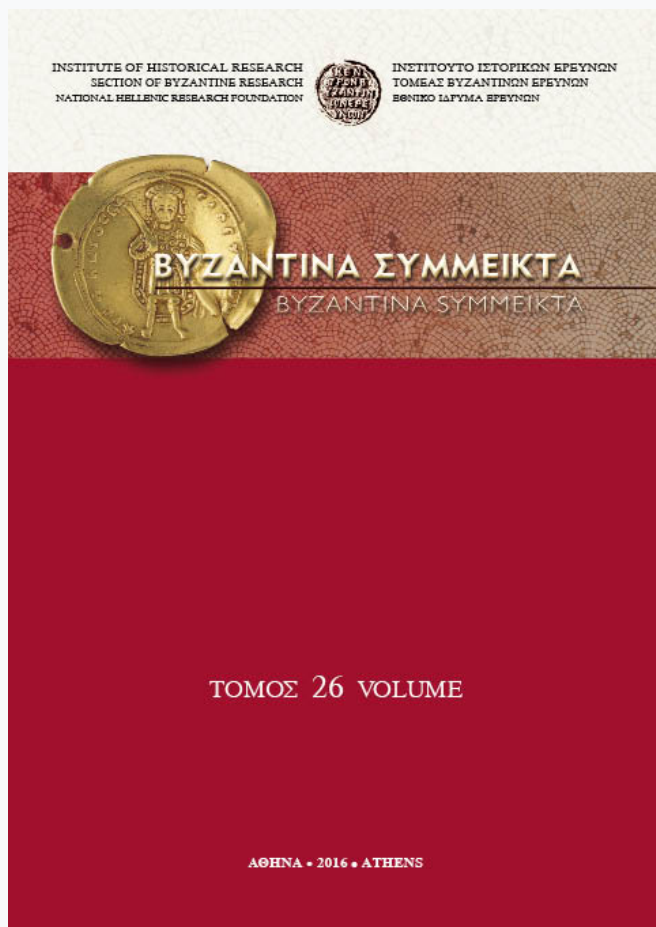


## Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 26, No 2 (2016)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 26



### The Soldier's Life: Early Byzantine Masculinity and the Manliness of War

Michael Edward STEWART

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.1182](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.1182)

Copyright © 2016, Michael Edward Stewart



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

#### To cite this article:

STEWART, M. E. (2016). The Soldier's Life: Early Byzantine Masculinity and the Manliness of War. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 26(2), 11–44. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.1182>

INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
SECTION OF BYZANTINE RESEARCH  
NATIONAL HELLENIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION



ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΤΟΜΕΑΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ



# BYZANTINA ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA

MICHAEL EDWARD STEWART

THE SOLDIER'S LIFE:  
EARLY BYZANTINE MASCULINITY  
AND THE MANLINESS OF WAR

ΑΘΗΝΑ • 2016 • ATHENS

MICHAEL EDWARD STEWART

THE SOLDIER'S LIFE: EARLY BYZANTINE MASCULINITY  
AND THE MANLINESS OF WAR

Οὐ γὰρ πρὸς ἀργύριον καὶ πλούτου  
ἐπίκτησιν οἱ εὐγενέστατοι Ῥωμαῖοι τὸ κατ'  
ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ ἠγωνίζοντο, ἀλλὰ δι' εὐκλειαν  
μόνην καὶ ἀνδρίας ἐπίδειξιν καὶ τῆς ἰδίας  
πατρίδος σωτηρίαν τε καὶ λαμπρότητα.

(Michael Attaleiates, *History*)<sup>1</sup>.

The ancient Romans admired the characteristics that they believed allowed them to establish hegemony over their rivals. It comes as little surprise then that the hyper-masculine qualities of the Roman soldier became the standard by which many Roman men measured their own worth. Indeed, like many cultures which rose to prominence primarily through military aggression, images of the soldier's life and the ideal man's life were often the same in Roman society. Perusing literary and visual sources from any period of Roman history draws attention to the importance of this connection to the idea of a common Roman military ethos through which all citizens could bask in their armies' glory<sup>2</sup>.

---

1. Greek text according to the edition of E. TSOLAKIS, *Michaelis Attaliatae Historia* [CFHB 50], Athens 2011, 169-170. Cf. *Miguel Atalicates: Historia*, ed. I. PEREZ MARTIN, Madrid 2002; trans. according to A. KALDELLIS - D. KRALLIS, *Michael Attaleiates The History* [Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, 16], Cambridge MA 2012, 401: *For the noble Romans of that time did not strive for money and the acquisition of wealth but simply for renown, the demonstration of their manliness, and their country's safety and splendour.*

2. I employ the terms "Eastern Roman Empire" and "Early Byzantine Empire"

This paper maintains that the majority of Romans in the Early Byzantine Empire echoed these sentiments. Christians and non-Christians admired the attributes that they believed distinguished the typical Roman soldier from his civilian and foreign counterparts - physical and spiritual strength, courage, prudence, discipline, self-mastery, unselfishness, and camaraderie (Plate 1). Relying upon this paradigm, the Late fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus contended that Roman pre-eminence had been achieved because its early citizens had avoided the “life of effeminacy” [*vita mollitia*]<sup>3</sup> brought on by wealth and the sedentary life and “fought in fierce wars” which allowed them to “overcome all obstacles by their manliness” [*virtute*]<sup>4</sup>.

Considering that few other cultures have ever sent such a large percentage of their citizens to war, this linking of Roman greatness with the special martial virtues of its men is not surprising<sup>5</sup>. Yet, the Christian Roman/ Byzantine state of the fifth and sixth centuries had developed into an entity

---

interchangeably to describe what the classicising historians and their contemporaries thought of still as simply the “Roman Empire”. At times, I use “Later Roman Empire” to describe events in the Western and Eastern halves of the Empire in the third, fourth, and the early part of the fifth century, before division created increasingly autonomous regimes. For discussions of the current debates surrounding the use of terms “Byzantium” and “Empire”, see A. CAMERON, *Byzantine Matters*, Princeton 2014, 26-45. A. KALDELLIS, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*, Cambridge MA 2015.

3. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 31.5.14: *verum mox post calamitosa dispendia res in integrum sunt restitutae hac gratia, quod nondum solutioris vitae mollitiae sobria vetustas infecta nec ambitiosis mensis nec flagitiosis quaestibus inhiabat, sed unanimanti ardore summi et infimi inter se congruentes ad speciosam pro re publica mortem tamquam ad portum aliquem tranquillum properabant et placidum* (my trans.); cf. ed. - trans. J. C. ROLFE, Loeb Classical Library [hereafter LCL] (3 vols.), Cambridge MA 1950-52, v. 3, 416-7. For the close association of *mollitia* with effeminacy see, C. WILLIAMS, *The Meanings of Softness: Some Remarks on the Semantics of mollitia*, *Eugesta* 3 (2013), 240-63.

4. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 14.6.10, ed. ROLFE, v. 1, 40-41: *ita magnitudo Romana porrigitur, non divitiis eluxisse sed per bella saevissima, nec opibus nec victu nec indumentorum vilitate gregariis militibus discrepantes opposita cuncta superasse virtute*. I have added a “their” and replaced the translator ROLFE’s “valour” for *virtute* with “manliness”.

5. On this connection as a common theme in Roman literature, see C. WILLIAMS, *Roman Homosexuality*, Oxford 2010, 135-37. For the large percentage of Roman citizens serving within the armies of the Republic and the Early Empire, see K. HOPKINS, *Conquerors and Slaves*, Cambridge 1978, 31-35.

far different to that of the Late Republican hero, Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus (235–183 BC), or the Principate of Augustus (ruled 27 BCE–14 CE). One area of change had been a notable decline in the participation in warfare by the Roman upper classes, as well as an increased reliance upon non-Roman soldiers within the ranks and in the highest echelons of military command<sup>6</sup>.

#### THE MANLINESS OF WAR

In the era of the Republic, the nobility had served as both political and military leaders (Plate 2). To be considered as “real” men, even the most affluent members of Roman society had needed to prove their virility on the battlefield. Provincial governors until the third century CE were typically men from the aristocracy who functioned as both civilian administrators and garrison commanders<sup>7</sup>. It is no coincidence then that in this era a Roman man’s identity remained tightly entwined with the notion that precarious manhood was best demonstrated and won on the battlefield. As one recent study on Roman masculinity avers, serving the state as a soldier “was the only way many Roman males could lay claim to being a man”<sup>8</sup>. According to one ancient Roman historian, this egalitarian martial ethic represented the determining factor in their defeat of rivals more dependent on mercenaries such as the Carthaginians<sup>9</sup>. In many ancient sources, the lives of warrior-

---

6. For the role of non-Roman as both soldiers and officers in the Later Roman army: P. SOUTHERN – K. R. DIXON, *The Late Roman Army*, New Haven 1996, 48-50, 67-73. J. H. W. G. LIEBESCHUETZ, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom*, Oxford 1990, 20-21. We do find, however, in the sixth-century Eastern Roman army a shift back to a force made up of predominantly citizen soldiers. For this development, see A. H. M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, (3 vols.), Oxford 1964, 670. J. TEALE, *The Barbarians in Justinian’s Armies*, *Speculum* 40 (1965), 294-322.

7. W. GOFFART, *Barbarian Tides: the Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire*, Philadelphia 2006, 190.

8. M. McDONNELL, *Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic*, Oxford 2006, 10-11.

9. Αἴτιον δὲ τούτων ἐστὶν ὅτι ξενικαῖς καὶ μισθοφόροις χρώνται δυνάμεισι, Ῥωμαῖοι δ’ ἐγχωρίοις καὶ πολιτικαῖς: Polybius, *Histories* 6.52, ed.-trans. W. R. PATON, LCL (6 vols.), Cambridge MA 1923, v. 3, 386.

aristocrats like Scipio stood as testaments to righteous and manly Roman behaviour at its apex<sup>10</sup>. This association of its elites' manliness with the establishment and maintenance of Rome's imperium helps us to appreciate why Roman intellectuals, like the Stoic Seneca (ca. 4 BCE–65 CE), argued that there was no virtue or manliness if an enemy were lacking<sup>11</sup>.

