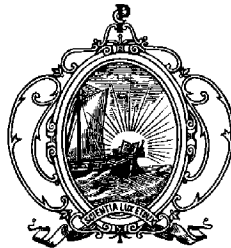


FROM ROME TO CONSTANTINOPE

Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron

edited by

Hagit Amirav & Bas ter Haar Romeny



PEETERS
LEUVEN – PARIS – DUDLEY, MA
2007

STRABO AND PROCOPIUS: CLASSICAL GEOGRAPHY FOR A CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

Michael MAAS¹

INTRODUCTION

In 1975, Aubrey Diller noted that a number of Greek authors in Constantinople in the early sixth century took an unexpected interest in the geographical work of Strabo of Amasia (c.64 BC – after 21 AD), the Augustan writer now considered to represent the pinnacle of the Hellenistic geographic tradition². The sudden interest of Byzantine writers in Strabo is all the more remarkable because his *Geography*, a work of seventeen books, was never completed or published³. Only a few scholars of the imperial

1. I would like to thank Andrew Fenton, Matthias Henze, Paula Sanders, Thomas Sizgorich, and the anonymous readers of this paper for their helpful comments. Translations of Strabo and Procopius are taken from the Loeb Classical Library editions. Procopius, *Wars*, trans. H.B. Dewing and G. Downey (1928 repr.; Cambridge, MA, 1992). Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (1917 repr.; Cambridge, MA, 1960), both with occasional changes.

2. Aubrey Diller, *The Textual Tradition of Strabo's Geography* (Amsterdam, 1975); Daniela Dueck, Hugh Lindsay, and Sarah Pothecary (eds.), *Strabo's Cultural Geography. The Making of a Kolossourgia* (Cambridge, 2005), for the most recent reconsiderations of Strabo and his work; Daniela Dueck, *Strabo of Amasia. A Greek Man of Letters in Augustan Rome* (London-New York, 2000), on his background, pp. 1-30; on the date and influence of the *Geography*, pp. 145-87; Katherine Clarke, *Between Geography and History. Hellenistic Constructions of the Roman World* (Oxford, 1999), esp. pp. 294-336; Rhiannon Menai Evans, *Forma Orbis: Geography, Ethnography and Shaping the Roman Empire* (Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1999), pp. 115-268; Christian Jacob, 'Geography', in J. Bruntschwig and G.E.R. Lloyd (eds.), *Greek Thought. A Guide to Classical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), pp. 299-311, and Christian Jacob, *Géographie et ethnographie en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1991), pp. 160-62; Edward Ch.L. Van der Vliet, 'L'Ethnographie de Strabon: Ideologie ou Tradition?' in Francesco Prontera (ed.), *Strabone. Contributi allo Studio della Personalità e dell'Opera* 1 (Perugia, 1984), pp. 29-86.

3. Diller, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 9-10, summarizes the reception of Strabo before the sixth century: The first known reference to the *Geography* occurs in a description of the *oikoumene* composed in hexameters by Dionysius Periegetes around 120 CE. Athenaeus (3.121a) made erroneous remarks about Strabo, possibly drawing upon a third source. Athenaeus' contemporary, Harpocration, a grammarian from Alexandria, also was familiar with Strabo's geography. The church historian Socrates mentioned Strabo once in his *Church History* (7.25), but it is not certain whether he refers to the *Geography* or Strabo's *History* that is now lost.

period consulted his *Geography*, and his *History* has entirely vanished⁴. Nevertheless, a manuscript of the work somehow made its way to Constantinople, where it caught the eye of a handful of writers in the sixth century⁵. Issues of transmission will not concern us here, however. This paper deals instead with the question of Strabo's influence upon the most important literary figure of sixth century Constantinople, Procopius of Caesarea (c.500-c.553), the writer whom Averil Cameron has done so much to illuminate.

Both Strabo and Procopius lived at times when the size of the empire and the nature of Roman imperial rule significantly changed. Their works in different ways testify to new visions of the inhabited world and Rome's mastery of it that evolved in response to these changes. Strabo praised the *pax romana* established by Augustus and continued by Tiberius as a period of peace and prosperity unparalleled in history⁶, and he approved of the spread of Roman civilization. Accordingly, his *Geography* described the natural features of the *oikoumene* (the inhabited world) and also addressed its diverse inhabitants, considering among other things how the earth's terrain affected their ways of life and what factors contributed to the appearance of civilization. In this regard Strabo showed particular interest in Rome as a bringer of civilization and the consequences of cultural contact between Romans and other peoples⁷. The *Geography* documents the Roman imperial vision taking shape at the beginning of the Principate, when new structures of imperial power and rapid expansion of Roman authority required a fresh conceptualization of the world and Rome's place in it. It was no coincidence, Nicholas Purcell points out, 'that this turning point in Roman imperial power produced the *chef d'œuvre* of ancient geography'⁸.

