




Michał Stachura (Kraków)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5276-5951>

THE VANDAL *HABROSÝNE* AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN PROCOPIUS' NARRATIVE ON THE RISE AND FALL OF THE VANDAL STATE

Abstract. The description of the Vandals' *habrosýne* (Procopius, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 5–9) apparently fit in with the topos of “a nation once valiant who, living among the luxuries, succumbed to effeminacy”, which had been present in Greco-Roman literature since the time of Herodotus. Following such a course of interpretation, this description could explain why the once formidable conquerors were so easily defeated by a comparatively smaller force under Belisarius' command. However, a closer look at the actual function of this passage in Procopius' narrative on the rise and fall of the Vandal state brings this seemingly obvious interpretation into question. It gains a particular significance when we discover some surprising parallels between the fates of the last Vandal king, Gelimer, and the last Lydian king, Croesus – as these two are depicted by Procopius and Herodotus, respectively. If we should recognize that what we have here is a particular literary allusion, a re-application of a Herodotean pattern for the purpose of recounting a contemporary story, this passage takes on a new meaning: representing the former affluence and the present misery of the Vandals serves as a starting point to deliberations on human helplessness in the face of Fate, while referring to *habrosýne*, as a stereotypical characteristic attributed to the Lydians, is an additional clue to put us on a track leading to associations between the two narratives.

Keywords: Procopius of Caesarea, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, Vandals, Gelimer, *habrosýne*, *Týche*

Habrosýne and its dangers in classical tradition

The theme of a “nation once valiant which succumbed to effeminacy while living in luxury” can be found already at a very early stage of Greek historiography. As Herodotus recounts, when Croesus attempted to rescue the Lydians,



his former subjects, from Cyrus' punishment, he suggested a more lenient method of conduct to the Persian monarch, with the intent of preventing any future revolt by the Lydian people:

send and forbid them to possess weapons of war, and order them to wear tunics under their cloaks and buskins on their feet, and to teach their sons lyre-playing and song and dance and huckstering. Then, O king, you will soon see them turned to women instead of men, and thus you need not fear lest they revolt¹.

This anecdote is based on some stereotypical views of the luxurious lifestyle of the Lydian people². In the Archaic period, Greeks did not yet denounce explicitly such a way of life, which they called *habrosýne* (ἡ ἀβροσύνη)³. Some members of the Greek aristocracy would even try to emulate it as a sign of a peculiar kind of prestige, even if they were not oblivious to certain dangers involved there. At the same time, long robes and other artefacts or manners of behaviour associated with the Lydian *habrosýne* were not regarded as unmanly; as a matter of fact, *habrosýne* would tend to be an object of disapproval in women as a sign of their excessive love for luxury items but also of their exaggerated care for physical appearance, both contrary to the required diligence and modesty⁴.

¹ HÉRODOTE, *Histoire*, I, 155, 4, ed. Ph.-E. LEGRAND, Paris 1932–1956 (cetera: HERODOTUS, *Historiae*): ἀπειπε μὲν σφι πέμψας ὄπλα ἀρήια μὴ ἐκτῆσθαι, κέλευε δὲ σφέας κιθωνάς τε ὑποδύειν τοῖσι εἵμασι καὶ κοθόρνους ὑποδέεσθαι, πρόειπε δ' αὐτοῖσι κιθαρίζει τε καὶ ψάλλειν καὶ καπηλεύειν παιδεύειν τοὺς παῖδας, καὶ ταχέως σφέας ὧ βασιλεῦ γυναικάς ἀντ' ἀνδρῶν ὄψει γεγονότας, ὥστε οὐδὲν δεινοὶ τοι ἔσονται μὴ ἀποστέωσι (trans.: A HERODOTUS, *Books I–II*, ed. J. HENDERSON, trans. A.D. GODLEY, Cambridge, Mass.–London 1999 [= LCL, 117]).

² M. DORATI, *La Lidia e la τρυφή*, *Aev N.S.* 3, 2003, p. 503–530.

³ Over time, this term became almost synonymous with the much more often used ἡ τρυφή (cf. M. DORATI, *La Lydia...*, p. 503–504), otherwise also perceived ambiguously: *tryphé* was condemned by moralists (cf. A. PASSERINI, *La ΤΡΥΦΗ nella storiografia ellenistica*, *SIFC* 11, 1934, p. 35–56; U. COZZOLI, *La τρυφή nella interpretazione delle crisi politiche*, [in:] *Tra Grecia e Roma. Temi antichi e metodologie moderne*, Roma 1980, p. 133–145; N. FISHER, *Hybris. A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece*, Warminster 1992, p. 111–117, 329–342, 350–352; T. GRABOWSKI, *Tryphé w ideologii Ptolomeusza*, [in:] *Spółczesność i religia w świecie antycznym. Materiały z ogólnopolskiej konferencji naukowej (Toruń 20–22 września 2007)*, ed. Sz. OLSZANIEC, P. WOJCIECHOWSKI, Toruń 2010, p. 93–94), but at the same time, propagated by some of the Hellenistic rulers as a manifestation of the opulence of their reign (cf. J. TONDRIAU, *La tryphé: philosophie royale ptolémaïque*, *REA* 50, 1948, p. 49–54; H. HEINEN, *Die Tryphé von Ptolemaios VIII Euergetes II. Beobachtungen zum ptolomäischen Herrscherideal und zu einer römischen Gesandtschaft in Ägypten (140/139 v. Chr.)*, [in:] *Althistorische Studien Hermann Bengtson zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von Kollegen und Schülern*, ed. IDEM, K. STROHEKER, G. WALSER, Wiesbaden 1983, p. 119–124; R. FLEISCHER, *Hellenistic Royal Iconography on Coins*, [in:] *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship. Studies in Hellenistic civilisation*, vol. VII, ed. P. BILDE, T. ENGBERG-PETERSEN, L. HANNESTAD, J. ZAHLE, Aarhus 1996, p. 36; S.L. AGER, *Familiarity Breeds Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty*, *JHS* 125, 2005, p. 22–26; T. GRABOWSKI, *Tryphé...*, p. 100–103).

⁴ M. MEAKER, *Von Blumenkranzen, Salbölen und Purpurgewänder. Luxus und Geschlechtsrollen in archaischen Griechenland*, [in:] *Luxus, Perspektiven von der Antike bis Neuzeit*, ed. E. LUPPI, J. VOGES, Stuttgart 2022, p. 51–79. The prevailing view of transferring the later stereotypes back

The conflict with Persia marks the beginning of the period of a much more consistent and direct criticism of the "Asian" mode of life, regarded as decadent. Herodotus observes it already very clearly in those terms, even though he still ascribes it to the Lydians, who were associated with it for a long time, rather than to the Persians⁵. It is significant that adhering to *habrosyne* is supposed to lead to the loss of the martial virtue of fortitude, not only in individuals but also in the entire nations.

As we know, the same decadence would be soon attributed to the Persians themselves⁶. If the *Cyropaedia* is indeed a work written in homage to Cyrus and his soldiers, the final chapter makes an almost satirical juxtaposition of them and the decadent fall of their contemporary descendants. It is with evident acrimony that the author refers to the sluggish and comfort-loving lifestyle of the contemporary Persians, as a result of which they had lost their former qualities⁷. Similar stereotypes are employed in the service of current politics as Isocrates incites his compatriots to take part in a war against the Achaemenid Empire by depicting the opponents as weak in body and spirit, stripped of fortitude and, in consequence, becoming easy to conquer⁸.

The success of Alexander's campaign only reinforced the stereotype of the decadent "effeminate man of the East". Although this stereotype would tend to be justified in different ways, for instance with the climate as a factor determining the human character or a specific political system⁹, the second interpretation was essentially only an extension of the cause-and-effect chain. Individuals living in specific climatic zones tend to embrace the mode of life that is suitable to their nature disinclined to fortitude, and in effect, born as a sort of people who sacrifice their freedom in exchange for the safe and luxurious life. Over time, the stereotype also served the purpose of a self-critical evaluation of the Greco-Roman civilization; it is sufficient to recall the first words of the *De bello Gallico* and the luxury articles *leading to the effeminacy of the spirit* (*ad effeminandos animos*), brought to Gaul by Roman merchants¹⁰.

onto the Archaic period was first contested in L. KURKE, *The Politics of ἀβροσύνη in Archaic Greece*, CA 11, 1992, p. 91–120.

⁵ Cf. M. DORATI, *La Lidia...*, p. 510, n. 43, for his opinion that the process of "transferring" the stereotypes of the Lydian "effeminacy" onto the Persians started with Herodotus. On the other hand, the picture of the Persians as valiant adversaries of the Hellenes, which is prevalent in this author's transmission, can be interpreted as a conscious opposition to the then-current trends (cf. S. SCHMIDT-HOFNER, *Das Klassische Griechenland. Der Krieg und die Freiheit*, München 2016, p. 79–82).

⁶ P. BRIANT, *History and Ideology: The Greeks and the 'Persian Decadence'*, [in:] *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed. Th. HARRISON, New York 2002, p. 193–210.

⁷ XENOPHON, *Institutio Cyri*, VIII, 8, ed. W. GEMOLL, Leipzig 1968. Cf. E.S. GRUEN, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, Princeton–Oxford 2011, p. 58–65.

⁸ ISOCRATES, *Panegyricus*, 150–151, [in:] *Isocratis Orationes*, vol. I, ed. F. BLASS, Leipzig 1907.

⁹ B. ISAAC, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton–Oxford 2004, p. 70–101.

¹⁰ C. Iulii Caesaris *Commentarii belli gallici*, I, 1, 3, [in:] *C. Iulii Caesaris Commentarii*, vol. I, ed. A. KLOTZ, Leipzig 1920. The whole situation is made even more complicated, of course, by the

The Vandal *habrosýne* in Procopius

Writing his works at the twilight of Antiquity, Procopius of Caesarea is an heir to a whole millennium of philosophical deliberations on living in luxury and its disastrous consequences for a warrior's virtue and merits, but he does not follow them in an unreflecting way. It had already been a long time since Romans realized the fact that Persians were a tough adversary, in no way susceptible to the disparaging stereotypes of the past¹¹. The stereotype of the "effeminate man of the Orient" appears in the *History of Wars*, but with reference to the inhabitants of Antioch, in a sarcastic remark made by the Arab chieftain Alamundaras, to the effect that *its people care for nothing else than festivals, luxurious living, and their constant rivalries with each other in the theatres*¹². But also in this case, the reality would prove, at least in part, the Arab's words wrong, considering the fact that members of the circus factions would go on fighting amid the chaotic defence of the city nine years later, even after the professional soldiers retreated¹³.

The most meaningful judgement passed by Procopius would concern Africa, not the Orient, specifically the Vandals ruling over their African kingdom for a century:

For of all the nations we know the Vandals happen to be the most effeminate (*habrótaoi*)¹⁴ [...]. Since they gained possession of Libya, the Vandals began to indulge in baths, all of them, every day, and enjoyed a table loaded with all foods, the sweetest and best that the earth and sea produce. They wore gold almost all the time and clothed themselves in Mede garments,

Romans transferring the stereotypes of "Eastern effeminacy" onto Greeks (B. ISAAC, *The Invention of Racism...*, p. 305–319; H. SIDEBOTTOM, *Ancient Warfare. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford–New York 2004, p. 10–14); thus, the critical view of the "effeminacy" affecting their own civilization was, at its starting point, a critical perception of the Hellenistic or Oriental influence.

