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## Breaking silence in the historiography of Procopius of Caesarea

**Abstract:** Procopius employs the motif of “grieving in silence” to describe the deliberations preceding Justinian’s invasion of Vandal North Africa in 533 (*Wars* 3.10.7–8) and his vendetta against the urban prefect of Constantinople in 523 (*HA* 9.41). The particularity of Procopius’ language in these passages makes their collocation especially pronounced. The distance between the *Wars* and the *Secret History*, which represents itself breaking the silence between what the *Wars* can state publicly and the unvarnished truth (*HA* 1.1–10), may be measured by two “wise advisers” who speak when others are silent: the quaestor Proclus, warmly remembered for his probity, and the praetorian prefect John the Cappadocian, a figure universally reviled. Discontinuities between the presentation of John in the *Wars* and the merits of the policies he endorses problematize readers’ impressions of not only John but also the relationship between the *Wars* and the historical reality the work claims to represent.

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### I

Two interrelated episodes in Procopius of Caesarea’s *Wars* and *Secret History*, respectively, present similar but incongruous images of deliberations within high councils of state in the later Roman empire.

The more straightforward of the two concerns the fate of Theodotus “the Pumpkin,”<sup>1</sup> an urban prefect of Constantinople during the reign of Justin I, whose success in cracking down against the excesses of the Blue circus faction in 523 CE threatened the interests of Justin’s nephew, the future emperor Justinian I. In the *Secret History*, Procopius tells us that Justinian retaliated by trump-

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1 *PLRE* 2: Theodotus qui et Colocynthus 11.

ing up charges against Theodotus and was on the point of securing his condemnation (*HA* 9.41 [A3<sup>2</sup>], trans. DEWING):

πάντων δέ οἱ ἐκποδῶν ἰσταμένων καὶ **σιωπῆ** τὴν ἐς τὸν Θεόδοτον **ὄδυρομένων** ἐπιβουλὴν, μόνος ὁ Πρόκλος τὴν τοῦ καλουμένου κοιαίστωρος ἔχων ἀρχὴν καθαρὸν ἀπέφαινε τοῦ ἐγκλήματος εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ θανάτου οὐδαμῆ ἄξιον.

And as all stood aloof from him and *in silence grieved* over the plot against Theodotus, Proclus alone, who held the office of quaestor, as its incumbent was called, declared that the man was innocent of the charge and in no way worthy of death.

Procopius employs the same motif of “grieving in silence” to describe the deliberations preceding Justinian’s decision to invade Vandal North Africa in 533. The prospect of an expedition was opposed by Justinian’s ministers and generals alike (*Wars* 3.10.7–8 [A1], trans. DEWING):

Βασιλεῖ μέντοι εἰπεῖν τι ἐπὶ κωλύμῃ τῆς στρατιᾶς οὐδεὶς, ὅτι μὴ ὁ Καππαδόκης Ἰωάννης, ἐτόλμησεν, ὁ τῆς αὐλῆς ἑπαρχος, θρασύτατός τε ὢν καὶ δεινότατος τῶν κατ’ αὐτὸν ἀπάντων. οὗτος γὰρ Ἰωάννης, τῶν ἄλλων **σιωπῆ** τὰς παρούσας **ὄδυρομένων** τύχας, παρελθὼν ἐς βασιλέα ἔλεξε τοιάδε ...

But as for saying anything to the emperor to prevent the expedition, no one dared to do this except John the Cappadocian, the praetorian prefect, a man of the greatest daring and the cleverest of all men of his time.<sup>3</sup> For this John, while all the others were *bewailing in silence* the fortune which was upon them, came before the emperor and spoke as follows ...

The episode is modeled on Artabanus’ warning against Xerxes’ expedition (*Hdt.* 7.10.1, trans. PURVIS with modifications):<sup>4</sup>

**σιωπώντων** δὲ τῶν ἄλλων Περσέων καὶ οὐ τολμώντων γνώμην ἀποδείκνυσθαι ἀντίη τῇ προκειμένῃ, Ἀρτάβανος ὁ Ὑστάσπεος, πάτρως ἐὼν Ξέρξη, τῷ δὴ καὶ πίσυρος ἦν, ἔλεγε τάδε ...

2 Refer to Table 1 infra for the relative arrangement of the key passages under discussion.

3 On Procopius’ description of John the Cappadocian, see further Section III below with note 54.

4 See H. BRAUN, *Die Nachahmung Herodots durch Prokop.* Nuremberg 1894, 46; on the “tragic warner” figure, see R. LATTIMORE, *The wise advisor in Herodotus.* *Classical Philology* 34 (1939), 24–35, esp. 34–35. On this episode, see J. A. S. EVANS, *Christianity and paganism in Procopius of Caesarea.* *GRBS* 12 (1971), 81–100: 85–86; R. SCOTT, *The classical tradition in Byzantine historiography,* in M. Mullett / R. Scott (eds.), *Byzantium and the classical tradition.* Birmingham 1981, 61–74, esp. 73–74; A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius of Caesarea: tyranny, history, and philosophy at the end of antiquity.* Philadelphia 2004, 180–181.

Now the rest of the Persians *remained silent* and did not dare to express an opinion in opposition to the one that had been offered; but then Artabanus son of Hystaspes, relying on the fact that he was Xerxes' uncle, spoke as follows ...

If, for Herodotus, “the silence that holds the Persian courtiers is the mark of their condition as subjects,”<sup>5</sup> the same may be said for Procopius. The particularity of Procopius' language in these passages in the *Wars* and the *Secret History*, however, makes their collocation especially pronounced.<sup>6</sup> The expression “grieving in silence” (σιωπή ... ὀδύρεσθαι) is otherwise attested anywhere in the TLG corpus only at *Wars* 3.25.19 [A2] (σιωπή ... ὠδύροντο)<sup>7</sup> – a passage to which we will turn presently.

5 See S. MONTIGLIO, *Silence in the land of logos*. Princeton 2000, 154. V. ZALI, *The shape of Herodotean rhetoric: a study of the speeches in Herodotus' Histories with special attention to Books 5–9*. Leiden 2014, 53–54, with notes 76–77, cites as parallel instances Hdt. 5.92.1 (Socles the Corinthian replies to the Spartan proposal to reinstall Hippas in Athens; see also 5.93.2), 9.42.2 (Mardonius addresses his assembled officers) and suggests as epic exemplars Hom. *Il.* 8.28–30 (Athena replies to Zeus), *Od.* 16.393–94 (Amphinomus relies to Antinous). On Herodotus' portrayal of the Persian court, see now C. B. R. PELLING, *Herodotus and the question why*. Austin 2019, 129–145; also L. BELLONI, *Un aposiopesi in Erodoto (7.10.1)*. *Lexis* 20 (2002), 25–31; P. HOHTI, *Freedom of speech in speech situations in the Histories of Herodotus*. *Arctos* 8 (1974), 19–27.

6 The distinctiveness and interrelatedness of the two episodes becomes all the more apparent in comparison with an incident in book seven of the *Wars* that presents a dilemma virtually identical to the one facing Proclus in the *Secret History*. Procopius praises Marcellus (*PLRE* 3 Marcellus 3), who as *comes excubitorum* proceeded with painstaking care and deliberation in exposing the conspiracy of Arsaces and Chanaranges against Justinian and subsequently demonstrated his personal integrity in shielding Germanus from the emperor's wrath; Procopius describes him as incorruptible, profoundly invested in the observance of justice, and of sober and forbidding mien (*Wars* 7.32.23). He was learned in the law, having been appointed *iudex pedaneus* by Justinian in 539 (*Just. Nov.* 82.1). Procopius recounts a scene in the *consistorium* in which the emperor, egged on by two unnamed officials, was raging against Germanus for failing to bring the matter to his attention immediately. “The other [officials], cowed by fear, remained silent and yielded to [Justinian] by not resisting his will. Marcellus alone managed to save the man by speaking candidly” (οἱ δὲ ἄλλοι κατεπτηχότες σιωπῆ εἶχοντο, τῷ μὴ ἀντιστατεῖν ἃ βούλοιοτο ἐγχωροῦντες αὐτῷ· Μάρκελλος δὲ μόνος ὀρθοστομίας διασώσασθαι τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἴσχυσε, 7.32.48). The language here is marked (ὀρθοστομεῖν is *hapax legomenon*), and the contrasting language and details between the two scenes show that neither is stereotyped or formulaic.

7 This investigation is based on a lemmatized proximity search of the TLG corpus for ὀδύρομαι within fifteen words of σιωπή, -ης. Cf. *Suda* O.59 ADLER s.v. Ὀδύρω: ... καὶ ὁ Λιβάνιος, νυνὶ δὲ τὴν κόνιν σιγῆ ὀδύρωμαι (“and Libanius [writes]: ‘but now the ash in silence I would bewail,’” trans. WHITEHEAD), evidently a corruption of *Or.* 61.1: ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν Νικομήδους πόλιν ... ταύτην δὴ τὴν ἔναγχος μὲν πόλιν, νυνὶ δὲ κόνιν σιγῆ δακρύσω ...; (“and shall I cry in silence for the city of Nicomedia ... a city no longer, reduced to ashes?”). On the distinctiveness of these episodes, see also note 120 *infra*.

Although the close parallelism at these two moments between the *Wars* and the *Secret History* has been discussed with reference to the pragmatics of courtly etiquette in late antiquity,<sup>8</sup> more relevant here is the self-characterization of traditional Greco-Roman historiography as an exercise in bridging the silence between the present and an otherwise evanescent past and in recovering and rehabilitating truths that are otherwise concealed by the dissimulating effects of power.<sup>9</sup>

In this connection, the relationship that Procopius constructs between the *Wars* and the *Secret History* is strikingly figured. If the *Wars* is a public, and therefore a necessarily circumspect and carefully hedged, account of a recent past that cannot be fully disclosed while the principals are still alive (*HA* 1.1–3), the *Secret History* represents itself as the breaking of the silence marked by the distance between what is able to be stated publicly and the frank and unvarnished truth (4–10).

The difference and the distance between the two works, as well as Procopius' own, necessarily ambivalent and conflicted, self-representation as a silence-breaking historian, may be measured by the gulf that separates the two "wise advisers" who venture to speak when others are silent: on the one hand, Proclus,<sup>10</sup> a figure warmly remembered for his probity, whose unwavering stance against patent injustice is presented without irony; on the other, John the Cappadocian,<sup>11</sup> a figure universally reviled upon his fall from Justinian's favor,

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8 See C. PAZDERNIK, 'How then is it not better to prefer quiet, than the dangers of conflict?': The imperial court as the site of shifting cultural frontiers, in D. Brakke / D. Deliyannis / E. Watts (eds.), *Shifting cultural frontiers in late antiquity*. Farnham / Burlington, VT 2012, 99–111: 107–111.

9 See C.W. HENDRICK, Jr., *History and silence: purge and rehabilitation of memory in late antiquity*. Austin 2000, esp. 131–170. Apposite is the so-called *sphragis* with which Ammianus Marcellinus closes (31.16.9): *opus veritatem professum numquam, ut arbitror, sciens silentio ausus corrumpere vel mendacio* (his is "a work which claims truthfulness and which, so I think, I have never knowingly dared to warp with silence or falsehood," trans. G. KELLY, *The sphragis and closure of the Res Gestae*, in J. den Boeft / J.W. Drijvers / D. den Hengst / H.C. Teitler (eds.), *Ammianus after Julian. The reign of Valentinian and Valens in Books 26–31 of the Res Gestae*. Leiden/Boston 2007, 219–241: 219), an allusion to Cicero, *de Orat.* 2.62: *nam quis nescit primam esse historiae legem, ne quid falsi dicere audeat? deinde ne quid veri non audeat?* ("for who does not know the first law in writing history to be that the historian must not dare to tell any falsehood, and the next that he must not dare to suppress any part of the truth?"). On the truth claims offered by the *Wars*, which are undercut by the *Secret History*, see Section III below.

10 *PLRE* 2 Proculus 5. See D. LIEBS, *Hofjuristen der römischen Kaiser bis Justinian*. Munich 2010, 130–134; C. PAZDERNIK, *The quaestor Proclus*. *GRBS* 55 (2015), 221–249.

11 *PLRE* 3 Ioannes 11.

whose opposition to the Vandal expedition is compromised by narrowly self-serving ends.

In patterning the deliberations over the Vandal expedition upon Herodotus, Procopius is signaling the structural importance of the scene, which punctuates a major turning point in his narrative and a moment of great historical consequence.<sup>12</sup> Important questions of interpretation hinge upon whether John the Cappadocian creditably acquits himself as an Artabanus-like wise advisor and whether his advice is validated by the subsequent course of events. Consensus on these matters has eluded scholars.<sup>13</sup> It has been suggested, for example, that, “while condemning John the Cappadocian ... Procopius admits that John acted bravely and reasonably in arguing against the African expedition.”<sup>14</sup> As

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**12** As I.J.F. DE JONG, *The anachronical structure of Herodotus' Histories*, in S. J. Harrison (ed.), *Texts, ideas, and the Classics: scholarship, theory, classical literature*. Oxford 2001, 93–116: 104, points out, at root the technique is Homeric.

**13** See G. GREATREX, *Perceptions of Procopius in recent scholarship*. *Histos* 8 (2014), 76–121: 97–98, expressing reservations about readings of the *Wars* that “can end up being over-ingenuous and subtle.” P. VAN NUFFELEN, *The wor(l)ds of Procopius*, in C. Lillington-Martin / E. Turquois (eds.), *Procopius of Caesarea. Literary and historical interpretations*. London 2017, 40–56: 52, observes more broadly that “scholarship fails to agree on what the exact tendency of the *Wars* is and what message Procopius precisely wishes to convey.”

**14** W. TREADGOLD, *The early Byzantine historians*. Basingstoke / New York 2007, 198; likewise, SCOTT, *Classical tradition* (as footnote 4 above), 73–74 (“the only incident in the *Wars* where Procopius presents John without criticism”); M. CESA, *La politica di Giustiniano verso l'Occidente nel giudizio di Procopio*. *Athenaeum* 59 (1981), 389–409: 400–401 (“in questa occasione Procopio presta insomma le sue idee al Cappadoce”); EADEM, *Procopio di Cesarea ed alcuni militari e sovrani 'germanici'*, in V. Lica / D. Nedu (eds.), *ΦΙΛΙΑ. Festschrift für Gerhard Wirth*. Galați 2006, 203–220: 212 and note 44. P. LAMMA, *Giovanni di Cappadocia*. *Aevum* 21 (1947), 80–100: 95–96, takes the speech at face value as an expression of John's views; see also A. RODOLFI, *Procopius and the Vandals: how the Byzantine propaganda constructs and changes African identity*, in G.M. Berndt / R. Steinacher (eds.), *Das Reich der Vandalen und seine (Vor-)Geschichten*. Vienna 2008, 233–242; 238–239. Compare S. BARNISH / A.D. LEE / M. WHITBY, *Government and administration*, in Av. Cameron / B. Ward-Perkins / M. Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 14. Cambridge 2000, 164–206: 196: “like any canny financier [John] was reluctant to endorse major new commitments.” KALDELLIS, *Procopius* (as footnote 4 above), 180–181, finds that “the prefect's caution is justified by later events.” J.A.S. EVANS, *The power game in Byzantium: Antonina and the empress Theodora*. London / New York 2011, 86, in contrast, finds that “John the Cappadocian's advice was wrong as well as negative, which may have been the reason why Procopius made a point of putting it on the record.” D. BRODKA, *Prokopios von Kaisareia und Justinians Idee 'der Reconquista'*. *Eos* 86 (1999), 243–255: 246–247, finds the attribution of the speech to John unremarkable: “Im Prinzip wird in der Rede des Johannes nichts Neues gesagt. Der Historiker deutet hier die Probleme an, auf die er schon früher aufmerksam gemacht hat”; cf. B. RUBIN, *Das Zeitalter Iustinians*, I. Berlin 1960, 185–186.

this statement indicates, readers of the *Wars* are called upon to form judgments, not only about John the Cappadocian, but also – and crucially – about the costs and benefits of Justinian’s Vandal War. Careful examination of the literary design apparent in Procopius’ narrative of that war (in many respects the most thematically coherent part of the *Wars*) indicates that discontinuities between the presentation of John in the work, on one hand, and the merits of the policy of conflict aversion attributed to John, on the other, are carefully drawn. Placing an estimable message in the hands of a discreditable messenger problematizes not only Procopius’ presentation of John in the *Wars* but also the relationship between the silence-breaking claims of the *Wars* and the historical reality the work claims to represent.<sup>15</sup>

Readers alert to the literary self-consciousness apparent in the scene are equipped to appreciate how its presentation of John, which at first glance might appear to be quite positive, fails upon fuller reflection to cohere.<sup>16</sup> The familiar Herodotean template that presses John into service as a wise advisor is defamiliarized by the introduction of the wholly unprecedented motif of “grieving in silence.” As will be discussed below, the superlatives that introduce John as “a man of the greatest daring and the cleverest of all men of his time” not only align his presentation here with depictions elsewhere in the *Wars* stressing his out-sized and uncanny qualities but also signal that the speech placed in John’s mouth, in direct discourse, cannot be taken at face value. The speech itself superimposes upon the scene’s Herodotean template an unmistakable allusion to Thucydides that is jarringly out of step with motivations ascribed to John by the Procopian narrator. Verbal and contextual correspondences between the scene and subsequent moments in the unfolding narrative of the Vandal War establish a thematic through-line that offers a nuanced assessment of the policy of conflict aversion attributed to John and evaluates the costs and consequences of armed conflict in light of the lived experiences of those who experience it on the ground.

