

Leah Shopkow. *The Saint and the Count: A Case Study for Reading Like a Historian*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. Pp 216. \$24.95.

How do historians, especially of the pre-modern past, wrestle with limited textual sources while maintaining historical accuracy? How can scholars identify biases, motivations, and errors by piecing together disparate narratives from a handful of texts? With refreshing honesty, Leah Shopkow demonstrates the historian's process, highlighting discoveries and pitfalls along the way, in her short but rich monograph, *The Saint and the Count*.

Shopkow begins her study with a passage from Stephen of Fougères' (d. 1178) *Life of St. Vitalis*, which details the saint's intervention in a local count's marriage due to the nobleman's acts of domestic violence. While the events of the selection hook the reader with questions of medieval relationships, gender roles, and family dynamics, Shopkow uses the excerpt as the catalyst for her investigation into the reliability of textual sources, the subjectivity of authors, and the purpose of primary sources. She presents the problem succinctly: "The people in the story died well before Vitalis did" (2). What, then, do we do with the passage? Why did Stephen include it? Should we discount the entire *Life* because of an apparently falsified portion?

In order to tackle these questions, Shopkow surveys different types of (mostly pre-modern) written sources, such as hagiography, with texts surrounding Vitalis as her examples. She explains the typical contexts, audiences, and authors for various genres, emphasizing that no source exists in a vacuum. Outlining the facts of Vitalis' existence in the eleventh century, Shopkow provides the reader with a historically accurate narrative of the saint before examining Stephen's life and textual compositions, as well as the networks of patronage and authorship that existed in the Low Countries and southern England in the twelfth century. Shopkow then turns back to the issue of genre, teasing out the characteristics of medieval hagiographies. Although modern readers often dismiss seemingly miraculous stories in such texts as fake, Shopkow argues for the value of unbelievable tales to the source as a whole. She historicizes the advent of "scientific" knowledge and "objective" criticism, and asserts "although we cannot determine whether a miracle actually occurred... we can ask instead what cultural work the author intended the miracle to do" instead of completely discounting the text (90).

Shopkow concludes by returning to the beginning passage with a scholarly investigation into medieval violence and gender. Just as the first four chapters show her process working with primary sources and historical facts, this chapter displays the historian's craft of researching themes, topics, and tropes with secondary sources in relation to primary sources. Shopkow examines medieval thought surrounding violence, property, marriage, and holiness, ultimately stating primary sources invite scholars to "start asking questions... to uncover the context in which the stories are being told" (110). She ends with an assertion that appears throughout *The Saint and the Count*: authors and creators always filter knowledge, and texts are a product of the environments in which they are created. Shopkow also calls attention to her own subjectivity and biases, making her own positionality clear to the reader.

Overall, *The Saint and the Count* is very readable and accessible to a wide audience outside the academy. Shopkow's clarity and transparency regarding both historical facts and the historical process make this work great for undergraduate courses such as an introduction to medieval history, a general history survey, or an upper-division class that interrogates sources and historiography at length. Particularly valuable to the student of history is the glossary, which explains basic terminology used in medieval history, and Shopkow's English translations of Stephen's *Life of St. Vitalis* and *Life of St. Firmat*, appended at the end of the monograph. With these tools and Shopkow's earnest guidance, the audience feels confident to contextualize and analyze sources from the medieval past and reading like a historian.

Sarah Luginbill
Trinity University