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Robert Mullally, *The Carole. A Study of a Medieval Dance*. Farnham: Ashgate and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. xvi + 148 pp. Plates, bibliography, and index. \$99.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4094-1248-9.

Review by Constant J. Mews, Monash University, Australia.

The study of dance, especially in the medieval period, has tended to be rather a specialist pursuit, conducted by those enthusiastic about its performance rather than integrated into a wider vision of cultural history. This relatively slim volume about the circular dance form known in medieval French as the *carole* (in Latin, *chorea*) is a carefully documented study of all known references to that type of dance in French literature, as well as to its iconography within French literary manuscripts, especially those containing the *Roman de la Rose*, initiated by Guillaume de Lorris and continued by Jean de Meun. As a study of this literature, in particular of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Mullally's monograph is meticulous. It opens with an observation, not widely appreciated, that the term *carole* disappears as a term referring to a dance still being performed after 1400. Mullally's concern is not so much with what the dance signified, or why it would give way to the *basse danse* in the fifteenth century, as with how exactly it was conducted. While the documentation is always precise and carefully presented, this lack of wider perspective may limit its accessibility to those who are not specialists in the field.

There is a strongly philological character to the opening chapters about the history of the term *carole* since c. 1400, its etymology, and its earliest citations and relationship to *chorus* and *chorea*. The study then reflects on the choreography and its reconstruction, with further discussion of its relationship to the more generic terms *bal* and *danse* as well as the linear *tresche*. This is followed by equally well documented chapters on the lyrics (with particular attention to their rhyme structure), the music (about which very little is known with certainty), and its iconography. There are concluding chapters on *carola* and *carole* in Italian and Middle English literature which reinforce the notion that the genre was overwhelmingly French in character. Paradoxically, there is no concluding overview that draws together the significance of the research presented in the monograph. One would appreciate, for example, some reflection on why the simple *carole*—a circular dance, in which participants, sometimes all women, sometimes men and women—fell out of favour. By virtue of its circular form, there was a necessary sense of equality between participants. Did the evolution of more complex forms of dance in the fifteenth century reflect a more sophisticated courtly ethos, different from the egalitarian implications of the *carole*?

While this monograph is immensely thorough in its analysis of references to *carole* in medieval French literature, it does not explore the large Latin literature about *chorea* articulated in commentaries on liturgical practice or in episcopal condemnations of the practice. There are no entries in the index relating to the dances associated with Christmas and Easter (from which Christmas carols derive). The practice of a circular dance is certainly very ancient, as attested by Eastern orthodox communities for whom it is still an established tradition. In the Latin West, it was also customary to dance the *chorea* at major feasts of the Church, as also at funerals (as attested by certain official condemnations, including those of practices of students at the University of Paris). Yet, of this literature we hear very little, except to explain the meaning of *carole* as performed in a secular or vernacular context. One would like to know, for example, whether the genre might have evolved out of an original sacred or paraliturgical context. From the examples discussed, however, it

seems that the circular dance had become the dominant form of entertainment in a wide range of contexts, both inside and outside a court setting in the thirteenth century.

Mullally certainly establishes that the *carole* was a circular dance, against those few speculations to the contrary that it might have been a couple dance. A common feature, condemned by preachers, was that the dance involved a series of side-steps to the left which they interpreted as a sign of its demonic character. Following this study, there can be no doubt that appreciation of the *carole* as an immensely popular form of entertainment provides a context for many French vernacular lyrics, only some of which survive with accompanying melodies.

The author identifies the earliest use of the Latin from which *carole* may have derived in Guibert of Nogent's early twelfth-century autobiography, in which he discussed ancient graves being laid out in a circle, *in modum caraulae*. Yet, the traditional Latin term *chorea* was certainly much older. He claims that "the earliest citation of *chorea* relevant to our purpose is to be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie*" (p. 23) (when speaking about the monuments of Stonehenge as laid out in such a form). The term, classical in origin, would be discussed by Isidore of Seville in the late seventh century as well as by numerous liturgical commentators. Indeed, the circular dance may well date back to before Christianity, but was appropriated by the church, as well as providing an opportunity for vernacular lyrics to develop. Consultation of the database of the Library of Latin Texts would have provided over a hundred uses of the term, including from the period of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the late thirteenth century, Grocheio's account of different kinds of dance is of great value, not just to the specialist wanting to know more about specific types of dance (including the *carole*), but for broader appreciation of the way dance could come to be appreciated by a theorist of music, not just condemned as the work of the devil.

So often in this study, one would like to know more about the broader significance of the *carole*, beyond the simple citation of the word. At what sort of occasion was it performed? Was it always joyful, celebrating life, or could it sometimes have a darker meaning? Dance has always been an underappreciated mode of communication and celebration, enigmatic to the historian because it seems to leave so little textual or visual trace. Yet, thanks to Mullally's study, we are better informed about the prevalence of a dance that certainly made medieval people happy. Did people stop dancing in circles after 1400? This seems unlikely, but the issue is not explored. This is a study that raises many questions that still have to be answered.

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