

REVIEW OF BOOKS

GREATREX (G.) (ed.) with CAMERON (A.) **Procopius of Caesarea: *The Persian Wars*. Translation, with Introduction and Notes.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xxviii + 251. £75. 9781107165700.

GREATREX (G.) **Procopius of Caesarea: *The Persian Wars*. A Historical Commentary.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xxxiii + 851. £140. 9781107053229.
doi:[10.1017/S0075426923000940](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426923000940)

Geoffrey Greatrex has produced the first English translation since Henry Dewing (*Procopius: History of the Wars* (London 1914)) of the first two books of the sixth-century historian Procopius' *Wars of Justinian*, which cover the Roman campaigns against Khusro's Persian empire. This is a full translation as opposed to Anthony Kaldellis' revision of Dewing's eight books of the *Wars* (*The Wars of Justinian: Prokopios* (Indianapolis 2014)). Greatrex's accompanying commentary is also unique in being the first commentary on a work of Procopius.

Although the translation is a landmark in Procopian studies, it is the accompanying commentary that stands out as representing a major breakthrough in the study of Procopius and the first two books of *Wars*. Greatrex sets the scene perfectly for those new to the subject with a brief overview of Procopius, the state of the Roman and Persian empires of the day and their relationship with each other. This strikes the right balance for the reader without getting bogged down in an extensive account of the political machinations of the time.

Much of the introductory section of the commentary focuses on the eight books of *Wars* as a whole and explains that they are not divided chronologically, but by the geography of the campaigns themselves. This introduction also includes an overview of the key events and people to be found in books I and II. Greatrex steers a neutral course on the whole, but he does highlight opposing views on certain issues such as Procopius' religion, the presence of invective in *Wars* and the role of speeches, leaving it to the reader to decide which interpretation is most persuasive.

The introductory chapters continue with a deeper look at Procopius' use of speeches, letters and digressions and offer several alternative views on the influences for these. This is a valuable insight into Procopius' writing since *Wars* contains, as Greatrex states, 120 speeches and 45 letters. These speeches typically appear before a battle and Greatrex notes that these speeches and letters could have provided Procopius the opportunity to criticize Justinian subtly when putting words in the mouths of Rome's enemies. This taps into an important current area of research into Procopius, namely the possible use of coded invective within *Wars* to criticize his emperor, as he would go on to do more explicitly in his *Anekdotia* (aka *Secret History*). Greatrex's treatment of this issue is typical of his approach throughout the commentary in that he offers insight into the writings and invites the reader to consider whether these speeches are used as scene-setting before the battle or reflect what was actually said, which could possibly be the case for the speeches of the general Belisarius, whom Procopius accompanied on many of his campaigns. There is also a brief yet illuminating examination of written and oral sources that Procopius may have used to provide the historical context to his narratives, with Greatrex offering several suggestions beyond Procopius' one named source, the 'History of the Armenians'.

The commentary itself follows the traditional format, with key passages selected for detailed analysis. Greatrex does, however, open each entry in the commentary by providing the original Greek text followed by an English translation and then his notes on the passage. This produces a rounded overview of the selected text to satisfy both undergraduate students and more senior scholars. Greatrex steers a neutral course here as well, posing questions raised by the passages, offering differing interpretations and directing the reader to further scholarship. What works particularly well is that he often takes the wise step of providing an overview of an entire section, such as in his interpretation of the events surrounding the Nika riots in Book I.24, before embarking on a line-by-line commentary, thus providing a clear and concise introduction to the passage to orientate the reader and explain major issues. The commentary also includes maps, city plans and battle diagrams which assist greatly in placing the text into context, especially for the battles such as Dara in Book I. For example, there is a large-scale map showing the location of Dara in relation to the Roman and Persian empires then a more detailed illustration showing the area around Dara. These are followed by further illustrations focusing directly on the city of Dara and its immediate environs and then the possible disposition and location of the Roman and Persian forces at the battle. Greatrex also discusses other interpretations (such as the battlefield potentially being up to 3km south of Dara). This all contributes to bringing the world of Procopius to life, and the inclusion of extensive references to relevant modern scholarship makes this an essential tool for the study of the first two books of *Wars*.

Although Greatrex characterizes the work as an historical commentary, he does address matters of textual interpretation and he identifies connections to earlier writers such as Herodotus and Thucydides. Greatrex also explores Procopius' lexical preferences and how they compare to his predecessors, pointing out, for instance, how Procopius' use of prepositions differs from that of Thucydides. This, Greatrex proposes, is an example of how Procopius develops his own distinctive style which will go on to be followed by future writers. As a result, although the focus is on the historical content of the text and the historian himself, there is more to this commentary than just explaining the events, people and places.

At the end of the commentary Greatrex provides a full translation of Photius' summary of Nonnosus' work on the Roman embassies to Ethiopia and Southern Arabia. Justinian aimed to end the Romans' reliance on the Persians for their supply of silk by trading with the Ethiopians, while the embassy to Southern Arabia was an attempt to persuade the Southern Arabians to engage the Persians militarily. Both embassies failed in their goals and this translation offers some more detail on events that Procopius briefly covers in Book I. This translation of Nonnosus also appears at the end of the translation volume, but in the commentary Greatrex expands on it not only with observations, but also by comparing the entries to those of Procopius and his contemporary chronicler, Malalas. This provides a far more detailed investigation of this text and its connections to Procopius. The commentary is rounded off with an 86-page bibliography which provides an excellent research tool for students and scholars alike and is testament to the depth of resources that Greatrex draws on throughout the commentary.

Looking next at the translation, the general flow of the prose makes the work accessible to the modern reader and therefore potentially opens the work to a new audience. It is based on Averil Cameron's 1967 translation of selections from the works of Procopius and uses Gerhard Wirth's revised version of Jacob Haury's Teubner edition (*Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia* (Leipzig 1963)), as opposed to Dewing, who used Haury's original. In the introduction to this volume, Greatrex looks in more detail at the state of the Roman and Persian empires and their relationship during Justinian's reign as well as providing an overview of the Persian wars themselves which prepares the reader well for the translation that follows. The translation contains footnotes to provide abridged

observations for the purpose of clarity on events and characters by way of cross-referencing to other sections of this work. Greatrex does, however, point out that these notes are intentionally brief as it is the function of the separate commentary volume to provide more detailed observations and interpretations. These footnotes to the translation, like the commentary, steer a relatively neutral course through these topics, offering the reader options to consider and suggestions for further reading.

The translation also includes the same maps, city plans and battle diagrams as found in the commentary, which is helpful. In addition, like the commentary, this volume includes a full translation of Photius' summary of Nonnosus' work. There are only footnotes to the text here, in the same format as for the translation of *Wars*, leaving more in-depth observation to the commentary. Although a useful addition, this does feel a little out of place in the main translation and is a far better fit within the commentary, where Greatrex affords it much more detailed analysis. The translation volume concludes with a valuable index of places, people and titles.

Overall, these two volumes provide a resource-rich aid to students and scholars alike in a form that has not been available until now in the study of Procopius and will likely form the backbone for the study of *Wars* I and II in the future. It can only be hoped that Greatrex's approach to the translation and commentary on these first two books will be used as a model for the remainder of the Procopian canon.

DAVID M. KENNEDY
University of Exeter
Email: dk410@exeter.ac.uk