

Christopher Lillington-Martin 
Cardiff University

Procopius' Belisarius: Authority Enacted, Narrated, and Contested¹

ABSTRACT: This article re-evaluates the portrayal of Belisarius by Procopius and other sixth-century sources, not to uncover new biographical data but to trace the evolving representation of his authority, reputation, and career. While Belisarius' life and military record are well known, the focus here is on how Procopius constructs, modulates, and at times destabilises his image across distinct literary genres and narrative contexts. The methodology lies in the integration of genre comparison (*Wars*, *Buildings*, *Anekdotia*), reception layering across Procopius' corpus, and a tripartite analysis of authority through gesture, strategic command scope, and political-theological framing.

Belisarius' military achievements against the Vandals, Goths, and Persians are examined alongside moments of critique, limitation, and internal challenge, revealing how Procopius' narratives balance encomium with ambivalence. Authority is shown to be both performative and precarious – shaped by systemic pressures, interpersonal dynamics, and imperial ideology. The article combines narratological analysis, spatial and career

¹ This article is dedicated to the memory of Professor Dariusz Brodka. Translations, with adaptations, of Procopius' *Wars*, *Anekdotia* (*Secret History*) and *Buildings* (all composed and published in the 540s and 550s) originate from: Dewing 1979; Dewing, Downey 1996; Kaldellis 2010; Kaldellis 2014; Signes Codoñer 2000; Greatrex 2022b; Garrido 1983, García Romero 2000; García Romero 2007, Periago Lorente 2005 (cf. references). 'Secret History' derives from the Latin translation, *Historia arcana*, Alamanni 1623. The title *Anekdotia* is used to refer to this text throughout this article. The dating of each work has been debated at length: cf. Greatrex 1994: 101–114; Greatrex 2022c: 61–69; Signes Codoñer 2017: 3–26 et al.

mapping, and late antique political theology to illuminate the rhetorical and conceptual architecture of Belisarius' portrayal.

Other contemporary voices, such as Jordanes, are considered to contextualise Procopius' representational strategies and to explore the conceptual ambiguities surrounding divine favour, supernatural agency, and delegated power. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of sixth-century political and military literacy – not through event reconstruction, but through the interpretive layering of genre, reception, and authority in the depiction of one of Justinian's most emblematic generals.

KEYWORDS: Belisarius, Procopius, genre comparison, reception layering, authority and gesture, narratology, political theology, military reputation, late antique historiography.

ἀντιτείνειν τε γὰρ ἐπιτάττοντι, οἶμαι, οὐδείς ἐτόλμα,
ἐπιτελῇ τε πράσσειν ὅσα ἐπιτάττοι οὐδαμοῦ ἀπηξιουν, τὴν
τε ἀρετὴν αἰσχυνόμενοι καὶ δεδιότες τὴν δύναμιν.

For no one, I am sure, would dare to resist his [sc. Belisarius'] **com-**
mands nor did his men ever refuse to carry out whatever orders
he gave, respecting his **excellence** and fearing his **authority**.

Proc. Wars 7.1.19.²

...καὶ νικᾷ μὲν βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς ὑπὸ στρατηγοῦντι Βελισαρίῳ,
ἐπάνεισι δὲ παρὰ τὸν βασιλέα τὸ στράτευμα ἔχων ἀκραιβνὲς ὅλον ὁ
στρατηγός, καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτῷ λάφυρα βασιλεῖς τε καὶ βασιλείας...

...the Emperor *Justinian* achieves victories through his General **Belisarius**,
and **he** returns to the *Emperor*, with the whole army intact,
and **he** gives *him* spoils, both kings and kingdoms...

Proc. Buildings 1.10.16

² Kaldellis 2014: 384 and Dewing 1914: 157 translate δύναμιν as **power**, as does García Romero 2007: 27 (**poder**). Garrido 1983: 223 has, '**autoridad**', as δύναμιν has the sense of authority too. I render ἀρετή as 'excellence' to stress performance and effect rather than moral valuation. This aligns with Procopius' habit of testing praise against outcome (τύχη/σοφίσματα) and with the article's focus on enacted and narrated authority rather than abstract 'virtue'.

καὶ περιήρχετο πικρὸν θέαμα καὶ ἄπιστος ὄψις, Βελισάριος
ιδιώτης ἐν Βυζαντίῳ, σχεδὸν τι μόνος, σύννους ἀεὶ καὶ
σκυθρωπός καὶ τὸν ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς ὀρρωδῶν θάνατον.

And he went about, a sorry and incredible sight, Belisarius
a private citizen in Byzantium, practically alone, always pen-
sive and gloomy, and dreading a death by treachery.³

Proc. *Anekdotai* 4.16

Introduction

This article examines how Belisarius (c. 502–565), was portrayed by Procopius (c. 500–c. 555) and other contemporary sources, regarding the first two phases of his career: 527–531 and 532–543. While Belisarius' biography is well known and widely studied, the focus here is not on uncovering new events but on analysing Procopius' evolving representation of his authority, reputation, and career across multiple literary genres. The study explicitly foregrounds a methodology that integrates genre comparison (historiography, panegyric, invective), reception layering across Procopius' corpus (*Wars*, *Buildings*, *Anekdotai*), and a tripartite analysis of authority, through gesture, strategic command scope, and political-theological resonance. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how Belisarius' image was constructed, modulated, and at times destabilised in response to shifting narrative and ideological contexts.

The article highlights its interdisciplinarity, combining narratological analysis, spatial and career mapping, and late antique political theology to illuminate the rhetorical and conceptual architecture of Belisarius' portrayal. The epigraphs given above will be analysed and then the extent to which Procopius' narrative supports them will be explored. Starting with *Wars* 7.1.19, Procopius offers a wholly positive evaluation of Belisarius upon his return from the first Italian campaign in 540. This passage closes what is generally accepted as a eulogy to

³ Signes Codoñer 2000: 170 offers 'una conjura' (a conspiracy) for ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς.

the general (*Wars* 7.1.8–21).⁴ It may be the most favourable assessment of Belisarius by any contemporary author, although Jordanes' consistently laudatory epithets for Belisarius serve a similar function. Furthermore, at *Buildings* 1.10.16 Procopius deliberately highlights Belisarius' commanding role in the western victories (of 533–540) in an ekphrasis of the *Chalke* mosaic, within Procopius' panegyric to Justinian (c. 482–565, r. 527–565). I will argue below that while Procopius' *corpus* does sometimes support the outstandingly positive characterisation of Belisarius' authority and achievements outlined within his eulogy and his ekphrasis, there are other occasions (not only in his *Anekdotai* but even in *Wars*) when Procopius' narrative highlights Belisarius' shortcomings. This diversity suggests that even the most famous and successful of Justinian's generals had to deal with abject failure as well as glorious success and that their careers could oscillate dramatically. Finally, *Anekdotai* 4.16 allows Procopius to deploy θέαμα and ὄψις to suggest theatricality. Belisarius' career in command started in 527 as *dux Mesopotamiae*, based at Dara, where Procopius was appointed as his ξύμβουλος (*consiliarius*/assessor or adviser). There, promoted to *magister militum per orientem*, Belisarius defeated a Persian army in 530, only to be defeated in 531 at Callinicum, which led to his recall to Constantinople. There he led the suppression of a civilian revolt in 532. By June 533 he had married Antonina, and he headed an invasion fleet towards Vandal Africa. Procopius was now Belisarius' πάρεδρος (senior advisor – see note 81). Belisarius' army took Carthage after the battle of *Ad Decimum* and, by December 533, had seized the Vandal treasure after the battle of Tricamarum. In early 534, Belisarius consolidated coastal Africa, the Balearics, Sardinia and Corsica. In April 534, Belisarius returned to Constantinople, bringing the Vandal king, warriors & treasure, where a Roman Triumph was celebrated and he was made *Consul* from 1st Jan 535. That spring, Belisarius led a fleet towards Carthage, but with secret orders to take Sicily, which he achieved by 31st December 535. After quelling African and Sicilian army mutinies in spring 536, Belisarius invaded Italy. After five years of warfare, in May 540, Belisarius was offered the Gothic crown and took the Gothic capital of Ravenna but remained loyal to Justinian. From 541–542,

⁴ Evans 1972: 73; Cameron 1985: 138, n. 24.

Belisarius outmanoeuvred the Persians in the East but exaggerated rumours of Justinian's apparent death from plague led to accusations of disloyalty, his fall from grace and his recall. In 544–549, he led a small force in Italy to try to contain the resurgence of the Goths.

At *Wars* 7.1.19, Procopius emphasises Belisarius' supposed complete control over his troops, conveyed through both the force of his commands and the personal reverence he inspired. The motivations for this obedience are twofold: respecting his excellence and fearing his authority. Procopius balances moral admiration and awe of authority to create an image of Belisarius as both virtuous and formidable. His men obey not merely because of military discipline but due to a deeper psychological and moral influence he exerts over them. The broader context of *Wars* 7.1 reveals that this is part of a rare and overtly positive eulogy of Belisarius, placed after his return from the Italian campaign. Yet, when juxtaposed with other parts of Procopius' work – especially the *Anekdotai* – such portrayals may take on an ironic edge. Even so, in this passage, the language is earnest and idealised: Belisarius is the kind of leader who commands both respect and fear, and who inspires unhesitating loyalty through a combination of excellence (ἀρετή) and authority (δύναμις). Procopius rarely uses the first-person singular, as he does here, which may convey irony or emotion.⁵ *Wars* 7.1.19 reminds us of his earlier first-person reflections on ἀρετή (arete) or virtue just two chapters before:

And while I watched the entry of the Roman army into Ravenna at that time, an idea came to me, to the effect that it is not at all by the wisdom of men or by any other sort of **excellence** [ἀρετῇ] on their part that events are brought to fulfilment, but that there is some **divine power** [τι δαιμόνιον] which is ever warping their purposes and shifting them in such a way that there will be nothing to hinder that which is being brought to pass.

Wars 6.29.32⁶

⁵ Anderson forthcoming: ch. 8.

⁶ Ἐμοὶ δὲ τότε διασκοπούμενῳ τὴν ἐς Ῥάβενναν εἴσοδον τοῦ Ῥωμαίων στρατοῦ ἐννοιά τις ἐγένετο, ἀνθρώπων μὲν ζυνέσει [ζυνέσει K: ἡ ἀνδρεία ἡ πληθύς L.] ἢ τῇ ἄλλῃ ἀρετῇ ὥς ἥκιστα περαινεσθαι τὰ πρασσόμενα, εἶναι δὲ τι δαιμόνιον, ὅπερ αὐτῶν αἰε

This prevarication accords with Procopius' broader causal repertoire (τύχη, δαίμων, and calculated σοφίσματα) as he modulates human agency across genres. This can be read as reducing the merit in Belisarius' success in taking Ravenna from the Goths in 540, and connecting these lines could suggest that Procopius is being more ironic than emotional at *Wars* 7.1.19. When Procopius narrates the entry of Belisarius' victorious army into Ravenna, in May 540 at *Wars* 6.29.32, he is describing the pinnacle of Belisarius' career (which relates directly to the eulogy at *Wars* 7.1.8–21).⁷ He attributes it to **τι δαιμόνιον** (a divine power), rather than **ἀρετή** (*arete*) of men (we can infer that he has Belisarius in mind). Flores Rubio categorises **τι δαιμόνιον** as:

a vague superior power that directs human affairs and that, no matter how much effort, determination, or intelligence we put into it, can end up diverting the outcome of our endeavours to where *it* deems most appropriate. What is unsettling for Procopius – and for any of us – is who truly represents this *power* that stands above human beings. It is evident that our author is not clear at all.⁸

The context involves comprehension of a complex concept and Flores Rubio maintains that Procopius does not understand it. However, perhaps Procopius is being ambiguous: he has left Chance out of his ruminations. This is possibly to hint that Belisarius' planning skills had had a greater effect in capturing Ravenna than Chance, compared to Belisarius' deployment of his forces to march towards Carthage and

στρέφον τὰς διανοίας ἐνταῦθα ἄγει οὐδὲ κωλύμη τις τοῖς περαινομένοις [περαινομένοις Wahler: περαιουμένοις KL: πεπωμένοις V1] οὐδεμία ἔσται. We should remember the common late antique linkage of victory to moral worth. Procopius' palette preserves causal ambiguity (cf. Ross 2018: 83).

⁷ Belisarius had disingenuously led the Goths to believe that he would accept their crown, betray Justinian and rule them from Ravenna: see Lillington-Martin 2009.

⁸ Flores Rubio 2006b: 368, n. 195 'Τὶ δαιμόνιον: un vago poder superior que dirige los asuntos humanos y que, por mucho que nos esforcemos o pongamos todo nuestro empeño e inteligencia, puede terminar desviando el resultado de nuestras empresas a donde considere más oportuno. Lo inquietante para Procopio y para cualquiera de nosotros es quién representa de verdad a ese poder que está por encima de los seres humanos. Resulta evidente que nuestro autor no lo tiene claro en absoluto' (transl. Lillington-Martin).

defeat Gelimer's Vandals (where Procopius mentions heaven, men, God and Chance).⁹ Flores Rubio considers that passage to be fundamental to understanding the relationship that, for Procopius, exists between Chance and God.¹⁰ In sum, while Procopius appears to offer a eulogy of Belisarius in *Wars* 7.1.8–21, his earlier reflections on divine power and the ambiguity surrounding human excellence in *Wars* 6.29.32 complicate this praise. These tensions suggest that Procopius' admiration for Belisarius may be more nuanced or ironic than it first appears.

