

Procopius of Gaza – Letters

(This file contains a slightly-modified Google Translate output from Federica Ciccolella’s Italian translation of the letters of Procopius of Gaza,¹ plus a few of the notes from the same, added as endnotes for each letter. It has no scholarly value so please don’t quote it. It’s just a quick tool made to help a non-Italian find their way around that book. There are far more extensive notes and references in the Italian, so use them. For any serious purpose, consult the original.)

1. To Caesarius and Eubulus¹

Concerning Pythagoras of Samos,² they say that even he did not always observe silence, but a fixed time was set for them³ to change to using speech, and this changeover they made. But even during the time of silence, they were not, I suppose, prevented from exchanging any information. Instead, while silence restrained the tongue, the hand ministered to the thought, and so they spoke again through written characters.⁴

But if indeed you are emulating Pythagoras, let there at least be a time-limit to your silence, and time will naturally dissolve it. But if you have succeeded in surpassing him, then you are stubborn and do not know how to reply.

Yet legend tells that Alpheus,⁵ who is a river, though being so far from Arethusa even now from the Peloponnese looks towards Sicily, and while crossing the sea he takes care to keep himself beautiful and to remain fresh for his spring. She welcomes her weary lover and gives herself to him, and then you could witness the extraordinary embrace of a river and a spring.

But you⁶ neither come to us with arguments, nor do you respond to those who do come. But I wish you would put an end to my reproaches! Otherwise... but I prefer not to say anything, so as not to end having caused pain.

¹ The learned allusions (e.g., to Pythagoras) suggest the addressees are literary men. Ep. 151 mentions a Caesarius, a teacher of one of Procopius’ students, but he seems younger than Procopius, so likely not the same person.

² The figure of Pythagoras is also referenced in Epp. 2, 87 and 164. It often appears in late ancient and Byzantine letters to reinforce a standard formula (*topos*) in late antique and Byzantine letters, of the addressee’s silence. Diogenes Laertius VIII, 10, drawing on the *Timaeus*, states that Pythagoras required five years of silence from his pupils.

³ The disciples of Pythagoras, the Pythagoreans.

⁴ Plato originates the idea of the “three ways of discourse” (written, oral, and mental) and it develops in the Stoics and Neoplatonists.

⁵ The river Alpheus flows near Olympia. The legend about the river and the nymph Arethusa is mentioned by Strabo (VI 2, 4), Pindar, Pausanias and Virgil.

⁶ Procopius often uses *pluralis sociativus* (referring to the author and his close circle), as here. It may have been a way to indicate to the recipient that the letter will be read aloud to an audience in the θέατρα (cf. Ep. 91).

¹ Eugenio Amato, *Rose di Gaza: gli scritti retorico-sofistici e le Epistole di Procopio di Gaza*. Series: Hellenica 35. Alexandria: Edizioni dell’Orso (2010). ISBN 9788862742337. The letters are on pp.290-437; notes on 438-503.

2. To Hieronymus¹

I thought the Nile had long since seized you, and while I welcomed you in memory, I spoke my usual words, "How fortunate are the sons of the Egyptians! They have long possessed the Nile, the bestower of all its gifts, while now they have also taken your muse, who is no less precious than the Nile; indeed, in my opinion, she is even greater. For the Nile, by flooding their land, allows them to enrich themselves, while you, directing your eloquence to the souls of the young, direct them to the riches of knowledge, no less than Pythagoras, who once lived among them, and Plato after him."² So I thought, while you were standing not far from here, unknown to me.

But when the bearer of your letter arrived, at first, filled with wonder, I thought it was a deception and could not believe my eyes.³ Then, when, having read the contents, I was convinced that this gift could not have come from anyone else, I rejoiced, don't you think? I thought, in fact, that the very hope of seeing you again was closer to being fulfilled, and naturally I was pleased that you had shown your country to be worthy of admiration, at least for a short while. It seems to me, however, that you accuse her in jest.

Of course, I could not deny that the air above our heads is as you said, that the water reminds those who drink it of the sea, and that our bread is kneaded haphazardly with barley; indeed, you have not even exaggerated the tragic tones regarding your country. Yet, my friend,⁴ you should be grateful to her, for she trains your mind in philosophy so that you can despise Egyptian luxury. Neither Calypso nor a change for the better in her nature convinced wise Odysseus, who inhabited a small and also rocky island—Ithaca, no less! – not to prefer his Ithaca to all this;⁵ not even a Spartan, I believe, even considering the way of life in his country, ever criticized Sparta.

But I know what prompted your accusations. You are greedy for money, my dear fellow! So, after being without earnings for a while, you cry out "Alas, alas!" and repeatedly invoke the Nile and the wealth that comes from it. This, if I am not mistaken, makes you arid, as you yourself said, and gives you a body no more beautiful than that of Chaerephon.⁶ But I believe that you are lovingly attached to your new bride and are just now experiencing the power of desire. May this happen as it is dear to Aphrodite and the Loves! Farewell,⁷ and I hope to call you the father of children⁸ soon too.

¹ From this letter and Epp. 9, 57, 81, 86, 91, 124, Hieronymus of Elusa studied in Alexandria, taught there and in Hermopolis, then returned to his wife and son in Elusa. Procopius repeatedly chides him for neglecting home for Egypt out of greed.

² For Pythagoras in Egypt, see Diogenes Laertius, VIII, 3; on Plato, *id.* III, 6-7. Also Aeneas of Gaza in his *Theophrastes* says that Plato "introduced into Greece the philosophy of the Chaldeans and the Egyptians", while Zacharias of Gaza (*Ammon.* 455-458) recalls that Pythagoras and Plato learned in Egypt the false doctrine of metempsychosis.

³ Procopius recognised his friend's seal on the outside of the letter, but only by reading it was he convinced that it really was from Hieronymus.

⁴ Procopius uses this phrase in letters addressed to people to whom he is bound by kinship or deep friendship: besides Hieronymus (here and in Ep. 86), also Philip (Ep. 123) and Diodorus (Ep. 128).

⁵ Ithaca is called τρηχεῖη, "rocky", in *Od.* X, 417; see also the description that Telemachus gives to Menelaus in *Od.* IV, 605-608. Procopius cites Odysseus several times as an example of temperance and fidelity to one's homeland: cf. Epp. 57 (also addressed to Hieronymus) and 113 (to Hieronymus and Theodorus), besides Epp. 80, 92 and 104. Here Procopius follows a well-established interpretative tradition in Byzantine culture dating back to the Cynics and the Pythagoreans, according to whom Odysseus' resistance to the song

of the Sirens (*Od.* XII, 153-200; cf. also *ibid.* 39-54) was a symbol of the soul's refusal to abandon itself to the planetary music that agitates man during life. In Plato's *Phaedrus* (259a), Socrates advises avoiding pleasures as Odysseus avoided the Sirens. Neoplatonism and Christianity made this interpretation of the myth their own; Christian writers pushed the allegory to see in the Sirens, Circe, and Calypso not only pleasures but also the attractions of pagan culture and philosophy, while Odysseus tied to the ship's mast became an image of Christ nailed to the cross.

⁶ In Plato's *Apology*, the Athenian Chaerephon is the enthusiastic admirer of Socrates who reports the response of the Delphic oracle according to which no one was wiser than Socrates (21a; cf. also X., *Ap.* 14). Aristophanes describes Chaerephon as a sickly and pale young man (*Nu.* 504) who only went out at night, to the point of earning the nickname νυκτέριος, "bat" (*Av.* 1296, 1564; cf. also *V.* 1412-1414).

⁷ Procopius uses the imperative ἔρωσο, the Greek equivalent to the Latin *vale*, which survives in letters up to the late Byzantine period. Cf. *Ep.* 124.

⁸ I.e. literary compositions.

3. To Pythius¹

If someone came to me without ever having done so before and demanded to know if I owned a lyre, then proceeded to discuss music, I would certainly understand the matter and immediately know that the man was an expert in music. If, however, the conversation turned to weapons, he spoke of battles and constantly told war stories, there would certainly be no need to go to Python² to be told that he was a soldier.

But what do I mean by this? You have certainly already understood, but I will tell you nevertheless. It seems to me that the Muses truly inhabit your soul: having submitted yourself to those goddesses, you live your life consecrated to them, and nothing is worthy of your admiration except books, speeches, and whatever else leads the soul to the best. For this reason you were welcomed by us hospitably, having begun our friendship in a manner, I believe, befitting of yourself. But I wish you were not mistaken in your hope of us, and that we possess the book you ask for! For thus, you would have what you desire forever, while for me the reputation of having given you a gift would be of the utmost importance. Now, however, I swear³—and not by Socrates' plane tree, but by the speeches themselves—that I have not yet obtained that precious object, although I have desired it for a very long time. But soon—with Hermes and the Muses!⁴—it will be brought to me from the city of Alexander.⁵ For that is where the officials sent it to us. So, if the matter were to succeed, you will certainly notice⁶ that I will approach you on my own initiative to share it with you, as if I myself were the one desirous of obtaining it.

¹ The only letter sent to this man of letters (cf. *PLRE* II, p.931) is Procopius' response to a request for a book which he does not yet possess. "Pythius" is an epithet of Apollo and a proper name in Herodotus, who in VII, 27-28 tells of a Pythius of Lydia and his generosity towards Xerxes; so here it may be a pseudonym, based on the numerous allusions to Apollo in the letter. In his epitaph for the master, Choricus of Gaza says that Procopius had a house full of books and could not bear to be without a book in his hand. Nothing is known of any public libraries in Gaza, so it is most likely that the Gazan intellectuals of the 5th-6th century possessed personal copies of the books they used for their studies and that borrowing and exchange were very common.

² I.e. Delphi.

³ The oath formula alludes to the plane tree of the *locus amoenus* in which Plato's *Phaedrus* takes place (229b, 230b-c, *al.*). The λόγοι, perhaps "Socrates' discourses", could refer to the content of the book, probably a collection of Socratic dialogues.

⁴ As the god of rhetoric, Hermes is part of the mythological apparatus of Byzantine letters. A passage from Choricus' epitaph for Procopius makes clear that the "Muses" and "Hermes" refer to the education received by the aspiring rhetorician at the school, respectively, of the γραμματικός and the ῥήτωρ, an education that

involved first the study of poetry (especially Homer) and then prose. In reality poetry continued to be studied also at the school of the ῥήτωρ. For this reason, the Muses and Hermes are often mentioned together as symbols of rhetorical art.

⁵ Alexandria, called this also in Epp. 86, 87, 99, 104, 120 and 156 (and "city of the Macedonian" in Epp. 57 and 104).

⁶ Hypothetical periods with the protasis in the optative and the apodosis in the indicative, which occur both in the writings of the authors of the Second Sophistic and in papyri, testify to a certain difficulty in mastering the optative, which had by then disappeared from the spoken language.

4. To Germanus¹

How much good men suffer when they prove themselves and then distance themselves from those who know them, I now tell others, having learned it through practice. For I knew you even before you devoted yourselves to eloquence. If you ask why, well, I had teachers with me who, having tested you, admired you. But as I, too, learned to know you, through my closeness to you, I was grateful to Fortune, and on the contrary, I reproached her if, after having given me a taste of such great goodness with the tips of my fingers,² as they say, she had then deprived me of its pleasure. And the present did not make me happy so much as the prospects of the future saddened me. For I thought that you would certainly leave us and depart very soon. This has happened, and now that it has happened it grieves me; I do not know what to do, while you do everything to inflame our love³ even more, even though you are far away. And behold, you have won, surpassing even my hopes with your solicitude for me. But would that one of the gods would be favourable to us and bring you back to us very soon!

¹ The only letter to this addressee. He appears to be a former pupil of Procopius, who has left Gaza to pursue his studies in another city, a very common situation among Procopius' correspondents.

² cf. Ep. 120, 4 and Euripides, *IT* 266; *Ba.* 709, etc.

³ The use of terms such as ἐρώμενος and κόρος referring to male characters should be understood as a homage to the conventions of Greek φιλία without any sexual implication. See in this regard Stowers, *Letter Writing*, pp. 29-31.

5. To John¹

If there were lawsuits for indifference toward friends, and if someone were to take me to court accusing me of this very thing—that is, of having committed a grave injustice by neglecting a friend—I would not believe I could win the case otherwise than by presenting you as a witness, you who now, I know not how, have appeared as my accuser. Your words have reached me so unexpectedly, if a trivial matter has made you inclined to doubt me. For I know that both those without friends strike with frequent blows with their letters when they wish to pretend, and friends remain silent when, content with the memory of absent ones, they are occupied with others. Therefore, writing is not a sign of affection, nor is silence a sign of reproach, unless the mind confirms both.

But leave these things aside and consider this: whether I have ever reason to forget you, whether in every admirable speech or action I act as if I were reverently remembering you, and whether in pronouncing the name of John I always add the word "gentle." If you consider all this, you will appreciate a silent man more than a speaker, even if his tongue rang with the brass of Dodona.² But

do not think that you can remain silent by using this excuse; otherwise, we will proclaim the opposite.

¹ Procopius responds to accusations of silence by John. Also addressed in letters 22, 56, 126, 149, 156 (?) and 158. He appears to be a lawyer with interests in poetry and philosophy, who practiced in Alexandria and Caesarea. See "Ioannes 50", *PLRE II*, p.606.

² The seat of a famous oracle of Zeus, mentioned already in the Homeric poems (*Il.* XVI, 233-235; *Od.* XIV, 327-328). The voice of the god made itself heard through the rustling of the leaves of a great oak tree and was interpreted by priests (called Σελλοί) and priestesses (called Πελειάδες, "doves"). The "bronze of Dodona" probably refers to a series of braziers placed on bronze tripods, near which there was a statue depicting a young man holding a whip; when the whip, set in motion by the wind, struck the braziers, a sound was created which, probably, induced the god's priests into ecstasy; see Johnston, *Divination*, pp. 66-68 (with indication of ancient pagan and Christian sources).

6. To his brother Zacharias¹

In wanting to tell you about this excellent man,² I fear I would seem to bother you in vain by speaking to those who already know. For you know what kind of man he is: having dedicated his entire life to God, he is filled with hatred for all human things and clings to the hope that comes from above; for this reason he is prey to the wicked and deserves to suffer. You also know that this other man—I am ashamed to call him brother!³—believes that the only virtue is to do every kind of wickedness: for so long he neglected his brother, so tormented by hunger, unwilling to provide him from his own resources what should come from a man of goodwill if the situation required it.

Now, however, my reproach is not that he neglected what befits the truly wise, but that, having become desirous of what does not belong to him, he took it for himself; indeed, he often scolds his brother and has even beaten him several times. Since he regards his opinion as law, perhaps he blamed nature for not having devised more means for wickedness.

So these actions of his are not the height of his wickedness, but rather the prelude to his future misdeeds. When his mother, who is already old, hoped to reap the rewards of having raised children as a woman who enjoys the respect due to her age and her noble lineage even from strangers, he repeatedly insulted her and repeatedly raised his hands against her who bore him—O Zeus!—without any regard for natural ties, age, pitiful grey hairs, or the loving name of mother. Indeed, he even violently overpowered her, knocked her to the ground and kicked her, while she screamed, as was natural, and called for her son. And what would a mother not say who had to endure such abuse from her own son after having given birth to him, raised him, and placed so many beautiful hopes in him? Finally, he even drove her from his home, poor, naked, and deprived of the necessities, perhaps granting her only gift: freedom from his company. Now he prides himself on the misfortunes these actions have caused, while an elderly woman, one who holds the first rank among our nobility, hopes to survive by doing manual labour.

But for this good man, even her suffering presented itself as another misfortune: lacking the means to support himself, he took her in, and although she increases his poverty, at least he repays his debt to nature. And now they live together, having as their only consolation the fact that they have not suffered more; yet the mother, who has certainly suffered every ill a woman can suffer, has as her only reason for living to recall her misfortunes, to weep at their memory, and to bare her breast to Justice while recounting her sufferings.

You, then, keep all this in mind and do not think that we have added anything to the truth: on the contrary, as is appropriate in a letter, we are only exposing the essentials of his wickedness. Consider your concern for that man's wickedness and become as God desires you to be, the law of friendship and the hope of the oppressed.

¹ Many of the letters in the collection are addressed to his brother Zacharius ("Zacharias 1", PLRE II, pp.1193-4), a rhetorician (Epp. 18 and 38) who became an official in Constantinople at the imperial consistorium together with another brother, Philippus (Ep. 45). Zacharias had contacts with Diodorus (below, n. 53 ad Ep. 8), from whom he received unspecified benefits (Ep. 32). Moreover, he practiced the profession of judge (Ep. 154); indeed, Procopius turns to him in this and other letters so that mistreated people may obtain justice. From Ep. 12 it appears that Zacharias was governor in Rhodes (ῥῶδων: praeses insularum), perhaps before moving to Constantinople; Epp. 43, 44 and 154 would also belong to this period, according to Martindale (PLRE II, loc. cit.).

² Procopius sometimes prefers to leave anonymous the characters he speaks about in his letters. In most cases, this is a precaution in case the letter is lost or falls into the wrong hands: an eventuality, it seems, far from remote in the Byzantine age.

³ The term ἀδελφός could be understood either literally, or possibly meaning "brother in Christ" or "colleague." But the same word is used later to mean the brother whom the man mistreated together with his own mother.

7. To his brother Philip¹

You have been silent to us for so long, and I cannot bear it. Look, it was winter, and it was hard for us to bear it. The swallows were seen, and even when they came, you did not speak, but now the cicadas are singing, and for us, your silence betrays our hopes.²

If you do this to grieve me, I do not know what I have done to grieve you, and yet I do not believe you could take greater revenge. If, on the other hand, you have passed from your former solicitude to indifference, you not only violate the law of kinship but also transgress the custom of friendship.

If it were not unpleasant to say, perhaps someone might even say that you have become your own accuser: for it seems that you are found guilty for the same reasons for which you yourself reproached us for silence.³ And how could it be possible that someone who has persuaded to converse should participate in the silence of the one who has been persuaded?

Besides, it's time to call me a sophist and mix jokes with the conversation.⁴ It doesn't really matter, and I'll patiently endure whatever you say just to hear you speak.

¹ Philip ("Philippus 7", PLRE II, pp. 875-876) was an imperial official in Constantinople together with his brother Zacharias (cf. n. 39 ad Ep. 6); from Ep. 59 he seems to have been employed in the chancery, while Ep. 47 suggests that, like Zacharias, he also practiced law. Furthermore, from Ep. 123 it appears that he married rather late in life. Like this one, most of the letters that Procopius addresses to him are centred on the theme of silence.

² The image of winter as the "season of silence", as opposed to spring as the "season of speeches", also appears in Epp. 10, 11, 24, 39 and 138. Swallows, which generally act as heralds of spring, are often used to symbolize letters themselves because their black and white colour recalls paper and ink.

³ Turning the accusation of silence against the one who made it is a *topos* in Procopius' epistolary: cf., e.g., Ep. 87.

⁴ Procopius alludes here to the jokes that his brothers made about his sophistic art; see Epp. 18, 37 and 46.

8. To Diodorus¹

The fame of your learning has filled our ears with the speeches we longed to hear: one, in fact, recounted your diligence in defence, another extolled your vehemence in the courts, and yet another your benevolence toward those who appealed to you, unless they were unjust. But I know I also heard this: when you saw men very powerful but with no regard for justice, you became enraged and heaped upon them praiseworthy blame. As I listened to these tales, with one saying one thing and another something else, I became as if possessed by pleasure and, filled with pride at these speeches, I felt as if I myself were the object of praise. I was also grateful to the narrators, as those who hear themselves praised are wont to be.

While I was in this state of mind and reflecting, our dear Orion approached me, gave me the letter you had written to him, and congratulated me on your friendship, as if he considered it a misfortune if I were unaware of your nature. But I, who have known you not only by reputation but also by experience, and know how you treat the needy even in their absence, praised you beyond words and called him blessed for having won your attention.

However, when he also asked for letters from me that, by recalling our friendship, might further stimulate your efforts, I called him foolish; for I said that you, born for virtue, would certainly have no need of letters exhorting you to it.

Yet I failed to persuade him. For he seemed to be partly right when he said, "What kind of person could someone who is already such a man, once he receives letters from you?" I hope, then, that you will become as you were before, and that I may be praised again for my friendship with you. I hope the young man is not deceived in his hope for us, but those who think they have great power will know that it is part of justice to be rightfully defeated.

¹ At least eighteen letters of Procopius' epistolary are addressed to a Diodorus («Diodorus 3», *PLRE II*, p. 359). From these it appears that he was a lawyer (Ep. 21,7: σχολαστικόν) born in Gaza and then moved to Caesarea, bound to Procopius by deep friendship perhaps as his companion of studies in Alexandria (Ep. 127); he seems to have dedicated himself to poetry, but with poor results (Ep. 140) and to have nurtured pagan sympathies (Ep. 77). Orion is asking Procopius to write letters of recommendation for him to Diodorus, in order to strengthen Diodorus' dedication towards him. Like the other σχολαστικοί in his epistolary (e.g., John, Sosianus, and his brother Zacharias), Procopius often asks Diodorus to intervene on behalf of his acquaintances who are victims of injustices to obtain justice for them. A Diodorus σχολαστικός is also the addressee of Epp. 7 and 22 of Aeneas of Gaza, from which it is evident that those two were divided by deep enmity, later resolved thanks to the intervention of common friends.

9. To Hieronymus¹

I thought I was keeping my sister's wedding a secret, not that it was known to everyone who lives near my house, let alone to you, whom I thought were still staying by the Nile. But it seems that nothing that has to do with luxury escapes you; indeed, as soon as there is an event, the smell of what is being celebrated strikes you from afar. Perhaps you can defeat the Homeric Zeus by loving libations and fat curling in spirals of smoke.

This is what the Nile and the fortunate men who live by that river have prepared you for, after whom, living in Elusa,² you have a much keener perception whenever smoke rises from the earth.

As for your slave, I was almost driven to abuse him for not letting you write the letter in full. But since he was bringing gifts from you, the sight of them changed my opinion and, I know not how, dissolved my anger. I will answer you briefly on these matters:³ for either a daughter⁴ has been born to you or one will be born to you.

¹ Procopius is surprised that Hieronymus (on whom, cf. note on Ep. 2), although still living in Egypt, has learned news concerning his family; in reality, Hieronymus has already returned to Elusa. The central part of the letter is dedicated to the contrast between the comfortable life of Hieronymus in Egypt and the poverty of Elusa, his native city, a theme that constantly recurs in the letters addressed to this character.

² Elusa (present-day al-Khalasa) was located in the northern Negev, 50 km southeast of Gaza and on the road between Jerusalem and Sinai. It was the most important city of the Negev. It is mentioned by several literary sources and represented in the Madaba map together with the other cities of Palestine. The archaeological explorations conducted so far and the Nessana papyri and the literary sources demonstrate that, despite the scarce water resources of the region, Elusa became an important centre in the Roman and Byzantine periods. For a period, it may have been the capital of the province Palaestina Tertia, a very flourishing region in late antiquity thanks to caravan traffic and viticulture. The city had several churches, a theatre, various public buildings and, in earlier times, a temple of Aphrodite. A school was also active there, where around 360 Eudaemon, one of Libanius' correspondents, taught. After the introduction of Christianity around 400, by Hilarion (Jerome, *Vita Hil.* 25 in *PL* 23, col. 41), the area around the city became a place of life and prayer for monks and hermits because of its desert location. Drought and shifting sands were constant threats to life in the city, which was indeed abandoned in the 8th century. In his letters, Procopius never misses an opportunity to emphasize the poverty and aridity of the place, especially in comparison to rich Alexandria, where many inhabitants of Elusa ended up emigrating: the city was "hell" (Ep. 87), where the water tasted of salt, bread was made of barley (Ep. 2, cf. Ep. 91) and wind and sand prevented the cultivation of the vine (Ep. 81).

³ The haste of the bearer which prevents writing more gives a realistic touch to the letter, but it is often a *topos*.

⁴ The "daughter" may be a metaphor for a letter; cf. Ep. 54, 2-3: "we are rhetoricians and fathers of many daughters." calling the products of one's intellect "children" is common in Byzantine epistolography.

10. To his brother Philip¹

The season that causes pain from silence has an end, indeed, it is over, while I, even though I want to entertain lofty thoughts in the hope of letters from you, become self-absorbed and remember the past; for as far as you are concerned, since you are silent, the whole year is a winter for us. Or rather: you make true winter more desirable to us, just as in winter attributing silence to the constraint of the season brings comfort, while in summer we have no choice but to weep because you show no consideration for those who love you. Moreover, the fact that on the one hand the need is lacking and on the other you continue to remain unheard instils in us the feeling of being despised. But, O all Loves,² lead this man to test our feelings, so that he may experience once and for all how shameful it is to be a neglected lover.

¹ This letter and the following one are based around the comparison of the addressees' silence to winter. See note on ep. 7.

² "Ἐρωτες, plural of Eros. The gods of love and desire who intervene in human affairs to change hearts and minds and punish those who try to avoid this. Here as in Epp. 11, 34 and 161, the Erotes are part of the set of images deployed to emphasize the bond of friendship between sender and addressee, with no reference to sex. See n. to Ep. 4.

11. To Zacharias

Break the silence for us, now that winter is over; both are unbearable; but if it were possible to hear you converse continually, not even winter would distress us so much. Then let your fountain gush forth for us in full flow! For it surpasses for me the pleasure that comes from spring, if in it too there is a new light, if in it too the swallows fill our ears with their song, celebrating, I think, the season, and the roses blooming from the calyxes offer a sober and harmonious sight and bring to mind the legends of the ancients: Adonis was beautiful and Aphrodite pursued him, and the mother of the Loves, I know not how, learned to love, but, having failed to win her beloved, was pricked in the foot and gave birth to the rose.¹ But since we love you, how insignificant these things seem compared to your voice!

¹ The myth of Aphrodite and Adonis and of the rose that turned from white to red because of Aphrodite's blood, which Procopius also mentions in Ep. 18, was a favourite theme of declamation in the Gaza environment, probably on the occasion of the celebration of the return of spring (the "day of roses").

12. To Zacharias¹

Here again the occasion demands your influence on behalf of the needy, and again it is I who provide you with the opportunity, so I know you will be grateful to me for two reasons: because you have discovered how to do good and because it was possible for you to do so thanks to me. For you truly enjoy doing good more than others enjoy receiving it, and you could even call the one who gave you the opportunity a benefactor. So I am proud, as if I were doing you a favour rather than receiving it. I know that you are laughingly asking yourself, "But what is this all about?"

There is a certain Alexander here, who carries on trade by sea and earns his living from it. As is usual with these merchants, he has created a business partner—Euthymius is his name—so that one can send whatever goods he deems appropriate while the other, staying here, receives them; thus they carry on their trade.

So this man, then, lives in Rhodes in your territory—O Zeus!—and yet he claims to be suffering wrongs. The one who wrongs him you could call "*curiosus*"² in the Roman language: this man establishes rules contrary to custom and devises an occasion for new gains, as if you had no authority in Rhodes.

This, of course, is without your knowledge; therefore, now that you know, let him stop, so that I may be grateful to you, and he, when he obtains justice, may be grateful to me, recounting that he was treated unjustly and ceased to be so.

¹ Procopius asks Zacharias to put an end to an abuse perpetrated against a Gazan merchant based in Rhodes by an individual described as a *curiosus*. If the Zacharias who is the addressee of this letter is Procopius' brother and not his namesake, one can suppose that he held governmental functions in Rhodes for a certain time, before or after practicing law in Constantinople (cf. n. 39 ad Ep. 6). However Procopius refers [...] to Zacharias as an influential member of the highest court of the capital and not as an ἄρχων in Rhodes, since he can intervene concerning the *curiosus*, who was an employee of the central government and not of the provincial authority. If so, then Zacharias' position would be that of an official of the praetorian prefecture, which had jurisdiction over the *curiosi agentes in rebus*.

² In the late imperial age, the *curiosus* was a type of *agens in rebus* who was sent by the central government to the provinces with secret police duties.

13. To the grammarians Alypius and Stephen, and to Hierius, the Latin grammarian¹

When the lawgiver Solon deemed his city prosperous thanks to his laws, considering it a loss that his prodigious wisdom should stop in Attica, he went to the Egyptians, who were proud of being wiser than others, and to Croesus, since he boasted of his wealth as a means to happiness. Solon, in fact, considered it more important to take pride in his own wisdom than that the Pactolus, flowing with gold, should flood all the land it crossed.² They were amazed to see Solon, and when he left they felt nostalgia for him, while the Athenians, among whom he had laid the foundation of knowledge, immediately prayed to Athena to return their lawgiver to the city. I would not be surprised, I think, if he had also devised his departure from his country because he wanted to know to what point of love the Athenians had reached towards him.

But if the Athenians wept for the absence of a single man, though they could count on other wise men, as is natural, what would happen to us, having been deprived of all the most authoritative? And that land which one might formerly have doubted whether to call Attica or Italy suddenly falls silent, has stripped itself of its insignia, and seems to suffer the same fate as Cithaeron when, after having welcomed the god in his power, it again remains suddenly deserted if he leaves, while Dionysus is nowhere to be found.

Therefore, I will cry out against Apollo, who called you to him, neglecting our affairs.³ And I believe the Muses congratulate him on his success. Besides, you too abound in ancient legends, since right there at Daphne⁴ you count the suffering of the god, the chastity and lovingness of Daphne, and a plant that brings comfort to a lover; and for you alone what you see bears witness to the story.⁵

But if also the dense cypresses have grown to do a favour to Apollo's beloved, if water flows abundantly, if cicadas sing, if the grass-strewn road has become sweet, trees follow one another and in between the houses are hidden by their height, a moderate breeze, a manifold perfume, and shade that wards off the annoyance of the sun, it is up to you either to announce it soon by word of mouth or to tell it with your letters. However, I would like to see you come to us to hear you, besides the rest, also prophesy. I think, in fact, that Daphne has granted you this as well.

¹ Procopius deplors the departure from Gaza of three grammarians called to teach in Daphne, near Antioch. On the addressees of this letter, cf. PLRE II, pp. 1029 («Stephanus 8»), 62 («Alypius 6») and 559 («Hierius 8»). In Ep. 145, Procopius recommends Hierius to Eudaemon, a judge, who could benefit from his services for his knowledge of Latin. Furthermore, Martindale (PLRE II, loc. cit.) suggests the identification of this Hierius with the addressee of Ep. 32 of Dionysius of Antioch, where Hierius and his colleagues are defined as Σοφιστὰὶ ἐν τῇ γῆ. Alypius is not attested elsewhere, but Stephen may be the addressee of Epp. 71, 89 and 105. If so, Stephen borrowed a book from Procopius which he had not yet finished paying for and, instead of for the promised three months, kept it for three or four years; in Ep. 105 Procopius finally greets the return of the book. Grammarians and rhetoricians taught mainly in cities and often moved from one place to another. The presence of a Latin grammarian first in Gaza and then in Antioch demonstrates that between the 5th and 6th centuries Latin was still taught in the Syro-Palestinian area, most likely to prepare young rhetoricians for law studies in Berytus. However, the use of Latin underwent a sharp decline in the eastern regions of the Empire starting from the end of the 5th century.

² A reference to Herodotus I, 29-33. The Pactolus flowed through the capital of the Lydian kingdom, Sardis; Herodotus (V, 101) states that gold dust floated on its waters. The allusion here is perhaps to a rich monetary offer that has induced the three grammarians to move to Daphne. In Ep. 89 Procopius refers to the wealth that Stephen should have received from teaching.

³ The transfer of the three grammarians from Gaza (Cithaeron) to Daphne (the seat of Apollo) is alluded to.

⁴ Daphne was a suburb of Antioch, on a hill a few miles south of the city. There was a temple of Apollo and an oracular spring there. The cypresses of Daphne are mentioned by Libanius (or. I, 262-263 Foerster, or. 11, 94-99 and 233-243), who saved them from being cut down ordered by a comes Orientis.

⁵ The myth of Apollo and Daphne, traditionally set in the Peloponnese, was "transferred" to Antioch with the construction of the temple of Apollo by the Seleucids (E.A.). Mythology was part of the teaching of the γραμματικός, as indicated, for example, by John of Gaza in his anacreontics 5 and 6.

14. To Palladius¹

I believe that the moral virtue of the powerful is of the greatest comfort to those who suffer injustice. For if power is joined with a mind that honours justice, what prevents what the laws decree from being realized?

But what do I mean by this introduction? You yourself could tell others what the advocate Isidorus was like in life, who was my friend once when he was alive and now is so in memory, and who offered himself for general admiration. But now that he has left the world of men, he has left his house without support. For she who was once his mother is now childless, on the threshold of old age and no longer a mother, while his wife bears the burden of widowhood. And what of his children? The daughters are still small and already experience the fate of orphans.

In short, they are in the hands of all who wish to harm them, unless you prevent it, you to whom their hopes look. For that fellow is wicked by nature but, having sheltered himself from punishments, when he noticed their solitude he revealed himself even more wicked; living next to them, having conceived envy due to proximity, he devised one sole thought: to show them that the house is uninhabitable. Therefore, he did not even allow the builders to oppose him legally; indeed, considering the reciprocal agreements established by letter a foolishness, he shows himself superior to the laws and to the agreements he himself had adhered to.²

But you, having assumed the opinion of a judge who hates pettiness, become a father for those girls, a son for the mother, like a husband for the wife, and for us what the test of facts has shown many times in the past. And let that man know that one cannot be without support as long as the laws and the men who honour justice are preserved.

