

Article

Saltatory Spectacles: (Pre)Colonialism, Travel, and Ancestral Lyric in the Middle Ages and *Raymonda*

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Abstract

This article examines tropes of (proto)colonialism in medieval European culture and *Raymonda* (Раймонда), a ballet that premiered in St. Petersburg in 1898 and is set during the Fifth Crusade (1217–1221). Juxtaposing premodern travel accounts with a postmedieval dance creation, this study illuminates how religious otherness, imperial ambitions, and feminine resistance frame representations of dance spectacle and spectatorship. Following a synopsis of the ballet, the subsequent section considers *Raymonda*'s Muslim characters vis-à-vis medieval texts and images. Here, I incorporate Crusades-era sources, travel literature, and their accompanying iconography alongside the characterizations and aesthetics that pervade *Raymonda*. These comparisons apprehend the racializing and (proto)colonial thrust of crusader ideology and Russian imperialism. The final section historicizes *Raymonda* through medieval lyric and gestures toward an Afro-Islamic ancestry of lyricism and ballet medievalism. Therefore, while traditional versions of *Raymonda* project Islamophobia, I posit that a rigorous examination of the Middle Ages imbues this ballet with profundity and intercultural nuance. Ultimately, this article demonstrates how a combined study of premodern travel and postmedieval dance may help scholars challenge the Eurocentrism, colonialism, and Whiteness that pervade medieval studies and the art of ballet.

Keywords: medieval/Middle Ages; travel literature; Crusades; Islam; ballet; troubadours; lyric; *qiyān*



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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of medievalism—or post-medieval re-imaginings of the Middle Ages—abounds throughout European art, literature, and music. Yet, little scholarship exists on ballet medievalism. Literary scholar Seeta Chaganti has offered one of the few studies on this topic. Her analysis of the medievalism within *Raymonda* (Раймонда), a ballet that premiered in St. Petersburg in 1898 and is set during the Fifth Crusade (1217–1221), imparts thought-provoking insights. As Chaganti writes, *Raymonda* “integrates historical textuality and memorializing nostalgia . . . in the construction of a medieval past” (Chaganti 2011, pp. 147, 157).¹

Taking a different, yet complementary, approach to ballet medievalism, I historicize the premodern backdrop of travel, religious otherness, and ancestral lyric that configure *Raymonda*. When referring to the historical Crusades and medieval travel accounts, I employ the terms “proto-colonialism,” “pre-colonial,” or “quasi-colonial,” to differentiate premodern acts of conquest and domination from modern realities of colonialism. In other words, medieval Christians may not have occupied and ruled over other territories and peoples as modern colonizers did, but their rhetoric and motivations resemble a colonial

mindset. In this sense, I derive inspiration from Marcel Elias' recent retheorization of medieval Orientalism. As he writes, "... crusades-informed representations [can] contradict, challenge, or otherwise disrupt Orientalist ideologies," and an informed medieval studies approach to Orientalism must incorporate "the resistance of Indigenous peoples, both military and cultural" (Elias 2025, pp. 466–67, 469). Indeed, the Crusades were rife with military reconquests and political resistance on the part of Muslim leadership and peoples. Moreover, medieval travel literature—particularly that of Marco Polo—showcases the vast wealth and power of the Mongol Empire (1206–1368), the largest contiguous empire in human history. Interestingly, nineteenth-century Russia acquired many of the Central Asian territories that the Mongols once held, and Russian scholars and imperialists often viewed the Mongol Empire with a sense of dignity and deference. Moreover, given that Russia straddles Asia and Europe, a simplistic binary between the Orient and the Occident does not hold. According to scholar David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Russian orientologists did not reduce the object of their inquiry to some uniform, Saidian other. . . . The most intriguing element of Russian thinking about Asia is the sense among many of a shared heritage" (Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010, pp. 238–39). Given these parallels, juxtaposing medieval sources with *Raymonda* yields rich insights about the role of dance in both signifying and countering colonization. Interpreting premodern travel accounts alongside postmedieval dance history, this study illuminates how religious otherness and imperial ambitions, as well as feminine resistance, frame representations of dance spectacle and spectatorship.

The first section provides a synopsis of *Raymonda*, paying close attention to the medievalistic elements in its narrative and décor. The subsequent section examines *Raymonda*'s Muslim characters vis-à-vis medieval texts and images. Here, I incorporate Crusades-era sources, travel literature, and their accompanying iconography alongside the characterizations and aesthetics of *Raymonda*. These comparisons apprehend the racializing and (proto)colonial thrust of medieval crusader ideology and nineteenth-century Russian imperialism. The final section historicizes *Raymonda* through medieval lyric and gestures toward an Afro-Islamicate ancestry of premodern lyricism and ballet medievalism. While traditional versions of *Raymonda* project Islamophobia, I posit that a rigorous examination of the Middle Ages imbues this ballet with profundity and intercultural nuance. Ultimately, this article demonstrates how a combined study of premodern travel and postmedieval dance may help scholars challenge the Eurocentrism, colonialism, and Whiteness that pervade medieval studies and the art of ballet.²

2. *Raymonda* (1898): Synopsis and *Mis-en-Scène*

Raymonda (Раймонда), which premiered at the Imperial Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg on 19 January 1898, is perhaps the most extreme example of ballet medievalism. In other words, *Raymonda* is a postmedieval concert dance work that reimagines the Middle Ages through choreography, music, décor, costumes, and narrative. The ballet contains a cast of characters that includes Provençal troubadours, courtiers, and crusaders. *Raymonda* encompasses three acts, four scenes, and an apotheosis. It features a musical score by Alexander Glazunov and choreography by Marius Petipa. The original production also featured décor by Orest Allegri, Piotr Lambin, and Konstantin Ivanov; costumes by the Director of Imperial Theaters Ivan Vsevolozhsky; and libretto by journalist, novelist, and traveler Countess Lydia Pashkova (Fullington and Smith 2024, p. 597; Garafola 2003, p. 2).

Visual elements from the ballet exude medievalism. An 1898 photograph of the Mariinsky Ballet performing Act I of *Raymonda* reveals the décor's neo-medieval aesthetic: knightly armor, heraldic banners, and Gothic statuary adorn the space (Figure 1). The frontispiece for a piano transcription of Glazunov's score imitates medieval paleography

and manuscript illustration, given the *Book of Kells*-esque historiated initial for the letter R, inhabited by a hybridized creature and intertwining tendrils (Figure 2). Vestiges of Petipa’s original choreography can be reconstructed using Stepanov notation, a method of notating ballet movements that was developed in imperial Russia. Most full-length versions performed today are based on the 1948 Soviet revival that Konstantin Sergeyev staged (Fullington 2022, pp. 266–68; Fullington and Smith 2024, pp. 621–24).³



Figure 1. Mariinsky Ballet dancers in Act I of *Raymonda*, St. Petersburg, 1898, by unknown photographer of the Imperial Mariinsky Theater, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons/Creative Commons.



Figure 2. Frontispiece for *Raymonda* score transcribed for piano, music by Alexander Glazunov, cover design by M.P. Belaieff, Leipzig, 1898, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons/Creative Commons.

Pashkova’s libretto weaves a “Crusades fantasy” story around the titular protagonist (Macaulay et al. 2022).⁴ In Pashkova’s narrative, *Raymonda* is a noble lady in thirteenth-century France—somewhere in the fictional Provençal region of Doris—who socializes with courtiers and troubadours in her family’s feudal castle.⁵ In Act I, scene 1, *Raymonda* is at court celebrating her name day (birthday) with her friends Clémence and Henriette, troubadours Bernard and Béranger, her aunt the Countess Sybille, and fellow courtiers. *Raymonda*’s betrothed, the knight Jean de Brienne, has been called away by King Andrew II of Hungary to fight in the Crusades overseas.⁶ A mysterious Muslim soldier named

Abderrakhman (also spelled Abderakhman) arrives at Raymonda's castle for refuge and immediately falls in love with her. At the end of the festivities, Raymonda falls asleep and dreams of the White Lady—also known as La Dame Blanche—who is an animated statue symbolizing an ancestral protector of Raymonda's family.⁷

In Act I, scene 2, Dame Blanche's intercessory agency conjures a dreamy vision for Raymonda. When dreaming, Raymonda dances tenderly with Jean de Brienne, framed by an elegant *corps de ballet* (ensemble dance) of allegorical ladies and knights. The dream becomes a nightmare when Abderrakhman appears and tries to ravish Raymonda.

Act II returns to the Doris castle setting, this time honoring Jean's homecoming from the Crusades. But Jean's return is delayed, and Abderrakhman compels his retinue of servants to dance for Raymonda, after which he tries to abduct her by force. Upon Jean's return, the drama intensifies when Abderrakhman challenges Jean to a duel. With the help of Dame Blanche, Jean vanquishes the enemy. Act III, which teems with national dances, solo *divertissements*, and a regal *pas de deux* (partnered dance), celebrates the wedding of Raymonda and Jean. The original ballet concluded with an apotheosis that re-enacted a medieval tournament.⁸

The Russian premiere of *Raymonda* was, overall, successful. Some critics consider it Petipa's last great ballet (Wiley [1990] 2007, p. 392; Meisner 2019, p. 250; Fullington and Smith 2024, p. 597).⁹ Russian émigré choreographer George Balanchine adored the musical score. As he wrote, "Glazunov's music for *Raymonda* contains some of the finest ballet music we have" (Balanchine and Mason [1954] 1977, p. 468). By all accounts, the original cast members were stellar. Sergei Legat danced the role of Jean de Brienne and the respected artist Pavel Gerdt danced the role of Abderrakhman, which was primarily pantomime to accommodate his more advanced age of fifty-three (Fullington and Smith 2024, p. 602). The sterling Italian ballerina Pierina Legnani danced the role of Raymonda to much acclaim (Fullington and Smith 2024, p. 597). Other original cast members included Georgi Kyaksht as Bernard, Nikolai Legat as Béranger, Olga Preobrazhenskaya as Henriette, Klavdiya Kulichevskaya as Clémence, Giusseppina Cecchetti as Countess Sybille, Nikolai Aistov as King Andrei, and Lydia Svirskaya as the White Lady (Fullington 2022, p. 255).

Although George Balanchine-Alexandra Danilova and Rudolf Nureyev produced (nearly) full-length versions for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo (1946) and the Paris Opera Ballet (1983), respectively, today *Raymonda* primarily lies within the repertory of Russian companies—particularly the Mariinsky Ballet of St. Petersburg and the Bolshoi Ballet of Moscow (Macaulay et al. 2022).¹⁰ Numerous dance critics and choreographers have condemned the ballet's plot, describing Pashkova's libretto as "static," "problematic," "incomprehensible," "foolish," "trivial," "inadequate," "weak," "narratively thin," or "geographically convoluted" (Meisner 2019, p. 249; Fullington and Smith 2024, pp. 599–600; Grigorovich and Vanslow 1989, p. 11; Vaughan 1975–1976, p. 31; Anderson 2016, pp. 64–65; Clarke and Crisp 1981, p. 223; Greskovic 1998, p. 47; Perriman 2009, pp. 106–7).¹¹ In 1936, Russian balletomane Prince Peter Lieven wrote, "I myself . . . could never follow the story of *Raymonda* . . . it has everything but meaning" (cited in Garafola 2003, p. 9).¹² In more recent decades, Western ballet companies have avoided staging the ballet due to its culturally insensitive stereotypes, Islamophobia, and Orientalism (Macaulay et al. 2022; Campbell 2024; Heimlich 2024).

The failure of many dance critics and scholars to appreciate *Raymonda's* historical complexity is, in my estimation, far more problematic than Pashkova's actual libretto. Here, I follow Chaganti's lead in reassessing this fraught artistic work from a medievalist's perspective. Interpreting *Raymonda* through the lenses of medieval travel literature, the Crusades, and courtly love lyric, this study underscores the colonial contours and religious violence that haunt this perplexing ballet. As my exploration ensues, I suggest that a

medieval studies approach to *Raymonda* can help humanize and vindicate an otherwise controversial work of art. In this way, *Raymonda* may work to acknowledge the Afro-Islamic and feminine origins of medieval lyric and premodern dance and, by extension, ballet.

3. Tracing Colonial Contours: Medieval and Modern

Despite the centuries-long chasm between the historical Crusades and *Raymonda*, both phenomena anchor themselves in imperialism and colonialism. The Czarist regime's dominance over Central Asia and Middle Eastern territories invites an interpretive dialogue with the medieval Crusades (see also Allworth [1967] 1994; Keller 2020). Indeed, the spirit of Russian nationalism permeated ballet culture, especially in St. Petersburg (Meisner 2019, p. 21; see also Macaulay 2019).¹³ According to scholar Nadine Meisner, Russian theater enjoyed strong aristocratic patronage, and Czarina Catherine the Great founded and supported imperial theater in the late eighteenth century (Meisner 2019, p. 17). Russia had colonized vast portions of Central and East Asia and the Middle East, though it often looked to the West—particularly to France and its legendary dancer King Louis XIV—for inspiration (Meisner 2019, pp. 1–3; Scholl 2004, pp. 31–32). Indeed, the Russian Czars, especially Nicholas I, mythologized themselves as an extension and culmination of Western civilization (Meisner 2019, p. 34). At the same time, however, Russia, as a Eurasian empire, also looked East; Slavophilia often bore the mark of Sinophilia. Accordingly, Russia saw itself as a neo-Byzantine empire that conjoined East and West (Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010, esp. pp. 2–4, 9, 91). As this section reveals, medieval travel literature, too, could carry ambivalent views of non-European and non-Christian lands and cultures.

