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PROCOPIUS

*LITERALLY AND COMPLETELY TRANSLATED
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Court of Justinian (p. 221)

CHAPTER XXVII

THE evil deeds of Justinian were so numerous, that time would fail me if I were to attempt to relate them all. It will therefore be sufficient, if I select some of those which will exhibit his whole character to posterity, and which clearly show his dissimulation, his neglect of God, the priesthood, the laws, and the people which showed itself devoted to him. He was utterly without shame; he had no care for the interests or advantage of the state, and did not trouble himself about excusing his misdeeds, or, in fact, about anything else but how he might plunder and appropriate the wealth of the whole world.

To begin with, he appointed Paul bishop of Alexandria, at the time when Rhodon, a Phoenician by birth, was governor of the city. He ordered him to (p. 222) show the greatest deference to the bishop, and to execute all his instructions; for by this means he hoped to prevail upon the chief persons of the city to support the council of Chalcedon. There was also a certain Arsenius, a native of Palestine, who had made himself most necessary to the Empress, and, in consequence of her favour and the great wealth he had amassed, had attained the rank of a senator, although he was a man of most abandoned character. He belonged to the Samaritan sect, but, in order to preserve his authority, he assumed the name of Christian. His father and brother, who lived in Scythopolis, relying upon his authority and following his advice, bitterly persecuted the Christians in that city. Whereupon the citizens rose up against them, and put them to death most cruelly, which afterwards proved the cause of much misery to the inhabitants of Palestine. On that occasion neither Justinian nor the Empress inflicted any punishment upon Arsenius, although he was the principal cause of all those (p. 223) troubles. They contented themselves with forbidding him to appear at court, in order to satisfy the continued complaints that were preferred against him by the Christians.

This Arsenius, thinking to gratify the Emperor, set out with Paul to Alexandria to assist him generally, and, above all, to do his utmost to aid him in securing the favour of the inhabitants; for, during the time of his exclusion from the palace, he affirmed that he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with all the doctrines of Christianity. This displeased Theodora, who pretended to hold a different opinion to the Emperor in religious matters, as I have already stated.

When they arrived at Alexandria, Paul delivered over the deacon Psoes to the governor to be put to death, asserting that he was the only obstacle in the way of the realisation of the Emperor's desires. The governor, urged on by despatches from the Emperor, which frequently arrived and were couched in pressing terms, ordered Psoes to be flogged, and (p. 224) he died under the torture. When the news of this reached the Emperor, at the earnest entreaty of Theodora, he expressed great indignation against Paul, Rhodon, and Arsenius, as if he had forgotten the orders he himself had given them. He appointed

Liberius, a Roman patrician, governor of Alexandria, and sent some priests of high repute to investigate the matter. Amongst them was Pelagius, archdeacon of Rome, who was commissioned by Pope Vigilius to act as his agent. Paul, being convicted of murder, was deprived of his bishopric; Rhodon, who had fled to Byzantium, was executed by order of Justinian, and his estate confiscated, although he produced thirteen despatches, in which the Emperor expressly ordered and insisted that he should in everything act in accordance with Paul's orders, and never oppose him, that he might have liberty to act as he pleased in matters of religion. Arsenius was crucified by Liberius, in accordance with instructions from Theodora; his estate was confiscated by the (p. 225) Emperor, although he had no cause of complaint against him except his intimacy with Paul. Whether in this he acted justly or not, I cannot say; but I will afterwards state the reason why I have mentioned this affair.

Some time afterwards Paul went to Byzantium, and, by the offer of seven centenars of gold, endeavoured to persuade the Emperor to reinstate him in his office, of which he said he had been unjustly deprived. Justinian received the money affably, treated him with respect, and promised to reinstate him as soon as possible, although another at present held the office, as if he did not know that he himself had put to death two of his best friends and supporters, and confiscated their estates. The Emperor exerted all his efforts in this direction, and there did not appear to be the least doubt that Paul would be reinstated. But Vigilius, who at the time was in Byzantium, resolved not to submit to the Emperor's orders in this matter, and declared that it was impossible for him (p. 226) to annul by his own decision a sentence which Pelagius had given in his name. So that, in everything, Justinian's only object was to get money by any means whatsoever.

The following is a similar case. There was a Samaritan by birth, a native of Palestine, who, having been compelled by the law to change his religion, had become a Christian and taken the name of Faustinus. This Faustinus became a member of the senate and governor of Palestine; and when his time of office had expired, on his return to Byzantium he was accused by certain priests of favouring the religion and customs of the Samaritans and of having been guilty of great cruelties towards the Christians in Palestine. Justinian appeared to be very angry and expressed his indignation that, during his reign, anyone should have the audacity to insult the name of Christian. The members of the senate met to examine into the matter, and, at the instance of the Emperor, Faustinus was banished. But Justinian, having received (p. 227) large presents of money from him, immediately annulled the sentence. Faustinus, restored to his former authority and the confidence of the Emperor, was appointed steward of the imperial domains in Palestine and Phoenicia, and was allowed to act in every respect exactly as he pleased. These few instances are sufficient to show how Justinian protected the Christian ordinances.

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For further readings see *Early Christian Authors on Samaritans and Samaritanism* by Reinhard Pummer, Mohr Siebeck, 2002