

# The *Andreios* Eunuch-Commander Narses: Sign of a Decoupling of Martial Virtues and Masculinity in the Early Byzantine Empire?



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*Abstract: This paper looks at the place of the sixth-century Byzantine general Narses (c. 480–573) in the history of Byzantine gender. Certainly, it has always been important for ancient and modern historians to emphasise Narses’ eunuchism. Indeed, for many modern scholars, Narses’ identity as a castrate has been more important for study than his military deeds and political achievements that proved ephemeral. For some, the presence of a eunuch in such an essential military role indicates a turning away from codes of generalship based on traditional martial courage and manliness. This paper questions such a view, suggesting that Byzantium had a much more flexible notion of eunuchs’ gender status than some recent scholarship allows. Indeed, it suggests that Narses fits into a continuing hegemony of traditional masculine values based on the supremacy of Byzantine men’s martial virtues*

The sixth-century Byzantine general Narses (c. 480–573) has long earned historians’ respect.<sup>1</sup> He deserves this acclaim since his major victories over the Goths in 552 and versus the Franks and Alamanni in 554 helped to secure the Emperor Justinian I’s (ruled 527–565) retaking of Italy from the Goths after an arduous nineteen-year struggle.<sup>2</sup> So too did Narses perform admirably for twelve years in his role as prefect

of Italy. Of course, it has always been important to emphasise that Narses was a eunuch. Indeed, for many modern historians, Narses' identity as a castrate is more important for study than his military deeds and political achievements that proved ephemeral. For some, the presence of a eunuch in such an essential military role indicates a turning away from codes of generalship based on traditional martial courage and manliness.<sup>3</sup> This paper questions this view, suggesting that Byzantium had a much more flexible notion of eunuchs' gender status than some recent scholarship allows. It will show that Narses fits into a continuing hegemony of traditional masculine values based on the supremacy of Byzantine men's martial virtues.

Superficially, the argument that Narses' military role represents a turning away from martial masculinity as a component of Byzantine ideology appears attractive. Certainly the Byzantine period is marked by the essential role that eunuchs played at all levels of court society.<sup>4</sup> Although their primary function throughout the Byzantine era remained service within the imperial palace, Narses was one of three eunuchs to command Byzantine armies during Justinian's reign. The eunuch, Solomon, was *magister militum* and *praetorian prefect* of Africa.<sup>5</sup> Another castrate, Scholasticus, served as commander of an army sent against the Sklavenoi in 551.<sup>6</sup> The number of eunuch generals only grew larger in subsequent centuries.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, in contrast to the gendered vitriol that had accompanied the eunuch Eutropius' military command against the Huns at the close of the fourth century, Narses' and the other eunuchs' prominent military commands, as far as we know, provoked little or no hostile response.<sup>8</sup> This absence may surprise since the battlefield had long represented a masculine realm in the Roman and Byzantine world. One sees late Roman sources, such as the poets Claudian (c. 370–404 AD) and Sidonius Apollonaris (c. 430–489), expressing the idea that eunuchs could not 'possess masculine military virtue.'<sup>9</sup>

A native Greek-speaker from Alexandria based in Italy, Claudian had crafted a famously hostile portrait of the late fourth-century Eastern eunuch-general and consul, Eutropius. The poet's gendered invective *In Eutropium* (Against Eutropius) lambasted the Eastern Romans for allowing an 'unmanly' eunuch to take on what he saw as the hyper-masculine duties of a military commander and consul.<sup>10</sup> Yet, this assessment is largely absent in sixth-century Byzantine writers. For instance, one finds in the sixth-century histories of Procopius and Agathias that Narses' status as a castrate did little to hinder his military acumen. Agathias, in fact, took seeming pleasure in rejecting this trope by depicting two Alamanni warriors in a Frankish army assuming foolishly that they would best the Romans in battle because 'a eunuch of the bedchamber' commanded their army. Guided magnificently by Narses, the Roman army annihilated the Franks.<sup>11</sup> Agathias attributed the Romans' subsequent victories to Narses' 'excellent generalship'.<sup>12</sup>

Modern scholars have used these ancient writers' depictions of Narses as a skilled military commander as evidence of larger societal shifts. Shaun Tougher sees Procopius' and Agathias' flattering views of Narses as an indication of 'a lessening of hostility towards eunuchs' from the fifth century, whilst in her recent study on eunuchs in Byzantine civilisation, Kathryn Ringrose contends that it serves as proof of a decline in the importance of *andreia* (the interchangeable concept of manliness or courage in ancient Greek) as a quality of a sixth-century Byzantine general. She also posits that contemporaries respected Narses for displaying what she considers 'good' eunuch traits such as 'cleverness and deviousness'.<sup>13</sup> While I largely agree with Tougher's point, the paper questions aspects of Ringrose's contentions. Before tackling these questions, let us explore briefly some of the reasons that moderns and ancients have sometimes perceived eunuchs as a threat to masculinity.

## EUNUCHS AND BYZANTINE GENDER CONSTRUCTS

In androcentric cultures like Rome and early Byzantium, the seeming gender ambiguity of eunuchs could be troubling.<sup>14</sup> As Ringrose explains, 'The appearance and behaviour of eunuchs represented the antithesis of appropriate male behaviour. The eunuch was scorned as shameful, neither man nor woman, a monstrosity, an outsider, and pitifully womanlike'.<sup>15</sup> We find this sentiment expressed in the observation by the fourth-century panegyrist Claudius Mamertinus that eunuchs were 'exiles from the society of the human race, belonging to neither one sex nor the other as a result of some congenital abnormality or physical injury'.<sup>16</sup> The *Historia Augusta*, probably composed by an anonymous author in the last quarter of the fourth century (while pretending to be six different authors writing in the late third and early fourth centuries), asserted that eunuchs represented 'a third sex of the human race'.<sup>17</sup> The very ease by which a man could quite literally be cut off from the 'source' of his sexual identity troubled many late Roman writers. At the opening of the fifth century, Claudian quipped that the knife makes 'males womanish'.<sup>18</sup> It appeared a very simple process indeed for a man to become a non-man. As Mathew Kuefler remarks, 'The presence of eunuchs constantly tested the division between men and women, between the manly and the unmanly, and continually revealed that division as an arbitrary and constructed one'.<sup>19</sup>

The issue of eunuchs' gender status in Byzantium remains contentious. To simplify a complex debate, modifying the older paradigm that claimed that eunuchs represented a 'third sex' in Byzantine culture, Ringrose contends it is better to see eunuchs as making up a third gender, 'male in sex, but with a difference'.<sup>20</sup> She asserts that, unlike classical intellectuals, Christian Byzantines based their criterion on behaviour more than physiology.<sup>21</sup> Shaun Tougher is more hesitant to consider eunuchs as a third gender. He postulates, I believe rightly, that eunuchs had 'a multiplicity of concurrent gender identities'. He maintains that whereas eunuchs

could be portrayed as a separate gender, a good number of Byzantine sources saw them as 'simply men'.<sup>22</sup> Warren Treadgold goes further. He rejects the idea that Byzantines ever seriously considered eunuchs as a third gender, suggesting that their roles in the Church and the military prove that they were seen as male.<sup>23</sup>