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**15** J. WEISWEILER, Unreliable witness: failings of the narrative in Ammianus Marcellinus, in L. Van Hoof / P. Van Nuffelen (eds.), *Literature and society in the fourth century AD: performing paideia, constructing the present, presenting the self*. Leiden 2014, 103–133: 107, comparably, investigates through a series of close readings “the complex forms of authorial self-awareness displayed by Ammianus.”

**16** As for the availability of such readers in the period, S. D. SMITH, *Greek epigram and Byzantine culture: gender, desire, and denial in the age of Justinian*. Cambridge 2019, demonstrates how classical *paideia* equipped members of the literary circle around Agathias and Paul the Silentiary to fashion transgressive authorial personae and to authorize subversive readings within the genre of Greek epigram; see esp. pp. 29–30 on epigram as a “system of textual relations.”

This essay, accordingly, offers a new and a nuanced reading of the arrangement of these verbal and contextual correspondences, which are detailed in four series of key passages designated **A–D** (see **Table 1** below). It distinguishes the figure of Procopius as the implied author of the works under examination (“who is neither the historical author nor the narrator but the guiding intelligence that motivates a work”<sup>17</sup>), from that of the Procopian narrator (modelled above all on the Thucydidean), and again from that of Procopius the embedded character (who like Thucydides appears in the narrative as an agent). The interplay among these figures is an effect of Procopius’ texts (in particular, for our purposes, the *Wars* and the *Secret History*),<sup>18</sup> which claim to expose the dissimulating effects of power but also, as works of contemporary history, cannot avoid being implicated in those effects themselves. Consequently, this essay also makes the argument that the relationship between John the Cappadocian in the *Wars* and Proclus in the *Secret History*, at the point at which each emerges in their respective narratives as a silence-breaking wise advisor, is synecdochic of the relationship that the two works – the former implicitly, the latter expressly – construct between themselves.

We begin by situating the motif of “grieving in silence” in two moments in book three of the *Wars* that punctuate Procopius’ narrative of the Vandal War in its ascendant phase. The stricken silence with which Justinian’s officials greet the prospect of the expedition [**A1**] finds an unexpected and ironic doublet in the shocked reaction evoked by a letter from Gelimer, the king of the Vandals, to his brother Tzazo and his forces on Sardinia, announcing the news of Belisarius’ initial victory in North Africa and subsequent occupation of Carthage [**A2**; see Section II]. At the same time as the *Wars* constructs the subjectivity of the participants who are implicated on both sides of the conflict, it draws pointed contrasts with those who are insulated from its consequences, who are figured as spectators [**B1**, **B2**]; when Tzazo is reunited with Gelimer on the mainland at Bulla Regia as book three comes to a close, moreover, a remarkable aside in the narratorial first person [**C2**] confesses the impossibility of describing the intensity and interiority of the grief experienced by the Vandals, once they have

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<sup>17</sup> For an elucidation of the distinction between the implied author of one or more works and the narrator(s) of those work(s), see S. M. WHEELER, *A discourse of wonders: audience and performance in Ovid’s Metamorphoses*. Philadelphia 1999, 66–74 (esp. 71–74 on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* as contemporaneous and complementary works); quotation at p. 67, citing W.C. BOOTH, *The rhetoric of fiction*. <sup>2</sup>Chicago 1983, 70–77, 151.

<sup>18</sup> Insofar as the narrator of the *Wars* is to be distinguished from that of the *Secret History*, as is suggested below, these figures become correspondingly more refractory.

been relieved of the necessity of silencing their emotions in front of their subjects on Sardinia.

At a prior point in the narrative, the same expression [C1; Section III] had announced the narrator's inability to fathom the unscrupulousness of John the Cappadocian, whose false economies in provisioning the expedition, once his opposition to it was overruled, imperiled its success. John's conduct substantiates Procopius' explanation of the actual motives behind John's opposition, while the narratorial aside drives home the outsized and uncanny qualities that Procopius consistently attributes to John. Turning now to John's speech [Section IV], we are equipped as readers of the *Wars* to see how Procopius has superimposed upon his Herodotean template an allusion to Thucydides that has been underappreciated by scholars and yet unmistakably subverts John's self-presentation as an Artabanus-like wise advisor advocating a policy of conflict aversion.

Procopius figures himself in the *Wars* as not only an author/narrator but also an investigator-participant – that is, as an embedded character who experienced the African expedition at the side of Belisarius.<sup>19</sup> Closely interrelated to questions that scholars have posed about the authorial judgment expressed toward John's opposition to the expedition is the narrator's account of a dream experienced by the character that relieved his anxieties about the venture. Placing the imagery of the dream into context [Section V] exposes a thematic through-line that links together John's concerns about provisioning the expedition; the subsequent exposure of his misconduct; and Belisarius' successes in overcoming obstacles up to, and culminating in, his uneventful occupation of Carthage, where soldiers and civilians alike observe civil order and preserve the rhythms of daily life [D2].

Preservation of the geopolitical status quo had been the principal concern put forward by John as the ostensible basis of his opposition to the expedition [D1; Section VI]. Here again, Procopius' Thucydidean intertext underscores the extent to which John's message must be distinguished from its messenger. Procopius' evaluation of Belisarius' achievement in peacefully occupying Carthage pointedly contrasts Belisarius' actions with John's words, to the detriment of the latter [Section VII]: to this extent, John is discredited and the optimistic reading of Procopius' dream validated. When Procopius turns, however, in book four of the *Wars*, to chronicling maladministration and misrule in Africa once Belisarius' energies are directed against the Ostrogoths, the bleak note on which the

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<sup>19</sup> See now A.J. Ross, Narrator and participant in Procopius' *Wars*, in Lillington-Martin/Turquois (eds.), *Procopius* (as footnote 13 above), 73–89, with salutary remarks about the pitfalls of taking a biographical approach to the study of Procopius' works.

narrative of the Vandal War concludes [D3] would seem to offer a retrospective endorsement of the worldview articulated by John.

Returning now to the comparison with which we began [Section VIII], we see how the difference and the distance that the *Secret History* and the *Wars* construct between the quaestor Proclus and John the Cappadocian, respectively, mirrors the relationship the two works construct between themselves.<sup>20</sup> John dares not disclose the actual motives that determine his opposition to the Vandal expedition, and so his claim to be breaking silence in the service of truth rings hollow, whereas Proclus' motives and his candor are unimpeachable. In much the same way, the narrator of the *Wars* may be counter-posed with the narrator of the *Secret History*.

Our investigation of the narratorial personae constructed by two literary texts, the *Wars* and the *Secret History*, respectively, is premised on the longstanding scholarly consensus attributing the authorship of the two works to the historical Procopius of Caesarea and the near-consensus positing that the first edition of the former (*Wars* books one through seven) and the latter were composed together and completed at the turn of the 550s.<sup>21</sup> The preface of the *Wars* anticipates that its readers will be actively engaged in forming judgments about the relationship between the present and the past,<sup>22</sup> while the opening of book

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**20** In a somewhat similar vein, J. GRETHLEIN, How not to do history: Xerxes in Herodotus' Histories. *American Journal of Philology* 130 (2009), 195–218: 197 offers a “metahistorical” reading of the Persian council scene in Herodotus “as an implicit commentary on the usefulness of the *Histories*.”

**21** A. KALDELLIS, The date and structure of Prokopios' Secret History and his projected work on Church history. *GRBS* 49 (2009), 585–616, rebuts efforts by B. CROKE, Procopius' Secret History: rethinking the date.” *GRBS* 45 (2005), 405–431, to revive arguments in favor of a later date (558/59) for the *Secret History*; see also GREATREX, Perceptions (as footnote 13 above), 100–101. L. VAN HOOF / P. VAN NUFFELEN, The historiography of crisis: Jordanes, Cassiodorus, and Justinian in mid-sixth-century Constantinople. *JRS* 107 (2017), 275–300, esp. 277–279, sketch how military and ecclesiastical crises in these years (550–552) stimulated historiographical production within elite circles in Constantinople.

**22** “Nothing greater or mightier than those deeds that occurred in these wars will be apparent to anyone, at any rate, who wishes to base his judgment on the truth (τῷ γε ὡς ἀληθῶς τεκμηριουῖσθαι βουλομένῳ). For in them have been performed more remarkable feats than any of those we know by report (ὧν ἀκοῆ ἴσμεν, cf. Thuc. 1.4), unless a reader of this narrative (τις τῶν τάδε ἀναλεγόμενων) gives the place of honor to antiquity and considers contemporary achievements unworthy to be deemed remarkable” (*Wars* 1.1.6–7). On the literary self-consciousness apparent in the preface of the *Wars*, see now M. KRUSE, Archery in the preface to Procopius' Wars: a figured image of agonistic authorship. *Studies in Late Antiquity* 1 (2017), 381–406; F. BASSO / G. GREATREX, How to interpret Procopius' preface to the Wars, in Lillington-Mar-

eight (which appeared in 552 or 553) celebrates the wide readership the first edition had attained.<sup>23</sup> Procopius' works are replete with cross-references that demonstrate their interrelations and their interdependence upon one another.<sup>24</sup> Literary-theoretical approaches – notably, narratology, reader-response theory, and the study of intertextuality – provide critical lenses that equip us to identify and appreciate the very qualities that Procopius' works predicate of themselves.<sup>25</sup> In particular, these approaches assign agency to implied<sup>26</sup> or inscribed<sup>27</sup> readers in finding meaning by recognizing and responding to the indeterminacy, reflexivity, and interpretability of texts. Book three of the *Wars*, Procopius' narrative of the ascendant phase of Justinian's Vandal War, displays techniques and effects that have been recognized in other monuments of classical and classicizing historiography.<sup>28</sup> Its relationship with its audience is remarkably nuanced. Figuring its readers as spectators who are uninvolved in and insulated from the risks and consequences of conflict, it aligns itself with participants in conflict, both combatants and civilians,<sup>29</sup> selectively disclosing and withholding

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tin/Turquois (eds.), Procopius (as in footnote 13 above), 59–72; P. RANCE, New viewpoints on Procopius. *Histos* 14 (2020), xciii–cvi: xciv–xcv.

**23** “The narrative that has been written (δεδιήγηται) by me up to this point has been composed (ξυγγέγραπται), as far as possible, by separating the material into books that focus on the different theaters of war, and these books have already been published and have appeared in every corner of the Roman empire” (τοὺς λόγους, οἵπερ ἤδη ἐξενεχθέντες πανταχόθι δεδήλωνται τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς, *Wars* 8.1.1; reiterated at 8.1.2: γράμμασι γὰρ τοῖς ἐς τὸ πᾶν δεδηλωμένοις).

**24** Compare AV. CAMERON, Procopius and the sixth century. London 1985, 33–35.

**25** Recent guides aimed at classicists include T. SCHMITZ, Modern literary theory and ancient texts: an introduction. Malden, MA 2007, and I. J. F. DE JONG, Narratology and classics. A practical guide. Oxford 2014.

**26** An “implied” reader is one who, in the definition of W. ISEMER, The act of reading: a theory of aesthetic response. Baltimore 1978, 34, “embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect.”

**27** “The kind of reader that the text posits”: D. FEENEY, Becoming an authority: Horace on his own reception, in L. B. T. Houghton / M. Wyke (eds.), Perceptions of Horace: a Roman poet and his readers. Cambridge / New York 2009, 16–38: 18–19 and note 9, citing S. R. Suleiman.

**28** Seminal reader-centered approaches include, for Thucydides, W. R. CONNOR, Thucydides. Princeton 1984, and T. ROOD, Thucydides: narrative and explanation. Oxford 1998; for Tacitus, E. O'GORMAN, Irony and misreading in the Annals of Tacitus. Cambridge 2000; for Herodotus, E. BARAGWANATH, Motivation and narrative in Herodotus. Oxford 2008; for Ammianus, G. KELLY, Ammianus Marcellinus: the allusive historian. Cambridge 2009. Contrast the Straussian approach to Procopius in KALDELLIS, Procopius (as footnote 4 above).

**29** Compare A. GOLZ, Anspruch und Wirklichkeit – Überlegungen zu Prokopios Darstellung ostgotischer Herrscher und Herrscherinnen, in G. Greatrex / S. Janniard (eds.), Le monde de Procope / The world of Procopius. Paris 2018, 285–310: 296–297, on Procopius as an author “embedded” in combat not unlike a contemporary war correspondent.

access to their thoughts and experiences, demonstrating the limits of narratability and dissimulating its representation of historical reality within a silence that stands in marked contrast to the truth-making claims of the *Secret History*.

Table 1: arrangement of key passages

<i>Wars</i>	
3.10.6	B1 θεαταὶ γενέσθαι
<b>3.10.8</b>	<b>A1 σιωπῇ ... ὀδυρομένων</b>
3.10.13	D1 τὸ τὴν ἡσυχίαν ἀγαπᾶν
3.13.12	C1 ὡς οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἔγωγε φράσαι ἰκανῶς ἔχοιμι
3.21.10	D2 ἡσύχαζον
<b>3.25.19</b>	<b>A2 σιωπῇ ... ὀδύροντο</b>
3.25.22	C2 ἅπερ ἔγωγε οὐκ ἂν ἔτι φράσαι ἰκανῶς ἔχοιμι
3.25.23	B2 θεατῇ γενέσθαι
4.28.52	D3 ἡσυχίαν τινὰ ... γενέσθαι
* * *	
<b>HA 9.41</b>	<b>A3 σιωπῇ ... ὀδυρομένων</b>

## II

Ταῦτα ἐπεὶ Τζάζων εἶδέ τε ἀπενεχθέντα καὶ ἐς τοὺς Βανδίλους ἐξήνεγκεν,<sup>30</sup> ἕς τε οἰμωγὰς καὶ ὀλοφύρσεις ἐτράποντο, οὐ μέντοι ἐκ τοῦ ἐμφανοῦς, ἀλλ' ὡς ἔνι μάλιστα ἐγκρυφιάζοντές τε καὶ τοὺς νησιώτας λανθάνοντες<sup>31</sup> **σιωπῇ** ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν τὰ παρόντα σφίσιν **ὀδύροντο**. (*Wars* 3.25.19 [A2])

**30** The contents of the letter: *Wars* 3.25.11–18. Gelimer had dispatched Tzazo with 5,000 troops to suppress an uprising on Sardinia (3.11.23).

