

## RESEARCH ON PROCOPIUS OF CAESAREA IN THE SCANDINAVIAN LANGUAGES

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### **From the Heruli to the Skrithifinns: Procopius as a Prism for ethnic identity in Scandinavia**

Procopius has traditionally been of interest to Scandinavians above all for his remarks (*Wars* 6.14–15) on the tribe of the Heruli (or Eruli) that moved into the region of *Thoulē*, identified with Scandinavia, and his descriptions of the various nations, the ‘wondrous’ (θαυμάσιον) midnight sun and the religious habits there.<sup>1</sup> This information was systematically exploited within a nationalistic framework, for example by Ericus Olai in his history of the ‘Gothic kingdom’, *Chronica regni Gothorum*, written towards the end of the fifteenth century. As part of a gradually emerging ancient Nordic historiography going back to Biblical times, the Gothic theme was to reach its peak in writings such as Olaus Magnus’ *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (1555) and in Rudbeck’s *Atlantica* (printed between 1677 and 1702). This version of the history of the Goths is a blend of Biblical mythology (the idea that Noah’s grandson Magog migrated to Scandinavia) and various late antique sources among which Procopius is one.<sup>2</sup> Even more

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the ancient material concerning the Eruli, see Ellegård (1987).

<sup>2</sup> For these early developments of Gothic ideology, see the overview in Lindroth (1975), 164–72. This was part of a larger European movement, later represented also by works such as Hugo Grotius’ *Prolegomena to Historia Gotthorum*, which was published in 1655. On the

important was Jordanes' *Getica* from about the same period (c. 550).

Among later, scholarly Scandinavian studies devoted explicitly to Procopius mention may be made of two Danish works. The first is G. Schønning's 'Afhandling angaaende de Gamles Kundskab om vort Norden efter Ptolemæi Tider' [Thesis on the Ancients' knowledge about our North after the time of Ptolemy], the second, posthumous, part of which was 'Angaaende hvad kundskab man har havt om vort Norden i Procopii Tider, i Følge af dennes Beretninger' [Concerning what knowledge there was about our North in the time of Procopius, according to his accounts, 1783].<sup>3</sup> The second is Erich Christian Werlauff's 'Forsøg på at oplyse og forklare Prokops efterretninger om de nordiske lande' [An attempt to illuminate and explain Procopius' reports on the Nordic countries, 1840].<sup>4</sup> This study is mentioned in Krumbacher (1897, p. 235) and included in the bibliography of Haury's edition of Procopius (though not, it seems, referred to in the actual text of the introduction), but can hardly be said to be of any value for modern research on Procopius.<sup>5</sup>

Though gradually filled out and systematised over the centuries, the development of Gothic themes in Scandinavian antiquarian patriotism can be traced back to

Neo-Latin evidence for the development of Gothicistic ideology primarily between the 16th and the 18th century, see Helander (2004) 398–410.

<sup>3</sup> Schønning (1783).

<sup>4</sup> Werlauff (1840).

<sup>5</sup> It is not, for example, mentioned in Rydén's overview (1993), 'Byzantine Philology in Scandinavia and Finland', but it may fall slightly outside Rydén's chronological frame. He does, however, mention J. L. Heiberg's (1854–1928) popular writings in Danish on e.g. Procopius (Rydén (1993) 484). Another, chronologically more narrow, presentation of Byzantine studies in Scandinavia (though, like Rydén, focusing on Scandinavian scholars and research environments, not on the Scandinavian languages *per se*) is Rudberg (1981). Bach (1942–44) and Fledelius (1971) are surveys for a Danish audience of Byzantine studies in general; similarly Callmér (1952), outlining 'Some traits in the history of Byzantine studies' for a Swedish audience.

