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St. Gall Research Paper

The monastery of St. Gall had a greater musical influence on Carolingian Europe than any other monastic community of the period, contributing to new styles and genres of liturgical composition; although it appears as though none of the genres perfected and documented at St. Gall in the late ninth century were original inventions of the artists who mastered them, irregardless the monastery in the mountains had the most outward influence on sacred music in Europe during this time.

Around 610 St. Columban, an Irish monk settled in the approximate sight of the future Abby with his disciples, three years later he left, leaving St. Gall (who was too ill to travel) (Clark, 1). St. Gall began to attract disciples of his own and preached the Rule of St. Columban, though there was still no Abby. Upon St. Gall's death his cell became both a place of pilgrimage and plunder, as it was visited by those wishing to see and others who wanted to steal the relics of St. Gall; twice the cell was looted first by marauders and then by the Franks (3). In 720 Othmar was made the first Abbot of St. Gall, which begins the history of the monastery, in 747 he partially substituted the Rule of Benedict for that of Columban, (the one that had been in practice dating from the Irish monks settlement); in 760 the transition to the Rule of Benedict was completed by another Abbot, the Abby now had to pay an annual tribute and ceased to be an isolated community as attempted by the Irish model of its original founders (3-5).

Historically the next major era of St. Gall is know as the Golden Age (816-926), it is also the time period that will be the focus of this paper (Vogler, 39). This is the period

of St. Gall's strongest influence on the musical world. It is stunning that this musical documentation survives today since the Abby was twice more invaded in 925 by Hungarians and in approximately 940 by Saracens (a group of people from Northern Africa), and it was devastated by fire in 937 (Clark, 11). As Clark said, "It is not surprising that under the stress of such adversity the fame of St. Gall should have suffered eclipse, and there are many evidences of decline," (Clark, 13); the decline is in reference to the influence that St. Gall had over Europe, particularly in the other centers of monasticism, in the arts: music, poetry, etc. The Abby continued to function up until 1805 when Napoleon ordered the dissolution of the monastery, the property was divided between Cantons and Catholics, and the Abbots hall was converted into a government building, only the library and the archives remain the property of Catholics (Clark, 17). There were other periods that the Abby flourished, but none were as significant to the entire continent of Europe as the Golden Age.

Some of the creative genres of late ninth century St. Gall were: texted tropes, melismatic melody, Latin verse songs, and chant tropes in a variety of registers, from simple expressions of joy to others expounding a more complex theology (King, 184). This artistic growth and mastery of these styles by Notker, Tuotilo and Ratpert results from combination of the school the Abby founded, the great teachers of the school, the ability to study outside examples of the genres, and the talent that these composers possessed. The refinements of musical notation were used more extensively at St. Gall than elsewhere and their tradition was better (Clark, 171); the refinements seem to mean the skill and overall use of the tools of the age (neumes, St. Gall's lettering system, etc.), while the tradition of the Abby probably relates to its teaching tradition. Simply the idea

of writing music down was a new concept, they had to decide what could and should be written down, and how then to do it: this was the task that was, if not partially solved, then refined at St. Gall during the Carolingian period (King, 179). Richard L. Crocker contends that the musical manuscripts of the Germanic lands became diastemic (had more precise indication of relative pitch) much latter than the French and Aquitaine manuscripts (7). Whether it was created at St. Gall is irrelevant, that it was mastered there and documented in such a way that we can study the music of the late ninth century using the St. Gall repertoire as reference and comparison proves its historically importance.

The first teacher of music at the Abby whose name has been recorded is Werinbert; little is know about him apart from him being a contemporary of Iso. Iso was both an excellent scholar and musician, he taught at the inner school from about 840. The real importance of the musical school of St. Gall began when Iso, Moengal, and Ratpert were the teachers, and Notker Blabulus and Tuotilo the pupils (Clark, 173). Iso was perhaps the first influential musical teacher as it is his first generation of students that made the biggest impact on Carolingian musical growth; in his preface to *Liber hymnorum* Notker sights both Iso and his other teacher Moengal as sources that he used in perfecting his sequence technique (with the nod given to Iso as the teacher who came up with a solution to his criticism of needing a different syllable for each note of the melisma). “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 ‘That the individual motions of the melody should receive separate syllables,’” also commenting “When I showed these little verses to my

teacher Macellus (Moengal), he, filled with joy, had them copied as a group roll; and he gave out the different pieces to different boys to be sung,” (Crocker, 1). We do not have any indication of what Ratpert taught, only that he did and composed. Also the only account of the teachers of this time period is by Notker, there is nothing in Tuotilo’s works that comment on his relationship to his teachers or what he learned from them in relationship to his mastery of the trope. We know that Tuotilo’s teachers were the same as Notker’s since they were contemporaries and friends. Ekkehart IV the famous historian of St. Gall wrote “Notker, Ratpert, and Tuotilo were but one heart and one soul. Their teacher Marcellus (Moengal) led them to the seven liberal arts, especially to music. In music they achieved such masterliness as can be perceived in their works,” (Volger, 57). The three influential ninth century St. Gall composers that will be examined in further detail are Ratpert, Tuotilo, and Notker Balbulus.

