

## Identifying Dissident Circles in Sixth-Century Byzantium: The Friendship of Prokopios and Ioannes Lydos

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Prokopios' *Wars*, released to the public in 551, was an instant success. When Prokopios published a supplement two years later he noted that his work had appeared in every part of the Roman empire.<sup>1</sup> The popularity of the work was in every way to be expected. Thoughtful men who had experienced the eventful reign of Justinian would respond with enthusiasm to a book as superb as the *Wars*. After all, Prokopios, who had traveled to Africa, Italy, and the east with Belisarios, had witnessed many of the events he described and had access to the court and contacts throughout the known world. His prose was concise and elegant and always reflected the humanity and cultural discretion of what he himself called a "liberal education," ἐλευθέριοι λόγοι καὶ παιδεία (e.g., in 1.24.12). It was inevitable that he would be admired and imitated by his successors, such as Agathias, Menandros, Evagrius, and the last historian of antiquity, Theophylaktos.<sup>2</sup> Later Byzantine accounts of the sixth century, e.g., the chronicle of Theophanes, consisted in large part of excerpts from the *Wars*. It is no accident that modern surveys still rely heavily on that work.

Modern historians, however, seem to possess an advantage over Prokopios' contemporaries and direct successors in the form of the *Secret History*, a heated invective against Justinian and perhaps the most infamous text from antiquity. This

contains all the sordid truth about the regime that Prokopios could not safely include in a public work. Had Justinian died sooner Prokopios may have integrated the material that became the *Secret History* into the narrative of the *Wars*, producing a less neutral-sounding history.<sup>3</sup> By 551 it would not have been unreasonable for contemporaries to expect that the reign was nearing its end. Yet after a generation on the throne Justinian had survived riots, plagues, wars, and conspiracies, and was showing no sign of giving up or slowing down. The supplement to the *Wars* was therefore produced and circulated in secret. In the preface Prokopios admitted his fear of a “multitude of spies” and a “most cruel death.” He could not even trust his closest relatives (1.2), which flatters the reader.

The *Secret History* was found in the Vatican Library in 1623 and has been at the heart of all discussion of Justinian ever since.<sup>4</sup> But there is little evidence that it was read between its composition and discovery. In later Byzantine times it is first mentioned by the tenth-century lexicon *Souda*, which perceptively describes “the so-called *Anekdotia*” as a mixture of “invective and comedy.” It is not mentioned again until the early fourteenth century, though there is some suspicion that the twelfth-century historian Ioannes Zonaras also had it.<sup>5</sup> The *Secret History* was indeed kept secret.

Obviously someone must have read the work, or at least owned and copied it, between 551 and the tenth century. More specifically, Prokopios must have had some readers in mind when he wrote it, men who he knew were as hostile to the regime as he was himself. It could not have been difficult to find them. Justinian was one of the most hated rulers in history, with bitter enemies in the Church, army, administration, aristocracy, as well as among the provincial population and the philosophers whom he persecuted. It is hard to believe that Prokopios did not give the *Secret History* to close friends, who were under no obligation to inform us of that fact in books of their own. Still, the paucity of later citations is telling. The work did not circulate widely and seems not to have shaped later views. Its influence has been suspected in the ecclesiastical history of Evagrius, an orthodox lawyer of the later sixth century who paints a very negative portrait of Justinian and made extensive use of the *Wars*. Yet his possession of the *Secret History* cannot be established beyond a doubt,<sup>6</sup> though it cannot be ruled out either. Many experienced the ruin of Justinian’s reign and did not need Prokopios to tell them how they had been victimized.

Still, the sixth century has not yielded all of its secrets. In fact, it has benefited very little from the recent surge of interest in late antiquity. Not one of its authors has received multiple studies written from diverse points of view, as have Eusebios, Julian, and Ammianus in the fourth century. There is room for innovation and new discoveries. So much of our understanding of the reign of Justinian depends on the *Secret History* that it is imperative to identify its original audience. Whom did Prokopios write it for? This, in turn, raises questions about the nature of dissident circles in sixth-century Byzantium.

I believe that two men can be linked to the *Secret History* with a fair degree of certainty. They were exact contemporaries of Prokopios and probably known to him personally. The first is the Platonist philosopher Simplikios, who denounced the age of Justinian as an age of tyranny in a commentary on the *Manual* of Epiktetos.<sup>7</sup> Simplikios was a student of Damaskios, the head of the Platonic Academy in Athens when Justinian moved against it in 529. I make this connection in a separate study, where I also argue that Prokopios' view of history was decisively shaped by his reading of Plato and that whole passages of his *Wars* are not factual history but rather an imaginative mimesis of Platonic themes.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore all the more interesting that Prokopios can be linked to the chief Platonic thinker of his time.

