

The narrator's disingenuousness certainly intends to frustrate his interlocutor's requests; the narrator certainly does know about Aristophanes and comedy.<sup>14</sup> His seeming rejection of Saturnalian joking leaves the interlocutor feeling that the narrator is dim-witted and old-fashioned (306a): εἶτα τίς οὕτω παχύς ἐστι καὶ ἀρχαῖος, ὦ Καῖσαρ, ὥστε καὶ παίζειν πεφροντισμένα; ἐγὼ ὥμην τὴν παιδιὰν ἀνεσὶν τε εἶναι ψυχῆς καὶ ἀπαλλαγὴν τῶν φροντίδων. The interlocutor is quoting Aristotle here (*Eth. Nic.* 1150b17: ἡ γὰρ παιδιὰ ἀνεσίς ἐστιν, εἴπερ ἀνάπαυσις) in order to make the narrator look foolish;<sup>15</sup> the narrator will turn the tables on the interlocutor in just a few lines and himself quote from Aristotle to justify speaking in riddles (306b: ἐπεὶ δὲ χρὴ τῷ νόμῳ πείθεσθαι τοῦ θεοῦ, βούλει σοι ἐν παιδιᾷς μέρει μῦθον διεξέλω πολλὰ ἴσως ἔχοντα ἀκοῆς ἄξια; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1128a19, ἔστι γάρ τινα πρέποντα τῷ τοιούτῳ λέγειν ἐν παιδιᾷς μέρει καὶ ἀκούειν, καὶ ἡ τοῦ ἐλευθερίου παιδιὰ διαφέρει τῆς τοῦ ἀνδραποδώδους, καὶ αὐτοῦ πεπαιδευμένου καὶ ἀπαιδευτοῦ). It is not just that Julian knows Aristotle, but that the characters in his dialogue know Aristotle. The poetic quotation that I propose we read at the introduction of this dialogue shows that the narrator is, from his first words, displaying a comic talent, as he exploits a comic poet in a sly attempt to disguise his desire to tell a funny story. This hardly exhausts the comic twists and turns of the prologue to the *Symposium*, but should be sufficient to illustrate how appropriate the poetic citation would be.

I suggest then that the introduction of Julian's *Symposium* contains an otherwise unknown dramatic trimeter, most likely from New Comedy, used to heighten a comic confrontation between a playful narrator and his slow-witted interlocutor.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Commentators take these words at face value as proclaiming that Julian has no talent for comedy and will therefore tell a serious story full of philosophical edification. See R. Pack, 'Notes on the *Caesares* of Julian', *TAPA* 77 (1946), 151–7, p. 154, Baldwin, art. cit. (n. 12), 449.

<sup>15</sup> The interlocutor has in mind the context of the Aristotelian passage, in which fondness for amusement is a sign of weakness (1150b16–17: δοκεῖ δὲ καὶ ὁ παιδιώδης ἀκόλαστος εἶναι, ἔστι δὲ μαλακός). But is the narrator thinking of the passage before this, in which we are told that one can have sympathy for those who try hard to restrain their laughter but ultimately cannot (1150b8–12: ἀλλὰ συγγνωμικὸν εἰ ἀντιτείνων, ... καὶ ὥσπερ οἱ κατέχειν πειρώμενοι τὸν γέλωτα ἄβρόσιον ἐκκαγαλζουσιν, οἷον συνέπεσε Ξενοφάντῳ)?

<sup>16</sup> I should like to thank my colleague David Sansone, and an anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this article, for their many helpful suggestions.

## PROCOPIUS, JUSTINIAN AND THE *KATASKOPOI*

Among the accusations Procopius brings against Justinian in the *Secret History* is the following:

The matter of the *kataskopoi* is as follows. From ancient times many men were maintained at public expense. They would enter enemy territory and gain access to the palace of the Persians, either under the guise of trading or by some other ploy. After investigating everything thoroughly, they would return to Roman territory and be able to report all the secrets of the enemy to the government officials. Forewarned, they were on their guard and nothing unforeseen would take them by surprise.

The Persians had long made use of this method too. It is said that Khusrāu increased the pay of his *kataskopoi* and gained an advantage by his foresight. For nothing [concerning Roman affairs escaped] him, [but Justinian spent nothing at all on them] and erased [the very] name of *kataskopoi* from the land of the Romans. As a result, many mistakes were made and Lazica was seized by the enemy, since the Romans had no idea where on earth the Persian king and his army were.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 30.12–16. There are lacunae in the text, and I have followed Haury's suggested restorations in the Teubner edition. The lacunae do not, however, affect the main concerns of this paper.

