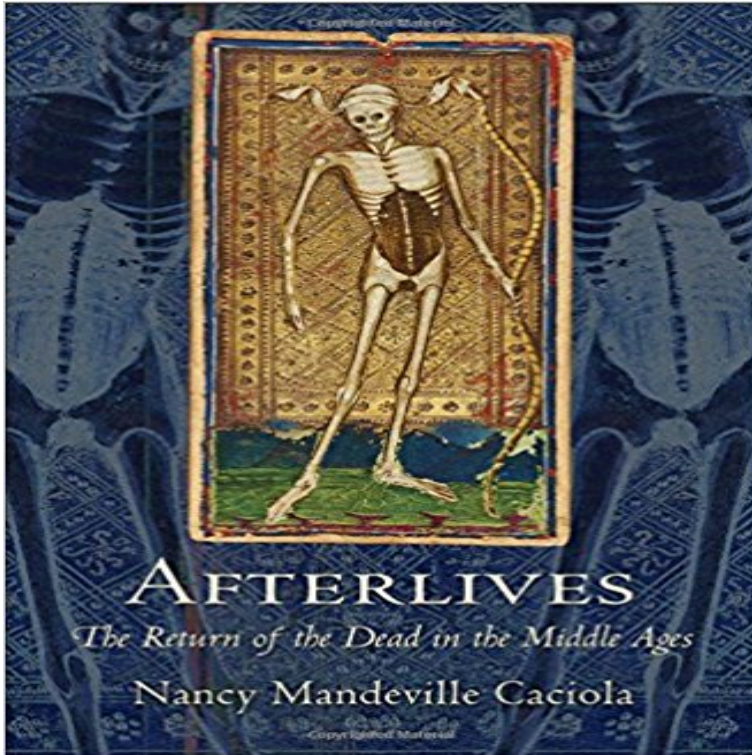


Afterlives: The Return of the Dead in the Middle Ages



Simultaneously real and unreal, the dead are people, yet they are not. The society of medieval Europe developed a rich set of imaginative traditions about death and the afterlife, using the dead as a point of entry for thinking about the self, regeneration, and loss. These macabre preoccupations are evident in the widespread popularity of stories about the returned dead, who interacted with the living both as disembodied spirits and as living corpses or revenants. In *Afterlives*, Nancy Mandeville Caciola explores this extraordinary phenomenon of the living's relationship with the dead in Europe during the five hundred years after the year 1000. Caciola considers both Christian and pagan beliefs, showing how certain traditions survived and evolved over time, and how attitudes both diverged and overlapped through different contexts and social strata. As she shows, the intersection of Christian eschatology with various pagan afterlife imaginings--from the classical paganisms of the Mediterranean to the Germanic, Celtic, Slavic, and Scandinavian paganisms indigenous to northern Europe--brought new cultural values about the dead into the Christian fold as Christianity spread across Europe. Indeed, the Church proved surprisingly open to these influences, absorbing new images of death and afterlife in unpredictable fashion. Over time, however, the persistence of regional cultures and beliefs would be counterbalanced by the effects of an increasingly

centralized Church hierarchy. Through it all, one thing remained constant: the deep desire in medieval people to bring together the living and the dead into a single community enduring across the generations.

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