RESTRICTED MOVEMENT

DANCING FROM LATE ANTIQUITY THROUGH THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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ABSTRACT – *Analysis of various sources from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, with a focus on texts by Church Fathers and conciliar norms intended to regulate the dancing practices, enables examination of the formation of Christian prejudice against dancing. A connection can be established between the* choreia *(choral dance) of the Ideal City described by Plato and the ideal of harmony that the early medieval Church attempted to impose as a form of social control. Such reflections, on dancing as well as on harmony – or the lack thereof – thus facilitate an in-depth reflection on the choreutic aspects of demonic possession.*

INTRODUCTION

During a charity event held in Rome in April 2014, two young American priests made a small spectacle: one did a tap dance and the other an Irish jig. As their performance took place in front of a crucifix and a portrait of Pope Francis, much of its excitement was received as brusque impropriety. Yet, facing criticism, they responded, "we'll just say to those that criticize us that they

should look at the Bible, where the Lord tells us to live with joy".[1] Such an argument, in which both parties claim to act in the interest of reinforcing the authoritative norm, is hardly a friction between 'modern' enthusiasm and 'conservative' preoccupations; it is in fact age-old, and, instead of a simple disagreement about dancing, always the result of diversified philosophical, religious, and social priorities.

The role of dance in Christian religious observation and celebration has a somewhat complicated and controversial history. It has long been held, and little challenged, that the early medieval decline of dancing in religious ceremonies resulted from the Church's outright condemnation of dancing as a diabolical act. This reductive interpretation offers no adequate accommodation for Christian promotions of dancing; more problematic still, it necessitates blindness towards comparable rationales of ancient philosophers and Church Fathers, one of the most dynamic and influential aspects of the dispute over the manifestation of spiritual structure. This article re-approaches Greek, Latin, and Jewish sources from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, including both denunciations and endorsements of dancing, and uncovers in them a common thread. While images of diabolical dancers do arise, the central concern of those who wrote about dancing at a holy time or place is the body's alignment with spiritual harmony. This is demonstrated by reanalysing what various sources tell us of dancing in religious contexts, and the spiritual, philosophical, and cultural reasons for treating dancing as an act of transgression.

ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY AND THE PLATONIC *CHOREIA*

At the beginning of the Christian era, the most positive approaches to dance were those derived from Judaism and polytheistic cults. Indeed, dance had always been an essential devotional tool of Jewish religious practice. In the first few centuries CE, Christians shared the idea that dancing was an act of worship and an expression of joy; such views are demonstrated in numerous literary remarks that martyrs as

1 "Ci limiteremo a dire a coloro che ci criticano di consultare la Bibbia, dove il Signore ci dice di vivere con gioia" (trans. Donatella Tronca). "Tip-tap e danza iralndese [sic], i preti ballerini si sfidano davanti a vescovi e cardinali," *Caffeina Magazine*. http://www.caffeinamagazine.it/2014-10-20-12-41-28/il-video/4035-tip-tap-e-danza-iralndese-i-preti-ballerini-si-sfidano-davanti-a-vescovi-e-cardinali (Accessed 29 September 2015).

2 "Τί οὖν μακαριώτερου τοῦ τὴν ἀγγέλων χορείαν ἐν γῇ μιμεῖσθαι;" (What state can be more blessed than to imitate on earth the choruses of angels?). Basil the Great, *Epistola II*, in *Basilius Gregorio*, ed. J. P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca 32 (Paris, 1857), 225-26 (trans. Tronca).

3 Steven H. Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 8.

4 Ibid., 20.

5 Ibid., 21-23.

6 Plato, *Laws* 7.816a, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. Robert Gregg Bury, vols. 10 and 11, Loeb Classical Library 187 and 192 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967-1968).

7 Plato, *Laws* 2.654ab; Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play*, 24-29.

8 Leslie Kurke, "Imagining Chorality: Wonder, Plato's Puppets, and Moving Statues," in *Performance and Culture in Plato's Laws*, ed. Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 132.