¹ Procopius asks Palladius to assist the mother, the widow and the children of the deceased lawyer Isidorus («Isidorus 6», PLRE II, p. 631), left defenceless against the attempt of a neighbour to seize their house. For a similar problem see Ep. 137. Palladius was evidently a judge and, according to Martindale («Palladius 16», PLRE II, p. 822), «presumably governor at Gaza, i.e. *consularis* of Palaestina Prima». To Palladius is also addressed Ep. 69, a *consolatio* on the death of his wife. He – or his namesake («Palladius 17», PLRE, II, p. 822) – also appears as the bearer of a letter from Musaeus to Procopius (Ep. 165; on Musaeus, cf. n. 702 ad Ep. 147).

² The neighbour continued to claim that the house was uninhabitable despite the intervention of expert architects (οικοδόμοι). He evidently thought to induce Isidorus' family to leave it and sell it to him at a price lower than its value.

15. To Nephalius¹

I was pleased to receive your letter, but in trying to put it into practice, I wasn't as helpful as I'd hoped. I could never say that fate is responsible, especially for you, but I can certainly say that it is divine providence, which guides our affairs as it wills.

¹ Nephalius appears as the addressee of six Procopian letters. Based on Ep. 67, he seems to have been a churchman or government official powerful enough to ask favours from the bishop of his city. He could be the monk Nephalius, originally from Alexandria, who opposed Severus of Antioch and other Monophysite followers in 508. Epp. 95 and 108 allude to his involvement in a dishonest action (a theft?), as a result of which Nephalius had to temporarily disappear. In this short letter, Procopius apologizes to him for not being able to comply with a request of his. The Hellenistic motif of Fortune that dominates human life persists in Byzantine epistolography despite the Christian context.

16. To Gessius, the Iatrosophist¹

When I picked up your letter, I almost felt as if I had received the Muses themselves: I was possessed by pleasure and did not know what had happened to me, like the Delphic gods when, upon Apollo's arrival from the Hyperboreans, they are at first silent, then suddenly filled with the god.²

Such was I as I admired every detail: the elegance of the words, the harmony of the connections, the beauty that emerges from every part, and, most importantly, your character, from which the letter to us sprang. And may you receive many blessings for having offered us such a feast.

But it is said that "one swallow does not make a spring."³ So, for example, was the first swallow sufficient to satisfy the need for spring? But if I were to add a second and a third, and then many more, the famous Croesus or the Golden-Streamed One would mean nothing to us. I gladly saw your children and was brought back to you as if through an image.⁴

Therefore I prayed to see even more, and—to use solemn words—better than his father. Indeed, when one prays, it is easy for him to say whatever he wants and imitate Hector.⁵ But consider that I am bringing to you my friend Dorotheus⁶ in person, who is here, without saying anything else, but thus fulfilling the hopes he himself offered when speaking of you. If, however, he hopes to gain something more through me, it would be your duty to ensure that he is not deceived in his opinion.

His character and his commitment will suffice to recommend this young man to you: qualities which, if it were possible for him to demonstrate to you with complete clarity, perhaps would not require our letters. But now, after having assessed the initial things thanks to me, I believe that later you will be filled with wonder thanks to him.

However, I think that my friend Anastasius,⁷ who is also a member of our family, also views you with benevolent eyes. And what more is there to say to a man who has long been dear to you and who has now chosen to be no less benevolent?

¹ Gessius has written to Procopius, who replies offering Dorotheus as his student. An iatrosophist is a professor of medicine and expert physician. Procopius addresses several letters to him - Epp. 16, 102, 122, 125 and 164. In hagiographic texts, iatrosophists are often described as sympathizers of paganism; their methods appear ineffective compared to God's intervention, which alone can cure human illnesses. A "Gessius the iatrosophist" of Alexandria is mentioned by Sophronius Patriarch of Jerusalem (c. 560-638) in his work dedicated to the miracles of Saints Cyrus and John (*PG* 87/3, coll. 3380-3676); Gessius, a pagan physician, converted when the two Saints cured his painful illness, which his science had been unable to heal (coll. 3513-3520). See also *PLRE* II, p. 511 («Gessius 3»). Gessius became a symbol of the pagan Alexandrian intellectual of the 6th century; his image as a stubborn and arrogant pagan also spread in the Arab world. He studied philosophy in Alexandria with Ammonius and medicine under the guidance of the Jewish physician Domnus, then practiced and taught in the same city between the 5th and 6th centuries, gaining honour and wealth and

competing with his master. He married a Phrygian woman and had children, some of whom died prematurely shortly before their mother (cf. Ep. 125). The *Suda* (s.v. Γέσσιος, Γ 207 Adler) highlights Gessius' great culture and excellence as a physician and teacher. Gessius is the addressee of two letters by Aeneas of Gaza (Epp. 19 and 20) and is mentioned by Damascius in his Philosophical History (fr. 128 Athanassiadi). Furthermore, a section of Zacharias of Gaza's Ammonius (361-940 Minniti Colonna) is dedicated to a dialogue between Zacharias himself and "Gessius" the iatrosophist, his fellow student at Ammonius' school.

² According to myth, Apollo returned to Delphi after a stay of one year among the Hyperboreans, a mythical people who lived "beyond the North Wind"; his arrival was welcomed by the Delphians with a paean. See also Ep. 65, 7.

³ A famous proverb. The "swallow" is a reference to the letter from Gessius.

⁴ The extra swallows are almost certainly Gessius' students. The equation of the relationship between master and pupil with that between father and son is found, for example, also in Libanius, Epp. 718, 1; 1266,5 Foerster; etc.

⁵ Procopius alludes to the episode in Book VI of the Iliad in which Hector takes leave of his family hoping that the young Astyanax will surpass his father's fame.

⁶ This Dorotheus is probably the character indicated by Garzya and Loenertz as "Dorotheus B", who according to the editors (*Procopii*, pp. XXIX-XXX) would also be the son of Pelagius and the bearer of Ep. 33 to "Dorotheus A"; a student of Procopius who decided to continue his studies in the medical field with Gessius; from Ep. 102 we learn that Procopius' recommendation was successful.

⁷ Anastasius is probably a relative of Procopius previously recommended by him to Gessius, who is nevertheless at Gessius' school when Procopius writes the letter. A certain Anastasius is mentioned by Aeneas of Gaza in his Ep. 3 as the owner of a field and victim of an abuse, for which Aeneas takes his defense.

17. To his brother Philip¹

Again a letter from us and again you belong to those who are silent. And I am afraid that you will blame us for talking nonsense: for you, who are completely silent, think that those who converse even a little are chatterboxes. But if you, being far away, neglect your friends, then for all those who are far from you there is nothing left but to be silent.

Well, return to being what you were and speak to us; for good men who do not do their duty are presented as an example by those who wish to behave badly. I would like you also to bear the imprint of a man who would not neglect his duty, whatever happened. Besides, you have shown yourselves so scrupulous towards the service requested of you by letter, as if you were carrying it out for yourselves.

I hesitate to tell you that I wish your commitment to become even greater. For, in exchange for the greatest gratitude, this is the only thing we can render to those who request service from us.

¹ For Philip see ep. 7. Procopius reminds his brother to honour a commitment he has made towards another person.

18. To his brother Zacharias¹

It seems, my dear fellow, that you will never stop making fun of us. And by all the gods, if only you wouldn't stop! Thus I, hearing your words, smile at your letters, I reach you in thought, and it somehow seems to me that I speak to you and hear you speak.

So, if you care about grace in letters – and certainly you do care – "strike thus" and it will seem that you grant me riches greater than if you offered to make me Croesus. Call me a sophist again and

speak of love for applause, add to that the raised eyebrow,² the haughtiness, and everything that is dear to you.

Many times, then, after saying "sophist" you took your leave, because according to you it was the same thing to pronounce that word and to call someone presumptuous. I, however, could not deny my art; but if it is characteristic of it to push towards presumption, perhaps you too possess much of that art, so that I fear that, as much as you partake of it... but I will be silent out of respect for you.

Perhaps you wonder if, although being a sophist and seeing that spring has already arrived, although it is necessary to strut with eloquence,³ I have spent all this time in silence; and probably you look in letters for flowers, swallows, the transformation of the sea into calm, the beautiful Adonis and Aphrodite who extraordinarily loved him, and you wonder not to hear again about the rose and its grace.⁴ I, on the other hand, could not say anything of the sort at all, and especially not to you, to avoid that you, laughing, call me again a boor and a sophist.

¹ Responding to his rhetorician brother's taunts, Procopius defends his profession of sophist. This is a letter of great interest both for defining Procopius' poetics and for understanding the tasks, ideals and expectations of the sophists of the School of Gaza.

² "To raise the eyebrow", an image often used by Procopius, is a sign of haughtiness; cf. below, Epp. 19, 8; 29, 3; 34, 3; etc. Like Xenophon (*Symposium* VIII, 3), Philostratus indicates the position of the eyebrows as a distinctive sign of the intellectual when in his *Lives of the Sophists* (I, 24, 528) he says about Marcus of Byzantium, "The set of his eyebrows and his frowning face marked him as a sophist."

³ The connection between the appellation of "sophist" and a well-known declamation theme suggests that celebrating spring with appropriate declamations was among the specific tasks of the sophists of Gaza. For the *topos* of spring as the "season of speeches", see note on Ep. 7.

⁴ See Ep. 11.

19. To Epiphanius¹

You were truly skilled at inducing to speech or silence whomever you wished, and it seems to me that you behave similarly to someone who possesses a lyre and, having learned to use it, now composes a song, now instead keeps away from the strings. Then, whatever is considered more important compared to this, he immediately devotes himself to it, and neither he himself nor his lyre could ever again produce a harmonious sound. And while you are silent with us, since you have turned to novelties, suddenly those who were once dearest to you – but now perhaps are dear – are depressed and silent.

But I know why. The laws have forced you to be ready to raise your eyebrow haughtily.² Then, having assumed the haughtiness of a lawgiver and already thinking of guiding the Romans³ with your vote, you placed yourself thus above us. But since consideration and the memory of our old acquaintance have penetrated you with difficulty – and if only it had happened sooner! – yet, now that I have heard your tongue speak sweetly together with the swallows, I feel relieved in my soul and it seems to me that the sun emits more light, and now for me it is truly spring! But I hope that in the future you will become benevolent towards us and will never again lapse into oblivion of your old loves.

¹ Besides this letter, Epp. 55, 60, 99 and 148 are addressed to Epiphanius; he is also mentioned in Ep. 135 («Epiphanius 4», PLRE II, pp. 398-399). In the letters of Aeneas of Gaza, an Epiphanius is the subject of Ep. 4

and addressee of letters 12 and 23. Martindale distinguishes between the two doubtfully («Epiphanius 5», *PLRE II*, p. 399). If these are the same person, it appears that this Epiphanius, a sophist and then a jurist, moved to Alexandria, where he led a very pleasant life. From Procopius' words in this letter at ll. 8-10, it would appear that Epiphanius became governor of a province. In his commentary on Aeneas' Ep. 12, Massa Positano (*Enea*, p. 93) notes that, while Aeneas complies with Epiphanius' request to have his portrait and a letter, in Procopius' letters the roles seem reversed, as it is Procopius who complains about Epiphanius' silence. In this letter, Procopius reproaches him for the haughtiness he has assumed thanks to the success achieved in his new career, nonetheless expressing his joy at having received news from him.

² It is interesting that to Epiphanius, although now occupied with laws and no longer a sophist, is "extended" the topos of the raised eyebrow, the typical outward representation of sophists' pride (cf. Ep. 18).

³ Referring here to New Rome, i.e. the Byzantines.

20. To Strategius and Iliasius¹

Once again, fish are sprouting from your vines, and the fields, it seems, yield the fruits of the sea, and you can harvest the grapes from the fields and the sea at the same time, obtaining grapes on the one hand and fish on the other. The sea seems to imitate your ways: you willingly bear the expenses, and it desires to gratify your ambition.² Instead, the sea among us makes us like landlubbers, except that it offers its waves and delivers its threat without fish.

¹ A letter to two friends who are in Egypt, alluding to the Nile flooding the land being harvested. Epp. 49, 50 and 51 indicate that Procopius recommended Strategius to Sosianus and to Ulpian for a lawsuit. At some point, while in Alexandria, Strategius would have come into conflict with Epiphanius over the theft of a garment (Ep. 99). Attractive but unfortunately unprovable is the identification with Flavius Strategius II («Strategius 4», *PLRE II*, p. 1033) of the Apion family, who was *comes domesticorum* in 497. Iliasius is a lawyer (Ep. 35) and landowner (Ep. 74).

² Procopius seems to allude to an investment in fishing by the two landowners, whose expenses are repaid by the generosity of the sea.

21. To Sosianus¹

If someone is a lover of riches, he would not willingly speak or listen to others speak of anything other than them. If you were to bring him gold and offer it to him, you would receive the greatest honour from him. A man who is interested in weapons takes pride in having a beautiful shield and, by carrying it around, is even more filled with Ares. But what could be done to please an honest man than to offer him the opportunity to see people like himself?

Therefore, since I know that you are such by birth and wish to remain such, it seemed improper to me that you did not know the advocate Diodorus, but I bring and give him to you and you to him, believing that I will do a favour to both of you if you come to know each other by experience. Both of you will undoubtedly praise me for the gift I have managed to secure for my friends.

¹ Procopius puts Sosianus in touch with the lawyer Diodorus based on the fact that both are honest men, besides practicing the same profession. As emerges from the other letters addressed to him (Epp. 50, 64, 107 and 157), Sosianus is also a lawyer, practicing in Caesarea like Diodorus, and Procopius often turns to him to recommend acquaintances in need of obtaining justice. Sosianus indeed seems to hold an important position in the administration of justice in Caesarea: according to Martindale (*PLRE II*, p. 1022), he was *assessor* to the *consularis Palaestinae Prima*.

22. To John¹

May the most learned Diodorus be an opportunity for us to break our mutual silence by asking you to write and by giving you my letter. Indeed, he is my friend, but he was an admirer of yours even before he saw you; it was my stories about you that aroused his love even before he saw you. He is enamoured of beauty and solicitous for noble men, as if he feared that such people might escape him. But what need is there for me to speak to you about him? When you have met him in person, you will certainly believe my praise too little and will call me a weak rhetorician for not even being able to say what belongs to him.

¹ Another contact between lawyers and lovers of rhetoric: this time, Procopius acts as an intermediary between Diodorus (Ep. 8) and John (Ep. 5), who both live in Caesarea and practice the same profession there.

23. To Diodorus¹

See what has happened to me; but I expected it. For I thought that, as soon as you arrived there, seeing the magistrates' rostrum, the ranks of rhetoricians, and the crowd of clients following them, you would immediately be filled with pride, and if anyone even wanted to converse with them, you would not even tolerate it. You will hold us in low regard: of us you will no doubt say, more or less, "What do I care about those who hide in the shadows?" But if I also added "and walk on the earth," I would not even be surprised.² I expected it: this haughtiness is born in the rhetoricians of our time, who even call others "clients," praising what concerns them.

And now it seems that you first chose us as friends not because you judged us worthy, as is natural, but because, for lack of better people, you used those who were there, and certainly you regret the time you unworthily wasted with us. And now, as I write, I fear you may be angry with our letter. I would like to wish you good luck; and if it is inevitable that we will be scorned in return, it will be painful, but we will endure it nevertheless, consoling ourselves with your good fortune.

¹ Procopius expresses his resentment towards Diodorus, who neglects his friend of old once he started his career in another city (most likely Caesarea, cf. Ep. 29). Note the lively depiction of the world of the courts in lines 2-3.

² As if Diodorus was one of the gods, looking down on common mortals.

24. To Zacharias and Philip

May winter, which as usual brings suffering, take away the reason of past silence;¹ but for any future silence, should it occur, you would naturally be the ones to answer for it. Yet, what a calamity the silence of the beloved is for lovers, how could one show it to those who have never come to the test of facts? You certainly should know it, since you are so loving towards friends; indeed, I would not get such ideas into my head as to believe that I too am loved in return by you.

Yet I would pray that this happen to me rather than to strut in an abundance of gold and reach the pinnacle of any fortune. For thus each one, unable to be serene for desire, would certainly console my love.

But if nothing of this happens and, on the contrary, you continue to be silent, I will accuse you for having caused such sufferings, while some judge expert in love will judge you and decide what you

must suffer or pay in return. Or rather, suffering will be avoided for you so as not to sadden again me, who loves you; he, instead, will decide that you must compensate me with as many letters as can console me for your previous silence.

¹ For winter, cf. Ep. 7.

25. To his brother Philip¹

For good men, character is sufficient to establish friendship; but since there also has to be the opportunity, first to come to terms with one another and then, after having assessed the person, to appreciate him, I have therefore delivered my letter to the learned Theon. For at first, thanks to it, you will regard him with benevolence; then you will consider the written words superfluous, and you will appreciate him, as I believe, for his own sake.

¹ Procopius recommends to Philip the bearer of this short letter, Theon (perhaps a sophist: «Theon 5», PLRE II, p. 1107.)

26. To Eusebius¹

If even a single day makes lovers grow old,² how old do you think I have become, after being struck so much by desire for you (and who, after having tested you, does not go away nurturing love for you?) and after being deprived for so long of your sight? But you do well to alleviate my discouragement with your letters, rivalling those wise physicians who, not knowing how to cure, only manage to soothe the pain. Such you have become for us, offering your letters in your place. And now I begin to imitate the passionate lovers and console my love through your image. Our dear Megaius has you as his father thanks to nature and me thanks to art; thus imagine that he is beside your boy through me.³ If, however, I neglect something, think that I am not able to do it; and I blame fortune for not being able to do everything to please you as much as I would like. But, O gods, grant that neither of us be mistaken in the hope we have placed in the boy.

¹ Eusebius, a friend of Procopius, has entrusted his own son Megaius to him to be educated as a rhetorician. After the nostalgia for the friend's closeness, Procopius expresses the hope that the teaching he imparts to the boy will not disappoint the father's expectations. Eusebius might possibly be identified with a sophist of the same name mentioned by Photius (*Bibliotheca* codd. 132-135) and the *Suda* (E 3738 Adler).

² A *topos* of epideictic speeches – particularly of wedding speeches.

³ After attending Procopius' school, Megaius went on to study law with the rhetorician and jurist Thomas (Ep. 42).

27. To Elias¹

When I picked up your letter, I seemed to see you there— to such an extent did you infuse all your grace into the written words! – and thanks to your letter I found myself smiling very often, as when I was full of pleasure in seeing you. There's nothing extraordinary or unexpected about remembering distant friends, but what they'd been hoping for has come true.

As for me, even when I sleep I seem to converse with you; many times, upon waking, I was saddened because it was a dream. If it were easy for me to give you what you desire, certainly you would have already welcomed back my disciple Megaius as a perfect rhetorician.

¹ Also the addressee of Ep. 79 (together with his relative Eusebius, on whom see Ep. 26), and the young Megaius. It's unclear whether this is the same Elias as the bishop of Epp. 39 and 159, who is addressed much more formally.

28. To his brother Victor¹

I received your book, which was dearer to me before I had experienced it. For it has arrived with an extraordinarily solemn title, while its content presents nothing new, but rather something that has been treated by many and various authors. For your sake, let me pass over even what would be better said.

In any case, my gratitude to you will remain engraved in my memory, but not as the Persian did to Pausanias, who was not wise to the end. For he, having had no respect for Plataea and the triumphs he loved, handed over to barbarians the Greece he had saved, as if he could not bear to live happily to the end.²

But you, in honouring what is your duty, there is nothing you will not do. For you, therefore, there will be a reward: not the first, by Zeus, but another alongside many firsts. For good people, it will be enough as a single reward that those who have been benefited only remember what they have received. But may it happen to me that I never forget those who bring me benefits within the limits of their will, even if their intentions are not realized.

¹ Procopius gives Victor a negative judgement on his book, then asks for an unspecified favour. No other letter is sent to this brother, («Victor 6», PLRE II, p. 1159). Severus, patriarch of Antioch (c. 465-548), in Ep. 34 Brooks, mentions Zacharias the scholastic (cf. n. 39 ad Ep. 6) together with a presbyter Victor and a presbyter Philip, but it is not clear that this is the same Victor.

² The Spartan general Pausanias led the Greeks to victory against the Persians in the Battle of Plataea (479 B.C.). Suspected of pro-Persian sympathies, he managed to avoid conviction until evidence of his treason emerged; to escape capture, he took refuge in the temple of Athena Chalkioikos, where he was left to starve to death (467/6 BC). Cf. Thucydides, I, 129-134.

29. To Diodorus¹

Are you still silent? Do you still despise us? In fact, I thought you had had your fill of arrogance; while you consider silence a sign of dignity, we, on the other hand, will use this circumstance in a competitive spirit, so as to defeat the eyebrows you raise because of silence. For it is the usual story: you have just seen the city of Caesar,² and now you are exalted and angry that you cannot soar on the wings of Perseus, while when you think of us, everything seems small and insignificant.³

But, on your part, an ancient and universal law was transgressed. For when, indeed, one leaves his family and heads for a foreign land, he must be the first to send letters, describing how the voyage went, how the overland journey was, whether he enjoyed any favours of fortune, whether the new country welcomed him kindly. You have said nothing, and we cannot tell anything of this; As for me, you've become more silent than the fish themselves.

But lest our friendship, forgotten through silence, gradually dissolve, I renew our relationship and become more benevolent toward you. And you, in the name of Zeus, protector of friendship,⁴ continue to delight us as usual and in a manner worthy of your grace.

¹ This letter develops the same theme as Ep. 23, also addressed to Diodorus: Procopius complains about his friend's silence, who since moving to Caesarea seems to have forgotten him.

² Caesarea remained important in the Byzantine period because of the port, called "Sebastos", which was the largest in the Eastern Mediterranean and restored by Emperor Anastasius. Its cultural and religious preeminence was due both to a school of rhetoric, whose professors, as testified by Libanius Or. 31, 42, were very well paid even compared to more prestigious schools and to the theological school founded by Origen which, thanks to Origen himself and Pamphilus of Caesarea, was enriched with a library of over thirty thousand manuscripts.

³ Perseus, son of Zeus and Danae, received winged sandals from the Nymphs, which together with a wallet, Hades' helmet and a steel sickle allowed him to kill the Gorgon Medusa. In late antique epistolography and in Procopius' own letters, on the other hand, Perseus' wings or sandals constitute a common image to express the topos of distance: they are tools that the sender would like to possess to be able to bridge the distance separating him from the addressee (cf. also Epp. 58, 90 and 123).

⁴ As guarantor of the order of the cosmos, Zeus was also considered the protector of hospitality and friendship (cf. Odyssey IX, 266-271). Zeus Φίλιος was sometimes flanked by Zeus Μελίχιος ("propitious"); representations of both survive in the form of a serpent and holding a cornucopia. Zeus Φίλιος is mentioned or invoked also in Epp. 34, 56, 71, 91 and 117 of Procopius, as well as in Aeneas of Gaza, Ep. 1,8, and in many Byzantine epistles.

30. <...>¹

If something painful has happened, let us attribute it to the winds and to the fate of human affairs; it, raging against our things, chases them up and down; a small movement is enough and it transforms, since it does not want to see anything stable and immobile.

And, I believe, terrible is the suffering, but even more terrible is the sight of it for those who witness it. A girl whom not even all the relatives knew is led to the tomb instead of the bridal chamber, before everyone's eyes! And behold, the hopes of the betrothed have remained empty, while the marriage contract was torn up on her tomb. Alas, what a horrible thing: if only it had never happened!

However, we are not the first against whom fortune arrays itself: it has already snatched many other girls from the bridal chamber and transformed their nuptial room into a place of lamentation. Alas, how many who took pride in their hopes have become legends because of it!

But since it always holds the deciding vote and everything happens as soon as it wishes, let it be defeated with philosophy and the mind, and for those dedicated to the Muses, let knowing how to bear events represent a greater advantage. I admire, in fact, the wise man who said: "Since what we want does not happen, let us try to want what happens."²

She departs, leaving behind the earth, the pains of marriage and the pangs of childbirth, if there ever had been any. And I am silent about the dangers of raising children and the terror that things go badly even in good fortune. Freed from all the ills that accompany life, she goes along a truly well-trodden path, which we all must travel by the very fact of being born.

¹ In the manuscripts this letter is a continuation of the previous one. But in fact it contains a monody concerning the death of a girl before marriage. Procopius insists on the contrast between fate and human hopes and on the theme of death as liberation. Despite the careful rhetorical construction, which corresponds to the precepts of Menander Rhetor on the λόγος παραμυθητικός (II, 413,5-414, 30, pp. 160-165 Russell-Wilson), the letter stands out for its heartfelt tone, especially in the conclusion.

² Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 8.

31. To Diodorus¹

Now I have understood how unjust you were in the past by remaining silent; for just as you delighted me by writing to me, for the same reasons you cause me absolute pain with your silence. When I picked up your letter, I was filled with an old joy, for it seemed to me that you were present in the written words and I felt compelled to address you as if you were here. On the one hand I was speaking to you, on the other I seemed to hear you speak; and, barely recovering, I realized that it was a dream and that we had deceived ourselves.

So write often, so that, since we are deprived of your sight, we can enjoy dreams: even a good lover, when he is unhappy with his beloved, has a beautiful dream and changes his mood. In fact, I fear that, if I say this, you will fill with pride, believing it all to be true, and silence will return. Then try to believe that it's all lies: if only you could hear yourself conversing!

Furthermore, look kindly upon the one who brings you my letter, who is my nephew and relative by marriage, if we need to discuss the future,² offering him your eloquence as an ally if necessary, thinking of granting me your full benevolence.

¹ This letter seems to belong chronologically after Epp. 23 and 29: Procopius, on the one hand, rejoices because his friend Diodorus (cf. n. 53 ad Ep. 8) has finally broken his silence after his move to another city (perhaps Caesarea, as in Ep. 29), on the other hand, fears that in the future he may again break off contact. The letter concludes with the indication of its true purpose: Procopius' request that Diodorus lend his help – perhaps in some legal case – to the bearer, his close relative by marriage.

² The bearer of the letter is about to become a «nephew» (ἀνεψιός) and a «relative by marriage» (κηδεστής) of Procopius, perhaps through marriage to a relative of Procopius himself: a sister or a niece, but not a daughter, because Procopius was not married.

32. To Diodorus¹

Our dear friend Zacharias himself frequently relates how many benefits you have bestowed upon him, and we have heard him say it, and your letter also made it clear. However, it falls short of the truth, because, I believe, you seem to know better how to do good than to speak of it. This is not a lack of oratory, but a modesty that conceals its own virtue. I proclaim to everyone your concern for us even before it manifests itself, and nothing unexpected happens to us; indeed, everything we hope for comes true, and even though our hope is always great, the proof of events does not nullify it.

Well, I want to say even more; but you, I know not why, think I am joking, so I will remain silent; for such is your modesty that you believe even those who sincerely praise you are joking. But I do not depart from the truth when I joke, nor from a joke when I speak the truth, if what I say concerns those who love me. So trust my praise, for in my opinion you are not at all among those despised.

¹ A letter of thanks for help provided to Zacharias, probably the same as Procopius' brother (cf. Ep. 6).

33. To Dorotheus¹

You were truly skilled at making small things great, at bestowing your muse on whomever you wished, and at describing me with your praises not as I am, but as it would be fitting for me to be. But with the very words with which you requested my discourses, using the Attic language² sacred to the Graces, you persuade me not to send them of my own free will, for fear that my children will be tested by your judgment. For our art, meeting with benevolent judges, perhaps seems great, while it will seem the opposite to anyone who wishes to analyze it.

But would that the first alternative were valid for me! Because, fearing your letter, my speeches often cried out, "Father, leave us alone," I with difficulty consoled them by promising that they would go from one house to another: "Since he already enjoys the company of the Muses," I said, "he would not go looking for you unless he also had the intention of exalting you."

The bearer is a fellow citizen of yours devoted to the Muses: his name is Dorotheus and they call him "son of Pelagius".

¹ Procopius sends to Dorotheus a volume of his speeches, expressing admiration for his friend's skill in rhetoric and not a little fear of his judgment. From Ep. 28 we learn that Victor did the same with Procopius: it was, therefore, a custom for the learned men of Gaza to submit their works to the judgment of their colleagues. Dorotheus, addressee of this letter and of Ep. 117, appears as a skilled rhetorician and a subtle literary critic («Dorotheus 10», PLRE II, p. 378).

² Atticism, an important part of the cultural program of the Second Sophistic (cf., e.g., Anderson, *The Second Sophistic*, pp. 89-100), was pursued as a stylistic ideal also by the literati of Gaza. According to Choricus (*op. VIII*, 8), Procopius was famous for his Attic style.

34. To his brother Philip

Oh, how much the Loves¹ can do and how many things they transform, and confirm with their deeds that nothing is stronger than they! They seem to say: "More than anything we hate contempt." And if someone raises his eyebrow and cares nothing for the words of a lover, they overturn the situation and behold, that haughty one suddenly begins to love and speaks humbly.

What do I mean by this? You certainly already know and laugh about it, yet it will be said to do them honour. For my desire to see you, having fallen upon me with all its intensity, dragged my reason along with it; I was terribly confused and did not know what had happened to me. Then it seemed to me that there was only one consolation: if you, though being far away, had spoken to me and I had often heard you speak. When, therefore, you learned of the matter, you experienced an unusual sensation – alas! – and you rose to arrogance. I loved you, but you paid no attention at all. I needed you and had nothing more. I adduced kinship, I addressed you as brother, I reminded you of Zeus, protector of friendship, but you in return were silent. In short, the situation was hopeless.

What happened then? I spoke to the Loves and wept, invoking their weapons; and behold, they listen to me! They struck you while you, having experienced it, were transformed, and you, who were formerly arrogant with us, implored me to become benevolent, so as not to experience from us the same things we experienced from you.

But, dear Loves, I obey you and before taking revenge I reconcile. If then he acts thoughtlessly again... but I do not think he would dare.

¹ See Ep. 10, n. 2.

35. To Ilasius¹

If an old saying has it that friends' possessions are shared,² and the most learned Peter is my friend, then naturally one might believe him also yours. If, then, it is right that I love him, the test of facts will show it many times over, while the sight of him meanwhile will bear witness to his character.

Because he needs a favour from you and absolutely wants to obtain it, he induced me to write this letter, believing that I have such influence over you that I cannot reasonably fail. But if what he believes is true, strengthen his opinion further; if instead it is false, help him even in that case, so that in the eyes of others it does not appear that we invent a mutual friendship. Moreover, he has justice on his side,³ and it is dear to you even without anyone asking you anything. Being able to prevent an injustice and neglecting to do so is equivalent to committing it, which is foreign to your way of thinking.

Know also that you will certainly consent, persuaded either by my letters or by his presence. Only in one way will you cause us pain: if, by delaying, you show your moral virtue to be too weak.

¹ Procopius asks the lawyer Ilasius (cf. Ep. 20) to assist his friend Peter. If Ep. 135 is addressed to the same Peter, he might be a grammarian or a rhetorician, colleague of Procopius («Petrus 22», PLRE II, p. 869); the unspecified accusation referred to in Ep. 135, if directed at Peter (and not at Epiphanius, the bearer of the letter) is perhaps the reason for Procopius' request to Ilasius.

² A proverbial expression, which Diogenes Laertius attributes to Pythagoras (VIII, 10), and is found in Euripedes and Plato, and in Aeneas of Gaza (Ep. 6), and became a *topos* in late antique and Byzantine letter-writing.

³ In Ep. 135 also Procopius insists on the falsity of the accusation against Peter.

36. To Elias¹

Those who have experienced your gift are led by knowing it to admiration, and its fame has the same effect on others, while both things induce me to keep forever a written memory of your generosity. I myself, when I am admired for having procured such benefits for my country, it is to you that I trace back in my memory the origin of those benefits. Behold, therefore, that I always prattle on inappropriately, attributing small things to you; and there is nothing strange about this; for not even those who burn incense to the gods show gratitude proportionate to their worth, but they show their goodwill as much as they can. And in what is offered to you, the greater things are as valuable as the lesser, if measured by your kindness.

¹ In thanking Elias for an unspecified gift, Procopius praises him as a model of generosity: no reward would ever be adequate for the benefits he has conferred. The Elias of this letter is perhaps the bishop of Ep. 159 and less likely the friend of Epp. 27 and 49; cf. n. 150 ad Ep. 27. Identification with Elias *pater civitatis* of Caesarea, remembered by an inscription commemorating the construction of a basilica, is also possible («Elias 6», PLRE II, p. 391).

37. To his brothers Zacharias and Philip¹

Hurrah for your letter, which lifted my spirits so much with joy! For what is more pleasant than hearing people speak, when one has prayed that they are close at least in words? "Fortune should have granted this long ago, but one day it might happen and come to a good end with your favour, O gods, if only they at least intend to send us a letter in place of themselves."

