“O ADMIRANDUS APIUM FERVOR!”
ALLEGORY AND THE BEE IN SOUTHERN ITALIAN EXULTET ROLLS

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ABSTRACT

Erin Kate Grady: "O admirandus apium fervor!"
Allegory and the Bee in Southern Italian Exultet Rolls
(Under the direction of Dorothy Verkerk)

The Exultet rolls of southern Italy have long been recognized as beautiful and singular examples of the liturgical culture of the southern Italian region during the Middle Ages. The manuscript rolls contain the illustrated text of the Easter proclamation, the Exultet, sung each year at the Easter Vigil. Scholars have studied the text, musical notation, images, and physical properties of the Exultet rolls, focusing on different aspects of their content and construction. Even with the wealth of scholarship concerning the Exultet rolls, there is little work investigating the abundantly illustrated bees and their importance to a thematic and visual understanding of the Exultet. The bees are, perhaps, the most noticeable image running through the Exultet rolls, and they invite further investigation.

This dissertation examines the union of text and image in format of the rotulus. It investigates the prevalence of images containing female allegorical figures, representations of female-centered concepts, natural imagery, and depictions of bees, suggesting that these figures, in conjunction with the text of the Exultet, indicate the possibility of understanding the rolls as representations of changing approaches to female potency in the economy of salvation history. This study suggests that with changes to liturgical texts and practices attributable to the suppression of the Beneventan rite in the eleventh century, the shift in the Exultet’s text and
images reflects a parallel alteration in understandings of the Church and the place of the female within it. The bee, as the most illustrated allegorical figure among all of the Exultet rolls and a representative of the Classical virtue of *sophrosyne*, functions as an emblem of the change in approach to both the Church and the Easter mysteries. As the role of the bee as a force unto herself becomes that of a servant to the common cause of the hive, so the place of female potency in the Church’s project of salvation is transformed from an essential role to one of service and submission. This study offers a new angle from which to look at the Exultet rolls, introducing a reading based on allegory, exegesis, and the semiotics of the roll.
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INTRODUCTION

“O admirandus apium fervor!” proclaims the Exultet as sung in medieval southern Italy. The proclamation sung every year during the vigil kept through the night before Easter praises the industry of the bees who make the wax that forms the Paschal candles and all the other candles that cast away the darkness of night. Beyond praising the bee, the Exultet celebrates much more, recounting the history of salvation in the long narrative arc that culminates with the day of Resurrection on Easter. The Exultet, in both its Beneventan and Franco-Roman forms, makes use of many rich allegorical and symbolic figures and images including the bee. With its full-throated praise of the bee, the Exultet opens a window on the changing interpretations of the Easter mysteries made manifest in text and images over time. Its employment of the bee as an allegorical figure for the Virgin Mary and the relationship of the female to the economy of salvation reflects the contrasts between the local churches and the Roman Church during a period of widespread ecclesiastical reform.

The group of manuscripts often referred to as the Exultet rolls of southern Italy are thirty-one manuscript rolls dated between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries, produced in southern Italy and containing either the liturgical rites for the Easter Vigil liturgy or the Exultet, a proclamation sung at the blessing of fire and candles during the Easter Vigil. Of the thirty-one rolls, twenty-eight contain the Exultet and three are either a pontifical or benedictionals that contain related ritual prayers. The Exultet rolls were used only once each year, at the Easter Vigil. Positioned as the night watch before the celebration of the Resurrection as the Easter day begins to dawn, the Easter Vigil is one of the most important of the liturgical year. As a part of
the Easter Vigil, the singing of the Exultet predates the production of any of the rolls and represents a long history associated with the blessing of fire and of a Paschal candle as part of the annual liturgy.

All of the Exultet rolls contain some degree of decoration, and most include cycles of illustrations that correspond to specific passages from the Exultet text. The Exultet, both Beneventan and Franco-Roman, consists of exhortations for heaven and earth to rejoice at the splendor of the Resurrection, praise for God as the creator and savior, a poetic catalog of the bee’s virtues, and prayers for the spiritual and secular communities. The Franco-Roman Exultet also traces key moments from Old and New Testament history, including the sin of Adam and Eve, Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea, and the Resurrection, tying them together chronologically and typologically. The nuances of language in the Beneventan and Franco-Roman texts will be discussed at length later in this paper.

In addition to the text of the proclamation, the Exultet rolls include illustrations and musical notation. The combination of text, music, and illustration in the format of a roll for use during a single annual liturgical rite sets these manuscripts apart from other decorated books and documents of comparable age and place of origin. The interplay of text and images and the shifts in verbal and visual content over the course of changes in the southern Italian liturgical landscape invites further investigation into the nature of the link between text and image and its communicative value concerning the local liturgy. The pervasive presence of female allegorical figures, imagery drawn from the natural world, and references to the classical tradition suggests the possibility of a female-centered aspect to the Easter narrative and its interpretation in southern Italy. This possibility, in turn, raises questions as to the place of such female potency as
can be discerned in the celebration of the bees within the overarching scheme of salvation history recounted in the Exultet.

This dissertation suggests that the change from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman Exultet text with the suppression of the Beneventan rite reflects an ideological shift as well. The intensity of the Beneventan Exultet’s female-driven imagery establishes a central role for the female in the economy of salvation, while the Franco-Roman Exultet with which it was replaced sets the female in a relationship of service to the process of salvation. Though the visual and textual evidence from the Exultets themselves bears out the claim that there was a shift in the tone and acceptability of expressions of female potency in these texts must remain a suggestion. With limited documentary sources surrounding the production of the Exultet rolls, it cannot be definitively proven that this kind of thinking was an underlying factor in the replacement of the Beneventan Exultet with the Franco-Roman Exultet text or a shift in visual imagery. Nevertheless, the investigation of the Exultet rolls with a view to understanding what they might have communicated to their readers or viewers offers a new lens through which to view them and to find different visual and textual nuances.

This dissertation will explore the use of female allegorical figures and female-centered imagery in the Exultet rolls in order to uncover a system of signs and symbols related to the importance of female potency. This investigation makes use of tools from semiotics, exegetical practice, and literary analysis to craft a multidimensional approach to the Exultet in text and image. Specifically, later chapters will establish that the bee functions as an allegorical figure in its own right and serves as a locus for changing understanding of female potency between the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultet texts. The use of the bee and its celebration in text and
image draw together the allegorical functions of text and image and embody the thematic pervasiveness of natural imagery in word and illustration.

The first chapter offers a general overview of historical and recent scholarship concerned with the Exultet rolls. Scholarship on the rolls extends from the nineteenth century to the present and comprises work from the areas of musicology, paleography, art history, and liturgy. The major works of scholarship across these fields will be considered in order to establish a sense of the foundational work that has been done concerning Exultet rolls. This chapter will demonstrate that there is still room in the existing scholarship for new readings and interpretations of the Exultet rolls.

The second chapter introduces the Exultet rolls in greater depth and situates them within the history of southern Italy and its regional church. Situating the production of the Exultet rolls within the wider development of Beneventan chant and its subsequent suppression gives context for the content of the Exultet and the changes it underwent with the introduction of the Franco-Roman text. A short survey of the origins of the Exultet as a part of the Easter Vigil and as a ritual text will be contextualized within the liturgical shape of the Easter Vigil and the use of the Paschal candle. The physical characteristics of the Exultet rolls will also be discussed in this chapter, though close study of their images will be reserved for a subsequent chapter.

Chapter Three introduces the use of allegory and examines the many allegorical figures included in the Exultet rolls’ illustrations. Allegory and allegorical interpretation are shown to be applicable to traditional female allegorical figures as well as to the bees so often depicted among the Exultet rolls. The significance of grammatically feminine language will also be addressed in this chapter, building a case for the suitability of reading the Exultet rolls through the lens of gendered language and female-focused imagery.
The bees are the central focus of Chapter Four, and of this dissertation as a whole, which explores the associations of the bee with women and feminine virtue from Greek mythology to the time of the Exultet rolls’ production. The textual and visual treatment of bees and their association with the Virgin Mary builds a strong case for there being abundant meaning embedded in the incorporation of a section as long as the Elegy of the Bees into the Exultet text. This chapter looks closely at the Exultet’s use of the bee both as an allegorical figure in itself and as a symbol for the Virgin Mary, focusing on ways in which the arrangement of the images as well as their content directs the reader’s or viewer’s attention to the allegorical figures and their interpretation.

The final chapter considers the shift from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman Exultet, particularly in terms of the description and representation of female allegorical figures, the use of gendered language, and the explication of the bee’s virtues. This chapter frames the shift in approaches to the content of the Exultet as an outgrowth of the wider ideology of Church reform that was happening during the second half of the eleventh century. By tracing the changes in the use of female-centered language and images, particularly with relationship to bees and the Virgin Mary, it will become clear that the perceived role of female power in salvation history and in the Church also shifts away from a central place to a subservient one.

Through the course of this study, it will become evident that the bee is the embodiment of the relationship between the feminine and the Church. With the changing nuances of the Elegy of the Bees in the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets, it becomes clear that the bee is an exemplar for the faithful, marking out the expected characteristics of female virtue in relation to the Church and community. The shift away from individual agency toward a hierarchical mentality reflects the ideological shift in the Church’s thinking about itself. Nevertheless, the
presence and the perfection of the bee remains in text and image, indicating flexibility between the traditional understanding of the bee and the reformist agenda of the Church in medieval southern Italy.
CHAPTER ONE: THE EXULTET THROUGH TIME: SCHOLARLY QUESTIONS AND EXISTING WORK

Though there is a significant quantity of scholarly material concerned with the nature, use, and content of the Exultet rolls, many unanswered questions and unexplored areas remain. This chapter will provide a snapshot of the current and historical scholarship on the Exultet rolls, establishing a sense of where there is still space for new scholarship and for this study in particular. Though scholarship concerned with Classics, patrology, the history of the Easter liturgy, and the history of southern Italy will be referenced throughout this study, the sources concerned with those themes will be introduced thematically as they become pertinent rather than summarized in this chapter.

**Key Questions in Scholarship on the Exultet Rolls**

Several questions tend to appear repeatedly in the literature about Exultet rolls. Among these are questions of origins and dating, many of which have been definitively answered. In addition to these questions, scholars have also taken interest in the commission of the rolls, the secular and sacred authority figures named or depicted in them, and the choice of figures included in the marginal decoration and the scenes of authorities. The representation of liturgical rites and the objects used during the Easter vigil also provides grounds for many scholarly inquiries concerned with the liturgy and the use of Exultet rolls in the Beneventan rite.

One of the more persistent questions associated with the Exultet rolls is the peculiar orientation of the illustrations in many of the manuscripts. Most of the rolls include miniatures
turned upside down to the reader of the text and musical notation. The question of why the images and text in these rolls are oriented so unusually has occupied many scholars, and several theories have been offered. Some, like Emilio Lavagnino, believe that the images are intended to be visible to the listening congregation, unfurled over the edge of the ambo as the deacon sings the Exultet. Others assert that the images were intended for the personal use of the bishop as the owner of the luxury manuscript, with their orientation away from the reader being a reminder that the images, like the roll itself, belonged not to the congregation or the lesser clergy, but to the Bishop. Most recent scholarship, with Thomas Kelly, rejects the idea that the images included in the rolls were meant to be viewed by those attending the liturgy. Scholarship concerned with the relationship of text and images, particularly that of Michael Camille and Herbert Kessler, also works against the idea of manuscript images generally being instructional tools for the populace. Though the reason for images reversed from text is a fascinating question, it is not one that this dissertation will attempt to answer.

Another common question is why the format of the roll was chosen for the Exultet southern Italy during these centuries. Though theories of Byzantine influence and the prestige status of rolls have been advanced, there is, as yet, no definitive explanation for the choice of the

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1 Twenty of the rolls, including the Pontifical and Benedictional rolls, have all or part of their images and text oriented differently.

2 Emilio Lavagnino, *Storia dell'arte medioevale italiana* (Torino: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1945). Lavagnino is one among many scholars from the early part of the twentieth century who gravitated toward the idea of images as instructional tools for the people. This idea begins to disappear in scholarship from the 1970s onward.


roll over the codex for this particular liturgical situation. Thomas Kelly discusses the practical aspects of this choice, situating the Exultet rolls among several other varieties of liturgical roll commonly used in southern Italian liturgical rites. Among other reasons, he sees the choice of the *rotulus* for the Exultet as a natural one for a sequence that really does not belong to the Sacramentary or the Missal. As a proclamation reserved for a single ritual moment of the liturgical year a kind of text that does not fit conveniently into the category of tract, sequence, or any other standard type of liturgical component, the Exultet’s most logical placement in graduals or missals is not necessarily clear. While a codex would certainly be the most logical format for a collection of chants and texts for use throughout the year, as in a gradual or missal, the singularity of the Exultet makes it an excellent candidate for an alternative format.

As will become evident, there is certainly a dearth of scholarly work concerned with the allegorical figures and the prevalent nature imagery that appears across the Exultet rolls as a manuscript group.

**Summary of Existing Scholarship**

When considering the nature and history of the Exultet rolls as material objects, liturgical books, artistic creations, and ritual objects, it is useful to consider the scholarly work that has been produced on each of these aspects. Though there is a sizable quantity of scholarship concerned with the Exultet rolls, much of it belongs to the nineteenth century or the first half of the twentieth. There are currently several scholars working on topics directly or indirectly related to the Exultet rolls, with a number of new publications made available between 2009 and

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6 Early scholars of importance include: Bertaux, Bannister, Latil, Lowe, and Avery. In the later part of the twentieth century through to the present, the major scholars of the Exultet rolls are Thomas Forrest Kelly, Guglielmo Cavallo, Lucinia Speciale, and Giulia Orofino, among others. (See notes below for citations pertaining to each author’s work.)
2014. The most recent publications focus either on a specific iconographic program within one or a few Exultet rolls or use the Exultet rolls as part of a larger study of southern Italian liturgical culture. Current and historical work on the Exultet rolls has been conducted by a wide variety of scholars working in fields like paleography, musicology, history, art history, and codicology. Each variety of scholarship brings differing nuances to the study of the manuscripts, yielding a rich body of scholarly work.

In the existing scholarship on Exultet rolls there are a variety of approaches to this body of manuscripts. For convenience, these methods of engaging with the rolls can be divided into art historical, musicological, and paleographic or historical. Most studies that include material about the Exultet rolls focus on individual rolls or small groups of rolls and address them thematically or from a single scholarly direction, often with minimal overlap among the many threads that comprise the history, use, and content of the Exultet rolls as complete historical objects. The following is a brief overview of the milestones of scholarship concerned with the Exultet rolls since the late nineteenth century, and does not pretend to be a comprehensive catalogue of all the literature related to the Exultet rolls and their cultural milieu.

The main areas of scholarship to be touched on in this chapter are as follows:

7 Lucinia Speciale and Nino Zchomelidse have recent publications from 2009 and 2014, respectively. Kelly’s *The Role of the Scroll* is more recent (2019) but is not primarily about the Exultet rolls. See below for full citations and descriptions of specific articles and books.


9 Kelly’s *The Exultet in Southern Italy* is a notable exception, as the author searches for a more comprehensive approach to the musical, visual, and ritual characteristics of the Exultet rolls.
as material objects and how were they deployed in liturgical situations? Concerning work on iconography in general, what aspects of the iconography have been under-studied? Considering work on music and text, focusing on the transition from Beneventan to Franco-Roman, where do the Exultet rolls maintain or revise the text, and can anything be known about the manner of their use during the transitional period?

**Structure and Purpose of Exultet Rolls**

A distinguishing feature of the Exultet rolls is that they are all constructed as *rotuli*, made to be read continuously from one end to the other. More details concerning the material aspects of the Exultet rolls will be offered in the next chapter, but it is worth noting here that their measurements, both in length and in width vary substantially.

The material properties of the Exultet rolls are detailed meticulously in the 1936 catalogue by Myrtilla Avery, *The Exultet Rolls of South Italy*, in which she provides not only images of all the manuscripts’ miniatures, but also detailed descriptions of their dimensions and content. Avery’s focus is primarily art historical, with the illustrations often described in much greater detail than the script or notation. She addresses the structural aspects of the rolls, which includes not only their physical construction but also the arrangement of their miniatures and the orientation of musical notation and text. She includes fairly comprehensive descriptions of the illustrations, with impressive linguistic renderings of the color that could not come through in a catalogue of black and white photographic plates. *The Exultet Rolls of South Italy* offers a solid foundational descriptive repository that aids the reader in identifying common figures, recurring liturgical illustrations, and details such as scripts and textual types. Other articles that Avery published venture a bit further into criticism, but generally are in keeping with the scholarly

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approaches common to the first half of the twentieth century. This is reflective of the scholarship on which Avery herself relied, focused more on the codicological properties of the manuscripts than on the implications of their structure and content.

Among the earlier scholars that Avery cites are Emile Bertaux and Henry Marriott Bannister. These scholars focus on practical aspects of the Exultet rolls, too, with detailed analyses of the texts of certain rolls and the layout and iconographic content of others. None of these early works constitutes a fully art historical approach to the Exultet rolls. Instead, they provide practical analysis of specific details and properties that lays the groundwork for future scholars’ work on other aspects of the manuscripts. Though the work does not fully reproduce all of the Exultet rolls photographically, it is a remarkable resource in that it was the only means available for seeing all of the Exultet rolls at once until the 1994 exhibition catalogue, Exultet. Recalling that most of the Exultet rolls are even now not readily accessible in museums or in digital formats and that Avery’s was the only comprehensive photographic publication concerned with these manuscripts until the exhibition catalogue published in 1994, the importance of these early studies to more recent scholarship must not be understated. Where Avery’s catalogue provided a largely descriptive set of notes for the body of Exultet roll manuscripts, the 1994


13 Guglielmo Cavallo, Giulia Orofino, and Oronzo Pecere, Exultet: Rotoli Liturgici Del Medioevo Meridionale (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, Libreria dello stato, 1994).
catalogue offers more nuanced essays for each roll and includes liturgical, art historical, and musicological essays on the manuscripts as a group.\footnote{Ibid. This volume includes essays and analytical commentary by Guglielmo Cavallo, Paolo Delogu, Thomas Forrest Kelly, Marco Palma, Carlo Bertelli, Beat Brenk, Valentino Pace, Lucinia Speciale, Francesco Magistrale, Anna Rosa Calderoni Masetti, Giulia Orofino, and Antonia d’Aniello. Many of these authors also have separate publications related to the Exultet rolls and southern Italian art.}

Regarding the liturgical use and practical deployment of the Exultet rolls as ritual objects, most scholarship is either quite early or fairly recent. Among the early works concerned with the liturgical use of Exultet rolls is Henry Marriott Bannister’s early twentieth-century article, "The ‘Vetus Itala’ Text of the ‘Exultet.’"\footnote{Henry Marriott Bannister, "The ‘Vetus Itala’ Text of the ‘Exultet.’"} This article deals not primarily with the rolls themselves, though they are often mentioned, but with the history of certain liturgical rites and practices associated with the Exultet in southern Italy. Bannister discusses the development of the blessing of wax and of the Easter candle. Though not fully concerned with the Exultet rolls as a genre, Lucinia Speciale’s book, Montecassino e la Riforma Gregoriana: l’Exultet Vat. Barb. lat. 592,\footnote{Lucinia Speciale, Montecassino e la Riforma Gregoriana: l’Exultet Vat. Barb. lat. 592 (Rome: Viella, 1991).} takes a close look at the transition from Beneventan to Roman rite liturgy as expressed in the production of one Exultet roll, Vat. Barb. Lat. 592.\footnote{Lucinia Speciale’s book, Montecassino e la Riforma Gregoriana: l’Exultet Vat. Barb. lat. 592, takes a close look at the transition from Beneventan to Roman rite liturgy as expressed in the production of one Exultet roll, Vat. Barb. Lat. 592.} This book makes use of a specific Exultet roll as the driving force for a study in liturgical history, incorporating aspects of art historical inquiry as well.

Most recently, Nino Zchomelidse has studied the Exultet rolls in the context of southern Italian liturgical furnishings, objects, and spaces. In Art, Ritual, and Civic Identity in Medieval Southern Italy, she devotes most of a chapter to the question of how the imagery in the Exultet rolls connects with or enhances the symbolic meaning of the liturgical acts associated with the
She considers the idea of physical movement of the scrolls through liturgical ritual. She, too, discusses the shift from Beneventan to Franco-Roman texts for the Exultet, reiterating the parallel between the replacement of the Beneventan Rite with the Roman. Zchomelidse goes into the Byzantine origins of some of the liturgical imagery included in the Exultet rolls, the use of rolls in Byzantine liturgy, and points of connection between the Beneventan and Byzantine liturgies. Her method moves between the liturgical and art historical aspects of the Exultet rolls and their original context and use, paving the way for studies that extend this multidimensional approach to the ritual as well as the visual lives of the manuscript rolls.

**Art Historical Studies**

Under the umbrella of art historical studies of the Exultet rolls fall many articles and monographs concerned with the images in the manuscripts and their iconographic provenance and significance. Among these are many articles and books that focus on small groups of Exultet rolls or include specific rolls in larger examinations of southern Italian medieval art or Beneventan art in general. Interest in iconographic elements is common, with a number of studies undertaking detailed analyses of a few rolls at a time. Among earlier articles of this type are studies of the Barberini Exultet, close examinations of rolls from Troia and Bari, and articles that focus on a particular aspect of the iconography. To the best of my knowledge, no comprehensive overview of the Exultet rolls’ iconography as a complete manuscript group exists beyond the catalogue descriptions of Avery and the 1994 *Exultet* catalogue.

Among the early scholars of the rolls’ images are Émile Bertaux and Emilio Lavagnino. Bertaux’s work, *L'art dans l'Italie méridionale*, offers a survey of the major works of art in

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17 Nino M. Zchomelidse, *Art, Ritual, and Civic Identity in Medieval Southern Italy*. 
southern Italy from the late sixth century through the late thirteenth century. This work, like Lavagnino’s *Storia dell'arte medioevale italiana*, situates the Exultet rolls in a broader panoply of southern Italian art, considering not only manuscripts, but also architecture, mural painting, mosaic, sculpture, and panel painting. These works serve the function of identifying the features of the Exultet rolls that tie them to the general artistic landscape from which they emerged. More recent scholarship that takes a more stylistic than iconographic approach includes work by Hans Belting, namely *Studien zur beneventanischen Malerei*. As a wide-ranging study of Beneventan painting, the Exultet rolls figure less prominently in this work than frescoes and other wall paintings from the region. Nevertheless, this book offers insight into the stylistic components shared by the Exultet rolls and other painted artwork in southern Italy.

Gerard Burian Ladner is another important scholar of the rolls’ iconography. In "The 'Portraits' of Emperors in Southern Italian Exultet Rolls and the Liturgical Commemoration of the Emperor," he looks closely at the iconography of secular leadership represented in the Exultet rolls. Though subsequent scholarship has not always agreed with some of his conclusions, Ladner’s detailed attention to both the images and the text in the rolls that he analyzes brings details to the fore that are otherwise easily overlooked.

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18 Emile Bertaux, *L'art dans l'Italie méridionale*.

19 Lavagnino, *Storia dell'arte medioevale italiana*.


22 Cavallo takes issue with Ladner’s dating of certain rolls. See bibliographic citation in following note.
Later in the twentieth century, significant work on the Exultet rolls was published by Guglielmo Cavallo. In addition to several articles, Cavallo’s book, *Rotoli Di Exultet dell’Italia Meridionale. Exultet 1, 2, Benedizionale dell’Archivio Della Cattedrale di Bari. Exultet 1, 2, 3 dell’Archivio Capitolare Di Troia*, provides detailed investigation of five related Exultet and Benedictional rolls.\(^23\) In this book, Cavallo assesses earlier arguments in favor of the rolls’ peculiarity of orientation of images to text as a consideration of the assembled faithful and he also offers criticism of some prior attempts to date the manuscripts with which he is concerned. More importantly, he attempts to establish Byzantine origins for both the use of the roll for the Exultet and iconographic tradition of Tellus and the Elegy of the Bees.\(^24\) As a contributing author to Cavallo’s book, Carlo Bertelli, a formidable art historian in his own right, provides commentary on the Troia Exultet 3. Bertelli has many other publications on southern Italian medieval art and early Renaissance art in general.\(^25\) Cavallo and Bertelli also provided essays for the 1994 catalogue, offering additional insights into both individual Exultet rolls and the figurative cycles that cut across the body of manuscripts in general.

Another notable scholar of the Exultet rolls, particularly the ones in Pisa, is Anna Rosa Calderoni Masetti. Her 1989 study of the Beneventan Exultet roll in Pisa, *L’Exultet “Beneventano” del Duomo di Pisa*, provides a detailed analysis of the manuscript, focusing


\(^{24}\) While I am not convinced that either of these attributions to Byzantine influence are accurate, his assertions represented a degree of departure from the earlier scholarship.

mainly on the images and their content.\textsuperscript{26} She provides useful information about the iconographic provenance of the images reproduced in the book. Masetti also engages with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholarship that touches on the Pisa roll, identifying possible discrepancies between these early scholars and her own research.

More recent iconographic studies have included thematic analysis. A notable example of this is Lucinia Speciale’s article, “Apocalisse e liturgia: il ciclo dell’Exultet,” in which she discusses the iconographic program of Vat. Lat. 9820 as fundamentally apocalyptic. Though concerned with a single roll, Speciale’s way of reading the manuscript’s images is potentially applicable to other rolls as well. In another article, “Scrivere per immagini: I rotoli dell’Exultet,” Speciale explores the relationship between text and images in the Exultet rolls in a general way, asserting that the images in the Exultet rolls are so closely tied to the text that “the transposition of the written word into the figure…takes on the evidence of a paradigm.”\textsuperscript{27} She identifies the Exultet rolls as different from other medieval text-image relationships, indicating that the Exultet rolls’ images are more than simple illustrations. According to this approach, they might even function as vehicles for deeper textual meaning in themselves.

Even though it has already been mentioned more than once, the value of the catalogue \textit{Exultet: Rotoli Liturgici Del Medioevo Meridionale} to iconographic study of the Exultet rolls is worth noting again. Throughout the essays for each of the Exultet rolls reproduced in \textit{Exultet}, notable additions to the art historical literature on these manuscripts abound. Rather than listing

\textsuperscript{26} Anna Rosa Calderoni Masetti, Cosimo D. Fonseca, and G. L. Cavallo, \textit{L’Exultet "beneventano” del Duomo di Pisa} (Galatina, Congedo Publ., 1989).

all of the contributors and summarizing their arguments, the material pertinent to the discussion in succeeding chapters will be cited there. With its nearly complete reproductions of all the rolls, this is, perhaps, the single most important book for anyone wanting a comprehensive view of the illustrations as well as the texts.

Thematically, the areas most often studied appear to be the Exultet rolls’ representation of liturgical rites and objects, the representation of secular and sacred authorities, and the biblical narrative illustrations. The allegorical figures, the monograms containing Christ in Majesty, and the depiction of bees and beekeeping all receive scholarly attention from time to time, but there are, to the best of my knowledge, no comprehensive studies of iconographic themes that cut across the majority of the Exultet rolls.

**Musicological Work on the Exultet Rolls and Beneventan Chant**

The most prominent work of recent scholarship taking a musicological approach to the Exultet rolls is Thomas Forrest Kelly’s *The Exultet in Southern Italy*. In this book, Kelly draws attention to the fact that the iconography and construction of the Exultet rolls have been studied fairly often, but that music and text are generally less thoroughly examined.\(^{28}\) He frames his analysis in terms of liturgy and ritual, and spends a great deal of time on the textual and musical variations among the Exultet rolls. His analyses include detailed attention to the meter of the Beneventan Exultet text as well as its content, allowing him to hypothesize a date range for the composition of the proclamation’s text. A well-known scholar of the Beneventan liturgy and its chant, Kelly offers practical insights that are often absent from art historical studies. This serves as a source of added dimensionality for the Exultet rolls, continually pointing out the liturgical and textual parts of the manuscripts that are easy to lose in art historical studies that treat the

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\(^{28}\) Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, viii.
visual snapshot of the images in isolation. Kelly’s extensive work on the sources and characteristics of Beneventan chant are of inestimable value for understanding the context in which the Exultet rolls would have fit into the regional liturgical traditions of southern Italy. In establishing a clear picture of the evolution and distinctive qualities of Beneventan chant and liturgy, the studies The Beneventan Chant and The Sources of Beneventan Chant allow the musical content of the Exultet rolls to be understood as part of a larger tradition of chant notation and composition.\(^{29}\) Kelly’s books and articles not only offer a meticulous approach to the details of Beneventan chant and notation, but also offer insight into the ritual use and the decoration of the Exultet rolls and other Beneventan rite manuscripts.\(^{30}\)

In conversation with Kelly’s work, additional musicological studies concerned at least in part with Beneventan chant and liturgy are also important. Among these are David Hiley’s Western Plainchant: A Handbook and Willi Apel’s Gregorian Chant.\(^{31}\) These volumes are most useful for understanding the wider historical development of chant and its notation across several centuries and a broad geographical area. Hiley gathers and presents basic information on genres of chant, modes and notation, and regional chant styles across Europe, thus providing


\(^{30}\) Kelly’s contributions to the study of Beneventan chant are too numerous to adequately list here. In addition to the monographs already cited, his main publications include, but are not limited to: Thomas Forrest Kelly, Capturing Music: The Story of Notation (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015); Thomas Forrest Kelly, Chant and Its Origins (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009); Thomas Forrest Kelly, Oral and Written Transmission in Chant (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009); Thomas Forrest Kelly, Paléographie musicale: Les témoins manuscrits du chant bénéventain. Vol. 21 (Lang, 1992); Thomas Forrest Kelly, The Ordinal of Montecassino and Benevento: Breviarium Sive Ordo Officiorum, 11th Century (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2008).

background helpful for contextualizing Kelly’s highly detailed and technical analyses of Beneventan chant. In addition to their richness in general information, Hiley’s and Apel’s books provide extensive bibliographies for further resources about chant and liturgy.

Among the most recent musicological works on Beneventan chant is Luisa Nardini’s *Interlacing Traditions: Neo-Gregorian Chant Propers in Beneventan Manuscripts.* Building on the work of Thomas Kelly, Nardini explores the body of tenth- through thirteenth-century Beneventan chant repertoire with a view to understanding patterns of transmission and composition in the Beneventan region. She considers the interaction of many traditions in the production of Beneventan chant, including Byzantine, Gallican, Roman, and Ambrosian. Given her assessment that the neo-Gregorian chants included in the Beneventan repertoire comprise a composite rather than a single regional tradition, Nardini’s study reinforces the importance of the Beneventan area as a cultural crossroads.

Concerning the interplay of chant and liturgy, two essays in *Chant, Liturgy, and the Inheritance of Rome* serve not to analyze the Exultet itself, but to examine the shape of the Easter vigil liturgy in Rome and in the Beneventan rite from a musical standpoint. Thomas Kelly’s “The Paschal Vigil in Medieval Rome” exposes the complexities of understanding a single day’s liturgy through manuscript sources, reminding one that the reconstruction of medieval liturgical practices, even within a limited geographical space, is a highly complex pursuit. Emma

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Hornby’s “Melodic Style and the Transmission of the Beneventan Easter Vigil Canticles” works similarly, tracing the provenance and musical evolution of the four tracts included in the Beneventan Easter Vigil liturgy. Neither of these essays treat the Exultet directly, but both serve to highlight the complexity of understanding liturgical practices from centuries past.

Scholarship Concerned with Southern Italy, Benevento, and Montecassino

As part of the contextualization of the Exultet rolls and their place within southern Italian art, liturgy, and culture, scholarship on Benevento and its politics and liturgy and works on the Abbey of Montecassino and its scriptorium are of high value. This category of scholarship is vast, so only works that directly relate to this dissertation will be addressed here. The major scholars whose work is discussed in this section fit into both paleographic and art historical categories.

Since southern Italy’s manuscript tradition is inextricably linked to its regional script, paleographic scholarship is useful for understanding the evolution of Beneventan scripts and its use in southern Italy. Though not all are directly related to the Exultet rolls, a wide range of scholarship on Beneventan script and its use in southern Italy is available, beginning with Elias Avery Lowe’s *The Beneventan Script* and its later companion volumes *Scriptura Beneventana*. These works, though not specifically concerned with the Exultet rolls, offer useful background on the origin and development of the hand in which most of the Exultet rolls are written. Lowe

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DiCenzo and Rebecca Maloy (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 2017), 143-188.


provides a detailed history of the Beneventan script, tracing it to its earliest appearance in the eighth century and identifying the precursors to the later version of the Beneventan scripts used in the Exultet rolls.\textsuperscript{37} Lowe’s work on the identification of specific styles of Beneventan script along with his comprehensive list of manuscripts significant to Beneventan paleography are of tremendous value for understanding the evolution of Beneventan writing and its use in southern Italy.\textsuperscript{38} The companion work, \textit{Scriptura Beneventana}, provides photographic facsimiles of leaves from many of the manuscripts that Lowe references in his earlier book. Taken together, these books provide foundational information not only about how to read Beneventan script, but also about the length and nature of the historical use of Beneventan script in southern Italian manuscripts.\textsuperscript{39}

A relatively recent work on the manuscripts of Montecassino is Francis Newton’s \textit{The Scriptorium and Library at Monte Cassino, 1058-1105}.\textsuperscript{40} In this book, Newton builds on Lowe’s work and makes additions and corrections to Lowe’s lists of Beneventan manuscripts. In some cases, Newton addresses discrepancies of dating or of place of origin and in others he makes additions to the catalogue of manuscripts written in the Beneventan hand. Newton focuses on the period often called the Golden Age of Montecassino, the period from the late eleventh through twelfth centuries when Abbots Theobald and Desiderius held the leadership of the monastery.

\textsuperscript{37} Lowe, \textit{The Beneventan Script}, 112-125.

\textsuperscript{38} Elias Lowe, \textit{Scriptura Beneventana}.

\textsuperscript{39} The Beneventan script is rather challenging to read, with its complex system of ligatures and abbreviations. Lowe’s work is essential for being able to understand the differences among Exultet texts as well as for reading other related manuscripts and facsimiles. Additionally, several of the Exultet rolls datable by the names included in their commemorations figure into Lowe’s history of the Beneventan hand.

