



Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others

By Ruth Mazo Karras



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'The best short introduction to medieval sexuality that I have read: a remarkable book.' - **Vern Bulloch**, *Reviews in History*

'Undergraduate and graduate students will find in Karras' book an extremely helpful guide to what can be a confusing and perplexing body of scholarship. Even established scholars are likely to find it enlightening as well as enjoyable.' - **James Brundage**, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*

'An impressively synthetic and highly readable survey of current scholarship on medieval sexuality that will be of considerable use in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.' - **Emma Campbell**, *Signs*

Sexuality in medieval Europe has become a vital scholarly field that is now recognized as central to the study of the Middle Ages. Using a wide collection of evidence from the late Antique period up until the fifteenth century, this new edition of the standard overview on the topic demonstrates that medieval culture developed sexual identities that were quite different from the identities we think of today, yet that were still in some ways ancestral to our own.

Challenging the way the Middle Ages have been treated in general histories of sexuality, Ruth Mazo Karras shows how views at the time were conflicted and complicated; there was no single medieval attitude towards sexuality any more than there is one modern attitude. The well-known lusty priest and the 'repressed' penitent have their roles to play, but set here in a wider context these figures take on fascinating new dimensions. Focusing on acceptable marital sexual activity as well as what was seen as transgressive, the chapters cover such topics as chastity, the role of the church, and non-reproductive activity.

Combining an overview of research on the topic with original interpretations,

now updated with the latest scholarship and additional material from medieval Christian Europe, Jewish medieval culture and the Islamic world, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* is essential reading for all those who study medieval history and culture, or who have an interest in the way sexuality and sexual identity have been viewed in the past.

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Editorial Review

Review

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- **James Brundage, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History***

" ... a comprehensive guide to medieval sexualities that will not only not bewilder undergraduates with its complexity and unfamiliarity, but will interest and even encourage them to read and research further."

- **Juanita Ferros-Ruys, *Parergon*:**

"One of the great points of this book is to tell us that the way we think about sexuality, desire and our bodies is not so different from the way others thought about the same topics even a thousand years ago. In fact, this book has established "that there was indeed a field of discourse that could be called 'sexuality' in the Middle Ages" (155). This conclusion, in itself, warrants buying, reading, and suggesting this book to others."

- **Anne Gilmour-Bryson, *Journal of the History of Sexuality***

"Sexuality in Medieval Europe is an impressively synthetic and highly readable survey of current scholarship (particularly historical scholarship) on medieval sexuality that will be of considerable use in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching."

- **Emma Campbell, *Signs***

"Karras brings together a number of subjects of interest to medievalists in general and feminist medievalists in particular, chief among them the conflicted and complex attitudes towards sexuality in medieval culture and the disparate ways these attitudes are represented and interpreted, both then and now."

- **Catherine Cox, *Medieval Feminist Newsletter***

About the Author

Ruth Mazo Karras is Professor of History at the University of Minnesota. She has published widely on the history of women, gender, and sexuality in the Middle Ages. Her books include *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* (2012), *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (2002), *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (1998) and

Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia (1988). She is a co-editor of the journal *Gender and History*.

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