

Part One

The Medieval Era



Prelude

What we now call the medieval era spans almost an entire millennium, from the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 c.e. until the beginnings of the Renaissance in the early 15th century. *Medieval* means literally “between the ages,” and the term was coined by later historians who looked back on these “middle ages” as an era of darkness between two periods of light, classical antiquity and the Renaissance. Those who lived in the medieval era did not see themselves as living “between” anything, of course, and this period was scarcely one of unbroken darkness. To the contrary: the legacies of the Roman Empire were far too deep and widespread to have disappeared entirely, and the architects, painters, poets, and musicians of the medieval era created some of the most breathtaking achievements in human history.

Still, the concept of a medieval era has persisted and it continues to provide a useful shorthand designation for an era that in many ways was undeniably different from what had come before. The five centuries after the fall of Rome were particularly difficult: western Europe experienced a marked decline in political stability, populations declined, infrastructure decayed, and learning of all kinds was lost. Basic engineering skills known in antiquity would not be recovered for almost 1,000 years. Entire libraries disappeared through fire or pillage. The collection of the great library at Alexandria, Egypt, with perhaps as many as 400,000 manuscripts during its glory years, would not be rivaled again for almost 2,000 years. For most of the medieval era, almost no one in western Europe could read ancient Greek; as a result, even those manuscripts by such philosophers as Plato and Aristotle that survived in the West could not be deciphered and were for all practical purposes lost until the later centuries of the era, when Latin translations began to appear. Although

scholars in the Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire and in the Islamic world continued to cultivate Greek, contact between Eastern and Western scholars was extremely limited until the late medieval era.

The medieval world was also a dangerous place. Infant mortality was high, and most of those who survived childhood died before age 30. Diseases like dysentery, typhus, and smallpox posed a constant threat, and plagues were a recurring feature

◀ **The three varieties of music.** This frontispiece to one of the most important sources of early polyphony, the Florence manuscript of the 13th-century *Magnus liber organi*, illustrates what medieval thinkers believed to be the three varieties of music. The figure on the left in each of the three panels is Musica. In the top panel, she points with her fully extended wand to an illustration of the four elements—earth, water, air, and fire (the stars)—representing music in its highest form: *musica mundana*, the “harmony of the spheres,” created by the mathematical ratios of movement and distance among the heavenly bodies. The belief in this kind of music, inaudible to the human ear, dates back to the ancient Greeks. In the middle panel, Musica points with her partially extended wand to four figures with their hands intertwined. These represent *musica humana* (“human music”), a harmonizing force that unites reason with the body, spirit with matter. *Musica humana* is also inaudible to human ears. In the bottom panel, Musica, with her wand retracted, gestures admonishingly to a man surrounded by musical instruments and playing a vielle. This image represents *musica instrumentalis* (“sounding music”), music in its lowest form, but also the only one of the three that can be heard by mortals.

Source: Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana/Ministry for Cultural Affairs/Med. Palat. 87, c. 121v.

of life. Travelers moved in large groups whenever they could to protect themselves against vagabonds and brigands. The rule of law was little more than an abstract idea in many corners of the continent.

Many men and women withdrew from the secular world altogether and devoted themselves to the church. Self-sufficient monastic communities dotted the European countryside. In England alone there were some 500 monasteries by the beginning of the 14th century. The Benedictines, Carmelites, Dominicans, Franciscans, and other orders varied in their forms of worship and routines, but all were devoted to the principle of monasticism, a way of life based on a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Monastic communities served as the primary repositories of learning in the medieval world. Devoting themselves to lives of prayer and labor, monks and nuns prepared, collected, and preserved manuscripts of all kinds, including treatises on philosophy, medicine, law, astronomy, and mathematics—topics having little or nothing to do with religion or theology.

New political entities arose to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of Rome. The most powerful of these was that of Charlemagne, the ruler of the Franks. His realm extended across what is now France, western and central Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and northern Italy. Charlemagne consolidated his powers through a strategic alliance with the papacy and, on Christmas Day in 800, he was crowned in Rome by Pope Leo III as “Sovereign of the Roman Empire.” He ruled from Aix-la-Chapelle (now Aachen, in western Germany), where he sought to follow the Roman model and reimpose strong centralized authority with a single set of laws within his dominions. As part of this effort, he sought to standardize the forms of Christian worship, and in the process exerted a profound effect on the development of sacred music (see Chapter 1).

But Charlemagne’s empire did not survive him. By the end of the 9th century his domain had been divided in three, with the Kingdom of France to the west, the Kingdom of Italy to the south, and the East Frankish Kingdom to the east. The last of

MEDIEVAL TIMELINE

HISTORICAL EVENTS MUSICAL LANDMARKS

ca. 475 – 525:
Boethius

476: The Western Roman Empire ceases to exist

ca. 525: St. Benedict codifies the rules of monastic life, including the services of the Divine Office

ca. 525: St. Benedict establishes a monastery at Monte Cassino (Italy)

800: Early codification of plainchant

800: Charlemagne crowned emperor by Pope Leo III

ca. 840 – 912: Notker of St. Gall

ca. 850 – 900: Earliest musical notation of plainchant and polyphony

843: The Treaty of Verdun divides the Carolingian empire

ca. 991 – 1050:
Guido of Arezzo

936: Otto I establishes what comes to be known as the Holy Roman Empire

1098 – 1179:
Hildegard von Bingen

1066: The Normans conquer England

1095: Beginning of the First Crusade

500

800

900

1000

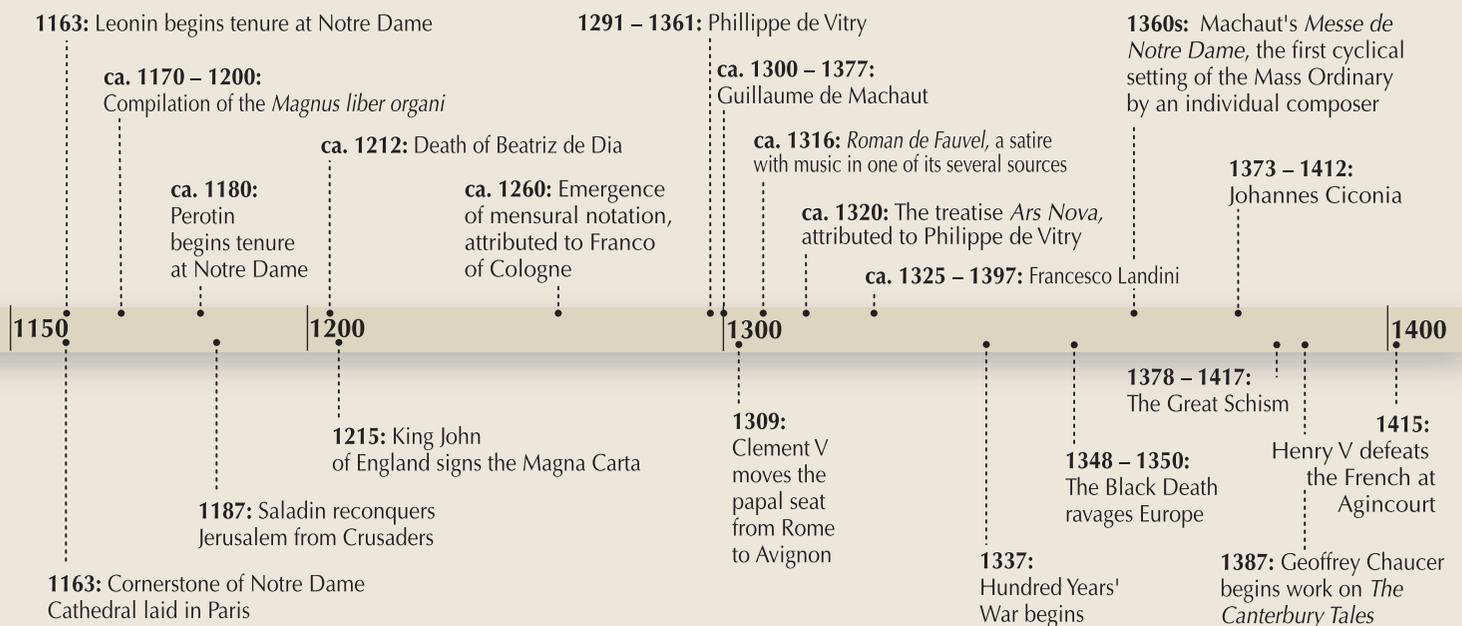
1100

these emerged as the center of the Holy Roman Empire, a loose confederation of states that, as the 18th-century French philosopher Voltaire famously quipped, was “neither holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire.” It was an essentially German entity that extended into what is now northern Italy. Weakened by a conflict with the papacy over the control of the territory around Rome and over the power to designate high-ranking church officials, the empire soon lost its cohesion. The emperor himself exercised only nominal authority and was elected by a small group of princes. The empire had no fixed capital but was ruled instead from whatever happened to be the home of the monarch at the time. Charles IV, for example, ruled from Prague in the years 1355 to 1378, and various emperors were crowned in such diverse places as Aix-la-Chapelle, Rome, and Mainz.

The looseness of this confederation was a political liability, but it proved an enormous boon to the arts, including music. Every one of the hundreds of duchies, principalities, and kingdoms across central and southern Europe employed its share of painters, poets, and musicians. By the end of the medieval era, the courts rivaled and in some respects even surpassed the church in the composition and consumption of new music.

While Germany fragmented, France and England began to emerge as centralized nation-states under the leadership of increasingly powerful monarchies. Here too, the arts flourished under the courts of kings and powerful nobles. The Duchy of Burgundy in eastern France was particularly hospitable to painting, poetry, and music in the 14th and 15th centuries before being absorbed into the Kingdom of France in 1477.

Medieval society was shaped by the system of feudalism, whose economic foundation was the self-sufficient estate, or manor. The peasants who worked the lands of the manor swore allegiance and service to the lord of the manor, who might in turn be the vassal of a more powerful noble. The peasants kept a portion of the harvest and submitted the remainder to the lord. In this highly decentralized system, economic and legal authority resided in a nearby castle rather than at some distant court. The steady growth of population and prosperity in the centuries after 1000 would ultimately spell



the demise of the feudal system. As agricultural productivity increased and trade began to expand, towns and cities replaced the castle as the central marketplace for goods and services.

Courtly life revolved around a highly stylized code of conduct. In public, love could be expressed passionately but only from a distance: the ideal knight paid homage to a lady of noble birth by dedicating himself to her service and offering lavish poetry and song in her praise—but never directly. The idea of courtly love in its purest form always involved self-contained torment. The object of desire was either a maiden or a married woman, but in either case unattainable by the strictures of social convention. In this context, love took on a kind of abstract, almost religious quality. Indeed, many poems and songs in praise of “my lady” can be understood as being directed toward either the Virgin Mary or an earthly noblewoman.

The year 1000 proved to be a milestone in history. Many feared the millennium would bring the end of the world. Instead, it marked the beginning of a wave of energy and optimism. The later centuries of the medieval era witnessed notable advancements in technology, architecture, education, and the arts. The horizontal loom, operated by foot treadles and vastly more efficient than its predecessors, came into widespread use in the 11th century; magnetic compasses and windmills first appeared in the 12th century; and paper, already common in Arabic lands for several centuries, was being produced in quantity in Europe by the 13th century.

Increasing prosperity and confidence combined with an upsurge in religious zeal in the late 11th century inspired a series of military ventures to reclaim the Holy Land from Muslim rule. The First Crusade, launched by Pope Urban II in 1095, succeeded in capturing Jerusalem, if only for a short time. Over the next 300 years various Christian rulers would try repeatedly to duplicate this feat, but without success. Although a failure from a military point of view, the Crusades had the unintended benefit of bringing the West into closer contact with Islamic culture, which for centuries had been cultivating such disciplines as philosophy, astronomy, mathematics (particularly algebra), and medicine.

In the 14th century, however, Europe entered a period of crisis. Population growth combined with crop failure to produce a devastating famine early in the century. A debilitating conflict between France and England known as the Hundred Years’ War broke out in 1337. In the middle of the century the bubonic plague swept across Europe, killing as much as a third of its population. And beginning in 1378, conflicting claimants to the papacy created a schism in the church. These crises, however, helped provoke an intellectual and political ferment that would contribute to the Renaissance and Reformation as Europe recovered in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Perhaps the most remarkable of all technological and artistic achievements of the medieval era was Gothic architecture. With its emphasis on height, this style of building supplanted the earlier Romanesque style. Squat, compact structures gave way to buildings of unprecedented size, grace, and light. The Gothic cathedrals of Notre Dame in Paris and in Chartres were both begun in the middle of the 12th century.

Toward the end of the 13th century, a series of artists and writers emerged whose works seem remarkably forward looking—so much so, in fact, that they are often seen as heralds of the Renaissance. Painters like Giotto (ca. 1267–1337) and sculptors like Giovanni Pisano (ca. 1250–ca. 1314), both Italians, began to depict the human form in a new and fundamentally different way. The faces are more individualized, more fully differentiated, and far more realistic—in short, more like the art of classical antiquity. Similar insights into human nature emerged from the work of poets like Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375),



Europe, ca. 768–814.

and Geoffrey Chaucer (1342–1400), who produced works of striking originality not in the international language of Latin, but in the vernacular languages of Italian and English.

