



# Order of Medieval Women: Women of Consequence

## Medieval Musings

*"We cannot live in a world that is interpreted for us by others... use our own voice, see our own light." St. Hildegard von Bingen, 1098 - 1179*

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## MADE FOR TRAVEL

This unique octagonal crown has been used by most of the kings of the Holy Roman Empire since its creation in western Germany circa late 10th—early 11th century. The crown, described as one 'of solid gold', is decorated with pearls in raised filigree settings and 144 precious "en cabochon" sapphires, emeralds, and ame-



Imperial Crown, Holy Roman Empire, Imperial Treasury, Hofburg Palace, Vienna © Bede 735c CC BY-SA 3.0.

thysts; the 12 largest gems representing the 12 apostles. The pearls and stones were put into openings that were cut into the metal and fastened with thin wires so that as the light hit the stones they appeared to glow from within. Later 2 iron plates were riveted to the 8 panels replacing the long original golden pins that held the plates together allowing the crown to be taken apart for easy transport. The 2 side plates have 3 small holes for chains and pendant jewels, known as pendilia (to hang), a feature of early Medieval goldsmith work.

The empress Matilda returned to Normandy from Germany in 1126 bringing many treasures she had acquired during her marriage to Henry V, including this Imperial Crown that her husband had worn during his coronation in 1111. The crown's center front, which now bears a large pectoral cross, said to have belonged to Henry II, was originally adorned by what is thought to have been a fire opal of great size, known as the *Waise*, 'the Orphan', named because of its uniqueness and last mentioned in Charles IV's inventory of 1350.

In 1250, medieval theologian and philosopher Saint Albert the Great wrote about the great jewel, a white opal. "The orphan is a jewel in the crown of the Roman emperor. Because the likes of it had never been seen elsewhere it is called the 'orphan'. It has the color of wine, of delicate red wine and it is as if the dazzling, white of snow penetrates the bright wine red and yet it remains dormant in this redness. The gem shines powerfully and it is said that it once even shone at night, but not in our time, but is said to preserve the honor of the empire."

**"What is better than wisdom? Woman.  
And what is better than a good woman?  
Nothing."**

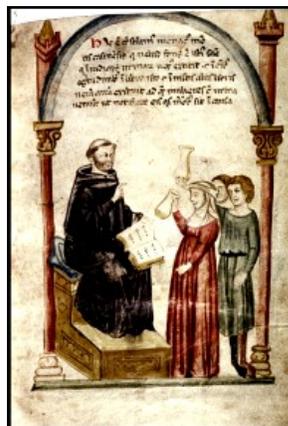
**Geoffrey Chaucer, English poet, 1343—1400.**

## MEDIEVAL MEDICINE

**D**uring the Islamic Golden Age, 9th—13th centuries, Islam became one of the most advanced centers for medical knowledge. Studying translations from ancient Greeks, Romans, Persians and Indian sources Islamic intellectuals discussed and debated medical concepts with the greatest scholars of their time, forging new advances in the science of medicine. In the 11th century when the Latin West had lost almost all knowledge of classical medicine.

Arabic medical writings began to become accessible through translations, particularly those of Avicenna, a Persian physician. Known as the father of modern medicine and author of several books, his medical encyclopedia *The Canon of Medicine*, circa 1025, presented medical knowledge from basic medical and physiological principles to diagnosis, treatment, and medical formularies. This 5 book encyclopedia set the standards for medicine in Medieval Europe and the Islamic world, remaining a standard medical textbook through the 18th century in Europe.

Just south of Naples and the Amalfi coast lies the old Roman city Salerno which, by the 10th century, had also become noted for their medical knowledge. The beginnings of southern Italy's Salerno as a medical center are somewhat vague but seems predestined, a healthy climate with easy port access, existing Jewish and Greek doctors and a local monastery dispensary coupled with greatly increased Islamic interaction after their 9th-century conquest of Sicily. With the spread of Islamic knowledge and Arab pharmacopeia there was an expanding trade in drugs, new substances from the distant East that perhaps enabled Salerno's doctors to offer treatments that were unavailable elsewhere in the Christian West.



Constantine the African lecturing on Uroscopy, Oxford, Bodlian, Rawl. c. 328, fol. 3r, 13th century.

In 1077 Constantine Africanus, a Muslim physician from North Africa, arrived in Salerno bringing with him prevalent knowledge of Islamic medicine from his Baghdad education. First arriving in Salerno as a merchant Constantine soon relocated to the monastery at Monte Cassino where he began translating Arabic manuscripts into Latin. With Constantine's influence, integration of Arabic and Jewish cultures and accessibility to Latin translations of Greek and Arabic texts of Hippocrates, Galen and Dioscorides the *Schola Medical Salernitana* transitioned from its original 9th



Arabic manuscript, *Dioscorides, De Materia Medica*, 1229, Topkapu Saray-Museum, Istanbul, The Yorck Project: Meisterwerke der Malerei.

century monastery dispensary base to the most important Western Mediterranean medical center during the 10th to 13th centuries. At the *Schola Medica Salernitan*athe in Salerno, women were permitted by the medical faculty to study, surprisingly free of clerical control even though the school was very close to the famous and very powerful monastery of Monte Cassi-

no. By the late 11th century Salerno's reputation for their medical practitioner's skills had reached beyond the Alps and would continue to

increase during the next two centuries becoming a major hub in the circulation of medical ideas and pharmaceutical products around the Mediterranean basin yet even as late as the 12th century Salerno was still small by our standards, the circumference of Salerno's outer wall a mile and a half which included encompassed gardens and orchards.