¹¹ M. STACHURA, *Der persische Krieger bei Prokop. Ein Beitrag zur Militärethnographie der Spätantike*, [in:] *Byzantina et Slavica. Studies in Honour of Professor Maciej Salamon*, ed. S. TURLEJ, M. STACHURA, B.J. KOŁOCZEK, A. IZDEBSKI, Kraków 2019, p. 367–381.

¹² *Procopii Caesarensis Opera Omnia*, vol. I–II, *De bellis libri VIII*, I, 17, 37, ed. J. HAURY, G. WIRTH, Leipzig 1962–1963, cetera: PROCOPIUS, *De bellis* (trans.: PROCOPIOS, *The Wars of Justinian*, trans. H.B. DEWING, revised and modernized, with Introduction and notes by A. KALDELLIS, Indianapolis–Cambridge, Mass. 2014).

¹³ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, II, 9, 17; II, 9, 28.

¹⁴ ἑθνῶν γὰρ πάντων ἀβρότατον. It is rendered as "luxurious" in the English translation (trans. DEWING–KALDELLIS, p. 203). As a way to reach a conclusion, I think the choice of this term is correct, but it seems that for a starting point of the present discussion, it should be better to assume the rendering "effeminacy" (found in the German and Polish translations, cf. PROKOP, *Werke*, vol. IV, *Vandalenkriege*, ed. O. VEH, München 1971, p. 205; PROKOPIUSZ Z CEZAREI, *Historia wojen*, vol. I, ed., trans. D. BRODKA, Kraków 2013, p. 291) as pointing more clearly to a set of stereotypes related to *habrosýne*. Only in such a case is H. Braun's juxtaposition of this quotation and the one from Herodotus at the beginning of this article quite obvious (cf. H. BRAUN, *Die Nachahmung Herodots durch Prokop*, Nürnberg 1894, p. 25).

which now they call "Seric." They passed their time in theaters, hippodromes, and other pleasurable pursuits, above all in hunting. They had dancers and mimes and all other things to hear and see that are of a musical nature or otherwise happen to be sight-worthy among men. Most of them lived in garden parks, which were well supplied with water and trees. They had great numbers of banquets and they diligently studied all the arts of sex¹⁵.

The existing interpretations of the passage

At first glance, this excerpt appears to link the stories of the rise and fall of the Vandal state: the descendants of the once formidable warriors of Geiseric, living in comfort and taking the advantage of the conquered province to excess, became effeminate and so weak that the relatively small army of Belisarius defeated them with no difficulty. It could be said that Carthage became a trap for the brave Germanic warriors by turning them into a bunch of effeminate Phoenicians¹⁶ – just as Capua had once stripped the valiant soldiers of the Carthaginian commander Hannibal of their fortitude¹⁷.

But interpretations of the excerpt by modern scholars turn out to be surprisingly disparate. Arnaud Knaepen, the author of the possibly most in-depth analysis of Gelimer's image in Procopius, points to the topos-related character of the depiction, yet without making it clear towards what kind of associations the presumed topos was supposed to lead¹⁸. Jonathan Conant views it not so much in terms of a topos as a caricature of the actual lifestyle of the Vandal elite stylized according to a certain topos, also juxtaposing it with the hundred years-older Salvian of Marseilles' warnings directed at Romans¹⁹. The juxtaposition seems to be not exactly fitting in so far as Salvian castigates not Roman hedonism but rather the Romans'

¹⁵ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 5–9: ἔθνῶν γὰρ ἀπάντων ὧν ἡμεῖς ἴσμεν ἀβρότατον μὲν τὸ τῶν Βανδίων [...] τετύχηκεν εἶναι. οἱ μὲν γάρ, ἐξ ὅτου Λιβύην ἔσχον, βαλανεῖοις τε οἱ ξύμπαντες ἐπεχρῶντο ἐς ἡμέραν ἐκάστην καὶ τραπέζῃ ἅπασιν εὐθηνούσῃ ὅσα δὴ γῆ τε καὶ θάλασσα ἡδιστά τε καὶ ἄριστα φέρει. ἐχρυσοφόρου δὲ ὡς ἐπὶ πλεῖστον, καὶ Μηδικὴν ἐσθῆτα, ἣν νῦν Σηρικὴν καλοῦσιν, ἀμπεχόμενοι, ἔν τε θεάτροις καὶ ἵπποδρομίοις καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ εὐπαθείᾳ, καὶ πάντων μάλιστα κυνηγεσίῳ τὰς διατριβὰς ἐποιοῦντο. καὶ σφίσιν ὀρχηστὰι καὶ μῖμοι ἀκούσματα τε συχνὰ καὶ θεάματα ἦν, ὅσα μουσικά τε καὶ ἄλλως ἀξιοθέατα ξυμβαίνει ἐν ἀνθρώποις εἶναι. καὶ ᾤκητο μὲν αὐτῶν οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν παραδείσοις, ὑδάτων καὶ δένδρων εὐ ἔχουσι· ξυμπόσια δὲ ὅτι πλεῖστα ἐποιοῦν, καὶ ἔργα τὰ ἀφροδίσια πάντα αὐτοῖς ἐν μελέτῃ πολλῇ ἥσκητο (trans. Dewing–Kaldellis).

¹⁶ Drawing links between the old and new Carthaginian enemies of Rome can be seen in the Latin poetry of the 5th century, portraying the Vandal king Geiseric as a new Hannibal. In this way, military actions undertaken against him would become, so to speak, a "fourth Punic war"; cf. M. WILCZYŃSKI, *Gejzeryk i „czwarta wojna punicka”*, Oświęcim 2016, p. 16–19; R. MILES, *Vandal North Africa and the Fourth Punic War*, CP 112.3, 2017, p. 384–410.

¹⁷ *Titii Livii Ab urbe condita libri XXIII–XXV*, XXIII, 18, ed. Th.A. DOREY, Leipzig 1976.

¹⁸ A. KNAEPEN, *L'image du roi vandale Gélimer chez Procope de Césarée*, B 71, 2001, p. 400.

¹⁹ J. CONANT, *Staying Roman. Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439–700*, Cambridge 2012 [= CSMLT, 82], p. 57–58.

sinful acts in general, not just those resulting from indulging in carnal pleasures. Moreover, he sets barbarians as a counterpoint here (quite ironically, the Vandals), who will take over the Roman heritage, not – as in Procopius – some other barbarians the Romans will have to confront after defeating the Vandals²⁰. Conant's merit is certainly in making the point that the Vandals' fall, after Geiseric's death, "into every kind of effeminacy" (to be specific: *malakía* (ἡ μαλακία) – i.e. the softness, which is just another term Romans used to refer to this stereotype) was already described by the Eastern-Roman historian Malchus of Philadelphia in the late 5th century²¹ – therefore, it would rather be a common opinion, not a literary invention thought up by Procopius. The trouble is that this opinion somehow corresponded to reality – as Conant points out, there are multiple records in sources attesting to the Vandals' love of hunting, baths, or magnificent gardens²². Likewise, Roland Steinacher regards Procopius' account as simply proving the advanced Romanization of the Vandal elite's way of life, with no attempt to seek any moralistic connotations there²³.

It is regrettable that Michel Edward Stewart, specializing – so to speak – in the topic of fortitude and effeminacy in Procopius' work, did not put up this particular citation to scrutiny. He only made a reference to it in his doctoral dissertation, taking it as a cautionary example directed towards the Romans²⁴. In his subsequent publications, concerning the perils of the "soft" way of life for the manliness of individuals as well as nations, he concentrates rather on examples from the *De bellis* books dedicated to the Gothic Wars²⁵. It is only his recent monograph that revisits a broader spectrum of his research to encompass the whole of Procopius' work, but the chapter with an analysis of the Vandal war and Gelimer's image concerns a different subject: fortitude and cowardice²⁶, and the above-mentioned quotation is referred there only marginally and construed as a polemical argument

²⁰ SALVIEN DE MARSEILLE, *Oeuvres II. Du gouvernement de Dieu*, VII, ed. G. LAGARRIGUE, Paris 1975 [= SC, 220]; cf. D. LAMBERT, *The Barbarians in Salvian's De gubernatione Dei*, [in:] *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity*, ed. S. MITCHELL, G. GREATREX, London 2000, p. 107–113.

²¹ μετὰ τὸν θάνατον Γωζιρίχου πεσόντες ἐς πᾶσαν μαλακίαν (MALCHUS OF PHILADELPHIA, *Fragmenta*, frag. 17, [in:] *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of Late Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, vol. II, ed. R.C. BLOCKLEY, Liverpool 1983, p. 424). This is how Malchus explains the reason for the Vandals' decision to make a pact with the emperor Zeno (instead of continuing to fight against the Roman Empire).

²² J. CONANT, *Staying Roman...*, p. 53–54.

²³ R. STEINACHER, *Gruppen und Identitäten. Gedanken zur Bezeichnung „vandalisch“*, [in:] *Das Reich der Vandalen und seine (Vor-)geschichten*, ed. G.M. BERNDT, R. STEINACHER, Wien 2008, p. 256.

²⁴ M.E. STEWART, *Between Two Worlds: Men's Heroic Conduct in the Writings of Procopius*, Diss. San Diego 2003, p. 54–55.

²⁵ M.E. STEWART, *The Soldier's Life. Martial Virtues and Manly Romanitas in the Early Byzantine Empire*, Leeds 2016, p. 247–316; IDEM, *The Danger of the Soft Life. Manly and Unmanly Romans in Procopius's Gothic War*, JLA 10, 2017, p. 473–502.

²⁶ IDEM, *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics in the Age of Justinian. A Study of Procopius*, Amsterdam 2020, p. 99–124.

aimed at those wary of an expedition against the Vandals, still perceiving them as formidable warriors²⁷.

A different aspect of the “decadence” topos is highlighted by Anthony Kaldellis: in his view, it was exactly the decadent lifestyle of the Vandals that they sacrificed their freedom at the most critical moment, submitting to the slavery of the Constantinopolitan despot²⁸. This interpretation is obviously underscored by Procopius' comment coming right after the quotation, where he says that when they were deprived of their former luxurious life Gelimer's companions stopped treating their enslavement as something disgraceful²⁹. At the same time, the Vandal example would be an allusion to the contemporary Romans – also the decadent “slaves of their own choice”³⁰. Kaldellis even finds an allusively veiled attack on the empress Theodora here, since the memory of the Vandals indulging themselves in carnal pleasures could be supposedly associated inevitably with the future empress' unusual sexual practices known from the *Historia Arcana*³¹.

