Introduction

> But it is not the case that we were left entirely ignorant of blades: even I kept the one that sharpens my reed pens . . .[1]
>
> A bishop who killed a Hagarene, drawing a sword against him in time of war, was similarly deposed.[2]

These two quotations, one tongue-in-cheek, the other serious and official, share a repudiation of physical violence. The first, from a letter of the scholar Ioannes Tzetzes (1110s–after 1180), playfully mocks the expectation that secular men should use weapons of war to defend themselves against their enemies. Tzetzes preferred intellectual battles, emphasising that his weapons were his pens and his primary means of attack was his writing. The second quotation, from a comment of the canon lawyer Theodoros Balsamon (c. 1140–after 1195), emphasises the incompatibility of killing and the clerical state. A bishop who took a life, even in the face of enemy attack, was no longer fit to be a cleric. How are we to interpret such rejections of military prowess, and what impact did they have on one's manliness? Were such men to some extent unmanned by their lack of military skill, or was their rejection accompanied by a sense of pride in a different brand of masculinity? These questions are part of a much bigger debate about the gender of Eastern Roman men. Accusations of Byzantine effeminacy, expressed by their contemporaries and amplified through modern historiography, have echoed through stereotypes of cunning, treachery and

[1] Letter 69 in P. A. M. Leone (ed.), *Ioannis Tzetzae Epistulae* (Leipzig, 1972), p. 98: πλὴν ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἡμεῖς ἄμοιροι παντελῶς μαχαιρίδων ἐλείφθημεν. κατέσχον γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς τὴν τοὺς γραφικοὺς ἀπευθύνουσαν δόνακας. On the context of this passage, see A. Pizzone, 'Tzetzes and the Prokatastasis: A Tale of People, Manuscripts, and Performances', in *TZETZIKAI EPEYNAI*, ed. E. E. Prodi (Bologna, 2022), pp. 19–73, at p. 40.

[2] *Syntagma*, IV, p. 191: Καὶ ἀρχιερεὺς Ἀγαρηνὸν φονεύσας, κατ' αὐτοῦ ξίφος ἀνατείναντα ἐν καιρῷ πολέμου, καθῃρέθη ὁμοίως.

aversion to war.[3] In this framework, the Byzantines' pacifism is often taken for granted, whether it is interpreted negatively as a cowardly refusal to fight or positively as a more 'civilised' behaviour.[4] Such discussions delve into the Orthodox Church's stance towards warfare and juxtapose the Eastern Roman clerics who dutifully followed the canons with the belligerent churchmen from Western Europe.[5] Similarly, the scribal and bureaucratic nature of Byzantium is often highlighted and contrasted with the more militaristic West. As Leonora Neville recently put it: 'The extremely militarized medieval Western European aristocracy looked at the civilian aristocrats of the Eastern Empire and saw fops who did not conform to their ideas of proper masculinity.'[6] This book contributes to our understanding of Byzantine gender through a focus on the masculinity of exactly these two sources of gender trouble: scholars and clerics.

I start by exploring the writings of Michael Psellos, Ioannes Tzetzes and Gregorios Antiochos: three learned men who openly rejected violence and its associated manly connotations, asserting instead the superiority of erudition. In doing so, they challenged the ideal of martial prowess and pushed the boundaries of intelligible masculinity. Their rejections could

[3] Paul Brown has noted that the stereotype of the effeminate Greeks starts primarily towards the end of the twelfth century and that modern historians tend to apply it retrospectively to an earlier period beginning with the sixth century, when what we find instead is an emphasis on the Greeks' treachery and cunning. See P. Brown, 'Perceptions of Byzantine Virtus in Southern Italy, from the Eighth to Eleventh Centuries', in *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society*, ed. B. Neil and L. Garland (London, 2013), pp. 11–27. By contrast, Leonora Neville has argued that references to cunning were already gendered, although she too identifies the period of the Crusades and Crusading historians as particularly responsible for building the image of the 'Byzantine man' as lacking in martial prowess and preferring trickery and deceit to battle. See L. Neville, *Byzantine Gender* (Amsterdam, 2019), pp. 7, 80–3. It is worth noting that such stereotypes were meant to be insulting because effeminacy, and to a large extent femininity more broadly, were viewed negatively by the Eastern Romans, a view that we need not (and indeed should not) share with our sources.

[4] T. Kolbaba, 'Fighting for Christianity: Holy War in the Byzantine Empire', *Byzantion*, 68 (1998), pp. 194–221, at p. 220.

[5] See, for example, N. G. Chrissis, 'Byzantine Crusaders: Holy War and Crusade Rhetoric in Byzantine Contacts with the West (1095–1341)', in *The Crusader World*, ed. A. Boas (London, 2016), pp. 259–77; A. Kolia-Dermitzaki, 'Holy War in Byzantium Twenty Years Later: A Question of Term Definition and Interpretation', in *Byzantine War Ideology between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion*, ed. J. Koder and I. Stouraitis (Vienna, 2012), pp. 121–32; I. Stouraitis, 'Jihad and Crusade: Byzantine Positions Towards the Notions of "Holy War"', *BS*, 21 (2011), pp. 11–63; P. Viscuso, 'Christian Participation in Warfare: A Byzantine View', in *Peace and War in Byzantium. Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis, S.J.*, ed. T. S. Miller and J. Nesbitt (Washington, DC, 1995), pp. 33–40.

