

The medieval sources on conducting

A practically universal silence is the main feature of the documentary material for the medieval period on the performance practice of conducting choirs in the liturgical field.

While on the one hand there is a fair amount of evidence that highlights the dignity, importance and tasks of those who assumed the role of ‘director’ of a *Schola*, on the other hand we are forced to admit, with equal certainty, that the same sources do not provide – if not in exceptional cases and then only circumstantially – precise and unambiguous information on the practical ways of performing the functions of director. Only certain general elements of such functions can be indirectly and partially deduced. At the same time one can also advance certain hypotheses, placing them within a framework of references that cannot be ignored. Finally, one can attempt a ‘musicologically’ scrupulous reading of the very few instances of more explicit documentation.

The history of the liturgy and of music – that of sacred music in particular – attest the pre-eminence of the role carried out by the *Schola cantorum* in the context of church and ecclesiastic ritual.

This institution gradually established a specific configuration of its own, while remaining in a mutual relationship with (though also differentiating itself from) the nucleus of the *Schola lectorum*. From the organizational point of view it flourished within a general design that contemplated multiple prospects, preparing for ecclesiastical careers that required one to guarantee the future candidates a proven competence in the sacred disciplines and canonical practices.

The members of the *Schola cantorum*, especially the younger recruits, were ready, along with the more experienced members, to give an answer to the various demands provoked by new situations that emerged from the management of a steadily growing sacred ritual. Over and above the specifically educational aspects, the training consisted in the sharing of a ritual experience that was organic and cyclic, yet nonetheless open to new acquisitions.

The most explicit early literary documentation on the *Schola*, which only slightly postdates that on the solo singers, is from Roman sources (*Liber Pontificalis* and *Ordines*) and is confirmed (even outside Rome) by various archaeological finds. These are traces of a phenomenon of general growth, which also developed *extra Urbem* in the same direction, though with less

pomp (owing to circumstantial requirements and environmental limitations).

Evidence comes from certain general considerations that highlight the role of the *Schola* in the musical communication of the rites within the institutional, professional and architectural aspects. We can point to a mass of interacting factors: eortological growth; the development of Christian poetry; the Christological and ecclesiological reinterpretation of the Davidic psalms; the easier exchange of vital experiences in ecclesiastical regions even distant from one another; the new 'basilical' configuration of the places of worship (which accommodated large assemblies); and finally, the 'aesthetic' refinement of the ritual practices, which at that time intended to establish themselves as an inheritance of the finest civic and ritual tradition of Roman civilization. In addition, we can also take into account the phenomenon of ministerial differentiation within the ecclesiastical *coetus* and the more complex rituality intended for the progressive clericalization.

The place of the directorial office, if we exclude the pedagogical and didactic functions, was the Choir, to be understood in its double meaning of a site and a unit of people. The traces of choral activity can be seen clearly to this day in the paleo-Christian basilicas where the *Schola* was situated in definite and well-defined spaces placed in front of the altar. Still visible today are the enclosures in the basilicas of San Clemente and Santa Maria in Cosmedin in Rome. But the custom of highlighting the place assigned to the ministry of singing was not only restricted to Rome. In this respect there is also eloquent evidence from the archaeological discoveries in distant regions.¹

Further eloquent testimony is provided by the poetic and literary evidence in honour of liturgical 'singers', particularly soloists, whose role – in a culture of oral transmission – had an importance that is difficult for us to appreciate today.

It is therefore more than legitimate to consider – in relation to these data – the need for a school organization, of a training structure, to ensure faithful transmission and also some control over 'inventiveness'. Indeed since singing – even solo singing – was a 'primary' code of communication, adopted both within the assemblies and for the assemblies, it could not be entrusted to subjective and extemporary improvisation, but was instead composed, recomposed and transmitted with the assistance of a definite craft; indeed all the

¹ On Roman antiquity, see ANTONIO FERRUA, "La Schola Cantorum", *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 113, 1962, 2, pp. 250-258. Archaeological discoveries have revealed places for the *Schola* in Alvinzano di Caserta (*Cubulteria*), near Castelfusano (*Laurentum*), at Aquileia, etc. The tradition remained uninterrupted for centuries; for example, in the biography of Arnardus Gauzolino (†1030) Andrea Floriacensis relates that the abbot "Chorum psallentium quoque pulcherrimo marmorum compsit emblemata, quæ asportari iusserat a partibus Romaniae". "Quod omni Gallicæ sit in exemplum".

more so when the subjects learning were first and foremost boy singers. Besides we are also aware of the strength of the sense of *traditio* and the consideration of the ‘canonicity’ of the ritual gestures and texts, even though at times they were sometimes differentiated (depending on the cultural area).

There was thus a need for the presence of a director and coordinator: but in what operative framework?

Certainly this occurred at the level of pedagogical and training (comprising actions of a ‘technical’ nature derived from cultural habits) vis-à-vis the ‘subjects’, and also at a level of organization and coordination vis-à-vis the overall institution. His work was to ensure, at the root, the success of a ritual ‘performance’ that must not only be appropriate, but also qualitatively noble.

