

A CASE OF DRUNKENNESS

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IN this article I want to use a story by Notker Balbulus, recorded in his biography of Charlemagne (*Gesta Karoli*), to show how a ninth-century text can teach us something about the performance practice of Gregorian chant at that time. The *Gesta Karoli* were written for Charles the Fat between December 883 and May 884. This source has little value for historians, as Notker seems to have dealt very freely with the historical truth. For music scholars, the source is all the more meaningful. After all, Notker is the great musician of Sankt Gallen, the writer of the letter about the meaning of the letters in the oldest neum manuscripts and the creator of many sequences. When Notker describes a musical practice, he does not simply make it out of his mouth, but rather tries to represent the practice as he knew it as precisely as possible. It therefore seems likely that the description of the musical practices in the *Gesta Karoli* was also the practice in the monastery of Sankt Gallen, which is so important for the tradition of Gregorian chant.

The story In that *Gesta Karoli* the following story is told in chapter 5:

Once upon a time there was a cleric in the king's retinue, poor and despised, and not sufficiently educated in science (*scientia litterarum*). The very good Karel was concerned about the man's poverty and, although everyone hated him and tried to get rid of him, Karel never allowed himself to be persuaded to humiliate the man or remove him from his entourage. Now it happened that on the eve of Saint Martin the death of a bishop was reported to the emperor. He summoned one of his clergy, a man by no means mediocre in stature or education, and bestowed upon him the episcopal dignity. The man, beside himself with joy, invited many from the court. He also received many from that area who came to him with great pomp. He had a sumptuous feast prepared for all. Therefore, overloaded with food, drunk and intoxicated with clear wine, he neglected to come to Matins on that most holy night. However, it was customary for the school leader to appoint those who had to sing a responsory at night (*responsorium cantare*) the day before. To this man, who was already almost in possession of the episcopal office, the responsory *Domine, si adhuc populo tuo* was dedicated. So when he was absent and a long silence passed, and one urged another to stand up for the responsory, and one after another said that he should already sing a responsory of his own, at last the emperor said: 'Let someone sing it' (*Cantet aliquis*). And then that despised man arose and, inspired by the divine spirit and strengthened by such authority, he initiated the responsory.

Soon the kind-hearted king ordered him to be helped, thinking that he would not be able to sing it completely (*canere nosset*). Since the others were singing (*cantarent*), and this unfortunate man could not hear the verse from anyone, when the responsory had been sung (*cantato responsorio*), he began to sing the Lord's prayer entirely according to the rules of the art (*modulatissi me psallere*). While everyone wanted to prevent him, the very wise Charles forbade anyone to hinder him because he wanted to see for himself how he would bring it to an end. And when he closed the verse with these words: *Adveniat regnum tuum*, the others, whether they wanted to or not, had to answer: *Fiat voluntas tua*.

The responsory

To understand what was so special about what the man did, and why he chose the Lord's Prayer as the verse, I will first recall the function and form of the responsory. A responsory is a chant that functions as a reflection on a reading at Matins. I hereby print the responsory as music example 1, from the *Nocturnale Romanum* (NR). It should be noted that the text of the responsory is not by an anonymous cantor, but by Sulpicius Severus, who already wrote down the *Vita* - the life - of Martinus in the fourth century.

The *responsorium corpus* begins with the text *Domine, si adhuc populo tuo* etc. The last phrase of the corpus is then *fiat voluntas tua*, which serves as a repetition. Then the verse begins, here taken from the tenth-century codex Hartker, which the Sankt Galler tradition would hand down. After this verse follows the repetition of the last phrase of the corpus. The form is therefore corpus (including last phrase) - verse - last phrase corpus (=repetendum). The tenth century antiphonal Hartker then gives the incipit of a second verse. A responsory can also have a doxology as the second or last verse, a *Gloria Patri*, which is then followed by a repetition of the entire corpus, or only by the repetition. In the surviving melodies of the responsories we distinguish two composition techniques. The corpus is often centonized. This means that it consists of a number of melody fragments, taken from a fixed repertoire of melody fragments, which are put together in a certain way. There are melody fragments that only occur at the beginning, and there are typical middle

passages and final formulas. The main feature is that they do not have a recitative character, but a Free character. The verses, on the other hand, have a fixed melodic structure, a so-called 'tonus', one for each of the eight modes in Gregorian chant. The main feature here is the recitation, which is punctuated with small melodic motifs.