The pace of learning as a whole gradually accelerated from the 12th century onward. The chief centers of scholarship began to shift from the church to newly emerging universities, many of which grew out of cathedral schools. The earliest universities—most notably in Bologna and Paris, both founded around the middle of the 12th century—focused chiefly on the study of theology, law, and medicine, but students in different fields often read the same authors. The most important of these was Aristotle, whose works were becoming more widely known at this time (although not

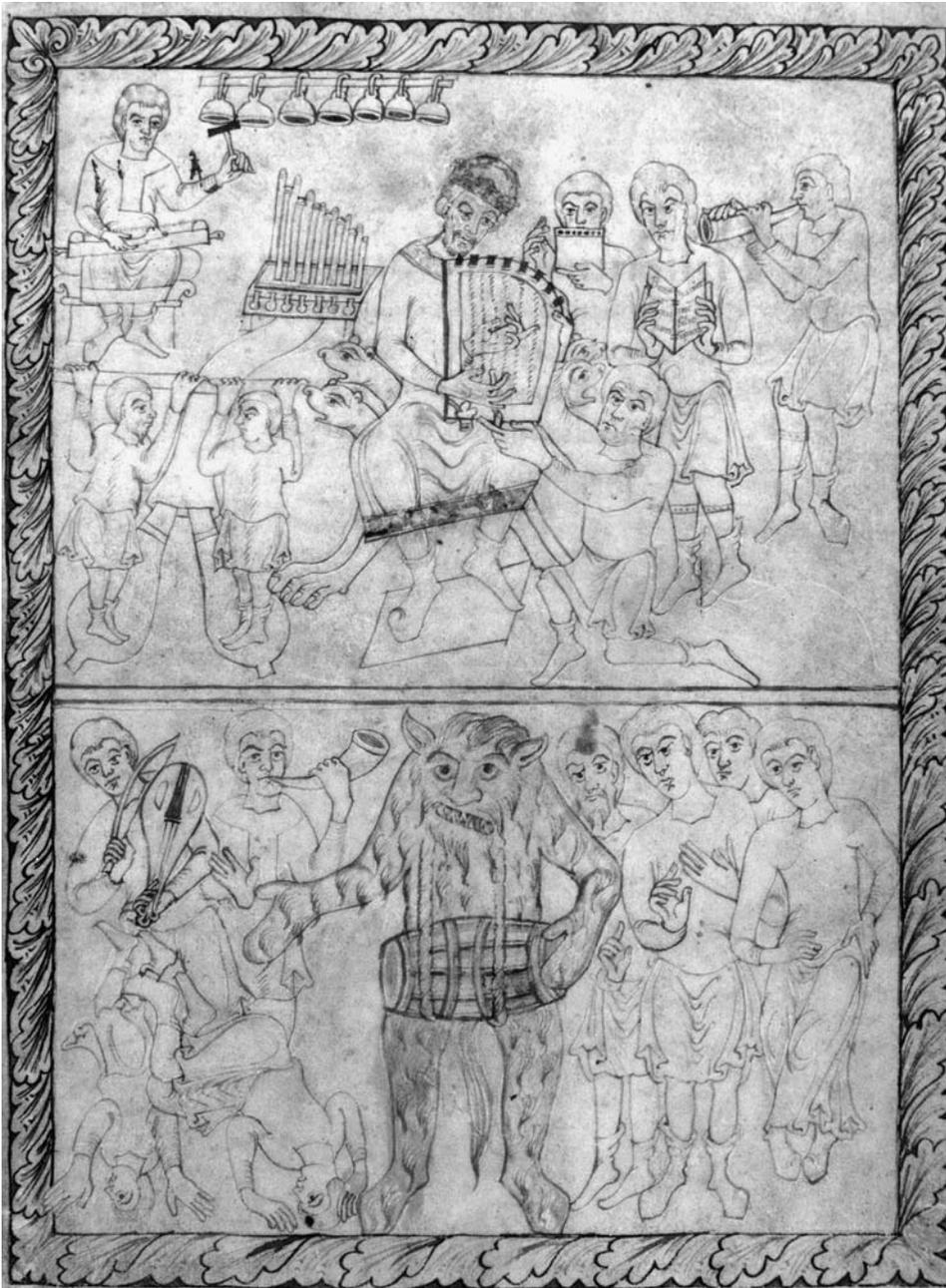


Europe in the mid-14th century.

yet in the original Greek). The faculty at the University of Paris included such major figures as St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and St. Bonaventure (Giovanni di Fidanza, 1221–1274), both of whom synthesized theology and philosophy to justify faith on the principles of reason. By 1300, 23 universities were scattered across Europe, including Oxford and Cambridge in England.

The dominant mode of thought in the new universities was known as scholasticism. Its proponents maintained that truth could be reached by a combination of reason and faith. The scholastic curriculum was based on the study of established authorities like Aristotle and St. Augustine. Empirical observation was not to be trusted, for the medieval mind was deeply suspicious of worldly appearances. Life on earth, after all, was considered transitory and decidedly inferior to the higher truths of divine eternity. Music was an important object of study in the new universities, but not musical performance. In the tradition of Pythagoras and the quadrivium, music was understood as a mathematical discipline—related more to geometry and astronomy than poetry or drama—that provided a source of insight into the relationship between numbers and the cosmos.

This preoccupation with theory at the expense of performance undermined the unwritten traditions of performance that might otherwise have survived between the musical practices of ancient and medieval worlds. The phenomenon of the sung drama was gone by the 5th century, as was the ability to read ancient musical notation. A new system of notation would not begin to emerge until the 9th century, and



The two sides of music. This miniature from an early-12th-century manuscript shows two contrasting approaches to the art of music. King David (top) represents musicians who understand their art. The figure at the top left plays chime bells of varying sizes, suggesting Pythagorean proportions; with his right hand he plucks a monochord, a device with a single string used to measure the ratios of sound according to the mathematical divisions of the string. Below him, two men provide the wind for a medieval organ by alternating pressure on the paired bellows; the organ itself is played on a set of levers, a precursor to the keyboard. The singers to the right read from notated music. In the image at bottom, a beast makes music, beating on a simple drum. No written music is in sight, and the acrobats in the lower left do somersaults. The two scenes reflect the medieval belief in the superiority of theory over practice. They conjure up Guido of Arezzo's derisive distinction between a musician and a cantor: "There is a great distance between a musician and singer/The latter says, the former understands what constitutes music./ For whoever does things without understanding them, is by definition a beast."

Source: Reprinted by permission of the Master and Fellows of St. John's College, Cambridge University Library

although elements of ancient musical theory endured through the writings of a few authors, their works were known to only a few and understood by fewer. The writings of the single most important theorist of the early medieval period, Manlius Severinus Boethius (480–524), for example, remained in obscurity until the 9th century.

The musical practices of the medieval era are thus difficult to reconstruct. Not until the late 9th century do we have notated sources of any kind, and even these are rare. Few manuscripts have survived the ravages of time. One very important early source of liturgical music, a manuscript known as Chartres 47, was destroyed by fire as recently as World War II. Fortunately, its contents had already been photographed. Yet we know any number of medieval works by the thread of a single source, and we can imagine all too easily the quantity of music that has been lost. And much of medieval

music was never written down at all. From all that we know about the music of the minstrels, it seems clear that most of this repertory was improvised, produced on the spot for the lords and ladies of a particular court as the occasion demanded.

The medieval era covers almost 1,000 years. Not surprisingly, the music of this period is extremely diverse, ranging from monophonic plainchant, first consolidated sometime around the 6th or 7th century, to the intricate polyphony of the 13th and early 14th centuries. And the range of music that has survived is amply sufficient to reveal a richly varied musical culture that established basic concepts and techniques we take for granted today: notation, polyphony, and an elaborate theory by which to rationalize both the art and science of music.

Primary Evidence THREE CATEGORIES OF MUSICIANS

In his De institutione musica ("Fundamentals of Music"), written in the early 6th century and widely read from the 9th century onward, Boethius answers the question "What is a musician?" by dividing those who deal with music into three classes. His distinction between theory and practice is a legacy of antiquity that would continue to influence the subsequent history of music.



Thus, there are three classes of those who are engaged in the musical art. The first class consists of those who perform on instruments, the second of those who compose songs, and the third of those who judge instrumental performance and song.

But those of the class which is dependent upon instruments and who spend their entire effort there—such as kitharists and those who prove their skill on the organ and other musical instruments—are excluded from comprehension of musical knowledge, since, as was said, they

act as slaves. None of them makes use of reason; rather, they are totally lacking in thought.

The second class of those practicing music is that of the poets, a class led to song not so much by thought and reason as by a certain natural instinct. For this reason this class, too, is separated from music.

The third class is that which acquires an ability for judging, so that it can carefully weigh rhythms and melodies and the composition as whole. This class, since it is totally grounded in reason and thought, will rightly be esteemed as musical. That person is a musician who exhibits the faculty of forming judgments according to speculation or reason relative and appropriate to music concerning modes and rhythms, the genera of songs, consonances, and all the things which are to be explained subsequently, as well as concerning the songs of the poets.

Source: Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, trans. Calvin M. Bower, ed. Claude V. Palisca (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 51.

Plainchant and Secular Monophony

The earliest notated repertoires of medieval music are monophonic. The oldest sources of **plainchant**—the monophonic sacred music of the Christian church—date from the last quarter of the 9th century; the first notated secular monophonic songs are found in manuscripts written about a century later. Both repertoires flourished long before the emergence of notation, however, which makes it difficult to reconstruct their early history.

THE EMERGENCE OF PLAINCHANT

Although it is often called **Gregorian chant**, after its supposed creator, Pope Gregory I, plainchant existed well before his reign (590–604), and its development continued long afterward.

The origins and evolution of plainchant are inextricably linked to the development of the Christian liturgy—that is, the body of texts and actions prescribed for Christian worship services. Christianity originated as a sect of Judaism, and the earliest Christians preserved many of the traditions and practices of Jewish worship: the offering of prayers, the singing of hymns, and the systematic recitation or singing of psalms and other passages from Holy Scripture. The Eucharistic **Mass**, or celebration of Holy Communion, although a distinctively Christian practice, also has Jewish roots. It is a ritualistic reenactment of the Last Supper, Christ's celebration of the Jewish feast of Passover with his disciples the day before his crucifixion.

The singing of psalms was particularly important in the early church. Indeed the Old Testament Book of Psalms itself demands this practice, as a few examples make clear:

O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. (Psalm 95)

O sing unto the Lord a new song. . . . Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp and the voice of a psalm. (Psalm 98)

O give thanks unto the Lord. . . . Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him. (Psalm 105)

The New Testament reinforced this tradition. Saint Paul admonishes the faithful to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).



Chapter Outline

The Emergence of Plainchant

The Elements of Plainchant

Liturgical Function

Relationship of Words and Music

Mode

Melodic Structure

Rhythm

The Expansion of Plainchant

Secular Monophony

Songs in Latin

France

The Iberian Peninsula

Germany

The patriarchs of the early church recognized the power of music to project the words of psalms and hymns with heightened intensity. “To chant well is to pray twice,” observed Saint Augustine (354–430), the bishop of the North African city of Hippo and a major figure in the early church.

At the same time, church leaders had qualms about mixing words and music in worship. The music, they worried, could distract listeners from the message of the text. Such ambivalence toward music in the liturgy would emerge repeatedly throughout the history of Christianity. Saint Basil (ca. 330–379), addressing this concern, rationalized the singing of psalms in this manner:

What did the Holy Spirit do when he saw that the human race was not led easily to virtue, and that due to our penchant for pleasure we gave little heed to an upright life? He mixed sweetness of melody with doctrine so that inadvertently we would absorb the benefit of the words through gentleness and ease of hearing, just as clever physicians frequently smear the cup with honey when giving the fastidious some rather bitter medicine to drink. Thus he contrived for us these harmonious psalm tunes, so that those who are children in actual age as well as those who are young in behavior, while appearing only to sing would in reality be training their souls. For not one of these many indifferent people ever leaves church easily retaining in memory some maxim of either the Apostles or the Prophets, but they do sing the texts of the Psalms at home and circulate them in the marketplace.¹

“Even a forceful lesson does not always endure,” Saint Basil concluded, “but what enters the mind with joy and pleasure somehow becomes more firmly impressed upon it.” Saint Augustine was not quite so optimistic. Music could indeed uplift the spirit, he argued, but it could also seduce listeners with its easy pleasure (see Primary Evidence: The Seductive Power of Music).