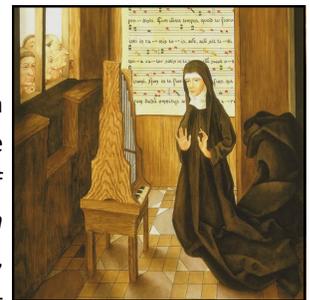
A passage from the *Ecclesiastical History* by Orderic Vitalis states that Ralph Mala-Corona, a worldly cleric and skilled physician, visited Salerno sometime before 1050 and "found no one as learned as he in the art of medicine except a certain learned woman, *sapiens matron*." Other writers also made frequent references to the medical practices of the *mulieres Salernitane*, the "Salernitan women". Trota is the only Salernitan woman healer whose name is attached to any medical writings. She is believed to have been the first female professor of medicine, the world's first gynecologist, and certainly the most famous. Her medical practices are attested to in 3 distinct textual resources including *Practical Medicine According to Trota (Practica Secundum Trotam)*, a compendium of 71 different remedies for gynecology and obstetrics. It is believed this text is part of a larger text of medical writings, a compendium entitled *On the Treatment of Illnesses (De egritudinum curatione)*, a massive compilation which contains excerpts from 7 leading Salerno medical doctors including Trota. Her contributions demonstrate considerable experience in the fields of gastrointestinal disorders and ophthalmology. Trota's medical knowledge can also be found within one of *Trotula* texts which includes a story of how she cured a young woman suffering from gas or flatulence in her uterus. The woman was first diagnosed as having some kind of intestinal rupture and was about to be operated on when Trota was called in "as a master". Astonished by what she found and doubting the initial diagnosis, Trota took the young woman home with her and treated her with baths in which mallows and the medicinal herb Pelli-

tory had been cooked and made into a plaster with radish juice and milled barley. The treatment cured her. a focused on how to help her patients with cures, therapies, and treatments using local ingredients. The 126 extant manuscripts of the Latin *Trotula* reflects only a fraction of the total that must once have circulated throughout Europe from the late 12th century to the end of the 15th. Trota remains somewhat a mystery, lacking information about exactly when she lived, how she was trained, whom she taught, and how she came by her literacy in Latin as there is nothing to suggest any direct connection with the church.

Another woman connected to the school in Salerno was the princess of Salerno, Sikelgaita. According to legend, she spent much of her time before her marriage studying medicine at the local medical school in Salerno. During the 1080s, when she and her husband Robert Guiscard d'Hauteville were conducting numerous battles, she had her own personal Salerno physician, Peter Borda.

Twelfth-century Hildegard von Bingen, a German scientist, philosopher, theologian, medical writer, and composer helped German scholars through her studies and writings to emerge from the Dark Ages. Considered among the most important scientists of her age she presented a re-envisioning of the cosmos and its interrelationship between man and his environment. Knowledge of gardening and agricultural symbolism saturated her medical philosophy, fusing herbs, animals, minerals to a healthy life. Her book *Causae et curae, Causes and Cures*, circa 1155, confirmed her humoral theory which stated the body needed to have balance among blood, phlegm, black and yellow bile.

Hildegard imagined the earth as a sphere wherein humans were a microcosm for the macrocosm of the cosmos. In her *Liber Divinorum operum, Book of Divine Works*, 1165-1164), she wrote: "Each human being contains heaven and earth and all the creation and remains one whole figure, and within every human being all things lie concealed." Her vision of the cosmos focused on the individual, "The firmament contains stars just as a man has veins to hold him together."



St. Hildegard's Prayer to the Holy Spirit with a musical score in the background, unknown source.

Between Trota's era and the 14th century, the medical field became increasingly bureaucratic, moving from a skill to a profession with academic training. In 1238, the medical faculty at the University of Paris insisted that doctors had to be licensed, placing sanctions against those who practiced medicine without a

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Chants royaux, Meeting of doctors at University of Paris, 1537 CE © BnF, Paris, folio 27v.

license. Universities, the gold standard of medical education beginning in the 13th century onward excluded women from attending universities, effectively preventing women from gaining official medical licenses.

In 1322 Jacqueline Felice de Almania, an Italian physician active in Paris, was brought to trial for unlawful practice while male physicians were rarely if ever, brought to court for similar charges. Almania had 8 witnesses that testified of her successes

after other physicians had failed and given up hope of the patient's recovery. One patient declared Almania was wiser in the art of surgery and medicine than any master physician or surgeon in Paris and only charged her patients if her treatment worked in curing their ailment. During the trial, the board made no effort to test her knowledge, her understanding of disease or its management. The final ruling of the court stated a man understood the subject of medicine better than a woman because of his gender. Almania was banned from practicing medicine under threat of excommunication if she ever did so again. This ruling essentially banned women from academic study in medicine in France and obtaining licenses until the 19th-century.

## "A CERTAIN CONFIGURATION IN THE HEAVENS"

In 1345, 672 years ago, the Black Plague invaded England and France, a time when Elizabeth de Clare, Isabella of France, Joanna of Flanders, and Philippa of Hainault were living in England and Jeanne of Belleville was patrolling the English Channel. In 1348, 3 years after the plague had invaded England and France, King Philip of France demanded a compendium of opinion from the medical faculty of the University of Paris, a highly regarded institution, as to the cause of this plague which was reeking death.

