
Since Anneke Mulder-Bakker’s publication of her ground-breaking 2005 monograph, *Lives of the Anchoresses*, attention to medieval anchoritism and other forms of the ‘semi-religious’ life for women, as practised in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the Low Countries, has grown inordinately; indeed, it has now burgeoned into a flourishing academic research area. Scholars, not least of medieval anchoritism, will therefore welcome with considerable enthusiasm Mulder-Bakker’s most recent contribution to the field: *Living Saints of the Thirteenth Century* (which, incidentally, also comprises the twentieth contribution to Brepols’ impressive Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts series).

This impeccably researched and substantial volume brings together for the first time in modern English translation the hitherto overlooked Lives of three of the five female anchorites originally featuring in Mulder-Bakker’s monograph: Yvette of Huy, Juliana of Cornillon, and Margaret of Magdeburg (‘Margaret the Lame’). Since at least two, perhaps all three, of these anchorites, as Mulder-Bakker argues, clearly had a hand in the writing of their own lives, this volume also provides an extremely important contribution to the ongoing debates about what constitutes ‘women’s writing’ in the Middle Ages, the importance, or not, of scribal mediation, and the amount of agency afforded the woman solitary, both within her own community and ecclesiastic circles more widely. As such, this volume also constitutes a sequel to, and development of Mulder-Bakker’s earlier work and opens up these important texts to much wider scrutiny. Indeed, the relative wealth of such Lives as these emerging from the Low Countries in the thirteenth century, and the bringing of them in accessible form to a far wider audience, has done much to broaden immeasurably our understanding of the concept and meanings of anchoritism. Anglophone scholars locked into a belief in English anchoritism as paradigmatic, should certainly think again in the light of the Lives presented here.

 Appropriately enough, this volume is also the result of international scholarly collaboration. The translations themselves, whilst carefully edited by Mulder-Bakker, have been undertaken by a range of other deeply respected scholars in the field, whose work on women’s history, writing, religiosity, and anchoritism will long remain pivotal: Jo Ann McNamara (The Life of Yvette of Huy), Barbara Newman (The Life of Juliana of Cornillon), and Gertrud Jaron Lewis and Tilman Lewis (The Life of Margaret the Lame). Although published initially elsewhere in separate contexts, each translation has been systematically revised.
and updated for this volume and is accompanied by an informed introduction, helpful timeline, and detailed footnoting (frequently added to by Mulder-Bakker), allowing for easy negotiation of each Life and its context. Mulder-Bakker and Newman have also collaborated on a comprehensive bibliography of primary sources to facilitate new research, presenting on pp. 43–45 a ‘Canon of Thirteenth-Century Southern Netherlandish Saints’ Lives,’ based on one originally produced by Newman in 2003 in ‘Goswin of Villers and the Visionary Network’ for *Send me to God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut*, ed. Martinus Cawley (Turnhout, 2003).

Readers familiar with *Lives of the Anchoresses*, and other areas of Mulder-Bakker’s more recent work, will recognize that she poaches—and understandably so—a good part of the volume’s main Introduction from her previous corpus, although it is true to say that nothing is lost in its distillation. Indeed, apart from the occasional inconsistency (some of the Latin terms used are translated, others not), and contradiction (a brief discussion on the theoretical—and contentious—*genderlessness* of the professed anchorite is a case in point [p. 25]) the text of the Introduction is an example of the author at her best: the writing is rigorous, informative, accessible, and dotted with perceptive and engaging analysis and insight. Most importantly, here Mulder-Bakker reiterates the assertion central to all her work: “We have to study the various texts on holy women on their own terms and treat them in their own culturally specific way” (p. 5), arguing, too, that it is the diversity of the women under scrutiny that is crucial to our understanding, not a misguided notion of any kind of homogeneity we might wish to find.

Of particular importance to our understanding of the Lives as examples of forms of women’s writing (whoever set down the words on the page) is Mulder-Bakker’s perceptive argument concerning the texts as *fragmenta*; that is to say, they are freighted with the sometimes disparate and disordered ‘remains’ of the actual words and thoughts of the women themselves, transformed and written up into exempla and relayed through the medium of ecclesial Latin. As such, these fragments stand in as ‘holy relics’ of a once living body and thus bring to mind for the audience on each reading the material body of the woman herself and all its complex, sacred meanings (pp. 27–32). Each Life is, therefore (and this is crucial), less a *Vita* aimed at canonization, and more a *Liber Vitae*, recording ‘lived experientia’ in the woman’s life (p. 33), and thus distinguishing itself from what we have traditionally regarded as the ‘saint’s life,’ based on the model of the *Vitae Patrum*, for instance.

As mentioned, the introductions accompanying each translation are detailed and helpful, although the one prefacing The Life of Margaret the Lame, a text supposedly written by a ‘Friar Johannes,’ is itself a little fragmentary. This may,