Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture.
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THE RECENT ESSAY collection *Reassessing the Roles of Women as "Makers"
of Medieval Art and Architecture*, edited by Therese Martin, makes a substantial
contribution to the literature on women's involvement in medieval artistic pro-
duction. Published as a two-volume set, the collection includes twenty-four
essays, thirty-two color plates, innumerable black-and-white images, and a
substantial bibliography. The essays range widely in content, covering materials
from the Crusader Kingdom to Scandinavia and from the 500s to the 1400s.
Rather than writing about each essay individually, in this review I will synthesize
them around two issues suggested by the collection's title: challenging assump-
tions ("reassessing") and women as artists and patrons ("makers").

The essays collectively challenge a range of assumptions about medieval
women's roles in processes of artistic production. Two essays on the architecture
of Islamic Spain, María Elena Díez Jorge's "Women and the Architecture of
al-Andalus (711-1492): A Historiographical Analysis" and Glaire D. Anderson's
"Concubines, Eunuchs, and Patronage in Early Islamic Córdoba," successfully
challenge the assumption that women in medieval Muslim societies were not
active as patrons, an assumption possibly based on our own negative percep-
tions of women's status in the contemporary Islamic world. Likewise, two
essays on manuscripts produced by medieval nuns, Jane Carroll's "Subversive
Obedience: Images of Spiritual Reform by and for Fifteenth-Century Nuns" and
Loretta Vandi's "Redressing Images: Conflict in Context at Abbess Humbrina's
Scriptorium in Pontetetto," challenge the assumption that these women were
not able to shape the books they produced to serve their own spiritual needs—
including during the late-medieval period of Dominican reform. Melissa R.
Katz's "The Non-Gendered Appeal of the *Vierge Ouvrante* Sculpture: Audience,
Patronage, and Purpose in Medieval Iberia," challenges the assumption that
cloistered women were the primary audience for these fascinating sculptures.
An additional pair of essays challenges assumptions about textile produc-
tion: Jenifer Ní Ghrádaigh's "Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early
Medieval Ireland" that textile production was less valued than manuscript
making and Nancy Wicker's "Nimble-fingered Maidens in Scandinavia: Women
as Artists and Patrons" that textiles were the primary form for women's ar-
tistic work. Annie Renoux's "Elite Women, Palaces, and Castles in Northern
France (ca. 850-1100)" challenges the assumption that women were not involved

in castle construction. And Ellen M. Shortell's "Erasures and Recoveries of Women's Contributions to Gothic Architecture: The Case of Saint-Quentin, Local Nobility, and Eleanor of Vermandois" challenges the assumption that the patronage of Gothic architecture was civic and royal by arguing convincingly for the involvement of women from noble and clerical families.

In focusing on women as the "makers" of medieval art, the essays treat women as both artists and patrons and consider the relationship between those two roles. Pierre Alain Mariaux's "Women in the Making: Early Medieval Signatures and Artists' Portraits (9th-12th c.)," contextualizes the evidence for women artists within medieval practices of self-identification and finds no differences between the practices of men and women. In her "Women as Makers of Church Decoration: Illustrated Textiles at the Monasteries of Altenberg/Lahn, Rupertsberg, and Heiningen (13th-14th c.)," Stefanie Seeberg writes of nuns conceiving, designing, and producing textile decorations for their churches that expressed their particular interests and concerns. And Nicola Coldstream's "The Roles of Women in Late Medieval Civic Pageantry in England" looks for evidence of women's active involvement in pageants as both makers and performers. Coldstream's and other essays (Ní Ghrádaigh's on textiles, Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg's on church construction and decoration, Rachel Moss's on women patrons in later medieval Ireland, and Loveday Lewes Gee's on patronage in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England) read as rather list-like, but do accumulate overwhelming evidence for women's frequent involvement in art-making. Their work substantiates Martin's challenge in her introductory essay to the assumption that medieval art was primarily produced by men.

As part of that challenge, Martin argues for treating both artists and patrons alike as the "makers" of medieval art, building from the medieval use of the term "*fecit*" to describe both of these activities (2-4). Several of the essays examine the relationship between patronage and physical production: Ní Ghrádaigh writes of elite women as combining those two roles in personally producing textiles, Wicker of a mother acting as patron for a rune stone and a bridge made to commemorate her daughter as a skilled maker, and Vandi of abbess Humbrina of Pontetetto as the patron of her own community's manuscript production. Katrina Kogman-Appel's "Portrayals of Women with Books: Female (Il)literacy in Medieval Jewish Culture" examines evidence for women acting as the patrons, owners, users, and producers of Haggadot manuscripts as revealing of attitudes towards female education. Other essays follow Martin's lead in treating the patron as the "maker" of the work of art, that is, as the individual whose interests and intentions are expressed in the resulting product: Moss investigates the role of women patrons in introducing new artistic forms into

