



The Art of Healing: Painting for the Sick and the Sinner in a Medieval Town

Marcia Kupfer

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Many historians of medieval art now look beyond soaring cathedrals to study the relationship of architecture and image-making to life in medieval society. In *The Art of Healing*, Marcia Kupfer explores the interplay between church decoration and ritual practice in caring for the sick. Her inquiry bridges cultural anthropology and the social history of medicine even as it also expands our understanding of how clergy employed mural painting to cure body and soul.

Looking closely at paintings from ca. 1200 in the church of Saint-Aignan-sur-Cher, a castle town in Central France, Kupfer traces their links to burial practices, the veneration of saints, and the care of the sick in nearby hospitals. Through careful analysis of the surrounding agrarian landscape, dotted with cults targeting specific afflictions, especially ergotism (then known as St. Silvan's fire), Kupfer sheds new light on the role of wall painting in an ecclesiastical economy of healing and redemption. Sickness and death, she argues, hold the key to understanding the dynamics of Christian community in the Middle Ages. *The Art of Healing* will be important reading for cultural anthropologists and historians of both medicine and religion as well as for medievalists and art historians.

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