4. Dueck, *Strabo*, pp. 69-75.

5. Diller, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 10-19: Stephanus of Byzantium, composed a massive *Ethnica* that consisted of a list of geographical place names. The surviving epitome of the *Ethnica* contains hundreds of cited and uncited references to the *Geography*. Marcianus of Heraclea, a minor geographer, mentioned Strabo. Priscianus Lydus, one of the neoplatonist philosophers who journeyed to Persia in 532, mentions Strabo as a source in his work *Solutiones eorum de quibus dubitavit Chosroes Persarum rex* and quotes him twice. The Italian diplomat and scholar Cassiodorus, who had a prolonged stay in Constantinople at mid-century, mentions the *Geography* in an excursus on Britain, but this information may have come from Jordanes. Hesychius of Miletus, composed the *Onomatologus* which supplied information on Greek authors, refers to Strabo's *Geography*.

6. Strabo, *Geography* 6.4.2; Dueck, *Strabo*, p. 101.

7. Clarke, *Between Geography and History*, pp. 329-36; Eran Almagor, 'Who is a Barbarian? The Barbarians in the Ethnological and Cultural Taxonomies of Strabo', pp. 42-55, esp. 53-54, in Daniela Dueck et al. (eds.), *Strabo's Cultural Geography*.

8. Nicholas Purcell, 'Strabo', in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd ed.; Oxford, 1999), p. 1447; Sarah Potheary, 'Kolossourgia. A Colossal Statue of a Work', in Daniela Dueck et

Procopius of Caesarea wrote during the age of Justinian I (r. 527-565), which like the Augustan era was a time of territorial expansion and ideological transformation. Constantinople, the New Rome, was emerging as the symbolic centre of a new mental map of the empire and surrounding lands as a Byzantine world view took shape. At the same time, the imprint of Christianity upon society intensified, as the emperor, acting above all as a Christian monarch, attempted to reform and restore the Roman state. In the process Roman imperialism received a Christian gloss. Justinian took pride, for example, in converting pagans and dragging them from geographical isolation into a wider, orthodox world⁹. Because Procopius was an eyewitness to many of the events of Justinian's reign as well as a thoughtful and impassioned interpreter of them, we have come to see many of these developments through his eyes. Unlike his contemporary Cosmas Indicopleustes, whose *Christian Topography* described the world as similar in design to the tabernacle of Moses, Procopius did not try to replace the Greek geographical tradition with an entirely new Christian cosmology¹⁰. Instead, as we will see, he adapted Strabo's notion of cultural landscapes modified by Roman imperialism to reflect new Christian realities.

Like Strabo's *Geography*, Procopius' *Wars* and *Buildings* display a broad geographical scope, but to different ends. Procopius was not writing a description of the known world's geography; he employed geography in the service of imperial history and panegyric. His narratives were framed by his emperor's military ambitions in the *Wars* and imperial policies of restoring the imperial infrastructure in the *Buildings*. The *Wars* in particular contained a great deal of geographical information informed by autopsy as well as literary study. The other authors of his day who showed an interest in Strabo extracted bits of geographical information from his treatise to suit their own purposes. Procopius mentioned Strabo, but unlike his contemporaries employed the *Geography* as more than a dossier of place names. What is intriguing about Procopius is that he shared with Strabo ideas about cultural change caused by Roman imperialism. Both men wrote at analogous moments of imperial transformation, though

al. (eds.), *Strabo's Cultural Geography*, pp. 5-26, here p. 25 on attitudes to Greek culture in relation to Rome.

9. Michael Maas, "'Delivered from their Ancient Customs': Christianity and the Question of Cultural Change in Early Byzantine Ethnography", in Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton (eds.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Seeing and Believing* (Rochester, 2003), pp. 152-88, here pp. 160-69.

10. Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Topographie chrétienne*, ed. Wanda Wolska-Conus (SChrét. 141, 159, 197; Paris, 1968-73).

Procopius' narratives were, of course, inflected by more recent phenomena, namely the dominance of Christianity in Roman life and the highly pronounced emphasis of the emperor himself as an agent of cultural transformation. Nevertheless, the similarities in the writers' approaches to civilization and empire deserve attention. We need not invoke a continuous history of writing about the physical face of the empire and the Roman stamp upon it in order to understand either writer, nor would anyone claim that we cannot understand Procopius without taking Strabo into account. In this paper I show how Procopius was directly influenced by the Augustan geographer. Part of Procopius' presentation of Justinian's transformation of barbarian cultures in the Caucasus region responded directly to Strabo's *Geography*. Exploring the connection between the two authors, furthermore, gives a glimpse of the construction of a Byzantine world view informed by the Roman imperial tradition.

STRABO'S CAREER AND OBJECTIVES

Born about 64 BC, and almost certainly a Roman citizen, Strabo came from a wealthy family in Pontus that had served the regime of Mithridates VI (d. 63 BC). As a young man he studied philosophy, especially Stoic doctrine¹¹. He knew Posidonius, the influential Stoic ethnographer and polymath. Strabo had an adventurous spirit and travelled widely. He became a friend of Aelius Gallus, the second prefect of Egypt, with whom he travelled up the Nile as far as Syene and to the borders of Ethiopia on a two year expedition¹². Following that adventure, Strabo took part in an unsuccessful Roman invasion of Arabia Felix, gaining first-hand knowledge of the perils and possibilities of imperial expansion into unfamiliar terrain¹³. Drawing from these experiences, as well as extensive travels throughout the Mediterranean basin and to Armenia and the Black Sea region¹⁴, he composed his *Geography* from the perspective of imperial exploration and expansion, illuminating attitudes about Rome and its place in the world fostered by the Augustan regime.

