Martina Biamino (Genoa)
iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4673-0773

Justinian, Pilgrimages and the *Theotokos*: Imperial Propaganda in *De Aedificiis* V[*]

Abstract. This article analyses Book V of *De Aedificiis*, specifically focusing on *Aed*. V, 6–9. Building on previous studies that demonstrate Procopius' journey within this book along an ancient road traditionally used by pilgrims, it is noted how, in what can be considered the second part of the book, the historian focuses on the churches built by Justinian for the *Theotokos*, all situated on high points in Palestine. Based on this, the article seeks to explain how this insistence on the churches of the Virgin on hillsides, combined with the theme of pilgrimage, serves court propaganda, which may have promoted a de-Judaization and a de-Nestorianization of Palestine. Additionally, it is hypothesized that Procopius may have drawn inspiration, given the subject matter, from a genre closely related to pilgrimage, such as that of *itineraria*.

Keywords: pilgrimage, Procopius of Caesarea, *De Aedificiis*, Byzantine churches, Jerusalem, *Nea Ekklesia*

Introduction

Procopius' *De Aedificiis*, his final and controversial work, can be divided not only into books but also into thematic sections. The first book focuses solely on Constantinople, while books II–IV cover military constructions and fortifications, and books V–VI deal with religious and civil buildings[1]. This reflects the actions of Justinian during his reign, encompassing wars, religion, and the care for the empire.

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[1] P. Cesaretti, M.L. Fobelli, *Procopio di Cesarea. Santa Sofia di Costantinopoli. Un tempio di luce (De Aedificiis, I 1, 1–78)*, Milano 2011, p. 10. Cf. G. Castiglia, *Procopio tra città e territorio: riflessioni a margine su una possibile valenza topografica del "De Aedificiis"*, [in:] *Procopio di Cesarea. Gli Edifici*, ed. C. Dell'Osso, Città del Vaticano 2018, p. 43–52.

Scholars have attempted to analyse the work as a whole, resulting in various interpretations of its meaning[2] and completeness[3]: this highlights the complexity of the *De Aedificiis* and the possibility to read it from different perspectives based on the individual books analysed[4].

In this paper we are going to focus on Book V solely: here we find churches, monasteries, bridges, road reconstructions, and hospices; all these buildings are aligned with the work's proem, which details Justinian's expansion of the empire, establishment of proper orthodoxy, and care for all aspects of his reign[5]. The topic of religion, therefore, could not be missing in such panegyrical work: orthodoxy was not only a matter of the Church, but also a political and imperial issue during the Byzantine Empire[6].

The significance of religion in Byzantine culture and politics led to the emergence of the earliest pilgrimages. To the best of our knowledge, these journeys commenced in the fourth century and gained momentum in the fifth century. Wealthy individuals, including two empresses[7], embarked on these expeditions,

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[2] Here we will briefly present the most famous interpretations of Procopius' work: A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth century*, New York 1985 [= TCH, 10], p. 112: within this work one can see the real Procopius, the result of his century; H.G. Beck, *Lo storico e la sua vittima. Teodora e Procopio*, trans. N. Antonacci, Roma–Bari 1988: it is a work composed on commission saying nothing about the real Procopius; P. Rousseau, *Procopius' Buildings and Justinian's Pride*, B 68.1, 1998, p. 121–138: the work combine together two levels of language: one is mysterious while the other is arrogant; A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea. Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, Philadelphia 2004: the *De Aedificiis* is studded with ironic and antiphrastic allusions in line with the author's anti-tyrannical and pagan positions, pretending to adhere to Christianism.

[3] About the completeness of the work cf. B. Rubin, *Prokopios von Kaisarea*, Struttgart 1954, p. 299: the omission of Italy would be in response to an attempt to not overshadow Belisarius; A. Cameron, *Procopius…*, p. 84–85: the *De Aedificiis* lacks of a final revision and, due to this fact, Italy was omitted.

[4] About the interpretation of a precise section of the *De Aedificiis* see the monography P. Cesaretti, M.L. Fobelli, *Procopio di Cesarea…*

[5] *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia*, vol. IV, *De Aedificiis Libri VI*, I, 1, 6–10, ed. J. Havry, rec. G. Wirth, Leipzig 1964 [= BSGR] (cetera: Procopius, *De Aedificiis*).

[6] Cf. J.C. Skedos, "*You Cannot Have a Church without an Empire*": *Political Orthodoxy in Byzantium*, [in:] *Christianity, Democracy, and the Shadow of Constantine*, ed. G.E. Demacopoulos, A. Papanicolau, New York 2017, p. 219–231, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1gn6b41.14 [5 IX 2022].

[7] The first was Helena, mother of Constantine: Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, III, 43, [in:] *Eusebius Werke*, vol. I, *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin*, T. 1, ed. F. Winkelmann, Berlin 1975 [= GCS]. There is no consensus among scholars on the date of her journey to Jerusalem: some date it between 324–325 AD; cf. S. Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross Was Found. From Event to Mediaeval Legend*, Uppsala 1991, p. 137–140; others date it in the spring of 327 AD. Cf. E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312–360*, Oxford 1984, p. 28–49; J.W. Drijver, *Helena Augusta. The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of her Finding of the True Cross*, Leiden–New York–København–Köln 1992 [= BSIH, 27], p. 55–72, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004246768; cf. I.L. Navarro, *Helena Augusta. Una biografía histórica*, Zaragoza 2013. The second was Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II: L.L. Gierlach-Walker, *Empress Eudocia: a Mole Enters the Theodosian Household*, Str 59, 2017, p. 84–103: she began a pilgrimage that led her to Jerusalem

which were conducted via land or sea. However, the maritime route was primarily limited to the summer months and often considered obligatory to minimize travel time[8], while the land route used the same roads as those employed for trade[9].

Valuable insights into the routes taken by pilgrims can be gained from the *Itineraria* written by them, in which the various paths to reach important Christian sites are showed. The Roman routes radiating from Ephesos, the capital of the province of *Asia*[10], formed the basic structure of communications in the eastern Byzantine empire, including the main Pilgrim's Road that was travelled by the Anonymous of Bordeaux, the first western pilgrim to leave a written record.

The emperor Justinian improved the road system, as noted by Procopius in the *De Aedificiis*, and Belke[11] showed that the majority of locations in Book V are on the Pilgrim's Road, with detours to places of imperial significance, such as Pythia.

The road repairs described by Procopius, although intended to improve journeys for the state and imperial family, also served other segments of the population, including clergy, monks, pilgrims, and merchants[12]. This emphasis on roads, if viewed in the context of pilgrimage, makes sense as a pilgrimage centre requires a connection to a regional and trans-regional communication system. Furthermore, analysing the *De Aedificiis* in conjunction with other sources, such as pilgrims' *Itineraria* and maps of the period, can provide a clearer understanding of Procopius' choice of places and their perception. I argue that the journey of Procopius in Book V of *De Aedificiis*, which showcases various buildings commissioned by Justinian, can be divided into two distinct parts. In the first section, Procopius mostly follows the Pilgrim's Road and travels through Anatolia to the city of Tarsus, while in the second, he departs from a specific path and instead focuses on the centre of pilgrimage par excellence, Jerusalem (*Aed.* V, 6), and later the Gerizim (*Aed.* V, 7) and Sinai (*Aed.* V, 8).