On the other hand, there is no evidence of any probative force that allows us to hypothesize a ‘directive’ action (relying on a specific gestuality) during the actual ‘celebration’. Indeed in the texts of the patristic and liturgical literature, we detect a distinct ‘diffidence’ (indeed even condemnation) of any form of gesture (even merely vocal) that might tend in some way to theatrical mimesis or make the ‘character’ prevail over the ministry. Of great positive concern, on the other hand, was that of ensuring the ‘symbolic’ and functional quality of the *chorus*: aspects that were perceived through its circular arrangement and its *concordia psallentium*. The vocal blend was probably entrusted to the communal ‘consonance’ that matured through institutional organization and vital experience. If indeed this result was obtained in this way, it might not have required the support of particular gestural techniques in the ritual performance.

This is a hypothesis that can be questioned, but it does not lack a certain plausibility if kept within the bounds of the earliest times of the *Schola* and of its liturgical service: i.e. up until about the 8th-9th centuries. Indeed nothing else can be deduced even from the less meagre surviving evidence concerning the Papal *Schola*. The Papal institution was certainly unique, yet it also stood as a paradigm, to be imitated, where required, in due proportion in accordance with necessity. The singers within it were subjected to a rigorous process of basic professional training.² Not even in Rome can we point to con-

² It is sufficient to mention the authoritative reference to the training of the *cantores* lasting about ten years, as Guido Aretnus commented in the *Epistola ad Michelem*, 15: “[...] vix decennio cantandi imperfectam consequi potuerunt”: in GUIDO D’AREZZO, *Le opere* [...], ed. Angelo Rusconi, Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005, pp. 132-133 (La tradizione musicale, 10. Le regole della musica, 1). To this same meaning we can perhaps also connect the text with which AGOBARDUS LUGDUNENSIS in the *Liber de correctione antiphonarii*, XVIII, PL 104, col. 338A, complains of the excessive time spent by the singers studying singing. Moreover, the future ‘masters’ were faced with even more taxing courses of studies that contemplated (at the very least) diction, reading, singing and music theory.

vincing evidence of the practice, within the rites, of particular movements on the part of the *primicerius* that can be likened to those that we may consider as supportive of choral ‘direction’ (or cheironomic conducting).³

Nor, on this matter, are we assisted by the ‘hierarchical’ distinctions, if we consider that the positions and titles of specific individuals concern above all the dignity of the subjects, but are not divorced from a certain idea of function. On various occasions the documentation refers to the titles of *Prior Scholae*, *Magister*, *Primicerius* or *Archicantor*, and *Paraphonistae*.⁴ These are terms that both within and outside the liturgical context refer to the organization and activity of the *Schola* itself.

The conclusion of this first type of approach to the problem prompts us to reassert the distinction that already emerged from the preceding lines. In other words, it is difficult to question the fact that gestures of various types, movements, cues and looks took place as useful or necessary tools for the *magister* when working in the processes of teaching, initiation and the transmission of pieces or formulas up until their memorization on the part of the pupils and the achievement of a shared technical device that could ensure the effect of ensemble. Such was the aim of the singers’ overall training. Indeed it was through gesture that the ‘director’ was able to tackle the need to recall to the memory of the singers already instructed or to those to be trained in memorization, all that went beyond the simple forms of psalmody or (though only outside Rome) the incisive strophic melodies of the hymns. Even the (non-solo) ‘formulaic’ and ‘centonized’ compositions probably needed to be recollected through some form of signalling, also owing to the interchangeability of their positions within the melodic phrases. It is therefore through the mediation of gesture that one could overcome that difficulty that Hucbald of Saint-Amand was still to mention in the 10th century when he wrote:

Primam enim notulam cum aspexeris, quae esse videtur elatior, proferre eam quocumque vocis casu facile poteris. Secundam vero, quam pressio-rem attendis, cum primae copulare quaesieris, quonam modo id facias, utrum videlicet uno vel duobus aut certe tribus ab ea elongari debeat punc-

³ The hypothesis is tackled by Dom Ambroise Kienle, who claims to base himself on *Ordo romanus I* (but on the fact mentioned, that the choir master took off his big cloak before the Mass, where does that appear in the text?). M. Huglo – from whom we learn about Kienle’s position – cites the hypothesis and calls it “ingenious” – probably without checking the *Ordo* mentioned – but nonetheless suggests that is ‘unlikely’: see MICHEL HUGLO, “La chironomie médiévale”, *Revue de musicologie*, XLIX, 1963, pp. 155-171.

⁴ See *Ordo romanus I*.

tis, nisi auditu ab alio percipias, nullatenus sic a compositore statutam esse pernoscere potes.⁵

Instead it seems – given the silence of the sources – that the whole of this *corpus* of signs and gestures cannot be imagined as being transposed (not even in a more ‘ritualized’ form) to the actual performance of the liturgical chants within the rites or various ritual segments. And that seems to apply at least (as we said above) to the earliest period of the service of the *Schola*. One can instead assert that the *magister cantorum* had the tasks of choosing the soloists, giving the performance its start and perhaps also the tone, indicating the rests and the close of the pieces, and ordering and initiating the processional itineraries.⁶ This, presumably, is the extent of the directorial activity in the act of performance.

