

Gregorian Chant: Local Traditions, their Meaning for Music Performance Today and New Approaches in Research

*Ergo et nos qui de rivo corruptam lympham usque hactenus bibimus, ad perennis fontis necesse est fluenta principalia recurramus.*¹
“Thus, we who up to now have also been drinking water from dirty streams need to return to the eternal source.”

Introduction

This paper has stemmed out within the context of my dissertation work the central theme of which is both the manuscript *Missale Rigense*², dating back to the 14th century and the local tradition of music in medieval Riga. These words above, attributed to Charlemagne – concerning the decadence of liturgical chant in the Carolingian empire and necessity of returning to Roman models – come back almost in cycles, during the centuries of what we call Gregorian chant. The quotation probably doesn't express the historical truth, but what we can see, is – the question of the stream and its source has been important already many years ago. Uttered by different personalities, in periods stretched between the 9th and 21st centuries, these words often describe very different realities and witness to a lingering existence of conflicts around that mysterious ideal: the *authenticity* of liturgical chant performance. The primary issue I am going to focus on is finding answer to the question if the musical material of the above manuscript comprises any particular local music tradition at all, owing to the fact that this aspect, being directly linked with such issues as history, identity and local music practice, in the music history of medieval Riga has never been investigated. This undoubtedly poses another question, concerning the notion of globality and locality in music, which is a very interesting question in research of Gregorian chant and its performance today. The big question is, if any local Gregorian chant tradition (written sources and performance practice) has it's own value or, should we just try to come back to the one, authentic version of it?

Text and melody: different approaches

Undoubtedly the main composition principle of Gregorian chant is the relation between the text and melody, where melody tries to express the deepest meaning of the text and its liturgical context. The interesting thing is, that this principle is interpreted differently in different sources, traditions and performance practices. During the decades of 20th century chant research, scholars specialized in musical paleography and its links to interpretation considered some types of early neumatic notation as rhythmically more precise. They gave a privileged role to the earliest neumes of the Saint Gall and Metz families.³ Since the same text can reveal different truths to different readers, this knowledge cannot be reduced to a set of tables and recipes for a precise performance of each neume. The discipline known as Gregorian semiology brought a new, enriching perspective to the understanding of the earliest neumes. However, the several performance schools engendered by Gregorian semiology bear witness that each of them represents just one possible point of view, an interpretation of an interpretation.⁴ It is also paradigmatical to compare different chant performances which all take as inspiration E.Cardine's research and believe in their accurate following of the principles of Gregorian semiology. If we listen to chant performances advised by such scholars as Godehard Joppich (ensemble “Singphoniker”), Alberto Turko (ensemble “In Dulci Jubilo”) and Marie Noël Colette (ensemble “Gilles Binchois”, directed by Dominique Vellard) in the last decades of the 20th century, we will be astonished by differences in their approach to the rhythm and articulation of chant melodies. The source is one and the same, but the outcomes so different...

¹ Iohannes Diaconus, *Vita Gregorii*, in: J.Migne (ed.), *Patrologia latina*, Paris 1892, vol.75, col. 90–91.

² The manuscript is available in Latvian Academic Library (Riga, Latvia).

³ I'm speaking here mainly about Dom Eugène Cardine's research and his work *Semiologia Gregoriana*, 1968.

⁴ See the very late text of E.Cardine: “Sèmiologie et interprétation” in: *Ut mens concordet voci. Festschrift Eugène Cardine*, St.Ottilien 1980, 31.