By the second and the third centuries, however, Roman men's military roles were being redefined. What scholars call the crisis of the third century played a part in this transformation. The twofold threats of external invasions and crippling civil wars ignited by rival claimants to the purple, challenged the Empire's military capabilities and created the necessity for reform<sup>12</sup>. Establishing control over the frequently rebellious Roman forces represented a key step in quashing this chaos. Those in power entrusted the states' defence to a professional army of mixed descent that fought its battles mostly on the Empire's outer fringes<sup>13</sup>. The imperial authorities also sought to curtail the threat presented by mutinous regional military commanders. The Emperor Diocletian (ruled 284-305), carved the provinces into smaller more manageable administrative units and increased the number of imperial leaders, first to two then to four. In a further effort to curb the threat of usurpation and create a more effective fighting force, the "senatorial amateurs", who had often used their military commissions merely as an obligatory step in their political careers, were no longer required to fulfil

---

10. See, e.g. Polybius, *Histories* 31.25, Cicero, *De officiis* 3.1.4, trans. W. MILLER, LCL, Cambridge MA, 1913-39. For Scipio as a prime example of aristocratic excellence and martial manliness, see A. M. ECKSTEIN, *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius*, Berkeley 1995, 28-30, 79-82.

11. Seneca, *De providentia* 2.4, 2.7, 4.16, trans. J. W. BASORE, LCL, (3 vols.), Cambridge MA, 1928-35.

12. For the combined military threat presented in the third century by a resurgent Persia in the East and the multiplicity of ethnic groupings along the Rhine and the Danube, see S. WILLIAMS, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, London 1997, 25-35.

13. A full discussion of this process is found in H. DEJVER, Les milices équestres et la hiérarchie militaire, in: *La hiérarchie (Rangordnung) de l'armée romaine sous le haut-empire*, ed. Y. LE BOHEC, Paris 1995, 175-91; P. EICH, Militarierungs- und Demilitarisierungstendenzen im dritten Jahrhundert n. Chr., in: *The Impact of the Roman Army, (200 B.C.-A.D. 476); Economic, Social, Political, Religious and Cultural Aspects*, ed. L. DE BLOIS – E. LO CASICCO, Leiden 2007, 511-515.

their military duties<sup>14</sup>. Sometime during Diocletian's reign, serving in the army became hereditary, and the sons of soldiers and veterans were obligated to follow their fathers' example<sup>15</sup>. Though not strictly enforced, a law from 364 forbade all Roman civilians the use of weapons<sup>16</sup>.

#### ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS TO MANLINESS

Even though men from the upper classes continued to serve as officers and provide a vital reserve of civil and military leadership upon whom the government could call in time of crisis, many wealthy aristocrats chose instead to pursue comfortable lives in one of the Empire's major cities or on their provincial estates<sup>17</sup>. In the fourth century, "elite" citizens' roles in the military decreased even further, and to meet its recruitment needs the army, at times, depended on the enrolment of foreign troops<sup>18</sup>.

It is important to point out, however, that non-Roman mercenaries had long played an important role in the Roman armies<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, as several recent studies on the Late Roman army have warned, we should not take the concepts of the "demilitarisation" of the Roman citizenry or the "barbarisation" of the Late Roman army too far. While it is notoriously difficult to determine with any certainty either the size of the Late Roman/Early Byzantine army or the percentage of Romans serving compared to non-Romans –particularly within the non-officer corps– the foreign

---

14. S. WILLIAMS – G. FRIEL, *Theodosius: The Empire at Bay*, New Haven 1994, 81, 100.

15. SOUTHERN - DIXON, *Late Roman Army*, 67.

16. *Codex Theodosianus* 15.15, eds. T. MOMMSEN – P. MEYER, Berlin 1905: *Quod armorum usus interdictus est*.

17. WILLIAMS - FRIEL, *Empire at Bay*, 25.

18. LIEBESCHUETZ, *Barbarians and Bishops*, 7, 248. For the difficulty of determining whether these "barbarian" soldiers had been granted Roman citizenship, see R. MATHISEN, *Peregrini, Barbari, and Cives Romani: Concepts of Citizenship and the Legal Identity of Barbarians in the Later Roman Empire*, *The American Historical Review* 111 (2006), 1011-40.

19. A thorough description of the recruitment of both Roman and non-Roman soldiers in the Late Roman army from the fourth to the sixth centuries is found in SOUTHERN – DIXON, *Late Roman Army*, 67-75. Some of these conventional views on recruitment have been recently challenged. See, e.g. M. WHITBY, *Emperors and Armies*, in: *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, eds. S. SWAIN - M. EDWARDS, Oxford 2004, 166-73; A. D. LEE, *War in Late Antiquity. A Social History*, Oxford 2007, 79-85.

component was never as high as some historians suggest. The majority of soldiers throughout the Byzantine period were “Roman”<sup>20</sup>.

Estimates vary on the Late Roman and Early Byzantine armies’ exact numbers. Recent suggestions for approximately 500,000 as the total for the combined forces of the fourth-century army and 300,000 for the sixth-century Byzantine forces—including frontier troops, fleet, and the field army—seem reasonable<sup>21</sup>. Whatever the exact tallies, we are dealing with a significant number of eligible Romans serving in the military. The non-Roman element in the Eastern Roman army in positions of command held steady at less than a third during the fourth and the fifth centuries. After the fifth century, the foreign component of the Byzantine army declined to perhaps a fifth of the overall total<sup>22</sup>. This shift was due to a combination of legislative efforts to monitor recruitment<sup>23</sup> and financial reforms undertaken during the reign of Anastasius I, which made military service much more attractive. Indeed, conscription which had been prevalent in the fourth century, by the close of the fifth century had been abandoned<sup>24</sup>.

The older assumption that military service had become progressively more unpopular amongst fourth-century Roman men from all classes has also been recently challenged<sup>25</sup>. Revisionist interpretations propose that desertion by Roman soldiers in the fourth and fifth centuries was no greater than that of earlier periods<sup>26</sup>.

---

20. Good introductions to the complex debates currently raging in the field of Late Roman and Byzantine identity are found in A. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium: the Transformation of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, Cambridge 2007. J. ARNOLD, Theoderic’s Invincible Mustache, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 6 (2013), 152-83. R. MATHISEN, *Natio, Gens, Provincialis, and Civis: Geographical Terminology and Personal Identity in Late Antiquity*, in: *Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity*, eds. G. GREATREX - J. ELTON, Burlington VT 2015, 277-288.

21. WHITBY, *Emperors and Armies*, 167. W. TREADGOLD, *Byzantium and Its Army*, Stanford 1995, 43-86. J. HALDON, *Warfare, Society and State in the Byzantine World, 565-1204*, London 1999, 99-101; LEE, *War in Late Antiquity*, 78-79.

22. LEE, *War in Late Antiquity*, 84-5.

23. *CJ*, 12.35.17, ed. P. KRÜEGER, in: *CIC*, v. 2, Berlin 1929, 470-471.

24. TREADGOLD, *Byzantium*, 14-15.

25. For the “problem” of desertion in the Late Roman army, see R. MACMULLEN, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome*, New Haven 1988, 52-55.

26. See, e.g. WILLIAMS - FRIEL, *Empire at Bay*, 211. LEE, *War in Late Antiquity*, 82-83.



Moreover, the reigning Early Byzantine emperor's relatives frequently served as high-ranking military commanders. These positions were not always just symbolic. For instance, the future Emperor Basiliscus (ruled 475/6), the Empress Aelia Verina's brother, led the failed campaign against the Vandals in 468. Three of the Emperor Anastasius I's (ruled 491-518) nephews—Hypatius, Pompey, and Probus—held important military commands during the first quarter of the sixth century. One need not be a member of the imperial family to strive for a career in the military. We find, in fact, a growing number of men from elite Eastern Roman families serving in the armed forces<sup>27</sup>. These men could not always count on their pedigree to land top commands. Even imperial family members were expected to serve and succeed as junior officers before taking on the highest ranks in the military<sup>28</sup>. This militarization of Byzantium's ruling elites only accelerated in the latter half of the sixth century<sup>29</sup>.

Of course, some of these military roles sought out by the Eastern Roman elites were largely ceremonial. For a price, the sons of the Eastern Roman upper crust could obtain a place in the palace guard, the *Scholae*. The *Scholae*, formed originally by Constantine I (ruled 306-337) as an elite cavalry unit, by the reign of Justinian (ruled 527-565) had largely taken on a ritualistic function<sup>30</sup>. Yet, I would argue, that the need for these leading families to have their sons to take on these symbolic military roles points to the allure of the values found in the soldier's life.

For its heavy fighting, the Early Byzantine armies relied heavily on conscripts from the traditional recruiting grounds found in the Eastern

---

27. C. WHATLEY, Militarization, or the Rise of a Distinct Military Culture? The East Roman Elite in the 6th Century AD, in: S. O'BRIAN - D. BOATRIGHT (eds.), *Warfare and Society in the Ancient Mediterranean: Papers arising from a colloquium held at the University of Liverpool, 13th June 2008*, Oxford 2013, 49-57.

28. D. A. PARNELL, The Origins of Justinian's Generals, *Journal of Medieval Military History* 10 (2012), 6. WHATLEY, Militarization, 53-54.

29. For the increasing influence of military elites in the reign of Maurice, see S. BARNISH - D. LEE - M. WHITBY, Government and Administration, in: *Cambridge Ancient History*, eds. A. CAMERON - B. W. PERKINS - M. WHITBY, Cambridge 2007, 164-206.

