

# GREGORIAN CHANT





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*A Guide to the History and Liturgy*



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*In memory of Canon Jean Jeanneteau*



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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER  
ABOUT THIS EDITION

At the request of Paraclete Press, Dr. Mary Berry, CBE, founder of the Schola Gregoriana in Cambridge, England, translated this book into English. The French edition was written by Dom Daniel Saulnier, OSB, and entitled *Le Chant grégorien par un moine de Solesmes*.

By the time of her death in 2008, Dr. Berry had completed her work and approved minor changes. It fell to the editorial staff at Paraclete Press to assemble the various chapters in the spirit of the French original and the translator's style. Since this work was completed posthumously, any errors in the text are the responsibility of the publisher and not of Dr. Mary Berry, a renowned and accomplished scholar, and an inspired friend.



# 1

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## HISTORY

*I am searching everywhere to find out about  
what people thought, what they did, and what they  
loved in the Church throughout the  
ages of faith.*

DOM GUÉRANGER

ABOUT two thousand years ago the Christian message left the holy city of Jerusalem and the lands of Syria and Palestine and spread rapidly all around the basin of the Mediterranean. As the message spread, so also the practice of Christian worship—what we know as the liturgy, or public prayer—was being developed. Since this was a time when any idea of centralization was completely unknown, each region was soon celebrating the liturgy, and therefore singing it, in its own language.

This diversity of language has been maintained up to the present day in the liturgies of the Middle East. In the lands of the western Mediterranean it would be different. After the first two centuries when the liturgy was celebrated in Greek, Latin—the language of everyday life—came to be used more and more. So each region of the Christian West began to have a repertory of sacred music of its own: there was a

single language but different texts and music. We know for certain that there existed:

- Beneventan chant, in southern Italy,
- Roman chant, in the city of Rome and its dependencies,
- Milanese chant, in northern Italy,
- Hispanic chant, on both sides of the Pyrenees,
- One, or perhaps several types of Gallican chant, in the lands of Roman Gaul.

### ROMAN ORIGINS

Of all these different repertoires of Latin chant in early Western Europe, the Milanese is the only one to be still in use today. The church of Milan has indeed preserved its own liturgy, not without some difficulty or compromise. The chant is still called “Ambrosian,” from the name of the spiritual protector of this whole tradition, the Bishop St. Ambrose (d. 397). It is to be found in manuscripts of the twelfth century.

As for the ancient Roman tradition, we learn about it from certain rather vague historical references,<sup>1</sup> but especially from the Sacramentaries.<sup>2</sup> So we are well informed about the ordering of the ancient Roman

liturgy,<sup>3</sup> but what about the chant? It could certainly have come to us only through oral transmission. Five books, dating from between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, have brought us the repertory as it was sung in certain of the Roman basilicas of that period. Even if there was any distortion or corruption this must have been minimal, for there are few variant readings among the five manuscripts. These sources make it possible for us to recapture to a large extent the tradition of the Old Roman chant.<sup>4</sup>

In essence, the composition of the Roman repertory dates from the fifth to sixth centuries. The Church had been free of persecutions since the beginning of the fourth century; even the administrative structure of the Roman Empire seems to have, as it were, passed into its hands. The building of the great basilicas had made it possible for public worship to take a great leap forward and to assume a new dignity. All the arts were making their contribution, and music had its place as well. It is a fact that up to that time most of the singing had been the preserve of the solo cantor. But the *schola cantorum* made its appearance at this moment, a group of about twenty clergy (experienced cantors and young pupils in training) who would place their competence at the service of liturgical celebration. Between the sixth and seventh centuries, this specialized group developed a repertory of sacred music made up of two categories of pieces.

The first category was a revision of the existing repertory. From then on, the *schola* was to replace the solo cantor for the performance of certain pieces, which up to that time would have been reserved for him, but would now be given by them a more elaborate style and a structure of greater complexity.

The second was the composition of fresh chants, linked to the development of spacious basilicas and to the ceremonial they command; one example of this would have been the chant called for by an imposing procession during the solemn entry of the celebrant.

By the time of Pope Gregory I (590) the composition of the whole corpus of Roman melodies would appear to have been completed.