A certain problem in all the above interpretations is the absence of any reference to the counterpoint of the subsequently unfolding (after the quotation considered here) account of the Moors' rough living conditions. It is mentioned (though marginally) by two scholars, both of them reaching some fairly extravagant conclusions. Charles Pazdernik cautiously suggests a possible intertextuality of the contrast between the Oriental lifestyle of the Vandals and the Spartan one of the Moors with a confrontation between the Persians and Spartans as presented in the *Hellenika* of Xenophon³² (I shall refer to Pazdernik's proposition linking the figures of Procopius' Gelimer and Xenophon's Pharnabazos in a further part of this article). An even more surprising interpretation has been proposed by Philip Wood: forced to abandon the former Vandal *vanitas* and choose the Moors' “ascetic” way of living, Gelimer would have pursued the Christian ascetic ideal, with his person serving as a good opportunity for praising it – even if indirectly – by the author³³.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 111 (let us take note that, in such a case, the picture of the Vandal life of luxury should be juxtaposed rather with a description of the fears arising in Constantinople before taking a decision on the expedition; PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 10).

²⁸ A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius's Vandal War. Thematic Trajectories and Hidden Transcripts*, [in:] *North Africa under Byzantium and Early Islam*, ed. S.T. STEVENS, J. CONANT, Cambridge, Mass. 2016 [= DOBSC], p. 18. The meaning of the Vandal “effeminacy” was similarly interpreted earlier by Averil Cameron, though she did not elaborate on this motif in her further discussion (A. CAMERON, *Gelimer's Laughter: The Case of Byzantine Africa*, [in:] *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, ed. F.M. CLOVER, R.S. HUMPHREYS, Madison 1989, p. 171).

²⁹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 14.

³⁰ A. KALDELLIS, *Ethnography after Antiquity. Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature*, Philadelphia 2013, p. 20–21.

³¹ A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius's Vandal War...*, p. 18.

³² Ch. PAZDERNIK, *Xenophon's Hellenica in Procopius' Wars: Pharnabazos and Belisarius*, GRBS 46, 2006, p. 194–195.

³³ Ph.I. WOOD, *Being Roman in Procopius' Vandal Wars*, B 81, 2011, p. 441–446.

(yet unfortunately, Wood does not explain how all of this could be reconciled with the former king's later acceptance of an estate from Justinian and why Procopius does not applaud any contemporary Christian ascetics instead of him³⁴).

Vandal effeminacy? – pros and cons

It appears that the deeper we go in our analysis of this particular excerpt from Procopius, the more its apparently obvious – even suggesting itself – interpretation becomes doubtful. It is puzzling to the extent that even if the historian does not confirm it overtly, there are at least several points in his “Vandal” narrative that could support such a “Capuan” interpretation.

The apparently powerful Vandals come to be defeated by the comparatively small invasion force in only two subsequent battles, at Decimum and Tricamarum³⁵. While leading his Roman troops into the latter confrontation, Belisarius contrasts the virtuous souls of his soldiers with the Vandals’ “huge bodies”³⁶ (perhaps meaning “fat” as a result of the luxury life?³⁷). The small surviving group of the Vandal aristocracy besieged on Mount Papua, were eventually broken not by the force of a military attack but as a result of the harsh conditions which proved too much for them to bear³⁸.

On several occasions, Gelimer himself behaves in ways that would compromise his own fortitude directly or at least his virtue of prudence, so inextricably linked with the virtue of fortitude³⁹. In the battle of Decimum, he fails to take advantage of the opportune moment (*kairós*) for defeating Belisarius, when each one of his possible moves – launching an attack on the Roman army in disarray or marching on Carthage – appeared (in Procopius’ opinion) to be leading to victory. Instead, he turns to mourning his fallen brother and arranging for his funeral ceremony,

³⁴ In actual fact, in Book I of *De bellis*, Procopius describes the Christian ascetic and holy man Jacob, and the miracle he performed, with great reverence (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, I, 7, 5–11) – it is an early example of how hagiographical narratives found their way into Classical-type historiography, cf. PROKOPIUSZ Z CEZAREI, *Historia wojen*, vol. I..., p. 22, n. 56.

³⁵ In his recapitulation of the campaign’s account, Procopius represents the victory as a success achieved with a force of only 5,000 cavalry (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 7, 20–21), clearly manipulating the facts to obtain the effect of exaggeration.

³⁶ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 1, 16.

³⁷ In Antiquity, fatness was regarded as one of the many possible negative consequences of living in luxury (*tryphé* is nearly equivalent with *habrosýne*), but it was not associated with gluttony itself, cf. M. STACHURA, *The Distant Origins of “Fat Shaming” or why the People of Antiquity did not Ridicule Fat Women*, SCer 12, 2022, p. 190–193.

³⁸ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 5, 14; IV, 7, 1–7.

³⁹ A sort of indirect proof can be found in Procopius’ consistent associations of imprudence with “audacity” (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, I, 3, 17; II, 9, 5; II, 19, 10; IV, 21, 15; IV, 25, 14; VI, 1, 33; VI, 3, 32; VI, 10, 7; VI, 16, 4; VI, 18, 2; VII, 27, 5; VII, 34, 34); thus, prudence would be the basic criterion for telling the difference between the true fortitude and a mere semblance of one.

allowing himself to be surprised and routed by the regrouped forces of the Roman general⁴⁰. During the final phase of the battle at Tricamarum (strictly speaking, during the final defence of the Vandal camp following the lost combat), his furtive flight becomes the last nail in the Vandal troops' coffin, causing panic and a complete disarray in the ranks⁴¹. Later on, already besieged with a small group of his comrades on Mount Papua, he initially refuses to surrender, still requesting the commander of the besieging troops to give him three things: a loaf of bread, which he had not tasted for so long, a sponge for cleaning his sore eye, and a lute for singing songs of his misery⁴². At this moment, he may appear to be not as someone who is a defeated but still proud commander, but as an effeminate singer full of self-pity. In the end, he decides to surrender after witnessing a scene of a Vandal boy getting beaten up by a young Moor for trying to steal a meagre Moorish flatbread from him⁴³. His outburst of laughter in front of Belisarius is seen by the eye-witnesses as an expression of madness in a man who becomes completely broken by his misfortune⁴⁴. The gesture of humility in front of the victorious emperor is perhaps not so much an act of mortification in view of the fact that the triumphant general Belisarius is obliged to perform it as well⁴⁵, but it is fair to remember how

⁴⁰ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 19, 25–31. Cf. D. BRODKA, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie. Studien zu Prokopios von Kaisareia, Agathias von Myrina und Theophylaktos Simokattes*, Frankfurt am Main 2004 [= STB, 5], p. 79. It should be noted that Hansjoachim Andres expressed doubt as to the actual presence of *kairós* here, despite the fact that this term is literally mentioned in the text (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 19, 29). The German scholar would even go on to suggest that Procopius himself did not believe his own words here (*Es macht den Eindruck, dass Prokop diese Aussage selbst nicht glaubt*, cf. H. ANDRES, *Der καιρός bei Prokop von Kaisareia*, *Mil* 14, 2017, p. 88). Indeed, if we were to assume Andres' hypothesis that Procopius employed an ingenious and complex conception of *kairós* based – on the one hand – on Platonic philosophy and – on the other – drawing from the Bible and the Christian faith, according to which *kairós* is a work of God and, at the same time, a “task” assigned to by Him to a man (H. ANDRES, *Der καιρός...*, p. 98), it would position the Creator in a somewhat ambiguous role here: charging Gelimer with the task of utilizing the *kairós*, but simultaneously, making him “blind” to see it. However, this situation would not have been exceptional among the paradoxes arising along the boundary between God's omnipotence and man's free will, both in the Bible and in the writings of the Church Fathers. Moreover, I think it would be safe to assume that Procopius made use of this long-standing term as a man of letters, rather than as a philosopher, and in an intuitive way, only occasionally attempting to readjust it to the Christian world-view.

⁴¹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 3, 20–23.

⁴² PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 30–33.

⁴³ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 7, 3–6. Most likely referring to the *taguella*, still known among the present-day Tuareg tribes. Procopius regards the Moorish cuisine as unworthy of a civilized man; cf. PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 13.

⁴⁴ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 7, 14.

⁴⁵ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 9, 12. For a possible meaning of that dual humiliation of the victorious and the defeated, see H. BÖRM, *Justinians Triumph und Belisars Erniedrigung, Überlegungen zum Verhältnis zwischen Kaiser und Militär im späten Römischen Reich*, *Chi* 43, 2013, p. 63–91.

the Goths taunted their former king Vitiges for his alleged lack of fortitude, when he agreed to accept similar terms of surrender⁴⁶.

There is nevertheless no way to find a place in the text where Procopius would overtly deny the Vandals' fortitude in general or Gelimer's own personal one. It is true that the Vandal troops would get into a panic on several occasions, but the same phenomenon affects the Roman armies (the chaotic battle of Decimum is essentially a sequence of successively occurring sudden retreats in panic, among both Vandals and Romans⁴⁷). In Procopius' eyes, the panic in itself seems to be a phenomenon naturally co-existing with wars, ethically neutral and affecting the top-level professional soldiers as well. Procopius also goes on to mention the personal fortitude of the king's brothers: Ammatas in the battle of Decimum⁴⁸ and Tzatzon at Tricamarum⁴⁹, with the glorious death of Tzatzon and his comrades, all of them fighting until the end, which is reminiscent of the conclusion of Procopius' composition and its account of the final, hopeless stand of Teia and his companions on Mount Lactarius, when the last king of the Ostrogoths showed his fortitude reputedly equal to the manliness of the mythical heroes⁵⁰.

If then Procopius comes to consider whether the success of the African campaign, so much beyond any expectations, was the outcome of "some virtue" or the verdicts of Fate, his wish is certainly to elevate the virtues shown by the Romans, yet with no intention of diminishing the manliness or other martial qualities of their opponents. On the contrary, the measure of the Roman success is the fact that they conquered the *kingdom at the height of its wealth and military strength*⁵¹.

Likewise, the words from Belisarius' speech addressing the soldiers' morale before the battle of Tricamarum should not be interpreted as an intention to belittle the opponents' physical qualities. It is true that several decades later, the author of the *Strategikon* refers to the Germanic people as "of bold souls but soft bodies" (σώματα ἀπαλά)⁵², most likely in regard of their perceived lack of resilience to the hardships of war, compared to either the Romans or some other adversaries of the Empire mentioned in his work (Persians, nations of the steppe, Slavs). However, in Belisarius' speech, a similar stereotype is certainly not the case – the "size of the bodies" is mentioned here alongside the numbers of the Vandals and contrasted with the moral qualities of the Roman troops. Belisarius goes on to suggest that the

⁴⁶ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, VI, 30, 5. It is noteworthy that Vitiges had earlier motivated his compatriots to fight by recalling Gelimer's fate (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, V, 29, 8), because the avoidance of such a disaster would be evidently worth making the greatest efforts and even risking one's life.

⁴⁷ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 18, 7; III, 18, 19; IV, 19, 22–24; IV, 19, 31–32.

⁴⁸ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 18, 6.

⁴⁹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 3, 14.

⁵⁰ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, VIII, 35, 20.

