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Procopius' *Secret History*: Rethinking the Date

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DETERMINING WHEN Procopius of Caesarea wrote his various works, the two installments of the *Wars* (Books 1 to 7, Book 8), the *Buildings*, and the *Secret History*, has long been problematic. Controversy flourishes anew.¹ In the case of the *Secret History*, the result remains indecision or, at best, agreement around either of two poles—one in 550/1, the other in 558/9. This polarity of opinion is driven by a simple dichotomy of interpretation. When Procopius says Justinian has already been emperor for 32 years at the time of writing the *Secret History* (24.29), from what point is the count reckoned? From the accession of his uncle Justin I in 518, as argued by the proponents of the 550/1 date, or from his own elevation as *Augustus* in 527 as argued by the proponents of the 558/9 date? In spite of all the careful scholarship applied to the *Secret History* in recent times there is a greater level of uncertainty about its currently preferred date (550/1) than has been acknowledged.

The first serious students of Procopius tended to date the *Secret History* to 558/9.² In 1891 Haury developed a detailed argument for an earlier date (late 550)³ which was subsequently canonized by Bury and Stein, then reinforced by the authority of Rubin and Averil Cameron in particular.⁴ Indeed, as

¹G. Greatrex, "Recent Work on Procopius and the Composition of *Wars* VIII," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 27 (2003) 45–67, esp. 67: "it is clear that a new phase in Procopian studies has opened up. Almost everything about Procopius is in doubt."

² Notably F. Dahn, *Prokopius von Cäsarea* (Berlin 1865) 485, but later revived for a time by J. A. S. Evans, "The Dates of the *Anecdota* and the *De Aedificiis* of Procopius," *CP* 64 (1969) 29–30, and "The Secret History and the Art of Procopius," *Prudentia* 7 (1975) 105–109.

³ J. Haury, *Procopiana* (*Programm des Königl. Realgymnasiums Augsburg 1890/1*) (Augsburg 1891) 9–27.

⁴ J. B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire II* (London 1923) 422; E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire II* (Paris 1949) 720–721; B. Rubin, "Prokopios

Greatrex observed, "Haury's case has met almost universal approval."⁵ Among other things, Haury insisted that the *Secret History* contained no trace of any event datable after 550. There was no effective dissent from Haury's position until 1987 when Roger Scott attempted to identify two events in the *Secret History* which, so he proposed, did occur after 550.⁶ Scott's case was challenged by both Greatrex⁷ and Evans⁸ who focused on the two key events identified by Scott, namely the debasement of the coinage and the deferral of the Passover celebration when it preceded Easter. Together they demonstrated that neither event is necessarily datable after 550 so they both reasserted Haury's date for the *Secret History* of late 550, or shortly thereafter. More recently, Signes Codoñer has sought to justify the 550/1 date by postulating as the genesis of the *Secret History* the expectations unleashed by the death of the empress Theodora in June 548, particularly the appointment of the emperor Justinian's cousin Germanus to lead the Roman army into Italy in 550 and the possible replacement of Justinian by the hopefully victorious Germanus.⁹ Greatrex, Evans, and Signes Codoñer may therefore appear to have settled the matter in favor of a date fixed at 550/1 for the *Secret History*. They have not.

von Kaisareia," *RE* 23 (1954) 355, and *Das Zeitalter Justinians I* (Berlin 1960) 468; Averil Cameron, *Procopius* (London/Los Angeles/Berkeley 1985) 8–9. A notable recent exception is M. R. Cataudella, "Historiography in the East," in G. Marasco (ed.), *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity* (Leiden 2003) 391–447, at 400–404. The most recent substantial study of Procopius avoids grappling with the details of dating his works by suggesting, questionably, that different dates of composition do not materially affect their perspective: A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea* (Philadelphia 2004) 46.

⁵ G. Greatrex, "The Dates of Procopius' Works," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 18 (1994) 101–114, at 102.

⁶ R. Scott, "Justinian's Coinage and Easter Reforms and the Date of the *Secret History*," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 11 (1987) 215–221.

⁷ Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 101–114.

⁸ J. A. S. Evans, "The Dates of Procopius' Works: A Recapitulation of the Evidence," *GRBS* 37 (1996) 301–313.

⁹ J. Signes Codoñer, "Prokops Anekdoten und Justinians Nachfolge," *JÖBG* 53 (2003) 47–82, building on his earlier discussion in *Procopio de Cesarea. Historia Secreta* (Madrid 2000) 48–53, 65–67.

Neither Greatrex nor Evans, nor indeed Signes Codoñer, have satisfactorily addressed Scott's subsidiary argument related to the counting of the years of Justinian from 527, rather than from 518.¹⁰ Scott distinguished between Procopius' references to events during the reign of Justin, on the one hand, and his starting point for reckoning the years of Justinian's reign, on the other, whereas Haury had argued that one necessarily implied the other. Haury was unequivocal. If Procopius credited Justinian with responsibility for events from the period of Justin (518–527) then he can only be dating Justinian's reign from 518.¹¹ So, when he records the passing of 32 years at the time of writing the *Secret History* he must mean the 32 years from 518, that is, he was writing in 550/1 and was not counting Justinian's imperial years according to constitutional reality. Rather, Procopius was reckoning on the basis of his own special claim that Justinian was really the power behind the throne from the very accession of Justin. This bedrock aspect of Haury's original case seems never to have received the critical inspection it has always demanded.

1. Justin in the *Secret History*

The *Secret History* is an intrinsically controversial and elusive work. Written in seclusion, circulated privately and discretely if at all, this Procopian tirade was always a tricky piece to fathom. For a long time its very authenticity was considered dubious. Others have regarded it as a literary hybrid,¹² while an attempt has even been made to construe the work as consisting of three separate set-pieces collected together in the eighth century with

¹⁰ Scott, *BMGS* 11 (1987) 221: "It needs stressing that at no point does Procopius actually state that he is treating Justin's reign as part of Justinian's."

¹¹ Haury, *Procopiana* 15–16: "Wenn nun Prokop alles aufzählt, was unter Justin geschehen ist, und den Justinian dafür verantwortlich macht, so ist auch das ein Beweis dafür, dass er von dem Regierungsantritt des Justin an rechnet ... Justin hatte ja nach der Ansicht Prokops nicht für sich, sondern für Justinian die Herrschaft bekommen."