9 Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play*, 32.

well as angels danced in heaven. For example, in the fourth century CE, Bishop Basil of Caesarea endorsed dancing by asking who would be more blessed on earth than those who could imitate the χορεία (*choreia*, choral dance) of the angels.[2]

The ancient Greeks also considered dance a supreme art form and, for this reason, associated it with the spiritual realm. It is moreover important to underline the social role dancing played for them as a collective ritual act. In *Laws*, especially Books 2 and 7, Plato systematically delineates what Steven H. Lonsdale calls an "ancient anthropology of dance".[3] Ritual dance was an instrument of *paideia* (education) and, in Platonic thought, moral and civic virtues could be acquired by learning to dance in the right way. As Lonsdale puts it, "Plato's legislation for musical activity in the Laws indicates the power of choral song and dance as an organ of social control for the transmission and maintenance of sentiments among citizens".[4] After all, the term νόμος (*nomos*, law) also means melody and musical mode: just as *nomos*, in the sense of 'law', is the basis of social order, it is by following the musical *nomos* that the collective *choreia* can guide the social body harmoniously.[5]

The term *choreia* indicates combined acts of singing and dancing, and, according to Plato, the link between the two derives from the body's rhythm and movement. In choral performances, voice and body must move in harmony or, to quote Plato, "when the representation of things spoken by means of gestures arose, it produced the whole art of dancing".[6] Only those who are trained to follow this harmony can live in the Platonic City. Those who cannot dance are described as *achoreutoi* and are rejected by the Ideal State, for they will not be able to socialize with the others or move in harmony with the rest of the civic *choreia*.[7] Leslie Kurke summarizes *choreia* as "the perfect coordination or orchestration of movement and song, so that many voices sing as one voice and many bodies move as a single organism".[8] *Choreia* therefore plays a civic role in Plato's work, to the point where the failure to move one's body in harmony with the others is seen as immoral and depraved.[9] It is thus probable that the angelic *choreia* described by Basil of Caesarea used the harmonious *choreia* from the Platonic Ideal State as a model.

THERAPEUTHAE AND KORYBANTES

The passage in the Gospel of Luke in which Christ criticizes the Pharisees' behaviour towards John the Baptist, saying "we played the flute for you, and you did not dance",[10] seems to indicate that Christ also understood dancing as a manifestation of joy. The apocryphal Acts of John, dated between the mid-second and end of the third century CE, mentions that Christ himself danced and sang a hymn at the Last Supper while the Apostles danced around him in a circle.[11]

Additionally, in *The Contemplative Life* from the first century CE, Philo of Alexandria describes the rites of singing and dancing at Pentecost celebrations performed by the Therapeutae, ascetics living in poverty and chastity. During the gathering, which was held every fifty days and included a vigil, two choirs – one male and the other female – moved around by dancing. Moreover, they were inebriated like the Bacchae, but their state of drunkenness was holy.[12] The importance that Philo places on the concept of χαρά (*chara*, joy) is noteworthy. He used the term to indicate the pleasure that fills the soul by making it smile and rejoice to the point where it is prompted to dance, thus appearing delirious and possessed (βεβάκχευται) to those not participating in the worship.[13] Remo Cacitti has identified a pertinent connection, in terms of therapeutic mediation, between the Christological hymn and dance in the Acts of John and the liturgical dancing of the Jewish ascetic community described by Philo.[14]

The ancient Greek verb βακχεύω, meaning 'to be possessed by a Bacchic frenzy' and always associated with the Dionysian world, was used by Philo to denote a state of divine possession. The term later took on a different, negative connotation in early medieval Latin sources, where the pejorative form obtained from the calque *bacchari* and its associated gestures was instead used to indicate a state of demonic possession.[15]