**31** Cf. Aristophanes, *Equites* 822 (Demos to the Paphlagonian): πολλοῦ δὲ πολὺν με χρόνον καὶ νῦν ἐλελήθεις ἐγκρυφιάζων (“For much too long a time and even now have you been acting underhand without my knowing it,” trans. HICKIE 1859). See also Proc., *HA* 1.36, on Antonina’s affair with Theodosius: λήσειν γὰρ ἐς τὸ παντελὲς οὐδαμῇ ᾤετο, ἐπεὶ τὴν γυναῖκα ἐώρα οὐκέτι τὸ πάθος ἐγκρυφιάζειν οἷαν τε οὖσαν, οὐδὲ κεκρυμμένως ἐξεργωγένας (“[Theodosius] reasoned that the affair couldn’t stay secret forever, and he saw that the woman was no longer able to dissimulate her infatuation or indulge in it secretly,” trans. KALDELLIS).

When this letter had been brought to Tzazo, and he had disclosed its contents to the Vandals, they turned to wailing and lamentation – not openly, however, but concealing their feelings as much as possible and avoiding the notice of the islanders, *silently* among themselves *they bewailed* their present state.

Tzazo's reception of Gelimer's letter and the disclosure of its contents to the Vandals in Sardinia set the scene for the culminating and concluding moment in book three of the *Wars*. As such, the episode serves as the fulcrum around which the overarching two-book structure of Procopius' narrative of Justinian's Vandal War (i. e., books three and four of the *Wars*) turns. Procopius' declaration that Tzazo's Vandals, having been apprised of Gelimer's defeat at Ad Decimum, "were grieving in silence" (σιωπή ... ὠδύροντο) unmistakably echoes the historian's image of Justinian's generals and senior ministers "grieving in silence" (σιωπή ... ὀδυρομένων, 3.10.8 [A1])<sup>32</sup> over the emperor's original decision to launch the expedition. The juxtaposition of these two moments effectively bookends the opening act of the Vandal War and makes the plight of Justinian's officials at the outset of the conflict, on one hand, and that of Tzazo's Vandals on Sardinia at its cliffhanging climax, on the other, into an unexpectedly ironic doublet.

The reduction of these two groups to grieving in silence does neither of them credit. Justinian's officials are cowed and submissive, and they dissimulate their concerns until John the Cappadocian steps forward. By the same token, the Vandals on Sardinia are stunned and bewildered by the news reaching them from the mainland, but their need to keep face and to avoid betraying their discomfiture to their subjects on the island obliges them to stifle their emotions and mask their reactions. Procopius constructs the subjectivity of the Vandals in remarkable detail, describing how they abandon themselves to the performance of grieving and yet how at the same time they dissimulate and obfuscate those impulses from outsiders, caught in the dilemma of deploring their situation without being able to say or to do anything about it.

On the face of it, these two moments validate not only Justinian's impetuosity in presuming to attack the Vandals in the first place but also the various interests that eventually prevailed upon the emperor to go through with the expedition.<sup>33</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, the cautiousness and aversion to

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<sup>32</sup> The parallel is heightened by the similarity of the two phrases taken as a whole, which lay stress upon an immediately pressing dilemma: τῶν ἄλλων σιωπή **τὰς παρούσας** ὀδυρομένων **τύχας**, 3.10.8; cf. σιωπή ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν **τὰ παρόντα σφίσι**ν ὠδύροντο, 3.25.19.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. BRODKA, Prokopios (as footnote 14 above), 246–247. Procopius extends the parallel with Herodotus (footnote 4 supra; cf. Hdt. 7.12–19), when he reports that Justinian's enthusi-

risk that Procopius imputes to the Roman officials as a group, and that John the Cappadocian articulates (and, at first, successfully presses in his speech in opposition to Justinian), seems in this moment to have been discredited by the course of events. So too the brutal reversal of fortune experienced by the Vandals in Sardinia, upon their receipt of Gelimer's letter, and their consequent struggles to mask their emotions and to avoid making a spectacle of themselves before the island's inhabitants would seem to elevate and to celebrate Justinian's cause at their expense.

Procopius situates himself – or, rather, situates the voice of the Procopian narrator, the narratorial persona that the text constructs for itself – in close proximity to these events. Not only do Procopius' readers experience John the Cappadocian's intervention with Justinian and the discomfiture of the Vandals on Sardinia with fly-on-the-wall immediacy, but they also access the innermost, undisclosed, and deliberately masked thoughts and emotions of the participants themselves.

In the former case, the narrator makes a panoramic survey. When Justinian announced his plans to his officials (ἐς τὰς ἀρχάς, *Wars* 3.10.2), most (οἱ πλείστοι) reacted unfavorably, mindful of the debacles sustained against the Vandals in the previous century; especially distressed were the praetorian prefect and the officers of the fisc, who would be expected to finance the expedition (3);<sup>34</sup> the generals shrank from the magnitude of the undertaking (4); the soldiers, recently recalled from the East, were nonplussed at the prospect of marine warfare and unfamiliar opponents (5); “but all the rest, as usually happens in large crowds,<sup>35</sup> wished to be spectators of new adventures (νεωτέρων πραγμάτων ... θεαταὶ γενέσθαι [B1]),<sup>36</sup> while others faced the dangers” (6).

Such sweeping declarations, informed by narratorial omniscience, are authorized by the conventions of classicizing historiography; they advance the

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asm for the war was rekindled by an Eastern bishop who had experienced an epiphany in a dream and expressed divine endorsement for the idea (*Wars* 3.10.18–20). Other sources attributing a range of motives for the expedition are conveniently surveyed by Kaldellis, in H. B. DEWING (trans.), *Prokopios. The wars of Justinian*, revised by A. KALDELLIS. Indianapolis 2014, 168 note 343.

**34** See further footnote 49 *infra*.

**35** “As usually happens in large crowds” (ἄπερ ἐν ὀμίλῳ φιλεῖ γίγνεσθαι): cf. Thuc. 2.65.4 (ὅπερ φιλεῖ ὄμιλος ποιεῖν), 4.28.3, 6.63.2, 8.1.4; on these expressions, see V. HUNTER, *Thucydides and the sociology of the crowd. Classical Philology* 84 (1988), 17–30.

**36** The Persian king Chosroes is “of unstable mind and irrationally fond of innovations” (ἄτακτός τε ἦν τὴν διάνοιαν καὶ νεωτέρων πραγμάτων ἐραστής ἄτοπος, *Wars* 1.23.1), qualities that align with Procopius' presentation of him as a spectator (θεατήρ) elsewhere in the work: see footnote 42 *infra*. On Justinian as an innovator (νεωτεροποιός), see footnotes 69–70 *infra*.

analysis of the situation at hand and do not sustain close scrutiny into the historian's sources and methods.<sup>37</sup> Procopius seems to be indicating, all the same, that speculation about an imperial expedition against the Vandals extended well beyond elite policy-making circles, and the distinction he draws between conflict aversion on the part of those who would be responsible for carrying out the mission, on one hand, and the enthusiasm of those in the masses who would experience conflict only as spectators (θεαταί), on the other,<sup>38</sup> is significant not only in the context of the sequel involving Tzazo's Vandals, as will be discussed presently, but also with reference to the relationship that Procopius' text constructs with its readers, who are also in the position of spectators vicariously experiencing the struggles of its characters.<sup>39</sup>

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**37** Comparable is Thucydides' analysis of the balance of opinion in Greece at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (2.8).

**38** Agathias could be describing the ironic inversion of this scenario during the Kotrigur attack on Constantinople in 559, when he writes of the ragtag civilian defenders hastily assembled under Belisarius, "the whole crowd clearly had no weapons and was inexperienced in war, and only because of their inexperience they thought that dangers produced the greatest pleasure and they had come more for a spectacle than to be drawn up for battle" (τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν ἅπαν πλήθος ἀνοπλὸν τε ἦν περιφανῶς καὶ ἀπόλεμον καὶ μόνῳ τῷ ἀπείρως ἔχειν ἡδίστους ἡγούμενοι τοὺς κινδύνους θέας τε ἔνεκα μᾶλλον ἢ παρατάξεως ἀφιγμένοι, 5.16.2, trans. S.D. SMITH).

**39** Plutarch figures readers as spectators in praising the vividness (ἐνάργεια) of Thucydides' writing: "Assuredly Thucydides is always striving for this vividness in his writing, since it is his desire to make the reader a spectator (θεατὴν ποιῆσαι τὸν ἀκροατὴν), as it were, and to produce vividly in the minds of those who peruse his narrative the emotions of amazement and consternation which were experienced by those who beheld them" (*de glor. Ath.* 347a, trans. BABBITT). As J. GRETHLEIN, Social minds and narrative time: collective experience in Thucydides and Heliodorus. *Narrative* 23 (2015), 123–139: 128–129, points out, with reference to this passage: "The internal spectators are crucial to 'making the reader a spectator.' Prefiguring the reception of the reader, the embedded audience lets the reader see the action through the lens of an eyewitness." Procopius' formulation stresses the difference and the distance between reception and experience: "As absorbed as we can get by narratives, the experiences in our reception always remain within the frame of 'as-if'": J. GRETHLEIN, Philosophical and structuralist narratologies – worlds apart?, in J. Grethlein / A. Rengakos (eds.), *Narratology and interpretation: the content of narrative form in ancient literature*. Berlin/New York 2009, 153–174: 156. Thucydides offers his readers a text that equips them "to look clearly" at the past (τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν, *Thuc.* 1.22.4, with E. GREENWOOD, *Thucydides and the shaping of history*. London 2006, 19–41), and yet implicates them in emotionally- and rhetorically-charged spectacles that complicate critical analysis; see R. HARMAN, Metahistory and the visual in Herodotus and Thucydides, in A. Kampakoglou / A. Novokhatko (eds.), *Gaze, vision, and visuality in ancient Greek literature*. Berlin 2018, 271–288: 279–286. Like Thucydides, Procopius relies on internal focalization that enables his readers to experience historical uncertainty and contingency through the perceptions of his characters; see F.K. MAIER, *Dealing with the invisible – war in Procopius*, *ibid.* 289–307. On the representation of spectators in Greek historiography more generally, see

If this opening episode is one bookend of the first act of Justinian's Vandal War, as has been suggested, which constructs a Procopian narrator capable of exposing and exploring silences that dissimulate concerns and emotions that his characters dare not disclose, the corresponding bookend, which reaches its crescendo once Tzazo and his forces reunite with Gelimer and the rest of the Vandals on the mainland at Bulla Regia, explodes those conventions.<sup>40</sup> It is marked by a striking aside in the first-person voice of the narrator, who confesses a limit to his powers of historiographical representation and destabilizes the relationship between his narrative and its implied audience of reader-spectators (*Wars* 3.25.22–23 [B2, C2]):

καὶ περὶ βαδίζοντες ἀφικνοῦνται ἐς τὸ Βούλλης πεδίον, οὗ δὴ ἀνεμίγνυντο τῷ ἄλλῳ στρατῷ. ἐνταῦθα συχνὰ ἐλέου πολλοῦ ἄξια Βανδίλοις ζυνέβη, ἅπερ ἔγωγε οὐκ ἂν ἔτι φράσαι ἰκανῶς ἔχοιμι. οἶμαι γὰρ εἰ καὶ αὐτῶν πολεμίων ἀνδρὶ θεατῆ γενέσθαι τετύχηκε, τάχα ἂν καὶ αὐτὸς Βανδίουλος τε τότε καὶ τύχην τὴν ἀνθρωπεῖαν ὦκτίσατο.

They reached the plain of Bulla traveling on foot, where they joined the rest of the army. And in that place there were many most pitiable scenes among the Vandals, *which I, at least, could never relate as they deserve*. For I think that even if one of the enemy themselves had happened *to be a spectator* at that time, he would probably have felt pity for the Vandals and human fortune generally.

On Sardinia, Tzazo and his Vandals had suppressed their emotions and concerns precisely to avoid making spectacles of themselves before the islanders; once reunited with their fellows and their families, they are no longer under the same constraint. The narrator confesses his inability to represent the intensity of these moments in his prose: they exceed his powers of expression, but he does not condemn them as excessive; indeed, he claims, even a hostile spectator (θεατῆς) hardly could have refrained from pitying the Vandals and acknowledging in them a common humanity and shared vulnerability.

The passage is recognizable generically as a “*pathos* statement” familiar from Thucydides,<sup>41</sup> but Procopius’ contrafactual scenario introduces a paradox: even a hostile spectator likely would have pitied the Vandals, had he observed

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A. D. WALKER, Enargeia and the spectator in Greek historiography. *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123 (1993), 353–377.

<sup>40</sup> This is to say that Procopius, in the first “bookend,” invokes expectations about the relationship between readers and spectators (as articulated in the preceding note), only to subvert those very expectations, in the second.

<sup>41</sup> E. g. Thuc. 7.30.3; see H. R. IMMERWAHR/ W. R. CONNOR, *Historiography*, in P. E. Easterling / B. M. W. Knox (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*. Cambridge 1985, 426–471: 447: “it expresses a general tragic feeling for the human situation of man in an uncontrollable environment.”

the spectacle at Bulla Regia. Had a hostile spectator been present (as on Sardinia), however, the Vandals likely would not have made a spectacle of themselves. The absence of spectators is the condition that allows the Vandals to break silence and to grieve openly – making, as it were, an anti-spectacle of themselves. The contrast between the Vandals' compartment on Sardinia and at Bulla Regia, respectively, exposes the limits of the Procopian narrator of the *Wars*, who can penetrate others' self-imposed silences but whose inability to represent an absence – in this instance, the anti-spectacle at Bulla Regia – dissimulates those moments within a silence of their own, which is marked in Procopius' text as the trace of an undisclosed reality or, one might say, of a varnished truth.

The implicit identification of Procopius' contrafactual spectator (θεατής, *Wars* 3.25.23 [B2]) at Bulla Regia with the crowd of spectators (θεαταί, 3.10.6 [B1]), whose enthusiasm for a prospective Vandal War was conditioned by their uninvolvedness in its dangers, secures the relationship between the two “bookends” of the “first act” of Justinian's Vandal War as it is represented in book three of the *Wars*.<sup>42</sup> To the extent that Procopius' text also figures its implied audience of readers as spectators who experience the struggles of its characters vicariously, as has been suggested above with reference to Procopius' panoramic survey of reactions to the prospect of attacking the Vandals, the reunion of the Vandals at Bulla Regia effaces the relationship of narrative to narratee, of text to reader, of spectacle to spectator: as Procopius goes on to relate, the situation is one that defies description or explanation.

The Vandals themselves, engrossed in their plight, have no words nor, indeed, any need for words in order to understand one another. Procopius stresses the ineffability and the impenetrable interiority of their interactions (*Wars* 3.25.24–26):

For Gelimer and Tzazo threw their arms about each other's necks and could not let go, *yet they spoke not a word to each other* (οὐδὲν μέντοι ἐς ἀλλήλους ἐφθέγγοντο), but kept grasping their hands and weeping, and each of the Vandals with Gelimer embraced one of those who had come from Sardinia in the same way. And they stood for a long time *as if grown together* (ὡσπερ ἀλλήλοις ἐμπεφυκότες) and found such comfort as they could in this, and neither did the men of Gelimer *ask* about [the rebel on Sardinia] Goda (for their present fortune had so stunned them that they were inclined to disregard matters that had previously seemed to them most important), nor could those who came from Sardinia *bring*

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<sup>42</sup> The word θεατής appears only four times in the *Wars*. It is used elsewhere in a concrete sense when Chosroes appears as a spectator in the hippodrome at Apameia (2.11.32) and again when he is seated (like Xerxes at Salamis) as an observer of the siege of Petra in Colchis (2.17.9); cf. *HA* 9.20, 10.8. See also footnote 36 *supra*.

*themselves to ask* (ἔρωτᾶν τι ἠξίουν) about what had happened in Libya. *For the place was sufficient for them to infer what had come to pass* (ικανὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ὁ χῶρος τεκμηριῶσαι τὰ ξυμπεσόντα ἐγίνετο). Indeed, *they made no mention* (λόγον ἐποιοῦντό τινα) even of their own wives and children, *knowing well* (ἐξεπιστάμενοι) that whoever was not there with them had either died or fallen into the hands of the enemy. Thus, then, did these things happen.