⁵¹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 7, 20: τὴν βασιλείαν τὴν [...] πλούτῳ τε καὶ στρατιωτῶν δυνάμει ἀκμάζουσιν (trans. Dewing–Kaldellis).

⁵² *Mauritii Strategikon*, XI, 3, ed. G. DENNIS, trans. E. GAMILLSCHEG, Wien 1981 [= *CFHB*, 17].

opponents' combat morale suffered a weakening as a consequence of the previous defeat, thus stressing the difference in the condition of the two sides' spirits even more⁵³. In his description of Belisarius' triumph in Constantinople, the author remarks on the Romans' admiration for the tall and handsome-looking Vandals⁵⁴ – therefore, the above-mentioned “size of the bodies” should refer to their good physical aspects, not to flaws. In turn, in his speech made prior to the battle of Decimum, the commander means to address proficiency in the craft of war rather than anything else: for instance, the Roman soldiers are very well experienced after a number of Persian campaigns, while the Vandals had no opportunity to confront an enemy more challenging than Moors for generations⁵⁵ (and let us remember this statement in the context of our further discussion: the Moors are an adversary quite unlikely to be recognized as a worthy opponent).

As for Gelimer, Procopius introduces this character in the first few sentences as a person who is treacherous, greedy, unrighteous, but still someone who is also seen as “the best warrior of his time”⁵⁶. Although the author considers the Vandal king's failure to make use of the opportune moment at Decimum as an act of imprudence, he ascribes it to a blindness ordained by God⁵⁷ – and whatever may be our own interpretation of the historian's world-view behind those words, this is a situation that is singular, accidental, and somehow beyond the king's will, not the result of any inherent flaw of his character.

The passage in context

The art of discerning the narrator's oblique intentions in the text offers, of course, an extremely broad range of possibilities, but it should be noted that when Procopius wants to make it clear how the Vandals' decisions at the time of their conquest in Africa contributed to their final defeat, he openly speaks his opinion here. With such intent, he recalls that after the conquest of Africa, Genseric ordered the demolition of the walls in all the cities of the region except for Carthage to prevent any of them from becoming a base for a potential Roman attempt to recapture the territory. In an ironic twist of fate, the lack of proper fortifications prevented the Vandals from seeking refuge behind the walls after the defeat at Decimum, prompting Procopius to reflect on how an apparently reasonable decision may turn out as a folly over time⁵⁸.

⁵³ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 1, 16–17; cf. M.E. STEWART, *Masculinity...*, p. 116–117.

⁵⁴ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 9, 10: εὐμήκεις ἄγαν καὶ καλοὶ τὰ σώματα.

⁵⁵ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 19, 7–8.

⁵⁶ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 9, 7: ὃς τὰ μὲν πολέμια ἐδόκει τῶν καθ' αὐτὸν ἄριστος εἶναι.

⁵⁷ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 19, 25.

⁵⁸ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 5, 8–10. Moreover, Gelimer himself was well aware of the fact that the neglect in the proper fortification work was a cause of his downfall (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 23, 20–21).

It seems that if Procopius had really credited the “effeminacy” of the victors, so demoralized by the excess of the seized wealth, with playing a role in the Vandal fall later on, he would have provided a story of the Vandal elite’s life of luxury with a suitable commentary or at least positioned it in a certain moment of his narrative that would have inevitably suggested such an idea to the reader. For example, the passage could illustrate a description of a more or less significant Vandal defeat in battle or a contrast between their ostensible power and how easily they were defeated by a small Roman force. Still, the situation is just the opposite in this case. Admittedly, not Gelimer’s comrades alone, but their Moorish allies repelled the attack on Papua, killing 110 Roman soldiers⁵⁹ (quite impressive, considering the fact that the death toll in the decisive battle of Tricamarum was reportedly fewer than 50 Romans and around 800 Vandals⁶⁰ – while the forces involved in the siege of Papua were incomparably smaller). As a result, the invaders were forced to give up on the idea of launching a swift attack and decided to organize a tight blockade around the mountain with the aim of breaking the defenders by starving them⁶¹. It is at this point of the narrative that the author provides the previously mentioned description of the former luxurious life enjoyed by the Vandal elite: *Thus it came about that Gelimer and those about him, who were his nephews and cousins and other persons of high birth, experienced a misery that no one could describe in a way that equaled the facts. For of all the nations we know the Vandals happen to be the most luxurious and the Moors the most hardy...*⁶² It can be seen that the narrator employs a particular case of the *incrementum* figure here⁶³ – as there is no simple way to depict the enormous amount of the misery suffered by the Vandal nobles, it is first necessary to emphasize their former life of comfort and then, just as expressively, the poverty of their new Moorish hosts: *As the Moors, then, were of such a sort, the followers of Gelimer, after living with them for a long time and changing the standard of living to which they had been accustomed to such a miserable existence...*⁶⁴.

The living conditions of the Moorish dwellers of Papua are then a counterpoint to the Vandal *habrosýne*:

⁵⁹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 1–3.

⁶⁰ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 3, 18.

⁶¹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 3.

⁶² PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 4–5: ἔνθα δὴ τῷ τε Γελίμερι καὶ τοῖς ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν ἀδελφιδοῖς τε καὶ ἀνεψιαδοῖς οὗσι καὶ ἄλλοις εὖ γεγονόσι ξυνέπεσε κακοπαθεῖα χρῆσθαι ἦν, ὅπως ποτὲ εἴποι τις, οὐκ ἂν ὁμοίως τοῖς πράγμασι φράζοι. ἔθνων γὰρ ἀπάντων ὧν ἡμεῖς ἴσμεν ἀβρότατον μὲν τὸ τῶν Βανδιλίων, ταλαιπωρότατον δὲ τὸ Μαυρουσίων τετύχηκεν εἶναι (trans. Dewing–Kaldellis).

⁶³ H. LAUSBERG, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric. A Foundation for Literary Study*, trans. M. T. BLISS, A. JANSEN, D. E. ORTON, Leiden–Boston–Köln 1998, p. 190–191.

⁶⁴ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 14: τοιούτοις δὲ οὗσι τοῖς Μαυρουσίοις οἱ ἀμφὶ τὸν Γελίμερα συχρὸν ζυγοικήσαντες χρόνον τήν τε ξυνειθισμένην αὐτοῖς διαίτιαν ἐς τοῦτο ταλαιπωρίας μεταβαλόντες (trans. Dewing–Kaldellis).

Moors live in stuffy huts, in winter, summer, and every other time, never leaving them because of the snow or the heat of the sun or any other discomfort due to nature. They sleep on the ground, with the prosperous among them, if it should so happen, spreading a fleece under themselves. Moreover, it is not customary among them to change clothing with the season, but they wear a thick cloak and a rough shirt at all times. They have neither bread nor wine nor any other good thing, but they take grain, either wheat or barley, and, without boiling it or grinding it into flour or barley-meal, they eat it in a manner not at all different from the animals...⁶⁵

There is no mention of the Moors' fortitude or manliness in this description. Also in the further chapters of Book IV, where they become the main adversary of the Roman Empire in the newly established *praefectura* of Africa, they are not portrayed as virtuous or even valiant at all. Instead, they are described as treacherous and disloyal (even among themselves), cowardly, and poor warriors, only able to prevail by having the upper hand in numbers or by deceit⁶⁶.

So even though *habrosýne* may fit into stereotypes of decadence and the loss of fortitude or manliness, it does not seem that this particular passage should be interpreted in such a way. In consequence, rendering the term *habrótatōi* as "most effeminate" here would not seem to be adequate⁶⁷. Apparently, the French translation referring to "softness" is more appropriate⁶⁸, although the most fitting rendering should refer (as per the English translation) to refinement or lavishness⁶⁹. It is also noteworthy that only some features of the "luxurious" Vandal life constitute the stereotypical ingredients of *habrosýne*: banquets, soft robes, sexual pleasures and – above all – various forms of entertainment⁷⁰, but besides those, Procopius

⁶⁵ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 10–13: Μαυρούσιοι δὲ οἰκοῦντι μὲν ἐν πνυγρηαῖς καλύβαις, χειμῶνι τε καὶ θέροις ὥρα καὶ ἄλλῃ τῷ ζυμπαντι χρόνῳ, οὔτε χιόσιν οὔτε ἡλίου θερμῇ ἐνθένδε οὔτε ἄλλῃ ὀτρωῶν ἀναγκαίῃ κακῶ ἐξιστάμενοι. καθεύδουσι δὲ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κώδιον οἱ εὐδαίμονες αὐτοῖς, ἂν οὕτω τύχοι, ὑποστρωन्नύντες. ἱματῖα δὲ σφίσιν οὐ ζυμμεταβάλλειν ταῖς ὥραις νόμος, ἀλλὰ τριβῶνιόν τε ἀδρὸν καὶ χιτῶνα τραχὺν ἐς καιρὸν ἅπαντα ἐνδιδύσκονται. ἔχουσι δὲ οὔτε ἄρτον οὔτε οἶνον οὔτε ἄλλο οὐδὲν ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ τὸν σίτον, ἢ τὰς ὀλῦρας τε καὶ κριθάς, οὔτε ἔψοντες οὔτε ἐς ἄλευρα ἢ ἄλιφιτα ἀλοῦντες οὐδὲν ἀλλοιότερον ἢ τὰ ἄλλα ζῶα ἐσθίουσι (trans. Dewing–Kaldellis).

⁶⁶ Procopius puts a special emphasis on their disloyalty (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 8, 10; IV, 25, 16). His observation is of course conditioned by a peculiar set of prejudiced views of the despised North-African barbarians (cf. J. CONANT, *Staying Roman...*, p. 256–258), even though he does not avoid criticizing the Roman acts of disloyalty towards the Moors (PROCOPIUS, IV, 21, 3–12, 20–22). Among the modern scholars, Wood is the only one to attempt to argue that Procopius valued the Moors for their ascetic living (cf. Ph.I. WOOD, *Being Roman...*, p. 444).

⁶⁷ As in the German and Polish translations, cf. note 14.

⁶⁸ A. KNAEPEN, *L'image...*, p. 400.

⁶⁹ Cf. note 14.

⁷⁰ In the *De bellis*, there are at least two statements where the love of theatre is a firm proof of the "effeminacy" of a nation: the above-mentioned opinion spoken by Alamundaras on the inhabitants of Antioch (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, I, 17, 37) and the Gothic envoy Vacis sneering at the "Greek" soldiers of Belisarius, in whose valour the citizens of Rome put their trust despite the fact that the

marks out – as characteristic of the Vandal customs – their penchant for hunting, a physical activity not associated with an excessively soft refinement or the loss of martial qualities.

There is no doubt that the misery experienced during the protracted siege contributed to the change in the Vandal nobles' attitude: *when at last even the necessities of life had failed, they held out no longer: death now seemed most sweet to them and slavery by no means disgraceful*⁷¹. Yet summing up this sentence with a scornful remark such as *they could not bear the loss of the luxuries they were accustomed to* should seem to be an anachronistic shifting of the pattern of the much later, moralistic parables onto the narrative of Procopius, linking the sinful hedonistic acts directly to the ensuing spectacular punishment. As a matter of fact, the author appears to offer a very different and much more profound philosophical tale in the subsequent chapters.

