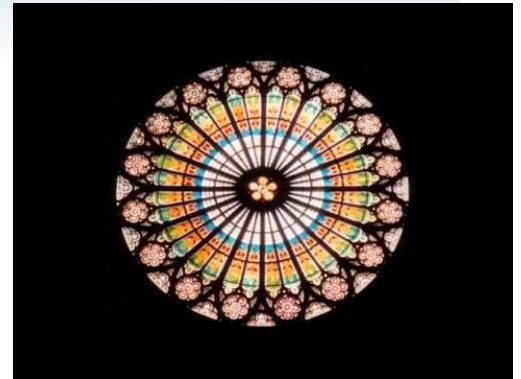


Cracking the code of Old Hispanic chant brings it to life for the first time



Gregorian chant is well known to all of us, but what is less well known is that the Iberian peninsula had its own chant tradition which flourished through to the late 11th century. Known today as Old Hispanic chant, it was largely supplanted by the Gregorian tradition when pitched notation was introduced. As a result, it was preserved not in transcribable melodies, but in neumes which acted as a barrier to our understanding of its melodies – until this project developed an analytical methodology to deal with the melodies.

Dr Emma Hornby at Bristol University and her co-investigator from the University of Colorado, Professor Rebecca Maloy, analysed the Old Hispanic chants sung during Lent (the threni, some Lenten laudes, and the Easter Vigil Canticles). The project combined musicology, theology and history in order to make its discoveries. The investigators gained a sense of the chants' musical grammar and aesthetic by looking at the choice and treatment of liturgical text, and setting them in the context of wider Western traditions. It considered melodic density (the number of notes per syllable) in the chants, and found that the words most lingered over were those most theologically central. This was done by looking for recurring themes in the Lenten texts, and pinpointing changes in relation to Biblical texts.

The result of this work is that the aesthetic of Old Hispanic chant is accessible to modern scholars and audiences for the first time. As well as studying the untranscribable chants, Dr Hornby performs the 2 dozen Old Hispanic chants that are preserved in pitch-readable notation. As director of Schola Cantorum, Bristol University Music Department's all-female choir, she brings this material to new audiences – and even to YouTube (see below). The innovative idea of examining the pacing of the melody as a clue to its theological and aesthetic meaning has also inspired others engaged in chant research, and has led to a number of pioneering publications.

Find out more...

- Watch performances of the chants by Schola Cantorum on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/bristolunischolacant>
- Visit Emma Hornby's staff profile: <http://www.bris.ac.uk/music/staff/eh/>
- Visit Rebecca Maloy's staff profile: <http://music.colorado.edu/faculty/rebecca-maloy/>.
- Access the Regensburg Cantus Planus site where a complete outline of the Old Hispanic Lenten Mass proper chants and readings with manuscripts in which the various chants and readings appear signaled is to be posted: http://www.uni-regensburg.de/Fakultaeten/phil_Fak_I/Musikwissenschaft/cantus/index.htm
- Keep an eye out for the monograph from the project to be published by Boydell and Brewer.

You might also be interested in...

- The Religion and Society-funded research network 'Performance, Politics, Piety: Music and Debate in Muslim Societies of North Africa, West Asia, South Asia and their Diasporas': <http://www.smlc.religionmusic.leeds.ac.uk/> , which has also led to the creation of the new journal *Performing Islam*.
- 'The experience of worship in late medieval cathedral and parish church', another Religion and Society-funded project: <http://www.bangor.ac.uk/music/AHRC/>
- Findings from medieval historian Miri Rubin's Programme research network on William of Norwich: http://www.religionsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/trail_of_a_deadly_cult

Award Title

Compositional Planning, Musical Grammar and Theology in Old Hispanic Chant

Team

Principal Investigator: Dr Emma Hornby (Bristol University)

Co-Investigator: Professor Rebecca Maloy (University of Colorado)

University

Bristol

Award Type

Phase 3 Small Grant

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