

The Life of Saint Katherine

by John Capgrave, edited by Karen A. Winstead

DESCRIPTION:

John Capgrave's *The Life of Saint Katherine*, written c. 1463 in Lynn in Norfolk, is, according to the editor, . . . the longest and most intricate Katherine legend written during the Middle Ages, either in Latin or in any vernacular. In telling the story of the life of the virgin martyr, Katherine, Capgrave uses many of the tropes that mark the enormously popular genre of hagiography as it was written throughout the Middle Ages. Given his learning, however, and his evident acquaintance with the works of Chaucer, Lydgate, and Osburn Bokenham, and his knowledge of medieval drama, and the possibility that he knew of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, this saint's life should be particularly interesting to students of late Middle English culture, especially literature. In the course of his encyclopedic narrative, in which he evidently sought to appeal to a broad audience in sophisticated, if provincial, Norfolk, Capgrave inserts digressions on Greek and Roman history; on just and unjust rule and justifiable vs. unjustifiable rebellion; on child care; on medieval English feasts, jousts, and pageants; and on the role(s) of women.

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