

Methodology of Music Research

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Denis Collins (Ed.)

Music Theory and its Methods

Structures, Challenges, Directions



Towards New Editing Methods for Transcribing the Polyphonic Notre Dame Conductus Repertory

Rebekah Woodward, University of Queensland, Australia

The repertory of polyphonic conductus found in the central Notre Dame manuscripts was created during a period of at least sixty years (Payne 1998, 141-2).¹ The term “conductus” in the central Notre Dame manuscript sources encompasses a number of sub-categories that have distinctive characteristics and demonstrate changing compositional processes over time.² Editions of the conductus repertory to date have been prepared using methodologies that do not allow for the diversity of the works within the conductus genre. The present study reviews earlier editorial methods and proposes alternative methods of transcribing some portions of the conductus repertory. As part of this process, I will examine in detail three conductus found in the manuscript Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Pluteo 29.1 (henceforth F) that present issues typical of those the transcriber would encounter. Those works are “Regnum dei vim patitur” (f. 352^v-353^r) and the two datable conductus “Eclypsim patitur” (f. 322^v-323^r) and “Pange melos lacrimosum” (f. 351^r-351^v).³ The historical and stylistic context of these works will be examined to assist in determining the best approach to transcribing each piece. An examination of characteristics and transcription methods for the Aquitanian polyphonic versus, as well as an application of the rules found in the *Discantus positio vulgaris*, will provide alternative approaches for transcribing portions of the above-mentioned works. Presenting each work in a way that highlights its distinctive compositional features and places it in a sub-category of this wide-ranging and dynamic repertory will be a starting point on a journey towards a new edition of the Notre Dame conductus repertory.

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- 1 Payne suggests that the earliest datable polyphonic conductus, *Novus miles sequitur*, for three voices, was written in 1173 in honour of Thomas Beckett, and the latest, written in 1224 to commemorate the battle of La Rochelle, is *De rupta Rupecula*. The central Notre Dame manuscripts are: Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Pluteo 29.1 (F), published in facsimile as Dittmer (1966-7); Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, 628 Helmst. (W1), published as Baxter (1931); Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek 1099 Helmst. (W2), published as Dittmer (1960); and Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, 20486 (Ma), published as Dittmer (1957).
 - 2 A detailed discussion of some important issues in conductus scholarship may be found in Everist (2000, 135-8).
 - 3 These conductus also appear in W1 in the following locations: “Regnum dei vim patitur” on f. 110^v, “Eclypsim patitur” on f. 101^r, and “Pange melos lacrimosum” on f. 110^r-110^v. “Regnum dei vim patitur” is also found in W2 on f. 114^r-114^v.

Existing Conductus Transcriptions

Two significant editions of conductus transcriptions are those of Gordon Anderson and Janet Knapp. Anderson's nine-volume edition, *Notre Dame and Related Conductus*, contains the entire repertory known at the time of publication (Anderson 1979-86). Knapp's edition contains thirty-five conductus selected from the two- and three-part repertories in F (Knapp 1965). Both scholars approach the repertoire with a modal methodology that does not discriminate between the chronological differences in the works or their inherent stylistic features. Thomas B. Payne identifies five different stylistic categories of conductus within the repertory, and these will be discussed in more detail shortly. Although the works in Payne's categories require different transcription methodologies depending on their characteristics and the period in which they were composed, the editions of Anderson and Knapp treat all the conductus in the same way. No distinction appears to be made between works with melismas and those without, or between works with very simple, brief melismas and those with elaborate formal structures that make use of voice exchange and other complex compositional devices.

There are two key assumptions underpinning Anderson's and Knapp's approaches to conductus transcription: first, that the entire conductus repertory was performed using modal rhythm (see particularly Anderson (1968 and 1972, 355), where he explains that "a flexible modal interpretation is most appropriate for Notre Dame conductus"); and second, that in the *cum littera* sections, where ligatures are used infrequently, the accents in the poetry could be used to determine which particular mode might apply. This issue is discussed at length in Knapp (1979); see also Page's (1997, 11-2) discussion of Knapp's study. Later discussion will show the limitations of these approaches. One further method employed by Anderson (1973, 293, 301) is the use of manuscripts written in mensural notation to determine the rhythm of earlier conductus. More recent research has called into question the validity of such approaches to the transcription of the repertory; see in particular Page (1997, 8-13) and Sanders (1985a, 449-453, 461-6), necessitating new transcription methodologies that take into account the historical background and stylistic features of each work in the repertory.