¹² For example, F. Rühl, "Die Interpolationen in Prokops Anekdoten," *RhM* 69 (1914) 284–298.

an added preface confected from other Procopian prefaces.¹³ Irrespective of its authenticity and veracity, it has acquired a reputation as a masterpiece of invective. It is an artful production designed for an educated audience and unconstrained by any strictures of genre.¹⁴ As such, attention has been paid in recent times to its literary character and composition. It is now seen as something Procopius worked on slowly and deliberately over a considerable period of time as opportunity arose. It was assembled in stages as its author picked it up and put it down. The *Secret History* could be revised and rewritten as the task unfolded and the tone became established. In literary terms it formed part of a tradition of studied invective which programmatically criticized and pilloried emperors and high officials.¹⁵ Some of the essential techniques of this approach involved representing the emperor as responsible for institutions and methods which he actually inherited, casting the deleterious consequences of particular decisions as the emperor's original motive, and portraying the empress Theodora as possessing all the vices of an independent woman who breached the conventions of feminine nature and behaviour.¹⁶

The assumption that in the *Secret History* Procopius is counting from the accession of Justin I in 518 derives from the way he describes Justinian's role during the reign of his predecessor and uncle/adoptive father Justin, that is, he casts Justinian as the "actual" ruler exercising Justin's imperial authority during

¹³ K. Adshead, "The Secret History of Procopius and its Genesis," *Byzantion* 63 (1993) 5–28, first queried by M. Angold, "Procopius' Portrait of Theodora," in C. Constantinides et al. (eds.), *ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝ. Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996) 21–34.

¹⁴ Kaldellis, *Procopius* 94–164.

¹⁵ Cameron, *Procopius* 49–83; F. Tinnefeld, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik in der byzantinischen Historiographie* (Munich 1971) 33–35; G. Greatrex, "Procopius the Outsider?" in D. C. Smythe (ed.), *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider* (London 2000) 220–223; Kaldellis, *Procopius* 49–52.

¹⁶ Bury, *History* 424; E. A. Fisher, "Theodora and Antonina in the Historia Arcana: History and/or Fiction?" *Arethusa* 11 (1978) 253–279; and Angold, in Constantinides 21–34.

those years.¹⁷ Procopius virtually lampoons Justin in the *Secret History*. Bearing in mind that we are dealing here with a dedicated piece of invective there is good reason for the caricature of Justin which appears, but it needs to be set in the context of the work's structure. The first segment of the *Secret History* is devoted to Belisarius and Antonina. It was towards the end of Justin's reign that Belisarius was appointed to the position of dux of Mesopotamia and Procopius was assigned to him as his secretary (*Wars* 1.12.24). Whether Procopius ever met Justin at this stage is not known. The next segment of Procopius' invective is focused on Justinian and Theodora, as he explains: "Now what manner of persons Justinian and Theodora were and the method by which they ruined the Roman Empire I shall proceed to tell forthwith" (*Secret History* 6.1).

Procopius begins his assault on the imperial couple by elucidating the career and personality of Justin, concluding by saying that he "did not succeed in doing his subjects any harm nor any good either" but was reticent and boorish (6.2–18). Next he brings in Justinian for the first time by explaining that during the reign of his uncle Justin he "used to administer the entire government" (6.19 νέος ὧν ἔτι διῳκεῖτο τὴν ἀρχὴν ξύμπασαν). Then Procopius proceeds to a general denunciation of Justinian accusing him of being the source of all disasters, injustice, and loss of life (6.20–25). It is a forceful précis. It is only at this point that he brings forth specific examples, one being the murder of the eunuch chamberlain Amantius in 518 and the other the murder of the senior general Vitalian in 520. While it is true that both murders took place under Justin, and may well have been on his orders, Justinian could have been implicated. Certainly he was blamed much later for the death of Vitalian.¹⁸ These were still easy points for Procopius to score with his audience in the 550s. A lengthy digression on the factions and their lawlessness under Justin follows (7.1–38),

¹⁷ Haury, *Procopiana* 11ff., and, most recently, Signes Codoñer, *JÖBG* 53 (2003) 47: "da die tatsächliche Regierung Justinians bereits mit dem Krönung seines Onkels Justin 518 beginnt."

¹⁸ Vict.Tonn. *Chron.* 107 (ed. Cardelle de Hartmann, *CCh* 173a, 35 = Mommsen, *MGH.AA* XI 197).

then another general censure of Justinian for crimes against the state (7.39–42). Procopius next turns specifically to Justinian's personality and appearance, including the story of his wife Theodora (8.1–10.23). In the course of this harangue he writes that after the death of his wife Euphemia (ca. 524) Justin became "foolish as well as extremely old, incurred the ridicule of his subjects, and since all were filled with utter contempt for him as not comprehending what was going on, they disregarded him; but Justinian they cultivated with great fear" (9.50).

Again, Procopius' portrayal of Justin is designed partly to play up the influence of Justinian and partly to play down the real authority of Justin himself, even to minimize the separate period of Justin's reign. One way he does this is by foreshortening the busy joint rule of Justin and Justinian between April and August 527 by saying it lasted "just a few days" (9.54). Procopius clearly claims that Justinian held full authority under Justin. He repeats it often throughout the *Secret History*. Given the highly polemical and tendentious nature of the work, these claims need to be taken with extreme care and skepticism. Procopius deliberately ascribes to Justinian all the deeds of Justin because it helped broaden the scope of his diatribe, and to extend the period of Theodora's dominance over him which is a special theme of the work.¹⁹ Irrespective of the date of the *Secret History*, there was probably sufficient uncertainty among Procopius' audience about events now some decades ago to enable this technique to succeed.

2. Reckoning Justinian's imperial years

The decisive evidence in determining the date of composition for the *Secret History* is Procopius' repeated statement that certain situations have lasted for 32 years. The disputed issue is determining his starting point for the 32 years. On one occasion he says that Justinian has not made the customary quadrennial donative to the army in the past 32 years since "this man took charge of the state" (ἐξ ὅτου δὲ ἀνὴρ ὅδε

¹⁹ Kaldellis, *Procopius* 142–150.

διωκήσατο τὴν πολιτείαν, 24.29). On other occasions he refers to the Blue and Green factions as having been in mutual combat for 32 years (18.33), which Haury considered conclusive for proving that Procopius was counting from 518, the beginning of the reign of Justin I, because he elsewhere (9.35–41) included the factional strife of 523.²⁰ Yet, this need not be the case at all. Factional violence between the Blues and Greens persisted throughout Justinian's reign from 527 to 558/9 (and beyond) and was quite intense at different points although the records of such violence are patchy and incomplete.²¹ In any event, the description of the punishment of the factionalists in 523 is completely disconnected from Procopius' account of the 32 years of violence. It is cast as a sort of digression in a lengthy section on Theodora in which Justinian is maligned for taking action against Theodotus who had justly punished those responsible for factional violence.

Then there are the accusations that Justinian failed his subjects by not making a remission of arrears of debts to the treasury for 32 years (23.1) and that he failed his officials because, thanks to his intervention, their loss of salary has occurred over a period of 32 years (24.33). Collectively, these observations would appear to suggest that at the time of writing 32 years of Justinian's reign have already passed. Indeed, Procopius gives the clear impression, at least on one occasion (24.29), that the 32 years have already elapsed, which would make the date of composition either July 550/June 551 (from July 518) or April 558/March 559 (from April 527). Yet, nowhere does Procopius unambiguously indicate from which year he is reckoning the 32 years of Justinian's reign. More especially, at no point does he necessarily state or imply that he is counting from the accession of Justin in July 518, rather than the accession of Justinian in April 527. He could just as easily be reckoning from the latter as the former, especially since the emperor himself decreed that his reign was to be counted from

²⁰ Haury, *Procopiana* 16.