Though the military history staged in *Raymonda* contains several anachronisms, the Christian–Islamic encounter the ballet dramatizes—embodied by the dualistic characters of Jean de Brienne and Abderrakhman—has some historical basis. As noted, *Raymonda* takes place during the Fifth Crusade that spanned from 1217 to 1221, when European Christian warriors attempted to recapture Jerusalem. Specifically, Latin crusaders first targeted Egypt, which was then led by the Sultan of Egypt and Syria Al-Adil (d. 1218), the younger brother of Saladin. In conjunction with the “meteoric rise” of the Brienne dynasty in the early thirteenth century, Jean de Brienne became the Latin King of Jerusalem (from 1210 to 1225) and the Emperor of Constantinople (from 1229 to 1237, see Perry 2018, p. 33; Perry 2013, chs. 3, 5), thereby emerging as the only individual in history to hold those two titles.¹⁴ In *Raymonda*, Jean and King Andrew II of Hungary join forces for the Fifth Crusade. Though the historical Andrew did participate in this venture and led a war council meeting in Acre (present-day Israel) in his “Hungarian royal tent” that included Jean, the Knights Templar, the Teutonic Knights, and other leaders of the Fifth Crusade, he soon left crusading for relic collecting (Runciman [1954] 1989, esp. 146–49; Perry 2013, p. 91).¹⁵

Visual details from medieval material culture and *Raymonda*'s décor/costuming magnify the crusading spirit undergirding (proto)colonial exploits. Consider Jean de Brienne's personal seal, which signifies his political power and proximity to the sacred (Figure 3a,b).¹⁶ On the left/obverse side, Jean appears enthroned and holds a scepter, thus broadcasting his absolute power. On the right/reverse side, three sacred monuments within the Holy Land—the Holy Temple, the Tower of David, and the Holy Sepulchre—connect Jean to the ancient kings and military heroes of Israel.¹⁷ The costuming for *Raymonda* tends to accentuate this holy warrior trope. For a 2013 production, Silas Stubbs of the Vanemuine Ballet (Tartu, Estonia) appeared in a white tunic emblazoned with a red cross, his limbs covered with a silvery fabric suggestive of chainmail (Figure 4). Jean de Brienne's heroic panache would resonate with nineteenth-century Russian spectators and justify Russia's imperial dominance over the Middle East and Central Asia (see also Allworth [1967] 1994).



Figure 3. Seal of Jean de Brienne, obverse (a) and reverse (b), depicting Jean de Brienne enthroned and three edifices symbolizing Jerusalem (the Holy Temple, the Tower of David, and the Holy Sepulchre), c. early thirteenth century, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons and Creative Commons.



Figure 4. Silas Stubbs as Jean de Brienne from *Raymonda*, choreography by Yelena Pankova (after Marius Petipa), Vanemuine Ballet, Tartu, Estonia, 2013, photograph by Jack Devant.

The historical Jean de Brienne had closer ties to another key crusader, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (d. 1250), who became his son-in-law in 1225.¹⁸ In the spirit of the Crusades, both men wanted to exert their power and influence over geographical areas and cultures beyond the traditional confines of Latin Christianity. In a 1219 letter to Frederick, Jean wrote: “Your lordship knows that prudent men have very often advised, and the holy Lateran council agreed, that through an invasion of the kingdom of Egypt [*quod per invasionem Regni Babyloniae*], the Holy Land might be more easily liberated from infidel hands [*manibus infidelium liberari*]” (cited and trans. in Perry 2013, p. 199).¹⁹ Such imperial machinations would resonate with a nineteenth-century Russian audience spectating *Raymonda*.

The crusading context, as well as the aura of Islamophobia, are central to *Raymonda*’s colonial valence. Within the medieval European mentality, colonialism and crusading

were integrally connected to religiosity, travel, and migration. The crusader figure fused the pilgrim and the warrior. Taking up the cross and traversing the seas, crusaders' travels abroad carried a Christic and militaristic charge. The impassioned rhetoric of Pope Urban II (d. 1099) and other persuasive voices convinced crusaders that infiltrating the Holy Land and demolishing Muslim enemies constituted a sacred duty. Crusaders were led to believe that if they perished on the battlefield, they would become martyrs and enter paradise (Claster 2009, pp. xiii, xv; Constable 2008, pp. 18, 144–46, 155–56; Riley-Smith 2011, pp. 9–28; Dickason 2020, p. 47). The martyrdom of Latin crusaders somewhat mirrors the theme of dynastic succession that animates many Czarist-era ballets (Macaulay 2019).

For scholar Suzanne Akbari, the First Crusade of 1095 marked a landmark moment in premodern colonization (Akbari 2000, p. 19). According to her logic, by invading the Middle East and subsequently establishing colonies known as Outremer, the crusaders imposed their presence, values, and domination onto a foreign entity with brute force. Akbari specifically points to the conquest of Jerusalem as exemplifying an early colonial experiment in the Middle East (see also Ingham and Warren 2003, pp. 1–18).²⁰ Within a broader chronological purview, historian Robert Bartlett suggests that the making of Europe entailed the colonizing project of Christendom, given medieval Europe's imperialist and universalizing tendencies (Bartlett 1994, esp. 306). While *Raymonda* premiered nearly six centuries after the 1291 fall of Acre (the last crusader stronghold), its imperialist impetus that lurks beneath its homage to the Middle Ages was well intact.²¹ More specifically, the pervasiveness of French royalty among *Raymonda's* cast of characters would resonate with the Francophilic tendencies of imperial Russian ballet.

Crusader chronicles, travel literature, and iconography provide clues as to how Western medieval Christians perceived the Muslim Other. These sources, in turn, can help scholars dissect and de-romanticize *Raymonda's* Islamophobia. Consider a passage from the thirteenth-century *Chronica Majora* (*Major Chronicle*) by Matthew Paris (d. 1259), which describes two Muslim dancers at the court of Frederick II (who, incidentally, had once been married to Jean de Brienne's daughter Queen Isabella II of Jerusalem):

Duae enim puellae Sarracinae, corporibus elegantes, super pavimenti planiciem quatuor globos sphericos pedibus ascendebant, plantis suis subponentes, una videlicet duos, et alia reliquos duos, et super eosdem globos huc et illuc plaudentes transmeabant; et quo eas spiritus ferebat, volventibus spheris ferebantur, brachia ludendo et canendo diversimode contorquentes, et corpora secundum modulus replicantes, cimbala tinnientia vel tabellas in manibus collidentes et jocose se gerentes et prodigaliter exagitant. Et sic mirabile spectaculum ituentibus tam ipsae quam alii joculatores praebuerunt.

[Two Saracen [*sic*] girls of fine form stood upon four spheres placed upon the floor, one on two balls and the other on the other two, and they danced across the spheres to and fro; and in a festive spirit they gesticulated with their arms, singing in various contorted ways, and twisting their bodies according to the tune, beating cymbals or castanets together with their hands, and prodigiously twirling themselves around in fun. And indeed they afforded a marvelous spectacle to those watching, as did other jongleurs]. (Paris 1877, 6:147; trans. Lewis 1987, pp. 280–81)

Matthew's chronicle communicates a vivid image of adept, acrobatic dancing women. The dancers' skill and allure seem indisputable from the author's/audience's perspective. However, the dancers' Muslim identity is key to the colonizing contours of the performance that Matthew portrayed. As Ernst Kantorowicz, Jill Claster, and I have written, Frederick was not only a spirited crusader (he participated in the Fifth and Sixth Crusades), but he

had a deep fascination for Islamic fashion and aesthetics (Kantorowicz 1957, p. 312; Claster 2009, pp. 225, 230–31; Dickason 2023a, p. 322).²²

Despite Frederick’s aura of tolerance, his imperial dominion and Christian allegiance cast the dancers’ agility and dexterity in a dimmer light. The chronicler invokes an ethnic slur (i.e., “Saracen,” [sic]) when describing the dancers’ religious identity. To be clear, this offensive term is not Arabic in origin; rather, Western Christians employed it to shape derogatory attitudes toward Islam (Tolan 2002, ch. 6).²³ An extant manuscript from the *Chronica Majora*, now housed at Cambridge University’s Corpus Christi College, contains a marginal illustration of the two female Muslim dancers (Figure 5). The women appear poised and elongated. They each stand upon a green ball, one playing the castanets and the other playing what appears to be a tambourine. The marginal rubricated annotation identifies them as “jongleurs or female dancers” (*joculatores sive saltatrices*), thus underscoring their entertainment value. Within the broader context of the Crusades and Frederick’s conquests abroad, these dancers, as I have written elsewhere, “inevitably become entangled with the politics of pleasure and conquest” (Dickason 2023a, p. 323).²⁴

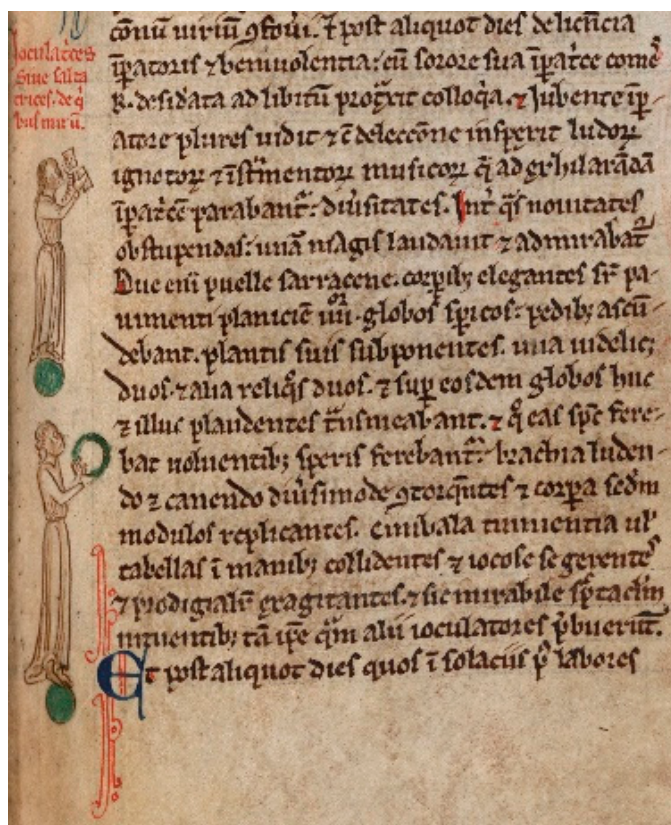


Figure 5. Female dancers from Matthew Paris’ *Chronica Majora* (*Major Chronicle*, detail), English, thirteenth century, University of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS. 16 II, folio 150 recto, courtesy of Parker Library on the Web.

The colonial contours of medieval dance resonate with the historical development of (postmedieval) ballet. As Philip Chan, co-founder of Final Bow for Yellowface—a campaign for ballet companies to jettison harmful Asian stereotypes—explains:

Ballet [particularly during the reign of King Louis XIV] arose in Europe during times of colonialism and empire building by Europeans in what is now the Americas, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Africa, lands around the Persian Gulf, and more. Conquered peoples were seen (always from a European perspective) as fascinating (exotic) as well as objects of

scorn—supposed encounters with them or their cultures on the stage being occasions to feel titillated, morally superior, and complacent about the enslavement and exploitation of “natives” by their governments. (Chan and Chase 2023, p. 49)

Building upon this notion, Chan includes *Raymonda* among his litany of Orientalist ballets that must be recalibrated racially to justify their inclusion in ballet companies’ repertory today. For him, *Raymonda* “is just about cultural differences and xenophobia” (Chan and Chase, p. 200).²⁵ I would add that since full-length versions of *Raymonda* are almost exclusively performed by Russian ballet companies, the performative afterlives of this ballet relive imperialist and nationalist fantasies for a post-imperial and post-Soviet age (see also Morrison 2016, p. 151).

Teasing out further the politics of *Raymonda*, dance historian Lynn Garafola explains how ballets produced during Russia’s Tsarist regime bore the imprint of imperialism:

In *Raymonda*’s case there were political as well as sexual overtones to the [military] encounter. Where Jean de Brienne embodied Christian idealism, Abderrakhman represented the disruptive Eurasian other: rivals in love, they contended for sovereignty over *Raymonda*’s Western domain. In *Raymonda*, the last of several Mariinsky ballets of the 1890s set in a royal court, the threat of dynastic instability arises not from the presence of moral evil (as in *The Sleeping Beauty*) but from the aggressive action of a political and sexual outsider. (Garafola 2003, p. 10).²⁶

Within the long history of European dance, classical/imperial ballet dancers inhabit a geopolitical arena in which they testify to histories of violence and conquest, as well as anxieties over maintaining imperial domination. As such, *Raymonda* recuperates the crusading spirit of the Middle Ages and reinscribes modern colonialism.

Medieval iconography adumbrated the (proto)colonial underpinnings of dance representations long before their sedimentation in post-medieval creations like *Raymonda*. Crusades-related imagery integrated dance, travel, and (proto)colonization in ways that bolstered contemporary political agendas. Consider Crusades-era sources pertaining to King Louis IX (d. 1270), a pious monarch known for enacting anti-Jewish legislation and launching both the Seventh and Eighth Crusades in 1248 and 1270, respectively.²⁷ (He was canonized as a saint in 1297.) Like Frederick II, Louis also enjoyed foreign entertainment. His biographer Jean de Joinville (d. 1317)—who elsewhere praised the Brienne dynasty—described three Armenians who delighted the crusaders with acrobatic marvels (de Joinville 1874, pp. 286–88; trans. Margaret Shaw in de Joinville 1963, p. 297; Perry 2018, p. 191; see also Dickason 2020, p. 49; Dickason 2023a, pp. 318–19).²⁸ Recalling the pair of Muslim dancers at Frederick’s court, such displays simultaneously served to evoke the admiration of the performers and to legitimize the authority of the Latin crusaders.

