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The Dance of Musa: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Holy Girl

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Abstract: This article examines a single figure from Christian history, the reformed sinner known as Musa of Rome (d.c. 593). Tracing the evolution of Musa from Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* to early modern pastoral texts, this study explores processes of condemnation, recalibration, and negotiation regarding dance in premodern Christianity. The first section analyzes medieval portrayals of Musa as expressions of "choreophobia," a term borrowed from dance studies scholar Anthony Shay that denotes cultural anxiety surrounding dance. Here, I argue that choreophobic renditions of Musa sedimented medieval misogyny and conceptualized sin. The second section turns to late medieval sources that assess dance differently vis-à-vis dance studies scholar André Lepecki's concept of "choreopolice" or "choreopolicing". For this study, choreopolicing highlights how ecclesiastical authorities refashioned Musa as a moralizing vehicle to articulate and implement clerical agendas. The third and final section explores Musa's inspiring aura as a sacred muse. In this vein, her kinesthetic afterlives helped Christian laity apprehend Marian piety, visualize the resurrected body, and communicate hope for redemption. Methodologically, this study embraces the frameworks of religious studies, medieval studies, and dance studies. However fictional and embellished retellings of the Musa story were, this article—the first in-depth scholarly study dedicated to Musa of Rome—demonstrates how the medieval dancing body manifested a site of political contestation, ecclesiastical control, and individual redemption.

Keywords: medieval/Middle Ages; Christianity; saints; dance; choreophobia; choreopolice; penitence; laity; Marian piety; resurrected body

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In his children's literary work entitled "Das Tanzlegendchen" ("The Little Legend of Dance", part of a larger 1872 work entitled *Sieben Legenden*, or *Seven Legends*), the Swiss writer and clerk Gottfried Keller (1819–1890) spun a tale about a young girl called Musa. In this story, Musa is a little girl who loves to dance, even in church. As Keller wrote, "when she [Musa] found herself alone in the church, she could not refrain from executing some balletic moves before the altar, and, so to speak, dancing a pretty prayer to the Virgin Mary" (cited and trans. in Ziolkowski 2018a, p. 213)."[1] The frontispiece from a 1919 edition of this work shows a sprightly Musa prancing on the page as the all-seeing eye of God looks down upon her, whereas an illustration from a 1921 edition depicts the little girl capering before a (neo-)Gothic church.[2] Keller's narrative recounts how one day, after pirouetting through a church service, Musa encounters an elderly gentleman. He teaches Musa beautiful, otherworldly movement. The man then introduces himself as the biblical King David, and implores Musa to abstain from earthly dancing so that she may dance in this most fulfilling fashion in heaven. Musa agrees—although it did take a period in ankle chains for her to refrain from dancing. When she passes away three years later from an illness, the Grecian Muses (including Terpsichore, the Muse of dance), Saint Cecilia, King David, and the Virgin Mary welcome her to paradise and its heavenly roundelays. While Keller himself did not subscribe to Christianity (or any other organized religious tradition), he portrays Musa with sincerity, rather than ridicule (Ziolkowski 2022, pp. 147–48).

The juxtaposition between a playful girl with major biblical and saintly figures from the Judeo-Christian tradition is notable from a religious studies perspective. As this article

unveils, the Musa story also has rich value for medieval studies. The first iteration of her story appears in *Libri Dialogorum* (*The Dialogues*) of Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604). *The Dialogues* also contains the life of St. Benedict of Nursia (d. 547), founder of the Benedictine Order. Though never officially canonized, the Roman Catholic Church honors Musa on April 2, and the Greek Orthodox Church celebrates her feast day on May 16. The faithful refer to her generically as "Saint Musa". Musa may be closer to a *beata* (blessed woman) than a *sancta* (saint), given the absence of papal approval of her sainthood (Vauchez 1993, pp. 207–10). Nevertheless, she came to champion the Christian virtues of faith and humility and inspired generations of clergy and laity.

After Gregory's original text, Musa reappeared in diverse theological sources between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. In their readaptations of Musa, medieval clergy and theologians forged her identity as a dancer to redirect laity to proper avenues toward penitence, confession, and salvation. Curiously, there has been no substantial scholarship on Musa, despite her presence in numerous religious texts—some penned by prominent theologians and preachers, including Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240), Guillaume Peraldus (d. 1271), and Giacomo della Marca (d. 1476).[3] Tracing the diachronic permutations of Musa throughout the Middle Ages, this study is analogous to recent expositions on biblical dancers, namely King David and Salome, by myself and Lynneth Miller Renberg, respectively (Dickason 2020, pp. 36–55; Miller Renberg 2022, esp. chaps. 4–5). What makes Musa rare, however, is that she is so well documented, despite not being a canonized saint or a personage from the Bible. To my knowledge, the only other literary figure/dancer who garnered a similar long-term celebrity is the *jongleur* of Notre Dame (a likely fictional tumbling acrobat who performed before a statue of the Virgin Mary). Medievalist Jan Ziolkowski has accordingly reconstructed the *jongleur*'s renowned piety and artistry over the course of seven tomes (Ziolkowski 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e, 2018f, 2022). Musa, a seemingly random and frivolous dancing girl, initially seems out of place vis-à-vis the hagiographic and exegetical corpora of Christianity. Nevertheless, as this study unveils, theologians and preachers gravitated toward her for a variety of traditional and reformist purposes and agendas.

Beyond mere recreation, dance could unleash powerful expressions of sin, sanctity, and transcendence in medieval European texts and images. The Musa story underscores how dance—at least from pastoral and monastic perspectives—constituted one of the most anxiety-ridden activities in the medieval West. Contemptuous attitudes toward dance emerged in late antiquity with Tertullian (d. 240), St. John Chrysostom (d. 407), Jerome (d. 420), and St. Augustine (d. 430) (Webb 2008; Tronca 2016, 2019). The demonization of dance percolated into the Middle Ages. Indeed, throughout the medieval period, numerous church councils and ecclesiastical statutes tried to prohibit dances of different kinds and within different contexts (especially dances performed in churches, in cemeteries, or on feast days).[4] The contentious religious context surrounding medieval dance helps cast in relief Musa's moralizing thrust.

Revolving around the key figure of Musa, who, as Gregory recounts, was an obscure holy girl from sixth-century Rome, this article explores some of the processes of condemnation and negotiation regarding dance in historical Christianity. In doing so, I follow in the footsteps of theologian Laura Hellsten and expand upon my own past scholarship concerning the sacralization of dance in the Middle Ages (Hellsten 2021; Dickason 2021). I also derive inspiration from historians Gregor Rohmann, Donatella Tronca, and Miller Renberg, who have unearthed the fraught relationships between premodern dance and social control (Rohmann 2012; Tronca 2019; Miller Renberg 2022). In certain Musa renditions, dance constitutes a sin to be avoided or punished. In other sources portraying her, dance constitutes a useful disciplinary tool in preaching, as well as a heavenly reward. Musa's stories—however fictional and embellished—show how the medieval dancing body was a site of religious and political contestation.

The first section of this article analyzes medieval portrayals of Musa as expressions of *choreophobia*. This term, borrowed from dance studies scholar Anthony Shay, encompasses

"negative and ambiguous reactions" to dance performance (Shay 1999, pp. 2, 7).[5] I argue that choreophobic renditions of Musa helped forge medieval misogyny and conceptualize sin. The second section analyzes primary sources in which Musa became a sinner-turned-celestial dancer. Here I utilize the concept of "choreopolice" or "choreopolicing" by dance studies scholar André Lepecki. Addressing contemporary dance, Lepecki employs the phenomenon of choreopolicing to denote imperative forms of movement, which I in turn apply to ecclesiastical reactions to dance in medieval Europe (Lepecki 2013). The third and final section explores Musa's inspiring aura as a sacred muse. In this vein, her kinesthetic afterlives helped Christian laity apprehend Marian piety, visualize the resurrected body, and communicate hope for redemption. Methodologically, this study embraces the frameworks of religious studies, medieval studies, and dance studies. However fictional and embellished retellings of the Musa story were, this article—the first scholarly study dedicated to Musa of Rome—demonstrates how Church authorities perceived dancing as an unruly action that warranted social control and ecclesiastical domination. Beyond earthly confines, dancing could also articulate the redemptive triumph of the human spirit.

1. Choreophobia: Musa as Sinner

The first known reference to Musa of Rome occurs in Book IV of *The Dialogues* of Gregory the Great. Gregory entitled this anecdote "The departure [death] of a girl called Musa" (*De transitu Musae puellae*) (Gregory the Great 1862). It narrates how the young Musa indulged in frivolities, namely jokes and games. One day the Virgin Mary appeared to Musa in a vision, imploring her to refrain from these activities for thirty days. Should Musa obey this request, she would commune with the Virgin and her choric coterie (which featured girls Musa's age dressed in white) in paradise. Musa altered her behavior successfully, but by the twenty-fourth day became feverish. As Musa expired on the thirtieth day, Mary appeared to her again. After Musa's soul departed from her body, she went to heaven to live among Mary and her virgin saints. Through Marian intercession, Musa abandoned hedonism for holiness. In death, she became blessed. Thus, Musa emblematized the principle of "perfection in imperfection," (which is, incidentally, the subtitle of Carole Straw's scholarly biography of Gregory the Great) (Straw 1988).[6]

Gregory showcases Musa as an alternative model of sanctity for Christians outside the cloister. In his *Dialogues*, Musa was the sister of a pious man named Probus. Through Probus' recollection and Gregory's narration, readers learn the nature of Musa's sin. The Virgin Mary commanded Musa "not to do anything silly, as foolish little girls often do and instead, she was to keep from laughing and joking [*risu et jocis*]" (Gregory the Great 1862, p. 348; 2002, pp. 211–12)."[7] To be clear, the original source does not identify Musa as a dancer. (By the thirteenth century, as I shall elaborate momentarily, her principal sin was rewritten as dance).

Gregory wrote *The Dialogues* to promote local Italian cults in the late sixth century, when many inhabitants had not completely conformed to Christianity and its customary monotheism.[8] The text's dialogue format charts the conversation between Gregory and a deacon named Peter. Peter the skeptic laments that his own Italy is bereft of the sacred wonders and awesome martyrs that once animated ancient Rome. Gregory challenges Peter's cynicism with numerous anecdotes of contemporary miracles, including those of St. Benedict. Unlike Gregory's dense theological compendia, *The Dialogues* hovers between oral and written texture, exuding a populist spirit and rustic tone, which has led some scholars to question its authorship (Little 1993; Straw 1988; Clark 1987, p. x, Clark 2003).[9] Evidently, Musa commanded the attention of someone as authoritative as Gregory the Great. She verified God's omnipresence in our daily lives and humankind's capacity for (positive) change. For Gregory and his interlocutor, Musa's story proves that no life—no matter how seemingly insignificant—remains untouched by the pivotal gift of grace.