For some, it would be a pleasure to be like Croesus and possess his wealth, for another to be called "Great King"; another, seeing the swallows, declares that he possesses spring, while I, rejoicing in your voice, felt prouder than Croesus with his famous talents, and prouder than the Great King sitting under the plane tree;² and instead of swallows it seemed to me that the Muses themselves were singing for me.

But now I will stop, because, by overstating my pleasure, I might end up sounding like a sophist in my letter, and because, laughing among yourselves, you might make fun of me for the same old story. I only say that addressing you both together gave me double pleasure, as happened to those who went to Delphi, when, singing a hymn, they addressed Apollo, but also Artemis was part of the song.³ This delighted the gods more than if one had sung each separately. For, being siblings, they wanted to remain such also in songs.

¹ Procopius' response to a letter from his brothers in which, besides some *topoi* of the epistolary genre, the motif of jokes about sophistic art already known from Epp. 7 and 18 appears.

² Herodotus (VII, 31) narrates that Xerxes, while marching against Greece, found in Lydia a beautiful plane tree, which he had decorated with gold, placing an armed guard there.

³ For example, in the Homeric Hymn III, to Apollo, Artemis is several times celebrated and invoked together with her brother (vv. 158, 165, 199).

38. To his brother Zacharias¹

You complain that the seasons have passed, but I complain that I am here again. So why do you remain silent? It is not enough to defend oneself by anticipating the reproach that may be levelled at us, but a guilty man who reproaches others—if you ignore the fact that it is others who he accuses in his claims—blames himself. Do not use as an excuse our stay in Byzantium accompanied by our silence; for me, in fact, even this Pamphylia is a witness that she spoke much but heard nothing.²

Oh, if only there were again a venerable tribune, an Attic judge, and the splendid vision of Athens, when rhetoric was at the height of its glorious destiny, while Plato – how to say it calmly? – could not bear its triumph. Immediately an accusation would have been lodged against you: "This man offends Greece since he scoffs at rhetoric, which is the foundation of cities," and I would come to accuse you.

But let me joke a little: already, from anger, I am filled with words of accusation and I could not keep silent the exordium: "There is nothing worse, O judges, than a man who denigrates that from which his power derives. For example, this fine man (I speak of you) even dares to speak ill of rhetoric, from which his prosperity and fame derive. Even if acquitted, then, he would be defeated, since he defeats that from which his victory comes. And he uses as a witness Plato, who placed rhetoric in last place and thundered loudly against the arrogance of rhetoricians."³

Having learned this, the judges of my speech... but no, I could not yet propose the penalty! But in your speeches, add Polus and Callicles,⁴ the disciples of Plato, who created them as spokesmen for his conclusions, as in a drama. Otherwise, grant that even the Socrates of comedy prevails.⁵

¹ On Zacharias, cf. n. 39 ad Ep. 6. After reproaching his brother for his silence, Procopius criticizes him for his contempt towards rhetoric. The logical relationship between the two parts is, however, very tenuous.

² The meaning of this passage is not clear. Procopius admits that while he was in Byzantium he did not write letters. Possibly he was staying in Pamphylia when he wrote this letter. Hercher understood the meaning as "For even this Pamphylia is my witness that I have spoken much, but have heard nothing."

³ In the first part of Plato's *Gorgias* (447a-461b) Socrates affirms the inferiority of rhetoric compared to philosophy. After the Second Sophistic, however, the contrast between rhetoric and philosophy becomes more apparent than real and is only a pretext for rhetorical exercises.

⁴ Polus and Callicles are characters in Plato's *Gorgias*. "Polus" is probably the nickname ("foal") that Plato gave to a sophist from Agrigento, a disciple of Gorgias and, according to Su(i)da (Π 2170 Adler), author of a *Περὶ λέξεων* and a scholar of the Homeric poems. Polus, against Socrates' criticisms, defends rhetoric and accepts injustice as a means to obtain and exercise power. Callicles, in whose house the dialogue takes place, is otherwise unknown to us; based on his defense of hedonism, of natural right over laws and of the active life over philosophy (Grg. 481c-522e), attempts have been made to identify him with other well-known personalities of 5th century Athens, such as Critias or Alcibiades.

⁵ In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Socrates represents sophistic rhetoric, skilled in making the weaker argument prevail.

39. To Zacharias¹

Winter has a limit for us; indeed, it ended while we were complaining about both your silence and the season. Instead, to our great joy, spring has arrived, and it has become more spring-like than usual: not only do the swallows sing of the season, but fame itself proclaims its vote in your favour, saying that you have made great progress and have become a member of a circle of prosperous rhetoricians. If it were to add to this what we wish for you, your success would certainly not be lacking. Then, if this has truly happened, I will pray for even greater successes; but if we must rejoice only in words, I praise fame and, thanks to it, divine the deeds.

¹ Procopius congratulates his brother on his career advancement, although he is not quite sure whether the rumours he has heard are accurate. The details are in the following letter (Ep. 40).

40. To Zacharias¹

Now I truly understand that the news was not just words but facts, and I certainly admire the Attic law, which also placed Rumour among the deities. For not only does Hesiod sing of her as a goddess, but also the Athenians, who learned of the battle of Mycale on the same day, said that it would be unacceptable not to consider Rumour a goddess.²

If, therefore, I were speaking to someone else, I would have said that you would immediately raise an eyebrow and declare that you would suffer terribly if someone did not repeatedly call you the lawyer of the powerful. Moreover, you would be prouder than Demosthenes on the Attic tribunal: he guided a single city by speaking as an orator, while you will preside over a tribunal from which justice for the subjects of an emperor derives.

These things I would say to another but would keep silent for you, whom I see more modest in your successes. Therefore, I always awaiting even greater events. Fortune, in fact, without fail, grants its favours to men of this kind, not at all envious of those who preceded them.

¹ The rumours in Ep. 39 are true: Zacharias has become a judge of the imperial court with supervisory functions and, as such, can be considered even superior to Demosthenes. Procopius, in praising his success and lack of arrogance, wishes his brother further progress in the future.

² According to Herodotus (IX, 100-101), at the Battle of Mycale (479 B.C.), the Greek naval squadrons defeated the Persian fleet after learning of the land forces' victory at Plataea, which had occurred the morning of the same day; therefore, the news of the Plataea victory, which reached Athens after the battle, also applied to the Mycale victory, fought a few hours later.

41. To his brother Zacharias

Welcome this letter, which is late and yet full of confidence for having reached a friend. Therefore, do not disappoint it in its hope by rejecting it and frowning your brows before it, since they say that even lovers who succeed late and with difficulty forget past sufferings because of present pleasure. But if you show yourself harsh towards it, it is painful to say, but I will say it. For I fear that another one will not easily reach you, since it will consider you arrogant and will take into account what the previous one suffered.

42. To Thomas¹

Truly now Justice and the Muses flourish and dwell among us. Having found your soul divided between just judgment and oratory, they now agree, as is natural, given that they are sisters and have the same father, Zeus.² For since, some time ago, you left without holding the city of Caesar³ in your power, what woes have occurred! They have abandoned our cities,⁴ while our affairs were being neglected; and they stayed with their father, accusing those on earth. But at a new signal you have returned to us, and behold, fortune has regained strength for the subjects. For if you pronounce a sentence, Justice does not reject it, and if you deliver a speech, the Muses certainly praise it.

But I will tell you what has amazed me most of all. The fact that you, despite your superiority, do not neglect those inferior to you – indeed, not only do you arrange conversations,⁵ but you remember friendship and wish to listen to anyone who has something to say – is on the one hand an addition to my admiration for you who, I believe, are a follower of the philosophy of Socrates.⁶ On the other hand, it is a burdensome situation for me, who as far as I can live alone and pray to remain hidden. And if I did not want to obtain another letter from you, I would remain silent, not knowing what to say after you.

But now I am ashamed to write and at the same time I cannot bear to remain silent, challenging your tongue to resound its harmony once more and hunting for something great with my small means.

May many and great successes befall him to whom it has fallen to administer our cities! Wishing to reveal the future before it came to pass, and recalling the memory of his former fortune, he called you as his collaborators and immediately prophesied the future to all.

I loved dear Megaius even before, as is natural, and I gave him everything I had. This is what the law of art requires. But he has both a father and a relative⁷ capable, thanks to their moral virtue, of instilling commitment even in an lazy person. Since you have now been put in charge of the boy, I will express a just prayer: O Zeus and you, other gods, grant that I may be more skilled than before and that Megaius may benefit from our help as much as the one who cares for him desires.

¹ Thomas, also addressee of Ep. 68, was a rhetorician who later became governor (*consularis*) of the province *Palaestina Prima*: cf. PLRE II, p. 1114 («Thomas 8»). From this letter it appears that, after holding a position in Caesarea, Thomas went elsewhere and then returned to the city, recalled by a high magistrate (ll. 17-19: perhaps the *praefectus Orientis*), encouraged by Thomas' good performance in his previous office (ll. 17-19). The letter also provides evidence of Procopius' involvement in the political life of his city. In congratulating his friend on his new appointment in Caesarea, Procopius praises his oratorical skill and competence in legal matters, which are combined with decorous modesty; finally, Procopius entrusts to him his former pupil Megaius, who has entered the provincial administration and is therefore now his subordinate (cf. Epp. 26,27 and 79) (E.A.).

² According to Hesiod, Zeus is father of both Justice (*Th.* 902) and the Muses (*Op.* 2).

³ Caesarea.

⁴ Caesarea, Gaza and the other cities of the province governed by Thomas.

⁵ Thomas convenes meetings among the *proteuontes* of the province. Procopius did the same according to Choricus (*op.* VIII, 31, p. 121 Foerster-Richtsteig = Proc. Gaz., *Test.* IX Amato). Moreover, his epistolary extensively demonstrates his relationships with the social and cultural elite of the Syro-Palestinian region (E.A.).

⁶ cf. Plato, Ap. 29d-31b.

⁷ Procopius refers respectively to Eusebius (Epp. 26, 27 and 79) and Elias (Epp. 27 and 79).

43. To his brother Zacharias¹

After reading your letters, I feel, in a certain sense, that I am no longer in the same state as before, but I am seizing the opportunity and considering it an unexpected gain. For suddenly I too am among those who ask you for something, and you, surprised, I believe, at my haste, will say the "What's the hurry!" of the comedy.² But I would have considered it reprehensible if, worried about time, I had not very quickly asked you for what it is appropriate for both you and me to grant.

The man who delivers the letter to you, Aeneas, is a fellow citizen of ours, whom I hope will prosper through your help. For he is of good family, has the manners of a noble man, and as an art he knows the laws. He wishes to make use of his art in such a way that it will be possible for him to remain noble in spirit: for he does not know how to enjoy gain unless it is combined with justice.

This can also be learned from the test of facts. Having been appointed justice in several cities and defender of justice,³ he lived up to this title to such a degree that he even defeated sycophancy. No one, in fact, had any reproach against him, not even unjustly. Indeed, this seemed even a laughingstock to the magistrates before you, who merely took, while he was not one of those who gave. For this reason he ceased to hold office, while others, as is natural, were doing things worthy of what they had given. Now, however, he wishes to return to his former position, bringing you the gift of a just mind. Am I perhaps beginning my requests with inappropriate arguments? Then, if you appreciate my request, honour it with your actions!

¹ Procopius asks his powerful brother Zacharias to help the bearer of the letter, Aeneas, to obtain a position. Aeneas («Aeneas 4», PLRE II, p. 17) is a lawyer from Gaza and *defensor civitatis* who had to resign from his office because of his honesty. According to the following letter, Procopius' request was successful.

² Procopius may be referring to the initial scene of Menander's *Dyscolus*: at v. 52, Chaereas asks Sostratus if it is possible that he fell in love with a girl immediately after seeing her. Sostratus replies affirmatively, εὐθέως, «immediately», and Chaereas comments: ὡς ταχύ, «how hasty!».

³ This properly refers to the *defensor civitatis*. Instituted by Emperor Valentinian with a law of 368 (*Codex Theodosianus* I, 29, 1), this magistracy required a man "of suitable morality" (*idoneis moribus*) and with experience in administrative and judicial fields. From the 6th century onwards, the *defensor civitatis* had, among others, the task of controlling the imperial bureaucratic apparatus, in order to protect the *cives* from abuses by public officials. The office lasted five years, non-renewable.

44. To his brother Zacharias¹

Having read your letter with joy, as is natural, because I could not praise it as it deserved I almost sent you the same letter in reply, only changing the address. Those to whom you sent my writings, magnifying them, thought they were hearing praise of yours, but it seemed to me that you were behaving almost as if Nireus, who "came to Ilium as the most beautiful man,"² was admiring Thersites. Therefore, shame for the praises assailed me, but not to the point of not rejoicing in them. For your letter, precisely where it wished to praise my things, was in full splendour and displayed its beauty, and induced the lover to a greater desire. Yet in your letter you also exalted, and not a little, my mediation.

But if I am praised for having acted as intermediary, what would I be if I had made the concession myself? For as much as giving is superior to asking, so much does he who undertakes to give surpass him who has asked in the reckoning of moral virtue. The most learned Aeneas rejoices as if he had already obtained his goal; having already tested you, he regards what is about to be done as if it had already been accomplished.

If, however, he announces it before having obtained it, how would he behave once he has achieved what he desires? And one day, recounting your life, you will certainly add that you knew how to double your favours also through speed. If only it had been possible to transform the excellent Megaius into a rhetorician in one day, we would not have needed a second day.

¹ Procopius responds to a letter from his brother, first thanking him for having praised his writings and then for having intervened on behalf of Aeneas (cf. the previous letter).

² Iliad 2, lines 670: Nireus (Greek: Νιρεύς) "Moreover Nireus led three shapely ships from Syme, Nireus that was son of Aglaïa and Charops the king, Nireus the comeliest man that came beneath Ilios of all the Danaans after the fearless son of Peleus." The same quotation appears in Ep. 161.

45. To his brothers Zacharias and Philip¹

I loved the excellent Julian for other reasons as well—he was capable of inspiring everyone he met to desire him—but I was still more pleased because he has become a reason for exchanging letters with you. If I ever succeeded in achieving this, I feel I would be beyond Cinyras.²

He asks for nothing unpleasant, but, wanting me to be near him and present, he hopes that this will happen thanks to you, as certainly I do too. In any case there is nothing I would not be if I were there.³

I don't know what a "consistory"⁴ is – its Roman noise hurts my ear!⁵ – but thanks to you I even love that name; I would really like it to be something divine, and I honour the name of something whose function I do not know. But if your fortunes have changed for the better, at least remain in fact what you were before,, so that I do not call you a haughty consistorian.

¹ The first part of the letter is a request for assistance for Julian, most likely a pupil of Procopius who wants to try his hand at a career in the imperial bureaucracy; the text is, however, unclear at ll. 5-6. In the continuation, with one of his usual rapid transitions, Procopius comments on the promotion of one of his brothers or both to the imperial council.

² Midas and Cinyras, kings respectively of Phrygia and Cyprus, were famous for their enormous wealth; see Plato, *Lg.* 660e. According to the most well-known version of the myth, Cinyras killed himself after realizing he had committed incest with his daughter Smyrna, who was then transformed into a myrrh tree; from that union Adonis was born (cf. Pseudo-Apollodorus, III, 14, 4; Hyginus, *Fab.* 57; Ovid, *Met.*, X, 298-524; etc.).

³ The passage is ambiguous and probably hides a lacuna in the original text (E.A.).

⁴ The successor to the *consilium* of the late Roman empire, starting from Constantine I the *consistorium* was the private council of the Byzantine emperor. It took its name from the hall where meetings were held, rather than from the obligation for participants to remain standing for the duration of the sessions (*silentia*), as is commonly believed. By the end of the 4th century, the *consistorium* was composed of the main administrative officials (e.g., *magister officiorum*, *comes sacrarum largitionum*, *comes rerum privatarum*, etc.), some military offices and other minor officials. The consistorium dealt with the promulgation of imperial laws, the reception of ambassadors and the discussion of affairs of great political and judicial importance. Later, participation in the *consistorium* was extended to senators, until in the 6th century, with Justinian I, the distinction between *consistorium* and senate became insignificant. See A. Kazhdan, «Consistorium», ODB I, p. 496. The function of Zacharias or Philippus or both, as lawyers, was probably that of *comites consistoriani*, who attended meetings of the *consistorium* as legal experts when it met for matters pertaining to justice; cf. PLRE II, p. 876.

⁵ Procopius' contempt for the Latin language, a *topos* inherited from the Second Sophistic and beyond, is more apparent than real if one considers that in Ep. 12 Procopius does not scruple to use a Latinism.

46. To his brother Zacharias¹

My country—God willing—looked upon us with benevolent eyes: it restored the people dear to me as I prayed to find them, and after a short interval it gathered spectators and aroused applause for me.² Moreover, a certain fame took hold of me and made me the talk of the town; in a certain sense I even seem to possess the boldness of youth, to have my mind exalted by applause, and to truly possess the art of sophistry, as you would say.

Make fun of me for this, by all means; I will not tolerate not being brilliant, not raising an eyebrow, and not following the rules of my art. And it's fine, let them joke, so that as usual I may provide you with material for your mirth. You should know, in fact, that by making fun of me you give me more joy than others who make me the target of much praise.

¹ Procopius received a favourable reception on his return to Gaza, which he uses to defend himself against his brother's teasing.

² Treating *θέατρον* as metonymy for "spectators", "audience".

47. To his brother Philip¹

Here's another letter, but you—I don't know what's happened to you—are silent again. If you say you don't have time, or rather, that your profession always brings you some opportunity for profit,

it's certainly terrible—alas, terrible!—if you can't even indulge in it for a little while throughout the year, but I nevertheless congratulate you on your industry. If, on the other hand, you're silent because you're growing rich through your art,² I also rejoice with you, but I really wouldn't want you to become so rich that you exalt yourself above us and no longer recognize those who were once so dear to you.

Yet we stand open-mouthed awaiting your letters and look at the sea no less than Phyllis did while calling out to that unjust Demophon, who was incapable of returning her love. Demophon, when he was newly married, as Phyllis's love was growing, left the bridal chamber, giving her hope that he would certainly return. So when he had taken his leave and left, he immediately turned around and no longer saw Phyllis, while she wept as she gazed out to sea and counted the ships, hoping one of them might be carrying Demophon.³

In reality, I believe our situation is more terrible: for he never wanted to show himself again, while you, though being not far away, refuse to send letters.

¹ Procopius does not accept that his brother has no time to write to him; if the reason is too much work and, consequently, a thirst for gain, Philippus risks becoming haughty and heartless like Demophon of myth.

² Possibly the art of rhetoric. Philip was perhaps a rhetorician or a lawyer, like his brother Zacharias (cf. Ep. 7).

³ For the myth of Phyllis, a Thracian princess seduced and abandoned by Demophon, king of Athens, son of Theseus (cf. Ep. 57), see Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Epit.*, VI, 16-17; Hyginus, *Fab.* 59; Ovid, *Ep.* 2; etc.

48. To Constantius¹

While I was still living on the Nile, I received your beautiful letter. It would be unfair to pass over in silence what happened to me because of it. As soon as the bearer handed it to me and added where it came from, I felt a feeling of love. For a while I was detached from all notion of the truth, and already it seemed to me that you were really beside me, and then I said: "My dearest fellow, how you have made me suffer by your absence, but now you have come to find the one who desires you."

Because, by repeating these words over and over, I gave the bystanders a chance to imagine what was happening to me, they said to me: "But what is the matter with you? He didn't come here to see you!" When I returned to my senses, I felt pain at being disappointed in such a hope; after weeping a little, I realized how strong love was and that it was an illusion consoling reason. When I then unsealed the letter and read it, I was so pleased that I knowingly detached myself from reality, repeating several times, "Isn't it him again...?" It was the desire that this would come true in the future that spurred me on.

¹ Constantius does not appear elsewhere in Procopius' epistolary; Martindale («Constantius 13», *PLRE* II, pp. 320-321) hypothesizes that he might be the Constantius native of Tarsus and *comes Orientis* who, according to John Malalas (*Chron.* XVI, 38 b, p. 393 Dindorf), suppressed the Green revolt in Antioch in 494. Anyway, this deeply emotional letter might belong to Procopius' youth as it seems to refer to his stay in Alexandria, perhaps to pursue his studies in rhetoric, although Procopius may have visited Alexandria at other times in his life, cf. Ep. 96.

49. To Ulpus¹

Although I had loved the excellent Strategius even before, I have now loved him even more, since he has become the subject of our correspondence. He, having broken the previous silence, has allowed us to speak to you and to hear you speak again. However, if our letters also give you pleasure, honour the one responsible for them, who is already grateful to you for your past solicitude, but will proclaim your generosity even more if you continue the favour. Instead, show a certain vigour against the unjust, so that everyone will understand what friends I have in store. I knew your brother even before I met him, because his fame often made him known to me. But when I met him in person I was even more amazed. I knew your brother even before I met him; in fact, his fame often made him known to me; but when I met him in person, I was even more amazed. Seeing him, I thought I saw you in someone else's body, and since you have been away for a long time, it seemed to me that you were beside us, but in another guise.

¹ Procopius asks Ulpus to assist Strategius (on whom see Ep. 20) in a legal matter; in the conclusion of the letter, he mentions his meeting with Ulpus' brother, who closely resembles him. From this letter and from Ep. 51, Ulpus (*PLRE II*, pp. 1181-1182) appears as a lawyer, a former fellow student of Procopius and therefore bound to him by deep friendship; Strategius is his client and probably also his student in law studies.

50. To Sosianus¹

It was truly right that I asked you boldly for a favour and that you promptly granted it. It's a fitting situation for both of us: for me to say what's needed, and for you to translate that word into action. Strategius has told me that your commitment to him has been so great that, as far as it depends on you, the trial is over and we have won. But see that this also happens in practice. In fact, I'm so confident, hoping for a conclusion with your help, that even before it ends, I'm searching for the words to express my gratitude for your favour.

¹ A letter asking for help with an unspecified problem from the lawyer Sosianus (cf. Ep. 21). Procopius reminds his friend that his assistance to Strategius (cf. Epp. 49 and 51) was very effective, and he hopes to benefit from the same advantage himself.

51. To Ulpus¹

You have avoided a copious accusation we had prepared against you. For when Strategius arrived without bringing letters, he was ashamed to approach me – and how could he not be? – and as he repeatedly tried to escape, I barely caught him. Then I called him odious, and an enemy of the gods because, having arrived among us, he brought no news of you, dearest friends, of whom I have often prayed to hear something.

However, he defended himself adequately, saying, in fact, that it was the haste of his departure that caused him to bring no letters. So I pardoned him, who was ashamed of this, while I said to myself, "Truly, how many things can time bring and transform! For dear Ulpus, when he shared our former fortune with us, was a friend and showed himself such. I would never have believed that he would change. But now that he has risen to glory and become powerful, he is unbearable in success and forgets his former friends. But as long as he is successful, we will patiently endure being neglected."

With these and similar words I was putting together a copious accusation against you. But the moment someone arrived to deliver me a letter from you, at first, before opening it, I kissed it many times; then, when I read the contents and found your excuses for the delay, I was not a little pleased and repented of my earlier words. Or rather, I said, "Alas, how many vain suspicions men have! Neither time nor fortune have changed the excellent Ulpius for us; on the contrary, he is kind to me and recognizes me as his former benefactor." But may you not induce us to accuse you again by returning to silence!

¹ After receiving a letter from Ulpius, Procopius regrets having doubted his friendship and having accused him of arrogance. On Ulpius, cf. Ep. 49.

52. To Silanus¹

You have disappointed us in a hope whose greatness you cannot express. For when I picked up your previous letter and learned from it that you would soon return to us, I was overjoyed and, heaving a great sigh of pleasure, I said, "O Zeus, if only this would happen!"

So every day I was waiting and I encouraging myself with a faint hope, saying indeed many times, "Perhaps one day I will see him and be able to speak to him after so long a time?" and "If only I could be with him again!" But since the time was now beyond hope, I did not consider it worthwhile even to write, doing this as a stimulus to love, as they say, so that you, thinking you were being despised, might be drawn even more towards us, wanting to reproach us for not remembering friends.

For it seems to me that you have become to us like the rhetorician Stratocles.² He indeed announced a victory to the Athenians, who had actually been defeated but were unaware of the outcome of the battle. Immediately, therefore, the city was saved and gave itself over to celebration, and despite their misfortune they rejoiced! But when the truth was announced and the pretence no longer held, "What harm have I done – said Stratocles – if thanks to me at least for two days you were happier and my pretence was useful?" But since, as it seems to Pindar, concern for one's mother is above occupations, may your country see you first, and us after her.

¹ Procopius expresses his displeasure because Silanus, despite having announced his return to Gaza, has not yet done so. He is, however, forced to acknowledge that the false announcement lifted his spirits and had on him the same effect that Stratocles' announcement had on the Athenians. From the letters addressed to him, it appears that Silanus was a lawyer (Ep. 109), a fellow student of Procopius in Alexandria; perhaps of Athenian origin (E.A.), he was nevertheless a good connoisseur of Attic style (Ep. 96).

² The episode cited here by Procopius would have occurred on the occasion of the naval defeat of the Athenians by the Macedonians in the Battle of Amorgos (322 B.C.) and is narrated by Plutarch (Demetr. 11). Stratocles, an Athenian orator, was an opponent of Demosthenes, a friend of Lycurgus and an ardent supporter of Demetrius Poliorcetes.

53. To his brother Philip¹

Behold, another letter for you from us, and again I know that you will remain silent. If you would allow me to say something I hate, your character has transformed into presumption and you do not wish to remain what you were before. But it's a good thing that I did not cross the Bosphorus Sea and come to the imperial city!² Perhaps I too, on seeing the great emperor, the robes of the highest dignitaries, some office with a resounding name, and this magnificence of yours – whether you wish

to speak of things or names – would raise my eyebrow and entertain bold feelings, raising myself to the level of the things that would parade before my eyes, and what was formerly dear to me would seem like a trifle. Since you yourself have been conquered by these things, I could not easily say whether I would avoid suffering the same fate, unless there arose in me the reasoning that mind and fortune are not the same thing, my dear fellow, but the latter moves as seems opportune to it, often changes, and makes fun of us, while, as for the former, it is right for a sensible man to master it and that not to be exalted with it when it is exalted, nor to change with it when it is cast down.

¹ Procopius attributes Philip's silence to the arrogance he derives from frequenting the opulent imperial court; he declares, therefore, that he is glad he did not also go to Constantinople and that he avoided a similar fate. On a related subject is Ep. 47. On Philip, Procopius' brother and imperial official, cf. Ep. 7.

² i.e. Constantinople, also called this in Epp. 76 and 136.

54. To his brother Zacharias¹

What sort of person would I become if I accepted a lover and brother who accuses me and thinks that we have nothing to say? And what do you say? We are rhetoricians and fathers of many “daughters”; it seemed right to me to call our letters this. “But this,” you say, “is past; now it no longer counts,”² but we are arrogant and despise the bond of love.

But if I were a poet, I would certainly invoke Apollo and the Muses saying: “Grant me to speak, to persuade, and not to seem unjust to my beloved.” Now, however, I will at least imitate poetic language “and I will swear a great oath, and may the gods be my witnesses” that as far as we are concerned, things are not as perhaps as people say, but we still have respect for friendship and memory of those dearest to us. “Then,” you ask, “why the silence?” I fear that an unjust fortune may outrage my offspring³ and transport my daughters, intended for you, one to one place, another to another; for somehow they have been received by strangers, who know not who they are or where they come from. And since I have fared ill with them, behold, I seemed, nay, am judged insensitive.

Why then grieve, by mentioning the others too? But, if I am not mistaken, yesterday or the day before yesterday one was sent to you telling of my adventures, and now, it seems, she is wandering, a stranger and alone.

But may she one day come into your hands, and may I rejoice in learning of it! For when I received your roses,⁴ I rejoiced over them no less than Odysseus did at the sight of the munificence of Alcinous; indeed on that occasion it was only the receiving that brought pleasure, while for us both things do, namely that you give and I take.

¹ Procopius defends himself against the accusation of silence made by his brother, citing the fear that his letters might not reach their destination.

² cf. Euripides, *Hec.* 284.

³ i.e. letters.

⁴ Zacharias' "roses" could be declamations on the subject of spring, according to the custom of Gazan rhetoricians (cf. Ep. 11) or poetic compositions (according to a metaphor dear to Sappho, fr. 55, 2-3 Voigt: ῥόδων τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας, "the roses of Pieria", referring to poetry), perhaps on the same subject, like the anacreontics of John of Gaza and those attributed to George Grammaticus (see Ciccolella, *Cinque poeti*, pp. LV-LVI).

55. To Epiphanius¹

Are you still silent? We are still among the despised, and has nothing of the old loves occurred to you? You are truly a ruthless and hard man. Do this for my sake, refresh your memory: you did not leave us with such hopes, on the contrary, you wept – alas! – and left reluctantly, and you promised to write even before disembarking, or pretty much so. But now all this is past, while you simply remain silent and pay us no heed. If, however, you continue to remain silent, I will raise a tragic cry, saying: "Alas, Zeus,² Friendship and Speech! You have been insulted, but so have I. He who insults us once called me a friend, but now no longer."

¹ A letter to Epiphanius (cf. Ep. 19) on the theme of silence.

² An invocation quite common in tragedy.

56. To John¹

If silence reveals false friendship, it must necessarily endure as long as there are words, if it is truly tested when there are no words. Then there is nothing left but to consider even a wicked man a friend, if only he spoke. But we are not such judges of friendship. For what prevents us from remembering friends even when we are silent? This applies to us now and will never cease to apply.

Let us consider instead that we have not been given the freedom to do everything as each one wishes: the external worries of life and the uncertainty of the future sometimes prevail over reason, and the latter command, while the former serves and obeys.

Therefore, ever since I devoted myself to teaching, constant challenges and the worries they entail have presented themselves to me from the beginning, and they have not left me until now. It would have been better to reflect on these things than to suspect for trivial reasons that once we were well-disposed toward friendship but have now ceased to be so.

But, O Zeus, O Loves, and whoever watches over friendship, I wish you could convince my accusers that I have never managed to forget them, but am with them in thought and seem to speak to them and listen to them speak, and that, if I ignore them, then I have also forgotten myself.

¹ For John, see Ep. 5. A letter on friendship.

57. To Hieronymus (?)¹

Do you still live by the Nile? Do you still neglect those who desire you? Tell me, what has happened to you that is so terrible? If you believe that delay inflames our love more, know well that it has already reached its peak and you could add nothing more to it. If the Macedonian city attracts you for its pleasures and because it seems to possess Helicon² itself, imitate Odysseus and, passing the Sirens, remember Ithaca.

Indeed, since now I desire to see you with golden cicadas in your hair in the ancient manner,³ I stand open-mouthed before the sea and scrutinize the ships, hoping that I may ever see you here. But it seems to me that you have emulated the famous son of Theseus, when you teach the boys: "O bridegroom Demophon, unjust guest...",⁴ you who no longer wish to even remember your own son; he is beautiful and, if you were there, he could now call you father.

¹ The letter is addressed to Stephen in the manuscript tradition, but the address to Hieronymus is supported by Garzya and Loenertz (*Procopii*, pp. XXXI-XXXII) based on the similarity of content with Epp. 2 (according to which the character is temporarily in Egypt) and 124 (in which Procopius expresses his concern for Hieronymus' family). For Hieronymus, see Ep. 2

² Helicon (the mountain sacred to the Muses: cf. Hesiod, *Th.* 2) is used as a metaphor to indicate a community of scholars.

³ In Aristophanes' *Knights*, Demos presents himself as τεπιγοφόρος, τάρχαῖα σχήματι λαμπρός, "golden cicada-crowned, brilliant in ancient appearance" (v. 1331). Indeed, as Thucydides explains (I, 6), before the 5th century B.C., Athenian aristocrats tied their hair in a knot held by golden cicada-shaped clasps.

⁴ A quotation from Callimachus, fr. 556 Pfeiffer. On the myth of Phyllis and Demophon, cf. Ep. 47.

58. To his brothers Zacharias and Philip¹

How could I present to you in words how intense the desire for you is that has seized me, unless somehow you have happened to experience similar feelings? For one who has suffered from it knows how to evaluate what concerns it. I am convinced that you are such and that you respect the law of friendship and also that of nature, according to which you write to me and console me with your letters.

And yet, since I was tormented by suffering, it often occurred to me to utter words like these: "I wish I were Perseus and could be seen winged, cleaving the air and being carried above the sea, so that, at the very moment I choose, I could arrive at you and enjoy love."

It is against nature, but not unfamiliar to those who love, this idea of wandering easily and dreaming of what cannot be. But if you can bear to hear me speak of myths again, I often envied Abaris, a Scythian and a barbarian but otherwise wise; happy, if you will, because, with an arrow at the service of his mind, he went wherever he wished, and no journey, however long, was a problem for Abaris!²

But why do I care about seeking far-fetched and unnatural examples? As comfort, only letters remain for us; let us leave Perseus and Abaris to the poets and the myths.

¹ To assuage the longing that he feels for his absent brothers, Procopius would like to transform himself into mythical characters with exceptional powers; in the end, however, he considers their letters adequate consolation.

