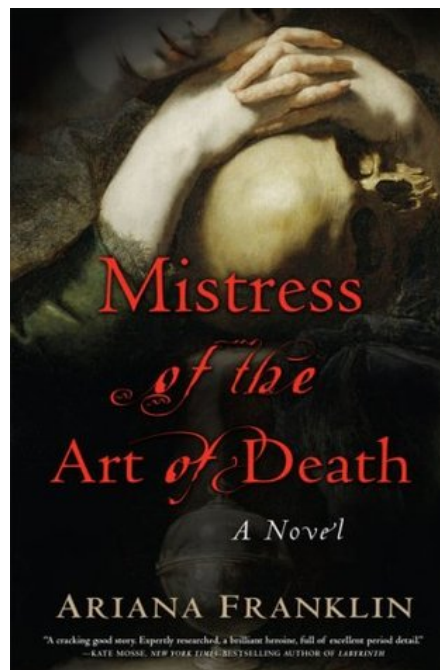




Mistress of the Art of Death

Ariana Franklin

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A chilling, mesmerizing novel that combines the best of modern forensic thrillers with the detail and drama of historical fiction. In medieval Cambridge, England, four children have been murdered. The crimes are immediately blamed on the town's Jewish community, taken as evidence that Jews sacrifice Christian children in blasphemous ceremonies. To save them from the rioting mob, the king places the Cambridge Jews under his protection and hides them in a castle fortress. King Henry II is no friend of the Jews-or anyone, really-but he is invested in their fate. Without the taxes received from Jewish merchants, his treasuries would go bankrupt. Hoping scientific investigation will exonerate the Jews, Henry calls on his cousin the King of Sicily-whose subjects include the best medical experts in Europe-and asks for his finest "master of the art of death," an early version of the medical examiner. The Italian doctor chosen for the task is a young prodigy from the University of Salerno. But her name is Adelia-the king has been sent a "mistress" of the art of death. Adelia and her companions-Simon, a Jew, and Mansur, a Moor-travel to England to unravel the mystery of the Cambridge murders, which turn out to be the work of a serial killer, most likely one who has been on Crusade with the king. In a backward and superstitious country like England, Adelia must conceal her true identity as a doctor in order to avoid accusations of witchcraft. Along the way, she is assisted by Sir Rowley Picot, one of the king's tax collectors, a man with a personal stake in the investigation. Rowley may be a needed friend, or the fiend for whom they are searching. As Adelia's investigation takes her into Cambridge's shadowy river paths and behind the closed doors of its churches and nunneries, the hunt intensifies and the killer prepares to strike again . .

Mistress of the Art of Death Details

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From Reader Review Mistress of the Art of Death for online ebook

Chrissie says

I started this 5 days ago. I was worried from the start that it would not be my cup of tea. For five days my head is telling me: Be patient! Don't be rash. Give this book a chance. You know those books that you cannot put down? Well this belongs instead with those books that you cannot motivate yourself to pick up. That is how it has been for me. Now this is only my opinion, and I am pretty darn sure that I am the "odd ball out" here! Why? Well because generally I do not like crime stories, but I thought with this one I would get history too. You do. You also get a mixture of different character types, different cultures.

Here is an excerpt about Cambridge, the town itself:

Believing it to be her business to investigate the murderer's territory and see something of the town, she was surprised but not displeased, to find that Brother Swithin, busy with a new influx of travellers, was prepared to let her go without an escort and that, in Cambridge's teeming streets, women of all castes bustled about their business unaccompanied with faces unveiled.....The town opened itself wide like a flat flower to catch what light the english sky gave it. (page 119)

Compare Cambridge to Salerno in southern Italy. I would have been happier if the story took place there, but then of course it would be a different story all together:

Adelia was clawed by homesickness. Most of all for Margaret, that loving presence. But also, oh, God, for Salerno. For orange trees and sun and shade, for aqueducts, for the sea, for the sunken Roman bath in the house she shared with her foster-parents, for the mosaic floors, for trained servants, for acceptance as her position as medica, for the facilities of the school, for salads - she hadn't eaten green stuff since arriving in this God-forsaken, meat-stuffing country.

