 750–754; For an excellent revision of Justin’s life and career before becoming emperor in 565, see Lin 2021.

³¹ Vigilantia, PLRE 2: 1165.

³² Sophia 1, PLRE 3: 1179–1180.

³³ For the political dynamics behind this marriage, see Van Hoof, Van Nuffelen 2017: 294–296.

³⁴ That Procopius does not discuss any marriages after the 540s offers additional evidence that *Secret History* does not postdate 550.

death-experience, Justinian and Theodora had begun paving the way for one of his close family members to succeed him on the imperial throne while simultaneously blocking the pathways to the purple of potential rivals.³⁵ Of course this burst of marriages may be coincidence rather than causal; on its own, it does not prove that they were motivated directly by the pandemic in 542, but it is plausible to suspect that they were. Once again, one must carefully balance Procopius' and other contemporary sources' emotive rhetoric concerning the impact of the so-called Justinianic plague with our growing knowledge of this pandemic.³⁶ Even if some may question the plague's direct impact on the politics and marriage alliances of the time, clearly Justinian's brush with death sparked a succession crisis that led to political scrambling for position amongst the ruling elite of Constantinople. These events would have a significant impact on the social networks of Constantinople for years to come. When taken in a broader sense, then, these episodes reveal vital details about not only the fractious politicking and shifting alliances of some of 540s Constantinople's most influential individuals and families, but also valuable insights on wider East Roman norms on betrothals and marriages amongst the elite at a time when there appears to have been an increasingly limited pool of suitable grooms and brides to choose from.³⁷ Since much of what we know about these matters hinges on the narrative provided by Procopius, it is worth examining in detail the story he relates. Let us continue, then, by examining one of the most famous and discussed episodes in *Secret History*, Procopius' account of the turbulent politics in the period when Justinian contracted and then recovered from Bubonic Plague in 542.³⁸

³⁵ For the pathway Justinian was clearing for his nephew, the future Justin II in the late 540s and early 550s, see Lin 2021.

³⁶ See the thoughtful comments of Sarris 2021; cf., however, the criticisms of Newfield 2022.

³⁷ Moorhead 1994: 10, n. 13.

³⁸ This episode forms a central focus of the recent scholarly articles by Whitby 2021 and Greatrex 2021, and more general histories by Evans 2011, Potter 2015, Parnell 2023.

Yersinia pestis

In the mid-spring of 542 the contagious disease caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* struck Constantinople. While this is not the place to engage deeply with the ongoing and heated debates about the severity of the plague in Constantinople and throughout Europe and Asia, even allowing for exaggeration it is clear from a wide variety of contemporary sources that the death toll throughout the spring and summer was significant (*Bella* II 22, 9; II 23, 1).³⁹ In the tightly packed city of Constantinople of 500,000 individuals, large numbers from all social levels died, including those amongst the younger nobility. One thing that modern plague experts can agree on is that the Justinianic plague impacted urban areas much harder than rural ones.⁴⁰ The egalitarian nature of the plague and its proclivity to kill the young and healthy represented a particularly distressing aspect of the pandemic for contemporaries. That Bubonic Plague indiscriminately killed women in the prime of their youth deeply troubled John, Bishop of Ephesus (489–578/579), who witnessed the devastating results of the pandemic in Constantinople:

(With what tears should I have wept) for beautiful young girls and virgins who awaited a joyful bridal feast and preciously adorned (wedding) garments (but were now) stripped naked and defiled with the filth of other dead, making a miserable and bitter sight, not even inside a grave, but in the streets and harbors, their corpses being dragged there like those of dogs (John Eph., see Witakowski, Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, 90).

For those who might submit that we should be on the alert for rhetorical exaggeration here, I find myself nodding in agreement with Peter Sarris' astute retort that when considering the validity of their numbers our sources provide, or the truthfulness of the vivid episodes they recount, we should read them 'in terms of the writers of our accounts

³⁹ Few debates in modern academia are currently as heated as the one between those who consider the sixth-century bubonic plague as a demographic and social disaster and those who argue for less tumultuous outcomes. For just a selection of some of the recent work, see Meier 2016, Harper 2017, Mordechai, Eisenberg 2019a, 2019b, Sessa 2019, Meier 2020, Sarris 2021, Newfield 2022, Tsiamis 2023.

⁴⁰ Sarris 2021: 324–235; Newfield 2022: 614.

trying and struggling to convey the full horror of the situation that seemingly confronted them.⁴¹

Though some from Constantinople's upper crust may have escaped the city to the relative safety of their estates in the countryside,⁴² Justinian and Theodora remained in the capital. In their detailed accounts of that horrific spring, both Procopius (*Bella* II 23, 5–6) and John of Ephesus (John Eph., see Witakowski, Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, 91–92) describe the active role that Justinian and his administrators played in leading the fight in Constantinople against the ravages of the plague: tending to the sick, burying the dead, and dealing with the wider social and economic effects of the pandemic.

The impartial nature of the plague would have been driven home to contemporaries when in May or June Justinian caught the disease that would come to bear his name (*Anec.* IV 1; cf. *Bella* II 23, 20, *Aed.* I 5–6).⁴³ Given that he was nearing sixty – an old man for the time – few gave the emperor much chance of survival. To borrow the words of Procopius from his panegyric *Buildings*, 'he [Justinian] had been given up by the physicians as being already numbered among the dead' (*Aed.* I 5, trans. Dewing). Judging by the panic over the succession that set in after the emperor fell seriously ill, in this case Procopius was not exaggerating. If Justinian had died at this time it would have also spelled trouble for Theodora, since many contemporaries interpreted a plague as God's retribution. Another historian who was living in the capital at the time, John Malalas, took in the wider geographic context of the pandemic and interpreted it as a sign of God's wrath, explaining, 'The Lord God saw that man's transgressions had multiplied and he caused the overthrow of man on the earth, leading to his destruction in all cities and lands' (Jo. Mal. XVIII 92 [482]). The author of the *Chronical of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor* provided a more precise identification, claiming 'that the scourge was from Satan, who received per-

⁴¹ Sarris 2021: 327.

⁴² Newfield 2022: 599, n. 75.

⁴³ The exact date that Justinian fell ill and the duration of his recovery is disputed. In this paper I follow the chronology of Whitby (2021) and Parnell (2023). Cf., however, the arguments by Greatrex 2021, who posits that Justinian contracted the plague shortly after it arrived in March/April 542. As noted above, however, it seems clear from our sources that Justinian fell ill at a later stage.

mission from God to discipline humankind (Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor, *Chron.* 192, p. 415 trans. Phenix & Horn, slightly modified).⁷ One observes in such examples that for devout Christians, Justinian's demise would have served as a sign of God's disfavor and might even indicate that it was time for a new dynasty. Conversely, the emperor's recovery must have been taken by the devout as a powerful sign that God had not abandoned Justinian or his people – at least that was how Justinianic propaganda would have wanted the populous to see it. Procopius considered (at least in *Buildings*) Justinian's survival to be a miracle, granted through the intervention of the saints Damien and Kosmas (*Aed.* I 6).

Yet during the darkest days of Justinian's illness those around the emperor, and especially Theodora, could be forgiven for pondering their place in a world without Justinian. Much of this angst would have to do with the lack of a clear successor. The emperor had no biological offspring of his own and had not designated a successor, something that would only change when the emperor was on his deathbed in 565,⁴⁴ and some are skeptical that it happened even then.⁴⁵ A similar crisis within the imperial palace over a disputed succession had arisen after Anastasius (r. 491–518) had died childless in July 518, when after the excubitors had threatened to kill the *scholares* candidate, Patricius,⁴⁶ and only after Justinian had supposedly turned down their offer did the opposing factions of imperial bodyguards settle on Justin, who at the time was the commander of the excubitors (*comes excubitorum*) – a three-hundred-man unit of elite imperial bodyguards that had been created by the emperor Leo I (r. 457–474) early in his reign.⁴⁷ Given that the account of this acrimonious succession comes from Peter the Patrician (Justinian's long-serving *magister officiorum*), we can be confident that Theodora and Germanus, the emperor's cousin, who was in the capital in 542, knew of it, and thus were intensely aware of how quickly things moved between opposing factions within the palace once an emperor with no

⁴⁴ Coripp., *In Laud.* I 138 (ed. Av. Cameron 1976: 40). For some of the possible reasons Justinian failed to designate a successor, see Moorhead 1994: 176.

⁴⁵ Av. Cameron 1975: 6–7.

⁴⁶ Patricius 14, PLRE 2: 841–842.

⁴⁷ *De ceremoniis* I 93.

clear heir died. One suspects that behind the scenes there would have been panicked negotiations among Theodora and other prospective candidates for the purple, which would have included Germanus. Based on the hostility between Germanus and Theodora, described by Procopius in *Secret History* (c. 545), some have questioned Germanus' viability in 542 as Justinian's replacement, preferring to speculate that the new emperor would have been a puppet handpicked by the empress, or alternatively Belisarius.⁴⁸

This move would not have been unprecedented; there was an example from fifty years earlier, after the emperor Zeno's (r. 474–491) death, his widow, Ariadne (c. 450–515) selected the obscure silentiary, Anastasius (r. 491–518), to succeed her Isaurian husband.⁴⁹ But this was an unusual case. In 491, there was a powerful faction of Constantinopolitan elites opposed to naming another Isaurian as emperor. Despite Zeno grooming his brother Longinus to replace him, the anti-Isaurian faction got their wish for an 'orthodox Roman' to be named emperor. Our sources magnify the role of Ariadne in the designation of Anastasius as emperor. To borrow the words of Fiona Haarer, 'the court intrigue and machinations which must have led to this appointment are mostly obscured from us.'⁵⁰ In the summer of 542 similar intrigues among rival factions seeking support for their preferred candidate must have rippled through the palace. The empress surely would have played an important part in these schemes. Theodora was, however, in a different and weaker position in 542 than Ariadne had been in 491. In his decades of service, Germanus had forged relationships with elite powerbrokers from civilian and military branches of East Roman society. As a result, I am inclined to believe that if Theodora ever had a serious plan in creating a 'puppet-emperor,' Germanus' proximity and legitimate claims to the purple would have made such a move on Theodora's part without his cooperation difficult at the very least.

⁴⁸ On the unstated suggestion here by Procopius that if Justinian died Belisarius would have sought to succeed him, see Potter 2015: 193; Parnell 2023: 148–150.

⁴⁹ Haarer 2006: 1–5; cf. Av. Cameron's (1975) discussion of the role that Theodora's niece, the Empress Sophia, played in selecting Tiberius II and Maurice. Cameron also points out the greater power Sophia wielded in comparison to Theodora.

⁵⁰ Haarer 2006: 2.

