

**A Presentation of “Prenes in Gre de Duobus” – Dance #7 found in the Gresley Manuscript
c. 1500, England**

Presented by Baroness Isabella Beatrice della Rosa called “Belle”

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Intent for Today’s Performance

Today I will present to you a modern interpretation of Dance #7, “Prenes in Gre de Duobus” found in the Gresley Manuscript. I present to you an example of notation from the original notebook this was taken from as well as an example of the music found to accompany 8 of the 26 dances described on the primary source.¹ The music we will be dancing to is the original music found to accompany this dance. Please note, the music bar was modified to fit the dance choreography and better conforms to modern music standards which allow current musicians a better ability to read the music. The instrument used by my accompanist is a modern violin, however, it is a direct descendant of the early modern *viola de gamba*, known to be played in Italy in the early 16th century. I would like to extend my gratitude to my partner, Lord Tarien Dane, and to my accompanist, Anna Larson. Without these two people, my presentation would be flat and without music!

¹ I was unable to obtain a facsimile of the exact dance I will be reproducing today, despite multiple requests to the Derbyshire Records Office to send me one. Instead, I have included an example of the original manuscript found in David Fallow’s article.

Background

In 1996, David Fallows, a professor of Musicology at the University of Manchester, was following a lead on some music a colleague alerted him to, when he made a very significant discovery. This music was written down in a notebook found in a series of papers belonging to the Gresley of Drakelow family and housed in the Derbyshire Records Office. Included in this notebook were Latin treatises on Chiromancy (palm reading) and Physiognomy, drawings of hands, Latin prayers, and a series of dances that are considered the earliest known evidence of dances in England. The apparent owner of the notebook, Johnes Banys (also listed as Banis), wrote down a list of 91 dances in alphabetical order. 26 dances listed had subsequent choreography written down and 8 of the 26 dances included matching music notation. Dr. Fallows was able to estimate the date of the notebook to 1500 +/- 20 years based on the watermarks found on the notebook paper, references to correspondence with known noblemen of the area, and the fact the prayers were written in Latin; suggesting it was written before Henry VIII established the Church of England in 1534. This makes it the earliest known example of dance in England.² To date, the extant evidence of early modern dance in England has consisted of a group of dances written on the flyleaf of a book printed in 1497, and a dance treatise of French Bassa Dances written by Robert Copeland in 1521.³ Neither examples fully explain dance steps or choreography and the next available treatise of English dance was John Playford's "The English Dancing Master" written in 1651.

The dances, themselves, provide a unique perspective into English Dance during the 16th century. While Dr. Fallows asserted that the Gresley dances were heavily influenced by the French Basse dances and terminology⁴, Jennifer Nevile, a lecturer of music and dance at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, argued that (while French influence cannot be denied) these dances are more influenced by

² Fallows, David. "The Gresley Dance Collection c. 1500." Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle No. 29 (1996): 1-20.

³ Nevile, Jennifer. "Dance in Early Tudor England: an Italian Connection?" Early Music May 1998: 231.

⁴ Fallows, 1.

Italian balli and choreography. She supported her argument for an Italian connection based on the similarity of Banys' English dance steps to Italian counterparts, and the variety of directional indicators which are not apparent in the French choreography of the time. Regardless of any continental influence, the dance steps found in the Gresley Manuscript include uniquely English terms not found elsewhere during this time. This shows a sophisticated dance style with a catalog of 15 unique and arguably English dance steps and a range of directional notation.⁵ However, because there was no additional information that was noted with the list of dances and choreographies, it is impossible to ascertain the class of English people who would have participated in these dances in 1500. The influence of Italian and French suggest that these dances might have been performed by the nobility, but there is no additional evidence to support this. Further, there is no proof to determine if these were social dances meant as a means to interact in court, or if these were performance pieces. The author appeared to have a working knowledge of dance steps and style. His choreography notation is condensed and written in a type of shorthand suggesting he referred to them as a reference rather than a teaching tool. Because of this, there is a strong argument that he was a dance instructor and attached to the Gresley family to teach dance to members of the household. However, there is no additional information on the author and his relationship to the Gresley of Drakelow family. Without any additional information on Banys, there is no way to know for certain what his role was and it would be dangerous to omit the idea that these dances may have been meant for revels or masks as performance pieces.⁶

Another unique feature of the Gresley Manuscript is the musical notation listed for 8 of the 26 dances that also included choreography. Both Fallows and Nevile wrote of the monophonic notation found in the notebook. Nevile noted in her subsequent article "Dance Steps and Music in the Gresley Manuscript" that in the margins of the pages containing the choreographic instructions "there are a

⁵ Nevile, Italian 232.

