

Jakob Riemenschneider: Prokop und der soziale Kosmos der Historiographie. Exkurse, Diskurse und die römische Gesellschaft der Spätantike. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2024 (Millennium-Studien 108). X, 261 pp., 1 table. € 109.95/£ 100.00/\$ 120.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-154686-5.

Two books on Procopius' digressions in one year is a treat, and two very different books at that. Albrecht Ziebuhr provided a meticulous study in which he carefully defined what constituted a digression in terms of classical theory, identified the formal markers in Procopius that marked the start and end of many digressions, and then listed what he accepted as digressions for each book of the *Wars*;¹ Ziebuhr traced their origins back to Herodotus, and defined them as ranging from decorative to vehicles for important messages, for example Procopius' views on major events or the Christian context of his narrative. In contrast, Jakob Riemenschneider's publication of his Innsbruck dissertation foregrounds theory, which is as important as the text of the *Wars*: indeed Procopius is the main focus for only two out of the five main chapters, just half of the book in terms of length, 114 pages out of 226, if one assigns to Procopius the Appendix that lists what Riemenschneider identifies as excursuses. His canvas is much broader than Ziebuhr's, namely the social world of historiography in the sixth century, and he aims to illuminate this context through analysis of some of Procopius' digressions.

The Introduction (pp. 1–39) is sub-divided into five parts. The first (“Prokop, zeitgenössische Diskurse und soziale Milieus in den Exkursen”, pp. 1–4) presents Procopius' text as the product of an interaction between the centuries-old literary tradition of historiography with its particular language and textual references on the one hand, and on the other the political, social, and cultural discourses relevant at the time of writing. This is hardly surprising, though Riemenschneider's objective is to read a series of digressions in a way that contextualises them discursively and then interprets them socially to reveal complex interrelationships that go beyond simplistic binary considerations such as whether Procopius was pagan or Christian, for or against

1 A. Ziebuhr: Die Exkurse im Geschichtswerk des Prokopios von Kaisareia. Literarische Tradition und spätantike Gegenwart in klassizistischer Historiographie. Stuttgart 2024 (Hermes-Einzelschriften 126); see the review by Mi. Whitby: The Varied Roles of Procopian Digressions. In: Plekos 26, 2024, pp. 631–635 (URL: <https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2024/r-ziebuhr.pdf>).

the regime of Justinian. The second part (“Prokop in der rezenten Forschung”, pp. 5–8) surveys recent bibliography, but inevitably cannot take account of Ziebuhr’s work. Riemenschneider offers a brief overview of trends in Procopian scholarship, noting that Procopius’ digressions are rarely treated as a whole collection and that they are generally perceived as less significant for assessing him as a writer than those of his successor Agathias. Riemenschneider’s hope is that his study will contribute to questions such as how far we can trust Procopius as a historian and what intentional distortions may have affected his narrative. The third part (“Exkurse, Milieus, Kommunikation und *interpretive communities*”, pp. 8–25) introduces the key concepts that Riemenschneider uses to handle the diversity of digressions; these need to be treated individually, before a gathering of some digressions can allow more general conclusions to be drawn about their political implications and Procopius’ underlying beliefs. He first offers a definition of what constitutes a digression (pp. 9–12), urging that these should not be restricted to those passages which Procopius explicitly signals as a departure from the main narrative, since there are places where he offers geographical information or personal commentary without flagging the passage as a formal digression. Consideration of the Appendix on digressions, however, reveals that Riemenschneider blurs the distinction between main narrative and digression, as will be discussed below. He then presents “Milieus” (pp. 13–15), which he regards as fluid constellations of people rather than static groups, “Communication” (“Kommunikation – Schreiben und Lesen im systemischen Kontext”, pp. 15–18), and “Interpretive Communities” (“*Interpretive communities* – Widersprüche bei Prokop lesen”, pp. 18–25), the last of which is also treated in the fourth section (“Anatomie der Untersuchung: *interpretive communities* als Türöffner zu den Milieus der klassizistischen Geschichtsschreibung im sechsten Jahrhundert”, pp. 25–30); here it is presented as the key to understanding the complexities and contradictions of the *Wars*, of which one example is the prominence of omens and oracles in a work that is otherwise rationalist.

