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TEACHING MEDIEVAL MUSIC TODAY: NEW APPROACHES TO PALEOGRAPHY AND MUSIC HISTORY

To talk about the Middle Ages in front of a freshman (i.e. first-year student) class, in an epoch that seems to deny the usefulness of knowing about the past, is bound to be a frustrating prospect, in many ways. We cannot, however, ignore the fact that without knowledge of our musical tradition, which was built throughout centuries of history and civilization, it is impossible to arrive at a correct comprehension of the music works of the past (the more they are far from us, the more exotic they sound). Besides this, the younger generations would lack a precious tool that allows them to interconnect several domains of knowledge (the arts, literature, mathematics, scientific disciplines). This is why the study of music history remains the main way to follow for the development of musical culture.

Our journey starts in the early Middle Ages, when the invention and large-scale use of music writing brought about a radical change in the creation of music, and marked the beginning of “music history” itself. The appearance of music notation is a key chapter in our discipline, for both its domain-specific and cultural content, but it is also one of the most exposed to criticism for allegedly producing superficial, dry knowledge, because it presupposes the study of many technical aspects. In order to describe the earliest non-diastematic neume notation techniques, or to explain the ensuing introduction of staff notation, we not only need a basic knowledge of music theory, but also notions and methodologies borrowed from paleography and philology. Of course, if we limit ourselves to the technical-theoretical aspects, our discussion will sound abstract and not particularly stimulating. But we can change this perspective completely, and generate productive didactic ideas, if we establish a connection between the introduction and development of notation in the transmission of Gregorian chant and the political factors and cultural implications behind its development. Students will find this much more realistic, immediate, and attractive than a solely technical and theoretical discussion.

So the purpose should be to combine a chronologically organized list of facts with some of the procedures that specialists (in our case, historians) employ in their work, in particular the use and study of documents. This approach is especially suited for undergraduate courses, since it encourages students to reconstruct history through a rigorous critical method.¹

¹ See M. R. DE LUCA, “Constructing Music History in the Classroom”, this issue, pp. 113-121; see also C. DAHLHAUS, “Che significa e a qual fine si studia la storia della

In my Medieval music history course, when I get to talk about Guido's introduction of the staff, I do not limit myself to present this essential, early 11th-century technical innovation as a product of the genius of the monk from Arezzo, for this would be reductive and historically inaccurate. In fact, the staff was not an "invention" in the true sense of the word. The contribution of Guido consisted in perfecting and systematizing a practice that was already under way towards the end of the 10th century, in the writing of Southern France and Southern Italy (Aquitanian and Beneventan notation).² Already a few decades before Guido, the monastic scribes of these regions used to carefully arrange the neumes over the text words, so that they could reproduce, with some degree of approximation, the interval distances of the melodic line – hence the current definition of '*imperfect diastematic notation*', because without the staff and the keys, the pitches remain uncertain. In other words, it would be possible to trace staves on these pages simply by connecting the notes of the same pitch to each other (provided that we know their pitch from other sources; Fig. 1).

musica?", and H. H. EGGBRECHT, "La scienza come insegnamento", *Il Saggiatore musicale*, XII, 2005, pp. 219-230 and 231-237.

² See GUIDO D'AREZZO, *Le opere: Micrologus, Regulae rhythmicae, Prologus in Antiphonarium, Epistola ad Michaellem, Epistola ad archiepiscopum Mediolanensem*, Introduzione, traduzione e commento a cura di A. Rusconi, Florence, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005, pp. XXXI f., and B. STÄBLEIN, "Schriftbild der einstimmigen Musik", in *Musikgeschichte in Bildern*, 3: *Musik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, 4, ed. by H. Besseler and M. Schneider, Leipzig, VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1975, pp. 38 and 40 f.

