

## The *Bele Alis* Sermon: Homiletic Song and Dance<sup>1</sup>

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The *Bele Alis* sermon is innovative — even daring — in a number of ways. It speaks to us in the modes of poetry and preaching, and tells us of the importance of dancing and singing, in a short text of intricate structure in which words, images, languages, and ideas are interwoven in dense and rhythmic fashion — “that we may be able to dance to God” as the preacher would have it in sentence eight.<sup>2</sup>

Popular material in the vernacular has been utilized in Latin religious texts throughout the medieval period. Jacques de Vitry enlivened his sermons with vernacular proverbs or with figures taken from popular romance, epic, or lyric, but only as colourful adjuncts to his message, in order to gain his listeners’ attention, or to use as cautionary examples of behaviour to be avoided. On one occasion he even used the *Bele Alis* figure in a parodic vein, as a negative model to illustrate the dangers of a vain life.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, a Middle

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1 This article began as a graduate research seminar directed by Robert A. Taylor, with major investigative input from Wendy Pfeffer and Lys Ann Weiss leading to a joint presentation at the Fifteenth International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1980. Further research has now been undertaken in light of continued scholarly interest in the sermon, the results of which are dedicated to our friend and colleague Brian Merrilees, who has long been engaged in the study of texts at the interface of Latin and French.

2 Psalm 150 exhorts us to “praise him [God] . . . in the dance” (*laudate eum . . . in choro*).

3 In “Algunos aspectos de la lírica medieval,” 32-33, Alvar quotes from Jacques de Vitry about the use of popular profane material to wake up his listeners “quando fatigati et tedio affecti incipiunt dormitare.” Exempla were commonly used also by Humbert of Romans, Alan of Lille *et al.* Specifically, Jacques de Vitry tells of St. Bernard’s sister going to visit him “cum pompa magna et ornamentu superfluo”; the monks refuse her entrance, and Jacques compares the story to one of the *Bele Alis* songs which finishes, “et deable l’en ont emportee.” See further Hunt, “De la chanson au sermon,” 436. Oiseuse in the *Roman de la Rose* is described in similar negative fashion, spending all day getting dressed up.

English sermon begins with a rather rowdy popular song “At wrestling my lover I chose . . .,” which is then explicated in English on a moralizing level, again stressing the need for repentance.<sup>4</sup> To these negative moralizing uses the *Bele Alis* sermon counterpoises a positive moralizing instance. It takes as its text a very popular vernacular *ron-det de carole*, decidedly secular — possibly licentious — in nature. No censure is attached to the song, or to the dance, or to Fair Alis herself.<sup>5</sup> These poeticized elements of real life, not bad in themselves, require only thoughtful exegesis to be directed properly to sacred ends, in particular to a Marian “mystical” reading.

The early attribution of the sermon to Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury (1206-1228), was challenged by Lecoy de la Marche,<sup>6</sup> but his reasons, based on an indirect reference to contemporary history in a text found close to the sermon in the Paris manuscript, do not stand up to scrutiny; Roberts noted the controversy but was careful not to pronounce;<sup>7</sup> Schneyer did not question the attribution;<sup>8</sup> Reichl concluded that the sermon might well be by Langton;<sup>9</sup> Zink pointed out the weakness of Lecoy’s reasoning, but continued to doubt the attribution, with no explanation;<sup>10</sup> Hunt followed Zink’s opinion.<sup>11</sup> In the absence of proof, while not denying the possibility that the ascription may prove to be authentic, we have opted to call the author “Pseudo-Langton.”

Our preacher’s positive spiritual reading of secular song and dance might cause surprise to a reader who still believes the Middle Ages to be irreducibly dichotomous, irreconcilably dialectical. Such a reader could express delight that a cleric of Aquinas’s parents’ or grandparents’ generation could preach such things, and that a congregation of his fellows could concur. Consider sentiments such as those of the opening benediction: “Grant that He who was born of the lineage of David / Guide us all to good and

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4 Edited by Förster; discussion of this and another similar English sermon featuring “wicked looks” and “bare breasts” in Regan, “Liturgy and Preaching,” 168; fuller presentation in Brown, “Texts and the Man,” 106-107.

5 Many clerics and preachers railed against the sinfulness of popular performances: Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric*, 15, quotes Lactantius in the fourth century concerning the “utterly shameless movements of the actors,” among hundreds of other condemnations of acting, singing, and dancing throughout the medieval period; see also Page, *Voices and Instruments*, 77-81, 89-90, 202-203.

