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The "Buildings" of Procopius in Relation to the Miaphysite Controversy and Northern Mesopotamia

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Öz

Prokopius'un "Yapılar" Adlı Eserini Miafizit Tartışmaları ve Kuzey Mezopotamya Bağlamında Okumak

Prokopius'un "Yapılar" adlı kitabı, "Savaşlar" ve "Gizli Tarih" adlı eserleriyle birlikte çağdaşı olan İmparator Iustinianus'un hüküm sürdüğü yılların (527-565) tarihini yazmak için temel kaynaklardan biridir. "Yapılar" bir 'imparatora övgü' (panegyrik) metnidir ve bu edebi formun kurallarına uyar. Prokopius, bu eserinde Iustinianus'u imparatorluğu genişleten, dönüştüren ve Hıristiyanlık içindeki bölünmelere son vererek Kilise'yi birleştiren güçlü bir bani olarak resmeder. Prokopius, eserine başkent Konstantinopolis ile başlar ve şehirdeki kiliseler üzerinde durur. Başkentten hemen sonra Kuzey Mezopotamya ve Suriye'ye odaklanır. Dara ile başlar ve imparatorun Dara'daki faaliyetlerine Konstantinopolis'teki Ayasofya'dan daha uzun yer verir. Kuzey Mezopotamya önemli bir sınır bölgesidir ve Perslerle savaşlar döneme damgasını vurmuştur, ancak Iustinianus döneminde bu savaşlar kadar gündemde olan başka bir konu Kristolojik tartışmalardır. Mezopotamya ve Suriye Süryani miafizit kilisesinin merkezi olmuştur. Prokopius doğu sınırına odaklandığı bölümde nadiren kilise yapılarına değinir ve miafizitlerden hiç bahsetmez. Güçlü bir sınır imajı çizmek için Prokopius'un kalelere odaklanmayı seçmesinden daha doğal bir durum olamaz. Bu makale, Prokopius'un Kristolojik tartışmalara girmemekle beraber, özellikle kilisede birliğe vurgu yapan mesajları edebi oyunlarla üstü kapalı bir şekilde verdiğini iddia eder ve Prokopius'un ihmal ettiği bazı yapıların Kilise'de bölünmüşlüğe işaret edebileceği-

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ni önerir. Prokopius, Konstantinopolis'teki Hormisdas sarayında bulunan ve miafizit Süryanilerle barış umudu ile inşa edildiği düşünülen Sergius ve Bakkhus kilisesi ile aynı avluda bulunan ve Roma'dan getirilen rölikler içeren Peter ve Paul kilisesini karşılaştırmaya uzun bir bölüm ayırır. Anlatma şekli kilisenin birliği konusunda imâlarda bulunduğunu düşündürür. Bu makale, Prokopius'un Kuzey Mezopotamya'yı anlatmak için seçtiği yapıları ve bunları ele alırken yaptığı tercihleri tartışır. Bu yazarın çok katmanlı metinlerindeki potansiyeli gözler önüne sererek, "Yapılar" adlı eserini Süryani miafizit kilisesi bağlamında yeni bir bakış açısıyla okur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Iustinianus, Teodora, Prokopius, miafizit, Süryani, Aziz Sergius ve Bakkhus Kilisesi

Abstract

Together with Procopius' other texts; namely "Wars" and "Secret History", "Buildings" is one of the principal sources for writing the history of the reign of the emperor Justinian (527-565). "Buildings" is a panegyric and conforms to literary conventions. Procopius portrays Justinian as a powerful patron who expanded and transformed the empire, and ended the schism in Christianity by uniting the Church. The first book of Buildings is dedicated to Constantinople and focuses on the churches of the imperial capital. In the second book, Procopius focuses on Mesopotamia and Syria. He starts with Dara and devotes a passage even longer than the one he wrote on Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. When he wrote Buildings, the discussions about Christology were as pressing as the wars with Persians, and Mesopotamia and Syria were the main centers of Syriac miaphysite Christianity. Procopius rarely mentions the churches in this book on the eastern frontier and he never talks about the miaphysites. Northern Mesopotamia is an important frontier and it may seem only natural that Procopius chose to focus on fortifications to depict a strong frontier. This article argues that while avoiding tackling the Christological disputes of the day, Procopius gave implicit references related to the unity of the Church by employing some literary devices and suggests that some buildings that Procopius neglected may have pointed to the division in the Church. Procopius dedicates a long section to the Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople which has been claimed was built in the Hormisdas Palace for the miaphysite refugees and compares it with the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, which had relics of these saints received from the Pope in Rome. His narration can potentially be interpreted as a reference to the unity of the Church. While discussing Procopius' preferences in choosing his material and treatment, this article shows the potential of analysing the many layers of his texts and reads the "Buildings" in a new light in relation to the miaphysites.

Keywords: Justinian, Theodora, Procopius, miaphysite, Syriac, church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus

Introduction

Procopius, who probably lived between 500 and 560, was born in Caesarea in Palestine. He became the secretary and legal advisor of Belisarius who was the general of emperor Justinian. Procopius traveled with Belisarius to different parts of the Empire[1]. His books, namely "Wars", "Secret History" and "Buildings", are the main texts for writing the history of the reign of emperor Justinian (527-565) who was his contemporary. These texts, which are very different from each other, were described as complementing each other in terms of aims of a writer and a historian trying different literary genres [2]. Whiting and Turquois argued that in "Buildings", Procopius shows off his versatility by displaying elements from historiography, geography, biography, as well as Christian hagiography and particularly miracle accounts, and patriography[3]. However, he is also a historian who wants to provide his audience not only the knowledge of the events but also "the ability to understand historical processes and the mechanisms of politics"[4]. Reflecting this, he is political in his writing.

