

PROCOPIUS IN THE FAR EAST: JAPANESE LANGUAGE STUDIES AND TRANSLATIONS

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Abstract: This article looks at the reception of and research on Procopius in Japan(ese). One of the main topics that Japanese scholars discussed in the second half of the twentieth century was Procopius' description of silkworms from *Sérinda*. These studies provide unique insights into this matter, some of which are detailed here. Then, the second part of this article focuses on two recent Japanese translations of the *Anecdota*, pointing out some of their strong and weak features. These observations reveal that there is still little Japanese material on Procopius, although several works are worth mentioning in relation to the development of Procopian studies globally.

Keywords: Historiography, Procopius, *Anecdota*, *Wars*, *Buildings*, Japanese.

Japanese-language Byzantine Studies began more than a half century ago. For various reasons, more than a few people in Japan have shown great interest in Byzantium, even though it had little or no direct relationship with their country.¹ Indeed, some scholars have paid attention to Procopius too. Here, I will briefly review the history of research on Procopius by Japanese people, mostly conducted in their mother tongue.

1. Reception and Studies

The first transliteration of the name of Procopius into the Japanese language was, to the best of my knowledge, made

¹ On Byzantine studies in Japan in general, see the English surveys by Wada (2001), Hashikawa (2003), and Otsuki (2012).

through the Japanese translation of Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des lois* in 1875–6 undertaken by Noriyuki Gah (1840–1923), an official and interpreter of the Japanese Government.² This work was widely distributed among Japanese intellectuals and politicians in the Meiji era and encouraged them to promote the political and social movement for democracy in the 1880s. Other than this, however, Japanese readers had never been much acquainted with the sixth-century author until the appearance of a Japanese version of Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in 1929–31 translated by Kaizō Nonomura (1877–1973), then a professor at Waseda University in Tokyo.³ The first academic work in Japanese on Procopius' works themselves seems to have appeared somewhat later. Kinji Chikayama (1907–75), a specialist of the Roman Empire at Keio University in Tokyo,⁴ published a long article on Justinian's administration of the East in 1939, in which he summarised and favourably evaluated Justinian's policy in the eastern part of the Empire according to the three works of Procopius as well as other contemporary sources. Although this did not provide an original contribution to the study of Procopius, it is worth mentioning as the first Japanese treatment of his three works in an academic context.⁵

After World War II, along with the gradual growth of reference books on Byzantium in Japanese,⁶ Procopius and

² Montesquieu (1875–6). The translation was from an English version of the work. Citations from Procopius' works appear at 6.5, 12.6, 21.15, 28.7, 30.7, and 30.12.

³ Gibbon (1929–31).

⁴ Chikayama is best known among Japanese readers for his translation of Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*.

⁵ Chikayama (1939). It also reveals that some studies on Byzantium had already been imported into Japan, such as those by J. B. Bury, Ch. Diehl, and A. A. Vasiliev, as well as Byzantine source editions, although Chikayama does not specify the editions he used (the Loeb series, perhaps?).

⁶ The first book concentrating on Byzantium published in Japan is Kamei (1948), which deeply depends on Vasiliev (1928–9).

his works gradually gained recognition among the public. Nevertheless, scholars' attention remained limited for two decades. One of the exceptions was a 1953 article by Hisashi Uono (1913–68), then lecturer in the Economic History of Medieval Europe at Keio University. Believing the *Anecdota* to be Procopius' 'confession' rather than a slanderous pamphlet,⁷ Uono analysed the evil deeds of Justinian's officials described in the *Anecdota* (*Anecd.* 20–30), comparing them to other contemporary sources. As he assumed the whole description in the *Anecdota* to be historical fact, Uono's analysis is superficial. Nevertheless, it is interesting that already in the early 1950s he considered the *Anecdota* to be an important historical source for Justinian's age.⁸

