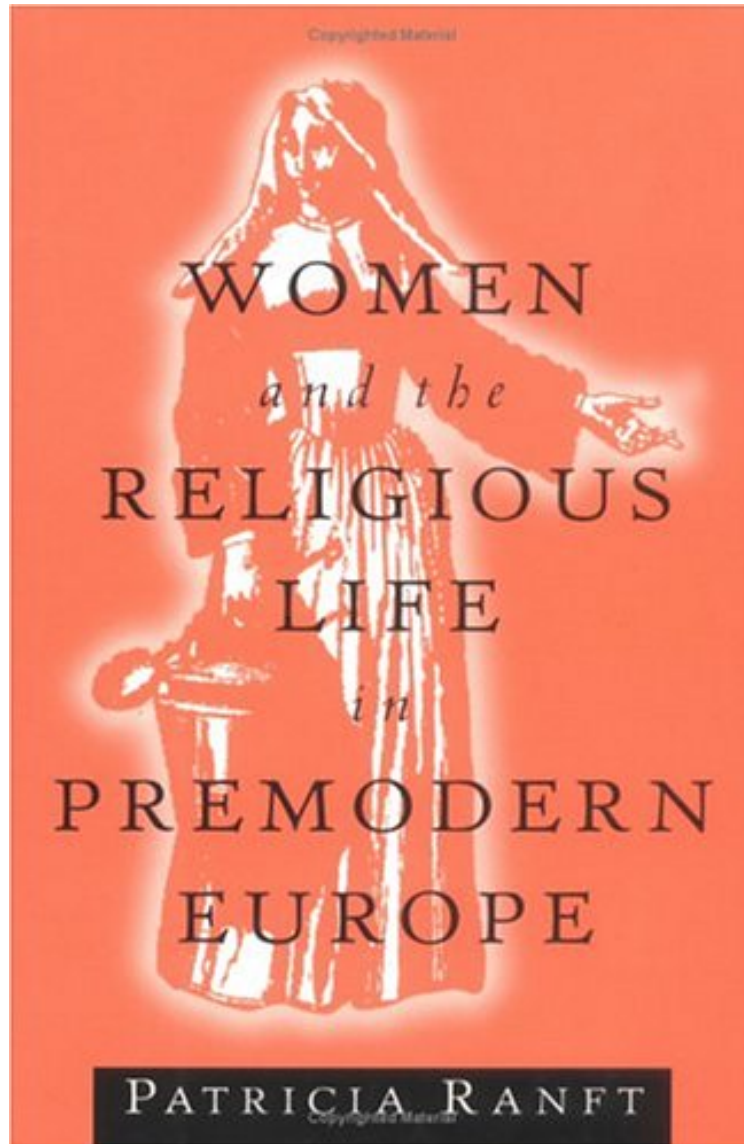


# Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe

Patricia Ranft

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**Patricia Ranft : Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Religious Life ExplainedBy Chris FelcherAuthor, Ranft gives a concise history of religious women from the 4th century through the 17th century. There is much evidence of the central role played by these women in the formation of the religious life in Europe and the premodern Europe. Many forms of religious life are explained: ascetics, virgins, deaconesses, anchorites, ammas, beguines, oblates, beatae, nuns,

canonesses, tertiaries and sisters. The material is organized chronologically....with Chapter 1: The Beginning and Ending with Chapter 8: The Transition into the Modern Age. Roles of different communities are highlighted such as The Grey Sisters, Ursulines, Visitandines, Poor Clares, Daughters of Charity, and Carmelites. The foundresses of many communities are included. Interesting information regarding tertiaries (lay members of a religious third order) who became saints. To clarify the 1st order was the clergy 2nd order were women religious and third order were the lay members. A very good reference book. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A valuable resource By Dark Kunoichi Ranft takes on a large time period in her discussion of religious women and their lives. Like her other books, this one is a must read. 12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. History of women in communal or solitary religious life By M. J. Smith Having recently read *Her Story*, I expected another feminist rendering of Church history. Instead I found a very enlightening account of the repeated rise and fall of women's authority within their own religious communities, the struggle between active and enclosed views of women's roles, the tension between professed religious and committed lay visions of women's appropriate role. The book was most helpful in putting context around stories I already knew: St. Mary of the Desert, St. Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen, etc. The book is introductory - often too sparse in detail for my taste. However, it does paint the broad picture in detail interesting enough to make one want to read more.

In her *Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe*, Patricia Ranft synthesizes the most recent research on women religious in chronological order and places these women in the center of the narrative. Starting with the fourth century birth of monasticism and continuing until the seventeenth century birth of the active congregation, Ranft's book puts to rest any lingering doubts about the pivotal role women have played in the development of Western culture and the Roman church. Written with both the scholar and student in mind, this is a long-awaited work that fills a gap in the history of western civilization, in the history of women, and in the history of the church.

From *Library Journal* Calling this narrative history, Ranft (history, Central Michigan Univ.) walks chronologically through the lives of religious women from Marcella in fourth-century Rome to Mary Ward's Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 17th-century England. Intent upon whatever is unusual and distinctive to each era, she notes, "[I]t is evident by now that the history of women religious is not an echo or mirror image of that of men religious." She disdains overly academic verbiage and succeeds in making accessible a mountain of useful and diverse information. However, a critical apparatus is noticeably lacking. Ranft never fully engages the issue of authorship or voice regarding female narratives. Nor does she suggest in more than a cursory way why women in different eras chose the religious path, other than through a sense of vocation. Still, she has done women's historical scholarship an immense service in collecting such a wealth of introductory information into a single volume. Recommended for women's history and religious collections. ?Sandra Collins, SLIS, Univ. of Pittsburgh Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* This concise and accessible history of religious women from the fourth through the seventeenth century will prove an invaluable resource for students of European history. Though Ranft does not set out to be comprehensive, she offers ample evidence of the central role played by women in the formation of the religious life of Europe and in the history of premodern Europe. With an introductory audience in mind, she keeps references as unobtrusive as possible but offers pointers for those who wish to pursue the subject further. Of particular interest is Ranft's contribution to historical documentation of opportunities for leadership afforded European women by the religious life (and created by European women in the religious life) before the modern era, as well as resistance to those opportunities within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This is not a supplement to the history of religious men so often offered as "standard" ; it is an integral contribution to the history of religious life in Europe and tells a story that should be read as indispensable to that history. Steve Schroeder About the Author Patricia Ranft is Professor of History at Central Michigan University. Her books include "Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe" and "Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition,"