

THEODORA AND ANTONINA IN THE HISTORIA ARCANAE: HISTORY AND/OR FICTION?¹

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THE HISTORIA ARCANAE OF PROCOPIUS is a puzzling work. The historian himself describes it as a continuation and correction of his eight-book *de Bellis*,² but its tone seems remarkably different from that of the earlier work — polemical, slanderous, even obscene.³ Nevertheless, the *Historia Arcana* is useful as a record of opposition to Justinian's reign, and it is the longest and most detailed source for the life of his Empress, Theodora, and for that of General Belisarius' wife, Antonina. Historians discussing Theodora and/or Antonina must turn to the *Historia Arcana*, and they must adopt some working assumptions about the accuracy of Procopius' black picture of these women, since it contrasts with a few more favorable references to them elsewhere.⁴ Scholars do not agree on this question, although it is important in reconstructing the lives of Theodora and Antonina and in assessing Procopius' historical methods. Gibbon, Holmes, and Ure, for example, accept Procopius' biographical statements as essentially accurate; Mallett rejects them as entirely false.⁵ Recent opinion,⁶ however, tends to regard the *Historia Arcana* as a mixture of fact and fiction, cautioning that the polemical and scandalous tone of the *Historia Arcana* compromises its accuracy, but conceding that some truth lies behind its slander. (A problem arises, of course, in separating basic truth from decorative lies; Diehl and Rubin,⁷ for instance, credit the *Historia Arcana* with what they term "psychological reality" in Theodora's portrait). Once noted, it is not uncommon to account for the deceptive mixture of truth and exaggeration in the *Historia Arcana* by labeling it a reflection of gossip about the court current in Procopius' time.⁸ The gossip theory is attractive, for it explains why Procopius' statements, outrageous and inaccurate as they may be, might have been widely believed by his contemporaries. Gossip as Procopius' source is difficult to prove, however, and no one has really tried to do so, beyond Diehl's observation that adultery of famous women was a *communis opinio* of the times and may be a *topos* in the biographies of Theodora and Antonina.⁹

A second and related problem is that Theodora and Antonina should appear at all in a work devoted to discrediting the Emperor and his general, Belisarius. Evans has noted the unusual prominence of these women in the *Historia Arcana* without really explaining the phenomenon except for an observation that Procopius apparently hated domineering women and therefore attacked Antonina;¹⁰ presumably, a similar explanation could be offered to explain Theodora's appearance in the *Historia Arcana*. Ure, Schubart, Diehl, and Rubin¹¹ regard Theodora as a necessary object of the *Historia Arcana* and its slanders because of the great influence she wielded in the Empire; Rubin¹² (with Comparetti) also detects a literary purpose in the portrayals of Theodora and Antonina, observing that they effectively blacken the reputations of their husbands by association.

Procopius' purpose in including Theodora and Antonina prominently in the *Historia Arcana* cannot be determined with certainty, nor can it be separated from the question of the accuracy and/or credibility of the character portraits of Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana*. Evans' explanation depends upon the assumption that Antonina was either in fact – or in then-current opinions – as domineering as Procopius says she was, and therefore earned the historian's ill will and a place in the *Historia Arcana*. The other two explanations – that Procopius intended to discredit either the women or their husbands with his portrayals of them – persuade only if these biographies actually would discredit their subjects in the eyes of contemporaries; in such a case, the characterizations may be influenced by contemporary gossip and need not be true to be credible in the eyes of a contemporary audience. Modern readers assume that the portraits of Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana* were as scandalous and offensive to a Byzantine audience as they are to us. As Diehl suggests, however, this may be an unwarranted assumption;¹³ what shocks us may have only amused or titillated Procopius' contemporaries, and portrayals which seem to us slanderous may have been relatively unremarkable to a sixth-century audience.

In evaluating Procopius' portraits of Theodora and Antonina, I propose first to examine what sorts of behavior were considered offensive and unacceptable for women in Procopius' time, and then to assess his characterization of Theodora and Antonina according to the standards of their own age. If the portraits are found to be *inoffensive* in sixth-century terms, I assume that Procopius did not include them

in order to discredit either the women or their husbands, but rather to present a comprehensive and accurate picture of Justinian's court. If, on the other hand, the portraits are found to be *offensive*, I assume that Procopius included them in order to discredit the women and their husbands for contemporary readers.

Once the purpose of these portraits has been deduced from their effect on a Byzantine audience, it will be possible to draw some tentative conclusions about the historical accuracy of Theodora and Antonina as they appear in the *Historia Arcana*. If the characterizations are *inoffensive* in terms of sixth-century standards, it seems to me very likely that they are also accurate, because I see no reason why Procopius would fabricate inoffensive characterizations which would serve no discernible purpose in the *Historia Arcana* and which might cause well-informed contemporary readers to doubt the reliability of the whole work (cf. *Arc.* 1.4-5). On the other hand, if the portraits are *offensive* by contemporary standards, the degree to which they correspond with sixth-century ideas of unacceptable female behavior will be instructive and relevant to the question of accuracy vs. credibility in these characterizations. Portrayals which appear to offend sixth-century norms of behavior need not satisfy modern standards of accuracy in order to be credible in their time, so long as the misdeeds described fit contemporary notions of offensive conduct. Such portraits of reputedly offensive persons would be credible to a contemporary audience whether these portrayals were based on fact or on gossip and fiction. The modern historian, therefore, must approach such portraits with extreme caution, because they are not necessarily accurate in the modern sense of the word.

Little work has been done on the subject of Byzantine attitudes toward women. Bréhier and Lambros¹⁴ have made brief general surveys and come to opposite conclusions; Bréhier detects a subservient position and low general regard for women in Byzantine society, while Lambros finds an attitude of reverence and respect towards them. Downey¹⁵ describes the position of women in sixth-century Constantinople as independent and respected; Evans¹⁶ suggests that Procopius reflects the values of a "traditional 'male vanity culture'" which relegated women to a passive role. However, no systematic study of the question has been attempted. In the scope of this article, it is possible to offer only partial evidence and tentative conclusions on the attitudes and expectations about women operating in Procopius' so-

ciety. These tentative conclusions may be compared with Procopius' portrayal of Theodora and Antonina in order to determine whether the portraits were offensive to a sixth-century audience, and whether they are likely to be accurate as well as credible.

In outlining sixth-century attitudes towards women, it is necessary to examine not only the opportunities theoretically open to them, but also the concurrent definition of the "good woman." What women are allowed to do and what women gain approval for doing may be entirely different; the limits of approved behavior indicate attitudes and stereotypes about women's capacities and nature much more clearly than tolerated behavior. Traces of society's view of women may be drawn from evidence of their position before the law, in the Church, and in daily life.