While Gregory remained a widely read author throughout the Middle Ages, to my knowledge, the Musa story did not acquire new adaptations or commentaries until about five and a half centuries after *The Dialogues* was produced. (It is certainly conceivable,

however, that the Musa story circulated via oral tradition during this long interval) (see also Adalbert De Vogüé 1986). Amid the proliferation of penitentials, confessionals, pastoral sources, moralized fables, and *exempla*, she resurfaced robustly from the twelfth through sixteenth centuries.[10] Citing from and elaborating upon authoritative luminaries like Gregory endowed medieval authors with legitimacy. As a Church Father, Gregory combined classical erudition with scriptural knowledge. He helped universalize monasticism and establish the liturgy. He was a pope yet stressed that all Christians could act like martyrs in their daily trials and self-sacrifice (Little 1993, p. 78; Hollywood 2012, p. 59; Markus 1997, pp. 68–71; Straw 1999). Franciscans and Dominicans apparently looked back to earlier texts, including Gregory's *Dialogues*, for material to include in their moralizing treatises and *exempla* compilations.

Since Musa was a repentant lay woman, she was a poster child (literally) for a penitential program. Her story could bolster clerical authority and encourage the laity to attend confession. After the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (canon 21), confession had become mandatory for all Christians (Schroeder 1937, pp. 259–60). Specifically, this council dictated that all Christian men and women must "individually confess all their sins in a faithful manner to their own priest at least once a year, and let them take care to do what they can to perform the penance imposed on them". Without confessing annually, or refusing to accept the Easter Eucharist, Christians "shall be barred from entering a church during their lifetime and they shall be denied a Christian burial at death" (Ibid). It is thus no coincidence, I posit, that Musa retellings seemed to proliferate around this time period.

I hypothesize that Musa re-emerged in the post-Gregorian sources as a response to the rise of the preaching orders, the universalization of confession, and the efflorescence of the cult of the Virgin Mary. This section examines "choreophobic" attitudes toward Musa, in which her sin became reconstituted as dancing. Although Shay grounds his study dedicated to choreophobia on dance in primarily post-revolutionary Iran and the contemporary Iranian diaspora (specifically that of Los Angeles County), his central claims are useful for apprehending Musa's role in medieval culture. Shay asserts that

> This study of ambiguous attitudes toward dance will yield different and valuable viewpoints of Iranian society . . . or those societies in which dance is not regarded as a positive or important activity . . . I cannot sufficiently stress the fact that . . . what I call choreophobic attitudes are complex. Individual and societal attitudes vary greatly regarding which individuals may or may not dance without censure, and in which social and psychological contexts this may occur. Individual attitudes may vary towards different dance styles and traditions as well (Shay 1999, p. 2).

Shay's point of entry into the history and sociology of Iranian dance rejects the aesthetic and ritual appraisal of dance traditions that dominate most Euro-American dance criticism and scholarship. Moreover, he emphasizes the malleability of choreophobic mentalities, which are created within specific contexts. Interpreting Musa through the lens of choreophobia reveals cultural—and especially clerical—anxieties regarding the body, gender, and the nature of evil. Remade into a dancer, Musa thereafter encoded the demonic, punitive, and misogynist contours of medieval dance polemic.

One of the earliest post-Gregorian revisions I have consulted comes from *Sermones Vulgares* (*Sermons to the People*, c. 1220–1228) by the French theologian Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240). The placement of the Musa story within his larger work is significant. Jacques situates Musa alongside other stories concerning the sin of dance, a transgression that Musa came to resist.[11] An extant manuscript of the *Sermones Vulgares* at the National Library of France contains a scribal annotation in the left margin alerting the reader about noteworthy content: *de peccato choreis* (concerning the sin of dance, see Figure 1) (Jacques de Vitry Thirteenth century, fol. 147r). From a dance studies perspective, this marginal comment constitutes a choreophobic inscription.



Figure 1. Anti-dance content from Jacques de Vitry's *Sermones Vulgares*, French, thirteenth century, Bibliothèque Nationale de France ms. fr. 17509, folio 146 verso.

Jacques both adheres to, and diverges from, his foundational source. Like *The Dialogues*, the *Sermones Vulgares* recounts how the Virgin Mary tells Musa to refrain from laughing for thirty days, after which the Virgin will come for her (*Ne riseris per xxx dies, et eris nobiscum*) (cited in Crane 1890, p. 115). Differing from Gregory's text, Jacques specifies that Musa refrained from laughing, as well as singing (presumably profane) songs and dancing (*procul dubio nisi a risu et cantilenis atque choreis*) (Ibid). The fact that Musa had to refrain from dancing in order to join Mary's heavenly company suggests that Jacques deemed dancing an impediment to faith and virtue.

A more dramatic readaptation of Musa appears in the *Sermones Dominicales* (*Sunday Sermons*) by the Italian Franciscan preacher and inquisitor Giacomo della Marca (known in English as James of the Marches, d. 1476, canonized in 1726). He nestled his Musa adaptation within *Sermo XVII* (Sermon 17), which revolves around the theme of *luxuria* (lust).[12] Giacomo begins this sermon by providing four reasons why men and women succumb to lust: (1) the dwelling of women (*mulierum habitatio*); (2) the leading of dances (*corearum ductio*); (3) the (visual) examination of women (*mulierum inspectio*); and (4) the seduction of elderly women (*vetularum seductio*) (S. Iacobus de Marchia 1978, p. 303). He proceeds to cite several passages from scripture and Augustine to substantiate his logic. Thereafter, Giacomo narrates the Musa story, referring to her as a girl who is devoted to dance (*puelle devote saltanti*) (Ibid., p. 305). As he continues, his prohibitory stance on dance becomes crystal clear:

> And she [the Virgin Mary said] to her [Musa]: Abandon dances and vain songs and in 30 days it will be done [i.e., you will be able to join us in heaven]. Behold, the Virgin prohibited dancing, because dances are nothing but the procession of

> the devil, where, with a torch ignited by lust, the devil consists of amorous songs and indecent touching and glances.[13]

Evidently, Giacomo construed dance as a diabolic activity. His choice of language (i.e., *processio diaboli*) is noteworthy from a choreophobic standpoint. By equating dance to a procession of the devil, Giacomo insinuates that dancing corrupts the Christian liturgy. To be clear, medieval liturgists understood the *processio* as a kind of tamed, disciplined, and dance-like movement that befitted Christian devotion (Durand 2000, p. 113; Mews 2009; Dickason 2021, pp. 78–88).[14] Musicologist Mary Caldwell has examined notations in liturgical manuscripts that are indicative of processional choreography, though she concedes that these dances were typically very localized (Caldwell 2024, pp. 29–60). Manuscripts intended for private devotion could include processional imagery. The Taymouth Hours, for example, depicts a group of pious processants at the Dormition (earthly death) of the Virgin Mary alongside prayers for the Office of the Cross (Anon Fourteenth Century d, fol. 133v).[15] Interestingly, this same manuscript also contains images of dancing devils, who are later shown punished (and immobilized) in the stocks (Anon Fourteenth Century d, fols. 140r, 170v; Caviness 2001, chap. 3; Stanton 2001, pp. 132–42, 196–204, 236). Art historian Kathryn A. Smith surmises that the artist's depiction of infernal prances and "dissonant soundtracks" could have been borrowed from devilish tropes in medieval theater (Smith 2012, pp. 237, 239, 241). Interpreted alongside Giacomo's sermon, iconographic evidence from the Taymouth Hours substantiates further the slippery nature of agile bodily movement, which could devolve easily from a dignified processional into an infernal jig.

In addition to spotlighting the devil, another important post-Gregorian change that Giacomo made regards Musa's age. In Gregory's version, she is a little girl (*parva puella*). However, as Ziolkowski observes, late medieval authors made her more mature, either as a young noblewoman or, in this case, a virginal girl (*puella*) who conceivably could be sexualized or could exude a pubescent sexuality (Ziolkowski 2022, p. 155).[16] Within Giacomo's larger sermon, Musa refrains not only from dancing, but also (at least implicitly) from sexual temptation. Dance, therefore, has become reconstituted as a form of illicit sexuality. As *Sermo XVII* ensues, Giacomo underscores the indexicality between dance and lust. Offering numerous passages concerning women's adornments and feminine wiles, he warns that (female) dancers—hiding behind the diabolical guise of physical beauty—cause great destruction, ultimately barring otherwise worthy men from paradise (S. Iacobus de Marchia 1978, pp. 305–8).

Giacomo della Marca and Jacques de Vitry likely refer to secular dances, as opposed to liturgical processionals or ritual movement. Jacques provides a clue in the Latin word *cantilena*. Though this term could refer to either a sacred, liturgical song or a popular song/ditty, by the thirteenth century, it also referred to secular dance-songs (i.e., amorous lyric that was sung alongside the performance of dance and instrumental music) (Page 1997, p. 73). Etching the sin of lust onto dancing bodies, Giacomo's sermon indicates that social dances, which necessitated mixed-gender socialization and physical contact, heightened sexual temptation between men and women. Specifically, Giacomo conjures the image of the *carole*, a circular group dance that was popular in Western Europe during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[17] Like most members of the preaching orders, James was savvy about the pastimes of his parishioners. Throughout the Middle Ages, dance was one of the laity's most beloved pastimes, as Robert Mullally and Christopher Page have shown (Mullally 2011; Page 1989). Moreover, Musa's name may form a pun in Old French. The Old French *muse* and the related *musardrie* appear in popular and pastoral literature. The terms denote amusement, worldly pleasure, play, or mundane vanity—basically, any secular diversion associated with laziness, apathy, or folly (Godefroy 1880, pp. 453–55). For example, the thirteenth-century moralizing work known as *Le Manuel des Pechiez* (*The Manual of Sins*), attributed to William of Waddington, denounces the ignorant masses for giving themselves over to amusements that compromise their moral integrity: "Idle amusements and such vanities, prances, dances, and such follies" (*Muses e tieles musardries/Trippes, dances, e teles*

folies) (William of Waddington 1940, p. 283 and n.1, trans. mine).[18] Refashioned as a dancer, Musa represents all Christians' vulnerability to moral failure.

At first glance, the choreophobic revision of Musa aligns with the gendering of dance in late antique sources. In his *Psychomachia*, an allegorical poem about the battle between good and evil, Prudentius (d. 413) imagined *Luxuria* as a brazen *saltatrix* (female dancer). In medieval manuscript illustrations, she kicks up her skirts before male soldiers, thereby distracting them from their civic and spiritual duties.[19] Addressing a more monastic readership as well as Christian women, Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) criticized dance in his *De Virginibus* (Concerning Virgins). He contended that dance undid the work of religion by counteracting chastity.[20] Alluding to Salome and Herodias (Matthew 14 and Mark 6), he strongly advised the female virgins in his care to reject the immodesty that dancing provokes (Ambrose of Milan 1845, p. 227; 1896, p. 899).[21] Jerome, too, implied that virginity was incommensurable with dance.[22] For example, in a letter to his spiritual sister Eustochium and her mother Paula (*Epistola XXII*), Jerome recounted a horrific dream that took place in the desert. Here, Jerome found himself immersed in the delights of Rome (*putaui me Romanis interesse deliciis*), surrounded by bands of dancing girls (*choris intereram puellarum*) (Jerome 1910, pp. 152–53; Cox Miller 1993, pp. 35–37; 1994; Brown 1988, pp. 375–76).[23] A fifteenth-century book of hours illuminated by the Limbourg Brothers, known as *Les Belles Heures*, contains an illustration of Jerome's dream that accentuates further the dancers' sex appeal (Figure 2) (The Limbourg Brothers Circa 1408–1409, fol. 186r).[24] While kneeling in prayer before the entrance of a church, Jerome beholds two beautiful ladies swaying their lithe, nubile bodies. A black demon hovers above him, trying to thrust Jerome toward the women. On the previous/opposite folio (185 verso), Jerome contemplates the Holy Sepulcher, and the text below begins the Passion cycle. The manuscript's arresting layout helps the reader/viewer comprehend the imminent dangers that lurk beneath the female dancing body. Both the late antique letter and the late medieval iconography arouse an aura that is at once choreophobic and starkly gendered.



