Module B1: Western liturgical chant

This module introduces students to the repertory of Western chant. As well as examining the principal forms and styles of the chant and exploring the repertory, the module considers the historical impact of editors and compilers of chant. You are encouraged to take this module with module A1: Historical outline of Christian liturgy and worship unless you already have a clear understanding of Latin liturgy.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the module you will have acquired (a) a knowledge and understanding of the principal forms and characteristics of the repertory of Western chant for Mass, Office and other related observances, and (b) a historical perspective on the formation, compilation, expansion, editing and performance of the chant.

Suggested reading and repertories

The standard work to guide you is David Hiley, Western Plainchant: A Handbook. This is now available in a paperback edition. Part II will take you through Study Area 1 (though not quite in the order listed); Parts VI, VII for 2.1; Part IV for 2.2; Part X for 2.3, and 2.4; Part XI for 2.5.

If you are making your first study of chant then you may find it useful to read a basic text-book introduction, such as Richard L. Crocker, An Introduction to Gregorian Chant, or that included in Jeremy Yudkin, Music in Medieval Europe, or Richard Hoppin, Medieval Music, or The New Oxford History of Music II: The Middle Ages to 1300 (but it must be the revised edition).

Some older books (such as Will Apel, Gregorian Chant) are now dated and need to be used with caution, but nevertheless contain much useful information. Dom Gregory Murray’s study is helpful in grasping the issues involved in the notation of chant.

John Stevens has made an important study of Words and Music in the Middle Ages, including chapters on chant, song, sequence, and liturgical drama.

The most accessible sources of chant are found in books edited by the Monks of Solesmes: Liber Usualis (recently reprinted), Graduale Romanum, Antiphonale Monasticon, Liber Hymnarius. Graduale Triplex includes additional neumatic notation from sources used for the edition.
Medieval English chant for the Mass (based on the Use of Salisbury, c.1500) is being published in practical editions edited by Nick Sandon. As well as the Ordinary of the Mass, the Temporal Cycle has now reached Holy Week.

A basic introductory anthology of chant is Mary Berry's Cantors.

Extracts from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century chant books are often on sale in antiquarian bookshops, or in stalls by the Seine near Notre Dame. Whole books can occasionally be found, and it is well worth asking in your local Roman Catholic church or convent, or in the houses of old-established Roman Catholic families: attics, store cupboards and lumber rooms are typical places.

Adaptations of existing chants for use with texts in the English language were made during the early years of the Reformation, including some of Marbeck's chant for The Book of Common Prayer. However most adaptations date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and may be found The Plainchant Gradual, The Ordinary of the Mass, and The English Hymnal, and more recently in An English Kyriale and Hymns for Prayer and Praise.

Recordings of chant vary in style and repertory and a substantial number are included in the current Gramophone catalogue. As well as recordings from abbeys (including Solesmes) you may wish to listen to Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge and Ensemble Gilles Binchois. There is a long essay on the performance of chant in the introduction to Liber Usualis: other approaches are often discussed in recording notes, but there are discussions in the journal Early Music, and reviews are often particularly informative.

In undertaking both studies and essays you would be well-advised to select representative groups of chants that you get to know really well. These could be selected from a single season, or chosen to represent a group of seasons or feasts.

Study areas
1 Repertory
1.1 Tones and modes: psalm tones and the pairing with antiphons
1.2 Music for the Proper of the Mass
Introit, Gradual, Alleluia, Tract, Sequence, Offertory, Communion
1.3 Music for the Ordinary of the Mass
Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus dei, Ite missa est/Benedicamus
1.4 Music for the Office
Psalms and antiphons, canticles and antiphons, responsories, hymns
1.5 Music for Holy Week and Easter
Palm Sunday procession, the passion, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday liturgy,
Easter Vigil, Easter Sunday masses
1.6 Processions and their chants
1.7 Late medieval compositions: tropes, sequences, rhymed offices, liturgical dramas
1.8 Regional, local and monastic variants

Essay questions related to study area 1:
In your answers you should relate your discussion to specific examples or extracts of chant.

B1.1.1 Distinguish antiphonal from responsorial chant in relation to structure, style and liturgical use.
B1.1.2 Discuss the repertories of the chant for one of the following: the Mass, Matins, Vespers, the Office and Mass of the Dead, Christmas Day, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, Easter Day. You may restrict your discussion to chant from one tradition or use.
B1.1.3 Modal classification is an essential means of selecting psalm tones for antiphons. Does it have limitations in relation to the wider repertory, or is it possible to identify musical characteristics attributable to each mode?
B1.1.4 Consider one of the following in relation to the chant: late medieval liturgical accretions; rhymed offices; liturgical drama; regional or monastic repertories; tropes, sequences, and hymns.