"Buildings" (De aedificiis) is about the construction projects of Justinian. It was written towards the end of Procopius' career, probably in 554 (or 559)[5]. Although the building projects of the Roman emperors is a common theme of panegyrics, there is no other text fully dedicated to building projects[6]. It has usually been assumed that this unusual text was commissioned by the emperor to restore his image after many catastrophes during his reign[7]. Kaldellis described "Buildings" as an insincere and probably forced panegyric with subversive overtones and serious factual distortions. According to him, although this text looks like a positive approach towards the emperor and a classic panegyric, it is a coded and rebellious text that can only be deciphered by the most knowledgeable readers[8]. These different interpretations of the text shaped the way it was read and resulted in considerable literature on Procopius and his writings[9].

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1 Greatrex 2014, 77.

2 Cameron 1996, 10. Greatrex 2014, 96.

3 Whiting – Turquois forthcoming. I thank Marlena Whiting for sharing their forthcoming article with me.

4 Brodka 2022, 196.

5 Some scholars suggest the later date. For a summary of the arguments, see Greatrex 2014, 103.

6 Whitby 2022, 139.

7 Downey 1947, 171, 181.

8 Kaldellis 2004, 55.

9 Greatrex (2014) analyzes the articles written on Procopius between 2003 and 2014. After 2014, there have been many other publications. The most comprenhensive are the two edited volumes: Lillington-Martin and Turquois (ed.) 2017, Meier and Montinaro (ed.) 2022. The eighth volume of the journal *Antiquité Tardive* dating to 2000, focuses only on "Buildings". There is also a forthcoming book by Routledge resulting from a DFG project entitled "Procopius and the Language of Buildings" undertaken by University of Mainz/University of Halle 2019-2022: Fashioning Sixth-Century Constantinople: Text, Translation and Commentary of Book I of the Buildings by Procopius of Caesarea, by Max Ritter, Elodie Turquois and Marlena Whiting. This includes an English translation of Book 1 of the Buildings (by Turquois) with interdisciplinary (philological, historical, and archaeological/art historical) commentary. I am grateful to Marlena Whiting for this information and for sharing with me her forthcoming article with Elodie Turquois entitled "Sacred Architecture in Sixth-Century Constantinople: The View From Procopius' Buildings" in Architecture as a sacred space in late antiquity, Basema Hamarneh and Davide Bianchi, eds.

"Buildings" incorporates many different genres[10], and it has been emphasized that although it is a text that would seem like a mine of information for archaeologists and architectural historians, it should be used with great caution, as it is full of technical errors, its content is purposefully selected and sometimes distorted[11]. By giving examples from the standing Constantinopolitan churches, Whiting and Turquois show how reconstructing these churches only by reading Procopius would be misleading[12]. Similarly, Averil Cameron illustrates how Procopius draws a very different picture of Carthage and argues that he cannot be understood by approaching his texts only as historical/archaeological records[13].

This article aims to read the "Buildings" with the miaphysites and Northern Mesopotamia, where the view of miaphysitism was largely accepted, in mind. It will explore Northern Mesopotamia beyond the names of places and buildings mentioned in Procopius and argue that some buildings might have been built in relation to the miaphysite controversy and with the purpose of establishing the Chalcedonian position. In Justinian's times, Christological disputes and the formation of the Syriac miaphysite church hierarchy was almost as pressing as the Persian wars, and these two problems were also related as most of the population in the eastern border were anti-Chalcedonian (see below).

Procopius has been seen as not interested in religious discussions. He criticizes the discussions on the nature of Christ in the "Wars" while mentioning a context related to the Western Church, and says he will remain silent about this discussion[14]. In fact, there has been arguments about him being a "sceptic". However, Cameron argues that in "Buildings", he has a religious tone[15]. Although he does not refer to the religious debates of the time, we find brief mentions and implications. In the introduction of "Buildings", he says: "And finding that the belief in God was, before his time, straying into errors and being forced to go in many directions, he (Justinian) completely destroyed all the paths leading to such errors, and brought it about that it stood on the firm foundation of a single faith"[16]. In Book six, where he talks about Libya, there seems to be a message about Arians who used to rule the region until Justinian's conquest. He talks about leading the barbarians to the true way and especially mentions churches dedicated to Mother of God, as a reference to Arians who reject the concept of Theotokos (Mother of God). There have been various suggestions about Procopius' silence about miaphysites, ranging from his reluctance about dealing with doctrinal disputes and persecutions to his "lack of a full appreciation of the delicate relationships", to his adherence to the rules of certain literary genre. Conterno argues that "Procopius' silence

10 Turquois 2015.
11 Börm 2022, 336.
12 Whiting –Turquois forthcoming.
13 Cameron 2018, 14.
14 Wars, 5.3.5-9.
15 Cameron 1966.
16 Buildings, 1.1.9.

on non-Chalcedonian Christians probably sounds louder to us than it did to his contemporaries". She argues that Procopius did not want to stigmatise non-Chalcedonian Christians as he did other heterodox Christians and, like Justinian, he focused on the common faith. He did not include them among the heresies he mentioned, they were instead included in the Christian *oecumene*[17].

Averil Cameron notes that the historians working on the sixth century should consider not only what Procopius says but also what he leaves out[18]. Procopius tells us that Justinian made the eastern frontier zone very strong. We get the impression that the region was a frontier zone only with walls and fortifications. We do not get any sense of the sacred landscape that the surviving architecture, archaeology and textual sources, especially in Syriac, convey. That might not be surprising as Procopius chose to focus on fortifications in Book 2. In fact, he explicitly says so in the beginning. Also in the end of Book 6, he says: "As many, then, of the buildings of the Emperor Justinian as I have succeeded in discovering, either by seeing them myself, or by hearing about them from those who have seen them, I have described in my account to the best of my ability. I am fully aware, however, that there are many others which I have omitted to mention, which either went unnoticed because of their multitude, or remained altogether unknown to me"[19]. Thus, we cannot construct an argument based only on the absence of churches and monasteries. However, it is not implausible to argue that, while carefully picturing a unified Church, he was also giving the signals that he was not ignoring the most important discussions of the time and by literary plays, he drew attention to some regions and some particular churches, while leaving others out.