The second man is Ioannes Lydos, who moved to Constantinople in 511 from his native Philadelpheia at the age of twenty, studied briefly under the Platonist philosopher Agapios, and ended up working in the praetorian prefecture—in addition to holding a chair in Latin at the University—until he retired in 551-552. Possibly in that year, or shortly afterwards, he published an antiquarian treatise *On the Magistracies of the Roman State*, which traces the history of Roman offices from the era of the kings down to the reign of Justinian. This work is especially concerned with the prefecture, whose decline Lydos lamented and wanted to reverse, but along the way it makes a number of interesting observations about a wide range of contemporary issues.<sup>9</sup>

In general, Lydos is a natural candidate for the intended readership of the *Secret History*. He had the same educational background and ideals as its author, which he too called ἐγρευθέριοι λόγοι (*Mag.* 2.18) and which included philosophy in addition to poetry and rhetoric. Both men were conservative in that they upheld traditional classical culture against the encroaching bureaucratic absolutism of Justin-

ian. In fact, both Lydos' and Prokopios' references to "liberal studies" occur in attacks against the new type of Philistine officials like Ioannes Kappadokes who were promoted by Justinian. Both avoided Christian references as incompatible with their cultural loyalties. Furthermore, Lydos had been asked by Justinian to compose and deliver a panegyric on his reign and then a history of the war against Persia. As he puts it elsewhere, "it was not safe to refuse the requests of an emperor such as he" (*Mag.* 3.28, 3.76). Prokopios also wrote a history of the Persian war (though not at imperial request) and was compelled to produce a panegyric for Justinian in the mid-550s, the *Buildings*. Both men belonged to the same class of mid-level officials who obtained positions based on their secretarial skills.<sup>10</sup> Both had access to the court and quoted extensively from Justinian's own laws. They seem to have known the same high officials, whom they describe in compatible terms. They also had similar views on recent history and criticized the regime in similar, if not identical, ways. Prokopios visited and probably resided in the capital throughout the 540s and early 550s, precisely when Lydos was teaching and writing his treatise *On the Magistracies*. The possibility that they did not know each other can probably be ruled out.<sup>11</sup>

It can be demonstrated within the bounds of plausibility that Lydos knew the *Secret History*. It will be shown below that the two thinkers had similar and often identical views on many topics and Lydos sometimes emphasizes non-obvious details that are also highlighted by Prokopios, even by using the same expressions and vocabulary. The reason that few extended precise verbal parallels can be found is probably due to Lydos' desire to vary the language for originality, but as we will see his views are identical. Also, he often orders the details of his arguments in exactly the same way as Prokopios, which is unlikely to be due to coincidence. When all is said and done it may still be possible that we are dealing with a coincidence, merely two men sharing similar views. But the closer their views—and the more hostile to the regime—the more likely it is that they did share them with one another. Also, these parallels are found in books that have rather different aims, in Prokopios to denounce the harm done to the world by Justinian, in Lydos to explain and decry the decline of the prefecture. This decreases the possibility for coincidence.

We should begin with their view of Justinian himself. Lydos did not intend his readership to be limited to a private group of like-minded individuals and so he had to tread carefully on matters relating to imperial policy. Justinian did not tolerate criticism or dissent. I have argued elsewhere that the praise of Justinian in *On the*

*Magistracies* is purely formal. The work reflects a very hostile view of nearly every aspect of the regime.<sup>12</sup> Even a scholar who has portrayed Lydos as a loyalist concedes that the logic of *On the Magistracies* implies that Lydos “to some degree felt Justinian had acted as a tyrant.”<sup>13</sup> Yet it is evident even from the surface of his work that Lydos, like Prokopios, felt the empire was in decline. His attempts to exculpate Justinian are meager and unconvincing. He severely criticizes his top minister, the prefect Ioannes Kappadokes, and blaming subordinates was an indirect way of blaming their master. To say that the latter was unaware of their misdeeds only makes him look incompetent (cf. *Mag.* 3.69). But Lydos, along with all informed contemporaries, knew that Justinian was fully aware of what his minions were doing. Conventional flattery and weak excuses were required by the rules of the game, as they are under any tyranny.