The concept of ‘Interpretative Communities’ is borrowed from the theoretical articulation of reader-response criticism by Stanley Fish.² Fish argued that, although an author may have particular views that they present in a work, the meanings of that work are determined by the interpretative ap-

2 S. Fish: *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, MA/London 1980.

proaches of its readers; these readers constitute communities which are accidentally-combined groups of individuals (Riemenschneider's "Milieus") linked by particular views that determine how a text is read; readers of a text will belong to a range of such communities, with the result that a text will have different meanings for members of these different groups. The application of this approach to Procopius entails that, in the first instance, the *Wars* must be read as literature rather than a historical source, since only this permits an understanding of the diversity of the work's social implications. By treating Procopius as a man of his times, writing for comparable people, rather than as an isolated thinker, Riemenschneider aims to shift analysis from the question of 'What did Procopius mean' to that of 'Who could understand the *Wars*' or 'How might the work be received and understood'.

The Introduction closes with a fifth part ("Euphrat und Tigris: ein klassischer klassizistischer Exkurs?", pp. 30–39), where the theoretical approach is put to the test through an analysis of the digression on Mesopotamia and the rivers Euphrates and Tigris (*Wars* 1.17.3–24), which contains a subsidiary digression on Orestes and Iphigenia among the Taurians (*Wars* 1.17.12–20);³ the starts of both the main and subsidiary digressions are clearly signalled, as is the conclusion to the subsidiary one, though the end to the main geographical one is not marked.⁴ Riemenschneider concludes that the passage offers Procopius an opportunity to display the excellence of his traditional *paideia* through his confidence and flexibility in handling both classical geographical texts, in particular Strabo, and poetic mythology in order to discuss the geography of contemporary frontiers, which is the point of departure for the digression. If the value of Riemenschneider's theoretical approach lies in the distinctiveness of its insights, the results suggest the benefits are limited: he unsurprisingly identifies education, *paideia*, and classicism as the primary manifestations of the milieus from which the 'Interpretive Communities' of Procopius' readers are drawn. In short, Procopius aspires to be a classical historian and uses the digression to demonstrate how well he can do this.

3 It might be noted that in the Appendix (p. 221) the references to these two units are incorrect ("1,17,3–25" and, incomprehensibly, "1,17,13.22"), an example of the numerous incorrect references in that list.

4 This explains why Ziebuhr (note 1) does not treat the account of the rivers as a digression.

Chapter 2 (“Literarische Techniken und Diskurse des sechsten Jahrhunderts über Genres und Milieugrenzen hinweg”, pp. 40–75) surveys the literary landscape of sixth-century Constantinople, its trends and political discourses, with a review of a wide range of texts that are roughly contemporary with the *Wars*. The first of three subsections (“Spätantike Panegyrik zwischen Genres und gesellschaftlichen Gruppierungen”, pp. 42–50) considers panegyric through the preface to the *Cycle* of Agathias (though most accept that this was addressed to Justin II) and Agapetus’ *Advice to the Emperor Justinian*, with brief comments on Procopius’ *Buildings* and Paul the Silentiary’s *Ekephrasis of Hagia Sophia*. The second looks at “Traditional Authors” (pp. 50–61), namely the anonymous *Dialogue on Political Science*, John Lydus, and the fragments of John of Antioch, who are presented as examples of writers with an interest in Roman, and especially Republican, history. The fragmentary state of John of Antioch and uncertainties about the stages of the composition of his chronicle are acknowledged as problems, though these might have been elucidated by contrasting what is known about him with the *Chronicle* of John Malalas: Malalas’ account of the years 527 to 532 and then the continuation of the *Chronicle* to 565, whether by Malalas or a different author is unclear, were certainly composed in the capital during Justinian’s reign. The third section on “Peripheral Perspectives” (pp. 61–71) embraces a number of authors from outside the capital, with John Philoponus as a representative of philosophy and theology, Cyril of Scythopolis for hagiography, and Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene as an author who combined historiography and antiquarian interests. A fourth, concluding, section (“Fazit: Autorschaft und Literaturen in Konstantinopel”, pp. 71–75) introduces both Jordanes and Romanus, authors whom it would have been difficult to fit into the previous sections.

