

In a university seminar course that I designed, “Women and Warfare in Antiquity and the Modern Day,” I have developed a six-week section of the course that focuses on comparing the historical memory of mass rape through military aggression in the twentieth and twenty-first century with the sketchier but substantial historical memory of the same in the ancient world spanning from the Bronze Age through late antiquity. My students and I start with modernity, and specifically with searing testimonials from those women and girls who have lived to tell about their experience of this en masse assault. In my class we call these “Readings from the Historiographic Revolution,” because these first-person experiential voices of women and girls have been elicited and recorded for the first time in the history of civilization starting only as of the twentieth century, and primarily since the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, with but a few pioneering female testimonials dating to the Balkan Wars of 1913-1914 (Stiglmyer 1994, Vranic 1994, Human Rights Watch 1995, 2000).

From this contemporary vantage point grounded in first-person experience, I then guide my students to explore the ancient historical precedents for this practice as presented in a variety of genres of Greek, Roman, and biblical sources, including history, epic, drama, lyric poetry, oratory, political philosophy, epigraphy, and iconographic sources. From this exploration of ancient evidence, my students learn how the practice of en masse sexual assault against captive women and girls in antiquity was recurrent, ethnically diverse, and not the exaggerated trope of one particular genre, such as tragedy or oratory. The practice was recurrent because it is attested in three or more eras from the Bronze Age through the Byzantine Empire. Second, it was ethnically diverse because different armies (e.g., Greek, Israelite, Illyrian, Roman) subjected captive women and girls to en masse sexual assault. Third, this military norm of mass rape is attested independently in three or more different genres or kinds of sources, and hence cannot be written off as sensationalist.

Given the deep historical roots of mass rape in military conquest, we then explore what the purposes were for the practice, why these roots are not better known, and why this subject has rarely—and for most of my students never—been raised in the classroom before, even though a good number of students in the course have already read some of the key ancient sources relevant to this topic, including Homer and Herodotus. One reason why, as I demonstrate to my students in a special lecture titled “Rape Happens,” is that contemporary historians of ancient warfare for the most part are brief in their treatment of the gang rape facet of warfare, and they do not try to integrate this sexual violence into the larger picture of ancient warfare and its devastating social effects in antiquity (Chaniotis 2005, van Wees 2004 and 1999, Ducrey 1999², Pritchett 1991, Schaps 1983, Harris 1979).

In light of this historical grounding, my students and I then return to the modern day to study how en masse sexual assault against girls and women persists as a social crisis and humanitarian concern in, for example, Darfur and Congo. For this we access key documents on the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International websites. At this point we explore primarily three topics: 1) similarities and differences in how mass rape is represented, understood, and practiced in the modern day as opposed to antiquity; and 2) how activist scholars, international law specialists, and journalists often reveal scant awareness about the history of mass rape in warfare going back to the *Iliad* and even prior; and 3) what needs to be done to raise this awareness.