CZESŁAW GRAJEWSKI

ON THE SEQUENCE FOR THE UNINITIATED

History teaches us that sometimes a combination of independent events can have consequences that no one could have foreseen. For example, what consequences could the Norman invasions of Frankish lands and a letter sent from the Benedictine abbey in St Gallen to the bishop of the northern Italian town of Vercelli have had on the development of music? Yet they did, and far-reaching ones at that.

During the Carolingian era, new genres emerged in the area of liturgical music in the Frankish territories. These were: tropes, sequences, rhymed offices[1] and liturgical drama. In the light of the subject matter of this article, the first two will be essential for the reason that they both came about as a result of the trope technique.

Need is the mother of invention. Like many discoveries, this technique emerged as a response to a specific need: to find a way of memorising melismas, i.e. long chains of notes (dozens or even dozens) per syllable of text in ornamental (i.e. melismatic) singing. It should be remembered that this is the moment in history when musical neumatic notation already existed,[2] but still without lines, the so-called *in campo aperto*. Its signs hinted at the general direction of

Prof. Dr. Czesław Grajewski – Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw; correspondence address: ul. Dewajtis 5, 01-815 Warszawa; e-mail: graczes@yahoo.com; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2692-8232.

[1] "The greatest number of chants composed from the ninth century onwards were not framed in the form of non-Roman chant genres, such as sequence, trope, chant or liturgical dramatisation, but in cycles of antiphons and responsories designed for the canonical hour office." D. Hiley, *Chorał kościoła zachodniego*, transl. M. Kaziński, Kraków 2019, p. 318.

[2] Neumatic notations (variations) operate a system of purely musical signs (so-called neums), initially placed at first without the use of lines, later using two, then four and five lines. Neums derive from oratorical signs and were known as early as the eighth century and became widespread in the following century. Cf. Jerzy Morawski, *Teoria muzyki w średniowieczu* (Warszawa: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, 1979), 96-97.

the melody's development, but it was characterised by a lack of interval precision, an imperfection that would only be removed by the introduction of lines at the beginning of the 11th century. The problem of memorising melodies affected syllabic, simple chants such as antiphons to a lesser extent, but was a real ailment in melismatic chants.

Particularly in the ancient Ambrosian (Milanese) repertoire, much more ornate than the Gregorian, last syllable of *the Alleluia* was sometimes accompanied by incredibly long chains of notes (fig. 1), described by St Augustine as 'longissimae melodiae'. The Alleluia poem is a solemn chant. It is this character that is imparted to it by this long chain of notes, that is, the melisma (or melismas) associated with the last syllable, the singing performance of which St Augustine defines as 'iubilare sine verbis', intended to impart a mystical sense to the composition. And he adds that it is difficult to express in words the joy of the blessed.[3]

A-lle - lu - ia - - - -

Music example 1. *Alleluia* from the Christmas celebration. Melisma over the last syllable

The difficulty of remembering such melodic structures is mentioned by Notker Balbulus (c. 840–912), a monk at the Benedictine monastery of St Gallen, in a letter to Liutward, bishop (880–899) of Vercelli in northern Italy. This letter is a kind of introduction, a *proemium* to the *Liber Hymnorum*[4] (written between 881 and 887) dedicated to Liutward, which included works by Notker. The words of homage due to the bishop[5] are followed by the letter proper *Cum adhuc iuvenculus essem* (fig. 1), the contents of which are familiar to scholars of the history

---

[3] Cf. Jerzy Pikulik, "Klasyczne formy chorału gregoriańskiego oraz monodii liturgicznej," in *Muzyka sakralna. Materiały z seminariów Gaude Mater*," ed. Jolanta Masłowska (Warszawa: Centrum Animacji Kultury, 1998), 19.

[4] St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 381, ff. 326-498 (c. 930). Contrary to the title, the book does not contain hymns in the proper sense, but sequences arranged according to the key of the liturgical calendar.

[5] "Summae sanctitatis merito, summi sacerdotii decore sublimato, domino dilectissimo Liuthuardo, incomparabilis viri Eusebii Vercellensis episcopi dignissimo successori, abbatique cenobii sanctissimi Columbani ac defensori cellule discipuli eius mitissimi Galli, necnon et archicapellano gloriosissimi imperatoris Karoli, Notkerus cucullariorum sancti Galli novissimus," in *Acta Sanctorum Ordinis s. Benedicti in saeculorum classes distributa. Beati Notkeri monachi s. Galli elogium historicum*, ed. Lucas d'Achery, and Joannes Mabillon (Paris: Billaine, 1685), 18.