\textsuperscript{40} Francis Newton, \textit{The Scriptorium and Library at Monte Cassino, 1058-1105} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
Newton looks closely at the manuscript output traceable to each Abbot’s tenure, uncovering nuances of periodization that are otherwise easily missed. He also identifies master scribes, demonstrating the stylistic changes associated with each. In his examination of the methods and practices of production in the scriptorium, Newton adds nuanced analyses of the development of the script and the changes and corrections made to it over time. Newton’s work provides an invaluable trove of information about what types of books emerged from the scriptorium at Montecassino, situating the Exultet rolls produced there in a more comprehensive context.

In a similar vein, Virginia Brown’s work offers additional depth and detail in the study of Beneventan manuscripts. With articles ranging a nearly forty-year span, Brown provides paleographic work on manuscripts not included in the lists of Lowe and Newton. In a series of five articles, “A Second New List of Beneventan Manuscripts,” Brown provides evidence for manuscripts from collections around the world to be added to the catalogue of Beneventan manuscripts. These substantial articles provide lists of manuscripts sorted by current repository and give notes that include measurements, state of conservation, and contents. Though they are not directly related to the Exultet rolls, these lists, along with Brown’s other work, add to the sense of the wide reach of books in the Beneventan script beyond their places of origin in southern Italy.

Within the last twenty years or so, Giulia Orofino has added significantly to the scholarship concerning manuscripts produced at Montecassino. Her multivolume work, *I codici decorati dell'archivio di Montecassino*, looks closely at all of the decorated and illustrated...

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manuscripts from the eight through tenth centuries (volume 1) and from before and during the Abbatial reign of Theobald (volumes 2.1 and 2.2). In these volumes, Orofino offers a descriptive catalogue of all the images in the manuscripts that she discusses. She provides not only visual analysis, but also comprehensive details regarding the manuscripts themselves. For the study of the Exultet rolls in particular, this study is useful in its close attention to iconography employed by the scribes and illuminators of the Montecassino scriptorium. Given the detailed information in Orofino’s work, several antecedents to images repeated in Exultet rolls appear to be a part of the Montecassino tradition, including the figures of Tellus in an early manuscript of Rabanus Maurus’ *De rerum naturis* (Cod Cas 132). In addition to her books and articles, Orofino is also a contributor of analytical material for the 1994 *Exultet* catalogue.

Regarding the history of Montecassino itself, both as an independent entity and in relationship to the rest of southern Italy, Herbert Bloch’s *Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages* is an invaluable resource. Based on meticulous research of primary source documents as well as extensive secondary scholarship, Bloch’s work gives a detailed and highly nuanced portrait of the monastery as a part of the southern Italian, Roman Catholic, and Mediterranean worlds of the Middle Ages. Bloch also provides insights into the use of Byzantine artists and styles in the reconstruction of the monastery and the decoration of the buildings when the Abbey was reconstructed in the tenth century.

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43 Cavallo et al., *Exultet*. Giulia Orofino contributed essays for the Montecassino Exultets 1 and 2, the Capua Exultet, and Naples (Mirabella Eclano) Exultets 1 and 2.

Conclusion

As is evident from the preceding short survey of major scholarship, there have not yet been any large-scale studies that draw together the material, liturgical, musical, textual, and visual aspects of the Exultet rolls as a group of manuscripts. The catalogue, *Exultet: Rotoli Liturgici Del Medioevo Meridionale*, comes the closest, providing both codicological and art historical information as well as full photographic reproductions of all the rolls. Nonetheless, this catalogue comprises numerous essays by different scholars and so does not fully address the similarities and differences in text and iconography across the Exultet rolls as a unified manuscript tradition. While excellent scholarship on individual rolls, small groups of rolls, and themes across the manuscript group exist, there seems to be room to add to the body of historical and current work.

Though there are many studies of the Exultet rolls from the vantage points of musicology, paleography, and art history, there are few instances of close looking at thematic threads in the content of the rolls as a group. While short studies of the apocalyptic imagery or the depictions of secular authority or liturgical imagery in the rolls do offer insight into the place of the manuscripts with respect to the biblical and political situation of the rolls, there are not, to the best of my knowledge, any articles or monographs that zero in on the representation of bees and other allegorical figures in a manner that reaches beyond the examination of more than one or a few rolls at a time. This dissertation attempts to stretch the exiting edges of scholarship by looking closely at images of female allegorical figures and illustrations of bees across the entirety of the Exultet roll group. One of the most compelling visual components of the Exultet rolls, the bees, has not been given more than a passing iconographic description in most of the literature concerning the rolls and their place in the history of art, music, and liturgy. The importance of the bees at both the visual and textual levels remains largely unexplored. This
dissertation will suggest that the bees in text and image offer a new lens for reading and understanding the Exultet rolls in their historical context.

The body of current scholarship leaves room for close consideration of the many ways in which the Exultet rolls can be read. Questions that remain and will be addressed in this dissertation include the significance of female allegorical figures throughout the Exultet roll manuscript group, the nature of the *rotulus* format in relationship to the Exultet text and its associated rituals, the female-centered iconographic and textual content of the Exultet rolls, and the possibility of a female-driven subtext in the Beneventan Exultet text. Considering the poetics of textual and iconographic continuity in the format of the Exultet roll, I hope to suggest that the use of the roll for the Exultet was not simply a choice made to communicate the prestige of the manuscript object, but also a choice that made the feminine aspect of the content of the Exultet manifest in visual and material forms. The use of the roll and the abundant illustration of Exultet texts that changed over time will be examined in relationship to the communicative value of the Exultet rolls in an increasingly centralized Church.
CHAPTER TWO: LITURGY AT THE CROSSROADS: THE EXULTET AS A MIRROR OF SOUTHERN ITALIAN CULTURE

In format, liturgical use, and content, the Exultet rolls are completely singular as a manuscript group and represent the innovative and autonomous regional traditions of Benevento that persisted long after the high point of Beneventan chant development and long after Rome sought to homogenize Catholic ritual practices in the region in 1081. Used only at the height of the Easter Vigil celebration, these rotuli contain text and illustrations encompassing biblical narrative, ritual practice, female allegorical figures, and imagery drawn from the natural world. The life story of the Exultet rolls begins with the development of a local ritual tradition in southern Italy and encompasses the manuscripts’ persistence in representing deeper theological and liturgical meaning than would be possible through text alone.

This chapter will consider the place of rolls and scrolls in Mediterranean Europe during the Middle Ages and explore the rise and fall of Beneventan chant and liturgy in southern Italy from the sixth century through the fourteenth. Through a thematic introduction to the text and images contained in the Exultet rolls, it will become clear that they have much more to tell us beyond the shape of the Easter liturgy and the content of the Easter story. The Exultet rolls, through their union of text and image, lead their readers to a deeper set of signs and symbols than those commonly associated with the Easter mysteries, namely a nature-driven and female-focused approach to understanding salvation history.
Rotuli and Scrolls in the Medieval Mediterranean

While the Exultet rolls are unique and played an important role in the liturgical life of the medieval Mediterranean, they were not the only rolls in use at the time. Rotuli or scrolls came in all sizes and were used for a wide range of purposes, from charters and diplomas to necrologies, genealogies, chronicles, and theatrical or choral parts. Smaller rolls often served the function of amulets or personal prayers and charms for individual devotion. Most Christian books and liturgical materials were in the codex format from about the fourth century, so while liturgical rolls were by no means prolific or common, some were indeed used in the Catholic churches of Italy and Western Europe and were contemporary with the production of the Exultet rolls. All of the Exultet rolls are characterized as rotuli, long membranes of vellum or parchment written and decorated vertically and rolled onto an umbilicus (wooden cylinder) for storage and portability. The membranes were generally glued together or woven together with thong or narrow pieces of the same material as the sheet. Rotuli are distinguishable from scrolls mainly in their orientation, as scrolls run horizontally with text perpendicular to the umbilicus while rotuli generally have text that runs parallel to it.

It is tempting to look at the Exultet rolls of Southern Italy as derivative of rotuli from the Byzantine world, where most rolls were liturgical, with the oldest extant ecclesiastical rolls dating back to the sixth century and their more proper modern successors dating mainly from the eight century and later. While the rotuli may appear similar at first glance, Thomas Kelly notes that the use of liturgical rolls in the Byzantine church does not necessarily indicate that the


Exultet roll tradition was influenced or inspired by the Byzantine. Instead, he asserts that the use of the liturgical roll did not become widespread in Byzantine practice until the eleventh century, well into the height of Exultet roll production in Southern Italy. While Byzantine rolls are laid out like Exultet rolls, then, in a vertical fashion and often with illumination, these qualities are insufficient for direct comparison and cannot be used to argue that the Exultet rolls emerge from a Byzantine tradition. In fact, there is no directly comparable type of roll between the Byzantine liturgical tradition and the Western Exultet roll, as there is no directly comparable ritual in Byzantine Easter worship. Gerstel explores the possible place of liturgical rolls in the Byzantine church by examining how they are represented in the painted decoration of church apses, and this research determines that there does not appear to be a direct link between their use in the Byzantine rite and in the Western European Church.

It is believed that the earliest surviving liturgical rolls of the medieval Mediterranean come from the seventh century and were used for particularly solemn rites or for specific prayers. Kelly cites literary references made to these rolls or even depictions of rolls in art to corroborate that they were often used in the liturgical life of the Church as prayers for Mass or for rites of exorcism. Unfortunately, these kinds of rolls no longer exist. There are, however, quite a number of rolls used for other liturgical functions to be found around Italy, most dating from no earlier than the tenth century.


49 Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 22-29. Occasional literary references indicate that rolls were sometimes used for particularly solemn rites or for specific occasions.
In the Ambrosian rite native to Milan, liturgical rolls were used with some regularity, though none that remain are directly comparable to the Exultet rolls in use or content. Among the rolls related to the Exultets are several pontifical and benedictional rolls that contain ritual prayers and detailed illustrations of both the rites and biblical narratives. Two such rolls that are closely tied to the Exultet roll group are part of the Biblioteca Casanatense collection in Rome. Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 1 and 724 (B I 13) 2 contain texts and illustrations associated with the Easter liturgy. (Figures 1, 2) These manuscripts offer possible insight into the manner of the Exultet rolls’ use, which will be discussed at greater length below.

While the use of liturgical rolls for everyday liturgical celebrations was fairly common in the seventh and eighth centuries, by the ninth century, their function began to shift. The use of rolls for the Ordinary of the Mass declined, and rather than being put to practical use in the medieval West, rolls became more symbolic than functional in most liturgical contexts, but this was not the case for the Exultet rolls which are notable for their purpose being both functional and solemn.

Apart from liturgical contexts, rolls and scrolls depicted in medieval art often represent the content of a book or evoke authoritative or traditionally respected text, as in the case of Old Testament prophets represented holding scrolls. The association of the scroll with revered figures and the Old Law situates the figure holding it in a readable historical setting. The long arc of history represented in art that includes both Old Testament and New Testament figures is appropriately reflected by the continuous line of the roll. In this sense, an Old Testament scroll could be understood by a Christian reader or viewer as unfurling in both directions—to the

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50 Ibid., 27-28. The rolls contain Psalms, antiphons, music, and litanies, but no prayers that would ordinarily be offered by the bishop. In the Ambrosian rite, a roll was used for the Exultet, but there are no existing Exultet rolls from this tradition.
beginning of creation at one end and toward the promised fulfillment of prophecies at the other. The timeline points in both directions, reinforcing the idea that the God revealed in the sacred texts is without beginning or end.

Even secular rolls participate in this idea of potential perpetuity. Genealogical rolls, while making practical use of the vertical line available in this format, are also fundamentally hopeful records that detail the roots and branches of family lines that could conceivably go on indefinitely. The tracing of family lines down multiple generations in a format that allows them to be visually unbroken is a powerful way of keeping records while at the same time asserting those lines’ longevity. The recitation and preservation of genealogies certainly predates the use of rolls for such purpose, but the resonance of the roll’s uninterrupted surface with the uninterrupted line of a family or nation is hard not to see.\(^5\) In a similar fashion, rolls containing legal codes or pronouncements might have been understood as more important and more permanent than the same content written on leaves or in small codices might have. With respect to legal documents, rolls could be used for practical expediency to contain short documents and carry them easily, but they could also lend a certain gravitas to the documents by visually aligning them with the works of poets, philosophers, kings, and prophets.

Throughout medieval Europe, rolls could be used to show genealogical or historical continuity, to enmesh the bearer of an amulet or magic roll into the unbroken stream of salvation history or the communion of saints, or to situate a legal pronouncement within a larger political or diplomatic tradition. All of these examples are instances in which the roll format signifies something greater than itself, insisting that the content of the roll be aligned with a longer and

\(^5\) While most genealogical rolls from England and France are later than the production of most Exultet rolls, twelfth century and later versus tenth to thirteenth centuries, the sense of unbroken paths through history transcribed onto an unbroken book surface seems similar.
more revered tradition than that to which any roll could lay claim on its own. The very nature of the roll, as a continuous object without predetermined page limits or the spatial constraints of a codex, demands that its reader acknowledge its particularity. The insinuation of solemnity or importance of the contents goes hand in hand with the selection of the roll as a format. As can been seen with the Exultet rolls, the roll is never an everyday item, but rather a special and elevated book reserved for a special function or occasion. The Exultet rolls emerged out of the complex and tumultuous history of Southern Italy to assume their special and central role in the Easter Vigil of the Beneventan rite.

**Lombard Invasion and the Emergence of Beneventan Chant**

Situating the Exultet rolls appropriately in time and space begins with the 6th century Lombard invasion in Italy, which presented a turning point that would inform the development of political and liturgical life in southern Italy for centuries to come. As a result of the Lombard presence in southern Italy, the city of Benevento became an important political and cultural center, and a place foundational to the liturgical tradition out of which the Exultet rose and flourished over several centuries.

The centuries following the collapse of the Roman Empire saw numerous occupying groups invade the Italian peninsula. Among these were the Lombards, a Northern European group who migrated south from Scandinavia and gained control of most of the Italian peninsula by the end of the sixth century.\(^2\) Encountering lands significantly depopulated as a result of the Gothic wars that took place from 535-554 between the Byzantine Empire and the Ostrogoths occupying Italy, the Lombards were in a position of strength as they began to pour into the

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region from 568 and further destabilize local infrastructure. According to Pope Gregory the Great, the Lombard invasion contributed to the destruction of Italian towns and cities:

Wild hordes of Lombards unleashed from their own native land descended on us. The population of Italy, which had grown vast, like a rich harvest of grain, was cut down to wither away. Cities were sacked, fortifications overthrown, churches burned, monasteries and cloisters destroyed. Farms were abandoned, and the countryside, uncultivated, became a wilderness. The land was no longer occupied by its owners, and wild beasts roamed the fields where so many people had once made their homes.53

While Pope Gregory’s account may have been accurate, the effects of the invasion were not uniform across Italy. Not all cities and towns suffered direct attacks, some were taken over with little or no bloodshed, and some localities still under Imperial rule felt the invasion’s effects more through governmental and social shifts than by violence.54 Though certainly not a benevolent invading force, they were a powerful one. As the Lombards settled in Italy, they established territorial areas ruled by chieftains often referred to as duces by the remaining Romans.55 During the early decades of Lombard presence, the much-weakened Western Roman empire managed to maintain control of small areas near Rome and Ravenna in addition to a few other outposts, but were no match for the strength of the invaders overall.56 Eventually, the Lombards and their principalities would become largely Christian, though in some regions parts of the pagan heritage of the invaders would persist.

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53 Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, Book III.38.

54 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, Book II.10. Whether Paul the Deacon’s characterization of the Lombard invasions as more by invitation than by force can be believed is a separate question, but the invasion was certainly not a single organized conquest accomplished entirely by violence.


56 Ibid., 398-399.
In the centuries following the initial invasions, Lombard kingdoms and duchies grew in strength, with the Kingdom of the Lombards covering much of the territory north of Rome and along the western coast, the Duchy of Spoleto taking in the central part of the peninsula east of Rome, and the Duchy of Benevento controlling most of southern Italy.

The territories held by Lombard nobles continued to grow through the centuries until the rise of Charlemagne and the expansion of his territories. More than once, the Lombard leaders engaged in conflict with both Byzantine and Papal forces, the balance of power did not shift entirely away from the Lombards until well into the eighth century.57 The northern and central Italian Lombard kingdoms thrived until they were absorbed into the land holdings of Charlemagne in 774.58 While the support of the Roman Church for Charlemagne and the Franks as truer Christians than the Lombards weakened Lombard dominance in northern and central Italy, this effect never quite reached the southern Duchy of Benevento. Even as the Lombard kingdoms collapsed as the dominant force in northern and central Italy, Lombard nobles continued to control the political landscape in southern Italy and persisted in their relative independence from the northern and central states and the attenuation of Lombard culture there. The somewhat smaller Duchy of Benevento already established in the south remained essential to the cultural continuity of both secular and religious life there through subsequent centuries,


58 Eduardo Fabbro, "Charlemagne and the Lombard Kingdom That Was: the Lombard Past in Post-Conquest Italian Historiography," Journal of the Canadian Historical Association/Revue de la Société historique du Canada 25, no. 2 (2014): 5-7, 16-17. Charlemagne was enlisted by Pope Hadrian to aid in Rome’s efforts against the Lombards, and this was effective against the northern and central Italian Lombard kings, but much less so in the south.
and the cultural divergence between the northern and southern Lombard groups only continued to grow as their respective power structures changed.

During the years of Lombard control in southern Italy, the establishment of a regional capital at Benevento helped solidify secular power in the territory. The Dukes of Benevento, particularly during the first centuries of their political influence, tended to adopt anti-Byzantine positions, resisting the expansion of Byzantine power and cultivating the growth of their own holdings instead.\(^5^9\) In addition to its general resistance to external political forces, the Beneventan state was not particularly interested in cooperation with Rome. Even after the majority had adopted the religion, the Lombards were not uniformly Christian, and the persistence of pagan and Arian practices continued in the Beneventan area well into the seventh century.\(^6^0\) The paganness of the Lombards at the time of their arrival in Italy meant that many monasteries and churches had been destroyed along their path. This dealt a blow to the Christian establishment and greatly diminished its resources. This weakening of the establishment along with the cultural divergence between northern and southern Lombards helped clear the way for new traditions to arise in the region of Benevento.

Throughout their early history in Italy, the Lombards were perceived as enemies to the Roman Church. This served to isolate the Christian population of southern Italy from the Roman church to such a degree that the liturgy developed differently in this region than in parts of Italy farther north. Though the southern Lombards resisted alliances with both ecclesiastical and secular powers at work in and around Benevento, the period of their greatest strength and influence during the eighth century saw the flourishing of Beneventan chant composition and

\(^5^9\) Paul the Deacon *Historia Langobardorum*, Book IV.38.

In the years surrounding the Lombard domination of the southern Italian region, a liturgical tradition now known as the Beneventan rite began to take shape. Comprised of a regional version of ritual practices, melodies and their notation, and even certain liturgical practices, this iteration of the liturgy was decidedly Catholic, but not fully in alignment with the texts and rituals of the Roman Church.

Within the boundaries of the Duchy of Benevento lay the renowned abbey of Montecassino. Established before the Byzantine war with the Ostrogoths or the Lombard invasion, this monastery exerted tremendous influence over the liturgical life of the region from its foundation by Saint Benedict of Nursia in 529 through its several cycles of destruction and reconstruction into the twentieth century. It has been argued that the beginning of the development of the Beneventan chant repertoire might have been a result of the Lombards’ destruction of the abbey around 570 as they expanded their territory. With its wide-ranging liturgical influence, the loss of the abbey and its direct connection to Rome could well have provided a space for the emergence of a new local style of chant.62

Thomas Kelly notes that the earliest date that can reasonably be given for Beneventan chant as its own repertoire is the mid-seventh century when the community of Montecassino was in exile, but the flourishing of Beneventan chant emerged in the early eighth century when the relationship between two centers of southern Italian liturgical life—the abbey of Montecassino and the church of Santa Sofia in Benevento—served to solidify the emerging body of Beneventan chant through its beginnings.63 The union of Lombard traditions brought along by


62 Ibid., 7.

63 Ibid., 9.
the invaders with the existing Catholic traditions yielded a new regional chant that could only have arisen in southern Italy.

As a political center in southern Italy, just more than 100 km from Montecassino, the city of Benevento provided a locus of influence for the ecclesiastical life of the region. The reconstruction of Montecassino in 718 represented an important moment of collaboration between Church and state in which the Catholic officials and Duke Romuald II of Benevento joined forces to rebuild this historical institution.  

By the time this project was undertaken, Benevento was already a Catholic principality, which meant that the communities of Montecassino and Benevento could work together more harmoniously, and thus the already-growing repertoire of Beneventan chant could be supported and further developed in a monastic context with the reconstruction of the abbey.

Shortly after the reestablishment of Montecassino, during the reign of Arichis II in Benevento, from 756 through 774 and as the prince of Benevento from 774 until his death in 787, the court church of Santa Sofia was established in Benevento. The complex included not only the church, but also space for a monastic foundation attached to it and dedicated to the recitation of the canonical hours throughout the day. Santa Sofia became central to religious life in the Duchy of Benevento, functioning not only as a place of devotion to local saints but also as a probable source of Beneventan manuscripts. In the few manuscripts thought to be from

64 Chronica Monasterii Casinensis, I.4

65 Chronica Monasterii Casinensis, I.9

66 Hans Belting, “Studien zum beneventanischen Hof im 8 Jahrhundert,” Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 16 (1962), 175-193. Belting provides extensive information about the construction and the architecture of Santa Sofia. The abbey’s early history places a monastery of nuns there and indicates a direct connection to the abbey at Montecassino. By the mid-tenth century, the nuns had been replaced by monks.
Santa Sofia, Kelly sees direct connections to the Montecassino scriptorium both in terms of content and style.\textsuperscript{67} This relationship between the scriptorium at Montecassino and the community of Santa Sofia became increasingly important in subsequent centuries because the growth in the number of sites where manuscripts were produced in the Beneventan chant powered the repertoire’s reach as it was expanding through the region. The Dukes of Benevento, in addition to strong political power, exerted influence over the Church and local religious practices within their borders, hastening the spread of the Beneventan liturgical repertoire throughout the region.

**Beneventan Chant: from Living Repertoire to Persistent Remnant**

The chant repertoire of the Beneventan rite was consistently written in the script of the same name. The use of a local script for the transmission of a local chant repertoire is consistent with the relative insularity of the liturgical life of southern Italy in the seventh and eighth centuries. According to Elias Lowe, the hand now known as Beneventan script is most likely a continuation of the old Italian manner of writing.\textsuperscript{68} Rather than offering evidence of a new southern Italian invention, the continued use of the Beneventan script represents a form of writing preserved in the south even as the northern and central regions of Italy moved toward scripts influenced by Carolingian minuscule from the ninth century onward. Thomas Kelly places most of the sources for Beneventan chant “along a Benevento-Montecassino axis.”\textsuperscript{69} The free movement of manuscripts and the use of Beneventan chant in all the localities along this geographical swath of Italy lasted for well over a century, until the next disaster at Montecassino.


\textsuperscript{68} Lowe, *The Beneventan Script*, 95-96.

\textsuperscript{69} Kelly, *The Beneventan Chant*, 17.
In 884 the abbey was once again sacked, this time by Islamic forces, disrupting the flow of chant material between the scriptorium at Santa Sofia in Benevento and the monastery. This further isolated the Beneventan liturgy and chant from Rome, as Montecassino was closely aligned to both Rome and Benevento throughout its history.

Beneventan chant reached its zenith in the eighth century, only beginning to decline in prevalence with the adoption of Gregorian chant during the ninth and tenth centuries. Even the Gregorian chant used in southern Italy shows signs of being somewhat insulated from central and northern developments, as liturgical books produced in and around Benevento by the eleventh century still show elements of Gregorian chant that had become obsolete in other areas by that period. This is one among several elements of the liturgy in southern Italy that reflects the preservation of existing traditions alongside the growth and development of uniquely local elements.

For centuries, the Beneventan rite was believed to be simply a segment of the Ambrosian tradition that flourished in Milan until the eleventh century liturgical reforms imposed by the Roman Church. Ambrosian chant, named for the first bishop of Milan, Saint Ambrose, originated in and around Milan as early as the fourth century with the supposed introduction of hymns into the liturgy by Saint Ambrose himself. Antiphonal chant is said to have been introduced into the Ambrosian repertory before its appearance in the liturgical chants of the Roman rite. The influence of the Milanese Ambrosian chant reached across northern Italy and

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was influencing southern Italian chant traditions by the eighth century. With the rise of Carolingian power and the spread of the Frankish chant that would eventually become what is now known as Gregorian chant, the Ambrosian repertoire was displaced in most of northern Italy. Its sphere of influence receded toward Milan and south, perhaps explaining its close association with the emerging Beneventan chant in the eighth and ninth centuries. Though related, the Ambrosian and Beneventan chant traditions are, in fact, distinct in their development. Thomas Kelly, in his several articles collected in *The Sources of Beneventan Chant* and elsewhere, gives a thorough portrait of the earliest manuscript evidence of a distinct musical tradition centered in Benevento. Though few documents remain to elucidate the details of Beneventan liturgical practice, the many full and fragmentary musical manuscripts written in Beneventan scripts and notation offer insight into the repertoire as an independent tradition. Unlike the Beneventan chant, Ambrosian chant would not be subject to suppression and replacement with Gregorian chant, though the Gregorian chant would exert some influence over the Ambrosian tradition as well.

Through the period during which both the Ambrosian and the Beneventan chant repertoires were thriving in Italy, the interplay between the monastery of Santa Sofia in Benevento and the abbey at Montecassino continued to grow as well. Historical documents connect the two foundations and indicate that there was mutual influence not only in matters of chant and liturgy, but also in the balance of political and ecclesiastical power. Though the monastery at Santa Sofia had indeed been administratively attached to Montecassino in the early part of its foundation, the invasions that had swept through the region in the late ninth century


effectively made Santa Sofia independent of the monastery. With the passage of several decades and another reconstruction of the abbey (completed in 949), the community of Montecassino returned from its places of exile.\textsuperscript{75} With the return of the community to the area, questions began to arise as to the nature of the relationship between Santa Sofia and Montecassino. Records indicate that official documents dating to 943 confirmed the possession of the church in Benevento by the abbey, but records also exist that this possession was contested by the abbot at Santa Sofia. This contentious power struggle for control of Santa Sofia continued for many years, with the abbey of Montecassino relying heavily on papal and Byzantine imperial authority in the early years of the conflict. The contentious debate over monastic dependence even yielded fabricated documents, indicating the vehemence with which Montecassino sought to exert authority over the Beneventan monastery.\textsuperscript{76} The increasing division between the communities at Montecassino and Santa Sofia are emblematic of the impending divisions between the Roman church and the Beneventan rite. With the growing loyalty of Montecassino to papal authority, the persistence of Beneventan chant is evidence of one way in which the Duchy of Benevento insisted on maintaining its essential independence and keeping its cultural and religious traditions alive. Santa Sofia did, indeed, gain its independence from Montecassino around 1051, though this Papal command came as a result of the city of Benevento’s submission to the authority of Rome.\textsuperscript{77} In spite of the official pronouncement of loyalty to the Papacy, the liturgical life of Benevento did not immediately conform to the practices and prescriptions of Rome. It

\textsuperscript{75} Chronica Monasterii Casinensis, I. 57-59. During the period before reconstruction was finished, the monks lived at Teano and Capua.

\textsuperscript{76} Herbert Bloch, Montecassino in the Middle Ages, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), 252ff. In The Beneventan Chant, 34, Kelly also provides an entertaining and extensive list of the fabricated documents associated with this conflict.

\textsuperscript{77} Chronica Monasterii Casinensis, II.81, 84.
would be several years before the Beneventan rite was suppressed and still longer before the regional practices of the area would fall into disuse.

After the Montecassino community reestablished itself in the reconstructed monastery in the mid-tenth century, the abbey experienced a renaissance, greatly increasing its output of manuscripts during and after the period of conflict over Santa Sofia. Through the second half of the tenth century and into the eleventh, the ties between Montecassino and Rome grew continually stronger, and the give and take of manuscripts and liturgical material between Montecassino and Benevento waned along with the political power of the Duchy.

In 1058 Pope Stephen IX, formerly an abbot of Montecassino, officially suppressed the Beneventan rite and use of its liturgical chant. Thomas Kelly notes that the term found in the documents identifies the chant as Ambrosian, but that this should be taken as a shorthand for the local chant still in use at Montecassino. Regardless of the prohibition, the use of some of the chants and texts persisted for a few decades beyond the rite’s official suppression. Abbot Frederick’s successor, upon his elevation to the Papacy, and a particularly important abbot at Montecassino was Desiderius, who held the office from 1058 until 1087. Abbot Desiderius encouraged the prolific production of books, thereby increasing Montecassino’s influence on surrounding churches and the regional cultural landscape. The period of Desiderius’ rule coincided with the suppression of the Beneventan rite and marked a shift away from the production of books containing Beneventan chant. The books containing the notation were often

78 Chronica Monasterii Casinensis, II.94. Stephen IX had previously been Frederick, Abbot of Montecassino. He held the abbacy for only a short time, as he was elected pope later in the same year, 1057.

79 Kelly, The Beneventan Chant, 39.
repurposed, becoming palimpsests or being separated into leaves and fragments.\textsuperscript{80} Even the few Beneventan traditions that persisted, such as the Exultet rolls, went from manuscripts containing Beneventan text and notation to rolls containing the Franco-Roman text. The transition to the production of Exultet rolls from Beneventan to Franco-Roman material does not necessarily mean that the rolls containing the Beneventan text and melody ceased to be used entirely. The use of the Beneventan text of the Exultet and the preservation of the Exultet roll as a liturgical object in the years immediately following the rite’s suppression are consistent with the insistence of Benevento and its inhabitants on maintaining identity and independence in as many ways as possible.

With the suppression of the Beneventan chant, Exultet rolls emerge as a noteworthy transitional manuscript genre. The rolls represent the persistence of regional practices while at the same time demonstrating sufficient adaptation to remain acceptable for use even after the suppression of the Beneventan rite that gave rise to them. Though the text of the Exultet certainly predates the earliest remaining Exultet roll, there are no extant Exultet rolls earlier than 981. The rolls produced during the transition from Beneventan to Franco-Roman dominance show a gap between tradition and conformity. The particularities of the Exultet rolls’ content and format set them apart from other types of rolls in use around Europe during the tenth through fourteenth centuries and offer insight into their cultural significance.

\textbf{Words for Dispelling the Darkness: the Exultet’s Origin and Themes}

As indicated by their name, all of the Exultet roll manuscripts are, in essence, vehicles for the text and notation of the Exultet proclamation. The Exultet rolls that persist today are no older

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 40. Kelly lists the few full manuscripts and other primary sources for Beneventan chant that remain. For more concerning manuscripts that are written in Beneventan script, though not necessarily containing Beneventan chant material, see Virginia Brown, \textit{Beneventan Discoveries} and Newton, \textit{The Scriptorium and Library at Monte Cassino}. 
than the tenth century, but the tradition of the Exultet proclamation on Holy Saturday is much older. The singing of the Exultet in the medieval church is associated with the dramatic ritual of the blessing and lighting of fire on the Easter Vigil.\textsuperscript{81} The use of a candle on the vigil of Easter dates back to at least the fifth century in Jerusalem, with subsequent centuries recording more elaborate rituals surrounding candles and the blessing of fire.\textsuperscript{82} Scholars believe that these early rites concerned with fire could be related to the far older tradition of the \textit{lucernarium}, or lighting of a flame in the evening as part of an offering of prayer. In northern Italy and elsewhere around Europe, the custom of blessing and lighting a Paschal candle was practiced as early as the fourth century, but not adopted in Rome until much later.\textsuperscript{83} Early references to a Paschal proclamation, perhaps the ancestor of the Exultet, can be found in fourth century letter attributed to Saint Jerome. In it, Jerome rejects the notion of both the Paschal candle and the use of a proclamation for its blessing, dismissing it as far too pagan for the Christian liturgy.\textsuperscript{84} A notable part of this perceived paganness was the reliance of the proclamations, varied and adjusted each year, on the Classical poets.\textsuperscript{85} By the seventh century, the practice of blessing Paschal candle had become fairly widespread across Europe, though the ritual was not standardized.\textsuperscript{86}

\begin{enumerate}
\item This is an oversimplification, as the place of the Exultet in the Holy Saturday liturgy differs among regions in Italy. In all cases, though, the Exultet and the blessing of fire take place at some point during the Easter Vigil.
\item Ibid., 521-524, 534.
\item The Beneventan text of the Exultet, as will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, does take Virgil’s \textit{Georgics} as a source.
\end{enumerate}
A variety of texts for the blessing of the candle have been preserved, ranging from the fourth through the twelfth centuries and from North Africa to Spain and Italy to France. In regional liturgies of Spain, Milan, and Benevento, as well as in the Franco-Roman tradition that eventually took over the liturgical practice of southern Italy, stable texts for the Easter proclamation began to emerge in the tenth century.\footnote{Robert Amiet, \textit{La Veillée Pascale dans l’Église Latine} (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999), 194.} The Milanese liturgy includes text that overlaps with the Beneventan and Franco-Roman texts, underscoring the idea that the Ambrosian chant of Milan was influential in the development of the Beneventan liturgy. It is also clearly related to the Franco-Roman text, as the three share the prologue to the Exultet. Beyond these similarities, though, the three traditions diverge in ways that impact our understanding of the Exultet’s place in southern Italian manuscript rolls. With respect to the textual tradition of the Beneventan Exultet, Thomas Kelly places the composition of the proclamation perhaps earlier than 650 but likely no later than the conversion of the Lombards to Christianity around 700.\footnote{Ibid., 194-205.}

The Exultet consists of two parts, the prologue and the preface. The preface is the longer section and is the place where the Exultets diverge most significantly in the Beneventan and Franco-Roman versions. The text of the Exultet as it appears in the rolls is not readily attributable to a single author. Given the early history of the text as a variable proclamation changed and improvised each year, it is unsurprising that the text that became stable was also a composite. A wide range of pagan and Christian sources seem to be woven into the poetry of the

\footnote{Kelly, \textit{The Exultet in Southern Italy}, 46. Kelly’s analysis takes a close look at the scansion of the Franco-Roman and Beneventan texts, using their accent patterns to establish age and relationship to regional comparanda.}
Exultet, which includes theological pronouncements, calls to prayer, praises of the bees, and highlights from salvation history. The Beneventan and Franco-Roman texts both use the same prologue, shared with the Exultet used in Milan, as noted above. There are lines of the preface that overlap, but the two texts are significantly different in content.

