

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

about matters of theology,” although they subsequently dismiss this as unlikely and anachronistic. This might lead the reader to expect the *vita* of Margaret the Lame to be dull fare. That is far from the case. Friar John paints Margaret as a lively and complex woman. At the age of one, we are told, “God mortified her in her limbs.” Despised and abused by her mother and her neighbors, Margaret assumed the life of a recluse perhaps as early as her mid teens. Unable to do much physical labor, she busied herself counselling great sinners, the poor, the desolate and the downtrodden. So popular was Margaret that “people said that she was talkative and gossipy, and behaved like a hostess in public.” She had a penchant for losing her temper, and not everyone received her counsel gladly. But in her Lord’s eyes, Margaret is “a teacher of love, uniquely adorning [his] crown.” She holds a privileged place in his heart and his kingdom, right next to his Mother: “I, my Mother, and you will be together in unique intimacy in eternity.” Their colloquies are punctuated with his (for God is always depicted as male) extravagant praise of her unique awareness and suffering.

Margaret’s is a mysticism of suffering, but not of physical suffering, as you might expect. Her suffering is spiritual suffering, caused by her awareness that “the more grace God gives to the soul, the less she can thank and praise him, because she sees herself as inadequate and unable to respond to God’s blessings.” It is “the heart’s suffering for the soul to praise God.” This leads her to conclude that it is through faith alone that one is united with God, not through great works, as the Devil tries to persuade her. One has to wonder if this insistence that faith alone is needed for justification contributed both to this text’s popularity in Northern France and Belgium in the fifteenth century, where most of the extant manuscript copies originated, and to its omission from the *Acta Sanctorum* in the seventeenth century, and its subsequent obscurity.

Whatever the case may be, this translation of *The “Vita” of Margaret the Lame* should do much to remedy that obscurity. Lewis and Lewis have striven to “render the text into idiomatic modern English, while remaining as close as possible to the Latin original.” They have succeeded in producing a very accessible translation of the text. It is accompanied by a comprehensive commentary geared to readers unfamiliar with medieval prose to be read alongside the text, an extensive index, and a useful bibliography. This volume promises to be a valuable resource for undergraduate courses on medieval mysticism as well as courses on medieval women. Scholars will also value this introduction to the *vita* of Margaret the Lame.

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Jones, Michael, ed. *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Volume VI c. 1300-c. 1415*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. xxx + 1110.

For those who have read the previous volume of the *New Cambridge Medieval History*, it will perhaps be of no surprise that volume six has little to say on gender or on topics of feminist concern. Elizabeth Van Houts, when review-