the thirteenth century, i.e., more or less simultaneously with similar developments in Spain (e.g. Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's *Historia Gothica* from 1243), whose claims to the Gothic heritage were disputed in the fifteenth century by authors such as the Swede Nicolaus Ragvaldi. In this movement, there is not much direct involvement with the text of Procopius on its own terms. Instead, the development of a broad, eclectically composed, image of a Gothic past forms the backdrop against which later discussions of more specific passages in Procopius have taken place. Although the 'Gothorum et Vandalorum' part of the monarchical title was dropped in both Denmark and Sweden in the 1970's, the 'Gothic connection' evokes interest even today, especially in popular archaeology.<sup>6</sup> Among the popular but still fairly sensible contributions from established publishing houses, we thus find, for example, the archaeologist and curator Kjell Lundholm's *Platons Athen och mörkrets hav. Essäer om Medelhavet och Nordkalotten* [Plato's Athens and the sea of darkness: Essays on the Mediterranean Sea and the Cap of the North, 1999]—a collection of essays containing, i.a., 'Pytheas, Ptolemeios och Prokopios samt landet vid Oceanens rand' [Pytheas, Ptolemy and Procopius and the land by the Ocean's brim].<sup>7</sup> Other examples are the many popular works by archaeologist Mats G. Larsson, e.g., *Göternas riken. Upptäcktsfärder till Sveriges enande* [The kingdoms of the Goths: Exploratory journeys to the unification of Sweden, 2002], which contains remarks on the midnight sun, on the Heruli etc.<sup>8</sup>

If Procopius was earlier mined for information in the service of Gothic ideology and nationalist ethnography, today's concerns are different. The excursus on the Skriithifini (Σκριθίφινοι) in 6.15.16–23 has for example been used to claim the primacy of marginalised groups like the Sami.

<sup>6</sup> Danish: 'de Venders og Goters konge'; Swedish: 'Götis och Vendes konung'.

<sup>7</sup> Lundholm (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Larsson (2002).

This issue is addressed by archaeology professor and ethnographer Stig Welinder in *Jämtarna och samerna kom först* [The Jamts and the Samis were First, 2008], who discusses the evidence from Tacitus, Jordanes, Procopius, Paulus Diaconus etc., but—in spite of the title—ends up in a problematisation of the concept of ethnicity, questioning its validity in Swedish archaeological research at least up until the period of Christianization.<sup>9</sup>

On the same note, finally, and with more immediate relevance for Procopius, a recent but unpublished Danish Master thesis (‘speciale’) in history investigates the very concepts of ethnicity and identity in Procopius: Jakob Theil Nielsen, ‘Prokops Goterkrig. En undersøgelse af etnicitet og identitet i det sjette århundrede samt disses begrebers betydning hos Prokop’ [Procopius’ Gothic Wars: an investigation of ethnicity and identity in the sixth century and the meaning of these concepts in Procopius, 2012].<sup>10</sup>

As is clear from the above, in most Scandinavian research Procopius is referred to not because of an interest in Procopius and his works as such, but only as a consequence of his value as a source for early Nordic history in specific passages of the *Wars*. In this respect the interest in Procopius parallels the interest in, for example, the Varangians and Viking travellers to Constantinople. It is thus within the fields of ancient Scandinavian history and archaeology (for which there is a sufficient and interested Scandinavian-reading audience) that we find discussions concerning Procopius in Scandinavian; but even in these cases the contributions are generally popular in character. Subjects pertaining to Greek and Byzantine philology and literary or cultural history do not have a sufficient audience for original research in the Scandinavian languages, but are directed immediately towards the larger international community – in Latin, German, English and French.

<sup>9</sup> Welinder (2008).

<sup>10</sup> Nielsen (2012).

### Translations, Essays and Overviews

Even if there is no vibrant research on Procopius in Scandinavian, a few works may be mentioned, especially the contributions by Sture Linnér in the 1990's and early 2000-s. Among other works by Byzantine authors and especially historians Linnér translated Procopius' *Wars* 3–4 under the title *Vandalkrigen* [*The Vandal Wars*, 2000] as well as *Hemlig historia* [*Secret History*, 2000] into Swedish. The translations contain introductions to Procopius and his works together with brief surveys of the state of international research.

