of woman is “inextricably intertwined with a range of other ideologies that structure social castes and classes, notions of race, morality or medicine, or such practices as courtliness and the literary” (242).

This is an informative, thought-provoking, and enjoyable volume that successfully widens the scope of study of the debate on women and gender, making an important contribution to gender studies and to medieval and Renaissance studies. Throughout the volume the authors point to the significance of the debate as more than a courtly game in which the misogynist side is merely the parroted repetition of inherited authorities. As the essays in Gender in Debate consistently show, the variety and frequency of works that strive to define “Woman” underscores the fluidity and adaptability of the debate, which could serve patriarchal interests, contribute to gendered, courtly self-fashioning, and also, if only tentatively, imagine new kinds of female subjectivity.

—Emily C. Francomano, Georgetown University


On the first page of Nancy F. Partner’s Introduction to Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1993) she notes that “feminist scholarship has restored to the Middle Ages the substantial reality that human societies consist of two sexes.” In the decade since Partner’s volume appeared, scholars interested in art patronage during the medieval period have continued to amass material documenting or suggesting that women, as well as men, commissioned works of art and have explored the varied meanings these works held for their audiences. This material has appeared for the most part as isolated journal articles or book chapters, so Loveday Lewes Gee’s study comes as a welcome, more broadly-conceived examination of the relationship between women and art patronage in England over the course of about 150 years.

Gee’s book incorporates material about specific patrons and specific monuments into an exploration of the process of patronage. Her Introduction (pp. 1-6) provides an extremely brief overview of pertinent research, including more theoretical studies that address medieval spirituality and gender issues, such as Caroline Bynum’s Jesus as Mother (1982). Chapter One introduces her readers to the women who people her study (“Noble and Generous Ladies,” pp. 7-24). Chapters 2, 3, and 4 address the reasons these noble ladies might have had for their patronage of various types of monuments, such as monastic foundations, castles, tombs, manuscripts, and seals, all under the general rubric of “Motives for Patronage” (pp. 25-72). Chapters 6 and 7, “Artistic Choices: Architecture” and “Artistic Choices: Sepulchral Monuments,” address the appearance and style of some of these monuments (pp. 91-122). In Chapter 5, “Decisions, Endowments, and Documents” (pp. 73-92), documentation of the relationships between a few patrons and their commissions allows Gee to look at the practical aspects of certain types of patronage, particularly religious foundations (the abbeys at Lacock, Sweetheart, and Denny) and
chantries (at Hereford Cathedral and St. Frideswide’s, Oxford). This chapter is clearly the nucleus of the book, where the “Motives” of the first three chapters, whether these are spiritual reasons, comfort, or status, develop into the “Choices” of the last two. In the concluding Chapter 8, “Patterns of Patronage” (pp. 123-38), Gee summarizes the themes and priorities that appear to have guided the women in her study. She argues that “perhaps the most significant and distinguishing aspects of female patronage were the emphasis on family and on their spiritual concerns” (p. 138). This conclusion, along with Gee’s suggestion that her ladies often showed a preference for styles and motifs connected with the court, is hardly a surprise to anyone who has worked in this field, but the breadth of examples and wealth of documentation she brings to the issue makes this an extremely useful study. Gee’s book is made more functional by the rare editorial decision to use footnotes rather than endnotes, and by a number of useful appendices including genealogical charts that help the confused reader keep the familial relationships of Gee’s patrons in order (pp. 170-177).

