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Review

A lively and compelling book...the author's particular strengths lie in her study of literature. Judith Jesch has captured the spirit of Viking women. Her book is a fitting tribute to them. --Medieval Archaelogy

From the Back Cover Women in the Viking Age explores an unfamiliar aspect of medieval history, and offers a new perspective on viking society, very different from the traditional image of a violent and male-dominated world.

About the Author JUDITH JESCH is Reader in Viking Studies at the University of Nottingham.

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Archaeology, runic inscriptions, onomastics, foreign historical sources, art history, and Old Norse literature and mythology illuminate different aspects of women's lives in the Viking age - on the farms and in the trading centres of Scandinavia, abroad on Viking expeditions, and as settlers in places such as Iceland or the British Isles; the study is therefore a valuable corrective the usual view of the Scandinavian raider-warriors and merchants who emerged on the European scene in the late 8th century. Archaeological evidence brings us into close physical contact with Viking age women, their dress, work and daily life. Runic inscriptions and literary texts allowing us to hear the authentic voice of women in the Viking age are studied in detail. History, art, myth and literature further demonstrate the differing perceptions of Viking age women by their male contemporaries in Scandinavia and in the countries affected by Viking activity, as well as the romantic myths of medieval Icelandic literature - the Norse sagas - responsible for modern views of Viking women. This survey of women's history covers most aspects of the Viking age. It should also serve as a useful general introduction to the period. Detailed notes and a full bibliography are included.

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Most helpful customer reviews

45 of 45 people found the following review helpful.

highly informative, great illustrations

By Susan Zuckerman

This is a very readable yet scholarly book. Jesch uses a large number of diverse sources to help us gain an understanding of women in the Viking Age, and has organized the book according to these sources. Archaeological evidence from grave sites gives us much information about wealthy women in particular, and evidence from house-sites tell us more about ordinary women's lives. Evidence from runes is especially

fascinating, as runic inscriptions are often short and cryptic. Yet here we often find what women actually wrote or accomplished, for example memorial stones they raised to honour dead relatives, or stones raised in honour of them building a bridge. Jesch looks at Scandinavian women travelling abroad (e.g. evidence from place names in England) and women mentioned in foreign writings, and how other cultures viewed them. She also looks at how they are portrayed in art, myths and poetry.

Finally Jesch extracts some common themes from these sources, and identifies some common female types, for example the warrior woman and the inciter. (For this, however, I would recommend "Old Norse Images of Women" by Jenny Jochens.)

There are numerous excellent photos and illustrations in this book, which really help bring it to life. I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in Viking/Norse history.

30 of 36 people found the following review helpful.

A truly great contribution to Women's History...

By littlecj-da@worldnet.att.net

Jesch's interdisciplinary approach enables the reader to understand and see the otherwise undocumented history of women in the Viking Age. She adds the material evidence of archaeological findings, runic texts, and Viking names to the evidence from narratiave sources to explore the history of women and their roles in the Viking Age. By taking a multidisciplinary approach, Jesch establishes a platform on which to reuild the history of Viking women and helps us to better understand the important roles women played in the Viking Age. She has included numerous illustrations depicting various Viking artifacts, copious notes explaning the meaning and significance of her research, and an extensive bibliography of resources that will add to our understanding of the Viking Age. Narrowing her focus to specific areas of research on Viking women, Jesch brings Viking women and portions of their history into prominence. This suggests that there is more to learn and explore in the field of Viking women, particularly in the areas of religion and legal positions of women during the Viking Age.

13 of 18 people found the following review helpful.

Women in the Viking Age

By Kate

I found this to be rather dry, tho informative, with an irritating theme running through about 'not having enough evidence to really know for sure'. I appreciated her use of multiple disaplines to explore these women's lives... however, I find myself believing that MS. Jesch has much more knowledge to share on Viking women than was presented in her book, and so would have prefered that her conclusion, at least, reflected so. I would have appreciated(and expected) a section with her conclusions about daily life in the differing circumstances of these women. Such as fibre arts, foods, clothing, armor, weapons, homes, homesites, disease/wound cause of deaths, etc. This to flesh out discoveries hinted at in her work. I would be willing to explore further Viking women writings of hers, especially if co-authored and with even more informative pictures.

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