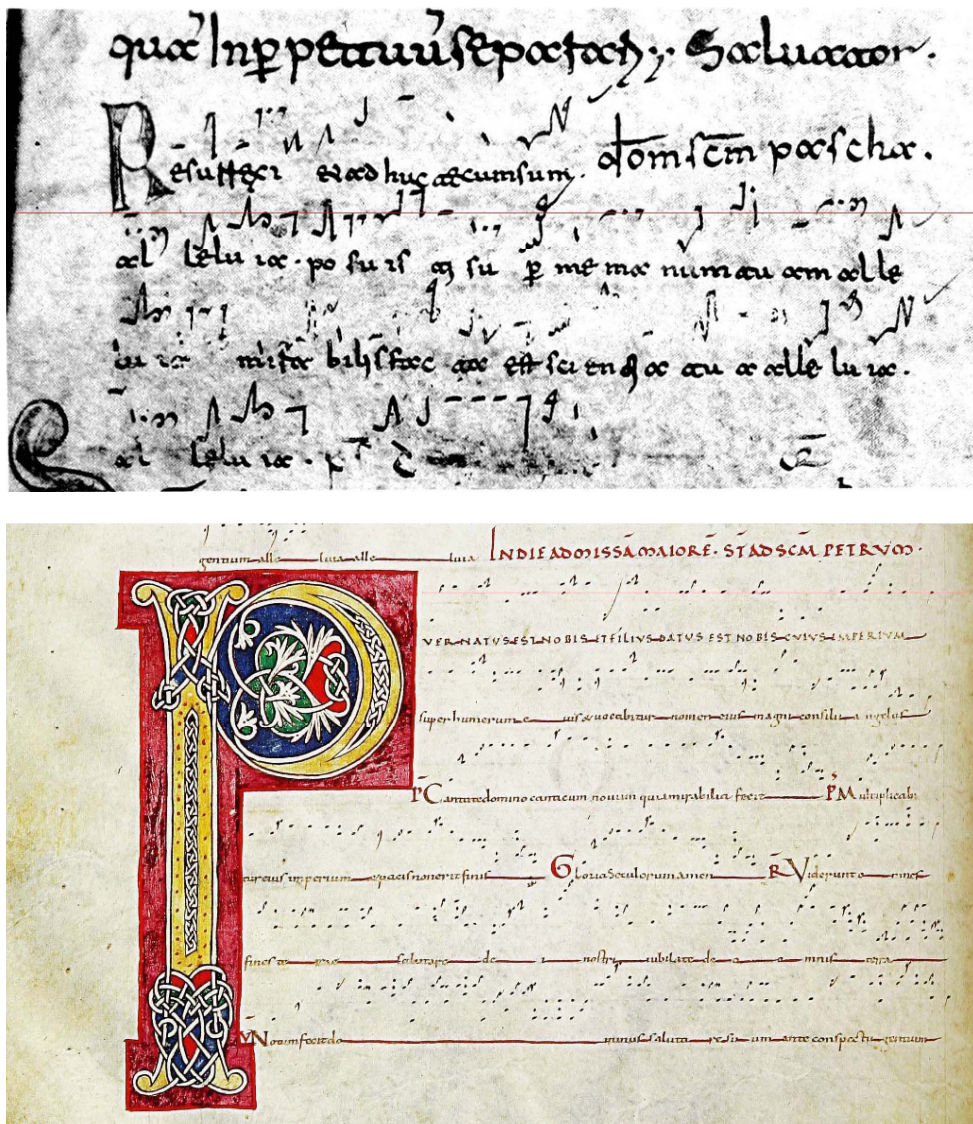


Fig. 1 – Facsimiles of the two manuscripts: Benevento, Biblioteca capitolare, 33, f. 82^v (Gradual 10th-11th century) and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 776, f. 13^v (Gradual from Gaillac, 11th century). I have added two thin red lines in order to highlight the option described above.