30. R. I. FRANCO, *Scholae Palatinae: The Palace Guards of the Later Roman Empire*, *Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome* 23 (1969), 201-219.

Empire's rural and upland areas<sup>31</sup>. Military service continued to offer citizens from more humble backgrounds an attractive career opportunity<sup>32</sup>. Many of the Empire's best generals had risen through the ranks. By the 430s, Roman generals had become fully integrated into Roman society in both halves of the Empire<sup>33</sup>. Threats from these charismatic military men draped in manly martial virtues represented one of the greatest threats to any reigning fifth-century emperors' autonomy<sup>34</sup>. Indeed, the intrigues of high-ranking generals like Bonifatius, Aëtius, and Ricimer in the West, and Aspar and the two Theoderics in the East, dominated secular accounts of fifth-century politics<sup>35</sup>.

To be sure, some urbanised elites perceived these citizen soldiers to be little better than barbarians and saw them as potential threats to the "civilised" parts of the Empire. Late Roman writers frequently criticised Roman soldiers for their troublesome behaviour, particularly when the military interacted with Roman civilians<sup>36</sup>. One fourth-century critic of the senatorial elites even tells us that some members of the nobility had rejected military service: *Militiae labor a nobilissimo quoque pro sordido et inliberali reiciebatur*<sup>37</sup>. Most military scholars agree, however, that this reluctance to

---

31. WHITBY, *Emperors and Armies*, 166.

32. LEE, *War in Late Antiquity*, 82.

33. B. CROKE, *Dynasty and Ethnicity: Emperor Leo and the Eclipse of Aspar*, *Chiron* 35 (2005), 153.

34. Fifth-century generals like Stilicho, Aëtius, Ricimer, and Aspar appear to have been content to rule behind the scenes, though Stilicho, Aëtius, and Aspar seemed to have hopes for their sons to rule eventually. Some of the possible reasons for this reluctance to take on the purple is discussed in M. E. STEWART, *The First Byzantine Emperor? Leo I, Aspar and Challenges of Power and Romanitas in Fifth-century Byzantium*, *Porphyra* 22 (2014), 4-17.

35. J. M. O'FLYNN, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire*, Edmonton 1983. M. McEVROY, *Child Empire Rule in the Late Roman West, AD 367-455*, Oxford 2013. J. W. P. WIJNENDAELE, *The Last of the Romans: Bonifatius - Warlord and Comes Africae*, London 2014.

36. H. ELTON, *Off the Battlefield: The Civilian's View of Late Roman Soldiers*, *Expedition* 10 (1997), 42-50. As Elton points out (50), ancient writers tended to complain about a minority of soldiers' poor behaviour, rather than point out the majority of military men "who did their jobs". For the extent of interaction between civilians and Roman soldiers during Late Antiquity, as well as a full discussion of the violence Roman soldiers inflicted on Roman civilians, see LEE, *War in Late Antiquity*, esp. 163-175.

37. Claudius Mamertinus, *Gratiarum actio suo Juliano imperatori* 20.1, ed. R. A. B.

serve had more to do with practical reasons, such as a dislike of distant postings, dissatisfaction with the Late Roman government and reluctance on the part of landowners to give up tenants, than with “an extreme loathing or fear of military service on the part of the Roman citizenry”<sup>38</sup>.

It is also true that from the reign of Arcadius (ruled 395-408) emperors had ceased to lead the army into battle personally. In the words of Walter Kaegi, “Some had made a gesture of departing to campaign, but they had not really led the armies in the field”<sup>39</sup>. Nevertheless, emperors without military backgrounds represented the exception not the rule throughout the Early Byzantine period. In the East, Marcian (ruled 450-457), Leo I (ruled 457-474), Zeno (ruled 474-5, 476-91), Basiliscus, Justin I (ruled 518-27), Tiberius II (ruled 574-82), Maurice (ruled 582-602), and Phocas (ruled 602-10) had all begun their careers as soldiers. The famous non-campaigning Justinian I had also begun his career as a soldier. He served as an elite member of the palace guards (*κωνδιδάτοι*) under Emperor Anastasios I (ruled 491-518), and commanded imperial troops in Constantinople (*magister militum praesentalis*) during Justin I's reign<sup>40</sup>.

One may attribute a tendency to avoid combat to a number of interrelated factors, including these emperors' age when they attained the purple, internal politics, and the stark lessons learned in the wake of the deaths of the fourth-century emperors Julian and Valens in battle<sup>41</sup>. So too could a non-campaigning emperor blame any military defeats on his generals, whilst basking in the glory of any of their victories, no matter how

---

MYNORS, *XII Panegyrici Latini*, Oxford 1964, 135. Cf. ed. D. LASSANDRO, Turin 1992; trans. S. LIEU, in: *The Emperor Julian: Panegyric and Polemic*, Liverpool, 1986, 29: *a squalid occupation unfitting for a free man*.

38. SOUTHERN – DIXON, *Late Roman Army*, 68. Cf. JONES, *Later Roman Empire*, 1062. Contra M. KUEFLER, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian ideology in Late Antiquity*, Chicago 2001, 40.

39. W. KAEGI, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge 2003, 68-69. In 611, the emperor Heraclius (ruled 610-42) broke with this precedent by leading the military campaign against the Persians.

40. *Εὐρεθεὶς δὲ ὁ εὐσεβέστατος δεσπότης Ἰουστινιανός, τηλικαῦτα κωνδιδάτος ὄν...* *De ceremoniis* I, 93 (CSHB, Bonn 1829), 248. Cf. *Constantine Porphyrogenetos, On Ceremonies*, 1.93, trans. A. MOFFATT – M. TALL [ByzAustr. 18], Canberra 2012, 428.

41. LEE, *War in Late Antiquity*, 35.

small<sup>42</sup>. For the reasons given above, we should not see the trend of emperors avoiding combat during their reign as evidence of a larger imperial and/or societal rejection of the traditional reverence for the emperor as an ideal military man.

A number of men from the Late Roman upper classes undoubtedly cultivated a more genteel lifestyle than their war-like ancestors from the Republic did. With the Empire's defence firmly in the hands of a mostly effective regular army, the men of the fourth and fifth-century landowning classes often appeared, in the words of A. H. M. Jones, "blissfully unaware of the dangers that threatened the Empire"<sup>43</sup>. Some gender scholars submit that development like these helped to transform the notion that Roman men, regardless of social status, needed to prove their heroic qualities by serving as idealised warrior-elites<sup>44</sup>.

From at least the first century CE, public displays of martial courage as a primary means of attaining a masculine identity had been complimented by alternative strategies of manliness based on non-martial pursuits. During the Principate's early years, Stoic and Christian intellectuals had popularised codes of masculinity centred on self-control and a mastery over one's passions such as anger and lust<sup>45</sup>. To be seen as a "true" man, one did not necessarily need to prove his courage and manliness in times of war, but could earn a masculine identity through private and public displays of self-control, endurance, and courage by fighting internalised "battles" with his body and emotions<sup>46</sup>. As Catherine Edwards explains, "The Stoic wise man turned his body into a battlefield on which he might show his *virtus*, prove himself a *vir fortis*"<sup>47</sup>.

---

42. H. BÖRM, *Prokop und die Perser. Untersuchungen zu den römisch-sasanidischen Kontakten in der ausgehenden Spätantike*, Stuttgart 2007, 95.

43. JONES, *Later Roman Empire*, 1062.

44. JONES, *Later Roman Empire*, 550-51.

45. For the similarities and subtle, yet important differences, between Stoic and Christian ideals of renunciation and self-control, see P. BROWN, *The Body and Society: Men Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York 1988, esp. 30-31, 178-80.

46. C. CONWAY, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, Oxford 2008, 24-31.

47. C. EDWARDS, The Suffering Body: Philosophy and Pain in Seneca's Letters, in: *Constructions of the Classical Body*, ed. J. PORTER, Ann Arbor 1999, 262.

Moreover, as the influential works of Maud Gleason have claimed, “the immense security of *pax romana*” had allowed many educated elites from the privileged classes the time to undertake more “civilised” modes of male self-fashioning based upon the rhetorical skills that they utilised in the political and legal rivalries that filled their days. Public speaking and face-to-face verbal confrontations with political rivals provided an alternative means for privileged Roman men to flaunt their verbal dexterity, as well as their manliness<sup>48</sup>. As Gleason puts it, “Rhetoric was callisthenics of manhood”. Amidst these often-tense verbal confrontations, a man would be constantly judged not just by his “mastery of words”, but also on his ability to use the correct manly voice, contain his emotions, and thus maintain the proper facial expressions and gestures. She continues by suggesting that from the second to the fifth century, “displays of *paideia* in public served to distinguish authentic members of the elite from other members of society, the gap between the educated and the uneducated came to be seen as no way arbitrary but the result of a nearly biological superiority”<sup>49</sup>. Somewhat more controversial is her proposal that the Roman elites had rejected athletics and warfare as an essential aspect of hegemonic masculine ideology:

“Perhaps physical strength once had been the definitive criterion of masculine excellence on the semi-legendary playing fields of Ilion and Latium, but by Hellenistic and Roman times the sedentary elite of the ancient city had turned away from warfare and gymnastics as definitive agnostic activities, firmly redrawing the defining lines of competitive space so as to exclude those without wealth, education, or leisure”<sup>50</sup>.

Social historians have argued that developments like these “could not help but have serious consequences for men’s identity”<sup>51</sup>. Yet, as even one

---

48. M. GLEASON, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, Princeton 1995. For advocates of GLEASON’S thesis: C. BARTON, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster*, Princeton 1993. V. BURRUS, *Begotten Not Made: Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity*, Stanford 2000. J. CONNOLLY, Like the Labors of Heracles: *Andreia* and *Paideia* in Greek Culture under Rome, in: *Andreia: Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity*, eds. R. ROSEN – I. SLUITER, Boston 2003.