10 Lk 7:32, in *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version (New York: Harper Collins, 1989).

11 Acts of John 94, in *Acta Iohannis. Praefatio – Textus*, eds. Éric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), 199. On the fortunes of the Acts of John and the complex question of dating it, see Éric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, *L'histoire des actes apocryphes des apôtres du IIIe au IXe siècle: le cas des Actes de Jean* (Geneva: Faculté de Théologie de Lausanne, 1982); Arthur J. Dewey, "The Hymn in the *Acts of John*: Dance as Hermeneutic," *Semeia* 38 (1986), 67-80; Jean-Daniel Kaestli, "Response," *Semeia* 38 (1986), 81-88; Melody Gabrielle Beard-Shouse, "The Circle Dance of the Cross in the Acts of John: An Early Christian Ritual" (Master's thesis, University of Kansas, 2009), kuscholarworks. ku.edu/handle/1808/6462.

12 Philo of Alexandria, *La vita contemplativa* 83-90, ed. Paola Graffigna (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1992), 87-91.

13 Remo Cacitti, Furiosa Turba: *i fondamenti religiosi dell'eversione sociale, della*

dissidenza politica e della contestazione ecclesiale dei Circoncellioni d'Africa (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 2006), 129. Philo says again in *De ebrietate* 1: "But whatever soul is filled with grace is at once in a state of exultation, and delight, and dancing; for it becomes full of triumph, so that it would appear to many of the uninitiated to be intoxicated, and agitated, and to be beside itself. [...] For in the case of those who are under the influence of divine inspiration, not only in the soul accustomed to be excited, and as it were to become frenzied, but also the body is accustomed to become reddish and of a fiery complexion, the joy which is internally diffused and which is exulting, secretly spreading its affections even to the exterior parts, by which many foolish people are deceived, and have fancied that sober persons were intoxicated. And yet indeed those sober people are in a manner intoxicated, having drunk deep of all good things, and having received pledges from perfect virtue." *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged, New Updated Version*, trans. Charles Duke Yonge, with a foreword by David M. Scholer (1854-55; Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 146-48. See also Cristina

In terms of musical instruments, the *aulos* (a pipe or a flute) was the most popular accompaniment to Dionysian rituals in ancient Greece. During such gatherings, Korybantes and Bacchae customarily abandoned themselves to a form of mania, which Gilbert Rouget defines as a possession trance.[16] Plato often describes the *aulos* as a typical instrument of mania and precludes it from the Ideal City, along with Bacchic dancing and the dances of Nymphs and Satyrs.[17] Yet, as Simonetta Grandolini has explained, Plato's disapproval of the *aulos* does not target the instrument itself; in keeping with his traditionalist nature, it is part of a condemnation of all instruments that subverted musical traditions and relinquished ancient austerity.[18]

As Rouget's studies on the relationship between music and trance show, there is no consequential link between the onset of trance and a certain type of music, or sound of a particular instrument: music cannot trigger trance by itself through its intrinsic virtues. Instead, trance is a state of consciousness where the most important roles are played by psychological and cultural components.[19] In *Symposium*, Plato associates the *aulos* with Marsyas, a character originally from Asia Minor – and therefore a foreigner – which is also where the cult of Dionysus originated. Adopting psychoanalytic terminology, Rouget explains that such an association is perfectly compatible with the general logic of possession, which always involves a form of invasion by the Other; in the case of rituals of Dionysian possession, the Other and Elsewhere are represented by Dionysus, the 'foreigner' *par excellence*.[21]

