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Saint or Witch?

Douceline of Digne in Thirteenth-Century France

ABSTRACT: *This essay reconsiders Douceline of Digne, a popular saint, who lived from c. 1215 until 1274 and was a key figure in France's Beguine movement at that time. Based on the description of her "life" by her disciple Philippine of Porcellet, the essay's three parts, "Women of Status," "The Franciscan Connection," and "Making the 'Impossible' Possible," address possible factors why a person might have been viewed as a saint instead of a witch. The author argues that Douceline's relatively high social status, her connection to the Franciscans, as well as contemporary notions of what constituted a miracle and what amounted to witchcraft all contributed to her popular sainthood.*

KEYWORDS: *medieval history; Catholic history; France; Douceline of Digne; Beguines; Franciscans; Philippine of Porcellet; miracles; sainthood; witchcraft*

Introduction

A young woman in a quiet and quaint village in medieval southern France is soaring through the air to the astonishment of several witnesses. Some come away from the encounter believing they have witnessed the miracle of a saint, others with the idea that they have experienced a case of demonic possession. What determines the miracles of sainthood as distinct from the works of witchcraft when both can manifest themselves in virtually the same way? The story of Douceline of Digne (c. 1215–1274) can at least partially answer this question.¹ This essay argues that the factors in Douceline's life that made her a popular saint rather than a witch were her social status, her connection to the Franciscans, as well as contemporary notions of what constituted a miracle and what amounted to witchcraft. Douceline was, in a sense, a "manufactured" saint.

Douceline's story is one of popular sainthood: she was renowned and referenced as a saint, but she was never officially canonized by the Catholic Church; thus, she is not a recognized saint. Hailing from a small town in the region of Provence (France), she lived from c. 1215 to 1274. Douceline was a Beguine, perhaps even "the" Beguine. Beguines were laywomen who aspired to partially imitate the life of nuns.² When Douceline began her adult life and dedicated herself to a pseudo-monastic existence, the Inquisition was becoming a permanent fixture in thirteenth-century France, where it had originally sought to root out Catharism.³ This, alongside the founding of the Franciscans in 1209, is crucial to consider when examining possible influences on Douceline's life and the creation of her hagiography.

¹ See Philippine de Porcellet, *The Life of Saint Douceline, a Beguine of Provence: Translated from the Occitan with Introduction, Notes, and Interpretive Essay*, trans. Kathleen E. Garay and Madeleine Jeay (Boydell & Brewer, 2001), 1.

² Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris: Gender, Patronage, and Spiritual Authority* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 2–3.

³ Pawel Kras, *The System of the Inquisition in Medieval Europe* (Peter Lang International Academic Publishing Group, 2020), 136. Catharism was a dualist, anticlerical, and ascetic Christian movement in medieval Europe, primarily southern France.

The primary means by which we know of Douceline is her “life,” written by to her disciple Philippine of Porcellet and translated into modern English by Kathleen E. Garay and Madeleine Jeay in 2001.⁴ Garay’s and Jeay’s work includes both the hagiography itself as well as a critical analysis of the source by the two translators which provides additional historical context. Douceline’s hagiography (or “life”) consists of several sections, or chapters, in roughly chronological order, starting with a brief description of Douceline’s childhood and family, and then continuing through the rest of her life until her death in 1274, with particular emphasis on her pious nature and reported miracles. While technically anonymous, the hagiography’s authorship and its context is critical to this essay’s theme and therefore expanded upon later. In assessing Douceline’s agency and how it was perceived, Carlos Eire’s 2023 monograph, *They Flew: A History of the Impossible*, has been invaluable.⁵ A history and religious studies professor at Yale, Eire explores the dynamics of the “impossible,” and his research on miracles and acts of levitation has largely inspired this essay. As far as other works pertaining to Douceline are concerned, she remains a relatively obscure topic in English-language scholarship. This is regrettable, as her story contains elements that transcend time, space, and religion.

This essay comprises three parts: “Women of Status,” “The Franciscan Connection,” and “Making the ‘Impossible’ Possible.” “Women of Status” covers the lives and social status of the women relevant to the text, namely, Douceline of Digne herself and the aforementioned Philippine of Porcellet, a prominent thirteenth-century noblewoman and hagiographer. “The Franciscan Connection” centers on Douceline’s brother, known as the Franciscan Hugh, a thirteenth-century Friar and preacher, as well as the text’s possible appeal to the Franciscans. “Making the ‘Impossible’ Possible” examines the reported miracles and the respective different—and, at times, not so different—views of the medieval and modern world.