The range of contemporary authors naturally has some overlaps with those discussed by Averil Cameron in her discussion of “The Crisis of Sixth-Century Literature”⁵ and Claudia Rapp in her chapter on “Literary Culture under Justinian”:⁶ John Lydus, Agathias, Paul the Silentiary, and Romanus are common to all; Cameron and Rapp both comment as well on Cosmas Indicopleustes, whose *Christian Topography* would have been relevant to consid-

5 Av. Cameron: *Procopius and the Sixth Century*. London 1985 (Classical Life and Letters), ch. 2, esp. pp. 19–23.

6 C. Rapp: *Literary Culture Under Justinian*. In: M. Maas (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge/New York 2005, pp. 376–397.

eration of Procopius' geographical digressions, but overall Riemenschneider's discussion ranges more widely than these predecessors. That said, it could have been extended to incorporate two voluminous categories of contemporary writing, namely legal texts, especially the prologues to Justinianic legislation, which contain antiquarian touches, and documents relating to doctrinal disputes that grapple with theological issues. The choice of Cyril of Scythopolis, who wrote in the first instance for an audience in Palestine, to represent the interests of monastic communities might be questioned, since, even if we do not know the names of their authors, several monastic hagiographies had been composed in or around Constantinople in the previous generation: the *Life of Daniel the Stylite* in its earliest form dates to the 490s, *the Life of Auxentius* probably to the first two decades of the century, the *Life of Marcellus the Sleepless* to the 530s, while the reworking of Callinicus' *Life of Hypatius* may also be a sixth-century text, as too might Mark the Deacon's *Life of Porphyry of Gaza*.⁷ These texts are likely to have been more familiar in the capital during Procopius' lifetime than Cyril's works.

Riemenschneider demonstrates that particular themes, literary techniques, and incisive political discourse are evident in different genres and broad milieus, so that the contemporary literary scene was a complex landscape; its commonalities may not always be appreciated by modern readers because of incorrect assumptions and perceptions of disciplinary boundaries. Thus a writer might belong to a milieu, for example bureaucratic-secular in the case of John Lydus or monastic-religious for Cyril of Scythopolis, but this was often a consequence of their choice of genre and did not impose a corresponding restriction on the author's intellectual or literary horizons. As an example, Procopius, while writing a secular history, had no qualms about including miracles that would not be out of place in a hagiography, while in their hagiographies Mark the Deacon and Cyril of Scythopolis displayed close knowledge of the workings of the imperial court in ways that would do credit to John Lydus. Contemporary audiences valued not only the traditions of a particular register or genre but also departures from these.

7 T. D. Barnes: *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History*. Tübingen 2010 (Tria corda 5), ch. 6, pp. 235–283. For the *Life of Porphyry* as a text that originated outside Gaza, quite possibly in Constantinople, see Mi. Whitby in: *Mark the Deacon: The Life of Porphyry of Gaza*. Translated with Introduction and Notes, with a Translation of the Georgian Life, by J. Childers, C. Rapp, and Mi. Whitby. Liverpool 2025 (Translated Texts for Historians 88), pp. 43–44, 47.