Relying upon intuition and nonverbal cues, consumed by grief and the enormity of loss, and reeling from the frustration of their hopes and expectations, the Vandals huddle together and form a closed circle, practically melting into one another.<sup>43</sup> Procopius' confession of his own inadequacy as a historiographer at this moment results not from an information deficit or a failure of imagination, but rather from his professed inability to convey the inarticulate and unarticulated grief of his subjects. As a narrator, he conspicuously fails to find words capable of conveying the Vandals' loss for words, making a spectacle of himself by inscribing within his text a narrative vacuum, an absence – a silence – that authorizes his reader-spectators to reflect more widely upon circumspect, recalcitrant, or unforthcoming qualities of the work in front of them.

### III

The formula with which Procopius confesses his deficiencies as the narrator of the *Wars* – “I, at least, could never describe [the subject] as it deserves” (ἔγωγε οὐκ ἂν ἔτι φράσαι ἱκανῶς ἔχοιμι, *Wars* 3.25.22 [C2]) – appears in only one other place in the work (3.13.12 [C1]):<sup>44</sup>

**43** B. RUBIN, Prokopios von Kaisareia. Stuttgart 1954, 140–141 ad loc. = *RE* 23.1 (1957), 273–599: 412–413, admires Procopius' depiction of the scene.

**44** Compare *Aed.* 1.7.1 (on the Church of St. Irene at Pera: ὃς δὴ οὕτω μεγαλοπρεπῶς τῷ βασιλεῖ ὅλος ἐξείργασται ὡς οὐκ ἂν ἔγωγε φράσαι ἱκανῶς ἔχοιμι, “This entire church was constructed by the emperor on such a magnificent scale that I, at least, could not possibly do it justice”), 1.11.16 (on the Hieron and Jucundianae palaces on the Bosphorus: ὧν δὴ οὐτὲ τὸ μεγαλοπρεπὲς σὺν τῷ ἐς τέχνην ἠκριβωμένῳ, οὕτε τὸν ὄγκον ἂν σὺν τῷ εὐπρεπεῖ λόγῳ φράσαι ποτὲ ἱκανῶς ἔχοιμι, “But I could never adequately describe either their magnificence with careful investigation of the workmanship or their massiveness in fitting words”). These are elements of the repertoire of techniques that Procopius employs in the *Buildings* in order to convey his speechlessness at the enormity of his task: see E. TURQUOIS, *Envisioning Byzantium: materiality and visuality in Procopius of Caesarea*. Diss. Oxford 2013, esp. 61–67.

Ὁ τῆς αὐλῆς ἑπαρχὸς Ἰωάννης φλαυρός τε ἦν τὸν τρόπον καὶ οὕτω δυνατὸς [εἰς τὸ προσαγαγεῖν] εἰς τὸ δημόσιον ἐπινοῆσαι χρήματα ἐπὶ λύμῃ ἀνθρώπων, **ὡς οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἔγωγε φράσαι ἰκανῶς ἔχοιμι.**

The praetorian prefect, John, was a crooked character and so skillful at devising ways of bringing money into the public treasury to the detriment of men *that I, for my part, would never be able to describe him sufficiently.*

Procopius will go on to relate how John the Cappadocian pursued the false economy of provisioning the expedition against the Vandals with under-baked hardtack biscuit,<sup>45</sup> which was cheaper to produce and disburse; by the time the fleet put in at Methone in the southwestern Peloponnesus, however, its provisions had disintegrated and spoiled, causing, Procopius claims, the deaths of five hundred men. Even after Belisarius had rescued the situation by procuring rations locally and had informed Justinian of John's malfeasance, the emperor failed to hold him to account (3.13.15–20).<sup>46</sup>

Procopius himself accompanied the expedition as Belisarius' *assessor* and *aide-de-camp* and witnessed these events at first hand.<sup>47</sup> He shows his reader how the episode fits into the larger portrait of John's villainy, culminating in his fall from Justinian's favor and forced ordination, that Procopius has already recounted in book one of the *Wars* (3.13.13):

ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν καὶ <έν> τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν λόγοις ἐρρήθη, ἥνικα πρὸς τῆς ἱστορίας ἐς τότε ἠγόμεν τοῦ λόγου.

But this has been said in the preceding books, when I was brought to that point in my narrative by my investigation [of the events in question].<sup>48</sup>

**45** A law of Constantius II and Julian of 360 CE, reaffirmed as *CJ* 12.37.1 (= *CTh* 7.4.6), provided soldiers on campaign with hardtack biscuit and bread (*buccellatum, panis*) as well as with ordinary and sour wine and with pork and mutton. Arcadius, Honorius, and Theodosius I decreed, in 404 (*CJ* 12.38.2 = *CTh* 7.5.2), that not even imperial estates were exempt from being requisitioned for the baking of *buccellatum*. Procopius reports that John the Cappadocian attempted to use the furnaces of the baths of Achilles in Constantinople for the purpose (*Wars* 3.13.16). See, in general, P. SOUTHERN / K. R. DIXON, *The late Roman army*. London / New York 1996, 79–82.

**46** See further footnote 110 *infra*.

**47** On Procopian autopsy, see Ross, *Narrator* (as footnote 19 above), 73–89.

**48** See *Wars* 1.24.12–15, 25.8–10; cf. John Lydus, *De Mag.* 3.57–72. This narratorial analepsis refers to the Nika rebellion in 532 CE, when John was dismissed from the prefecture. Procopius uses comparable language proleptically when referring to Belisarius' capture of Sicily in 535 CE: "The way in which this was done will be told by me in subsequent books, when my narrative leads me into my investigation of events in Italy" (ὄντινα δὲ τρόπον, ἐν τοῖς ὀπισθέν μοι λόγοις λελέξεται, ὅτε με ὁ λόγος ἐς τῶν Ἰταλικῶν πραγμάτων τὴν ἱστορίαν ἄγει, 4.14.2).

Now Procopius once again picks up the thread (3.13.14): “I will explain here how he destroyed the soldiers” (τὰ δὲ νῦν ὄτω ποτὲ τρόπῳ τούτους δὴ τοὺς στρατιώτας διεχρήσατο ἐρῶν ἔρχομαι).

This scandal over provisioning the Vandal expedition substantiates the covert objection, discussed above, that Procopius had attributed to John the Cappadocian at the initial prospect of attacking the Vandals – namely, that it would fall to him as praetorian prefect to find the money to outfit the expedition.<sup>49</sup> On that occasion, John broke the silence that had gripped the other officials in order to spare himself, above all, from having to meet this burden. Its sequel, once the expedition has gone forward in spite of John’s objections, exposes the depths of his unscrupulousness and shows that the earlier narratorial intervention was subtly proleptic. In resuming the story of John’s villainy and slotting it into its place in his firsthand account of the progress of the expedition against the Vandals, Procopius displays surehanded control over his material and a keen sense of the shape that his line of inquiry, his ἱστορία, imposes on the selection and arrangement of that material.

The same emphatic, first-person voice that announces the unfathomability of John the Cappadocian’s scheming reminds Procopius’ readers, nevertheless, of the path along which the historian’s inquiry has led, and, with something of a Herodotean flavor,<sup>50</sup> it brooks no equivocation about the consequences of John’s behavior. As is the case with the Vandals at Bulla Regia, and unlike other first-person interventions in the *Wars*, however, Procopius is figuring himself not as an investigator-participant whose declaration authenticates some-

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In these passages, ἱστορία (“[historical] investigation”) seems to refer to the reconstruction of a past constituted out of τὰ πράγματα (“events”), which, on one hand, is generative of λόγος (“narrative”) and, on the other, is organized and articulated by it.

**49** *Wars* 3.10.3: “But the men who were the most sorrowful of all and who, by reason of their anxiety, felt the keenest apprehension (μάλιστα δὲ ἤλγουν τε καὶ περιώδουνοι τῇ μερίμνῃ ἐγίνοντο), were the praetorian prefect, whom the Romans call praetor (ὃ τε τῆς αὐλῆς ἐπαρχος, ὃν δὴ πραιτώρα καλοῦσι Ῥωμαῖοι ...), also the administrator of the treasury (... καὶ ὁ τοῦ ταμείου ἡγούμενος), and all to whom had been assigned the collection of either public or imperial taxes, for they reasoned that while it would be necessary for them to produce countless sums for the needs of the war, they would be granted neither flexibility nor any extensions.” A former praetorian prefect, Archelaus, accompanied the expedition with responsibility for its provisions (3.11.17; *PLRE* 2, s.v. Archelaus 5). On fiscal administration in the period, see J. F. HALDON, *Economy and administration*, in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge 2005, 28–59.

**50** Compare Ross, *Narrator* (as footnote 19 above), 82–83: “if the [Procopian third-person] ‘he’ participant bears some resemblance to Thucydides, then the [first-person] ‘I’ participant is distinctly Herodotean.”

thing he has personally witnessed,<sup>51</sup> but rather as an author/narrator confronted by the limits of narratability, signaling the impossibility of expressing the inexpressible.<sup>52</sup>

Prior occasions on which John the Cappadocian is introduced in the *Wars* lay stress upon his outsized and uncanny qualities. According to Procopius, John was untouched by liberal studies and classical *paideia*; his superlative attributes are, to the contrary, innate (*Wars* 1.24.12–13):

He learned nothing at grammar school other than the letters themselves, and poorly at that. But *through the strength of his natural ability* (φύσεως ... ἰσχύϊ) he became *the most powerful* (δυνατώτατος) man of our times, for he was *the most capable* (ικανώτατος) at knowing what had to be done and at finding solutions to practical problems. However, he also became *the most wicked* (πονηρότατος) of all men and *bent all the force of his nature to it* (τῇ τῆς φύσεως δυνάμει ἐς τοῦτο ἐχρῆτο).<sup>53</sup>

So too in the deliberations about the expedition against the Vandals, John is “a man of the greatest daring and the cleverest of all men of his time” (θρασύτατός τε ὢν καὶ δεινότητος τῶν κατ’ αὐτὸν ἀπάντων, 3.10.7).<sup>54</sup>

John’s silence-breaking intervention in these deliberations is of a piece with the transgressive, larger-than-life persona that Procopius constructs for him elsewhere in the *Wars*. The Cappadocian’s fall from grace presented Procopius with an opening to expose his maladministration and to offer the kind of unsparing criticism that was authorized by the truth-telling claims of classicizing historiography.<sup>55</sup> As the Procopian narrator declares in the preface to the *Wars*

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51 See e.g. *Wars* 8.22.7–8, where Procopius describes his visit (θεασάμενος ἐρῶν ἔρχομαι) to the site of Aeneas’ perfectly-preserved ship in Rome, among other instances collected by Ross, *ibid.* 80–83 – who does not, however, discuss the two passages [C1, C2] under examination here.

52 Apposite in this connection is Ross’ observation, *ibid.* 80: “The actions of the first-person singular [in Proc.] are almost exclusively reserved for corroborations and explanations of *adynata* and *mirabilia*, rather than for the description of actions or interactions with the main characters ...” See also footnote 115 *infra*. R. R. Warhol, *Neonarrative; or, how to render the unnarratable in realist fiction and contemporary film*, in J. Phelan / P.J. Rabinowitz (eds.), *A companion to narrative theory*. Malden, MA 2005, 220–231, defines “what can’t be told because it’s ‘ineffable’” as the supranarratable, a subcategory of “unnarration” in modern realist fiction.

53 The portrait may be compared to Thucydides’ judgment on Themistocles (1.138.3; see also *Wars* 7.1.13, of Belisarius: A. DUWE, *Quatenus Procopius Thucydidem imitatus sit. Jahresbericht des Marien-Gymnasiums zu Jever* 1885, 7), of which it is almost an ironic inversion.

54 Trans. DEWING; compare DEWING/KALDELLIS, *Wars* (as footnote 33 above): “the most impudent and shrewd man of his time.” See also footnote 61 *infra*.

55 G. GREATREX, *The composition of Procopius’ Persian Wars and John the Cappadocian. Prudentia* 27 (1995), 1–13; IDEM, *Procopius the Outsider?*, in D.C. Smythe (ed.), *Strangers to them-*

(1.1.4), “to rhetoric cleverness is appropriate; to poetry, inventiveness; and to history, truth” (πρέπειν ... ῥητορικῇ μὲν δεινότητα, ποιητικῇ δὲ μυθοποιΐαν, ξυγγραφῇ δὲ ἀλήθειαν). He insists that he has composed the work with scrupulous attention to detail, omitting the shortcomings of none of the figures inscribed within, including those of his close associates.<sup>56</sup>

While the *Wars* proclaims its fidelity to historical truth, however, the *Secret History* undermines those claims by presenting itself as an esoteric supplement and corrective. In contrast to the third-person narratorial voice of the *Wars* that identifies itself with Procopius of Caesarea, in the manner of classical historiography,<sup>57</sup> the first-person voice of the *Secret History* refrains from identifying itself, but it asserts that it will reveal causes (αἰτίαι) that the *Wars* was obliged to conceal.<sup>58</sup> The two works are strikingly concordant in their portrayal of John the Cappadocian; yet, even where the disgraced praetorian prefect is concerned, the *Secret History* intimates how much the *Wars* leaves unsaid.<sup>59</sup>

John’s intervention in the deliberations over the Vandal expedition is framed, as we have seen, by Procopius’ damning portrait of his depravity and

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selves: the Byzantine outsider. Burlington, VT 2000, 215–228, argues that the material on John the Cappadocian in book one of the *Wars* was originally intended for the *Secret History*.

56 “Accordingly, he has not concealed the shameful deeds of even his most intimate acquaintances but has written down with complete accuracy everything that happened to all concerned, whether it was done well by them or not” (ταῦτά τοι οὐδέ του τῶν οἰ ἐς ἄγαν ἐπιτηδείων τὰ μοχθηρὰ ἀπεκρύψατο, ἀλλὰ τὰ πᾶσι ξυνενεχθέντα ἕκαστα ἀκριβολογούμενος ξυνεγράψατο, εἴτε εὖ εἴτε πη ἄλλη αὐτοῖς εἰργάσθαι ξυνέβη, *Wars* 1.1.5).

57 “Procopius of Caesarea has written the history of the wars ...” (Προκόπιος Καισαρεύς τοὺς πολέμους ξυνέγραφεν, *Wars* 1.1.1). See H. LIEBERICH, Studien zu den Proömien in der griechischen und byzantinischen Geschichtsschreibung, II. Teil: Die byzantinischen Geschichtsschreiber und Chronisten. *Programm des Königlichen Realgymnasiums München* 1899/1900, 1–2.

58 Compare esp. *Wars* 1.1.5 (footnote 56 supra) with *HA* 1.3: “Moreover, I was forced to conceal the causes of many of the events that I narrated in earlier books. It is therefore incumbent on me here to reveal what had previously remained concealed as well as to disclose the causes of those events that I did report there” (ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλῶν τῶν ἐν τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν λόγοις εἰρημένων ἀποκρύψασθαι τὰς αἰτίας ἠναγκάσθη. τὰ [τό] τε [δ'] οὖν τέως ἄρρητα μείναντα καὶ τῶν ἔμπροσθεν δεδηλωμένων ἐνταυῦθὰ μοι τοῦ λόγου τὰς αἰτίας σημήνια δεήσει). GREATREX, *Composition* (as footnote 55 above), 10 note 26, also compares τὰ μοχθηρὰ in *Wars* 1.1.5 with *HA* 1.10: διά τοι ταῦτα πρῶτα μὲν ὅσα Βελισαρίῳ **μοχθηρὰ** εἰργασται ἐρῶν ἔρχομαι· ὕστερον δὲ καὶ ὅσα Ἰουστινιανῶ καὶ Θεοδώρα **μοχθηρὰ** εἰργασται ἐγὼ δηλώσω (“I will, therefore, proceed to relate first all *the wretched deeds* that were done by Belisarius; then I will testify to all *the wretched deeds* done by Justinian and Theodora”). On the relationship between the two works, see now A. KALDELLIS, Procopius’s Vandal War: thematic trajectories and hidden transcripts, in S.T. Stevens / J.P. Conant, (eds.), *North Africa under Byzantium and early Islam*. Washington, DC 2016, 13–21.