The passage from *Buildings* (1.10.16) is a concise and stylised piece of imperial praise, serving both rhetorical and ideological purposes. The structure is carefully balanced and formulaic, typical of panegyric prose. The phrase maintains Justinian as the subject and source of victory, while acknowledging Belisarius as the instrumental agent. The use of ὑπὸ with the participle στρατηγοῦντι subtly highlights Belisarius' role without challenging the primacy of imperial authority. The general's return "with the whole army intact" (ἐπάνεισι... τὸ στράτευμα ἔχων ἀκραιφνὲς ὅλον) is described in elevated language. The adjective ἀκραιφνὲς ('pure / untouched'), conveys not only survival but also the moral and physical integrity of the force, suggesting an idealised image of campaign and commander. The passage culminates in Belisarius offering the emperor "spoils, both kings and kingdoms" (δίδωσιν... λάφυρα βασιλεῖς τε καὶ βασιλείας), which is a striking expression emphasising the magnitude of Belisarius' conquests and the symbolic submission of foreign powers. Yet the use of δίδωσιν places emphasis on Belisarius' subordination: Procopius has him give rather than claim, presenting his success as a tribute to imperial greatness.

On the surface, this is a clear example of imperial encomium, where the achievements of both emperor and general are praised but ultimately reinforce Justinian's supremacy. Belisarius is portrayed as the loyal servant, his glory channelled upward to the emperor. Politically, however, the passage may be more complex. Composed within *Buildings*, a text designed to glorify the emperor, the depiction of Belisarius' campaign success and total loyalty reads as a performative narrative. Given Procopius' more ambivalent tone in the *Wars* and the *Anekdotai*,

⁹ *Wars* 3.18.2–3.

¹⁰ Flores Rubio 2006a: 164, n. 259.

this passage's idealisation of Belisarius and his campaign may reflect a rhetorical necessity rather than an unambiguous reality.

The themes at play involve the tension between imperial control and military agency. Although Belisarius wins the battles and secures the spoils, the credit flows to Justinian. The idealised image of the untouched army evokes a “clean” campaign – an outcome that contrasts with the more complex realities documented elsewhere in Procopius' work. Additionally, the phrase “spoils, both kings and kingdoms” evokes Roman traditions of triumph and empire-building, with Belisarius functioning as the agent of imperial expansion. Yet this grandeur risks drawing attention to the general's own centrality – and by implication, the emperor's dependence on him. Procopius' deliberate emphasis, on naming Belisarius and listing his deeds here, is arguably very out of place in the context of an encomium for the emperor.¹¹ This exemplifies Procopius' skill at being ambiguous. Ultimately, this passage presents a carefully curated image of harmonious imperial hierarchy, but when set against Procopius' broader corpus, it invites a more sceptical reading. The polished idealism of *Buildings* may veil deeper tensions between appearance and reality, between emperor and general, and between propaganda and history.

At *Anekdotia* 3.16, Procopius has Theodora use **θεάματος** in direct speech when referring, euphemistically, to Antonina's adopted son (and alleged lover), Theodosius, as a ‘pearl’. Theodora offers to make a ‘sight’ (**θεάματος**) of him.¹² So Procopius equates both Antonina's husband (*Anekdotia* 4.16, cited above) and her son/lover (*Anekdotia* 3.16) as *sights* to be gawped at. The contrast is that Theodosius

¹¹ Lillington-Martin 2025b: generals are unnamed in a later ekphrasis (*Vita Basilii* 89), considered to have been modelled on Procopius' *Buildings* 1.10.15–16 (see Ritter 2021: 153)

¹² *Anekdotia* 3.16 “O dearest patrician, a pearl fell into my hands yesterday the likes of which no one has ever set eyes on. If you like, I would not begrudge you the spectacle of it out of spite; on the contrary, I would willingly make a **sight** of it for your pleasure.” Ὡ φιλτάτη πατρικία ἔφη ᾠ μάργαρον ἐς χεῖρας τὰς ἐμὰς τῇ προτεραίᾳ ἐμπέπτωκεν, οἷον οὐδεὶς ποτ' ἀνθρώπων εἶδε. καὶ σοι βουλομένη οὐκ ἂν φθονήσαιμι τοῦ **θεάματος** τούτου, ἀλλὰ ἐπιδείξω. Cf. 26.9 for **θεάματα** as stage-shows in which Theodora had grown up.

is a 'radiant figure', whereas Belisarius is now a 'dark soul'.¹³ This latter image links to Procopius' use of ἰδιώτης, which can mean 'private citizen' as opposed to one holding public office, but is a term of abuse, like English 'idiot', too.¹⁴ Therefore, Procopius is once again employing his mastery of ambiguity.. He uses exactly the same vocabulary to describe the fall of John the Cappadocian from prefect to ἰδιώτης.¹⁵ Procopius is certainly characterising Belisarius as having lost his title of *MMO* and the authority that went with it. Furthermore, σύννους ἀεὶ καὶ σκυθρωπός (always pensive and gloomy) may be synonyms given by Procopius for the avoidance of doubt. This is not the pensive quality of the philosopher but of someone who is utterly despondent. However, in addition, Procopius writes this way (*Anekdotia* 4.16), to communicate that Belisarius had lost all (c. 542) having fallen from grace and become a lost soul. Procopius' method of supplying a hostile or negative presentation of a protagonist in his *Anekdotia*, alongside a positive or ambiguous one in his *Wars*, has been discussed elsewhere by me in relation to Antonina, Belisarius' wife.¹⁶ As in her case, perhaps something of the real Belisarius emerges through Procopius' dual portrait. In conclusion, Procopius' depiction of Belisarius in the *Anekdotia* contrasts starkly with his portrayal in the *Wars*, using ambiguity and irony to present a figure who has fallen from glory to despair. This dual representation – both admiring and critical – suggests a more complex, perhaps more realistic, image of Belisarius emerging between the lines.

Moving on to whether Procopius' narrative supports the cited epigraphs, Lia Rafaella Cresci argues convincingly that Belisarius 'is portrayed as a friend and supporter of peace: cf. *Wars* 1.14.1–3' by Procopius and 'In reality, it is extremely significant that the elements of gratuitous aggression are systematically excluded from the portrait of Belisarius'.¹⁷ The argument that Procopius' characterisation of Belisarius excludes aggression can be extended to absolving Belisarius from

¹³ Here, I repurpose Williams' terms, cited below.

¹⁴ *LSJ* ἰδιώτης: A. II. "one in a private station, opp. to one holding public office, or taking part in public affairs"; III.3 "ignoramus".

¹⁵ *Wars* 1.25.31.

¹⁶ Lillington-Martin 2024a: 224, 240.

¹⁷ Cresci 1986: 254 '...egli viene dipinto come amico e sostenitore della pace...') and 255 ('In realtà è estremamente significativo che dal ritratto di Belisario vengano

responsibility for most other forms of violence. Procopius minimises gratuitous aggression, attributing major strategic offensives to imperial initiative, while showing Belisarius' own violence chiefly in a disciplinary or punitive frame (e.g. the executions at Abydos and the impalement of Laurus at Carthage – see notes 83, 96 and 105). Procopius tends to lay the blame for aggression, in which Belisarius is directly or indirectly involved, at others' doors. In *Wars*, he often blames Justinian, such as for ordering Belisarius to: raid Persarmenia; attempt fort building on the eastern frontier at Mindouos (breaking a treaty); march into Persia (before the Persians attack Dara) in 530;¹⁸ slaughter civilians to quash the Nika riots of 532;¹⁹ lead the expedition against the Vandals of North Africa and the islands of the western Mediterranean from 533;²⁰ seize Sicily in 535 and invade Italy from 536. On all of those occasions, Justinian places Belisarius in charge of the military forces. However, Book 6 partly blames Belisarius for the disarray in the high command and the failure to attack Vitigis when he was vulnerable outside of Rimini and for worrying too much about attacking the Gothic fortresses *en route* to Ravenna, which might have been left in his army's rear. The close of Book 7 has several instances of Belisarius acting in a negative way, where Procopius simply inverts good characteristics, e.g., Belisarius violently seizing lands and treating his soldiers unjustly. Indeed, Procopius later praises Narses in Book 8 for not worrying about taking on certain fortresses and just going around these outposts and settling things once and for all in a big set battle. But Procopius was not a general and Narses had a huge army which was larger than any which Belisarius had ever commanded. Sometimes blame is placed on Antonina or Theodora, such as when the pair entrapped and brought down Justinian's powerful prefect, John the Cappadocian. Procopius does blame Belisarius for controversial deeds such as the deposition of Pope Silverius and the execution of Constantinus in 537, in *Wars*,

esclusi sistematicamente gli elementi di aggressività gratuita...' (transl. Lillington-Martin). See also Greatrex 2022b: 191.

¹⁸ Lillington-Martin 2007 and Lillington-Martin 2013.

¹⁹ For recent reassessments and a map of the debate, see Greatrex 1997: 80–83; Brodka 2018: 51–53; Parnell 2023: 67–74.

²⁰ Lillington-Martin 2018 and Lillington-Martin 2024b.

although he then 'corrects' the stories in his *Anekdotia* by shifting the blame to Antonina.²¹

Belisarius is ubiquitous in Books 1–7 of *Wars* and is mentioned, by name, four times as often as Justinian.²² It is therefore not entirely surprising that, at Antioch in the early 590s,²³ Evagrius of Epiphania (*Syria II*) seems to have perceived that Procopius' *Wars* were primarily about Belisarius, rather than the Emperor Justinian. Indeed, in his '*Ecclesiastical History*', Evagrius suggested, '[I]t has been written by Procopius the *rhetor*, who wrote a book about the deeds of Belisarius'²⁴ (γέγραπται δὲ Προκοπίῳ τῷ ῥήτορι τὰ κατὰ Βελισάριον συγγράφοντι).²⁵ It is noteworthy that, just four decades after the publication of *Wars* and less than 20 years since the death of Justinian and Belisarius, Evagrius' description of Procopius' *Wars* focuses on Procopius, as *rhetor*, writing about 'the deeds of Belisarius'.²⁶ Furthermore, Evagrius' 'exploitation [of Procopius' *Wars*] is extensive, embracing both direct quotation and more selective summary... citations are located in the central section of book iv (iv. 12–27), which was largely based on his writings'.²⁷ Such a reception by Evagrius is not altogether surprising considering Belisarius' heavy presence throughout *Wars* 1–7.

Procopius occasionally deploys sophisticated ambiguous characterisation both to criticise Belisarius and to highlight that he was the emperor's instrument. He is characterised as one of Justinian's best generals,²⁸ who survived his military campaigns against the Persians, Vandals and Goths, despite being exposed to danger. For example, he

²¹ Lillington-Martin 2024a.

²² Belisarius 715 mentions, Justinian 175. On Justinian, see also Rubin 1960; Rubin 1995; Meier 2003; Tate 2004.

²³ Whitby 2000: xiii.

²⁴ Adapted from Whitby 2000: 212.

²⁵ Evagrius, *HE* 4.12.

²⁶ Evagrius *HE* 4.12, 19; 5.24, perhaps following Agathias 1. proem, 22, 32; 2.19.1; 4.15.1, 4.26.4; 4.29.5; 4.30.5, and both followed by Suida II 2479.

²⁷ Whitby (2000: xxviii) notes, 'Evagrius compliments [Procopius] on his care, emotional description, elegance, eloquence and exceptional clarity (iv. 12, 13, 19)'.

²⁸ *Wars* 1.13.9: 'After this the emperor Justinian appointed Belisarius general of the East and instructed him to march against the Persians. Ὑστερον δὲ βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς στρατηγὸν τῆς ἑω Βελισάριον καταστησάμενος, στρατεύειν ἐπὶ Πέρσας ἐκέλευεν.

was: attacked and almost killed by Goths with spears and swords, in a skirmish near the Salarian Bridge, just before the siege of Rome; nearly assassinated with a dagger by Constantinus (a subordinate general) during that siege and, saved from a Goth's arrow by Unigast, a *doryphoros* (δορυφόρος), when besieging Osimo.²⁹ Other excellent generals such as Sittas and Solomon were killed in battle, by Armenians and Mauri respectively.³⁰

Progressive redefinition of character

As previous authors sometimes characterised their heroes as being intimidated (Homer's Odysseus; Apollonius Rhodius' Jason and Virgil's Aeneas), Procopius sometimes represents Belisarius as being intimidated by his own hungry troops (voluntarily fasting for Easter or short on supplies when under siege), or served by purportedly 'unreliable' allies,³¹ which attempts to divert blame from Belisarius for some of his defeats. This happened to Belisarius before the battles of Callinicum, 531, and at Rome, 537; when he had to deal with mutinies in North Africa and Sicily, 536, and when he had to manage calls for him to declare himself emperor in Ravenna, 540, perhaps in Syria, 542. The causes were different, but such events are reminiscent of Tacitus' portrayal of the treatment of Germanicus by his troops and *vice versa* (before he went on to lead them to honour the remains of the legions of Varus in the Teutoburg forest in A.D. 14) and his dealing with mutinies.³² We should bear in mind that Tacitus was writing about long-deceased characters whilst Procopius was writing about contemporary, very much alive, ones. My comparison with Tacitus is heuristic, highlighting parallel narrative strategies, but not asserting direct derivation or factual identity.

