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# 1 From abbey to cathedral and court: music under the Merovingian, Carolingian and Capetian kings in France until Louis IX

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Music for much of the Middle Ages is mostly treated as a trans-national repertoire, except in the area of vernacular song. Nevertheless, many of the most important documented developments in medieval music took place in what is now France. Certainly, if the concept of 'France' existed at all for most of the Middle Ages, it did not encompass anything like the modern *hexagone*: French kings (or, more properly, 'kings of the French') usually did not directly control all the territories they nominally ruled, and southern territories in particular sought to maintain their political and cultural distinctiveness. Still, it can be useful to consider medieval music in relation to other developments in French culture. From the intersections of chant and politics in the Carolingian era, to the flowerings of music and Gothic architecture, to the growth of vernacular song in the context of courtly society, music participated in broader intellectual and institutional conversations. While those conversations did not generally have truly national goals, they took place within what is now France, among people who often considered themselves to be, on some level, French.

## The Gallican rite of Merovingian France (*c.* 500–751)

As the Roman empire gradually disintegrated, its authority was largely replaced by local leaders and institutions. The Christian church took up some of the empire's unifying functions, but it too was geographically fractured as communication became more difficult. A distinct Gallican liturgy can be seen even before the conversion of Clovis, the first of the Merovingian kings, around the year 500. In light of future events, it is interesting to note that the earliest document attesting to Gallican liturgy is a letter by Pope Innocent I, dated 416, requesting that the churches of

I am grateful to William Chester Jordan and Daniel DiCenso for comments that kept me from several inaccuracies in areas outside my area of specialisation. The members of my research group here at Loyola, as usual, forced me to clarify my thoughts. All remaining errors are my own.



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Gaul follow the Roman rite, but surviving texts attest to the persistence of the local liturgy.[1]

While the existence of a Gallican rite is clear enough, what it sounded like is harder to determine.[2] No musical sources survive, since Gregorian chant effectively suppressed Gallican melodies before the advent of notation in the ninth century. Some texts and descriptions give hints, and traces may remain within the Gregorian liturgy, but teasing out the details is difficult, and scholars do not always agree on methods or results.[3] What evidence survives suggests less a single coherent rite than a heterogeneous body of materials whose specific contents may vary from place to place, perhaps sharing a basic liturgical structure but using different readings or prayers. Though it largely disappeared, Gallican chant provided the Frankish roots onto which the Roman rite was grafted to create what we know as Gregorian chant. This new hybrid was inextricably linked to Carolingian reforms.

## The Carolingian renaissance and the creation of 'Gregorian' chant (751–*c.* 850)

While the effective power of the Merovingian kings declined over the seventh century, that of the mayors of the palace who ruled in the king's name increased, until in 751 Pépin III (the Short, d. 768) definitively took the royal title himself. He sought to enhance his new royal status in part by a renewed Frankish alliance with Rome.[4] Pope Stephen II travelled to Francia, making the first trip of any pope north of the Alps, and in 754, at the royal abbey of Saint-Denis, he anointed Pépin and his sons. By the end of the century Pépin's son Charles, later known as Charlemagne (r. 768–814), was the most important ruler in the West, controlling much of what is now France, Germany and Italy, and he was crowned by the pope in Rome on Christmas Day 800.[5]

The Carolingians took their role as protectors of the church seriously, seeking to reform religious life through the better education of clerics.[6] The cultural flowering that resulted, often called the Carolingian renaissance, built on both Merovingian and Gallo-Roman roots. Monastic and cathedral schools were created to foster basic Latinity, which could be passed by parish priests to the laity, and to provide further education in the liberal arts and theology. Both patristic texts and classical works by authors such as Cicero, Suetonius and Tacitus, largely neglected in Frankish lands for a couple of hundred years, were copied in the new script known as Carolingian minuscule, developed at the monastery of Corbie.[7] Not only were older texts copied, but Carolingian masters wrote new commentaries on both sacred and secular texts, as well as poetry and treatises on a wide

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variety of subjects. Through all this can be seen not only a concern for proper doctrine, but also an increased emphasis on the written word.