At this point, as a kind of parenthesis, it is also worth considering the matter from another point of view, one that has only been hinted at previously.

We know that Gregorian Chant, and even before that the various repertoires distinguished by local melodic idioms, were a clear and living expression of the close relationship – one that lasted for long time over the medieval centuries – that music had with memory. It was a relationship whose mythical-philosophical origins can be identified in the idealized consanguinity between the Muses and Memory: those Muses that make music – in the meaning still understood by Isidor of Seville – the art of modulating, but in such a way that only the memory is capable of retaining the sounds, which by their very nature are destined to ‘perish’ given that they are not codified in writing.⁷ To this point of view we can attribute, ‘in its own way’, that interpretation made by Augustine and Boethius and known to all, according to which music is a ‘reminiscence’ of the Name of God.

⁵ YVES CHARTIER, *L'Oeuvre musicale d'Hucbald de Saint-Amand: les compositions et le traité de musique*, Montréal, Bellarmin, 1995, p. 45.

⁶ “[...] exeunt de sagrestia et magister scolarum et cantor ordinant processionem”: Padua, Biblioteca Capitolare, ms. E 57, c. 95v; see *Il “Liber ordinarius” della Chiesa padovana*. Padova, Biblioteca Capitolare, ms. E 57, sec. XIII, ed. Giulio Cattin and Anna Vildera [...], Padova, Istituto per la storia ecclesiastica padovana, 2002 (Fonti e ricerche di storia ecclesiastica padovana, XXVII), 130, n. 127.

⁷ “Musica est peritia modulationis sono cantuque consistens. Et dicta Musica per derivationem a Musis. [...] Quarum sonus, quia sensibilis res est, et praeterfluit in praeteritum tempus inprimaturque memoriae. Inde a poetis Iovis et Memoriae filias Musas esse confictum est. Nisi enim ab homine memoria teneantur soni, pereunt quia scribi non possunt”: ISIDORO DI SIVIGLIA, *Etimologiarum* III, 15, in JOSÉ OROZ RETA & MANUEL-A. MARCOS CASQUERO, *San Isidoro de Sevilla, Etimologías, Edición bilingüe* I, Madrid, La Editorial Católica, 1982 (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 433), pp. 442-455, based (with revisions) on the historic edition of W.M. Lindsay, Oxford, Clarendon, 1911 (Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis).

Now it appears clear – in the context in question – that this relationship between music, chant and memory raises quite a few queries and obviously seems to call into question that supportive approach that characterizes a directorial activity engaged in clarifying the unfolding of a melodic line by means of a gesture.

In this way our problem reasserts itself and calls into question the definition of the semantic meaning of ‘cheironomy’. This is another theme that is anything but self-evident. On this matter we can consider certain aspects that broaden the problematic horizon and – though not providing certain answers – at least restrict one or two layers of the purely imaginary sphere.

a) Quintilian defines the ‘cheironomy as the art of the gesture’,⁸ and the reference is to rhetorical practice: for it is a rhetorical aid, a non-verbal code that is functional to the expression of discourse. It is a ‘solo’ practice that was to be personalized by singers (liturgical and otherwise) in the course of history, either through committed corporeal involvement or even through mere exhibition.

The texts of Augustine and Boethius, but above all those of Isidor of Seville, seem to give a certain foundation to a first aspect, even if at the price of a questionable semantic interpretation: that of looking for a close relationship with neumatic notation in the etymology of the word. Certain scholars have indeed asserted that the Greek signifier embraces the fact of a union between χεῖρ = hand and νεῦμα = sign, understood as neumatic notation. In this case the cheironomic gestures, subsequently translated into graphic signs placed above the texts of the repertoire, would lie at the origin of neumatic notation.⁹

If a relationship does exist, it should in any case not be sought in the etymology, so much as in the practice that emerged after the graphic formulation: that of the neume, by then fixed on the page, transferred to gesture.

In any case the word νεῦμα is not attested in the West before the year 708,¹⁰ and according to Amalarius, who relies on the reliable grammarian

⁸ “[...] et certe quod facere oporteat non indignandum est discere, cum praesertim haec cheironomia, quae est (ut nomine ipso declaratur) lex gestus, et ab illis temporibus heroicis orta sit et a summis Graeciae viris atque ipso etiam Socrate probata, a Platone quoque in parte civilium posita virtutum, et a Chrysippo in praeceptis de liberorum educatione compositis non omis- sa”: M.F. QUINTILIANUS, *Institutio oratoria*. I, XI, 17, ed. Adriano Pennacini, Torino, Einaudi, 2001.

⁹ This claim, among other things, is justified if one takes into consideration some of the neumatic scripts, such as that of St Gall, which played such a decisive role in the revival of Gregorian chant and in the subsequent studies.

¹⁰ See *Analecta Bollandiana*, LII, 1934, p. 484.