⁶ Fallows, 3-4.

series of numbers which appear to refer to the repeat indications above the music.”⁷ Further examination of the music and margin notation reveals that the music and choreography was not necessarily intended to match exactly and that the flexibility of the music with the dance “could have been a practical response to their use of pre-existing tunes for their newly devised dances.”⁸

Original Piece to Draw Upon

[Noted in an index created by the Derbyshire Records office as: Prenes in gre; music on p. 74, no.5, headed ‘Prenes in gre 2’ and with subtitle ‘Alas the herd wihill that I coth dans’]

the trace

Trace Forthright vi singlis; ather torn other aboute, and forthright vi singlis agen. After the end of the trace, rak both togeder and torne/ Then face to face vi singlis, ethir contrary oder, and iii retrettes ayen/ Then a flowredelice of both at onys/ Then change places and torne face to face / Then a flowredelice and come togeder

My Modern English Translation

The “trace” (Initial Dance Steps)

Trace forward 6 singles; turn the other person about, and forward 6 singles again. After the end of the trace, perform a raki together and turn/ Then face to face, 6 singles either contrary to the other and 3 retretts back/ Then a flowerdelice of both at once/ then change places and turn face to face/ Then a flowerdelice and come together.

Challenges

In the process of researching my material for this project, I came across many challenges and theories regarding the dances of the Gresley Manuscript. The most notable challenge was that there was no supporting documentation on how the dances were to be performed. As noted before, they were written down in a condensed manner without explanation of how the steps should be performed. The dance steps do include anglicized names to steps that are familiar throughout western Europe in the 15th and 16th century; such as ‘singlis’, ‘doblis’, and ‘obeysawance’ which mirror French and Italian names for singles, doubles, and bows. There are also step terms that mirror other Italian steps which

⁷ Nevile, Jennifer. “Dance Steps and Music in the Gresley Manuscript” Historical Dance Vol 3.6 (1999): 3.

⁸ Nevile, Dance 5.

allow a dancer to interpret these steps in the Gresley Manuscript. Despite these similarities, there are an additional 6 dance steps noted that do not have a matching step found elsewhere. I was able to find six different interpretations of the Gresley Manuscript authored by both professionals in the field of music and early dance and by SCA masters of dance. This produced six different ways for these steps to occur. For simplicity sake I chose to use the choreography found in "Cherwell Thy Wyne: Dances of fifteenth century England from the Gresley manuscript" written by Ann and Paul Kent and published by the Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society. The Kents have an extensive knowledge of 15th and 16th Century dance, were able to collaborate with Fallows and Nevile, and were able to obtain digital images of the original notebook. Their explanation of the dance steps and their method of writing the choreography was the easiest for me to follow from all of the modern interpretations I discovered.

Another challenge for me was determining if these dances were meant for a mix of genders or if these dances were meant to be performed only by men. The 26 dances specifically use a single gender in the direction notation either by use of the male pronoun or in phrasing. For example, in the 5th dance listed, "Bugill de Tribus", the first notation reads:

"After the end of the trace, every man togeder two doblis. Than the first and the last forthright, the medill contrary him and torne face to face mett into a triangle wyse."⁹

The use of male phrasing is consistent throughout. As a result, there are many theories to whether women participated in these dances. Fallows argues that these were arguably meant for men only.¹⁰ Nevile argues that the use of the male gender suggests that these dances could have been meant for performances at the revels of the court of Henry VII. Account books of the Revels Office note that there were dances performed exclusively by the King and his courtiers and the Queen with her Ladies. She further argues that women at this time danced demurely and it was only the men's parts that included vigorous movements and leaps. Further, still, there are only a

⁹ Fallows, 8.

