

MENANDER AND PROCOPIUS CAESARIENSIS

Procopius was born into an upper class Christian family in Caesarea in around 500 AD, and, as was common in those days for a person of his status, his education was based on the study and imitation of classical authors¹. This form of education is reflected in his historical works, in particular the *De bellis*, probably written in the mid-540s, which contains imitations of and allusions to various ancient authors, among them Homer, Herodotus, Pindar, Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Plato².

Some years ago Averil Cameron suggested that Procopius, *De bell.* 2.30.51 φιλεῖ γὰρ τὸ δαιμόνιον, ὅπερ ἐς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὠραΐζεσθαι πέφυκεν, ἀπὸ μειζόνων τε καὶ ὑψηλοτέρων ἐλπίδων κρεμᾶν οἷς δὴ οὐκ ἐπὶ στερρᾶς φύσεως τὴν διάνοιαν ἐστάναι ξυμβαίνει (“for the divine power, which likes to play cat-and-mouse with men, will often keep dangling those whose judgement is not founded on toughness of character by offering them great and soaring expectations”) might be an allusion to Menander fr. 672 K.-A. ὡς ὠραΐζεθ’ ἡ Τύχη πρὸς τοὺς βίους (“how fate plays cat-and-mouse with human lives”)³. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only place where it has been suggested that Procopius alluded to Menander. The allusion is, however, a somewhat distant one.

That Procopius did make use of allusions to lines from Menander can be demonstrated beyond doubt by comparison of the following passages:

(a) Menander, *Georg.* fr. 5:

εἰμι μὲν ἄγροικος, καὶ τὸς οὐκ ἄλλως ἐρῶ,
καὶ τῶν κατ’ ἄστῃ πραγμάτων οὐ παντελῶς
ἔμπειρος.

(“I am a country man, I don’t deny, and I’m not quite *au fait* with city ways.”)⁴

(b) Procopius, *De bell.* 3.9.5: ἐπεὶ οἱ ὁ θεῖος Ἰουστίνος ὑπέργηρῶς τε ὦν ἐβασίλευε καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὴν πολιτείαν πραγμάτων οὐ παντελῶς ἔμπειρος. (“For his uncle Justinus, who was emperor, was very old and not altogether experienced in matters of state.”)⁵

Procopius’ καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὴν πολιτείαν πραγμάτων οὐ παντελῶς ἔμπειρος is a clear reference to Menander’s καὶ τῶν κατ’ ἄστῃ πραγμάτων οὐ παντελῶς ἔμπειρος. The only difference is κατὰ τὴν πολιτείαν standing as a sub-

¹ A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, London 2005, 6-7.

² M. Kruse, *Procopius*, *OCD*⁵.

³ A. Cameron, *Menander fr. 788 K.*, “Hermes” 95, 1967, 382, with her translations.

⁴ M. G. Balme, *Menander. The Plays and Fragments*, Oxford 2002, 224.

⁵ H. B. Dewing, *Procopius, History of the Wars*, vol. II, Cambridge MA 1916, 85.

stitute for κατ' ἄστν, a change appropriate and necessary when referring to the emperor. Justinus I was now old, and his successor, Justinian, although not yet emperor, could administer the government as he pleased behind the back of the old man. The reference to Menander makes an unflattering comparison between Justin I and Menander's ἄγροικος: the aged emperor is depicted as a character out of touch with the ways of governing and taken advantage of by others.

This is not the only place where Procopius refers to Menander, *Georg.* fr. 5. There is a more distant allusion in the letter where Theodatus, king of the Ostrogoths, writes to Justinian and says (*De bell.* 5.6.16), οὐ γέγονα μὲν βασιλικῆς αὐλῆς ἐπηλύτης, τετύχηκε γάρ μοι τετέχθαι τε ἐν βασιλέως θείου καὶ τεθράφθαι τοῦ γένους ἀξίως, πολέμων δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐν τούτοις θορύβων εἰμι οὐ παντελῶς ἔμπειρος (“I am no stranger to royal courts, but it was my fortune to have been born in the house of my uncle while he was king and to have been reared in a manner worthy of my race; and yet I have had little experience of wars and of the turmoils which wars entail”)⁶. The words πολέμων δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐν τούτοις θορύβων εἰμι οὐ παντελῶς ἔμπειρος echo καὶ τῶν κατ' ἄστν πραγμάτων οὐ παντελῶς ἔμπειρος.

It is difficult to say whether Procopius had any direct familiarity with the comedies of Menander. He could have learnt the line preserved in Menander, *Georgos* fr. 5 indirectly from anthologies or from some other source. It may have put a smile on the faces of those of his ancient readers who recognized the allusion.

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ABSTRACT:

It is suggested that Procopius was to some extent familiar with verses from the comedies of Menander. One line in Procopius, *De bellis* 3.9.5 is an unrecognized almost complete citation of Menander, *Georgos* fr. 5.

KEYWORDS:

Menander, Procopius, literary allusion, Byzantine history.

⁶ H. B. Dewing, *Procopius, History of the Wars*, vol. III, Cambridge MA 1916, 55.