

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

reviews at 42, 58–64). Stewart synthesizes recent efforts to reconstruct his biography (32–41) and debates over his religious identity (45–54), the dates of his works (55), and the puzzle posed by the *Anecdota* (58–67). His Procopius is a Christian, though in a society where that could mean many things. Drawing selectively on hypotheses by Geoffrey Greatrex, Juan Signes Codoñer, and Henning Börm, Stewart presents a version of the *Anecdota*, which, while intended for integration into *De bellis* (*Wars*), does not represent the historian’s “true” views (whatever that might mean) but rather “a piece of panicked political manoeuvring” (65–66) by an insider too closely associated with an unpopular regime. Above all, however, Stewart prudently disavows a straightforward connection between the author and the views expressed (explicitly or implicitly) in these highly rhetorical texts (e.g., 31–32; though not an inflexible stance, compare a more optimistic statement regarding the possibilities of reconstructing “‘authentic’ viewpoints” at 88).

Chapter 3 (“The Danger of the Soft Life”), which is a lightly revised version of Stewart’s 2017 article in the *Journal of Late Antiquity*,<sup>1</sup> considers Procopius’s judgments in his works regarding “the manly and the unmanly” (72). Stewart situates *De bellis*’s accounts of the fifth-century empire and Eastern reconquest within a wider contemporary discourse of the decline and fall of a demilitarized (and thus effeminized) Western Empire: “In sharp contrast to the ‘passive’ West Romans, Procopius stressed that the East Romans’ enduring adherence to a martial lifestyle and control over their armed forces had allowed them to continue to deploy non-Romans as pawns” (77). Stewart shows how various speech-and-battle set pieces in *De bellis* disarmed the Italian/Gothic charge that the Easterners were unmanly “Greeks,” inferior to their warlike Gothic enemies. Competing claims to militarized masculinity thus emerge as central to the historian’s account of the legitimation of both Gothic and East Roman rule over Italy in the mid-sixth century.

Chapter 4 (“Courage, Fear, and Generalship in the *Vandal War*”) considers the portrayal of military masculinity in Procopius’s account of the East Roman campaigns in Africa in 533–534 CE. Stewart takes as the leitmotif of this narrative the experience of fear: sometimes appropriate, sometimes excessive, sometimes insufficient. In this sense, the qualities of the main antagonists—the East Roman commander Belisarius and the Vandal king Gelimer

1. Michael E. Stewart, “The Danger of the Soft Life: Manly and Unmanly Romans in Procopius’ *Gothic War*,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 10, no. 2 (2017): 472–95.

—resided in their capacity to moderate those two critical emotions, both within themselves and among their armies. Stewart argues for a closer connection between the manliness/courage (*andreia*) of generals (naturally, in moderation) and the fortunes of their armies in Procopius than has sometimes been appreciated in accounts focused on the play between the two impersonal models of causation represented by fate and providence. The result, as Stewart himself notes (at 123), is a much more conventional connection between self-control, morality, and success in Procopius's thought—and a much less subversive reading of the conquest of Africa in the *Vandal War* (*De bello Vandalico*)—than has often been offered.

Chapter 5 (“Shattering the Glass Ceiling: Eunuchs in a Changing World”) considers Procopius's surprisingly positive accounts of the eunuch generals Solomon and Narses in *De bellis*. This chapter is a valuable exploration of the developing role of eunuchs as bodyguards and military leaders in Late Antiquity. It works best as a riposte to Kathryn Ringrose's argument that the success of Solomon and Narses represented a devaluation of *andreia* in early Byzantine society; Stewart convincingly shows that these generals were seen to fulfill the hegemonic model of Roman masculinity, as certain “manly women and restrained barbarians” could be accepted on these terms (138). Procopius could portray eunuchs as ideal military leaders, just as he could find a “man general” like Belisarius (145: a nicely blunt translation of *stratēgos anēr*) wanting (148–52). Stewart's intermittent efforts to press an argument for a transition to greater acceptance of eunuchs in the sixth century, though plausible, founders on the character of his evidence. There is a critical mismatch between this account of social change with the complexities of the discussions of Narses (in particular) by Procopius and Agathias, which, while showing the general's own surprising virtue, continued to assume eunuchs in general would conform to negative stereotypes rooted in a perception of insufficient masculinity (cowardice, indolence, etc.). Likewise, on Stewart's own presentation, undiluted polemic against specific eunuchs in the fourth and fifth centuries stemmed from their political rivals, usually after the fall of these particularly controversial figures (e.g., Eusebius, Eutropius, Chrysaphius). In this sense, the title of this chapter is resonant in (perhaps unintended) ways: the focus of the glass-ceiling metaphor on the successes of exceptional individuals over wider structural constraints, along with the requirement of women in late-stage capitalism to inhabit normative patriarchal roles so as to achieve something close to equity, is, of course, a subject of

fundamental feminist critique.<sup>2</sup> (Or, to put it another way, did it really represent significant historical change if eunuchs like Solomon and Narses had to “lean in”?)