49. GLEASON, *Making Men*, 22-3.

50. GLEASON, *Making Men*, 17.

51. KUEFLER, *Manly Eunuch*, 39. Cf. GLEASON, *Making Men*, 14. BURRUS, *Begotten Not Made*, 19-22, 180. MCDONNELL, *Roman Manliness*, 384-89.

advocate of Gleason's thesis acknowledges, this restyling of masculine self-fashioning, and seeming rejection of martial virtues as a key aspect of Roman manliness, "may be less an indication of the luxury of the secure than an instance of making a virtue out of necessity"<sup>52</sup>. The remainder of this paper examines some of these shifts and reflects on how they influenced the customary Roman belief in the integral relationship between physical prowess in battle and standards of manliness. Arguing against the standard view in gender studies, however, I will show that despite these shifts, many Roman writers in the Early Byzantine period continued to associate notions of heroic manliness with the traditional ideals of manly virtue found in both visual and textual representations of the soldier's life.

#### THE EMPEROR AS AN EXEMPLAR OF MARTIAL MANLINESS

The idea of the emperor as the embodiment of Roman martial prowess and idealised manliness in the Later Empire was ubiquitous<sup>53</sup>. The relationship between masculinity, military virtues, and the emperors' divine right to rule were never far beneath the surface of this imagery (e.g. plate 1, 3, 4, 6)<sup>54</sup>. By concentrating notions of heroic masculinity into the figure of the emperor, imperial ideology fashioned a portrait of the ideal emperor as a model of "true" manliness for all aspiring men to emulate<sup>55</sup>. This paradigm reflected the increasing domination of state ideology by the imperial family and its direct supporters, and it helps to highlight the Later Roman emperors' growing autocratic power. Though far from a move towards the "Oriental despotism" argued for in the older historiographical tradition, the reigns of Diocletian and his successors witnessed the growth of a more elaborate court ceremonial, along with an increased promotion of the emperor in literary and visual portrayals as an authority reliant predominantly upon divine assistance (at first that of pagan divinities, and then the Christian

---

52. BURRUS, *Begotten Not Made*, 21.

53. For the use of this iconography as an essential component of imperial propaganda in the Later Empire, M. McKORMICK, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, Cambridge 1986, esp. chaps 1-3.

54. KUEFLER, *Manly Eunuch*, 26.

55. CONWAY, *Behold the Man*, 39.

God) for his clout (plates 1 & 3)<sup>56</sup>.

The lives of the emperors serve as the focal point in many of the written sources that have come down to us from the Later Empire. A wide range of literary genres, including history, poetry, panegyric, biography, invective, and satire, employed the lives of past and present emperors as didactic tools for their audiences<sup>57</sup>. “Good” emperors, such as Trajan (ruled 97-117) and Marcus Aurelius (ruled 161-180), served as prime examples of virtue and masculinity, while “bad” emperors like Nero (ruled 54-68) and Domitian (81-96), illustrated the Greco-Roman belief in the connection between vice and unmanliness<sup>58</sup>. We find in the texts at our disposal that the deeply rooted Hellenic virtues of courage in battle, justice in politics and calm majesty in the face of defeat helped to define notions of ideal rulership<sup>59</sup>. For our Eastern authors, these qualities remained closely aligned to the four cardinal virtues: *φρόνησις* (prudence), *δικαιοσύνη* (justice), *σωφροσύνη* (temperance), and *ἀνδρεία* (manliness or courage), that served as vital components of the principle term for “goodness” and ideal manly behaviour in ancient Greek, *ἀρετή*<sup>60</sup>. Emulating concepts found in Plato’s descriptions of the ideal philosopher-king, a model Late Roman emperor needed to be both a *φιλόλογος* (lover of reason) and a *φιλοπόλεμος* (lover of war)<sup>61</sup>.

---

56. A thorough examination of the increased authority wielded by emperors in the fourth and fifth centuries Empire may be found in S. MACCORMACK, *The World of the Panegyrists*, in: *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 1981, 187-218.

57. On the role of these literary genres in the Later Empire, see T. HÄGG – P. ROUSSEAU (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 2000.

58. CONWAY, *Behold the Man*, 24.

59. A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the end of Antiquity*, Philadelphia 2004, 221.

60. See, e.g. Menander, *Second Treatise* 373, eds. - trans. D. RUSSELL - N. WILSON, Oxford 1981: *ἀρεταὶ δὲ τέσσαρες εἰσιν, ἀνδρεία, δικαιοσύνη, σωφροσύνη, φρόνησις*. For the adoption of this Hellenic model into Roman intellectual culture, see MCDONNELL, *Roman Manliness*, 149. Cf. Cicero, *De officiis* 1.5.15, who translated these four principle virtues into Latin as, *temperantia, prudentia, iustitia, and fortitudo*. Late Antique examples for the continuity of this concept include: Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 22.4, and Ambrose, *De officiis* 1.24.115, ed.- trans. I. J. DAVIDSON, Oxford 2001.

61. For these two traits as essential qualities for a model Late Roman emperor to display, see Themistius, *Or.* 4.54a, ed. G. DOWNEY, *Themistii Orationes*, v. 1, Leipzig 1965, 77; cf. *Politics, Philosophy and Empire in the Fourth Century: Select Orations of Themistius*, eds. -

Efficiently integrating these expected political and military virtues allowed the emperor to become an exemplar of not only ideal rulership, but also of supreme manly conduct<sup>62</sup>.

The flowery prose of the panegyrists publicised the “excellence” of their targeted emperor by relating to their audience the leader’s adherence to these dual themes. As one Late Roman writer tells us, panegyrists sought to mould an image of the reigning emperor in a similar way to the artist who sculpted a beautiful statue<sup>63</sup>. Just as in sculpture, in this medium image was everything. Since panegyrists sought to craft an idealised image of the reigning emperor, concrete facts seldom got in the way. Like the variety of solid materials available to the sculpture, a long list of established virtues acted as the moral substance out of which an author moulded his portrait<sup>64</sup>. “Courage”, in many of these representations, made up one of the foremost characteristics for an emperor to display, and according to one prominent fourth-century practitioner, the one virtue that served as a true “*mark of royalty*”<sup>65</sup>. As an imperial virtue in the fourth and early fifth centuries, this “courage” (in Latin expressed as *fortitudo* or *virtus*, and in Greek usually as ἀνδρεία) usually refers to behaviour in battle<sup>66</sup>. Courage in war differed from the “courage of spirit” (*animi fortitudo*) displayed by Hellenic philosophers or the “soldiers of Christ” (*militia Christi*) who were being popularised by the Christian and non-Christian intellectuals of the age<sup>67</sup>.

---

trans. P. HEATHER – D. MONCUR [Liverpool University Press - Translated Texts for Historians], Liverpool 2001. On Plato’s depiction in the *Republic* of the idealised philosopher-king: Plato, *Republic* 521d, 525b, 543a, ed. S. R. SILLINGS, *Respublica*, Oxford 2003. For the influence of the *Republic* on Late Roman and Early Byzantine intellectuals, see KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 106-17.

62. On the Roman emperors as the personification of Roman manliness, see D. MONTSERRAT, Reading Gender in the Roman World, in: *Experiencing Rome: Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman World*, ed. J. HUSKINSON, London 2000, 153-182. KUEFLER, *Manly Eunuch*, 26-29. CONWAY, *Behold the Man*, 45-47.

63. Synesius, *de Regno* 14, ed. N. TERZAGHI, *Synesii Cyrenensis Opuscula*, Rome 1944, 5-62.

64. C. NORENA, The Ethics of Autocracy in the Roman World, in: *A Companion to Greek and Roman Thought*, ed. R. K. BALOT, Oxford 2008, 273.

65. Themistius, Or. 1.5c (ed. DOWNEY). See too, Ambrose *De officiis* 1.33.175, where he concluded that “courage [*fortitudo*] belongs on a higher scale than the other virtues”.

66. NORENA, Ethics of Autocracy, 275.

67. Like the Stoics, many Christian theologians placed spiritual courage on a higher



This promotion of physical courage typified the conventional view that an emperor's bravery was less metaphorical, and therefore needed to be applied in wartime to prove his ability to perform his primary role as the Roman realm's protector.

A fourth-century panegyric composed by an anonymous author in praise of the Emperor Constantine I provide us with vivid examples of this view. In a speech, from 310, the author compliments Constantine for taking on the rigors of the soldier's life:

*Fortuna posuisset, crescere militando uoluisti et adeundis belli periculis ac manu cum hostibus etiam singulari certamine conserenda notioem te gentibus reddidisti, cum non posses esse nobilior* <sup>68</sup>.

*Pulchrum enim, di boni, et caeleste miraculum imperator adulescens, (the author continued) in quo illa quae iam summa est fortitudo adhuc tamen crescit, in quo hic fulgor oculorum, haec ueneranda pariter et grata maiestas praestringit simul et inuitat adspectus* <sup>69</sup>.

Granted, the author purposefully created an idealised description of Constantine. However, it demonstrates nicely how standards of model leadership and manliness in the Later Empire remained closely bound to conventional notions of martial prowess and a continued adulation of the soldier's life.

We find further examples of these militaristic themes in the imperial biographies that thrived in this period. Several of these ancient studies,

---

plane than physical bravery. Christian intellectuals such as Ambrose in *De officiis* 1.27.129, however, found it important to point out in their writings the value of the physical courage (*fortitudo*) that led "people to protect the country in time of war."

