
Galla Placidia as 'Human Gold': Consent and Autonomy in the Sack of Rome, CE 410

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How can we understand female experience when it is refracted through the lens of male writers? This is a perennial problem for the lamentably discrete section of historians who are in search of women's history, but in other areas of historical scholarship this issue of unconscious bias and its implications have not been fully recognised.¹ The lack of recognition of the gender bias in ancient historiography has had particular implications for critical understandings of the early biography of the Roman empress Galla Placidia (c.388–450) (see Figure 1).² Placidia was caught up in the sack of Rome in CE 410, when hostile Visigoths besieged and invaded the city.³ Only sparse details can be gleaned from the historical record and the circumstances of her capture are far from clear, but Placidia was forcibly taken by Visigothic forces from the looted capital either as part of the sack in 410, or during events that preceded it.⁴ Perhaps as long as six years after her initial capture, the Visigothic king Athaulf took Placidia in marriage. In CE 415 Placidia gave birth to a child; but by the following year the child was dead, Athaulf had been murdered, and Placidia had been 'returned' to her brother, the Emperor Honorius.⁵ Gender dominates the foreground of the historical narrative, but Placidia has so far largely escaped the scholarly trend of gender-orientated revisionism of late antique and Byzantine history.⁶ These events have only been approached along the lines of traditional ancient history which builds a male-specific narrative, based on sources written by men, and focused on the experiences and values of men; as Stanley Burstein notes, women and their experiences are at best incidental to these narratives.⁷ The lack of critical attention to Placidia's early life and the absence of challenging bias in scholarly approaches has had stark consequences for our understanding of Placidia's experiences: she has not been perceived as a victim of war-ravaging, the violence and coercion she would have been subject to during her capture has not been considered, and her consent or its absence to marriage and sex has been disregarded.⁸

In methodological terms, this article confronts the politics of the version of the past established by ancient writers and received in continuity by scholarship. The absence of deconstruction in scholarly approaches has produced a homogenised version of the early biography of Placidia transmitted from antiquity to modern criticism. This article revisits the ancient evidence, finding alternate interpretations not only in the extant source material but by reading meaning into the absence of discussion from key sources. Such absences can be seen as a clear authorial choice: where historical

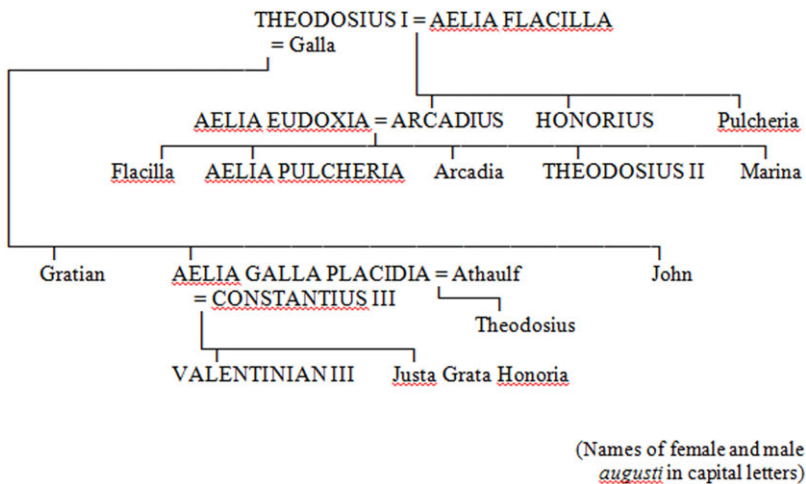


Figure 1: The Theodosian Dynasty [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

details are perceived as disruptive and cannot be manipulated to complement authorial ideologies, they are discarded. Simply recognising these absences is a valuable activity from which we can derive meaning and knowledge. Female silence in history is usually understood to signify complicity rather than resistance; no objection from Placidia is recorded, but the notion that we should necessarily assume her complicity is resisted here. Placidia and her experiences are instead centralised as far as possible, challenging the automatic credibility of the sources by exposing gender bias and representation based on typology.⁹ Female agency and consent are important areas for revisionist activity and this article contends that female consent – to movement, marriage or sexual intercourse – should not be automatically assumed. Such a shift in critical perspective is essential when the context increases the likelihood of violence, rape, captivity and forced marriage, as the violent conflict of the sack of Rome in CE 410 would have done. A more nuanced approach to female consent has the potential to transform our understanding of Placidia's early biography as well as relations between Romans and Visigoths in the early fifth century and the nature of politically motivated marriage alliances.

A fundamental shift in critical perspective on Placidia is long overdue. This article challenges established notions about Placidia with the leverage of a methodology that is comparative and theoretically underpinned. Reconceptualising Placidia not only as the wife of a Visigothic king but as a war captive who was forcibly married can be furthered through engagement with theories and studies of gendered violence within ancient and modern warfare. This article builds particularly on the work of Kathy L. Gaca, who shows that the weight of ancient military studies often fails to recognise the wider context of warfare which extends beyond the battlefield.¹⁰ This includes sexual violence and populace ravaging, which has particular consequences for women, girls and children. Gaca argues persuasively that it is inadequate to regard ancient ravaging warfare 'simply as men's business of exercising lethal force on one another'.¹¹ Her research on ravaging warfare in ancient societies sees beyond the androcentric

paradigm of military conflict by foregrounding the treatment of these marginalised groups. Gaca's research is relevant here because it is unique in comprehending warfare ravaging from archaic Greece to the modern day, informed by modern theories of violence within warfare as well as approaches to the ancient past.¹² Modern scholarship has emphasised the continuities of sexual violence and ravaging within warfare throughout human history: the phenomenon of rape within warfare is understood to be transhistorical, and research into ravaging warfare focused on diverse periods of history has greater transferability as a result. Gaca builds on the historical continuities with effective comparative analysis of ancient and modern examples, including the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict (1992–5), the terrorising of Yazidi women in 2014 and the Rwandan genocide in 1994.¹³ A greater comprehension of sexual violence in the ancient past can be achieved if we venture into what might be uncomfortable scholarly territory: taking a multi-disciplinary and comparative approach, reading out from silences in the evidence, and challenging accounts provided by ancient authors enables a more balanced and accurate understanding of Placidia's experiences as a war captive and a 'spear-won bride' (*δορῖκῆτος*).¹⁴

Competing ideologies and ancient representations of the marriage

The historical evidence for Galla Placidia's early life and forcible marriage is characteristically understood as problematic: the surviving sources are often dismissed as partial, fragmentary and laconic.¹⁵ We know when Placidia was born but not where, or where she was buried. It is unclear exactly when Placidia was captured during the Visigothic sack, by whom, and under what circumstances, or why she was in Rome in the first place. No portraiture that can be securely identified as Placidia survives from antiquity. As Liz James has highlighted, '[c]ontemporary historians recorded dates that mattered: and those relating to women clearly came low down on that scale, indicating that such dates were of little or no relevance to the purposes of the writers of the time'.¹⁶ The nature of the sources and their ideological agendas mean that the lived experience of Galla Placidia is repressed, leaving us with a peculiarly one-sided and sterilised narrative. In order to achieve a more balanced and informed understanding of the capture and marriage of Placidia, it is essential to pick apart the partial narratives as presented by ancient writers.

Contemporary responses to the marriage between Placidia and Athaulf perceived the union in idealistic and heavily providential terms, overlaid with a significance determined by the competing ideologies of writers. The marriage is attested in various ancient sources including Paulus Orosius, the chroniclers Hydatius and Prosper, the church historian Philostorgius and Jordanes.¹⁷ Olympiodorus of Thebes, writing in his (now fragmentary) history in the first half of the fifth century, shows considerable interest in Placidia and devotes most attention to the marriage, delineating the wedding ceremony in some detail.¹⁸ Olympiodorus transforms the marriage from a difficult historical detail into an event, and one that is at least ostensibly happy and festive. He records that an elaborate Roman ceremony was held in the house of Ingenuus, a nobleman of the city of Narbonne, southern Gaul. Both Placidia and Athaulf wore traditional Roman dress, with Athaulf's garments including a Roman general's cloak. In a subversion of the traditional dowry, Athaulf's wedding gifts to Placidia included fifty handsome young men dressed in silk clothes carrying gold and precious stones looted

from the sacked city of Rome. As at a traditional Roman wedding, songs were sung, first by Priscus Attalus, whom Athaulf had promoted as emperor, and then by other Gallic noblemen. Olympiodorus notes that the ceremonies were completed by celebrations from Romans and barbarians together. Olympiodorus's purpurate description of the wedding ceremony cannot be understood as a typical example from antiquity: it is heavily distorted by the ideological objective to display the marriage as thoroughly Roman, and the barbarian king as thoroughly Romanised. Through dress, ritual and display, Olympiodorus's depiction of the ceremony functions as a firm restatement of Roman cultural hegemony: Athaulf is transformed from barbarian to Roman, and Placidia wholly retains her status as a Roman, not Gothic Queen.

