


MONKS, PRIESTS, AND MAGICIANS:  
DEMONS AND MONASTIC SELF-DIFFERENTIATION  
IN LATE ANCIENT EGYPT



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*This paper will explore Egyptian monastic literature's presentation of the monk as an expert in controlling the demonic in the context of social contact and competition with two similar and overlapping figures, the (pagan) priest and magician. How does monastic literature define and legitimate the identity and role of the monk? First, a series of stories counter the similarities between monks and priests/magicians by basing the monk's ability to fight the demonic in a superior written text, the Christian Scriptures (as opposed to the magical text). Second, some anecdotes show monks in direct competition with priests and/or magicians, a struggle in which the demonic can serve as a "third term" and which the monastic literature resolves by depicting priests becoming monks. Finally, accounts of exorcisms by monks locate monastic authority over the demonic in the virtue of humility, a strategy of legitimation that more generally promotes the monastic lifestyle as superior to other options for religious virtuosi.*

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