At the time of Justinian's sickness, Germanus headed a family of immense social prestige. With close genealogical links to the House of Justin I and possibly to the royal Roman Anicii, Germanus in 542 was one of the richest and most powerful men in the mid-sixth-century East Roman empire.⁵¹ Yet we have only scanty information about important aspects of his life. The precise identity of his mother and father is uncertain. Considering Germanus' age and the fact that we know the names of Justinian's nephews and nieces, we can be confident that Germanus' family was closely related to Justin I.

It has been speculated that Germanus' family had emigrated to Constantinople at the turn of the sixth century. Alan Cameron has suggested that Germanus' father was an unidentified eastern Anicius who married a sister of Justin,⁵² while Brian Croke names one of Justin's brothers as Germanus' father.⁵³ Germanus' birthdate is also unknown. Given his progression in the Roman military, sometime in the late 480s to mid-490s is the likeliest date. When Justin became emperor in 518, Germanus, perhaps a decade younger than Justinian, stood at a similar level on the political ladder to that of Justinian, who at the time of Justin's ascension served in the *candidati* – an elite unit of imperial guardsmen consisting of forty men chosen for their dependability as well as their military prowess and fine physiques.⁵⁴

We know around this time that Germanus had obtained the highly sought rank for the senatorial aristocracy in Constantinople, that of *vir*

⁵¹ Jord. Get. 3.14: *in quo conjectum Aniciorum genus cum Amala stirpe spem adhuc utriusque generis, Domina praestante promittit*. Discussed in J. Signes Codoñer 2003: 73–75; here Signes Codoñer suggests that it was this link to the Anicii that so worried Theodora, since her side of the family might be marginalized, which explains her linking of her kin to the Anicii. There have been many attempts to uncover Germanus' precise connection to the Anicii. Mommsen 1882: 146, suggested that Germanus' mother was the daughter of Anicia Juliana. More recently, Tate 2004: 404 and Bjornlie 2013: 117, n. 63 contend that Germanus' first wife, Passara, who provided the link to the Italian Anicii. Cosentino 2016: 117, puts forward the possibility of a marriage between one of Germanus' sons and a woman belonging to the Anician family. The fact that Procopius never mentions Germanus' genealogical link to the Anicii may mean that it is spurious.

⁵² Al. Cameron 2012: 162.

⁵³ Croke 2007: 20.

⁵⁴ Croke 2007: 34–35.

illustris.⁵⁵ Justin had named Germanus as *magister militum per Thraciam*, 518–527. The decision quickly paid dividends. Procopius (*Bella* VIII 40, 7) describes Germanus' victory over the Antae shortly after this appointment. Germanus' career continued to flourish under Justinian. Though this identification is uncertain, he may be the Germanus described by Procopius (*Bella* I 13, 21), serving as a cavalry commander at the battle of Dara in the summer of 530, which had seen a Roman army led by Belisarius achieve a notable victory over the Persians.⁵⁶ By 536 at the latest he had obtained the title of *patricius* (Jord. *Rom.* 376, 383; *Get.* 81, 314) and the military rank of *magister militum praesentalis*,⁵⁷ a command that Justinian had held under Justin.⁵⁸ By the sixth century the *magister praesentalis* was a commander of detachments of the army in and around the capital. Hence, given the threat they might present to the ruler, the emperor appointed regime loyalists.⁵⁹

That Justinian assigned this command to Germanus speaks volumes about their close relationship at the time. Justinian had then sent Germanus to North Africa to replace the eunuch Solomon in 536,⁶⁰ where he crushed a mutiny led by one of Belisarius' former soldiers, Stotzas (*Bella* IV 16, 1–4; Marc. Com. 536, 2; 537, 3; Jord. *Get.* 310; Corrip. *Ioh.* III 317). In Africa, Germanus further proved his loyalty to the emperor when he thwarted another rebellion on the part of one of his own personal bodyguards, Maximinus, between 537 and 538. This challenging and risky command once again speaks volumes about Justinian's trust in Germanus. Moreover, unlike the rumours that swirled around Belisarius (*Bella* IV 8, 6), we never hear anything about Germanus ever

⁵⁵ Croke 2021: 53 n. 96.

⁵⁶ For this battle, see Lillington-Martin 2013.

⁵⁷ Just. Nov. 22 (536 March 18), where Germanus and one of six of Justinian's highest officials to whom copies of the novel were sent. The other general to receive the novel was not Belisarius but Sittas (Tzittas), the other *magister praesentalis* at the time. On the evolution of the *magister militum praesentalis*, see Jones 1964: 124–125; Treadgold 1995: 54–63.

⁵⁸ For the circumstances surrounding Justinian's appointment in 520, see Croke 2007: 35, n. 188.

⁵⁹ For Justinian's propensity to grant prime military commissions to men of proven loyalty, see Conant 2012: 228.

⁶⁰ Solomon, PLRE 3: 1167–1177.

seeking to betray Justinian while in North Africa. Even more, he was praised for his efficient administration of the province.⁶¹ The naming of his young son Justin as consul in 540 would have revealed to the wider Roman public the high regard in which Germanus and his family were held.

Yet, like most of Justinian's generals, Germanus experienced some less glorious moments as well. In 540, Germanus achieved more mixed results when Justinian sent him and his son Justin 'in great *disorder*' (θόρυβος) at the head of a vanguard of 300 soldiers to Roman Syria to protect the important city of Antioch from the Persian shah Khusro's (r. 531–579) army, which had launched a surprise invasion into Roman lands. These territories were denuded of many of Justinian's best troops and generals, who were busy fighting in North Africa and Italy (*Bella* II 6–9; Marc Com. 540, 1; Jo. Mal. XVIII, 87 [480]). Procopius specifying the number of troops as three hundred may be no accident. This is, of course, the exact number of Spartan troops that had fought gloriously to the last man against the Persians at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE, which granted the Greeks the needed time to then mobilize their army.⁶² Procopius exonerates Germanus by pointing out that (unlike their Greek forebears) Justinian had failed to send the promised relieving army (*Bella* II 6, 15). Only then does Germanus abandon Antioch to its fate. At the time, however, Germanus' failure to prevent Khusro's devastating sack of Antioch must have been humiliating.⁶³ Not coincidentally, Justinian replaced Germanus with Belisarius (*Bella* II 14, 18; Jord. Rom. 377). Germanus' replacement by Belisarius may have been the origins of friction between the pair, which is hinted at in *Bella* (VII 32, 19), though as two of Justinian's longest serving and preeminent generals, this rivalry may have developed earlier.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, this

⁶¹ Marc. Com. 536.9: 'Germanus in Africa feliciter administrat.'

⁶² As Conor Whately has pointed out to me, we do have other examples of units of 300 in Procopius, e.g., *Bella* I 13, 19; II 3, 13; V 5, 4; 14, 1; 26, 19; 27, 11; 27, 13; VI 5, 2; 12, 40; VII 18, 29; 22, 3; 22, 21; 27, 3; 30, 6. Yet, considering that Germanus would have had access to the imperial units within the capital, three hundred men seems to be unusually small number to send against the Persians' huge invading force. For example (*Bella* VI 7, 25–26), John had 2,000 calvary when he raided Picenum in 538.

⁶³ On this sack, see Brands 2019.

⁶⁴ For this animosity, see Stewart 2020: 181–191.

competition between two of his most successful generals may not have troubled the emperor too much; Justinian's tendency to play his leading generals off one another has been seen as a partial reason that he stayed in power for so long.⁶⁵

Considering his difficulties against the Persians, Germanus' return to Constantinople in early 541 and his subsequent lack of military commands until 548 might indicate a cooling relationship between him and the imperial couple. This is a plausible conjecture. We have, however, no explicit evidence for such a claim. There is a simpler explanation for Germanus' seven-year residence in Constantinople: he had retired. As we discussed, Germanus had served loyally in Roman armies in four different decades, and by 541 at the very least he was approaching fifty. So, too, was his first wife, Passara, dead by this time.⁶⁶ Hence, rather than seek another command he instead chose to settle down in Constantinople to raise his now motherless children – Justin, Justina, and Justinian.⁶⁷ It was still a bit soon to seek suitable partners for them, but after settling in he may have begun looking for a second wife for himself, which would have entailed establishing connections amongst Constantinople's most respected families.

At this point his children were not yet at an age when it would have been urgent to look for future partners. In 541 Justina would have been twelve or thirteen. The ages of his sons are more difficult to pin down, but they both would have been living with their father. Justin (consul 540) was anywhere from eleven to fifteen, and his younger brother Justinian a year or two younger. As we will see, the real troubles between Theodora and Germanus (and Justinian) that Procopius details in *Wars* and *Secret History* likely arose sometime after the succession crisis of 542, when Justinian and Theodora may have begun to worry that now

⁶⁵ Rance 2005: 469–470.

⁶⁶ For the possibility that Germanus was around the same age as Justinian, or even older, see Croke 2005: 423. Writing about Germanus' subsequent marriage to the Gothic Queen Matasuentha around 549, Procopius (*Bella* VII 39, 14) is vague about when Passara had died, only mentioning that it had been a long time ago. On the political circumstances at the time of Germanus' and Matasuentha's wedding, see Van Hoof, Van Nuffelen 2017: 277–278.

⁶⁷ Iustinus 5, PLRE 3: 754; Iustinianus 3, PLRE 3: 744–747.

that Germanus had established himself as a viable candidate for the purple he might, at some point, expedite Justinian's exit from the stage.

Finally, one must note that the entire discussion of Justinian's illness and the political aftermath comes from a section in *Secret History* on Belisarius, not the part on Justinian, as one might suspect.⁶⁸ This is a clue that we should always keep Belisarius in mind, even when he is not in the narrative.

Treachery?

Germanus and Theodora were not the only ones worrying about their place in a future regime if Justinian died. According to Procopius, rumors about Justinian's ailment – and even that Justinian had already died – had leaked from the palace. The rumors eventually reached the Roman military encampment dealing with Khusro's second major attack on Roman lands since the first one Germanus had confronted in 540. Whether this communication occurred through official or non-official channels, and how long the news took to travel from Constantinople to the frontier, is impossible to say with certainty.⁶⁹ All we know for sure is that when the message did arrive a heated discussion over possible succession ensued. Procopius describes unspecified commanders, declaring that if 'the Romans, set up another in Constantinople as emperor over them, they would never submit to him (*Anec.* IV 2).'⁷⁰

Procopius hedges here by not providing the subversive general's names, only saying that once Justinian had recovered the generals within the Roman high-command were caught by surprise and scrambled to prove their loyalty to his regime by slandering one another. In an instance of possible strategic silence, Procopius never reveals

⁶⁸ For the construction by modern editors of *Secret History* into the current structure of chapter divisions, see Pfeilschifter 2021: 121–122.

