INTRODUCTION: MAKING LITURGY

This is a book about religious ritual and its written remains. Much in the same way that scholars have devoted their attention to architecture, vestments, painting, ivories, metalwork, stone-carvings and the many other material fragments of Christian life which survive from early medieval Europe, my concern here is with books: those which stood ready on the lectern to be read and proclaimed in church; those which might help an individual find his or her way through the daily labyrinths of the liturgy; and those stowed away in the armarium for the future edification of their readers. On the surface, these are the witnesses which lead us deepest into the ritual past of the medieval Church. Their ceremonial directions, spoken words and notated music can furnish us with a vivid sense of how a rural priest passed his days, on one end of the spectrum, or how temporal power was legitimised in the spectacles of coronation or episcopal ordination, on the other. But ritual reconstruction is only one part of what follows here. To be sure, there is no shortage of social and cultural history in the ceremonies by which a sickly child was baptised or a pagan building made Christian, nor any shortage of fascination in the music sung to alleviate drought or to usher a dying soul into heaven. But that history is incomplete without an understanding of the men and women who wrote these things down, of the function and status of their writings and of the ancient parchment sheets which we now have before us.¹

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Behind every medieval manuscript there are human stories, and liturgical manuscripts of the early Middle Ages have a very special kind of insight to offer. Put simply, there was no one way to record an elaborate and multi-sensory piece of ritual theatre. Nor, indeed, was there an a priori imperative to do so, for medieval memories were strong and adaptive, books expensive and inflexible. Written responses to ritual therefore encode all kinds of historical value, not only of the basic parameters of literacy and orality, but also of practical needs, abilities, customs and mindsets. As physical objects, liturgical texts were apt to be participants in the very acts they were designed to describe: held, carried, transported, damaged. They could symbolise beyond themselves, communicating authority, knowledge or entitlement, and they could be decorated inside and out. They could be associated with physical space, whether shrine, chapel or altar. They could be reshaped and adapted, rejuvenated for new contexts, and they could be discarded, either consigned to redundancy and obsolescence or memorialised as valued remnants of the past. Under the right circumstances, liturgical books are therefore supremely eloquent witnesses to the intellectual and cultural life of the early medieval Church. The challenge for the historian is first to learn their language, and second to persuade them to speak.

Ottonian liturgy: perceptions and possibilities

Few periods in history are more encouraging of this approach than tenth- and early eleventh-century Germany – known as ‘Ottonian’ for its line of Saxon kings called Otto – and for two quite different reasons. Historians will be broadly familiar with the first, for this was ‘a profoundly liturgical age’, as Henry Mayr-Harting has put it, in which the spheres of temporal and spiritual life were utterly intertwined. Kings were famed for their piety, bishops were famed for their lordship, and religious acts framed the

2 Henceforth ‘Ottonian’ and ‘Germany’ are used as shorthand to describe the period of East Frankish history loosely bounded by the accession of Otto I in 936 and the death of Henry II in 1024. To avoid undue confusion, I have not substituted the word ‘Salian’ in the few places where my discussion drifts later than the bounds of the ‘Ottonian’ dynasty.


great occasions of church and state, whether in sacral anointings staged on resonant feast days or in the processional adventus ceremonies when dignitaries imitated Christ's entry into Jerusalem in the presence of adulating crowds. These events were not the everyday experience of worship in this period, by any means, but they are seen to symbolise a wider cultural re-engagement with the rituals of the Christian Church. As the tenth century wore on, religious communities which were errant or lax were being set back on track with ‘reform’ movements, new churches were being built, lay participation and private devotion were on the rise and the liturgy was being adorned not only with new books – apparently the place of choice for Ottonian illuminators, who often took as their subjects the actors, postures and props of the liturgy – but also with new ritual compositions. Now a couple of centuries old, the repertory of

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Romano-Frankish chant known as ‘Gregorian’ was close to being filled out, and it was enjoying extensive embellishment as singers interwove their own words and melodies (‘tropes’) and composed new polyphonic layers (‘organa’);¹⁰ the veneration of saints had begun to attract the composition of new sets of Proper chants (that is, music for a specific feast) to go with new hagiographic literature;¹¹ and there seems to have been an increased emphasis on rituals in procession, not only as expressed in the accounts of solemn adventus, in hagiography and in the abundance of surviving ritual directions, but also as permitted (or even demanded) by contemporary developments in romanesque architecture.¹²

In her researches into medieval biblical study Beryl Smalley proposed that there had been a wider intellectual shift in the tenth century, as theological practices had moved in an oft-quoted dictum ‘out of the cloister and into the choir’.¹³ She had observed not only the creative energies being devoted to the liturgy and its environs, but also a concomitant lull (a ‘dramatic pause’, in her words) in the production of scriptural commentaries. That assessment conceals a wider problem – or stimulus, depending on your point of view – which is that no appraisal of tenth-century activity is ever fully separable from the state of source survival. Perceptions of a dearth of evidence have long fuelled the idea that Ottonian culture operated in a less literate frame, with written documents replaced by the dynamic, performative transactions of ritual and ceremony. In his work on king-making Ernst Kantorowicz famously contrasted the numerous