Figure 2. St. Jerome tempted by dancing ladies and a demon, from *Les Belles Heures*, Limbourg brothers, illuminators, Paris, c. 1408–09, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection, MS. 54.1.1a, folio 186 recto.

However, Tronca demonstrates that critiques emanating from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages do not prove that the early Church unilaterally condemned dance. Rather, she explains: "This evidence warrants the hypothesis that. . .negative conclusions [concerning dance] almost always derived from specific situations of disorder and were often characterized by drunkenness and lust" (Tronca 2016, p. 58). Furthermore, Tronca adds that ecclesiastical authorities tended to feminize dance/dancers (Ibid., p. 59).[25] Situating the works of Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and others within an even broader context, historian Peter Brown reveals that the early Christian ideal of chastity cannot be reduced to abstinence from sexual activity (Brown 2012, esp. pp. 144–48, 311–12). Addressing Jerome's aforementioned letter to Eustochium and similar sources, Brown writes, "But the purpose of letters such as *Letter 22* was not simply to close the bodies and the houses of noble virgins and widows against the perils of sex. It was to ensure that these widows and their virgin daughters closed the doors of their palaces against an outside world that was eager less for their bodies than for their money" (Ibid., p. 265). Beyond carnal temptation, *luxuria* in Late Antiquity encompassed greed, pride, and the desire for power.

By the Late Middle Ages—coinciding with Musa's rebirth in penitential and pastoral contexts—representations of medieval dance (textual and visual alike) assumed more misogynist contours. I surmise that the so-called Gregorian Reform of the eleventh century (led by Pope Gregory VII, d. 1085), which placed a strong premium on clerical celibacy, impacted ecclesiastical attitudes toward women, and, by extension, dancing women. Historians Jo Ann McNamara, Maureen Miller, Dyan Elliott, and others have shown that the Latin Church's fixation on clerical celibacy exerted marginalizing effects on women (McNamara 1994; Miller 2003; Elliott 2005; Frassetto 1998). For instance, while the double monastery (i.e., contiguous houses inclusive of male and female monastics) flourished in earlier centuries, the presence and idea of women stoked a source of temptation and a crisis of masculinity for medieval monks. This charged context could help breed medieval misogyny. It is therefore not surprising that preachers from the post-Reform era (the Church officially mandated clerical celibacy in the twelfth century) were leery of women's dancing bodies and, accordingly, redacted the Musa story by stressing the theme of lust.

Recent scholarship scrutinizes the gendered dynamics of late medieval dance. Miller Renberg writes that, "the dancing body is always a gendered body, and gender certainly mattered to the [medieval] theologians and sermon writers addressing dance" (Miller Renberg 2022, p. 6). Though medieval dance was diverse in practice—inclusive of liturgical processions, bouncing boy bishops, refined partnerings, vigorous peasant capers, and so forth—select clerical writings framed dance in binary terms. This dualistic framework, in turn, constructed and categorized gendered behaviors. According to Miller Renberg, "Clerics framed dance within neatly defined binaries, setting sacred and profane bodies, gendered male and female respectively, as opposing poles. Both in sermons and in parishes, dance's acceptability was determined by the gender of the performer" (Ibid., p. 160).[26] In concert with these insights, Musa's gender practically pre-determined the sinful nature of her dancing.

The choreophobic correlation between dance and gender appears elsewhere among the late medieval reception of Gregory's oeuvre. Consider Jehan de Stavelot's early fifteenth-century Benedictine miscellany. One illustration depicts a group of seven naked women holding hands and dancing in a monastery garden as St. Benedict peers at them from a nearby window (Figure 3) (Jehan de Stavelot Circa 1432–37, fol. 135r).[27] The image appears in a section of the manuscript entitled *Veritas de virtute castitatis* (the truth concerning the virtue of chastity). The text in the lower margin reads like a digest of the Rule of St. Benedict: "If you wish to chastise luxury [lust], master the body, bear what has been tested. Pray, study, meditate. Flee the region and the clamor within it."[28] The author/scribe repeated this imperative in Old French and Middle High German. Christ (top right) and Daniel (top left) inject the scene with biblical quotations, equating apocalyptic ordeal to sexual temptation.[29]



Figure 3. Balak, Balaam, daughters of Moab, Israelites (left/verso) and Florentius, Benedict, dancers (right/recto), from Jehan de Stavelot, *De Sancto Benedicto*, French c. 1432–37, Chantilly Musée Condé, MS. 738, folios 134 verso–135 recto, courtesy of Bibliothèque et archives du Château de Chantilly.

Like the Musa story, this scene draws from Gregory the Great. Specifically, the Benedictine imagery portrays Gregory's *Life of Saint Benedict* (recounted in book II of *The Dialogues*).[30] An innovator within Western medieval spirituality, St. Benedict codified hermetic discipline by institutionalizing the monastic enterprise. In a scene from his *vita*, the spiteful monk Florentius desired to see Benedict falter. He led seven naked women into the monastery garden. Upon seeing the women play (*ludentes*) and join hands from his window, Benedict promptly left the monastery with some of his disciples (Gregory the Great 1862, p. 148; 2002, pp. 71–72).[31] As was the case with the Musa story, Gregory did not employ specific dance terminology. The Latin term *ludus* was, however, certainly broad enough to encompass dance.

Returning to the Benedictine miscellany manuscript, the bifolium imagery juxtaposing idolaters and dancers manufactures an interrelationship between dance, femininity, and idolatry. The verso (left) side of the bifolium depicts diverse biblical figures: King Balak of Moab, the false prophet Balaam, the daughters of Moab/Midianites, and the sons of Israel (Figure 3) (Jehan de Stavelot Circa 1432–37, fol. 134v).[32] When the two illustrations are seen side by side, the bifolium creates a visual correspondence between the seven idolatrous women about to fornicate with Israelites and the seven dancers trying to seduce St. Benedict.[33] This dance iconography effectively genders vice and virtue. Monasticism is masculine/monotheistic/chaste; depravity is feminine/idolatrous/lustful. Benedict's escape from the dancers promotes his community of monks, lending order and fraternal support to their ascetic zeal. Contemplated alongside the Musa story, the choreophobic contours of the Benedictine miscellany presage how female dancing ignites lascivious conduct.

To be sure, the Benedictine miscellany was produced long after ancient idolatry—and by implication ancient/Greco-Roman polytheism—threatened the hegemony of the Latin Church. Indeed, late medieval articulations of "the pagan" were more of an allegorical abstraction than a tangible reality (Dickason 2021, p. 25). Discussing Indigenous American ritual actors, dance scholar Lindsey Drury demonstrates that settler-colonialists imposed "paganizing" nomenclature onto Native dance traditions, thereby invalidating and otherizing Indigenous artistry and religiosity (Drury 2021).[34] Hellsten unveils how nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars and theologians "paganized" medieval dance practices, thereby fabricating artificial taxonomies of Christian and non/pre-Christian (Hellsten 2021, pp. 13–14, 152, 236).[35] Similar ideological constructs hover over the post-Gregorian Musa and St. Benedict retellings, when Christian authors and artists devised various rhetorical

techniques to otherize and demonize dancers. Beyond gender and misogyny, Christian choreophobia exudes a colonizing thrust.

In the early modern period, variations on the Musa story placed her within broader discussions of dance and damnation, sometimes exhibiting a high degree of creative license. Both Domenico Cavalca's fourteenth century *Pungilingua* (*Stinging Tongue*) and Gabriele Barletta's fifteenth-century *Sermones* (*Sermons*), which were circulated in early modern printed editions, compare and combine the story of Musa with anecdotes of lustful and idolatrous women, as told by the Bible, Origen (d.c. 253), and Jerome (Cavalca 1547, in-fol.; Barletta 1571, fols. 139v–140v). Cavalca demonizes Musa and her feminine ilk further by including the story of Cyrillus, a disciple of Jerome. In this tale, a woman's ghost allegedly appeared to Cyrillus, warning him against vain dances on earth. Apparently, she had overindulged in dancing during her lifetime and proceeded to pay for it in hell (Cavalca 1547, in-folio). The free, expressive dancing body in this life transmogrified into the unfree, tortured dead body in the infernal afterlife. Thus, the literary afterlives of Musa collided with unfortunate afterlives of sinners.

Alessandro Arcangeli's scholarship brings attention to punitive responses to premodern dance. As he explains, "[medieval and early modern moralizing texts] concerning dance could be summarized as an anthology of various punishments for individuals or groups of sinners" (Arcangeli 1992, p. 32). On some level, Arcangeli's assessment of the lethal consequences of medieval dance resonates with Shay's depiction of dance under the Iranian regime, in which, Shay writes, "people will put themselves at risk by dancing" (Shay 1999, p. 1).[36] Given Iran's ban on public dancing, transgressors may face harsh punishments, including prison time and numerous lashes.[37] The immediacy of contemporary Iranians facing carceral and corporal punishment casts in relief the serious consequences of medieval dance.

Considered within the post-Lateran IV era, late medieval renditions of Musa rationalize the otherwise melodramatic "theater of God's punishment" (Arcangeli 2000, p. 211). The punitive potential of dance could be theologically instructive. For instance, introducing their *Cursed Carolers in Context* volume, Miller Renberg and Bradley Phillis argue that fanciful legends of dancers' punishments (however fictional they happened to be), "became a space in which medieval readers, writers, and listeners could debate the meaning and significance of a surprising variety of questions, including ecclesiastical authority, gender roles, pastoral responsibility, and even the conduct of crusades" (Miller Renberg and Phillis 2021, p. 2). Moreover, Marianne Ruel (Robins) demonstrates how dance in early modernity became equated with heresy and hindered confession (Ruel [Robins] 2006, pp. 126, 374).[38] In this way, Christian-inflected choreophobia altered Musa into a sinful dancer who needed to be saved.

2. Choreopolicing: Musa as Heavenly Dancer

While the aforementioned readaptations of Musa forged an equivalency between dance and sin, other medieval texts permitted dance in specific contexts and places. As this section shows, the Musa story demonstrated how earthly discipline was rewarded with heavenly dances. However divergent in detail, the many variations of the life of Musa presented a story about a recovering dance addict who joined the heavenly *chorea*. As I argue, the Musa of the Late Middle Ages helped establish a sacred afterlife of dance.