Payne's Categories of Conductus

Payne's examination of datable conductus builds on other scholars' attempts to assign dates to particular works in the genre based on events and historical figures described in the texts. See for instance, Schrade (1953) and Sanders (1985b). Payne's investigations into the datable conductus repertory's musical design uncovered specific characteristics held in common by conductus composed around the same time, enabling him to divide the datable repertory

into five groups: the polyphonic cantio group, the earliest layer group, the earliest conductus with caudae, the classic Notre Dame conductus style group and the thirteenth-century group. Each of these categories requires a specific approach to transcription if the characteristics of each style are to be conveyed. An understanding of the individual characteristics of the works in Payne's categories is central to their treatment in the following discussion. Payne's explanations of each of these groups will therefore be examined in turn.

Payne's first style is the polyphonic cantio group, an example of which is "Ver pacis aperit" written in approximately 1179. Although "cantio" is a broad term that encompasses many kinds of medieval song, Payne's use of the term refers specifically to works in the form AAB (Payne 1998, 120). "Ver pacis aperit" is a trouvère contrafact without melismas, and Payne suggests that this is one of the earliest styles of conductus because later works seem to focus more on melismatic writing. Payne has found only one datable conductus in this style written after 1200: "De rupta Rupecula" written in 1224 (130).

The next style is what Payne calls the "earliest layer" of conductus writing. These works are similar to the polyphonic cantio group but are not in cantio form. They do not have melismas, unlike all of the datable conductus written after those in this category. They may have regular strophic texts, such as "Novus miles sequitur", written in 1173, and "In occasu syderis," written in 1183. Payne notes that two significant features of these early layer conductus are the syllabic style of declamation and the lack of caudae (131).

The third conductus category is the early conductus with caudae, which in the present study will also be called the Aquitanian-style conductus. Payne describes the text setting of works in this style as much more ornate. This is also the first group chronologically to contain melismas and caudae. Payne considers that there is a direct link between these works and the works of the Aquitanian and Calixtine repertories: he points out that in the conductus "Eclypsim patitur", written in 1183, the "two vocal parts frequently match varying aggregates of ligated pitches that are often ambiguous with regard to their harmonic simultaneity and rhythmic execution, if any such specificity is indeed intended." Furthermore, Payne observes that this style makes use of "synchronicity and mirror-image counterpoint" – features of the Aquitanian polyphonic style (Payne 1998, 131-2, 134).

The fourth category Payne describes as classic Notre Dame conductus style. All datable conductus from the time of "Redit etas aurea" onwards (1189 or possibly 1194) have caudae, and the *cum littera* and *sine littera* sections in the classic style function more independently of each other than do the melismatic and syllabic sections of the earlier conductus with caudae. Unlike the conductus in the third category, the parts are more closely balanced and it is easy to see the way that they fit together (Payne 1998, 134). "Redit etas aurea" says Payne, contains "seemingly new formal awareness in its reliance on clearly articulated

repetitive structures in each of its two voices,” but there is “no significant rhythmic interplay among the phrases” (135).

The conductus “Anni favor iubeli” of 1208 is an example of Payne’s fifth style: thirteenth-century style, dating from the turn of the thirteenth century and later. This style of writing includes dovetailing of voices, “motivic interrelationships among the voices, voice exchange, and occasionally canon” (Payne 1998, 136-7).

The present investigation will discuss alternative transcription approaches for the early conductus with cauda and the classic conductus. These two groups of conductus contain works that are characterised by sharply contrasting texted and untexted sections. They are not heavily governed by modal theory as the conductus in the thirteenth-century style group are, but instead draw on earlier theoretical concepts of rhythm and style. The brevity of the present discussion precludes a close examination of the characteristics of works in the thirteenth-century style; however, future investigation in this area is necessary in order to determine how closely conductus in this category resemble the modal transcriptions of Anderson, Knapp and others. The polyphonic cantio group and earliest layer conductus group are likewise outside the bounds of the present study, as they are not characterised by the sharply defined texted and untexted sections of the early conductus with caudae and the classic conductus. Further investigation of works in these styles and their characteristics would also usefully determine what relationships exist among the works in these styles and between the different conductus categories.