1. *Women of Status*

Prior to examining Douceline’s life and story, some additional context should be provided and terms defined. “Witchcraft” is more or less associated with the idea of demonic possession; in essence, it is the channeling or physical manifestation of evil in the physical world, whether intentional or not, into all manner of effects. Witchcraft is thought to be intentional and directly harmful to others. “Possession,” meanwhile, may occur even in non-wicked individuals due to any variety of reasons, such as simply visiting a part of the woods that they should not have visited at all or not at the time when they did so. Possession and witchcraft are, in essence, conditions that are assessed on the basis of communally perceived parameters.⁶ These include, but are not limited to, muttering and wild ravings; thoughts to invoke curses; levitation or outright flying; and sickening the environment, whether it be people’s health, plants, or animals. “Miracles,” on the other hand, are thought to be acts of the Divine on earth that directly supersede natural limitations, and they include levitation,

⁴ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*.

⁵ Carlos M. N. Eire, *They Flew: A History of the Impossible* (Yale University Press, 2023).

⁶ Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion in Later Medieval Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 1.

bilocation, visions of holy figures, and—perhaps most commonly—miraculous healings. Notably, witchcraft tends to be associated with women of low social status or outcasts.⁷ Douceline and Philippine were the exact opposite of this.

Douceline's hagiography makes her social connections quite clear. The very opening of her "life" emphasizes her father's status and affluence: "There was a man of the city of Digne [in Provence], a great and wealthy merchant called Berenguier."⁸ The remainder of the opening proceeds much as one might expect, listing her mother and her brother Hugh. Hugh himself is referenced as a Franciscan of renown (whose status is further explored in this essay's second part), and it is noteworthy that his position is extolled directly after that of the father. Douceline is highlighted as pious from an early age, engaging in acts of charity and volunteer work, such as aiding the poor. While encouraged by her family to join the Church like her brother Hugh, she rejected this path, instead opting to found her own community, which became known as the Beguines of Marseille.⁹ There are several notable aspects to the hagiography's presentation of Douceline's family. The strangest of these—considering that we are dealing with the biography of a popular saint—is perhaps the emphasis on her family's wealth. However, this is intentional: it sets the stage for the introduction of Philippine later on, all the while establishing the concept of pious behavior sponsored by wealth, a theme consistently revisited in the text with regard to Douceline's and Philippine's relationship. Absent from the text is any information about Douceline's early years that does not pertain to the status of her relatives or her pious works as a child and young adult.

As far as Philippine is concerned, one must address the question of the text's authorship. According to previous scholars, including the Abbé Joseph-Hyacinthe Albanés and René Gout, Philippine is either the text's author or, at the very least, its sponsor.¹⁰ As discussed by English translators Kathleen E. Garay and Madeleine Jeay, a variety of peculiar textual characteristics underscore this assessment,¹¹ such as its casual tone, intimate details, and the usage of the term "saint." The language itself, according to the translators, is not the proper Latin of the Church that one would expect in a formal religious text; in fact, its casual tone suggests someone with a non-clerical background. The intimate details of Douceline's life, particularly the direct quotes attributed to her, suggest someone who interacted with her regularly. For example: "My daughter, do not be ashamed on my account, for I myself would not be ashamed to make you known to my father."¹² The text's details concerning the community's buildings, such as which rooms were adjacent to each other, suggest that the author was a member of Douceline's group of Beguines and knew her personally. Additionally, two central themes permeate the text, namely, an emphasis on Philippine's support for Douceline and the assertion of the latter's sainthood despite any formal

⁷ Anna P. Grelson, "Marginal Heroines: Witchcraft as Resistance" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2018), 60–61.

⁸ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 25.

⁹ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 26–28.

¹⁰ See Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 16–17.

¹¹ See Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 16.

¹² Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 27.

canonization; taken together, they suggest an author with a personal connection who would have had something to gain from Douceline's canonization. All this makes Philippine the primary contender for the hagiography's authorship. She had the education, wealth, and opportunity. When combined with the previously discussed points, the arguments for Philippine's authorship are convincing.