Truly, I am trying to present a fair unbiased review. I am bending over backwards to point out the positive along with the negative. However, there aren't that many lines worth quoting.....

The central theme is about Christian children who are being killed in Cambridge during medieval times. The year is 1170. The Jews are accused. Who else would be accused, even though they are all hiding to escape the hatred of the Christians? They are in fact imprisoned. So how can they be killing the kids? And the deaths of the children are gruesome. They are sexually assaulted. their eyelids are torn off. Not a pretty sight. But Henry II doesn't believe the Jews are guilty and he certainly doesn't want them all imprisoned because then they cannot work and pay their taxes. To him! He needs their money! The murderer must be found so the Jews can go home, back to work so they can pay taxes. And for some reason the King of Sicily is involved too. He has sent three to investigate the crime. One is a Jew, Simon. One is Muslim and then there is the doctor who is to study the corpses and help figure out who the murderer is. This is Adelia, and she is a woman, trained in Salerno, but still a woman, when woman were not accepted as doctors! Not in England. So the premises are very interesting. So why am I bored? This one does not pull me. It neither gets me mad nor delights me. It doesn't move me at all.

There is humor. Adelia is so darn headstrong; it is downright amusing. Would one have such a person in the 1100s? Of course it **is** possible, but not that likely. However it has taken me 137 pages to care about her, to laugh with her sometimes. You cannot help but admire her stubbornness. She will find the murderer, if it is the last thing she does.

So what is wrong? This reads like fiction from start to finish. No, I cannot say that since I have only read

through 137 pages. From start through page 137, it reads like fiction. I do not think the style will change. You get a feel for a book right from the beginning. Rarely does that "feeling" change. The plot can take interesting turns but that is not the same as how the book portrays the individuals. So if you adore fiction over all else, this might be right up your alley.

And **most** people are curious to know who the bad guy is. Who is the murderer? Since this isn't a true story I simply cannot get terribly involved. The story does not feel real. Now that I think is a serious fault. I don't like short stories, and yet I loved Babette's Feast. Dog Tails: Three Humorous Short Stories for Dog Lovers had me laughing from start to finish! So why is this author incapable of making me enjoy a novel of historical crime? I try to stretch into different genre, that is why I keep trying books that are not what I usually read. You know, I like reading historical memoirs and about different cultures. I will continue to try and stretch my horizons, but not with this book. I am closing this book - leaving it unfinished. It is not for me. It might be just perfect for you. Vivez la différence! I can always pick it up later and give it another try. If I continue reading it now I will just get more and more annoyed and frustrated.

Brigid says

Read this pre-Goodreads. My opinions are my own:

Melanie says

3.5 stars. I wasn't sure at the beginning of this book if I would like this. For some reason, I was having trouble comprehending. I'm not even sure if that is an accurate way to describe it. But then it all came together and I really enjoyed the story. Set in the Middle Ages, this book satisfied my historical fiction addiction. I love the premise of there being forensic pathology in that time period (even if it probably isn't historically accurate) and a woman being the doctor. The "bad guy", the church, the town locals are all great characters. There is some romance which didn't bother me either. I am looking forward to the next installment (which I already have).

Recommended if this type of book is your thing :)

Eva says

Excellent historical crimefiction about an 12 th century female pathologist. Interesting period in England, i know almost nothing about. Well written. Absolutely love it. Thanks Annet and Suzanne for the recommending reviews!

Nikoleta says

Ζωντανές περιγραφές και ξυπνοί διλόγοι, που κάνουν την αφήγηση να ρέει σαν νερόκι. Το βιβλίο μας εισάγει μέσα και εύκολα στον μεσαιωνικό του κόσμο, χάρη στην ξυπνή αφήγηση της Ariana Franklin, η οποία δεν αραδιάζει στοιχένια για την εποχή λες και πρόκειται για μακροσκελή σχολική εργασία, αλλά η εισαγωγή μας γίνεται μέσα από την ίδια την πλοκή και τους ρωές, επής φαίνεται τι η μέλητη της γύρω από την μεσαιωνική Αγγλία ήταν προσεκτικήτατη. Ατρεψά τους ρωές, είχαν ντονες προσωπικήτητες και κέφτη ιδιοσυγκράσια. Το μυστήριο του βιβλίου ήταν τόσο καλοφτιαγμένο και ντονο, στε με κρήτησε ξγρυπνή λη τη νχτα, γιατί δεν μπορούσα επιτλους να κλέσω το βιβλίο πριν ανακαλύψω τον κατ? συρρο? δολοφνο. Πολ? μα πολ? ώρα?ο βιβλίο, εμαι ενθουσιασμένη. Κρμα που η bell δεν προχωρεί στην κδοση και της υπλοιπης σειρας.

