

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.

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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

dynasty, Jansen re-charts, both through prose and graphics, the royal family trees of the early modern era, putting women at the core. Thus, Chapter One identifies the “foremothers” (Isabel of Castile, Margaret Beaufort, Caterina Sforza, and Anne of France) of women rulers and regents of the sixteenth century. According to Jansen, these four women “suggest a range of political models for the women who were to follow them” (8). This reconceptualization provides a new way of “seeing” political power in this period (although the family trees themselves are a bit dense and difficult to read).

Having laid this foundation, Jansen examines the question of women and political rule country by country, beginning with Spain (writ large to include Habsburg imperial possessions), moving on to cover England/Scotland and Italy, and then ending with France. Each of these chapters is densely packed with information about the political power wielded by each of a series of women. Yet scholars who have worked on particular personalities will undoubtedly have objections to Jansen’s presentation. In her desire to move through an admirably large catalogue of women (which thereby contributes greatly to our understanding of the scope and range of women’s political power in this period), certain nuances are left out. This is also reflected in the bibliography and footnotes for each chapter (the footnotes are more thorough than the bibliography which is only a sampling of the major sources used). Jansen is largely dependent on the standard biographies of each of these women (where they exist). This often makes her overly dependent on somewhat dated pieces of scholarship. While Jansen rightly notes that these works should not be dismissed out of hand, she might also have delved more deeply into recent scholarship on these women that has appeared in articles, essays, and dissertations. This lacuna is significant since many of these studies have emphasized how women used material culture, piety, and patronage to shape and wield political power in this period—topics that Jansen does not sufficiently engage.

That being said, Jansen does seek to draw out certain analytical continuities that tie these women together. She analyzes, for example, how women used chastity and virginity as a political tool. She also ponders the ways in which some women were discredited by rumors of madness, illegitimacy, and sexual impropriety.

Overall, however, Jansen’s presentation is narrative and biographical. This obscures some of the critical issues, notably the language of gender and political power. Jansen may accept too readily the misogynist discourse of the era. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that both women *and* men articulated spirited defenses of the exercise of political power by women. Using Knox’s inflammatory text as the grounding for the book obscures some of the subtlety surrounding the debate that he entered when he wrote it. Further, Jansen quotes passages from both primary and secondary sources that practically demand some sort of commentary. Ernst Breisach, Caterina Sforza’s most recent biographer, refers to her as a “virago” (41) and a contemporary French chronicler commented on her “masculine courage” (49). Jansen does not comment on this charged use of language. Nor does she probe what it meant when

English women invoked the categories of *femme sole* or *protectrix* in defending their political rights.

While this review has tended towards pointing out the shortcomings of Jansen's work, it is important to emphasize the significant contributions that it makes. First, it brings together a catalogue of women who are typically isolated into discrete biographical studies and geographical niches. Second, Jansen herself presents the work as a *narrative* of women and political power. Her goal is to present these women in their political context, demonstrating the instances in which they wielded power. In this regard, the book would be a useful tool in exposing students to the scope and depth of women's political influence in this period and would have a welcome place in the classroom. Her book will also be of use to scholars whose work is devoted primarily to an examination of a single politically powerful woman. Seeing these extraordinary cases in the context of their contemporaries and against a range of cultural and political backdrops should enrich the study of women and political power in this period.

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Friar Johannes O.P. of Magdeburg. *The "Vita" of Margaret the Lame, a Thirteenth-Century German Recluse & Mystic*. Translated, with commentary, by Gertrud Jaron Lewis and Tilman Lewis. Peregrina Translation Series. Toronto: Peregrina, 2001. Pp. 187.

This English translation of the *Vita Margarete contracte* is based on the 1992 Latin critical edition of this all-but-forgotten thirteenth-century text published by Paul Gerhard Schmidt. It is the first translation of this text into a modern vernacular language, and is a welcome addition to the collection of *vitae* of thirteenth-century nuns, recluses and beguines from Flanders and Germany published in the Peregrina Translation Series. *The "Vita" of Margaret the Lame* is welcome not only because it makes accessible another voice from that era, but also because of the distinctiveness of that voice.

While the stereotypical formulations and conventional images of the hagiographical tradition are in ample evidence in this text, there are also some notable departures from that tradition. Most remarkable is the absence of miracles and visions. Although this is not for lack of opportunity, as Margaret's hagiographer explains, or complains: "God did not let her see angels, because she neither wanted nor desired to. Once, however, it was as if he said to her in her heart: 'You could see angels, if only you wanted to.'" Missing also is the conventional death scene. Reference to the physical phenomena associated with mysticism is minimal, as is the biographical detail. Instead, the focus is almost exclusively on Margaret's inner life.

Accompanying this focus on Margaret's inner life is another distinctive aspect of this *vita*, the insertion of numerous treatises, sermons, and homiletic asides. This leads Lewis and Lewis to wonder "whether Margaret the Lame really existed or whether she is only a foil for Friar Johannes' own thoughts