Though all three of these Byzantinists' views on the 'gender' of eunuchs differ, each position helps to explain why eunuchs like Narses were not cut off from the masculine. Castration did not necessarily mean that a eunuch could not be deemed 'manly' or fight on the frontlines. The traditional dichotomy between virtue and vice based on a bipolar model of gender proved a popular method in describing 'good' and 'bad' eunuchs throughout the Byzantine era. On the one hand, when Byzantine sources praised eunuchs, they described them often as displaying typically masculine attributes. On the other hand, when eunuchs faced criticism, it was 'in terms of values traditionally ascribed to women'.<sup>24</sup> It is only against this background that one can understand how his fellow Byzantines could perceive Narses as an *andreios* ('manly', 'courageous') commander.

### NARSES: THE MANLY EUNUCH

Like most sixth-century Byzantine eunuchs, Narses began his life in Constantinople as an outsider. Most of what we know of his life before 530, and in particular, how and when he became a eunuch, is based on conjecture rather than concrete evidence.<sup>25</sup> All that we can say with any real certainty is that he hailed from Persian Armenia and had risen to prominence under Justinian. He had first attended Justinian and Theodora as a *cubicularius* (chamberlain); ultimately, attaining the top post available to a court eunuch, the position of *praepositus sacri cubiculi* (grand chamberlain). He was also a treasurer (a favourite position for Byzantine eunuchs) and later served as *spatharius* (bodyguard).<sup>26</sup>

Although Procopius depicted Narses, at times, as vain, jealous, insubordinate, petty, and overly reliant on barbarian auxiliaries, the historian respected Narses for being a successful and resourceful commander.<sup>27</sup> Yet it does not appear that Procopius or Agathias took Narses' position as a general for granted. Procopius presented Narses 'as an anomalous example' of a typical eunuch. When Narses arrived to Italy from Constantinople in 538 with a large army, the historian proclaimed that the eunuch was more 'keen and more energetic than would be expected of a eunuch [ἄλλως δὲ ὄξυς καὶ μαλλον ἢ κατ' ευνουῶχον δραστήριος]'.<sup>28</sup> Agathias too indicated that Narses' 'courage and heroism' were unusual for a eunuch.<sup>29</sup>

Seen in this light, Procopius' biographic sketch of Narses offers yet another inversion of 'typical' behaviours one finds throughout *Wars*.<sup>30</sup> Procopius' presentation of Narses does not indicate that just any eunuch could become an able military commander, only that in certain instances, just as one can find manly women and restrained barbarians, one can find a vigorous, and indeed, a manly eunuch. These inversions were not an invention of sixth-century writers. One finds such reverses before the fifth century. Ammianus Marcellinus, for instance, provided a similar account of an 'atypical' eunuch a century and a half earlier when he provided a backhanded compliment to the court eunuch, Eutherius, by suggesting: 'Among the brambles roses spring up, and among the savage beasts some are tamed'.<sup>31</sup>

Procopius and Agathias, however, undermine Ringrose's contention 'that neither' Procopius nor Agathias 'attributes Narses' success to traditional courageous manliness'. Examples from both historians demonstrate the opposite. Procopius reported with little sense of irony that Narses' supporters in the officer corps hoped that the eunuch would achieve his own fame through 'deeds of wisdom and manliness' [ἔργα ξυνέσεώς τε καὶ ἀνδρείας].<sup>32</sup> Agathias too described Narses as 'manly and heroic' [τὸ δὲ ἀνδρεῖον καὶ μεγαλοργόν].<sup>33</sup> These characterisations serve as convincing proof that contemporaries had little problem with seeing Narses as an *andreios* military man. With his remark about Narses 'that true nobility of soul

cannot fail to make its mark, no matter what obstacles are put in its path', it seems clear that Agathias would have placed Narses on or near the top of his ladder of human excellence and/or gender difference.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, martial virtues had never centered solely on 'courage' or 'physicality'. According to Agathias, 'Brains and not brawn' represented the primary qualities of an effective Roman general.<sup>35</sup> This attitude need not surprise. Byzantine military handbooks, in fact, preferred it when military commanders avoided fighting on the front lines with their men. For example, the late sixth-century military guidebook, Maurice's *Strategikon*, advised that generals should avoid battle and limit their actions to directing the formations 'and adapting to the movements of the enemy'.<sup>36</sup> Procopius also criticised generals for risking themselves fighting on the frontline.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, men with little or no military background could lead Roman and Byzantine armies.<sup>38</sup>

Procopius' account showed that it was the combination of Narses' 'brains' with his soldiers' 'brawn' that had led to the Byzantines' final victories over the Goths. Indeed, one should not suppose that Narses avoided danger during these battles or assume that the eunuch had not received military training. Despite the eunuch's diminutive stature, Agathias described Narses on horseback leading his men into a skirmish against the Franks.<sup>39</sup> Narses' age (he was probably over seventy during the events depicted in book eight of Procopius' *Wars*), more than the fact that he was a former court eunuch, probably represented the primary reason that Narses failed to play a larger role in combat. Procopius depicted Solomon leading cavalry charges and fighting on the frontlines with his men.<sup>40</sup> In 541, the Empress Theodora had sent Narses—then the commander of the Emperor Justinian's bodyguard—to assassinate the praetorian prefect, John the Cappadocian. Though the attack failed, Narses took a leading role in the attempt.<sup>41</sup>

The imperial family frequently chose castrates for such important tasks because of their eunuchism. Moreover, military-eunuchs could lessen the threat of usurpation.

