

Medieval Sex Lives

The Sounds of Courtly Intimacy on the Francophone Borders

by **Elizabeth Eva Leach**

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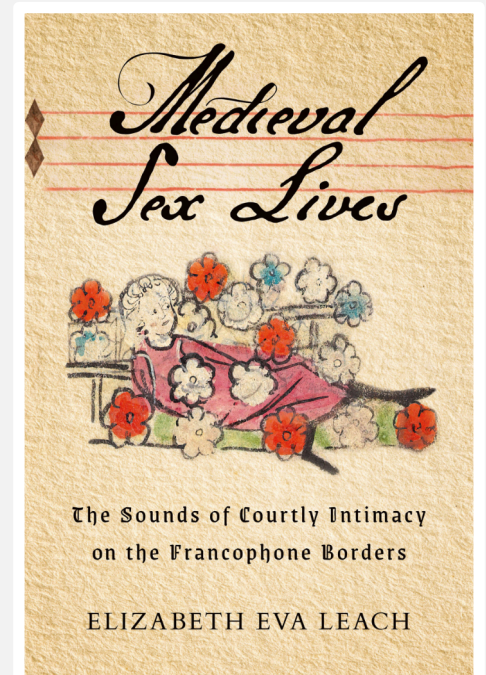
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Medieval Sex Lives examines courtly song as a complex cultural product and social force in the early fourteenth century, exploring how it illuminates the relationship between artistic production and the everyday lives of the elites for whom this music and poetry was composed and performed. In a focused analysis of the Oxford Bodleian Library's Douce 308 manuscript—a fourteenth-century compilation that includes over 500 Old French lyrics composed over two centuries alongside a narrative account of an elaborate courtly festivities centered on a week-long tournament—Elizabeth Eva Leach explores two distinct but related lines of inquiry: First, why the lyric tradition of "courtly love" had such a long and successful history in Western European culture; second, why the songs in the Bodleian manuscript would have been so important to the book's compilers, owners, and readers.

The manuscript's lack of musical notation and authorial attributions make it unusual among Old French songbooks; its arrangement of the lyrics by genre invites inquiry into the relationship between this long musical tradition and the emotional and sexual lives of its readers. Combining an original account of the manuscript's contents and their likely social milieu with in-depth musical and poetic analyses, Leach proposes that lyrics, whether read or heard aloud, provided a fertile means of propagating and enabling various sexual scripts in the Middle Ages. Drawing on musicology, literary history, and the sociology and psychology of sexuality, *Medieval Sex Lives* presents a provocative hypothesis about the power of courtly songs to model, inspire, and support sexual behaviors and fantasies.



Elizabeth Eva Leach is Professor of Music at the University of Oxford. She is the author of *Sung Birds and Guillaume de Machaut*.

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