² According to Herodotus (IV 36), the Scythian or Hyperborean Abaris, a wise man devoted to Apollo, travelled throughout the world without eating and carrying an arrow that symbolized the god. Procopius here follows a later version of the myth, elaborated, it seems, by Heraclides Ponticus (4th century B.C.), according to which Abaris would have travelled on horseback on the arrow.

59. To his brother Philip¹

If both the ancient precepts and the law of nature require that one repay what is owed to one's parents, how much more is it fitting to show gratitude to one's country, from which our parents also derived their origin? Circumstance now calls you to it, and please imagine that your native land, through me, is now issuing this call to you; for thus, you will have fulfilled your duty and will be able to leave us a memorial of it, especially since necessity concerns even the most serious matters.

Expect nothing burdensome, but it is very easy for you to grant this, while for those who receive it, it is important to obtain it. We desire that requests concerning the city be delivered to the emperor through your bishop or the emperor's brother,² so that the dignity of the one presenting them will guarantee a hearing for what is presented. In doing so, that person will be doing a common favour to those who ask for it and to us, from whom it has been requested.

¹ Procopius urges his brother Philip, who works in the imperial chancery, to interest the patriarch of Constantinople or the emperor's brother (Zeno or Anastasius) so that a petition on behalf of the city of Gaza may be presented to the sovereign; Philip is obliged to comply with the request in the name of his duty towards his homeland. This letter clarifies the social function that the late antique sophist performed within the city community.

² Possibly the emperor Zeno (474-491) and Longinus, consul in 486 and 490, but precise chronological data is lacking.

60. To Epiphanius¹

If you are silent when we converse and write when we are silent, I fear, as I write, that I will have to converse with the mute and listen to the silent. Yet men, it seems, have devised correspondence to preserve the semblance of presence for those who are far away and to speak to them through letters as if they were near. But I, after reading your letter, even burst into tears of pleasure: I seemed to hear you here, as you used to be, breathing sweetness, "This is it," I said, "it's his most beloved voice." But in the name of love itself and friendship, if you still know and remember them, do not deprive me of your letters and do not take away my only consolation, and do not let me truly begin to envy those who do not love from the beginning, who never happen to complain about such sufferings.

¹ Letter based on the theme of presence-absence, on which see Ep. 26. On Epiphanius, cf. Ep. 19.

61. To his brothers Zacharias and Philip¹

I hastened to put that fellow in contact with you with my previous letter, not knowing him thoroughly, but believing, because of his tall tales, that he was what he was not. Without my noticing, he used the disguise of an honest man, being however such as the test of facts has shown him. For while he was about to set sail from Gaza, he stayed with someone he knew, as is natural, until the ship arrived. Having obtained trust in the name of the law of friendship and having received this favour as well, on top of many others, he turned his host's house upside down and stripped him of all the wealth he possessed! And to escape suspicion, he had a key ready for his machination, and after opening the door with it and taking everything he found, he put the strongbox back in its place as before. As soon as he had left and need called the owner towards the goods he thought he had stored, his crime was uncovered and it was impossible to deny the evidence. Menelaus also enjoyed such hospitality gifts when he was deprived of Helen instead of receiving a reward.² I was induced to write about this so that, since trust has been placed in him thanks to you, he may not do other similar things to anyone who trusts him, and those who suffer them may not reproach you, and you certainly may not reproach me.

¹ Procopius warns his brothers that a protégé of theirs has robbed his host, and this could have repercussions on the reputation of those who had recommended him. The description of the theft and its discovery occupies the central part of the letter.

² The Trojan prince Paris, while a guest of Menelaus in Sparta, seduced Menelaus' wife Helen, abducted her and fled to Troy with her; this action was the origin of the Trojan War. The theme, which dates back to Homeric or cyclic epic, was variously treated in Greek and Latin literature; especially noteworthy are the Latin elaboration by Ovid (Ep. 16) in the 1st century A.D. and the Greek one by Coluthus (*De raptu Hel.*) in the 5th-6th century.

62. To his brothers¹

Again a moment has arrived that requires a letter for you, and again we have thought that we have achieved our purpose. For what kind of life would it be for us if we were deprived of the possibility of speaking to you and writing to you? If, however, we obtained something similar from you, O Heracles, how fortunate we would be! Therefore, do not delay in translating your desire into actions, so that, by despising the law of Eros, you may not experience his darts: for that god is skilled both at aiming darts and at wielding the bow, and he makes his target those who despise a lover.

¹ Another letter rebuking silence.

63. To Athenodorus¹

When I received the book, I was naturally grateful to you, while I rejoiced with myself for having been so fortunate as to have friends like you. And may envy not strike me with a rough stone, as Pindar says!² I have indeed prayed to Fortune to be able one day to return you an adequate favour. It immediately provides me the occasion as you desired it, while I, who was seeking it for a long time, have just obtained it: I have in fact convinced the one who holds everything to give you the part you happen to need. Then, if you came to us, you would obtain your treasure more quickly, after partly convincing and partly being convinced on the price, as the law of commerce requires; otherwise, he himself will come to you when circumstances demand it, as was promised to us.

¹ Athenodorus does not appear elsewhere in the letters. He is perhaps a bookseller and is certainly bound to Procopius by friendship; the final part of the letter concerns the payment for a book that he procured for Procopius.

² A quotation from Pindar, *O.* VIII, 55.

64. To Sosianus¹

The admirable Alpheus has announced to me that towards him you have become as he wished, I expected, and it was fitting for you to appear. When I learned of it, I was happy – and how could I not be? – but by now the matter did not seem at all extraordinary to me. If you like, even before I was already describing you as you have become towards him, to the point that, not knowing what else to say, he fell silent laughing and called me blessed for our friendship. But try to devote the same commitment to what I asked of you when I was with you, so that he may be grateful to me and we two, in turn, may be grateful to you.

¹ Procopius thanks Sosianus for the legal assistance provided to Alpheus upon his recommendation and urges him to continue in his commitment. On Sosianus, cf. Ep. 21.

65. To Zacharias¹

I received your letter, something that should have happened long ago, but yet not even the fact that it happened only now has diminished my gratitude. Such is the suffering of lovers: when things go badly, the situation seems hopeless to them and they cannot bear it; but when they conquer the object of their love, they forget past sufferings as if nothing had happened to them. But now that you know this, be careful not to afflict us with your silence before writing: for I would not want to be happy after having suffered much. Not even the inhabitants of Delphi would want Apollo Pythius to depart from them, even if, when he is there, they immediately celebrate the appearance of Apollo with a feast.

¹ In thanking Zacharias for his letter, Procopius urges him not to make him suffer with his silence anymore.

66. To Nestorius¹

We have been deceived in a hope that lasted a long time and that, with the passage of time, caused pain, since it did not admit realization, and yet it procured joy and made us more patient. For it, bringing your letter to memory, induced us to believe that you would certainly return to us very soon. But now that we have been disappointed even in hope, how could we bear it patiently? But O Fortune, Fortune – behold, I will recite a bit of tragedy as comfort for the pain – why do we delight you so much with our grief? If only you did not induce men to love, or at least let them enjoy each other, and not delight in their separation! But there is nothing strange, dear Nestorius, if we, being men, experience such misfortunes; instead, we must bend our necks and willingly bear the yoke of necessity; for voluntary sufferings are more bearable for those who suffer.

¹ Like Silanus in Ep. 52, Nestorius had announced a visit without keeping his promise, but this time Procopius' disappointment is much deeper and leads him to reflections on the harshness of human fate. From the other letters addressed to him (Epp. 70, 75 and 150) it appears that Nestorius, a former pupil of Procopius and perhaps from Elusa, had left Gaza to move to a hilly or mountainous area, where he had bought a farm that ensured him a fair amount of wealth.

67. To Nephalius¹

I believe it does not escape even you to what level of poverty Stephen has arrived, and that he cannot even create a hope of life with his own hands, since he has been almost deprived of sight as well by Fortune. Therefore, devising a remedy for his indigence, he has changed his garment for that of a deacon. Unfortunately, this expedient risks being of no use to him, unless he obtains help from you: I am convinced that it is available to all who desire to obtain it. If you are the ones to ask, some one of your bishops will consent, I believe, to keep him as a servant or simply to support him. Know, however, that even if he receives no help, he never stops talking nonsense; on the other hand, if he obtained some benefit, where would it not be natural for this fellow to announce the favour received? I believe, in fact, that he will consume his natural loquacity in remembering that favour.

¹ Procopius recommends to Nephalius (on whom, cf. n. 91 ad Ep. 15) Stephen, a deacon who has fallen into poverty. According to Procopius, being unable to do manual work, Stephen might enter the service of some bishop and, for some reason, Nephalius seems the right person to obtain this. The final reference to Stephen's loquacity (ἀδολεσχία) and his ability to weave praises of his benefactors suggests that he is also a rhetorician and, as such, perhaps a former pupil of Procopius, which would explain Procopius' interest in him.

68. To Thomas¹

The memory of honest men can bring pleasure even without their sight, especially when, after having filled with absolute love those who have experienced them, they are no longer there to constantly nourish pleasure with their sight. Then, indeed, not knowing what happens to them, instead of sight they have desire to always nourish memory. And behold, they represent to themselves the distant people and devise something that imitates their presence. I speak thus, in maxims, because I have fallen into such suffering since I had the chance to admire you for having known you, and now that you are not here I seek you again, and I pray to Fortune to devise a new remedy and one day bring together lovers who are so far from each other.

¹ Affectionate letter in which Procopius expresses his desire to see his friend Thomas again (on whom cf. Ep. 42).

69. To Palladius¹

At first sight, the letter filled with your wisdom aroused, as usual, everyone's pleasure; but when it came time to read its content, we nearly flooded it with tears. For it is certainly necessary that those who share successes also partake if something causes suffering. But by the gods, see how thoughtlessly Fortune operates, which does not wish to make distinctions, if it hastens to strike the wicked, if it sends its darts even against honest people!

For if it were possible to measure things on the basis of moral virtue, you would not have experienced, know this, unjust Fortune. Instead, now you weep for your wife: a chaste woman, as is natural, and the just companion for a wise man, but – and this is the most terrible thing – a mother of children, moreover still in need of a mother. Who would not weep to hear this, who, after such a disaster, would resist not possessing your mind? I am convinced that, obeying Isocrates, before anything happened to you, you gained experience with external events, since you often saw similar situations and often heard others recounting them.²

Besides, what difficulty does not beset our life? What shows it to be calmer than the sea? One becomes proud, another, having reached the top, has Fortune betray him and falls headlong; one grows old invoking death as comfort, another was snatched away before youth. One marries, another weeps for his wife. These things fill our life and induce us to confirm Homer's opinion that "nothing more feeble than man does the earth nourish."³

For the divine principle⁴ decrees that nothing remains at all as it was born, but, even if men obtain something according to their intention, "Wait a little – it says – and it will certainly disappear." Therefore, let us be allowed to suffer according to divine providence and according to a will that certainly directs our life towards the good, while nobly bearing what God sends means prevailing with one's own virtue and not surrendering completely to Fortune.

This is, in fact, an ornament for good men: not to change one's mind together with one's circumstances. So enough of tears: you will not "bring her back to life before suffering another evil."⁵ You yourself will become a mother for your children, and God with His will will bring your hopes for them to fulfilment.

¹ A *Consolatio* for the death of Palladius' wife (on whom cf. Ep. 14); for this motif in Byzantine epistolography, see Ep. 30. Starting from the principle that friendship means sharing not only joys but also sorrows, to comfort his friend Procopius draws on concepts from the heritage of ideas of Stoicism, Neoplatonism and Christianity. The elevated style full of quotations from literary and philosophical works suits the dignity (1) of the addressee, who in Ep. 165, 1 is called λογιώτατος.

² Cf. Isocrates 1, 2.

³ A quotation from *Od.* XVIII, 129.

⁴ τὸ δαίμονιον: in Plato (*Euthphr.* 3b; *Tht.* 151a; etc.) this term generally indicates a divine principle (cf. Cicero, *Div.*, I, 122: *divinum quiddam*). As an intermediate entity between divinity and human beings, the δαίμων had great fortune in later elaborations of Platonic philosophy. Plato's Socrates in the *Apology* understands the "daimon" as an inner voice that guides his actions and directs him towards the search for truth (40 a-b); as such, the daimon, while being a principle "external" to the human soul, does not have the characteristics of a true god, insofar as it leaves man the faculty to decide his actions. In the Christian age, the ambivalence of the meaning of δαίμων led to attributing a completely negative meaning to this term. The use of the neuter δαίμόνιον as a noun becomes common in New Testament Greek, where it has acquired the negative meaning of "evil spirit" and therefore "demon", often used in reference to pagan gods; see *PGL*, s.v. δαίμόνιον. See also below, Epp. 111, 7; 126, 2 and 164,1.

⁵ A quotation from *Il.* XXIV, 551.

70. To Nestorius¹

I was pleased with your letter, even too beautiful, which on one hand justified your long silence, which, even if you had written many times, you nevertheless maintained with me, until I received your letters; on the other hand, it excessively reproached me for blaming your silence outright. But – by the gods! – both things pleased me. One, in fact, concerned a person who had never done any wrong to friends, the other one who did not even wish to give the impression of doing so. Therefore, I have been defeated in reproaching you for silence and I would always wish to be defeated in this. I received your letters late and with difficulty: the letter you sent as the first arrived as the second. It should be your task to consider, if I accuse so violently when I think I am suffering an injustice, how I might become if I really suffered it.

¹ Procopius justifies himself for having unjustly accused Nestorius of silence (Ep. 66), an accusation due to a mix-up in the delivery of letters.

71. To Stephen¹

You are still silent, though dwelling in Daphne, by that famous talkative and prophetic water,² while I have long been scanning the ships, always awaiting the future. One or two land and demonstrate that what concerned us was nothing but hopes. I analyse the reason for your silence and am completely confused. If I have wronged you in some way – but I have not – let it disappear and be carried off by the winds. Yet I will incur a punishment more severe than the accusations if I do not hear you converse. Otherwise, if you pretend in vain, saying you cannot speak elegantly, we are the judges and we reproach your motivation.

But by now I foresee the matter even without drinking the water of your Daphne. You will say you blush with shame for having broken your promise and despised agreements, and because it is already three or four years that you keep the book, while you promised you would not keep it even two months. So, if you speak with repentance, you will show it by no longer keeping it longer. Accepting your silence, the sign of your shame, I consider the situation as caused by your need, although I gave you a book that I have not even paid for yet, and it is not clear whether it belongs to the seller or to me who gave it to you.

Yet I placed no reservation on your use: neither the ambiguity of its possession, nor the necessity to learn something from it, but neglecting everything I would give it to you along with many gifts, if you allowed me to do so. And yet there is nothing serious if you prolong the delay until now. If, however, you continue, I will profit from the matter to such an extent that I will consider everyone untrustworthy; what hopes would I have, after having suffered all this from you?

Not so, however, the most learned John, who, having received a book from me, not long afterwards sent me a second one in addition. In this way he preferred to show himself grateful rather than to secure possession of a book. And do not tell me: "I kept it, but I did not wish to rob you." For of this I am convinced, I solemnly swear.

But there was no need to extend the delay, since returning something late and reluctantly has the same effect as robbing. But by Zeus, protector of friendship,³ do not wait for more letters, nor for another ship beyond the one that brings you this letter.

¹ The references to Daphne, a suburb of Antioch, show that the addressee of this letter is the same grammarian Stephen to whom Ep. 13 is addressed; Procopius complains not only about the absence of letters from him, but also about the failure to return a book for which the seller has not yet been fully paid.

² The Castalian spring which according to Aeneas of Gaza (Ep. 17, 13) ἐπαισθάνεται τοῦ θεοῦ, «perceives the god» (scil. Apollo). On Daphne, see Ep. 13.

³ See note on Ep. 29.

72. To Diodorus¹

He who brings you this letter will not experience your benevolence now for the first time, but while still recounting the first, he will experience it a second time, certainly even more important, it seems to me. The first time he enjoyed it while he was about to be called our relative, but this time he will receive it after having truly become so in fact. And you, who honoured him when he was about to become so, what would you do seeing that he has become so? I believe you will immediately turn the law archives upside down, and after sharpening your tongue, you will hurl torrents of words against the wicked. And what else will you bring to the spectator's memory if not an Attic tribune? This I can say and this the young man present here hopes. And I will not be caught lying, nor he hoping in vain.

¹ Procopius recommends to Diodorus (see Ep. 8) a young man related to his family, so that the powerful and skilled lawyer will take an interest in his case and do him justice.

73. To Castor¹

Many are the reasons that require your benevolence towards the bearer of this letter; the lineage that unites us, the marriage that strengthens the kinship, and – most importantly – our letter. And it is not a speech of ostentation, but rather of confidence that my words are insignificant in nature but have great power with you. He needs a just tongue and a fluent eloquence that can extinguish slander. I know, therefore, that you will surpass my hope; always, in fact, you aspire to achieve more than one hopes from you. It would only remain for you to surpass my hope with your actions, or at least to show that events are not inferior to it.

¹ Castor («Castor 3», PLRE II, pp. 270-271) is a lawyer and Procopius, in the name of the friendship that binds him to him, asks him to take an interest in the case of a relative of his who is a victim of slander.

74. To Ilasius¹

Your land seems to bear good fruits but to oppose itself only to men's physique; for it offers the former as a prodigy for those who behold them and does violence to the nature of the season, while, having received the latter vigorous, it has returned them pale. Therefore, I would not like to fall ill after having enjoyed a few fruits, nor to be ashamed and be silent if asked the reason. This you used to do, while in silence you embellished your lands. Instead, I desire that you enjoy very many good things and that you surpass the nature of the land with the health of your body.²

¹ Procopius declines Ilasius' invitation (on whom see note on Ep. 20) to stay on his fertile but unhealthy farm. Based on Ep. 20, Ilasius' farm seems to be located in Egypt, near the Nile.

² The concluding wish is ironic: Procopius hopes that Ilasius has better health than the unhealthy nature of his land (E.A.).

75. To Nestorius¹

Chremylus became rich suddenly, as the comedy says.² And now it seems that you too are rich: a thing that never happened to you, since you were always poorer than Irus.³ For this, therefore, your country has become dearer to you, which you formerly called an abyss of the earth,⁴ while you have become entirely a slave to matter, bidding farewell to philosophy. Thus you have completely nullified that mildness and serenity that I had formerly with difficulty instilled in you, and the hopes of progress placed in you.

Now, naturally, you have become a mountaineer and such as the law of your country wants. You have enjoyed such gains thanks to fortune, you who formerly philosophized on the threshold of poverty! So you willingly stay in your country and seek not a way to become wiser, but a way to see the harvests waving. I, having desire for you, reproach the Loves⁵ if they cannot induce a single soul to return the love of one who desires in this way.

¹ Procopius laments that Nestorius (note on Ep. 66), having become a landowner, has betrayed the philosophy learned at his school and is now dedicated to accumulating wealth.

² In Aristophanes' *Plutus*, vv. 335-336, Blepsidemus wonders about the reasons for the sudden wealth of the old Cremylus, the protagonist of the comedy.

³ Irus is a beggar and a symbol of extreme poverty. Ulysses fights the beggar Irus and kills him in *Od.* XVIII, 1-107; cf. also Epp. 99 and 131.

⁴ This could be Elusa, given that Agapetus, in Ep. 47, 7, uses the same term for that city.

⁵ See note on Ep. 10.

76. To his brothers Zacharias and Philip¹

Your letter on one hand revealed your affection towards us, on the other did not lack a sensible spirit, while both these qualities appeared genuine, each with the support of the other; for it is not simply because you love us that you wished to keep us here, but because you considered our sight superfluous if not accompanied by convenience; nor because you have become fearful of the uncertainty of the future have you dissuaded me from undertaking the journey again towards you, but the style of the advice was singular and full of rhetorical wisdom, since it did not contain an overly pressing invitation and allowed one to glimpse refusal. But I am so far from loving vainglory and earthly cares and from envying others' happiness that, although in this case I did not find myself in the condition I desired, yet I bore it for so long.

And now, since they promise me to do what is fair, I do not consider it an advantage to see the imperial city simply with insubstantial hopes and, moreover, loving tranquility and considering it the only happiness and, in short, after having come to consider Byzantium in order to find a way to free myself once and for all from earthly cares and enjoy a more divine life.

However, since I do not love cares, I dismiss the idea. For one must not choose anything that the will of God does not welcome, and everything that is not realized reveals that it does not have God's approval, just as, if something happens not joined to pain, it is certainly God who decided it and it happened. And it is not possible that anything happens that He has not decided, nor that anything that has happened He has not decided, so that, if any of the promised things should come true, apparently it is necessary to remain here and I cannot oppose it.

But if these are only words and the necessity of things not happened dissolves, this shows the decree of God, which orders me to go to you. Otherwise, certainly the conditions for which I would have had to stay here would have been realized.

¹ Procopius explains the reasons that made him listen to his brothers and not to go to Constantinople again. This gives him the opportunity to analyze the relationship between human will and divine will. The complexity of the style and language used and the probable presence of textual problems make the interpretation of this letter particularly difficult. It would seem that Procopius considered the opportunity to visit his brothers in Constantinople, perhaps because of some difficulty in the place where he was living (Gaza?). We do not know enough of Procopius' biography to say what the problems were that he alludes to in this letter. It cannot be ruled out that he was involved in the religious controversies following the Council of Chalcedon, which may perhaps have been responsible for his withdrawal from public life in his later years. The less-than-encouraging response of his brothers and the improvement of his situation may have discouraged him from undertaking the journey, which, based on Ep. 53, never seems to have taken place.

77. To Diodorus¹

I thought that you would celebrate the feast of the martyrs² here with us and would grant us finally to succeed in seeing you; while you, even if you just see the Maiuma³ in a dream, apparently you are unhappy, fearing the bad omen, and you call the day *nefastus*. For a long time and from afar hatred has been instilled in you to such an extent that for this reason you do not even want to see friends;

thus you demonstrate that time increases anger rather than awareness. Thus I always predicted and thus it happened.

For since I saw that often you even fled from this place because of those who caused you suffering, I often said "Alas, alas!" and "Once you have departed from us, you will not want to see us anymore." But not even Achilles remained angry with the Achaeans for so long; indeed, since he suffered staying away, he yielded, as was his duty, and changed his attitude. Yet I am grateful to Fortune that you do not have Thetis as a mother: long ago, in fact, you would have prayed to her and we would have been ruined.⁴

¹ Procopius is sorry that Diodorus has distanced himself from his friends after suffering an unspecified injustice. On Diodorus, see note on Ep. 8.

² It is unclear what festival this was. The celebration of saints and martyrs in Gaza is attested by Choricus.

³ A pagan water-festival; also one of the names of the ancient port of Gaza. Ciccolella prefers the former.

⁴ Procopius alludes to the famous episode narrated in *Il. I*, 357-427: Achilles, angry with Agamemnon, is consoled by his mother Thetis, who promises to intercede with Zeus so that Agamemnon's action is punished.

78. To Irenaeus¹

To arouse my benevolence towards Zoneus and his followers, first you were responsible, then, after the test of facts, the character of those young men. And after having obtained the first favours thanks to you, in the end it was thanks to themselves that they aroused my love. For diligence adorns them in character and not even nature can contradict it, to the point that, if it had not happened that you mentioned it before, perhaps I would have supposed that they are related to you by the same lineage, deducing their nature through their character. Congratulations to your lineage if it is capable of generating such people! Know, therefore, that I have a very solid opinion of those young men; if, however, I also have the power to second my inclination, let that rest on the knees of the gods.

¹ Procopius compliments Irenaeus for having recommended to him as pupils Zoneus and other talented young men belonging to his family. Ep. 4 of Aeneas of Gaza is addressed to a sophist Zoneus, but there is nothing connecting the two.

79. To Eusebius and Elias¹

Since I gladly see you when you are here and always remember you when you are away, I thought that this circumstance should not be passed over in silence; always, in fact, it is sweet for me to send you letters, while you would never consent to send our common son² without letters, and I would be ashamed to do so. Therefore, as long as he was with me, for my solicitude towards him it seemed that I had become his natural father, while now that he goes away from us I can only pray to hear others say: "God granted that that young man be as you wished him, and thus he has become." But if only he had a father in the art of oratory, certainly not more affectionate, but perhaps better.

¹ This letter is directly connected to Epp. 26 and 27. Megaius is about to leave Procopius' school, and Procopius, professing humility, hopes that the young man can continue his studies with a better teacher. On Eusebius and Elias, see notes to Ep. 26 and Ep. 27.

² As his teacher, Procopius considers himself a father to Megaius in the same way as his natural father; cf. also Ep. 149, 2, etc. See note to Ep. 16.

80. To Phaedrus¹

Words are truly images of the soul and have revealed the mind of distant people, no less than a painter with the objects he wishes to reproduce. In fact when I read your letter, it seemed to me that the author was here, even though I did not know him in person, to the point that, if someone delivered your letter to me after removing the address, I would believe it was the letter of an affectionate father to a son. Thus virtue seems to reveal its disciples. The fact that you, without ever having seen me nor having tested me, begin a correspondence with me and make me a partaker of the goods you possess, what praise would it not deserve? Yet I have decided never to despise my Ithaca whatever happens; indeed, I envy the Homeric Odysseus because, neglecting everything else, he desired his small island, which no one would ever mention to sum up great praises.

¹ Phaedrus – not otherwise known – has invited Procopius to his place without knowing him, showing the great esteem he has for him; Procopius politely declines the invitation, which might concern the offer of a chair in another city.

81. To Hieronymus¹

Again Egypt and luxury, we poor compared to you and no consideration for the absent. But this is nothing: well and good, as long as you laugh seeing the Nile flowing with gold! And even if you raise your eyebrow even more, we will certainly bear being despised. For a day will come² when you will see Elusa again and you will weep for the sand carried by the winds that strips the vine to its roots. There also dwell some desert and brackish nymphs,³ while Zeus Pluvius⁴ is nowhere. Then I will laugh and write a comedy about fortune, while you will consider me happy, now despised. However, while the Nile allows you to give yourself airs, at least write, and call us insignificant ones who walk on the earth, if you like. Thus we will be happy if you write and at the same time we will console ourselves for your presumption with hope for the future.

¹ A letter with a similar theme to Ep. 2.

² The words used as borrowed from *Iliad* IV, 164, in which Agamemnon makes a sinister prophecy about the fall of Troy; the allusion gives an ironic twist to Procopius prediction of Hieronymus' return to Elusa.

³ Since there were no water sources near Elusa, the "desert nymphs" could refer to the waters that, after winter rains, flow in dry stream beds, or in runoff areas; with these waters the inhabitants of Elusa irrigated their fields and replenished their drinking water reserves. The "brackish nymphs" might instead allude to well water; cf. indeed Ep. 2.

⁴ God of rain.

82. To Zacharias and Philip¹

Our dear John will ask for your benevolence both because of kinship and because he also studied with me. He is, in fact, the son of Leontius, if you know Dionysius, the husband of our grandmother. His father was the brother of Dionysius, just to remind you who he is even if you know him. But even without these ties, you could certainly consider him a worthy disciple of ours who completed the throng of my students.

Therefore, do not hesitate to treat that young man well, since benevolence is due to him from every point of view. For I pass over in silence the fact that also thanks to his character he attracts anyone who sees him, since he knows how to blush before saying something and knows how to speak modestly, measuring his words according to circumstances, and possessing talent superior to his age.

Instead, the foul Theodore, after turning the ship towards us, has again gone backwards, perhaps because he would regret it if ever anything he promised had come true, and he had brought his words to completion.

¹ Procopius recommends to his brothers John, a pupil of his related to the family, emphasizing his talent and modesty; this is most likely a John different from the lawyer addressee of Epp. 5, 22, 56, etc. John is contrasted with Theodore (a "navicularius), who instead has not kept his promises.

83. To Zacharias and Philip¹

He who delivers this letter to you is one of those who have frequented me: not for long, but yet he considers even the fact that I write the simple name sufficient for a benefit from you. He awaits the test of facts as a demonstration of whether his judgment is right. Therefore, the commitment for you consists in not disappointing him in his idea and not shaming me, who have the reputation of having so much influence over you.

¹ Letter of recommendation written reluctantly and without conviction, feelings that the addressees certainly knew how to grasp (E.A.). Procopius recommends a pupil who, although he has attended his school for a short time, has not hesitated to ask him for a letter for his influential brothers; he therefore urges them to act so as not to jeopardize his reputation. It must be considered that in late antiquity, a teacher's success was also linked to the contacts he could guarantee his pupils for their careers.

84. To Zacharias and Philip¹

Again a letter for you and again another bother: if only it does not seem that I know no measure in asking but always hasten to cover previous requests with subsequent ones, and meanwhile you laugh among yourselves and say that it was better when I kept quiet rather than now that I barrage you with a volley of letters. Yet, even if I provide you with an occasion to waste time and laugh, I will not bear to be silent, as you would say, since from fortune I have obtained an art, that of always speaking, especially now that the matter concerns our necessities.

For our representatives, elected by common vote, ask that the supreme authority consent to an easy thing: a ship exempt from taxes that can supply me with the food allowance.² They also ask that the old tributes be confirmed for the successors and that the simple name be changed. These things await your commitment, and if you bring them to completion you will do something pleasing both to me and to those who have turned to you through me.

If instead you neglected them, I would happen to suffer for two reasons: because I will not realize my hope and because I will not succeed because of you; one thing procures shame, the other harm. But certainly we will succeed if God above consents and you meet the need and thus the supreme authority decrees.

¹ Another letter to Zacharias and Philip, this time so that, thanks to their intervention, a petition from the city of Gaza can be forwarded to the competent imperial office, which is most likely the praetorian prefecture. The petition seems to concern, besides the payment of inheritance taxes, also the granting of a privilege to Procopius himself: perhaps a public salary (E.A), as also suggested by Ep. 128; for Gaza, like other cities, possessed a municipal chair of rhetoric with teachers paid at public expense.

² In exchange for the service they performed for the community (embassies, official speeches and teaching), sophists enjoyed certain privileges, such as exemption from taxes and liturgies. The term σιτηρέσιον here, used in Attic Greek as a noun indicating "provision", "supply", "resource", etc. (e.g., Demosthenes, 4, 28), in Roman and Byzantine times properly indicated the *frumentatio*, the free distribution of grain often promoted by emperors or generals (e.g. Plutarch, *Caes.* 57, 8; Dio Cassius, 59, 6, 4). The expression here, σιτηρέσιον χορηγεῖν, "to provide the food-allowance," is common: cf., e.g., Appian, *BC XVII*, 120, 19; Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 84, 2, 24-25; etc.

85. To Zacharias and Philip¹

The swiftness of your solicitude has struck us to such an extent that we counted the days from when we sent our proposals and found that you almost beat us in time. To such an extent does it behove good brothers to be treated with solicitude, who consider any gain whatever they procure for each other for mutual serenity. But how much affection does it not reveal, surpassing even the strict necessity of the requests and offering more than the requester desires? Therefore, do not stop behaving like this, and I will not stop being proud for this.

¹ Procopius thanks his brothers for having responded with extreme promptness to an unspecified request of his, thus obeying the laws of brotherly love.

86. To Hieronymus¹

It should have been you, my friend, who departed from us, to initiate correspondence and to inform us, full of desire, whether Poseidon was propitious to you and made the sea flat for your ship, whether the situation in the city of Alexander is favourable to you, whether you happily sailed up the abundant Nile, whether your school is flourishing and, consequently, whether you possess money in heaps and your house overflows with Egyptian gifts.

You should have written these things and kept your promises, in which there were frequent letters, but not oblivion of friends. But you do not even care for the one who writes to you, refusing to answer letters! Well, this is already the second I have sent you, and if you continue to be silent we will soon add a third, until at least a little shame for your behaviour assails you and we manage to hear your voice.

¹ Procopius reproaches Hieronymus (cf. Ep. 2) for not having taken the initiative to write to him immediately after arriving in Alexandria (the same "duty" is recalled to Diodorus in Ep. 29). As in the other letters addressed to the same character, Procopius does not fail to allude with irony to Egyptian wealth, by which Hieronymus was evidently attracted.

87. To Agapetus¹

You were truly good at seizing first an expected accusation and turning against others what one would rightly have used against you. Once, in fact, you lived in the city of Alexander, but when you

left it you remained silent and indeed, as far as you were concerned, you stayed here hidden. But glory be to fame, which lets nothing about better men escape! It revealed that you were here, and I was forced to wonder why you did not make yourself heard. "If he thinks thereby to give himself importance and to maintain an attitude worthy of Pythagoras² – I said – silence does not befit a rhetorician. If instead he detested Elusa as a place hateful to the gods and a hell,³ he should have sought comfort from friends."

So none of this applied to you, but rather I maintained that you have become proud and consider of no value those who were once very dear to you, and this while living in Elusa and being almost under the guidance of a brother who does not joke. While I was reflecting on these things to myself, I would never have expected to see you suddenly as my accuser. Therefore, I smiled at your letters and admired your rhetorical art which gave you such authority, thanks to which I, who before accused in my speech, had to seek a defence.

