

Modern scholarship has hitherto paid little attention to the *corpus* of Procopius of Gaza's letters; their artificial and often obscure style, in fact, represents a challenge for readers and translators. Indeed, these letters convey important information about the author himself and his cultural environment. As the co-author (with E. Amato) of a forthcoming Italian translation of Procopius' letters and declamations—the first into a modern language—I intend, first of all, to describe the problems I encountered in carrying out my task and, secondly, to assess the value of these letters as historical and cultural documents. These letters convey important information about the author's attitude toward his art; at the same time, they enhance the picture of the Gazan environment resulting from the works of other Gazan authors of the fifth and sixth centuries. Making Procopius' letters accessible to modern readers hopefully will encourage further exploration of the so-called Third Sophistic.

Procopius addresses his letters to a wide range of people—relatives, friends, colleagues, rhetoricians, pupils, etc.—and expresses opinions regarding the most diverse situations. Both in commenting and in suggesting, praising and criticizing, expressing joy and signifying anger, Procopius remains detached about his subject matter. His complex and highly rhetorical language echoes his vast culture. A translator can receive great help from a careful *Quellenforschung*; nevertheless, as is common in late-antique literary texts, Procopius' language fluctuates continuously between the literal and the metaphorical. The mixture of ancient and modern terms and of pagan and Christian expressions, as well as the very frequent references and allusions to ancient texts, are responsible for Procopius' obscurity but were certainly valued and appreciated by the addressees of his letters.

Often the scholar suffocates the man; however, behind Procopius' complex literary style we can glimpse something of his world. Together with friendship and family ties, his relationships with his pupils are of great importance. Procopius' audience appears as a community that shares the same moral values and cultural tastes. Within this community, Procopius' art finds its justification: he is a "sophist," i.e., an expert on eloquence and, at the same time, a moral man who can guide his contemporaries by reminding them of past virtuous examples. The picture of Procopius' addressees emerging from his letters coincides with John of Gaza's description of his audience as "swarms of the wise bee" hovering between pagan heritage and Judaeo-Christian spirituality.