DIRTY DANCING

In his commentary on Matthew at the end of the fourth century CE, John Chrysostom states that "where dance is, there is the devil".[22] This expression re-emerges in later works, such as the thirteenth-century texts by the Dominican Guillaume Peyrot and the Canon Regular Jacques de Vitry.[23] Indeed, the statement has almost always been used – even in some contemporary scholarship – to summarize indiscriminately

the Christian concept of dance, as if it has never changed, regardless of time and context, since the dawn of the religion.[24] In my opinion, the Church Fathers' negative convictions about dancing do not seem far removed from the attitudes of many earlier pagan philosophers towards theatre, mimes, and the acting profession in general. After all, Cicero also associates dancing with madness and drunkenness – characteristics that do not belong to a respectable person – in his oration *Pro Murena* to defend Lucius Licinius Murena against Cato's accusation that he had danced in Asia. This classical text had an enormous influence on censors of dancing in the West, partly because Ambrose of Milan quoted it in *De virginibus*.[25] This example alone cautions us not to reduce the Church Fathers' disapproval of dancing to opposition between Christianity and paganism, lest we mistakenly claim that dancing was excluded from churches because it was seen as a pagan practice.

Scripture provides various examples of dancing, some of which are treated negatively, such as the idolatrous dance by the Jews before the Golden Calf, or Salome's provocative dance.[26] More often, however, they are celebratory dances in moments of joy or in praise of God.[27] Other Christian sources often refer to biblical models to endorse, or oppose, dancing inside or near places of worship, cemeteries, and martyrs' graves. For example, in *De paenitentia*, Ambrose of Milan maintains that one should not copy the hysterical movements of indecent dancing, but rather David's dance before the Ark of the Covenant, as the latter can bring one closer to true faith.[28]

The first testimony regarding the Christian custom of dancing on martyrs' graves in the presence of relics is provided by the anonymous text of a homily spoken in a church in the Orient, probably between 363 and 365 CE. This sermon was delivered during a celebration in honour of the martyr Polyeuctes, and it went as follows: "Through which acts of thanks shall we recognize the love that he had for God? We shall dance for him, if you should so desire, our usual dances".[29] In one of his sermons, Augustine condemns the insolence of certain believers who have danced and sung for an entire night on the grave of the martyr Cyprian in Carthage:

Bermond, *La danza negli scritti di Filone, Clemente Alessandrino e Origene: storia e simbologia* (Frankfurt am Main: Domus Editoria Europaea, 2001).

14 Remo Cacitti, "Οἱ εἰς ἔτι νῦν καί εἰς ἡμᾶς κάνονες. I Terapeuti di Alessandria nella vita spirituale protocristiana," in *Origene maestro di vita spirituale. Origen: Master of Spiritual Life*, eds. Luigi F. Pizzolato and Marco Rizzi (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2001), 86.

15 Luigi Canetti, "La danza dei posseduti: mappe concettuali e strategie di ricerca," in *Il diavolo nel Medioevo: atti del XLIX Convegno storico internazionale, Todi, 14-17 ottobre 2012*, ed. Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2013), 577.

16 Gilbert Rouget, *Musica e trance: I rapporti fra la musica e i fenomeni di possessione*, trans. Giuseppe Mongelli, rev. ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), 256-309.

17 Plato, *Republic* 3.399c-e, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, ed. and trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, vol. 5, Loeb Classical Library 237 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Plato, *Laws* 7.814d ff.

18 Simonetta Grandolini, "A proposito di armonia frigia, Dioniso e ditirambo in Platone," *Giornale Italiano di Filologia* 53 (2001), 289.

19 Rouget, *Musica e trance*, 3-11.

20 Plato, *Symposium* 215c, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, vol. 3, Loeb Classical Library 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

21 Rouget, *Musica e trance*, 129-131.

22"ἔνθα γάρ ὄρχησις, ἐκεῖ διάβολος". John Chrysostom, *In Matthaeum homiliae* 48.3, ed. J. P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca 58 (Paris, 1889), 491.

23 Jacque de Vitry: "Chorea est circulus, cuius centrum est diabolus" (Dance is the circle in whose centre stands the devil). Alessandro Arcangeli, "La Chiesa e la danza tra tardo Medioevo e prima età moderna," in *Ludica: Annali di storia e civiltà del gioco* 13-14 (2007-8), 203 (trans. Tronca).