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‘liturgy’ of this period with the rational ‘legal science’ of the twelfth century, while Karl Leyser proposed that a post-Carolingian cultural breakdown had pushed the workings of Ottonian government into the realm of orality. Whether or not we embrace these views, the principle of a non-verbal, ritualised culture appears to hold even where sources do survive, with the written testimony often characterised as unusually opaque, symbolic or polyvalent, and contested accordingly. As Timothy Reuter once put it in a sage piece of advice to the would-be historian, ‘people who want their sources to offer something like video-reportage of the past should not choose the tenth and eleventh centuries to work on’.16

As objects of material and intellectual history, liturgical books have a valuable and largely unrealised place in these debates. But by the same token they also refocus the agenda. Contrary to outward impressions, the majority of surviving liturgical sources from the tenth century actually yield no direct insights into this supposed ‘age of liturgy’, and they communicate none of the decorative or dramatic embellishments just described. Instead, their purpose was far more mundane. Serving the obligations of Mass and Office, the daily sources of spiritual nourishment upon which religious life subsisted, these books were the simple tools of the trade, with whose help were performed the basic rituals by which time was structured, memories carved out and each successive age of the human existence marked, from baptism to last rites to commemoration in death. From this point of view emerges a ‘liturgy’ whose defining

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16 Reuter, ‘Bishops’, p. 36.


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feature was not difference at all, but continuity, not only with those first members of the early Church whose actions were memorialised in scripture and re-enacted on a daily basis, but also with the Carolingians, whose efforts to transform the Frankish liturgy in the eighth and ninth centuries had profoundly shaped its ongoing practice in the tenth. 19 Hence the absence of liturgical evidence from this period is far less significant than it might initially seem. Even if book production slowed in the early tenth century, Carolingian manuscripts probably continued to suffice and, more to the point, memory kept the whole machinery going, as it had done for centuries. 20 As Isidore of Seville wrote of one particular aspect of the liturgy, ‘this creed of our faith and hope is not written on papyrus sheets and with ink, but on the fleshly tablets of our hearts’. 21

When tenth-century liturgy is viewed through the lens of continuity, an equally important historical parameter emerges, and this is the second of two reasons to study liturgical sources from this period. Whether or not ritual practices were changing in any substantive way under the Ottonians, what was certainly changing was the use of the written word. Whilst most of the ‘new’ forms of ceremony can actually be traced back to the ninth century – whether tropes, sequences, processions or coronations – the codicological forms associated with those texts mostly cannot. 22 This separation may well be connected to source survival, and there may be some truth in the thesis that certain Ottonian scriptoria prioritised liturgica ahead of other types of book. 23 But that is not the


21 Isidore, Etymologies, VI.xix.58, trans. Barney et al., p. 150.


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whole story. Also changing was the very contract between ritual, writing and the book, in multiple and significant ways which go beyond simple oral–literate dynamics, and which provide ample fodder for the discussions which will follow.

LITURGICAL MANUSCRIPTS BETWEEN THE ‘FIRST’ AND ‘SECOND’ GENERATIONS

At the beginning of the tenth century, a priest responsible for the organisation of Christian worship had a range of different written tools at his disposal. We cannot generalise about all of them, for scribes were not inextricably bound to convention (a point which is always worth keeping in mind), but we can comment on the basic books which had come to be standard issue for the parish clergy under the Carolingians. In his early ninth-century capitulary, one of countless such edicts of the period, Bishop Gerbald of Liège required that every priest have a sacramentary (missale), lectionary, martyrology, penitential and psalter. Some 300 miles to the east, booklists from the Bavarian diocese of Freising show that priests had, among others, sacramentaries (missales), lectionaries, antiphoners, collectars, homiliaries and Office books (officiales). Each book type contributed the basic raw materials for the daily obligations of Mass and Office, as well as the means to perform the cura animarum, that is, the pastoral rituals which included baptism, penance and last rites.

A sacramentary therefore provided the relevant prayers for the celebration of Mass, a lectionary provided the readings, an antiphoner provided the chants to be sung, a martyrology provided the calendar of important hagiographic observances, a collectar provided collects (prayers), a homiliary provided biblical commentary and sermons, a psalter provided psalmody and a penitential afforded the means to administer penance.

