

Ladies, Whores, and Holy Women: A Sourcebook in Courtly, Religious, and Urban Cultures of Late Medieval Germany. Edited by Ann Marie Rasmussen and Sarah Westphal-Wihl. TEAMS: Medieval German Texts in Bilingual Editions 5. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010. Pp. vii+158. ISBN: 9781580441513.

THIS SLENDER VOLUME brings together seven texts, grouped in five chapters, that address women's cultural status in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century German-speaking lands. Using the lenses of class, sexual activity, and spiritual learning, the editors examine the ways in which these texts project aspects of women's gendered experience. The presentation of the texts, as with other volumes in the series, adopts facing-page translations, preceded by generous contextualizing introductions and brief bibliographies.

The texts that the editors have chosen are disparate in nature, a feature that enhances the volume's suitability for classroom use, for the selections balance fictional and satirical writings with documentary evidence of the day, and various pairings of texts might be imagined. "A Woman's Confession" (*Die Beichte einer Frau*), for instance, seemingly advocates forgiveness of adultery because it encourages chivalric virtues. At the other end of the social spectrum, the distinctly lower-class stepmother of "Stepmother and Daughter" (*Stiefmutter und Tochter*) "teaches her daughter whoring," as a manuscript subtitle suggests, and enumerates both financial and social benefits that accrue from such work. The editors provide two versions of *Stiefmutter* in order to illustrate the process of interpretive adaptation in manuscript transmission of such late medieval texts. Their introduction usefully highlights the changes in voice and tone between the Augsburg and Nuremberg redactions. They argue that the "streamlining of the Nuremberg redaction goes beyond plot to ideology" (114) and tease out the commercial/financial element of the dialogue as a special focus for attention. Echoes of such concerns can be found a century later in the writings of Venetian courtesan Veronica Franco,¹ though of course regional practices of institutional prostitution and its control are highly variable. The editors also provide text and translation of the Nuremberg brothel regulations from ca. 1470 (*Ordnung der gemeinen Weiber in den Frauenhäusern*).

To these texts with their overt emphasis on sexuality, the editors add two that emphasize women's spiritual accomplishments, particularly in the context of Meister Eckhart's teachings. They provide a substantial portion of *Schwester Katrei*, providing italicized summations of the portions that were cut (presumably for reasons of space). They pair this well-known text with another broadly

circulated legend called here “The Twenty-One-Year-Old Woman” (*Die Frau von ein-und-zwanzig Jahren*). Curiously, this shorter text has yet to be assessed fully in the scholarly literature. There is not yet a complete index of manuscripts containing the work, for which both F. P. Pickering (the source for the version given here) and Erika Kartschoke in the *Repertorium deutschsprachiger Eheleben*² adopt the standard title “Die Frau von 22 Jahren.” This reflects the changing age of the narrator in the different manuscript versions; she is variously aged twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-four, and fifty-one. From the point of view of readership, it is interesting to note that Pickering bases his “Version B” on Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms germ. oct. 571, fols. 103r–107r, a manuscript copied in part by sisters Ursula Frym and Barbara von Hedingen, and owned by at least three specific Inzigkofen sisters, reflecting the text’s popularity with monastic readership. Another copy of the legend, one that stems from the Dominican women’s convent of Altenhohenau, has recently been digitized.³ Although the editors do not directly take up the question of nuns’ readership for this or other works in their sourcebook, they do include the booklist of Elisabeth von Volkenstorff, giving a glimpse into the reading habits of an upper-class lay female reader. The introduction to the selection is particularly valuable here, for the editors are able to identify a number of the texts Elisabeth owned, no mean feat in a period that largely lacks standardized titles. They explain the “various Teichners” (103) by citing the popularity of Heinrich Teichner’s writings and explaining that “his tone and style were so distinctive that his name . . . became a genre term, which is exactly how Elisabeth uses it in her book list” (103). One of Volkenstorff’s texts the editors do not gloss for the novice reader is “The Bible of Our Lady” (*unser fraun wibel*). This was almost certainly one of the lives of Mary (*Marienleben*) circulating at the time, as Franz Pfeiffer pointed out in the mid-nineteenth century,⁴ and most likely the *Marienleben* of Bruder Philipp, which is extant in at least 96 separate copies and was read by lay and monastic audiences alike as a “vernacular version” of the new testament.

As can be seen, the editors have opted to present a variety of texts in a woman’s voice, rather than seeking more specifically for authorial women *per se*. The bulk of these contributions are anonymous and reflect the large pool of unattributed texts that circulated widely in late medieval society. This is a great boon to the evolving conversation over women’s social roles in the fifteenth century, for texts about women—whether by men or by women—can tell us about social ideals and anxieties of the day. The editors also have a particular fascination with scribe Clara Hätzlerin and come close to treating her as an independent authorial agent; they give special weight to her “new titles” (112),

though it would have been helpful to the student reader to have a broader background on scribal rubricating as an intellectual practice of the day. It is a pity, then, that the bibliographies seem somewhat dated, perhaps reflecting a delay in publication. Most of the supplemental texts they cite date from more than a decade ago, and a few of the more recent additions (for example, Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter's collection *Envisaging Heaven*, cited on p. 53) seem only tangentially related to the works they are supposed to accompany. Nor do the editors cite any of Albrecht Classen's works, though selections from his volume on *Late-Medieval German Women's Poetry*, for instance, could have provided lyric works to complement the documents and dialogues presented here. In all, however, the merits of the collection outweigh any quibbles the reviewer might have. The selection of relatively short pieces from among the most widely circulated texts of the period will make the volume useable as supplemental reading in German history, women's studies, or medieval literature classes.

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NOTES

1. Veronica Franco, "Letter to a Mother Who Wanted Her Daughter to Become a Courtesan," in *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Laura Anna Stortoni (New York: Italica Press, 1996), 174-79.

2. F. P. Pickering, "Notes on Late Medieval German Tales in Praise of 'Docta Ignorantia,'" *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 24.1 (1940): 121-37; Erika Kartschoke, ed., *Repertorium deutschsprachiger Eheleben I/1* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996), 63-64.

3. Werner Fechter, *Deutsche Handschriften des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts aus der Bibliotheken des ehemaligen Augustinerchorfrauenstifts Inzigkofen* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1997), 169-71. The Altenhohenau copy of "Die Frau von 21 Jahren" (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 1109) is dated 1481 and can be found at http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/bsb00035397/image_694. Although four anonymous hands contributed to the Altenhohenau volume, the hand that copied "Die Frau von 21 Jahren" is known to have been an Altenhohenau nun; see Karin Schneider, *Die deutschen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München: Die mittelalterlichen Handschriften aus Cgm 888-4000*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), 78.

4. Franz Pfeiffer, "Über Hartmann von Aue: Zum Ereke," *Germania* 4 (1859): 185-237, here 189-90.