The Miaphysite Syriac Orthodox Church

Some communities rejected the Council of Chalcedon (451) and adopted a miaphysite (one nature) Christology. Chalcedonians who agreed on dyophysite (two nature) theology called the non-Chalcedonians heretics[20]. Syriac, Coptic, Armenian and Ethiopian churches are miaphysite churches and depending on the emperors' points of view, they either suffered or flourished. Over centuries, there have been attempts to unite the Church. The Henoticon which was published in 482 was one of them. However, this text was found pro-miaphysite and thus led to the further separation of the Roman and Constantinopolitan churches. Until 518, when Justin was raised to the throne, Constantinople remained closer to miaphysite theology. Under Justin, anti-Chalcedonians were marginalized and persecuted. A distinct miaphysite Syriac Orthodox Church took shape mostly during Justin and Justinian's reigns. In 532, Justinian reviewed his uncle's harsh policy and convened discussions in the Palace of Hormisdas in Constantinople with the hope of achieving a

17 Conterno 2018.

18 Cameron 1996, 227.

19 Buildings, 6.7.18.

20 For a good summary of the dispute, see Bardill 2017, 81.

solution that would please both sides[21]. However, after a council in Constantinople in 536 condemned the non-Chalcedonians, persecutions started again[22]. A few years after 553, the date of the Council of Constantinople in which the Syrian Orthodox Church did not participate, Jacob Baradeus, who was first sent to Constantinople to look after the interests of the miaphysites and later travelled in disguise providing for the pastoral needs of Miaphysite communities all over the Near East, started to form the episcopal hierarchy of the Syriac Orthodox Church[23].

"Buildings" and construction activities in Northern Mesopotamia

The first book of "Buildings" is dedicated to Constantinople and its surroundings, and starts off with Hagia Sophia. The second book is about Mesopotamia, on which this article focuses. Dara received special attention in that book. Procopius then moves on to Edessa, Carrhae and Callinicum while defining them as in the province of Osrhoene[24] but also pointing out that they are also between the rivers geographically. He then talks about Syria. The third book is about Armenia and regions in the north, and the fourth focuses on the Balkans, Illyricum and Thrace. In the fifth book, this anti-clockwise movement is reversed, and he returns again to Anatolia, Syria and Palestine. The last book is on Egypt and North Africa. As Whitby has observed, the introduction of the first four books of "Buildings" are devoted to a detailed description of a particular building or settlement[25]. In the first book, it is Hagia Sophia and in the second it is Dara. In fact, Procopius writes more on Dara than he writes on Hagia Sophia, the most important building of Justinian's reign. We understand from Procopius that there were three main purposes of Justinian's building activities: to reinforce Orthodox Christianity and honor God, to fortify and protect the borders of the empire and continue the Roman way of civic life and culture. Procopius portrays Justinian as a powerful patron expanding and transforming the empire and re-establishing the Christian faith[26]. Procopius includes many miracles to imply that God was with Justinian in his activities.

In the introduction of "Buildings", Procopius mentions how Justinian was not an exhibitionist like an Egyptian pharaoh but an emperor building useful things like city walls and constructions to manage water. He belittles what had been built before Justinian, especially those structures built by Anastasius,[27] and elaborates on how Justinian made the region strong and beauti-

21 Brock 1981, Bardill 2017, 81.
22 Greatrex 2007, Coke 2006, 36-40.
23 Menze 2008, 9, 270.
24 Buildings, 2.8.1.
25 Whitby 2022, 140.
26 Elsner 2007, 35.
27 When talking about Thrace in Book 4, Procopius gives a direct reference to Anastasius, mentioning that the walls Anastasius built caused greater calamities. I thank Marlena Whting for pointing this out to me. In Book 2, the references to Anastasius are indirect.

ful[28]. It is especially remarkable that he gives the names of churches only in Dara, Sergiopolis and Antioch. The first two cities were called Anastasiopolis because Anastasius raised the status of these settlements to that of metropolis and built extensively there. When Procopius talks about Sergiopolis, he places emphasis to the church. Although, he does not say that Justinian built a church there, he says "they", "the men of former times", built a church to honour the famous saint Sergius. He notes that this church was prone to attacks and Justinian surrounded it with a remarkable wall and provided water[29]. Justinian is depicted here as a protector of the Church and the believers, and these sections also serve to portray Justinian as superior to the non-Chalcedonian Anastasius. As we shall mention below, Justinian paid special attention to Saint Sergius.

The wars with the Persians were the most critical events of the sixth century, and especially of Justinian's reign[30]. Procopius focused on these wars more than any of his contemporaries. In his "Wars", he dedicates the first two books and the half of the eighth book to the East. It is usually assumed that Procopius was in the East accompanying general Belisarius between 527-531 and later in 541[31] and his descriptions were considered eyewitness accounts. As we said, the first place he describes in detail is Dara (Anastasiopolis, modern Oğuz). It is located 30 kilometers southeast of Mardin. Dara was founded by Anastasius opposite the Persian city of Nisibis (modern Nusaybin) and it was a source of great pride for the Byzantines[32]. Procopius emphasizes the importance of the city by saying that if something happens to this city, the calamities would not stop there and the whole empire would suffer from it[33].

