

WAR, REBELLION AND EPIC IN BYZANTINE NORTH AFRICA

In around 550 the Latin poet Corippus composed his epic *Iohannis* to celebrate the forgotten wars of a Byzantine general against the 'Moorish' or 'Berber' peoples of North Africa. This book explores the rich narrative of that poem and the changing political, social and cultural environment within which he worked. It reappraises the dramatic first decades of Byzantine North Africa (533–550) and discusses the ethnography of Moorish Africa, the diplomatic and military history of the imperial administration, and the religious transformations (both Christian and 'pagan') of this period. By considering the *Iohannis* as a political text, it sheds new light on the continued importance of poetry and literature on the southern fringes of imperial power, and presents a model for reading epic as a historical source. This title is part of the Flip it Open Programme and may also be available Open Access. Check our website Cambridge Core for details.

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WAR, REBELLION AND EPIC
IN BYZANTINE NORTH
AFRICA

A Historical Study of Corippus' Iohannis

ANDY MERRILLS

University of Leicester



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For John Graham Merrills (1942–2018)
With love

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Preface

The decision to write this book crept up on me somewhat unexpectedly. For several years, I had been struggling with historical questions surrounding the nature of ‘Moorish’ or ‘Berber’ societies in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries. The *Iohannis* is a central source for understanding these groups, but the more I worked with it, the less I seemed to understand. Corippus’ poem has long been exploited by historians and archaeologists of North Africa as an invaluable repository of information, and by a small number of brave philologists as a peculiar late flowering of Latin verse, but these two strands had rarely been reconciled. Why precisely did Corippus write an epic about a minor military campaign that barely warranted notice outside Africa? If his intention was to celebrate imperial power (as is generally assumed), why did he do so in almost 5,000 hexameter lines, rather than using the conventional medium of panegyric? And why did he include within his work so many extended criticisms of imperial bureaucratic incompetence? If he sought to demonize ‘the Moors’ in a display of metropolitan chauvinism, why are figures like the ally Cusina presented in such laudatory terms? And if Corippus is to be trusted as a source on the complex ethnography of the frontier zone, how can we reconcile this with his evident debts to the literary tradition of Latin epic? It seemed that the only way of approaching these questions was to look at the text itself and the historical circumstances of its production. And the appropriate medium for this was on a grand scale which Corippus himself might have appreciated; hence this book.

Inevitably, this opened up a whole new raft of challenges. There are many difficulties with the text of the *Iohannis*, thanks to its unique transmission history. As discussed in Chapter 1, the poem has been the object of extensive philological scrutiny since its rediscovery at the start of the nineteenth century, and this process is ongoing. As a historian by training, rather than a late Latinist, my intention has been to discuss the *Iohannis* in its historical context, rather than consider strictly textual issues.

As such, I have necessarily leaned very heavily on the philological scholarship of others.

Translations of passages from the text are my own, but I am enormously grateful to Paul Roche and especially Aaron Peltari for their diligent help with Corippus' frequently baffling Latinity. Aaron in particular has improved my halting English translations in every respect; his efforts have improved what follows considerably and set the discussion on much firmer foundations. Throughout, I have used the edition of Diggle and Goodyear published by Cambridge University Press in 1970. This remains the standard complete edition of the epic, although revised editions of Books I, II, III, IV and VIII have now been published, and have also been consulted. In a small number of cases, I have followed the proposed readings of these editions; these are noted appropriately. I have consulted: the complete translations of G. W. Shea (into English), J. Didderen (into French) and Ana Ramírez Tirado (into Spanish), as well as the translations and commentaries of individual books and passages by Maria Assunta Vinchesi, Chiara Tommasi Moreschini, Vincent Zarini, Yves Modéran, Benjamin Goldlust and Peter Riedlberger. I have deferred to conventional English tenses for ease of understanding in my translation (Corippus often uses a vivid present tense in narrating past events, which can be confusing). In the absence of a reliable English translation of the *Chronicle* of Victor of Tunnuna, the few excerpts from that text are also my own. For all other ancient texts, I have used published translations, which are marked accordingly.

For clarity – and for the convenience of non-specialists – I have followed the book numbering and line ordering of Diggle and Goodyear (excepting a small number of cases which are identified in the notes). Peter Riedlberger and Giulia Caramico have recently demonstrated convincingly that Diggle and Goodyear were in error in their location of the end of Book IV and the start of Book V. In the absence of a widely available edition of the poem with the revised line numbers, however, I have deferred to conventional book and line numbering as a mercy to the reader. For the same reason, I have continued to refer to the poet as 'Corippus', despite Riedlberger's persuasive suggestion that the manuscript evidence prefers 'Gorippus'. This may well be correct, but the small scholarly tradition that exists around Corippus conventionally refers to him by that name, and consistency and clarity seem of particular importance if he is not to be buried even further in obscurity.

