

Lois L. Huneycutt. *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship*. Boydell, 2003. pp. ix + 207 + 4 b/w maps.

**B**orn in 1080, the princess Edith of Scotland is best known today as Matilda the wife and queen of Henry I of England. This daughter of Malcolm II of Scotland and the Anglo-Saxon Margaret was born and raised in Scotland and was baptized with the name Edith. In 1100 she was married to Henry I and, somewhere around the same time, started going by the name of Matilda. Although it is not clear exactly when or why this name change occurred, it was permanent, and from around 1100 until her death in Westminster in 1118 the queen would continue to be known as Matilda. Given that her own seal employed the formula "Matilda II," it would seem that the queen herself accepted this name change.

The uncertainty surrounding the name change reminds us of the gaps, shadows, and dead-ends that so often accompany the quest to recover a medieval woman's life. In this work,

Lois L. Huneycutt attempts to reconstruct as much as possible about the activities and motivations of Queen Matilda, and to assess how Matilda did or did not fit into any so-called model of medieval queenship. Of necessity, there are occasions when inference, reasoned speculation, and suggestion take priority over definitive conclusions, but, in all instances, Huneycutt is fair to the evidence and provides fine examples of one of the feminist scholar's most necessary skills: the ability to interpret one piece of evidence from as many angles as possible and to draw conclusions even from evidence that seems contradictory or ambiguous (witness Huneycutt's discussion of Matilda and literacy here). Overall, this book is a good example of just how much one can recreate about a medieval life by following the old-fashioned virtues of wide reading, detailed contextualization, and making the most of every piece of

evidence. Even so, the book remains quite short (150 pages of text, plus appendices), and this is sobering evidence that the surviving traces of medieval women's lives are simply never going to be as numerous as those for medieval men in equivalent social positions. Huneycutt works well with a range of sources (the *vita* of Matilda's mother Margaret; letters; numerous chronicles mined for anything to do with Matilda; and charters in particular), and the fact that she has created a flesh and blood image from snippets tells us at once the successes as well as the problems of medieval feminist scholarship—the problem that sometimes snippets are all we have to work with, but success in that with hard work and imagination, it is still possible to create something useful out of them.

The book starts with a chapter on Edith's girlhood, drawn from the *vita* of Margaret (commissioned by Matilda herself) as well as numerous chronicles. Chapter Two examines Germanic (particularly Anglo-Saxon) queenship in

the centuries before Matilda providing both a useful survey of trends in queenship and a good grounding for how Matilda will or will not conform to earlier models. Chapter Three investigates just how much income and land Matilda held. Although sources such as charters are highly ambiguous (land grants tell us about land that was given away, not about land that was kept), Huneycutt establishes that Matilda held substantial land in London and Rutland as well as the lordships of at least three nunneries and most likely more. Chapter Four is likely to be the most appealing for scholars of medieval women's public authority. Here Huneycutt analyzes a range of sources (e.g., Matilda's letters on the Investiture Controversy; the 33 charters she is known to have issued) to argue that Matilda exercised substantial political authority and maintained her own staff of functionaries who worked for her rather than for the king. Pages 78–79 make the valuable point that we should not be side-tracked by trying to put Matilda into some modern category of “vice-regent”;

rather, we should investigate the actions she performed and the actions that society allowed her to perform. Henry's travels to Normandy gave Matilda periods of authority in her own right, manifested by her activities in the curia and in both judicial and ecclesiastical matters. But equally, we must not ignore the political power of the queen's intercessionary activities, activities that could take place at any time and not solely in the king's absence. In Chapter Five, Huneycutt seeks the motivations of Matilda's religious patronage while Chapter Six examines artistic patronage. Inference and reading between the lines necessarily play a large role in trying to isolate motivation, but Huneycutt's arguments are always reasonable and never taken beyond their limits. The book concludes with Matilda's death in 1118 and the curious fact that medieval chroniclers later paid little attention to her. Of course, the fact that after 1135 Stephen of Blois' supporters claimed that the marriage of Henry and Matilda was invalid did not help Matilda's posthumous reputation in some quarters.

Finally, Appendix 1 includes a handlist of Matilda's 33 *acta*, with good descriptive summaries. Appendix 2 features a translation of the long version of the *vita* of Margaret. This text has been translated several times before, but it is useful to have a translation within the same covers as a study of the patron herself.

The book will be of interest to researchers in medieval feminist studies. By this I do not mean that it is characterized by explicit references to feminist theories or scholars, for it is not. The Introduction refers to earlier students of "women's history" in its summary of past scholarship, but it does not enter into the debate over women's history versus feminist history. Nonetheless, the issues that Huneycutt explores concerning the ways in which a medieval woman could exercise authority, and whether that authority was in her own right or merely as a stand-in for her husband, obviously go to the heart of feminist scholarship.

At some points the ongoing argument was overshadowed

by the individual case studies. That is, the argument tended to be most explicit in certain select parts of the book (e.g., the Conclusion), whereas some readers might appreciate a more ongoing and cumulative presentation of the argument. For example, we read that, in some instances, Matilda's exercise of authority stemmed from her own energy and initiative while in others, the political context of the time provided the opportunity. Slightly more clarification of which activities fell under which umbrella would have been appreciated and would have helped the reader see the argument build on itself chapter by chapter even more clearly. Overall, however, this book certainly succeeds in what it has set out to do, and it will be a key addition to the study of medieval queenship.

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"Wouldest thou wit thy  
Lord's meaning in this  
thing? Wit it well: Love  
was his meaning."

□ *Julian of Norwich,*  
*Revelations of Divine Love*