

Introduction: Latin Song and Refrain

Within medieval Latin song, the refrain is a unit of text and music that repeats regularly in the course of an individual song. The refrain represents a moment of return, repetition, and remembering, the “re-” prefix signaling its functional and structural identity: the Latin refrain always repeats. The songs in which refrains appear typically feature rhymed, rhythmic, and largely devotional, yet generally nonliturgical, Latin poetry; songs are set to music for one or more voices, copied in manuscript sources beginning in the twelfth century, and transmitted as late as the sixteenth century in printed song anthologies. Identified as *conductus*, *versus*, *cantilena*, *cantio*, *prosa*, *planctus*, and *rondellus*, among other labels, in the Middle Ages and contemporary scholarship, medieval Latin songs easily number over 1,000, transmitted in hundreds of manuscript sources throughout Europe.¹ Songs with refrains comprise more than a third of this extensive repertoire, making the structural return of music and text one of the most significant formal features of medieval Latin song.²

This book takes the refrain as a starting point in the study of medieval Latin song culture, identifying the repetition of music and poetry as a locus for generating musical, poetic, and cultural meaning. By focusing on a formal feature, I purposefully seek continuities and connections in the creation, copying, and performance of Latin song across the Middle

¹ A precise tally is challenging to calculate due to the problems of defining scope and accounting for the variability of genre and function. Catalogues and inventories of *conductus* and *versus* do exist. *Cantum pulcriorem invenire* (hereafter *CPI*), directed by Mark Everist and Gregorio Bevilacqua, is the most recent inventory of the *conductus*. It updates Gordon Anderson’s *Opera Omnia* for the *conductus*: Anderson, ed., *Notre-Dame and Related Conductus*, catalogued in Anderson, “Notre Dame and Related Conductus.” Earlier inventories of the *conductus* can be found in Gröninger, *Repertoire* and Falck, *Notre Dame Conductus*. For the *versus* and songs referred to in modern scholarship as *nova cantica*, a new edition is underway by the Corpus Monodicum research group based at the University of Würzburg (directed by Andreas Haug): www.musikwissenschaft.uni-wuerzburg.de/forschung/corpus-monodicum.

² See the Appendix. In constructing this archive of refrain songs – which should not be understood as exhaustive, but rather as always evolving – I am indebted to the existing catalogues, inventories, and scholarship cited in the previous note. However, my conclusions and definition of scope differ from these in many cases, and the Appendix includes sources and songs yet to be accounted for or included in modern catalogues.

Ages. This approach contrasts with previous scholarship, which has tended to privilege genre, individual manuscripts or sources, polyphonic settings, and authorship as rubrics for categorization and analysis, as a result eliding songs and sources that fall outside of these variously medieval and modern parameters. In this book, I am not interested in defining a new subgenre, or in rejecting the utility of previous scholarly paradigms. Rather, placing the refrain at the center of inquiry allows an examination of the materiality, performance, and cultural meaning of Latin song that captures both its transregional and local creation and transmission, as well as its generic fluidity.

There is no singular meaning or interpretation possible for the Latin refrain beyond its identity as a repeated unit of music and text. Like medieval Latin song more broadly, songs with refrains – for which I use the general term “refrain songs” – looked, sounded, and functioned differently depending on where and by whom they were created, copied, and sung. Yet at the same time, commonalities emerge, namely shared stylistic and poetic traits, performance rituals, or manuscript contexts that overtly acknowledge the refrain as a formal component capable of shaping and conveying a particular set of meanings. Throughout this book I move between unique or exceptional, and shared or universal examples, highlighting what each might tell us about both the Latin refrain and devotional song culture in the Middle Ages. I begin by asking what the refrain is and what it does in medieval Latin song. In other words, what distinguishes a song with a refrain from one without a refrain, and is this distinction meaningful from a medieval perspective or as an analytical tool? How do refrains alter or inflect the performance and transmission of songs? In what way do refrains signal cultural or ritual meanings that are different from those of songs without refrains? What can refrains tell us about medieval song cultures more broadly, not only encompassing Latin song alone, but also refrain forms in vernacular song? When, how, and by whom were Latin refrain songs performed?