In our case, the reference is the Beneventan notation, which was also employed in Tuscany, although in forms that were simpler than the Campanian model at the time of Guido. So, because he apparently built on specific local conventions, which he only fine-tuned to make them more efficient, the myth

of Guido as a genius is somewhat debunked, in favor of the idea that artistic creation in the Middle Ages was ultimately a collective effort, strongly based on tradition rather than on the creative act of an isolated individual. This conclusion has a clearly positive impact in terms of education.³

The writings of Guido, however, contain information not only about the technical details of his innovation, but also about the cultural, social and political mechanisms behind it. So on the one hand, he explains how his system works:

Therefore, pitches are so arranged that each sound, howsoever much it is repeated in a chant, is always found in one and the same row. In order that you can better distinguish these rows, lines are drawn closely, and they make some rows of pitches on the lines themselves, some between the lines, that is, in the space between the lines. Thus, however many sounds there are on one line or on one space, they all sound similarly. And so that you can understand, moreover, how many lines or spaces involve one sound, certain letters of the monochord are affixed to certain lines or spaces, and even colors are added. From which it is given to be understood, that in the whole antiphoner and in every chant, however many lines or spaces have one and the same letter or the same color, thus they sound similarly in every respect, just as if all had been on one line. Because just as the line indicates the identity of sounds, so the letter or color indicates the identity of lines in every respect, and through this also of sounds (*Prologus in Antiphonarium*, 44-49).⁴

On the other hand, he stresses that it is the only way to put an end to the confusion in the liturgical practice of his time, and thus to attain the ideal of standardization in prayer that had been a general aspiration since the Carolingian age:

³ See G. LA FACE, “Creatività e immagini in due Lieder: un percorso didattico”, this journal, IV, 2014, pp. 57-74 (English version, “Creativity and Image in Two Schubert Lieder: A Didactic Approach”, *ivi*, pp. 75-92).

⁴ GUIDO D'AREZZO, *Le opere* cit., pp. 118-120: “Ita igitur disponuntur voces, ut unusquisque sonus, quantumlibet in cantu repetatur, in uno semper et suo ordine inveniatur. Quos ordines ut melius possis discernere, spissae ducuntur lineae, et quidam ordines vocum in ipsis fiunt lineis, quidam vero inter lineas in medio intervallo et spatio linearum. Quanticumque ergo soni in una linea vel in uno sunt spatio, omnes similiter sonant. Ut autem et illud intelligas, quantae lineae vel spatia unum habent sonum, quibusdam lineis vel spatiis quaedam litterae de monochordo praefiguntur atque etiam colores superducuntur. Unde datur intelligi, quia in toto antiphonario et in omni cantu quantaecumque lineae vel spatia unam eandemque habent litteram vel eundem colorem, ita per omnia similiter sonant, tamquam si omnes in una linea fuissent, quia sicut linea unitatem sonorum, ita per omnia littera vel color unitatem significat linearum, ac per hoc etiam sonorum”. English translation from *Guido d'Arezzo's Regule ritbmice, Prologus in Antiphonarium, and Epistola ad Michabelem*, A Critical Text and Translation with an Introduction, Annotations, Indices and New Manuscript Inventories by D. Pesce, Ottawa, The Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1999, pp. 419-421.

Who does not bewail that also, which is so grave an error in the holy Church, and so dangerous a discord, that when we celebrate the divine office, we are seen often not to praise God, but to vie among ourselves. In short, scarcely one agrees with another, not the pupil with the teacher, nor the pupil with his fellow pupils. From which it follows that the antiphoners are by now not one nor even a few, but so many as there are teachers in the separate churches, and now commonly the antiphoner is called not Gregory's, but Leo's or Albert's, or anybody else's (*Ibid.*, 30-33).⁵

But Guido also does not fail to emphasize the undisputable advantages offered by his method, which gives singers an otherwise unattainable autonomy: "For, in such a way, with the help of God I have determined to notate this antiphoner, so that hereafter through it, any intelligent and diligent person can learn a chant, and after he has learned well part of it through a teacher, he recognizes the rest unhesitatingly by himself without a teacher" (*Ibid.*, 40-41).⁶

Behind these considerations, however, hides what was a much greater concern for monks and Medieval religious life in general: to reduce the enormous waste of time needed to study chants in an oral tradition system:

But wretched singers and pupils of singers, even if they should sing every day for a hundred years, will never sing by themselves without a teacher one antiphon, not even a short one, wasting so much time in singing that they could have spent better learning thoroughly sacred and secular writing. And what of all evils is more dangerous, many canons and monks neglect the psalms and sacred readings, and nocturnal vigils with purity, and others works of piety, through which we are summoned and led to everlasting glory, while they pursue by a most unremitting and most foolish effort the science of singing, which they can never master (*Ibid.*, 21-29).⁷

⁵ GUIDO D'AREZZO, *Le opere* cit., p. 118: "Illud quoque quis non defleat, quod tam gravis est in sancta ecclesia error, tamque periculosa discordia, ut quando divinum celebramus officium saepe non deum laudare, sed inter nos certare videamur. Vix denique unus concordat alteri, non magistro discipulus, nec discipulus condiscipulo. Unde factum est, ut non iam unum aut saltem pauca, sed tam multa sint antiphonaria, quam multi sunt per singulas ecclesias magistri. Vulgoque iam dicitur antiphonarium non Gregorii, sed Leonis aut Alberti, aut cuiuscumque alterius". English translation from *Guido d'Arezzo's Regule* cit., pp. 411-413.

⁶ GUIDO D'AREZZO, *Le opere* cit., p. 118: "Deo auxiliante hoc antiphonarium notare disposui, ut per eum leviter aliquis sensatus et studiosus cantum discat, et postquam partem eius bene per magistrum cognoverit, reliqua per se sine magistro indubitanter agnoscat". English translation from *Guido d'Arezzo's Regule* cit., pp. 415-417.

⁷ GUIDO D'AREZZO, *Le opere* cit., p. 118: "Miserabiles autem cantores, cantorumque discipuli! Etiam si per centum annos cotidie cantent, numquam per se – sine magistro – unam, vel saltem parvulam – cantabunt antiphonam! Tantum tempus in cantando perdentes, in quanto et divinam, et saecularem scripturam potuissent plene cognoscere. Et quod super omnia mala magis est periculosum, multi religiosi ordinis clerici et monachi psalmos et sacras lectiones et nocturnas cum puritate vigiliis et reliqua

As the musicus explains in another work, this goal, which seems unattainable, becomes really easy when melodies are read from a book in which neumes are reproduced on a staff: "... I undertook, among other things, to teach music to boys, ... and some of them, trained by imitating the [steps of the mono]chord, with the practice of our notation, were within the space of a month singing so securely at first sight chants they had not seen or heard, that it was the greatest wonder to many people" (*Micrologus, Prol.*, 32-35).⁸

Given the character of this paper here I will not address the problems that Guido had to face in his personal life, which had to do with the fact that his innovation challenged the privileged status that singers enjoyed within the monastic community, as the keepers and undisputed authorities of the musical tradition. The clashes that broke out in Pomposa as a result of this led him to abandon the abbey, and find hospitality at Tedaldo of Canossa, bishop of Arezzo (we have an impassioned account of this in Guido's letter to his brother Michele).

With my students, however, I always stress the fact that Guido's theological and pastoral considerations are in keeping with the aspirations to a religious life that had to be more consistent with the message of the Gospels, as advocated in the same epoch by Pier Damiani and the Camaldolese monks, who paved the way for the reform of Pope Gregory VII, aimed at bringing order in the Church's structure.⁹ Indeed, very few people know that the monk from Arezzo can be included among the forerunners of the Gregorian Reform: while a clue to this may be his collaboration with the bishop of Arezzo, the uncle of Matilda of Canossa, who was the most stalwart supporter of Gregory VII,¹⁰ conclusive

pietatis opera, per quae ad sempiternam gloriam provocamur et ducimur, negligunt, dum cantandi scientiam, quam consequi numquam possunt, labore assiduo et stultissimo persequuntur". English translation from *Guido d'Arezzo's Regule* cit., pp. 409-411.