#### THE FRANKISH–ROMAN MERGING

During the second half of the eighth century, a rapprochement was beginning to take place between the Frankish Kingdom (of Pépin the Short and his son Charlemagne), and the Papacy (Stephen II and his successors). This rapprochement was at first political: the estates of the Papacy were being threatened by the Lombards, whereas the young King of the Franks was anxious to ensure the legitimacy of his right to a throne conquered after a severe struggle. Pépin the Short promised to protect the Papal estates, and the Pope came to France with his court, renewed the consecration of the

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King of the Franks, and made a long stay at the Abbey of Saint-Denis.

These events led to the new ruler's appreciation of Roman liturgical customs. Pépin the Short realized that these customs could help to ensure religious unity throughout his territories and thus strengthen their political unity. He therefore commanded that the Roman liturgy be adopted throughout his kingdom.

The introduction of the Roman liturgy had the practical result of suppressing the Gallican chant repertory and replacing it with the Roman. We can find, too, in the correspondence and chronicles of the time, several mentions of requests in Gaul for books from Rome. Books were sent and there were exchanges of cantors, because no musical notation for the chant was in existence at that period; the best that could be done was to send books containing the words, minus their melodies.

No written account has come down to us of what happened at that moment, in the second half of the eighth century, in Frankish Gaul between the Seine and the Rhine. Could the changeover perhaps have taken place at Metz? Liturgists and musicologists have compared the eleventh- to thirteenth-century Roman service-books with the Gregorian ones. Their conclusions lead to the following hypothesis, which seems highly probable:<sup>5</sup> at the time of the encounter between the two repertories, the Gallican and the Roman, some kind of cross-fertilization took place. It was a simple matter to impose the texts

of the Roman chants, since they were contained in the manuscripts. It was quite a different matter when it came to the melodies. The overall style of the Roman chant, including its modal structure,<sup>6</sup> was in general accepted by the Gallican musicians,<sup>7</sup> but they covered it over with a completely different style of ornamentation—the style to which they themselves were accustomed. In other words, instead of a simple replacement of one by the other, the result was a hybrid that might be formulated by the following equation:

*Roman \* Gallican → Frankish-Roman*

in which the arrow represents cross-fertilization.

The most ancient musical witness to this cross-fertilization goes back to the end of the eighth century, to the Tonary of Sant-Riquier,<sup>8</sup> which simply indicates the first words and the mode of a few pieces in the new style of chant. A whole century would pass before chant books containing musical notation would appear. The first ones to have come down to us date from the very end of the ninth century, and more especially from the tenth.

Like all the most ancient liturgical chants, the new Frankish-Roman chant repertory was born of the oral tradition, as can be clearly demonstrated by internal analysis. But if we accept the historical hypothesis that has just been described, there must have been a break in the oral tradition: the suppression of one local (Gallican)

repertory and its replacement by a foreign one (Frankish-Roman). This imposition of a new repertory on the entire West met with a great deal of resistance, in Gaul, in Milan, in Rome itself and in Spain. Two conditions helped finally to bring about the success of such an upheaval:

- the invention of a system of noting down the melodies in writing, which marks a considerable turning point in the history of music;
- the attribution of the composition of the new chant to one of the most famous figures of Christian antiquity: Pope Gregory the Great.<sup>9</sup>

The composition of Gregorian chant lies within the context of a great movement of civilization, which historians have called the first “Carolingian Renaissance.” During this period the barbarian races, which were in the process of establishing themselves, were looking toward the culture of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and they indulged in attempting to emulate the Byzantine Empire. As a result, the new repertory immediately became an object commanding the attention of the musicologists of the time. Those known as the theoreticians would force the various chants into rhythmic and modal categories sometimes far removed from the truth of their original composition. These are the same men, who—as early as the ninth century, in other words, even before the writing

of musical notation was fully in place—were to go in for experimentation with syllabication and organum, which would provide the new repertory with unforeseen developments.

## NEW COMPOSITIONS AND REFORMS

Seen from the musical point of view, the second half of the Middle Ages appears as a period of intense creativity and theorizing.