These are questions that have rarely been asked, not only about refrain song, but in most cases about medieval Latin song more generally. Only recently has Latin song begun to receive serious analytical and interpretive attention beyond cataloguing and editing, both of which have represented central scholarly concerns and efforts for over a century. The work of musicologists Mark Everist, Thomas Payne, Anne-Zoé Rillon-Marne, Andreas Haug, Helen Deeming, and Rachel May Golden, among others, has begun moving the study of Latin song, and especially the *conductus* and *versus*, toward a deeper engagement with song’s cultural work and

embedding in medieval communities, whether populated by intellectuals, preachers, clerics, or students.³

For the refrain in medieval Latin song, Margaret Switten and Andreas Haug have offered productive models for analysis, both with a focus on the twelfth-century *versus*. Switten compares refrains in the *versus* with those in troubadour song, examining the range of ways in which refrains manifested compositionally between languages to different effects and performative ends.⁴ Haug, by contrast, focuses on Latin song, with only brief references to vernacular song, and differentiates between what he terms “real” and “virtual” refrains.⁵ The former consists of a ritual and responsorial component of “old” Latin liturgical song that carries over to “new” song of the twelfth century (namely, *versus*). The “virtual refrain,” comprising short repeated sounds and words, or grammatical features, emerges alongside the “real refrain” as an aesthetic feature of the “new” song. While Haug and Switten offer important insights into the medieval Latin refrain, their focus on the twelfth-century *versus* leaves the majority of refrains and refrain songs unexamined and undertheorized.

The relative paucity of research on Latin song and refrain is striking in comparison with the sheer volume of work dealing with vernacular song, especially the French *chanson* and, above all, the *refrain*.⁶ The French *refrain* of the thirteenth century has rightfully been a focal point in studies of medieval song, with musicologists and literary scholars alike offering a range of interpretations of the structural, aphoristic, citational, and intertextual French *refrain* located in song, romance, and the motet.⁷ Although comparing the French *refrain* to the Latin refrain is, in most cases, like comparing apples to oranges, the *refrain* is inextricably linked to

³ The Bibliography and notes for this book paint a more complete picture of scholarship on Latin song; however, see, for example, the recent book-length study of the *conductus* by Everist, *Discovering Medieval Song*; Payne, “Poetry, Politics, and Polyphony,” “Aurelianus civitas,” and “Chancellor *versus* Bishop”; Rillon-Marne, *Homo considera*; and Golden, *Mapping*. The collected essays in Deeming and Leach, eds., *Manuscripts and Medieval Song*, also include several manuscripts transmitting Latin song, and Deeming herself has published numerous articles dealing with Latin as well as vernacular song, employing a range of methodologies.

⁴ Switten, “Versus and Troubadours.”

⁵ Haug, “Ritual and Repetition” and “Musikalische Lyrik.”

⁶ Judith Peraino’s point regarding terminology around the *refrain* and its italicization is well taken, in that she avoids italicization of “refrain” when referring to its “autonomous” as opposed to structural role. See Peraino, “*Et pui conmencha a canter*,” 1 n. 1. For the purposes of clarity, however, I use italics for refrains in French contexts as opposed to in Latin song; refrains in other vernaculars are identified by the specific language. Throughout, abbreviations are expanded without notice and spelling of all original texts conforms to individual manuscripts.

⁷ For scholarship and bibliography on the French refrain, see Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*; Ibos-Augé, *Chanter et lire*; and Saltzstein, *Refrain*.

Latin refrains due to processes of contrafacture explicitly connecting refrains across language. Latin refrains, however, cannot be understood or interpreted using the same methodologies used for the *refrain*; the mechanisms by which the Latin refrain was employed in song, and its transmission, performance, and meaning, are vastly different from those of the *refrain*.

First and foremost, the *refrain* repeats structurally within individual songs but it also travels independently between genres, without necessitating repetition either within songs or among different contexts for its identification.⁸ In this regard, the *refrain* represents a singular phenomenon in medieval music, poetry, and literature. By contrast, repetition is a *sine qua non* for the Latin refrain. Moreover, although the French *refrain* is often positioned as a vernacular touchstone for the Latin refrain, a fuller examination of the body of Latin refrain songs reveals connections among refrains and refrain songs in several languages. In this book I grapple with the complex relationship of the Latin refrain not only to the French *refrain*, but also to refrains in English and German. As extensive scholarship on the French *refrain* has usefully illustrated, however, what refrains mean and what role they play in song and culture depends on many factors, not all of which apply equally across language.