Procopius dedicates a long section to the water control system in Dara. According to Procopius, Chryses of Alexandria was not in the city when a devastating flood occurred in the city. He went to bed in distress and dreamed about the solution to the problem. He drew the project and sent it to the emperor Justinian. In the meantime, Justinian summoned the famous architects of Hagia Sophia, Anthemius and Isidorus, to ask their opinion. They came up with some ideas but Justinian, miraculously, drew the exact same project of Chryses before seeing his message. They could not conclude on the solution but when Chryses' message arrived and the emperor saw that he had had the same idea, he summoned the architects again and showed them the letter. Chryses returned to Dara to realize the project[34]. Water management is a recurring topic for all the regions mentioned in the "Buildings". Based on the technical details that Procopius gives on the management of water, Howard-Johnston argued that Procopius might have had a technical background[35]. However, Elodie Turquois has shown that Procopius had a very limited understanding of

28 Buildings, 2.4.14.
29 Buildings, 2.9.3.
30 On the long-lasting warfare between the Byzantines and Persians, see Greatrex – Lieu 2002, 102-114.
31 Börm 2022., 310- 311.
32 Keser-Kayaalp – Erdoğan 2017.
33 Buildings, 2.1.11.
34 Buildings, 2.3.
35 Howard-Johnston 2001, 19-30.

technical matters and sometimes invents technical terms[36]. As Pickett argues, water management was part of Procopius' rhetoric throughout "Buildings"[37].

Procopius attributed the strengthening of Dara's walls to Justinian. Although Zanini[38] and Whitby[39] argued that there is a Justinianic phase in the walls of Dara, Croke and Crow showed that Procopius exaggerated the impact of Justinian[40]. Procopius attributes the cathedral and the Church of Saint Bartholomew to Justinian but other sources clearly record that the latter was built by Anastasius who had a dream of Bartholomew saying that he had been appointed guardian of the city. The emperor therefore sent his relic to Dara. In Procopius' account of Dara, a rivalry with Anastasius, a non-Chalcedonian emperor, is clear and the message seems to be that God is with Justinian.

Procopius' account of Edessa is also worth mentioning. According to Procopius, Justinian's architects changed the course of the Scirtus river (Karakoyun) which had been causing problems, and built a dam to the northwest of the city[41]. However, according to Wilkinson, Justinian only improved an existing trench[42]. Procopius also tells us that after the flood in 525, Justinian restored the destroyed parts of the city, including the church of the Christians[43]. According to Palmer, authorities were very late in responding the calamities in the city. Palmer interprets the Chronicle of Edessa, written in Syriac, as a petition to draw the attention of the emperor and ask him to take the necessary measures[44].

The church that Procopius calls the "Church of the Christians" might be the famous Edessene church of Hagia Sophia. Centuries later, Mas'ūdi (d. 956) classified this church as one of the wonders of the world and stated that it was built by Justinian[45]. However, there is no account prior to him that links this church to Justinian. According to the 12th century chronicler, Michael the Syrian, the church was rebuilt and decorated when Amazonius was bishop (540-554)[46], thus during Justinian's reign. If Procopius is right that Justinian gave the city immediate attention after the flood of 525, rebuilding the church might have started when Justin was still emperor. Procopius explicitly states that Justinian should receive credit for the buildings erected by his uncle Justin[47] and counts what Justin does among Justinian's deeds. What little we know about Hagia Sophia at Edessa comes from a Syriac hymn *(Sogitha)*[48]

36 Turquois 2015, 231.
37 Pickett 2017, 81.
38 Zanini 2003, 20, fn.21.
39 Whitby 1986, 737–83.
40 Croke – Crow 1983, 143–59.
41 Buildings, 2.7.2.
42 Wilkinson 1981, 286.
43 Buildings, 2.7.6.
44 Palmer 2000.
45 Le Strange 1905, 104.
46 Michel le Syrien, book 9, ch.29; book 11, ch.27. The Syriac hymn also mentions the bishop (Palmer 1988, 2. Strophe).
47 Buildings, 1.3.3
48 McVey 1983. See also: Palmer 1988.

written for the inauguration of the church. Based on the description in the hymn, there have been various suggestions about the plan of the church (fig. 1, 2 and 3). It is only clear that it was a domed building. The suggested hypothetical plans were inspired by other Justinianic churches, namely Sts. Sergius and Bacchus and Hagia Eirene.

One should note here the choice of Syriac for the inauguration of the church. Although the writer of the hymn was probably Chalcedonian, the hymn may have been used to establish a link with the Syriac community of the city which were mostly miaphysites[49]. The fact that Procopius prefers a general term like "the church of Christians" may indicate that he does not want to highlight any propogandistic activity that would address the disunity in the Church. Edessa was the main theological center of Syriac Christianity and the Syriac language was the Edessan dialect of Aramaic.

When talking about Constantia (modern Viranşehir), the seat of the *dux* of Mesopotamia, Procopius emphasizes the water works and city walls. He mentions how Justinian brought water inside the city walls and adorned the city with fountains[50]. Remains of the city walls match Procopius' accounts. When describing them, instead of saying that the lower courses were built with basalt ashlar blocks, he says the walls are of strong stone that are used in making millstones. This is an additional support for Turquois' argument above that he was not much of a technical man. Procopius belittles the walls before Justinian's improvements by saying they can be climbed by a ladder[51].

There is a monumental building, probably a martyrion (fig. 4), located just outside the walls of Constantia. It has an octagonal inner layout and a circular exterior wall. Today there is only one pier of the octagon standing (fig. 5)[52]. Johnson connects the octagon in Constantia with the octagonal churches at Thessaloniki, Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople, St. Michael at Anaplus (Arnavutköy), and St. John the Baptist in Hebdomon and dates it to the time of Justinian[53]. These churches share large piers, ambulatories, galleries, and elongated sanctuaries. The twelfth-century chronicler Michael the Syrian mentions a church in Constantia dedicated to the saints Cosmas and Damian[54]. The monumental octagon in Constantia may have been the church dedicated to these saints. Such a church could only be built during times of peace with the Persians. Greatrex argues these times were also the times when persecutions of miaphysites were more severe, as we can see from the life of John of Tella[55]. John of Tella (the Syriac name for Constantia) was a very influential figure in the formation of the Syriac Church[56]. He was arrested in 537 and died in prison. This monumental church, built in the home town of an

49 McVey 1983, 118.
50 Buildings, 2.5.11.
51 Buildings, 2.5.
52 Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 135.
53 Johnson 2018, 124.
54 Michel le Syrien,11, 23, 516.
55 Greatrex 2007, 290.
56 Menze 2011, 447.

influential figure in the formation of the Syriac Church, might have served as Chalcedonian propaganda.