Ratpert wrote poetic musical creations known to be Latin hymns for prayers sung by the monastic community using the appropriate neumes. His authorship has been established for a number of pieces some of the more well-known being *Ardua spes mundi*, an all saints feast litany; *Laudes omnipotens ferimus*, a communal hymn and *Aurea lux terrae*, a hymn for receiving the queen (Vogler, 57-58). Besides Latin hymns, Ratpert wrote “verses” or processional liturgies such as *Rex Sanctorum angelorum* and *Ardua spes mundi* is also more of a verse than hymn; but Ratpert is the only major composer from late ninth century St. Gall not credited with inventing a genre of musical composition (Clark, 170).

As for Tuotilo, he was the most diverse artist of the three, Ekkehart described him as,

A master of sculpting and painting, and like his companions was a musician, but superior to all in every kind of string and wind instrument; indeed he instructed the sons of nobility in the playing of strings in a room specified by the Abbot for the purpose; he was well versed in poetry in both languages, and was a masterful creator of verses and melodies (Volger, 59).

It is for the trope that Tuotilo's artistic contribution will be examined thoroughly since his compositions were marked by excellent and recognizable euphony...these tropes he indeed performed in the presence of King Charles (59). His tropes were both extensions of, or, interpolations in existing texts of masses, five of Tuotilo's tropes have been preserved his most famous is the Christmas trope *Hodie cantandus est nobis puer* (44). The other known tropes of his authorship are *Omnium Virtutum gemmis*, *Quonian Dominus Jesu*, *Omnipotens genitor*, and *Gaudet et cantata* (Clark, 60). Tropes served to introduce a sung element or were interwoven between the flights of thought and melody (60).

Tuotilo set out on the task of adorning certain portions of the mass sung on high festivals by inserting words and music appropriate to the context.

The original text itself is not in any respect modified in meaning, what is added I not so much an interpolation as a commentary (Clark, 191-192).

At a time when choral singing had reached a high level, but instrumental music was a rare accomplishment, Tuotilo sang his own tropes to his own accompaniment on the Psalter (rotta in the German vernacular); he could do this since he played all manner of stringed instruments and pipes better than anyone else (Clark, 197); and the melodies

he composed were strange and easily recognized, since on the Psalter he excelled, the music sounded sweeter as in his well known trope *Hodie*. There are good grounds for believing that Tuotilo only wrote introductory and not internal tropes, and only for the Introit and Offertory (Clark, 196), because that is all that remains today and it is thought that he only experimented with prefixing text not interpolating it (Clark, 193).

The oldest tropes in existence are believed to be the work of Tuotilo; it is a safe assumption that he was the earliest master of the genre, it uncertain whether he was the pioneer (Clark, 192). That Tuotilo is the master is not really contested, he is recognized as one of the best know masters of the early medieval trope (Volger, 60); his compositions are as well-know as Notkers sequences, and no trope is more famous than his *Hodie cantandus est nobis puer*, it remains only a question of his invention of the genre (Clark, 197). Tuotilo is the oldest know composer of existing medieval tropes, however it is likely that he got his inspiration from another composer and merely mastered the style.

It is conceivable that an antiphonary form a Jumieges monk contained tropes to the Introit and inspired Tuotilo to explore the genre; since the trope did not particularly flourish in the Germanic areas as it did in the English and French, especially Normandy where there is proof of exuberant growth of tropes. It is practically certain that Tuotilo's first trope was written after the arrival of the monk from Jumieges, as described in Notker's preface, because if Tuotilo had invented the trope then Notker would not have had to wait for the arrival and example of the French monk before finding his method of memorizing the melismatic Alleluia passages (Clark, 192-193). The poetic musical genre of tropes in the solemn liturgy was no more the invention of Tuotilo than was the

sequence that of Notker, both probably came from Jumieges (Volger, 59-60). From all of these examples it is quite clear that Tuotilo did not invent the genre he mastered.

Strangely enough he is best remembered and cherished for his ivory carvings that adorn certain holy manuscripts, his greatest talent was that of a jack of all trades but, because of this he does not hold the importance that Notker does for this era, musically.

Notker Balbulus who called himself the stammerer,

is celebrated as the most influential poet; his greatest achievement was the sequence of the Latin liturgy (it occurs between the epistle and gospel of the solemn mass, it follows or replaces the melismatic wordless Alleluia jublations, originally Notker created them to assist in his memorization of the long Alleluia melismas. Sequences became liturgical genre that found its way into the sung mass on Sunday and feast day in the Western church (Volger, 58).

What makes Notker so important is that he is the only composer in what is present day Switzerland who ever gained universal recognition, lasting for over six centuries, Wolfram von den Steinen, (a Notker connoisseur) said that “Notker is the name of the poet towering above all others,” (Volger, 58-59).

