



# JUDITH OF FLANDERS

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ART, BOOKS, AND WAR IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE



Judith of Flanders: Art, Books, and War in Medieval Europe (working title)  
Pitch for a graphic biography by Mary Dockray-Miller  
Pitch deck art by Frankie Paradise

**Premise:** This graphic biography narrates the life of Judith of Flanders (c.1031-1094), a medieval noblewoman who lived through almost constant warfare yet managed to successfully craft a fulfilling and creative life; she is still renowned for her collection of deluxe art objects and her religious faith. Through her childhood in Bruges and her two marriages into England and Germany, she

spoke many languages and travelled more extensively than almost all European women of her time. Defying many of our conventional stereotypes about women in the Middle Ages, Judith created ways to develop her own sense of style and expression in clothing, book design, needlework, and architecture, building her own life and legacy for herself and her community.

**Author:** While I have published widely in academia, this project is my first foray into writing for a general audience. I've combined my professional expertise in medieval women's history with my passion for narrative nonfiction to produce a text aimed at that reader who loves all things medieval: the knights, the dragons, the outfits, and the stories.

**Story:** The prologue introduces 18-year-old Judith, half-sister to the Count of Flanders, as she is about to embark into her first marriage to Tostig Godwinson, middle son of the English Earl of Wessex. She is anxious about the new life that awaits her in a foreign country. The narrative then proceeds chronologically through Judith's life, beginning with her childhood and education at her brother's court in Bruges (their father died when she was a baby). Her brother's daughter Matilda was about the same age as Judith, and the girls were raised as sisters.



Judith's first marriage into the family of the powerful Earl Godwin put her close to the English royal family – Queen Edith was her sister-in-law and it was said that the Godwins controlled King Edward rather than the other way round. As Lady of Northumbria, Judith established herself as a powerful woman who patronized artists and churches even in the politically fraught years of the mid-11th-century. She hired a clerk, here called Scriptus, as her chief of staff, personal priest, and primary artist. The narrative follows circumstantial evidence to suggest that Tostig and Judith's marriage was a formal, political, and diplomatic alliance rather than a partnership of affinity or personal attraction.

In 1061, Judith accompanied her husband in a group of English travelers to Rome, where she was able to experience art, architecture, food, clothing, and languages from around the Mediterranean basin. She bought art materials like stone and precious metals and gathered ideas for new styles and trends.



When she returned to England, she very unusually established her own scriptorium, where she and Scriptus designed the four magnificent Gospel Books that we still have today – with their gold and silver treasure covers, elaborate illustration programs, and

the words of Jesus Christ marked out in red ink. Her team of scribes, artists, binders, and metalworkers worked under her direction; two of the books even include "donor portraits" of Judith interacting with figures from the Bible.



Tostig and Judith fled to Flanders from England in 1065, when the conflicts we now call the Northern Rebellion, the Battle of Stamford Bridge, and the Norman Conquest were starting to escalate. Judith became a widow in September of 1066: she lost her position, her husband, and her home as part of the collateral damage of those two turbulent years.





As civil war brewed in Flanders as well, Judith took the uncommon step of negotiating her second marriage herself – to Welf, Duke of Bavaria and Lord of Ravensburg castle. Circumstantial evidence suggests that this marriage was a happy one for both of them – they raised two sons and worked together to advance his position in the Holy Roman Empire. In Germany, Judith re-established herself as a patron of the arts, even receiving credit for the atypical design of Rottenbuch Abbey, which she and Welf founded.

Judith died peacefully in 1094 at Ravensburg, praised as a donor, founder, patron, and designer. She and Welf still rest in the crypt beneath the altar at Weingarten Abbey.

**Audience:** the biography bridges the middle grade and YA worlds.

**Length/style:** approximately 100 pages, ideally in full color in a medievalist style that allows echoes of the illustrations in Judith's manuscripts.