The present contribution aims to complement Belke's analysis with a focus on the second part of Book V: the areas outside Anatolia. This article will provide an overview of Procopius' journey and offer a possible other interpretation of the book. Considerable attention will be given to the focus on the figure of the

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where she settled between 443 and 460 AD; she built monasteries, pilgrim lodgings, churches for the Virgin and the Basilica of St. Stephen, which remained one of the largest Christian buildings of worship for a century.

[8]   J.H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology, and War. Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649–1571*, Cambridge 1988, p. 87; cf. S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society. The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. I, *Economic Foundations*, Los Angeles–Berkeley–London 1967, p. 316.

[9]   G. Perta, *I porti di pellegrinaggio in Terrasanta (sec. IV–X)*, [in:] *Studi in onore di Guglielmo de' Giovanni-Centelles*, ed. E. Cuozzo, Salerno 2010, p. 251–266.

[10]   K. Belke, *Communications. Roads and Bridges*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon, R. Cormack, Oxford 2008, p. 298.

[11]   K. Belke, *Prokops De Aedificiis, Buch V, zu Kleinasien*, ATa 8, 2000, p. 115–125.

[12]   *Ibidem*; cf. also idem, *Communications…*, p. 301–302.

Theotokos in the second part of the book; the massive presence of the God-bearer from chapter 6 onward has received little attention so far, as well as the theme of the height of the Palestinian mountains. Additionally, a comparison with other genres, such as travel itineraries, will be explored.

Why pilgrimages in Book V?

The motivations behind pilgrimage need to be investigated. While faith in God was a strong driving factor, it is well documented that pilgrims also travelled long distances in search of localities known for healing properties or miracles[13]. Thus, it is not surprising that many of the cities mentioned in Book V were also famous for hosting healing centres[14]. The proem of the book states that Justinian was dedicated to remedying all urban afflictions[15], which, in a medical context, can be linked to both the pilgrimage theme and the facilities intended for pilgrims, while also considering structures of civic importance. The ἰάομαι παθήματα nexus ('to cure the affections' *Aed.* V, 1, 3) clearly implies a medical metaphor[16], indicating that the emperor took care of every problem that could affect the cities. This nuance is useful in explaining both the routes taken by Procopius and some of the constructions he describes, including churches, monasteries, hospices for travellers, the needy, and the sick. The distinction between these buildings was not clear-cut in the fifth century; the term *xenon* or *xenodochion*[17] simply indicated a structure that could be used by travellers or the needy[18], and the term 'πτωχεῖον' referred specifically to facilities for the needy in the novels of Justinian[19]. Procopius' use of 'πτωχεῖα' and 'ξενῶνα' in Book V indicates an awareness of the differences between these structures and the development of a lexicon related to pilgrimage[20].

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[13] C. Foss, *Pilgrimage in Medieval Asia Minor*, DOP 56, 2002, p. 142.

[14] *Ibidem*: These centres are of course Ephesos, but also Nicaea, Nikomedia, Pythia with its springs, Caesarea of Cappadocia, and Tarsus.

[15] Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, V, 1, 3: ἐν δέ γε τῷ παρόντι καὶ ὅσα κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην Ἀσίαν καὶ Λιβύην αὐτῷ εἴργασται ἢ […] πόλεων ἰωμένῳ παθήματα πάντα.

[16] For the thematic of Justinian as a physician thaumaturg cf. G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire. Études sur le recueil des Patria*, Paris 1984 [= BBE, 8], p. 289.

[17] The council of Nicaea referred to *xenodochia* and *hospitia* as well-established fact, buildings created for pilgrims, sick or poor people; M. Voltaggio, '*Xenodochia' and 'Hospitia' in Sixth-Century Jerusalem: Indicators for the Byzantine Pilgrimage to the Holy Places*, ZDPV 127, 2011, p 198, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41304101 [8 X 2022]. PGL, *s.v.* ξενοδοχεῖον: there is no a specific meaning for this term.

[18] Antoninus Placentinus, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, 23, [in:] *Itinera Hierosolomytana speculi IIII–VII*, ed. P. Geyer, Vindobonae 1898 [= CSEL, 39] (cetera: Antoninus).

[19] Novella CXXXIII, 6: *Novellae*, [in:] *Corpus Iuris Civilis. Iustiniani Novellae recognovit Rudolf Schoell*, vol. III, ed. R. Schöll, W. Kroll, Cambridge 2014 [= CCS], https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Corpus/Novellae.htm [28 XII 2022] (cetera: ed. Schöll & Kroll 1993).

[20] E.g. Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, V, 9, 4: ξενῶνα ἐν Ἱεριχῷ and *De Aedificiis*, V, 9, 35: τὸ πτωχεῖον τοῦ ἁγίου Κόνωνος.

The theme of religious buildings connected to pilgrimage and structures for travellers, the sick, and the needy may reflect the challenges of a historical period marked by epidemics and famine. The *De Aedificiis* is dated after the summer of 553[21] and the sixth century was characterized by several plagues, including the most notable one in 542, and other epidemics, as well as a three-month bread shortage and widespread riots in May 556[22]. Meier, citing Kitzinger[23], highlights two phases of Justinian's reign: during the first, the emperor aimed to create a synthesis of classical and Christian ideals, whereas during the second phase, rigid religious expressions of Christianity became prominent[24]. According to the dating of Procopius' work, namely after the summer of 553, the *De Aedificiis* is positioned in the second phase of Justinian's reign. In this celebratory work, the control over the classical concept of *pax deorum* can be seen, but now reinterpreted in a Christian context. Regardless of the period, it was the emperor's responsibility to maintain religious respect for the stability of the empire.