¹⁰ Fallows 1.

few references to hand holding in any of the 26 dances suggesting that men would dance close to each other, but not actually touch.¹¹ My favorite argument, however, comes from a Laurel of Dance from the Kingdom of Lochac, Master Hoskuld Atlason of Iceland, who mentioned that it is also possible that these are dressage or horse dances.¹² My personal interpretation is that the author used “man” not in the strict gender sense, but in a humanistic manner to represent the first, second, or third person. Since most of the Gresley Manuscript dances are for an odd number of people, there was no way to know if a given set would have two men and one woman, two women and one man, or a set of three single gendered people. There is evidence of men and women dancing together in other sources written in the time period both in England and on the continent. Further, Roger Ascham, tutor to Elizabeth I, discusses dance as part of his Humanistic curriculum. It seems odd to me that men and women would dance together prior to 1500, then not dance together for a while, and then begin again in 1548. Regardless, it is important to note that there is no concrete evidence to support either argument, so I choose to interpret these dances as mixed gender dances.

Conclusion

This has been a very enjoyable and interesting project to research and reproduce. Not only was I able to understand the importance and uniqueness of the dances found in the Gresley Manuscript, but I was also able to explore areas of 16th Century England I had not previously been introduced to. I have a better understanding of the influence France and Italy had on English culture and was able to explore the prevalence of single gendered dances as performance pieces in the court of Henry VII. Though there has been much written on the Gresley Manuscript in the

¹¹ Nevile, Italian 239 – 241.

¹² Gray, Norman. “Notes on the Gresley Dance Collection”.
<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~grayn1/gresley/Gresley.html>

last 20 years, there is still much experts do not know regarding the dances, their origins, and their intent. Until further primary evidence is discovered, we may never know who the author was, his relationship to the Gresley of Drakelow family, and how these dances should be interpreted. However, we are fortunate that modern experts in the field of musicology and early modern dance have worked hard to ensure that these dances are made available to a wider audience.

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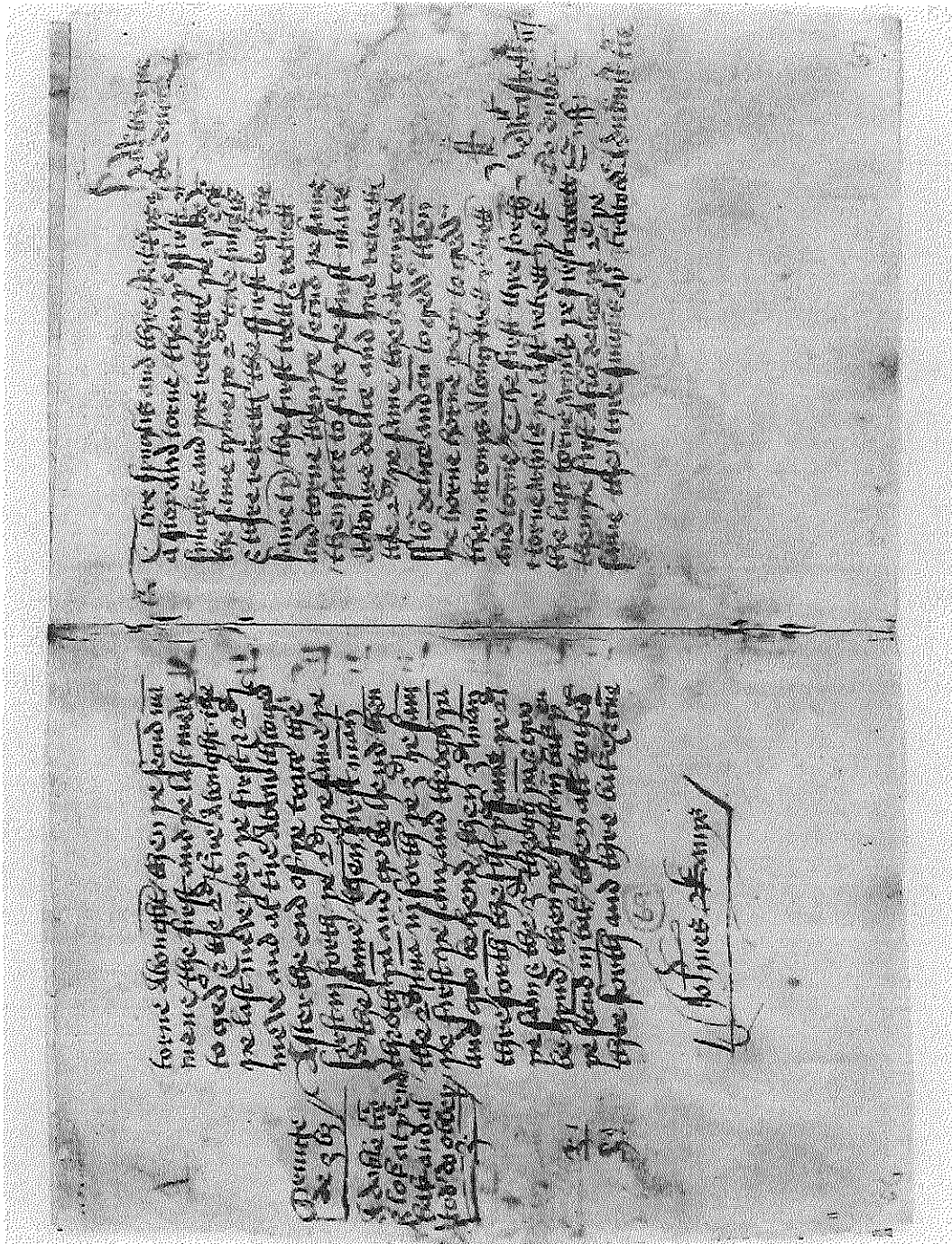


