

WARTIME RAPE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

CONSACRATED VIRGINS AND VICTIM BIAS IN THE FIFTH - CENTURY WEST

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A SHORT SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLE

The paper examines some of the principal witnesses of the fifth century concerning the wartime rape. The main authors presented are:

Augustine, bishop of Hippo

Hydatius, bishop of Aquae Flaviae and chronicler

Paulinus of Pella, a man from the Christian élite of Gaul

Leo the Great, pope of Rome

Sozomen, historian of the Eastern Roman Empire

In the works of the previously mentioned authors, one can notice the greater consideration towards the violence endured by consecrated virgins. Some examples may be found in Augustine's report of the Visigothic sack of Rome (410) or in a letter sent by Leo the Great to the clergy of Mauretania after some raids committed by the Vandals (446).

Specific attention regarding this topic is mostly motivated by the turmoil brought in the ecclesiastic community by the rapes of holy women. Nevertheless, the whole community suffered the violence of war.



These accounts of the fifth century are mostly silent about the names of the victims. There is a widespread reluctance to delve into the details of the violence and the rapes, especially by the Christian authors.



Abduction and sexual violence were considered two sides of the same coin by Roman law. For instance, a man that payed the ransom for his ravished wife could not accuse her of adultery, implying thus a strong connection between her abduction and the rape.

THE COMPARISON WITH PROCOPIO'S WARS

The main sources selected by Ulriika Vihervalli reveal that violences and rapes were mostly endured by Roman and Christian women and committed by brutal barbarians in the aftermath of sieges and battles. Despite this, in the siege of Naples reported by Procopio, it was the Roman army the main perpetrator of the slaughter of many civilians and of the sack of the city.

Moreover, wartime rape and abduction is also presented in the paper as a premeditated and widespread weapon, useful to humiliate, subjugate and demoralize the enemy, which it is indeed. Nevertheless, in Procopio's perspective, the massacre of the men and the abduction of children and women by the Romans was functional to bring new order in the Gothic society.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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