²¹ Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions* (Oxford 1976) 276–277.

his accession on 1 April 527.²²

Even allowing for the manifest element of invective in the *Secret History*, in other works Procopius also refers to Justinian's power during the reign of Justin. Normally these other Procopian statements have been construed as reinforcing that of the *Secret History*, namely that Justin was a non-entity and that Justinian wielded full authority throughout his reign.²³ Yet, Procopius does not quite say so much. In the *Wars* he explains that while Justinian did "not yet" (οὐπω) exercise imperial power he still wielded influence (κατ' ἐξουσίαν, 3.9.5). Although this phrase has been translated as "at his pleasure," thereby reinforcing the notion of capricious power on Justinian's part, what Procopius means is that during Justin's reign Justinian held positions of power. Indeed, between 518 and 527 Justinian became progressively the most senior imperial official, as *magister militum*, then, from 525, *Caesar*.²⁴ He wielded power according to his position (κατ' ἐξουσίαν). That is quite a different thing from saying he wielded full authority and influence instead of the emperor Justin so that he was, in effect, emperor himself.

Likewise in the *Buildings* Procopius claims it is legitimate to include buildings from Justin's period in the list of Justinianic buildings because "Justinian administered the government also during his uncle's reign but on his own authority" (κατ' ἐξουσίαν, 1.3.5). Certainly Justinian was a keen and prolific builder. When he came to live in the palace of Hormisdas from 518 he was soon involved in building a church (Sts Peter and Paul) within the precinct of his palace. Another (Sts Sergius and Bacchus) was to follow within a few years. At the same time he was also directly involved in sponsoring the construction and

²² Justinian *Novel* 47: *Palam namque est quia nunc [A.D. 537] quidem annum undecimum nostri scribunt imperii, incohante vero Aprile mense et prima die, in qua nos deus Romanorum superposuit rebus, duodecimum annum scribent, et ita de cetero, donec nostrum deus imperium extenderit* (1).

²³ E.g. Bury, *History* 424.

²⁴ *PLRE* II 646 "Justinianus 7," with the various stages of Justinian's career explained in B. Croke, "Justinian under Justin: Reconfiguring a Reign" (forthcoming).

renovation of other churches and buildings at Constantinople in the period between 518 and 527.²⁵ As a senior official and courtier there was nothing unusual about such activity on Justinian's part. There was a long tradition of such construction in the imperial capital, and other aristocratic contemporaries such as Anicia Juliana were no less energetic as builders than Justinian. It was quite proper of Procopius to attribute to Justinian himself certain buildings in the period of Justin's reign such as the Church of the Virgin at Blachernai.²⁶ Again, Procopius is not necessarily saying that Justin's rule counted for nothing or that everything he did himself is attributable to Justinian. His point is that Justinian was able to achieve certain things on his own authority during these years. On this point Procopius is clear and consistent.

Equally clear and consistent is the way Procopius reckons the years of Justinian in the *Wars* where he frequently records a particular event as taking place in a certain imperial year of Justinian.²⁷ For instance, he describes the drawn-out negotiations for the "Endless Peace" treaty between the Romans and Persians in 532/3 as concluding when Justinian was "already in the sixth year of his reign" (*Wars* 1.22.17), that is, 1 April 533 to 31 March 534. There can be no doubt that in the *Wars* he counts imperial years from 527. He does so not only in Books 1 to 7 which were published originally in 550/1 but also in Book 8 published a few years later. The subsequent treaty with the Persians in 552/3 is dated by Procopius to the "twenty-fifth year of the emperor Justinian" (8.15.12). Throughout the *Wars* Procopius invariably followed Justinian's law requiring imperial years to be counted from 1 April 527. The question then is whether in the less inhibited private world of the *Secret History* Procopius felt freer to abandon the normal mode of reckoning the emperor's reign and offer a literary substitute which in-

²⁵ *Buildings* 1.3.3, 4.25–29.

²⁶ *Buildings* 1.3.3.

²⁷ *Wars* 1.16.10 (year 4); 1.22.17 (year 6); 2.3.56 (year 13); 2.5.1 (year 13); 2.28.11 (year 19); 2.30.48 (year 23); 3.12.1 (year 7); 4.14.6 (year 10); 4.19.1 (year 13); 4.21.1 (year 17); 4.28.41 (year 19); 5.5.1 (year 9); 5.14.14 (year 11); 8.15.12 (year 25); 8.33.26 (year 26).

cluded the reign of Justin as well, thereby artificially counting Justinian's imperial years from 518. Such an approach seems highly unlikely. Procopius himself closely tied the *Secret History* to the already completed books of the *Wars*. In his preface (1.1–3) he begins by explaining that in the *Wars* he has already covered events extensively but that he now intends to traverse the same ground once more. This time, however, he will reveal what previously had to remain hidden and will explain what was previously unexplained. The deliberate connection between both of the author's works strongly suggests that the method of reckoning Justinian's regnal years in the *Wars*, that is, from April 527, was not abandoned for another method in the *Secret History*. A closer consideration of how Procopius describes Justinian during the reign of Justin, July 518 to April 527, reinforces the likelihood that in the *Secret History*, as in the *Wars*, Procopius counted Justinian's regnal years from 527.

Far from slavishly absorbing Justin's reign into that of Justinian, and therefore counting the years of Justinian from July 518, Procopius consistently differentiates the two throughout the *Secret History*. He does this in various ways. Firstly, he denotes the commencement of Justin's reign (6.11, 6.17, 19.4 Ἰουστίνος τὴν βασιλείαν παρέλαβε; 24.18 ἡνίκα τοίνυν Ἰουστίνος τὴν βασιλείαν παρέλαβεν). He is able to date particular events to Justin's time (11.5 ὑπὸ τὸν χρόνον τῆς Ἰουστίνου βασιλείας), including Justinian's courting of Theodora.²⁸ Then he

²⁸ *Secret History* 12.29 (ed. Haury) γράμματα γὰρ Ἰουστινιανῶ γραφουσα ἔτι τοῦ Ἰουστίνου διοικουμένῳ τὴν βασιλείαν. This raises an acute textual problem. The MSS. read διοικουμένου, which means that Procopius says Justinian was sending letters to Theodora while Justin was still emperor. That makes perfect sense and was accepted by one modern editor (D. Comparetti, *Le inedite* [Rome 1928] 89.2, 235, more recently by F. Conca, *Procopio. Storie segrete* [Milan 1986] 182). Haury, however, convinced as he was of Procopius' thoroughgoing attempt to attribute to Justinian all events and policies of Justin's reign, printed διοικουμένῳ instead (originally proposed in Haury, *Procopiana* 10 n.1, reiterated in Haury, "Zu Comparettis Ausgabe der Geheimgeschichte Prokops," *BZ* 35 [1935] 288–298, at 289). That changes the sense to mean that it was Justinian ruling the realm of Justin. In other words, Haury's emendation is based on historical supposition rather than philological necessity. διοικουμένου should probably