⁸ GUIDO D'AREZZO, *Le opere* cit., p. 6: "... cepi inter alia musicam pueris tradere ... et quidam eorum imitatione chordae ex nostrarum notarum usu exercitati ante unius mensis spatium invisos et inauditos cantus ita primo intuitu indubitanter cantabant, ut maximum plurimis spectaculum praeberetur". English translation from *Hucbald, Guido and John on Music: Three Medieval Treatises*, translated by W. Babb, edited with introduction by C. V. Palisca, New Haven - London, Yale University Press, 1978, p. 58.

⁹ See G. M. CANTARELLA, "La 'Vita Beati Romualdi', specchio del monachesimo nell'età di Guido d'Arezzo", in *Guido d'Arezzo monaco pomposiano*, Atti dei Convegni di studio (Codigoro, Ferrara, Abbazia di Pomposa, 3 ottobre 1997 – Arezzo, Biblioteca Città di Arezzo, 29-30 maggio 1998), ed. by A. Rusconi, Florence, Olschki, 2000, pp. 3-20, and more generally L. ORABONA, *La Chiesa dell'anno Mille. Spiritualità tra politica ed economia nell'Europa medievale*, Rome, Studium, 1988.

¹⁰ See C. RUINI, "Musica e politica ai tempi di Matilde di Canossa", in *San Bartolomeo del "Pratum Episcopi". L'ospitale di valico della strada "Francesca della Sambuca" nel Medioevo. Nono centenario della morte di Matilde di Canossa (1115-2015)*, Atti delle giornate di studio (Spedaletto, Chiesa di San Bartolomeo, sabato 8 agosto 2015 – Riola, Sala dei

evidence is found in his letter to the Archbishop of Milan, Aribertus II.¹¹ Considering this peculiar position, which the monk from Arezzo had within the difficult historical context of his time, we can identify the political and cultural factors that favored the introduction of the technical innovation of the staff, and the ethical and practical needs it managed to satisfy.

It is surely no chance that in the decades that followed the epic clash between the Pope and the Emperor Henry IV (the Investiture Controversy), in the early 12th century, north of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines – that is, in the territories that had formerly been controlled by the Emperor and were now under the rule of the Pope – we witness the growing spread of liturgical chant books written with the new staff notation.¹² A confirmation of this process is provided by the story of the chant book at the cathedral of Bologna. When, after the end of the conflict between the Pope and the Emperor, the tradition of bishops appointed by the German emperors during the 11th century was abruptly interrupted by the Pope's imposition of bishop Bernard (1096-1104), the magnificent gradual created some fifty years before for the cathedral (currently MS 123 of the Angelica Library in Rome: a book which, according to the standards of the time, was meant to remain in use for centuries) was replaced by a copy (now kept at the Archivio capitolare in Modena, O.I.13) updated with the more disciplined and stricter liturgical forms prescribed by the Gregorian reform.¹³ Yet the most interesting aspect of the new edition of the Bologna *liber cantus* is the fact that the unusual, overabundant non-diastematic notation of the antigraph, of northern derivation, had been replaced with a

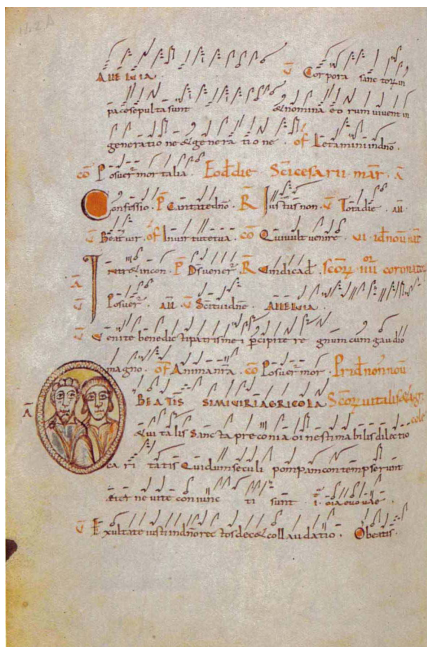
Novanta della Rocchetta, sabato 14 novembre 2015), ed. by R. Zagnoni, Porretta Terme, Gruppo di studi Alta Valle del Reno, 2016, pp. 152-156.