Although Byzantine law recognized women as persons and protected their rights, marriage legislation traditionally treated them as inferior to men and placed them in a disadvantaged position if they sought divorce. From the time of Constantine, the law designated different standards of marital conduct for women and for men and applied different punishments for women and for men who divorced without sufficient grounds. For instance, under Constantine¹⁷ a wife was entitled to divorce her husband, but only if he was a murderer, poisoner, or tomb robber; a woman claiming other grounds such as drunkenness or sexual offenses was deported without dowry or privilege of remarriage. On the other hand, a man had grounds for divorce if his wife was an adulteress, procuress, or poisoner; a man divorcing his wife for "light conduct" had only to forfeit her dowry and refrain from remarriage for two years. Legislation enacted by Theodosius and Valentinian ameliorated these penalties somewhat, but the inequality between the positions of husband and wife before the law remained.¹⁸ The marriage legislation of Justinian attempted to equalize the penalties meted out to women and to men for similar misconduct; for instance, according to legislation of 542 and 548 A.D., both women and men repudiating their mates without grounds could be confined to a nunnery or monastery for life.¹⁹ Justinian also enacted legislation which afforded protection to women in the family and placed them in a more advantageous legal position than they had previously enjoyed. Women could demand divorce if their husbands capriciously beat them or indulged in flagrant adultery,²⁰ but wives were protected from divorce on false adultery charges by more stringent requirements of proof of

misconduct.²¹ In addition, a woman who married without dowry was protected from repudiation on that account.²² Finally, even women outside respectable family life benefited from Justinian's legislative attention; for instance, it was prohibited to require an actress to swear an oath to remain in her profession.²³ We must not assume, however, that the innovative regard for women's position and rights in Justinian's legislation necessarily reflected a new and egalitarian attitude towards women in society at large; rather, as Diehl has suggested, Justinian alone may have entertained an unusual respect and consideration for the position of women, perhaps because of the influence of Theodora.²⁴

Women received a certain amount of status in the Church. Bury has observed that the increasing prominence of the Church in Greek life had an ameliorating effect upon the position of women and upon social attitudes towards them, for they were conceded the dignity of an immortal soul, welcomed into the Faith, and allowed to take religious orders.²⁵ The early Christian writers, however, displayed a distinctly unfavorable attitude toward the nature of women and their effect upon men. As Katharine M. Rogers observes in a study of literary views of women, "Every one of the major Christian writers from the first century through the sixth assumed the mental and moral frailty of women, dwelt upon the vexations of marriage, and reviled the body and sexual desire. This attitude was to pervade the medieval Church and persists into religious writings even today."²⁶ Evidence for the inferior and even dangerous nature of some women could be drawn from both the Old Testament (e.g. Samson and Delilah, *Judges* 16:4-22; Job's wife, *Job* 2:9-10; Lot's wife, *Gen.* 19:17-26) and the New (e.g. *Cor.* i 11:1-15);²⁷ Rogers traces this derogatory view of women in scripture back to the "Yahwist" version of the creation of woman from man (*Gen.* 2:18-23; cf. *Gen.* 1:27) which suggests woman's more distant relationship to the Creator and her greater susceptibility to vice and folly.²⁸ In spite of the low regard accorded women in the eyes of the Church, the Theotokos enjoyed great reverence and prominence; as a special and divinely favored woman, Mary's position was apparently quite different from that of her fallible and mortal sisters. This is clear from Procopius' references in the *de Aedificiis* to women honored by the Church. Many churches mentioned bear the names of female saints and martyrs, some renowned (as St. Anne, i 3.11), some obscure (as St. Prima at Carthage, vi 5.9), but the most prominent

female figure in terms of the Church and its buildings is, predictably enough, the Theotokos. Procopius begins his discussion of imperial churches by enumerating the churches honoring Mary in Constantinople; it is reasonable, he observes, to proceed from God to His mother (i 3.1). The *de Aedificiis* closes with a description of the fortress and church dedicated to Mary at Septem, which symbolized her protection of the entire Empire and its invulnerability (vi 7.16).

The everyday life of Byzantine women, what they typically did in sixth-century society, is an important but elusive element in assessing society's attitudes towards them. Saints' lives provide some information on the role of women, especially among the lower classes, and deserve to be examined in a separate study. The prestige and power of various assertive empresses (such as Ariadne, widow of Zeno) is well known. The experiences and position of women of the middle and upper class, however, cannot be assumed to be identical either with the exceptional life style and position of the Empress²⁹ or with the experiences of very poor women. Elusive as these more privileged women may be in their daily lives, they are important for this study because it was through them that the upper class formed its opinions of the nature and capabilities of women. It is presumably among the upper class that the audience of the *Historia Arcana* was to be found, and to upper class attitudes towards women that it would appeal.

Some information on the lives of upper class women can be derived from the works of Procopius himself, who moved in aristocratic circles³⁰ and who mentions women of this class incidentally in the course of his narrative. Women apparently could be expected to marry at a fairly early age, for Procopius notes with surprise one young woman still unwed at eighteen (*Arc.* 5.9) and incidentally describes another as a former child bride (*Bell.* vii 31.11). It is plain from marriage negotiations described in the *Historia Arcana* (*Arc.* 5.9; 5.18) that families often arranged beneficial unions between their offspring; these marriages were sometimes within the extended family (*Bell.* vii 31.11). Married or not, women apparently led somewhat restricted and segregated lives. They could not go to the theater (*Bell.* i 24.6); they were assigned to a separate stoa in St. Sophia (*Aed.* i 1.56) and accommodated in separate hospitals and travellers' hostels (*Aed.* ii 10.25). Women encountered slights and rebuffs within the family because of their sex. Procopius refers to a will overturned by Justinian

in which the testator's brother and nephews received a greater inheritance than his daughter (*Bell.* vii 31.17-18), and he cites an ancient law which assigned part of the property of a deceased senator to the state should no *male* offspring survive him (*Arc.* 29.19). Also, certain appeals to public morality mentioned by Procopius reflect a general distrust of female sexuality throughout society. Intercourse with a holy woman (but not with a holy man) is specified in a list of opprobrious crimes (*Arc.* 19.11), and illicit relations with a woman justified executing an envoy (*Bell.* v 7.15). (The latter opinion, although enunciated by a barbarian, is accepted in substance by his Roman interlocutors.) Procopius also implies that society developed protective taboos concerning women. In his description of prostitutes at Amida, he observes that "they displayed naked the parts of a woman which it is not right (οὐ θέμις) to show men" (*Bell.* i 7.18). Fear of women and the effect of their sexuality on men appears to have motivated this attitude toward displaying the female genitalia, and the generalized form of its expression suggests that society acknowledged and respected the taboo.

To judge from Procopius' observations on women, the Empress did indeed occupy a special place in society and enjoy unique prestige among women, not unlike the case of the special woman in the Church, the Theotokos. The Empress possessed a public stature otherwise accorded only to men; statues were dedicated to her (*Aed.* i 11.8), foundations established bearing her name (*Aed.* iv 7.5; vi 5.10; vi 5.14), and her tomb placed with her husband's in the Church of the Holy Apostles (*Aed.* i 4.19). Other imperial or royal women could receive similar honors; for instance, Constantine enlarged and renamed a Bithynian city for his mother (*Aed.* v 2.1) and the town of Zenobia was named by and for the queen who founded it (*Bell.* ii 5.4; *Aed.* ii 8.8). These, however, are the honors accorded royalty and, in the case of the Empress or the Queen Mother, the honors accorded a close female connection of the Emperor. The position of typical women, even of the upper class, need not be affected in the least by the prestige of these exceptional women.³¹

Fragmentary as it is, this picture of daily life among upperclass Byzantine women agrees in several respects with the situation of women in classical Athens as described by Sarah B. Pomeroy.³² Early marriage and restricted contacts outside the family circle contributed, in Pomeroy's opinion, to a "patriarchal" stereotype of women as

dependent and intellectually inferior to men. The combined data from the law, the Church, and daily life in sixth-century Byzantium suggests that this stereotype survived in upper class attitudes from classical into Byzantine times and was additionally justified through the Christian theme of woman as a creature dangerous by nature. Such a patriarchal attitude finds full development in the non-polemical writings of Procopius, namely in the *de Bellis* and *de Aedificiis*, where his attention focuses upon the deeds of men, but where the demands of vivid historical writing dictate the inclusion of a certain number of female characters. Procopius subscribes to the practices of the so-called "tragic historians" of classical literature to the extent that he often concentrates on the dramatic aspects of a historical event and animates his narrative by focusing on the characters involved.³³ These characters are often female, and frequently incidental to the main progress of historical events. Procopius has chosen to include them for artistic reasons; in describing them, he reveals his assumptions about women through the roles which they act out.

