

al-ghalsila who prepared corpses for burial, slaves, and non-Muslims.

Guthrie's concluding chapter introduces additional well-chosen examples of Muslim women's history, but they do not work to wrap up the discussion properly. It is unclear why Guthrie introduces them here rather than in the earlier chapters where they would have added depth to the book as a whole. Putting them at the end leaves the reader wondering where she wanted to go next with the work rather than presenting a conclusion.

Overall, the book is lacking in analysis and interpretation. Rather than what the chroniclers say, what does the author think at this point? Is there a way to tie all of the disparate strands together? Where should the discourse go from here? Given the amount of material presented by the author and the range of sources from across the Islamic world she has masterfully blended into this work, the lack of analysis detracts from the quality of her scholarship and the project as a whole. Guthrie's effort is to be commended, but the subject deserves more attention than this book provides.

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Harbus, Antonina. *Helena of Britain in Medieval Legend*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002. Pp. viii + 215.

Antonina Harbus's book on Helena of Britain is fascinating. Her purpose is to separate the historical Helena from the legendary empress and to explore the origins and development of the claim that Helena was British, eventually coming to be identified in the later Middle Ages as the daughter of King Cole of Colchester. The book is organized chronologically, with individual chapters devoted to the legend in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages (I), Anglo-Saxon England and Francia (II), the Welsh tradition (III), Anglo-Latin history and the Brut tradition (IV), the later Middle Ages (V) and the post-medieval legend (VI). Appendices provide a transcription of the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century *Vita sancta Helene* by Jocelin of Furness, and the anonymous Middle English verse *St. Elyn*.

What comes across most forcefully in Harbus's book is the way in which both the woman and the legend were appropriated by a series of male authors and rulers anxious to assert their own particular agendas. *Helena of Britain* is not a feminist book, and it was never the author's intention that it should be; nevertheless, greater attention to the ways in which women might have come into contact with the Helena legend and used it for their own purposes would have been welcome. Citing such authors as Aldhelm, Bede, Cynewulf, and Ælfric, Harbus establishes the origins of the British Helena legend in the Anglo-Saxon period, her popularity apparently developing out of and along side that of the cult of the cross. The textual evidence Harbus musters is strong enough, but her silence as to the possible role of royal women in the development of both is problematic, especially as Anglo-Saxon royal women played such a prominent role in the conversion process. She notes, for example, the popularity of free-standing sculpted stone crosses in early Northumbria

(p. 29), but fails to mention the possibility that this type of monument was pioneered at the abbey of Whitby, a double house closely connected with the royal women of Northumbria.¹

Harbus goes on to point out that the feast of Helena first begins to appear in calendars in England in the tenth and eleventh centuries and connects increased interest in the feast to clerical authors such as Æthelwold and Ælfric; but one wonders in this instance if Helena's growing popularity might not be connected with royal women such as St. Edith of Wilton (961–84), the illegitimate daughter of King Edgar, or queen Emma/Ælfgifu (980x90–1052), queen to both Æthelred II and Cnut. Edith of Wilton was taught by Benno of Trier and was credited with building a cruciform chapel which Benno decorated with paintings of the passion of Christ as Edith had seen it in her heart. Trier, as Harbus discusses at length, was a center of Helena's cult, and it is certainly reasonable to assume that Benno would have passed an interest in the royal saint credited with discovery of the true cross on to his royal pupil. Similarly, the *Liber Vitae* of New Minster and Hyde Abbey lists among the relics in the "Greek shrine" given by Queen Emma to the abbey, relics of the wood of the cross, the stone on which the cross stood, and of Christ's manger and sepulcher (fol. 58rv). While not overtly comparing Emma to Helena, such donations may imply a knowledge and use of the Helena legend by early medieval queens that transcends the written record. Emma was also a documented patron of St. Hilaire, Poitiers, and may have had an interest in St. Radegunde of Poitiers.² Radegunde was described by her biographer, the nun Baudonivia, as a new Helena, and it may be significant that Radegunde begins to appear in Anglo-Saxon calendars at exactly the same time that Helena does. Harbus's list of calendars in which Helena appears fails to note Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale 274 (Y.6), fol. 9v, produced at either Peterborough or Ely (both monasteries patronized by Emma) ca. 1050.