68. *Panegyric of Constantine* 6, 3.3, ed. R. A. B. MYNORS [as in n. 37], 188. Cf. eds.-trans. C. E. V. NIXON – B. S. RODGERS, in: *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*, Berkeley 1994, 222: *Fortune has placed you above all checks to the acquisition of glory, you wished to advance by serving as a soldier, and by confronting the dangers of war and by engaging the enemy even in single combat you have made yourself more notable among the nations, since you cannot become more noble.*

69. ed. MYNORS, 198. Cf. eds.-trans. NIXON – RODGERS, *Panegyric of Constantine* 6, 17.1-2, p. 243: *For it is a wonderful thing, beneficent gods, a heavenly miracle, to have as Emperor a youth whose courage, which is even now very great, nonetheless is still increasing, and whose eyes flash and whose awe-inspiring yet agreeable majesty dazzles us at the same time as it invites our gaze.*

which one modern critic has labelled “*μυθιστορία*” have come down to us<sup>70</sup>. Though of minimal historical worth, these imperial portraits provide us with essential insight into the types of behaviours that their authors considered worthy of praise or condemnation. In works such as 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), and the *Liber de caesaribus* written by the Roman aristocrat Sextus Aurelius Victor (ca. 320-ca. 390), the supreme virtues of particular rulers could be contrasted to the supreme vice of others<sup>71</sup>. Similar to the depictions of celebrities found in modern gossip magazines, these commentaries on the emperors remained less concerned with providing accurate accounts of these men’s lives than with looking back on these rulers, and by way of an array of titillating anecdotes “making moral judgments on them”<sup>72</sup>.

Military virtues in these sources too represented a prerequisite for any “righteous” manly emperor to demonstrate, whilst their authors perceived a disinclination to fight as a typical trait of “bad” and unmanly rulers<sup>73</sup>. Praise of one’s military prowess did not necessarily need to correspond to actual deeds on the battlefield. The *Historia Augusta*, for instance, described the mediocre Emperor Claudius II’s (ruled 268-270) rather tepid military record as comparable to the triumphant Roman generals of the past, lauding the emperor for displaying “the valour” [*virtus*] of Trajan, the “righteousness” [*pietas*] of Antoninus, the “self-restraint” [*moderatio*] of Augustus<sup>74</sup>.

Imperial iconography duplicated such themes. The diptych in plate 4 depicts the Emperor Honorius (ruled 393-423) as an ideal Roman military leader and man. Decked out in ornate armour and holding a labarum in his right hand, which proclaims, “In the name of Christ, may you always

---

70. R. SYME, The Composition of the *Historia Augusta*: Recent Theories, *JRS* 62 (1972), 123.

71. For the debate surrounding the date of the publication of the *Historia Augusta*, see A. CAMERON, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, Oxford 2011, 743-82.

72. KUEFLER, *Manly Eunuch*, 27.

73. KUEFLER, *Manly Eunuch*, 26-29.

74. *Historia Augusta, Claudius II*, 2.3, ed.- trans. D. MAGIE, LCL (3 vols.), Cambridge MA 1921-32, v. 3, 155.

be victorious” (*IN NOMINE XRI VINCAS SEMPER*), the young leader appears as a model Christian emperor living the *vita militaris*<sup>75</sup>. Yet, despite the visual representations of military valour found in the example above, Honorius famously never fought in battle, and his forces faced frequent setbacks at the hands of both external and internal enemies.

Although more constrained by the tenets of their genre to provide their readers with accurate accounts of both men’s characters and events, the more sophisticated histories of this era tended as well to concentrate on the deeds and the emperors’ moral fibre<sup>76</sup>. The classicising historians assumed that “great” men made history, and that a leader’s manly or unmanly conduct often determined the Empire’s well-being<sup>77</sup>. It is therefore not surprising to find that these writers, who focused on great wars and the personalities of a few major characters as the primary shapers of events, paid so much attention to the emperor’s moral and martial qualities in their accounts. A passage from Eunapius’ history provides us with evidence of this tendency in the Later Empire: *καὶ συμφανές γε ἅπασι κατέστη ὡς ἡ*

75. For the melding of Christian and classical “triumphal” elements in Late Roman imperial imagery, see J. ELSNER, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, Oxford 1998, 84-87. J. D. ALCHERMES, Art and Architecture in the Age of Justinian, in: *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M. MAAS, Cambridge 2005, 343-45.

76. Agathias, *Histories*, preface, 1-18, ed. R. KEYDELL, *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum libri Quinque* [CFHB 2], Berlin 1967. (Cf. trans. J. D. FREND [CFHB 2A], New York 1973).

*Καλὸν μὲν τι χρῆμα καὶ εὐδαιμον νῖκαι πολέμων καὶ τρόπαια πόλεων τε ἀνοικισμοὶ καὶ ἀγλαΐσματα καὶ ἅπαντα ὅποσα μεγάλα τε καὶ ἀξιάγαστα ἔργα. ταῦτα δὲ καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα δόξαν μὲν τινα καὶ ἡδονὴν τοῖς κτησαμένοις ἐπάγει, ἀποβιοῦσι δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐκείσοι οἰχομένοις οὐτὶ μάλα ἐθέλουσιν ἔπεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ λήθη παρεμπεσοῦσα ἐπικαλύπτει καὶ παρατρέπει τὰς ἀληθεῖς τῶν πράξεων ἀποβάσεις ἤδη δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐπισταμένων ἀποβιούντων οἴχεται καὶ διαδιδράσκει ἢ γνώσις σὺν αὐτοῖς σβεννυμένη. οὕτως ἄρα μνήμη γυμνὴ ἀνόνητόν τι καὶ οὐ μόνιμον οὐδὲ τῷ μακρῷ συνεκτείνεσθαι πέφυκε χρόνῳ. καὶ οὐκ ἂν οἶμαι ἢ πατρίδος προκινδυνεύειν ἔνιοι ἔγνωσαν ἢ ἄλλους ἀναδέχεσθαι πόνους, εὖ εἰδότες, ὡς, εἰ καὶ σφόδρα μέγιστα δράσαιεν, συναπολεῖται τὸ κλέος αὐτοῖς καὶ διαρροῆσεται, μόνῳ τῷ βίῳ αὐτῶν ἐκμεμετρομημένον, εἰ μὴ τις, ὡς ἔοικε, θεία προμήθεια τὸ ἀσθενὲς τῆς φύσεως ἀναρρωνῦσα τὰ ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας ἐπισηγάγεν ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὰς ἐνθὲνδε ἐλπίδας.*

77. For this emphasis in the classicising historians: K. SACKS, The Meaning of Eunapius’ History, *History and Theory* 25 (1986), 52-67. D. ROHRBACHER, *Historians of Late Antiquity*, London 2002, 70. KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 20. W. TREADGOLD, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, London 2007, 21.

Ῥωμαίων βασιλεία, τρυφήν μὲν ἀρνούμενη, πόλεμον δὲ αἰρουμένη, οὐδὲν ἀφίησι τῆς γῆς τὸ ἀνήκοον καὶ ἀδούλωτον. ἀλλὰ δεινὸν γέ τι χρῆμα ταῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων φύσεσιν ὁ θεὸς ἐγκατέμιξεν, ὥσπερ τοῖς ὀστακοῖς τὴν ἐπικίνδυνον χολὴν καὶ τοῖς ῥόδοις ἀκάνθας, οὕτω ταῖς ἐξουσίαις συγκατασπείρας τὴν ἡδονὴν καὶ ῥαθυμίαν, δι' ἣν, πάντα ἐξὸν εἰς μίαν μεταστῆσαι πολιτείαν καὶ συναρμόσαι τὸ ἀνθρώπινον, αἱ βασιλεῖαι τὸ θνητὸν σκοποῦσαι πρὸς τὸ ἡδὺν καταφέρονται, τὸ τῆς δόξης ἀθάνατον ἐξετάζουσαι καὶ παρεκλέγουσαι<sup>78</sup>.

We can see from the excerpt above that the conservative historian believed that “soft” Roman emperors who had abandoned their martial role threatened the state’s survival. This equation of the military life with idealised manliness and the state’s well-being on the one hand, and civilised luxury with effeminacy and decline on the other hand, represented a standard theme in the Greco-Roman literary tradition<sup>79</sup>.

For modern critics, Later Roman and Early Byzantine writers’ reliance on well-trodden virtues and vices hinders our ability to explore these men’s “real” personalities in any great depth<sup>80</sup>. Although it is true that these ancient authors remained somewhat constrained by the limitations their genres and their intense focus on literary style, their fascination with stock behaviours to describe the character of the emperor represents more than just an example of these authors blurring the lines between literature and history by relying on empty rhetoric procured haphazardly from their classical models. We must keep in mind that rhetoric frequently functioned for these Early Byzantine historians as a way to comment on current events<sup>81</sup>. As Alan

---

78. Eunapius, frag. 55.5-10 (ed. - trans. R. C. BLOCKLEY, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus, Malchus, and Candidus*. vol. 2, Liverpool 1983), 78-82: *It was clear to all that if the Roman state rejected luxury and embraced war, it would conquer and enslave all the world. But God has set a deadly trait in human nature, like the poisonous gall in a lobster or thorns on a rose. For in high authority he has implanted love of pleasure and ease, with the result that, while they have all the means with which to unite mankind into one polity, our Emperors in their concern for the transient turn to pleasure while neither pursuing nor showing interest in the immortality which is brought by glory.*

79. WILLIAMS *Roman Homosexuality*, 139.

80. A criticism of Procopius made by A. CAMERON, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, London 1985, 148-49.

81. KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 6-16.

Cameron points out in his study of imperial society at the turn of the fifth century, the notion of an emperor actively avoiding a life of luxury and taking on the rigors of the martial life held a particular appeal for those intellectuals writing during the reigns of Theodosius I's heirs, Arcadius and Honorius—emperors who had largely avoided their expected roles in state and military affairs<sup>82</sup>.

This negative stance towards “unwarlike” emperors and their closest advisors represents a common motif in Later and the Early Byzantine sources. Part of this disdain seems to reflect the upper classes' frustration at being cut off progressively from access to the emperor's confidence and political power. One recent study on ancient Roman masculinity even claims that the “minor political role” that the men from the aristocracy had in the Later Empire played an essential part in the reshaping of these men's masculine identity, and the creation of a “new” Christian masculine ideal<sup>83</sup>.