This is the greatness of sophistry, and it has not spared even one who practices the same trade, sending, as they say, owls to Athens.⁴ But my children⁵ – for thus you called the speeches – are ashamed to come to you, who can bring to light even their hidden deformity.

¹ The letter is Procopius' defence against the accusation of silence by Agapetus; after reminding him that he was not exempt from the same fault, Procopius praises his friend's rhetorical ability, compared to which his own is insignificant. Agapetus, addressee of this single letter, is probably a rhetorician and lawyer from Elusa who returned home after a period spent in Alexandria (PLRE II, p. 30); Procopius shows that he esteems him because, as with Dorotheus (Ep. 33), he submits his λόγοι to him.

² The reference to Pythagoras is part of the *topos* of silence in Byzantine letters; cf. note on Ep. 1.

³ Cf. note on Ep. 9.

⁴ The phrase "owls to Athens" (taken from Aristophanes, Av. 301) was proverbial for indicating a useless effort; the owl was depicted on Athenian coins because it was sacred to the city's goddess, Athena. Cf. also Ep. 102.

⁵ See note on Ep. 9 for the image of speeches as children.

88. To Dorotheus¹

While I was already about to reply to your first letter, you yourself anticipated me by sending me a second; thus you are impatient to defeat me even in letters! "But to what is all this time due," you will say, "and why delay in writing?" It is not granted, being human, to do everything one wants, but it is inevitable to obey, submit to necessity, and second circumstance; it, then, grants not what one desires, but what fate assigns in relation to need. Up to now I have suffered this unwillingly and yet in silence, though I could admire your solicitude when you were with us and the affection you still preserve for me after you left again, the envy that formed against you and the past snares of fortune, and how you became sensible again, dedicating yourself entirely to discourses and after bidding farewell to chatter about past experiences, having preferred to come off worse on every occasion in order to win over the Muses.

But may you very soon reap profit from your love of the Muses and obtain as much as you desire; may you become more sensible than the calumny of the past, if it was true, and more prosperous, if it was false, so that your future life may no longer be a receptacle for lying calumnies but you may appear again as you were before. For thus, if the extremes are joined, the middle perishes, struck from both sides.²

¹ After apologizing for not having responded earlier to a letter of his, Procopius proceeds to console his friend, who has been a victim of slander provoked by envy. The addressee is not certainly known as the same as Ep. 106.

² With this military image, Procopius means to say that if the good reputation of the first phase of Dorotheus' life finds correspondence in the good reputation of the last phase, the slanders that characterized the central part of his life will be dissolved (E.A.).

89. To Stephen¹

Still silent? Still are we among the neglected? Well, before you kept us bound to you with your frequent letters and it was most pleasant to hear you speak often. But now you are unexpectedly silent and we have been deprived of this pleasure. Such is the enjoyment I have had from good books! For while I go in search of them, I seem to have lost even the person dearest to me of all.

But first of all send me the book and do not let me lack anything of your former affection. Otherwise, let being friends at least remain. In this way, in fact, it will seem to me that I have suffered nothing. Then tell me how your school is doing, if a crowd of disciples attends the exhibitions and – most importantly – if you enjoy wealth and if a Pactolus² has flooded your house. May all this happen to you! Then, we will have had your book, and your money in the future will be counted in thousands.

¹ In reproaching Stephen for not having sent him news from his new seat, Procopius takes the opportunity to remind him to return the book he has borrowed from him. This is most likely the same grammarian Stephen to whom Epp. 13, 71 and 105 are addressed, and who moved from Gaza to Antioch to teach (cf. n. 76 ad Ep. 13). The emphasis placed on wealth and the high number of students shows that these were the goals teachers aspired to in late antiquity.

² Cf. note on Ep. 13.

90. To Sabinus¹

If for lovers a single day is enough to grow old, you would not be able to calculate how much we have aged. Once, in fact, we were happy to see you and to have you with us; everything was pleasing to us: your most sweet face, your discourses that charmed the ear, your mind that dispensed affection. And whatever beauty one longed for, it was enough only to see you.

But now suddenly we are deprived of all this, so I am confused and I love myths and would pray to become the famous Perseus. Perhaps, in fact, having taken flight briefly, it would be possible for me to give comfort to my love. "But how can my heart hesitate so?"² And behold, nostalgia has moulded wings for me too and I have become Perseus, a legend, and everything that an intellect seized by desire easily desires to imagine.

I was happy to see you in a dream, and when I got up I immediately felt comfort for having seen you. If you treat well the one who brings you this letter, you will do me a favour and strengthen the opinion he happened to have: that, if you receive letters from us, there will be nothing you will not easily do.

¹ In recommending a protégé of his to Sabinus, Procopius expresses nostalgia for his friend's physical proximity. Sabinus, probably a rhetorician and lawyer («Sabinus 8», PLRE II, p. 969), is also the addressee

of Ep. 131, which however offers a very different image of this character, to the point of raising doubts that it is the same person.

² A quotation from *Il. XI*, 407.

91. To Hieronymus¹

Of what grave accusation did we enjoy from you, we the presumptuous, the overly sophisticated, the sick with pride under a modest appearance! And I could not say how many arguments you have accumulated against us, as if you had long been seeking the moment to unleash your tongue against us. Therefore, without even adducing a just motive, you bring out what you had long kept hidden. And so tell me: what is so terrible if, writing to you, I addressed the letter "Procopius greets Hieronymus"? I am sure that you too would agree that this is in accordance with ancient custom.² "But there is no need – you say – to depart from the custom now prevalent." So go ahead and accuse, even if one wished to lead back to ancient dignity the pomposity that now dominates and to bring back to Terpander's muse³ the music that has degenerated into meaningless songs and vulgar bagatelles!

But why, by Zeus, protector of friendship, would you yourself seem solemn to us if you pronounced some Attic word and obtained approval because in accordance with ancient rules, when it is possible for you to fill yourself with vulgar words and bring them to the tribune? Or rather, why is it that, when you sit on the chair before the young, you deem it right to present them with some powerful word of the famous Aristides to gain approval by speaking like him? Or did not Polemon cleanse ancient rhetoric of Asiatic charlatantry?⁴ If fortune had offered you to be born then, I believe that perhaps you would also bring an accusation against him because, neglecting custom, he wished to be presumptuous by returning to the ancient art. If only now the Spartan table were in use again and our diet were like that of the ancient Persians: barley bread, water, and watercress! Even now one could see these foods prevailing in your Elusa, not because of excessive temperance, but because so many are the foods that that land laboriously provides its inhabitants.⁵

But yet, now that you have learned Egyptian luxury, you have shed your ancestral customs: you, who prescribe maintaining customs even beyond what is fitting! The fact, then, of calling me presumptuous for having cited your name after mine seems typical of someone little aware that what comes first in order does not at all have first place in value, or who pretends not to know the saying of Demosthenes that children are wont to recite, according to which action, compared to speaking and voting, though being last in order is first and strongest in efficacy.⁶ But if you accuse this outright of presumption, it is time to include in the vice of arrogance, along with me, those who in ancient times employed the custom of such addresses, among whom, leaving aside others, I count Socrates and Plato, who raised philosophy to the heavens.⁷

But as for presumption, from this moment stop and do not direct the knife of the proverb against yourself. Or is it not true that your stories have long been known: that as soon as you disembarked, the sons of the Egyptians accompanied you in procession with a barbaric cry, and there was a feast no less solemn than when, once, a favourable generation gave them Apis;⁸ and that, having become exalted in mind for these reasons, you not only called me insignificant, who live in a small city, but were also neglecting your country, your wife, and your very son? And perhaps you considered me of no value, I who practice philosophy, because I did not receive abundant applause from an indistinct

voice – O Zeus! – and in a barbaric tongue; moreover, what is more serious, you called yourself a happy man if they made your house overflowing with food and meat.

See how much you have become proud over little things, you who now accuse me of presumption? And I say this – by the gods! – not because I wish to avenge myself for your words – for I do not think it in accordance with my philosophy – but because, if it were possible for me, I wish to make your tongue more moderate. But take care not to refrain from writing such things to us, frightened by the power of my words!

For, in the name of your Nile and the Graces that dwell with you, I presented your letter as a public rhetorical exhibition, and it was recited to everyone in the centre of Gaza.⁹ And I was ashamed to be called presumptuous in your letter and the public laughed at me, while you seemed to succeed with your arguments.

¹ On Hieronymus, cf. note on Ep. 2. In this example of a refutatory letter, Procopius counters Hieronymus, who accused him of arrogance in heading a letter by placing the sender's name before the addressee's: this would be, according to Hieronymus, an arbitrary return to an obsolete habit. Hieronymus' reproach gives Procopius the opportunity to reaffirm "the stylistic laws of the epistolary genre, according to which one can, when necessary, choose to adhere to a moderate language, not bound by the inflated formulas of the time [...] in the name of sobriety and simplicity". This letter is of great interest not only for reconstructing Procopius' point of view on ancient and contemporary rhetoric, but also because, in the final part, a clear testimony of the public reading of letters in the Gazan θέατρα is offered

² The "ancient usage" indicated by Procopius corresponds to the formula commonly used in opening letters (*praescriptio*) which includes the sender's name in the nominative followed by the addressee's name in the dative and the verb χαίρειν. This is the beginning commonly used, for example, in letters found on papyrus, and recommended as in accordance with ancient usage both by Libanius (Ep. 1034, 2 Foerster) and by Pseudo-Libanius (*Char. epist.* 51, p. 21, 11-13 Weichert). A variation of this formula occurs when the addressee's name, in the dative, is written first, with or without the verb χαίρειν, as happens in some official letters and in letters between Christians; perhaps this is the usage Hieronymus was referring to when criticizing Procopius. This change, which is observed particularly in papyrus letters from the 5th century onwards, may possibly reflect the influence of Christian epistolography. Letters inserted in literary works, however, show great freedom in the use of the initial formula. For example, in Chariton's novel *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, in IV, 4, 9 Chaereas begins his letter to Callirhoe with the words Καλλιρόη Χαίρέας; later, however, in VIII, 4,2-3, we have a letter from Chaereas to the sovereign without heading, while in VIII, 4, 5 Callirhoe's letter begins with the classic formula Καλλιρόη Διονυσίω εὐεργέτη χαίρειν. See also the two letters inserted in the novel by Achilles Tatius (V, 18, 2; 20,5).

³ Terpander of Antissa, poet and musician of the early 7th century B.C., composed *nomoi*, preludes and *scholia* and was considered the inventor of the seven-stringed lyre and the Mixolydian mode. In Procopius' epitaph (op. VIII, 8, p. 112 Foerster-Richtsteig = Proc. Gaz., Test. III Amato), Choricus cites Terpander together with Arion (on whom, cf. below, Ep. 165) as models of the harmonious style that conforms to the rhythmic rules which Procopius adhered to.

⁴ Marcus Antonius Polemon of Laodicea (c. 90-144), an exponent of the Second Sophistic, had honours and fame both as a teacher and as a protégé of the emperors Trajan, Hadrian and Antoninus Pius. Procopius seems to consider Polemon as a model of Atticizing oratory, but both ancient judgments on his style (from Philostratus, *VS*, 1,25,542, to Marcus Aurelius in *Fronto*, Ep. II, 10) and his two surviving declamations apparently contradict this judgment: Polemon's style – not without admirers and imitators in subsequent centuries – can rather be characterized as Asianic. This has led to various attempts to emend and interpret the Procopian passage.

⁵ See note on Ep. 9 for the difficult conditions in Elusa.

⁶ Quotation from Demosthenes, 3,15.

⁷ Such letters are for the most part products of the Second Sophistic, the golden age of fictional epistolography. They, together with other collections attributed to famous figures of antiquity, were considered authentic until the criticism of Richard Bentley in 1697 (*Dissertation*, pp. 535-553).

⁸ The cult of the bull Apis is attested from the earliest origins of Egyptian history and had as its center the city of Memphis; first only a deity, then a royal image, Apis was later associated with the god Ptah and later with Osiris. He was attributed the power of prophecy and of giving fertility to women. The only aspect of the cult of Apis sufficiently known to us is the funeral ceremony: the embalmed body of the animal was carried in procession and buried by a crowd of faithful, which included members of the pharaoh's family and a troop of soldiers. After the death of an Apis, the priest of Ptah was charged with finding another with the same characteristics, i.e., black with a white triangular spot on the forehead and a crescent-shaped one on its side; Procopius seems to allude to the celebrations that accompanied the transport of the chosen animal from the countryside to Memphis.

⁹ On the public reading of letters in late antiquity, see also Ep. 107, 16.

92. To Orion¹

Since I always carry you in my memory, I almost seem to be near you and I imagine that you are near me, even though you are far away. And everything pleasantly returns to my memory all together: the tranquillity of your manners, your commitment in discourses, your balanced way of reasoning, and, what is most important, a temperance that repels the irrational assaults of youth. And sometimes I think to myself: one who showed himself in this way under the gaze of us all, how might he become once left to himself? In reality, I believe, he will surpass his former qualities, competing with himself to show to us, who are far away, that he truly honoured virtue for its own sake and not out of regard for us who watched him. And if he then also lives in a city full of luxuries and amidst many examples of dissoluteness, this will make him even more motivated to resist pleasures.

Besides, what athlete proud of his victories, once arrived at Olympia, will consider that great contest a good time for indolence and, instead, not immediately intensify his training and not confirm his previous victories with this more important one? Thus you, having closed yourself off to sensations, having become imperturbable before everything you hear and see, will show that the ease of evil is not capable of prevailing over temperance, but when the desire for nobler values is alive, whether it be the Sirens or Circe who transforms everything, Odysseus will win again, now showing the *moly* – that is, I believe, the wisdom that Hermes gave him – now girding himself with virtue and, I believe, sailing beyond the pleasures that cry out loudly.²

¹ Procopius praises Orion for having maintained his moral integrity despite the allurements of the great city to which he has moved (most likely Constantinople). Orion («Orion 3», *PLRE II*, p. 813), mentioned in *Ep.* 8 as a friend – or pupil – of Diodorus, is also the addressee of *Epp.* 115, 139, 144 and 155. From these letters it appears that he studied rhetoric with Procopius (Ep. 144) and law in Berytus, finally settling in Constantinople, where he practiced law (Ep. 155); at some point in his life he married a girl from Gaza (Ep. 115).

² Hermes gives Ulysses the herb *moly* to protect him from Circe's spell, which turns men into animals.

93. To Apollonius¹

The most devout Martyrius, rich in virtue but poor by fortune, needs your influence, having had excellent proof of it, as he says, from past events, and he easily convinced me, since I know that you extend your hand to all who need to rise up and call upon you for help. He, who with us can obtain only means that would not infuse him with strength and would leave him to die, looks towards you, thinking that this could be liberation from his ills.

But devote yourself willingly to this, granting him a benevolent glance for the good of yourself, of me, and of him who is in need. He said, in fact, confidently, that if you received a letter from me, there would be nothing you would not willingly do. While I smiled and asked him how he knew, he was ready even to pledge the future. Realize, therefore, his hopes, so that, if need calls again, he may not pledge the future, saying that I have no power with you.

¹ In this single letter addressed to Apollonius (probably a lawyer or a judge: «Apollonius 6», PLRE II, p. 122), Procopius recommends Martyrius to him for what seems to be legal help, urging him to meet his request so as not to compromise his reputation.

94. To Diodorus¹

Again I have received your letter, clear and extraordinarily beautiful in words, but obscure in handwriting to the point of hiding the grace of the style. For it seems to me that, since you fear to fall into oblivion of your nature by constraining it to clarity, you seek to mitigate the comprehensibility of the words with the tracing of the letters, so that, thanks to your usual obscurity, you may again have your distinguishing mark. Thus this seems an advantage to you and it seems to me that you are afraid of departing from your reputation.

Courage, then: God forbid that I should ever change my mind, nurturing a different opinion of you, and that I should deprive you of your extraordinary fame on my own initiative! Only do not force me to go to Pytho and say, showing your letters: "Tell me, O prophetic Pythian,² what on earth did the author mean?" Let these things be said in jest by me, faithfully imitating your grace.

¹ Playful letter in which Procopius reproaches Diodorus (see note to Ep. 8) for sending him a letter with illegible handwriting.

² On "Pytho" and "Pythius", cf. note to Ep. 5.

95. To Nephalius¹

Your letter already invites us to the festival, tells us that the house is at our disposal, shares what is found there, and promises us the good of discourses. I am exceedingly pleased with you for your affection and it really seems to me that the festival has already been fulfilled for me now that I have received your letter. But many impediments have arisen to my journey from here. You, however, fare well, overcome the causes of pain, and do not remember only those present. If then, with your letters, you could uplift the depressed, this would be for me more glorious than the fortune of Polycrates.²

For good people have often upset our ears saying: "He has done something terrible!", meaning you; "He was caught red-handed!" and: "He is gone!" While they spread these rumours, they presented witnesses who claimed to come from your city; one told the other and the news passed from mouth to mouth. When, however, I received your letter, which was so foreign to the unjust rumours as to also invite friends to a feast, I immediately filled with joy and, since I had proof that it was all false, I announced your letter everywhere, so that those who were previously shameless finally blushed, bowed to the ground, and, I believe, railed against fortune for not having got away with it any longer.

¹ From this letter it seems that Nephalius (on whom cf. Ep. 15) has been involved in some unpleasant situation as a result of his own action or a slander. Ep. 108, a request for information from Procopius, is closely connected to this one.

² Herodotus (III, 39-60, 120-125 and 142-149) narrates the exceptional fortune and the shameful end of Polycrates, tyrant of Samos from c. 538 to 522 B.C.

96. To Silanus¹

Dear Macarius, who enjoys my benevolence for his zeal and character, brought and delivered your letter to me, and I, having recognized your handwriting at first sight and joyfully received the address, immediately and without delay immersed myself in your writing, and immediately the swan resounded in my ears and, as if spreading its wings to Zephyrus, abandoned itself entirely to song and became more sublime, while now I have understood with certainty that your nightingale was not an Attic legend, but the girl who became a bird was from Athens and still preserves in her song the Attic tongue:² this is the image of her that the words in your letter convey.

But I, after having rejoiced at these things, caught my breath, and meanwhile was led back to the memory of ancient happiness: how we both were by the Nile,³ how generously fortune offered me the chance to sate myself with you, how I hated being deprived of you and how I am now happy to have you again. For it now seems to me that I have you with me through your letter. Therefore, I was grateful to the one who brought it; then I said to him: "How happy is your lineage, boy!", and I reproached him for having hidden that he was your relative.

So, how should I act? How could I offer him as much as I would like? If, however, you measure the favour on the basis of goodwill, there is nothing he will not obtain from us. But now that I have heard that you are united in a marriage bond, I would pray to see also your children, who might eloquently show to those who see them who their father is.

¹ Procopius responds to the recommendation of Silanus (note to Ep. 52) for the young Macarius, who is also the bearer of the letter; the context (l. 6: τὴν σὴν ἀηδόνα etc.) seems to suggest that Silanus was from Athens (E.A.). This letter is placed chronologically before Epp. 97 and 153, from which it appears that Macarius, after studying rhetoric with Procopius, would have undertaken legal studies with Babilas and together with Zosimus, becoming a lawyer («Macarius 5», PLRE II, p. 697).

² The images in this period – the swan, Zephyr, the nightingale – are part of the repertoire of late antique rhetoricians and sophists. These images pass into epistolography through rhetoric. As for the swan, its connection with eloquence, poetry and song is due not only to this bird's habit of singing before dying, but also to the fact that according to Plato (R. 620c) Orpheus would have been transformed into a swan after death. The comparison with the nightingale is common for rhetoricians and sophists. Procopius alludes here to the famous myth of Procne, daughter of Pandion king of Athens, who was transformed into a nightingale after serving to her husband Tereus, with the complicity of her sister Philomela, the flesh of her son Itys.

³ Cf. note on Ep. 48. In his *Life of Severus* (transmitted in Syriac and edited by Kugener, Vie, pp. 1-115), Zacharias Scholasticus provides a description of the life of young people from Gaza moving to Alexandria to study.

97. To Macarius¹

Of your affection towards us there is also sweet testimony, and your gift,² combined with your honey, reproduces your disposition of soul. For, having become a lover of discourses and having sated yourself with them, you have recognized that it is certainly a great thing, a friendship that

progresses with time and that admits no oblivion due to distance. Therefore, although I appreciated you even before, now I have admired you even more, because though not present you are near me. But fare you well, sate yourself with the laws, and may you quickly become, to speak poetically, "a great joy for your father, your city, and all your people."³

¹ Macarius, who was recommended to Procopius by Silanus in the previous letter, has now completed his studies in rhetoric; Procopius, his former teacher, praises the letter he writes in taking leave of him before undertaking his new legal studies.

² The "gift" is the letter Macarius sent to Procopius.

³ The Homeric verse from which this quotation is taken (*Il.* III, 50) has πῆμα, "harm", instead of χάρμα; the change is a sign of Procopius' irony.

98. To Diodorus¹

Why has this happened to you, who have a powerful tongue and thunder loudly against those who are silent? You have been caught red-handed in what you criticized, you have accused yourself without realizing it, and you have remained ensnared and prisoner in your own nets: for having done what you reproached others for, you now receive reproof from yourself; in short, you have become entangled in your own wings, becoming a victim of the proverb.² So that, if things had gone as they should, I would certainly have answered you with your own letter; for you would have immediately realized that you first hurled reproaches as if you were without sin, while now you err as if you had never made accusations. Moreover, what is more important, in a burst of generosity you sent me some extraordinarily beautiful sandals of yours, even more suitable for the foot, as in comedy,³ without an accompanying letter, without saying either "take them" or "farewell."⁴

Yet, it seems, you were prouder of them than the famous Croesus when he gave Pythius the marvellous bricks.⁵ It is evident that you, who had bought them from the craftsman much earlier, were always on the alert to seize the opportune moment, so that I might come forward with them on feast day, proclaiming your generosity to the spectators.

Therefore, after understanding what was going through your mind, I advanced walking with long strides in the manner of Homeric Ajax and struck the earth, drawing the spectators' attention to my feet, and if anyone refused to look, I considered him insolent and finally forced him to look. Then, without anyone asking me where I had got them, I announced: "Diodorus gave them to me!" And on everyone's lips, for me there was mockery for my boorishness, for you the fame of benevolence. These are the advantages I gained from your fine footwear; I almost walked upside down so that your gift might be clearly visible!

¹ On Diodorus, see note on *Ep.* 8. After refuting the accusation of silence, Procopius ironically thanks his friend for the gift of a pair of shoes and states that he has done his best to highlight his generosity. Lucian (*Rh.Pr.* 15) indicates as an important part of the sophist's attire showy footwear: Attic sandals of a feminine type, high and openwork, or Sicyonian boots decorated with strips of white leather.

² This proverb, coming from a fragment of Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* (*fr.* 139, 4-5 Radt; cf. *Suda*, O 992 and T 183 Adler), is quoted several times by classical and Byzantine authors.

³ Procopius' quotation comes from a lost comedy, which Garzya and Loenertz (*Procopii*, p. 52) identify doubtfully with a verse from Plato the comic's Hecate.

⁴ Procopius complains that Diodorus did not accompany his gift with a letter containing the traditional formulas: «receive (δέξαι, *accipe*) this gift...» and «farewell (χάριε, *vale*)».

⁵ Herodotus (I, 50) tells the story of the 117 gold bricks that Croesus had melted down and donated to the temple of Apollo at Delphi.

99. To Epiphanius¹

I believe you are considering with great astonishment what has happened to me that I should take the initiative to write. If you want to know the reason, Strategius arrays himself against you with his speeches and advances violently with his insults while he spins a long accusation; in short, he has made my house a courtroom. And most importantly, just like experienced orators, he is not satisfied with present accusations alone, but mixes ancient and recent facts, rakes up old stories, and presents as a witness against you the whole city of Alexander, telling of horse spectacles, devotion to dice, public gossip about horses, and everything that comes to his mind to say.² He says, however, that you are still devoted to horses, that you continue to frequent those who can breed them, and that you have learned the art of flatterers by gratifying your belly. I would not be able to tell in one go how many rumours he repeatedly pours into my ears.

Here is the reason: "I am naked because of this man," he says. "I had only one garment left for burial, and because of this man it is lost. For – he says – he took worked linen with the pretext of having a garment made for me by the hands of his maidservants, and left me more naked than Irus³; much time has passed – he says – and I am tired of hoping."

If, therefore, you care to tame his tongue and also free my ears, send him the garment as soon as possible. Otherwise... well, I cannot bear to say how many things one could still say who, even when he had nothing to complain about, made life a chatter! If then he also added a just cause, you could say that anger resides in his tongue.

¹ In this letter, Procopius tries to resolve with a certain humour a dispute that broke out in Alexandria between Strategius (see Ep. 20) and Epiphanius (see Ep. 19) over the possession of a linen garment that Strategius kept aside for his burial. Considering Aeneas of Gaza's letter of thanks to his pupil Theodore for the gift of a garment (Ep. 18 Massa Positano), it is evident that this was a valuable item and, for this reason, Strategius' anger against Epiphanius becomes understandable to moderns.

² Cf. note on Ep. 3. As in many other cities of the empire, during the imperial age, horse races were loved and followed in Alexandria; see, e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *or.* 32, 31, 40-46, 74-87; Philostratus, *VA V*, 26. Some graffiti found in the auditorium of Kom el-Dikka reveal that also in the Egyptian city, as in Constantinople, the factions of the Greens and the Blues faced off in support of the charioteers who performed in the hippodrome, but probably without the political implications that this opposition acquired in the Byzantine capital.

³ See note on Ep. 75.

100. To his brothers Zacharias and Philip.¹

The change in season, which ends for us the obligatory silence, demonstrates henceforth the silence by choice.² So compete in letters, writing as many things as we desire. We desire that no one come to us without bringing a letter from you. For one who arrives saying the usual "They really had no time," "They intended to write to you," "I left suddenly," will leave here after being judged by me, his judge, as lazy in friendship. But if I reproach those who do not bring me letters like this, how much do you think I should do so with you, who do not send them to me?

¹ The request for letters to his brothers follows three of the best known *topoi* of Byzantine epistolography: silence, winter, and the bearer's haste.

² For the relationship between the season of winter and silence, cf. Epp. 7,10, etc.

101. To his brother Zacharias¹

With how much ambition you have filled me when you exalted my brief letter and my laconism, as you would call it! So, therefore, for you I have a proud look and have become a true Spartan, while for me Lycurgus is everything and Solon nothing. I almost spoke even in Doric, forgetting Attic. And then my partly fortified country also bothers me, because it is not an image of Sparta, unfortified by walls.² This is what a good rhetorician can do, who induces one to feel what he wants. But if you praise me again as Attic, beware that I may not disown Sparta again: to such an extent am I dragged by the desire for your letters. But be careful to avoid that you, in jest, end up praising Egypt and I find myself becoming Egyptian in language!³ In short, have pity on me, by Zeus, because I cannot help being passionate about everything you are passionate about.

¹ Playful letter to his brother Zacharias; Procopius says he is ready to change his style to please his brother. Of cultural interest are especially Procopius' explicit profession of Atticism (4) and his affirmation of the power of rhetoric over listeners/readers (6-7).

² Thucydides (III, 94, 4) says that the Spartans lived in villages without walls. However, the fact that Livy (XXXIV, 27, 2; 28, 6 and 8; XXXIX, 37, 5, etc.) and Pausanias (VII, 12, 8) mention defensive works and fortifications suggests that the city was surrounded by walls around the 2nd century B.C.

³ I.e. barbaric. Cf. Ep. 91.

102. To Gessius, the Iatrosophist¹

It pleased me that you yourselves wrote to recommend dear Dorotheus to me, who, conversely, I first recommended to you with my letters; and what greater proof could there be that our letters have had effect according to our hopes? When he arrived to us, he wanted to speak of nothing but you; either because he wished to please me, or because he delighted in your memory, he frequently mentioned you as benevolent, good, and filled with Asclepius in tongue and hand, and said that truly the graces of your tongue have compensated for the rigor of medicine.²

While he spoke thus, I anticipated his praises before hearing them by telling him about you and said to him smiling: "You are bringing owls to Athens."³ But he was even more ambitious to win and, thinking he was adding something new, found that even that was known to me long since; finally he fell silent, content, saying he was grateful to the gods for having had the good fortune of such a master, about whom it is possible to speak always and not tell anything new. But devote yourself wholeheartedly to this young man, who, if nothing else, at least knows how to remember his benefactors.

¹ This letter is placed chronologically after Ep. 16: Procopius responds to Gessius' recommendation by praising in turn Dorotheus (most likely the bearer of Gessius' letter), whom he himself had previously recommended, and telling him of the admiration the young man feels for his new teacher. On Gessius and Dorotheus, see respectively notes on Ep. 16.

² In the teaching of medicine carried out by an iatrosophist like Gessius, the technical notions of the discipline were expressed in a rhetorical style. This explains, for example, why Athenaeus includes a doctor among his

"sophists at dinner", while Eunapius also includes some doctors in his biographies of philosophers and sophists.

³ The same proverbial expression is cited in Ep. 87.

103. To Stephen¹

I was pleased to receive your letter because through your writing I saw the one whom I always took pleasure in remembering, if indeed discourses are images of the soul. And if you allow me to say it, I thought I had become more important than I am, considering that you count me in the group of your friends, that you take me into account, and that you send me first letters that invite others like them. Through that for which you seemed to admire me, you allowed me to see yourself in your letters, telling of yourself through me. So that I, smiling, said to myself: "How true these words would be, by the gods, if they were said of the one who wrote them!"

Now, however, without realizing it, you spoke of me not as I am, but as I should have been to obtain such praise. May you obtain many benefits for your dedication, for the mildness of your character, and for the affection of your memory and, what is more important, because though not here you are near me.

¹ Possibly the same person as the Stephen of Ep. 134. Both letters depict a man who is a learned admirer of Procopius but of higher social status. Indeed, Procopius addresses him with deference and modesty, thanking him for having taken the initiative to write to him and for having praised him more than he deserves.

104. To Antiochus¹

How mistaken I was in my hopes for you! I thought, in fact, that you, as soon as you had freed yourself from medical matter, would then come to us both to practice philosophy according to your ancient promises, and also just to see us; but you torture us, longing for the city of Alexander and like one clinging to the land of the Lotus-eaters.² But for my part, let the city of the Macedonian³ prevail with its numerous attractions, and farewell to it with its Nile and its sea! If, however, the Muses also inhabit it, you will have me too as its celebrator.

But what does all this matter compared to our tranquillity and your philosophy, on which we have so often nurtured hopes? Therefore, after shaking off all the rest as useless chatter, imitate Odysseus, looking to your true Ithaca; let nothing be an obstacle to you, neither lotus nor Circe nor Calypso; but let us strive so much the more to surpass the son of Laertes,⁴ because the contests to which you aspire are greater!

¹ In this single letter to Antiochus («Antiochus 16», PLRE II, p. 105), Procopius expresses his displeasure because the young man, after completing his medical studies in Alexandria, has decided to stay in the Egyptian city and has thus betrayed Procopius' hopes for his return to Gaza «to practice philosophy».

² The episode of Odysseus among the Lotus-Eaters is narrated in Od. IX, 82-104.

³ Alexandria. Cf. note on Ep. 3.

⁴ Odysseus.

105. To Stephen¹

When I saw your brother, it seemed to me that I had you yourselves here and I was led to you thanks to the resemblance in appearance. So full of love am I always and in any case, and if I see something that conforms to the object of my passion, I consider it sufficient for the consolation of my pain. I also received my book, which should have been brought back to me long ago, but even if I have only just got it back now, I have not been treated worse than if I had got it back from the beginning. To reclaim it I had to shout with all the breath I had and perhaps I seemed inopportune. After recovering it with difficulty, I remember that I recovered it but no more than the difficulty. Therefore, if you thought that I was displeased or suffered terribly, let the winds truly carry that idea away!

¹ Procopius thanks Stephen for finally returning the book borrowed a long time ago; this is evidently the same character to whom letters 13, 71 and 89 are addressed (cf. note on Ep. 13).

106. To Stephen¹

It seems that you see nothing but money, and that drags you down, makes you exalted, and has filled your brain with golden images. Although I had written to you concerning tranquillity, saying that circumstances do not grant us everything, but rather what fate assigns in relation to our need, and although I had told you that need is not the lack of riches but that towards which we are led by fortune, you have thrown yourself completely onto money and seemed to commiserate with me, who was without means; and then you sought to comfort me by opposing philosophy to riches, thinking that I truly weep because I do not live in luxury with the talents of Croesus! Thus your ears ring and you seem to hear that everyone speaks of money.

But what, by Zeus, has led you to this madness? How could I justify the fact of not writing letters by adducing lack of money, as if it were necessary for one who writes to swim in gold? But if nothing else, writing is independent and free from the dominion of wealth. Thus your intellect is tested by your illness; for it, stretched as it is in that direction, transforms everything, referring it back to that, and makes hearing a partner in its deception. I fear that, even if I said "lyre" and pronounced the word "horse," you would seem to hear "money" again, and while consoling others, you yourself would need someone to cure you. I was induced to joke with you on these subjects and to insert into my letter the laughter that seized me reading yours. But you, freeing yourself a little from your illness, in future write a sensible letter.