Gary says

Start with Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales." Throw in a cameo of a calculating and brash King Henry II straight from "The Lion in Winter." Add some medieval mystery on par with Umberto Eco's groundbreaking "The Name of the Rose". And finish it off with the forensics of "CSI", and you'll have some appreciation for Ariana Franklin's remarkable achievement in "Mistress of the Art of Death", a fresh and inspired twist of historical fiction and crime thriller, a blockbuster of murder and mayhem told through lively, darkly humorous prose that is as educational as it is entertaining.

The setting is 12th century England. King Henry II, still smarting from the Church's reaction to the murder of archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket, is anxious to get to the bottom of the grisly murders of four children in Cambridge. The Cambridge townspeople, steeped in superstition and New Testament legend, blame the murders on the local Jewish population, who are banished to Cambridge Castle for protection against a mob bent on retribution. The wily Henry, coming to the Jews defense not from love but for the sake of continued tax revenue from his affluent moneylenders, reaches out for help from his cousin, the King of Sicily, and Italy's renowned medical school in Salerno. In response to this request, Adelia, a talented young female doctor in "the art of death" - essentially the forensics of the time - is sent to assist. In a time when women barely rate above stable animals and medical treatment is limited by an overwhelmingly powerful to relics and prayer, Adelia faces not only the formidable task of tracking down a serial killer who is obviously still on the loose, but also overcoming ignorance and prejudice in cracking a case of unthinkable evil. Notwithstanding some anachronisms - some noted and others ignored - Franklin delivers her tale with the historical authority of Edward Rutherford or Bernard Cornwell, while told in dialogue as engaging as Grisham, Forsythe, or Follett at the tops of their games. I found myself glued to the top notch "whodunit", while at the same time captivated by the vivid period detail and political intrigue of the time.

If this is not the best new fiction of 2007, it is certainly among the most original as it takes more than a few unsuspected twists in getting to a climax that is as insightful, ironic, and intelligent as it is white-knuckled. Well done, Ms. Franklin!

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

A medieval mystery in which Simon of Naples, a eunuch and a unique woman with the ability to decipher

the wounds inflicted on bodies, race to discover the identity of a violent killer of children before he strikes again.

From its opening lines, *The Mistress of the Art of Death* had me in its thrall. *"Here they come. From down the road we can hear harnesses jingling and see dust rising into the warm spring sky. Pilgrims returning after Easter in Canterbury. Tokens of the mitered, martyred Saint Thomas are pinned to cloaks and hats- the Canterbury monks must be raking it in. They're a pleasant interruption in the traffic of carts whose drivers and oxen are surly with fatigue from plowing and sowing. These people are well fed, noisy, exultant with the grace their journey has gained them. But one of them, as exuberant as the rest, is a murderer of children."* pg 1.

I have been to Canterbury and viewed the spot where Thomas Becket was cut down by the knights of Henry II. It is an amazing place. Even more so when you consider that it has been standing for so long. I loved going back there, if only in a story.

The Mistress of the Art of Death herself, Adelia, is a brilliant and headstrong heroine. She embodies what I imagine women to have been in the time before we were allowed the same privileges as men. *"She sighed with impatience. "I see you are regretting that the woman, like the doctor, is unadorned. It always happens." She glared at him. ... "Turn over that stone"- she pointed to a flint nearby-"and you will find a charlatan who will dazzle you with the favorable conjunction of Mercury and Venus, flatter your future, and sell you colored water for a gold piece. I can't be bothered with it. From me you get the actuality." He was taken aback. Here was the confidence, even arrogance, of a skilled artisan."* pg 52.