[6] Neville, *Byzantine Gender*, p. 7. Similarly, Bennett noted: 'in the late 1090s there can have been few in the crusader host who valued learning above the robust virtues required to defeat the enemy. Knowledge was admired, certainly, and prudence and intelligence, along with bravery and good birth; but bibliophilia was definitely suspect.' See M. Bennett, 'Virile Latins, Effeminate Greeks and Strong Women: Gender Definitions on Crusade?', in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. S. Edgington and S. Lambert (Columbia, 2002), pp. 16–30, at p. 18.

take various forms – from showing little interest in hunting and fighting to refusing to eat animal meat or ostentatiously reading a book while riding – and they were often accompanied by exhibitions of classical learning. This, I argue, was not accidental. It was the masculinising power of education that allowed them to challenge traditional masculine ideals by embracing certain more 'feminine' behaviours and characteristics without compromising their manliness. Nor was this type of behaviour limited to these three individuals; rather, I posit the existence of a collective scholarly gendered identity which provided a notable alternative to military masculinity.

Next, I turn towards clerics to establish how different they were from laymen when it came to physical ways of expressing their manhood. I focus on hunting and fighting, two associated activities that allowed for the display of manly bodily strength. With hunting, the differences between religious and lay were less clear cut. It was not prohibited by canon law, and both laymen and clerics could be faulted for overindulgence; only monks came in for harsher criticism. By contrast, a much firmer line was drawn around all religious men when it came to violence against other humans. Evidence suggests that clerics who transgressed the canons against killing were deposed. Many also seem to have abandoned religious life before they pursued violent activities. Those who remained clerics were strongly encouraged to fight spiritual battles; yet military metaphors were used to describe their spiritual work, suggesting a wide popularity of the ideal of martial prowess, even among men who were strictly forbidden from fighting.

By focusing on the relation of clerics and scholars with violence, this book aims to counterbalance, as well as advance and complement, the more numerous studies on other types of Eastern Roman manhood, and particularly military and imperial masculinities.[7] At the same time, comparisons with Western men, especially in Chapters 3 and 5, as well as the Conclusion, widen the discussion, while broader questions addressed by

[7] M. Lykaki, 'The Byzantine Masculinity at War: An Approach on the Manliness of the Army in the Middle Byzantine Era', *Byzantion Nea Hellás*, 39 (2020), pp. 229–53; T. Maniate-Kokkine, 'Η επίδειξη ανδρείας στον πόλεμο κατά τους ιστορικούς του ιιου και ιιου αι.', in *Το εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο. Πρακτικά Δ' Διεθνούς Συμποσίου Εθνικού Ιδρύματος Ερευνών*, ed. K. Tsiknakis (Athens, 1997), pp. 239–59; M. Stewart, 'Soldier's Life: Early Byzantine Masculinity and the Manliness of War', *BS*, 26 (2006), pp. 11–44; M. Hatzaki, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium: Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text* (New York, 2009), which focuses on the ambiguous relationship between physical beauty and masculinity and discusses both soldiers and emperors. For a recent study of imperial masculinity and sexuality, see chapter 2 in M. Masterson, *Between Byzantine Men: Desire, Homosociality, and Brotherhood in the Medieval Empire* (London, 2022).

this book extend beyond the strict limits of history, to speak to theoretical themes of interest to scholars of gender, animal studies, disability and posthumanism.

Masculinities

Since this is primarily a book about gender, some definitions are in order. I take masculinities to refer *not* to 'a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals', but to 'configurations of practice that . . . can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting'.[8] The plural is important, as it highlights the variation that existed based on commonly held ideas about the age, race, disability, social and religious status of the people involved. The ways such social interactions were lived and depicted in writing can be hard for the historian to capture, as similar events could be portrayed differently from author to author or even from page to page. To help produce a coherent image out of something that is fluid and fugacious, I will use the categories of scholarly and clerical masculinities. These are not meant to ossify or overly stabilise our understanding of gender relations but *are* meant to give a clearer idea of the negotiations that took place between some (mostly) male groups who shared textual and emotional communities and underwent similar societal pressures to behave in specific gendered ways towards other people and animals. This emphasis on the relational aspect of gender is also not meant to deny the role of personal embodiment in the experience of gender. Although I do not take masculinity to be embedded in the body in an essentialising sense (that would see only men as being masculine), I do take into account the effects that the interaction between bodily lived experience and discourse could have on one's expression of gender.