27 For the book types described here and below there exists no one authoritative guide, partly because none is sufficiently comprehensive, partly for specific historical reasons which I shall explore below. The reader is therefore advised to consult across the following list: V. Fiala and W. Irtenkauf, ‘Versuch einer liturgischen Nomenklatur’, in Zur Katalogisierung mittelalterlicher und
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By the end of the period bounded by this book, however, the intellectual climate had changed considerably. New kinds of codex were now being created in abundance, each creation being defined very broadly by a tendency to compile, arrange and prescribe, and by a move from genre-based collections to those directed towards a performer or situation, a shift often spoken of in terms of a ‘second’ generation.28 As existing ritual texts were being brought together in new combinations, so too were previously unwritten liturgical details being incorporated into the mix, whether minor spoken interpolations, elements of choreography or logistical directions. In the book known as the troper, therefore, scribes had begun to collect together and organise tropes, the elaborate musical and textual interpolations of the chants for Mass and Office, just as other scribes were beginning to make processionals for the chants sung in procession, and sequentiaries for the lengthy, quasi-symphonic compositions for festal Mass known as sequences.29 Sometimes these different genres of text were combined with one another, and sometimes they were brought together with the Gregorian chants already found in graduals, antiphoners and cantoraria to make ambitious new kinds of musical compendia.30 In breviaries, meanwhile, the daily obligations of performing the Divine Office were simplified and systematised by uniting the previously disparate components of worship (chiefly collects, chants and readings) from their respective books (collectar, antiphoner, and bible);31 and in missals were united the equivalent materials for the Mass (chiefly from the sacramentary, gradual and lectionary).32 The daily pastoral needs of clergy

30 M. Huglo, Les livres de chant liturgique.
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were increasingly catered for by multi-purpose handbooks known as rituals, and the often instructional and educational intent of these books was shadowed by the proliferation of ordinals and customaries, which prescribed rules and guidance for the religious life. Finally, this period also saw the rise of the pontifical, the book type which was to the bishop as the ritual was to a priest: a compilation of liturgical materials broadly appropriate to that clerical rank.

While it is true that some of these ‘new’ book types can be traced back to Carolingian times – one could cite, for example, the ‘breviary’ in the hand of Reginbert of Reichenau (†846) or the near-contemporary ‘pontifical’ of Bishop Baturich of Regensburg (817–47) – there is a distinction to be made between these early examples and those which came later. Seeking to put this difference into words, some have resorted to the value-heavy language of ‘first attempts’ and ‘prototypes’, of forms ‘primitive’ and ‘pure’. However, it may be more helpful to understand the shift in terms of a growing perception, recognition and awareness of the means by which these texts were being stored. By the eleventh century, conventions were beginning to crystallise as books took on more consistent shapes and formats, and this was often accompanied by a higher, more self-aware grade of manuscript production. Even the nomenclature was beginning to stabilise, although much of the modern vocabulary (including terms like ‘pontifical’ and ‘ritual’) would not enter common use until much later. Tasked to distil this development into its essence, one could say that whereas occasional compilations had once merely assisted as resources for the performance of the liturgy, liturgical books of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were coming much closer to being active participants in – if not determinants of – the rituals they sought to represent.

This ‘second’ generation was itself a new departure, for to arrange liturgical materials in more prescriptive kinds of formation was not only

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36 The ‘breviary’ survives as the fragments Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Kupferstickk., Kapsel 336/SD 2813 and 2816, on which see B. Bischoff, Katalog der festländischen Handschriften des neunten Jahrhunderts, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1998–2004), no. 3644, vol. II, p. 325; the ‘pontifical’ is ONB Ser. nov. 2762, published as Das Kollektar-Pontifikale, ed. Unterkircher. I thank Susan Rankin and David Ganz for drawing my attention to the former.
to shift the equilibrium between performance and the written word, but also to force existing texts into new conceptual categories. That which was previously unwritten was being made certain and fixed, simultaneously reifying current practice and determining that of future generations; and that which was already written was being reinterpreted through the act of compilation. To provide hagiographic Office lessons excerpted from the original *vitae*, for example, is to alter the way in which that literature is understood. Similarly, to collect together different tropes of a single introit chant is to transfer their identity from the individual (the association with a specific ritual moment at the beginning of Mass) to the collective (the common factor of ‘trope’). The subsequent transmission of lesson sets and trope sets as if literary objects in their own right raises the legitimate question of what came first: were the written records manifestations of a conceptual separation, or did they precipitate that change? The same dilemma colours the history of missals, sometimes seen as the catalyst for the proliferation of private devotions from the tenth century onwards, sometimes as the product. In these various ways, the changes to ritual practice and written convention in the tenth and eleventh centuries cannot be seen as separable issues. They were intimately and inextricably bound together.

Needless to say, the division of medieval liturgical books into the categories of ‘first’ and ‘second’ generations is useful only as a loose guide. Quite apart from the difficulty of systematising the intent of thousands of individual scribes, the grey area between these imaginary poles is precisely what empowers this study. The same point applies to book typologies, which, though essential aids for navigating through the baffling array of surviving sources, give a misleading impression of uniformity. For those who appreciate the certainty of codicological categories and systems, and who may lament the wider scholarly absence of a foolproof guide to early medieval liturgical books, there are at least three reasons why such security is neither attainable nor desirable here, even in the imaginary world where ritual customs stay still.

I have suggested that one of the features of tenth- and eleventh-century liturgical practice was the growing recognition and solidification of new, more clearly defined book types. But there is an accompanying paradox. The more that writing intervenes in the running of the liturgy, the more a scribe has to commit to performance decisions in advance, hence the greater the potential for these books to differ among themselves. This


39  Some of the ideas which follow echo P.-M. Gy, ‘Typologie et ecclésiologie des livres liturgiques médiévaux’, *La Maison-Dieu* 121 (1975), 7–21.