

Alleluya: O Vir Magne

A critical performing edition of an Alleluia Proper in honour of St Chad found in
GB-Ob. MS. Rowl D. 1225

M A J Adach

Editorial Commentary

Introduction and Contexts

The subject of this critical edition is a fragment of plainsong found in the Bodleian Library. It is one of several musical items (the work of numerous scribes) found in MS. Rawl. D. 1225, a large codex containing the Martyrology of Usard. The MS is a medium-sized codex measuring 245x175mm and is 134 folios in length. Judging from the handwriting style, the MS was written in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It belonged to St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury, as it contains an inventory of that church's feretory¹. This included the right arm of Chad, the hair-shirt of Thomas Canteloupe, and the spear that pierced Christ's side.² The Crown of Thorns is listed as missing. The Martyrology's calendar contains the obits of Parish benefactors and rectors. The text itself contains many additions in the margins. Among these is a substantial entry for Chad (f.35v) and one for the Dedication of Lichfield Cathedral (f.16v).³ The presence of these confirms that the MS was written for use in the Diocese of Lichfield.

The plainsong fragment in question is an Alleluia Proper in honour of Chad. It is found with other items in the endleaves of the MS. It is one of three items penned by the same scribe in black, thirteenth-century square notation on red staves. The other items are all either in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary or St Edward the Confessor. Aside from one two-part, polyphonic antiphon (f.132v), the musical items are all examples of monophonic, liturgical chant. They were almost certainly intended for use at masses at St Chad's, Shrewsbury and are, due to the destruction of the historic collection of the Lichfield Cathedral Library in the Civil War, rare examples of the plainsong and early polyphony used in the Diocese during the pre-Reformation era.

Editorial Method

The notation and text (a typical example of thirteenth-century English Textura) in the MS is in a reasonable and legible condition. The bottom right-hand corner of f. 132v shows significant wear and tear from years of turning the page. This corner is rather faded and, as such, the editor has had to reconstruct a few notes and fragments of text. This is signified in the edition by italicised text and cue-sized notes.

For ease of performance, the editor has chosen to transcribe the thirteenth-century square notation into modern notation. One of the greatest challenges faced by an editor when transcribing medieval neumes into modern notation is the question of melismas. What may have been a seven-note melisma made up of three sets of neumes in the MS, is usually transcribed as a group of notes under one, long slur. This method suggests to a performer that melismas can be read as one indivisible unit rather than a group of several, individual units. To acknowledge the neumatic make-up of a melisma, the editor has chosen to use multiple slurs when notating a melisma. The upper one signifies the overall melisma, whilst the lower slurs mark the individual group of neumes.⁴

Performance Practice

The two chief considerations when approaching any piece of liturgical plainsong are forces and rhythm. With regards to the former, a cantor should sing the Alleluia without the *jubilus* – the long, elaborate melisma on the final syllable of the word 'Alleluya'. After this has been sung, the choir should respond by singing both the Alleluia and *jubilus*. The verse section should be sung by one cantor.

The question of rhythm in plainsong is somewhat of a black art. A good guiding principal is to follow the pull of the final and reciting note (here, the *F* and *Bb* respectively). When in the middle of a melisma, it is worth being attentive to the neumes that make it up and to follow their shape and direction, using one's innate musicality to discern the natural, ebb and flow of the melody.