Performances inspired by Dom Eugène Cardine's studies take into account all the subtleties provided by Saint Gall manuscripts with their rich indications for rhythm and neume grouping. Still, besides the importance of careful references to rhythmical nuances in the neumatic script, there are many other levels one may also need to consider when incarnating these signs into sound. The same levels fit also with later manuscripts of 12th-14th centuries. There is the text, the rhetorical function of each piece with its profile crystallized over centuries of oral transmission, there is its modal identity, ornamental richness, the architectural space in which it should be performed and understood. And last but not least: the mentality, native tongue and musical taste of particular performers play a very significant role in the process of interpretation as well. All these elements influence decisions about performance. Yet we will never be able to know precisely which was the meaning of terms such as *long* and *short*, *fast* and *slow* for Saint Gall cantors and scribes, how these values relate to each other, and how flexible they were in their symbiosis with the text of a piece. Medieval chant didn't survive only through the mirror of Saint Gall neumes and if we want to perform chant repertoire from other (also later) sources we shouldn't be trapped by a St.Gall short-sightedness or apply parameters from one notation to another. The ultimate help and guide in the performance of neumes seems to be the text of the particular chant we are singing, the sense of the story we are telling. Only in connection with the text, and with the modal structure of a concrete chant melody, can neumes and the particular melody itself reveal their inner logic.

Local traditions of gregorian chant

The matters of globality and locality in music is nothing new and we face these question already in Middle Ages. We can even speak about the first Carolingian "globalization" of liturgical song and its repercussions in the sound universe of chant traditions in 9th century Europe. Already then, in 9th century, we can observe an almost legendary confrontation between the Carolingian cantors and the local musical traditions which they sought to replace by their own repertoires and vocal styles. We can imagine an astonishing diversity of chant styles of medieval Europe, at a time when chant traditions were competing for ascendancy in the young empire of Pippin, Charlemagne and their successors.

The imperial reform of the liturgy and its musical structures arrived in the different regions of the Carolingian empire almost as a "cultural revolution", finding in many places an established local liturgy with which it had to contend.⁵ In the name of Roman authority, used by Charlemagne in a political goal of unification, many local liturgical and musical traditions were suppressed. Of the local musical traditions which survived this confrontation, each has been preserved in a different way: some survived for several centuries before being completely eradicated (Beneventan chant in Southern Italy); and some were merged with layers of other traditions in building the complex, hybrid repertoire which we commonly call "Gregorian chant".

Texts written already in the Carolingian period by such personalities as John the Deacon⁶ or Notker of St.Gall⁷ often mention differences among these regional traditions. But, do they only refer to the differences between melodies? For Charlemagne's contemporaries, maybe the word *difference* meant rather a diversity in performance styles, in the approach to the text articulation? Perhaps, they referred to the variable numbers of singers involved in the performance in different regions, or to the pronunciation of Latin? In trying to find concrete vocal solutions to these dilemmas, one notices, how delicate is the border between the *same*, *similar* and *different*, as mentioned by medieval authors. A chant melody can be perceived as *same* from place to place of its melody, but also because of its text, its liturgical assignment, its sound, the vocal technique of the performer, or its particular ornamentation style.

The missal of Riga

Now I would like to focus on a more ancient musical evidence which documents the life of sacral music in medieval Riga, namely, the missal of Riga. Although much later than the above examples, the missal of Riga, dating back to the 14th century, represents a local musical tradition, having its own particular place within the context of numerous sacral music traditions of the late Middle Ages.

Rather little is known about the medieval church music in Riga. Only individual suppositions are possible in this field, based on established medieval facts, concerning the prevalent trends of church music in Europe.

⁵ See for example: Susan K.Rankin, "Carolingian music", in: *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and innovation*, ed. Rosamund McKitterick, Cambridge 1993, 274–316.

⁶ Iohannes Diaconus, *Vita Gregorii*, in: J.Migne (ed.), *Patrologia latina*, Paris 1892, vol.75.

⁷ *Notker Balbuli Gesta Karoli Magni Imperatoris*, ed. H.F.Haeefele, *MGH, Scriptorem Rerum Germanicarum, Nova Series*, 12, Berlin 1959.