The reality that Adelia has been taught to see is not pretty. She learns all about the horrors that mankind inflicts on one another through her schooling. It has hardened her, but she seeks, beyond all else, to give voice and justice to the murdered. *"Man hovers between Paradise and the Pit... Sometimes rising to one, sometimes swooping to the other. To ignore his capacity for evil is as obtuse as blinding oneself to the heights to which he can soar."* pg 77.

And yet, Adelia is still sassy. I loved her attitude. *"He found her modest- a description, Adelia had long decided, that was applied to women who gave men no trouble."* pg 88. Though this novel could have dragged the reader through the stultifying reality of medieval attitudes and prejudices, instead Ariana Franklin takes us on a sparkling adventure filled with just enough detail to give the flavor of the time.

Recommended for those who like mysteries, historical fiction, strong heroines and perhaps some romance on the side. *The Mistress of the Art of Death*, though it touches on dark themes, was a welcome respite for me from a world that so often shows its shadows. I hope that it is an escape for you too.

Tamora Pierce says

This is the first in the Mistress of the Art of Death series, introducing Adelia, a doctor of medicine who is also trained in forensic medicine at the University of Salerno in Italy (a university which taught Christian, Jew, and Muslim alike) and her manservant the Saracen Mansur, a eunuch. When four small children are murdered in Cambridge, one of them seemingly crucified, the townspeople turn on the Jews of the city, who flee to the sheriff's castle for protection. Henry II needs the Jews for the money they pay him in taxes and he dislikes unrest of any kind. He sends to the King of Italy for Salerno-trained investigators to solve the murders. Due to miscommunications and the head of the medical department's unworldliness, Simon of Naples comes with a female doctor of death, not a male one.

And thus it begins. When Adelia relieves Prior Geoffrey of incredible pain, he becomes her friend, supplying

her with a respectable woman to live with (Adelia's own nursemaid having died on the way), a place for them to live and set up a medical establishment with Mansur to masquerade as the doctor (because women are forbidden to be doctors by the Church) and Adelia to be his assistant and translator. Together with Simon, who is Jewish, the three begin to investigate the deaths of the children, together with the help/interference of Rowley Picot, the king's tax collector.

The webs are tangled and touch on the city's flesh and bone: their killer is probably a Crusader; the idea of Jews as Christ-killers and the idea of blood debt; the omnipresence of the river and fens in allowing the killer to come and go as he pleases. In all of this there is the danger if Adelia is found out, because the church will burn her as a witch. And there are other complications. Loads of `em. Plus a surly small boy, a smelly dog, the vaulting of one of the dead children to martyr status to bring money into a convent, and a king who is trying to bring the rule of law to the realm.

I love these books. This is my second reading of MISTRESS.

Amina says

It took me some time to read this book cause I've got exams coming up, not because I didn't like it..

If you like history books, you will be pleasantly surprised with this book, I mean I liked it and I don't like historical fiction, not even Phillipa Gregory's books. I like how the main character is witty smart, intelligent girl, who is pretty independent considering the time the book was set in.

Also, the plot is great, you've got the crime, but not many details about it, which tbh I was glad there wasn't, I don't think I would have been able to read about the gore details. There are many "unbelievable" things that happened in the book, but all in all it's a good book, worth reading, and has some great remarks you'll like!
:D

Also, I think Sir Rowley Picot was inspired by Rhett Butler, or is it just me?

Karlyflower *The Vampire Ninja, Luminescent Monster & Wendigo Nerd Goddess of Canada (according to The Hulk)* says

F, is for Franklin

3 Stars

Okay, let's get the trash out of the way first, shall we?!

Ms. Franklin:

(By which I mean, I would like you to go through your novel and remove EVERYTHING which is not important to the story you are telling *cough* stupid romantic sub-plot *cough*)

Now, to be fair, it is VERY romance light – and what is there doesn't rear its ugly head until about 3/4 of the way through the novel, which is GOOD! – but I found it unnecessary and frankly **annoying**. Romance shouldn't bleed into thrillers (or suspense) stories unless it is UNAVOIDABLE! I hate it, I hate it, I hate it! And moreover, I felt like this novel should have ended when the STORY in it ended.... Right?! Am I crazy? Most of the last chapter is entirely unnecessary.... What IS that?!

