

ambiguity into these categories. For example, some texts penalized the abduction of an adult woman if the abductor initially took her against her will, even if she afterwards came to terms with the abductor and wanted to marry him. This stipulation might be the result of judges witnessing many women reconciling with their abductors. It also gave judges leeway to punish the abduction of an adult woman who had consented. Relatives who complained that an adult daughter or niece had been violently kidnapped only needed to prove that someone had heard her screaming. Several texts considered the abductee's outcry the most important evidence that she had been taken against her will. From the distinct categories of the early legal texts, the lines between forcible abduction, now closely connected to rape, and consensual seduction blurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. That evolution reveals a growing social anxiety about the consequences of marriages without parental consent in the Low Countries. It was precisely because women in this region enjoyed inheritance rights that their marriages held great consequences. The importance of marriages combined with the power held by middling group families in the Low Countries' cities under scrutiny entailed a greater degree of control over young men and especially women's life choices.

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