Linnér has also published some popular introductory material on Procopius in other places. In an essay in the collection *Hellenika* (1986) entitled 'Sanning och sken i Prokopios skrifter' [Truth and appearances in the writings of Procopius] Linnér presents Averil Cameron's *Procopius and the Sixth Century*. This is followed by a translated extract from the *Secret History* (8.22–33 and 10.15–23).<sup>11</sup> Further contributions by Linnér include 'Om Prokopios *Hemlig historia*' [On Procopius' *Secret History*, in the journal *Medusa*, 2001] and 'Prokopios' in the collection, *Hellenskt och romerskt* [Hellenistic and Roman, 1998], also with translated passages.<sup>12</sup> Linnér's essays are examples of pieces written by trained Greek and Byzantine philologists, but directed toward a more general audience. Sometimes they contain references, sometimes not. Such essays concerning Procopius can be found for example also in the Swedish-speaking Finn professor Henrik Zilliacus' book *Kleios väktare* [*Kleio's Guardians*, 1991], which presents some classical historians but ends with an 'Epilog vid Bosporen' [Epilogue by the Bosphorus] on Procopius.<sup>13</sup> Such essays are often reliable accounts or summaries, but do not contain actual new research.

As for general chronological surveys, a few works may be mentioned: Alf Henrikson, *Byzantinsk Historia* [Byzantine

<sup>11</sup> Linnér (1986), 74–85.

<sup>12</sup> Linnér (1998) 109–36.

<sup>13</sup> Zilliacus (1991).

history, 1971), Linnér, *Bysantinsk kulturhistoria* [Byzantine cultural history, 1994] and Jan Olof Rosenqvist, *Bysantinsk litteraturhistoria* [Byzantine literary history, 2003] with the companion volume *Bysantinsk antologi* [Byzantine anthology, 2005] including brief translated selections from the *Buidlings* (1.1.20–42 on Hagia Sophia) and the *Wars* (6.19–20).<sup>14</sup> Rosenqvist's literary history was translated into German in 2006.<sup>15</sup> These works contain information on Procopius, but again in the form of summaries. The magnificent anthology *Arven fra Byzans* [The Byzantine heritage, 2010] is a solid, thematically arranged work with contributions from a number of Danish scholars, and contains some references to Procopius as well.<sup>16</sup>

Linnér has also written a brief survey of 'Bysans i svensk litteratur' [Byzantium in Swedish Literature], where he mentions that Marmontel, whose *Bélisaire* was translated into Swedish early on, was an influential author in Sweden and that the Swedish author Göran Tunström's *Tjuven* [The Thief, 1986] contains some slightly absurdist references to Procopius. However, most Swedish authors who have been inspired by Byzantine culture have felt this influence on a rather general level.<sup>17</sup> A recent example of a fictional work based on Procopius' description of Theodora is the Danish author Dorrit Willumsen's *Klædt i purpur* [Dressed in Purple, 1990].

<sup>14</sup> Henrikson (1971) (described in Rudberg (1981) 22 as '[u]n livre de vulgarisation de bonne qualité et bien amusant'); Linnér (1994a); Rosenqvist (2003), (2005).

<sup>15</sup> Rosenqvist (2006).

<sup>16</sup> Hjort (2010). Procopius is referred to in connection with the production of silk, and references to his description of Hagia Sophia and other churches can be found in the chapters on Byzantine art and architecture. Similar references to Procopius in the context of art history and the influence of Byzantine art in medieval Scandinavia can be found in E. Piltz, *Det levande Bysans* [The Living (or: Vivid) Byzantium] (Piltz, (1997)).

<sup>17</sup> Linnér (1994b), with an English summary, 99–100; the essay is reprinted in Linnér (1998) 137–95. For the reception of Byzantium in 20th-century Swedish literature, see especially the studies by Bodin (2002), (2011), and (2013).

In conclusion it is probably fair to say that a philologist or ancient historian doing research on Procopius without knowledge of the Scandinavian languages does not miss very much—the relevant works of this kind by Scandinavian authors are written in other languages than their mother-tongue, usually English and German. For anyone with a specific interest in the history of the reception of Procopius in the Nordic countries in the early modern and modern periods the matter is a naturally a different one.

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