Martha A. Brożyna, ed.
Gender and Sexuality in the Middle Ages: A Medieval Source Document Reader.
McFarland, 2005.
pp. xii + 316.

Compiling a collection of primary sources is an incredibly useful but thankless task. Having conceptualized a complex field of study, selected, edited, translated, and introduced a vast, almost limitless array of sources, and finally imposed order upon the chaotic cacophony of voices from the past, the hapless compiler is left to the mercy of the reviewer. These reviewers, of course, are always able to identify the omission of their favorite documents or quibble about the organizational structure or otherwise generally carp from the sidelines. Yet for all this, collections of documents are increasingly important for medievalists, both in the classroom and outside it. Courses require primary sources and few students, even graduate students, possess the linguistic facility to tackle them in the original languages. And as medievalists become increasingly sensitive to the need for more inclusivity in our notion of "the medieval," we, too, run up against our own linguistic limitations when confronted with Arabic or Hebrew, Greek or Old Church Slavonic. So, for many reasons, collections of primary sources in translation are valuable–and yet the reviewer is tempted to criticize.

Martha Brożyna has compiled a useful group of documents for those of us interested in medieval sex, gender, and sexuality. The collection is consciously wide-ranging, encompassing the ancient antecedents of medieval ideas and stretching to whenever the Middle Ages ended, according to the unique cultural, religious, and geographic circumstances of a given region. The book also breaks out of the tendency to focus on western Europe, pushing eastward to encompass Byzantine, Slavic, and Russian areas. Attention to religious and ethnic difference equally adds to the volume's diversity, with due attention to heretics, Jews, and Muslims.

Brożyna argues that her collection is cross-disciplinary and so, instead of following the pattern of similar volumes and organizing the material around themes, she has elected to use disciplines to categorize the material. Consequently, there are sections focused on "The Bible" and "Christian Thought," which include theology, preaching, mysticism, and hagiography. The section on "Chronicles" is subdivided by early Christian and Germanic sources, Continental Europe and the British Isles and Ireland, and a third division on Russia and the Byzantine Empire. "Biology, Medicine, and Science" is divided into sections: Understanding Male and Female, Sexual Activity and Reproduction, and Remedies. Only "Literature" really adheres to a strict division according to discipline: Poetry; Riddles, Songs and Stories; Advice Manuals; Memoirs; Sagas; and Drama. Where the structure fundamentally departs from the notion of discipline, however, is in the

final three sections: "Witchcraft and Heresy," "Judaism," and "Islam." There is another, I am sure unintended, consequence of this organizational schema, and that is found in some very unusual juxtapositions of sources. For example, the subsection "Memoirs" is comprised of the unlikely grouping of Augustine, Guibert of Nogent, Peter Abelard, and Margery Kempe. Few would argue that these four account for the major memoirs that survive from the Middle Ages, and certainly all four individuals had rather interesting things to recount about their experiences as sexed and sexual persons. Together, however, Augustine's tales of his mistress, Guibert's tormented account of his parents' marriage, Abelard's description of his affair and subsequent castration, and Margery's account of her negotiations with her husband to terminate their sexual relationship, lead to a view of medieval people that is both perplexing and puzzling. Augustine and Margery were separated by a thousand years of thought about marriage and chastity; Guibert and Abelard were near contemporaries but separated by education, experience, and intellect. Nor is there sufficient introduction to each brief and highly edited excerpt to provide enough context to allow an unfamiliar reader to make sense of each person and his/her experience (together, all four extracts with introductions total only nine and a half pages of text). There are other equally incomprehensible clusters of extracts that, in the end, appear more arbitrary than not.

Brożyna is indeed faithful to her promise to broaden the geographic scope of the "Middle Ages." There is plenty of material from the Byzantine, Islamic, and other eastern cultures, much of it not part of the usual, accessible medieval canon of sex and gender. For example, extracts from the Islamic Hadiths, oral accounts of the activities of Muhammad or his contemporaries, written down two centuries later, provide a lively and informative counterpoint to the more familiar extracts on sexuality from the Qur'an. The Hadiths provide a glimpse of how a teaching might have been implemented in practice, for example, by discussing the sexual behavior of husbands and wives during menstruation.

This volume, like most collections of primary sources, has its strengths and weaknesses. Some readers will be frustrated by the brevity of the documents, snippets that are frequently ripped from their context. Others, however, will be delighted by the breadth of scope and the attention given to the oft-neglected early Middle Ages and the eastern areas. As a collection of primary sources for the classroom, the volume will need a great deal of mediation from the instructor. Courses are usually organized chronologically or along thematic lines and in either case, drawing together the disparate pieces of evidence will be laborious, but there is enough substance in the volume that it could likely sustain

this kind of use, at least at the introductory levels. It is certainly a volume that any scholar of sexuality and gender in the Middle Ages will want to have on her or his shelves.

Jacqueline Murray
University of Guelph

Gene Brucker. *Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence, with a new preface.* University of California Press, 1986; rpt. 1988 & 2005. pp. vii + 138.

When Gene Brucker's *Giovanni and Lusanna* was first published in 1986, it was hailed as belonging to "new scholarly territory."[1] Microhistory was a relatively nascent field of historical inquiry in the 1980s, and despite initial fears of over-generalizations and insularity, it was quickly gaining a wide following. The ability of these snapshots from the lives of ordinary men and women to bring history to life suddenly made the past much more exhilarating and accessible to those both in and outside the discipline. David Herlihy put it best when he asked: "When may we expect the movie?"[2] Reviewers of *Giovanni and Lusanna* at once ranked this fine work among the likes of Carlo Ginsburg's *Cheese and the Worms*, Natalie Zemon Davis' *The Return of Martin Guerre*, and Judith Brown's *Immodest Acts*. Although these texts have since been joined by a number of other similarly outstanding works of microhistory (for example, Judith Bennett's *A Medieval Life*, or Robert Bartlett's *The Hanged Man*), these few works, including *Giovanni and Lusanna*, are still the most widely read and compelling of their genre.[3] The reasons for this are twofold. Most obviously, it is rare to stumble across such an inspiring and well-documented case in the archives. But more important still, there is much more to these books than just a good story. Brucker, like Ginsburg, Davis, and Brown before him, is capable of teasing out the subtle details that make sense of the lives he is examining and help us to understand the meaning and individuality of these ordinary men and women in the world in which they lived. Only an accomplished scholar, well grounded in the institutions and social structures of the past, like Gene Brucker, can help us to appreciate the courage of Lusanna di Benedetto, daughter of a Florentine artisan and widow of a linen-cloth manufacturer, when she chose to challenge Florence's social and political hierarchies by initiating a suit against Giovanni della Casa, son of a wealthy merchant family, who she argued was, in fact, her husband.

Initially, Lusanna and Giovanni's relationship was nothing out of the ordinary. In the world of Renaissance Florence, where men married for profit and usually many years after they became sexually active, love often took place outside of marriage.