

Saints, Pilgrims, and the Medieval Church

The Book of Margery Kempe
Written in the late 1430s

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Jesus, Empire and Church

- Roman Empire ~50 to 312
 - Christianity illegal
 - Sporadic persecution
- Jesus and Apostles
- Early Christian Martyrs
- Rise of Celibacy
 - Holy widows, virgin saints
- Christian Rome, after 312
 - Christian Emperors
 - East and West
 - Germanic peoples & kingdoms
- Secular Clergy
 - bishops, priests
- Monasticism
 - monks, nuns
- Spiritual Marriage
- Medieval Christian monarchies, from 12th C
- Cult Virgin Mary

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Saints

Rome and early medieval:

- martyrs
 - Roman persecution
 - Germanic opposition
- St. Perpetua, d. 203 AD
- brides of Christ
 - cloistered nuns
 - St. Hildegard of Bingen, 12thC
 - anchorites
 - Julian of Norwich, 14thC
 - widows
 - St. Bridget, 14thC
- Holiness
 - withdrawal
 - hermits
 - monks
 - engagement
 - kings
 - bishops, friars

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The literature of saints

- Hagiography: Lives of Saints
 - Challenging authority, patriarchy
 - St. Winifred, 7th C
- Writings: visions and experiences
 - St. Perpetua, 3rd Century
 - Hildegard of Bingen, 12th Century
 - St. Bridget, 14th Century
 - Julian of Norwich, 15th Century

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Introduction: Perpetua

“What follows here shall she tell herself; the whole order of her martyrdom as she left it written with her own hand and in her own words.”

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.asp>

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“We were still under legal surveillance and my father was liked to vex me with his words and continually strove to hurt my faith because of his love: ‘Father, said I...I call myself nothing other than that which I am, a Christian.’ Then my father, angry with this word, came upon me to tear out my eyes; but he only vexed me, and he departed vanquished, he and the arguments of the devil....

After a few days we were taken into prison, and I was much afraid because I had never known such darkness. O bitter day! There was a great heat because of the press, there was the cruel handling of the soldiers.”

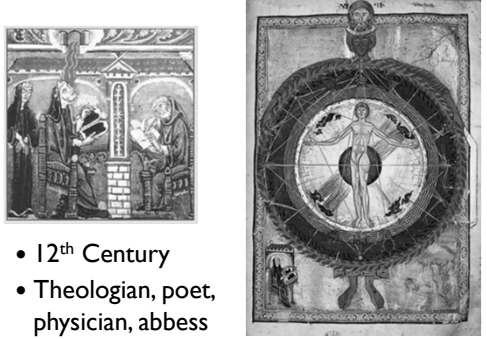
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- *Perpetua's Visions*

"I beheld a ladder of bronze, marvelously great, reaching up to heaven; and it was narrow, so that not more than one might go up at one time. ... And I went up, and I saw a very great space of garden, and in the midst a man sitting, white-headed, in shepherd's clothing, tall, milking his sheep; and standing around in white were many thousands. And he raised his head and beheld me and said to me: 'Welcome, child.' And he cried to me, and from the curd he had from the milk he gave me as it were a morsel; and I took it with joined hands and ate it up; and all that stood around said, 'Amen.' And at the sound of that word I awoke, yet eating I know not what sweet."

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Hildegard of Bingen



- 12th Century
- Theologian, poet, physician, abbess

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Hildegard of Bingen

The Virtues of St. Benedict, The Inspired Author of the Rule

- And I, a poor little female in form, unlearned by human teaching, looked toward the true light and to the memory of blessed Benedict as you requested, in order that the matters in the teaching of the Rule which are more difficult and obscure to human understanding might be revealed to me through the grace of God.
- And I heard a voice from the true light saying to me: The Holy Spirit effected most brilliant gifts and mystic inspirations in St. Benedict, so that his mind glowed with the love of God, and by his virtues he shone like the dawn."

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In the Middle Ages -

Little chance at martyrdom
But – monasticism provided chance for...