¹ Not the same as the addressee of Ep. 88. In refuting the *consolatio* for his poverty that Stephen sent him, Procopius criticizes him for his excessive love of money, describing his obsession with comic and paradoxical traits.

107. To Sosianus and Julius¹

It is not amiss to tell you what happened to me when I received your letter. Not long ago, someone who claimed to be an expert in celestial phenomena and who, as he said, knew the art of predicting the future from the stars, having met me suddenly, placed his little stone on his fingers² and said: "How fortunate you are, even if you don't know it! For something great and extraordinary beyond all

hope will happen to you." Hearing these words, I imagined Plutus himself, I filled myself with honors in thought, and had a grander opinion of the fortune I hoped for.

Therefore, while I was in this state of mind, when someone came to bring me your letter, "Behold – I said – words have become facts: they have learned excellent news and hasten to reveal it to me before others. What else, in fact, could have happened to them for them to write to me now so unexpectedly?" When, however, reading the contents, I learned of the despicable reed³ and the paltry commerce, "Ouch," I said to myself, "I have been fortunate beyond hopes." And as they say, I have passed "from horses to donkeys."⁴ Alas, fortune is capable of bringing every novelty, but I would never have hoped to become a reed seller, sitting under a tent. Apparently, this is what Zeus brings to pass and grants me." And the laughter at me spread through the listeners,⁵ and: "Here is the man," they said, "and the prophecy of the god!"⁶

¹ With an ironic tone and descriptive liveliness, Procopius tells the story of a disappointment: the wealth promised to him by the stars is actually little, because it is linked to the trade of reeds. The letter reveals a subtle critique, of a Christian stamp, towards pagan divinatory practices. Julius, not otherwise known, is probably a business partner of the lawyer Sosianus (on whom, cf. note to Ep. 21).

² Procopius' generic passage could allude to a simple numerical calculation on the fingers (cf. Ep. 132), but the context of the letter rather suggests a type of divination by means of *sortes* (cleromancy). Explicitly criticized by both Cicero (*Div.* II, 86-87) and Favorinus of Arelate (cf. Amato, *Favorinos* III, pp. 9-18), and implicitly by Apuleius (*Met.* IX, 8), this divinatory practice consisted of throwing small objects (knucklebones, sticks, etc.) and observing their arrangement.

³ The reed, a very humble material, found numerous uses in antiquity: from common objects, such as pens for writing, to palisades and some structural parts of buildings.

⁴ This proverb, mentioned by Pseudo-Plutarch (*De Alex. prov.* 19, 1) and in various collections of paroemiographers, continued to be well known throughout the Byzantine age; for late antiquity, see, e.g., Babrius 76, 18 Luzzatto-La Penna; Libanius, *Ep.* 1524,1 Foerster; etc.

⁵ Cf. Ep. 91 for the public reading of letters.

⁶ A quotation from Aristophanes, *Pl.* 63. The Aristophanic verse fits perfectly the situation Procopius finds himself in: in the comedy, Carion comments ironically on the gain Cremylus has had from Apollo's oracle.

108. To Nephalius¹

You have caused us no little concern, since you are neither here according to your ancient promises nor have you explained the reason with a letter, so that for us it only remains to push ourselves towards absurd thoughts, that something execrable may have happened to you.

Now, however, a certain rumour has also disturbed me, which says what it says. But if only it were really just a rumour, nothing more. If, therefore, you care about leading us towards serenity, at least grant us the comfort of your letters.

¹ This short letter is probably connected to Ep. 95. Not receiving news from Nephalius, Procopius urges him to dispel his worry that something unpleasant has happened to him. On Nephalius, cf. note to Ep. 15.

109. To Silanus¹

...instead of temperance there was insolence, instead of the bridal chamber, funeral laments, instead of the persuasion of law, violence and a drawn sword. If <then> it were one of those in possession of wealth or power <...> to go so far, even then it would be terrible – and how could it

not be terrible in a State and with laws against slavery under our² authority, O Zeus? – yet there would be some consolation for the matter.

Now, instead, this is the fundamental point of the misfortune: one cannot easily know even where he comes from, he who dared such actions, while suffering has made him well known to us. But stop, O most wise one, the lament for those who have suffered: return the girl to her mother's bosom, so that those who behave thoughtlessly may know that Justice exists and pursues those who err. Show to those who honour temperance that it is an advantage for the laws that there be men who know how to dominate wickedness when they are in power.

¹ Request to Silanus (on whom, cf. note to Ep. 52) to intervene as a lawyer in an abuse, perhaps the abduction of a girl. However, the loss of the initial part prevents us from fully understanding the situation Procopius refers to.

² The proposal to correct ἡμῶν in ὑμῶν, «under your authority» is probably well-founded. If so, Silanus would not be a simple lawyer but an imperial official.

110. To Diodorus¹

You ridicule our silence while I cannot bear your presumption, because of which you perhaps believe you are a man worthy of honour if you give us the impression of being at a very great distance and if you often succeed in inspiring this speech in us: "When will dear Diodorus come to us, sweet in appearance, who outshines the Sirens with the pleasures he procures and neglects his country to save the city of Caesar?"²

You think we invent such stories, always tormenting ourselves with waiting, and certainly among yourselves you decree that the rarity of the object always intensifies the seeker's desire. Therefore you neglect us. This is not terrible, although it is serious; but you do not hold in any account even the country's solemnities.³ But you have many times awakened the hope that you would come, then you have disappeared again and we have been deceived.

Therefore we have decreed to send an embassy and call our benefactor. For thus you enjoy being called. But at least, my dear fellow,⁴ show up to celebrate the feast with us. If, however, you wait for the embassy, it is time for you to stay there. For there is no one to call you.

¹ Procopius responds to the accusation of silence by Diodorus, reminding him that he too does everything to be missed. This letter can be related to Ep. 77 based on the reference to a festival to be celebrated together (12: τὴν μεθεόρτιον πανήγυριν), unless one understands "festival" metaphorically as the joy Procopius expects from meeting Diodorus.

² Caesarea (cf. Ep. 29), the city where Diodorus practiced law.

³ It is not clear to which festivities Procopius is referring.

⁴ Cf. note to Ep. 2.

111. To Diodorus¹

The habit calls the most pious Timotheus to the solitary life,² but the torments of his fortune, which push him to need, also exhort him to go to you. He has a father deprived of means by a reversal of fortune and brothers who suffer because of their number and age; since, in fact, they are numerous and still small, they look to their father's support. Therefore their creditors are many, but except for

one they are all benevolent; unfortunately, this one adds to their misfortune. For the house that the demon barely left them, mortgaged to many creditors, he claims to take for himself alone, even if its value exceeds the debt; he should, instead, either bring in a buyer and obtain the fair share of the entire price, or content himself with the part of the house that covers the amount of the debt. That man considers the lack of buyers for now an advantage and is more pitiless than fortune.

But you grant to him, who needs it, your tongue as an ally, procuring for him the benevolence of the judge. Let the one who causes him pain experience just constraint and a more serene personal opinion, striving either to wait for the buyer or to take as much of the house as the debt requires, so that we may admire both you for your solidarity and the judge for his vote.

¹ Procopius asks the lawyer Diodorus to intervene in a case concerning the inheritance of the monk Timothy, revealing himself to be a discreet connoisseur of the law (ll. 8-10). It is hardly likely to be the well-known Timothy the grammarian of Gaza, a pupil of Horapollon and author, among other things, of a treatise on animals living in India, Arabia and Egypt and of some grammatical works («Timotheus 3», PLRE II, p. 1121).

² Monasticism flourished in Gaza starting from the end of the 4th century, becoming a very important social and cultural reality in the region. In particular, Gazan monasticism created an educational system that ended up attracting young people like the rhetorical-philosophical school of the city.

112. To Nonnus¹

You refused a beloved for yourselves² since you longed for more important things and hastened towards the priesthood;³ but now I fear that your beautiful hair, which I have always admired, may become an obstacle to your ardour. When, in fact, you see that the moment has arrived and that your celebrated hair is about to fall,⁴ you will run away, I believe, in tears of grief; then you will desire to appear as a beautiful bridegroom instead of as a priest. And if this happens, you will ask for the hand of a girl and then on the wedding day you will find yourself with your love taking a leap towards the priesthood. But stop once and for all being dragged in a circle, taking experience as your teacher, so that I do not hear again ... of wedding gifts, of your nuptial branches, and of everything that has now made fun of us.

¹ In this letter to Nonnus, vacillating between ordination and marriage, Procopius reveals the same irony towards marriage expressed in Ep. 123 for the wedding of his brother Philip. The hopelessly corrupt text of the last two lines prevents us from understanding how far Procopius' joke went.

² The pronoun, omitted by codex F, is corrected to ἡμῶν by Hercher. Indeed, the transition from the singular σέ to the *pluralis sociativus* ἡμῶν within the same sentence seems rather abrupt and may indicate a textual problem.

³ The term used might also refer to ordination as bishop.

⁴ I.e. when receiving the tonsure during ordination.

113. To Hieronymus and Theodorus¹

I have understood that your wisdom always and everywhere shines through speech, and what sight has not offered me, fame gives me, which cries out with a common proclamation that the grandfather is in charge of introducing laws, that the father with the grace of his tongue drags hearing towards the severity of the laws, and that thanks to them you possess all the qualities that they, your predecessors, divided into parts.

Therefore, now that I have met in person the one I formerly knew only by hearsay, "Blessed," I said, "is the city in which such a noble lineage lives and a son receives governance from his father; children of blessed fathers, how many placed the hopes of their lives upon you! Oh, if only I could somehow be with you and sate myself with your culture!"

But great for men is the desire for one's country, and witness is Odysseus, who neglected Calypso to see Ithaca again; moreover, it does not seem to me lawful to appropriate another's place contrary to the discourses of justice. Therefore, keep from me the customary homage.

¹ Hieronymus (not to be confused with the addressee of Epp. 2, 9,57, etc.) and Theodorus are two brothers, jurists and perhaps teachers of law like their father and grandfather, who have extended an invitation to Procopius to move to their city – Berytus? – to work there as a teacher; cf. *PLRE II*, pp. 561 and 1094, «Hieronymus 3» and «Theodorus 50». Procopius respectfully declines the invitation as he does not want to leave his homeland and, above all, to enter an environment where others already carry out the same activity; the same theme is at the center of the following letter. Choricus, in praising Procopius' fidelity to Gaza (his "Ithaca"), recalls that he had refused offers from the schools of Antioch, Tyre and Caesarea, but not from Berytus, which perhaps did not exert the same attraction as the other cities; however, the interest of the Berytians in Procopius is confirmed by the following letter.

114. To Hermias¹

When I saw your greatness through the writings sent to me, I naturally admired your mind, while I congratulate the city of the Berytians² if it possesses as protector a man such as to concern himself with virtue and discourses, and this while the times push towards the opposite. But may you enjoy yourself and the city enjoy your solicitude! For me, however, it is burdensome to neglect my country, taking example from you. For if you devise everything, believing you are embellishing your native land, how could it go well for me not to do that for which I praised you? But also introducing myself into a place where another has succeeded seems foreign to logic. But may you succeed, my excellent friend, in what you desire for me and for the city itself.

¹ The theme of this letter connects with that of the previous one: Procopius declines the invitation of the magistrate Hermias to move to Berytus, adducing the same reasons as in Ep. 113. The tone, however, is much more solemn and the style more elaborate, as befits an addressee of higher rank and high culture. From ll. 2-3, indeed, it appears that Hermias held a high office in his city, probably as *defensor* or *pater civitatis* or *vindex*. Martindale («Hermeias 5», *PLRE II*, p. 548) excludes that he could be the governor of the province (*Phoenicia*) because from the letter it seems that his jurisdiction concerned only Berytus.

² Berytus (present-day Beirut) was the seat of a famous school of legal studies. From the Severan age until the whole late antiquity, the school attracted students from all the eastern regions of the empire eager to pursue a career in public administration as σχολαστικοί. The course of study lasted four years (raised to five under Justinian) and followed a very rigorous program. The study of Roman law ensured the survival of the Latin language longer than in all the other cities of the *pars Orientis*.

115. To Orion¹

I consider it superfluous to write to a man who in the future dreams of landing with us to sing the wedding song and become the groom of a beautiful girl: it is right, in fact, to grant a lover the praise of his beloved, thanks to which, though physically far away, your heart beats with love and you are all excited at the idea of running here to us; nearby things are truly small signs of human happiness to you, while only one city seems to you to exist, the one where your beloved resides, and may it be

nobler than Byzantium. And I fear that, when your passion is like a river in flood, without even greeting friends, you will suddenly set out on a journey towards us, reproaching the length of the voyage. But these are the words of one who is joking; may you instead, once and for all, return, driven by wise reasoning, to beget "children"!²

¹ Orion (on whom, cf. note to Ep. 92) is in love with a girl from Gaza, but Procopius suggests to him the possibility that in the future, once passion has subsided, he will return to practicing rhetoric in the usual way. The letter is based on one of the *topoi* of wedding songs dedicated by masters to their pupils: "Eros prevails over Hermes, love distracts from study". At the end of this "reversed" wedding song, the traditional wish to beget children is transformed into that of begetting speeches. With similar irony, Procopius reacts to his brother Philip's wedding in Ep. 123. Rather than misogyny, these reactions seem dictated by an aspect of Procopius' *persona*: a totalizing vision of the rhetorician and sophist profession and an absolute dedication to his duties, compared to which the normal needs of human life have little importance.

² I.e. speeches.

116. To Anatolius¹

Many and clear are the reasons that recommend the young man to me. The first and most important are the letters full of your Holiness; then, a good father, who from the first acquaintance induces one to be benevolent; besides this, the law of my art, which threatens strict accounting should I neglect what is opportune; but perhaps also the zeal of the young man will offer me no very small portion. Nothing remains for us but to invoke the favour of God, the only one thanks to whom it is possible for the will to come to a good end.

¹ Procopius responds to Anatolius (not otherwise known, but perhaps a churchman), who has recommended a pupil of his to him. The reference to the "law of art" allows us to understand the seriousness of Procopius' educational commitment, for which accepting talented pupils is above all a duty.

117. To Dorotheus¹

You were truly skilled at procuring wings for whomever you wished and showing him soaring in the air. For, made winged by your letters, I seemed to be everywhere, as you said, thanks to fame, while I crossed as many inhabited cities as men inhabit and reached even the barbarians, transported by my light mind, and every people seemed to crown me for my discourses. In short, thanks to your letter I even ignored what had happened to me, until some god deprived me of your wings. And having reluctantly stopped wandering: "Why do these things happen to me?" I say. "Consider the one who wrote and take into account his affection, and you will marvel at how many things the desire of friendship can convince you of. And it makes one believe in the non-existent and honour the false as true." For this reason, I believe, you are immoderate in praises, and though speaking without restraint, you still think your words are inferior to reality. For you, the measure of praises is your mind, which considers that nothing is sufficient for praise. But in the name of Zeus, protector of friendship, stop writing such things to a man who looks little at himself and is ashamed of your letters.

¹ Possibly the same Dorotheus to whom Ep. 33 is addressed. The two letters are closely connected to each other: whereas in the previous one Procopius expressed some fear of the learned Dorotheus' judgment on his

writings, in this one he playfully reproaches him for the excessive praise he has given him. Overall, the letter is quite conventional; it contains the *topoi* of wings, friendship, and self-deprecation.

118. To Diodorus (?)¹

And again the moment of piety and again I have recourse to your wisdom. For a man, one of those who have consecrated themselves to God and are known for their rule of life, has, through unjust calumny, it seems, incurred the wrath of a judge, for having allegedly raised his right hand in hostility against those who serve the laws. Those who brought these accusations have transferred onto him the faults of others, as they say. And the judge is full of wrath, summons him before him, and is impatient to punish him, and behold an occasion that now more than ever requires benevolence.

So present yourself, and pronounce one of your speeches, and you will free the judge from wrath. Even if a terrible action has been committed – which has not even happened – induce the jury to pardon, which, if nothing else, has respect for the habit he wears. Present yourself along with many who are suitable to support the request, but, better still, even before the others, so that it seems that you give a particular contribution. Thus you will receive the praise of all, because truly you first presented the request and became for others an example of noble benevolence.

¹ Procopius requests legal assistance for a cleric or a monk (cf. also Ep. 111), accused of violence against a government official; the case seems difficult due to the hostility of a judge towards him, but Procopius trusts that the addressee of the letter will remedy this. This letter has been transmitted as addressed to Dorotheus, like the previous one, but assigned to Diodorus by Garzya and Loenertz (Procopii, p. XXX) based on the fact that the character to whom Procopius is addressing is a lawyer (ll. 7-9), while no Dorotheus in his epistolary is one; moreover, the adverb *πάλιν*, repeated twice at the beginning of the letter, refers to previous requests for help, which are appropriate for Diodorus rather than Dorotheus.

119. To Pancratius¹

"He desires not to seem, but to be excellent," says Aeschylus,² once having decided to praise someone. Thus you have revealed yourself to us, not – as commonly happens – showing friendship only while you were here nor measuring your affection based on place, but striving to be better and to surpass yourself. It is natural, then, that oblivion has not succeeded in snatching you from my mind, but I like always to say something Socratic: "If I ignore Pancratius, I forget even myself,"³ his tongue dances thanks to the Muses, while virtue has made his soul its own, holy as a temple inaccessible to wickedness."

Therefore you are happy, bearing such distinguishing marks, and you inhabit the city which is the common mother of discourses.⁴ The yearning seasons made an agreement among themselves for it; the sea gently bathes it and the Nile embraces it as if clinging around a lover, and everywhere there are woods, trees, and crops, and manifold beauties strike the eyes. But God will increase your happiness also with the gift of a reward for virtue. "Make your friends partakers of your prosperity,"⁵ delighting us with the goods of your tongue and sending us from house to house your poems. For it is not right to keep hidden those things which, shown to others, will bring the greatest advantage.

¹ Pancratius, the addressee of this and the following letter, is a former pupil of Procopius who, after his studies in Gaza, moved to Alexandria to perfect his rhetoric («Pancratius 2», PLRE II, p. 829). Ep. 120 is probably earlier

than Ep. 119, as it refers to Pancratius' departure from Gaza, while this letter presupposes that the young man is already in Alexandria. In Ep. 152, then, Procopius reproaches Pancratius for his silence and for not keeping his promise to write to him. This letter is distinguished particularly for the abundance of quotations and images dear to rhetoric (the Muses, the Horae, Socrates) and the following one for compound words, some of which are rare.

² A quotation from Aeschylus, *Th.* 592.

³ cf. Plato, *Phdr.* 228a.

⁴ Alexandria, noted for its natural and architectural beauties and the favourable geographical position. Procopius' expression "mother of speeches" alludes to the tradition of rhetorical studies in the city. In late antiquity, however, Alexandria was especially famous for studies in mathematics, astronomy, medicine and philosophy.

⁵ A quotation from Euripides, *Or.* 450 (with *δέ* added between the first two words).

120. To Pancratius¹

Those who once sailed past the Sirens² and drank in their songs with their ears did not desire their country, did not remember their children, but it seemed right to them to suffer anything rather than depart from those whose pleasure they had experienced. And we, after tasting your art, as they say, with the tip of a finger, were possessed by absolute desire for it to the point of choosing not to be far from it even for a little, although it was inevitable to be physically separated. While you departed, we departed in mind together with you, and behold, now we live in the city of Alexander, imagining with fantasy that we are with you.

It is the Loves who engender such an opinion in me. And even if, coming to my senses, I return to myself again for a little while, I enjoy your stories even more. And all distinctly remember your virtues: one the mildness of your speech, another the loftiness of your rhetorical figures. Others have called you sweet, another speaks of the moderation of your disposition, another has said that you carry the Muses on your tongue, and each one vies to be the first to tell your merits. But you write, alleviating your absence with letters, and willingly grant us the pleasure of seeing the bearer of your letters.

¹ On Pancratius, see note to the previous letter.

² Procopius establishes a comparison between the charm exerted by the Sirens' song on sailors and the enthusiasm that reading Pancratius' letters rouses in him.

121. To Nephalius¹

As much as you formerly uplifted our spirits with letters, so much now you have surpassed our hopes with your honesty. For remedying the past and consoling one who has been convinced that he was wronged in friendship, how do they not befit a man wise in mind and who knows how to cure what causes suffering? One thing of yours has pained me: if you think that I have suffered so much as to need gifts that make me change my mind, like Agamemnon with the Thessalian champion.² However, I gladly accepted even the gifts, not because they are dear to me so much as because the intention of the one who sent them is dear to me. And he who brings my letter, in need of your benevolence, may he obtain it to the extent that his request causes no disturbance.

¹ In order to be forgiven by Procopius after his long silence (cf. Epp. 95 and 108), Nephalius has sent him gifts; Procopius thanks him and recommends the bearer of the letter to him. On Nephalius, see note to Ep. 15.

² Procopius refers to Agamemnon's useless proposal to Achilles (whose homeland, Phthia, was indeed in Thessaly) to compensate for the loss of Briseis with gifts in *Il.* IX. This episode is treated by Procopius in one of his *dialexeis* (op. VII Amato).

122. To Gessius, the Iatrosophist¹

He who delivers the letter to you, though raised by a widowed mother² and lamenting the lack of necessities, yet has not deviated towards indolence, excited by youth, or become free to do as he pleased, but, wishing to improve his condition, not only has a passion for eloquence but also hastens towards your tongue, to draw from it an adequate starting point towards a respectable life, as if it were enough for him to look to you and obtain liberation from his sufferings, improving his hopes for the future thanks to your teaching. Therefore, knowing your disposition and knowing that you pay attention to those who need to receive good, I confidently lead this young man to you, providing you, instead of a great reward, a material to cultivate anew.

¹ Recommendation to Gessius (cf. note to Ep. 16) for the bearer of the letter, a young man in difficult economic circumstances.

² According to Choricus, Procopius was the same.

123. To his brother Philip¹

With difficulty you made us, who were perplexed, change our minds, when you wrote that you wished to sing a wedding song and become a father of children. For the abundant fame that had spread was bringing us every rumour from every direction, and while all told, we listened in silence, ignoring our own more important affairs, and seeming to be joking to those who questioned us, as if we purposely pretended to be ignorant.

Now, however, after having rejoiced at your letter, I would willingly have immediately become winged Perseus² and, having arrived near you in flight over the sea, I would have seen the sacred nuptial canopy and the most pleasant vision of all, a loving, ex-philosopher groom, and if someone called him "material," he would answer philosophically that it was necessary to honour the reproduction of the species, providing a contribution in exchange for oneself and satisfying the natural duties towards it.

Yet you have been conquered, my friend, and, however late, you are experiencing the darts of the Loves; they say the bride is beautiful – by the Graces! – and capable of distracting her lover from philosophy. Become a father only "for the procreation of legitimate children," as comedy says,³ and if only I could very soon see a child of yours who proclaims his father in appearance but above all in affability and nobility of soul, and who resembles him in other virtues.

¹ Procopius addresses a veritable epistolary wedding song to his brother. Despite the generally ironic tone, indeed, the letter contains some of the *topoi* of a speech in praise of a spouse, as codified, for example, by the handbook of Menander Rhetor (II, 399, 11-405, 14, pp. 134-147 Russell-Wilson), in particular the long proem (II. 1-10); the reference to the bridal chamber (7), the generative power of Eros and the divinities favorable to the union (11-12); the praise of the bride (12-13) and finally the wish to beget children (13-16).

² A reference to Menander. Cf. note to Ep. 29.

³ Another direct quotation from Menander, fr. 453, also found in Lucian (*Tim.* 17), Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* II, 23) and other authors of the imperial and late antique age. The reading of Menander by the Gazan rhetoricians is confirmed by references to the comic poet in Choricus' orations.

124. To Hieronymus¹

How you pride yourself on the Nile and attack us, bringing Egypt into the middle, as if you had fallen into oblivion of dearest Elusa! Thus not only are your letters sophistic, but I also seemed to see the haughtiness of Gorgias. You said, in fact, that the Nile rains from the earth, if some word has not escaped me, and makes navigable what was formerly passable on foot.²

But what does this have to do with you, who live in the city of Hermes,³ which Zeus Pluvius does not even look upon, while the Nile, passing by it, hurries elsewhere? And then why do you say, lying, that you gather harvests? Unless you call "harvests" the snakes and scorpions, so many are there. Apparently once, stung by one of them, they say you shouted "ouch!"; then, having meanwhile caught sight of a sumptuous table, you threw yourself entirely upon it, greeting the scorpion, perhaps after having said this comic line to it: "Not even dead may I ever be without you."⁴ This is what you should have written, not preening yourself with others' goods!

But you also accuse me of being silent, when it is you who tell us absolutely nothing. Certainly, you could have found someone who speaks more, and you would not quote Cotocides⁵ to us, who mocks sophists because they were like flutes.⁶ Farewell, together with your son and your wife. And do not bear down severely on your son Alexander, imposing too many efforts on a young age.

¹ Another playful letter to Hieronymus (see Ep. 2) who, after despising his homeland Elusa for Egyptian wealth, is forced to live among snakes and scorpions in Hermopolis, in the most arid area of Egypt.

² With these words, besides showing off sophistic rhetoric, Hieronymus was referring to a very widespread theory in antiquity, according to which the Nile floods originated from the push of a river, a sort of second Nile which, on certain days of the year, surfaced from underground caves.

³ Hermopolis. *Hermoupolis Magna* (present-day al-Ashmunein) is the Greco-Roman name of the Egyptian city of Khnum, located on the left bank of the Nile and capital of the 15th-16th nome of Upper Egypt. The dry climate alluded to has preserved very many papyri.

⁴ A quotation from Euripides, *Alc.* 367-368, taken up by Aristophanes, *Ach.* 893-894.

⁵ Aeschines is called "Cotocides" by Demosthenes (13, 29). The allusion might concern Aeschines, 3,229, or some passage of a lost oration.

⁶ Cf. Ep. 2.

125. To Gessius, the Iatrosophist¹

How bitter are the decrees of fortune against us and suited to the plot of a terrible tragedy! We have not yet finished with the most painful burial of children, and behold, fortune suddenly drags away the mother – probably doing her a favour if she placed her beside her most beloved children, but adding for us pain to pain and making one tomb more burdensome with another tomb – and deprived of their mother, alas, children still clinging to the maternal breast.

Truly beyond tears and any representation are these misfortunes, and such as to confirm the myth of the unfortunate woman turned to stone from a human being.² Apparently she was a Phrygian and

a barbarian and had not prepared her soul for the draught of fortune with the potions of philosophy.³

It is told, for example, that the great Anaxagoras, when the premature death of his son was announced to him, immediately replied that he had been ready for a long time and felt no great pain at such news, saying: "I knew that I had begotten a mortal."⁴ And I believe I guess from what has been said that, if someone had announced to him that his wife had died together with the child, he would certainly have added: "I knew that I had married a mortal."

Therefore I honour the discoverers of tragedy, since they realized that fortune turns human affairs upside down. They invented for us theatrical performances, perfectly anticipating the misfortunes of our loved ones with the ills of others.

For what misfortune happens to us that time has not already shown in the past? What new event could occur without referring to a similar model? But if we truly are pleased to show ourselves stronger than fortune, we will run to the harbour of our usual philosophy, considering who we are, where we came from, what are the explanations of our reality, that if we are bound we must nevertheless be freed when it seems opportune to the one who bound us and lay down the mask that the author of the great drama imposed on us.

This is the exhortation of "know yourself."⁵ This is your task, my most learned friend: you who, I believe, continually unfold the discourses⁶ of providence and offer yourself as an example of steadfastness to those not initiated into wisdom.⁷ So let us return to ourselves, saying: "But what could I do?" and "The deity accomplishes everything."⁸ If, in fact, you consider these things, you will accomplish deeds worthy of yourself and will dispose the deity to finally look upon our affairs with benevolent eyes.

¹ On Gessius, cf. note to Ep. 16. This is a consolatory letter, in which Procopius comforts his friend for the loss of his son and wife. Here as in other letters of similar tone (Epp. 30 and 69) Procopius follows the precepts of Menander Rhetor on λόγοι παραμυθητικοί (cf. n. 168 ad Ep. 30). Here, too, indeed, the "lament" (ll. 1-20) precedes the "consolation" (ll. 20-30). However, the usual philosophical motifs of the consolatory genre are given more space than in similar letters; moreover, the letter stands out especially for its numerous literary reminiscences. This rhetorical-philosophical *tour de force* perfectly suits the high cultural level of the addressee.

² According to the famous myth (ll. XXIV, 602-617; Hyginus, *Fab.* 9 and 10; Pseudo-Apollodorus, III, 5, 6; etc.), Niobe, queen of Thebes, dared to boast that her offspring was more numerous than Latona's. Apollo and Artemis then avenged their mother by killing all of Niobe's children, who was petrified by grief or turned to stone by Zeus.

³ The concept of philosophy as medicine for the soul is quite common in the imperial and late antique age: cf. Plutarch, *Adulescens*, 12d, Dio Chrysostom 18, 7; etc.

⁴ The episode is narrated by Galen (*De plac. Hipp. et Plat.* IV, 7, 9).

⁵ The proverbial inscription placed on the pediment of the temple of Apollo at Delphi: cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* IV, 2, 14; Plato, *Phlb.* 48c; *Chrm.* 164e; *Prt.* 343b; etc

⁶ An expression frequently used to indicate the reading and explanation of written works; cf., e.g., Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Affect.* VI, 59, 7 Canivet.

⁷ The concept of culture as "initiation" is expressed by Choricus in describing Procopius' teaching, «introducing the young to the mysteries of the ancient authors» (op. VIII, 7, p. 111 Foerster-Richtsteig = Proc. Gaz., Test. II Amato).

⁸ A quotation from ll. XIX, 90; these are Agamemnon's words of resignation in admitting to having been a victim of Ate, blinding, in the outrage towards Achilles.

126. To John¹

I received your welcome and truly full-of-charm letter, which on one hand Socratically accuses my demon² of the long silence, on the other, through praises, leads back to philosophy itself me, who lie on the ground and cannot lift my gaze towards the summit of virtue – and what else am I if not a sophist, as you yourself might mock me? – or, better still, seduces the ear so that it, ravished by entirely inappropriate praises, patiently tolerates the accusations against rhetoric and endures these truly trite warbles, the "image of a part of politics," the "familiarizing oneself with people,"³ and all that discourses made in jest require – and I will not say out of envy, in the name of the respect I bear for philosophy and Plato. And, as I believe, you yourself, my most wise friend, holding a contrary opinion about the art, in scorn, it seems, attack, so to speak, the shadow of a donkey, heaping upon us Thrasymachuses, Poluses,⁴ and all that Plato's whims have created. But in short, my dear fellow,⁵ stop speaking ill of the highest things! Otherwise... but I keep the threat for a better moment.

¹ On John, see note on Ep.36.

² These are two quotations on the debate between philosophy and rhetoric from Plato's *Gorgias*, respectively 463d and 463a. Both concern the critique of rhetoric that Socrates makes against his interlocutor Gorgias.

³ A proverbial expression often used by Aristophanes (*V.* 191) and in oratorical prose to indicate a useless and pointless action.

⁴ The Chalcedonian sophist Thrasymachus (c. 459-400 B.C.) is cited by many ancient authors but is mainly known for being one of the interlocutors in Plato's *Republic*. While in the *Phaedrus* (266c) Plato mentions Thrasymachus simply as a good rhetorician, in the *Republic*, in accordance with his name ("bold fighter"), he makes him the theorist of force as the source of law (338c) and the defender of injustice as an expression of individual freedom (344c). On Polus, cf. note on Ep. 38.

⁵ See note on Ep. 2.

127. To Diodorus¹

When I read your letter, I came to the memory of past happiness, forming in my mind the image of the Nile and the pleasure of seeing you near it, and I happened to weep at the instability of fortune, since it turns high and low. Now it brings men together as one would never hope, now it separates again those it has brought together against all hope. But men have devised a wise remedy against it, sharing desire through letters and creating some form of presence with written words.

¹ Procopius writes to his friend Diodorus (note on Ep. 8), nostalgically recalling the time spent together in Alexandria, perhaps to pursue studies in rhetoric; then, as consolation, he emphasizes the importance of letters as an antidote to the whims of fortune that unites and separates individuals at will.

128. To Diodorus¹

Since I accepted the celebrated salary, concerning which in the past I sent out all my voice, I have maintained silence, not because I had forgotten the favour after receiving it, nor because I was heir to the muse of Gerontius:² only to you, in fact, did fortune offer this advantage. And who, not seeing him, will satisfy his desire through you, as if being appropriately led towards the model through a precise image?³

I repaid the favour with silence, so that I might not happen to speak, saying less than I want to say. And my gratitude for you will remain recorded in me better than with the king of Persia, who knew how to honour the betrayal and the pro-Persian Pausanias,⁴ even if, desiring complete success in the

most important matters, my friend,⁵ and having engaged your intellect in this work, you pronounced passionate words about us, too far from our way of thinking: you called us poor before the judge!⁶

For this I was very angry, if you remained open-mouthed towards matter after having fallen from the sublimity of philosophy, to the point of saying, thinking of money, ignoble and miserable words and not considering either my dignity or the most wise Diogenes, who made the greatest wealth consist in a small wallet.⁷ But strive to become free, considering the world a small thing compared to virtue!

