

PROCOPIUS IN SPAIN

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Introduction

Late Antique and Byzantine Studies are not officially represented in any Spanish University. Interest in the Eastern Roman Empire during the reign of Justinian is mostly restricted to Romanists and art historians, whereas historians of Late Antiquity usually concentrate on developments in the western half of the Empire and Latin sources. Greek philologists in Spain rarely go beyond the fourth and fifth century A.D., and the standard history of Greek literature written in Spanish concludes its survey of Greek historiography with Zosimus.¹ The inclusion of Christian authors in classical studies, particularly among Greek philologists, still remains problematic and contested,² and the Byzantine authors who are occasionally examined by classicists are chiefly philologists such as Photius (for his *Library*) or Eustathius of Thessalonica (for his commentaries on Homer).³

¹ López Férez (1988) 1098–1101.

² See Torres Guerra (2014).

³ Signes Codoñer (2015) explores the relations between classical philology and Byzantine studies in Spain.

Spain in Procopius' Works

This situation clearly does not favour research on the work of Procopius in Spain and may be viewed as a kind of late reprisal on the part of Byzantine *Spania* for being excluded from the detailed narrative of the Justinianic 'Reconquista' written by Procopius in his *Wars*. As is well-known, the sending of a small contingent of Byzantine troops to support Athanagild in 552 is not mentioned by Procopius in the last book of his *Wars*, the eighth, which covers the events in the whole Mediterranean from 550 to 552/3.⁴ Moreover, the fact that Procopius mentions Liberius, the supposed commander of the imperial troops in Spain, as being in Sicily in 551 and in Constantinople in 553, but not as the leader of the campaign in Baetica, has led some scholars to doubt that the general was actually sent to the Iberian peninsula to back the rebel Athanagild.⁵

Be that as it may, the only references of Procopius to the presence of Byzantines in the territories around the Iberian peninsula are a short mention in *Wars* 4.5.1–9 of the conquest of Septem (Ceuta) and the Balearics by Justinian in 553 following the defeat of the Vandals and a reference in *Buildings* 6.7.14–16 to the construction in Septem of a church consecrated to the *Theotokos* and a *φρούριον*. Obviously, these two important notices constitute a starting-point for any discussion of the history of Byzantine *Spania*, given the scarcity of literary sources about the presence of Byzantine troops or the administration in southern Spain and the Balearic islands.⁶ Therefore, real progress in the research of Byzantine Spain, from the Justinianic conquest to the final recovery of the territory by the Visigoths in 626, is made

⁴ Concerning the date of publication of this last book of the *Wars* see Greatrex (2014) 97.

⁵ Vallejo Girvés (2012) 143–7.

⁶ Vallejo Girvés (1993) 349–72 and Vallejo Girvés (2012) 100–2 and 440–3. For the beginning of Byzantine occupation of the Balearics see Vallejo Girvés (2005). Vallejo Girvés is also preparing a new contribution on this topic for a monograph on the Balearics coordinated by M.A. Cau (ed.) (in press), *Las islas Baleares durante la Antigüedad tardía (siglos III–X)*, (Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité Tardive) Turnhout.

only by archaeologists, who try to produce a coherent view of the Byzantine occupation of the territory based on material evidence gathered both at the main coastal settlements of *Malaca* and *Carthago Spartaria* and at the inland fortresses at the supposed *limes* with Visigothic territory.⁷ Of special relevance for the archaeologists is the information provided by Procopius on the basilica and fortification of *Septem*, which are now supposed to have been situated under the modern cathedral and the caliphal fortress of the Umayyads respectively.⁸

Translations of Procopius

However, despite the limited interest of Procopius as a source for the history of Byzantine Spain, there have been some studies on Procopius conducted in Spain, both general and on particular issues, which are perhaps worth mentioning here. First of all, the first Spanish translation of the *Secret History* and the complete series of the *Wars* (in four volumes) was published between 2000 and 2007 in the prestigious collection *Biblioteca Clásica Gredos*, which has published since 1977 all the major Classics of Latin and Greek literature of Antiquity.⁹ The Procopian volumes were important in many senses, for it was the first time that a Greek author of the Justinianic age was published in the collection (Agathias would follow¹⁰), one in which Christian authors were reluctantly published, provided that they did not deal with religious matters. Since the publication of

⁷ A detailed overview in Vizcaíno Sánchez (2009).

⁸ See Bernal Casasola–Pérez Rivera (2000), Bernal Casasola (2003) and Villada Paredes (2009) 186–90. For a summary of the debate see *Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Bizantinística* 4 (2010) 3–6, available at <http://bizantinistica.blogspot.com.es/p/boletin.html>. For the buildings of Justinian in *Septem* as a part of his intended ‘*renovatio imperii*’ see Vallejo Girvés (1995). See also Vallejo Girvés (2002a) for the image of the columns of Hercules in the Byzantine literature, including Procopius.

⁹ Signes Codoñer (2000), Flores Rubio (2000), García Romero (2000), Flores Rubio (2007) and García Romero (2007).