It was from 1970 onwards that Japanese historians concentrating on Eastern-Western cultural interactions in the pre-modern world began to give more attention to Procopius and that original contributions on Procopian studies came to be written. As is well known, Procopius mentions the story of silkworms delivered by 'Indian' monks from *Σηρόνδα* to Byzantium (*Wars* 8.17.1–7), and historians enthusiastically attempted to identify where the place was.⁹ Contrary to the theses that identified *Σηρόνδα* as in China, Khōtan, Kashmir, or Sogdiana, a Japanese Byzantinist, Hiroshi Wada (1940–), proposed in his doctoral thesis that it seemed to be (located in) the area around the south-eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, based on the lifespan of the silkworm and other terms.¹⁰ Unfortunately, this view has not received enough attention, even though the thesis was written in German.¹¹

Another notable opinion on Procopius' description of the silkworm was published by Masao Mori (1921–96), an

⁷ Interpretation by Bréhier (1950) 300; Uono also mentions the name of Ostrogorsky without citation, by which he means probably Ostrogorsky (1952) held by Keio University Library.

⁸ Uono (1953).

⁹ The passage on the import of the silkworm was acknowledged by Yule (1944) 51–4.

¹⁰ Wada (1970) and (1978).

¹¹ One of few exceptions is Lilie (2007) 293.

eminent scholar of Turkic Studies. He doubted whether the descriptions of Procopius and Theophanes of Byzantium of the silkworms delivered from the East (*Sérinda* in Procopius, *Séres* in Theophanes¹²) were historical, suggesting, instead, that it was the motif of a narrative that had been transmitted from the East to Byzantium. He pointed out that Procopius' and Theophanes' narratives on the secret import of the silkworms from the East to Byzantium are similar to that of the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* (*Da tang xi yu ji*) composed by a Chinese Buddhist monk Xuánzàng (602–64) in 646 at Chang'an. In Chapter 12, Xuánzàng relates a story of silkworms being secretly imported from Tang China to Khōtan (this event is traditionally dated to ca. fifth century).¹³

Both Wada and Mori's opinions should be further evaluated by world scholars. From the technological viewpoint, an agronomist-historian, Junro Nunome (1914–2008), has noted that Procopius explains an interesting method of the incubation of silk eggs using the heat of dung. According to Nunome, this method is attested only after the eighteenth century save for Procopius' narrative.¹⁴

Several studies have contributed to other aspects of Procopius' works. In 1976, Hiroshi Ogino (1913–95), historian of maritime trade across the Indian Ocean, argued that the embassy of Justinian I to Ethiopia and Himyar under the leadership of Ioulianos (described in *Wars* 1.20.9) should be placed between the Battle of Kallinikos and the death of Kavadh I, that is April–September 531, the date independently followed by the recent *Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*.¹⁵ Shiro Sasano (1949–), specialist of architectural history at Tokyo Institute of Technology, investigated the activities of *μηχανικοί* reported in the *Buildings* (*Aed.* 1.1, 2.3, 2.8) and revealed that a *μηχανικός* in that period engaged

¹² Phot. *Bibl.* cod. 64.

¹³ Mori (1970) 385–90. The Chinese text is provided by *Da tang xi yu ji* 1021–3.

¹⁴ Nunome (1979) 336–9.

¹⁵ Ogino (1976); cf. Robin (2012) 284.

not only in building activities but also in various scientific tasks and thus that neither the translation ‘mechanical engineer’ nor ‘architect’ for the word is appropriate.¹⁶ In another paper, Sasano dealt with the idea of the sixth-century Byzantine city by examining the *Buildings* (*Aed.* 2) as well as the *Strategicon*. For the study of Procopius, it is important that Sasano pointed out unique characteristics of the description of the city of Daras in the *Buildings*. According to Sasano, Procopius introduces the motif of salvation into the concept of the city in his detailed explanation of its renovation by Justinian, by comparing the city to Noah’s Ark. At *Aed.* 2.1.4–27, Procopius employs specially the word *τοῖχος* in the plural form, which means not only ‘walls’ but also ‘the sides of a ship’. Furthermore, he describes how Justinian raised the city wall thirty *podes* and constructed a triple wall around watchtowers. These numbers, as Sasano pointed out, correspond to the height (thirty cubits) and the decks (three-decked) of Noah’s Ark.¹⁷