According to Mayer, since Cosmas and Damian are saints from Syria, they functioned as intermediaries in the theological disputes[57] and churches dedicated to them were visited by believers from different denominations[58]. When Procopius talks about the church of Sts. Cosmas and Damian in Constantinople, he mentions that when Justinian was very ill, he dreamt of these saints and that is why he restored the church dedicated to these strong saints in a splendid way[59]. In Book 2, there is a mention of Cosmas and Damian when Procopius mentions the city of Cyrrus in Syria. He relates how Justinian restored its walls and water system, because of his respect for the saints of Cosmas and Damian whose bodies were close to the city[60] but does not mention any church building there. In Northern Mesopotamia, there is another church that is dedicated to St. Cosmas which was located in Amida (Diyarbakır). The *opus sectile* (fig. 6) fragments originating from this church[61] are similar to those in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, San Vitale in Ravenna and the cathedral in Poreč[62]. Although plausible, this is not enough evidence to date this church to Justinian's reign. If that was the case, attention to Syrian saints may be related to the efforts to unite the Church, as we shall discuss more below.

Procopius dedicates a relatively long section to Rhabdion castle and describes the region the castle was located in as a piece of Roman land within Persian territory[63]. When he first saw the place, Procopius was astonished at how the land on either side belonged to the enemy. Rhabdion is a castle built by Constantius II. It defines the eastern part of the Tur Abdin region, a cultural landscape dotted with Syrian Orthodox churches and monasteries[64]. Whitby notes that Procopius only rarely moves away from describing water management and fortifications and he argues that the section on Rhabdion is one of these rare instances[65]. However, Whitby does not comment on the possible reasons of Procopius for doing so. Procopius comments on the topography and the Romanness of the region. Although he notes the agricultural lands around Rhabdion[66], which must have been cultivated by the monks of the nearby monasteries, he does not mention the presence of any monasteries. His avoidance of Syriac monasteries and focus on the Roman identity serve his purposes in "Buildings".

He does, however, mention the names of some monasteries in Book V,

57 Mayer 2009, 357–67.
58 Booth 2011, 117.
59 Buildings, 1.6.5-8.
60 Buildings, 2.11.2
61 Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 88.
62 Terry 1986, 147–64.
63 Buildings, 2.4.3.
64 The name of Tur Abdin is usually linked to the Syriac "turo daʿ ʿabode" meaning "the mountain of the servants of God", but it most probably derived from the Greek name of the castle: "to rhabdion". Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 156.
65 Whitby 2022, 146.
66 Buildings, 2.4.6.

where he briefly returns to Mesopotamia alongside Anatolia, Syria and Palestine. He starts the book by saying he has included "all the fortifications of cities and the fortresses, as well as the other buildings which he erected throughout the East"[67] and says he shall tell "all that was done by him in the rest of Asia and in Libya, either in fortifying, or in repairing the roads…..or, finally, in repairing all the parts of cities which had become defective". He ends Book V with a list where he records "all that he did in the monasteries… in the form of a summary", listing the monasteries in Jerusalem, Phoenicia, Mesopotamia, Cyprus and Pamphylia. He even recorded the wells Justinian built in monasteries[68]. Mentioning monasteries, who were, especially in Constantinople, political agents of disunity[69] did not serve the purposes of Procopius who tried to portray unity and security. He seems to be aware of the awkwardness of neglecting the monasteries and thus includes them as a list, probably a deliberately chosen literary device for dealing with a subject he is avoiding and wants to deal only in "summary". Delphrachis, Zebinus, Theodotus, John, Sarmathê, Cyrenus and Begadaeus are the names of the monasteries in Northern Mesopotamia that he lists[70]. None of the above, recorded by Procopius as being in Mesopotamia, can yet be associated with archaeological remains. We cannot tell whether the monasteries are Chalcedonian or miaphysite. A geographic list places all monasteries under the same category, in a way that details of denomination do not matter.[71] He locates the list just after mentioning the monastery at Sinai. In that way, the reader cannot question the location of the list here and the absence of the monasteries in other books.

Procopius tells us that, alongside the city walls of Dara and Amida, Justinian refortified Ciphas, Sauras, Margdis, Lournês, Idriphthon, Atachas, Siphriŭs, Rhipalthas, Banasymeôn, Sinas, Rhasios and Dabanas. We can relate some of these fortifications with what is on the ground. Ciphas is medieval and modern Hasankeyf, Rhipalthas is a castle 30 kilometers west of Hasankeyf, Sauras is modern Savur and Margdis is modern Mardin. Siphrius is probably the castle known as Rabat, and it has been suggested that Idriphthon is Hisarkaya which is located to the north of Savur[72]. If Justinian refortified all these locations, it is not implausible that some buildings in the monasteries nearby could be related to these same campaigns of building[73]. In the monastery of Mor Gabriel in Midyat, a circular structure with a brick dome is nowadays called Theodora's dome (fig. 7). It is next to the main church of the monastery which was most probably built or adorned during Anastasius' reign. The do-

67 Buildings, 5.1.

68 Buildings, 5.9.

69 Whiting – Turquois forthcoming.

70 Buildings, 5.9.31.

71 I am grateful to Marlena Whiting for pointing this out to me and for sharing their forthcoming article: Whiting – Turquois forthcoming.

