

Christopher Paolella

**“Against Her Will and Crying Out”:
Poverty and Human Trafficking in
Late-Medieval Europe**

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Late-Medieval Europe

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During the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the status of prostitution evolved from a trade or a profession, however marginalized, into a source of malignant temptation. Prostitutes ceased to be sex workers who sought to alleviate economic insecurity through commercial sex and became vain, selfish women who desired wealth and opulence, led upstanding married men astray and, thus, threatened their souls and the moral and civic orders of a reformed society. Sex workers became the literal embodiment of the decadence and corruption that threatened to engulf the world as epitomized by the richly attired Whore of Babylon astride the seven-headed Beast adorning the Lutheran Bible.¹ Nevertheless, the study of late-medieval human trafficking makes clear that vanity, selfishness, and spiritual malignance were little related to prostitution and the commercial sex industry. Instead, the commercial sex industry depended upon poverty, limited employment opportunities for women, and male entitlement, all of which led to vulnerability and, thus, victimization, as women and girls struggled to alleviate economic duress. Frequently, families prostituted their children or sold them to the commercial sex industry to ease the burden of poverty. The intense competition for limited employment opportunities in industries, such as food service and hospitality, textile production and care, and domestic service, left poor women vulnerable to predatory employers. Traffickers, noble and common and male and female, understood these constraints and skillfully exploited them to funnel victims into the commercial sex industry of the late-medieval era, which was often accompanied by the acquiescence or participation of local authorities. Once in, escape was difficult. Typically an expression of widely held attitudes of male entitlement, violence compelled victims to labor for an industry whose profits filled the coffers of municipalities and local elites.

Before proceeding, terms must be defined. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime defines *human trafficking* as

¹ Robert James Bast, *Honor Your Fathers: Catechisms and the Emergence of a Patriarchal Ideology in Germany 1400–1600* (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 226.

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.²

This study uses the modern definition of human trafficking, because the term did not exist during the Middle Ages, and indeed, human trafficking lacked a definition with an international consensus even up to the year 2000.³ Therefore, this study is effectively and necessarily referring to a modern definition backward into an earlier age. Although the term human trafficking is anachronistic, the primary sources from the period nevertheless record activities that mainly fit this modern definition (apart from organ removal).

Enigmatic figures known by different names, such as procurers, receivers, *lenones*, *destrales*, and bawds, were central to late-medieval human trafficking activities. These shadowy individuals were the links among the networks of late-medieval human trafficking: occasionally, they were the go-betweens that supplied labor and clients to the sex industry or the bridges that linked human traffickers and the sex industry. At other times, they were traffickers and sex workers themselves as well as simple thugs and pimps. Their activities and roles varied across transactions, but their objectives remained constant: to facilitate commercial sex by serving as a link between supply and demand.

² Article 3, paragraph (a), *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*; online at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/index.html> [accessed 07.09.2024].

³ Anthony M. DeStefano, *The War on Human Trafficking: US Policy Assessed* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007): xvi.

Lastly, this study considers the various types of brothels found in the late Middle Ages. Between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, three types of brothels were generally found in Western Europe, namely, houses of assignation, informal brothels, and formal or municipal brothels.

Houses of assignation were arrangements in which prostitutes did not reside in or own the building and paid the landlord a percentage of their fee per client.⁴ This type was likely the earliest type of brothel, because these houses were the most flexible; potentially any enclosed shelter could become a house of assignation. Moreover, little to no start-up cost was required, because prostitutes did not need to own a property and could rent a room per client.

Legally, informal brothels were the default establishments until the end of the thirteenth century, because no brothel was officially sanctioned until 1285 (in Montpellier). Their existence was precarious and vulnerable to the whims of civil magistrates and municipal governments, territorial lords, ecclesiastical officials, and to popular sentiments. Toleration was the best that could be expected; thus, informal brothels were not permanent in time or space. They came and went as opportunities emerged and as the demand for sex intersected with the supply of sex labor and of coin. Taverns, inns, and public baths (also known as *stewes* in England) were perhaps the most famous of these informal brothels, but not every such establishment operated as a brothel. Those that did operate as brothels might do so occasionally to gain extra revenue and then abandon commercial sex activities when able or pressured by municipal and ecclesiastical authorities. Moreover, homeowners might rent their houses or single rooms to prostitutes to make extra income. Under these circumstances, the distinction between a house of assignation and an informal brothel is difficult to draw, and the study suggests that the main difference lies in whether prostitutes worked at the place on a long-term basis (brothel) or simply rented per client on an ad hoc basis (house of assignation).

⁴ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 72.

Formal, licit, and municipal brothels were institutionalized establishments with permission to operate through official licenses. They were permanent features of the urban landscape and employed women whose main, if not sole, occupation was sex work. In certain cases, these establishments were private enterprises that operated with official recognition and sanction; in other cases, the municipality outright owned and managed the establishment. Still in other cases, the municipality leased the rights to manage and, thus, profit from brothels to private third parties. These institutions emerged in Europe after 1285 and became popular after circa 1350. With the development of licensing, houses of assignation and informal brothels became *illicit* institutions but remained a part of the structural landscape of the sex industry.

With these definitions in mind, the study now considers the intersectionality among poverty, vulnerability and exploitation, and the commercial sex industry.

In France and England, poverty pressured families into prostituting their daughters. Mothers are the most present in extant court records, whereas fathers are seldom accused of such an activity. This scenario implies a systemic bias against women in which crimes against public morality were concerned and a particularly acute financial vulnerability that single mothers experienced when deprived of their husband's income. For example, Jacques Rossiaud conducted a survey on 130 cases of sex work in Dijon between 1440 and 1540 and found that nearly all women had entered sex work by the age of 17 years, and one-third had entered before the age of 15 years. Out of 77 cases in which the reasons for entering prostitution are recorded, only approximately 15 percent seemingly voluntarily entered freely and without coercion. A quarter of the cases involve young women who were sold or pressured into sex work by their families due to dire poverty. Moreover, 27 percent of the women were victims of public rape; as such, their chances for marriage were slim, because the victims bore the shame of sexual assault.⁵ Faced with the prospect of a daughter without the hope of economic security in

⁵ For a survey on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sex workers in Dijon, see Jacques Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, trans. Lydia C. Cochrane (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1996): 32–33.

marriage, families then sold them into municipal brothels or prostitution rings, where they might still eke out a living and relieve the household of their financial burden.