¹⁰ Ortega Villaro (2008).

these volumes, Spanish historians have been able to rely for the first time on a trustworthy annotated version in Spanish of one of the most important historians of Late Antiquity, a circumstance that triggered research on the field with the beginning of the new century. Unfortunately, the *Biblioteca Clásica Gredos* stopped publishing new volumes before a translation of the Procopian work *On Buildings* was ever commissioned. A translation appeared in 2003 in a series of the University of Murcia, accompanied by a few informative notes,¹¹ but it is to be used with some caution. It remains therefore a desideratum to produce a new Spanish translation of the text which takes into account the complex relation between the short and long versions of the *On Buildings*, as revealed recently by Federico Montinaro.¹²

A long and detailed general introduction to Procopius was written by myself in the volume of the *Secret History* of the Gredos series.¹³ It not only provided the Spanish reader with an updated *status quaestionis* until the year 2000, but also contained new insights, especially about the last years of Procopius and the chronology of his works, with special attention to the dating of the *Secret History*. Thus, new arguments for the year 550 were advanced. The question of the credibility of Procopius and his use of sources (particularly laws) was also addressed. I developed some of these arguments in later publications in German,¹⁴ which found some echo mostly outside Spain.¹⁵ I also wrote an

¹¹ Periago Lorente (2003). The text *On the Buildings* has also been used by Egea (2003) in his dossier of sources on the construction of Hagia Sophia.

¹² Montinaro (2012) and (2015).

¹³ Signes Codoñer (2000) 7–142.

¹⁴ Signes Codoñer (2003b), (2003c) and (2005).

¹⁵ See Croke (2005) against the arguments advanced in Signes Codoñer (2003b) and arguing for a dating of the *Secret History* in 558–9. Kaldellis (2009) convincingly rebutted Croke (2005) with arguments that partly overlap with mine, but not taking my research into account. For a recent *status quaestionis* see Greatrex (2014). See also J Signes Codoñer, ‘One History... in several installments: Dating and Genre in Procopius’ Works’, forthcoming in *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici* 55 (2018).

overview in Spanish about genres in historical writing in Late Antiquity where I compared the classicising works of Procopius with other works by contemporary authors that even wrote in languages other than Greek but shared a common literary background.¹⁶

Literary Discussions

There has not been much philological research on Procopius since the appearance of my general introduction to his work, but many Spanish publications, even before the publication of the Spanish translation, took the works of Procopius into account when dealing with particular historical questions. Margarita Vallejo, for instance, used Procopius (along with Corippus) as a source for discussing the survival of pagan practices in North Africa,¹⁷ or for documenting the exchanges between Byzantines and Visigoths during the reign of the Ostrogoth Theudis, for whom *Wars* 5.12.50–13.13 is the main source.¹⁸ Javier Arce used Procopius as a key source for explaining the Visigothic migration to Spain after 531.¹⁹ José Soto Chica made extensive use of the *Persian wars* of Procopius in his military, economic and political history of the conflict between Byzantines and Sassanids at the eastern frontier between 565 and 642.²⁰ In Argentina Rubén Barreiro based on Procopius for describing the tactics of the Byzantine campaign against the Vandal Kingdom in 532–533.²¹ Rosalía Rodríguez López used the *Buildings* as a source in her overview of the urbanism at the time of Justinian.²² However, studies on Justinianic legislation in Spain usually

¹⁶ Signes Codoñer (2003a).

¹⁷ Vallejo Girvés (1994). See also Vallejo Girvés (1997).

¹⁸ Vallejo Girvés (2002b) 81–9.

¹⁹ Arce (2013), esp. 38–9.

²⁰ Soto Chica (2012) and (2015a). See also Soto Chica (2015b).

²¹ Barreiro (2011).

²² Rodríguez López (2012).

make limited use of Procopius as source;²³ the same applies to art historians.

Procopius' Theodora: a Special Case

The portrait drawn by Procopius of Empress Theodora has always inspired the imagination of modern scholars and represents a special case. Idealised or scandalous portraits of the empress are regularly published and are more or less predictable in their approach,²⁴ although some of them are better documented.²⁵ The popularity of Theodora also explains why many of the biographies of Theodora written in other languages have been translated into Spanish.²⁶ There have also been occasional comparisons of her life with other modern actress who rose to prominence in our age, and most particularly with Eva Duarte (Evita Perón, 1919–1952), one of the modern myths of Argentinian political history.²⁷

Conclusion

On balance, we can conclude that Procopius continues to be an outsider in the mainstream of Late Antique historiography in Spain and this despite the extant Spanish translation of all his works. This has to do, as we mentioned in the Introduction, both with the focus on peninsular history of modern Spanish historians (for whom Procopius

²³ González Fernández (1997).

²⁴ See for instance the essay of the Argentinian González Cremona (1993) or the short presentation of Mayor Ferrándiz (2010).

²⁵ Lasala Navarro (2013) considers, basing on Procopius and other sources, the role played by the empress in the official correspondence, justice, ceremonial and financial resources.

²⁶ Furstenberg (1959), Lamb (1959), Fèvre (1991), Bradshaw (1996), Herrin (2002), Cesaretti (2008). As a curiosity we can mention the Spanish translation of the Portuguese biography of Riveyro (1791).

²⁷ For a comparison of both lives see, among others, Fischer-Pap (1982) and Foss (2001).

is not especially relevant) and with the prevalence among Classical philologists of a conservative approach to the Greek literature of Antiquity, from which late historians such as Procopius are usually excluded.

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