Comminianus, the corresponding Latin term – *nutus* – means a gesture of the hand.¹¹ This is the semantic approach of the Latin West, which seems to justify the connection between cheironomic practice and the appearance of neumatic notation.

b) A differently nuanced argument, on the other hand, can be proposed if one refers to Greek music (and that of other ancient civilizations). It could have had some relevance to a liturgical ‘Byzantine cheironomy’ even before that of the West. Indeed there exists an interpretation – which is much easier to endorse – that interprets the term cheironomy as a union between χεῖρ = hand and νόμος = law. In this case it is something ‘manual’ that ‘governs’ various activities. Nonetheless there is only one passage in post-Classical Greek literature that applies it to a melodic context.

To the practices of various types the gesture confers a rhythm or serves to enhance the expression. Documented with this meaning are the practices of directing a dance, guiding an instrumental ensemble and conferring control to a variously choreutic movement. Even a form of ‘expressive’ self-gesticulation may be understood. The gesture of the hand of the ‘coryphaeus’, who is not necessarily the director of the music, nonetheless governs the agogic, dynamic and expressive qualities of a ludic moment or ritual ensemble.

Can we admit the influence of such a marked gestuality in the field of liturgical chant, first in that of Bizantine sacred music and then with an extension to broader contexts in the Western regions? We are not against giving some credit to this hypothesis, but only if it is contextualized within the context of changed ritual and cultural conditions.

Some sort of reconstruction of this ‘setting’ is indeed possible (and here we also come to the need to restrict the chronological *post quem* ambit); and though always hypothetical, such a reconstruction is nonetheless based on strong analogies of cultural data and on a wider concordance of the evidence.

And here we refer to the time of the birth and establishment of the ‘Gregorian’ or Franco-Roman repertoire (also considering it a decisive turning point in terms of the ‘direction’ of a ritually active *Schola*).

Unquestionably such a comprehensive and complex event still conceals many secrets: but when it comes to describing it, there are also as many features that are substantially defined. They can be placed chronologically from

¹¹ “[...] neuma graecum est et interpretatur nutus ut Comminianus grammaticus dicit”: AMALARIUS, *Liber de ordine antiphonarii*, XVIII.9, in *Amalarii episcopi opera liturgica omnia*, published at Ioanne Michaelae Hanssens, III, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1950 (Studi e Testi, 140), p. 55.

the moment of the pre-Carolingian political-ecclesiastical events up to that of the Carolingian reform aimed at promoting the new liturgical organization.

An attempt, therefore, is made to collect and interpret various elements, in anticipation of a greater clarification of the theme of 'direction'. Between the end of the 8th century and the beginning of the 9th century the following elements became established, either imposed by need or suggested by particular objectives:

- the need for a more thorough organization of the *Scholae*, and of new establishments of the *Scholae* as mainstays of support and efficiency for ensuring the liturgical unification of the European territories, in turn the instrument of a better religious and socio-political amalgam. Such a promotion had already been continuing for some time, according to the testimony of Bede, but it was not a part of a systematic project of ritual 'Romanization'.
- more substantial traces of reference to the theory (understood more or less strictly) and to the practice of the Greco-Byzantines in the musical sector. The establishment of the oktoechos is the clearest evidence of this. And perhaps also the more frequent use of an 'organalis' voice. This influence does not mean a 'transposition' of models *sic et simpliciter*, but the inseminalization of ideas and operative horizons that contribute to evolutions at a local level.
- the invention of formulas to assist the development of the relationship between auditory memory and intonations according to precise modes. Well-known are the examples such as "Primum quaerite regnum Dei" or "Tertia die est quod haec facta sunt", etc.
- the appearance of unheighted notation, which still cannot define the degrees of the sounds and their melodic curves on the page and therefore does nothing to change the relationship of dependence between the singers and the 'director'. He must continue to provide all the elements, also those already notated (given that the manuscript is not designed for the use of the singers). Moreover, the parchment fixes only the elements that are most difficult to memorize, above all those associated with aspects of rhythm and ornamentation. The same applies also to the additional letters: precisely because they are susceptible to nuanced interpretation, they presuppose a dependence on some precise cueing. In fact the unity of choral expression is the primary objective required of a guide during the act of performance. All of this is decisive, to the extent that the unheighted neumatic notations are also called 'cheironomic notations'.

The growth and the perfecting of the neumed codices unquestionably attest the intention to support the regulation and appropriate application of the

new standard repertoire, as entrusted to the heads of the *Scholae*. The codices were necessary. The thorough diffusion and the ‘unanimous’ execution of the chant – by that stage universally sanctified by the name of Gregory – could surely not be dependent on a number of singers of proven competence, as in former times (i.e. activated simply and solely by the resources of memory, given also that many also were the melodic and rhythmic novelties introduced into the repertoire), a number that could be sufficient to cover the needs of the huge structure. Although obviously the precious support of the neumed codices could not be easily multiplied (also because of their cost), it seems that everything possible was done to equip the libraries of the *Scholae* with at least one copy. Thus, after study and personal assimilation, the choral director could make use of it to re-transmit the teaching of the pieces with greater fidelity, in conditions in which memorization and the very integral custody of the memorized heritage were increasingly difficult. This was and remained the true problem: because the neumed codex could also act as a definitive, yet mute, depository of the liturgical repertoire. In this regard it is sufficient to think of what, later still, Johannes Affligemensis ‘Cotto(n)’ was to declare:

Hae autem omnia intervalla distincte demonstrent, usque adeo, ut et erroem penitus excludant, et oblivionem canendi, si semel perfecte sint cognitae, non admittant: quis non magnam in eis utilitatem esse videat? Qualiter autem irregulares neumae erroem potius quam scientiam generent in virgulis et clinibus atque podatis considerari perfacile est, quoniam quidem et aequaliter omnes disponuntur, et nullus elevationis vel depositionis modus per eas exprimitur. Unde fit, ut unusquisque tales neumas pro libitu suo exaltet aut deoprimat, et ubi tu semiditonum vel diatessaron sonas, alius ibidem ditonum vel diapente faciat, et si adhuc tertius adsit, ab utrisque disconveniat. Dicit namque unis: Hoc modo magoster Trudo me docuit; subiungit alius: Ego autem a magistro Albino didici; ad hoc tertius: Certe magister Salomon longe aliter cantat. Et ne te longis morer ambagibus, raro tres in uno cantu concordant, ne dum mille, quia nimirum dum quisque suum praefert magistrum, tot fiunt diversificationes canendi quot sunt in mundo magistri.¹²

- hence the neumatic notation (at least that of certain families), as well as being a practical-functional-institutional new aid and an unquestioned

¹² JOHANNES AFFLIGEMENSIS, *De musica cum Tonario*, cap. XXI, ed. Joseph Smits van Waesberghe, Rome, American Institute of Musicology, 1950 (Corpus scriptorum de musica), pp. 133-134; also still relevant, by the same JOSEPH SMITS VAN WAESBERGHE, “La place exceptionnelle de l’ars musica dans le développement des sciences au siècle des Carolingiens”, *Revue grégorienne*, XXXI, 1952, pp. 81-104.

attestation of the new professional status nobilitating the master who could ‘read’, translated the former authentically gestural code of the arduous and well-tested experiences of teaching into a visual code of notation through the perfection of staff-notation and rhythmic devices. Conversely, from this moment on, the fixed notation would in turn make its contribution: that of restoring to the future movements of the hand an orientation such as to make the direction resemble a genuine act of a ‘ritual’ nature (*nomos*).

- the increasing spectacularization of the liturgical rites; a kind of Gallican-Frankish reprisal over Roman *sobrietas*. This became such that it also supported (and integrated) a director’s gestural competence for the benefit of the singers.
- finally, one must calculate the authentic ‘aesthetic’ cure, at least at a projectual and programmatic level. It arose not out of ‘aestheticism’ (saving the always recurrent, dangerously centrifugal, force of ‘musical’ considerations), but within the lively scope of that substantial Biblical-liturgical spirituality that recognized the primary value of the interpreted and prayed Word. Now, it was only in the gesture (and in the cheironomic management of the choir) at the moment of the living and vital act of the ritual commitment that all the elements that were clear to the intelligence (and pulsating in the heart) of the ‘director’ – who in turn was engaged in ‘prayer’ and not free of the emotional factor – could find a precious element that was simultaneously expressive of self and mystagogical-impressive for the singers. This corresponds to what John the Deacon succinctly imagined in the 9th century when he spoke of the sweet song of St Gregory rendered with the gentle inflections of sweet melodies. From this point of view the medieval liturgical chant and its composition can be assessed as the peak of a rhetorical process through which the fruits of a believing and convinced participation in the ‘dialogue of the Alliance’ were externalized (in gestures of praise or supplication, wise reflection or pithy narration).

Subsequently, and due to the combined presence of all these factors, the very same different perspectives underlying the semantic interpretation of the term ‘cheironomy’ lend themselves to a re-reading in which one can more comfortably combine the peculiar nuances of meaning: ‘neume’, therefore, both as *nomos* and as *nutus*, both regulators of the exhaling *pneuma* and definitive mover of the vocal vibrations, regulated through the choral execution of a hand.

The verbal signifier remained the Greek one, but the practical activation was adapted to the situation and to the necessities of the contextual novelty in which it was now received; only that in the West the use (if any) of the cheironomic hand rules out – with exceptions – the simultaneous use of a digital system of signs.

And in fact, after the Carolingian Reform we register the (extremely limited)

apparition of Western evidence of a literary and/or iconographic nature concerning the *magister chori* or *magister scholae*. They are texts or images that imply his position of dignity (functional-practical and symbolic) and/or allude to a possible directorial gestuality; among other things favoured also by the rediscovery and revival of liturgical elements of the weighty early Temple ritual. Typical is the figure of David: “vir in canticis eruditus, qui armoniam musicam non vulgari voluptate, sed fideli voluntate dilexit...”¹³ as well as that of the ‘choir-leader’ evoked by the psalms.

