

Gregorius presul meritis

The anonymous three-part motet in the manuscript

Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 2794.

An abandoned dedicatory song from the 1470s?

Introduced and edited by
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The anonymous three-part motet in the manuscript Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 2794. An abandoned dedicatory song from the 1470s?¹

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Introduction

The unique source for this motet is the chansonnier in Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 2794. It is the first piece of music in the manuscript, copied without text on two openings (folios 1v-3). The only trace of a text is the incomplete word “Regorius” written under the beginning of the part labelled “Tenor”. George Morton Jones identified in his description of the manuscript this incipit as the first word of the trope “Gregorius presul meritis”, which functions as an introduction to the Introit “Ad te levavi” for the first Sunday of Advent, and he established that the plainchant of the trope is heard in long note values in the tenor.²

Clemens Blume and Clames M. Dreves published the text of the trope in *Tropi graduales. Tropen des Missale. Mittelalter. Zweite Folge* (Analecta hymnica medii aevi 49; AH 49). Leipzig 1906, pp.19-20 after sources from 10th – 16th centuries:

Gregorius presul meritis et nomine dignus
unde genus ducit summum conscendit honorem;
renovavit monumenta patrum priorum,
tunc composuit hunc libellum musice artis
schole cantorum anni circuli.
Eia dic, domine, eia:³

[Ad te levavi animam meam (Dominica Prima Adventus: Introitus⁴)]

- 1 The edition is a revision of material previously published (2012) as html-files. They are part of my online edition *The Copenhagen Chansonnier and the ‘Loire Valley’ chansonniers. An open access project* (at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/index.html>).
- 2 George Morton Jones, *The “First” Chansonnier of the Biblioteca Riccardiana, Codex 2794: A Study in the Method of Editing of 15th Century Music*. PhD-dissertation, New York University 1972, vol. I, p. 93.
- 3 “Gregory, principal by merits and dignified by name, / there from where his lineage originated, he achieved the highest honour; / he renewed the monuments of earlier fathers, / and composed this little book of musical art / for the school of singers for the cycle of the year. / Eia sing to the Lord, eia:”
- 4 The standard version of this song is easily available in *Graduale Romanum*, Tournai 1961, p. 1.

This chant setting was surely meant as the opening piece of the music collection. The main scribe made spaces in all three voices for big illuminated letters, which should have the height of two musical staves. These letters were like all the other intended decorative letters in the MS never executed, and the scribe never got around to write in the text or correct the details of notation, and he left this and other pieces unfinished along with many empty pages. Especially his notation of hexachordal signatures is inconsistent. All three voices have from the start a one-flat signature, but it soon disappears in the upper voice on the first opening (ff. 1v-2), and likewise in the last staff of the contratenor. In return, the superius' two last staves on the page have flats on the third line (for *e'*; bb. 55-72), which indicate that the flat for *b'* is valid all the way through. On the second opening (ff. 2v-3) none of the voices show any flats.

In the present edition, the reconstruction of the text underlay follows *Analecta hymnica*. In the sixth line most sources have “Eia dic, domne, dic”, but the setting clearly uses the three-syllable “domine”.

The tribute to Pope Gregory I, which underpins the myth of Gregory as the creator of the yearly cycle of plainchant, was introduced into the liturgy during the Carolingian era, and it appears in a considerable number of early sources of French and Italian origin.⁵ In the 15th and 16th centuries the trope appears in many Bohemian sources,⁶ and this fact has induced the conclusion that the trope at that time had become a Bohemian speciality retaining an important role in the Utraquist liturgy.⁷ However, according to *Analecta hymnica* missels printed in Paris and Lyons after 1500 still included this trope.⁸ But why this tune turns up in a motet at the opening of a chansonnier, which most probably was made around 1480 by a scribe connected to the French court chapel, is difficult to figure out. After probably losing his patron who had commissioned a chansonnier, the main scribe sought to make it more attractive to different customers by adding first a new gathering of folios containing two attractive four-part motets by Compere and Ockeghem

5 For the early sources, see Ritva Jonsson (ed.), *Corpus troporum I. Tropes du propre de la messe 1, Cycle de Noël* (Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Studia Latina Stockholmiensia XXI), Stockholm 1976, p. 102; concerning the Gregory-myth, see Bruno Stäblein, ‘„Gregorius praesul”, der Prolog zum römischen Antiphonale’, in Richard Baum & Wolfgang Rehm (eds.), *Musik und Verlag. Karl Vötterle zum 65. Geburtstag am 13. April 1968*. Kassel 1968, pp. 537-561, and James W. McKinnon, ‘Gregorius Praesul Composuit Hunc Libellum Musicae Artis’, in Thomas J. Heffernan & E. Ann Matter (eds.), *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*. Kalamazoo M.I. 2001 (2nd ed. 2005), pp. 613-632.

6 Cf. Andreas Haug, *Troparia tardiva. Repertorium später Tropenquellen aus dem deutschsprachigen Raum* (Monumenta monodica medii aevi – Subsidia, I), Kassel 1995, pp. 56-57 and 83-86.

