

draw), Rapoport's is perhaps the more innovative book methodologically. It is certainly among the most useful studies available for our understanding of medieval marriage and life outside it.

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1. Paula Sanders, "Gendering the Ungendered Body: Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law," *Women in Middle Eastern History*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven/London: Yale UP, 1991), pp. 74–95.
2. Charles Donahue Jr., *Law, Marriage and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008).



Cordelia Beattie. *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England.* Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. x + 179.

CORDELIA BEATTIE makes a prominent contribution to the field of single-women studies with a very clear and smart series of arguments concerning the use of the category of single woman in a variety of texts from across late medieval England. Her focus is on classification: who had the power to classify in this society, where classifications overlapped, how to place both classifiers and classifications in their appropriate contexts, and how modern scholars might understand medieval classifications on their own terms. Although she is interested primarily in how those in various positions of power in late medieval England classified unmarried women, an important overarching theme emerges, that is, the need for scholars to read texts carefully in order to appreciate the complexity of medieval society. Beattie models this to great effect through a series of close analyses of primary sources.

After exploring medieval understandings of single women in her introduction, including the legal construct of *femme sole* [single woman] and the dominant religious hierarchical categorization of virgin-widow-wife, Beattie presents a series of case studies. In each she examines different types of medieval texts and considers the assorted classifications used among these texts and, most rewarding, within the same type of document. The variety of documents is important because "no single example should be taken as representative" (p.

147). In addition, context is crucial. Throughout her book, Beattie argues that prevailing discourses influenced the categories seen in these documents. For example, in her second chapter she considers penitential texts and argues that the language employed concerning sexual sin affected the categories of women differently, so that while a single woman in one text might have associations of virginity, in another she might have more negative moral connotations.

In the chapter on fiscal discourse, perhaps her strongest chapter, Beattie also emphasizes careful attention to context as well as intertextual reading. Through a consideration of tax returns from 1379 from various counties in England, she finds a fascinating array of classifications for single women, sometimes by occupation, sometimes by value-laden terms like *paupercula* [poor little] widow, and sometimes by life-cycle or marital labels such as *puella* [girl or daughter] (perhaps suggesting “youth and the never-married state,” p. 76), *sola* [single woman], and *vidua* [widow]. In some records it appears that daughters were classified as servants rather than as family dependents (p. 92). These findings argue against the common assumption that women were classified according to stages of the life cycle while men were classified by occupation. From this evidence, she is able to argue convincingly that the assessors were making choices about how to classify single women based on a variety of often competing discourses that could vary by region.

Her fourth chapter likewise considers texts often viewed as pragmatic and formulaic documents. Through an examination of fourteenth-century guild returns and registers, Beattie uncovers how guild officers thought about membership. In this type of document, women’s marital status and the legal definitions that applied were stronger than in other types of documents. However, she argues that there is a gendered difference in guild texts. Unmarried men were considered as economically independent, but unmarried women were predominantly thought of as “to-be-married” (p. 119) rather than as *femmes soles*, in the strictly legal sense. In the last chapter Beattie focuses on attempts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including the influential 1413 Statute of Additions, to standardize descriptors in court and probate records in England. She explains that by the sixteenth century “singlewoman” had become a standard designation meaning “never married” in a way that was not as prevalent in the Middle Ages.

The challenge for Beattie was to weave the discourses together with the descriptive evidence, the understandings with the representations. Her study makes it clear that documents that many scholars take for granted as communicating practical economic, religious, or occupational information can be read much more deeply and with great reward. In addition, she highlights the

complexity and richness of medieval texts and the fact that they are saturated with contemporary values. Medieval authors of these texts certainly made choices about how to classify the people with whom they interacted. What is less strongly indicated, although not crucial to her central argument, is just how these broader cultural, religious, and legal discourses directly affected classifications of people. The idea that classifications had moral associations is persuasive, but it is more difficult to prove how these associations were internalized.

This is a valuable study for those interested in women's history in premodern Europe, but also for students of medieval history more generally. With *Medieval Single Women*, Beattie has taken a refreshing approach to documents sometimes judged as overtly transparent. Also commendable is her ability to explore how legal understandings, such as *coverture* [suspension or covering of the legal personality of a wife during marriage], competed and overlapped with other discourses so that in documents we can see terms that meant single woman, meaning alone and not covered by a man, alongside terms with "value-laden" associations like maiden and *puella*. Beattie's work emphasizes that women in medieval England, perhaps more than men, were conceptualized in a great variety of fashions, as marriageable, married, or widowed, dependent or independent, legally or economically, head of their own household or part of another, young or adult, pure or corrupt.

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Allison Levy. *Re-Membering Masculinity in Early Modern Florence: Widowed Bodies, Mourning and Portraiture.* (Women and Gender in the Early Modern World.) Ashgate, 2006. Pp. xx + 194.

Re-membering Masculinity is both a study of the complex nature of the representation of the widow, specifically the sixteenth-century Medici widow's portrait, and the failure of the widow's—as well as men's—portraiture. Levy's well-illustrated exploration of these two axes is necessarily an interdisciplinary project which, in turn, broadens the project's appeal to scholars in a variety of disciplines.

In chapter 1, "Disjecta Membra," Levy introduces the anxieties of loss and being forgotten that are central to the study through an analysis of the now