72 Comfort 2017.

73 While Marlia Mundell Mango finds it likely (Mundell 1981, 526), Palmer rejects the idea because of the Chalcedonian position of the emperor (Palmer 1990, 123). It should be noted that the building of the main church of the monastery of Mor Gabriel was an extension of the building programme in Dara (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 209).

med structure, whose function remains uncertain[74], competes with the church next to it in terms of size (fig. 8), bringing in mind a competition with what the non-Chalcedonian emperor Anastasius had built. Although Palmer argues that the Theodora associated with this building was a different Theodora[75], today the narrative is about empress Theodora, wife and consort of Justinian. In miaphysite sources, Justinian was portrayed as a "predominantly hostile figure", whereas Theodora was "an undeniable partisan"[76]: the daughter of a miaphysite priest and a believing queen[77]. She accommodated Severus' followers in the Palace of Hormisdas[78] and it has been argued that the Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople was linked to the miaphysite presence in the palace. Could the domed building at Mor Gabriel have been built by Justinian or Theodora during the negotiations for the unity of the Church as extending a hand to miaphysites, like the Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople (see below)? The solid brick dome and the courses of stone and brick on the walls of "Dome of Theodora" may favor a Justinianic date but they are not enough for secure dating.

The centrally planned main church of the monastery of Deir Zafaran is unlike the transverse churches in other monasteries of the region. It has large niches on the south and north walls and may have also been built during Justinian's reign. Marlia Mundell Mango has suggested a date between 526 and 536, mainly based on historical events surrounding Justinian's efforts at conciliation, and the architectural sculpture[79]. The absence of an account on Deir Zafaran's earlier history is puzzling; this silence might favour an association with Justinian as miaphysites would be likely to erase his memory. For example, an eighth-century text, the Qartmin Trilogy, about the foundation of the monastery of Mor Gabriel associates the foundation of buildings extant at the time with various Byzantine emperors, including Honorius and Arcadius[80] (very unlikely to be true), but there is no mention of Justinian as a founder as he was seen as a persecutor. It has to be noted that all the buildings that have been mentioned above as related to Justinian are domed. We do not know the original layout of St. Cosmas in Amida as it had been extensively rebuilt when Gertrude Bell visited the church in the early twentieth century and today nothing is left of the church except the opus sectile fragments we mentioned above. While domed buildings were nothing new in the empire[81] there was extensive experimentation with the form on a large scale in the Justinianic period.

74 Palmer argued that it was a baptistery (1990, 145). Keser-Kayaalp (2021, 200) argued for a burial chamber. According to the inhabitants of the monastery, the building was later used as a reception hall next to the kitchen.
75 Palmer 1990, 145.
76 Pazdernik 1994, 272.
77 Harvey 2001, 215.
78 Lives 47, 679.
79 Mundell 1981, 528.
80 Palmer 1990, 47, 50.
81 Bardill 2008, 341.

The Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople and the miaphysite church

By way of support for my argument that Procopius made implicit references to the Syriac church and miaphysites, I would like to bring the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople into my discussion. This church has been a subject of dispute amongst scholars which resulted in a series of articles one responding to the other. These discussions started with Krautheimer's identification of this church as a palace church. Cyril Mango questioned this categorization and argued that the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus was built for the non-Chalcedonian refugee community in the Palace of Hormisdas. Krautheimer and Mathews disagreed; Mango revised his argument saying that it was built for the non-Chalcedonian bishops who attended the theological discussions held in that palace in 532. In 2000, Bardill summarized these arguments and agreed in principle with Mango. However, while arguing that it was built for the miaphysites, Bardill has suggested a date later than 532, i.e. after the meetings[82]. In a 2006 article, Croke argued that non-Chalcedonians sought refuge in Constantinople in large numbers only after 536. He also argues that the church was built earlier to compete Anicia Juliana's church of St. Polyeuktos and had nothing to do with the miaphysites[83]. In the latest article of this debate, Bardill argues that the church was built between 532 and 536 when Justinian was in conciliation with the miaphysites. Bardill rightly sees the building of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus alongside the church of Sts. Peter and Paul as an architectural statement symbolizing: "the hoped-for understanding between the Chalcedonians (aligned with Rome and represented by St. Peter) and the non-Chalcedonians (represented by Sergius, guardian of the eastern frontier, where the non-Chalcedonian heartlands were located)"[84].

The discussions on this church have taken what Procopius wrote as just a physical description. I would argue that it was more than that. Procopius says:

> *... These two churches do not face each other, but stand at an angle to one another, being at the same time joined to each other and rivalling each other; and they share the same entrances and are like each other in all respects, even to the open spaces by which they are surrounded; and each of them is found to be neither superior nor inferior to the other either in beauty or in size or in any other respect. Indeed each equally outshines the sun by the gleam of its stones, and each is equally adorned throughout with an abundance of gold and teems with offerings. In just one respect, however, they do differ. For the long axis of one of them is built straight, while in the other church the columns stand for the most part in a semi-circle. But whereas they possess a single colonnaded*

82 Mango 1972, 189-93; Krautheimer 1974, 251-53; Mathews 1974, 22-29; Mango 1975. For a summary of this discussion, see: Bardill 2000.

83 Croke 2006.

84 Bardill 2017, 85.

> *stoa, called a narthex because of its great length, for each one of their porches, they have their propylaea entirely in common, and they share a single court, and the same doors leading in from the court, and they are alike in that they belong to the Palace. These two churches are so admirable that they manifestly form an adornment of the whole city, and not merely of the Palace*[85].

I would argue that Procopius seems to be referring to the Christological disputes when describing the physical properties of these churches. These churches, like the denominations of the divided Church, are beautiful by themselves, they do not face each other, and while they rival with each other, they are also connected. One is "neither superior nor inferior to the other". It is impossible to argue that these churches were equals in terms of plan. While the church of Sts. Peter and Paul was a basilica, repeated often, especially in Rome, the plan of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus has been interpreted as novelty by many scholars. However, Procopius presents this one respect that they differ. Procopius points out that their common point is that they belong to the Palace. "Palace" here must be referring not only to a building complex but as a metaphor for the Empire or Emperor.[86] As we mentioned, one of the motivations of Buildings was to present a united Church. Interpreting Procopius this way provides additional support for the ideas of Mango and Bardill, that Sts. Sergius and Bacchus was intended as a gesture of conciliation towards the miaphysite community in Constantinople.