The same principles have determined my usage of proper names, ethnonyms and toponyms, both ancient and modern. Names have been

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transmitted in a range of different forms in the extant texts – not least as a result of transliteration into (and from) Latin, Greek and the various languages spoken in late antique Africa – and have often changed further as they are rendered by contemporary scholars into Arabic or into modern European languages. Where common anglophone forms exist, I have used these (thus, Carthage, Justinian, Belisarius, Procopius and – as noted – Corippus); where modern conventions vary, I have tried to be consistent (Lepcis Magna, Guntharith, Antalas, Laguatan, Cusina). In some cases, different names are deliberately used for the same figure, depending on their status. Thus, Stotzas as the historical rebel as he appears in Procopius and the historical sources, but Stutias as he appears in the *Iohannis*. I have generally given the ancient place names where known, and the modern Arabic toponyms where these can be identified with confidence. In many cases, the locations mentioned in the *Iohannis* remain elusive, and these issues are acknowledged in the discussion.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the work that followed would not have been possible without the extraordinary support of many institutions, colleagues, friends and family. I am grateful to many people who have read and commented upon this work as it developed. Doug Lee, David Mattingly, Neil Christie, Paul Roche, Aaron Pelttari and the anonymous referees for Cambridge University Press all read the book in its entirety, and it has been much improved from their suggestions and criticism. Robin Whelan, Simon Loseby and Dave Edwards all read multiple chapters (often multiple times) and were crucial to helping me formulate different arguments as they developed. For specific help on particularly knotty research questions, and for listening patiently to my incoherent ramblings over the past few years, I would also like to express my great thanks to: Dan Stewart, Nikki Rollason, Ollie Harris, Jamie Wood, Naoise MacSweeney, Conor Whately, Greg Hays, Ine Jacobs, Mark Rawlinson, Cori Fenwick, Gavin Kelly, Lisa Fentress, Anna Leone, Philipp von Rummel, Andy Morrison, Richard Miles, Bruce Hitchner, Mary Harlow, Sarah Knight, Jonathan Conant, Anne Rogerson, Roland Steinacher, Kai Francis, Matt Doyle, Laura Smith, Michael Wuk and Eric Blaum.

Ideas and arguments within this book were first outlined and presented to audiences in conferences and seminar talks at Leicester, Lincoln, Rethymno, Tübingen and (in very embryonic form) Dumbarton Oaks: I am grateful to many people present at each for their comments and criticisms. Additionally, several aspects of this discussion were explored initially (and sometimes in more depth) in a range of articles, book

chapters and handbook contributions over the past few years. Full details of these publications can be found in a typically self-aggrandizing section of the bibliography, and need not be repeated here. Nevertheless, I am grateful to the editors and reviewers associated with these works for their help and patience, particularly Bruce Hitchner, Valentino Gasparini, Michael Stewart, Miriam Wagner and Philip Rance.

Writing and researching this book would not have been possible without the support of the staff and students of the School of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Leicester. The bulk of the writing was done during a semester of study leave at the end of 2021, and I am grateful for the University and College support that allowed this to happen. Financial support to undertake library research was provided by the Society of Libyan Studies and by John Whitehouse and the Ancient North Africa research group at the University of Sydney, and I am grateful to both institutions for this. Many of the most difficult sections of the text (both my own, and making sense of Corippus') were worked out in the enormously congenial setting of the Gladstone Library in Hawarden. Working there feels like finding the cheat codes to a world of focused writing, and it is highly recommended: the Welsh rarebit is delicious too.

I leave my greatest debts until last. My partner, Julia Farley, has been an endless source of inspiration, stimulation and joy, and this book would have been unthinkable without her. She listened as the ideas contained within it slowly took shape, and supported its author with patience and love, even as she has undertaken far grander (and incomparably more important) projects of her own. In happier times, it would be dedicated to her outright. But I think she knows that.

I first articulated the idea for this book, and made a firm statement that I was going to write it, while in conversation with family members in the sad circumstances of my father's funeral in October 2018. In the tumultuous months and years since – in pandemic lockdown and out of it – Dad was never very far away. An academic (and indeed a Cambridge University Press author) himself, he was very familiar with the joys and frustrations of balancing writing and the other parts of the job, of searching for the *mot juste* while being aware of the looming pile of marking still to be done. Without him as a role model and – until recently – as a source of enormous support and good sense, I could never have been doing a job that I love. I have written elsewhere about books and the process of grief, but this project was an important part of that too. He was in my mind as I planned, considered and wrote this book, and I dedicate it to him with great pride. In every sense this was written in his memory. I miss him.