Clerical Masculinity

'Clerical masculinity' has long been a popular term among Western medievalists, who have used it to examine to what extent being a cleric determined one's gender expression. More specifically, for the high Middle Ages, clerical masculinity often refers to the gender of secular clerics in the aftermath of the eleventh-century Gregorian reforms, which aimed to

[8] J. W. Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity: Formulation, Reformulation, and Amplification* (London, 2018), p. 35.

separate sacred from profane.[9] But the terms 'cleric' and 'clerical' have also been used more loosely to refer to monks, many of whom in this period were ordained clerics.[10]

In this context, medievalists have paid particular attention to the reformers' new-found stress on celibacy, which distanced the clergy from a gender definition based on marriage and physical procreation.[11] McNamara famously asked 'Can one be a man without deploying the most obvious biological attributes of manhood?'[12] More recently, attempts have been made to move away from celibacy as the principal category of analysis.[13] Importantly, for our purposes, emphasis has been placed on the impact of evolving ideas about violence, not least in the context of the crusades.[14]

Western religious men in this period were prohibited from fighting or even hunting – rules that were often transgressed as well as forcefully repeated.[15] Their anxiety to justify to themselves and to society their

[9] There are interesting studies of clerical masculinity outside this timeframe. Of particular relevance is M. Armstrong-Partida, *Defiant Priests: Domestic Unions, Violence, and Clerical Masculinity in Fourteenth-Century Catalunya* (Ithaca, 2017), which discusses how clerics performed gender identities which were closely connected to lay masculinities, both by ending up in marriage-like relationships in which they acted as sexual partners and fathers, and by performing violence in their relationships with their lay parishioners or with their clerical colleagues.

[10] Thibodeaux, for example, does not distinguish between 'clerical' and 'monastic', even as she argues that distinctions between different types of religious men are important for gender: J. D. Thibodeaux, 'Introduction: Rethinking the Medieval Clergy and Masculinity', in her *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2010), pp. 1–15, at pp. 6–7.

[11] See, for example, H. Thomas, *The Secular Clergy in England, 1066–1216* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 154–85; J. Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 115–57; C. N. L. Brooke, 'Gregorian Reform in Action: Clerical Marriage in England, 1050–1200', *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, 12:1 (1956), pp. 1–21.

[12] Although McNamara's question helped launch useful research into clerical masculinity, its focus on genitalia may strike readers as misplaced in light of the present-day reality of, for example, trans men (among other groups). See J. A. McNamara, 'The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150', in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. A. Lees (Minneapolis, 1994), pp. 3–29, at p. 5. For other studies focusing on the impact of the reforms on gender, see R. N. Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation', in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (London, 1999), pp. 160–77; J. Murray, 'One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?', in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. L. M. Bitel and F. Lifshitz (Philadelphia, 2008), pp. 34–51; J. D. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity, and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066–1300* (Philadelphia, 2015).

[13] See, for example, Thibodeaux, 'Introduction: Rethinking the Medieval Clergy and Masculinity', p. 6 which aims to emphasise that celibacy 'was not the only criterion for clerical manhood'.

[14] See, for example, A. G. Miller, '"Tails" of Masculinity: Knights, Clerics, and the Mutilation of Horses in Medieval England', *Speculum*, 88:4 (2013), pp. 958–95; K. Allen Smith, 'Saints in Shining Armor: Martial Asceticism and Masculine Models of Sanctity, ca. 1050–1250', *Speculum*, 83:3 (2008), pp. 572–602; N. R. Hodgson, K. J. Lewis and M. M. Mesley (eds.), *Crusading and Masculinities* (Abingdon, 2019).

[15] See also Chapter 5.

inability to perform violence is well documented. Jacqueline Murray has argued that the Gregorian reforms and the resulting monasticisation of the secular clergy led the Church to put forward a model of masculinity in which the battle against temptation was represented as a manly struggle. Religious men were depicted as soldiers who used their faith, rather than physical weapons, to fight, and by doing so ultimately bought into a secular model of manhood.[16] By contrast, Ruth Mazo Karras has highlighted the use of military metaphors as a means to transcend, rather than live up to, the secular model. Everyone knew that military metaphors were metaphors, but for their writers they stood for something more powerful than the physical warfare to which they were contrasted.[17] Similarly, Katherine Smith has shown that although in contexts of war religious men were classified alongside women, children and the poor as groups who could not defend themselves, the concept of spiritual warfare allowed them to exhibit masculine qualities, such as fortitude and bravery, while avoiding the pollution associated with blood-shedding. These masculine qualities were often extended to religious women, yet, as in the case of ordinary warfare, the assumption was that spiritual combat came more naturally to men and only exceptionally to admirable women.[18]

Such gendered discourses developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries largely through religious propaganda and the manipulation of clerical narratives. As Maureen Miller has demonstrated in her study of reform hagiography, clerical masculinity was deliberately presented by religious authors as superior to elite lay masculinity, by putting forward the image of weak and morally corrupt secular men while elevating the manly and powerful clergymen. In these hagiographies, evil and violent laymen who usurp lands and benefices are used as foils to the manly clerics who defend them.[19] As these different expected sets of behaviour proliferated, the lives and identities of clerics, as well as the way in which they were seen by other men and women, were radically altered. Utilising the category of 'clerical

[16] J. Murray, 'Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity, and Monastic Identity', in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. H. Cullum and K. J. Lewis (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 24–42, at p. 37.