7 David R. Holeton, Hana Vlhová-Wörner & Milena Bílková, ‘The Trope *Gregorius praesul meritis* in Bohemian Tradition: Its Origins, Development, Liturgical Function and Illustration’, (Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice, Volume 6), Prague 2007, pp. 215-246 (http://www.brrp.org/proceedings/brrp6/holeton_et_al.pdf - accessed February 2012): “Like the Gregorian attribution in the Sacramentary, over time the attribution *Gregorius praesul* in the Gradual also ceased to be transcribed and, after 1100, had virtually disappeared from new graduals except in Bohemia where the text came to take on an independent life and formed a part of the rich liturgical life that characterised the Prague use of the Roman rite.” (p. 222) “Because it is at this very time the tradition of including this chant at the beginning of the mass for Advent Sunday disappeared almost completely from the European liturgical repertory outside Bohemia.” (p. 223) “If the non-Bohemian sources reflect the real state of the liturgical repertory in other European regions, Prague would have been the only place where Gregory the Great was still proclaimed as the author of the chant repertory for the whole liturgical year long after the practice had ceased elsewhere.” (p. 227).

8 AH 49, p. 20.

(fasc. 2); and finally, he added a new opening gathering (fasc. 1), in which he started to enter *Gregorius presul meritis*.⁹ It is conceivable that it was planned as a sort of “dedication” piece, as a musicians’ motet, a tribute to music and the collegium of musicians rather than Pope Gregory. It is remarkable that only when the tune reaches the words “musice artis” in bars 92-96 the setting becomes declamatory chordal.

The tenor carries a tune, which – without being identical – is easily recognisable as related to the tunes published by Bruno Stäblein after 12th-century liturgical books from Nevers and Chartres.¹⁰ It is rhythmized in long note values, but becomes freely melismatic at the end. While all sources for the tune give it in Mixolydian mode with B and E naturals appearing at crucial spots, it is here by the addition of a one flat signature (and the consequent flattening all the tune’s top notes) transformed into G-Dorian, which completely changes its character.

The setting is varied with lively counter-voices after the spacious opening, where the outer voices imitate the tune’s rising fourth. Two-part passages alternate with three-part texture; there is a passage in *sesquialtera* (bb. 37-42); important words are emphasised by homorhythm and fermatas (“musice artis”, see above, and bb. 109-112 “Eia dic”); and the texture is enlivened by snippets of imitation on motives from the plainchant (bb. 53-55, 61-65 (S-T), and 75-80) and the concluding octave canon between superius and tenor (bb. 122-127).

As mentioned, the main scribe of Florence 2794 did not finish his work on this motet. We cannot know whether the text he used was in fact the old trope or a new one, changed in order to honour a possible receiver of the manuscript or a contemporary musician – maybe with a different text in the upper voice. The leader of the court chapel, Johannes Ockeghem, could be a candidate for praise as the father of modern music!

9 See further my paper, *The French musical manuscript in Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 2794, and the ‘Loire Valley’ Chansonniers*, at http://www.pwch.dk/Publications/PWCH_Florence2794.pdf (or <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/NOTES/Flo2794art.html>).

10 Stäblein, ‘„Gregorius praesul”’, pp. 557-558.

Florence 2794 no. 1

Gregorius presul meritis (Unicum)

Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 2794, ff. 1v-3

[Superius] Mensura = \bullet

Gre - go - ri -

Tenor

1) GRE - go - ri -

[Contratenor]

Gre - go - ri -

8

us pre - sul me - ri - tis

us pre - sul me - ri - tis

us pre - sul me - ri - tis

14

et no - mi - ne di - gnus

et no - mi - ne di - gnus

2) et no - mi - ne di - gnus

23

un - de ge - nus du -

un - de ge - nus du -

1) The main copyist did not finish the copying of this motet. The text is missing, and the key signatures are inconsistent. All three voices open with one flat each on ff. 1v-2, on the next opening (ff. 2v-3) they have none (see further the comments).

2) *Contratenor*, bar 16.2, the *punctus* is missing (error).

32

du - - - - - cit sum - - - - -

cit sum - - - - - mum

cit sum - - - - - mum, sum - - - - -

37

3

mum con - scen - dit

con - scen - dit ho -

mum, con - scen - dit

43

ho - no -

no - - - - - rem;

ho - - - - - no - - - - - rem;

51

2)

rem; re - no - va - vit

re - no - - - - - va - - - - -

re - no - va - vit mo -

1) Tenor, bars 37-38 are missing (error).

2) Superius, bars 55-72, a key signature of a flat on the e'-line is introduced – shown as accidentals in the transcription.

58

mo - nu - men - ta

vit

nu - men - ta

65

pa - trum pri - o -

ta pa - trum pri - o -

pa - trum pri - o -

73 1)

rum, tunc com -

rum, tunc com -

rum, tunc com - po - su -

80

po - su - it

po - su - it hunc

it hunc

1) *Superius*, bars 73-75 are a *brevis*-note (error).

87

mu - - - si -

li - bel - - - lum mu - - - si -

li - bel - - - lum mu - - - si -

94

ce ar - tis scho - le can - - -

ce ar - tis scho - le can - to -

ce ar - tis

100

to - rum an - ni cir - cu - - -

rum an - - - ni cir - - -

an - ni cir -

106

li. E - ia dic,

cu - - - li. E - ia dic,

cu - li. E - ia dic,

1)

1) *Superius*, bar 112 is *a longa* (error).

113

do - mi - ne, e - ia, e - ia dic

do - mi - ne, e - ia, e - ia dic

121

do - mi - ne, e - ia, e - ia dic

do - mi - ne, e - ia, e - ia dic

127

ia:
ia:
ia:

1) Tenor, bar 123.2 has a *minima*-rest only, the note *d* is missing (error).