

Henning Börm, *Prokop und die Perser. Untersuchungen zu den römisch-sasanidischen Kontakten in der ausgehenden Spätantike (Oriens et Occidens 16)*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2007, 382 pp., ISBN 978-3-515-09052-0

Procopius of Caesarea's book is unquestionably a valuable source of information for those studying the relations between Rome and the Sasanid state. Although he is frequently quoted, no one has so far undertaken the effort of a systematic, critical analysis of Procopius' knowledge of Persian affairs. An attempt to fill this gap is this book by Henning Börm, which is based on his doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of J. Wiesehöfer.

The author begins his discussion with an introduction (pp. 11–17), in which he defines his objectives. These include answering three important questions: 1) What knowledge the Romans had of Persian affairs at the time of Justinian?; 2) How Procopius assessed the Sasanid state and the Persians themselves?; and 3) How far it is possible to characterize Rome's Persian policies and to analyze Roman-Persian relations in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. with Procopius and his contemporary sources (p. 12)? The first chapter sums up the present state of research into Procopius' writing, the history of the eastern Roman Empire at the declining stage of late Antiquity, and the history of the Sasanid state in the same period (*Überblick über wichtigste Forschungsliteratur*, pp. 18–29). The next chapter focuses on Procopius himself (*Prokop: Umwelt, Leben und Werk*, pp. 30–69). It presents not only facts about the historian's life and work, but also speculations about his possible sources of knowledge about Persian affairs (pp. 52–57). The author concludes that it is impossible to name a single such source with any certainty, since Procopius most probably used both written and oral sources, adjusting his evidence to his needs and selecting from it the information he needed. It may also be that Procopius' testimony which is not confirmed elsewhere could have resulted from his erroneous interpretation of whatever source he was using (p. 57). The chapter concludes with a description of other sources from that time: Roman, Syrian, Armenian, Persian, and Arabic (pp. 57–69). The next chapter, like the preceding two, is also general. It concerns the picture of the Persian in antique historiography from Herodotus onward (*Das Perserbild in der antiken Historiographie*, pp. 70–89). The picture the author creates based on the accounts of ancient historians and writers makes for a reference point in his further discussion of the image of Persians as constructed by Procopius himself (cf. *Das Bild der Perser bei Prokop*, pp. 247–275). In the longest chapter, *Prokops Angaben zu persischen Realien* (pp. 90–246), the author makes an effort to analyze all mentions of the Sasanid state in Procopius' works. These concern various issues: monarchy, Persian aristocracy, offices and their related titles, military affairs, religion, geography, and history of the Persian state. The author concludes that Procopius' interest in Persian history is quite selective since he devotes little space to events before 400 A.D., and his knowledge of them is random, although probably based on valuable sources. His picture of

developments between 400 and the start of Justinian's reign is more detailed, but still far from complete: Procopius focuses on selected events and lacks the ambition to describe them in a systematic way. As he analyzes Procopius' book, the author concludes that the Roman historian was chiefly interested in the eastern Roman empire, only attending to Persian affairs when the logic of his narrative so required. Börm supposes that Procopius' knowledge was far greater than what he related in his book. In the last chapter (*Die römisch-persischen Beziehungen in der ausgehenden Spätantike*, pp. 276–336) and the conclusion (*Fazit: Prokop als Quelle für das Sasanidenreich und das römisch-persische Verhältnis unter Justynian*, pp. 337–340), the author makes a judgment of Procopius as a historian of the period. He finds that use of Procopius' knowledge of Persian affairs requires great caution, especially because we have no way of verifying the information he provides (cf. p. 340: „Prokop ist und bleibt eine problematische Quelle, da sein Bericht von zahlreichen Faktoren beeinflusst und teilweise verzerrt wird, und nicht immer ist möglich, seine Angaben durch Hieranziehung anderer Zeugnissen überprüfen“). Of this, users of Procopius' book have long been aware; was then this obvious conclusion worth the effort invested in its making? I am convinced that it was. For the first time, Procopius' entire book has been studied in close detail, which makes all Börm's observations more credible than those based on scrutiny of isolated events. Many of his focused analyses and interpretations will serve researchers of various aspects of Persian history in late antiquity well.



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