Although already the 12th century marks a remarkable borderline in the transition from the music of one voice to polyphonic⁸, it is unlikely that church music of medieval Riga of the 13th–14th centuries was polyphonic. Most probably they still were Gregorian chants which for several centuries had presented themselves as the most appropriate and widely-spread repertoire of church music in Western Europe. This fact is supported by the only written evidence, preserved till nowadays – the so-called *Missale Rigense*. In the history of music in Latvia the fact that the above manuscript which dates back to the 14th century has preserved till nowadays is unique. The voluminous book presents a lot of information, concerning the service practice in the Riga Cathedral of the 14th century. One can find there both the liturgical calendar with the cycle of celebrations, pertaining to the Riga of those by-gone days and various service procedures alongside with texts for reading and prayers. As a whole, this material provides a rich documentation of worshipping praxis and tradition. The above manuscript is still more worthy, owing to the musical notation it contains. Thus, the missal of Riga proves to be the first musical evidence in the history of Latvia due to the scores of Gregorian chants to be found there.

It may be stated with assurance that the five mass chants, documented in the above codex present only an insignificant part of the Riga cathedral musical life in those faraway days. The exquisite notation of the chants and the sophisticated level of their vocal technique clearly present medieval Riga as a flourishing centre of culture where its Cathedral of Saint Mary has witnessed chants which sounded in all most significant sacral music centres in Europe, namely, monasteries and cathedrals.

All in all, the missal of Riga contains musical notations of five Gregorian chants:

INROITUS:	Terribilis est
GRADUALE:	Locus iste
ALLELUIA:	Vox exultationis
OFFERTORIUM:	Domine Deus
COMMUNIO:	Domus mea

All these mass chants are traditional *Proprium* chants for the feast of Dedication of a church (*In Dedicazione Ecclesiae*), which in Middle Ages were performed not only during the consecration of a cathedral or church but also while annually commemorating that day. The notation of the missal of Riga has been presented in the form of the so-called *Hufnagel-Notation* which in Middle Ages is common alongside with square notation. The former is mostly made use of in all mass antiphonales of German origin, whereas in Italian and French manuscripts one can more often find the so-called square notation.

Carrying out an exploration of the local musical tradition of medieval Riga which has been documented in the codex *Missale Rigense* one has to conclude that prior to a detailed analysis of particular chants it is of vital importance to gather information, concerning a wider musical context of the given tradition, comprising diverse musical traditions, pertaining to the above period and significant issues of notation. It should be noted that already since the reign of the pope Gregory the Great (540–604) the catholic church is characterized by a regular and active disposition the principal aim of which is to unify the liturgically-musical tradition, thus attaining a presumably more comprehensive unity. Already Gregory the Great realized that, singing the same plainsongs and celebrating one and the same mass, it was possible to consolidate church which was geographically more and more expanding. However, it should be mentioned that this aim essentially has not been achieved even up to the Council of Trent (1543–1563) and many churches and monasteries still preserve more or less local traditions, compared to those cultivated in Rome which are more or less different. Within the above context it becomes evident that the local tradition of Riga also presents not only particular features which document the singularity of Riga musical tradition as such but these features have to be considered within a more extended regional context. As indicated above, Riga as a metropolis of Livonia at that time largely incorporates into the context of north-German musical tradition⁹, however, presenting several interesting peculiarities.

Investigating and analyzing in detail the chants of the missal of Riga and comparing them to other manuscripts of the 14th century together with the relevant local traditions, one more regularity becomes evident to be definitely considered. Namely, regarding the line of chant melody and modal peculiarities, it is possible to find features in common which are characteristic of several manuscripts, representing a particular region of

⁸ The first half of the 12th century – the two-part singing tradition of the Limoges cathedral; The second half of the 12th century – the beginning of a rapid growth of *Notre Dame* school in Paris.