In short, our itinerary traced started from a picture featuring ‘circumstantial’ evidence to arrive, though not without effort, at being better equipped with some objectively delineated confirmation, even if of a somewhat late date. Therefore the re-reading of the few available documents would seem possible; and though the reading is not completely clear and does lend itself to ambitiously categoric statements, it can at least be seen as tentatively probative. We shall here survey the main ones, which have already been collected and interpreted and commented (in his own way) by M. Huglo.

I – Literary texts

The elements found in them refer to one or more elements worthy of note. Hence a schematic categorization of the references is not easy, especially if one wishes to pay attention to the geographic positioning and to the ‘chronological’ succession of the texts themselves.

a) institutional importance of the *Magister chori*

Certain passages put the role of the director into clear relief, though without entering into descriptive details:

- “Cantoris officium est chorum in cantuum elevatione vel depressione vel per se vel per succentorem suum regere”.¹⁴ What is interesting is the specification “succentorem suum”.¹⁵

¹³ AGOSTINO D’IPPONA, *La Città di Dio (De civitate Dei)*, XVII, 14, ed. Domenico Gentili, Roma, Città nuova, 2005, 5/2.

¹⁴ A Customary of Lichfield (1193) or of Exeter; quotation in MARTIN GERBERT, *De cantu et musica sacra a prima ecclesiae aetate usque ad praesens tempus*, I, 304, Oberried, 1774.

¹⁵ Allusions are found to double conducting (perhaps also synchronized, if required by the different positioning of the choirs): “Duo regentes chorum”; see MICHEL HUGLO, *La chironomie médiévale*. The Paduan *Liber ordinarius* (Padua, Bibl. Capitolare, ms. E 57, fol. 102r) attests the activity of two choirs for the proses of the *Benedicamus Domino* at the end of the baptismal procession: “[...] quatuor de canonicis vel aliis ecclesiae clericis in corpore ecclesi-

- His central position in the choir-crown is stressed: somewhat like the jewel of a ring. This aspect, as well as the stressed role (also ‘functional’) of guaranteeing ‘unity’, is insistently stated by the texts on account of its ‘patristic’ nature and owing to its strong ‘symbolic’ dimension.
- There is a specified place for the choir and above all for the *Magister*. As in Antiquity the *Schola* had found its positioning ‘around the altar’ in a semicircle,¹⁶ but in the 11th century there was a reassessment of ‘before the altar’, prompted by the widespread Cluniac spirituality.¹⁷ In each of the two positions (the earlier and the new) an important position must have been reserved for the ‘director’. The performers always stand in a close circle around him. All must clearly be able to receive the necessary indications for singing, especially those imparted by hand gestures. He is the point of reference when, once the soloists have sung the melodies rich in melismas, the chant involves the whole *Schola*.
- The *Magister* must be carefully watched by the members of the choir: “Praecentorem [...] directorem sui constituent ad quem diligentissime attendant”¹⁸.
- The *Magister chori* was accorded the honorific designation of *baculus*, as for great dignitaries: “Magister scholarum tenens baculum episcopalem incipit Puer natus est et per certas determinatas stantias¹⁹ ab utroque latere cantatur usque in fine”.²⁰ The very presence in the book of the rule that orders this custom attests the importance that was attributed to this specific practice and symbol of the *magister*’s privilege and duty. Once again one notes a mention of the presence of a certain aesthetic-performative dramatization obtained by dividing the choirs and hence also by exploiting the church’s acoustic-spatial features.
- Or again, Andrea Floriacensis narrates in the life of Arnardus Gauzolino: “Fecit et precentorialem virgam argenteo scemate nitentem, cuius verticis summitas fert christallum et lucida gemmarum contubernia, haec subnotans modulamina: Octonos distingue modos per pneumata, cantor, / Laudibus in cunctis placeas ut iure tonanti. / Regibus est sceptrum, can-

ae cantat...” the first prose; the second is performed by four other singers, placed “in eminentiori loco graduum ab altari sanctae Crucis” (see *Il Liber ordinarius della Chiesa padovana*).

¹⁶ “Chorum autem ab imagine factum coronae et ex eo ita vocatum; unde et Ecclesiasticus liber scribit: Stantem sacerdotem ante aram et in circuitu eius corona fratrum”: ISIDORO DI SIVIGLIA, *De Eccl. Officiis*, I,2.

¹⁷ see ULDERICUS III, *Consuetudines Cluniacenses*, PL 149, 749.

¹⁸ GIROLAMO DI MORAVIA, today identified as a English Dominican active also in Paris (Hieronymus of ?); see also MICHEL HUGLO, *La chironomie medievale*.

¹⁹ The reference is to the parts of the tropings present in the *Introitus*.

