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The Exiling of Women from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: Data, Patterns, and Research Avenues[1]

This chapter presents and discusses a data collection pertaining to the exiling of women in late antiquity, here defined as the period from the fourth to the mid-seventh century. Although they make up a minority of the total cases of exile during these centuries, a substantial number of exiled women are documented in late antique sources. Their experiences have attracted little attention from scholars, as the wealth of recent studies on exile have tended to privilege the treatment of men, and especially bishops.[2] This paper is a first step in redressing that imbalance.

We will begin by explaining our definition of "exile", which has guided how we have selected our data. We will then describe the features and limits of the data collection itself, the sources it is drawn from, and the categories we have chosen to order the information. Here, we will highlight trends, patterns, and peculiarities, before briefly discussing, first, how these compare to what we know about women's exile in the earlier Roman empire, and, second, how cases from the later Roman empire compare to those from the post-Roman world. Finally, we will point to a range of research avenues that are worth pursuing further based on this dataset. Most importantly, a suggestion from the data that deserves further scrutiny is that in late antiquity the motivations, conditions, and experiences for and of women's exile seem to have changed significantly in comparison to the earlier imperial period.

Defining "Exile"

In its most basic sense, an "exile" is simply a person who has spent a prolonged period outside his or her homeland. The term is most often used to describe persons who are forced to leave

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[2] See for recent studies Daniel Washburn, *Banishment in the Later Roman Empire, 284-476 CE* (London: Routledge, 2013); Julia Hillner, Jörg Ulrich, Jakob Engberg, eds., *Clerical Exile in Late Antiquity* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2016); Dirk Rohmann, Jörg Ulrich, Margarita Vallejo Girvés, eds., *Mobility and Exile at the End of Antiquity* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2018); Jennifer Barry, *Bishops in Flight: Exile and Displacement in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2019); Julia Hillner, "Waves Across the Pond: Exiling Clerics in Late Antiquity," in *Studies in Late Antiquity* 3 (2019). See also the database: Julia Hillner, Dirk Rohmann, Harry Mawdsley, *Clerical Exile in Late Antiquity* (www.clericalexile.org, 1 July 2018; last accessed 30/04/2023), which collects around 500 cases of exile in late antiquity.

their communities, rather than those who choose to settle in foreign lands, but even strictly voluntary forms of migration sometimes fall within the term's semantic range. In the Roman and post-Roman worlds, exile was a similarly capacious concept, denoting a "state of being" that could be applied to virtually any kind of migrant.[3]

To collect our dataset, however, we have concentrated on a particular type of exile: that which was intentionally inflicted by those in power. It is more aptly called banishment. This is not a form of movement for which there is an easy analogy in the modern Western world. While deportations happen today, these are usually reserved for so-called "illegal immigrants", who are sent back to their native countries. By contrast, in the Roman empire and the post-Roman kingdoms, banishment tended to happen within the boundaries of the polity, usually because the authorities wanted to retain control over those affected. Banishment thus acted as a form of incapacitation, which limited victims' activities and movements in a similar way to how the modern prison penalty functions today.[4] Indeed, as we shall see, the boundaries between banishment and imprisonment were frequently blurred during the period, as individuals could be sent to enclosed institutions, such as fortresses, monasteries, or domestic residences, and forced to remain there.[5]

Banishment was a common penalty in late antiquity. As such, it was generally enforced as a result of formal legal proceedings: an offender was accused of a crime, convicted by a tribunal, and sentenced to banishment as punishment. The punishment came in different forms, with Roman law recognising distinct penalties such as *exilium*, *relegatio*, *deportatio* and *aquae et igni interdictio*.[6] Each of these incorporated technical differences concerning the conditions of the sentence. *Deportatio*, for example, was invariably severe since it was always permanent, compelled offenders to reside in particular locations, and resulted in the loss of their property and citizenship; by contrast, *relegatio* did not strip offenders of their civic status and otherwise provided greater scope for leniency, with judges determining its duration, spatial limits, and whether or not it was combined with property confiscation. An awareness of these different penalties was retained in the post-Roman kingdoms, but there was also a degree of legal

[3] Washburn, *Banishment*: 3. See also Laura M. Napran, "Introduction: Exile in Context," in, *Exile in the Middle Ages. Selected Proceedings*, ed. Laura M. Napran and Elisabeth van Houts (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004): 1-9.
[4] On "incapacitative sanctions", see Terance D. Miethe and Hong Lu, *Punishment: A Comparative Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 30-3.
[5] Julia Hillner, *Prison, Punishment and Penance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 194-241.
[6] Mary V. Braginton, "Exile under the Roman Emperors," *The Classical Journal* 39, no. 7 (1944): 391–407; Washburn, *Banishment*: 16-40.

simplification, with legislators favouring the more flexible sanction of *exilium*, in which the terms of the sentence were decided on a case-by-case basis.[7]