Meanwhile, after finishing his dissertation on *Σηρίνδα* in 1970, as mentioned above, Hiroshi Wada continued to devote his attention to Procopius. His article entitled ‘Procopius’ Image of Justinian’ focused on Justinian’s character and his activities narrated in the *Anecdota*, arguing that Procopius’ negative description of Justinian could paradoxically reveal the Emperor’s capability in the governance of the empire, although the author did not argue whether such a reading existed among Byzantine readers of the *Anecdota*.¹⁸ Another article, on ‘Procopius’ Ideal Society’, dealt with his *Kaiserkritik* through three themes: *Renovatio imperii Romanorum*; his politics on Orthodoxy; and his abuse of Roman law. However, this was no

¹⁶ Sasano (1987). Cf. recent translations that prefer the traditional interpretation of this word: Roques (2011); Cesaretti and Fobelli (2011).

¹⁷ Sasano (1990) 47–9. Sasano tends to generalise the case of Daras to all eastern Byzantine cities, which requires further examination. Although Roques (2011) 444 lists this work, he does not utilise it in his notes to the *Buildings*.

¹⁸ Wada (1994). This article unfortunately lacks the description of modern historiography on the subject.

more than a brief commentary on Procopius' passages and does not go beyond Tinnefeld's important work on this matter, to which Wada does not refer.¹⁹

In sum, there are several works in Japanese that await world scholars' attention, as well as others that ought not to be labelled academic. This mixture of the good and less so may derive from the fact that most Byzantinists cannot read Japanese. In other words, most of the works in Japanese have never been exposed to serious review. Anyway, with the gradual decrease of Japanese Byzantinists concentrating on the sixth century, no major work on Procopius has been published in Japanese in the twenty-first century, except for Wada's partial introduction to the *Anecdota* in his reference book on Byzantine sources.²⁰ Nevertheless, recently two Japanese translations of the *Anecdota* have appeared simultaneously, which I review below briefly.

2. Translations

From 2010, Hiroyuki Hashikawa (1974–) and Koji Murata (1988–), both Byzantinists, launched a reading circle on Procopius' *Anecdota*, inspired by the new English translation offered by A. Kaldellis.²¹ As a result, the first Japanese translation of the *Anecdota* was published, in three parts in a journal from spring 2013 to spring 2015.²² This work, based on Haury and Wirth's edition as well as other textual readings offered by later scholars, provides a fairly literal translation enabling an easy comparison with the Greek text and a bibliography of existing translations of the *Anecdota* in other languages (about forty).²³

Intended for the academic readership, the Hashikawa–Murata translation is accompanied by over 600 detailed

¹⁹ Wada (1996); Tinnefeld (1971). On the theme of *Kaiserkritik*, see now Greatrex (2014) 89–90.

²⁰ Wada (2006) 201–2 (on Chapter 9 of the *Anecdota*).

²¹ Kaldellis (2010).

²² Hashikawa and Murata (2013), (2014), and (2015).

²³ Hashikawa and Murata (2013) 82–3; id. (2015) 69.

notes, most of which aim to follow the existing (especially European) scholarship and several of which could contribute to a better understanding of the *Anecdota*. For example, at *Anecd.* 9.37, major modern translators without exception have interpreted the nickname of Theodotos, *κολοκύνθιον*, as ‘pumpkin’.²⁴ Certainly, the modern Greek word *κολοκύθι* means pumpkin.²⁵ However, at the time of the sixth century, this plant had probably not yet been introduced into the Roman Empire. *Geoponica* 12.19 reveals that *κολοκύνθος* is a (bottle) gourd,²⁶ and Procopius’ *κολοκύνθιον* seems to be identified with that too.²⁷

One of the major weak points of Hashikawa and Murata’s work is a number of awkward expressions caused by the literal translation, which sometimes makes it difficult to follow the meaning. Another problem is the lack of a general bibliography, despite the fact that the authors adopt the abbreviated form of references (except in their first citation in the notes). Overall, their translation seems to be reliable from the perspective of correctness, though one cannot say it is flawless. For example, at *Anecd.* 1.26, the man called back by Belisarius is his son-in-law Theodosius, not Constantine as they mistakenly say.

