



Dreaming of Cockaigne: Medieval Fantasies of the Perfect Life

Herman Pleij

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Imagine a dreamland where roasted pigs wander about with knives in their backs to make carving easy, where grilled geese fly directly into one's mouth, where cooked fish jump out of the water and land at one's feet. The weather is always mild, the wine flows freely, sex is readily available, and all people enjoy eternal youth.

Such is Cockaigne. Portrayed in legend, oral history, and art, this imaginary land became the most pervasive collective dream of medieval times—an earthly paradise that served to counter the suffering and frustration of daily existence and to allay anxieties about an increasingly elusive heavenly paradise.

Illustrated with extraordinary artwork from the Middle Ages, Herman Pleij's *Dreaming of Cockaigne* is a spirited account of this lost paradise and the world that brought it to life. Pleij takes three important texts as his starting points for an inspired of the panorama of ideas, dreams, popular religion, and literary and artistic creation present in the late Middle Ages. What emerges is a well-defined picture of the era, furnished with a wealth of detail from all of Europe, as well as Asia and America.

Pleij draws upon his thorough knowledge of medieval European literature, art, history, and folklore to describe the fantasies that fed the tales of Cockaigne and their connections to the central obsessions of medieval life.

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