In England, in 1395, Elizabeth Brouderer [Broiderer] was accused in a court testimony of trafficking her daughter among various men over the course of one night. According to the deposition, Elizabeth “brought a certain Alice, her daughter, to different men for the sake of lechery, putting her with those men in their beds at night without light [...]”⁶ In the 1470s, Joan Chapman, the widow of a certain John Chapman of Sandown in Kent, was charged with *bawdry* (being a *bawd*) for pimping her 15-year-old daughter Alice to Flemish and German merchants in a port.⁷ In 1494, Katherine “Dwythwoman” [Dutchwoman] was accused of being a bawd for her daughter, “because she [Katherine] beat her when the girl refused to visit the lodgings of a certain Lombard [Italian], by whom the girl later had a child.”⁸ These examples demonstrate the underlying effects of poverty. As widows, immigrants, and craftswomen whose fortunes were unpredictable, these women would have likely faced intense financial hardships; thus, they resorted to the repeated sale of their children to alleviate such pressure. The choice of these women of foreign merchants who were likely to have ample sums of hard currency at hand is not an accident.

Families were dependent on the income that their children could provide directly through employment or indirectly through labor in the

⁶ *Item dixit quod quaedam Elizabeth Brouderer [...] quae etiam conduxit quandam Aliciam filiam suam diversis hominibus luxuriae causa, ipsam cum eisdem hominibus in lectis eorum noctanter absque lumine [...]s]* London Metropolitan Archives, *Pleas and Memoranda Rolls*, CLA/024/01/02/35: A34 membrane 2; Elizabeth Brouderer was implicated in a court testimony given by John Rykener, a male prostitute in London during the 1390s, whose case will be revisited in this chapter. For more information on John Rykener and Elizabeth Broiderer, see David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, “The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth Century London,” *GLQ* 1 (1995): 459–65, and David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, “‘Ut cum muliere’: A Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth Century London,” in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carl Freccero (London: Routledge, 1996): 99–116.

⁷ Kent Archives Office, *Sandwich Yearbook (The Old Black Book) 1432–1487*: Sa/AC1 folio 195v.

⁸ London Metropolitan Archives, *Acta quoad correctionem delinquentium* (Commissary Court Act Books): 9064.6 Folio 22r (note: the folio has since been renumbered to 21r.)

household economy. These families were unable to afford to maintain their children indefinitely, and the economic prospects of young single women, especially those of poor or middling status, were limited outside of marriage within village communities. The majority of these prospects were found in cities and towns that were often located far beyond the protection of families and kinship networks. The search for employment was a moment of acute vulnerability for young women and girls in the late Middle Ages, who were occasionally driven into a fiercely competitive labor market due to desperate financial circumstances.

For example, in the early 1470s, a young woman named Ellen Butler was searching for a position as a domestic servant in London, when a certain Thomas Bowde approached her. Bowde was a shrewd confidence man who used Ellen's desire for domestic employment as a pretext to lure her into his home in Southwark, in which he operated a brothel. When Ellen refused to cooperate, Thomas then brought charges against her, accusing her of owing him an insurmountable debt. Although Ellen claimed coercion, the court sided with Thomas, and Ellen faced the choice of imprisonment for delinquency or a return with Thomas to employment in his brothel. Evidently, Ellen opted for imprisonment, because at a certain point between 1473 and 1475, she petitioned the Bishop of Winchester for a release from prison, although her fate is unknown.⁹

As another example, in England in 1517, a tailor named John Barton was accused of kidnapping a young woman named Joan Rawlyns. In court, Joan testified that she had told her patroness, the Lady of Willesden, that she wished to go to London where servant wages were higher than those in Aldenham, Hertfordshire, where she lived (approximately 16 miles northwest of Westminster). The Lady of Willesden consequently asked John Barton, an acquaintance of hers, to escort Joan to London. Mr. Barton confessed that he had met Joan on the highway as he came from services at Our Lady of Willesden. John promised as follows:

⁹ Kew National Archive, *Chancery Court Proceedings*, C1.48.191. See Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England," *Signs* 14, no. 2 (1989): 418 for Ellen's petition.

Joan Rawlyns [...] to bring her to a good and honest service in this city [London]. Whereupon she, putting her trust and confidence in him, went with him throughout all the city until he, unknown to her, had brought her to the Stewes' side [Southwark] and there he left her in the house of a waterman [ferryman], and then went immediately to a bawd there and made covenant with her to set the said maiden with the said bawd. In the meantime, the said maiden, perceiving by the said waterman's wife that she was in such an evil-named place, knelt down on her knees and besought her for Our Lady's sake to help convey her to this city; which accordingly she did honestly in this city, where she [Joan] now remains in honest service.¹⁰

The courts imprisoned John Barton due to his history of “dishonorable transactions with women.” He was later paraded through the city streets, pilloried, and finally expelled from the city. John's record of *dishonorable transactions* implies that he apparently trafficked semi-professionally, and he clearly maintained an extensive network of personal connections in London's underworld. He knew local buyers who would swiftly conclude transactions, and he knew safe houses where he may surreptitiously hold his abductees in the meantime. Given that John knew to bring Joan to the waterman's house and his history of dishonorable transactions, one can reasonably assume that Joan was not the first person trafficked by the pair.