²⁰ See *Il “Liber ordinarius” della Chiesa padovana*, 56, n. 65 m (ms. E57, fol. 44v).

toribus est et id ipsum./ Hoc metuunt multi, dum stat censura superbi; /
hoc et amant monachi, stantes in laude parati. / Aurea virga notat, quid rex
pro iure sequatur. / Innixus longo cantor dat signa bacillo. / Grex sequitur
tutus, clare tonat ipsa iuventus. /Hoc Helgardus tuus cantor non segnis
alumnus / solemniter de more facit, legemque priorum / Palmatus baculo,
gemmis crustatus et auro. / [...] Hunc pro more gerit festis solemnibus
anni.../...”.²¹

This text is one of the most significant and complete descriptions available. The rich *baculus* of the *Magister* is here likened to a king's sceptre and bishop's crozier. As a result the singers symbolize a faithful 'flock' that knows and behaves in accordance with the indications of the guide (reminiscent of the Evangelical text of St John). The 'choir' therefore appears as a living metaphor of the Christian people that walk in docility and give praise in concord. In the situation described this role is given to the conscientious *magister* Helgardus, who performs it according to custom ("de more facit, pro more gerit...").

b) allusions to cheironomic activity during the sacred rites

A second series of texts contains some more precise allusions to aspects of gestuality: that within which we can include 'cheironomic' direction.

- “Praecentor manu et voce alios ad harmoniam excitat”.²² “Manu et voce”: is the concise expression of a personal behaviour that unites external commitment and the expression of the inner world. A term that we find repeated literally in the following text, written in a geographically distant place and in a context specifically referring to the practice of Ambrosian chant. Here it is:
- “Primicerius, lectorum paululum semotus a loco suo infra chorum incipit antiphonam in choro lectoribus circumstantibus eum in modum coronae, ipso mediante manu et voce descensionem antiphonae et ascensionem”.²³ Hence in Milan the custom of directing (we may hypothesize a technical *koiné*) is similar to that of Rome, Gaul and other regions. The referred-to vicinity between the place of the *Schola* and the place from which the

²¹ Text included by JULIUS VON SCHLOSSER in the anthology *Quellenbuch. Repertorio di fonti per la storia dell'arte del Medioevo occidentale (sec. IV-XV)*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 1992, pp. 183-184.

²² ONORIO D'AUTUN, *Gemma animae*; see MICHEL HUGLO, *La chironomie médiévale*.

²³ BEROLDUS, *Ordo et caerimoniae ecclesiae Ambrosianae Mediolanensis*, ed. Marco Magistretti, Mediolani, Josephi Giovanola, 1894.

readers proclaimed the sacred readings responds to a theological-symbolic viewpoint – as perfectly realized by the verbal-melodism of the repertoire – and not only to matters of practicality.

- “Cumque manum ille ad modulos sequentiae pingendos rite levasset...”. This time we are dealing with narrative evidence left by the author of the *Casus Sancti Galli* (1030).²⁴ During a solemn Mass celebrated at Inghelheim in the presence of various bishops, a monk from St Gall made his way to the centre of the choir²⁵ to direct with the gesture of his hand the singing of the *Laudes Salvatori*, the sequence attributed to Notker. The tone of the chronicle suggests that the gestuality associated with the direction of the singing was customary (note the strong sense of the adverb *rite*, which further specifies the *mos*). It is an integral part of the act of performance, linked to a ritual behaviour that is prized by all and not only useful to singers. From other evidence concerning this very celebration – in particular the chronicle notes written by some of the bishops present – we learn that the monk from St Gall was the ‘director’ of the singing school of Mayence.
- Even the tradition of singing of Cassino – which was influenced by Greco-Byzantine practice – was familiar with directorial gestures as a means of ensuring unity in performance. Like everywhere else, it decisively contributed even to a better phrasing of the soloist, but was above all useful as a means of ensuring the unity of the *Schola*. With the interpretative refinements of a rhythmic nature the function of gesture becomes even more decisive. In the 12th century a monk from Montecassino testifies to a practice of singing adopted and jointly observed in various (Greek) monasteries in southern Italy. There the choir master is explicitly called Χειρονομικός. This is not surprising, given the well-known relations with the Byzantine repertoire and hence also with the cheironomic experience of that tradition. Its rules are attested by a more substantial number of sources: “the choir master with his hand raised on high indicates to all with his gestures the rhythm and the mode of performance in a manner that all, watching his hand at the same moment, perform together the singing as if it were one single voice”.²⁶

²⁴ *Casus Sancti Galli*, Monum. Germ. Hist. (MGH), SS. II. 3. See also MICHEL HUGLO, *La chironomie médiévale*. For a version in Italian translation: *Cronache di San Gallo*, ed. Gian Carlo Alessio, Torino, Einaudi, 2004.

²⁵ The documents of St. Gall, concerning the structure of the abbey church in the 11th century, clearly attest the existence – in front of the altar – of a large space reserved to the ministry of the singers. The term is *Chorus psallentium*, as we deduce from a plan preserved in the Library of the Swiss town, reproducing the whole area of the monastery as it appeared in the year 820.

²⁶ The quote, which on account of its value we intentionally propose in translation, is given in

- Once again, the same source also bears witness to the dignity and rank of the director, who “holds his stick in his left hand; he raises his right on high so that all can see it and may apply the rules of his technique of neumes; for example, he shows how to rise by five degrees”.

2 – *The iconographic elements*

a) Iconography of uncertain interpretation.