Expounding upon my own recent work, here I focus on the (pre)colonial and anti-Islamic imagery from manuscripts associated with Louis IX (Dickason 2020, pp. 46–48; Dickason 2021, pp. 38–39; Dickason 2023a, pp. 318–21). One important thirteenth-century manuscript, which Louis most likely commissioned, is the so-called *Morgan Crusader Bible*, now housed at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York City. Consider the illustration of the dance of Miriam from Exodus 15:20 (Figure 6).²⁹ In the lower left quadrant, Miriam (the figure playing the tambourine or nakers/kettle drums) and Israelite women clap their hands in a dance and song. To the right, Moses and other seated men observe the performance. The above quadrants illustrate the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21), while the lower right quadrant depicts the waters of Marah (Exodus 15:23). The dance of Miriam represents an expression of thanksgiving to the Jewish god Yahweh. It also symbolizes a dance of liberation from the Israelites’ Egyptian enslavers. Gazing upward at the demise of Pharaoh’s army, Miriam solidifies the connection between victory, emancipation, and rhythmic movement.



Figure 6. The dance of Miriam (Exodus 15:20), from the *Morgan Crusader Bible*, Paris, c. 1250, Morgan Library and Museum MS. M 638, folio 9 recto.

The history behind the *Morgan Crusader Bible* is key to its (pre)colonial significance and, by extension, its colonial framing of medieval dance. Scholars surmise that Louis IX commissioned the picture Bible to bolster his propaganda for the Crusades, given the monarch's fervent desire to recapture Jerusalem from the Persians and Egyptians (Claster 2009, pp. 247–52, 260–63). This manuscript was likely a collaboration between four Paris-based artists during the Crusades. Its large-scale illustrations depict Old Testament kings, patriarchs, and military generals. Successive scribes or owners added marginal inscriptions in Latin, Persian, and Judeo-Persian, which testify to the manuscript's unusual provenance before the banker John Pierpont Morgan Jr., or Jack Morgan, acquired it in 1916. Librarian extraordinaire Belle da Costa Greene was instrumental in this acquisition, which was perhaps the Morgan Library's most significant addition to its collection since the death of John Pierpont Morgan (Senior) in 1913 (Voekle and L'Engle 1998, p. 16).³⁰ Historians believe that the manuscript first belonged to Louis IX, then his younger brother, Charles of Anjou. The first documented owner was Cardinal and Bishop of Cracow Bernard Maciejowski (d. 1608), who eventually gave it to Shah 'Abbas the Great, King of Persia. The Shah displayed religious tolerance toward Christians and was an ally to the Vatican against the Turks. Thus, the codex is also known as the *Maciejowski Bible* or the *Shah 'Abbas Bible* (Weiss 1998a; Weiss 1998b; Dickason 2020, p. 46).

The *Morgan Crusader Bible* depicts only select scenes from the Old Testament. Therefore, the artists' choice to include the dance of Miriam was deliberate. Situated within a crusading context—in which ancient soldiers appear in medieval armor—the dance of Miriam seems to validate and consecrate Christian warriors' invasion into, and conquering of, Muslim territories. The manuscript may also form a direct correspondence between the ancient Egyptian enemy depicted in the Bible and the medieval Egyptian/Muslim enemy during the Seventh and Eighth Crusades. The Siege of Damietta (1218–1219), when Latin crusaders

attacked the Egyptian port city and took it by force from Ayyubid Sultan al-Kamil, is perhaps an immediate point of reference. (Since the Siege of Damietta was part of the Fifth Crusade, *Raymonda* takes place within this precise historical window.)³¹ Furthermore, the *Morgan Crusader Bible's* dance iconography suggests an equivalence between the Israelites and the Christian crusaders. This imagery would have been relevant to the thirteenth-century crusaders at war with the Muslim opponents abroad. Within this logic, conquering Muslims constitutes an act of divine providence. In concert with Willie James Jennings' scholarship, the Late Middle Ages ushered in a stratified supercessionist logic, and one in which, Jennings writes, "the Christian theological imagination was woven into the processes of colonial dominance" (Jennings 2010, pp. 13–14).

The *Morgan Crusader Bible*, I posit, features additional Islamophobic dance iconography. As I have demonstrated and discussed elsewhere, the illustration depicting dancing women celebrating David's triumph over Goliath (from I Regum 18:6–7, Vulgate, or I Samuel 18:6–7) offers an interchangeability between the young David as a Christian crusader and the giant Goliath as a Muslim villain (Dickason 2020, pp. 47–48; Dickason 2021, pp. 38–39).³² I would also add that Goliath's identity as a giant further solidifies his interchangeability with Muslims. Literary scholar Sylvia Huot argues that giants represented "aberrant humanity" and racial alterity in the Middle Ages, and were often associated with Muslims (Huot 2016, p. 8). Therefore, by conquering a giant, the young David initiates civilization and establishes racial "purity." Fittingly, the *Morgan Crusader Bible* depicts the dance of King David further along in the manuscript (folio 39 verso).³³ The female dancers celebrating the young David's triumph likewise oppose barbarism and sub-humanity.

Migrational motifs within medieval dance history became more evident in travel literature of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. One of the most celebrated medieval travel narratives is Marco Polo's *Le Devisement du monde* (*The Description of the World*, commonly known as *The Travels*). In 1298, Polo co-wrote this text with the romancier Rustichello of Pisa while imprisoned in Genoa. Several scholars have observed how Polo, who travelled through the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia, approached different cultures with more curiosity and admiration than prejudice and derision (Burack 2024). However, I have argued that Polo's descriptions of foreign (i.e., non-European and/or non-Christian) dancers were often ambivalent, objectifying, or obsequious (Dickason 2023a, pp. 325, 331–34).

Consider a group of diners, musicians, and dancers around an outdoor fire from a fifteenth-century illustrated French manuscript entitled *Le Livre des merveilles du monde* (*The Book of Marvels of the World*), a codex comprising seven authors/texts and the work of five illuminators/collaborators, which contains the full account of Polo's *Travels* (Figure 7). This section of Polo's text describes the province of Tangut, a Tibeto-Burman Buddhist kingdom. The text does not mention dancers, but rather fixates on locals' practices of animal sacrifice and the cremation of deceased humans (Polo and Rustichello of Pisa 2016, pp. 45–46; see also Polo and Rustichello of Pisa 2019). The dance iconography lends an additional interpretive layer. At first glance, the illustrator, known to art historians as the Master of the Mazarin Hours (and most likely a French artist who had not been outside of Europe), depicted the dancers in a manner comparable to that of European dancers. For instance, they dance in a (semi)circular formation, wear courtly fashions, and link hands with handkerchiefs, all of which are consistent with medieval European dance iconography. Upon closer inspection, the *Marvels* dancers exude otherness. The three male and two female dancers don elaborate headgear. The men's pointy hats resemble the stereotypical horned hat (*pileum cornutum*) that medieval artists devised to depict Jews (Lubrich 2015). The women's hats are turban-like, which calls to mind otherizing representations of Muslims (Cawsey 2009, p. 383). These otherizing details inform aspects

of the text. Medieval Christian readers/viewers would likely be repulsed by acts of cremation. As historian Caroline Walker Bynum has shown, medieval Christians believed that they would reinhabit their bodies at the end of time (Bynum 1995). As literary scholar Geraldine Heng asserts, religion (and not always biology) was one of the key markers of racial difference in the Middle Ages (Heng 2018).³⁴ Given the temporal gap between Polo's thirteenth-century text and the fifteenth-century imagery, it appears that medieval race-making accrued more robust articulations over time.



Figure 7. Dancers from *Le Livre des merveilles du monde* (*The Book of Marvels of the World*, detail), Master of the Mazarin Hours, illuminator, French, c. 1410, Bibliothèque Nationale de France ms. fr. 2810, folio 23 recto.

Throughout Polo's *Travels*, fire often accompanies "idolatry" or other bizarre rituals and behaviors. In the city of Saba (Persia), for example, Polo learns about the so-called fire worshipers. Specifically, they are Zoroastrian inhabitants of a castle called Palasata and worship fire (Polo and Rustichello of Pisa 2016, pp. 25–27).³⁵ Elsewhere in Polo's section on Persia, he remarks that "there are many cruel and murderous people, and they are of faith of Muhammed" (Polo and Rustichello of Pisa 2016, p. 27), while further along in his eastward travels, Polo alludes to strange and idolatrous customs concerning fire (Polo and Rustichello of Pisa, pp. 48, 58, 100, 134–36). In this context, Polo's sentiment may be closer to aversion than appreciation.³⁶ Moreover, the *Marvels* manuscript, produced in the early fifteenth century for John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, who in turn gave it to his uncle, John Duke of Berry, orients itself around a colonial gaze. Scholar Mark Cruse emphasizes the quasi-colonial patterns of ownership, as the first owner was a crusader and the second owner was interested in foreign lands and luxuries (Cruse 2020, pp. 217–21; see also Dickason 2023a, p. 348; Preston 2017). Returning to the *Marvels* illustration, the religious otherness of fire rituals heightens the dancers' alterity. The manuscript highlights how dance imagery encodes religious, racial, and cultural difference through the motifs of crusading, conquest, and commodities.

Textual and visual representations of dancers from *The Travels* complicate Polo's well-documented awe and reverence for the Great Khan (specifically, the Mongol ruler and Yuan dynasty founder Kublai Khan, d. 1294). Consider a *Marvels* manuscript illustration by the so-called Egerton Master, which offers a dance scene at the Great Khan's court (Figure 8).

This image accompanies a section of Polo's text entitled "How the Great Khan holds great court and great feasts" (*Comment le grant Kaan tient grant court, quant il est retournez d'oiseler et fait moult grant feste*) (Polo and Rustichello of Pisa 2016, pp. 85–86; Polo and Rustichello of Pisa 2019). The text describes the splendor of the Great Khan's palaces and courtiers, but does not mention dance/dancers in any specific way. In the image, the foreign dancers appear to be performing on grass, yet they are enclosed within a wooden structure adorned with crimson walls. The male dancers appear somewhat contorted, given the awkward positioning of their heads and arms. One of the men grabs a woman forcibly, his left hand clutching her upper arms and brushing against her right breast. When recounting his travels through Cathay and South Asia, I have examined elsewhere how Polo's descriptions of dancers may be pleasing on the surface, yet they allude to polygamy, sensual pleasure, and sorcery (Dickason 2023a, pp. 330–36). As I have written,

Travel writers like Polo were astonished by this empire's wealth and enormity, though they intermittently critique Mongols' supposed idolatry and heathenism. Travel writers' depictions of Asian dancers suggest that European onlookers/readers enjoyed seeing these performers as servile, sexually available, and docile—not unlike colonized subjects. While these texts do not describe or record deliberate acts of colonial domination, they conjure proto-orientalist fantasies of consumption and exploitation.



Figure 8. Court dancers from *Le Livre des merveilles du monde* (*The Book of Marvels of the World*, detail), the Egerton Master, illuminator, French, c. 1410, Bibliothèque Nationale de France ms. fr. 2810, folio 44 recto.

Moreover, Polo repeatedly refers to diverse South and East Asian religious practitioners as "idolaters" who practice "devilish enchantments" (Polo and Rustichello of Pisa 2016, pp. 39, 45, 58, 97, 114–15, 117, 120). Sierra Lomuto's scholarship addresses instances of racialization and colonial fantasy concerning the Mongols in Middle English literature. As she writes, "Mongols became racialized as exotic allies in medieval discourse, beginning in the crusades specifically as allies against Muslims in the Holy Land," which shapes "assertions of Latin Christian dominance over the east" (Lomuto 2019, p. 174).³⁷ In this way, chivalric romances that imagined the Mongols may be placed into conversation with travel literature. While Polo conceded that the Mongol Empire was more awesome and prosperous than its European counterparts, Latin Christians' lust for the exotic and impulse to conquer became entangled in the *Travels'* trope of dancing Others. Relevant to *Raymonda*, imperial Russia acquired many of the Asian territories that the Mongols once conquered (Keller 2020). Like Polo, nineteenth-century Russians both exoticized and admired Eastern cultures. It is also noteworthy that Russian ballets beyond *Raymonda* (including those staged for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes) privilege an Eastern-inspired aesthetic.

The otherized representations of non-Christian dancers reappear in *Raymonda*. This is most apparent in the Muslim character Abderrakhman, who first appears in Act I during the heroine's birthday festivities. Photographs from the 1898 premiere show Pavel Gerdt's Orientalized robes and headgear, and his exaggerated facial hair, which recycle stereotypes of the Muslim male.³⁸ A photograph from a 2010 production by the Bolshoi ballet, danced by Dmitri Belogolovtsev, features highly stylized costuming and makeup that effectively "Easternize" him. Moreover, the acrobatic quality of the movement, in which Belogolovtsev extends his right leg sky-high while skimming his left supporting foot momentarily *en pointe*, communicates a transgressive, frisson-like effect for onlookers (Figure 9).³⁹ To be sure, part of the Bolshoi "brand," as musicologist Simon Morrison notes, involves acrobatic flair and a grand style (Morrison 2016, pp. xxvi–vii). The Bolshoi Ballet's particular stylization is also politically fraught, given the company's proximity to the Kremlin and the fact that several czars were coronated in Moscow (Morrison 2016, pp. 120, 130, 132). Thus, the Bolshoi's *Raymonda* blends exoticism with coloniality.



