

SOCIAL WORLDS OF LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES



Michael Edward Stewart

# Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics in the Age of Justinian

A Study of Procopius

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in the Age of Justinian



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# Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

The Late Antiquity experienced profound cultural and social change: the political disintegration of the Roman Empire in the West, contrasted by its continuation and transformation in the East; the arrival of 'barbarian' newcomers and the establishment of new polities; a renewed militarization and Christianization of society; as well as crucial changes in Judaism and Christianity, together with the emergence of Islam and the end of classical paganism. This series focuses on the resulting diversity within Late Antique society, emphasizing cultural connections and exchanges; questions of unity and inclusion, alienation and conflict; and the processes of syncretism and change. By drawing upon a number of disciplines and approaches, this series sheds light on the cultural and social history of Late Antiquity and the greater Mediterranean world.

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*A Study of Procopius*

*Michael Edward Stewart*

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Cover illustration: San Vitale, mosaic of the south apse wall, a flowing fountain with details of two eunuch *cubicularii*. The eunuch furthest to the left garbed in a white tunic and gold chalmys draws open a curtain as he gazes at the Empress Theodora. The second eunuch dressed in a white tunic and white chalmys stands next to the empress.

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To, John-David, Annabelle,  
Sophie, and Charlotte,  
Πάντα σέθεν φιλέω.



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# List of Abbreviations

AA	<i>Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
AABS	Australian Association for Byzantine Studies ( <i>Byzantina Australiensia</i> )
ANCL	Ante-Nicene Christian Library
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BCE	Before the Common Era (or BC)
BH	<i>Basileia Historia</i>
BMGS	Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies
BS	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
Byzantion	<i>Revue Internationale des Études Byzantines</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
CCAA	The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila
CCAJ	The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian
CE	Common Era (or AD)
CJ	Justinian, <i>Codex Iustinianus</i>
CM	<i>Chronicon Minora</i>
CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
Chron.	<i>Chronicon</i>
CIC	<i>Corpus Iuris Civilis</i>
CTh	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>
DOML	Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library
EHR	English Historical Review
Epist.	<i>Epistulae</i>
frag.	<i>Fragmenta</i>
GRBS	Journal of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies
HA	<i>Historia Augusta</i>
HE	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
JHS	Journal of the History of Sexuality
JLA	Journal of Late Antiquity
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
JWH	Journal of Women's History
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
NCMH	The New Cambridge Medieval History, Volume 1, c. 500-700
PG	<i>Patrologia Curus Completus, Series Graecae</i>



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PL	<i>Patrologiae Curus Completus, Series Latina</i>
PLRE	<i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i>
SC	Sources chrétiennes
TAPA	Transactions of the American Philological Association
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians



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On a more personal level, it is a great deal to ask of one's family to have daddy spend an enormous amount of time on a monograph that will do little to put food on the table. This book was indeed written amidst the joyful cacophony of raising four children ten years old and under. Writing a monograph in such circumstances is never an easy task, but it has been made much easier with my wife Gina's diligent perseverance to allow 'daddy' to spend countless hours in his study pecking away at a keyboard and reading countless books and articles when he could have been making dinner or helping put children to bed. It is therefore to her and my children that I dedicate this book.



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## A Note on Translations, Sources, and Names

The quotations from Procopius' works provided here derive from H.B. Dewing's edition in the *Loeb Classical Library* (1914-1940). This monograph relies on a combination of my own and existing translations. References to the translator are provided in the footnotes and in certain instances the original language. However, when I modernise English words or idiom found in some of the older translations, no notation will be made.

Although Procopius used the term 'Byzantine' when referring to a denizen of Constantinople or at times 'Greek' to describe the East Romans, the historian's preferred term was 'Roman'. Throughout this monograph I employ 'East Roman', 'Byzantine', and 'Roman' to describe Justinian's soldiers. Procopius also distinguished between Goths and Italians in what he saw as a post-Roman kingdom. I use 'Italians' and 'Italo-Romans' to describe the 'natives' of late fifth- and early sixth-century Italy. Finally, to better reflect Procopius' usage, 'Goth' will usually be preferred instead of 'Ostrogoth'.