Even if a young woman successfully found employment, she was still in danger. A limited market for female labor meant that competition for employment was fierce; with little certainty of finding an alternative occupation, women could not easily afford to leave a predatory employer. For example, in 1385 in London, a certain Elizabeth Moryng was accused of operating a prostitution ring out of her embroidery shop and of pimping the young women and girls who were ostensibly her

¹⁰ London Metropolitan Archives, *Letter Book N 1515–1526*, col/AD/01/010 (X109/028 on microfilm): folio 47v. See also, London Metropolitan Archives, *Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, Repertory 3 1515–1519*, col/CA/01/01/03 (X109/129 on microfilm): folios 157v–158r.

apprentices. One of her victims, a young woman named Joan, testified that Elizabeth had retained her and:

divers other women and bound them to serve her in that art [embroidery], whereas in truth, she did not practice that art, but after she retained them she exhorted said Joan and all the other women living with her and serving her to live in lechery and to go with friars, chaplains, and all others wishing to have them.¹¹

Joan's testimony led to the conviction of Moryng on charges of bawdry, who was eventually banished from London.¹² In 1423, Alsoun [Alison] Bostone was sentenced to spend an hour at the pillory for three consecutive market days after being convicted of "having let to hire for immoral purposes" her 13-year-old apprentice named Joan Hammond, "to divers persons for divers sums of money."¹³

However, the association between the textile and sex industries was not entirely illogical. Women who were associated with textile work, such as those who laundered, embellished, or repaired clothing, had access to restricted male-only living spaces, such as cloisters and rec-tories. Therefore, they were popularly associated with prostitution. For example, in the city of London, authorities charged two prostitutes, namely, Juliana atte Celer and Alice de Lincoln, with operating a *dis-orderly house* in Hosierlane, outside of the designated red-light district in London (also known as *Cokkes' Lane*) in 1338.¹⁴ In 1395, a London

¹¹ London Metropolitan Archives, *Letter Book H 1375–1399*, col/AD/01/008 (X109/023 on microfilm): folio 194v; see also Reginald R. Sharpe, ed. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: H, 1375–1399* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1907): 271, and H.T. Riley, ed. and trans. *Memorials of London and London Life in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Centuries* (London: Longman, 1868): 484.

¹² Karras, *Common Women*: 59.

¹³ London Metropolitan Archives, *Letter Book K 1422–1461*, col/AD/01/010 (X109/025 on microfilm): folio 11v; see also Reginald R. Sharpe, ed. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: K, Henry VI* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911): 17; London Metropolitan Archives, *Journals of Court of Common Council: Journal 2*, col/cc/01/01/002 (X109/046 on microfilm): folio 19r.

¹⁴ Roll A 5: (i) 1337–44, Membrane 11, in A. H. Thomas, ed. *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London*, vol. 1, 1323–1364 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1926): 165–97.

prostitute named John Rykener claimed that he had “stayed at Oxford for five weeks before the last feast of St. Michael’s, and worked there as an embroideress in women’s clothing, and called himself “Eleanor.” Moreover, while in Oxford, “three unsuspecting scholars, one of whom was named Lord William Foxlee, another Lord John, and the third Lord Walter, practiced the abominable vice with him often.”¹⁵ One may recall that Elizabeth Brouderer was accused of trafficking her daughter and that John Barton was a tailor and a part-time sex trafficker in sixteenth-century London. In Paris, the two centers of prostitution on the right bank of the Seine, namely, *rue de Baille-Hoe* and *Court-Robert-de-Paris*, were located in areas known for textile production.¹⁶ Thus, the association between traditional female labor and prostitution implied that young women and girls employed in such industries were widely presumed to be promiscuous and were, thus, vulnerable to exploitation.

Similar to the textile industry, food service and hospitality was an industry that was dependent on female labor and closely associated with prostitution throughout the medieval period. Such widely held presumptions of lascivious behavior among tavern workers placed employees at risk. For example, a local London tavern called the Pye in Queenhithe developed the reputation as a place, “which is a good shadowing for thieves, and many evil bargains have been made there, and many strumpets and pimps have their covert there, and leisure to make false covenants.” Municipal authorities believed that recommending the prohibition of the tavern to operate at night was necessary to ensure “the destruction of evil” that the Pye seemingly nurtured.¹⁷ In Kingston-upon-

¹⁵ *Item dictus Johannes Rykener fatebatur quod per quinque septimanas ante festum santi Michaelis ultimo elapsus morabatur apud Oxonium et operatus est ibidem in veste muliebri in arte de brouderer nominans ipsum Alianoram [...] tres scolares ignotos, quorum unus nominatur dominus Willielmus Foxlee, alius dominus Johannes, et tertius dominus Walterus, usi fuerunt sepius cum ipso abominabile vitium supradictum.* London Metropolitan Archives, *Pleas and Memoranda Rolls*, CLA/024/01/02/35: A34 membrane 2.

¹⁶ Hercule Joseph Francois Geraud, *Paris sous Philippe-le-Bel: d’après des documents originaux, et notamment d’après un manuscrit contenant le rôle de la taille imposée sur les habitants de Paris en 1292* (Paris: 1837): 77.

¹⁷ London Metropolitan Archives, *Pleas and Memoranda Rolls*, CLA/024/01/02/51: A50 membrane 7.b; see also A.H. Thomas, ed. *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943): 138.

Thames, a woman named Mariona Butcher was accused of whoredom in association with her management of a local tavern in 1434. Several years later, in 1437, she was presented before local authorities as *a strumpet*.¹⁸ In London, William Basseloy, a taverner, was accused of pimping Thomesina Newton from his establishment in 1470, while two servants of the Busche Tavern, namely, Mandelelyn and Alice, were procured by the proprietor. The taverness of Le Schippe acted as a procurer for one of her tapsters.¹⁹

Even if taverners indirectly engaged in sex trafficking, they could certainly facilitate such activities by turning a blind eye. By 1251 in France, prostitutes, ruffians, and *vagabond women* (*mulier vagabunda*) were prohibited from Montpellier's taverns.²⁰ Caustelnaudary fined the prostitutes who ate in public houses and the taverners who served them; the municipal statutes of St. Felix prohibited prostitutes from taverns. In addition, throughout the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the consuls of Toulouse impressed the necessity of barring prostitutes from the city taverns on their successors.²¹

In England in 1470, John Mande and his wife were accused of pimping John's sister at a tavern and of establishing networks with other pimps and prostitutes in other public houses apparently without any interference from the establishments.²² In 1516, a hostler from the Bell Inn in London used the neighboring alehouse as a rendezvous point to arrange a tryst between a prostitute named Elizabeth Tomlins and a priest named Gregory Kyton.²³

¹⁸ Surrey Record Office, *Kingston Manor Court Rolls (Frankpledge)*: KF1.1.1 m.1; KF1.3. m.1d.