- Celibate lives as brides of Christ
- Endowments and gifts
- Retirement to monasteries
- Devotional experiences

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Margery's reading list

Popular fourteenth-century devotional books – for laity in particular

Chapter 62

- Hilton's book,
 - *The Scale of Perfection*
- St. Bonaventure
 - *Stimulus Amoris (The Pricking of Love)*
- Richard Rolle
 - *Incendium Amoris (The Fire of Love)*
- Bride's book, St. Bridget's *Revelations*


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Nicholas Love,

The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ

- "... written ...[so that] devout imaginations and likenesses stir simple souls to the love of God and desire of heavenly things... to imagine and think diverse words and deeds of him and others that we find not written so that it not be against the law [doctrines of faith], as St. Gregory and other doctors say, that holy writ may be expounded and understood in diverse ways."

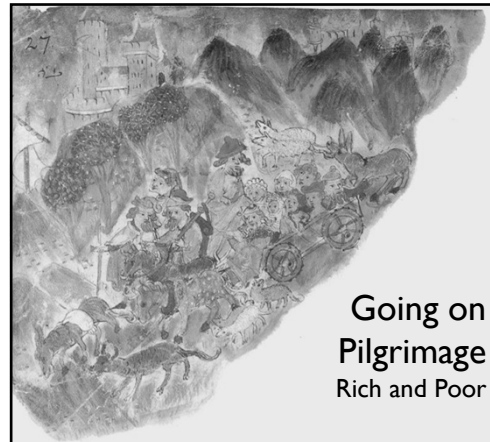
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Pilgrimage

- Holy Places
 - Where Jesus walked
 - Rome
 - Santiago de Compostela
 - Local shrines
 - St. Thomas a Becket, Canterbury
- Holy Relics

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Going on Pilgrimage

Rich and Poor




Pilgrim badges



Examples of Pilgrim Badges of St. Andrew, an worn in medieval times by thousands of pilgrims from all over Europe and made by the holy shrine of St. Andrew in Fife. Badges, which had four stitching holes so that they could be sewn to hats or clothing, were worn to gain the Saint's protection and as proof of pilgrimage.





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Popular Religion in the Later Middle Ages

- Cult of the Virgin Mary
- Suffering humanity of Christ
 - join spiritually in Christ's passion
 - more extreme: flagellants
- Urban fraternal guilds
 - Corpus Christi mystery plays, processions
- Anticlericalism
 - Black Death, 1348, recurrent
 - Papal schism, 1378-1415
- Lay devotionism and pilgrimage


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Heresy and Anti-clericalism

- Challenged
 - church hierarchy
 - sacraments
 - priesthood monopoly on -
 - access to God's grace & sacraments
 - theology
 - preaching and teaching


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Lollards

- Followers of **John Wycliffe** (1320-1384)
 - Doctor of Divinity, Oxford University
 - Advocated church reform
 - Vernacular Bible
 - Elimination of church wealth
 - Pope is Antichrist
 - Rejected transubstantiation


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Challenge to authority

- Peasant's Rebellion, 1381
- Lollards persecuted by Lancastrian kings
 - 1401 William Sawtre, priest of Lynn
 - 1410 John Badby, craftsman of Worcester
 - 1413 Sir John Oldcastle's rebellion
 - 1415 Council of Constance
 - John Hus of Prague
 - Wycliffe, condemned exhumed (1428)


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Authority in the Middle Ages

- Patriarchy
 - Husband is head
 - Husband controls all property
 - Women hold no offices
 - Women must be under male supervision
- Yes, but...
 - Women can inherit and hold property
 - The lord can be a lady
 - A wife can be appointed attorney
 - A wife as *femme sole*

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Marriage

- Mutual consent required
- Indissoluble
- The conjugal debt
- Spiritual Marriage


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Into this world came

◦ **MARGERY KEMPE**


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Who's Margary?

- The ambitious town business woman?
- The hysterical woman?
- The mystic and visionary?
- The pilgrim traveller?
- The heretic?
- The hypocrite?
- The independent woman who challenges male authority?
- The really tired mother or frustrated wife?