As Ringrose explains, 'eunuchs were seen as a safer option, and often utilised when women or minor children ruled'.<sup>42</sup> Though Procopius failed to make this point, no eunuch could hope to become emperor.<sup>43</sup> This reality had more to do with their 'mutilation' than their gender. Indeed, any type of mutilation generally barred men from becoming emperor. As God's representative on earth the emperor needed to maintain his corporeal perfection. Blinding, castration and *rhinokopia* (cutting off the nose) all served as effective methods to incapacitate one's rivals.<sup>44</sup>

So why did Justinian use eunuchs as military commanders? The emperor's reasoning for doing so appears multi-faceted. His break with recent precedent may have been a practical decision based on the reality that Solomon and Narses were the best qualified to lead. Solomon had first earned his military reputation during service under Belisarius in Persia and North Africa.<sup>45</sup> Narses' loyalty and financial acumen represent two reasons for his appointment to a military command.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Narses had performed coolly under pressure during an uprising in 532 known as the Nika revolt, which had seen the near overthrow of Justinian.<sup>47</sup> The combination of Narses' quick-thinking during the revolt and his close relationship with Theodora — due in part to their shared Christological position<sup>48</sup> — provide the likely rationale for the eunuch's appointment in 535 to lead a Byzantine army into Alexandria to reinstate the monophysite Theodosius as patriarch.<sup>49</sup>

Fear of usurpation appears to have also played a role in Narses' promotion. Where Procopius only insinuated, Agathias made it plain that Justinian felt threatened by Belisarius' growing popularity.<sup>50</sup> The fifth and early sixth centuries had seen Roman and non-Roman soldiers playing increasingly important roles in the making and the unmaking of Roman emperors. Generals like Aetius and Ricimer in the West and Aspar in the East were arguably the most powerful and influential fifth-century politicians. All of these men hailed from the military aristocracy, and they often used their power and influence to control the reigning emperors, who were often little

better than puppets. Moreover, many fifth-century emperors had begun their careers as relatively obscure soldiers in these generalissimos' armies.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, it should not surprise us that the non-campaigning Justinian felt vulnerable to usurpation. His fears were not completely unjustified. After Belisarius' defeated the Gothic king, Vitigis, the Gothic nobility had offered, 'to declare Belisarius Emperor of the West'.<sup>52</sup> This threat to Justinian's authority appear to have made the emperor suspect Belisarius' loyalty. By appointing Narses, Justinian therefore removed the real threat that a charismatic — and corporeally intact — military man like Belisarius could present to those in the imperial leadership. Narses' survival probably depended on the emperor. Beholden to the ruling imperial regime, eunuchs in positions of prominence had long been vulnerable to execution during political crises or regime changes.<sup>53</sup> Narses, indeed, famously clashed with Justinian's successor Justin II and his wife Sophia.<sup>54</sup>

Further evidence suggests that contemporaries saw the choice of Narses to lead the military campaigns in Italy as unusual. Procopius explained that some Romans believed that Justinian had selected Narses because of a prophecy that a eunuch would bring about the Goths' downfall. Although Procopius discounted this explanation, his earlier comment that 'the reason why this was the wish of the emperor was explicitly evident to no one in the world', implies that Procopius felt somewhat befuddled by Narses' appointment. Therefore, I would largely agree with Averil Cameron's contention that 'it was for Procopius a galling blow that Narses achieved the final victory in Italy, not Belisarius.'<sup>55</sup>

One might ask then why does Procopius appear to celebrate Narses' virtues at the close of *Wars*? As Anthony Kaldellis has suggested, it may have served as a means of contrasting Narses' victories with what Procopius saw as Belisarius' failures in Italy after 540.<sup>56</sup> What better way to denigrate Belisarius than to explain how a eunuch had defeated the pugnacious Goths. Yet, one should be careful not to stretch the *Wars'*

subtext too far. Procopius never expressed this sentiment directly in any of his extant writings, including *Secret History*. The closest he came to creating a gendered contrast between the two generals comes in book six where Procopius related a rift in 538 between Narses and Belisarius that had paralysed the Byzantine army's progress. In a heated argument with Narses, Procopius tellingly described Belisarius as a 'man general' [στρατηγῶ ἀνδρῖ].<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, it must be stressed, that book eight of *Wars*, published shortly after Narses' successes, contains a largely positive assessment of Belisarius.<sup>58</sup> So too, as I have argued in more detail elsewhere, the close of *Wars* reveals a more upbeat attitude towards the reconquest as a whole than some modern historians have suggested.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the negative portraits found in *Secret History* and books six and seven of *Gothic War*, were all likely composed and published at the nadir of Byzantine's fortunes in Italy around 550/51.<sup>60</sup> Book eight also exonerates Belisarius' failures in Italy somewhat, by claiming that the Romans' victories under Narses were partly due to Justinian's re-focus on the campaign and, most importantly, providing Narses with the supplies and the men that Belisarius had long begged for, but had never received.<sup>61</sup> So the historian's admiration for the general who had finally 'defeated' the martial Goths may have been genuine. Certainly, in Procopius' account, Narses played a primary role in defeating the martial Gothic king Totila at the fateful battle of Busto Gallorum (also known as the Battle of Taginae) in 552. A recent analysis of the battle, explains that Procopius had simplified the actual circumstances of the battle, and instead, crafted a 'caricaturing of the wily "eunuch-general" outwitting the brave, but rash "barbarian king" Totila'.<sup>62</sup> Narses' intelligence and planning paved the way to an overwhelming Roman victory.

Even if Procopius secretly held a grudge against the eunuch for disrupting Belisarius' earlier military campaigns, he needed to explain how and why Narses had attained a victory that his former superior had failed to achieve. Following values found in his historical model Thucydides,<sup>63</sup> Procopius believed in the link between

one's virtues and one's success in the world.<sup>64</sup> This mindset might help to explain why the historian replaced the flawed, conniving, and less politically successful Narses found in much of book six of the *Gothic War* with the more virtuous and triumphant eunuch depicted in books seven and eight.

Undeniably, Narses displayed many of the traits of an ideal 'manly' non-eunuch early Byzantine commander. The eunuch's affability, courage, cleverness, organisational and tactical abilities, as well as his oratory skills that allowed him to incite his soldiers to perform great deeds of courage and manliness on the battlefield, represent some of Narses' best 'martial' qualities. Unlike Ringrose and Rance, however, I do not believe that Procopius saw Narses' administrative skills and 'cleverness' as eunuch-specific traits; they are characteristics expected of any successful leader or general.<sup>65</sup> Procopius depicted Belisarius as clever, well organised, and, at times, devious.<sup>66</sup>

## THE SOLDIER'S LIFE

A key question is whether the early Byzantines understood that the use of eunuchs in the military represented a larger societal move away from the traditional idea that the battlefield represented a masculine domain. If *andreia* was becoming a less important cultural and/or military value, one would expect to see a decrease in the number of examples of idealised military men displaying typical martial courage and manliness in this period. The evidence does not support such a view.

