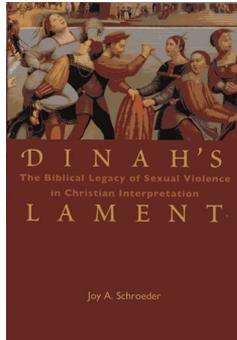


○ **REVIEW OF JOY A. SCHROEDER, *DINAH'S LAMENT: THE BIBLICAL LEGACY OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION***
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Had I realized when I offered to review this book that this was a study of Christian interpretation spanning the period 150 to 1600 C.E. and not that of today, I might not have sent off my email response. What I would have missed! This book ties interpretation to context with immediate relevance for today, as well as providing such a guide through the commentators of the period that I was fully absorbed from beginning to end. Although this is one of a number of recent reception history studies, the author is not a biblical scholar but a church historian, and a feature of the book is the wide range of early material that she has managed to access: sermons, letters, and priests' handbooks, as well as hagiographies and popular literature of the time. One of the most fruitful sources is the *Glossa ordinaria*, a Vulgate text with interlinear and marginal glosses dating from 1100s. As would be expected most, though not all, of these works were written by clergy for clergy; a few journals and letters written by women provide another view.

Schroeder skillfully guides the reader through centuries whose worldviews and assumptions about the meaning of virginity, chastity, and women's place in the home were significantly different to mine. If I was surprised to find women, who differed significantly from their male counterparts in their attitudes towards the victims of rape, voicing some of the same gender assumptions, I needed to be reminded that they too were shaped by the cultural understandings of their world, just as we are by ours. At the same time some of the views expressed in these early centuries were disturbingly similar to those one still hears: Richard of St Victor (d. 1173) was not alone in his view that women even enjoy rape nor would he be entirely alone today. And that question that is raised so often in cases that come before the law: was the women complicit? The complexities of interpretation and the complexity of cultural values are well explored. I came away with some hard thinking.

The texts chosen are familiar texts of terror, of women violated or threatened with violence, or, in the case of Potiphar's wife, enticing the man and making a false rape charge. As the mater-

ial is largely from the Western Latin-speaking church, with most of the writers using the Vulgate, the key term covering these narratives is *stuprum per vim* (forcible intercourse), ‘as the term was understood by our patristic, medieval, and Reformation authors’ (p. 2). The book opens with the Dinah narrative. Whereas there has been much discussion recently as to whether Dinah was indeed raped, the Vulgate closed any doubt with its translation that Shechem overcame her *vi* (by force). What was the implication of this for Christian interpreters? What follows is a wide-ranging illustration of the differing modes of early biblical interpretation. The examples would provide an excellent resource for any class studying this particular period. Within the allegorical and moral readings the variations intrigue: Dinah is the soul prone to seduction by Satan, the sinful soul straying beyond the proper boundaries, the curious soul, for curiosity is the first of twelve sinful steps, according to Bernard of Clairvaux. Schroeder adopts Elizabeth Clark’s term, ‘ascetical exegesis,’ for such readings addressed to monks, nuns and consecrated virgins: ‘Dinah’s rape serves as a cautionary tale about the destruction that awaits the person who heedlessly ignores the path of virtue’ (p. 14). For some interpreters the fact that she went out to see the women of that region, serves as a lesson about custody of the eyes.

One gains a sense both of the life lived in the monasteries and convents and in the secular world as well. Certain charges move from the cloister to the ordinary life outside: curiosity, for example, ‘is a very great vice, blameworthy in the female sex,’ according to Wolfgang Musculus writing in the sixteenth century (p. 49). One senses too the lives of individual men and women: Jerome writing to Eustochium and the mother of Paula the younger about the dangers of going out from home and joining bad company, Abelard having Dinah sympathize with Shechem, Luther, the father of daughters, imagining Dinah wanting to go out and see how the other young women were dressed. He may be addressing sixteenth century parents, yet his message is similar to those of the earlier allegorists: young women are to stay at home, for Satan lies in wait! Although Schroeder notes that his ‘fatherly’ reading has ‘a fairly different tone among most of the other reformers’ (p. 41). So ‘fatherly’ in fact, that, as she points out, his sympathy is more with Jacob, the father. The complexities and tensions between the writer’s own experience and the values of the day are clear in Abelard’s poem, where Dinah both excuses Shechem and lays the blame on herself: ‘Ravished [raptus] by my beauty, you were forced ([coactus] to ravish [rapere] me’ (p. 29). There are also the intriguing variations: Zwingli, for example, reading from the Hebrew, takes the imperfect form to imply that Dinah often went out unsupervised!