⁹ It goes without saying that it cannot be disassociated with a more extended view on the overall cultural tradition which incorporates both art and architecture alongside with the liturgical praxis and significant aspects of the cultural tradition).

medieval Europe. Theoretically, it can be called German choral tradition which in this case means not only manuscripts of German origin alone as it certainly is in the case of the missal of Riga but embraces also the territory of the present-day Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Slovakia etc. In musicology the above tradition is also referred to as German choral dialect. The author of this term who juxtaposes the so-called Roman choral dialect to the German choral dialect is one of the most significant 20th century researchers in the field of medieval music – Peter Wagner (1865-1931) who defined German choral dialect primarily according to a particular unitary and altered structure of intervals to be found in the melody lines of Gregorian chants. The fundamental essence of these interval alterations manifests itself as a gradual loss of notes in chants, having a half-tone above them in the tone-row, namely, *E* and *B*. Usually it occurs when prior to these sounds the melody anticipates a saltatory movement, for instance, *D-A-B*. It is particularly indicative in the case of *B* where it most often transforms into *B-flat* or *C*. It is highly probable, that these alterations resulted from intonation problems as well which may occur while intoning half-tone after a bigger interval (for instance, the fifth) or after the sequence of several major seconds. Here it is again clearly seen that numerous phenomena in medieval music have emerged spontaneously, resulting from the difficulties of regular performing or some other kind of interaction. Even more, as described by Peter Wagner the above alterations are substantiated by a live development within motion: *The hereditary aspect of medieval chants is subjected to the same law, the live creative spirit of the whole civilization is subjected to: develops that who lives and flourishes; only that who is dead and cold remains stiff and unaffected. The driving force, being active in all times and serving art, manifests itself in the Gregorian choral tradition as well.*¹⁰

To concretize the difference of chants between the musical tradition of Riga and the contemporary universally accepted *Vaticana* version let us compare both variants on the basis of Introitus *Terribilis est*. The highlighted fragments in the *Vaticana* version are those which in the missal of Riga are different.

Example 1. The missal of Riga, manuscript of 14th century in German Hufnagel notation.

Example 2. The manuscript of Einsiedeln¹¹ and *Vaticana*¹². The manuscript of Einsiedeln reveals the tradition of St. Gall neums (beginning of 11th century), whereas *Vaticana* version has been authorized by the Roman catholic church in the square notation and corrected for the last time in the late 20th century.

¹⁰ Wagner Peter, *Einführung in die Gregorianischen Melodien // Ein Handbuch der Choralwissenschaft. Zweiter Teil – Neumenkunde*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970, 435. *Dennoch war auch die mittelalterliche Gesangsüberlieferung nicht von dem Gesetze ausgenommen, dem alles lebendige Geisteswerk der Menschheit unterworfen ist: was lebt und blüht, verändert sich, nur das Tote, Kalte ist starr und unveränderlich. Die treibenden Kräfte, die dem Fortschritt der Zeiten und der Kunst dienen, waren auch in der Choraltradition tätig.*

¹¹ *Codex Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibl.121 (Paléographie Musicale IV)*.

¹² To find in the choral book *Graduale Triplex* (1979).

Ethnomusicological approach and its benefits

The very big question now is, how to analyze and understand these differences we find in these two melody versions. Could it really be, that cantors of medieval Riga sensed and performed music differently than in Italy or France? I will try now to give an idea of contemporary global methods of analysis and scientific investigation towards exploring the repertoire of Gregorian chant as such alongside with its diverse local traditions. Such posing of the problem naturally calls for an extended and interdisciplinary approach to the issue to be investigated which is characteristic of ethnomusicological approach, however, the scope of research presents also several problems where also the classical approach of music history still proves to be essential. While investigating these two approaches, I will try to reveal the distinctive feature of the ethnomusicological approach.