Although legal texts give us much insight into how legislators envisaged the application of banishment, they are less forthcoming on the realities of the punishment. In order to explore "real-world" instances of exile, we must turn to other sources, especially narrative ones. Here, we are faced with the problem that ancient and late antique authors did not necessarily reproduce the exact legal details around cases of banishment. In our data collection we have, therefore, decided to include all incidents in which women were forcibly removed from particular areas or regions, even where we cannot establish if this happened as a result of a formal trial and conviction, or of "extra-judicial" coercion. By "extra-judicial" we mean forced movement not intended as punishment per se, but that enacted by persons in power to achieve some strategic goal. Rulers, for example, might expel their aristocratic opponents from court to remove them from the political sphere, or send their disobedient relatives to crown properties to control their behaviour. While these cases were sometimes the result of trumped-up charges, rulers had other coercive means at their disposal, so we cannot assume that an individual's banishment necessarily resulted from a criminal conviction.

Our Dataset (nos. refer to the Appendix)

Overall, we have identified 84 cases of exile that concern women. For our date range, we have followed the chronological framework of the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (PLRE), from the reign of Gallienus to that of Heraclius (260 to 641 CE), although our first cases of female exiles date only from the later tetrarchy, from 311 (nos. 1 and 2).[8] While for this chapter we have not systematically collected all known male exiles as well, and are especially missing complete information on the numbers of exiled lay men, by way of comparison we can point at some relevant figures from other collections: for example, of the 497 cases of exiled clerics recorded by the database *Clerical Exile in Late Antiquity*, 468 concern men and only 11 women (e.g. female ascetics). There are a further 18 cases of exile of whole groups in this database (e.g. the followers of a bishop), among whom may well have

[7] Harry Mawdsley, *Exile in the Post-Roman Successor States, 439 – c.650* (University of Sheffield, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 2019): 62-8.
[8] A. H. M. Jones, John Robert Martindale, John Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vols. 1-3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971-1992), henceforth and in the Appendix PLRE. Not all our exile cases are in PLRE, however, and some women are only mentioned in the entries of their male relatives or contacts, a common problem in PLRE.

been women, as we know for certain in one case.[9] Similarly, of the 258 cases compiled by Harry Mawdsley in his dissertation on exile in the post-Roman kingdoms, 191 concern men compared with only 33 women, along with an additional 34 cases involving larger groups, some of which again may have included members of both sexes.[10] As these examples demonstrate, therefore, we only have a small number of female cases, compared to what we know of the number of men who were exiled or fled from arrest in late antiquity. Nonetheless, 84 is a large enough figure to draw some reasonably robust conclusions, including statistical ones.

For personal data, we have collected information on, where possible, exiled women's names, as well as their kinship relations and their "status". In terms of the latter, we have distinguished between: royal women, by which we mean relatives both of emperors and of rulers of post-Roman kingdoms (the so-called "barbarian" kings); senatorial women, by which we mean members of the late Roman aristocracy; elite women, by which we mean relatives of nobles in the post-Roman kingdoms; ascetic women, by which we mean those who took a monastic vow; ecclesiastic women, by which we mean ascetics, deaconesses, or wives of clerics; and freed women, or women who were unfree either under Roman slavery or under the more flexible category of "unfreedom" in the post-Roman world.[11]

We have also collected information pertaining to the respective women's exile. In addition to the start date of exile, these data include geographical information on the territory within or from which a woman was exiled, distinguishing between the Roman empire and individual post-Roman kingdoms. Our collection also contains data on the authority responsible for the exile (for example, an emperor, a post-Roman ruler or a bishop),[12] as well as on the reason for the exile, and the conditions to which the respective woman was subjected. These conditions could vary considerably, and we have sought to contain this variety in the dataset. Recorded conditions include the expulsion or forced emigration of a woman from a given territory, or the banishment of a woman to the margins of a territory, such as the Great Oasis in Southern Egypt or the North African desert (we call this "frontier banishment"). Both forms do not seem to

[9] Julia Hillner, Dirk Rohmann, Harry Mawdsley, *Clerical Exile in Late Antiquity* (www.clericalexile.org, 1 July 2018; last accessed 30/04/2023). The group of mixed gender were monks and nuns exiled from Syria in 525; see Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *chronicon* 3.22.
[10] See appendix 2 in Mawdsley, *Exile*: 316-65.
[11] On unfreedom, see Alice Rio, "Freedom and Unfreedom in Early Medieval Francia: The Evidence of the Legal Formulae." *Past & Present* 193 (2006): 7-40.
[12] Due to limited space, the printed version of the database, which appears below in appendix 1, does not include this information.

have imposed further limits on her mobility. Other conditions could involve banishment to a specific place, such as an island, the separation from a woman's kinship or service network, and property confiscation, to downright incapacitation through forced labour, house arrest or monastic confinement. We have also included cases here which did not start out as legal forms of banishment, but as attempts to avoid legal or coercive repercussions that effectively turned into banishment. There are a good number of cases in which women fled to churches or monasteries, after which they either remained there permanently or temporarily, or were further processed into exile from there.[13]

Aside from a couple of inscriptions, most of the sources underpinning this dataset are narrative or polemical sources: chronicles, histories, and ecclesiastical treatises. It is therefore important to point out that what we have assembled are not neutral, objective data on banishment, but data on how women's exile was reported. To some extent the patterns emerging provide a window into what late antique and early medieval authors found noteworthy and, crucially, data on how they wrote about women's banishment, and not a comprehensive picture of the actual institution. This must be taken into account in their interpretation. For example, we must ask whether similarities in describing women's banishment by different authors points to patterns of actual reasons for and conditions of their treatment, or whether there are literary conventions, shared agendas, or inherited traditions at play in the representation of these events.