Consulting "many knowledgeable men in modern astrology and medicine concerning the causes of the epidemic" in addition to relying on their own knowledge and ancient authorities like Aristotle, the faculty issued a treatise addressing the "cases of this pestilence," which they divided into 3 parts. The first explained the "distant cause" which is up and above and in the heavens". The second is on a "near cause which is lower and on earth," and the third "prognostications and signs, which are connected to both." "Concerning the Universal and Distant Cause. There-

fore we say that the distant and first cause of this pestilence was and is a certain configuration in the heavens. In the year of our Lord 1345, at precisely one hour past noon on the twentieth day of the month of March, there was a major conjunction [lining up] of three higher planets in Aquarius. Indeed, this conjunction, together with other prior conjunctions and eclipses, being the present cause of the ruinous corruption of the air that is all around us, is a harbinger of mortality and famine and many other things besides, which we will not touch on here because it does not pertain to our subject. Moreover, that this is so testified by the philosopher Aristotle, in his book, *Concerning the Causes of the Properties of the Elements*. Around the middle [of the word] he says that mortality of men and depopulation of kingdoms happen whenever there is a conjunction of two planets, namely Saturn and Jupiter, so that on account of their interaction disasters are magnified threefold to the third power [i.e. nine times], and all this is to be found in [the writings of] ancient philosophers. And Albertus [Magnus] says in his book, *Concerning the Causes of the Properties of the Elements*, that a conjunction of two planets, namely Mars and Jupiter, brings about a great pestilence in the air, and that this happens especially under a hot and humid sign [i.e. Aquarius], as was the case when the planets lined up [in 1345]. For that time, Jupiter, being hot and wet, drew up evil vapor from the earth, but Mars, since it is immoderately hot and dry, then ignited the risen vapors, and therefore there were many lightning flashes, sparks, and pestiferous vapor and fires throughout the atmosphere..."

It is interesting that the medical faculty of the University of Paris, a highly respected institution, included in their explanation for the Black Plague on astronomy cited by Aristotle first described 1500 years earlier. This reinforces their high regard for the seven areas of classical knowledge established by the Greeks and Romans and later adopted by the medieval world. From: *The Black Death, the Great Mortality of 1348-1350, A Brief History with Documents*, John Aberth, 2005.

**"The mercy of heaven is greater than you or your sins. Let your sadness be dispersed by its glorious beams. Do not let apathy prevent you from seizing the moment for repentance. It matters not how wickedness has flourished. Divine grace can flourish still more abundantly."** XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

from *The Plays of Roswitha* by Hrotsvit von Gandersheim  
translated by Christopher St. John

## DEMICIENT OR NOT?



Belt for a Lady's Dress, c. 1375-1400, Italy, Siena? 14th century, basse-taille enamel and gilding on silver, silver thread, gilt-silver buckle, cast and chased, Overall: 93 1/16" x 1 1/8" x 3/16". Gift of the John Huntington Art, Cleveland Art Museum, Cleveland, Ohio.

Clothing displayed a person's wealth and status and one of the most important accessories for a woman was her "girdle", a loose belt that hooked around the waist. The girdle could be made from leather, metal, or embroidered fabric and was often very lavish and associated with fertility and marriage. The girdle was long and thin and placed at the waist using a knot or buckle. A demicient girdle was similarly made but placed more suggestively lower on the hips with a pair of round fittings which were joined by a hook and chain allowing the remaining weighted *belt-chape*, or pendant end, to suggestively dangle down the front. Pockets had not appeared yet so the girdle also provided a place to hang keys, amulets, a pomander (scent holder) or small book. Purses were



de France 1332-1350  
Royal MS 16 G VI Folio 14r,  
British Library, London..



*Mariens'*, 1425-1435,  
Aleš South Bohemian Gallery,  
Hluboká nad Vltavou,  
Czech Republic.

usually ornately embroidered and tasseled providing a notable fashion accessory besides a practical place to keep money and could be attached to the girdle with a metal hanger.

## A NEW WORD, WERGILD

A monetary alternative to vengeance was instituted by early civilizations. We might call it blood money, but in Anglo-Saxon and Scandic societies it was known as *wergild* "man payment", in Ireland it was Éraic, Galan's in Wales, Główszczyzn in Poland, and Diya in Islam. The monetary alternative consisted of a payment made by the offender, or his kin, to the family suffering the loss. The size of the *weregild* was determined by the type of loss up to a man's life and was largely conditional upon the social rank of the victim. Using a fee schedule, based on a standard "free man," it could then be multiplied based on the social rank of the victim and circumstances of the crime.



During the reign of Charlemagne, his *missi dominici* (palace inspector) required 3 times the regular *weregild* 'should they be killed whilst on a mission from the king.'

The *weregild* for women varied, relative to men of equal rank. Among the Germanic tribes on the upper Rhine river, the rate was double the *weregild* of men. The Saxon value of an equal status woman was half that of men.

Christianization around the 9th century replaced payment of the *weregild* with capital punishment. By the 12th-century *weregild* had almost ceased entirely as a practice throughout the Holy Roman Empire although this idea of blood money is still used in some Middle Eastern countries of today.

## THE MAKING OF A SAINT

"Most of the women who were honored as saints in England belong to the first hundred years after the acceptance of Christianity. A few other women who lived in the 10th century and came under the influence of the monastic revival have been revered as saints ...but no woman living during the Anglo-Norman times has been thus honored, for the desire to raise women to sainthood was essentially Anglo-Saxon and was strongest in the time which immediately followed the acceptance of Christianity."

Stages of canonization in the Catholic Church  
Servant of God → Venerable → Blessed → Saint

*Studies in Church Dedications*, Frances Arnold-Foster,  
"Saxon Ladies of High Degree" pp 349-350.

link to: <https://archive.org/details/studiesinchurchd02arno>

## THE PARIS BLANCHE KNEW

**B**lanche of Castile and her grandmother Eleanor of Aquitaine were women who shared similar traits. Both were devoted to family and its inherent responsibilities had a strong commitment to their convictions, understood power, and left lasting legacies for their family and country. Eleanor, viewed as one of the most influential women during the Middle Ages, played a major role in the 12th century defending the Plantagenet realm and their continental possessions. Granddaughter Blanche had a shrewd political mind and strength of character, protecting the realm for her young son Louis and serving as his regent and counselor for almost 25 years.