In spite of such misgivings, most leaders of the early church acknowledged the power of rhythm and melody to reinforce the word and cultivated liturgical song. But none of this earliest chant was notated, and we have only tantalizing references to it. We know much more about the texts that were set to music than we do about the music itself, which was passed on from one generation to the next in a process of oral transmission. As Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636) observed, “Because sound is a sense impression, it vanishes as time passes and is imprinted upon the memory. . . . If a man does not remember sounds they perish, for they cannot be written down.”²

Surviving accounts document a wide diversity of liturgical and musical practices during Christianity’s first 600 years. The church lacked a strong central authority, and liturgical and musical practices varied considerably from place to place. By the 7th century, several distinct rites had established themselves in the West. The most important of these were the Roman, the Ambrosian (used in northern Italy and named after Saint Ambrose, who died in 397), the Gallican (in Frankish lands of what is now France and western Germany), and the Mozarabic or Visigothic (on the Iberian Peninsula). Each of these rites maintained its own liturgy and repertory of chants.

How, then, did a comprehensive and unified repertory of plainchant come into existence? The answer is inextricably linked to the establishment of the Roman rite as the primary liturgy of the church. From the early 7th century onward, successive popes—the bishops of Rome—asserted their primacy within the Western church,

Primary Evidence THE SEDUCTIVE POWER OF MUSIC

Saint Augustine (354–430) was the bishop of the North African city of Hippo from 391 until his death. A prolific writer and influential thinker, he is considered a founder of Christian theology. In this passage from his autobiographical Confessions, he struggles with the role of music in worship, remaining ambivalent about it. To the extent that it opens the mind of the worshipper to the meaning of the text it conveys—“the words which give it life”—it is, he admits, good. But to the extent that it enralls the worshipper with its own seductive sensuousness, he condemns it as an invitation to sin.



I used to be much more fascinated by the pleasures of sound than the pleasures of smell. I was enthralled by them, but you [God] broke my bonds and set me free. I admit that I still find some enjoyment in the music of hymns, which are alive with your praises, when I hear them sung by well trained, melodious voices. But I do not enjoy it so much that I cannot tear myself away. I can leave it when I wish. But if I am not to turn a deaf ear to music, which is the setting for the words which give it life, I must allow it a position of some honor in my heart, and I find it difficult to assign it to its proper place. For sometimes I feel that I treat it with more honor than it deserves. I realize that when they are sung these sacred words stir my mind to greater religious fervor and kindle in me a more ardent flame of piety than they would if they were not sung; and I also know that there are particular modes in song and in the voice, corresponding to my various emotions and able to stimulate them because of some mysterious relationship between the two. But I ought not to allow my mind to be paralyzed by the gratification of my senses, which often leads it astray. For the senses are not content to take second place. Simply

because I allow them their due, as adjuncts to reason, they attempt to take precedence and forge ahead of it, with the result that I sometimes sin in this way but am not aware of it until later.

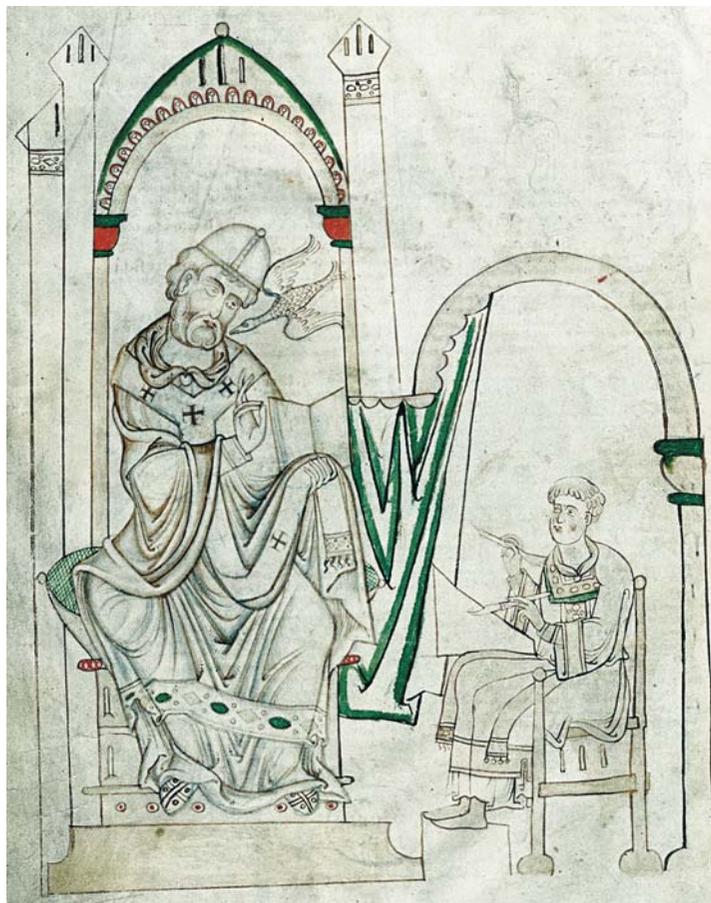
Sometimes, too, from over-anxiety to avoid this particular trap I make the mistake of being too strict. When this happens, I have no wish but to exclude from my ears, and from the ears of the Church as well, all the melody of those lovely chants to which the Psalms of David are habitually sung; and it seems safer to me to follow the precepts which I remember often having heard ascribed to Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, who used to oblige the lectors to recite the psalms with such slight modulation of the voice that they seemed to be speaking rather than chanting. But when I remember the tears that I shed on hearing the songs of the Church in the early days, soon after I had recovered my faith, and when I realized that nowadays it is not the singing that moves me but the meaning of the words when they are sung in a clear voice to the most appropriate tune, I again acknowledge the great value of this practice. So I waver between the danger that lies in gratifying the senses and the benefits which, as I know from experience, can accrue from singing. Without committing myself to an irrevocable opinion, I am inclined to approve of the custom of singing in church, in order that by indulging the ears weaker spirits may be inspired with feelings of devotion. Yet when I find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, I confess that this is a grievous sin, and at those times I would prefer not to hear the singer.

Source: Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, 33, trans. and ed. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 238–9.

and in so doing vigorously promoted the export of the Roman liturgy and with it a standardized body of chant. In the absence of musical notation, the popes relied on specially trained singer-clerics to carry this repertory of chant to distant realms. By the late 9th century, the legend had emerged that Pope Gregory I (Saint Gregory the Great), who reigned from 590 to 604, had been responsible not only for promoting the diffusion of the Roman liturgy, but for composing the chants himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Like all myths, this one had a basis in reality, for unquestionably an earlier pope had brought a substantial degree of order to what must have been a widely diverse body of melodies and texts. Possibly it was Gregory I, who had indeed been instrumental in establishing papal authority and who had sponsored a mission to distant England. Or it may have been another Gregory, Pope Gregory II, also a

Pope Gregory and the Holy Spirit. Pope Gregory I, according to legend, received the corpus of plainchant through the agency of the Holy Spirit, who visited him in the form of a dove and whispered the chant melodies into his ear. To the medieval mind, the legend was a reality and a cornerstone of the belief that the repertory of plainchant was a sacred gift. The image here is anachronistic insofar as no system of musical notation existed during the time of Pope Gregory I's reign (590–604). The earliest surviving notated sources date from about 300 years later. The curtain represents the distance between the simple scribe and the pope who would later become a saint. According to the legend, the scribe, puzzled by the pope's long intervals of silence while dictating the chant, peeked behind the screen and saw Gregory receiving the chant from the Holy Spirit.

Source: Universitätsbibliothek/akg-images



strong promoter of Roman primacy, who reigned from 715 to 731. Without notated sources, and in the absence of further documentation, we will probably never know with certainty exactly who played what role in the early dissemination of a unified plainchant repertory.

We do know, however, that this early consolidation of the chant was not universally accepted, at least not immediately. The Gallican, Ambrosian, and Mozarabic rites and their associated plainchant repertories continued to flourish alongside the Roman liturgy and its chants. It was ultimately not a pope, but a secular ruler, Charlemagne, who realized the papal goal of a primarily Roman liturgy in the West.

Charlemagne's coronation as emperor by Pope Leo III in Rome in 800 consummated an alliance between the papacy and the most powerful secular kingdom in the West. The church, in effect, validated Charlemagne's power, and Charlemagne, in turn, supported the authority of the church. The emperor devoted considerable energy to the administration of his far-flung territories. He recognized that a unified liturgy—along with a unified body of music—would go a long way toward solidifying both the idea and practice of central authority. With the aid of the papacy, Charlemagne eventually succeeded in imposing a single, more or less standard liturgy—the Roman liturgy—throughout his empire. The Mozarabic and Ambrosian liturgies never disappeared entirely, but their use declined significantly.

Although the evidence is sketchy, most scholars now believe that Charlemagne instigated an even more comprehensive codification of the core repertory of plainchant than that accomplished under earlier popes. One prominent scholar has recently

argued that a notated form of these chants must have been prepared by the end of Charlemagne's life, but that it and the subsequent sources from the next century or more have since been lost. This hypothesis has merit. Certainly a great many manuscripts have been lost, and these could have included ones with notated chant. Yet it seems equally plausible that the chant repertory continued to be transmitted entirely by word of mouth for well over a century.

In either case, the absence of written plainchant melodies from Charlemagne's time prevents us from understanding the early history of plainchant with much precision. The liturgical books, decrees, and accounts that have survived suggest the repertory Charlemagne had distributed throughout his empire was not the original Roman chant but rather a Frankish reworking of it. In promulgating the Roman liturgy, in other words, Charlemagne's administrators substantially modified the music of that liturgy. We also know that Charlemagne established several singing schools to teach the chant to choirmasters, who in turn took these melodies (either memorized or notated) back to their home churches. The most important of these singing schools were in Metz (in what is now eastern France) and St. Gall (in what is now eastern Switzerland). Charlemagne further ordered that "in every bishop's see instruction shall be given in the psalms, musical notation, chant, the computation of the years and seasons, and grammar."³

To judge from the earliest preserved notated chant sources, which date from the beginning of the 10th century, Charlemagne largely succeeded in his attempt to unify the corpus of liturgical music used throughout his realm. Notation emerged gradually in different forms in different places—an Aquitanian manuscript from southern France, for example, uses a set of note shapes unlike those found in Beneventan manuscripts of southern Italy—yet the repertory transcribed by these apparently independent sources is remarkably consistent from place to place. In the oldest known layer of plainchant melodies, disagreements among sources tend to be insignificant. One source might fill in an interval of a third that others leave open, but this hardly constitutes a substantial change to the nature of the melody.

If these chants were indeed disseminated by word of mouth, as most scholars believe, their preservation represents a remarkable feat of collective memory. It may seem unlikely that thousands of chants could be learned and transmitted orally for two centuries or more without any significant deterioration of their integrity. Memory, however, was a skill cultivated far more intensively in medieval times than in our own. The monks and clerics who transmitted these chants sang them on a regular basis week after week, month after month, year after year. They viewed them not merely as a repertory of songs to be learned but as objects of intense devotion—sacred relics—passed down from none other than Saint Gregory himself. A single chant melody, moreover, might serve more than 50 different liturgical texts, reducing the total number of melodies to be memorized. Finally, many chants rest on melodic fragments that are formulaic in one way or another—that is, they are made up of subunits whose shape follows an established pattern.

The ability of singers to learn and memorize the chant repertory without musical notation helps explain why notation itself was so slow to develop. In this sense, the real puzzle is why notation ever emerged at all. Perhaps it resulted from the desire to set down in writing an object—the chant—considered to be divinely inspired. It seems not to have been connected with the rise of polyphony, whose earliest forms were apparently also performed without the aid of notation. Whatever the reason, the emergence of notation changed the way in which music was both created and transmitted.

Focus EARLY CHANT NOTATION

Early chant notation was based on signs known as **neumes** that indicate the pitches or groups of pitches in a chant melody. The word derives from the Greek *neuma* meaning “gesture,” and most of the signs do in fact point, or gesture, in the direction of the pitches they represent, either singly or in groups of two, three, or four. Various forms of neumes used throughout Europe resembled one another fairly closely. The following diagram gives the Latin names of seven neume forms and compares the way they appear in manuscripts from two different early sources: the monastery of St. Gall in Switzerland and the Aquitaine region of France. The fourth column shows how the same neumes appear in modern plainchant notation as presented in the 19th century by the monks of Solesmes, France, and sanctioned by the Vatican. The last column shows the pitch contours transcribed in conventional modern notation.