Finally, despite the gradual move towards Greek name-spellings in recent scholarship, with some exceptions, I have adopted the Latin name-spellings familiar to a more general reading audience. This means, for example, that I have used 'Procopius' instead of 'Prokopios' and 'John Malalas' and not 'Ioannes Malalas'.



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## Preface

A generation of historians has been captivated by the notorious views on gender found in the mid-sixth-century *Secret History* by the Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea. Yet the notable but subtler ways in which gender coloured Procopius' most significant work, the *Wars*, have received far less attention. This monograph examines how gender shaped the presentation of not only key personalities, but also the Persians, Vandals, Goths, East Romans, and Italo-Romans, in both the *Wars* and the *Secret History*. By analysing the purpose and rationale behind Procopius' gendered depictions and ethnicising worldview, this investigation unpicks his knotty agenda. Despite Procopius' reliance on classical antecedents, the gendered discourse that undergirds both texts under investigation must be understood within the broader context of contemporary political debates at a time when control of Italy and North Africa from Constantinople was contested.



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# Part I

## Finding Procopius

I (Goddess *Roma*) love the Amal (Theodahad) who has sucked at my breast, the brave man formed by my society, dear to the Romans for his wisdom, revered for his courage by the tribes [...]. For, if Africa deserved to receive her freedom through you, it is cruel for me to lose a freedom which I have always been seen to possess. Greatest of victors control the impulses of your anger.  
– Cass. *Var.* 11.13.4-5 (trans. Barnish)

There was among the Goths one Theodahad by name, a son of Amalafrida, the sister of Theoderic, a man already of mature years, versed in Latin literature and the teachings of Plato, but unpractised in war and far removed from the active life, and yet he was extraordinarily accomplished at making money. This Theodahad had obtained most of the lands in Tuscany, and he was eager to take the remainder from their owners by violent means.  
– Proc. *Wars* 5.3.1-2 (trans. Kaldellis, modified)



1. AR antoninianus of Philip the Arab struck in Rome 247 AD. Reverse: Roma seated left, holding Victory and scepter ROMAE AETERNAE.



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# 1. Introduction

In November of 536, a Roman army of 6,000 soldiers was on the move along the *Via Latina* in Italy.<sup>1</sup> Led by the Constantinopolitan Emperor Justinian's (r. 527-565) renowned general, Belisarius, the heterogeneous force of battle-hardened veterans—many of whom had helped defeat the Vandals in North Africa in 534 and the Goths in Sicily in 535—were fresh off another triumph, the bloody storming of Naples and the capitulation of its Gothic garrison.<sup>2</sup> Belisarius and his men were now in search of larger quarry—Rome, the birthplace of empire.<sup>3</sup> Though Belisarius had received assurances from a papal delegation that Rome would open its gates to him, the general likely knew the Goths would not relinquish their control of Italy so easily. In fact, once Naples fell to Belisarius, the Gothic army reacted by electing a new king, the *dux* [general] Vitigis, who had served previously as the deposed Gothic King Theodahad's *spatharios* [head bodyguard] and had been playing a leading role in organising Gothic resistance to Belisarius' advance.<sup>4</sup> With the East Roman army fast approaching, in the early days of December Vitigis retreated to Rome. Shortly thereafter, Vitigis abandoned Rome for the better protected Ravenna, where he began rallying a segment of the Gothic nobility that was viscerally opposed to the rule of Italy from Constantinople.<sup>5</sup>

For Vitigis, the challenge was twofold. We learn from a contemporary source that his decision to abandon Rome stemmed from the Gothic king's

1 For this route, see *Proc. Wars*. 5.14.6.

2 On Belisarius, see PLRE III: 181-224 [Belisarius]. For Belisarius in the works of Procopius, see Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie*, pp. 115-120; Whately, *Battles and Generals*.

3 As Lucy Grig ('Competing Capitals', p. 48) has shown, late antique imperial iconography and literature often depicted Rome and Constantinople as 'twin' cities, 'sharing sovereignty over the globe'.