6 Lecoy de la Marche, *La Chaire française au Moyen Age*, 93.

7 Roberts, *Stephanus de Lingua-Tonante*, 24.

8 Schneyer, *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones*, 468, n. 32.

9 Reichl, *Religiöse Dichtung*, 387.

10 Zink, *La Prédication en langue romane*, 42.

11 Hunt, “De la chanson au sermon,” 439.

true songs,” and a little further on: “lay aside the perverse elements in good things,” and still further, “When I say *Fair Alis*, you know that dancing was first devised for vanity. . . . In order, therefore, that we may be able to dance to God . . . .” These might even be termed “transformative” by our modern reader. Pseudo-Langton places these statements within the initial fifth of his sermon, inviting his listeners to prepare their hearts (or, as we would say, minds)<sup>12</sup> for the sophisticated Marian exegesis which is to follow. It is an effective rhetorical strategy to catch their attention; for not only is he about to ask them to be active hearers of his words, but, rather than telling them what to think, he will provide them with a technique to use when thinking. These are clearly people who are not expected to “leave their brains at the door,” as modern ecclesiastical jargon would have it. The intellectual charge he puts to his congregation is indeed significant, respects their intellects, and allows them considerable freedom (more on this below).

The wish in the invocation is fulfilled immediately by *Fair Alis*, for she (the lyric) is offered as one of those “good and true songs.” As with all things of this world, she is not in herself perfect, but requires refining, in this case through exegesis, so that “the perverse elements in good things,” specifically in this “good thing,” *Fair Alis*, may be laid aside. She is light and tripping, but Pseudo-Langton does not condemn her for it. Yes, he plainly asserts that dancing was “first devised for vanity,” but note the temporal modifier “first”: “that was then, this is now.” Terpsichore worshipping God was clearly an approved exegesis for at least one literate cleric of the early thirteenth century.

Pseudo-Langton calls on his congregation not docilely to say as he says, but to reason as he reasons. He provides no approved and improving *contrafact* for *Bele Alis*, in contrast to the strategy attributed in the later fourteenth century to Richard Ledrede, the Franciscan Bishop of Ossory (c.1317 - c.1361). Ledrede’s lyrics in the *Red Book of Ossory* seem to have been intended in some instances — possibly even most — to replace the lyrics in the secular songs sung by his clerks.<sup>13</sup> If so, those Absolons (Ledrede’s clerks) may have had little choice in the words they put to their favourite tunes. Pseudo-Langton offers his congregation a choice, for he asks them to be their own exegetes and shows them how: change not the words of your song, but imbue them with mystically informed readings through the different “senses” of scripture, much like those provided by contemporary interpreters of the *Song of Songs*.<sup>14</sup>

12 For the changing imagery of the physiology of “mind / heart / soul / conscience / memory,” see Jager, *The Book of the Heart*, 5; also Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 48-49.

13 Colledge, *The Latin Poems of Richard Ledrede*, xxxvi-xl. For other examples of pious *contrafacta* of secular lyric, see Bec, “Lyrique profane et paraphrase pieuse.”

14 Surveyed in Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved*, and Astell, *The Song of Songs*.

He writes, “Wholly fair are you, my friend, and there is not a blemish on you [Cant. 4:7]. This is Fair Alis . . . of whom it is thus said: Just as a lily among thorns, so is my friend among the daughters [of Zion] [Cant. 2:2] . . . she is the Queen of Justice, the Mother of Mercy.”

Choice is offered in the particular images which individuals may choose to develop, in the particular biblical or patristic connections they trace, in the moral lessons they derive when uncovering the Virgin beneath Fair Alis’s raiment.<sup>15</sup> Pseudo-Langton has given his auditors a model they can apply to any vernacular lyric. This is certainly a more sophisticated strategy than feeding them the *contrafact* words they may sing.

Pseudo-Langton’s sermon has until now chiefly been studied because it presents a reading of an Old French lyric cited elsewhere. Among surviving sermons of its vintage it is considered a relative rarity because its Old French lyric quotations are embedded in a Latin matrix. It may, however, not have struck contemporaries as rare for that reason. It was quite common at the time for preachers to take some quotidian aspect of life as the starting point for a homily, such as the cutting of a quill pen, or the various stages in the preparation of a book.<sup>16</sup> Aspects of an object, process, or social relationship were realistically delineated — the subject had, after all, to be recognizable to the congregation — before allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses were explicated. In the context of thirteenth-century homiletics, *Bele Alis* is just such a quotidian object, no more and no less.

A knowledge of that same context cautions us to be wary of dogmatic statements about the language in which *Bele Alis* could have been delivered. Its bilingual character is so basic to modern conceptions of the piece that many doubt it could have had any other linguistic form. The Latin etymologies provided by Pseudo-Langton are most often seen as buttressing that view. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century practice, however, tells a different tale. Giraldus Cambrensis (c. 1146-1223), on tour in Wales (1188) with Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury, to promote the Third Crusade, remarks several times that when members of his party preached in Latin or French, Alexander, Archdeacon of Bangor, translated their words into Welsh. A text delivered in Latin or French was therefore received by many — perhaps the majority — in Welsh.<sup>17</sup> Had Archbishop Baldwin or Gerald employed either Latin or French etymologies, Alexander would have

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15 The great variation found in the exegesis of similar themes is a notable characteristic of much twelfth- and thirteenth-century homiletic; for examples drawn from the symbolism of scribal production, see Rosenfeld, “Symbolism of Writing.”

