

## Reviews

Geoffrey Greatrex and Hugh Elton, with assistance from Lucas McMahon, *Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. Pp.xv, 341.  
DOI: [10.1017/byz.2015.17](https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2015.17)

This volume publishes a selection of 22 contributions from the tenth Shifting Frontiers conference, which was held in Ottawa in March 2013. As with other events in the series, the notion of frontiers is treated metaphorically, with the focus this time being on Genres, primarily but not exclusively literary genres. It is a good choice of topic, providing as it does an opportunity to reflect across a wide variety of genres on how scholarly approaches have evolved over the past half century. A generation ago scholars, inheriting a focus on genres from the study of classical literature in the 1960s and 1970s, could deploy the conventions of genres as explanations for why authors in Late Antiquity could, or could not, do certain things: for example the cessation of Greek historiography, both secular and ecclesiastical, was attributed to the genre boundaries which were so rigid that they could prevent potential authors from composing histories. Happily this has now changed, with the result that generic conventions have actually become a much more useful device through which to investigate texts, since it is now accepted that authors had the confidence to draw what they needed from a variety of sources.

The volume is divided into six sections: Homiletics & Disputation; Ecclesiastical Genres; Visual Genres; Procopius and Literature in the Sixth-century Eastern Empire; Technical Genres, and Other Literary Genres. Individual contributions, most of which are about a dozen pages, though one comprises only six, inevitably vary in their fit with this structure and their contribution to the overall theme of mutable generic boundaries, but in his brief introduction Geoffrey Greatrex creates a flexible framework that manages to embrace most treatments.

Under Homiletics we have papers on Medicine in the late fourth century, Ambrose's *De obitu Theodosii*, Jerome's *De viris illustribus* and the *Panarion* of Epiphanius. Tiphaine Moreau interestingly analyses the different elements that Ambrose combined to create a political homily that was relevant to a range of elements in his audience, while Colin Whiting plausibly argues that Jerome was compiling a handy reference work for Christians who needed to know what works were orthodox. In Ecclesiastical Genres there are contributions on Liberatus, Papal Decretals, the *Collectio Avellana*, Victor of Vita, and the Devil in ecclesiastical historiography. Philippe Blaudeau's significant analysis of Liberatus unravels the different influences on this work, which was developed to present essential background to the contemporary Three Chapters dispute. Geoffrey Dunn probes the emergence of a new genre, that of the authoritative Papal Decretal in the mid-fifth century, by considering how two letters of Pope Zosimus, composed before papal correspondence achieved this exalted status, subsequently came to be included in collections of formal Decretals. Dana Viezure argues that the papal letters included in the *Collectio Avellana* were designed as a coherent whole that affirmed the independence of popes as international leaders by deliberately excluding references to the Ostrogoths and their intrusions into papal affairs. The Visual section presents papers on aristocratic and imperial representation under the Tetrarchs and Constantine, Victory on coins around the end of the fourth century and Diptychs. Mariana Bodnaruk makes the unsurprising point that the choice of dress in public sculpture reflected the different images to be conveyed to viewers, while Christopher Doyle shows how *Victoria* on coinage that was intended to publicise successes, however illusory, gradually evolved into a Christian angel. Alice Christ offers an important analysis of diptychs that supports the rejection by Kathleen Shelton of the connection of the Young Office-holder diptych with the Stilicho family.

The Sixth-century section contains three papers on Procopius and one on perceptions of imperial success and failure. Federico Montinaro pursues his hypothesis that the short recension of Procopius' *Buildings* was composed before the long version. Unfortunately, this remains speculation and nothing in the current paper confirms Montinaro's view: comparison of the Prefaces is indecisive, and the discussion of Martyropolis reveals that the short recension is no closer to the nature of the strengthened wall, which I described a generation ago, than the full version.

Deployment of such arguments actually undermines confidence in the hypothesis. Charles Pazdernik analyses Totila's speech defending his strategy after Belisarius recaptured Rome in 547 in the context of Pericles' final speech in Thucydides, to demonstrate the complex intertextuality of Procopius' allusions to his historiographical model. Elodie Turquois investigates Procopius' use of technical language and descriptions, plausibly urging that these are just as relevant to the interests of his readers as to his own expertise. Finally Marion Kruse compares Justinian's explanation of Roman success in his *Novels* with the analysis of imperial failure in Zosimus and Jordanes.

The section on Technical Genres covers Military Manuals, employment contracts and ethnicity, the last clearly being a topic rather than a genre but whose inclusion is perhaps justified by exploitation of legal texts. Conor Whately tackles the issue of who read military manuals, developing an interesting argument that they were more than practical guides and so illumine the tastes of contemporary audiences. Christel Freu reviews the extensive evidence for labour contracts in Late Antiquity to argue, notwithstanding stylistic changes and emergence of new legal statuses, for substantial continuity with earlier employment arrangements. The final miscellaneous section embraces Cassiodorus' *Variae*, World Chronicles and Himerius. Shane Bjornlie argues that the *Variae* need to be seen as deliberately introducing encyclopaedic variety into a letter collection that idealises Ostrogothic administration; the result hints at the intellectual culture of the administrative elite to which Cassiodorus belonged. Sergei Markov considers the genre of World Chronicles as being defined by their Christian view of world history as a linear progression from the Creation rather than by a particular format or audience; this is undoubtedly plausible, though the chapter has little to say about late antique texts. Finally Edward Watts briefly highlights innovations in Himerius 8, a monody in which a traditional lament for the death of Himerius' son is interwoven with his personal situation in exile.

Different readers will find particular sections of greater or lesser interest, but there is much of value in this collection overall.

Michael Whitby  
University of Birmingham

Juan Signes Codoñer, *The Emperor Theophilus and the East, 829–842. Court and Frontier in Byzantium during the Last Phase of Iconoclasm*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies 13. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. Pp. xii+518.  
DOI: [10.1017/byz.2015.18](https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2015.18)

To the extent that history is about people, as well as being the politics of the past, political biography remains an essential way of reading and writing it. This is especially true for ancient and medieval societies, where autocratic rulers adopted high political profiles and the surviving written record is largely structured around their personal reigns. Yet the profiling of rulers in ancient and medieval sources presents the modern historian with a particular challenge, since it is all too often deficient in objective, coherent, incisive and contextualised explanations for political actions and decisions. Faced with the inadequacy of biographical information, scholarship since the nineteenth century on Roman and Byzantine emperors has opted for one, or a combination, of three approaches. One is to write a history of 'the age of X', in which the biographical narrative is subordinated to descriptive analysis of the geopolitical, social, economic and cultural context. Another is to foreground a biographical narrative that relies on a critical but positivist ranking and harmonisation of the sources, combined with intuitive conjecture to fill in the gaps of the evidence. Both these approaches are driven by the issues rather than the evidence. The third approach prioritises the evidence, or rather, it treats the evidence as the principal point at issue, and aims to provide the *prolegomena* for a biographical narrative, by subjecting the sources to exhaustive philological and narratological deconstruction.

Juan Signes' 500-page study of an emperor who ruled for thirteen years and died around the age of forty combines the second and third approaches. It answers the need for a biographical, narrative focus on a controversial, high-profile ruler who gave rise to an extraordinary number of anecdotes. Its overriding concern is to establish a correct chronological sequence for the crowded events of Theophilus' career. At the same time, it subjects the evidence for each event to an exhaustive, analytical review, so that the book reads more like a series of critical essays than a narrative synthesis. Although this does not make life easy for the reader, it is entirely justifiable, given the previous scholarship on Theophilus. In the state of this scholarship, the most pressing