11. Dueck, *Strabo*, pp. 62-69, Purcell, 'Strabo', p. 1447.

12. Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.12; the expedition was either in 26-25 or 25-24: Ronald Syme and B.M. Levick, 'Aelius Gallus', in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd ed.; Oxford, 1999), pp. 18-19; Erich Gruen, 'The Expansion of the Empire under Augustus', in Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin, and Andrew Lintott (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History* 10. *The Augustan Empire, 43 B.C.-A.D. 69* (2nd ed.; Cambridge, 1996), pp. 148-51.

13. Strabo, *Geography* 16.4.22-24

14. Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.11; Dueck, *Strabo*, pp. 15-30.

Strabo's treatise addresses 'what we call the *oikoumene*, the world which we inhabit and know'¹⁵. Just as scholars had presented a new vision of the inhabited world in the aftermath of Alexander the Great, Strabo composed a picture of the *oikoumene* now shaped by the might of Rome. By placing Rome at the conceptual centre of his description of the world, he wove a legitimization of Roman power into the pre-existing tapestry of Greek geographical knowledge. Strabo's project had the practical intention of serving Rome as well as science, as he explains:

Now my first and most important concern, both for the purposes of science and for the needs of the state, is this – to try to give, in the simplest possible way, the shape and size of that part of the earth which falls within our map, indicating at the same time what the nature of that part is and what portion it is of the whole earth for this is the task proper of the geographer¹⁶.

... for governmental purposes there would be no advantage in knowing such countries and their inhabitants, and particularly if the people live in islands which are of such a nature that they can neither injure nor benefit us in any way because of their isolation¹⁷.

By providing a systematic description of the world that would be useful to Roman commanders and administrators, Strabo brought his geographical knowledge to the service of imperial expansion. He showed what portions of the earth were isolated and what parts were worth Rome's attention. These were useful lessons for an expanding empire.

STRABO ON BARBARISM AND CIVILIZATION

A set of ideas about the relation of barbarism to civilization underlay Strabo's *Geography* and his understanding of Roman imperialism. Like so many of his predecessors in the Greek scientific tradition, Strabo addressed the significant differences separating communities by entering into a debate about the opposition between barbarism and civilization¹⁸. He gave no extended discussion of these terms, but they were essential

15. Strabo, *Geography* 1.4.6.

16. Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.13.

17. Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.8; Dueck, *Strabo*, pp. 118 and 154 with n. 29; Christian Jacob, 'Geography', pp. 299-311, here p. 309.

18. Patrick Thollard, *Barbarie et Civilisation chez Strabon. Etude Critique des Livres III et IV de la Géographie* (Paris, 1987); see review of Thollard by D.R. Dicks, *Classical Review* (1991), pp. 26-27; Almagor, 'Who is a Barbarian?', p. 43 on the various ethnological schemes used by Strabo. For general background, see Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, 2004).

for his treatise. His understanding of them may be pieced together from observations scattered throughout his work¹⁹.

Strabo imagined a cultural continuum between barbarians and civilized peoples²⁰. According to the geographer, barbarians display brutishness that comes from living in desolate, remote, mountainous places where climate makes agriculture difficult or impossible. Without urban life they have no laws and are always at war. If they are fortunate they manage to live in rude villages. Lacking the true culture that comes from living in cities, they keep apart from other peoples. This standoffishness prevents them from being influenced by more civilized communities. In fact, the most extreme characteristic of barbarism is the inability or refusal to respond to external, civilizing influences²¹.

Above all others in Strabo's scheme, Romans (and Greeks) are the antithesis of barbarians and the embodiment of civilization because they have coherent political organization, vigorous civic institutions, and above all openness to interaction with other cultures²². With Rome as the centre and symbol of civilized life, barbarism meant distance from Roman norms and implied a physical distance from the empire as well, seen in geographical remoteness and consequent cultural isolation²³. Thus barbarism was a phenomenon of degrees – and an escapable condition.

The continuum between barbarism and civilization shaped Strabo's geographical descriptions. He always began with what he considered the most civilized portions of a region and progressed to the least civilized. This generally meant that his descriptions began with cities on the seacoast and moved inland. Furthermore, his treatment of the inhabited world moves from west to east in the manner of a periplus.

For Strabo, geography did not determine barbarism and civilization, but it did provide the landscapes in which they might develop²⁴. Following the Hellenistic geographer Eratosthenes, he preferred to characterize societies on the basis of their good and bad qualities. Romans and Carthaginians,

19. L.A. Thompson, 'Strabo on Civilisation', *Platon* 31 (1979), pp. 213-30.

20. Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore, 1935), for lengthy excerpts and discussion of texts; Almagor, 'Who is a Barbarian?', p. 52-55.