24 See, for example, Ottorino Pasquato, *Gli spettacoli in S. Giovanni Crisostomo: Paganesimo e Cristianesimo ad Antiochia e Costantinopoli nel IV secolo* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1976), 113.

Once, not many years ago, the effrontery of dancers infested this extremely holy place, where the body of such a holy martyr lies; the pestilent vice and the effrontery of dancers – I repeat – infested such a holy place. All through the night, they sang impiously and danced to the rhythm of the song.[30]

Augustine also expresses disapproval of the celebration of a feast known as *Laetitia* in Thagast. In 395 CE, in a letter to his friend Alypius, he argued that those who dismissed the ban on the feast known as *Laetitia* were simply looking for an excuse to get drunk.[31] As *laetitia* is the Latin equivalent of the Greek term χαρά, it is worth asking whether the feast that Augustine criticized was associated with the same joy and pleasure that had previously been celebrated by Philo as virtually the best religious experience. This evidence warrants the hypothesis that dancing was not condemned in Christian contexts and excluded from churches because it was seen as evil itself; rather, negative conclusions almost always derived from specific situations of disorder and were often characterized by drunkenness and lust. Basil of Caesarea, for example, denounced the custom of certain women who danced drunkenly near the basilicas of martyrs on the night of Easter,[32] while Augustine spoke out against the Donatists, who danced near martyrs' graves, ran around, and blessed their cups through contact with the tomb while celebrating the memory of the martyr Lawrence.[33]

An association between dancing and disorder is also present in conciliar texts. In the fourth century CE, two canons of the Council of Laodicea addressed these practices directly by imposing a ban on disorderly dancing and jumping at weddings.[34] The council texts that banned dancing and singing "cantica turpia" (depraved songs), even those ratified by the Gallic Councils of Vannes (461-491 CE)[35] and Agde (10 September 506),[36] were upheld in different geographical contexts and met practically no challenge throughout the Middle Ages. In sixth-century Gaul, Bishop Caesarius of Arles also frequently preached against the speaking of "cantica turpia vel luxuriosa" (depraved or lascivious songs) and dancing in a diabolical manner

while uttering obscenities. Caesarius specifically condemned dancing in front of basilicas, a much more improper practice, thus a serious offence.[37] The Councils of Auxerre (c. 573-c. 603)[38] and Châlons (639-654) revisited the condemnation of dancing and obscene singing, which demonstrated a tendency to take more offence against women, as groups of dancers were almost always "foemineis" (feminine, effeminate).[39]

In Visigothic Spain in the sixth and seventh centuries, Bishop Isidore of Seville castigated celebrations and immodest dancing during the calends of January, the ancient *Saturnalia*.[40] Similarly, in Rome in the mid-eighth century, Saint Boniface wrote a letter to Pope Zachary, complaining that people celebrated the calends in an extremely noisy manner in front of Saint Peter's church.[41] As the ninth canon of the Roman Council of 743 (summoned by the same Pope Zachary) demonstrates, a ban on celebrating the calends of January was promptly implemented.[42] Returning to Visigothic Spain, we find Valerio of Bierzo, a monk who recounted a curious episode of a cleric dancing, which he describes as almost theatrical and lascivious. Valerio's use of "bacchabundus" is suggestive because of its explicit Bacchic associations.[43] Ties between dancing and drunkenness, madness, and excess are central to these accounts of celebration.