⁶⁹ As Greatrex notes (2021: 573, n. 14), in emergency situations this journey could take as little as ten days.

⁷⁰ Procop. *Anec.* IV 2: ἐνταῦθα ἔλεγον τῶν ἀρχόντων τινὲς ὡς, ἣν βασιλέα Ῥωμαῖοι ἕτερόν τινα ἐν Βυζαντίῳ καταστήσονται σφίσι, οὐ μήποτε αὐτοὶ ἐπιτρέψωσιν. Dewing inaccurately translated this passage as a 'second Justinian,' which unnecessarily and inaccurately changes the meaning and political context.

whom this new emperor might have been. As we noted above, it was likely someone selected by Theodora or, more plausibly to my mind, Germanus.⁷¹

Yet Procopius mentions neither. All readers to decide the ‘truth’ for themselves, Procopius only says that two of Belisarius’ subordinates,⁷² the generals Peter and John the Glutton, who were with the army in the east, had declared ‘obstinately’ that it was the joint supreme commanders (*magistri militum per Orientem*) in the east at the time, Belisarius and Buzes, who had voiced their concerns about succession. Procopius does not tell us who they told this to, but their accusation eventually got back to Theodora. These were serious charges; a general could be killed for merely planning rebellion.⁷³ However, neither John nor Peter were particularly trustworthy witnesses. Peter and John were subordinates to Belisarius and Buzes, who, as the reader of *Wars* would know, had bones to pick with Belisarius. Peter had previously disobeyed Belisarius’ orders (*Bella* II 18, 16–25), which led to a defeat against the Persians, while John (*Bella* II 19, 28–29) had bungled as well, drawing Belisarius’ ire. As Geoffrey Greatrex posits, they may have pointed the finger at Belisarius and Buzes, ‘in a bid to deflect accusations against themselves.’⁷⁴ To this observation I would add that through all of this subterfuge it might have been Procopius’ intention to suggest that Belisarius was falsely accused and had been, as always, the loyal subordinate. This would follow a pattern in *Secret History* of an emasculated Belisarius being dominated by what Procopius saw as his natural subordinates in both his private life – Antonina – and his public life – Theodora, John, and Peter. All of this culminates at the close of the section on Belisarius (Bks. II–V), with Theodora bullying Belisarius into betrothing his daughter Ioannína to her grandson, Anastasius

⁷¹ For Procopius’ adulation of Germanus and that he was seen as a possible successor to Justinian in the 540s, see Signes Codoñer 2003: 47–82; cf., however, Croke 2005, 2022.

⁷² Parnell 2023: 234, n. 26

⁷³ See the example of Vitalian’s murder at the behest of the emperor Justin for plotting rebellion, discussed in Croke 2007: 35.

⁷⁴ Greatrex 2021: 571. On just how viable a candidate Belisarius was to be named emperor, see Börm, 2013: 63–91.

(the son of her unnamed illegitimate daughter)⁷⁵ to get her hands on the general's vast fortune.⁷⁶

Following another trope deployed throughout *Secret History*, rather than discussing the story from either Buzes' or Belisarius' viewpoints, Procopius foregrounds Theodora's motivations, all-the-while Justinian remains firmly in the background.⁷⁷ Theodora reacts as one might suspect in *Secret History*, interpreting the alleged statement by Belisarius and Buzes as a direct slur against herself and then immediately recalling all four of the commanders back to Constantinople to face a formal investigation. I would agree with Michael Whitby that it was more likely a now recovered Justinian who had ordered the generals back to the capital. In *Wars* (II 31, 24), Procopius only says that Belisarius returned to Constantinople after Justinian had ordered him to return to Italy to thwart the revival of the Goths; the eighteen-month gap between commands is not explained. Here, *Secret History* comes closer to the truth.

According to Procopius, Belisarius was cleared of all charges, but Theodora coaxed Justinian to strip him of his command. That Theodora pushed Justinian to make this choice is again implausible. It is more likely that Justinian had made the decision and was already thinking of having his best general return to Italy, which had seen the resurgence of the Goths under the capable leadership of a new king, Baudila/Totila.⁷⁸ Another of Justinian's long-serving generals, Martin, replaced Belisarius as *magister militum per Orientem*, which Whitby dates to the winter of 542/543, though Greatrex posits that this appointment had occurred much earlier.⁷⁹

Buzes suffers a more onerous fate than Belisarius. Procopius, however, leaves it to the reader to guess what Buzes had done to incur

⁷⁵ For the likelihood this daughter was illegitimate and some comments on the social and political limitations placed upon 'bastards' in Roman society, see Al. Cameron 1978: 271–272.

⁷⁶ For a recent estimate of Belisarius' wealth, see Parnell 2023: 211–212.

⁷⁷ Following Procop. *Bella* II 21, 34, Whitby (2021: 417) reasonably posits that Justinian had recovered by the time of the recall and therefore made the decision to dismiss Belisarius.

⁷⁸ On Baudila/Totila, see Cristini 2022.

⁷⁹ Greatrex 2021: 576.

Theodora's greater wrath, though some have assumed that it was because Belisarius represented a more dangerous target.⁸⁰ Procopius offers an absurd version of Buzes' internment. After being ordered to meet Theodora in the women's chambers, the empress has him thrown into a secret pit beneath this part of the palace, where Procopius tells us the empress imprisoned anyone who troubled her. Buzes would languish for two years and four months, until in what Procopius describes as a rare change of heart, the empress released Buzes. Buzes nevertheless emerges from prison as a physical wreck, and Procopius laments that 'Everyone stared at him as if he were dead. For the rest of his life the unfortunate man suffered from bad eyesight and his body was sickly (*Anec.* IV 12).' Despite its obvious rhetorical purpose as part of a wider condemnation of Theodora, and to a lesser degree Belisarius, consensus accepts the basic outline of the story Procopius tells here.⁸¹ Though not even his accusers nor Procopius go so far to say it, some modern historians believe that if Justinian had died Belisarius would have sought to succeed him.⁸²

It has been noted that the planned insurrection by Buzes and Belisarius was the closest the military had come in the sixth century to overthrowing the civilian government in Constantinople.⁸³ We have some supporting evidence for the basic truths for Procopius' account, since we find signs in another source of Belisarius' short-lived disgrace in early 543, where the continuer of the *Chronicle of Marcellinus* declares, 'Belisarius was summoned from the East and, although running into enmity and serious danger and being exposed to envy, he was again sent back to Italy' (*Marc. Com.* 545, 3). Belisarius' oath not to rebel (*Bella* VI 29, 19–20) only applied if Justinian ruled, so Belisarius may not have accepted anyone except himself to succeed Justinian.⁸⁴ It might also explain Belisarius' comparatively light punishment, since Justinian too recognized that Belisarius' oath applied only to him and not to any successor, whomever that may have been.

⁸⁰ Av. Cameron 1985: 72.

⁸¹ E.g., Parnell 2023: 150–151; cf., however, Whitby 2021: 417.

⁸² Potter 2015: 193.

⁸³ Parnell 2017: 198 n. 109; Potter 2015: 193.

⁸⁴ This is a point I owe to David Parnell.

So, too, is there an otherwise unexplained gap in Buzes' service record, where we only find him leading Roman armies again in the year after Theodora's death, in 548.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, there are also some strange incongruencies in Procopius' portrait of Buzes, especially when we compare the differing accounts in *Secret History* and the versions in *Wars*. Buzes' supposed life-long afflictions do not seem to have hindered him much. Procopius records (*Bella* VII 34) that Buzes had obtained a command against the Gepids in 549, and we know from Procopius' continuer, Agathias, that Buzes had garnered another prestigious command in 554. Either Buzes had recovered miraculously or, more likely, Procopius had exaggerated the harshness of his imprisonment.⁸⁶

I, like others, doubt that Buzes had spent two years imprisoned in the basement beneath Theodora's palace bedroom, though he had suffered some sort of punishment.⁸⁷ Here we see Procopius' *modus operandi* throughout *Secret History*, to take an episode with a basis of truth and then sprinkle it with some exaggeration or outright lies. Moreover, there may be another reason for Theodora's change of heart towards Buzes in early 545, and this may be the impending marriage of his cousin John to Justina, the daughter of Germanus, that summer.⁸⁸ But before unpacking the tangled web of politicking behind that wedding, let us first return to Belisarius' and Procopius' version of his disgrace that led the general to arrange his daughter and sole heir, Ioannína, to marry Theodora's grandson.

Once Belisarius was cleared we do not know exactly how long it took for the general to return to favor. To ascertain the magnitude of the rift between Justinian and Belisarius one must carefully read between the lines of *Secret History*. Scholars have suggested that this 'disgrace' lasted anywhere from a few months to a year or longer. I would go for the former figure, suggesting that there are other reasons that could explain why Belisarius stayed in Constantinople. Some may have been

⁸⁵ Theodora's death: *Bella* II 30, 49; VII 30, 4; *Anec.* V 23, 27.

⁸⁶ These incongruencies also offer another possible clue that *Secret History* was written in the late 540s before being abandoned, c. 550. If it had been composed later one would think Procopius would have corrected the disconnect between the portrait of Buzes in *Secret History* and the one in Book VII of *Wars*.

⁸⁷ Potter 2015: 194; Whitby 2021: 417; cf., however, Foss 2002: 144.

⁸⁸ For these scions of Vitalian, see Parnell 2017: 139–142.

due to the general's need to gather fresh recruits for the campaign. Besides the fact that many of Justinian's and Belisarius' best troops were now assigned to the Persian border, deaths from the plague would have impacted the army both in the soldiers and the pool of recruits it killed, and by the economic hardships it brought on, which exacerbated Justinian's inability after 540 to fund his numerous campaigns on different fronts or to pay his troops. Much of this time in and around Constantinople may have been spent by Belisarius trying to gather the funds and the soldiers to head to Italy.⁸⁹ That he had failed to adequately do both tasks is evident from Procopius' account of Belisarius' struggles in the years after he arrived in Ravenna in the spring of 545, where a shortage of soldiers, money, and supplies prevented Belisarius from achieving the glories in this second campaign that he had achieved during his first.

There is a second explanation for Belisarius' eighteen-month sojourn in Constantinople. Though I am now moving further into the realm of speculation, one might connect Belisarius' presence in the city to Justinian and Theodora's lingering fear of usurpation or assassination, not by Belisarius but rather Germanus or another unnamed usurper. We learn from the failed plot to assassinate Justinian in 548/549 that the band of Pers-Armenian conspirators had prioritized carrying out the assassination of the emperor before Belisarius and his contingent of elite guardsmen arrived back to the capital from the general's second campaign in Italy (*Bella* VII 32, 19).⁹⁰ They had a backup plan, however. If Belisarius happened to arrive back to the capital before the assassination they would kill Belisarius and the emperor simultaneously, 'since it would then be easier to arrange matters to their liking' (VII 32, 39).

