

How Chant was Brought to Britain

The following texts, about the introduction of Roman chant in Britain in the seventh century, provide a useful background to the same development in Francia in the eighth. They may help us find out if the process was the same, and what gaps in the Frankish story can be filled by the British one.

Most of the English texts are quoted after Penguin translations. These translations are quite free (as they should be for a wide readership), but I have made the translations more literal in those places that are important for our purposes.

The first text is excerpted from the Biography of Pope Gregory by the first of our Four Authors, the fiercely pro-Roman and anti-Frankish author John the Deacon (c.880):

597	<p>Hinc est quod hujus Gregorii tempore cum Augustino tunc Britannias adeunte, per Occidentem quoque <u>Romanae institutionis cantores</u> dispersi, barbaros insigniter docuerunt. Quibus defunctis Occidentales Ecclesiae ita <u>susceptum modulationis organum vitiarunt</u>, ut Joannes quidam Romanus cantor cum Theodoro aequae civis Romano, sed Eburaci archiepiscopo, per Gallias in Britannias Vitalliano sit praesule destinatus, qui circumquaque positarum Ecclesiarum filios <u>ad pristinam cantilenae dulcedinem revocans</u>, tam per se, quam <u>per suos discipulos</u> multis annis <u>Romanae doctrinae regulam</u> conservavit.</p>	<p>Hence it is that in the time of this Gregory, when Augustine went to Britain, <u>singers of the Roman school</u> were dispersed throughout the West, and they instructed the barbarians with distinction. After they died the Western churches so <u>corrupted the received organ of singing</u>, that a certain John, a Roman singer (together with Theodore, a Roman citizen yet also archbishop of York), was sent by bishop Vitalian [<i>r.</i> 657–672] to Britain by way of Gaul; and John recalled the children of the churches in every place to <u>the pristine sweetness of the chant</u>, and he preserved for many years, as much by himself as <u>through his disciples, the rule of Roman doctrine</u>.</p>	<p>Gregory sends singers of the Roman <i>schola cantorum</i> all over the West</p> <p>the melodies were soon corrupted</p> <p>John is sent (see below)</p> <p>to restore the chant</p> <p>and to maintain the Rule of Roman Chant doctrine</p>
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From this point until the testimony of Ecgbert of York in the 740s (below, p. 4), all texts are taken from two authors: an anonymous English chronicler and Bede the Venerable (673–735).

EH *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (completed 731)

LA *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* (after 716)

AC *The Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrith* (about 717)

Translations: EH: Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1955); **LA** and **AC: The Age of Bede**, trans. J. F. Webb (London: Penguin, 1965).

601	<p>[EH I. xxix] Praeterea idem papa Gregorius Augustino episcopo, quia suggesserat ei multam quidem ibi esse messem, sed operarios paucos, misit cum praefatis legatariis suis plures cooperatores, ac verbi ministros: in quibus primi et praecipui erant Mellitus, Justus, Paulinus, Rufinianus; et per eos generaliter</p>	<p>Hearing from Bishop Augustine that he had a rich harvest but few to reap it, Pope Gregory sent with his envoys several collaborators and ministers of the Word (of whom the principal and most outstanding were Mellitus, Justus, Paulinus, and Rufinianus), and through them all things</p>	<p>Pope sends more missionaries,</p> <p>who bring, amongst others,</p>
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universa quae ad cultum erant ac ministerium Ecclesiae necessaria... et codices plurimos.

necessary in general for worship and the service of the church... and many books.

liturgical books [not necessarily with music]

633 [EH II.xx] Reliquerat autem in Ecclesia sua Eburacensi Jacobum diaconum, virum utique ecclesiasticum et sanctum, qui multo exhinc tempore in Ecclesia manens, magnas antiquo hosti praedas, docendo et baptizando eripuit... Qui quoniam cantandi in ecclesia erat peritissimus... magister ecclesiasticae cantionis juxta morem Romanorum seu Cantuariorum multis coepit existere.

Paulinus left behind his deacon **Jacobus** to care for the church of York. Jacobus was a holy churchman who remained a long time in that church, teaching and baptizing, and snatching much prey from the clutches of our old enemy the devil.... Since he was most skilled in singing in church he became the Master of Ecclesiastic Chant for many people, according to the manner of the Romans and Cantaburians.

