



The Life of Saint Helia: Critical Edition, Translation, Introduction, and Commentary (Oxford Early Christian Texts)

Virginia Burrus, Marco Conti

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The Life of Saint Helia, a late ancient Latin hagiography of uncertain provenance, is a remarkable and virtually unknown text, of which a critical edition and English translation appear here for the first time, accompanied by an introduction and commentary. Written predominately in dialogue format, the *Life* records a lengthy and highly polemical debate between a young girl Helia and her mother regarding the relative merits of virginity and marriage, followed by a dialogue between Helia and a bishop and a debate between Helia and a judge. The arguments both for and against virginity are biblically based, and the text is notable for its citational density and exegetical creativity. The dramatic narrative that frames the dialogue appears to have been influenced by the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, while the speeches suggest familiarity with the virginity apologetics of Ambrose and Jerome; because the *Life* has is preserved in only two medieval manuscripts, both from northern Spain, a Priscillianist context of composition is possible.

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