**Comps:** The biography fills an empty niche in the market: there are very few graphic biographies about premodern people, and hardly any about premodern women (Joan of Arc is an exception). Three somewhat similar titles:

Grolleau, Royer, Gilfillan, *Audubon on the Wings of the World*

Grolleau, Royer, Vick, *Darwin: an Exceptional Voyage*

Wulf, Melcher, *The Adventures of Alexander von Humboldt*

**Character depictions and sample to follow**

# JUDITH

Judith of Flanders is a medieval noblewoman, traveler, and patron of the arts and the church. As the daughter and sister of Counts of Flanders, she follows a traditional path for a woman of her class- marriage to advance the political goals of her father's family- but she also finds ways to express herself artistically and intellectually. Over the course of her life, she designs and commissions books, art objects, and even an entire abbey.

1040



1060



1085

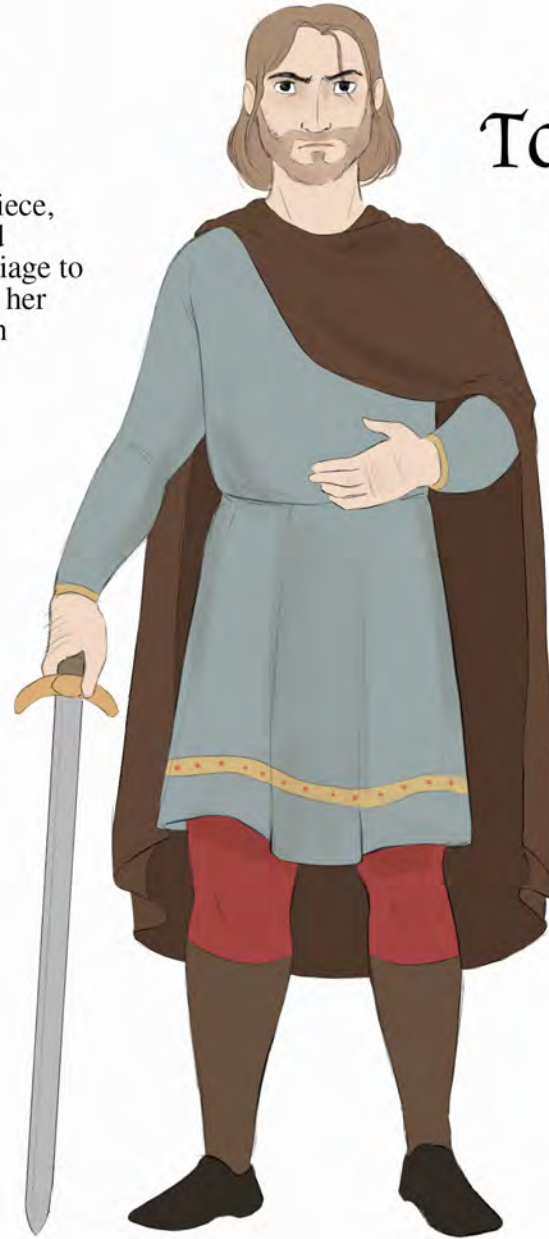






## MATILDA

Matilda is technically Judith's niece, but they are about the same age and are raised as sisters. Matilda's marriage to Duke William of Normandy makes her Queen of England after the Norman Conquest in 1066.



## TOSTIG

Tostig, Judith's first husband, is the Earl of Northumbria (in northern England). He dies in battle in 1066, fighting his own brother for the English throne.

# SCRIPTUS

Scriptus is a monk who lives in Judith's household, functioning as her chief of staff. He is an artist, a scribe, a writer, and a project manager. He draws the fanciful animals in Judith's books.

1055



1075



# WELF

Welf, Judith's second husband, is the Duke of Bavaria (in southern Germany) and Lord of Ravensburg Castle. The marriage includes affinity and affection; Judith and Welf work together in politics and patronage. They have two sons.