A Note on Abbreviations, Translations and Maps

The maps in this volume were produced by the author using base maps taken from the Antiquity a-la Carte website, <http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/alacarte>.

References to ancient sources and common works of reference follow the abbreviations in the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, the *Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity* and the fourth edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. I have used standard editions for all ancient sources throughout. Where I have used others' translations of texts these are marked in the text and indicated in the bibliography. As noted in the preface, all other translations are my own.

For the convenience of the reader (and at the risk of some redundancy), those abbreviations which are frequently used and which may not be immediately obvious to non-specialists are listed here. I have also noted English translations of primary sources here, where available.

AAA	S. Gsell. 1911. <i>Atlas archéologique de l'Algérie</i> (Algiers and Paris).
Agathias	Agathias, <i>Historiae</i> , ed. R. Keydell. 1967. <i>Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum Libri Quinque</i> (Berlin); trans. J. D. Frendo. 1975. <i>Agathias. Histories</i> (Berlin).
AL S/R.	<i>Anthologia Latina</i> , ed. D. R. Shackleton Bailey. 1982. Teubner (Stuttgart); ed. A. Riese. 1894. Teubner (Leipzig). In deference to convention, poems are referred to by both the Shackleton-Bailey (AL S) and Reise (AL R) numbers.
<i>Anth. Pal.</i>	<i>Anthologia Palatina</i> , ed. and trans. W. R. Paton. 1916–18. Loeb. 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
Apoll. Rhod. <i>Argon.</i>	Apollonius Rhodius. <i>Argonautica</i> , ed. and trans. W. H. Race. 2009. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).

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Athanasius

Apol. ad Const. *Apologia ad Constantium*, ed. G. Opitz. 1941. *Athanasius Werke II.1* (Berlin), trans. M. Atkinson and A. Robertson. 1892. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY).

Contra Gentes, ed. and trans. R. W. Thompson. 1971. *Athanasius. Contra gentes, and, De Incarnatione* (Oxford); trans. E. P. Meijering. 1984. *Athanasius, Contra Gentes* (Leiden).

Augustine

Conf. *Confessiones*, ed. L. Verheijen. 1981. CCSL, 27 (Turnhout); trans. S. Ruden. 2017 (New York).

De Civ Dei. *De Civitate Dei*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb. 1955. CCSL, 47–8 (Turnhout); trans. H. Bettenson. 1972. *St Augustine. City of God* (Harmondsworth).

De Div Daem. *De Divinatione Daemonum*, ed. J. Zycha. 1900. CSEL, 41 (Vienna); trans. E. Hill, R. Kearney, M. G. Campbell and B. Harbert. 2005. *Augustine. On Christian Belief* (New York).

Ep. *Epistulae*, ed. A. Goldbacher. 1895–1911. CSEL, 34 (Vienna); trans. W. Parsons, 1951–89. *Augustine. Letters*. 6 vols. (Washington, DC).

Avitus

Carm. *Carmina*, ed. R. Peiper. 1883. MGH AA 6.2; trans. G. W. Shea. 1997. *The Poems of Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus* (Tempe, AZ).

Barrington R. J. A. Talbert (ed.) 2000. *The Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (Princeton, NJ).

CCSL *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*.

Chron Gall. *Chronica Gallica A*, ed. T. Mommsen. 1892. MGH AA, IX (Berlin); ed. R. Burgess. 2001. 'The Gallic Chronicle of 452. A New Critical Edition', in R. W. Mathisen and D. Shanzer (eds.), *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul. Revisiting the Sources* (Aldershot), 52–84; partially trans. A. C. Murray. 2000. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul. A Reader* (Peterborough), 77–84.

Chron Pasch. *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf. 1832 (Bonn); trans. M. Whitby and M. Whitby. 1989. *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD*, TTH, 7 (Liverpool).

