

Werner Williams-Krapp

Geistliche Literatur des späten Mittelalters

Kleine Schriften Edited by Kristina Freienhagen-Baumgardt and Katrin Stegherr



In the Late Middle Ages vernacular literature became immensely important as a means of communicating religious knowledge to the unlearned and semi-learned. Whereas an elitist 'mystical' discourse dominated vernacular religious literature of the 14th century, in the 15th century adherents of the so-called theology of piety initiated a tremendous 'democratization' of religious knowledge, which can also be seen as a reaction to the strongly increasing rate of literacy among the laity and the ability to produce books more cheaply due to the increased use of paper. This new inclusion of the laity in the religious literary culture contributed in an important way to the success of the Reformation. In the articles collected here, Werner Williams examines central aspects of this development and its socio-historical prerequisites. He interprets and contextualizes important works of mystical literature, provides an extensive analysis of the immense importance of the reform movements within the orders in the 15th century for the production, reception and circulation of religious literature, and finally, focuses on the diverse forms in which the lives of the saints, the most beloved medieval narrative genre, appear in vernacular literature.

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