In the *de Bellis* women are frequently mentioned as passive members in marriage or family relationships. The story of the noble Roman lady Prejecta, related at some length in Books Four (27.19-28.43) and Seven (31.2-15), typifies the situation of many women described by Procopius. She is helpless and dependent upon the men who cross her path; imprisoned by the murderer of her husband, Prejecta was forced to misrepresent the situation to her uncle, Justinian, for her captor hoped to marry her and enjoy the benefits of an imperial connection and a large dowry. An assassin came to Prejecta's rescue, however, and was rewarded both by Justinian and by Prejecta as the avenger of her husband's murder. In Book Seven, Procopius explains that the lady's gratitude impelled her to marry her deliverer, a prospect which pleased his ambitious nature. The appearance of a long-neglected wife foiled these marriage plans, however, for the claims of the wife were championed by Theodora and Prejecta married another man.

Contemporary ideas of the character and motivation of a well-behaved woman probably affect the presentation of Prejecta's story, for the *de Bellis* was the official history of Justinian's reign, and Prejecta's position as the Emperor's niece would dictate that all delicacy and regard for her reputation be observed. In carefully explaining Prejecta's desire to remarry as an act of gratitude, not of passion (*Bell.* vii 31.3), Procopius suggests that reverence for the

marriage bond and passionless devotion are proper female attributes.³⁴ By stressing the fact that Prejecta was never interfered with during her captivity (οὐτε τι ὑβρίσας λόγῳ ἢ ἔργῳ ὄτρωσθαι ἐξ αὐτῆς iv 27.20), Procopius appears to reflect society's high regard for female chastity. The story of Prejecta also introduces several themes frequent in the *de Bellis* when women's activities are described: their typically passive role in society, the importance of the marriage connection for a woman, and the benefits to a man's career and finances which an expedient marriage might bring.

The theme of the marriage devised to profit a man recurs frequently in discussions of Roman (vii 12.11) and barbarian unions (v 11.27; v 12.22; v 12.50; v 13.4; vii 39.14). The ability of women to transmit power and influence to their male connections, if not actually to wield it themselves, is apparent in various ways. A Roman wife may enable a barbarian to establish himself as friendly and "Romanized" (viii 26.13; viii 9.7-8), or a woman may serve as a link of power and influence between important men. Prejecta, for instance, first appears in the *de Bellis* to explain the prestige which her husband gained through marriage into Justinian's family (iv 24.3), and even Placidia, notable as regent of the Western Empire (iii 3.16), is first mentioned only to establish the important relatives whom her husband gained by marriage (iii 3.4). It is rare indeed that a woman achieves sufficient prestige to be cited as a powerful and recognizable figure in her own right. The Gothic queen Amalasantha is such a figure (v 11.27), as is Antonina, wife of Belisarius (vi 7.15). In fact, the roles which these two women play in the *de Bellis* are extraordinary in numerous respects and warrant fuller attention later in this paper.

Procopius follows the practice of the "tragic historians" particularly in his descriptions of war scenes,³⁵ where women are portrayed as helpless victims to heighten the pathos of the narrative (*Bell.* vii 26.11-12; v 10.15-19; vi 17.2-3; ii 9.9-10). They are sometimes described as the potential or actual victims of rape, a particularly horrible crime in a society which valued chastity highly. The plight of the women at the fall of Antioch (ii 8.35) and Rome (vii 20.30-31) is dramatized in this way. In the Roman episode, the Goth Totila saves the daughter of Symmachus from rape and also takes a firm moral stand against his own nobles when they intervene on behalf of a rapist (vii 8.12ff); he describes rape as "sin" (ἁμαρτία) and "pollution" (μίαιμα *Bell.* vii 8.18). The excellent moral character of Totila

is thus established in terms of his behavior and attitudes as judged by Procopius under a strict code of female chastity; it contrasts sharply with the laxity and licentiousness of the Roman commanders described in a juxtaposed passage (vii 9.1).

Women considered “good” according to a strict code of chastity may nevertheless occasion lustful and intemperate behavior in men. An anonymous woman described by Procopius in Book Eight provides an excellent example of this situation, which recurs through the *de Bellis* (cf. also i 6.1-9; iii 4.17-24). The lady’s beauty inflamed a Persian commander, who failed to persuade her to his will and tried to force her; enraged, her husband killed the Persian and his soldiers, men described by Procopius as “lost uselessly because of the commander’s lust” (παρανάλωμα τῆς τοῦ ἄρχοντος ἐπιθυμίας viii 10.6). It is sobering to reflect that in the narrative of Procopius a man is typically drawn to a woman because of her beauty (e.g. ii 5.28; v 11.7-8), but her beauty is also potentially dangerous. These stories leave the impression that women are the passive objects of men’s inevitable lust and cannot avert the disaster thus occasioned by any good or moral action on their own part. This viewpoint is articulated by the tyrant Maximus when he claims that passionate love for the Emperor’s wife motivated all his own evil deeds (iii 4.36); Maximus is an unsympathetic character, but the explanation which he offers is consistent with the viewpoint underlying the *de Bellis*. Procopius himself reflects the same assessment of male-female interaction when he catalogues “self-restraint” (σωφροσύνη) among the virtues of the general Belisarius and illustrates it by explaining that Belisarius generally avoided contact with women (vii 1.11-12); he touched only his wife, and he refused even to view the beautiful women captives available to him. The famous passage on prostitution in the *de Aedificiis* (i 9.2-9) reflects and elaborates the same view of male lust as a destructive and aggressive element in society. Procopius explains the prostitution trade in Constantinople in terms of lust victimizing poverty; he emphasizes the prostitute’s helplessness before male demands, thus rousing pity and indignation in the audience.³⁶ Although this passage describes whores as the passive and passionless victims of male lust, like “good women” they are not considered guiltless when men desire them. Procopius explains that Justinian and Theodora established a convent expressly for reforming ex-prostitutes and called it “Repentance” (Μετάνοια).

Although the female characters examined so far are typically passive and dependent upon men, there are a number of episodes in the *de Bellis* where women initiate and carry out a plan of action. The conditions and outcome of such action are noteworthy.

In a number of cases, women act independently because they are overwhelmed by emotion; Proba opens the gates of Rome to the enemy out of pity for her starving neighbors (iii 2.27), Matasuntha so resents her forced marriage that she betrays her people (vi 10.11; vi 28.26), and Eudoxia seeks revenge on her husband by appealing to the Vandal Gizeric, who plunders Rome and takes the women (including Eudoxia) captive (iii 4.36 = iii 5.3). Each of these influential and highborn women is driven by emotion to act contrary to the best interests of her own people and of herself. Undeterred by higher considerations such as loyalty and patriotism, they act with poor judgment and suspect morality to indulge their own emotions.³⁷

Poor judgment is also the hallmark of the reign of Placidia, who held imperial power in the West as regent for her son Valentinian. Procopius attributes the vicious character of Valentinian, his occult and adulterous interests, to the “womanish” education given him by his mother (θηλυνομένην παιδείαν τε καὶ τροφήν iii 3.10) and traces the loss of Libya, the great disaster of his reign, to her ineptitude when confronted with the court intrigues which resulted in a Vandal takeover (iii 3.14-36). Finally recognizing the situation, Placidia appealed to men for help (iii 3.29), thus typifying both the characteristic bad judgment of women and the familiar theme of female helplessness.

