CONTENTS

~ ARTICLES

FIGHTER, PLAYER, HUNTER: QUEER WOMEN
AND FEMALE AGENTS ON SECULAR GOTHIC IVORIES
Emma Le Pouésard

WOMEN’S PUBLIC LANGUAGE IN THE
OLD ENGLISH APOLLONIUS OF TYRE
Sophia D’Ignazio

MALORY’S GWENYVERE AND HER LADIES
Molly A. Martin

READING THE BOOKS OF MARGERY KEMPE
AND ALICE PYETT: ATTACHMENT AND FEMINIST
RESTORATION IN MICHELLE PAYER’S WAKENHYRST
Laura Varnam

~ RETROSPECTIVES

LESBIANS LIKE ME
Judith M. Bennett

~ BOOK REVIEWS

STONE FIDELITY: MARRIAGE AND EMOTION IN MEDIEVAL TOMB SCULPTURE
Jessica Barker
Reviewed by Amy Danielle Juarez

WOMEN WARRIORS AND NATIONAL HEROES: GLOBAL HISTORIES
Boyd Cothran, Joan Judge, and Adrian Shubert, eds.
Reviewed by Misty Urban

WOMEN’S FRIENDSHIP IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE
Karma Lochrie and Usha Vishnuvajjala, eds.
Reviewed by B. Skye Oliver
Apostate Nuns in the Later Middle Ages
Elizabeth Makowski
Reviewed by Morgan McMinn

A Life of Ill Repute: Public Prostitution in the Middle Ages
Maria Serena Mazzi
Joyce Myerson, translator
Reviewed by Amanda L. Scott

Female Authorship, Patronage, and Translation in Late Medieval France: From Christine de Pizan to Louise Labé
Anneliese Pollock Renck
Reviewed by Alani Hicks-Bartlett

Acts of Care: Recovering Women in Late Medieval Health
Sara Ritchey
Reviewed by Tanya Stabler Miller

The Basque Seroras: Local Religion, Gender, and Power in Northern Iberia, 1550–1800
Amanda L. Scott
Reviewed by Phyllis Zagano

Women, Food, and Diet in the Middle Ages: Balancing the Humors
Theresa Vaughan
Reviewed by Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson

Women Religious Crossing between the Cloister and the World: Nunneries in Europe and the Americas, ca. 1200–1700
Mercedes Pérez Vidal, ed.
Reviewed by Alexandra Verini

Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond, 650–1100
Diane Watt
Reviewed by Andrew Breeze

Medieval Intersections: Gender and Status in Europe in the Middle Ages
Katherine Weikert and Elena Woodacre, eds.
Reviewed by Ebba Strutzenbladh

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Women’s religious life has long been a rife source of material for feminist scholars. In recent decades, the notion that nuns sat passively in their cloisters watching the world go by has been debunked, and an exciting range of scholarship by historians, literary scholars, theologians, musicologists, and art historians has excavated medieval and early modern female monastic life.

This volume adds another voice to an already large assembly of research on nuns. As editor Pérez Vidal explains in the introduction, the essays contribute to ongoing conversations about religious women with a cross-temporal approach since it joins essays on medieval and early modern convents. The introduction to the volume also asserts that it expands the study of religious women by including nuns’ interactions across the Atlantic although given that only three of the seven essays consider Latin America, this goal seems less fully accomplished. Further, as the introduction states, the volume to some degree foregrounds interdisciplinary dialogue, although the majority of the authors are historians and the majority of essays focus on the Hispanic world.

As the volume’s title emphasizes, the book’s main thesis concerns the permeability of enclosure and the interconnections between convents and their secular surroundings. While the general point that medieval and early modern convents were permeable and political has been made previously by scholars such as Elizabeth A. Lehfeldt, Claire Walker, Ulrike Strasser, and many others, the essays in the present volume offer compelling further proof for this assertion.