His most famous sequences are *Natus ante saecula*, for Christmas; *Festa Christi*, for Epiphany; *Laudes Salvatori*, for Easter; and *Sancti Spiritus assit nobis gratia*, for Pentecost. What makes these pieces (and this composer) so special is that they are found in hundreds of medieval manuscripts and early printed missals throughout Western Europe (Volger, 59). *Laudes Salvatori* can be found in fifty-three medieval manuscripts throughout England, France, Spain, and the Netherlands; *Sancti Spiritus adssit nobis*

gratia has been found in sixty-six manuscripts, from Dublin to Florence and was sung for the Pope in Rome (Clark, 189-190). His most famous collection is the *Liber hymnorum* (Book of Hymns) (Crocker, 2), which has been found in several other geographic areas of musical importance as well. Crocker goes on to say that the primary significance of the *Liber hymnorum* is for the study of early sequence, one can measure other sequences with unknown composers against Notker's repertory to find evidence of borrowed materials, both by Notker and others (370).

The text that gives the misinformation about Notker and Tuotilo's invention of sequences and tropes respectively was written by the St. Gall monk Ekkehart IV, over a hundred and fifty years after Notker's death. This appears to be the only strong case made for St. Gall's authorship of these new genres, and it is overrun with false accounts and made up events, such as the Roman cantor who taught the monks of St. Gall the Roman rite and how to integrate Gregorian chant into their liturgical offices. It is possible that French and Italian Prose developed independently of Notker, although this is not certain (Clark, 188). Noker himself relates in his preface to his *Liber hymnorum* that he had seen the idea first in practice through a Jumieges monk that had fled to St. Gall; showing that not even he took the credit for its invention. There are other contentions as to whether Noker borrowed Celtic airs, Alpine Folk-Songs, or Byzantine melodies (Clark, 190). Crocker demonstrates best the similarities and borrowing that Notker's pieces shares with a West-Frankish sequence *Nunc Exultet*, it is very possible that Notker has a copy of this piece before him when he wrote *Laudes Salvatori*, because the rhetorical structure he followed so closely as well as the narrative concept of the whole which is apparently imitated and developed further (Crocker, 114).

It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the creation of the sequence was one of the most important innovations in the whole history of medieval music. A new genre had come into being and boundless vistas were opened up (Clark, 188); and Notker was the master of the new art. His “texts unfolded in a vigorous series of free rhetorical periods cast in the sonorous cadences of classical dictation, rich with assonance,” (Crocker, 2); he also writes that while Notker probably observed and studied other versions of the same melody he was going to use, and finally that Notker’s *Laudes Savatoris* is a masterly piece of work, a virtuoso (114).

Notker is the only composer of the trio studied that made a contribution to musical theory by way of a treatise or in this case a letter to his brother Lambert demonstrating his “significant letters” that he used in musical notation to clarify the neumatic notation and to add information to the music that the neumes could not (King, 173-174). There are enough correspondences of the time period to rule out the possibility that Notker invented all of these letters and their meanings, but it is true that Notker envisioned more letters with a greater variety of effects than any other set used elsewhere (King, 173). His set uses several letters with the most frequent used being *c* (said speedily or quick), *t* (ought to be drawn out or hold it), *a* (stretching of a rising interval), and *k* (shouts with a ringing voice); of course there are also the letters *d*, *e*, *l*, *s*, *p*, *f*, *g*, and *o*, along with several others that have been lost to history (King, 174-175). St. Gall scribes are well known for their attention to detail when working with music, they used the vertical space above the neume to show pitch relatively, it was not precise but relative to what symbol came directly before and after (King, 182); it is uncertain whether the

symbols universally known as “St. Gall neumes” were created wholly or even substantially at St. Gall (King, 183).

Whatever their [St. Gall neumes] origin, the musical work of the St. Gall scriptorium at the end of the ninth century reached a level of sensitivity and sophistication which represents the extreme of what was achievable using this kind of sign system (King, 183).

The Abby of St. Gall was perhaps the centre of musical growth and mastery in the late ninth century; the Abby distinguished itself in the centuries of the Carolingian period by cultivating Benedictine worship through unique poetic and musical achievements which proved to be influential in far places for a long time (Volger, 57). The liturgical practices of St. Gall continued to be the practice of the surrounding Germanic people especially in Eastern Europe up until the liturgy was reformed in the Council of Trent. Also the twelfth century saw a general decline in the monasteries influence and creative production, for a time even the school of music came to an end (Clark, 200).

The composers examined did not invent the musical genres that they mastered (although Ekkehart IV would like us to believe they did). Notker, Tuotilo, and Ratpert were writing for god not themselves, perhaps that is why they were all so successful; it also can not hurt being contemporaries, friends, and brothers (clerically speaking) with each other.

The tropes and sequences were not a way of establishing ownership of something that has comes from outside, but of making a foreign repertory familiar and acceptable, through the process of localization; each piece of the Roman rite is regarded as a precious jewel, to be surrounded by

embellishments which enhance as well as interpret its message (King, 192).

This is the attitude that was held by these composers and as history has shown their embellishments and enhancements are the finest recorded examples of the time period. It matters little who invented what genre, when historians always begin their exploration with the place that it flourished at such high levels of artistic creativity and was documented better than any other monastic community.

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