21. On characteristics of barbarians, see Thollard, *Barbarie et Civilisation*, pp. 6-19, for convenient lists of characteristics; Edward Ch.L. Van der Vliet, 'L'ethnographie de Strabon', p. 63; Thompson, 'Strabo on Civilisation', p. 220.

22. Thompson, 'Strabo on Civilisation', pp. 221-29; for Strabo's sources, see Ernst Honigmann, *RE IVa* (Stuttgart, 1932), pp. 97-151 and Dueck, *Strabo*, pp. 180-86.

23. Thompson, 'Strabo on Civilisation', p. 219.

24. Dueck, *Strabo*, p. 79; Thollard, *Barbarie et Civilisation*, pp. 22-26 for the Stoic background.

for example, have had excellent governments and so should not be dismissed as barbarian because they are not Greek²⁵. Natural forces contribute to the emergence of a society's qualities. If natural conditions permitted agriculture, as they did on the Nile²⁶, in Libya²⁷, parts of Europe²⁸, or India²⁹, he believed that humans would accumulate wealth and eventually develop cities and establish laws and political order, sure signs of civilization. Factors other than climate also come into play in determining the character of a human community:

And again, as regards the various arts and faculties and institutions of mankind, most of them, when once men have made a beginning, flourish in any latitude whatsoever and in certain instances even in spite of the latitude; so that some local characteristics of a people come by nature, others by training and habit.³⁰

The Athenians, for example, due to their unique political organization, their love of reading and writing, and other habits, produced a brilliant civilization while other Greeks, such as the Spartans and Thebans, did not match them³¹.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

Strabo assumed that Rome had a civilizing mission, and that knowledge of geography could help them. Romans could teach remote peoples to enter a wider world:

The quality of intractability and wildness in these [Iberian] peoples has not resulted solely from their engaging in warfare, but also from their remoteness; for the trip to their country, whether by sea or by land, is long, and since they are difficult to communicate with, they have lost the instinct of sociability and humanity. They have this feeling of intractability and wildness to a less extent now, however, because of the peace and of the sojourns of the Romans among them³².

Though not the only bringers of civilization to barbarians, Romans were particularly skilled at leading peoples from barbarous isolation into

25. Strabo, *Geography* 1.4.9

26. Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.3

27. Strabo, *Geography* 17.3.1; 3.15; 3.24

28. Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.26

29. Strabo, *Geography*, e.g. 15.1.19, 23, 28; Thompson, 'Strabo on Civilisation', p. 215

30. Strabo, *Geography* 2.3.7; Dueck, *Strabo*, p. 79.

31. Strabo, *Geography* 2.3.7; Thompson, 'Strabo on Civilisation', p. 217.

32. Strabo, *Geography* 3.3.8.

a civilized political realm³³. Strabo celebrated the unity that Romans had brought to the inhabited world: 'Now that all peoples have been brought into subjection to a single power, everything is free from toll and open to all mankind.'³⁴ He described the consequences of Roman rule:

The Romans, too, took over many nations that were naturally savage owing to the regions they inhabited, because those regions were either rocky or without harbours or cold or for some other reason ill-suited to habitation by many, and thus not only brought into communication with each other peoples who had been isolated, but also taught the more savage how to live under forms of government³⁵.

Similarly, the barbarians beyond Marseilles turned from war to civic life and farming because of the Romans. The Cavari, one of these Gallic peoples, 'are no longer barbarians, but are, for the most part, transformed to the type of the Romans, but in their speech and in their modes of living, and some of them in their civic life as well'³⁶. Many other examples in the *Geography* make the same point, that by establishing peace, Rome breaks down the barriers of isolation and permits its subject peoples to establish political order and so enter into a broader, unified, and more civilized realm:

... But wherever such sojourns are rarer the people are harder to deal with and more brutish; and if some are so disagreeable merely as the result of the remoteness of their regions, it is likely that those who live in the mountains are still more outlandish. But now, as I have said, they have wholly ceased carrying on war; for both the Cantabrians ... and their neighbours have been subdued by Augustus Caesar; and instead of plundering the allies of the Romans ... now take the field for the Romans. Further, Tiberius, his successor, has set over these regions an army of three legions ... and it so happens that he already has rendered some of the peoples not only peaceable but civilized as well³⁷.

For all of his enthusiasm for Roman success in bringing civilized life to the barbarous peoples of the inhabited world, however, Strabo understood, as had so many of his predecessors, that civilization could be a mixed blessing, for Roman civilization might have a corrupting effect:

And yet our mode of life has spread its change for the worse to almost all peoples, introducing amongst them luxury and sensual pleasures and, to satisfy these vices, base artifices that lead to innumerable acts of greed. So then,

33. Dueck, *Strabo*, pp. 115-22; Almagor, 'Who is a Barbarian?', p. 53.

34. Strabo, *Geography* 9.4.15; Dueck, *Strabo*, p. 64, 117-18.

35. Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.26.

