

The Books and the Life of Judith of Flanders, by Mary Dockray-Miller. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015. Pp. 160; 26 color plates, 5 b/w figures, 1 b/w table. ISBN: 9781409468356.

The Books and the Life of Judith of Flanders offers a “patronage biography” of Judith of Flanders. Mary Dockray-Miller focuses on four spectacular Gospel books that Judith commissioned. In contrast to other women of her class who employed land or property as their means of patronage, Judith used objects to create friendships, demonstrate status, and forge networks. Dockray-Miller’s study furthers the scholarship of others like Kimberly LoPrete, Linda Mitchell, and Louise Wilkinson on medieval countesses. Refreshingly, Dockray-Miller eschews the characterization of Judith’s patronage and influence as “extraordinary” and casts this activity as normative. Hence, this book adds to the normalization of elite women’s power.

Dockray-Miller’s examination follows the course of Judith’s life (ca.1032-1094). The introduction places Judith both within the context of aristocratic power and the recent historiographical contributions on medieval aristocratic women. Examination of Judith’s life begins in chapter one. Like many medieval elites, Judith’s childhood remains shrouded in uncertainty, and it is only as a married woman that Dockray-Miller can really begin to trace her life. In 1055, Judith married Tostig of the Godwin house and became “the lady of Northumbria” (although she and Tostig did not seem to spend much of their time there). Judith began her patronage of manuscripts and other precious objects during this marriage. The next chapter focuses on the production of the Gospel books, which started in England in the 1060s. Although Judith ranks as the foremost patron of manuscripts in Anglo-Saxon England, Dockray-Miller points out that many other women also supported the creation of manuscripts. The question of where Judith’s scriptorium was located is an important question for this chapter and Dockray-Miller posits it was probably somewhere in the south. While it is difficult to determine the extent of Judith’s role in the design of the books, Dockray-Miller makes the persuasive argument that Judith likely had a great deal of input into the production of the third Gospel book because it guided her personal devotions. These books were a demonstration of Judith’s status, and she would need affirmation of her status as she and Tostig were driven out of England into exile in Flanders by the Northern Rebellion. In chapter 3, Dockray-Miller argues that the portraits in the fourth Gospel book were a way for Judith to use her power as a corrective to Tostig’s loss of Northumbria. After Tostig’s death, Judith remained in Flanders for a time, but eventually married

Welf IV, duke of Bavaria, with whom she had two sons. Like late Anglo-Saxon England, the eleventh-century German Empire was beset by political rivalries and instability. In chapter 4, Dockray-Miller traces Judith's use of patronage to forge important bonds with highly placed communities and individuals, which helped to solidify her family's power in the midst of this political turbulence. The final chapter in the book addresses the afterlife of Judith's patronage, specifically that of the abbey of Weingarten. Whether or not Judith was responsible for introducing the cult of St. Oswald to the monks of Weingarten or donating the important Relic of the Holy Blood, Dockray-Miller concludes that the monks themselves celebrated Judith as their venerable patron in later histories of the monastery. This chapter acts as a fitting conclusion to the life of a woman who fostered the creation of beautiful objects and who used them to forge bonds with prominent laity and clergy.

A particular strength of this patronage biography is the historical context that the author provides for the creation of the Gospel books. Dockray-Miller carefully unpacks Judith's life to examine her patronage choices and how that patronage developed in response to her own life circumstances. Patronage was used to celebrate her power, but also to restore her status and create important relationships that could help her elevate her position—and that of her husbands and children. Author and publisher are also to be commended for including extensive images—some in color—of these Gospel books and for the appendices of translated documents, as both serve to strengthen and illuminate Dockray-Miller's analysis.

Dockray-Miller also places Judith and her patronage in other contexts. By tracing Judith's travels, the author reconstructs the possible artistic influences and objects that would have informed the design of her Gospel books. Like many women of her class, Judith did not live in just one place. Born in Flanders, she moved to Anglo-Saxon England when she married Tostig, then back to Flanders in exile, and then finally to Bavaria upon her marriage to Duke Welf IV. Dockray-Miller follows Judith's geographic itinerancy and crosses several geopolitical boundaries. As a result, she presents a rich picture of possible sources of art that informed the production of these manuscripts and demonstrates how Judith's patronage was a constant in her life as she moved throughout medieval Europe. Such itinerancy was common to women of elite standing, and Dockray-Miller captures this reality—and challenge—of aristocratic women's lived experience.

A question that is not answered in Dockray-Miller's otherwise commendable treatment of Judith, however, is why she, unlike most other elite women, did

not control any land. This is an intriguing anomaly and merits further consideration. Was Judith, in fact, anomalous because of her lack of landed property or was her use of treasure and material objects more common among elites than currently understood? Did Judith exchange land for material objects because of her own particular circumstance? Or did Judith actually control land, but the documents recording this control are no longer extant? Furthermore, Dockray-Miller asserts throughout the book that Judith's Gospel books reflected her "aesthetics" and "good taste." Clearly they were valuable and valued objects, but did contemporaries regard Judith as a woman of discerning taste or queen of excess? These assertions about Judith's aesthetic sense detract somewhat from the author's otherwise solid analysis of how these books helped Judith to shape her identity, gain influence, and forge friendships.

Blending textual evidence with artistic patronage allows Dockray-Miller to outline the important moments of Judith's life and her interactions with other elites—secular and sacred. This patronage biography adds much to our understanding of how elite women coped with the political turbulence of the eleventh century and how they were able to translate failure into success through their artistic sponsorship.

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