4 Vitigis PLRE III: 1382-1386 [Vitigis]. Vitigis had earned his military reputation with an important victory over a combined Gepid and Herule army in 530, on which see Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 340-341. Massimiliano Vitiello (*Theodahad*, pp. 27-29) proposes that perhaps some physical impairment had prevented Theodahad from the 'prerequisite' Gothic military education. This goes too far. It seems more plausible that, as their hold on Italy grew more secure, a distinct minority of Gothic elites would have willingly abstained from the 'prerequisite' military training. For a more detailed analysis of the blurring of the boundaries between Goths and Italo-Romans in Ostrogothic Italy, see Halsall, 'The Ostrogothic Military'.

5 *Proc. Wars* 5.11.10-11, *Jord. Get.* 310, *Rom.* 372, *Marc. com. Chron.* s.a. 536. Upon hearing the news of his replacement, Theodahad had escaped Rome with a small cadre of loyal followers. However, one of Vitigis' henchmen caught and executed Theodahad fifteen miles outside of Ravenna.

overestimation of the size of Belisarius' force, and the need for Vitigis to consolidate his hold on the throne.<sup>6</sup> A defeat in the early days of his rule would have surely proven disastrous for a man whose propaganda espoused the notion that he had received the 'kingly office' largely because of his martial prowess.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, though Vitigis had the necessary military qualifications for Gothic kingship, he lacked the noble background that also served as a vital prerequisite. This gap in his resume could only be resolved by heading to the stronghold of Gothic power, Ravenna, which at that time was one of Europe's most important cities.<sup>8</sup> Vitigis' politically advantageous marriage to the former Gothic King Theoderic's (r. 471-526) granddaughter, Matasuentha, shortly after he arrived in Ravenna proved enough to secure Amal support.<sup>9</sup> This respite in Ravenna also provided Vitigis crucial time to raise a larger army.

So, unopposed on 9 December 536, Belisarius captured the city of Rome from the Goths without a fight.<sup>10</sup> As Belisarius' army marched triumphantly through the Asinarian Gate located to the southeast of the city, through a prearranged agreement with Belisarius, in the northwest the 4,000 soldiers of the Gothic garrison fled through the Flaminian Gate and headed along the *Via Flaminia* to Ravenna. Belisarius then ordered Leuderis, the Gothic garrison commander who had stayed behind in order to surrender Rome, to deliver 'the keys of the gates to the city' to Justinian. The seminal historian of Justinian's reign, Procopius of Caesarea—who was there on what must have been a gloriously symbolic entrance—proclaimed happily 'that Rome became subject to the Romans again after a space of sixty years'.<sup>11</sup>

Belisarius had triumphed again. Yet a reader of Procopius' memorable account of these campaigns, the *Wars*, soon learns this declaration was a tease; although the city of Rome had fallen, the real fighting between the Goths and the East Romans had just begun. The momentum of Belisarius'

6 Proc. *Wars* 5.11.11, 5.16.19.

7 Cass. *Var.* 10.31.1 (trans. Barnish), 'I was chosen not in the privy chambers, but in the wild open field. I was not sought among the subtle debates of sycophants, but as the trumpets blared' [*Non enim in cubilis angustiis, sed in campis late patentibus electum me esse noveritis, nec inter blandientium delicata colloquia, sed tubis concrepantibus sum quaesitus*]. La Rocca, 'Consors regni', p. 141, discusses the gendered aspects of this declaration.

8 On late antique Ravenna's exalted status as the residence of late Roman emperors, Gothic kings, and Byzantine exarchs, see Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*. For the prominence of Ravenna during Theoderic's reign, see Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*, pp. 141-144.

9 Proc. *Wars* 5.11.27.

10 Lib. Pont. *Vita Vigilius* 61.4 assigns it to '10 December'.

11 In providing this date, Procopius followed Marcellinus Comes' (*chron* s.a. 476.2) suggestion that the empire in the West had fallen in 476.

deep thrust into Italy quickly proved logistically and politically difficult to sustain. Rome, in fact, would change hands four more times in the next sixteen years. By 547, the revered city had been reduced to rubble and largely denuded of people for the first time in its long history.<sup>12</sup>

