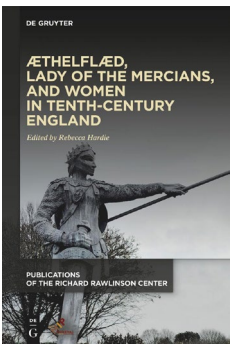

Rebecca Hardie (Hg.), Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, and Women in Tenth-Century England (Publications of the Richard Rawlinson Center). Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter 2023. XII, 306 S. 9 farb. Abb., 2 s/w-Abb. 1 Tab.

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The contributions to this volume focus on Æthelflæd (c. 870–918), Lady of the Mercians. Æthelflæd was the daughter of Alfred the Great and ruled over Mercia together with her husband Æthelred until his death in 911 and thereafter. She played a key role in shaping the future Kingdom of England. In her introduction to the volume (1–27), Rebecca Hardie offers concise accounts of Æthelflæd's life and legacy, the scholarly engagement since the 1950s, and the volume's two key concepts: 'women' and 'tenth-century England'.

The four essays in Part 1 ('Æthelflæd's Life and Reign') succeed in re-assessing Æthelflæd's role and power in early medieval England through new approaches to the (albeit scarce) textual record. Martin Carver (31–57) combines archaeology with history to give intriguing insights into Æthelflæd's "family of engineer-warriors" (37). The archaeology of *burhs* (forts built after Roman examples), which Æthelflæd saw fortified during her father's reign or which she built during her own warfare, reveals her ingenious "adaptation of Roman technology to fort building, potting, and supply chains" (53). Michael Wood (59–88) discusses the Mercian Register (MR), a short chronicle "embedded in the *Early English Chronicle* B, C, and D for the years between 902 and 924" (59) that records Æthelflæd's life and reign and that propagates the formation of a unified England. In a comparative analysis, Wood demonstrates that the MR "provides a unique and precious narrative of the deeds of an early medieval female ruler" (85) from the point of view of Mercia. Alice Hicklin (89–112) takes into account contemporary records from Western Europe in which elite women partake in military action. In this broader context, the Lady of the Mercians' "campaigns are exceptional for the manner in which they were recorded, not for the fact that they occurred" (108). Finally,

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Andrew Rabin (113–136) convincingly argues that the charters of Æthelflæd are instances of female legal agency and part of a "multigenerational dynastic strategy" (118), which "served as a self-conscious exercise in political propaganda designed to secure West Saxon rule in Mercia and to represent as Æthelflæd an acceptable political figure to those over whom she ruled" (115).

The well-balanced Part 2 ('Women in Tenth-century England and Beyond') starts off with three essays on medieval social practices. Nicole Marafioti (139–164) contrasts Æthelflæd's royal interment with contemporary forms of burial where people (mostly men) were denied the right to be buried in a Christian cemetery. Such "unconsecrated burial […] affected women's lives and livelihoods" (149) both economically and socially. Gender and social status in relation to food production are explored by Debby Banham when asking: "Did the Lady of the Mercians Make Her Own Bread?" (165–186). Æthelflæd is called *Myrcna hlæfdige* 'bread-kneader of the Mercians' in the MR (Old English *hlæfdige*, lit. 'loaf-kneader', Present-Day English *lady*). A wide range of sources reveals that women from different social classes played central roles in food processing and production, yet Æthelflæd provided 'daily bread' for her people in other ways. Fresh insight into women's education, "textual production and manuscript use" (189) is offered by Christine Voth (187–223) in her palaeographical and linguistic re-assessment of English and Latin additions to 'The Book of Nunnaminster' and 'The Royal Prayerbook'.

The remaining three essays engage with literary imaginations of queens: Stacy S. Klein (225–251) examines the digressive story of Eadburg of Wessex (*bl.* 787–802), daughter of the Mercian king Offa, in Asser's 'Vita Alfredi'. Stylising her as a counter-example of good royal office, Asser secured "Alfred's […] rightful claim to the English throne" (240). In a similar vein, Victoria E. H. Walker (253–276) illustrates how the Old English translation of Orosius's 'Seven Books of History Against the Pagans' was instrumentalised at the West Saxon court: the 'bad queen' Semiramis, an example of "the transhistorical dangers of female rule" (260), should warn against entrusting women with regal power. These fictions eventually fomented mistrust against Æthelflæd and her daughter Aelfwynn. Part 2 is rounded off by Clare A. Lees (277–301), who focusses on different forms of modern (National) Medievalism by which Æthelflæd is (re)imaged and remembered in public spaces, in historical pageants, and in the poetry of Ann Hawkshaw and Maureen Duffy.

Hardie has brought together ten interdisciplinary approaches that engage with different ways in which storytelling contributes to nation-shaping. The successful combination of archaeological, historiographical, and philological perspectives, which very often mutually reinforce each other, immensely broadens our understanding of Æthelflæd and female power in medieval England and beyond.