When studying texts written under intolerant rulers we should be attentive to the subtle links that connect seemingly irrelevant passages, for one of the rhetorical tricks by which criticism could be disguised was to divide its premises among different sections and allow the reader to draw the conclusion for himself. For instance, in *On the Magistracies* 2.28 Lydos praises Justinian for not only emulating Trajan in arms, but also surpassing the piety and moderation of Augustus, the nobility of Titus, and the sagacity of Marcus. It just so happens that in 2.3 Lydos condemns *precisely* Augustus’ piety and moderation as insincere, short-lived, and equal to “blasphemous flattery.” This is no coincidence and should cause us to question the other flattering remarks. For example, Lydos later says that in the days of Constantine emperors *used* to be appointed only if they excelled in both learning and weapons (3.33). The implication is that this is no longer the case. So much then for Justinian emulating Trajan in arms. Lydos also laments the decline in public affairs and refers to the time when emperors used to be clement and magistrates “still” affectionate to subjects (3.18). Is this no longer the case? What then are we to make of the many instances when he calls Justinian clement?

The key accusation that Prokopios levels against Justinian is “innovation,” i.e., disturbing the established order. This more than anything made him a tyrant in the historian’s eyes.<sup>14</sup> Lydos also formally links innovation to tyranny in discussing the emperor Domitian: “he was vainglorious and liked innovations, for it is characteristic of tyrants to overturn anciently established customs.”<sup>15</sup> And just a few pages later he logically implies that Justinian was an innovator when he notes that Justin,

his uncle and predecessor, “lived quietly and devised no innovations, but the one who followed him, his nephew, rushed to bring about everything that served public utility” (2.28). Lydos contrives to avoid saying that Justinian innovated by denying that Justin did so and then contrasting him to Justinian. But the effect is the same, if more polite. And this follows closely upon a definition of tyranny as innovation that uses Domitian as its example. As it happens, the *Secret History* has an extended and rather gruesome comparison between Justinian and Domitian (8.12-21).

Prokopios and Lydos were both preoccupied with tyranny. In the preface of the *Secret History* Prokopios confesses that he hesitated before writing the book on account of his fear that the wickedness it recorded would be imitated by future rulers. But then he reflected that those rulers would be discouraged by the thought that their deeds would likewise be set down for posterity to condemn, just as he was doing in the case of Justinian. For who, he asks, does not know the evil of Semiramis, Sardanapalos, and Nero? Besides, his work may also offer some consolation to those who fall into the hands of tyrants (1.6-10).

These sentiments are echoed by Lydos. He declines in one place to discuss the innovations of Domitian and Caracalla, “for things done by those who ruled badly, even if useful, should be despised” (1.4).<sup>16</sup> He states later that tyrants harm not only their contemporaries but also future generations because they may find imitators (2.1). He uses the same word here (ζηλωτάς) that Prokopios uses in his preface. Later he refers to the unjust expenses of Nero “and of those who imitated him” (3.45), and compares a servant of the wicked Ioannes Kappadokes to Sardanapalos (3.58), though he calls him many other things as well.

Others whom Lydos labels as tyrants are the early kings of Rome, the *reges*, and the dynasts like Marius and Sulla who precipitated the fall of the Republic.<sup>17</sup> He manages to link them to Justinian as well through the latter’s use of the title *despotes*, or “master.” Like all tyrants, Lydos explains, Romulus liked to be called *despotes* rather than just king. This title the Romans later believed was incompatible with freedom, so they used it for those who lorded it over them like tyrants, such as Marius and Sulla. The early emperors rejected the title but

since the insolence had already been introduced in earlier times as if by way of homage, the clemency of our most serene emperor... just tolerates being called “despot,” that is, “good father.” Not only does he not delight

in it, but he is embarrassed rather that he should seem not to admit into his presence those who think that they are honoring him (1.5-6).

Again, the conventional flattery serves to disguise the deeper point, which reveals that protocol at the court of Justinian was fundamentally tyrannical. In his work *On the Months* Lydos had asserted that Domitian was called a despot and not a king because he was a tyrant (4.20). He also claims that the first after Domitian to be called a despot was Diocletian (1.26), whom he calls a tyrant in *On the Magistracies* (1.4). According to his own argument, therefore, all despots are tyrants, and Lydos fails to offer a good reason for not including Justinian in this group. The defense based on the emperor's embarrassment is transparent. In reality, contemporaries knew that Justinian was very aggressive in his demands to be called *despotes* and *kyrios*. The issue was live and anyone on Lydos' side of it would have seen through the rhetoric. The background against which we should evaluate Lydos' testimony is provided by Prokopios. Here is what he says about the matter at the end of the *Secret History*:

In the past those who attended upon the emperor called him "emperor" and his wife "queen," and each of the other magistrates by whatever office he happened to hold at the time; but if anyone should converse with either of these two and refer to them as "emperor" or "empress," and not as "master" or "mistress" (δεσπότης, δεσποινῆ), or if he should attempt to avoid calling any of the magistrates "slaves," he would be regarded as both stupid and profane and sent away as though he had sinned most terribly and insulted those who least deserved it.... So these two were always taking everything into their own hands to the ultimate ruin of their subjects, and compelled everyone to dance attendance upon them in the most servile (δουλοπρεπέστατα) manner (30.25-30).

Prokopios and Lydos are once again making the same point, only Lydos must keep up appearances because he intended his work to be read by the broader public. Both men hated the servility that Justinian imposed on his subjects and Lydos emphasizes twice that the title of *despotes* was fit only for slaves (δούλοι). His suggestion that the emperor was embarrassed not to admit those who thought they were honoring him by it is an ironic reversal of Prokopios' claim that he would send away anyone who did not!

Some of the similarities in the way that Prokopios and Lydos discuss the regime are due to the fact that both allude frequently to Justinian's own edicts.<sup>18</sup> For example, Prokopios complains that he abolished the consulship, and emphasizes the loss of the *largesse* that the consuls used to provide to the poor and to the various professions (*SH* 26.12-15). In *Novel* 105 of 537 Justinian had noted that the burden of *largesse* had become too great and set limits on the amount that consuls could dispense to the people.<sup>19</sup> Though the emperor claimed that his intention was to make the consulship "immortal," he soon ceased appointing men to the office, prompting Prokopios' comment that in the end "no one saw a consul anymore, not even in his dreams."

Lydos also devotes a chapter to the consulship, in which he immediately draws attention to the *largesse* it grants to citizens (2.8). He does not say a word about its abolition by Justinian. Instead he rhapsodizes on its supreme importance, extolling it as "the mother of the Romans' freedom, for it stands in opposition to tyranny." It was Brutus, "that champion of freedom," who established it after expelling the last of the kings. When he states next that the office "is incompatible with tyranny, so that when the former has power the latter does not exist," we can infer that only a tyrant would abolish it. It is precisely because he wants to suggest this that Lydos *cannot* say that Justinian effectively abolished the office. We must remember that all informed contemporaries would know already that the emperor had ceased appointing consuls, so they could draw their own conclusions from the premises that Lydos provides. We cannot ignore the fact that the consulship no longer existed when Lydos wrote these words.<sup>20</sup>

In his edict Justinian had presented the consulship as an ornament of the state, not an essential office, and its preservation as a matter of nostalgia. The office was subordinate to the imperial Fortune, or *tyche*, which God had sent as a "living law" to mankind. An emperor may don its insignia (*stole*) whenever he wishes. Lydos clearly had a contrary view, linking the consulship indissolubly to Roman freedom. At the end of his discussion he even directly contradicts Justinian's edict—under the guise of praising its author!—by saying that the emperor "deems the consulship superior to the imperial rank." Imitating the edict's exact words he says that "our most gentle father and most clement emperor, in his reform of affairs and *largesse*" dons consular insignia (*stole*) "whenever he wishes to adorn his station (*tyche*)." We may suspect that "reform of affairs" is only a rhetorical way of saying "innova-

tions,” just as “rushing to bring about everything that served public utility” (*Mag.* 2.28) is only a euphemism for Prokopios’ claim that Justinian brought confusion everywhere.

It is possible that Prokopios and Lydos were responding independently to the same circumstances and laws. But as the number of parallels mounts and the point of view continues to converge the burden of proof shifts gradually onto those who assert that the two men were merely like-minded contemporaries. If Prokopios did in fact entrust Lydos with the *Secret History*, then it is certain that they were close friends indeed. As Machiavelli says in a crucial chapter about political dissidence, “if indeed you wish to communicate it, communicate it to one alone, of whom you have had very long experience or who is moved by the same causes as you.”<sup>21</sup>