Figure 9. Ivan Belogolovtsev as Abderrakhman in Act II of *Raymonda*, Bolshoi Ballet, Moscow, 2010, photograph by Ирина Лепнёва, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons/Creative Commons.

In Act II, Abderrakhman tries to impress Raymonda with his retinue, which includes men donning turbans, women bearing their navels, and enslaved children enacting obsequious gestures. Disturbingly, the Russian students sometimes perform these roles in blackface.⁴⁰ Glazunov's score heightens the exoticized aura with Orientalist motifs: *Danse des garçons Arabes* (*Dance of the Arab Boys*), *Entrée des Sarrazins* (*Entrance of the Saracens [sic]*), *Grand pas Espagnol* (*Grand Spanish Dance*), *Danse orientale* (*Oriental [sic] Dance*) and *Bacchanal* (*Bacchanal*).⁴¹ These caricatured stylizations manifest and magnify the Islamophobic texture of Pashkova's libretto, which identifies Abderrakhman with the aforementioned medieval slur, "Saracen [sic]."

Reinscribing the religious dualism portrayed in Crusades-era sources, Abderrakhman dances in counterpoint to the crusader Jean de Brienne. In the ballet, Jean dances in the so-called *danseur noble* style; his movements are symmetrical and regal. This portrayal mirrors medieval accounts of Jean, which praised his courage and knightly prowess (Perry 2018, p. 53). In contrast, Abderrakhman's movements are frantic and exaggerated, and he

“manhandles” Raymonda during the nightmarish conclusion of the dream scene. Even though Abderrakhman is, unlike Jean, a fictional character, his presence in the ballet underscores the (pre)colonial thrust of the Crusades. The historical Jean de Brienne was French royalty who, because of his success as a crusader, lorded over the Holy Land and the Byzantine Empire. He, therefore, radiated imperialism and domination. According to historian Guy Perry, the Brienne dynasty fit the ideological patterns of geopolitical expansion centuries before the emergence of the nation state (Perry 2018, pp. 1–2). While *Raymonda* premiered long after the dynasty’s dissolution and the Crusades, the ballet did have political resonance for Russia and, as noted earlier, Russian imperialists tended to see themselves in medieval Byzantium. Moreover, the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894, which constituted a military agreement between France and Russia to counter the growing German Empire, partly explains *Raymonda*’s fixation on French history and culture (Perry 2018, p. 185; see also Mahiet 2016). Through the prism of the Crusades and medieval history, colonized Others in *Raymonda* testify to Russian imperialist dynasties and reignite a nationalist spirit.

4. Recreating *Raymonda*

Post-nineteenth-century productions of *Raymonda* have proved to be challenging. Modern audiences typically find *Raymonda*’s Islamophobic motifs outdated and offensive. Over the years, some choreographers and dancers who have desired to perform Glazunov’s score and Petipa’s steps circumvent the problematic characterizations by simply stripping away the narrative. Balanchine eventually did with his *Raymonda Variations* (1961). Twyla Tharp appropriated parts of the score in *The Little Ballet* (1983), which showcased the virtuosity of superstar Mikhail Baryshnikov without a plotline.⁴² In 2005, the Australian Ballet reset *Raymonda* in 1950s Hollywood. The ever irreverent Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, a self-identified “gender-skewing comic ballet company” based in New York, navigates *Raymonda*’s “baffling” storyline by “[ignoring] all of these plot intrigues and present[ing] the happy ending” (Anon 2024). In 2017, the Royal Danish Ballet launched a new production choreographed by Nikolaj Hübbe after Petipa, which toned down the demonization of Islam. Instead of a duel to the death in Act II, Abderrakhman and Jean de Brienne form a truce and bow to one another.⁴³

The most recent re-imaginings of *Raymonda* include Tamara Rojo’s 2022 version for the English National Ballet (London) and Mikko Nissinen’s 2024 version for the Boston Ballet. During her esteemed dancing career with the English National Ballet, Rojo herself danced the role of Raymonda, albeit for a more traditional version. In a 2016 photograph, Rojo resembles a majestic Byzantine empress (Figure 10). Readapting *Raymonda* several years later as the company director, Rojo recast the titular character as the legendary nurse Florence Nightingale (d. 1910) and set the ballet during the Crimean War (1853–1856). “The ballet is not a biography, but this did give the character agency,” Rojo told *The Times* (Jays 2022). Rojo’s feminist approach helps refashion the figure of Raymonda into a stronger character, while the original Muslim enemy becomes an Ottoman ally.⁴⁴ It is also noteworthy that, historically, Russia endured a “humiliating” defeat during the actual Crimean War (Morrison 2016, p. 120), hence Rojo’s reimagining works to thwart vestiges of Russian imperialism. Commenting on Rojo’s dream scene, *The Guardian*’s critic Sanjoy Roy writes, “It harnesses the essence of balletic magic—a stage flooded with moonlight and dancers in gauzy white—but peoples this traditionally female realm with both men and women, their ordered ranks, crossing runs and sighing spirals engendering an almost spiritual sense of the tender with the wounded. You believe that in nursing, Raymonda really has seen a higher purpose” (Roy 2022). Instead of chivalry and xenophobia, feminism and interculturalism permeate Rojo’s revisionist creation.⁴⁵



Figure 10. Tamara Rojo in Act III of *Raymonda*, English National Ballet, 2016, photograph by Erik Doble, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons/Creative Commons.

The Boston Ballet took a different approach to eliminate racialized and Islamophobic tropes. Director Nissinen, along with co-choreographers Florence Clerc and Alla Nikitina and set and costume designer Robert Perdziola, retained the medieval setting, but reduced the ballet's length by almost half.⁴⁶ Instead of dramatic tension and conflict, Nissinen's compact ballet focuses on the love story between Raymonda and Jean de Brienne. Although Jean is still identified as a crusader, there are no Muslim characters. Writing for *The Boston Globe*, Karen Campbell explains that "Nissinen wanted to provide a full ballet experience for audiences as well as Boston Ballet's dancers that highlights the work's academic classicism and technical bravura yet incorporates new choreography, reimagining and streamlining the narrative for contemporary audiences" (Campbell 2024). In Nissinen's view, he effectively de-racialized *Raymonda* by privileging classical dance over a controversial narrative. Nissinen explained his strategy for "reimagining a classic" at a 2024 Boston Ballet donors' event:

I personally never liked the story [of *Raymonda*]; it was convoluted, it was complicated, and I didn't quite get it. It didn't make enough sense. And in today's [multicultural] world, to imagine that somebody from another religion comes and is "the bad guy" [is controversial]. In 1898, people didn't travel around [like we do today], they didn't have internet, they didn't know how the rest of the world is. So, if everything was portrayed in a really extreme caricature [back then, it has become unacceptable today] . . . So, I wanted to tell the story, but in a much more abstract [way] . . . We have not treated *Raymonda* well enough [i.e., stripping it down to variations without narrative has not done justice to this monumental work]. There are not enough of these key cornerstone classical ballets. Our repertoire is not as rich as opera repertoire. So, it is very important that we do the things that we choose to do really well . . . [Since our Boston Ballet dancers have mastered neoclassical and contemporary repertoire] now is the time to emphasize academic classical ballet . . . Because they are the generation that will take our art form and pass it onto the following generation. (Nissinen and Stinchcomb 2024).⁴⁷

Evidently, these new iterations of *Raymonda* honor the hallowed contributions of Petipa and Glazunov while grappling with the legacies of colonialism and Orientalism in proactive ways.⁴⁸

As this article ensues, it offers a decidedly different re-interpretation of the ballet based on medieval sources, specifically lyric poetry. The following subsection examines the role of the troubadours in *Raymonda*, paying close attention to crusader topoi in original troubadour lyric. The last subsection suggests that Islamophobic themes in *Raymonda* may be upended by appealing to the Afro-Islamic origins of medieval lyric. This historically informed re-evaluation of *Raymonda*, I posit, reconciles some of the ballet’s problematics while remaining true to its original medieval *mis-en-scène*. Reassessing *Raymonda* through premodern materials underscores the generative, polysemous possibilities of medieval primary sources.

5. Songs of Love and War: The Troubadours

Raymonda presents medieval France as the birthplace of chivalry and courtly love. Indeed, many scholars locate the first troubadours in twelfth-century Occitania.⁴⁹ Troubadours’ innovative lyric, or poetry that was intended to be sung at court and set to instrumental music, took vernacular and amorous expression to new heights. *Raymonda* features two troubadour characters: Bernard, most likely the Provençal troubadour Bernard de Ventadorn, d. 1194; and Béranger, possibly named after the Catalan troubadour Berenguer de Palazol, d.c. 1209 (Beaumont [1938] 1941, p. 449).⁵⁰

The historical Bernard de Ventadorn was one of the most popular troubadours of his day. A miniature painting from a thirteenth-century *chansonnier* (songbook) depicts him performing against an illuminated background (Figure 11). Bernard often lyricized about the intense feeling of *joya* (joy) that one experiences when being in love. His well-known song, “Tant ai mo cor ple de joya” (“My Heart is So Full of Joy”), begins by articulating the transformative powers of love (de Ventadorn n.d.; Ventadorn, cited and trans. in Goldin 1973, pp. 131–32).⁵¹ Indeed, for Bernard, the euphoria of *fin’amors* (fine or true love) is so pivotal that it can transform the dead of winter into a verdant spring (see also Lazar 1995; see also Paris 1883). He emphasizes that this fine love is exceedingly rarefied; one cannot resort to madness or comport themselves as *desmezura* or without measure. Within the code of courtly love, the Occitan term *mezura* encompassed a form of discipline—both for the poet, adhering to compositional meters and rules, and for the lover, practicing courtly love (Wettstein 1974).



Figure 11. Miniature portrait of Bernard de Ventadorn from a *chansonnier* (songbook), French, late thirteenth century, Bibliothèque Nationale de France ms. fr. 12473, folio 15 verso, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons/Creative Commons.

Comparably, in *Raymonda*'s realm, the courtiers' refined movements animate the feudal atmosphere of largesse and courtesy. Dance critic Alastair Macaulay recognizes how chivalry radiates through the ballet's libretto: "[Pashkova] keeps her ballet in France, in the time of troubadours and courtly love. My guess is that she was more interested—perhaps with Petipa's encouragement—in this mediaeval birth of romantic love and the age of chivalry" (Macaulay et al. 2022).

The other troubadour who may have inspired a figure from *Raymonda*, Berenguer de Palazol, composed lyric with similar themes and structures to those of Bernard. Approximately twelve of his songs survive (Aubrey [1996] 2000, pp. 216–17; Newcombe, cited in de Palazol 1971, p. 56). In a *chansonnier* portrait, Berenguer appears on horseback (one of the markers of nobility), though in fact he was a poor knight (Figure 12). Relevant to *Raymonda*, Berenguer sometimes lyricized on the theme of absence (i.e., when lovers are separated by distance or other uncontrollable situations); the geographical divide between the betrothed characters Raymonda and Jean de Brienne during the Fifth Crusade propels much of the ballet's dramatic tension. For example, his song "Bona dona, cuy rix pretz fai valer" ("My Fine Lady, Whom in My Opinion Noble Merits Lift High"), discusses unrequited love, given his beloved's apparent withdrawal (Berenger [Berenguer], cited in de Palazol 1971, pp. 75, 77).⁵² Counterintuitively, prolonged absence stokes his desire more ardently. In true chivalric fashion, the courtly lover proclaims that his beloved is more worthy of love than himself.⁵³ This intense devotion becomes explicit in Act II of *Raymonda*, after Jean has returned from his military venture abroad. In a duel to the death, Jean risks his life to safeguard his fiancée from the clutches of Abderrakhman.



Figure 12. Miniature portrait of Berenguer de Palazol from a *chansonnier* (songbook), French, late thirteenth century, Bibliothèque Nationale de France ms. fr. 12473, folio 126 recto, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons/Creative Commons.

Complementing these troubadour characters, *Raymonda*'s choreography exudes themes of medieval courtship. Act I features several couples' dances and group dances punctuated by conjoined hands, flowers, and garlands. In her opening solo, Raymonda encircles roses placed on the stage floor with her *bouffées en pointe* (tremors on tiptoe). She then proceeds to collect each flower from the floor by ascending into a *relevé attitude derrière* (lifting one bent leg backwards while the other leg rises to pointe), as seen in an 1898 photograph of the Mariinsky virtuosa Legnani (Figure 13).⁵⁴ This enchanting entrance presages the ensuing garland dance/*Grande Valse* (Big Waltz) of the *corps de ballet* of coupled women and men.⁵⁵

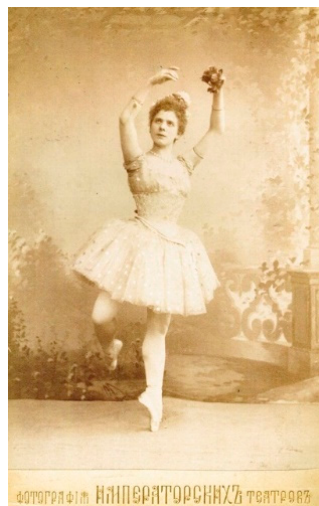


Figure 13. Prima ballerina assoluta Pierina Legnani in Act I of *Raymonda*, Mariinsky Ballet, St. Petersburg, 1898, by unknown photographer of the Imperial Mariinsky Theaters, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons/Creative Commons.

