

# *The Male Body and Social Masculinity in Premodern Europe*

Edited by Jacqueline Murray

In the premodern world, the male body and masculinity were inextricably entwined and imbued with ambiguity, mutability, and contradiction. Prevailing beliefs about the body rendered it unstable just as masculinity itself was ambivalent, in flux, and in a perpetual process of becoming. Masculinity existed only if it were recognized, acknowledged, and affirmed by other men who recognized it, acknowledged it, and affirmed it. The eleven essays in this volume provide an overview of the intersections between physical embodiment and social masculinity and demonstrate their mutability and mutual dependence. While physical prowess reinforced masculinity, social status could overcome bodily defects. Removing a physical sign of masculinity, such as cutting a king's hair, could also deprive the man of social and political status. Possession of a socially-valued quality, such as the strong heavenly voices of the *castrati* singers, allowed men to transcend their physical emasculation and enjoy social masculinity. Crossing premodern Europe, these essays examine how masculinity was constructed by external presentation, such as hair, musculature, sexual prowess, clothing, and honourable behaviour, or deconstructed through bodily defects such as virginity, impotence, castration, non-normative sexuality, or shameful behaviour. Together, they reveal the fluctuations that men experienced and explore how social and embodied masculinity intersected and could reconstruct or redefine masculinity as social and cultural values modified.

## Advance Praise

A deeply illuminating study that showcases the sheer variability and complexity of masculinity. Through original interpretations and fascinating details – from a “womanly” lord who sired a reported 1000 children to portraits of famous *castrati* to semi-public impotence trials – these authors show us how manhood in the past was every bit as mutable and contested as it is in our own modern world. An accessible and engaging collection that challenges any of our preconceived notions about what it means to be a man.

LEAH DEVUN, *Rutgers University*

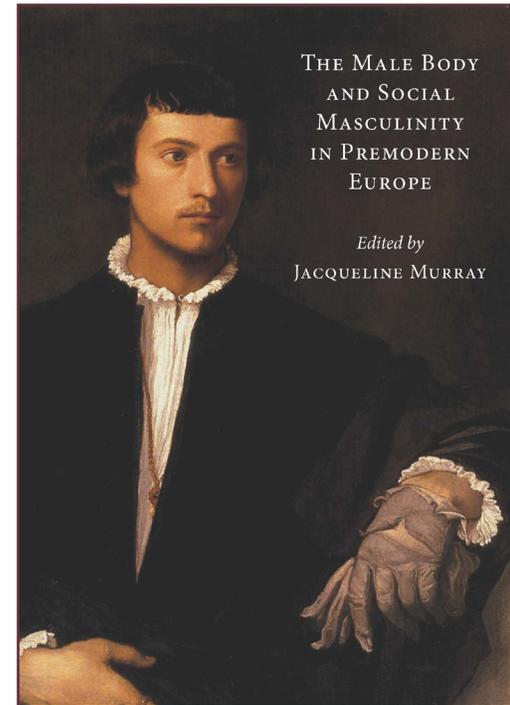
This wide-ranging and provocative collection makes a crucial intervention in the way we think about premodern masculinity, revealing it to be multi-faceted, complex, and even contradictory. Its insights speak not only to scholars of the past but to debates about masculinities today.

KARMA LOCHRIE, *Indiana University*

This innovative collection makes a crucial intervention in masculinity studies by challenging long-held assumptions about sexuality, economics, piety, and power in premodern Europe. The book guides the reader to look afresh on the premodern man without contemporary biases of normative gender behaviour. It will appeal to specialists and students of European early modern and medieval history and art history.

GERRY MILLIGAN, *College of Staten Island, CUNY*

JACQUELINE MURRAY is Professor of History at the University of Guelph where she also served as Dean of Arts. She has published widely on masculinity and male sexuality in the premodern world.



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