In 1199 King John, under the Treaty of Le Goulet, agreed that Philip Augustus' son, 12-year-old heir-apparent Louis, would marry one of his nieces. At John's request, it became Eleanor's responsibility to travel to Castile and select a bride from her 2 unmarried granddaughters. In December 1199 Eleanor had just started her journey to Spain when she was ambushed and held captive by Hugh IX of Lusignan, a man carrying a vengeance because his lands had been sold to Henry II by his forebears. After agreeing to Hugh's demands, Eleanor continued on her 500-mile journey, arriving in Castile mid-January. Spending 2 months at the Castilian court Eleanor became well acquainted with her granddaughters, finally selecting the younger Blanca whose personality Eleanor felt was a better fit as a queen consort to France, justifying her selection with the excuse Blanca's name would be easier to modify to a French name, Blanche.



In late March Eleanor and Blanche began their journey back across the Pyrenees. Realizing how important this union between France and England was to both countries it seems inconceivable that Eleanor would not have used their time together to help prepare Blanche for her life ahead. They arrived in Bordeaux in time to celebrate Easter with the famous warrior Mercadier who had agreed to escort the Queen and Princess north from Poitiers to Normandy. The following day Mercadier was assassinated by a rival mercenary captain, devastating the 77-year-old queen, fatigued to such a point she became unable to continue the 215 mile trip to Normandy. Eleanor and Blanche traveled the 85 miles in easy stages to the Loire Valley where Eleanor then entrusted her granddaughter to the Archbishop of Bordeaux who assumed the role of Blanche's escort.

Arriving on May 22, 1200, at the Abbey of Port-Mort in Normandy 12-year-old Blanche and 13-year-old Louis signed the treaty placing Blanche as the pledge of peace between the rival kings. Their marriage took place the following day with Archbishop of Bordeaux giving the nuptial benediction. Since France was under interdiction and would remain so until that September, no church bells were ringing to announce their arrival into Paris, yet assuredly the young couple would have caused excitement and been warmly welcomed by the bustling city of 110,000, the most populous city in western Europe. The couple arrived at what would be their residence, the Royal Palace on the western side of the Île de la Cité, a site with thousand-year-old Roman foundations and later site of a Merovingian palace. Blanche's new residence was the same place her grandmother Eleanor had resided as queen almost 60 years earlier. From her palace windows, Blanche would have looked across the river Seine to the Right Bank, awed at the activity for the Louvre, a massive fortress designed to protect Paris' most vulnerable point against an English attack from Normandy. Philip's newly constructed Grand Pont stone bridge provided easier access from the Île to the Right Bank, replacing an older wood bridge over foundations referred to by Roman Emperor Julian in a 358 A.D. letter describing Lutetia (Paris) "an island in the middle of the river; wooden bridges link it to the two banks. The river rarely rises or falls; as it is in summer, so it is in winter."



Louvre fortress, *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, October, ca 1412-1416, Limbourg brothers, Musée Condé, château de Chantilly, Oise, France, fol 10v.

The Louvre's Romanesque style fortress was nearly square, enclosed by the 8 1/2 foot thick crenelated and machicolated (murder holes) curtain wall, surrounded by a water-filled moat. Attached to the outside of the walls were 10 defensive towers. In the courtyard, slightly offset to the northeast, there was a cylindrical keep 100 ft. high, 50 ft. in diameter with 13 ft. thick walls. The keep was encircled by a deep, dry moat with stone counterscarps to help prevent the scaling of its walls with ladders. Accommodations in the fortress were supplied by the keep's vaulted chambers and 2 additional wings built inside the west and south curtain walls. Philip Auguste ordered the construction of the Right Bank wall enclosure to be tied to the fortress, giving Paris a de-

finned urban space in addition to marking rural areas that the royal power wished to see developed. With the Louvre’s completion, it became the center of administration holding the archives, treasury ,and court functions as the capital of the kingdom. Philip also began to use the new castle for recreation and ceremonial functions, the vassals of the king now taking their oath of loyalty at the Louvre instead of the Palais de la Cité, which remained the monarch's Parisian home until the mid 14th century when the Louvre transitioned into a royal residence under Charles V, 1338—1380.



A Paris market, from *Le Chevalier Errant* by Thomas de Saluces (about 1403) Paris, BnF, département des Manuscrits, Français 12559, fol. 167.

The Right Bank quickly became a center of commerce and finance. The port, workshops, and the merchant houses were located in close proximity to the grain market, Les Champeaux. As the grain market flourished it began to draw other markets around it including Les Halles, a large food market which Philip had recently enlarged. Both the market area and a new roof were constructed to provide shelter for the merchants who came from all over to sell their wares.

As Blanche explored the Île de la Cité she certainly, would have enjoyed the easy walk to Notre Dame at the other end of the Île. After 37 years of construction, the nave and chancel were finally finished as the western façade was just beginning to emerge. Blanche would have not been familiar with its architectural style as Notre Dame was one of the first cathedrals built in what became known as French Gothic, a concept emerging from northern France. Perhaps, as she entered the cathedral, she would have shared the abbot of Mont Saint-Michel’s reaction as he cried entering Notre Dame “If ever this edifice is completed there will be nothing to compare it to but the mountains themselves!” As a Parisian she would have watched in awe as the cathedral continued to emerge skyward, the western façade completed 25 years after she first entered Paris. The 2 towers and north rose window would take another 25 years, finally completed just 2 years before her death in 1252. The massive cathedral would take another 100 years to be completed, earning its distinction as one of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture.