Broadly construed, *Raymonda*'s choreography shares some formalistic affinity with medieval dance forms, namely the *carole* (circular group dance), *bassedanse* (processional couple's dance), and *jeu de chapelet* (garland dance), all of which functioned as rites of courtship for the nobility (Dickason 2021, ch. 6; Regalado 2006, pp. 345, 347, 351; Ferrand 1986, esp. 88; McGee 1995, pp. 549–50; Mullally 2011).⁵⁶ For example, a fourteenth-century manuscript illustration from Jacques Bretel's *Le Tournoi de Chauvency* (*The Tournament of Chauvency*, c. 1285) depicts a row of dancers donning garlands (Figure 14), thereby fusing the motifs of courtship, springtime, and fertility. These floral accents also recall courtly love lyric, since troubadours often began their *cansos* (love songs) with a "spring opening" (or what German scholars have termed *Natureingang*) that announces the season of romantic love (Van D'Elden 1995, p. 267).



Figure 14. Dance scene from Jacques Bretel's *Le Tournoi de Chauvency* (*The Tournament of Chauvency*), Metz, France, c. 1309, University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Douce 308, folio 113 recto, courtesy of the Bodleian Library and Creative Commons.

Further along in Act I of *Raymonda*, select musical motifs that *Raymonda*, troubadours Bernard and Berenger, and the troubadours' beloveds Clémence and Henriette enact—namely *La Traditore* and *La Romanesque*—are supposedly based on medieval and Renaissance dance music (Fullington and Smith 2024, pp. 611–12; Fullington 2022, pp. 239–40; Macaulay et al. 2022).⁵⁷ Glazunov's predominant use of harps, flutes, and lute-like stringed instruments does indeed transport listeners/viewers to a premodern era.

Raymonda's overt presence of troubadours is noteworthy, given that medieval troubadours were important progenitors of courtly dance in premodern Europe. Literary treatises from the Middle Ages, for instance, provide instructions for composing *dansas* (an Occitan lyric form meant to be danced) (McGee 1995, pp. 549–50). Troubadours Raimbaut d'Orange (d. 1173) and Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (d. 1207) and the trobairitz (female troubadour) Gaudairença (fl. late twelfth century), as well as several anonymous trobairitz, composed other dance-based lyric, including the *estribot*, the *estampida*, the *cobla*, and the *balada* (Goldin 1973, pp. 78–79; Galvez 2012, pp. 46–48, 230 n. 92; Kehew 2005, pp. 252–55; Bruckner et al. [1995] 2000, pp. xv–vi, xxx, 39–40, 130–33; Bogin 1976, pp. 67–68; Gaunt 1995, p. 289; Zufferey 1989, pp. 39–40). In her *planh* (song of lament), an anonymous trobairitz described others dancing at court as she despaired over a lost love (see Bruckner et al. [1995] 2000, pp. 120–21).⁵⁸ A fascinating dance motif appears in a *canço* by the moralizing troubadour Marcabru (b. 1110) entitled “Contra l’ivern que s’enansa” (“With the Winter Coming Forth”). In this song, he discourses on the peerless virtue of his desired lady and ends with enigmatic verses that link dance (*el tresc*) to the mysterious origins of the troubadour project (*trobar*) (Marcabru n.d.).⁵⁹

Compared to the Crusades-era sources and travel literature already discussed in the present study, troubadour lyric and courtly dances may seem (literally) flowery. However, many troubadours and trouvères (their northern French imitators) were also crusaders. Scholar Linda Paterson determines that at least 75 troubadours and 37 trouvères either took up the cross, so to speak, or reacted to the Crusades from home. Those who journeyed and fought abroad wove their first-hand crusading experiences into their songs (Paterson 2018, p. 1).⁶⁰ Even the first known troubadour, the Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitou Guilhem IX (d. 1127), was a crusader. The Occitan term *crozada* appears in crusader-poets’ lyric, and these warrior-artists emitted blistering critiques of the Albigensian Crusade. Launched by Pope Innocent III in 1209 as a tactic to uproot “heresy” rampant throughout Southern France, the Albigensian Crusade was, to many troubadours, a *falsa croisada* (or “false Crusade,” see Paterson 2018, p. 5). Within this geopolitically fraught context, troubadour lyric may be construed as a type of travel account.

In the same spirit as *Raymonda*, the troubadours’ Crusades-inflected lyric is at once colonial and romantic. When the aforementioned Frederick II embarked on his first Crusade in 1215, the troubadour-jongleur Guillem Figueira (d. 1250) praised and memorialized the sovereign’s pious valiance in verse:

Reys Frederics, vos etz frugz de joven,
e frug de pretz, e frug de conoyssensa,
e si manjatz del frug de penedensa,
feniretz be lo bon comensamen.

[King Frederick, you are the fruit of youth [courtly qualities], and fruit of merit, and fruit of learning, and if you eat of the fruit of penitence, you will end well the good beginning]. (Guillem Figueira, cited and trans. in Paterson 2018, pp. 130–31)

Some ten years later, when Frederick had become deeply entrenched in the crusading effort, the troubadour Falquet de Romans (fl. 1215–33) urged him on:

A l’emperador man,
pos valors renovella,
qe mov’ab esfortz gran
contra la gen fradella
ez haia en Dieus son cor,
qe Sarrazi e Mor

han tengut li destret
 trop lonjamen
 la terra on Dieus nasqet
 e-l monumen,
 e taing be qe per lui cobrat sia.

[I send word to the Emperor, since valor is reviving, that he should move with a great army against the race of villains and have God in his heart, for Saracens [*sic*] and Moors [*sic*] have too long held sway over the sepulcher and the land where God was born, and it is right that they should be recovered for him]. (Falquet de Romans, cited and trans. in Paterson 2018, p. 140).⁶¹

Falquet's Islamophobic and racialized language parallels that of medieval travel literature and crusader chronicles. The tenor of militaristic urgency underscores the political framing of lyric poetry.

Beyond the battlefield, crusader lyric explored troubadours' competing commitments to courtly love, militarism, and the Church. Literary scholar Marisa Galvez explains:

These specifically lyrical articulations are crucial for understanding the crusades as a complex cultural and historical phenomenon. . . In a period during which the church imagined the need to recover the Holy Land as inseparable from the individual and collective moral reform of its believers, the crusader subject of vernacular literature and media sought to reconcile competing ideals of earthly love and chivalry with crusade as a penitential pilgrimage. (Galvez 2020, pp. 1–2)

Through innovative metaphors and paradoxical motifs, crusader-poets attempted to resolve this dilemma. Consider excerpts from "Aler m'estuet la u je trairai paine" ("I Must Go There Where I Will Endure Suffering"), a song by trouvère-crusader Châtelain d'Arras (fl. early thirteenth century):

Aler m'estuet la u je trairai paine,
 En cele terre ou Diex fu travelliés;
 Mainte pensee i averai grevaine,
 Quant je serai de ma dame eslongiés;
 Et saciés bien ja mais ne serai liés
 Dusc'a l'eure que l'averai prochaine.
 Dame, merci! Quant serai repairiés,
 Pour Dieu vos proi prenge vos en pitiez.
 Douce dame, contesse et chastelaine
 De tout valoir, cui sevrance m'est griés,
 Si est de vos com est de la seraine
 Qui par son chant a plusors engigniés;
 N'en sevent mot, ses a si aprociés
 Que ses dous cans lor navie mal maine;
 Ne se gardent, ses a en mer plongiés;
 Et s'il vos plaist, ensi sui perelliés.
 En peril sui, se pités ne m'aïe;
 Mais, se ses cuers resamble ses dous oex,
 Donc sai de voir que n'i perirai mie:

Esperance ai qu'ele l'ait mout piteus.
 Sovent recort, quant od li ere seus,
 Qu'ele disoit; "Mous seroi esjoïe,
 Se repariés; je vos ferai joiex;
 Or soiés vrais comme fins amoureux."
 Ha! Diex, dame, cist mos me rent la vie;
 Biaux sire Diex, com il est precieus!
 Sans cuer m'en vois el regne de Surie:
 Od vos remaint, c'est ses plus dous osteus.
 Dame vaillans, comment vivra cors seus?
 Se le vostre ai od moi en compaignie,
 Adès iere plus joians et plus preus.
 Del vostre cuer serai chevalereus.
 [I must go there where I will endure suffering
 In that land where God was tortured;
 I will have many heavy thoughts
 because I will be away from my lady;
 And know well that I will never be happy
 Until the time I will have her close to me.
 Lady, have mercy! When I will have returned,
 I beg you by God that pity takes you. . .
 Ah! God, lady, these words restore life to me;
 Good lord God, how they are precious!
 Without a heart, I go away to the kingdom of Syria:
 With you it remains, its sweetest refuge.
 Worthy lady, how will a body live without a heart?
 If I have your heart with me in company,
 I will be the most joyful and brave.
 By your heart, I will be valiant]. (Châtelain d'Arras, cited and trans. in [Galvez 2020](#), pp. 35–37)

For this warrior and lyricist, leaving his beloved to battle abroad mirrors the Passion of Christ. To keep his amorous devotion alive, he offers his lady his heart. These kinds of songs may be subsumed within a genre known as the *chanson de departie* (departure song), composed by troubadours and trouverès who were forced to leave their homelands/beloveds for the Crusades ([Paterson 2018](#), esp. 9, p. 255). The disembodied heart motif that enlivens the Châtelain's song conjures, in Galvez's words, the trope of the "unrepentant crusader." This unrepentance stems from resistance to ecclesiastical directives. Rather than dissolving one's heart into Christ and rejecting earthly concerns, the crusader-poet offers his heart to his lady ([Galvez 2020](#), esp. 35). In *Raymonda*, the character of Jean de Brienne similarly embodies the divided loyalties to the Church/state and his betrothed.

6. Re-Centering Feminine Lyric Voices: La Dame Blanche and the *Qiyān*

Raymonda's deliberate connection to the troubadours involves another (significantly underestimated) character. The aforementioned White Lady/La Dame Blanche represents

a pivotal presence, especially during the dream sequence. Dance scholars and critics have interpreted Dame Blanche as an ancestor to Raymonda, a family protectress, a “patron saint,” or an “intercessor” (Beaumont [1938] 1941, p. 450; Fullington 2022, pp. 201–202; Fullington and Smith 2024, p. 602). For Chaganti, the appearance of the White Lady forges an “ancestor worship” motif that animates the “nostalgic memorializing” central to this ballet’s medievalism (Chaganti 2011, p. 154).⁶² In most productions of *Raymonda*, the Dame Blanche is dressed in all white. I have observed her wearing a diaphanous veil over a Romantic-style (long) tutu (Royal Danish Ballet), or donning a full-body covering in the form of a nun-like habit or wimple complete with a crown (Bolshoi Ballet and Astrakhan State Theater of Opera and Ballet).⁶³ In a 2013 *Raymonda* production by the Vanemuine Ballet, the dancer portraying the White Lady appeared in a long, lacy garment that formed a contrast with the backdrop’s jewel-toned heraldry (Figure 15). Through her alchemical agency, Dame Blanche guides Raymonda through a phantasmagoric vision of Jean. The couple dances in an enchanting floral garden filled with allegories (e.g., *Gloire, Renommée, Amours*, or Glory, Renown, Love), knights, and charming ladies (Fullington 1998, p. 80).



Figure 15. Unidentified dancer as the White Lady/Dame Blanche in *Raymonda*, choreography by Yelena Pankova (after Marius Petipa), Vanemuine Ballet, Tartu, Estonia, 2013, photograph by Jack Devant.

Regardless of whether Pashkova, Petipa, or Glazunov were aware of her symbolic resonances, Dame Blanche, in my view, constitutes *Raymonda*’s most medievally complex character.⁶⁴ The troubadour *alba*, or “dawn song” in Occitan, resonates with the character of Dame Blanche. (Incidentally, the term *alba* means white in Latin.) The troubadour Giraut de Bornelh (d. 1215) produced the first known *alba*, *Reis glorios* (Glorious King), which consecrates the nocturnal tryst of adulterous lovers. The song is sung from the perspective of the lover’s friend who keeps watch at night, lest the jealous husband catch the lover and beloved in an illicit act of lovemaking. Giraut punctuates the song with the refrain “And soon the dawn will rise” [*e ades sera l’alba*] . . . (Giraut de Bornelh, cited and trans. in Goldin 1973, pp. 196–97). The song’s repetitive versification attempts to stop time as the lovers desire to prolong their union.

Similarly, in the ballet’s dream scene, Raymonda and Jean de Brienne enjoy each other’s company in an intimate reverie. Dame Blanche’s mysterious machinations enable their otherworldly reunion. According to Pashkova’s libretto, “the White Lady moves silently around the terrace, Raymonda, as if in a trance, follows her. At a sign from the White Lady the garden is enshrouded in darkness for a time. The mists gradually disperse, revealing the figure of Jean de Brienne” (Pashkova, cited in Fullington and Smith 2024, p. 801; trans. Wiley [1990] 2007, p. 399). During this scene, the Dame Blanche dances to

her musical leitmotif, which Fullington and Smith describe as “sweet, gentle, and dreamy” (Fullington and Smith 2024, p. 606; see also Fullington 2022, p. 233).⁶⁵ After the *pas de deux* of Raymonda and Jean, the “third wheel,” Abderrakhman, infiltrates the dream, thereby desecrating the aura of *fin’amor*.

