Reading Medieval Anchoritism: Ideology and Spiritual Practices (Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages)

Mari Hughes-Edwards

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Medieval anchorites willingly embraced the most extreme form of solitude known to the medieval world, so they might forge a closer connection with God. Yet to be physically enclosed within the same four walls for life required strength far beyond most medieval Christians. This book explores the English anchoritic guides which were written, revised and translated, throughout the Middle Ages, to enable recluses to come to terms with the enormity of their choices. The book explores five centuries of the guides' negotiations of four anchoritic ideals: enclosure, solitude, chastity and orthodoxy, and of two vital anchoritic spiritual practices: asceticism and contemplative experience. It explodes the myth of the anchorhold as solitary death-cell, revealing it as the site of potential intellectual exchange and spiritual growth.

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