



# **Lives of the anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe (The Middle Ages Series)**

*Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker*

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In cities and towns across northern Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a new type of religious woman took up authoritative positions in society, all the while living as public recluses in cells attached to the sides of churches. In *Lives of the Anchoresses*, Anneke Mulder-Bakker offers a new history of these women who chose to forsake the world but did not avoid it.

Unlike nuns, anchoresses maintained their ties to society and belonged to no formal religious order. From their solitary anchorholds in very public places, they acted as teachers and counselors and, in some cases, theological innovators for parishioners who would speak to them from the street, through small openings in the walls of their cells. Available at all hours, the anchoresses were ready to care for the community's faithful whenever needed.

Through careful biographical studies of five emblematic anchoresses, Mulder-Bakker reveals the details of these influential religious women. The life of the unnamed anchoress who was mother to Guibert of Nogent shows the anchoress's role as a spiritual guide in an oral culture. A study of Yvette of Huy shows the myriad possibilities open to one woman who eventually chose the life of an anchoress. The accounts of Juliana of Cornillon and Eve of St. Martin raise questions about the participation of religious women in theological discussions and their contributions to church liturgy. And the biographical study of Margaret the Lame of Magdeburg explores the anchoress's role as day-to-day religious instructor to the ordinary faithful.

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