The medieval *alba*, however, was not only about adultery. Literary scholar William Paden suggests that the *alba* symbolizes the dawn of a new love, and couples’ dancing may serve as a prelude to, or consecration of, marital union (Paden 2024, pp. 31–33). Framing marital bliss corresponds to Petipa’s notes to Glazunov. The adagio music for the dream *pas de deux* should be, Petipa instructed: “heavenly music, poetic, expressive, lively, passionate” (Petipa 1975–1976, p. 41). Analyzing the Dame Blanche from a lyrical perspective helps elucidate her significance in Pashkova’s narrative and her mystique via nineteenth-century medievalism.

Somewhat inexplicably, many *Raymonda* renderings have discarded the character of Dame Blanche. The great ballerina Alexandra Danilova, who danced in the Mariinsky production as well as Balanchine’s 1946 full-length version (which she co-staged with him), told musicologist Douglas Fullington, “You could just forget the White Lady” (Danilova and Fullington 1998, p. 75).⁶⁶ Nissinen’s recent Boston Ballet production retains the Dame Blanche, but significantly reduces her role choreographically (Nissinen and Stinchcomb 2024).⁶⁷ Counteracting the marginalization of Dame Blanche, I argue that she is indispensable to unlocking the deeper meanings of *Raymonda*. Crucially, these exegetical layers help wrest *Raymonda* from the colonial contours of nineteenth-century medievalism and imbue ballet medievalism with interculturalism, as opposed to xenophobia.

Raymonda’s Provençal setting forges a binary between the courtly, chivalrous House of Doris and the religio-racial alterity of Abderrakhman. Dance critics Clement Crisp and Mary Clarke argued that Jean de Brienne represents courtly love and Abderrakhman symbolizes a “darker, sexual passion” (Clarke and Crisp 1981, p. 223; see also Perriman 2009, p. 109).⁶⁸ I contend, however, that the ancestral status of Dame Blanche complicates this dualism. Scholars and balletomanes may arrive at more nuance if they include the *qiyān* as part of Dame Blanche’s (and by extension *Raymonda*’s) ancestral lineage—at least in the form of a feminine lyric voice. The *qiyān* (as they were known in Arabic) constitute a lesser-known influence on the development of troubadour lyric in Occitania. The scholarship of María Rosa Menocal, Fuad Matthew Caswell, Anthony Shay, Dwight Reynolds, and Lisa Nielson reveals that the *qiyān* (plural, or *qaynah* singular) were enslaved, though sometimes free, girls and women primarily from North Africa or Mashriq who performed in Abbasid, Umayyad, and Iberian courts from the eighth through the twelfth centuries (Menocal 1990, pp. 27–33; Menocal 2002, p. 133; Caswell 2011; Shay 2014, esp. 121–22, pp. 129–31; Reynolds 2017, pp. 100–23; Nielson 2021, esp. pp. 110–11).⁶⁹ They dazzled audiences with their exquisite and multiform talents in lyric, singing, instrumental music, dancing, shadow puppetry, calligraphy, martial arts, fencing, and beyond.

In Arabic, *qaynah/qiyān* literally means “trained technician(s).” Although some of these performers were not native Arabic speakers, they learned a vast repertoire of Arabic songs, along with the other aforementioned skills. Since it was time-consuming and expensive to train them (their training typically occurred in Baghdad or Medina), *qiyān* were considered major “investments” (Beeston, cited in Al-Jāhiz 1980, p. 2; Reynolds 2017, p. 102).⁷⁰ Shay explains that, unlike other Muslim women, the *qiyān* did not wear veils, indicative of their servile status. Despite their refined skills and etiquette, *qiyān* were still expected to engage in sexual relations with their masters and patrons (Shay 2014, pp. 96–97, 100).⁷¹ Some *qiyān* had exceptionally wealthy owners (including caliphs), which afforded them a fine education consisting of grammar, poetry, rhetoric, mathematics, law, philosophy, religion/Qur’an studies, medicine, folklore, etc., (Richardson 2009, p. 110). Historical accounts describe

these women, who ranged from lighter to darker complexions, as arrestingly beautiful and alluring (Richardson 2009, p. 111; Reynolds 2017, p. 103). The Abbasid poet Ibn al-Rumi (d. 896) memorialized the entrancing *qaynah* named Wahid: “Wahid has enslaved me . . . The freeborn are enslaved by her,” (cited in Richardson 2009, p. 111).

Indeed, extant first-hand accounts convey how extraordinary the *qiyān* were, in terms of their virtuosity and their artistry. As recorded by the Arab–Andalusian poet and historian Ibn Bassām, the ruler Hudhayl ibn Razin (d. 1044) acquired an exorbitantly expensive (unnamed) *qaynah*: “She was unique among the *qiyān* of her age. She had no peer in her class, no one had seen [a woman] more cheerful, more gracious of movement, gentler of gesture, sweeter of voice, better in singing, more excellent than her in writing, more skilled in calligraphy, more refined in manner, and more possessed of all that is good and could be desired” (cited in Reynolds 2017, p. 114). Fragmentary sources attributed to the thirteenth-century writer al-Tifashi mention the dancing prowess that these women mastered: “She might also be skilled on all of the different instruments, as well as all forms of dance and shadow-puppetry” (cited in Reynolds 2017, p. 117). The most celebrated *qaynah* was Arib al-Ma’uniya (d.c. 891), who lived to be almost 100 years old. Shay writes that Arib “was legendary in her musical and poetic prowess” and possessed countless songs in her repertoire. Arib was so successful at her craft that she eventually gained her freedom (Shay 2014, pp. 130–31). Musicologist Lisa Nielson adds that Arib reportedly danced and clapped as she sang (Nielson 2021, pp. 111–12).

My rationale for interjecting the *qiyān* into my interpretation of *Raymonda* lies in the historical relationship between the *qiyān* and the medieval troubadours. As Menocal famously observed, Al-Andalus, or Muslim-controlled Iberia, nurtured the invention of new strophic structures as early as the eighth century (Menocal 1990). In a later study, she focused on the ring song, or Arabic *muwashshah*, which literally means sash, circle, or girdle (Menocal 2002, p. 127).⁷² These “ring songs,” Menocal explained,

were meant wholly to be enjoyed, and sung along with, even danced to, rather than just listened to and admired with detached connoisseurship . . . this kind of song made rhyme an encircling device, repeating rhyme patterns of sometimes dizzying complexity, with internal rhymes as well as those linking one stanza to another. (Menocal 2002, pp. 126–27).⁷³

Moreover, Menocal argued that the *qiyān* of Islamic Iberia were necessary precursors to the Southern French troubadours. To substantiate her claim, she marshaled key military evidence, specifically the Siege of Barbastro (1064), after which French soldiers captured hundreds (and by some accounts, thousands) of *qiyān*. William VIII (d. 1086), then Duke of Aquitaine, transported the “war booty” across the Pyrenees and into France. He thereafter utilized the *qiyān* in his feudal court. His son and heir, William IX, grew up with their dazzling entertainment. For Menocal, it was no coincidence that William IX—known in Occitania as Guilhem IX—became the first troubadour (Menocal 2002, p. 123; Wacks 2013).⁷⁴

Extending Menocal’s argument, I speculate that the *qiyān*, given their essential connection to courtly love lyric, invite new perspectives on *Raymonda*. Re-interpreting *Raymonda* through medieval studies, one may reconstrue Dame Blanche as the ghost of a *qaynah*, given her ancestral, lyrical, and feminine forces.⁷⁵ Such a re-reading of classical ballet would, in theory, complicate the Islamophobic and colonial valences of *Raymonda*. In my estimation, this approach carries more intellectual and intercultural integrity than simply excising the narrative altogether or re-situating the ballet in modern times to “rescue” it from its contentious past, as recent ballet productions have done.

Reconsidering a ballet like *Raymonda* with the *qiyān*’s legacy in mind, a simplistic East–West dualism becomes untenable. With cast members portraying Provençal troubadours and the Dame Blanche/White Lady conveying a *qaynah*’s ancestral lyric voice, *Raymonda*

may in fact gesture toward a decolonial framing. In this sense, the ballet may honor Islamic pasts, working against the presence of a Muslim antagonist (i.e., Abderrakhman).⁷⁶ In this way, Dame Blanche returns as an atavistic *saltatrix viatrix* (female dancer as wayfarer/traveler/wanderer), unearthing a hidden archive of female performers from diverse religions, races, and stations.

7. Conclusions

Integrating medieval lyric and travel literature into ballet research, this study acknowledges and challenges the Eurocentrism, colonialism, and Whiteness that have corrupted *Raymonda* and its problematic afterlives.⁷⁷ In this conclusion, I summarize two recent scholarly methodologies that align with the kaleidoscopic vision of a medieval studies-informed *Raymonda*. Medievalist Sharon Kinoshita, an expert on and translator of Polo's *Travels*, counsels scholars to treat forays into the global Middle Ages (i.e., beyond the confines of Europe) as "trans-regional" perspectives (Kinoshita 2024, p. 230). Here, Kinoshita emphasizes the concept of "worlding," which implies a processual, dynamic, and emerging modality of engagement with other cultures (Kinoshita 2024, pp. 230–31).⁷⁸ The generative polysemy of medieval travel literature lends itself to multiple points of view and occasions for resistance. Under the imperial and/or Christian gaze, dancing bodies responded to charged moments of encounter.

Echoing Kinoshita, literary scholar Sierra Lomuto states that the presumption of globality (as a totalizing view of the past) is an illusion (Lomuto 2024, p. 286). Adumbrating a methodology with rich epistemological potential, Lomuto embraces metaphors of movement and multi-dimensionality, as well as the qualities of dynamism and flexibility (Lomuto 2024, pp. 286–88, 290):

As a method, instead of a framework, for engaging the past, the global Middle Ages sets us, and that which we study, into constant motion. More so than attempt to encompass the world, the global Middle Ages should make available the notion of spacetime in our historical analysis, which ultimately moves us beyond the global, seeking stability not in a stationary foot but in the ever-shifting relations between. (Lomuto 2024, p. 290)

Dance—the quintessential art of motion—embodies the quicksilver restlessness of this revisionist stance. Kinesthesia invites a productive and empathetic dialogue between the traveler/crusader and the Other, the Middle Ages and (post)modernity. The value of dance studies for medieval studies—and, by extension, medieval studies for dance studies—has now come full circle (or full "sphere," as Lomuto may prefer), illuminating the various interactions and intersections of bodies in motion and migration.

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Notes

- 1 In the scope of this article, I cannot provide an in-depth examination of medievalism within *Raymonda*'s choreography, though Chaganti offers an illuminating interpretation of *Raymonda*'s solo variation from Act III (Chaganti 2011, esp. 157). Fullington and Smith provide an impressive in-depth analysis of the entire ballet based on extant choreographic notation (Fullington and Smith 2024, pp. 622–63; Fullington 2022, pp. 259–342). For more on ballet medievalism, see (Richard 2007).
- 2 When interpreting medieval textual and visual sources, I am indebted to Cord Whitaker's concept of "black metaphors," which posits that blackness inheres in whiteness in paradoxical and complex ways, see (Whitaker 2019).
- 3 To be clear, Sergeyev's 1948 revival for the (then) Kirov Ballet greatly altered Petipa's contribution. The Sergeyev notations are housed in Harvard University's Theater Collection, and many manuscripts have been digitized. For more studies on *Raymonda*, see (Meisner 2019, esp. 249; Grigorovich and Vanslow 1989; Fullington 1998, p. 77; Fullington 2022, ch. 3; Fullington and Smith 2024, ch. 10; Garafola 2003).
- 4 For translations of Pashkova's libretto, see (Wiley [1990] 2007, pp. 393–401; Fullington and Smith 2024, pp. 797–803). For a translation of Petipa's notes to Glazunov (based on Pashkova's libretto), see (Petipa 1975–1976, pp. 38–44).
- 5 Douglas Fullington and Marian Smith note (but do not offer decisive evidence) that the ballet's protagonist may have been inspired by an historical figure from medieval France: "Perhaps the only medieval counterpart of the character of *Raymonda* heretofore identified is Raymonde, daughter of Raymond VI (1194–1222), count of Toulouse, who became a nun at the monastery of Espinasse" (Fullington and Smith 2024, p. 598 n.6).
- 6 Both Jean de Brienne (c. 1170–1237) and King Andrew (alternatively spelled Andrey, Andree, or Andrei) II of Hungary (1177–1235) were actual figures from medieval history, but they did not collaborate in the way the ballet suggests, nor were they nephew and uncle. Theater historian Sergey Konaev believes that the presence of King Andrew facilitated Petipa's/Glazunov's inclusion of Hungarian-themed national/folk dances in Act III (cited in Macaulay et al. 2022). In a similar vein, historian Guy Perry believes *Raymonda* takes place during the Fifth Crusade precisely because Hungary had a more overt role in that particular military venture, further facilitating the national dances (Perry 2013, p. 9).
- 7 Douglas Fullington and Marian Smith observe that Pashkova's White Lady comes from a supernatural guardian character in Sir Walter Scott's 1820 novel, *The Monastery* (Fullington and Smith 2024, p. 598), though Alastair Macaulay suspects that the librettist found inspiration from Ann Radcliffe's 1794 Gothic thriller, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, specifically the ghostly ancestral protector character known as the Marchioness de Villeroi (Macaulay et al. 2022). In *Raymonda*, Countess Sybille (whom the libretto also identifies as a canoness), explains the White Lady's identity during a pantomime sequence in Act I. Sybille communicates that the White Lady is a "revered ancestor" and protector of the House of Doris who warns them about impending danger and exerts a retributive function, "[punishing those] who do not fulfill their responsibilities" (cited in Wiley [1990] 2007, p. 397; see also Petipa 1975–1976, pp. 38–39).
- 8 According to Fullington, at *Le Tournoi*, the tournament-themed conclusion to the original *Raymonda*, "the scenery rises to reveal a square full of people, with knights on horses engaged in combat" (Fullington 1998, p. 82). To date, I have not witnessed a ballet performance that still includes the apotheosis.
- 9 A critic from *The Saint Petersburg Gazette* called *Raymonda* a "grandiose success," after which Petipa and Glazunov each received a laurel wreath, see (Wiley [1990] 2007, p. 393). For more studies on *Raymonda*, see (Garafola 2003; Meisner 2019, esp. 249; Grigorovich and Vanslow 1989; Fullington 2022, esp. ch. 3; Fullington and Smith 2024, ch. 10). After *Raymonda*, Petipa created an additional six ballets during the early 1900s.
- 10 To be clear, both Balanchine/Danilova and Nureyev staged several versions of their respective *Raymondas*. Balanchine produced subsequent (though more streamlined) full-length versions for the Ballet Russe in later years, whereas Nureyev produced earlier versions for the Royal Ballet (for the Spoleto Festival in 1964), Australian Ballet (1965), Zurich Opera Ballet (1972), and American Ballet Theatre (1975), which featured Byzantine-styled sets by Barry Kay, see (Anderson 2016, p. 65; Balanchine 1984, esp. 172–73). In later decades, Balanchine stripped *Raymonda*'s overarching narrative and arranged select divertissements and *pas de deux* (primarily from Act III) in his *Pas de Dix* (1955), *Raymonda Variations* (1961), and *Cortège Hongrois* (1973). For more details on Balanchine's *Raymonda* and his collaboration with Danilova, see (Garafola 2003; Danilova and Fullington 1998). Moreover, in Russia, Simon Morrison notes that *Raymonda* remained so popular over the years that even local Soviet hair salons were named after the ballet and its heroine (Morrison 2016, p. 351).
- 11 Dance historians often refer to Pashkova—who also served as the St. Petersburg correspondent for *Le Figaro* and produced two ballet librettos before *Raymonda*—as a "minor" or "society" novelist (Meisner 2019, p. 38; Fullington 1998, p. 77). In contrast, Sergey Konaev views Pashkova as a complex, yet misunderstood figure (see Macaulay et al. 2022).
- 12 Although Balanchine considered Glazunov's score one of the finest of the ballet canon, he found that the story was "nonsense" and "difficult to understand;" see (Balanchine and Mason [1954] 1977, p. 468). Alexandre Benois, who designed the sets for Balanchine's *Raymonda*, found the story absurd (cited in Garafola 2003, p. 9), whereas the sartorial anachronisms (e.g., armored knights next to