[17] R. Mazo Karras, 'Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt: Clerical Masculinity in Medieval Europe', in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, ed. L. M. Bitel and F. Lifshitz (Philadelphia, 2008), pp. 52–67.

[18] K. Allen Smith, 'Spiritual Warriors in Citadels of Faith: Martial Rhetoric and Monastic Masculinity in the Long Twelfth Century', in *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. D. Thibodeaux (New York, 2010), pp. 86–110, at p. 92.

[19] M. C. Miller, 'Masculinity, Reform, and Clerical Culture: Narratives of Episcopal Holiness in the Gregorian Era', *Church History*, 72 (2003), pp. 25–52.

masculinity' allows medievalists to chart these changes more effectively by emphasising the relationship between gender and religious status, and by drawing attention to the peculiarities in the presentation of the clerical male.

Byzantinists have yet to make use of the category of 'clerical masculinity' in their analysis of gender.[20] Admittedly, many of the changes which motivated its use for the West never took place in Romanía. Eastern Roman secular clerics (i.e. priests, deacons and subdeacons who were not monks) could have wives and children, only needing to abstain from sex before their liturgical duties. Even bishops, who needed to put their wife into a monastery before their ordination, did not have much to prove in terms of their virility: they could have previously fathered children and supported a family financially – classic markers of masculinity.[21] This brought most secular clerics much closer to lay males, but distanced them from monks who, like their Western counterparts, had to observe complete abstinence. But there were still differences that meant that clerics and laymen could be very different kinds of men. Importantly, clerics were forbidden from acting violently, and fighting in battle was particularly problematic. It is on such differences between laymen and clerics, centring on violence, that I will focus my discussion of the importance of religious status for our understanding of gender in Romanía. The further division between clerical and monastic will also be important, and at points the separate term 'monastic masculinity' will be used to emphasise that although monks could be ordained clerics, the differences in the lives of the two groups is meaningful enough to warrant the distinction.

Byzantinists have largely downplayed the importance of such religious distinctions in their study of masculinity, with detrimental effects. This can be seen through the example of eunuchs, whose categorisation as a 'third gender' has partly hinged on the confusion caused by differences in religious status. Consider the following statement by Kathryn Ringrose, who, despite being a proponent of court eunuchs as a 'third gender', argued against it when it came to eunuchs who joined the Church:

> Christianity and the Church created a ladder of status and perfection that, while it remained oriented to a male ideal (only men could be priests, after all), had rendered procreation irrelevant. Thus, a key component of the

[20] See, for example, D. Krueger, 'Between Monks: Tales of Monastic Companionship in Early Byzantium', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 20:1 (2011), pp. 28–61.

[21] M. Perisanidi, *Clerical Continence in Twelfth-Century England and Byzantium* (London, 2019), pp. 34–5.

> complex factors that led to the construction of a distinct gender for eunuchs in secular and court society had been eliminated in the religious realm. For this part of society, at least, eunuchs are neither a third sex nor a third gender; they are simply men.[22]

There are several reasons why this claim does not work. For one, there is evidence that eunuchs did not seamlessly blend in in male monasteries. There were specialist eunuch monasteries and others from which eunuchs were excluded; and, even when eunuchs could join male monasteries, they could stand out because of both their appearance and certain assumed behavioural characteristics.[23] We see this very clearly in stories about people described in the text as women who entered male monasteries as eunuchs: they chose to present themselves as eunuchs rather than men precisely because men and eunuchs were meant to look different.[24] But, for our purposes, a more important problem with the foregoing quotation is that the eunuchs' inability to procreate would have stood out compared to clerics. Although Ringrose is right that abstinence was an important Christian ideal, it did not 'render procreation irrelevant'. The passage mentions priests, but they only needed to abstain from sex temporarily before their service at the altar and could have wives and children. Only with a clear sense of the distinctions between clerics (of different grades) and monks can we decide whether 'eunuchs in the Church' is a coherent category in terms of the gendering of its members, and how it may have been differentiated from the category of court eunuchs. The example also highlights that in understanding a person's gender, knowing whether they were a priest, a monk or a layman is as important as knowing whether they were a eunuch. Religious status was not an incidental characteristic, but an inextricable part of gender identity.

A similar misunderstanding can be found in Shaun Tougher's criticism of Ringrose:

> Although she argues that eunuchs in Byzantium can be regarded as a third gender, the eunuchs she has in mind are really a distinct group, the court eunuchs. What then of other eunuchs in Byzantine society? What gender do

[22] K. M. Ringrose, 'Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium', in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. G. Herdt (New York, 1993), pp. 85–110, at p. 108.

[23] For eunuch-only monasteries, see S. Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society* (London, 2008), pp. 75–7.

[24] For a description of what eunuchs may have looked like, see K. Ringrose, 'The Byzantine Body', in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Bennett and R. Karras (Oxford, 2013), pp. 362–78.