Transcribing the Early Conductus with Caudae

The conductus “Eclypsim patitur,” written in 1183 on the occasion of the death of Henry the Young King, the son of, and co-ruler with Henry II, is in a style that Payne associates with the polyphony of the Aquitanian versus repertory (Payne 1998, 134). Although the theme of the work – mourning the passing of a temporal leader – is not one associated with the devotional, particularly Marian texts of the known collection of Aquitanian versus, the style of the work contains characteristics that are also found in the Aquitanian polyphonic repertory. Payne identifies in this conductus “synchronicity and mirror-image counterpoint” and groups of ligatures that contain different numbers of notes that fit together in a way that is unclear (131-2, 134). Similar features may be observed throughout the Aquitanian versus repertory. In particular, the text setting, size and correspondence of ligatures, and the way in which melismas are used in the polyphonic versus “Vellus rore celesti maduit” and “Veri solis

radius,” and the Benedicamus Domino versus “Omnis curet homo,” correspond closely to these features in “Eclypsim patitur.”⁴

It is perhaps also significant that Henry the Younger’s mother was Eleanor of Aquitaine, and that his death took place at Martel, near Limoges. It would not be surprising for a conductus composed there to be created in the Aquitanian polyphonic versus style. The manuscripts containing the central Aquitanian repertory were copied, according to Sarah Fuller (1969, 51), between approximately 1100 and 1150, and such a polyphonic style may well have been in use some thirty years later than the youngest manuscript, StM-D, was copied.

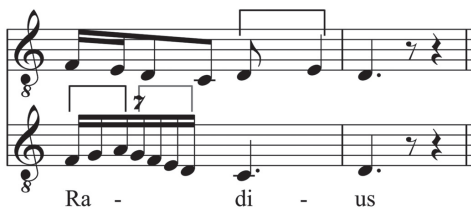
The transcription of such a work therefore needs to take into account Aquitanian polyphonic transcription procedures, as well as those traditionally associated with the Notre Dame repertory, such as modal rhythm and its direct antecedents. Anderson’s transcription (1988, 13-4) of “Eclypsim patitur,” from the version in W1, f. 110^r, is, like his other transcriptions, in bars of 6/8 (although without a key signature) and appears to be in a modified second mode. There are thirty-nine two-note ligatures in the work, and some of these have been transcribed as breve-long, but many others cannot fit this pattern; for example at bar twenty-one, on the syllable “-tan-” (see Example 1 below), where a group of three two-note ligatures and the note before have been reduced to a seven-note group of semiquavers, including two plicae. Another group of seven semiquavers, at bar thirteen on the syllable “Ra-” (see Example 2), is created from a three-note ligature followed by a four-note ligature – an entirely different form of notation but reduced to the same aural effect in this transcription.

Ernest Sanders (1985b) also transcribed the opening brief melisma of “Eclypsim patitur” (see Example 3) and its final cauda in an investigation into datable conductus. Sanders’s transcription of the brief melisma on the opening syllable “E” differs significantly from Anderson’s (Example 4), suggesting that the notation is ambiguous and does not imply a clear modal rhythm (Sanders 1985b, 505).

4 The central Aquitanian repertory is contained in four manuscripts, each comprised of a number of layers written at different times. These three versus may be found in the following manuscripts: “Vellus rore celesti maduit” is in the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque National fonds latin 3719 (StM-C), published as Gillingham (1987b), in two places, layer C-I, f. 15^v and layer C-IV, f. 78^v, and it is also in the manuscript London, British Museum, Add. 36881 (StM-D), published with StM-B as Gillingham (1987c) in layer D-I, f. 9^v. “Veri solis radius” is contained in StM-C, layer C-IV, f. 54^r, and layer C-I, f. 16^v; it is also in StM-D, layer D-I f. 5^v and in the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque National fonds latin 3549 (StM-B), f. 149^r. Polyphonic versions of “Omnis curet homo” are found in StM-B f. 154^r, StM-C layer C-IV f. 79^v, and StM-D, layer D-I f. 2^v. Sarah Fuller’s 1969 dissertation “Aquitanian Polyphony of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries” is the standard discussion of the repertory and contains a full inventory of the musical contents of the four composite manuscripts of the central Aquitanian repertory (368-404).



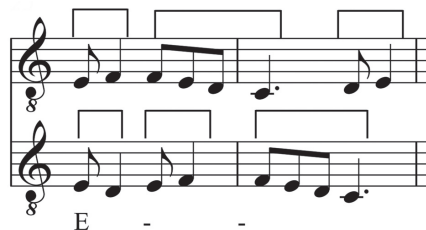
Example 1: Seven-note group of semiquavers in Anderson's transcription (1988, 4:14) of "Eclypsim patitur."



Example 2: A different ligature grouping transcribed as seven semiquavers in Anderson's transcription of "Eclypsim patitur" (1988, 4:14).



Example 3: Sanders's transcription (1985b, 505) of the opening of "Eclypsim patitur."



Example 4: Anderson's transcription (1988, 4:13) of the opening of "Eclypsim patitur."

