

Sub-project B03

Manuscript Culture and Chant Communities: Organization of Knowledge in Manuscripts of Polyphonic Music from the So-Called Notre Dame Repertory

Prof. Dr. Oliver Huck

Eva Maschke, M.A.

Summary

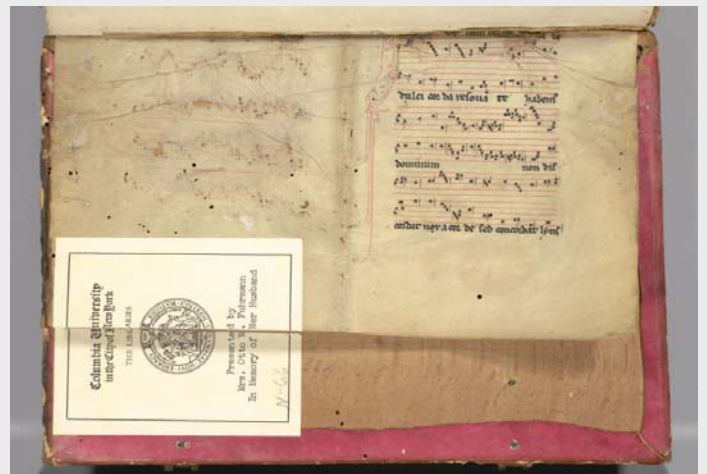
The repertory of polyphonic music of the 12th and early 13th centuries associated with Notre-Dame de Paris is the central corpus of high medieval polyphony linked with the composers Leonin and Perotin. Being multiple-text manuscripts containing organa, conducti as well as some clausulae and motets, the four surviving manuscripts and a series of fragments contain repertoires from several musical genres. From the 13th century onwards, a manuscript culture of European manuscripts of polyphonic music emerged as the functions and visual organisation of these manuscripts became increasingly distinct from liturgical books of musical notation. In the European Middle Ages, music was understood primarily as an act which, in the case of polyphonic music, can be described as singing in a community of experts (chant community). The notator of a music manuscript visualised and organised information concerning the execution and performance of the music. Extracts from the Notre Dame repertory were still being re-notated and sung into the 15th century.

Objectives

The aim of this project is to dispel the common view of the Notre Dame repertory, which is still shaped by the dichotomy between the oral and written form and the aesthetic conception of a 'Magnus liber organi', by describing how knowledge about the repertory was organised at various locations and what caesurae there were within French manuscript culture. The project intends to present the first diachronic examination of the visual organisation of knowledge in manuscripts of polyphonic music from the 13th and 14th centuries, thereby highlighting the prevailing plurality and state of flux. The visual organisation of the manuscript is correlated with object-specific cultural practices within a community of singers (chant community). Analysis of the different use of musical symbols and layouts for one and the same piece in different manuscripts helps researchers to understand the discursive function of notation within a chant community and also how knowledge was kept up to date in subsequent generations and transferred to other chant communities through the performance of music.



Trimmed double page from a music manuscript after being used as waste material, Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Gammel kongelige Samling 1810, 4°. Notation of two pieces of *organum*, *Alleluia*, *Epulemur in Azimis* and *Gaude Maria. Gabriele archangelum. Gloria*, already features mensural elements.



Fragment of a music manuscript from the former Dominican Monastery, Frankfurt (Main), used as waste material. Now kept in New York, Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, incunabulum N-66, with the end of the *Conductus Porta salutis ave* and the start of the *Conductus Sursum corda elevate*.

The practice of depicting medieval polyphonic music in European manuscripts

Manuscripts continued to play a central role in European music long after the introduction of music printing in the 15th century. In the production of manuscripts containing musical notation, the actual procedure of notating is always seen as a separate step which cannot be equated with writing a text (in this case, a liturgical or poetic text assigned to the music) or with book decoration. The objective of notating – regardless of whether the notation preceded or followed the actual music – was to organise and visualise knowledge relating to the execution and performance of music.

As regards the transmission of music through the ages, knowledge refers primarily to information about the execution and performance of the music notated in the manuscripts. From the 13th century onwards, written examples of music notation included not only pitches but also rhythmic durations. In contrast to modern notation, it is not an individual musical symbol which represents the duration of a note, but the interrelationship of several symbols, including purely visual features such as the spacing or grouping of the symbols. The period from 1200 to 1430 was characterised by a number of caesurae with regard to the way in which music manuscripts represented temporal order, particularly in polyphonic music. The basis of square notation as an initially regional form of the diastematic neume was extended and the significance of the symbols enhanced beyond denoting the pitch to also providing information about rhythmic durations.