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The Empire at the End of Time: Identity and Reform in Late Medieval German Prophecy

Frances Courtney Kneupper

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In this book, Frances Courtney Kneupper examines the apocalyptic prophecies of the late medieval Empire. Even within the sensational genre of eschatological prophecy, German prophecies are conspicuous for their bitter and violent nature. In addition to depicting the savage chastisement of the clergy and the forcible restructuring of the Church, these prophecies, also infuse the apocalyptic narrative with explicitly German elements. In fact, German speakers are frequently cast as the agents of these stirring events in which the clergy suffer tribulations and the Church hierarchy is torn down.

Kneupper explores the significance of these prophecies for members of the Empire from 1380 to 1480. Offering detailed accounts of the most significant prophecies, Kneupper shows how they fit into currents of thought and sentiment in the late medieval Empire. In particular, she considers the relationships of German prophecy to contemporary discourses on Church reform and political identity. She finds that eschatological thought was neither marginal nor heretical, but was embraced by a significant, orthodox population of German laypeople and clerics, thereby contributing to the development of a self-conscious, reform-minded, German-identified Empire on the Eve of the Reformation.

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