records that Justin ruled for nine years (19.8 Ἰουστίνου ἔτη ἑννέα τὴν αὐτοκράτορα ἀρχὴν ἔχοντος), as well as noting the conclusion of his rule in August 527 (9.54 Ἰουστίνος μὲν ἐτελεύτησε νόσῳ, τῇ ἀρχῇ ἐπιβιούς ἔτη ἑννέα). Similarly, Procopius notes the commencement of Justinian's reign (8.4, 11.1, 18.36, 24.20 ἐπειδὴ δὲ αὐτὸς τὴν βασιλείαν ἔσχε, 25.5 and 26.15 ἐξ οὗ δὲ Ἰουστινιανὸς τὴν βασιλείαν παρέλαβε). Moreover, three times he links the beginning of Justinian's reign with his consort Theodora (8.53 τοίνυν τὴν βασιλείαν Ἰουστινιανὸς τε καὶ Θεοδώρα, 9.54 Ἰουστινιανὸς ξὺν Θεοδώρα τὴν βασιλείαν ἔσχε, 30.27 ἐξ ὅτου δὲ οὗτοι τὴν βασιλείαν παρέλαβον). Certainly in those instances Procopius can only mean to say that Justinian's reign began in April 527 and should be counted from then. Not only does Procopius separately identify the reigns of both Justin and Justinian in the *Secret History*, he is also able to distinguish carefully between the successive phases of Justinian's power: first (πρότερον) in terms of his due authority under Justin and subsequently (ὑστερον) with full imperial power (18.45 Ἰουστινιανοῦ πρότερον Ῥωμαίοις διοικουμένου τὴν πολιτείαν καὶ ὑστερον τὴν αὐτοκράτορα ἀρχὴν ἔχοντος).

While Procopius separates the reigns of Justin and Justinian, then differentiates between them when required, he is still able to exercise literary licence in attributing events from Justin's reign to that of Justinian where it plainly suits his purpose. Natural disasters, for example, fall into this category. Such calamities were always interpreted as a sign of divine disfavour. To collect together in summary form all the earthquakes and floods which occurred after July 518 adds rhetorical weight to Procopius's argument that Justinian only brought affliction to his people. There were floods at Edessa (18.38), along the Nile (39), and at Tarsus (40); earthquakes at Antioch (41) and Anazarbus (41) plus other cities (42) Amasia (Pontus), Polybotus (Phrygia), Philomede (Pisidia), Lychnidus, and Corinth. Above all there was the plague in the 540s (44). Procopius sweeps into this catalogue of divine retribution those disasters which had occurred in Justin's reign (37 τούτου γὰρ Ῥωμαίων διοικουμένου

stand (cf. J. Sykoutres, "Zu Prokops Anekdoten, Textkritisches," *BZ* 27 [1927] 22–28, at 26).

τὰ πράγματα). It enabled him to expand and consolidate his list, to magnify divine disfavor for Justinian.²⁹ By itself, however, it does not mean that in the *Secret History* Procopius automatically dated Justinian's reign from the accession of Justin in July 518. Nor does the absence of such disasters occurring after 550 mean that he cannot be writing after that.³⁰

By virtue of the rank and authority deriving from Justinian's positions as *magister militum* and *Caesar* between 518 and 527, he was one of the most powerful (from around 525 *the* most powerful) of the officials at the court of Justin. That was the basis of his significant influence on his uncle's regime, but it is quite a different matter to accept at face value Procopius' slander that Justinian effectively displaced the power of Justin and dominated him from his accession in July 518. It is a further assumption still to conclude that when Procopius reckons the reign of Justinian in the *Secret History* he necessarily counts from 518. Reckoning from 527 would have been more natural. At the time Procopius was writing, whether 550/1 or 558/9, his readers knew instantly the duration of Justinian's reign. It was, as noted already, always dated from 1 April 527 and was the official method of calculating a year. To start from somewhere other than 1 April 527 would be perverse. No other contemporary writer does so, nor does Procopius himself in the eight books of his *Wars*. It is unlikely in the *Secret History* too. For rhetorical effect, Procopius does seek to attribute every negative action of Justin's reign to Justinian, but that does not necessarily mean that when he counts years he begins in 518. In fact he would appear to indicate the opposite. There is no necessary connection between his rhetorical strategy and his computational claims, not least because he never says he is counting in an unorthodox or irregular fashion. His audience is left to assume naturally that he is using the official method of reckoning Justinian's regnal years from 527, not to speculate, infer, or presume otherwise.

²⁹ M. Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians. Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Göttingen 2003) 86–89.

³⁰ As argued by Haury, *Procopiana* 19–20, and Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 105.

3. Dating events in the *Secret History* after 550

Unsurprisingly for a literary tour de force such as the *Secret History*, no absolute and incontrovertible dates for events are offered, quite apart from the 32 years of Justinian's reign. Some events can be assigned their correct date from other extant information, including from other works of Procopius, but most remain dateless. On certain occasions Procopius does refer to the present time of writing: all the military events up to the present day (ἄχρι δεῦρο) have been covered in the *Wars* (1.1), as already noted; the fate of Antonina's captured and tortured enemies is not known even now (3.8 νῦν); the reconstituted statue of Domitian at Rome is still standing (8.20 ἐς τὸδε τοῦ χρόνου); in Colchis the Persians have continued to destroy Colchians, Romans, and Lazi "until the present" (18.24 μέχρι δεῦρο); Peter Barsymes retains an involvement in importing and reselling of dyes "up to the present" (25.23 ἐς τὸδε τοῦ χρόνου); the Alexandrians have free grain distribution "to this day" (ἄχρι δεῦρο 26.42). In all these cases the reference to the present is not precise enough to pinpoint a particular year.

On the other hand, these contemporary references of Procopius do not manifestly exclude a date later than 550/1. Much has been made of the fact that no event in the *Secret History* is datable after 550. It has always been considered a decisive fact in establishing the 550/1 date, a position reiterated more recently in the cases assembled by Greatrex, Evans, and Signes Codoñer.³¹ There are different ways of dealing with this issue. Firstly, the absence of events definitely datable after 550 need indicate nothing decisive about the date of the work at all. The *Secret History* is not a chronicle or narrative history with a clear sequence or order of events. The very nature of the work, highlighted by its preface, ensures that much of it is summative and general rather than specific and focused. Secondly, it is not impossible that some events do indeed imply a date later than 550 but that we simply lack corroborative evidence for their date. In fact, there has been a degree of circular argument involved in assuming that certain events must be earlier than 550

³¹ Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 105; Evans, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 308; Signes Codoñer, *JÖBG* 53 (2003) 48 n.7, 51.

simply because they are recorded in the *Secret History*.