⁸⁹ Procopius (*Bella* II 28, 1) does mention that Justinian's nephew, the general Justus, had died of 'disease', which has reasonably been interpreted as plague. Nevertheless, his failure to mention its impact on the army is not that surprising, considering he was mainly interested in the higher command and officer corps, on which see Whately 2022. Moreover, though Procopius does not make the connection, Justinian's inability to pay his troops and fund his campaigns in Italy and elsewhere after 542, Sarris (2021) and others have demonstrated convincingly the impact of Plague on the East Roman war effort and wider economy.

⁹⁰ This plot is covered in Meier 2003a: 261–263; Stewart 2020: 176–191.

Procopius has the conspirators voice the assumption that in 548/549 Belisarius would have opposed a regime headed by Germanus.

As noted above, Belisarius would probably not have supported Germanus as emperor in 542 either. This is not so strange if Belisarius had been Germanus' commanding officer at Dara in 530, something that may have grated on the blue-blooded Germanus' nerves. And we know that Germanus was ambitious. Procopius records that after he was named as the commander of the army in 550, tasked to return to Italy, 'a great ambition took hold of Germanus, to achieve for himself the overthrow of the Goths, so that he would be credited with the recovery of both Libya and Italy for the Roman Empire' (VII 39, 11). Though nowhere in this digression does Procopius mention Belisarius, clearly Procopius has Germanus claiming Belisarius' accomplishments in 533 and 540 on his mind in 550. It is not too great a step, then, to suspect that this rivalry had deep roots.

There is another puzzling element in Procopius' account of Belisarius' disgrace that one could logically attribute to Theodora and Justinian's unease in late 542. This is that Justinian forced Belisarius to hand over his large contingent of bodyguards/soldiers (δορυφόρους τε καὶ ὑπασπιστάς) to 'certain officers and Palace eunuchs.' It is worth quoting in full:

As for Belisarius, though he was convicted of none of the charges, the emperor, at the insistence of the empress, relieved him of command, which he had held and appointed Martin as General of the East in his stead, and the emperor ordered that Belisarius' spear-bearers and shield-bearers along with any of his Household servants skilled in warfare to be detached from him and dispersed to other officers and eunuchs within the palace [*italics in original?*]. So, the latter cast lots over them, men, and weapon alike, to distribute them all amongst themselves as chance would have it for each one (*Anec.* IV 13–14).⁹¹

⁹¹ 'Βελισάριον δὲ βασιλεὺς, καίπερ οὐδενὸς τῶν κατηγορουμένων ἀλόντα, ἐγκειμένης τῆς βασιλίδος παραλύσας ἧς εἶχεν ἀρχῆς Μαρτίνον ἀντὶ αὐτοῦ τῆς ἐφ' αὐτὸν στρατηγὸν κατεστήσατο, τοὺς τε Βελισαρίου δορυφόρους τε καὶ ὑπασπιστάς, καὶ τῶν οἰκετῶν εἴ τι ἐν πολέμῳ δόκιμον ἦν, τῶν τε ἀρχόντων καὶ τῶν ἐν Παλατίῳ εὐνούχων τισὶν ἐπέστειλε διαδάσασθαι. οἱ δὲ κλήρους ἐπ' ἐκείνοις ἐμβεβλημένοι αὐτοῖς ὄπλους ἅπαντας ἐν σφίσιν αὐτοῖς διενείμαντο, ὡς πη κατατυχεῖν ἐκάστω συνέβη.

This absorption of Belisarius' personal guard to serve within the imperial guards and Martin's army in the east is usually accepted by contemporary scholarship with only minor modifications. But there are reasons to be suspicious of Procopius' account. We can observe that Procopius is vague about the precise number involved in the handover. Though in *Wars* (VII 1, 20) Procopius maintains that at one point during his first campaign in Italy Belisarius had 7,000 guardsmen, the numbers that had accompanied him to Constantinople would have been much smaller, large enough to offer him protection but not so many as to spook the emperor and empress. That some of Belisarius' units – both those who had accompanied Belisarius and those who had remained on the eastern front – were handed over to Martin and headed back to the eastern borderlands is not unusual, since that area of operations would soon heat up again and they would be needed. Yet, that some were given to palace eunuchs (and other officers) suggests that Justinian was seeking to bolster his imperial palace guard units, such as the *protectores*, *domestici*, *excubitores*, and *candidati*.⁹² Of the 5,500 members of the *scholares* that served within and outside the capital (3,500 regulars and 2,000 supernumeraries), around 500 were deployed within the imperial palace itself (*Anec.* XXIV 15–20). Procopius (*Anec.* XXIV 21–29) and his near contemporary Agathias (*Hist.* V 15, 4) both lament the deterioration of these guardsmen's fighting skills, since many positions within these units had become honorary and were no longer linked to these individuals' martial prowess but rather to the influence of their families.⁹³

Therefore, Justinian's need for Belisarius' guardsmen may have stemmed from necessity rather than punishment. The units of *scholae palatinae* (palace guardsmen) surely needed bolstering, since we would expect that deaths from the recent pandemic had thinned their ranks.⁹⁴

⁹² On the duties and evolution of the *protectores* and *domestici* from the fourth to the sixth centuries, see Emion 2017. On the *candidati*, see Whitby 1987.

⁹³ Al. Cameron 1972: 137; cf. Av. Cameron 1970: 49–50; Whitby 1987: 466, n. 66. As Alan Cameron rightly points out, these units did prove to be effective at certain crucial points during Justinian's reign.

⁹⁴ As David Parnell (2023: 236, n. 2) suggests, 'Belisarius departure in 544 would fit right in that time frame in which the army would have lost veteran soldiers to the plague in 542/543 and not yet been able to replace them all.'

Second, the emperor may have wanted some additional battle-hardened soldiers to augment ranks filled with mostly ceremonial ones. Third, maybe Justinian believed he could not trust some of the existing units. This would not have been paranoia on his part. The *scholae* and *excubitores*, and at least one member of the *candidati*, had betrayed him in the past. During a popular uprising in January 532, known as the Nika Revolt, Justinian was nearly overthrown, largely because many of the *scholae* and the *excubitores* had gone over to the rebels.⁹⁵ It seems logical, then, that in the aftermath of the recent succession crisis the emperor may have been wary of the loyalty of some of the current guards.

Nonetheless, I must point out that most of these guardsmen and household servants' primary loyalty would have been to Belisarius. Indeed, most would have sworn an oath of loyalty (*sacramentum*) to Belisarius, not to the emperor. And while we moderns may discount the significance of these oaths, in the sixth century, especially amongst soldiers, they were much more binding.⁹⁶ One must ask just how trustworthy would these soldiers have been? Put another way, why risk having men loyal to Belisarius guard the most intimate regions of the palace if you did not trust them to protect you and your wife's lives? I believe that this is yet another instance of Procopius twisting the truth.

The literary aspects of the entire episode are clear. After being forced to give up his bodyguards and prevented from interacting with his closest associates, Procopius paints a sad picture of a gloomy Belisarius skulking around Constantinople as a private citizen in constant terror of being pounced on by an assassin. This tale of woe culminates with Belisarius – ‘worn-out by servile fears and apprehensions which were cowardly and entirely unmanly’ (*Anec.* IV 22: φόβοις τε ἀνδραποδώδεσι καὶ μερίμναις ἀποκναιόμενος φιλοψύχοις τε καὶ ὄλως ἀνάνδροις) – fleeing the palace back to his residence, terrified that he would be set upon by imperial assassins. When one of Theodora's messengers arrived at Belisarius' residence the general feared

⁹⁵ Discussed in Stewart 2023a.

⁹⁶ On the extent of the Roman emperor's trust in the *sacramentum* to assure allegiance in the Late Roman army, see Hebblewhite 2016: 134–142. cf., the c. 600 Strategikon's (*Strat.* 11.2.16–20) condemnation of the Avars for their failure to honor oaths. On the power of oaths more generally in the Age of Justinian, see Pazdernik 2009, Wuk 2022.

the worst. Procopius reports that ‘Belisarius leapt onto his bed and laid upon his back, serving himself up to be slaughtered, so completely had his manliness deserted him’ (*Anec.* IV 25),⁹⁷ only to discover that the man had not been sent to murder him but to give him a message from the empress, which declared that Theodora, at the behest of Antonina, had forgiven Belisarius. After supposedly paying an enormous fine of 3,000 pounds of gold (or 216,000 *nomismata*) to Justinian, the emperor returned the remainder of Belisarius’ property to him and appointed him as ‘commander of the imperial stables’ (*comes sacri stabuli/ ἄρχων ἱπποκόμος* [*Anec.* IV 39]).⁹⁸ An overjoyed Belisarius ran to Antonina, and kissing her feet swore ‘that henceforth he would not be her husband but her trusted slave’ (*Anec.* IV 30: ἀνδράποδον δὲ αὐτῆς τὸ ἐνθένδε πιστὸν ὠμολόγει καὶ οὐκ ἀνὴρ ἔσεσθαι).⁹⁹ This reversal in what the historian considered the proper gender dynamics in marriages finds Procopius making the ridiculous claim that Belisarius wanted to return to command against the Persians, but Antonina refused to allow it because her husband had insulted her there, forcing him to head to Italy a second time. Besides the gendered inversions at play here – where Procopius ridicules Belisarius for his obsession with a purportedly sixty-year-old Antonina¹⁰⁰ – follows the pattern of the Roman polemic of inverting the virtues found in encomia and panegyric.¹⁰¹ This portrait of an unmanly Belisarius simply inverts Procopius’ account from *Wars* (VII 1, 5–8), describing the general’s first semi-retirement after capturing the Gothic king Vitigis in 540, where a resplendent and manly Belisarius, surrounded by his intimidating cadre of barbarian bodyguards, proudly marched around the capital each morning, fearing

⁹⁷ ὅπερ ἐπεὶ Βελισάριος ἤκουσε, χεῖρας καὶ πόδας ἐπὶ τῆς στιβάδος ἐλκύσας ὕπιος ἔκειτο, πρὸς τὴν ἀναίρεσιν ἐτοιμώτατος· οὕτως ἅπαν αὐτὸν τὸ ἀρρενωπὸν ἀπελελοίπει.

⁹⁸ As Hendy 1985: 171 has suggested, this amount is a gross exaggeration on Procopius’ part. For a comparison, Justinian was only able to collect annually five to six million *solidi/nomismata* in tax from the entire empire.

