

## ASPECTS OF RAPE IN ANTIQUITY

DEACY (S.), MAGALHÃES (J.M.), MENZIES (J.Z.) (edd.) *Revisiting Rape in Antiquity. Sexualised Violence in Greek and Roman Worlds*. Pp. xiv + 285, ill. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Cased, £130, US\$175. ISBN: 978-1-350-09920-3. doi:10.1017/S0009840X24001008

This volume updates and expands *Rape in Antiquity: Sexual Violence in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (edd. K.F. Pierce, S. Deacy [1997]). In contrast to the 1997 volume, this edition questions whether ‘rape in antiquity’ represents a concrete topic of scholarly investigation. Its authors explore ‘sexualized violence’, thereby expanding its focus to the aftermath of rape and ‘the contexts in which violence can become sexualized’ (p. 13). Its sixteen contributions, arranged thematically into five sections, use literary and material evidence ranging from mythology to Disney films, from pursuit scenes on Greek pottery to clerical texts in late antiquity, to examine acts of sexualised violence. Some authors bring new perspectives to well-trodden ground (e.g. the question of teaching Ovid’s rapes), while others branch out into new areas (Jane Holland’s *Boudicca & Co.*, for example). Together, these contributions advance the scholarly discussion of rape in antiquity by widening its focus to encompass other forms of sexualised violence.

The introduction by Deacy addresses head-on the criticisms raised in E.M. Harris’s 1997 review (*Echos du monde Classique: Classical views* 41.3, 483–6). She reflects on the previous volume’s accomplishments and shortcomings, noting in her summaries how each contribution engages with and diverges from the earlier essays. This edition addresses gaps in the earlier volume (wartime rape, Ovid, late antiquity, reception studies, pedagogy, explicit use of theory, and the lived experiences of women), although Deacy notes that the experiences of the enslaved as well as Roman sources are under-represented in the current volume; in this vein, I found that Latin elegy and New Comedy were conspicuous absences. She then explains this book’s shift in focus from defining and categorising rape to a broader understanding of ‘sexualized violence’ – which serves the volume well, though the term deserves more unpacking.

In Part 1, the contributions attempt to answer the titular question ‘Why Are We Still Reading Rapes?’ E.M. Harris re-examines Greek sources to uncover sympathy for rape victims: using Menander, Lysias, tragedy and the wall painting of Persephone at Vergina (among other sources), he concludes that readers (or viewers) are often invited to sympathise with rape victims and that sexual violence was a crime warranting severe punishment, which, however, depended upon the intention behind the crime, not the modern notion of consent. In the next chapter H. Ranger revisits the ethics of teaching Ovid’s rapes. Her argument falls squarely in the ‘radical feminist’ approach (most famously represented by A. Richlin’s reading of Ovid as metapornography: ‘Reading Ovid’s Rapes’, repr. in: A. Richlin, *Arguments with Silence: Writing the History of Roman Women* [2014], pp. 130–65): she argues that any ‘liberal feminist’ attempt to resurrect the female voice and thereby justify reading Ovid is hopelessly entangled in the text’s violence and in the structural inequalities of Classics itself (i.e. racism, classism and misogyny). She illustrates her point with an excellent reading of the contemporary South Korean novel *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang as a text that enjoins readers to consider the ethics of aestheticising sexual violence and their complicity in such violence. She ultimately sees teaching Ovid as a ‘process of acculturation’ (p. 37) that perpetuates systemic inequalities and concludes, somewhat pessimistically, that we cannot create ‘resisting’

readings of Ovid from within academia. The next chapter by R. Diver focuses on another modern audience of mythical rape: namely, children. In an insightful analysis of abridged versions of the myth of Io, she concludes that, while Io is not explicitly shown as a rape victim in myths for children, the stories' portrayals of gender norms and relations can still be formative for children's attitudes to sexuality and consent.

Part 2, 'Victims and Survivors', shifts the focus to cultural attitudes towards victims of sexual assault and pederasty. Building upon work on assault against women in ancient Athens (e.g. R. Omitowoju, *Rape and the Politics of Consent in Classical Athens* [2002]), Magalhães situates his exploration of the sexual assault of boys via Aeschines' *Against Timarchus* (among other textual sources) in a nuanced discussion of age and consent in antiquity. He persuasively concludes that, while a law explicitly forbidding statutory rape is not supported by the evidence, it was highly likely that cases of assault against prepubescent boys could be prosecuted under the law against *hybris*. N.S. Rodrigues also attempts to elucidate ancient attitudes to pederasty: he examines the evolution of the myth of Chrysippus to argue that Euripides likely portrayed the sexual relationship between Chrysippus and Laius negatively as rape in his lost play. Rodrigues's argument skilfully navigates the murkiness of pederasty in ancient Greece and situates it in the democratic socio-political context to consider various audience reactions to Euripides' version of the myth. The final chapter moves to late antiquity: U. Vihervalli incisively examines shifting clerical attitudes towards wartime rape survivors in the fifth century CE. She describes how Augustine addressed the fourth-century idealisation of suicide as a response to rape by separating a virgin's unwilling Mind from her defiled Body, while Leo the Great built upon Augustine's work by advising on the status of raped virgins in the clerical hierarchy. Her insightful conclusion addresses the shortcomings of these clerical responses for uncovering the lived experiences of women (e.g. victim blaming, the creation of an 'ideal' rape victim, the lack of female voices) and refocuses on the victims themselves, wondering if these attempts at consolation and reintegration were adequate responses to their trauma.