¹¹ See GUIDO D'AREZZO, *Le opere* cit., p. LXXIII f.

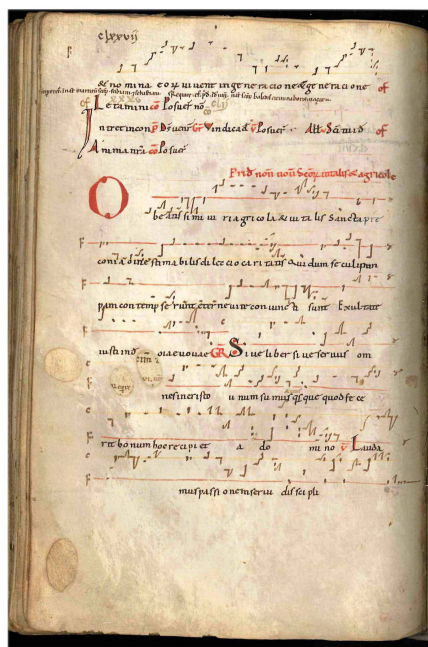
¹² See G. BAROFFIO, “Nota Romana: l'espansione delle notazioni italiane e l'area d'influsso dei Canossa”, in *Matilde e il tesoro dei Canossa tra castelli, monasteri e città*, ed. by A. Calzona, Milan, Silvana, 2008, pp. 164-175; C. RUINI, “Nota Romana in Aemilia? Documenti sulla diffusione della notazione dell'Italia centrale nella diocesi di Reggio Emilia”, in *Papers Read at the 15th Meeting of the IMS Study Group CANTUS PLANUS, Dobogókő/Hungary. 2009. Aug. 23-29*, ed. by B. Hagg-Huglo and D. Lacoste, Lions Bay, BC (Canada), The Institute of Mediaeval Music, 2013, pp. 543-556; and ID., “Mille anni di canto liturgico nel monastero polironiano”, in *I manoscritti di canto liturgico di San Benedetto Polirone*, ed. by C. Ruini and S. Roncroffi, Bologna, Pàtron, 2011, pp. 17-22.

¹³ See C. RUINI, “Political Changes and Music Writing Styles in 11th-Century Bologna”, in *CANTUS PLANUS. International Musicological Society Study Group, Papers Read at the 16. Meeting, Vienna, Austria, 2011*, ed. by R. Klugseder, Vienna, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften - Kommission für Musikforschung, 2012, pp. 349-354.

musical writing clearly imported from Tuscany, i.e. with the neumes written on a Guidonian staff (including the red line of F and the yellow line of C).¹⁴



Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, 123, f. 142v



Modena, Archivio capitolare, O.I.13, f. 159v

Fig. 2 – Pages of two manuscripts: Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, 123, f. 142v, and Modena, Archivio capitolare, O.I.13, f. 159v, which allow to contrast two versions of the same introitus to a mass written in honor of two typically Bolognese saints, the martyrs Vitale and Agricola: the first version uses non-diastematic neumes; in the second the same neumes are written on a staff.

I am convinced that, for an effective didactics of music history (not only medieval, but of other epochs as well), it is always profitable to combine the analytical description of technical and theoretical phenomena with considerations about the historical facts behind them. If we search for the reasons that led the men and women of such a distant time to adopt a certain innovation, or conversely to hold on to a specific tradition, we will be able to give a vivid picture of historical processes that might otherwise seem inexplicable or abstract.

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¹⁴ See ID., “Il codice Angelica 123. Musica e politica tra i secoli XI e XII”, in *Bologna e il secolo XI. Storia, cultura, economia, istituzioni, diritto*, ed. by G. Feo and F. Roversi Monaco, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2011, pp. 239-252.