In several situations, women act independently to persuade their male connections to some novel course of action, which almost invariably proves ill-advised and/or disastrous. Particularly noteworthy among these episodes (*cf.* also i 23.8-21; iii 6.26; vii 1.37-42) is the bloody military rebellion in Africa attributed by Procopius to a number of causes, including the pressure of Vandal wives upon their Roman husbands (iv 14.8-21). Significantly, Procopius concludes his account of the revolt with the reminder that these women caused it; the other factors (i.e., Arian discontent, arrival of other mutineers) were apparently less shocking to Procopius and are not reiterated (iv 15.47). When women initiate and carry out a course of action in the *de Bellis*, the outcome is disastrous because they typically act emotionally and with limited foresight; when men follow the initiatives and suggestions

of women, Procopius implies that their compliance is not only dangerous but also particularly outrageous. An atypical variation on the theme of a woman's influence over her husband is the tragic encounter between the doomed pretender to Justinian's throne, Hypatius, and his wife Mary, "a woman of intelligence, renowned for her prudence" (ξυνετή τε οὔσα καὶ δόξαν ἐπὶ σωφροσύνην μεγίστην ἔχουσα i 24.23). In a hysterical parting scene, Mary fails to restrain her husband from disaster during the Nika riots; her reputation for intelligence and prudence does not earn this woman a hearing. In Procopius' narrative the incident seems to heighten the pathos of her husband's fate.

The theme of women who act independently receives its most startling expression in an anecdote used by Procopius to illustrate the horrors of famine at Ariminum. Two women, the only survivors in their neighborhood, killed and devoured passing travelers until their eighteenth victim surprised and overpowered them (vi 20.27-30). The story, more folktale than history, is especially interesting because it capitalizes upon the viability of female monster figures in the contemporary imagination. "Bogeymen" in Greek were, after all, "bogeywomen" (Μορμώ, Λάμια).

The women encountered so far in Procopius' narrative were depicted either as helpless and dependent or as independent and dangerous (with the exception of Hypatius' wife). Because Procopius does not label their behavior as unusual, it was apparently congenial with the expectations of women entertained by Procopius and his audience. Such expectations complement an assumption on the part of society that women were in fact inferior to men. This attitude seems to underlie an incident in which the Romans refused a prisoner exchange involving a Goth of quaestor rank and a Roman woman of high status because they deemed the exchange of a noble woman for an influential man in no way proper (vii 40.23).

Particularly interesting among the women of the *de Bellis* is Amalasantha, queen of the Goths, and the only prominent woman who earns Procopius' obvious approval for her good character and active role as a ruler. Amalasantha's career recapitulates a number of familiar themes: she is typically identified in terms of her relationship to an important man ("mother of Athalaric," iii 14.5; iv 5.18; v 2.1-2), and she depends for her power upon the good will of men (of Justinian, iii 14.6; v 2.23; v 3.28; of the Goth lords, v 3.11). Although clearly acting in a man's world, Amalasantha is atypical in her behavior to-

wards men. She is never described as beautiful or said to influence a man through her feminine appeal;³⁸ instead, Procopius praises her for virtues rare in the women he portrays, sagacity and justice (ξύνεσις καὶ δικαιοσύνη v 2.3), and summarizes her admirable character as “extremely masculine” (ἐς ἄγαν τὸ ἄρρενωπὸν v 2.3).³⁹ Procopius further observes that she neither feared the Goth lords whose intrigues threatened her position nor bent “in womanly fashion” (οὔτε οἷα γυνὴ ἐμαλθακίσθη) to them, but maintained regal conduct (v 2.21) by banishing (v 2.21) and murdering (v 2.29; v 4.13) her enemies. However masculine her virtues might have been, Amalasantha could not finally escape the weaknesses of her sex. Fear led her to compromise her plans for her son’s education (v 2.18) and to undertake the betrayal of her people to Justinian (v 3.28); poor judgment led her to an inaccurate assessment of her chief rival’s character and strength (v 4.4). The victim of this mistake, Amalasantha died as the helpless captive of her rival (v 4.13-27), thus dramatizing the dependence and poor judgment typical in Procopius’ view of women. Although she appears as a woman of great ability who merits admiration and approval (cf. v 4.28-29; vii 9.10), Amalasantha is also a comforting witness to male superiority, for she appeals to Justinian’s superior strength for protection and falls victim to her male rival’s greater skill at intrigue.

In two other passages Procopius labels women who act independently and effectively as “masculine,” and also illustrates the ultimate subservience of these superlative women to men. A tale developed in some detail (viii 20.11-41) focuses upon an unnamed princess of Brittia who wages war “in the manner of a man” (τὸ ἄρρενωπὸν ἀνελομένη viii 20.25) to avenge her honor and to punish the prince who jilted her. In a climactic scene the unfortunate prince appears in chains before the warrior princess and finds, to his relief and surprise, that she wishes only to complain of her dishonor and to demand marriage. Procopius develops this drama with particular attention to the prince’s terror before his powerful female opponent and his relief at her submission (viii 20.37-41); it seems that these features of the tale pleased Procopius and his audience by dramatizing the subservience of a strong and threatening woman to a man. A similar motif underlies Procopius’ explanation of the legendary Amazons (viii 3.5-9). Procopius denies that an entire race of manly women (γένος γυναικῶν ἀνδρείων) could have existed, because such would defy human nature (viii 3.7). He suggests instead that a historical accident fostered the

Amazon legend; women traveling in a nomadic tribe were left on their own at the death of their men and were forced by fear and hunger to adopt the manly arts of war until they were destroyed by their neighbors. In this passage Procopius disarms the threatening legend of a female warrior society by extrapolating back from societies known to him (viii 3.8-9). He capitalizes upon contemporary ideas about women when he explains that the Amazons did not choose to live apart from men, that they only fought because they were afraid and hungry, and that they could not defend themselves against the normal societies around them.

Such an interpretation of the Amazons is entirely consistent with the patriarchal stereotype of women inferred from Procopius' society (as typified by law, the Church, and daily life) and from his non-polemical writings. This stereotype implies that women were rightly subject to the control and protection of men because of their naturally disruptive influence upon men and upon society. Women who avoided control by men would be distrusted by their contemporaries, for such women affronted God and society by rejecting the domination generally considered beneficial to all. In the context of sixth-century attitudes toward the independent woman, it is extremely significant that independence of action and influence over men are characteristic of Theodora and Antonina as portrayed in the *de Bellis*. Viewed in detail from a contemporary perspective, these portrayals inspire apprehension rather than admiration and suggest a link to the biographies of Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana*.

