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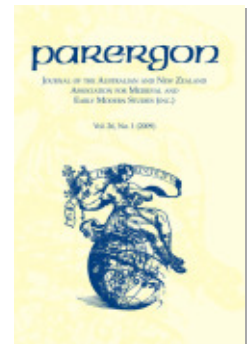
Jo Ann Kay McNamara (1931-2009)

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# OBITUARY

## Jo Ann Kay McNamara (1931-2009)

Jo Ann Kay McNamara died in New York City on 20 May 2009, aged 78. McNamara (Jo Ann, as she was known to her friends) was a renowned scholar of the role of women in medieval society, and a great friend to many members of ANZAMEMS. In particular, she was an inspiring keynote speaker and participant in the first ANZAMEMS Wellington conference of 1998, organized by the late Kim Walker, and a helpful member of *Parergon*'s Advisory Board over many years. Her major academic interest was in the early middle ages, and the role of religious women in challenging standard expectations of female agency during that period. She was also important in developing the study of medieval masculinity, notably through her pivotal article, 'The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150', in *Medieval Masculinities: regarding men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). She saw the ecclesiastical reform movement of the eleventh and twelfth centuries as creating a new kind of masculine hero, replacing that of the warrior. The ideal of chastity as pursued by women and men she saw as seeking to create a new ideal of gender equality.

Jo Ann speaks eloquently about her debt to other women in the academy who helped her, in her essay 'The Networked Life', published within *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, edited by Jane Chance (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). Completing her PhD in 1967, she spent much of her life teaching at Hunter College, New York. While her first book, derived from her doctoral thesis, concerned a late thirteenth-century diplomat, *Gilles Aycelin: servant of two masters* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1973), she subsequently turned to issues relating to women, gender, and power in early Christianity and in early medieval Europe with volumes such as *A New Song: celibate women in the first three Christian centuries* (New York: Institute for Research in History, Haworth Press, 1983), and, with John E. Halborg and E. Gordon Whatley, a volume of key primary sources, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992). Her most well known book was *Sisters in Arms: Catholic nuns through two millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). Her scholarly

activity, however, was only part of her identity. As those privileged to receive her Christmas letters can attest, Jo Ann McNamara remained a vivid observer and critic of contemporary politics, always insisting that scholarly research could never be completely separated from political engagement. The friendship and support she gave to young scholars in Australia and New Zealand, as well as the Association as a whole, will be sorely missed.

*Constant J. Mews*

