How to Read Medieval Art

Wendy A. Stein
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Hazy, enigmatic, disturbingly uncivilized, the millennium-long Middle Ages followed the wondrous Greek and Roman eras, seemingly unable to rise above the competing mischief of Roman and Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and the Vikings, Normans, Franks, et al. Even the paganistic Celtic and Germanic traditions maintained relevance in many quarters. In that light, it is important to remember that art in the Middle Ages was “made because patrons caused it to be made.” The whimsies and preferences of the artist mattered little. And the predominant source of wealth and power at the time was, of course, the church. This enlightening book showcases splendid illustrations of thirty-eight iconic works from the MET’s vast collection—altarpieces, stained glass, tapestries, sculptures, and illuminated manuscripts, to name a few—next to Wendy Stein’s detailed discussions of why each piece provides a fundamental understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Middle Ages overall.

MATT SUTHERLAND (Winter 2017)

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