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0521023270 - Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England

Fiona Somerset

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Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England

Fiona Somerset investigates the politics of translating learned Latin materials into English between around 1370 and 1410, when such translation was highly controversial. It was thought potentially capable of rendering authoritative intellectual information and methods of argumentation previously available only to educated clerics accessible to a much wider lay audience. The book examines what kinds of academic materials were translated into English, what sorts of audience were projected for this sort of clerical discourse, how writers positioned themselves with respect to potential audiences and opponents, and what dissemination and readership their writings met with. The well-known concerns of authors such as Langland, Trevisa, and Wyclif with clerical corruption and lay education are discussed, and linked to those of more obscure writers in both Latin and English, some only recently edited, several extant only in manuscript. Rather than demarcating orthodox from heretical writers, the book explores their shared attitudes towards lay audience.

FIONA SOMERSET is Assistant Professor of Middle English at the University of Western Ontario; this, her first book, was prepared while she was a research fellow in Medieval English at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford.

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