

Procopius, *History of the Wars*

“On Racing Factions”

The population in every city has for a long been divided into two groups, the Greens and the Blues; but only recently, for the sake of these names and the places which they occupy while watching the games, have they come to spend their money, to abandon their bodies to the cruelest tortures, and to consider it a not unworthy thing to die a most disgraceful death. The members [of each faction] fight with their opponents not knowing for what reason they risk their lives, but realizing full well that even when they vanquish their opponents in brawls, they will be carted off to prison and that, after they have suffered the most extreme tortures, they will be killed. Therefore, there arises in them an endless and unreasoning hatred against their fellow men, respecting neither marriage nor kinship nor bonds of friendship, even if those who support different colors might be brothers or some other kind of relatives. Neither human nor divine affairs matter to them compared to winning these [street] fights. When some impious act is committed by one of them against God, or when the laws and the state are injured by their comrades or opponents, or perhaps when they lack the necessities of life, or their country is suffering dire need, they ignore all this as long as events turn out well for their own "faction." For this is what they call the bands of rioters. Even women participate in this abomination, not only accompanying the men but, if the occasion arises, even opposing them, although they do not go to the public spectacles nor are they motivated by any other reason. Thus I, for my part, consider [their actions] nothing else than a sickness of the soul. And this is how things are among the people of every city.

from Procopius, *History of the Wars*, Loeb Classical Library, (London: 1914), Vol 1, 218-220

Procopius: JUSTINIAN SUPPRESSES THE NIKA REVOLT, 532

[From *History of the Wars*, I]

At this time [January 1, 532] an insurrection broke out unexpectedly in Byzantium among the populace, and, contrary to expectation, it proved to be a very serious affair, and ended in great harm to the people and to the senate, as the following account will show.

In every city the population has been divided for a long time past into the Blue and the Green factions; but within comparatively recent times it has come about that, for the sake of these names and the seats which the rival factions occupy in watching the games, they spend their money and abandon their bodies to the most cruel tortures, and even do not think it unworthy to die a most shameful death. And they fight against their opponents knowing not for what end they imperil themselves, but knowing well that, even if they overcome their enemy the fight, the conclusion of the matter for them will be to be carried off straight away to the prison, and finally, after suffering extreme torture, to be destroyed. So there grows up in them against their fellow

men a hostility which has no cause, and at no time does it cease or disappear, for it gives place neither to the ties of marriage nor of relationship nor of friendship, and the case is the same even though those who differ with respect to these colours be brothers or any other kin. . . . I, for my part, am unable to call this anything except a disease of the soul. . . .

At this time the officers of the city administration in Byzantium were leading away to death some of the rioters. But the members of the two factions conspiring together and declaring a truce with each other, seized the prisoners and then straightway entered the prison and released all those who were in confinement there. . . . Fire was applied to the city as if it had fallen under the hand of an enemy. . . . The emperor and his consort, with a few members of the senate shut themselves up in the palace and remained quietly there. Now the watch-word which the populace passed to one another was Nika [i.e., "Conquer"]. . . .

...On the fifth day of the insurrection in the late afternoon the Emperor Justinian gave orders to Hypatius and Pompeius, nephews of the late emperor, Anastasius, to go home as quickly as possible, either because he suspected that some plot was being matured by them against his own person, or, it may be, because destiny brought them to this. But they feared that the people would force them to the throne (as in fact fell out), and they said that they would be doing wrong if they should abandon their sovereign when he found himself in such danger. When the Emperor Justinian heard this, he inclined still more to his suspicion, and he bade them quit the palace instantly. . . .

On the following day at sunrise it became known to the people that both men had quit the palace where they had been staying. So the whole population ran to them, and they declared Hypatius emperor and prepared to lead him to the market place to assume the power. But the wife of Hypatius, Mary, a discreet woman, who had the greatest reputation for prudence, laid hold of her husband and would not let go, but cried out with loud lamentation and with entreaties to all her kinsmen that the people were leading him on the road to death. But since the throng overpowered her, she unwillingly released her husband, and he by no will of his own came to the Forum of Constantine, where they summoned him to the throne; . . .

The emperor and his court were deliberating as to whether it would be better for them if they remained or if they took to flight in the ships. And many opinions were expressed favouring either course. And the Empress Theodora also spoke to the following effect: "My opinion then is that the present time, above all others, is inopportune for flight, even though it bring safety. . . . For one who has been an emperor it is unendurable to be a fugitive. May I never be separated from this purple, and may I not live that day on which those who meet me shall not address me as mistress. If, now, it is your wish to save yourself, O Emperor, there is no difficulty. For we have much money, and there is the sea, here the boats. However consider whether it will not come about after you have been saved that you would gladly exchange that safety for death. For as for myself, I approve a certain ancient saying that royalty is a good burial-shroud." When the queen had spoken thus, all were filled with boldness, and, turning their thoughts towards resistance, they began to consider how they might be able to defend themselves if any hostile force should come against them. . . . All the hopes of the emperor were centred upon Belisarius and Mundus, of whom the former, Belisarius, had recently returned from the Persian war bringing with him a following which was both powerful and imposing, and in particular he had a

great number of spearmen and guards who had received their training in battles and the perils of warfare. . . .

