

ANNEKE B. MULDER-BAKKER, ed., *Living Saints of the Thirteenth Century: The Lives of Yvette, anchoress of Huy; Juliana of Cornillon, Author of the Corpus Christi Feast; and Margaret the Lame, anchoress of Magdeburg* (Brepols, 2011) ISBN 9782503520773 (hardcover); ix + 416 pages; EUR 95 excl. tax.

The translations contained in this volume represent the most up-to-date English editions of the *vitae* of three important holy women from the thirteenth century: widowed anchoress and mother Yvette of Huy (1158-1228); prioress, prophetess and recluse Juliana of Cornillon (1192/3-1258); and disabled anchoress Margaret the Lame of Magdeburg (ca. 1210-1250). Blossoming interest in new forms of female devotional practices in the period is testified by Brepols' publication of relevant volumes in the *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts* (MWTC) series, to which this current work also belongs (vol. 20). This publication complements earlier releases of the Middle English critical editions of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina the Astonishing, and Marie of Oignies (MWTC, vol. 23), and modern English translations of the *vitae* of Christina the Astonishing, Margaret of Ypres, and Lutgard of Aywières (MWTC, vol. 19). Scholarship of such texts finds on the significance of the *mulieres religiosae*, a heterogeneous grouping of holy women who expressed their devotion both as lay women and monastics.

The translations are supple and engaging throughout, balancing accessibility of English idiom with academic precision. Footnotes provided are extremely useful, pinpointing Biblical references and intriguing particularities of

Latin *lexis* for further study. Appended to each translation is a chronology of key events in the protagonist's lifetime, and significant happenings afterwards. These timelines are most welcome, offering the reader a means to place *vitae's* happenings in broader social and historical contexts.

Each translation is preceded by an interpretive essay on the given text. Barbara Newman's (Northwestern University) introduction to Juliana of Cornillon's biography deftly situates the saint in her specific socio-cultural milieu (146-175.) The saint is much studied due to her tireless promotion of the Corpus Christi Feast, a rite she prophesied via mystical vision. Newman's clear dissection of the particularities of the Feast and its institution provide excellent anchoring material for research on this topic (162-170). Discussions relating to the network of powerful clerics supporting Juliana (165-6), her support system of other religious women, and her staunch opponents (152-6) also show the intricate relationships in which the saint was embroiled. Moreover, such analyses point to the complexities of Juliana's life as holy woman, balancing spiritual power and ecclesiastical obedience. An appendix also contains translations of two other documents highly important to the study of Juliana's influence as a religious woman: the papal bull of Pope Urban IV to Eve of St-Martin in 1264 signalling the official adoption of the Corpus Christi Feast and the letter of Robert, bishop of Liège, establishing the Feast in his diocese in 1246 (298-302). Jo Ann McNamara's (Hunter College, City University of New York; sadly now deceased) introductory essay to the Life of Yvette of Huy amply delineates the key issues thrown up by the text (49-66). The unique positioning of Yvette, mother and widow, as an exemplarily pious 'manly woman' is well situated, as is her dislike of men and their sexual filth (50-54). Yvette's devotion to charity, the sick, and poor is also highlighted (60-66). Analyses of potential disobedience on the part of the saint, including her possible refusal to detail her visions to her confessor, are nuanced and subtly drawn (58). The translators' introduction to Margaret's *vita* grounds the biography briefly, highlighting central research questions, including suffering as a form of particularly female devotion (305-309). Compared to the other translations' introductions in this volume, this essay feels overly abbreviated, skimming over the surface of Margaret and her context. However, it does provide references to other relevant recent scholarship. In any case, the appearance of an English translation of Margaret's biography is significant. Margaret is under-represented in contemporary hagiographical studies. Most likely this is because of her *vita's* omission from the *Acta Sanctorum* and the relatively recent appearance of a critical Latin edition in the early 1990s. The text's neglect plausibly also relates to a lack of widely available English translation. Gertrud Jaron Lewis (Laurentian University) and Tilman Lewis' translation of Margaret's *vita* in this volume thus responds to a significant gap and acts as a stimulus for interrogation of this frequently ignored text.