Even so, Germanicus and Belisarius do seem to have sometimes been treated in similar ways by Tacitus and Procopius, regarding

²⁹ 5.18.3ff.; 6.8.1ff. and 6.27.13–14 respectively.

³⁰ *Wars* 2.4.52, 2.3.25 and 4.21.25–28.

³¹ Cameron 1985: 125, n. 88, 147.

³² Tacitus *Annals* 1.31–54, esp. at 34–35.

Tiberius and Justinian, respectively. Williams notes that interpretations of Tacitus' portrait of Germanicus in the *Annals* 'range from "the radiant figure compounded of all virtues and excellence (and popular in proportion) to set against the dark soul of Tiberius Caesar," to a comic failure'.³³ Something similar could be argued of Belisarius regarding Justinian within Procopius' *Wars* and *Anekdotia*. Williams maintains that we need not expect consistent characterisation of Germanus by Tacitus to 'argue that Germanicus' contradictory characterization serves to provide commentary on the nature of the principate',³⁴ which is something to consider regarding Procopius' Belisarius, who is portrayed as it suits the narrative. Michael Stewart argues that the portrait of Belisarius, as either a good or bad person/general, is often shaped by whether he is winning or losing.³⁵ Christopher Pelling argues that in Tacitus' 'curiously indecisive narrative... with Germanicus we seem to have a more irregular technique'.³⁶ He adds that 'Simple and straightforward denigration or praise would be inadequate for the principate: should we be surprised if they are inadequate for Germanicus too, and the alternative atmosphere and world that he comes to embody?'.³⁷ Pelling observes that 'Germanicus' characterization in the *Annals* functions as a commentary on the entire concept of the principate' saying, 'Tacitus' treatment of Germanicus is a reflex of his approach to the principate as a whole,' but he adds that we 'can regard Germanicus rather as he regards the past, particularly the republican past'. This may apply to Procopius' treatment of Belisarius and his view of Justinian's regime. Pelling observes that, 'Germanicus and Agrippina may themselves be presented as achingly innocent of any disloyalty, even perhaps of any malice against Tiberius, but they presage very sinister themes indeed'.³⁸ This too could be applied to Procopius' account of Belisarius and Antonina *vis a vis* their loyalty to Justinian and Theodora. Overall, Tacitus' Germanus and Procopius' Belisarius are both feted as good generals, even though they have significant weaknesses. Germanus was

³³ Williams 2009: 117, n. 1.

³⁴ Williams 2009: 117–118.

³⁵ Stewart 2022: 245–264.

³⁶ Pelling 1993: 59–60.

³⁷ Pelling 1993: 68, n. 3.

³⁸ Pelling 1993: 72, n. 3.

bullied by his troops, and this could be said of Belisarius, especially at Callinicum in April 531.³⁹

This comparison of the way a later author, Procopius, may have written, consciously or not, in similar ways to an earlier one, recalls Procopius' comments in his preface (*Wars* 1.1.1–2). There he reflects on writing history for those men of future generations who plan to benefit from reading history so as to predict likely results of their actions. No doubt Procopius saw earlier authors (Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Apollonius, Tacitus etc.) in this way. He may be hinting that leaders should plan well and perhaps be suggesting that his protagonists sometimes failed to plan properly. He certainly discusses planning throughout the *Wars*, which includes over 200 examples. In addition to being presented as intimidated by his own troops in the *Wars*, Belisarius is often portrayed as bullied by Justinian, Theodora and Antonina in the secret *Anekdotia*.

A close reading of *Wars* suggests that Procopius “treatment of Belisarius ranges from the eulogistic to the critical”,⁴⁰ because Procopius' views changed over time. There is heavy criticism of Belisarius at the end of Book 7 (in stark contrast to the eulogy at its start):

Belisarius returned to Byzantium in disarray. For five years he had not disembarked anywhere on the soil of Italy nor had succeeded in making a single march there by land, but he had taken refuge in concealed flight during this whole time, always sailing without interruption from one coastal fort to another stronghold along the shore.

As a result the enemy, having now little to fear, had enslaved Rome and everything else, practically speaking.⁴¹

Wars 7.35.1–2

³⁹ Kaldellis (2014: 47, n. 100) highlights that Procopius makes Belisarius “seem weak and unable to control his army. Jordanes, *Romana* 363, stresses that the fault lay with the army, not the general.”

⁴⁰ Greatrex 2014: 95, n. 76.

⁴¹ Βελισάριος μὲν τὴν ἐπὶ τὸ Βυζάντιον οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ ἦει, γῆς μὲν τῆς Ἰταλῶν πενταετὲς οὐδαμῇ ἀποβάς, οὐδέ πη ὁδῶ ἰέναι ἐνταῦθα ἰσχύσας, ἀλλὰ φυγῇ κεκρυμμένη ἐχόμενος πάντα τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον, ἕκ τε ὀχυρώματος αἰεὶ ἐπιθαλασσίῳ τινὸς ἐς ἄλλο ἐπὶ τῆς παραλίας ὀχύρωμα διηνεκὲς ναυτιλλόμενος. καὶ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἀδεέστερον τοῦς πολεμίους τετύχηκε Ῥώμην τε ἀνδραποδίσαι καὶ τᾶλλα ὥς εἰπεῖν ἅπαντα. Kaldellis

Procopius criticises Belisarius indirectly in another way. He sometimes does so by proposing that he himself was a noteworthy agent who restored a sense of confidence in Belisarius. Procopius sets this up by representing Belisarius as uncertain regarding various military strategies on at least ten occasions, when he experiences moments of perplexity (*aporia*). At the military level, Procopius characterises Belisarius (after moments of *aporia*) as returning to comprehension or confidence after occasionally accepting Procopius' own advice on military matters. Procopius emphasises when his advice contributes to Belisarius' successes in Africa, Sicily and Italy. Therefore, Procopius occasionally characterises himself more as an expert military adviser to Belisarius than a mere 'reporter' of events,⁴² whose contribution to Belisarius' success was, according to himself, significant at key moments in Justinian's wars against the Vandals and Goths. Procopius includes a general comment regarding advisors in a speech by Archelaus:

For when things go well for people they attribute their success to their own judgment or fortune, but when they fail they blame only the one who advised them.⁴³

Wars 3.15.5

Perhaps Procopius felt blamed by Belisarius for something he had advised upon and sensed the need to emphasise occasions when his advice had been sound. To achieve his self-portrayal as an expert military adviser, Procopius sometimes represents characters (including himself) as feeling 'at a loss' or 'perplexed'. In *Wars* 1 and 3–6, he has 'his hero' Belisarius feeling so: at the Persian invasion of Commagene in 531; his fleet's arrival to Sicily in 533; his army's disorderly sacking of the Vandal camp at Tricamarum, 533; at the siege of Naples in 536; hearing the Goths were marching against Rome in 537 (although since this was predictable, Procopius may be exaggerating the degree of perplexity); when the besieged population of Rome demand action in 537;

(2014: 449, n. 715) signals that Procopius provides a similar evaluation at *Anekdotia* 5.1.

⁴² As Procopius is characterised by Cameron 1985: xi–xii, 13, 86, 151, 241.

⁴³ οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι καλῶς μὲν φερόμενοι εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν γνώμην ἢ τύχην ἀναφέρουσι τὰ πρασσόμενα, σφαλέντες δὲ τὸν παραινέσαντα αἰτιῶνται μόνον.

strategising at Fermo in 538; at the siege of Osimo in 539, and on learning of the invasion of Italy by the Franks in 539.⁴⁴ Normally, Procopius portrays Belisarius as reaching a successful solution alone. So he may be setting Belisarius up to appear puzzled but complimenting him on his own abilities to plan solutions in difficult circumstances. However, on two occasions, on Sicily and at Osimo, Procopius represents himself as providing Belisarius with solutions. These are of particular interest as they frame the Vandal and first Gothic wars, 533–540. Belisarius' landing on Sicily opened the western wars as a launchpad to invade North Africa, and the long-awaited capture of Osimo allowed Belisarius to move on to take Ravenna, ending the first Gothic war. Procopius is using his portrayal of Belisarius to highlight his own participation in, and importance regarding, momentous events.

As the main protagonist (if not always his 'hero') of *Wars*, Procopius mentions Belisarius' name increasingly across (approximately equally long) Books 1 to 6 (from 46 to 55; 63; 80; 163 to 193 times respectively) before dropping in Books 7 and 8 (115 and 5 times respectively). By contrast, Justinian is mentioned, by name, 221 times in Books 1 to 8: the frequency varies across Books 1 to 7 (from 29 to 52; 17; 19; 16; 8 and 34 times respectively) before rising in Book 8 (46 times). There are 23 Johns who are mentioned a total of 481 times (John nephew of Vitalian appears approximately 110 times, mostly in Books 6 and 7). It is noteworthy that Book 6 sees the highest number of mentions of Belisarius (193) and the lowest number of mentions of Justinian by name (8). This is the book which culminates in Belisarius' capture of the Gothic capital, Ravenna, and the one in which he is offered, but declines, the Gothic crown three times.⁴⁵ Regarding the *Persian Wars*, Greatrex comments that 'Belisarius occupies a special place in the narrative:... the Persian King Khusro dominates book ii... Belisarius still shines in his encounter with the king in 541 (ii. 20–21).'⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Wars* 1.18.4 δηπορεῖτο; 3.14.3 ἀπορούμενος; 4.4.6 ἐν ἀπόρῳ; 5.9.10 ἀπορουμένῳ; 5.17.1 δηπορεῖτο; 6.3.12 ἀπορουμένῳ; 6.16.17 δηπορεῖτό; 6.23.23 ἀπορουμένῳ; 6.25.19 ἀμχανίαν respectively.

⁴⁵ Lillington-Martin 2009: 5–7.

⁴⁶ Greatrex 2022b: 10, n. 31.

Procopius offers a highly complex and evolving portrayal of Belisarius, shaped by context, outcome, and rhetorical purpose. Much like Tacitus' treatment of Germanicus, Procopius' Belisarius moves between glory and failure, heroism and helplessness, depending on the moment and message. This progressive redefinition is rooted in a literary tradition that accommodates ambivalence: like Odysseus or Germanicus, Belisarius is sometimes intimidated, uncertain, or undermined and yet still retains the aura of a significant general. His character is filtered through both military success and Procopius' shifting authorial stance: in *Wars*, Belisarius may appear noble or perplexed; in the *Anekdotai*, he may be diminished or ridiculed. At times, Procopius even inserts himself as a key figure in Belisarius' decision-making, casting his own advice as pivotal. The variations in how frequently Belisarius and Justinian are mentioned further reflect these narrative and thematic fluctuations, especially with Book 6 marking the zenith of Belisarius' prominence. Ultimately, as with Tacitus' Germanicus, Procopius' Belisarius becomes not just a military protagonist but also a vehicle through which larger political and moral critiques of leadership, loyalty, and imperial control are articulated.

Belisarius' first rise and fall, 527–531

The early stages of Belisarius' career under Justinian offer insight into Procopius' subtle narrative techniques and political commentary. In charting Belisarius' rise from guard to commander on the eastern frontier, Procopius not only outlines the general's military progression but also uses ambiguity to suggest complex dynamics between Belisarius, Justinian, and himself. In 527, Justinian promoted Belisarius from his role as an officer among his guards, a *doryphoros* (δορυφόρος),⁴⁷ to become the Commander of Mesopotamia (ἄρχοντα καταλόγων τῶν ἐν Δάρα; ἐν Μεσοποταμίᾳ στρατιωτῶν ἄρχων or *dux Mesopotamiae*), based at Dara on the eastern frontier.⁴⁸ Procopius himself was appointed

⁴⁷ *Wars* 1.12.21.

⁴⁸ *Wars* 1.12.24; 1.22.3; Pseudo-Zachariah, *Chron.* 9.2a (93).

as Belisarius' adviser / *sumboulos* (ξύμβουλος or *assessor*) in 527 too.⁴⁹ However, Procopius avoids specifying who appointed him, inviting readers to infer that Belisarius was responsible. Geoffrey Greatrex outlines the possibilities and concludes that it 'will have been Belisarius'.⁵⁰ This ambiguity may serve to enhance Procopius' own stature or hint at a higher authority's involvement, such as Justinian's. This in turn permits him to characterise both: insinuating that Belisarius does not decide enough and that Justinian decides too much. This leads to potential irony because Procopius gained the necessary experience to write *Wars* by subsequently serving Belisarius from 527 until at least 540. They probably remained in contact, to some degree, into the 540s and perhaps beyond. Given that Belisarius features so much more often than Justinian in the narrative, the opening lines of *Wars*: 'Procopius the Caesarean has written (the history) of the wars which Justinian, Emperor of the Romans, waged against the barbarians of the East and of the West...' ⁵¹ might have been ironic but for the fact that the emperor frames such decisions.