Procopius and Agathias consistently praised military men as upholding the best traditions of 'Roman' manliness. For these Byzantine intellectuals, the manly deeds of courage and self-restraint performed in the theatre of war by idealised soldiers set a standard of masculine excellence that was difficult for their civilian counterparts to match. These historians shared a view found in Ammianus, that suggested that

Roman pre-eminence had been achieved because its early citizens had avoided the 'life of softness/effeminacy' [*vita mollitia*]<sup>67</sup> brought on by wealth and the sedentary life and 'fought in fierce wars,' which allowed them to 'overcome all obstacles by manliness [*virtute*]'.<sup>68</sup>

We find similar sentiments when Agathias had Narses declare in a set-speech to his soldiers: 'To triumph forever over our enemies is our birthright and ancestral privilege'. Narses continued by praising his soldiers' superior physical and intellectual virtues. He declared, 'It would indeed be shameful, fellow Romans, if you were to suffer the same fate as the barbarians and not to outshine them as much by your superior intelligence as you do in physical prowess'.<sup>69</sup> In works that focused on warfare and the deeds of soldiers, it should not shock us that, in Procopius and Agathias' minds, a 'manly man' [ἀνήρ ἀνδρεῖός] was a military man.<sup>70</sup> In order to delve further into the ways sixth-century Byzantines connected the concept of *andreia* with military virtues, let us turn to Procopius' infamous portrait of Belisarius found in *Secret History*.

## DRAINING ANDREIA

There are several important reasons for choosing Procopius as the main source for his era and as a good example of how early Byzantine gender ideologies were constructed.<sup>71</sup> Procopius has, arguably, long been the most important and widely read early Byzantine historian.<sup>72</sup> Procopius' writings attained popularity during his own lifetime; the historian claims that the history found an audience throughout the Empire.<sup>73</sup>

Yet as we have touched on above, uncovering Procopius' 'true' views is problematic. Undoubtedly, without careful analysis, Procopius' three works: the *Buildings*, the *Secret History*, and the *Wars*, may appear either to have different authors, or to be the work of one severely schizophrenic individual. In *Buildings*, Procopius

extolled Justinian as God's messenger on earth, leading the Empire back to glory. In contrast, in the *Secret History*, Justinian appeared as the 'Lord of the Demons', driving Byzantium to disaster.<sup>74</sup> The *Wars* took the middle ground, incorporating negative and positive descriptions of the emperor and his military campaigns. Some of these discrepancies, however, partly reflect the nature and the limitations of Procopius' historical models. The *Wars* was a work of secular history that focused on great men and great battles. The *Secret History* followed the literary genre of *psogos* (invective) and *komodia* (satire), while the *Buildings* followed the restrictions of 'the most artificial of all classical genres to modern taste, that of panegyric'.<sup>75</sup>

Procopius' oft-times paradoxical portraits of Justinian, Belisarius and Narses presents a real problem for anyone hoping to interpret his writings, particularly the *Secret History*. I would agree, however, with Anthony Kaldellis' assertion concerning Procopius, that 'Contrary to what is implied in recent scholarship, genres do not write books. Authors do'.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, as Kate Cooper has convincingly proven in her research, an understanding of even rhetorical constructions in ancient writers like Procopius helps provide a more detailed picture of how ancient men and women understood themselves.<sup>77</sup>

Although the audience for such a detailed prose account of Justinian's military campaigns in Persia, North Africa, and Italy could never have been large, its Byzantine readership probably included influential Greek-speaking members of the bureaucracy and the military high command.<sup>78</sup> Procopius may too have recited his work in front of larger and less-educated audiences, who, as Brian Croke aptly reminds us, 'were no less used to formal rhetoric and found these works enjoyable'.<sup>79</sup> The *Wars* also influenced other early Byzantine historians. Agathias, who accused some of his fellow sixth-century writers of composing histories that demonstrated a 'flagrant disregard for the truth' and no concern for historical precision, in contrast, complimented Procopius for his accuracy and reliability.<sup>80</sup> This praise was not limited to secular historians. The sixth-century ecclesiastical historian, Evagrius, who paraphrased large

sections of *Wars* for his own history, revealed the esteem in which Procopius was held: 'Procopius has set forth most assiduously and elegantly what was done by Belisarius, when he commanded the Eastern forces and by the Romans and Persians when they fought each other'.<sup>81</sup> The regard in which contemporary historians held him and his popularity amongst an influential segment of early Byzantine society indicates that his history was considered accurate and suggests that his paradigms of heroism and masculinity were ones that his audience could appreciate.

Procopius witnessed many of the events he described and knew many of the people found in his writings. In 527, the historian had been appointed as *assessor* (legal secretary) to Belisarius, the newly appointed commander of the Eastern forces.<sup>82</sup> For the next thirteen years, Procopius accompanied Belisarius on his military campaigns in the East against the Persians, to the West in Africa against the Vandals, and in Italy against the Goths. After 540, the two parted ways, and we lose track of the historian's exact location. We do not know if he joined Belisarius in his 541 campaign against the Persians, though he was present the next year when the plague struck in Constantinople. It is almost certain that after 542, he no longer witnessed the events he described, but relied on Byzantine diplomatic records and on his contacts in the Byzantine army and within the Roman Senate.<sup>83</sup> Though we do not know the exact circumstances behind the pairs split, as we discussed above, Procopius attributed the Goths and Persians resurgence after 540 on Belisarius' shortcomings as a general and a man.

Procopius' famously acrimonious *Secret History* attributed many of Belisarius' military defeats, not on failed military strategies, but on his contention that Belisarius had been effeminised. Procopius revealed that it was not rival generals or insubordinate troops that brought about Belisarius' downfall, but an even more formidable enemy: his wife. Procopius, who praised Belisarius for his ability to govern even the most fearsome barbarians, condemned his superior for becoming a slave to his own lust. Like any good warrior, Belisarius did not give in without a fight and he

waged a difficult campaign against her 'womanly wiles'. Again and again, he attempted to escape his wife's clutches and for brief moments he was able to restore his honour by rejecting Antonina's 'tricks of magic', and thereby he became a 'proper' man once more. Each time, however, the respite was fleeting, and Belisarius returned once again to be Antonina's 'faithful slave not her husband'.<sup>84</sup>

Procopius drew attention to how a 'real' man handled disruptive women when he presented the Byzantine general, Constantine, berating Belisarius for ignoring Antonia's suspected adultery: 'If I had been in your shoes, I should have got rid of that woman instead of the youngster [Theodosius – Antonina's purported lover]'. Belisarius not only refused to heed Constantine's advice, but as Procopius related, a short time afterwards had the general executed at Antonina's behest. These actions evoked the 'bitter hostility of the Emperor and of the influential Romans one and all'.<sup>85</sup>

Procopius deftly revealed how troubles in one's domestic world could spill over into the public domain. Following a rhetorical commonplace in classical literature, Procopius emphasised that once a man became enslaved to a woman he could never be a superior leader of men. Belisarius' concern over his wife's depravity led him to sacrifice the state's most vital interests to his own domestic concerns. According to Procopius, Belisarius' obsession with Antonina led to the Byzantine setbacks in the war against the Persians and the Goths. 'Incapacitated by his wife's waywardness', Belisarius refused to travel far beyond the Empire's boundaries, and therefore failed to take the initiative against the Persians. Procopius related that his fellow Romans claimed that Belisarius had 'sacrificed the most vital interests of the State to his own domestic concerns'.<sup>86</sup> The historian also blamed Belisarius' lacklustre second campaign in Italy on his refusal to punish his wife for her 'crimes'.<sup>87</sup>