A canon of twenty-seven thirteenth-century saints' Lives from the southern Low Countries is provided, offering a useful starting point for research (43-5). Groupings organised by gender and religious activity (holy laymen/women or nuns/monks) offer insight into the variance of the *corpus* at a glance. Indeed, Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker's (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen) general introduction

emphasises the importance of reckoning with the inherent differences between the lives of the holy laity and those in ecclesiastical institutions (3-5; 1-42). This 'diversity,' she argues, is often marginalised in recent scholarship in favour of a focus on monastics, and must be explored to its fullest. It is essential to unpack the term *mulieres religiosae*, carefully discerning typology and authorial methodology. Mulder-Bakker provides three broad subsets of *mulieres religiosae*: (1) holy virgins and beguines (10-18); (2) holy matrons, widows and holy knights (18-21); (3) anchoresses and hermits (21-27). In each instance, the author provides synoptic mini-essays with many examples of individuals fitting her classifications drawn from her canon. These sections function as sharp analytical overviews, essential reading for researchers seeking a starting point with the material. Given the book's broader focus on three female religious biographies, Mulder-Bakker's concentration on material relating to female individuals is natural, though these pages also contain brief discussions of holy men. Further, Mulder-Bakker highlights instances of mobility between categories, ensuring her taxonomy fits the fluid nature of the religious lifestyles under discussion. For example, Mary of Oignies, Odilia of Liège, and Yvette of Huy were all widows and entered anchorholds (19, 21) – thereby variously positioned in sets (2) and (3).

Mulder-Bakker urges scholars to recognise the texts as definitively not 'historically trustworthy' biographies, but instead carefully selected and shaped excerpts with varying claims to authenticity (5). James of Vitry utilises the term *fragmenta* in his prologue of the *vita* of Mary of Oignies to signify circulating stories relating to a saint (29). Mulder-Bakker draws on Vitry's terminology to explain a tripartite production process: the saint's body and actual life (relics), which generate stories about the saint (*fragmenta*), then concretised by authors into hagiography (*exempla*) (29-30). Crucially, an *exemplum* is glossed specifically as a story which re-occurs in the instance it is read or spoken: *vitae* reanimate saints and thus ultimately coincide with the saint's corporeal remains and relics, offering traces of real presence (30). Mulder-Bakker argues that these *vitae* are not, *sensu stricto*, hagiographies. None of the texts were intended to promote the saints for canonisation, and all focus on the experiences of women living salvation very much in the contemporary world (30-2). For this reason, she maintains that rather than bearing the label *vita*, such a text should be identified as *Liber Vitae* (book of life) (32-3). Again, James of Vitry's vocabulary inspires Mulder-Bakker, as he proclaimed that Ur-beguine Mary of Oignies 'read' to her community from 'the book of life' through her manner of existence (33). There is a dearth of references to intended audience within the works, though most extant manuscript copies are found in male monasteries (37-42). Cistercian abbeys such as Wahlberg and Sint-Truiden welcomed men and women from the urban centres on feast days. In this monastic setting the lay urban folk were exposed to the *vitae* and such vital, exemplary narratives played into their own religious development and self-fashioning (40).

With such attention paid to the constructed-ness of the texts themselves, greater attention to detail regarding the precise composition of the canonical corpus would be most welcome. Inclusion in Mulder-Bakker's corpus depends on fulfilment of the category of Latin *vitae* composed shortly after the death of late

twelfth- and thirteenth-century religious men and women of the Southern Low Countries (6-8). Despite some deliberation on selection criteria and the canonical *vitae*, comments here are unsatisfying as to important issues regarding other scholars' consideration of *vitae* either within or outside of such a canon. The inclusion of Margaret of Magdeburg is unconvincing, seeming primarily to fit the editor's desire for the text's inclusion in the volume. Though she lived in the thirteenth-century and lived a holy life, Margaret did not live in the region of Brabant- Liège (6). Her biographer, as Mulder-Bakker points out, refers to beguines in the text and there is evidence the work had an audience in the medieval Southern Netherlands (6, 33) However, Friar Johannes uses the example of the beguines to point out Margaret's superior religiosity, not simply to group her in with them (388). Margaret is not included in other canons of female biographies of the period, including that provided by Walter Simons in his 2010 chapter 'Holy Women of the Low Countries: A Survey' (647-8). Nor is she included in *City of Ladies*, Simons' seminal study of beguines in the medieval Low Countries from 2001. Additionally, more analysis of variances within the canonical corpus more generally would be enlightening. For example, Mulder-Bakker includes Alice of Schaerbeek and Odilia of Liège in her canon, whereas Walter Simons explicitly excludes the former (*Cities of Ladies*, 170n.9) and Margot H. King and Ludo Jongen's 2007 bibliography (online, via *Monastic Matrix*) elides the latter in groupings of thirteenth-century female hagiographies from the region. Nevertheless, this work is indispensable for scholars of thirteenth-century female devotion in the Low Countries, whether as an entry-point to the field generally or for specific analyses of the given saints.

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