ballerinas in tutus) irked Mikhail Fokine (cited in [Beaton 1949](#), p. 45). Sir Frederick Ashton considered choreographing his own *Raymonda*, but abandoned it because he disliked the plot; see ([Vaughan 1975–1976](#), p. 33; [Macaulay et al. 2022](#)).

13 Tim Scholl explains how, in the years following the Russian Revolution, the culture of *Proletkult* (proletarian culture) transformed ballet into a spectacle for the masses ([Scholl 2004](#), pp. 69, 101).

14 For historian Guy Perry, the fall of the Brienne dynasty in the mid-fourteenth century mirrors the fall into relative obscurity of *Raymonda* by the mid-twentieth century ([Perry 2018](#), p. 185). Konaev clarifies, however, that *Raymonda* remains an important component of Russian repertory (cited in [Macaulay et al. 2022](#)).

15 Perry suggests that, at some point, Andrew II and Jean may have resembled rivals more than allies, given that Andrew thought himself a better contender for King of Jerusalem ([Perry 2013](#), p. 91). Counteracting *Raymonda*'s image of benevolence, Andrew was an unpopular ruler who conspired against his elder brother. Interestingly, his daughter, St. Elizabeth of Hungary (d. 1231, canonized in 1235), was known for her acts of charity and Franciscan piety and abandoned dancing and games to appear less vain ([Dickason 2021](#), pp. 149–50).

16 Notably, the House of Brienne seal depicts a militant knight riding on horseback, clad in chainmail armor, and wielding a sword, which can be viewed online via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean_de_Brienne_1288.jpg (accessed on 13 July 2025).

17 For more detail regarding Jean de Brienne's seal, see ([Perry 2013](#), p. 54).

18 However, Jean de Brienne eventually developed hostility toward the Hohenstaufens ([Perry 2018](#), p. 66; [Perry 2013](#), pp. 122, 135, 137).

19 In this letter, Jean goes on to recount the Siege of Damietta and also reaffirms the crusaders' desire to perpetuate their dominion over the Holy Land.

20 When discussing (proto)colonialism in the Middle Ages, it is noteworthy that many premodern Islamic caliphates were powerful and had amassed substantial wealth; see ([Şahin et al. 2021](#)). Therefore, premodern "colonized" or "subaltern" identities are not equivalent to those theorized vis-à-vis modern acts of colonization.

21 As Claster explains, some scholars extend the Crusades timeline until 1396, following the Battle of Nicopolis ([Claster 2009](#), pp. xvi, 303–305).

22 For related studies on power and race-making in Frederick's court, see ([Heng 2015](#), pp. 25–26; [Kaplan 1987](#), p. 32).

23 Following Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, I acknowledge the problematic valences of this term in medieval primary sources. When necessary to invoke this terminology in my own writing, I, like Rajabzadeh, place it in quotation marks ([Rajabzadeh 2019](#), pp. 1–8).

24 For scholarship on representations of Islamic dance in the West, see ([Temple 2001](#), pp. 34, 66–75; [Zeitler 1997](#), p. 36; [Folda 2005](#), pp. 421, 471; [Kapitaikin 2019](#), pp. 3–9; [Kaplan 1987](#), p. 29; [Wollesen 2013](#), pp. 345–57).

25 For a study on medievalism and Orientalism in *The Nutcracker* ballet, see ([Dickason 2023b](#)). For a broader study of Orientalism and medievalism in modernity, see ([Ganim 2005](#); [Matthews 2024](#)).

26 In her study of Balanchine's 1946 *Raymonda* for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo (co-staged by Danilova), Garafola argues that, for Balanchine, remaking this ballet constituted an homage to Petipa and an aesthetic return to the old Russia; it thus differed from the neoclassical and modernist experiments of his youth. As Garafola writes, "it was *Raymonda*, and Balanchine's intense, prolonged involvement with Petipa's choreography, that precipitated the great 'neo-Imperial' ballets of 1947 [*Le Palais de Cristal/Symphony in C* and *Theme and Variations*]. Here were Petipa's grand visions, his processions, and variations, heavenly hierarchies, and poems of love, fully distilled and imaginatively reinvented. . . Thanks to *Raymonda*, Balanchine had finally come home to Petipa and Petersburg" ([Garafola 2003](#), p. 15). I thank Lynn Garafola for sharing her unpublished paper with me.

27 Incidentally, Jean de Brienne became a relative of Louis IX through his third marriage to Berengaria of Léon-Castile. Reportedly, Jean's sons were treated with courtesy and respect at the court of Louis IX back in France ([Perry 2013](#), pp. 164–65).

28 Another interesting Crusades-related dance reference is the Maltese branle, supposedly devised by the Knights of Malta, see ([Arbeau \[1589\] 1967](#), p. 153; [Dickason 2023a](#), p. 324).

29 For additional dance imagery from the *Morgan Crusader Bible*, see Morgan Library and Museum, MS. M 638, fols. 13v, 17r, 29r, and 39v ([Anon. Circa 1240](#)).

30 Belle da Costa Greene was recently the subject of a landmark exhibition at the Morgan Library and Museum, "Belle da Costa Greene: A Librarian's Legacy." As a Black woman who passed as White among New York's elite circles in the early twentieth century, Greene was a complicated figure, see ([Ardizzone 2007](#); [Als 2024](#)). Sierra Lomuto cautions against reducing Greene's legacy to a DEI-inflected initiative that champions a global medieval studies approach. Moreover, Lomuto explains that, although Greene curated African and Asian premodern manuscripts as well as European ones, Greene still inhabited an American culture rife with imperialist and colonial roots, see ([Lomuto 2023](#), pp. 15, 17). For more on Greene's contributions to medieval studies in the United States, see ([Eze 2024](#)).

31 The Fifth Crusade was ultimately unsuccessful, and Latin crusaders could not recapture Jerusalem.

- 32 The image in question is from the *Morgan Crusader Bible*, Morgan Library and Museum MS. M 638, fol. 29r, which can be viewed online via the Morgan's Corsair visual database: <https://www.themorgan.org/collection/crusader-bible/57>, accessed 16 February 2025. Critical biographies of King David underscore his lust for power and proclivity for violence, see (McKenzie 2000; Baden 2013).
- 33 The illustration can be viewed online via the Morgan Library and Museum's Corsair database: <https://www.themorgan.org/collection/crusader-bible/78> (accessed on 10 July 2025).
- 34 According to Heng, "[religion] could function both socioculturally and biopolitically: subjecting peoples of a detested faith, for instance, to a political theology that could biologize and define, and essentialize an entire community as fundamentally and absolutely different in an interknotted cluster of ways," (Heng 2018, p. 3).
- 35 According to Polo, the ritual of these castle dwellers is related to the Three Magi.
- 36 The fourteenth-century (Pseudo) John Mandeville, in his largely fictitious *The Book of John Mandeville* or *The Book of Marvels*, similarly decries the "cruel Jews" (*chiens juifs*) and "miscreant Muslims" (*mescreans*) he allegedly encountered in his travels (Mandeville 2011, pp. xx, 3–4; Mandeville 2023, pp. 168, 170). When traveling through the Holy Land, the author reminds readers of how Jews tortured and killed Christ and he expresses disgust for Muslims' polygamy and their supposed literal interpretations of sacred texts (Mandeville 2011, pp. 50, 58, 69, 85–86).
- 37 Specifically, Lomuto analyzes a female literary figure ("the Mongol Princess") from the fourteenth-century romance *The King of Tars* (Lomuto 2019).
- 38 The Marius Petipa Society website contains photographs of Pavel Gerdt in costume, as well as numerous other original *Raymonda* cast members: <https://petipasociety.com/raymonda/>, accessed 16 February 2025.
- 39 See also the Bolshoi Ballet's 2024 production (choreography by Yuri Grigorovich after Marius Petipa and Alexander Gorsky) with Pavel Dmitrichenko as Abderrakhman.
- 40 For American critiques on the persistent use of blackface in Russian ballet, see (Marshall 2019; Nichols 2019). The racialization of Muslims originated in the Middle Ages, as Muslims were often Black in the European imaginary, see *Le Chanson de Roland*, in (Anon 1978, esp. 2; Heng 2003, pp. 70–71; Kinoshita 2001; Alfonso X 2000, esp. 99, p. 401; Akbari 2009, pp. 156, 175, 200, 236; Cohen 2001, p. 114; Sturges 2015, p. 15; Armstrong 2006, p. 177; De Weever 1994; De Weever 1998, ch. 1).
- 41 Incidentally, George Balanchine danced the role of one of the "Arab boys" in a Mariinsky production during his childhood in St. Petersburg (Balanchine and Mason [1954] 1977, p. 500; Garafola 2003, p. 3). For more on exoticized musical motifs in Glazunov's score, see (Edgecombe 2008).
- 42 Zoë Anderson describes Tharp's work as simultaneously "modern and Russian" (Anderson 2016, p. 66; see also Greskovic 1998, p. 555).
- 43 The production can be viewed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEfkK4UsMNc>, accessed 15 February 2025. Interestingly, theater historian Sergey Konaev mentions a (now retired) 1938 Soviet version that may be the first "decolonial" *Raymonda*. As he recounts, "In that production, *Raymonda* was finally disappointed with a mean cold crusader [Jean de Brienne] and married Abderrakhman, who was shown as kind, trusty and good" (cited in Macaulay et al. 2022). Lynn Garafola refers to this same production as a "Socialist Realist version" (Garafola 2003, pp. 2–3).
- 44 To be fair, Yuri Grigorovich's 1984 Bolshoi Ballet restaging also attempted to render *Raymonda* into a stronger and more autonomous character. As he wrote, "*Raymonda* is about flourishing femininity, about a woman's love seeking for harmony [sic], about a mysterious soul [that] preserves its whole heartedness in spite of its inconsistencies." Grigorovich continues by extolling the great Soviet ballerina Natalia Bessmertnova's peerless portrayal of the heroine: "Her *Raymonda* is a whole philosophy of woman's nature in which fidelity and self-will, tenderness and obstinacy, fearlessness and unprotectedness, steadfastness and fragility fascinatingly coexist" (Grigorovich and Vanslow 1989, p. 38). Along these lines, Willa Cather's 1918 novel *My Antonia* derived inspiration from *Raymonda*, which, according to Wendy Perriman, gave Cather a blueprint for strong, matriarchal female characters who value cultural heritage (Perriman 2009, esp. 108–11).
- 45 Now the Artistic Director of San Francisco Ballet, Tamara Rojo brought her *Raymonda* production to the West Coast in March 2025.
- 46 Perdziola explains his approach and previews select costumes here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMDrKhkIc_o, accessed 15 February 2025.
- 47 Although Nissinen's production is very much a recalibrated classic, the monumental versions of Petipa, Grigorovich, and Nureyev deeply inspired him. Nissinen also admires a 2022 Dutch National Ballet production that was choreographed by Rachel Beaujean (after Petipa). According to the company website, "Beaujean decided to overhaul the libretto and, partly inspired by series like *Game of Thrones* and *Bridgerton*, to adapt the storyline so that today's audiences can relate to it. In her production, therefore, the young Hungarian grand duchess *Raymonda* does not simply do as she's told and marry the vain crusader Jean de Brienne. Instead, she is a young, independent woman who, attracted to the mysterious Abd al-Rahman, makes her own decisions on the path of love." See: <https://www.operaballet.nl/en/dutch-national-ballet/2023-2024/raymonda>, accessed 15 February 2025.