In the earliest notated chant manuscripts, like the 10th-century example from St. Gall shown here, the neumes indicate only relative movement—three notes up, a skip downward, an ascent of four notes—not specific pitches. They are thus at best memory aids for

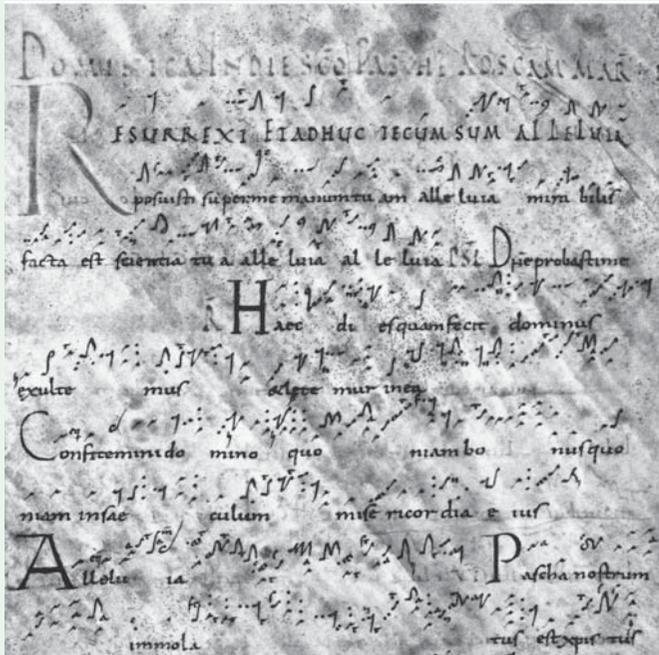
singers already familiar with the melodies they record. These manuscripts almost certainly were not used in performance because they show none of the telltale wear that would have resulted from such use, such as finger smudges or candle wax.

During the 11th century, some scribes began to align neumes according to their pitch above and below an imaginary line. At about this same time, still other scribes began to add a single line or a pair of lines to indicate a fixed pitch or pitches. In a Gradual copied in the 11th or 12th century, for example, we find a much more careful placement of neumes around two lines, the upper one labeled as C (middle C), the lower one labeled as F (below middle C). These early **diastematic**, or **heightened neumes**, provide a far better sense of pitches, although even this kind of notation is still not entirely unambiguous. Only much later, in the 13th and 14th centuries, do we begin to see sources with pitches clearly notated on a full set of staff lines. These later diastematic sources nevertheless confirm the remarkable consistency of the plainchant repertory throughout medieval Europe.

Selected neumes found in chant manuscripts

Name of neume	St. Gall sources	Aquitainian sources	Modern plainchant notation	Modern transcription
punctum				
podatus				
clivis or flex				
scandicus				
climacus				
torculus				
porrectus				

Focus continued



Non-diastematic chant notation. The neumes of the earliest notated sources, originally from the Benedictine abbey of St. Gall (now Switzerland), indicate the general contours but not the actual pitches of the chants. Shown here is the Introit, Gradual, and Alleluia for the Mass for Easter Sunday from one of the earliest notated chant manuscripts that has survived in its entirety—Laon 239—believed to have been copied in eastern France some time around 930.

Source: Bibliotheque Municipale de Laon, France/Ms 239, folio 52



Partially diastematic chant notation. The opening of the Easter Sunday Introit *Resurrexi* in this chant manuscript copied in southern Italy in the 11th or 12th century illustrates the emerging technique of diastematic chant notation. The scribe has used a straight line labeled with an F-clef to indicate a fixed pitch and has meticulously arranged the Beneventan neumes to reflect their relative position in relation to this pitch. The spectacularly elaborate initial “R” (for “Resurrexi”) reflects the special importance of the feast day of Easter.

Source: Biblioteca Capitolare, Benevento, Italy, Codex VI-34, fol. 123 recto/photo © 2002 Antonio Citrigno

THE ELEMENTS OF PLAINCHANT

Plainchant is pure melody, with no harmony, accompaniment, or added voices. Analyzing it requires a different set of criteria than that used for most other kinds of music. Five elements in particular are key to understanding plainchant:

- Liturgical function
- The relationship of words and music
- Mode
- Melodic structure
- Rhythm

Let us consider each of these elements in detail.

Liturgical Function

The single most important factor defining the nature of any given chant melody is its function within the liturgy. A basic understanding of the Christian liturgy is therefore essential to understanding the musical styles of chant. The two main forms of worship were the Divine Office, a series of services held at specified times throughout the day, and the Mass, a ritual reenactment of Christ's Last Supper with his disciples.

In its broadest outlines, the liturgy of Western Christianity remained essentially consistent throughout western Europe from the time of Charlemagne's imposition of the Roman liturgy early in the 9th century until the Reformation in the 16th century. Variations in local custom notwithstanding, a Mass celebrated in Paris followed basically the same format as one celebrated in London or Rome. A Vespers service sung in Antwerp was essentially the same as one sung in Madrid. Even the language—Latin—was universal.

The Divine Office. The **Divine Office** (also known as simply the **Office**; the term derives from the Latin *officium*, meaning “duty”) owes much to the traditions of Jewish worship, which featured a fixed daily schedule of prayer and the singing of psalms. The Rule of Saint Benedict—the regulations governing monastic life promulgated by Saint Benedict (ca. 480–ca. 547)—codified the basic structure and content of the eight services that comprise the Office. The Office was observed primarily by cloistered monks and nuns rather than the laity. Local practices varied considerably and changed over time, but here is the general outline:

Matins: during the night (2 or 3 A.M.)	Sext: at noon
Lauds: at dawn	None: at 3 P.M.
Prime: at 6 A.M.	Vespers: at sunset
Terce: at 9 A.M.	Compline: before bedtime

These services varied considerably in length, from as little as 20 minutes (Prime, Terce, Sext, None) to as much as 2 or 3 hours (Matins); Lauds, Vespers, and Compline generally ran from a half hour to an hour. Regardless of length, every service centered on the recitation of psalms and included the singing of at least one **strophic** hymn (a hymn with each stanza set to the same melody) as well as readings from the scripture, which in turn were followed by a sung response. Some Offices included canticles, biblical passages not from the Psalms but recited or sung as such. Under the Rule of Saint Benedict, the entire Book of Psalms—all 150 of them—was recited once each week over the course of the Divine Office.

The Mass. Mass was celebrated in monasteries and convents every day between Prime and Terce and in all churches every day in the early morning. It was open to any baptized member of the community in good standing with the church. The Mass consisted of a mixture of spoken, recited, and sung elements, some of which took place in every celebration of Mass (the Ordinary), some of which were specific to particular Sundays or feast days (the Propers). An easy way to remember the difference between the Ordinary and the Proper is that the Ordinary was sung at every Mass, hence its content was unchanging or “ordinary”; the Proper consisted of those items suitable or “proper” only to particular days.

The full text of the Mass Ordinary is given in Appendix 5. The table here outlines the structure of the service as a whole.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MASS			
SUNG		RECITED OR SPOKEN	
Ordinary	Proper	Ordinary	Proper
	1. Introit		
2. Kyrie			
3. Gloria			
			4. Collect
			5. Epistle
	6. Gradual		
	7. Alleluia (or Tract)		
	(7a. Sequence)		
			8. Gospel
9. Credo			
	10. Offertory		
		11. Offertory Prayers	
			12. Secret
			13. Preface
14. Sanctus			
		15. Canon	
		16. Lord's Prayer	
17. Agnus Dei			
	18. Communion		
			19. Post-Communion
20. Ite missa est			

The liturgical year. The church year revolves around two major feasts: Christmas, which celebrates Christ's birth, and Easter, which celebrates Christ's resurrection. Each of these feasts is preceded by a season of penitence—Advent before Christmas and Lent before Easter—and each is followed by a season of variable length—Epiphany after Christmas, Pentecost after Easter. The church year begins with Advent, and the cycle as a whole, in somewhat simplified form, follows this order:

- **Advent**—From the fourth Sunday before Christmas until Christmas Day.
- **Christmas**—December 25 and the 12 days following.
- **Epiphany**—January 6 (the visit of the Magi) until the beginning of Lent.
- **Lent**—From Ash Wednesday (40 days—not counting Sundays—before Easter) to Maundy Thursday (the Thursday before Easter). The 40 days commemorate Christ's period of time in the wilderness. Maundy Thursday, which commemorates the Last Supper, is followed by Good Friday, which marks the day of Christ's crucifixion, and Holy Saturday, the Easter Vigil.

Focus A GUIDE TO THE LITURGICAL BOOKS CONTAINING PLAINCHANT

The Vatican has always played an active role in editing and publishing the official chant books used in the Office and Mass. During the 19th century, however, the Benedictine monks of the Abbey of Solesmes, in northern France, began to take an active role in recovering the earliest forms of the chant by carefully comparing the notation preserved in early medieval manuscripts. The resulting “Solesmes editions” of chant—published by the firm of Desclee in Tournai, working in conjunction with the monks of Solesmes—were soon recognized by the Vatican as the official chant books of the Roman Catholic Church. After the wide-scale reform of the liturgy during the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965, however, these books fell out of widespread active use and were for many

years out of print. Scholars who specialize in the study of chant generally work from the original notation on medieval manuscripts (see Focus: Early Chant Notation, p. 30).

The most important chant books are as follows:

- The **Gradual** (*Graduale*), which contains the complete chants for the Mass, both Ordinary and Propers
- The **Antiphoner** (*Antiphonale*), which contains chants for the Office, except Matins
- The **Liber usualis**, a useful 20th-century anthology of many different kinds of chants from both the Mass and the Office.

- **Easter**—The first Sunday after the first full moon on or after March 21 (the beginning of spring). Eastertide continues for 40 days, concluding with the Feast of the Ascension, marking Christ’s entry into heaven.
- **Pentecost**—From 50 days after Easter until Advent. The Feast of Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on Christ’s disciples. Lasting from 5 to 6 months, the season after Pentecost is the longest in the church year.

Relationship of Words and Music

Plainchant is a wonderfully effective way of projecting a text. From a purely practical point of view, the sung chant resonates longer, carries much farther, and is more readily audible in a large space like a church than a text that is merely read. Syllabic recitations of chant, with one note per syllable on a single pitch, are especially effective in this regard. Yet the urge to embellish such recitations musically—to deviate from the standard formulas of recitation on a fixed pitch—ultimately led to the creation of new chants that went well beyond merely practical needs. Simple and elaborate chants thus exist side by side in the liturgy, depending on the nature and function of the texts to be sung. From a musical perspective, chants fall into three broad stylistic categories: syllabic, neumatic, and melismatic (Example 1–1). In **syllabic** passages, each syllable of text has its own note. In the more embellished **neumatic** passages, each syllable is sung to between two and six notes. And in the most florid **melismatic** passages, a single syllable is sung to many notes.

Syllabic chant in the Mass. Certain elements of the Mass, such as the Epistle or the Gospel, must convey relatively long texts, and for this reason they do not afford time for embellishment. The Epistle and Gospel for Christmas Day, for example, both follow prescribed formulas and feature little melodic motion. The priest intoning these texts need only adjust the number of notes on a basic **recitation tone** to the number of syllables, deviating in a formulaic way from this central pitch at points corresponding to the grammatical middle and end of each sentence. These slight deviations allow

EXAMPLE 1-1 Syllabic, neumatic, and melismatic chant.

a) **Syllabic**

b) **Neumatic**

c) **Melismatic**

the listener to hear the text as a series of distinct syntactic units. Closure at the end of the text is indicated by a distinctive drop in pitch, a **cadence** (a term derived from the Latin word *cadere*, meaning “to fall”). Similar patterns of recitation are evident in the Collect (a prayer; the word is pronounced with the accent on the first syllable), the Preface (so called because it leads into the Sanctus), and the Post-Communion (a prayer of thanks). The Secret is a prayer said silently by the priest at the high altar with a concluding Amen sung aloud to a reciting tone.

Other chants with relatively long texts are syllabic without centering on a recitation tone. These include the various forms of the Gloria and Credo, as well as the Lord’s Prayer (*Pater noster*) and the Sequence, a kind of hymn that appears after the Alleluia on special feast days.

Neumatic Chant in the Mass. Whereas syllabic chants tend to be functional but not of great interest from a musical point of view, other portions of the liturgy—those that do not incorporate so much text—receive more elaborate music. The Introit, Offertory, and Communion are sometimes called action chants because they accompany actions of the priest and his attendants who are celebrating Mass. The Introit is sung during the procession into the church, the Offertory during the presentation of the bread and wine, and the Communion during the distribution of the bread and wine.

These chants are typically built around a psalm verse. *Puer natus est nobis*, the Introit for the Mass on Christmas Day, for example, incorporates a psalm verse (*Cantate Domino canticum novum . . .* from Psalm 98) that is essentially recitational. But the introduction to the psalm verse (from *Puer natus* through *magni consilii*) is freely composed in terms of both its text and its music. The setting is neumatic, with melismas of three, four, or five notes distributed liberally throughout. The Offertory and Communion for Christmas Day are even more elaborate. The remaining items of the Ordinary—the Kyrie, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, and *Ite missa est*, all of which feature relatively brief texts—are also predominantly neumatic with a mixture of syllabic and mildly melismatic passages.

