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Liturgy, plainchant and music at the Paris Sainte-Chapelle:
questions on the identity of a royal institution

Daniel Saulnier

Liturgical book and institutional identity

We have become accustomed to using the term « livre liturgique de... » And so begins the problem. How must I translate this « de » ?

« liturgical book of/from... » Sainte-Chapelle...

Reliquaire

« de » = of ? from ? at ? to ? in ? for ?

It is not only a question of french-english translation.

To use the term « livre liturgique de... » is an easy and agreeable practice. However, it veils many uncertainties and ambiguities well.

For instance, here is the breviary called "Chateauroux breviary". **Bréviaire Châteauroux 1**

Its astonishing iconography borrows several specific motifs and decor from ceremonies of the Sainte-Chapelle. **Bréviaire Châteauroux 2**

But:

– The calendar is not the Paris Sainte-Chapelle since it ignores the Dedication

– Its liturgy is rather that of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, as shown by:

- ornamentation of the page August 15th

Bréviaire Châteauroux 3

- baptismal procession to Saint-Jean-le-Rond

- many mentions of *ecclesia parisiensis*

– It has the feast of the Holy Relics with octave

Bréviaire Châteauroux 4

So how to look at it? as a breviary of the Sainte-Chapelle? of/from Notre-Dame? as a Parisian book? Should we think, as we have been tempted to do, that Notre-Dame had for a time followed liturgical practices that belonged to the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris?

In fact, this valuable breviary has three illustrious ancestors.

Antiphonaire de Compiègne

The antiphonal called "Compiègne" (Paris, BnF lat 17436), compiles texts of the Mass and Office, but is *not representative of the use of a community* : this is a luxurious gift, offered to the Emperor Charles the Bald, on the occasion of the Dedication of the chapel of the Compiègne castle in 877¹ ; an iconic book protesting that the emperor is attached to the "Roman" liturgy.

Antiphonaire de Hartker

A century later, the antiphonal called "Hartker"² offers another configuration: it contains many more antiphons than necessary for singing in the community of St. Gallen, and is therefore not a direct witness of their liturgical practice.³

Manuscrit de Florence

Apparently, the wonderful manuscript Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pluteus 29.1, the oldest Parisian witness of the *Magnus liber organi* (13th century), was also a royal gift, offered to King Louis IX on the occasion of the Dedication of the Paris Sainte-Chapelle⁴.

¹ Cf. Michel Huglo « Observations codicologiques sur l'antiphonaire de Compiègne », in *De musica et cantu. Studien zur Geschichte der Kirchenmusik un der Oper, Helmut Huckle zum 60. Geburtstag*, Peter Cahn & Ann-Katrin Heimer ed. (Hildesheim : Olms, 1993), 117-130.

² Ms Sankt Gallen Stifstsbibl. 390-391. Cf. Daniel Saulnier/Thèse/Mss

³ Small clarification: the melodies of antiphons given by the manuscript of Hartker, are evidence of usage and melodic designs in use in St. Gallen in 1000. But the presence of such antiphon in this manuscript does not mean it was sung in St. Gallen in 1000.

⁴ Cf. Barbara Haggh et Michel Huglo, « Maius liber—Maius munus », *Revue de musicologie* 90/2 (2004), 193-230, 226-227.

The Breviary of Chateauroux is somewhat similar. It does not reflect community usage but rather the piety of a man, a prince – probably the Dauphin Louis de Guyenne (1397-1415), son of Charles VI "the Fool".

Louis de Guyenne devant Louis IX⁵

He lives in the Ile de la Cité and possesses a personal chapel that mimics the liturgical practices of Notre-Dame. The liturgical and musical content of such a book does not allow any deductions on the practices of the Sainte-Chapelle.

The inventories mention numerous books stored inside the furniture of the Sainte-Chapelle. This means that they are "in" the Sainte-Chapelle. They may have been copied, but also purchased, stored or received like gifts or inheritances.

Libraries are filled with books of liturgical chant whose allocation remains largely undetermined or whose recipient changed over the years: the Mont-Renaud gradual-antiphonal⁶, the Gradual of Albi / Gaillac⁷ and the antiphonal Beneventan called "Saint-Loup."⁸

The calendars and contents of manuscripts

The differences between the calendar at the beginning of a manuscript and the content of this book should be explored in a systematic way. Even within the calendar, the order in which the celebrations are listed for a given date is not meaningless.