During this historical period, the *Theotokos* became a symbol, serving as a mediator between humanity and God. Her cult grew in popularity after the plague, and Justinian not only established the liturgical feast of the Annunciation, but also

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[21] For the datation of the work, the mention in *De Aedificiis*, V, 3 of the construction of a bridge over the Sagari river is crucial. Procopius tells us that the bridge was under construction: Theophanes, however, reports that in *Annus Mundi* 6052 Justinian had begun this project – the year would therefore be between 559 and 560. G. Downey, *The Composition of Procopius, De Aedificiis*, TPAPA 78, 1947, p. 181: more likely the spring of 560. M. Whitby, *Justinian's Bridge over the Sangarius and the Date of Procopius' De Aedificiis*, JHS 105, 1985, p. 131: basing on the dating provided by Theophanes, asserts that *De Aedificiis* must have been written from that year. G. Greatrex, *The Dates of Procopius' Work*, BMGS 18, 1994, p. 101–115 (cf. also idem, *The Date of Procopius' Buildings in the Light of Recent Scholarship*, EsBiz 1, 2013, p. 13–29) points out a strange inconsistency: if this were so, Procopius would pass over the collapse of the dome of Hagia Sophia in 558 and its reconstruction by Justinian. According to Whitby Procopius decided not to pay attention to the new dome as it was not yet decorated. Greatrex, however, does not see how the work could have been completed in such a short amount of time and, furthermore, it is not explained why the author defines the assault in 540 as "recent". Therefore Greatrex proposes, with regard to the bridge over the Sagari, that the work was begun around 554 – after the earthquake, therefore after 550 – and was later left suspended and then completed around 560. F. Montinaro, *Byzantium and the Slavs in the Reign of Justinian: Comparing the Two Recensions of Procopius' Buildings*, [in:] *The Pontic-Danubian Realm in the Period of the Great Migration*, ed. V. Ivanišević, M. Kazanski, Paris 2011, p. 89–114: he believes that the *De Aedificiis*, particularly in the form of the short redaction, was conceived as an appendix to the first instalment of the Bella in 550–551: the eight-book edition of 553–557 prompted Procopius to expand and update the work.

[22] F.P. Retief, L. Cilliers, *The Epidemic of Justinian (AD 542): a Prelude to the Middle Ages*, AThe 26.2, 2006, p. 126, https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v26i2.52567 [2 X 2022]: only the plague of 558 was as devastating as the one in 542.

[23] E. Kitzinger, *Byzantinische Kunst im Werden. Stilentwicklungen in der Mittelmeerkunst vom 3. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert*, Cologne 1984.

[24] M. Meier, *The "Justinianic Plague": An "Inconsequential Pandemic"? A Reply*, MJou 55.2, 2020, p. 191.

showed his support for the increasing devotion to the Virgin Mary by requesting Procopius to detail the numerous churches dedicated to her that he had built[25].

Given the growing focus on the Virgin Mary, it is not surprising that the churches dedicated to the *Theotokos* by Justinian are the main focus in the second part of Book V. Procopius' attention to Mary and the theme of pilgrimage may also explain the list found in the final chapter of the book.

The discussion of the Virgin Mary and *De Aedificiis* would be incomplete without mentioning one of the major constructions dedicated to her, the *Nea Ekklesia*. This building holds significant meaning and significance as a symbol of the God-bearer.

The *Nea Ekklesia*: the imperial power over Jerusalem

The Holy City appears in the fifth book of Procopius' work through the description of the new church for the *Theotokos*, the *Nea Ekklesia*. This inaugurates the second part of the book, which is entirely dedicated to Mary[26]. The next chapters (*Aed*. V, 6–8) describe three churches built for the God-bearer on hillsides in Palestine.

Trampedach[27] argues that Justinian's interest in Jerusalem was due to the role it played in the emperor's ecclesiastical politics and its association with the Chalcedonian credo and Roques suggests that the construction of the *Nea Ekklesia* aimed to counteract the influence of the Monophysites, who were strongly anti-Chalcedonian[28]. To the hypotheses of the two scholars, it is necessary to add a third point, which will be discussed later, namely Justinian's desire to combat Judaism in the Palestinian region. This intention, therefore, dear to the emperor, would find its place within the celebratory *De Aedificiis*. If pagans were recognized as followers of an erroneous religion and if heretics constituted a problem for the official religion, Jews and Samaritans, also 'people of the book', were an inconvenient presence that hindered Chalcedonian orthodoxy: this is why Shahîd speaks of a de-Judaization of Palestine, claiming that the *Nea Ekklesia* was part of this project[29].

In fact, it is important to consider that the *Theotokos* embodies the Chalcedonian orthodoxy defended by the emperor as the God-bearer and proof of the

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[25] *Ibidem*, p. 190.

[26] From a research on the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* the term *Theotokos* occurs nineteen times in the *De Aedificiis*, ten of them from Book V onwards: *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, http://stephanus. tlg.uci.edu [5 X 2022]. Here it is considered also the Book VI.

[27] K. Trampedach, *Ein neuer Tempel Salomons in Jerusalem? Der Bau der Nea-Kirche (531–543) durch Kaiser Justinian*, Mil 12.1, 2015, p. 155–178.

[28] *Procope de Césarée. Constructions de Justinien Iᵉʳ*, vol. V, ed. et trans. D. Roques, Alessandria 2011, p. 382.

[29] I. Shahîd, *Justinian and the Cristianization of Palestine. The Nea Ekklesia in Jerusalem*, [in:] *Κλητόριον εις μνήμην Νίκου Οικονομίδη*, ed. Φ. Ευαγγελατου-Νοταρα, Τ. Μανιατη-Κοκκινη, Αθήνα 2005, p. 373–385.

Incarnation. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Justinian, who aimed to restore the *pax Dei*, sought to establish his own presence in the most important Biblical locations, and that Jerusalem, as the ultimate religious centre, was crucial for an emperor committed to religious aspects. Moreover, a church built in Jerusalem, a prime destination for pilgrimage, would have ensured that it was not only seen by the local population but also by people from other regions or even foreigners, spreading Justinian's message.

I argue that Procopius, therefore, deliberately and precisely chooses the *Theotokos* as a symbol of Justinian's politics in Palestine and starts with the *Nea Ekklesia*. This was one of the largest constructions of the period, along with the church of St. John in Ephesus[30] and the church of the Holy Apostles. It was dedicated on the 20 November 543, the day before the celebration of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple[31], which recalls the tradition of the *Proto-Evangelium* of James[32]. The church was discovered in 1970 by Avigad[33] in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City and its position matches the description of the historian of the *De Aedificiis*[34]. Scholars agree that the church was intended to be a renowned pilgrimage destination in the sixth century, given the considerable amount of money invested by the emperor[35].

However, the *Nea Ekklesia* was unique in that it was not built on a renowned sacred site[36]. Trampedach emphasizes the location of the church to explain its significance. The hill chosen by the emperor creates an ideal triangle with the ancient Temple of Solomon and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher built by Constantine the Great[37]. The connection between the *Nea Ekklesia* and the *Anastasis* is also noted by Amitzur: for him the extension of the *cardo* was meant to link the two churches, especially in the occasion of a procession: therefore, the *Nea Ekklesia* is the 'new' church of the *Anastasis*, which in the previous times replaced the Jewish Temple[38]. The church's location has also drawn Shahîd's attention[39], another time in connection to the ancient Temple of Solomon: the Church of Justinian would be built in a position that overlooks the Temple ruins, thereby demonstrating

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[30] It is worth mentioning that, after the proem, the church of St. John the Theologian is the first building encountered in Book V (*Aed.*, V, 1, 5).

