

for the merit of *Women, Art and Patronage* lies in its breadth. It is the sort of book that should appear in the bibliography of any scholar working on the art, architecture, or culture of this period in English history, and will seed future studies, many more narrowly focused and more theoretically-oriented. Although the book ends with the lackluster, rather self-consciously academic statement that "It has proved possible to suggest a very positive, imaginative and dynamic picture of the achievements of noblewomen in England as artistic patrons during the reigns of Henry III and the three Edwards" (p. 138), Gee's book offers much more than a suggestion; it is a panorama.

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**Guthrie, Shirley.** *Arab Women in the Middle Ages: Private Lives and Public Roles.* London: Saqi Books, 2001. Pp. 268.

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Women's roles in Muslim societies have largely remained poorly known in the western world and obscured by the stereotypes in Islamic historiography. The efforts of Fatima Mernissi, Nikki Keddie, and Gavin Hambly, among others, have begun to lift this veil. In *Arab Women in the Middle Ages*, Shirley Guthrie's exploration of medieval women's lives, based on sources ranging from the Qur'an to regional and local folk practices clears up misconceptions, describes regional and local differences in various practices, and uncovers facts previously shrouded by anti-feminist bias. Guthrie draws on religious, philosophical, historical, literary, and legal texts to describe the experience of medieval Arab women. Guthrie's sources enable her to demonstrate variations in thought and practice in the medieval Arab world, but she appears content just to present them as if they could speak for themselves.

Guthrie begins with a discussion of marriage and the seclusion of Arab women in the home. There were different types of arrangements as well as variations in practice between, for example, Bedouin tribes and Andalusian Arabs. Guthrie notes points where women had some leeway to negotiate conditions of the marriage contract. Likewise, while she describes the rationale for the tradition of women's seclusion, ways that women found to flout their freedom, despite the criticism of their male counterparts, receive equal attention. Chapters 2 and 3 maintain the focus on the married woman with a discussion of reproduction, contraception, and childcare.

Chapters 4 through 6 are full of examples of household etiquette, foodways, and dress. Guthrie's presentation is consistently broad, overwhelming the reader with snippets of information with little contextualization. Chapters 7 and 8 take up women's roles in wider society, although Guthrie's survey overextends itself once again. She introduces some individuals such as Shajarat al-Durr, whose career Guthrie summarizes with references to the conflict between Egypt and Syria caused by her sultanate, but she fails to provide adequate detail on this sultana. Guthrie distinguishes between women's activities in the political arena, everyday life, and low life, listing various occupations for women and giving some documentation of how they were perceived. Chapter 8 discusses women on the margins of Islamic societies such as prostitutes, the

al-ghalsila who prepared corpses for burial, slaves, and non-Muslims.

Guthrie's concluding chapter introduces additional well-chosen examples of Muslim women's history, but they do not work to wrap up the discussion properly. It is unclear why Guthrie introduces them here rather than in the earlier chapters where they would have added depth to the book as a whole. Putting them at the end leaves the reader wondering where she wanted to go next with the work rather than presenting a conclusion.

Overall, the book is lacking in analysis and interpretation. Rather than what the chroniclers say, what does the author think at this point? Is there a way to tie all of the disparate strands together? Where should the discourse go from here? Given the amount of material presented by the author and the range of sources from across the Islamic world she has masterfully blended into this work, the lack of analysis detracts from the quality of her scholarship and the project as a whole. Guthrie's effort is to be commended, but the subject deserves more attention than this book provides.

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**Harbus, Antonina. *Helena of Britain in Medieval Legend*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002. Pp. viii + 215.**

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Antonina Harbus's book on Helena of Britain is fascinating. Her purpose is to separate the historical Helena from the legendary empress and to explore the origins and development of the claim that Helena was British, eventually coming to be identified in the later Middle Ages as the daughter of King Cole of Colchester. The book is organized chronologically, with individual chapters devoted to the legend in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages (I), Anglo-Saxon England and Francia (II), the Welsh tradition (III), Anglo-Latin history and the Brut tradition (IV), the later Middle Ages (V) and the post-medieval legend (VI). Appendices provide a transcription of the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century *Vita sancta Helene* by Jocelin of Furness, and the anonymous Middle English verse *St. Elyn*.

What comes across most forcefully in Harbus's book is the way in which both the woman and the legend were appropriated by a series of male authors and rulers anxious to assert their own particular agendas. *Helena of Britain* is not a feminist book, and it was never the author's intention that it should be; nevertheless, greater attention to the ways in which women might have come into contact with the Helena legend and used it for their own purposes would have been welcome. Citing such authors as Aldhelm, Bede, Cynewulf, and Ælfric, Harbus establishes the origins of the British Helena legend in the Anglo-Saxon period, her popularity apparently developing out of and along side that of the cult of the cross. The textual evidence Harbus musters is strong enough, but her silence as to the possible role of royal women in the development of both is problematic, especially as Anglo-Saxon royal women played such a prominent role in the conversion process. She notes, for example, the popularity of free-standing sculpted stone crosses in early Northumbria