16 E.g., Goering and Rosenfeld, “The Tongue is a Pen”; Rosenfeld, “Symbolism of Writing.”

17 See Dimock, “Itinerarium Kambriae,” 55, 83.

had to make them immediately intelligible in the local vernacular.<sup>18</sup> Learned Latin sermons, some macaronic, may have been delivered before “mixed” audiences more often than is now realized.<sup>19</sup> A striking conceptual parallel occurs in two sermons attributed to Peter Comestor (d.1179/1189) which employ the imagery of medieval book and document production, a collection of processes that would have been familiar to many clerks at the time. The texts of the sermons, however, enjoin all, even the *illiterate*, to become scribes, writing the divine precepts on the parchment that is their hearts.<sup>20</sup>

### The Song

Instead of following the traditional practice of basing his sermon on a quotation from the Bible, Pseudo-Langton has chosen as text a popular dance song about a beautiful maiden who rises early, dresses carefully, and goes out into the garden to pick flowers for a garland.<sup>21</sup> The song is found in a great number of variations throughout France and England, and must have been well known to both the preacher and his audience, since the mere mention of *Bele Alis* suffices to bring forward the notion of dancing and vanity with no need for further explanation.<sup>22</sup> The song itself is sensual, especially in some of its other variations; while never entirely spelled out, the meagre story line seems to involve an amorous encounter in which the maiden is preparing to meet her lover. In particular, the context of flower-picking is broadly suggestive, with the possibilities ranging from sexual adventure<sup>23</sup> to the symbolic garland of red roses as part of traditional folk marriage ceremonies, to the garland of lilies symbolizing the purity of virgins taking their vows as they enter into spiritual marriage with Jesus.<sup>24</sup> Lewis believed that the

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18 For Gerald, as for many of his literary contemporaries, etymology was a commonplace of explication; see Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 209.

19 Longère, *La Prédication médiévale*, 161-64 (various opinions are reported); Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric*, 18-19; Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons*, 106-29, esp. 115, n. 24.

20 Migne, *Patr. lat.* vol. 198, col. 1740a; vol. 171, col. 815b; Rosenfeld, “Symbolism of Writing”; for interesting material on the simultaneous use of “complementary” languages in legal procedure and record (but with some application to literary texts) see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 207-11.

21 Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, 231, refers to the poem as “a popular ditty,” and calls attention to the novelty of the preacher’s choice of text.

22 See Rokseth, “Danses cléricales”; Page, *Voices and Instruments*; Horowitz, “Les danses cléricales”; Wright, *The Maze and the Warrior*; and Nevile, “Dance Performance,” for further information on medieval dancing.

23 “Cueillir la violette,” for example, is a common medieval euphemism for intercourse; in some of the *Bele Alis* versions, reference is made to maternal warnings of the danger of meeting with *bacheliers*.

24 Laforte, “Les trois *Fleurs d’Amour*,” 217.

popular Alis imagery took its source in the apocryphal Bible story of the visitation to Anna, mother of the Virgin Mary, who washed, put on her bridal apparel, and went into the garden to pray, where she was told by an angel that she was to conceive a child.<sup>25</sup> This hypothesis, although it has not met with wide approval, ought not to be lightly discounted. The apocryphal Gospels were extremely popular throughout the medieval period, and such a striking story as that of Anna could very well have been current, and transmuted into a secular dance song.<sup>26</sup> Should Lewis be proven correct, there would be something attractive in the notion of a legend of St. Anne having become a story of a secular girl, and then having been turned back into a mystical description of Anna's daughter Mary, the mother of Christ. The germs of stories have taken odder turns.

The text of *A's Bele Alis* is apparently not extant in a monophonic setting; it is not among those set to music published by Tischler.<sup>27</sup> It would be relatively easy to adapt *A's* text to the *Bele Alis* music Tischler published, and its original setting was probably similar. The poem itself is noted in abbreviated form in the manuscripts, as was frequently the case; an attempt was made by Gennrich<sup>28</sup> to re-establish the probable form that the song would have taken in its performance as a *carole*. Did our preacher perform it at the beginning of his sermon? Nothing indicates this directly, but the idea is not to be dismissed. Pains were taken from the beginning of the sermon to stress the legitimacy of both singing and dancing in exegetical terms as a form of approach to God, and examples are available to indicate that some animated preachers did in fact sing and dance. It is reported of St. Francis that he "spoke with such great fervor of spirit, that [. . .] when he spoke the words with his mouth, he moved his feet as though he were dancing."<sup>29</sup>

### The Sermon (Architecture)

The sermon reveals an intricate inner structure that depends on echoes and suggestions interlinking the secular song with the Marian interpretation. Even the opening prayer of benediction is designed to lead the audience into the central notion of dancing and singing. The mention of Christ's Davidic lineage in the fifth line of the invocation directly

25 Lewis, "The Origin of the Aalis Songs," 292.

26 Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 48-67, esp. chaps. 2 and 4 (57-58).