As subsequent chapters will further explore, the Beneventan text is by far the most poetic in its treatment of the Easter mysteries and their corresponding symbols in the natural world. The nature of Christ and His Resurrection, the Incarnation, the examples of the bees’ industry and virginity, the self-sacrifice of the candle, and the need for blessings on the faithful are topics celebrated in unequal proportion to one another. The praise of the bees is easily the most extensive portion of the preface, indicating the weight of the creatures’ importance not only to the production of wax for the Paschal candle, but also to the narrative of purity and selfless fruitfulness so often celebrated in praises of the Virgin Mary. The Beneventan Exultet is a proclamation filled with imagery of the heavenly bodies interwoven with the earthly bodies of the Virgin and the bees. The body of the Easter candle is consumed by its own fire even as the body of the Virgin Mary gave its own flesh to make the Christ of the Exultet a body with which to radiate light into the darkness of the fallen world. The Beneventan Exultet is intensely physical in its imagery, even as it uses this imagery to make the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Resurrection easier to imagine for the listening faithful.89

By contrast, the Franco-Roman Exultet adheres much more closely to the chronological sequence of events leading to the Resurrection. Tracing the key typological figures of the Old Testament, this Exultet is much more Christ-centered than the Beneventan. The Franco-Roman Exultet is comparatively didactic, explicitly drawing connections between the events of salvation

89 For the full Beneventan and Franco-Roman texts, see Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 32-40. All quotations of the Exultet and its translation are taken from Kelly’s editions.
history and their effects of the souls of the faithful. After a long and beautiful explication of Christ’s redemptive actions and their prefigurations, the Exultet turns to the praise of the Paschal candle. Here it includes its own verses in praise of the bees, though these lines are less explicit in their celebration of the bees’ virginal fertility than the Beneventan Exultet’s verses. It next returns to the Passover night and a short celebration of the light that the candle, representing Christ, will provide through the darkness of night and into the Easter sunrise.

Both Exultets end with prayers for the benefit of the clergy, the faithful, and the year ahead, leading into the next steps in the Easter Vigil liturgy. The function of the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultet texts is essentially the same even though their content differs substantially. The Beneventan text was in use in southern Italy much earlier than the Franco-Roman and offers insight into what aspects of the Easter celebrations were most resonant for the members of the church in the Beneventan area. Among the most important metaphors are the stars, fire, light and shadows representing the mystery of Christ’s transformation of fallen humanity into redeemed, the wonder of the bees (as they were understood in antiquity and the Middle Ages) representing the perfection of chastity and the selflessness of fecundity brought to perfection in the Virgin Mary, and the perfection of the candle that sustains itself while also providing a barrier between the faithful and the darkness and danger outside its light. The text in praise of the bees is approximately twice as long in the Beneventan Exultet as in the Franco-Roman and focuses less on the candle produced from the beeswax than on the admirable nature of the bees themselves. While the bees are clearly understood as emblems of the Virgin Mary and of the virtuous Christian, they also indicate the substantial influence of earlier pagan ideas about nature and the virtues it teaches.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{90} Arthur Bernard Cook, "The Bee in Greek mythology,” \textit{The Journal of Hellenic Studies} 15
In the Beneventan Exultet, the natural world is presented as a manifestation of the Easter mysteries. In the Franco-Roman Exultet, the natural world is at the service of salvation history. Though a subtle difference, the change from Beneventan to Franco-Roman Exultet texts represents the imposition of a more uniformly Christocentric approach to the Paschal story and, by extension, to the increased uniformity of religious practice and belief in Southern Italy.

Eventually, even the Franco-Roman Exultet would be superseded by the Roman rite’s imposition of uniformity across the Catholic world. The Exultet as it is sung today bears only the faintest resemblance to the earliest Beneventan versions illustrated in the Exultet rolls.

**The Shape of the Easter Vigil**

Sometimes referred to as “the mother of all vigils,” the Easter Vigil celebration traditionally takes place on Holy Saturday in preparation for the Resurrection celebration on Easter Sunday. The Exultet belongs to the Easter Vigil liturgy, which was carried out in several different versions in medieval Italy. The essential aspects of the Easter Vigil shared by all of the Italian rites, though not always arranged in the same way, were the blessing of the fire and the candle, the Liturgy of the Word, the rites of initiation, and the Eucharistic prayers. The proclamation of the Exultet fit in with the blessing of the fire and the candle and the Liturgy of the Word, depending on which tradition was followed.

The blessing of the fire, in some cases aligned with the blessing of the Paschal candle and the proclamation of the Exultet, was conducted in a variety of ways from its appearance in the seventh century through the Middle Ages and beyond. The details of practices for the blessing of fire depended on place, with some localities reserving a flame from earlier Holy Week services.

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some lighting new flames for each day of the triduum, and some kindling new fire only on Holy Saturday.\textsuperscript{92} Sometimes the fire would be kindled outside the church building, the Paschal candle would be blessed and lighted from it, and the new light would be brought into the church to shine from the Easter candle. A number of blessings and prayers associated with the blessing of fire are known, many of which draw imagery concerned with light from biblical passages as well as pagan traditions.\textsuperscript{93} Associations between fire dispelling darkness and Christ’s Resurrection as a renewal of the light of grace dispelling the darkness of sin are strong even outside the Easter Vigil context, but the ritual kindling of fire is certainly a powerful symbolic action when carried out in the nighttime hours before Easter day. The methods for kindling the fire also varied regionally. The Beneventan rite is known to have used stones for the striking of the new flame, as did several other regional versions of the kindling of new fire.\textsuperscript{94}

During the Easter Vigil, as the most solemn celebration of the liturgical year, there are several readings, drawn from both the Old Testament and the New. The earliest versions of the Easter Vigil had as many as twelve readings, though the medieval vigils in Europe generally had about seven. The earliest sources for the Easter Vigil, from the fourth century, describe the readings as being drawn from the Psalms, the prophets, and the Gospels, giving few details as to

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93 Alistair J. MacGregor, “Fire and Light in the Western Triduum: Their Use at Tenebrae and at the Paschal Vigil” (PhD diss., Durham University: 1989), 140-144 and 153-154.

94 Ibid. Mac Gregor provides an extensive study of the various ways that the new fire was kindled, connecting the use of stones to produce the spark for a flame to much older pagan practices. Regarding the Beneventan rite, he cites Hesbert’s article on the antiphonal in \textit{Ephemerides Liturgicae}, vol. 60.
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which passages were commonly read. The readings usually included typologically rich narratives from Genesis and Exodus as well as key passages from the prophetic literature. The order of the readings and their content varied according to time and place but was eventually standardized to conform to the Roman practice. Thematically, the readings often comprise passages concerned with sacrifice, deliverance from death, and the arrival of a self-sacrificing Messiah, all concepts closely associated with the Passover understood by Christians as a prefigurement of Christ in his salvific role.

The rites of initiation into the Christian faith were associated with the Easter Vigil in the earliest centuries of the Church. By about the fifth century, though, the profession of faith by adults to be baptized had been separated into its own rite, conducted in the morning on Holy Saturday, with the baptism following during the evening vigil. As the practice of infant baptism became more common, the need for adult initiation rites at Easter became less pressing. As a result, the blessing of the water in the baptismal font that would be used throughout the year overtook the actual rite of baptism in the Easter Vigil proceedings. Though baptisms could still occur during the Easter Vigil, they were less common through the centuries until the most recent liturgical reforms instituted at the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.


96 Amiet, La Veilée Pascale, 285-296, 312-314.

97 Ibid., 320-343. Though this section of Amiet’s book does not mention the Easter Vigil as celebrated in Southern Italy, it is of interest that the development of practices such as dipping the candle into the font, and blessing both the candle and the participants in the liturgy are reflected in illustrations from the pontifical and benedictional rolls Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 1 and Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 2. See Figures 1 and 2.
The remainder of the Easter Vigil liturgy was not particularly different from other Catholic celebrations in the Middle Ages. The Eucharistic liturgy was largely the same as at any other mass with the exception of first reception of the Eucharist by new adult initiates. There are no images of the Eucharistic liturgy in the Exultet rolls, strengthening the assertion that this was the least distinctive part of the Easter Vigil liturgy, though theologically among the most important.

The proclamation of the Exultet preceded the rites of initiation and the liturgy of the Eucharist in all regional traditions and was consistently aligned with the readings and the blessing of the fire. Unsurprisingly, elements that resonate with the readings as well as with the blessing of fire and the Paschal candle regularly appear in the illustrations of the Exultet rolls. These aspects of the Exultet rolls will be considered at length below.

**The Exultet Rolls’ Form and Function**

All of the Exultet rolls that still exist appear to have originated in southern Italy, probably no farther north than Montecassino or Capua, and seem to begin with a commission by Bishop Landolfo of Benevento for a decorated rotulus containing the text of the Exultet. According to Zchomelidse, the innovative object became the inspiration for many similar rolls throughout the region.\(^{98}\) The earliest extant Exultet roll, apart from a pontifical and a benedictional that do not contain the Exultet text, dates to 981-987 CE. The Exultet roll Vat. Lat. 9820, in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, was produced in Benevento. Its dating is based on the presence of two names, Pandolfo and Landolfo, a Duke of Benevento and an early bishop.\(^{99}\) Landolfo was


\(^{99}\) Valentino Pace, in *Exultet*, 101.
elevated to the newly-created See of Benevento in 969, becoming its first archbishop and strengthening the ties between the Roman church and the Beneventan principality. The importance of the commissioner of the earliest Southern Italian rolls was likely a primary reason for the spread of the manuscript type.

Landolfo’s Exultet roll (Vat. Lat. 9820) is the earliest of the extant rolls, and originally included the Beneventan version of the Exultet text, Beneventan chant notation, and numerous illustrations. Though much of the text is now missing, it was once oriented in the opposite direction from the images. The innovation introduced in the earliest Exultet roll is its integration of text and image in a new way. Earlier liturgical rolls generally contained a continuous column of text, with decoration only along the margins. The disruption of the Exultet text with large illustrations appears to be new to the manuscript group, and there are several ways that this new format plays out among the Exultet rolls taken together.

As a body of manuscripts, the Exultet rolls have a number of qualities in common. Not all of the manuscripts are still intact, several having been separated into sheets and a few cut apart to the extent that the text is no longer there. Most of the rolls are between 25 and 32 cm in width, with outliers ranging from 13 cm to 47.5 cm. They include a text of the Exultet, either Beneventan or Franco-Roman, indicating that their sole intended use was the Easter Vigil liturgy. Almost every roll contains musical notation, most of which is written in Beneventan neums. All of the rolls are decorated to some extent, with illumination ranging from flourishes and


101 Myrtilla Avery, *The Exultet Rolls of South Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 7. In addition to information on the width of each manuscript, Avery includes a range of lengths for the rolls as they are preserved today. Most have been disassembled or cut for more convenient storage.
decorative letters to fully realized narrative miniatures depicting scenes from the Exultet text or the Bible. Many Exultet rolls offer evidence of an iconographic tradition or similar location of origin based on the continuity of their depictions of figures such as Tellus, Ecclesia, and bees, among others. The manuscripts share subject matter for their illustration in many cases. The sequence of the images and the choice of what is represented is often consistent across several rolls. The iconographic similarities and textual relationships among rolls will be discussed at length in subsequent chapters as the illustrations and their textual connections are addressed thematically.

The use of the Exultet proclamation for the Holy Saturday liturgy long predated the production of the earliest known Exultet roll. Early versions of Easter proclamations reach back as far as the seventh century. Further exploration of the text will be conducted in subsequent chapters, but it is worth noting that the literary and theological content of the Exultet shifted between the earliest Beneventan versions and the eventual standard Roman text. The latest Exultet rolls date to the second half of the thirteenth century and generally contain the Franco-Roman version of the text, reflecting the suppression of the Beneventan rite and its replacement with the more homogenized Franco-Roman tradition during the late eleventh century.

Most information about the practical aspects of the Exultet rolls’ use comes mainly from illustrations included in the pontifical and benedictional rolls regularly grouped with the Exultets. These include images that represent moments in the Easter Vigil liturgy, including depictions of clergy making the proclamation, presumably the Exultet, from an unfurled roll. Though tempting, this representation of unfurled rolls being read by the deacon atop the ambo is not enough to explain the rationale for the reversal of images in relationship to the text. Rather, it reinforces that the rolls were used at the Easter Vigil at a sizable distance from the faithful, but
near the bishop and attending clergy. Thomas Kelly sees the reversal of the images in some of the rolls as a connection of the Exultet rolls to the pontifical and benedictional rolls that were completely for episcopal use.\(^{102}\) Though the use of images oriented opposite the text occurs in both the Beneventan and Franco-Roman, the order of events for the Easter liturgy differs between the rites. In both, the location of the ambo from which the Exultet might have been sung would have been the same, but the sequence of prayers and ritual activities was substantially different in the Beneventan rite from any other in use in Italy at the time.

In the Beneventan rite, the Exultet was proclaimed not immediately after the blessing of the fire, as in the Roman rite, but after the readings.\(^{103}\) The sequence of liturgical events at the Easter Vigil comes largely from Beneventan missals and other books since the order of the celebration is not reflected in the Exultet rolls themselves. With its extended celebration of the light, heavenly bodies casting light into the darkness, and the self-sacrificing nature of the bees, the Virgin, and the candle, all of whom give their own bodies for the illumination of humanity, it is curious that the Exultet and blessing of the candle come only after the readings. The blessing of the candle after the readings is interesting in that it would be, presumably, necessary for there to be some light by which to read. As Thomas Kelly notes in his discussion of the benedictional, the blessing of the candle and the proclamation of the Exultet would happen just prior to the final reading before the Mass.\(^{104}\) Even in this order for the Easter Vigil liturgy, the blessing of the

\(^{102}\) Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 201-205. Kelly argues that the reversal of the images earmarks them as the rightful domain of the bishop. With the proximity of the bishop to the ambo from which the deacon proclaimed the Exultet (whether in the Beneventan liturgy or the Roman), it is reasonable to think that the illustrations would only be legibly visible to the bishop and other nearby clergy.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., 135.

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 137.
candle and the proclamation of the Exultet maintain a pride of place in the rites leading up to the celebration of the Mass. This way of doing things places the Exultet at a sort of culmination in the Old Testament narrative leading to the typological moments closest to the advent, death, and resurrection of Christ. Coming toward the end of the readings, this series of readings provides a literary runway for the Exultet with its extra-biblical imagery and exuberant celebration of light and nature. Kelly provides evidence that the Beneventan order was used in southern Italian churches outside of Benevento itself into the twelfth century, citing manuscript evidence that the Beneventan order often persisted even where the Franco-Roman text had become the standard for the Exultet.  

This indicates that the Exultet might have existed outside the increasingly standardized liturgy, being a single annual event executed in a variety of ways around Europe.

The Beneventan rite before the production of the earliest existing Exultet roll is believed to have placed the singer of the Exultet not atop the ambo, but most likely from the ground level in the sanctuary. This is consistent with the rites practiced in Rome and elsewhere around Italy. By the tenth century, though, the proclamation of the Exultet appears to have moved to the ambo exclusively. This is consistent with the practice in Rome from the late eleventh century onward, perhaps indicating that the design of the Exultet rolls as illustrated rotuli was not necessarily dependent on their legibility from an ambo. Images in the Exultet rolls show the blessing of the

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105 Ibid., 139-143.

106 Zchomelidse, *Art, Ritual, and Civic Identity*, 38-41, speaks of the rolls unfurling down the ambo when the Exultet was sung, probably based on the liturgical illustrations found in some of the rolls. This is not certain, though, and is in contradiction to Kelly. Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 156-157, notes that the practicalities of blessing the candle indicate that it would not make sense for the Exultet to have been sung from the ambo. In addition, he cites images from Exultet rolls and benedictionals that depict both floor-level and ambo-level proclamation, indicating a diversity of possible methods.
candle both ways, with the deacon standing on a step or atop an ambo.\textsuperscript{107} Either way, it is certain that the deacon was consistently the one to proclaim the Exultet and that the bishop was responsible for touching the candle to bless it in the Beneventan rite.

The Exultet rolls rarely include the \textit{lumen Christi} response associated with the blessing of the candle, though it is known to have been sung in nearly all the practices of the Easter Vigil liturgy. This indicates a separation between the ritual practice and the Exultet itself, allowing for the mixture of existing melodies for the \textit{lumen Christi} with the increasingly common Franco-Roman Exultet through the eleventh century and beyond.\textsuperscript{108} By the thirteenth century, the Beneventan chant had been largely replaced with the Franco-Roman as approved by the pope. Later additions of rubrics and notes to several of the Exultet rolls indicate that the Roman sequence of the proclamation of the Exultet concurrent with the lighting of the Paschal candle came into practice while the Exultet rolls were still in use. The Beneventan and Franco-Roman rites include the use of incense in the preparation of the Paschal candle and the making of the sign of the cross over the candle.\textsuperscript{109}

The introduction of the Roman manner of ordering the Easter Vigil proceedings was a bit later in southern Italy than elsewhere in Italy. Though the Franco-Roman text began to appear in Exultet rolls as early as the eleventh century, the use of the roll format and the adjustment of existing rolls with new Franco-Roman text replacing the Beneventan leads one to believe that the

\textsuperscript{107} Kelly, \textit{The Exultet in Southern Italy}, 157. Gaeta 1 and Troia 1 show no ambo, while Pisa 2 and Troia 1 do show an ambo.

\textsuperscript{108} Pierce, “Holy Week and Easter in the Middle Ages,” in \textit{Passover and Easter: Origin and History}, 174-5. See also MacGregor, \textit{Fire and Light in the Western Triduum} for greater depth concerning the history of combining the \textit{lumen Christi} with the Exultet rite. Amiet also discusses the incorporation of the \textit{lumen Christi} in \textit{La Veillée Pascale}, 218-219.

\textsuperscript{109} Amiet, \textit{La Veillée Pascale}, 183-193.
transition from one tradition to the next was anything but seamless. In Benevento, there is evidence of overlapping uses, with the cathedral following the Beneventan order even as Santa Sofia began to follow the Roman order preferred by Montecassino.\textsuperscript{110} By the twelfth century, the movement away from the older Beneventan order of the Easter Vigil was occurring with greater consistency even in the city of Benevento. Nonetheless, the persistence of the older regional tradition for nearly a century after its official suppression speaks to its importance to the local community. The same can be said of the continued use of the Exultet rolls, with rolls being produced well into the thirteenth century even for use with the Franco-Roman order of the liturgy.

**Imagery and Allegory in Exultet Roll Illustrations**

The illustrations in the Exultet rolls are directly related to the text, though the images are often more detailed and elaborate than the passages to which they refer. Though they are richly illustrated, it is not likely that the Exultet rolls’ images were intended to be seen by the assembled faithful. As noted above, the bishop and his attending clergy would have been much more likely to see the miniatures if the roll were unfurled as the deacon sang the proclamation. The orientation of illustrations in several Exultet rolls has invited speculation on their manner of use during the Easter Vigil liturgy. In a number of cases, the illustrations are oriented in the opposite direction from the text, leading to the theory that the images might have been intended to appear right side up to the assembled faithful as the rotulus unfurled over the ambo during the proclamation of the Exultet. This idea is complicated by the number of rolls in which the images and the text read in the same direction and by the challenge of keeping the roll open in order for

\textsuperscript{110} Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 144.
it to be visible at full length.\textsuperscript{111} While there is no simple answer to the question of the orientation of text and images in various ways, it is clear that there is often a direct relationship between the illustrations and the portions of the Exultet text placed nearby.\textsuperscript{112}

As noted above, there are several commonalities in the placement of images in relationship to the text. Tellus, Ecclesia, and Christ in Majesty, for example, appear in a similar sequence in no fewer than eight of the rolls, indicating a conventional repertoire of sections deserving of illustration. There are a number of subjects for illustrations that appear again and again across the Exultet rolls as a group. These include elaborately decorated letters containing images, depictions of the Virgin Mary, representations of allegorical figures, and imagery drawn from the natural world, to name a few.

A clear common trait of the Exultet rolls as well as the pontifical and benedictional rolls is the presence of illuminated letters. The largest illustrated letters, also referred to as monograms in much of the literature, appear in many of the rolls and most of them are similar in terms of content. Most of the manuscripts, fifteen produced earlier than 1100, include a richly decorated monogram for the passage beginning \textit{Vere dignum}. In several instances, the monogram functions as a space for the illustration of Christ in Majesty. A curious feature of several of these \textit{Vere dignum} illustrations is that where the text is oriented differently from the illustrations, the letters of the monogram function as a canopy, throne, or enclosure for the figure of Christ. In a few instances, the \textit{Vere dignum} initial creates a space for a Crucifixion scene. Another common large

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 5ff, 168. Kelly gives a humorous description of the way that a roll would snap back if simply allowed to trail over the rim of the ambo. Without someone to hold the end, he says, there would be nothing to keep it from “snapping shut like a window shade.”

\textsuperscript{112} Though some of the Exultet rolls had the original Beneventan text scraped off and replaced with the Franco-Roman, the images remain in their original locations. Beneventan text is still discernible in palimpsest in several Exultet rolls.
decorated initial is the *E of Exultet*. The *Exultet* initials, however, tend to be decorated with interlace and other flourishes rather than with narrative illustration. Smaller-scale flourishes and decorated letters appear throughout the body of Exultet roll manuscripts. These range from small decorated letters to begin each verse of the Exultet (Figure 3) to highly detailed monograms filled with interlace decoration (Figure 4). The letters add beauty to the rolls, but also serve as convenient milestones throughout the text. In these aspects of their decoration, the Exultet rolls are more similar to other illuminated liturgical manuscripts with which they are contemporary.

Given the proximity of the Exultet’s proclamation to the blessing of the Paschal candle, it is not surprising that the rolls include many candles in their illustrations. Candles appear not only in association with text about the Easter candle, but also in images concerned with ecclesiastical and temporal authority. The multivalence of the candle as a symbol not only of the light that drives away darkness but also as a metaphor for the self-sacrificing nature of Christ, the Virgin, and the Church makes the repeated use of candles in the illustrations more complex than simple depiction of the Easter Vigil liturgy.

In several of the Exultet rolls, as well as in the pontifical and benedictional rolls, representations of liturgical practices surrounding the Easter Vigil liturgy appear. These range from the blessing and lighting of the Paschal candle, as mentioned above, to the ordination of clergy and the proclamation of the Exultet itself. The Casanatense rolls 724 (B I 13) 1 and 724 (B I 13) 2 are particularly instructive as to the events of the Beneventan Easter Vigil, though the benedictional also contains a number of biblical narrative illustrations. Several other rolls include images of the ordination of clergy, scenes concerned with the baptismal font, prayers offered by the deacon, and the evening offering, among others. These routinely include depictions of the liturgical furnishings surrounding the Easter Vigil rites, giving insight into how they might have
been celebrated. The inclusion or omission of an ambo as the place from which the Exultet was sung varies among the manuscripts, leaving room for ambiguity about the uniformity of the rite. Even among the three Exultet rolls from Gaeta, there is variation as to the presence of an ambo versus a small step in representations of the gathering of the faithful (fratres carissimi) or the evening offering (sacrificium vespertinum).

In many of the rolls, there are a variety of images of the Virgin Mary, sometimes seated and sometimes flanked by angels or saints, and occasionally shown in a Nativity scene. The depictions of the Virgin Mary are not always in predictable locations, though they can sometimes be found in the later sections of an Exultet roll near the prayers for the ecclesiastical and secular authorities (Figures 5, 6). When the Virgin appears in a Nativity scene, it is most often in association with the Elegy of the bees, underscoring the metaphor that links the purity of the bees with the perfection and inviolability of the Virgin.

There is an abundance of allegorical figures illustrated in the Exultet rolls, as well. Some iconographic areas where the Exultet rolls depart significantly from other liturgical manuscripts and rolls is the representation of female allegorical figures. The most common such figures are Tellus and Ecclesia. In eight of the rolls, the figure of Tellus appears in conjunction with the text’s command, “Let the earth rejoice, enlightened with such brightness…”¹¹³ (Figure 7) Similarly, the figure of Ecclesia appears close to the passage, “Let mother Church, too, be glad, adorned with the brightness of such splendor.” (Figure 8) Both of these passages appear in the prologue shared by the Beneventan and Franco-Roman versions of the Exultet, and illustrations of these figures occur in eight Exultet rolls produced before the twelfth century. The words lend

¹¹³ Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 32-40, provides a translation of the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets. All English quotations from the Exultets will be from Kelly’s translations.
themselves well to representation as female allegorical figures, since the terms used in the Exultet text as well as in the labels for the illustrations are feminine. Tellus, Ecclesia, and other figures discussed later are all feminine nouns and the concepts associated with them are often feminine in character as well.

The heavenly bodies described in the Exultet text also appear in several images across the manuscript group. In conjunction with its representation of Tellus, BAV Vat. Lat. 9820 includes an image of Caligō, a female allegorical figure representing shadow or darkness (Figure 7). The small figure sits to the her left as Tellus tilts her head up toward the hand of God that reaches down through a half-circular mandorla to shed a ray of light onto her head. This imagery of light dispelling darkness or otherwise making itself perceptible to the world is consistent with both Exultet texts’ emphasis on the Easter mysteries as a source of light for the faithful. In some later Exultet rolls, the figures of Lux and Tenebrae again appear with Tellus. (Figure 9) A star often appears above the Nativity scene, but also crops up above the scene of the Baptism of Christ and inside of Christ’s mandorla. Though it is arguable whether they constitute heavenly bodies, mandorlas appear often in the transitional space between heaven and earth in the Exultet rolls. (Figure 10) The multicolored concentric circles or ovals that surround Christ in many instances appear either to present a window into Heaven behind him or to set him apart in his own bright and clear space, as in several images of the descent into Hell. Again, the words associated with light lend themselves to casting as feminine in images: Lux and Caligo, like stella and cera are feminine nouns. Light, whether in the guise of an allegorical figure, emerging from the heavens through a mandorla, or illuminating the page as candles or lamps, is essential to both the text and the images of the Exultet in the Beneventan and the Franco-Roman versions.

114 In Bari 2, the presence of stylized stars is noticeable in several places, including Christ’s mandorla and in the negative space of the illustration for the Elegy of the Bees.
In addition to the allegorical figures of Tellus and Ecclesia, Lux and Caligo, twenty of the Exultet rolls contain illustrations for the Elegy of the Bees. The passage celebrating the virtues and contributions of the bees frequently appears in combination with or adjacent to an illustration of the Nativity, visualizing the text’s comparison of the bees’ miraculous generation of offspring with the purity and fruitfulness of the Virgin Mary. This comparison will be more fully analyzed in subsequent chapters. The images of the bees are one of several instances in which elements of the natural world appear in conversation with biblical or allegorical figures alluded to in the text. As noted above, the Beneventan and Franco-Roman texts both devote a sizable section of the proclamation to the Elegy of the Bees. The exuberance of the language used in these texts reflects the wonder of both the natural world and the mysteries that the natural world represents. The large quantity of images of the bees, along with the presence of vegetation, animals, heavenly bodies, and animal and vegetal interlace designs in many of the images across the Exultet roll group leads to consideration of the possibility that the natural world is doing more in this manuscript group than simply providing a backdrop for more important narrative imagery.

As products of a uniquely regional southern Italian liturgical culture, the Exultet rolls represent a type of object that connects early local religious practice with the later homogenized liturgy demanded by Rome. The continued use of the Exultet rolls after the suppression of the Beneventan liturgy indicates a deeper meaning embedded in the manuscripts both as carriers of content and as material entities made for use and human interaction. The unusual combination of the rotulus format with a text used only once a year and illustrations that privilege allegorical, symbolic, and natural imagery sets the Exultet rolls apart from other rolls in use around the Mediterranean at the time. As the next chapter will show, this unlikely combination of qualities also indicates that the Exultet rolls are fundamentally feminine objects.
CHAPTER THREE: ALLEGORY AND IMAGE IN THE EXULTET ROLLS

The tradition of Exultet rolls is uniquely Beneventan, as is the relationship between the text, the images, and the rotulus itself. One of the most versatile aspects of the Exultet rolls is their use of allegory as a tool for fitting more meaning into the object than words or images alone could do. Their abundance of allegorical material works in tandem with the rotulus format to produce objects that speak on theological, artistic, and practical levels, among others. Thematically, there are many possible directions that a study of allegory in the Exultet rolls could take, but this chapter focuses on allegorical figures represented as women or associated with the feminine, imagery drawn from nature, and the extensibility of the roll. It explores the relationships among all these aspects and examines what they might be able to tell the reader/viewer about the female-driven nature of the Exultet rolls.

Allegory as a Tradition of Christian Thought and Expression

The power of allegory as a way to encapsulate complex ideas in readily understandable and memorable forms has made it an attractive device for writers and artists of all kinds and has been a part of the literary and artistic landscape for millennia. Allegory, whether in art or literature, was clearly an essential part of early Christian theology and biblical interpretation. The use of allegoresis as an interpretive tool reaches back into the Midrash tradition of Judaism and the Classical world’s explication of myths and literary histories. Allegory is an effective way of layering meaning onto easily communicated units such as stories, poetry, and images. Looking

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at myths and biblical narratives and images that depict such stories as allegories for theological or cultural content beyond the surface-level meaning allows the reader or viewer to enter more deeply into the content while still observing economy of linguistic or visual expression in the work itself. According to Jeremy Tambling, one of the major uses of allegory in the Classical world was to allow syncretism among disparate traditions.\textsuperscript{116} This allowed a harmonization of the values of the sociocultural moment with revered texts that might not obviously share these values, providing an opportunity for allegorical interpretation to maintain the relevance of culturally significant stories and objects. When applied to the Exultet rolls, both in terms of text and of illustration, the convention of allegorical interpretation clearly runs through the entire body of manuscripts. In the Exultet text itself a strong connection to the exegesis of the Church Fathers and to even older pagan poets is easily discernible, and the images often reflect similar layers of associated meaning.\textsuperscript{117} Though they are not the only occasions of allegory in the Exultet rolls, illustrations of female figures and of parts of the natural world are particularly prominent examples of the encoding of meaning into imagery.

A classic method of allegoresis used regularly by Patristic writers and recommended by medieval exegetes such as Thomas Aquinas is the fourfold method of biblical interpretation. According to this approach, any scriptural text can be interpreted according to four senses:

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 21. Allegory is distinct from allegoresis. An allegorical text or figure is the ground into which deeper meanings are encoded, while allegoresis is the activity of interpretation or the unpacking of the meaning concealed in the allegory. The author cites Classical and early Christian writers’ use of allegoresis to explain parts of myths or stories with troubling or illogical literal aspects allowed the interpreter to preserve the social or theological expectations of current thought while also maintaining the integrity and correctness of the established narrative. For more on the fourfold interpretation of scripture, see Henri de Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis} (Grand Rapids, MI: T&T Clark, 1998).

\textsuperscript{117} Examples include Virgil’s \textit{Georgics} and the \textit{Hexameron} of St. Ambrose, both of which will be discussed later.
literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical. The literal sense is precisely as it seems: the
details of the narrative as it is presented. The allegorical sense looks for the meaning hidden
beneath the surface of the words or the image and often deals with typologies or foreshadowing
of New Testament events in Old Testament texts. The tropological sense looks for the moral
implications of biblical passages, while the anagogical links a passage’s meaning to the
apocalypse anticipated as the eventual fulfillment of Christianity with the second coming of
Christ and the establishment of a new cosmological order. The Exultet text offers a combination
of allegorical interpretations of biblical moments essential to Christianity’s story of redemption
and original text that itself provides ground for interpretation according to the allegorical sense.
As the images and the text of the Exultet rolls are examined, the allegorical sense and its
fundamental importance to the expansion of the Exultet beyond the biblical will become readily
apparent. In their use of female figures and female-driven imagery in both text and images, the
Exultet rolls can be read through a different lens—as an indication of the possibility that the
milieu out of which they arose was more female-centered than the centralized Church that would eventually erase them.

**Tellus, Lux, Caligo, and Ecclesia: the Exultet’s Female Allegorical Figures**

The use of female figures as allegorical representations of abstract ideas is a convention that reaches back to antiquity and, perhaps, even farther. Throughout the history of art, female figures have been used as personifications of freedom, justice, and other social constructs that are otherwise difficult to visualize. They are also used to depict natural phenomena in visual and verbal form. Allegorical figures tend to be female, while the male figures in Classical and Early Christian art tend to have a one-to-one correspondence with gods or characters from mythological and biblical stories. Female figures are used in places where a symbol or a
personification is called for far more often than male figures. Even well into the Renaissance, the figures used to personify virtues, vices, concepts concerning art, psychological phenomena, and more were overwhelmingly female. Though there are instances of male allegorical figures in works from the Renaissance, namely northern European engravings by Dürer and his contemporaries, female allegorical figures are by far more common throughout the history of art. The female figure serves a symbolic function in image as well as text, indicating a tradition that routinely embeds multiple layers of meaning into the female image, whether in words or visual representation.

In the Exultet rolls, allegorical figures appear frequently. The presence of female figures representing the earth or the Church in most of the illustrated manuscripts in combination with the widespread use of imagery drawn from the natural world creates a landscape of images rooted in the allegorical interpretations of the Bible put forth by the Church Fathers while still providing ground for allegoresis in their own right. Allowing for a broader concept of what constitutes an allegorical figure, the range of subjects fitting into this category becomes more expansive. If one applies the status of allegorical figure to any representation that encodes hidden meaning, the communicative power of images in the Exultet rolls becomes even greater.

One of the most recognizable subjects of Exultet illustrations is Tellus, a personification of the earth. Associated with this image is the phrase, “Let the earth rejoice, enlightened with such brightness, and shining with the splendor of the eternal king, feel the darkness of the whole world dispelled.” The figure of Tellus appears in nine of the Exultet rolls, or approximately

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118 Dürer’s *Allegory of Sculpture* and other artists’ representations of artistic and literary pursuits sometimes make use of male allegorical figures in the Early Modern period, but these are nowhere near as common as female figures.

119 “Gaudeat se tantis tellus irradiata fulgoribus et eterni regis splendore lustrata totius orbis se
one third of the total number of Exultet rolls (excluding the pontifical and benedictional rolls). In some of the rolls that do not include Tellus, the section of the rolls that would be associated with such an illustration is missing.\textsuperscript{120} In other rolls, such as Bari Exultet 3, there are few or no figurative illustrations.\textsuperscript{121} Where Tellus does appear, she is most often represented as a half-length nude figure suckling an animal at each breast.\textsuperscript{122} The animals vary, generally consisting of combinations of oxen, snakes, and harts. Consistently, two different animals nurse at Tellus’ breasts. This type of Tellus image appears five times, with similarities that cut across all instances. Beyond the obvious compositional similarity of Tellus presented as a semi-nude woman nursing animals, most of the images also represent Tellus holding either a torch or a cornucopia in her right hand. The variations among animals and other details in the five most similar Tellus illustrations indicate a degree of freedom on the part of the artist, perhaps providing evidence that the earliest among them functioned more as a source of inspiration than an image to be directly copied.