This particular process of sacralization, however, resulted from a Christianized modality of "choreopolicing". In his Foucauldian approach to dance studies, Lepecki theorizes choreography as a system of command that "implements, needs, produces, and reproduces whole systems of obedience" (Lepecki 2013, p. 16). According to this logic, dance-making issues forth from authoritarian origins, in which obedient bodies reproduce pre-ordained movements. The power relations that undergird choreography lead Lepecki to craft his theory of choreopolicing. When describing mass protests in contemporary contexts, Lepecki notes the highly "choreographed police presence" that accompanies these crowds, which is designed to "de-mobilize political action" and to ensure "a daily choreography of

conformity" (Ibid., pp. 16, 20). Just as modern police forces control movement and reinstate law and order, medieval clerics defined the precise times and places under which dance was prohibited or permissible. This section reveals the many medieval renderings of Musa that showcase ecclesiastical techniques of choreopolicing.

The *Sunday Sermons* of Odo of Cheriton (d. c. 1247) is one of the first sources to recast Musa as a postmortem dancer. Educated in Paris, Odo was an English preacher and fabulist. Intended for pastoral purposes, his collection of fables drew upon animal behavior and Greco-Roman rhetoric to comment on human morality.[39] Odo appropriated his Musa tale from *The Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, but devised a few innovations of his own. Odo's revision, entitled *De quadam puella advocate a beata virgine* (Concerning a certain girl who had been counseled by the blessed Virgin), transformed Musa into a heavenly dancer:

> [According to the legend,] the blessed Virgin appeared to a certain girl, leading a dance of the most beautiful virgins [*pulcherrimarum uirginum ducens choream*], and said to the girl: "Do you desire to be part of this fellowship of ours", and the girl responded, "Lady, I desire this most affectionately". Afterwards the blessed Virgin said to her: "You must abstain from dances [*Abstineas a choreis*] and from the vain things of this world; you shall exercise nothing frivolous or girlish, and after thirty days you will come to me". Having seen such things, the girl took herself in hand with great strictness to forgo the levity of her past life. And she explained the cause of this sudden change to her protesting parents. After the twenty-fifth day, she fell ill with a fever, and on the thirtieth day, with the hour of her death approaching, she perceived the blessed Virgin coming with the girls to see her, and she [Musa] called her [the Virgin] so that she would come to her. With an open voice, she proclaimed: "Behold my Lady, I am coming [*Ecce domina, uenio*]". And thus she obtained a vision of peace with the holy virgins (Eudes de Cheriton 1896, p. 344, trans. mine).[40]

Evidently, this vision of peace entails everlasting dances with Mary and her attendants. Here, dance is a heavenly reward for Musa's earthly discipline. This anecdote suggests that dance is not wholly wicked. Rather, there is an appropriate time and place for dancing. Odo's revisionist stance coincides with my earlier work assessing the relationship between dance and penitence: "These sources [e.g., late medieval penitentials, vernacular fables, philosophical texts, and *exempla*] do not necessarily indicate that dance is evil in itself. Rather, they identify the conditions under which dance can be sinful or holy" (Dickason 2021, p. 106). Moreover, Arcangeli, Page, and I have demonstrated that major medieval thinkers—including Peter Lombard (d. 1160), St. Bonaventure (d. 1274), and Albertus Magnus (d. 1280)—contemplated and theorized how dances, spectacles, and other leisurely activities could be enacted without incurring sin and sacrilege (Arcangeli 2000, pp. 83, 88–89; Page 1989, pp. 34, 129–32, 78; Dickason 2021, pp. 116–29). To be clear, Odo's Musa does not go so far as to sacralize dance on earth. She does, however, endorse dancing as an acceptable activity in paradise. Accordingly, those who have cultivated asceticism in this life are worthy of indulging in kinesthetic splendors in the next life.

In material culture, Musa's dancing may foreshadow heavenly rewards. The single medieval image depicting a dancing Musa I have uncovered thus far comes from a thirteenth-century manuscript of *Les Cantigas de Santa Maria* (*The Canticles of Holy Mary*, Figure 4) (Alfonso X Thirteenth century, fol. 117r). Composed in Galician-Portuguese by King Alfonso X (d. 1284), this collection of troubadouresque lyric praises the peerless beauty, virtue, and mercy of the Virgin Mary. In Alfonso's oeuvre, the Musa story appears in *cantiga* 79. Interestingly, Alfonso, like Gregory, did not specify that Musa danced. Alfonso merely described her conduct as "frivolous and flighty" (Alfonso X 2000, p. 104). Deviating from Alfonso's text, the artist depicted Musa as a dancer. In the manuscript miniature, she wears a pellote, or a sleeveless tunic that medieval women typically layered over a dress. Musa holds a long sash or ribbon in her hand, and her toca, or headdress, resembles a crown (Keller and Cash 1998, p. 18). Perhaps the artist fashioned Musa as a dancer precisely because medieval retellings of this story were well circulated by the late

thirteenth century. Moreover, Musa's placement in a garden may heighten her association with dance and the sacred. In medieval texts and images, gardens often had Edenic and prelapsarian connotations. Even secular texts, namely the thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose* (*The Romance of the Rose*) by Guilluame de Lorris, imagined utopian gardens in which idealized dances of courtship took place (de Lorris and de Meun 1992, pp. 76–80). Inspired by the *Cantica Canticorum*, or Song of Songs/Song of Solomon 4:12 ("A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up [*Hortus conclusus soror mea, sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus*])", the Benedictine theologian Rupert of Deutz (d.c. 1129) identified the Virgin Mary as the *hortus conclusus* (the enclosed garden), in reference to her holy, virginal womb that served as the vehicle of the Incarnation.[41] In line with this tradition, medieval and Renaissance paintings often placed the mother Mary in the middle of a lush, verdant garden. Furthermore, historian Fiona Griffiths explains that the hermetically sealed garden became a potent symbol of monastic enclosure, especially for religious women (Griffiths 2006, pp. 137–39). In this sense, the *Cantigas* miniature painting offers a visual gloss that simultaneously indicates Musa's frivolity and prefigures her postmortem destiny as a sacred dancer.

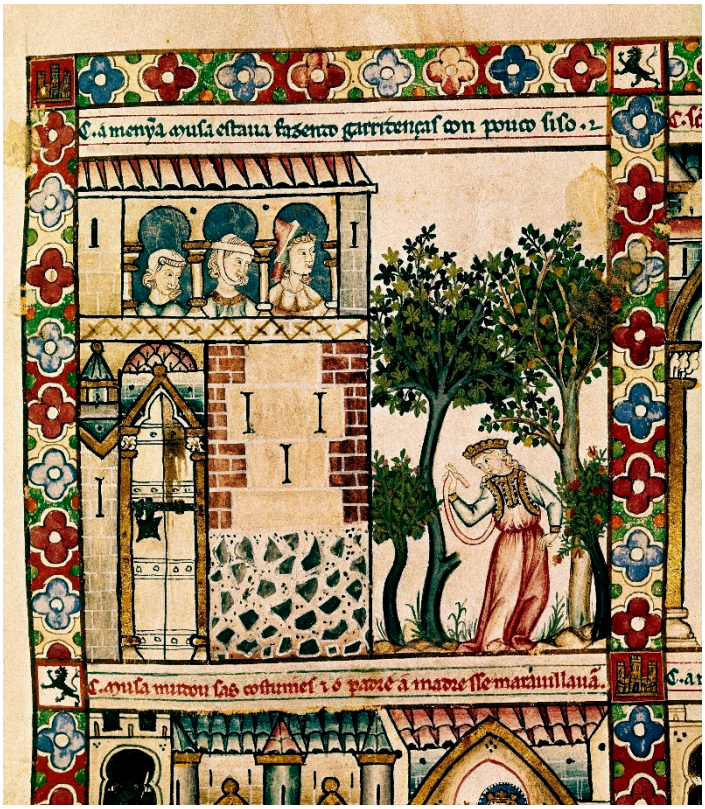

Figure 4. The dance of Musa, from Alfonso X's *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (cantiga 79), Spanish, thirteenth century, El Escorial MS. T.I.1, folio 117 recto, Alamy.com.

Musa's sacral tenor creates an interesting tension with the choreopolicing tendencies of the Middle Ages, which became more apparent in select fourteenth-century sources. In his *exempla* collection entitled *Scala Coeli* (*The Ladder of Heaven*), the French Dominican Jean Gobi the Younger (d. 1350) expounded quite liberally upon Musa's backstory and dancerly roles. Gobi specified that Musa was of knightly lineage (*generis militaris*).[42] This elevated her to the status of a *domina* rather than a *puella*, affording her more prestige and power. At the Virgin's behest, Musa agreed to trade in transitory dances on earth (*transitoria choree*) for eternal rounds in heaven (*in celo chorea ducantur*). In conclusion, Musa proclaimed to her father: "It is written in Jeremiah 31, that 'you shall again be adorned with your timbrels and shall go forth in the dance of those who make merry.'"[43] Here, the

reformed Musa glosses Jeremiah 31:4, informing her father that the faithful will dance in the eternal afterlife. The first part of the Vulgate verse reads, "And I will build you again, and you shall be built, O virgin of Israel."[44] In the biblical context, Jeremiah's prophecy concerns exile and destruction, followed by homecoming and reconstruction, celebrated with dancing.[45] Having Musa spout scripture and educate her father renders her character more authoritative than those from previous renditions. In this sense, Gobi's intellectual and prophetic Musa challenges the misogynist retellings of Giacomo della Marca and his ilk. Taking into consideration a choreopolicing perspective, however, it is perhaps more likely that clerical authors like Gobi manipulated Musa as a mouthpiece for their own prescriptive agenda. Dancing beyond the grave, exegetical authority superimposed itself onto Musa's heavenly body.

Directly following Gobi's Musa retelling in the *Scala Coeli* is a related narrative that lends further credence to the choreopolicing of medieval dance. I argue that this tale can be construed as an additional/alternative account of Musa. This version, which Gobi attributed to the thirteenth-century Dominican friar Johannes of Magdeburg, revolves around a young virgin who loves to dance, her confessor, and the Virgin Mary. The girl/Musa confides in her confessor about an encounter she had with Mary. During this conversation, the girl realizes that if she avoids vain dances on earth, she will be spared time in Purgatory (*et tunc sine purgatorio evolabo*). She rises to the challenge, and, once in paradise, revels in infinite roundelays alongside Christ and the Virgin Mary (Gobi Fifteenth century, fol. 38r; 1991, p. 588).[46] The exchange between the girl/Musa and her confessor may call to mind the *cura monialium* (or monastic care of nuns and beguines/lay sisters). According to Griffiths and Jeffrey Hamburger, this partnership may reflect a more cooperative, rather than unequal, relationship between religious women and their male confessors (Griffiths 2004; Hamburger 1998, chap. 4). Gobi's second iteration highlights the salutary effects of the male confessor-female confessee relationship, especially in terms of penitential progress and purgatorial intercession. The ideological underpinnings of choreopolicing, however, may reduce the dancer's agency and willpower. Deviating from Gregory and earlier adaptations, the confessor in Gobi's tale can be credited for helping to discipline the girl's/Musa's unruly body. Logically, then, an ecclesiastical mentalité influenced the development of sacred dance in medieval Europe.