27 Tischler, *Trouvère Lyrics*, vol. 14, Rondeau 44. For information on MSS, see note 38 below.

28 Reproduced and discussed by Delbouille, "Sur les traces," 202-203.

29 Regan, *Liturgy and Preaching*, 168-70; music was commonly used by Franciscans (Francis was himself a poet and a musician); some sermon collections contain religious lyrics, even musically scored: see Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, Appendix A, 373-76.

reminds the hearer of David's dancing before the Lord,<sup>30</sup> and the final request of the invocation that Christ lead us to "good and true songs" is to be fulfilled immediately by the *Fair Alis* poem. Within the poem itself are found numerous words and images that reinforce with admirable delicacy and strength the preacher's simple message: Fair Alis is the Virgin Mary.

The reciting (or singing?) of the poem suggests to the homilist "idle words" and "vanity," justifying his statement that our moral duty is to "lead vanity back to truth." Dancing may have been first devised for vanity, but when dancing becomes an instrument of Christian ethics, it is found to symbolize three basic Christian works — teaching men ("sonorous voice"), loving God and neighbour ("entwining of arms"), and harmonizing actions to words ("stamping of feet"). Even the designation of "fair" in *Fair Alis* is linked to the Virgin, through Mary's traditional association with the beauty of the Bride in the *Song of Songs*: "fair are you . . . there is not a blemish on you." The word *blemish* in turn leads into a typical medieval etymology in which *Alis*, already linked to flowers and to the lily, is derived from *a* ("without") and *lis* ("lily" in French, "strife" in Latin, which Pseudo-Langton equates with "impurity"), a perfect descriptor of the flawless Virgin. The word *garden* from the poem leads to the word-play commonly attached to Mary: *virgo* / *virga* / *virgultum* ("virgin / shoot / orchard").<sup>31</sup> "Garden / orchard" in turn suggests "fruit," thence Jesus who is "the fruit of [the Virgin's] womb." At the end, the song's refrain is turned into a curse on blasphemers: "Depart . . ." from the song echoes the words of Christ, condemning disbelievers to the fires of hell, a curse repeated here just as it is in the Bible (Matt. 25:41-43). It may be tempting to relate this final image to another version of the *Bele Alis* poem in which the vain maiden is carried off by devils, but we cannot be sure that our preacher knew this version of the song.

### Medieval Texts Glimpsed through Pseudo-Langton's *Speculum*

The main significance of the *Bele Alis* sermon now lies in what it suggests about the intertextuality of polytextual motets; specifically, it offers a model for how some in the early thirteenth century might have interpreted the concurrent voices of motets. According

30 2 Sam. 6:14. In Pseudo-Langton's time, even respectable minor prelates could be found dancing by custom in some important liturgical spaces: see Wright, *The Maze and the Warrior*, 138-51 (evidence chiefly post-thirteenth century); Horowitz, "Les danses cléricales"; Nevile, "Dance Performance."

31 This is a traditional, Church-sanctioned play on words found in the Easter Office of the Virgin, justified at length by Hugh of St. Victor: "Quod multiplici ratione Maria dicatur virga," *Patr. lat.*, vol. 177, col. 826-27. Cf. Zink, *La Prédication*, 290.

to this model, the secular text (for example, *Bele Alis* in Pseudo-Langton) does not determine the reading of the religious text (for example, the *Song of Songs* or other texts Pseudo-Langton presents as Marian), but rather the religious text determines the reading of the secular one. Considering Pseudo-Langton's sermon itself as a metaphorical motet can offer a helpful image. If *Bele Alis* stands in for the *triplum* (upper voice), Pseudo-Langton's weaving together of Marian texts is the *motetus* (middle voice) or *tenor* (foundational voice), and it is that lower voice which is the key unlocking the meaning of the *triplum*. Alternatively — and more radically — if one employs a metaphor based on a contemporary *mise-en-page* of biblical commentary, *Bele Alis* is the basic text, written in a larger script and occupying the centre of the bifolio, while the Marian texts provide the commentary, penned in smaller script in the surrounding columns. Other contemporary readings of motets were certainly possible and likely,<sup>32</sup> but the *Bele Alis* sermon attests solely to a Marian one; and it does so with fair science and art.

Curiously, modern literary critics seem unwilling to read the *Bele Alis* sermon against the background of medieval homiletics. Sylvia Huot, in her excellent study of the thirteenth-century motet, unaccountably calls Pseudo-Langton's work a "literary game" to amuse "those trained in the arts of rhetoric and exegesis," for "as the sermon states, *Bele Aalis* is a frivolous and utterly profane text";<sup>33</sup> yet, as seen above, a plain and exact reading of the text shows no such condemnation of *Bele Alis*. A good many Latin parodies of various religious genres survive, nearly all characterized by statements baldly contrary to contemporary doctrine and belief; the *Bele Alis* sermon is not among their number.<sup>34</sup> Huot acknowledges her debt to Michel Zink, who made much of the text being in Latin and necessarily excluding the laity,<sup>35</sup> but the evidence from Gerald of Wales and Peter Comestor demonstrates that such a "necessity" does not necessarily apply to contemporary homiletics. The argument for a frivolous intention — as it were, a leering Pseudo-Langton stamping his feet, entwining his arms with his fellows, and singing with a sonorous voice of *Bele Alis* as the Virgin Mary — is not a strong one.<sup>36</sup> It merely proves that it is possible to be too clever about a clever sermon.