When Hypatius reached the hippodrome, he went up immediately to where the emperor is accustomed to take his place and seated himself on the royal throne from which the emperor was always accustomed to view the equestrian and athletic contests. And from the palace Mundus went out through the gate which, from the circling descent, has been given the name of the Snail. . . . Belisarius, with difficulty and not without danger and great exertion, made his way over ground covered by ruins and half-burned buildings, and ascended to the stadium. . . . Concluding that he must go against the populace who had taken their stand in the hippodrome—a vast multitude crowding each other in great disorder—he drew his sword from its sheath and, commanding the others to do likewise, with a shout he advanced upon them at a run. But the populace, who were standing in a mass and not in order, at the sight of armoured soldiers who had a great reputation for bravery and experience in war, and seeing that they struck out with their swords unsparingly, beat a hasty retreat. . . . [Mundus] straightway made a sally into the hippodrome through the entrance which they call the Gate of Death. Then indeed from both sides the partisans of Hypatius were assailed with might and main and destroyed. . . . There perished among the populace on that day more than thirty thousand. . . . The soldiers killed both [Hypatius and Pompeius] on the following day and threw bodies into the sea. . . . This was the end of the insurrection in Byzantium.

from Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, xxiv, translated by H.B. Dewing (New York: Macmillan, 1914), pp. 219-230, slightly abridged and reprinted in Leon Barnard and Theodore B. Hodges, *Readings in European History*, (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 52-55

Procopius: The Reconquest of Africa, 534 ***On the Wars* IV.9**

Justinian's program of renovatio of the Roman Empire, expressed by his building program, his re-organization of the Law, was perhaps clearest in his wars. He directed the "reconquering" of the Western part of the Empire, and was, in the early phases, successful.

Procopius' work, On the Wars, provides an excellent source for this aspect of Justinian's program. Below he recounts the success of Belasarius, Justinian's great general, in overthrowing the Vandal Kingdom in northern Africa. This victory was easy, but marked the first stage in the program of reconquest. The triumph which was accorded Belisarius upon his return is described below by Procopius. Note especially the continuity in the old Roman traditions - as Procopius makes clear, the triumph itself was part of the program or restoration.

Belisarius, upon reaching Byzantium with Gelimer [last king of the Vandals, captured by Belisarius in 534] and the Vandals, was counted worthy to receive such honours, as in former times were assigned to those generals of the Romans who had won the greatest and most noteworthy victories. And a period of about six hundred years had now passed since anyone had attained these honours, except, indeed, Titus and Trajan, and such other emperors as had led armies against some barbarian nation and had been victorious. For he displayed the spoils and slaves from the war in the midst of the city and led a procession which the Romans call a "triumph," not, however, in the ancient manner, but going on foot from his own house to the hippodrome and then again from the barriers [the starting point for the racers at the open end of the Hippodrome] until he reached the place where the imperial throne is. And there was booty, - first of all, whatever articles are wont to be set apart for the royal service, - thrones of gold and carriages in which it is customary for a king's consort to ride, and much Jewelry made of precious stones, and golden drinking cups, and all the other things which are useful for the royal table. And there was also silver weighing many thousands of talents and all the royal treasure amounting to an exceedingly great sum (for Gizeric [leader of the Vandals who had sacked Rome in 455] had despoiled the Palatium in Rome) and among these were the treasures of the Jews, which Titus, the son of Vespasian, together with certain others, had brought to Rome after the capture of Jerusalem [70 A.D.]. And one of the Jews, seeing these things, approached one of those known to the emperor and said: "These treasures I think it inexpedient to carry into the palace in Byzantium. Indeed, it is not possible for them to be elsewhere than in the place where Solomon, the king of the Jews, formerly placed them. For it is because of these that Gizeric captured the palace of the Romans, and that now the Roman army has captured that of the Vandals." When this had been brought to the ears of the Emperor, he became afraid and quickly sent everything to the sanctuaries of the Christians in Jerusalem. And there were slaves in the triumph, among whom was Gelimer himself, wearing some sort of a purple garment upon his shoulders, and all his family, and as many of the Vandals as were very tall and fair of body. And when Gelimer reached the hippodrome and saw the emperor sitting upon a lofty seat and the people standing on either side and realized as he looked about in what an evil plight he was, he neither wept nor cried out, but ceased not saying over in the words of the Hebrew scripture: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." And when he came before the emperor's seat, they stripped off the purple garment, and compelled him to fall prone on the ground and do obeisance to the Emperor Justinian. This also Belisarius did, as being a suppliant of the emperor along with him. And the Emperor Justinian and the Empress Theodora presented the children of Ilderic [one-time king of the Vandals and friend of Justinian; overthrown by Gelimer] and his offspring and all those of the family of the Emperor Valentinian with sufficient sums of money, and to Gelimer they gave lands not to be despised in Galatia and permitted him to live there together with his family. However, Gelimer was by no means enrolled among the patricians, since he was unwilling to change from the faith of Arius.