[31] M. Barker, *Justinian's 'New Church' and the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*, S.JOLT 103, 2005, p. 5, http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/default.htm [25 II 2023].

[32] S. Vahilé, *La dédicace de Saint-Maria-la-Neuve*, RAug 2, 1903, p. 137.

[33] Cf. for more N. Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, Nashville–Camden–New York 1980, p. 229–246.

[34] Y. Tsafrir, *Procopius and the Nea Church in Jerusalem*, ATa 8, 2000, p. 154.

[35] M. Voltaggio, *'Xenodochia' and 'Hospitia'…*, p. 199.

[36] K. Trampedach, *Ein neuer Tempel Salomons…*, p. 155–178.

[37] *Ibidem*.

[38] H. Amitzur, *Justinian's Solomon Temple in Jerusalem*, [in:] *The Centrality of Jerusalem. Historical Perspectives*, ed. M. Poorthuis, C. Safrai, Kampen 1996, p. 168–171.

[39] I. Shaîd, *Justinian and the Cristianization…*, p. 377.

Christianity's superiority over Judaism, but also the emperor as better than Solomon. Analyzing the *Nea Ekklesia* in parallel with Procopius' description, scholars have noted how the historian presents it as a new Temple of Solomon. Summarizing the various interpretations concerning their similarity, Amitzur[40] notes that both the Temple and the *Nea Ekklesia* used cedars, which, although costly, were necessary to establish a correlation between Justinian's church and Solomon's Temple. The measurements of the *Nea Ekklesia* also do not seem to have been left to chance by the emperor: the building measures 200 x 100 cubits, the exact measurements that the future Temple would have had according to the prophecy of Ezekiel[41]. Furthermore, Shahîd claims that the columns of the *Nea Ekkelsia*, coloured like flames of fire, recalled those of the *Portico* of the Temple that lay in ruins on the Temple hill[42]. This brief and partial exposition of the similarities between the *Nea Ekklesia* and the Temple of Solomon could possibly be supplemented with another minor detail. Procopius, in regards to the church, mentions the existence of internal doors that prepared the viewer for what he was about to encounter[43]. It is possible that the historian is referring here to a decoration that somehow foreshadows what the visitors are about to see beyond. Procopius, although is often dry in his descriptions in Book V, specifies this detail, which perhaps is intended as a reference to the Temple, as we read in 1Reg 6: 1–38 that the interior of that building was richly decorated.

Having analysed these interpretations, it is also interesting to note that the description of the church outlined by Procopius places a particular emphasis on its height: the tallest hill, which towers over is chosen, and the church reaches upwards; therefore, one may suggest a simpler explanation: the location was chosen also for its association with the 'high places' in the Old Testament (*Septuaginta*: τὰ ὑψηλὰ)[44]. In the Bible, these places were associated with Jewish kings and religious aspects of royal power, as demonstrated by the associations of *bamoth* (the Hebrew word for 'high places') with religious aspects of royal power. Peatfield[45] writes regarding this topic that

> topographically Jerusalem is set within the hills that separate the fertile coastal lands of Israel from the deserts of the interior. The site identified as the original city of David is set on the slopes of Mount Moriah overlooking the Kidron Valley. The expansion of the city to include the summit of the mountain (called Zion), *i.e.* what became the Temple Mount, can plausibly be interpreted as royal monopolisation of religious power represented and expressed through the symbol of the mountain, the ultimate high place.

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[40] H. Amitzur, *Justinian's Solomon Temple…*, p. 163–166.

[41] Ez 40.

[42] I. Shaîd, *Justinian and the Cristianization…*, p. 381.

[43] Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, V, 6, 24.

[44] L.S. Fried, *The High Places (Bāmôt) and the Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah: An Archaeological Investigation*, JAOS 122.3, 2002, p. 437–465.

[45] A. Peatfield, *High Places and Royal Shrines*, [in:] *Tara. From the Past to the Future. Towards a New Research Agenda*, ed. O. Sullivan, M. Scarre, M. Doyle, Dublin 2013, p. 480–481.

Of course in Antiquity, mountains are places where men can connect with God. In the Bible, for example, God speaks to Noah on Ararat in Gn 8, descends on Sinai to meet Moses in Ex 24: 16, and is described as 'the holy God who dwells in the heights' (ἅγιος ὁ θεὸς ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν ὑψηλοῖς, ἐνεπλήσθη Σιων κρίσεως καὶ δικαιοσύνης)[46] in Is 33: 5. Procopius similarly underscores the holiness of summits in *Aed.* V, 8, 7, when discussing Mount Sinai. He claims that it is impossible for a man to spend the night there because of the divine phenomena that could overwhelm the human mind. The fact that all the churches described in the following chapters are built on high places may be a reference to the Old Testament and the Byzantines' view of themselves as the new chosen people[47]. Furthermore, this would align well with Shadhîd's studies regarding a de-Judaization of Palestine: Procopius ensures that Christianity appropriates symbols typical of Jewish royal power.

The *Nea Ekklesia* is located on the 'highest hill' of Jerusalem, specifically on one of the altitudes of Mount Zion[48], the only available site for the new construction. It is dedicated to the most significant figure in the saintly realm who serves as an intermediary between men's prayers and God, the Virgin Mary. During a historical period characterized by insecurity, the emperor's generosity gifts the people with a sanctuary devoted to the Mother of all mothers who, like Justinian, can heal her faithful, this time in a tangible way. Thus, in addition to the emphasis on its height, the author also focuses on the two hospices located near the church, which are described towards the end of the description of the sacred building's spaces:

προϊόντι δὲ πρόσω ἡμίκυκλα δύο, ἀλλήλοις ἀντιπρόσωπα ἑκατέρωθεν τῆς ἐπὶ τὸ ἱερὸν ὁδοῦ ἑστᾶσι· ξενῶνες δὲ τῆς ἑτέρας ἐφ᾽ἑκάτερα δύο, Ἰουστινιανοῦ βασιλέως ἔργον· ἅτερος μὲν ξένοις ἐνδημοῦσι καταλυτήριον, ὁ δὲ δὴ ἕτερος ἀναπαυστήριον νοσοῦσι πτωχοῖς[49].

Then as one advances there are two semi-circles (*hemikykla*) which stand facing each other on one side of the road which leads to the church, while facing each other on the other side are two hospices, built by the Emperor Justinian. One of these is destined for the shelter of visiting strangers, while the other is an infirmary for poor persons suffering from diseases[50].

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[46] *Septuaginta. Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, *duo volumina in uno*, ed. A. Rahlfs, Struttgart 1979, https://www.academic-bible.com/en/online-bibles/septuagint-lxx/read-the-bible-text/ [10 XII 2022].

[47] M. Gallina, *Incoronati da Dio. Per una storia del pensiero politico bizantino*, Viella 2016, p. 1–59.