In terms of these patterns, we must first note the chronological distribution of the cases contained in the dataset. Although on average we could calculate that, during late antiquity, a woman may have been exiled somewhere at least every five years, the phenomenon, or the reporting about it, seems to have accelerated over the course of the period. While we can only count eight cases of exile for the fourth century, by the sixth century this number rises to 39. In terms of women's identity, over half of the cases of exile concern imperial or royal women, followed by another third that concern female members of the Roman senatorial or post-Roman elites. A tenth involves ecclesiastical or ascetic women, while the smallest group are unfree or freed women (see Graph 1).[14] The focus of our sources on women from the top of society is not surprising, given their elite perspectives. Similarly, the predominantly Christian nature of our sources—and their attention to doctrinal conflicts or debates about dogma—explains the

[13] On church or monastic asylum becoming exile, see Margarita Vallejo Girvés, "Case Studies of Church Asylum and Exile in Late Antiquity," in *Mobility and Exile at the End of Antiquity*, ed. Dirk Rohmann, Jörg Ulrich, Margarita Vallejo Girvés (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2018): 113-139.

[14] The numbers include some overlaps of identity markers, such as ecclesiastic senatorial women (e.g. deaconesses), which have been counted in both categories. Some attributions are not entirely certain.

appearance of women somehow associated with Christian communities. While the presence of unfree women (however small) in this dataset may be surprising, these cases are also all related to ecclesiastical matters, with one possible exception.[15]

This insight suggests that we may need to correlate the chronology and the identity of women, or the reporting on these, with the reasons for which they were exiled. In terms of such reasons, we can also note that aside from the more conventional exile for legal crimes (whether secular ones, such as adultery or treason, or "ecclesiastical" ones such as remarriage or illicit sexual relationships with clerics), we also see a large number of cases where the legal context is unclear (Graph 2).[16] It appears that, in late antiquity, wives often accompanied their husbands into banishment not because they had been complicit in their crime, but because they were encompassed by their husband's sentence. One such example can be seen in Visigothic Hispania, when King Reccared banished a group of Gothic notables from Mérida for conspiracy in 587.[17] After one of their number, a man named Vagrila, had escaped from custody and sought asylum in a local basilica, the enraged king decreed that the fugitive, along with his seemingly innocent wife (no. 69) and children and all their possessions should become the property of the church in perpetuity (although this sentence was quickly rescinded when the bishop freed the enslaved family in an ostentatious display of clemency).[18]

What is even more striking is that wives often seem to have been punished with banishment and also property confiscation for an offence that their husband had committed, after the husbands themselves had been executed. We see this especially in cases of treason or usurpation. For example, John Chrysostom described two such cases in an open letter to a young widow (nos. 4 and 6), written between 378 and 382 while he was still a priest at Antioch. Here, he mentioned the wife of the *secundicerius notariarum* Theodore, beheaded for treason in 371. Subsequently, the property of his wife was also confiscated and she was "banished from her freedom", enlisted among wool workers and "compelled to lead a life more pitiable than

[15] The possible exception is Septimima (no. 70), a nurse in a Merovingian royal household convicted of treason in 589. Her precise status is not clear, but she may well have been unfree; on household slavery and servitude in the early Middle Ages, see Alice Rio, *Slavery after Rome, 500-1100* (Oxford: OUP, 2017): 135–174.
[16] For exile as a statutory penalty for sexual crimes in late Roman law, see Antti Arjava, *Women and the Law in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 193-202; for ecclesiastical crimes, see Julia Hillner, "Gregory the Great's Prisons: Monastic Confinement in Early Byzantine Italy," in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 19 (2011): 433-471. Some women were exiled for more than one reason (such as regime change and criminal activity); these reasons have been counted separately in Graph 2.
[17] On this conspiracy, see Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain 409-711* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004): 68.
[18] *V. Patr. Emer.* 5.10-11, CCSL 116: 81-92.

any bondmaid", which could mean that she was forced to reside among the servants at court.[19] John Chrysostom then went on to detail another case, that of Artemisia (perhaps the widow of the usurper Procopius of 366-7) who was equally stripped of her property, so that she had to roam around begging, a type of banishment that may be similar to the legal sentence of *interdictio aquae et ignis*, the exclusion from the basic necessities of life.[20] It should be noted that John was writing here to dissuade his widowed correspondent from remarrying. He therefore had a clear agenda to describe marriage in negative terms and to point out what terrible effects it could have on wives. Nonetheless, because he names actual names, we can be sure that his accounts were grounded in some real occurrences, while leaving it unclear whether these women had committed any crimes beyond having made questionable marital choices.