Plate 1: pp. 66-67, the last page of gathering II and the first of gathering III (both written on parchment); they show the end of No. 19, No. 20 and the new section starting with No. 21 and most of No. 22.

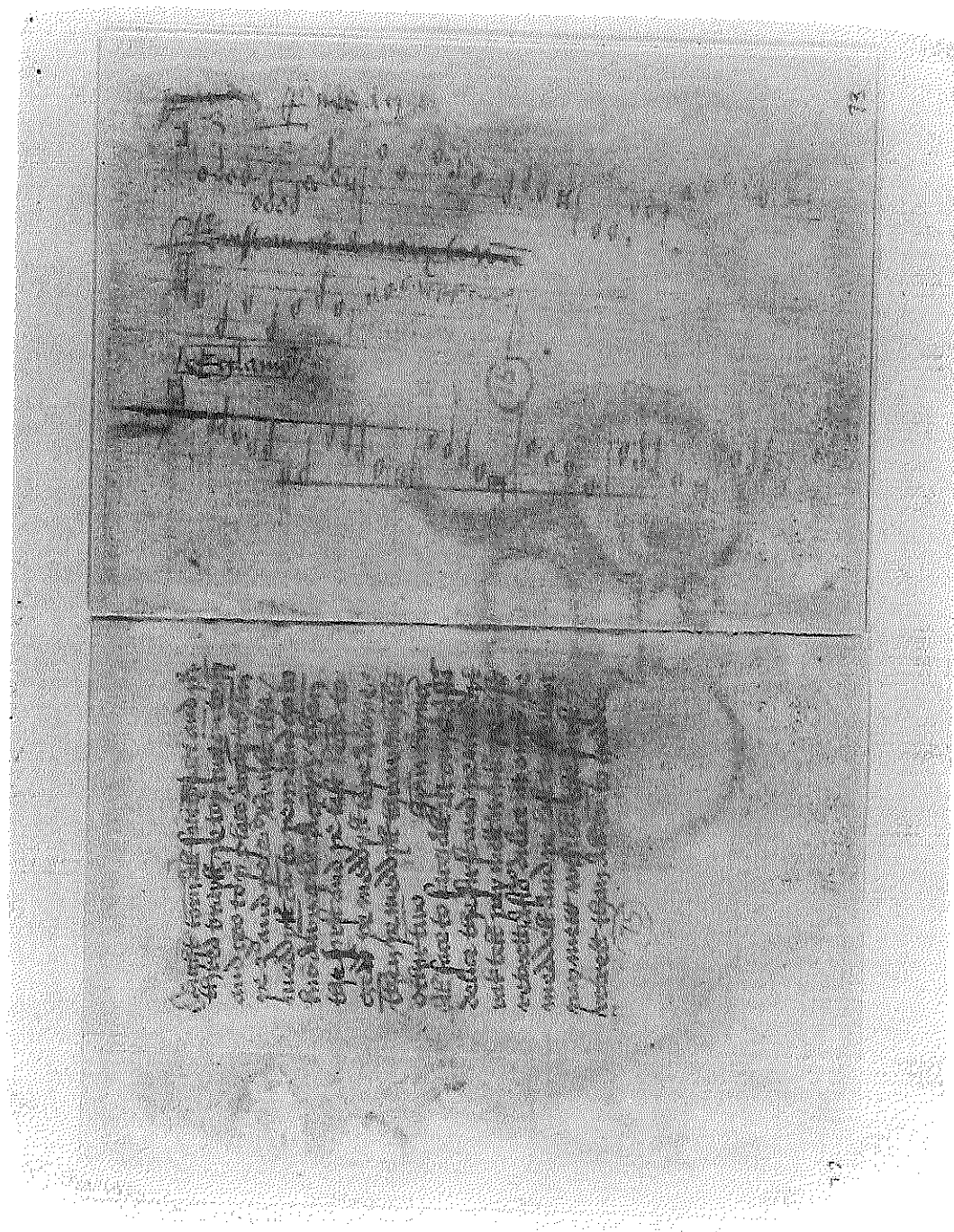


Plate 2: p. 72–73 (both written on paper); they show the end of No. 26 and melodies 1–2.

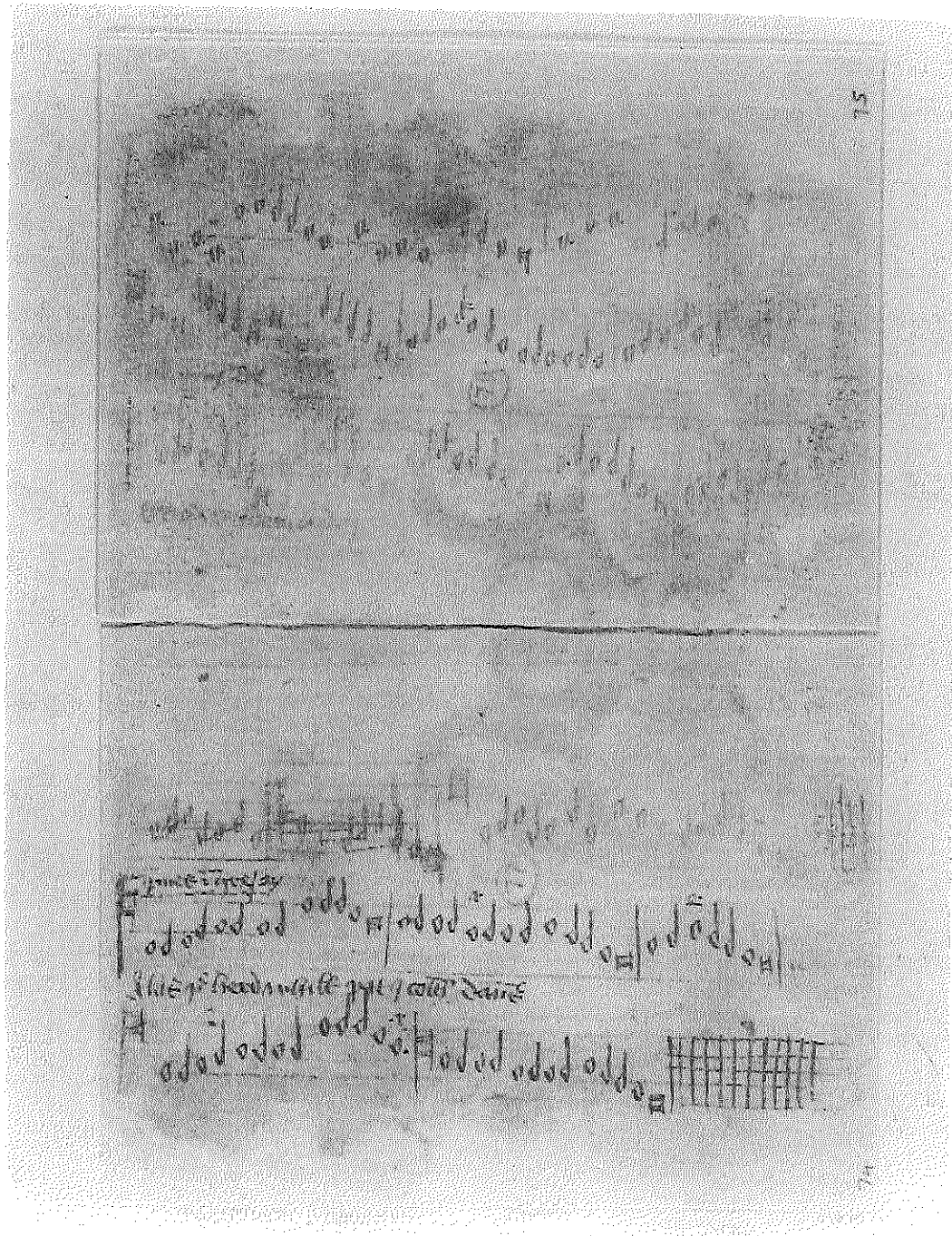


Plate 3: pp. 74–75 (both written on paper); they show melodies 3–5.

