



## Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)

By Nancy Mandeville Caciola

Download now

Read Online →

**Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)** By Nancy Mandeville Caciola

Trance states, prophesying, convulsions, fasting, and other physical manifestations were often regarded as signs that a person was seized by spirits. In a book that sets out the prehistory of the early modern European witch craze, Nancy Caciola shows how medieval people decided whom to venerate as a saint infused with the spirit of God and whom to avoid as a demoniac possessed of an unclean spirit. This process of discrimination, known as the discernment of spirits, was central to the religious culture of Western Europe between 1200 and 1500.

Since the outward manifestations of benign and malign possession were indistinguishable, a highly ambiguous set of bodily features and behaviors were carefully scrutinized by observers. Attempts to make decisions about individuals who exhibited supernatural powers were complicated by the fact that the most intense exemplars of lay spirituality were women, and the "fragile sex" was deemed especially vulnerable to the snares of the devil. Assessments of women's spirit possessions often oscillated between divine and demonic interpretations. Ultimately, although a few late medieval women visionaries achieved the prestige of canonization, many more were accused of possession by demons.

Caciola analyzes a broad array of sources from saints' lives to medical treatises, exorcists' manuals to miracle accounts, to find that observers came to rely on the discernment of bodies rather than seeking to distinguish between divine and demonic possession in purely spiritual terms.

↓ [Download Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession ...pdf](#)

📄 [Read Online Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possessio ...pdf](#)



# Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)

*By Nancy Mandeville Caciola*

## **Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola**

Trance states, prophesying, convulsions, fasting, and other physical manifestations were often regarded as signs that a person was seized by spirits. In a book that sets out the prehistory of the early modern European witch craze, Nancy Caciola shows how medieval people decided whom to venerate as a saint infused with the spirit of God and whom to avoid as a demoniac possessed of an unclean spirit. This process of discrimination, known as the discernment of spirits, was central to the religious culture of Western Europe between 1200 and 1500.

Since the outward manifestations of benign and malign possession were indistinguishable, a highly ambiguous set of bodily features and behaviors were carefully scrutinized by observers. Attempts to make decisions about individuals who exhibited supernatural powers were complicated by the fact that the most intense exemplars of lay spirituality were women, and the "fragile sex" was deemed especially vulnerable to the snares of the devil. Assessments of women's spirit possessions often oscillated between divine and demonic interpretations. Ultimately, although a few late medieval women visionaries achieved the prestige of canonization, many more were accused of possession by demons.

Caciola analyzes a broad array of sources from saints' lives to medical treatises, exorcists' manuals to miracle accounts, to find that observers came to rely on the discernment of bodies rather than seeking to distinguish between divine and demonic possession in purely spiritual terms.

## **Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #1122102 in Books
- Published on: 2006-07-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x .20" w x 6.13" l, 1.12 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

 [Download Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possessio ...pdf](#)



**Download and Read Free Online Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola**

---

**Editorial Review**

Review

"This book is a thoughtful and rich exploration of an important aspect of medieval religious culture. Discerning readers interested in spirituality, gender, or conceptions of the body in the Middle Ages will be well rewarded."? *American Historical Review*

"Caciola brings to light lesser-known but textually documented visionaries of the Middle Ages, along with the big names, in her study of the fine line between 'delusional' and 'devotional' behaviors. In discussing these medieval women's behavior and writings, she highlights the fact that gender was often the factor that determined whether one was considered demonically or divinely possessed. . . . Caciola provides a perceptive piece of historical scholarship on a topic of great interest to religious studies and women's studies collections."? *Library Journal*

"*Discerning Spirits* is clearly an important contribution to the study of medieval culture, demonic possession, sainthood, and women's history. Caciola has a strong command of Latin, French, German, and Italian as witnessed in the numerous translations dispersed throughout the text. . . . Ultimately, the work succeeds in laying out a framework for the discernment of bodies associated with divine and demonic possession, especially among women."? *Comitatus*

"The point of departure for this remarkable and bracingly refreshing book on female spirit possession in medieval France, Italy, and the Lowlands is the observation that divine possession and demonic possession manifested themselves in almost identical ways in the human body. . . . The author has a remarkable gift for language and an obvious delight in the well-chosen word; her sentences crackle with energy and shine with a luminous clarity. . . . *Discerning Spirits* is a masterful achievement."? *Renaissance Quarterly*

"The groundbreaking work on exorcism manuals and the impressive range of sources handled throughout the book are particularly noteworthy. Moreover, the striking visual evidence is clearly presented, lucidly analyzed, and tightly interwoven with the rest of the argument. Scholars, graduate students, and even advanced undergraduates interested in the history of women, the church, and the body will profit from reading *Discerning Spirits*."? *Speculum*

"Nancy Caciola explores the deep misogyny in medieval culture as it appears in the treatment of female demoniacs, in clerical reactions to women's extraordinary piety, and in the literature on discernment of spirits. She traces the ambiguous boundary between sainthood and demonic possession. And she shows with unusual clarity how thinking about these matters developed in the specific circumstances of later medieval culture. *Discerning Spirits* will fascinate readers interested in sainthood, possession, women's history, and medieval culture generally."—Richard Kieckhefer, Northwestern University