On closer inspection there are several identifiable events described by Procopius which could be dated later than 550. For instance, it is possible that his comment on the misfortunes of the Romans and Lazi in Colchis (18.24) includes their defeats which occurred in the period up to 557.³² Then there are the examples of Constantinus, the quaestor, and Marthanes, the *dux* of Cilicia. In impugning Justinian for the way he has treated certain imperial offices and officials, Procopius turns his attention to the emperor's chief legal officer, the *quaestor*. Procopius' account of Justinian's treatment of the quaestorship (20.15ff.) begins with his first appointee Tribonian who entered office in 529,³³ thereby ignoring the quaestors of Justin at this point and reinforcing the notion of giving attention to only Justinian's appointments.³⁴ Procopius concludes his account of these officials with the career of Constantinus (20.20–23). Now it was only in 549, whether early or late that year is unknown, that Constantinus was appointed as *quaestor*.³⁵ Procopius describes him as being very young and inexperienced when appointed in 549 but he became a close friend of the ageing emperor. He goes on to explain that the young quaestor accumulated large sums of money through dubious dealings and retained the ear of the emperor. He was open to bribery for any advantage, "treading the air and contemplating all men with contempt" according to Procopius in imitation of Aristophanes (*Clouds* 225), the author most frequently cited in the *Secret History*.³⁶ Procopius' characterization of Constantinus gives the impression that at the time of writing he had been in the position more than merely a few months or just a year, which is all that would be possible if the *Secret History* was written in 550/1. Constantinus was still quaestor when Justinian died in 565.

³² Details in Stein, *Histoire* 510–516.

³³ *PLRE* III 1336 "Tribonianus 1."

³⁴ However, he does elsewhere (*Secret History* 6.13, 9.41) refer to one of them, namely Proclus.

³⁵ *PLRE* III 342–343 "Constantinus 4."

³⁶ Kaldellis, *Procopius* 58–59, 149.

As for Marthanes, he was at Mopsuestia in Cilicia on 17 June 550, that is, around the time Procopius was writing about him in the *Secret History* according to the current orthodoxy. There he was involved, on behalf of Justinian, in attending a synod inquiring into the removal of bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia's name from the diptychs.³⁷ Procopius describes a series of events involving Marthanes over an unspecified period of time: first in suppressing violence in Cilicia on Justinian's orders, then in enriching himself and responding to opposition by killing the patron of the Blues at Tarsus, then having to have his reputation restored at Constantinople before he could enter the city once more (29.26–38). Even then, he was set upon by the Blues in the imperial capital. The question is whether this drawn-out series of events predates or postdates Marthanes' attendance at the synod at Mopsuestia in June 550. These events described by Procopius have been dated "before 550 when Procopius wrote the *Anecdota*" although it is recognized that they "may have been recent since Marthanes was in Cilicia in 550."³⁸ It is no less possible that these events actually occurred after June 550, not before. Marthanes appears to have been *dux* at the time, a title he had evidently not achieved by June 550, otherwise it would surely have been noted in the council records which are normally punctilious about matters of titulature. At the time of the council he was simply *vir magnificus*, with the by now widespread honorary title *comes domesticorum*.³⁹ Had he held the substantive position of *dux* at that time we might have expected due notice of it.⁴⁰ That he was subsequently *magister militum* in 558/9 suggests a routine promotion from *dux*. In other

³⁷ *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* IV.1 (Berlin 1971) 116.8; 117.19; 118.21; 119.6, 13.

³⁸ *PLRE* III 836

³⁹ *ACO* IV.1 118.21.

⁴⁰ It is proposed in *PLRE* III 836 that Marthanes held a position in Cilicia corresponding to that of the *dux* of Lydia and Lycaonia, which became unpopular because of exploitation similar to that of Marthanes, as described by Procopius. These abuses took place in the early 550s, leading to reform of the office in 553 (*Nov. Just.* 145). If this were so, the absence of the title in the 550 Mopsuestia synod record would be an additional reason to date Procopius' account of Marthanes' actions after 550.

words, it looks as if Marthanes remained in Cilicia, except for his visit to Constantinople, throughout the 550s and only became *dux* after June 550. The events described by Procopius could well have occurred after 550, even a few years after.

Similarly, Procopius describes how the *comes sacrarum largitionum* Peter Barsymes first became responsible for creating an imperial monopoly for the dye industry (25.22–25). In fact, this account provides a good example of the circular argumentation encountered with the *Secret History*. It is concluded that Peter must have still been *comes* in 550 precisely because Procopius' work is taken to be dated to 550.⁴¹ Yet, Procopius' language at this point is not entirely clear. It would seem to imply, however, that Peter is still engaged in the dye trade and therefore still *comes* after 550. Peter ceased to be *comes* around 555 when he became Praetorian Prefect for the second time,⁴² but Procopius does not say he was definitely still *comes* at the time of writing. He may therefore be referring to the period after 555 when Peter was no longer *comes* but as Praetorian Prefect still profiting from the monopoly dye business he created as *comes*. None of these indications of events later than 550 in the *Secret History* is absolutely persuasive by itself. Together, however, they highlight the difficulty of Haury's claim, followed by Evans, Greatrex, and Signes Codoñer, that absolutely no event in the work can be dated later than 550, thereby excluding the possibility that Procopius was writing later than 550/1.

4. Context and purpose of the *Secret History*

The context and purpose of the *Secret History* have proved no less controversial than its date. If it was completed in 550/1, then Procopius must have been working on it simultaneously with *Wars* 1–7 which was published around the same time. The key to interpreting the *Secret History*'s purpose and context is its preface. There Procopius claims, as already noted, that he has recounted all the *Wars* up to the present according to time and place but that he will no longer adhere to such a division.

⁴¹ Stein, *Histoire* 769.

⁴² *PLRE* III 1001 "Petrus 9"; Stein, *Histoire* 769–772.

Instead, he will now treat Justinian's rule more synthetically which had not been previously possible, least of all while the actors were still alive. The whole work is cast as if Justinian's reign is already in the past. It is only at the very end that Procopius makes clear that Justinian is still alive and on the throne (30.34). Even then publication would be risky, given that their family and close friends could still be offended and resentful. Procopius goes on to express a fear of having his work dismissed as beyond belief but finds surety in the willingness of witnesses. The *Secret History* is designed as a cautionary tale in order to deter future miscreants by showing how their misdeeds may prejudice the judgment of posterity against them.

What contemporary circumstances inspired Procopius to such systematic vituperation can only be inferred. Some have argued that his disillusionment with Belisarius was the trigger for the *Secret History* before its scope was broadened out,⁴³ others have argued that it was designed to expose the tyranny of Justinian and to provide a counter-view to that portrayed in imperial propaganda.⁴⁴ The most elaborate explanation is the recent thesis of Signes Codoñer,⁴⁵ which requires particular discussion. He takes as his starting point the implication of what he considers to be a clear conflict of date. That is to say, he interprets Procopius as claiming that he was completing the *Secret History* in the course of Justinian's 32nd year counting from 518, hence 549/50. Since this predates the completion and publication of *Wars* 1–7 in the following year (551), then the chronological distinction must betray significance, especially since in the preface to the *Secret History* written in 550 Procopius refers to the *Wars* as already finished (p.48). Consequently, Procopius' statement must mean that when the *Wars* was completed it only reached the same point as the *Secret History*, that is, early 550. Signes Codoñer explains this apparent anomaly by postulating that when Procopius was completing the *Secret History* in 549/50 he expected Justinian, an old man further enfeebled by the death of his wife in June 548, not to live much

⁴³ Cameron, *Procopius* 55.