The church was also the primary beneficiary of many developments in the visual sphere.[8] Liturgical manuscripts and other books were often highly decorated, both on the page and in their bindings, which may include ivory carvings or jewels. New churches, cathedrals and monasteries were built and supplied with elaborate altar furnishings, such as chalices and reliquaries. Few examples survive of textiles and paintings, but ample evidence exists of their use. Charlemagne's court chapel at Aachen is a superlative example of visual splendour in the service of both religion and royal power.

The importing of the Roman liturgy and its chant into the Frankish royal domain was an important part of the Carolingian reforming agenda. Roman liturgical books and singers circulated in Francia as early as the 760s. The effort to displace the existing Gallican liturgy in favour of the Roman, however, was never as successful as the Carolingian rulers might have liked. The number of documents that mandate the Roman use suggests a general lack of cooperation on the part of the Franks, and the surviving books attest to far greater diversity in practice than Carolingian statements would suggest.[9] Moreover, melodic differences between the earliest sources of Gregorian chant and later Roman manuscripts show that Gregorian chant is in reality a hybrid, created through the interaction of the rite brought from Rome and Frankish singers. Susan Rankin compares Gregorian and Roman versions of the introit *Ad te levavi*, arguing that the Gregorian version shows a Carolingian concern for 'reading' its text in terms of both sound and meaning to a greater degree than the Old Roman melody does.[10] This fits within the Carolingian reforming ideas already seen. In any case, Gregorian chant eventually became more than just another local liturgy: it was transmitted across the Carolingian empire and beyond, and given a uniquely divine authority through its attachment to Gregory I (d. 604), Doctor of the Church, reforming pope and saint. The earliest surviving Frankish chant book, copied about 800, uses his name, and an antiphoner copied in the late tenth century provides what becomes a familiar image: Gregory (identifiable by monastic tonsure and saintly nimbus) receiving the chant by dictation from the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove.[11]

The need to learn, understand and transmit this new body of liturgical song led to developments in notation and practical theory that are first attested in Frankish lands.[12] The earliest surviving examples of notation come from the 840s, and the first fully notated chant books were copied at the end of the ninth century. A system of eight modes may have been in use as early as the late eighth century, as witnessed by a tonary, which classifies

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chant melodies according to mode, copied around 800 at the Frankish monastery of Saint-Riquier. Treatises explaining the modes and other aspects of chant theory appear in the ninth century; early examples include the *Musica disciplina* of Aurelian of Réôme, a Burgundian monk writing in the first half of the ninth century, and Hucbald (d. 930), a scholar and teacher from the royal abbey of Saint-Amand. In addition to chant books and treatises on practical theory, the earliest surviving copy of Boethius's treatise on music, a fundamental source for the transmission of ancient Greek speculative theory to the Latin West, was copied in the first half of the ninth century, perhaps at Saint-Amand. The proper performance of chant, as aided by these tools, was an essential element in the education of clerics in Carolingian times and beyond.

## Monastic culture under the later Carolingians and the early Capetians (*c.* 840–*c.* 1000)

By his death Charlemagne ruled much of Western Europe, but the later ninth century and the tenth century were marked by a return to local concerns, even while the authority of monarch and church were acknowledged. This attitude may be reflected in the flowering of musical creativity associated with individual religious institutions. Even as Gregorian chant took hold, new chants were created to enhance local saints' cults, and new genres such as sequences and hymns allowed additions to established liturgies. Just as glosses became important in the second half of the ninth century as a way of commenting on texts, tropes were created to enhance existing chants, adding words and/or music to explain or expand upon the original.[13] For instance, the notion of Jesus' birth as the fulfilment of prophecy is underlined in this trope added to the Christmas introit found in a manuscript from Chartres (chant text underlined):

> Let us rejoice today because God descended from Heaven and to earth for our sakes
> A boy is born to us
> Whom long the prophets predicted
> and a son is given to us
> Now we know that this child was sent into the world by the father
> upon whose shoulder dominion rests and his name will be called
> wonderful counsellor, mighty god, prince of peace
> angel of great counsel.[14]

Polyphony, which will be discussed in the next chapter, likewise began as a way to enhance chant. While these practices can be found all over the Christian West, and some specific examples were transmitted widely,

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these additions to the central Gregorian repertoire were not standardised, but rather locally chosen, and often locally composed.

