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Illuminating Women In The Medieval World



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Synopsis

When one thinks of women in the Middle Ages, the images that often come to mind are those of damsels in distress, mystics in convents, female laborers in the field, and even women of ill repute. In reality, however, medieval conceptions of womanhood were multifaceted, and womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s roles were varied and nuanced. Female stereotypes existed in the medieval world, but so too did women of power and influence. The pages of illuminated manuscripts reveal to us the many facets of medieval womanhood and slices of medieval lifeÃ¢â ¬â •from preoccupations with biblical heroines and saints to courtship, childbirth, and motherhood. While men dominated artistic production, this volume demonstrates the ways in which female artists, authors, and patrons were instrumental in the creation of illuminated manuscripts. Ã Â Featuring over one hundred illuminations depicting medieval women from England to Ethiopia, this book provides a lively and accessible introduction to the lives of women in the medieval world. Ã Â

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Christine Sciacca is assistant curator of manuscripts at the J. Paul Getty Museum. She is the editor of Florence at the Dawn of the Renaissance (Getty Publications, 2012) and the author of Building the Medieval World (Getty Publications, 2010). Ã Â

IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve seen many beautiful illuminations at different museums, but never understood the deep meaning of them until reading this book. It is written in a straight-forward manner. Each story is supported by remarkable illumination. However, the order of presenting those illuminations

strikes me as not well-organized. For me natural order would be from presenting birth, learning, to getting married or nunnery and life struggles or luxuries.The fact is: in the medieval times in the male-dominated church and state little was recorded in regards to women. So those illuminated manuscripts offer glimpses into their lives: from giving a birth, baptism, teaching children read, to taking part in political and economic arena and giving spark to women literacy.The book starts with a breath-taking illumination of Saint Hedwig of Silesia, Poland, 1353. Her life reflects ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“the varied prescribed roles that women in the Middle Ages played: wife, mother, political negotiator, charitable patron, pious laywoman, and saint.Illumination of Mary Magdalene Borne Aloft depicts family of wealthier class where mother teaches her daughter read, often using prayer books as primers.Threshing and Pig Feeding illumination presents ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“important functions of women in medieval society.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Manuscripts were some of the most expensive art objects that one could buy in the Middle Ages.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Lot of them were commissioned by and for women, thus leaving us with glimpses into their lives.In the Middle Ages, some women were forced to become nuns as their families could not afford dowries. Their dedication was to prayer, charity and God, but also led to encouragement of female literacy and ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“eventually spreading to the royalty, the nobility, and the middle class.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•Saint Elizabeth of Hungary illumination depicts niece of Saint Hedwig. Elizabeth is widowed at young age and choses to join convent instead of marrying again. But her spiritual advisor subjects her to cruel treatment of lashing.Economic role: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Peasant women helped harvest the fields alongside men, and women of the growing merchant class produced and sold crafts and participated in the trade of goodsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• And wealthy women commissioned luxury goods, including manuscripts.Through illuminations displaying love, we learn about types of courting women: flirtatious conversations, game playing, poetry citing, love letter writing.A Marriage Ceremony illumination depicts marriage contracts, creating political and economic alliances.The Birth of Caesar illumination portrays Julius CaesarÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s mother giving birth to him through stomach incision; not clear if this gave term ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Cesarean.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•The Massacre of the Innocents illumination paints painful picture of Middle Age realities of mothers protecting their children from soldiers stabbing them.Most common manuscripts to be commissioned were books of hours and prayer books. Books of hours were the medieval bestsellers. There were relatively few women artists/writers, creating text and painting images, compared to male artists/writers.Christine de Pizan illumination is of one of the earliest known professional female authors.Hildegard of Bingen Receiving a Vision illumination ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“was 12th century nun famous for her visions, which she wrote down

and were eventually published.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•

Very interesting exposition on some 100 illuminations gathered together for an exhibition at the Getty Museum this year. The purpose: to show the place and roles of medieval women revealed in these small works of art. They are beautifully reproduced here. The place of the medieval women can be inferred from the ownership and creation of the original books themselves. This work's stated purpose is to increase insight into the daily lives of medieval women. Among the basics found: that women, at least wealthy women, owned, commissioned and sometimes even produced these works. While men dominated in other areas of the arts, women did have a major role in creating illustrated manuscripts, books of hours. Subjects included the lives of the saints, stories from the bible, scenes from life. There are scenes depicting medieval women with angels interceding for them with Mary or Jesus. There is even a scene of childbirth. Religion is the center of life and women are the center for carrying belief forward.Whether a book such as this will interest a reader will depend on may things: are you open to religious art, for that is what much of these illuminated manuscripts are; do you simply enjoy medieval art; are you interested in the art of or for women of medieval times and how it may express their lives? If the answer to any of these questions is at all positive, you should check out this bookA copy of this book was provided by the publisher through NetGalley in return for an honest review.

Most people have a limited knowledge of women in the Middle Ages. This book by Christine Sciacca will open up many eyes. The publication is timed to coincide with the 2017 exhibition at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.An illuminated manuscript is defined as a manuscript in which the text is supplemented with decorations. These could include initials, borders, and illustrations. Ms. Sciacca has divided her book into four sections, Medieval Ideals of Womanhood, Warnings to Medieval Women, Medieval Women in Daily Life, and Medieval Women in the Arts. The layout is wonderful, and almost turns the pages for readers. The balance between text and illuminations changes constantly, never allowing the eyes to tire.The Middle Ages was a time when males dominated the church and state, and controlled much of what happened. However, there were women who thought differently, who were opposed to the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“normalÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• order of things and had the courage to speak their minds. Many of the illuminated manuscripts present these women through the images and accompanying text. Not only are women featured, but many of the manuscripts were commissioned by female patrons as well as illuminated by women.The script is informative, enlightening readers not only about each illumination but also

offering a back history of some of the essential characters featured in the art. For anyone interested in the medieval life and the attitudes of those living during that time, this is an excellent book. Five stars.My thanks to NetGalley for an advance copy of this book.

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