



# The Displacement of the Body in Ælfric's *Virgin Martyr Lives*

*Alison Gulley*

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## **The Displacement of the Body in Ælfric's Virgin Martyr Lives** Alison Gulley

The Displacement of the Body in Ælfric's Virgin Martyr Lives addresses 10th-century Old English hagiographical translations, from Latin source material, by the abbot and grammarian Ælfric. The vitae of Agnes, Agatha, Lucy, and Eugenia, and the married saints Daria, Basilissa, and Cecilia, included in Ælfric's Old English Lives of Saints, recount the lives, persecution, and martyrdom of young women who renounce sex and, in the first four stories, marriage, to devote their lives to Christian service. They purport to be about the primacy of virginity and the role of the body in attaining sanctity. However, a comparison of the Latin sources with Ælfric's versions suggests that his translation style, characterized by simplifying the most important meanings of the text, omits certain words or entire episodes that foreground suppressed female sexuality as key to sainthood. The Old English Lives de-emphasize the physical nature of faith and highlight the importance of spiritual purity. In this volume, Alison Gulley explores how the context of the Benedictine Reform in late Anglo-Saxon England and Ælfric's commitment to writing for a lay audience resulted in a set of stories depicting a spirituality distinct from physical intactness.

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