Procopius' charge is suspiciously vague about the precise circumstances of Justinian's action. The one specific event he does mention is the loss of Lazica to the Persians, which occurred in 541. Procopius himself provides a detailed narrative of the background to this event in Book 2 of the *Wars*, but when this narrative is set alongside the passage from the *Secret History* quoted above, a significant discrepancy becomes apparent – a discrepancy which does not appear to have received attention in the modern literature dealing with either Procopius or Justinian.

The Lazi inhabited that part of the Caucasus adjacent to the Black Sea. Earlier in the sixth century, the Lazi had become a client kingdom of the Roman Empire and converted to Christianity,<sup>2</sup> but in more recent years had suffered at the hands of corrupt Roman officials. During the winter of 540/1, they invited the Persians to deliver them from the Romans,<sup>3</sup> a suggestion on which Khusrau was only too willing to act:

Khusrau assembled a large army and was preparing for the invasion without, however, revealing his plan to the Persians (apart from those sole individuals with whom he usually consulted concerning secret affairs). He also instructed the [Lazian] envoys to tell no-one what was afoot. Instead he made out that he was setting off for Iberia [the region east of Lazica] to set affairs there in order since, he said, a Hunnic tribe had attacked the Persian empire in that region.

At this time Belisarius arrived in Mesopotamia where he assembled the army from round about, and he was sending men into Persian territory to spy... On their return, the *kataskopoi* were adamant that the enemy would not be mounting an invasion for the meantime, for Khusrau was preoccupied elsewhere with a war against the Huns. When he heard this, Belisarius wanted to invade enemy territory immediately with the whole army.<sup>4</sup>

Procopius therefore provides two very different explanations for the loss of Lazica. According to the *Secret History*, Justinian was responsible by virtue of his having abolished *kataskopoi*, as a result of which the Romans had no forewarning of Persian moves. According to the account in the *Wars*, it was not the absence of *kataskopoi*, but rather their being misled by deliberate Persian disinformation.

In her recent study of Procopius, Averil Cameron has urged that the *Wars* and *Secret History* be viewed as 'complementary rather than opposed',<sup>5</sup> but, initially at least, it is difficult to see how this could be possible in this instance. Faced here with such contradictory versions, there is a strong temptation to try to show that one of the two accounts is wrong. One might, for example, try to find a third account by an independent author which confirms one or other of Procopius' versions. Something analogous to this has been done with respect to Procopius' account in the *Wars* of the battle of Callinicum in 531. The independent contemporary account of these same events by John Malalas reveals that Procopius' version tried to conceal Belisarius' responsibility for the Roman defeat.<sup>6</sup> No such control, however, exists for the particular events of 541 which concern us here.<sup>7</sup>

There are other less definitive possibilities worth exploring. The sheer detail of the version in the *Wars* might understandably incline one to favour it as the account to be trusted, but as Cameron has also stressed, we must beware of 'privileging' the

<sup>2</sup> E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* ii (Paris and Bruges, 1949), p. 267.

<sup>3</sup> As Stein notes (*ibid.* p. 492), they were probably also influenced by the blow that Roman prestige suffered as a result of the Persian invasion of Syria the previous summer.

<sup>4</sup> *Wars* 2.15.35–16.4.

<sup>5</sup> *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London, 1985), p. 162.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 146, 157–8.

<sup>7</sup> Other sources which mention the campaign, without shedding light on the reasons for Persian success: Zacharias Rhetor, *HE* 10.13; Theophanes p. 229 (de Boor).

*Wars*<sup>8</sup> – a point forcefully illustrated by the case of the battle of Callinicum noted earlier. Are there, then, any flaws in the *Wars* version? Procopius' statement about Khusrau's ploy to mislead the Romans about his intentions might prompt doubts: how could the historian have known of the Persian king's secret strategy? This is not, however, as problematic as it might appear. Procopius had only to compare the reports of the *kataskopoi* – that the Persians were off to meet a Hunnic invasion of Iberia – with what actually happened. An obvious explanation for the discrepancy was that Khusrau had deliberately spread a false report of his intentions.

