



Dockray-Miller, Mary, *The Books and the Life of Judith of Flanders*,  
(Farnham: Ashgate, 2015). Hardback. pp. 176. 36 colour and 5 b&w  
illustrations. R.R.P. £54.00. ISBN 978-1-4094-6835-6.

---

*Review*

One of the obstacles facing scholarly attention to women and their roles in the Middle Ages is the relative lack of source material from which to form a faithful biographical account. That there were certain women who served as remarkable figures in Europe's medieval history is certain, and Mary Dockray-Miller's book brings together textual accounts of patronage and recent scholarship to confirm that Judith of Flanders is among those women.

Judith's life spanned a period of political turmoil for Europe and England, including events surrounding the Norman Conquest and the investiture dispute in the Holy Roman Empire. This, alongside her family ties and marital situation, presented challenges to Judith's autonomy as an individual and to her social status. Through the analysis of texts as well as the objects that Judith commissioned and donated, and her patronage history, Dockray-Miller shows how Judith was able to secure and maintain her social status and power, and be remembered for her largesse and piety. As well as an introduction with biographical and historical background, the book comprises five chapters, each covering a major period in Judith's life.

Dockray-Miller's introduction begins by linking the present and past, presenting the image of Judith in modern culture as a well-known patron of art, literature and of Weingarten Abbey. She includes references to a video game depicting Judith and invites the reader to view on YouTube the annual *Blutritt* of Judith's Holy Blood relic through the streets of Weingarten, Germany. That a comprehensive biography of this significant figure is problematical, the author acknowledges, and she proposes a "patronage biography" by way of analysing the

artworks Judith commissioned and donated. Dockray-Miller is also interested in showing that this pattern of patronage was undertaken by Judith as a cultural strategy to secure power and status. As such, this volume can contribute to the study of how middle-tier aristocratic women could wield power and influence that would have been more easily attained by monarchs and regents. Judith's patronage practices differ from women of higher social status in that she had no access to land, did not found or endow any monastic houses, and that her gifts consisted entirely of "moveable goods" with attention to how she wanted to be portrayed, using "literacy and patronage as a way to define and assert her status." (9)

There is a note on how hagiographic material is used; the author does not wish to discard any reference to Judith in the few documents that mention her, but treats them with reasonable caution, extracting fact from surrounding fiction. Throughout the biography, Dockray-Miller refers to various sources with which Judith's life story can be constructed, and gives a survey of criticism and scholarly opinion, noting similarities with other stories where relevant. This way, she is able to draw on several texts to both date major events in Judith's life and to discern a pattern in Judith's deeds and influence on her contemporaries.

One of the sources presented in the first chapter on Judith's life in Northumbria as the wife of Tostig Godwin is Symeon of Durham's *Libellus de Exordio*, where Judith is mentioned giving a donation to gain entry to see the shrine of St Cuthbert. Her journey to Rome is composed from accounts in the *Vita Wulfstani* and *Gesta Pontificum*, enabling the author to describe an altar of porphyry now in Cluny that is associated with Judith and her largesse.

The second chapter concerns the four Gospel books that Judith commissioned for herself, remarkable because they are the only personally-commissioned set of books remaining after the loss of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts of this period. With metal treasure covers, jewel-encrusted, ornate, gold lettering, miniatures and full-page illustrations, they are an impressive example of secular patronage by a woman

in late Anglo-Saxon England. Dockray-Miller surveys the scholarship on these Gospels, referring to the work and analyses of Rosenthal and McGurk, but convincingly disputes the location of the scriptorium workshop being in Judith's household in York, using contemporary accounts of Tostig's southern land holdings, and information about one of the artists who is also credited with the Crowland Psalter.

Judith's Gospel books are now located in New York, Fulda and Monte Cassino, and Dockray-Miller gives a survey of these manuscripts and their decoration, and the scholarship linking them. She addresses the representations of the Evangelists, with special focus on the Monte Cassino manuscript, using as a reference the *Speyer Golden Gospels* and the *Trinity Gospels* to note stylistic as well as compositional similarities. She suggests that two birds, one an anthropomorphized St John, the other a transcended eagle, represent two versions of John rather than two different birds as was previously thought.

The third chapter tells of Judith's exile in Flanders after the rebellion in Northumbria. Several historical events are related where some detail can be discerned of Tostig's or Judith's actions and movements, and Tostig's role in William's conquest of England. The question of exactly how Tostig died at the Battle of Stamford Bridge is demonstrated in texts that are incongruent, such as the *Vita Ædwardi*, *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, and that of William of Malmesbury and Oderic Vitalis. Judith's donor portraits from this time attest to her intentional depiction as culturally sophisticated, pious and wealthy, despite her being dependent on her half-brother Baldwin V, proclaiming her social status as the once potential queen of England.

Rather than live as an exile or go into a convent with her mother-in-law in St Omer, Judith took an active role in decisions governing her life and image. From the *Ea Tempestate* Dockray-Miller gleans important details about Judith's marriage to Welf IV: the messengers of marriage negotiation dealt directly with Judith rather

than her family, Judith travelled to Germany to meet Welf before the negotiations had been concluded, and she turned down the proposal until she could ascertain Welf's social and financial suitability and security. Although Welf was affected by the investiture dispute in the Holy Roman Empire, Judith's new home at Ravensburg remained secure. In addition to providing Welf with two sons, Judith gave one of her Gospels to the dowager empress Agnes, and became patron of Weingarten Abbey. Her gifts helped assert her status and assisted Welf's political position.

The last Chapter deals with the Holy Blood relic that Judith is said to have been given from Baldwin before his death, and which she donated to Weingarten along with relics of St Oswald, and for which she is still venerated. Referring to the *De Inventione Sanguinis Christi* and the *De Translatione Sanguinis Christi*, as well as the *Ea Tempestate*, Dockray-Miller shows how Judith is associated, by her gifts, with the most powerful figures of the eleventh century, and she relates accounts of the acquisition of the Holy Blood by Emperor Henry III and the Pope, among others, and, as always, compares texts and notes inconsistencies. In conclusion, Dockray-Miller shows how, despite the small amount of historical and biographical records, documents relating Judith's patronage give a biographical picture of her assertiveness through gifts during political and military turmoil, securing her long-lived reputation of generosity and piety, and contribution to eleventh-century material culture.

The nature of the reliance on primary textual sources, and that with scholarly caution, as well as the focus on objects as historical resources, is supplemented with the inclusion of colour plates and black-and-white photos of Judith's Gospels and portraits. Of great value are the appendices, which comprise Modern English translations of some of the source texts, such as the *Vita Oswini*, lists of gifts donated to Weingarten, and texts relating to the Holy Blood relic. The addition of family trees and an index that includes historical figures is also helpful.

This is a valuable, single-volume reference to the life of Judith of Flanders as well as a survey of Judith's Gospel manuscripts. With her presentation of a biography by means of material resources, Mary Dockray-Miller opens the way for the study of roles of women of the lower aristocracy, their contributions to culture and politics, and their significance as prominent figures in European history, and legitimizes ways in which resources can be understood.

Stephanie Hathaway  
University of Oxford