### *The Progress of Notation*

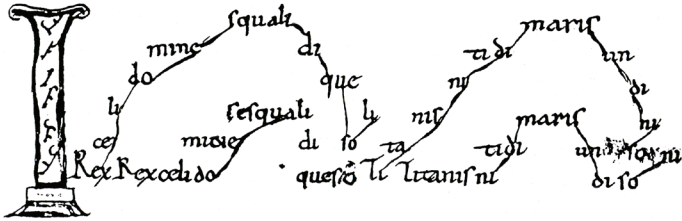
The earliest notations have no indication of pitch intervals, but only of rhythmic values and agogics [variations of expression]. This is clearly what was best for a type of music that is essentially a vocal declamation, guided by the extreme freedom of the inflexions of the words. But notation was soon required to find some way of indicating the pitches of intervals. By comparing manuscripts, one can see that this further requirement had the effect of making it impossible to maintain the delicate precision of the rhythmic signs.

The gradual appearance of staff lines, then clefs and the guide, and finally their interconnection within the system of the Guidonian stave [named after Guido d'Arezzo]—all this, while restricting the notator's possibility of showing precisions of rhythm, helped to expand the diffusion of the repertory and to lighten the memory

load. The Guidonian stave, developed during the first half of the eleventh century, might be compared with a filter through which to view the original composition. It will probably prevent us from ever discovering the complete truth about the primitive scales, with their micro-intervals and the practice of *musica ficta*.

ve, etc. Archangé-lica Marí- am fá-  
 mina salutánti-a sic fantur: Ave maris, cœli, terræ orbis  
 renátrix Mari-a, grávida intácta et Dé-i grá-ti- a ple-na.  
 Domino summi De-i géni-to altitróno complacu-ísti devó-  
 ta virgo, íde- o Do- minus tecum, etc.

— offertory trope Ave Maria —



— Polyphonic sequence *Rex cæli Domine* —

At its birth, musical notation was intimately tied to oral transmission. Before it came into being one sang everything from memory. For decades while it was being elaborated one still sang by heart, but the cantor had recourse to the book to prepare himself before the service. Once the system of notation was established everyone sang with their eyes glued to the book. Little by little the role of the memory diminished; the singer was no longer able to reproduce the original vocal articulations: he was stopped in his tracks by the inevitable inadequacy of the signs.<sup>10</sup> A new chapter of musical history was about to begin.

“The loss of momentum in the flow of Gregorian music, caused by fixed restrictive points of phraseology, opened up a new era of creation.”<sup>11</sup>

*Syllabication of melismas*

A melisma, or *jubilus*, is a vocalization, a moment of pure music that develops over a single syllable; it is a means of elaboration that is essential to Gregorian chant. From the ninth century onwards, however, the melismas of certain pieces (*Alleluia*, *Kyrie*, and others) became the object of *syllabication* with the addition of tropes—that is, extra words, one syllable for each note of the melisma. These tropes, which display both wit and ingenuity, not to mention mannerisms and pedantry, were hugely popular as early as the tenth century.

“But there was another side to the coin which must be taken into account: when melismas, which were originally purely vocalizations, were transformed into syllabic chants by the addition of words, this modification changed not only the original style, but also contributed to distorting the rhythm; in effect, it resulted in the individual notes, which were often of varying duration as seen in the original notation, ending up being all of the same length when each is pronounced as a single syllable.”<sup>12</sup>

*Organum*

The ninth-century treatise *Musica enchiriadis* contains the first piece of polyphony known in the West, and it lists the first theoretic requirements for music in more than one part. It is obvious that a simple doubling at the fourth totally destroys any sense of the modality of the original single line of melody, whereas the efforts of the performers to keep the parts together spells utter ruin to the flexibility of its rhythm.