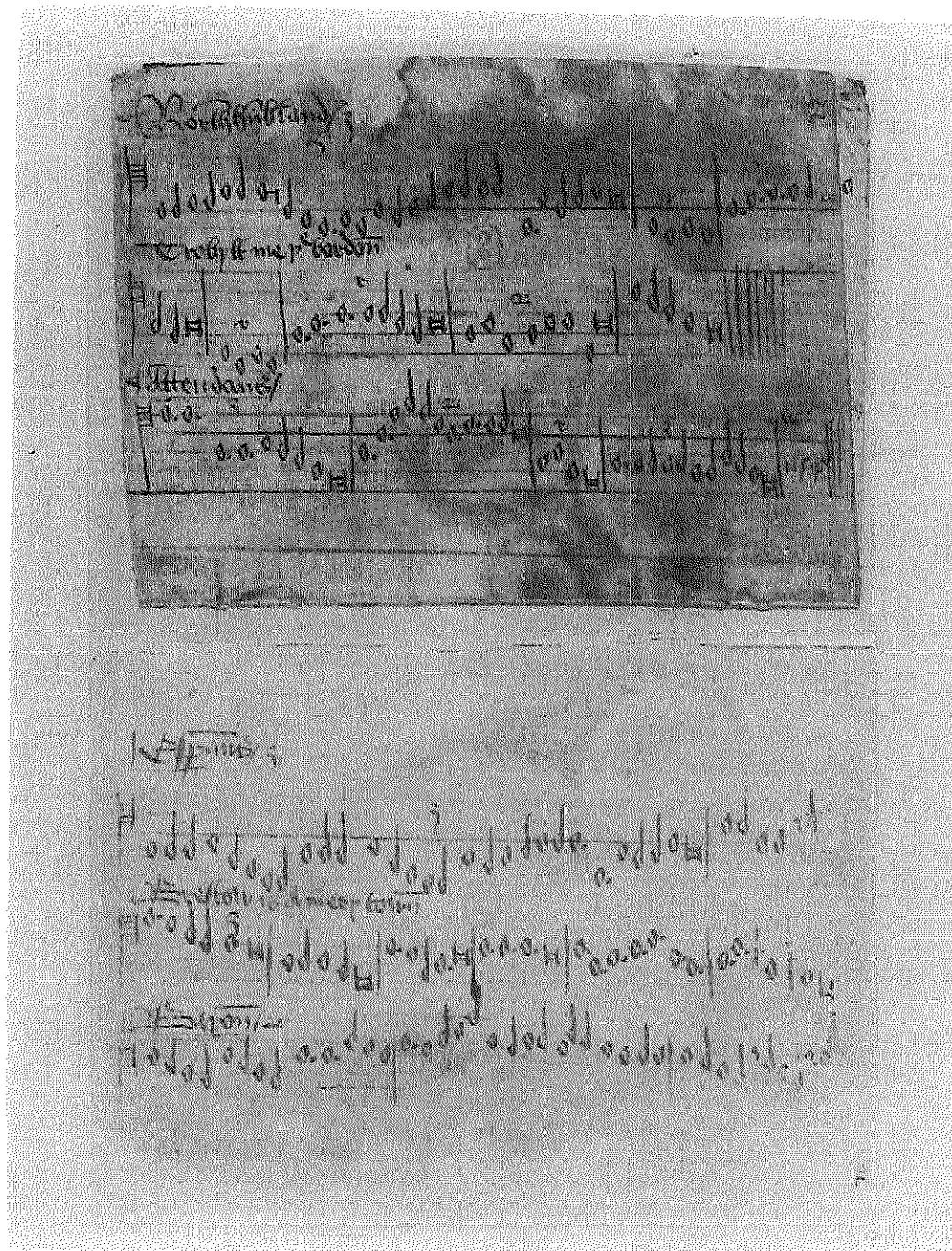


Plate 4: pp. 76–77 (p. 76 written on paper, p. 77 on parchment); they show melodies 6–9.