Onto the actual story:

It was said in the school's mortuary that Adelia was interest in you only if you were dead.

I thoroughly enjoyed Franklin's writing style, I thought her way of showing the essence of a woman struggling within herself to exist in a man's world was exquisite! The plot was interesting and compelling; if a bit slow in getting itself actually started. I quickly became invested in Adelia's struggles both as a woman and a foreigner. I bled for the murdered children and ached to figure out who the murderer was so that I could bring him/her to justice. I longed to free the Jews trapped by bigotry in the towers of the castle. And I broke for a woman pursuing a career she would never truly be able to take credit for.

As I said, I thought the story ended when the killer was brought to justice (erm, is this spoilery? Probably but only in a minor way) but Franklin kept writing, and what came after was just, well, unnecessary for me.

Overall, yes I DID enjoy this story but it's unlikely I will read the next in the series.

Logic played no part in it; the Jews were feared because they were different and, for the townspeople, that fear and difference endowed supernatural ability.

Alison says

Being a feminist reader of historical fiction is to invite inner turmoil. Excessively plucky female characters seem inaccurate. Some are constantly winking at the reader, as if to say, "after graduating with my degree in women's studies, I opted to spend a few months time traveling so I could offer enlightened commentary on unenlightened times. I hope you appreciate my presence in your book!"

But, without those characters, I'd be even more annoyed (and depressed) by the frighteningly woman-unfriendly times, and probably stop reading historical fiction all together.

Such was my struggle with this book. The highly independent, spirited female lead doesn't really belong in her backwards setting. On one hand, that's the point, to see how far she is ahead of her time. On the other hand, she probably would have been burned as a witch if she had actually showed up in medieval England as an autopsy specialist.

(Not to mention the whole notion of "independent female" is pretty harshly undercut when she and a token handsome young man fall in love - he even rescues her from mortal peril! Unnecessary romance in mysteries is a literary pet peeve of mine that I needn't explore further here.)

But anyway, as a mystery, this book is both typical and satisfying. You meet a bunch of suspects, investigate the crime scene, endure some twists and turns, and then find out whodunit in an action-packed climax. In the book's favor, the bloody murderer is a believable surprise, which is the best resolution to a mystery.

In summary, I'd recommend this book for a plane ride where you can focus on the plot and not get bogged down in the greater implications of feminism vs. history vs. fiction.

Nancy says

You know what I have really missed in my life? A Librarian. Not a librarian, small l, but a Librarian - that mystical, magical woman who watches what you read, and what you check out again and again, and who one day says to you: "You know what? I think you'd like THIS."

I like THIS. It's a mystery, set in medieval Cambridge; its heroine is a doctor, no, a coroner; there's a big mystery about murdered children (the Jews are being accused!), and also a charming (and unlikely) romance to add to the fun. It's not Literature, and doesn't pretend to be; but I LIKE IT. It's a lovely read, nicely done, and I look forward to other mysteries featuring Adelia and Rowley.

(I'm hoping for some stuff about the Black Plague: I love the Plague! Of course, the time frame is a couple of hundred years too early; I must resign myself to disappointment. I have the feeling this author is too conscientious to go down Anachronism Avenue.)

Rachel says

Ugh. Can I give a book zero stars? Where do I start? The anachronisms in this book could take up an entire review: feminism, religious tolerance, psychology, forensics and modern medical theory... I kid you not. The author has characters eavesdropping on conversations in languages they don't speak. (Or do I assume that a 9-year old eel catcher in Cambridge speaks Arabic?) The plot is patchy and formulaic. The characters are completely one-dimensional and their relationships are not given any space to develop but change on a dime when the plot requires characters to fall in love or get along or have a fight. And the writing... Good God, I am sick of authors without restraint. In this economy can we not hire a few good editors to rein in the blatant abuse of excessive language and the inclusion of every single piece of irrelevant information to prove that the author did some research?