Chapter 3 (“Milieus und Messaging: ‘fremde’ Welten und ‘heimische’ Milieus”, pp. 76–114) returns to the *Wars* to analyse two extended geographical digressions about places on the outer edges of the Roman world, namely Brittia or the British Isles (*Wars* 8.20)⁸ and the Red Sea (*Wars* 1.19).⁹ The western digression opens with a long account of a conflict between the Angles of Britain and the Varni (8.20.11–41) that is introduced with a discussion of the geography of Britain (8.20.1–10); the dispute had apparently arisen from a broken marriage agreement, and neither this nor the resulting fighting has any direct connection with the events being narrated in adjacent chapters. It does, however, serve to introduce the presentation of Brittia as a paradoxographical place that is divided into contrasting east and west parts by a long wall, with the latter section receiving the souls of the dead in a process that Procopius introduces as virtual myth, λόγου μυθολογία ἐμφορεστάτου (8.20.47). The only link to the events of the *Wars* is that a Frankish king had included some Angles, inhabitants of Brittia, in an embassy to Justinian to suggest that he controlled the place, but this is extremely tangential.

The eastern digression is totally different. The Red Sea was known as a place of political and diplomatic importance, for example through the reports of the embassies of Nonnosus, as well as of religious conflict, and so for Riemenschneider the digression is designed to interest a different interpretative community, one that would be interested in Justinian’s diplomatic strategy in a peripheral area. The digression is introduced with the remark that Justinian hoped to recruit the local nations to assist in his struggle against the Persians (*Wars* 1.19.1), and is followed by a summary of efforts by the Ethiopian king, Ella Asbeha, to control the region of Himyar in the Arabian peninsula, and then by Justinian’s unsuccessful attempt to use this king to break Persian control of the Indian silk trade (*Wars* 1.20). The two digressions are opposites, a Herodotean account of distant wonders and an analysis of contemporary geopolitics. Riemenschneider’s discussion is intended

8 Ziebuhr (note 1) only treats the geographical-ethnographical section on Brittia (*Wars* 8.20.42–58) as a digression, with the preceding narrative of military events involving the Franks and Varni as part of the main narrative. This has some justification, since this section on Brittia is clearly marked off from what precedes and follows, though the chapter does open with a discussion of the geography of Brittia that links to the subsequent expansion (*Wars* 8.20.1–10).

9 In his Appendix (p. 221), Riemenschneider divides this into two digressions, on Axum and Himyar (*Wars* 1.19.1–26) and on the Blemmyes and Nobatae of southern Egypt (1.19.26–36), though in formal terms they are a single unit.

to show how different milieus are reflected in the text, while recognising that the boundaries of these milieus are not sharp, and what communication between Procopius and his public might look like (p. 28). Another way of framing these conclusions would be to say that, with his extensive knowledge and diverse interests, Procopius varied his narrative with different sorts of material, stories of marvels in the distant west just as Herodotus included more fantastic material for remoter regions such as central Asia, and insights into imperial strategy when closer to home. A point that might have been made, though admittedly Riemenschneider is not concerned with Procopius' intentions, is that the digressions have very different contexts and purposes. The treatment of the Red Sea immediately follows the embarrassing defeat of Belisarius at Callinicum (*Wars* 1.18), and may well have been intended to divert attention from this by introducing an exotic location;¹⁰ by contrast the discussion of Brittia separates the narrative of Roman struggles to maintain control in the Balkans (*Wars* 8.18) from an account of the difficulty of organising effective reinforcements for campaigns in Italy (*Wars* 8.21), with the latter account soon to be interrupted by the presentation of another marvel, the ship of Aeneas (8.22.7–16).