36. Strabo, *Geography* 4.1.12.

37. Strabo, *Geography* 3.3.8; Dueck, *Strabo*, pp. 115-22.

much wickedness of this sort has fallen on the barbarian peoples also, on the nomads as well as the rest; for as the result of taking up a seafaring life they not only have become morally worse, indulging in the practice of piracy and of slaying strangers, but also, because of their intercourse with many peoples, have partaken of the luxury and the peddling habits of those peoples³⁸.

For Strabo, then, Roman imperialism and geography were closely linked. As the civilizing power, Rome could offer its subjects political institutions, good government, peace, and access to a wider world that it controlled.

PROCOPIUS AND CHRISTIAN IMPERIALISM

Not much is known about the details of Procopius' life³⁹. Born in Palestine, in the city of Caesarea Maritima, he served as an aide to Justinian's general Belisarius from 527 to 540 (except for a brief period from 534-536)⁴⁰ and died about 553. Versed in the Greek classics through the conventional education of upper-class boys, he may well have received further training as military engineer or as an architect⁴¹. He wrote three books, the *Wars*, which narrate Justinian's military endeavours in Thucydidean style; the panegyric *Buildings*, which celebrates the emperor's constructions throughout the empire; and the notorious *Secret History*, a lurid exposé of the crimes of the imperial court. His wartime travels with Belisarius on the Persian, Vandalic, and Ostrogothic fronts provided a wealth of first-hand experience of topography, evidenced in the many descriptions of landscape that fill his account. Geography plays a substantial role in Procopius' *Wars* and *Buildings*⁴². The first seven books of the *Wars* are

38. Strabo, *Geography* 7.3.7; Dueck, *Strabo*, pp. 79, 119; on the idea that cultural contact could have negative consequences, see Isaac, *The Invention of Racism*, pp. 239-47.

39. James Howard-Johnston, 'The Education and Expertise of Procopius', *Antiquité Tardive* 8 (2000), pp. 19-30; Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (Berkeley, 1985); Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea. Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (2004); and Berthold Rubin, *Prokopios von Kaisareia* (Stuttgart, 1954) = RE v.23 (Stuttgart, 1957), pp. 273-599, for discussion and further bibliography on Procopius' life and career.

40. Howard-Johnston, 'Education and Expertise', p. 19, cites: *Wars* I.1.1 and 3; I.12.24; 4.14.37-42; 6.29.32.

41. Howard-Johnston, 'Education and Expertise', pp. 25-30, makes the case for his training.

42. Maria Cesa, 'Etnografia e Geografia nella Visione Storica di Procopio di Cesarea', *SCO* 32 (1982), pp. 389-409, outlines Procopius' use of geographical information in excursions as well as mixed with his historical and ethnographic data. R. Benedicty, 'Die Milieu-Theorie bei Prokop von Kaisareia', *Byz. Zeit.* 55 (1962), pp. 1-10; Hervé Inglebert, *Interpretatio Christiana. Les mutations des savoirs (cosmographie, géographie, ethnographie, histoire) dans*

arranged according to theatres of war, first describing the eastern front against Persia; then North Africa in the Vandalic war; and finally Italy in the war against the Ostrogoths. Consequently, the structure of the *Wars* has a geographical character as well as a wealth of geographical description.

The narrative which I have written up to this point has been composed, as far as possible, on the principle of separating the material into parts which relate severally to the countries in which the different wars took place ...⁴³

The eighth book abandons this geographical arrangement and addresses combat in all the wars across the empire⁴⁴. Procopius follows a geographical arrangement in listing Justinian's many constructions and restorations in *Buildings*.

PROCOPIUS AND THE CAUCASUS

Especially during the final decades of Justinian's reign, the Roman and Persian empires competed for the wealth and manpower resources of the Caucasus mountain region⁴⁵. The struggle over this remote but strategically important area was part of the larger conflict that consumed Roman and Persian energies throughout the sixth century. Justinian attempted to strengthen his control of the area through the use of military force, diplomatic efforts, and, for the first time, missionary activity directed from the palace as a tool of state policy⁴⁶.

Procopius devoted considerable attention in the eighth book of his *Wars* to the peoples and topography of the Caucasus mountain range. Like Strabo, he emphasized the remoteness and rugged character of the region and the barbarity of its inhabitants⁴⁷. For Procopius this inhospitable region was barbaric for two time-honoured reasons that we have already seen in Strabo: the terrain was nearly impassable, which cut the inhabitants off from contact with civilization, and it did not enjoy the benefits

l'Antiquité chrétienne 30-630 après J.-C. (Paris, 2001), pp. 92-104 for background on Christianization of geographical traditions.

43. Procopius, *Wars* 8.1.1-2; see Howard-Johnston, 'Education and Expertise', p. 20 n. 7.

44. Howard-Johnston, 'Education and Expertise', suggests this change was due to illness and awareness of impending death, p. 21.

45. Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel N.C. Lieu (eds.), *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars 2. A.D. 363-630: A Narrative Sourcebook* (London, 2002).

46. For an introduction to Justinian's policies in the Caucasus, see Geoffrey Greatrex, 'Byzantium and the East in the Sixth Century', in Michael Maas, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (New York-Cambridge, 2005), pp. 477-509, here p. 491; Maas, 'Delivered from their Ancient Customs', pp. 160-69.