32 Possibilities are surveyed and variously set forth in Page, *Discarding Images*; Pesce, *Hearing the Motet*; Huot, *Allegorical Play*.

33 Huot, *Allegorical Play*, 61 and 192; also 59, 73, and 191.

34 A selection of these can be sampled in Lehmann, *Die Parodie*, 182-257.

35 Huot, *Allegorical Play*, 61, referring to Zink, *La Prédication*, 146-48.

36 Wenzel's perceptive observations on English macaronic sermons written between 1350 and 1450 could apply equally to the *Bele Alis* sermon: "The element of humor or burlesque that is characteristic of humanistic macaronic verses [. . .] does not occur in these sermons at all; they are not *sermons joyeux* but instruments of serious moral exhortation" (Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons*, 11).



## Conclusion

It is no longer possible to think of medieval literature as existing in a series of compartments labelled as to genre or language, or defined as sacred or profane, serious or parodistic, high or low register. To be sure, many medieval treatises attempted to classify and define literary production in this way (after the fact), and early philological investigations followed the same urge until comparatively recent times; but the medieval texts themselves often resisted scholarly attempts to enclose them in rules, and embarrassed researchers by their unpredictable nature, their contradictions, their ambiguity, their tendency to cross boundaries, to mix humour and gravity, courtliness and obscenity, clarity and obscurity. In more recent times, some scholars have gone so far as to suggest that ambiguity, contradiction, and unpredictability were in fact cultivated by some medieval writers as features of their art.<sup>37</sup>

## Editorial Matters

The *Bele Alis* sermon is found in seven manuscripts from the thirteenth century in France and England;<sup>38</sup> the dance-song that serves as its text appears in numerous forms and places throughout northern France and England, and poems similar to it were widespread in English and in several Romance languages from the twelfth century into modern folklore.<sup>39</sup> Reichl offered the first critical edition, based on *A*, using five manuscripts. Hunt, working independently, utilized six manuscripts (plus the seventh in an

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37 Bolduc, *Medieval Poetics*, focuses principally on “the intersection of the sacred and the secular” but has much to say about the general question of ambiguities and contradictions inherent in medieval literature. Particularly interesting in the context of this study are her remarks about the innate hybridism of motets (133). Hans-Robert Jauss was one of the first to draw critical attention to the fact that “a single literary work can be grasped or understood in light of more than one genre” (Jauss, “Littérature médiévale,” 83, here paraphrased by Gravdal, “Poem Unlimited,” 15); Gravdal speaks cogently of “the intergeneric nature of medieval literature” (16); Huot, *Polytextual Reading*, 203, explores the concept of “polytextual reading,” the process by which the reading (or hearing?) of one text “becomes a process of reading multiple ‘virtual’ texts [. . .] produced through intellectual and imaginative processes of memory and association.”

38 For a brief identification of the seven manuscripts, see Hunt, “De la chanson au sermon,” 439 and 450-51; further remarks on five of the manuscripts are found in Reichl, *Religiöse Dichtung*, 380 (contents of MS *T*, 55-58; *A*, 79-81); contents of *P* and *Pa* in Zink, *La Prédication*, 36-37 and 39-42. The manuscript sigla are those of Hunt, “De la chanson au sermon,” 439.

39 See the list of French poems in Van den Boogaard, *Rondeaux et refrains*; *Bele Alis* is rondeau 42, refrain 1506.

appendix), based on *Pa*.<sup>40</sup> Hunt justifies his choice of *Pa* succinctly: “Le texte qui est le plus digne de confiance.”<sup>41</sup> Manuscript *A*, however, has several features that make it at least as interesting as *Pa*, and perhaps even more deserving of our trust:

1. The attribution to Stephen Langton (in *A* and *C*) is still worthy of consideration, pending further evidence (see note 6).<sup>42</sup>
2. *A* alone has the opening benediction, which gives important initial references to the subject matter of the sermon and therefore may be considered part of its architecture: the dangers of the *fraus diabolica* contrasted with the comfort of the *fides catholica* may be a subtle lead-in to the transformation of the profane Alis into the sacred Virgin. The prayer also makes reference to King David (“ex styrype davitica”) and to good and true songs (“bona et vera cantica”), thus providing a lead-in to the thematic importance of dancing and singing, and through “cantica” to the *Song of Songs*, which plays an important part in the allegorical imagery used in the sermon.
3. The sixth sentence, which introduces dance as “primo ad vanitatem inventum” (first devised for vanity) is missing from *Pa* (replaced by “Ergo videamus que sit Bele Aalis,” repeated [mistakenly?] further down). This sentence makes the essential connection between dancing and vanity, and is in fact such a meaningful transition between the notion of “vanity back to truth” of the fifth sentence and the description of the three necessary qualities of dancing in the seventh sentence, fitting so well with the overall architecture of the sermon, that it would be difficult to deny that it belonged to the original text.
4. In sentence eight the words “id est geminam caritatem” (that is a twofold charity), missing from *Pa*, offer a useful link between the notion of intertwining arms in dance and the biblical precept of loving both God and neighbour.
5. In sentence seventeen, the link with Alis is made, whereas it is lost in *Pa*.