Belisarius is soon characterised as being tasked by Justinian with fort building in the Persian borderlands such as at Mindouos.⁵² Despite a defeat there in c. 528, Justinian is again, perhaps gratuitously, specified as having made him General of the East (στρατηγὸν τῆς ἑω or *magister militum per orientem/MMO*), in April 529. By specifying that Justinian promoted Belisarius twice, in 527 and 529 with specific belligerent orders, Procopius lays aggressive decisions at Justinian's door, and, in addition, he increases Belisarius' authority by associating him with the emperor. Although Procopius eventually characterises Belisarius as the victorious *MMO* winning a spectacular victory at the battle of Dara in June 530, during most of his narrative of this battle Procopius suggests that Belisarius may have shared the authority which resulted in that victory. By tracing Belisarius' promotions and initial military engagements, Procopius crafts a dual commentary: on the growing

⁴⁹ *Wars* 1.1.3; 1.12.24.

⁵⁰ Greatrex 2022b: 169.

⁵¹ *Wars* 1.1.1 Προκόπιος Καισαρεὺς τοὺς πολέμους ξυνέγραψεν οὗς Ἰουστινιανὸς ὁ Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς πρὸς βαρβάρους διήνεγκε τοὺς τε ἐφους καὶ ἐσπερίους...

⁵² *Wars* 1.13.1–8; Lillington-Martin 2012: 4–5.

stature of Belisarius and the assertive, sometimes overreaching, role of Justinian. Through careful framing, Procopius positions himself as both participant and observer, subtly shaping the reader's perception of imperial authority and military competence.

Dara: Authority shared?

Perhaps Belisarius' most famous battle, partly because Procopius provides an extensive description of it, was that at Dara in June 530. Yet even in this moment of triumph, Procopius presents a complex picture of shared command, political manoeuvring, and carefully modulated credit. Justinian had ordered Belisarius to gather an army to march against the Persians.⁵³ He assembled his forces at Dara, but the enemy pre-empted him by invading from Nisibis. Malalas' account notes that Hermogenes (together with the *magister militum* Rufinus): had been sent to the east as ambassadors; then stayed with the '*magister militum*' Belisarius, encamped outside Dara; sent a message to Kavad and awaited a response from the Persian Shah (which materialised as an attack from Nisibis).⁵⁴

Procopius notes that 'Hermogenes also came to [Belisarius] from the emperor to set the army in order with him, holding the office of *magister*'.⁵⁵ Pseudo-Zachariah outlines the Roman victory at Dara but mentions neither Belisarius nor Hermogenes.⁵⁶ According to Procopius' detailed account, it seems that the command of the army was shared in some way. Perhaps Hermogenes' role as intended ambassador was switched to apply his diplomatic skills to the Roman army, while Belisarius remained in command of tactical leadership. Although this scenario is not specified by our ambiguous author, Procopius does

⁵³ Wars 1.13.9 et al. in Martindale 1992a and Martindale 1992b (henceforth PLRE) 3a, 184.

⁵⁴ Malalas, *Chron.* 18.50. Bo. 452.13–453.1414 (crediting only Sunicas for challenging a Persian leader named Sagos, to single combat and slaying him during the battle).

⁵⁵ Wars 1.13.10 καὶ οἱ Ἑρμογένης ξυνδιακοσμήσων τὸν στρατὸν ἐκ βασιλέως ἀφίκετο, τὸ τοῦ μαγίστρου ἀξίωμα ἔχων.

⁵⁶ Pseudo-Zachariah, *Chron.* 9.3 (only Sunicas and Simmas, as baptised Huns, and the Heruls 'under' Bouzes are named, and credited for their deeds).

describe Belisarius and Hermogenes: receiving a report; deploying their units; writing a letter; delivering a speech; drawing up their troops; listening to Pharas' plan; redeploying troops and halting the pursuit, *together* (this joint-command view, οἱ ἀμφὶ Βελισάριον, alternating with Belisarius alone, is labelled *Doppelkommando* [dual command] by Koehn).⁵⁷ Procopius only describes Belisarius *alone* as receiving a message from the Persian commander,⁵⁸ and has Hermogenes *alone* order Andreas not to fight a second duel (but Andreas disobeys).⁵⁹ Procopius has 'the men close to Belisarius' send a second letter and prepare for battle.⁶⁰ As Belisarius and Hermogenes listen to Pharas' plan *together* and 'those close to Belisarius' are pleased by it, Hermogenes is undoubtedly included among 'those close to Belisarius'.⁶¹

This suggests that Hermogenes is also to be included in the other instances when 'those close to Belisarius' are mentioned. Therefore, we may infer that Procopius is giving primacy to Belisarius, and grouping Hermogenes with the general staff, but he is ambiguous in the process. Indeed, Procopius explicitly credits Belisarius for the triumph, after initially suggesting it was shared with the commander Hermogenes.⁶² However, Belisarius' authority soon diminished after the heavy defeat at Callinicum, which highlighted the fragile nature of his command. In this instance, Procopius lessens Belisarius' responsibility by emphasising factors like unreliable allies and the challenges of leading fasting and poorly disciplined troops. This narrative approach is reminiscent of Tacitus' portrayal of Germanicus and reflects Procopius' tendency to divert blame from Belisarius when failures can be ascribed to systemic issues or external pressures. Belisarius was recalled to Constantinople and his authority was then assigned to Sittas, brother-in-law to the Empress Theodora.

Through his nuanced depiction of the Dara campaign, Procopius subtly elevates Belisarius while simultaneously revealing the precarious

⁵⁷ Wars 1.13.12, 22; 1.14.1, 20, 28, 33, 44 and 53. See also Whately 2016: 107; Koehn 2018: 37, n. 95.

⁵⁸ Wars 1.13.17.

⁵⁹ Wars 1.13.35.

⁶⁰ Wars 1.14.7 αὐθις δὲ οἱ ἀμφὶ Βελισάριον ἔγραψαν ὧδε; 1.14.12 οἱ ἀμφὶ Βελισάριον.

⁶¹ Wars 1.14.32–33 καὶ ἐπεὶ τοὺς ἀμφὶ Βελισάριον ἤρεσκε.

⁶² Wars 1.16.1.

nature of his authority. The shifting roles of figures like Hermogenes, and the later fallout after Callinicum, highlight the historian's use of ambiguity to explore the tension between personal merit, imperial favour, and structural constraints within the military hierarchy.

Callinicum: Authority lost!

The campaign leading to the battle of Callinicum in April 531 highlights both the strengths and limitations of Belisarius' leadership, as preserved in various accounts. The sources paint a complex picture of a general navigating strategic caution, religious observance, and a fractious army, against a Persian force that may have exploited both terrain and timing to their advantage. As well as Procopius, Pseudo-Zachariah, Malalas and Jordanes offer details of the campaign and battle.⁶³ The Persians entered Roman territory via the Euphrates valley, near Circesium, and advanced deep into Syria towards Antioch. On receiving reports of this incursion, Belisarius organised a very efficient response and manoeuvred his forces, near to Gabbula, so as to block the Persians' route to Antioch. They then retreated down the Euphrates valley towards the frontier. Belisarius had his forces shadow the Persians, remaining a day's march behind them, apparently with the intention of 'escorting' them out of the empire. Belisarius' authority began to fragment as he did not attack the Persians and, '[B]ecause of this everyone secretly mocked him, both officers and soldiers, but not a man reproached him to his face.'⁶⁴ On Good Friday, 18 April 531, the Persians arrived at Callinicum and camped on the opposite, southern, bank of the Euphrates. The next day they seemed to have lingered there because Belisarius' army had to march from Soura, 25km westwards (or perhaps Soura II, 20 km away) to reach Callinicum. Moreover, Procopius' references to times of the day suggest that the battle was fought in the afternoon.⁶⁵

⁶³ Malalas, *Chron.* 18.60; Pseudo-Zacharias, *Chron.* 9.4a; Jord. *Rom.* 363.

⁶⁴ *Wars* 1.18.12 διὸ δὴ ἅπαντες αὐτῷ λάθρα ἐλοιδοροῦντο, ἄρχοντές τε καὶ στρατιῶται, ἐκάκιζε μέντοι αὐτὸν ἐς ὅσιν οὐδεὶς.

⁶⁵ *Wars* 1.18.35–48.

Procopius claims that the Persians intended to march through uninhabited country rather than keeping to the bank of the Euphrates, but he could not have known this and is probably basing it on what the Persians did after the battle. Similarly, he asserts that they were in the act of preparing for departure when Belisarius' army arrived, but he could not have known that either and he is probably trying to support Belisarius' defence that his army was overeager to fight an unnecessary battle.⁶⁶ Therefore, the Persians, after a good rest, may have actually been waiting to offer battle to Belisarius' (tired, thirsty and hungry) army. Such lingering may have been planned partly to take advantage of the (mostly Christian) Roman army's participating in a pre-Easter fast. This is feasible because Procopius highlights the fact that it was Easter Saturday, and the Roman officers and troops were passionately eager to fight despite their fasting during Easter week.⁶⁷

Procopius portrays Belisarius as wishing to allow the Persians to return across the frontier, as recommended to him by Hermogenes.⁶⁸ Pseudo-Zachariah adds that the Persian army leader wrote a letter to Belisarius, to suggest he not attack 'for the sake of the Nazarenes [possibly Christians] and the Jews who are in the army that is with me, and for the sake of you who are Christians'.⁶⁹ This assigns knowledge of the Christian calendar and customs to the Persians (similarly, Procopius later has Belisarius display knowledge of the Bedouin religious calendar and customs).⁷⁰ However, the army challenged his authority.⁷¹ Belisarius initially tried to resist his army's desire to fight (the troops may have had the Persians' plunder in mind, as well as indignation at the raid and religious fervour) and then agreed to give battle but the Persians won.⁷² Therefore, it is feasible that the Persians, based on their knowledge of Christian customs, formed a plan to entice the Romans into a conflict when they would be weakened by fasting. Even if Belisarius' authority had been respected, the Persians could have

⁶⁶ *Wars* 1.18.13–14.

⁶⁷ *Wars* 1.18.15–16.

⁶⁸ *Wars* 1.18.16.

⁶⁹ Pseudo-Zachariah, *Chron.* 9.4.

⁷⁰ *Wars* 2.16.18.

⁷¹ *Wars* 1.18.24.

⁷² *Wars* 1.21.2 et al. in PLRE 3a, 186.

counter-attacked the Romans, and the result may not have been very different. Belisarius was recalled to Constantinople by the emperor, his conduct was investigated,⁷³ and he was relieved of the office of *magister militum per orientem*. This setback was the first of several serious blows to his authority. Belisarius' reluctance to engage at Callinicum, shaped by both prudence and external advice, ultimately clashed with the zeal of his own troops and the calculated provocation of the Persians. The defeat marked a turning point in his career, as Procopius' account suggests both a loss of authority and imperial concern.

Reputation protected?

Procopius, however, does his utmost to conceal Belisarius' downfall and to protect his patron's reputation and associated authority by suggesting that 'Belisarius came to Byzantium at the summons of the emperor, having been removed from the office which he held, in order that he might march against the Vandals'.⁷⁴ The falsehood in this is confirmed by the fact that Belisarius is reappointed as *MMO* before the expedition was launched in June 533, over two years later. Procopius later compounds the fabrication by characterising Justinian as removing Belisarius from the East surreptitiously in 531, to be redeployed in the West in 533 by recounting that,

Belisarius, the General of the East, was summoned and came to [Justinian] immediately, no announcement having been made to him nor to anyone else that he was about to lead an army against Libya, but **it was given out** that he had been removed from the office which he held.⁷⁵

Wars 3.9.25

⁷³ Malalas, *Chron.* 18.60–61 (on which Procopius is silent). See also Stachura 2024: 348, n. 104.

⁷⁴ *Wars* 1.21.2 καὶ Βελισάριος βασιλεῖ ἐς Βυζάντιον μετάπεμπτος ἦλθε περιηρημένος ἦν εἶχεν ἀρχὴν, ἐφ' ᾧ ἐπὶ Βανδύλους στρατεύσειε.

⁷⁵ παρὶν μὲν αὐτῷ μετάπεμπτος ὁ τῆς ἐώας στρατηγὸς Βελισάριος, οὐχ ὅτι ἐς Λιβύην στρατηγήσειν μέλλοι προειρημένον αὐτῷ ἢ ἄλλῳ ὁτῶσιν, ἀλλὰ **τῷ λόγῳ** παραλέλυτο ἧς εἶχεν ἀρχῆς. Similarly, Procopius uses the Greek **τῷ λόγῳ** ('according to rumors') at 5.5.6; 6.12.39 and 2.15.35.

Procopius here adds the assertion that his removal from office was a cover story and so perhaps *Wars* 3.9.25 could be seeking to expand on *Wars* 1.21.2; but it is not credible. Procopius does his best to protect Belisarius' reputation, and in so doing he assigns far-sighted strategic planning to Justinian. We can thus conclude that Belisarius' authority rose from 527, before he fell from grace in 531 but he was given a second opportunity in 533. We shall now consider why he was granted another chance to wield power with even more authority than he had previously held.