"In thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe, theologians and preachers could not decide how to interpret the behavior of certain inspired women who experienced trances and ecstatic states: were they possessed by the devil or filled with the Holy Spirit? With no objective criteria for 'discerning spirits'—evaluating the soul based on outward appearances—it was generally accepted that the signs were ambiguous and the nature of the women's souls uncertain. By exploring the historical record, Nancy Caciola helps us understand that the strict opposition between Good and Evil is not an intrinsic aspect of religious and political discourse. Such a book is urgently needed today!"—Jean-Claude Schmitt, author of *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*

#### From the Inside Flap

"Nancy Caciola explores the deep misogyny in medieval culture as it appears in the treatment of female demoniacs, in clerical reactions to women's extraordinary piety, and in the literature on discernment of spirits. She traces the ambiguous boundary between sainthood and demonic possession. And she shows with unusual clarity how thinking about these matters developed in the specific circumstances of later medieval culture. *Discerning Spirits* will fascinate readers interested in sainthood, possession, women's history, and medieval culture generally."—Richard Kieckhefer, Northwestern University

"In thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe, theologians and preachers could not decide how to interpret the behavior of certain inspired women who experienced trances and ecstatic states: were they possessed by the devil or filled with the Holy Spirit? With no objective criteria for 'discerning spirits'—evaluating the soul based on outward appearances—it was generally accepted that the signs were ambiguous and the nature of the women's souls uncertain. By exploring the historical record, Nancy Caciola helps us understand that the strict opposition between Good and Evil is not an intrinsic aspect of religious and political discourse. Such a book is urgently needed today!"—Jean-Claude Schmitt, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, author of *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*

#### From the Back Cover

"Nancy Caciola explores the deep misogyny in medieval culture as it appears in the treatment of female demoniacs, in clerical reactions to women's extraordinary piety, and in the literature on discernment of spirits. She traces the ambiguous boundary between sainthood and demonic possession. And she shows with unusual clarity how thinking about these matters developed in the specific circumstances of later medieval culture. *Discerning Spirits* will fascinate readers interested in sainthood, possession, women's history, and medieval culture generally."—Richard Kieckhefer, Northwestern University

"In thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe, theologians and preachers could not decide how to interpret the behavior of certain inspired women who experienced trances and ecstatic states: were they possessed by the devil or filled with the Holy Spirit? With no objective criteria for 'discerning spirits'—evaluating the soul based on outward appearances—it was generally accepted that the signs were ambiguous and the nature of the women's souls uncertain. By exploring the historical record, Nancy Caciola helps us understand that

the strict opposition between Good and Evil is not an intrinsic aspect of religious and political discourse. Such a book is urgently needed today!"—Jean-Claude Schmitt, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, author of *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **John Richardson:**

Book is definitely written, printed, or outlined for everything. You can learn everything you want by a publication. Book has a different type. We all know that that book is important issue to bring us around the world. Next to that you can your reading talent was fluently. A reserve *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)* will make you to end up being smarter. You can feel far more confidence if you can know about anything. But some of you think that will open or reading any book make you bored. It is not necessarily make you fun. Why they might be thought like that? Have you seeking best book or suited book with you?

#### **Alexandra Sauer:**

This *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)* usually are reliable for you who want to certainly be a successful person, why. The reason why of this *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)* can be among the great books you must have is actually giving you more than just simple reading through food but feed an individual with information that maybe will shock your before knowledge. This book is usually handy, you can bring it everywhere you go and whenever your conditions both in e-book and printed versions. Beside that this *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)* giving you an enormous of experience like rich vocabulary, giving you test of critical thinking that we know it useful in your day action. So , let's have it and enjoy reading.

#### **Marcia Marshall:**

This book untitled *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)* to be one of several books that best seller in this year, honestly, that is because when you read this publication you can get a lot of benefit onto it. You will easily to buy this kind of book in the book retail store or you can order it by means of online. The publisher in this book sells the e-book too. It makes you more readily to read this book, as you can read this book in your Smartphone. So there is no reason for you to past this reserve from your list.

#### **Martha Royal:**

The particular book *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)* will bring one to the new experience of reading any book. The author style to spell out the idea is very unique. Should you try to find new book to see, this book very suited

to you. The book *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)* is much recommended to you you just read. You can also get the e-book from your official web site, so you can quickly to read the book.

**Download and Read Online *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past)* By Nancy Mandeville Caciola**

**#A23ME7DZKPO**



## **Read Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola for online ebook**

Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola Free PDF d0wnl0ad, audio books, books to read, good books to read, cheap books, good books, online books, books online, book reviews epub, read books online, books to read online, online library, greatbooks to read, PDF best books to read, top books to read Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola books to read online.

### **Online Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola ebook PDF download**

**Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola Doc**

**Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola Mobipocket**

**Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola EPub**

**A23ME7DZKPQ: Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages (Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past) By Nancy Mandeville Caciola**