After the Council of Trent (1545–1563) Gregorian chant entered upon a period of reforms regarding both editions and performance. The Renaissance and its “humanists”<sup>13</sup> took it upon themselves to make systematic corrections of the melodies, and to subject them to the rules of classical Latin (as they understood them at that time!). The long melismas, which had become tiresome since the art of singing them had been lost, were truncated, being left with only a few notes. The printed editions could offer nothing but “a heavy, boring succession of square notes, incapable of inspiring a single feeling and saying nothing to the soul.”<sup>14</sup>

## THE RESTORATION IN PROGRESS

In 1833, a young priest in the diocese of Le Mans, Prosper Guéranger, undertook the task of restoring the life of Benedictine monasticism to the priory of Solesmes after forty years of interruption due to the French

Revolution.<sup>15</sup> The Rule of St. Benedict describes the monastic day as being entirely centered around the solemn celebration of the Mass and the Divine Office. To restore the Benedictine way of life meant therefore a return to the liturgical forms of Christian antiquity. Dom Guéranger was not particularly musical, but he had good taste, erudition, and discernment. Moved by spiritual charisma, he started to work with enthusiasm for the restoration of Gregorian chant.

He began by criticizing his monks' performance of the chant and asked them to respect the primacy of the text, its pronunciation, accentuation, and phrasing, all this to guarantee intelligibility at the service of prayer. After a few years, thanks to the invaluable words of advice of a local priest, Canon Gontier, the singing of the chant in the little monastery was transformed, and news of it began to spread. The first rule of how to interpret Gregorian chant had been stated:

“The rule that governs all other rules is that, pure melody apart, chant is an intelligent declamation, with the rhythm of speech, and well-phrased. . . .”<sup>16</sup>

Between the years 1860 and 1865 Dom Guéranger put one of his monks, Dom Paul Jausions, in charge of restoring the authentic melodies, in accordance with the following principle:



“If someone honestly believes he has found the true Gregorian phrase in all its purity in a particular piece of chant, it will be when examples of that same piece, from churches some distance apart, give the same reading.”<sup>17</sup>

Work began in a very austere way. It entailed copying by hand the most ancient manuscripts of Gregorian chant to be found in the Bibliothèque Municipale d’Angers. Their script, “in delicate ‘fly-legs,’” was for the time being indecipherable.

In this effort to rediscover the original shape of Gregorian chant, the Abbot of Solesmes was not alone. His work was part of a wider movement of interest in the sacred repertory.<sup>18</sup> It was, nonetheless, at Solesmes that the work of restoration assumed the necessary scientific dimension. The first attempts at comparing a number of manuscripts, undertaken by Dom Jausions, were followed by those of Dom Joseph Pothier, and resulted in 1883 in the publication of a first book of chants for the Mass, in which the restitution had already reached a very creditable level of excellence. It had been preceded by *Les Mélodies Grégoriennes* in 1880, the first treatise on the composition and performance of Gregorian chant. This book is still of value today, having lost none of its relevance.

Dom André Mocquereau developed this scientific enterprise, by compiling a collection of facsimiles of the principal manuscripts containing the chant to be found in the libraries

of Europe. In so doing, he became the founder of the workshop and publication known by the name of *Paléographie Musicale* (1889).

This collection of facsimiles, enriched by such indispensable tools as catalogues, card indexes, and synoptic charts, constitutes the material foundation for the restoration of the Gregorian melodies.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, this research resulted in the publication of an official edition<sup>19</sup> of chants for the Mass (*Graduale Romanum*, 1908) and for the Divine Office (*Antiphonale Romanum*, 1912).

A further stage was reached with the publication of the *Antiphonale Monasticum* (1934), which shows how much progress had been achieved in this work of faithful restitution.

But this was not to be the final word on the chant: the Second Vatican Council (1963–1965) called for a new and better critical edition of the existing chant books.<sup>20</sup>

To achieve this aim, scholars at the present time have been greatly helped by the work of Dom Eugène Cardine (a monk of Solesmes, 1905–1988). It was he who first discovered the laws of the earliest hand-written neumes. He also laid the foundations for a critical edition of the *Graduale Romanum*. The origins of the Gregorian repertory remain shrouded in mystery,<sup>21</sup> making it impossible in our day to be certain that there exists a single manuscript archetype of this repertory, a unique and totally reliable source of all the documents that have come down to us. All we can look

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for is a source used for the diffusion of the repertory. The publication of this critical edition cannot therefore be envisaged within the short term. However, we now know which are the most important witnesses of the tradition: they are catalogued and studied; they are gradually revealing their secrets.