Finally, we must pay attention to the conditions of women's exile, as highlighted in Graph 3. In this graph, the shaded bars each depict a different way in which exiled women were treated, arranged in a way that they indicate a continuum from the least restrictive form (left) to the most restrictive (right). The darkest bar indicates cases in which women were not only banished to specific locations but were also held in some kind of imprisonment. At the other extreme, we have cases of flight, expulsion, and forced emigration. In terms of chronology, it should be noted that one of the most incapacitating forms of women's exile, monastic confinement, began to be inflicted upon women only from the late fifth century onwards, at least according to our sources. It seems to have started out as a measure by which women sought to escape from more humiliating treatment, but which then regularly resulted in a state of immobilisation. One of the first cases is that of Leontia, wife of the usurper Marcian, who in 479 fled to the monastery of the Akoimetoi on the outskirts of Constantinople, where the emperor, Zeno, could then conveniently "abandon her" (καταλιμπάνει; no. 20).[21] Around a decade later, at the opposite end of the Mediterranean, the Burgundian princess Chroma was exiled to a convent by her uncle, King Gundobad, after he had murdered her father and annexed his kingdom (no. 32). Thereafter, monastic confinement became a very common sanction for women in the Eastern

[19] John Chrysostom, *Ad viduam juniorem*, 4: τῆς ἐλευθερίας αὐτῆς ἐκπεσοῦσα ταῖς ταμιακαῖς ἐρίθοις ἐγκατελέγετο, καὶ πάσης θεραπαινίδος οἰκτρότερον ζῇν ἠναγκάζετο βίον (transl. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers); on this letter and its description of violence against women, see Belinda Washington, "John Chrysostom's Letter to a Young Widow: Reflections on Imperial Women Roles at Regime Change," in *Empresses-in-waiting. Female Power and Performance at the Late Roman Court*, ed. Christian Rollinger, Nadine Viermann (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, forthcoming). On Theodore, see also PLRE I, Theodorus 13, p. 898.
[20] Artemisia is no. 4 in the appendix. On *interdictio aquae et ignis*, see n. 6 above.
[21] John of Antioch, frg. 303.

Empire, where it was even enshrined in law.[22] It would also become common in the post-Roman kingdoms, although not until the second half of the sixth century perhaps because there were fewer female monastic houses there initially.[23]

Comparison to Women's Exile in the Early Empire

The following discussion makes use of a second dataset on women's exile, as assembled by Frank Stini in the prosopographical appendix (*Alphabetischer Katalog*) to his study on exile in the early empire.[24] It is important to emphasise that these data have been collected from qualitatively different sources (especially early imperial historians), for a different research project using different methods, and with different questions in mind than our own. For this reason, we are not fully comparing like with like. Given that these data exist in published form, however, it is still worth at least tentatively indicating similarities and differences, even if what follows needs to be considered with caution.

A first point of convergence that we can note is the ratio of exiled men and women. Because Stini has collected evidence for both, we can stipulate that, for the early empire, 12% of all recorded exile cases concerned women (45:260). This is not dissimilar from the ratio in Harry Mawdsley's catalogue on exiled individuals in the post-Roman world as mentioned above (17%, 33:191). It seems therefore that, at least numerically, the interest by authors in women's exile remained fairly constant over the longue durée. This will need verification, however, against Stini's methods of inclusion or exclusion of certain forms of banishment, especially with regard to arbitrary, rather than legal forms of banishment, and because we lack full data on the later Roman empire.[25]

We also note some striking differences between Stini's data and our own. The first concerns the identity of exiled women, which seems to diversify substantially in late antiquity. In the early empire, the vast majority of exiled women (60%) that appear in Stini's catalogue are

[22] Julia Hillner, "Monastic Imprisonment in Justinian's Novels," in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 15 (2007): 205-237.
[23] On the development of monasteries in the West, see Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism. From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).
[24] Frank Stini, *Plenum exiliis mare. Untersuchungen zum Exil in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2011): 219-277. This catalogue contains men and women.
[25] Stini's catalogue does contain types of banishment that happened outside due judicial process, like the banishment of relatives of defeated foreign leaders, which points at an equally capacious definition of exile as employed here. For example, he includes Thusnelda, wife of the Cherusci noble Arminius, who was interned in Ravenna in 15CE (Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.57-59).

aristocratic women, of either equestrian or more frequently senatorial status. Royal (imperial) women, the largest group in our dataset, only make up a third. An even smaller group—just four cases—are "foreign" women: the wives or daughters of defeated foreign rulers who had been brought to Rome and allowed to live there or somewhere in Italy in banishment from their homelands.