Defining the Latin Refrain

Genre is the most contentious factor in the historiography of Latin song. Although the categories of *versus*, *conductus*, and the term coined in the twentieth century, *nova cantica*, each have historiographical traditions and, in the case of the first two, medieval support in the form of theoretical discussions and scribal rubrication, Latin songs go by many different names in medieval and modern contexts, making it challenging to connect terms to specific works.⁹ The limits of a single genre are also complicated by transmission patterns in which songs might be rubricated as *versus* in one source and *conductus* in another, or a *cantilena* in one and *prosa* in another. It is currently impossible to acquire complete repertorial control over genres of medieval Latin song; its edges and limits are constantly in flux

⁸ On the role of repetition (or lack thereof) for the French *refrain*, see Saltzstein, *Refrain*; Butterfield, “Repetition and Variation”; and Doss-Quinby, *Les Refrains*.

⁹ On medieval song genres and labels, and terminological challenges, see Strohm, “Late-Medieval Sacred Songs”; Stevens, *Words and Music*, 48–52; Reckow, “Conductus”; Falck, *Notre Dame Conductus*, 1–8; Gillingham, *Critical Study*, 49–55; and Deeming, “Latin Song I,” 1023–1024.

and impacted by issues of source history and survival, and the status of cataloguing.

I have chosen to be inclusive in this book. The refrain songs discussed throughout this book and listed in the Appendix have most frequently been labeled by scholars, or rubricated in manuscripts, as *conductus*, *versus*, *rondellus*, and *cantilena*, and less often as *Benedicamus Domino* tropes and *prosas*. Although labels such as these will crop up at points in this book to clarify transmission history or issues of historiography, I use “song” to emphasize continuities among sources and contexts. In so doing, I do not intend to efface the particularities of specific genres, but instead focus attention on a formal aspect of Latin song that, more than other formal or stylistic features, traverses genre, time, and place. Justification for this inclusivity is found in the songs themselves and their manuscript transmission. Song concordances generate networks throughout the entire corpus of medieval Latin song and its sources, regardless of medieval and modern genre categories.

In opting for inclusivity, I have not avoided the challenges of defining an archive of Latin song. Decisions I have made beyond language (Latin) and form (refrain) include the nature of the poetry itself, namely the exclusion of the admittedly few metrical poems, and a focus instead on the more numerous *rithmi* – rhymed, rhythmical, accentual, and syllabically regular poems often set to music.¹⁰ Less a choice and more by virtue of the repetition necessitated by refrains, nearly all the songs I consider are also strophic rather than through-composed. Most songs also survive with musical notation in at least one source, although not always; I have opted to include unnotated sources when there is either internal or external evidence suggesting the possibility of a musical rendering. In terms of temporal scope, I begin with the earliest collections of notated *rithmi* in the twelfth century, comprising manuscripts of songs commonly termed *nova cantica* and rubricated, depending on source, as *versus* and *conductus*, and conclude with the first printed sources for medieval song in the sixteenth century. This chronological scope is supported by a twelfth-century watershed in the composition of musical settings of largely devotional Latin *rithmi*, while the end date is defined by the first appearance of

¹⁰ Notably, not all refrain song concordances retain the refrain, nor are all refrain songs monolingual. For definitions and overviews of the *rithmus*, see Fassler, “Accent”; Sanders, “Rithmus”; Page, *Latin Poetry*, 28–53; Norberg, *Introduction*, 81–129; and Everist, *Discovering Medieval Song*, 74–76 and *passim*. On later printed sources for medieval Latin song, see *ibid.*, 280–281.

medieval Latin song in print, ushering in a novel – if understudied – history.¹¹

The poetry of the Latin refrain song is chiefly devotional, dedicated to celebrating the liturgical and calendar year and favorite holy and saintly figures (see Chapters 1 and 2). This is a feature of medieval Latin song more broadly, and is amplified when limiting by form – nondevotional, satirical, polemical, topical, or amorous poems are in the minority when refrains are present. Consequently, although the corpus is inclusive, the following chapters deal exclusively with the more numerous devotional songs. Extraliturgical Latin songs, including those with refrains, share many formal, poetic, and contextual features beyond language with liturgical genres such as sequences, hymns, and tropes, and were also transmitted in several troped liturgies, particularly for the Feast of the Circumcision.¹²

