



Encyclopedia of Women in the Middle Ages

By Jennifer Lawler

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Most people have heard of Lady Godiva and her horseback tax protest in the 11th century and Joan of Arc who in the 15th century fought against the English for the French gaining sainthood in 1920. Many know of Eleanor of Aquitaine, 12th century Queen of France and England, and powerful manipulator and protector of kings. Some know of Hildegard and Beatrice and Blanche and Clare. There are many famous women of the Middle Ages whose lives and leadership brought important changes to history.

This encyclopedia contains several hundred entries on the culture, history and circumstances of women in the Middle Ages, from the years 500 to 1500 C.E. The geographical scope of this work is wide, with entries on women from England, France, Germany, Japan, and other nations around the world. There are entries on queens, empresses, and other women in positions of leadership as well as entries on topics such as work, marriage and family, households, employment, religion, and various other aspects of women's lives in the Middle Ages. Genealogies of queens and empresses accompany the text in an appendix.

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Editorial Review

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Lawler's contention is that while much has been written about the Middle Ages, if you ask the average person to name women of this time period, the usual answers are Joan of Arc and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Beyond these noted individuals, only queens and famous mistresses rate any mention in standard texts. In correcting this underreporting of half of the population, Lawler delved deeply into historical records and archives. As might be expected, hers was not an easy task given the absence of women in the historical records.

Lawler profiles women from 500 to 1500 C.E., among them Amalasantha (d.535), Ostrogothic queen of Italy; Herrad of Landsberg, twelfth century abbess and mystic; Peretta Peronne, fifteenth century surgeon; and Shiko, sixth century empress of Japan. Also included are women from legend and literature, such as Griselda and Guinevere. But coverage goes beyond a compilation of brief biographies to provide information on women's issues and concerns during this time period--*Hospitals, Marriage and family, Social class, and Witchcraft and the arcane arts* are examples of contextual entries, which range in length from a few lines to six or seven pages. Encyclopedia entries, many of which include suggested readings, occupy just over half the book. The remainder of the work consists of genealogical charts (approx. 60 pages), a 9-page glossary, a 28-page bibliography, and an index. There are no illustrations.

There are other resources in which readers might find information about many of the women covered here, including *Extraordinary Women of the Medieval and Renaissance World* (Greenwood, 2000) and Gale's nearly completed *Women in World History* (see p.1172). What sets this volume apart is the juxtaposition of biographical material with information on some of the conditions and circumstances that shaped medieval women's lives. Recommended for high-school, public, and academic libraries. REVWR
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Review

Delve[s] deeply...recommended --*Booklist/RBB*

Nicely written, readable, interesting entries --*Arba*

Recommended --*Feminist Collections*

About the Author

Award-winning author **Jennifer Lawler** is a freelance writer. She is also the author of *Encyclopedia of the Byzantine Empire* (2004) and lives in Lawrence, Kansas.

Users Review

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