Belisarius' second rise and fall, 532–543

An uprising in Constantinople in January 532 led to second chances for both Belisarius and Justinian. Belisarius was instrumental in saving Justinian's throne during the suppression of the *Nika* riots, within nine months of his defeat at Callinicum. Belisarius was thus able to redeem himself in Justinian's eyes and allay imperial concerns,⁷⁶ as he, and a group of the emperor's loyalists, which included Mundus, Constantiolus and Narses, were effectively given authority to quash the rioters by any means. This resulted in a multi-pronged co-ordinated attack on the gathering point for the rebels in the hippodrome, which reportedly killed 30,000 civilians. Procopius highlights the role of Belisarius in that attack, which may not be entirely unjustified considering that Mundus did wait for Belisarius to enter the hippodrome before he engaged.⁷⁷ According to the *Chronicon Paschale*, it was Belisarius and his guardsmen who captured the *kathisma* and handed over the leaders of the rebellion, which included the usurper Hypatius (the nephew of the former emperor Anastasius), to Justinian for punishment.⁷⁸ With his own authority reestablished, Justinian confirmed Belisarius' status. This is evidenced by *Novellae Constitutiones* 155, regarding a case in Antioch, which Justinian addressed to Belisarius, as στρατηγός (general), on 1st February 533. This suggests he was reappointed as *magister militum*

⁷⁶ *Wars* 1.24.44–53; et al. in PLRE 3a, 187.

⁷⁷ Greatrex 1997: 79–80, n. 98; Brodka 2018.

⁷⁸ CP 624–625, 625.8–11.

per orientem sometime in 532, or January 533 at the latest. However, instead of conducting military operations in the East, Belisarius was ordered to lead 50,000 soldiers and sailors on an expedition to invade the Vandal kingdom (North Africa, the Balearic Islands, Sardinia and Corsica).⁷⁹ Procopius states that, “As general with supreme authority over all [*autokrator*] the emperor sent Belisarius, who was again in command of the eastern armies [*MMO*]”.⁸⁰ The expedition, which left Constantinople in late June 533, captured the entire kingdom of the Vandals (except Lilybaeum, modern Marsala, Sicily) by early 534. Belisarius’ authority was confirmed by three things: not only by his office as *MMO* and Procopius’ designation of him as *autokrator* but, in addition, according to Procopius, by a document from Justinian:

And the emperor gave him written instructions to do everything as seemed best to him, confirming that his acts would be as valid as those performed by the emperor himself. The *letter*, in fact, gave him the authority of an emperor.⁸¹

Wars 3.11.20

In line with the authority which Procopius assigns to Belisarius at the time, within three chapters he refers to himself, in his account of the voyage to Africa, as a senior adviser (*πάρεδρος*, *paredros*, or *quaestor*).⁸² Procopius may be enhancing his own reputation.

The *Codex Justinianus* (*CJ*) 1.27.2.pr., issued in Constantinople on 13 April 534, refers to Belisarius as *MMO* on the eve of his return. Procopius states that, on his second expedition to the west in 535, the “general in supreme command over all [*autokrator*] was Belisarius”, suggesting similar authority to that held in 533. Furthermore, Procopius has Belisarius refer to his being supreme commander in a speech to (in)subordinate commanders in 541 (*Wars* 2.18.6), and he has Justinian

⁷⁹ *Wars* 1.26.1 et al. in PLRE 3a, 187.

⁸⁰ *Wars* 3.11.18 **στρατηγὸν δὲ αὐτοκράτορα ἐφ’ ἅπασιν** Βελισάριον βασιλεὺς ἔστελλεν, ὃς τῶν ἐφ’ αὐτῷ καταλόγων ἦρχε.

⁸¹ **γράμματά** τε αὐτῷ βασιλεὺς ἔγραψε, δρᾶν ἕκαστα ὅπῃ ἂν αὐτῷ δοκῇ ἄριστα ἔχειν, ταῦτά τε κύρια εἶναι ἅτε αὐτοῦ βασιλέως αὐτὰ διαπεπραγμένου. βασιλέως γὰρ αὐτῷ **ρόπην** τὰ γράμματα ἐποίει.

⁸² *Wars* 3.14.3 discussed in Lillington-Martin 2018: 158–160.

refer to Belisarius' supreme authority in a letter to Totila in 546 (*Wars* 7.21.25). Therefore, αὐτοκράτωρ (supreme commander) was only ever bestowed upon Belisarius in so many theatres of war, in Procopius' *Wars* at least.⁸³

Authority *en route* to victory in Africa

Procopius characterises Belisarius as using his authority over army discipline on a number of occasions during the expedition against the Vandals. Shortly after sailing from Constantinople, when the fleet was delayed at Abydos for four days due to a lack of wind, two Hunnic mercenaries got drunk and murdered a fellow Hun. Procopius specifies that Belisarius had them impaled to instil discipline in the army.⁸⁴ On arriving at the African coast at Caput Vada (Rass Kaboudia, Chebba) Belisarius anchored his fleet and called the commanders to a strategy meeting on his ship. Procopius says that many speeches were made both for and against disembarking the army. He reports that (the older) Archelaus (possibly ironically) complimented Belisarius on his virtue, judgment and experience and reminded all that Belisarius alone held power, before making a long speech listing reasons not to disembark the army.⁸⁵ Procopius has Belisarius respond with an equally long speech outlining the advantages of disembarkation.⁸⁶ Belisarius is characterised as considerate and wise, presenting alternatives and proposing to choose the best course of action *with* his commanders, who adopt his plan. This is reflected in a very similar conference at Dara in June 541 when the commanders debate options regarding an invasion into Persia,⁸⁷ and another at Sisauranon to debate a retreat.⁸⁸ So, Procopius

⁸³ *Wars* 5.5.4 στρατηγὸς δὲ αὐτοκράτωρ ἐφ' ἅπασι Βελισάριος ἦν; in 541 at 2.18.6 αὐτὸν ἕκαστον αὐτοκράτορα τοῦ πολέμου ἐθέλοντα εἶναι, in 546 at 7.21.25 ὅτι δὴ αὐτοκράτορα τοῦ πολέμου πεποίηται Βελισάριον, κύριός τε διὰ τοῦτο ἐκεῖνος εἶη τὰ πρὸς Τουτίλαν ὅπως βούλοιο διοικήσασθαι.

⁸⁴ *Wars* 3.12.7–22.

⁸⁵ Archelaus 5 in PLRE 2, 133; *Wars* 3.15.1–17.

⁸⁶ *Wars* 3.15.18–30 and see Krallis 2022: 300–301.

⁸⁷ *Wars* 2.16.6–19.

⁸⁸ *Wars* 2.19.35–44.

characterises Belisarius as a leader who used his authority to achieve collective decision-making.⁸⁹

The day after landing at Caput Vada, Belisarius punishes soldiers who had stolen some fruit. This relates to maintaining his authority and army discipline (as at Abydos), but Procopius notes it was important that the army did not alienate the local Roman population. Belisarius orders his troops to pay for food at this point, although this may be rhetoric as it is the sort of order we would expect to have been given before disembarking.⁹⁰ Pseudo-Zachariah concurs by writing 'Belisarius... was a friend to the peasants and did not permit the army to molest them.'⁹¹ Zachariah was commenting on Belisarius' authority and control over the Roman army in the East but the same policy was applicable in North Africa and Italy. Having applied his authority on his soldiers, he marched the army northwards towards Carthage without further incidents of indiscipline, whilst the fleet shadowed the army and moved up the coast. On reaching *Ad Decimum*, Belisarius' cavalry defeated the Vandals on 13 September 533. The next day he was joined by his infantry, and he led the army to Carthage but camped outside to avoid any potential ambushes by the enemy, or plundering by his troops, under cover of night, even though the Carthaginians opened their gates.⁹² This suggests that neither Procopius nor Belisarius entirely trusted the troops to respect Belisarius' authority. Meanwhile the fleet was approaching Carthage and anchored at Stagnum (9 km from Carthage), but that night Admiral Calonymus and some sailors plundered the property of merchants in Mandracium.⁹³ That the admiral of the fleet disobeys Belisarius demonstrates the limitations in his ability to control his officers despite Justinian's letter (*Wars* 3.11.20), giving 'him the authority of an emperor'. This may explain why Belisarius led the fleets in the subsequent Sicilian and Italian campaigns rather than have a separate admiral,⁹⁴ even though our sources are silent. On 15th

⁸⁹ Similarly at *Wars* 7.30.15. See also Krallis 2022: 299, 304; Azzani 2023; Stewart 2025.

⁹⁰ *Wars* 3.16.1–8.

⁹¹ Pseudo-Zachariah, *Chron.* 9.93.

⁹² *Wars* 3.20.1–2.

⁹³ *Wars* 3.20.15–16.

⁹⁴ Michael Stewart, pers. comm.

September, Belisarius deployed all the soldiers and sailors to march into Carthage. Procopius has Belisarius remind his troops: that their own good behaviour towards the local population had resulted in good luck until that point on the campaign and that the locals' ancestors had been Roman citizens.⁹⁵ Procopius emphasises the soldiers' respect for Belisarius' authority:

though the Roman soldiers were not accustomed to enter a subject city without disorder, even if they numbered only five hundred, and especially if they made the entry unexpectedly, all the soldiers under the command of this general showed themselves so orderly that there was not a single act of insolence nor a threat, and indeed nothing happened to hinder the business of the city.⁹⁶

Wars 3.21.9

Belisarius ensured his soldiers entered Carthage peacefully, and did so in Syracuse, Rome and Ravenna too, but Procopius relates that he was unable to control them after storming the Vandal camp at Tricamarum and Gothic Naples.⁹⁷

Authority envied, challenged and restored

On entering the palace in Carthage on 15th September 533, Belisarius 'seated himself on Gelimer's throne'.⁹⁸ This physical manifestation of his authority might have confirmed 'that his acts would be valid as if the emperor himself had done them' but it did not, and it was followed by accusations. Procopius immediately demonstrates, in the succeeding lines, how Belisarius' authority was undermined by recounting how the

⁹⁵ *Wars* 3.20.17–20.

⁹⁶ τῶν γὰρ δὴ Ῥωμαίων στρατιωτῶν οὐκ εἰωθότων θορύβου χωρὶς ἐς πόλιν κατήκοον σφίσιν οὐδ' ἂν κατὰ πεντακοσίους εἶεν ἄλλως τε καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀπροσδοκῆτου ἰέναι, οὕτω δὴ κοσμίους ἅπαντας ὁ στρατηγὸς οὗτος τοὺς ἀρχομένους παρέσχετο ὥστε οὐδὲ ὕβριν τινὰ ἢ ἀπειλὴν γενέσθαι, οὐ μὴν οὐδέ τι ἐμπόδισμα τῇ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν ἐργασίᾳ ξυνέβη.

⁹⁷ *Wars* 5.6.12–18 (Syracuse); 5.14.4–14 (Rome); 6.29.32–35 (Ravenna); 4.3.24 and 4.4.3–5 (Tricamarum); 5.10.29; Lillington-Martin, Stewart 2021: 293, n. 39 (Naples).

⁹⁸ *Wars* 3.20.21 ἐν τῷ Γελίμερος θρόνῳ ἐκάθισεν.

victims of the raid on Mandracium appealed to him. He bound admiral Calonymus by oaths to return the goods stolen from Mandracium, but the admiral disregarded what he had sworn to the 'autokrator'. Rather than criticise Belisarius' failure to punish the admiral, the author describes how the admiral died.⁹⁹ Procopius describes how some envious officers slandered Belisarius to Justinian by suggesting he sought to establish his own kingdom. Procopius both defends Belisarius against accusations of disloyalty (see below) and points out that his authority was only respected superficially by the admiral.

Belisarius' authority had benefitted by the significant riches he had obtained during the African campaign. He spent money on workers to dig a trench around Carthage's circuit-wall, which he was having repaired.¹⁰⁰ Procopius reports that Belisarius' authority was recognised by the leaders of the Mauri:

For all those who ruled over the Moors in Mauretania and Numidia and Byzacium sent envoys to Belisarius saying that they were slaves of the emperor and promised to fight with him.¹⁰¹

Wars 3.25.3

To these Mauri Belisarius sent the traditional gold and silver insignia of office and much money.¹⁰² Procopius says that in fact the Mauri remained neutral and so perhaps he is being ambiguous. This story could be interpreted by certain readers as the Mauri promising to fight with Belisarius as emperor. This possibility is supported by the subsequent uprising of the Mauri on learning in the Spring of 534 that Belisarius planned to sail from Carthage back to Constantinople, with his guards and the Vandal prisoners.¹⁰³ The circumstances foreshadow the uprising of the Goths in Italy after Belisarius disingenuously feigned acceptance of their crown and then left Ravenna to return to Constantinople in May

⁹⁹ *Wars* 3.20.22–25.

¹⁰⁰ *Wars* 3.23.19–20.

¹⁰¹ ὅσοι γὰρ ἐν τε Μαυριτανίᾳ καὶ Νουμιδίᾳ καὶ Βυζακίῳ Μαυρουσίων ἦρχον, πρέσβεις ὡς Βελισάριον πέμψαντες δοῦλοί τε βασιλέως ἔφασκον εἶναι καὶ ξυμμαχήσειν ὑπέσχοντο.

¹⁰² *Wars* 3.25.3–8.

¹⁰³ *Wars* 4.8.20.