Theodora and Antonina make frequent but sporadic appearances through the *de Bellis*. They are mentioned numerous times as the companions or co-agents of their husbands in official business; Procopius frequently notes Antonina traveling on campaign with Belisarius (*Bell.* i 25.11; iii 12.2; iii 19.11; v 18.43; vi 4.6; vii 28.4; vii 30.2) and Theodora acting in co-operation with Justinian (*Bell.* iv 9.13; *Aed.* i 2.17; i 9.5; i 11.27; v 3.14). An impression of equality or at least shared influence between husband and wife thus emerges in these two marriages. In the case of Theodora, it is reinforced by Procopius' description of the palace mosaic which portrayed Justinian and Theodora celebrating victory over the Vandals and Goths while the Senate looks on (*Aed.* i 10.16-18). More important, episodes in the *de Bellis* suggest that Theodora exercised independent power, sometimes opposing or directing the will of her husband. The Empress

begins her famous speech to the royal council at the time of the Nika riots by citing the opinion that she should not, as a woman, speak at all (*Bell.* i 24.33); the fact that she does so, and that she claims for herself lust for imperial power (i 24.36), establishes her among those unusual women who do not adopt a helpless, submissive role among men. Because Justinian follows her advice and events establish its soundness, she is an additionally atypical female. Thus Theodora shares with Amalasantha the independent exercise of royal power and the ability to deal with men on their own terms. Unlike Amalasantha, however, she is not said to fear men and is not portrayed as inferior to them. Indeed, the conclusion of Prejecta's story indicates that Theodora was capable of enforcing her will upon a man (vii 31.12-16); that men also feared Theodora's power is apparent from the excruciating terror of her which Procopius attributes to John the Cappadocian (i 25.4-7), a powerful member of Justinian's retinue. The story of John also illustrates the one respect in which Procopius describes Theodora as a typical woman; she could influence men through her sex appeal. Procopius remarks that John misjudged Justinian's tremendous devotion to his wife and thus acknowledges the influence which she wielded over her husband; in the general context of the *de Bellis*, the typically female capacity to influence men appears dangerous and makes Theodora an additionally threatening character. When Procopius celebrates her great beauty in the *de Aedificiis*, his words are ominous as well as fawning (i 11.8-9), given his view that female beauty is dangerous.

In many ways, Antonina reflects and extends the characterization of Theodora. Like the Empress, Antonina acts in concert with her husband, inspires his devotion (*Bell.* vii 1.11), and can influence his decisions (v 18.43). She is also a woman of initiative and independent action among men (iii 13.24; vii 30.25). Procopius describes Antonina as "most capable among mankind of doing the impossible" (ἤν γὰρ ἱκανωτάτη ἀνθρώπων ἀπάντων μηχανᾶσθαι τὰ ἀμήχανα i 25.13) and proceeds to illustrate his judgment by recounting her successful plot against John of Cappadocia (i 25.13 ff), an adventure demanding masterful deception and engineered with the help and encouragement of Theodora. Like Theodora, Antonina displays no need to depend upon men. It is Theodora who provides her with motivation for her deeds (i 25.13 and 22) and with financial resources for her ambitions regarding Belisarius (vii 30.3). Together, these women are extremely

threatening, for they demonstrate the dangerous and typically female ability to influence men through their sex appeal, but they also possess the typically male opportunity and inclination for independent action.

Antonina and Theodora are portrayed as independent women capable of influencing men both in the *de Bellis* and in the *Historia Arcana*. Because Procopius' tone in the *de Bellis* is not polemical and his character observations are surely not intended to misrepresent and displease his imperial patrons, these portraits were probably accurate and acceptable to their subjects. Evidence supporting the accuracy of the portrait of Theodora in the *de Bellis* comes from statements in Justinian's own legislation which indicate her independence and power and his devotion to her.⁴⁰ Antonina may well have been a powerful figure as well; the anecdote from the *Liber Pontificalis* regarding her complicity in the destruction of Silverius,⁴¹ true or false, at least implies that she was active and recognizable at court. In terms of their independence and influence over their husbands, the earlier and apparently accurate portraits of Antonina and Theodora in the *de Bellis* forecast their later ones in the *Historia Arcana* and provide a consistency of characterization between the two works which has been denied by Rubin.⁴² The actual personalities of Antonina and Theodora, as far as they can be assessed from Procopius' report in the *de Bellis*, would have offended Procopius and his contemporaries deeply and would have predisposed them to believe that these were offensive women who were very likely to demonstrate all the negative attributes applied to women in the sixth century. A careful examination of Antonina and Theodora as portrayed in the *Historia Arcana* indicates that Procopius presents them as women who would offend sixth-century sensibilities in almost every particular. At this point, I propose to compare Theodora and Antonina as they are portrayed in the *Historia Arcana* with sixth-century ideas of offensive women in order to suggest (1) what part of the portrayals is consistent with a contemporary stereotype and need not be true in order to be credible to a contemporary audience, and (2) what parts are not consistent with the stereotype and may be historical.

Procopius describes Antonina before Theodora in the *Historia Arcana*, and in many respects his treatment of Antonina forecasts his famous portrait of the Empress. The portrayal of Antonina centers on the observation, already expressed in the *de Bellis*, that she was the

close companion of her husband's career and exerted influence over him. In the *Historia Arcana*, Antonina's companionship and influence over her husband are presented as evidence of a relationship between husband and wife which violated contemporary standards of proper behavior. Procopius attributes Antonina's unusual influence over her husband to dark and supernatural causes; he claims that she practiced magic to control Belisarius. By portraying her as much older than her husband (4.41) and by comparing her to a deadly scorpion (1.26), Procopius presents Antonina as a sort of predatory witch figure. Following the view expressed in the *de Bellis*, that a woman's control over her husband is dangerous and offensive, Procopius illustrates the humiliating consequences of uxoriousness with a vivid scene perhaps created especially for the *Historia Arcana* (4.20-31). In a supposedly private interview, Belisarius is shown as terrified, submissive, and slavishly grateful to his wife for intervening with the Empress on his behalf; Antonina is cold and haughty, accepting her husband's servile devotion by allowing him to kiss her feet. Procopius traces various misdeeds of Belisarius to the dangerous control exerted over him by this woman. Because of his insane love for her, he neglects his military duties (2.18-21), condones embezzlement of booty due to the Emperor (1.19), forswears his solemn oaths (1.21, 1.26; 3.30), and accepts the role of cuckold (1.19-20).

Because Antonina has wilfully inverted the normal relationship of control by husband over wife, she appears to be unaffected by the normal restraints placed upon women by natural inclination and social convention. She has no respect for social contracts, breaking her solemn oath (2.16), revoking the betrothal of Belisarius' daughter (5.23-24), and, in the central anecdote concerning her, indulging in flagrant adultery. In this, the tale of Theodosius, Procopius claims that Antonina deliberately rejected the proper attitudes of a wife; she intended adultery from the time of her marriage and was deterred from it neither by shame nor by fear of her husband (1.13). She also appears as an unnatural mother, for Theodosius is first introduced as her Christian "foster son" by baptism (1.16), and Antonina's passion for him leads her to undertake the destruction of her real son (1.34; 2.3-4). Since Procopius has described Antonina as an unrestrained woman, he is free to amplify her character in the directions in which contemporary attitudes regarded women as most dangerous and excessive. He builds upon the assumption that women are overly emotional by describing

Antonina's hysteria at the loss of Theodosius (1.38) and her savage punishments of her enemies (e.g. 1.27). He exploits society's concern for the effect of female sexuality by portraying Antonina as an untrammelled libertine.⁴³ The account of her early life forcefully establishes shameless and lustful associations; Antonina is said to be the daughter of a prostitute, the mother of many bastards, and a generally lewd person (1.11-12). Her adulterous alliance with Theodosius is marked by shameless exhibitionism (1.17-19) and insatiable lust; Procopius stresses this aspect of her passion by asserting that Theodosius wished to escape from her and felt terror and guilt at their misdeeds (1.36).