Chapter 4 (“Milieuübergreifende interpersonale Netzwerke und das mögliche Publikum”, pp. 115–151) represents another departure from Procopius to investigate interpersonal networks that cut across milieus and possible audiences. It focuses on networks primarily through two case studies, the contacts of Severus of Antioch and the environs of Gaza, but first glances at what can be gleaned about the contacts of Agathias through the poetic friends who contributed to his *Cycle*, his comments about the audience of Uranus (*Histories* 2.29.1–5; 32.2–5), and the digression about the friends of Anthemius' neighbour, the courtier Zeno (*Histories* 5.7.2, 5). Other glimpses into networks could have been offered by John Lydus and his fellow provincial Zoticus, who set him on the path to a successful bureaucratic career (*de Magistratibus* 3.26), or by the guardsman, *scholarius*, Auxentius who belonged to a group of *spoudaioi*, committed Christians, which met regularly in the church to St Irene, a group that included a palace official and Marcian, who was soon to become *oeconomus* of Hagia Sophia (*Life of Auxentius* 2).

10 G. Greatrex: Procopius of Caesarea, *The Persian Wars*. A Historical Commentary. Cambridge 2022, p. 208, summarises the suggestions. Riemenschneider (p. 90) treats it as marking the change in Persian leadership from Kavadh to Khusro rather than a diversion from Belisarius.

Riemenschneider first reviews the networks that emerge from the fifth-century correspondence of Synesius of Cyrene and Theodoret of Cyrhus, whose collections of letters continue the epistolary tradition of Libanius in the fourth century. The chapter advances to the sixth century by means of Severus, the Miaphysite patriarch of Antioch in the latter part of Anastasius' reign and a leader in doctrinal discussions with Justinian in the 530s. We are well-informed about Severus' time as a student through the biography by Zachariah of Mytilene. In his twenties Severus travelled from his home town of Sozopolis in Pisidia to Alexandria to study philosophy, grammar, and rhetoric, before moving to Beirut for law; Zachariah was a fellow student in both places, and they belonged to a group of Christian enthusiasts who took action against closet pagans. Severus' later networks are illustrated by his extensive correspondence as patriarch. The intellectual capital of Gaza offers another opportunity to investigate networks through the speeches and letters of some of the members of the Gaza School, in particular Aeneas and Choricus, as well as, from a very different angle, the correspondence of two local holy men, Barsanuphius and John. In each case there is ample evidence for interaction between clerics and lay people, officials, soldiers, and civilians. Granted Riemenschneider's interest in theory, it is perhaps surprising that he does not apply Social Network Analysis to this material, or refer to Giovanni Ruffini's work that applied it to late antique Egypt with interesting results.¹¹

The connections to Procopius of this interesting discussion are not really spelled out, but can be inferred. Although we do not have the sort of information about the educational career of Procopius that we have for Severus, since his only reference to a childhood friend is the merchant he happened to encounter at Syracuse in 533 (*Wars* 3.14.7), it is reasonable to infer that he was educated in a cohort of friends in Caesarea and possibly Gaza and/or Alexandria, while his position in Belisarius' service entailed that he was in regular contact and correspondence with a very wide range of people, both military and civilian. After he withdrew from service in 540 or 541 and took up residence in Constantinople, he will have maintained some of these con-

11 G. R. Ruffini: *Social Networks in Byzantine Egypt*. Cambridge 2008. Although the bibliography does include R. Dekker: *Episcopal Networks and Authority in Late Antique Egypt. Bishops of the Theban Region at Work*. Leuven/Paris/Bristol, CT 2018 (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 264), the approach or conclusions of this book are not exploited.

tacts, if only as a way of securing information on events that he no longer witnessed in person. The traditional educational background with its focus on the pagan classics was one firm determinant of his interests and conceptual approach to information and events, but his practical experience of different parts of the empire, which was probably more extensive than most of his civilian contemporaries, intersected with and enriched these. His decision to write contemporary history for readers who are unlikely to have understood the geography of events, and quite possibly not their historical context, meant that he had to provide guidance if his work was to be appreciated.