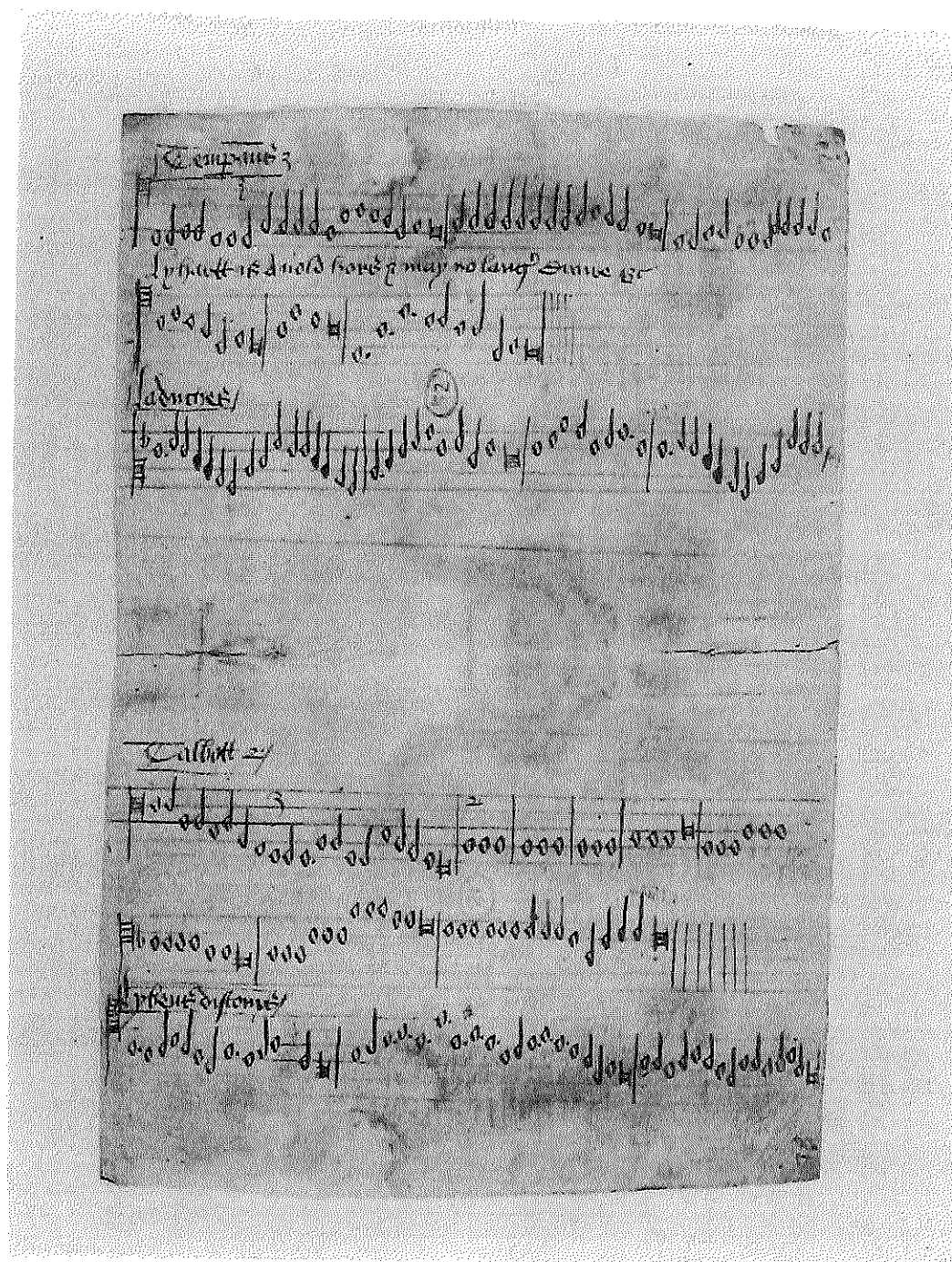


Plate 5: pp. 78–79 (both written on parchment, at the middle of gathering III); they show melodies 10–13.

Prenes in gre de duobus

no.7

the trace

Trace forthright vj singlis ather torne other aboute and
forthright vj singlis agen After the end of the trace rak both
togeder and torne / Then face to face vj singlis ethir contrary oder and iij
retrettes ayen / Then a flowrdelice of both at onys / Then change places
and torne face to face / Then a flowrdelice and come togeder

Prenes in gre

music from the manuscript



* Bar modified to fit the dance choreography