The Roman Councils of 826 and 847 banned celebrations with banquets on feast days, as some, "et maxime mulieres" (and especially women), instead of praying, danced, sang obscene songs, and played "ioca turpia" (depraved games) in a manner reminiscent of pagans. In the 847 Council, it was stressed that this type of celebration was done "super mortuos" (on the graves of the dead).[44]

With regard to the latter practice, a ninth-century source relates what happened during the transfer of Saint Vitus' relics. After founding a monastery at Corvey in Saxony in 822, the monks of Corbie obtained the relics of Saint Vitus in 837. During the transfer, choruses of men and women danced around the church all night long, singing the *Kyrie Eleison*. These choruses are somewhat similar to

25 Cicero, *Pro Murena* 13, in *Cicero in Twenty-Eight Volumes*, trans. Coll Macdonald, vol. 10, Loeb Classical Library 324 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Ambrose of Milan, *De virginibus* 3.5, in *Verginità e vedovanza: tutte le opere di Sant'Ambrogio*, ed. and trans. Franco Gori, vol. 1 (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1989). See also Alessandro Arcangeli, *Davide o Salomè? Il dibattito europeo sulla danza nella prima età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2000), 108.

26 Ex 32:19; Mt 14:6-8; Mk 6:22-25.

27 2 Sm 6:14-16; Ps 149:2-3; Ps 150:4-5; Jgs 15:12-13; Jer 31:13; Eccl 3:4.

28 Ambrose of Milan, *De paenitentia* 2.6, in *Ambrosius, Explanatio symboli, De sacramentis, De mysteriis, De paenitentia, De excessu fratris Satyri, De obitu Valentiani, De obitu Theodosii*, ed. Otto Faller, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 73 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1955), 117.

29 "Ποῖα δὲ χαριστήρια τῆς πρὸς Θεὸν ἀγάπης προσάγοντες, εὐγνώμονες ἂν νομισθείημεν; Χορεύσωμεν αὐτῷ, εἰ δοκεῖ, τὰ συνήθη".

those performed by the Therapeutae in first-century Alexandria, where the latter celebrated the *chara*. Further, in *Historia translationis Sancti Viti*, a monk from Corbie affirms that the dancing devoted to Saint Vitus' relics was harmonious; there was no swearing. Instead, they prayed and sang the *Kyrie* while they were dancing.[45] The purpose of such clarification was probably to highlight the opposition to a form of dancing that had been prohibited. The case of Saint Vitus is particularly interesting because the saint was worshipped mainly for healing people who had demonstrated demonic possession. In the tenth century, his relics were taken to Prague, from whence his cult spread throughout Central Europe, and his name was subsequently associated with a type of encephalitis – now Sydenham's Chorea – known as "Saint Vitus' Dance".

In approximately the same period, Hincmar of Reims wrote a list of rules for the priests in his diocese. One of these rules banned them from dancing and even making the faithful laugh on commemorative days of the dead or during any other holy occasions.[46] The difference between this ninth-century source and earlier reproaches such as Augustine's sermon against celebrating the *Laetitia* is that Hincmar mainly addressed priests. He managed a diocese in the Carolingian age, while Augustine preached directly to the faithful. Yet, the textual evidence raises doubts whether there was indeed much of a difference, in terms of religious awareness, between a ninth-century canon and a fourth-century convert: the first of Hincmar's rules was that his priests learn fundamental prayers such as the *Credo* and *Our Father*. In this respect, the texts by Augustine and Hincmar share a common ground against dancing and "cantica turpia" (depraved songs). Therefore, though produced in different contexts and times, they both expressed disapproval of similar practices.

In the following centuries, similar bans were also included in penitential books, a sign that all of the prohibitions expressed by the councils continued to be transgressed by the faithful. For example, the Paenitentiale pseudo-Theodori, initially attributed to Theodore of Tarsus or of Canterbury (602-609), but probably of Frankish origin

Louis Gougaud, "La danse dans les églises," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 15 (1914), 10, quoting Benjamin Aubé, "Homélie inédite," in the appendix of *Polyeucte dans l'histoire* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1882), 79 (trans. Tronca). See also Remo Cacitti, "*Sepulcrorum et picturarum adoratores*: un'iconografia della *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* nel culto martiriale donatista," in *L'ara dipinta di* Thaenae. *Indagine sul culto martiriale nell'Africa paleocristiana*, ed. Remo Cacitti et al. (Rome: Viella, 2011), 113; E. Louis Backman, *Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine* (London: George Allena & Unwin, 1952), 23-24.