During the 11th century, the area around the cathedral was the community of Notre Dame, a small city where the clerical community lived, worked, and maintained their gardens with a market in front of the Cathedral. The cathedral was also here the first school in Paris was established. As other schools developed around the city the school of Notre Dame concentrated on higher education, earning a reputation throughout Europe as one of the leading centers of scholarship. Blanche’s arrival in 1200 was a notable year for the school of Notre Dame as it had just become the “ancestor” to the University of Paris which had been relocated to the Left Bank.



Notre Dame behind rue Neuve-Notre Dame where book trades practiced. *Hours of Etienne Chevalier, The Right Hand of God Protecting the Faithful*, Jean Fouquet, France, 1452-1460, Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y.

Access to the University and Left Bank from the Île was eased with completion of Philip’s second stone bridge, Petit Pont, a place that had provided access from the Île to the Left Bank since Roman times. Blanche would have shared the joy with other Parisians that Philip had also paved the old foul-smelling mud streets in the area with stone. With the more strategic Right Bank wall completed and able to provide defense against the Norman threat, Philip immediately started construction on the Left Bank, a second priority as it was a less urbanized. The mile and half Left Bank wall took 15 years to construct, finishing in 1215, the same time Louis, Blanche’s first child, was turning 1 and the English barons’ rebellion against King John had begun.

The newly chartered University of Paris joined other new colleges being established around the monasteries on the Left Bank. The area with almost 3000 students soon became known as the Latin Quarter, as Latin was the language of instruction of the universities. The colleges were not under the authority of the Bishop of Paris, but directly under the pope. The area around Montagne Sainte-Geneviève had become crowded with students who frequently came into conflict with the neighbors and city officials. In 1200 a riot erupted between students and townspeople, breaking out in a tavern leaving 5 persons dead. After this violent incident and the threat of the universities leaving Paris Philip issued a diploma "for the security of the scholars of Paris," affirming that students were subject only to ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Unrest would occur

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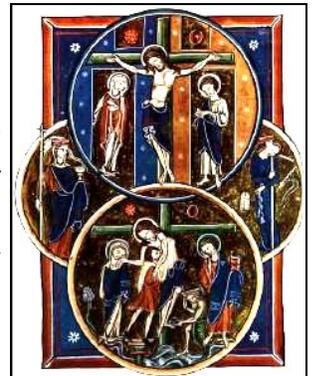


Professional scribe Herman Strepel's advertisement sheet, *Münster*, illustrating available script names in golden letters, The Hague, Royal Library, 76 D MS 45, c. 1447, Netherlands.

again in 1210 and 1229. As the most populated western city in Europe, Paris had a variety of trades, from money changers familiar with exact values for all the different silver and gold coins in circulation throughout Europe to craftsmen organized into guilds producing and selling goods under strict rules and regulations that protected members against competition and unemployment. Among the various trades were book dealers known as stationers. Although the monastic houses were still copying manuscripts, the scholarship had passed on to the universities and was moving towards professional stationers, who by the 14th century had almost fully given way to commercial urban scriptoria.

Stationers were located across from Notre Dame cathedral as the center for commercially-made vernacular books. Ordering a book involved many decisions including a selection of paper or parchment, determining if images or illuminated letters were to be added, as well as letter style and size of the script desired. Often the stationer would have a large poster mounted to their door showcasing the various scripts offered. The Carolingian script that had been used for the previous 400 years began to give way to the Gothic script which lasted until 1350 when Carolingian script had a revival and was later modified to Carolingian minuscule. Blanche was a patron of the arts and owned a variety of books in both French and Latin. The *Psalter Blanche of Castile*, attributed to Blanche, was one of the finest books of the period, sumptuously illuminated with illustrations arranged in roundels, rivalled only by the splendor of the well known *Psalter of St. Louis*, the Morgan Bible, which she ordered for Louis during her regency, 1226-1234, a testament to both the values she held with regard to Louis' education, and a depiction of a widowed mother guiding her son into adulthood.

From 1243-1248 Paris experienced a period of intense architectural creativity; one vast building-yard as Louis sought to complete several projects before he headed for the Crusades. Besides Sainte-Chapelle, work had progressed on Notre Dame so that the south tower was ready to receive its bells and become the voice of the Cité. Convents were going up along with numerous hospitals and almshouses. The chronicler, Joinville, commented on how much was being accomplished, whether in building or military expeditions without increasing the taxes. In his *History of Saint Louis* Joinville wrote the King 'never imposed taxes such that they were complained of...for he did all things by the advice of his good mother, by whose counsels he was always guided.' Blanche's good management was the secret behind Louis's generosity; she understood when to make the court live within its means and when to spend liberally. In 1248 Blanche reassumed the role of regent as Louis IX departed for the Crusades, holding that office until her death in 1252. Blanche left a lasting legacy, she had 'given herself up to the running of the kingdom, it had been her calling, first forced upon her by circumstances, later freely accepted.' Matthew Paris wrote of her death, 'She left the realm of France inconsolable'.



*Psalter Blanche of Castile*, Vienna 2554, 1200-25, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, fol. 24r, Paris.

