

Ringleaders of Redemption: How Medieval Dance Became Sacred.
 By Kathryn Dickason. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. xvii
 + 369 pp. \$99.00 cloth.

Medieval dance is a notoriously tricky subject, which is likely why only a handful of book-length studies have been published on the topic. Dr. Kathryn Dickason's monograph is one of the few books in English devoted entirely to the subject of medieval dance, written by a scholar whose disciplinary home is in religious studies, but whose work traverses several interrelated disciplines, including ritual and performance studies, gender studies, medieval literature, and dance history. *Ringleaders of Redemption* focuses on the theological aspects of medieval dance, arguing that "dance became an integral part of medieval religious life" (3) and tracing the sacralization of dance as practice and metaphor from the early Middle Ages to the fifteenth century. Significantly, Dickason defines medieval dance inclusively as an "all-encompassing activity that spanned the full spectrum of human experience" (4), enabling her to corral a wide range of sources, from biblical commentaries and exegetical texts to art historical images and vernacular romances. A highlight of the book is its inclusion of 73 full color images, chiefly from medieval manuscripts, although at times the discussion of the images in the body of the text could have benefited from consultation with art historians.

The book achieves an impressive chronological and geographical scope due to its varied source materials, although Dickason asserts a focus on France, Italy, and Germany (8). Chronologically, the book begins in the early Middle Ages with the church fathers and concludes with late medieval writings on and images of the danse macabre. A central tension throughout the book is the duality of dance as either good, moral, and devotional, or bad, sinful, and even demonic. Although Dickason is concerned with the religious authorization of dance as part of Christian devotional practices, she reminds readers that dance always occupies a liminal space within the Catholic Church, not only in the Middle Ages but also in the twenty-first century, as her introduction and epilogue make clear by means of contemporary anecdotes.

Ringleaders of Redemption comprises an introduction and epilogue framing two chronologically arranged parts. Part 1, "Gracing the Idols," focuses on the Western Christianization of dance by means of the Bible, saints, and the Catholic liturgy in Chapters 1–3, while part 2, "Grace before its Master," explores dance in secular and sacred contexts from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth century in chapters 4–7. The endnotes are extensive, with an average of over one hundred notes per chapter (note that in some cases the endnote page headers are misnumbered). The endnotes offer a wealth of information and citations, providing an up-to-date bibliography of medieval dance. Although an index is also included, its five pages could have been tripled, considering the length of the book. As Dickason notes, portions of all but chapter 3 appear in previous publications, as readers familiar with her work will recognize. For those, like myself, who teach her scholarship, the book offers a synthesis of her research and individual chapters could easily be assigned to upper level undergraduate and graduate students across disciplines. For instance, although the topic is specialized, Dickason always defines new terms and provides English translations in the main text. Succinct introductions and conclusions to each chapter clearly signpost the central arguments of the book and will enable a wide range of readers to engage with this otherwise niche topic.

Individual chapters vary widely in thematic focus and source materials. Chapter 1 focuses on dance in the Bible and the variously positive and negative reactions of medieval commentators to these dance scenes, which include Miriam's dance, the dance around the golden calf, the dance of King David, and the dance of Salome. Chapter 2 highlights the role of the medieval cult of saints in the sacralization of dance, with case studies of dance in two saints' cults—Sainte Foy and St. Francis of Assisi. Chapter 3 examines the role of dance in relation to the Christian liturgy, drawing on the writings of liturgists, as well as the evidence of dance in liturgical dramas and in the Easter liturgy at Auxerre Cathedral. Chapter 4 positions dance between good and evil, considering how the evidence of penitential writing and sermons brings to light the tension between dance as leading to sinful behavior and dance as part of a process of redemption and salvation. Chapter 5 continues to explore this tension in the context of female mysticism, bringing gender politics more explicitly into the discussion of bodies, dance, and devotion. Chapter 6 newly considers the role of dance in secular literary contexts, arguing that “dance in romance functioned as a quasi-religious vehicle of reenchantment” (9), with a particular focus on dance as a ritualizing tool in the tradition of the *Roman de la Rose* and Dante's *Commedia*. Finally, chapter 7 examines later medieval dance traditions connected with illness and death, namely choreomania and danse macabre, identifying the changing cultural identity of dance in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as it moved toward greater professionalization and secularization.

Certain themes run throughout the chapters, including an emphasis on gender, the concept of grace (*gratia*), and the inherent duality of dance as both a positive and negative social and cultural practice. Where Dickason is at her strongest is in close readings of texts, whether biblical commentaries or vernacular romances; it is in these moments that we gain the most insight into the complicated picture that is medieval dance. Like all historical dance scholars, the greatest problem Dickason faces is the slipperiness of dance itself—its terminology, meaning, and performance practices. Although Dickason guards against critiques by asserting an all-encompassing definition at the outset, slippage occurs throughout the chapters among differing understandings of dance, especially between dance as a bodily practice and dance as a metaphor or literary trope. Despite this understandable ambiguity around its main focus, *Ringleaders of Redemption* offers a rich overview of medieval dance history and historiography that newly argues for the religious authorization and sacralization of dance in medieval arts, literature, and culture.

Mary Channen Caldwell
University of Pennsylvania
doi:10.1017/S000964072200018X

***Liturgical Poetry in Christian Nubia: The Evidence of Wall Inscriptions in the Lower Church at Banganarti.* By Agata Deptuła. Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplements 38. Leuven: Peeters, 2020. xii + 161 pp. €95.00 hardcover.**

The *Supplements* series of the *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* is one of the centers of Nubian studies. Deptuła's volume is the third supplement in a series on Banganarti,