

Introduction

Dance at Rome – Roman Dance

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Salva res est, saltat senex.
Servius, in *Aen.* 8.110

Dance at Rome

When we think of dance in Graeco-Roman antiquity, most of us think probably first of the Greeks. Dance was omnipresent in the ancient Greek world, and this perception is sustained and amplified by the modern poetic and philosophical imagination. In his famous poem *Die Götter Griechenlands* from 1788, Friedrich Schiller gives the beautiful dances around the altar their due: “Beautifully entwined soulful dances / circled around the resplendent altar” (“Schön geschlungne seelenvolle Tänze / Kreisten um den prangenden Altar”, lines 93–94); roughly a century later, Friedrich Nietzsche idealised the exuberant dances of Dionysos, and Paul Valéry gave his thoughts on dance the form of a “Socratic dialogue” between three philosophers and a dancer with Greek names (*L’Âme et la danse*, 1921). To a whole generation of critics the dances by Loie Fuller seemed to resuscitate the Tanagra figurines or the dancers depicted on ancient Greek vases, and Edward Steichen’s famous photographs immortalised Isadora Duncan dancing among the ruins of ancient Greek temples. It is to a great extent a Greek universe that unfolds in the modern imagination around ancient dance.¹

¹ Accordingly, a vast majority of chapters in Fiona Macintosh’s edited volume *The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World* (2010) address the reception of ancient Greek dance; see also Fitzgerald 2019 (elucidating Egyptian, Minoan, and Mycenaean in addition to Greek aesthetic inspirations); Dorf 2021 and 2018; Shay 2017; Fabbri 2009; Caron 2006. Emmanuel 1896 documents attempts at reconstructing ancient Greek dance based on vase images and cinematographic animation; on the possibilities and limits of such an approach, see Smith 2010; Naerebout 1997, 209–253. In his book on Loie Fuller from 1904, Roger Marx writes, “par elle l’orchestrique des anciens Hellènes nous est rendue” (Marx 1904, 7). On Steichen’s photographs of Isadora Duncan, see Marenzi 2018; on

Scholarship on ancient dance has followed the same pattern.² The Greek chorus, this crucial element of literary and musical culture in the archaic and classical epochs and beyond, has elicited the interest of countless scholars especially since German Idealism.³ In addition to aesthetic questions, groundbreaking studies since the 1970s addressed the social function of Greek choruses, and the last twenty years saw a new wave of studies on the chorus.⁴ More recently, the Greek solo dancer of the archaic and classical age has also come into the focus of research on ancient dance.⁵ By contrast, Roman dance has been far less prominent. Studies are few and far between, and only in recent years is there a surge in interest in Roman dance, and particularly in imperial pantomime, originally a Greek genre which ascended to great popularity under the Roman emperors.⁶

Turning to the history of modern ballet from the eighteenth century onward, however, it is interesting to note that practitioners – dancers, choreographers, and impresarios alike – mostly looked to imperial pantomime for inspiration in their endeavour to create dances that were able to tell stories.⁷ The tragic chorus, by contrast, elicited mixed responses and was often eliminated in modern tragedies inspired by ancient ones, as well as in stagings of ancient tragedies.⁸ The discovery of Pompeii in the eighteenth century fueled a craze for novels set in post-classical, Roman antiquity, inaugurated by Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) and continuing for decades, and the fin-de-siècle fascination with spectacular entertainments found a

Duncan's study of ancient Greek images of dancers, see Duncan 1927, 79. Even in fascist Italy, it was Greek dance that appealed to the contemporary imagination, as Fiona Macintosh (Oxford) showed in a talk delivered on 15 Jan 2021: "Reconstructing Greek Dance with Fascist Ideology"; see also Taddeo 2017, 184 n. 40, 189–225. Unless stated otherwise, translations are mine.

2 Monographs on Greek dance include Emmanuel 1896; Séchan 1930; Lawler 1964a and 1964b; Prudhommeau 1965; Lonsdale 1993; Naerebout 1997. Despite its broader title, Weege 1926 focuses largely on Greek dance. Article-length overviews on "ancient dance" also routinely limit themselves to Greek dance, under which pantomime is subsumed: see, e. g., Zarifi 2007.