In late antiquity, as we have seen, royal women make up the largest group, and new types of exiled women emerged, of "ecclesiastic" identities and also of much lower status. The group of exiled female aristocrats therefore substantially decreases. Rather than reflecting an actual decline in the use of exile against aristocratic women, this pattern is almost certainly due to historiographical changes, with authors now prioritising Christian affairs and the individuals caught up in them over politics involving lay elites, as already mentioned. Simply put, we lack the critical mass of Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, or Cassius Dio to fully capture the fate of senatorial women in late antiquity. It is also worth noting that the boundaries between imperial and aristocratic women were more fluid in the earlier empire, and so some female relatives of former emperors can be counted among the latter rather than the former.[26]

Another difference relates to the reasons for which women were exiled. Peculiar late antique crimes such as heresy, usually refusal to convert to the Christian orthodox position of the day, or ecclesiastical offences, are of course absent from Stini's catalogue.[27] Yet there are also some divergences that are less easy to explain. The vast majority of exiled women in the early empire were apparently charged with specific crimes under existing law. Next to accusations of treason, magic, incest, poisoning and so on, the most frequent accusation was of adultery, for which—as is well known—the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* of 18 BC prescribed banishment, in the form of *relegatio in insulam*, that is to an island, with some property confiscation, but without loss of citizenship.[28] To be sure, in the early empire not every instance of exile was the result of judicial proceedings, especially in the case of imperial women, and often accusations were a smoke screen for other reasons to remove troublesome individuals.[29]

[26] For example Iunia Calvina, a great great granddaughter of Augustus through her mother, banished in 49 CE for incest (Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.8.1).
[27] On heresy as a crime, see Laurette Barnard, "The Criminalization of Heresy in the Later Roman Empire: A Sociopolitical Device?," in *The Journal of Legal History* 16 (1995): 121-146.
[28] Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986): 121-127.
[29] As Mary Boatwright, *Imperial Women of Rome. Power, Gender, Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021): 69-78 notes, not all banishments of imperial women involved formal trials, but there was always a "judicial" context implied through the reference to existing "crimes".

For example, in 62 CE Claudia Octavia, the divorced wife of Nero, was banished for adultery to Pandateria, because Nero's new wife Sabina Poppaea resented her presence (Octavia was, indeed, killed shortly after).[30] Yet, "real" adultery processes and condemnations did happen. For example, according to Pliny, Gallitta, the wife of a military tribune was condemned to exile under the Lex Iulia for adultery with a *centurio*, after having been brought to court, the emperor's *iudicium*, by her rather unwilling husband.[31] Late Roman emperors continued to legislate on adultery, with eventually the penalty becoming a peculiar form of banishment, confinement in a monastery, as mentioned above. Of actual adultery cases resulting in banishment—in a monastery or not—we hear comparatively little, however. The majority of women's banishments in late antiquity were an outcome of what is better described as coercion than legal norms. In the early empire, the really clear occurrences of this type almost exclusively involved banishment as a result of war captivity, that is, the aforementioned wives and daughters of defeated foreign rulers. Such practices continued in the later empire; the Ostrogothic queen Matasuentha (no. 46) is one example.

An even trickier case are women who accompanied their banished husbands or were banished after their husbands' executions. In the early empire, the former did happen although not frequently. In the majority of such cases—as far as we can tell—the wife accompanied her husband voluntarily or she was suspected or even condemned for having been complicit in his crime, usually conspiracy. For example, at the time of Nero and then Vespasian, Fannia, wife of the stoic philosopher and ardent republican P. Helvidius Priscus, accompanied her husband twice into exile, and was afterwards also banished herself by Domitian for publishing a vita of her husband. She was clearly seen as a troublemaker.[32] In late antiquity, by contrast, the number of female companions of exiled men increased substantially. In addition, the exile of apparently innocent women after the violent demise of their male relatives—due to failed conspiracies or regime change—does not seem to have occurred in the early empire.

Finally, we can note differences in the conditions of exile. To start with, we know much more about the locations of women's exile in the later Roman empire.[33] Late antique authors thus exhibited a greater interest in the conditions of banishment than their early imperial counterparts, again showing how changes in writing practices had a significant impact on what

[30] Boatwright, *Imperial Women*: 75.
[31] Pliny, *ep.* 6.31.
[32] Stini, *Plenum exiliis mare*: 242.
[33] In the case of Stini's catalogue we lack information about the locations of exiled women in just under half the cases; in our dataset, it is 20%.

we can say about the "reality" of exile. Nonetheless, what we do know about exile destinations in the early empire is suggestive of real changes between the two periods. In the early imperial period, women—like men—were most frequently sent to specific locations, where they were expected to remain for the duration of their sentences, as opposed to being simply expelled or forced to relocate from an area. Mediterranean islands were the most common destinations for banished women, as they were for banished men. This is interesting, since some historians have argued that such islands were selected by the authorities as they were located far away from the Empire's political centre, but also from frontiers and thus its military forces.[34] But while these security concerns might make sense for banished men, they hardly apply to women, who were not likely to be expected to take up arms. Instead, as Stini himself argues, islands were chosen because they inflicted a greater sense of alienation upon offenders by emphasising the distance to their home communities (usually the city of Rome) and by denying them the comforts and enjoyments of urban life.[35] Consequently, the authorities' preference for island banishment suggests that the conditions of women's exile were shaped mainly by penal considerations. This is not surprising, given that women were generally being banished as result of formal legal processes.