Paulinus leaves York

James now in charge

who becomes a Master of Chant just like the masters in Rome and Canterbury

669 [EH IV. ii] Sed et sonos cantandi in ecclesia, quos eatenus in Cantia tantum noverant, ab hoc tempore per omnes Anglorum Ecclesias discere coeperunt: primusque, excepto Jacobo de quo supra diximus, cantandi magister Nordanhymbrorum Ecclesiis, Aeddi cognomento Stephanus fuit ... At ipse [Theodoricus] ... ordinavit ... Putta; maxime autem modulandi in ecclesia more Romanorum, quem a discipulis beati papae Gregorii didicerat, peritum.

The sounds of song in church, hitherto known only in Kent, now began to be learned in all the churches of the English. The first Master of Chant in the Northumbrian churches (excepting the aforementioned deacon Jacobus) was Eddi, known as Stephen... And Putta... was most skilled in singing according to the manner of the Romans, which he had learned from the pupils of blessed Pope Gregory.

chant practice spreads throughout England

the pupils of Gregory had taught singing to Putta

676 [EH IV.xii] ... Putta episcopus ... magis in ecclesiasticis quam in mundanis rebus erat industrius; sed in illa solum ecclesia Deo serviens, ubicumque rogabatur, ad docenda Ecclesiae carmina divertens.

[Putta] was more industrious in religious than in worldly matters. Yet he served God in that church only, and wherever he was asked, he would take a detour to teach songs of the church..

Putta generous in teaching chant

About John the Archcantor (about 680)

680 [EH IV.xviii] ...vir venerabilis Johannes archicantator ecclesiae sancti apostoli Petri, et abbas monasterii beati Martini, ... nuper venerat a Roma per jussionem papae Agathonis ... Accepit et praefatum Johannem abbatem Britanniam perducendum; quatenus in monasterio suo cursum canendi annum, sicut ad sanctum Petrum Romae agebatur, edoceret: egitque abba Johannes ut jussionem acceperat pontificis, et ordinem videlicet, ritumque canendi ac legendi viva voce praefati monasterii cantores edocendo, et ea quae totius anni circulus in celebratione dierum

...the venerable John, Archcantor of the church of the holy apostle Peter and Abbot of the monastery of Saint Martin ... had recently come from Rome under instructions from Pope Agatho [r. 678-681] ... Benedict received Abbot John and conducted him to Britain, so that he would teach in his monastery the cycle of chants of the [liturgical] year, just as it was sung at Saint Peter's, Rome. In accordance with the Pope's instructions, Abbot John taught the cantors of the monastery the order and rite of singing and reading aloud, and he put into writing all that was necessary for

John travels from Rome to England

and provides extensive teaching

festorum poscebat, etiam literis mandando: quae hactenus in eodem monasterio servata, et a multis jam sunt circumquaque transcripta. Non solum autem idem Johannes ipsius monasterii fratres docebat, verum de omnibus pene ejusdem provinciae monasteriis ad audiendum eum, qui cantandi erant periti, confluebant. Sed et ipsum per loca in quibus doceret, multi invitare curabant.

[LA ch. 6] ...ordinem cantandi, psallendi atque in Ecclesia ministrandi juxta morem Romanae institutionis suo monasterio contradidit, postulato videlicet atque accepto ab Agathone papa archicantore ecclesiae beati apostoli Petri et abbate monasterii beati Martini Joanne, quem sui futurum magistrum monasterii Britannias, Romanum Anglis adduceret. Qui illo perve-niens, non solum viva voce quae Romae didicit ecclesiastica discentibus tradidit; sed et non pauca etiam litteris mandata reliquit, quae hactenus in ejusdem monasterii bibliotheca memoriae gratia servantur.

[AC ch. 11] ...reverentissimus abbas Benedictus Romam ire disposuit, ut librorum copiam sanctorum, ... patriam referret; maxime magistros, qui iuxta ritum Romanae institutionis ordinem cantandi et ministrandi in ea quam nuper fundaverat ecclesia docerent... [Benedictus et Ceolfridus] multa discunt ecclesiae statuta, et beatae memoriae Johannem archicantorem Romanae ecclesiae, abbatemque monasterii beati Martyni, secum Britanniam ducunt, qui nos abundanter ordinem cantandi per ordinem et viva voce simul et litteris edocuit.

the proper observance of festivals throughout the year. This document is still preserved in this monastery, and many copies have been made for other places. John's instruction was not limited to the brethren of this monastery alone; for men who were proficient singers came from nearly all the monasteries of the province to hear him, and he received many invitations to teach elsewhere.