3 See Goldhill 2013; Billings 2013.

4 See Calame 1977; Mullen 1982; Henrichs 1994–1995; Ceccarelli 1998; Bierl 2001; Wilson 2003; David 2006; Perusino/Colantonio 2007; Athanassaki/Bowie 2011; Kowalzig 2011; Kurke 2012; Kowalzig/Wilson 2013; Billings/Budelmann/Macintosh 2013; Gagné/Hopman 2013; Calame 2017; Gianvittorio 2017; Steiner 2021.

5 Olsen 2020.

6 On Roman dance, see Wille 1967, 187–202; Garelli-François 1995; Giannotta 2004; Fless/Moede 2007; Alonso Fernández 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2020; Naerebout 2009; Curtis 2017, 1–19; on pantomime, see below pp. 20–21. New companions on dance in the (broadly conceived) ancient world are currently being prepared: Alonso Fernández/Olsen (forthcoming); Briand, in progress.

7 Hall 2008; Lada-Richards 2010; Fenböck 2021.

8 Corneille's *Œdipe* for instance, though heavily influenced by both Seneca and Sophocles, features no chorus. For the practice of omitting the chorus in stagings of Greek tragedies, common in the 19th century, see Hall/Macintosh 2005, 197. The reception of the ancient chorus in opera is a different matter; see Savage 2013. On new solutions for staging the chorus since the 2000s, see Papa-lexiou 2013.

welcome mirror in the imaginary decadence of ancient Rome, now illustrated by Pompeian frescoes of dancing figures.⁹ Female dancers feature repeatedly as protagonists of these novels, several of which include a reference to a mysterious ancient epitaph containing the laconic words *saltavit et placuit*, “she danced and pleased.” These Latin words were a more or less mediated reminiscence of an actual epitaph on a young slave named Septentrio, found in Antibes and made notorious among French readers interested in the past by Michelet’s incisive if brief discussion in his *Histoire de France* (CIL 12, 188, datable in the third century CE):

D M
PVERI SEPTENTRI
ONIS ANNOR XII QVI
ANTIPOLI IN THEATRO
BIDVO SALTAVIT ET PLA
CVIT.

To the manes of Septentrio, the boy of 12 years who, in the theatre in Antipolis, danced on two days and pleased.

Michelet’s musings on the boy’s premature death, not mourned by family members, anticipated the sense of loss that permeated a lot of the popular literature that aimed to revive antiquity and thrived on isolated glimpses of the ancient world as preserved in archeological remains, reducing an already sparse evidence to even tinier fragments and leaving ample space to the modern imagination: “Je ne connais rien de plus tragique que cette inscription dans sa brièveté, rien qui fasse mieux sentir la dureté du monde romain ...”, Michelet wrote.¹⁰ The unexpected fortune of this young Roman dancer as a source of inspiration for nineteenth century novelists may serve as a healthy reminder that classical Greece has not always eclipsed subsequent ancient dance cultures in the modern perception. It is an invitation to look harder for Roman dance and the impact it made on Roman literature and material culture, and to ask how it may enrich our understanding of the Roman world.

More recent discussions of epitaphs and honorary inscriptions on Roman dancers have shown that some of them both enjoyed fame and riches and were very much loved by their families and peers. On a funerary altar dedicated by the impresario Calpodius, the pantomime Theocritus Pylades is honoured “on account of his merits” by the band of musicians and dancers to which he belonged, the *grex Romanus* (CIL 5, 5889, from Lodi, second century CE), and an even younger boy than Septentrio, named Celadio, is mourned in an inscription from Petelia by the troupe of the panto-

9 Ducrey 2013 discusses the pioneering role of popular novels set in antiquity in the revival of ancient dance at the turn of the 20th century.

10 Michelet 1833, 96. See the excellent discussion by Ducrey 1996, 162–196.

mime Ionicus, his father, who endured “everlasting grief” (first century CE; see Graf in this volume).¹¹ The freedwoman dancer Licinia Eucharis is also commemorated by her father.¹² Michelet was certainly right to note the “hardship of the Roman world” in one regard, namely the high mortality of children and adolescents: Licinia Eucharis died at fourteen. But it would be mistaken to think that only individuals of the lowest social standing and deprived of agency and social networks were professional dancers.