A major factor in the fracturing of the Carolingian empire was the common practice of dividing territory among all male heirs, rather than passing on a title only to the eldest. When Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious died in 840, he left three sons. At the Treaty of Verdun in 843, they agreed on a division of the empire, and Charles the Bald, the youngest, inherited most of what is now France. The notion of a unified kingdom, however, was difficult to maintain as areas such as Brittany, Gascony, Burgundy and Aquitaine each held on to their own culture and traditions, and often their own laws and language. The Frankish kingdom was further challenged by Viking raids, which became more numerous from the 840s. In 845 the Vikings reached Paris, and from the 850s winter settlements can be found in the Seine valley. In 911, Charles the Bald's grandson Charles the Simple ceded the area around Rouen, creating what eventually became the duchy of Normandy. A further crisis came in 888, when, for the first time since Pépin III became king in 751, there was effectively no adult Carolingian candidate to take the throne. After a century of conflict, Hugh Capet was elected king in 987. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Frankish culture was located more within individual religious institutions than at a royal court.

Monasteries were particularly important sites for the creation of new types of chant, and for the study and transmission of learning in general. From Alcuin, an English monk who was Charlemagne's chief advisor and was named abbot of Saint-Martin of Tours in 796, to Suger (*c.* 1081–1151), abbot of Saint-Denis and confidant of Louis VI, and beyond, churchmen were key advisors to kings. New monasteries flourished even as royal power waned, and old ones were reformed and better endowed by local patrons, who requested in return prayers for their souls and those of their relatives. The best-known reform house was founded at Cluny in 910 by William the Pious, duc d'Aquitaine.[15] Cluny and its many daughter houses fostered proper celebration of the Office, reinforcing the idea that a monastery's primary work is corporate prayer. Cluniac houses, like Benedictine monasteries, cathedrals, chapels in royal palaces and other churches, were adorned with new buildings and decorations to enhance the liturgy, which was preserved in notated and sometimes decorated manuscripts. Reforming impulses also led to the formation of new orders, most notably the Cistercians in the twelfth century, and the Franciscans and Dominicans in the thirteenth. These tended to take a more austere attitude towards chant, but they too copied liturgical books.

A number of Frankish abbeys can be associated with specific musical developments. The library of the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Gall, in

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modern Switzerland, still holds a number of the earliest surviving manuscripts containing musical notation, as well as standard works such as Boethius's *Consolatio philosophiae*, classical authors such as Cicero, Virgil and Ovid, and vernacular texts.[16] Saint-Gall was also the home of major early creators of tropes and sequences such as Notker and Tuotilo, and an early example of the *Quem quaeritis* dialogue can be found there.[17] Another early centre of both troping and Latin song, as well as liturgical drama and early polyphony, was the abbey of Saint-Martial in Limoges, founded in 848. The cultural flowering associated with this monastery in the late tenth century and eleventh century included an attempt to proclaim its namesake, a third-century bishop, as an apostle. This effort, spearheaded by Adémar de Chabannes, who wrote a new liturgy for Martial, was ultimately unsuccessful, but it did enhance the fame of the abbey and its value as a pilgrimage site.[18]

Saint-Denis, just outside Paris, had been a royal abbey since Merovingian times, and served as burial site of many French kings.[19] Pope Stephen II and his *schola cantorum* stayed there in 754, and demonstrations of the Roman chant and liturgy probably took place at the abbey at that time. New efforts to foster Denis's cult in the ninth century led to the conflation of the third-century bishop of Paris with the fifth-century theologian Pseudo-Dionysius, in turn linked to Dionysius the Areopagite, a Greek disciple of Paul. The octave or one-week anniversary of this enhanced Denis's feast was celebrated by a Mass with Greek Propers, the only one of its kind. In the twelfth century Abbot Suger, a close advisor and friend to Louis VI who had been educated at the abbey, built one of the earliest manifestations of the new Gothic architectural style there, replacing a Carolingian church. Aspects of the building reflect principles of Pseudo-Dionysian thought, and a mid-eleventh-century rhymed office for Denis emphasises 'the light of divine wisdom' as described in the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius.[20] Saint-Denis did not cultivate polyphony, as the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris did, but its widespread practice of melismatic embellishments of chant can be seen as an attempt to move the singer or listener to the immaterial world, reflecting the belief that vocalisation without words approximated angelic speech and the Divine Voice.[21]