> eunuchs in other roles constitute? One thinks especially of those who occupied religious positions, the monks and clergymen. Regarding the religious in general, Ringrose raises the possibility that there were in fact more than three genders in Byzantine society, that multiple gender identities existed. Although she does not pursue this idea, it is one that requires study before one can pronounce on the gender status of eunuchs in Byzantium.[25]

Although this refers to a different part of Ringrose's work from the foregoing quotation, the issue at hand is the same: what do we do with the fact that eunuchs are different in religious contexts? One solution envisaged here is to create further subcategories for their gender: a 'third gender' for eunuchs in the palace, a 'fourth gender' for eunuchs at the monastery, a 'fifth gender' for eunuchs who are clerics.[26] What this solution intuits but does not express clearly is that gender more broadly is not stable and coherent: there is no one way of describing all women, all men or all eunuchs. Indeed, as we have learned from the Black female scholars who have defined intersectionality, gender hides within it internal differences; it is part of one's multiple identities which are not independent but co-constitutive of each other and often bring with them interlocking systems of oppression.[27]

In this case, the experience of religious eunuchs is similar but also different from that of both lay eunuchs and religious men and women; they face limitations and advantages that are unique to them as a double category. Intersectional thinking exposes these internal differences 'within' gender and can help us avoid expectations of coherence, such as the one reflected in the following statement from Leonora Neville's recent book: 'There is usually some sort of logic working within each discourse, but

[25] Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society*, p. 111.

[26] In Western medieval historiography, monks and nuns in the Merovingian world have been argued to form a third gender due to their similar ways of life. See J. A. McNamara, 'Chastity as a Third Gender in the History and Hagiography of Gregory of Tours', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. K. Mitchell and I. Wood (Leiden, 2002), pp. 199–209. Complaints about the proliferation of 'third genders' have also been put forward by Jacqueline Murray, who identified more medieval groups that recent scholarship had placed within this category, including dowagers in thirteenth-century England and the clergy following the Gregorian reforms. Murray, 'One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?', pp. 35–6.

[27] The concept of intersectionality has a long history in Black feminist theory and activism. Early versions of it can be found in the writings of nineteenth-century Black women such as Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper, whom Crenshaw herself uses as examples. See K. Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1 (1989), 139–67. See also V. M. May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* (London, 2015), p. 125.

when they are all brought together the images of eunuch are so contradictory and incompatible that no general social understanding of eunuchs has emerged so far.'[28] Because of the impact of other intersecting identities on gender, one coherent image of eunuchs could not possibly emerge from the sources. Using categories such as 'clerical masculinity' reminds us of these internal differences and can help us understand gender more fully by emphasising the impact of other identity markers upon it.

Scholarly Masculinity

Another aspect of identity that helps construct one's gender but is often neglected in modern historiography involves learning. By this I mean both the more formal education that a man may have received as a boy or adolescent and the knowledge and literary experience he continued to amass later in life through reading, writing, teaching, participation in *theatra* and other intellectual endeavours. The gendering of these activities in the Middle Ages has so far received little attention. Among Western medievalists, two studies that address this topic head on are those of Ruth Mazo Karras on the Late Medieval universities and Elizabeth Eva Leach on music in the monastic classroom. Karras explained that the reason why the masculinising power of learning within the university context had remained hitherto unexamined was its very self-evidence: 'That medieval European universities were exclusively masculine is so obvious as to be hardly worthy of comment.'[29] In her study, she went on to highlight how the absence of women, instances of sexual violence, verbal competitions described in military terminology, an emphasis on rationality and distinctions between the dumb animal and the educated man were all fundamental to the formation of a particular type of manhood.[30] Of special interest are her comments about comparisons between the unlearned man and the human beast:

[28] Neville, *Byzantine Gender*, p. 52.

[29] R. Mazo Karras, 'Sharing Wine, Women and Song: Masculine Identity Formation in the Medieval European Universities', in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. J. Cohen and B. Wheeler (New York, 1997), pp. 187–202, at p. 187.

[30] Chapter 3: 'Separating the Men from the Beasts: Medieval Universities and Masculine Formation' in R. Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2003), pp. 67–108. See also P. H. Cullum, 'Learning to Be a Man, Learning to Be a Priest in Late Medieval England', in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. S. Rees Jones (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 135–53, which deals with clerical masculinity in the Late Middle Ages in the context of celibacy and arms-bearing, but also emphasises the importance of literacy and education for the creation of distinct genders for lay and clerical men.

> Like knights, students could compete in (intellectual) combat, through disputations. Unlike knights, the 'Other' being rejected by students was as much animal as feminine; masculinity, for these men, was based upon the idea of rationality and moderation that distinguished the man both from the woman and from the beast.[31]

Similarly, Leach found that learning to understand the music's masculine rationality as expressed, for example, in numerical ratios allowed the monks to maintain their masculine identity when they sang or heard others sing, despite the fact that music was generally associated with feminine emotions and could feminise or bestialise those who listened to it passively.[32] As we will see, such an emphasis on rationality and fear of assimilation to the dumb animal were also prevalent in the Eastern Roman context.