On the other hand, *A* is marginally defective in relation to *Pa*: (1) *Pa* adds *concordans voci* at sentence seven, which is effective in explaining the notion of good works

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40 Noting that all surviving manuscripts are defective, Reichl justified his choice of *A* by claiming that it was relatively free of major errors (*Religiöse Dichtung*, 380); he restored the “original” text by incorporating or preferring readings from other witnesses. Hunt (“De la chanson au sermon”) is faithful to the text of *Pa*, indicating all important variants in critical notes. In neither case is the text translated.

41 Hunt, “De la chanson au sermon,” 442.

42 For a brief background to the scholarly debate over Stephen Langton’s possible authorship of the sermon, see Lecoy de la Marche, *La Chaire française au Moyen Age*, 91-94.

harmonizing with one's precepts; (2) in sentence fifteen, the phrasing in *Pa* is clearer and more complete.

The text has been newly established, with only three alterations introduced to emend scribal slips: omission of a repeated *ad* in sentence two; *main se leva* in sentence three for *matin leva* (*se* is correctly used in sentence fourteen and all six of the other manuscripts, *matin* replaces *main* for metrical reasons, as in *V*); addition of a missing *m* in *gem[m]a* of sentence nine. We have preferred not to change the order of sentences ten to eleven, despite the apparent logic of having them follow sentence twelve (and of omitting sentence thirteen).

**Latin Text** — (MS A: London, British Library, MS Arundel 292, fols. 38-39)

1. Sermo magistri Stephani de Langedune, archiepiscopi Cantuariensis, de sancta Maria.
2. Benedictione apostolica:  
Benedicatur gens ecclesiastica.  
Fugiat a nobis fraus diabolica [*Iac. 4:7*]<sup>43</sup>  
et maneat semper fides catholica.  
Ille qui natus est ex stirpe davitica  
perducat nos omnes ad (ad) bona et vera cantica.
3. *Bele Aliz* [*main se*] *leva*  
*sun cors vesti e para,*  
*enz un verger s'en entra,*  
*cink flurettes y truva,*  
*un chapelet fet en a*  
*de rose flurie.*  
*Por deu trahez vus en la,*  
*vus ki ne amez mie.*
4. Legimus quod de omni verbo otioso reddituri sumus Deo rationem in die iudicii. [*Mt. 12:36*]
5. Et ideo debemus errantes corrigere, errores reprimere, prava in bonis exponere, vanitatem ad veritatem reducere [*Act. 14:14*].
6. Cum dico *Bele Aliz*, scitis quod tripudium primo ad vanitatem inventum fuit.
7. Sed in tripudio tria sunt necessaria, scilicet: vox sonora, nexus brachiorum, strepitus pedum.

43 Quoted also by Origen/Rufinus: *Originis Tertia Homilia in Exodum*, 3, in Simonetti and Danieli, eds., *Originis Homiliae*, 106.

8. Ut ergo possimus Deo tripudiare, hec tria in nobis habeamus: vocem sonoram,<sup>44</sup> id est, predicacionem sanctam, gratam Deo et hominibus; nexum brachiorum, id est geminam caritatem, scilicet dilectionem Dei et proximi [*Mt. 22:37-40; Mc. 12:30-31; Lc. 10:27*]; strepitus pedum, id est, opera concordancia nostre predicacioni, ad imitationem Domini nostri Jhesu Christi, qui primo cepit bona facere et postea docere [*Act. 1:1; Iac. 2:16-18*].
9. Deinde videamus que sit *Bele Aliz*. Hec est illa *Bele Aliz* de qua sic dicitur: “Speciosa specialis, preciosa ut gem[m]a, rutilans quasi Lucefer inter sidera . . .”;<sup>45</sup> et alibi: “Tota pulchra es amica mea et macula non est in te.” [*Ct. 4:7*]
10. *Ceste est la Bele Aliz;*  
*ceste est la flur, ceste est le lis,*
11. de qua sic dicitur: Sicut lilium inter spinas, sic amica mei inter filias [*Ct. 2:2*].
12. Et dicitur hoc nomen Aliz ab *a* quod est *sine*, et *lis*, *litis*, quasi *sine lite* sine reprehensione, sine mundana fece. Et hec est regina justicie, mater misericordie.
13. *Ceste est la bele Aliz;*  
*ceste est la flur, ceste est le lis.*
14. Sequitur: . . . *matin se leva,*  
*sun cors vesti e para,*
15. Unde habemus: Adorna thalamum tuum Syon.<sup>46</sup> Ista *Bele Aliz*, id est beata Virgo Maria, adornavit thalamum suum, id est mentis conscientiam, quando concepit Regem Celorum et Dominum.
16. Sequitur: *en un verger s'en entra,*

44 We are reminded of the oft-repeated medieval definition of the perfect voice per Isidore of Seville: *Perfecta autem vox est alta, suavis et clara* (The perfect voice, moreover, is loud, sweet, and clear); Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum* 3.22.14. See also McGee, *The Sound of Medieval Song*, 19-20 and 170.