Close parallels can also be established between the arguments of the two men. In the last section of the *Secret History*, devoted to Justinian’s administration and reforms, Prokopios claims that “this emperor was from the start more savage than all the barbarians together” and names some of the barbarians who invaded the empire during Justinian’s reign (23.8). He then goes on to list the taxes and impositions that subjects had to endure, focusing on military requisitions and the billeting of troops on civilian premises (23.9-24). He echoes the comparison of Justinian to the barbarians in *Wars* 7.9.1-6, where he says that the Roman army began to plunder Italy, making its inhabitants yearn for the return of the barbarians. Lydos, for his part, also states that provincials found invasions by barbarian armies easier to bear than rule by their own people; moreover, he does so in the same section in which he lists all the taxes and impositions that they had to pay, focusing chiefly on the billeting of troops and military requisitions (3.70). Again, both authors are probably echoing edicts that Justinian issued to correct abuses, especially *Novel* 32, whose preface states that some of those abuses were not less harmful than the passage of barbarians. But the other parallels in expression and organization are unlikely to be coincidental. The same is probably true of the rhetorical complaints that they make regarding the farmers who were forced to abandon their lands due to heavy taxation: here both authors are alluding to the preface of *Novel* 80, which institutes the office of *quaesitor* to deal with the influx of people to the capital.<sup>22</sup>

Both authors lament the declining fortune of the “orators,” i.e., men who like themselves sought posts in the administration or the courts based on their training in

rhetoric. Prokopios accuses Justinian of demoralizing the entire class by depriving it of financial incentives (*SH* 26.2). Lydos harps on this theme throughout his treatise (e.g., *Mag.* 2.16-18, 3.9). He notes that the emperor Anastasios promoted orators to the highest positions, which had the effect of encouraging oratory at all levels of the administration (3.50). Yet now, he laments, there is no incentive or opportunity for speeches and the staff is poor and desperate (3.66).

Prokopios also decries the poverty that career bureaucrats faced in old age. It used to be that they received progressively higher salaries as they rose through the ranks so that they had an adequate pension. But Justinian deprived them of income so that now they and all who depend on them must live in poverty (*SH* 24.30-33; cf. 22.12-13). Lydos also devotes a chapter to the poverty of the prefecture's staff and pays particular attention to the misery of all who retired, including himself (3.67). Of course, Lydos was more personally affected by this than Prokopios, and that is why he dwells on the details of the reforms.<sup>23</sup> Both men were in their sixties by the early 550s and that is perhaps why they focused on the plight of those in retirement.

Attention is also paid by both men to administrative reforms that affected provincials. Prokopios accuses Justinian of downsizing the public post, an institution that he praises highly for swiftly conveying information and taxes; locals could also sell their goods to feed the horses and grooms at the post's many stations. But Justinian reduced the number of stations, causing disruption to communications and loss to the farmers, whose crops now rotted in the fields (*SH* 30.1-11). Lydos also devotes attention to this measure, ascribing it to the prefect Ioannes Kappadokes. He praises the post in exactly the same terms as Prokopios and notes that the reform led to crops rotting in the fields (*Mag.* 3.61). Both texts use genitive absolutes here and are close in vocabulary.<sup>24</sup>

Prokopios and Lydos also take identical positions with regard to Justinian's officials. The newly established *quaesitor* and *praetor plebis* are presented by both as essentially punitive, to accuse and prosecute people for various crimes.<sup>25</sup> But what is even more remarkable is the unanimity with which they evaluate the personalities of specific high officials, often using exactly the same language. This is especially true of the praetorian prefect Ioannes Kappadokes, whom they both hated. Given that he had fallen from power in 541, Prokopios felt it was safe to include the material on him in the *Wars*, otherwise he would probably have kept it for the *Secret*

*History*.<sup>26</sup> Be that as it may, both he and Lydos denounce his lack of education, avarice, attacks on cities, as well as drunken and debauched life-style, including prostitutes and induced vomiting. Both say that he hoped to gain the throne for himself. Prokopios labels him “the most wicked of all demons” and Lydos also refers to him frequently as a demon and fiend. Both ascribe his fall proximately to the empress Theodora, but ultimately to Divine Justice.<sup>27</sup> This convergence may be explained as independent reactions to events that both authors witnessed, but the striking parallels in their exaggerated and rhetorical accounts suggest closer connections. At any rate, there can be little doubt that Lydos had read the *Wars*, and, assuming he was not yet acquainted with its author, would he not then seek out a man who lived in the same city and whose feelings about the accursed prefect so mirrored his own?