Independently, half a year after the completion of Hashikawa and Murata’s translation, another Japanese translation of the *Anecdota* was published by a renowned publisher, Kyoto University Press.²⁸ The translator is Hiroshi Wada, now Emeritus Professor of the University of Tsukuba. Based on the Haury–Wirth edition, this book provides a translation with useful subheadings that afford an easy understanding of the contents. The number of notes is moderate (about 300), and they are no more than general

²⁴ ‘Pumpkin’, ‘citrouille’, ‘Kürbis’, ‘zucchino’, ‘calabaza’, ‘тыквой’, etc.

²⁵ Cf. Chantraine (1999) 557.

²⁶ *Geoponica* 12.19. Cf. Koder (1993) 35.

²⁷ Hashikawa and Murata (2013) 108 n. 201.

²⁸ Wada (2015). The book is one in the series entitled *Western Classic Library*, which aims to offer (new) translations of all major ancient works in Latin and Greek.

explanations, and do not refer to any scholarly works. This translation is followed by a general introduction on Procopius's life (his name, origins, career, education, religious beliefs) and on the *Anecdota* (title, date of composition, contents and its reception in later ages),²⁹ as well as by twelve additional explanations of some major figures and places (Justinian, Theodora, Belisarius, Antonina, Constantinople, John of Cappadocia, Justin I, Hippodrome and Circus factions, ἀνθρωποδαίμων, Antioch, and Tribonian).³⁰

Wada's translation is clearly superior to Hashikawa and Murata's in terms of readability, but there are, however, some problems regarding precision and reliability.³¹ Indeed, in the whole translation, Wada tacitly adds proper names that are not explicitly given in the Greek text. Moreover, he sometimes adds expository phrases in the Japanese text, or he paraphrases the Greek text without indication,³² while in a few cases he omits minor phrases.³³ There are also a number of minor misunderstandings. For example, at *Anecd.* 3.31, it should not be 'Kallinikon', but 'Kallinikos'; at 4.8, Wada translates 'Bouzes ... the man who was once consul', but the Greek text is Βούζης ... ἀνὴρ ἐξ ὑπάτων γενόμενος, from which it is uncertain whether Bouzes himself was consul or not,³⁴ and at 5.34, the reference should be to Carthage, not Chalcedon. All in all, Wada's translation of the *Anecdota* targets the general public but thus abandons accuracy and recent scholarship, even though Wada is a historian. In the postscript, he states, 'I have continued to study the historian Procopius'. Nevertheless, unfortunately,

²⁹ Wada (2015) 269–90.

³⁰ Wada (2015) 225–68.

³¹ In the following critique, I deal with only first five chapters of the *Anecdota*.

³² Proc. *Anecd.* 1.2, 1.5, 1.14, 1.21., 1.30, 1.36; 2.10; 3.1, 3.18; 4.7, 4.14; 5.8, 5.11, 5.14, etc. On these additions and paraphrases, Wada largely follows the German translation of Veh (2005).

³³ Proc. *Anecd.* 1.14; 2.14, etc.

³⁴ See Martindale (1992) 256.

all his references are to works published in the twentieth century.³⁵

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In conclusion, it can be said that studies on Procopius have never flourished as a special research field in Japan(ese), but there are several works which are worth introducing for the development of Procopian studies in the world. Recently, two translations of the *Anecdota* have appeared that will hopefully encourage further studies by the younger generation of Japanese scholars. One may be concerned, however, that these may not present a full image of Procopius and the age of Justinian. Translations of his remaining works are a *desideratum*, in order that the Japanese people can gain a rounded picture of him.

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³⁵ Wada (2015) 289–90.

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Note: English titles with an asterisk are my translations; journal names are given with their cited English names.

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