Chapter 5 (“Milieuübergreifende Exkurse und Diskurse”, pp. 152–212) might have been expected to apply the previous investigation of provincial communication networks to Procopius, but instead offers four specific digressions as a practical test for the general hypotheses and observations that have been advanced. The first two parts (“Christliche Spiritualität und die Macht der Perser I: Der Eremit Iakobos”, pp. 153–160; “Christliche Spiritualität und die Macht der Perser II: Die Abgar-Legende”, pp. 161–174) present the incident of the hermit Jacob at the time of the Persian siege of Amida in 502 (*Wars* 1.7.5–11) and the Abgar legend about the inviolability of Edessa in the context of Khusro’s desire to capture the city in 540 (*Wars* 2.12.7–30). These two digressions align Christianity with Roman military action against Persia and demonstrate that Procopius was conversant with the discourse of Christian miracles. The conclusion is that, despite Procopius’ classical up-bringing and generic limitations on Christian elements in traditional historiography, the *Wars* is a work that is firmly rooted in contemporary Christian religious discourse. The third part (“Fränkische Geschichte und die Dynamik des Barbarendiskurses”, pp. 175–194) considers the digression on Franks (*Wars* 5.11.29–13.14), where Procopius reviews how the failure of western emperors in the fifth century and the more successful diplomacy of Theoderic had contributed to the creation of a powerful new nation in Gaul. In contrast to the other major western digression on Britia, which was examined in chapter 3 and represents a paradoxographical diversion for the main narrative, the Frankish digression focuses on military and political information that is relevant to contemporary imperial strategy in Italy: in each case the digression is aligned with the needs of the adjacent narrative. It does also continue the religious theme from the eastern digres-

sions by noting that there was a doctrinal element to conflicts involving the Franks (5.13.10), so that even in the non-Roman West Christianity was an essential element for understanding events. The fourth section (“Die Genealogie der Mauren und jüdische Antiquaria”, pp. 194–212) considers the digression on the Moors as an Old Testament people (*Wars* 4.10.12–29), where the classical tradition of Herodotus is combined with Judaeo-Christian stories in an example of how different milieus are skilfully combined by Procopius. Riemenschneider notes that this serves as a structural break between the two main parts of the *Vandal Wars*, and also identifies it as a signpost to the complex literary world of the sixth century and how different influences overlap within Procopius’ narrative.

Thereafter a “Conclusion” (pp. 213–220) first summarises the results of each chapter and then draws out some general points in a couple of pages (pp. 218–220). The first is that, despite the clear evidence for the relevance of Christianity as a historical factor, it would be wrong to assume that Procopius was committed to Christianity since contradictory passages could be adduced; such an assumption is seen by Riemenschneider as an instance of the methodical flaw of attempting to make inferences about an author and his beliefs from a text. It is unfortunate that these contradictory passages are not presented and analysed in the same depth as the Christian ones, but one might guess that Riemenschneider has in mind the basis for the argument of Anthony Kaldellis that Procopius was a closet pagan;¹² indeed a rehabilitation of Kaldellis’ pagan thesis is one obvious product of an interpretive-community approach to the analysis of the *Wars*, since that can place all possible interpretations on an equal footing. It is, however, worth emphasising that reader-response theory does not exclude the validity of investigating authorial intent, and that one interpretation of a body of text may have stronger validity than another. For example, in an analysis of responses to climate change Shirley J. Fiske employed interpretive communities to explain why some people responded sceptically to evidence whose conclusions others

12 A. Kaldellis: *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*. Philadelphia 2004. Riemenschneider does briefly refer to Kaldellis at p. 116.

regarded as manifestly obvious:¹³ the theoretical analysis explains these different responses, but does not place them on an equal level of plausibility.