## A GRANDDAUGHTER'S MEMORIAL FIFTY YEARS LATER

The most popular Christian pilgrimage during the Middle Ages was to the shrine of the apostle St. James the Great in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, northwest Spain. With tens of thousands of pilgrims following 4 main routes to the shrine, the pilgrims' daily needs were met by a series of hospitals, often staffed by Catholic orders. Donations were encouraged as many poorer pilgrims had little clothes and poor health, often barely getting to the next hospital. In 1187, at the bequest of Queen Eleanor of England, consort Alphonso VIII founded the Abbey of Santa María la Real de las Huelgas and Royal Hospital, located along the pilgrimage route to feed and clothe the poor pilgrims. Queen Eleanor and Queen Berengaria are both documented as supporting and being involved with the abbey. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Reflecting on Eleanor's father William X of Aquitaine dying in the Pyrenees while on a pilgrimage, was it a coincidence the Abbey of Santa María la Real and Royal Hospital was built exactly 50 years after William's death by his granddaughter Eleanor of England, daughter of Eleanor? Did Eleanor visit while in Castile and, if so, what would have been her reflections?



Santa María la Real de Las Huelgas Monastery and Royal Hospital, 1254 marriage site of Edward I to Eleanor of Castile, burial site of Alfonso, Eleanor and daughter Berengaria © Zatateman CC BY-SA 3.0.

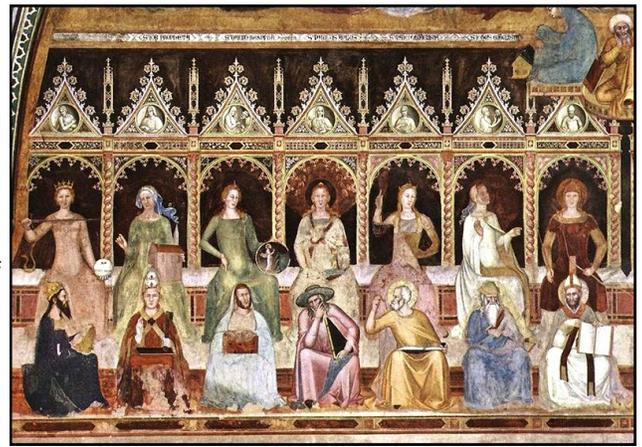
## THE SEVEN LIBERAL ARTS

Inherited from classical antiquity, the seven liberal arts embraced the curriculum of school education in the Middle Ages. Plato described them in his famous work, *The Republic*, as did his most famous student, Aristotle who stated that an educated man should be capable of considering and investigating any idea or concept thoroughly without necessarily embracing or dismissing it. It was believed that a classical education of the seven specific subjects trained the mind to think. Divided into two parts, the *Trivium* consisted of Grammar, Dialectic (logic) and Rhetoric (speaking and writing), and was required for the advanced *Quadrivium*, dividing mathematics developed by the Pythagoreans as it pertained to matter and quantity including Arithmetic (numbers), Geometry (numbers in space), Music (numbers in time) and Astronomy (numbers in space and time).



English, ca 1190-1200, V & A Museum, Medieval & Renaissance Room 8, Wm. & Eileen Ruddock Gallery, London.

The portrayal of the seven liberal arts was highly visible in many forms during the medieval period. A 14th-century fresco portrays the seven liberal arts as young women sitting in Gothic arches supported by symbolic male images. A 13th-century hinged casket bears the seven liberal arts with its sides decorated with six medallions that are not only personifications of the Liberal Arts, but also Philosophy and Nature. A 15th-century illumination, *Consolation of Philosophy*, tells of an ancient Roman philosopher Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (d. 524 AD) who was unjustly imprisoned for treason near the end of his life. In this famous text an allegorical figure, Lady Philosophy, visits Boethius and teaches him how to ease his suffering through contemplation of the good. According to Lady Philosophy, the seven Liberal Arts are the necessary preparation for philosophical study as she introduces each of the arts with their appropriate attribute.



*Seven Liberal Arts*, ca 1365, by Andrea di Bonaiuto, fresco, Basilica of Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Italy. L to R: Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, Music, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Grammar.



"*Consolation of Philosophy, Philosophy Presenting the Seven Liberal Arts to Boethius*," 1450–1485, Coetivy Master, MS 42 fol. 2v, Paris.

Cathedral architecture was another medium to portray the liberal arts as seen on Siena Cathedral's 13th-century pulpit column or Chartres Cathedral's 12th-century south portal tympanum 'Throne of Wisdom'. The arts on the tympanum are shown in band-like arches with a carved personification and historical practitioner of the art carved immediately below. In the lower-left of the outer arch, the practitioner Aristotle bends over his writing while personified Logic stands above him with a staff in hand. Above them sits Cicero with Rhetoric and Euclid with Geometry. Encircling the peak is Arithmetic above Boethius, Astronomy



Base of Siena Cathedral's pulpit column, Carrara marble, Representation of the Seven Liberal Arts, Nicola Pisano, 1265–1268, Siena Cathedral, Italy, © JoJan CC BY-SA 3.0.

above Ptolemy, and Grammar above 6th-century author Priscian. Since the figures of Grammar and her practitioner fill the final spaces available, the outer arch portrays Music carved on the inner arch complete with her bells and strings along-side Grammar, Pythagoras, her practitioner, sits at his work below.