59 See GREATREX, *Composition* (as footnote 55 above), esp. 9–13.

the circumstances of his downfall, on one side, and by the uncanny inventiveness and the brazen indifference he displayed toward the health and readiness of the imperial forces in the scandal over provisioning the Vandal expedition, on the other. We have also seen how Procopius supplies the motive for (or the cause of) that scandal – its αἰτία – by revealing why the praetorian prefect and other treasury officials, in particular, were “grieving in silence” about Justinian’s plans for invading Africa.<sup>60</sup> Here the narrator of the *Wars* shows himself capable of penetrating the self-imposed silences of others, as is subsequently the case with the Vandals on Sardinia. As is the case with the Vandals at Bulla Regia, however, the narrator of the *Wars* subsequently confesses his inability to fathom the inexplicable qualities and capacities he attributes to John.

These overarching and mutually-reinforcing structures demonstrate the control that the narrator of the *Wars* exercises over his narrative, even as they destabilize the relationship between that narrative and the historical truth it claims to represent. Insofar as the *Secret History* otherwise undermines the truth claims of the *Wars*, but John the Cappadocian’s downfall authorizes its narrator to be completely frank and forthcoming about John’s deficiencies, the reticence the *Wars* displays about John is all the more striking; much the same can be said about its treatment of the defeated Vandals at Bulla Regia, about whom Procopius might have been as curt and dismissive as he pleased. Yet the *Wars* uses wholly distinctive language, first, to characterize John’s and the Vandals’ respective dilemmas as “grieving in silence” [A1, A2 (cf. A3, discussed below)] and, second, to confess Procopius’ inability to describe or explain their interiority once their silence has been broken [C1, C2]. At the liminal moment of the breaking of silence in each of the two situations, moreover, the implied reader of the *Wars* is figured, first, among a throng of spectators whose eagerness at the prospect of action against the Vandals is inversely correlated with their accountability for the consequences and, second, as a would-be voyeur of the anti-spectacle at Bulla Regia [B1, B2].

## IV

At the point at which the Vandal expedition is proposed, accordingly, the reader of the *Wars* is inclined to evaluate John’s intervention skeptically and, once John’s scheming and maladministration in provisioning the expedition is exposed, justified in validating that stance. As we have seen, John’s motivation

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<sup>60</sup> *Wars* 3.10.3; see footnote 49 *supra*.

for opposing the expedition is patent: his interest in avoiding responsibility for the demands that would be placed upon the treasury, were the expedition to go forward, is self-serving, but to the extent that resources were in fact unavailing, his concerns are not without merit.

The terms in which Procopius reintroduces John the Cappadocian at this moment, as “a man of the greatest daring (θρασύτατος) and the cleverest (δεινότατος) of all men of his time” (*Wars* 3.10.7, discussed above), signal that the speech he delivers to Justinian is a piece of sophistry. One is reminded of Procopius’ declaration, in the preface of the *Wars*, that “cleverness (δεινότης) is appropriate to rhetoric,” while history is concerned with truth (1.1.4); the formula “bold and clever at speaking” (θρασύς καὶ λέγειν δεινός), moreover, is familiar from the Attic orators.<sup>61</sup> The artificiality of speeches in classicizing historiography is patent:<sup>62</sup> we should not marvel, therefore, that someone derided elsewhere by Procopius as barely literate (1.24.12, discussed above) is here credited with delivering, in direct discourse, an address worthy of a sophisticated courtier.<sup>63</sup>

A pair of superimposed and yet startlingly discordant intertexts heightens the artificiality of the episode. The first of these, the parallel with Herodotus, has already been noticed, and analogies drawn between the *Wars* and the *Histories* as to the (a) narrator, (b) the speaker, and (c) his addressee can be represented schematically:

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61 Dem. 22.66 (*Against Androtion*), with a pejorative connotation; see J. OBER, *Mass and elite in democratic Athens*. Princeton 1989, 106. Esp. apposite is Dem. 22.31 (trans. HARRIS): “But [Solon] was aware of the danger that at some time in the future there might be a large group of men who were *both eloquent and bold* but also led lives full of vice and depravity” (οὐκ οὐκ ἐνόμιζεν ἀσφαλές, εἴ ποτε συμβήσεται γενέσθαι συχνούς ἀνθρώπους κατὰ τοὺς αὐτοὺς χρόνους εἰπεῖν μὲν δεινοὺς καὶ θρασεῖς, τοιοῦτων δ’ ὄνειδῶν καὶ κακῶν μεστούς). A scholiast glosses the phrase: “‘clever,’ i. e., skilled in speaking, and ‘bold’ in character” (‘δεινοὺς’ μὲν δυνατοὺς ἐν τῷ λέγειν, ‘θρασεῖς’ δὲ διὰ τὸν τρόπον, *Schol. Dem.* ad loc).

62 See A. TSAKMAKIS, *Speeches*, in R. K. Balot / S. Forsdyke / E. Foster (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Thucydides*. Oxford 2017, 267–281, esp. 271, on classical historiography. On postclassical works, see A. M. TARAGNA, *Logoi historias. Discorsi e lettere nella prima storiografia retorica bizantina*. Alessandria 2000, 87–88; J. D. FRENDO, *Three authors in search of a reader: an approach to the analysis of direct discourse in Procopius, Agathias, and Theophylact Simocatta*, in C. Sode / S. Takács (eds.), *Novum Millennium*. Aldershot 2001, 123–135.

63 See PAZDERNIK, ‘How then is it’ (as footnote 8 above), esp. 110: “Procopius is demonstrating in this episode exactly how ripe for appropriation – or misappropriation – these courtly modes of self-representation might be.” Similarly, the Herul federate Pharas claims, as a barbarian, to lack experience as a writer and speaker in the rhetorically sophisticated letter he addresses to the besieged Gelimer on Mt. Papua (*Wars* 4.6.15); see IDEM, *Xenophon’s Hellenica in Procopius’ Wars: Pharnabazus and Belisarius*. *GRBS* 46 (2006), 175–206.

**(a) Procopius : Herodotus****(b) John the Cappadocian : Artabanus****(c) Justinian : Xerxes**

The allusion is straightforward: John the Cappadocian is figured, however improbably, as a Herodotean “wise advisor,” whose insights into the human condition and the vagaries of fortune recommend a policy of conflict aversion that momentarily restrains the impetuosity of the monarch.<sup>64</sup> Justinian is figured in the corresponding role with scant elaboration: unlike Xerxes, he does not make a speech setting out his position, nor does he offer a response to the objections lodged against him.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Procopius is selective and focused in his treatment of the episode as a whole. He seems careful, in particular, to avoid placing Belisarius in a role corresponding to that of Mardonius, Xerxes’ ambitious and overweening general,<sup>66</sup> offering the ameliorating explanation that, unbeknownst even to Belisarius, Justinian had recalled him from the East in order to lead the expedition while the story was bruited about that he had been dismissed from his command.<sup>67</sup>

If the Herodotean “wise advisor” provides the template for the episode at the level of the story, however, Procopius’ text introduces a second, Thucydidean, intertext that, paradoxically, both reinforces and subverts this pattern. When Justinian decides to move against Gelimer, the Procopian narrator describes the emperor as “quick to devise a plan and tireless in carrying out his decisions” (ἦν γὰρ ἐπινοῆσαι τε ὀξύς καὶ ἄοκνος τὰ βεβουλευμένα ἐπιτελέσαι, 3.9.25), unmistakably appropriating language that Thucydides’ Corinthians use, in the debate at Sparta in 432 BCE that precipitates the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 1.68–71), to

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**64** Compare in this respect the efforts of Proclus as quaestor to cool Justin I’s enthusiasm for adopting Chosroes (*Wars* 1.11.11–18); see PAZDERNIK, Quaestor (as footnote 10 above), esp. 236–246.

**65** Compare Hdt. 7.8, 11. See further footnotes 4, 33 *supra*.

**66** Compare Mardonius’ speech (Hdt. 7.9), which earns a rebuke from Artabanus (7.10η).

**67** Incensed at the effrontery of Gelimer, Justinian resolved to conclude hostilities with Persia and to attack the Vandals, “and Belisarius, the general of the East, was summoned and came to him immediately, not because it had been announced to him or 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 he held” (καὶ ... παρῆν μὲν αὐτῷ μετὰπεμπτος ὁ τῆς ἐώας στρατηγὸς Βελισάριος, οὐχ ὅτι ἐς Λιβύην στρατηγήσειν μέλλοι προειρημένον αὐτῷ ἢ ἄλλω ὀτρωοῦν, ἀλλὰ τῷ λόγῳ παραλέλυτο ἧς εἶχεν ἀρχῆς, *Wars* 3.9.25). Belisarius had been discredited following the Persian victory at Callinicum: see G. GREATREX / S.N.C. LIEU (eds.), *The Roman eastern frontier and the Persian wars. Part II: AD 363–630. A narrative sourcebook*. London / New York 2002, 92–94. Unmentioned here is Belisarius’ role in suppressing the Nika rebellion (cf. 1.24.40–54).

contrast the intrepid, grasping national character of the Athenians with the stolid, reactionary character of the Spartans: “[The Athenians] are innovators and are quick to devise a plan and then to carry it out in action” (οἱ μὲν γε νεωτεροποιοὶ καὶ ἐπινοῆσαι ὄξεις καὶ ἐπιτελέσαι ἔργω ἃ ἄν γῶσιν, Thuc. 1.70.2, trans. Woodruff, modified).<sup>68</sup> Unless the Spartans act (the existing truce, the so-called Thirty Years Peace, notwithstanding), the Athenians’ momentum will become irresistible – or so the Corinthians insist.

Procopius’ allusion to Thucydides is pointed. He repeats the same claim about Justinian in an unmistakably derogatory sense in two places in the *Secret History*.<sup>69</sup> In book two of the *Wars*, moreover, he causes envoys of Vittigis, the king the Goths, to echo the same Thucydidean intertext in appealing to Chosroes to resume hostilities against Justinian, lest Justinian’s victories in the West upset the balance of power with Persia.<sup>70</sup> Unless Chosroes acts (the existing truce, the so-called Eternal Peace, notwithstanding), Justinian’s momentum will become irresistible – or so the Gothic envoys insist.

Here again the analogies are straightforward and quite apt:

- (a) Procopius : Thucydides**
- (b) the Gothic envoys : the Corinthians**
- (c) Chosroes : the Spartans**

The date of the Gothic embassy, in 539 CE, is subsequent chronologically to the launching of the Vandal expedition in 532, but in the narrative space-time of the *Wars* the embassy, placed in book two, precedes Procopius’ account of the Vandal War in books three and four. Both allusions to the Corinthians’ speech, one placed in the mouths of Justinian’s opponents and another voiced by the Procopian narrator, concur in aligning Justinian with the national characteristics attributed to the Athenians by Thucydides’ Corinthians in the debate at Sparta,

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**68** Close readings of the speech include G. CRANE, The fear and pursuit of risk: Corinth on Athens, Sparta and the Peloponnesians (Thucydides 1.68–71, 120–121). *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 122 (1992), 227–256; P. DEBNAR, Speaking the same language: speech and audience in Thucydides’ Spartan debates. *Ann Arbor* 2001, 30–47; S.N. JAFFE, Thucydides on the outbreak of war: character and contest. Oxford 2017, 59–75.

**69** The emperor is “quarrelsome and an obsessive innovator ... quick to form base plans and to carry them out” (δύσερίς τε καὶ νεωτεροποιὸς μάλιστα ... ἐπινοῆσαι μὲν τὰ φαῦλα καὶ ἐπιτελέσαι ὄξυς, *HA* 8.26); likewise, “exceedingly quick to devise and swift to carry out unholy deeds” (διαφερόντως ὄξυς ἐπινοῆσαι τε καὶ ταχὺς ἀποτελέσαι ἀνόσια ἔργα, 13.33).

**70** “For [Justinian] is by nature an innovator ...” (ὁ μὲν γὰρ νεωτεροποιὸς ... ὦν φύσει, *Wars* 2.2.6). For the context, see B. DIGNAS/E. WINTER, Rome and Persia in late antiquity: neighbours and rivals. Cambridge 2007, 106–107.

in a manner that is wholly consistent with the allusions in the *Secret History*. Less significant for our present purposes is the fact that three of the four allusions unambiguously signal their hostility to Justinian, than that they consistently figure Justinian as an analogue of the Athenians.

With this pattern in front of us, two places in John the Cappadocian's speech opposing the Vandal expedition are especially arresting.

First of all, John's speech opens, quite unexpectedly, by aping the same Thucydidean intertext we have been examining, the Corinthians' speech to the Spartans. John credits Justinian's willingness to entertain constructive criticism (*Wars* 3.10.8):

Τὸ πιστόν, ὦ βασιλεῦ, τῆς ἐς τοὺς ὑπηκόους τοὺς σοὺς ὁμιλίας τὴν παρρησίαν ἡμῖν ἀναπετάνυσσιν ὅ τι ἂν μέλλοι τῇ πολιτείᾳ τῇ σῇ ξυνοίσειν, ἦν καὶ μὴ πρὸς ἡδονὴν σοι τὰ λεγόμενά τε καὶ πρασσόμενα ᾗ.

Your good faith, O emperor, in dealing with your subjects affords us the ability to speak frankly regarding anything that will be of advantage to your regime, even though our words and deeds may not be to your liking.

The opening baldly borrows its *incipit* and syntax from the Corinthians (Thuc. 1.68.1):<sup>71</sup>

Τὸ πιστόν ὑμᾶς, ὦ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, τῆς καθ' ὑμᾶς αὐτοὺς πολιτείας καὶ ὁμιλίας ἀπιστοτέρους ἐς τοὺς ἄλλους ἦν τι λέγωμεν καθίστησιν ...

Your confidence, Lacedaemonians, in your own government and society renders you less trusting toward others if we have something to tell you.

The speakers use certain key words in starkly differing ways. John praises the integrity and honesty (τὸ πιστόν) of the relationship (ὁμιλία) of the emperor toward his subjects for enabling opposing viewpoints that benefit the state (πολιτεία). The Corinthians charge that the honesty and integrity (τὸ πιστόν) of political and social life (πολιτεία καὶ ὁμιλία) among Spartans makes them resistant to opposing viewpoints.<sup>72</sup> The differences between the two passages reflect the differing positions of the speakers with respect to their addressees. The Corinthians approach the Spartans as exasperated allies,<sup>73</sup> while John the Cappadocian presents himself to Justinian as a loyal subordinate. John must insist that his loy-

<sup>71</sup> See H. BRAUN, *Procopius Caesariensis quatenus imitatus sit Thucydidem*. Erlangen 1885, 24.

<sup>72</sup> DEBNAR, *Speaking* (as footnote 68 above), 43, argues that τὸ πιστόν was a distinctly Spartan catchword or slogan echoed here by the Corinthians; cf. Pericles at Thuc. 1.141.5.

<sup>73</sup> "In no other debate in the History are the speakers so critical of their audience": *ibid.*, 46.

alty authorizes his *παρρησία*, his ostensibly unconstrained performance that risks incurring displeasure,<sup>74</sup> while the Corinthians take this prerogative for granted and make every effort to provoke and unsettle.