Olympiodorus's depiction of the wedding ceremony projects an ideal of harmony and peace between Romans and Goths, where Roman culture was readily received by the barbarians and was not compromised by any aspect of barbarity. But Olympiodorus was not alone in his inclination to read a deeper significance into the union. Writing in his *Historiae adversus paganos* around three years after Placidia's marriage to Athaulf (c. CE 417), Orosius represented her capture and marriage as an afterthought. Orosius details Alaric's invasion (*irruptio*) of the 'fearful city' (*trepida Roma*), describing the reaction to the sack (*nihil factum*), and weighing it against other historical disasters Rome had suffered.¹⁹ It is only once the historical narrative has moved on from the sack that Orosius admits the detail of Placidia's capture and marriage to Athaulf.²⁰ Orosius represents the marriage in uncompromisingly positive terms: 'Placidia . . . was captured and taken to wife by Athaulf . . . as if, by divine decree, Rome had given her as a hostage and special pledge; thus, by her marriage with this most powerful barbarian king, she was of great benefit to the state'.²¹ Orosius depicts Rome as the dominant force in the circumstances in which Placidia is captured and married. Placidia is given as a 'special pledge' (*speciale pignus*) in accordance with the providence of God (*diuinus iudicium*); neither the agency of the Goths, nor Placidia, is evident. Placidia is represented by ancient authors as voiceless and entirely passive. Her behaviour is wholly determined by others. Placidia is captured (*capio*) by the Goths, taken as a wife by Athaulf (*uxorem adsumpta*), given by the Romans (*traditio*), all as part of a grand narrative orchestrated by God. When Athaulf determines to obliterate the Roman empire, replacing it with a Gothic empire (*Romania* for *Gothia*), it is 'the persuasion and advice of his wife, Galla Placidia' that deters him from this clearly erroneous path.²² For Orosius the sacrifice of Placidia in her capture and marriage is an essential part of the divine plan for the Gothic harmonisation with Rome, the empire chosen to endure until the end according to Orosius' eschatological vision of the past, present and future.

In Olympiodorus and Orosius we find two important sources that are exceedingly partial, representing the marriage according to their ideological agendas, and seeking to mitigate the conflict and tension between Rome and the occupying Visigothic forces in the extreme. Olympiodorus and Orosius are not alone in reading a significance into the union that extends far beyond the mundane.²³ Both the fifth-century chronicler Hydatius and the Church historian Philostorgius understand the marriage between Placidia and Athaulf in prophetic and apocalyptic terms, through biblical allusion to a prophecy in the book of Daniel (11:6). Hydatius presents Athaulf as the king of the north who was preordained to marry a daughter of the south, here Placidia.²⁴ The text of Philostorgius's *Church History*, written in the late fourth or early fifth century,

is impaired by lacunæ at the crucial place, but it is evident that the text also alludes to a prophecy of Daniel (2:31–45): the strength of the kingdom of iron (intended to be understood as Rome) is mixed through marriage with the brittleness of clay (the Goths).²⁵ The grand eschatological imaginings conjured by Orosius, Hydatius and Philostorgius contrast significantly with the Byzantine historian Zosimus's approach: despite covering historical events up to CE 410, the details of Placidia's marriage to Athaulf, the birth of Theodosius, and her eventual release, are neglected entirely.²⁶ Zosimus, writing in the early sixth century, gives Placidia the briefest of mentions, observing that she concurred with the Roman senate in condemning Serena, the wife of Stilicho, and that she was later a hostage of Alaric: 'The emperor's sister, Placidia, was also staying with him [Alaric], and although she was only a hostage she enjoyed every honour and the attention due to a member of the imperial family'.²⁷ Zosimus's version of events may lack elaboration and sensationalist spin, and in its plainness seem closer to reality, but it is not a fair representation. The absence of detail about Placidia's capture during the Visigothic sack and her marriage to Athaulf does not accurately reflect the significance of these events.

Zosimus is not the only ancient writer who deliberately ignores Placidia's experiences of warfare, captivity and forced marriage. The catastrophe of the sack of Rome demanded the considerable textual attention of Augustine of Hippo, yet nowhere does he make reference to or discuss the capture and forced marriage of Placidia. Both Augustine and Orosius were prompted to compose their most significant works by the sack in the decades following, and yet their responses to Placidia's captivity at enemy hands are markedly different.²⁸ Augustine's reticence on the topic is especially notable as he is the ancient writer who engaged most with the issue of the implications for the populace of the sack, especially women and sexual violence.²⁹ For Jerome in Bethlehem, the sack was a considerable shock and was nearly beyond credibility: 'Who would have believed that Rome, which was built up from victories over the whole world, would fall; so that it would be the mother and the tomb to all peoples'.³⁰ But like Augustine, Jerome did not exploit the capture of Placidia as an obvious symbol of failure and loss in his rhetoric of lament and catastrophe. Reading out from an absence of evidence can be a familiar methodological exercise for those studying women in antiquity, and the absence of discussion from key sources like Jerome, Augustine, and Zosimus makes an important contribution to the representation of Placidia and our understanding of events. Although the motivations behind elision are too complex and multifaceted to be discussed here, it is important to recognise the conscious authorial decisions involved in suppressing details of Placidia's early biography that are perceived as difficult or disruptive to individual authorial ideologies.

There is, however, one exception in the prevailing discourse of manipulation, elision or idealisation in the presentation of Placidia's capture and marriage. Written by an anonymous author who composed a series of short imperial biographies during the second quarter of the fifth century, a brief biography of Honorius does not represent Placidia's capture and marriage in positive or providential terms:

The state suffered many severe wounds during his [Honorius'] reign. The most biting was the capture and ruin of the city of Rome by Alaric, king of the Goths. The sister of the emperor, the Augusta Placidia, at first a captive and then, it is true, the wife of a king but a barbarian one, is a blot on the public life of the times.³¹

Little is known about this source, and the paucity of detail here provided does not differ from other pieces of evidence that describe Placidia's capture and forced marriage. However, the source constitutes a significant anomaly in the historical record, demonstrating that these events were not universally conceived of in positive terms: Placidia as a hostage and then bride of a barbarian king was the worst occurrence during the reign of Honorius, and a 'stain' (*decolorat*) on the times. Placidia as the wife of a king, but a barbarian one (*sed barbarus*), betrays a status anxiety that echoes in Olympiodorus's concerted efforts to represent the wedding ceremony as transformationally Roman. Olympiodorus and Orosius are at pains to suppress the idea that Placidia married the wrong sort of elite leader, but perhaps as a more cogent interpretation, it would inevitably surface somewhere in the historical record. With this exception, ancient re-imaginings of the marriage contrive to read a providential, aetiological, and apocalyptic significance into the union, assimilating it within an overarching narrative of harmony between the Goths and Romans. The representation of the marriage in these partisan terms is almost complete, and is overwhelmingly perceived as being in no way negative or detrimental.

Denial and distortion in the historical narrative

We can, however, see that Athaulf's decision to take Placidia in marriage was grounded in a very different historical reality, occurring within a period of momentous turmoil and change. The determined positivity in the sources is not able to diminish the scale of the catastrophic political failure of the western government and the marriage can be seen as 'a tacit assertion of Roman powerlessness in the face of Gothic military might'.³² The sack of Rome signified a loss of control, humiliating a political authority already weakened by decades of pressure from non-Roman groups on northern and eastern frontiers. Placidia's capture would have amplified the immediate severity of the invasion, and her time in captivity as a hostage would have prolonged the impact of the disaster far beyond three days, as some contemporary sources like Orosius emphasised.³³ Perceptions of the marriage as an intrinsic element of disaster and loss are not dominant in modern criticism, but John Matthews has observed that the marriage between Placidia and Athaulf was made 'under severely constrained conditions', and that the Gallic kingdom the union was depicted as inaugurating by writers like Orosius was 'an ephemeral failure'.³⁴ The Visigothic strategy of trying to force the government at Ravenna to fulfil their demands for supplies and territory had repeatedly and ostensibly failed, causing much hardship for the Visigoths as well as for those unfortunate enough to encounter them as they took what they wanted.³⁵

Rather than inaugurating a long-term vision of peace, Matthews has recognised that the marriage was an unassailable obstacle to peace, effectively removing the possibility of a diplomatic agreement between the Visigoths and Romans.³⁶ Placidia's marriage to Athaulf, as represented by writers like Olympiodorus and Orosius, was a literary contrivance, packaged by ancient authors in such a way as to make it palatable.³⁷ It was an act of essential legitimacy that usefully distracted from the difficult realities of events: of violent invasion, rape, looting and hostage taking, and for Roman military success and cultural hegemony to be undermined. Whether this is acknowledged or not, the depiction of Placidia's marriage by ancient writers and its discussion in modern

criticism includes these aspects: sexual violence is obscured through marriage, and lived experience is obscured through silence.

