

# The Chair of Saint Lutgard

## The cult of a medieval object

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The chair of Saint Lutgard, dating of 1190-1210. Kerniel, Abbey Mariënlof.

### Form chair to cult object

The chair of Saint Lutgard is a less known, medieval object with a remarkable practise. It is used by women with a child wish. Until today they visit Abbey Mariënlof in Kerniel (Belgium) with a last spark of hope. They come to pray to Saint Lutgard, take place in the chair and ask for her help with their unfulfilled desire to have children or for obtaining a prosperous birth.

When this practice started is not clear. We have to wait until 1936 for the first record of usage. Most likely it existed already much longer. Then, when the construction of the chair became too unstable due to its popularity, it became forbidden to take place in it.

In addition worshippers started to scratch parts off the chair. They considered the chair as a relic and believed that these parts would help them and found comfort in it. A plate was added to protect the chair of its destruction.



The chair with above a protective plate. Kerniel, Abbey Mariënlof. © KIK-IRPA, Brussels



The chair of Saint Lutgard, condition in 1944. © KIK-IRPA, Brussels

### Saint Lutgard

Saint Lutgard was born in Tongeren (Belgium) in 1182. After a vision in which she met Christ, she decided to enter the Benedictine convent of Saint Catherina in Sint-Truiden. Around her 33th birthday Saint Lutgard was elected prioress. However she wanted to become a Cistercian and went to the convent of *Aywira* where she died in 1246.

Lutgard belonged to the 13th century mystical women's movement in the diocese of Liège. These women chose a life of simplicity and chastity in the spirit of the gospel. During her life she had a lot of mystical experiences and visions in which the Lord came to her.

### The Chair, an heirloom of Saint Lutgard

The chair was used by Saint Lutgard as a choir seat. After the French Revolution the last sister, Régine de Musiël (1753-1836), wrote a will in which she mentions that after her death the chair had to go to Abbey Mariënlof, where the chair is preserved today. In 1944 the chair was photographed by the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) in Brussels. The object was placed on a platform and the object was supported by four spherical feet. A restoration was carried out around 1960. The platform, the four spherical feet and the protective board on the top of the chair were removed.