Both men also praise the learning of the jurist Tribonianos. Prokopios adds that he was corrupt and avaricious, but this was nevertheless overshadowed by his outstanding *paideia*.<sup>28</sup> Of the prefect Phokas, appointed to replace Kappadokes for a few months in 532 after the Nika riots, Prokopios says in the *Secret History* that he was just and entirely innocent of corruption—rare praise for this text. It also happens that Phokas, a pagan who committed suicide in one of Justinian’s witch hunts, was also Lydos’ idol. The last few surviving pages of *On the Magistracies* form a little panegyric on Phokas, praising his liberality, self-control, kindness, and piety.<sup>29</sup>

Prokopios and Lydos’ views of recent emperors also tally. Justin they depict as one who knew and did nothing.<sup>30</sup> Anastasios, on the other hand, they present very favorably, praising his prudence, mildness, and careful management of the finances. Lydos grants that he was accused of avarice, but counters with stories that highlight his generosity, remission of taxes, and private liberality.<sup>31</sup> To be sure, these were popular perceptions, especially among those who felt victimized by Justinian and who longed for the days when the emperor was a kindly accountant. But there are points of common emphasis. Both mention the large reserve that Anastasios left in the treasury and that was squandered by his successors in only a few years. Both also emphasize his generosity to the cities, especially in the form of tax remissions.<sup>32</sup> And Lydos’ odd statement that under Anastasios “a deep peace was making the entire state flaccid” seems based on the passage in Prokopios’ *Wars* which states that the soldiers at Amida were unprepared for a Persian attack because it was a time of peace and prosperity.<sup>33</sup> Finally, it is important that neither author evaluates that em-

peror on the grounds of his religious policies, as did other authors who were closely linked to the regime of Justinian. This does not mean that they were secretly monophysite sympathizers. To the contrary, both were Platonists who had no interest in Christian sectarian strife and had a secular view of the imperial position.<sup>34</sup>

If the link proposed here gains acceptance, the comparison between Lydos and Prokopios may be extended to passages where they discuss other issues, for Prokopios would not have entrusted the *Secret History* to anyone who did not agree with him on fundamental issues of politics, though total unanimity need not be assumed. For example, Lydos' allusions to Justinian's abstinence from food and sleep and his furious working habits, though echoing boasts made by the emperor in his edicts, may reflect something of Prokopios' suspicion that such behavior demonstrated the emperor's intention of throwing everything into confusion, and ultimately his inhumanity.<sup>35</sup>

There are also non-political topics on which the two men may have disagreed. In a curious passage of the *Wars* Prokopios digresses to explain why it is impossible for any man to discover the intention (διάνοια) of the Sibyl before the events she is supposed to have predicted, and gives an instance of a wrong reading of Sibylline texts by some Romans during the war in Italy. He claims that the oracles jump from Libya to Persia to Rome with no "rational sequence"—a pointed contrast to his own *Wars* perhaps? He implies that the oracles are useless.<sup>36</sup> It just so happens that Lydos was a firm believer in the Sibylline oracles, of which he had written an account in his work *On the Months*, almost certainly published before the *Wars*. He there tried to explain the reason why the oracles were preserved in an imperfect form and reflected a "limping intention (διάνοια σκάζουσα)."<sup>37</sup> It is plausible to suspect that Prokopios is responding directly to Lydos here. If so, it adds a dimension of friendly teasing and rivalry to their relationship.

To conclude, when reading Lydos we must not forget that he already knew many of the things that Prokopios wrote about Justinian in the *Secret History*. When he noted that tyranny and the consulship are incompatible he knew that it had been at least ten years since Justinian had appointed a consul. When he argued that tyrants like to be called despots, he could not very well go on to say that Justinian insisted on the title, though he and everyone at the court knew that. We may wonder therefore who Prokopios had in mind when he said that contemporaries who witnessed what happened would vouch for his good faith in writing the *Secret History* (1.5).

The value of the *Secret History* far exceeds its preservation of information not recorded in other sources. By revealing to us what was really hiding behind the seemingly neutral *Wars* it sets limits on the tendency of modern historians to homogenize the intellectual culture of Justinian's reign. Prokopios was brave enough to write an indirectly critical history of a reigning emperor — quite possibly the only man ever to do so in Roman history. He deserves additional praise for risking so much to write the *Secret History*. But there were other ways to write the truth under a tyranny and these were known to Lydos, the orator and professor of Latin. The *Secret History* offers us the opportunity to link the chief writers of the age, to uncover the loose and fragile web of dissidence that bound historians, lawyers and jurists, professors and bureaucrats, to the last philosophers of antiquity. It shows us the passion and the futility of the last men who valued “liberal education” above all else. Witnessing the rise to power of men who lacked any commitment to classical culture, or indeed any acquaintance with it, they preserved for posterity the true record of a regime that subordinated all intellectual activity to its own absolutist ideology.