This analysis of the evidence has highlighted the disjuncture between lived experience and textual representation in the biography of Placidia's early life. But why did ancient writers choose to represent events against logic and reason? This was, after all, a much more difficult task than to bemoan catastrophe. Why do (almost) no authors admit in their writings the failure Placidia's capture and forced marriage represented, or the huge psychological blow this would have been? Most obviously, the denial facilitates the ideological agenda of downplaying the severity of the Visigothic sack. As Cam Grey has observed, violence is messy, and not just because it might involve blood, broken bones, bodily fluids and mayhem.³⁸ A denial of violence avoids anomalous and unsightly lumps in the smooth and sterilised historical narrative that writers like Orosius were so keen on achieving. Challenging the determined characterisation of Placidia's capture and forced marriage as beneficial in fact reveals it to be the very opposite. Her captivity at barbarian hands exposed the failure of Rome's military power. The enemies of Rome had invaded and terrorised Italy before besieging and sacking the capital, and still they could not be expelled from Roman territory. These failings were compounded by the gendered shame and dishonour of Placidia's captivity, an uncomfortable reminder of Roman subjugation as well as her personal disgrace.³⁹

Placidia and the construct of female sexuality

The determined efforts of ancient writers to transform the historical narrative into the opposite of the political reality they encountered had another significant outcome: it necessarily subverted the stereotypical ways in which ancient women were represented, according to their emotions and sexual urges.⁴⁰ As Liz James has argued, female sexuality and emotion 'served to explain everything' for Roman authors, from Augustus's daughter Julia to the Empress Theodora.⁴¹ With Placidia we find the opposite, that the emotional and sexual aspects of her character are elided, underlining the sterility of her representation reduced to typology. Not only do ancient writers fail to record any response from Placidia following her capture, forced marriage and impregnation, her depiction is tightly controlled and idealised. This is evident in the moralising function Placidia fulfils in curbing the excessive emotional response of Athaulf in his retributive passion to destroy Rome. Athaulf learned to refrain from war and prefer peace 'by the persuasion and advice of his wife, Placidia, a woman, indeed, of a very keen mind and very good religiously'.⁴² The depiction of Placidia as a pious Christian, dutiful wife and political ambassador deviates from James's readings of ancient women: '[s]ex (and its consequences, child-bearing) is the language in which women's actions are almost invariably expressed by the written sources; in a sense, there was no other way of telling these stories'.⁴³ It is revealing that Placidia is an exception, that an alternative narrative approach not (ostensibly) dictated by sex and child-birth was invented to write her into history. The representation of Placidia is uncharacteristically gendered precisely because ancient authors wanted to downplay the violence she would have experienced, and to avoid textual proximity to sexual violence, disgrace and shame. Rape (in the ancient sense of *raptus*) and captivity, shame and disgrace, and the difficult reality of sex and reproduction with the leader of Rome's enemy, meant that Placidia's story was

terminally euphemised, giving us an even more reductive version of an ancient woman than usual.⁴⁴

Agency, consent and rape

The subversion of typological approaches to female sexuality by ancient authors generates ambiguity over Placidia's sexual status, an issue which both ancient and modern observers have studiously avoided.⁴⁵ This article does not seek to dispel that ambiguity: to demand a clear and coherent narrative risks creating the 'perfect victim', and to make conclusive judgements about consent or its absence from the historical evidence would only be useful in revealing modern prejudices. We know that Placidia was unmarried when she was captured, very likely meaning that she was a virgin, and that she had sex because of her child-bearing. The difficult issue of reading rape into antiquity is further complicated in relation to Placidia because female agency in her later biography is strong: she exercised considerable political authority, ruling as a regent for Valentinian III for fourteen years and becoming 'Augusta' around CE 420.⁴⁶ Placidia is, therefore, very clearly more than a victim.⁴⁷ The modern critical assumption that Placidia did consent to marriage with Athaulf is made almost universally. Walter Goffart and S. I. Oost understand that Placidia gave her consent, whilst Geoffrey Dunn argues paradoxically that Placidia welcomed her exploitation by Athaulf.⁴⁸ However, there are exceptions to the critical trend: Placidia and Eudoxia's absence of consent to marriage has been highlighted by Becker-Piriou.⁴⁹ Hagith Sivan sees it as highly unlikely that Placidia would have desired to marry the leader of Rome's enemy and the perpetrator ultimately, if not directly, responsible for her violent kidnap from Rome and prolonged captivity.⁵⁰ The marriage confers legitimacy on the violence perpetrated against Placidia, effectively diverting attention from Placidia's lack of freedom and absence of consent.

In the absence of further evidence, it is impossible to provide conclusive answers to the specific questions of consent and rape in relation to Placidia. But as a victim of war-ravaging and an enemy captive, Placidia's lack of freedom means that she was unable to operate agency. Without agency there can be no consent, and her experiences as a war-captive, a spear-won bride and a child-bearer can be seen at the very least in broadly non-consensual terms. This act of reading potential rape self-consciously goes against the critical grain: it is more acceptable, or at least more common, to 'read in' consent rather than rape in antiquity, a reading that is mostly made unconsciously, and privileges the dominant perspective of male writers.⁵¹ As Harris has recognised, the absence of consent is a major element in the definition of rape, and we should at least acknowledge that we can read an absence of consent into silence and ambiguity.⁵² Although we have no 'complaint' in the modern sense, or any objection raised by Placidia, this does not mean that she did not object, and a lack of consent can indicate just that: no consent. Roman legislation concerning rape did not foreground female sexual consent, as Melanie Webb has observed.⁵³ Roman law distinguished between adultery, elopement and rape, but these categories were not defined by a female will or initiative: 'In other words, rape was not clearly or consistently distinguished from other forms of illegitimate sexual activity'.⁵⁴ Our inability to determine conclusively whether Placidia was raped is itself evidence, if not of a specific rape, then of a culture of invasion, war and war-ravaging in which sexual violence was normalised and issues

of consent were irrelevant. A direct consequence of this culture is our ignorance of Placidia's experiences during her captivity.⁵⁵

Placidia as a victim of war-ravaging

The absence of critical attention to Placidia as a victim of war-ravaging conforms to the wider historical reception of the gendered implications of warfare beyond the battlefield as 'persistently downplayed or overlooked in the history of warfare since antiquity'.⁵⁶ But through comparative research we can revise our perception of Placidia, resisting the one-dimensional version we find in the ancient textual evidence and re-locating her as a victim of war-ravaging, taken captive by a hostile invading army, subjected to a programme of forced mobility and treated as part of the material spoils of war.⁵⁷ Modern scholarship has emphasised the continuities of sexual violence and ravaging within warfare throughout human history: the phenomenon of rape is understood to be transhistorical.⁵⁸ As Gloria Gaggioli has argued, '[s]exual violence has occurred during armed conflicts at all times, on all continents'.⁵⁹ Warfare ravaging as a recurring pattern found in different contexts, cultures and conflicts has been a sustained focus of study.⁶⁰ The likelihood of sexual violence against women is significantly heightened during conflict as opposed to peacetime, and to perceive Placidia as a victim of war-ravaging increases the likelihood that she was subjected to sexual violence.