⁴⁴ Kaldellis, *Procopius* 146.

⁴⁵ *JÖBG* 53 (2003) 47–82.

longer thereby freeing the author to release the *Secret History* which is predicated on the assumption of Justinian's final demise (p.57). Moreover, at this moment Procopius sees Germanus, recently appointed general for the Italian campaign and implicated in a conspiracy against the emperor in 548, as Justinian's successor and actively promotes his cause (p.59). So, when ready for publication *Wars* 1–7 culminated with the appointment of Germanus in 549/50 and his marriage to the Gothic queen Matasuntha, a “suitably provisional end for his account” (p.59). In fact, it ended at the end of the 15th war year (March 550) which is the logical point for a historian to end a work, according to Signes Codoñer. Victory for Germanus in Italy would be the springboard to a new era.

Signes Codoñer goes on to argue (pp.72–75, 78) that at precisely this time the hopes centred on Germanus as a replacement for Justinian, which he sees reflected in Procopius, were shared also by Jordanes in his *Romana* and *Getica*. It was part of a liberating phase at Constantinople in the aftermath of the death of the domineering Theodora. The description of Germanus in *Wars* 7.39 is a programmatic counterfoil to that of Justinian in the *Secret History* (pp.60–61). Procopius may even have had involvement with the “circle of Germanus” (p.62) and contemplated “a new dynasty founded by Germanus” (p. 79). Unfortunately, these aspirations suddenly evaporated in 550 when the Slavs penetrated deep into Roman territory and Germanus died unexpectedly in the course of dealing with them. Hence, according to Signes Codoñer, Procopius and Jordanes now needed to produce alternate conclusions to their already completed works, the former (p.60) by adding another chapter to his *Wars* (7.40) and the latter (pp.76, 79) by inserting a laudation of Justinian in the concluding chapters of his works (*Get.* 315). All in all, so Signes Codoñer proposes, the *Secret History* can only be explained in the context of events in the period 548 to 550.

Interesting and novel as it is, Signes Codoñer's subtle thesis fails because it ignores or minimises too many basic facts. In particular, each of its three lynchpins is untenable. First, it is impossible to construe Procopius as having finished his *Secret History* during Justinian's 32nd year (549/50) since the author clearly refers to the 32 years as having already elapsed (e.g.

24.29), which means he is writing in the emperor's 33rd year (550/1, if counted from 518), that is to say, not necessarily earlier than *Wars* 1–7 after all. Second, there is the unnecessary assumption that *Wars* 1–7 must have ended at 7.39, the completion of a war-year (March 550). While the end of a war-year might make for a neat ending for a book, it is only an assumption that Procopius followed that practice. By contrast, there is no problem in assuming that *Wars* 7 originally ended where it now does. That is, however untidy it might appear, Procopius ended his Book 7 in 551 (at 7.40) and not in 550 (at 7.39). Third, there is no need to assume that Jordanes was only inspired by the hope of Germanus' ascendancy and that the final section of the *Getica* can only be a "later addition" (p.76). Instead, Jordanes is quite explicit about the genesis of his historical works and his prefaces explicate his authorial intentions. It is simply an exaggeration to claim that Germanus is the focus and inspiration for the *Getica*.⁴⁶

There are fundamental problems with certain other assumptions underlying this thesis. That Germanus was Justinian's main threat as an alternative emperor (p.72) or "best successor" (p.79) is overstated. If, as argued by Signes Codoñer, Justinian was considered too old to continue ruling by 550 then the same might be said of his cousin Germanus who was the same age or possibly even older. He was already *magister militum* of Thrace in 518 when Justinian was just one of the forty palace guards.⁴⁷ Similarly, the notion that the marriage of the elderly Germanus and Matasuentha had been long planned but had been prevented by Theodora (pp.66, 75, 78) is unlikely. Although Procopius says that Germanus was able to marry Matasuentha because his first wife Passara had died long ago (*Wars* 7.39.14), the marriage is likely to have accompanied Germanus' new appointment in 549. It was a recent political opportunity to be exploited, not a longstanding love-match retarded by Theodora. Other cases of marriages facilitated by

⁴⁶ B. Croke, "Latin Historiography in the Barbarian Kingdoms," in Marasco 369–375 (citing earlier literature on what has become a contentious question).

⁴⁷ *PLRE* II 504–505 "Germanus 4."

Theodora's passing are questionable too: that of Germanus' daughter Justina and Vitalian's nephew John did not take place after the death of Theodora as asserted by Signes Codoñer (pp.65 n.51, 66, 78) but while John was in Constantinople in 545 (*Wars* 7.12.11), a fact which Procopius avoids openly admitting in the *Secret History* (5.11–12). Signes Codoñer has simply assumed that because Theodora did successfully intervene to prevent the marriage of Justinian's niece Praiecta with Artabanes then she must have prevented those of Germanus and his daughter as well.

Problematic too is the pervasive power ascribed to Theodora and her family which heightens the contrast in the political atmosphere before and after her death (pp.68–72). Certainly she was active in public life, but the extent of her role is normally exaggerated. Signes Codoñer overstates the situation when he claims that she “had until now [548] decisively determined imperial policy, partly by her religious conviction and partly by ensuring the participation of her family in power” (p.78). The reality is that she was exercising authority and influence as others in her position had done previously, but her role in determining religious policy was somewhat circumscribed.⁴⁸ More generally, that Theodora and Justinian are together a focus for the *Secret History* does not mean that it can only have been written when she was alive or shortly thereafter. Rather, it could well have been written many years after her death because it was a rhetorical necessity to maintain the unity of the imperial partnership, just as it was in the *Buildings* which was definitely written several years after Theodora's death at the earliest.⁴⁹

In brief, Signes Codoñer's thesis is based on a compound of questionable assumptions. Procopius completed and published the first seven books of his *Wars* at the point when the Italian campaign was about to resume in 551/2 with Narses as the replacement general for Germanus. Jordanes (*Get.* 315) too concluded his history by April 551 with the hope of triumph for

⁴⁸ Cameron, *Procopius* 78–81.

⁴⁹ Michael Whitby, “Pride and Prejudice in Procopius' *Buildings*: Imperial Images in Constantinople,” *AntTard* 8 (2000) 59–66, at 63.

the Roman emperor and the resolution of the drawn-out war in Italy. When Procopius was finalizing *Wars* 1–7, and Jordanes his *Romana* and *Getica*, the Roman hopes for an imperial victory were being carried by Narses, not Germanus.