¹⁹ Barbara Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 108.

²⁰ Société archéologique de Montpellier, ed., *Le Petit Thalamus de Montpellier* (Montpellier: Jean Martel Aîné, 1840): 139; *Mémoires de l'Académie de Nîmes. 8e série, tomes VIII et IX; années 1885 et 1886* (Nîmes, 1886): 54.

²¹ Leah Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in the Languedoc* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985): 81.

²² Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*: 108.

²³ London Metropolitan Archives, *Repertories of the Court of Aldermen, Repertory 5 (1518–1521)*, col/ca/01/01/005 (X109/131 on microfilm): folios 52–52v.

Domestic service was a third industry of specialized female labor that was closely associated with sex work and trafficking. Domestic servants worked near employers in typically private and intimate settings. Isolated from the public world of the streets, alone with employers in private quarters, and dependent on them for livelihood, domestic servants were vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of their employers. In Dijon, for example, more than one-third of 130 known cases of sex work between 1440 and 1540 involved domestic service.²⁴ In Toulouse, Peter and Katherine Fontanes were sentenced to corporal punishment and banishment from the town after a conviction of pimping their 10-year-old domestic servant named Catherine in 1474.²⁵ In Paris, in the year 1400, Jeanne de Baugie was accused of abducting a young girl whom she lured into her house with the promise of employment in domestic service. During her interrogation, which included torture, Jeanne confessed to running a *disorderly house* and acting as a procuress. However, when she sought royal pardon, Jeanne opted not to retract her confession, which suggests that the charges may well have been true.²⁶

In England in March 1437, the letter books of London record that a couple named Richard Peryn and his wife Margaret had “been committed to prison” not only for “generally keeping a disorderly house” but also

for having enticed Isabella Potenam, a maiden, from the service of Thomas Harlowe, and carried her to their house in the parish of All Hallows Berkyng, and there shut and sealed her, and sold her to be debauched by George Galiman [Galleyman] and others, against her will and crying out.²⁷

²⁴ Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*: 33.

²⁵ Archives départementales de Haute-Garonne, 1B 4 (November 12, 1473–September 17, 1478): folio 50r.

²⁶ Bronislaw Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 236.

²⁷ London Metropolitan Archives, *Letter Book K 1422–1461*, col/AD/01/010 (X109/025 on microfilm): folio 169b; see also, Sharpe, *Calendar of Letter-Books: K*: 216.

In 1490, Agnes Hutton was accused of bawdry for allegedly procuring and soliciting “young girls and the servants of divers men to commit the crime of fornication with divers men, and leads them to the chambers of Lombards, Spaniards, and Easterlings.”²⁸ At the turn of the sixteenth century, the Commissary Court Act Books record that Robert Cliff and his wife were charged as common bawds for pimping their maidservant named Elizabeth Mountain to “divers merchants.” Notably, several years earlier, the couple sold their previous maid, a young girl named Agnes Smith, to “Lombard merchants.”²⁹ However, whether this earlier sale was for a single encounter with young Agnes, multiple encounters, or an outright permanent sale of a human being between two parties remains unknown. In 1517, John Barton abducted Joan Rawlins as she sought employment in domestic service in the city of London. One year later, in 1518 in the Ward of Farringdon, Elizabeth Knyght, the wife of John Knyght, was convicted of being a “bawde to a certain person who committed the foul and detestable sin of lechery in her house with a young girl of thirteen years to the great displeasure of Almighty God.” According to the proceedings, the victim testified that the wife of one Everard, a carpenter, convinced the girl to go with Elizabeth Knyght and told her that she would “have honest service [domestic service] and fair wage of said Elizabeth.” The victim was escorted to the Knyghts’ house; upon arrival, she was sent upstairs to the bedchambers. Once inside, Elizabeth “shut fast the lower door, and there she [the victim] found the said man waiting, who took her in his arms, and as she cried, he stopped her mouth, and he had do with her against her will.”³⁰

Although accounts of kidnapping and abduction abound in court records (as discussed) and are the clearest and most evident examples of sex trafficking, familial pressure and predatory employment were other common methods of exploitation. Economic duress placed women and girls in precarious circumstances, and the intense competition for lim-

²⁸ Karras, *Common Women*: 73.

²⁹ London Metropolitan Archives, *Acta quoad correctionem delinquentium*, 9064.8: folio 254v.

³⁰ London Metropolitan Archives, *Letter Book N 1515–1526*, col/AD/01/013 (X109/028 on microfilm): folios 21r–22v.

ited employment opportunities in industries, such as food service and hospitality; textile production and care; and domestic service left poor women vulnerable to predatory employers.

After a victim entered the commercial sex industry, she was bound by debt and violence, and escape was difficult although possible. The late-medieval sex industry retained and compelled labor through debt and through outright coercion, intimidation, and brute force. Brothelkeepers used debt to entrap women and girls in their establishments. One may recall that in London in the early 1470s, Thomas Bowde attempted to force Ellen Butler into prostitution by claiming that she owed him an insurmountable debt and that Ellen opted for imprisonment instead of working in his brothel. In Southwark, brothelkeepers were also prohibited from loaning money to their prostitutes presumably to ensure they did not trap the women in the brothel by debt.³¹ In Dijon, Jeanne Saignant, who was considered the finest *maquerelle* (procuress or *madam*) in the city during the 1460s, enjoyed the protection of ecclesiastical and secular authorities. For two decades, her bathhouse at St. Philibert catered to single and married men, clerics, and the local nobility. Meanwhile, her girls were deeply indebted to Ms. Saignant, who used debt to trap them in her bathhouse. Jeanne ran in exclusive circles and kept company with local noblewomen. Moreover, she was a close friend of Jean Coustain, the *Valet de Chambre* of Duke Philippe le Bon. Her brother was a priest, which enabled her to cater to the clergy and, thus, to enjoy the unspoken protection of local ecclesiastical authorities. Through personal and professional networks of associates and clients, Saignant was able to delay the legal actions taken against her on charges of blackmail