Though one should remain sceptical of such sweeping generalisations, many Late Roman authors, who largely hailed from the aristocracy and bureaucracy, appeared uncomfortable with the Later Empire's growing autocracy<sup>84</sup>. This outlook is not startling, considering that the classical texts that made up much of the foundation of these men's early education stressed the importance of free will for men seeking to achieve “true” manliness<sup>85</sup>. These established ideals preached that “manly freedom and nobility” depended upon a man's propensity to challenge and reject despotic rule<sup>86</sup>. The Eastern Roman historians adhered to the traditional Hellenistic distrust of despotism, and tended to link servility to effeminacy<sup>87</sup>. With these thoughts in mind, let us briefly consider how the growing dominance of the emperor and his supporters influenced the masculine identity of those within the

---

82. A. CAMERON – J. LONG – L. SHERRY, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*, Berkeley 1993, 4.

83. KUEFLER, *Manly Eunuch*, 49-69.

84. P. BROWN, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*, Madison 1992, 137.

85. E.g., Herodotus, *Histories* 7.107, trans. A. D. GODLEY, LCL (4 vols.), Cambridge MA 1920-25, v. 3, 410; Plato, *Republic* 579a.

86. KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 142.

87. For the use of these *topoi* in Eunapius: SACKS, *Eunapius' History*, 63; for Procopius, see KALDELLIS, *Procopius*, 145.

ruling hierarchy, as well as the Roman nobility, who as we have seen were playing less significant roles within the military and administrative branches of the Later Roman government.

#### MILITARY ARISTOCRACY

Scholars have long understood that the Later Empire experienced the growing accumulation of political power into the hands of the imperial family and their allies, Roman and non-Roman. This process, which one historian labels the “personalization of late Roman politics” led to the breakdown of the three-tiered system of Roman society that had allowed the leisured classes to coexist “with a professional class of officials and soldiers whose primary purpose was to maintain the smooth working and safety of the Empire”<sup>88</sup>. The internal court politics discussed previously played a part in these developments. Threatened by their rivals from within the Roman aristocracy, emperors in this period increased their independent authority by taking steps to protect themselves by gathering at the higher levels of public service a cadre of relatives, foreign mercenaries, and eunuchs who frequently owed their survival to the ruling regime<sup>89</sup>. As a reward for their loyalty, the emperor regularly appointed many of these “new men” into the rapidly expanded fourth-century senatorial orders in Rome and Constantinople<sup>90</sup>.

These measures meant that many Romans from the nobility became more isolated from intimate contact with the emperor and the upper echelons of imperial service (Plate 5). Throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, eunuchs, monks, non-Roman generals, and the emperors’ female relatives took on positions of influence held traditionally by these men<sup>91</sup>. Although the upper-crust of Roman society continued to be esteemed for its noble heritage, vast wealth, and refined lifestyle, members of the leisured class like the Roman

---

88. GOFFART, *Barbarian Tides*, 194-95, 234-35.

89. Eunuchs and “barbarians” in positions of prominence were particularly vulnerable to execution during political crises or regime changes. For the expendability of eunuchs, see HOPKINS, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 176-96, and for the vulnerability of senior “barbarian” military commanders, WILLIAMS – FRIEL, *Empire at Bay*, 148.

90. A thorough discussion of the expansion of the senatorial orders in the West and the East is found in JONES, *Later Roman Empire*, 523-62.

91. KUEFLER, *Manly Eunuch*, 50-55.

senator Symmachus (ca. 340–ca. 405), became progressively more cut off from taking an active role in the administration and the day-to-day decision-making that shaped the Empire's policies. Those in power increasingly assigned these important political roles to those within the imperial inner-circle, men who hailed from the military and the powerful Christian Church<sup>92</sup>.

By accumulating such power into his hands, the emperor, along with members of his family and the Roman army under his control, tended to monopolise military glory and martial excellence, while demilitarised members of the land owning classes focused on more intellectual forms of men's self-fashioning<sup>93</sup>. As I stressed earlier, however, the upper classes' separation from the highest levels of military service and the corridors of political power was never complete<sup>94</sup>. Nevertheless, the rise of a long series of emperors in the fourth and fifth centuries who owed their elevation to military or dynastic connections, and not to their rapport with the aristocracy, helped to create an inner circle of ruling elites dependent upon their own interpersonal relationships for their positions of power<sup>95</sup>. The growing dominance of these alliances also contributed to the formation in this era of what some specialists call a "separate military aristocracy", based not so much on ethnicity or class, but on ties of loyalty and good old-fashioned martial virtues<sup>96</sup>. This new hierarchy welcomed successful non

---

92. For example, when discussing Symmachus' famous dispute with the bishop Ambrose over the removal of the Altar of Victory from Rome, HEATHER (*Politics and Philosophy*, 35) suggests that the real decision making occurred behind the scenes, a place from which these pagan aristocrats found themselves increasingly cut off.

93. A full discussion on the Roman nobility of the Late Roman era cultivating less martial pursuits is found in S. J. B. BARNISH, *Transformation and Survival in the Western Senatorial Aristocracy, c. A. D. 400-700*, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988), 120-55.

94. On the continuing power wielded by the Eastern aristocracy, see BROWN, *Power and Persuasion*, 3-34, and for the West: J. MATHEWS, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364-425*, Oxford 1975, 1-3, 30, 50. Contra the remarks of KUEFLER, *Manly Eunuch*, 50. For a list of Later Roman officeholders from the aristocracy, as well as a discussion of their participation in the civilian and military administration in the fourth century, T. D. BARNES, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, Cambridge 1982, esp. 49-102.

95. For the connections between the imperial family and these military strongmen, see MATHEWS, *Western Aristocracies*, 32-55, 88-100.

96. GOFFART, *Barbarian Tides*, 191. A. DEMANDT, *The Osmosis of Late Roman and*

Romans, who had commonly risen from within the ranks of the army<sup>97</sup>.

Though the sources from this era maintained a generally hostile attitude towards the foreigners in the imperial service<sup>98</sup>, it is important to remember that it usually only took a “barbarian” two generations to become “Roman”<sup>99</sup>. A “*heroic man*” [ἄνθρωπος ἡρωϊκὸς] in this age could be either a “native” or a “barbarian” serving in the Western or Eastern Roman armies<sup>100</sup>. There is a contradiction between the xenophobia we find in some of the Late Roman sources, and the reality of increased accommodation. On this paradox, Walter Goffart comments: “Hostility to barbarians was built into the language; almost by definition, barbarians stood for what imperial citizens shunned. But literature does not directly mirror everyday reality. Sheer aversion was not a practical attitude in an age of rapid social and cultural change. The admission of elite barbarians into the Roman military elite was an established fact in the third century and only increased as time went on”<sup>101</sup>.

To be sure, the boundaries between Roman and foreigner had always been surmountable. In contrast to the Greeks, the Romans’ multiracial Empire, along with their tradition of inclusion, had contributed to a somewhat more nuanced notion of foreigners’ “otherness”. From the era of the Republic, the growth of Rome had depended upon its soldier’s ability to conquer foreign lands and make Romans out of barbarians<sup>102</sup>. Visions of a “pure” Roman state like those found in writers like Eunapius appear to be based on the

---

Germanic Aristocracies, in: *Das Reich und die Barbaren*, eds. E. CHRYSOS – A. SCHWARTZ, Vienna 1989, 75-86.

97. P. AMORY, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554*, Cambridge 1997, 27.

98. For the general hostility of the majority of Romans towards the appointment of these non-Romans to positions of high command, see A. CAMERON, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius*, Oxford 1970, 371.

99. A point made in KALDELLIS, *Hellenism*, 77.

100. See, e.g. Olympiodorus, frag. 40, ed. - trans. BLOCKLEY, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians*, 202-203.

101. GOFFART, *Barbarian Tides*, 192.

102. For a selection of essays on Greek attitudes towards barbarians, from the classical period to the later Middle Ages, T. HARRISON (ed.), *Greeks and Barbarians*, New York 2002. For Roman attitudes towards foreigners during the Principate, see M. MAAS, Strabo and Procopius, in: *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron*, ed. H. AMIRAV – B. H. ROMENY, Leuven 2007, 71-75.



upper classes' traditional prejudicial attitudes, particular political crises, and rhetorical practices, as much as a conviction that all of these foreigners needed to be eliminated from the armies. In reality, even a staunch critic of foreigners, like Eunapius, could praise a "barbarian" such as Fravitta for his martial virtues, "proper" religious views, and proven loyalty to the Roman state<sup>103</sup>. Undeniably, in the aftermath of the disastrous military defeat at Adrianople in 378, that saw the near Eastern Roman field army's near annihilation and the death of the Eastern Emperor Valens, those in power realised that the security of the state depended on the institution of a more conciliatory policy towards foreign peoples than former emperors had previously had the luxury to employ<sup>104</sup>.

One finds, as well, that even conservative intellectuals in the fourth and fifth centuries supported the separation of the imperial administration's civilian and military branches<sup>105</sup>. In his famous debate with a "Greek" expatriate who had joined the Huns, the fifth-century diplomat and historian, Priscus of Panium, countered the former citizen's claim that the Roman state had fallen into decline because of its citizens' rejection of their martial legacy. The Greek explained that, because of his wealth, after his capture when the Huns sacked his polis he was allowed to prove his worth in combat, and, having proven his "valour" [*ἀριστεύσαντα*], was granted his freedom. The Huns accepted him as an "elite" person and permitted him to marry and to have a family. The Greek then contrasts the choice he had under the Huns with what he saw as the plight of many Roman men within the Late Empire. Like earlier Roman historians, the Greek hinted that many Roman men had been enervated by their inability to protect themselves and the Empire from both internal and external threats. He blamed the Eastern Empire's current troubles (early in the 440s) on the emperors' ban on men carrying weapons and therefore allowing a professional army to fight for the Romans' freedom<sup>106</sup>.