In Procopius' mind, Belisarius' 'abandonment of his manhood [ἀρρενωπὸν ἀπελελοίπει]', had made him an unmanly shell of his former masculine self. The historian wrote:

Thinking not one worthy thought nor even remembering that he had ever been a man, but perspiring constantly, with his head swimming, trembling violently in helpless despair, tortured by servile fears, and apprehensions, which were both cowardly and wholly unmanly [ἀνάνδροις].<sup>88</sup>

By allowing Antonina to take on the dominant role in their marriage, Belisarius not only drained his manliness, but according to Procopius, at that moment, 'the hand of God was unmistakably against him', and consequently, Justinian's reconquest of Italy.<sup>89</sup>

Although one can debate whether or not the hostile rhetoric above represented Procopius' 'true' feelings about Belisarius, it certainly provides proof concerning the role that a general's masculine virtues played in determining outcomes on the field of battle. This is only one of several examples in Procopius' writings where military failures resulted from a general's lack of manliness. For instance, in *Wars* and *Secret History*, Procopius blamed the failures of Sergius, supreme commander of Byzantine forces in North Africa (544–5), on his 'unmanly, [ἀνάνδρος] 'soft' [μαλακός] and 'effeminate nature' [γνάθους φύσων].<sup>90</sup>

Narses and his fellow eunuch commanders, Solomon and Scholasticus, conversely, were never depicted by Procopius as soft, effeminate, or unmanly. Though it is always dangerous to make an argument based on omission, it is also interesting that Narses does not appear in *Secret History*.<sup>91</sup> If Procopius was writing around 558/59, as some suggest (although 550/51 is the more accepted date), then he may well have been aware of Narses' appointment as commander-in-chief. Even if Procopius composed *Secret History* before Narses' commission, one would think that the eunuch's influential role in Justinian's army and on-going rivalry with Belisarius should have merited some comment. Like Eutropius a century and a half earlier, as a eunuch-commander, Narses would have seemed to have made a perfect target for a historian so fond of gendered invective. Indeed, as a eunuch, Narses would have been

perceived by most Byzantines to be immune to a women's charms. Yet Procopius said nothing.

Of course Procopius was pretty accepting of eunuchs' roles in Byzantine civilisation. This does not mean that Narses evaded all gendered jibes. As mentioned earlier, Procopius' continuer Agathias used the eunuch-trope in his history. So Procopius was probably aware of these gendered attitudes towards eunuchs, but chose not to use them.

His fellow Byzantine historians largely shared Procopius' respect for Narses.<sup>92</sup> In twelfth-century Byzantium, a successful eunuch-commander could be described 'as a new Narses'.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps more surprising, early medieval Western sources have also left us largely positive descriptions of Narses.<sup>94</sup> Writing in the Frankish kingdom of Burgundy in the early 580s, Marius of Avenches celebrated Narses' achievements in Italy:

After Narses, former superintendent [of the sacred bedchamber] and patrician, had laid low so many usurpers — that is Baudila [Totila] and Tëias kings of the Goths; and Buccelin, a duke of the Franks; as well as Sindual the Herul — he was recalled from Italy in this year, by the above mentioned Augustus [Justin II] having commendably restored Milan and other towns the [Ostro] Goths had destroyed.<sup>95</sup>

Significantly, for our purposes, even Western sources that subscribed to Narses' anachronistic 'betrayal' of Italy to the Lombards first found in Isidore of Seville's chronicle from 616, portray Narses' reasoning for the 'duplicity' in a sympathetic light.<sup>96</sup>

In closing, sixth and seventh-century Byzantine texts abound with emotive rhetoric associating traditional Roman codes of masculinity with idealised visions of the soldier's life. Manly *andreia* continued to be an essential aspect of both generalship and idealised men's self-fashioning. This is not to say that the masculinity of soldiers represented the only type of heroic manliness in this period. Alternative pathways to

achieving 'true' manliness had long been a feature of masculine ideology in the late Roman and the early Byzantine period. Extreme ascetics, courageous martyrs, fearless philosophers, and powerful political and Church leaders were all, at times, compared favourably to military heroes.<sup>97</sup>

Traditional hegemonic masculinity secured in acts of bravery in warfare, however, proved resilient in the early Byzantine period. The increasing use of eunuchs in positions of command from the sixth century did little to shake the idea that 'Roman' greatness had been earned by the manly blood of its soldiers. As a realm dominated by 'real' men, the battlefield continued to provide one of the easiest places for men in the early Byzantine period to prove not only their courage, but also their manliness. Byzantines like Procopius and Agathias created a place for Narses in this masculine world. For these historians, and one suspects their contemporary readers, Narses' *andreia* and, indeed, manliness served as further evidence of Byzantium and its men's masculine supremacy.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 555]; J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian* (London: Macmillan, 1958), pp. 267–80; T. S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy AD554–800* (London: British School at Rome, 1984), pp. 80–4; Lawrence Fauber, *Narses the Hammer of the Goths* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 135; and John Martyn, 'The Eunuch Narses', in *Text and Transmission in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Chris Bishop (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholarly Publishing, 2007), pp. 46–56.

<sup>2</sup> Modern military historians, for example, have rated Narses as a better general than his rival Belisarius. See for example Bevin Alexander, *How Wars are Won: The 13 Rules of War from Ancient Greece to the War on Terror* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002), pp. 49–52.

<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 133. The original impetus for this essay was as a response to a question from the examiners of my dissertation, 'The Soldier's Life: Martial Virtues and Hegemonic Masculinity in the early Byzantine Empire', (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Queensland, 2012), who suggested that Procopius' presentation of Narses might serve as proof that the early Byzantines were turning away from the traditional belief that martial virtues were linked to masculinity.

<sup>4</sup> On the role of eunuchs in Byzantine civilisation, see Rodolphe Guiland, 'Les Eunuques dans l'Empire Byzantin: Étude de Titulature et de Prosopographie Byzantines', in *Études Byzantines*, Vol. I (Bucharest: Institute Français D' Etudes, 1943), pp. 197–238; Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 2003; and Shaun Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Procopius, *Wars* 4.11.47–56, ed. and trans. by H. B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library 5 vols. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1914–28). Procopius (*Wars*, 3.11.6), however, differentiated Solomon from man-made eunuchs by emphasising that his castration resulted from a childhood accident. For a discussion on the subtle differences in Byzantine attitudes towards 'accidental' eunuchs like Solomon and 'created' eunuchs see Tougher, *Eunuch*, 31–2, 46.

<sup>6</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 7.40.5.

<sup>7</sup> For a select prosopography of eunuchs in Byzantine civilisation see Tougher, *Eunuch*, pp. 133–71.