1070



1090



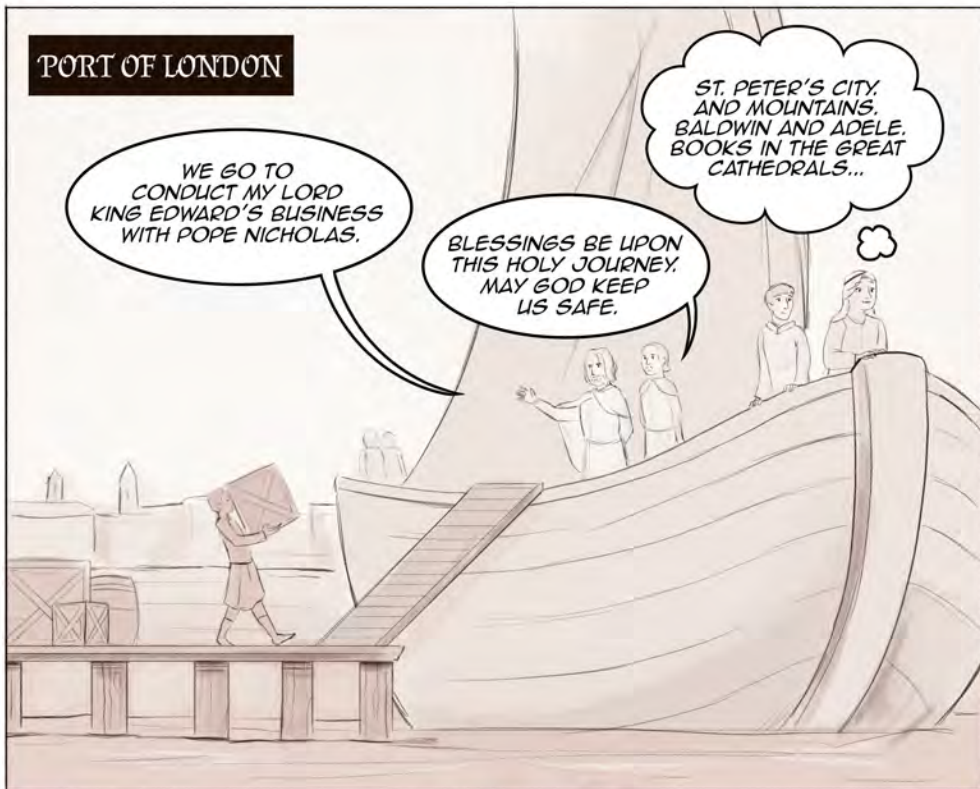


## PORT OF LONDON

WE GO TO CONDUCT MY LORD KING EDWARD'S BUSINESS WITH POPE NICHOLAS.

BLESSINGS BE UPON THIS HOLY JOURNEY. MAY GOD KEEP US SAFE.

ST. PETER'S CITY, AND MOUNTAINS. BALDWIN AND ADELE. BOOKS IN THE GREAT CATHEDRALS...



## SPEYER CATHEDRAL

THE EMPEROR AND EMPRESS ARE RIGHT THERE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

THE COLORS GLOW. AND THE GOLD...

WE WILL MAKE BOOKS LIKE THIS.



## ALPINE CROSSING

NOT MUCH FURTHER, MY LADY- I CAN SEE THE LIGHTS OF THE ABBEY NOW.

AND THE VIEW TOMORROW WILL BE GLORIOUS FROM THE TOP OF THE PASS.



## BRUGES

WELCOME BACK, MY SISTER.

EDWARD AGES RAPIDLY. TOSTIG'S OLDER BROTHER HAROLD STANDS READY TO TAKE THE THRONE AS SOON AS EDWARD GOES TO GOD.

BUT THERE ARE RUMORS THAT EDWARD HAS NAMED WILLIAM OF NORMANDY HIS HEIR. SO MATILDA WOULD BE QUEEN OF ENGLAND.

THE GODWINS WOULD NOT STAND FOR WILLIAM. THEY WILL FIGHT FOR ONE OF THEM TO BE KING.