Compared with this, the account in the *Secret History* is much more problematic. Its polemical tone and the black-and-white contrast of Justinian with Khusrau are obstacles to ready acceptance of its claim, and the claim itself seems inherently improbable: what government is going to abolish completely its facilities for intelligence-gathering, no matter how unsophisticated they may be? But in spite of these general reservations, there does not seem to be anything which shows conclusively that the version in the *Secret History* is false. There is one possibility, but this proves on closer examination to be inconclusive. Early in the *Secret History*, Procopius discusses at length Belisarius' invasion of Persian territory in 541. He claims that Belisarius did not penetrate more than a day's journey into Persian territory because he was preoccupied with his wife's infidelities and concludes thus: 'And yet, if he had been willing at the outset to cross the river Tigris with his whole army, I think he would have plundered the whole of the Assyrian countryside and reached as far as the city of Ctesiphon without encountering any opposition whatsoever.'<sup>9</sup> This statement could be taken to presuppose that Belisarius had some knowledge of Khusrau's absence somewhere in the north; if so, it would contradict Procopius' later statement about no one having any idea of Khusrau's whereabouts in 541, and so undermine the credibility of the *Secret History*'s version. But Procopius' criticism does not *require* this presupposition in order to be effective. Belisarius is still vulnerable to criticism even if he did not know of Khusrau's absence. He had allowed himself to be distracted from his public responsibilities by his private concerns; had he concentrated on his military duties and ventured deeper into Persian territory, he would soon have discovered the reduced numbers of Persian defenders and been able to exploit the opportunity that presented itself.

Evidence does exist, however, which indicates that the version in the *Secret History* contains exaggeration. Procopius implies that Justinian disbanded the *kataskopoi* permanently, but the *History* of Agathias which deals with the 550s includes references to Roman *kataskopoi*.<sup>10</sup> If the *kataskopoi* were completely disbanded some time before 541, they did not remain a thing of the past for the remainder of Justinian's reign. Furthermore, this element of exaggeration in the *Secret History*'s version is consistent with what we know about similar accusations Procopius makes against Justinian regarding other institutions vital to the defence of the empire. In particular, the *Secret History* charges the emperor with having ceased to pay the frontier troops (*limitanei*) and eventually depriving them of the very name of soldiers<sup>11</sup> – that is, 'Procopius speaks as if the *limitanei* were finally abolished.'<sup>12</sup> Procopius' account of Khusrau's invasion of 540 in the *Wars* provides some confirmation for part of this claim when it mentions that the Roman garrison in the town of Beroea had not received their pay for a long time.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand,

<sup>8</sup> op. cit. (n. 5), p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> 2.25.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. 2.20.2 (554/5), 5.16.4 (559).

<sup>11</sup> 24.12–14.

<sup>12</sup> J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian ii* (London, 1923), p. 358 n. 4.

<sup>13</sup> 2.7.37.

various sixth-century sources testify to the continued existence of *limitanei* throughout Justinian's reign,<sup>14</sup> while an analysis of numismatic evidence regarding the sixth-century *limitanei* has concluded that although these troops may indeed have been disbanded in Palestine, the same evidence points to their presence – and payment – elsewhere in the empire without interruption during Justinian's reign.<sup>15</sup> Doubts have also been expressed about the complete accuracy of the statement in the *Secret History*<sup>16</sup> that Justinian dismantled most the *cursus publicus*.<sup>17</sup>

Once the tendency of the *Secret History* to exaggerate the extent of genuine changes is recognised, it becomes possible to see how Procopius' differing accounts of the fate of the *kataskopoi* might be reconciled. Given this tendency and the improbability of any government doing away with the intelligence-gathering facilities at its disposal, it seems reasonable to suggest that the *kataskopoi* were not in fact disbanded completely but rather that their numbers were reduced – perhaps as part of John the Cappadocian's more general cost-cutting measures during the 530s.<sup>18</sup> If this were the case, such a reduction would be reflected in less thorough cross-checking and confirmation of intelligence reports, which in turn would account for the ease with which Khusrau misled the Romans as to his intentions in the Caucasus. This is, I think, the most convincing way of marrying together Procopius' divergent accounts concerning the *kataskopoi* during Justinian's reign.

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<sup>14</sup> A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 661ff.

<sup>15</sup> P. J. Casey, 'Justinian and the *limitanei*' in D. Breeze (ed.), *Studies for J. C. Mann* (forthcoming). I am grateful to John Casey for allowing me to see and cite his paper in advance of publication.

<sup>16</sup> 30.8–11. Cf. John Lydus *De mag.* 3.61.

<sup>17</sup> M. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c.300–1450* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 607: 'There is evidence that this [dismantling by Justinian] did not happen, or that if it did the situation was at some subsequent stage at least partly rectified.'

<sup>18</sup> Jones, op. cit. (n. 14), pp. 284f.