<sup>8</sup> As a propagandist for the Western generalissimo Stilicho, Claudian was rather extreme in his denigration of a rival from a then hostile Eastern half of the Empire. It is important to point out, however, that several Eastern sources (e.g. Eunapius, frag. 64, 65, ed. and trans. by R.C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus, and Malchus*, 2 vols. [Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1983], Zosimus, *New History* 5.38–18, ed. and French trans. by Francois Paschoud, *Zosime, Histoire Nouvelle*, 3 vols [Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1971–89]; English trans. by Ron Ridley, *New History*, AABS 2 [Brisbane: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986], Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicle* s.a. 396, ed. and trans by Brian Croke. AABS 7 [Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1995]) criticised Eutropius with similar hostile rhetoric. For a lucid discussion on the gendered aspects of Claudian's vilification of Eutropius see Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 65–7, 69.

- <sup>9</sup> Jacqueline Long, *Claudian's 'In Eutropium' Or, How, When and Why to Slander a Eunuch* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 129; and Sidonius, *Carmina* 1.9, trans. by W. B. Anderson, *Poems and Letters*, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936).
- <sup>10</sup> For just two specific examples see Claudian, *In Eutropium*, ed. by J. Hall (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1985); trans. by Maurice Platnauer, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1922) 1.281, 2.112–14 (vol. 1).
- <sup>11</sup> Agathias, *Histories*, 1.6.8, 1.22.6, ed. by R. Keydell, *Agathiae Myrinae Historiarum Quinque* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1967); trans. by J. D. Frendo, (New York: W. de Gruyter, 1975).
- <sup>12</sup> Agathias, *Histories*, 2.9.1.
- <sup>13</sup> Shaun Tougher, 'Social Transformation, Gender Transformation? The Court Eunuch, 300–900', in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, eds. L. Brubaker and J. M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 88; and Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, p. 133.
- <sup>14</sup> For the centrality of the masculine in Rome and Byzantium see Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*; Myles McDonnell, *Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007); Colleen Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Stewart, 'The Soldier's Life'.
- <sup>15</sup> Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, p.12; and Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*, pp. 31–36.
- <sup>16</sup> Claudius Mamertinus, *Speech of Thanks to Julian* 19.4., trans. by Samuel Lieu, *The Emperor Julian Panegyric and Polemic*, Translated Texts for Historians 2 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1986).
- <sup>17</sup> *Historia Augusta* 23.4–8, ed. and trans. by David Magie, Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921–32).
- <sup>18</sup> Claudian, *In Eutropium*, 1.48.
- <sup>19</sup> Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*, p. 36. Cf. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p.10.
- <sup>20</sup> Collin Wells, 'Review of Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender*', *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (2004.02.12), <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2004/2004-02-12.html> [accessed 15 January 2012].
- <sup>21</sup> Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, pp. 2–23.
- <sup>22</sup> Tougher, 'Social Transformation', p. 82.
- <sup>23</sup> Warren Treadgold, 'Review of Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender*', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* Vol. 12, No. 3 (2006), pp. 466–469.
- <sup>24</sup> Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, pp. 19–20.
- <sup>25</sup> See for example, Robert Browning, *Justinian and Theodora* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 41; Martyn, 'Narses', p. 46.
- <sup>26</sup> John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.66 (469), 18.71 (476), ed. by I. Thurn, *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000); trans. by Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michaels Jeffreys, and Roger Scott, *The Chronical of John Malalas*, AABS 4 (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986).
- <sup>27</sup> Procopius' portrait of Narses is more nuanced, and in places, less positive than Tougher or Ringrose indicates. For his 'negative' qualities see *Wars*, 6.18.11, 6.18.28–29, 6.19.18., 8.23.17–20. For 'positive' traits see *Wars* 6.13.16, 8.26.5, 8.26.14, 8.31.22, 8.35.36.
- <sup>28</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 6.13.16–17.

<sup>29</sup> Agathias, *Histories*, 1.16.2.

<sup>30</sup> For a full discussion of these inversions in *Gothic War* see Michael Edward Stewart, 'Contests of *Andreia* in Procopius' *Gothic Wars*', *Παρεκβολαι* 4 (2014), pp. 21–54.

<sup>31</sup> Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 16.7.4-8, ed. and trans. by J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1935-1940). For these accounts of 'good' and 'bad' eunuchs throughout the late Roman and Byzantine eras see Tougher, *Eunuchs*, pp. 26–35.

<sup>32</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 6.18.7. I have changed the translator Dewing's 'courage' for ἀνδρείας to 'manliness.' Procopius also described (*Wars*, 3.9.25) the Emperor Justinian as ὀξύς (sharp, clever). Eunuch-commanders after Narses continued to face hostile gendered rhetoric. See the eleventh-century historian, John Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories* 16.8, trans. by John Wortley, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Agathias, *Histories*, 1.16.12. To better match the gendered tone of this section of Agathias' history, I have changed the translator Frenno's 'courage' for ἀνδρεῖον to 'manliness'.

<sup>34</sup> Agathias, *Histories*, 1.16.2.

<sup>35</sup> Agathias, *Histories*, 2.22.5.

<sup>36</sup> *Maurice's Strategikon*, 2.16, trans. by G. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

<sup>37</sup> See for example, Procopius, *Wars*, 5.18.5.

<sup>38</sup> Though these inexperienced commanders represent the exceptions not the rule, a famous example is Areobindus the *magister militum Africae* (545) who was married to Justinian's niece Prajecta. Procopius described (*Wars*, 4.16.2, 4.25.25) him as having no military experience.

<sup>39</sup> Agathias, *Histories*, 1.21.5. For Narses' small, frail body, see *Histories*, 1.16.2.

<sup>40</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 4.11.15, 4.19.17.

<sup>41</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 4.11.47–56; 1.25.24–30.

<sup>42</sup> Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, p. 134.

<sup>43</sup> Though, according to contemporary sources, the eunuch-exarch of Ravenna, Eleutherios, had attempted to have himself proclaimed Western emperor in 619. The chronicle known as the *Auctarii Havniensis Extrema* (ch. 25, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, *Auctarii Havniensis Extrema, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Auctores Antiquissimi 9 Chronica Minora 1*: 339 (Berlin, Weidmann, 1892) published around 625, provides the longest account on Eleutherios, explaining that the eunuch had been coaxed to head to Rome to be crowned. Cf. Liber Pontificalis, *Vita Boniface* ch. 2, trans. by Raymond Davis, *The Book of the Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715*, Translated Texts for Historians 6 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989); and Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards* 4.34, trans. by William Foulke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974); and Agnellus, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, ch. 106, ed. by Deborah Mauskoph Deliyannis, *Agnelli Ravennatis Liber Pontificalis Ecclesia Ravennatis, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 199 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Judith Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence: Women and Empire in Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) p. 268.