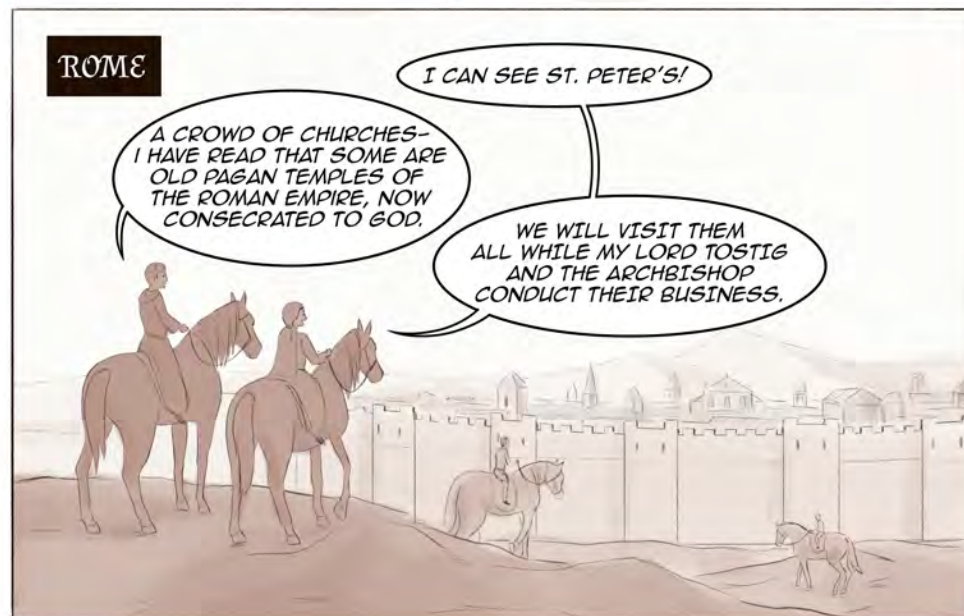


## ROME

I CAN SEE ST. PETER'S!

A CROWD OF CHURCHES- I HAVE READ THAT SOME ARE OLD PAGAN TEMPLES OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, NOW CONSECRATED TO GOD.

WE WILL VISIT THEM ALL WHILE MY LORD TOSTIG AND THE ARCHBISHOP CONDUCT THEIR BUSINESS.







CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE

SCHOLA ANGELORUM

SANCTA MARIA ROTUNDA

CHURCH OF ST. AGNES

WE WILL PRAY BEFORE THE  
TOMB OF ST. PETER.  
AND PERHAPS HIS HOLINESS  
THE POPE WILL PERMIT US  
INTO HIS LIBRARY.

HE HAS FULL BIBLES,  
GOSPEL BOOKS, PRAYER BOOKS,  
PSALTERS - TOO MANY FOR  
US TO SEE EVEN A SMALL PART  
OF HIS TREASURES-

YES, MY LADY,  
AND THERE ARE MANY  
OTHER WONDERS HERE  
IN ROME AS WELL.







ROME

BE WELL ON YOUR JOURNEY, LADY WIFE.

WE WILL FOLLOW AS SOON AS OUR BUSINESS WITH THE POPE IS CONCLUDED.

WELCOME TO ROUEN, MY ALL-BUT SISTER!

WE HAVE BEEN PARTED FOR TEN YEARS! AND I HAVE SO MUCH TO TELL YOU.

I HOPE YOU WILL STAY MANY DAYS.

ROUEN

THE FINE CHALICE GIFTED TO MY LADY FROM THE EMPRESS AGNES?

FOUR BOLTS OF FINE LINEN PURCHASED IN ROME?

GOLD AND GARNET NECKLACE PURCHASED FOR MY LADY BY THE LORD TOSTIG IN SIENA?

WHERE ARE MY CHRONICLE FOLIOS?

LONDON

AUTUMN 1061

AND THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING...

# The Life and Travels of Judith of Flanders 1031-1094

Flanders.....1031-1051  
England.....1051-1065  
Pilgrimage to Rome.....1061  
Flanders.....1065-1071  
Holy Roman Empire...1071-1094

