

Ravishment of Women:
The Meaning of Ravishment in Medieval England

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The article 'The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England' by Caroline Dunn is correct in what it is explaining about medieval life. That overall in her article she says that is the actual use of the words *rapuit* or *raptus* can be seen as not rape but more as abduction. Dunn properly looks at primary sources and checks the use of the word *raptus* and shows how this is correct through graphs and tables.

One way to see that Dunn's article is correct about talking about ravishment in the medieval world is the sources that she uses. One of them is *"I will never consent to be wedded with you!": coerced marriage in the courts of medieval England* by Sara M. Butler which this paper has primary and secondary sources and like Dunn's paper talks about the abduction of women and how it was actually to help the woman in a abusive home situation.¹ She also uses primary sources like Henry VI Parliament of 1453 in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England* and documents from The National Archives.² With these she uses actual facts from when women were abducted for marriage and were rape and when these occurrences were just for escaping abusive households. Dunn has taken the time to research not only secondary sources but primary sources to make sure that what she is overall writing was the correct information that her readers can trust and use for future sources.

Dunn also uses in her article that women were being abducted but to save them from a terrible life at home, as used with her references to Chaucer and Malory. She also mentions

¹ Butler, Sara M. 2004. "'I will never consent to be wedded with you!': coerced marriage in the courts of medieval England." *Canadian Journal of History* 39, no. 2 247+.

² Dunn, Caroline. 2011. "The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England." *Speculum Vol. 86*, No. 1 79-116 .

how with these men are just seeking back their property as they are more as an asset to them.³

This can be confirmed with the article by Shannon McSheffrey and Julia Pope talking about a woman call Jane Boys who had gone willingly with her abductor Robert Langstrother.⁴ In going with her abductor, she is choosing what to do with her life, even if the reports of her father say otherwise. With this it can be seen what Dunn has said is true in her article as Malory has done the same for Joan Smith.

Another way she has used primary and secondary sources is with Dunn looking at the court not using raptus in rape cases where for primary sources she had gathered them and put together a chart to show the cases that have used and not used the words in order to talk about these cases. For the secondary sources Dunn uses articles from Ruth Kittel and Kim Phillips talking about the ravishment of virgins, which the two of them are scholars on the subjects. Dunn also uses for this case John Palsgrave who wrote a dictionary in 1852 of the proper spelling and use of these words in the document of court. More of the spelling with not using the word raptus is shown on a chart on page 108 and references to both primary and secondary sources which she had mentioned on page 83 and 84.⁵

Finally, even with Dunn's conclusion on her article she is still sourcing primary sources talking about the differences between being taken sexually or a female departing. That with her

³ Dunn, Caroline. 2011. "The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England." *Speculum Vol. 86, No. 1* 79-116 .

⁴ McSheffrey, Shannon, and Julia Pope. 2009. "Ravishment, Legal Narratives, and Chivalric Culture in Fifteenth-Century England." *Journal of British Studies Vol. 48, No. 4* 818-836.

⁵ Dunn, Caroline. 2011. "The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England." *Speculum Vol. 86, No. 1* 79-116 .

final conclusion Dunn is saying how in most cases of women being taken it's not sexually but husband's other families trying to get back their property. That these cases that were brought up in court was a mix between keeping woman safe from their attackers but in some cases from women trying to get away from family members.⁶

Dunn has looked at the use of these words from all sides not dismissing that there could be no cases on rape but that it was there but there needs to be more researched into the difference between the words. To know when it was a case of helping a woman or if this was a woman trying to escape her home with her relatives coming to court to try to get her back.

Overall, the article from Caroline Dunn is a credible source with numerous of primary and secondary sources in order to back her claims of the proper uses of ravishment in medieval court cases. With primary sources from actual court cases to primary sources that have also studied these primary sources it can be seen that Dunn has done the proper research in order for this article to be a credible source for readers to use in their papers. This can be seen with two other sources by Sara Butler and Shannon McSheffrey and Julia Pope confirming what Dunn was talking about all throughout her paper.

⁶ Dunn, Caroline. 2011. "The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England." *Speculum Vol. 86*, No. 1 79-116 .

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