A second conclusion is to point to the diversity of themes and interests evident in the digressions which indicate the range of interpretive communities with which Procopius was engaging; these communities, though different, were quite capable of comprehending the primary interests and preferences of each other, so that Procopius, though a committed traditionalist in terms of style, was naturally fully conversant with the Christian discourse whose aggressive milieu dominated contemporary society. In spite of differences between such communities, and plentiful evidence for religious disagreements, as well as for particular regional identities, economic divergences, and military pressures, sixth-century society still needs to be seen as a united whole that was connected by the sorts of links illustrated in chapter 4, as well as by the common classical education that united the literary elite. The *Wars* is a demonstration that the capacity for integrative communication across the diversity of milieus still existed in the mid-sixth century.

The volume concludes with an Appendix (pp. 221–226) that lists 159 excursuses, each with a one-line description and text reference; a bibliography (pp. 227–254) that is extensive, especially for modern scholarship;¹⁴ there is a helpful list of the main passages discussed (pp. 255–258), and finally brief indices of people and topics (pp. 259–260; p. 261).

The Appendix is more important than it might appear at first sight, since Riemenschneider presents it (p. VIII) as a resource that contains more passages than could be discussed in the main text, and suggests that these might form the basis for further reflection about the digressions, both individually and collectively. Riemenschneider's list identifies far more digressions than the 49 included in the tables in Ziebuhr.¹⁵ In part this is because he splits some excursuses into multiple units: for example what in formal terms is the

13 S. J. Fiske: "Climate Skepticism" Inside the Beltway and Across the Bay. In: S. A. Crate/M. Nuttall (eds.): *Anthropology and Climate Change. From Actions to Transformations*. 2nd ed. New York/London 2016, pp. 319–325. This salutary warning about using reader-response theory is not in Riemenschneider's bibliography.

14 Timo Stickler's recent chapter, cited at p. 218, n. 10, is omitted: T. Stickler: *Procopius and Christian Historical Thought*. In: M. Meier/F. Montinaro (eds.): *A Companion to Procopius of Caesarea*. Leiden/Boston 2022 (Brill's Companions to the Byzantine World 11), pp. 212–230.

15 Ziebuhr (note 1), pp. 69–76.

very long digression about the reasons for Persian interest in Lazica, with which Book 8 opens (*Wars* 8.1.7–5.33), is divided into eleven separate entries. Another factor is that he includes passages of narrative that do not directly relate to the wars of Justinian's reign but are in formal terms part of the main narrative, for example the background sequences that open the three main divisions of the *Wars*,¹⁶ information on Persian internal affairs,¹⁷ the account of a failed usurpation at Dara,¹⁸ or a famine at Rome.¹⁹ Such background narrative could be presented as a formal digression in which the narrative is interrupted by a return to earlier events, as Thucydides chose to do in his account of the Pentecontaetia (*History* 1.89–117), or, to jump to the opposite end of the spectrum of classical historiography, Theophylact Simocatta did in recording the outbreak and first decade of the Persian war (*History* 3.9.1–18.4). In contrast, Procopius adopted a more Herodotean approach in which the main narrative gradually emerges from its preliminaries.

Riemenschneider also includes a number of geographical passages that, though they are not formally signposted, can arguably be classified as digressions,²⁰ as well as accounts of events that are not strictly military, for example the Nika Riot or an attempted coup at Dara (*Wars* 1.24; 26) that should be treated as part of the main narrative. Other indeterminate passages listed by Riemenschneider concern oracles, omens, and marvels,²¹ siege equipment,²² and authorial reflections;²³ I had expected Riemenschneider to pay specific attention to this last category as possible examples of direct communication between Procopius and his audience, for example in response to questions

16 A single entry for *Wars* 1.1.2–12 – although this entry might appear to point to subsections of the first chapter, it in fact relates to the first twelve chapters, as Riemenschneider's brief description, "Persian history; Persian-Roman contacts before Justinian" indicates; nine entries for the first nine chapters of *Wars* 3; five entries for the first four chapters of *Wars* 5.

17 *Wars* 1.21.16–23; 1.23.

18 *Wars* 1.26.

19 *Wars* 7.17.9–25.