47. Procopius, *Wars* 8.3.1-2

of Roman institutions and government. He added further reasons, reflecting the concerns of his own day: the peoples of the Caucasus were not Christian and, furthermore, in this region the proper character of men and women was inverted (men were castrated and, at least in the legend of the Amazons, women acted like men). In the frontier zone between the empires of Rome and Persia local societies were 'out of order' in different ways. Because of these destabilizing factors, the region was susceptible to change and thus amenable to the civilizing influence of Rome. I have chosen three episodes from Procopius' Caucasian narrative that illustrate these barbarous conditions and how Rome altered them. Only in the third does Procopius discuss Strabo, but in all three the similarities to Strabo's approach let us see what Procopius has added.

THE STORY OF THE ABASGI

The Abasgi were among the Caucasian peoples who became enmeshed in Justinian's plans in the 530s as he manoeuvred against Persia⁴⁸. They earned Justinian's particular displeasure for their role in the trade of eunuchs:

Beyond the Apsilii and the other end of the crescent the Abasgi dwell along the coast, and their country extends as far as the mountains of the Caucasus. Now the Abasgi have been from ancient time subjects of the Lazi, but they have always had two rulers of their own blood ... And these barbarians even down to my time have worshipped groves and forests; for with a sort of barbarian simplicity they supposed the trees were gods. But they have suffered most cruelly at the hands of their rulers owing to the excessive avarice displayed by them. For both their kinds used to take such boys of this nation as they noted having comely features and fine bodies, and dragging them away from their parents without the least hesitation they would make them eunuchs and then sell them at high prices to any persons in Roman territory who wished to buy them. They also killed the fathers of these boys immediately, in order to prevent any of them at some time to exact vengeance from the king for the wrong done their boys and also that there might be in the country no subjects suspected by the kings. ... And it was in consequence of

48. Greatrex, 'Byzantium and the East in the Sixth Century', pp. 491, 497; David Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity. A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia 550 BC-AD 562* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 65-68, 268-314; Cesa, 'Etnografia e geografia', p. 211 (Abasgi); Neil McLynn, 'Seeing and Believing: Aspects of Conversion from Antoninus Pius to Louis the Pious', in Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton (eds.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Seeing and Believing* (Rochester, 2003), p. 252. On the slave trade in the Black Sea region, see David C. Braund and G.R. Tsitskhladze, 'The Export of Slaves from Colchis', *CQ* NS 30.1 (1989), pp. 114-25.

this that most of the eunuchs among the Romans, and particularly at the emperor's court, happened to be Abasgi by birth.⁴⁹

Procopius does not make it clear when the Abasgi came within the Roman sphere of influence. At the beginning of his description of Justinian's war against the Lazi, he states that the Abasgi were Christians and had been friends of the Romans for a long time⁵⁰. The extent of their Christianization must have been limited, for when he continues his narrative in book 8, Procopius describes them as having become Christian only under Justinian's influence. Bringing Christianity is an imperial act:

But during the reign of the present Emperor Justinian the Abasgi have changed everything and adopted a more civilized standard of life. For not only have they espoused the Christian doctrine, but the Emperor Justinian has also sent them one of the eunuchs from the palace, an Abasgius by birth named Euphratas, and through him commanded their kings in explicit terms (διαρρήδην) to mutilate no male thereafter in their nation by doing violence to nature with the knife. This the Abasgi heard gladly, and taking courage now because of the decree of the Roman emperor they began to strive with all their might to put an end to the practice. For each one of them had to dread that at some time he would become the father of a comely child. It was at that same time that the Emperor Justinian also built a sanctuary for the Virgin in their land, and appointed priests for them, and thus brought it about that they learned thoroughly all the observances of the Christians; and the Abasgi immediately dethroned both their kings and seemed to be living in a state of freedom⁵¹.

As soon as the local kings had been deposed, Justinian began to station Roman troops among the Abasgi in an effort to bring their land fully under Roman control. Harsh Roman methods failed to win the hearts and minds of the Abasgi, who chose new kings and revolted. The Romans brutally suppressed the revolt and devastated the land of Abasgia⁵².

Procopius reports that prior to the revolt the emperor gave strict instructions for the Abasgi to stop the practice of castrating young boys

49. Procopius, *Wars* 8.3.12-21; see Thomas Sizgorich, 'Reasoned Violence and Shifty Frontiers: Shared Victory in the Late Roman East', in H.A. Drake, et al. (eds.), *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 167-76, here p. 169.

50. Procopius, *Wars* 2.29.15; Later in the century, Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* 22, cited Procopius on the conversion of the Abasgi; Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, pp. 264-65, on Christians in Abasgia in the fourth century. The Arabic (though not the Armenian) version of Agathangelos says that Abasgia was Christianized in the fourth century by Gregory the Illuminator: see Nina Garsoïan, 'Abchasia', in A. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York, 1991), p. 3. On Procopius' view of eunuchs, see Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant. Eunuchs and the Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 132-33, 186-87, and 208-209.