An increasingly more significant part is played by approaches, characteristic of ethnomusicology which open a more extended and sometimes quite an unexpected horizon and context for numerous investigations. To illustrate this one has to cite the ideas of Alan P. Merriam, an outstanding 20th century American musicologist and anthropologist of music, which are for the first time most laconically voiced in his book *Anthropology of Music*. He comes forward with a suggestion that music should be studied in three analytical levels: the conceptualization of music, behaviour with relation to music and the sounding of music. A. Merriam puts a lot of emphasis on the relationship between music and anthropology, thus providing for a wider context, while considering the origin of music, and a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons of emerging of sound and their interaction. Awareness of the contexts of the relevant cultures, among them technological, economical, social, political, religious, artistic and linguistic, prove to be an essential element while carrying out research with such an approach.¹³

American musicologist Peter Jeffery has focused on these problems more in detail, highlighting the necessity of ethnomusicological approach to the research of medieval music nowadays. He holds that, owing to the necessity of highly specific knowledge in the expertise of old manuscripts and notation; in the theoretical concepts of ancient Latins and Greeks and in the history of liturgy and theology, critical investigation in the field of medieval chants is still left at the disposal of historical musicologists. In this connection Peter Jeffery writes the following: *But because ethnomusicologists have shied away from chant research, many very basic questions that they routinely raise about every musical tradition have gone virtually unasked. As a result, entire areas of chant study that ethnomusicologists would find especially interesting and useful are very poorly researched.*¹⁴

Ethnomusicological investigation of Gregorian choral music is vital not only for placing the choral praxis on solid basis of a decent comparison of different cultures, but also to reveal something that has not been studied in the long run, as far as this old and significant musical tradition is concerned, which has been and is still being cultivated in different continents and countries all over the world. This marks again an extremely important field of research which proves to be central in my investigation as well – the influence of local music culture on different aspects of choral performance and notation. The most obvious indicator of this fact is: for the past three decades, one of the most debated subjects in chant study has been the problem of oral and written transmission, a subject that was once regarded as the peculiar province of ethnomusicology. However, it seems that it is just there that an explanation for such a big discrepancy among local traditions can be found.

The problem of transmission in the present-day research is becoming increasingly topical because to study it closer it is necessary to consider the relevant repertoire from the most diverse standpoints. This problem is also covered in the works by American musicologist Janice Kleeman who lists various phenomena to be encountered in the process of investigation: *The parameters of musical transmission extend to phenomena physiological and psychological, acoustical and anthropological, as well as to matters musical that we conventionally consider. It is necessary to interrelate the seminal contributions of various disciplines to the study of transmission, with the aim of broadening what has been, up to now, a too often culturally-biased perspective upon a topic too narrowly defined.*¹⁵

Such an approach has no real alternative and essentially there is nothing new in it: the use of ethnomusicological perspectives in medieval musicology has been defended for many decades (for instance, in Hungarian and Czech musicology).¹⁶ Such perspectives are to be found particularly often in the works of several outstanding scientists of Eastern and Central Europe, always viewing traditional and professional music as

¹³ See in: Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1980, 358.

¹⁴ Peter Jeffery, "Re-Envisioning Past Musical Cultures." *Ethnomusicology in the Study of GREGORIAN CHANT*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1995, 2.

¹⁵ Janice E. Kleeman, "The parameters of Musical Transmission." *The Journal of Musicology* 1985–86, 4: 1–22.

¹⁶ See for example: Bardos 1975; Dobszay 1971, 1990.

equally worth investigating. These works present local traditions not as a mistake of some later period or even fallacy (as it seen sometimes seen today), but as an extremely valuable material which illustrates the particular musical tradition.

Conclusion

Especially significant role in research of local musical practices gives the approach of ethnomusicology. It opens new perspectives which consider Gregorian chant as a musical corpus in whose not only early history oral transmission had an essential role, represented an immense liberation and a chance to see aspects of chant composition, transmission (oral – written – literate) and performance in a different light. As an inspiration for the learning and transmission of chant melodies, these ideas provide significant support to chant scholars and performers. These scholarly initiatives encouraged a current in chant performances. The belief in a unique, Roman, origin of Gregorian chant, which was put in question in the domain of research during the 20th century – ironically, after the discovery of Old Roman manuscripts¹⁷ – still seems to wait for a serious transformation in the world of performance. We admit the existence of a plurality of local chant traditions in the Middle Ages. We should first of all accept, that they can sound very differently, or that they sounded (and still sound) differently to different listeners; and finally, that our visions of them can sound even more differently. As an inspiration for the learning and transmission of chant melodies, these ideas provide significant support to musicologists and performers.

