



Medieval Feminist Forum

A Journal of Gender and Sexuality

VOLUME 59 • NUMBER 1 • SUMMER 2023



University Press | Kalamazoo
MIEVEAL INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

MEDIEVAL FEMINIST FORUM
A Journal of Gender and Sexuality

VOLUME 59 • NUMBER 1 • SUMMER 2023

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Medieval Feminist Forum, e-issn 2151-6073
<https://doi.org/10.32773/AVHW9936>

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Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond, 650–1100, by Diane Watt. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, ISBN 978-1-4742-7062-5.

Congratulations are due for this definitive account of literacy and early Englishwomen. It is a job admirably done and with a special surprise; for Diane Watt accepts the Whitby life of Pope Gregory (with its famous story of English youths in Rome and “not Angles, but angels”) as being by a woman writer. If Cædmon of Whitby is the first named English poet, then an unknown religious of Whitby is England’s earliest female autor—quite an achievement for a small Yorkshire town. On those grounds alone, *Women, Writing and Religion* will be prescribed reading all over the world for courses on Woman and the Book. It has fundamental and permanent value.

Its material, treated with learned seriousness (so that it always repays consultation), appears in six chapters. We start with Ely and Whitby in about 700 CE, then move forward to convents at Barking (in south Essex) and Minster (in east Kent). Chapters 3 and 4 take us to the Continent and the letters or verse of women in the circle of St. Boniface (d. 754); thereafter, we encounter the Latin lives of abbesses ruling German convents, then the tenth–eleventh centuries and a return to England, with a chapter on the Benedictine community at Wilton (outside Salisbury). We end at the village of Markyate (near St. Albans), home of Christina, anchorite and visionary. In both geographical and literary terms, this is quite a tour.

So, a cheering verdict: here almost everything merits praise. Diane Watt opens windows on inhabited landscapes; she presents a diversity of men and women, the good, the bad, and (sometimes) the startling. Here are instances: while a villain called Thunor is attempting to stop nuns from settling at Minster, the “earth suddenly opens up” and swallows him into its depths (63). Serves him right! Besides founding communities, women also worked as copyists, the result often being beautiful books, such as a “gold-inscribed copy of the letters of St. Peter” (77) written by Eadburg of Wimborne, Dorset. Elsewhere is haunting analysis (pp. 86, 88) of *The Wife’s Lament*, an Exeter Book poem wherein a deserted woman grieves on how “First my lord went away from the people, / Over tossing waves” and concludes “It is a misery for those, who, longing, / Have to wait for a loved one.” Death at sea being ever-present, little wonder that King Cnut had devotion to St. Edith (d. 984), a Wilton religious whose intercession (he believed) saved his life “during a fierce storm” (133). The king had more than fine words. He

commissioned “a golden shrine or casket dedicated to her” (135). It had unexpected attributes. When its makers tried to cheat their clients, they suffered unfortunate consequences. Better was Christina of Markyate, making “gifts of mitres and sandals” to send to the Pope (164), who responded politely. Yet one thing not mentioned for Christina is how as a young woman she was nearly seduced by Ranulph Flambard (d. 1128), Bishop of Durham. Luckily, she tricked him and “darted out of the room,” locking the door firmly behind her. One might think that, given such goings-on, medieval women must often have seen the attractions of life as a nun.

Diane Watt has, then, given us a precious book, one that will last. *Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond* deserves every success.

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<https://doi.org/10.32773/LRZB4846>

Medieval Intersections: Gender and Status in Europe in the Middle Ages, edited by Katherine Weikert and Elena Woodacre. New York: Berghahn Books, 2021. Pp. 132. ISBN: 9781800731561.

Emerging from the 2014 Gender and Medieval Studies conference at the University of Winchester, and originally published as a special issue of *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* in 2016, this collection of essays is a celebration of interdisciplinarity in medieval studies. The volume’s contributors explore the changes and disruptions, the possibilities and boundaries, of gendered medieval lives in light of the shifting nature of status, its limitations as a currency, and its impact both inside and outside male hegemonic cultures. With a geographical emphasis on sources from England, France, and Italy, though Spain and Scandinavia figure as well, the nine chapters cover thematic ground that is likely to function as a stimulating springboard for further work on gender and status.

The introduction has not been updated substantially since 2016, which is something of a missed opportunity. Reflections on Joan Scott’s call to consider gender as a useful category of analysis and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s definition of interdisciplinarity are important markers of a