Nor would a Roman citizen dance only if drunk or mad, as Cicero famously suggests at one point: “No one dances who is sober, except perhaps if the person is crazy, not in private nor at a decent and respectable dinner-party” (*Nemo enim fere saltat sobrius, nisi forte insanit, neque in solitudine neque in convivio moderato atque honesto, Pro Murena* 6.13), a passage which is routinely adduced to show that the Romans did not think highly of dancing.¹³ In reality Cicero attempts to assuage his client, Murena, from the charge of being a dancer leveled at him by Cato, whose austere morals were notorious. Cicero scolds Cato for using an “insult from the street” (*maledictum ex trivio*) and puts the charge into perspective by pointing out that dance (*saltatio*) is the “final accompaniment” (*comes ... extrema*) of banquets and amusements and the “last” (or “slightest”?) addition to all vices (*omnium vitiorum ... postremum*) – a mere accessory to depraved habits of which there is no trace in Murena.¹⁴ The problem of dancing, then, is one of shady contexts and disreputable practitioners, and for “dancer” to work as an insult, a whole set of additional parameters have to be in place. The passage offers by no means the wholesale dismissal of dancing that is often attributed to it, and its rhetorical exaggeration should not be taken absolutely.

A similar oscillation between positive and negative judgements can be observed in connection with Sempronia, a woman of Catiline’s entourage whom Sallust describes in characteristically ambivalent terms: she was beautiful and learned and could “play the lyre and dance more elegantly than was necessary for an honest woman” (*psallere et saltare elegantius quam necesse est probae*), but did not heed decency (*Catil.* 25). The

11 See Cadario 2009 for Theocritus Pylades; Lazzarini 2004 for Celadion; more generally on the epigraphical record, Tedeschi 2017; Caldelli 2005; Strasser 2004; Leppin 1992.

12 CLE 55 = CIL 6, 10096. See Alonso Fernández 2015, 322–330; on female dancers in the imperial period, see further Webb 1997; Starks 2008.

13 See, e.g., Lawler/Spawforth in the most recent edition of the *The Oxford companion to classical civilization* (2014), a perfect example of the perpetuation of this stereotype. RE and Dagr both argue that Roman hostility towards dance should not be taken at face value, but they dedicate the bulk of the entries, “Tanzkunst” and “*saltatio*” respectively, to Greek dance, reflecting the amount of extant information, rather than ancient reality.

14 “Cato calls Murena a dancer. It is an insult of a strong accuser when it is uttered with truth but of a defaming detractor when it is wrong. Hence, since you have this authority of yours, you should not, Marcus Cato, pick up an insult from the street corner or from some slanderous calumny, nor call a consul of the Roman people a dancer, but consider with what additional vices someone needs to be affected in order to be truly accused of this. No one dances who is sober (etc.).” See Alonso Fernández 2011, 479–481 and 2020, 177–180; Naerebout 2009, 149–150; Curtis 2017, 9.

passage is not lost on the dialogue characters in Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, written over four centuries later, who comment on various types of extravagance (*lascivia*) among their Roman ancestors, which they themselves claim to have "emended" (*sat.* 3.14.3). Broaching the subject of dance, Rufius says: "I'll pass over the fact that married women considered dancing not dishonourable; rather, even the honest among them applied themselves to dancing, albeit not to the point of perfecting the art. In fact, what did Sallust say? 'to play the lyre and dance more elegantly than was necessary for an honest woman'. So even he does not reproach Sempronia because she knew how to dance, but only because she knew how to dance really well" (*sat.* 3.14.5). But despite the somewhat ostentatiously raised eyebrows, the discussion of dance in this symposiac dialogue set at the twilight of pagan culture acknowledges that many respectable Romans of old enjoyed dancing, including, for instance, Appius Claudius, triumphator of 143 BCE (*sat.* 3.14.14).