The one place where modal rhythm seems to be not only possible but also unambiguous is in the extended melismas over the syllables “Mors” (Anderson’s bars 28-32) and “-ce-” (Anderson’s bars 40-54). The ligature groupings of 1+3+3 are only interrupted for repeated notes or possible rests at the ends of phrases. Sanders does not transcribe the cauda in the same way as Anderson; see Sanders’s transcription (1985b, 506). Sanders follows a dotted crotchet with a crotchet and then a quaver, unlike the very clear third-mode pattern of a dotted crotchet followed by a quaver and then a crotchet. Anderson has used the latter modal pattern to transcribe both the caudae. It would seem that there are two very different systems of rhythmic and stylistic notation present in this work: a pair of modal caudae joined with a *cum littera* section that does not fit easily into any modal reading, and moreover exhibits characteristics of the Aquitanian polyphonic style.

A hybrid such as this raises some interesting questions. Many decades elapsed between the composition of “Eclypsim patitur” and the copying of F and W1. Were the work’s originally Aquitanian caudae (or perhaps more appropriately, melismas) updated to make the longer untexted sections easier to sing during this time? Was it more fashionable for such early works to have their melismas updated during these decades? And how long would a song relating to a particular event, that is, the death of a king, continue to be sung? To address these questions, we may begin by turning to Mark Everist’s investigation of the works found in the Metz Fragment. Here, Everist (2000, 135-163) uncovered a practice of updating conductus in the second half of the thirteenth century. The techniques used included transmitting the works monophonically rather than polyphonically and “imparting a notational precision to those parts of the *conductus* that, in the notation of their earliest sources, remained imprecise” (Everist 2000, 138). It would seem that the updating of the conductus repertory did not begin in the mid-thirteenth century, but rather at a time before the scribes began to copy the works into W1 and F.

Another conductus written in the twelfth century that may well have been updated in the thirteenth is “Novus miles sequitur.” The conductus is believed to have been written to commemorate the death of St Thomas of Canterbury in 1173, but Payne (1998, 141-2) points out that it is the only datable conductus written in three parts before 1189. Sanders (1985b, 518-20) also states that it is too early a date for a three-part conductus, and moreover that the work is in two parts in two of the extant sources, and only in three parts in one source. This, he suggests, may be because the triplum was added at a later date. St Thomas Beckett’s remains were transferred to a shrine in 1220 (Butler 1995, 20), which may have provided an occasion for the conductus to be updated.

Methodologies for Transcribing Aquitanian Versus

Transcribing the *cum littera* part of “Eclypsim patitur” in a style that remains faithful to its beginnings as an Aquitanian polyphonic song requires consideration of the system of transcription that is appropriate for transcribing the Aquitanian versus repertory. The matter of rhythm in the performance of Aquitanian polyphony has been investigated in a number of different ways. Although Sarah Fuller transcribed the Aquitanian polyphonic repertory in her 1969 dissertation (vol. 3), Bryan Gillingham (1994) was the first scholar to publish transcriptions of the entire polyphonic repertory (with accompanying critical notes as Gillingham (1984)). Gillingham’s transcriptions are for the most part in bars of 6/4 meter, with a number of pieces given in unmeasured rhythm. Gillingham has made the distinction, based upon the text, between works that can be transcribed using decisive rhythm and works that cannot. When the text is metrical poetry, he claims, then quantitative meter can be employed to create measured transcriptions due to the “symbiotic relationship between music and text” (Gillingham 1984, 211). Gillingham also compared the Aquitanian-style repertory with sequence repertories of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These sequences were written in later styles of notation, embodying clear information about rhythm. The similarities between the older Aquitanian-style works and the later ones with more clearly notated rhythm therefore allow the evidence of manuscripts written fifty to one hundred years later, Gillingham says, to be applied to the Aquitanian-style repertory. The other works in the repertoire, he says, do not have this relationship between text and music; for example, when works are too melismatic for the meter of the poetry to be determined (Gillingham 1984, 211, 234).

There are a number of difficulties inherent in Gillingham’s approach. Hendrik Van der Werf (1993, 1:102-3) points out that Gillingham does not make clear which sequences he compared to the versus repertory, or how many of them he analysed in order to come to his conclusion that the two repertories were so alike that the rhythms of the later repertory might be applied to the earlier one. He also argues that the use of notes of very small duration (demisemiquavers and hemidemisemiquavers) along with minims in the same pieces of music is a practice not seen even in the early examples of that most precisely measured of forms, the motet, and therefore would be highly unusual in the Aquitanian-style versus repertory. Furthermore, Van der Werf considers Gillingham’s inability to fit his theory of determining rhythm to the entire repertory to be evidence of the unsuitability of this approach.

Van der Werf’s own edition of the Aquitanian polyphonic repertory, published with the polyphonic works of the Codex Calixtinus, does not include rhythmic interpretations of the works; However, Van der Werf does discuss some features in the notation that might convey rhythmic information, such as