20 E.g. *Wars* 2.29.14–22 (the river Boas or Phasis); 4.19.11–14 (the river Abigas); 5.26.4–13 (Portus and Ostia); these and similar passages are not included in Ziebuhr's lists.

21 E.g. *Wars* 5.7.6–8; 6.7.1–11; 7.35.4–8.

22 *Wars* 5.21.3–12; 7.24.17–18.

23 *Wars* 2.9.11.14 (in particular 2.9.13); 7.24.28–30; 8.16.33.

which he might have fielded at one of the readings of his draft work that he almost certainly delivered. A number of the references in the list are incorrect, which might suggest a lack of attention to detail.²⁴ It so happens that Riemenschneider's specific analyses all relate to passages listed as digressions by Ziebuhr, so that uncertainties about definition do not affect his discussion. I do not believe that the Appendix really offers the basis for a wider study of digressions and interpretive communities.

As noted above, Riemenschneider asked that his analysis should be judged on the basis of the insights that it offered into Procopius as a writer. Here I must confess to being underwhelmed. The different and sometimes contradictory aspects of Procopius have been well analysed, for example by Averil Cameron, or more recently, the various contributions to the Mischa Meier and Federico Montinaro collection.²⁵ Whether these aspects are convincingly explained by the application of reader-response theory will be a matter of opinion. A valid question might be whether Procopius decided what to include, especially in his digressions, on the basis of a diversity of expected readerships, or on the basis of what he knew from his wide-ranging travels and reading and thought would help readers to understand as well as enjoy his narrative? It is well-known that different sections of the *Wars* have different flavours, with the account of Belisarius' triumph over the Vandals being presented in almost miraculous terms, complete with fulfilled omens and other wonders, or the Ostrogothic siege of Roman having an Iliadic tone, for example with accounts of gory wounds.²⁶ To my mind, these different emphases reflect how Procopius chose to interpret the events he was narrating and demonstrate the importance of treating his texts as a whole rather than by isolating particular elements. Undoubtedly he expected his audiences and readers to notice different emphases between narratives, but his authorial decision was the crucial one for pointing readers in the right direction.

24 E.g. *Wars* 1.17.12–20 (not “1,17,13.22”); 3.11.25–31 (not “3,11,35–40”); 4.13.42–45 (not “4,13,33–6”); 8.32.23–26 (not “8,34,23–6”); there are numerous more minor errors.

25 Cameron (note 5); Meier/Montinaro (note 13).

26 The practice can be traced back to Thucydides with the overtones of tragedy in the account of the Syracusan expedition in books 6–7.

Procopius was, like Herodotus, a person with an unusual store of information and extensive interests, and these determined how he composed the *Wars*. The importance of attending to the literary aspects of the *Wars*, as urged by Riemenschneider, is hardly novel: it is unlikely that anyone would ignore the literary aspects of Herodotus or Thucydides, Tacitus or Ammianus, and the same surely applies to Procopius as well, especially in the light of Averil Cameron's work. That said, recognising that the *Wars* is a work of literature does not reduce its importance as a source for the history of the sixth century, nor the relevance of attempting to establish what Procopius' intentions might have been. To my mind, the most interesting parts of the volume are the more general chapters, on the highly-varied literary culture of the sixth century (chapter 2) and the type of networks that existed (chapter 4). These might have been tied more directly to Procopius to ensure that the volume cohered and became greater than the sum of its parts.

Overall, I found the more traditional approach of Ziebuhr to digressions more convincing and rewarding than Riemenschneider's, though those with a greater penchant for theoretical approaches to historiography may well decide the opposite. In any case, even if my assessment of this volume is less than enthusiastic, this does not mean that the volume is not of significance and interest. Riemenschneider's discussions made me think hard and will certainly need to be taken into serious consideration by those working on Procopius in the future.

Michael Whitby, University of Birmingham
Professor emeritus
m.whitby@bham.ac.uk

www.plekos.de

Empfohlene Zitierweise

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