A lot depended on circumstances and measure. Dissolute dancing during dinner parties was not a respectable pastime for Roman citizens, and Cicero himself uses this charge elsewhere (*In Pisonem* 22; *Pro Deiotaro* 26; *In Verrem* 2.3,23). What is often overlooked, though, is that similar dismissals can also be found in Greek sources, as Edith Hall showed in her 2010 article "The missing exemplary male dancer."¹⁵ In Homer, dance is repeatedly associated with non-Greeks (the Trojans, the Phaeacians), and Priam uses the word "dancer" as a slur no less than the Romans do: at the end of the *Iliad*, he calls his own sons – the ones who have not died like Hector – "liars and dancers" (ψεύσται τ' ὀρχησται τε, *Iliad* 24.261). The most amusing instance of indecorous dancing from the Greek world is probably Herodotus' anecdote of Hippocleides, who displeased his prospective father-in-law by dancing upside down on a table (when underwear, it must be noted, was not part of the costume). "You danced away (ἀπορχήσας) your marriage", cried the father of the bride; to make things worse, Hippocleides famously replied that he did not care (οὐ φροντίζῃς Ἰπποκλείδῃ, 6.29).¹⁶ In short, dance is a social practice that is regulated and subject to policing not just at Rome, but probably in every culture, including ancient Greece. Plato was well aware of the potentially subversive power of choral dancing, and dedicated substantial parts his *Laws* to the topic.¹⁷

Roman philosophers did not ignore dance either, although we do not know of any Roman philosopher who enjoyed dancing himself, unlike Socrates, who allegedly liked to dance – at least if we believe his own words in Xenophon's *Symposium*, which are, as often, undercut by irony.¹⁸ But when it suited their purpose, they would mention dance

15 Hall 2010. The point was also made by Naerebout 2009, 149 n. 14.

16 See also Athenaeus 14, 628cd, where this negative example illustrates the idea attributed to Damon of Oa that dance is a transparent expression of one's character, and for a recent discussion, Olsen 2020, 180–188.

17 See Peponi 2013; Prauscello 2014; Folch 2015. Religious festivals and dancing as a backdrop of Plato's later philosophy are discussed by O'Meara 2017, 125–134.

18 Xen. *symp.* 2.16; see Huss 1999; Hall 2010, 149–150; Olsen 2020, 161–163.

and build it into their arguments. In one of his dialogues Cicero, for instance, has Cato (of all people!) refer to dance in order to elucidate the Stoic concept of wisdom (*De finibus* 3.24): like acting or dancing, Cato argues, wisdom does not aim at producing an outcome but is fulfilled in the practice itself. The argument is prepared by a more general comparison between life and the stage, especially popular among the Stoics:

For just as an actor or a dancer is given not just any but a certain particular role or movement (*histrioni actio, saltatori motus non quivis sed certus quidam est datus*), so life has to be lived in a certain way, not in just any way; and this way we call appropriate and suitable. For we do not think that wisdom is similar to seamanship or medicine but rather to the acting and dancing which I just mentioned, in such a way that its end – that is, the exercise of the art – lies in itself and is not sought outside (*ut in ipsa insit, non foris petatur extremum, id est artis effectio*).

The underlying distinction between the theoretical, practical, and producing arts is Aristotelian (*Nicomachean Ethics* 6.4, 1140a). But as far as we can see, Aristotle does not adduce dance as an example of a “practical” art. We find this example only in Roman authors (Cicero and Quintilian¹⁹). While we do not know for sure whether they were the first to use it or whether it appeared in Hellenistic sources, they would not have adopted it if it did not make immediate sense to their audience. Down to late antiquity, the specific expressive possibilities of dance caught the attention of philosophers, above all Augustine, who returned to the physical language of pantomime on various occasions and analysed it with great subtlety.²⁰

Priests, *matronae*, boys and girls

If even Cato can adduce dance as a matter of course in a philosophical dialogue by Cicero, it may be fair to conclude that dance permeated all walks of life in ancient Rome. One of the areas in which dancing features prominently is Roman religion. The most famous male Roman dancers are probably the *Salii*, a college of priests, whose very name according to Varro points to dancing: *Salii ab salitando, quod facere in comitiis in sacris quotannis et solent et debent* (*De lingua latina* 5.85).²¹ They performed a dance called *tripudium*, as did the Arval Brethren (see Prescendi in this volume).²² Interest-

19 *Inst.* 2.18.1–5.

20 See Schlapbach 2018, 58–59, 66–69, 93, 144–148.

21 Similarly, *Ov. fast.* 3.387; *Porph. Hor. carm.* 1.36.12. Cf. *Livy* 1.20.4, on Numa: “He likewise chose twelve *Salii* for Mars Gradivus and gave them the distinction of the embroidered tunic and over the tunic a bronze breastplate and divine shields, which are called *ancilia*, and he bade them to carry them through the City and to proceed performing songs along with the three steps (*tripudiis*) of a stately dance (*saltatu*)” (see Prescendi in this volume, at n. 27).