Priscus responded by supporting the status quo; he extolled the benefits of

---

103. Eunapius, frag. 69.2, ed. - trans. BLOCKLEY, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians*, 108.

104. For the political reasoning behind Theodosius I's policy of "appeasement" towards the Goths and other foreign peoples after 378, see WILLIAMS – FRIEL, *Empire at Bay*, 23-35.

105. See, e. g., Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 21.16.3.

106. Full debate in Priscus, frag. 11.2.405-510, ed. - trans. BLOCKLEY, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians*, 266-272.

a division of labour within the Empire. In his mind, the “*wise and good men*” of the Roman polity had “*ordained that some should be guardians of the laws and that others should attend to weaponry and undergo military training, with their sole object that they be ready for battle and go out confidently to war as if some familiar exercise*”. Stressing his primary point that not all Roman men needed to prove their prowess on the battlefield, Priscus surmised that battles were best left in the hands of those trained to fight. Priscus, in fact, criticised the Huns for forcing an “*inexperienced man*” to fight in battle, claiming, “*The Romans are wont to treat even their household slaves better.*” The dialogue concludes with the weeping Greek agreeing, “*The laws were fair and the Roman Polity was good, but that the authorities were ruining it by not taking the same thought for it as those of old*”<sup>107</sup>.

Whether or not we accept the historical accuracy of this exchange, it provides us with further evidence that Romans from the educated classes had come to terms with having an army made up of Romans and non-Romans. This sentiment, however, does not indicate that men like Priscus rejected the importance of martial virtues for both the well-being of the Empire and the shaping of heroic codes of manliness. The opposite seems true. Throughout the fragments that survive, Priscus expressed his admiration of the courage and manliness of soldiers who stood up to barbarians like the Huns. He goes to great lengths, in fact, to contrast those he considered effeminate appeasers, with the courageous, and manly conduct of those who faced the Huns in diplomacy and in battle with traditional Roman élan<sup>108</sup>.

We should also question the argument made by one recent study on Late Roman masculinity that the Late Roman army’s “*barbarisation*” had

---

107. Priscus, frag. 11.2.498-499, ἄμεινον δὲ καὶ τοῖς οἰκέταις διατελοῦσι Ῥωμαῖοι χροόμενοι (ed. - trans. BLOCKLEY, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians*, 272). In what remains of his reply, Priscus failed to dispute the Greek’s accusations concerning the cowardice and unwarlike qualities of Theodosius II and his generals, suggesting he agreed that the current political turmoil was due to these men’s poor military record, rather than an indication of larger failure of the Roman military and political system.

108. For the cowardice and the unmanliness of Theodosius II and his generals: Priscus, frag. [3.1], [3.8]. For the martial qualities of the emperor Marcian, Eastern Roman soldiers, the Asimuntians, and Attila: Priscus, frag. 5.18-20, 9.3. 40-80 (ed. - trans. BLOCKLEY, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians*, 228 and 238-242).

led to its decreased efficiency and reliability<sup>109</sup>. The non-Romans who served within the Late Roman armies did so, on the whole, with remarkable loyalty and reliability, even when fighting peoples from their own ethnic grouping. As A. H. M. Jones noted over half a century ago, this dependability is not surprising considering their high level of assimilation to Roman ideals, and the reality that the multiplicity of ethnic groups who served in the Roman forces shared little sense of tribal loyalty<sup>110</sup>.

Finally, we must reject the idea proposed by Mathew Kuefler that Late Roman men saw the disasters of the fifth century as evidence that the barbarian enemies who threatened the Empire had become better soldiers, or as Kuefler puts it, “manlier than the Romans”<sup>111</sup>. Depictions of the Later Empire like those found in Kuefler bring to mind the image of cowed unmanly Roman aristocrats handing over their lands to “magnificently armoured barbarians” that so angers scholars like Walter Goffart. As Goffart reminds us, “The ‘fall’ of the West Roman Empire is not now (perhaps not ever) envisioned as a military defeat by brave barbarians of enervated troops that had lost the will to fight”<sup>112</sup>. Even in the final years of the West, Roman generals like Aëtius continued to prove this dominance on the battlefield<sup>113</sup>.

Most current scholarship on the Late Roman army agrees with this assessment, contending that when properly led, the Eastern and the Western Roman armies continued to maintain a distinct advantage in direct confrontations with their foreign enemies<sup>114</sup>. Ancient and modern historians have observed that, with few notable exceptions, the supposed “martial spirit” and superior manliness of the foreign barbarians proved “no match for the

---

109. KUEFLER, *Manly Eunuch*, 43-49.

110. For these points: JONES, *Later Roman Empire*, 621-622; SOUTHERN – DIXON, *Late Roman Army*, 50, 69-71.

111. KUEFLER *Manly Eunuch*, 48.

112. GOFFART, *Barbarian Tides*, 28.

113. For the continued effectiveness of the Western army under the command of Aëtius, see H. ELTON, Defence in fifth-century Gaul, in: *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, ed. J. DRINKWATER – H. ELTON, Cambridge 1992, 167-76.

114. SOUTHERN – DIXON, *Late Roman Army*, 177; see also HEATHER (*The Fall of the Roman Empire, a New History*, Oxford 2005, 446), who argues that the dual problems of the Hunnic invasions combined with political infighting in the fifth-century Western Empire led to a perfect storm of calamity, whereby “the barbarian peoples had just enough military might to carve out their enclaves.”

disciplined military face of Rome”<sup>115</sup>. Indeed, the Western military’s gradual decline stemmed primarily from financial reasons, rather than an inability to match non-Romans on the field of battle. The loss of North Africa to the Vandals in the 430s and 440s ultimately had disastrous consequences for the Western Empire and its army. A vital loss of tax revenues and corn from this region made it increasingly difficult for Valentinian III’s regime to pay, clothe, and feed his troops<sup>116</sup>.

#### VITA MILITARIS

Laudatory accounts of military men pervade the pages of the secular texts that survive from this age. A variety of artistic mediums expressed the idea found in the sixth-century Eastern Roman historian Agathias that for Rome *συγγενές γὰρ ἡμῖν καὶ πάτριον κρατεῖν ἀεὶ τῶν πολεμίων*<sup>117</sup>. In the early years of the fifth century, anyone spending any time in one of the many major or minor cities scattered throughout the Western and Eastern halves of the Empire, would have been surrounded by visual reminders of what one modern scholar calls Rome’s masculine *imperium*<sup>118</sup>. Across its vast expanse, a remarkable homogeneity of material culture bound the twin regimes’ disparate cities<sup>119</sup>. A zealous militarism certainly represented a common theme in any city’s expression of its *Romanitas*<sup>120</sup>.

Intricately carved marble reliefs on exterior walls, columns, and other memorials spoke to this faith by providing the onlooker with a continuous pictorial narrative of Roman victories over “barbarian” enemies<sup>121</sup>. Mosaics and paintings often complemented these sculpted forms, as the one in Milan

115. GOFFART, *Barbarian Tides*, 25.

116. MCEVOY, *Child Empire Rule*, 264-265.

117. Agathias, *History* 2.12.2: *to triumph forever over our enemies is our birthright and ancestral privilege* [trans. FRENDO, 44].

118. WILLIAMS, *Roman Homosexuality*, 135.

119. JONES, *Later Roman Empire*, 1015; see also, A. CAMERON, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of a Christian Discourse*, Berkeley 1991, 77-78.

120. For the centrality of military success to the ideology of the fifth-century Christian Roman Empire, see F. MILLAR, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II*, Berkeley 2006, 41-42.

121. G. DAVIES, Greek and Roman Sculpture, in: *The Oxford Companion to Classical History*, eds. S. HORNBLLOWER – A. SPAWFORTH, Oxford 1998, 651-52.

described by Priscus, showing *τοὺς μὲν Ρωμαίων βασιλεῖς ἐπὶ χρυσῶν θρόνων καθήμενους Σκύθας δὲ ἀνηρημένους...*<sup>122</sup>.

In the middle of the sixth century, Procopius described a magnificent mosaic from Justinian's palace in Constantinople depicting the Empire's victories over the Vandals in North Africa and in Italy against the Goths: *ἐφ' ἑκάτερα μὲν πόλεμος τέ ἐστι καὶ μάχη, καὶ ἀλίσκονται πόλεις παμπληθεῖς, πῆ μὲν Ἰταλίας, πῆ δὲ Λιβύης καὶ νικᾷ μὲν βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς ὑπὸ στρατηγοῦντι Βελισαρίῳ, ἐπάνεισι δὲ παρὰ τὸν βασιλέα, τὸ στράτευμα ἔχων ἀκραιφνὲς ὄλον ὁ στρατηγός, καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτῷ λάφυρα βασιλεῖς τε καὶ βασιλείας, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἐξαίσια. Κατὰ δὲ τὸ μέσον ἐστᾶσιν ὁ τε βασιλεὺς καὶ ἡ βασιλις Θεοδώρα, εἰκότες ἄμφω γεγηθόσι τε καὶ νικητήρια ἐορτάζουσιν ἐπὶ τε τῷ Βανδύλων καὶ Γότθων βασιλεῖ, δορυαλώτοις τε καὶ ἀγωγίμοις παρ' αὐτοὺς ἤκουσι*<sup>123</sup>.

We see in fact from other ancient testimony that commissioning these visual monuments for public consumption served as one of the first steps an emperor took after a military triumph<sup>124</sup>. Behind all of this imagery, one can observe a long-held conviction held by many Greek and Roman intellectuals that history represented a process whereby the manly conquered the unmanly<sup>125</sup>.