Despite Gobi's affiliation with the Dominican Order (renowned for its commitment to maintaining orthodoxy), his inclusion of the cosmic dance in the *Scala Coeli* places him within a larger genealogy of (pre)Christian thought. Indeed, the conceptual frameworks of Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, and medieval cosmology construed dancing as a terrestrial expression of the movements of spheres, stars, and constellations. Plato's *Timaeus* described the creation of the universe as organizing chaos and void into order and form. Put differently, Plato conceived the entire cosmos as a dance that symbolizes wholeness and perfection (Plato 2009, pp. 1224–91; Meyer-Baer 1970, pp. 12–16; Knäble 2014, pp. 70–74). Around the sixth century ACE, Pseudo-Dionysius, a Neo-Platonic thinker, re-theorized Plato's paradigm through a Christian lens. As James Miller writes, "[For Pseudo-Dionysius], the circular motion of God signified His eternal sameness, the completeness of His identity, and His power to encompass all things within His providential order" (Miller 1986, p. 509). In subsequent works, Pseudo-Dionysius re-ordered the galactic gyrations as angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchies.[47] Rohmann and Philip Knäble show how later medieval formulations of sacred dance—both in theory and practice—were likewise indebted to Platonic cosmology (Rohmann 2009; Knäble 2014). Perhaps most memorably, Dante Alighieri (d. 1321) poeticized the Christian cosmic dance in the *Paradiso* section of his *Commedia*.[48] Gobi's revisionings of Musa resonate with these concepts and motifs. In doing so, he imbued the dance of Musa with cosmological complexity. Transcending personal pleasure, dance now mirrors the ordering principles of creation.

From an elite (i.e., intellectual and ecclesiastical) standpoint, expositions on the nature of sin, penitential regimes, and cosmological theories contributed to the spiritualization of dance in the Middle Ages. Once anchored in the heavenly realm, Musa's reformed

conscience enabled her to partake in celestial motions without blame. As the next section shows, Musa's story inspired lay Christians to perfect their piety. Following in the footsteps of this heavenly dancer, the faithful could face the hour of their death with anticipation and resolve.

3. Musa as Medieval Terpsichore

Reborn as an exemplary penitent and heavenly dancer worthy of adoration and emulation, Musa embodied the true meaning of her name. Indeed, the name Musa is integral to artistic inspiration. The Latin etymology of *Musa* derives from the Muses of ancient Greece (*Mousai*), the nine mythological beings or demi-goddesses associated with the arts. Their powers of inspiration enabled mortals to conjure divine presence and radical imagination through poetry, music, drama, and dance. The Muses were the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne. They were the handmaidens of Apollo yet harmonized with Dionysius. As exceptional dancers, Hesiod extolled their beauty, whereas Pindar believed that their movements engendered the Three Graces (Miller 1986, p. 220). Pythagoras considered the Muses to be the dance's celestial archetype (Ibid., p. 325). In line with her ancient Greek predecessors, the post-medieval Musa claimed her demi-goddess status. In Keller's aforementioned short story, Musa dines with all nine Muses, sitting next to Terpsichore. Ziolkowski summarizes this encounter: "In the celestial crescendo to the tale, Keller puns on the name of his leading lady by bringing these classical divinities on stage in person. In fact, he goes so far as to seat the new arrival to paradise at a table with the ninesome, together with Cecilia, patron saint of music" (Ziolkowski 2022, p. 149).[49]

Within late medieval Christianity, Musa reemerged as a kind of Terpsichore of the tomb. Christians looked up to her not so much for artistic inspiration (like Euro-American choreographers who derive influence from exceptional dancers today), but more for her message of hope concerning salvation. This section shows how Musa—once recast as a heavenly dancer—became an iconic source of inspiration for lay Christians. Since dance constituted a shared activity between this *beata* and the laity, laypeople could engage with Musa's narrative on a more visceral, empathetic level than those of bygone martyrs. Furthermore, Musa's close rapport with Mary exemplifies the Virgin's pervasive operations in Christians' daily lives. Finally, by performing the phenomenon of the crossover (e.g., from life to death, from death to everlasting life, from earthly dancer to heavenly dancer), Musa's story helped lay Christians reconcile the otherness of death with the familiarity of bodily being.

Musa's sheer relatability enabled her to function as a "saint" for the people. True, most Musa stories were composed in Latin, the language of the Church. (Alfonso's *Cantigas* is a notable exception, as well as some early modern Italian adaptations). Nevertheless, the medieval dancing Musa was clearly designed to instruct laity. Musa had a Gregorian pedigree, yet, during the Late Middle Ages, she contributed to the popularization of the saints, or what historian André Vauchez calls the "laicization of sainthood" (Vauchez 1993, pp. 141–57). Unlike typical late antique and early medieval martyrs and saints, Musa garnered an aura of sanctity without extreme suffering (and, as noted earlier, without an official canonization). And unlike sainted queens, Musa did not wield political power. Nor did royals, clergymen, or other high-status humans surround her at her deathbed. (The dying Empress Adelheid, d. 999, for instance, knew that, after this final display of pomp, "she would join with Moses's sister in the timbrel and the dance, with David on the strings and pipes" (Odilo of Cluny and Anon 2004, pp. 141–42).[50]

One of the tactics by which the Musa story reached lay Christians lies in the notion of exemplarity, or learning by example. This didactic strategy reached its apex in pastoral literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, yet it too was indebted to Gregory. *Exemplum* is an important term and concept throughout *The Dialogues*, occurring over six hundred times. For Gregory, the *exemplum* functioned as a quotidian mode of biblical exegesis, an interpretive technique that he apparently learned from studying Origen (Judic 2010, pp. 133–38; Eudes de Cheriton 1896, p. 175). In broad strokes, *exemplum*

refers to a moral example of what to do—or what not to do.[51] As an *exemplum*, clerics interpolated Musa into their own performance of sermons for the benefit of lay listeners. Alongside exemplarity, the medieval reprisal of Musa was a rhetorical strategy of "re-folklorization". In other words, ecclesiastical intelligentsia readapted stories of folkloric origin to inculcate Christian teachings into popular culture more engagingly and effectively (Polo de Beaulieu 1999, pp. 104–5). Following Gregory, medieval scholastics expanded the category of *exempla* to embody a more encompassing intellectual regime. For instance, Petrus Alphonsi (d.c. 1116), a Jewish physician convert from Al-Andalus, was a prominent exponent of this trend. His *Disciplina Clericalis*, a Christianized *compilatio* of old wisdom, recuperated the Hebrew *musar* (discipline or moral conduct).[52] This text was one of several that influenced thirteenth-century Dominicans and Franciscans in their preaching. Since Musa indulged in the popular pastime of dancing, she immediately resonated with lay Christians. Therefore, she exemplified a modality of discipline and personal sacrifice to which those outside the cloister could aspire.

The centrality of the Virgin Mary in Musa retellings amplifies Musa's connection to lay piety. In conjunction with the rise of Mary's cult in the Latin Church during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, miracle stories of the Virgin became increasingly popular. Vernacular works, including *Le Gracial* (*The Book of Grace*) by William Adgar (d.c. 1200), *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame* (*The Miracles of Our Lady*) by Gautier de Coinci (d. 1236) and the aforementioned *Cantigas de Santa Maria* by Alfonso X, helped galvanize a lay readership.[53] Ziolkowski notes that at least sixteen Marian miracle collections contain variations of the Musa narrative (Ziolkowski 2022, p. 155; Poncelet 1902). In popular tales as well as Musa renditions, Mary activates the operations of grace. The Virgin's penetration into the daily affairs of medieval Christians drew no boundaries; she helped monks and mothers, kings and the disabled. With her pervasive presence in personal prayer books and miracle stories, Mary functioned as the *mediatrix* of all humanity. For reformed Christians, Mary's mercy tempered God's justice. As the *sancta sanctorum* (the saint of saints), she assisted other holy people in feats of healing (Vauchez 1993, p. 157).[54] In legal terms, Mary assumed the role of advocate—hence, the title of Odo of Cheriton's aforementioned Musa anecdote, *De quadam puella advocate a beata virgine*. Mary pleaded on behalf of her devotees and confounded the satanic adversary (Rubin 2010, p. 224; Newman 2013, pp. 272–87). In late medieval Musa adaptations, the Virgin Mary herself is a heavenly dancer who sacralizes further the art of dance. In paradise, other dancers function as celestial courtiers who honor the Queen of Heaven. Within the Virgin's celestial realm, dancing bodies are innocent and immaculate.

The Musa story would have been deeply resonant for medieval Christians, given the Virgin Mary's connection to dance in visual and literary artifacts—including personal art objects intended for lay devotion and large-scale works of art that were often in the public purview. Marian iconography adorned psalters and books of hours that were typically customized for lay patrons. The imagery often juxtaposed courtly activities (jousting, hunting, dancing) with saintly feats (martyrdom, passion, intercession). Consider the Queen Mary Psalter, likely commissioned for Isabella of France (d. 1358), which contains abundant dance iconography and spotlights sacred mothers: the Virgin Mary, biblical heroines, and mothers of saints (Stanton 1997; 2001, pp. 103–112, 126, 139–52, 198, 213).[55] In one of the manuscript's many dance illustrations, the Virgin Mary leads a linear dance or processional of sainted women along the *bas-de-page* (Figure 5) (Anon Circa 1310–1320, fol. 229r).[56] Mary appears crowned, and links hands and what appear to be handkerchiefs with three other haloed women. On the viewer's right, an angelic musician plays a lute-like instrument. According to art historian Licia Buttà, the *bas-de-page* imagery from the Queen Mary Psalter likely drew from availably circulating *exempla*. The dance iconography exerts a didactic and moralizing function for members of the laity and nobility, including women and girls (Buttà 2014, pp. 109–10).[57] From this iconographic perspective, Musa belongs to a broader choreographic imaginary in which visualizing dance (and especially Marian dance) proleptically apprehends heavenly delights.



Figure 5. The Virgin Mary dances with sainted women and angelic musician (detail), from the Queen Mary Psalter, England, c. 1310–20, British Library Royal MS. 2 B VII, folio 229 recto, © The British Library Board.

In her analysis of medieval dance iconography, theologian Laura Hellsten interrogates the presumed boundary between reality and representation. She argues that dance imagery, including depictions of dancing angels (i.e., non-human performers), provides evidence for actual liturgical dance performance. In other words, scholars may re-construe such images as (approximate) documentations of lived experience. As Hellsten explains:

> The artwork [of dancing Christ and dancing angels] depicts ideas of what was plausible. In my theoretical framework, I have called this artefact as an image. From images such as these, it is not possible to claim certainty of an actual practice with full clarity. Yet, if we do recognize these portrayals as similar to dancing, we may conclude that rejoicing in dance-like moves seems to have been understood as an honorary act, worthy of being portrayed on sacred objects and a gesture associated with God himself as well as with angels (Hellsten 2021, p 160).