The oldest of the Tellus images, in Vat. lat. 9820, was painted between 981 and 987 in Benevento.\textsuperscript{123} (Figure 7) This image is truncated by a cut to the membrane, leaving only about

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\textsuperscript{120} Pisa 1, for example, is very much damaged, with largely unintelligible illustrations followed by several later membranes of text and notation that are much better preserved.

\textsuperscript{121} Avezzano does not contain large miniatures, but only decorative initials with animal and vegetal interlace. Bari 3 is almost all text and notation, with the occasional flourished initial and one headpiece at the end of the roll. Vat lat. 3784 (5) is only text and notation, with small finely decorated initials interspersed.

\textsuperscript{122} The rolls containing the nursing Tellus are Vat. Lat. 9820, Vat. Barb. Lat. 592, British Library MS Add. 30337, Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3, and Salerno.

\textsuperscript{123} See Avery, \textit{The Exultet Rolls} and Pace in \textit{Exultet} for details regarding dating.
\end{flushleft}
half of the animals nursed by Tellus on the page. This image, as the earliest, is most likely the exemplar for subsequent similar representations of Tellus. Though faded, she is visibly nude and nurses a hart to her left and an ox to her right. This combination of animals appears in two other Tellus images, Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3 and Salerno (Figures 9, 11). The ox is often associated with the sacrificial aspects of pagan religion and Judaism, and can represent pre-Christian worship as well as Christian sacrifice. Similarly, the hart often represents piety and longing for union with God, as in the Psalm, “As the deer longs for running streams, so my soul longs for you.” In the two later rolls, twelfth and thirteenth century respectively, the ox and the hart are quite clear, as are the cornucopia or torch and the smaller figure of Caligo or Tenebrae. In the earliest image, Vat. Lat. 9820, and the latest, Salerno, there are clearly leaves and flowers emerging from the horn in Tellus’ right hand, whereas the similarly placed object in Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3 is filled with stylized flames and labeled lux. The contrast between Lux and Tenebrae or Caligo is demonstrated in all three images, with the tiny allegorical figure being waved away by Tellus’ left hand. (Figures 7, 9, 11) In these images Caligo/Tenebrae looks a bit forlorn, casting a glance back toward Tellus, who is now engaged with the hand of God reaching down from above to bless or cast light on her. Tellus, seated on the ground and shown with her lower half clothed in red and gold, looks up toward the hand of God in Vat. Lat. 9820 and Salerno, but gazes away to her left in Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3.

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124 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, Book XII 1.28.

125 Psalm 42, “Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum...”; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, Book XII 1.18. Isidore does not focus on the Christian interpretation of most of the creatures he describes, but rather on why their names are suitable and whence those names came.

126 Tenebrae refers to shadows, and Caligo is a word for darkness. Both terms are used as names for the allegorical figures of darkness.
In all three images, there is an identifiable similarity of content, but a notable distinction can be made in each image’s placement of Tellus in relationship to the heavens and to Christ enthroned. In Vat. Lat. 9820, Tellus must almost lay back in order to face the ray coming down from the hand of God. (Figure 7) The right hand emerges from a set of concentric semicircles attached to the footstool of the throne on which Christ sits. There is a direct connection from the throne of Christ through the hand of God and its short ray to the face of Tellus just below. The proximity of the figures, with no disconnected space between them appears to describe the closeness of the connection between the earth with all that belongs to it and the creating force of God just above. In this image, Christ, the hand of God, and Tellus are all directly linked to one another within the same frame. Embedded into this image is an intimation of closeness between the earth and its creator. With each successive iteration of this composition, the space between Christ and Tellus increases. In Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3, there is a separate frame for Christ and for Tellus indicated by an expanse of green earth above Tellus’ sky. (Figure 9) Peculiarly, the figure of Christ in the upper portion of the miniature appears only as a torso, seeming to come directly out of the ground. He is arranged in the pose of the Pantokrator but is not physically connected to the semicircular mandorla that breaks the line between the green turf of his own surroundings and the blue band of Tellus’ sky. The semicircular opening into heaven is composed not of concentric circles, but instead of a fan of multicolored petals. Rather than emerging from the center of the semicircle, here the hand of God seems to come from behind the golden frame. It reaches down behind Tellus’ head, but with no ray of light emanating from it. She seems not to notice its presence. In this image, there is space between each of the key elements: green turf between Christ and the mandorla from which the hand of God emerges and blue sky between the hand of God and Tellus. Because of its positioning, there is no obvious
relationship between Christ enthroned and the figure of Tellus, suggesting that there is a clear separation between the earth and God. Tellus is distinctly below Christ and the hand of God does not reach her. In the latest instance of the type, the Salerno Exultet, there is no connection whatsoever between the depiction of Christ enthroned and the image of Tellus. (Figure 11) Each image is bounded by a decorative border, indicating that they were painted as two distinct frames. The image of Christ presents a stately seated figure, completely self-contained in a circular mandorla. In the frame below, Tellus is represented in a way similar to that of Vat. Lat. 9820. She leans back to look up toward the hand of God emerging from a section of circular mandorla and emitting a narrow ray that intersects with her halo. Here, though connected by the ray of light, Tellus and the hand of God are spatially more distant from one another than in either of the other two images. The disconnection of the hand of God from Christ enthroned and the greater space between Tellus and the hand of God indicate that there is an increase in the sense of distance between heaven and earth over the course of three centuries. The distancing of Tellus from heaven and Christ over the centuries of the rolls’ manufacture suggests a shift away from direct identification of the earth, especially represented as a female figure, from its creator. The imagination of the artists, formed by the shifting cultural tide of Church reform, might well have been creating a wider margin between the pagan pre-Christian feminine and the Christ-centered liturgical practices and thought being standardized across Europe.

The other type of image depicting a nursing Tellus shows her as though her torso emerges directly from the earth. With no lower body visible, she appears to be of a piece with the hill on which trees and plants grow and the animals she suckles rest. Both Vat. Barb. Lat. 592

127 There is a break between membranes where the two images would logically connect with one another, but the border pattern seems continuous. The decorative frame at the bottom of the image of Christ enthroned completely separates it from the image of Tellus.
and British Library MS Add. 30337 contain images of this kind. (Figures 12, 13) Though they are very similar, these two images are not quite identical, though compositionally, the two are similar in almost every way. The details of the rendering in Barb. Lat. 592 are much finer and more distinct than in Add. 30337, with distinguishable leaves and branches, animal features, and facial features for Tellus. The two illustrations are also an exact match for content, with small tree growing from the top of Tellus’ head and an ox and serpent nursing at her right and left breasts, respectively. Given the long association of the serpent with evil and sin, it is no surprise that it is nursed at Tellus’ left breast.¹²⁸ In both of these images, the Tellus image is nearest the *Mater Ecclesia* illustration. This proximity suggests a relationship between the unredeemed earth before the advent of Christ and the mediating power of the Church to disseminate the teachings necessary for participation in the redemption celebrated at Easter.

Both Vat. Barb. Lat. and Add. 30337 were made at Montecassino during the late eleventh century. Their images of the nursing Tellus call to mind two illustrations in Montecassino’s famous eleventh-century manuscript of Rabanus Maurus’ *De rerum naturis* (Cod. Cas. 132).¹²⁹ (Figures 14, 15) In the Rabanus Maurus manuscript, there are two images that offer parallels with the nursing Tellus figures. The first, found on Cod. Cas. 132 page 278, belongs to Maurus’ discussion of the seas. (Figure 14) It shows a half-length female nude nursing a serpentine sea monster at each breast. Her hands are upraised in an orant posture very similar to Tellus in the Exultet rolls, and she looks forward toward the viewer just as Tellus does in the Exultet rolls.

¹²⁸ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, Book XII 4.1-48; Isidore gives lengthy descriptions of all the varieties of snakes and why they have their names and attributes. In the Latin rendering of the passage from Psalm 103, cited below, *reptilia* and *draco* are the words used in the passage to which Rabanus Maurus and the illustrations appear to refer.

¹²⁹ This work is also referred to as *De universo*, and is printed under this alternate title in Patrologia Latina, vol. 111. When referring specifically to Cod. Cas. 132, I will cite it as *De rerum naturis*, but will cite the text in general according to Migne’s title, *De universo*. 

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This is a passage concerned with the Red Sea, where Maurus discusses the sea as an allegory for Baptism.¹³⁰ He links Baptism to the miracles of the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea.¹³¹ As there is no obvious visual connection between the passage and its illustration, a reference to Psalm 103 might explain the presence of the nursing sea monsters: “Quam magnificata sunt opera tua, Domine! omnia in sapientia fecisti; impleta est terra possessione tua. Hoc mare magnum et spaciosum manibus; illic reptilia quorum non est numerus: animalia pusilla cum magnis. Illic naves pertransibunt; draco iste quem formasti ad illudendum ei.”¹³² The sea, as part of the earth’s fullness, teems with creatures—reptiles great and small as well as the dragon that plays in its depths. Though the serpent is often associated with evil or the Devil, the Psalm celebrates the serpent and the sea monster as parts of creation, and the illustration in Cod. Cas. 132 seems also to take this positive tone. Regarding this image, Orofino remarks that the iconography, beyond its Classical connotations, is believed to refer to Baptism.¹³³

The second illustration reminiscent of the Exultet rolls’ nursing Tellus appears on page 296 of Cod. Cas. 132. (Figure 15) This image, depicting Tellus, shows her nursing an ox and a

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¹³⁰ Rabanus Maurus, De Universo Book XI, 5, “Mare autem iuxta allegoriam aut baptismum significat, aut mundanam sapientiam aut saeculum aestuandis persecutionum, aut peccatores fluctibus uitorum tumultuantes. Nam mare baptismum significat, ut est illud apostoli, omnes baptizati sunt in nube et in mari, ubi uerus Pharao cum exercitu suo submergitur, et uerus Israhelita persequente hoste liberatur.”

¹³¹ For more on typologies linking the Red Sea and Baptism, see Dorothy Verkerk, Early Medieval Bible Illumination and the Ashburnham Pentateuch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 72-102.

¹³² Vulgate Psalm 103, “How marvelous are your works, Lord! In your wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your possessions. That great and spacious sea was made by your hands and those reptiles of which there is no number; the animals great and small. That sea which ships will traverse; that serpent which you made to play in it.”

¹³³ Orofino, I Codici Decorati, 73. Orofino cites Frugoni as identifying the image with the salvific power of the Church through Baptism. This requires further investigation, as the work cited has remained unavailable to me.
serpent in a pose very similar to those of Barb. Lat. 592 and Add. 30337. Here Tellus is visible from the waist up, her lower body obscured by or emerging from an expanse of yellow ground. She nurses an ox and a serpent, in precisely the same manner as in both Exultet rolls that show Tellus at one with the earth she represents. The Cod. Cas. 132 image illustrates a passage from Rabanus Maurus concerning the earth.\footnote{Rabanus Maurus, \textit{De universo} Book XII, 1.} According to Orofino, the image illustrates a quotation from Isidore of Seville’s \textit{Etymologiae} as well as the chapter of Rabanus Maurus.\footnote{Isidore of Seville, \textit{Etymologiae}, XIV 1.1: “Cuius nomina diversa dat ratio; nam terra dicta a superiori parte, qua teritur; humus ab inferiori vel humida terra, ut sub mari; tellus autem, quia fructus eius tollimus; haec et Ops dicta, eo quod opem fert frugibus; eadem et arva, ab arando et colendo vocata.” Rabanus Maurus’ text is essentially a quotation of Isidore’s passage from the \textit{Etymologiae}. His catalogue in \textit{De universo} relies heavily on Isidore’s work.} Orofino again cites Frugoni’s interpretation of the serpent as an allusion to original sin. If this interpretation of the serpent as a representation of original sin is accepted, then the illustration of Tellus nursing it might be understood as a conflation of the idea of earth as mother with the problem of all that is earthly being associated with sin.

Several other ways of depicting Tellus are used, but only once each, in Bari 1, Vat. Lat. 3784, Pisa 2, Troia 3, and Montecassino 2.\footnote{Bari 1 shows a full-length clothed Tellus accompanied by animals. Pisa 2 avoids allegorical figures altogether and shows a scene of agriculture. Vat. Lat. 3784 shows a male figure. Montecassino 2 shows Christ in a mandorla surrounded by animals and angels. Troia 3 has a female figure to the side of a field of flowers and trees.} (Figures 16-20) Female figures for Tellus are present in Bari 1 and Troia 3. In Bari 1, Tellus appears as a full-length female figure standing at the foot of a small green hillock. (Figure 16) Each hand grasps a tree growing from the ground and surrounded by ferns or other short shrubbery. At Tellus’ feet are goats, a boar, and a dog with a collar. Tellus stands majestically facing the viewer. Her clothing is woven with a pattern reminiscent of fleurs-de-lys and she is crowned with leaves and flowers. This Tellus is separated...
from the Christ in Majesty figure by a *Fratres carissimi* image, disrupting any narrative connection between the image of the earth personified and the process of its redemption. This roll does not contain a *Mater Ecclesia* miniature, leaving this as the sole female figure in the roll. This roll also has a distinctly Byzantine flavor, with medallions of saints along both margins often labeled in Greek.

The Troia 3 roll depicts Tellus as a full-length nude figure in motion, arms raised in an orant position and looking backward over her shoulder at a field filled with trees, flowers, and small plants. (Figure 17) This depiction is unlike any of the other Tellus images in several ways. First, she is a completely nude figure and is separated from the plant life in the image rather than sitting or standing in the midst of it. Second, she neither nurses animals nor touches plants. She appears, rather, to be leaving the frame in which the plants bloom. This Tellus also has no interaction with heaven via the hand of God or by close proximity to a Christ in Majesty figure. In this roll, Tellus is separated from the Christ in Majesty image by several inches of the roll and by a large block containing a decorative initial for the E of *Exultet*. It seems reasonable to assume that Tellus’ raised hands and the flowering of the trees and plants are indicative of the exultation commanded by the text, but there is no clear relationship in the image itself to the redemptive mysteries celebrated in the Easter Vigil and recounted in the *Exultet*.

Pisa 2, with its scene of agricultural activity around a large flowering vine, omits a human figure of Tellus. Instead, an array of men participate in the harvest of grapes and a donkey waits to haul them away toward what is presumably a winepress at the left side of the image. (Figure 18) Though there is no one-to-one correspondence between a figure of Tellus and the fruits of the earth, the idea of earthly nourishment is certainly present in the scene. The earth is often associated with fertility and feeding, as is also the case in the several images of Tellus suckling
the animals, so the use of a fruiting vine in place of a female figure is not particularly surprising. Apart from biblical scenes and an image of the Virgin enthroned, Pisa 2 includes only one other female figure: a supplicant before the duke in the illustration of temporal authority.

The two most peculiar images of Tellus are the ones that use a male figure to represent the earth. In Montecassino 2, this figure is identifiable as Christ, with his cruciform halo, and is seated within a mandorla that rests on the ground surrounded by plants and animals. (Figure 20) The figure of Christ is seated in a Pantokrator-type pose, and an angel emerges from either side of the top of the mandorla. At the edges of the image are trees in bloom and inhabited by birds. Christ is inserted directly into the abundance of the earth, perhaps indicating that it is already redeemed and therefore “shining with the splendor of the eternal king.”

The animals surrounding Christ’s mandorla include a lion, some other variety of cat, two goats, and a bull. The only other image with such a menagerie is Bari 1, as described above. The other unusual image, found in Vat. Lat. 3784, also uses a male figure where Tellus would be. (Figure 17) In this image, the large circle filled in with green is taken to represent the earth. Onto this green ground are superimposed a blue and gold circle containing a half-length Christ and, below that, a blue and gold oval containing a semi clad young man crowned with the crescent moon. Beat Brenk, in his accompanying essay in Exultet, sees the male figure with the moon as the personification of Caligo subjected to Christ, who functions as Lux. If Brenk is correct, then this roll also omits an allegorical figure of Tellus, preferring to represent the figure of Caligo opposite the rising sun of Christ.

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137 “…et eterni regis splendore lustrata…”

138 Brenk, in Exultet, 211.
In addition to the inclusion of Caligo with Tellus in the images discussed above, the figures of Caligo and Lux also appear a number of times together. Most often, Lux and Caligo are shown on either side of the crucified Christ, sometimes as human figures and sometimes as sun and moon. Other instances of Lux and Caligo or Caligo alone occur several times across the Exultet rolls. Once Lux and Caligo together flank the scene of the harrowing of Hell, and twice Caligo or Tenebrae appear alone, put to flight by Christ or by the sun. Whatever the mode of representation, Lux and Caligo are concepts that recur throughout both the Old and New Testaments as well as in early Christian and medieval exegesis. The association of light with goodness, the arrival of Christ, and the redemptive value of his death and resurrection is a thoroughgoing theme in biblical texts through to the book of Revelation. Similarly, the equation of darkness with sin, death, and separation from God is consistent throughout the Bible. The dichotomy of light versus darkness is a part of representations of creation, the journey from sin to redemption, movement from ignorance to knowledge, and other such momentous shifts. Even in secular contexts, similar associations for light and darkness can be found, indicating that these concepts resonate beyond the purely theological and encompass even pre-Christian thought.

Crucifixion scenes are often accompanied by representations of Lux and Caligo. Though the use of Lux and Caligo alongside the Crucifixion is frequent in the Exultet rolls, it is also common in other medieval art. The inclusion of the figures is a reference to the Gospel

139 Some version of Lux and Caligo alongside the Crucifixion is included in Manchester, Montecassino 2, Salerno, MS Add. 30337, Capua, Gaeta 2, Gaeta 3, and Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3. Naples 2 (Mirabella Eclano) also shows the discs for sun and moon, but on either side of a Christ in Majesty adjacent to a VD monogram.

140 Bari 1 depicts Lux and Caligo with the harrowing of Hell and Troia 3 and Pisa 3 offer scenes of personified darkness or shadow fleeing from Christ.

141 Among many others, the Rabbula Gospels and the Sacramentary of Henry II make use of
passages Mark 15:33 and Luke 23:44-45, which describe darkness coming over the earth at the hour of Christ’s death and the darkening of the sun. In the John Rylands University Library, Manchester, Exultet roll, Lux and Caligo are rendered as female allegorical figures shown at half-length within circles to either side of the crucified Christ. (Figure 21) The figures are mirror images of one another; women clothed in matching dresses, each holding a torch the crosses the boundary of her circle toward the outer margin. The figures are distinguishable by their colors, fiery orange for Lux (or Sol) and pale white for Caligo (or Luna). While the torch of Lux seems to be aflame, Caligo’s torch appears not to be lighted. Caligo also has the remnants of a small, dark moon just atop her head. A step removed from the human figures of light and darkness are the sun and moon represented in Montecassino 2. (Figure 22) In this image, each astral body is depicted in its usual color—red for the sun and deep blue for the moon. Female profiles emerge from the interior division of each circle, creating a hybrid of female allegorical figure and image of natural phenomena. A highly stylized representation of Lux and Caligo accompanies the Crucifixion scene in Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3. (Figure 23) Here, Lux and Caligo appear as Sol and Luna, an orange and a blue circle containing female faces. As in the other images, they face one another, but these faces seem to be exhaling, blowing toward the center where the upright of the cross separates them. The Salerno roll continues and simplifies the method used in Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3, with a face easily discernible in the blue moon and hints at a possible face in the orb of the sun. (Figure 24) The roll at Capua includes clearly labeled circles with faces, Luna and Sol. (Figure 25) These, like so many others, have opposing color schemes, these figures.

though there are few other distinguishing features. A similar approach is taken in Gaeta 2, where
the circular sun and moon are distinguishable only by color within the *Vere Dignum* monogram
that contains a Crucifixion scene. (Figure 26) Gaeta 3 reduces this type of Lux and Caligo
imagery even further, depicting two circles, each with a face, in attendance on either side of the
 crucified Christ. These figures are nondescript as to which is which, simply evoking the presence
of the heavenly bodies. MS Add. 30337 presents the most simplified version of Lux and Caligo,
reducing them to a red circle and a blue circle on either side of the Crucifixion scene. (Figure 28)
This kind of rendering relies on the knowledge of the reader/viewer and his or her ability to
de code the significance of light and darkness.

In the Bari 1 Exultet, female figures representing Lux and Caligo accompany the image
detailing the resurrection of the Old Testament saints. 143 (Figure 29) These figures take positions
that mirror one another, but they are more individual than the Lux and Caligo figures in the
Manchester roll. Ringed by circles of orange and yellow, respectively, the figures face the center
of the composition as though watching Christ’s actions below. The heavenly bodies are present
both as allegorical figures and in the details of each image. A small red sun hovers near Lux’s
head, while Caligo is surrounded by moon and stars. Though not rooted in any obvious biblical
passage, the association of Lux with the rising sun and the resurrection of Christ as the light of
the world is an easy connection. Similarly, the association of Caligo with night and the darkness
of death before redemption is also readily understandable.

An uncommon but arresting type of image depicting darkness (Caligo or Tenebrae)
appears in Troia 3 and Pisa 3. (Figures 30, 31) Though not completely similar to one another,
both Exultets show darkness fleeing away from Christ or his representative. In Troia 3, the image

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143 This image type is also referred to as the Harrowing of Hell, the Descent into Hell, the
Descent into Limbo, and the Resurrection of the Just.
of Tenebrae is a human figure rendered in deep gray black.\textsuperscript{144} (Figure 30) She reels back as though struck by a finger of flame reaching down from a blue semicircle in the sky. Similar lines of fire reach toward the personification of light, a ruddy figure clad in red and holding a blazing torch. The small figure of light is reminiscent of the Classical figure of Helios, a torch-wielding youth.\textsuperscript{145} There is no doubt as to whether light or darkness has the upper hand. This image immediately follows the scene of the Resurrection, presumably the catalyst for the banishment of darkness. Pisa 3 also shows darkness as a human figure, this one distinctly female, separated from Christ by the pillar of fire. (Figure 31) The figure of darkness shrinks away from both and floats curled uncomfortably within a blue circles rimmed in red and orange. She appears confined by the brightness of the solar color that hems her in if not by the presumbale radiance of the pillar of fire or Christ’s gesture of authority. In her accompanying essay for Pisa 3 in \textit{Exultet}, Anna Rosa Calderoni Masetti describes the allegorical figure not simply as Tenebrae, but as \textit{peccatorum tenebrae}, the darkness of sin.\textsuperscript{146} The image comes between two passages in the Franco-Roman text that refer to darkness and light: “This therefore is the night which purged the shadows of sin with a column of fire…This is the night which through all the world for those who believe Christ, who are separated from the vices of the world and the darkness of sin,

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\textsuperscript{144} This image illustrates the passage, “Hec nox est, de qua scriptum est: Et nox ut dies inluminabitur…” This is the night, of which it is written: And the night will be illuminated even as the day.
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\textsuperscript{145} Eva Parisinou, “Brightness Personified,” in \textit{Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium}, Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin, eds. (London: Ashgate, 2005), 29-43. Parisinou describes iconography associated with Helios on Classical Greece, 32-33. She also discusses the personification of stars in Greek art, noting that while female personifications were common for light and darkness, the stars were more often depicted as male figures in Attic and early southern Italian vase painting, 33-34.
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\textsuperscript{146} Anna Rosa Calderoni Masetti, in \textit{Exultet}, 466. Literally, \textit{the darkness of sinners}.
\end{flushleft}
restores them today to grace and unites them to holiness." This use of the pillar of fire alongside the Easter story is a well-known typology, tying the Exodus narrative to the Easter narrative through parallels of sacrificial offering, divine intervention, and liberation from bondage—literal bondage in which the Egyptians held the Israelites captive and figurative bondage of humanity to sin and death.

Whether as allegorical bodies or literary concepts, light and darkness figure prominently into the Exultet text and illustrations across the manuscript group. Textually, the Exultet is filled with images that play up the distinction between light and darkness, sin and redemption, the time before Christ and the time of his resurrection. The pairing of female figures for light and darkness, sun and moon, day and night, signify an awareness of the complementarity between the two. Light cannot be fully appreciated without darkness and the beauty of the dawn would be lost without the night. The repetition of figures of light and darkness as well at their many mentions in the text give the Exultet an overall tone of darkness making way for light, both in the literal sense with the Paschal candle and in the figurative sense with liberation from the darkness of sin.

Another figure that appears frequently in the Exultet rolls is Ecclesia, the personification of the Church. The illustration of Ecclesia is associated with the phrase, “Let mother church, too, be glad, adorned with the brightness of such splendor; and let this hall resound with the great voices of the people.” Traditionally, the term ecclesia refers both to the institutional Church and to the faithful who comprise it. The use of the designation mother for the Church reaches at

147 “Hec igitur nox est qua peccatorum tenebras columnae illuminatione purgauit. Hec nox est que hodie per uniuersum mundum in Christo credentes uitiis seculi segregatos et caligine peccatorum reddit gratie sociat sanctitate.”

148 “Letetur et mater ecclesia tanti luminis adornata fulgore et magni populorum vocibus hec aula resultet.”
least to the third century with Cyprian’s statement that “You cannot have God for your Father unless you have the church for your mother.”

The motherhood of the Church has been extensively commented on and is central to the discipline of ecclesiology, but can only be partially addressed here. For the purposes of this paper, the history of the allegorical figure of Ecclesia is more pertinent.

In several instances, the representation of Ecclesia in the Exultet rolls includes not only the allegorical figure, but also a church building. The composition of the images comes in a few variations as to the relationship between the figure and the architecture. In two of the twelve images recording Ecclesia, the composition consists of a richly-clad female figure enthroned on the roof of a church building. In several others, a similar female figure of hieratic scale stands in the nave of a church, often with representatives of the clergy and laity in the smaller side aisles. In yet others, the female figure is supplanted by a gathering of the faithful or a snapshot

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149 Cyprian, *De unitate ecclesiae* 6 Patrologia Latina Vol 4., 495ff.


151 See Penelope C Mayo, "The Crusaders under the Palm: Allegorical Plants and Cosmic Kingship in the" Liber Floridus", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 27 (1973): 29-67. Though the iconography is not reflected in the Exultet rolls, it is interesting to note he use of the palm tree as an iconographic element in the representation of the allegorical figure of the Church.

152 Vat. Lat. 9820, Velletri

153 Vat. Barb. Lat. 592, BL MS Add 30337, Montecassino 2
of some liturgical celebration.\textsuperscript{154} In two instances, the allegorical figure of Ecclesia is presented not as the traditional female figure, but as a male clergy member.\textsuperscript{155}

Beginning with the earliest way of representing Ecclesia, Vat. Lat. 9820 is the logical starting point. (Figure 8) Curiously, this version of Ecclesia presents her as an elaborately dressed female figure seated on a cushion perched atop the nave of a church, with feet resting on the roof of the side aisle. Around her head is a rectangular nimbus surrounded by a golden halo trimmed in red. Sprouting from the rectangular portion are three decorative protrusions similar in shape to those of Tellus in the adjacent image. In the case of Tellus, these have sometimes been labeled flaming torches, but their shape appears to be more floral than flame-like.\textsuperscript{156} For Ecclesia, the bases of the ornaments are more triangular, but the three-leafed flower at the end of each one is similar to Tellus,’ though more stylized. Of particular note are the candle stands that surround the church on which Ecclesia sits. The arrangement of the twelve candles ranged straight across a horizon line that appears to persist behind the church structure calls to mind an altar. If the candles are to be associated with the altar as well as Ecclesia in all her allegorical splendor, then the image could suggest the sacramental and sacrificial nature of the Church as an institutional body. A similar image, and one even more evocative of the church as a locus of sacramental sacrifice, appears in the Velletri Exultet. (Figure 3) This roll is of uncertain date, with some scholars arguing for production as early as 1106 and others estimating its manufacture

\textsuperscript{154} Bari 2, Vat. Lat. 3784, Troia 3

\textsuperscript{155} Salerno, Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3

\textsuperscript{156} Valentino Pace in \textit{Exultet}, 103. The ends of Tellus’ ornaments are a bit more feathered, and similar, as Pace says, to flaming torches. He does leave some ambiguity as to whether these were intended to be flames. This kind of crown only appears again in the Salerno Exultet, where the ornamentation is clearly not representing flames.
sometime during the thirteenth century. The image of Ecclesia in the Velletri roll is also a female figure enthroned atop a church building. She, too, wears a rectangular nimbus and is clad richly and adorned with gold. Rather than the twelve candles of Vat. Lat. 9820, this Ecclesia is surrounded by just six candlesticks. A canopy hung with yellow and red curtains rises from the ends of the church building and creates the effect of a baldacchino, further emphasizing the necessary connection between the Church and the Eucharistic sacrifice celebrated on and around Easter. The curtains protect and reveal Ecclesia as well as the church, perhaps suggesting a relationship with the veil of the Temple that is drawn back or torn asunder at the moment of Christ’s death.

Another image of Ecclesia that includes a female figure appears in Vat. Barb. Lat. 592 and BL MS Add 30337. (Figures 33, 34) This composition places Ecclesia, of hierarchic stature, in the central nave of a church building. In both images she is crowned and beautifully dressed. Her hands are raised in an orant position and her head is framed by a pair of hanging lamps. In both images, crowds of people fill the side aisles of the church. They are of far smaller stature than Ecclesia herself, and represent the faithful and the clergy, easily distinguished by their tonsured heads. In Vat. Barb. Lat. 592, the groups are clearly labeled, making them unmistakable. Apart from details of color, execution, and scale, the two rolls offer images that are compositionally the same. The presentation of a female allegorical figure within the central space of the church building preserves the importance of identifying the Church as a maternal, female force while simultaneously situating her within the physical structure in which liturgical activity

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157 Lowe and Bannister argue for the early date, while Valentino Pace places it nearer the thirteenth century. Either way, much of the roll is missing, making it difficult to know what once was included in its illustrations.
takes place. The institutional sacramental life of the Church begins to encompass its maternal aspect, subtly subordinating the female allegory of Ecclesia to the hierarchical structure. An instance that appears almost as a transitional image between the version with Ecclesia as a female figure standing in a church nave and the depictions of liturgical celebrations is the miniature in Montecassino 2. (Figure 35) Here, a female figure of Ecclesia stands obscured by the altar in the central section of the building.\textsuperscript{158} As in the two previous images, the clergy and the faithful throng in the side aisles. The main difference here is the presence of the altar and the almost priestly gesture of the figure of Ecclesia. This image moves the representation of Ecclesia closer to the version that emphasizes the sacramentality of the Church over the more mystical allegorical aspect.

Related to the image of Ecclesia standing within an architectural setting are the illustrations in Pisa Exultet 2 and Gaeta Exultet 1. (Figures 36, 37) The Pisa 2 Ecclesia is configured differently from the Vat. Barb. Lat 592, MS Add. 30337, and Montecassino 2 versions in that the representatives of the clergy stand in the central architectural area with Ecclesia and the representatives of the people stand in the side aisles. Even more notable, though, is the substitution of a male figure of tall stature in the center space where a female allegorical figure might be expected. This could be read in either of two ways. First, the Church is fully identified with the clergy, reiterating its fundamentally sacramental character and separating this sacramental function from the idea of the Church as an almost personal maternal entity. Alternatively, the Church could be understood as the architectural space within which the sacramental nourishment evoked by the title Mater Ecclesia takes place. In this case, the clergy

\textsuperscript{158} Giulia Orofino in Exultet, 378. Orofino identifies the central figure as female and says that she stands to the right of the altar. The position of the figure, though, makes her seem more like a liturgical celebrant, obscuring the line between allegorical figure and representation of liturgical events.
stand within the maternal space rather than serving an independent institution that is itself their spiritual mother. Either way, the female figure is excluded from the content of the image and the sacramental function of the Church receives the greatest emphasis. The importance of the priestly power to perform the Eucharist, to teach authoritatively, and to mediate the spiritual resources of the Church are far more readily readable than any reference to the maternity of the Church in these images. Even the depiction of the female Ecclesia figure in Montecassino 2 is ambiguous as to the relationship between the female figure and the altar. The much-damaged state of the Ecclesia miniature in Gaeta 1 makes it difficult to be certain of its exact composition, but there is a fragmentary male figure with a rectangular nimbus standing within an arch similar to those in Pisa 2 and the other rolls with frontal Ecclesia images. It seems reasonable to think that Gaeta 1 uses a format similar to Pisa 2 for this illustration.

In several instances, the personification of Ecclesia as a single person is omitted in favor of a depiction of liturgical activity within an ecclesiastical space. This, again, keeps the focus on the liturgical activity for which the clergy are responsible. In Bari 2, Vat. Lat. 3784, and Troia 3, a gathering of clergy and faithful for some type of liturgical celebration within an ecclesiastical space is used as the illustration for “Letetur mater ecclesia…” \(^{159}\) (Figures 38-40) In Bari 2 and Vat. Lat. 3784 the precise variety of celebration is not obvious, whereas the miniature in Troia 3 certainly represents the Easter Vigil. Bari 2 presents a church space divided into two parts, one of which contains a group of the faithful and one of which contains a bishop, a deacon, and the altar. (Figure 38) The arches and the extremities of the building are decorated with lamps, but there is no evidence of the Paschal candle in the image. Here the separation of the clergy from the laity by some degree of architectural barrier persists, even though their gestures makes it

\(^{159}\) Bari 2, Vat. Lat. 3784, and Troia 3 all use this format.
clear that they are interacting. The architectural details of the image give the impression that the building extends beyond the width of the space shown and make the space more similar to Ecclesia images with a single figure as the central focal point. This similarity of architectural structure changes in the Vat. Lat. 3784 and Troia 3 versions. In Vat. Lat. 3784, a self-contained church building with three arched openings allows the viewer to see clergy and faithful gathered within. (Figure 39) The whole structure is enclosed by a domed roof, and an apse protrudes from the left side. Starting from the left, nearest the apse, each arch contains a different group: clergy, male faithful, and female faithful. The men and women face the clergy, and all raise their hands in gestures of prayer. The people gathered in the church are similar in appearance to the people in the preceding image in the roll. This image, like the one in Bari 2, is unclear regarding what liturgical moment is represented. Troia 3 is similar in its depiction of a complete church structure but diverges from the others in the specificity of the ritual shown. (Figure 40) Here the deacon is shown standing behind the ambo atop which the Paschal candle stands. The three interior arches are thronged with the (apparently male) faithful gathered to participate in the celebration. As will be explored in a later chapter, the shift from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman text is accompanied by differing approaches to the illustration of female figures including Ecclesia.