Two further studies that are worth mentioning involve learning and masculinity in the ancient world and provide important precedents for Eastern Roman ideas about gender. Maud Gleason's now-classic work on the careers of two second-century rhetoricians has demonstrated how public speaking and verbal confrontations, with their emphasis on the correct voice and proper facial expressions, could provide an alternative path to manliness, outranking physical strength in 'the callisthenics of manhood'.[33] More recently, Meriel Jones has investigated the concept of *paideia* in Ancient Greek novels, positing this lifelong process of learning as a defining element of elite masculinity.[34]

Yet so far, for Romanía the emphasis has been on the gender of individual authors, or on their perspectives of the gender of others, without considering masculinity within the context of the group.[35] In this book, I bring together Psellos, Tzetzes and Antiochos – three learned men, one lesser known and two very famous and considered idiosyncratic – to show that they in fact have quite a lot in common when it comes to their gender

[31] Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men*, p. 108.

[32] E. E. Leach, 'Music and Masculinity in the Middle Ages', in *Masculinity and Western Musical Practice*, ed. K. Gibson (London, 2009), pp. 21–40.

[33] M. W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), p. xxii.

[34] M. Jones, *Playing the Man: Performing Masculinities in the Ancient Greek Novel* (Oxford, 2012).

[35] Another scholarly man whose gender has received some attention is Nikephoros Bryennios. Paidas has focused on Bryennios' description of men, women and eunuchs, from which we could also infer some of the author's own masculine ideals. See C. Paidas, 'Issues of Social Gender in Nikephoros Bryennios' Ὕλη ἱστοριῶν', *BZ*, 101 (2008), pp. 737–49. Neville has emphasised Bryennios' support of traditional Roman values of proper masculinity, particularly through his use of Roman exempla. See L. Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge, 2012).

expression: they all exalt learning above physical strength, prefer riding mules instead of horses and openly express so-called feminine emotions such as grief. They all also subvert military masculinity in their own way: Psellos by advertising his lack of emotional control, Tzetzes by refusing to hunt or even eat animals and Antiochos by willingly cultivating a weak body hunched over his books. I posit that the similarities in these men's gender expression are typical of a wider group and use the concept of 'scholarly masculinity' to encourage thinking in terms of a collective identity.[36]

By placing the emphasis on the masculinising power of learning, this approach has the potential to provide radical reinterpretations of our sources. In this book, this applies primarily to the much-discussed figure of Psellos. Two previous studies of Psellos' gender, by Stratis Papaioannou and Roland Betancourt, have focused on his strong emotional responses and have taken little account of the impact of education and learning on his masculinity.[37] In contrast to Papaioannou's emphasis on rhetorical effeminacy, I will argue that Psellos repeatedly laid claim to manliness by centring his learning – the very characteristic which, as we will see, allowed him to display behaviours that were in some ways coded as feminine. His masculinity was different from that of a soldier or an emperor, but no less intelligible or legitimate within his society. In contrast to Betancourt's choice of they/them pronouns for Psellos, I have preferred he/him. This is not meant to foreclose the possibility of non-binary/trans readings. Such approaches can help uncover new productive interpretations of medieval texts as well as providing strong affirmative support for trans visibility today.[38] But pronouns are contextual rather than essential. Given that my chapter focuses on Psellos' public defence and imagining of his own manhood, it makes sense to invoke Psellos' self-description as a man. Indeed, in this context it is arguably an act of respect towards Psellos' own complicated relationship to manhood to acknowledge his claim to

[36] This is not a label one encounters often in Byzantine or Western medieval historiography. It is used more often in the Early Modern context or in reference to Chinese history.

[37] See especially chapter 6: 'Female Voice: Gender and Emotion' in S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 192–231; E. N. Papaioannou, 'Michael Psellos' Rhetorical Gender', *BMGS*, 24 (2000), pp. 133–46; R. Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2020), pp. 110–11, 113–15.

[38] For two excellent examples of trans readings from the medieval West, see B. Gutt, 'Medieval Trans Lives in Anamorphosis: Looking Back and Seeing Differently (Pregnant Men and Backward Birth)', *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 55:1 (2019), pp. 174–206; M. W. Bychowski, 'The Necropolitics of Narcissus: Confessions of Transgender Suicide in the Middle Ages', *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 55:1 (2019), pp. 207–48.

masculinity through the use of masculine pronouns.[39] It is worth noting, however, that scholarly masculinity as a lens need not be applied only to men. They are the group which has by far the most access to appeals to manhood, but the masculine capital that results from education could very well be used to masculinise women and non-binary people.

