

her introduction by stating that “This book is not just a history of women, but a history of the early European Middle Ages through the eyes of women” (12). In that sentence she challenges us to re-categorize our methods for classifying knowledge, to make explicit rather than implicit the fact that “traditional history” means “a history of men,” even one gussied up with sidebars and extra paragraphs about Joan of Arc or Eleanor of Aquitaine so as to seem inclusive of women (as Bitel discusses in her conclusion, 266-296). But her book is not classified as traditional history or as “real” history—its Library of Congress call number is HQ1147.E85 B57 2002x, and it sits in the “women’s” section of the library even as Rosamond McKitterick’s *The Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2001) sits in the “real” history section at D121 .E28 2001. Because of the ways we classify knowledge, *Women in Early Medieval Europe* will probably not be a primary textbook for any history class not explicitly focused on women, although it certainly could function as one. This fault, however, is inherent in our culture, not in Bitel’s scholarship, and she is to be lauded not only for her contribution to our teaching but also for her attempt to reconfigure the ways we classify historical knowledge and scholarship.

—Mary Dockray-Miller, Lesley College

---

**Deborah A. Fraioli. *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate*. Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, Ltd., 2000. Pp. x, 235. \$75.00. ISBN 0-85115-572-3.**

---

The attempt by the English and Burgundians to vilify Jehanne d’Arc can be reduced to a few simple factors: they sought to destroy the threat she posed to religious and secular authority as a low-born, uneducated woman usurping the traditional role of a man, of a warrior in particular, without renouncing her essential female-ness or claims to divine inspiration. Her astonishing accomplishments, as well as her straddling of class and gender “lines,” continue to mystify modern scholars even as they frustrated her contemporaries. Fortunately, we now have Deborah Fraioli’s recent book, *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate*, a long-overdue and invaluable tool for understanding how the enigmatic Jehanne was received and understood by her contemporaries. Fraioli’s examination begins to fill a gap in scholarship regarding the theological battle that this young woman’s claims to be *a Deo*, at a time when divine involvement was especially desirable for the Dauphin’s earthly political concerns, set off at Charles VII’s court. In a close examination of significant contemporaneous texts, Fraioli focuses in particular on the essential process of *discretio spirituum* that propelled the first efforts to determine the extent of the Dauphin’s support of Jehanne’s claims.

Fraioli begins her study with Jehanne’s arrival at Chinon, where general reactions to the young girl’s declarations “were characterized by a mixture of derision and disbelief” (7). Nevertheless the dynastic concerns of the war and Jehanne’s legendary revelation that Charles was the “true heir of France’ [*vray héritier*]” spurred the court to action, and the ecclesiastical members of the *Conseil* conducted an initial investigation. Fraioli supports the validity of this early inspection, in spite of some critics’ uncertainty, stemming from the political expediency of a swift acceptance of Jehanne and her mission,

stating that “the theologians at Chinon, despite political conditions, [could] accept that responsibility [relating to the charism of discretion], and conduct an unprejudiced examination of Joan” (12). Emphasizing the early skepticism of theologians regarding Jehanne, Fraioli outlines their reluctance to endorse the divine nature of her mission’s origin in spite of the growing impatience of both Jehanne and the court to act on her revelations.

One of the most important outcomes of this study is the recognition that Jehanne’s adoption of male dress caused considerable concern from the outset, even among her French supporters. In the author’s discussion of *De quadam puella*, the treatise whose purpose was to ascertain the source of Jehanne’s alleged prophecy for the French court, Fraioli writes that “since most historians (including some of Joan’s contemporaries) have wanted to view the accusations against male dress as a desperate invention concocted at Rouen (and at the very least an English invention), DQP is troubling to their argument, for it tells us that in Joan’s own party controversy surrounded her attire virtually from the beginning” (42-3). The comprehensive examination of Jehanne at Poitiers must have been somewhat of a disappointment to the French court and the girl, for the *Poitiers Conclusions* endorsed her and her mission “only provisionally” (54), approving her advance to Orléans but not confirming that she was sent by God as she stated. A victory at Orléans, then, would be the miracle the theologians sought to verify her claims. It would not be until after the council at Poitiers and the French court’s commitment to Jehanne that nonpartisan treatises against her were dismissed, and it was such propaganda as the pro-Jehanne *De mirabili victoria* that enjoyed wide dissemination and influenced the later arguments that are familiar today from the rehabilitation trial documents.