As we have seen, John's assertions are undercut by the narrative: others have been cowed into silence, and John is outrageous and self-serving. Justinian's court is no more welcoming of *παρρησία* than John is acting in Justinian's interests or in those of the commonwealth. John's barefaced assertions to the contrary signal his unscrupulousness, while his ability to manipulate Justinian demonstrates how boldness and cleverness capitalize upon rhetoric's indifference to truth. John's success, however fleeting it turns out to be, is symptomatic of larger political and institutional dysfunction and malaise, a toxic environment that made John not only tolerable but indispensable to Justinian and allowed him to operate for so long with impunity, even after the disaster at Methone.<sup>75</sup>

Procopius' Thucydidean intertext drives home John the Cappadocian's unsuitability for the role that the story's Herodotean template presses him into playing. Indeed, John's opening allusion to the Corinthians' speech at Sparta is shockingly maladroit: he commences his *λόγος ἀποτρεπτικός*, a speech of dissuasion, by ostentatiously citing a classic *λόγος προτρεπτικός*, a speech of encouragement.<sup>76</sup> Where Thucydides' Corinthians call for immediate and resolute action, Procopius' John, like Herodotus' Artabanus, counsels moderation and restraint. Consequently, John's speech makes a startling mismatch between the speaker and his addressee:

**(a) Procopius : Thucydides**

**(b) John the Cappadocian : the Corinthians (?)**

**(c) Justinian : the Spartans (!)**

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<sup>74</sup> The word *παρρησία* only appears in the *Wars* embedded in direct discourse, where it denotes, here in its initial appearance, “outspokenness” within the trope of speaking truth to power (compare P. BROWN, *Power and persuasion in late antiquity: towards a Christian empire*. Madison 1992, 61–70) but elsewhere “boldness” and “freedom of action,” especially in the stereotyped expression *ἀφείλετο ... τὴν παρρησίαν* (“[a circumstance] has taken away [their/your/our] confidence/freedom of action”): see *Wars* 4.15.27, 6.16.12, 7.12.7; also *βόσκει* (“feeds/nourishes”) ... *τὴν παρρησίαν*, 5.29.12; in other expressions, 6.18.14, 8.23.26.

<sup>75</sup> Compare LAMMA, Giovanni (as footnote 14 above), 95–96.

<sup>76</sup> For the distinction, see Arist., *Rh.* 1.3.3–6, 1.4; [*Rh. Al.*] 1–2, 34.

Quite unlike the analogies that have been examined above, this one fails to cohere.<sup>77</sup> Justinian, otherwise figured as the Athenians, should not be pressed into the place of the Spartans. The Corinthians, as figured by John, should not be counselling restraint. Speaker, speech, and addressee are confused and out of sync with comparable patterns observable in the work as a whole.

If the opening of John's speech is guilty of committing what we might call an allusive malapropism – the making of an infelicitous allusion to Thucydides in place of a more appropriate intertext<sup>78</sup> – then it remains to ask how such a faux pas as this contributes to Procopius' characterization of John. The implied or inscribed readers of the *Wars* are those who possess the elite literary education that the historical John the Cappadocian, Procopius and others insist, most assuredly lacked. Procopius's text presents such readers with an embedded allusion to the Corinthians' speech, voiced by the Gothic ambassadors to Chosroes in book two, that is rhetorically and contextually apt. It frames the debate over the Vandal expedition – the centerpiece of which is John's speech – with a narratorial allusion to the Corinthians' speech that is contextually apt (and that narratorial judgments expressed in the *Secret History* surreptitiously echo).

When Procopius' text, accordingly, presents an unlettered, brazen, and diabolically resourceful John the Cappadocian donning the guise of the wise advisor and essaying a courtly speech in favor of conflict aversion – only to voice an allusion to the bellicose speech of the Corinthians that goes off the rails with its very first word – readers of the *Wars* are equipped to see this as caricature and are afforded the pleasure of having their erudition validated at John's expense.

One need not posit that the embedded speakers themselves, be they John or the Gothic envoys, are “conscious” of alluding to Thucydides – nor, for that matter, that their embedded addressees, be they Chosroes or Justinian (whom the *Secret History* dismisses as barbaric in his speech, his dress, and his intellect<sup>79</sup>), are

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77 C. B. R. PELLING, Intertextuality, plausibility, and interpretation. *Histos* 7 (2013), 1–20: 18, stresses how the defamiliarization of intertextual templates derived from classic target texts stimulates interpretation at the point of reception.

78 Seemingly obvious candidates are the speeches of Archidamus at the debate at Sparta in 431 BCE (Thuc. 1.80–85) and of Nicias against the Sicilian expedition (6.9–15, 20–26). On parallels between Herodotus' Artabanus and Thucydides' Archidamus and Nicias, respectively, see C. B. R. PELLING, Thucydides' Archidamus and Herodotus' Artabanus, in M. A. Flower / M. Toher (eds.), *Georgica: Greek studies in honour of George Cawkwell*. London 1991, 120–142: 129–145, and N. MARINATOS, Nicias as a wise advisor and tragic warner in Thucydides. *Philologus* 124 (1980), 305–310.

79 ... ἀλλὰ τὴν τε γλῶτταν καὶ τὸ σχῆμα καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν ἐβαρβάριζεν (*HA* 14.2).

capable of recognizing these allusions.<sup>80</sup> Quite to the contrary, the inaccessibility of the intertextual dimension to these narratively embedded characters reinforces the artificiality of the episodes in which they appear and privileges the position of Procopius' readers, whose superior knowledge and perspective make them conscious of (and complicit in) the strategies that the *Wars* employs to construct the historical truth it claims to represent. To the extent that Procopius' readers are figured as "spectators of new adventures" (*Wars* 3.10.6 [B1]), however, whose appetites are whetted by their distance from the action, they remain unimplicated in and insulated from events in which narratively embedded characters unavoidably participate.

## V

Of course, the *Wars* represents Procopius, a participant himself in Justinian's wars, as both the narrator and an embedded character.<sup>81</sup> His position with respect not only to his fellow character-participants but also to his reader-spectators is correspondingly double-edged. The narratorial third-person voice conveys the character's solidarity with the officers and soldiers who faced the dangers of the Vandal expedition while affording access to his subjectivity and reframing his experiences with allusive inter- and intratexts. The prospect of sailing with the expedition terrified the character, confides the narrator, until he experienced a dream-vision that relieved his anxieties.<sup>82</sup> He dreamt that, while he was present

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**80** The historicity of the letter addressed by Belisarius to Justinian following his occupation and defense of the city of Rome in 536 (*Wars* 5.24.1–17), which is clearly modelled on the famous letter of Nicias in Thucydides (7.11–15) and plausibly would have been composed by Procopius himself, should not be discounted (K. ADSHEAD, Procopius' *poliorcetica*: continuities and discontinuities, in G. Clarke et al., *Reading the past in late antiquity*. Rushcutters Bay 1990, 93–119: 98); in this case, there is every reason to suppose that the allusion was meant to be noticed; see now C. PAZDERNIK, Nicias' letter to the Athenians and their response (Thuc. 7.11–16). *Classical Philology* 115 (2020), 424–441, esp. 435–438.

**81** Like Thucydides (but unlike Herodotus, "who finds his place in his text only through his activities as traveler, researcher, and writer," as an "external narrator"), Procopius is "an internal narrator in as much as he ... appears as an agent"; quotations from T. ROOD, Thucydides, in I. J. F. de Jong / R. Nünlist / A. Bowie (eds.), *Narrators, narratees, and narratives in ancient Greek literature*. Leiden 2004, 115–128: 116 (citing Thuc. 4.104.4).

**82** "With them [i.e., Belisarius and Antonina] was also Procopius, who wrote this history. Previously he had been extremely terrified at the danger, but later he had seen a vision of a dream that caused him to take heart and made him eager to go on the expedition" (ξυνῆν δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ Προκόπιος, ὃς τότε ξυνέγραψε, πρότερον μὲν καὶ μάλα κατορρωδῆσας τὸν κίνδυνον, ὄψιν δὲ

in Belisarius' house, strangers arrived bearing loads of sod that were strewn with flowers, and that Belisarius and his spearmen reclined on the sod as if they were dining and ate the flowers, which were sweet to the taste (*Wars* 3.12.4–5).

The narrator assures us that the embedded character who experienced the dream was heartened by it, but neither the character nor the narrator offers to interpret the vision or to draw express analogies between the imagery in the dream and the situation in which the character finds himself.<sup>83</sup> The character recognizes himself within the dream as a bystander who witnesses the action rather than participating in it. Perhaps this position is a prefiguration of the distance inscribed between the narrating voice of the historian and the historical events that are the focus of his line of inquiry.<sup>84</sup> The dream itself, represented by the Procopian narrator as a scene within a scene or *mise en abyme*, would accordingly stand, on a highly abstracted plane, as a prefiguration of Procopius' narrative of the Vandal War – or, rather, of a key point of inflection within it.

Indeed, whatever the covert or sublimated significance of the imagery in the dream might be, the image of Belisarius and his officers enjoying their repose and feasting on the fruits of another land, delivered to them by strangers, clearly foreshadows the freighted moment, following his initial victory over Gelimer at Ad Decimum and occupation of Carthage, when Belisarius and his retinue dined in Gelimer's palace on dishes, Procopius tells us, that had been prepared for the Vandal king (*Wars* 3.21.1–6):

When the time came, Belisarius commanded that luncheon (ἄριστον) be prepared for them in the place where Gelimer was accustomed to entertain the leaders of the Vandals. This place the Romans call 'Delphix' (Δέλφιξ) ...<sup>85</sup> So Belisarius dined in the Delphix and with him all the notables of the army (ἐν Δέλφικι τοίνυν Βελισάριός τε ἦσθε καὶ εἶ τι ἐν τῷ στρατεύματι δόκιμον ἦν). And it happened that the luncheon (τὸ ἄριστον) made for Gelimer on the preceding day was in readiness. *We feasted* on that very food that the servants of Gelimer served, and they poured the wine and waited upon us in every way (καὶ ταῖς τε

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ὄνειρου ἰδῶν ὕστερον, ἢ αὐτὸν θαρσῆσαι τε ἐποίησε καὶ ἐς τὸ στρατεύεσθαι ὠρμησεν, *Wars* 3.12.3).

**83** I. ANAGNOSTAKIS, Prokopios' dream before the campaign against Libya: a reading of *Wars* 3.12.1–5, in C. Angelidi / G.T. Calofonos (eds.), *Dreaming in Byzantium and beyond*. Farnham 2014, 79–94, argues that the image of Belisarius and his men tasting sweet flowers alludes to the *Odyssey's* land of the Lotus Eaters (9.80–102), which traditionally had been located in Libya and from which no one was able to return.

**84** Compare the formulation of these ideas in Procopius' own terms as discussed in footnote 48 supra.

**85** A digression follows on the origin of the name and likewise that of 'palace' [Παλάτιον], which Procopius develops into a broad sketch of Graeco-Roman cultural continuity and Roman imperial hegemony.

βρώσειν αὐταῖς **εἰστιάθημεν** ἢ τε τοῦ Γελίμερος θεραπεία παρτίθει τε καὶ ὦνοχόει καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὑπούργει).

Striking here is the narratorial first-person plural, which collapses the nested representational frames that distinguished the narrator from the embedded character and the character from the image of himself in the dream. Procopius figures himself as a participant and an agent, rather than a bystander and an observer. He counts himself within a privileged circle that is demarcated by its proximity to Belisarius, by the ties of reciprocity and patronage that are celebrated and cemented through commensality, and by its ambivalent relationship to Justinian.<sup>86</sup> As would subsequently transpire also in the ascendant phase of the Gothic War in Italy, Belisarius' comportment in Carthage – dining at Gelimer's table, seating himself on Gelimer's throne – would arouse suspicions that he aimed at usurpation rather than the restoration of imperial suzerainty from Constantinople.<sup>87</sup>

Procopius emphasizes the contingency and fortuity of the occasion.<sup>88</sup> Belisarius achieved a glory never before attained by the men of his time, “nor indeed any men of ancient times,”<sup>89</sup> not on account of his victory at Ad Decimum, which Procopius allows resulted as much from the Vandals' own mistakes as from Belisarius' generalship,<sup>90</sup> but rather in light of the tranquil entry of his troops into Carthage, who refrained from the customary excesses practiced by victorious soldiers.<sup>91</sup> No insult was offered, no interruption in the flow of daily life and commerce (*Wars* 3.21.10 [D2]):

Indeed, nothing happened to hinder the business of the city. In a captured city, then, that had changed its regime and joined a different realm (ἐν ἀלוσῃ πόλει καὶ πολιτείαν

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**86** Compare Ross, Narrator (as footnote 19 above), 83–86, who does not discuss the present passage but points out that Procopius reserves the first-person plural for his account of the expedition's progress toward Carthage, where such usages generally “refer to the anonymous and collective mass of the army” (84).

**87** See *Wars* 4.8.1–8. Similar allegations resurfaced following Belisarius' occupation of Ravenna in 540 CE: see 6.30.1–2.

**88** See footnote 111 *infra*.

**89** See footnote 112 *infra*.

**90** *Wars* 3.19.25.

**91** “For though Roman soldiers were not accustomed to enter a subject city without confusion (θορύβου χωρίς), even if they numbered only five hundred, and especially if they made the entry unexpectedly, this general kept all the soldiers under his command in line (κοσμίους) so that there was not a single act of insolence nor threat” (οὐδὲ ὕβριν τινα ἢ ἀπειλήν γενέσθαι, *Wars* 3.21.9–10). On this episode, see C. PAZDERNIK, Procopius and Thucydides on the labors of war: Belisarius and Brasidas in the field. *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 130 (2000), 149–187, esp. 159–171.

μεταβαλούση και βασιλείαν άλλαξαμένη), it came about that no man's household was excluded from the marketplace (ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγορᾶς). The clerks drew up their lists of the soldiers and conducted them to their lodgings, just as usual, and they obtained their lunch by purchase from the market (ὄνιον ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγορᾶς τὸ ἄριστον λαβόντες),<sup>92</sup> as each one wanted, and *they were quiet* (ἡσύχαζον).

By drawing attention to these alimentary concerns, Procopius has constructed a remarkable through-line from the genesis of the Vandal War to the occupation of Carthage and what the historian describes as Belisarius' (almost literally) crowning achievement. The progression becomes apparent in hindsight and is more clearly surveyed working backward, *hysteron proteron*. Images of quartermasters' clerks dutifully filling out their paperwork and billeting soldiers, and likewise of soldiers acquiring provisions for their mid-day meal at market rates out of the commutation of their rations into cash, might have been lifted out of the dreary regulations in the *Codex Iustinianus*;<sup>93</sup> yet the perpetuation of a bland and bureaucratic routine, which Procopius celebrates here unironically, encapsulates a vision of civil society that assesses the consequences of conquest in light of the lived experiences of persons implicated within it. Under Belisarius' enlightened leadership and strict discipline, not only did soldiers refrain from preying upon civilians, whom they were instructed to embrace as fellow Romans liberated from the Vandals,<sup>94</sup> but they also enjoyed conditions that enhanced their own welfare and redressed the shortcomings that had contributed to their victimization at an earlier stage of the expedition. Procopius sums up this moment of balance, accord, and contentment with a simple, pregnant, declaration: "they were quiet" (ἡσύχαζον).

We should find clear connections, then, among the humble fare purchased by Belisarius' soldiers for their lunch (τὸ ἄριστον) in Carthage; the altogether more regal luncheon (likewise, τὸ ἄριστον) that Belisarius and his retinue, including Procopius himself, found waiting for them in Gelimer's palace; and the prefiguration of that luncheon in Procopius' dream vision prior to the departure of the expedition from Constantinople. Procopius' solicitude for the billeting and messing of the rank-and-file in Carthage, moreover, is the counterpart of his

<sup>92</sup> After his landfall, Belisarius had severely reprimanded soldiers for foraging in the countryside: *Wars* 3.16.5; compare 3.17.6.

<sup>93</sup> Compare *CJ* 12.37, "Distribution of military provisions" (*De erogatione militaris annonae*).

<sup>94</sup> See esp. Belisarius' instructions to his troops prior to entering the city: *Wars* 3.20.18–20; compare 3.16.1–8 and see also 7.1.8–10. On the theme of liberation and imperial restoration in the official rhetoric of the period, see now C. PAZDERNIK, *Libertas* and "mixed marriages" in late antiquity: law, labor, and politics in Justinianic reform legislation, in D. P. Kehoe / T. A. J. McGinn (eds.), *Ancient law, ancient society*. Ann Arbor, MI 2017, 167–182.

outrage over the disaster at Methone, when rotting provisions supplied by John the Cappadocian contributed to the deaths of five hundred fighting men. Methone, in turn, is the sequel and the consequence of John's evasion of responsibility, as praetorian prefect, for financing and equipping the expedition, which crystallizes his opposition to the Vandal expedition and finds expression in his silence-breaking speech to Justinian.