A little later the triumph [in honor of his inauguration as consul] was celebrated by Belisarius in the ancient manner also. For he had the fortune to be advanced to the office of consul, and therefore was borne aloft by the captives, and as he was thus carried in his curule chair, he threw to the populace those very spoils of the Vandalic war. For the people carried off the silver plate and golden girdles and a vast amount of the Vandals' wealth of other sorts as a result of Belisarius' consulship, and it seemed that after a long interval of disuse an old custom was being revived. . . .

Procopius, *History of the Wars*, IV, ix, translated by H.B. Dewing (New York: C.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), pp. 279-283.

Procopius: The Roman Silk Industry, c. 550

Procopius shows how the silk industry was first introduced into Europe from the Orient.

About the same time there came from India certain monks; and when they had satisfied Justinian Augustus that the Romans no longer should buy silk from the Persians, they promised the emperor in an interview that they would provide the materials for making silk so that never should the Romans seek business of this kind from their enemy the Persians, or from any other people whatsoever. They said that they were formerly in Serinda, which they call the region frequented by the people of the Indies, and there they learned perfectly the art of making silk. Moreover, to the emperor who plied them with many questions as to whether he might have the secret, the monks replied that certain worms were manufacturers of silk, nature itself forcing them to keep always at work; the worms could certainly not be brought here alive, but they could be grown easily and without difficulty; the eggs of single hatchings are innumerable; as soon as they are laid men cover them with dung and keep them warm for as long as it is necessary so that they produce insects. When they had announced these tidings, led on by liberal promises of the emperor to prove the fact, they returned to India. When they had brought the eggs to Byzantium, the method having been learned, as I have said, they changed them by metamorphosis into worms which feed on the leaves of mulberry. Thus began the art of making silk from that time on in the Roman Empire.

Sources.

From: *Procopii Caesariensis Historiarum Temporis Sui Tetras Altera. De Bello Gothico*, trans. Claudius Maltretus (Venice, 1729), Lib. IV, cap. XVII, p. 212; reprinted in Roy C. Cave & Herbert H. Coulson, eds., *A Source Book for Medieval Economic History*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1936; reprint ed., New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1965), pp. 244-245.

Scanned by Jerome S. Arkenberg, Cal. State Fullerton. The text has been modernized by Prof. Arkenberg.

Procopius: *De Aedificiis*

Procopius: on the Great Church, [Hagia Sophia]

Justinian's great building project of the Church of the Holy Wisdom - Hagia Sophia - was completed in a few short years of building, and dedicated in 537. The dedication is not to any "St. Sophie", but to Christ as the "Holy Wisdom" of God.

The emperor, thinking not of cost of any kind, pressed on the work, and collected together workmen from every land. Anthemius of Tralles, the most skilled in the builder's art, not only of his own but of all former times, carried forward the king's zealous intentions, organized the labours of the workmen, and prepared models of the future construction. Associated with him was another architect [mechanopoios] named Isidorus, a Milesian by birth, a man of intelligence, and worthy to carry out the plans of the Emperor Justinian. It is indeed a proof of the esteem with which God regarded the emperor, that he furnished him with men who would be so useful in effecting his designs, and we are compelled to admire the wisdom of the emperor, in being able to choose the most suitable of mankind to execute the noblest of his works....

[The Church] is distinguished by indescribable beauty, excelling both in its size, and in the harmony of its measures, having no part excessive and none deficient; being more magnificent than ordinary buildings, and much more elegant than those which are not of so just a proportion. The church is singularly full of light and sunshine; you would declare that the place is not lighted by the sun from without, but that the rays are produced within itself, such an abundance of light is poured into this church....

Now above the arches is raised a circular building of a curved form through which the light of day first shines; for the building, which I imagine overtops the whole country, has small openings left on purpose, so that the places where these intervals occur may serve for the light to come through. Thus far I imagine the building is not incapable of being described, even by a weak and feeble tongue. As the arches are arranged in a quadrangular figure, the stone-work between them takes the shape of a triangle, the lower angle of each triangle, being compressed where the arches unite, is slender, while the upper part becomes wider as it rises in the space between them, and ends against the circle which rests upon them, forming there its remaining angles. A spherical-shaped dome standing upon this circle makes it exceedingly beautiful; from the lightness of the building, it does not appear to rest upon a solid foundation, but to cover the place beneath as though it were suspended from heaven by the fabled golden chain. All these parts surprisingly joined to one another in the air, suspended one from another, and resting only on that which is next to them, form the work into one admirably harmonious whole, which spectators do not dwell upon for long in the mass, as each individual part attracts the eye to itself.

No one ever became weary of this spectacle, but those who are in the church delight in what they see, and, when they leave, magnify it in their talk. Moreover it is impossible accurately to

describe the gold, and silver, and gems, presented b the Emperor Justinian, but by the description of one part, I leave the rest to be inferred. That part of the church which is especially sacred, and where the priests alone are allowed to enter, which is called the Sanctuary, contains forty thousand pounds' weight of silver.

Translated by W. Lethaby and H. Swainson, from Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, in *The Church of St. Sophia Constantinople*, (New York: 1894), pp. 24-28.

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