Richard Derus says

This book was a group read on LibraryThing...The Highly Rated Book Group sponsored it, with the game-though-gravid Vintage_Books leading us through some very trenchant questions about our impressions of both the book and the world it's set in...and thank goodness for that! It's a lot more fun to read a book in a group of like-minded people, ones who read on multiple levels like our brethren and sistern here on this site.

Adelia Vesuvia, our sleuth, is a forensic physician in a time when I didn't know such existed. The twelfth century is a time period I find extremely fascinating. I've read a fair bit about this time, focusing on English and French history and the Crusades (those horrific events!); Catholic Church history at this time, when the schism from Eastern Orthodoxy was new and the invention of religious primacy in matters of the state was being consolidated, is also an interest of mine.

This book's evocation of that time is appealing to me precisely because it's relatively new to my somewhat jaded sensibilities. Salerno as the primary focus of Western medicine is a well-trodden path; the fact that

Salernitan physicians could be women is not well-trodden, and the simple IDEA of forensics in this time...! Irresistable pulls for me, the historian-who-hated-school.

So I was disposed from the giddy-up to like the book. The author's execution was the primary unknown quantity for me. I am thrilled and delighted with the execution because the characters, while displaying anachronistic ideas and ideals, are quite believably constructed and supplied with plausible motivations for their divergent social attitudes. I can willingly suspend my disbelief at every turn where the story requires me to do so. That's very high praise from me!

Characterization, in a series mystery, is make-or-break. Do I, the reader, like this group of people enough to continue inviting them out to dinner? (The price of a hardcover book being equivalent to the price of an entree at a tablecloth restaurant; the trade paper to an entree at Applebee's or TGIFriday's; the rack-size to a value meal at the local McDonald's; which restaurant am I willing to take these characters to?) The answer, while unique to each individual, is the source of the publisher's and author's income. It behooves all parties to the preparation and publication of a mystery to consider this. The good people at Putnam, now a tentacle of the Penguin empire, have done a very very good job of making this assessment and bringing a solid, interesting cast of regulars to my table at Le Cirque.

Sir Rowley, Adelia Vesuvia's English suitor, is a fine example. He's three dimensional in his pursuit of her, not simply presented as out to get some one thing; I think of some of the characters in Ellis Peters' Brother Cadfael mysteries as contrasts to this quality of characterization. We're given to understand that Sir Rowley has goals and ambitions that Adelia Vesuvia can both forward and threaten in equal measure. His ultimate place in her life, and her in his, isn't a foregone conclusion. Both characters are presented as struggling with what the other means to them on multiple planes. That's just plain good storytelling. It will keep me buying hardcovers as long as Franklin keeps doing it.

The minor characters, eg Gyltha the housekeeper and Mansur the Moor, are deftly drawn as well. They don't, in contrast to many series mysteries, come across as convenient mouth-pieces for the author's needed plot developments. (*cough*PhryneFisher'sDot*cough*)

Finally, the integration of real political developments like Henry II's move to take control of the Church's legal framework in his empire, is seamless enough to take a moment to recall as factual instead of created. It's necessary to move this plot forward. But it's also the historical reality. Well done, madam! Seldom achieved in fiction, still less the less-respected "genre" fiction that mysteries are published as.

This is a four-and-a-half star recommended book. Sally forth and procure it from yon bookery.

Aimee says

In coming to the decision to purchase this book, *Mistress of the Art of Death*, I did my background research first. I visited a fair few blogs that had reviewed the book, and found that the reviews were so entirely positive that I couldn't wait to get my grubby paws on the book myself. The bloggers were not wrong (thank the gods). This novel is a gloriously delicious read.