22 Granino Cecere 2014; Alonso Fernández 2016a; Patzelt 2018, 179–186.

ingly, there seems to have been a debate in antiquity as to their name and origin. Various authors transmit versions of a minority view according to which the Salian priesthood took its name from a Greek – an Arcadian or Samothracian called Salios or Saïos – who brought the dance to Rome.²³ The endeavor to trace Roman religious institutions back to Greek roots was as common in antiquity as it is unfounded in the case of the Salii. But it is illustrative of the fact that the Romans tried to make sense of their own cultural and religious practices by relating them to similar practices of their neighbours. This is probably why Samothrace and Mantinea were singled out as possible places of origin of the Salians: the former is known for its cult of Magna Mater, and in the latter a festival in honour of Persephone and Kore was celebrated, the Koragia. Dancing very likely played an important role in both of them.²⁴ Despite these erudite but speculative associations, the perception of the Salii as an ancient and noble Roman institution formed by King Numa prevailed, although the connection with Numa must likewise be understood as a later fiction.²⁵

Dancers featured prominently in the *pompa circensis*, which is described in some detail in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities*. The procession to the circus (as well as that to the theatre) was led by *ludiones*, "dancers", a word which was at the same time interpreted as *Lydioi*, i. e. Lydians who according to an ancient tradition settled on the Italian peninsula and became the Etruscans.²⁶ Their appearance, though apparently not their dance, resembled that of the Salii: they wore short tunics, helmets, swords, and bucklers. It is interesting to note that single *ludiones*, depicted in a static pose and recognisable by their attributes, continued to be represented on coins and reliefs as an iconographic shorthand of the *pompa circensis* or the *ludi* at large throughout the early imperial period.²⁷ The *ludiones* were followed by the *contendants*, and after those more dancers followed, arranged in three age groups and representing the Roman people at large. These bands of dancers, who performed a war dance in the fashion of the Greek *pyrrhiche*, introduced a playful element, as especially the young boys and youths were not warriors but posed as such. This ambiguous, liminal character of the dancing is further reinforced when on their heels followed choruses representing satyrs and Silens

23 Festus p. 438, 27–439, 10 Lindsay; Serv. *Aen.* 2.325; 8.285, 663; Isid. *orig.* 18.50 (relying on Varro); Plut. *Numa* 13.4 (on which see Buszard 2011). See Schlapbach (forthcoming).

24 On Samothracian influences on Roman religion, see Popkin 2015.

25 Bremmer 1993, 165. See Alonso Fernández 2016b, 312–313, on the Salian dance as befitting a Roman *vir*.

26 Dion. Hal. *Ant.* 2.71.4; Val. Max. 2.4.4.

27 See Latham 2016, 31–35, 156–157; Tagliafico 1994; Dupont 1993; Jannot 1992. Fless/Moede 2007, 256 note the relative absence of iconographic representations of dancers in action as part of processions; see also Fless 2004. In addition to the idiosyncrasies of iconographic conventions, this might also be an instance of the fact that what everybody knows does not have to be shown, i. e. that *ludiones* dance. Another example are the Muses, who are depicted as dancing in literature but not in the figurative arts (see Schlapbach 2018, 255).

aping and mocking the preceding dancers, a specifically Roman element, as Dionysius notes.²⁸