The tale of Gelimer's surrender

Gelimer does not surrender too soon. First, as mentioned before, he received a letter from Pharas, the commander of the besieging forces, who presented him with the generous terms of surrender in the emperor's name⁷² (strictly, on behalf of Belisarius, who – as the *strategós autokrátor* – was entitled to take decisions with the emperor's authority⁷³).

This is not the only case of a magnanimous proposal made to the besieged in the entire *De bellis*, sweetening the shame of surrender with a moralistic discourse. The most memorable one could be the offer presented to the already desperate Persian garrison of Petra, where accepting the proposal of entering the emperor Justinian's service is the sole alternative to the defenders' certain death⁷⁴. Still, the line of argumentation would then follow a completely different course – the speaker draws a contrast between genuine fortitude and foolish audacity fuelling the decision of choosing a certain death⁷⁵. In his portrayal of the Persians' decision to fight until the end as manliness⁷⁶ (elsewhere in the text, the same Persians even deserve a rare compliment when he says he “never heard” of a similar act of fortitude⁷⁷),

only people arriving from Greece they had known were *actors of tragedy, mimes, and thieving sailors* (PROCOPIUS, V, 18, 40, trans. Dewing–Kaldellis; cf. M.E. STEWART, *The Soldier's Life...*, p. 286).

⁷¹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 14: ἐπειδὴ καὶ αὐτὰ σφᾶς τὰ ἀναγκαῖα ἤδη ἐπιλελοίπει, οὐκέτι ἀντεῖχον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ τεθνάναι αὐτοῖς ἥδιστον καὶ τὸ δουλεύειν ἥκιστα αἰσχρὸν ἐνομίζετο (trans. Dewing–Kaldellis).

⁷² PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 15–26.

⁷³ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 11, 20.

⁷⁴ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, VIII, 12, 4–13.

⁷⁵ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, VIII, 12, 6; VIII, 12, 10–11.

⁷⁶ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, VIII, 12, 2.

⁷⁷ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, VIII, 11, 41; cf. M. STACHURA, *Der persische Krieger...*, p. 374–375.

the narrator unmasks the hypocrisy of a false moralizing. A similar argumentation, yet underpinned with a considerable dose of acerbic irony, can be seen in a Gothic envoy's speech addressed to Belisarius during the siege of Rome⁷⁸.

Pharas' message is built upon two different oppositions: between the (apparent) freedom of the besieged, left at their Moorish allies' mercy, and the (alleged) enslavement of the Emperor's service, and then between the ability to deal with the adversities of Fate and the ability to accept a small portion of the good which Fate mixes into those adversities.

As regards the first theme, the juxtaposition of the "enslavement" in surrendering to the emperor and Gelimer's only apparent "freedom", based on his complete dependence on Moorish support, may appear to be a cheap eristic trick, but Pharas puts two significant authorities on the line there: his own and that of Belisarius. If he, as a Germanic noble, and Belisarius himself do not think it is dishonourable to serve the emperor, then there is no reason to consider such enslavement as dishonourable to Gelimer, especially in view of the offer of receiving the patrician dignity and entering the ranks of the Roman Empire's elite (of course, connected with a proper material status)⁷⁹. If this argument should be likewise considered as sort of perverse in Procopius' view, it would have to be just as consistently assumed that he ironically describes the virtues of Pharas⁸⁰ and Belisarius⁸¹ – which is to say, if the readers were to observe Gelimer's surrender with contempt, Belisarius would also have to turn out as a weak man in this regard, a man choosing (for despicable motivations) the tyrant's service over a dignified warrior's death⁸². Although a similar interpretation is apparently proposed by Anthony Kaldellis⁸³, it seems to me rather implausible. Even in the *Historia Arcana*, Procopius does not openly criticize the commander's loyalty to the emperor on a political level and if he looks down on his meekness, it is first of all in the context of his private life, as on the meekness of a hen-pecked man harassed by the unfaithful wife and her friend, the empress⁸⁴. In addition, such a formulation of the denouncement of this sort of "enslavement" would be aimed, in fact, at the institution of monarchy in general, rather than at Justinian alone. If, however, Procopius could be seen as a critic of the

⁷⁸ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, V, 20, 8–14.

⁷⁹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 17–22.

⁸⁰ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 4, 29–31.

⁸¹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, VII, 1, 8–22.

⁸² It is interesting to note that in one of the statements attributed to him (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, V, 8, 12–18), Belisarius takes up the subject of freedom in the context of the Neapolitans living in the Ostrogoth kingdom, taking it for granted that the submission to the Gothic rule means "enslavement" to them, while the subordination to the emperor's authority – "freedom".

⁸³ A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius of Caesarea. Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, Philadelphia 2004, p. 144–150.

⁸⁴ *Procopii Caesarensis Opera Omnia*, vol. III, *Historia quae dicitur Arcana*, 3–4, ed. J. HAURY, G. WIRTH, Leipzig 1964 (cetera: PROCOPIUS, *Historia Arcana*).

monarchy order, an advocate for the “freedom” understood as breaking out of such “slavery”, he did have an exemplary hero at his disposal, namely Stotzas, the leader of the revolted Roman soldiers: it is exactly the “freedom” thus understood that he would make the cause of the struggle carried on by himself and his comrades⁸⁵. But even with the best efforts, it would be difficult to consider Stotzas as a positive character in the *De bellis*⁸⁶.

I have already noted that a quite interesting interpretation of this short discourse on the freedom and enslavement, as it is uttered by the Germanic commander, has been proposed by Charles Pazdernik, who observes there a reference to the exchange of words between the Spartans and Pharnabazos in Xenophon’s *Hellenika* when the Persian satrap is tempted to forsake his allegiance to the Great King⁸⁷. It would be a remote allusion, essentially reversing the original situation – there, the servant is persuaded into abandoning his master and choosing “freedom”, while in this case, the hitherto sovereign ruler is supposed to forsake the illusion of “freedom”, entering into the despotic monarch’s service⁸⁸. With no intention to challenge Pazdernik’s argumentation, I would like to refer to a literary motif where there is no need for such a radical reversal of the whole situation.

It seems that a certain downside to his interpretation is the concentration exclusively on the first of the two oppositions, as signalled in Pharas’ letter⁸⁹. An equally important, even if apparently more trivial, part of the proposed argumentation is the one that sets out Belisarius’ proposal (without questioning the value of bearing the adversities of Fate “with dignity”) as another *kairós* on Gelimer’s path: Fate offers him, in fact, one more chance, adding a bit of the good to the misfortune borne with dignity, but it is up to him alone if he should take it⁹⁰.

⁸⁵ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 15, 30–31. Paradoxically, establishing one’s own tyranny would ultimately turn out to be a consequence of the thus-conceived anarchic freedom (D. BRODKA, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie...*, p. 139).

⁸⁶ Anthony Kaldellis seems to follow along this line as he argues that in the rebel leader’s speech, the soldiers under his personal command prove to be “men”, eventually having to admit that this figure is a faithless and cynical traitor whose “manliness” is just another piece of evidence for the degeneration of the period (A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius’s Vandal War...*, p. 19). For an extremely critical view of the rebels as a chaotic and anarchized rabble, see D. BRODKA, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie...*, p. 136–139. The character of Stotzas would be only justified by the fact that he is essentially a tragic figure embroiled in the predetermined role by the force of the circumstances (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 11, 30–31).

⁸⁷ XENOPHON, *Helléniques*, IV, 1, 34–36, ed., trans. J. HATZFELD, Paris 2019.

⁸⁸ Ch. PAZDERNIK, *Xenophon’s Hellenica...*, p. 184–195.

⁸⁹ We should not criticize Pazdernik for this choice as the focus of his research is clearly limited to this first motif (*ibidem*, p. 185).

⁹⁰ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 23–26. Although the term *kairós* is not mentioned here literally, it is my impression that Pharas’ words: *Or should we consider that the good gifts of Fate are not just as inevitable as are her undesirable gifts? But not even total fools think this* (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 24: ἢ οὐχ ὁμοίως τοῖς φλαύροις ἀναγκαῖά γε ἡμῖν καὶ τὰ παρὰ τῆς τύχης ἀγαθὰ λογιστέον ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν οὐδὲ τοῖς σφόδρα ἀνοήτος δοκεῖ, trans. Dewing–Kaldellis; modified, cf. note 118) should point

It should be noted that Gelimer does not reject the Roman commander's arguments. He refuses the proposal for a different reason: becoming the emperor Justinian's captive turns out to be unbearable to him not because, as a sovereign ruler himself, he would not be able to bear the thought of surrendering to the authority of another ruler, but for the prospect of ignoring the enormous wrong done to him (that is, as he believed, an unprovoked attack on his realm)⁹¹. He writes that he even prays for God's punishment upon Justinian, and it is here that he utters his particular words of an ominous prophecy: *Yet he too is a man and, although he is an emperor as well, it is not at all unlikely that something may befall him that he would not choose*⁹². In the further words of the letter, he asks Pharas (as previously mentioned) for three objects, that is, a sponge, a loaf of bread, and a lyre, and when the astonished officer hears the justification of this request and comes to realize the profound misery of the Vandal king, he bursts out crying himself – caused not so much by sympathy as by a bitter reflection over man's helplessness in the face of Fate's verdicts⁹³.

A little later, the same reflection comes to be expressed in an apparently opposite manner: in an uncontrollable burst of laughter. As Gelimer (broken by the sight of a hungry Vandal boy beaten up by a young Moor, he eventually decided to surrender) is brought in to stand before the victorious Belisarius as a captive, he bursts out in uncontrollable laughter, which some wanted to see as a laughter of a madman utterly broken by his misery. But Procopius offers an alternative explanation of his behaviour: Gelimer, who first reached the heights of prosperity and subsequently the lowest bottom of his fall had the experience of *all the gifts of fortune, both good and evil, he thought that man's lot was worthy of nothing else than much laughter*⁹⁴. Regarded in this way, Gelimer's laughter is not an expression of insanity but the wisdom of someone who – having gained a kingdom and then lost it – achieved a distance perspective on everything considered as fortune and misfortune by the average mortal. It is true that such an explanation is only the historian's supposition, but this thought seems to be reiterated in the words of Ecclesiastes, which Gelimer keeps repeating while walking as a captive during Belisarius' triumph in Constantinople⁹⁵.

to this conception quite obviously. The reader of the *De bellis* must have inevitably thought about how Gelimer missed the opportune moment (*kairós*) in the battle of Decimum; cf. note 39.

⁹¹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 27.

⁹² PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 28: καίτοι καὶ αὐτῷ ἀνθρώπῳ γε ὄντι, καὶ βασιλεῖ οὐδὲν ἀπεικὸς ξυμβήσεσθαι τι ὧν οὐκ ἔλοιτο (trans. Dewing–Kaldellis).

⁹³ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 33–34.