Such assertions represent more than the anachronistic whims of modern scholars interested in uncovering ancient masculinities. Another Eastern

---

122. Priscus, frag. 22.3. *sitting upon golden thrones surrounded by dead barbarians at their feet* (BLOCKLEY, 314).

123. Procopius, *On Buildings* 1.10.16-20, ed. J. HAURY – G. WIRTH, *Opera omnia*, v. 4, Leipzig 1964, 40-41; trans. H. B. DEWING, LCL. Cambridge MA 1954, v. 7, 86-87. *On either side is war and battle, and many cities being captured, some in Italy, some in Libya: and the Emperor Justinian is winning victories through his General Belisarius, and the General is returning to the Emperor, with his whole army intact, and he gives him spoils, both kings and kingdoms and all the things that are most prized among men. In the center stand the Emperor and the Empress Theodora, both seeming to rejoice and to celebrate victories over both the King of the Vandals and the King of the Goths, who approach them as prisoners of war to be led into bondage.*

124. Herodian, *Roman History* 3.9.12, trans. C. R. WHITTAKER, LCL (2 vols.), v. 1, 322-23, Cambridge MA 1969-70: *τούτων δὲ αὐτῷ δεξιῶς καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν εὐχὴν προχωρησάντων ἐπέστειλε τῇ τε συγκλήτῳ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ, τὰς τε πράξεις μεγαληγορῶν, τὰς μάχας τε καὶ τὰς νίκας δημοσίαις ἀνέθηκε γραφαῖς.*

125. KUEFLER, *Manly Eunuch*, 49.

Roman historian, writing in the early years of the fifth century, informs us that imperial image-makers created these art forms with the express intent of impressing upon their visual audience the *ἀνδρείαν μὲν γὰρ βασιλέως ἢ ῥώμην στρατιωτῶν ...*<sup>126</sup>.

In a centralised governmental system like that found in the Early Byzantine Empire, imperial propaganda provided the emperors and their backers with a powerful tool to publicise their authority and manipulate popular opinion across its expanse<sup>127</sup>. The classically educated elites, who represented an essential audience for these media campaigns, would have understood the social significance of the ideology, and in particular, the militaristic symbolism intrinsic to these art forms. Raised in educational systems based on a steady diet of classical Latin authors, such as Sallust, Seneca the younger, and Vergil in the West and Greek authors like Homer, Herodotus, and Thucydides in the East, the literate classes in both halves of the Empire remained intimately aware of the time-honoured idealisation of the military ethic as an essential aspect of both masculine ideology and Rome's right to *imperium*<sup>128</sup>.

Much of the Byzantine literature that survives from the fourth to the sixth centuries articulates long-held notions of heroism and masculinity, whereby Roman military men represented true exemplars of Roman virtue and manliness. We have already seen how Priscus crafted images of the non-soldier Theodosius II (ruled 408-50) and his ministers as unmanly fops. Despite lacking around two thirds of the text, it appears that the career diplomat had constructed the conventional binary contrast comparing the unmanly vices of Theodosius II and his generals and eunuch advisors with the more typically martial and masculine ideals displayed by the soldier-emperor Marcian's (ruled 450-457) military background and his strong diplomatic stance against the Huns<sup>129</sup>.

Such a gendered view of the Western Roman's fifth-century failures

---

126. Eunapius, frag. 68 *ἀνδρεία* ('manliness', 'courage') of the emperor or the strength of his soldiers (trans. BLOCKLEY, 108).

127. HEATHER – MONCUR, *Politics, Philosophy and Empire in the Fourth Century* [as in n. 61], 35-37.

128. For the familiarity of the Byzantine elites with these classical sources, see TREADGOLD, *Byzantine Historians*, 1-2, 68-9.

129. Priscus, frag. 5.18-20 (BLOCKLEY, 302-306).

was common in Western and Eastern sources. Procopius followed contemporary Justinianic and, indeed, Ostrogothic propaganda that placed primary responsibility for the losses of the Empire's Western provinces on a combination of non-martial and effeminate fifth-century Theodosian emperors, and what the historian described as an increasingly demilitarised Italian populace<sup>130</sup>. Writing in early 550s Constantinople, the self-proclaimed Goth Jordanes elaborated further, claiming that the naming of the former soldier Marcian as Eastern emperor in 450 had brought about the end of sixty years of "effeminate rule" [*delicati decessores*] for the Empire<sup>131</sup>.

So while the Christianisation of the Roman Empire remains arguably the most important event in Late Antiquity, it is a mistake to conclude its establishment led to the immediate decline of traditional notions of masculinity based, in part, on martial virtues and the xenophobic belief in the right for Roman masculine dominion over non-Romans. Contrary to the arguments made by some recent studies, most Roman men in the early Byzantine Empire did not have the luxury or the desire to contemplate whether Christians fighting spiritual battles or aristocratic intellectuals were more courageous or "manlier" than actual Roman soldiers fighting in the "real" world. Despite the military challenges faced by the Eastern Roman army throughout the early Byzantine period, and the disappearance of the Western army in the fifth century, many Byzantines continued to believe in the soldiers' superior manliness and courage.

We should therefore like question one recent scholar's assertion that, along with the emperor, "the holy man and the bishop were the most

---

130. For Justinian's attitudes towards his predecessors failures in the West, *CJ*, 30.11.12, of April 535, eds. P. KRÜGER – T. MOMMSEN, vol. 2. *CIC*, Berlin 1929. Cf., Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.9-10, ed. T. MOMMSEN, *MGH*, AA 12, Berlin 1894; trans. S. J. B. BARNISH, *The Variae of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator, the Right Honourable and Illustrious Ex-Quaestor of the Palace, Ex-Ordinary Consul, Ex-Master of the Offices Praetorian Prefect and Patrician: being Documents of the Kingdom of the Ostrogoths in Italy, chosen to illustrate the Life of the Author and the History of his Family*. Translated with Introduction and Notes, Liverpool 1992. For gendered views in Theoderic's Italy, see J. ARNOLD, *Theoderic and the Roman Imperial Restoration*, Cambridge 2014, 15-22, 48-51.

131. Jordanes, *Romana* 332 (my trans.), ed. TH. M. MOMMSEN, *MGH*, AA, 5/1, Berlin 1882 [repr. 1961]; *Regnum quod delicati decessores prodecessoresque eius per annos fere sexaginta vicissim ...*

powerful and evocative figures in Late Antiquity”<sup>132</sup>. As scholars like Warren Treadgold have suggested, sentiments such as the one expressed in the preceding passage are not surprising considering that many recent studies on the period tend to rely heavily on Christian panegyrics and hagiographies for their conclusions, while largely ignoring ancient secular texts that offer a far more jaded view of monks, bishops, and holy men<sup>133</sup>.

Although I would not go as far as Treadgold in rejecting the relevance of these Christian “heroes” in contributing to our understanding of early Byzantine society and its diverse constructions of masculinity, one must balance these often hagiographical Christian accounts with the more commonplace attitudes one finds in secular, and indeed certain religious sources, which praise the virtues found in the soldier’s life as an essential aspect of heroic masculinity. It was, in fact, the Byzantine’s appreciation and appropriation of these long-established Roman martial ideals, which contributed to a lingering sense of manly *Romanitas* in Byzantium<sup>134</sup>.

---

132. C. RAPP, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, Berkeley 2005, 3.

133. TREADGOLD, *Byzantine Historians*, preface, 8-9. For similar attitudes, see KALDELLIS *Procopius*, 1-60. B. W. PERKINS, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilisation*, Oxford 2005, 1-12.

134. This admiration by the medieval Byzantines of the manly masculine martial virtues of their Roman ancestors is discussed by A. K. KALDELLIS, A Byzantine Argument for the Equivalence of All Religions: Michael Attaleiates on Ancient and Modern Romans, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 14. 1/2 (2007), 1-22. L. NEVILLE, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium*, Cambridge 2012.





1. The Late fifth or early sixth-century Barberini ivory (Louvre, Paris) depicting a triumphant Roman emperor on horseback with a captive in tow. The emperor is probably Justinian, though Zeno and Anastasios I are also possibilities. The horse rears over the female personification of earth, whilst Winged Victory crowns the emperor. Beneath the rider, barbarians cower. On the side panels, soldiers carry miniature victories (source: wikimedia commons).



2. The third-century Grande Ludovisi sarcophagus (CE 251/252) in Rome's Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Altemps (source: wikipedia. org).



3. Fourth-century silver plate (Hermitage, St. Petersburg) depicting the Emperor Constantius II. In the military scene, the emperor is mounted and wielding a lance. He is being crowned by Winged Victory. (source: wikimedia commons).



4. Probus diptych (Aosta Cathedral, Italy) depicting the Emperor Honorius in full military regalia. It probably commemorates a Roman victory over the Goths in 406 (source: wikipedia. org).



5. Ivory diptych of the Western generalissimo Stilicho with his wife Serena and son Eucherius (ca. 395 from Monza Cathedral) [source: wikimedia commons].

6. Reconstruction of the Column of Arcadius based on the engravings of an anonymous draftsmen before its destruction in 1715. (source: wikipedia. org).



Η ΖΩΗ ΤΟΥ ΣΤΡΑΤΙΩΤΗ: Η ΠΡΩΙΜΗ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΗ  
ΑΝΔΡΟΠΡΕΠΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ Η ΑΝΔΡΕΙΑ ΣΤΟΝ ΠΟΛΕΜΟ

Στην εργασία υποστηρίζεται ότι οι λόγιοι του Ανατολικού Ρωμαϊκού κράτους προβάλλουν καθιερωμένα πολεμικά ιδεώδη ως πρότυπα της εξιδανικευμένης ανδροπρεπούς συμπεριφοράς, συντελώντας στην διατήρηση τόσο του θαυμασμού προς τον αρρενωπό Ρωμαίο στρατιώτη, όσο και των αναμνήσεων του ανδροπρεπούς *imperium* της Ρώμης.