Melismatic Chant in the Mass. The most elaborate chants in the Mass are the Gradual and Alleluia, along with the Tract, which replaces the Alleluia during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent. These chants feature relatively brief texts, and to recite such a short text in the same manner as the Epistle or Gospel would create an exceptionally brief unit of music. This kind of text thus not only allows but virtually demands a more musically elaborate presentation, and the Alleluia repertory in particular

Listen
CD1 Track 2

mysearchlab (with scrolling translation)
INTROIT *PUER NATUS EST NOBIS*
FROM THE MASS FOR
CHRISTMAS DAY
Score Anthology I/2a

Listen
CD1 Tracks 5/6

mysearchlab (with scrolling translation)
OFFERTORY AND COMMUNION
FROM THE MASS FOR
CHRISTMAS DAY
Score Anthology I/2g & 2j

Listen
CD1 Track 3

mysearchlab (with scrolling translation)
GRADUAL *VIDERUNT OMNES* FROM
THE MASS FOR CHRISTMAS DAY
Score Anthology I/2d

Listen
CD1 Track 4

mysearchlab (with scrolling translation)
ALLELUIA *DIES SANCTIFICATUS*
FROM THE MASS FOR
CHRISTMAS DAY
Score Anthology I/2e

Focus MODERN CHANT NOTATION

The modern editions of plainchant produced by the monks of Solesmes retain certain elements of the medieval neumes but can nevertheless be read quite easily with the knowledge of a few simple rules. Each four-line staff is marked with a clef indicating either middle C or the F below middle C. The individual neumes are read from left to right, except for the *podatus* (♩), which is read from bottom to top. Groupings of notes are sometimes indicated by ligatures (such as ♩ or ♪). What looks like half a neume at the end of each staff line is in fact an indication of the first pitch of the next line. This *custos* (“guardian”) makes it easier for the eye to move from one staff to the next.

The rhythmic interpretation of chant has long been a controversial issue. Even the monks of Solesmes did not agree among themselves about whether the chant was

rhythmically fixed (proportionally long and short durations) or “free,” with all the notes of more or less equal duration but shaded in length according to the length of the syllable being sung. Most performances nowadays tend toward the latter approach, giving the music a supple, almost floating quality.

The Solesmes editions of chant include several additional markings to distinguish among the individual sections of a given chant. In the Gradual *Viderunt omnes* from the Mass for Christmas Day, for example, vertical lines of varying length in the middle of the staff indicate major divisions within the text (and thus also the music) of the chant. The dot at the end of the last note of each such unit reinforces the demarcation of that portion of the text; the dot itself has no rhythmic significance.

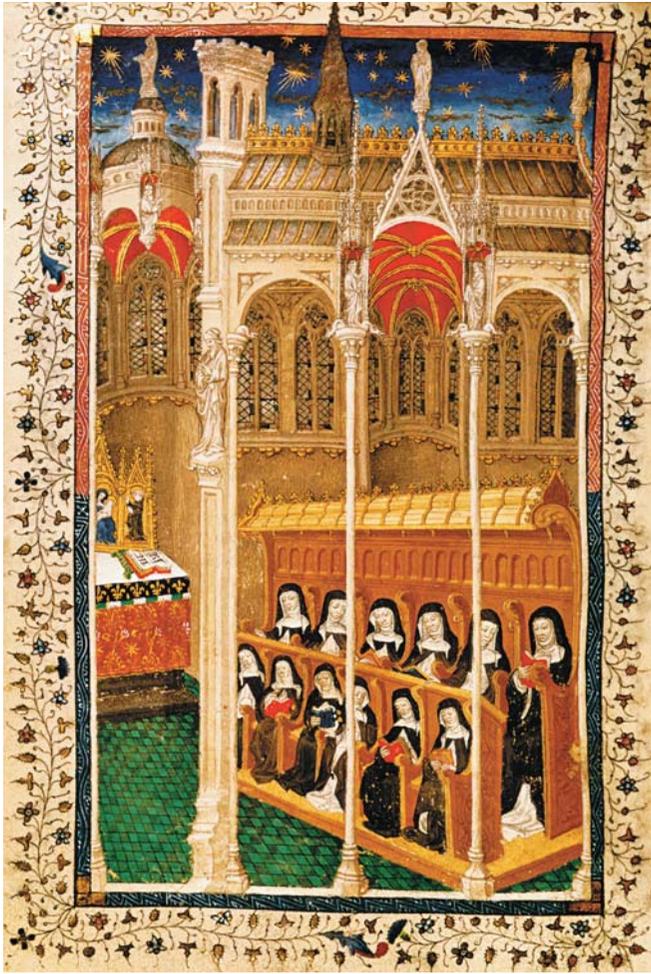
Grad.
5.
V
Idérunt ó- mnes * fínes tér- rae sa-
lu- tá- re Dé- i nóstri : jubi- lá- te Dé- o
ó- mnis tér- ra. V. Nó- tum fé- cit Dó-
mi- nus sa- lu-
tá- re sú- um : ante conspéctum génti- um re-
ve- lá- vit * justí- ti- am sú- am.

Gradual *Viderunt omnes*, from the Liber usualis (Paris: Deslée, 1964), p. 409.

Source: Gradual *Viderunt omnes* From The Liber usualis. Ed. by the Benedictines of Solesmes. Tournai (Belgium): Desclée, 1959. Page 409.

is known for its florid, exuberant melodies, especially on the final syllable of the word *alleluia*, a passage known as the *jubilus* (derived from the same root as “jubilation”).

The Gradual, Alleluia, and Tract are called **responsorial chants** because the chorus alternates with (“responds to”) the soloist. In the Gradual for Christmas Day, *Viderunt omnes*, the soloist intones the opening two words (up to the asterisk marked in the score), at which point the chorus enters (*fines terrae . . .*). This entire unit is known as the **respond**. The subsequent psalm verse, also taken from Psalm 98 (*Notum fecit Dominus . . .*), is then sung by the soloist. In earlier times, the chorus’s part of the respond would be repeated, but this practice had disappeared by the 13th century.



Nuns chanting. Plainchant was sung with equal fervor in convents as well as monasteries. This scene is from a miniature in an early-15th-century English manuscript.

Source: Master of St. Jerome: Nuns in choir, Cotton Domitian A XVII, f.177v, 7/10340, © The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved

Alleluias are performed in a slightly different manner. The soloist intones the opening word (up to the asterisk in the score); then the chorus repeats this same passage exactly. The chorus proceeds to sing the *jubilus*, an elaborate melisma, and the soloist then sings the verse (*Dies sanctificatus . . .*), with the chorus joining in on the final phrase (here, *super terram*). Finally, the soloist sings the opening “alleluia” and the chorus enters directly with the *jubilus*.

Word and Music in the Chants of the Divine Office. The chants for the Divine Office reflect the nature of their texts in a similar fashion. Psalms, with their lengthy texts, are recited syllabically to one of the eight melodic formulas known as **psalm tones**. Each psalm tone corresponds to one of the eight musical modes (discussed in the next section). The eighth psalm tone (Example 1–2) is typical of the various formulas used to recite these texts: it begins with a very brief gesture that brings the singer to the recitation tone, which serves to project any number of syllables. Psalm verses typically divide into two units, and a cadential formula provides a mediant cadence; the second half of the psalm verse is recited to the same recitation tone, and a final cadence marks the end of the verse. This pattern is repeated for as many verses as are to be sung. The two halves of the psalm tone were often sung antiphonally, between a soloist and the chorus, or between two halves of the chorus. The psalm tone is repeated until all the appointed verses of the psalm have been sung. The ninth psalm tone, the *Tonus peregrinus* (“wandering tone”), has two different recitation tones but is limited largely to the singing of a single text, Psalm 113.

EXAMPLE 1-3 The medieval plainchant modes.

AUTHENTIC		PLAGAL	
1. Dorian		2. Hypodorian	
3. Phrygian		4. Hypophrygian	
5. Lydian		6. Hypolydian	
7. Mixolydian		8. Hypomixolydian	

indicates final
 indicates recitation tone

The names that came to be connected with these modes much later—Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian—derive from Greek place names thought to be associated with each of the modes, rather in the same manner as the Greek *tonoi*. The Greek prefix *hypo* means “under” (as in “hypotenuse”) and was applied to those modes with an ambitus that ranged under (and over) the finalis. But these designations are more appropriately reserved for discussions of 16th- and 17th-century polyphony. When speaking of medieval plainchant, it is preferable to apply the simple numerical designations (Mode 1, Mode 2, etc.) actually used in the original sources of this music.

Although early chant manuscripts give evidence of at least some organization of their contents by mode, it was not until the 11th century that we find a systematic and consistent application of the eight-mode system, thanks in large part to the work of the Italian monk Guido of Arezzo (991–after 1033) and the German monk Hermannus Contractus (1013–1054). Most later chant manuscripts—from about the middle of the 11th century onward—assign every chant to a particular mode.

Melodic Structure

Plainchant melodies generally follow a limited number of intervallic patterns. In keeping with the function of projecting the text at hand, most chants feature a high percentage of stepwise intervals, punctuated by thirds and an occasional fourth or fifth (the fifths almost always ascending, not descending). Intervals greater than a fifth are quite rare, especially in the oldest layers of the chant repertory. Octave leaps might occasionally occur between two separate phrases of a chant but almost never within a musical or linguistic phrase.

The melody of the Introit for the Mass on Christmas Day, *Puer natus est nobis*, is fairly typical. The intervals are mostly conjunct with an occasional leap of a fifth or third. The range is limited largely to a sixth (G below middle C to E above), with an occasional extension to the F above the E. This is a standard range for a melody in Mode 7. The middle section (the psalm verse, beginning with *Cantate Domino*) explores a slightly higher range and centers on the Mode 7 recitation tone, D.

The Gradual *Viderunt omnes* (Mode 5) ranges somewhat farther afield, as might be expected of the more musically elaborate genre of the Gradual. Like most chant melodies, it features a series of distinctive contours. The opening section moves through

a succession of gently rising and falling arches. The verse (*Notum fecit Dominus . . .*) covers an unusually wide range before returning to the finalis, F. The Alleluia *Dies sanctificatus* (Mode 2) is equally elaborate in its series of rising and falling melodic arcs.

In theoretical terms, the pitches used in plainchant melodies do not derive from a system of successive diatonic octaves, but rather from a series of interlocking hexachords. In medieval theory, a **hexachord** is a group of six notes, all separated by whole steps except the third and fourth notes, which are separated by a half step. The individual notes of the hexachord are known by their **solmization syllables**—*ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la*—derived from the syllables and corresponding notes of the first six lines in the plainchant hymn *Ut queant laxis* (Example 1–4).

We must not think of these solmization syllables as the equivalent of our fixed pitches (such as “middle C” or “G below middle C”). Instead, the system of hexachords provided singers with a framework of pitch relationships: from *mi* to *fa* is always a half step, and it can always be found between the third and fourth pitches above *ut*, which itself was a movable pitch. Only much later did the solmization syllables come to be associated with fixed pitches in certain languages such as French, in which *ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la* are used today to indicate the pitches C, D, E, F, G, and A.

The entire range of available pitches—the **gamut**—was conceived of as a series of seven interlocking hexachords beginning on C, F, or G (Example 1–5).

Hexachords were considered “hard” if they included a B \natural ; “soft” if they included a B \flat , and “natural” if they included no B at all (that is, running from C to A). Individual notes within the hexachord system were identified unambiguously by combining the names of all the various solmization syllables each could sustain. Thus the lowest note in the system, the *gamma*, could only be an *ut* and was thus known as *gamma ut* (which in turn gave the name to the gamut). The F a seventh higher, in turn, could function

EXAMPLE 1–4 The opening of the hymn *Ut queant laxis*: the source of the solmization syllables.

That your servants may sing with deeper notes of your wondrous deeds, St. John,
cleans the guilt of unclean lips.

EXAMPLE 1–5 The gamut.

THE EXPANSION OF PLAINCHANT

By the end of the 9th century, a core repertory of plainchant had been established for the entire liturgical year, Mass and Divine Office alike. It was around this same time that the legend of the chant's divine origins from the Holy Spirit through the agency of Saint Gregory first began to appear. To replace any of these melodies with new works would have been almost unthinkable.

Yet the monks and clerics of this time continued to add to the plainchant repertory by writing new music for the liturgies of newly established feast days to honor recently canonized saints. The music for these celebrations often drew on existing melodies but gave rise to new ones as well.

The chants of the Mass Ordinary also continued to expand after the 9th century. In earlier times, these texts were intoned to very simple melodies, and they were performed so often (once every day of the year) that no one seems to have felt the need to commit them to writing: parchment, after all, was an expensive material. Because of their simplicity and everyday use, moreover, these melodies were not perceived as part of the legacy of Saint Gregory. Thus later monks and clerics felt a greater sense of freedom to add to this repertory. A quick glance at the many Kyries preserved in the *Liber usualis* (see Focus: A Guide to the Liturgical Books Containing Plainchant, p. 34) reveals that many of them were written in the 10th century or later, some even as late as the 16th century.

But by far the most important source of new repertory after the 9th century resulted from a process known as **troping**. A **trope** is a musical or textual addition to an existing chant. The term comes from the Latin *tropus*, meaning “a turn of phrase,” and is used here in the sense of embellishing or elaborating an otherwise plain statement. Tropes could be added to the beginning or end of a chant, or they could be interpolated into the chant itself. The original chant, in any event, remained intact, even if it was now framed or interrupted by new material.