¹ After justifying his silence, Procopius on the one hand thanks Diodorus for having successfully pleaded a case for him, on the other hand reproaches him for having insisted on his poverty before the judges. The case probably concerned the granting of public money to Procopius (cf. Ep. 84; see «Diodorus 3», *PLRE II*, p. 359).

² According to Martindale («Gerontius 9», *PLRE II*, p. 509), Gerontius might be a sophist, even though «the sense requires that he be a person noted for his silence». It seems very unlikely that Procopius is alluding to the sophist Gerontius of Apamea, a friend and rival of Libanius. From the context of the letter, it would rather seem that Gerontius, not mentioned elsewhere in Procopius' epistolary, was the teacher of Diodorus (and of Procopius? Cf. Ep. 127).

³ A basic concept of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy is used here, regarding the relationship between master and pupil.

⁴ Cf. Ep. 28.

⁵ Cf. Ep. 2.

⁶ On the opinion of poverty in late antiquity, cf. note on Ep. 67. See also Ep. 131.

⁷ Numerous anecdotes circulated about Diogenes of Sinope (c. 412-323 B.C.), considered one of the founders of the Cynic school and an advocate of extreme poverty as a means to achieve self-sufficiency. See also the biography in Diogenes Laertius (VI, 20-81), and the references to Diogenes contained in the orations 6 and 8-10 of Dio Chrysostom. Together with the little cloak (τριβώνιον: cf. n. 484 ad Ep. 99), the knapsack was the symbol of the philosopher's poverty: cf., e.g., Plutarch, 332a; 499d; Favorinus, *Fort.* 18 (I, p. 488, 3-4 Amato); Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ep.* 98, 1 Gallay; etc.

129. To Diodorus¹

For those who care about friendship, I believe affection and readiness in satisfying the needs of friends are sufficient, but the fact of also spending one's own is neither just nor good for the one receiving the favour. Besides, one who has suffered a loss once is more reluctant towards a second need. And if this does not happen to you because you are always strengthened by the law of friendship, at least I am blocked by shame from writing about whatever I please. Therefore, if you wish that I always enjoy my frankness towards you, you will not delay in taking the debt due.

¹ Procopius reproaches Diodorus because, perhaps considering his meagre means (cf. Ep. 128), he has not accepted a reimbursement in money.

130. To Marcellus¹

The reason for the present letter is not shamelessness nor the inability to remain within one's limits, but a man dear to God and filled with every virtue, whom neither the fact of having just arrived from Egypt, nor a respectable school,² nor the threat of winter, nor the obstacle of the sea, nor the long journey have convinced to neglect the promises made to you, but since he knows that keeping promises with deeds and being equally close to everyone are one single virtue, he looks to you with

all himself. He also promises to come to us very soon, and I was easily convinced of it, having had proof from the promises he made to you.

Nothing remains for you, therefore, but to let yourselves be surpassed, and it would be fitting not to wish to hinder a man who believes that nothing is so terrible as being forced not to keep the promises he has made. So send immediately someone who gives us an account of your benevolence.

¹ Procopius recommends to Marcellus – perhaps a fellow sophist and teacher – a young Egyptian (a monk?)

² The character mentioned by Procopius is "dear to God" and comes from Egypt, so it cannot be excluded that the term φροντιστήριον (cf. also Ep. 89) is here to be understood as "monastery" or "monastic community".

131. To Sabinus¹

You reproach me for poverty as if to blame me, and this thing seems to you a most baneful beast²; moreover, and this is the most serious of all, to you I am Irus³ and perhaps I lack daily bread; and what would you not be capable of saying, since you have equally deviated from virtue and philosophy, you who feel pity for what you should admire while you think that one who is elevated, light, and not dragged down by the weight of matter is deprived of who knows what great goods?

For, measuring happiness with your belly⁴ and seconding human opinions, you rent your tongue for illicit purposes, while you turn the courts upside down and public executioners are an addition to your deceit⁵. You knock at the doors of the rich, and if someone were master of the art of feasting, he would give up, exhausted by your admiration. A splendid feast for you is a colourful garment, a pompous gait, and a glance that runs here and there; you have ears everywhere like Midas,⁶ in case some little woman struck by your charade says something.

But then, how long, enchained by a long sleep like an Endymion,⁷ will you refrain from rising towards virtue? Stop, in short, gaping at your little body and feeding your prison to your own detriment. Stop dreaming of gold, always fantasizing about quantities of money, and wandering in thought through a great number of offices. The goods you have within you are not equal to those of any of your friends.

Come over to our side instead, if you will, prostrate yourself before the common goddess, Poverty, and acknowledge her as your lover. For she treats you better than us and has promised that she will continue to love you.

¹ In reproaching Sabinus for his excessive attachment to money, Procopius praises poverty as a means to elevate the soul above earthly things. Despite the serious theme, the letter contains a description of the ambitious Sabinus in full comic spirit. Sabinus, a former student of Procopius and a lawyer, is also the addressee of Ep. 90.

² Cf. Aristophanes, Pl. 442-443. This initial reference to comedy provides, as it were, the key to interpreting the entire letter.

³ Cf. note on Ep. 75.

⁴ Proverbial expression starting from Demosthenes, 13, 296. Cf. also Cicero, *N.D.* 1,40, 113: *omnia quae ad beatam vitam pertineant ventre metiri*.

⁵ Using intimidation in court against respectable people.

⁶ Procopius alludes to the famous legend of the Phrygian king Midas who, in a musical contest between Pan and Apollo, expressed himself in favor of the satyr. The god, angered, punished him by making him grow a pair of donkey ears; cf. Ovid, *Met.* XI, 146-143; Strabo, I, 3,21; etc.

⁷ According to Pseudo-Apollodorus (I, 7, 5), the beautiful Endymion, beloved by Selene, obtained from Zeus the gift of sleeping forever without ever aging or dying.

132. To Dorotheus¹

I would never have expected before how much you would grieve me with your departure if I had not had the test of facts as a guide. Since, in fact, you left, abandoning us, I have not stopped wandering with you in thought and picturing harbours and the sea. Often I said: "Hear me, O Poseidon who encircles the earth!",² asking him to offer you a benevolent sea; I counted on my fingers the days of the voyage and was near you with all myself, to the point that, even when I tried to call someone else, often without realizing it I would address him as Dorotheus. He would laugh, but for me the mistake was a pain. You perhaps did not know how much affection you left in us. Often, when I saw someone approaching from afar, I seemed to see you, by the gods, since eyes are easily deceived towards the object of the mind's desire. But with difficulty I freed myself from the error, when I received a letter from you and alleviated my love.

¹ According to Garzya and Loenertz (*Procopii*, p. XXX), the Dorotheus to whom Procopius addresses both this affectionate letter and Ep. 138 would be «quelqu'un avec qui Procope s'est lié d'une amitié très vive durant un séjour de Dorothee à Gaza» (Dorothee C). While Ep. 138 is very conventional, in this letter Procopius expresses accents of deep affection and sincere nostalgia.

² A quotation from Od. III, 55 (= IX, 528).

133. To Diodorus¹

I received your beautiful dried figs, better, I believe, than the Attic ones,² because of which, as they tell, the great war was stirred, when the king came, throwing earth on the sea and cutting a mountain, transforming it into sea; I also received truly beautiful sandals.³ However, "but neither the dog rose nor the anemones are comparable to roses."⁴ For what Attic figs and what cakes,⁵ towards which you always stretch your tongue, are not better than large, beautiful raisins,⁶ which comfort natural sweetness with a moderate astringent taste? But I also sent some pickled birds,⁷ comfort for a greedy stomach. Is not our stuff much better? Every gourmet judge, I believe, would say so. On the other hand, perhaps you will say the same of future sandals. I am open-mouthed for them; when, however, you send them... but I absolutely do not want to say how I will try to make fun of you.

¹ To Diodorus, who has sent him dried figs, Procopius responds by sending him in turn salted birds and magnifying his gift. Letters accompanying gifts consisting of foodstuffs are frequent in Byzantine epistolography.

² Attic figs, fresh or dried, in antiquity were considered the best in the world (cf. Athenaeus, III, 74e, etc.), to the point that their export was regulated by special laws. Athenaeus (XIV, 652b) narrates that a eunuch served Attic figs to Xerxes at table to remind him that the region they came from was not yet his, thus pushing him to war against the Greeks. Similarly, Plutarch (173c) relates that Xerxes refused Attic figs, reserving them to eat when he had conquered the land that produced them.

³ Possibly a metaphor for literary compositions.

⁴ A quotation from Theocritus, 5, 92-93.

⁵ Flat bread or flatcake. See Aristophanes, *Eq.* 1219; Athenaeus, XIV, 645d (a list and description of the various types of bread recalled by ancient literary sources).

⁶ The production of raisins in Palestine was linked to that of wine (on which, cf. note on Ep. 12).

⁷ The practice of treating and preserving food in brine is documented since antiquity; for example, Herodotus (II, 77) mentions the use of salted fish (ιχθύες ἀλμῆ τεταριχευμένοι) among the Egyptians.

134. To Stephen¹

Everything that distinguishes good men proclaims your magnificence. As witnessed by those who have known you, words are conquered by deeds and seem to come after facts. After always consigning your solicitude towards me to my greatest admiration, I continue to do so especially now that it has induced a man of such importance to me to give very little weight to distance, so that, even if he had used letters of light tone, I could not have opposed his requests. And to me, who felt some reluctance towards departure, imposed such a burden both the virtue of his whole life and all that fame hastens to announce after being strengthened by experience, to the point that I almost followed him dressed as I was, without even saying goodbye to my loved ones. But in the end a thought held me back from sailing, while I reflected that I should never disdain the country in which I first saw the sun, and that it is better to respect its rights than to have much money and neglect the many strangers who are here because of me.²

¹ This Stephen is probably the same as in Ep. 103. The beginning of the letter suggests a person of importance, possibly a *clarissimus*. The situation underlying the letter is not entirely clear. Procopius seems to allude to a transfer proposal presented to him by a prominent figure sent by Stephen, or by Stephen himself; he is inclined to accept but is induced not to leave by the thought of his homeland. This coincides with what Choricus (op. VIII, 12, pp. 113-114 Foerster-Richtsteig = Proc. Gaz., Test. IV Amato) narrates regarding the offer received by Procopius from the city of Caesarea and the strong pressures exerted on him to convince him (E.A.).

² Procopius states that he does not want to leave his homeland partly because of his attachment to it (see Epp. 113 and 114) and partly out of consideration for those (students or scholars) who have come to Gaza for him. Moreover, the reference to money makes it very likely that, like Hermias (Ep. 114), Stephen had offered Procopius a teaching position in another city; his courteous but firm refusal would therefore be the true motivation of the letter.

135. To Peter¹

Dear Epiphanius, bringing me very great affection thanks to your letters, joined me and gave proof of all his zeal in oratory, showing none of the defects of youth, but giving himself entirely to discourses and being constant in practice. And truly this seems to prove that the accusation was invented and that what has been going around for a long time is false. For such things are typical of lazy people and of a mind dragged by meaningless idleness to illicit things. One who heeds Isocrates and consumes "the leisure of life in the desire to hear discourses"² does not give the slanderer reason to think his accusations well-founded. Moreover, even if he were silent, his life is sufficient to defend him. But may it rather happen that the young man does not disappoint my hope regarding this.

¹ Procopius praises Epiphanius to Peter (who had evidently recommended him to him previously) and expresses his doubts that the accusations against him could be true. Peter is the subject of Ep. 35, where he appears in need of legal assistance. On Epiphanius, cf. note on Ep. 19.

² A quotation from Isocrates, 1, 18, 6.

136. To his brothers Zacharias and Philip¹

The excellent Timotheus, the bearer of this letter, provides for now the pretext for writing to us; on the other hand, since fortune has given him an honest father, extraordinarily fond of the quiet life, he manifests in himself the one who generated him, showing on his face the nobility of his manners; therefore he readily blushes whether someone praises him or merely wishes to look at him. For some reason he has reached the imperial city² and needs your influence, which may provide assistance that does not create problems for you as much as possible. In doing this, you will be pleasing to good men, than which nothing is more important for those who know how to honour virtue.

¹ Procopius asks his brothers for assistance for the young Timothy who is about to go to Constantinople. This Timothy is perhaps different from the monk of Ep. 111; nor does the letter contain elements that encourage identification with the famous Gazan grammarian.

² Constantinople.

137. To his brothers Zacharias and Philip¹

The current year, it seems, will bring frequent requests from us, moreover just and with an appreciable motivation, by virtue of which a person of noble soul and Hellenic² spirit would be very happy to do a favour or receive one from others.

Here is the necessity for the present. The most learned Nilus, who has dedicated his life to God,³ lives in the city and, since his mother leans on him, caring equally for her old age and the weakness deriving from it, he is known for his piety perhaps not less than many who live the life of a hermit. Possessing a house that has an adjacent unbuilt plot, he also had the misfortune of a wicked neighbour, who, having planned some windows on the side of the unbuilt plot – a thing not lawful – at first declared that they would not be an impediment to anyone wishing to build.⁴

But now that words have turned to deeds, he adduces the windows as an impediment, as if claiming that right which, when he was making his innovations, he had ignored! Seeing himself rejected in every court of justice, he devises for himself recourse to authority and, above all, to a man who has always known how to favour justice.

For he is pushing as far as the powerful Nestorius, encouraged by the fact that he is not on the spot. For, using his usual methods as support, he has boasted of having purchased his just authority for the purpose of his fraud, and having procured material for his crime, he is also attempting to discredit the praises that arise from every side for him.⁵

But, having come to know of these facts through you, he will hinder with threats one who commits injustice by using a man who honours justice.

¹ In this rather complex letter, Zacharias and Philip are called upon to warn the powerful Nestorius: the young presbyter Nilus has suffered injustice from an unscrupulous neighbour, who does not hesitate to turn to Nestorius' authority to have his claims guaranteed. Probably the Nilus of this letter is not the same former pupil that Procopius playfully reproaches in Ep. 163, as Martindale thinks («Nilus 4», *PLRE II*, p. 785). Nestorius, a judge, is most likely different from the Nestorius addressee of Epp. 66, 70,75 and 150 (cf. note to Ep. 66). A Nestorius σχολαστικός and βουλευτής (*curialis*) of Gaza is, however, mentioned in Zacharias of Gaza's *Life of Isaiah*; see *PLRE II*, p. 780, s.v. «Nestorius 5».

² The adjective ἑλληνικός, which in Christian Greek has taken on the negative meaning of "pagan" is used by Procopius in a laudatory sense.

³ I.e. a monk.

⁴ Nilus' neighbour has opened windows that overlooked the unbuilt land belonging to Nilus, with the guarantee that they would not constitute an impediment to any future construction; when, however, Nilus plans to build on his property, the neighbour opposes. See Festa, *Animadversiones*, p. 41. Work on private buildings (such as opening windows) was strictly regulated by Roman and Byzantine law, as demonstrated by the entire section *De aedificiis privatis* of the *Codex Justinianus* (VIII, 10); for example, in the case set out in this letter, opening windows would have obliged Nilus to maintain a distance of at least twelve feet between the existing building and the new one (VIII, 10. 12).

⁵ The wicked neighbour has appealed to the powerful Nestorius, and is attempting to resort to corruption, thereby compromising Nestorius' good name.

138. To Dorotheus¹

For lovers, spring was certainly not a change in the weather, the splendour of the season, the swallows singing, and the earth made multi-coloured by flowers, but the voice of the object of love transforming the winter of silence that was an obstacle to the soul of lovers into a sweet sound. Such you seemed to me when you gave me the gift of your letters, which are better than any pleasure; because the past winter came violent in its nature, but seemed more burdensome because you were silent.

¹ On this letter and its addressee see Ep. 132. The letter is based on the *topoi* of silence and the conventional images of spring.

139. To Orion¹

Your uncle believes that he would make a great contribution to your education if he truly obtained letters from me, and he prepares to write precisely to speak about this. I, on the other hand, admired that man for his affection towards you, since he has spared not even the smallest things with which he knew he could please you, while I preferred silence, blushing at myself and having nothing wise to send him. For as it also seems to the most wise Plato, it is not possible to know what virtue is unless one is driven to virtue by actions.² But what I do not know, I would truly blush to speak of and do as if someone, not knowing music even in a dream, then said he was Orpheus ready to charm animals with his lyre.³ But if it were necessary to put his hand to the sounds, his boast would immediately arouse laughter and the trick would be easily discovered.

How then am I believed by your uncle to be what I am not? Certainly you have often spoken of me in flattering terms by virtue of the law of friendship, and he, not considering your affection but believing that your words come from facts, expects me to be such as you have moulded me with your words. Now I demand an account of your lie and refute your words, not being able to become a teacher of virtue. However, since it is to you that I am writing, consider admiring me still, so as not to prove to yourself that you have lied.

¹ Orion's uncle (on whom, cf. note to Ep. 92), who evidently acts as the young man's guardian, asks Procopius to write edifying and instructive letters to his nephew (E.A.). Procopius reproaches the young man for having exaggeratedly praised him, thus raising great expectations in his uncle: he, indeed, does not feel at all a "teacher of virtue" (in Ep. 142, however, Procopius agrees to play this role for Cyriacus).

² The concept of knowledge of virtue as a necessary prerequisite for acting well is expressed by Plato (*La.* 190b).

³ On the myth of Orpheus, poet and musician son of the muse Calliope, see Hyginus, *Fab.* 164; Diodorus Siculus, IV, 25; Pausanias, IX, 30, 3; etc.

140. To Diodorus¹

For two obols you have filled my house with Euripides' rags,² sending me rhythm-less offerings,³ as you like to call them, coarse and Iphicratan sandals, at which the general Iphicrates would raise a loud cry⁴ because they bear no indication of Attic provenance.⁵ For they show neither any grace nor a trace of the Hymettian bee, nor do they proclaim with their appearance Attica, where are <...> Marathon, Salamis, and men who are lovers of liberty and pride, and not – by Zeus! – initiates into the Muse that is with you; for your... but let a religious silence be maintained, lest something escape me.

¹ Playfully, Procopius reproaches Diodorus for his gifts of little value. Like Epp. 98 and 133, this letter testifies that part of the relationship between the two long-time friends was the exchange of gifts, which could consist of food, clothing, or literary works.

² On Euripides' "rags", cf. Aristophanes, *Ach.* 414-415.

³ Possibly compositions dedicated to Adonis (which were not lacking in the cultural environment of Gaza: cf. note on Ep. 11) in verse or rhythmic prose.

⁴ A quotation from Il. VII, 124, taken up by Herodotus, VII, 159.

⁵ Iphicrates, an Athenian general (d. c. 353 B.C.), was responsible for a reform of hoplite armament aimed at increasing speed of movement in battle. Part of the new armament were the particular footwear that took his name: according to Diodorus Siculus (XV, 44, 4), Iphicrates was indeed the inventor of sandals "easy to untie and light". Probably, the lightness made these sandals not very resistant and therefore inexpensive.

141. [To Cyriacus]¹

Such were your gifts, while, as for ours, you too would praise them, you who so please your belly. For, since you are not only gluttonous, but have also made filling your stomach an occupation and measure supreme happiness by food, if ever you manage to catch something sweet, you immediately stick out your tongue, like Ajax sticking out his great shield. Witness is that time when you took away the flatcake from others and immediately put it all in your mouth.

¹ Garzya and Loenertz (*Procopii*, p. XXXII and 112) believe that this letter is actually the continuation of the previous one, erroneously separated from the rest and attributed to the addressee of the following letter by the manuscript tradition. Indeed, the "gastronomic" theme of this letter, as well as the mention of the sandals of Ep. 140, appear together in Ep. 133, addressed precisely to Diodorus.

142. To Cyriacus¹

How much children must be grateful to fathers cannot be calculated according to merit, unless one is himself a father of children. Then, in fact, from the love he feels towards his children he will certainly know how his parents were towards him. However, all those consecrated to the Muses judge truth in words even before experiencing it. So it is fitting that you become such towards your parents, who, so to speak, contribute affection more than others. For this reason they have induced me to write the present letter, asking you, as a compensation due to parents, that you not dishonour

them and become such as they want you to be, and may God realize their desire. Then, in fact, even death would be easier for them to bear, knowing what successor of their lineage they have left.

¹ The difference in tone of this letter compared to the previous one seems to confirm Garzya and Loenertz's doubts about the identification of Cyriacus as the addressee of Ep. 141. In this, which is therefore the only letter in Procopius' epistolary addressed to Cyriacus, Procopius writes to a young man (probably a former pupil of his) at the invitation of his parents, reminding him of his moral duties towards them. Cf. Ep. 139.

143. To his brothers Zacharias and Philip¹

He who has brought you this letter is the son of Agathus, who honours honesty and is known among all just men. The boy, when he attended my school, showed as much a steady character as a very lively enthusiasm. And now he has set out on a journey to the imperial city because he desires to procure in addition knowledge of the laws² in order to progress as a rhetorician, supporting the administration of the State with his person after presenting speeches in his defence with his tongue. It is not right, however, to pass over in silence his coming to you, who, since in a certain sense you consider those initiated by me as children,³ will also show towards him no small affection.

¹ Procopius recommends to his brothers a young pupil who wishes to continue his legal studies in Constantinople.

² Legal studies were introduced in Constantinople no earlier than 425. As in Berytus, two chairs of law existed at the beginning of the 6th century. From the *Codex Theodosianus* and other sources, the names of some jurists who operated and taught in the imperial capital are known: Leontius and Erotius in the 5th century and Theophilus, Gratinus and Julian in the 6th.

³ In this phrase, Procopius combines the image of his pupils as children (cf. note on Ep.16) with the concept of culture as initiation (note on Ep. 125).

144. To Orion¹

The test of facts can sift good friends especially when they are absent. For a distinguishing mark of affection is not to appreciate what is near: sometimes someone might do that as one who on stage wore the mask of a good man and simulated what he is not. If instead someone who is physically far away goes in the same direction with his care and joins in thought, this is he who is capable of maintaining the law of friendship. Such you arrived for us, after surpassing even your previous merits with the value of your subsequent ones. But if children are also images of their fathers, then naturally fame transports me too on high, making a small father seem greater thanks to a good son and, as you said, transmitting my name to cities everywhere. But may you honour virtue, demonstrating that you have, regarding the laws, that zeal and natural talent that you had with me for discourses.

¹ Orion (cf. note on Ep. 92) has begun his law studies away from Gaza (probably in Berytus: cf. Ep. 155). Procopius expresses his joy because his former pupil, thanks to his successes, brings him fame and glory.

145. To Eudaemon¹

I did not think it right to let pass in silence the fact that the most learned Ierius is coming to your city, entrusted with teaching the language of the Italics among us and adorned with good manners

even more than with education. It would be beautiful, in fact, to always enjoy your presence; it is a second way, as they say, to converse with distant people through letters. However, truly fortunate are those for whom you administer justice while, clinging to your voice as to a tripod,² they watch as a completely new spectacle Justice coming to them, which the past had erased.³ And it is superfluous to say that you will also benefit the bearer of this letter in what he asks of you. For one for whom discourses are life, how will he not honour the fathers of discourses as soon as he sees them? May he therefore return announcing what we pray to hear, namely that you surpass your fame with the test of facts and give more than those who receive desire.

¹ Procopius recommends to Eudaemon the grammarian Hierius, who has taught Latin in Gaza (cf. Ep. 13) and is perhaps the bearer of the letter. Eudaemon is a man of law and perhaps a provincial governor («Eudaemon 5», *PLRE II*, p. 407); a collaborator with a good knowledge of Latin could certainly be useful to him. Moreover, the profession of grammarian was not incompatible with the practice of law or a political career.

² In the sanctuary of Delphi, the Pythia, priestess of Apollo, prophesied from atop a tripod placed near a chasm in the ground; the vapours emanating from it caused a kind of ecstasy.

³ Procopius compares Eudaemon's return to that of Justice, whose expulsion from the world of men is narrated by Hesiod, *Op.* 220-224.

146. To Nephalius¹

You, in the abundance of riches, complain about the lack of means, while I despise riches and the rich, though tormented by extraordinary poverty. Thus, therefore, it is the mind that creates the state of poor and rich, not riches, which wander here and there because of fortune. So stop complaining to us in a petty way and consider nothing important, unless it gives some contribution to virtue. For what is not such is alien and drags towards deception. Therefore those who know how to be wise, after shaking off these cares like a sort of drunkenness and folly, leaving earth to earth, traverse the sky with an elevated spirit, after having swum through sensations, matter, and the space of error as through a stormy sea.

¹ Procopius urges Nephalius (on whom see note on Ep. 15) to free himself from his obsession with wealth.

147. To Musaeus¹

I received the book, which has become more desirable to me because, taken from your hands, it certainly absorbed something poetic; I believe that whoever uses it in the future will feel his intellect sharper, no less than Socrates when he sat by the Ilissus, where were both the temple of the Nymphs and the dwelling of Pan.² But if only you would also take the other books and work³ on them, rendering them such that I, as I take up each one, may feel my inspiration ever more divine!

¹ Procopius thanks Musaeus for having given him a book on loan or as a gift or, probably, for having returned a book sent to him for reading, according to a common practice among his correspondents. Musaeus is also the addressee of Ep. 165. From the two epistles, Musaeus appears as an authoritative figure and a man of great culture, perhaps a poet, towards whom Procopius feels admiration.

² The *locus amoenus* of Plato's *Phaedrus* (on which cf. Ep. 3) is located by the Ilissus (229b) and is sacred to Pan, to whom Socrates addresses the final prayer (279b-c), to Achelous and to «some Nymphs».

³ Possibly Musaeus added annotations and commentary.

148. To Epiphanius¹

Truly the proverb knew well the lot of lovers: even if they wish to perjure themselves, they are guaranteed forgiveness by the gods. For, behold, I have written to you despite having promised not to write to you; to such an extent am I dragged by my desire for you and become a lying lover! But write often and offer your lovers at least a simulacrum of your image in place of your sight.

¹ Short letter in which Procopius asks Epiphanius (cf. Ep. 19) to break his silence, transgressing the promise not to write to him first.

149. To John¹

I envy you for your offspring, since you know how to generate such creatures; for you exhibit children happy from happy fathers, wisely offering divine principles through the nectar of the Muses. Such has the most learned Muselius arrived for us; wishing to praise him and not being able to express his qualities, I consider only silence adequate for his praise. But if you would listen to me, apply to yourself the voice of Agamemnon: "strike thus," dear Teucer, and do not spare yourself in speaking.

¹ On the possible identification of the John who is the addressee of this letter with John of Gaza, see note on Ep. 5. Procopius thanks John for having recommended to him the young and promising Muselius («Muselius 2», *PLRE II*, p. 768).

150. To Nestorius¹

Still silent? Still do you become more troublesome than fortune? That one, in fact, deprived me up to now of your sight, while you have denied us even short syllables, certainly in no way imitating the well-known communion among friends. But I desire you even though you are not here and I am happy with your memory, and now, since I have found a favourable circumstance, I am not capable of honouring silence at a moment when it is truly appropriate to address you. You instead, if you have not derived from your country also this, the not remaining faithful to the principles according to which I educated you in the past,² stand by those who love you. Otherwise, imitate with letters the sight of you and you will convince me that the enormous distance of place has not at all defeated my teaching. To such an extent do I exalt myself for a man, adhering to the pride of a teacher.

¹ Procopius reproaches Nestorius for his silence but, as in Ep. 148 with Epiphanius, affection leads him to take the initiative to write. On Nestorius, cf. Ep. 66.

² Procopius alludes to the theme of Epp. 66 and 75: Nestorius, returned to his homeland (probably Elusa), would not have gone to visit his master despite promises (E.A.).

151. To Sozomenus¹

It was no small pleasure for us that the wise Caesarius brought us by telling of your commitment. Oh, how a noble man, educated in discourses, paid us an irreproachable and pure praise, smiling and at the same time rejoicing with me for my offspring!² I congratulated you for the praises, him for his choice, and myself for my fortune, if a man so good has testified that our pupils have a good

reputation. But mature in virtue,³ overshadowing yourself with wisdom, and provide occasion for greater praises to those who tell of you!

¹ Procopius congratulates his former pupil Sozomenus on the praise bestowed upon him by Caesarius, with whom the young man continued his studies. Sozomenus is not otherwise known; as for Caesarius, he seems to be a much more authoritative figure than the Caesarius to whom Ep. 1 is addressed.

² I.e. literary speeches. Cf. Ep. 16.

³ Cf. Plato, *Lg.* 913b.

152. To Pancratius¹

Is this how you neglect those who love you? Is this how you restrain the torrents of your tongue? As for me, not only does desire paint your portrait for me, but now I have also realized that I dream while the body is awake. But grant yourself to us at least up to letters; for lovers it is a comfort to see even a small sign of loved ones. Remember also those discourses that contained promises either to come to us very soon or to make your absence unnoticed with frequent letters. Now, however, there is a risk that I will accuse you before the Muses, saying that the wise Pancratius was skilled at saying what he did not intend to do.

¹ Procopius reminds Pancratius (on whom, cf. Ep. 119) of his promise, not kept, to write to him. The letter is rather conventional and based on some of the most familiar epistolary *topoi*.

153. To Zosimus and Macarius¹

The most wise Babylas, when he came, willingly told me things I desire to hear but knew before he said them. For on the basis of the fact that, attending my school, you have adorned commitment in discourses with the wisdom of character and with other virtues, it was clear without any doubt that even departing towards the allurements of the laws you would still remain yourselves; and if only you could become somehow more ambitious to aspire to the best! If, however, these things give me pleasure, what must I say – God willing² – when, placed before entire courts and spreading respect for the laws with your wise tongue, you conquer those present with the test of facts and the absent with your fame? When news like this is spread, Polycrates will seem insignificant to me compared to fortune and Croesus with his many talents will seem nothing to me.³

¹ As in Ep. 151, Procopius expresses his joy at the successes of two of his former pupils who have undertaken legal studies, and urges them to continue to do well. Nothing is known of Babylas, Procopius' "source", except that he was probably a professor of law in Berytus (*PLRE II*). On Macarius, see Ep. 96. As for Zosimus («Zosimus 5», *PLRE II*, p. 1206), a sophist of the same name is the addressee of Ep. 8 of Aeneas of Gaza. Furthermore, in a Suda article (Z 169 Adler), we read of a sophist Zosimus of Gaza or Ascalon, who lived during the reign of Anastasius I (491-518), author of a rhetorical lexicon and commentaries on Demosthenes and Lysias; none of these works survive.

² Cf. Ep. 46.

³ On Polycrates and Croesus, cf., respectively, notes on Ep. 95 and Ep. 13,4.

154. To his brother Zacharias¹

I do not know who those who bring your letter are, but since they admire you, I consider them very close relatives. For when they saw me and came to recognize some resembling feature, they

guessed the truth, after discussing among themselves and making each other judges of the matter, namely that I am the brother of their most beloved. Since they were being pushed towards a unanimous opinion, they presented themselves and addressed me all together, and looked at me with benevolent eyes; all the time they went on about your wonders, calling you an upright judge, a just official, and in every possible respectful way, and perhaps they said things inferior to your merits but undoubtedly it was clear that they wanted to say more than they managed to express, demonstrating that their opinion of you was better than their tongue. And I, crowned with their numerous praises – for I considered personal the praises that concerned you – to them who asked for a reward I gave this present letter.

¹ Procopius reports with satisfaction to his brother, perhaps while the latter is governor in Rhodes (cf. Ep. 6 and Ep. 12), the praises paid to him by some young people who, evidently, are in his service and can fully appreciate his human and professional qualities.

155. To Orion¹

I would not have believed that such an accusation could arise from you, nor that I could be guilty of silence towards those who do not know where on earth or sea they have arrived. But apparently, to avoid the impending charge, you have chosen to accuse rather than present me with an account. You, in fact, should have been the first to tell, "I left the land of the Berytians," "I crossed much sea," and: "Coasting the islands, I saw the Hellespont with its escort of wonders from both continents,"² and having passed the Propontis, I arrived right at the Bosphorus, where I saw a city that presents itself to arriving travellers with an extraordinary spectacle. For, lying on an isthmus, it looks upon Asia stretching opposite Europe, and separating Pontus³ from the rest of the sea, it displays its wonders," and all the nonsense that those who have seen those places are accustomed to say crudely, trying to astound our ears. If you had written such things and we had been silent, then we would rightly be brought before accusations. Now, however, after being silent and neglecting the law of sea travellers, you begin to practice your art on me, moving your lawyer's tongue. However, at least write: even if you wrote accusations, we would bear it.

¹ On Orion, cf. n. 446 ad Ep. 92. Procopius responds to the accusation of silence levelled at him by his former pupil; in turn, he reproaches him for not having given him news of the journey he made by sea from Berytus, where he had studied law, to Constantinople along the coasts of Asia Minor, the Dardanelles Strait (Hellespont), the Sea of Marmara (Propontis) and the Bosphorus, where the Byzantine capital stood. At the same time, Procopius takes the opportunity to mock the rhetorical descriptions of journeys full of exaggerated expressions and effective images.