⁹⁴ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 7, 14–15: πάντων τε ταύτη τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς τύχης ἀγαθῶν τε καὶ φλαύρων ἐν πείρᾳ γεγονότα, ἄλλου οὐδενὸς ἄξια τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἢ γέλωτος πολλοῦ οἶεσθαι εἶναι (trans. Dewing–Kaldellis).

⁹⁵ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 9, 11.

Gelimer and Croesus

It is very likely that the reader of Herodotus should associate some of those scenes with some already present in the work of the “Father of history”. Gelimer’s sudden outburst of laughter (as interpreted by Procopius) mirrors the episode when Croesus, standing at the stake, recognizes in a flash the same truth which – in his case – once had been unsuccessfully tried to be revealed to him by Solon⁹⁶. The words of his warning to Justinian recall the moment just afterwards, when the victorious Cyrus recognizes that being a human himself (ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος ἐὼν), he commits to the flames someone who was equal to him in good fortune – and decides to spare Croesus⁹⁷. It is worth noting here that Gelimer’s helpless threatening also renders his former high status of power and prosperity and the current position of Justinian as equal; perhaps by repeating *vanitas vanitatum* he means not only his lost royal splendor, but also the one enjoyed now by the seemingly victorious Emperor. And even Pharas’ weeping over human Fate is heavily reminiscent of the scene from Herodotus where the Persians lament over the fateful misfortune of the last pharaoh⁹⁸. I should also add lastly that if Procopius – in a bow to the Christian religion – wished to express Solon’s wisdom through the words of the Bible, Ecclesiastes appears to be the most appropriate choice for this purpose⁹⁹.

The interpretation I have proposed would ascribe an additional, allusive meaning to the reminiscence of the Vandal *habrosýne*. The usual word used in Greek for describing the “soft” way of life was *tryphē*¹⁰⁰, but it is only *habrosýne* that points explicitly to the stereotypical feature of the Lydian people and, in consequence, hints at a parallel between Gelimer’s and Croesus’ stories. At the same time, the deliberations about falling from the highest prosperity to the deepest misery would not be understandable if Procopius had not already earlier pictured, in vivid terms, both the former and the present living conditions experienced by the Vandals.

The analogy proposed here does not seem to depart as far from the literary original as the one offered by Pazdernik, even though there is indeed a significant difference between the fates of the last kings of the Vandals and Lydians. In Herodotus’ narrative, the wisdom of Croesus is appreciated by Cyrus as he becomes the

⁹⁶ HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, I, 86, 3–5. Perhaps in already contesting the claim of Gelimer’s laughter as being a possible sign of insanity, Procopius may have referred to Herodotus, where such outbursts of laughter are usually interpreted as expressions of madness (cf. P. VAN NUFFELEN, *The Wor(l)ds of Procopius*, [in:] *Procopius of Caesarea. Literary and Historical Interpretations*, ed. C. LILINGTON-MARTIN, E. TURQUOIS, London–New York 2018, p. 48).

⁹⁷ HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, I, 86, 6.

⁹⁸ HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, III, 14; cf. Th. HARRISON, *Divinity and History – The Religion of Herodotus*, Oxford 2000 [= OCM], p. 58.

⁹⁹ For a possible influence of the Archaic Greek thought on the Book of Ecclesiastes, see H. RANSTON, *Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature*, London 1925.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. note 3.

Persian ruler's adviser¹⁰¹. Likewise, Gelimer receives a proposal of becoming a senator, even a patrician (and thus joining the circle of the emperor's advisers), but his agreement would entail the necessity of renouncing his Arian confession¹⁰². Refusing to choose this option, the former Vandal king is satisfied with an estate in Galatia granted to him by the emperor and withdraws into private life¹⁰³. This could be seen as just another piece of evidence for a veiled criticism of the emperor's repressive religious policy¹⁰⁴. Could it have been that Fate offered Justinian the same opportunity as it once did to the victorious Persian monarch but the ruler ignored it (with the deplorable consequences for the future years of his reign)?

By the way, such a reversal in the ending of a story would not be an isolated case in Procopius' writings. It has been recognized for a long time that the anecdote about the speech made by John of Cappadocia, opposed to the African expedition and Justinian's subsequent hesitation mirrors Herodotus' story on Artabanus and Xerxes¹⁰⁵. In both cases, the monarchs initially allow themselves to be persuaded

¹⁰¹ HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, I, 88–89. Incidentally, Croesus connects his duty to serve as an adviser to Cyrus with the fact that Fate made him the Persian ruler's slave (*doúlos*).

¹⁰² Let us recall that this regulation was not dictated by Justinian for this particular case but was the result of the legal restriction, already over a century old at the time, according to which the non-Orthodox were not allowed to hold offices in the Roman Empire (*Codex Theodosianus*, XVI, 5, 29, a. 395; XVI, 5, 42, a. 408, [in:] *Theodosiani Libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et Leges Novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, ed. Th. MOMMSEN, P.M. MEYER, Berlin 1905), with the exception of the military ones (*Codex Iustinianus*, I, 5, 12 and 17, a. 527, [in:] *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. II, *Codex Iustinianus*, rec. P. KRÜGER, Berlin 1954).

¹⁰³ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 9, 13–14.

¹⁰⁴ The passage of the *Historia Arcana* in which Procopius lists up Justinian's measures against the religious dissidents (PROCOPIUS, *Historia Arcana*, 11, 14–33) is just a part of the enumeration of this emperor's repressive acts towards various groups of the Roman society and does not have to be understood as a voice against religious persecution as such, but there is no doubt that Procopius blames the emperor's anti-Arian policy for contributing to the army revolt in Carthage (536) and – in consequence – to the havoc in Africa (PROCOPIUS, *Historia Arcana*, 18, 10–11; PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 14, 11–15; cf. W.E. KAEGI, *Arianism and the Byzantine Army in Africa 533–546*, T 21, 1965, p. 23–53). Some more recent research on the *Historia Arcana* (especially following the interpretation posited by H. BÖRM, *Procopius, his Predecessors, and the Genesis of the Anecdota: Antimonarchic Discourse in Late Antique Historiography*, [in:] *Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity*, ed. IDEM, Stuttgart 2015, p. 305–346) do not allow us to make a simple projection of the critical view of the emperor in this work onto the *De bellis* (where it would have been possibly expressed in a "tacit" or indirect way – cf. J. SIGNES CODOÑER, *Kaiserkritik in Prokops Kriegsgeschichte*, [in:] *Freedom and its Limits in the Ancient World. Proceedings of the Colloquium Held at the Jagellonian University, Kraków, September 2003*, ed. D. BRODKA, J. JANIK, S. SPRAWSKI, Kraków 2003 [= Ele, 9], p. 215–229), but in this case, the assertions found in the two works are convergent, and even though in the *De bellis* Procopius does not provide them with a commentary critical of the emperor, the bitter irony of the words in the conclusion of his account on the wars in Africa (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 28, 52) sounds completely in correspondence with his opinion expressed in PROCOPIUS, *Historia Arcana*, 18, 10–11.

¹⁰⁵ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 10, 1–21; HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, VII, 10–18. Cf. H. BRAUN, *Die Nachahmung Herodots...*, p. 46; A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius of Caesarea...*, p. 181 and V. ZALI, *Fate, Divine*

by the argumentation of their advisers and depart from the original plan, but both of them reconsider their decisions after being admonished by a deity in a dream. As for Xerxes, the words of the deity turn out to be a temptation through which it leads the Persian monarch to an ultimately disastrous outcome, while the divine promise given to Justinian is fulfilled in the astonishing success of the Vandal campaign. It may be that Procopius employs a well-known pattern here by building a Herodotean correlation exactly in order to highlight the specific difference between the respective endings of the narratives. We could have a look, in a similar manner, at the differences in the respective endings of the histories of Gelimer and Croesus.

The hypothesis of Procopius deliberately juggling Herodotean motifs for his narration of Gelimer's surrender, where the last Vandal king is stylized as a "contemporary Croesus" figure, appears to be plausible in light of the research bringing up multiple references to the "Father of history" in the *De bellis* and the *Historia Arcana*¹⁰⁶. In fact, more or less obvious, though quite casual, handling of Herodotean motifs can be identified also in the earlier sections of Procopius' African narrative¹⁰⁷. The parallel between Gelimer and Croesus seems to be not only closer than the one between Gelimer and Pharnabazos, but also extends over a greater part of Procopius' narrative, at least from the situation when the negotiations started until Gelimer humbled himself before Justinian and accepted the emperor's favour. This does not mean I believe it is necessary to dismiss Pazdernik's proposition – perhaps Procopius wished to display his erudition by drawing on Xenophon (in the discussion of "freedom" and "servitude") as well as Herodotus (discussing Fate and the wise approach to the fortunes and misfortunes it may bring)¹⁰⁸. It is my impression that Procopius is above all a writer who is able to build one narrative

phthonos, and the Wheel of Fortune: the Reception of Herodotean Theology in Early and Middle Byzantine Historiography, [in:] *God in History. Reading and Rewriting Herodotean Theology from Plutarch to the Renaissance*, ed. A. ELLIS, Newcastle upon Tyne 2015, p. 93–95.

¹⁰⁶ For a list of the probable and possible references to Herodotus in Procopius' works, see H. BRAUN, *Die Nachahmung Herodots...*, *passim*. For more recent interpretations of the references to Herodotus in the preface to Procopius' work (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, I, 1), see M. KRUSE, *Archery in the Preface to Procopius' Wars. A Figured Image of Agonistic Authorship*, *SLA* 1, 2017, p. 381–406; F. BASSO, G. GREATREX, *How to Interpret Procopius' Preface to the Wars*, [in:] *Procopius of Caesarea. Literary and Historical...*, p. 59–72. In the context of our further discussion, let us also take note of Averil Cameron's remark on Procopius' borrowing of Herodotean phrases in the instances where he says that *something was preordained to someone*; in Cameron's opinion, such "fatalistic" expressions can still be reconciled with the author's Christian world-view (A. CAMERON, *The 'Scepticism' of Procopius*, *Hi* 15, 1966, p. 477–478).

¹⁰⁷ For more on this topic cf. M. STACHURA, *Inspirations from Herodotus Found in Procopius' Account on the Fall of the Vandal Kingdom*, [in:] *Proceedings of the 11th International Symposium of Byzantine and Medieval Studies "Days of Justinian I"*, Skopje 9–11 November 2023 (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁸ For some Herodotean inspiration discerned in this second thread of Pharas' letter, see V. ZALI, *Fate...*, p. 97.

on several allusions simultaneously¹⁰⁹, with the use of diverse motifs and different literary references, thus obtaining a transmission much richer in meanings than he could have achieved with a simple and direct imitative technique.