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- CIL* VIII G. Wilmanns and T. Mommsen (eds.) 1881. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum vol VIII. Inscriptiones Africae Latinae* (Berlin).
- CJ* *Codex Justinianus*, ed. P. Krueger. 1954. *Corpus Juris Civilis*, vol. 2. 11th ed. (Berlin); ed. B. W. Frier, trans. F. H. Blume. 2016. *The Codex of Justinian. A New Annotated Translation*. 3 vols. (Cambridge).
- Claud. Claudian, *Opera Omnia*, ed. and trans. M. Platnauer. 1922. Loeb (Cambridge, MA); trans. N. W. Bernstein. 2023. *The Complete Works of Claudian* (London).
- Coll Av* *Collectio Avellana*, ed. O. Guenther. 1895. CSEL, 35 (Prague).
- Corippus
Iust. *In Laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris*, ed. and trans. A. Cameron. 1976. *Flavius Cresconius Corippus. In Laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris Libri IV* (London).
Pan Anast. *Panegyricus in laudem Anastasii*, ed. and tr. A. Cameron. 1976. *Flavius Cresconius Corippus. In Laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris Libri IV* (London), 34–6.
- CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*.
- Diod Sic. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, ed. and trans. C. H. Oldfather, R. M. Geer and C. L. Sherman. 1933–70. Loeb. 12 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Dracontius
 DLD *De Laudibus Dei*, ed. and trans. (French) C. Moussy and C. Camus. 1985–8. Budé (Paris).
Rom *Romulea*, ed. and trans. (French) J. Bouquet and É. Wolff. 1995–6. Budé (Paris).
- Epiphanius
Adv Haer. *Adversus Haereses*, trans. F. Williams. 1987–93. *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*. 2 vols. (Leiden).
- Eusebius
Theoph. *Theophania*, trans. (German) H. Gressmann. 1904. *Eusebius. Theophanie* (Leipzig).

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- Evagrius
- HE *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier. 1898. *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with the Scholia* (London); trans. M. Whitby. 2000. *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, TTH, 33 (Liverpool).
- Hdt. Herodotus, *Histories*, ed. and trans. A. D. Godley. 1920. Loeb. 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Hom. *Il.* Homer, *Iliad*, ed. and trans. A. T. Murray. 1924. Rev. W. F. Wyatt. 1999. Loeb. 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Horace ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough. 1926. *Horace. Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*. Loeb (Cambridge, MA), 442–89.
- Inst Just.* Justinian, *Institutiones*, ed. T. Mommsen and P. Krüger. 1928. *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 1. 16th ed. (Berlin); trans. P. Birks and G. McCleod. 1987. *Justinian's Institutes* (London).
- Ioh* *Iohannis*. For the editions of this work and translations consulted, see the Bibliography.
- Ioh Bic. John of Biclarum, *Chronicon*, ed. T. Mommsen. 1894. MGH AA, XI (Berlin); trans. K. B. Wolf. 1991. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, TTH, 9 (Liverpool), 61–80.
- Ioh Lyd *De Mag.* John Lydus, *De Magistratibus*, ed. and trans. A. C. Bandy. 1982. *Ioannes Lydus. On Powers* (Philadelphia, PA).
- Isid.
- Hist Goth (LR)* Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum* (Long Recension), ed. and trans. (Spanish) C. R. Alonso. 1975. *Las Historias de los Godos, Vandalos y Suevos de Isidoro de Sevilla* (Léon); trans. K. B. Wolf. 1991. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, TTH, 9 (Liverpool), 81–110.
- Jord. *Rom* Jordanes, *Romana*, ed. T. Mommsen. 1882. MGH AA, V.1 (Berlin), trans. P. Van Nuffelen and L. Van Hoof. 2020. *Jordanes. Getica and Romana*, TTH, 75 (Liverpool).

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- Jul Hon. Julius Honorius, *Cosmographia*, ed. S. Monda. 2008. *La Cosmographia di Giulio Onorio. Un excerptum scolastico tardo-antico* (Rome).
- Juvencus Juvencus, *Libri Evangeliorum libri quattuor*; ed. J. Huemer. 1891. CSEL 24 (Prague); trans. S. McGill. 2017. *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels* (London).
- Lactantius, *Instit.* Lactantius, *Epitome Institutionum Divinarum*, ed. E. Heck and A. Wlosok. 1994. Teubner (Stuttgart); trans. A. Bowen and P. Garnsey. 2003. *Lactantius. Divine Institutes*, TTH, 40 (Liverpool).
- Livy Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, ed. and trans. B. O. Foster, F. G. Moore, Evan T. Sage and A. C. Schlesinger. 1951–67. Rev. J. C. Yardley. 2018. Loeb. 14 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Luc. *BC* Lucan, *Bellum Civile*, ed. and trans. J. D. Duff. 1928. Loeb (Cambridge, MA); trans. S. H. Braund. 2008. *Lucan. The Civil War* (Oxford).
- Lucr.,
De Rer. Nat. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, ed. and trans. W. H. D. Rouse. 1924. Rev. M. F. Smith. 1992. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
- Macrob. *Sat.* Macrobius *Saturnalia*, ed. and trans. R. A. Kaster. 2011. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
- Malalas John Malalas, *Chronographia*, ed. L. Dindorf. 1831 (Bonn); trans. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys and R. Scott. 1986. *Byzantina Australiensia*, 4 (Melbourne).
- Marc Com Add. Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon* (anonymous addenda), ed. and trans. B. Croke. 1995. *The Chronicle of Marcellinus. A Translation and Commentary* (Sydney).
- Mart. Cap. Martianus Capella, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, ed. J. Willis. 1983. Teubner (Leipzig); trans. W. H. Stahl, R. Johnson and E. L. Burge. 1977. *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts. Vol. II. The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (New York).