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### Notes

- 1 *Wars* 8.1.1; ed. J. Haury, *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia*, rev. G. Wirth, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner) 1962-64; tr. H. B. Dewing, *Procopius*, Loeb Classical Library, 7 vols. (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press) 1914-1940. For the latest exchange over the dates, see G. Greatrex, ‘The dates of Procopius’ works,’ *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 18 (1994) 101-114; J. A. S. Evans, ‘The Dates of Procopius’ Works: A Recapitulation of the Evidence,’ *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 37 (1996) 301-313.
- 2 See M. Whitby, ‘Greek Historical Writing after Procopius: Variety and Vitality,’ in Av. Cameron and L. I. Conrad ed., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, v. 1: *Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton: The Darwin Press) 1992, 25-80, here 25-26.

- 3 Cf. G. Greatrex, 'Procopius the Outsider?' in D. C. Smythe ed., *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider* (Burlington, Vt: Ashgate) 2000, 215-228, here 216-220.
- 4 Cf. Av. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London and New York: Routledge) 1996, ix, 49-50.
- 5 P. Magdalino, 'Aspects of Twelfth-Century Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*,' *Speculum* 58 (1983) 326-346, here 331; C. Foss, 'The Empress Theodora,' *Byzantion* 72 (2002) 141-176, here 176.
- 6 Though they disagree about many things, P. Allen (*Evagrius Scholasticus the Church Historian = Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense: Études et documents*, v. 41 [Louvain] 1981, 9-10, 190) and M. Whitby (*The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus* [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press] 2000, 233 n. 86) agree on this.
- 7 I. Hadot ed., *Simplicius: Commentaire sur le Manuel d'Épictète* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill) 1996, 14.18 ff. and epilogue (pp. 257, 454).
- 8 A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) 2004 (forthcoming), here c. 3.
- 9 Ioannes Lydus, *On Powers or The Magistracies of the Roman State*, text, tr., and commentary by A. C. Bandy (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society) 1983 (henceforth cited as *Mag.*). Lydos gives a small autobiography in chapters 3.26-30. His other extant works, *On Celestial Signs* and *On the Months*, offer no direct insight into his political thought. The latter will sometimes be cited: R. Wuensch ed., *Ioannis Laurentii Lydi Liber de mensibus* (Leipzig: Teubner) 1898.
- 10 Cf. G. Greatrex, 'Lawyers and Historians in Late Antiquity,' in R. W. Mathisen ed., *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press) 2001, 148-161.
- 11 So too Av. Cameron, op. cit., 243.

- 12 Cf. A. Kaldellis, 'Republican Theory and Political Dissidence in Ioannes Lydos,' which has been provisionally accepted for publication in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 28 (2004). Some of the arguments made there are summarized here.
- 13 M. Maas, *John Lydus and the Roman Past: Antiquarianism and Politics in the Age of Justinian* (London and New York: Routledge) 1992, 96.
- 14 E.g., *SH* 6.21, 8.26, 11.2, 21.24, 26.11; cf. *Wars* 2.2.6.
- 15 *Mag.* 2.19; for Domitian's innovations, see also 1.49; for tyranny, see the definition in 1.3.
- 16 Yet he briefly discusses Domitian's twelve prefects in *Mag.* 2.19.
- 17 Kings: *Mag.* 1.3, 1.5, 1.31; dynasts: 1.6, 1.48, 2.1.
- 18 For Lydos, see J. Irmischer, 'Justinianbild und Justiniankritik in frühen Byzanz,' in H. Köpstein and F. Winkelmann ed., *Studien zum 7. Jahrhundert in Byzanz* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag) 1976, 131-142, here 134-135; and J. Caimi, 'Ioannis Lydo *de magistratibus* III 70. Note esegetiche e spunti in tema di fiscalità e legislazione protobizantine,' *Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi* 1 (1981) 317-361, *passim*, esp. 349 ff. The final third of the *Secret History* (19-30) is a direct commentary on Justinian's laws; see A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea*, c. 4. A preliminary version of this thesis was presented at the 28th annual Byzantine Studies Conference (2002; Columbus, Ohio).
- 19 Text in *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, v. 3: *Novellae*, ed. R. Schoell and G. Kroll (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos) 1959 (reprint of the 1895 edition) (the reader must sometimes supply his own emendations to the text).
- 20 For Justinian and the consulship, see J. Moorhead, *Justinian* (London and New York: Longman) 1994, 60-61.
- 21 Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* 3.6.8 (tr. N. C. Mansfield and N. Tarcov [Chicago: University of Chicago Press] 1996, 225); cf. Prokopios, *Buildings* 1.1.10, 1.1.16.

