THE ATTITUDE OF THE FATHERS TO FEATHER-BEDS

In the eleventh chapter of his letter to Eustochium on virginity (epist. 22) Jerome anticipates an objection. His addressee will say she cannot endure a rigorous diet, for she comes of noble stock and is accustomed to feather-beds (semper in plumis; for the phrase cf. Caes. Arel. serm. 20,3 nos in plumis). Such beds seem to have caused Jerome a certain preoccupation. He warns against feather-beds for the young epist. 79,7.7. Demetrias is commended for doing without them epist. 130,4,4. The penitent should sleep instead on a mat of reeds tract. in psalm. 93, 20. Finally he records reproachfully how before her conversion the voluptuous Blesilla found even feather-beds too hard epist. 38,4,2.

Others of the Fathers too pronounce upon this topic. Feather-beds debilitate according to ps. Chrysost. salt. Herodiad. 1. Already Clement Al. paed. 2,9,77,2 had thought them bad for health as well as sybaritic. Avoidance of them became part of any strict regimen. Chrysostom twice reports how ascetically-minded young women abandon feather-beds for the floor: hom. in Eph. 13,3 and stat. 13,2. Beds of the same type are the occasion for self-castigation at Prudent. hom. 328f. and again later at Caes. Arel. serm. 20,3. It is not therefore surprising that Orsiesius 46 and Basil renunt. 4 both prohibit them.

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