Such connections are of course speculative, but so too are some of the examples of kings' involvement with the Constantine/Helena story and the cult of the cross that Harbus cites. Not all scholars accept that King Oswald's raising of the wooden cross at the Battle of Heavenfield in 633 had anything to do with the legend of Constantine.³ Moreover, Bede does not say that Oswald was imitating Constantine (*pace* Harbus, p. 29), but only that he erected a wooden cross and asked his army to pray to it (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, iii.2). The latter mistake is part of Harbus's general tendency to rely on secondary or later sources, particularly with regard to the early Anglo-Saxon and Frankish material. What is the original source for Alcuin's request for a relic of the cross in 796? Harbus (p. 31) cites only Swanton's 1987 edition of the poem *The Dream of the Rood*. Did King Æthelstan really receive a nail from the crucifixion from duke Hugh of France at Malmesbury in 926, or is William of Malmesbury (writing in the second quarter of the twelfth century) simply attempting to bolster the status of the abbey by attaching the name of a famous king who happened to be buried at Malmesbury to an important abbey relic? Exeter also claimed to possess a relic of the True Cross donated by Æthelstan,⁴ but curiously this gets no mention.

Harbus is on stronger ground in chapters IV and V when dealing with the way in which Helena came to be identified as the daughter of King Cole and the use to which various authors and towns, especially Colchester, have put the legend. Harbus examines the legend as recounted by William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, documenting the historical, theological and political contexts in which each author's work needs to be situated. Particularly rewarding is her discussion of the *Vita sanctae Helene* by Jocelin of Furness, a text in which Helena appears as a politically powerful ruler for the first time.

The book has its minor infelicities, such as an odd repetition of the story of the Breton Helena and the place-name Tumba Helena on pages 77 and 80, and in one place (p. 123), Helena is identified as Constantine's wife rather than his mother. There is also much discussion of visual depictions of the Helena legend, such as the twelfth-century sculpted cross at Kelloe, Co. Durham, and the St. Helena windows in the church of St. Michael and All Angels, Ashton-under-Lyne, yet these go unillustrated. Despite its problems, *Helena of Britain* is a well-written, informative, and provocative book. Antonina Harbus has done us all a service by bringing together an impressive collection of sources ranging in date from the third to the twentieth century and by demonstrating so clearly that due to the transformation of the legend over time, we are not dealing with one Helena, but many.

—Catherine E. Karkov, Miami University

¹ Rosemary Cramp, "A Reconsideration of the Monastic Site of Whitby," in *The Age of Migrating Ideas*, ed. R. M. Spearman and John Higgitt (Edinburgh and Stroud, 1993), 70; Richard N. Bailey, *England's Earliest Sculptors* (Toronto, 1996), 51–2.

² Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-century England* (Cambridge, 1997), 171–2.

³ Douglas Mac Lean, "King Oswald's Wooden Cross at Heavenfield in Context," in *The Insular Tradition*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov, Michael Ryan and Robert T. Farrell (Albany, 1997), 79–97.

⁴ Patrick W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge, 1993), 178.

Jansen, Sharon L. *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. Pp. 311.

In *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe*, Sharon L. Jansen offers a thoroughgoing narrative of women and governance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Rather than focus on the accomplishments of a single extraordinary female monarch, Jansen instead turns to a consideration of a broader range of female political activity in this period. Thus, lesser-known figures like Margaret Tudor, eldest daughter of Henry VII, and Louise of Savoy come to the fore alongside the more famous examples of Elizabeth I of England and Isabel of Castile.

In developing this narrative Jansen strives to create a thread that connects all of these women across time and place. By documenting ties of marriage and