## VI

Having circled in this way back to John the Cappadocian, we are now in a position to consider the second place in his speech at which an echo of Thucydides is especially arresting. As we have seen,<sup>95</sup> John's speech cuts against the grain of the surrounding narrative by alluding to the bellicose speech of the Corinthians at Sparta while cautioning Justinian against the perils attendant upon attacking the Vandals. Justinian, who is otherwise figured as the analogue of the meddling, relentless Athenians, is here miscast as the counterpart of the stolid, risk-averse Spartans, as the two sides are characterized by the Corinthians. These miscues combine with Procopius' overarching, unrelentingly hostile, portrait of John to undermine the Cappadocian's claim to be speaking candidly and with Justinian's best interests at heart.

The Corinthians' speech to the Spartans turns upon the opposition they construct between the Spartan and Athenian national characters and their corresponding stances with respect to international relations.<sup>96</sup> Alone of the Greeks, the Corinthians charge, the Spartans remain quiet (ἡσυχάζετε, Thuc. 1.69.4), while allowing their opponents to gather strength; the Athenians, in contrast, "have been born never to allow themselves nor anyone else to enjoy peace and quiet (πεφυκέναι ἐπὶ τῷ μήτε αὐτοὺς ἔχειν ἡσυχίαν μήτε τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους ἔαν, 1.70.9). The Spartans' stubborn embrace of ἡσυχία, and the Athenians' hostility to it, emerges as the leitmotif of the speech. Rather than striking back at Athenian provocations, the Spartans remain on the defensive, preferring to expose themselves to the chances of war (ἐς τύχας ... καταστῆναι, 1.69.5) against an opponent who is becoming all the more formidable. They have not considered how different the Athenians are from themselves: how revolutionary and daring, how optimistic and impetuous, how undeterred and self-sacrificing.

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<sup>95</sup> See Section IV supra.

<sup>96</sup> Thucydides (4.55, 8.96) makes similar comparisons in his own voice: see L. EDMUNDS, *Chance and intelligence in Thucydides*. Cambridge, MA 1975, 90.

The Athenians live lives filled with toil and danger (μετὰ πόνων ... καὶ κινδύνων); they are relentless and insatiable; “they do not consider any day a holiday unless they have done something that needed to be done, and they think that an idle rest (ἡσυχία ἀπράγμων) is as much trouble as hard work” (1.70.8). Yet the Spartans temporize and fail to understand that they will perpetuate peace and quiet (ἡσυχία, 1.71.1), only by standing firm against wrongdoers.

The Corinthians hammer home the incompatibility between Sparta’s old-fashioned habits (Thuc. 1.71.2–3) and preference for an international order characterized by non-interference, settled power relationships, and risk-aversion – summed up by their repeated references to ἡσυχία<sup>97</sup> – and Athens’ appetite for disruption and transgression. John the Cappadocian’s address to Justinian, likewise, turns on his evaluation of the merits of a ἡσυχία-focused international order in relation to the risks and rewards of foreign adventurism.<sup>98</sup> Of course, John must take the opposite tack and argue, *contra* the Corinthians, in favor of the Spartan position, perpetuating the mismatch between his Herodotean template and his Thucydidean intertext.

John’s position is carefully hedged and, once he gets down to specifics, remarkably clear-headed, leading many to conclude that here John is serving, however improbably, as a spokesman for Procopius’ own views.<sup>99</sup> This interpretation becomes much more nuanced, however, once it becomes apparent how thoroughly John’s premises are controverted by Belisarius’ initial successes, as these are borne out in Procopius’ narrative. John himself gestures proleptically when he insists that, even if he risks antagonizing Justinian in the present moment, he will make his goodwill apparent in the future:<sup>100</sup> for (γάρ), he says, should Justinian be unpersuaded and attack the Vandals, “if the struggle is prolonged for you, it will come about that my advice wins praise.”<sup>101</sup>

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97 J. ZUMBRUNNEN, *Silence and democracy: Athenian politics in Thucydides’ History*. University Park, PA 2010, 34–36, surveys uses of ἡσυχία and its cognates in Thucydides more generally.

98 Should Justinian attack the Vandals and suffer a reverse, warns John (*Wars* 3.10.16), “having already broken the treaty (αἰ σπονδαί), you will draw the danger to our own land”; likewise (*ibid.*), “a reversal of fortune will harm what is already well established” (τὸ τῆς τύχης ἐναντίωμα λυμανεῖται τοῖς εὖ καθεστῶσι). For CESA, *Politica* (as footnote 14 above), 401, these statements crystallize Procopius’ opposition to Justinian’s wars in the West; see, *contra*, BRODKA, *Procopius* (as footnote 14 above), 246–247.

99 See footnote 14 *supra*.

100 προσκρούσων μὲν τὸ παραυτίκα ἴσως ... ἐς δὲ τὸ μέλλον τὴν εὐνοίαν τὴν ἐμὴν καταφανῆ δείξων (*Wars* 3.10.10).

101 μηκυνομένης σοι τῆς ἀγωνίας τὴν ἐμὴν παραίσεις εὐδοκιμῆσαι ξυμβήσεται (*Wars* 3.10.11).

The elaboration of this claim is rather complex and may be set out as follows (*Wars* 3.10.12–13):

For if, on the one hand (εἰ μὲν γάρ), (i) you have confidence that you will prevail over the enemy,

(ii) it is not at all unreasonable for you to sacrifice the lives of men, expend a vast amount of treasure, and undergo the difficulties of the struggle.

For (γάρ) (iii) victory, once it has been accomplished, effaces all of the calamities (τὰ πάθη) of war.

But if, on the other hand (εἰ δέ),

in the first place (μὲν), (iv) these things “lie on the knees of God” (ἐν τοῖς τοῦ θεοῦ γούνασι κεῖται), and,

in the second place (δέ), (v) it is necessary for us, considering the precedents (παραδείγματα) of what has happened before,<sup>102</sup> to fear the outcome of war,

(vi) how is loving peace and quiet not better than the dangers of conflict? (πῶς οὐχὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσι κινδύνων τὸ τὴν ἡσυχίαν ἀγαπᾶν ἄμεινον; [D1])

On one side of the ledger, John sketches what Thucydides’ Corinthians (and Procopius’ readers) could recognize as the “Athenian” position: a resolute attitude (i), heedless of the cost in blood and treasure (ii), plausibly produces an end that justifies the means (iii).<sup>103</sup> John is skeptical of such an outcome and adamantly opposed to such an undertaking, as Procopius has informed us (*Wars* 3.10.3). In order to undermine Justinian’s confidence and dull his appetite for military aggression, accordingly, John goes on to elaborate, on the other side of the ledger, a correspondingly “Spartan” position by recommending caution in view of the inscrutability of the future and the admonitory value of the past.<sup>104</sup>

Saying that an undetermined outcome “lies on the knees of the gods” (iv) is already a well-established coinage in Homer and may well have Near Eastern roots.<sup>105</sup> In putting the expression in John’s mouth here, Procopius seems less

**102** παραδείγματα δὲ τῶν προγεγενημένων χρωμένους (*Wars* 3.10.13): compare παραδείγμασι τοῖς προγινομένοις χρώμενοι (Thuc. 3.10.6, the speech of the Mytileneans to the Peloponnesians at Olympia in 428 BCE); see DUWE, Procopius (as footnote 53 above), 17.

**103** The Corinthians develop the theme of Athenian relentlessness and their willingness to absorb losses most fully at Thuc. 1.70.5–7.

**104** Compare in this respect the position of Thucydides’ Archidamus (1.83.3): “We [Spartans], who will bear most of the responsibility for the outcome, either way, should reflect calmly (καθ’ ἡσυχίαν) on the consequences that may follow.”

**105** Hom., *Il.* 17.514, 20.435; *Od.* 1.267, 400, 16.129. “A picturesque way of saying that the future of some issue rests with a higher power whose will is not yet known”: R.B. ONIANS,

likely to be aiming for allusive specificity than signaling that John is thinking aphoristically and, possibly, putting on airs. John's point is to underscore the uncertainty and contingency that attends any human undertaking, and the impression of any specifically Christian coloring (apart from John's use of the monotheistic singular) is remote.<sup>106</sup>

Lacking certainty about the future, human beings must rely upon the exemplarity of prior experiences, which bode ill in the instant case (v): here John is referring obliquely to the failure that attended prior efforts to oust the Vandals from North Africa, which Procopius has told us was weighing heavily on the minds of most of Justinian's officials when he initially disclosed his plan (*Wars* 3.10.2).

John artfully frames his recommendation in favor of preserving the status quo and avoiding conflict as a rhetorical question (vi) that counterpoises "loving peace and quiet" (τὸ τὴν ἡσυχίαν ἀγαπᾶν) against "the dangers of conflict" (οἱ ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσι κινδύνοι). John implies that the advantages of the former position are self-evident, in view of the inscrutability of the future and the ominousness of the past. John's pro-ἡσυχία stance in favor of preserving the status quo and avoiding disruption places him squarely at odds with the arguments advanced by Thucydides' Corinthians and compounds the artificiality and unreality of the episode as Procopius reconstructs it.

The ἡσυχία championed by John the Cappadocian is a freighted concept not only as far as Procopius' Thucydidean intertext is concerned, as we have seen, but also in the larger context of Procopius' narrative of the Vandal War. At root, the word denotes a state of stillness and quiet; it signifies, that is, the silence that is a product and an expression of contentedness and the absence of strife. Procopius employs the abstract noun, at the only point in the *Wars* at which it appears prior to John the Cappadocian's speech, to connote the official solemnities of the imperial court, participants in which were expected to maintain an atmosphere of mystical harmony and ineffable majesty. In a narratorial aside, Procopius introduces a certain figure as one "who had always *assisted* the

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On the knees of the gods. *Classical Review* 38 (1924), 2–6: 2. M.L. WEST, The east face of Helicon. West Asiatic elements in Greek poetry. Oxford 1997, 222–223, finds in Babylonian poetry "plausibly ... the mythological concept that underlies the Homeric phrase," insofar as the gods' knees are concerned (a detail that has puzzled ancient and modern commentators).

**106** Pace J.A.S. EVANS, Christianity and paganism in Procopius of Caesarea. *GRBS* 12 (1971), 81–100: 85–86, who points out that Artabanus warns Xerxes about the hazards of divine jealousy (Hdt. 7.10ε); Procopius chooses the expression, he suggests, in order to avoid attributing jealousy to the Christian God, but its Homeric pedigree goes unnoticed.

emperor while in the palace *in all the business of the court*” (βασιλεῖ μὲν αἰεὶ ἐν παλατίῳ τὰ ἐς τὴν ἡσυχίαν ὑπηρετοῦντα, *Wars* 2.21.2).<sup>107</sup>

This ἡσυχία, then, that characterizes the orderly functioning and stately decorum of court ceremonial and that affects an awestruck silence worthy of the theophanic spectacle of the imperial presence, differs categorically from the utter speechlessness that grips Justinian’s officials when the emperor declares his intention to attack the Vandals. There is a delicious irony, accordingly, when John the Cappadocian breaks that stricken silence and, parting with courtly etiquette, ventures to thwart Justinian by selling him on the benefits of ἡσυχία. In framing John’s dilemma in this way, Procopius is problematizing a policy of conflict aversion that, as valid as it may be on its merits, is compromised by narrowly self-serving ends. The peace and quiet, ἡσυχία, championed by John the Cappadocian is, above all, his own – and, ostensibly, Justinian’s. Notably absent from these deliberations, however, are the interests of the participants – both the combatants and the civilian inhabitants in North Africa – who ultimately run the risks and bear the burdens of the ensuing hostilities.

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**107** DEWING/KALDELLIS, *Wars* (as footnote 33 above) translate: “served ... as privy counselor.” The text continues in parenthesis: “this honor is bestowed upon those whom the Romans call *silentiarii*” (σιλενταρίους Ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσιν οἷς ἡ τιμὴ αὕτη ἐπίκειται). On *silentiarii*, see now S. ACERBI, La figura del ‘silentarius’ en la corte bizantina, in S. Montero Herrero / M.C. Cardete del Olmo (eds.), *Religión y silencio. El silencio en las religiones antiguas. 'Ilu. Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones*, 19. Madrid 2007, 290–221, esp. 212–213; R. DELMAIRE, Les institutions du Bas-Empire romain de Constantin à Justinien: les institutions civiles palatines. Paris 1995, 38–43; also A. KAZHDAN, *ODB* 1991 s.v. *Silentarios* (“a court attendant whose first duty was to secure order and silence in the palace”), *Silentium*. With Procopius compare John Lydus (*De mensibus* 1.30, trans. HOOKER): “It seemed good to have the council gather no longer in the marketplace, but in the palace – and the Romans customarily called such a council *conventus*, meaning, a ‘coming-together.’ And for the many people taking counsel, silence was required; from this enthusiasm for silence, which in their ancestral language they call *silentium*, they decided to name them *silentiarii*” (ἔδοκει μὲν μηκέτι ἐπ’ ἀγορᾶς, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῷ Παλατίῳ τὴν βουλὴν συνάγεσθαι, τὴν δὲ τοιαύτην σύνοδον κομβέντον ἔθος Ῥωμαίοις καλεῖν, ἀντὶ τοῦ συνέλευσιν. σιγῆς δὲ τοῖς πολλοῖς βουλευομένοις δεῖ· ἐκ τῆς περὶ τὴν σιγὴν σπουδῆς – σιλέντιον δ’ αὐτὴν πατριῶς καλοῦσιν – σιλενταρίους ἔκριναν ὀνομάζειν αὐτούς). Procopius seems to be using the expression ἐς τὴν ἡσυχίαν here as the equivalent of “in the *silentium*”; cf., in Totila’s harangue to his troops at Busta Gallorum (*Wars* 8.30.9), σκῆψιν ἐς τὴν ἡσυχίαν εὐπρόσωπον (“sufficient excuse for inaction”). See now also A. BECKER, Verbal and nonverbal diplomatic communication at the imperial court of Constantinople (fifth–sixth centuries). *DOP* 72 (2018), 79–92.

## VII

When Procopius credits Belisarius for the orderly occupation of Carthage and for the peace and quiet that is preserved there, as we have seen,<sup>108</sup> he evaluates this achievement in terms that strikingly recapitulate and repudiate the premises of John the Cappadocian's speech. John predicts that, if the struggle against the Vandals is prolonged, "it will come about that my advice will win renown" (τὴν ἐμὴν παραίνεσιν εὐδοκιμήσαι ξυμβήσεται, *Wars* 3.10.11); Procopius declares, however, that "it came to pass for Belisarius to win renown" (Βελισαρίω δὲ ξυνηέχθη ... εὐδοκιμήσαι, 3.21.8), on the day his forces entered Carthage. The juxtaposition is stark, inasmuch as Procopius reserves the expression "to win renown" (εὐδοκιμήσαι) in his own voice almost exclusively for references to Belisarius,<sup>109</sup> notably where he compares Belisarius favorably with John.<sup>110</sup>

John also premises his argument in favor of preserving the status quo and conserving peace and quiet, as we have seen, upon the inscrutability of the future and the ominousness of the past. Experience, however, confounds these expectations in altogether unpredictable ways. Belisarius and his retinue dined in Gelimer's palace on food that had been prepared for the Vandal king. Procopius observes: "And it was possible to see Chance (ἡ τύχη) in all her glory making a display of the fact that all things are hers and that nothing is truly owned by any man."<sup>111</sup> Belisarius won renown for the orderly entry of his troops into Carthage, "as has happened (τετύχηκε) to none of his contemporaries nor indeed any men

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**108** See Section V supra.