Populace ravaging or ravaging warfare is a strikingly gendered and age-based practice, and follows a distinct pattern: men kill and are themselves killed, through battle, siege, ambush, slaughter.⁶¹ The dominant group then massacres all males, or at least those of fighting age, a practice known as 'andrapodizing' (*ἀνδραποδίζεσθαι*) in ancient Greek, *diripere* and *depopulare* in Latin.⁶² Women and girls are taken as war-captives and subject to rape and enslavement according to age and sex.⁶³ As Josh Levithan describes, '[a]fter the pillaging of the most obvious targets, prisoners were rounded up. Every person in the stormed city became a prisoner without rights and could be kept or sold as a slave . . . it seems clear that any sack included rape'.⁶⁴ Martial rape is the signature aggression in attacking the girls and women of a ravaged people.⁶⁵ Young and fertile females are kept alive for the compulsory procreation of offspring, male and female, raised from birth to fill their subordinate, gendered work roles.⁶⁶ Gaca offers a neat summation of what constitutes warfare ravaging: 'Thus, the organised violence of populace-ravaging warfare is made up of male massacre, martial rape against the females of the targeted people, and killing grown and mature women . . . Martial rape is consequently integral to ravaging warfare'.⁶⁷ A significant gap exists in research on warfare ravaging and conflict-based sexual violence in the late ancient period.⁶⁸ However, Gaca's pioneering scholarship provides a transhistorical perspective with which to understand the experiences of marginalised groups in narratives of warfare, including Placidia's capture and forced marriage.⁶⁹

Perceiving Placidia as a victim of warfare ravaging illuminates the female battery, exploitation and potential sexual assault within an environment of perilous martial conflict and hostility. Placidia was a tool to display, communicate and maintain dominance.⁷⁰ She was powerless, voiceless and unable to resist the agency of those around her, either Athaulf and the Visigoths, the barbarian Singeric who 'returned' her, or her brother Honorius. There is no firm evidence to suggest that she was able

to operate power or control as a hostage, despite her royal blood; she was not able to negotiate her freedom, for example, and her period in captivity did not conclude favourably. Becker-Piriou has emphasised Placidia's passive role in negotiations between Honorius, Athaulf and Constantius: she was an object to be traded with or a means to build relations through marriage.⁷¹ Becker-Piriou's observation that children enabled empresses to pressurise their husbands, and could function as a lever to exert their own influence, underlines how politically detrimental to Placidia's situation the premature death of Theodosius was in CE 415.⁷²

Zosimus's claim that 'although a hostage', Placidia was treated in accordance with her imperial status, enjoying every honour and the attention due to a member of the imperial family, is a feeble denial of her mistreatment, particularly, and euphemistically, sexual violence.⁷³ When detailing Placidia's release from captivity, Orosius makes a similar claim: '... he [Wallia] returned the emperor's sister Placidia, who had lived with honour and respect while with him, to her brother'.⁷⁴ As Victoria Pagán has observed, attention to small scraps of evidence preserved within an already fragmentary record, as we find with Placidia, can nonetheless further our understanding of Roman women.⁷⁵ To presume that her status as an imperial princess made Placidia inviolable is a dangerous assumption that follows the vein of the denial and idealism established by ancient authors. As Gaca has argued, 'Once girls and women of targeted peoples were reduced to being ravaged war-captives in antiquity, little or nothing of their sexual or other volition was granted any recognition or respect, for that was the mark of freedom, and their freedom was revoked'.⁷⁶ Firmly established by ancient writers, the trend of unconscious bias has continued in modern criticism, where the undeniably difficult questions of rape and consent within the early biography of Placidia remain largely unasked.

Modern critics have instead perceived marriage to Athaulf in exclusively positive terms, understanding it as a valid and functional match that benefited Placidia, and produced legitimate issue. Guisto Traina understands that living among the barbarians gave Placidia valuable political experience, allowing her to 'boast knowledge of the barbarian world'.⁷⁷ Michael Kulikowski stresses how her forced marriage to Athaulf profited her in the long-term.⁷⁸ Bertrand Lançon foregrounds Placidia's agency, arguing that she fulfilled her political aims by reversing the situation and marrying Athaulf: 'from a captive, she became not only a queen, but obtained a dominant position as Roman Empress to which her husband swore allegiance'.⁷⁹ Dunn proposes that Placidia was 'more than willing to be exploited', overcoming any initial aversion:

... when she realised the opportunity it offered her as the wife of a powerful figure. Here was her chance, through marriage, to do what others had failed to do, namely to solve the Gothic problem that had bedeviled the empire for decades. This marriage would make her an important player in future negotiations between the Goths and the empire.⁸⁰

The exploitation of Placidia was not of equal benefit, and such an understanding of Placidia's political foresight and diplomatic motivations for an exploitative marriage lacks credibility. This narrow perspective on the past does little to challenge the idealised reasoning established by ancient authors where the oppression, coercion and exploitation of Placidia is suppressed in order to preserve the illusion of Roman

hegemony.⁸¹ Whilst they are not dominant, alternative scholarly views are available: Audrey Becker-Piriou gives a valuable perspective on marriage to barbarian leaders as detrimental to imperial women.⁸² Liz James observes how particularly elite women were used to cement political alliances and bind men to each other through marriage and reproduction; they were also discarded or reused when political alliances changed or developed unexpectedly.⁸³ This pattern is evident with Placidia, but her marriage as a spear-won bride is markedly different to conventional marriage alliances; there is a lack of formal agreement to the match, and the breakdown of alliances with Athaulf's death has particularly adverse consequences for Placidia.

But even within the idealising discourse that dominates how Placidia's capture and coerced marriage were represented, her objectification as part of the material gain of warfare cannot be entirely obscured within the ancient evidence. Gaca argues that the subjugation and enslavement of non-combatant captives (like Placidia) were fundamental to populace ravaging warfare: 'This is what this warfare was substantially for . . . aggravated heterosexual rape was not merely a regular practice but an important purpose in these man-to-man armed conflicts'.⁸⁴ Placidia's capture and marriage was not an unintended consequence of the sack, but was absolutely central to the catastrophe; Placidia herself, to echo Gaca's language, as a 'war-captive concubine' and then as a spear-won bride, was part of the Visigothic material profit following the plunder of the city.⁸⁵ The pattern of ravaging warfare involved seizing plunder once the violence of battle was complete, and this plunder was principally the bodily persons of women and children who would be commandeered and exploited for economic gain.⁸⁶ As Scodel has observed, women in warfare were perceived as the enemies' most precious property. Raping them is the final act in defeating the enemy, and as slaves they are an ongoing demonstration of the victors' triumph.⁸⁷

From this perspective Olympiodorus' description of the wedding present Athaulf makes to Placidia of gold and silver treasure looted from Rome takes on a more sinister shade, seemingly reinforcing Placidia's status and value as and amongst the material gain of war:

Amidst the celebrations, along with other wedding gifts Athaulf gave Placidia fifty handsome young men dressed in silk clothes, each bearing aloft two very large dishes, one full of gold, the other full of precious – or rather, priceless – stones, which had been carried off by the Goths at the sack of Rome.⁸⁸

The fifty anonymous young men wearing silk who bear the treasure can be understood in the same sense, as captives taken during the sack and who add to the material gain of the Visigoths.⁸⁹ To use Gaca's language, Placidia was 'human gold', objectified and exhibited alongside the nameless young men and looted precious metal in a perverse re-enactment of her own experiences.⁹⁰ The wedding ceremony can be similarly understood as part of this exhibitionism, a visceral display of triumphal hegemony intended to demonstrate the martial subjugation of one group and the conquest of another.

This reinterpretation, which challenges the narrative of a harmonious marriage alliance between Placidia and Athaulf as promulgated in the ancient evidence, is substantiated by the nature of Placidia's 'return' to Honorius following Athaulf's death. The moments immediately before and after escape are the most dangerous for a victim of family violence, and Placidia's release sees an intensification of hostility,

violence and degradation. Placidia was again on display, this time on a forced march before the horse of Singeric, the brief successor to Athaulf, with other captives for twelve miles, like a prisoner of war: 'To spite Athaulf he [Singeric] ordered his queen, Placidia, to walk before his horse with the rest of the prisoners for a distance of twelve miles from the city'.⁹¹ Placidia's return was a calculated and vindictive ordeal designed not to threaten her life but to humiliate and shame her whilst demonstrating Visigothic ascendancy.⁹² As argued by MacKinnon, these acts 'make women's bodies into a medium of men's expression, the means through which one group of men says what it wants to say to another'.⁹³ Following her capture, Placidia's value as an imperial princess and Athaulf's spear-won bride and child-bearer was made obvious in her cruel display alongside looted precious metal. Placidia's shift in value as a revenant was again made evident in the nature of her return. The 'realistic expectation of ransom for people of wealth and high social status' was fulfilled, and Placidia was exchanged for 60,000 measures of grain.⁹⁴ The humiliation of Placidia alone convincingly demonstrates that the ideologically determined narrative of Gothic-Roman harmony that was so important to writers like Orosius was illusory. The reaction to news of Athaulf's death in Constantinople in CE 415, greeted with fireworks and games, similarly suggests a deeper level of Romano-Visigothic hostility than the dominant ideology of the surviving evidence would suggest.⁹⁵