Philippine is introduced midway into the text, in section five of the hagiography, as follows:

"It happened one time that a noble lady of Provence by the name of Philippine of Porcellet, Lady of Artignols, came to the holy mother [i.e., Douceline] with great devotion, and entered Roubaud [i.e., the Beguines' community of Marseille] to be her daughter. And once she was there, she saw the holy mother living in poverty and receiving the meagre alms that were given to her. And she saw her so destitute that, when she was ill, she often did not have a penny to make herself better. And so, this lady, who was a very rich woman, had compassion for her. And one day she went to her in secret and, kneeling humbly, begged her to accept her help, saying that she was ready and willing to look after her needs and give her the necessities of life for as long as she lived."¹³

This introduction is illuminating when viewed through the lens of Philippine as the text's author. Up until this point, one finds no explicit mention of anyone's name in the narrative, apart from Douceline herself and the members of her family. Thus, the very first non-family member to be introduced and linked to Douceline in the story of her life is Philippine. And here, too, the text alludes to the theme that wealth does not necessarily beget sin or, at the very least, comes with a negative connotation. The "life" links Philippine's pious nature to her willingness to employ personal wealth for Douceline's benefit; thus, one cannot badmouth wealth (as seen earlier with Douceline's father). Another key aspect is the timing when this intervention might have happened. Philippine is being tied to the establishment of Douceline's community. Despite the high probability that it was Douceline's father's funding and her brother's religious life that facilitated the launching of her Beguine community, this quote places Douceline's fortuitous encounter with Philippine center stage and asserts the latter as the pivotal figure who helped establish Douceline's Beguines. This especially makes sense if the text was not just intended to promote Douceline, but to cement Philippine's role as well, thereby furthering the probability of Philippine's involvement and likely authorship.

Of secondary interest to Philippine's role is the language employed in this quote. There is the rather straightforward aspect of asserting the good-natured piety and devotion of both Douceline and Philippine, but there is also a noteworthy subtext, namely, the mentioning of Douceline's destitution. "Meagre alms" suggests that she was receiving less than what she deserved.¹⁴ This appears to be one of the intended takeaways of the entire work, when considering that it was essentially written as a petition to have Douceline canonized. Recalling the previous points about authorship, and factoring in additional considerations, such as the text's assurance of Douceline's sainthood toward any skeptics, as well as the usage of the word "saint" despite her not being canonized, it appears that it may have been the intention to have the text read aloud to a congregation—with clergy in attendance—as a means to petition for the recognition of Douceline's sainthood. Such a recognition would have instantly

¹³ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 38.

¹⁴ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 38.

reflected positively on the noblewoman Philippine who was sponsoring such a thing. Douceline's acknowledgment as a saint would not just have boosted Philippine's own image; it would also have promoted pilgrimage to, as well as membership in, their Beguine community, which would have been an attractive side effect of Douceline's canonization. This much is clear: neither Douceline, the Beguine community's founder in Marseille, nor Philippine, her hagiography's sponsor and likely author, were social outcasts who were viewed with suspicion by their local environment.

2. The Franciscan Connection

Before looking at the hagiography itself to examine Douceline's connection—and possible appeal—to the Franciscans, there are several contextual elements one should consider. The first of these are the beliefs and religious styling of the Franciscans themselves. Founded in 1209, they were to follow the life and teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi (c. 1181/1182–1226)¹⁵ by focusing on a life of poverty and outreach to the community. Their ideals came to be revived and associated with the spiritual priorities of the Beguine movement during the later thirteenth century. When seeking legitimacy and asserting authority, leaning on a connection to something—or someone—already established and growing in influence can be helpful. In the case of Douceline and her Beguines, the Franciscans fulfilled this role. Both Douceline's personal connection to the Franciscans as well as the text itself underscore this important link—a fact that would not have been lost on the hagiography's intended audience.

In the "life," Douceline's brother Hugh appears repeatedly, and there is clear importance placed on him. Hugh's introduction at the beginning of the text affords him equivalent status to Douceline, stating that "[b]oth of them, by the brilliance of their light and perfection, shone in the eyes of the sinners and of the just; they were the splendor of all holiness, and, by their example of virtue, they shone and they lit up the estate of holy penitence."¹⁶ Moreover, Hugh was one of two direct influences on Douceline's founding of her community. He was the one who arranged for Douceline to be accepted by the Franciscan Sisters of Genoa when visiting Paris (additionally, she had already been accepted by several religious houses in Provence, though none are clearly specified).¹⁷ One gathers that Hugh was rather well-connected, even if his reputation may have been exaggerated by the text, which evidently intended to emphasize how much Douceline's Beguines had in common with the Franciscans in order to appeal to the latter.

