

Gender Asymmetries and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean

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Slaves in Court: Strategies of Prosecution and Defence and the Making of Status, Gender, and Race Asymmetries in Premodern Venice (14th–18th Centuries)

When slave women were tried in court, the legal power imbalance could hardly be greater. In premodern Venice, slaves were considered the personal property of their masters and were therefore subject to the sole sovereignty and arbitration of their owners. Therefore, only cases that violated the authority and integrity of the slave owners went to court, i.e. when a slave was convicted of crimes such as theft and fraud, when a slave was caught in the act for having sexual contact (voluntarily or involuntarily) with a person not belonging to the master's household, or when a slave was accused for threatening her master through the use of violence. The Venetian jurisdiction, in return, was under the responsibility of the male nobility. Magistrates, scribes, and witnesses were all men. The slave women's experiences of physical and sexual violence as well as acts of social and ethnic discrimination in the masters' households can thus only be deduced when accidentally mentioned in passing for the record of the progression of events. The crime case files of the Venetian *Avogaria di Commun*, that are almost consistently handed down to us over a period of 450 years (1324–1791), provide us with a unique possibility to analyse patterns and observe shifts and changes in the strategies of prosecution and defence of the criminal court, the household masters and their accused female slaves. The paper will focus on the making and re-making of status, gender and race asymmetries between slaves and non-slaves. While a serial evaluation of data will show long-term trends and tendencies, selected court cases from different points in time will serve as starting point for micro-historical in-depth studies.

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Peril, Pleasure, Purity: Slavery and Sexuality in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean

In the early modern Mediterranean, captivity and enslavement were periods of sexual perils. Sexual exploitation, trafficking, and rape were common, and captives wrote extensively about the dangers of being exposed to sexual violence or behaviour that contemporaries considered illegitimate. In a world turned upside down, sexual assault feature prominently into captives' narratives. When writing about their experiences in captivity, captives prominently linked the transgression of social, religious, and sexual boundaries with notions of bodily and spiritual (im)purity. Among captives and slaves, sexuality epitomised the dangers that servitude posed for the purity of the soul and body as much as the corrosion of legitimate sexuality and morals when living among "infidels" in foreign lands. Many such stories of suffering still await to be uncovered from the archives and many more, most certainly, have not entered archival records at all. This paper highlights a few cases that showcase a different perspective, though, namely positive, empowering, and pleasurable sexual experiences during slavery, as well as the perils of sexuality upon former captives' return to home.

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Pregnancy and Motherhood: Gendered Experiences in (Her)-Stories of Enslavement

Pregnant women and young mothers were prone to enslavement because their capacity to bear and to birth a child had become obvious already. The capacity to give birth – I will argue along a few case studies – is a key factor in gendered experiences of enslavement and also in gendering practices of enslavement and during slavery. However, to become pregnant during slavery has rarely been a peaceful event, but was most often the result of (serial) sexual violence. This tension between violence and pregnancy (i.e., the urge to keep a pregnancy and the baby alive) is not limited to slavery but a dimension of female experience throughout human history. Therefore, my paper will address the tension between the individual and the collective – as Trauma Studies have lately suggested, in order to entangle the analysis of violence in contexts of strong asymmetrical dependency.

discussants: TAMAR HERZIG (University of Tel Aviv), ZUR SHALEV (University of Haifa), ROSITA D'AMORA (Salento University, Lecce)