In the later Empire, island banishment almost completely disappears; in fact, there is only a single documented example of a woman being exiled to an island during the period, and this is to Rhodes, a rather large territory (no. 84). If a woman was exiled to a specific location, it was usually a city or even more typically, a frontier location. This development was, however, also not specific to women, but as Julia Hillner has shown elsewhere, the late antique shift from island to frontier banishment was probably driven by the increasing use of exile to punish religious dissidence, and in particular a desire to send those with unorthodox views to the margins of the empire away from an imagined centre.[36] Aside from frontier banishment, the comparison with Stini's catalogue suggests that another key development in late antiquity was that women's exile became, on the whole, more restrictive. This was particularly true in the case of imperial and royal women and the wives of failed usurpers, who were routinely banished to fortresses, palaces, or other domestic residences where they were forcibly detained. This development culminated in monastic confinement, which obviously did not exist in the early empire.

[34] Theodor Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht* (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1899): 973.
[35] Stini, *Plenum exiliis mare*: 171-188.
[36] Hillner, *Prison*: 212-217.

Comparing Women's Exile in the Late Roman and Post-Roman Worlds

Having reflected upon the differences between the early and late imperial periods, we will now consider how the collapse of the Empire may have impacted the exiling of women. There was no decline in the number of women banished in the successor states, with the ratio of documented cases remaining almost identical across the categories of Roman and post-Roman (see Graph 4). On the contrary, given that the Roman category includes examples from the Eastern Empire and thus covers the entire period of study, there was a considerable uptick in the frequency of cases in the post-Roman west. This was presumably a consequence of political fragmentation, which multiplied some of the contexts in which women might be exiled. The vast majority of cases, however, are associated with either the Merovingian or Vandal kingdoms (see Graph 4). To some degree, this disparity must reflect the vagaries of source preservation rather than actual differences in the application of the penalty. In Merovingian Gaul, for example, the survival of a substantial narrative text—Gregory of Tours' *Decem Libri Historiarum*—means that cases were more likely to be recorded here than in neighbouring kingdoms. Nonetheless, in Vandal Africa, it is possible that women were, in fact, banished in greater numbers than were their counterparts elsewhere in the post-Roman west. Vandal kings were the only "barbarian" rulers to routinely employ the penalty against religious dissidents, as they looked to promote their favoured brand of Christianity at the expense of the Nicene church.[37] While these attempts to establish orthodoxy primarily affected men, especially Nicene clerics and court officials,[38] Vandal kings sometimes extended the scope of their measures to include women as well.[39] This context of religious persecution, absent from other kingdoms, helps explain the overrepresentation of Vandal cases in our dataset.

If we move beyond the overall figures of Roman and post-Roman cases and compare specific variables, some interesting patterns emerge. With regard to status, there was broad continuity in the frequency of cases involving imperial/royal (23:26) and senatorial/elite (11:11) women, which is not surprising given the continuing preoccupation of post-Roman sources with those at the top of society. Interestingly, the number of cases involving unfree/freed women quadrupled (1:4), but because of the tiny sample size it is difficult to know if this represents a real change in how exile was implemented. Perhaps more significant is the fact that there are

[37] Andrew H. Merrills and Richard Miles, *The Vandals* (Chichester: Wiley, 2010): 177–203.
[38] Robin Whelan, *Being Christian in Vandal North Africa: The Politics of Orthodoxy* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017): 143–64.
[39] Examples in the appendix include nos. 17, 24, 25, and possibly 9.

no documented cases involving ecclesiastic or ascetic women in the post-Roman west, compared with 4 and 5 cases in the Roman Empire respectively. Given that the exiling of such women was typically associated with disputes over orthodoxy, the decline in these cases can perhaps again be linked to the general absence of religious conflict in the successor states.

This lack of interest in enforcing orthodoxy can similarly be detected in the changing reasons for exile (see Graph 5). While there is superficial parity in the number of Roman and post-Roman cases in which women were exiled for heresy, all the latter instances were linked to the Vandal kingdom. Elsewhere in the post-Roman west, women were apparently no longer banished for religious dissidence. As for the other reasons for exile, most exhibit continuity from the Roman to the post-Roman world, with the number of cases remaining roughly the same. Indeed, the only really significant change is the increased prevalence of women exiled on account of regime change. In our categorisation of the data, we defined "exile due to regime change" as occurring when an imperial/royal woman was banished following the death or deposition of a monarch without her being convicted of criminal charges. Apparently unknown in the Principate, it is possible that its emergence in late antiquity may partly indicate changes in reporting strategies, insofar as the sources become less likely to record a case's legal aspects. Even if that is true, however, late antique rulers do appear to have been much more concerned about the potential threat posed by royal women than were their early imperial counterparts.

