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**Review Essay: Ashley, Kathleen, and Pamela Sheingorn, edd.**  
***Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society***

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Ashley, Kathleen, and Pamela Sheingorn, edd. *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society*. University of Georgia Press, Athens 1990. 243 pp. \$30.00 / \$15.00.

Blumenfeld-Kozinski, Renate, ed. *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y. 1991. 315 pp. \$41.50 / \$15.95.

A decade of renewed interest in the medieval cult of the saints and the specificity of women's spirituality culminated in the publication of Rudolph Bell's *Holy Anorexia* and Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Far from having the last word on the subject, these two works plowed ground that others in the collections of essays under consideration here have seeded and harvested.

To find a collection of essays as internally coherent as that edited by Ashley and Sheingorn is unusual. Read in its entirety, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society* conjures up medieval life in cross-section. Ashley and Sheingorn's introduction includes a detailed historical survey, with bibliography, treating the evolution of St Anne as a 'constructed saint' in both eastern and western Christendom. The question of Anne's biography, her relationship to the Virgin, and the development of her cult from the second-century apocryphal *Protevangelium* of James through the late medieval *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine to eventual decline after the council of Trent pronounces devotion to the mother of Mary 'misplaced' and Martin Luther, exemplifying the attitude of many reformers, points out that the existence of his one-time patron had never been satisfactorily proven.

The 'multiple voices' of this collection arise from the multiple media they examine (folk tradition, drama, polemic, statuary, miniatures, wall paintings, altarpieces, and genealogical charts) from France, England, Belgium, and Italy during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. The essays insist, furthermore, on the

multiple images generated by the veneration of St Anne (Francesca Sautman and Gail McMurray Gibson) and the appropriation of her image for purposes social, political, and polemical (Kathleen Ashley, Roger J. Crum and David G. Wilkins, Pamela Sheingorn, Myra D. Orth). The text is generously illustrated and remarkable in its inclusion of sixteen exceptionally clear reproductions of panels of the *Saint Anne Altarpiece* originally produced for the Carmelite church in Frankfurt.

*Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, originating in the 1987 Barnard Medieval and Renaissance conference, is a much more heterogeneous ensemble of essays, fourteen in all, many quite specialized in subject matter and all the product of established scholars. In spite of a wide variety of critical approaches, the volume taken as a whole, like *Saint Anne*, but without its perhaps forced insistence on a grounding in cultural studies, works to represent the society generative of so many and varied images of sainthood.

This is especially true in part 1, 'Hagiography and History', which treats saints' lives as promotional material for monasteries (Magdalena Carrasco), society's changing views of holiness (André Vauchez), the spiritual sanctions of the *Book of Llandaff* and other charters of southeastern Wales (Lester K. Little), and the use of concrete images of everyday life and references to specifically English and Irish historical details in the *South English Legendary* (Klaus Jankofsky).

The second section, 'The Language of Religious Discourse', provides analyses of the *Golden Legend* (Evelyn Birge Vitz), Christine de Pizan's affirmation of authorial voice in the *Cité des dames* (Kevin Brownlee) and the illustrated *passio* of Romanus of Antioch with reference to language theories of St Augustine and Prudentius (Cynthia Hahn). David Damrosch studies Bernard of Clairvaux's portrayal of the alienation of women (and to a lesser extent Jews and heretics) as emblematic of human exile from God.

Damrosch's essay leads naturally to part 3, 'Saintliness and Gender', predicated as this section is on difference. John Coakley and Richard Kieckhefer focus on men, the former providing an anatomy of male piety and the latter an original look at male confessors' interactions with female saints. Karl Uitti delineates positive aspects of medieval attitudes toward women, while Elizabeth Robertson, in her study of the *Life of Saint Margaret*, considers these attitudes to have imprisoned women in their physical natures, forcing them to seek the spiritual world through the physical. Jo Ann McNamara's exciting and important contribution situates female sanctity at the nexus of power and spirituality but finds women's efforts to express themselves spiritually shaped and limited by the outlets society permitted them.

Echoes, reverberations, and a well-done introduction by Brigitte Cazelles unify this rich volume. Practically speaking, it is difficult to circulate papers among contributors but this work cries out for the intertextual acknowledgment of common concerns and cross-disciplinary discoveries if only to avoid the recommendation of fellow essayists' topics for 'future study'!