[48] M. Voltaggio, *'Xenodochia' and 'Hospitia'…*, p. 199. Cf. *Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem Conducted by Nahman Avigad*, *1969–1982*, vol. V, *The Cardo (Area X) and the Nea Church (Areas D and T). Final Report*, ed. O. Gutfeld, Jerusalem 2012.

[49] Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, V, 6, 25.

[50] Trans. H.B. Dewing: Procopius, vol. VII, *On Buildings*, V, 6, 25, ed. et trans. H.B. Dewing, G. Downey, Cambridge, Massachusetts–London 1940 [= LCL, 343], p. 349.

The figure of the Virgin Mary was associated with healing shrines located in or near the capital city, and under Justinian, she became the embodiment of imperial victory and the defender of the Chalcedonian faith. These values are evident in Procopius' *De Aedificiis*: with the mention of the hospice for sick, the author is likely providing (also and not only) evidence of Mary's healing powers in the passage above, while in another (*Aed*. VI, 2, 19) he writes about two cities, both named Augila, that were converted to Christianity by Justinian and where he built churches dedicated to the *Theotokos* as a protector of the cities and of the truth of the faith. A church was also built in Theopolis-Antioch[51] during the city's reconstruction by Justinian. The Virgin was seen as a guarantor of the safety of the empire, encompassing the healing power, protection of cities, and defence of the faith in her figure as the *Theotokos*. This explains her prominence in the second part of Book V and the attention paid by Procopius to the ξενῶνες, or hospices, for travellers, the needy, and the ill.

The term καταλυτήριον, which is present in other passages of the *De Aedificiis* and refers to hospices for magistrates or generic travellers, is used in this case to refer specifically to pilgrims. Antoninus Placentinus, whose pilgrimage was around 570 AD[52], visited the *Nea Ekklesia* and wrote about two hospices for pilgrims[53].

The focus on illness in these hospices can be explained by both the healing powers of Mary and the unique position of the church, which lacks a link to a biblical event, as noted by Trampedach. In this sense, pilgrims, after a period fraught with difficulties, were drawn by the possibility of receiving care from the Virgin, while those in need experienced imperial philanthropy, but also all the visitors eventually come in contact with the Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Moreover Horden-Purcell[54] have noted that pilgrimage tends towards places that are easily accessible and also have an established tradition as pilgrimage destination. Such places necessitated adequate infrastructure, including urban transit stations for the exchange of information and supplies, well-maintained roads, lodging, potable water, and food. These amenities were essential for facilitating travel and supporting the needs of pilgrims[55].

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[51] Procopius' use of the new name of Antioch is interesting, as the *De Aedificiis* is the only work of the author in which the city appears mentioned as Theopolis, with the evident celebratory intent of Justinian (cf. Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, XVIII, 29, ed. I. Thurn, Berlin 2000 [= *CFHB. SBe*, 35]: Malalas explains that Justinian changed its name to Theopolis, but later continues to refer to the city by its old name).

[52] Cf. C. Milani, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini. Un viaggio in Terrasanta del 560–570 d.C*, Milano 1977.

[53] Antoninus, 23: *De Sion vero in basilicam sanctae Mariae, ubi est congregatio nimia monachorum, ubi sunt et xenodochia virorum ac mulierum, susceptio peregrinorum, mensae innumerabiles, lecta aegrotorum amplius tria milia*.

[54] P. Horden, N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford 2000, p. 446.

[55] M. Ritter, *Beherbergung von Pilgern. Zwischen Glaube und Geld: Zur Ökonomie des byzantinischen Pilgerwesens (4.–12. Jh.)*, Heidelberg 2020 [= BOO, 14], p. 56.

Anyway, it is important to note that Procopius does not mention the specific name of the mountain in the passage, as opposed to chapters 7 and 8, where Gerizim and Sinai are clearly named. The focus is solely on the height and location of the church, which was chosen by the emperor himself. However, it cannot be assumed that the emperor's personal preference was the sole reason for the placement of the church at this particular location. For the general public, particularly pilgrims, there must have been a more profound reason for its construction in this specific spot.

It can be argued, thus, that there were two main reasons for the construction of the *Nea Ekklesia* at this specific location: a) Justinian's desire to demonstrate his political and religious power over Jerusalem, and b) the growing belief, which may begin to spread in this century, of a connection between Mount Zion and the Virgin. I would like to add a further point to the current discussion, namely that the church, dedicated to the *Theotokos*, simultaneously served the function of combating the last vestiges of Nestorianism present in Palestine.

If the issue addressed in point a) has previously been argued, we will now proceed to discuss the imperial intention of subjugating the Samaritans and Jews, referred to as 'people of the book'. In regards to the latter, it is widely recognized that the publication of Novel 146 *De Hebraeis*[56] in 553 was intended to encourage the Jews to embrace the truth of the scriptures through the use of alternative languages for reading them[57]. The establishment of a church dedicated to the *Theotokos*, in conjunction with such incentives, would have played a crucial role in promoting Chalcedonian orthodoxy[58] in a city that was abundant with Jewish places of worship. The name of the *Theotokos*, the God-bearer, embodies everything that was opposed by the Jewish religion, and the choice to dedicate the church to Her was particularly significant considering its position – namely a building which overlooks the Temple[59]. Moreover, this specific definition of the Virgin would have reached out to the Monophysites, who emphasized the divine nature of Christ more than the human one. Naming in this way the church built

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[56] A. Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, Detroit 1987, p. 408; Novella CXLVI, ed. Schöll & Kroll 1993, https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Corpus/Novellae.htm [28 XII 2022].

[57] C. Brewer, *The Status of the Jews in Roman Legislation: the Reign of Justinian 527–565 CE*, EurJ 38.2, 2005, p. 134.

[58] It must be noted that Procopius generally portrays Christians positively: he employs the term Χριστιανοί to refer to the orthodox. Not only the Christian people arouse the author's interest, but also, as we see in the analysed Book V and, in general, in *De Aedificiis*, the Christian buildings. Because of these reasons, Stickler claims that Procopius is Christian. Despite this article is not the venue to discuss this aspect regarding the historian, this point can help the reader to better understand the discussion presented in this article. For more about the topic, cf. T. Stickler, *Procopius and Christian Historical Thought*, [in:] *A Companion to Procopius of Caesarea*, ed. M. Meier, F. Montinaro, Leiden–Boston 2022 [= BCBW, 11], p. 214–215.

[59] I. Shadhîd, *Justinian and the Cristianization*…, p. 378.

in the most sacred city could have been Justinian's way of reconciling with the Monophysites, bringing an end to the schism of the sixth century[60].