51. Procopius, *Wars* 8.3.12-21.

52. Procopius, *Wars* 8.9.10-30.

for the slave trade. He uses the adverb διαρρήδην, which usually connotes the specific formulations of a law or a treaty, and remarks that the Abasgi enthusiastically responded to the emperor's command.⁵³ He does not say that Justinian issued a specific law or signed a treaty that would put an end to the practice of castration; that would come later. Procopius does, however describe Justinian's prohibition as though it were entirely successful.

The circumstances described by Procopius were not the end of the story of Christianization of Abasgia or of castration in the Caucasus, however. In 558, a few years after Procopius' death, Justinian did issue a general law, *Novel* 142, that forbade castration. Not specifically addressing the situation in Abasgia (which remained, however, the chief source of eunuchs in the empire), the preface to *Novel* 142 explains that although some people had been suitably punished, the practice of castration had not stopped, and so a new law with severe penalties was necessary. The law states that men and women involved in the practice will have their property confiscated and be exiled. The emperor paid attention to the victims of the crime as well: All castrated slaves in the empire will receive their freedom⁵⁴.

This law exemplifies Justinian's view of innovative Christian legislation and is in keeping with general trends in his lawmaking. There had been eunuchs at the Roman court for a very long time⁵⁵, but the emperor confronted the tradition in explicitly Christian terms. His law says that to commit the crime of castration is to imperil one's salvation and that castration is an act against God. Justinian meant to end a barbaric practice for Christian reasons⁵⁶. Thus Christian civilization came to a remote and barbarous people through an imperial law forbidding castration. In Justinian's civilized, Christian world, men must remain men.

53. Procopius, *Wars* 8.3.20.

54. Justinian, *Novella* 142. in *Corpus Iuris Civilis* 3, *Novellae*, ed. Rudolfus Schoell and Guilelmus Kroll (Zurich, 1972), pp. 705-706. On later Byzantine views of Justinian's legislation on eunuchs, see Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*, pp. 198-99.

55. For overviews, see: Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 172-96; Sean Tougher, 'Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview, with Special Reference to their Creation and Origin', in Liz James (ed.), *Women, Men, and Eunuchs. Gender in Byzantium* (London, 1997), pp. 168-84; and Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch. Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago, 2001); Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*.

56. Justinian, *Novella* 142, pref.

THE STORY OF THE TZANI

The Tzani were another people of the Caucasus toward whom Justinian directed his attention. Procopius discussed the empire's interaction with them in his *Wars* and his *Buildings*, as I have discussed elsewhere.⁵⁷ It is enough to present here Procopius' depiction of the Tzani in *Buildings*:

From ancient times the Tzani have lived as an independent people, without rulers, following a savage-like manner of life, regarding as gods the trees and birds and sundry creatures besides, and worshipping them, and spending their whole lives among mountains reaching to the sky and covered with forests, and cultivating no land whatever, but robbing and living always on their plunder ... For this reason the Tzani in ancient times used to live in independence, but during the reign of Justinian they were defeated in battle ... and abandoning the struggle they straightway yielded to him, preferring toilless servitude to dangerous liberty. And they immediately changed their belief to piety, all of them becoming Christian, and they altered their manner of life to a milder way, giving up all brigandage and always marching with the Romans whenever they went against their enemies. And the emperor Justinian, fearing that the Tzani at some time might alter their way of life and change their habits back to the wilder sort, devised the following measure. Tzanica was a very inaccessible country ... As a result of this it was impossible for the Tzani to mingle with their neighbours, living as they did a life of solitude among themselves in the manner of wild beasts. Accordingly he cut down all the trees by which the routes chanced to be obstructed, and transforming the rough places and making them smooth and passable for horses, he brought it about that they mingled with other peoples in the manner of men in general and consented to have dealings with their neighbours. After this he built a church for them ... and caused them to conduct services and to partake of worship, so that they should know they were human beings⁵⁸.

In this passage Procopius echoes Strabo very closely in describing a transition from barbaric isolation to civilization as the obstacles of a rugged terrain are, quite literally, cut back. The Tzani do not know agriculture, true religion, or how to mix with other peoples. Solitude and independence set them apart from cosmopolitan Romans. The two authors do not correspond entirely, of course. Strabo does not mention the emperor *per se* as an agent of cultural transformation, while Procopius explains that it is the emperor who brings the Tzani not merely to civilization but to full realization of their humanity. That humanity is defined by entry into the broader Christian community⁵⁹.

57. Maas, 'Delivered from their Ancient Customs', pp. 160-69; see also the comments of Neil McLynn, 'Seeing and Believing', pp. 250-53.

58. Procopius, *Buildings* 3.6.1-13.

59. Maas, 'Delivered from their Ancient Customs', pp. 160-69.

THE STORY OF THE AMAZONS

When describing the peoples of the Caucasus, Procopius noted that the city of Amisus on the Thermodon River had once been associated with the Amazons⁶⁰. He had done some research on the legendary women warriors, and it is on this subject that he engaged most directly and openly with Strabo. Procopius' investigations had led him to a variety of opinions about the Amazons, but he found himself in close agreement with his predecessor. Both men agreed that women should not act like men and indeed are incapable of doing so.