⁹⁹ Av. Cameron 1985: 74, n. 49.

¹⁰⁰ For the implausibility of this assertion and Antonina’s likely real age, see Parnell 2023: 14. Cf. the negative connotations (*Anec.* IX 30) that Procopius gives to Justinian’s ‘overpowering love’ (ἔρωτα ἐξάϊσιον) for Theodora.

¹⁰¹ E.g., Aphth. *Prog.* 28, 3–6 (Rabe 1926).

neither man nor woman.¹⁰² As Averil Cameron has pointed out, ‘all this elaborate scenario of feminine intrigue is merely a device.’¹⁰³ Concerning this observation, I would only question the degree of Belisarius’ disgrace.

Procopius indeed lets it slip that Belisarius had not given all his bodyguards or property to Justinian. Procopius describes how Belisarius habitually went from his residence to the palace, ‘accompanied by his pitiful and meagre retinue (*Anec.* IV 20–21).’¹⁰⁴ While Procopius meant this statement to be derogatory, it contradicts his claim that during his disgrace Belisarius had no retinue at all and had been forbidden contact with any of his associates.

Therefore, the reality behind Belisarius’ reinstatement was less dramatic than Procopius or modern accounts make it. As part of their reconciliation, Belisarius provided Justinian with some of his bodyguards, household servants, and a portion of his vast wealth to protect both their positions in Constantinople. Justinian wanted to ensure that the soldiers guarding him and Theodora in the palace were not Germanus’ or another contender’s creatures, so he used some of the soldiers from the general he trusted most, Belisarius. Belisarius, then, surely would not have needed all his guardsmen. But there would have been a financial incentive to do so. When on campaign Belisarius could depend on a steady flow of booty to help pay for his retinue. But while in Constantinople, Belisarius would be responsible for paying hundreds or even thousands of now idle soldiers. By loaning some of these men to Justinian he could expect the emperor to share part of this onerous burden while maintaining his men’s loyalty at a decreased cost.¹⁰⁵ Speculating further, I would suggest that one of the reasons Belisarius had spent eighteen months in Constantinople before sailing to Italy in 544 may have been that his presence would have discouraged a usurpation or assassination by former contenders for the purple who now realized

¹⁰² For Procopius inverting, in *Secret History*, of many of Belisarius’s virtues in *Wars*, see Stewart 2022: 278.

¹⁰³ Av. Cameron 1985: 74.

¹⁰⁴ Procop. *Anec.* IV 20 (transl. Kaldellis): ἐγένετο δὲ ὧδε. ἤλθε μὲν ποτε Βελισάριος πρῶτ’ ἐς Παλάτιον, ἥπερ εἰώθει, ξὺν ἀνθρώποις οἰκτροῖς τε καὶ ὀλίγοις τισίν.

¹⁰⁵ I owe this point concerning Belisarius’ goal to avoid paying these idle soldiers of Marco Cristini.

that Justinian was not going to die anytime soon. Would Theodora and Justinian have been so foolish as to keep Belisarius in the capital if he really had his eyes on the throne, or if he might throw his support behind another candidate? No, they trusted these bodyguards because the evidence suggests that Belisarius supported the emperor's decision to integrate them into the imperial guards.

So, as I suggested above, during his time in Constantinople Belisarius was gathering supplies, raising money, and recruiting soldiers to join him on campaign in Italy, something we know that he did in Thrace on his way to Italy in 544 (*Bella* VII 10, 1–3). From the later recruiting campaign of Germanus in 550 (*Bella* VII 39, 16), we can extrapolate that Belisarius would have used both his own funds and Justinian's to coax spearmen and guardsmen of other officers from garrisons in and around the capital to join the Italian campaign. As the early life pathways of the emperor Justin and the generals Sittas and Belisarius demonstrate, Constantinople had long attracted soldiers of fortune from within and outside the empire's borderlands. Yet even this supply seemed to have dwindled by 543/544. That Belisarius did not have enough soldiers with him when he returned to Italy for a second time in 544 is one thing that both *Secret History* and *Wars* agree. This earlier recruitment campaign would have taken time since, as we have observed, many of his *bucellarii* were in the east, where they would fight in the campaigns against the Persians in 543/544, and deaths from plague would have further diminished the pool of candidates.

This manpower crisis, both within the palace guard units and Belisarius' expeditionary force, is a convincing sign that Bubonic Plague had impacted both the war effort and day-to-day politics in Constantinople. Procopius never makes the causal connection, preferring instead to emphasize the role of Belisarius and the Roman high-command's moral and masculine decline after 540.¹⁰⁶ This is another reminder that for Procopius the events described in this highly rhetorical narrative were important primarily for the aspects of the characters of Belisarius and Theodora that they revealed. The fact that Belisarius had given some of his bodyguards to Justinian in 542/543 would have

¹⁰⁶ For the key role of individuals in shaping historical events in Procopius, see Brodka 2021: 205.

only been dimly remembered at the time Procopius was writing at the close of the decade, and hence the historian may have concluded that it would make an edifying anecdote by which to highlight his main thesis that Belisarius' failures during his second campaign in Italy could be attributed to the great general's emasculation at the hands of Antonina and Theodora. Nevertheless, as we have seen, there are valuable nuggets of information that slip through, as well as those that allow us to recover at least part of the more complicated reality.

The truth is that whatever rift had developed between Belisarius and Justinian/Theodora seems to have closed in 543. *Secret History* (*Anec.* IV 37), as it commonly does, provides further background reporting that the reconciliation between Belisarius and Theodora was made complete with a betrothal sometime likely in 543 of Belisarius' and Antonina's only child Ioannína with Theodora's grandson Anastasius. Of course, Procopius puts a sinister spin on it:

The man's great wealth had long grated on Justinian and Theodora. They kept saying that he had treacherously hidden away the bulk of the public funds of Gelimer and Vitigis, and given only an insignificant portion of them to the emperor. But they weighed the man's hard work against the defamation that they would incur from others, and besides, they could concoct no credible accusation, so they bided their time. But now that the empress had caught him in a state of abject terror and completely cowed, in a single stroke made herself mistress of his entire property. For the two of them became in-laws when Ioannína, the daughter of Belisarius and his only child, was engaged to Anastasius, the son of the empress' daughter (*Anec.* IV 33–37).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ ἐκ παλαιοῦ δὲ Ἰουστινιανόν τε καὶ Θεοδώραν πλοῦτος ὁ τούτου τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀκριβῶς ἔκνιζεν, ὑπέρογκός τε ὢν καὶ βασιλικῆς αὐλῆς ἄξιος. ἔφασκόν τε ὡς τῶν δημοσίων χρημάτων Γελιμερός τε καὶ Οὐιττίγιδος τὸ πλεῖστον ἀποκρυψάμενος λάθρα ἔτυχε, μοῖραν δὲ αὐτῶν βραχεῖάν τε τινα καὶ οὐδαμῆ ἀξιόλογον βασιλεῖ ἔδωκε. πόνους δὲ τοὺς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τῶν ἔξωθεν τὴν βλασφημίαν διαριθμοῦμενοι, ἅμα δὲ καὶ σκῆψιν ἀξιοχρεῶν ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐδεμίαν κεκομισμένοι ἠσυχῆ ἕμενον. τότε δὲ ἡ βασιλις αὐτοῦ λαβομένη κατωρρωδηκότος τε καὶ ἀποδειλιάσαντος ὄλως πράξει μῆ διεπράξατο ξυμπάσης αὐτοῦ τῆς οὐσίας κυρία γενέσθαι ἐς κῆδος γὰρ ἀλλήλοις ξυνηλθέτην εὐθὺς, Ἰωαννίνα τε ἡ Βελισαρίου θυγάτηρ, ἥσπερ μόνης ἐγενόνη πατήρ, Ἀναστασίῳ τῷ τῆς βασιλίδος θυγατριδῷ μνηστῆ γέγονε.

We are uncertain of Ioannína's exact age at the time of the betrothal, but most believe she was under twelve years old, since one at the time could legally marry at twelve and one could legally be betrothed as young as seven.¹⁰⁸ She may, however, have been slightly older, since despite no legal impediment, elite women at the time usually married when they were between fifteen and seventeen, or as we will see even older.

We should furthermore reject Procopius' claim in *Secret History* that Theodora's only interest in linking her grandson (from an unnamed and likely illegitimate daughter) to Belisarius' daughter was her hunger for his wealth and property. Though there may have been some financial motivation,¹⁰⁹ the primary impetus for Theodora was more immediate and practical: first, it would bind Justinian's loyal general to her side of the family as well; second, it would provide her family yet another pathway to long-lived social prominence. What more could a grandmother ask? Of course, in the biased storyline found in the *Secret History*, a domineering Theodora and her accomplice Justinian – whom we are told had long coveted Belisarius' wealth – were only interested in the marriage to bully an emasculated Belisarius to cede both his property and daughter.

Once again, the reality was surely more nuanced. The betrothal was based on what at the time may have been a mutual desire to tie the two families together. What better way to prove to the wider public that any troubles between the emperor and his best general had ended? Given that a contemporary of Belisarius, the general Sittas had married Theodora's older sister Komito in 528, it was certainly not an unprecedented step for the empress to link her kin to one of Justinian's generals. Moreover, as David Parnell submits, 'This engagement was a promise for the future rather than a plan for immediate action.' Along these lines, since Antonina accompanied Belisarius to Italy and

¹⁰⁸ On the debates surrounding Ioannína's age, see Parnell 2023: 14, 153.

¹⁰⁹ As Lin (forthcoming) notes, in 565 Belisarius's estate and fortune did fall into imperial hands and was managed by one of Theodora's kinsmen, a certain George (Jo. Mal. XVIII 149). Lin posits further that it was Antonina's son and Belisarius's stepson, Photios, who helped bring this to fruition. As Lin further points out (2021: 132), that at his death, Justinian's nephew, Marcellus, had also given his property to the state (John Eph. 5, 18). Hence, this was not that unusual.