- 22 *SH* 23.6, 23.16, 23.20; *Mag.* 3.70.
- 23 Cf. J. Caimi, *Burocrazia e diritto nel De magistratibus di Gionvanni Lido* (Milan: A. Giuffrè) 1984, 434-436.
- 24 *SH* 30.11: οἱ δὲ τοὺς ἀγροὺς κεκτημένοι καρπῶν τῶν σφετέρων σεσηπότων τε καὶ εἰκῆ κειμένων ἀνόνητοι... γίνονται; *Mag.*: τῶν εἰδῶν ἀπράτων ἐνσηπομένων ταῖς κτήσεσιν. For the reforms, cf. M. Maas, *op. cit.*, 21.
- 25 Cf. *SH* 20.9-11 with *Mag.* 3.70. Both echo Justinian's legislation; cf. J. Caimi, 'Ioannis Lydo *de magistratibus* III 70,' 351-353.
- 26 G. Greatrex, 'The Composition of Procopius' *Persian Wars* and John the Cappadocian,' *Prudentia* 27 (1995) 1-13.
- 27 Cf. *Wars* 1.24.12-15, 1.25, 2.30.49-54, with *Mag.* 2.21, 3.58-59, 3.62, 3.65. For Lydos on Kappadokes, see J. Caimi, *Burocrazia e diritto*, 243-257, who rightly notes that under cover of the prefect Lydos was attacking the policies of Justinian himself. Does Lydos' blaming of recent woes on the *Daimon* in *Mag.* 3.12 refer indirectly to Justinian, lifting a page from the *Secret History* (12.14-32, 18.36)? Cf. also *Mag.* 3.20.
- 28 Cf. *Wars* 1.24.16, 1.25.1-2, with *Mag.* 3.20.
- 29 Cf. *SH* 21.6-7 and *Wars* 1.24.18 with *Mag.* 3.72-76. For a good discussion of Phokas, see M. Maas, *op. cit.*, 78-82. A most fascinating figure from this period was Petros Patrikios, Justinian's *magister officiorum* for 25 years (539-565), who also wrote historical and political works. Prokopios and Lydos give mixed, albeit compatible, pictures of him; cf. *Wars* 5.3.30 and *SH* 16.1-5, 24.22-23, with *Mag.* 2.24-26. Lydos was writing when Petros was alive and dangerous; yet note how he avoids praising him for any moral qualities. For Lydos on Petros, see also J. Caimi, *Burocrazia e diritto*, 274-283.
- 30 Cf. *SH* 6.11-16, 8.2-3, and *Wars* 3.9.5, with *Mag.* 3.51.
- 31 Cf. *SH* 19.5-7 and *Wars* 1.10.11, with *Mag.* 2.27, 3.46-50. For Lydos on Anastasios, see J. Caimi, *Burocrazia e diritto*, 211-230.

- 32 Cf. *SH* 19.5-7, 23.7, and *Wars* 1.7.35, with *Mag.* 3.47, 3.51 (note the spin on squandering).
- 33 Cf. *Wars* 1.7.4 with *Mag.* 3.51; cf. A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea*, 98.
- 34 For a different contemporary view of Anastasios, see B. Croke, *Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2001, 96, 98, 107, 128-133, 176-177. For Lydos' Platonism, see A. Kaldellis, 'The Religion of Ioannes Lydos,' *Phoenix* 57 (2003) forthcoming; for Prokopios' politics, see idem, *Procopius of Caesarea*, 159 ff.
- 35 Cf. *Mag.* 2.15, 3.39, 3.55, with *Novels* 8 (preface), 30.11, and *SH* 12.27, 13.28-33; cf. also *Buildings* 1.7.5-16. The contrast is also made by Av. Cameron, op. cit., 246-247.
- 36 Prokopios, *Wars* 5.24.28-37 (cf. 5.7.6-8). See K. Adshead, 'Procopius' Poliorcetica: Continuities and Discontinuities,' in G. Clarke ed., *Reading the Past in Late Antiquity* (Rushcutters Bay, NSW: Australian National University Press) 1990, 93-119, here 99, who brings out his Thucydidean intentions.
- 37 *On the Months* 4.47; for Lydos and the Sibyls, see A. Kaldellis, 'The Religion of Ioannes Lydos.'