540. In both circumstances Belisarius had the authority of an emperor and had defeated his enemy, but he remained loyal to his emperor and returned to Constantinople as Justinian's subordinate rather than rule independently. Procopius highlights Belisarius' loyalty at Carthage, and after capturing Ravenna he says that "never, while the emperor Justinian lived, would Belisarius usurp the imperial title."¹⁰⁴ Procopius seems to admire Belisarius' loyalty, but he went on to gain respect for the Goths, a view which he needed to disguise. I argue that Procopius presents Belisarius as shaping a Mauri perspective, in 534, in a manner structurally akin to his Gothic strategy in 540: an initial elevation of his personal role, followed by a staged withdrawal that reasserts imperial authority.¹⁰⁵

Whilst Belisarius oversaw the repairs to the wall of Carthage, the Vandals approached the city and sought traitors to assist them: either Carthaginians or Arian Roman soldiers. One Laurus, a Carthaginian, is proven guilty by his own secretary and convicted of treason. Belisarius had him impaled, successfully discouraging further acts of treason, and attacked the Vandal king, Gelimer's, reorganised forces and soundly defeated them at Tricamarum in mid-December 533.¹⁰⁶ The Roman troops stormed and then pillaged the Vandal camp throughout the night as Belisarius' control over them evaporated:

For neither did fear of the enemy nor respect for Belisarius occur to them, nor indeed anything else at all except the desire for spoils and, being overmastered by this, they came to disregard everything else.¹⁰⁷

Wars 4.4.5

¹⁰⁴ *Wars* 6.30.28 ὁ δὲ οὐ προσδεχομένοις αὐτοῖς ἄντικρυς ἀπεῖπεν, ὥς οὐκ ἂν ποτε ζῶντος Ἰουστινιανοῦ βασιλέως Βελισάριος ἐπιβατεύοι τοῦ τῆς βασιλείας ὀνόματος.

¹⁰⁵ Lillington-Martin 2009: 11–13.

¹⁰⁶ *Wars* 4.1.8. For Tricamarum campaign strategy, battle location and tactics see Lillington-Martin 2025a: 1–14.

¹⁰⁷ οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτοὺς τῶν πολεμίων φόβος οὐδὲ ἡ Βελισαρίου αἰδῶς ἐσήει οὐδὲ ἄλλο τῶν πάντων οὐδέν, ὅτι μὴ ἡ τῶν λαφύρων ἐπιθυμία, ταύτης τε ὑπερβιαζομένης ἐς ὀλιγωρίαν τῶν ἄλλων πάντων ἐτράποντο.

But at daybreak he took his stand upon a certain hill by the road, appealing to a discipline that no longer existed and heaping reproaches upon all, soldiers and officers alike.¹⁰⁸

Wars 4.4.7

Eventually, Belisarius manages to restore order: '... those who were of the household of Belisarius... themselves came up beside the general and obeyed the orders they were given.'¹⁰⁹ This was the second serious loss of authority. Much of what Procopius writes here is about influence over groups, which is a form of 'authority', attained by giving a certain impression as a commander, to mere fortune, to the type of people being influenced. So there is a chain of causes and attempts to exert control over groups that always risk getting out of hand. In some ways the characterisation is of the soldiers not the commander.

After this Belisarius exerted his authority once again, by garrisoning the cities and islands which the Vandals had ruled: Sardinia; Corsica; Caesarea in Mauretania; Septem; Ibiza, Majorca, and Minorca and Tripolis.¹¹⁰ On the grounds that it had belonged to the Vandals, he sent a force to seize Lilybaeum, on the western tip of Gothic Sicily, but it was repulsed. Procopius has Belisarius write a rather belligerent letter to the Gothic commanders demanding their cooperation. Procopius has them refer to their queen, Amalasuentha, who instructs them to reply to Belisarius by offering to let Justinian arbitrate. This suggests limitations to Belisarius' authority.

Belisarius accepted the surrender of Gelimer, the king of the Vandals and Alans, in March 534. Procopius claims, in *Wars*, that Belisarius requested permission from the emperor to bring Gelimer to Constantinople *and* that Justinian then invited Belisarius to choose between staying in Africa or returning to Constantinople.¹¹¹ Such a 'request' demonstrates another limit to Belisarius' authority and the 'invitation' would

¹⁰⁸ ἅμα δὲ ἡμέρα ἐπὶ λόφου τινὸς τῆς ὁδοῦ ἀγχοῦ εἰστίηκει, τὴν τε οὐκέτι οὔσαν εὐκοσμίαν ἀνακαλούμενος καὶ πολλὰ πᾶσι στρατιώταις τε ὁμοῦ καὶ ἄρχουσι λοιδορούμενος.

¹⁰⁹ *Wars* 4.4.8 οἱ τῆς Βελισαρίου οἰκίας ὄντες... αὐτοὶ δὲ παρὰ τὸν στρατηγὸν ἰόντες τῶν σφίσι παραγγελλομένων κατήκουον.

¹¹⁰ *Wars* 4.5.1–10.

¹¹¹ *Wars* 4.7.17 and 4.8.1–8.

seem less than logical if any such ‘request’ had been made. There was a reason for the ‘invitation’ being issued, which may partly relate to his having sat on Gelimer’s throne in September 533: ‘For some of the officers slandered him [Belisarius] to the emperor, charging him, without any grounds whatever, with seeking to set up a kingdom for himself, a statement for which there was no basis whatever.’¹¹² In his *Anekdotia*, Procopius states that Justinian, ‘straightway summoned Belisarius to return home without the least delay, laying against him an utterly unjustified accusation of tyranny.’¹¹³ Kaldellis observes that Procopius quotes the same language in both the *Wars* and the *Anekdotia* describing this charge as ‘utterly baseless.’¹¹⁴ Martindale sees *Anekdotia* 18.9 as a ‘malicious interpretation of these events, forming part of his [Procopius’] attack on Justinian’.¹¹⁵ However, Kaldellis argues that ‘CJ 1.27.2.15 (13 April 534) suggests that Justinian had “ordered” Belisarius to return.’¹¹⁶ This implies that Justinian had concerns about Belisarius’ loyalty: he returned to Constantinople.

Belisarius was then granted the honour of a triumph in Constantinople (534), made *Consul* (535) and promoted to the rank of *Patricius* (536).¹¹⁷ Peculiarly, Procopius never refers to Belisarius as a patrician either in his *Wars* or his *Anekdotia*, despite naming many characters as such, including Antonina, who derived this highest honorary court dignity through her marriage to Belisarius.¹¹⁸ The honour of the triumph and dignity of being appointed *Consul* and raised to patrician rank all added significantly to Belisarius’ authority and reputation.¹¹⁹

¹¹² *Wars* 4.8.2 τῶν γὰρ ἀρχόντων τινὲς διέβαλον αὐτὸν ἐς βασιλέα, **τυραννίδα αὐτῷ οὐδαμῶθεν προσήκουσαν ἐπικαλοῦντες.**

¹¹³ *Anekdotia* 18.9 Βελισάριον αὐτίκα μελλήσει οὐδεμιᾶ μετεπέμπετο, **τυραννίδα οἱ οὐδαμῶθεν προσήκουσαν ἐπεγαλέσας.**

¹¹⁴ Kaldellis 2010: 81, n. 174.

¹¹⁵ PLRE 3a, 192.

¹¹⁶ Kaldellis 2014: 206, n. 381. On Belisarius being hated by other commanders and members of the imperial court, see Krupczyński 1978; 1981.

¹¹⁷ *Wars* 4.9.1–3; 4.9.15–16; et al. in PLRE 3a, 193.

¹¹⁸ *Anekdotia* 3.16.

¹¹⁹ Beard 2007: 287–330; Börm 2013: 63–91 offers the most recent and thorough discussion of the circumstances behind Belisarius’ triumph.

Because of Belisarius' success in Africa, Justinian's *Codex* (April 534) adds the postnominals *alanic. vvandalic. afric.* to his previous ones to mark the subjugation of the Africans, Vandals and Alans:

In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Emperor Caesar Flavius, Justinianus, Allamannicus, Gothicus, Franciscus, Germanicus, Anticus, **Alanicus, Vandalicus, Africanus**, pious, fortunate, renowned Conqueror and Triumpher and ever Augustus.¹²⁰

Codex Iustinianus 1.27.43

These epithets were passed on to subsequent emperors down to Heraclius. Belisarius, as *Consul* in 535 and still *MMO*, campaigned successfully in Sicily and Italy until 540, and then in Syria until 542.

To Rome!

When Belisarius led the second expedition to the west in 535, 'The emperor instructed Belisarius to give out that his destination was Carthage'¹²¹ but gave him secret orders to seize Sicily if feasible. However, apart from Procopius' designation of him as *autokrator*, there is no mention of Belisarius' office as *MMO* or of a letter for him from Justinian (although Procopius includes a letter from Justinian for the Franks).¹²² So, in the context of the expeditions of 533 and 535, Belisarius, as *autokrator*, is commander-in-chief of 24 and 10 other named commanders respectively. Starting at Catania, he conquered Sicily and marched into Syracuse with a triumphal procession, distributing gold coins on the last day of his consulship, 31 December 535, and wintered there.¹²³ There soon ensued a military revolt in Africa at Easter

¹²⁰ CJ 1.27.1.pr. in nom. d. n. ihesu christi imp. c. flav. iust. alaman. gotthic. francic. germanic. antic. **alanic. vvandalic. afric.** pius felix incl. victor ac triumphator semper A.

¹²¹ Wars 5.5.6. βασιλεύς τε Βελισαρίω ἐπέστελλεν ἐς Καρχηδόνα μὲν τῷ λόγῳ στέλλεσθαι.

¹²² Wars 5.5.8–9.

¹²³ Wars 5.5.17–19. 4.14.1–4.

536.¹²⁴ Solomon, with Procopius, escaped to Sicily from Carthage and appealed to Belisarius for help. Procopius does not tell us how long, or why, he had been in Africa. Belisarius rushed to Carthage with 100 of his spearmen and guards in one ship and news of his arrival caused the rebels to retreat from Carthage. There he organised 2,000 loyal troops and defeated the rebels in battle, at Membresa, before returning to Sicily where another mutiny had broken out.¹²⁵ Neither Procopius, nor any other source, explains how Belisarius quelled the mutiny in Sicily. By November 536, he had invaded Italy and was besieging Naples, which was taken by storm after refusing to surrender. In early December 536, Rome surrendered to Belisarius, and he prepared the city to withstand a siege. His authority was now recognised by all of Italy south of Rome and Samnium, and he garrisoned parts of southern Tuscany.

The Goths, under their new king, Witiges, marched on Rome in February 537 and defeated Belisarius in a skirmish near the Salarian Bridge, which led to Belisarius expressing confidence in winning the war which caused him to be ridiculed by some of the population.¹²⁶ During the siege, Pope Silverius was deposed in March 537,¹²⁷ and Belisarius allegedly ‘**ordained** the deacon Vigilius in his place’.¹²⁸ This suggests an added element to Belisarius’ authority beyond the military and civil spheres, into the religious, and confirms his ‘supreme command’ as ἀντοκράτωρ. Belisarius led a successful defence of Rome, including about 70 skirmishes by horse archers over several months. This led to demands by the army and citizens for a pitched battle against the Goths,¹²⁹ similarly to how the army had insisted on fighting at Callinicum in 531. As at Callinicum, and despite careful preparations, the Goths’ superiority in numbers, and some Roman ill-discipline, led to a heavy defeat for the Romans,¹³⁰ and Belisarius resumed his tactics of sallies by horse archers.¹³¹

¹²⁴ Wars 4.14.41–42.

¹²⁵ Wars 4.15.46–49.

¹²⁶ Wars 5.18.42, 27.25–29.

¹²⁷ Lillington-Martin 2024a: 227–233.

¹²⁸ Marc. com. Addit. 537.1 *loco eius Vigilium diaconum ordinavit*.

¹²⁹ Wars 5.28.3; cf. 1.18.24.

¹³⁰ Wars 5.29.16–50.

¹³¹ Wars 6.1.1.

During that same summer of 537, Justinian made a legal change which affected Belisarius. In his *Novellae Constitutiones* 47, Justinian decreed that official documents and legal proceedings be dated with the addition of the emperor's name and regnal year first, instead of being dated solely by the most recent consul's name. Procopius criticised Justinian for adding his name to things.¹³² Such dating had been in Belisarius' sole name since 535.

Authority rescinded

Belisarius' second and most serious fall from grace occurred in 542, again in Syria, and he was relieved of his command as *MMO* for a second time, Martinus taking his place. Procopius claims that Belisarius was again recalled by the emperor to be sent to campaign in the West, this time in Italy, but again there was a two-year gap before he was sent there in 544, and his disgrace beforehand is confirmed.¹³³ In his *Anekdotota*, Procopius explains how Belisarius was suspected of disloyalty to the imperial couple, despite causing Khusro to withdraw his army from Syria in 542, and the emperor forbade many of Belisarius' friends or men who had previously served him in other ways to visit him (possibly including Procopius himself).¹³⁴ This brings us back to *Anekdotota* 4.16 at the head of this article, which Procopius uses to describe Belisarius' plight from late 542. Belisarius is now a private citizen without a military command. With this fall from grace in mind, Procopius compensates by lauding Belisarius' achievement of repelling Khusro in *Wars* 2:

The Romans held Belisarius in high regard, and the man seemed to have gained *more renown in this affair even than when he brought Gelimer or Vitigis* as captives to Byzantium.¹³⁵

¹³² Kaldellis 2010: 50, n. 72; Miller, Sarris 2018: 405, n. 1; *Anekdotota* 11.2.

¹³³ *Wars* 2.21.34; 7.9.23; *Jord. Rom.* 377; *Marc. com. Addit.* 545.3.

¹³⁴ *Anekdotota* 4.2–6 and 13–15. Stewart 2023: 178–192 deals at length with this episode and the current scholarship regarding it.