The exiling of such women following regime change is thus a distinctive feature of late antiquity, and more particularly of the post-Roman world. It is documented most frequently in Merovingian Gaul, presumably because of that polity's frequent division into smaller *Teilreiche*, which increased the number of courts and hence the number of royal women who could be exiled. But crucially, the practice is reported at least once in (almost) every post-Roman kingdom, suggesting it was a cross-regional phenomenon of some significance. The most plausible explanation for its increased prominence is that royal women posed an even greater threat to rulers after the collapse of the Empire. This was partly due to these women's dynastic connections, which made them useful assets for men looking to stake a claim on the throne. While this was also true of royal women in the Roman Empire, the hereditary principle was, on the whole, stronger in the successor states, and so new kings had good reason to put superfluous royal women out of the reach of their rivals.[40] It is also the case that these women

[40] On succession practices in the barbarian kingdoms, see Ian N. Wood, "Kings, Kingdom and Consent," in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. Ian N. Wood and Peter Sawyer (Leeds: University of Leeds Press, 1977), 6–29.

were more directly involved in high politics than their Roman counterparts precisely because of the breakdown of imperial structures. In the post-Roman kingdoms, bureaucracies and institutions were weaker, and politics more personal and centred upon the king's court. Given that the court also functioned as a domestic space, the lack of separation between the public and private spheres allowed royal women to carve out significant influence for themselves.[41] They acted as power brokers between aristocratic factions and, as managers of the royal household, they often controlled the royal treasury. Yet royal women were also uniquely vulnerable, since their standing had no secure basis beyond their relationship with the reigning monarch. Regime change therefore put them in a very precarious position. For a new king on the make, banishing his predecessor's wife and other female relatives was an attractive strategy, since it removed a potentially disloyal figure from court politics and may have facilitated the seizure of considerable quantities of liquid wealth.

We might expect any changes in the reasons for exile to have influenced its conditions, but this is difficult to establish on the basis of the surviving evidence (see Graph 6). This is because the number of unclear cases increases by fourfold in the post-Roman kingdoms, limiting our ability to draw robust conclusions from the data. Even so, there are some developments that warrant further discussion. The absence of religious conflict outside Vandal Africa, for example, seems to have led to a decline in frontier banishment in the post-Roman world; there are only two documented cases of this form of exile, both of which are associated with the "persecution" of Nicene Christians by Vandal kings. The apparent reduction in cases of monastic confinement is more misleading. With a single exception, the Roman cases date from the late 470s onwards, that is after the collapse of the Western Empire, and thus are contemporary with the successor states.[42] Indeed, as mentioned already, this type of exile emerged at roughly the same time at both ends of the Mediterranean but is not reported with any frequency in the post-Roman west until the later sixth century (when the sources become better and female monastic houses proliferated). The successor states did not, then, witness a decline in monastic confinement, but rather its emergence as a strategy of dealing with politically-dangerous women.

Finally, it is possible that exile became more restrictive in the post-Roman west, at least for certain kinds of women. If we concentrate on cases of imprisonment or those in which women

[41] Janet L. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London: Hambledon Press, 1986): 1–48; Pauline A. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Leicester University Press, 1983): *passim.*
[42] The exception is Olympias (no. 10).

were held in specific locations, the evidence in the successor states is inconsistent, with the former declining (9:6) and the latter increasing (7:11). A pattern can be discerned, however, if we concentrate specifically on royal women. In the Roman Empire, 41% of cases involving such women resulted in the victim being held in a specific location or imprisoned. By comparison, in the post-Roman west, the figure rises to 62%, or 70% if we discount cases in which the conditions of exile are unclear. This would support our earlier suggestion that royal women posed a greater threat than they had done before, with rulers intensifying the conditions of banishment in the hope that it would limit the woman's potential to cause trouble.

Avenues for Further Research

By way of concluding remarks, we would like to point at three questions emerging from the above discussion that, in our view, warrant further investigation.

Provided that we can trust our data to reveal real trends, we must ask, first, why there was an increase in incidents where women were exiled not via judicial procedure or for crimes that they had themselves committed, but as wives of men who had offended the authorities in some way. Perhaps late antique authors did not know or perhaps they were, unlike classical authors, uninterested in legal technicalities, leaving it open whether such wives had been complicit in usurpations or plots. But the frequency of such cases reported by late antique authors also suggests that at least some women were targeted simply qua being a wife, that is, that they were collateral damage of their husbands' actions. Perhaps—although this is a very cautious perhaps—wives were increasingly seen as liable for their husband's behaviour due to changing attitudes towards marriage. As Kate Cooper has shown, in late antiquity the marriage bond came to be seen as the strongest social relationship in a household, at the expense of a wife's relationship with her birth family. This was partly because of emerging Christian ideas around the indissolubility of marriage, partly due to a rising habit of elite men to seek out socially inferior brides, and partly due to, in the post-Roman kingdoms, inheritance practices around land which disadvantaged the property holding of women.[43] These features of marriage may have increased the dependency of wives on their husbands, which in turn meant they were less protected against the consequences of their husbands' behaviour.