45 This is reminiscent of the praises and attributes of Mary commonly found in hymns and motet texts; for the latter, see Tischler, *The Earliest Motets*, vols. 1-2. It has not been possible to identify the exact phrases; the passage may be a confected epitome of such texts. The allusion Hunt detected (“De la chanson au sermon,” 444, n. 2) to the antiphon *Maria virgo assumpta est . . . stellato sedet solio* from the York Breviary seems unusually faint; in any case, the York Breviary is a late source of the 14th or 15th century; Hughes, *Lambeth Palace*, 2:762-63. The Barnwell Antiphoner (a Use of Sarum) is temporally more appropriate, but the suggested allusion is hardly strengthened; Frere, *Graduale Sarisburiense*, vol. 7:499.

46 This is the opening of a poem ascribed to Abelard (as noted by Reichl, *Religiose Dichtung*, 383): *Patrologia latina* 178, col. 1792-93. As Hunt notes in “De la chanson au sermon,” 444, n. 16, it is the response for the first lesson of the first nocturn at Matins of the Presentation of the Virgin: Hughes, *Lambeth Palace*, vol. 2, 622. The text also appears in Sarum for the Feast of the Purification of the BVM: see Frere, *Graduale Sarisburiense*, 180-81.

17. Ista *Bele Aliz*, de qua sic dicitur, est virgo, virga, virgultum: virgo, unde habemus: Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium [*Is 7:14; Lc 1:31*]; virga: Egredietur virga de radice Jesse [*Is 11:1*]; virgultum: cuius fructum agnovimus per annunciationem angeli, dicentis: “Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui.” [*Lc 1:42*]<sup>47</sup>
18. Sequitur: *cinck flurettes i truva,*
19. Quinque flores<sup>48</sup> invenit in virgulto isto ista *Bele Aliz*, qui nec ardore arescunt, nec calore marcescunt, nec ymbribus suffocantur.
20. Que sunt hii flores? Fides, spes, caritas, [*1 Cor 13:13*] virginitas, humilitas.<sup>49</sup> Quicumque habebit hos flores in se, habebit coronam de lapide precioso.
21. Sequitur: *un chapelet fait en a,  
de rose flurie.*
22. *Par le chapelet* debemus intelligere coronam auream quam imposuit Deus super capud eius quando constituit eam Reginam Reginarum.<sup>50</sup>
23. Sequitur: *Pur Deu treez vus en la,  
vus ke ne amez mie.*
24. Quibus dictum est hoc: “*Treez vus en la, vus ke ne amez mie*”? — hereticis, paganis et falsis christianis qui non credunt Christi resurrectionem et qui blasphemant eum,
25. Talibus dictum est: “*Treez vus en la, vus ke ne amez mie*,” id est: “Ite maledicti in ignem eternum qui preparatus est diabolo et angelis eius!” [*Mt. 25:41*]
26. “Esurivi enim et non dedistis mihi manducare, sitivi et non dedistis mihi bibere, nudus fui et non cooperuistis me, hospes fui et non suscepistis me, infirmus fui et non visitastis me, in carcere fui et non venistis ad me.” [*Mt. 25:42-43*]
27. Talibus dictum est hoc: *Treez vus en la, vus ki ne amez mie*, id est: “Ite maledicti in ignem eternum qui preparatus est diabolo et angelis eius!” [*Mt. 25:41*]

47 The second line of the Hail Mary, doubtless familiar to Pseudo-Langton’s audience from its use in Marian festal liturgies and in their own private devotions.

48 See the commentary by Laforte, “*Les trois Fleurs d’Amour*,” 212, n. 3, who notes that the five flowers were commonly associated with the five senses, whose sinfulness was expiated by Jesus with His five wounds. The audience would undoubtedly have made the link between secular and sacred through the shared symbol of the crown / garland: the crown of roses was used in the traditional marriage ceremony, the crown of lilies in the spiritual marriage of virgins taking their vows upon entry into religious orders.

49 A somewhat unusual grouping. A version of it — “*fides, spes, dilectio Dei et proximi, castitas, humilitas*” (faith, hope, the love of God and neighbour, chastity, humility) — is found in the commentary on Isaiah now attributed to Haimo of Auxerre: *Patrologia latina* 116, col. 982a.