The Goths unquestionably resisted with greater determination than had the Vandals. In early 537, with his hold on the kingship secure, Vitigis prepared to mount a campaign to retake Rome. He likely knew that he needed to drive Belisarius and his small army out of Rome before reinforcements and resupplies from Constantinople could arrive. Vitigis either left Ravenna or arrived outside of Rome on 21 February 537—our source provides an ambiguous date.<sup>13</sup> The speed and scale of Vitigis' counter-attack seems to have caught even the usually well-prepared Belisarius off guard. Desperate to delay the advance of Vitigis' army, the East Romans launched a series of sorties against the Gothic vanguard. From Procopius' perspective, the Romans had held the upper hand in these initial skirmishes, but the Goths' sheer numbers overwhelmed them, and Belisarius—who had led one of the daring raids—barely made it back into Rome alive.<sup>14</sup> After the Gothic army arrived outside the walls of Rome, Vitigis established a series of fortified camps by which to tighten the noose by restricting movement in and out of the city. Procopius, who would have witnessed the arrival of the Gothic army, vividly described in the *Wars* the fear that engulfed the city in the early days of the siege.<sup>15</sup> Reflecting what was surely a harrowing experience, Procopius later detailed the ups and downs of the blockade with dramatic flourish. His account of the year-long siege is one of the most riveting in the *Wars*; indeed, it has been described recently as 'one of the most remarkable combat narratives in any text from antiquity'.<sup>16</sup>

As Procopius describes it, the battle for Italy was a contest of competing ideologies as much as one of men and arms. As we will see, the gendered rhetoric in the *Wars* functions as a key weapon in Procopius' literary arsenal. Though scholars have rightly stepped back from seeing Procopius as

12 Croke, *Chronicle of Marcellinus*, p. 138.

13 Lib. Pont. *Vita Silverius* 60.4.

14 For a fuller account of Procopius' description of this skirmish, see Stewart, 'Contests of *Andreia*', pp. 36–38.

15 For the enormous size of the Gothic army, see Lib. Pont. *Vita Silverius* 60.4. In contrast to his usual precision, Procopius (*Wars* 5.16.10, 5.24.3) provides the impossibly large number of 150,000 for Vitigis' army. Anthony Kaldellis (*Wars of Justinian*, p. 291, n. 529) and Conor Whately ('Some Observations on Procopius' Use of Numbers') discuss some of the possible reasons for this exaggeration.

16 Whately, *Battles and Generals*, p. 159.

an unfiltered mouthpiece for Justinian's propaganda, his enthusiasm for Belisarius and the East Roman side is clear—especially in Books 5 and 6 of the *Wars*. Even in these earlier books, however, Procopius' tale is much more than just one of 'heroic' Romans versus 'villainous' barbarians. Procopius' ability to tell both sides of the story by looking at the wide swath of the lives the Gothic war adversely affected throughout Italy, is what, for some, ranks him amongst the greatest historians of antiquity.<sup>17</sup> One should not see Procopius' impartiality, however, as the mere residue of the historian's increasing disillusionment with the campaign as it dragged on. It was a key expectation of ancient rhetoric and history to tell both sides of the story, a mandate which Procopius follows, providing the opinions and viewpoint from the opposing sides and pointing out the 'good' and the 'bad' in his main and bit players. Though surely not immune from either exaggeration or a reliance on long-standing stereotypes about those non-Roman peoples he and his contemporaries labelled as barbarians, Procopius also offers sympathetic portraits of the Vandals, Goths, and Persians both as peoples and as political entities with legitimate claims over the lands they held.<sup>18</sup> Procopius does such a fine job of this impartiality, as we will see in the next chapter, that some modern historians have a difficult time determining just whose side he was on.

This is not to say that the *Wars* lacks prejudices or always offers accurate visions of the actions and actual motivations and strategies of Justinian's enemies. For these alternate views, we fortunately have extant documents like the *Varia* of Cassiodorus that in a collection of 468 letters, edicts, and panegyrics tells parts of the Gothic side of this eye-grabbing story.<sup>19</sup> This balance is necessary, since some of the claims Procopius makes offer a suspiciously Constantinopolitan view of contemporary realities.<sup>20</sup> As modern scholars have become increasingly aware, Justinian's 'reconquest' was not just being contested on the battlefields in North Africa and Italy, but also

17 Michael Whitby, 'The Greatness of Procopius', p. 38.

18 On Procopius' sympathetic and varied vision of non-Roman peoples, see Greatrex, 'Roman Identity in the Sixth Century'; Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea*, p. 221; Sarantis, 'Roman or Barbarian'. Cf. Averil Cameron (*Procopius*, p. 239), who argues that Procopius attempted to preserve the 'established order by creating a strong demarcation between civilised peoples and barbarians'. Cf. Goffart (*Barbarian Tides*, pp. 94–96), who uses Procopius' account of the Herules to make the larger claim that Procopius wanted to expel all the barbarians from the Roman Empire. On the standardised classical vocabulary and tropes in Procopius' depictions of non-Roman peoples, see Curta, 'The Making of the Slavs', p. 167.

