

too tall an order. No fault, however, is to be found in the call (209) to the “average twenty-first century female” “to take issue with the notion of purity as a determiner of moral sexual status.” And indeed of many other entrenched constructs of the “second sex.”

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Michele Renee Salzman, *The Falls of Rome: Crises, Resilience, and Resurgence in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 462 pp. ISBN: 9781107111424. \$39.99, £29.99.

Michelle Salzman has written an important book. The title is misleading in some ways; for a start, “the falls of Rome” refers to Rome as a city, not to the Roman Empire, as many might expect. (I will come back to two other ways I do not quite agree with the title later.) But what she argues, and she is wholly convincing, is that the major crises in Rome’s late antique history were in each case rather less serious than many historians have supposed. The sieges and/or sacks of Rome in 410, 455, and 472, and several during the disaster of the Gothic war between 537 and 550, were not necessarily fatal; in each case they offered challenges for the senatorial aristocracy, who for a long time were largely Rome-based, to rebuild and reconstruct, which senators took up with some commitment. And she demonstrates her point, with the appropriate nuances in each case, very successfully.

Salzman starts with the civil war of 312, which wasn’t really a crisis for Rome anyway, as Constantine’s battle was outside the city; her fourth-century chapter is in effect scene-setting for the structures of late antique senatorial power after 400. But the Visigothic sack of Rome in 410 and the more serious pillaging by the Vandals in 455 are effectively downplayed; Rome’s resilience, and that of its aristocratic elite, is here made fully clear. Salzman is inclined to think that the civil war of 472, which led to a battle on the Palatine hill, was rather more serious; here the evidence is sketchy, and I was not fully convinced, but it does not matter that much; her concern is once again to show how the still-resilient senatorial aristocracy rose to the occasion and repaired the city, as they had done before—and indeed the next two generations, under Odoacer and Theodoric, showed both a senatorial and a Roman resurgence (her second major resurgence, after that of

Valentinian III). Even the most serious sieges and sacks by far, in the Gothic War, could well have been recovered from if Justinian and his successors had not changed the basic governmental structures of Italy, sidelining the senatorial elite from it. Justinian's reorganization of Italy radically undermined the *cursus honorum*, which was essential for the renewal of senatorial status, given that it was not fully hereditary and that male heirs relied on office-holding to bring them full rights in the Senate.

Salzman backs this up with some very well-researched and well-displayed prosopographical work. Never has the post-Constantinian Senate been so clearly delineated across three centuries. I really learned from this. And her footnotes are highly judicious; some of the detailed arguments are located there, and I always agree with her (including where she disagrees with me, 149, as I think I wrote pretty much what she herself says). She trusts narrative sources rather more than I do, with their rhetorical (and often noncontemporary) tales of violence and destruction, but again this does not actually matter, for her theme is, precisely, resilience; whatever crisis Rome faced, it was recovered from, until the 540s. Indeed, in the end I was so happy with her basic argument that I began to feel that Rome's fifth-century crises were pretty marginal to the history of the city—which then became the second way in which her title, stressing various “falls,” is a bit misleading. How much damage, in an enormous city, could three days of Gothic pillage, and even fourteen of Vandal pillage, really do? (Pillage has its own logistical problems. How many Vandals were there? How did they organize the carts?, etc.) It was indeed unsurprising that senators set to work so fast after; it was probably above all their own houses, plus the most obvious public buildings, that suffered—a small percentage of the urban fabric.

Salzman sets out at the start of the book the standard paradigms for the end of Late Antiquity, catastrophe and transformation, and makes clear that she is not wholly attached to either of them. There *was* real change. Rome *did* get poorer and smaller. I think she is entirely right in her position here. But the tone of the book works against this; we hear much more about resilience, thanks above all to the continuance of senatorial evergetism, than about its opposite. And this is where my third problem with the title comes in: this is less of a book about Rome than one about senators. It ends when the Senate does, in the early seventh century, where (334) that moment is now simply “the fall of Rome” in the singular. Broadly, the Senate comes out of the book well; senators feel public obligations, and care about the city, even though they are also manipulative in favor of their own interests (sometimes they do

both on the same page, as at 285). Rome as a city, however, is less in focus. How did the city work? What did people do there? And above all, why, after 400, did its population drop so consistently and (in the late fifth century) probably rapidly?