Set in the Middle Ages as a medieval mystery, our protagonist has been asked to travel to Cambridge (United Kingdom) from the Middle East, to research the mystery behind a group of local children who have been tortured to death and mutilated in a similar manner to one another. Short in stature, Dr. Vesuvia Adelia Rachel Ortese Aguilar of Salerno is a strange and unlikely heroine, and a Doctor of the Dead, meaning she is a medically-qualified examiner of dead bodies. Fiesty and scientifically-minded, Dr. Aguilar has little other

choice than to work undercover, considering this is medieval England where female doctors are few and far between because of society's view of women. Add to this the fact that she can apparently derive messages from the bodies of the dead and Dr Aguilar's the perfect candidate to be accused of witchcraft and set to burning. And so, under the wing of her valiant protector and old friend Simon of Naples, Dr. Aguilar acts as the servant assistant to her own Arab slave, Mansur, who plays the role of 'Doctor' to all external prying eyes.

As a particularly valuable doctor's assistant, our headstrong protagonist struggles with the case of the mutilated kidlets on both a personal and professional level, and her search for the killer becomes more and more desperate, as further children are picked off by an unknown murderous beast. But could the animal be closer than she thinks?

I read this book in one sitting. That in itself should alert you to how much I enjoyed this read, considering I have the attention span of a gnat when the book waives from awesomeness for longer than a few pages. And the book is 507 pages long. So, I think you'll agree - no mean feat.

The reason it's such a robust dish of perverse playfulness, I believe, boils down to the expert writing. It's a perfect balance of detail and sparseness, and makes you forget that this medieval period could have been a bit boring for the casual reader of history. That's if anyone less expert had written this book. In fact, the style reminds me a bit of another little masterpiece, Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth* (little?! Hah!), although *Mistress of the Art of Death* is less focused on lifetimes and more focused on moments. It's what makes a fast-paced story, I guess! If you like the sound of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* with a splash of *The Da Vinci Code* then this book is for you.

Besides being a cracker of a crime thriller, *Mistress of the Art of Death* is an intensely satisfying historical read too. There are so many paths this book could explore further - the persistence of a little disease called 'cholera', Jewish/Islamic/Christian fireworks, gallant knights returning from crusade, scientific enlightenment intruding on religious fervour, corrupt and ignorant priors and prioresses...the list is extensive. YES, I will admit - there are some historical follies rather than facts, but I promise you the story's entertainment will have the most uptight historian turning a blind eye to its mistakes. And as it's set in the period when mighty Plantaganet Henry II was occupying the throne, the author puts a fascinatingly rare and positive spin on the reign of a king who has only been known to history for commanding the murder of Thomas Becket, the then Archbishop of Canterbury.

If you really want though, you can go barging past all this historical 'nonsense', and there's still a bloody good read to be found under the rubble.

As for characterisation, Dr Aguilar herself is amazing - I don't quite understand, being a hopeless romantic myself, why I am drawn to this woman who has 'no time for love' and little time to be emotionally swayed by the horror of the children's tortured bodies. She is so far beyond the submissive stereotype of a Middle Eastern woman it seems to make perfect sense to put her into a doctor's role in the middle of the 12th century. She is fighting against prejudices that not even modern time can necessarily remedy, but of course as it is with the most admirable women of sense, strength and integrity guard inner empathy and vulnerable hope. And yes, for all the romanciphiles out there - there're a few heated moments for your imagination to enjoy.

For true lovers of crime fiction, some of the twists aren't all that surprising, but it'll still keep you entertained for long enough to see if you figured out the clues correctly. If you're not into crime fiction this doubles as a fantastic historical fiction novel as well - just don't take it too seriously. If you're a fan of neither genre, I still challenge you not to enjoy this book.

Yep, I gobbled this book up, and then licked each of my fingers afterwards. It's that good.

Rating: 5 perfectly scrumptious stars for Mistress of the Art of Death.

Felicia says

I am a historical mystery geek, sometimes I'll go on a tear and read a whole series in a row, like the Peabody mysteries or Lindsay Davis' Rome mysteries, so I picked up this book after reading great reviews. I was not disappointed!

Very interesting setting, mainly compelling because of the main character, a medieval woman doctor. Felt well researched, a serial killer thriller set long ago in a fascinating world. Leans a bit too much in the "womanly" direction sometimes (I felt the romance was a bit shoehorned in) but DEFINITELY will be downloading the next one to my Kindle.

Ingrid says

An Italian female physician/pathologist is sent to England to solve the murder of a few children. Almost 5 stars. It's written with humor and I really enjoyed it. Thank you Annet for the recommendation!

