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Gertrude of Helfta

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Gertrude of Helfta (* 6 Jan 1256 – † 17 Nov 1301)

1. Name variants: G. the Great, Trutta

2. Places: Helfta

3. Biography: G. entered the monastery in 1261 at the age of five. There is no knowledge about her family background. According to her (auto-)hagiography 'Legatus divinae pietatis' she underwent a crisis which lasted a few weeks before she converted, as a consequence of a vision of Christ she had in 1281 (Jan 27), meaning she was thus initiated into mystical life. Together with an unidentified sister, she co-authored the 'Legatus' and was also active in recording the visions of her spiritual sister Mechthild of Hackeborn, editing them into the *Liber specialis gratiae*. G. was well acquainted with the literature and theology of her time. It remains uncertain whether she authored the collection of prayers known as *Exercitia Spiritualia*. She is sometimes mistaken for Gertrude of Nivelles. G. of Helfta has, however, more often been confused with the contemporaneous abbess of her convent, Gertrude of Hackeborn, a misidentification that was first clarified at the end of the 16th c. and then again in 1875 with the edition of the *Legatus* by the monks of Solesmes.

4. Cultus:

a. Relics: –

b. Liturgical commemoration: 16 Nov (*Calendarium Romanum* 1969, 145), 17 Nov (LThK 4, 538)

c. Patronage: Tarragona; Perú; Monastery of St. G., Cottonwood, Idaho; Parish Church St. G. Munich; various other monasteries and churches.

d. Attributes: Jesus Child in heart, book (her revelations) in hand, heart in flames, crucifix.

5. Fontes: *Legatus divinae pietatis*, in: P. DOYERE, *Œuvres spirituelles*, Paris 1968–86; *Liber specialis gratiae*, in: L. Paquelin, *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechthildianae* 2, Paris 1877; *Exercitia spiritualia*, ed. O. HUMBERG, Elbersfeld 2001.

6. Literature: R. KIRAKOSIAN, *From the Material to the Mystical in Late Medieval Piety. The Vernacular Transmission of Gertrude of Helfta's Visions*, Cambridge 2021; E. JOHNSON, *This is My Body. Eucharistic Theology and Anthropology in the Writings of Gertrude the Great of Helfta*. Collegeville, Minn. 2020; V. RANFF, *Liturgische Soteriologie bei Hildegard von Bingen und Gertrud von Helfta*, in: D. Olszynski / L. Roth (ed.), *Soteriologie in der hochmittelalterlichen Theologie*, *Archivum Verbi. Yearbook for the Study of Medieval Theology* 19, Münster 2021, 37–70; B. J. NEMES, *Scenes of Writing, Figurations of Authorship. A literature Historian's Reflections on the Veracity of the Passages Recounting the Textual Genesis of the Special Edition of Gertrude of Helfta's Legatus divinae pietatis*, in: *ACi* 69 (2019) 145–160; LThK 3rd ed. 4, 538; *Calendarium Romanum*, Vatican 1969, 145, <https://archive.org/details/CalendariumRomanum1969/page/n143/mode/2up>; LCI 6, 404–405.

7. Illustrations: From the late 17th c. onwards when her name enters the martyrologue, cf. L. SCHÜTZ, in: LCI 6, 404–405; stained glass *Sacré Coeur* Paris after 1945; wall painting Pécs Cathedral, c. 1885.

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