[Benedict] introduced in his monastery the order of chanting and singing the psalms and conducting the liturgy according to the practice in Rome. To this end Pope Agatho, at Benedict's request, offered him the services of the chief cantor of St Peter's and abbot of the monastery of St Martin, a man called John. Benedict brought him back to Britain to be choirmaster in the monastery. John taught the monks at first hand how things were done in the churches in Rome and also committed a good part of his instruction to writing. This is still preserved in memory of him in the monastery library.

...the most reverend abbot Benedict decided to go to Rome to bring back home a plentiful supply of sacred books ... Above all however he planned to bring back teachers: these would establish in the church he had just founded the order of chant and ceremonies according to the usage of the Roman rite. ...[Benedict and Ceolfrith] learnt in Rome many of the Church's laws and they brought back with them to England John, the archcantor of the Roman Church, and abbot of St Martin's monastery, who generously taught us the order of chanting both by word of mouth and by his writings.

he writes up the proper observance in a book, presumably without notation

John becomes a celebrated teacher

psalm-singing introduced by Benedict

Pope Agatho sends the Archcantor John

John wrote up his teachings in a book

Archcantor John teaches orally as well as by means of writing

The Tradition of Pope Gregory

709 [EH V. xix] Quo tempore ibi gradum archiepiscopi Honorius, unus ex discipulis beati papae Gregorii, vir in rebus ecclesiasticis sublimiter institutus servabat.

At this time, Honorius, one of the disciples of blessed Pope Gregory and a man of great experience in church matters, was occupying the archbishopric with great distinction.

Honorius a disciple of St Gregory

709 [EH V. xxi] Cantatorem quoque egregium, vocabulo Maban, qui a successoribus discipulorum beati papae Gregorii in Cantia fuerat cantandi sonos edoctus, ad se suosque instituendos accersiit, ac per annos duodecim tenuit: quatenus et quae illi non noverant, carmina ecclesiastica doceret; et ea quae quondam cognita longo usu vel negligentia inveterare coeperunt, hujus doctrina priscum renovarentur in statum. Nam et ipse episcopus Acca cantator erat peritissimus...

He also invited a famous singer named Maban, who had been trained in vocal music by the successors of blessed Pope Gregory's disciples in Kent, to come and instruct him and his clergy. He retained his services for twelve years, to teach them whatever church music they did not know, and also to restore to their original form, by teaching, any chants learned long ago that had become decrepit through long use or negligence; Bishop Acca was also a singer of great experience.

Maban was taught by those who had succeeded the disciples of Pope Gregory taught new chants and corrected errors in those already known

Ecgbert of York (d. 766)

740s [*Dialogus*] ... ut noster didascalus beatus Gregorius, in suo antiphonario et missali libro, per paedagogum nostrum beatum Augustinum transmisit ordinatum et rescriptum.

... as our teacher the blessed Gregory transmits in his Antiphonal and Missal Book, arranged and copied by our master the blessed Augustine [of Canterbury]

Gregory still a teacher, though indirectly, through the Antiphonal

Hoc autem jejunium idem beatus Gregorius per praefatum legatum, in antiphonario suo et missali, in plena hebdomada post Pentecosten, Anglorum Ecclesiae celebrandum destinavit. Quod non solum nostra testantur antiphonaria; sed et ipsa quae cum missalibus suis conspeximus apud apostolorum Petri et Pauli limina.

In his Antiphonal and Missal, the same blessed Gregory has assigned this fast, by means of the aforesaid [Augustine], to be celebrated by the English Church in the full week after Pentecost. This is testified not only by our own Antiphonals, but also those which we have seen along with the Missals at the threshold of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

Gregory's decisions regarding fasting
Ecgbert has seen Gregory's Antiphonals personally at Rome

1. What were the primary occupations of the musicians who taught Roman singing abroad?
2. What was the minimum span of time needed to learn Roman chant?
3. To what extent was writing a part of the mission to teach plainchant in Britain? Are we talking of practical sources or library copies?