One approach in previous scholarship has distinguished between liturgical and nonliturgical songs. This is problematic, however, given not only the inclusion of Latin songs in troped liturgies, but also the identity of many Latin songs as song-form tropes of Office versicles, most notably *Benedicamus Domino*.¹³ I include, consequently, song-form tropes and reworkings as well as songs serving liturgical functions, so long as they feature a refrain and do not explicitly belong to a specific liturgical tradition other than troping; in other words, I exclude hymns or sequences while including song-form reworkings of both genres. In many cases, such works are transmitted alongside Latin refrain songs lacking specific liturgical designations, demonstrating scribal awareness of the close link between liturgical and devotional song.¹⁴ Importantly, songs are not static. In one

¹¹ Beginning with twelfth-century song collections is complicated by the survival of earlier collections of Latin songs, such as the *versus* collection, including *rithmi* and metrical poetry, in Paris lat. 1154, or the Cambridge Songs. My rationale for excluding these from discussion rests in the patterns of transmission that link repertoires copied from the twelfth century onward, including songs copied in the *Carmina Burana*.

¹² On the mixture of Latin songs and tropes in troped liturgies for the Feast of the Circumcision, see Arlt, *Ein Festoffizium des Mittelalters*; “Office” and Boudeau, “La question des variantes.” As Jeremy Llewellyn eloquently states with respect to the earliest twelfth- and thirteenth-century repertoires, “the *nova cantica* blossom within a context of troping: oftentimes they breathe in a performative synchrony with other, pre-existing texts,” referring above all to the *Benedicamus Domino* versicle (see later in this Introduction); “Nova Cantica,” 149.

¹³ On the relationship between the *Benedicamus Domino* and Latin song, see Harrison, “Benedicamus, Conductus, Carol”; Arlt, *Ein Festoffizium des Mittelalters*, 1:160–206; Hiley, *Western Plainchant*, 213–215; Stevens, ed., *Later Cambridge Songs*, 27–29; and Everist, *Discovering Medieval Song*, 49–52 and 199–213.

¹⁴ A similar choice is often made for the *versus*, and *nova cantica* more generally, supported by parallels in poetic form and musical construction between songs with and without a reference to, or citation of, the *Benedicamus Domino* versicle. See, for example, Fuller, “Aquitainian Polyphony,” 1:22–27;

source, a song might conclude with the text of the *Benedicamus Domino* and in another the versicle text might be absent, exposing the permeability of genre and function within medieval Latin song (see Chapter 4).

The definition of a refrain as a unit of text and music that repeats, while simple, does not fully account for the spectrum of refrains and repetition in Latin song. As Haug's distinction between "real" and "virtual" refrains implies, the repetition of text, music, or text and music takes many forms. As a result, what constitutes a refrain in Latin song becomes another factor in demarcating boundaries. In this book I also allow the refrain to recur among songs as well as between strophes, but in these cases, it typically repeats structurally within its new context as well. I also include the structural repetition of music with a variable text in cases where it is clear that these sections functioned as a refrain based on musical and poetic form, rhetoric and scansion, or scribal cues. This does not entirely avoid thorny issues of identification and inconsistencies brought about by individual songs but, as I explore in Chapter 4, moments of inconsistency and ambiguity offer insights into the intricacies of the inscription and performance of Latin refrains and refrain forms. Finally, within single manuscripts, songs with refrains of varying lengths frequently sit side by side; the relative length of refrains is not a definitive marker of difference in terms of meaning or function.