Gee’s book follows two methodological threads within this exploration of the process of patronage. First, she explores as a historian the roles of women as patrons of art, teasing out the raw wool of documents published in places like the Calendar of Close Rolls, as well as citing material gathered by earlier scholars. This is one of the most valuable aspects of the book and will remain an excellent resource for studies of specific monuments or patrons; it is bolstered by sixty black-and-white photographs of monuments, manuscripts, and drawings of destroyed tombs. All this material is summarized in “Appendix A: Female Patrons: Families, Burials and Patronage” (pp. 139-69), which is an alphabetical listing of the “noble and generous ladies” that includes their dates, their family relationships, and lists objects with which they have been connected along with the reason for the connection (i.e. an obituary in a manuscript calendar, heraldry, or “conjectural”), including citations of relevant source material. Despite the occasional typographical error (the dating of the Reydon Hours as 1220-23 instead of 1320-23 on p. 139, for instance) this appendix deserves its very own bookmark.

The other more theoretical thread of the book is to explore whether the gender of the patrons was reflected in the works they supported and, more broadly, to look at the patterns of patronage typical of these medieval women. Throughout the book Gee compares the commissions of these wealthy women with those of male contemporaries, for instance following a discussion of the Taymouth Hours and its probable patron, Isabelle of France, with a paragraph on the Luttrell Psalter and its first owner, Geoffrey Luttrell (pp. 49-53). She mines medieval sources and modern discussions of female spirituality and decorum to add color and conviction to her discussions of gender differences in the patronage of her period, but this aspect is never quite fully developed, remaining somewhat crowded out by the profusion of examples and documents. Indeed, the question of what comprises “patronage” is never directly addressed; many of the manuscripts discussed in Chapter 2, “Motives for Patronage: Piety II” were surely received as gifts rather than directly commissioned by the women who used them. This is a minor quibble, however,
for the merit of *Women, Art and Patronage* lies in its breadth. It is the sort of book that should appear in the bibliography of any scholar working on the art, architecture, or culture of this period in English history, and will seed future studies, many more narrowly focused and more theoretically-oriented. Although the book ends with the lackluster, rather self-consciously academic statement that “It has proved possible to suggest a very positive, imaginative and dynamic picture of the achievements of noblewomen in England as artistic patrons during the reigns of Henry III and the three Edwards” (p. 138), Gee’s book offers much more than a suggestion; it is a panorama.

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Women’s roles in Muslim societies have largely remained poorly known in the western world and obscured by the stereotypes in Islamic historiography. The efforts of Fatima Mernissi, Nikki Keddie, and Gavin Hambly, among others, have begun to lift this veil. In *Arab Women in the Middle Ages*, Shirley Guthrie’s exploration of medieval women’s lives, based on sources ranging from the Qur’an to regional and local folk practices clears up misconceptions, describes regional and local differences in various practices, and uncovers facts previously shrouded by anti-feminist bias. Guthrie draws on religious, philosophical, historical, literary, and legal texts to describe the experience of medieval Arab women. Guthrie’s sources enable her to demonstrate variations in thought and practice in the medieval Arab world, but she appears content just to present them as if they could speak for themselves.

Guthrie begins with a discussion of marriage and the seclusion of Arab women in the home. There were different types of arrangements as well as variations in practice between, for example, Bedouin tribes and Andalusi Arabs. Guthrie notes points where women had some leeway to negotiate conditions of the marriage contract. Likewise, while she describes the rationale for the tradition of women’s seclusion, ways that women found to flout their freedom, despite the criticism of their male counterparts, receive equal attention. Chapters 2 and 3 maintain the focus on the married woman with a discussion of reproduction, contraception, and childcare.

Chapters 4 through 6 are full of examples of household etiquette, foodways, and dress. Guthrie presentation is consistently broad, overwhelming the reader with snippets of information with little contextualization. Chapters 7 and 8 take up women’s roles in wider society, although Guthrie’s survey overextends itself once again. She introduces some individuals such as Shajarat al-Durr, whose career Guthrie summarizes with references to the conflict between Egypt and Syria caused by her sultanate, but she fails to provide adequate detail on this sultana. Guthrie distinguishes between women’s activities in the political arena, everyday life, and low life, listing various occupations for women and giving some documentation of how they were perceived. Chapter 8 discusses women on the margins of Islamic societies such as prostitutes, the