³¹ Bodleian Library, MS. e Mus. 229, A6; see also J.B. Post, "A Fifteenth-Century Customary of the Southwark Stews," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* (1977): 418–28, for a full transcription of the customs. The use of debt to keep women trapped in sex work was common in medieval Europe despite periodic attempts to outlaw the practice, particularly in the Holy Roman Empire. In fact, rumors circulated in German cities, such as Ulm and Ludwigsburg, of financial practices in which women were used as security for loans, who were then forced to pay back the *loan* through sex work, and of clandestine *markets* in which brothelkeepers bought, sold, and traded women. See Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): 94–97.

and procuring for several years. When she was finally brought before the courts, her trial lasted four years.³²

The experience of violence in the late-medieval sex trade was not unique to the trade. It was also partially the experience of violence in the urban environment.³³ The commercial sex industry was associated with other professions known to traffic in vice and brutishness; thus, the women and girls who worked in the industry lived in a world of violence.

For example, Avignon banned gambling in brothels and the homes of prostitutes as well as in taverns and inns during the 1240s.³⁴ In London in September of 1281, 29 men were arrested on charges of “divers trespasses, as for homicides, robberies, beatings, assaults [...] with swords and bucklers.” The charges also included gambling and “keeping houses of ill fame (*lupanaria*), contrary to the peace of the lord the King, and contrary to the ordinance and provision of good men of the City.”³⁵ In 1393, a municipal ordinance in London connected “many and divers affrays, broils, and dissensions” as well as the murders of “many men” with “the frequent resort of, and consorting with, common harlots, at taverns, brewhouses of *huksters*, and other places of ill-fame” within the city.³⁶

Although violence was not exclusive to the commercial sex industry, sex workers were acutely vulnerable to violence due to the nature of their work. Outside of confined spaces and in the open space of the streets,

³² Madam Saignant was found guilty of blackmailing members of the ducal court and of potion brewing instead of procuring. Archives départementales de Côte d’Or, B2 360/8, file 986 non-foliated.

³³ As Barbara Hanawalt observed, urban women were more likely to meet with violence in their homes, but more women were killed in the streets, in the homes of other people, or in public establishments compared with their counterparts in rural villages. A solitary woman in an urban environment was more likely than the rural counterpart to meet a violent end. Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*: 81–84.

³⁴ *ni tabernariis, vel trichariis, vel lupanaribus, vel domibus meretricum, seu albergariis*. M.A.R. de Maulde, *Coutumes et règlements de la République d’Avignon au treizième siècle* (Paris: L. Larose, 1879): 166.

³⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, *Letter Book B 1275–1312*, col/AD/01/002 (X109/017 on microfilm): folio 3b; see also Reginald R. Sharpe, ed. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: B, 1275–1312* (London, 1900): 6.

³⁶ Riley, *Memorials of London*: 535.

respectable women were generally expected to avoid making eye contact to preserve a sense of privacy and personal space. In contrast, men held up their gaze to survey this public space and, thus, to dominate it as well as to remain alert for potential threats to personal safety. Prostitution placed women in an awkward position. Similar to respectable women, prostitutes were primarily concerned about personal space; however, in contrast to their respectable counterparts, they openly sought the intrusion of this space. Similar to men, prostitutes kept their gaze high to survey the public space; in contrast to men, however, they invited the violation of their personal space.³⁷

Such intrusion brought not only the promise of economic gain but also the risk of violence. Municipal and ecclesiastical authorities viewed the invitation of the prostitute to violate personal space as a threat to public order, such that they took steps to enclose the women in areas or establishments authorized for prostitution to contain this threat. Evidently, not every prostitute was willing to abide by formal policies of segregation. When sex workers resisted official attempts to restrict their movement, municipalities responded by authorizing the use of force to compel compliance. Thus, the borders between reputable and disreputable neighborhoods were reinforced through state-sanctioned violence, such as the official expulsion of prostitutes from *respectable* neighborhoods throughout France over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by municipal and royal ordinances.³⁸ An early fourteenth-century municipal statute of Nîmes, for example, authorized the beating of any *public woman* found outside of the red-light district of the

³⁷ Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*: 80–84.

³⁸ In 1205 from Carcassonne Municipal Article 105, see Jean Baptiste Alexandre Théodore Teulet, *Layettes du Trésor des Chartes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Henri Plon, 1863): 281; in the 1240s from Arles Municipal Statute 49, see Charles Giraud, *Essai sur l'histoire du droit français au moyen âge*, vol. 2 (Paris: Videcoq, 1846): 205; in the 1240s from Avignon Municipal Statute 116, see Maulde, *Coutumes et règlements*: 191; in 1254 from cities and towns across France, see Louis IX's "Great Ordinance," Louis Carolus-Barré, "La grande ordonnance de 1254," in *Septième centenaire de la mort de saint Louis: actes des colloques de Royaumont et de Paris, 21–27 mai 1970* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1976): 85–96; in the 1290s from Abbeville, see Jean Boca, *La justice criminelle de l'Echevinage d' Abbeville au moyen âge (1184–1516)* (Paris: Lille, 1930): 200–202; in 1299 from Narbonne, see Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*: 28.

town.³⁹ Throughout the second half of the fifteenth century in Dijon, with the permission of local authorities, the women of the municipal brothel repeatedly hunted down their competition, such as freelance prostitutes, and threatened to have them forcibly carried off into the brothel if they persisted in their activities.⁴⁰

In England, a case in 1382 typifies the official tolerance of violence against suspected prostitutes. On July 9 of the same year, a certain chaplain named Thomas Norwich answered an official charge of trespassing by one Henry de Wilton. Henry claimed that Thomas had:

on divers occasions between August 1, 1381 and July 8, 1382 by force and arms and against the peace had eloigned and carried away the plaintiff's wife Joan, [as well as] woollen and linen cloths, silver plate, dishes, pewter saltcellars, and iron and brass pots and pans.

According to court proceedings,

A jury brought in a verdict *that as regards the wife, she was nothing but a common strumpet, and so there was no eloigning* [emphasis mine], but the defendant was in possession of certain goods belonging to the plaintiff of the value of 60s [...] It was considered that the defendant pay 60s damages and restore the goods, in default of which he was committed to prison.⁴¹

³⁹ Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*: 28, 168.

