

## Some Reading on Common Misconceptions about the Middle Ages

Interest in Medieval literature and culture has, over the past years, become quite prevalent in my seminars, and I noticed there seems to be a demand for further information, especially with regard to clearing up a few common misconceptions. I have compiled a bibliography for you, loosely organised alongside some of the more common misunderstandings about the ~1,000 years that comprise the European Middle Ages. This is obviously just a starting point: there are many more publications constantly being published.

*Contrary to the proper MLA format I ask people to adapt in their academic work, this list is kept deliberately simple, to account for the fact that several of these texts might be accessible to you in multiple formats and may have been (re)published by different publishing houses.*

(\* = available via PLUS library)

### General

- Albin, Andrew, et al (eds.). *Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past*. (2019)\*
- Bull, Marcus. *Thinking Medieval: An Introduction to the Study of the Middle Ages*. (2005)\*
- Gabriele, Matthew & David M. Perry. *The Bright Ages: A New History of Medieval Europe*. (2021)
- Harris, Stephen J. & Bryon Lee Grigsby (eds.). *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages*. (2008)
- Heng, Geraldine. *The Global Middle Ages: an Introduction*. (2021)\*
- Rubin, Miri. *Cities of Strangers. Making Lives in Medieval Europe*. (2020)\*

### (1) "Nobody Knew About Sex in the Middle Ages."

- Betancourt, Roland. *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages*. (2020)\*
- Bullough, Vern L. & James A. Brundage. *The Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. (1996)\*
- Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. (1999)\*
- Fradenburg, Louise, and Carla Freccero (eds.). *Premodern Sexualities*. (1996)
- Harris, Carissa. *Obscene Pedagogies. Transgressive Talk and Sexual Education in Late Medieval Britain*. (2018)\*
- Karras, Ruth Mazo. *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*. (2005)\*
- Lidman, Satu, Meri Heinonen & Tom Linkinen (eds.). *Framing Premodern Desires: Sexual Ideas, Attitudes, and Practices in Europe*. (2017)\*

### (2) "The Dark Ages: the Medieval Church Suppressed Science and Innovative Thinking."

- Falk, Seb. *The Light Ages: The Surprising Story of Medieval Science*. (2020)
- Frugoni, Chiara. *Books, Banks, Buttons, and Other Inventions from the Middle Ages*. (2003)\* [in German]
- Grant, Edward. *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts*. (1996)\*
- Hannam, James. *God's Philosophers: How the Medieval World Lay the Foundations of Modern Science*. (2009)
- ---. *The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution*. (2011)

### (3) "Women Were So Oppressed They Had No Presence in the Middle Ages."

- Amt, Emilie. *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Source Book*. (2010)
- Bennett, Judith M. & Ruth Mazo Karras. *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*. (2013)\*
- Bérat, Emma O. *Women's Genealogies in the Medieval Literary Imagination. Matrilinial Legacies in the High Middle Ages*. (2024)\*
- Bérat, Emma O., Rebecca Hardie, Irina Dumitrscu (eds.). *Relations of Power. Women's Networks in the Middle Ages*. (2021)\*
- Cadden, Joan. *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*. (1993)\*
- Lewis, Gertrud Jaron. *By Women, for Women, about Women: the Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany*. (1996)\*
- Lochrie, Karma. *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't*. (2005)
- McCracken, Peggy. *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature*. (2003)\*
- Ramirez, Janina. *Femina. A New History of the Middle Ages, Through the Women Written Out of It*. (2022)
- Schaus, Margaret (ed.). *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: an Encyclopedia*. (2006)\*

### (4) "Medieval Women were Unable/Not Allowed to Read and Write."

- Bérat, Emma O. *Women's Genealogies in the Medieval Literary Imagination. Matrilinial Legacies in the High Middle Ages*. (2024)
- Dinshaw, Carolyn & David Wallace. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*. (2003)\*
- Frick, Deborah. *Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Seventeenth Century Women's Visionary Writings*. (2021)\*
- Green, Dennis Howard. *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*. (2007)
- Jitske, Jasperse. *Medieval Women, Material Culture, and Power: Matilda Plantagenet and her Sisters*. (2020)\*
- Light, Laura. *Women and the Book: in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. (2015)
- Olson, Linda & Kathryn Kerby-Fulton. *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*. (2005)\*
- Powell, Morgan. *Gender, Reading, and Truth in the Twelfth Century: The Woman in the Mirror*. (2020)\*
- Saunders, Corinne & Diane Watt (eds.). *Women and Medieval Literary Culture: from the Early Middle Ages to the Fifteenth Century*. (2023)\*
- Skinner, Patricia. *Studying Gender in Medieval Europe: Historical Approaches*. (2018)

### (5) "People in the Middle Ages Believed the Earth was Flat."

- Garwood, Christine. *Flat Earth: The History of an Infamous Idea*. (2008)
- Russell, Jeffrey Burton. *Inventing the Flat Earth: Columbus and Modern Historians*. (1991)\*

**(6) "Race and Racism Are Modern Concepts. Medieval People Didn't Know About Race."**

→ this one is tricky – while race as a concept did not exist in the same way, racial thinking and practices were already prevalent in the Middle Ages (and before)

- Eli'av-Feldon, Miriam, Benjamin Issac & Joseph Ziehler (eds.). *The Origins of Racism in the West*. (2009)
- Heng, Geraldine. *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*. (2018)\*
- Isaac, Benjamin. *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. (2006)\*
- Ramey, Lynn T. *Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages*. (2014)
- Whitaker, Cord J. *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking*. (2019)
- Strickland, Debra Higgs. *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art*. (2003)

**(7) "The Middle Ages Were Heteronormative. Gender Diversity Is a Modern Idea."**

- Blud, Victoria. *The Unspeakable, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval Literature, 1000-1400*. (2017)\*
- Brubaker, Leslie. *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*. (2004)
- DeVun, Leah. *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*. (2021)\*
- Hotchkiss, Valerie R. *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe*. (1996)\*
- LaFleur, Greta (ed.). *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality Before the Modern*. (2021)\*
- Rasmussen, Ann Marie. *Rivalrous Masculinities. New Directions in Medieval Gender Studies*. (2019)
- Sauer, Michelle. *Gender in Medieval Culture*. (2015)\*

**NB:** For "*Nobody Was (Allowed to Be) Queer in the Middle Ages*", see my separate list, "*Some Reading on the Queer Middle Ages*".