<sup>45</sup> Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor, *Chronicle* 9.93, ed. by Geoffrey Greatrex, trans. by Robert Phenix and Cornelia Horn, *The Chronicle of Pseudo Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity*, Translated Texts for Historians 55 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011); and Procopius, *Wars*, 3.11.5–6.

<sup>46</sup> Shaun Tougher, 'Byzantine Eunuchs as Generals: The case of Narses', in *Verflechtungen zwischen Byzanz und dem Orient*, ed. by M. Grünbart (forthcoming).

- <sup>47</sup> For a description of Narses' vital role in thwarting the revolt see Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.71 (476).
- <sup>48</sup> For the probability of Narses being a Monophysite see John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.39, ed. and Latin trans. by E. W. Brooks, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae Pars Tertia*, Corpus scriptorium Christianorum Orientalium, vols. 105-106 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1952).
- <sup>49</sup> Marion Kruse III, 'Narses and the Birth of Byzantine Egypt: Imperial Policy in the Age of Justinian', (unpublished honours thesis, University of Richmond, 2008), pp. 24–27.
- <sup>50</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 6.30.1–5; and Agathias, *Histories*, 5.20.5. Historians continue to debate just how viable a rival Belisarius was; see Henning Börm, 'Justinians Triumph und Belisars Erniedrigung Überiegungen zum Verhältnis Zwischen Reich', *Chiron* 43, (2013), pp. 63–91.
- <sup>51</sup> In the East, the emperors Marcian (ruled 450–7 and Leo I (ruled 457-74) had served under the Alan strong-man Aspar. Full discussion in Michael Edward Stewart, 'The First Byzantine Emperor? Leo I, Aspar and Challenges of Power and *Romanitas* in Fifth-century Byzantium', *Porphyra* 22 (2014), pp. 4–17.
- <sup>52</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 6.30.27.
- <sup>53</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, pp. 176–96.
- <sup>54</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Chronicon* 116, trans. by Kenneth B. Wolfe (2004), [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/isidore\\_chronicon\\_01\\_trans.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/isidore_chronicon_01_trans.htm) [accessed 10 February 2015]; and Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards* 2.5.
- <sup>55</sup> Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1985), p. 203.
- <sup>56</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the end of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 193–6.
- <sup>57</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 6.13.4–5. Discussed in Kruse, 'Narses', p. 10.
- <sup>58</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 8.21.1–3, 8.25.12.
- <sup>59</sup> Michael Edward Stewart, 'Aeneas' Ship: Notions of Return in Procopius' *Gothic Wars*', *Networks & Neighbours* 3.2 (forthcoming).
- <sup>60</sup> Books five, six, and seven of *Gothic Wars* covering events in Italy from 535–550 are generally accepted to have been published around 550–551. Book eight, which described the on-going wars in Italy and Persia from 551–553 was probably published in late 553 or 554. For 550/51 as the likely date for *Secret History's* composition, see J. A. S. Evans, 'The Dates of Procopius' Works', *GRBS*, 37 (1996), pp. 301–20; and Cameron, *Procopius*, pp. 8–11; and Geoffrey Greatrex, 'The Dates of Procopius' Works', *BMGS*, 18 (1994), pp. 101–14; and Juan Signes Codoñer, 'Prokops Anekdotia und Justinians Nachfolge', *JÖBG*, 53 (2003), pp. 47–82; and Anthony Kaldellis, 'The Date and Structure of Prokopios' Secret History and His Projected Work on Church History', *GRBS*, 49 (2009), pp. 585–616. For 558/59: Roger Scott, 'Justinian's Coinage and Easter Reforms and the Date of the *Secret History*', *BMGS*, 11 (1987), pp. 215–21; Brian Croke, 'Procopius' *Secret History*: Rethinking the Date', *GRBS*, 25 (2005), pp. 405–31.
- <sup>61</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 7.21-10, 8.26.7. Cf. Procopius, *Secret History* 4.39–40.
- <sup>62</sup> Philip Rance, 'Narses and the Battle of Taginae (Busta Gallorum) 552: Procopius and Sixth-Century Warfare', *Historia*, 54 (2005), p. 426.
- <sup>63</sup> For this influence see Charles F. Pazdernik, 'Procopius and Thucydides on the Labors of War: Belisarius and Brasidas in the Field', in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 130 (2000), pp. 149–87; and Kaldellis, *Procopius*, pp. 17–61. On how Procopius' *Wars* differs from Thucydides see Maria Kouroumali, 'Procopius and the Gothic War', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 2005), pp. 9–26. Despite Procopius' reputation as a classicising historian, many of the themes in

Procopius' writings would have bewildered Herodotus and Thucydides. Foremost of these novelties was the Christian influence on the works. Full discussion in Cameron, *Procopius*, pp. 64–5; and Michael Stewart, 'Between Two Worlds, Men's Heroic Conduct in the Writings of Procopius', (unpublished master's thesis, San Diego State University 2003), pp. 25–9.

<sup>64</sup> Warren Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 223.

<sup>65</sup> For typical traits expected from an ideal commander see for example, the description of the fifth-century Roman generalissimo Aetius found in the fragment of the *Historia* of Renatus Frigeridus recorded by the sixth-century historian Gregory of Tours (*History of the Franks*, 2.8, trans. by Lewis Thorpe [London: Penguin Books, 1974]: 'His (Aetius) intelligence was keen, he was full of energy, a superb horseman, a fine shot with an arrow and tireless with the lance. He was extremely able as a soldier and he was skilled in the arts of peace. There was no avarice in him and even less cupidity. He was magnanimous in his behaviour and never swayed in his judgement by the advice of unworthy counsellors. He bore adversity with great patience, was ready for any exacting enterprise, he scorned danger and was able to endure hunger, thirst and the loss of sleep'.

<sup>66</sup> See for example, Procopius, *Wars*, 5.22.1–9. Belisarius cleverly lures the Goths into battle and laughs at their 'barbarian simplicity'. *Wars*, 6.30.24–7. Belisarius shows his devious side by going along with the Goths' offer to make him emperor of the West. **Procopius described (*Wars* 3.9.25) Belisarius as ὀξύς (sharp, clever).**

<sup>67</sup> For the close association of the term *mollitia* 'softness' with 'effeminacy' see Craig Williams, 'Some Remarks on the Semantics of *mollitia*', *Eugesta*, 3 (2013), pp. 240–63.

<sup>68</sup> Ammianus, *Histories*, 31.5.14 (my trans.); 14.6.10. I have replaced the translator Rolfe's 'valour' for *virtute* with 'manliness.' Cf. Theophylact, *History* 2.14.6, trans. by Michael and Mary Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>69</sup> Agathias, *Histories*, 2.12.2–6.