In most cases, only the first mention correspond with real ceremonies for this date. The following are brief commemorations sometimes added at the end of office. But they are often nothing more than formal statements, listed – or added – on schedule and without any consequence for the practical liturgical activity of the community.

⁵ Louis of Guyenne (right), Dauphin of France, receiving instruction from Saint Louis (Louis IX of France, left), with the heraldic charges of France and Bavaria. British Library, Royal 13 B III f. 2.

⁶ Cf. Daniel SAULNIER, « Die Handschrift von Mont-Renaud und ihre französischen Varianten », *Musicologica Austriaca* 14/15 (1996), 125-132.

⁷ Cf. Marie-Noël Colette...

⁸ Daniel Saulnier, thèse / Benevent 21.

It is in this spirit that we must consider the abundant, almost industrial production of song books without notation that is spreading throughout Paris in the late fifteenth century⁹.

At the Sainte-Chapelle, the singers are mobile and will sometimes sing or conduct in another church. Books can thus largely be used in other chapels. The Sainte-Chapelle is a foundation. Foundations never begin from zero: they begin from the **patrimony** of the place of the Foundation (Chartreuse / Lyon) or that of the mother church (Cluny). In Paris, the liturgy of the Sainte-Chapelle was not built *ex nihilo*, but most probably from the use of the *ecclesia parisiensis*, the Cathedral nearby.

Then, on this basis, some characteristics specific to the foundation are individualized and put in place: subdirectories and specific practices.

The Ordinary of the Sainte-Chapelle, Paris Arsenal 114 (1471), contains several significant mentions:

- The invitory psalm is sung *prout invenitur in antiphonariis*¹⁰, **Arsenal 114**
- The invitory and its psalm are sung *modo quo in libris reperiuntur*¹¹.
- we can see added in the margins: *que /// in grosso breviario*¹². **Arsenal**

114'

These annotations in the text or margin, show how the detail of the ordinary liturgy is based on a number of reference books, which are not necessarily "from the Sainte-Chapelle", but convey a more general use, like that of a major center of Paris.

⁹ Cf. Sarah Long, *The chanted mass in parisian ecclesiastical and civic communities, 1480-1540: local liturgical practices in manuscripts and early printed service books*, Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008.

¹⁰ « as it is found in the antiphonaries », f. 112r, according to the foliation in Arabic numerals.

¹¹ « as found in books », f. 122v.

¹² « which [is to be found] dans le gros bréviaire », f. 143r.

In addition, the cabinets of the Saintes-Chapelles of Paris, Bourges and Dijon, contain a number of partial books, booklets for insertion in the ordinary books like these booklets containing specific or "new" feasts:

Unus liber plurium festorum novorum

Unus liber de sancta corona et de aliis sanctis

Quatuor quaterni de officio novorum festorum

*Unus liber de festis novis.*¹³

This leaves us guessing that there is a special relationship with the "general books". These books are read in a selective way, marked by the traditional and oral character of many habits and practices.

At times, the authorities feel the need to consolidate practices and avoid excesses and innovations by writing customary, ordinary or other normative documents. The reasons that this is put in writing are multiple. Thus the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris was founded and reformed several times by rulers: the acts of these successive foundations have been preserved. Sometimes, shaken by liturgical reforms and musical innovations, the authorities need to regain control on everyday life in the Sainte-Chapelle.

In this respect the document known as the Proprium of 1689 is eloquent.

Proprium de 1689

As well being the *proprium* of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, that is to say the entire liturgical texts belonging to the Sainte-Chapelle, he also gives a precise order for musical practices based on the importance of feasts, fixes the detailed program for each day of the year (masses, offices, foundations and evening prayers) and formulates for each song the musical modalities of its

¹³ Inventory conducted in 1335 and 1336, copied to the Treasury charters, in the register J of Transcripta.

performance practice. The fact that it is printed shows the importance accorded to such a document, which seems without interest outside the walls of the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris.