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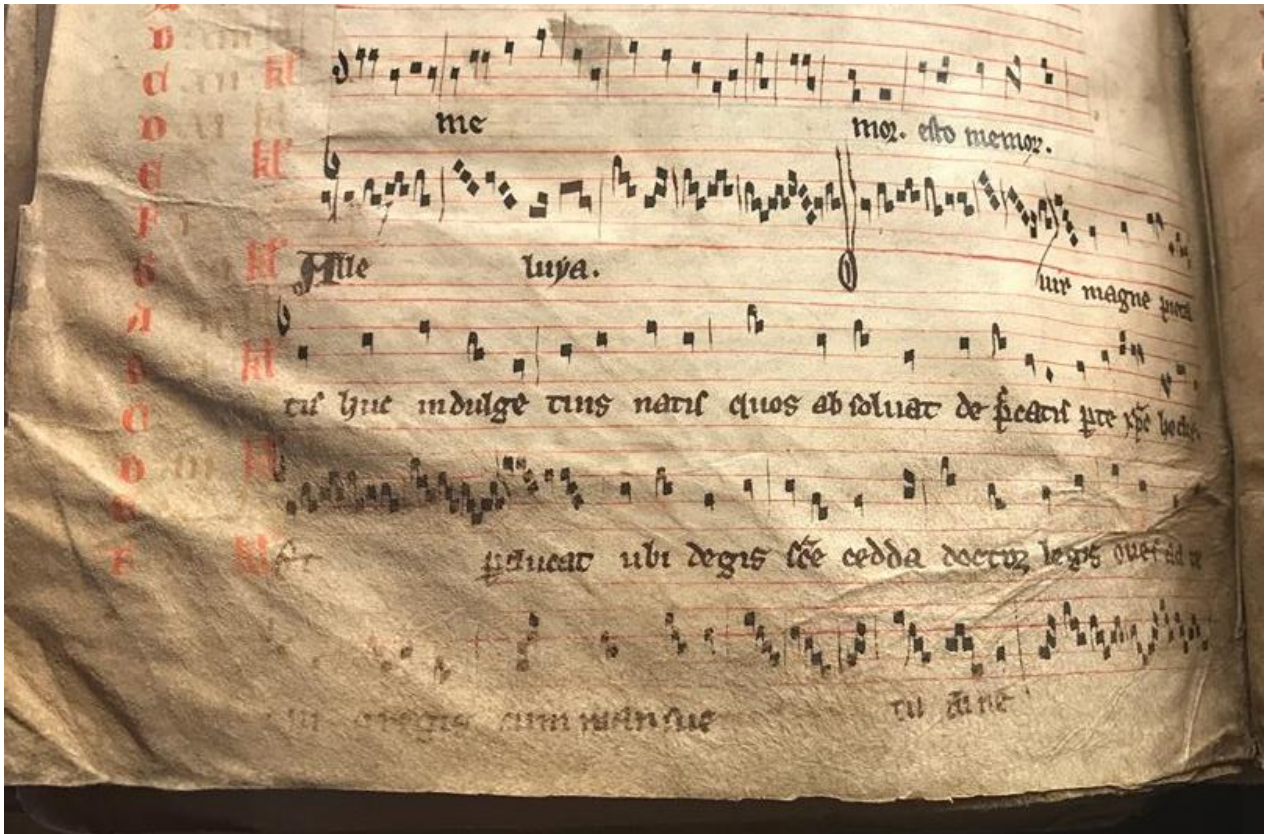
The Close, Lichfield
In. Fest. S. Apollonia, 2018

¹ *'hee sunt reilquae invente in fereto S. Cedde Salopi'* (f.8r).

² *'...de brachio sti. Cedd – also a bone of ye arme of seynt chad'; 'De cilicio Sci. thome cantel. Epi et de casula in qi sepultus erat – Of the haire shirte of saint thoms cantel. and of the chesrple yt he was buryed yn'; 'De lancea Xpi – Of the spere that wounded oure Lord'* (f.8r)

³ *'In Britannia maiore depo. Beati Cedde Epi...'* (f.35v), *'Dedicatio isti Cathe. S Cedd.'* (f.16v).

⁴ For further information on the benefits of this editorial method, please refer to **Adach, Maks** (2017). *Issues in reconstructing and executing a historically-informed performance of Laude Spirituale from the Florence Laudario (I-Fn BR 18)*. Unpublished Manuscript, University of Oxford.



Facsimile of GB-Ob MS. Rawl. D. 1225, f.132v

Source

Oxford, Bodleian Library: MS. Rawl. D. 1225

Text

Alleluia

O Vir Magne Pietatis
Huc indulge tuis natis
Quos absolvat de peccatis
Per te Christus hodie
Et perducatur ubi degis
Sancte Cedda doctus legis
Oves ad te sui gregis
Cum mansuetudine.

Alleluia

O Great Man of Piety,
Grant that, through you,
Your children gathered here today
May be absolved of their sins by Christ,
And lead the sheep with gentleness,
O Holy Chad, teacher of the law,
To your flock, where you reside.

Alleluia: O Vir Magne

Alleluia Proper for S. Chad
Use of Lichfield (c. 13th)
GB-Ob MS. Rawl. D. 1225 f.134v

1. Cantor (without Jubilus)
2&3. Full (with Jubilus)

Al - le - - - - - lu - ya_____

*

O Vir_____ mag-ne pi-

e_____ ta - - - tis huc in - dul - ge tu - is na - tis quos_ ab - sol -

- vat de pec - ca - tis per te Chri - stus_____ ho - di - e._____

Et_____ per - du-

cat_____ u - bi_ de - gis Sanc-te_ Ced - da_ doc - tus_ le - gis o - ves ad te

su - i gre - - gis_ cum_____ man - su - e - - - -

- tu - - - di - - - ne. *

Ut Supra