19 Arnold, *Roman Imperial Restoration*, p. 46. One finds sound accounts of Cassiodorus' life and career in O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus* and Giardina, *Cassiodoro Politico*.

20 Frankforter, 'Procopius and a Woman's Place', p. 42.

in the discourse of elites in late antique foci of power such as Carthage, Rome, Ravenna, and Constantinople.<sup>21</sup> Shane Bjornlie describes lucidly the turbulent ideological landscape in which Procopius wrote the *Wars*:

The instability of loyalties during the Gothic War meant that the interpretation of ideologically charged events had particular significance. Procopius' history is replete with episodes in which Goths, Italians and eastern imperial representatives change allegiance during the course of the war. In such a fluid environment, signifying attachment to a specific memory carried even more weight.<sup>22</sup>

This is a point worth repeating. What is history if not an attempt to relate memories of the past to justify contested events in the present? Elites within the Vandal, Visigothic, Ostrogothic, and Frankish courts undoubtedly disputed Justinian's claims to former Roman lands. As I have argued elsewhere, elements of these vigorous debates also survive in the *Wars*. In the *Gothic War*, for example, we find Procopius countering propaganda emanating from the Gothic side that portrays the Goths as manly protectors of Italy, while simultaneously casting the East Romans as 'outsiders' and unmanly Greeks.<sup>23</sup> The rhetoric demonstrates, in my estimation, how one's cultural identity can be shaped by a particular view of the past. To borrow the erudite assessment of Jussi Rantala, 'The world as we understand it, our culture, customs, values, and many other things important to us, affected by facts and events which once were—or which we imagine once were'.<sup>24</sup> Such a view concerning the links between cultural identity and history helps to elucidate why it was so important for Procopius in each section of the *Wars*—the Persian, Vandal, and the Gothic—to first explain what he believed to be the key developments of the previous century to then better

21 For a discussion of these sources and the disputed nature of Justinian's imperial *renovatio*, see Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition*; Arnold, *Roman Imperial Restoration*; Gillett, 'Telling Off Justinian'. A consensus has developed that what is commonly referred to as Justinian's reconquest resulted from opportunity rather than a long-held plan to restore the glory of the Roman Empire; see, for instance, Heather, *Restoration of Rome*, pp. 137–153. For the notion that Procopius cast the Italian campaign as 'a punishment of rebels' rather than a reconquest, see Boy, 'History of Wars', pp. 202–229. For an examination of the political and religious ideologies behind Justinian's Western military campaigns, see Brodka, 'Prokopios von Kaisareia und Justinians Idee der Reconquista', pp. 243–255. And for some of Justinian's core objectives, see Lillington-Martin, 'Procopius, πάρεδρος / quaestor'.

22 Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition*, p. 148.

23 Stewart, 'Contests of *Andreia*', pp. 21–54.

24 Rantala, 'Identity in the Roman World', p. 20.



appreciate contemporary political disputes.<sup>25</sup> Byzantine historians like Procopius composed their histories with a didactic purpose in mind. By reading about both the mistakes and successes of their forefathers, current and future generations of Byzantine soldiers and political leaders could learn not to repeat the mistakes of the past.<sup>26</sup>

This political, and oft-times gender-laced, rhetoric surrounding Procopius' depiction of Justinian's military campaigns is one of the central themes of my book. I will suggest that a detailed analysis of Procopius' writings will not only help us better know aspects of his authorial intent, but also offer an important window into sixth-century Mediterranean culture and politics.<sup>27</sup> In fact, though it is imperative to appreciate the influence of his classical literary models upon Procopius' writings, so too is it vital to grasp the fundamental historicity that structures and shapes Procopius' subject matter.