5. Relationship of the *Secret History* to *Wars* 8 and *Buildings*

There are clear connections between the *Secret History* and two other works of Procopius, namely *Wars* 8 and *Buildings*, which are relevant to determining its date. Moreover, the dates of these latter works are linked to that of the *Secret History*. Together they constitute an intricate chain. Since their dating is interdependent, a different preferred date for one impacts invariably on the others. *Wars* 8 has usually been placed somewhere in the period 554–557.⁵⁰ The crux for its dating is Procopius' statement that the treaty with the Persians which was finalised in 545 involved a tribute payment of "eleven and a half years" (*Wars* 8.15.17). The dating therefore turns ultimately on whether one reads the "eleven and a half years" from 545 as retrospective which places *Wars* 8 in 557⁵¹ or, more likely, as prospective which puts it in 554.⁵² Notwithstanding Procopius' statement on the tribute payment, it is hard to see why, if writing *Wars* 8 in 557, he did not continue his story further than the end of 552 on any of the three military fronts (Italy, Africa, the East). Further, since there are indications that *Wars* 8 was completed in a hurry not long after the last events described,⁵³ a date around 553 seems most likely. However, the *Secret History* is usually taken to belong definitely before *Wars* 8 on the twin assumptions that (1) the preface of the *Secret History* which claims to be providing an alternative account to the *Wars* can only refer to *Wars* 1–7, and (2) the absence of a cross-reference by Procopius in the *Secret*

⁵⁰ Bury, *History* 422; Stein, *Histoire* 717; Cameron, *Procopius* 8.

⁵¹ The preference of Evans, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 306.

⁵² The preference of Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 106–107; argued more fully in 27 (2003) 52–57.

⁵³ O. Körbs, *Untersuchungen zur ostgotischen Geschichte I. Das Kriegsjahr des Prokop* (diss. Jena 1913) 93–97.

History to any part of *Wars* 8 means it was not yet written.⁵⁴ As noted earlier, both these assumptions are at least contestable. *Wars* 8 may well precede the *Secret History* not follow it.

The early sections of the preface of the *Secret History* have striking affinities of sentiment and wording with the preface to *Wars* 8. It has been claimed that Procopius' prefatory comments can apply only to *Wars* 1–7 (published in 551), so that his scurrilous work provides an offset to those books alone.⁵⁵ This is not a definitive argument. In the preface to the *Secret History* Procopius says that he has previously told the story of the *Wars* "up to the present" (1.1 ἄχρι δεῦρο), a general phrase not indicative of a particular year and thereby implying a date of composition immediately after the latest events recorded in *Wars* 1–7. He also says that he has previously located events according to their appropriate time and place (ἐπὶ καιρῶν τε καὶ χωρίων τῶν ἐπιτηδείων). Certainly there is an overt structural distinction between *Wars* 1–7 (separate books on separate fronts) and *Wars* 8 (single book covering all fronts), but in the composite *Wars* 8 Procopius still clearly distinguishes events by time and place, using the same narrative and chronological techniques to organise and compartmentalize his account as in *Wars* 1–7. The wording of the preface of the *Secret History* could just as easily include *Wars* 8 and thereby make it possible to date the *Secret History* after *Wars* 8.

Similarly, the argument that the *Secret History* contains cross-references to material in *Wars* 1–7, but never *Wars* 8, is not definitive either. Attempts to identify correspondences between incidents in *Wars* 8 and the *Secret History* have been discounted.⁵⁶ More significant, however, is the pattern of cross-referencing between the two works as a whole. Given its very nature, there is only a limited amount of material in the *Secret History* which, despite the claims of the preface, directly relates

⁵⁴ Evans, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 311–312, argues for one such cross-reference, namely the promise to cover ecclesiastical events (*Wars* 8.25), which he interprets as a later (never completed) part of the *Secret History*.

⁵⁵ Haury, *Procopiana* 22; Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 105; Evans, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 308.

⁵⁶ Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 106.

to the *Wars*. Hence there is inevitably some unevenness of treatment. Further, a detailed analysis of the identified cross-references shows that not every book of *Wars* 1 to 7 re-appears in the *Secret History* anyway. It is a matter of selectivity and scale. *Wars* 8 constitutes just 193 of the 1219 pages of Haury's edition of the *Wars* or 15% of the whole work. It is perhaps not surprising that no material from it appears, just as there is no material from *Wars* 3 for instance. By itself, the absence of a demonstrable reference to material in *Wars* 8 does not mean that the *Secret History* must predate *Wars* 8. For the moment, then, the possibility that the *Secret History* was written after *Wars* 8, and that its 32 years reckoned for Justinian's reign is to be counted from April 527, remains open.

Not only has it been argued that the *Secret History* must be dated before *Wars* 8 but also that it must pre-date the *Buildings*. As for the even more vexed question of the date of the *Buildings*, the competing options are 554 and ca. 560. A strong argument has been mounted for ca. 560,⁵⁷ but there is an even stronger case against it.⁵⁸ The key testimony adduced for 554 is that the description of the dome of Hagia Sophia which collapsed in May 558 shows that the work cannot be as late as 560/1, otherwise Procopius would not have mentioned the dome (1.1.22–78). On the other hand, if the work were composed in installments beginning with Book 1 then that part of the work could have been written before May 558 when the dome fell in.⁵⁹ The main argument in favour of ca. 560 is Procopius' account of the current building of the bridge over the Sangarius river which is otherwise attested (by Theophanes but putatively derived from Malalas writing in the 560s) as commencing in 560. Conversely, it is argued that Theophanes cannot have taken this entry from Malalas but from a different

⁵⁷ M. Whitby, "Justinian's Bridge over the Sangarius and the Date of Procopius *De Aedificiis*," *JHS* 85 (1985) 129–148, at 141–147; Evans, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 305–306.

⁵⁸ Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 107–113; G. Greatrex, "Procopius and Agathias on the Defences of the Thracian Chersonese," in C. Mango and G. Dagron (eds.), *Constantinople and its Hinterland* (Aldershot 1995) 127–129.

⁵⁹ Evans, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 303 with n.8.

document and that his chronology cannot be relied on here. Further, the bridge could not have been completed by 562 if building commenced only in 559.⁶⁰ For both dates there are other subsidiary arguments. Procopius' statement in the *Buildings* that officials convicted of conspiring to murder Justinian still enjoy the privileges of high office (1.1.16) is taken to indicate 554 as a date of composition by assuming that this is a reference to the conspiracy of 548 involving Artabanes and others. Since Artabanes' last known office was in 554, a date of 560 is considered too late for such a statement to be true whereas in 554 it still was true.⁶¹

A more convincing proposition, first advanced by Greatrex, is that Procopius' description of the reconstructed Chersonese "long wall" (*Buildings* 4.10.1–17) must predate 559 because it includes an account of how an unspecified enemy had been able to overrun the old wall only "recently" (9 ἔναγχος). That is to say, this can only refer to the Hun invasion of 540 which was more "recent" in 554 than in 560. Yet again, doubt obtrudes. It could refer instead to the invasion of 550 (*Wars* 7.40.31–45). In any event, since the wall proved effective against the Huns in 559 Procopius would surely have mentioned the fact if he were writing later.⁶² Then there is the Slavs' destruction of

⁶⁰ Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 110–112; 27 (2003) 49–50.