The three remaining images of Ecclesia all differ substantially from all of the illustrations described above. Two make use of male figures for Ecclesia, while the third omits human figures altogether. The Salerno roll presents an opportunity for comparison with the images showing a female Ecclesia enthroned on the roof of a church. Here, the allegorical figure of Ecclesia is replaced with the figure of a pope, crowned and vested, with his arms outstretched. He is surrounded by candles, five on each side, and is without the cushion on which the female Ecclesia figures usually sit. This complete identification of the Church with its hierarchy and the
continuation of altar-like composition are signals that the motherhood of the Church was secondary to its institutional structure for the artist and his community. This way of representing Ecclesia is not traditional.

The other images of male figures illustrating the *mater ecclesia* passage also fall outside the tradition of allegorical figures representing the Church. In Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3, one large miniature encompasses both Ecclesia and the people. (Figure 41) Salmon-colored pillars uphold a decorated arch within which two registers of figures appear. In the lower portion of the image, a crowned man holding a musical instrument stands at the center of a crowd of men and looks up toward the figure contained in the upper register. Barely separated from the people below, the figure in the upper portion of the image stands on a thin beige partition that gives way to green ground topped by deep blue sky. The figure of Ecclesia is of ambiguous gender, though most likely male based on the similarity of its dress to the dress of the people below. Standing on the narrow partition and flanked by four candles on each side, the figure again recalls the structure and illumination of the altar for the Eucharistic liturgy.¹⁶⁰ In this image, the allegorical figure of Ecclesia and the people who belong to the Church are within the same architectural arch rather than separated by columns. Sacramental mediation is still evoked by the ground line that serves as an altar surface, but the relationship between the personification of the Church and the people is much closer in its visualization. In effect, this Ecclesia figure is similar to the image in which the allegorical figure, whether female or papal, sits atop the church structure that is itself like an altar. The relationship of the faithful to that altar is different in Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3, where the faithful are an intentionally integrated element within the same architectural

¹⁶⁰ Beat Break, in *Exultet*, 321. The accompanying essay for this roll in *Exultet* is largely descriptive, giving details about colors and structure, but with no reference to the peculiarity of the image among representations of Ecclesia in general.
frame as Ecclesia. Though the faithful are still separated from the activity by the plane of the altar or upper ground line, the vertical relationship between Ecclesia and the people intensifies the intimacy of the sacramental connection between the Church and the faithful. This serves as reinforcement that the sacramental life of the Church is its maternal function, making a female representation of Ecclesia unnecessary.

Apart from the abundant presence of allegorical figures of Tellus and Ecclesia, many other female figures appear in the iconographic landscape of the Exultet rolls. These figures exist in most of the rolls, in varying locations. Examples include images of the Virgin Mary, female members of the lay faithful, depictions of the souls in limbo, and representations of biblical narrative moments. While none of these figures strictly qualify as allegorical, they do communicate many layers of theological and symbolic meaning and so could be subjected to allegorical interpretation or allegoresis. The five images of the Virgin in Majesty link the Exultet rolls to a long tradition of Byzantine and Roman depictions of the same subject. Whether attended by angels or saints, the Virgin is usually seated and holding the child Jesus on her lap. The details differ, but the necessity of the Virgin’s role in the economy of salvation is reiterated in each. The image in Pisa 2 shows the Virgin standing at the center of the space, with a female attendant on either side. (Figure 42) Between the figures, knee-high plants grow—red on the outer margins and green nearest the Virgin. Tiny birds perch atop the innermost plants, which, like the rest, are similar in appearance to the vines and plants shown in the nearby illustration of the Elegy of the Bees. In the other three images, the Virgin sits on a throne, with the infant Christ on her lap. In MS Add. 30337, the attending angels have been cut away. (Figure

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161 The Virgin in majesty or enthroned appears in Pisa 2, British Library MS Add. 30337, BNF Nouv. Acq. Lat 710, Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3, and Salerno.

162 Pisa 2, Add. 30337, Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3, and Salerno all include a Virgin in Majesty.
43) Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3 provides a more complete view, with brightly colored angels on either side of the Virgin and Child. (Figure 44) The Salerno roll presents a similar composition, albeit a bit less expressive in the interactions of the angels with the Christ Child. (Figure 45) The images of the Virgin, both in the images just mentioned and in those tied to biblical narratives, are not allegorical in the strict sense, but serve as guideposts for the necessity of female participation in the stories that comprise salvation history. The same can be said of other instances of female figures that are not properly allegorical, including depictions of Eve, the scene of the women at the tomb on Easter morning, and images of the faithful interacting with temporal or spiritual authority. Even without established allegorical meanings, these other female figures add to the overall balance of female figures across the Exultet rolls taken together.

The presence of a variety of allegorical figures and other female figures throughout the rolls suggests a certain degree of recognition of the importance of the historical or social significance of the women depicted in narrative illustrations and as allegorical figures. The artists’ choice to use female figures when other options clearly existed and would have been acceptable indicates a degree of value assigned to the constellation of literary and theological concepts associated with the female allegorical figure. In a similar way, the inclusion of narrative illustrations that involve female biblical characters happens to a varying degree among the Exultet rolls and suggests that the artists, or at least the commissioner, had agency in the selection of scenes depicted.

**The Roll as Female-Centered Format**

The inclusion of female allegorical figures in the illustration of the Exultet, along with the depiction of other female figures as described above, provides a starting point for the idea that the female or the feminine is important to the overall content of the Exultet rolls and the
Communities in which they were produced or used. More is required, however, to support any kind of assertion that there is a fundamentally female-driven way of understanding these manuscripts. An essential part of establishing that there could be a feminine substrate to the Exultet rolls is an examination of their format and its connotations. It might be suggested that the use of the roll is consistent with ideas of the generative power of the female body in its necessity for the perpetuation of family lines and historical progression. The poetics of lines and the semiotics of lists add dimensionality to the choice of the roll as a format.

Manuscript rolls are, by nature, continuous. As noted in the previous chapter, the roll evokes the possibility of perpetuity or extensibility, particularly when used to trace historical successions or genealogical trees. Successions, genealogies, histories, and poems are often described in terms of lines. Geometrically, lines extend infinitely in either direction, with only their segments being discrete and practically measurable units. Lines are often associated with things that people want to go on forever: family legacies, time, stories, and so on. The continuance of all these culturally significant things require intellectual as well as physical investment on the part of human beings, and most require some kind of creative or generative action. Lineages and monarchical successions rely on marriage and procreation for the continuance of any line, devoting near-equal space in a genealogy to the female members of a family. This is especially evident in genealogical rolls, in which mothers are listed alongside fathers in a continuous family tree or line. The necessity of female participation in the perpetuation of family lines or lines of succession is, theoretically, unlimited. So long as


164 Kelly, The Role of the Scroll, 91-99. Genealogical rolls are most often English or French, and many date to the twelfth century or later. Examples chronicling royal lineages are often the most beautiful and the best preserved.
someone is available to be a mother, the genealogical line can continue. The possibility of near-infinite extension of the family line is suitably contained in a roll. The roll, with its vertical orientation and ready way of attaching new sections to the existing collection of membranes is harmonious with the optimism that expects a family line to continue indefinitely.

The inclusion of genealogical lists in the Bible serves a connective function, not only establishing the sequence of important patriarchs, but also establishing the necessary relationships between the historical lineage of the Old Testament kings and the human origins of Christ. The tree of Jesse, a commonly illustrated typology, is based on the genealogy with which the Gospel of Matthew begins. Rather than giving a complete history, with both mothers and fathers, this genealogy lists the male progenitors from Abraham to the generation before Christ, providing balanced numbers between Abraham and David, David and the Babylonian Captivity, and the Babylonian Captivity and Christ. Four times before the Virgin Mary, women are named in the genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Though the reason for their inclusion over the better-known characters of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah is unclear, their presence in the list has been related to the presence of gentiles in the family line of Christ or to the unlikely unions between women perceived as sinful or unsuitable and men of royal lineage. It has also been suggested that the irregularity of these unions in some way prefigures the irregularity of the family established by the marriage of Joseph and Mary for the sake of Christ’s arrival. The Gospel of Luke also gives a genealogy, but it traces the lineage of Mary rather than

165 Matthew 1: 1-16.

that of Joseph.\textsuperscript{167} Luke’s genealogy reaches back farther, too, tracing the family line to Adam. This approach not only roots the birth of Christ in the creation of humanity, but also lends a sense of his being a part of the divine economy from all eternity. In Luke’s genealogy, particularly, the reach of the list connects the arrival of Christ in human form with the creation of the earth and all its inhabitants. Where the Exultet recalls the dispelling of the darkness from the earth, celebrates the establishment of all that fills it, and ties the redemption of the world to the sin of Adam, it weaves the narrative of biblical history into a single long line that, theologically, will persist into eternity. If it is accepted that the genealogy of Mary is the theme of Luke’s version, then the list that consists entirely of male progenitors is actually oriented to the demonstration of the lineage of the woman who would provide the entirety of Christ’s human body. The existence of the most important male in the genealogy, Christ himself, depends on the list of men that led to his mother. The inclusion of Mary’s ancestors in this genealogical list is consistent with her celebration in the Exultet and in many illustrations of the Virgin and her life included in the Exultet rolls.

In \textit{The Infinity of Lists}, Umberto Eco discusses the human propensity for list making as a means of connection to the limitlessness of the universe that surrounds us. For Eco, the list, whether verbal or visual, is a manifestation of the possibility of establishing a relationship between the finite nature of individual experience and the existential expansiveness of the incomprehensible immensity around us.\textsuperscript{168} Visual and verbal lists often incorporate an \textit{et cetera} of some kind, indicating the innumerability or unknowability of their subject. Ranging from the

\textsuperscript{167} Anthony Maas, "Genealogy of Christ," \textit{The Catholic Encyclopedia}, Vol. 6. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909). This is partially speculative, as several scholars believe that the Eli mentioned in relation to Joseph was likely his father in law and the maternal grandfather of Christ.

\textsuperscript{168} Umberto Eco, \textit{The Infinity of Lists} (New York: Rizzoli, 2009), 15-18.
types of grapes in Virgil’s *Georgics* to the vastness of the multitude of stars in heaven, Eco notes the necessity of the *et cetera* given the impossibility of ever completing the list. In painting, the implied extension of the scene beyond the frame of the image serves the same function, showing the viewer that the image is simply a section of an infinitely extending space or scene. The Exultet is itself a kind of list. It lists moments throughout the biblical narrative of creation, fall, and redemption as well as moments that comprise the ritual surrounding the Exultet in liturgical context. Even within the sections of the Exultet text, there are a number of internal lists: the prophecies and typologies of the Easter night, the acts of God on behalf of humanity, the virtues of the bees, and the commemorations of sacred and secular authorities. The format of the roll is well suited to the list-like character of the Exultet, even apart from its illustration, in that it evokes the perpetuity implied by the narrative.

In the visual vocabulary of the Exultet rolls, clear narrative lines connect Tellus, Eve, the Virgin Mary, and the Church. These lines are genealogical in an abstract sense, with the earth giving rise to Adam and Eve and Eve being the female progenitor whose indiscretion can only be undone through the cooperation of the Virgin and the perpetual mediation of the Church. The story is intended to be timeless even though the events are constrained by the historical moments in which they are told to have taken place. The extension of the story of salvation backward toward the beginning of time and forward toward an eternity informed by the mysteries celebrated in the Easter Vigil lends an aspect of infinity to both the Exultet and the roll that contains it. As will be discussed below, the presence of female imagery, imagery concerned with the natural world, and figures that are readable as female-centered allegorical elements provides

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169 Ibid., 49. He also lists examples from Homer, Ovid, and Dante. Eco considers a multitude of varieties of list, from lists of angels and saints to catalogues of possessions, as expressions of possibility and infinitude. His lists range from Antiquity to the contemporary world, reflecting the nuanced use and understanding of the list as an extensible format in every age.
material suitable for understanding the Exultet rolls as evidence of a subtext of female potency underlying the traditional Christ-centered narrative.

**Images Stretching Beyond Text**

The relationship between text and images in the Exultet rolls is curious, to say the least. The illustrations discussed earlier in the chapter are excellent examples of images that often reach beyond the content of the text that they are meant to describe. Rather than functioning as simply descriptive representations, the images often expand on short segments of text, realizing a greater depth and allegorical meaning than the text alone would communicate.

Considering the interaction of text and image in the Exultet rolls, it becomes clear that the two work together, with the illustrations often extending the possibilities of interpretation even beyond the content of the texts that they depict. The divergence of the Franco-Roman from the Beneventan text of the Exultet will be addressed in a later chapter. There are substantial differences between the two, though both versions include references to many of the same biblical narratives, an Elegy of the Bees, and commemorations of sacred and secular authority. In both Exultets, the text is filled with imagery. Many instances offer direct references to biblical texts and narrative moments, but only a fraction of these are illustrated with consistency across the manuscript group. There are far more moments sung about in the text than represented by illustrations. In addition to the images already described and the instances of natural imagery to be explored below, scenes including the Nativity, the Crucifixion, and the descent into Hell are among the most common biblical images. Other frequently included images are historiated monograms, gatherings of angels, Christ in Majesty, donor portraits, and various liturgical scenes.
Even when the images are not distinctly allegorical, they can often create a kind of parallel narrative that is extra-textual while still being related to the illustrated text. In a number of cases the images function largely in isolation from the text. This is especially true of the illustrations of liturgical or ritual activity. Many of the rolls, benedictional or pontifical rolls and Exultet rolls alike, include images that show parts of the Easter Vigil liturgy in action. Beyond the prologue shared by both the Beneventan and the Franco-Roman Exultets, the texts make only indirect references to the liturgical activity of lighting the Easter fire and blessing the candle. For images associated with this beginning section of the Exultet, the self-referential aspect of the illustrations is clear and distinctly related to the text: “Ut qui me non meis meritis in leuitarum numero dignatus est aggregare luminis sui gratiam infundens cerei huius laudem implere precipiat.”

Additional oblique references to the Easter Vigil’s liturgical proceedings are included in the preface of the Beneventan Exultet and also in the Franco-Roman, but give few specifics of the practical matters of the ritual. In several instances, the illustrations go far beyond the simplicity of the text. Images that depict the presentation of the roll, the activity of blessing the candle, interactions with the baptismal font, the deacon poised to sing the Exultet, and more provide much greater visual detail than is clearly indicated by the text.

In instances where allegorical figures do appear, as in the images of Tellus, Ecclesia, Lux, and Caligo described above, there is usually some distance between the content of the text and the content of the images. When the text, “Gaudeat se tantis tellus irradiata fulgoribus et eterni

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170 “So that he who not through my merits has deigned to number me among the priests, pouring the grace of his light, may direct me to accomplish the praise of this candle.” Prologue to the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets.

171 See images such as the ordination of the archbishop in Vat. Lat. 9820, the *fratres carissimi* image in Bari 1, the *sacrificium vespertinum* image in Vat. Barb. Lat. 592, and many others of this sort.
regis splendore lustrata totius orbis se sentiat amisse caliginem,” is illustrated in both the Beneventan and Franco-Roman versions, there are few direct links between the words and the image. The word *tellus* is the essential link between the two, but there is nothing in the text that indicates that Tellus should be a female figure, a nursing woman, a stand of trees, or a young man subordinated to the light of Christ. In most instances, the illustrator chooses to use some iteration of a female figure, suggesting that the artist had associations beyond the content of the text that could be incorporated into the illustration of an Exultet roll. This expansion of the content through illustration occurs to varying degrees across the Exultet rolls as a group.

The images regularly go beyond the content of the text, with highly detailed illustration of moments from the life of Christ and the life of the Virgin as well as images from Old and New Testament narratives. Some of these images provide expansions of typology associated with the text but not fully explained therein. Pisa 2 contains a number of illustrations that are not directly reflective of the Exultet text. This roll includes a Christological cycle of illustrations, including several scenes from the infancy narratives and the Passion. Most of the illustrations in the Pisa 2 Christological cycle have little or no direct connection to the Exultet text. The insertion of the Annunciation, the presentation of Christ in the Temple, the baptism of Christ, and miracles performed by Jesus allude to the importance of all Christ’s life events to overarching purpose of his death and Resurrection, but there is no obvious textual reason for the inclusion of the series of images. The opening image cycle of Pisa 2 is also spatially separate from any text, providing something of a narrative prelude to the Exultet and its content. Nevertheless, there are allusions

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172 Prologue to the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets. See the descriptions of these images in the earlier section of this chapter.

173 Bari 2 also includes a smaller-scale version of this, with images of the baptism of Christ, the Transfiguration, and Pentecost preceding the Exultet itself.
in the text to the content of a number of the images, particularly if the images are viewed in an allegorical or typological fashion. In Pisa 2, the images in the cycle preceding the Exultet itself share themes of healing, liberation, fulfillment of prophecy, and self-sacrifice, all of which are meanings embedded into the soteriology of the Exultet narrative.

Other images in the Exultet rolls place images according to a combination of thematic or allegorical content and specific passages from the text. In British Library MS Add. 30337, an illustration of the *Noli me tangere* immediately follows the passage, “O beata nox que sola meruit scire tempus et hora in qua Christus ab inferis resurrexit. Hec nox est de qua scriptum est ‘et nox ut dies illuminabitur,’ et ‘nox illuminatio mea in deliciis meis.’”¹⁷⁴ The next stanza goes on to celebrate the restoration of human innocence and the banishment of sin. The image of the risen Christ and Mary Magdalene in the garden is not obviously linked to any more of the text than the nine words referring to the Resurrection. (Figure 46) Arguably, the image of Christ’s descent into Hell, three images earlier in the roll, would have been a more directly related illustration.¹⁷⁵ (Figure 47) The *Noli me tangere* illustration brings all the connotations of Easter morning to the celebration of the night vigil. The text sings about the night becoming as bright as day, presumably the day of Resurrection. The night of the Resurrection will emerge into the day, becoming the light and joy of the faithful as it did for Mary Magdalene and the first followers of Christ. This illustration brings together the reference to the Resurrection with a vignette

¹⁷⁴ “O blessed night which alone was worthy to know the time and the hour in which Christ arose from the underworld. This is the night of which it is written ‘and night shall be as bright as day’ and ‘night shall be my light in my gladness.’”

¹⁷⁵ The earlier image of Christ releasing the Old Testament saints from the underworld is a one-to-one illustration of a passage in the text, though some of its details, such as the identifiable presence of John the Baptist, the devil trodden down into a pit of fire, and the throng of souls awaiting the risen Christ are all expanded visualizations of the text.
evocative of a complete story filled with its own typologies from the gospel of John.\textsuperscript{176} This image is one among many such examples across the Exultet rolls. Representations of this kind take the hint of a story or scene articulated in the text and spin it into a fully realized image filled with its own iconography and symbolic content. This way of using images to expand on text is consistent with the process of allegoresis. The images use the text as a vehicle for conveying further meaning. If the words of the Exultet are understood as fundamentally allegorical, then their images can be read as the associated allegoresis.

The Exultet is fertile ground for allegoresis, combining direct references to well-known typologies with poetry specific to the Easter Vigil. Its use of natural imagery in text and illustration exemplifies the richness of the allegorical material contained in the rolls. The illustrations that include natural imagery, more fully described below, add greater visual detail to the text and provide material for further interpretation. This use of images to reach beyond the explicit content of the text is consistent across the Exultet rolls, and it often results in illustrations that provide extra-canonical material for consideration alongside the orthodox narrative of the Easter liturgy and the Exultet within it.

The use of illustration to go beyond the essential content of the text is evident in many aspects of the Exultet rolls, especially when that illustration consists of allegorical figures and other extra-textual details. This habit of using images to expand the communicative power of the text continues in the rolls’ employment of imagery drawn from the natural world.

\textsuperscript{176} John 20:17, “Dicit ei Iesus noli me tangere nondum enim ascendi ad Patrem meum vade autem ad fratres meos et dic eis ascendo ad Patrem meum et Patrem vestrum et Deum meum et Deum vestrum.”
Nature and Natural Imagery

While it is certainly not the aim of this study to suggest that there is a fundamental connection between the concept of the feminine and the natural world, it is reasonable to say that there is a long tradition of associating these ideas. The use of personification in reference to Mother Nature and Mother Earth is an old convention, and one which the illustrators of the Exultet rolls appear to employ. This alignment of female figures and allegorical content with imagery of flowers and plants, stars and light, and bees with their hives adds to the pervasive sense of female potency throughout the Exultet rolls. While they are not strictly allegorical figures or even images of female bodies, the illustrations of natural elements almost always consist overwhelmingly of grammatically feminine nouns. The consistency with which the Exultet rolls’ illustrators elected to depict grammatically feminine things in their miniatures is suggestive of a female-focused layer of meaning in the text as understood at the time of the rolls’ manufacture.

Natural histories, catalogues, and etymologies explaining the structure and meaning of the natural world often record not only the contemporary way of thinking, but also earlier thought on similar subjects. In pre-Christian works, these catalogues establish relationships among places and the creatures that dwell in them, offer explanations for arrays of natural phenomena, and harmonize the known with the speculative. In a similar way, these extensive lists of natural phenomena written by Christian authors work to harmonize the nature of the observable and imagined world with the content of Christian revelation. The earlier Christian writers draw not only on the biblical, though, but also on the Classical, referring to and extending the interpretations of pre-Christian writers on the nature and meaning of the world. Among the best-known writers of natural histories and compendia are Pliny the Elder, Isidore of Seville, and Rabanus Maurus. These writers often treat the known world as well as the legendary or
mythological world, attempting to create comprehensive systems of relationship and meaning that could be applied to real-world, literary, and scriptural references to the things described while also allowing for the mythical and monstrous to be just as intentional a part of creation as anything known and encountered every day.

Among the most common elements in the illustration of the Exultet rolls are flowers and plants. Whether as part of the setting or as elements essential to a narrative or figurative scene, flowers and plants appear in a great many illustrations across the Exultet rolls. As will be explored below, plants, flowers, and trees are key to the scenes with which the Elegy of the Bees is illustrated. The flora figure prominently into the images of Tellus, but also appear in less obvious places. In Pisa 2 flowering plants are interspersed between the Virgin and her attendants, and similar vegetation appears in the image of Tellus and several other scenes in the roll. Whenever Eve appears, so does a tree. When the resurrection is shown, there are often flowers and plants among the figures attending the tomb. In depictions of the Annunciation there are flowers, and the Nativity usually includes at least one plant. Grammatically, most of these flora are feminine. *Flos, arbor, herba, planta*, are all feminine nouns, and paired with *terra, tellus*, and *natura*, they make sense as a background landscape for the Exultet rolls.

Stars and other heavenly bodies also appear frequently in the manuscripts, not only as sun and moon, Lux and Caligo, in Crucifixion, descent to Hell, or Tellus scenes, but also as additions to other scenes. Rabanus Maurus says of the heavenly lights, “Luminaria autem quae in caelo sunt posita, diem noctemque inluminant, secundum creatoris sui dispositionem, et cursus sui officia peragunt. Hoc est sol, luna, et stellae, iuxta qualitatem suam significationes allegorias habent…” Rabanus Maurus, *De Universo* Book 9, Chapter 9, in *Patrologia Latina* vol 111. “The
light and darkness, but there is more to be said of stars. Stars appear in Nativity scenes, alongside the Adoration of the Magi, alongside images of Luna or Caligo, and in the occasional decorated initial. Stars offer a subtler light than the sun or moon, gently holding darkness at bay. Stars, like the moon, are grammatically feminine, even though they are generally not represented in human form. In the Exultet rolls, the stars appear as larger than life astral bodies ranging from multi-pointed balls to highly stylized geometric constructions. According to Isidore of Seville, stars shine not with their own light, but by the light of the sun. Rabanus Maurus associates the star with Christ: “Stella Christus est ut in Apocalipsi: Ego sum stella splendida et matutina. Et alibi orietur stella ex Iacob.” In Marian iconography, stars often signify the perpetual virginity of Mary, the stars on her shoulders and forehead signifying her virginity before, during, and after the birth of Christ. Even though they are not as prominent in the Exultet rolls’ images as other heavenly bodies, the stars are effective as part of the overarching theme of light dispelling darkness throughout the Exultet text.

Perhaps the most distinctive variety of natural imagery in the Exultet rolls is the repeated illustration of bees and their hives. As will be explored at length in the next chapter, bees are illustrated in most of the Exultet rolls, with twenty manuscripts containing one or more images of bees or their hives. Associated with a long passage from the Exultet often called the Elegy of the Bees, the depictions of bees and apiculture connect the worlds of nature and culture. Not only does the Exultet’s celebration of the bees refer to Classical poetry for much of its imagery, but it

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179 Rabanus Maurus, *De Universo* Book 9, Chapter 13.
also perpetuates Classical ideas about the moral perfection of the bee. Again grammatically feminine, the bee is understood as the ideal model of chaste industry unstained by self-interest or lust and is understood, in much Greek and Latin literature, as the paradigm for ideal female behavior. The Exultet text associates the nature of the bee with the virtues of the Virgin Mary, praising in her the same qualities that made the insect so fascinating as an object for emulation. In the Exultet rolls, bees function as their own kind of allegorical figures. With the Classical and medieval belief that they were able to reproduce asexually, bees’ persistence and moral perfection makes their colonies something of an infinite prospect in itself. If a human line is to persist, its members must learn from the virtues of the bees, for the bees represent perfection as well as an infinite list of their own. The next chapter will assert that the bees offer a particular kind of insight into the Exultet’s subtext of female potency.

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CHAPTER FOUR: THE POWERFUL PRESENCE OF THE BEE IN THE EXULTET

Among the many allegorical figures and all the images depicting the natural world, the bee stands out as an unusual example in the Exultet rolls. In the rolls, the insects appear as illustrations for a celebration of the bees. In the context of the Elegy of the Bees, the Classical and pre-Christian associations of bees with the Greek ideal of *sophrosyne* and the perfection of female virtue provide a historical thread running from Greek mythology through to the Christian Exultet. As part of a broader landscape of female figures and feminine language, the exuberant celebration of the bees in both the text and the images of the Exultet belies a consistent and long-standing interest in female potency made visible in the bees, but also in the figures of Tellus, Ecclesia, and the Virgin. The iconography of the bees and associated images in the Exultet rolls in conjunction with both the Beneventan and Franco-Roman versions of the text strengthens the argument for a female-driven subtext in the Exultet. Through the illustrations of the bees and the Exultet texts, the bees become faithful workers for the common good, providers for the community, and representatives of the highest ideals of female virtue. The beehive becomes a metaphor for the womb, the community, and the Church. The bees become the fitting emblem of the Virgin Mary and her powerful role in the Easter narrative through their association with the Annunciation and the Nativity.

The bee is, perhaps, the most charming of the figures consistently represented in the Exultet rolls, in the section known as the Elegy of the Bees. A flight of poetic fancy, the Elegy of the Bees is a passage in the Exultet found in both the Beneventan and Franco-Roman versions and often richly illustrated with bees and other imagery. Here the bees demonstrate not only the
importance of their contribution to the furnishing of the Easter rituals, but also the ideal female qualities embodied by the bee and celebrated in the Virgin Mary, the allegorical Ecclesia, and the Christian faithful. Of the twenty-eight Exultet rolls, twenty contain illustrations of bees in either natural or cultivated hives. The hives are, at times, shown at harvest, with interactions between bees and people highlighting the dependence of humans on the bees’ industry. When considering the text and the images in conversation, a picture of the bee as a maternal figure, a chaste creature, an industrious worker, and a provider of warmth and light emerges.

The association of bees with women is an old one, with Classical writers’ poetry, letters, treatises, and retelling of folklore making mention of the insects as a metaphor for female virtues and social expectations. In their long association with the ideal qualities of women, the bees represented in the Exultet rolls offer a compact emblem of the classic feminine aspects of Eve, the Virgin Mary, and the allegory of the Church and function as allegorical figures themselves. The bees celebrated in the Elegy together with their visualization in the rolls’ illustrations function as a shorthand for the overarching presence of female imagery in text and image throughout the Exultet rolls as a manuscript group.

The Elegy of the Bees

The Elegy of the Bees was a part of the Easter Exultet in the Beneventan and Franco-Roman traditions from its earliest appearance in Italian manuscripts. In The Exultet in


\[182\] In older scholarship, the terms Vetus Itala and Vulgata were used for the Beneventan and Franco-Roman versions of the Exultet, respectively. Bannister was largely responsible for popularizing the earlier terms. The more recent names offer a clearer connection to the broader liturgical rites to which each text belongs. See Henry Marriott Bannister, "The ‘Vetus Itala’ Text of the ‘Exultet’", Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*. These terms are also used throughout the
Southern Italy, Thomas Kelly provides an exhaustive analysis of the variants of the Exultet text. In his study, he cites early evidence for the *praeconium Paschale*, an alternate name for the Exultet, in a letter often attributed to St. Jerome and dating to 384 CE. In the letter, the author refuses to help his correspondent with the composition of a *praeconium Paschale*, indicating that there is no way of doing it well. Jerome complains about writers’ tendency to include pagan elements, probably referring to the Elegy of the Bees. His discomfort is understandable, given the paucity of references to bees in the Bible. While honey is often celebrated, particularly in the Hebrew Bible, only once is a favorable statement made regarding the bee: “The bee is small among flying creatures, but her product is the best of sweet things.”\(^{183}\) The few other references to bees focus, instead, on their sting.\(^{184}\) As we will see, Jerome’s concerns were founded—the Elegy of the Bees does indeed contain numerous allusions to Classical mythology and treatises concerned with bees.

Before examining the literary antecedents of the Elegy of the Bees, it is helpful briefly to examine the situation of the passage within the Exultet as it appears in the rolls. The Elegy of the Bees comes after the prologue and about halfway through the preface of the Exultet.\(^{185}\) The prologue, shared by the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets, calls the Church and all of creation to rejoice in the splendor of the vigil that awaits the Resurrection, followed by a prayer descriptive essays in *Exultet*.

\(^{183}\) Sirach 11:3

\(^{184}\) References to bees’ stings include Judges 14:8 and Deuteronomy 1:44. Most other bee references are oblique and mainly concerned with honey.

\(^{185}\) See the full text of the Franco-Roman and Beneventan Exultets in Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 32-39. The details of the Elegy of the Bees differ between the two versions, but they both celebrate the chastity and the industry of the bees.
for God’s grace to be poured out on the cleric who will sing the praises of the Paschal candle.\textsuperscript{186} The Beneventan preface first celebrates Christ’s triumph over death and then praises him as the Creator. From here, the Beneventan Exultet proceeds with the Elegy of the Bees, followed by a highly descriptive passage in praise of the Paschal candle itself. The Franco-Roman Exultet is organized in a similar fashion, but its preface begins with a far more detailed recounting of biblical history from creation through the redemptive death of Christ. The Elegy of the Bees is a bit shorter in the Franco-Roman text, but still draws on many of the same ideas and allegories as the Beneventan. It is worth noting that Thomas Kelly dates the Beneventan and Franco-Roman prefaces to sometime before 650 CE, and that they could well have been imported from Milan or somewhere else that used the Exultet earlier than Rome and Southern Italy.\textsuperscript{187} This establishes the text as much earlier than the oldest existing Exultet roll, Vat. Lat. 9820, and attests to the length of the tradition of singing the praises of the bees along with the blessing of the candle.

Rather than being the work of a single author, the Exultet is a compilation of Classical with Christian elements, which strengthens the relationship of the bees to a variety of allegorical figures.

\textbf{The Bee in the Classical Imagination}

The Beneventan version of the Elegy of the Bees demonstrates a deep connection to Classical traditions about bees’ propagation, character, and work. The text repeatedly calls to mind the supposed virginity and purity of the bees: “…preserving their virginity, they generate

\textsuperscript{186} “…So that he who not through my merits has deigned to number me among the priests, pouring the grace of his light, may direct me to accomplish the praise of this candle…”

\textsuperscript{187} Kelly, \textit{The Exultet in Southern Italy}, 45-46. This dating is largely based on the metrical \textit{cursus} of the Beneventan text. It is also worth noting that the text of the prologue to the Franco-Roman and Beneventan Exultets is shared with the Milanese version. Kelly cites a long list of scholars concerned with the tradition of the metrical \textit{cursus} in liturgical prose.
offspring; they are glad with progeny; they are called mothers; they remain untouched; they generate sons, and they do not know husbands… O splendid examples of virginity who convey not harm to the possessor, but riches to themselves.”188 The text goes on to praise the candle made from the product of the bees, celebrating the object that “…when it is lit feeds on the fabric of its own body…”189 The celebration of bees that are understood as chaste and self-propagating offers insight into the importance of the maternal aspect of the Church as a chaste and virginal bride of Christ.190

The Franco-Roman text praises the candle first, and then goes on with its Elegy of the Bees. It expounds on the process by which the bees reproduce, praising their extensive effort and ceaseless work. The Franco-Roman version makes an explicit connection between the virginity of the bee and the virginity of Mary, the Mother of God: “O truly marvelous bee, whose sex is not violated by the male, nor shattered by childbearing, neither do children destroy their chastity. Just as Holy Mary conceived as a virgin, gave birth as a virgin and remained a virgin.”191 While the Exultet’s texts and images are not overtly mythological, the ideals of female perfection that they employ are the product of a long pre-Christian tradition associating bees with the practice of virtue. Therefore, the interplay that St. Jerome perceived between the pagan and the Christian in the Elegy of the Bees was not unfounded, as it persists throughout the text of both Exultets and is reflected in their illustration. Perhaps the clearest connection between the bees of the Exultet and their Classical ancestors is the virtue of sophrosyne celebrated in Greek mythology.

188 Beneventan Exultet elegy of the bees as translated by Kelly, Exultet, 34.
189 Beneventan text of the Exultet
190 2 Corinthians 11:2-4 and Ephesians 5:32
Bees appear occasionally in Greek mythology, with stories tracing the origin of bees to Crete and the cave where Rhea bore Zeus. The cave of Zeus’s birth was a place sacred to bees, reinforcing their importance in the landscape of the natural world and in human interaction with it. In later parts of the Rhea and Zeus story, intruders seek out the cave in order to steal the honey, only to be punished by stings from the bees and later transformed into birds by the infant Zeus. Other stories that link bees with the gods of Greece and Rome include the tale of a king of Crete, Melisseus, whose daughters, Melissa and Amalthaea, fed the infant Jupiter milk and honey. As Cook retells it, “Melissa was by her father made the first priestess to the Magna Mater; and from this fact the representatives of the goddess are still termed Melissae.” Though there are several variations, the story sometimes includes Zeus transforming Melissa into a beautiful bee to save her from the wrath of Cronos.