Ioannína had stayed behind in Constantinople, this agreement would have also granted the general's daughter a safe adoptive household to stay in while her parents were away. Indeed, the house of John the Capadocian, which a contemporary source tells us Theodora had gifted to Belisarius around this time, may have served as the young girl's residence (Marc. Com. 544, 3).¹¹⁰

In Procopius' account, however, this 'forced' union serves as a further sign both of Belisarius' emasculation at the hands of Theodora and his wife and as an omen of the future of the marriage alliance. In Procopius' snarky opinion, having ceded his 'natural' dominant masculine status, both Belisarius' second campaign in Italy and the marriage between Ioannína and Anastasius were doomed from the beginning. Even worse, instead of turning on those who had offended him, Belisarius meekly obeyed both his wife and the imperial couple (*Anec.* IV 40–41). Here is additional proof that *Secret History* may have been aimed at the supporters of Germanus. Procopius makes it clear that Belisarius lacked the necessary virility to stand up and punish his tormentors – Antonina, Theodora, and Justinian. Those hoping for a revolution led by Belisarius would be disappointed (*Anec.* IV 40).¹¹¹ Yet all hope was not lost for those seeking to end the repression of Justinian and Theodora. It is no coincidence that in the next book another man whom the empress offended, Germanus stands up to Theodora. Who better to take on the task Belisarius had failed to take up? Book V, indeed, opens with the ominous statement: 'Belisarius, coming to Italy for a second time, departed from there most ignominiously.' As we shall see, in this book – the final one in the section on Belisarius – it is another wedding, between Germanus' daughter Justina and the general John that pushed Belisarius' teetering campaign in Italy over the edge and led to the dissolution of Ioannína's and Anastasius' relationship.

¹¹⁰ John had been exiled in August of 541, but as Croke surmises (1995: 136), it may have been gifted in 544.

¹¹¹ πάντες μὲν οὖν ὑπετόπαζον τὰ τε ἀμφὶ τῇ γυναικὶ ταύτῃ, ἥπερ ἐρρήθη, Βελισάριον διοικῆσαι καὶ βασιλεῖ ταῦτα ὁμολογήσαι ἀμφὶ τῷ πολέμῳ ἃ δεδιήγηται, ἀπαλαξείοντα τῆς ἐν Βυζαντίῳ διατριβῆς, ἐπειδὴν τε τάχιστα τοῦ τῆς πόλεως περιβόλου ἐκτὸς γένηται, ἀρπάσασθαι τε αὐτίκα τὰ ὄπλα καὶ τι γενναῖον καὶ ἀνδρὶ πρέπον ἐπὶ τε τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ τοῖς βιασαμένοις φρονήσῃν. Cf. Kaldellis 2014: 400, n. 652.

The Fixers

By the early spring of 545, Justinian sat more securely on his throne. A more confident ruler had ‘on March 23, 544 issued Novel 122 (Novella 122 in CIC, 3: 592–93), wherein he asserted that the plague’s ravages as terminated.’¹¹² During the fall of 544 Belisarius had arrived in Ravenna, which must have at least briefly made the emperor more optimistic about a campaign that, after his illness, had increasingly been neglected since the plague struck in 542. The emperor appears to have increasingly focused on religious matters and dealing with some of the economic and social problems exacerbated by the pandemic.¹¹³

As I noted earlier, in this period Justinian and Theodora had also looked after the well-being of their nearest relatives. Sometime in 544, Justinian’s niece Praeiecta had married a patrician Areobindus (*Bella* IV 24, 3). When Areobindus was murdered in North Africa in March 546, it was Theodora who ensured that Praeiecta did not marry her rescuer Artabanes, whom it was discovered had another wife. Instead, she was married to John, a scion of the House of Anastasius (*Bella* VII 31,11–14). The Pers-Armenian Artabanes had only a few years earlier been fighting for the Persians, and it was alleged that he had killed the empress’ brother-in-law Sittas in battle in 538 (*Bella* II 3, 25), which might explain the grudge the empress bore towards Artabanes.¹¹⁴ Though Procopius naturally does not credit her for it, it proved to be a wise decision, since Artabanes subsequently got caught up in the plot to kill Justinian and replace him with Germanus in 548/549.¹¹⁵ Unquestionably, Theodora was ensuring that her and Justinian’s close family members would have the blueblood to match that of Germanus and his heirs.

Justinian and Theodora were also securing the futures for the emperor’s sister Vigilantia’s sons, Marcellus and Justin. In 543, Justinian had granted Praeiecta’s brother Marcellus a prestigious military

¹¹² Stathakopoulos 2007: 102.

¹¹³ For Justinian’s prioritizing of religious issues in the aftermath of his illness, see Moorhead 1994; Meier 2016; Sarris 2021: 132–133.

¹¹⁴ In an interesting side note, Buzes (*Bella* II 31, 3) had ‘treacherously’ murdered Artabanes’ father, John, at a parlay in 539.

¹¹⁵ For a fuller discussion, see Stewart 2020: 164–192.

command (*Bella* II 28, 2),¹¹⁶ and in that same year, or shortly after, Justinian and Theodora had found Marcellus a prestigious wife, Juliana, identified by modern historians as the daughter of the consul Magnus (518), and as Foss contends, possibly one of the two daughters described by Procopius in *Secret History*, as the offspring of a consular father and of three generations of consuls (*Anec.* XVII 7, trans. Dewing, p. 201).¹¹⁷

Of course, Procopius' constant need to amplify Theodora as the 'overbearing' empress means that he provides a hostile vision of the empress maliciously manipulating the marriage market by promoting her family while blocking those of her rivals. As the son of the emperor's sister, Marcellus was certainly not the poor lout Procopius' portrays but a young man on the rise.¹¹⁸ Yet on the pages of *Secret History* Procopius laments: 'these two girls were coerced to marry two beggarly outcasts, although born of noble family, though there were young aristocrats who would have been delighted to marry them' (*Anec.* XVII 12, trans. Kaldellis). Alan Cameron perceives there to have been a slightly different but still illustrious ancestry for Marcellus' bride, observing, 'Juliana was descended not only from the line of Anastasius, but (*via* Olybrius) from the Anicii and the last two great imperial houses of the West.'¹¹⁹

Whatever her precise ancestry, Juliana was certainly a catch for Marcellus and provided Justinian's nephew with a precious link to the older nobility. This offers us another appropriate warning of how carefully we must negotiate the minefield of virulent rhetoric when using the *Secret History* to recreate a clearer picture of what would have been far more delicate negotiations between the imperial family – Justinian and Theodora – and Juliana's family. Of course there would have

¹¹⁶ For Marcellus' part in defending against a Bulgar raid in 562, see Jo. Mal. XVIII 132, 135, 145, 146; discussed in Lin 2021: 140.

¹¹⁷ Foss 2002: 161–162. See, too, Lin 2021: 134.

¹¹⁸ Scholars like Foss tend to emphasize the social differences between Justinian's relatives with those of Anastasius. But it is important to remember that Marcellus was born after Justin had become emperor in 518, thus was born into a life of privilege. Indeed, the House of Anastasius, which Foss and others describe as esteemed aristocratic families, was only a few decades older than the House of Justin.

¹¹⁹ Al. Cameron 1978: 273.

been some from the older nobility who turned up their noses at the young man with shallow bloodlines. Indeed, Procopius' continuous harping on the social discrepancy between the lowborn Theodora and Justinian provides a clue to the intended audience for *Secret History*, which I have argued elsewhere differed somewhat from that of *Wars* and *Buildings*.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, intermarriage occurred between those of older and those from the barbarian military elite.¹²¹

Around 480 a then seventeen/eighteen-year-old Anicia Juliana had married Areobindus, a scion from the Gothic/Alan Adraburii, men who were labeled derogatively as barbarians.¹²² As Foss suggests, the marriage between Marcellus and Juliana suited Theodora's policy of uniting the imperial family to the highest aristocracy.¹²³ Nevertheless, it would not be this or any marriage to the older nobility but a marriage that Procopius does not discuss, the one between Theodora's niece, Sophia, and Justinian's nephew, Justin, that eventually secured the succession for both bloodlines of the imperial family.¹²⁴ Ultimately the depth of one's aristocratic roots proved less important than one's current connections.

Though some prefer a date prior to 542 for Justin and Sophia's marriage, 543 or 544 is more likely.¹²⁵ Some of this chronology depends on an unknown – the precise date of Sophia's birth. To determine Sophia's birthdate and the year of her marriage it would help if we knew for certain which of Theodora's sisters was her mother. Unfortunately, John of Ephesus (HE 2, 10, cf. Vic. Tunn. 174) only says that Sophia was the niece of Theodora, who had two sisters – Komito and Anastasia. When interpreted in an ancient context, this frustrating omission is not so strange, since as Hilner has recently demonstrated, leaving

¹²⁰ Stewart 2023b; Contra Croke 2021: 57, who insists that Procopius was writing for essentially the same audience for all three works.

¹²¹ Cooper 2007: 113; McEvoy 2013: 143, 213–215.

¹²² McEvoy 2016: 493; Juliana 3, PLRE 2: 636.

¹²³ Foss 2002: 162.

¹²⁴ On the equal power Sophia shared with Justin, see Av. Cameron 1975: 9. The omission of Justin is not that surprising in that he was one of Justinian's few relatives to not serve in the military

¹²⁵ Signes Codoñer 2003: 71, n. 67. Lynda Garland, on the other hand, is far less specific, only suggesting that it occurred sometime before Theodora's death in 548: <http://roman-emperors.sites.luc.edu/sophia.htm> (Accessed 11 Feb. 2020).

aristocratic women nameless could serve as a sign of respect.¹²⁶ Though we cannot discount the possibility that Anastasia may have been her mother, prevailing orthodoxy names the better documented Komito as her mother, which would then make Sittas (or Zittas, Tzittas) her father. If true, this might help us better date Sophia's birth, since we learn from Malalas (Jo. Mal. XVIII 10 [430]) that Theodora's older sister Komito and Sittas had been married sometime in 528.

We might further pinpoint Sophia's birthdate, since Sittas had spent most of 529–531 on a campaign in the East.¹²⁷ Hence it is likely that she was born or at least conceived shortly before he departed. If this identification is correct in 542 it would have made her twelve or thirteen. Though legal, as I have already indicated, at the time it was a bit young for a woman of the Byzantine upper crust to marry. A date of 544 for her marriage would make Sophia fifteen or sixteen when she married Justin, who would have been ten to twenty years older than his bride. An age of fifteen/sixteen fits nicely with the median age for a Byzantine woman to marry. The date of 529 for her birth and 544/545 also fits well with what we know of Sophia's daughter, Arabia, since we learn from Corripus that Justin had a married daughter when he became emperor in 565. If Arabia had been born in 545 or 546, it would make her nineteen or twenty at the time of Justin's accession, an appropriate time for a young woman of the time to be married, though in this instance a date of 542 for Justin and Sophia's marriage would also work.

Therefore, in early 545 Theodora and her family were in a much more secure position than they had been just three years prior. Hence, some of the insecurities about the potential succession and social positioning in 542 of some of Justinian's and Theodora's closest kin had surely abated. This increased security might then explain a move to alleviate some of the strain on the imperial couple's relationship with Germanus. This is not, however, the vision we get in Procopius. Seeking as always to place Germanus in the best light while simultaneously putting Theodora in the worst light, Procopius paints a far different picture of the political dynamics behind this union. To better understand

¹²⁶ Hillner et al. 2022.