Conclusions

Northern Mesopotamia was not only a region bordering the frontier with the Persians, but also a stage for the foundation of the miaphysite Syriac Orthodox church hierarchy. It is only natural that this region received great attention in "Buildings" which was probably commissioned to enhance the emperor Justinian's image. Justinian and Theodora tried to put an end to the division within the church. Theodora hosted miaphysite Syriac monks in the Hormisdas palace and the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus was built as a gesture of goodwill to them, if not as an actual space of worship for them. However, the unity could not be achieved and Justinian, who restarted the persecutions in 536, retained a reputation among miaphysites as an evil emperor. A unified Church, a strong frontier and God's continuous help toward the emperor feature repeatedly in the text. Procopius generally avoided references to theology, and seems to have ignored the buildings that might be related to the miaphysite controversy, or glossed over the association.

Procopius focuses on the military nature of the Mesopotamia. In terms of religious architecture, he only mentions the cathedral and the church of St. Bartholomew in Dara, both probably built by Anastasius, and the rebuilding of the Great Church in Edessa. Setting the emperor Justinian up as a more

85 Buildings, 1.4.3-7.

86 Thanks to Marlena Whiting for suggesting this interpretation.

capable ruler than the non-Chalcedonian emperor Anastasius seems to be a recurring topos, although there is no direct reference to Anastasius as a builder in Mesopotamia. Even the choice of Sergius as a saint symbolizing the East may be related to Anastasius who was a champion of the saint, in the 510s arranging for the relic of Sergius' thumb to be translated to Constantinople, and elevating Resafa/ Sergiopolis to the rank of metropolitan see[87].

Some structures in the region, such as the dome at Qartmin, the church of St. Cosmas at Amida, the Octagon in Constantia, the main church of Deir Zafaran and the Church of Hagia Sophia at Edessa may have been built related to the miaphysite controversy during the time of Justinian; either to win over the hearts of miaphysites in times of negotiations or to establish the "true faith" during persecutions. It is remarkable that these buildings are all domed, however, since their date cannot be securely established and the general lack of evidence does not really allow us to link them as a related group of Justinianic buildings, any argument as to their symbolic meaning must remain hypothetical.

It would have been impossible for Procopius to mention all the churches and monasteries of the Justinianic period and it has been noted that he omits many structures in other regions that we know of from epigraphy[88]. One might argue that he did not have the information about those buildings. However, he describes in some detail the regions in which they were located, for example Rhabdion castle in the case of Tur Abdin region, or the walls of Constantia. One might also argue that this neglect was a result of his focus on fortifications. However, he did not exclude all the churches and monasteries. Another argument might be that these buildings were erected as means of propaganda of the "true faith" and Procopius did not want Justinian to be seen as having wasted resources on an issue which was not resolved. Or Procopius avoided any church or monastery that would make one doubt about the unity of the Church.

87 Key Fowden 1999, 92.
88 Feissel 2001.

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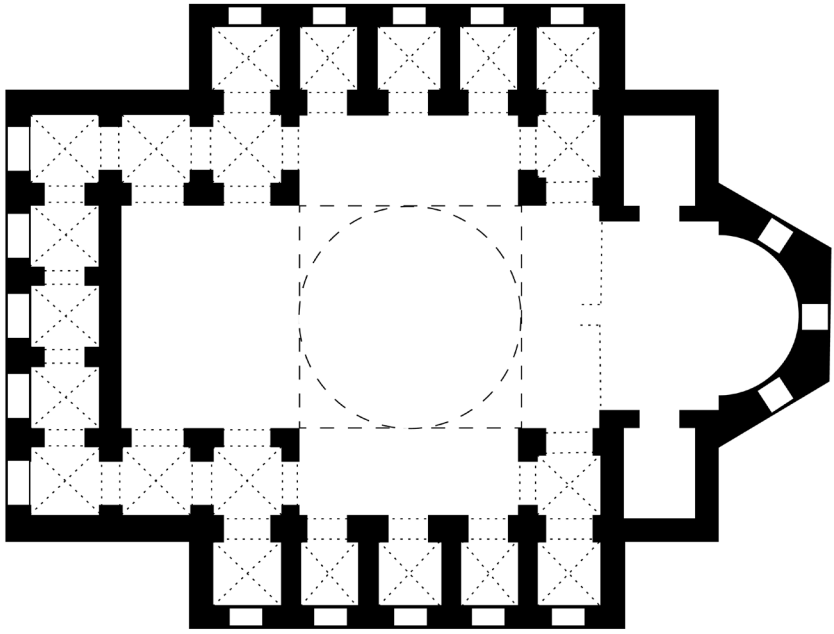

Fig. 1. Reconstruction of Hagia Sophia at Edessa by Schneider
(After Schneider 1941 reproduced in Palmer – Rodley 1988, fig. 1).

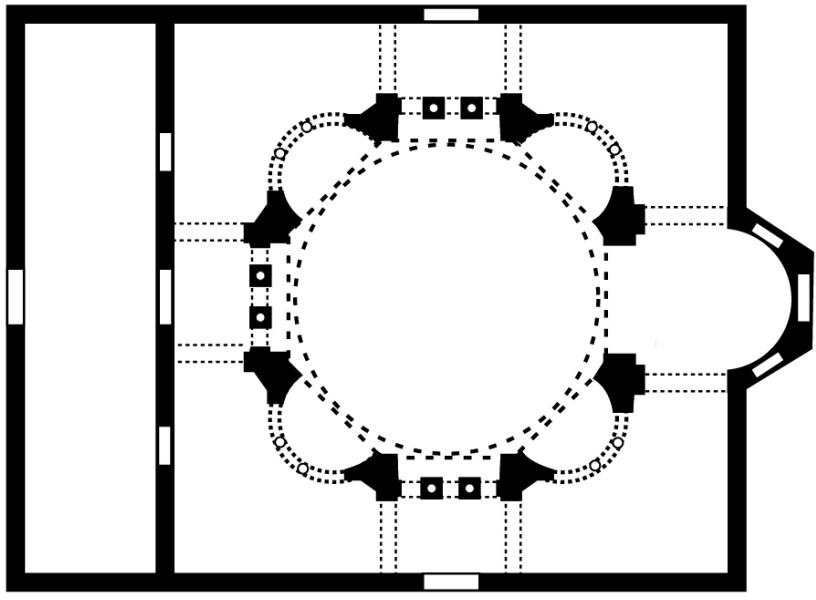

Fig. 2. Reconstruction of Hagia Sophia at Edessa, inspired by the plan of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople (after Palmer – Rodley 1988, fig. 2).