Animals and the Formation of Masculinity

I also hope that this book will draw greater attention towards the importance of animals for the construction of gender. This has been extensively studied among Western medievalists but remains very much under the radar when it comes to Byzantinists, with many recent studies focusing instead on the use of animals as political metaphors or on their roles in activities such as hunting and agriculture.[40] Symptomatic of the attitude of the field is the following comment by Neville, who, in rightly highlighting the significance of intertextuality, understates that of animals, mentioning research on horses as an example of information that is less likely to contribute to our understanding of gender. She writes:

> The mismatch between our common reading of Medieval Roman texts and the authorial goals behind those texts is particularly significant for the study of gender because a great many of the ancient and biblical models have to do with the proper performance of gender for men and women. Interpretations of gender norms are far more likely to be skewed by surface readings of texts, than assessments of, say, the use of horses.[41]

As I have shown elsewhere, the use of horses or of their less noble counterparts, mules and donkeys, could have significant consequences for the gender of those riding them. These equids acted as carriers of political and gender rhetoric, and as their social and religious connotations interacted with the social and religious status of their riders, they had the

[39] Elsewhere, I have used they/them pronouns for Psellos to emphasise how he constructed his gender deviance as acceptable within cis manhood by contrasting himself to an abject transfeminine figure. See I. Maude and M. Perisanidi, 'Transmisogyny, Ableism, and Compulsory Cisness: Case Studies from Byzantium', *Past & Present*, 268 (2025), pp. tbc.

[40] On the Western Middle Ages, see studies by Karl Steel, including K. Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus, 2011); K. Steel, *How Not to Make a Human: Pets, Feral Children, Worms, Sky Burial, Oysters* (Minneapolis, 2019). For Romanía, see I. Anagnostakis, T. G. Kolias and E. Papadopoulou (eds.), *Animals and Environment in Byzantium (7th–12th c.)* (Athens, 2011); T. Schmidt and J. Pahlitzsch (eds.), *Impious Dogs, Haughty Foxes and Exquisite Fish* (Berlin, 2019); T. Schmidt, *Politische Tierbildlichkeit in Byzanz: Spätes 11. bis frühes 13. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 2020).

[41] Neville, *Byzantine Gender*, pp. 12–13.

potential to masculinise or emasculate.[42] Another excellent monograph that has taken the interaction between animals and gender seriously is Adam Goldwyn's *Byzantine Ecocriticism*.[43] I return to this in some detail in Chapter 2, where I discuss questions of animal domination and what happens when we are willing to imagine subjectivities where the human 'becomes-with' the animal.[44]

Throughout this book animals will appear in different guises: from dumb grazing beasts that act as a foil for the learned man, to emotional support pets who comfort scholars in their illness or keep them company during their studies, to hunted prey and hunting partners. They can be the recipients of scholarly praise, affectionate attention or bloody violence. As we will see, which role animals ended up playing on each occasion, and how grievable or worth living their lives were considered to be, had an impact on the masculine expression of those with whom they interacted.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1 focuses on Michael Psellos to explore his self-presentation as a scholar and a man in his *Chronographia*, orations and letters. I start with his centring of learning already from the moment of birth, and emphasise its importance for the different milestones that Psellos went through on his way to manhood. I compare the description of his learning to that of his mother and daughter, and discuss the ways in which he gendered education as masculine even in the case of women. Then, I examine how Psellos adapted and surpassed ideals of masculinity based on bodily strength, either by appropriating metaphors of physical prowess for the benefit of the scholar or by rejecting violent activities, such as hunting and fighting, in favour of learning. In doing so, I highlight how his treatment of domination differed markedly depending on whether he talked about military, religious or scholarly men. I also use the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and masculine capital to discuss what Psellos tells us about the gendering of violence more broadly in Eastern Roman society, and I revisit

[42] M. Perisanidi, 'Byzantine Parades of Infamy through an Animal Lens', *History Workshop Journal*, 90 (2020), pp. 1–24.

[43] A. Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism: Women, Nature, and Power in the Medieval Greek Romance* (Cham, 2018).

[44] K. Wright, 'Becoming-with', *Environmental Humanities*, 5:1 (2014), pp. 277–81, at pp. 279–80: 'Becoming-with is a form of worlding which opens up the frames of what registers to us and so what matters to us (in part by recognising what matters to others). For example, in becoming-dog one does not acquire fur or paws, but becomes attuned to a multiplicity of worlds through encounter with a new relational context – a doggish *Umwelt*.'

some of his most famous passages when it comes to the expression of emotion. More specifically, I argue that by flaunting his education and manipulating the image of the philosopher, Psellos accrues enough masculine capital to allow himself to incorporate emotional responses often characterised as feminine while extending the boundaries of acceptable male behaviour.