# THIS YEAR IN HISTORY

- 568: The Kingdom of the Lombard's founded in Italy, survived until Franks 774 invasion under Charlemagne.
- 638: Jerusalem captured by the Arab army.
- 718: Second Arab attack on Constantinople.
- 738: Jerusalem falls to Islamic forces.
- 768: Reign of Charlemagne begins, the greatest ruler of Western Europe during the Early Middle Ages.
- 998: Vladimir I of Kiev, grandson of St. Olga of Kiev, embraces Christianity which becomes the national religion.
- 930: University of Bologna, oldest university in Europe is formed (alumni: Thomas Becket, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Albrecht Durer, Nicolaus Copernicus, Popes Alexander VI, Innocent IX, Gregory XIII, Gregory XV and Irnerius, founder of the School of Glossators (those who studied Roman law-based including the Codex of Justinian).
- 1118: Knights Templar founded, becomes the most recognizable and impactful military orders during the Crusades.
- 1148: Anna Comnena begins writing the *Alexiad*, a 15 volume history of Byzantium covering the period 1069–1118.
- 1298: Marco Polo publishes his tales of China, a key step towards the bridging of Asia and Europe in trade.
- 1328: First War of Scottish Independence ends in Scottish victory. Edward III of England signed the Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton on 1 May 1328, which recognized the independence of Scotland with Bruce as King.
- 1378: The Catholic Church becomes embroiled in the Great Schism which will last until 1417.
- 1418: The "school" of navigation founded by Prince Henry the Navigator sponsors the first of many expeditions that greatly increases knowledge of the middle Atlantic Ocean and Africa's west coast.

## TEMPLE PENDANTS



In Byzantium, as in other medieval societies, ear ornaments were one of the most prominent elements of the female attire. While numerous Byzantine ornaments fall into this category, it is believed these pendants were worn not by threading through the earlobe, but rather suspended by various means such as straps or short chains from the hair or headdress and hung near the temple or cheek. They are generally referred to as 'temple pendant,' or 'headdress rings.'

The pendant's hollow interior probably held a piece of perfumed cloth with the small stick used to guide the cloth in and out of the pendant. The surface of the pendant included intricate patterns and borders, with a center medallion of a young beardless man. Crosses embellish the accompanying stick.



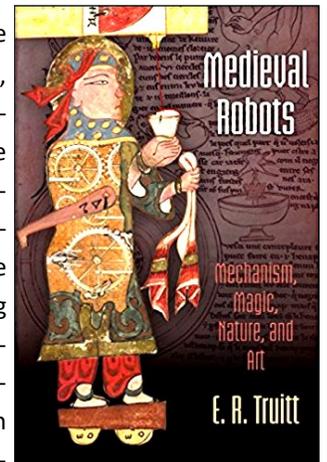
Temple Pendant and stick, ca 1080-1150, Constantinople, Cloisonné enamel and gold, 1 15/16 x 15/16 in., stick 2 x 1/16 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

## READERS CORNER: *Medieval Robots:*

### *Mechanism, Magic, Nature and Art*

by E.R. Truitt

"*Medieval Robots* recovers the forgotten history of fantastical, aspirational, and terrifying machines that captivated Europe in imagination and reality between the 9th and 14th centuries. E. R. Truitt traces the different forms of self-moving or self-sustaining manufactured objects from their earliest appearances in the Latin West through centuries of mechanical and literary invention. Chronicled in romances and song as well as histories and encyclopedias, medieval automata were powerful cultural objects that probed the limits of natural philosophy, illuminated and challenged definitions of life and death, and epitomized the transformative and threatening potential of foreign knowledge and culture. This original and wide-ranging study reveals the convergence of science, technology, and imagination in medieval culture and demonstrates the striking similarities between medieval and modern robotic and cybernetic visions."



## TROUBADOURS AND ROMANTIC LOVE

### “High Society”

Women were very important in courtly life and the object of troubadours. The troubadour movement first appeared in Southern France with Duke William of Aquitaine, Eleanor of Aquitaine’s grandfather, the first reported practitioner.



*Le Roman de la Rose*, 15th century, Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Douce 195, fol. 150v.

The troubadours were noblemen who composed music and lyrics to be played and sung at court by their servants called minstrels or jongleurs. The troubadour’s model of the ideal lady was the wife of his employer or lord, a lady of higher status, usually the rich and powerful female head of the castle. The poet gave voice to the aspirations of the courtier class for only those who were noble could engage in courtly love. This new kind of love saw nobility not based on wealth and family history but on character and actions, particularly appealing to poorer knights who saw this as an avenue for advancement



Carved Ivory mirror case, courtly scenes, early 14th century, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

The poetic forms and music was quite complex. The theory of male-female relationships elaborate and artificial, appears to have been based upon Plato’s view that love is caused by a single soul being split in half in heaven, one half placed in the body of a man and the other in that of a woman. Plato believed that when the two souls sense the nearness of each other they seek to reunite. Does that seem strange?

Consider the 1956 song “True Love” made famous by Bing Crosby and Grace Kelly...

**Darling, you and I have a guardian angel, on high,  
with nothing to do**

**But to give to me and to give to you love forever true.**

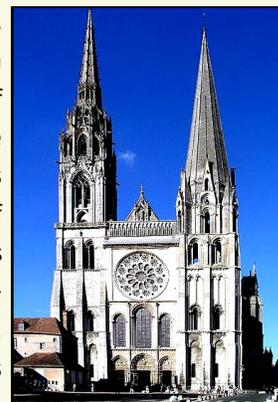
The song states each soul has a guardian angel, supposing that the lovers share a single soul. Today we talk of “soul-mates,” are we also making the same assumptions within our concept of romantic love?

This poetical and musical practice gave rise to a social movement as courts throughout Europe turned the theory of troubadour love poetry into patterns of behavior. Elaborate and artificial codes arose to govern the relationships between men and women based on old feudal relationships. The lover swore to serve his beloved

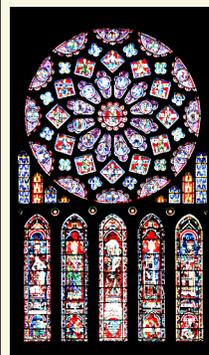
and would fight in tournaments for the favor of his lady, defending her honor against all else. The troubadour hoped that the object of his affection would either pay him or influence her husband to extended patronage to the poet. The troubadour movement with its elaborate manners and language also provided another way to differentiate society’s classes by keeping the commoners and middle class in an inferior position.