The word “restoration” deserves to be understood in its totality. To improve the basic shape of the melodies is already a step in the right direction toward the restoration of Gregorian chant. But this restoration will be fully achieved only when Gregorian chant is firmly integrated into the normal, living practice of the liturgy by the whole assembly (in monasteries, parishes, etc.). There are indeed some entire communities that are working hard at this restoration of the practice of the chant, but quietly, unobtrusively, and with no musicological pretensions whatsoever. . . .



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# LITURGY

*The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant  
to be the music that belongs specifically  
to the Roman liturgy.*

VATICAN II

**T**he Roman Catholic liturgy makes great use of the chant. Many actions of its public worship (processions, for example) are accompanied by chants. At certain moments the ritual act is reduced to a single line of text sung either by a solo voice or by the whole assembly (the chant between the readings, for example). Since chant is so closely linked to the liturgy, it is obvious that a study of Gregorian chant requires a thorough knowledge of the liturgy.

The heart of the liturgy is the celebration of the Mass, or Eucharist. In this sacred action during which the Church, solemnly gathered together in the diversity of her members, through the ministry of priests renews the actions and words of Christ on the evening of the Last Supper, the day before He freely offered Himself up to death for the salvation of mankind. For the last two thousand years, in obedience to the explicit command of Christ,<sup>22</sup> the Church has never ceased to re-enact these

gestures,<sup>23</sup> and it is in their accomplishment each Sunday that she passes them on to us. It is because the sacred chant is intimately bound up with this celebration, clothing it as with a garment, that we can understand how this very repetition of the liturgical action itself has passed the chant down to us.

Everything spread from Jerusalem, where the Church was founded, and from Antioch, where for the first time the disciples of Jesus were called Christians.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper was an innovation that marked a radical departure of Christian worship from that of Judaism. However, if the first Christians quickly distanced themselves from the sacrificial practices of the Temple, they were the heirs to a great deal of Jewish ritual practice.<sup>24</sup> For example, the morning Synagogue worship on the Sabbath, made up of Scripture readings, chants, Scriptural commentaries, and prayers,<sup>25</sup> is the origin of the first part of the Mass, the only difference being that the celebration took place on Sunday<sup>26</sup> to commemorate the Resurrection, instead of on Saturday. It added in the Christian texts that make up the New Testament, paving the way for a whole new liturgical creativity, which led, in its turn, to strong apostolic clarification.<sup>27</sup>

Christian liturgy also includes the Liturgy of the Hours, or the Divine Office. This collection of prayers marks the different moments of the day, resulting in nothing less than the sanctification of time. The cycle of the Hours was itself gradually elaborated as it developed

from its Jewish origins.<sup>28</sup> Even though this daily prayer affects every Christian, it is in monasticism that it finally took shape. The Rule of St. Benedict (ca. 530) exercised a decisive influence in this organization. There are two major celebrations in the daily structure: Lauds in the morning and Vespers in the evening; daybreak is anticipated shortly after midnight by the long service of Vigils (Matins), in which readings (from the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, and the lives of the saints) have pride of place. As the day goes on, the community reassembles for the “Little Hours”: Prime<sup>29</sup> in the early morning, Terce at about ten, Sext at the end of the morning, None at the beginning of the afternoon, and Compline just before bedtime.

For St. Benedict the Divine Office was above all a service of praise:

“Let us therefore, during these moments, offer up our praise to our Creator . . . and let us rise again in the night to praise Him. . . .”<sup>30</sup>

The singing of psalms and the readings from Holy Scripture constitute the main part of the repertory, but St. Benedict also allows for poetic, non-scriptural texts (hymns) and other ecclesiastical writings (litanies, special blessings and collects) to be included.

Ex. 15, 1. 2

VIII  
MBCKS

**C** Anté-mus- Dó-mi-no : gló-ri-ó-se e-

nim hōnō-ri-fi-cá-tus est : equū et ascen-

sō-rem prō-ié-cit in mā-re : adiú-

tor et prō-téctor factus est mi-hi in sa-lū-tem.

∇. Hic De-us me-us, et hōnō-rābo e-

um : De-us patris me-i, et ex-al-tā-

bo e-um. ∇. Dó-mi-nus cōnte-rens bel-

la : Dó-mi-nus nō-men est il-li.

— Paschal Vigil: —

*Canticle to follow a reading from the Book of Exodus*