



The Gnostics

David Brakke

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Brakke writes a pioneering study of the way the demon role relates to religious thinking and to cultural anxieties. The author's sources include biographies of exceptional monks, collections of monastic sayings and stories, letters from ascetic teachers to their disciples, sermons, community rules, and biblical commentaries. When monks imagined the resistance that they had to overcome in cultivating their selves or the temptation that offered an easier path, they saw supernatural beings that could take the shapes of animals, women, boys, and false angels in their attempts to seduce monks away from their devotion to God. And when they considered the inclinations in their own selves that opposed their best intentions, they concluded that demons introduced such problematic "thoughts" to their minds. Although the last twenty years has seen an explosion of scholarship on early Christian asceticism, producing brilliant explorations of the body, sexual renunciation, fasting, and gender, combat with demons has been left relatively unexplored.

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