30 "Aliquando ante annos non ualde multos etiam istum locum inuaserat petulantia saltatorum. istum tam sanctum locum, ubi iacet tam sancti martyris corpus, sicut meminerunt multi qui habent aetatem; locum, inquam, tam sanctum inuaserat pestilentia et petulantia saltatorum. per totam noctem cantabantur hic nefaria, et cantantibus saltabatur". Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo In natali Cypriani martyris* 311.5, ed. J. P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 38 (Paris, 1841), 1415 (trans. Tronca).

31 Augustine of Hippo, *Epistola* 29.2, in *S. Aurelii Augustini*

and datable to the ninth century, bans "ballationes et saltationes" and "cantica turpia et luxoria". This text is seen as a combination of rules selected from other penitential books, as well as biblical and patristic quotes.[47] Yet, it is important to emphasize that such books were produced for a specific reason – in this case, to ban dancing in church, singing obscene songs, and playing diabolical games – and were not simply repeated formulas or quotations from the Fathers. Therefore, if dancing was banned, it is because the practice was still alive and continued despite the bans throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

CONCLUSION

Dancing was dismissed in Christian discourses not because it was seen as devious or a remnant of pre-Christian traditions, but because it was regarded as a practice that kindled the fear of losing control, potentially leading to disorder. Disorder, to begin with, is removed from the Platonic harmony established through the χορεία of the Ideal City, an idea that the Church hierarchy also aspired to and deemed accordingly an equilibrium in which every element had to be coordinated into a harmonious symphony. This is the reason why approval was granted to the harmonious dancing around the relics of Saint Vitus, but not to frenetic dancing, which was at times considered a manifestation of demonic possession. The presence and behaviour of disharmonious dancers interrupting the symphony were treated as immoral and depraved. In physical terms, moreover, the body of a disjointed dancer or a supposed victim of demonic possession indicated a form of invasion and was thus considered incompatible with the harmony that the Church strove to create. Just like the Platonic χορεία, the Church's chastisement of dancing from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages was essentially a form of social control.

Hipponensis Episcopi Epistulae, ed. Alois Goldbacher, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 34.1 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1895), 114. See also Cacitti, "*Sepulcrorum et picturarum adoratores*," 112.

32 "By performing their choral dances in the basilicas of martyrs outside the city, they have made holy places the workshop of their indecency". Basil the Great, *Homilia* 14.1 *in ebriosos*, ed. J. P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca 31 (Paris, 1857), 445 (trans. Tronca).

33 Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo* 305/A, in *Sermones de Vetere Testamento: id est sermones 1-50 secundum ordinem vulgatum insertis etiam 9 sermonibus post Maurinos repertis*, ed. Cyrillus Lambot, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 41 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1961), 58.

34 Canon 39, *De Christianis celebrantibus festa gentilium*, and canon 53, *Ut in Christianorum non saltetur nuptiis* (571-574). Both in *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi, vol. 2 (Florence: Antonio Zatta, 1759), 581.

35 *Concilium Veneticum*, in *Concilia Galliae, a. 314-a. 506*, ed. Charles Munier, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 148 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963), 154.

36 *Concilium Agathense*, in Munier, *Concilia Galliae*, 209-10.

37 Caesarius of Arles, Sermones 1, 33, and 113, in *Sermones ex integro a Caesario compositi vel ex aliis fontibus hausti,* ed. Germain Morin, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 103 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953).

38 *Concilium Autissiodorense*, ed. Friedrich Maassen, *MGH Concilia aevi merovingici 1* (Hannover: Hahn, 1893), 180.

39 *Concilium Cabilonense*, in Maassen, *MGH Conc. 1*, 212.