Transmission of musical heritage: tradition and innovation

These considerations on the status of liturgical chant books introduce us to the transmission of musical heritage.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in their idealization of the Middle Ages, gave us the image of a plainsong virtually frozen in the square notes of French manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. And when I say frozen, the expression is not from me but from this admirer of Solesmes pointing the finger at the neo-Gothic walls of the abbey emerging from a romantic fog at the turn of the nineteenth century: "This is frozen plainsong!"¹⁴ The philological approach and the search for an illusory "authentic melody" in the jumble of variants that constitute the medieval tradition has not helped, nor the desperate attempt to ask the neumes to infuse the square notes with a semblance of life.

The musical object transmitted by the tradition of liturgical choirs has a name and an identity. We already know this object appears in medieval space as a constellation of variants. Manuscripts and printed books set it as a sort of "avatar", a formal signature comprising a "nucleus" of literary, melodic and rhythmic elements. This avatar allows us to recognize and identify the musical object during his travels through time and space. But it is in no way enough to restore its existential nature and revive the musical object as concrete.

Gradually, ordinaries, ceremonial books and treatises introduce us to a vocabulary that reflects the diversity of musical "incarnations" that can receive an "avatar" known as a simple plainchant incipit.

¹⁴ K. Bergeron, *Decadent enchantments*,

By the mid-ninth century, before the onset of songbook neumes, the medieval theorists began to regulate the practices of the **pre-polyphonic** organum and descant, thereby attesting to their popularity. In the eleventh century, Guido, the most famous codifier of antiphonal and music notation, signed the *Micrologus*, a small book about organum composition. And treatises confirm that polyphony was practiced at Notre Dame a long while before the first copy of manuscripts of organum appeared.

The fruits of an intense musical composition remain hidden behind the square notes of plainsong. **Certainly**, on ordinary days, the choir sings briskly (“rondement”) the immemorial melody; on Sundays and feast days, the singers impose a slower tempo, *mensura gravior*, even *gravissima* for the most solemn feasts. A close **examination** of the texts depicts an approach to music creation based on plainsong. Just as the medieval "teacher" proclaims himself a simple "reader" of the authority on which he comments, so the ecclesiastical singer remains a "reader" of the most authoritative musical repertoire in the liturgy (plainsong): he sings "sur le livre."

Terms that describe this art remain for us rather **enigmatic**: great song (grand chant), florid chant, descant, counterpoint, faburden, machicotage, music, figurative music...

Of these practices, there is almost nothing written because they are mostly **improvised**. What is certain is that the "subject" remains the plain chant, only music recorded in the liturgical books. But his melodic line is doubled, tripled, sometimes quadrupled. These multiple voices may move in step, note against note, or on the contrary, the plain song expands its tempo to let other voices add their ornaments. The melodic lines can move in parallel or intersect.

For example, the days before Christmas:

*Antiphona O cantatur in cantu florido mensura gravissima ante Canticum ab organo et Choro per alternas vices, et post canticum cantatur musice a Choro.*¹⁵

¹⁵ Proprium, p. 32

« The *O* antiphon is sung in florid chant with a very slow tempo before the Canticle, which alternates between the organ and choir, and after the Canticle, it is sung “in music” by the choir. »

But on 20 and 21 of December, due to the feast of St. Thomas:

*Commemoratio Feriæ per antiphonam O clavis [/O oriens] quæ semel cantatur musice*¹⁶

« Commemoration of the weekday by the antiphon *O clavis* [/ *O oriens*] once sung in music. »

On Sundays of Lent:

*Tractus cantatur musice*¹⁷

« The Tract is sung in music »

But on Monday, Wednesday and Friday:

cantatur in Cantu Gregoriano ab alternis choris

« it is sung in Gregorian chant alternating between choirs »

Well just by reading the general rubrics of the Proprium, one can understand that the same song may receive quite different modes of performance practice, in accordance with the degree of solemnity of the day.

Whatever the mode of performance practice, the text of the chant is never **al**tered, so the standard of the ecclesiastical institution is always respected. This perspective allows us to understand the gradual introduction of motets. Whenever a motet uses the official text of chant books and corresponds to a specific liturgical situation, the most likely explanation is that it has replaced the plainchant.

As an **antithesis** to academic music, the living art of the singers of the Sainte-Chapelle reminds us that without innovation, there can be no tradition.

¹⁶ Proprium p. 33

¹⁷ Proprium p. 7