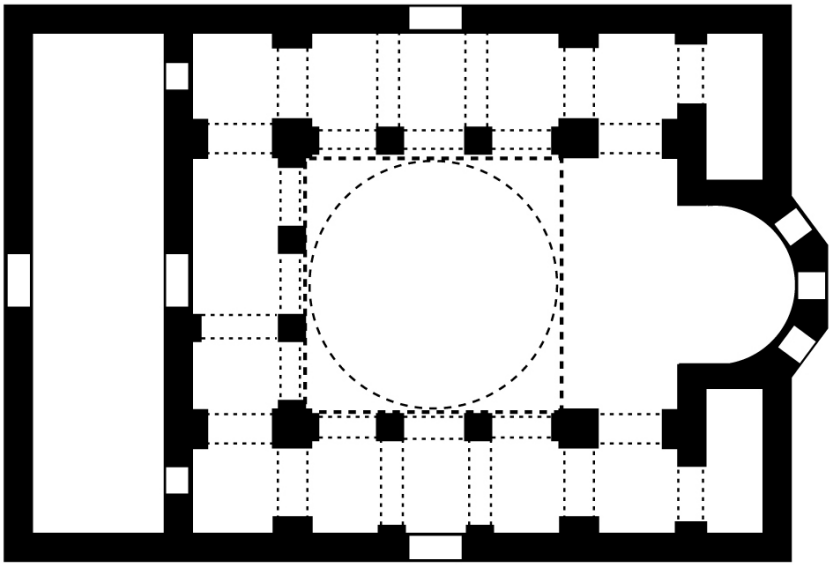

Fig. 3. Reconstruction of Hagia Sophia at Edessa, inspired by the plan of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople (after Palmer – Rodley 1988, fig. 3).

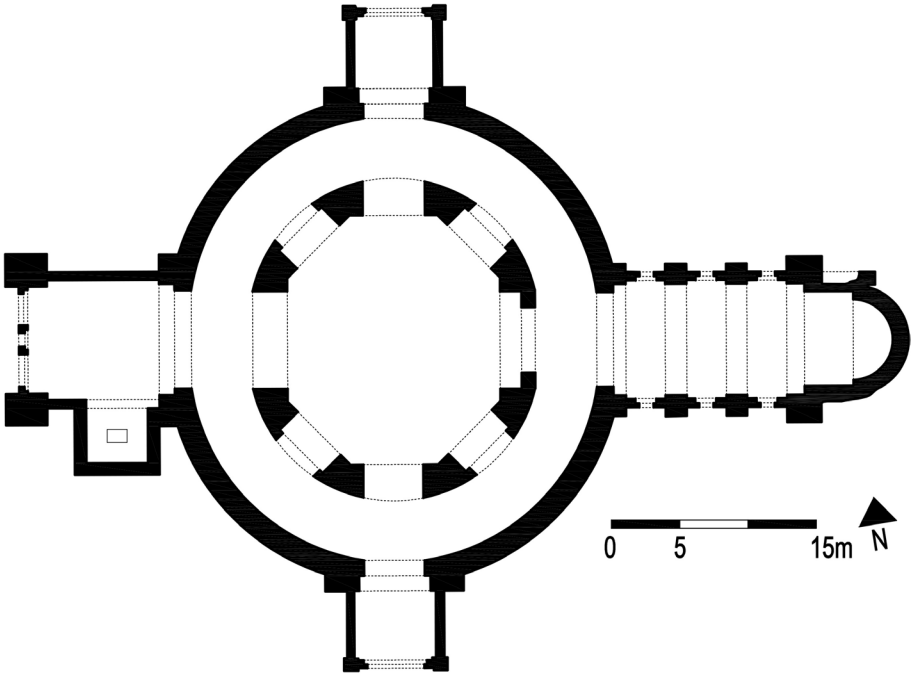

Fig. 4. Plan of the Octagon in Constantia (after Strzygowski, et. al. 1903: fig.69).

Fig. 5. The standing pier of the Octagon in Constantia

Fig. 6. Opus sectile fragments from the Church of Mor Cosmas at Amida (now in Diyarbakır Museum).

Fig. 7. The so-called "Dome of Theodora" in the monastery of Mor Gabriel.

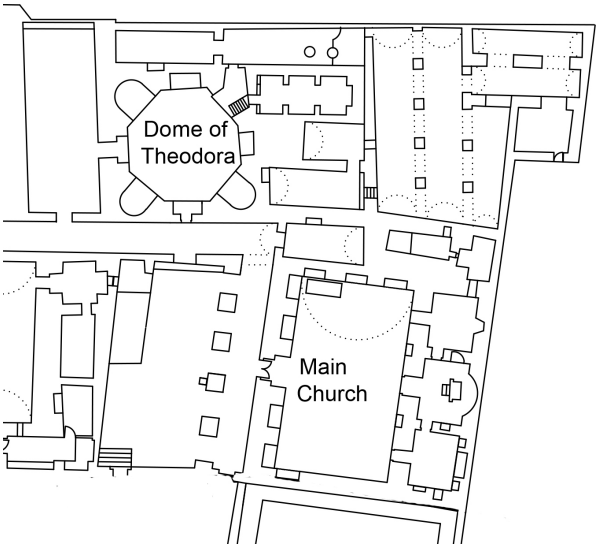

Fig. 8. Plan showing the relation of the church and the so-called "Dome of Theodora" in the monastery of Mor Gabriel.