Following a conversation with two traveling holy women, who disappeared immediately after speaking to her but led her to pondering her future (a story likely included to illustrate Douceline's saintly receiving of guidance from those directed by the Divine), it was Hugh who advised his sister against joining any existing religious community and encouraged her to establish her own group instead, thus rendering her the "first Beguine" of Provence.¹⁸ Also of

¹⁵ Mary Beth Ingham, "Franciscan Theology," in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe et al. (University of St Andrews, 2022), [online](#).

¹⁶ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 25.

¹⁷ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 30.

¹⁸ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 31.

note is the fact that Hugh was officiating when Douceline took her vow of poverty.¹⁹ Hugh apparently preached at Hyères, the town east of Toulon where Douceline's group is reported to have originated, and his preaching helped attract members.²⁰

The text goes to great lengths in asserting Hugh's prominent role in Douceline's life and in the establishment of her community, while touting that she would have become a Franciscan Sister had she not received divine guidance toward her own particular mission. As the text neglects to identify the other religious establishments that had apparently accepted her, the focus on the Franciscan connection is clearly intentional. Considering the geographical parameters of Hugh's preaching, he likely had a hand in establishing the rules and teachings of Douceline's community. Thus, a Franciscan, in effect, helped establish this sisterhood.

The emphasis on the Franciscan connection is not limited to Douceline's brother Hugh; it remains a recurring theme throughout the text, with Franciscan Friars surfacing time and again. Toward the end of the text, when detailing Douceline's death and interment, the Franciscans put in another strong appearance: "The saint [i.e., Douceline] was honored in every way by the clerics, especially by the Friars Minor, who regarded her as a sister, and indeed in Christ she was the true daughter of the lord Saint Francis."²¹ Here, the hagiography's author directly equates Douceline with being a member of the Franciscans (despite her never having joined any such community) and goes as far as to say that the Franciscan Friars themselves claimed her as one of their own. This is done in order to further legitimize the Beguines, which, next to the assertion of Douceline's saintly status, is the other primary goal of this text. Recall the reference to Douceline as the "first Beguine" of Provence; it is paired with the statement that "[t]he holy mother wanted to be called a Beguine, through the love of Our Lady, who was her model."²² This asserts Douceline's embracing of the title of Beguine but also emphasizes that such a title and lifestyle were guided by the example of the Virgin Mary. To counter any doubts that might arise about Douceline's devotion, the text unequivocally stresses her self-identification as a Beguine who was following the example of the Virgin Mary and thereby closely aligning herself with the Franciscans who, in turn, were known for their particular devotion to the Virgin Mary.

Generally speaking, the Beguine movement was one of commoners and laypeople. It did not have a noble background, and it actively catered to the poor. Rather than emphasizing Scripture and education, Beguines promoted a humble and simple lifestyle—one might even accuse them of reveling in destitution. This is certainly evident in Douceline's hagiography, where the Beguines' overwhelming theme is a life of humility and poverty, better yet if attained by the renunciation of one's former wealth. This, however, did not help the Beguines' reputation. Even in the time of Douceline herself, the moniker of Beguine was someone "scorned by the world's pride."²³ By actively adopting the title of Beguine, both the

¹⁹ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 38.

²⁰ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 31–32.

²¹ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 93.

²² Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 31.

²³ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 34.

hagiography's author (likely Philippine) and its subject (Douceline) sought to embrace the term and transform its negative connotations into positive ones, much in the same way people still do in the modern day with insults, when they embrace the respective stereotypes instead of rejecting them. This also complements the Beguines' secondary goal of attaching themselves to the Franciscans' rising tide.

In keeping with this, the text names Saint Francis as one whose name, even when merely whispered, moved Douceline to ecstasy,²⁴ a consideration not given to other saints whose names go unmentioned. Thus, the Franciscan connection was intentional, explicit, and profound. While Douceline's Beguines may have shared some of the striking traits generally associated with witches—such as poverty, low social status, and being unmarried or widowed—this was certainly offset by their personal and spiritual ties to the Franciscans.