Chapter 2 broadens our perspective by examining Ioannes Tzetzes' letters and his *Chiliades*. I start by showing the similarities between Tzetzes' and Psellos' conceptions of gender: Tzetzes too considered education to be gendered masculine, used metaphors of physical prowess to describe his scholarly activities and rejected violence in favour of learning. Both scholars were happy to ride a mule instead of a horse and made no pretence about their riding skills. These characteristics, and other relationships that Tzetzes developed with the natural world, presented a challenge to hegemonic masculinity. A notable example is Tzetzes' expression of solidarity with animals: not only did he not hunt or kill them, but he often refused to eat them. In his collection of ancient stories, Tzetzes described animals as capable of friendship, affection, loyalty and grief, and praised their understanding of the world as in some ways superior to that of humans. He also used his affective connections with animals to justify his open expression of emotions and did not hesitate to grieve for humans, animals and plants. As this chapter shows, Tzetzes was not that different from Psellos and much of what united them stemmed from their scholarly endeavours. These connections prompt us to consider the lives of more Eastern Roman scholars along similar lines, studying them as a distinct category of men with shared masculine characteristics. At the same time, this chapter invites us to think about the animals, past and present, that have been involved in the construction of gender, and through its discussion of the blurring of human/animal boundaries, it encourages greater empathy with our natural environment.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the letters of Gregorios Antiochos to explore the scholar's gendered body. I show that, like Psellos and Tzetzes, Antiochos challenged the ideal of military masculinity, and he did so by attaching himself firmly to the image of the scholar. He juxtaposed the strong body of the soldier forged through physical exercise with the frail body of the learned man hunched over his books from a young age, and declared his preference for the latter. He also expressed his own relationship with books, and the furniture that facilitated his rhetorical work, in disability terms. They were his cane, staff, armrest and guides. They formed an extension of his body in a prosthetic way that enabled him to live a free and

independent life. When at points the connection with scholarship was severed, Antiochos felt truly disabled. A body in crisis emerged that was assailed by unwanted becomings, prime among them the possibility of becoming-horse (*alogon*) and losing his rationality. Antiochos, who experienced chronic illness from a young age, combined his own bodily feeling with the gender discourses we have seen at play in Tzetzes and Psellos to create a subversive image of the scholar. His association with books and learning allowed him to masculinise bodily weakness through references to the body of the scholar as an ideal. It is in Antiochos' writing that we see most clearly the power of scholarly gender identity as a group identity.

In Chapter 4, I use chronicles, hagiographies, *ekphraseis* and polemical treatises to discuss clerical hunting in Romanía. This is an underdeveloped area of study among Byzantinists, who either do not discuss clerical hunting or wrongly assume that all religious men were prohibited from it. Such prohibitions had existed for Western monks and clerics since Late Antiquity, but, as I show, there is not enough evidence to suggest that Romanía followed the same pattern. Given that teaching how to hunt was one of the main ways of educating the youth of the nobility, the fact that the experience of hunting could be shared between clerics and laymen had consequences for gender. Contrary to the situation in the West, in the Eastern Roman context, narratives of clerical hunting did not put the emphasis on differences between clerics and secular men and non-participation did not seem to entail the loss of masculine capital. Rather, the focus was on human/animal interactions as well as the need to avoid overindulgence, while the emphasis was the same whether the person involved was an emperor or a cleric. The criticism Eastern Roman clerics received was mostly symptomatic of other aspects of their life. The situation was, however, different for monks, whose ascetic life was more incompatible with the luxury involved in certain types of hunting, and we are reminded of the importance of paying attention to religious subdivisions. Finally, in this chapter I come back to the central role played by animals in gender construction: they were not simply seen as prey to be dominated by the manly man but could act as co-creators of the skills necessary for the hunt, leaving their traces on their co-hunters' subjectivity. At the same time, the malleability of Eastern Roman ideas about which animal lives were worth preserving allowed authors to strategically unify all men against the animal Other or to distinguish between different types of men, creating in the process hierarchies of masculinities.

In Chapter 5, I use canonical, historical and hagiographical sources to investigate the impact of prohibitions against violence on clerical

masculinity. I examine two clerical groups: those who committed acts of violence but wished to remain clerics and those who chose to abandon their religious status for secular or military life. I start with the prohibition against clerical participation in warfare, which was well inscribed in both Western and Eastern canon law. I note, however, a difference between the two: the Western medieval Church put more emphasis on bloodshed, while the Eastern Roman Church was more concerned with the clerics' state of mind and particularly the avoidance of anger. This meant that in Romanía, outside the strict prohibitions against killing, which clearly distinguished lay and clerical men, there was more of an overlap in the exercise of moderate force. This was the case, for example, with religious teachers, who could be no less violent than their secular counterparts. The situation was different when it came to clerics who wished to abandon religious life. In canon law, this topic was discussed in relation to dress, insisting on strict distinctions between religious and secular vestments. In histories, authors were more willing to accept such shifts with little comment, indicating that in practice religious status was characterised by a great amount of fluidity. This in turn suggests a more fluid expression of gender throughout one's life. Finally, the last part of this chapter focuses on Michael Khoniates' *Life* of Niketas, the eunuch bishop of Chonai, who fought both corporeal and invisible enemies. Although he avoided physical violence and used prayer as his primary weapon, he was presented as a manly protector of his flock. Indeed, Michael can be said to have exaggerated the masculinity of his eunuch to offset any associations with effeminacy. In doing so, Michael sustained the ideals of military masculinity, allowing us to see their limits in the case of a religious figure. At the same time, however, his description raises questions about the manliness inherent in the protective powers of a eunuch saint and the gendering of warfare more broadly.