

Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men.

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Abstract

Early Christian legends of monastic women disguised as men have recently been the object of psychological, literary, sociohistorical, anthropological, and the ological study. In this article, I will raise new questions about these legends from the perspective of the poststructuralist theory of intertextuality. What are the cultural "texts" that these legends "play upon"? What does this intertextuality tell us about how such legends participated in late antique cultural discourse on gender and the female body? Here, I examine five cultural "texts" reworked in the legends: 1) the lives of earlier transvestite saints like St. Thecla; 2) the *Life of St. Antony*; 3) late antique discourse about eunuchs; 4) the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife from Genesis;

and 5) the textual deconstruction and reconstitution of the female body in early Christian literature. These "intertexts," along with key christomimetic elements in the legends, suggest how binary conceptions of gender identity were ultimately destabilized in the figure of the transvestite saint.

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INTRODUCTION

This is an essay about the peculiar ways in which women's identity and piety were portrayed in late antique hagiographical texts. In early Christian saints' lives, women are alternatively castigated as fallen daughters of Eve and lauded as heroic models for pious imitation. On the one hand, they are depicted by male writers as sources of temptation and objects of lust; on the other hand, a select number of them are celebrated as somehow having transcended the limitations of their sex. In light of these conflicting images, how did the authors of saints' lives seek to shape



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