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Margery's explorations and encounters

- Her life journey
 - physical, emotional, and spiritual
 - construction of self
 - rejection and rejection
- Her book
 - construction of book
 - purpose
 - effect and reception
 - meaning and significance

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About Margery Kempe

- Born 1373, Lynn, Norfolk
- Father: John Burnham, merchant
 - Corpus Christi guild
- Married 1393
John Kempe




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Understanding Margery

In the context of medieval –

- popular religion
 - mysticism and lay devotion
 - pilgrimage
- religious and secular authority
- social hierarchy
- male patriarchy
- women's space and place

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MS 62183, Folio 15r
The Book of Margery Kempe
British Library

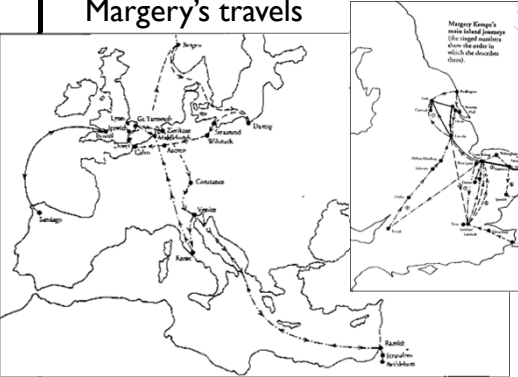
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Margery as Traveller

- Journey to recreate herself
 - Challenges church's sacramental authority
 - priesthood
 - Challenges husband's authority
 - Challenges secular/political authority
 - Challenges social hierarchy
 - Challenges woman's cultural place
- What does she become?


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Margery's travels



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Margery's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, 1413-15



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Margery's Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, 1417-18



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Pilgrimages to N. Europe, 1433-34



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Margery's physical & spiritual journey

- How does Margery follow the path set by:
 - Pilgrims?
 - Martyrs?
 - Saints?
 - Mystics?
 - Jesus?

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Whom does Margery encounter?

- Who is hostile?
- Who is her friend and supporter?
 - In England
 - On pilgrimage
 - In the secular world
 - In the spiritual world

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People Margery encounters

- **Julian of Norwich**, 1342 – ca. 1416
 - Anchorite and visionary
 - *Revelations of Divine Love*
- **Bishop of Lincoln**, Phillip Repington
- **Archbishop of Canterbury**
- **In Leicester**
- **On pilgrimage**

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Julian of Norwich, 15th Century

- “This is a Revelation of Love that Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in Sixteen Showings, or particular Revelations.”
- The First is of His precious crowning with thorns – with lessons on the nature of the Trinity
- The Fourth is the scourging of His tender body, with plenteous shedding of His blood.
- The Fifth is that the Fiend is overcome by the precious Passion of Christ.
- The Sixth is the worshipful thanking ... Our Lord rewardeth His blessed servants in Heaven.
- The Seventh is [our] often feeling of weal and woe.
- The Eighth is of the last pains of Christ, and His cruel dying.
- The Ninth is of ... the hard Passion of Christ and His rueful dying: in which joy and pleasing He wills that we be solaced and made glad.
- The Eleventh is an high ghostly Showing of His dear worthy Mother.
- The Sixteenth is that the Blissful Trinity, our Maker, in Christ Jesus our Saviour, endlessly dwells in our soul, ruling and protecting all things, including us.

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Julian of Norwich, the fourth showing

...I saw, beholding, the body plenteously bleeding as from the Scourging, as thus:—The fair skin was broken full deep into the tender flesh with sharp smiting all about the sweet body. So plenteously the hot blood ran out that there was neither seen skin nor wound, but as it were all blood. And when it came where it should have fallen down, then it vanished. Notwithstanding, the bleeding continued awhile: till it might be seen and considered. And this was so plenteous, to my sight, that I thought if it had been so in nature and in substance at that time, it should have made the bed all one blood, and have passed over about.

And then came to my mind that God has made waters plenteous in the earth to our service and to our bodily ease for tender love that He has for us, but yet He likes better that we take full homely His blessed blood to wash us of sin: for there is no water that is made that He likes so well to give us.

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Mary of Oignies, 1177 -1213

- Founder of Beguines
 - Lay religious communities of women in northwest Europe who live and work and worship together, but not under a rule. Some women were mystics and writers. The writings that were more theological in nature caused the Church to condemn some Beguines as heretics. The whole Beguine movement were declared heretical in 1312, but some allowed to continue under bishop's supervision.
- Jacques de Vitry in 1215, testifies that the priest asked to leave the church because of her unrestrained, loud sobbing. The priest then was stricken with similar tears that he could not stop. He recognizes that the tears are indeed a grace of God.

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