later medieval Ireland, Gee looks at images of women patrons as potentially revealing their individual interests, and Jaroslav Folda's "Melisende of Jerusalem: Queen and Patron of Art and Architecture in the Crusader Kingdom" argues for recognizing Melisende as a major patron who used her patronage to unify her diverse kingdom. In her essay, "Reception, Gender, and Memory: Elisenda de Montcada and Her Dual-Effigy Tomb at Santa Maria de Pedralbes," Eileen McKiernan Gonzales successfully utilizes the exceptional form of this tomb and contextual issues regarding the increasingly strict enclosure of nuns to argue that Elisenda intentionally and meaningfully differentiated her self-representation for different audiences, creating both a personal self for the nuns to remember and a regal persona for public and clerical commemoration. Likewise, Filipe Pereda's "Liturgy as Women's Language: Two Noble Patrons Prepare for the End in Fifteenth-Century Spain" looks to correspondences between the funerary liturgies dictated in the wills of Mencía de Mondoza and Beatriz Manrique and the art and architecture of the funerary chapels they patronized to argue that the latter expressed these women's spiritual interests.

A final group of essays on women as patrons goes beyond identifying patronage as a form of art-making to problematize patronage itself. Two essays on the patronage of Portuguese queens, Anna Maria S. A. Rodrigues's "The Treasures and Foundations of Isabel, Beatriz, Elisende, and Leonor: The Art Patronage of Four Iberian Queens in the Fourteenth Century" and Miriam Shadis's "The First Queens of Portugal and the Building of the Realm," examine how patronage changed over time, whether over one woman's lifetime or over several generations. In her essay "The Patronage Question under Review: Queen Blanche of Castile (1188-1252) and the Architecture of the Cistercian Abbeys at Royaumont, Maubisson, and Le Lys," Alexandra Gajewski challenges the notion that the resulting artwork is expressive of the patron's personality by pointing to the range of intermediaries that typically stood in between the patron and the final work of art. And Mickey Abel's "Emma of Blois as Arbiter of Peace and the Politics of Patronage" examines the textual sources for Emma's patronage as revealing its significance for the later generations who composed these texts, rather than treating the texts as straightforward documentary sources. These essays are of a piece with recent review essays on the issue of patronage in medieval art: Jill Caskey, for example, has identified a range of terms and phrases (other than *fecit*) that were used to identify patronage activities as revealing "more complexity and often less certainty regarding matters of agency than our habitual use of the monolithic term 'patron' might imply."[1]

Issues of agency are key here for identifying women's agency has become central to the project of feminist art history, as is exemplified by the third of

Norma Broude and Mary Garrard's anthologies of such work entitled *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*.[2] As Rachel Dressler and I have noted previously in this publication, insofar as it is identified with studying the work of women artists, this emphasis on agency appears to have marginalized medieval art for feminist scholars (so that this Broude and Garrard volume does not include an essay on medieval material).[3] Identifying patronage as another potential form of female agency opens an opportunity for medievalists to contribute to feminist work in the discipline; however, work in this vein must proceed with full recognition of the complexities of medieval patronage practices and processes of artistic production.

Contextualizing the collection's essays on women as patrons within the broader field of feminist art history points to an issue with Martin's conceptualization and presentation of the project as a whole. She nowhere identifies the collection specifically as a work of feminist scholarship. The word "feminist" appears only once in her introductory essay, in a list of the different methods and approaches adopted by the individual authors (27). And yet the broad goal for the project that Martin outlines at the end of her essay, cultivating "an appreciation of women's active roles even within the constrained circumstances of the medieval past . . . [in order to] contribute to dispelling the passive acceptance of women's secondary status in the present" (33), is certainly a feminist one. Why does she not use the word? The one hint she provides is in writing of work on women's history as being "ghettoized (sometimes even by the individual researcher herself), a trend that the present volume seeks to avoid" (5). Perhaps it is self-identification as a feminist that Martin sees as self-ghettoizing? Dressler and I have both again pointed to a resistance to feminism within the field of medieval art history. Martha Easton writes of the term feminism as being political and divisive, and as potentially seeming outdated, even as she argues for its value and its continued use.[4] Martin's avoidance of the term in this otherwise substantial contribution raises significant concerns about the status of feminist work in medieval art history today.

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NOTES

1. Jill Caskey, "Whodunnit? Patronage, the Canon, and the Problematics of Agency in Romanesque and Gothic Art," in *A Companion to Medieval Art:*

Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 197.

2. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds. *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

3. Rachel Dressler, "Continuing the Discourse: Feminist Scholarship and the Study of Medieval Visual Culture," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 43.1 (Summer 2007): 19-20; and Marian Bleeke, "Feminist Approaches to Medieval Visual Culture: An Introduction," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 44.2 (Winter 2008): 47-52.

4. Martha Easton, "Feminism," in *Medieval Art History Today – Critical Terms* (special issue of *Studies in Iconography* 33 [2003]): 99-112.