A certain ambiguity, or incoherence, is of course a broader problem in interpreting the “metaphysical background” of Procopius' work. The story of the rise and fall of the Vandal state is so full of various contradictory references to the supernatural sphere that it may serve as evidence for a number of contradictory hypotheses on the author's (or the narrator's, as obviously the two do not have to be identical) world-view. God who foretells a victory to Justinian through the words spoken by one of the bishops is almost the Lord of the Hosts from the Old Testament promising to stand up for His chosen one¹¹⁰, while God to whom Belisarius refers in his orations grants victories not so much to the advocates of orthodoxy as to those who are just¹¹¹, regardless of their confession (Procopius provides a similar argumentation in the words spoken by Totila, an Arian heretic¹¹²). In turn, God from Gelimer's prophetic warning is an inscrutable master of Fate dispensing fortune and misfortune in mysterious ways, God that the emperor – as being “only human” – should fear, irrespective of his creed or personal merits.

All of these are merely words spoken by the protagonists of the story. As the narrator, Procopius takes note of the numerous signs indicating God's blessing for the campaign, but these are all only good omens of the future victory¹¹³ or some *ex post* evidence of God's verdicts coming true¹¹⁴. The sole turning point in the course of the expedition where the narrator makes a direct reference to Divine intervention is the previously mentioned moment of Gelimer's blindness at Decimum¹¹⁵, decisive for the outcome of at least the first part of the campaign (incidentally, the motif of “blindness” sent down by God is here rather more Herodotean¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ As an example, let us take a look at the prologue to his history, built on the successive allusions to Herodotus, Thucydides, and Homer. The above-mentioned speech made by John of Cappadocia also contains some references to these three authors (H. BRAUN, *Die Nachahmung Herodots...*, p. 25).

¹¹⁰ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 10, 18–20.

¹¹¹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 12, 11; III, 16, 16.

¹¹² PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, VII, 8, 22–24; VII, 9, 16.

¹¹³ Referring to the abundant spring which the Romans came across as they landed (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 15, 34–35) – it is noteworthy that according to Corippus, one of the participants, John Trogletes, mentions this fact, although he does not see any miracle or sign in the event (*Flavii Cresconii Corippi Iohannidos seu de Bellis Libycis Libri VIII*, I, 383, ed. J. DIGGLE, D. GOODYEAR, F. RICHARD, Cambridge 1970).

¹¹⁴ Like the surprisingly fulfilled dream in which St. Cyprian foretold the punishment on the Vandals (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 21, 17–25). However, the recalled ancient prophecy according to which Gamma shall chase Beta away and then Gamma is chased away by Beta (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 21, 14–16) would rather correspond to the unconsciously pronounced prophecies from the narrative of Herodotus (cf. Th. HARRISON, *Divinity and History...*, p. 127–130).

¹¹⁵ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 19, 25.

¹¹⁶ *Theoblades* in Herodotus, cf. Th. HARRISON, *Divinity and History...*, p. 54.

than Biblical, as there is no comment referring to a possible punishment for the usurper's sins). Obviously, the careful reader should easily identify a number of other fortunate (from the Roman perspective) occurrences, although the narrator does not ascribe those events openly to any intervention of the powers beyond human control¹¹⁷.

If we should ask, in turn, about the narrator's statement in which the "metaphysical" background of the story is revealed, the author's commentary at the beginning of the description of the battle at Decimum is obviously of relevance here: *God, who sees from afar what the future holds, traces out the manner in which it seems best to him that things should come to pass [...] so that in all of this a path is laid down for Fate, who implements all that has been ordained beforehand*¹¹⁸. It is easy to notice that there are three interrelated factors here: God, Fate, Destiny. Anthony Kaldellis, who discerns here, and in some other statements of Procopius, the presence of some sort of a modern-day atheism (concealed out of necessity and predating its period by many centuries), does not reach further than the first phrase suggestive of a "God" who is essentially limited to the role of a passive observer, but thus all the causality would be attributable to Fate (*týche*), conceived as "blind luck"¹¹⁹. Such an interpretation is contradicted by all the further part of the sentence: God is the one who is active in enabling the work (acts) of Tyche, while the latter turns out to lead towards everything that was already pre-established earlier on. Dariusz Brodka is correct in observing here that the issue is not Fate acting randomly (*Zufallstyche*), but Fate acting with a purpose (*teleologische Tyche*)¹²⁰, which – in such a framework – would be just a servant of Providence. Removing God from this triad would be risky, especially as Procopius makes it clear, in both the *De Bellis* and the *Historia Arcana*, that Tyche is only a name invented by humans to describe the acts of God which are incomprehensible to humans¹²¹. Nevertheless, the point made by Brodka would remain valid even if we assume that God is a "superimposed" factor here (following Kaldellis' hypothesis),

¹¹⁷ Also interpreted as the Divine intervention is the storm stopping Bonifatius from running away with the treasure of the Vandal king, but this one is rather a "private explanation" made by a corrupted official seeking a pretext for betraying his former master "in accordance with his conscience" (PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 4, 33–41).

¹¹⁸ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 18, 2: ὁ θεός, πόρρωθεν ὁρῶν τὰ ἐσόμενα, ὑπογράφει ὅτι ποτὲ αὐτῷ τὰ πράγματα δοκεῖ ἀποβῆσθαι [...] ἵνα γένηται τὰ τύχη τρίβος, φέρουσα πάντως ἐπὶ τὰ πρότερον δεδογμένα (trans. Dewing–Kaldellis, modified: in the present article, I have attempted to be consistent in rendering ἡ τύχη as Fate).

¹¹⁹ A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius of Caesarea*..., p. 183.

¹²⁰ D. BRODKA, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie*..., p. 41.

¹²¹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, VIII, 12, 34–35; PROCOPIUS, *Historia Arcana*, 4, 44–45; I should also mention the observation made by D. BRODKA, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie*..., p. 54–55 about a slightly Protean nature of Procopius' Tyche. As it is represented in this author's work, it appears to be a freely utilized literary motif rather than a consistently conceived philosophical conception (see also IDEM, *Prokop von Caesarea*, Hildesheim–Zürich–New York 2022, p. 145–147).

a tactical “bow” to the prevalent world-view of the period. Even then Procopius' narrative would remain a story of the astonishing fulfillment of many successive prophecies, not of the total unpredictability of Fate. There is no way to overlook the fact how much it comes to resemble especially the Lydian motif of Herodotus' narrative. Essentially, the difference is found exactly in the role played by God: in Herodotus, even a god could postpone (at most), not avert, any predestined thing¹²², while according to Procopius, God is the Lord of all destinies no less than of the Fate leading to those. But this difference may be likewise only apparent after all, since as Tom Harrison remarks, eventually also in the world-view of the “Father of history” (or at least in that of Solon, around whose conceptions this narrative of Herodotus is built up¹²³), there is ultimately a god or some impersonal “divine power” (*to theïon*) behind Fate¹²⁴.

Conclusion

Anthony Kaldellis is quite correct in pointing out that there is a tension between the world-views behind the words of the two main protagonists in the Vandal narrative, Belisarius and Gelimer¹²⁵. If Belisarius puts his trust in the fortitude and martial prowess of the soldiers under his command, and in God's justice¹²⁶, Gelimer comes to realize – more and more with each successive defeat – the fact that he is just a toy in the game of Fate¹²⁷. It is also notable that the author leaves the question open in his narrator conclusion, to be resolved by the reader: *Whether this happened on the strength of Fate's judgement or thanks to some virtue, one justly marvels at it*¹²⁸. The wisdom of Croesus as acquired by the Vandal king remains one of the many voices in Procopius' narrative. Both Pharas' tears and Gelimer's laughter are ultimately underpinned by the views of the two protagonists of his story, which the author recounts with a distanced perspective¹²⁹. They build up the figures of the two Germanic leaders in a way similar to how the figures of Belisarius and Totila are built by their deep belief in the rewarding and punishing justice of Heavens, perhaps mistaken but conditioning their already “objectively”

¹²² HERODOTUS, *Historiae*, I, 91.

¹²³ Th. HARRISON, *Divinity and History*..., p. 36–40.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 35; cf. also E. EIDINOW, *TYCHĒ* (τύχη, ἡ), [in:] *The Herodotus Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ch. BARON, Hoboken 2021, p. 1507.

¹²⁵ A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius of Caesarea*..., p. 181–189.

¹²⁶ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, III, 12, 11; III, 16, 16; III, 19, 4–8; IV, 1, 13–16.

¹²⁷ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 2, 16; IV, 6, 28; IV, 7, 8.

¹²⁸ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 7, 21: τοῦτο γὰρ εἴτε τύχῃ εἴτε τινὶ ἀρετῇ γέγονε, δικαίως ἂν τὰς αὐτὸ ἀγασθῇ (trans. Dewing–Kaldellis, modified: Dewing–Kaldellis proposes “by chance or some kind of valor”, but it does not seem to me that Procopius referred to “mere chance” here nor that ἡ ἀρετὴ is certainly understood here as valor).

¹²⁹ PROCOPIUS, *De bellis*, IV, 6, 34; IV, 7, 14–16.

(at the narrator judgement level) admirable acts¹³⁰. Thus, even if both Gelimer's and Pharas' deliberations have a generally "Solonian" overtone, we cannot speak here about the adoption of the Herodotean views on Fate and the human condition in Procopius' history, but much more about using a certain Herodotean pattern to construct an interesting story and the figures of its protagonists.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- C. Iulii Caesaris Commentarii*, vol. I, *Commentarii belli gallici*, ed. A. KLOTZ, Leipzig 1920.
- Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. II, *Codex Iustinianus*, rec. P. KRÜGER, Berlin 1954.
- Flavii Cresconii Corippi Iohannidos seu De Bellis Libycis Libri VIII*, ed. J. DIGGLE, D. GOODYEAR, F. RICHARD, Cambridge 1970.
- HÉRODOTE, *Histoire*, ed. Ph.-E. LEGRAND, Paris 1932–1956.
- ISOCRATES, *Panegyrikos*, [in:] *Isocratis Orationes*, vol. I, ed. F. BLASS, Leipzig 1907, p. 41–87.
- MALCHUS OF PHILADELPHIA, *Fragments*, [in:] *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of Late Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodoros, Priscus and Malchus*, vol. II, ed. R.C. BLOCKLEY, Liverpool 1983, p. 402–462.
- Mauritii Strategicon*, ed. G. DENNIS, trans. E. GAMILLSCHEG, Wien 1981 [= *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, 17].
- Procopii Caesarensis Opera Omnia*, vol. I–II, *De bellis libri VIII*, ed. J. HAURY, G. WIRTH, Leipzig 1962–1963.
- Procopii Caesarensis Opera Omnia*, vol. III, *Historia quae dicitur Arcana*, ed. J. HAURY, G. WIRTH, Leipzig 1964.
- SALVIEN DE MARSEILLE, *Oeuvres II. Du gouvernement de Dieu*, ed. G. LAGARRIGUE, Paris 1975 [= *Sources Chrétiennes*, 220].
- Theodosiani Libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et Leges Novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, ed. Th. MOMMSEN, P.M. MEYER, Berlin 1905.
- Titi Livii Ab urbe condita libri XXIII–XXV*, ed. Th.A. DOREY, Leipzig 1976.
- XENOPHON, *Helléniques*, ed., trans. J. HATZFELD, Paris 2019.
- XENOPHON, *Institutio Cyri*, ed. W. GEMOLL, Leipzig 1968 [= *Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*], <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110948912>

Translations

- HERODOTUS, *Books I–II*, ed. J. HENDERSON, trans. A.D. GODLEY, Cambridge, Mass.–London 1999 [= *Loeb Classical Library*, 117].
- PROCOPIOS, *The Wars of Justinian*, trans. H.B. DEWING, revised and modernized, with Introduction and notes by A. KALDELLIS, Indianapolis–Cambridge, Mass. 2014.
- PROKOP, *Werke*, vol. IV, *Vandalenkriege*, ed. O. VEH, München 1971.
- PROKOPIUSZ Z CEZAREI, *Historia wojen*, vol. I, ed., trans. D. BRODKA, Kraków 2013.