⁶¹ Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 110; 27 (2003) 51. On closer inspection, this particular argument is not totally convincing. The statement comes at the end of the preface to the *Buildings*, at a point where Procopius is comparing Justinian to the exemplary Cyrus, as recounted in Xenophon's *Cyropaideia*. In extolling the superiority of Justinian's personal qualities Procopius resorts to the Homeric "as gentle as a father" (*Od.* 2.47, 15.152), citing the emperor's clemency in pardoning the conspirators. Quite apart from its summary quality it cannot be asserted incontrovertibly that Artabanes, for example, was not still in some office or other in 560; nor can we be certain who the other conspirators were. Some of those who held office in 560/1 could well have been part of the conspiracy in 548. Further, the very inclusion of a failed conspiracy in an encomiastic work such as the *Buildings* could well signify that an appropriate lapse of time had only been reached by 560; cf. Evans, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 306 n.12, Signes Codoñer, *JÖBG* 53 (2003) 62–65.

⁶² Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 108–109; 27 (2003) 51; in *Constantinople* 126–127.

Topirus in 549 (*Buildings* 4.11.14) for which the reconstruction could be described as “not much before” (14 οὐ πολλῶ ἔμπροσθεν, cf. *Wars* 7.38.9–19). Unfortunately, there is no way of accurately dating Justinian’s rebuilding of the church of St John the Baptist at the Hebdomon which Procopius also describes as “recent” (*Buildings* 1.8.15 ἔναγχος), nor the rebuilding of the aqueduct and palace at Heracleia which had until recently (ἔναγχος) been suffering from water shortages because of the deterioration of the city’s aqueduct over time (4.9.14–16), nor to what year should be ascribed the Hun destruction of Potidaea which occurred “not long ago” (4.3.22 οὐ πολλῶ πρότερον) at the time of writing. Certainly, it could well be the invasion in 550/1 (*Wars* 7.40.36–45) but it could also be that in 559. The 559 invasion may also be the explanation for the need to restore the Thracian Long Wall and the circuit wall of Selymbria (*Buildings* 4.9.7–13) which may be ascribed to Justinian’s personal supervision, as is well documented.⁶³ On balance, all these instances imply a 554 date for the *Buildings*.

Irrespective of the exact date of the *Buildings*, it continues to be assumed that on any reckoning the *Secret History* must predate the *Buildings*. The principal reason for this assumption is the statement in the *Secret History* which refers to the flooding of Edessa in 525 as something Procopius will treat further in a forthcoming work.⁶⁴ His account of the flood at Edessa in the *Buildings* (1.7.2–8) is taken to be the fulfillment of this promise. Hence, it is considered a clinching argument. But is it? What Procopius actually says in the *Secret History* is that “the Scirtus river, by overflowing, Edessa, became the author of countless calamities to the people of that region, as will be written by me in a following book” (ὡς μοι ἐν τοῖς ὀπισθεν λόγοις γεγράμμεται,

⁶³ Whitby, *JHS* 85 (1985) 145–146; Evans, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 303–304. Procopius does not say how these walls came to be damaged, but it could have been because of the earthquake of December 557, which is known to have wreaked destruction at the Long Wall and Selymbria. This may be an indication that both works were actually closer together in time, that is to say, that the *Secret History* was written closer to 560 than 550. An uncomfortable point, acknowledged by Evans (311).

⁶⁴ *Buildings* 18.38, with J. Haury, “Zu Prokops Geheimsgeschichte,” *BZ* 34 (1934) 11; Evans, *CP* 64 (1969) 30 with n.8, dissenting.

transl. Dewing). Yet, this passage is seriously infected with what Evans labeled a “troublesome cross-reference.”⁶⁵ The manuscripts of the *Secret History* read ἔμπροσθεν (previous), not ὀπίσθεν (a conjecture introduced by Haury, who believed that the *Secret History* was written before the *Buildings*), thereby reversing the connection between the two works, and making the reference a backward-looking comment, rather than a forward-looking one, from the author of the *Secret History*. That in turn necessitates the easier emendation of γεγράψεται to γέγραπται and means that Procopius is referring back to a previous account of the flood in the *Wars*. No such account is extant but, as Haury himself observed, there is a lacuna in the manuscripts at just that point.⁶⁶ On balance, it is preferable to stick with the manuscripts' ἔμπροσθεν because it is a perfectly intelligible reading and does not require emendation.⁶⁷ This means that even if the *Buildings* is dated to 554 there is no reason why the *Secret History* could not in fact post-date the *Buildings* after all.

Reassembling these connections, it appears there are grounds for arguing that *Wars* 8 was written fairly quickly around 553 to bring the story up to date following the popularity of *Wars* 1–7 which appeared in 551. Next came the *Buildings* in 554, while the *Secret History* reached its final form around five years later in 558/9 even though it was not put into circulation at that point. Both the *Secret History* and the *Buildings* are complex but well-structured works which will have taken some time to plan and prepare. By 558/9 Procopius will have been ageing.⁶⁸ His original employer and hero Belisarius was in retirement and remained under a cloud although he was brought back in 559 to defend the city against a raid by the Kotrigur Huns. The

⁶⁵ Evans, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 310.

⁶⁶ Haury, *Procopiana* 18; *BZ* 34 (1934) 10–11.

⁶⁷ As argued by Whitby, *JHS* 85 (1985) 144, who also discounts another conjectured cross-reference (*Secret History* 13.30 ~ *Buildings* 1.7.7–10), which was accepted by Greatrex, *BMGS* 18 (1994) 105 n.10, but rejected by Evans, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 311.

⁶⁸ That is, he had not already died in 553 or so, as argued by J. Howard-Johnston, “The Education and Expertise of Procopius,” *AntTard* 8 (2000) 19–30, at 21, but rejected by Greatrex, *BMGS* 27 (2003) 46, and Signes Codoñer, *JÖBG* 53 (2003) 53–58.

Goths had now been defeated and Italy had reverted to full Roman authority upon the reestablishment of direct control in 554. The protracted *Wars* on the Persian front and in Lazica had now reached a point of truce. The *Secret History* is designed to act as a counter to the image of events presented in the *Wars*. It arguably reflects better the prevailing political environment of the later 550s than the uncertain period of 550/1.

6. Conclusion

This contribution to resolving the date of Procopius' *Secret History* has aimed to build on the recent offerings of Scott, Greatrex, Evans, and Signes Codoñer by looking behind them to the original, and largely unquestioned, views of Haury on which they depend. Too much weight has been placed on the proposition that Procopius' repeated reckoning of 32 years for Justinian at the time of composition can only be counted from 518. By probing the language of Procopius and highlighting the way he distinguishes between the reigns of Justin and Justinian it has become clear that a date of 550/1 for the *Secret History* involves considerable uncertainty. The arguments that no event in the *Secret History* is datable after 550, and that the work necessarily pre-dates *Wars* 8, are not definitive. Nor can it be contended that the *Buildings* must post-date the *Secret History*, because the crucial cross-reference is based on a questionable emendation to the text of the *Secret History*. Above all, a fresh case can be made for counting the 32 completed years of Justinian from April 527, which points to a date of composition between 1 April 558 and 31 March 559. We can only confirm the wisdom in the observation of Evans,⁶⁹ arising from long and close familiarity with both the texts and the issues, that there are more "conjectures and suppositions" involved in the process of dating Procopius' *Secret History* than has usually been conceded.

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⁶⁹ *GRBS* 37 (1996) 313.