¹³⁵ Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ Βελισάριον ἐν εὐφημίαις εἶχον, μᾶλλον τε σφίσιν ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐν τούτῳ εὐδοκιμῆσαι τῷ ἔργῳ ἐδόκει ἢ ὅτε Γελίμερα δορυάλωτον ἢ τὸν Οὐίτιγιν ἐς Βυζάντιον ἦνεγκεν.

It is noteworthy that Procopius states that the ‘Romans’, rather than the emperor, held Belisarius in high regard. He goes on to add further details to explain the situation:

For in reality it was *an achievement of great importance* and one *deserving great praise*, that, at a time *when all the Romans were panic-stricken* with fear and were hiding themselves in their defences, and *Khusro with a mighty army* had come into the midst of the Roman domain, *a general* [sc. Belisarius] *with only a few men*, coming in hot haste from Byzantium just at that moment, should have set his camp over against that of the Persian king, and that *Khusro* unexpectedly, either through fear of fortune or of the valour of the man or even because deceived by some tricks, should no longer continue his advance, but should in reality *take to flight*, though pretending to be seeking peace.¹³⁶

Wars 2.21.29

Here Procopius is being unusually explicit by asserting that Belisarius deserved great praise for rushing from Constantinople to Syria and outmanoeuvring the Persian shah to force him to withdraw. Procopius is effectively providing a taste of his subsequent eulogy to Belisarius at Wars 7.1.

Procopius’ careful readers could infer that he was implying that the emperor had treated Belisarius as poorly in this case as he had, according to Procopius’ view, two years earlier after taking Ravenna from the Goths in 540. This would suggest that Justinian was happy to celebrate a general’s success once but not for a second or third time. Belisarius achieved three remarkable successes against three kings. Other generals enjoyed a certain degree of celebrated success against enemies,

¹³⁶ ἦν γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς λόγου καὶ ἐπαίνου πολλοῦ ἄξιον, πεφοβημένων μὲν καὶ τοῖς ὀχυρώμασι κρυπτομένων Ῥωμαίων πάντων, Χοσρόου δὲ στρατῷ μεγάλῳ ἐν μέσῃ γεγονότος Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῇ, ἄνδρα στρατηγὸν ζὺν ὀλίγοις τισὶ δρόμῳ ὅξει ἐκ Βυζαντίου μεταξὺ ἦκοντα ἀπ’ ἐναντίας τοῦ Περσῶν βασιλέως στρατοπεδεύσασθαι, Χοσρόην δὲ ἐκ τοῦ ἀπροσδοκίτου, ἢ τὴν τύχην ἢ τὴν ἀρετὴν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς δείσαντα ἢ καὶ τισιν ἐξαπατηθέντα σοφίσμασιν, ἐπίτροσθεν μηκέτι χωρῆσαι, ἀλλὰ τῷ μὲν ἔργῳ φυγεῖν, λόγῳ δὲ τῆς εἰρήνης ἐφίεσθαι.

but then conveniently died fighting in their theatres of operations (e.g. Sittas in Armenia and Solomon in Africa). One simply refused to return to Constantinople (Narses in Italy). Procopius characterises Belisarius as unusually successful, loyal in trying circumstances and deserving of more praise than he received.¹³⁷ From 544–549 his title was ‘commander of the imperial stables’ (*comes sacri stabuli* / ἄρχων τῶν βασιλικῶν καταστάς ἵπποκόμων).¹³⁸ Justinian again promoted him to *MMO* in 549 and he retained this prestigious title until 551, and no one else was appointed to the position until 555.¹³⁹

Jordanes’ epithets for Belisarius

Writing c. 550, Jordanes describes Belisarius’ titles in various ways culminating in one which might be seen to suggest increased authority for him and to almost challenge that of Justinian. Initially, in his *Getica*, Jordanes uses Belisarius’ official titles:

... the most glorious man Belisarius, *magister militum* of the Orient, former ordinary consul and patrician.¹⁴⁰
Jord. *Get.* (171).

At *Romana* (366, 373, 375 and 378), Jordanes ‘emphasised Belisarius’ position as *consul*’.¹⁴¹ Jordanes then has Justinian and Belisarius share the victory titles of *Vandalicus*, *Africanus* and *Geticus* in his *Getica*:

This praiseworthy people [Goths] ceded to an even more praiseworthy emperor [Justinian] and offered its hands to a braver general [the Goths offered to hand their crown to Belisarius!], whose fame will be silenced

¹³⁷ See also Chassin 1957; Downey 1960; Evert-Kappesowa 1964; Boss 1993; Hughes 2009; Parnell 2017; 2023.

¹³⁸ *Anekdotia* 4.39.

¹³⁹ PLRE 3b, 1499.

¹⁴⁰ *Virum gloriosissimum Belisarium Magistrum Militum Orientalem, Exconsulem Ordinarium atque Patricium*. Jord. *Getica* & *Romana* (van Nuffelen, van Hoof 2023).

¹⁴¹ Van Nuffelen, van Hoof 2023: 213, n. 642.

in no century and no age. Indeed, the victorious and triumphant emperor **Justinian** and the **consul Belisarius** will [both] be called **Vandalicus**, **Africanus** and **Geticus**.¹⁴²

Jord. *Get.* (315).

Whilst Justinian, as emperor, used such victory titles, Belisarius, as a general, could not and so Jordanes is deliberately associating Belisarius with Justinian's privilege.¹⁴³ However, at *Romana* 377, Jordanes has Belisarius as sole '*Wandalicus Geticusque*' ('victor over the Vandals and over the Getae' [Goths]). Whilst this was by no means an official title, it is noteworthy that a contemporary writer described Belisarius in this manner around 550, and it indicates that Belisarius retained an admirable reputation. Such considerations may partly explain why Justinian removed the title of *magister militum per orientem* from Belisarius in 551. What is certain is that every emperor from Justinian to Heracilius employed the titles *alanic*, *vandalic*, *afric.*, which Belisarius had earned for Justinian, and contemporaries knew this.

Belisarius was rehabilitated apparently by betrothing his daughter, Joannina, to Theodora's grandson, c. 543, and then conducting his second Italian campaign, 544–549. However, with the effects of the plague from 541 and with a consequent lack of resources, his main achievement there was to limit the success of the Gothic king, Totila (Baduila). Justinian later chose Germanus, recently married to Matasuinthia, widow of Vitigis, to lead the final campaign with a large army in 550 but he died *en route* and was replaced by Narses in 551 (Procopius ponders why Narses was chosen).¹⁴⁴ Justinian could have sent Belisarius on a third campaign but chose to send a relative instead. On his death, a eunuch was chosen, who refused to return to Constantinople and outlived Justinian, in Italy.

¹⁴² *Haec laudanda progenies laudabiliori principi cessit et fortiori duci manus dedit, cuius fama nullis saeculis nullisque silebitur aetatibus, sed victor ac triumphator Iustinianus imperator et consul Belesarius Vandalici Africani Geticique dicentur.*

¹⁴³ Van Nuffelen, van Hoof 2023: 27–28, 369, n. 974.

¹⁴⁴ *Wars* 8.21.6–19.

Conclusion

The portrayal of Belisarius' authority, as explored through Procopius' narrative and corroborated by other contemporary accounts, presents a multifaceted image of the general. While Procopius provides the most detailed assessment of Belisarius among his contemporaries, his depiction is marked by a notable contradiction, ranging from moments of high praise to severe criticism. This contrast, coupled with Jordanes' consistently laudatory epithets for Belisarius, illustrates the complexities of evaluating a figure whose reputation was both celebrated and constrained. Procopius characterises Belisarius' authority as both remarkable and limited, often shaped by the broader context of Justinian's reign. For example, Belisarius' triumph at Dara is presented as a singular achievement, with Procopius explicitly attributing the victory to Belisarius' leadership, after initially suggesting it was shared with Hermogenes. However, this authority quickly faded at Callinicum, resulting in a heavy defeat that demonstrated the fragility of his command. In such instances, Procopius mitigates the general's responsibility, suggesting his authority was undermined by unreliable allies or by the difficult circumstances he faced, such as leading troops who were fasting and poorly disciplined. This narrative tactic resembles Tacitus' portrayal of Germanicus and reflects Procopius' tendency to divert blame from Belisarius.

In contrast, Jordanes' epithets for Belisarius emphasise his unparalleled military successes and enduring legacy. The titles *alanic*, *vandalic*, and *afric.*, bestowed upon Justinian following Belisarius' victories in Africa, were recorded in the *Codex Iustinianus* and continued to be used by subsequent emperors until Heraclius. This enduring association highlights Belisarius' central role in Justinian's campaigns, particularly his decisive defeat of the Vandals and the subsequent consolidation of Roman authority across North Africa, Sardinia, Corsica, and the Balearic Islands. Even so, Procopius notes the limitations of Belisarius' authority, pointing out moments when envious officers slandered him, or his orders were superficially respected but not fully obeyed. Procopius' ambiguous treatment extends beyond specific campaigns to a broader reflection on Belisarius' role. The historian occasionally

criticises the general, such as for the execution of Constantinus or the failures against the Goths during the second western expedition. These moments suggest that Procopius recognised Belisarius' shortcomings, though he often redirected criticism toward Antonina, or Emperor Justinian, whom he blamed for limiting resources or undue interference. This tension between emperor and general is a recurring theme in Procopius' works, where Belisarius is portrayed as an instrument of Justinian's will.

Despite his criticisms, Procopius acknowledges Belisarius' extraordinary contributions. In *Wars* 2, he explicitly praises the general for his swift response to Khusro's invasion of Syria, an action that forced the Persian shah to withdraw and earned Belisarius great acclaim. Such moments of eulogy reveal Procopius' underlying respect for the general, even as his narrative balances these successes with episodes of failure or diminished authority. The progressive redefinition of Belisarius' character in Procopius' works, alternating between glory and critique, may reflect Procopius' own shifting perspective or his complex relationship with the general. Procopius' defence of Belisarius' failure at Callinicum, his 'correction' of narratives via the *Anekdota*, and his depiction of Belisarius being intimidated by his troops all point to a historian grappling with the nuances of authority and responsibility. At times, Procopius appears to distance himself from Belisarius, perhaps as a way of defending some of the advice he proffered, or to critique the broader failures of Justinian's regime.

The portrayal of Belisarius is a nuanced and layered narrative that juxtaposes his remarkable achievements with the limitations imposed by his environment. His victories against the Vandals, Goths, and Persians solidified his reputation as Justinian's most capable commander, yet these triumphs were often tempered by Procopius' reflections on the fragility and transience of his authority. Through his characterisation of Belisarius, Procopius not only offers a rich depiction of the general, but he sheds light on the complex dynamics of power, loyalty, and authority. Three claims are central: that Procopius constructs authority across formal, enacted, and narrated planes; that the Ravenna 'prevarication' is a deliberate narrative valve preventing triumph from hardening into personal sovereignty; and that the 534 Mauri episode anticipates, in

perception and refusal, the 540 Gothic theatre. Finally, the reception diptych, Evagrius' rhetorical admiration and Jordanes' epithets, shows how fame exceeded any single genre's politics.

This study's contribution lies in its methodology: an integrated approach combining genre comparison, reception layering, authority/gesture analysis, and strategic command scope. By tracing how Procopius' representation of Belisarius shifts across *Wars*, *Buildings*, and *Anekdotia*, the article reveals a dynamic interplay between literary form and political meaning. The interdisciplinary framework – drawing on narratology, spatial and career mapping, and late antique political theology – enables a deeper understanding of how authority is staged, contested, and refracted through narrative. Rather than reconstructing events, this analysis foregrounds the rhetorical architecture of reputation, showing how Procopius' evolving depiction of Belisarius reflects broader anxieties about imperial power, delegated command, and historical memory.

References

Primary sources

- Alamanni N., 1623, *Procopius Caesariensis, Anekdotia sive Arcana Historia, quae est Liber nonus Historiarum*, N. Alamanni (ed. and transl.), Romae.
- Bidez J., Parmentier L., *Evagrius Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History*, J. Bidez, L. Parmentier (eds), London 1898.
- Brooks E.W., 1919a, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, E.W. Brooks (ed. and transl.), Louvain.
- Brooks E.W., 1919b, *Historia Ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta*, vol. 1: *Textus Syriacus*, E.W. Brooks (ed. and transl.), Louvain.
- Brooks E.W., 1921, *Historia Ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta*, vol. 2: *Versio Latina*, E.W. Brooks (ed. and transl.), Louvain.
- Brooks E.W., 1924, *Historia Ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta*, vol. 3: *Textus Syriacus*, E.W. Brooks (ed. and transl.), Louvain.
- Brooks E.W., *Historia Ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta*, vol. 4: *Versio Latina*, E.W. Brooks (ed. and transl.), Louvain.
- Dewing H.B., Downey G., *Procopius. Buildings, History of the Wars, Secret History (Anekdotia)*, tr. H.B. Dewing and G. Downey, Cambridge 1914–1940.
- Dindorf L., 1831, *John Malalas, Chronographia*, L. Dindorf (ed.), Bonn.