One category of tropes added words to an existing melisma. These interpolated texts, known as *prosulae* (singular, *prosula*, from the same root as the English word “prose”), also served as a kind of commentary on the original text. Textual troping was especially prevalent in the extended melismas of the Gradual, the Alleluia, and the Offertory, as well as those sections of the Mass Ordinary with brief texts, such as the Kyrie. The Sequence, authorized for special feast days, began life as a texted trope on the jubilus, the extended melisma at the end of the Alleluia. It eventually became a separate element of the liturgy in its own right and was cultivated with special intensity in the 10th century.

Primary Evidence

SPARE THE ROD, SPOIL THE CHANT

Singing chant was a serious business. Regulations in place during the 11th century at the Cathedral of St. Benigne in Dijon (France) prescribed a variety of techniques for dealing with choirboys—students at the cathedral school—whose demeanor or performance fell short of established standards.



At Nocturns, and indeed at all the Hours [of the Divine Office], if the boys commit any fault in the psalmody or other singing, either by sleeping or such like transgression, let there be no sort of delay, but let them be stripped

forthwith of frock and cowl, and beaten in their shirt only . . . with pliant and smooth osier rods provided for that special purpose. If any of them, weighed down with sleep, sing ill at Nocturns, then the master giveth into his hand a reasonably great book, to hold until he be well awake. At Matins the principal master standeth before them with a rod until all are in their seats and their faces well covered. At their uprising likewise, if they rise too slowly, the rod is straightway over them.

Source: *The Oxford History of Music*, introductory volume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901), pp. 190–1.

The Kyrie *Cunctipotens Genitor Deus* (Example 1–6) is a later (post-9th-century) chant that, during the 12th century, was troped with a new text. Between the two original words—the simple plea for mercy, *Kyrie eleison*—are interpolated the words *Cunctipotens Genitor Deus omni creator* (“All-powerful Father, God, creator of all things”). The troping process (with added words indicated in italics) thus leads to this:

Kyrie *Cunctipotens Genitor Deus omni creator* eleison

Lord, *All-powerful Father, God, creator of all things*, have mercy

Aside from the textual trope, the melody itself exhibits several characteristic features of late chant. The earliest melodies tend to float without a strong sense of

EXAMPLE 1–6 Kyrie *Cunctipotens Genitor Deus*: (a) untexted trope; (b) texted trope.

(a) Ky - ri - * e - le - i - son.

(b) Ky - ri - e Cun-cti-po-tens ge - ni - tor De - us *om-ni cre - a - tor e le - i - son.

Primary Evidence

WORDS, MUSIC, AND MEMORY: THE *PROSULA*

Long before the advent of musical notation, the monks who sang plainchant on a daily basis had begun to embellish at least some melodies both musically and textually. Melismatic chants—the various intonations of the Kyrie and the jubilus of the Alleluia in particular—proved especially inviting for the addition of interpolated texts. In one of the earliest accounts of such a trope, Notker of St. Gall (ca. 840–912, also known as Notker Balbulus, “The Stammerer”) explains that the practice arose from a need to make the chants easier to memorize. Notker was a monk who worked at the Benedictine abbey of St. Gall in what is now eastern Switzerland. He eventually collected the prosulae he had written in a *Liber hymnorum* (*Book of Hymns*), which he organized according to the cycle of the liturgical year.



When I was still young, and very long melodies—repeatedly entrusted to memory—escaped from my poor little head, I began to reason with myself how I could bind them fast.

In the meantime it happened that a certain priest from Jumièges (recently laid waste by the Normans) came to us, bringing with him his antiphony, in which some verses had been set to sequences; but they were in a very corrupt state. Upon closer inspection I was as

bitterly disappointed in them as I had been delighted at first glance.

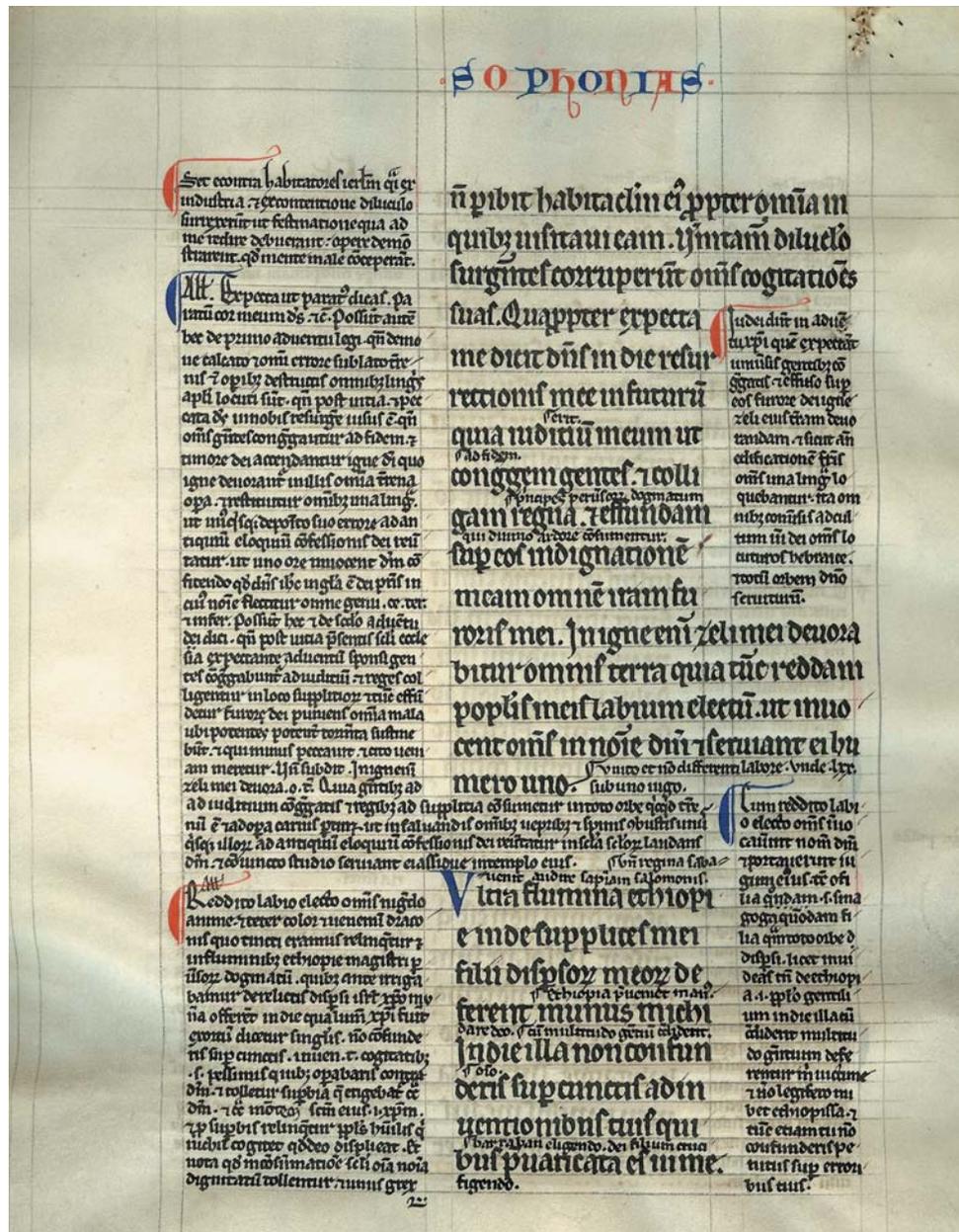
Nevertheless, in imitation of them I began to write *Laudes Deo concinat orbis universus, qui gratis est redemptus*, and further on *Coluber adae deceptor*. When I took these lines to my teacher Iso, he, commending my industry while taking pity on my lack of experience, praised what was pleasing, and what was not he set about to improve, saying, “The individual motions of the melody should receive separate syllables.” Hearing that, I immediately corrected those which fell under *ia*; those under *le* or *lu*, however, I left as too difficult; but later, with practice, I managed it easily—for example in “Dominus in Sina” and “Mater.” Instructed in this manner, I soon composed my second piece, *Psallat ecclesia mater illibata*.

When I showed these little verses to my teacher Marcellus, he, filled with joy, had them copied as a group on a roll; and he gave out different pieces to different boys to be sung. And when he told me that I should collect them in a book and offer them as a gift to some eminent person, I shrank back in shame, thinking I would never be able to do that.

Source: Notker Balbulus, Preface to *Liber hymnorum* (*Book of Hymns*), trans. in Richard Crocker, *The Early Medieval Sequence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), p. 1.

The art of glossing. In the medieval era, anything worth reading was worth glossing. The original text shown here—a 13th-century manuscript copy of the Old Testament's Book of Zephaniah, in Latin—was prepared from the very start with a gloss of its own in both the right and left margins. Still further commentary was inserted between some of the lines in the main text: these additions interpret specific words or phrases. The practice of adding successive layers of commentary to an original source lies behind the medieval impetus to create textual and musical tropes for existing chants, and eventually to add new voices to an established plainchant melody.

Source: Bridwell Library Special Collections, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University.



contour or direction, whereas later ones often have a much stronger sense of movement toward the cadences at the end of each grammatical unit and especially toward the finalis. The prominence of the interval of the fifth, particularly the rising fifth, is also typical of later chant. A relatively higher degree of melodic repetition within a chant also characterizes the later repertory, although even the earliest Kyrie settings tend to feature musical repetitions that mirror the repetitive nature of the text.

Another kind of trope adds both words and new music to an existing chant. In one manuscript from the late 10th or 11th century (Example 1–7), the Introit for the Mass on Easter Sunday, *Resurrexi*, is preceded by an extended trope consisting of both words and music, with a series of similar tropes interpolated into the course of the Introit itself. The troped text (indicated in italics here) comments on the words of the original Introit. The introductory trope sets the mood (“Rejoice and be glad . . .”), and subsequent interpolations comment on the original Introit text (in roman type),

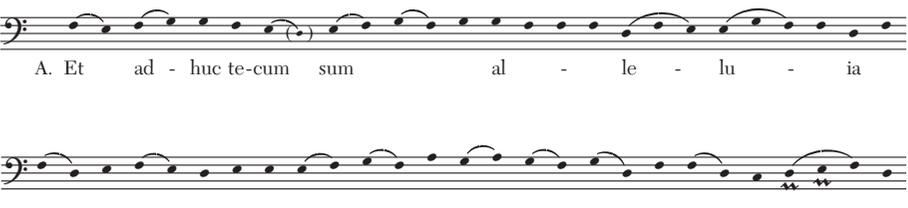
EXAMPLE 1-7 Beginning of the troped Introit *Resurrexi*: original antiphon (b, d) alternating with trope (a, c, e).

(a) Antiphon with Tropes

 T. Gau-de - te et le - ta - mi - ni qui - a sur - re - xit do - mi - nus

(b) 
 al - le - lu - ia Io - cum - de - mur cum il - lo di -
 cen - tess e - ia

(c) 
 T. Dum re - sur - ge - ret in iu - di - ci - o
 de - us

(d) 
 A. Et ad - huc te - cum sum al - le - lu - ia

(e) 
 T. Con - tre - mu - it ter - ra

Christ's pronouncement to the visitors to his tomb on the morning of Easter Sunday ("I have risen . . .").

Gaudete et letamini quia surrexit dominus alleluia
Iocundemur cum illo dicentes eia
 Resurrexi
Dum resurgeret in iudicio deus
 Et adhuc tecum sum alleluia.
Contremuit terra xpisto surgente
Christ a mortuis . . .

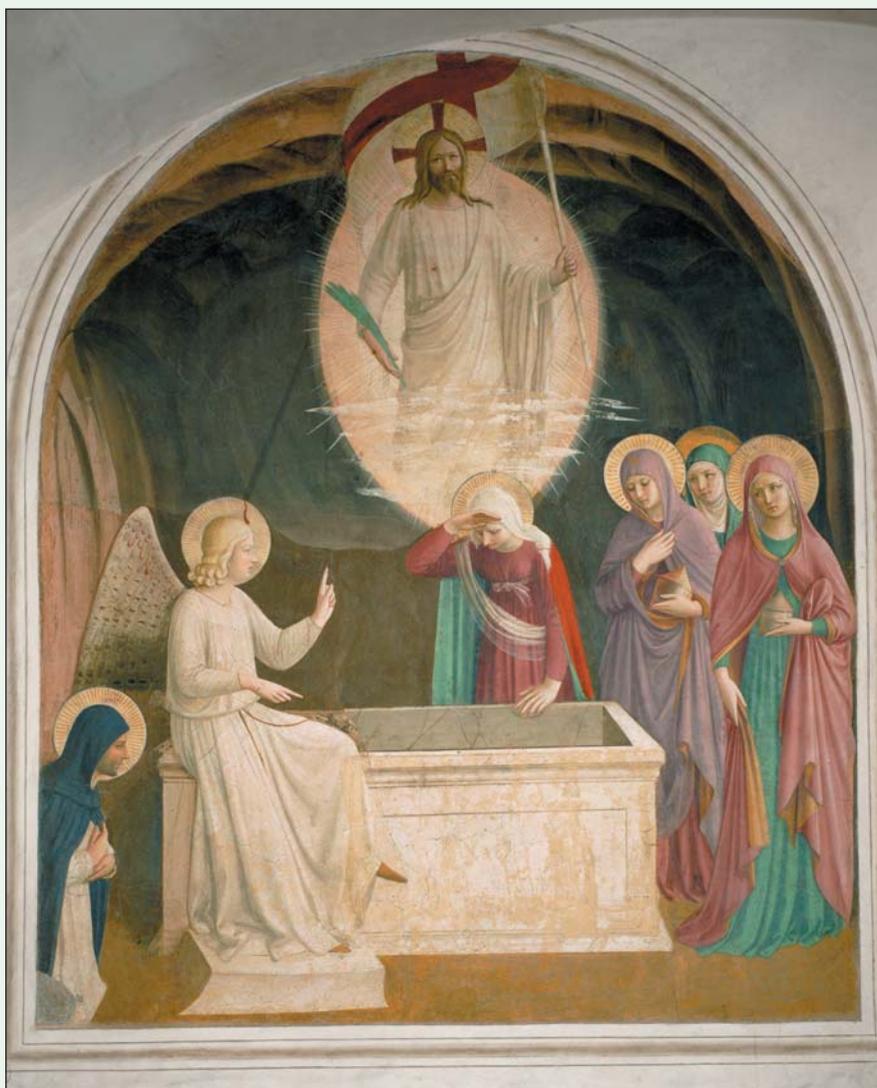
Rejoice and be glad, for the Lord has risen, alleluia.
Let us delight in that, saying "Eia."
 I have risen
Until in judgment God would rise
 And I am still with you, alleluia.
The earth trembled when
rose from the dead . . .

