

Abstract

War was not an uncommon experience during the European Middle Ages. In particular, the Hundred Years War, a century-long conflict between England and France, encompassed all of the expected calamities associated with prolonged military conflict. This subject has been well studied by medieval historians, especially with regard to the subject of military strategy, conquest and transformation. The subject of sexual violence during this conflict, however, has been given little attention. Historians are well informed about the frequency of rape and sexual assault by enemy soldiers as a form of military dominance. While such violence occurred during the Lancastrian occupation of Normandy (1415-1453), both native men and English immigrants committed acts of rape outside of military action. Through an examination of the unpublished ecclesiastical court records of fifteenth-century Rouen, and the letters of remission produced by the incarcerated, I argue that sexual violence functioned as a way for both native men and English conquerors to prove their masculinity by the physical domination of women. This domination included coerced marriages between English men and native women. English men from all ranks, from soldiers to clerics, sought native women as partners in order to assimilate themselves into local society, and to ensure their dominance over the French. French men committed acts of rape and sexual violence as public demonstrations of manliness. Finally, I argue that sexual violence might better be understood by medieval historians as a broader category that extends beyond forcible rape to include coerced marriages such as these.