Part 3, 'Critiquing "A Series of Erotic Pursuits"', comprises three analyses of pursuit scenes on fifth-century red-figure pottery that question the productivity of framing ancient experiences through the term 'rape'. M. Serino carefully combines a structuralist analysis (after C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'A Series of Erotic Pursuits: Images and Meanings', *JHS* 107 [1987], 131–53) with a new sensitivity to archaeological context to read a series of pursuit scenes from Himera in Sicily as 'simulated' violence that alludes, through ritual, to the civic integration of young women through marriage. In the next chapter R. Osborne addresses the trend in vase painting towards anonymised pursuit scenes featuring Eros by contextualising it within a larger shift in visual imagery over the fifth century from action to contemplation. He concludes by considering what this shift can say about sexual behaviour, arguing that it represents a new emphasis on how the object of pursuit welcomes, or resists, sexual advances and on the concept of 'affective bonds' (p. 142). V. Rächle likewise examines pictorial markers for female agency in abduction scenes and reads them within contemporary understandings of female sexuality and rape. She gathers together scenes ranging from clearly unwelcome pursuit (e.g. satyrs and maenads) to 'abductions' that appear more like consensual marriage (e.g. Dionysus and Ariadne) to argue convincingly that, if the schema of erotic pursuit can portray such 'diametrically opposed concepts of gender relations' (p. 149), then pursuit scenes cannot reliably act as shorthand for rape.

The contributions in Part 4, 'Constructing Rape and Sexual(ized) Violence', expand definitions of rape using novel theoretical approaches. Deacy revisits her 1997 chapter on Athena: she moves away from her original reading of a patriarchal, yet sexually assaulted, Athena by using sexual conflict theory from evolutionary humanities to open

up space for more ambiguous readings. She proposes that, while Athena does not consent to sex, her behaviour (e.g. grinding the semen-soaked wool into Gaia, raising Erichthonios in her temple) suggests her agency and destabilises the categories of rape and consent. The next chapter by E. Groff similarly expands the definition of sexual violence as ‘violence aimed at sexuality’ (p. 184) (after J. Bourke, *Rape: a History from 1860 to the Present* [2007]) in a rich examination of the martyrdoms of Febronia and Mahya in the sixth-century Byzantine East. Groff compellingly argues that their torture was sexually charged because contemporary attitudes could not comprehend the female body apart from its reproductive, and therefore sexual, potential. M. Marturano makes fruitful use of the term ‘sororophobia’ (female-perpetuated violence stemming from internalised misogyny) (expanding upon H. Michie, *Sororophobia: Differences Among Women in Literature and Culture* [1992]) to expand the discussion on rape in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* by focusing on women who punish other women for being raped. After briefly considering Diana and Juno, Marturano expertly draws upon the less-discussed episodes of mortal women who sabotage other women (e.g. Clytie and Leucothoe) to argue that Ovid deflects the blame for and violence of rape from male rapists to jealous women. She also examines episodes of women who attempt to support the ‘sisterhood’ (e.g. Cyane) and are swiftly and violently punished, ultimately arguing that sororophobic women, and Ovid too, support patriarchal oppression.

The final section, ‘Coded Rapes: Now and Then’, deals with the ways in which rape is disguised in popular media or, in contrast, used as a poetic or rhetorical device. A. Mik uses the figure of the centaur to analyse how children’s and young adult literature convey the difficult topics of violence and rape to young people. After a survey of media ranging from Disney’s *Fantasia* to the *Harry Potter* series, she concludes that, while centaurs are sanitised in youth media, darker meanings can be uncovered by those familiar with the classical source material. K.F. Pierce similarly focuses on popular media: the portrayal of Helen in comic books. Pierce deftly examines images of the pivotal moment of her abduction (or seduction) in comics from the 1950s to today and contextualises these images of Helen within contemporaneous attitudes towards women in comic books. Her conclusion problematises such portrayals, particularly those of Helen’s extreme passivity, and discusses the welcome new trend of resurrecting female voices through comics. M. Johnson’s fascinating chapter reads Jane Holland’s portrayal of Boudicca in her poem *Boudicca & Co.* alongside Procne and Philomela from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as well as contemporary research on women’s roles in genocide and modern warfare. She emphasises themes of the abject, the carnivalesque and the spectacular in these episodes, arguing that Boudicca, in line with Ovid’s Procne and Philomela, destabilises the categories of rape: Holland’s Boudicca is ‘truly repellent; a sexual brute who has been brutalized sexually; a flawed, violent, psychopathic, recalcitrant victim-of-war; and one of war’s great victimizers’ (p. 247). Johnson’s eloquent chapter is classical reception studies at its finest, opening up new interpretative pathways for both contemporary and ancient literature, as well as for Boudicca as a historical figure. The final chapter by J.Z. Menzies also engages with Procne and Philomela: Menzies examines sexual violence as a rhetorical figure and its role in shaping Athenian civic identity via Demosthenes’ funeral oration. In portraying these women as defenders of their own sexual honour against a foreigner, she argues, Demosthenes recasts them as champions of democratic ideals.

The collection as a whole has some stand-out essays – I found those on late antiquity, Ovid and Boudicca particularly thought-provoking –, and its expansion to new sources and time periods is welcome. Some chapters (e.g. those on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* or the series on pursuit scenes) would also make excellent starting points for classroom discussion. While I wonder whether the focus on sexualised violence sidesteps the problems of a

volume on 'rape in antiquity', this very focus and its theory-informed approaches expand the semantic range of 'rape', while its broad array of sources pushes the boundaries of 'antiquity' – making it well worth the attention of scholars and teachers of sexualised violence worldwide.

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