For some, my use of gendered approaches to better understand Procopius and his world might raise apprehensions or generate accusations of methodological anachronism.<sup>28</sup> There is certainly a need to remain alert to the dangers of applying present preoccupations and modern definitions to ancient societies that might have seen the world very differently than we do. As Leonora Neville has recently suggested, 'the fields of social history, economic history, women's history, cultural history, literary history, and others would have been confusing to authors of ancient and medieval Greek history'.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, as this same scholar and others have shown, obsessions with gender and codes of proper manliness are not merely a modern concern. Discussions of masculinity and femininity permeate the ancient Roman and early Byzantine literature. Unquestionably many Byzantines from the governing classes valued 'true' manliness as a cultural ideal and appreciated reading about it in works of history.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the

25 For a stimulating discussion on the didactic importance of these fanciful tales for interpreting subsequent events in the Wars, see Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea*, pp. 62-93.

26 Neville, *Anna Komnene*, p. 22.

27 For a summation of the disputes surrounding gender as a category for historical inquiry, see Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*, pp. 1-15; Stewart, 'Some Disputes'; *Soldier's Life*.

28 For a more complete analysis of the debates surrounding gender and masculinity as methodological tools to interpret the past, see Tosh, 'What Should Scholars Do with Masculinity?'; Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis'.

29 Cf. Neville, *Anna Komnene*, p. 21; Stewart, 'Some Disputes', pp. 77-91.

30 For just a sampling of some of the excellent recent work on this topic, see Gleason, *Making Men*; Conway, *Behold the Man*; Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*; Burrus, *Begotten Not Made*; McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*; Neville, *Heroes and Romans*; *Anna Komnene*; Buckley, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene*.

dichotomy between virtue and vice was often a gendered one.<sup>31</sup> As Mathew Kuefler posits, whereas the masculine was considered essential and faultless, the feminine was frequently perceived to be insignificant and flawed. The degraded social role that women played in much of history remained intimately connected with the idealisation of the 'universalised masculine'.<sup>32</sup>

Gendered approaches play a critical role in Procopius' writings. One need only to read the emotive gendered language unleashed in his *Secret History* to be aware of how important it was for Procopius for men and women to adhere to what he considered to be the proper codes of their gender conduct. Procopius' three works, the *Wars*, the *Secret History*, and the *Buildings*, supply insight into how not only the historian but his contemporaries perceived conceptions of manliness. It has indeed been demonstrated that, 'masculinity is in large part created by language'.<sup>33</sup> I draw on Andrew Romig's insight that such gendered configurations 'dictate what individual people can and cannot do, who they can and cannot be, and under which circumstances these allowances and restrictions occur'.<sup>34</sup> In such ways, dominant gender ideologies regulate a full spectrum of behaviour.<sup>35</sup> Leaning upon the work of Judith Butler,<sup>36</sup> Coleen Conway suggests that 'gender is something that one *does* rather than something one *is*'.<sup>37</sup> In short, one did not just become a 'true' man in ancient Rome and Constantinople, one had to earn it.<sup>38</sup> The precarious nature of manhood then helps to explain our ancient authors' anxiety about the insecure nature of masculinity in even male-dominated states like early Byzantium.<sup>39</sup>

Such active gendering did not just apply to individuals but entire peoples as well. In the *Wars*, Procopius wielded gendered themes to aid him in unravelling the complexities of disputes between nations. Some of this

31 Stewart, *Soldier's Life*, esp. pp. 43-130.

32 Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*, pp. 2-3.

33 Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, p. 16.

34 Romig, *Be a Perfect Man*, p. 6.

35 On these hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, see Connell, *Gender and Power*, pp. 183-188.

36 Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

37 Conway, *Behold the Man*, p. 9.

38 On the notion that 'real' Roman men were created and not just born, see Connolly, 'Andreaia and Paideia', pp. 287-317. Anthropologists have demonstrated that in many cultures, manhood is not a status attained by entering 'adulthood' but an elusive category that must be demonstrated or won, see Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*.