Although texture – the number of voice parts – has frequently, and rightly, defined boundaries of study within medieval Latin song, refrain songs survive both in monophonic and polyphonic settings, with an emphasis on the former. In rare cases, songs survive in both single- and multi-voice settings, or refrain and strophes can be set in contrasting textures (see Chapter 3). Notably, texture does not necessarily correlate with the relative length or complexity of refrains. Monophonic and polyphonic settings both include examples of shorter and longer refrains of varying complexity in terms of poetry and music. The skill levels necessitated by musical settings of refrain songs are also variable, although the emphasis on monophony is paralleled by an emphasis on syllabic settings and singable melodies featuring narrow ranges and limited intervals. Only a handful of refrain songs include elaborate melismas (including *caudae*) or feature intricate musical settings, whether monophonic or polyphonic. By and large, this is a repertoire of repetitive, tuneful, and singable songs, approachable by amateurs and trained singers alike. And for all that refrain

note, however, possible stylistic distinctions discussed in Marshall, "A Late Eleventh-Century Manuscript," 71–100 and Carlson, "Devotion to the Virgin Mary," 1:26–29.

songs have been mostly overlooked by scholars, modern performers and ensembles have long recognized their musical and poetic value.¹⁵

In terms of meter and rhythm, musical settings of refrain songs are typically notated in nonmensural or unmeasured notation, occasionally at odds with the clear and regular rhythmic patterning of their poetry. Following the work of Christopher Page and Mark Everist in particular, I transcribe unmeasured notation in a rhythmically neutral fashion, unless the notation is either explicitly modal or mensural (for example, in polyphonic *caudae* in thirteenth-century repertoires or mensurally notated works in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century songbooks).¹⁶ Mensural or metrical notation is an exception, however, and the rhythmic feel of the songs in performance stems from the regular rhythm and accent pattern of the *rithmus*, and not from the musical notation.¹⁷

Melody parallels form in the Latin refrain song, its contours shaping and following the poetry. Text–music relationships in the repertoire range from highly expressive to virtually formulaic and, for the most part, these distinctions do not align cleanly with factors such as genre, function, or transmission.¹⁸ A central concern in analyzing the music and poetry of refrain forms, however, is the relationship between strophic material and refrain material. Since nearly all refrain songs are strophic, repetition occurs musically in both strophes and refrain; literal repetition of text typically only occurs in the refrain, although certain songs may feature various levels of repetitive wordplay in strophes, edging closer to Haug’s “virtual” refrain. Although factors such as length, texture, complexity, and text setting can be helpful in classifying refrain songs, examining the structure of the refrain’s repetition within individual songs points toward two main categories of refrain songs: (1) songs in which refrains are sung between individual strophes (which I term strophic+refrain) and (2) songs in which the refrain, or a part thereof, occurs both within and between individual strophes.

¹⁵ As Christopher Page writes, many Latin refrain songs have “bold and ingratiating musical settings” that appeal to a range of listeners (*Voices and Instruments*, 88), an assertion backed up by the frequent recording of refrain songs by early-music ensembles.

¹⁶ Page, *Latin Poetry*; and Everist, *Discovering Medieval Song*.

¹⁷ On mensural notation and Latin song, see Everist, *Discovering Medieval Song*, 283–294, and for a more general overview, Strohm, “Sacred Song.”

¹⁸ Wulf Arlt in particular has explored music–text relationships in *nova cantica*; see “Nova cantica.” On the *versus* alone, see Carlson, “Striking Ornaments” and “Two Paths.” For the *conductus*, see especially Rillon-Marne, *Homo considera*, and Everist, *Discovering Medieval Song*, 151–180 and *passim*. See also several articles and chapters by Helen Deeming dealing precisely with the question of how music and text work together in Latin song, exemplified in Deeming, “Music and Contemplation.”

The former is by far the most common form for Latin refrain songs, recognizable as a verse–chorus form that characterizes many song repertoires. The latter is a more specific formal structure that shares many similarities with the medieval French *rondeau*, taking the musical and poetic form of aAabAB or ABaABabAB, or variations thereof – the partial repetition of the refrain within individual strophes is the main marker of the *rondeau*. Many songs, for instance, take the form aAbB, which Hans Spanke refers to in his study of Latin *rondeaux* as the embryonic form of the *rondeau*; for Spanke, all permutations of the *rondeau* with its “Binnenrefrain” (“internal refrain”) are related to this basic shape.¹⁹ The presence of an internal refrain, consequently, establishes a key formal difference among Latin songs, a difference I retain here. Moreover, similarities between the French *rondeau* and some Latin refrain songs have led to the contemporary label of *rondellus* (plural *rondelli*), a Latinization of *rondeau*, a term I employ throughout this book to differentiate between song forms.²⁰ Following Spanke and others, I identify *rondelli* as songs in which one or more lines of the refrain are inserted within strophes as an “internal refrain,” as well as occurring at the beginning and/or end of strophes.