Strabo stated his views this way:

For instance, who could believe that an army of women, or a city, or a tribe, could ever be organized without men, and not only be organized, but even make inroads upon the territory of other people, and not only overpower the peoples near them to the extent of advancing as far as what is now Ionia, but even send an expedition across the sea as far as Attica? For this is the same as saying that the men of those times were women and that the women were men. Nevertheless, even at the present time, these stories are told about the Amazons ...⁶¹

Procopius, who was a thoroughgoing misogynist and sceptic, similarly dismissed the possibility of a race of Amazons appropriating the martial traits of men⁶²:

But today nowhere in the vicinity of the Caucasus range is any memory of the Amazons preserved or any name connected with them, although much has been written about them by Strabo and by other writers. It seems to me that the most truthful account of the Amazons is given by those who say that there never was a race of women endowed with the qualities of men and that human nature did not depart from its established norm in the mountains of the Caucasus alone; but the fact was that barbarians from these regions together with their own women made an invasion of Asia with a great army, established a camp at the river Thermodon, and left their women there, while they themselves were overrunning the greater part of the land of Asia, they were encountered by the inhabitants of the land and utterly destroyed, and not a man of them returned to the women's

60. Procopius, *Wars* 8.3.1-11. I am grateful to Thomas Sizgorich for his helpful comments on this passage.

61. Strabo, *Geography* 11.5.3.

62. On his attitudes to women, see Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, pp. 67-83, and Leslie Brubaker, 'The Age of Justinian. Gender and Society', in Michael Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 427-47, here pp. 427-36; Clarke, *Between Geography and History*, pp. 249-250, discusses Strabo on the Amazons.

encampment; and thereafter these women, through fear of the people dwelling round about and constrained by the failure of their supplies, put on manly valour, not at all of their own will, and, taking up the equipment of arms and armour left by the men on the camp and arming themselves in excellent fashion with this they made a display of manly valour, being driven to do so by sheer necessity, until they were all destroyed⁶³.

Procopius' denial of the Amazons is more complex than Strabo's however, and he does not simply rely on Strabo's authority. Instead, he offers an explanation of the Amazons' origin based on recent experience. He suggests that the legend of the Amazons began when a band of nomads invaded the Caucasus in remote antiquity. When all the men were killed in battle, the women were forced to take up arms, and they died fighting valiantly. Procopius then draws an analogy between these ancient nomads and a force of Huns slain in battle in his own day. Referring to eyewitness accounts of the corpses of these Huns both male and female, he concludes that while some females may have died in the battle, their numbers were few, and they most certainly did not constitute an entire army of women. This rationalizing application of contemporary knowledge to dismiss the credibility of a venerable legend is quite in keeping with his general rule not to accept mythological explanations or out-of-date information about place names and events⁶⁴. In his rejection of the gender transgression implicit in the notion of a female army, and in his insistence on a proper order of gender roles, Procopius was defining civilization in a conventional way⁶⁵. Procopius has given us several examples of how the barbarism of Caucasian peoples may be mitigated by their acceptance into Justinian's realm. One of these is by maintaining traditional gender roles for men and women. We have seen with the Abasgi that he approved of imperial intervention legitimized by Christian belief to stop castration and the mutability of gender roles for men that it represented. On the level of myth, he explains that Amazons are quite simply an impossibility. Procopius' version of Roman imperialism, like Strabo's, requires that gender roles remain fixed.

63. Procopius, *Wars* 8.3.6-7. Procopius includes Strabo among scholars who understand the Amazons correctly.

64. Procopius, *Wars* 8.1.8-13.

65. Brubaker, 'Gender and Society', p. 427.

CONCLUSION

Strabo of Amasia adapted the tradition of Greek geographical science about the inhabited world to the needs of the Augustan age, producing a Roman view of imperial expansion and civilization. Five hundred years later, Procopius of Caesarea brought this Roman approach to the *oikoumene* into service for a Christian emperor and a Byzantine world view. In their different eras the two writers created similar imperial landscapes, sites where Roman activity transformed the ways of uncivilized peoples. Geography played a fundamental role in the creation of these imperial landscapes, for rugged, remote terrain helped create the conditions that nourish barbarism, as both men agreed. Both writers believed that inability to interact with a broader, more cosmopolitan world kept a people in the grip of barbarism. In the narratives of both writers, Roman help was on the way to lead these unfortunate nations to civilization. There were some differences in how the two writers described the cultural transformation, however. Where Strabo presented a transition to the enjoyment of political institutions and good order as a sign of the civilizing process, Procopius saw integration into a Christian community (with Roman imperial institutions) as essential for civilization. Within that privileged community were gender roles for men and women sanctioned by the faith. Procopius also stressed the agency of his emperor in the creation of Christian civilization. We know that Procopius read Strabo, at least on the Caucasus region, and this essay has suggested that Strabo's presentation of the transformative power of Roman imperialism influenced him. We do not need Strabo to understand Procopius, but the Byzantine author will be in sharper relief if Strabo stands beside him. Together these imperial writers help us understand how geography came from Rome to Byzantium.