Other stories describe Melissa not as a princess, but rather as a nymph who discovered a honeycomb and became devoted to the bees who made it, giving the creatures their name and becoming their protector. In her study *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult, Lore*, Jennifer Larson illuminates an extensive history of bee nymphs, perhaps including Melissa, as civilizing influences on the development of humanity, teaching men to avoid cannibalism, clothe themselves, and so on. She writes, “The bee nymphs here are regarded as teachers of the

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192 Cook, "The Bee in Greek Mythology," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 15 (1895), Cook cites Antoninus Liberalis (xix), who lived in the second or third century CE and wrote a *Metamorphoses*.

193 Ibid., 2-3. Cook cites passages from Lactantius that refer to Didymus on Pindar.

194 One of the Greek words for bee is *melissa*, a feminine noun used to refer to honeybees.

earliest skills and moral values that distinguished civilized humans from bestial savages.”

The bee nymphs go on to be the teachers of Aristaios, the bee master, who in turn teaches Dionysos. In most cases from Greek mythology, the role of bee nymphs is either protective or nurturing, making them a logical choice for association with traditionally female qualities. These tales indicate associations between bees and the nurturing role of mothers, and Greek tradition continued for centuries to anoint the lips of eight-day-old infants with honey.

Among the oldest descriptions of bees are Aristotle’s *Historia* and Virgil’s *Georgics*.

Considering literary and Classical associations with bees, it is worth noting that the insects were often linked with concepts of the perfect woman. There is a long history of favorable comparison between bees and the industrious and chaste woman. Among the Greeks, the bee was a symbol not only of the ceaseless and productive labor of the good wife, but also of her disinterest in sensual, particularly sexual, pleasure. This calls to mind the Greek virtue of *sophrosyne*, a composite concept that encompasses all the qualities just listed as well as sensibility, propriety, and self-knowledge. The term *sophrosyne* was applied to both masculine and feminine virtues in early Greek literature, though its core concepts of self-possession and general conformity to moral expectations expand into far more nuanced masculine and feminine

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196 Ibid., 87.
197 Cook, "The bee in Greek mythology,” 3.
ideals as time goes on.\textsuperscript{201} As far back as the \textit{Iliad} and \textit{Odyssey}, the opposition of the unbalanced and problematic life of vice versus the integration and measured virtue of \textit{sophrosyne} could be used as a distinction between the true hero and the fatally flawed character.\textsuperscript{202} In early Greek literature, the term most often refers to soundness of mind rather than a specific set of virtues composing an overall character.\textsuperscript{203} Helen North notes that the idea of \textit{sophrosyne} was not as important during the Homeric age as it later became and that the qualities that made Penelope so laudable as a virtuous woman were not labeled with the name at the time of the epic’s composition.

In his book, \textit{Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of Self-Restraint}, Adriaan Rademaker distinguishes between the moral and intellectual varieties of \textit{sophrosyne}, indicating that there is a high degree of variation among the concepts and qualities associated with the virtue. Among the lines of the intellectual virtues are qualities such as discretion, prudence, reasonability, and soundness of mind. The moral virtues included are temperance, self-control, moderation, and chastity.\textsuperscript{204} Rademaker goes on to complicate these classifications, indicating that the intellectual sense of \textit{sophrosyne} tends to be driven by self-interest while the moral sense is predominantly focused on relationship.\textsuperscript{205} In either mode, the virtue is associated with propriety within oneself

\textsuperscript{201} North, \textit{Sophrosyne}, 1.

\textsuperscript{202} Bernard MW Knox, “The Ajax of Sophocles,” \textit{Harvard Studies in Classical Philology} (1961): 4-10. The \textit{megalopsychia} of Achilles and Ajax presents a counterpoint to Odysseus who is the truer and more reliably virtuous man. Though not strictly described as \textit{sophron} in the text, the contrast in qualities is fitting.


\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 8ff. Rademaker is also critical of North’s relatively strict adherence to the idea that the
and in relationship to others. It is no surprise, then, that it would eventually become associated with the ideal attributes of women. The compatibility of both the intellectual and moral senses of *sophrosyne* with the habits and attributes of bees is a large part of the allegorical strength of the bees in the Exultet.

In her study of *sophrosyne*, Helen North examines fragments from Semonides, in which he declares the best woman to be like the bee, who is faithful to her husband and sows increase for the household.\(^{206}\) The virtue of *sophrosyne* was often applied in honorary epigrams for Greek women in later Antiquity, related primarily to chastity and moderation in consumption of food and drink.\(^{207}\) Later writers like Plutarch continued to assign importance to the virtue, and while it was recommended and encouraged for both men and women, *sophrosyne* remained the primary virtue celebrated and sought after in women.\(^{208}\) The concept of *sophrosyne* also took root among Roman writers, though no single word could quite encapsulate all its associations. Many multivalent words could be used in Latin to cover the various nuances associated with the Greek name for the virtue, and those most commonly included in inscriptions honoring women were *pudicitia* and *castitas*, further emphasizing the perceived value of sexual purity and self-control.\(^{209}\) North attributes the full importation of the idea of *sophrosyne* to Cicero, with his moral sense of *sophrosyne* developed later in the literary tradition, well after the Homeric exempla for the intellectual sense that she sets up in her book, *Sophrosyne*.

\(^{206}\) North, “The Mare, the Vixen, and the Bee,” 36.

\(^{207}\) Rademaker, *Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of Self-Restraint*, 259-261. The passages that Rademaker cites are primarily concerned with moderation in drink, spending, and female behavior. In subsequent pages, he goes on to discuss concepts of chastity at greater length.

\(^{208}\) North, *Sophrosyne*, 253.

\(^{209}\) Ibid., 261. Here North cites a wide variety of fragments that speak of self-controlled conduct and personal restraint. Being epitaphs and fragments, these sources are not readily available in
many expositions on virtues and their corresponding vices, and his exhortations to *frugalitas*, *temperantia*, and *moderatio*.\textsuperscript{210}

Even as early Christian writers began to work toward bridging the gap between pagan philosophical traditions and Christian doctrine, *sophrosyne* persisted as a part of the moral landscape. Where pre-Christian culture had understood *sophrosyne* as a multivalent term encompassing a range of virtues related to self-moderation, Christian writers were much more likely to reduce the virtue to its aspect concerning chastity.\textsuperscript{211} Recognizing *sophrosyne* as a virtue of women, early Christian writers applied the term to women’s spiritual development with greater attention than had pagan ethical writers.\textsuperscript{212} The use of the term *sophrosyne* in Christian circles could be applied both to men and to women, though it was still most commonly associated with female virtue. Among the Apostolic Fathers, the sobriety and purity associated with it contrasted with the licentious behavior of pre-conversion Christians. From the time of Justin Martyr onward, *sophrosyne* would come to be among the highest compliments for Christian women, especially when contrasted with unconverted husbands or communities.\textsuperscript{213} Later still, with Clement of Alexandria, full identification of *sophrosyne* with women goes so far

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\textsuperscript{210} Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 5.34. Toward the end of the section, Cicero discusses freedom from excessive appetites. Similar descriptions of virtues are to be found in book 4.16.

\textsuperscript{211} Josef Pieper, *Fortitude and Temperance*, trans. Daniel Coogan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), 72-74. Pieper discusses the problem of the overvaluing of chastity with respect to other aspects of temperance. The problem that often arises with the virtue of temperance in Christian writing and practice is its tendency to assign all things sensual to the realm of the evil. He traces this imbalance not to the ancient origins of *sophrosyne*, translated into Roman life as *temperantia*, but to the various heretical beliefs in circulation during the first few centuries of Christianity.

\textsuperscript{212} North, *Sophrosyne*, 312-314.

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as to label practice of the virtue as a kind of martyrdom of complete self-mastery for the sake of perfect fidelity to God.\textsuperscript{214} The Cappadocian writers would align \textit{sophrosyne} closely with virginity and with restraint in marital relations, setting it as a criterion for rising to the highest level of virtue in this life.\textsuperscript{215}

Considering the evolution of \textit{sophrosyne} from a pagan to a Christian virtue, even in so abbreviated a fashion, it is easy to understand why the bee was such a potent symbol for the perfection of virtue. If the highest form of Christian virtue, especially for women, is self-restraint in accordance with one’s state in life, then what better emblem for representing such virtue than the bee that remains perfectly pure while also living a life of service to its community? With the celebration of the bee’s chastity and virginity in the Exultet, a view of the consistency of thought concerning bees and their significance begins to emerge. The virtues of the bees so eloquently extolled in the Exultet function as exempla for the Easter Vigil attendees, creating a web of images, text, and socio-cultural content that could be readily decoded by the attentive listener.

\textbf{Images of Bees in the Exultet Rolls}

Bees are among the most frequently illustrated subjects among the Exultet rolls, though certainly not the most realistically rendered. In most of the illustrations for the Elegy of the Bees, the bees themselves are highly stylized and disproportionately large by comparison to their dwellings, perhaps for the sake of highlighting their importance or in order to make them more readily recognizable. The bees range from recognizably striped line drawings or diamond-patterned giants to green-striped creatures or small birds. While it is possible that these are intentional choices based on texts outside the Exultet, it is equally possible that these variations

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{214} Clement of Alexandria, \textit{Stromata}, VII.
\item\textsuperscript{215} North, \textit{Sophrosyne}, 341-342.
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are an example of artistic license and enjoyment. In either case, the size and fanciful details of the bees make them hard to miss or to forget.

The hives depicted in the Exultet rolls are generally recognizable as known types of beekeeping apparatus in use in southern Italy during the Middle Ages, indicating that the artists were to some degree familiar with contemporary practices. In all of the Exultet rolls that include images of bees, some variety of horizontal hive appears. These are most often cylindrical hives, most likely made of logs or woven plant material. Box hives are also depicted, and these, too, are consistent with the hive types common at the time of the rolls’ manufacture.216 In her *World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting*, Eva Crane notes that the Exultet rolls offer the earliest known illustration of beekeeping in southern Italy. She indicates that the archaeological evidence of beekeeping in southern Italy is consistent with these illustrations and seems to have grown out of a Roman tradition of keeping horizontal hives.217 With an established tradition of apiculture in the region and the length of the passage in both the Beneventan and Franco-Roman versions, it is not surprising that the Elegy of the Bees would be a commonly illustrated passage of the Exultet. Though the depiction of bees and hives is constant among the twenty rolls that include them, the arrangement of the images, the addition of beekeepers, or the combination of the images of bees with other narrative content all serve different communicative purposes for the allegorical interpretation of the bees and their associated texts.

**Bees and Their Hives**

The most common way for the Elegy of the Bees to be illustrated in the Exultet rolls is with a simple image of a hive placed near plants or flowers attended by bees. Even within this

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217 Ibid., 203-207.
type, there is some degree of variation, though. The colors and arrangements of the hives, the peculiarities of each roll’s bees (which rarely ever look like real bees), and the degree of interaction between the bees and the nearby flora all communicate a variety of associations between the earth, feminine virtue, and the bees. Not only does this variety of composition reinforce the connection of the virtuous bees celebrated in the Exultet with the figure of Tellus and earth as mother, but also makes manifest a Classical interpretation of bees and their behavior. Through image and text together, a nuanced portrait of the hive in the Exultet as womb, as Church, as community begins to emerge.

In the earliest existing Exultet roll, Vat. Lat. 9820, red and gold bees resembling flying fish buzz about near horizontal hives stacked five high on either side of the image.218 (Figure 48) The bees themselves are shown attending to two magnificently large scarlet and yellow flowers, far larger in scale than the hives. Here the bees are distinctive, with heavy red outlines and red stripes. They alight on the flowers, drawing out the nectar necessary for producing honey. The hives themselves seem to be cutaway drawings, showing the growing honeycombs within. In this image, there are no human figures present. Though the roll is incomplete and does not retain the complete text of the Elegy of the Bees, it did originally contain the Beneventan text, which, unfortunately, was erased and replaced with the Franco-Roman text sometime in the twelfth or thirteenth century.219 In this particular illustration of the bees, we find a reflection of the Beneventan text, “They use the flower as a husband; with the flower they furnish offspring; with the flower they build their houses; with the flower they gather riches; with the flower they

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218 The roll dates to c. 981-987 CE.

219 Pace, in Exultet, 101.
fashion wax.”220 This passage calls to mind Classical observations about bees’ behavior and reinforces the important relationship between the Exultet and Classical thought. In Book IV of the *Georgics*, Virgil discusses the relationship between the bees’ flower gathering and their hives. He notes that the bees use material that they have gathered from flowers to produce both honey and wax. He says,

> For some watch over the gathering of food, and under fixed covenant labour in the fields; some, within the confines of their homes, lay down the narcissus’ tears and gluey gum from tree bark as the first foundation of the comb, then hang aloft clinging wax; others lead out the full-grown young, the nation’s hope; others pack purest honey, and swell the cells with liquid nectar.221

The pastoral quality of the illustration and of Virgil’s poetry resonates with the Exultet text in its celebration of the bees’ use of flowers for their sustenance. The grammatical gender of the bee in both Latin and Greek is feminine, and the Exultet casts her as such, reminding the listener that the bee knows no husband but the flower. Here, the Exultet text and the illustration in Vat. Lat. 9820 present a picture of the beauty of the bee, with the words insinuating the desirability of chastity and virginity not just in the natural world, but also in the lives of the faithful.

A similar kind of illustration, the eleventh-century Exultet from Troia, Exultet 1, contains an image of bees that has faded with age. (Figure 49) The image crosses two membranes of the roll and shows bees inside a network of horizontal hives to the left and buzzing around plants and flowers on the right. The bees here are fabulously stylized, with expressive oversized eyes and broad black stripes. They are shown in all their expected activities, constructing honeycomb, emerging from enclosed cells, drawing nectar from flowers, and returning to their hive. Rather than a realistic representation, these hives appear in a geometricized format, combining

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220 Beneventan Exultet elegy of the bees as translated by Kelly, *Exultet*, 34.

221 Virgil, *Georgics IV*, lines 156-164.
rectangles of various sizes with diamonds containing evenly spaced dots. The illustration precedes the Elegy of the Bees, giving a kind of synopsis of their activities. The formation of honeycomb and the depositing of progeny into the wax cells to finish developing brings to mind Aristotle’s *Historia animalium*: “The bees carry the wax and bee-bread upon their legs, but the honey is disgorged into the cells. After the progeny is deposited into the cells, they incubate like birds.” The ambiguous dots in each diamond could very well represent these infant bees, safely ensconced deep within the busy hive. The idea of bees depositing their young into the safety of an enclosed cell is reminiscent of the Incarnation, with the physical presence of Christ, in effect, deposited into the inviolate womb of the Virgin. This self-contained and chaste generation of offspring is in keeping with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. As Irenaeus of Lyon writes,

> For just as [Eve] was led astray by the word of an angel, so that she fled from God when she had transgressed His word; so did [Mary], by an angelic communication, receive the glad tidings that she should sustain God, being obedient to His word. And if the former did disobey God, yet the latter was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the Virgin Mary might become the patroness of the virgin Eve.
>
> And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so is it rescued by a virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience.\(^223\)

The virginity of Mary and her status as both the New Eve and the mother of Christ reflect the importance of the idea of the Virgin’s womb as an untainted resting place for the newly incarnate Son of God. The bees’ peculiar manner of generation is also consistent with the, albeit less

\(^{222}\) Aristotle, *History of Animals*, 5.9.6, 129-130.

mystical, notion of the perfect chastity of the Greek woman rich in *sophrosyne* who brings forth children without succumbing to lust.

Gaeta 2, also produced in the eleventh century, places its image at the beginning of the Elegy of the Bees. (Figure 50) In an incomplete or nearly faded line drawing, four stacked horizontal hives appear at the center. On either side, stylized trees that resemble oversized flowers rise to the top of the illustration and offer refuge to neatly organized rows of bees. In this drawing, the bees fly purposefully in precise patterns, reiterating the Classical and early Christian idea that bees represented the ideal of communal organization and division of labor for the shared welfare. Of the bees’ community, Virgil had noted that bees live according to strict rules and patterns, functioning unselfishly: “They alone have children in common, hold the dwellings of their city jointly, and pass their life under the majesty of law.”224 Ambrose of Milan elaborates on this passage from Virgil in the *Hexameron*, echoing the Classical wisdom about the chastity and the industry of the bees.225 These qualities of the bee colony are celebrated in the Franco-Roman text: “Part of them gather blossoms with their mouth and burdened with their provisions return to the hive. And there others with inestimable skill construct the cells with clinging glue; others press together the flowing honey; others turn flowers into wax, others mold the newborn with the mouth; others seal up the nectar collected from flowers.”226

224 Virgil *Georgics* IV, lines 153-154. Virgil goes on to detail all the jobs divided among the bees, illustrating the industry and communal nature of the colony.

225 Ambrose, *Hexameron*, Chapter 21, 67. Ambrose, *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961). One of Ambrose’s iconographic attributes is the bee or beehive, not because he contributed significantly to the discourse on bees and their metaphorical meaning, but because of a story in his legend. The tale is that a swarm of bees settled on Ambrose’s face when he was a baby and left behind a drop of honey. This was taken as a sign that he was destined to become a sweet-tongued preacher.

organization and self-sustaining harmony of the beehive calls to mind the ideal of the organization of the Church. The allegorical figure of Ecclesia, a female figure standing for the institutional Church, illuminates the perfection of the hive as a female ideal. The visualized body of the Church, as represented allegorically, is female, bringing harmony to all the parts of the community so that the whole body functions and bears fruit. Continuing with the link between the beehive and the Church, Troia 2 includes a very simple illustration for the Elegy of the Bees, with the hives represented as even rectangular boxes within and around which bees fly to and fro. (Figure 51) The badly faded scene is adjacent to a partially missing image of Ecclesia, with both images on the same membrane. The proximity of the illustration of the bees to the image of Ecclesia invites comparison between the activity and organization of the bees and the function and hierarchical structure of the Church and calls to mind the Beneventan passage, “O admirable ardor of the bees! For their common task they gather as a peaceful throng, and though many are working, a single substance is increased.” Like the beehive, the Church depends on the harmonious interaction of many different individuals. The organization of both hive and Church are strictly and inflexibly hierarchical, demanding complete adherence to appointed stations within the whole.

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227 “O admirandus apium feruor! ad commune opus pacifica turba concurrunt et operantibus plurimus una augetur substantia.” Kelly, The Exultet in Southern Italy, 34.

228 1 Corinthians 12: 12-14. “Sicut enim corpus unum est, et membra habet multa, omnia autem membra corporis cum sint multa, unum tamen corpus sunt: ita et Christus. Etenim in uno Spiritu omnes nos in unum corpus baptizati sumus, sive Judaei, sive gentiles, sive servi, sive liberi: et omnes in uno Spiritu potati sumus. Nam et corpus non est unum membrum, sed multa.” “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” NIV
Similarly simple in its presentation, Gaeta 3 presents three stacked horizontal hives, each three rectangular boxes high, with tall, leafy plants that resemble palm fronds in the interstitial spaces of the frame. (Figure 52) In this image, the bees are very hard to see, small and faded as they are as they buzz about between the plants and the hives. Though on a separate membrane, the nearest image following the illustration of the bees is an allegorical figure of Ecclesia as a woman watching a pair of clerics receive the gifts for the Eucharistic liturgy. (Figure 53) Again, the close proximity of the bees to Ecclesia reinforces the poetic connection between the bees and the Church. The bees are a part of their hive in the same way that the faithful are part of the Church, and the bees’ gifts of honey and wax might be reflected in the liturgical gifts of bread and wine produced and offered by the members of the Church. With the Church represented as a regal female figure, she might easily be associated with the Virgin Mary as well, though the iconography is not such that this figure could be mistaken for the Virgin.

Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3 shows a three-level horizontal hive resting on legs made from forking tree branches, a flowering vine grows to the right of the hive, and enormous green and yellow bees feed from the flowers. (Figure 54) In their mouths they carry tiny flowers back to the hive to nourish their community. This image illustrates an important passage from the Franco-Roman Elegy of the Bees that underlines the perceived division of labor among a hives constituents: “Partem ore legentes flosculos onerate victualibus suis ad caster remeant.”229 This same passage, concerned with the various labors of the bees is reflected in illustrations from other rolls that depict only the bees and their hives, perhaps with a few plants and flowers.

BNF Nouv. Acq. 710 takes a similar compositional approach to Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3, and shows four horizontal hives, in red and yellow, adjacent to a row of lushly curling green

229 “Part of them gather blossoms with their mouth and burdened with their provisions return to the hive.” Kelly, The Exultet in Southern Italy, 38.
plants. (Figure 55) The bees circulate among the fuzzy green buds and the hives above. Rather than being true to life, these bees appear almost like birds, with feathered-looking wings and little beaks that recall the previously-cited passage from Aristotle: “After the progeny is deposited into the cells, they incubate like birds.”\textsuperscript{230} A subsequent illustration in BNF Nouv. Acq. 710, on the following membrane, depicts the Virgin enthroned, with angels on either side, highlighting the relationship of the bees with the ideal represented by the Virgin Mary. (Figure 56) As the one person before Christ believed to have been preserved from original sin, Mary has a place as the highest example of human virtue besides Christ himself. In this sense, the bees can be understood as the natural world’s foreshadowing of the perfection of the Virgin Mary.

Montecassino 2 includes two images for the Elegy of the Bees. (Figures 57, 58) The first is very simple, including three horizontal hives, each three levels high. Narrow flowering plants stand at either end of the group of hives, but no bees are shown in this scene. The second illustration is much more like other illustrations of the Elegy of the Bees, with horizontal hives and luxuriant flowering plants. Here, the bees are small, and they creep along between the leaves and flowers of the plants. It is important to note that the nearest image following the second illustration is a Nativity scene, which reflects the Franco-Roman passage: “Just as holy Mary conceived as a virgin, gave birth as a virgin and remained a virgin.”\textsuperscript{231} (Figure 59) Curiously, the Nativity scene and the first image for the Elegy of the Bees are oriented differently from the other images, and in the same direction as the text. The second illustration of the bees, however, is oriented opposite the text. This is especially odd, as the second set of beehives is part of the

\textsuperscript{230} Aristotle, \textit{History of Animals}, 5.9.6, 129-130.

\textsuperscript{231} Franco-Roman text, Kelly, \textit{The Exultet in Southern Italy}, 39.
same membrane as the Nativity. Montecassino 2 is not the only Exultet roll with more than one vignette illustrating the Elegy of the Bees. Pisa 2 has three illustrations associated with the passage. (Figures 60-62) The first of the three shows large bees, again somewhat birdlike, feeding on the flowers that grow abundantly on the tree and plants nearby. Like one of the images in Montecassino 2, the last of the Pisa 2 sequence does not include any bees, but rather a garden of trees and flowering plants.

The three remaining rolls that focus on bees with their hives are Capua, Troia 3, and Salerno. (Figures 63, 64, 66) The Exultet from Capua offers a very simple illustration of bees and their hive. (Figure 63) This image contains a stacked beehive in bands of yellow, red, and green, with a veritable swarm of bees entering and exiting. One bee, much larger than the others, rests in a yellow hive and could well be the colony’s queen or, by extension, the Virgin Mary. The beehive in Troia 3 consists of one seven-level horizontal hive in red, brown and green, with a blooming tree and a row of succulent plants to the left. (Figure 64) Between the flowers and the hives, tidy lines of bees zip back and forth or attend to the flowers. As in Montecassino 2, these bees and their hive are followed by an illustration of the Nativity. (Figure 65) Troia 3’s Nativity includes a small vignette of the Annunciation as well, solidifying the metaphor of the bees for the Virgin Mary. The Salerno Exultet’s illustration of the bees sets horizontal hives on either side of the frame, four levels high and in blue, purple, red, green, and yellow. (Figure 66) They seem to hover against the deep blue background. A flowering tree grows between the hives, curling with leaves and flowers that the bees tend. The small striped bees in this image are truer to life and look less like birds as they return to their hives and fill the just-discernible honeycombs within.

Though the illustrations are all that remain of the Salerno roll, the next image is of the Virgin and

\[232\] Possible reasons for this mixture of orientations lies beyond the scope of this paper but will provide fertile ground for further research.
Child enthroned. (Figure 45) Once again, the proximity of the two images reinforces the direct association of the bees and their virtues with the purity and motherhood of Mary.

Images focused on the bees with hives rather than in direct connection with keepers or a biblical narrative are more readily readable in their Classical context and leave more room for allegoresis on the part of the reader or viewer. Illustrating the bees in a human-free setting removes the idea of harvest and usefulness and allows the viewer to contemplate the nature of the bee itself. The harmonious functioning of the hives and the faithfulness of the bee to its true nature reiterates the fittingness of the metaphor of the hive as a descriptor for the institutional Church. The hive also has unmistakable associations with the Incarnation and Mary’s perpetual virginity: “preserving their virginity, they generate offspring…they generate sons, and they do not know husbands.” Just as the hive functions as a womb for the infant bee, the inviolate womb of the Virgin bore Christ.

The situation of the bee in an idyllic setting mirrors the harmony of humans with nature before the sin of Adam and Eve. This, in turn, links the bee to earth at its creation and therefore to Tellus as the representative of that primordial, natural earth. The paradisiacal backdrop against which the bees appear in conjunction with the Classical and medieval perceptions of the moral uprightness of the bees, makes for a set of illustrations reflecting the perfect nature and virtues of the bees celebrated in the text without giving any overt interpretations in visual form. The natural goodness of the bees is celebrated largely on its own in these images, allowing space for the reader or viewer to draw his or her own connections from text to image and allegorical meaning. In other varieties of illustration for the Elegy of the Bees, their allegorical character is

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233 Beneventan text, Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 34.
communicated more directly through their interaction with people and through overt connection to the Virgin.

**Bees and Workers Together**

While the peaceful scenes of bees in hives and interacting with the natural world certainly reflect the Classical origins of the Elegy of the Bees, images of interaction between bees and human beings also serve this function even as they subtly indicate the placement of humans above nature in the hierarchy of being. Some of these images also serve as links between the sustaining and spiritually nourishing motherhood of the Church and the chaste productivity of the bees who give both food and light by their hierarchical cooperation. Within the category of images showing bees and people together, there is variation as to the nature of the interactions, ranging from simple apiculture and harvest to almost liturgical offerings of honey and wax. The bees’ ability to meet human needs for food and light parallels the Church’s responsibility for providing sacramental nourishment and light.

The interdependence of bees and humans is a feature in both Exultet texts and the works of Roman writers. An unusual example of both the Beneventan and Franco-Roman traditions is the late eleventh-century Exultet from Bari, Exultet 2. This roll presents a vision of stylized bees, hives, and flowers, with just one figure, presumably a beekeeper, in attendance (Figure 67). Here, as in several other rolls, the illustration of peaceful coexistence between bees and their keepers reinforces the goodness of bees in their cooperation with the order established by God and carried out by humans. The beekeeper has his tools close at hand: a basket, grated container, and stick.234 According to Columella, the arrangement of beehives, their distance from one another, and their situation in conditions favorable to the colony was the responsibility of the

234 Francesco Magistrale on Bari 2 in *Exultet*, 204.
beekeeper on whom the members of the hive would depend for occasional moves to more
suitable locations. This illustration in Bari 2 includes both birds and bees interacting with trees
and flowers, as well, evoking an ideal harmony with the natural world.

Consistent with the observations of Roman writers like Columella, Bari Exultet 1
presents a scene in which we see three men constructing new hives and gathering bees that
appear to have swarmed from a cylindrical hive on the ground. (Figure 68) Columella, writing
around 60 CE, offered a less poetic synthesis of beekeeping practices than his predecessor Virgil
had. He tells us about the process of constructing a hive and about the requirements for the
arrangement of the hives themselves. One of the hive varieties that he mentions is the hollow
tree, as seen in this illustration. The central figure, closest to the existing hive, bends forward
and holds a wooden stick that is consistent with beekeeping tools of the time. The basket
strapped to the figure’s back contains a few large bees, perhaps the queen needed to begin the
new colony for which the figure to the far left of the frame carves a new log-type hive. The third
figure, to the right, holds a basket aloft to trap the bees removed from the tree into which he
inserts his wooden beekeeper’s stick. This is one of the most active and, most likely, accurate
depictions of the relationship between humans and bees. Cultivation of bees was already an old
tradition by the time that this illustration was made, and the expertise of the three men
concerning their task is clear. The bees’ hive is situated in a field of flowers and framed with
trees that offer shelter to the swarming colony. Here we see a harmonious cooperation between
the natural and the man-made, as the beekeepers manage the natural movement and making of
the bees. Without the bees, the beekeepers would certainly be at a disadvantage, lacking honey to

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235 Columella cited in Crane, World History of Beekeeping, 206.

236 Ibid., 206.
eat and beeswax to burn. The dependence of humans on the industry of bees reflects the
dependence of people on the produce of the earth and infants on the nourishment of a mother,
drawing a parallel to the images of Tellus nursing the wild creatures as she is exhorted to “rejoice
in splendor” at the redemption of fallen man. Thus, the message of human dependence on the
nourishment of female beings, whether allegorical or literal, is reinforced again.

Another Exultet roll produced at Montecassino, perhaps around 1087 CE, and now
residing in the Vatican libraries, Barb. Lat. 592 presents another image of interaction between
bees and humans. It remains a beautifully illustrated manuscript in spite of its damaged state.
(Figure 69) An unusual feature of this roll is its set of later annotations beneath many of the
images. The annotations are in Italian rather than Latin, and they are oriented to be read by the
viewer of the images rather than the reader of the Exultet. The illustration for the Elegy of the
Bees in this manuscript is one of humans harvesting the bees’ produce. Much like the illustration
for Bari 1, this scene depicts an environment replete with plants, flowers, and trees around which
bees fly and feed. The human figures here are also engaged in similar pursuits, but the specifics
of their activities are more readily legible. The two men to the far left of the space cut away
sections of honeycomb from an elevated horizontal hive, with one man holding a vessel to catch
the honey as it falls. With the exception of one large bee that flies directly toward the face of the
man cutting the comb, the bees appear largely unperturbed by the harvesting process, perhaps
indicating that their role in feeding people and lighting their way is indeed a part of the natural
order of the world. The figures at the right of the image remove a colony of bees from a tree and
are about to guide them into a new hive for cultivation. The cluster of bees resembles a bunch of

237 Bari 1 is one of only two rolls prior to 1100 CE that do not show Tellus as a nursing mother.
Bari 1 depicts her as a female figure fully clothed and standing between trees and amid a variety
of animals. The arrangement of the space is not dissimilar to the arrangement of space in the
Elegy of the Bees illustration.
grapes, as described by Virgil in the *Georgics*, “then trailing in vast clouds, till at last on a treetop they stream together, and hang in clusters from the bending boughs.” The man on the ground, the one holding the new hive upright, lifts a brazier of calming smoke toward the colony of bees as it is lowered. The industry of the bees is the center of attention here, with so many shown continuing their labors even as the harvesters disrupt their hives. The bees here are gentle and thoroughly focused on gathering the red and blue flowers’ nectar. The trees in this illustration are similar to those in the illustrations of Tellus and Eve, reinforcing continuity among all the manuscript’s images of nature and their relationship with female allegorical figures.

British Library MS Add 30337 also represents the harvest of honey and comb in its illustration of the Elegy of the Bees. In this much simpler image, a single figure extracts honeycomb from a horizontal hive suspended on a wooden frame. (Figure 70) The rest of the space is full of bees busily extracting nectar from flowers and returning to the hive. This roll, produced in Montecassino just as Barb. Lat. 592 was, and at nearly the same time, shows that there was consistency in the manufacture of such manuscripts. Unlike Barb. Lat. 592, though, MS Add. 30337 places its bees nearest the image of the Virgin enthroned.

Though it appears to be damaged by wear, or at least faded over its nearly ten-century lifespan, Pisa 2 gives a lovely three part sequence of illustrations, the first two of which contain bees. The first shows bees buzzing around a symmetrical grouping of trees and flowers. (Figure 60) The plants are rendered in the same colors as the tree that represents Tellus in this Exultet roll, making a visual link to the earlier passage in the Exultet text that links the bees and their environment to the earth: “They use the flower as a husband; with the flower they furnish

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238 “…immensasque trahi nubes, iamque arbore summa confluere et lentis uvam demittere ramis…” *Georgics* IV, lines 557-558. *Uvam* is the notable word here.
offspring; with the flower they build their houses…."

The small trees and flowering plants are of a kind with those in the images of Eve and the Virgin Mary, as well. The bees hover near the leaves and flowers, presumably gathering the fodder for their honey and wax. In the second image, the bees are hidden within their horizontal hives, but a beekeeper with a brazier resembling a chalice is present and making ready to gather the wax needed for the Paschal candle. (Figure 62) This is an unusual image among the Exultet rolls, as it shows a female figure presenting something, perhaps honey or wax, to a winged figure seated on a stool with a cushion. This is a fascinating image, particularly considering the long literary tradition of associating women with nourishment and the offering of honey to infants in Greek mythology.

One more eleventh-century Exultet roll gives us an image of humans harvesting honeycomb. Naples Exultet 1, which is believed to have been made somewhere in Campania, perhaps in Benevento, is incomplete in its current state and shows many signs of damage, but still contains a wonderful illustration for the Elegy of the Bees. (Figure 71) The final image of the existing portion of the roll, the depiction of two men harvesting honeycomb is faded in color, but beautiful in composition. In the center of the image, a twisting tree rises between two sets of stacked horizontal hives. A standing man harvests honeycomb from the top left hive while another crouches to draw comb out of the bottom right one. In what appears to be the artist’s use of an existing flaw in the parchment, the body of the crouching man consists of a hole around which a face, hands, and legs were drawn. Above the tree, a swarm of bees follows their much larger queen bee, clearly reflecting Classical and contemporary ideas about the movement and

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239 Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 34. Beneventan text: “Flore utuntur coniuge; flore funguntur genere; flore domos instruunt…”

behavior of bee colonies.\textsuperscript{241} The recognizability of the queen bee also evokes the importance of maternal leadership for the perpetuation of the community in a manner consistent with the concept of the Church as Mother and the maternal fecundity of the earth. In the roll’s reduced state, the image of the beekeepers accompanies an incomplete text for the Elegy of the Bees, and there is no other nature imagery in the roll. As one might expect, the text of the Exultet is as incomplete as the roll itself, and the Elegy of the Bees is no longer a part of the manuscript. Even without this particular portion of the text, though, the image once again does the work of bringing the relationship of bees and humans into focus. For light and for the performance of religious rituals, specifically the use candles at the Easter Vigil, people depend on the industry of the bees.