3. Making the "Impossible" Possible

When examining witchcraft and sainthood, there is an inevitable and somewhat problematic issue that arises, namely, supernatural feats. When arguing in favor of someone's sainthood, miracles must have been performed (or occurred) and attested to. These may include anything from simply invoking the name of the candidate for sainthood during a prayer that then results in a miraculous healing to levitating off the ground or even performing feats of bilocation, that is to say, being in two places at once.²⁵ Among these, levitation stands out as being quite witchlike when compared to the others. After all, there is no obvious physical difference between a saint levitating off of the ground in ecstasy and, say, a witch levitating off of the ground in pursuit of some alleged wickedness. Indeed, the state of ecstasy itself can also be associated with witchcraft.²⁶ The difference lies in the perception of those present and the circumstances under which the supernatural feat transpires. Of course, this is ignoring a far more glaring and persistent issue: How does one examine that which, by modern secular standards, is impossible? When considering Douceline's hagiography, one is challenged to muster a basic level of (at least partial) trust that that which is being related and attested to constitutes the perceived-as-accurate account of a real person. The issue becomes even more pressing when one considers the fact that nearly half of the hagiography testifies to the miracles that Douceline allegedly performed, including outright levitation in front of Charles I of Anjou (c. 1226/1227–1285), count of Provence and (later also) king of Sicily.²⁷ While one may not be able to accept, at face value, such acts as actually having occurred, one may not simply dismiss them or gloss over their importance, both with regard to the life of a saint and the original audience for whom the hagiography was intended. For the purpose of assessing these acts, one has to attempt to put oneself into the mindset of those living in thirteenth-century France rather than those living today. To illustrate this, it is

²⁴ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 49.

²⁵ Eire, *They Flew*, 1–3.

²⁶ Animesh Manna, "Witchcraft: A Survey of Medieval Ecstasy," *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities* 3, no. 3 (2023): 73–78.

²⁷ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 51.

helpful to consider how such an “impossible” act is recorded in Douceline’s hagiography. The following passage details one of her ecstatic states:

“The first time that King Charles saw her enraptured, he wanted to test if the ecstasy was real. This was at the time when he was count of Provence. He tested it in the following way. He had a quantity of lead melted and had it thrown, boiling, onto her bare feet, in his presence. She felt nothing. The king held her in such affection because of this, that he made her his co-mother. But afterward, when she had come back from her rapture, she felt great pain in her feet, and her anguish was unbearable. She was very ill from it and unable to walk.”²⁸

According to this narrative, Douceline experienced such a state of ecstasy—seemingly separated from the world around her—that she ignored molten lead being thrown onto her feet, and the incident was witnessed by a famous nobleman who subsequently favored her because of it. As such, the sequence of events seems sound. Lying about a witness like Charles of Anjou would have been unlikely, especially given his prominence (after all, his brother was the saintly King Louis IX of France) as well as the close and respectful relationship between him, his wife, Douceline, and the Franciscans expressed elsewhere in the text. Even if exaggerated, there appears to have been some measure of affinity between Charles’s wife and Douceline.²⁹ Meanwhile, Charles’s “test” reflects the skepticism one might expect toward the authenticity of an ecstatic state, and there are lasting, harmful effects from having the molten lead thrown on Douceline’s feet. The molten lead stands out in particular, as prior ecstatic states mentioned in the narrative had involved her being prodded with spikes to ascertain whether or not she was truly in a trance.³⁰ It is conceivable that one could train oneself to ignore being jabbed or stuck with various kinds of pins. Molten lead, on the other hand, seems virtually impossible to ignore and represents a far more drastic “test;” in fact, it demonstrates a degree of skepticism and self-awareness in light of a miracle claim that would not seem out of place at all in a modern-day scenario (minus the level of violence involved in this particular “test,” of course).

Yet pain tolerance and ignoring the world around oneself through meditation are not completely “impossible” acts when compared to the feat of unassisted levitation. Here is an example of one of Douceline’s witnessed levitations:

“Many other people observed how far she was above the ground in these ecstasies, and measured the distance with their own hands on different occasions. There were many who, when she was in this rapture, kissed the soles of her feet in devotion, in the same way that was described above.”³¹

Here, the “impossible” is addressed rather matter-of-factly by several witnesses. While still demonstrating elements of skepticism, as evidenced by the assurance of distance measuring and people’s hands coming between Douceline and the ground on other occasions, something far more inconceivable than supernatural pain tolerance is emphasized, namely, the fact that Douceline’s ecstasies were frequently accompanied by levitations.³² When

²⁸ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 51–52.

²⁹ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 36.

³⁰ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 51.

³¹ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 51.

³² Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 48–57.

examining this passage alongside the previous one, a more complete picture of the medieval worldview emerges. The “impossible” is very much possible and, to an extent, even normalized, yet there is still skepticism; justification (viewed as verification) is required; and witnesses are self-aware that what they are stating to have happened is fantastical. If the choice is between believing that nearly all figures of medieval European religious history were scam artists, who engaged in magic tricks, or accepting that supernatural feats reflect, on some level, sincerely held beliefs, then one must accept medieval European beliefs as genuine. While the text is certainly agenda-driven (i.e., focused on demonstrating Douceline’s sainthood and exalting the Beguines’ devotion to the Virgin Mary as akin to the Franciscans), it is backed by a genuine belief in what is written as witnessed.

Thus far, the focus has been on phenomena considered common to both witchcraft and sainthood—namely, ecstasy and levitation—that merely differ in the perception of those present and the circumstances under which they transpire. Yet the most extensive and physically impactful miracles afforded the saints are their miraculous healings. While ecstasy and levitation may be interpreted differently by different people, that is not the case when it comes to healing, because medieval European witchcraft was generally associated with harm. Meanwhile, healing could come in as many forms as there were health problems. Healing most commonly occurred via the touch of a saint or via the invocation of a saint’s name in prayer, resulting in the miraculous, inexplicable, and sometimes overnight disappearance of the problem. Healing could range from addressing a simple illness to the curing of a child who had been born quadriplegic, as was the case in one of Douceline’s miracles.³³

Attributed miracles did not have to be in the realm of the “impossible.” There was a category that bridged the gap between the “impossible” and the “ubiquitous,” namely, divine guidance. Douceline herself, according to her hagiography, decided to forgo joining the Franciscan Sisters of Genoa on the basis of the advice of two traveling holy women, who disappeared immediately after speaking to her.³⁴ In effect, this seems quite similar to following one’s instinct, heart, dreams, horoscope, or superstitious feelings of direction. Whether one is the most devout Christian or the staunchest atheist, people frequently make superstitious (as opposed to “rational”) decisions as trivial as what to eat for breakfast or as important as what to do in life. The element of almost ubiquitous superstitious beliefs pertains to both the medieval European worldview and that of the modern age.

If one is to make sense of witchcraft and sainthood in thirteenth-century France, one must look toward a mixture of self-awareness and true belief that is both similar to and wildly different from modern secular Western thought. Perhaps most importantly, while skepticism existed in much the same way as it does now, a sense of limitation on the wonders and abilities of the natural world did not. Thus, the “impossible” was not quite so far-fetched.³⁵

³³ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 81.

³⁴ Philippine de Porcellet, *Life of Saint Douceline*, 29–30.

³⁵ Fabián Alejandro Campagne, “Witchcraft and the Sense-of-the-Impossible in Early Modern Spain: Some Reflections Based on the Literature of Superstition,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 96, no. 1 (2003): 29.

Conclusion

Douceline is a popular religious figure whose hagiography is an agenda-driven attempt to argue for her recognition as an official saint, while also promoting the legitimacy of the Beguine movement. Despite being a female mystic, she was never in the running to be considered a witch, as several of her traits were the opposite of what one would expect in a witch: she was well-connected, had affluent parents, and—perhaps most importantly—maintained strong ties to the Catholic Church, and she did all this while catering to a community of poor, single, and possibly widowed women. In her historiography, her feats are legitimized by the reputation of her brother and the apparent Franciscan support she enjoyed. Several of her miracles, while mirroring feats occasionally associated with witchcraft, attained their status due to their particular witnesses, such as Charles of Anjou (as opposed to some suspicious farmers). Despite the agenda and authority backing her, however, one cannot deny the element of true belief that pervades her miracles in a way that seems at odds with a modern secular view but may be closer to it than one might initially think.

Researching Douceline of Digne draws attention to issues beyond those one might expect to encounter in medieval hagiography. Of particular note for future research is the fact that her hagiography was, in all likelihood, written by a woman—Philippine of Porcellet—and that it advocates for a sisterhood of women, something that is highly unusual when dealing with medieval hagiographies, which are overwhelmingly written by men. A comparison of writing styles and self-views between male and female authors may unveil intriguing ways in which holy men and women viewed themselves and each other in their writings, and explore how moral values may have changed over time. Exploring the case study of Douceline shows that, despite an agenda, there can still be true faith and good beneath complicated motivations.

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