¹²⁷ Sittas 1, PLRE 3: 1160–1161.

these events let us continue with Procopius' version of John's and Justina's marriage from *Secret History*.

Sometime during the summer of 545 the Roman General John – the nephew of the former consul (520) and rebel Vitalian – married the eighteen-year-old Justina in Constantinople.⁴² Procopius, our only source for this marriage, insists that it had been a hastily arranged betrothal, stealthily negotiated during John's mission to the capital from the Italian front to request more money, troops, and supplies from Justinian. These negotiations needed to be done in secret because Theodora had been doing her best to thwart the careers and marriage prospects of Justina and her two brothers, Justin and Justinian. I quote it here in full:

The empress so hated Germanus, and made her hatred of him obvious to everyone, that no one would dare enter a marriage relationship with him, even though he was the emperor's cousin. His sons remained without brides until her death and his daughter Justina was still unwed at the age of eighteen. For this reason, when John arrived in Constantinople, having been sent there by Belisarius, Germanus was so desperate that he opened negotiations with him regarding a possible marriage, even though John was far beneath his rank. Since the prospect pleased both, they decided to exchange the most dreadful oaths to the effect that they would do everything in their power to make the marriage happen since they had little trust in the other, the one being all-too aware that he was reaching above his rank, the other being otherwise unable to secure a son-in-law (*Anec.* V 8–11, trans. Kaldellis [modified], pp. 23–24).

According to Procopius, despite Theodora's efforts to break apart the union, John – though terrified by her threats, 'stubbornly' refused to abandon the alliance. Procopius then suggests that when John returned to Italy he refused to meet with Belisarius, fearing that the general's wife, Antonina, would have him murdered on Theodora's orders. This discord between Justinian's two most prominent generals pushed an already teetering Roman military campaign in Italy over the edge, and truncating actual events, Procopius describes Belisarius begging Justinian to relieve him of his command (which only occurred in 548/549). *Wars* offers many of the details missing in *Secret History*, blaming much on the quagmire in Italy from 546–548 on John, and another of Justinian's generals, Bessas, for his 'timidity, corruption, and

disobedience' (*Bella* VII 18, 24–29; 19, 1–33; 25, 22–23).¹²⁸ Even more interesting, the plot to kill Justinian and replace him with Germanus, discussed at great length in *Wars*, is entirely absent in *Secret History*'s version of Belisarius' recall.

Here modern accounts concerning this affair tend to follow the general pattern laid out by Procopius, emphasizing Germanus and his family's marginalization by a vengeful Theodora who was desperate to assure positions within Constantinople's social elite for her nearest kin. In the political dynamics surrounding this wedding others perceive signs of the growing chasm between Germanus and Theodora. Sihong Lin has suggested recently that Germanus had married Justina to John from expediency or 'possibly to cement an alliance among those who were opposed to the empress'.¹²⁹ A similar view is found in Potter, who links John's animosity towards Theodora to his cousin Buzes' disgrace in 542. It is important to underline, however, that to oppose Theodora meant also to oppose Justinian.

There is little evidence of a rift between the emperor and John at this or any other time. The sources instead reveal that John's career remained tightly tied to Narses, a former court eunuch who was one of Justinian's and Theodora's most trusted advisors and generals.¹¹¹ Moreover, after Germanus' death in 550, it was John who was Justinian's first pick to lead the new campaign in Italy. Though John was replaced by Narses, John teamed up with the eunuch and played a key part in the final victory over the Goths in the early 550s. As with much of *Secret History*, Procopius' main aim here and elsewhere was to glorify Germanus and his family while putting the empress Theodora (and Justinian) in the worst possible light. Though it contains the core truth that John and Justina had married, most of the rest is by and large rhetorical.

Though scholars frequently cite Justina's 'advanced' age as evidence that Theodora had really been stifling Germanus and his children's marriages, as I noted above, eighteen was not that old for a woman from the East Roman elite of the day to marry. There was

¹²⁸ Rance 2021: 86. As Rance further demonstrates, Belisarius' does not escape blame, e.g., *Bella* VII 19, 30–33, 35; 1–39.

¹²⁹ Lin 2021.

great flexibility in such norms. Even a summary glance at the marriage ages of Mediterranean elites illustrates that many women connected to royal or imperial families were married in their late-teens or even early twenties. It has been suggested that Matasuentha was around eighteen or nineteen when she married Vitigis,¹³⁰ though she may have been a few years younger.¹³¹ Aelia Eudocia was twenty-one when she married the emperor Theodosius II (r. 408–450) in 421. The empress Aelia Ariadne (c. 450–515) was around seventeen when she married Zeno. A mentioned above, Anicia Juliana was around seventeen or eighteen when she wed Areobindus, in 480. Theodora would have been in her late twenties or early thirties when she married Justinian, and her sister Komito much older when she wed Sittas.¹³²

By 545, so too were Germanus' sons' in bachelor status in their late teens and early twenties, not unusual by the standards within Constantinople's social elite. Sittas and Belisarius' bachelorhood lasted until their mid to late twenties to early thirties. And famously, Justinian was around forty when he married Theodora. Procopius implies that Justin and Justinian had secured brides after Theodora's death, so both were now in their mid to late twenties, the typical age men from Constantinople's elite began their own families. Though Justin would be exiled to Africa and then murdered shortly after Justin II secured the throne in 565, Justinian escaped Justin II's murderous eye and flourished in the second half of the sixth century. As Lin has intriguingly pointed out, though we never learn precisely who Justin married, we know more about his brother Justinian.¹³³ There is evidence from Gregory of Tours (*Hist.* V 30). that Justinian had a son and a daughter. Some identify his son as Germanus, described in later sources as marrying one of the daughters of the emperor Tiberius II (r. 578–582). After Tiberius' death, we are told that Germanus had refused to become emperor (John of Nikiu, *Chron.* 94). As Lin notes, this was not the end of Germanus' influence, since in 601 his daughter had married the emperor Maurice's

¹³⁰ Vitiello 2017: 57.

¹³¹ Cristini (forthcoming).

¹³² Foss 2002: 165.

¹³³ Lin 2021: 131–132.

son, Theodosius. Others suggest that this Germanus was a relative of Germanus and Matasuentha's son was Germanus junior.¹³⁴

Whatever this individual's precise identity, Germanus' offspring did eventually find suitable partners. With the line 'His sons remained without brides until her death,' Procopius' hints that these marriages had occurred shortly after Theodora's death. Once again, it is plausible that Procopius, noting Justina's age in 545, retroactively concocted a story about Theodora's wider plan to stifle Germanus' offspring's marital ambitions; or perhaps Theodora had married one of her or Justinian's relatives to a bride or groom whom Germanus had been eyeing for his children. It would have been easy enough to embellish such a tale. Certainly, in a work that sought to be provocative, the more mundane truths about this marriage alliance – and others he brings up – were inconvenient for the wider didactic story he was trying to tell.

It is also implausible that these talks between John and Germanus were as rushed as Procopius' makes them, where the betrothal and wedding are condensed to fit the brief time John was in Constantinople. As one of the highest-ranking generals in Italy and the relative of a former consul and contender for the purple, Vitalian – John – though not at Germanus' social level, was certainly not as great the social unequal Procopius makes him to be.¹³⁵ It is interesting – and perhaps significant – that in *Secret History* Procopius never mentions his claim from *Wars* (VI 10, 11) that John had supposedly been negotiating to marry Matasuentha in 538.¹³⁶ This could be because this section was composed before Germanus married the former Gothic Queen, or to

¹³⁴ Wes 1967: 192–193; Whitby 1988: 7; Brandes 2009: 303–316.

¹³⁵ For Procopius overly downplaying John's social status, see Cosentino 2016: 120.

¹³⁶ Marco Cristini (forthcoming) believes that with his use of *peri gamou* (*Bella* VI 10, 11), Procopius is only implying that John and the queen discussed dissolving Matasuentha's marriage with Vitigis, which could have been declared void because it had taken place against her will and Vitigis was already married. Cristini contends that for a granddaughter of Theoderic it would have been unconceivable to marry an East Roman general. On the other hand, Cristini does not entirely rule out that Procopius simply misunderstood or invented this episode. I see more fire beneath the smoke. John's tactically odd refusal in 538 to obey Belisarius's order (*Bella* VI 11) to abandon Rimini in the face of Vitigis impending attack might be better understood if John believed that he might have a chance of marrying Matasuentha if he defeated her husband.

mention it might undermine his point about John and Germanus' social inequality.

So, too, is Theodora's violent reaction to the marriage alliance exaggerated or made up entirely. One would expect Theodora and Justinian had attended John's and Justina's wedding. To not have done so would have been an outright declaration of the cousin's split. And nowhere is there a sign that this ever happened, even during the darkest days of the later plot to kill Justinian. The notion that Theodora would have dared to openly threaten Germanus or John, who both had powerful support-networks in Constantinople and Italy, is also questionable. This episode is exceptionally plot driven; as with much of *Secret History*, John and Justina are mere pawns in Procopius' wider purpose.

Where in *Wars* (VII 30, 25) Belisarius' recall leads to the long digression on the plot to assassinate Justinian, and replace him with Germanus, in *Secret History* Procopius transitions from Belisarius deteriorating military situation in Italy to the crumbling of Anastasius' and Ioannína's relationship:

And then misfortune fell upon his own household as well, as I will explain. The Empress Theodora pressed hard to finalize the marriage pledge between Belisarius' daughter to her grandson, and she pestered both parents in a steady stream of letters (*Anec.* V 17–18).¹³⁷

Procopius explains that Belisarius and Antonina had gotten cold feet and were ruing their decision made years earlier under duress. Despite their reluctance, according to Procopius, Theodora had not waited for their approval to go ahead with the wedding. Capitalizing upon the fact that Belisarius and Antonina were stuck in Italy, Theodora had coaxed Anastasius to rape Ioannína:

For she caused the young girl to live with the youth without any sanction of law. And they say that she secretly she actually forced her to offer herself, much against her will, and thus, after the girl had been compromised, she arranged the wedding for her, to the end that Justinian might put a stop to her little game.

¹³⁷ Θεοδώρα ἡ βασίλισς τῆς Βελισσαρίου παιδὸς ἐξεργάζεσθαι τὴν ἐγγύην ἐπειγομένη τῷ θυγατρὶδῷ συχνὰ γράφουσα τοὺς γειναμένους τὴν κόρην ἠνώχλει.