- Flores Rubio J., 2006, *Procopio de Cesarea, Historia de las guerras. Guerra gótica (Libros V–VI)*, transl. J. Flores Rubio, Madrid.
- Flores Rubio J., 2008, *Procopio de Cesarea, Historia de las guerras. Guerra vándala (Libros III–IV)*, transl. J. Flores Rubio, Madrid.
- Frier B.W., 2016, *The Codex Justinian: A New Annotated Translation, with Parallel Latin and Greek Text*, 3 vols, B.W. Frier (ed.), transl. F.H. Blume, Cambridge.
- García Romero J.F.A., 2000, *Procopio de Cesarea, Historia de las guerras. Guerra persa (Libros I–II)*, transl. J.F.A. García Romero, Madrid.
- García Romero J.F.A., 2007, *Procopio de Cesarea, Historia de las guerras. Guerra gótica (Libros VII–VIII)*, transl. J.F.A. García Romero, Madrid.
- Greatrex G., Phenix R., Horn C., 2011, *Pseudo-Zachariah, Historia Ecclesiastica*, transl. G. Greatrex, R. Phenix, C. Horn, Liverpool.
- Haury J., Wirth G., 1962, *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*, vol. 1: *De Bellis Libri I–IV (Wars: Persian and Vandal Wars)*, J. Haury, G. Wirth (eds), Leipzig.
- Haury J., Wirth G., 1963, *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*, vol. 2: *De Bellis Libri V–VIII (Wars: Gothic War)*, J. Haury, G. Wirth (eds), Leipzig.
- Haury J., Wirth G., 1964a, *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*, vol. 3: *Anecdota (Secret History)*, J. Haury, G. Wirth (eds), Leipzig.
- Haury J., Wirth G., 1964b, *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*, vol. 4: *De Aedificiis (Buildings)*, J. Haury, G. Wirth (eds), Leipzig.
- Jeffreys E., Jeffreys M., Scott R., 1986, *John Malalas, Chronographia*, transl. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, R. Scott, Melbourne.
- Kaldellis A., 2010, *Prokopios: The Secret History with Related Texts*, A. Kaldellis (ed.), Indianapolis.
- Kaldellis A., 2014, *Procopios, The Wars of Justinian*, A. Kaldellis (ed.), transl. H.B. Dewing, Indianapolis.
- Miller D.J.D., Sarris P., 2018, *The Novels of Justinian: A Complete Annotated English Translation*, P. Sarris (ed.), transl. D.J.D. Miller, Cambridge.
- Moore C.H., Jackson J., 1931, *Tacitus, Annals: Books 1–3*, transl. C.H. Moore, J. Jackson, Cambridge.
- van Nuffelen P., van Hoof L., 2023, *Jordanes, Getica & Romana*, transl. P. van Nuffelen, L. van Hoof, Liverpool.
- Sarris P., Williamson G., 2007, *Prokopios, The Secret History*, P. Sarris (ed. and transl.), G. Williamson (transl.), London.
- Signes Codoñer J., 2000, *Procopio de Cesarea, Historia secreta*, transl. J. Signes Codoñer, Madrid.
- Thurn J., 2000, *John Malalas, Chronographia*, J. Thurn (ed.), Berlin.
- Whitby M., 2000, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, transl. M. Whitby, Liverpool.

Whitby M., Whitby M., 1989, *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD*, transl. M. Whitby, M. Whitby, Liverpool.

Secondary sources

- Anderson D., forthcoming, 'Self-Naming in Hipponax', [in:] *Hipponax the Poet: Archaic Greek Poetry's Enfant Terrible*, V. Casato, E. Prodi (eds), Cambridge.
- Azzani G., 2023, *Performing Authority in Byzantium: Bodies, Gestures, and Behaviour in the Practice and in the Literary Representation of the Power*, PhD Diss, Tübingen, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15496/publikation-77427>.
- Beard M., 2007, *The Roman Triumph*, Cambridge.
- Börm H., 2013, 'Justinians Triumph und Belisars Erniedrigung. Überlegungen zum Verhältnis zwischen Kaiser und Militär im späten Römischen Reich', *Chiron* 43, pp. 63–91.
- Boss R., 1993, *Justinian's Wars: Belisarius, Narses and the Reconquest of the West*, Stockport.
- Brodka D., 2018, *Narses. Politik, Krieg und Historiographie im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.*, Berlin.
- Cameron A., 1985, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, London.
- Chassin L., 1957, *Bélisaire, généralissime byzantin (504–565)*, Paris.
- Cresci L.R., 1986, 'Lineamenti strutturali e ideologici della figura di Belisario nei Bella Procopiani', [in:] *Serta Historica Antiqua*, vol. 1, Roma, pp. 247–275.
- Downey G., 1960, *Belisarius: Young General of Byzantium*, Dutton.
- Evans J.A.S., 1972, *Procopius*, New York.
- Evert-Kappesowa H., 1964, 'Antonina et Belisaire', [in:] *Byzantinische Beiträge*, J. Irmscher (ed.), Berlin, pp. 55–72.
- Garrido J.V., 1983, *Poema e historia de Belisario*, Barcelona.
- Greatrex G., 1994, 'The Dates of Procopius' Works', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 18, pp. 101–114.
- Greatrex G., 1997, 'The Nika Riot: A Reappraisal', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 117, pp. 60–86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/632550>.
- Greatrex G., 2014, 'Perceptions of Procopius in Recent Scholarship', *Histos* 8, pp. 76–121, <https://doi.org/10.29173/histos255>.
- Greatrex G., 2022a, 'Procopius, the Nika Riot, and the Composition of the *Persian Wars*', *Tactica Militaria* 26, pp. 45–57.
- Greatrex G., 2022b, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars: A Historical Commentary*, Cambridge.
- Greatrex G., 2022c, 'Procopius: Life and Works', [in:] *A Companion to Procopius of Caesarea*, M. Meier, F. Montinaro (eds), Leiden–Boston, pp. 61–69.

- Hughes I., 2009, *Belisarius: The Last Roman General*, Yardley.
- Koehn C., 2018, *Justinian und die Armee des frühen Byzanz*, Berlin, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110597202>.
- Krallis D., 2022, 'The Politics of War: Virtue, Tyche, Persuasion and the Byzantine General', [in:] *Military Leadership from Ancient Greece to Byzantium: The Art of Generalship*, S. Tougher (ed.), Edinburgh, pp. 284–305, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474459969-020>.
- Krupczyński P., 1978, 'Belizariusz a dwór i oficerowie', [in:] *Acta Universitatis Lodzensis Folia Historica* 29, pp. 3–24.
- Krupczyński P., 1981, *Trudności zachodnich wypraw Belizariusza*, Łódź.
- Lillington-Martin Ch., 2007, 'Archaeological and Ancient Literary Evidence for a Battle near Dara Gap, Turkey, AD 530: Topography, Texts and Trenches', [in:] *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest: Proceedings of a colloquium held at Potenza, Acerenza and Matera, Italy (May 2005)*, A.S. Lewin, P. Pellegrini (eds), Oxford, pp. 299–311.
- Lillington-Martin Ch., 2009, 'Procopius, Belisarius and the Goths', *Journal of the Oxford University History Society: Odd Alliances* 7, pp. 1–17.
- Lillington-Martin Ch., 2012, 'Hard & Soft Power on the Eastern Frontier: A Roman Fortlet between Dara and Nisibis, Mesopotamia, Prokopios' Mindouos?', *The Byzantinist* 2, pp. 4–5.
- Lillington-Martin Ch., 2013, 'Procopius on the Struggle for Dara and Rome in 537–38: Reconciling Texts and Landscapes', [in:] *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity: Current Perspectives*, A. Sarantis, N. Christie (eds), Leiden, pp. 599–630.
- Lillington-Martin Ch., 2018, 'Procopius, πάρεδρος / quaestor, *Codex Justinianus*, 1.27 and Belisarius' Strategy in the Mediterranean', [in:] *Procopius of Caesarea: Literary and Historical Interpretations*, Ch. Lillington-Martin, E. Turquois (eds), London, pp. 157–185.
- Lillington-Martin Ch., 2024a, 'Antonina Patricia: Theodora's Fixer at the Female Court and the Politics of Gender in Procopius', [in:] *Empresses-in-Waiting: Power, Performance, and the Female Court of the Later Roman Empire (4th–7th c.)*, Ch. Rollinger, N. Viermann (eds), Liverpool, pp. 223–242, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.6947046.15>.
- Lillington-Martin Ch., 2024b, 'The Strategic and Economic Importance of Western Mediterranean Islands to Byzantium, from the 6th Century: Belisarius' Strategy', [in:] *Las islas Baleares durante la Antigüedad Tardía (siglos III–X): Historia y Arqueología*, M.Á.C. Ontiveros (ed.), Oxford, pp. 60–69, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.14996063.8>.
- Lillington-Martin Ch., 2025a, *Tricamarum: Battlefield, Strategies and Tactics*, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.19112.69124>.

- Lillington-Martin Ch., 2025b, 'Procopius' Ekphrasis: for Justinian or Belisarius?' Keynote address at *Orality, Aurality and Literacy in Late Late Antiquity (450–700 CE)*, Universität Innsbruck, Institut für Klassische Philologie und Neulateinische Studien, October 16–18.
- Lillington-Martin Ch., Stewart M.E., 2021, 'Turning Traitor: Shifting Loyalties in Procopius' *Gothic Wars*', *Byzantina Symmeikta* 31, pp. 281–305, <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.26164>.
- Lillington-Martin Ch., Turquois E., 2018, *Procopius of Caesarea: Literary and Historical Interpretations*, Ch. Lillington-Martin, E. Turquois (eds), London, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315602288>.
- Luce T.J., Woodman A.J., 1993, *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, T.J. Luce, A.J. Woodman (eds), Princeton.
- Martindale J.R., 1992a, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 3a: *AD 527–641 (Abandares – 'Iyād ibn Ghanm)*, Cambridge.
- Martindale J.R., 1992b, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 3b: *AD 527–641 (Kālādji – Zudius)*, Cambridge.
- Meier M., 2003, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians. Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.*, Göttingen.
- Ontiveros M.Á.C., 2024, *Las islas Baleares durante la Antigüedad Tardía (siglos III–X): Historia y Arqueología*, M.Á.C. Ontiveros (ed.), Oxford.
- Parnell D., 2017, *Justinian's Men: Careers and Relationships of Byzantine Army Officers, 518–610*, Basingstoke, <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56204-3>.
- Parnell D., 2023, *Belisarius & Antonina: Love and War in the Age of Justinian*, Oxford.
- Pelling C.B.R., 1993, 'Tacitus and Germanicus', [in:] *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, T.J. Luce, A.J. Woodman (eds), Princeton, pp. 59–85.
- Periago Lorente M., 2005, *de Procopio de Cesarea, Los edificios*, transl. M. Periago Lorente, Murcia, https://www.um.es/cepoat/estudiosorientales/?page_id=291.
- Ritter M., 2021, 'The Byzantine Afterlife of Procopius' *Buildings*', [in:] *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 75, pp. 143–170.
- Rollinger Ch., Viermann N., 2024, *Empresses-in-Waiting: Female Power and Performance at the Late Roman Court*, Ch. Rollinger, N. Viermann (eds), Liverpool, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.6947046>.
- Ross A., 2018, 'Narrator and Participant in Procopius' *Wars*', [in:] *Procopius of Caesarea: Literary and Historical Interpretations*, Ch. Lillington-Martin, E. Turquois (eds), London, pp. 73–90.
- Rubin B., 1960, *Das Zeitalter Justinians*, vol. 1, Berlin.
- Rubin B., 1995, *Das Zeitalter Justinians*, vol. 2, Berlin–New York.

- Signes Codoñer J., 2017, 'One History... in Several Instalments: Dating and Genre in Procopius' Works', *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 54, p. 3–26.
- Smith W., 1849, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, London, <http://www.ancientlibrary.com/smith->
- Stachura M., 2024, 'The Discourse on the Difference between Audacity and Real Fortitude in *De bellis* by Procopius of Caesarea', *Classica Cracoviensia* 27, pp. 323–355, <https://doi.org/10.12797/CC.27.2024.27.13>.
- Stewart M.E., 2022, 'Bashing Belisarius: Polemical Characterizations in Procopius' *Secret History*', *Acta Classica Supplementum* 11, pp. 245–264.
- Stewart M.E., 2023, 'A Tangled Web: Marriage and Alliance in the Shadows of the Plague, 542–548', *Classica Cracoviensia* 26, pp. 161–215, <https://doi.org/10.12797/CC.26.2023.26.03>.
- Stewart M.E., forthcoming, *Portraits of Generalship and Authority in the Age of Justinian*, M.E. Stewart (ed.), Amsterdam.
- Tate G., 2004, *Justinien, l'épopée de l'Empire d'Orient*, Paris.
- Whately C., 2016, *Battles and Generals: Combat, Culture, and Didacticism in Procopius' Wars*, Leiden.
- Whitby M., 2000, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, transl. M. Whitby (ed.), Liverpool.
- Whitby M., 2023, 'Procopius Meets His Gomme? Greatrex on *The Persian Wars*', *Plekos* 25, pp. 89–125.
- Williams K.F., 2009, 'Tacitus' Germanicus and the Principate', *Latomus* 68/1, pp. 117–130.
- Woodman A.J., 2015, 'Tacitus and Germanicus: Monuments and Models', [in:] *Fame and Infamy: Essays on Characterization in Greek and Roman Biography and Historiography*, R. Ash, J. Mossman, F.B. Titchener (eds), Oxford, pp. 254–268, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199662326.003.0017>.