⁴⁰ Archives départementales de Côte d'Or, B2 360/5 m.633 (1454); B2 360/8 m.986 (1460); B2 360/9 (1465); B2 360/15 (1489). Nuremberg similarly allowed licensed prostitutes to attack their freelance competitors on occasion to discourage illicit prostitution in the city. See Roper, *The Holy Household*: 97.

⁴¹ London Metropolitan Archives, *Pleas and Memoranda Rolls*, CLA/024/01/02/26, A25: membrane 8b; see also A. H. Thomas, ed. *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London*, vol. 3, 1381–1412 (London, 1932): 18. Official toleration of violence against sex workers was also found on the opposite side of the English Channel. For example, the customs of Normandy and Brittany, which both probably date back to the twelfth century but written down in the early thirteenth century, sanctioned the rape of prostitutes. For Normandy, see Jean Le Foyer, *Presentation of the Norman Criminal Law in the 13th Century* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1931): 96–97; for Brittany, see Yvonne Bongert, *History Course on Criminal law*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1973): 182.

In this disturbing case, Thomas faced restitution and potential prison time, not for the abduction and likely sexual assault of Joan, but for the theft of moveable property. Because Joan was “nothing but a common strumpet,” she could not have been assaulted according to the judgment of the court. Whether Joan engaged in prostitution is unknown, although her public persona was evidently considered disreputable based on the proceedings. Regardless of her activities, court records generally illustrate the dangers faced by trafficking victims and sex workers. Their marginalized social status denoted susceptibility to state-sanctioned, or at the least, officially tolerated violence in addition to the risks inherent to their trade.

Nevertheless, authorities occasionally did act to protect sex workers from violence. For example, in 1231 in Sicily, Frederick II in *Constitutions of Melfi* decreed the death penalty for the rape of a prostitute.⁴² The 1285 authorization of the Montpellier red-light district assured the women that they would “now and forever remain under the protection of the lord King [James II of Majorca] and the council of this town.”⁴³ In 1383, the Bishop of Albi suggested that the city build two brothels, namely, one outside the walls and another inside where the women could be housed at night for their safety and protection. Statutes across the Languedoc imposed substantial fines and, occasionally, corporal punishment for the rape of prostitutes throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴⁴ For example, in 1389 in Valence and Avignon, the rape of a prostitute in the municipal brothel carried a fine of 100 *sous*.⁴⁵ In the 1460s, the municipal brothel of Toulouse was guarded during the

⁴² Jean Louis Alphonse Huillard-Breholles, ed. *Titulus XXI: De violentia meretricibus illata*, in *Historia diplomatica Friderici Secundi: Tome IV, pars I* (Paris: 1854): 23–24.

⁴³ *et pro omnibus aliis et singulis mulieribus meretricibus, habitantibus seu habitare in posterum volentibus in hac villa [...] quod dicte mulieres possint, nunc et in perpetuum, permanere [...] sub protectione dicti domini regis et sue curie huius ville.* A. Germain, “Statuts inédits des repenties du couvent de Saint-Gilles de Montpellier,” in *Mémoires de la Société archéologique de Montpellier V* (1860–9): 124–26.

⁴⁴ Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*: 34, 68–69.

⁴⁵ *Si quis mulierem diffamatam aut aliam de lupanari, violenter cognoverit, debet pro banno, centum Solidorum Viennensium.* Denis-François Secousse, ed. *Ordonnances des rois de France de la troisième race*, vol. 7 (Paris: L’Imprimerie Royale, 1745): 316 Item 50. See also, J. Girard and P. Pansier, *La Cour temporelle d’Avignon aux XIVe et XVe siècles* (Avignon: Roumanille; Paris: Champion, 1909): 171.

day by the deputy magistrates of the city and during the night by the captain of the watch (*capitan del geyt*).⁴⁶

In England, throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the municipal authorities of Southwark, Sandwich, and Southampton prohibited the managers of stewes and brothels from beating the women under their employ.⁴⁷ Thus, in many cases, municipalities used violence to create a system of reward and punishment, which encouraged prostitutes to voluntarily cooperate in their segregation. Inside the designated zones of prostitution, the women were under official protection from violence; outside of these zones, however, they were susceptible to it.

One may ask, however, who protected these women from their *protectors*, who could just as easily become their persecutors? For example, in 1304, the royal officers of Philip IV of France (1285–1314) ejected and *disinhibited* (*deshabite'es*) prostitutes living on the street of *La Laguque* in Beaucaire at the request of the local nobility, burghers, and Franciscans.⁴⁸ In Dijon, Avignon, and Lyons, sergeants in the service of local nobility administered the local bathhouses and operated them as informal brothels.⁴⁹ In the 1450s, a group of unemployed mercenaries in Burgundy called the Coquillards took up residence in the municipal brothel of Dijon. As self-appointed protectors, they extorted services and large sums of coin from the women.⁵⁰ In 1456, a 26-year-old woman named Catherine caught the eyes of archers in service of the Duke Philippe *le Bon* of Burgundy. The archers made it publicly known that they planned to carry her off to the Dijon brothel. Under the threat of rape, Catherine opted to go to the brothel voluntarily to avoid the humiliation of being

⁴⁶ Archives municipales de Toulouse, FF 117 (1462); see also Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*: 117–20.

⁴⁷ Southampton City Records Office, *The Mayor's Book of Fines 1488–1594*, SC 5/3/1: folios 42v, 55v; see also Martin Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge: Regulating Sex in England, 1470–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 163.

⁴⁸ Archives municipales de Beaucaire, B2.2, “*Putains*,” non-foliated.

⁴⁹ Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*: 6, 30.

⁵⁰ Much of the extant primary source documentation on the Coquillards derives from the contemporaneous accounts of a Dijon prosecutor named Jean Rabustel in 1455. For more information on the Coquillards and their trial, see Joseph Garnier, *Les Compagnons de la Coquille* (Dijon, 1842).

led there publicly.⁵¹ The documents did not note Catherine as a prostitute; nevertheless, neither her respectable status protected her from the threat of rape outside of the brothel nor did municipal protection prevent the threat of rape therein.