Procopius shows little understanding of the details of the marriage. Relying upon hearsay, Procopius suspiciously does not discuss the details of this wedding, only relating that the pair had eventually fallen in love and spent eight blissful months together. When Theodora died, however, after Antonina had arrived back to Constantinople in the summer of 548, she had separated the couple, which Procopius explains elicited a negative response from Constantinople's upper crust, since the couple had fallen in love. And just as bad from Procopius' view, Ioannina was now considered as tarnished goods by other prospective suitors. Unfortunately, we learn nothing further from Procopius nor other surviving sources about the matter, though one modern historian speculates that eventually Antonina and Belisarius had come to terms with the marriage; others believe that the union was severed.¹³⁸

Why were Belisarius and Antonina so opposed to a marriage that they had agreed to a few years earlier? Alan Cameron once posited that Antonina's and Belisarius' hesitance to bind themselves to the imperial family may have derived from issues of status. As discussed above, it is practically certain that Theodora's daughter was not Justinian's child, and moreover had never been adopted by Justinian and was thus illegitimate. Hence Cameron concluded that: 'Antonina naturally wanted a real aristocrat or a real prince for a son-in-law.'¹³⁹ Yet Anastasius was certainly not a nobody. As Cameron admits, Theodora's daughter had likely married a descendent of the emperor Anastasius.¹⁴⁰ Some offer another motive behind the linking of Ioannina and Anastasius, suggesting that Theodora may have wanted to block Ioannina's offspring from imperial succession. By pressuring Belisarius and Antonina to marry their daughter to her grandson, Theodora, not only bound the powerful general closer to her and Justinian, but kept Ioannina from marrying a noble from outside of the imperial family and hence producing a rival to the throne.¹⁴¹ By binding her to the son of her illegitimate daughter,

¹³⁸ Evans 2011: 200, has suggested that Ioannina and Anastasius were eventually reunited, but there is no historical evidence for this.

¹³⁹ Al. Cameron 1978: 271–272.

¹⁴⁰ Al. Cameron 1978: 272.

¹⁴¹ I owe this point to Christopher Lillington-Martin.

Theodora not only removed this threat but also further opened the doorway for her relatives like Sophia to rule.

Yet, as I have hinted, it is possible that the two had never married. There are certainly reasons to be suspicious of Procopius' version of events. As one scholar noted recently, this episode resembles 'plots from New Comedy and Plautus,' whereby this piece of salacious gossip centring on the sordid circumstances surrounding betrothal and marriage merely reverses a typical marriage betrothal and alliance.¹⁴² In this inversion a husband and wife's wedding night together is despoiled by an alleged previous rape. The marriage alliance between noble families, instead of bringing them together, drives a wedge between them. Hence it is a caricature, tracing next to nothing about what occurred and offering minimal insights about either Ioannína or the alliance between Antonina/Belisarius and Theodora's/Justinian's families.

The sensational claim that Theodora had coaxed Anastasius to rape Ioannína does not ring true – even Procopius indicates it was only a rumour. But even more ridiculous is the idea that Theodora and Justinian would have dared to have allowed the marriage to go ahead without Belisarius' and Antonina's explicit approval or attendance at the wedding of their sole heir. All of this certainly would have been grounds for Belisarius to turn on Justinian. Instead, from the story in *Wars*, relating events around the same time, Belisarius and Justinian were clearly close allies, with no signs of animosity that one might expect if the emperor had allowed a rape and a clandestine marriage to happen under his nose. Moreover, as we have touched on above, around the same time the conspiracists considered Belisarius to be so loyal to the emperor that he would need to be killed for the plot to succeed. This does not suggest that in the summer of 548 Antonina had needed to forcibly separate a now happily married Ioannína and Anastasius. It is more likely that once Antonina arrived back in Constantinople in the summer of 548 she had merely retaken guardianship over Ioannína. This may have meant moving her daughter from the household where she had been living, and perhaps breaking apart a burgeoning love affair between Ioannína and Anastasius, but I can only speculate. This may have generated gossip amongst Constantinople's elites. Procopius

¹⁴² Christopher Lillington-Martin (pers. comm.).

played upon these rumours to embellish or make up the sordid details as a further means of undercutting these four protagonists and furthering his authorial agenda.

To sum up, it is more likely that there had never been a formal agreement in 543, only a move to have Ioannína live under the protection of the imperial family. Maybe rumours had spread amongst Constantinople's elites concerning the young Ioannína and Anastasius, who likely would have been seen in one another's company, especially if Belisarius' daughter was living under the protection of the empress. Certainly, a girl living without her parents would have been highly vulnerable to such gossip. While it is possible that some sort of relationship or infatuation may have developed between the pair, that a wedding, even in secret, ever occurred is unlikely.

When the possibility of a coup receded in the aftermath of Germanus' death in Sardica in 550, so too did the necessity of highlighting the seedy circumstances behind the pairing of Ioannína and Anastasius and integrating it into *Wars*. Instead, seeking to honour the memory of his hero, Procopius chose to explain how Germanus had been falsely accused by some of scheming to overthrow Justinian. Hence, the young couple is dropped, never to be mentioned again in Procopius or by any other Byzantine source. The couple's erasure from the historical record reminds us of how heavily we rely on the circumstances of fate, and a writer like Procopius for our views of Justinian's reign and the relationship of individuals like Ioannína and Anastasius.

Conclusion

The key to untangling this Gordian knot surrounding these marital alliances lies in distinguishing between Procopius' motivations and those of the couples he describes. The views found in *Secret History* articulate one end of the spectrum. As we have observed throughout this article, there was never one single reliable reality but multiple, depending on one's differing perceptions and viewpoints. The portraits of these marriages in *Secret History* reflect Procopius' literary and political priorities at the time. When attempting to sift truth from exaggeration or

lie, it is difficult to get the balance right. While some of my readers may not agree with some or even any of my reconstructions, I hope I have demonstrated that Procopius heavily distorts even those parts of *Secret History* that modern historians interpret as basically ‘true.’ When constructing his digressions on marital matters, Procopius had a specific agenda and audience in mind. Hence, these episodes – and moreover much of *Secret History*, should be read considering the wider political and social crisis of the mid-540s brought on by Bubonic Plague in 542.

This is not to say that his accounts of these marriages – and the politicking around them – do not contain some underlining truths. There is little doubt that when it came to looking for brides and grooms for their close relatives, Germanus and Theodora were picking from a similar pool of depleted candidates. As we have observed, the close kin of Theodora and Justinian made several politically advantageous marriages to scions of the Anicii and the House of Anastasius. The undergirding contention by Procopius in *Secret History*, that Theodora was manipulating the marriage market in Constantinople to her favor, was in the end proven true. Yet it was a long game. One suspects that Procopius c. 550 would never have guessed that it would be Theodora’s niece, Sophia, and Justinian’s nephew, Justin – both of whom never garnered a single mention in any of his writings – who would don the purple in 565. Indeed, older consensus maintained that fortune played as much a role in Justin’s and Sophia’s accession as the machinations of Theodora and Justinian. Yet, Justinian (and to a lesser degree Theodora, since she died in 548) may have been clearing a path for Justin and Sophia to rule for much longer than formerly believed.¹⁴³

Mid-sixth-century Constantinople was a place where families could quickly rise but just as quickly fall. This point would have been seared into the imperial couples’ minds after Justinian fell ill from plague. Having witnessed the intense politicking amongst the rival factions hoping to replace Justinian in the summer of 542, it drove the pair to act once he recovered. In this task they were successful. Through her and Justinian’s collaboration, the emperor and Theodora’s nieces, nephews and other close relatives would achieve greatness in the generation after her death. It is likely, for instance, that our Praiecta was the

¹⁴³ Lin 2021.

grandmother of the blue-blooded Egyptian noble Apion III, identified in a papyrus from 591.¹⁴⁴ We learn that Justin II had attempted to install the ‘jilted’ Anastasius’ brother, Athanasius, as the miaphysite patriarch of Alexandria, all of which has been interpreted as a sign of the close relationship of Justin II and Sophia with the House of Theodora.¹⁴⁵ So, while Procopius offers us a distorted portrait of these marriages, the angst he conveys from some within the older nobility about this rising family is accurate. Procopius’ fascination with these marriage alliances is a product of its troubled time. *Secret History*’s depictions of the tangled web of politicking amongst Constantinople’s elites for suitable brides and grooms from a shrunken pool of candidates from 542–548 indeed offer tantalizing evidence of the ongoing social and political impact of Bubonic Plague in the six years after it first struck Constantinople in the spring of 542.

Chronology

- 482 – Justinian born
- c. 490s – Germanus and Theodora born
- c. 500 – Germanus’ family move to Constantinople
- c. 500 – Belisarius born
- c. 511–520 – Justin II born
- c. 515 – unnamed daughter of Theodora born
- c. 518–520 – Matasuentha born
- After 518 – Justinian and Theodora begin relationship
- c. 522/523 – Justinian and Theodora married
- 523/524 – Marcellus born
- c. 525 – Germanus marries Passara
- 528 – Komito marries Sittas
- c. 527–533 – Belisarius and Antonina married
- August 527 – sole rule of Justinian and Theodora
- c. 528–530 – Sophia born
- c. 530 – Anastasius, grandson of Theodora, born
- December 536 – Vitigis usurps the Gothic throne
- January 537 – Vitigis marries Matasuentha
- February 537 – Vitigis leaves Ravenna and besieges Belisarius’ army in Rome

¹⁴⁴ Al. Cameron 1978: 268–269.

¹⁴⁵ Lin (forthcoming).

- December 537 – John arrives in Rome
March 538 – John takes Rimini
March/April 538 – Negotiations between John and Matasuentha
542 – Vitigis dies in Constantinople
May/June 542 – Justinian catches plague, Khusro captures Callinicum, Persian withdrawal from Roman territory
Autumn 542 – Justinian recovers, Belisarius recalled to the capital
Winter 542/543 – appointment of Martin
Summer/fall 543 – Belisarius restored?
c. 543 – Betrothal of Ioannína to Anastasius (?)
542–544 – Marcellus marries Juliana
c. 542–545 – Justin marries Sophia
Spring 544 – Buzes released
c. 544 – Justinian gives Belisarius John the Cappadocian's home in Constantinople
c. fall 544 – Belisarius returns to Italy
Spring 545 – John sent to Constantinople
Summer 545 – John marries Justina
c. 544/545 – Praeiecta marries Areobindus
545 – Areobindus murdered in North Africa
Fall/Winter 547/548 – Procopius claims that Ioannína married Anastasius
547–549 – Praeiecta marries John
28 June 548 – Theodora dies
Summer 548 – Antonina 'separates' Ioannína from Anastasius (or just takes over guardianship)
548/549 – conspiracy to murder Justinian
c. 549 – Germanus marries Matasuentha
Summer 550 – Germanus dies
550/551 – *Secret History* abandoned

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