Salzman of course discusses this, especially at 122, 177–83, and 266. She gives us the basic data—which are clear in the examples of steady urban abandonment in some eastern areas in particular, openly hypothetical in the case of the guesses at total population size (but that she cannot avoid, and anyway I'm happy with the guesses). But she does not problematize it. There are several possible reasons, of course. Rome was getting, maybe, less state supply of food—although, as the population dropped, that might have mattered less, and anyway, when it was vital in the post-Gothic War period, popes stepped in as backup (326)—or else all movement of goods was getting too localized to supply a very large city that was no longer a real seat of government. The senatorial elite who lived there, plus the salaried state officials who were not in Ravenna (i.e., many of the providers of buying power for the city's artisans) certainly eventually became fewer, as she says. And I would wonder to what extent Rome was becoming less attractive and less conceptually potent, as the *caput mundi*, when the “world” it was “head” of contracted; after the 470s, after all, that world only included Italy and Dalmatia. Doubtless all these reasons played their part, and others too. But I would like to know what Salzman thinks here about how all of this could be balanced as explanations, set against her demonstration that one clearly invalid explanation is a decline in senatorial commitment.

By the 550s, when Justinian tried to reconstruct the government and the potential (but unrealized) prosperity of Italy, these processes had gone too far. I detect just a mild tone of regret in this book for the fact that the eastern emperors did not use the Senate to any significant extent from then on. Salzman well shows, indeed, that senatorial rank was still important (at least to senators) as late as the time of Gregory the Great. But the point is that this was by now not enough; in the former Western Empire outside Rome (and soon, for different reasons, in the east too), traditional civilian ranks of all kinds were by then less significant to decision makers. The decline in the wider relevance of Rome, and its elite, is however incidental to *The Falls of Rome*, and to its focus on what happened to senatorial patronage, and to senators themselves. I think this is a weakness in the book. But it has to be set

against its multiple strengths. Peter Brown puts it nicely in his puff for the book on the cover: Rome's leaders "imposed their own pace of change on a crisis-ridden age." Salzman shows how her senators did indeed do that, and this is a real achievement.

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Michael Stewart, *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics in the Age of Justinian: A Study of Procopius*. Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 246 pp. Color and black-and-white figures. ISBN: 9789462988231. €99.

The sixth-century historian Procopius of Caesarea has often been an author of first resort for students of gender in Late Antiquity. His violently misogynistic account of the empress Theodora in *Anecdota* (*Secret History*) is a classic recourse for modern historiography (and university survey courses). Yet, as Michael Stewart rightly notes, gendered discourse permeates Procopius's various experiments in historiography in much more fundamental ways than a focus on "the carnal escapades and political misdeeds of puissant women" suggests (71). In this sense, Stewart's book is best understood as the product of various central concerns in the wider discipline of gender history: not least, the effects of hegemonic masculinity (always anxious, often in crisis; cf. 25).

Chapter 1 is less a standalone introduction than an overture sounding the book's central theme: the role of gendered discourse in Procopius's view of sixth-century Mediterranean politics and—in particular—the late fifth-century "loss" of (and hence, Justinianic "reconquest" of) areas of the Western Roman Empire (esp. 24, 28). Drawing support from extensive recent scholarly work on Roman and Byzantine masculinity (24–28), Stewart offers a refreshingly pithy justification of such an investigation against any residual claims of anachronism: "in some sense, taking a gendered approach to history came naturally to Procopius" (27).

Chapter 2 ("Will the Real Procopius Please Stand Up") belies its now rather dated cultural reference (which gave me a pleasing mental image of a peroxide blond Procopius) by providing an up-to-the-minute summary of the state of the question on the sixth-century historian (see esp. the literature