& Cantor ψ ibidem; H336

2.Resp.
Π.
D

O-mi-ne,* si adhuc pó-pu-lo tu- o sum ne-

ces- sá- ri- us, non re-cú-so subí- re propter

e- os la- bó- rem: † Fi- at vo-lúntas

tu- a. ψ O- cu-lis ac mánibus in coelum semper in-tén-

tus, invíctum ab o- ra- ti- ó-ne spí-ri-tum non re- la-

xá- bat. † Fi- at.

Muziekvoorbeeld: *Het responsorie Domine si adhuc*, (NR, p. 378*).

The alternate verse.

The text of this responsory makes it clear why the singer, who did not know the text of the verse, took the Lord's Prayer as an alternative. By singing that text up to the words *Adveniat regnum tuum*, the repetendum *Fiat voluntas tua* was a logical continuation, as can be seen in the printed *Pater Noster* text.

Pater noster qui es in caelis Sanctificetur nomen tuum, Adveniat regnum tuum Fiat voluntas tua...

The choice of the Lord's Prayer as the text for the verse is a discovery. By choosing this text, the 'simple man' indicated that he could not only sing or set a text to a tone, but that he was also aware of the form of the response and of the fact that the connection of the text of the verse on the rehearsal had to be logical.

More information from the text

The first thing of interest is the description of the practice of the magister scholae of appointing individual singers for the responsories. The responsories are considered soloistic chants, and this text seems to confirm that. Isidore of Seville says: A responsorium is so called because, after one has sung, the others respond (Hanssens I, 259). So there is also a facet of singing together, and this text also confirms that. They are mainly sung at Matins, after the lections. Each singer apparently prepared his own song and then performed it solo. However, this man, who had not been sufficiently trained in scientia litterarum, knew unpreparedly that after this reading this hymn text had to be performed. It is not clear to me how he knew that text. Did he know him by heart? Was there a book? Was the text perhaps first read after the reading? Or was the song also prepared jointly, because of the joint response? He couldn't have gotten the melody from a book anyway. If a book with musical notation was already available - in any case they have not been handed down to us from so early on - then this cannot have been a notation from which the melody could simply be sung from the page.

Such books with such precise melody notation only came into use around 1000. Apart from the fact that books from that early have not been handed down, we also read in Hucbald, around 900:

'The signs which custom has handed down, and which have equally different forms depending on the different regions, can contribute only little [to the singing of the melody from the page], although they may be of some use for remembering: they lead the viewer always on an uncertain path.'

Hucbald thus confirms once again what we already know from tradition: music notation before 1000 was inadequate. Notker does not seem surprised that the other singers are able to sing along equally unprepared at the king's command. And this text also shows that the last phrase after the verse was repeated by everyone. Thanks to Karel's order that everyone sing along to the rest of the corpus, we also have to conclude that the text of the responsory was not available. Because everyone was singing, and therefore using his mouth for other purposes, our cleric could not hear from anyone what (the text of) the verse was.

It does not surprise me that he was subsequently able to set a text that was well known to him to melody. Every singer, as we read in Aurelian of Réome in 850, should have the notes of all the verses of the antiphons or introit chants and also of the responsories imprinted in the shrine of his heart with the help of memory. I know from my own experience that once you know the melody structure, which is a *tonus*, by heart, you can sing any text you want to it. As I have said before, the verses of the responsories are sung according to a scheme of the eight modes available in Gregorian chant. This means that there are no more than eight standard melodies for these verses, which are used according to the key of the corpus. The psalmody in the choral prayer is also sung on a limited number (according to the early theorists eight) fixed melodic patterns, the so-called psalm tones. The responsory tones are closely related to these psalm tones in structure and preference for certain recitation tones. In that context it would be interesting to study the word '*psallere*' in Notker. It is clear that Notker only uses it once in his *Gesta Karoli*, in a context in which it cannot be associated with the sung text, as the Lord's Prayer is not a psalm, but can be associated with the sung melody. In any case, *Psallere* seems to be used here in the sense of reciting.

The verse is therefore not that difficult to set to music, but it is more difficult to imagine that the corpus could have been sung unprepared. As already mentioned, the surviving responsories use the centonization technique. If you knew the melody fragments 'the words' required for this technique, and you were aware of the 'grammar' (which, by the way, has still not been properly researched), then it is conceivable that you could compose a chant '*à bout portant*'. put together. But how could the others sing along? I think the school leader was primarily responsible for this. In the first half of the ninth century, Agobard of Lyon already complained that the singers were occupied with nothing other than singing and that he considered this very harmful to their souls. Apparently, there was vigorous rehearsal under the direction of the master *anis melodiae*, so that everyone could sing along to the songs by heart.