It is a little hazardous to try and decipher a cheironomic behaviour presented as ‘paradigmatic’ through an ideal attribution to St Gregory the Great. Here we refer to the pose in which the pope is shown in representations in the Hartker Codex²⁷ and in that of an ivory from Nonantola.²⁸

In both cases the gesture of the saint implies the use of one hand only, the left hand. A plausible explanation advanced for this ‘left-handed’ practice is that the artist specifically wished to represent a cheironomic gesture, and not a papal blessing. In this regard the iconographic version of Hartker is fairly convincing on account of the breadth of the gesture that the saint accomplishes in the act of ‘dictating’ the neumatic script, when – as wisely as Solomon – “antiphonarium centonem cantorum studiosissimus nimis utiliter compilavit”.²⁹ This is not quite so clear in the image of Nonantola, given the almost static, hieratic quality of the scene (excepting the dynamism of the angel). Nonetheless, we are dealing with an ‘iconographic typology’ and as such it should have a clear meaning.

b) A case of ‘explicit’ iconography.

It is a matter of two important and eloquent pictures carved on ivory tables, belonging to an original diptych.³⁰ A close observation is instructive

MARTIN GERBERT, *De cantu et musica sacra a prima ecclesiae aetate usque ad praesens tempus*, I - 1774. The source, not specified by Gerbert, is presumably the codex Cassino 318, but it has been impossible to verify this.

²⁷ Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Ms 390, Antiphonary of the Office.

²⁸ In this instance it is the ivory book-cover of the *Cantatorium* of Nonantola (Ms I), today preserved in the Museo Benedettino Nonantolano e Diocesano d'Arte Sacra.

²⁹ Referring to the well-known text of JOHN THE DEACON, PL LXXV, 90, of doubtful historical value but of very strong mythical force.

³⁰ The two ivory plaques are separate, but both in origin surely formed the cover of a *Cantatorium*; its size of 33,3 x 11,6 cm is similar to that of other books of the same type (Monza, St. Gall, etc...). The dismembering has led to the two plaques being housed today in different places: one in the Fitzwilliam Museum of Cambridge, the other in Frankfurt.

also because it stands as a kind of essential synthesis of all the elements hitherto referred to.

- At the centre of the first table³¹ stands the majestic figure of St Gregory, clothed in casula and pallium. Here it is his right hand that is raised as if in the act of directing (and not blessing!), as is deduced from the almost symmetrical representation of the left hand holding the antiphonary open at the first page: *Ad te levavi animam meam*. This is clearly an evocation of a figure and of a founding event. Around the saint, represented on a smaller scale, yet significantly arranged in a semicircle ‘*ad modum coronae*’, are seven clerks in the act of singing, bound together by the central figure of the *magister chori*. This man has his hands raised, in the very act of directing the chant that he knows by heart and which he has made the singers memorize. His image, significantly shown with his back turned, offers almost a mirror-reflection of the pose of the holy pontiff: for he is his representative and extension into the present. One imagines that he himself is also singing, thus accomplishing a gesture of complete participation, which this time must be given *manibus et voce*.
- The second scene is substantially similar to the first one in its arrangement, but it is equally interesting and important in showing us the position of the *Schola*, during a specific liturgical practice, as is documented by the earliest sources: almost *in circuito altaris*. Previously we noted that in the earliest times the cheironomic gestuality of the *Magister* is never explicitly mentioned. Yet here it appears, evidenced by the two raised arms, displaying a movement that is directorial and choreutic at the same time: most likely it is the singing of the *Sanctus*, in an ideal vision of a Mass celebrated by St Gregory himself.

It is not possible to establish to what extent these images reflect an early practice or whether they sanctify a more recent practice. In any case they respond to our scrutiny very significantly.

This state of affairs, of a ‘medieval’ cast, was still to enjoy a long survival, though with a variety of accentuations and realizations. It was to decline in around the 16th century, for reasons that are well known to all and easily imagined.

After Mocquereau’s studies, undertaken at a fairly mature stage of the modern Gregorian renaissance, cheironomy was to reassert itself as an apt, if not even positively necessary, feature: and yet its practice was to unfold in the

³¹ For its sculptural beauty and the accentuated overall dynamism, this figure is reproduced in JEAN-CLAUDE SCHMITT, *La raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990.

shade of theories and methodologies that did not match that maturity.

Today a step forward – through the mediation of advanced semiological research and the modal aesthetic – is possible and indeed indispensable.

A wide-ranging documentation and a serious discussion on the present modalities of conducting are to be welcomed today, in view of the unquestioned interest and common advantage. In this way it should be possible to delineate – taking into account all the variables of the personal contributions of the *Magistri Scholarum* – certain objective features of a directorial style.

This should be done not in obeisance to, or in imitation of, what has become normal in concert (or at least choral) practices, but for a serious proposition of historical truth to safeguard the purity and freshness of a Gregorian chant that is re-proposed as the singing of the ‘heart’ of each person that the ‘voice’ reveals, but which reaches fullness of prayer and symbolic, ecclesial force only with the authoritative service of a guide gifted with refined sensitivity and equipped with an expert ‘hand’.