39 On this anxiety over men's masculinity in imperial and late Rome, see Barton, 'All Things Beseem the Victor'; Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*. On current scholarly debates concerning these reoccurring 'crises of masculinity', see Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire*, pp. 19-21.

reliance has to do with the classical literary traditions Procopius followed. The notion that Rome's military struggle against foreign enemies served as a test of each side's masculinity represented a prominent theme in Roman historiography.<sup>40</sup> In the Roman literary tradition, the mightier and manlier the barbarian enemy the better, since, however brave they were, they would fall eventually to the might of Roman arms and masculine prowess. Craig Williams expresses pithily this common paradigm:

True Roman men, who possess *virtus* by birthright, rightfully exercise their dominion or *imperium* not only over women but also over foreigners, themselves implicitly likened to women. An obvious implication is that non-Roman peoples were destined to submit to Rome's masculine *imperium*.<sup>41</sup>

Quite simply, many Romans seemed convinced that their numerous victories over foreign forces had occurred not only because they had better training, equipment, and tactics, but as Myles McDonnell phrased it, because they believed that 'they were better men'.<sup>42</sup> Of course, Procopius' East Roman Empire based in Constantinople was a different political entity than the Latin-speaking Italian-based Republican and early and high Rome(s) described by McDonnell and Williams. By the opening of the sixth century, the empire ruled by the primarily Greek speakers from Constantinople had been cut off from not only Italy and the city of Rome, but from most of the old lands in North Africa and Western Europe.<sup>43</sup>

For a culture built on triumphal masculine imagery, the loss of the ancestral homelands in the fifth century had come as quite a shock.<sup>44</sup> Letting go of the notion of Roman exceptionalism indeed was difficult for Byzantines like Justinian and Procopius. In my view, this connection to a glorious past—as much as the need to adhere to genre expectations—helps to explain why discussions of masculinity and femininity permeate the writings of Procopius and that of many of his contemporaries. In this highly competitive androcentric world, attacking one's enemy often

40 For a more detailed discussion, see Stewart, *Soldier's Life*, pp. 43–90.

41 Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, p. 135.

42 McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, p. 3.

43 On the growing prominence of the Greek language in the fifth-century East Roman Empire, see Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, pp. 15, 96–97.

44 Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*, pp. 46–49. For this sense of loss as primarily reflecting a Constantinopolitan perspective, see (with further references) Arnold, *Roman Imperial Restoration*, pp. 26–27.

meant attacking their masculinity with a barrage of gendered insults. The gendered nature of Procopius' discourse can therefore be partly explained by the changing nature of political power and identity in the wider sixth-century Mediterranean world.<sup>45</sup> For Justinian to sell his costly military adventures, his propaganda needed to adhere to many of the conventional barbarian tropes found in the ancient literary tradition, which were often based on the Romans' dominance over those labelled as barbarians. Defining precisely who were the former Romans and who were the barbarians in these former imperial lands proved a challenging task indeed. Those peoples in North Africa and in Italy labelled 'the Romans of old' by Procopius needed to accept that the armies sent from Constantinople were not only 'fellow' Romans endowed with traditional martial *Romanitas*, but they also needed to accept that they needed rescuing from a harsh barbarian yoke. Though we can debate how closely Procopius adhered to these ideological mandates, it is vital to always keep them in mind when we read his writings. In some sense, taking a gendered approach to history came naturally to Procopius.

Of course, a thorough understanding of Procopius' classical models—especially Thucydides and Herodotus—is essential for comprehending Procopius' views on concepts such as identity, virtue, courage, and masculine ideology.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, we should also see Procopius' writings as a product of his own age. Just because Procopius emulates Thucydidean concepts, language, and/or narrative strategy, it does not mean that the subsequent thoughts or descriptions were disconnected from 'sixth-century values'. As I declared in *Soldier's Life*:

[...] imagine if we rejected early Byzantine writers' use of passages and concepts found in the Old and New Testament, and/or early Christian theologians, as 'products of an earlier age,' and hence not representative of early Byzantine values. Early Byzantium was not a monolithically Christian world. Raised in a culture that educated many young elites on the writings of Thucydides and other classical authors, it is little wonder that some long-established views on manliness and unmanliness also survived.<sup>47</sup>

45 For similar links between power and identity and late antique apocalyptic discourse, see Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 54.

46 For a recent discussion of these intertextual connections in Procopius' writings, see Moore, 'Procopius of Caesarea and Historical Memory'.

