

Andreas HOLSCHNEIDER. — **Die Organa von Winchester. Studien zum ältesten Repertoire polyphoner-Musik.** Hildesheim, G. Olms, 1968. In-8, 199 p., 19 pl.

The Winchester organa constitute the oldest known monument of polyphonic music. They occupy an intermediate place between the theoretical exercises of the *Musica Enchiriadis* of the late ninth century and the more evolved style of melismatic organum from the school of Notre-Dame de Paris. The importance of this repertory, which is preserved in the two Winchester manuscripts, one at Cambridge (CCC 473) and the other at Oxford (Bodl. 775), has been well known to musicologists. More than one scholar — such as, for example, W. H. Frere, J. Handschin or A. Machabey — has dealt with the problems of analysis and worked on a preliminary inventory, without however crossing the barrier that represents the heart of the problem: the transcription of the organa that are notated in staff-less neumes, and the analysis of their compositional style. The issue thus deserved a renewed inquiry, one that would proceed from the foundations. Precisely this is what Dr. A. Holschneider of the University of Hamburg has undertaken in his thesis: a most rigorous analysis of the sources, a transcription of the ancient organa, and a discussion of associated problems. His study, a work of great precision and of remarkable prudence in its conclusions, reopens the issue of the origins of polyphony in England and France.

The author properly begins his study with a description, analysis, and dating of the sources. Judging purely from palaeographic and liturgical indications (in particular the inclusion of the anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral, which took place on 20 October 980, and the celebration of the feast of St Ethelwold, from 996 onwards), the old part of the Cambridge manuscript would have to be dated right at the beginning of the eleventh century. Further additions to the manuscript were made up to the middle of that same century. But is this dating, so prudently arrived at, not a little too early? As a matter of fact, the manuscript contains a tonary which cites, for every tone, the verses which Berno of Reichenau had placed as epigraphs in his own tonary dedicated to the Pilgrim of Cologne (1021–1036). How to explain the appearance of these verses, extracted from Berno's tonary, in a manuscript that postdates the millennium by only a few years? Should one revise the dating, established with such attention to detail by Holschneider, and move up the presumed period of origin by at least two decades? The author, to whom we submitted this objection, is not inclined to think so: he reckons that it was already during his sojourn at Fleury, before 1008, that Berno would have composed the verses upon the eight which he was later to insert in his tonary "published" between 1021 and 1036.

In any case, the Cambridge manuscript is older than that of Oxford, whose assumed date was too early: the lost exemplar for the latter manuscript must have been copied between 976 and 984 or a little later, but its copy, now at Oxford, cannot

have been written before the middle of the eleventh century. This is most fortunate for us, as the neumatic notation, which makes abundant use of significative letters, employs more precise diastemacy than was the custom at the end of the tenth century, for which reason the melodies are also relatively easier to decipher.

After his descriptive preliminaries, the author presents a list of organum fragments from the neumed manuscripts of Fleury and Chartres (pp. 63–67); these could be supplemented by the references to pieces in the Ordinary of Chartres published in 1953 by Canon Delaporte. At Chartres, Sigon, pupil of Fulbert († 1028), had successfully practiced the improvisation of organal chant. Certain written pieces may perhaps have travelled from France to England: the connections between Winchester and the monasteries of Corbie, Jumièges, Fleury, and other French churches are well known. But what about the Winchester repertory itself? The author believes that its composition is to be attributed to the School of Winchester, and more particularly to Cantor Wulfstan, disciple of Bishop Ethelwold († 984). Several indications argue in favor of that attribution, in particular a text by the chronicler William of Malmesbury, who attributes to Wulfstan the composition of the *Vita* of Ethelwold and “aliud opus de tonorum armonia valde utile” [another most useful work, about the harmony of tones].

Wulfstan was very probably the composer of the tropes for the feast of Saint Ethelwold, his master, which are contained in the Cambridge manuscript. He also constructed, between 984 and 994, the pneumatic organ in the Old Minster which he himself describes in his letter to Elpheg II: an organ having ten registers, with a keyboard of 40 keys, each carrying a letter of the alphabetic notation system (see pp. 139–145). It remains to be seen if the organ, constructed in the church, and no longer for the use of the court as in the Carolingian age, served to support one of the parts of vocal organum?

But, returning to the chronicler’s text, *armonia* denotes — according to the *Enchiridis* from the late ninth century — “polyphony”. Wulfstan would then have composed a treatise on “polyphony”, now lost. Now the distance from theory to practice is not great and the singular agreement of the titles of certain written organa (*Melodia notata*), contrary to improvised organum, is an argument that supports the attribution of the compositions notated on the Winchester parchments to Wulfstan.

Yet in order to study those pieces, and to analyse them, they must first be deciphered! The organa are notated in neumes without staves and without clefs. A preliminary study of the notation is thus called for. At the very beginning of the chapter on the Winchester neumes, Holschneider remarks that the English notation in use at Winchester depends directly on models from northern and western France, in particular from Normandy. Yet his chief concern is the features that could contribute to a decipherment, in particular the intervallic values of certain neumes and the meanings of the letters which bestow an indication of relative pitch upon the neumes. The pages on notation are rich in judicious observations and reflect ample experience with the habits of English notators. The author puts his method into

application by deciphering several selected examples, and he transcribes a good number of pieces from the old repertory in the appendix (pp. 156–181).

If the transcriptions of the GM parts (= *Grundmelodie*: principal voice), deciphered with the help of English diastematic manuscripts, are beyond question, the transcription of the organal voices involves a certain element of conjecture, even if the principles on which it is based are solid. Some of the editor's choices must remain open to discussion — as for example on p. 110, at the beginning of the *Alleluia V. Angelus*: should the initial bivirgas of the Alleluia and of the two versets not be transcribed f rather than g, because of the preference of that neume for the upper note in a semitone? The formula is repeated half a dozen times and the choice of one solution over another must have ramifications for any subsequent conclusions regarding the theory of note-against-note writing applied by the composer...

There is room for hesitation in the presence of multiple possible solutions more often: the author himself gives an example on p. 115. Generally speaking, however, the proposed solutions are most judicious, and perfectly defensible from the viewpoint of palaeography. Moreover they are sometimes legitimated and confirmed by the concrete application of rules of note-against-note singing that were laid down in the ninth and tenth centuries. Still, it seems tricky and, as the author himself anticipated (cf. p. 127), not without the risk of *petitio principii*, to offer reflections on the rules of note-against-note singing at Winchester at the end of the tenth century following those transcriptions! Nevertheless it is possible to draw certain conclusions from the transcriptions: the important cadences generally end on unisons— which is not always the case in Chartres and Fleury, —the organal voice moves by preference in parallel motion, and there is only limited use of contrary motion, and so on.

The author addresses various questions that have to do with the choice of pieces reserved for organal treatment, the division of the intonation and the final reprise, and certain words of the liturgical text; finally, he comments on the aesthetics of the genre which — according to the rubrics in the manuscripts — evoked the admiration and emotion of the listeners. In his conclusion, he situates the Winchester organa in their proper place in the course of the first developments of the art of polyphony.

This study, which is supplemented with a rich bibliography, illustrated with twenty plates of English and French manuscripts, and provided with detailed tables, must henceforth be reckoned among the fundamental works for the study of the earliest polyphonic endeavors.

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