Here, Hellsten alludes to the rich tradition of liturgical dance in the Middle Ages. I concur that, on some level, iconography from the Queen Mary Psalter and textual representations of Musa dancing with Mary and her angelic retinue evoke sacred dance praxis. In the Psalter, the accompanying text from Psalm 107 may corroborate Hellsten's claim: "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready: I will sing, and will give praise, with my glory./Arise, my glory; arise, psaltery and harp…". The verses suggest that music, and by extension dance, are pious expressions of praise. Moreover, the fact that medieval Christians believed that King David authored the Psalms amplifies the sacred aura of dance. Indeed, King David was perhaps the holiest dancer from the Bible (II Samuel 6:14–15, or II Regum in the Vulgate). Elsewhere I have shown how, during the Middle Ages, the dance of David became associated with piety, praise, humility, and beyond (Dickason 2021, pp. 28–40). Evidently, medieval nuns appealed to David's example to justify their dance performances (Rigaud 1964, p. 536; Schmitt 1990, p. 91). From a more oblique angle, David shares a connection to Musa. In his *Moralia in Iob* (*Morals on the Book of Job*, c. 595), Gregory the Great wrote: "I am more surprised at David dancing, than fighting [*ego David plus saltantem stupeo quam pugnantem*]. For by fighting, he subdued his enemies; but by dancing before the Lord [*saltando autem coram Domino*], he overcame himself" (Gregory the Great 1985, p. 1391; 1884, p. 876).[58] Despite the obvious contrasts between David and Musa—in terms of rank, gender, and age—they both submit to divine authority. In doing so, they both functioned as paradigms of sacred dance in the West.

Musa shared a special rapport with another sacred dancer: the Virgin Mary. Martin Leutzsch demonstrates that various texts from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages (including apocryphal gospels, monastic letters, hymns, vernacular songs, exempla, hagiography, visionary literature, and liturgical dramas) envisioned Mary's dancerly identity

(Leutzsch 2022, pp. 113–19). The thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea* (*Golden Legend*) by Jacobus de Voragine, for instance, depicted the coronation of the Virgin as an epic dance party, which may in turn visualize the presumed similarity between *corona* (crown) and *chorea* (dance) in Latin (Jacobus de Voragine 1998, p. 791; 2012, p. 471).[59] Moreover, vernacular and lyric poetry repurposed secular and courtly dances in ways that endorsed Mariology.[60] These texts and musical compositions infused Marian piety with secular elements. For example, in the anonymous thirteenth-century *La Court de Paradis* (*The Court of Paradise*), Mary Magdalene invites the Virgin Mary to dance with her: "The Magdalene calls with her,/Then took her by the beautiful hand,/And while singing they go about with great pleasure:/[Lyric insertion:] Let all those who have fallen in love [*sunt enamoraz*]/Come and dance [*Viegnent dancier*], but not the others" (Anon 1953, p. 98, trans. mine).[61] The penitent prostitute and Virgin Queen partner one another in paradise, much to the delight of their fellow saints, martyrs, patriarchs, and lay consorts.

In juxtaposing the dance of Musa with the *Court of Paradise*, it is significant that the latter text combines Old French poetry, Old French and Occitan lyric, and Latin hymnody (in fact, one of the extant manuscripts contains musical notation for the *Te Deum* hymn) (Anon Thirteenth Century b, fol. 333r). Replacing *court* with *querole* (*carole*, or secular round dance), the *explicit* from another manuscript version blends heavenly assembly with secular diversion: "here ends the Feast of All Saints and the *carole* of Paradise" (*explicit le feste de tous sains/et la querole de paradis*) (Anon Fourteenth Century b, fol. 106v).[62] Intermingling sacred and profane elements, the poem exemplifies what medievalist Barbara Newman calls the "crossover" of medieval culture. As Newman explains:

> [Crossover] is about the terms of engagement between sacred and secular before the early modern shift. It interprets the secular as always already in dialogue with the sacred, and it probes that dialogue's many modes. . . . Crossover is not a genre in itself, but a mode of interaction, an openness to the meeting or even merger of sacred and secular in a wide variety of forms (Newman 2013, p. ix).

Overlapping carnal and cosmic evocations, medieval dance enriches the phenomenon of the crossover. The dance of Musa is, likewise, an art of the crossover. Her movements choreographed a peregrination toward penitential discipline, teaching the laity that dance would not have to be abandoned forever. In the meantime, the Virgin Mary's superlative sanctity valorized lay dancing bodies in the afterlife.

The act of crossing over also carries an ontological charge. To this point, the proliferation of Musa in penitential and pastoral sources occurred when theories on the resurrected body became increasingly elaborate. According to eschatological theories of the Middle Ages, the human body was so integral to identity that its physical reality continued after death, reconstituting itself beyond the end of time. Historian Caroline Walker Bynum has shown that a tight correlation between the body and selfhood undergirded medieval theological debates on bodily resurrection (Bynum 1995a, 1995b). Against this backdrop of material continuity, Musa's piety allowed her to bypass physical corruption and decay. Harnessing the principles of bodily resurrection, she reclaimed her (dancing) body in the afterlife. In this sense, Musa's crossover shares an affinity with King Solomon's memorable monologue from the *Paradiso* section of Dante's *Commedia* (canto XIV). Dante the pilgrim expresses curiosity about the blessed souls' luminosity and sensorial capacity, to which Solomon responds:

> When we are once again clothed with our
> glorious and holy flesh [*la carne glorïosa e santa*], our person will be more
> pleasing by the whole,
> therefore, what the highest Good gives us of
> gratuitous light will be increased, light that
> enables us to see him. . .
> so this brightness that encircles us [*così questo folgór che già ne cerchia*] will be

> surpassed in appearance by the flesh that today
>
> is covered up by earth,
>
> nor can so much light weary us, for the organs
>
> of our body will be strong enough for whatever can delight us (Alighieri 2010, pp. 286–87).

Far from being disembodied and ethereal, the blessed enjoy a richer sensory engagement and more refined bodies than their earthly counterparts. Musa's *transitus*, too, did not abolish the fluxity of flesh. Corporeal continuity re-energized the eternal *chorea*.

Medieval dance iconography may help contextualize further the trope of the crossover. Analyzing medieval depictions of Christ and the prophets in sculpture and manuscript illustration, art historian Bissera Pentcheva observes choreographed crossings of their legs and feet. She argues that this chiastic sign symbolizes the inter-penetration of the terrestrial and the celestial, accomplished by the Incarnation (Pentcheva 2023).[63] In a comparable vein, another folio from the aforementioned Queen Mary Psalter positions the biblical dance of Miriam (Exodus 15:20) above the burial of St. Catherine of Alexandria (Figure 6) (Anon Circa 1310–1320, fol. 284r).[64] In the historiated initial (C for *Cantemus*, or "Let us sing [to the Lord]"), Miriam stands with her timbrel (tambourine) beside a horned Moses while the Egyptian enslavers perish in the Red Sea. God observes the ensuing drama from his lofty perch. In the lower margin, two angels inter St. Catherine's body at Mt. Sinai in the presence of wild beasts. God blesses Catherine from above and holds an orb with his other (left) hand. The burial scene creates a confluence of dance and martyrdom, imbuing the crossover motif with additional exegetical layers. As a component of her martyrdom, St. Catherine was tortured by the wheel. Though the Queen Mary Psalter does not show the wheel, the burial imagery may remind viewers of the implements of her torture. Wheeling conjoins dance, death, and persistent faith in suggestive ways, and the orb object may presage the cosmic dance.



Figure 6. Moses, Miriam, and the burial of St. Catherine of Alexandria, from the Queen Mary Psalter, England, c. 1310–20, British Library Royal MS. 2 B VII, folio 284 recto, © The British Library Board.

The inclusion of Miriam instills further crossover motifs in the Psalter's iconography. The dance of Miriam is the first dance in the Bible and emblematizes an acceptable dance of praise, thanksgiving, and prophecy. The twelfth-century compendium known as the *Glossa Ordinaria* (Ordinary Gloss) contains an interpretation of this dance by Cassiodorus (d.c. 585). He identified the dance, coupled with Miriam's tambourine playing, as an act of primal penitence (Froehlich et al. 1992, p. 162).[65] In the thirteenth-century *Bible moralisée* (Moralized Bible), the dance of Miriam foreshadows the coronation of the Virgin Mary, thus affirming the dance's proper place in the afterlife (Guest 1995, pp. 66–67).[66] Sacred music also connects the thresholding valence of *transitus* to Mariology. A late medieval Spanish hymn, *In Festo rosarii* (On the Feast of the Rosary), which was performed during lauds on the feast of the Ascension of Mary (August 15), portrays her beauty, triumph, and justice as a dynamic sequence, "stepping well into divine dances [*transis coelicolas rite choreas*]" (Anon 1894, p. 2; trans. Backman [1952] 2009, p. 45).[67] In her act of ascension, Mary executed the choreography of crossover. And with Mary's intercession, Musa too crossed over.

Incidentally, the only other medieval image of Musa I have hitherto uncovered shows her in the act of crossing over. This image appears in a fifteenth-century Flemish manuscript of Miélot's *Miracles of Our Lady*, which contains exquisite grisaille miniatures from the atelier of Jean Tavernier. One folio depicts Musa on her deathbed (Figure 7) (Miélot 1456, fol. 18v).[68] She turns her head to the left, beholding the Virgin Mary, who blesses the dying girl with her right hand. Mary's saintly attendants gather behind her, ready to accompany Musa on her pilgrimage to eternal life. Here, the crossover is, in essence, an invitation to the sacred dance. Though neither a martyr nor mystic, Musa proved that Everywoman/Everyman has the capacity for spiritual rebirth. By recalibrating her dancing body at the *hora mortis* (hour of death), Musa emblematized how bodily discipline could achieve stunning feats of transformation.

From a more theoretical (though admittedly less theological) perspective, the formalist construction and virtual supplementation of medieval dance were deeply intertwined with modalities of crossing over. Seeta Chaganti's masterful book on medieval dance and poetic form, *Strange Footing*, discusses how medieval dance oscillated between material and immaterial, performative and virtual (Chaganti 2018). Thus, she describes medieval dance as haunting, strange, and disorienting (Ibid., p. 3). Somewhat analogous to Chaganti's assessment, scholars Jean-Claude Schmitt, Nancy Caciola, Elina Gertsman, Adrien Belgrano, and others attest that medieval pastoral and folkloric texts reveal that dancing in cemeteries and graveyards was a popular—albeit highly contested—variety of lay amusement (Schmitt [1994] 1998, pp. 84, 117–19, 139–40, 182, 214–17; Caciola 2017, pp. 3–4, 141–42, 249, 252; Caciola 1996, pp. 38–42; Gertsman 2010, p. 54; Belgrano 2016; Balogh 1928, p. 8; Rohmann 2012, pp. 184–86; Hellsten 2022, pp. 6, 8–9, 11, 22; Stevens 1986, p. 162; Lauwers 2005; Sachs 1937, pp. 252–53; Horowitz 1989, p. 279; Schemmann 2000, p. 133).[69] An uncanny and haunting sensibility, therefore, loomed over medieval dance practice. Moreover, co-existing as live performance and lyric poetry, medieval dance could be apprehended physically (through the act of live dancing) and vicariously (through the act of embodied reading). Chaganti explains:

> In this ductile experience of poetic form, the reader is aware of forces, irregular and uncanny, supplemental to the evident regularity of the lyric's stanzaic pattern. . . . Reenacting a formal experience conditioned in the *ductus* of dance, however, reveals in the virtual supplement a strangeness of form not conceivable in modern and postmodern contexts and terms (Chaganti 2018, p. 227).

For medieval readers/dance practitioners, specters of dancing bodies guided one's engagement with the written word.

