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The Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century (The Middle Ages Series)

Fiona J. Griffiths

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In *The Garden of Delights*, Fiona J. Griffiths offers the first major study of the *Hortus deliciarum*, a magnificently illuminated manuscript of theology, biblical history, and canon law written both by and explicitly for women at the end of the twelfth century. In so doing she provides a brilliantly persuasive new reading of female monastic culture. Through careful analysis of the contents, structure, and organization of the *Hortus*, Griffiths argues for women's profound engagement with the spiritual and intellectual vitality of the period on a level previously thought unimaginable, overturning the assumption that women were largely excluded from the "renaissance" and "reform" of this period. As a work of scholarship that drew from a wide range of sources, both monastic and scholastic, the *Hortus* provides a witness to the richness of women's reading practices within the cloister, demonstrating that it was possible, even late into the twelfth century, for communities of religious women to pursue an educational program that rivaled that available to men. At the same time, the manuscript's reformist agenda reveals how women engaged the pressing spiritual questions of the day, even going so far as to criticize priests and other churchmen who fell short of their reformist ideals.

Through her wide-ranging examination of the texts and images of the *Hortus*, their sources, composition, and function, Griffiths offers an integrated understanding of the whole manuscript, one which highlights women's Latin learning and orthodox spirituality. *The Garden of Delights* contributes to some of the most urgent questions concerning medieval religious women, the interplay of gender, spirituality, and intellectual engagement, to discussions concerning women scribes and writers, women readers, female authorship and authority, and the visual culture of female communities. It will be of interest to art historians, scholars of women's and gender studies, historians of medieval religion, education, and theology, and literary scholars studying questions of female authorship and models of women's reading.

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