Before addressing point b), I would like to focus on what has been said above, namely the possibility that, alongside the de-Judaization of Palestine, the *Nea Ekklesia* also sought to extinguish Nestorianism. The term *Theotokos* clearly opposes that of *Christotokos*, the emblem of the Nestorian faction, which attributed to the Virgin the maternity of Christ as a man and not as God. Although Nestorianism had been condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431, we see how Justinian, ten years after the inauguration of the *Nea Ekklesia*, would have condemned the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ibla of Edessa, and Theodoretus of Cyrrhus as Nestorian, leading to the schism of the Three Chapters[61]. Justinian thus seeks to preserve the *pax Dei* of the empire by aligning himself against those segments of the population that were viewed more negatively in religious terms: Jews, Samaritans, and Nestorians, who were also detested by Monophysites, as well as by Chalcedonian believers.

Regarding point b), the presence of the Virgin Mary in Jerusalem is supported by apocryphal literature that became widespread in Syria and Palestine between the fifth and the sixth centuries. While a comprehensive examination of the vast and complex apocryphal material is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is crucial to acknowledge its circulation and influence, also among powerful individuals, as exemplified by Romanos the Melode, a poet in close contact with the imperial court. Cunningham[62] highlights Mary's intercessory role as the link between Christians and the Son. As she notes, Romanos portrays this role in a dramatic and engaging manner, using his interpretation of biblical and apocryphal narratives to dynamically connect with his listeners. Georgia Frank's studies[63] also demonstrate that Romanos explores the thoughts and reactions of numerous biblical and apocryphal characters to bring their stories to life for the sixth century congregations. Romanos' ultimate goal was to convey the paradoxical doctrine of Chalcedonian Christianity[64]: for him Mary indeed represents an effective intercessor[65]. Another example of the circulation of the apocryphal tradition can be seen in the account of the Piacenza pilgrim, who, following the apocryphal tradition of the Dormition,

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[60] *Ibidem*, n. 18, p. 378.

[61] Cf. L. Perrone, *La Chiesa di Palestina e le controversie cristologiche. Dal Concilio di Efeso (431) al secondo Concilio di Costantinopoli (553)*, Bologna 1980.

[62] T. Arentzen, *Virginity Recast. Romanos and the Mother of God* (publ. PhD thesis, Lund University 2014), p. 21–22; M.B. Cunningham, *The Virgin Mary in Byzantium*, *c. 400–1000 CE. Hymns*, *Homilies and Hagiography*, Cambridge 2022, p. 58–59.

[63] G. Frank, *Dialogue and Deliberation: The Sensory Self in the Hymns of Romanos the Melodist*, [in:] *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, ed. D. Brakke, M.L. Satlow, S. Weitzman, Bloomington–Indianapolis 2005, p. 163–179.

[64] M.B. Cunningham, *The Virgin…*, p. 65.

[65] *Ibidem*, p. 13.

wrote about the tomb in the Getsemani, describing it as *et in ipsa valle est basilica sanctae Mariae, quam dicunt domum eius fuisse, in qua de corpore sublatum fuisse*[66].

The examples of Romanos and Antoninus serve to illustrate that the presence of apocryphal works could be found both in high-brow literature, such as that of Romanos the Melode, and in travelogues, such as Antoninus of Piacenza's. Although this is currently speculative, it cannot be disregarded that the tradition linking Mount Zion to the life of Mary may have been widespread in the mid sixth century. This is evidenced by the fact that the church is dedicated to the *Theotokos* and one of the passages read during the inauguration of the *Nea Ekklesia*, such as Psalm 131: 8[67], would later be connected to Mary's Dormition[68] in the seventh century. Apocryphal narratives from the late fifth and early sixth century, such as the *Liber Requiei*, suggest that Mary's death occurred in the vicinity of Mount Zion[69]. The complex tradition of texts referred to as the *Palm of the Tree of Life*, which served as the basis for John of Thessalonica's homily for the Dormition in the early seventh century, states that Mary resided in the *highest* and oldest part of Jerusalem[70].

In the context under consideration, it is necessary to examine the role played by Procopius' *De Aedificiis*. As a historian, he was obliged to chronicle and praise the emperor, but his work also served to convey a message. It can be surmised that, in addition to his classical education, Procopius may have been influenced by the pilgrim itineraries. The adoption of this model, at least for this work, would permit him to not only present the various buildings and to concentrate on the most significant ones, but also to extol them, by presenting a pilgrimage route for the faithful to follow. Consequently, it cannot be dismissed that the author, through his treatment of the theme of pilgrimage, also draws on the genre commonly associated with it.

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[66] Antoninus, 17 (*CSEL* 29, 170 = CCL 175, 137, p. 137–138).

[67] K. Trampedach, *Ein neuer Tempel Salomons…*, cit. 52 p. 172.

[68] S.J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford 2003, p. 127.

[69] *Ibidem*, p. 128 et ss. *Liber Requiei* 70 (41 Eth, 27 Lat): *De transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice*, vol. I–II, ed. V. Arras, Louvain 1973 [= CSCO, 342; 351], i. 1–84 (Eth.) and 1–54 (Lat.). M. Van Esbroeck, *Les Textes littéraires sur l'assomption avant le Xe siècle*, [in:] *Les Actes apocryphes des apôtres*, ed. F. Bovon, Geneva 1981, p. 280. A. Wegner, *L'Assomption de la T.S. Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VIe au Xe siècle*, Paris 1955 [= AOC, 5], p. 232–233.

[70] *Ibidem*, p. 33–35 and M.B. Cunningham, *The Virgin…*, p. 122: *Most of the Byzantine preachers believed, according to the Palm of the Tree of Life version of the legend, that Mary was living in the highest (and most ancient) part of the city of Jerusalem, known as Mount Zion, at the time when their story began. She occupied the house that included an upper room where Jesus had presided over the last supper with his disciples (Mt 26: 17–30; Mk 14: 12–25; Lk 22: 7–38; Jn 13: 1–17: 26) and appeared to his disciples at the time when Thomas doubted his resurrection (Jn 20: 26–29).*

Pilgrimage itineraries: a potential inspiration for Book V of *De Aedificiis*?

In his work, Procopius guides readers through the path of the Chalcedonian creed, selecting locations that best demonstrate it, like a pilgrim itinerary. If one considers pilgrimage as a potential central theme of the book, the insistence on roads is entirely sensible. Külzer[71] asserts that

> a functional connection with a local and interregional communication system is indispensable for any pilgrimage center. A well-built road facilitates trvelers' access, ensures a continuous supply of food, goods, and construction materials for permanent development, and supports the area's residents.

The focus on roads is notable and warrants examination in the context of other sources, such as various pilgrim *Itineraria* and maps from the period, particularly Madaba's (Fig. 1). By doing so, the path taken by the historian in relation to the locations of major importance and their perception would become clearer.