## The Capetians and the age of cathedrals (987–*c.* 1300)

The focus on individual institutions as sites for musical developments continued under the early Capetians. While monasteries continued to serve an important role, urban cathedrals received increased attention, especially in the royal heartland still known as the Île-de-France. The

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election of Hugh Capet (r. 987–96) did not immediately lead to a resurgence of royal authority across the land, but it increased over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Primogeniture was still gaining acceptance and was not uncontested, so the early Capetians formally crowned and associated their eldest sons with them in their own lifetimes. This stability of succession allowed them time to build power. They also encouraged a new ideal of kingship: while coronation had long been seen as a sacrament, and the notion that the monarch is defender of the church had long roots, the early Capetians went a step further to build an image of the king as holy man. This can be seen in Helgaud of Fleury's life of Robert the Pious (r. 996–1031), and in the widespread belief in the king's touch, by which scrofula and other illnesses were said to be cured.[22] The strongest manifestation of the sacralisation of kingship was the canonisation of Louis IX in 1297.

The early Capetians directly controlled only the area around Paris, but they gradually extended their geographic control westwards and southwards, and this culminated in the reclaiming of Normandy from the English kings in 1204. Philip Augustus (r. 1179–1223) further enhanced the position of Paris as his royal capital, building a new wall to protect recent growth. An economic recovery, beginning in the second half of the eleventh century, also benefited the French kings: the agricultural riches of northern France, including the royal domain, began to be realised, and trade between these areas and markets to the north, south and east was strengthened. Urban areas, especially Paris, became transportation hubs. Because cathedrals, unlike monasteries, tend to be located in cities, they benefited from this economic activity through the patronage of kings, nobles and townsfolk. New buildings were created in the new Gothic style, which encouraged liturgical and musical developments as well.

After the cathedral in Chartres burned in 1020, Bishop Fulbert (d. 1028) began work on the current building, which was also dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The Marian cult already active there was enhanced, with a new focus on the Nativity of the Virgin.[23] The liturgy fashioned for this new celebration combined chants for Advent and Christmas from the traditional Gregorian repertoire with newly composed material, including three responsories attributed to Fulbert himself. The best-known of these outlines the lineage of Mary through the Jesse tree, which is spectacularly expressed in glass at the west end of the cathedral (see Example 1.1).[24]

> The shoot of Jesse produced a rod, and the rod a flower; and now over the flower rests a nurturing spirit. [V.] The shoot is the virgin Genetrix of God, and the flower is her Son.

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**Example 1.1** Fulbert of Chartres, *Stirps Jesse*, responsory for the Nativity of the Virgin, respond only

Styrps Jes - - - - se
vir - - gam pro - du - xit
vir - - - - ga - que flo - rem.
Et su - per hunc flo - rem
re - qui - e - - - scit spi - ri - tus
al - - - - - - - - - -
- - - - - - mus.

This melody begins by hovering around its final, D, dipping down to A at the word ‘Jesse’, in the process emphasising Jesse as the root of this genealogical tree. It then rises a little, centring on F with hints of G at the two appearances of the word *virga* (rod), showing how the branch lifts away from the root, but by moving downwards again links the branch to that root, as well as to the flower it produces. When the Spirit rests on that flower, it releases a luxurious melisma on the word *almus* (nurturing), which both rises to A, the highest note of the chant, and falls to the octave below before cadencing on the final. The effect is one of a gradual ascent, but one that is thoroughly grounded, like the Jesse tree itself. A similar process operates in the verse, which explains the image described in the respond: the melody rises to A on *dei* (God), then falls to *flos* (flower), showing how Christ ultimately serves as both culmination and source of the Jesse tree. Fulbert, or whoever composed the music, did not choose the perhaps obvious path and create a melody that rises inexorably from beginning to end through an authentic range (or that might even extend its range to show the scope of the tree’s ascent), but by using a plagal mode, with a relatively limited compass that envelops its final, he followed a different path, one that emphasises stability and rootedness.[25]

Notre-Dame of Paris, at the heart of Philip Augustus’s capital city, is perhaps the best-known Gothic cathedral. It was renowned for its

