



The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity (The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society)

Mathew Kuefler

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The question of masculinity formed a key part of the intellectual life of late antiquity and was crucial to the development of Christian society. This idea is at the heart of Mathew Kuefler's new book, which revisits the Roman Empire during the third and fifth centuries of the common era. Kuefler argues that the collapse of the Roman army, an increasingly autocratic government, and growing restrictions on the traditional rights of men within marriage and sexuality all led to an endemic crisis in masculinity: men of Roman aristocracy, who had always felt themselves to be soldiers, statesmen, and the heads of households, became, by their own definition, unmanly.

The cultural and demographic success of Christianity during this epoch lay in the ability of its leaders to recognize and respond to this crisis. Drawing on the tradition of gender ambiguity in early Christian teachings, which included Jesus's exhortation that his followers "make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," Christian writers and thinkers crafted a new masculine ideal, one that took advantage of the changing social realities in Rome, inverted the Roman model of manliness, and helped solidify Christian ideology by reinstating the masculinity of its adherents.

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