As previously mentioned, it is plausible that the historian was influenced by pilgrimage itineraries written by the faithful. There are several hallmarks of an itinerary present in the fifth book of *De Aedificiis* that we are going to sort by relevance: a) the final list in *Aed.* V, 9, which succinctly summarizes the most significant pilgrimage sites, mentioned without any detail since they are not the focus of the author; b) the straightforward descriptions of the sites throughout the book; c) the references to streets and distances; and d) the emphasis on the Holy City, which serves as both a final destination and a starting point for further journeys. These typical features benefit Procopius, who can glorify the emperor through his buildings and infrastructure, while also promoting themes of importance to the imperial household. The historian, following the Pilgrim's Road for the first part of Book V (*Aed.* V, 1–5), highlights the road repairs and new branches implemented by the emperor, while in the second part (*Aed.* V, 6–9), he focuses on the figure of Mary Theotokos, starting with Jerusalem, a central destination for pilgrims.

The *De situ Terrae Sanctae* written by Theodosius between 518–530 A.D. bears a resemblance to Procopius' work, as the first section of Theodosius' itinerarium contains five journeys from Jerusalem to other holy sites in the Holy Land, possibly influenced by the Madab Map as suggested by Tsafrir[72]. Similarly, Antoninus

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[71] A. Külzer, *Pilgrims on their Way in the Holy Land: Roads and Routes According to Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Travel Accounts*, [in:] *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Journeys, Destinations, Experiences across Times and Cultures. Proceedings of the Conference Held in Jerusalem, 5th to 7th December 2017*, ed. F. Daim, J. Pahljtzsch, J. Patrich, C. Rapp, J. Seligman, Mainz 2020, p. 11.
[72] Y. Tsafrir, *The Maps Used by Theodosius: On the Pilgrim Maps of the Holy Land and Jerusalem in the Sixth century C.E.*, DOP 40, 1986, p. 139.
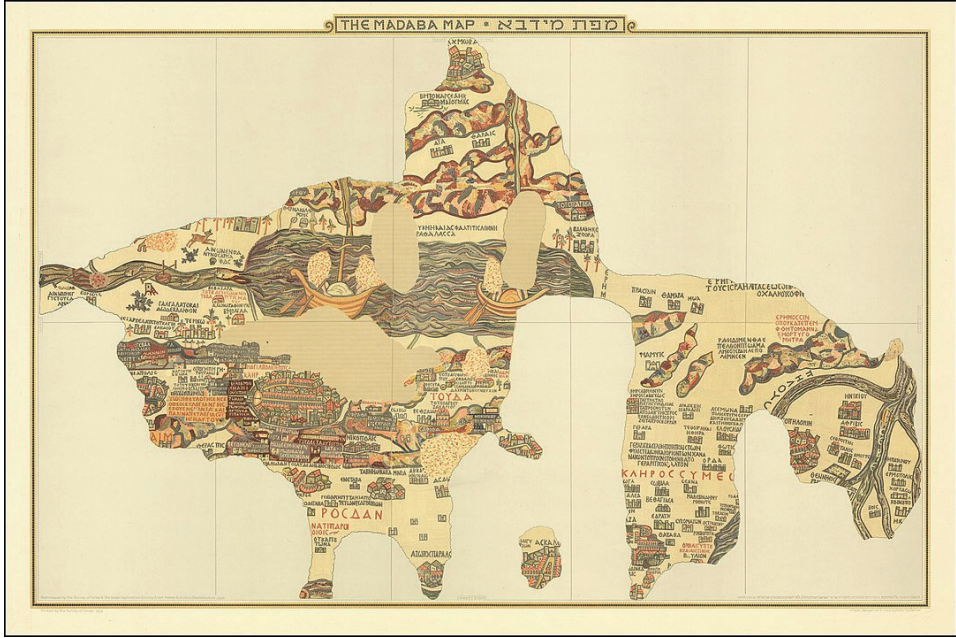
Fig. 1. The Madaba Map. In the rectangle, it can be seen the city of Jerusalem (reproduction of the drawing of the Madaba map created by Paul Palmer, architect in Jerusalem, in 1901, published in 1906 in "Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins"; Wikipedia, Public Domain, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madaba_Map#/media/File:Palmer_&_Guthe_image_of_the_Medaba_map.jpg [7 III 2023].

of Piacenza, the pilgrim mentioned above, visited the same localities as Procopius[73], but after reaching Jerusalem, he travelled to nearby areas. It is possible that Procopius had a similar idea, as he visited Neapolis, Gerizim, and the Sinai after his path through Anatolia, with Jerusalem serving as the central point of both arrival and departure. This idea is also present in the *Anonymous Burdigalense*, a travel account written during the age of Constantine, between 333–334 AD[74],

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[73] Here I am referring to the localities in the *Aed.* V, 9, e.g. Bethlehem (Antoninus, 29), Eleutheropolis (Antoninus, 32).

[74] More precisely, the year 333 is that of the outward journey and 334 that of the return. It is thus possible to know the chronological arc in greater detail thanks to the fact that the two consuls of Constantipolis are cited (*Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 571, 6 – *Itineraria Antonini Augusti et Burdigalense*, [in:] *Itineraria romana*, vol. I, ed. O. Cuntz in aedibus B.G. Teubneri, Lipsiae 1929 (cetera: *Itinerarium Burdigalense*). Cf. digilibLT, Biblioteca digitale di testi latini tardoantichi, https://digiliblt.uniupo.it [17 IX 2022]); G. Uggeri, *Itinerarium Burdigalense. Il primo pellegrinaggio in Terrasanta*, [in:] *I pellegrinaggi nell'età tardoantica e medievale. Atti del convegno, Ferentino, 6–8 dicembre 1999*, Ferentino 2005, p. 161–178.

twenty years after the Edict of Toleration that allowed freedom of worship. The text shows that the faithful undertook pilgrimages to various holy places in the empire, and the *Anonymus*[75] chose an overland route, traveling from Bithynia[76], Galatia[77], Cappadocia, Cilicia[78], and then on to Antioch and finally to Palestine[79] (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. The path followed by the Anonymous of Bordeaux, 333–334 AD (the image, modified, is taken from A. Trono, L. Oliva, *Innovations in a Traditional Landscape of Pilgrimage: The Via Francigena del Sud towards Rome and Other Apulian Pilgrim's Routes*, "Religions" 12, 2021, fig. 5 https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/12/1065) [6 III 2023].

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[75] G. Uggeri, *Itinerarium*…, p. 162.

[76] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 571, 9–10: [9] *A Constantinopoli transis Pontum, venis Calcedoniam*, [10] *ambulas provinciam Bithyniam*.

[77] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 574, 3: [3] *fines Bithiniae et Galatiae*.

[78] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 579, 1: [1] *fines Cappadociae et Ciliciae*.

[79] M. Tangheroni, *Itinerari marittimi a Gerusalemme*, [in:] *Il mondo dei pellegrinaggi. Roma, Santiago e Gerusalemme*, ed. P.C. Von Saucken, Milano 2018, p. 213.