**Bees and the Virgin Mary**

Though the images of hives and harvesting honey do not generally include female human figures, the visualization of human use of and dependence on bees’ products evokes human dependence on the resources of the earth, returning us to the importance of Tellus as a mother figure. In these illustrations where the potency of Tellus is perceptible, there are trees or flowers present in almost every case, making for a collection of grammatically feminine nouns in the images even where no woman is present.\textsuperscript{242} A few rolls place their images for the Elegy of the Bees in combination with a Marian image, such as the Nativity or the Annunciation. In several other rolls, though, the illustrations for the Elegy of the Bees are either combined with or


\textsuperscript{242} Latin words *apes, cera, arbor, terra, mater, ecclesia, virgo*, and many others can be extrapolated from the images and the text.
adjacent to depictions of the Nativity or the Virgin enthroned. This kind of nearness speaks clearly to the known allegorical power of the bee as a typological symbol for the Virgin Mary.

Eight of the rolls described above put images of the Virgin in close proximity to those of bees and their hives. Though not explicitly linked through iconography, the relationship between bees and Marian imagery is allegorically consistent with the content of the Beneventan text and directly reflective of the Franco-Roman.\footnote{Kelly, \textit{The Exultet in Southern Italy}, 33-39. While the Beneventan text never explicitly mentions Mary, the comparison in implied. The Franco-Roman version is more explicit, “Sicut sancta concepit uirgo Maria uirgo peperit et uirgo permansit.” “Just as holy Mary conceived as a virgin, gave birth as a virgin and remained a virgin.”} As was noted earlier in the chapter, bees have long historical associations with ideal female behavior. Christianity’s paragon of female perfection is the Virgin, whose perpetual virginity and miraculous bearing of Christ along with her traditional freedom from all sin make her a perfect match with the bee. This relationship is evident in the arrangement of the images. About half of these Exultet rolls follow the illustration of the bees with one of the Virgin enthroned or standing with attendants. These include Pisa 2, MS Add. 30337, BNF Nouv. Acq. 710, Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3, and Salerno. The choice of the Virgin in some version of a regal or majestic composition indicates the artists’ understanding of the Elegy of the Bees as a celebration of the virtues of the Virgin. Most often, the attending figures are angels, further alluding to Mary’s position as queen of heaven and earth. As such, she becomes a link between the mother figure of Tellus, the bees who represent the perfection of the natural world, and the redeemed nature of creation made possible through the cooperation of the Virgin.

In a similar fashion, three rolls, Montecassino 2, Capua, and Troia 3, place an image concerned with the Incarnation in close proximity to the bees. Montecassino 2 situates a Nativity scene between two illustrations of the Elegy of the Bees, and Capua places an Annunciation
scene immediately after the illustration of the bees. The Capua roll includes both the Annunciation and the Nativity just after the image of bees and their hives. These combinations of images make an overt connection between the supposed asexual reproduction and perfect natural virtue of the bees and the virginal conception and birth of Christ. The perpetual virginity of Mary is a theme constantly reiterated by the Church Fathers, as Ambrose states: “Mary’s life should be for you a pictorial image of virginity. Her life is like a mirror reflecting the face of chastity and the form of virtue. Therein you may find a model for your own life . . . showing what to improve, what to imitate, what to hold fast to.”244 The same can be said for the bees. This marriage of meanings becomes even more pronounced with the elision of the images of bees and the Nativity scene that occurs in Montecassino 1, Manchester, and Gaeta 1.

In Montecassino Exultet 1, the plant life is absent, but the Nativity scene is combined with the illustration of the bees and their hives, demonstrating parallel concepts of virginal motherhood, human dependence on nature, and the central role of female virtue in the creation and redemption of mankind. (Figure 72) The hives stand on either side of the Nativity scene, small rectangular boxes on legs, and bees are visible within the boxes and around them. Here the bees fall somewhere between the tiny birds of BNF Nouv. Acq. 710 and the more lifelike bees of the Salerno roll. In the Nativity scene itself, most of the iconography is conventional, with the Virgin reclining on cushions within a cave, the infant Jesus swaddled in a manger, and an ox and ass keeping watch over the child. The Annunciation to the Shepherds happens off to the right, with the angel facing both a beehive and the pair of bewildered shepherds. The bathing of the baby occupies the space between the shepherds and the Virgin, while St. Joseph sits in the lower left corner gazing up at the mother and child. The guiding star, emerging from a deep blue

244 Ambrose, The Virgins 2:2:6.
semicircle above, sends a shaft of light down directly onto the face of the infant Christ.

Considering that the Beneventan text never mentions the Virgin Mary, it is notable that the Nativity appears in combination with the Elegy of the Bees. The text’s description of the bees’ virginal generation of offspring is a clear metaphor for the virgin birth when read together with the image. The use of bees as representatives of virginal procreation has roots in the Classical past, with Virgil being just one of several writers who mention the bees’ chastity: “…they indulge not in conjugal embrace, nor idly unnerve their bodies in love, or bring forth young with travail, but of themselves gather their children in their mouths from leaves or sweet herbs…”

The bees, like the virtuous woman exemplified in the Virgin Mary, are rich in *sophrosyne*, unconcerned with sexual activity and completely devoted to the betterment of the community.

The Exultet roll that is housed at John Rylands University Library, in Manchester, UK, contains just a few tiny illustrations of bees, but does follow the convention of a hive accompanied by flowers. (Figure 6) It, too, places a Nativity near the beehives, though this combination of scenes is not quite as dramatic as Montecassino 1. Here the Nativity scene is small, wedged between lines of text. The essential elements are present, with an unusually large infant Jesus swaddled and set alongside the Virgin, ox, and ass guarding the infant, the bathing of the infant Christ, and St. Joseph sitting off to the side and watching it all. Just one line of text away from the Nativity is the first set of bees, rotund striped insects feeding on flowers. The Manchester Exultet separates the bees into three small spaces, interspersing the illustrations with the text of the Elegy of the Bees. All three images show the bees interacting with plants, and two

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245 “…preserving their virginity, they generate offspring; they are glad with progeny; they are called mothers; they remain untouched; they generate sons, and they do not know husbands… O splendid examples of virginity who convey not harm to the possessor, but riches to themselves.”

provide images of horizontal hives. The first shows the exterior of the blue log-type hive, with the bees entering and exiting from either end, and the second gives a view of the interior, filled with clusters of honeycomb that almost resemble clusters of grapes. The bees in this second hive are busily fabricating new cells of comb and filling the space of the hive. These are the industrious bees of myth and of everyday observation, as they fill their hives with the waxen comb destined for use at the Easter Vigil and throughout the Church year. In their juxtaposition with the Nativity scene, the association of bees and their honey with maternal nourishment is again evoked, indicating that the bee is a fitting emblem for the perfection of the Virgin and the sustaining force of the earth for the material needs of man along with the strength of the Church for his spiritual needs.

A third Exultet roll with similarities to Montecassino 1 and Manchester is the eleventh-century Exultet 1 from Gaeta. Like Montecassino 1 and Manchester, Gaeta 1 places the bees and their hives in the same space as the Nativity. (Figure 73) Here the three horizontal hives form a line above the Nativity scene. The bees move among the hives and the flowering plants interspersed with them, but do not interact with the group below. The Nativity scene combines some of the conventions followed by Montecassino 1 and Manchester, with the Virgin and Child contained in a rectangular space representing the cave, as in Manchester, and the annunciation to the shepherds shown off to the right, as in Montecassino 1. In Gaeta 1’s Nativity, the Magi approach from the left side of the image, walking toward an angel who speaks to them. This image contains more angels than the others, with three attending the Virgin and child and one more swooping down the right margin to announce the good news to the shepherds below. The one visual link between the bees and the Nativity scene is a peculiar arc to the far right of the line of hives. The small striped arc, reminiscent of a rainbow, appears to emerge from the musical
notation above and enter the beehive. Immediately beneath the arc and originating from the beehive is a series of lines that appear to flow downward in a stream. Perhaps intended to represent the star guiding the Magi, this striped arc of light might also be read as a representation of divine light that will be recreated in the light of the Paschal candles to be made from the bees’ wax. Here the echoes of the original Beneventan text resound, “But among the things in which we believe, let us proclaim the favor of this candle. Whose odor is sweet, and whose flame cheerful…which is not tainted by foreign colorings, but is illuminated by the Holy Spirit.”\(^{247}\) The light provided by the Paschal candle is none other than the light of Christ, brought to the members of the Church by the potent virtue of a holy woman.

Richly embedded in the poetic imagination of the Exultet’s Elegy of the Bees is a treasury of Classical conceptualizations concerning the small but industrious bee. While noteworthy differences between the Beneventan and the Franco-Roman text exist, the centrality of the bee in the Exultet overall persists in both versions and is evidence of a deeper system of signs and symbols embedded in the Easter Vigil ritual and its representations. The bee is almost never alone in the images that illuminate the text, perhaps announcing through the creature’s relationships to the hive, the workers, and, by proximity, the Virgin, the necessity of community and the importance of female virtue’s participation in salvation history. Like the perfectly pure bees of Classical lore, the perfectly chaste and obedient Virgin conceals a power of generation both mysterious and miraculous, transforming the dark night of the Easter Vigil into a “night that will be clear as day, and will become my light and my joy.”\(^{248}\) Whether through the use allegorical language, the repetition of feminine nouns, the presence of female allegorical figures,

\(^{247}\) Beneventan Exultet elegy of the bees as translated by Kelly, *Exultet*, 34.

\(^{248}\) Franco-Roman Exultet, my free translation.
or the abundance of female images, the Exultet rolls bring to light a growing list of female-centered ideas. These ideas manifest differently in the Beneventan versus the Franco-Roman texts, and even though the presence of the Elegy of the Bees in both indicates some degree of continuity of tradition from which the two spring, the distinctions are worth exploring particularly as they relate to female power.
CHAPTER FIVE: SHIFTING TEXTS AND SHIFTING NARRATIVES: BENEVENTAN TO FRANCO-ROMAN EXULTETS

Easter proclamations have been used in various forms since the early centuries of Christianity, first with the *sacrificium vespertinum* and various examples of *laus cerei* and later with the evolution and development of the Exultet as it is preserved in the Beneventan and Franco-Roman versions included in the Exultet rolls and manuscripts contemporary with them.249 Focusing on just the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets, this chapter will consider the shift in content between the two, especially as the Franco-Roman version supplanted the Beneventan text in liturgical use in southern Italy. The changes, both obvious and subtle, amount to a shift in a significant portion of the allegorical content, particularly as it relates to female figures, the natural world, and the Elegy of the Bees.

The Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets: a Synopsis

The Beneventan and Franco-Roman texts of the Exultet have a number of features in common. They both use the same prologue, sharing the text with the Milanese liturgy as well. This portion of the text exhorts all the heavens and earth, the Church and the faithful to rejoice in the splendor of the Paschal candle’s light. It invokes blessings on the singer of the candle’s praises before transitioning into the preface according to either the Beneventan or Franco-Roman text. The preface is the part of the Exultet with which the illustrations of Tellus, Ecclesia, and several varieties of liturgical images are associated. This section will give an overview of the

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249 The *laus cerei* was a blessing for the Paschal candle, composed year by year, as mentioned by Augustine in the *City of God* XV.22
content in each Exultet, with deeper analysis of what the differences between the two communicate explored later in the chapter.

The Beneventan rite was suppressed in the late eleventh century, with the expectation that increased conformity to the Roman rite would take root in southern Italy. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the replacement of Beneventan chant and liturgical practice with Roman chant and liturgy was in no way instantaneous. While many books of Beneventan chant were lost and replaced with Roman rite materials, the peculiar beauty and uncommon format of the Exultet rolls is probably one of the reasons why so many survive. Along with the shift away from the regional rites, several of the Exultet rolls were edited to bring their text into conformity with the new requirement for the use of the Franco-Roman text for the Easter Vigil. The choice to edit existing rolls rather than destroy them speaks to the importance of the tradition of using Exultet rolls and an unwillingness to dispense with a longstanding practice that has no true counterpart in the Roman liturgy.250

The Beneventan Exultet preface is vivid in its imagery, singing of darkness and light, earth and heaven, life and death over and over again, and is the more cosmological of the two versions. The night of the Resurrection is cast as the moment to which all others have led. The night becomes the “mother of light” that heralds the resurrection of the dead, including both the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the Old Testament saints.251 The designation of the night of the Resurrection as the mother of light echoes Augustine’s description of the Easter Vigil as the “mother of all vigils,” not only because of the Resurrection’s centrality to Christian

250 To the best of my knowledge, there is no record of rolls or other highly decorative manuscripts devoted to the Exultet alone anywhere outside of southern Italy, with the exception of one currently held at Pisa.

251 Kelly, The Exultet in Southern Italy, 33. “...ad noctem istam, non tenebrarum sed luminis matrem perducere dignatus est, in qua exorta est ab inferis in eterna die resurrectio mortuorum.”
doctrine, but also on account of the liturgical magnitude with which it is traditionally celebrated. The passage naming the night as the mother of light speaks of Christ leading the gathered faithful to the night that will give birth to the day of Resurrection. The text of the preface begins in the third person, being mainly about Christ and the Resurrection, but then it shifts to second person, addressing the maker and former of all things. The addressee is ambiguous, as it immediately follows the description of Christ’s Resurrection, blurring the distinction between Jesus and God the Father. This passage seems to collapse the Creator and the Incarnate Son into a single you: “Truly you are the precious maker, you are the former of all things…You are all and complete in yourself, who while you slip into the world through a virgin womb, yet you value the virginity of your creature.”

Following the praise of the maker of all things, the Beneventan Exultet launches into the Elegy of the Bees, which is the more female-centered of the two. The Beneventan text focuses on the virginity of the bees, celebrating their industrious productivity as a result of their purity: “O splendid examples of virginity who convey not harm to the possessor, but riches to themselves; they do indeed bear away the prize, and with the prize they take on no sin.” This Elegy of the Bees repeats the importance of flowers to the bee again and again, emphasizing the interaction between bees and flowers and, in turn, the use of materials drawn from the earth for all that the bees produce. The Elegy of the Bees praises the communal work of the hive, recognizing the

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252 Augustine, Sermon 219.

253 “Vere tu pretiosus es opifex…”

254 “…formator es omnium…Totus ac plenus in te es, qui dum per uerginea uiscera mundo illaberis, uirginitatem etiam creature comendas.”

strength of the foundation that can hold the weight of the honey with which the bees load it:
“…they do not fear to impose upon their hanging dwelling such a weighty load of honey.” \(^{256}\) The Elegy of the Bees concludes with a transition to the praise of the candle.

The praise of the candle is a paean to the candle itself more than to the light it sheds. The candle is described in terms of sweetness and purity, both qualities that also pertain to the bees and their products. The candle, “…when it is lit feeds on the fabric of its own body…” and the dripping wax is reabsorbed and feeds the flame again. \(^{257}\) This is framed in Eucharistic terms, with the description of the waxen rivulets from the candle: “…which disperses as a yellow vein the half-consumed portions as a divine blood, as the flame absorbs the received fluid.” This calls to mind the self-sacrifice of Christ sacramentally repeated in the Eucharistic liturgy. The praise of the candles also recalls the virginal purity of the bees and of Mary. As the candle’s wax, with its flame, is “not tainted by foreign colorings, but is illuminated by the Holy Spirit,” so the bee’s purity is preserved from lust in generation and the Virgin’s womb is untainted by original sin. \(^{258}\)

Soon the Beneventan Exultet turns to the liturgical rite at hand, calling for blessings on the candle and anyone who “should take up this candle against the blasts of the winds.” \(^{259}\) The following prayers are for the people, and connect the light of the candle to the life to come. The last portion of the Beneventan Exultet is similar to the Franco-Roman version in its inclusion of prayers for the hierarchical Church authorities and the secular authorities of the day. The two

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\(^{256}\) Beneventan Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 34.

\(^{257}\) Beneventan Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 35.

\(^{258}\) Beneventan Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 34.

\(^{259}\) Beneventan Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 35.
Exultets do differ in the specifics of their wording, but the formula is generally the same in this set of blessings.

The Franco-Roman Exultet shares many points of content with the Beneventan, but its thematic emphases are often very different. Beyond the standard invitation to prayer, identical to that of the Beneventan text and a staple of Catholic liturgical formulae, the Franco-Roman Exultet begins with a proclamation of the fittingness of singing God’s praises. It then parallels the sacrifice of Christ with the story of the Exodus and the Resurrection, calling on well-known typologies that see the Exodus story as a prefigurement the death and Resurrection of Christ, substituting the blood of sacrificial animals for the perfect sacrifice of Christ. “O certainly necessary sin of Adam,” it sings, “which is canceled by Christ’s death!”260 While the Beneventan takes a more mystical and nature-centered tone, the Franco-Roman Exultet is more overtly Christocentric in its recounting of salvation history.

After tracing the parallels between the Exodus and Easter, the Franco-Roman text goes on to praise the night of the vigil. This is not the first mention of the special character of the night preceding the Resurrection, but in this four-stanza section the Exultet turns its attention to the meaning of the night and its illumination by the candle. The power of the night, of course, comes from the Resurrection that occurred at an unspecified hour before dawn: “O blessed night which alone was worthy to know the time and the hour in which Christ arose from the underworld.”261 The final stanza of this group beseeches God the Father to accept the candle, calling it and its flame the sacrificium vespertinum, or evening sacrifice. This term links the offering of the Paschal candle to early traditions of the sacrificium vespertinum, placing the Easter Vigil along

260 Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, The Exultet in Southern Italy, 36-37.

261 Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, The Exultet in Southern Italy, 36-37.
the historical continuum of such celebrations reaching backward to the early Christians and forward into a future of indefinite length. The praises of the candle give way to the Elegy of the Bees, which is substantially different from the Beneventan version.

In its Elegy of the Bees, the Franco-Roman Exultet frames its celebration in terms of the perfection of the bee: “The bee surpasses all the other living things that are subject to man.”262 The bee has natural wisdom in understanding the seasons and is an ideal member of the hive, contributing according to its appointed task. The bee serves the community as the believer is expected to serve the Church. The virginity and chastity of the bee are a main theme in this Elegy of the Bees, uniting the ideas of virginity, industrious work, and selfless labor.

The main areas of difference between the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets can be summarized as follows. The Beneventan Exultet celebrates the supererogatory nature of the Incarnation and the death and Resurrection of Christ, while the Franco-Roman text frames the events leading to Easter primarily as the fulfillment of the typology of Exodus, drawing a parallel between the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and salvation of humanity from sin through Christ. The Beneventan text celebrates the self-immolation of the Paschal candle, while the Franco-Roman text praises it mainly for its light (its usefulness) and compares it to the pillar of Fire from the Exodus story. The Beneventan Elegy of the Bees praises the skill and productivity of the bees as well as their virginity, connecting all that they do to the earth through their reliance on flowers. The Franco-Roman Elegy of the Bees, instead, casts the virtue of the bees as fundamentally in the service of their hive, or, by extension, the Church. When celebrating light, the Beneventan rite ascribes it to three sources: the Easter candle, the Resurrection, and, once, the stars, while light in the Franco-Roman Exultet comes from four sources: the pillar of

262 Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 38.
fire, the Resurrection, the Easter candle, and the morning star. The two Exultets also differ in length, with the Beneventan being a bit shorter than the Franco-Roman.

The Beneventan and Franco-Roman rites differ not only in their length and narrative arc, but also in their treatment of allegorical and natural imagery, where the Beneventan takes a more mystical approach compared to the typology-driven Franco-Roman. The complex network of differences between the two versions also indicates a shifting sensibility as to the importance and agency that could be ascribed to the feminine. The shift from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman Exultet is made manifest through the gendered noun of the bee, the associations of light and darkness, the privileging of community over individual virtue and motherhood, the degree of dependence on Old Testament typology, the focus on sin, the relationship of salvation to creation, or the place of the Virgin Mary. All these differences and the resistance they sometimes met emerge in the text and images of the Exultet rolls, illustrating the tension between tradition and reform.

**Gregorian Reforms and the Suppression of the Beneventan Rite**

The eleventh century was a period of reform and of increasing centralization of the authority of the Catholic Church. The reforms named for Pope Gregory VII began toward the middle of the eleventh century and would continue through the 1080s. Efforts by the Roman Church were underway to create greater uniformity among the various regional liturgical practices and to regularize liturgical content, which led to the suppression of the Beneventan chant at Montecassino in 1058 under Pope Stephen IX. As a result of the suppression, many Beneventan liturgical books were lost, and, along with them, much of the Beneventan chant repertoire.
The Gregorian reforms were not fundamentally about liturgical reform, but about the enforcement of an increasingly centralized and hierarchically authoritative model of the Church. This growing interest in establishing the Roman Church as the seat of administrative and spiritual power is evident in changing applications of terms and titles to the Roman Church in relationship to the Catholic churches throughout the world. Klaus Schatz, a notable theologian, reminds his readers that the transition from the somewhat disjointed and varied Church of the early Middle Ages to the centralized institution of the late Middle Ages involved gradual redefinition of terms referring to the Church hierarchy.\(^\text{263}\) In documents pertaining to Church law and practice, terms such as *mater et magistra*, *caput*, *fons*, and *vertex* were used with increasing frequency as synonyms for the Church of Rome.\(^\text{264}\) Schatz notes that the terms themselves were not at all new, but that their application to the Roman Church as all of these vis à vis the regional churches was substantially increased during the period of the reform. The thought behind the language was this:

The Roman church is the anchor, the head, mother, because all churches are oriented toward it and accept it as normative. Furthermore, it is the "source" since it expresses and safeguards unerringly the apostolic tradition of the faith and the ecclesial discipline going back to Peter. It is a norm that is not strictly limited to the sphere of faith. Rather, as the Anglo-Saxon reformers during the Carolingian era already recognized, it extends to the entire sphere of correct practices in the life of the Church, both in law and especially in the liturgy. In light of this principle, Gregory VII succeeded in having the Roman liturgy accepted in the Spanish kingdoms, and in combating the ancient Spanish liturgy which he considered to have been infected with Arian and Priscillian influences.\(^\text{265}\)


\(^{264}\) Ibid., 125. The terms mother and teacher, head, source, and summit are still prevalent in ecclesiology, with the primacy of Rome still a central focus.

\(^{265}\) Ibid., 125.
This idea that the Roman Church must be the singular source and authority for all other churches could be applied to any facet of religious life and practice as well as to the political and practical relationships of the Church with its constituents. Adherence to the policy of Petrine obedience and ecclesiastical discipline would effectively solidify the hierarchy of the Church into more than just a spiritually unified institution. The centralization of the hierarchical Church and the repeated assertion that the Roman Church was the only one truly founded by Christ began to transform the European political landscape surrounding the institution and its relationships with secular authorities.

In an attempt to solidify the pope in Rome as head and all local churches as subject to Roman authority, the Gregorian reforms were fueled in large part by linguistic changes and shifting connotations of terms associated with the Church and its hierarchy. This changing use of language is evident in the replacement of the Beneventan Exultet with the Franco-Roman. Like the Gregorian reforms, this substitution did not involve the importation of a newly composed text. Instead, the expectation that the Franco-Roman version would be adopted resulted in the attenuation or erasure of much of the less-orthodox content embedded in the Beneventan version.

The shift from Beneventan to Franco-Roman text in the production of new Exultet rolls or the adaptation of existing ones was not so much a matter of replacing older content with newer content, but rather one of replacing a text full of female-driven imagery with one that takes a more Christocentric tone. Regarding dating, Thomas Kelly places the prologue shared by the two much earlier than the prefaces.266 While there are more extant examples of early Franco-Roman Exultets, it is likely that the Beneventan preface was composed sometime during or after

266 Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 51-53. Kelly provides extensive analysis of the sources of each text, as well.
the seventh century.\textsuperscript{267} With the suppression of the Beneventan rite in the late eleventh century, Kelly notes that there is no documentation of a specific prohibition against the singing of the Beneventan Exultet.\textsuperscript{268} He asks whether there might, then, have been some degree of choice as to which Exultet text would be used and to what degree. The lack of an explicit constraint along with local preference for the regional text might account for some of the delay in the transition from Beneventan to Franco-Roman Exultet texts for the rolls.

\textbf{Erasure, Preservation, and Regional Persistence}

Among the Exultet rolls, there are a variety of ways that the texts were adjusted to conform to the general use of the Franco-Roman liturgy. Some Exultet rolls that are entirely Beneventan remain, but more were either altered from Beneventan to the Franco-Roman text or were made with the Franco-Roman text in the first place. Within each group, there are differences as to the content and placement of images, but in many instances there are parallels as well.

Several of the Exultet rolls underwent revisions to replace most or all of their Beneventan text with Franco-Roman. Among these is the oldest of the Exultet rolls, Vat. Lat. 9820. From this roll, there are clearly membranes missing, and its current arrangement is probably not true to its original layout.\textsuperscript{269} Having been restored, the sections are no longer attached to one another and vary greatly in size.\textsuperscript{270} The roll contained the Beneventan text when it was made, sometime between 981 and 987, and was written in the Beneventan script. Sometime in the twelfth or

\begin{footnotes}
\item[267] Ibid., 53-59.
\item[268] Ibid., 59.
\item[269] Valentino Pace, in \textit{Exultet}, 101.
\item[270] Ibid., in \textit{Exultet}, 101.
\end{footnotes}
thirteenth century, the Beneventan text was erased and overwritten with the Franco-Roman Exultet. Valentino Pace notes that as many as five different hands, four from the tenth century and one later, can be discerned in the roll, making it clear that this was a dynamic object that was edited more than once.²⁷¹ Looking closely, it is possible to see the shadow of the original Beneventan text. This roll is one in which the images were kept intact even though the text was changed. As a result, the images are often some distance away from any text with which they would be expected to illustrate.

Gaeta 1 is another roll in which parts of the text were erased and replaced with the Franco-Roman text. It is now displayed in the Museo Diocesano, but was once separated into leaves stored in an album.²⁷² This roll is peculiar in its mixture of Beneventan and Franco-Roman text. Only on one section, section 3, is the Beneventan text preserved, probably because that text is written in beautiful decorative block capitals between a star-shaped initial and a monogram for Vere Dignum. In all the other sections, the text is written in a gothic script datable to between 1335 and 1342.²⁷³ Presumably around the same time, the Beneventan chant notation was entirely removed and replaced with square notation. The images are, again, left in place, with staves for the square notation fit into cramped spaces around them several times. The same peculiar arrangement of images separated from related text happens here, with the Elegy of the Bees, for example, being a full section away from the illustration.

A third roll with text that was erased and replaced is Bari 2. Though originally Beneventan, the Franco-Roman text, written partly in Beneventan script and partly in a gothic

²⁷¹ Ibid., in Exultet, 101.

²⁷² Pace, in Exultet, 341.

²⁷³ Ibid., in Exultet, 341.
hand, was substituted for it in the early thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{274} Like Gaeta 1, Bari 2 has added square notation, though it is a bit more predictably placed and contained than Gaeta 1’s. Here, again, the images persist in their original places along the roll. Pisa 2 contains a mixture of Franco-Roman and Beneventan text, with the patchwork mainly in and around the Elegy of the Bees.\textsuperscript{275}

The adjustment of existing Exultet rolls with new text could be indicative of their status as objects of value and prestige. It would be unlikely that bishops or other clergy in charge of the Exultet rolls would be willing to destroy them. The partial erasure, removing the Beneventan text but preserving the images, might have been a way to keep an important part of the existing regional tradition while conforming to the suppression of the Beneventan rite in general. The refusal to completely discard or erase all evidence of the Beneventan tradition in word and image might also reflect attachment of local churches to the established way of doing things in the face of religious and political pressure to be absorbed into the Roman Church’s way of functioning.

In addition to the adjustment of old rolls to meet the expectations of conformity with Roman practice, new rolls were made with the Franco-Roman Exultet. These rolls, though, often include images that mirror the older Beneventan way of illustrating the Exultet. The continued use of illustration types that once belonged to the Beneventan Exultet rolls is evidence of the persistence of existing conventions. The choice to perpetuate traditional visions of Tellus, Ecclesia, images of the liturgy, and other subjects leads one to believe that the southern Italian Church’s cooperation with the imposition of Roman liturgical practice might not have been as complete as the simple production of Exultet rolls with Franco-Roman text makes it seem.

\textsuperscript{274} Francesco Magistrale, in \textit{Exultet}, 201.

\textsuperscript{275} Masetti, in \textit{Exultet}, 151.
Shifting Imagery

While there is a small subgroup of the Exultet rolls that began with the Beneventan text and were later edited to contain the Franco-Roman, many more rolls were produced with the Franco-Roman as their original text. These rolls also contain a full complement of illustrations that refer not only to the prologue shared with the Beneventan version, but also to the specific narrative arc of the Franco-Roman text. With its different approach to retelling the essential moments of salvation history, it is no surprise that the Exultet rolls made with the Franco-Roman as their original text should include images like the sin of Adam and Eve, the crossing of the Red Sea, and other images taken from the Exodus story. The Exultet rolls themselves are evidence of Church reform and regional resistance to it. Through the transition from Beneventan to Franco-Roman, the text and images of the Exultet rolls provide a window into the Church’s new and limited interpretations of the Easter mysteries.

The suppression of the Beneventan rite did not reach the Exultet immediately. As new rolls began to be made with the Franco-Roman text, the choice of subjects to illustrate gradually made the transition, too. The oldest of the Franco-Roman Exultet rolls tend to illuminate the initial resistance to reform and have a combination of images drawn from the Beneventan Exultet tradition and images more closely aligned with the narrative sequence of the Franco-Roman text. An early example of this is Vat. Barb. Lat. 592, from the late eleventh century, which includes only one image that is specific to the Franco-Roman Exultet. (Figure 74) The “happy fault” of Adam’s sin appears in a richly detailed miniature. The image sets Adam and Eve in a glade framed by what almost seems like a textile backdrop. Adam consumes the forbidden fruit directly from Eve’s hand as the extraordinarily long serpent coils around both Eve and the tree. Illustrations of Adam and Eve are examples of images that are not included in any of the Beneventan Exultets and reflect the passage from the Franco-Roman text, “O certainly necessary
sin of Adam’s which is canceled by Christ’s death! O happy blame which merited such and so much a redeemer!”

Images concerned with Adam and Eve appear in six of the fourteen illustrated rolls created with the Franco-Roman text. This is one of many examples of images that are direct reflections of the Franco-Roman text included in Exultet rolls that also make use of the Beneventan tradition. Other images that appear far more often in Franco-Roman than Beneventan Exultets, though there is some overlap, include various versions of Christ’s descent to the underworld and the liberation of the Old Testament faithful. As time went on and the replacement of the Beneventan Exultet with the Franco-Roman took root in the production of Exultet rolls, the quantity of illustrations specific to the Franco-Roman text increased.

The iconography in the illustrations of the Franco-Roman Exultet did not change immediately upon the introduction of the text, and the gradual transition toward including images specific to the text took several decades. The rolls later in the group, however, do generally reflect a changing sense of the meaning in the Exultet. This shift in the depiction of a figure like Ecclesia is manifest in the Salerno and Pisa 3 Exultets, both from the thirteenth century, which represent Ecclesia either as a male figure or as a church building without any humans nearby rather than the more common vision of Ecclesia as a female allegorical figure. (Figures 75, 76)

This is of particular interest, as the illustration for Ecclesia is associated with the text of the prologue that did not change with the adoption of the Franco-Roman rite. The choice of imagery departing from older conventions could be read as a change in the thought underlying the artists’ understanding of the Church as a hierarchical structure rather than a nurturing mother. While

276 Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, The Exultet in Southern Italy, 37.

277 This number does not include Pisa 1, which contains only remnants of two badly damaged images. Several of the rolls are also damaged, with parts missing that might once have contained similar imagery. Among these are Velletr, Capua, and Naples 2.
there is not a strict correspondence of change in iconography with later dates of production, some of the later rolls do offer a more detailed set of specifically Franco-Roman illustrations.

In Pisa 3, one of the three latest illustrated Exultet rolls, both the salvation of the firstborn sons of the Hebrews and the crossing of the Red Sea are illustrated, and the pillar of fire appears in one of the miniatures. (Figures 77, 78, 31) All three of these illustrations reflect the Exultet text as it retells the story of the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt. In the first two images, the crossing of the Red Sea and the salvation of the firstborn, Moses and Aaron appear alongside the Israelites, reflecting the traditional interpretation of Christ as the New Moses based on the Gospel of Matthew. The image of the Israelites preparing their doors with the blood of the lamb stand in a structure that looks more like a Christian church than housing for an enslaved populace. In this image, Moses and Aaron preside watchfully, resembling saints or apostles with their dress and their halos. The third Exodus image in this roll is singular among Exultet roll images. Here, Exodus’ pillar of fire takes the central place, looking like an architectural column surrounded by tiny red flames against an arch-shaped blue background. To the left of the pillar stands Christ with a pointed finger outstretched toward it. On the other side, a female personification of shadow, Tenebrae, shies away from both the fire and the authoritative Christ. Whether the gesture of Christ is directed at the pillar or at the fleeing darkness, the image combines elements from the Old Testament, including the sin of Adam and the Exodus narrative, the Franco-Roman Exultet’s trove of references to light and darkness, and the general association of the risen Christ with brightness and light. With its emphasis on the typology of the Exodus, the inclusion of these elements in a Franco-Roman roll is not surprising. The typological focus of Pisa 3 does, however, indicate an increasingly Christocentric view of the Exultet, with the
images of this thirteenth-century roll often including some version of Christ blessing or in Majesty.