It was not, therefore, until Jehanne’s *Lettre aux Anglais* that we see the first unequivocal statement of her divine mission, a strange document indeed as far as summons to war are concerned, with its overtures to peace mixed with her confident promises to chase the English out of France with God’s help. Her *Lettre* understandably diverges from the early image of Jehanne as simple, pious, and above all feminine, an ideal certainly promoted by the *Poitiers Conclusions*, but its distribution and her subsequent victory at Orléans galvanized the French cause and inspired Jacques Gelu’s *De puella aurelianensi dissertatio*, whose passionate support of Jehanne marks a significant reversal in attitude for the archbishop, and Christine de Pizan’s *Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc*, a pro-Jehanne poem written in Anglo-Burgundian territory to generate support for Charles’s cause in Paris. Fraioli continues her investigation with later texts important to the theological debate, such as the enthusiastic addendum about Jehanne in the *Collectarium historiarum* and the vitriolic “Reply of a Parisian Cleric,” a Burgundian tract refuting the *De mirabili victoria* whose arguments, especially those surrounding Jehanne’s male dress, would soon after be seen in the condemnation trial. Fraioli’s discussion of the relatively late text (1442), *Le champion des dames* by the Burgundian Martin Le Franc, seems outside the scope of her argument regarding the contemporary theological treatises, but she includes it as part of the debate continuum because of its surprising pro-Jehanne focus and its use of *De mirabili victoria* as a source.

Fraioli also offers the reader helpful appendices with English translations of several key texts.

Fraioli's careful literary assessment of the early texts in the Johannic debate, examined in chronological order with particular attention paid to their relationship to one another, returns the reader to a part of the argument that is largely overlooked in modern criticism surrounding the saint and her accomplishments. As the author states in her conclusion, these texts affect "our understanding of Joan of Arc when she is approached, not biographically, but, as her contemporaries apparently viewed her, as an object of theological debate" (193). The use of the word "object" is ironic because it becomes evident, in the study of the progression of the texts, that Jehanne was used as a theological symbol of pro-French propaganda long before her capture, as much as she was symbolically vilified by the English, and whose mission climaxed with the Dauphin's crowning at Reims. Johannic scholars would do well to consider these texts to further their understanding of Jehanne's remarkable history, especially in regard to her reception by her contemporaries as a self-proclaimed agent of God's will on earth.

—Wendy Marie Hoofnagle, *University of Connecticut, Storrs*

---

**Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons, eds., *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*. (New Middle Ages.) New York and Houndmills, Eng.: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003. Pp. xxix, 506. \$65; £40.**

---

A former colleague once remarked that "nobody has yet written a decent biography of Eleanor of Aquitaine." Eleanor has attracted many myths, both in medieval times and in subsequent centuries, which have clouded assessments of her to the present day. Of particular concern to feminists has been the tendency—not limited to disapproving medieval clerics—to ascribe to Eleanor the worst excesses associated with womankind. This is the Eleanor who sleeps with her uncle, parades naked on crusade, and murders her rivals. Other writers, seeking to rehabilitate Eleanor, have created a counter-mythology of Eleanor as a uniquely powerful, independent, and cultured woman, queen of the troubadours and the "courts of love." She is often defined in terms of her relations to men, particularly (after the title of one work),<sup>1</sup> the "Four Kings;" her husbands Louis VII of France and Henry II of England, and her sons Richard I and John.

Happily, this volume goes a long way toward dispelling the mythology. Wheeler, Parsons, and the contributors have produced a set of studies that explore Eleanor's life, career, and context in great depth. The nineteen chapters, bookended with an introduction by the authors and epilogue by Jane Martindale, explore the queen-duchess's political career and status, and her cultural legacy. Elizabeth A. R. Brown introduces us to the state of Eleanor scholarship, updating her own 1976 study of the queen.<sup>2</sup> Marie Hivergneaux and Ralph Turner look at Eleanor's role in the government of her duchy of Aquitaine and her authority during the reigns of her sons. These, alongside Brown's introduction, are fine examples of the approach to Eleanor's life,