If we examine the sequence of localities named by Procopius, it becomes apparent that the historian covers the same territories as the *Anonymous Burdigalense*, and in the same order. Some of the localities, such as Nicomedia[80], Iuliopolis[81], Tarsus[82], Adana[83], Jerusalem[84] and Mount Garizim[85], Mount Sinai[86] and Jericho[87] are identical. The *Anonymus Burdigalense* provides a succinct account of the journey, with only the section on the Holy Land being more elaborately described, likely reflecting the traveller's interests. Additionally, the Pilgrim's Road, which is followed by the Anonymous and partially by Procopius, suggests that the Byzantine historian was tracing a well-established traditional pilgrimage route that would have been recognizable to his readers. Procopius frequently mentions 'for those who proceed by this route'[88] without further elaboration, as it would have been a familiar concept to the masses, given that pilgrimage routes were often the same as trade routes.

The second part of Procopius' work, which focuses on the Holy Land, appears to be of greatest interest to the historian: this can be observed through a peculiar characteristic in that the second part, being the only one in Book V, comprises one construction per city/mount, while in the first part multiple elements, such as road repairs, churches, monasteries, and watercourse diversions are included in the account of each single area. It can be inferred that Procopius deliberately chose to focus on the three mounts of Zion, Gerizim, and Sinai and on the figure of the *Theotokos* to serve imperial propaganda effectively. Thus, the historian would promote the religious imperial appropriation of Palestine, which appears, in his work, free from Judaism and Nestorianism. This deliberate interest of Procopius is further reinforced by the final list in *Aed.* V, 9, where he explicitly informs the readers that he will simply enumerate the remaining imperial works. As a result, Cesaretti notes that the material is presented according to the author's intentions[89]. This makes sense when considering the fact that Procopius deliberately chose to focus exclusively on the major churches dedicated to the *Theotokos* in Palestine. By including the list, the historian conveys to his audience that there are other significant constructions in the Palestinian region, of which he is well aware, yet by excluding them, he demonstrates a restricted interest in the figure

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[80] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 572, 7–8: [7] *civitas Nicomedia mil. VIIII* [8] *fit a Constantinopoli Nicomedia usque mil. LVIII.*

[81] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 574, 8: [8] *civitas Iuliopolis mil. VIII.*

[82] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 579, 3: [3] *civitas Tarso mil. XII.*

[83] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 580, 3: [3] *civitas Adana mil. XIIII.*

[84] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 589, 7 – 596, 4.

[85] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 587, 2–3: [2] *civitas Neapoli mil. XV* [3] *Ibi est mons Agazaren.*

[86] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 586, 1–2: [1] *mons Syna, ubi fons est, in quem* [2] *mulier si laverit, gravida fit.*

[87] *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 597, 2: [2] *Ibi fuit civitas Hiericho.*

[88] For example, Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, V, 3, 1.

[89] P. Cesaretti, M.L. Fobelli, *Procopio di Cesarea…*, p. 12.

of the *Theotokos*. Regarding the omission of certain buildings, Cameron contends that Procopius likely included and described only those structures that were most familiar to him[90]. Nevertheless, building upon Cameron's scholarship, we can adopt a more comprehensive perspective. Specifically, as previously indicated, Procopius primarily concentrates on those buildings that served his particular panegyrical purposes. The first building of the second part (*Aed.* V, 6), the *Nea Ekklesia*, marks the beginning of a new era in both the Marian cult, which would witness the establishment of the Feast of the Dormition[91] less than fifty years later, and in Justinian's government, which increased its focus on religious policies, as reflected in this book. Furthermore, Procopius' description of *Nea Ekklesia* has the capacity to appeal to the eyes of pilgrims by highlighting the two hospices. After the plague, a healing centre of this magnitude[92] would have been attractive to the faithful and this could also be seen as a strategy to conceal the lack of a traditional biblical reference to the site. Another type of consideration for pilgrims could be represented by the mention of cisterns and wells within the work and particularly in the final list. These were not part of public architecture but of private one, and in fact, the Second Sophistic praised temples, baths, and walls when extolling a city[93].

The historian, therefore, based on the devotion to the *Theotokos*, presents the power of the emperor over the Holy City and the remaining Palestinian localities. Firstly, he focuses on the city itself, and then he highlights the emperor's control over Mount Gerizim, which was previously under the heretic Samaritans, and finally, over Mount Sinai, where God appeared to Moses in the form of the Burning Bush[94]. Like a traveller's account, Procopius carefully selects the focal points of his work and the *Nea Ekklesia*, located in a period between the plague and religious reforms, was undoubtedly the first appropriate destination after the Anatolian peninsula, but it was also a symbol of the Chalcedonian dogma.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Book V may be divided into two parts. The first part, from the beginning to the fifth chapter, focuses on the Anatolian peninsula and follows the Pilgrim's Road, while the second, from the sixth chapter onwards, is centred on the most important mounts in the Holy Land, where churches dedicated to the *Theotokos* are located. This interest of the historian reflects the increase in Marian

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[90] A. Cameron, *Procopius*…, p. 83–112.

[91] The feast was institutionalised by the emperor Maurice (582–602): S.J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*…, p. 73.

[92] The number of beds for the sick was substantial; Antoninus, 23: *lecta aegrotorum amplius tria milia*.

[93] J. Pickett, *Water and Empire in the De Aedificiis of Procopius*, DOP 71, 2017, p. 119–121.

[94] These two mounts, the Gerizim and the Sinai, will be subjects of future articles.

devotion following the plague and Justinian's attention to religion to restore the Christian *pax Dei*. Unsurprisingly, the first building mentioned in the second part is the *Nea Ekklesia*, which allows us to understand how the figure of the Virgin was used by the historian to convey religious and political messages on behalf of the emperor, namely de-Judaization of Palestine, maybe alongside de-Nestorianization.

The emphasis on the height of the *Nea Ekklesia* and the hospices is meant, respectively, to demonstrate the triumph of Chalcedonian orthodoxy and to attract pilgrims. Additionally, the position of the church may be evidence of a shift in the Marian cult, which would justify the choice of Mount Zion.

What is fascinating is the way Procopius promotes all these messages to his readers at the same time. By using the theme of pilgrimage, the historian creates an ideal path to follow and by doing so, he shows similarities with actual pilgrims' itineraries. This could explain the presence of the list in *Aed*. V, 9, where Procopius, like a pilgrim, solely mentions all the buildings in the Holy Land that do not serve his purpose, that is, their lack of functionality in conveying the messages advocated by the emperor. The focus on the pilgrims, who were the 'spectators' of Justinian's religious buildings, can be seen through the mentions of structures meant for them, the emphasis on roads and bridges, which ensured safe passage for travellers, and the mentions of cisterns and wells, which were necessary for water supply, as described by Antoninus[95].

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[95] Antoninus, 36.

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Martina Biamino

University of Genoa – DIRAAS
Balbi 4 street
Genoa 16126, Italy
martibiami97@gmail.com