Troia 3 is, perhaps, the most detailed example of the addition of narrative scenes from the Franco-Roman text. The roll is earlier than Pisa 3, having been made in the second half of the twelfth century. In addition to the images often shared with Beneventan Exultets, this roll includes several images concerned with the Exodus narrative as well as two scenes detailing the sin of Adam and Eve. In this roll, the arrangement of the images is especially noteworthy, with depictions of Exodus scenes interspersed with images of Christ that are typologically related. As the preface begins, a scene of God finding the newly shameful Adam and Eve is the first biblical illustration for this part of the text. (Figure 79) The next image shows the preparation of the Israelites’ homes for the Passover followed by the crossing of the Red Sea. (Figures 80, 81) In the crossing of the Red Sea, the Israelites appear between two sets of tall, rolling waves on their way toward the pillar of fire and cloud that looks rather like a bicolored tree. The three images beyond these first Exodus narratives depict the salvation of believers in Christ from darkness and sin, the ascent of Christ from the underworld, and the Crucifixion. The typological relationship between the first few images is clear, as the sin of Adam and Eve is supposed to have set all subsequent sin and suffering in motion. The Passover provided an escape from bondage by way of obedience and sacrifice on the part of the Israelites, a freedom made real by their miraculous travel through the Red Sea. In a similar way, those faithful to Christ are represented emerging from a shadowy cave with the aid of an angel. This setting is visually similar to the cave from which Christ emerges in the next scene, leaving the doors and locks scattered and broken. These images reflect the New Testament echo of the Israelites’ escape from Egypt, particularly when taken in relationship to the image of the Crucifixion: “O inestimable favor of charity that to
redeem a servant you sacrificed a son!” The servitude of the Israelites in Egypt was broken by a sacrificial offering followed by a series of miraculous events even as humanity’s servitude to sin and death was broken by the Crucifixion and death of Christ followed by the miracle of his return from death.

This typological approach continues in Troia 3’s next set of images, beginning with the moment of original sin, as Adam reaches for a piece of the fruit that Eve is already eating. (Figure 82) The next image shows the moment of the Resurrection, with a satisfied-looking Christ stepping out of the tomb while three sleeping guards hunch down together. (Figure 83) The following image shows a figure of darkness fleeing away from the light of the sun and its human representation. These three images directly reflect the texts near which they appear. Typologically, the Resurrection undoes the condemnation to sin called down on the children of Adam and Eve, and it drives away the darkness of sin and separation from God. The last pair of images, each showing groups of figures, represents the gifts of the Easter night: “Therefore the blessedness of this night banishes misfortunes, washes away sins, restores innocence to the fallen, gladness to the sorrowful, puts hatred to flight, procures concord and subdues power.” (Figure 84) The first image represents the things that are banished, while the second shows the positive results of the Easter night, except, perhaps, for the king who sits subdued at the right margin. Just one more moment from Exodus appears in Troia 3, several images farther along the roll, depicting the Egyptians handing over valuable goods to the Hebrews in illustration of the

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278 Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 37.

279 Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 37.
“O truly blessed night, which despoiled the Egyptians and enriched the Hebrews….”\(^{280}\) (Figure 85)

Given its fidelity to the Franco-Roman text, it makes sense that the narrative images of the Exodus story do not appear in the order that they would in the Bible, but rather as they do in the Exultet. The text and the images correspond almost directly, with the text oriented the same way as the images. In addition to the elaborate illustrations depicting the Exodus narrative, Troia 3 includes a number of illustrations that share subjects with Beneventan Exultets. Beyond the images that are directly tied to the text, the roll includes a series of images before the prologue that retell the appearances of Christ after the Resurrection: the women at the tomb, *a noli me tangere*, the road to Emmaus, an appearance to his disciples, and doubting Thomas. From here, the more familiar illustrations of the prologue begin. Though female figures do appear in biblical narrative images and in the images of Tellus and Tenebrae, there are no others included in this roll. The visualization of the text reveals a clear fidelity to the Franco-Roman text’s focus on Christ as the fulfillment of the Exodus typologies.

With the introduction of the Franco-Roman Exultet came the question of how to both preserve the Exultet roll tradition and conform to the suppression of the Beneventan rite. Early solutions of erasure and replacement gave way to the production of new Exultet rolls containing the Franco-Roman text. The adoption of a different version of the Exultet combined with the persistence of the use of the roll and a degree of iconographic continuity in the newly-produced rolls indicates some resistance to the imposition of the new liturgical repertoire. Long-term changes in the Franco-Roman Exultet’s visualization are evident over the course of their manufacture, beginning with just a few direct references to the text, as in Vat. Barb. Lat. 592, and

\(^{280}\) Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 39.
ending with many corresponding illustrations as in Pisa 3 and Troia 3. The overall trajectory of the illustration of the Franco-Roman Exultet indicates a change in the Church’s understanding of the Easter mysteries and represents a movement from the female-centered approach of the Beneventan text toward a typologically-driven interpretation of salvation history.

_Chatting and Remaining Female Content in Text and Image_

There is an abundance of female or feminine content in both the texts and the images of the Exultet rolls. In both the texts and the images, the use of allegorical language and allegorical figures indicates a network of deeper meanings embedded in words as well as images. Through the repetition of female figures and words and images that rely on feminine nouns, a growing list of female-centered ideas emerges from the Exultet rolls as a group. The deployment of these words and images differs between the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets. As various themes are examined in relation to each text, a picture of the ideological transition from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman version emerges.

_Gendered Language and Images in the Exultet_

Both the Beneventan and the Franco-Roman Exultet texts are rich in allegorical concepts and female-centered imagery. In the prologue shared by both Exultets, the figures of Tellus and Ecclesia are mentioned in the text. In many rolls, images of these figures appear nearby their names, with calls for them to rejoice. In the prologue, the earth shines and the Church is made radiant with the brightness of the rising Christ. Beyond the prologue, where the Beneventan and Franco-Roman texts diverge in the preface, each text uses differently nuanced language surrounding concepts like light and darkness that can be depicted as allegorical figures, imagery focused on birth and generation, and hints at the female virtue of _sophrosyne_. The grammatically feminine nouns that form the bedrock of the Elegy of the Bees and much of the other content in
both Exultets are used differently in each, suggesting that the imposition of the Franco-Roman text in place of the Beneventan effected a shift toward reduction and eventual removal of much of the female-driven content in the Exultet.

**Light and Darkness**

Light and darkness, day and night, stars and splendor, flame and fire are constantly present in the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets. In the prologue, the earth is enlightened with splendor and brightness, and the darkness of the whole world is dispelled. The light of the candle is compared with the light of God that will strengthen the deacon to sing the Exultet. Beyond the prologue, the imagery of light comes through differently in each text. The repeated imagery of light and brightness contrasted with darkness and night occurs in both Exultets, but their uses are different. The Beneventan text uses light and darkness in broader and more cosmological ways, indicating a deeper connection to the natural world than the Franco-Roman version, which uses the terms mainly in relationship to the Exodus and Resurrection typology narrative.

In the Beneventan Exultet, the night is not a place of shadows, but the “mother of light” leading to eternal day. The night is not an evil to be dispelled, but a source from which the brightness of the Resurrection will emerge. The candles of the Vigil are described as “starry ornaments of the churches,” inviting an image of points of light that punctuate an anticipatory darkness. The Paschal candle is not mentioned specifically until the end of the Elegy of the Bees, where its praises are sung for the cheerfulness of its flame, among other qualities. The light of the candle and its self-sufficiency make it fit for its task of providing protective light, a refuge
and wall against the enemy. Among the prayers for the faithful is a request that they should be “inflamed with the desire of things to come.”

The Beneventan understanding of light and darkness is rarely reflected in the images. Though shared with several of the Franco-Roman rolls, the presence of both Lux and Caligo, light and darkness, in images of the Crucifixion is the most common place to find direct representations of the two beyond the prologue. Another occasion for depicting light is in the star that often accompanies Nativity scenes such as those in Montecassino 1 and Gaeta 1, where the light makes a connection between heaven and earth. (Figures 72, 73) Similarly, the stars that appear in Bari 2’s images function both as stars and as flames, connecting with the description of candles as starry ornaments, quoted above. Bari 2 places its stars in liturgical illustrations as well as inside the mandorla of Christ the Pantokrator and among the seraphim. (Figure 86) Similar stars appear in Bari 2’s Elegy of the Bees, drawing a visual connection to the candle flames that the wax will feed. (Figure 67)

The Franco-Roman text mentions the night many times, mainly as a mark of emphasis on the night of the liturgical vigil being the night of the Resurrection in contrast to the multifaceted use of night and darkness in the Beneventan text. The Franco-Roman text’s repeated declaration, “This is the night…” ties the present vigil to the historical moment it celebrates, compressing all of the events from the Exodus to the Easter Vigil into a single night. Reference is made to the

281 Paraphrase from the Beneventan text.


283 See Chapter three for a complete list of rolls that include Lux and Caligo as part of the Crucifixion scene.
darkness of sin and, late in the Exultet, to the “gloom of this night.”^284 There are far more references to light than to darkness or night in the Franco-Roman text. Beginning with the “column of light” that led the Israelites across the Red Sea and which is made real in the present liturgical vigil through the Paschal candle, this Exultet links light mostly to the Paschal flame. Even the quotation in the passage, “This is the night of which it is written ‘and night shall be bright as day’ and ‘night shall be my light in my gladness,’” links the light of the Resurrection with the light of the candle that will receive praise in the next part of the text. The indivisibility of the flame, its vividness, and its persistence are celebrated. The last part of the Franco-Roman text prays that the light of the candle will be “mixed with the lights of heaven” and that petitions, “May the morning star find its flames burning; …that morning star…that knows no setting, that serene star who, returned from the underworld, enlightens humanity.”^285 Christ is understood as the morning star, bringing a masculine overtone to the imagery of light at the end of the Exultet.

In their illustration of the prologue, three rolls with Franco-Roman text join the Beneventan tradition of depicting a small figure of darkness, Caligo, being put off by the figure of a nursing Tellus. The earliest of these, Vat. Lat. 9820, is easily explained as an image that remained when the Beneventan text was erased and replaced, but the other rolls, Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3 and Salerno, were made with the Franco-Roman text. (Figures 7, 8, 11) The images might be explained as occasions of emulating an exemplar or they could indicate an appreciation of the vividness of the imagery that can be captured in such a miniature. More subversively, the use of this imagery could be read as an instance of persisting in an older tradition. Given that the image of Tellus with Caligo belongs to the shared prologue, though,

^284 Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 37.

such explanations must remain speculative. Beyond the images common to the preface or illustrations of the Crucifixion, two Franco-Roman Exultets, Troia 3 and Pisa 3 depict the flight of the shadows, or the allegorical figure of Tenebrae. (Figures 30, 31) In both images, Tenebrae appears as a female figure drawing back from a light source associated with a male figure. In Troia 3, the small black figure of Tenebrae falls away from a brightly clad male figure of the sun, and in Pisa 3, Tenebrae is trapped within a dark circle and draws back from both the pillar of fire and the emphatically gesturing figure of Christ. Though not many, the images of light and darkness in the Franco-Roman rolls are associated more with banishment than illumination.

Tellus, Ecclesia, and the Natural World

Though they both belong to the prologue to the Exultet and are, therefore, shared by both the Beneventan and Franco-Roman versions, there are different conventions for the representation of Tellus and Ecclesia across both types of Exultet rolls. The use of natural imagery recurs as well, though in a subtler way than the allegorical figures themselves.

In illustration of the verse, “Let earth rejoice, enlightened with such brightness, and shining with the splendor of the eternal king, feel the darkness of the whole world dispelled,” images of Tellus often depict her as a nursing mother. This way of showing Tellus as a maternal figure reaches back to the oldest Exultet roll, Vat. Lat. 9820, and is repeated with slight variations four more times. This variety of representation is not limited to Beneventan rolls, but appears in Franco-Roman ones, too. The nursing Tellus is one of several kinds that appear across the Exultet rolls. She also appears as a woman standing among plants and animals (Bari 1), a male figure enclosed within a mandorla (Vat. Lat. 3784 and Montecassino 2), or as a fruiting vine (Pisa 2). (Figures 7, 16, 17, 20, 18) While the images of the nursing Tellus appear in both Beneventan and Franco-Roman rolls, the illustrations that present her in a non-female fashion are
mainly Franco-Roman.\footnote{Vat. Lat. 3784 is the outlier here, but most of its images are unlike those of any other Exultet roll.} The differences in representations of Tellus reflect both artistic choice and changing sensibilities as to the nature of the earth. The earth can be maternal toward the natural world or she can be the source of fruit useful to humans. The earth can also simply be subject to the majesty of God, as in Vat. Lat. 3784, where the small male figure appears beneath the feet of Christ in Majesty. The relationship of Tellus to heaven and to the creatures she sustains is generally clearer in Beneventan rolls and Franco-Roman ones that maintain the nursing Tellus iconography.

The text associated with Ecclesia is similarly placed in the prologue, again shared by both the Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultets. The prologue says, “Let mother church, too, be glad, adorned with the brightness of such splendor; let this hall resound with the great voices of the people.”\footnote{Kelly 32 Prologue} Again, there is no strict distinction between the iconography employed by Beneventan versus Franco-Roman rolls for this subject, but more Franco-Roman rolls than Beneventan depict Ecclesia either as a liturgical gathering or as a male figure than as a female figure. The changing perception of the Church as an institution governed by hierarchical leadership led away from the regal female figure more common in the Beneventan tradition.

Though not a feature of either Exultet text, natural imagery does play a part in the illustration of the Exultet rolls. In the Beneventan rolls, trees, flowers, vines, and animals appear in images of Tellus, reinforcing the dependence of living creatures on the earth. Natural surroundings accompany almost every image of the Elegy of the Bees, whether Beneventan or Franco-Roman, and trees and plants surround Adam and Eve in the images showing the moments of original sin. The natural world is not specifically celebrated in the Exultet’s illustrations, but
the presence of plant and animal life in both versions’ images certainly enriches their main subjects.

**The Virgin and the Bee**

Among the noteworthy shifts in the transition from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman Exultet is the movement away from some of the more intense expressions of female potency contained in the Beneventan text, particularly regarding the Virgin Mary and the praises of the bee. Subtle differences can be detected in the texts’ identification of the bees’ virtue, their social role, and their similarity to the Virgin.

The text of the Beneventan Exultet identifies the bees more closely with the Virgin Mary, though it never mentions her name. The Incarnation is associated with the beginning of the Elegy of the Bees in the Beneventan text, with the virginity of Mary functioning as a transition to the Elegy’s praise of the bees’ chastity: “…while you slip into the world through a virgin womb, yet you value the virginity of your creature.”\(^{288}\) The richness of the Elegy’s imagery concerning the bee is centered on the noun’s feminine gender. The bees are praised because, “filios generant; et uiros non norunt.”\(^{289}\) The bees’ procreation without sexual contact is reiterated in the following lines that repeat the role of the flower as a husband, doing no harm to their virtue and still amassing riches. This association of the bees with the Virgin is directly reflected in the images that combine the illustrations for the Elegy of the Bees and with the Nativity.\(^{290}\) The comparison of the bees with the Virgin is clear, though the Beneventan text does not turn it into a simile as obviously as the Franco-Roman does. In the Beneventan text, the Virgin is the essential element

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\(^{288}\) Beneventan Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 33.

\(^{289}\) Beneventan Exultet as translated by Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 34.

\(^{290}\) As discussed in Chapter 4, these are Montecassino 1, Manchester, and Gaeta 1.
of all else that follows in the path to the redemption of humanity. She is the conduit for the maker of the world to enter it as a human.

The three images that place the Elegy of the Bees and the Nativity in the same image are all Beneventan: Manchester, Montecassino 1, and Gaeta 1. (Figures 6, 72, 73) In each of these, the proximity of the bees to the Virgin makes an unmistakable connection between them. The bees are engaged in the same virginal procreation as Mary, albeit in very different ways, and they carry on with their tasks of bringing light and nourishment through their wax and honey just as Mary brings light and spiritual nourishment to the world through her son.

The closeness of the bees and the Virgin is less obvious in the Franco-Roman Exultet. The text does not mention the creation of the world or make any reference to the Incarnation until after the Elegy of the Bees, when it adds, “Just as holy Mary conceived as a virgin, gave birth as a virgin, and remained a virgin.” This is its one instance of direct comparison between the Virgin and the bees, and the general fidelity of the artists who produced the rolls to the sequence the Franco-Roman Exultet means that a Nativity or Virgin enthroned often follows the Elegy of the Bees. The reframing of the relationship between the bees and the Virgin Mary by placing the reference to the Virgin last shifts the focus of the narrative arc in the Franco-Roman version. The Elegy of the Bees comes only after the Exodus story has been told and the candle offered, which does not direct the reader or listener to contemplate the miraculous generation of Christ. With the mention of Mary placed after the Elegy and kept short, it becomes more of a compact dogmatic assertion than a celebration of the role of the Virgin in the story of salvation.

Celebration of Female Virtue

In each of the Exultet texts, concepts associated with the virtue of *sophrosyne* appear most clearly in the Elegy of the Bees. As discussed in Chapter 4, this constellation of qualities is strongly reflective of both the bees and the Virgin Mary. The characteristics of the bees and of the Virgin are readable as qualities generally desirable for women of virtue as far back as Classical Greece, and the way that these characteristics are described or illustrated in the Beneventan and Franco-Roman texts differs subtly. The Beneventan text gives a different kind of power to the bee and to the Virgin, and, arguably, a greater power than the Franco-Roman text that places the bee and the Virgin Mary at the service of the Church rather than essential to it.

In the Beneventan text, the bees actively generate offspring through their interaction with flowers. They actively build shelters and amass honey and wax. While they do these things as part of a common task, the overall unity of the hive and the division of labor is not stressed in this version of the text. The bee is her own agent, individually practicing the virtues of chastity and industriousness as much for her own sake as for the good of the hive. The emphasis on the singularity of the bee’s virtues is shared with the singularity of the Virgin’s; the bee is unique among all creatures in the natural world for its virginal procreation and marvelous capacity to produce light and food for its own good as well as the greater good, and the Virgin Mary is unique among all women for her virginal motherhood and her powerful role in providing the fabric of a body for Christ that would allow the redemptive events celebrated at Easter to occur.

In the Franco-Roman text, the Elegy of the Bees is, again, the primary location of references to female virtue, though it takes a more labor-oriented tone than the Beneventan text does. Unlike the Beneventan text, the Franco-Roman saves its reference to the Virgin Mary until the end of the section, indicating the bees’ connection to the wax of the candle over their metaphorical relationship to the Virgin. While still placing virginity at the top of the list, the
Franco-Roman text gives greater emphasis to the common efforts of the bees. It ascribes wisdom to the bee: “Though she be but tiny in the smallness of her body, she revolves prodigious knowledge in her tiny breast, weak in force but forceful in abilities.”292 After describing the bee’s knowledge of the seasons, the Franco-Roman Elegy turns to a description of the bees in the plural, listing the different jobs that they do cooperatively for the benefit of the hive: “Part of them gather blossoms…others…construct cells with clinging glue; others press together the flowing honey; others turn flowers into wax…mold the newborn with the mouth…seal up the nectar collected from flowers.”293 These are largely communal activities, and though still associated with female virtue, they are not upheld as directly in correspondence with the virtues of the Virgin. The impulse of the bee to begin working as soon as the springtime arrives is one of just three mentions of individual virtue, with the others being virginity and knowledge. It could be argued that the industriousness of the virtue of sophrosyne is reflected in this sensibility of the bee, who, when “the springtime has swept away the glacial feebleness…immediately feels the need to come forth to her work.”294 The qualities of sophrosyne here are not intended for the growth and development of the individual, but of the larger community. In this way, both the practice of female-centered virtue and the qualities of the Virgin Mary and her cooperation within the arc of salvation history are shown to be at the service of the Church and its purpose in the world.

292 Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, The Exultet in Southern Italy, 38.

293 Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, The Exultet in Southern Italy, 38.

294 Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, The Exultet in Southern Italy, 38.
Visions of Motherhood in the Exultet

Hand-in-hand with the differences in their representations of female virtue associated with *sophrosyne* are the differences in the two Exultets’ descriptions of motherhood and uses of motherhood as a metaphor. As has already been noted, there are discernible differences in the Beneventan and Franco-Roman texts’ use of female-centered imagery and ideas. This is no less true in their treatment of the role of mothers and motherhood in the preface portion of each Exultet. The Beneventan version provides a multifaceted vision of the maternal, where the Franco-Roman version gives a simpler and more reductive view, indicating yet another area in which the Franco-Roman Exultet presents a more masculine vision of salvation history.

In the prologue to the Exultet, the Church is referred to as mother, in keeping with language in use from the early centuries of Christianity. This is the only direct reference to motherhood in the prologue, though the illustrations that accompany its reference to Tellus often include a nursing female figure. The earth has long been personified as a mother, so it is not shocking that a maternal image would often accompany illustrations of Tellus. The nursing Tellus images of British Library MS Add. 30337 and Vat. Barb. Lat. 592 depict a female figure united with the earth and nourishing even its detested creatures, such as the snake. (Figures 13, 12) Surrounding the figure of Tellus are abundant trees and plants which also, presumably, receive nourishment from her. A less nature-driven version of the same image type presents Tellus as a female figure seated on the ground and nursing a pair of animals. These images, in Vat. Lat. 9820, Casanatense 724 (B I 13) 3, and Salerno focus the viewer’s attention on the connection of earth with heaven, giving less explicit visions of the earth as mother. (Figures 7, 9, 11)

In their representations of the Church, or Ecclesia, there is great variation in visual representations among the rolls. In most of the rolls that began with Beneventan text and were
altered to contain the Franco-Roman, Ecclesia appears as a female personification, either enthroned upon a church structure or standing within an ecclesiastical space. In only two rolls originally Beneventan does Ecclesia appear as a representation of liturgical activity rather than as a female figure. Among the Franco-Roman rolls, there is a mixture of representations of Ecclesia ranging from the female allegorical figure to a male figure or a church building with no figures at all. The varied choices of artists to use either a female figure or an institutional representation is indicative of the gradual changes in the perception of the Church’s role. The Gregorian reforms changed the nuances of the use of the mater in relation to the Church, giving it a more authoritative sense that is reflected in the representation of mater ecclesia as an instance of liturgical celebration or a male figure.

The Beneventan Exultet text presents a nuanced vision of motherhood, framing it in terms of renewal and regeneration as well as procreation. Its description of the Easter Vigil night as the “mother of light” sets the tone for the rest of the text, in which creation is celebrated. The ambiguity of the text is beautiful in its shifting person, with there being no clear referent for the “you” of the text, “Truly you are the precious maker, you are the former of all things, whose nature was not in the carrying out of functions, but in the power of the word.” Though, theologically, it is clear that this passage is meant to refer to Christ, the overtones of creative fashioning evokes an image of a purposeful establishment of the world beloved of its maker. The same might be ascribed to the Virgin, who, as the Mother of God, creates a physical form in which the divine might dwell at no cost to the integrity of her virginity. The close proximity of texts about the creation of the world and the Incarnation of its maker weaves a connection

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295 Bari 2 began with the Beneventan text and was edited later, and Gaeta 1 contains the Beneventan text.

between the two, making the motherhood of Mary a kind of echo of the creation of the world. Motherhood figures prominently into the Beneventan Exultet’s Elegy of the Bees, as well. The bees give birth virginally, as does the Virgin Mary, though the comparison with her is never made explicit. They take no true husband, but rely on the natural world around them for the production and sustenance of their progeny. This vision aligns the motherhood of the Virgin with the motherhood of the bees, each which provides a picture of female-centered power over the production and support of elements essential to the Church: wax for candles to dispel the darkness and the body of Christ to banish the shadow of sin. This kinship between the motherhood of the Virgin and the motherhood of the bees is especially noticeable in the images of the Nativity combined with the images of the bees, as described above.

The Franco-Roman text makes no mention of mothers or motherhood before the Elegy of the Bees, and even then only toward the end of the section: “…others mold the newborn with the mouth…O truly marvelous bee, whose sex is not violated by the male, nor shattered by childbearing, neither do children destroy her chastity.”\footnote{Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, \textit{The Exultet in Southern Italy}, 38.} The passage is followed by the Franco-Roman version’s only other, rather formulaic, reference to motherhood: “Just as holy Mary conceived as a virgin, gave birth as a virgin and remained a virgin.”\footnote{Franco-Roman Exultet as translated by Kelly, \textit{The Exultet in Southern Italy}, 39.} The metaphorical relationship between the inviolate bee and the perpetually virginal Mary is clear enough, but there is no connection made to creation or to the night of the vigil in this part of the Exultet.

The Beneventan and Franco-Roman Exultet texts differ substantially in their approaches to recounting the Easter narrative and the events leading to the night of the Resurrection. With
the suppression of the Beneventan rite and the introduction of the Franco-Roman Exultet into the production of Exultet rolls, shifts of text eventually resulted in shifts of imagery, as well.

The Feminine as Essential to the Divine

While both the Beneventan and the Franco-Roman Exultets effectively proclaim the Easter mysteries, the two texts present significantly differing visions of the role of female figures and female potency in the economy of salvation. The transition from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman Exultet brought with it a shift in interpretive approaches to the Easter story and its annual retelling. Changes in emphasis in text and image reflect a shift away from the female-centered text and imagery of the Beneventan version toward the male-oriented Franco-Roman version. In this movement from one text and its content to a different, more orthodox one, two distinct concepts of the relationship between female potency and the divine emerge.

In the Beneventan Exultet, the female is essential to the process of salvation, with images of motherhood, generation, nourishment, and virginity. The procreative power of the feminine in the Beneventan Exultet is manifest in the texts well as the images that illustrate it. Night is a mother who gives birth to light, virtues associated with women are celebrated in the Elegy of the Bees, and the womb of the Virgin is described with respect and virginity as of value to God. By directly linking the Incarnation with the virginity of both Mary and the bees, the Beneventan text sets the stage for the Elegy of the Bees to be read in light of female potency. It is the female virginal womb, the female bee, the feminine Tellus and Ecclesia or Lux and Caligo that drive the narrative in the Beneventan Exultet, indicating through text and image that the contributions of each female figure or feminine noun is essential to the achievement of salvation. Without the Virgin’s participation, there would be no body for Christ to carry out his purpose. Without the bees, there would be no wax for a candle to drive away the darkness and there would be a lack of
honey to nourish the young who will one day take up the task. The model of chaste generation applies to the Church, as well, and the Beneventan text’s repeated language of reverence for the maternal and for the miracle of bringing forth young without any stain of sin can be applied to the Church’s sacramental birth of sinless children through Baptism. In the Beneventan Exultet, the Church is understood as a true mother, just as the Virgin and the bees are. The power of the female Church, the Virgin, and the bee is understood as essential to the process of propagating and sustaining the Church through history. The female, here, is seen as a driving force for all the processes that contribute to the perpetual renewal of the Church and the faithful through time and into eternity.

The Franco-Roman Exultet, by contrast, offers a view of the female at the service of salvation, casting motherhood in terms of the division of labor or as a contribution to the common good. Apart from the mention of Tellus and Ecclesia in the prologue, few references are made to female power or virtue. The Elegy of the Bees celebrates the knowledge and industriousness of the bee almost as often as it celebrates her chastity. The examples of the bees’ virtues are all community-driven, focusing on the service that the bee performs for the hive. Following the Elegy’s praise of the bees’ labors, a connection between the chastity of the bee and the virginity of Mary brings the Franco-Roman Exultet’s treatment of female imagery to a close. In this Exultet, the night is simply night and not a mother of light, the shadows are things to be cast out and not illuminated by the soft light of the candle. The role of the bee and of the Virgin is one of service rather than one of individual agency, placing value on labor for the common good at the core of female virtue. The Church, then, is the hive that must function hierarchically if it is to function at all, and the brilliance of female potency becomes attenuated in its place of humble service.
The shift from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman Exultet text does not represent a simple change in liturgical text, but a shift from individual local traditions to homogenized hierarchical rites. The change of content did not serve only to universalize the liturgical practice across geographical territories, but to introduce increasingly hierarchical interpretations of the Exultet tradition. Where the Exultet had once been filled with poetic celebrations of the power and agency of the female in bringing salvation history to fruition in the Easter mysteries, it would become a lesson in typology and the necessity of a hierarchical Church. The differing approaches to the Elegy of the Bees and the Virgin Mary make this shift clearest. In the Beneventan Exultet, the female is essential to salvation, while in the Franco-Roman Exultet, the female is at the service of salvation. This slow erosion of the recognition of female potency would continue until later Exultets no longer made reference to bees or to the Virgin at all.
CONCLUSION

The Exultet rolls are unique among their manuscript contemporaries not only for their employment of the *rotulus* format, but for their content and their connection to the liturgical culture of southern Italy in the Middle Ages. A product of the Beneventan tradition that arose in southern Italy between the years leading to the invasion of Italy by the Lombards and the loss of religious and political autonomy, the Exultet roll provides insight into changing ideas about the power of the Church and the meaning of its doctrine. The growth and geographical expansion of the Beneventan rite across southern Italy allowed there to be many Exultet rolls produced across the region, and the later suppression of the Beneventan rite met slow adoption or even resistance as the shift to Franco-Roman liturgical material got underway after 1058. The Beneventan Exultet was in use in southern Italy long before the introduction of the Franco-Roman text into the area. The gradual adoption of the imported text and the eventual transition to including illustrations specific to the Franco-Roman text indicates a certain degree of tension between the traditional text and images of the local Beneventan Exultet and those of the interloping Franco-Roman. The transition to Franco-Roman text did eventually take hold, but the persistence of the *rotulus* for the Exultet and the insistence on maintaining some iconographic conventions leads one to believe that the acceptance of the Beneventan rite’s suppression was met with some continued adherence to established tradition.

This dissertation deals with questions as to the nature of Exultet rolls themselves, both as *rotuli* and as objects intended for the single annual Easter Vigil. The study suggests that the text
and images of the Exultet, along with the use of the roll format come together to indicate the possibility of a female-centered subtext to the manuscripts and their content.

A number of the Exultet rolls’ qualities can be reexamined in light of the transition from Beneventan to Franco-Roman text for the Exultet, as the differences between the two elucidate shifting interpretations of the Easter narrative and changing values for the virtues it celebrates. The shifting language of the Exultet invites a new reading of both text and images through the lens of allegorical figures, female virtue, and female potency. With reforms intent on standardizing the hierarchical relationship of local churches to the Roman Church at the heart of the change from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman Exultet, it is not surprising that the content of the Exultet would change as well. This dissertation suggests that one of the major changes to the Exultet, its changing engagement with female potency, represents a changing interpretation of the place of the female and its individual power and value with regard to the Church hierarchy. The change from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman Exultet reflects the attenuation of the Exultet’s praise for female potency, reducing it from an essential role in the economy of salvation to a position of service to the common good.

While there has been abundant scholarship concerned with the origins of the Exultet rolls as objects, their textual and musical content, their images, and their liturgical use, there is not a great deal of work that takes a speculative tone and asks what deeper meanings might be readable across the group. Musicology can tell us the lineage of the melodies and liturgical rites that gave rise to the Exultet, and paleography can tell us where and how the texts were written into the rolls. History can paint a picture of what the social, political, and liturgical landscape was like when the rolls were made, and art history can unpack the iconography of the rolls and make connections between these and other related works. These are all invaluable fields of study
and insight into the Exultet rolls, and there is often much interaction among fields concerned with these manuscripts. There is still room, though, to consider the communicative possibilities of the Exultet rolls in new and speculative ways. In order to begin thinking about the Exultet rolls as multidimensional objects with a variety of stories to tell, it is necessary to draw together scholarship from different disciplines and look for new angles to examine. This dissertation is an attempt to turn the Exultet rolls a different way and contemplate new facets of the objects. Far from presuming to apply a feminist theoretical lens to the Exultet, this paper focuses on signs and symbols, allegory and exegesis, as ways to get a fresh look at the place of the female figures, natural imagery, and bees in the Exultet rolls and in the imagination of the Church during a period of reform.

Through the particularities of the Exultet rolls’ composition, with text, musical notation, and images combined in a continuous vertical roll, attention is drawn to the format and to the content in a more focused way than might be the case were the Exultet to be included in a codex containing other texts, too. The choice of the *rotulus* evokes not only the prestige status of the bishop to whom the roll belongs, but also the solemnity of the Easter Vigil. In addition, the roll carries associations of continuity and perpetual extension, linking it to the genealogies, histories, and lists that are so often recorded in similar formats. As a shape of endless extensibility and potential perpetuity, the roll might also be associated with female potency and considered a fitting reflection of the necessity of female participation in the perpetuation of family lines, patterns or succession, and historical continuation.

The repeated use of female allegorical figures, natural imagery, and depictions of bees provides ample material for the consideration of female-centered language and imagery in the Exultet. The dwelling of the Exultet on feminine language and virtues valued in women indicates
a deeper set of associations that change with the shift from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman

text. The imagery in both text and illustration most strongly links the the bees with the Virgin

Mary, proclaiming the value of virginity and the superiority of the virginal birth associated with

each. The chastity and selflessness of the bee, along with her industriousness, is praised in echo

of the virtue of *sophrosyne* that provides a template for the ideal of female virtue. The symbolic

relationship between Mary and the bees is evident in the frequent placement of the Elegy of the

Bees image near a Nativity scene. While images in books can sometimes obscure this proximity,

the intentionality of the arrangement becomes clear, as do the colors and details, when

encountered in person. Montecassino 2, for example, is much easier to visualize as a unified

whole when stretched across a table than when divided among the printed pages of a

photographic reproduction. The same can be said of the rolls on display in Gaeta, where the full

length of the Exultet rolls (Gaeta 1 and Gaeta 2) can be taken in all at once.

In considering the transition from the Beneventan to the Franco-Roman Exultet, the texts’

differing approaches to the Easter narrative reveal an underlying shift in thought concerning the

female and its place in the history of salvation. With the suppression of the Beneventan rite, the

Beneventan Exultet was eventually replaced by the Franco-Roman, and its deeply female-

centered imagery began to give way to the more institutionally focused Franco-Roman text. Over

the course of this change, most evident in in the Elegy of the Bees, it becomes clear that the role

of the bee, the Virgin, and the earth changes from being understood as a central or essential part

of the economy of salvation to being at the service of the Church and its needs.

The bee, “though she be tiny in the smallness of her body,” is a driving force in the

textual and visual landscape of the Exultet.299 As a symbol of female virtue as well as female

299 Franco-Roman Exultet, as translated by Thomas Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 38.
power, the bee is an effective allegorical figure for the individual female in relation to the Church or community. The necessity of female participation in the process of salvation history is abundantly clear in the language of the Beneventan Exultet, but the subsequent use of the Franco-Roman Exultet lessens the strength of this position of power. With the bees’ change of station in the Franco-Roman Exultet, the attenuation of female power in the progress of salvation takes hold, changing the relationship between the Church and its female constituents, historical and contemporary.
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