40 Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* XLI (XL): *De ieiunio kalendarum ianuariarum, in Sancti Isidori Hispalensis De ecclesiasticis officiis*, ed. Christopher M. Lawson, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 113 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989).

41 Boniface, *Epistle* 50, in *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae*, ed. Ernst Dümmler, *MGH Epistolae Merowingici et Carolini Aevi 1* (Berlin: Weidemann, 1892), 301.

42 Canon 9, *Concilium Romanum I congregatum a Zacharia Papa*,

a. 743, in *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi, vol. 12 (Florence: Antonio Zatta, 1766), 384.

43 "In tanta exarsit freneticae insaniae dementia truculentus, atque inexplicabile ebrietatis temulentia irretitus, ut nec etiam nocturnis temporibus me permitteret esse quietum. Nam dum vel nocturno silentio me ejus considerem evadere pestem, petulanti importunitate impudicus semper prorumpens, et mendicitatis meae hospitium hora refectionis impudenter adiens, pro charitate consolationis mihi furibundus intulis jurgium atrocitatis, et nobis in charitate convescentibus, ille superbia vesaniae suae atque ebrietate vexatus, velut canis invidens, rabidus super nefanda convicia, frendens stridore dentium, spumansque ore lymphatico bacchabundus, propriis me lacerare manibus nitebatur. In tanta exarsit odii caecitate frustratus, atque invidiosae nequitiae flamma succensus, ut nec ante sacrosanctum pepercere altarium. Ibique me gravissimis injuriis irrite confusum, nisi fratris intercessione fuissem exceptus, ferro me in conspectu multorum rabiens jugulare conabatur. Post tanti furoris insaniam tandem sedata, sic

denique in amentia versus, injustae susceptionis ordinem oblitus, vulgari ritu in obscena theatricae luxuriae vertigine rotabatur; dum circumductis huc illucque brachiis, alio in loco lascivos conglobans pedes, vestigiis ludibricantibus circuens tripudio compositis, et tremulis gressibus subsiliens, nefaria cantilena mortiferare ballimatiae dira carmina canens, diabolicae pestis exercebat luxuriam. Sic quippe exaestuans mersus vino, temulentia sepultus, ut ebrius patiebatur sitim et esuriem vomens; qui somno deditus, desidiosque torpore obvolutus, non erat inter crebro psallentibus hymnis Dei ducentibus noctes. Nunquam tales pestes Christus habere dignatus est servos". Valerius of Bierzo, *Opuscola*, *Ordo querimonie* 34, ed. J. P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 87 (Paris, 1851), 443-44.

44 *Concilium Romanum* a. 826, in Maassen, *MGH Conc.1*, 581-82; canon 39, C*oncilium Romanum* a. 847, in *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi, vol. 14 (Florence: Antonio Zatta, 1769), 895.

45 *Historia translationis Sancti Viti auctore monacho Corbeiense* (BHL 8718-8719), ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, *MGH Scriptores* 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1829), 584.

46 Hincmar of Reims, *Capitula Synodica. 710 capitula presbyteris data, anno 852*, Chapter 14, ed. J. P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 125 (Paris, 1852), 776. Maria Caterina Jacobelli considers this source the first testimony of what later became known as *risus paschalis* (Easter laughter): sometimes during the Easter Mass homily (as well as other holy festivals), the priest made the believers laugh by telling them funny stories that usually had sexual overtones. *Il Risus paschalis e il fondamento teologico del piacere sessuale* (1990; repr., Brescia: Editrice Queriniana, 2004), 40.

47 *Paenitentiale pseudo-Theodori*, ed. Carine van Rhijn, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 156B (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Carine van Rhijn and Marjolijn Saan, "Correcting Sinners, Correcting Texts: A Context for the *Paenitentiale pseudo-Theodori*," *Early Medieval Europe* 14 (2006), 23-40.

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