## CHARTRES CATHEDRAL, FRANCE

Constructed between 1194–1221, Chartres Cathedral is considered a “masterpiece” and the high point of French Gothic art. Even before the Gothic cathedral was built. Chartres was and has remained a place of pilgrimage. The current church is the last of at least 5 that have occupied the site since the 4th century. After the 1020 fire, the church was rebuilt with Cnut, at Emma’s request, contributing to the rebuilding of which the crypt remains. Emma had a strong family connection to the church as well as realizing an opportunity for political gain.



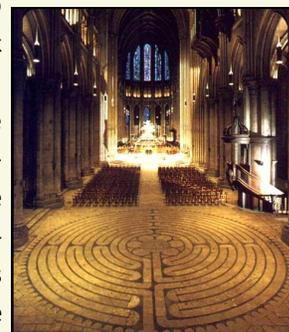
West façade, Chartes, France.



North transept rose window, ca 1235,  
© Eusebius.

With over an acre of stained glass, Chartres is known for its 12th century stained glass windows; 152 of the original 176 stained glass windows still survive, more than any other medieval cathedral in the world. In 1230 the North Rose and its 5 lancet windows were a gift from Queen Blanche of Castile. Later 13th-century windows would feature a deep manganese blue, replacing cobalt which had been the predominant color for stained glass.

For over 800 years pilgrims to Chartres have continued to walk the largest of any medieval mazes, 42’ in diameter. Set into the nave floor stones the labyrinth is believed to be a representation of the spiritual quest of the pilgrim traveling to the holy land. Labyrinths like this began to appear in the 12th-century, most often in Italy.



© Loyola University Chicago.

## RELICS FOR A SAFE DELIVERY

Realizing childbirth in the middle ages was a hazardous process, women relied on their Church to help ensure a safe delivery which included the use of relics and girdles of the Virgin Mary. During the 13th and 14th centuries, the monks of Westminster practiced lending their girdle out from time to time to women of high status, including at least 2 queens.

The earliest reference of women seeking a girdle to assist during labor was Canterbury Cathedral who lent St. Anselm's belt to women in childbirth as mentioned in Eadmer's *Vita Anselmi*, 1124. Westminster Abbey had a girdle of the Virgin Mary that was loaned to pregnant ladies in the royal family. In 1242 the girdle was sent to Gascony for the benefit of Queen Eleanor of Provence who gave birth later in the year to daughter Beatrice. Fifteenth-century records from Westminster, if accurate, show a black woven girdle with the words of the hymn '*Nesciens mater*' (Mother) and the prayer '*Deus qui salutis*' (God with) embroidered in gold letters given by '*Matildis bona regina.*' Queen Matilda of Scotland known as a patron to needleworkers. In 1503 Henry VII's wife Elizabeth of York paid 6 s. 8 d. to a monk who brought her the girdle of the Virgin to protect herself during childbirth.

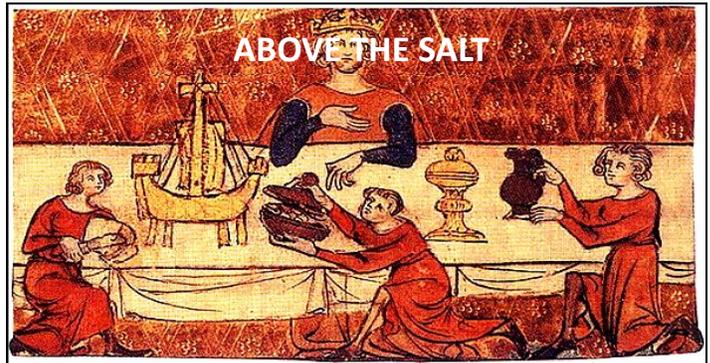


Madonna giving girdle to St Thomas, Madonna della Cintola, Filippo Lippi, 1445/70, Museo Civico, Prato.

Women unable to obtain a relic relied on other forms of supernatural aids which, by the later middle ages, included certain mineral stones such as rock crystal, jaspers, and malachite. Another

option was to use scrolls made from either parchment or paper with a cross 1/15 the height of Jesus or a reproduction of the wound on his side. Laid across the belly during childbirth the scrolls contained written promises that whoever viewed or wore them would have an easy delivery.

Poor women had to make do with humbler precautions such as tying their girdles or their shoe latches (similar to a lace) to a bell and striking the bell 3 times which was said to help smooth the process of birth.



A king at table by Walter de Milemete's manuscript, *De secretis secretorum*, British Library, add. 47680, fol. 60v., c 1326-1327, London.

The most exclusive of all table ornaments, the nef, found only on the grandest tables and coupled with seating arrangements, symbolized medieval society's social order. Nefs were often in the form of a ship and were believed to symbolize "good fortune and fair sailing on the uncertain seas of life". While some nefes were purely for decoration, others were designed to hold salt, a scarce and valuable condiment. Nefs were available in multiple designs, on some the upper portion of the nef could be lifted off to reveal a drinking vessel in the lower section, while others were designed to hold cutlery or napkins. Interestingly, there were also a few nefes that were able to be locked as protection against poisoning!

Dining customs were carefully observed and followed during the medieval period. At the banquet table your station in life dictated where you sat. The most important guests and those of high noble rank were seated closer to the lord and lady of the house, with easy access to the salt-cellar which has been translated into the term "above the salt".

When available even monks were not immune to the temptation of adding salt to enhance their food. With their vow of silence, they developed a silent gesture for the salt, "When you want salt, then shake your hand with your 3 fingers together, as if you were salting something."



"The Burghley Nef," 1527/8, France, V&A Museum, London.