



Reviews

KATHARINA A. WILSON and NADIA MARGOLIS, eds., *Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*. 2 volumes. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. Pp. xxxix, 997. ISBN: 0-313-33017-4, 0-313-33018-2. \$199.95.

This new encyclopedia presents the reader with two hefty volumes, packed with over 300 entries. Each entry comprises an essay of sometimes considerable length, followed by a bibliography of primary and secondary works. Entries are also cross-referenced to other similar topics. The editors have striven to include 'both basic and in-depth information,' on both individuals and broad topics, spanning from the second to the fifteenth centuries, that will provide a broad sampling of 'medieval women's diverse cultures.' This project consciously expands its boundaries beyond Europe, offering entries on non-western cultures such as China, India, and the Aztecs. The editors seek to include not only canonical topics but also those that have been neglected or marginalized, such as transvestism, in order to enable new avenues of study.

The coverage of this encyclopedia is generally good, providing entries on women active in most European countries as well as the Byzantine. Its focus is broadly interdisciplinary, including literary figures and writers as well as historical figures active in politics, religion, art, and music. This project focuses not only on individual women, however, but also gives attention to concepts useful in Women's and Gender Studies such as dress, rape, celibacy, and marriage.

There are inevitable gaps in any conceptual framework, and this is where these volumes fall short. For example, when one searches for 'Mothers' or 'Motherhood,' one is referred by a cross reference to 'Childhood and Childbearing.' Alas, when one consults that nearly nine page entry, which offers a splendid synthesis of the work of Aries and his successors, there is but one paragraph focusing on mothers, describing Clarissa Atkinson's work on the idea of Christian motherhood. The bibliography provides no better start for a student interested in motherhood, giving only two further citations: Caroline Walker Bynum's *Jesus as Mother* and an article in French on Christine de Pisan and the figure of the mother, amidst an exhaustive list of works on children.

For those interested in Arthurian studies, *Women in the Middle Ages* provides useful articles on most female figures in Arthurian tradition. There is a piece on 'Arthurian Women,' as well as individual essays on Guinevere, Isolde, Morgan le Fay and even Lunete and the Lady of the Lake. The article on Morgan stands out as comprehensive and detailed, charting the evolution of this literary figure from her first appearance in the *Vita Merlini* to her later medieval position as Arthur's

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antagonist. However, this volume does not offer entries on familiar gendered topics central to Arthurian studies such as courtly love, chivalry, or romance. One article on *minne* is included, but without cross references leading to it from the topics above. This encyclopedia provides a useful 'Guide to Related Topics' allowing researchers to find all entries on, for instance, abbesses or witches; however, as a gendered field of study, it would have been useful to see Arthurian tradition as such a rubric, pulling all related entries together.

The strength of this encyclopedia is that it will convince scholars and students of the diversity of women's experiences and actions throughout the Middle Ages. It will prove an important resource for student research assignments, and it is a book that, if not owned by every medievalist due to its cost, should be included in their library's reference collection.

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