Moralized tales and *exempla* in which Musa retellings appeared are entirely different literary genres than those that Chaganti examines. Nevertheless, Musa's dancerly identity was no inadvertent detail. Through lived experience and vicarious apprehension, Musa's story resonated with lay Christians, illuminating humankind's capacity for change and

moral evolution. Passing from vanity to theophany, *transitus* re-envisioned Musa's dance as a totalizing journey and an inspiring act of becoming.



Figure 7. Musa on her deathbed, while the Virgin Mary and her saintly retinue beckon the girl to heaven. From Jean Miélot's *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame*, atelier of Jean Tavernier, Flemish, 1456, Oxford's Bodleian Library, Ms. Douce 374, folio 18 verso. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library and Creative Commons.

4. Conclusions

According to anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna, "human history testifies [that] when dance is suppressed it rises phoenix-like to live again in some other transformation" (Hanna 1993, p. 126). Despite the Latin Church's choreophobic attitudes toward dance, Musa's long lineage within Christian history showcases the perennial significance of dance for humanity and religiosity. Indeed, dance was such a deep human need that even hegemonic ecclesiastical structures could not extinguish it. As medieval Europe drifted further away from an ancient, polytheistic Rome, clergy realized that dance could be re-positioned to work in the service of Christendom. Clerics and preachers thus choreopoliced their lay underlings, discursively taming exuberant bodies into vessels of modesty, discipline, and conformity.

Hanna writes elsewhere that, "because dance is extraordinary, it is an attention-getting device, arresting, and seductive. Its departure from ordinary behavior emphasizes the distinctiveness of dance and makes it memorable. . . . Thus dance is useful as a medium of evocation and persuasion, it focuses attention by framing experience" (Hanna [1979] 1987, p. 102). The expressive power and arresting allure of the dancing body accentuated Musa's exemplary piety. She could therefore re-brand herself, so to speak, as a Christianized Terpsichore.

On a more fundamental level, Musa's dance showcased her humanity. According to religion scholar Kimerer LaMothe, dancing constitutes a life-enabling activity that is indispensable to the development of human cognition, culture, and empathy (LaMothe 2015). If one agrees with LaMothe's more speculative take on human evolution, dance may constitute the most archaic form of human communication and artistry. In the Middle Ages and beyond, the dance of Musa was both a sacred calling and a creative call to action.

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Notes

1 As Ziolkowski explains, Keller used the German poet and Lutheran preacher Ludwig Theoboul Kosegarten (d. 1818) as a source for his Musa story (specifically Kosegarten's *Legenden*), see Ziolkowski (2022, p. 153).

2 Several of these children's book illustrations can be viewed online (via open access) in Ziolkowski (2018a, pp. 214–15): https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0132, accessed 23 November 2024.

3 Frederic Tubach provides a list of primary texts and manuscript sources on Musa in (Tubach 1981, p. 114). See also Evelyn Faye Wilson (1946, pp. 6, 13, 17–18, 26, 32, 35, 38, 63). Alessandro Arcangeli, Marianne Ruel [Robins], Patricia Healy Wasyliw, and Lynneth Miller Renberg, summarize in brief (but do not analyze at length) the story of Musa, see Arcangeli (1992, pp. 40–41); Ruel [Robins] (2006, p. 106); Healy Wasyliw (2008, pp. 36–37, 50); Miller Renberg (2022, p. 32, n. 49). Martin Leutzsch also summarizes the narrative but does not mention Musa's name in Leutzsch (2022, pp. 116–17). John Esten Keller and Annette Grant Cash succinctly describe (but do not show) a medieval image of the dancing Musa in Keller and Cash (1998, esp. p. 18). Ziolkowski mostly discusses the postmedieval Musa in Ziolkowski (2018a, pp. 213–15; 2022, pp. 147–56).

4 The councils and statutes prohibiting and regulating dance are indeed numerous, see especially G.G. Coulton (1976, pp. 199-205, 211); Germaine Prudhommeau (1986, chap. 5); Anne Wéry (1992, pp. 119–20); Julia Zimmermann (2007, pp. 30, n. 26, 49–52, 209–10); Catherine Ingrassia (1990, chaps. 1–2); Paul Bourcier (1995, chap. 1); Michele Veissière (1982, pp. 45–52); Pierre Riché (1985, pp. 159–67); Yvonne Rokseth (1947); Bernadette Filotas (2005, pp. 154–55, 161–65, 175); Louis Gougaud (1914, pp. 10–20).

5 Although Shay's study focuses on (mostly contemporary) Iranian dance, his analysis is germane to the medieval Christian context.

6 Specifically, Straw refers to Gregory's reconciliation of flesh and spirit. She argues that Gregory's chief contribution to Christian theology was a "broader integration of the carnal side of life in a unified vision of reality" in which imperfect flesh was necessary for attaining spiritual perfection, see Straw (1988, p. 26).

7 Healy Wasyliw notes that, because Gregory followed the Musa story with an anecdote about a badly behaved boy who never reforms and thereafter ends up in hell, he combined the classical view of childhood as "weakness" with the Christian view of childhood as "innocence," (2008, p. 37).

8 For the accounts of the gradual making of Christendom and lingering of polytheistic religions, see Robert Bartlett (1993); Milis ([1991] 1998).

9 In particular, Francis Clark has called Gregory's authorship into question, though most scholars concur that Gregory was the author.

10 The Musa story maintained a constant circulation and revision from the twelfth through sixteenth centuries: Jacques de Vitry (Thirteenth century, fol. 147r; 2013, p. 255); Thomas Crane (1890, p. 115); William Adgar (1982); John Hovedan (1914, pp. 32–33); Johannes Herolt (1481, p. 454); Guillaume Peraldus (1648, fol. 35v); Anon (1957, pp. 33, 40); Alfonso X (2000, p. 104); Jean Miélot (1456, fols. 18r–19r); Jean Miélot (1885, pp. xvii, 16, fol. 18v); S. Iacobus de Marchia (1978, p. 305); James le Palmer (le Palmer Circa 1375, fol. 451v); Sebastian Brant (1502); Gabriele Barletta (1571, fol. 140r); Domenico Cavalca (1547, in-fol.); Anon (1926, pp. v–vi, 13, 7, 79, 258, 312); Anon (Thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, fol. 146v); Anon (Fifteenth Century a, fol. 20r); Arnold de Liège (attrib.) (Fourteenth Century, fol. 25r); Anon (Fourteenth Century c, fol. 12r); Anon (Fifteenth Century b, fol. 5r). Frederic Tubach (1981 provides a useful list of sources for the Musa story in *Index Exemplorum*, p. 114).

11 "Procul dubeo nisi a risu et cantilenis atque choreis cessaset", from Jacques de Vitry, *Sermones Vulgares* CCLXXV, cited in Crane (1890, p. 115).

12 Giacomo's previous two sermons, XV and XVII, focus on the sacrament of confession. Dance also appears in his *Sermo X*, which covers games (*de ludo*), though he provides circumstances under which dance could be either licit or illicit. *Sermo XXVII*, which

addresses the topic of *sortilegiis* (fortune tellers or perhaps here witches), compares them to Herodias, the mother of Salome, and specifies that they dance, see S. Iacobus de Marchia (1978, pp. 192, 273–302, 431).

13 "Et ais: dimicte choreas et cantus vanos et in tertio die venies et sic factum est. Ecce virgo quod prohibuit choreas, quia choree nihil aliud sunt quam processio diaboli, ubi cum facula accensa a luxuria diabolus consistit cum cantilenis inamorandi et tactis et visis indpudicis". In S. Iacobus de Marchia (1978, p. 305), translation mine.

14 James Miller discusses processional dances (oftentimes enacted around an altar) in ancient Greek and Roman religions, see (Miller 1986, esp. p. 314).

15 For a more detailed description of this image, see Smith (2012, pp. 228—30). This manuscript may have originated from the same workshop and (female) patron as the Queen Mary Psalter, which I discuss in the third section of this article. For more context on the Taymouth Hours' possible patronage, see Smith (2012, pp. 16–21).

16 Likewise, the biblical Salome became more mature and sexualized in later commentaries and representations, see Janice Capel Anderson (1992, pp. 121–22).

17 For more context on the *carole*, see Robert Mullally (2011).

18 Robert Mannyng expounded upon this tale, see Mannyng (1901).

19 For dance imagery in the *Psychomachia*, see Prudentius (Circa tenth century, fols. 16v and 19v); Prudentius (Tenth century, fol. 18r); Eric Stanley (1991, pp. 28, 31, n.31).

20 "Quid dicitis vos, sanctae feminae? Videtis quid docere, quid etiam dedocere filias debeatis? Saltat, sed adulterae filia. Quae vero pudica, quae casta est, filias suas religionem doceat, non saltationem". From Ambrose of Milan, *De Virginibus*, III.6.31, cited in Ambrose of Milan (1845, p. 901).

21 Interestingly, here Ambrose used a Cicero, classical authority, to arrive at his conclusion: "For as a certain teacher of this world has said: No one dances [*saltat*] when sober unless he is mad". Tronca notes that this passage "had an enormous influence on censors of dancing in the West", primarily because Ambrose cited it, see Tronca (2016, p. 57). For recent studies on the dance of Salome in the Middle Ages, see Barbara Baert (2016); Dickason (2021, pp. 40–48); Miller Renberg (2022, pp. 105–130).

22 "I pray you, let not Zion the faithful city become a harlot: let it not be that where the Trinity has been entertained, there demons shall dance and owls make their nests, and jackals build (*ibi daemones saltent et sirenae nidificent et hiricii*). Let us not loosen the belt that binds the breast", from Jerome, *Epistola XXII.6*, in Jerome (1910, p. 153); trans. in Jerome (1893, p. 104).

23 In the last section of this letter, Jerome describes heavenly rewards that include dance, namely the virgin choirs of Mary in paradise and Miriam's dancing and tambourine playing after the parting of the Red Sea, see Jerome (1910, pp. 209–10).

24 The Limbourg Brothers (Circa 1408–1409, fol. 186r). Like many late medieval books of hours, this manuscript, commissioned by Jean de France, the Duke of Berry (d. 1416), was intended for lay (rather than monastic) readership.

25 For medieval tales connecting lust and dancing women, see also *Malanquin*, ll. 10836–43, in Anon (1993, pp. 25–26); Adrian Tudor (2005, pp. 147–48, 412, 431–37, 577–79).

26 Elsewhere, Miller Renberg demonstrates how medieval theologies of dance and gender impacted British colonial contexts, see Miller Renberg (2023).

27 For another illustration of this scene picturing clothed dancers, see Anon (Circa 1450, fol. 15v).

28 My transcription is as follows: "Si vis luxum castigare, corpus doma fer temptatus. Ora, stude, meditare. Fuge locum personatus". In Jehan de Stavelot (Circa 1432–37, fol. 135r) The scroll framing the bottom of the image summarizes the relevant scene from Benedict's *vita*: "Vir de cella conspiciens, nudas septem puellas quos Florentius ad temptationem carnis ad duxerat, timens lapsum discipulorum, invidie locum dedit. Libro Dialogorum IV", in ibid. Although the accompanying captions do not specify that the nude girls are dancing, an earlier passage from the manuscript specifies that they did dance, see fol. 80v. For a thirteenth-century rendering of the life of St. Benedict, see Jacobus de Voragine (2012, p. 188).

