

June Hall McCash

The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women

Athens: University of Georgia P, 1996. Pp. xx+352. 39 photogr. \$60.00 \$25.00

Reviewed by Anne Klinck

This collection makes a useful contribution to our knowledge of the cultural activities of medieval women; the book is the first to deal exclusively with the subject of female patronage in the Middle Ages (Preface ix). It examines the role of women as patrons not just of letters, but also "of the visual and decorative arts, of architecture, and of religious and educational foundations" (Stephen Nichols, Foreword xviii-xix), and "seeks to test the limits of what can legitimately be called patronage" (Preface ix).

June Hall McCash's "Overview" covers a wide spectrum of material and makes some helpful, though not necessarily new, generalizations. For example, she notes that most independent female benefactors of the arts were widows or women in religious life, since relatively few married women were able to engage in patronage without the assistance of their husbands (7). She comments on the reasons—personal, political, or religious—which led women to become patrons. Her point that women, being less versed in Latin, were particularly instrumental in the promotion of vernacular literature (25) is also familiar, but still worth emphasizing. Similarly, Nichols comments on the gendering of language into the (Latin) father and the (vernacular) mother tongue (Foreword xiv). McCash shows how women's interest in the *speculum dominarum* helped to establish female values (29). Women patrons were often motivated by a desire to support their own sex and to counter the "misogynistic outpourings from male clerics" (34). Remarkable women like Eleanor of Aquitaine should not be regarded as anomalies in their cultural patronage, but as particularly striking cases of a widespread trend (33).

After the "Overview," ten essays follow, arranged in chronological order, covering female patrons in Europe from Theodora of Byzantium in the sixth century (Anne McLanan) to Isabel of Portugal, wife of Philip Duke of Burgundy, in the fifteenth (Charity Cannon Willard). Joan Ferrante examines "Women's Role in Latin Letters." Madeline Caviness, writing from a Marxist perspective, concerns herself with the visual arts, and the extent to which women controlled the means of production. Lois Huneycutt focuses on Matilda of Scotland, the first consort of Henry I; John Parsons on "Thirteenth-Century Plantagenet Queens," especially Eleanor of Castile, second wife of Henry III. Miriam Shadis explores a tradition of female patronage in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Castile; she sees in the relationship of Leonor, Berenguela, and Blanche to the convents which they founded or administered, a means of constructing their personal power as well as that of their royal family. Karen Jambeck, like Shadis, studies a matrilineal pattern of patronage—in this case in England, between 1200 and

1475. Frances Underhill directs her investigation to Elizabeth de Burgh, who founded Clare College, Cambridge. And Ralph Hanna devotes his paper to peasant and bourgeois women promulgators of literature in Norfolk.

The book's main limitation is its focus on women from the highest echelons of society; it thus sheds light on the aspirations of the most highly privileged and has little to say about the generality of women. Really, Hanna's paper is the only one to go beyond this; his essay also extends the notion of patronage beyond benevolent support. Hanna considers two Lollard women, Margery Baxter and Avis Mone, and the well-known mystics Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich. Most interesting is his account of the illiterate Margery Baxter, whose "patronage" manifested itself in physical acts like stretching out her arms to exemplify the presence of the Cross in the true believer, and personally carrying Lollard books to potential converts. Hanna also sees Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich as women who found inventive ways to produce and disseminate books—though, sadly, this inventiveness never forestalled male appropriation.

Unfortunately, much of the material in McCash's collection simply catalogues the acts of patronage undertaken by various aristocratic women. Also, inferences are sometimes drawn from inadequate evidence. McCash observes that Hild, abbess of Whitby in the seventh century, "could read Latin, *no doubt*, with a fair amount of ease" (27; my emphasis). In fact, Bede praises her sagacity but never mentions her Latin. Again, Underhill paints a picture of an avidly musical Elizabeth de Burgh—on the basis of several account-book references to payments for music and musicians.

Overall, *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* is less searching than one would like, but still a highly informative and interesting collection, and a valuable addition to our knowledge of women's relationship to political power and social change in the Middle Ages.

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Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann

Columbia, S. C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995. Pp. 228. \$34.95

Reviewed by Holger A. Pausch

Critical and scholarly discussions of Ingeborg Bachmann's works in recent years are not only alive but indeed well. The exegeses of her texts have lost neither their luster, intrigue nor remarkable dynamics, as affirmed by the broad and undiminished interest in her work on the national and international literary scene. Since the height of Bachmann's critical reception in the early 1980s, an average of over fifty papers, articles, studies, and books have been published annually, not counting chapters in anthologies, theses, and dissertations. The