The chapters are organized chronologically and to a degree spatially as the opening essays focus on Europe and the later ones extend to Latin America (although the last chapter ends in France). The first chapter, “Female Dominican Identities (1200–1500)” by Sylvie Duval, examines the relationship between Dominican friars and religious women, challenging the widespread idea that Dominicans were reluctant to integrate women. Citing two bulls as well as documents written by nuns themselves, Duval concludes that while male juridical structures might have aimed to exclude women, many women did in fact see themselves as part of the Order of Preachers. This chapter, therefore, points to the nuances and complexities of women’s religious identities and the need for taking into account multiple sources in deciphering them.
The volume’s second chapter, “In Touch with the Outside: The Economic Exchanges of the Observant Dominican Convent of St. Catherine in St. Gallen” by Claudia Sutter, focuses on organizational and financial aspects of convents in the late Middle Ages by reconstructing the economic contact between the convent of St. Catherine in St. Gallen in Switzerland with the outside world. By using two case studies—the trade in oats and wine over twenty years—Sutter concludes that even when living in strict enclosure, nuns could autonomously manage their convent’s legal, administrative, and economic affairs.

The third chapter, “Beyond the Wall: Power, Parties, and Sex in Late Medieval Galician Nunneries” by Miguel García-Fernández, again considers how nuns’ lives extended outside convent walls, this time by focusing on Galicia. Examining a range of documents, this chapter focuses not just on economic agency but also on the ways that nuns maintained family ties, spoke to those outside the cloister about business matters, and attended local celebrations. By tracking dispensations for illegitimacy, García-Fernández also documents nuns’ sexual relationships. In this way, the article counters late medieval ecclesiastical rhetoric that stressed nuns’ enclosure and shows that such enclosure was often more theory than practice.

Chapter 4, “Reform and Renewal in the Dominican Nunneries of Spain and Latin America” by the volume’s editor Mercedes Pérez Vidal, examines Observant reform across a wide temporal and spatial span. The chapter begins by summarizing the reforms of Dominican nunneries in Castile starting in the fifteenth century. It then turns to the establishment of nunneries in the New World. One of Pérez Vidal’s more interesting insights is that nuns and patronesses also fostered reform, a point that comes across especially in the section on art. The chapter concludes that studies of reform need to be more localized and to consider more fully the different agents involved in reform.

Chapter 5, “Transatlantic Circulation of Objects, Books, and Ideas in Mid-Seventeenth-Century Mexican Nunneries” by Doris Bieñaño de Peralta, tracks a transatlantic dialogue involving books, objects, and images that enabled the inhabitants of Mexican nunneries to participate in but also to reappropriate the culture of Imperial Spain. The chapter focuses particularly on the exchange of books about European nuns such as Teresa of Avila and Gertrude the Great in New Spain’s nunneries and their reception among creole religious women. Bieñaño de Peralta argues that Mexican nuns were inspired by these women’s writings and used them to authorize their own life writings.
The sixth chapter, “Estefania de San Joseph and Esperanza de San Alberto: The Dual Discourse in the Lives of Two Exemplary Afro-Women Religious in Early Modern Spanish-America” by Valérie Benoist, examines the spiritual biographies of two Afro-women in New Spain. Benoist demonstrates that the biographers of Estefania de San Joseph and Esperanza de San Alberto whitened these women in order to glorify their criollo convents and orders. Erasing the African roots of their subjects enabled biographers to avoid threatening the racial hierarchies of the Iberian colonial world. One of the more compelling chapters in the volume, this chapter foregrounds the ways that male authors curated and repurposed the reputations of religious women.

The volume’s final chapter, “Le monachisme bourbonien et la fabrication de l’autorité au féminin à Fontevraud au XVIIe siècle” by Annalena Müller, focuses on an abbey with both male and female communities both ruled by an abbess. While Fontevraud’s medieval period has received more scholarly attention, Müller hone in on a seventeenth-century conflict between the abbess and the monks, who opposed the increasing power of the abbess who gave preference to Jesuits as spiritual guides. In exploring this conflict, the chapter finds that the abbey’s history was curated by the abbess Jean-Baptiste to portray Fontevraud as a place where women have always dominated, a point of view that Müller notes also suits the desires of modern scholars to locate proto-feminist spaces. The chapter thus shows the importance of looking at convents across time to understand the complex power dynamics between religious men and women.

As a whole, this volume offers an intriguing set of essays on various women’s monastic communities. While it might have been helpful for the introduction to register the significant amount of existing scholarship on the permeability of the cloister and for the volume to include more scholarship on the Americas, it nonetheless offers a useful starting point for further scholarship on nuns in colonial spaces and serves to bolster existing findings on the very tangible ways in which nuns were embedded in the world.

Alexandra Verini
Ashoka University

https://doi.org/10.32773/NRAY9213