Chapters 6 (“Killing Justinian”) and 7 (“Totila: Hero or Trope?”) seek to challenge the consensus that Procopius presents positive accounts of two of Justinian’s enemies: the general and conspiracist Artabanes and the Gothic king Totila. The plot to kill the emperor in 549, in which the former was implicated, has often been seized upon as a place where Procopius articulates his own opposition. While noting Procopius’s obvious sympathies with some of the plotters’ grievances, Stewart effectively demonstrates the historian’s efforts to distance himself from other aspects of the plot through use of obvious exaggeration in their reported speech. Most telling here is the deployment of a series of classic gendered tropes—a man undone by his romantic desires and then dominated first by a woman and then by a subordinate—to make Artabanes a much less straightforward candidate for audience identification. The final chapter on Totila offers a reading less obviously linked to the gendered concerns of the book. Stewart explains Procopius’s evolving characterization of the king—from ideal ruler to doomed barbarian warlord—through a contrast between the literary demands (and time of writing) of books 7 and 8; yet, in his view, the latter nevertheless remains a model for East Roman high command. A short conclusion recapitulates two central themes: the lack of differentiation in individual moral judgments regarding barbarians and Romans and the need to pursue integrated readings of Procopius’s works to ascertain the potential meanings of individual stories (if not his own opinions).

Stewart’s book offers a rich, learned, and remarkably accessible account of the role played by sixth-century gender norms in *De bellis*. Although the book could have used a more developed introduction and conclusion to provide a detailed statement of his overarching contribution, this book will undoubtedly be a must-read for students of one of Late Antiquity’s most closely scrutinized authors. They may need some additional help in joining the dots—between what can sometimes read like a series of individual essays on specific episodes—to see the bigger picture regarding Procopius, his world, and the wider historical discipline. Stewart nevertheless makes a compelling

2. For a brief and trenchant summary, see Dawn Foster, “Why Corporate Feminism Is Convenient for Capitalism,” *The Guardian*, 11 Dec. 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/11/corporate-feminism-capitalism-womens-working-lives>.

case that masculinity was a fundamental framework for Procopius, and that a close reading of his deployment of gendered language and concepts is necessary to undertake even “traditional” political or literary analyses of his histories.

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Michael J. Hollerich, *Making Christian History: Eusebius of Caesarea and His Readers*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021. 316 pp.  
ISBN: 9780520295360. \$95.

Eusebius of Caesarea was a prolific polymath. Writing in the aftermath of Constantine’s accession, he was the author of biblical scholarship, apologetics, history, theological polemic, and celebrations of the new Constantinian order (such as the *Vita Constantini*). He worked at a major cusp of Christian history, when Christian thinkers tried to sort out their new relationship to a state that had persecuted them in the very recent past. Michael Hollerich’s *Making Christian History* focuses on the significance of Eusebius’s work as an ecclesiastical historian and on his enduring influence on the genre of ecclesiastical history.

Chapter I examines Eusebius’s *Historia Ecclesiae* (*HE*) itself. The *HE* can be read, in part, as the emplotment of a Roman civil war onto the biblical narrative of divine deliverance. But it was also a continuation of Luke-Acts, which saw bishops (and exegetes) as the successors to the apostles and Nicaea as a new Pentecost, and it describes the failed rebellions of the Jews and the Roman persecution of the Christians. As such, it has been seen as a novel kind of national history. Eusebius’s method was as innovative as his combination of historical genres. As a former copyist who had worked in Origen’s library at Caesarea, he makes generous use of quoted documents that have been a treasure trove for later scholars and inspired the methods of his successors. Hollerich provides a thorough introduction to the historian and his context, as well as considering his sources (e.g., Hegesippus and Josephus) and the fate of other texts that were often linked to the *HE*, both those by Eusebius (the *Chronicle* and the *Vita Constantini*) and those that were not (the *Life of Sylvester*).