Like Antonina, Theodora is said to exert influence over her husband because of his love for her (9.30-32) and because of her skill in manipulating him (13.19). To explain Theodora's control of her husband, Procopius asserts that she practiced magic (22.27-28) and emphasizes her continuous program to cultivate her beauty, which would increase Justinian's vulnerability to her (15.6-8). Belisarius' insane love for his wife supposedly diminished his effectiveness in military affairs, the chief area of his fame; similarly, Justinian's passion for Theodora supposedly corrupted law and foreign relations, two areas of his special concern. Procopius complains that Justinian's desire to marry Theodora motivated him to allow senators to marry courtesans (9.51); Procopius considers this legislation harmfully innovative and conducive to a lower standard of public morality. (The possibility that Justinian intended a genuine improvement in the condition of women before the law is conveniently ignored by Procopius.⁴⁴) Justinian's reputation among foreign powers is ruined by Theodora's supposedly secret assurance to the Persian king that she controlled her husband's judgment absolutely; the king declares that a state controlled by a woman is no state at all (2.33-36). In ordinary men excessive devotion to a woman appeared to be a prelude to disaster; in Justinian's case, the disaster is expressed in superlative terms: "His love burned up the Roman state" (ἡ πολιτεία τοῦ ἔρωτος τοῦδε υπέκκαυμα 9.32). Having asserted Theodora's influence over her husband, Procopius extends the theme of domination to other men because of Theodora's position as Empress. She is depicted as exercising control over men by demeaning male officials and dignitaries of the court (15.13-16; 15.24-35), by pursuing and torturing her enemies

(3.9-12; 16.23-28; 17.38-45), and by advancing the careers of her favorites (3.19; 17.13; 22.5; 22.22).

Like Antonina, Theodora is portrayed as a woman subject to none of the controls imposed by nature or society on her sex. She betrays none of the normal feminine concern for her children, practicing numerous abortions during her early career (9.19) and allegedly murdering her embarrassing and only son (17.17-23). She does not respect the behavior considered typical of women in the family sphere, for Procopius remarks that she undertook the matchmaking functions normally performed in the family throughout the whole Empire, but discharged the office in a heartless and wilful manner (17.28-32). Although Theodora is described as an unrestrained female, she was apparently known to be a chaste wife, and Procopius makes no accusations of infidelity against her.⁴⁵ Apart from citing a weak tale that she favored a palace slave and tortured him in order to discount rumors of her interest (16.11), Procopius prefers to use indirect methods to attack her reputation as a wife. First, he attributes much of Antonina's success as an adulteress to Theodora's help and encouragement (3.6-18). Then Procopius declares that Theodora used her position to force impure behavior on the part of other women, compelling unwilling cohabitation (5.21). In this way, she is portrayed as destroying marriage on a large scale in society; she also forces socially inappropriate (17.7-9) or degrading (17.32-37) unions, and encourages and supports adultery among wives (17.24-26). Thus she appears to inflict further insults upon men of a particularly odious sort (17.26).

As an unrestrained woman, Theodora indulges her whims and emotions in a typically female fashion. She is capricious, causing inconvenience to her retinue (15.36-38) and unmerited financial distress to her subjects (25.18-19); the tortures which she inflicts on her enemies show her to be savage in her wrath; and, as in the *de Bellis*, she is capable of terrifying men (3.26). Theodora's determination to carry out her will (15.2-3) makes her emotional motivations all the more formidable.⁴⁶ In establishing Theodora's sexual liberation, an indispensable component of slander to his audience, Procopius concentrates on her early life, probably exploiting the generally known rumor of Theodora's early career in the circus⁴⁷ by attaching to it a string of tales consistent with the taboos and fears related to women. Thus Theodora's sexual aggressiveness and voracity are emphasized

by anecdotes of her early life (9.15; 9.16; 9.18), and she is said to prefer younger men (9.15). Exhibitionism (9.17; 9.20; 9.23) is attributed to her in words recalling the anecdote of the prostitutes at Amida (γυμνὰ ἐπιδείξει, ἃ τοῖς ἀνδράσι θέμις ἄδηλά τε καὶ ἀφανῆ εἶναι 9.14). The taboo against viewing female genitals lies behind a particularly notable insult contributed by Procopius: Theodora seemed to wear her genitals on her face, where all must see them (9.24)! The charge of irregular sexual practices, a slur favored by Procopius (9.15; 9.25), is extended to Theodora's childhood in an unusual way, for Procopius claims that she acted as a pederast's partner before reaching maturity (9.10). Here Procopius apparently exploits another social taboo current in his time, for there are references in the *Historia Arcana* to prosecution of suspected homosexuals (11.34; 16.19; 16.23; 19.11; 20.9).

Procopius' sexual profile of Theodora is not only shocking, it is monstrous. An incident in which Theodora actually castrates a young man (16.18-21) suggests that Procopius intends to portray her as a woman whose sexual misdeeds surpass the violation of regular taboos. Sexual slanders against her are intensified by associating her sexuality with the supernatural: Theodora is credited with a dream foretelling her marriage to the King of Demons (12.31-32) and demons supposedly banished several of her lovers from her chambers (12.28).

The excessive and shocking behavior attributed by Procopius to Theodora and Antonina is emphasized by the presence of several inoffensive women in the *Historia Arcana*, who act in conformity with the high standards of female behavior implicit in the *de Bellis*. One such lady dies to preserve her chastity (7.37-38), a figure of reproof when contrasted with the sexual excesses attributed to both Theodora and Antonina. Three other "good" women mentioned and approved in the course of the *Historia Arcana* are of royal status and seem to offer specific contrasts with aspects of Theodora's character which Procopius considered especially offensive. As noted above, royal women apparently occupied a special position in Byzantine society and received special respect and privileges. Privilege, however, is not to be equated with license. To judge from the story of Domitian's unnamed wife (8.16-18), a royal wife was approved for respecting and honoring her deceased husband publicly, even if he was patently immoral and unworthy. Theodora's declaration to the Persian king that she controlled her husband, for example, contrasts starkly with this example of good regal conduct. Procopius' treatment of Lupicina/

Euphemia, the wife of Justin, offers a number of interesting parallels and contrasts to the portrayal of Theodora. Like Theodora, Euphemia came from a humble and not completely respectable background (slave, barbarian, and concubine of Justin, 6.17). Unlike Theodora, however, she was retiring and self-effacing as Empress, totally incapable and unwilling to participate in government; her character is approved by Procopius as “very far from wicked” (πονηρίας μὲν γὰρ ἡ γυνὴ ἀποτάτω οὐδὲν 9.48). Procopius emphasizes the fact that this modest and good woman entered public affairs only to oppose Theodora as future Empress (9.47); her disapproval apparently interested Procopius because he could represent it as the moral outrage felt by a “good” woman towards an “evil” one of similar background. The possibility that Euphemia was simply jealous of an upstart is of no use to Procopius and he does not mention it. Finally, the figure of Amalasantha reappears briefly in the *Historia Arcana* (16.1-5) as a queenly paradigm who contrasts sharply with Theodora. Amalasantha’s regal qualities are retained from her earlier portrait in the *de Bellis* (*Bell.* v 2.3) but are described somewhat differently in order to suggest Theodora’s impression of her: a woman rivaling the Empress in position, beauty, and ingenuity, but also possessing the advantages of noble birth and “magnificent, masculine bearing” (*Arc.* 16.1). Theodora’s reaction to this rival is expressed in terms of her desire to maintain control over Justinian. In one of the most controversial passages in the *Historia Arcana*, Procopius claims that she murdered Amalasantha (16.2-5; cf. 24.23) for fear of losing control over the Emperor.⁴⁸

We may now assess the likelihood that Procopius relied upon lies and slanderous gossip current in Constantinople for his statements regarding Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana*. As stated above (p. 268), Theodora apparently *was* a very independent woman, and her husband *was* devoted to her; these same things may well have been true of Antonina and Belisarius. The *Historia Arcana* is apparently accurate in this respect. The most striking features remaining in Procopius’ portrayal of Theodora and Antonina, however, are consistent with the sixth-century stereotype of areas in which independent (or uncontrolled) women would be expected to misbehave. As Procopius depicts them in the *Historia Arcana*, Theodora and Antonina are sexual libertines, emotional volcanoes, and savage, unscrupulous manipulators of the men around them. We would expect sixth-century gossip to concentrate upon exactly such topics.