² The Hellespont, the narrow strait separating Europe from Asia, was full of mythical and historical echoes.

³ I.e. the Black Sea.

156. To John¹

Truly wise was he who said these words here, namely that the wise man "... even if he lives in a distant land / and even if I never see him with my eyes, I consider him a friend."² Just such a feeling, my dear fellow, has seized me, who am ignorant of your appearance but terribly prey to desire for you. But glory be to fame, thanks to which what is separated is united and what is far away seems somehow near!

For, having often seen you thanks to it, having embraced with pure intellect your happy solicitude for better things, and being joined to you by an incorporeal love, I certainly have no need at all of corporeal signs, but when I also got your letter sent from the city of Alexander, it seemed to me that I had you yourself here. For the character of your words and the inability to do without placing the divinity as a seal of your friendship towards me did not belie your previous fame, but showed you such as I expected to see you, and this while frequenting the courts according to the law of your art and being able to maintain sobriety to such an extent in the intoxication of worldly affairs.

But may you reach the fulfilment of what you have set out to obtain! This, in fact, is the goal for sensible people: the return to one's own principle. Extraordinary, indeed, it is to remove the multiplicity that is in us in order to return happily to that from which, in our unhappiness, we departed.

¹ To John, who has written to him from Alexandria, Procopius philosophically justifies the necessity of communicating by letter with distant people. Since Procopius says he does not know him personally, according to Martindale (*PLRE* II, pp. 605-606) this would be a different addressee («Ioannes 49») from the one of the other letters addressed to John («Ioannes 50»). However, this John is also a lawyer and seems to have pronounced philosophical interests.

² A quotation from Euripides, fr. 902.

157. To Sosianus¹

A certain most pious man has come to us after having suffered very much because of his abject brother, but considering it a sufficient act of justice if he could succeed in obtaining at least what he was deprived of. Therefore, through me, he seeks refuge in your influence, which can not only recommend him to the judge, but also offer him the assistance of very powerful people and reduce court expenses. With difficulty, in fact, and only thanks to collections,² is he able to provide for his own sustenance. But also ensure that his case be judged in a short time.

For his requests are simple: that the adversary dissolve with an oath the accusations regarding the facts adduced. Besides this great solicitude of yours, also offer as adequate support, as a contribution to the collection, your tongue which is most refined and which flows with free impetus in defence of justice, a support not only pleasing to God, but also well accepted by those who ask for it and sufficient for the needy.

¹ Procopius urges the lawyer Sosianus, who practices in Caesarea (note to Ep. 21), to attend to the case of a man who has been unjustly deprived of his assets by his brother.

² These are voluntary contributions or loans granted without interest; see, e.g., Pseudo-Demosthenes, 25, 1, 22.

158. To John¹

He who bears this present letter, being a good man, complains of the poverty caused by his brother's injustice. Therefore he wishes to reach the city of Caesar to recover what is due to him, assuming it is possible for him. But deign to help him, making the powerful people among you ready to provide him with adequate assistance. For he has only one hope of consolation, that of obtaining support from the laws, of which he has been deprived for too long because of his abject brother who

always plots new subterfuges. Therefore, console his poverty, cutting as much as possible the expenses of the courts.

¹ Letter similar to the previous one, but more concise in argument and less elaborate in style. Procopius recommends to John, a lawyer in Caesarea (Ep. 5), a man – again unnamed – who has been a victim of his own brother. The two letters, transmitted one after the other by codex V, were particularly suitable for comparison in a scholastic context. Besides presupposing the same starting situation, i.e., abuse by a brother, both letters contain a request for intercession with powerful people and a plea to reduce judicial costs. The vocabulary used by Procopius is also very similar between the two letters. They could, therefore, be submitted to rhetoric students as models for different treatment of the same topics.

159. To the bishop Elias¹

Although it is possible to say many things from which one could write a tragedy about the jokes of fortune, which always changes our affairs as it wishes and does not allow anything to remain equal to itself, I will be silent about all this to a man who has long condemned earthly goods and who defeats fortune through the things he neglects, not wishing to admire anything of it; but I will only remember this, that nothing is as much ours as we ourselves are. And what are we? Certainly not this body of ours, which is perishable, nor the madness of riches, nor all that gives power to fortune, but a rational soul, chained to the body for some reason or other.

Therefore those who have known how to understand important things got rid of everything other than it as of an extraneous burden, considering that these things do not at all tend towards their own essence. They considered nothing an obstacle to the mind: not the suffering of the body, not the loss of riches, not the difficulty of circumstances; instead, withdrawing into themselves, they were free and feared as the only punishment to deviate from virtue and to be held in account as slaves for the desire of riches and for regard towards their own body, after having unworthily subjected the better to the worse and admired men who are violent and in all things richer than themselves.

Therefore one, using the body as if it did not belong to him, uttered those words of freedom "Crush," saying, "crush the sack of Anaxarchus, but you will never crush Anaxarchus himself";² another, having voluntarily refused the things he had, said: "Crates frees Crates."³ These and similar things belong to a truly noble soul, which is master of itself, tramples on pleasures, and is capable of not changing together with circumstances.

Remember, therefore, as it seems to Epictetus, that you are an actor in a drama that is as the author wishes it,⁴ while to Plato it seems that the wise man is happy even if, in all that does not concern this, things go badly for him.⁵ Besides, when our things go well, we certainly give little thought to extraneous ones; another, in fact, is the current that transports them.

¹ To the Christian bishop Elias (on whom, cf. Ep. 27), Procopius addresses a letter that develops the theme of the instability of human fortune and the necessity of detachment from earthly life; to reinforce his arguments, Procopius uses a series of references to the classical philosophical tradition (especially Platonic and Neoplatonic) and, therefore, pagan. This is a very interesting letter, as it clearly reveals the absorption of the pagan tradition into the Christian context of Gazan culture.

² According to Diogenes Laertius, (AP VII, 133), this phrase was uttered by Anaxarchus before being tortured and killed by being crushed in a mortar on the orders of Nicocreon (or Timocreon), the tyrant of Cyprus, whom he had offended. No work by Anaxarchus of Abdera (c. 380-c. 320 B.C.) survives.

³ Crates of Thebes (c. 365-c. 285 B.C.), coming from a rich family, converted all his possessions into money, which he distributed to his fellow citizens, and chose to live in absolute poverty on the streets of Athens together with his wife Hipparchia (cf. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 86). A Cynic philosopher and pupil of Diogenes, Crates advocated and practiced simplicity of life and detachment from earthly goods; the anecdotes concerning him are full of humour. He was a teacher, among others, of Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism. The phrase quoted by Procopius became proverbial.

⁴ A quotation from Epictetus, *Ench.* 16.

⁵ A quotation from Plato, *Grg.* 507c-e.

160. To his brother Philip¹

I loved the one who brings you this letter for other reasons too, but above all because, since he always remembers you for your benefits, in the end he has also become responsible for my letter to you, saying that it would have been terrible if he had presented himself to you without letters from me. You, however, at least grant us in exchange a single letter, and break the five-year silence together with the Pythagoreans.² For we have even become the bronze of Dodona,³ desiring to push you to words.

¹ Procopius entrusts this brief letter to a young collaborator of Philip (perhaps recommended by him previously to his brother) to urge his brother to break his silence.

² Cf. Ep. 1.

³ Cf. Ep. 5.

161. To Evagrius¹

How typical your words are of one who loves excessively and has managed to crown the beloved with victory over all! For, since in your letters I not only surpassed contemporaries but also – which is not lawful to say – Demosthenes was defeated, Thucydides came second, and sweet Herodotus was placed alongside them, since therefore I was such in your words, smiling to myself I said: "Nothing is stronger than the power of Eros.² For the most beloved,³ having fallen under the dominion of affection towards us, did not know how to recognize the reality concerning me and suffers something similar to one who presents the sharp-headed man of Homer – and who else if not Thersites? – as the foremost of the Greeks in appearance, perhaps even better than Nireus himself, who 'came to Ilium as the most beautiful man'⁴." But for me it would be a very great reason for praise if it seemed that I had even only come to know those we have defeated, having you as judge.

Therefore, full of admiration for your affection, I dedicated the discourses to the Loves, after having addressed apologetic prayers to the orator of Paeania if desire persuades men, especially those who delight in the power of discourses, to say as many things as they wish to say. But I will engage in a prayer, this time moderate, saying: "May you, dearest friend, succeed and obtain with the laws as many victories as you have obtained with discourses."

¹ Evagrius, perhaps a former pupil of Procopius (PLRE II, pp. 402-403, has given excessive praise to his master's rhetorical art, for which Procopius kindly reproaches him, wishing him success in the profession of lawyer he has undertaken. This letter clearly indicates the literary models of the Gaza school (Demosthenes, Thucydides and Herodotus).

² Cf. Ep. 10.

³ Cf. Ep. 48.

⁴ On Nireus and Thersites, cf. Ep. 44.

162. To Nilus¹

You were truly skilled at making small things great² and showing an invincible tongue in what you desired. For you fabricated so many praises about me and presented them so easily that no one could have spoken as easily starting from the truth. And it seems to me that you have spread yourself in such eloquence perhaps wishing to show your hidden nature. For probably you believe that, when you were here, it was not known what great Muse you had cultivated in yourself at the school of rhetoric.

I, on the other hand, knew you well even when you were here, but I did not praise you as much as was necessary while you were practicing with me, lest praises, freeing ambition, interrupt your course while you were always proceeding towards a greater goal and hastening towards the highest point.

Now, however, I have without doubt been pleased by your letter, considering not the praises – certainly I have taken flight, soaring everywhere thanks to your words – but the fact that we have obtained the success of calling you a son born of the Muses. For, moving your tongue thus for a lie, what could you become once you had adhered to the truth?

But I was also pleased that you mocked yourself because, insatiably loving riches, you have extended your commerce even to my discourses. But fill your right hand, O most fortunate one, and I will patiently bear to see my discourses on sale.

However, take care not to have also to answer for them, having first demanded justice from yourself, for having dared to make public some of my inconvenient children.³

¹ Nilus, a former pupil of Procopius, has sent his master a letter full of praise. Procopius responds by praising his skill in eloquence, but chides him for having divulged some of his speeches without authorization.

² Cf. Ep. 33.

³ On speeches as children, see Ep. 9.

163. To Cledonius¹

Long live the grace in letters and the tongue that flows freely and can say what it wants! For, since you have raised me, who in discourses is insignificant and of art has little more than the garb, so high that I am now uncertain whether you ever wrote the address of this letter without realizing it while writing to others, what would you not easily be able to say if you wished? And it seems to me that you have moved your tongue so much wishing to make it clear that you will demand from me that your son be able to speak in this way. For this you have established for me so great a contest that I would almost have withdrawn even from the promise to teach him, if it had not come to my mind

that the boy, since he possesses his father's nature, will in all likelihood surpass my teaching, providing from home what is lacking to it. So that it is fitting for you not to seek everything from me, so that I may not be silent, being embarrassed before the need to give an account. But I promise as much affection for him as you yourself would offer if it happened to you to be his teacher; for the boy induces me to it, offering commitment equal to his nature.

¹ Cledonius, a rhetorician not otherwise known, asks Procopius to accept his own son as a pupil; Procopius is flattered and, at the same time, indicates his task as burdensome, since it will not be easy to meet the expectations of an expert in rhetoric like Cledonius. The same situation is envisaged in Ep. 26.

164. To Gessius¹

A "demonic" impediment, to speak Socratically,² has appeared to restrain up to now the impulse to write, my dear fellow;³ it besieges us with one illness after another,⁴ since this is the present life that we are given to enjoy. For a crowd of innumerable ills has seized, somehow, the life of men; one is afflicted by poverty, another is tormented by pains of the soul, another has his body in a bad state, another complains because he has no child, another weeps for those he has. And what need is there to speak of the loss of wives and children, which experience has made known to you as you should not have known, that is, by the test of facts? And it would be long to go through in words the things that stand before our sight and that life shows in facts, while God guides our existence, it seems to me, so that, after stumbling upon a quantity of events against our will, we may in no way cling to earthly reality, which has nothing stable and immutable, but, having abandoned the place of our misfortunes, we may hasten towards the other life, having flown towards the sky with our mind, even if the body is still forced to remain here, and we may not weep for one who departs from the chains of this world, who finally manifests himself in his freedom. For I agree with him who said, whoever is the author of this phrase: "The best thing for men is not to be born at all and, once one is born, to pass through the gates of Hades as quickly as possible."⁵ And the tragic scene, having appropriated this thought, says that it is necessary for us to gather and "lament to how many ills he who is born comes."⁶

Then why do we continue to lament after having accompanied in funeral procession our dearest people, safe from the storm of life, before they experienced the ills here, and why, then, do we wish the divinity to be as seems right to us, while it is necessary to consider beautiful what seems opportune to it? Thus truly was the emulator of the great Pythagoras, who, to one who had said as a prayer: "May the god give you what you desire," replied: "No, be silent! May I desire what he gives me."⁷ For, having often prayed to attain many things, later, not having obtained them, we have recognized from facts that they did not happen opportunely, while, having obtained many things that we desired according to our expectations, shortly after we reproached fortune because they happened. Thus, since they look at insignificant things, men have no stable nature; moreover, we are ignorant of what could be absolutely useful for us. Therefore it is necessary to yield to the greater power that wisely guides our life, even if its decisions are unknown to us.

¹ As in Ep. 125, Procopius addresses with his friend, the physician Gessius (n. 94 and Ep. 16), the theme of the precariousness of life and human hopes; the occasion, this time, seems to be an illness of Procopius himself.

² Cf. Ep. 126.

³ Cf. Ep. 2.

⁴ Aelius Aristides often mentions in his orations the poor health that afflicted him throughout his life (or. 36, 9; 48,5-6; 50, 1-2; etc.). Also Aeneas of Gaza's letters 19 and 20, addressed to Gessius, centre on the author's illness, who suffered from nephritis; there is, however, no indication of the illness or illnesses afflicting Procopius.

⁵ This is a recapitulation of vv. 1, 425-428 of Theognis' elegies.

⁶ A quotation from a fragment of Euripides' Cresphontes (fr. 449,4).

⁷ This anecdote, attributed to the Pythagorean Timarides of Tarentum or Paros, is cited by Iamblichus, VP 145 (E.A.). On Pythagoras, cf. Ep. 1.

165. To Musaeus¹

The most learned Palladius arrived bringing pure gold, your letter, and if he had brought me the talents of Croesus I would not have looked at him with such benevolent eyes. For one glories in one thing, another in another: the Lydian in gold, the Spartan in his spear, Arion in strings and notes,² while for me it is a reason for pride to see you, your letters, and all that I may be able to enjoy of you; so that we owe the young man also a reward according to justice, and if we did not give it to him we would naturally be ashamed. The reward is not, by Zeus, either gold or Indian stones – for I am not rich in these things, nor has the young man come here to obtain them – but neither the beauty of discourses – for I am not fertile in Muses³ nor do I boast of my Atticisms, since of such things the children of the fortunate have abundance – but if you wish to see what my gift is, it is affection and commitment: of this, in fact, I am master, as Demosthenes says, while of other things fortune and the Muses are masters, who distribute their gifts as seems opportune to them.

¹ On Musaeus, see Ep. 147. The conventionality and epistolary *topoi* of the initial part give way to a warm and firm profession of professional honesty by Procopius.

² According to tradition, the lyric poet Arion of Methymna, who presumably lived around 600 B.C., gave artistic form to the dithyramb. Herodotus (I, 23-24) tells a famous legend about him, according to which, thrown into the sea, he would have been saved by a dolphin attracted by the beauty of his song.

³ Besides a play on words on Musaeus' name, this emphatic reference to the Muses perhaps aims to underscore the distance between Procopius and the addressee of the letter, a poet; consider also Procopius' final words on the gifts of the Muses.

166. Megethius to Procopius¹

When, recently, you gave a reading among us of your funeral oration, I so delighted in your Attic honey that I believed the Musegetes² himself, together with the Graces, had had a hand in the oration with you. In fact, at every single word of yours, I and those who were listening filled the theatre with applause, each shouting loudly like Stentor.³ When we then returned to the city, behold, admiration for you spread further, and your golden writings were on everyone's lips. They were judged, comparing them with each other, since nothing is equal to them, without being able to conclude to which one more than any other the palm of beauty should be awarded. To such an extent did equal graces flow forth from every part. Since, therefore, those who, for various commitments, did not have the fortune to hear the oration, prayed to be able to taste, through me, your Attic honey, send the oration, quite sure that, after crowning it with a thousand new praises, we will send it back to you immediately.⁴

¹ Ciccolella prints this following Ep. 167 and 168.

² I.e. Apollo.

³ For this expression, see Aristides, or. 2, 109.

⁴ From this passage it seems possible to infer that Megetius resided in a city different from Gaza and that, therefore, Procopius was invited to give public recitations elsewhere as well.

167. <...>¹

You truly carry the very Graces on your tongue and seem to me like a sanctuary of theirs; here a temple is erected by you, and a soul that, with a pure plectrum, harmonizes skilfully with the tongue, enchants the goddesses. Therefore they delight in it more than in the sight of Naxos, which is said to have been the island of the Graces; here Dionysus surrendered to Ariadne and became her husband.² But the son of Semele came up aptly in our discussion; for if he were not a god, what serious accusation would he have received from us for having neglected a poor man, who sees debts in his dreams, even from his own blankets, but who has dedicated himself above all to the Muses and the Graces!

For a while he had his little field, O Dionysus, and placed his hopes on it, waiting to take whatever the vines might grant. But why, coming in your power, O Dionysus, did you not show them laden with fruits? Oh, if only you had mounted the wine vats, had danced the Bacchic dance, and nothing had been empty of must! Then, being now well-off, he would have danced for pleasure and would have been an even better artist.

Do you also want to know what Dionysus replies to these words? "It is impossible to be both rich in words and in money. Therefore," he says, "I ruined the grapes to increase the power of his tongue still more. For even the cicadas, nourished only by dew, contain within themselves the whole of the Muses, and listening to them you could say that they were once men and became cicadas."

So it is reasonable to be content with what one has, and even if the tax collectors are troublesome, it is enough that he sings for them and they will immediately forget about the money.

¹ Not in the Garzo edition. Published in E.V. Maltese, "Un'epistola inedita di Procopio di Gaza," in: *Parola del passato* 39 (1984): 53-54. This letter appears together with four other already known letters of Procopius on folios 272^{r-v} of the Madrid manuscript Scor. <I>. III. 15 (gr. 234), which dates back to the 15th century. The Procopian authorship seems confirmed by the correspondences in lexicon and style with the other letters highlighted by the editor. Procopius addresses a friend of his, devoted to the Graces and the Muses (i.e., probably, to both oratory and poetry) to console him for the poor outcome of the grape harvest on his farm. Beneath the elegant humour, which characterizes this letter like many others by Procopius, one might perhaps grasp a moral lesson: the failed miracle by the wine god, alluded to in the letter, contrasts with the miracles with which the holy monk Hilarion several times succeeded in producing vineyards near Gaza (Jerome, V. Hil. 27).

² Several different versions of the myth of Dionysus and Ariadne are found in ancient literary sources, especially regarding Ariadne's abandonment on Naxos by Theseus, acting under compulsion by Dionysus (so Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Epit.* I, 9). Probably the Graces or Charites were originally associated with the cult of Dionysus.

168. <...>¹

Well done on your marvellous letter! It fell upon us like a spring of eloquence, and sounds like something utterly musical instead of the swallows. I am like one possessed by pleasure, admiring

everything – the diction, the content, the harmony, the writer! And suddenly I seem to myself to be a Lydian, imitating the customs of the Lydians, who, being devoted to the cult of Dionysus, celebrated spring only when Dionysus happened to be among them.

But perhaps you will laugh at these things, since the sophistic character truly blooms in them, and you might possibly call me a sophist as a term of contempt. But I cannot help admiring beautiful things, and even if you are silent, my dear fellow, I say the opposite. But do not cause trouble for me while I am trying to represent in writing the pain that caused by silence!

¹ Not in the Garzo edition. Published by L.G. Westerink, "Ein unbekannter Brief des Prokopios von Gaza," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 60 (1967): 2, from Oxon. Barocc. 131, which dates to the years 1260-1270. However, the quantity of commonplaces this letter contains suggests that it might be a school exercise rather than an authentic Procopian letter. The manuscript itself gives no ascription.

169. Megethius to Procopius¹

Sophists, inasmuch as their life consists in creating speeches, I know are chatterboxes. Nothing, therefore, restrains them from chattering: neither bridegrooms, nor those celebrating a birthday, not even a quarrelsome husband with a talkative wife, a rich man or a poor man. Indeed, what am I saying? Often one ends up disturbing the very dead, not leaving even the deceased to rest in peace.² If, then, a friend writes to you, oh, what an infinite flood of words is poured out upon him, you answering syllable by syllable!

Well, now I do not know for what reason you violate the law of these men or why you advance towards me like one of the followers of Pythagoras³ and, although you yourself first received a letter from us, you have not reciprocated with an equal one, either before sending the speech, or once you had sent it.

Yet, at the very moment when your "children"⁴ were about to arrive here for the public exhibition, if for nothing else, it would have been necessary to write to me at least so that I might set about making the theatre benevolent towards them. In fact, even those who put on dramatic works, when they are about to show them to the spectators, first demand their benevolence.

I am forced to tell you such nonsense in the name of the son of Aphrodite, who, having arrived in force, orders me to be a lover of your speeches. By this god here, my letter takes a bit of liberty, but in the name of Hermes⁵ and the Muses, to whom the applause for your "offspring" is reserved, write to one who loves your writings.

¹ Published as Ep. 2 in E. Amato, "Sei epistole mutuae inedite di Procopio di Gaza ed il retore Megezio" in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 98 (2005), pp.367-382.

² Allusion by Megetius to the various types of encomiastic speech (wedding song, birthday speech, epitaph, declamation, etc.), widespread, in his time, among sophists and in which Procopius himself excelled.

³ Cf. Ep. 1, 87, 160.

⁴ "children" meaning his literary works.

⁵ Hermes symbolises rhetoric. Cf. Ep. 3.

170. Procopius to Megethius¹

You know for us, my dearest friend, about that Attic tongue, thanks to which the venerable things of old were affirmed and which knew how to save in fact this "great name of Athens."² For my part, you belonged to the Eupatrids³ and had the origin of your lineage in Butes.⁴ You would not have disavowed this opinion of mine by speaking, believe me, and proclaiming before the judges, "The genuine Attic tongue and the source of the Muses flow so much upon your tongue, that I cannot, listening to a speech of yours, remain in myself, like the celebrants of Bacchus when they are totally possessed by the god."

For which reason, veiled, I do not look with clear eyes, when I hear my speeches praised. The way you praise them, in fact, manages to hide with its beauty the object of admiration, and you seem to do the same as if, dwelling by the Nile in Egypt, and then, hearing of a small stream, you set about admiring it. Hence your speaking to us with a certain freedom and your considering that sophists are a collection of chatterboxes. For you abuse your own nature and speak impetuously, without any fear "that another god may rouse the Trojans!"⁵

But that the race of sophists is talkative (what else to call them?), but that even corpses, vainly assailed, have provided them material for making useless praises, not even I could deny; so that, against you, may the expression 'not to grasp the truth with mockery'⁶ apply. Yet, take good care that there is no difference at all in the emptiness of speech between listening to a sophist or a rhetorician, and that you do not fall into what the proverb prescribes, being trapped by your own words instead of by wings. And let it be, by your grace, that every rhetorician is a man of honour!

On the other hand, I could not affirm that justice of the laws is promised to the guilty and, if someone, craving and taking what does not belong to him, does not return it, it is said that their crimes are the will of the legislators. Here for us are the courts, the arena of nonsense, and he who once shone in nurturing hopes, after having struck with words and with his won cases, goes away in tears, almost glimpsing the noose and overwhelmed by the sentence. Those laws and those legislators, "everything has vanished."⁷ Do you not think, in the name of Zeus protector of friendship, that it is the same to disturb the dead and a talkative rhetorician who, against all expectation, makes the living a dead thing?

Not even you could say that these observations of mine fall far from the truth; nor is any of them directed against you, except that you behave in the same way, but with moderation, if you complain about the fact that I did not ask you by letter to prepare the favour of the theatre for the speech I had sent you.

¹ Published as Ep. 1 in E. Amato, "Sei epistole...". See note to Ep. 169.

² Probable allusion to Thucydides, VII, 64,2.

³ In the census system of Athenian inhabitants introduced by Solon, the Eupatrids constituted the most important class.

⁴ This refers to the hero Butes, son of the king of Athens, Pandion, and Zeuxippe, brother of Procne, Philomela and Erechtheus (cf. pseudo-Apollodorus, III, 14, 8), considered the mythical progenitor of the Eteobutad magnate family of Athens (see Harpocration, *Lex.* p. 138, 12-13 Dindorf).

⁵ A quotation of Homer, II, X, 511.

⁶ Proverbial, first found in Aeschylus (fr. 139,4-5).

⁷ A quotation of Euripides, *Andr.* 1219; cf. also Aristophanes, *Ach.* 208-209.

171. Megethius to Procopius <...>¹

Those who write to you sophists, it is fitting that they write “full of the meadows of Athens.”² But if I, who am lazy and so profoundly slow, have not gathered from there even enough to pour drop by drop, in the name of your Apollo, do not despise a poor man, do not feel belittled, if I knock at the rich man's door,³ I a drop compared to the entire ocean! Well, since on this point you seem to agree with me – I am, in fact, your friend – hear also what reactions I had while going through your letter.

The proem of the letter, my dear friend, I could not even tell you how inviting it was for me: we made a feast of it! I had risen to such a height that I imagined, out of joy, getting lost in the clouds. And how could I not be at that point? I was raised by the proem to the rank of the Eupatrids of Athens, you assigned me, as origin of my lineage, Butes. What is more venerable than these?

But, proceeding in the reading, Heracles, what did you do with the Eupatrid, with the venerable name of the Athenians? You have degraded us to the rank of their Thetes⁴ – but what am I saying, Thetes? ... to the level of delinquents deserving the noose, as there are everywhere, in the passage where you affirmed that we rob the accused of justice. What a pungent reaction to seal your letter, that adorable noose, to which according to you many through our fault have ended up hanging. So that I did not even get to rejoice at the preceding words, because I was seized by discouragement from the subsequent ones.

And, while I was contemplating the sky, I found myself worrying whether there was a place underground where I could sink! Thus, after having made my condition fly high, you have denied me praise. And enough of that; if indeed rhetoricians are talkative (this is the substance of your letter), then reflect on this: that they babble nonsense, if it happens, before one single judge, while you gather a myriad of spectators and literally break the eardrums of all of them.

But, the most unbearable thing of all is that three days in advance you threaten the hapless spectators; they, seeing this day looming and fearing it no less than, in its time, Tantalus' stone, ask the gods above for one of two things: either to create a new Tereus⁵ or to make them sprout occluded ears. I have behaved thus with you all the more in the expectation of being able to capture one of your speeches. Therefore, play along with me too, so that I may not be disappointed in my hopes. I salute you.

¹ Published as Ep. 3 in E. Amato, “Sei epistole...”. See note to Ep. 169. Amato gives the heading as “Megethius to Procopius, greetings.” There is no indication in Ciccolella as to why the “...” is present.

² I.e., in pure Attic language: the expression, of remote Aristophanic origin (cf. *Pan.* 1299), is almost a distinctive “mark” of the writers of the Gaza school.

³ Allusion to Aristophanes, *Plut.* 959-962, as well as to Plato, *Rep.* 364b, 5-6 and 489b, 7-8; cf., Ep. 131, 8.

⁴ The fourth and last class of Athenian inhabitants in Solon's census system, with no right to become magistrates and holding only active voting rights.

⁵ Outside the metaphor, the expression means “an individual capable of silencing sophists”: Tereus, indeed, cut out Philomela's tongue, so that she could not reveal to her sister Procne the violence suffered.

172. Procopius to Megethius¹

With what shamelessness you spring forth and go beyond what is proper! You have poured pure anger into your letter and you seem to me to shout “ouch!”, to have glued the entire stage to your tongue, to go on shouting about Tereus and Tantalus, to have filled every word of yours with

tragedy, so that I often examine, fearful, whether your letter has hands, whether it might land a right on my chin and I might suffer unexpected harm from it. Yet, in the meantime, though fearing it, caressing it with a gentle hand I said to it: "Criticize, criticize by all means; but do not curse, it's not right!"

In what have I erred? Did I not call you Attic? Did I not enrol you in the rank of the Eupatrids? Has anything more important ever come into the world? If, however, you wish your progenitor to be called just, I am willing to suffer any fate: this I could never assert. That is why you invoke Tereus and Tantalus against me; I will then call loudly upon Minos and Rhadamanthus² with these words: "Hasten, justice is outraged!" and again "His tongue, which utters such grand words, do not cut it off; rather, flay him entirely and hang him up: let him be an example to others, since he goes about speaking ill of sophists, like Marsyas did of Apollo." Those announce the *performances* in the theatres and advertise in advance the spectacles of the Muses; these, since everything must be prepared before the feast and news must precede the feast, have prayed to be Tantalus and have no shame in the prayer! Yet, if nothing else, the form of the bench and the Attic image would have required admiration!

But why speak of it? A digression on such things, even if burning, apparently is a matter of little interest, and their sight is only suffering. In matters of judgment, it is, they say, like "the donkey listening to the lyre"³; indeed, these men hold theatres in contempt. By Zeus, protector of friends, reply as soon as possible with a letter of similar tenor and, as far as your will is concerned, never deprive me of your pleasure; otherwise, it will seem that you do not know how to understand one who jokes.

¹ Published as Ep. 4 in E. Amato, "Sei epistole...". See note to Ep. 169.

² According to a tradition, attested in Plato (cf. *Ap.* 41a; *Gorg.* 524a; etc.), Minos and Rhadamanthus, together with their brother Aeacus, judge the dead in the underworld; hence their rising as undisputed models of fairness in judgment.

³ This saying, among the oldest and most widespread Greek proverbs, indicates an ignorant or stupid person, just like the donkey, which, at the melodious sound of the lyre, cannot grasp its harmony.

173. Megethius to Procopius¹

If I have made you suffer with my truce, let the contest be kindled anew, neither of us sparing blows "from the chariot": I have almost won the first prize with my words. If I have written to you that these things of mine are completely defective, it is easy for me to clash with the Academics.² If, therefore, as I said, you have suffered because of my truce, come on, let us proclaim a learned contest and snatch the weapons of the sons of Hermes!³ On the contrary, if, deeming peace a noble good, I have aimed for it and negotiated it, why do you not offer the thanksgiving gifts for this fifth day of beautiful peace,⁴ reciprocating with those that come from friendship?

But meanwhile, as I write these things, my heart swells with anger, as Homer says,⁵ since a sophist, who should mediate peace from the bench, is now trained to launch himself at great speed into the race of contention; instead, if one invites him to that of friendship and, having given a (peaceful) greeting, wishes to hear a similar response, for such an individual a whole year passes (in silence), though he remains in contact.

¹ Published as Ep. 5 in E. Amato, “Sei epistole...”. See note to Ep. 169.

² From this passage it is clear that the exchange of *mutuae* between Procopius and Megetius has suffered some loss.

³ I.e. rhetoric.

⁴ The footnote does not really explain this.

⁵ Cf. Homer, *Il.* IX, 646.

174. Megethius to Procopius¹

Of the letters you've sent me, some are filled with tears because the vines aren't bearing fruit; this last one raises hopes of a fine day with the promise that Dionysus will pass smiling through my fields. Come, besides the Muses, you'll also please the Musurgetes² (they are of the same lineage as Dionysus)³. Beg them on your knees to undertake the mission on behalf of our vines: Dionysus shouldn't disdain brothers if they are held in the highest regard. Besides, you won't compete with me in this gratuitous action: if I squander the jar in abundance, you'll share in the gain. Or isn't there an ancient adage that friends should share their goods with one another?⁴ Farewell.

P.S. Send as soon as possible your renowned “*Philip and the Athenian Collaborator of the Macedonians*”⁵ – with which you received a sea of applause the day before yesterday, while the undersigned was wandering in the hedges—, so that I am not the only one to remain starving for the delicacies of Attica.

¹ Published as Ep. 6 in E. Amato, “Sei epistole...”. See note to Ep. 169. This letter seems to be the response to Ep. 167, in which Procopius consoles his anonymous addressee, who is mainly interested in the Muses and the Graces (i.e., poetry and rhetoric), for the poor outcome of the grape harvest (Dionysus) on his farm. In this letter Megetius responds that the grape harvest (Dionysus) was good, demonstrating that it can go hand-in-hand with literary activity. Indeed that the two should not be opposed.

² Apollo.

³ Dionysus, Apollo and the Muses are, indeed, all equally children of Zeus.

⁴ Allusion to the famous saying attributed by ancient sources to Pythagoras, because he decided to pool all goods among his pupils.

⁵ I.e. Aeschines, indicated as an instigator/collaborator of Philip of Macedon also by Photius (*Bibl. cod.* 264 [490b, 24-25]). From this passage, it is clear that Procopius was the author of at least two declamations on historical subjects, dedicated to the figures of Demosthenes and Aeschines.