Santrauka

Grigališkasis choralas: vietinės tradicijos, jų šiandieninė reikšmė muzikos atlikimui ir nauji tyrimo metodai

Šio pranešimo pagrindas yra mano disertacija, kurioje nagrinėju XIV a. *Missale Rigense* rankraštį ir vietinės muzikos tradiciją viduramžių Rygoje. Pirmiausia ieškau atsakymo į klausimą, ar minėto rankraščio muzikinė medžiaga yra kiek nors paveikta vietinės muzikos tradicijos, nes šis aspektas, tiesiogiai susijęs su tokiomis problemomis kaip istorija, identiškas ir vietinė muzikinė praktika, niekada nebuvo tyrinėtas viduramžių Rygos muzikinėje istorijoje. Tad neabejotinai kyla kitas klausimas, susijęs su muzikos globalumo ir lokalumo sąvoka, kuri yra itin aktuali šiandien tyrinėjant grigališkąjį choralą ir jo atlikimą.

Be jokios abejonės, pagrindinis grigališkojo choralo kompozicijos principas yra ryšys tarp teksto ir melodijos, o melodijos uždavinys – išreikšti giliausią teksto prasmę ir liturginę mintį. Įdomu tai, kad šis principas įvairiuose šaltiniuose, tradicijose ir koncertinėse praktikose interpretuojamas skirtingai.

Šiuolaikinių analizės globalinių metodų ir mokslinių tyrinėjimų apžvalgą mėginu pateikti analizuodamas grigališkąjį choralą ir įvairias jo vietines tradicijas. Dar Karolingų laikais Johnas Deaconas ir Notkeras iš St. Gall savo tekstuose dažnai minėjo regioninių tradicijų skirtumus. Tačiau ar jie turėjo omenyje tik skirtumus tarp melodijų? Karolio Didžiojo amžininkams žodis *skirtumas* galbūt reiškė skirtingą atlikimo stilių, požiūrį į teksto artikuliaciją? Gal jie turėjo omenyje nepastovų dainininkų skaičių skirtinguose regionuose ar lotynišką tarimą? Bandydami surasti konkrečius vokaličius šių dilemų sprendimus, pastebime, kad, kaip nurodo viduramžių autoriai, tėra nežymi riba tarp *tas pats*, *panašus* ir *skirtingas*. Choralo melodiją galime suvokti kaip *tą pačią* dėl teksto, liturginės paskirties, skambesio, atlikėjo vokalinės technikos arba ypatingo ornamentinio stiliaus.

Toks problemos iškėlimas, žinoma, reikalauja platesnio tarpdalykinio požiūrio į analizuojamą problemą. Tai būdinga **etnomuzikologiniam požiūriui**, tačiau tyrimo apimtis kelia dar keletą problemų, kurių sprendimui būtinas **klasikinis požiūris** į muzikos istoriją. Tyrinėdamas šiuos du požiūrius, mėginu atskleisti bendruosius ir skiriamuosius bruožus.

Ypač svarbus vaidmuo tyrinėjant vietinės muzikos praktikas tenka etnomuzikologijai. Ji atveria naujas perspektyvas, padedančias pažvelgti į grigališkąjį choralą kaip į muzikinę visumą, suteikiančią progą pamatyti choralo **kompozicinius aspektus, perteikimą** (žodinių–rašytinių–raštingą) ir **atlikimą** kitoje šviesoje. Šios idėjos, kaip įkvėpimas mokytis ir perteikti choralo melodijas, suteikia žymią paramą choralo specialistams ir atlikėjams.

¹⁷ See a concise synthesis of that process in Michael Huglo, “La recherche en musicologie médiévale au XXe siècle”, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 39 (1996) 72–75.