2 Compilers, editors, historical influences, and performance
2.1 From oral tradition to written repertory: the period from Pope Gregory to the Frankish empire
2.2 Medieval transmission: from unheightened neumes to four-line stave
2.3 Reforms and editions of the Counter Reformation
2.4 Performance of the chant in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries
2.5 Solesmes and their editions of the chant in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries
2.6 Adaptations of the chant to the English language
2.7 Current approaches to performance

Essay questions related to study area 2:
B1.2.1 Is it appropriate to refer to 'Gregorian' chant, or is the formation of the medieval repertory of Western chant more correctly attributed to the Franks?
B1.2.2 Outline the modes of transmission and notation of liturgical chant from the early Church to c.1600.
B1.2.3 How did the Counter Reformation affect the chant and its place in the liturgy?
B1.2.4 Consider one of the following in relation to the chant: France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the nineteenth-century revival in France; the nineteenth-century revival in England.
B1.2.5 In what respects is the Solesmes approach to the editing and performance of the chant ‘authentic’? Are other approaches valid?
B1.2.6 What are the advantages and disadvantages of adapting the chant to vernacular texts? Compare specific Latin originals with vernacular adaptations in your discussion.
B1.2.7 Compare three recent and contrasting recordings of chant. In what ways do they differ in aesthetic, style and technique? How does the approach to performance reflect issues of notation?

Study
You must study both areas listed above.

Although you may choose (or be directed by a supervisor in) your own pattern of study it must include those issues listed in the study areas above, and you are advised to take account of
the recommended items listed above.

In undertaking the writing of essays you are advised to consult the guidance for presentation of written work in the general study notes.

Assessment and satisfactory completion
At the end of the module you must submit two essays, each of 3,750-4,000 words, for assessment. The subjects of the essays must be selected from topics set by the Academic Board at the beginning of the module. Your essays may relate to both study areas, or only to the first area. A bibliography of materials consulted should be appended to the essay.

The assessment of the module will be based on the two essays. If both essays relate to the first study area, you may also be required to provide additional evidence of study undertaken in the area not covered by the two assessed essays. This may consist either of notes made during study or an essay on a topic related to the area. The examiners will request these materials if they require them.

Two copies of all materials for assessment and establishment of satisfactory completion should be forwarded to the Course Secretary and postmarked not later than 31 January or 30 June in the appropriate study period.

Bibliography:
Willi Apel, Gregorian Chant (Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1958; 5th printing 1973)


Richard H. Hoppin, Medieval Music (London and New York, Norton, [c.1978])

Peter Jeffery (ed.), The Study of Medieval Chant: Paths and Bridges, East and West (Woodbridge & Rochester NY, Boydell & Brewer/University of Rochester Press, 2001)


Dom Gregory Murray, Gregorian Chant according to the Manuscripts (London, Cary, 1962)


John Stevens, Words and Music in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986)

1. From the monks of Solesmes (Edition de Solesmes)
1.1 For the revised orders post-Vatican II

Graduale Romanum

Graduale Triplex

Liber Hymnarius

Processionale Monasticum

1.2 Selective collections

1.2.1 For the Benedictine Office: Antiphonale Monasticum
1.2.2 For secular churches mostly on Sundays and Holydays: Liber Usualis

2. Facsimiles and Editions of Salisbury Chants


Nick Sandon (ed.), The Use of Salisbury (Newton Abbot, Antico Press, 1984-):
1. The Ordinary of the Mass
2. The Proper of the Mass in Advent
3. The Proper of the Mass from Septuagesima to Palm Sunday
4. The Masses and ceremonies of Holy Week
5. The Proper of the Mass from Easter to Trinity
6. The Proper of the Mass from Trinity to Advent
3. Introductory Anthology

Mary Berry, Cantors: A Collection of Gregorian Chants (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979)

4. Chant adapted to English texts


G. H. Palmer and Francis Burgess (eds.), The Plainchant Gradual (Wantage, St Mary’s Press, rev. ed.1962)

5. Introductory booklets

J. H. Arnold, The Approach to Plainsong through the Office Hymn (London, 1927; London,
Oxford University Press, [1936]; repr. 1956)


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