

Linus Ubl

Mechthild of Hackeborn

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hebis.

Mechthild of Hackeborn (* ca. 1241 / 1242 – † 1298 / 1299)

1. Name variants: M. of Hakeborn, M. of Helfta

2. Places: Helfta, *Rothardesdorf*

3. Biography: M. was the youngest daughter of count Albert II. of Hackeborn and his wife Gertrude. Due to the lack of sources, the hagiographically stylized biography in the *Liber specialis gratiae* has to be treated with caution. According to the prologue, she entered the monastery of *Rothardesdorf* at the age of seven, and moved with the entire convent under the leadership of abbess Gertrude of Hackeborn, M.'s biological sister, to Helfta, near Eisleben. There, the monastery flourished and encouraged mystical writings, as evidenced by the *Liber specialis gratiae* and Gertrude of Helfta's *Legatus divinae pietatis*. In particular the collaborative aspects seemed to have facilitated the writing process as several sisters contributed to authoring the texts. There is some dispute about the influence of Mechthild of Magdeburg, who is likely to have entered the convent towards the end of her life and completed her *Fließendes Licht der Gottheit* there. According to the *Liber*, M. kept her mystical revelations secret and only told her fellow sisters about them on her 50th birthday. The text draws heavily on bridal mysticism and imaginative allegories, shows a great familiarity with other medieval theologians (Bernard of Clairvaux and the Victorines, among others), and thus displays expert theological knowledge. The *Liber* was transmitted widely in the Late Middle Ages and translated into several vernacular languages. Several versions, ranging from almost complete versions to excerpts within the context of prayer books, demonstrate a functional flexibility, as can also be seen by the printed editions from the 16th c. onwards. Due to the division into academic disciplines and the differing reception within the past two centuries, M. received less attention than the other mystics associated with Helfta; scholars have only recently turned their attention to her.

4. Cultus:

a. Relics: –

b. Liturgical commemoration: 19 Nov (Memorial for OSB, OCist, OCSO)

c. Patronage: –

d. Attributes: Occasionally portrayed with a book (the *Liber*) and/or the Heart of Christ

5. Fontes: *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechthildianae 2: Sanctae Mechthildis Virginis Ordinis Sancti Benedicti Liber Specialis Gratiae accedit Sororis Mechthildis ejusdem ordinis Lux divinitatis. Opus ad codicum fidem nunc primum integre editum Solesmensium O.S.B. Monachorum cura et opera, Poitiers/Paris 1877.*

6. Literature: B. MCGINN, *The Flowering of Mysticism. Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)*, New York 1998, 267–282; M. HUBRATH, *Schreiben und Erinnern. Zur „memoria“ im Liber specialis gratiae Mechthilds von Hakeborn*, Paderborn et al. 1996; VerLex 6, 251–260; R. VOADEN, *Mechthild of Hackeborn*, in: *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100–c. 1500*, ed. A. MINNIS et al., Turnhout 2010, 431–451.

7. Illustrations: Sculpture in Engelszell, made by Johann Georg Üblhör, (1754–1764) https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Engelszell_Stiftskirche_-_Nepomukaltar_3_Mechthild.jpg

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