Annet says

I'm always looking for excellent historic fiction. There's so much around and not all books are best quality.... Like more readers here, as I understand it, I had trouble getting into this one, not an easy read, but once I got past that barrier, it was good *and* getting better and better... An intelligent medieval murder mystery, solid historical background, Plantagenet period (Henry II), interesting. Not really an easy read for me, so I had to stay focussed, which is okay, because it was good. Will certainly find the sequels to this series of Adelia Aguilar, Mistress of the Art of Death. Recommended for those who like historical fiction. Solid 4 stars.

1171 - Adelia Aguilar is a rare thing in medieval Europe, a woman who has trained as a doctor. Her speciality is the study of corpses, a skill that must be concealed if she is to avoid accusations of witchcraft. But in Cambridge a child has been murdered, others are disappearing, and King Henry II has called upon a renowned Italian investigator to find the killer - fast. What the king gets is Adelia, his very own Mistress of the Art of Death...

Jonfaith says

You are a drab, she told herself, seduced into infatuation by a soldier's tale. Outremer, bravery, crusade, it is illusory romance.

Greg wrote this <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...> a few years back and the crux is applicable here. I was looking for a detour, something fun after so much Rome, plague and Theory. I found Ms. Franklin's premise interesting, if highly improbable. Such proceeded and the tale veered into the impossible. The

protagonist maintains a bubble of certainty which is repellent to most measures of Medieval mindset. This may work with Bones or the Gringa Detective on The Bridge but a stoic investigator appears almost silly during the reign of Henry II. The plot is standard, someone is abducting children and murdering them. local logical implicates the Jews. The service of three investigators from Salerno are summoned. Keen-witted urchins and tax collectors with golden hearts contribute greatly. Henry has the best lines, chewing through scenes like Peter O'Toole and becoming the Deus ex machina to a plot leaning painfully on the Crusades and the corpse of Thomas Becket. Consider me underwhelmed.

Diana says

I was quite captivated by this book. As a medieval scholar, I had some initial doubts I'd like it because I am often disappointed by books that feature 20th/21st century concerns and situations in a medieval setting (investigating mysteries, forensic science, in this case). All too often, the authors don't get the historical elements right, and the story ends up being too anachronistic.

Ariana Franklin, however, knows her medieval history. The story is a page-turner as well, and the world Franklin describes is richly and accurately drawn, and manages to dispel many of the myths about medieval life that too many people have. In that respect, this book is a gem, although I do think there will be those readers who will think it's not really accurate because they haven't done enough real research about the "real" medieval times.

I love the main character - she is a no-nonsense, outspoken, and educated intelligent woman who nevertheless understands all too well the obstacles women of her time had to face - and knows how and when to pick her battles.

For those who believe this book is anachronistic and inauthentic, I'd like to add the following:

It's more plausible than most people realize. Salerno WAS well-known for its medical training of women (as well as many foreigners, including Arabs and Africans, Muslim and otherwise), and the medical training was far ahead of the rest of Europe - so the medical elements in the novel were accurate. There was a famous female physician about a century before this story is set, named Trotula, who wrote two medical books about the diseases of women and their treatments that were used by male medics/physicians in order to treat their female patients more efficiently. Trotula even occupied the chair of medicine at the medical School of Salerno.

Here's a link to a web page about Trotula: <http://www.distinguishedwomen.com/biogra...>

Franklin did her research on Salerno and women physicians, and Adelia is based loosely on women like Trotula.

Actually, in 12th century England, under Henry II and his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine, although in no way "friendly" to women by our standards, women did have more relative freedom (legally and socially) than they would by the mid-1200s, when the Church became more oppressive toward women's education - and then secular laws followed suit. In the 11th and 12th centuries, especially in England and Northern France, women who chose the religious life (as well as many women of noble and royal lineage) had access to a fairly well-rounded education. Eleanor of Aquitaine in England had a great hand in that.

Just thought I'd add my .02 worth about this book - which I gave 5 stars to BECAUSE it was NOT as historically anachronistic as other medieval "mystery thrillers" tend to be.

I look forward to reading the second in the series.