<sup>70</sup> For example, Procopius' effusive praise in *Wars* of men with military backgrounds, Theodosius I (3.1.2–3), Majorian (3.7.4–13), Leo I (3.6.11), Belisarius (7.1.1–21), Totila (7.6.4), and Germanus (7.40.9); Agathias: the Roman Palladius (1.9.3), the Goth Aligern and the Herul Sindal (2.9.12).

<sup>71</sup> Procopius' views on gender—particularly his attitudes towards Theodora, Antonina, Belisarius, and Justinian found in the *Secret History*—have received particular attention. Much of this work has been the by-product of the upsurge of research focusing on the role of women in the early Byzantine Empire. For example see, Judith Herrin, 'In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach', in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. by Averil Cameron and Amelie Kuhrt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), pp. 167–89; Pauline Allen, 'Contemporary Portrayals of the Byzantine Empress Theodora (A.D. 527–548)', in *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, ed. by Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), pp. 93–103; Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527–1204* (London: Routledge, 1999); Liz James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001); Leslie Brubaker, 'Sex, Lies, and Texusality: The Secret History of Prokopios and the Rhetoric of Gender in Sixth-Century Byzantium', in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. by Leslie Brubaker and Julia Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 83–101; and Harmut Ziche, 'Abusing Theodora: Sexual and Political Discourse in Procopius', *Βυζαντικά*, 30 (2012–13), pp. 311–22.

<sup>72</sup> For a thorough discussion of Procopian scholarship in the past twenty years see Geoffrey Greatrex, 'Recent work on Procopius and the Composition of *Wars* VIII', *BMGS*, 27 (2003), pp. 45–67; and 'Perceptions of Procopius in Recent Scholarship', *Histos*, 8 (2014), pp. 76–121, (*Addenda*) 121a–121e.

<sup>73</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 8.1.1.

<sup>74</sup> Procopius, *Buildings*, 1.1.16; and Procopius, *Secret History* 30.34, trans. by G.A. Williamson (London: Penguin Books, 1981)

<sup>75</sup> Averil Cameron stresses (*Procopius*, pp. 25, 60) that seeing the *Secret History* simply as an exaggerated satire does not give 'justice to its complexity and its earnestness, and should not be used to obscure the substantial portion of the work that is devoted to detailed political accusation', Geoffrey Greatrex goes further ('Procopius the Outsider', *BMGS*, 18 (1994), pp. 101–14), maintaining that the *Secret History* is not a separate genre from *Wars*, but was made up of material that Procopius hoped to insert into *Wars* if the emperor predeceased him. Opposing these views in a sharp revision, Henning Börm ('Procopius and his Predecessors, and the Genesis of the *Anecdota*', in Henning Börm ed., *Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015), pp. 305–45) submits that the hasty composition of the *Secret History* indicates that it was produced because Procopius feared a coup was inevitable, and he wanted to disassociate himself from Belisarius and Justinian's inner-circle. Therefore, the views portrayed in this work are merely an attempt by Procopius to ingratiate himself to the 'new' regime, and therefore not reflective of his 'true' views at all. I see the points of view expressed by Procopius in the *Secret History* as exaggerated, yet sincere, suggesting that it is representative of the historian's pessimistic mindset towards Justinian's floundering Gothic campaign around 550–552 when he probably composed the diatribe.

<sup>76</sup> Kaldellis, *Procopius*, p. 143.

<sup>77</sup> Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womenhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 11–3.

<sup>78</sup> For this probable audience see Treadgold, *Byzantine Historians*, p. 189; and Brian Croke, 'Uncovering Byzantium's Historiographical Audience', in *History as Literature in Byzantium*, ed. Ruth Macrides (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), p. 33

<sup>79</sup> Croke, 'Historiographical Audience', p. 33.

<sup>80</sup> Agathias, *Histories*, proem 18–22.

<sup>81</sup> Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.12, trans. by Michael Whitby, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, Translated Texts for Historians 33 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

<sup>82</sup> Most historians believe that Procopius was a lawyer. For example see Juan Signes Codoner, *Procopio de Casarea: Historia Secreta*, (Madrid: Gredos, 2000), pp. 11–12; and Geoffrey Greatrex, 'Lawyers and Historians in Late Antiquity, in *Law, Society and Authority in Late Antiquity*', ed. by Ralph Mathisen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 151. However, James Howard-Johnston has theorised that Procopius was an engineer/architect. See James Howard-Johnston, 'The Education and Expertise of Procopius', *Antiquite Tardive*, 8 (2000), pp. 19–30.

<sup>83</sup> For this probable date see Cameron, *Procopius*, p. 188. We know from *Wars* 2.22.9 that Procopius was living in Constantinople when the plague struck in the spring of 542. See *Wars* 8.21.10–11, where a Roman senator provided Procopius with the story of the prophecy concerning Narses.

<sup>84</sup> Procopius, *Secret History*, 2.33.2, 2.37.2, 4.29–30 (trans. by Williamson).

<sup>85</sup> Procopius, *Secret History*, 1.25–30 (trans. by Williamson).

<sup>86</sup> Procopius, *Secret History*, 2.33.3, 2.25–7, 3.31 (trans. by Williamson).

<sup>87</sup> Procopius, *Secret History*, 4.39–45. Cf. However, a more positive assessment (*Wars* 8.21.1–4) of Belisarius composed after Narses had defeated the Goths.

<sup>88</sup> Procopius, *Secret History*, 4.22–6, 5.32–3, trans. by H. B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 6 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935). I have used Dewing's translation of this passage and the next because it more accurately reflects the gendered vocabulary of the original Greek.

<sup>89</sup> Procopius, *Secret History*, 4.42, 5.1–8 (trans. by Dewing).

<sup>90</sup> Procopius, *Secret History*, 5.32, I have changed the translator Dewing's 'effeminate in his way of living' for γνάθους φύσων to 'effeminate nature'; *Wars* 4.22.2.

<sup>91</sup> See Martyn, 'Narses', p. 55, where Martyn attributes this omission to Procopius' sincere respect for Narses.

<sup>92</sup> See for example, John Malalas, *Chronicle*, 18.110 (484), 18.116. (486); and Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.24; and John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.1.39.

<sup>93</sup> Tougher, *Eunuch*, p. 121.

<sup>94</sup> See for example Gregory of Tours, *Histories*, 4.9; and Liber Pontificalis, *Vita Vigilius*, ch. 8, *Vita John*, ch. 2–3; and Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, 2.3, 2.5.

<sup>95</sup> Marius of Avenches, *Chronicle* s.a. 568, in *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader*, ed. and trans. by Alexander Callander Murray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 106.

<sup>96</sup> See for example, Isidore of Seville, *Chronicon*, 116; and Liber Pontificalis, *Vita John*, ch. 3–4; and Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, 2.5.

<sup>97</sup> Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*; and Colleen Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