29 The top right banderole is from Luke 12:35: "Let your loins be girt and lamps burning in your hands" (Sint lumbi vestri praecincti et lucernae ardentes in manibus vestris). The top left banderole is from Daniel 3:27: "Their garments were not altered, nor had the smell of the fire passed on them", (Sarabara eorum non fuissent inmutata et odor ignis non transisset per eos), both in Jehan de Stavelot (Circa 1432–37, fol. 80v).

30 Coincidentally, Benedict, like Musa, died of a fever.

31 Gregory the Great (1862), see *Vita Benedicti*, in *Libri Dialogorum*, II.8, in *PL*, 66:148; trans. in Gregory the Great (2002, 39:71–72).

32 Other cameo figures include Job, Peter, and John of Patmos, all of whom alluded to the sins of Balaam and the Moabites. As told in Numbers 25, the Israelites conquered several kingdoms, but, in the course of their wanderings, they fornicated with idolaters and sacrificed to their gods. This aroused God's anger and in retribution he punished the Israelites with plagues until Aaron reformed their behavior.

33 The Moabite dancers hold square-shaped tambourines, consistent with my observations of Western medieval representations of Jewish dancers, e.g., Anon (Circa 1250, fols. 13v, 29r, 39v); Anon (Circa 1197, fols. 49v, 52v, 64v); Anon (Fourteenth Century a, fol. 16v. St). Benedict's *vita*, by contrast, tells how Benedict destroyed polytheistic idols, see *Libri Dialogorum* II.8.11, in Gregory the Great (1862).

[34] However, by contrast, Drury shows that American modern dancers appropriated "pagan" motifs in ways that ultimately validated their choreographic creations.

[35] In the realm of nineteenth and twentieth-century philosophy and folklore, Jason Ānanda Josephson-Storm posits that many modernists (including German Romanticists), valorized "paganism" over Christianity, thereby blaming Christianity for the alleged disenchantment of the world. See Josephson-Storm (2017, esp. pp. 89–91).

[36] Shay, *Choreophobia*, 1. Elsewhere, Shay considers dancing (either public or private) in Iran a form of "resistance" against the regime, see Shay (1999, pp. 11, 14).

[37] However, this law (derived from Article 637 of the Islamic legal code and supposedly based on Islamic Sharia) is rather vague and open to interpretation. Men and women are forbidden to commit acts against "public morality", which may include dance, though the Article does not mention dance explicitly. Shay concedes that, generally speaking, Iranian shahs and courtiers were much more accepting of dance than caliphs and Ayatollahs, see Shay (1999, pp. 61–62, 66). Shay also notes that the Safavid Dynasty was an especially rich era for Islamic dance, see ibid., p. 74.

[38] For a study on early modern dance from the perspective of court politics, see Jennifer Nevile (2004).

[39] For more on Odo's approach and historical background, see Alain Boureau (1992, pp. 153–55); John Jacobs, in Odo of Cheriton (1985), intro. During the Middle Ages, Odo's fables (which included those of Aesop and his own) were translated into French, Welsh, and Spanish.

[40] This passage is from section CXXI of the *Sunday Sermons*. For Odo's more condemnatory discourse on dance, see Arcangeli (2000, p. 100).

[41] Rupert of Deutz seemed to have initiated the Mariological Song of Songs commentary tradition in the West, see Rupert of Deutz (2024, esp. pp. 138–60).

[42] To be clear, Arcangeli specifies that Musa was the daughter of an aristocratic acquaintance of Pope Gregory the Great, at least according to his *Dialogues*, see Arcangeli (1992, p. 40). However, Gregory's text preceded the development of medieval chivalry and the knightly class by several centuries.

[43] "Cui frater: 'Scriptum est in Jeremia 31,' quod 'Adhuc ornaberis tympanis tuis et egredieris in choro ludentium.'" From *Scala Coeli*, CCCXXXVIIIa, in Gobi (Fifteenth century, fol. 37v), cited in Gobi (1991, p. 587); Arcangeli (2000, pp. 213–14). In another example of re-writing Gregory's *Dialogues* (*Libri Dialogorum* I.9), Jean Gobi the Younger altered the original story about an intoxicated man listening to a monkey musician. Specifically, Gobi changed Gregory's drunkard into a foolish dancer who is killed by a rock (*Scala Coeli*, CCCXLV).

[44] Jeremiah 31:4, Vulgate: "Rursumque aedificabo te et aedificaberis virgo Israhel adhuc ornaberis tympanis tuis et egredieris in choro ludentium."

[45] In the context of the Hebrew Bible, Jeremiah was very outspoken about the Israelites' idolatrous behavior. They broke God's covenant by worshiping Baal, and Jeremiah therefore prophesied a period of exile and the destruction of Jerusalem.

[46] This anecdote occurs in section CCCXXXVIIIb of the *Scala Coeli*. in Gobi (Fifteenth century), 38r; cited in Polo de Beaulieu, 588.

[47] For more analyses of the dance content in Pseudo-Dionysius' writings, see Françoise Carter (1987); Creighton Gilbert (2000).

[48] For analyses of representations of movement in Dante's *Commedia* from a dance studies perspective, see James Miller (2000); Kathryn Dickason (2018); Karen Silen (2022); Ludmila Ancone (2017); Alessandro Campeggiani (2024).

[49] I specify "temporarily", since Keller's narrative ultimately bars the Grecian Muses from paradise. According to Ziolkowski, "The legend comes to a melancholy conclusion in which the Muses are condemned forevermore to the underworld. Unlike the nine sisters, Musa endures no ejection from paradise, but the reader is left to compare heavenly and earthly delights and to wonder whether the first do not come up short when set against the second", in Ziolkowski (2022, p. 149). I suspect that this melancholic ending has to do with Keller's secular stance.

[50] In the larger context of this passage, Adelheid, one of the most politically powerful women of the Middle Ages, died around the anniversary of her son, Emperor Otto. On her deathbed, she gave alms, took Mass, and had her body prepared for burial.

[51] Historian Jacques le Goff's crisp definition is useful: "[an *exemplum* is] a brief narrative given as true and destined to be inserted in a discourse (usually a sermon) in order to persuade listeners by means of a salutary lesson", in Claude Brémond et al. (1982, p. 67).

[52] Moreover, with his multicultural/multifaith background, Petrus Alphonsi incorporated the Greek *paideia* (education or learning) and the Arabic *adab* (etiquette or refinement) to inform the Latin concept of *disciplina*. His *Disciplina Clericalis* comprises a collection of moralized anecdotes, mostly of Alexandrian and Middle Eastern origins, including the Arabian Nights cycle as well as Persian and Sanskrit stories, see Pierre d'Alphonse (2001, pp. 27, 48–52, 200); Petrus Alfonsi (1977, pp. 17, 26–27, 200); Claude Brémond and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Brémond and Beaulieu 1992, pp. 85–87); John Tolan (1993, p. 3, chaps. 4 and 6). Peter's principal source was the Hebrew *Mischle* (see also Proverbs 1, 3, 15, 23), though some of his later works projected an anti-Judaic tone. For Peter's influence on late medieval preachers and *exempla* compilers, see Polo de Beaulieu (1999, pp. 279–80). For scholarship on the relationship between ancient Greek *paideia* and premodern dance, see Tronca (2019).

[53] Scholars often refer to the twelfth century as the "Marian century", especially in reference to France, England, and Italy, see Luigi Gambero (2005, p. 105.)

[54] Aimo of Fleury, for instance, recounts a posthumous miracle of St. Benedict (c. 974), in which the Virgin Mary and the saint cured a nun possessed by demons in the guise of green beetles who performed an airborne dance, in *Miracula sancti benedicti*, II.11, as discussed in Dominique Barthélemy (2010, p. 80).

[55] The Queen Mary Psalter was likely made for Isabella of France, the wife and queen of King Edward II of England. It is named after Queen Mary I of England, one of its sixteenth century owners. For studies on the Virgin Mary as a courtly lady, see Rachel Fulton (2002, pp. 217–18); Penny Shine Gold (1985, pp. 1–42); Joan Ferrante (1975, pp. 65–97; 1997, pp. 107–35); Miri Rubin (2010, pp. 222–24).

[56] The corresponding text is Psalm 107, Vulgate: "... Paratum cor meum Deus paratum cor meum cantabo et psallam in gloria mea/exsurge psalterium et cithara. ..." This corresponds to Psalm 108 in most modern Bibles. The Queen Mary Psalter image appears opposite a scene showing St. Dunstan of Canterbury (d. 988), an English abbot and Benedictine monk, adoring the Virgin and Christ Child (fol. 228v). This manuscript contains many folios of dance iconography: see fols. 56v, 166v, 173v, 178v, 179v, 181v, 182r, 189r, 196v, 197r, 201r, 203r, 204r, 264v, and 284r.

[57] To be clear, this manuscript also contains negative and ambivalent dance iconography. For example, Buttà examines dancers pictured in this manuscript who appear to be monks and nuns, as well as dancers who resemble animal-human hybrids, see Buttà (2014, pp. 115–20). In these instances, she explains, dance imagery communicates ambiguity, virtues or vices, and good or bad governance.

[58] Here Gregory responds to Job/Iob 37:24.

[59] Miller elaborates on the *corona-chorea* trope in antiquity, as it applied to the cosmic dance and dances of choral maidens, see Miller (1986, pp. 89, 379–80).

[60] For more on the confluence of courtly and sacred motifs, see Vauchez (1993, p. 461).

[61] The latter two lines cited here come from an Old French refrain with select Occitan words, see Gaston Reynaud (1974, p. 151); Alfred Jeanroy (1925, p. 320); Douglas Buffum (1912, p. 7); William Paden (1993, pp. 51–52). For the accompanying musical notation, see Anon (Thirteenth century b, fol. 334r).

[62] The *explicit* is followed by a commentary on the Psalms, see Anon (Fourteenth Century b, fol. 107r), or the *explicit*'s facing page, thus reinforcing the conflation of secular and sacred genres.

[63] For approaches to chiastic imagery in Byzantine dance, see Nicoletta Isar (2003, p. 200).

[64] This illustration corresponds to the canticle of Moses and Miriam from Exodus 15.

[65] For a more extensive analysis of this passage, see Dickason (2021, pp. 15–16).

[66] For the accompanying illustration, see Anon (Thirteenth Century a, fol. 21v). For a more extensive analysis of this passage, see Dickason (2021, pp. 18–19).

[67] *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, in Anon (1894, 16:2); translation mine after Eugène Louis Backman ([1952] 2009).

[68] The accompanying text appears in Miélot (1456, fols. 18r–19r). See also Miélot (1885, pp. xvii, 16, fol. 18v); Arcangeli (1992, p. 41). For other dance images from this manuscript (unrelated to Musa), see Miélot (1456, fols. 24v, 52r). Interestingly, the explicit is followed by a *balade* (dance-song), see Miélot (1456, fols. 119v–120r).

[69] For connections between the cemetery dancers and the *danse macabre*, see Schmitt ([1994] 1998, pp. 139–40, 182, 214–17); Gertsman (2010). For a study on cemetery dances in early modernity, see Emily Winerock (2015).

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