Violence permeated the brothels.⁵² In England, they were routinely referred to as *disorderly houses* in court proceedings that “harbored men of ill fame.” In London, six prostitutes fled the city after two instances of murder in their establishment in 1261.⁵³ Edward II closed the city brothels in 1310, because he suspected that they were harboring criminals. *Receivers* in connection with these brothels were associated with sex trafficking, robbery, murder, and “other diverse transgressions” in the city of London according to his royal decree.⁵⁴ In the *disorderly house* of Ellen De Evesham in the Ward of Farringdon Without in 1338,

In Christmas week last after midnight certain foreigners from her [Ellen’s] house attacked a man, who was passing along the highway with a light, and after felling him with blows on the head and body, bound his arms and legs and carried him within the said Ellen’s house, and that she was present with a lighted candle in her hand during the assault [...].⁵⁵

In 1391, the city of London issued yet another municipal ordinance that prohibited boatmen from transporting any “man or woman to the stewes

⁵¹ Archives municipales de Dijon, B2 360/6: m.772.

⁵² In many Italian towns, brothels were often fortified buildings; brothel keepers were authorized to carry arms, and municipal authorities punished clients who abused the women with fines and public humiliation. See, Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*: 83.

⁵³ Crown Pleas: 45 Henry III–47 Henry III (nos. 108–47), in Martin Weinbaum, ed. *The London Eyre of 1276* (London: London Record Society, 1976): 31–41.

⁵⁴ Thomas Rymer, ed. *Foedera, Conventiones, Litterae et cujuscunque Generis Acta Publica*, vol. 2, 1 (London: 1818): 124. The connection between receivers and sex trafficking as well as other violent crimes continued well into the fifteenth century. For further references, see Henry Thomas Riley, ed. *Liber Albus: The White Book of the City of London* (London: John Russell Smith, 1862): 395, and A.H. Thomas, ed. *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943): 154.

⁵⁵ *Pleas and Memoranda Rolls*, A5: (i) membrane 11, see also Thomas, *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, vol. 1: membrane 11.

between sunset and sunrise, nor moor his boat within 20 fathoms of the shore during that period, lest misdoers be assisted in their coming and going.”⁵⁶ In the Ward of Crepulgate Without in December of 1422, the ward’s bathhouse was indicted as follows:

as a nuisance and trouble to neighbors, because it is a common house of harlotry and bawdry, and a great resort of thieves and also of priests and their concubines, to the great disgrace of the city and the danger and mischief of the neighbors and passersby.⁵⁷

In Southwark, the Bishop of Winchester retained authority over the bathhouses in the borough as part of the Winchester Liberty since the early fourteenth century. Under his supervision and protection, the commercial sex industry grew and thrived to his personal profit. Despite ecclesiastical oversight, local and royal authorities were aware of trafficking victims in the Southwark baths. For example, the fourteenth-century *Dyvers Ordinaunces and Constitutions* is explicit in its preamble that, “to the gret displeur of God and gret hurt unto the lorde King [...] Horrible sin has multiplied [...] women are being kept in brothels against their will [...]” The ordinances went on to charge the royal bailiff with weekly inspections to ensure public health in the brothels and that the women were not beaten or held against their wishes.⁵⁸ Direct royal intervention evidently relieved the bishop of his responsibilities as a landed magnate in managing the safety of the stewes, because extant records suggest that only by the beginning of the sixteenth century had the Bishop of Winchester begun to inquire whether women were being

⁵⁶ London Metropolitan Archives, *Letter Book H 1375–1399*, col/AD/01/008 (X109/023 on microfilm): folio 264. The city had repeatedly issued such decrees since the thirteenth century; see Karras, *Common Women*: 37.

⁵⁷ London Metropolitan Archives, *Pleas and Memoranda Rolls*, CLA/024/01/02/52, A51: membrane 3; see also Thomas, *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, vol. 4: 154.

⁵⁸ Bodleian Library, MS. e Mus. 229, A1, A5, B2, B34, B40. The Bishop of Winchester was responsible for the regulation of the Southwark stewes in the capacity of a noble landowner instead of a ranking ecclesiastic.

held against their will.⁵⁹ In Southampton and Southwark, the Bawds of the Stewe were repeatedly fined for the physical abuse of their prostitutes despite municipal statutes and prohibitions.⁶⁰ The fact that such fines were repetitive indicates that violence within the stews was endemic and that legal remedies were quite simply ineffective.

In France, violence affected sex workers and staff in municipal brothels. In August of 1448, Jehan Sudre worked as private security for the municipal brothel of Toulouse and was killed in the establishment during an altercation with a certain Poncelet Paulin. In 1460, a young man from Toulouse named Guillot del Cung faced royal prosecution for 24 offenses, including the abduction a young woman named Jahanete from the municipal brothel of Toulouse and her sale across the Languedoc in Carcassonne, Narbonne, Beziers, Montpellier, Avignon, and Marseilles, to his considerable profit.⁶¹ In 1467 in Dijon, the lieutenant of a provost was sued for refusal to intervene in multiple assaults and brawls in the bathhouse of Marion la Liegeoise.⁶²

Although the women, staff, and patrons were vulnerable to violence, the brothel was frequently susceptible during times of unrest. A brothel owned by the Lord Mayor of London, William Walworth, was attacked in 1381 during the Peasants' Revolt,⁶³ while the Dijon brothel was sacked seven times in the 50 years between 1495 and 1545.⁶⁴

In fact, cruelty and brutishness were associated with the very foundation of the Dijon municipal brothel. The establishment was founded in 1436 at a time when a public rape epidemic scourged the city. Day labor-

⁵⁹ Since 1505, representatives of the bishop were instructed to ask whether brothelkeepers beat their prostitutes as a means of compelling labor during their inspections, see Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge*: 163.

⁶⁰ Southampton City Records Office, *The Mayor's Book of Fines 1488–1594*, SC 5/3/1: folios 42v, 55v; Hampshire Records Office, II M59/C1/21/1; Bodleian Library, MS. e Mus. 229, B40.