**109** See *Wars* 2.21.28 ("The Romans praised Belisarius and he seemed to have achieved greater glory [εὐδοκιμήσαι] in their eyes by this feat than when he brought Gelimer or Vittigis captive to Byzantium"), 5.5.1 ("Meanwhile it happened that Belisarius had distinguished himself [ἠὐδοκίμηκεν] by the defeat of Gelimer and the Vandals"); see also the following footnote. The sole exception to the pattern is found in Procopius' famous eulogy of Theoderic the Great, 5.1.29; see now C. PAZDERNIK, Reinventing Theoderic in Procopius' Gothic War, in Lillington/Turquois, Procopius (as footnote 13 above), 137–153. Elsewhere the narrator mentions how an unnamed Roman gained renown (ἠὐδοκίμησεν, 3.4.27; cf. *Suda* Θ.389 Adler s.v. θαλαδίας) by making a quip at the expense of Valentinian III following the assassination of Aëtius in 454 CE. Embedded characters use the expression in direct discourse at 4.2.31 (Tzazo), 16.21 (Germanus).

**110** Procopius alleges that John resented Belisarius because "he drew the odium of all people upon himself, whereas Belisarius was esteemed (εὐδοκίμων ... ἔτυχεν) more than anyone else" (*Wars* 1.25.12). Following the disaster at Methone, Belisarius, reporting the matter to the emperor, "gained in favor (ἠὐδοκίμησεν) himself, but he did not at that time bring any punishment upon John" (3.13.20).

**111** παρὴν τε ἰδεῖν ὠραϊζομένην τὴν τύχην καὶ ποιουμένην ἐπίδειξιν, ὡς ἅπαντὰ τε αὐτῆς εἶη καὶ οὐδὲν ἀνθρώπῳ ἴδιον γένοιτο (*Wars* 3.21.7).

of ancient times.”<sup>112</sup> Belisarius’ experiences to that point in North Africa, Procopius affirms, were both fortuitous and unprecedented. His achievement neatly subverted the premises upon which John’s opposition to the expedition was founded. His actions, and not John’s words, won renown. He preserved peace and quiet while surmounting “the dangers of conflict” and accomplishing a revolutionary change of regimes. At the end of book three of the *Wars*, as the opening act of Procopius’ narrative of the Vandal War draws to a close with Gelimer not yet subdued, but with the Vandals locked together in indescribable grief at Bulla Regia, the repudiation of John the Cappadocian and of John’s policy of conflict aversion would appear to be complete.

Following Belisarius’ victory over Gelimer at Tricamarum in December of 533 BCE and the consolidation of imperial control over North Africa by Solomon, his successor, prospects in North Africa remained bright: “as a result of this, all the Libyans who were subjects of the Romans ... seemed the most fortunate of all men.”<sup>113</sup> Yet Solomon’s death and the subsequent misrule of others contribute to a crisis that, even once the situation has been retrieved, leaves devastation in its wake. The very last words of Procopius’ narrative of the Vandal War are unrelentingly grim (4.28.52 [D3]):<sup>114</sup>

οὕτω τε Λιβύων τοῖς περιγενομένοις, ὀλίγοις τε καὶ λίαν πτωχοῖς οὖσιν, ὄψε καὶ μόλις ἡσυχίαν τινὰ ξυνηνέχθη γενέσθαι.

Thus it came to pass that the Libyans who survived, few as they were in number and extremely poor, at long last and just barely managed *to find some peace and quiet*.

If the images and the narratorial interventions with which book three of the *Wars* closes repudiate John the Cappadocian, then it must also be admitted that the sardonic note on which the Vandal War concludes, at the end of book four, appears to vindicate his prediction that his advice would be credited if the struggle were prolonged and to echo ironically his warning: the peace and quiet, ἡσυχία,

**112** Βελισαρίω δὲ ξυνηνέχθη ἐκείνη τῇ ἡμέρᾳ εὐδοκιμῆσαι ὡς οὔτε τῶν κατ’ αὐτὸν οὐδενὶ πώποτε οὔτε τῷ ἄλλῳ τῶν ἐκ παλαιοῦ γεγονότων τετύχηκε (*Wars* 3.21.8); see also 4.7.18–21 (footnote 115 *infra*). On the role of chance in defeating the Vandals, see KALDELLIS, Procopius (as footnote 4 above), 176–189.

**113** καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ Λίβυες ἅπαντες, οἱ Ῥωμαίων κατήκοοι ἦσαν ... ἔδοξαν εὐδαιμονέστατοι εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἀπάντων (*Wars* 4.20.33).

**114** On this passage, see KALDELLIS, Procopius’ Vandal War (as footnote 58 above), 14. On the causes of military discontent, see *Wars* 4.14.8–15, 5.15.55. The image of devastation in North Africa is reiterated at 8.17.22. See A. D. LEE, *The empire at war*, in Maas, *Cambridge Companion* (as footnote 49 above), 113–133, esp. 126–129.

that John advises Justinian to conserve was, for the Libyans subsequently enmeshed in conflict, all too dearly bought.

## VIII

The historical judgments about the Vandal War that are detectable in the *Wars* are complex and correspondingly dissimulated within spaces and silences inscribed in the text. John the Cappadocian cannot be reduced to a spokesman for the historian's views, even where he happens to voice something that seems to be approximating them. While Belisarius' uncanny and unprecedented successes against the Vandals confounded John's predictions, they also confounded the well-founded fears of the participants themselves, not least the fears of the historical Procopius who sailed with the expedition. Belisarius' achievement, falling well outside the bounds of rational calculation and prediction, scarcely discredited a policy of conflict aversion, inasmuch as betting on a miracle is not a policy. Procopius' narrator is left to marvel at the Vandals' reversal of fortune.<sup>115</sup>

The *Wars* nonetheless equips its readers to understand how, in Procopius' estimation, that achievement was squandered. Suspicions over Belisarius' imperial ambitions, which the historian insists were baseless, diverted the general from post-conflict reconstruction, disappointing prospects for pacifying North Africa and opening the door for subsequent maladministration and misrule.<sup>116</sup> The effect is to magnify (and to exonerate) Belisarius, on one hand, and, on the other, to drive home the point that, absent such a remarkable and capable figure exercising effective leadership on the ground, Justinian's "liberation" of North Africa amounted to little other than occupation and exploitation by a foreign power.

Insofar as Procopius' line of historiographical inquiry goes quite some way toward substantiating John's claim that the merits of his policy prescriptions

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**115** "For things that seemed to reason (λόγω) impossible are actually (ἔργω) accomplished, and many times things that previously appeared impossible (ἀδύνατα), when they become real (ἀποβάντα), seem to be worthy of wonder (θαύματος ἄξια). But whether such events as these [i. e., Gelimer's overthrow] ever took place before I am not able to say" (εἰ μέντοι τοιαῦτα ἔργα πώποτε γεγενῆσθαι τετύχηκεν οὐκ ἔχω εἰπεῖν, *Wars* 4.7.19–20). See also footnote 52 supra.

**116** The charges are made explicit in the *Secret History* (18.5–11, esp. 9); compare esp. *Wars* 4.8.1–5. On Belisarius, see PH. WOOD, Being Roman in Procopius' Vandal Wars. *Byzantion* 81 (2011), 424–447, esp. 433, 439.

would become apparent as the struggle dragged on,<sup>117</sup> it remains to investigate how such an estimable message fares in the hands of such a discreditable messenger. Here it is worthwhile to return to the moment in the *Secret History* with which this discussion began, an instance of stricken silence in the court of Justin I, whose relationship to the corresponding instance in the *Wars* is akin to that of an object and its image in a distorting mirror. Matters of war and peace are not at stake, but the future emperor Justinian is instead pursuing a vendetta against a blameless official, Theodotus “the Pumpkin,” and it requires the intervention of a figure of unimpeachable integrity, the quaestor Proclus, to blunt (if not wholly to prevent<sup>118</sup>) a blatant miscarriage of justice.

Like the larger work of which it is a part, the episode displays an unvarnished style to impart what it claims to be the unvarnished truth.<sup>119</sup> Dispensing with the conventions of classicizing historiography, the narrative merely reports Proclus’ *sententia* in indirect discourse without rhetorical elaboration; it affords no access into the embedded character’s interiority and motivations; it declines to find relationships between particular circumstances and universal patterns and precedents for human behavior. For all of these reasons, the appearance here of the motif of “grieving in silence” (σιωπή ... ὀδύρεσθαι), which is so idiosyncratic not only in Procopius’ oeuvre but in all of Greek literature, is all the more striking.<sup>120</sup> We have seen how the expression signals moments of intense emotional turmoil and internalized conflict that have to be dissimulated because they threaten to upset established relationships of power, be it the relationship of the emperor to his officials or that of the Vandals to their subjects on Sardinia.<sup>121</sup>

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**117** *Wars* 3.10.11 (footnote 101 supra).

**118** The “Pumpkin” was stripped of his rank and relegated to Jerusalem on Justin’s orders, where he went into hiding in fear of assassination: *HA* 9.42.

**119** See A. KALDELLIS, Introduction, in idem, *Prokopios: the Secret History with related texts*. Indianapolis / Cambridge 2010, vii–lix: xxxv–xl.

**120** Procopius sparingly applies ὀδύρεσθαι tout court, but he does so in contexts in which grieving is vocalized and performed overtly, by individuals as well as groups: *Wars* 1.24.56 (of Pompeius bewailing his treatment following the suppression of the Nika rebellion), 1.25.15 (of Antonina feigning complaints about Justinian), 2.12.21 (of Abgar of Edessa), 4.3.23 (of the Vandal reaction to the flight of Gelimer), 5.23.25, 27 (of the Gothic besiegers of Rome), 6.1.34 (of the imperial army lamenting the death of Chorsamantis); *HA* 17.4 (of Justinian feigning grief over the murder of Callinicus). It will be noticed that the word is only used descriptively in the naratorial voice.

**121** VAN NUFFELEN, *Wor(l)ds* (as footnote 13 above), 46–49, analyzing material other than that examined here, finds that “in the *Wars* speechlessness is a cipher for a lack of control of reality. This shows, in turn, that language is the medium through which control is exercised.”

The *Wars* deploys these signals counterintuitively, linking the subjective experiences of the officials who bear the unwelcome responsibility for prosecuting the Vandal War with those of the Vandals who are swept up in it. The effect is to humanize the two groups by demonstrating their mutual vulnerability and fallibility and, by making such an improbable association between them, to universalize their plight. Procopius' audience of reader-spectators, who are uninvolved in and insulated from the events that are the focus of the historian's line of inquiry, are nevertheless implicated in the narrative by their shared humanity, equipping them to appreciate the consequences and the costs of the ensuing conflict. At the same time, the *Wars* also insists upon the particularity and the contingency of the events it relates by disclosing the limits of narratability and denying to its audience access to the unmediated and inarticulate griefs of the Vandals at Bulla Regia, on one hand, and to the unfathomable pathologies animating John the Cappadocian, on the other.

The affected artlessness of the *Secret History*, where Proclus' intervention on behalf of Theodatus is concerned, throws into stark relief the artful affectations of the *Wars*, where John the Cappadocian's intervention in opposition to the Vandal expedition is concerned. The former episode is a demonstration of breaking silence that, to the extent that it speaks truth to power frankly without classicizing embellishments, crystallizes the larger truth-telling claims of the *Secret History* and represents in miniature the work of which it is a part.<sup>122</sup> The corresponding proposition, that the debate over the Vandal expedition is a representation in miniature of the *Wars*, brings to the fore John the Cappadocian's much more self-subverting invocation of *παρρησία* and the distorting effects of the work's classicizing structures and allusions. If the quaestor Proclus is at this moment an avatar and an icon of the narrator of the *Secret History*, might the same be said for John the Cappadocian and the narrator of the *Wars*?

The foregoing discussion has indicted John for committing a so-called "allusive malapropism,"<sup>123</sup> by echoing infelicitously the speech of the Corinthians in the conference at Sparta in book one of Thucydides, the form and content of which are ill-suited for John's conflicted and self-serving purposes. While characters embedded in the narrative are insensible of this mismatch, cultural capital and critical distance equip implied or inscribed readers of the *Wars* to recognize how the narrative stylizes its representation of the events in question. No less

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<sup>122</sup> The *Secret History* is not without learned allusions, notably to Aristophanes: see KALDELLIS, Introduction (as footnote 119 above), xxxvi–xxxviii.

<sup>123</sup> See Section IV *supra*.

culpable for perpetrating an allusive malapropism, however, is the Procopian narrator of the *Wars*, who is responsible for pressing John into the ill-fitting role of the Herodotean wise advisor, casting the Cappadocian as an Artabanus manqué.<sup>124</sup> The difficulties and the dissonances that Procopius' readers experience in attempting to reconcile the messenger with the message are the product of this mismatch, which has to be appreciated as an aspect of the literary design of the *Wars* that demonstrates the relationship between the work's classicizing style and its politically sensitive content and context.<sup>125</sup>

Above all, it is the *Secret History's* example of playing the "wise advisor" template straight that exposes its counterpart in the *Wars* as a parody of that template, inasmuch as sober and straight-talking Proclus is parodied by clever and daring John. The gulf that separates these two figures measures the distance and difference that the *Secret History* constructs between itself as a silence-breaking exposé and the necessarily less candid and forthcoming *Wars*, and again between the narrator of the *Secret History* and the narrator of the *Wars*:

### **The *Secret History* : the *Wars***

#### **The narrator of the *Secret History* : the narrator of the *Wars* Proclus in the *Secret History*<sup>126</sup> : John in the *Wars***

To the extent that the narrator of the *Wars* is implicated in John's rhetorical subtlety and its problematic relationship to historical truth, he nevertheless repudiates John's ruthlessness by confessing his inability to fathom the depths of John's depravity.

This suggestion – that, at the moment at which John the Cappadocian intercedes in the deliberations over the prospective invasion of Vandal North Africa, he serves as a figuration or a representation in miniature of the Procopian narrator of the *Wars* – is a meaningful inversion of the tired and inconclusive debate

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**124** On Artabanus as a narratorial alter ego of Herodotus, see I.J.F. DE JONG, Herodotus, in eadem / Nünlist / Bowie, *Narrators* (as footnote 81 above), 101–114: 113–114.

**125** Compare KALDELLIS, *Procopius' Vandal War* (as footnote 58 above), 20: "One work was a narrative, the other an argument. ... Fear restricted the *Wars*; hostility energized the *Secret History*." Contrast S. CONSTANTINO, *Violence in the palace: rituals of imperial punishment in Prokopios' Secret History*, in A. Beihammer / eadem / M. Parani (eds.), *Court ceremonies and rituals of power in Byzantium and the medieval Mediterranean: comparative perspectives*. Leiden 2013, 375–387: 384, for whom in the *Secret History*, "Prokopios shows himself as a wholly unreliable and absurd interpreter of his own work," but who mischaracterizes, in my view, the *Wars* as a panegyric of Justinian together with the *Buildings*.

**126** It must be borne in mind that Proclus is represented as an embedded character in the *Wars*: see footnote 64 supra.

over whether John serves as a spokesman for the views of the historical Procopius, which could not be stated openly while the principals were alive. Whether the *Wars* figures John as a spokesman for its author, this is to say, is a less productive question than whether it figures its narrator as an ironic and rueful counterpart of John. Those who would posit that the *Wars* dissimulates the settled judgments of its author about historical truth within a silence of their own, the trace of which is marked in the text by John's silence-breaking speech, must first address the work's all too plausible depiction of a world in which judgments about the present, the past, and the future are situational, provisional, and revisable<sup>127</sup> – a world, that is, of varnished truths, in which the narrator of the *Wars* is ineluctably enmeshed.<sup>128</sup>

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**127** Compare VAN NUFFELEN, *Wor(l)ds* (as footnote 13 above), 50, for whom the *Wars* is “a narrative that insists on the gap between world and word, and this both on the level of the representation of events (the *Wars* themselves) as on the level of man's action in the world (the events described in the narrative).”

**128** This essay incorporates elements of a paper (“Conflict aversion in Procopius of Caesarea”) that I was invited to deliver at the XXIII Finnish Symposium on Late Antiquity, “Conflict in late antiquity,” in October 2014, but which I was obliged to withdraw due to a disabling personal injury. Let me acknowledge with heartfelt thanks the support and encouragement I received at the time from the organizers, especially Ville Vuolanto, and subsequently from Bronwen Neil. I also acknowledge with gratitude the sound advice of Michael Maas and the constructive suggestions of the two anonymous readers for *BZ*.