[43] Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 143-198. On women and landed property in the post-Roman world, see, for example, Marios Costambeys, "Kinship, Gender and Property in Lombard Italy", in *The Langobards before the Frankish Conquest: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. G. Ausenda et al. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009): 69-94.

Second, we should ask why the number of exiled royal women increased in late antiquity. On a very basic level, this may have been because there were more of them. From the tetrarchy onwards, late imperial rule was frequently collegial in nature, multiplying the number of women associated with the throne. This proliferation of royal women continued after the collapse of the Western Empire when new polities emerged that each had their own ruling dynasties. At the same time, these women seem to have acquired greater political importance. This was largely due to their ability to act as conduits of dynastic legitimacy, something already evident in the fourth century but which intensified thereafter, meaning that their status could be exploited by men who wished to obtain the throne.[44]

Royal women may therefore have posed a latent risk to late antique rulers, which encouraged them to exile superfluous female relatives as well as female members of previous regimes. The latter phenomenon—banishment due to regime change—was likewise a novel feature of late antiquity, and perhaps especially of the post-Roman world. In the early Empire, imperial women seem to have rarely been exiled after the deaths of emperors. In the later empire, we lack sufficient research on this phenomenon. It is true that we see few imperial women "properly" exiled, but we may have to expand our gaze towards phenomena such as forced celibacy, forced marriage, or simply disappearance of women to fully understand their fates after regime change.[45] We should also remember, as we discuss here, that female relatives of usurpers sometimes faced banishment (or worse) if their husbands failed to obtain the throne. Still, in the post-Roman west it was more common for new kings to exile the female members of the previous regime. The most plausible explanation is that these women posed an even greater threat to those in power than their imperial counterparts, but this requires further verification.

A final remaining question is why women's exile became more restrictive over time. The shift to more arbitrary forms of banishment as well as the increased political standing of royal women had a significant impact upon the conditions of exile. It meant that victims were subjected to tighter constraints as the authorities sought to control their activities and in particular, to prevent their return to the political sphere. In other words, security concerns seem to have eclipsed the penal agendas that had previously dictated the terms of banishment. This

[44] The importance of women as conduits of dynastic legitimacy is already apparent during the Theodosian dynasty, see Anja Busch, *Die Frauen der theodosianischen Dynastie* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2015): 214-217.
[45] See Julia Hillner, "Concluding Remarks: Imperial Women after Curtains", in *Empresses-in-waiting. Female Power and Performance at the Late Roman Court*, ed. Christian Rollinger and Nadine Viermann (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, forthcoming).

may explain why women were increasingly exiled to fortresses or palaces, where the authorities could closely monitor them and limit their access to the outside world. It was for these reasons that late antique rulers also began to exile women to monasteries, a practice that emerged independently in both the eastern and western Mediterranean at the end of the fifth century. To borrow a term from biology, this seems to represent a clear example of "convergent evolution", with rulers—both Roman and "barbarian"—responding in similar ways to the same basic problem: how to deal with the female relatives of one's defeated or deceased rivals?[46] Banishing them to a monastery was a convenient solution. For one thing, it restricted access to the women to a similar degree as was the case for those exiled to other types of enclosed institutions. But monastic confinement had some additional advantages. If the woman was forced to take vows and join her host community, she was (at least in theory) prohibited from ever returning to secular life, marrying, or producing children. This made monastic confinement a peculiarly effective way of neutralising a woman's political agency.

Beyond these strategic advantages, however, banishing women to monasteries may have also satisfied other, more ideological concerns. Late antique rulers often represented exile as an act of *clementia* par excellence; by sparing the lives of their enemies, they demonstrated their moderation and self-restraint, qualities that were associated with good rulership in both the classical and Christian traditions.[47] Rulers could thus reap considerable propaganda benefits through the enforcement of exile, and this was particularly true in the case of monastic confinement. Not only did this sanction spare its victims from death, but it protected their eternal souls by placing them in centres of spiritual contemplation and subjecting them to a regimented programme of prayers and fasts. In the contemporary mindset, therefore, monastic confinement may have been a uniquely salutary form of exile. As such, it may have allowed rulers to dispose of troublesome people, while claiming—perhaps not entirely cynically—that they were looking after their best interests, if not in this world then at least in the next. In this way, a truly new type of banishment emerged at the end of antiquity, not only for women, but also for men.

[46] See George R. McGhee, *Convergent Evolution: Limited Forms Most Beautiful* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2011).
[47] Hillner, *Prison*: 115-116, 320.

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