

Justinian, the *limitanei*, and Arab-Byzantine relations in the 6th c.

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The expansionist policies of the emperor Justinian echoed, as was intended, the events of the heyday of the empire. Large armies were on the move, provinces were created or reestablished, governors with suitably archaic titles were appointed, and new frontiers defended. These events are fully chronicled by Procopius who was at the centre of the events, being attached to the household of Belisarius, *magister militum*. In such circumstances dissent from the Procopian narrative calls for a certain boldness; nevertheless, others have questioned the veracity of specific details¹ and discussed the historian's political and social stance.²

Procopius produced three works recording the reign of Justinian: an account of the wars against the Persians, Vandals and Goths; a survey of the emperor's activities as a builder of churches, towns and fortifications; and the *Anecdota* or *Secret History* which the historian claimed to reveal the truth of events obscured for political reasons in his other published writings. The loathing of the emperor and of his consort, Theodora, expressed in the *Anecdota* needs no emphasis, but the extent to which independently verifiable historical material is buried in a work of such partisan hostility does require investigation. In this paper I shall examine a statement made about the treatment of the frontier forces of the imperial army and investigate it in light of numismatic and archaeological evidence.

Justinian's reign was one in which recurrent financial problems went hand in hand with massive state expenditure on warfare, the reconquest of Italy and Africa, and an enormous programme of public building throughout the empire. Procopius makes much of imperial improvidence but trivialises the problem by ascribing it to an open-handedness in paying subsidies to barbarians:

And he never ceased pouring out great gifts of money to the barbarians, both those of the East and those of the West and those of the North and those of the South, as far as the inhabitants of Britain. (*Anec.* 19.13, transl. E. Dewing)

Even allowing for the unlikely inclusion of Britain among the recipients of imperial subsidies, this hardly constitutes an intelligent analysis of the empire's economic problems. Nevertheless, a situation existed in which resources were lacking and schemes were needed to raise the level of state revenues. According to Procopius these measures included the confiscation of property, the sale of monopolies and state offices, and the withholding of the pay of the army. Alleged to have been especially affected by these policies were the frontier forces:

The Roman emperors of earlier times stationed a very great multitude of soldiers at all the points of the Empire's frontier in order to guard the boundaries of the Roman domain, particularly in the eastern portion, thus checking the inroads of the Persians and the Saracens; these troops they used to call *limitanei*. These the emperor Justinian at first treated so casually and so meanly that their paymasters were four or five years behind in their payments to them, and whenever peace was made between the Roman and the Persians, these wretches were compelled, on the supposition that they too would benefit from the blessings of peace, to make a present to the Treasury of the pay which was owing to them for the specified period. And, later on, for no good reason, he took away from them the very name of regular troops. Thereafter the frontiers of the Roman empire remained destitute of guards and the soldiers suddenly found themselves obliged to look to the hands of those accustomed to works of piety. (*Anec.* 24. 12-14, transl. E. Dewing)

Of itself, delay in paying soldiers was not a new phenomenon. Even as well regulated a ré-

1 B. Croke and J. Crow, "Procopius and Dara," *JRS* 73 (1983) 143-59.

2 A. Cameron, *Procopius and the sixth century* (London 1985).