

PROCOPIUS IN TURKEY

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Procopius of Caesarea is one of the most important literary sources for the early Byzantine and late antique history of Turkey. In his *Buildings*, in the *Secret History*, and in the *Wars* there are plenty of details about the religious, archaeological, ethnographical, and cultural history of Byzantine Anatolia. One can learn about the ethnographic and cultural history of the eastern Black Sea, or the fate of the Montanists, ancient Phrygian heretical Christians, or some details about the Sangarius bridge or the construction of Dara as a border town. However, the importance of Procopius is not as recognised by Turkish historiography of that period as it deserves.

Translations and Direct Studies

Neither Turkish classical philology nor historiography has produced a full set of the works of Procopius in translation. Only his *Secret History* has been twice translated into the Turkish language many years ago,¹ mostly because of its graphic stories attracting the public interest.² Apart from this translation, the first book of the *Buildings* has been rendered into Turkish, while a commentary has also been devoted to it. The main reason behind the interest in the

¹ Duru (2017), frequently reprinted; the *Secret History* was also published under a different title: Calap (2002).

² The representations of Theodora by Procopius in his *Secret History* are extensively exploited in books designed for a popular audience: see for example Dikici (2009) and (2016).

Buildings was no doubt the history of the construction programme of Justinian in Constantinople.³

No historical work on Procopius has been published yet. A painstaking search has revealed only two M.A. theses and a short paper in a popular history magazine, which was also reproduced as a chapter in another book. In her M.A. thesis, Çiğdem Menzilioğlu, a student of classical philology, deals with the linguistic relationship between Greek and Latin in Procopius, taking the *Buildings* as a case study.⁴ Her primary concern is the etymology of the Latin art terms in the Greek prose of Procopius. However, this is a very limited work: not only is it concerned with only about 90 words, but it also does not develop a deep literary comparative approach. In another M.A. thesis, Tolga Ersoy, a student of medieval history, produced a study on Procopius that considers the representations of the Persians in the *Wars*.⁵ Ersoy mainly deals with the Procopian Sasanids in the context of imperial rituals, the patrimonial status of official positions, espionage activities, and religious, burial, and military rituals in a rather respectful manner. He also exploits Procopius as a quarry of information for the portraits of Iranian figures like Cyrus, Khusro, Kavadh, and Peroz. Tolga Ersoy also devotes attention to the Gothic leaders in Procopius like Theodahad and Theodoric. Ersoy rightly places Procopius in the tradition of classical historiography and proposes that he portrays the Persians in a positive light because he used the Persians as a mirror for his own political and intellectual milieu.⁶ A. Mican Zehiroglu, author of several regional historical studies of the Black Sea, deals with extensive quotations from Procopius' *Buildings* (3.6.8–26; 3.7.1–4) on Trapezus (modern Trabzon)

³ Özbayoğlu (1994). For the commentary see Düzgüner (2004).

⁴ Menzilioğlu (1994).

⁵ Ersoy (2009).

⁶ Cf. Kaldellis (2013) ch. 1, and Greatrex (2018) for this approach.

and attempts to identify several modern toponyms with ancient ones.⁷

The Use of Procopius as a Source

An M.A. thesis on the foreign policy of Justinian is based largely on materials drawn from Procopius and never deals with a critical reading of the source material.⁸ Although the lack of any serious philological work on Procopius is a problem, the extensive use of his works is also apparent on any matter that Procopius covered. This fact is not only very obvious in political historical studies, but is also very visible in social, cultural, and regional historical studies. Accounts of earthquakes and diseases in Turkey and several archaeological surveys make use of the works of Procopius.⁹ Several amateur studies dealing with the early medieval political history of Anatolia quarry information from Procopius.¹⁰ Byzantine archaeological artefacts in Istanbul and all over the Anatolian peninsula are naturally studied using Procopius' works to varying degrees.¹¹ Hence another category in which Procopius is widely used is in secondary materials that deal with the history of Hagia Sophia, as it is still standing intact at the centre of the historic peninsula and remains the most important tourist attraction there. Also for the history of other important Byzantine buildings Procopius is still an important reference, as, for example, the magnificent huge bridge complex over the river San-

⁷ Zehiroğlu (2000). The paper is reprinted in his short monograph, *Antikçağlarda Doğu Karadeniz (The Black Sea in Antiquity)*.

⁸ Akkaya (2016). For a similar and weaker work see Gülem (2015).

⁹ Akpınar (2012); Aydingün, (2009); Aydingün (2005); Ozansoy (1996); Bakır (2005); E-N. Beksaç (2009).

¹⁰ Kütük (2014); Konuk (2013).

¹¹ Kuban (2016); Parla (2005); Ramazanoğlu (2009); Serin (2013); Yavuz (2005).

garius,¹² just as for any narrative or academic paper about Hagia Sophia.¹³

Procopius is an important source for the languages and ethnic composition of early medieval Anatolia and he deservedly receives attention in the papers related to those topics. He is not only a source for the *Vubih* language, spoken by a lost Caucasian tribe, but he is also a source on the tribal history of the northern Black Sea tribes, among which the medieval Turkic tribes were an important component.¹⁴ Nor is Procopius neglected in the two studies dealing with Anatolian place names.¹⁵ For historical studies dealing with commercial relationships in the early medieval Byzantine world, Procopius naturally features prominently as an important quarry of information, as on, for example, the silk road, the Rhodian sea law in *Digest* 14.2, confiscation, the economic articles of treaties, and the slave trade.¹⁶ Procopius is discussed in late antique urban historical studies too.¹⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion, the importance of the works of Procopius for the history and archaeology of Byzantine Turkey is undeniable, even if his works have been sorely neglected. The absence of any serious philological study of the works of Procopius in Turkish scholarship has led to their being taken at face value in historical studies of every sort related to the history of sixth century or the foreign policy of Justinian. Their use as a repository of information clearly

¹² Şahin (2013).

¹³ Diker (2016).

¹⁴ Serdar (2015); Subaşı (2010); Küçük (2013); Karatay (2010); Çeşmeli (2015); Çağatay (2014). For a bare mention of Procopius see Kayalı (2013).

¹⁵ Alican (2012); Kara (2016).

¹⁶ Tezcan (2014), Kurul (2015); Emir (2011). Köse (1991).

¹⁷ Kütük (2015); Ramazanoğlu (2009); Sepetçioğlu (2013); Serdar (2015); Serin (2013); Subaşı (2012); Parla (2005).

shows that although there is a certain awareness about Procopius as an important source for the history of Byzantine Anatolia, there has nevertheless been a lack in Turkey of any examination from the point of view of textual criticism or historical commentary. This can only be explained by the lack and neglect of proper classical studies in the Turkish historiographical tradition, which concentrates chiefly on other historical fields.

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