The response text *Domine si adhuc* comes from the aforementioned antiphonal by Hartker. As in this description, Hartker indicates the repetition of the last phrase after the verse. This repetition is a Frankish custom, Amalarius mentions that the Romans do not know it and it does not occur in the so-called old Roman books. In the books of the Gregorian tradition it is mixed: many responsories have such a repetition,

others do not, perhaps the result of the mixing of the two traditions. The naturalness with which Notker describes the man's invasion indicates that at the end of the ninth century this responsory did not follow Roman custom, and, if Notker's source for this story can be traced back to the time of Charles, this was not even around 800, or no longer, the custom. Yet, given the mixed Frankish tradition of responsories with and without such a repetition, we must wonder how our new singer could force everyone to repeat this phrase. Could that be heard?

Analysis of the melodies of the responsories has shown that the last phrase is preceded by a melodic motif that is repeated at the end of the verse. Through this form of what is called 'cueing' in ethnomusicology, it can indeed be recognized by ear where the part to be repeated begins. These rehearsals are also standard melody fragments. So one only had to listen intently to the repetition of the cue fragment during the verse to be able to join in with the repetition.

Oral and written tradition

I hope I have shown that musically it is not impossible. However, why could the man only hear the text of the verse orally? Were there no books? A book of hymns does not seem very common indeed. Ekkehardt IV tells in his *Casus sancti Galli*, written between 1034 and 1056, how a certain Romanus introduced not only the antiphonal of Saint Gregory, but also a *Cantarium*. This was an instrument, Ekkehardt describes, that this Romanus had specially brought from Rome and on which the antiphonal could be opened, so that the singers could correct their mistakes. Such a cumbersome description for something that could well have been a music stand or a music stand indicates that it was apparently not that common even in the eleventh century. The format of the oldest surviving hymnals also does not seem to suit use for large groups. The notation in the oldest books with music notation can often be referred to as the word 'fiddling'.

Not the kind of notation that allowed you to see at a glance how the melody should proceed, and for which you had to already know the melody in order to use it, as we already heard from Hucbald. More suitable as a reference work, for someone who was already an expert, than as a score.

There was a book for the lectures, as we read again at Notker. In a post script to the story printed above he says:

'What I forgot to say about the organization of the readings when I spoke about the distribution of the responsories, I will make up for somewhat here. No one in the palace of the very learned Charles was told what to read, no one waxed the lock or made any sign with his nail, but everyone took care to be so familiar with everything that was to be read, that he, if he were unexpectedly ordered to read, would be found blameless.'

The sign with wax or with the nail only seems meaningful in a written text. So there was a book for the readings, but probably not for the verses of the responsories.

As always in these types of sources, it is not clear in the entire story whether Notker actually describes the situation at Charles's court, or whether elements from his own experience are reflected. When Notker refers to reading, he does not hide his admiration for Karel's men: due to thorough preparation, they did not need what we call mnemotechnical means, no wax marks or marks scratched with a nail. Is he setting an example for his confreres, bearing in mind the instructions in the Rule of Benedict about reciting readings from memory in short Matins? And does he also use the singing of Karel's chapel as an example, or does the situation described in that context correspond to his daily reality? These are questions I cannot answer here.

Wise lessons

What does this story teach us? Responses were partly sung solo. The singers were appointed in advance and could then prepare. The improvisational singing of an existing text to a tone known by heart seems to be confirmed by this story. It is not clear how the choir was able to sing along to the melodies, but other sources show that a singing master must have been involved, as a book with exact melody notation did not exist. The texts of the responsory verses were not available for everyone to peruse in a book during the service, and were therefore sung from memory, varying more or less over a standard melody. It was perhaps not unusual for the lyrics of such a verse to be whispered into a singer's ear while singing the corpus. Perhaps the text of the corpus was also transmitted orally during the service, but this story does not provide a definitive answer. One detail is of great importance. The custom of repeating the last phrase, which is not Roman, is here assumed to be known without ado.

This repetition is something self-evident for Notker, which in any case seems to demonstrate that this custom already existed in St. Gall at the end of the ninth century.

Finally, you may be curious about the continuation of the story. Our newcomer singer is richly rewarded. It is not the negligent elect-bishop who is ultimately elected to the high office, but he.

This case of drunkenness has given us a lot of information about the singing of responsories (or at least one) in the ninth century. For us, the intoxication of the unelected bishop means a wealth of information about a dark area. The man himself, however, must have been left with quite a hangover. So it already applied to him then: Drink destroys more than you would like.

SOURCES:

A.M.J. Zijlstra, Singers and writers. The tradition of Gregorian chant from ca. 700 to ca. 1150. Dissertation Utrecht University, 1997: in particular chapter 2.