Procopius' methods in the *Historia Arcana* are admirably suited to presenting rumor and gossip about Theodora and Antonina in such a way that it appears to be historical evidence. Procopius suggests by innuendo crimes which he cannot actually prove, such as Theodora's supposed murder of her mysterious son John (17.22-23) and describes crimes perpetrated by her against unnamed persons (15.25; 17.43-44; 17.7); he also claims detailed knowledge of private interviews (4.21-23) and secret documents (2.32-36), for which a reliable source is difficult to envision. Occasionally Procopius assumes an extravagant and hyperbolic tone in describing Theodora's activities, for instance in claiming that she inflicted many abortions upon herself (9.19) and enjoyed at least forty men in one evening (9.16). All these allegations are basically unprovable and could well be outright fabrications; their veracity is especially suspect because Procopius complains that it was virtually impossible to gain any information about the Empress which she did not wish to be noised abroad (16.12).⁴⁹ These allegations are effective, however, because they create an impression of her guilt in the mind of the reader. Similarly, damaging editorial comments intruded by Procopius on the character and motivations of his subjects create an impression of knowledge and authority where none need exist (e.g. Antonina intended to commit adultery from the time of her marriage, 1.13; Theodora took special care lest her appointees be good men, 17.27). Procopius also employs the technique of the tragic historian, the dramatic scene, to create a vivid impression of an event which may never have occurred (e.g. the above mentioned "private" interview between Belisarius and Antonina). These methods of distortion – innuendo, hyperbole, editorial intrusion, and perhaps outright fabrication – allow Procopius to transform his subjects as he deems appropriate to then-current expectations and his own purposes.

Both Procopius' methods and the stereotyped quality of his material argue that his portrayals of Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana* cannot be used to reconstruct their biographies, but only to indicate the sort of slander and gossip which was directed against them in Procopius' time. In my opinion, the apparently historical details of these two portrayals, although not necessarily false, cannot be regarded as certainly factual unless they fall into one of two categories.⁵⁰ (1) Details which do not contribute to the picture of Antonina or Theodora as typical sixth-century female villains. Two examples of such details are Procopius' statements that Theodora

was short (10.11) and that she founded the Metanoia convent for reformed prostitutes (17.5). On the other hand, the story that Theodora had a prostitute sister (9.9) contributes to the impression of her as a person of disreputable connections; her son John and his mysterious fate establish her savage and anti-maternal character (17.16-23). Such details lend an air of truth to a stereotyped picture of Theodora as an offensive woman in sixth-century terms and are not necessarily biographical. (2) Details which contribute to the stereotype of a bad woman in the *Historia Arcana* but which are also confirmed by other sources in a neutral tone. John of Ephesus' story that Antonina had a son, Photius, who was once a monk is such a detail, for it occurs without any reflection on the character of Antonina (*Hist. Eccl.* i 32). On the other hand, the passages in Cassiodorus which Bury considers corroboration of Theodora's complicity in the murder of Amalasantha (*Var.* x 20; 21)⁵¹ are so neutral and vague that they prove nothing about Theodora unless the reader already assumes her guilt.

Procopius' portraits of Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana*, although shocking and not necessarily factual, were not likely to damage Procopius' credibility with contemporary readers. His methods preclude direct contradiction of so-called biographical evidence. The data is often so vague (e.g. regarding anonymous victims of torture) or of such a nature (e.g. private interviews) that no confirmation – or contradiction – could exist. It would be as difficult for a sixth-century reader as for later historians to prove Procopius false.⁵² Also, I believe that Theodora and Antonina were actually the sort of independent, strong women whom Procopius and his contemporaries would find extremely threatening to their concept of how women should behave, and whom they would therefore label offensive. It seems to me that Procopius and his contemporaries *wanted* to believe that Theodora and Antonina did the sort of things attributed to them in the *Historia Arcana* because such portraits agreed with the then-current stereotype of independent or offensive women.⁵³ Whether these portrayals were based on fact or on gossip and fiction did not affect their credibility with a contemporary audience.

The characterizations of Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana* were extremely offensive to contemporary readers and probably believable as well; these portraits would discredit Justinian and Belisarius, the primary targets of the *Historia Arcana*, with a force impossible to achieve by simply attacking the two men.⁵⁴ Procopius

apparently recognized what an effective weapon he had against Justinian and Belisarius in his portraits of their wives and therefore gave great prominence to Antonina and Theodora in the *Historia Arcana*. Procopius' attack on Belisarius relies entirely upon describing Antonina's misdeeds and Belisarius' submission to her; Antonina was apparently the only aspect of Belisarius' upright life (cf. *Bell.* vii 1.4-22) in which he was vulnerable to disapproval.

In his attack on Justinian Procopius has utilized and extended the technique of defaming the wife in order to insult her husband. Although Justinian is portrayed as fully capable of independent mischief, much of the evil in his character is traced to Theodora's influence and encouragement. Moreover, Procopius treats Justinian and Theodora as two aspects of a single evil being, with the result that he can slander one and blacken both. The identification between husband and wife is accomplished and reinforced in a number of ways. Procopius first mentions the name of Justinian in the *Historia Arcana* together with Theodora (1.4); they are cited as co-rulers frequently in the work (4.33; 6.1; 9.53 etc.). Procopius claims that the two rulers were perfectly united and coordinated in their activities (13.9), differing only in non-essential respects of personality (13.9; 15.19) and sharing the unique characteristics of demons incarnate, bent on destruction of the world (12.14). Thus official misdeeds of one ruler cast odium equally upon both; accusations made against Theodora damage Justinian as well. Procopius also manages to turn defamation of Theodora's private life into slander of Justinian. He asserts that Justinian proved his utter depravity by rejecting all manner of chaste, noble, beautiful and proper candidates for marriage and by marrying Theodora instead (10.2). Thus any evil imputed to Theodora before her marriage to Justinian becomes his crime as well (10.4-5).

The portrayals of Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana* are thus essential to its purpose. Procopius was himself subject to and conscious of the attitudes toward women typical of his times; in skillfully exploiting these attitudes to destroy the reputations of Justinian and Belisarius, he has created an extraordinarily effective work of slander. Procopius has gone beyond the methods normally connected with modern historical method and modern historians, taking for his sources what is likely to be gossip and rumor, and appealing

to his readers' prurience and spitefulness. His ingenuity as a historian, if not his integrity, is admirable.