50 On the theme of the Coronation of the Virgin, see Fiero, *Three Medieval Views*, 115, note 16.

28. Per predicta patet que ista est *Bele Aliz* de qua prediximus, est Regina Justicie, Mater Misericordie, que portavit Regum Celorum et Dominum, qui cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto vivit et regnat, Deus. Amen.

### English Translation

1. Sermon of Master Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, on Saint Mary.
2. With the episcopal blessing:  
Grant that the people of the Church be blessed.  
Let diabolical deceit flee from us  
And the Catholic faith abide forever.  
Grant that He who was born of the lineage of David  
Guide us all to good and true songs.
3. *Fair Alis arose early,  
dressed and prepared herself,  
went into a garden,  
found there five flowers,  
made of them a garland  
of rose blossoms.  
In God's name depart,  
you who do not love.*
4. We read that on the Day of Judgement we will have to render to God an account of every idle word.
5. And so we ought to correct those who stray, curb errors, lay aside the perverse elements in good things, and lead vanity back to truth.
6. When I say "Fair Alis," you know that dancing was first devised for vanity;
7. yet in dancing three things are necessary, namely: a sonorous voice, the entwining of arms, and stamping of feet.<sup>51</sup>
8. In order, therefore, that we may be able to dance to God, we must possess these three things in us: a sonorous voice, that is, holy preaching, pleasing both to

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51 This is possibly the origin of the term for the musical dance(s) called *estampie* / *estampida* / *stantipes*. Some striking iconographic parallels to Pseudo-Langton's "three things" necessary for dance survive; e.g., New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 638, Morgan Bible / Maciejowski Bible, Paris, c.1250, fol. 9r (rejoicing Israelites); London, British Library, MS Add. 42130, Luttrell Psalter, East Anglia, c.1325-1335, fol. 164v (dancers outside the walls of Constantinople). In the first image the dancers are presumably singing, while in the later example loud instruments fulfill the function of the "sonorous voice."

God and to men; the entwining of arms, that is, a twofold charity, namely, the love of God and neighbour; and the stamping of feet, that is, works harmonizing with our preaching, in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who undertook first to do good works, and then to teach.

9. Next let us see what sort of person is this Fair Alis. She is that Fair Alis of whom it is thus said: “Most beautiful of the beautiful, precious as a jewel, glowing like the Morning Star among the constellations”; and elsewhere: “Wholly fair are you, my friend, and there is not a blemish on you.”
10. *This is Fair Alis;*  
*this is the flower, this is the lily,*
11. of whom it is thus said: “Just as a lily among the thorns, so is my friend among the daughters [of Zion].”
12. And it is said that this name *Alis* is derived from *a* [i.e., “away from”], that is, *sine* [i.e., “without”], and *lis, litis* [i.e., “strife”], as if to say “without strife,” “without blame,” “without worldly impurity.” And she is the Queen of Justice, the Mother of Mercy.
13. *This is Fair Alis;*  
*this is the flower, this is the lily.*
14. Then follows: . . . *arose early,*  
*dressed and prepared herself,*
15. Whence we have: “Prepare your bridal chamber, O Zion.” This Fair Alis, that is, the Blessed Virgin Mary, prepared her bridal chamber, that is, the conscience of the mind, when she conceived the King and Lord of Heaven.
16. Then follows: *went into a garden,*
17. That Fair Alis, of whom it is thus said, [that she] is a virgin, a shoot, an orchard. A virgin, whence we have: “Behold, a virgin will conceive and bring forth a son”; a shoot: “a shoot shall go forth from the root of Jesse”; and an orchard, whose fruit we recognize through the annunciation of the angel saying: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”
18. Then follows: *found there five flowers,*
19. That Fair Alis found five flowers in that orchard, which are neither parched by burning heat, nor withered by a hot wind, nor killed by the drowning rain.
20. What are these flowers? Faith, hope, charity, virginity, and humility. Whoever shall possess these flowers in himself, shall possess a crown of precious stones.
21. Then follows: *made of them a garland*  
*of rose blossoms.*

22. By the garland we ought to understand the golden crown which God placed on her head when He appointed her Queen of Queens.
23. Then follows: *In God's name depart,*  
*you who do not love.*
24. To whom is this said: "*Depart, you who do not love,*" but to heretics, pagans, and false Christians who do not believe in the resurrection of Christ and who blaspheme him,
25. To such it was said: "*Depart, you who do not love,*" that is: "Go, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels!"
26. "For I was hungry and you did not give me anything to eat, I was thirsty and you did not give me anything to drink, I was naked and you did not clothe me, I was a stranger and you received me not, I was ill and you did not visit me, I was imprisoned and you did not come to me."
27. To such this was said: "*Depart, you who do not love,*" that is: "Go, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels!"
28. Through what has been said, it is evident that this is the Fair Alis, about whom we have spoken; she is the Queen of Justice, the Mother of Mercy, who bore the King and Lord of Heaven, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, [world without end].<sup>52</sup> Amen.

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<sup>52</sup> The rest of the customary doxology is supplied here from C; see Hunt, "De la chanson au sermon," 447, n. 3.



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