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Merobaudes <i>Pan.</i>	Merobaudes <i>Panegyric</i> , ed. and trans. F. M. Clover. 1971. <i>Flavius Merobaudes. A Translation and Historical Commentary</i> (Philadelphia, PA).
MGH AA	Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi.
Nemesianus,	<i>Cynegetica</i> , ed. and trans. (French) P. Volpilhac. 1975. Budé (Paris).
<i>Not Dig. Occ.</i>	<i>Notitia Dignitatum Occidentalis</i> , ed. O. Seeck. 1962. <i>Notitia Dignitatum. Accedunt Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae et Latercula Provinciarum</i> (Frankfurt).
<i>Nov. Just.</i>	Justinian, <i>Novellae</i> , ed. R. Schoell and W. Kroll. 1970. <i>Corpus Iuris Civilis</i> , vol. 3, 15th ed. (Berlin); trans. D. Miller and P. Sarris. 2018. <i>The Novels of Justinian. A Complete Annotated English Translation</i> . 2 vols. (Cambridge).
Ovid	
<i>Ars Am</i>	<i>Ars Amatoria</i> , ed. and trans. J. H. Mozley. 1929. Rev. G. P. Goold. 1979. Loeb. 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
<i>Met</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i> , ed. and trans. F. J. Miller. 1916. Rev. G. P. Goold. 1977. Loeb. 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
<i>Tr.</i>	<i>Tristia</i> , ed. and trans. A. L. Wheeler. 1924. Rev. G. P. Goold. 1988. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
<i>Pan Lat.</i>	<i>Panegyrici Latini</i> , ed. R. A. B. Mynors. 1964. <i>XII Panegyrici Latini</i> (Oxford); ed. and trans. C. E. V. Nixon and B. Saylor Rodgers. 1994. <i>In Praise of Later Roman Emperors. The Panegyrici Latini</i> (Berkeley, CA).
Parthemius <i>Resc ad Sid</i>	Parthemius, <i>Rescriptum ad Sigisteum</i> , ed. K. Buechner. 1982. <i>Fragmenta Poetarum Latinorum epicorum et lyricorum</i> (Leipzig), 201.
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina</i> .
Plin. <i>HN</i>	Pliny, <i>Historia Naturalis</i> , ed. and trans. H. Rackham. 1938. Loeb. 10 vols. (Cambridge, MA).

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- PLRE* II J. R. Martindale (ed.) 1980. *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Volume II. AD 395–527*. 2 vols. (Cambridge).
- PLRE* III J. R. Martindale (ed.) 1992. *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Volume III. AD 527–641*. 2 vols. (Cambridge).
- Plut., *Alex.* Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, ed. and trans. B. Perin. 1919. *Lives. Vol. VII*. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
- Priscus Priscus, *Fragments*, ed. and trans. R. C. Blockley. 1983. *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire, vol. II* (Leeds), 222–377.
- Procopius
- Buildings* *Buildings*, ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing. 1914. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
- BG, BP, BV* *Wars* (*BP* = *Wars* 1–2; *BV* = *Wars* 3–4; *BG* = *Wars* 5–8), ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing. 1914. Loeb. 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA); rev. trans. A. Kaldellis. 2014. *Prokopios. The Wars of Justinian* (Indianapolis, IN).
- SH* Procopius, *Secret History*, ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing. 1914. Loeb (Cambridge MA); rev. trans. A. Kaldellis. 2010. *Prokopios. Secret History with Related Texts* (Indianapolis, IN).
- Prop. Propertius, *Elegies*, ed. and trans. G. P. Goold. 1990. Loeb. (Cambridge, MA).
- Prosper, *Chron.* *Prosperi Tironis epitoma chronicon*, ed. T. Mommsen. 1892. MGH AA, IX (Berlin); partial trans. A. C. Murray. 2000. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul. A Reader* (Peterborough), 62–76.
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