Focus BEYOND NOTATION

Any ensemble that plans a performance of Hildegard von Bingen's *Ordo virtutum* must choose an approach both compatible with and committed to the expression of the notated score. The sources that transmit this work provide only the voice parts, without indication of rhythmic values (much as is the case with liturgical chant manuscripts). Some interpretations limit their scope accordingly, using only voices and basing the rhythms on the accents built into the melodic line and text meaning. The version by Ensemble für Musik des Mittelalters, led by Stefan Morent, adds only the ringing of bells at the climactic song of Victory ("the old serpent has been bound," section 80). At the other extreme,

the 1982 recording by Sequentia, directed by Barbara Thornton and Benjamin Bagby, uses an accompanying ensemble involving a flute, a pair of fidels (or fiddles), and an organetto, as well as the bells at Victory's song (which is sung in a higher register). The instruments breathe with the singers and follow the vocal line freely, alternating between drones and heterophony. Only at Victory's song do the accompanying instruments cease; a pause precedes the next section (81), in which the Virtues sing their praises in the customary lower register, but now a cappella.

Medieval sacred dramas like Hildegard von Bingen's *Ordo virtutum* grew out of the inherently dramatic nature



Erich Lessing / Museo di S. Marco, Florence, Italy/Art Resource, NY

Focus continued

of the Mass itself, and in particular such dramatic tropes as *Quem quaeritis in sepulcro*. The scene between the women and the angel at the tomb of Jesus Christ is depicted in this Fra Angelico fresco, “Holy Women at the Sepulchre.”

Is it legitimate to take such liberties with the notated score? From the evidence available to us through contemporary accounts and depictions of music-making, we know that notated sources do not always reflect the full range of resources used in performance. Yet how far is too far? The historical record for a work like Hildegard’s *Ordo virtutum* is too thin to say with any degree of certainty that it was always performed in a certain way

and by certain forces but not by others. Some will find the present performance excessive in its interpolations; others will maintain that it creates a greater degree of sonic variety that makes *Ordo virtutum* more appealing to modern-day audiences. Still others will hold that attempts to achieve historically “authentic” performances impinge excessively on the demands of musicianship, and that the very concept of authenticity itself is anachronistic: it is entirely possible that Hildegard herself may well not have thought in terms of any one correct manner of performance. (Sequentia, when it issued a second recording of *Ordo virtutum* in 1998, took a very different approach from its first one.) The debate continues.

Manuscript of the “Quem quaeritis” trope. This Easter trope, first found in 10th-century manuscripts in St. Martial, Limoges, France, evolved at a time when church officials were encouraging dramatizations of liturgical events to make them more tangible for congregants. The “Quem quaeritis” trope was successful enough to be part of the Sarum (English) liturgy by the end of the century. From there, the English developed the nonliturgical mystery play, collected in regional cycles that have remained a part of the British theatrical repertory. This version comes from a *processionale*, a collection of chants and prayers for processions, from 14th-century Dublin.

Source: Bodleian Library, Oxford University

Composer Profile

Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179)

We can securely attribute more compositions to Hildegard von Bingen than to any other musician, male or female, who worked before the early 14th century. In spite of her impressive output, Hildegard did not consider herself a professional composer or musician. Born into a noble family in what is now western Germany, she entered a Benedictine convent at the age of 7 and took vows when she was 16. In her early 30s she began to experience visions and revelations, which she recorded in a series of books. Hildegard was the first woman to receive explicit permission from a pope to write on theology. She also wrote on such diverse subjects as medicine, plants, and lives of the saints, all while directing the life of a thriving convent as its abbess.

Hildegard's devotion to music is clearly evident in a letter of protest she wrote toward the end of her life. The laws of the church dictate that individuals who have been excommunicated—barred from receiving communion because of a grave offense against the church—cannot be buried on consecrated ground. Hildegard was accused of having permitted just such a person to be buried on the hallowed ground of her convent's cemetery, and as punishment the prelates of Mainz forbade the nuns there from celebrating the Divine Office with music, permitted only to speak the liturgy. In a letter to those prelates, Hildegard eloquently defends the practice of music as something that goes beyond aesthetics and penetrates the most basic issues of faith.

In obedience to you we have until now given up the singing of the Divine Office, celebrating it only by quiet reading—and I heard a voice coming from the living light, telling of those various kinds of praise concerning which David speaks in the Psalms: “Praise him with the sound of the trumpet, praise him with the psaltery and the cithara, praise him with the tympanum and the chorus, praise him with strings and the organ, praise him with the well-sounding cymbals, praise him with the cymbals of jubilation. Let every spirit praise the Lord” [Psalm 150: 3–6]. In these words we are taught about inward concerns by external objects, how according to the makeup of material things (the properties of musical instruments)

we ought best to convert and to refashion the workings of our interior man to the praise of the Creator. . . .

Thus it is just that God be praised in everything. And since man sighs and moans with considerable frequency upon hearing some song, as he recalls in his soul the quality of celestial harmony, the prophet David, considering with understanding the nature of what is spiritual (because the soul is harmonious), exhorts us in the psalm, “Let us confess the Lord on the cithara, let us play to him on the psaltery of ten strings” [Psalm 32:1], intending that the cithara, which sounds from below, pertains to the discipline of the body; that the psaltery, which sounds from above, pertains to the striving of the spirit; and that the ten strings refer to the contemplation of the Law. Thus they who without the weight of sure reason impose silence upon a church in the matter of songs in praise of God, and thereby unjustly deprive God of the honor of his praise on earth, will be deprived themselves of the participation in the angelic praises heard in Heaven, unless they make amends by true regret and humble penitence.

Church officials eventually relented.

KEY DATES IN THE LIFE OF HILDEGARD VON BINGEN

1098	Born in Bermersheim near Worms (now western Germany).
1106	Enters a Benedictine convent.
1136	Becomes prioress of the abbey of St. Disibod in Diessenberg.
1147	Establishes a new convent on the Rupertsberg, within the bishopric of Mainz.
1152	Finishes her decade-long work on <i>Scivias</i> (“Know the Ways”), a manuscript that records and interprets her visions.
1179	Dies on 17 September at her convent in Rupertsberg near Bingen (western Germany).

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Hildegard herself organized her compositions into two large collections: the *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum* (“Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations”) and the *Ordo virtutum* (“Play of the Virtues”). The *Symphonia armonie* is a cycle of liturgical works partly for the Mass (an Alleluia, a Kyrie, and seven Sequences)

but mostly for the Office (43 antiphons, 18 responsory chants, 3 hymns, and 4 devotional songs). The *Ordo virtutum* is a morality play consisting of 82 monophonic songs that depict a struggle between the devil and the 16 Virtues (Charity, Obedience, Humility, Chastity, and so on). The settings of the poetry are predominantly syllabic; the cycle may have been performed in connection with the services of the Office or in celebration of a newly opened church.



Hildegard von Bingen. This image comes from a 12th-century manuscript copy of Hildegard’s works. Looking toward heaven, Hildegard receives divine inspiration and writes on a tablet. The similarity to images of Saint Gregory receiving the plainchant from the Holy Spirit is striking (see p. 28).

Source: Biblioteca Governativa Statale/LUCCA/akg-images

This kind of troping reflects a much broader medieval phenomenon that permeated virtually every field, from theology to philosophy to astronomy to law: the desire to comment, to embellish, to gloss. Providing new commentary on an existing text was considered one of the most basic ways to advance knowledge. If enough viewpoints and arguments were taken into account, medieval thinkers reasoned, the truth of any given matter would surely come out in the end. Thus we have countless medieval manuscripts in which an original text is glossed and in which the glosses themselves become an object of still further commentary.

Certain passages in the liturgy became special favorites for troping because of their inherently dramatic nature. In its original state, the Introit *Resurrexi* begins with Christ's first words to Mary and those who seek his body in the tomb: "I have risen. . . ." The trope known as *Quem quaeritis in sepulcro* recreates the drama leading up to this moment. It begins with the angel asking Mary and her companions, *Quem quaeritis in sepulcro, o Cristicole?* ("Whom do you seek in the sepulchre, O followers of Christ?"). The dialogue continues:

Trope [MARY]: The crucified Nazarene, Jesus, O heavenly one.

[ANGEL]: He is not here; he has risen as he foretold. Go and announce that he is risen.

[MARY AND HER COMPANIONS]: Alleluia, the angel at the tomb announces that Christ has risen.

And behold, that which had been foretold by the prophet is fulfilled. To the father in this manner he says:

Introit I have risen and am still with you, alleluia . . . [etc.]

This scene and others like it were occasionally staged as **liturgical dramas**—dramas because the parts were represented by individuals, liturgical because the presentation was part of the service of worship. One medieval account describes the staging of the *Quem quaeritis in sepulcro* scene in some detail. A monk representing the angel at the tomb of Christ assumes his position "quietly, with a palm-branch in his hand" while a group of three others, representing "the women coming with spices to anoint the body of Jesus," move through the church "slowly, in the manner of seeking something. When therefore that one seated shall see the three, as if straying about and seeking something . . . let him begin in a dulcet voice of medium pitch to sing: 'Whom do you seek in the sepulchre, O followers of Christ?'" The dialogue continues from there.

Dramatized performances of such dialogues varied widely by time and location, as well as by their place in the liturgy. They were sometimes presented as tropes of the Introit at Mass, sometimes as additions to Matins. Hildegard von Bingen's *Ordo virtutum* is an example of a freely composed drama not connected with any existing chant or ritual but rather composed to texts and melodies entirely of Hildegard's own creation. The plot of this morality play—a dramatized allegory of good versus evil—centers on a series of disputes between the devil and 16 Virtues, each of which is represented by a different singer. Significantly, the devil has no music: he shouts all his lines. It would seem that hell, for Hildegard, was a world without music (see Composer Profile: Hildegard von Bingen).

New saints and new feast days also created a demand for new texts and new music. During the late medieval era and well into the Renaissance, more than a thousand rhymed offices—so called because their music and poetic text followed a strict metrical and rhyming pattern—were established for use in services in honor of particular saints or feasts. Hymns offered yet another outlet for the creative impulses of composers

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HILDEGARD VON BINGEN

Ordo virtutum

Score Anthology I/5

working within the medieval church, who produced more than a thousand melodies to these freely composed strophic texts. The melody of *Pange lingua gloriosi corporis mysterium*, to a text written by St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century for the Feast of Corpus Christi, exemplifies this repertory. It bears the melodic hallmarks of a later chant style, with a strong sense of melodic symmetry and direction.

Composers continued to write chants well into the Renaissance. No less a figure than Guillaume Du Fay (see Chapter 4) composed a plainchant office in honor of the Virgin Mary as late as the 1450s. Other, less prominent composers were still writing chants in the 16th century. By this point, however, many of these later accretions to the repertory of liturgical plainchant—troped portions of the Ordinary, Introits, Offertories, and the like—had come to be viewed as unauthorized and corrupt. The reform-minded Council of Trent (1545–1563), reacting to the challenge of the Protestant Reformation, eliminated all troped texts and all but four Sequences from the liturgy (*Victimae paschali laudes* was one of the few to survive). For this reason, these textual tropes and most Sequences are not included in modern editions of the church's liturgical books. At least some of the melodies associated with these tropes have remained, however, like the Kyrie *Cunctipotens Genitor Deus*, whose music (without the troped words) can still be found in the *Liber usualis*.