Conclusion

This article brings a renewed scrutiny to the ancient evidence for the capture, probable sexual violence and forced marriage perpetrated against Galla Placidia. It has begun to illuminate Placidia's actual conditions of existence that have been obscured by partial truths, omissions and gaps rather than lies, by ancient writers who present a narrative which smooths over contradictions, evades reality and masquerades as coherence.⁹⁶ This denial and idealism, which leaves a curiously sterilised narrative, can be productively counter-balanced through comparative research. Placidia can be seen not as a valuable commodity for trade between political groups, but as a victim of war-ravaging, subjected to the same non-consensual capture, subjugation and sexual violence that echoes (often silently) in the lives of women and girls implicated in warfare in antiquity. Placidia's status as an imperial princess, the daughter and sister of emperors, differentiates her significantly from the 'ordinary' female experience of captivity and forced marriage within martial conflict. Her visibility in the historical record is markedly increased, as is her value as a bargaining tool.⁹⁷ The leverage ownership Placidia gave ensured her survival, but would not necessarily have guaranteed an enjoyable stay as a guest of the Goths. This alternative perspective illuminates Athaulf's marriage to Placidia at far remove from the happy festivities as described by Olympiodorus, and reveals the manipulations and distortions necessary for Orosius's vision of Romano-Gothic harmony personified by the marriage to function coherently. The discourse of idealisation in the ancient evidence transforms Placidia's capture and forced marriage into a standardised narrative that suppresses the reality of her experiences, represses her resistance and conceals her status as a victim. This reassessment highlights the imperative not to articulate and therefore to deny this historical obverse, challenging the reading practices inherited from antiquity that write Placidia's autonomous desire out of history.

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Notes

1. For the segregation of women's history, see K. Wilkinson, *Women and Modesty in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 6.
2. Stuart Irvin Oost's biography of Placidia published in 1968 set the English-language standard for the biographical treatment of Placidia. S. I. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta: A Biographical Essay* (Chicago: Sirago, 1968). Other biographies followed: V. A. Sirago, *Galla Placidia e la trasformazione politica dell' Occidente* (Louvain: Bureau de recueil, Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1961); L. Storoni Mazzolani, *Galla Placidia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1975); H. Gourdin, *Galla Placidia: impératrice romaine, reine des Goths (388–450)* (Paris: L'œuvre, 2008); H. Sivan, *Galla Placidia: The Last Roman Empress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); J. E. Salisbury, *Rome's Christian Empress: Galla Placidia Rules at the Twilight of the Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).
3. For a recent analysis of the sack, see J. Lipps, C. Machado and P. von Rummel (eds), *The Sack of Rome in 410 A.D.: the Event, its Context and its Impact: Proceedings of the Conference held at the German Archaeological Institute at Rome, 04–06 November 2010* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2013). The impact of the sack is contested in ancient as well as modern receptions. For further discussion, see P. Van Nuffelen, 'Not Much Happened: 410 and All That', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 105 (2015), pp. 322–9. For the sack within a wider historiographical context, see P. C. Díaz, 'Crisis, Transition, Transformation: The End of the Roman World and the Usefulness of Useless Categories', in R. Lizzi Testa (ed.), *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), pp. 15–37.
4. According to Orosius's *Historiae adversus paganos* (7.40.2), Athaulf himself captured Placidia, but it is possible that this is history in hindsight as she later became his wife. M.-P. Arnaud-Lindet (ed.), *Histoires contre les païens* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1990–1), vol. 3, pp. 117–18; Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, tr. R. J. Deferrari (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), p. 356. Other sources confirm that Placidia's capture coincided with the sack in 410: Olympiodorus, *frag.* 6, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire. Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus* (II), tr. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1983), pp. 158–9. Prosper, *Chronicon, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Chronica Minora*, tr. T. Mommsen, I (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), 1259, p. 468; Marcellinus, *Chronicon*, s.a. 410, *The Chronicle of Marcellinus*, repr. T. Mommsen's edition tr. B. Croke (Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies), p. 10. Hydatius records Placidia's capture in CE 409, Hydatius, *Chronicon*, 44, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Chronica Minora* II, tr. T. Mommsen (ed.) (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894), p. 17; R. W. Burgess (ed.) and tr., *The Chronicle of Hydatius. And the Consularia Constantinopolitana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 80–1. Zosimus (6.12.3) seems to suggest that Placidia was captured by the Visigoths before the sack in 410. Zosimus, *Zosime. Histoire Nouvelle*, tr. F. Paschoud (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1989), vol. 3, pp. 14–15; *Zosimus. A New History*, ed. and tr. R. T. Ridley (Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1982), p. 131.
5. In modern scholarship Placidia's return to Italy following her period in captivity is frequently designated in the passive, echoing Orosius who depicts Wallia as having returned Placidia to her brother: *Placidiam imperatoris sororem honorifice apud se honesteque habitam fratri reddidit*. '... he [Wallia] returned the emperor's sister Placidia, who had lived with honour and respect while with him, to her brother'. Orosius, 7.43.12, p. 130, p. 362.
6. For an example of such historical revisionism centred around gender, see B. Neil and L. Garland, *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).
7. S. M. Burstein, 'Whence the Women? The Origin of the Bactrian Greeks', *Ancient West and East* 11 (2012), pp. 97–104, here p. 98. As Anne Edwards has noted, '[t]here is no area where androcentric bias is more visible and systemic than male violence against women'. A. Edwards, 'Male Violence in Feminist Theory: an Analysis of the Changing Conceptions of Sex/Gender Violence and Male Dominance', in J. Hanmer and M. Maynard (eds), *Women, Violence and Social Control* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 13–29, here p. 14. See S. M. Braund, *Latin Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 152–75, for discussion of the problems that different types of evidence present for our understanding of 'real' experience.

8. Although focused on a much later period, Antony Eastmond takes a similar approach in illuminating the medieval noblewoman Tamta and her experiences of forced marriage and rape in thirteenth-century Turkey. Eastmond argues that 'Tamta's shift from forced bride to female ruler represents one the greatest transformations of a woman in the thirteenth century'. A. Eastmond, *Tamta's World: The Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p. 2.
9. As Victoria Pagán has observed, ancient representations of women are not 'wholly accurate portrayals of lived experience but rather fictional constructions. Women are assigned actions in the sources to serve the interests and the rhetorical strategies of male authors'. V. E. Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives in Roman History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004) p. 15.
10. K. L. Gaca, 'Ancient Warfare and the Ravaging Martial Rape of Girls and Women. Evidence from Homeric Epic and Greek Drama', in M. Masterson et al. (eds), *Sex in Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 27–97, here p. 278. Ellen O'Gorman argues that the problem is that 'military history appears to stand forth as the quintessentially patriarchal discourse'. E. O'Gorman, 'A Woman's History of Warfare', in V. Zajko and M. Leonard (eds), *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 289–288, here p. 193. On sexual violence in warfare, see N. Henry, T. Ward, and M. Hirshberg, 'A Multifactorial Model of Wartime Rape', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 9 (2004), pp. 535–62, here p. 535: 'The inexorable link between sexual violence and war has had a long-standing tradition of neglect and ignorance in public awareness and in academia'. A. D. Lee has discussed the difficulty of concrete evidence of wartime rape, concluding that 'it must nevertheless have been common practice on the part of both Roman and non-Roman soldiers'. A. D. Lee, *War in Antiquity: A Social History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 145. Exceptions to this critical blind-spot include the work of Kathy L. Gaca, cited below fn. 71; H. van Wees, *Status Warriors: War, Violence, and Society in Homer and History* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1992); D. Schaps, 'The Women of Greece in Wartime', *Classical Philology* 77 (1982), pp. 193–213; and P. Loman, 'No Woman No War: Women's Participation in Ancient Greek Warfare', *Greece & Rome* 51 (2004), pp. 34–54. On sacks following besiegement, see J. Levithan, *Roman Siege Warfare* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), pp. 205–27.
11. K. L. Gaca, 'Continuities in Rape and Tyranny in Martial Societies from Antiquity Onward', in S. Lynn Budin and J. MacIntosh Turfa (eds), *Women in Antiquity Real Women Across the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1041–56, here p. 1041.
12. This approach is an explicit point of focus for Gaca's article, 'Continuities in Rape'.
13. Gaca, 'Continuities in Rape', pp. 1041–56. For a similar approach using contemporary sexual assault in civil conflict to understand ancient accounts, see E. K. Solvang, 'Guarding the House. Conflict, Rape, and David's Concubines', in M. Masterson, N. Sorkin Rabinowitz and J. Robson (eds) *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 50–66, here p. 51.
14. *δορῆκτηρος*, 'a captive of the spear, taken in war', referring particularly to women 'won by the spear'. For example, see Euripides, *Andromache*, 1.55, Euripides, D. Kovacs (ed.) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 288; Homer, *Iliad*, 9.343, Homer, *The Iliad*, tr. A. T. Murray (London: William Heinemann Press, 1946), p. 406. A similar term, *αἰχμάλωτος*, means 'taken by the spear, a captive, prisoner of war'. See Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1440, and Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 417.
15. By contrast, Julia Hillner has recognised that Placidia is often considered to be an exception as a late antique woman whose life is reasonably well documented through narrative sources, architecture and art, and even documents ostensibly composed by her own hand. J. Hillner, Review of Joyce E. Salisbury, *Rome's Christian Empress: Galla Placidia Rules at the Twilight of the Empire*, *The Ancient History Bulletin Online Reviews* 6 (2016), pp. 121–64, here p. 121. On the possible burial place of Placidia and her son Theodosius, see M. McEvoy, 'The Mausoleum of Honorius: Late Roman Imperial Christian and the City of Rome in the Fifth Century', in J. McKitterick, C. M. Osborne, Richardson and J. Story (eds), *Old Saint Peter's, Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 119–36, here p. 123.
16. L. James, 'Ghosts in the Machine: the Lives and Deaths of Constantinian Imperial Women', in Neil and Garland (eds) *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society*, pp. 93–113, here p. 97.
17. Orosius, 7.40.2, vol. 3, 117–8, p. 356. Hydatius, *Chronicon*, pp. 18, 85. Prosper, *Chronicon*, 1259, p. 468. Philostorgius, 12.4, ed. J. Bidez, *Philostorgius. Kirchengeschichte. Mit dem Leben des Lucian von Antiochien und den Fragmenten eines arianischen Historiographen*, 3rd edn, rev. F. Winkelmann (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1981), p. 143; *Philostorgius: Church History*, tr. P. R. Amidon (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 157–8. Jordanes, *Romana et Getica* XXXI 160, p. 99.
18. See Olympiodorus, *frag.* 24, pp. 186–9. On Placidia and the role she fulfilled in her marriages, see M. Harlow, 'Galla Placidia: Conduit of Culture?', in F. McHardy and E. Marshall (eds), *Women's Influence on*