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NOTES

- ¹ This study developed from a paper presented at the Ninth Conference on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University (May 1974). I would like to thank Catherine Reid Rubincam, Robert Hadley, Angeliki Laiou-Thomadakis, Janet Martin and Christopher Rowe for their helpful suggestions. I am grateful to the Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington, D.C., for the leisure and resources with which to pursue this study.
- ² *Arc.* 1.1-3.
- ³ Cf. John W. Barker, *Justinian and the Later Roman Empire* (Madison 1966) 68, 78. J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (London 1923) ii 424.
- ⁴ See Charles Diehl, *Justinien et la civilisation byzantine au vi^e siècle* (Paris 1901) 42 n. 2.
- ⁵ Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*³ (London 1908) iv 335 n. 128, p. 211; William Gordon Holmes, *The Age of Justinian and Theodora* (London 1912) i 337 f.; Percy Neville Ure, *Justinian and his Age* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1951) 198-199, 216-217. C. E. Mallett, "The Empress Theodora," *The English Historical Review* 2 (1887) 1-20.
- ⁶ Bury ii 426-427; Wilhelm Schubart, *Justinian und Theodora* (Munich 1943) 51; Ernest Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* (Paris 1949) ii 236; Berthold Rubin, *Das Zeitalter Justinians* (Berlin 1960) i 106; Barker 68-70; Robert Browning, *Justinian and Theodora* (London 1971) 67; J. A. S. Evans, *Procopius* (New York 1972) 88-90.
- ⁷ Charles Diehl, *Theodora, Empress of Byzantium* trans. by Samuel Rosenbaum (New York 1972) 3, 38; Diehl, *Justinien* 45; Rubin i 116.
- ⁸ Diehl, *Theodora* 68; Bury ii 427; H. B. Dewing *Procopius* (Cambridge, Mass. 1935) vi p. vii; Barker 68; Rubin 202; Evans 89-90.
- ⁹ Diehl, *Theodora* 70-71.
- ¹⁰ Evans 93, 91; cf. 97.
- ¹¹ Ure 198; Schubart 52; Diehl, *Theodora* 78; Rubin 216.
- ¹² Domenico Comparetti, *Le inedite Libro Nono delle Istorie di Procopio di Cesarea* (Rome 1928) 203; Rubin 215.
- ¹³ Diehl, *Justinien* 45; *Theodora* 38.
- ¹⁴ Louis Bréhier, *Le monde byzantin: la civilisation byzantine* (Paris 1950) 10-12; Spiro Lambros, "Ἡ Γυνὴ παρὰ τοῖς Βυζαντινοῖς" in *Neos Hellenomnemon* xvii (1923) 259-260.

- ¹⁵ Glanville Downey, *Constantinople in the Age of Justinian* (Norman, Okla. 1960) 29.
- ¹⁶ Evans 97.
- ¹⁷ *Codex Theodosianus* 3.16.1 (331 A.D.), 2 (421 A.D.). For a discussion of late imperial marriage legislation, see A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602* (Norman, Oklahoma 1964) ii 974-75.
- ¹⁸ *Codex Iustinianus* 5.17.8 (449 A.D.), 9 (497 A.D.).
- ¹⁹ *Novella* 117.13 (542 A.D.); *Novella* 127.4 (548 A.D.) specifies that "no difference" in penalty for men and women must exist.
- ²⁰ Beating: *Novella* 117.14; Adultery: *Novella* 117.9.5.
- ²¹ *Novella* 117.15.
- ²² *Novella* 22.18. For a discussion of dowry practice, see Stein ii 414.
- ²³ *Novella* 51.
- ²⁴ Charles Diehl, *Justinien et la civilisation byzantine au vie siècle* (Paris 1901) 63.
- ²⁵ Bury i 20.
- ²⁶ Katharine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (London 1966) 21.
- ²⁷ For additional passages, see Rogers 3, 8-9.
- ²⁸ Rogers 3.
- ²⁹ For a colorful description of the Empress' way of life, see Charles Diehl, *Byzantine Empresses*, trans. by Harold Bell and Theresa deKerpely (New York 1973) 7-17.
- ³⁰ Evans 17.
- ³¹ For a development of this theme, see Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Paris 1949) 121.
- ³² Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Wives, Whores, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1975) chapters 4 and 5.
- ³³ F. W. Walbank, "Tragic History: A Reconsideration," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 2 (1955) 4.
- ³⁴ The general impression that marriage is important for a woman is incidentally reinforced by descriptions of barbarian customs and legends illustrating a woman's dependence on her husband. Cf. *Bell.* vi 14.6-7 and viii 20.57.
- ³⁵ Walbank 4.
- ³⁶ This passage recalls Justinian's use of similar themes in his legislation. The greed of the procurers, the poverty of their female victims, and the disgust felt by prostitutes for their profession are cited in *Novella* 14 (535 A.D.).
- ³⁷ These women are in the tradition of the Tarpeia figure, who betrays her country for love. See F. Mielentz, "Tarpeia," *RE* iv A (1932) 2337-38 for a discussion of this *topos* in ancient literature. Also Alexander Krappe, "Die Sage von der Tarpeja," *RhM* 78 (1929) 249-267 for a discussion of the figure in world literature. I am indebted to Peter Siewert for this reference.
- ³⁸ Although Amalasantha was not unattractive physically, to judge from *Arc.* 16.1.

- ³⁹ For approval of a woman expressed in similar terms, cf. Socrates' exclamation, ἀνδρικήν... τὴν διάνοιαν τῆς γυναικός, Xen. *Oec.* 10.1; Xerxes' comment on Artemisia, οἱ μὲν ἄνδρες γεγόνασι μοι γυναῖκες, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἄνδρες Hdt. viii 88; the Hellenistic essay "Periktione," where a woman is advised to be δικαίη καὶ ἀνδρική καὶ φρονέουσα καὶ αὐταρκεῖη Stob. iv 28. 19; and the Roman orator Maesia Sentia, *quam, quia sub specie feminae virilem animum gerebat, Androgynem appellabant* Val. Max. viii 3.1. For women disapproved as "manly," cf. Sall. *Cat.* 25.1; Tac. *Ann.* xii 7.
- ⁴⁰ Theodora's financial independence: *Novella* 28.5.1; 29.4; 30.6. Her power in government: *Novella* 8.1. Justinian's devotion to Theodora: *Novella* 8.1. Discussed by Bury ii 30-31 and by Diehl *Justinien* 52.
- ⁴¹ "Vita Silverii," *Liber Pontificalis* ed. L. Duchesne (Paris 1886) i 292-293. Discussed by Evans 89-90, and by Bury ii 378-9.
- ⁴² Rubin states that the *de Bellis* forecasts the calumnies of the *Historia Arcana* in the case of Justinian but not of Theodora (p. 441 n. 542).
- ⁴³ It is not surprising that sexual slanders of women were not uncommon in classical literature, for they effectively complement a patriarchal stereotype. Cf. Semon. *fr.* 7.48-54 (Diehl); Sall. *Cat.* 25.3; Tac. *Ann.* xi 12; xi 26; xii 3; Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.
- ⁴⁴ David Daube, "The Marriage of Justinian and Theodora. Legal and Theological Reflections," *Catholic University Law Review* 16 (1967) 391.
- ⁴⁵ Diehl *Theodora* 38, 70-76; Barker 70; Rubin 106.
- ⁴⁶ In this respect Theodora resembles the wrathful and powerful Hera/Juno figure familiar from the epic tradition (e.g. *Il.* 4.20-36, *Aen.* 1.4-75).
- ⁴⁷ Rubin 101-2.
- ⁴⁸ For a selection of views on the murder of Amalasantha, see Diehl *Theodora* 98; Barker 151; Evans 11; and Bury ii 426.
- ⁴⁹ Diehl *Theodora* 62.
- ⁵⁰ It would be extremely interesting to isolate all the details of Theodora's and Antonina's biographies which fall into these two categories and which are therefore likely to be accurate. I include only a few illustrative examples of each category, for I feel the task of considering them all requires a separate article.
- ⁵¹ Bury ii 166-167.
- ⁵² Cf. Evans, 87 quoting Bury, ii 426-427; "in no instance can we convict him [Procopius] of a statement which has no basis in fact."
- ⁵³ Similarly, the biographies of ancient authors were affected by invective *topoi* and "typical" anecdotes, as shown by J. Fairweather, "Fiction in the Biographies of Ancient Writers," *Ancient Society* 5 (1974) 231-275 (esp. 244-247, 270-272).
- ⁵⁴ The reputation of a man is similarly damaged through association with a powerful woman in the cases of Antony and Cleopatra (Plut. *Vit. Ant.*) and Claudius and Messalina (Tac. *Ann.* xi 25-38) and Agrippina (Tac. *Ann.* xii 3-7).