¹³⁰ Cf. D. BRODKA, *Prokop...*, p. 143–144.

Secondary Literature

- AGER S.L., *Familiarity Breeds: Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty*, "Journal of Hellenic Studies" 125, 2005, p. 1–34, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426900007084>
- ANDRES H., *Der καίρὸς bei Prokop von Kaisareia*, "Millennium" 14, 2017, p. 73–102, <https://doi.org/10.1515/mill-2017-0003>
- BASSO F., GREATREX G., *How to Interpret Procopius' Preface to the Wars*, [in:] *Procopius of Caesarea. Literary and Historical Interpretations*, ed. C. LILINGTON-MARTIN, E. TURQUOIS, London–New York 2018, p. 59–72, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315602288-5>
- BÖRM H., *Justinians Triumph und Belisars Erniedrigung, Überlegungen zum Verhältnis zwischen Kaiser und Militär im späten Römischen Reich*, "Chiron" 43, 2013, p. 63–91.
- BÖRM H., *Procopius, his Predecessors, and the Genesis of the Anecdota: Antimonarchic Discourse in Late Antique Historiography*, [in:] *Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity*, ed. H. BÖRM, Stuttgart 2015, p. 305–346, <https://doi.org/10.25162/9783515110969>
- BRAUN H., *Die Nachahmung Herodots durch Prokop*, Nürnberg 1894.
- BRIANT P., *History and Ideology: The Greeks and the 'Persian Decadence'*, [in:] *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed. Th. HARRISON, New York 2002, p. 193–210, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474468916-016>
- BRODKA D., *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie. Studien zu Prokopios von Kaisareia, Agathias von Myrina und Theophylaktos Simokattes*, Frankfurt am Main 2004 [= Studien und Texte zur Byzantinistik, 5].
- BRODKA D., *Prokop von Caesarea*, Hildesheim–Zürich–New York 2022.
- CAMERON A., *Gelimer's Laughter: The Case of Byzantine Africa*, [in:] *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, ed. F.M. CLOVER, R.S. HUMPHREYS, Madison 1989, p. 171–190.
- CAMERON A., *The 'Scepticism' of Procopius*, "Historia" 15, 1966, p. 466–482.
- CONANT J., *Staying Roman. Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439–700*, Cambridge 2012 [= Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 82], <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139048101>
- COZZOLI U., *La τρυφή nella interpretazione delle crisi politiche*, [in:] *Tra Grecia e Roma. Temi antichi e metodologie moderne*, Roma 1980, p. 133–145.
- DORATI M., *La Lidia e la τρυφή*, "Aevum Antiquum" N.S. 3, 2003, p. 503–530.
- EIDINOW E., *TYCHĒ (τύχη, ἥ)*, [in:] *The Herodotus Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ch. BARON, Hoboken 2021, p. 1507–1509.
- FISHER N., *Hybris. A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece*, Warminster 1992.
- FLEISCHER R., *Hellenistic Royal Iconography on Coins*, [in:] *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship. Studies in Hellenistic civilisation*, vol. VII, ed. P. BILDE, T. ENGBERG-PETERSEN, L. HANNESTAD, J. ZAHLE, Aarhus 1996, p. 28–40.
- GRABOWSKI T., *Tryphé w ideologii Ptolemeusza*, [in:] *Spółeczeństwo i religia w świecie antycznym. Materiały z ogólnopolskiej konferencji naukowej (Toruń 20–22 września 2007)*, ed. Sz. OLSZANIEC, P. WOJCIECHOWSKI, Toruń 2010, p. 91–107.
- GRUEN E.S., *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, Princeton–Oxford 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400836550>
- HARRISON Th., *Divinity and History – The Religion of Herodotus*, Oxford 2000 [= Oxford Classical Monographs].

- HEINEN H., *Die Tryphè von Ptolemaios VIII Euergetes II. Beobachtungen zum ptolomäischen Herrscherideal und zu einer römischen Gesandtschaft in Ägypten (140/139 v. Chr.)*, [in:] *Althistorische Studien Hermann Bengtson zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von Kollegen und Schülern*, ed. H. HEINEN, K. STROHEKER, G. WALSER, Wiesbaden 1983, p. 116–128.
- ISAAC B., *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton–Oxford 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400849567>
- KAEGI W.E., *Arianism and the Byzantine Army in Africa 533–546*, “*Traditio*” 21, 1965, p. 23–53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0362152900017657>
- KALDELLIS A., *Ethnography after Antiquity. Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature*, Philadelphia 2013, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812208405>
- KALDELLIS A., *Procopius of Caesarea. Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, Philadelphia 2004, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812202410>
- KALDELLIS A., *Procopius’s Vandal War. Thematic Trajectories and Hidden Transcripts*, [in:] *North Africa under Byzantium and Early Islam*, ed. S.T. STEVENS, J. CONANT, Cambridge, Mass. 2016 [= *Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia*], p. 13–21.
- KNAEPEN A., *L’image du roi vandale Gélimer chez Procope de Césarée*, “*Byzantion*” 71, 2001, p. 383–403.
- KRUSE M., *Archery in the Preface to Procopius’ Wars. A Figured Image of Agonistic Authorship*, “*Studies in Late Antiquity*” 1, 2017, p. 381–406, <https://doi.org/10.1525/sla.2017.1.4.381>
- KURKE L., *The Politics of ἀβροσύνη in Archaic Greece*, “*Classical Antiquity*” 11, 1992, p. 91–120, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25010964>
- LAMBERT D., *The Barbarians in Salvian’s De gubernatione Dei*, [in:] *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity*, ed. S. MITCHELL, G. GREATREX, London 2000, p. 103–115, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1n357t2.13>
- LAUSBERG H., *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric. A Foundation for Literary Study*, trans. M.T. BLISS, A. JANSEN, D.E. ORTON, Leiden–Boston–Köln 1998, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004663213>
- MEAKER M., *Von Blumenkranzen, Salbölen und Purpurgewänder. Luxus und Geschlechtsrollen in archaischen Griechenland*, [in:] *Luxus, Perspektiven von der Antike bis Neuzeit*, ed. E. LUPPI, J. VOGES, Stuttgart 2022, p. 51–79.
- MILES R., *Vandal North Africa and the Fourth Punic War*, “*Classical Philology*” 112.3, 2017, p. 384–410, <https://doi.org/10.1086/692906>
- PASSERINI A., *La ΤΡΥΦΗ nella storiografia ellenistica*, “*Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica*” 11, 1934, p. 35–56.
- PAZDERNIK Ch., *Xenophon’s Hellenica in Procopius’ Wars: Pharnabazus and Belisarius*, “*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*” 46, 2006, p. 175–206.
- RANSTON H., *Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature*, London 1925.
- SCHMIDT-HOFNER S., *Das Klassische Griechenland. Der Krieg und die Freiheit*, München 2016, <https://doi.org/10.17104/9783406679162>
- SIDEBOTTOM H., *Ancient Warfare. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford–New York 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780192804709.001.0001>
- SIGNES CODOÑER J., *Kaiserkritik in Prokops Kriegsgeschichte*, [in:] *Freedom and its Limits in the Ancient World. Proceedings of the Colloquium Held at the Jagellonian University, Kraków, September 2003*, ed. D. BRODKA, J. JANIK, S. SPRAWSKI, Kraków 2003 [= *Electrum. Studia z Historii Starożytnej*, 9], p. 215–229.

- STACHURA M., *Inspirations from Herodotus Found in Procopius' Account on the Fall of the Vandal Kingdom*, [in:] *Proceedings of the 11th International Symposium of Byzantine and Medieval Studies "Days of Justinian I", Skopje 9–11 November 2023* (forthcoming).
- STACHURA M., *The Distant Origins of "Fat Shaming" or why the People of Antiquity did not Ridicule Fat Women*, "Studia Ceranea" 12, 2022, p. 181–213, <https://doi.org/10.18778/2084-140X.12.36>
- STACHURA M., *Der persische Krieger bei Prokop. Ein Beitrag zur Militärethnographie der Spätantike*, [in:] *Byzantina et Slavica. Studies in Honour of Professor Maciej Salamon*, ed. S. TURLEJ, M. STACHURA, B.J. KOŁOCZEK, A. IZDEBSKI, Kraków 2019, p. 367–381.
- STEINACHER R., *Gruppen und Identitäten. Gedanken zur Bezeichnung „vandalisch“*, [in:] *Das Reich der Vandalen und seine (Vor-)geschichten*, ed. G.M. BERNDT, R. STEINACHER, Wien 2008, p. 243–260.
- STEWART M.E., *Between Two Worlds: Men's Heroic Conduct in the Writings of Procopius*, Diss. San Diego 2003.
- STEWART M.E., *The Danger of the Soft Life. Manly and Unmanly Romans in Procopius's Gothic War*, "Journal of Late Antiquity" 10, 2017, p. 473–502, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jla.2017.0025>
- STEWART M.E., *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics in the Age of Justinian. A Study of Procopius*, Amsterdam 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048540259>
- STEWART M.E., *The Soldier's Life. Martial Virtues and Manly Romanitas in the Early Byzantine Empire*, Leeds 2016, p. 247–316.
- TONDRIAU J., *La tryphè: philosophie royale ptolémaïque*, "Revue des études anciennes" 50, 1948, p. 49–54, <https://doi.org/10.3406/rea.1948.3388>
- VAN NUFFELEN P., *The Wor(l)ds of Procopius*, [in:] *Procopius of Caesarea. Literary and Historical Interpretations*, ed. C. LILINGTON-MARTIN, E. TURQUOIS, London–New York 2018, p. 40–55, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315602288-4>
- WILCZYŃSKI M., *Gejzeryk i „czwarta wojna punicka”*, Oświęcim 2016.
- WOOD Ph.I., *Being Roman in Procopius' Vandal Wars*, "Byzantion" 81, 2011, p. 424–447.
- ZALI V., *Fate, Divine phthonos, and the Wheel of Fortune: the Reception of Herodotean Theology in Early and Middle Byzantine Historiography*, [in:] *God in History. Reading and Rewriting Herodotean Theology from Plutarch to the Renaissance*, ed. A. ELLIS, Newcastle upon Tyne 2015, p. 85–126, <https://doi.org/10.29173/histos88>

Michał Stachura

Jagiellonian University

Institute of History

ul. Gołębia 13

31-007 Krakow, Polska/Poland

mistachu@gmail.com