47 Stewart, *Soldier's Life*, pp. 29–30.

It is also vital to differentiate between modern-day and sixth-century Byzantine notions of gender and identity. We should avoid seeing a world with numerous and rapidly changing gender ideologies like our own. The Mediterranean world of Procopius' day had far more stable and restricted views about masculinity, femininity, or indeed, about society in general, than is typically found in our modern age, where rapidly evolving cultures and technologies have created far more adaptable and varied understandings of these concepts.<sup>48</sup>

I do not claim that this book offers a comprehensive examination of Procopius' political and gendered rhetoric. Moreover, because this book is primarily concerned with the ways Procopius and his contemporaries used a gendered lens to view and interpret issues surrounding Justinian's attempts to retake the 'lost' Roman provinces in the West, this study focuses primarily on the military campaigns in North Africa and Italy, rather than those against the Sassanian Persians. I contend that the wars between Late Antiquity's two great agrarian powers raise a separate set of geopolitical and literary issues for Procopius.<sup>49</sup> Those looking for a chronological political history of the age may be disappointed as well. Nevertheless, I contend that a careful investigation of Procopius' polyphonic discourse demonstrates that his language of masculinity and effeminacy reflect wider ethnic and political concerns.

To achieve a better understanding of these connections, I divide the book into seven chapters framed by this prologue, a short conclusion, and a chronology. The chapters are separated by theme rather than strict adherence to chronology. By looking at Procopius and his writings from different thematic angles and theatres of war, each chapter builds on the arguments of the preceding one. Chapter 2 investigates what we know about Procopius, both as a man and as an author. Chapter 3 switches attention to Procopius' gendered discourse to examine with greater scrutiny how the language of masculinity and effeminacy reflects wider ethnic and political debates at a time when Justinian laid claim to the 'lost' territories in North Africa and Western Europe, a period of tremendous tension between East and West. By looking at Procopius' presentation of those he considered the native Italo-Romans, I will demonstrate that Procopius' beliefs concerning Roman and Gothic identity were linked intimately to masculinity and manliness. By centring on the emotion of 'fear', Chapter 4 explores how Procopius

48 Discussed in McDonnell, 'McDonnell on Kaster'.

49 For a fine recent study on Procopius' presentation of the Persians, see Börm, *Prokop und die Perser*.



masterfully combines ‘facts’ and literary *topoi* to vividly supply a didactic account of the East Romans’ lightening victory over the fearsome Vandals in 533–534. Chapter 5 considers Procopius’ presentation of military eunuchs within the larger framework of late antique and Mediterranean attitudes towards castrates as unique symbols of imperial power. By exploring the ways attitudes about imperial court eunuchs as military commanders shifted in parallel in Latin and Greek texts from the fourth to the sixth centuries, and considering the key role played by Justinian’s eunuch military commanders Solomon and Narses in this shift, I seek to highlight Procopius’ part in a larger societal move to a more positive attitude towards castrates. Chapter 6 examines in detail a failed plot to assassinate Justinian in 549. It seeks to explain why the heavily gendered rhetoric in Procopius’ account of the plot resembles that found in the *Secret History*, which was likely being written at around the same time. By doing so, I will demonstrate how the historian consciously connected his character sketches of the Persarmenian general Artabanus in the *Wars* and the ‘anti-Belisarius’ found in the *Secret History*.

To achieve a deeper understanding of Procopius’ presentation of non-Romans, his literary process, and perhaps his attitudes towards the Italian campaign, Chapter 7 examines Procopius’ vivid and nuanced portrait of the Gothic King Totila in Books 7 and 8 of the *Wars*. Recent research has shown that the line between Romans and those labelled as ‘barbarians’ by Procopius—like the Goths and Vandals—had become more permeable in the fifth and sixth centuries. Some have seen reflections of this new reality in Procopius’ portrait of Totila. Others, however, conclude that the older constructs of barbarians fighting manfully but ultimately submitting to Rome’s masculine *imperium* still rule supreme in Procopius’ works. It has recently been suggested that Procopius praised Totila simply because he comes the closest of all the Gothic kings to living up to this old paradigm. This chapter strives to add further nuance and context to these views.