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cultivation of polyphony, which will be discussed in the next chapter, but chant and other forms of monophonic song continued to be central to its liturgical life.[26] Its canons had connections outside the cathedral, most notably at the abbey of Saint-Victor and the nascent university. Saint-Victor was a major centre of Augustinian reform in the twelfth century, balancing rejection of the world with serving the laity and seeking to create clerics who would teach 'by word and example'.[27] Its canons translated their reforming doctrine into liturgical song through a substantial group of sequences, many associated with Adam (d. 1146), who served as a canon and precentor of Notre-Dame before retiring to the abbey. Philip, chancellor of Notre-Dame from 1217 to 1236, wrote a number of conductus texts (for more on the conductus see below), though it is uncertain whether he wrote music, and indeed several are linked to melodies by Perotin, who will be discussed in the next chapter. Since Philip's position brought him into contact with the university, it is not surprising that some of his conductus refer to student conflicts in the early thirteenth century.[28]

The growth of the University of Paris reflected a renewed concern for the proper education of clerics. Paris became the centre of a new cadre of clerks, associated with noble and royal households, educated at cathedral schools and universities and often remunerated in part through the acquisition of church benefices. University-trained clerics also enhanced the rosters of monasteries, cathedrals and other sacred foundations. This educated non-noble class, whether based at church or court or moving between the two, provided a number of the creators and performers of the written musical tradition, monophonic and polyphonic, in both Latin and the vernacular. Music as an abstract mathematical art was one of the seven liberal arts, but Joseph Dyer argues that it and the other disciplines in the quadrivium were effectively eliminated from the curriculum at the University of Paris by the mid-thirteenth century in favour of other subjects, especially Aristotelian logic.[29] There is evidence, however, that university students had significant contact with practical music-making, through their early education, the liturgical practices of colleges and relationships with cathedral canons and singers of the Chapelle Royale. Peter Abelard and Peter of Blois are known to have written songs in Latin, and Abelard also composed hymns and six *planctus*. In perhaps the best-known witness to university-related music-making, the theorist known to us as Anonymous IV, probably a monk of St Albans in England, tells us about sacred music in Paris, especially Notre-Dame polyphony, on the basis of his experience as a university student.

Cathedrals were not the only witnesses to the Gothic style. After Louis IX (r. 1226–70) bought the Crown of Thorns from the Byzantine emperor in 1241, he built a chapel within the royal palace to house it. The

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Sainte-Chapelle is a masterpiece of colour in glass and paint that visibly links the French kings to those of the Old Testament and both to Christ the King.[30] These connections were made in the liturgy for the chapel as well, perhaps most notably in the Offices created to celebrate Louis IX after canonisation:

> Rex regum regis filio
> regales parans nuptias,
> post certamen in stadio
> celi prebet delicias
> glorioso commercio.
> [V.] Pro regno temporalium
> regnum habet celestium
> Ludovicus in premium.
>
> The King of kings, laying out a kingly wedding feast for the king's son, offers him, after the race in the stadium, the delights of heaven in glorious exchange. [V] In exchange for the kingdom of earthly things, Louis has the celestial kingdom as reward.[31]

In this responsory, Louis is explicitly linked to the New Testament parable, and both Christ (by analogue) and Louis are offered celestial kingship for their earthly work. The responsory is less melismatic than many examples, perhaps in part so that it can reflect the rhyming text.[32] Its fourth-mode melody is restless, beginning with a leap from D to A and cadencing on various pitches before the extended melismas on *glorioso commercio* (glorious exchange, referring to Louis's exchange of earthly rule for spiritual delights) close on E, as though finding at last in heaven the rest the saint could not find on earth.

## Secular monophony and the growth of courtly song (*c.* 1100–*c.* 1300)

To this point we have focused mostly on music for the church, but other forms of Latin song appear as early as the ninth and tenth centuries. Particularly associated with the abbey of Saint-Martial is a group of songs variously called *carmen*, *ritmus* and especially *versus*. While many of these pieces are sacred or even para-liturgical, they also include *planctus* or laments, such as those on the death of Charlemagne and on the battle of Fontenay (842), satirical songs and so forth. These songs are mostly syllabic and usually strophic in form, with a single melody used for multiple stanzas of text, though the *planctus* and lai share the paired-verse form of the sequence, where a new melody is used for each pair of

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