Energetic and exuberant dancing is also associated with the Galloi, the self-castrating worshippers of Magna Mater from Asia Minor, who are attested in Rome starting from the end of the second century BCE (see Curtis in this volume).²⁹ The pageant in honour of the Great Mother during her festival, the *ludi Megalenses* which took place in April, is memorably described by Lucretius (2.600–660). Not a neutral witness on religious matters, Lucretius' portrayal foregrounds the excessive and ecstatic nature of the cult, dwelling on the dances of an "armed band", whom he refers to as Curetes and who "leap up rhythmically, joyful with blood, shaking their awful crests with the nodding of their heads" (*ludunt in numerumque exultant sanguine laeti / terrificas capitum quatientes numine cristas*, 2.631–632).³⁰ The cult of Magna Mater, though firmly integrated into the Roman religious landscape, retained its foreign flavour, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus writes that in fact Roman citizens would assist but were not allowed to perform the rituals themselves (2.19.4). Some kind of participation of the public, and indeed of women, must nevertheless have characterised the cult. Discussing the elevated style of tragedy, Horace offers as a comparison the image of a *matrona* exceptionally given over to dancing: "as a married woman who is prompted to dance on holidays chastely mingles a bit with the impudent satyrs" (*ars* 232–233). A scholiast under the name of Ps.-Acro comments matter-of-factly that married women (*matronae*) danced during the festival of Magna Mater: "there are in fact certain cults, in which married women dance, such as during the sacrifices for the Mother of the Gods."³¹

Dancing *matronae* can also be assumed for the cult of Bona Dea, although the evidence for dancing as a component of the nocturnal ritual reserved for women is somewhat thin. One of the main sources, Plutarch's *Life of Caesar* 9–10, recounts how a male intruder – Clodius, the secret lover of Caesar's wife Pompeia, who dressed as a female harper (*psaltria*) for the occasion – is eventually discovered when he does not accept the invitation of a woman to play, or dance, with him: the word is *paizein*, which means more often "to dance" than "to play an instrument."³²

28 Dion. Hal. *Ant.* 7.72.5–11, based on Fabius Pictor (who apparently did not mention the *ludiones*). According to Bernstein 2007, 228–229, the representation of the people at large is also a specifically Roman element.

29 Iulius Obsequens 44a mentions them for the year 101 BCE; Val. Max. 7.7.6 for 77 BCE. See Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 140–143 and 283–284.

30 The Curetes were often associated with the Corybantes, followers of the Magna Mater (Strab. 10.3.12).

31 *ars* 232–233: *ut festis matrona moveri iussa diebus / intererit Satyris paululum pudibunda protervis*; Ps.-Acro ad loc.: *sunt enim quaedam sacra, in quibus saltant matronae, sicut in sacrificiis Matris deum*. On the participation of women in the cult of the Mother goddess, see Borgeaud 1996, 165. Alonso Fernández 2011, 224 n. 402 suggests that the scholion might refer to the cult of Bona Dea.

32 LSJ s. v. 2) dance; 4) play on a musical instrument; dance and sing. Plu. *Caes.* 9.4: "And the most important rites are celebrated by night, when merrymaking is added to the nocturnal festival and a lot of music is played as well." 10.2: "as he (sc. Clodius dressed as a *psaltria*) was prowling in the

On other occasions, mature women may have joined maidens in their dances. Horace's Ode 2.12, which celebrates the poet's mistress Licymnia, portrays her as dancing in honour of Diana on the occasion of the latter's festival, not without hinting, via *litotes*, at a tension between Licymnia (a typical name for a *hetaera*) and the maidens who danced for the chaste goddess (lines 17–20):

*quam nec ferre pedem dedecuit choris
nec certare ioco nec dare bracchia
ludentem nitidis virginibus sacro
Dianae celebris die.*

For her it brought no disgrace to bring her foot in the choruses, nor to compete in fun nor to give her arms as she played with the radiant maidens on the sacred day of Diana's crowded worship. (Trans. Curtis 2017, 115)³³

Festus reports that on March 1, the *Salii* were accompanied by girls, the *Saliae virgines*, who performed the sacrifice and perhaps also the dances with the priests. By the late Republic they were hired (*conducticias*) for the occasion of the ritual, but they may originally have been aristocratic maidens with priestly functions.³⁴ For the year 207, Livy mentions a chorus of twenty-seven girls, who performed a dance on the forum to avert danger.³⁵ Augustus' secular games of the year 17 BCE featured a mixed chorus composed of 27 boys and 27 girls (*virgines lectas puerosque castos*) who performed Horace's *carmen saeculare* – certainly with reference to the ritual of 207 BCE.³⁶ The inscription of the Severan secular games also mentions girls (and boys, if the integration of the line is correct) performing a song (line 235):

*pueri et puel]LAE PALLIOLATAE CVM DISCRIMINALIBVS, MANIBVS CONNEXIS,
CA[rm]EN C[ecinerunt nove compositum*

boys and girls, adorned with mantles and hair-pins, having joined their hands sang a newly composed song.

large house and trying to avoid the lights, an attendant of Aurelia came upon him and asked him to dance (*παίζειν*), as one woman would another, and when he refused, she dragged him forward and asked who he was, and where from." The incident is mentioned also at Cic. *Sest.* 116; *har. resp.* 4–5 and 37. Mastrocinque 2014 emphasises the overlap between the cult of Bona Dea and Dionysism, which might point to the inclusion of dancing.