- Classical Civilization* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 138–50. Harlow notes the central role of Placidia in the surviving fragments of Olympiodorus' work (p. 139).
19. Orosius, 7.39.1, vol. 3, p. 113, p. 353. 7.40.1, vol. 3, p. 117, p. 355.
 20. Orosius, 7.40.2, vol. 3, pp. 117–8, p. 356.
 21. Orosius, 7.40.2, vol. 3, pp. 117–8, p. 356. *In ea inruptione Placidia, Theodosii principis filia, Arcadii et Honorii imperatorum soror, ab Athaulfo, Alarici propinquo, capta atque in uxorem adsumpta, quasi eam diuino iudicio uelut speciale pignus obsidem Roma tradiderit, ita iuncta potentissimi barbari regis coniugio multo reipublicae commodo fuit.*
 22. Orosius, 7.43.7, vol. 3, pp. 129, 362: *Ob hoc abstinere a bello, ob hoc inhiare paci nitebatur, praecepit Placidiae uxoris suae, feminae sane ingenio acerrimae et religione satis probae, ad omnia bonorum ordinationum opera persuasu et consilio temperatus.*
 23. The idea that the arrival of the Goths in Italy led by Alaric was a sign of the end of times is found in Maximus of Turin (*Sermones* 2.17–24), whilst simultaneously in Gaul Sulpicius Severus viewed the mingling of barbarians with the armies and citizens as a prelude to the end of times. Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica*, 2.3.6. *Sulpicii Severi libri qui supersunt, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 1, ed. C. Halm (Vienna: C. Geroldi Filium Bibliopolam Academiae, 1866), p. 58; *A Select Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Volume XI, Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian*, tr. A. Roberts (Oxford: Parker, 1894), p. 98. Socrates represents the sack of Rome as a form of divine punishment. Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 7.10, *Sokrates Kirchengeschichte*, eds G. C. Hansen and M. Sirinjan (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1995), pp. 355–6.
 24. Hydatius, *Chronicon*, Olympiad 298 XX, pp. 84–5: *Ataulfus apud Narbonam Placidiam duxit uxorem; in quo profetia Danihelis putatur inpleta, ut ait, filiam regis austri sociandum regi aquilonis, nullo tamen eius ex ea semine subsistente.* 'Athaulf married Placidia in Narbona. By this event it is thought that the prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled, according to which the daughter of the king of the south would be united with the king of the north, but no offspring by her would survive'.
 25. Philostorgius, 12.4, p. 143: *Ὁ δὲ τῆς αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς ἀδελφὸς ... βαρβαριχοῦ γὰρ γένους τοῦ Σαυρομάταω χρηματίζειν αὐτοῦς, καὶ συναφθῆναι τότε τῷ ὄστρακίνω γένει τὸν ἐχ σιδήρου τὴν γῆνεσιν ἔλκοντα. οὐ τοῦτο δὲ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἠνίκα πάλιν Ἀδαῶλφος γαμικαῖς ὁμιλίαις τῇ Πλακιδίᾳ συνήπτετο• τὴν γὰρ ὄστρακίνην φύσιν ...*; pp. 157–8: 'Now his wife's brother ... they were of Sauromatian barbarian stock, and [he?] who had sprung from iron was then joined to the race of clay. And that is not all, but it [happened] also when Ataulf was joined in marriage to Placidia, since the substance of clay ...'.
 26. See Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 6.12, p. 15, p. 131.
 27. Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 5.38, p. 56, p. 119, and 6.12.3, p. 15, p. 131: *ἔμεινε δὲ καὶ ἡ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀδελφὴ Πλακιδία παρ' αὐτῷ, ὁμήρου μὲν τρόπον τινὰ τάξιν ἐπέχουσα, πάσης δὲ ἀπολαύουσα τιμῆ καὶ βασιλικῆς θεραπείας.*
 28. Augustine, *De civitate dei*, 1.1–2, (ed.) B. Dombart (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1905–8), pp. 4–6; *Saint Augustine. City of God*, trans. H. Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972), pp. 6–8.
 29. Augustine, *De civitate dei*, 1.16–19, pp. 27–35, 26–31. See Augustine, *Ep.* 111, where he considers the spiritual fate of women made captive by barbarians. *Saint Augustine. Letters. Volume II (83–130)*, tr. by W. Parsons (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), pp. 245–54; J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (Paris, 1886), p. 33. See M. Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God": Susanna, Rape Law, and Testimony in City of God 1.19', in M. A. Tapie and D. W. McClain (eds), *Reading Scripture as a Political Act: Essays on Theopolitical Interpretation of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), pp. 57–82; M. Webb, "'On Lucretia Who Slew Herself": Rape and Consolation in Augustine's *De civitate dei*', *Augustinian Studies* 44 (2013), pp. 37–58; K. Harper, *From Shame to Sin. The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 172–4.
 30. Jerome, *In Ezekiel*, III Praef. col. 75, *Patrologia Latina, Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Stridonensis Presbyteri Opera Omnia*, trans. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1845).
 31. *multa in huius principatu gravia rei publicae vulnera contigerunt, sed illud acerbissimum fuit, quod urbs Roma per Alaricum Gothorum regem capta atque subversa est. soror imperatoris Augusta Placidia primum captiva, deinde uxor regis quidem sed barbari statum temporum decolorat. Narratio de imperatoribus domus Valentinianae et Theodosianae.* In *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi* 9, *Chronica Minora* I, ed. T. Mommsen, (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), p. 630; A. C. Murray, *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul. A Reader* (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 2000), p. 162.
 32. J. P. Conant, 'Romanness in the Age of Attila', in M. Maas (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 156–74, here p. 171.