Chant nevertheless continued to be performed in services regularly for more than 1,000 years, often in heavily modified form, including harmonized versions in the 18th and 19th centuries. Only with the Second Vatican Council of 1963–1965 did the tradition of plainchant as a vital element of the Roman Catholic liturgy come to an end.

SECULAR MONOPHONY

Plainchant had secular parallels in every European culture of the medieval era. As with plainchant, word and music were considered inseparable. Poet, composer, and singer were often one in the same person, and most of this repertory was transmitted orally long before any of it was ever committed to writing. Although the surviving sources preserve only a single line of music for any given work, images and written accounts suggest that these songs could also be accompanied by one or more instruments. The exact nature of such performances remains a matter of speculation, although it seems clear that the essence of this repertory rests in its melody rather than in any polyphonic elaboration that may or may not have been added to it in performance.

Songs in Latin

Songs in Latin passed easily across linguistic boundaries. The most famous collection of this kind is the *Carmina Burana*—“Songs of Benediktbeuern”—a name given in the 19th century in honor of the Benedictine monastery in Bavaria where the manuscript containing these songs was housed for many years. (Carl Orff's 1937 oratorio *Carmina Burana* is a more recent setting of 25 of the more than 200 texts in the collection.) The original manuscript, compiled in the late 13th century, is notorious for its songs about gambling, drinking, and erotic love. It also includes songs that satirize the moral teachings of the church and point out the shortcomings of priests and monks, as in the following:

I am the abbot of Cockaigne
and my assembly is one of drinkers,
and I wish to be in the Order of Decius,
and whoever searches me out at the tavern in the morning,
after Vespers he will leave naked,

and thus stripped of his clothes he will call out:
 Woe! Woe!
 what have you done, vilest Fate?
 the joys of my life
 you have taken all away!

Such texts would have had great appeal to the wandering minstrels who went from town to town and court to court providing entertainment to any and all who would pay for it. One such group called itself the Order of the Goliards, after a nonexistent patron Goliath (Goliath). They owed their allegiance to no particular court, but earned their living by performing on the road. Other minstrels did more than sing: they juggled, danced, and performed acrobatic feats and magic tricks.

France

The *troubadours* (in southern France) and *trouvères* (in northern France) derive their names from the same root as the modern French *trouver* (“to find”). These poet-composers “found”—or as we would say today, created—new texts and melodies alike. The *trouvères* wrote their songs in medieval French, the *troubadours* in Occitan (also known as Provençal), a language related to both French and Spanish. A substantial repertory of some 2,100 *trouvère* songs—both texts and music—has been preserved. Music to lyrics by the *troubadours*, in contrast, is available for only about a tenth of the more than 2,500 known poems.

The *troubadours* and *trouvères* were at their most active in the 12th and 13th centuries. Their repertoires included love songs, laments, pastorals, and dialogues. The relationship between noblemen and noblewomen in the texts of these songs is consistently governed by the elaborate etiquette of courtly love, which called for the woman to be idolized and praised from afar. Most of these works, regardless of subject matter, are strophic, both musically and textually. The longest form is the *chanson de geste* (literally, a “song of deed”), an epic account of chivalrous accomplishments. The popular *Chanson de Roland*, from the second half of the 11th century, for example, recounts the heroic adventures of one of Charlemagne’s knights. This lengthy poem of more than 4,000 lines could be recited by a singer according to a formulaic pattern not unlike that of the psalm tones. The performers of this repertory—usually minstrels and *jongleurs*, members of a lower social order—were expected to embellish and improvise on this basic pattern; as a result, individual songs transmitted in more than one source often show significant variants. Unlike plainchant, secular songs were not considered gifts of the Holy Spirit and were not regarded as objects of veneration. Stylistically, though, this repertory is not unlike plainchant in its melodic structure: text settings are primarily syllabic and only occasionally melismatic. The rhythmic interpretation of the notated songs remains a particular matter of debate among modern-day scholars. As in the case of chant, most performers today prefer a flexible approach that allows the words to be declaimed in a fluid, natural manner.

Although some *troubadours* and *trouvères* were of noble birth, most were not, and these tended to be an itinerant lot. One of the most famous and prolific of all *troubadours*, Bernart de Ventadorn (ca. 1140–ca. 1190), was banished from two different courts for becoming too emotionally attached to the ladies of those courts; he spent the last years of his life in a monastery.

Forbidden love also seems to have shaped the life (or at least the writings) of the Countess (Beatriz) de Dia (d. ca. 1212), a *trobairitz* (female *troubadour*) whose *A chantar m’es al cor* (I must sing from the heart), in Occitan, may well be autobiographical.



Music and social status. For many centuries, wind and percussion instruments were more closely associated with outdoor activities and the lower classes than were stringed instruments. The musicians shown here belong to the social class of acrobats, actors, and *jongleurs* whose skills were widely enjoyed in the medieval era but whose personal status in society was quite low. The double flute on the right is an indirect descendant of the ancient Greek aulos; the pipe and tabor were typically played by a single instrumentalist who fingered the pipe with one hand and beat the drum with the other.

Source: Royal 10 E. IV ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved

It is a moving lament written from a woman's perspective, and the only poem of the Countess to have survived in manuscript with music. The music of *A chantar* moves within a relatively narrow ambitus, but its steady rise and fall, culminating in a climb to the melody's highest pitch in the penultimate line, imparts a sense of intense emotion to the words. According to an account (*vida*) written about a century after the Countess's death, she was married to Guillaume, Count of Poitiers, but fell in love with a certain Raimbaut d'Orange (Raimbaut d'Aurenga, d. 1173), also a troubadour, and "made about him many good and beautiful songs"; but chronology and lack of positive evidence make it unlikely that Guillaume or Raimbaut was involved with the Countess.

Regarded highly by his contemporaries and successors, Peire Vidal (fl. ca. 1175–ca. 1215), the son of a furrier from Toulouse in what is now southern France, is credited with around 50 surviving texts; 12 of these have melodies. Many courts sought his talents: he served at the courts of Toulouse, Marseilles, Aragon, Castile, and Montferrat, and he may have accompanied his patron Richard I (Richard the Lion-Hearted) on the Third Crusade (1193–1194). His tempestuous character was far different from that of the Countess, indeed from most troubadours. *Baros, de mon dan covit* ("My lord, he who wishes [my downfall]") begins with typically prodigious praise of a lady, but over the course of the poem Peire compares his behavior at court favorably with others, boasts of his skills in seduction and fighting (which he loves more than monks love peace), and touches on the gossip that surrounds lovers and the imperative

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 BEATRIZ DE DIA
A chantar
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CD1 Track 11
mysearchlab (with scrolling translation)
 PEIRE VIDAL
Baros, de mon dan covit
 Score Anthology 1/7

to wander. *Baros, de mon dan covit*, like *A chantar*, follows the AAB structure referred to as “bar form” in German medieval secular monophony (discussed earlier in this chapter). Its conjunct melody stays within a fourth for its opening four lines, but then leaps upward dramatically for the fifth and sixth lines (“I love her completely, without falsehood/And am entirely hers, if she will be mine”) before returning to the lowest part of the song’s ambitus for the final three lines. *A chantar* has seven lines in each stanza and has a tighter melodic structure (a b a b c d b) than *Baros, de mon dan covit*, which after its initial four lines (a a1 a a1) is relatively varied. (See Performance Perspective: Interpreting the Troubadour and Trobairitz Repertory.)

The Iberian Peninsula

The preserved repertory of *cantigas* (“songs”) from the Iberian peninsula—present-day Spain and Portugal—is quite small. Only two sources transmit the poetry with melodies. One is a set of six songs by Martin Codax, an otherwise obscure composer working around 1230 in what is now northwestern Spain. The other source is a large and sumptuously illustrated manuscript containing more than 400 *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, songs in honor of the Virgin Mary, prepared for (and possibly composed in part by) Alfonso el Sabio (“The Wise”), king of Castille and Leon from 1252 until 1284. Although sacred in subject matter, these songs were not liturgical. Their poetic and musical style, moreover, is consistent with what we know of the secular songs that were written in this place and time. The texts of the *cantigas* are written in Gallo-Portuguese, and most are set syllabically in strophic form with a refrain.

Scholars have debated the extent of Arabic influence on the music of this repertory. Large portions of the Iberian peninsula had been under Muslim rule since the 8th century, and the impact of this culture on Spain and Portugal extended to virtually every aspect of life. Exactly how much musical influence is to be found in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* remains unclear, however.

Germany

In German-speaking lands, the **Minnesinger** (literally, singers of *Minne*, or courtly love) developed their own repertory of songs. The most famous of these poet-composer-performers were Tannhäuser (ca. 1230–1280), the central character in Wagner’s 19th-century opera of the same name; Walther von der Vogelweide (ca. 1170–1230);

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ALFONSO EL SABIO (?)

Cantigas de Santa Maria, no. 140

Score Anthology I/8

Knight music. A combatant prepares for a jousting tournament to the accompaniment of a lute (played with a plectrum) and a vielle in this image from a 14th-century French manuscript.

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France



Performance Perspective

Interpreting the Troubadour and Trobairitz Repertory

Our knowledge of the troubadour and trobairitz repertory is sketchy at best. What few written sources survive convey only words and pitches, but no rhythms. Iconographic evidence and verbal accounts suggest that these songs were performed with instrumental accompaniment, but we have no idea of what form that accompaniment might have taken. In short, we have very little evidence of how these works were actually performed. This leaves contemporary performers with considerable latitude in interpreting these works. The performances of the two *cançons* in the Anthology represent just a sampling of possibilities. Both use instrumental accompaniments that are wholly speculative, and both reflect the influence of Arabic music on European secular musicians of the medieval era, the result not only of the various Christian crusades to Islamic Palestine but also the occupation of the Iberian peninsula by the Moors from the 8th century on. Libby Crabtree, the soprano of the Martin Best Consort, sings *A chantar m'es al cor* with a relatively pure sound to the accompaniment of an ensemble of instruments: a fiddle, which provides sustained drones in a manner that recalls the practice of organum (to be discussed in Chapter 2); an *oud*, the

Middle Eastern forerunner to the lute; and a psaltery, a plucked string instrument resembling a small zither. The group brings a strong sense of organization to the piece, although pulse is never allowed to dominate the flow.

The Clemencic Consort, by contrast, uses only a psaltery accompaniment, and the tenor, Frederick Urrey, employs a more declamatory and slightly nasal style of singing reminiscent of traditional Middle Eastern performance practice even today: he “slides” into and out of notes, and the intonation is intentionally flexible. The group adds a brief improvised segment on the recorder between verses. Among the most recorded of Vidal’s songs, *Baros* (or *Baron* or *Barons* as it has been transmitted in some sources) has been performed in a variety of singing styles and with a wide range of accompanying instruments, including flute and hand drum as well as the instruments mentioned previously. There is even one recording of *Baros* for solo *vielle* (fiddle), without a singer. As with performances of Hildegard’s *Ordo virtutum*, these ensembles and others have only their imaginations to limit their aesthetic choices.



Countess (Beatriz) de Dia. Her precise identity remains uncertain, but this trobairitz probably penned many more songs than *A chantar*, the only one securely ascribed to her.

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France



Peire Vidal. One contemporary described this celebrated troubadour as “the best singer in the world and a good finder [creator]; but he was the most foolish man in the world, because he thought everything tiresome except verse.”

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France

The Cantigas de Santa Maria.

Although ascribed to Alfonso el Sabio (“Alfonso the Wise”), who ruled the Kingdom of Castile and León I, scholars now believe that if Alfonso wrote any of the words or music at all, he probably wrote a relatively small number of them. In this image, from one of the several 13th-century manuscripts that preserve the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Alfonso (center right) listens to musicians performing a song in praise of the Virgin Mary (right). The instruments include three psalteries of varying shapes, a recorder, and a *vielle* (fiddle). Dancers perform in the background.

Source: Album/Oronoz/Newscom



and Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170–1220), author of the epic *Parzifal*. Chivalry, the praise of God, and the praise of noblewomen are recurrent themes in their songs. Many *Minnelieder* (*Lieder* means “songs”) are written in **bar Δ17form**, consisting of two musically identical statements (called *Stollen*) and a final closing statement (the *Abgesang*), creating the pattern of AAB.

Walther von der Vogelweide’s *Palästinalied* provides a good example of this repertory. In bar form and largely syllabic, it tells of a crusader knight’s thrill at standing on the same ground as Christ had during his lifetime. (The First Crusade had captured Jerusalem, permitting Christians to make pilgrimages to the holy city.) Like the songs of the troubadours and trouvères, the *Minnelieder* were almost certainly performed to the accompaniment of instruments, but no notated source of this accompaniment has been preserved.

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WALTHER VON DER VOGELWEIDE

Palästinalied

Score Anthology 1/9

SUMMARY

By the time the repertories of secular monophony reached their peak in the 11th and 12th century, polyphony had already established itself in the realms of both the sacred and secular. The repertory of liturgical plainchant would continue as an integral element of the Christian liturgy for many centuries, supplemented by newer works for multiple voices. Secular monophony, however, would gradually be supplanted by polyphonic genres by the end of the 14th century.