- 33 The metapoetic overtones Licymnia's name, which used to be interpreted as a pseudonym for Maecenas' wife Terentia, are discussed by Harrison 2017, 148–149; Curtis 2017, 118–119.
- 34 Festus p. 439, 18–22 Lindsay; cf. CIL 6, 2177, an epitaph on a young woman called *praesula*. See Alonso Fernández 2011, 268; Glinister 2011, 112–113.
- 35 27.37.14: *in foro pompa constitit, et per manus reste data virgines sonum vocis pulsu pedum modulantes incesserunt*; 31.12.8. See Prescendi and Curtis in this volume; Curtis 2021.
- 36 See Schnegg 2020, 247–264; Curtis 2017, 149–158; Habinek 2005, 150–157. The quote is line 6 of the *Carmen saeculare*.

The words that interest us are *manibus conexis*, a seemingly unspectacular detail but in antiquity an unambiguous shorthand for dancing (see Bellia in this volume).³⁷

The examples of dancing in Roman culture adduced so far belong to religious contexts. Servius mentions dancing in Roman religion as a matter of course, rooted in the body and sanctioned by ancient custom. He writes that “our ancestors did not want any part of our body not to feel *religio*; in fact, song pertains to the spirit, and dance pertains to the mobility of the body” (*sane ut in religionibus saltaretur, haec ratio est, quod nullam maiores nostri partem corporis esse voluerunt, quae non sentiret religionem: nam cantus ad animum, saltatio ad mobilitatem pertinet corporis*, Serv. Ecl. 5.73).³⁸ On this view, religious practice derives from primeval biological conditions, and among them is physical movement. The most basic property of the living body is that it moves and is mobile. The newborn, in order to take her first breath, must move, and once dead, the body is distinguished by its irrevocable immobility and rigidity. Movement in turn encompasses and characterises the entire living body. By anchoring dance in this simple experiential fact, Servius suggests that there is a strong connection between physical movement, sensation, and religious practice, a view that finds support in cross-cultural studies of religion.³⁹ The idea that there should be “no part of our body not to feel *religio*” implies that the attention, care, and observation that characterise *religio* are ideally felt in and through the body, and dance is their physical expression.⁴⁰

Servius distinguishes furthermore between dance as part of religious practice and dance as an art or a skill, characterising the former precisely in opposition to the latter. Commenting on Virgil’s first *Georgic* 1.347–350 (“And let no one apply the sickle to the ripe ears before adorning his temples with plaited oak branches and performing disordered dance movements for Ceres and singing songs”), Servius notes: “disordered movements’, that is, a dance connected to religion and not coming from any art whatsoever” (*motus incompósitos id est saltationem aptam religioni, nec ex ulla arte uenientem*). Servius’ distinction, which associates cultic dancing with the spontaneous, untutored physical expression of reverence, seems rather modern and clashes with the abovementioned accounts of ritual dances consisting of regular patterns of movement that could be learned and brought to perfection. Rather than indicating a clear-cut dichotomy

37 See Schnegg 2020, 324 and 389. Bärbel Schnegg drew my attention to an ingenious conjecture made by Giovanni Battista Pighi, who integrated a mere three letters in line 260, VAV, as *antr] uau]erunt* – “they danced” (see Schnegg 2020, 330 and 392; the subject is *matronae*).

38 See Alonso Fernández 2011, 184; Wille 1967, 187 assumes that Servius’ source is Varro. The line in Vergil is *saltantis Satyros imitabitur Alphesiboeus*.

39 See, e. g., Corrigan 2008 and 2017; Brandstetter 2016; Binder 2019; Schlapbach 2021.

40 On Roman dance as an intensified form of prayer, see Patzelt 2018, 178–213; Klinghardt 2011; Hahn 2007, 236–237.