48 However, I will add that Jean de Brienne's identity as a crusader in the Boston Ballet's production does not eliminate the specters of colonialism and Islamophobia that undergird the original *Raymonda*. Moreover, Jennifer Heimlich notes that Nissinen did not consult diversity experts when reconceiving the new production (Heimlich 2024).

49 Several balletomanes seem to be confused about the setting for the ballet, stating that it takes place in Hungary (Balanchine and Mason [1954] 1977, p. 468; Greskovic 1998, p. 47).

50 The original *Raymonda* program notes identify Béranger as a troubadour of Aquitaine (Wiley [1990] 2007, p. 394), but I found no such record of a Provençal troubadour with this name. It is possible that the character is entirely fictional.

51 For example, see the first two stanzas of Bernard's *canço* "Tant ai mo cor ple de joya,/tot me desnatura./Flor blanca, vermeilh'e groya/me par la frejura,/c'ab lo ven et ab la ploya/me creis l'aventura,/per que mos chans mont' e poya/e mos pretz melhura./Tan ai al cor d'amor,/de joi e de doussor,/per qu'el gels me sembla flor/e la neus verdura./Anar posc ses vestidura,/nutz en ma chamiza,/car fin'amors m'asegura/de la freja biza./Mas es fols qui.s desmezura,/e no.s te de guiza,/Per qu'eu ai pres de me cura,/deis c'agui enquiza/la plus bela d'amor,/don aten tan d'onor,/car en loc de sa ricor/non volh aver Piza [My heart is so full of joy,/all is changed for me./Flowering red, white, and yellow,/the winter seems to be,/for, with the wind and rain, so/my fortune's bright I see,/my songs they rise, and grow/my worth proportionately./Such love in my heart I find,/such joy and sweetness mine,/ice turns to flowers fine/and snow to greenery./I go without my clothes now,/one thin shirt for me,/for noble love protects now/from the chilly breeze./But he's mad who'll not follow/custom and harmony,/so I've taken care I vow/since I sought to be/lover of loveliest,/to be with honor blest: /of her riches I'd not divest/for Pisa, for Italy.]" (de Ventadorn n.d., cited and trans. in Goldin 1973, pp. 131–32).

52 Here is the stanza in full: "Bona dona, cuy ricx pretz fai valer/sobre las plus valens al mieu vejaire,/avetz razo per quem dejatz estraire/lo belh solatz nil amoros parer,/si non quar vos auziey anc far saber/qu'ieus amava mil aitans mais que me ?/En aquest tort me trobaretz jasse,/quar non est tortz que jaus pogues desfaire. [My fine lady, whom in my opinion noble merit lifts high above the most worthy, have you any reason for daring to withdraw your charming company and your loving appearance from me, unless it be because I have heard you make it known that I loved you a thousand times more than myself? You will always find me at fault in this respect for it is not an error that I could ever correct for you.]" (In de Palazol 1971, pp. 75, 77).

53 For a psychoanalytic reading of troubadours' desire, see (Lacan [1986] 1992).

54 Petipa's notes to Glazunov indicate the importance of this moment: "You must pay special attention to this entrance. It is for the prima ballerina" (Petipa 1975–1976, p. 39). According to a critic writing for *The Saint Petersburg Gazette* in 1898, Legnani danced the role of *Raymonda* "superbly—with incomparable grace, plastique, and strength of movements" (cited in Wiley [1990] 2007, p. 393).

55 Photographs showing the medievaesque circular formations and garlands appear on the Mariinsky Ballet's website: <https://www.mariinsky.ru/en/playbill/repertoire/ballet/raimonda/>, accessed 14 February 2025.

56 Scholar Robert Mullally claims that the lower classes also danced the *carole* (Mullally 2011, pp. xv, 14). However, in my examination of medieval literature, I have come across very few references to peasants performing this dance, one example being the thirteenth-century *Le Roman de Manekine* by Philippe de Rémi. Relevant to medieval round dances, Petipa's choreographic notes for Act I of *Raymonda* specify a "circle dance (*khovorod*)" (Petipa 1975–1976, pp. 39), whereas Byzantinist Nicoletta Isar has traced the ancient and medieval roots of the *khovorod* that reappear in Vaslav Nijinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (Isar 2023).

57 Petipa's choreographic notes for the *Traditore* specify that "feet cross and recross in a gliding pas," and, during the *Romanesque* section, *Raymonda* plays the lute while her friends (the troubadours and their female companions) dance (Petipa 1975–1976, pp. 38, 40). For a study on the theological significance of crossed legs/feet in medieval European art, see (Pentcheva 2023).

58 Moreover, a dance motif appears in a *tenso* (debate song) featuring troubairitz Domna Duran and her husband Peire Duran, cited in (Bruckner et al. [1995] 2000, pp. 64–65).

59 Scholars surmise that the vernacular *tresca* may have been a stamping dance (like the Occitan *estampida* or Old French *estampie*), but the term is also philologically linked to the word for weave/weaving. Scholar Mark Taylor suggests that Marcabru could have employed this dance metaphor to indicate *trobar* as a weaving of words, see (Taylor 2000, pp. 353–54).

60 Some scholars surmise that Jean de Brienne may have composed trouvère-style songs as well, and a spurious account of his life by a certain Minstrel of Reims presents him as a courtly and chivalric hero at tournaments (Perry 2013, pp. 7, 17–18, 26–29).

61 It is also noteworthy that Provençal troubadours, who were essentially victims of genocide via the Albigensian Crusade, nevertheless peppered their songs with ethnic slurs when referring to the Muslim enemies abroad, e.g., Giraut Riquier's "Be m degre de chanter tener" and Peire Cardenal's "Clergue si fan pastor."

62 Of all the modern re-stagings of *Raymonda*, Yuri Grigorovich's 1984 production for the Bolshoi Ballet best captures the White Lady's medieval, lyrical, and ancestral elements. As he and Vanslow wrote, "As an image of the knight's poetry, a symbol of fate, the White Lady is preserved [in Grigorovich's version] . . . In her white glimmering dress, majestically dominating on the tips of her toes, she is the center of all this mysteriously-shadowed stage. She is a symbol of the heroine's soul, a support for her activity, purity in the vortex of confused feelings, luring expectations, frightening forebodings" (Grigorovich and Vanslow 1989, p. 35). However, the Bolshoi seemed to have excised the White Lady from its *Raymonda* circa 2003.

- 63 The Royal Danish production, with Femke Mølbach Slotcan as the White Lady, can be viewed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEfkK4UsMn&t=1774s>; as well as a 1989 filmed Bolshoi Ballet production with Irina Dmitrieva as the White Lady: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKFykYtR5YQ>, both accessed 14 February 2025.
- 64 Interestingly, the pyrotechnic special effects of the ballet's first staging were troubadoursque. Fullington and Smith describe how the original White Lady descended from a pedestal during her first entrance (Fullington and Smith 2024, p. 631; Fullington 2022, p. 276). As Grigorovich notes, "Glazunov easily transferred his imagination to the romantic epoch of the Middle Ages to which he had been attracted since childhood. He read many books about those times, knew the historic events very well . . . Glazunov spoke with enthusiasm about knighthood and knights, about poet-singers (troubadours), trouvères, and minstrels, about performances on the squares of medieval towns and about life in castles." Not long before Glazunov started working on *Raymonda*, Grigorovich adds, he traveled through Germany, where he witnessed many medieval monuments, including Cologne Cathedral (Grigorovich and Vanslow 1989, pp. 20–21). On a similar note, Konaev avers that Petipa "always did his homework well," which entailed historical and iconographic research on French monarchs (cited in Macaulay et al. 2022).
- 65 Reflecting upon *Raymonda* decades after she danced it, Danilova remembers that the White Lady danced to "big music" (Danilova and Fullington 1998, p. 73). Petipa's notes to Glazunov indicate that the White Lady's entrance should be: "Music in a style somewhat *pathétique* [a musical term for an emotional and sentimental style], ideal. All of this passage will show your inspiration to advantage" (Petipa 1975–1976, p. 41).
- 66 Balanchine-Danilova eventually dropped the White Lady character from subsequent Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo performances (Fullington 2022, p. 342). Later choreographers and scholars echo Danilova's dismissal of her: for example, Alastair Macaulay recounts that "in 1984, I asked Frederick Ashton if he had ever considered choreographing a complete *Raymonda* around the bits of Petipa choreography that were then known to him. He replied, 'When I looked at the story, it involved a White Lady. The only White Lady I knew was a cocktail'" (Macaulay et al. 2022). Moreover, Nadine Meisner refers to the White Lady as a "feeble version of the Lilac Fairy [from Petipa's 1890 *Sleeping Beauty* ballet]" (Meisner 2019, p. 249; see also Wiley [1990] 2007, p. 392; Danilova and Fullington 1998, p. 75).
- 67 Nissinen explains the Dame Blanche's role in his new *Raymonda* production: "The dream scene has the White Lady. She is basically a sculpture in a house who is a spiritual protector of the family and of family history in one sculpture. This sculpture has seen every baby born in the long history of this family, and every death and every fight. In the original version, the White Lady becomes a live person. I have used the White Lady very shortly, about three minutes. When *Raymonda* is sleeping on her divan, she [the White Lady] comes alive and wakens *Raymonda* and brings Jean de Brienne and circulates them until their hands touch. And that's the beginning of the dream *pas de deux*" (Nissinen and Stinchcomb 2024). Among all the *Raymonda* readaptations I have studied, a 2022 production by the Astrakhan State Theater of Opera and Ballet gives the most choreographic and narrative prominence to Dame Blanche; see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V557ySdBN7s>, accessed 18 February 2025.
- 68 In Nureyev's psychologically dense *Raymonda*, the titular heroine has erotic fantasies about both men, but Abderrakhman turns out to be an illusion (Vaughan 1975–1976, p. 33).
- 69 For more on the social status of *qiyān*, see (Richardson 2009; Gordon 2009; Nielson 2021, p. 64). *Qiyān* are sometimes compared to the *hetaerae* of ancient Greece, the geishas of Japan, or the courtesans of Renaissance Italy.
- 70 According to Al-Jāhiz, they could memorize between 4000 and 10,000 songs (Al-Jāhiz 1980, p. 35).
- 71 Shay notes that, although the Qur'an does not prohibit dance, dancing was often connected to sex and prostitution in Islamic culture (Shay 2014, pp. 111–12). For possible illustrations of the *qiyān*, see Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana ms. Arab 368, fol. 9r: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.ar.368; and the (reconstructed) Samarra fresco: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Painting-reconstructing-the-image-of-unveiled-female-dancers-depicted-in-a-fresco-from_fig3_269279292, both accessed 16 February 2025. I thank Lev Arie Kapitakin for informing me about these works of art.
- 72 Incidentally, Jean de Brienne gives *Raymonda* a scarf before he leaves for the Crusades. In a famous solo variation from Act I, *Raymonda* dances with the scarf (*pas de châte*). In a 2022 production by the Astrakhan State Theater of Opera and Ballet, Dame Blanche covers *Raymonda* with this scarf at the end of the dream vision. Moreover, her diaphanous wimple and bell sleeves recall *Raymonda*'s scarf, as well as medieval fashion.
- 73 For a study on Iberian dance during Late Antiquity, during which Church Fathers associated dancing with heresy, see (Tronca 2021).
- 74 Interestingly, Jean de Brienne's third marriage to Berengaria of León-Castile (d. 1237, daughter of King Alfonso IX of León and Queen Berengaria of Castile) formed an alliance between France and Iberia (Perry 2018, p. 188). For scholarship tracing the profound influence of Middle Eastern dance and music (via the Crusades) on Western European dance, see (Temple 2001, pp. 34, 66–75; Kapitakin 2019, pp. 3–9; Valls 2019, esp. 25, 37). For a study tracing the medieval Islamic origins of flamenco, see (Goldberg 2023).
- 75 In a comparable vein, Konaev reappraises Pashkova's libretto, revealing her authorial deftness. He considers Pashkova an "ideal person for her story," given her extensive travels, rich social encounters, and novels with strong female characters. In fact, Konaev believes that *Raymonda* is a reworking of a semi-autobiographical novel, *Hannah Pacha* (1880), that Pashkova wrote. Moreover, Konaev explains that Pashkova was often drawn to Islamic themes in a sympathetic (rather than intolerant) way.

- ⁷⁶ See also Akram Khan's and Phil Chan's comments on the productive potential of vulnerability, curiosity, and subversion when performing controversial works (Chan and Chase 2023, pp. 231, 244).
- ⁷⁷ In a forthcoming essay, I provide evidence for the medieval origins of ballet more broadly. This research differs from traditional narratives, which locate the beginnings of ballet in the Renaissance or Baroque periods (Homans 2010, esp. 3–11). However, Jennifer Homans' recent biography of Balanchine reveals the importance of medieval concepts (e.g., chivalry, courtly love, and religious icons) for twentieth-century ballet (Homans 2022).
- ⁷⁸ For additional critiques of the underlying Eurocentrism of certain global medieval studies implementations (especially within English departments), see (Orlemanski 2024; De Souza 2024; Lomuto 2020; Lomuto 2023).

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