Chapter two considers the stories of the early martyred Christian virgins. Changes of attitude follow changes of context. Whereas in the early centuries of persecution the rape of women martyrs could be understood as the fate of the faithful, once persecution ended, the reverse became the case: the faithful virgin could not be assaulted against her will. Schroeder argues that the ‘divine protection of virginity served to emphasize Christ’s role as spouse and protector of ascetic women, his virgin brides,’ the corollary being that ‘when rape occurs, the victim must have consented ... or somehow failed to merit the divine favor’ (p. 58). Some of the examples are chilling: a fourth century letter to a rape victim declares, ‘Truly the flesh cannot be corrupted unless the soul were corrupted first,’ and asks, ‘How will you show your face before Mary, Thecla, Agnes, and the unspotted chorus of purity?’ (p. 76). So the tales of miraculous and providential escapes. And the question of concern: could a raped woman be considered morally pure or was she now stained? The loss of the hymen becomes a major issue if it is protected by Christ the jealous bridegroom. Although the overriding purpose of these tales was to regulate

the lives of women, Schroeder draws on women's writings to show that this was not always successful: the accounts of Christina of Markyate and Margery Kempe indicate that some women managed their lives on their own terms while still adhering to the notions of faithful virginity, while Marguerite of Navarre's novellas openly challenge the assumptions surrounding rape and the victim's complicity.

Chapter three is the horror story of horror stories: the dismembering of the Levite's concubine. Is it surprising that all the commentators accessed here are male? Or, thankfully, that this was one tale that was not used to regulate the lives of women? But it was used as a vehicle of several disturbing theologies. Chapter four focuses on the rape of Tamar, which Schroeder notes repeatedly raised questions, particularly about her request to her brother Amnon to marry her, which receive widely varying answers. Interpretations addressed to women warn them not to be alone with a man, and to be wary of priests (understood as brothers).

The final texts are those of Potiphar's wife and Susanna, both women who, like Tamar, speak out. Schroeder's opening paragraph makes the disturbing point that, in the eyes of these early commentators, 'a woman who speaks about sexual violence cannot be trusted. Only silent, passive women are trustworthy, and they are protected by God' (p. 191). Potiphar's wife, of course, was neither passive nor silent; she was both deceitful and sexually provocative. A narrative of a woman crying rape when there was no rape openly called for the woman's condemnation. Frequently likened to the woman of Proverbs 7, she is used as a warning to both men and women by writers from Ambrose to the Reformers, Ambrose writing '[t]he words of a lascivious woman are the snares of lust,' whereas Joseph, the model of the chaste man, could not be tempted (p. 196). Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry uses her to warn his daughters of the dangers of adultery but has to provide her with a suitably unhappy ending. Allegory allowed the expression of anti-Semitism: Potiphar's wife is the Synagogue and Joseph the Christ. For some commentators, Joseph's beauty also features, but mostly it is the woman who tempts. Luther's gap-filling provides such dramatic details as Joseph having to move his bed to avoid her coming to him at night!

Schroeder pairs this story with that of Susanna, known from the Theodotion version. She, of course, becomes a model of piety for women; in fact, she is the example of that belief discussed in chapter two; the chaste virgin protected by her bridegroom Christ. But there is a problem: Schroeder highlights the struggles of the commentators, beginning with Jerome, to turn Susanna's loud cries into the silent prayer more appropriate for women. For Jerome '[h]er voice was great, not with the vibrations of the air or the shout of her throat, but with the greatness of her *modesty* with which she cried out to God.' So, too, Ambrose, 'in keeping silence before humans she spoke to God' (p. 211). Daniel is permitted to cry out with a *magna voce*, but not Susanna. As Schroeder points out, '[w]hen a commentator goes to great lengths to deny the plain meaning of the text, it is frequently because the text is disturbing to the interpreter and an important issue is at stake' (p. 214). Not surprisingly women commentators such as Christine de Pizan, Lucrezia Tornabuoni and Argula von Grumbach are not so concerned: Susanna does indeed cry out, rather than keep silent about the truth. As she also does in a poem that probably circulated among the Wycliffe followers, who, Schroeder suggests, may have heard in Susanna's cries a cry of protest against their own persecutors. But the overwhelming message delivered through both these biblical tales was that women could accuse men unjustly, and that women's silence is the ideal.

The final chapter discusses the portrayals of sexual violence in art, with some beautifully reproduced illustrations. I had not been aware of the medieval use of stylized gestures to represent

actions and emotions, so this chapter provided keys to decode some of what I was seeing. Other illustrations were graphic enough on their own, some with sexual details allowing the viewers 'to become voyeurs of the women's eroticized suffering' (p. 236).

I would most warmly recommend this book for any course discussing early biblical interpretation, the ethics of reading, texts about women, and the response to sexual violence and rape. It is about ancient interpretation and yet it is so timely for the world in which we live.