33. Orosius, 7.39.15, vol. 3, p. 116, p. 355. For a similarly determined optimism regarding Rome's recovery, see also Olympiodorus, *frag.* 25, p. 188.
34. J. F. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court A.D. 364–425* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 317–8.
35. For example, Bordeaux was sacked by Visigoths as they withdrew from Gaul for Spain. See Paulinus of Pella, *Eucharisticon*, pp. 311–27; *Ausonius Decimus Magnus*, tr. and ed. H. G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 328–31.
36. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, p. 317.
37. As argued by S. Teillet, *Des Goths À La Nation Gothique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2011), pp. 147–8.
38. C. Grey, 'Shock, Horror, or Same Old Same Old? Everyday Violence in Augustine's Africa', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 6 (2014), pp. 216–32, here p. 232.
39. Jordanes represents Honorius as eager to free Placidia from 'the disgrace of servitude'. Jordanes, *Romana et Getica* XXXII (164), pp. 100–1: *simulque desiderans germanam suam Placidiam subiectionis obprobrio liberare*.
40. Noted by A. Richlin, 'Julia's Jokes, Galla Placidia, and the Roman Use of Women as Political Icons', in B. Garlick, S. Dixon and P. Allen (eds), *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), pp. 65–93, here pp. 66–7. Stereotype threat is evident in Oost's perception of Placidia, whom he characterises as a 'nagging wife'. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, p. 163.
41. James, 'Ghosts in the Machine', p. 111. Similarly Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives*, pp. 15–16: 'It is important to remember that ancient sources are notoriously unreliable about women's sexual misconduct . . . Before this premise was exposed, the study of ancient literary sources merely reproduced the male-authored point of view. But recognition of this premise allows us to observe the political, sexual, and moral ways in which women serve male discourse . . . Any assertion otherwise would simply reinscribe male perceptions rather than expose them'.
42. Orosius, 7.43.7, 323; vol. 3, p. 129: . . . *feminae sane ingenio acerrimae et religione satis probae, ad omnia bonarum ordinationum opera persuasu et consilio temperatus*.
43. James, 'Ghosts in the Machine', pp. 111–12.
44. ' . . . the participation of specific women is a historical fact; yet the portrayal of these specific women is, to a certain degree, commensurate with the portrayal of women in general'. Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives*, p. 16.
45. In her biography of Placidia, Sivan asks pertinent questions but does not progress to further investigation: '[W]as Galla a willing or coerced bride? Did the wedding represent the culmination of a tragic process that had begun with the storming of her residence at Rome in 410 and ended in prolonged captivity and marriage to her captor? Or should we succumb to a more romantic view that has been beautifully advanced by fictional tales woven around Galla falling for a handsome barbarian (and vice versa)?' Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, p. 12. On the issue of silence in the ancient evidence on rape, David Schaps observes that '[i]f the sources rarely mention rape, this is probably because the suggestion was indelicate as long as the women were citizens, superfluous once they were captives'. Schaps, 'The Women of Greece in Wartime', pp. 203–4. Lillie argues that 'evading and avoiding the reality of sexual violence . . . is another way of perpetuating the structures and systems that promote, reward, and tolerate sexual violence'. C. Lillie, *The Rape of Eve: The Transformation of Roman Ideology in Three Early Christian Retellings of Genesis* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2018), p. 12.
46. See L. Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Female Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries', L. James (ed.) *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 52–75, here fn. 13, p. 67.
47. Lillie, *The Rape of Eve*, p. 11, argues that '[a]s Roman law clearly shows, rape was a known concept in the ancient world; what was at issue was who was "rapable" and by whom'. For a discussion of the difference and tension between ancient and modern understandings of rape, see G. Doblhofer, *Vergewaltigung in der Antike* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1994).
48. W. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 195; Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, pp. 126–8. Oost considers that 'it would be an easy inference that she [Placidia] found Athaulf at least attractive'. Oost, *Galla Placidia*, p. 143, fn. 22; Geoffrey D. Dunn, 'Flavius Constantius, Galla Placidia, and the Aquitanian Settlement of the Goths', *Phoenix* 69 (2015), pp. 376–93, here p. 383.
49. Audrey Becker-Piriou, 'De Galla Placidia à Amalasonthe, des femmes dans la diplomatie romano-barbare en Occident?', *Revue Historique* 647 (2008), pp. 507–43, here pp. 513. See also Harlow, 'Galla Placidia', pp. 142–3.

50. Sivan has conjectured that Placidia would have been ‘a reluctant, if not battered, bride’. Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, p. 14. Dunn argues explicitly against Sivan’s interpretation. Dunn, ‘Flavius Constantius’, p. 382. For the battery war-captive women and girls were subjected to prior to rape, see Gaca, ‘Continuities in Rape’ p. 1052.
51. For studies of rape in antiquity, see S. Deacy and K. F. Pierce, *Rape in Antiquity* (London: Duckworth in association with The Classical Press of Wales, 1997); R. Omitowaju, *Rape and the Politics of Consent in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); F. Zeitlin, ‘Configurations of Rape in Greek Myth’, in S. Tomaselli and R. Porter (eds), *Rape: An Historical and Cultural Enquiry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 122–51; A. Laiou (ed.), *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993); N. Sorkin Rabinowitz, ‘Greek Tragedy: A Rape Culture?’, *EuGeStA* 1 (2011), pp. 1–21.
52. Edward M. Harris, ‘Did Rape Exist in Classical Athens’, in Harris, *Democracy and the Rule of Law in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 297–332. Harris argues that the victim’s lack of consent was given little or no consideration in classical Athens. See also Z. M. Packman, ‘Call it Rape: A Motif in Roman Comedy and Its Suppression in English-Speaking Publications’, *Helios* 20 (1993), pp. 42–55.
53. Webb, “‘Before the Eyes of Their Own God’”, p. 58, with further references.
54. Webb, “‘Before the Eyes of Their Own God’”, p. 58.
55. For a discussion of remembering and forgetting sexual violation during the sack of Rome in the writings of Augustine, see J. Barry, ‘So Easy to Forget: Augustine’s Treatment of the Sexually Violated in the *City of God*’, forthcoming, pp. 1–18.
56. Gaca, ‘Ancient Warfare’, pp. 283–4.
57. For mobility during wartime, see A. Chaniotis, ‘Mobility of Persons During the Hellenistic Wars: State Control and Personal Relations’, in C. Moatti (ed.), *La mobilité des personnes en Méditerranée de l’Antiquité à l’époque moderne: procédures de contrôle et documents d’identification* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 2004) pp. 481–500.
58. The idea of increased frequency, savagery and systematic organisation of wartime rape in the late-twentieth century is observed by Jonathan Gottschall, ‘Explaining Wartime Rape’, *The Journal of Sex Research* 41 (2004), pp. 129–36, here p. 129.
59. G. Gaggioli, ‘Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts: A Violation of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law’, *International Review of the Red Cross* 96, 894 (2014), pp. 503–38, here p. 504. For a similar argument, see B. J. Baines, *Representing Rape in the English Early Modern Period* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), pp. 2, 28; K. L. Gaca, ‘Martial Religion, Ravaging Warfare, and Rape: Polytheistic Greek and Monotheistic Israelite Views’, in M. A. Paludi and J. Harold Ellens (eds), *Feminism and Religion: How Faiths View Women and Their Rights* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2016), p. 177.
60. The phenomenon of sexual violence within warfare is a significant area of cross-disciplinary study, and the literature produced is vast. Nicola Henry et al. develop a theoretical framework for approaching the connection between sexual violence and warfare. Henry et al., ‘A Multifactorial Model’, pp. 535–62. Dubravka Zarkov engages critically with the notion of a field of feminist studies of war and violent conflict. D. Zarkov, ‘Towards a New Theorizing of Women, Gender, and War’, in K. Davis, M. Evans and J. Lorber (eds) *Handbook of Gender and Women’s Studies* (London: Sage, 2006), pp. 214–33. Susan Brownmiller’s classic study of rape includes sexual violence within wartime, understanding it as part of a continuum of sexual violence in exclusively civilian and peacetime contexts. S. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975). Catharine A. MacKinnon’s important research drew attention to rape within warfare particularly through the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict. See MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, pp. 141–233.
61. Gaca, ‘Continuities in Rape’, p. 1042; K. L. Gaca, ‘The Andrapodizing of War Captives in Greek Historical Memory’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 140 (2010), pp. 116–71, here p. 121. On gender within warfare, see A. Chaniotis, *War in the Hellenistic World: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 102–14.
62. Gaca, ‘Continuities in Rape’, p. 1042; Gaca, ‘Ancient Warfare’, p. 279 n. 7. See also Levithan, *Roman Siege Warfare*, p. 209.
63. Gaca, ‘Continuities in Rape’, p. 1041. See also F. M. Green, ‘Witnesses and Participants in the Shadows: the Sexual Lives of Enslaved Women and Boys’, *Helios* 42 (2015), pp. 143–62.
64. Levithan, *Roman Siege Warfare*, p. 216.
65. Gaca, ‘Continuities in Rape’, p. 1042. As Gaca notes, it is generally intended to be a survivable ordeal, although it can be fatal: unrestricted gang rape is deliberately lethal. Gaca, ‘Continuities in Rape’, pp. 1042–3. For rape as genocide, see C. A. MacKinnon, ‘Rape, Genocide and Women’s Human Rights’, in