Rondelli represent roughly 20 percent of refrain songs, with ninety-six extant works in the Appendix, although they are among the most cited and edited.²¹ The formal similarity of the *rondellus* to the French *rondeau* has led to numerous theories positing a strong directionality between the two brought about, variously, by contrafacture, shared authorship, or influence. The precise directionality of the relationship between Latin *rondelli* and French *rondeaux* remains unclear and, to a degree, matters less than

¹⁹ Spanke, “Das lateinische Rondeau,” 131–132.

²⁰ Modern scholarship has labeled *rondeau*-form Latin songs *rondelli* starting with Friedrich Ludwig in his *Repertorium*; see Ludwig, *Repertorium*, 1:124–125. For its recent use, see Everist, *Discovering Medieval Song*, 22. Not all scholars adopt the Latin term; some refer to these songs as “Latin *rondeaux*”; see Spanke, “Das lateinische Rondeau” and Anderson, ed., *Notre-Dame and Related Conductus*, vol. 8. The term *rondellus* as used here should not be confused with the compositional technique of voice exchange described by music theorists; see Sanders, “Rondellus,” *GMO*; Falck, “Rondellus,” Canon, and Related Types”; and Reckow, “Rondellus/rondeau, rota.”

²¹ Scholars and editors often limit investigation of Latin refrain forms to *rondelli*, and even more often to the final fascicle of F, effectively limiting the repertoire to fewer than sixty songs; see, for instance, Aubry, *La Musique et les musiciens d’église*, 45–51; Spanke, “Das lateinische Rondeau”; Rokseth, “Danses clericales”; Aubrey, “The Eleventh Fascicle”; Falck, *Notre Dame Conductus*, 123–129; Stevens, *Words and Music*, 178–186; Page, *Voices and Instruments*, 88–91; Wright, *Maze and the Warrior*, 151–155; and Haines, *Medieval Song*, 67–75.

probing the complicated relationship between the two. The most striking characteristic of *rondelli* compared to strophic+refrain songs is where and how they are transmitted. *Rondelli* are transmitted in a narrow range of sources (see the following section) and, in each of these, songs tend to be clustered or otherwise organized deliberately according to form. In other words, scribes paid attention to form and, not just the presence of a refrain, but the nature of the refrain form itself. The tension between these two formal manifestations of refrains will arise throughout in this book in light of the implications of form for performance, interpretation, function, and the relationship of Latin and vernacular song.

Manuscript Sources

Manuscript and transmission history provide the best justification and support for the privileging of the refrain, as I have defined it, in medieval Latin song. Patterns of compilation and organization speak to a distinctively medieval desire to group like with like, resulting in several large collections of refrain-form songs. These are found in manuscripts copied in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; twelfth-century scribes showed less inclination to organize according to form. The pinnacle of the Latin refrain song in terms of individual sources is located in two manuscripts copied in thirteenth-century France: Tours 927 (copied between 1225 and 1245) and F (copied *ca.* 1240s–1250s). The former is well known for its preservation of an Easter play and the *Jeu d'Adam*, among other Latin and French texts and musical items; F is widely known among musicologists as a central source for Parisian polyphony and monophony, transmitting the *Magnus liber organi*, Latin motets, and *conducti*.²² Notably, these two sources together transmit the greatest number of *rondelli*, as well as strophic+refrain songs. Tours 927 alone transmits thirty-one monophonic refrain songs (eighteen of which are *rondelli*) and F transmits fifty-five monophonic refrain songs in its final eleventh fascicle, fifteen of which are concordant with Tours 927 and forty-nine of which are *rondelli*. F transmits an additional twenty-two monophonic and polyphonic refrain-form works in earlier fascicles.

²² The most recent reconsideration of Tours 927, including its dating, is in Chaguinian, ed., *The Jeu d'Adam*. The bibliography on F is extensive; for overviews on dating and citing pertinent scholarship, see Roesner, ed., *Antiphonarium*, 7–39; Hagg and Huglo, “Magnus liber”; and Williams, “Magnus Liber Organi.” See also Bradley, “Contrafacta and Transcribed Motets” and *Polyphony in Medieval Paris*.