⁶¹ Paulin was later granted remission for the murder by Charles VII in a letter dated back to 1452. The outcome of the trial of Guillot de Cung is unknown. See Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*: 34, 92–93, 116.

⁶² Archives départementales de Côte d'Or, B2 360/10, November 1467.

⁶³ V.H. Galbraith, ed. *The Anonimale Chronicle, 1333–1381* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1927): 140.

⁶⁴ Archives municipales de Dijon K/83 for 1495 and 199; K/84 for 1514 and 1525; I/142 for 1527; K/85 for 1536 and 1542; all are non-foliated.

ers, craftsmen, and sailors tended to be poor young men who typically had few prospects for marriage in an urban environment in which they were in competition with wealthier peers and older, established widowers. These poor single men frequently targeted women in the households of their wealthier rivals, and their bitterness and sense of entitlement are palpable in extant court proceedings. For example, in Dijon in 1449, G. Robelin was a journeyman in the butcher's trade who shouted to a young domestic servant that he would have his pleasure with her similar to her master.⁶⁵ In 1454, a gang of six young men assaulted the domestic servant of an unmarried carpenter in the streets of the city.⁶⁶ Moreover, in 1505, the 16-year old niece of the viscount-mayor of the city was accosted in the streets by two journeymen masons who shouted, "We are going to fuck you; we can fuck you just as well as the others!" In 1535, the son of a local weaver threatened a 22-year-old domestic servant named Jaquette that he had "a right to have a go with you just like the others."⁶⁷ Authorities in Dijon, similar to many Western European cities, saw the founding of a red-light district or a municipal brothel as the solution to a greater evil, which was the threat of violence upon respectable women and girls.⁶⁸ In general, brothels and prostitution rings catered to day laborers; craftsmen; sailors and merchants; and members of nobility or their households. Thus, the Dijon brothel was founded with the intention of providing an acceptable outlet for male entitlement and aggression that is, prostitutes: poor women and girls. If the city fathers hoped that the founding of the municipal brothel would help curb the threats to civic order, then they were mistaken. The brothel did little to quell

⁶⁵ Archives départementales de Côte d'Or, B2 360/4: item 364.

⁶⁶ Archives départementales de Côte d'Or, B2 360/5: item 619.

⁶⁷ Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*: 22–23.

⁶⁸ Municipal attitudes were informed by a long-lasting tradition of Christian tolerance toward prostitution as a necessary evil. Augustine discusses the necessity of prostitution for the proper functioning of society without which society would dissolve into uncontrollable lust and degeneracy. *De Ordine* II.IV.XII, *Patrologia Latina*, 32:1000; Thomas Aquinas echoed Augustine's sentiments and argued that to, "Remove the sewer and you will fill the palace with odor; similarly with bilge; remove prostitutes from the world and you will fill it with sodomy." *Tolle cloacam, et replebis foetore palatium: et similiter de sentina. Tolle meretrices de mundo, et replebis ipsum sodomia*. "De regimine principum ad regem Cypri," IV.14 in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 16 (Parma: Pietro Fiacadori, 1864): 281.

violence; across the next 50 years between 1436 and 1486, more than 125 cases of public rape were documented, which is a number that likely represents a mere fraction of the total assaults committed. Violence continued in Dijon well into the sixteenth century, which is nearly a century after the brothel was founded. The acts were accompanied by brutality, which included beatings and, in one case, dragging a pregnant woman through snow-covered streets.⁶⁹

The moralistic diatribes that demonized prostitutes as temptresses and seductresses, which abound in the writings and sermons of sixteenth-century reformers, do not match the reality of sex work in the late Middle Ages. Far from vain, luxury-loving, venal women who sought to corrupt the souls of God-fearing men, prostitutes were most frequently poor women and girls who were struggling to alleviate poverty through the few options available to them. In many cases, the choice to enter sex work was never theirs to make. Families sold them as children to supplement the household income or to relieve the financial burden of a daughter who would never marry as a result of sexual assault. In the hopes of independently securing employment, young women were vulnerable to predators in their search for work and after taking a position. With the very few employment opportunities available to young women, those who were sufficiently fortunate to find employment were frequently unable to afford to leave a job if their employer became predatory. Accused of actively seeking to tempt and seduce (and condemned, as a result), sex workers were frequently, in fact, trapped by debt and compelled to labor through brute force or the threat thereof.

⁶⁹ Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*: 12–22.

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During the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the status of prostitution evolved from being seen as a trade or a profession, however marginalized, into a source of malignant temptation; the prostitute ceased to be a sex worker who sought to alleviate her economic insecurity through commercial sex, and became a vain, selfish woman who desired wealth and opulence, and who led upstanding married men astray and thus threatened their souls and the moral and civic orders of a reformed society. Sex workers became the literal embodiment of the decadence and corruption that threatened to engulf the world as epitomized by the richly attired Whore of Babylon astride the seven-headed Beast. Yet, the study of late-medieval human trafficking makes clear that vanity, selfishness, and spiritual malignance had little to do with prostitution and the commercial sex industry. Instead, the commercial sex industry thrived upon poverty, limited employment opportunities for women, and attitudes of male entitlement, all of which led to vulnerability, and thus to victimization, as women and girls struggled to alleviate their economic duress.

THE AUTHOR

Christopher Paoella earned his Doctorate at the University of Missouri in 2019 under the direction of Dr. Lois Huneycutt. He is the author of several works, including, “‘For She Is Not Work’: A Noblewoman’s Experience of Human Trafficking in the Viking Age” in *Portraits of Medieval Europe, 800–1400*, edited by Christian Raffensberger and Erin Thomas Dailey (New York: Routledge, 2024) and *Human Trafficking in Medieval Europe: Slavery, Sexual Exploitation, and Prostitution* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020). He has presented his research at major national and international conferences such as the *Third Global Meeting: Slavery Past, Present, and Future* at Indiana University Europe Gateway in Berlin, Germany in 2018; and the *52nd Annual International Congress on Medieval Studies* in Kalamazoo, MI at Western Michigan University in 2017. He now teaches history at Perimeter College at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia.