Introduction – Critical Reflections on the Literary-Historical Background and on the Relevant Scholarship

Where do we stand today?

Reading medieval women’s literature constitutes, until today, a challenge, yet a very productive and far-reaching one both for scholars and the general reader because it seems, deceptively, to go against the strain, and yet it also takes us to the core. Medieval Studies have vastly profited from moving away from the traditional male-dominated canon, including an ever-growing number of significant women writers from that time period who were not at all completely muted and more often than we might have assumed knew well how to operate in public, asserting themselves quite powerfully. By the same token, the history of literature, in very general terms, has also experienced a tremendous invigoration and innovation because of the inclusion of alternative voices to the traditional canon, which suddenly appears to be a rather constructed and artificial entity—if it has not always been that throughout time, determined by male intellectuals. However, even though our awareness about those female poets has expanded considerably, we still face the great need to create a holistic picture portraying the entire situation across Europe and from the early to the late Middle Ages. Many female writers/poets might be known by specialists of Spanish or German literature, but this has not yet helped to create a more comprehensive understanding on a European level.

The purpose of the present book consists of continuing with our critical analysis and interpretation of some of the most seminal texts by those authors/poets and thus to lay the foundation for further research in that field. Drawing from much previous research, such as Joan M. Ferrante’s outstanding book *To the Glory of Her Sex* (1997),¹ my efforts are directed at contributing to the ongoing concatenation of literary and social-historical studies focused on female poetry and prose from the Middle Ages, introducing and

¹ Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex* (1997). To this we have to add the foundational, seminal study by Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (1984), who has really opened this field, especially in the Anglophone world.
discussing especially well-known and also lesser-known writers from the tenth through the fifteenth centuries, some of whom were religious, and some of whom were secular. In the epilogue I will conclude with a brief analysis of the work of a sixteenth-century French author, whose work will allow us to look backwards and forward.

Overall, as this book argues, we cannot be content with studying the situation for women writers only in medieval France, England, or Germany, as is often the case; instead we need to include voices also from Spain and Hungary, or wherever we can detect them. While the contributors to Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland (2013) provide valuable insights into the history of women in the Celtic Middle Ages, the chapters that will follow try to weave a tapestry of known and unknown women writers from northern and southern Europe, from France and England, from Spain and Hungary. The purpose consists of bringing to light women’s voices in many different literary texts; but I will never concern myself with the (only) here irrelevant issue whether these were heterosexual or homosexual individuals.

We know of many efforts by my male poets to project a female voice during the Middle Ages, but that is certainly not sufficient for uncovering the true poetry and other writing by female authors.² Medieval love poetry talks a lot about women and their position vis-à-vis the female object of desire, but this is not adequate for a critical analysis of the true gender issues in the pre-modern area, as scholars such as Lorie Anne Finke,³ Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace,⁴ Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt,⁵ Jennifer Summit⁶ have clearly outlined in their studies and editions.

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² Isabella Tomassetti, “Weibliche Stimmen in der höfischen Dichtung Kastiliens” (2008). Feminist historians, by contrast, pursue a much more aggressive perspective. See the contributions to Las mujeres en la edad media, ed. Maria Isabel del Val Valdivieso and Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar (2013).
⁵ The History of British Women’s Writing. 700 – 1500, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt (2012).
The female voice from the Middle Ages has already been recognized as powerful and strong, and we only need to acknowledge the various writers as worthy participants in the global discourse and thus move away from the traditional, male-dominated canon, as I have suggested as well in a previous book. Misty Schieberle now points out, for instance, that even some male poets (John Gower, Geoffrey Chaucer, Stephen Scrope, et al.) projected surprisingly wise, intellectual, rational, and authoritative female voices as counselors to princes. “[T]hese male poets disrupt the traditional antifeminist stereotypes in Latin mirrors for princes such as Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum* or the *Secretum secretorum* and depict women as indispensable and respected political counselors, neither weak nor inferior in sagacity to those whom they advise.”

My current intentions here cannot be so much as to introduce entirely new aspects of their lives and works, as if to return to a traditionalist, positivistic approach to ‘history as it was’ (Leopold Ranke), but to assemble all the relevant information and to develop a better understanding of some of their most important narratives and thus to gain a solid cultural-historical comprehension of women’s actual participation in the culture of their time across medieval Europe and how they managed to find a literary voice on their own. Most importantly, each critical reading will be accompanied by extensive cultural-historical investigations, and at the end I will draw conclusions as to parallels, similarities, diversities, and commonalities, thus profiling the entire world of medieval women’s literature more poignantly through the study of eight major examples.

To re-emphasize, today, we know of many more medieval women writers than in the past decades, and many of them have challenged us in our understanding of canonical literature at large and the formation of power structures outside of the texts. Writing and making one’s voice heard in many different circumstances proves to be almost more important than to achieve a certain aesthetic or rhetorical quality, though the latter must not be ignored or dismissed either. For many women turning to religious literature, either copying

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it themselves or creating it themselves, was a very viable and pragmatic option. We can, hence, no longer simply argue that medieval women at large were mostly ignored, muted, or silenced, although this very claim can still be found even in most recent scholarship.9

As the example of the Dorothea von Hof (1458–1501), citizen of Constance, Germany, who created a huge compilation of ca. one thousand excerpts from religious sources in 1482, indicates, religious themes were of great interest also for those whom we cannot identify as mystics or anchorites, as beguines or as a canonesses. Instead, Dorothea was the wife of Jörg von Hof and has only recently received critical attention, although her work, the Buoch der götlichen liebe und summe der tugent (Book of Divine Love and Summa of Virtues) represents a major contribution by a female secular writer—not necessarily an author in her own right—to the literature of her time, obviously drawing from extensive libraries in the Dominican women’s convents of Zoffingen Constance, St. Catherine in St. Gall, and in the parish church of St. Stephen. Already in 1483 Dorothea completed her next work, the copy of a German prayer book, Der curß von unser frouwn (The Course Taken By Our Lady), so her example confirms how much many different kinds of women in the Middle Ages were actually involved in the entire process of creating, copying, and disseminating literature.10 To this we would have to add the significant number of prayer books produced for women, such as The Prayer Book of Ursula Begerin first conceived as a religious picture book for Strasbourg nuns (the Penitents) ca. 1380 and 1410, then remade into a prayer book for this nun, Begerin in 1480 through the addition of 156 new German prayers. It’s textual and visual complexity and

9 Numerous contributors to Women and Pilgrimage in Medieval Galicia, ed. Carlos Andrés González-Paz (2015), predicate their analysis on this very position. Kevin R. Poole, in his review (The Medieval Review 15.10.21), basically agrees with this position, although he seriously criticizes the entire volume for many shortcomings: “Before the modern period women indeed wrote very little about themselves, but there has been quite a large number of works written about them by men, from antiquity to today. Many depict women in a very negative light, as chapter 1 of this book points out, but it is an error to say that men have spoken of—or written about—women less than women have themselves.” As our book will demonstrate, it is only a modern misconception that medieval women did not speak about themselves, even though they lived within a strongly patriarchal system.

richness makes it to a veritable handbook of late medieval religious art and devotional literature.\textsuperscript{11} In other words, women were both on the creative and the receiving side of medieval literature.\textsuperscript{12}

The category of gender as an hermeneutic tool can thus gain in profile and sharpness, as the contributors to a volume edited by Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees have already indicated, and as Susan Mosher has confirmed in a number of studies.\textsuperscript{13} Of course, scholarship on women’s literature has progressed tremendously over the last decades, but we cannot rest on our laurels and cannot be satisfied with recording or editing what medieval women have published without next examining carefully the wider implications and messages contained in the relevant narratives and poems. So, what are the remaining desiderata and gaps, and how do we need to proceed to make progress in integrating female poets into our canon, hence the literary history, and consequently also into our class syllabi?

First of all, a large body of texts by medieval women writers remains rather neglected, and we have hardly begun considering the possibilities of comparative studies, drawing connections between female authors across Europe, whether they were familiar with each other or not. Granted, much has been done in this regard vis-à-vis mystical women writers, and the body of relevant scholarship is already legion and does not need to be reviewed or be engaged with any longer in our context.\textsuperscript{14} The key issue, by contrast, proves to be how to establish a new understanding of female voices in the Middle Ages who did not only participate in the public discourse, but who also pursued an individual, active agenda that helped them to establish their own individuality outside of the standard literary genres. Intriguingly, this

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] See the contributions to \textit{Women and Wealth in Late Medieval Europe}, ed. Theresa Earenfight (2010).
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thematic orientation is of course not specific to the Middle Ages, but pertains to all writers, male or female, throughout the ages, but it seems to have had a particular profile in the medieval period.

Although María Mar Cortés Timoner concentrates on late medieval Iberian women writers exclusively, some of the conclusions of her doctoral dissertation (2002) deserve to be quoted here as representative of the critical issues that we need to keep in mind and discuss further until day. Significantly, her observation has carried over until the very present situation in feminist scholarship because the issue of gender is somehow also associated with the issue of spirituality, the very essence of writing all by itself:

Las cinco autoras citadas ejemplifican la espiritualidad bajomedieval que, por un lado, seguía vinculando nobleza y conventos y, por otro, pedía reforma, vivencia interiorizada de Dios y humildad. Esto permitió que algunas mujeres, como las místicas visionarias Sor Juana de la Cruz y Sor María de Santo Domingo, obtuvieran prestigio y autoridad espiritual a pesar de su estatus social y de ser mujeres.

[The five authors quoted here exemplified the late medieval spirituality which, from one perspective, was connected to nobility and convents; from another, demanded reform, living interiorizing God and humility. This made it possible that some women, such as the mystical visionary Sor Juana de la Cruz and Sor María de Santo Domingo, obtained prestige and spiritual authority despite their social status and despite being women.]

Numerous Spanish scholars have pursued the same goal of unearthing both historical women in the Iberian Peninsula (such as queens and other noble women) and women writers specifically, who challenge modern concepts about gender roles in the past most critically by means of their extraordinary


16 María Mar Cortés Timoner, “Madres y maestras espirituales” (2002), 948. She also adds: “La escritura de estas mujeres supone atrevimiento porque, a lo largo de la Edad Media, pertenecer al género femenino obstaculizó el acercamiento de la mujer a la voz pública” (952; The writing of these women suggests a daring move because, in general during the Middle Ages belonging to the female gender blocked women to reach the public voice). See also Cortés Timoner’s very useful and insightful anthology, *Las primeras escritoras en lengua castellana*, ed. M. del Mar Cortés Timoner (2015).
control of the written word.\footnote{Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez, \textit{Damas, santas y pecadoras} (2008); see now Lorca Murcia, \textit{Las mujeres en la Edad Media}, ed. María Isabel del Val Valdivieso and Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar (2013).} I will engage with the situation in medieval Spanish literature, meaning texts written in the rather diverse Iberian Peninsula with modern Spain not yet in existence, more in detail in the chapter on the noteworthy memorial writer Leonor López de Córdoba.

It will also be of great importance to figure out more specifically how women poets projected themselves, mirrored their own social environment, gained the necessary self-confidence to begin writing and hence expressing themselves, and this in a world that was seemingly completely dominated by male authority. In addition, we also need to understand more in detail what specific genres women writers preferred or were limited to, which can shed important light on their position within their families, the courts, and society at large. All this ought to be placed within a framework with references to the historical, social, religious, and political conditions providing women with loopholes or set up building barriers for their self-realizations.

We do have numerous studies available that address women’s history, such as Bonnie S. Anderson’s and Judith P. Zinsser’s \textit{History of Their Own} (1988), followed by the famous volumes edited by Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (1990–1992).\footnote{Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, ed., \textit{A History of Their Own} (1988, 2000); here I have consulted the Spanish translation, \textit{Historia de las mujeres: Una historia Propia}, trans. Teresa Camprodón (1991; 2009); Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, ed., \textit{Storia delle donne} (1990–1992); see especially the volume on the Middle Ages ed. by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, here quoted from the Spanish translation, \textit{La edad media} (1992).} But they often take, by default, the scholarly highway and paint with rough brush strokes in order to cover centuries and many different social classes. This has then commonly led to the necessity to mention many different names in passing, without going into any details, which will be, by contrast, very much my concern here.

Overall, the purpose of the present book consists of putting to rest once and for all the often still voiced mythical notion of medieval women being mostly suppressed and muted by their male contemporaries, being illiterate and uneducated, or of simply not being present in the intellectual circles of writers and poets. Of course, and by necessity, in the following individual
chapters that will stand more or less on their own but were written specifically for this book to form part of a holistic perspective, we will be dealing with some of the most famous representatives, as is normally the case when we engage with literary history. Intriguingly, these individual writers demonstrate how much, after all, women were involved in the creation of literature throughout the entire Middle Ages and thus had found ways to engage with the public discourse on many different issues.¹⁹ Beyond those really famous authors such as Marie de France, I will then also consider additional voices from various parts of medieval Europe, again only representatively, and will specifically offer close readings or interpretations, giving them more credit than in the past, placing them on an equal level.

In other words, instead of writing here a history of women’s literature in, say, medieval Germany or medieval England, as has already been done in various venues, the purpose consists of projecting a cross-European picture and to situate those various women writers in a wider intellectual network, whether they communicated with each other or not or were even aware of other authors. Most strikingly, as we will observe, the focus on medieval European women’s literature will uncover major similarities and mutually shared concerns, whether the individual writers had personal contacts or simply lived too far apart to take note of each other. The struggle against patriarchy seems to have been a rather universal one across the continent, if not also beyond and throughout the entire Middle Ages (and maybe even until today in some sense). I cannot address women’s writings outside the scope of the European continent because that would be beyond my range of knowledge and beyond my linguistic expertise. But we can be certain that our conclusions will allow numerous implications for female writers in the Arabic or Asian societies during that period as well.

In other words, the canon of so-far known pre-modern women writers has expanded tremendously over the last decades, but this does not mean that they hence enjoy the same standing as their contemporary male writers in our literary histories. Many women, actually, continue to linger in their

¹⁹ There is by now much research on the history of women in the Middle Ages; see, for instance, the contributions to Fürstinnen und Städterinnen: Frauen im Mittelalter, ed. Gerald Beyreuther, Barbara Pätzold, and Erika Uitz (1993).
shadows and yet deserve to be brought to the foreground. Preliminary and more advanced work in that regard has already been done, to some extent at least, by the contributors to a volume on the history of German women’s literature from 1988, and many others. Spanish contributions to the study of medieval women at large have been particularly rich, but might not have been adequately received by their European colleagues. Most of these studies come directly on the heels of extensive historical research on women in the Middle Ages and the early modern age. We can now refer, for instance,

20 Significant work in this regard has already been done by scholars such as Jennifer Summit, Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt, Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees, Sister Prudence Allen, R.S.M., Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, M. del Mar Cortés Timoner, Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, Gisela Brinker-Gabler, Katharina Wilson and Nadia Margolis, and Barbara Becker-Cantarino; see, for example the latter’s Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit (1987). For more specialized studies, especially on women’s lyric poetry, which I am not considering in this volume, see Gudrun Daul, Frauenliteratur des Mittelalters – Mythos oder Wirklichkeit (1995); Angelika Rieger, Trobairitz (1991). For German women’s poetry, see Albrecht Classen, Deutsche Frauenlieder des fünfzehnten und sechzehnten Jahrhunderts (1999); id., ‘Mein Seel fang an zu singen’ (2002); id., Late-Medieval German Women’s Poetry: Secular and Religious Songs (2004).


23 For a small selection of the relevant research literature, see the contributions to Beyond Their Sex (1984); to La femme au Moyen Âge, ed. Françoise Thibaut (1992); and Katrien Heene, The Legacy of Paradise (1997).

24 See, for instance, Thomas Kuehn, Law, Family, & Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy (1991); Helmut Feld, Frauen des Mittelalters (2000); Frauen in der frühen Neuzeit, ed. Anne-Marie Bonnet and Barbara Schellewald (2004). See now the contributions to Las mujeres en la edad media, ed. María Isabel del Val Valdivieso and Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar (2013). The situation of women in the early modern age proves to be almost as enigmatic or unknown to us as of those women in the Middle Ages; see Manuel Fernández Álvarez, Casadas, monjas, rameras y brujas (2002). Despite much research, this field still will require intensive investigations.
to the study by Valerie L. Garver who focuses on women in the Carolingian age, while Lisa Bitel examines the history of early medieval women at large.25

Regarding the approach that this book will take, I will engage, of course, with the relevant scholarship where appropriate, but I do not want to let it overshadow the actual examination of texts and their historical context. I can only refer with great respect to many great contributions to the field of medieval women’s literature dating back several decades by now, but hope that my own discussions will open new perspectives and lay the foundation for future studies. From a pedagogical point of view, I envision that this book will be used in direct companionship with the primary sources, steering the readers through these works by various European authors and alerting them to the critical issues and important topics raised in those texts.

In order to gain a good handle of the larger framework, especially pertaining to women’s lives in the Middle Ages, subsequently I will outline some of the key approaches pursued by international scholarship and discuss where we stand today in our understanding of their various political and social positions, their educational level, and their professional activities. I hope that this will also help the general reader to gain a good grasp of the actual conditions medieval women could enjoy. At the same time it would be most desirable if the following discussions will contribute in many different ways to the ongoing critical examination of medieval women’s literature.

Despite much productive scholarship on pre-modern women’s literature, many authors and many texts still await their rediscovery and/or full examination and appreciation. This is quite surprising in light of decades of intensive research, but much of Anglophone publications has, of course, focused on England and France, while the Continent remains somewhat less studied, and vice versa. German researchers have no obvious reason to consider also Spanish women writers, and the same applies to the opposite side, and yet all these texts by female medieval authors and poets in a way speak to each other, take up very similar concerns and pursue similar efforts. As María del Mar Cortés Timoner now opines:

El simple hecho de que decidieran hacer oír su palabra más de los muros domésticos o conventuales nos empuja a querer saber qué deseaban o necesitaban comunicar,

es decir, a plantear un diálogo abierto con ellas. Acercarnos a sus textos es introducirnos en un interesante ámbito que nos permite enriquecer el conocimiento de nuestro pasado histórico-cultural, nos conduce a cuestionar el canon literario y a proponer otra escala de valores para entender y apreciar mejor las obras de las primeras escritoras en lengua castellano.\[26\]

[The simple fact that they decided to make their voices heard more outside of the domestic or convent walls encourages us to want to know what they desired and needed to communicate; that is, to establish an open dialogue with them. To approach their texts means to familiarize ourselves with an interesting environment that allows us to enrich our knowledge of our historical-cultural past, and it makes us to question the literary canon and to establish other scales for understanding and evaluating better the works of the first women writers in the Spanish language.]

Investigating medieval women writers today requires interdisciplinary methods that operate on the basis that women issues during the pre-modern era were rather parallel across Europe. This also requires that we take into account—as English, German, or French language scholars—the critical investigations by major Spanish scholars, such as María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, or by the Austrian scholar on mysticism and women’s literature, Peter Dinzelbacher.\[27\] The opposite process should also be initiated, as this book intends to do.

To discuss medieval women writers represents a major step into the world of older literature as it has come down to us because this allows us to retrieve many heretofore often ignored or misunderstood figures from the past who self-confidently and learnedly expressed their own ideas, related stories, and reflected on basic values of their times. Simultaneously, the discussion of medieval women’s literature allows us to gain a valuable approach to all literary discourse, reflecting on the tension between majority and minority voices, hence on power differentials, and, surprisingly perhaps, on the


\[27\] I will engage extensively with some of Rivera Garreta’s research in the chapter on Leonor López de Córdoba; here see her Conceptos y metodología en los estudios sobre la mujer (1993); eadem, Nombrar el mundo en femenino (1994); eadem, Textos y espacios de mujeres (1995). For Peter Dinzelbacher, see, for instance, his Christliche Mystik im Abendland (1984); id., Deutsche und niederländische Mystik des Mittelalters (2012). See also Kurt Ruh, Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik. Vol. 2 (1993).
ultimate relevance of the written word with respect to the establishment of self-identity, social self-determination, and public influence.

Courtly women all over medieval Europe were certainly involved in the production of love poetry and often contributed in a sophisticated manner to the larger discourse on love, either by themselves or in exchange with a male partner (tenso, Wechsel, cantigas de amigo). Of course, most collections of troubadour poetry or of Minnesang are void of direct female voices, as if the discourse on courtly love was only a matter relevant for men. But we know of the trobairitz in twelfth-century Provence, and a number of late medieval women poets in the German language areas. Moreover, much of medieval Iberian love poetry seems to have been performed by women, such as María Peres, who were, however, often the object of satirical criticism. It deserves mention that colleagues at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, have created a most impressive text collection of pre–1750 German women’s literature, the now so-called “The Classen Early (Pre-1750) Collection,” which is only waiting to be quarried by generations of new scholars.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, medieval women’s literature had long been regarded as marginal or irrelevant in the past, but only because the male counterparts had dominated the discourse, or because they were privileged by male scholarship since the late eighteenth century. Pursuing an art-historical perspective, Katrin Graf has, however, demonstrated that there are numerous illustrations of medieval women presenting them as writing themselves, which signals that the medieval public would have had considerably less issues with women writers than the modern world seems to have imagined.

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28 Medieval Woman’s Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches, ed. Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen (2002); see also Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez, Damas, santas y pecadoras (2008), 29–43. For the tenso in Gallego-Portuguese, see Giulia Lanciani, “Per una tipologia della tenzone galego-portoghese” (1995), vol. 1, 117–130.


31 http://sophie.byu.edu/literature_early_pre1750 (last accessed on Jan. 27, 2016).

Without doubt, of course, a majority of the surviving texts by women were written by nuns, anchoresses, or beguines—here disregarding the entire question regarding the role of male confessors and scribes serving as amanuenses for these female authors—hence mostly by religious and devout authors.33 Many of those writers enjoyed tremendous authority at their time and experienced huge popularity, at least spiritually speaking, as has been confirmed only recently once again by Penelope D. Johnson (1991) and now also by the contributors to Women in the Medieval Monastic World (1991), to Women in the Medieval Monastic World (2015), and to Nuns’ Literacies in Medieval Europe (2015).34 María del Mar Cortés Timoner’s recent anthology of medieval Spanish women’s literature (2015) is pleasantly accompanied by solid introductions and appropriate bibliographies.35 Most recently (2015), Veronica O’Mara, Virginia Blanton, and Patricia Stoop edited a volume on medieval nuns’ literacy, in which the contributors investigate the relationship between Latin and the vernacular as used in women convents. “To highlight the benefits of cross-cultural comparison, contributions include case studies focused on northern and southern Europe, as well as the extreme north and west of the region. A number of essays illustrate nuns’ active engagement with formal education, and with varied textual forms, such as the legal and epistolary, while others convey the different opportunities for studying examples of nuns’ artistic literacy. The various discussions included here build collectively on the first volume to demonstrate the comparative experiences of medieval female religious who were reading, writing, teaching, composing, and illustrating at different times and in diverse geographical areas throughout medieval Europe.”36

Later centuries sometimes witnessed the slow but steady disappearance of those individuals from the literary and other annals because their names

were either left out by accident or deliberately excised, especially when they had relied on their vernacular language and did not embrace Latin for their discourse. Then, subsequent generations of male scribes simply integrated their texts into larger contexts, and soon enough the female authorship disappeared from sight or merged with others, as was the case with the Northern German beguine-turned-nun Mechthild von Magdeburg (d. ca. 1282/1294) and her famous *Flowing Light of the Godhead.*

This large topic proves to be so intriguing, illuminating, and relevant for us today because it represents a significant example of modern misconceptions about gender discrimination, patriarchal power structures, and the relevance of cultural-historical studies for the comprehension of our own world today. However, many lay people, and this includes numerous scholars as well, commonly and rather incorrectly assume that the Middle Ages were determined by male society altogether, or patriarchy, whether we think of the Church, the monarchy, knighthood, chivalry, the university, and the world of mercantile business and farming. Scholars have commonly argued, for instance, that women were normally excluded from going on pilgrimages, but recent research is beginning to shatter this concept, demonstrating that almost the very opposite was the case. We also understand much better now the extensive role which women played in the field of medical care, although the late Middle Ages actually witnessed the steady push by the male authorities to exclude them increasingly as not sufficiently trained in academic terms—ironically, of course, women were not even allowed to join a university. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, the entire world of medicine, at least until the late Middle

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37 Sara S. Poor, *Mechtild of Magdeburg and Her Book* (2004). Poor’s analysis proceeds, of course, in a considerably more complex fashion than I can outline here.