- A. Stiglmyer (ed.), *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 183–96, here p. 190; R. M. Schott, 'War Rape, Natality and Genocide', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 13(1–2) (2011), pp. 5–21; M. I. Rey, 'Reexamination of the Foreign Female Captive: Deuteronomy 21:10–14 as a Case of Genocidal Rape', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32 (2016), pp. 37–53.
66. Gaca, 'Continuities in Rape', p. 1042. On rape and forced concubinage in an earlier Greek context, see R. Scodel, 'The Captive's Dilemma: Sexual Acquiescence in Euripides Hecuba and Troades', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98 (1998), pp. 137–54.
67. Gaca, 'Continuities in Rape', p. 1043.
68. For example, warfare ravaging, rape, women or children within warfare are not concentrated areas of study in A. Sarantis and N. Christie (eds), *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity. Current Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 2 vols. Rape is mentioned briefly by G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West: 450–900* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 152, and without any reflection or analysis. The issue of rape is raised by Brent Shaw but not discussed as a separate issue. B. D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 33, 147, 215, 729–30. The topics of women and rape are absent from M. Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars. From the Third Century to Alaric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
69. K. L. Gaca, 'Reinterpreting the Homeric Simile of *Iliad* 16.7–11: The Girl and Her Mother in Ancient Greek Warfare', *American Journal of Philology* 129 (2008), pp. 145–71; Gaca, 'Andrapodizing'; K. L. Gaca, 'Manhandled and Kicked Around: Reinterpreting the Etymology and Significance of *andrapoda*', *Indogermanische Forschungen* 115 (2011a), pp. 110–46; K. L. Gaca, 'Girls, Women, and the Significance of Sexual Violence in Ancient Warfare', in E. Heineman (ed.), *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones from the Ancient World to the Era of Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011b) pp. 73–88; K. L. Gaca, 'Martial Rape, Pulsating Fear, and the Sexual Maltreatment of Girls (*paides*), Virgins (*parthenoi*), and Women (*gynaikes*) in Antiquity', *American Journal of Philology* 135 (2014), pp. 303–57.
70. Echoing C. Card, 'Rape as a Weapon of War', *Hypatia* 11 (1996), pp. 5–18, here p. 7.
71. Becker-Piriou, 'De Galla Placidia', p. 520.
72. Becker-Piriou, 'De Galla Placidia', p. 520.
73. Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 6.12.3, pp. 15, 131: *ἔμεινε δὲ καὶ ἡ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀδελφὴ Πλακιδία παρ' αὐτῷ, ὁμήρου μὲν τρόπον τινὰ τάξιν ἐπέχουσα, πάσης δὲ ἀπολαύουσα τιμῆ καὶ βασιλικῆς θεραπείας*. 'The emperor's sister, Placidia, was also staying with him, and although she was only a hostage she enjoyed every honour and the attention due to a member of the imperial family'.
74. Orosius, 7.43.12, p.p 130, 362: *Placidiam imperatoris sororem honorifice apud se honesteque habitam fratri reddidit*. A. T. Fear translates that Placidia 'lived in honour' and was 'unmolested'. Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. A. T. Fear (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 413. For a similar claim about the inviolability of female relations during martial conflict that nonetheless reveals the underlying threat of rape and dishonour, cf. Paulinus of Pella following the hostile evacuation of Bordeaux by Athaulf. Paulinus of Pella, *Eucharisticon*, pp. 321–6, pp. 330–1.
75. Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives* p. 17.
76. Gaca, 'Continuities in Rape', p. 1043. This is echoed by Schaps, 'The Women of Greece in Wartime', p. 205.
77. G. Traina, *428 AD. An Ordinary Year at the End of the Roman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 51–2.
78. M. Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars from the Third Century to Alaric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 182.
79. Bertrand Lançon, 'Les Projections européennes des historiens modernes sur deux impératrices romaines du Ve siècle : Galla Placidia et Aelia Eudocia', in Guyonne Leduc (ed.), *Les rôles transfrontaliers joués par les femmes dans la construction de l'Europe* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2012), pp. 23–9, here p. 25 (author translation).
80. Dunn, 'Flavius Constantius', p. 383.
81. There is an identifiable tendency in some modern criticism to pay no attention to these events at all. For example, H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); P. J. Heather, *Goths and Romans 332–489* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); A. Soby Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Jordanes and the History of the Goths. Studies in a Migration Myth* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press University of Copenhagen, 2002); P. Heather, *The Goths* (London: Blackwell, 1996). Even in his biography on Placidia, Oost frames four out of his eight chapters around male figures, and reaches Placidia only at chapter six. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*.

82. Becker-Piriou, 'De Galla Placidia', pp. 513–16.
83. James, 'Ghosts in the Machine', p. 98.
84. Gaca, 'Ancient Warfare', pp. 278–97.
85. Gaca, 'Ancient Warfare', p. 280.
86. In *Politics* (1.8.12, 1256a and 1256b) Aristotle understood warfare as a method of economic acquisition and that the most desired property were human beings as slaves, particularly young women and children beyond the age of early infancy. *Aristotle Politique Livres I et II*, trans. J. Aubonnet (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1960) vol. I, p. 26; *Aristotle Politics Books I and II*, trans. T. J. Saunders (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 11–12.
87. Scodel, 'The Captive's Dilemma', p. 142.
88. Olympiodorus, *frag.* 24, pp. 186–9: ἐν οἷς μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων γαμικῶν δώρων δωρεῖται Ἀδαοῦλος καὶ ν' εὐειδεῖς νεανίας σηρικὴν ἐνδεδυμένους ἐσθῆτα, φέροντος ἐκάστου ταῖς χερσὶν ἀνὰ δύο μεγίστων δίσκων, ὧν ὁ μὲν χρυσοῦ πλῆρης, ὁ δὲ τιμίων λίθων, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀτιμῆτων ἐτύγχανεν ἢ τῆς Ῥώμης ὑπῆρχε κατὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν τοῖς Γότθοις ἀποσυληθέντα.
89. For discussion of the commandeering of pre-adolescent boys in ravaging warfare, see Gaca, 'Ancient Warfare', pp. 282–4; Gaca, 'Martial Rape', p. 307.
90. Gaca, 'Continuities in Rape', p. 1046.
91. Olympiodorus, *frag.* 26, pp. 188–9: ...καὶ τὴν βασιλῖδα Πλακιδίαν εἰς ὕβρω Ἀδαοῦλου ἐκ ποδὸς προηγῆσασθαι τοῦ ἵππου ἅμα λοιπῶν αἰχμαλώτων ἐπέταξε· καὶ τὸ διάστημα ἦν τῆς προπομπῆς ἐκ τῆς πόλεως μέχρι δωδεκάτου σημείου.
92. Such behavioural patterns are intrinsic within warfare and include sexual violence: 'rape in war ... has been used as a ritual of degradation of the other side, a way on instilling terror, a tactic of demoralization, a plundering of booty, and a humiliation rite for the men on the other side who cannot (in masculinity's terms) protect "their" women'. MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, p. 223.
93. MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, p. 223.
94. Chaniotis, *War in the Hellenistic World*, p. 113. Olympiodorus, *frag.* 30. For an alternative view of the implications of Placidia's return, see Dunn, 'Flavius Constantius', 376–93. Becker-Piriou, 'De Galla Placidia', p. 514, emphasises how barbarian kings quickly discarded their wives if it suited new diplomatic interests, either by humiliation, incarceration or death.
95. *Chronicon Paschale*, 415, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonn: E. Weber, 1832) vol. 1, p. 572; *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD*, tr. Mi. Whitby and Ma. Whitby, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989) CE 415, p. 64.
96. Echoing C. Belsey, 'Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text', in J. Newton and D. Rosenfelt (eds), *Feminist Criticism and Social Change. Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture* (London: Methuen, 1985) p. 46.
97. Women in warfare 'who lost their lives or were raped during the sack of cities are as anonymous as the mothers and widows of the dead warriors'. Chaniotis, *War in the Hellenistic World*, p. 113.