of medieval France,[6] musicologists, literary scholars[7] or art historians[8] for two reasons.
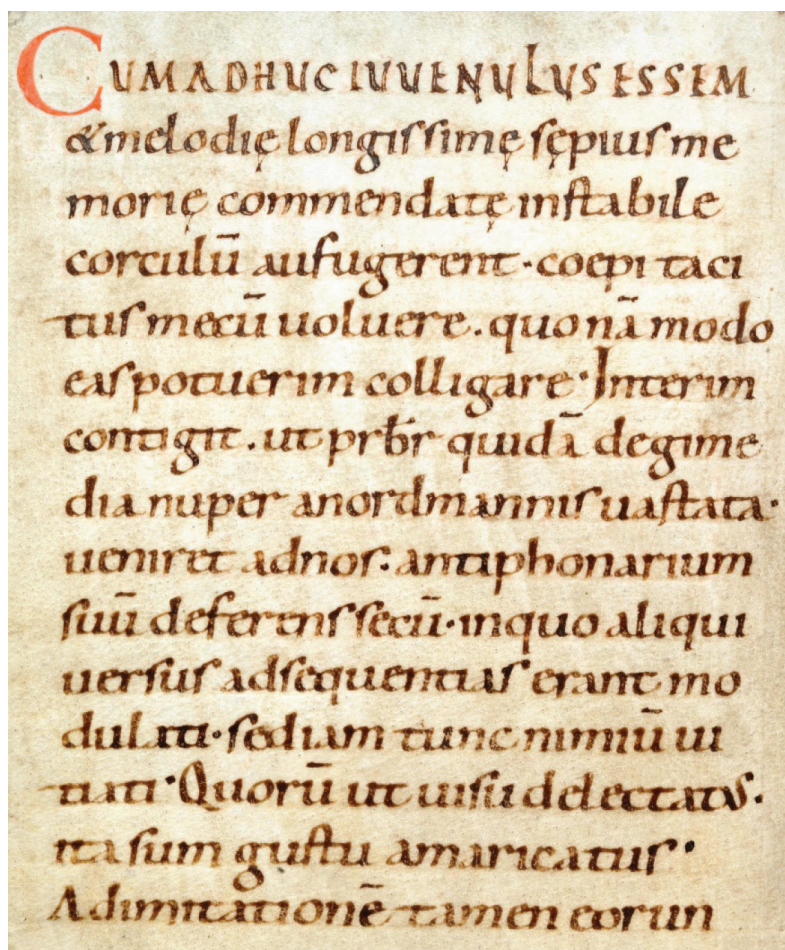

Fig. 1. Copy of Notker's letter to Bishop Liutward. St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 381, f. 328, in: http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/csg/0381

---

[6] Francis PALGRAVE, ed., *The Collected Historical Works of Sir Francis Palgrave, K. H*, vol. 1: *The History of Normandy and of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 409.

[7] Karl REICHL, "Plotting the Map of Medieval Oral Literature," in *Medieval oral literature*, ed. Karl Reichl (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 15.

[8] Stanisław KOBIELUS, "Concordia novi et veteris testamenti w zestawieniach ilustracji: uderze-nia młotków Tubal-Kaina oraz wbijania gwoździ w ręce i nogi Chrystusa podczas krzyżowania," *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 61, no. 4 (2013): 19-20.

Firstly: its author attests that in their youth, these *longissimae melodiae* had to be mastered by memory: *Cum adhuc iuvenculus essem, et melodiae longissimae, saepius memoriae commendatae, instabile corculum aufugerent, coepi tacitus mecum volvere, quoniam modo eas potuerim colligare*.[9]

Secondly: the historical circumstances surrounding the writing of this letter initiated the emergence of hitherto unknown musical genres: the aforementioned tropes and sequences. Here, fleeing from the Normans, a monk from the destroy-ed Benedictine abbey of Gimedia[10] (now Jumièges near Rouen) arrived in St Gal-len around 862. As Notker reports in his letter, he brought with him the *antipho-narium*[11] used in the monastery there: *Interim vero contingit ut presbyter quodam de Githmedia nuper a Nordemannis vastata veniret ad nos, antiphonarium suum deferens secum*.[12] Driven by curiosity, Notker looked through this manuscript and found in it the solution to a problem that had been bothering him.[13]

Namely, he noted that the Benedictines of the north applied to melismas a technique later called troping. It consisted in adding a new text at the end of a melody (in this case *the Alleluia*), in such a way that each note corresponded to one syllable. The jubilations (melismas) in this book, thus texted, were called *prosa*. Notker generally liked this idea, although he was disappointed in the deta-ils, for he wrote in a further letter: *Quorum ut visu delectatus, ita sum gustu ama-ricatus*.[14] But this is a matter of individual aesthetic sensitivity. What is important is that the enlightenment that Notker must have undergone at that moment caused him to compose compositions along the lines of those he saw in the book brought by the migrant. It was these original compositions that were included in the *Liber Hymnorum*, which he sent to the Bishop of Vercelli with a kind dedication and introduction (*Cum adhuc iuvenculus essem*).

---

[9] "When I was still a young man, and the longissimae melodiae, more often than not inflicted by heart, were fleeing from an unsteady heart, I began to consider silently myself how I could stop them." Translations of excerpts from the Notker's letter by L. Dyka.

[10] Or Githmedia. See Florence, Bibliotheca Nazionale Centrale, ms. F III 565 (13th century), f. 96r-v.

[11] In view of the fact that Notker goes on to report on the Alleluia verses, it is very likely that he is referring to the missal, which was also called an 'antiphonarium' at the time. At that time, the antiphonarium often contained both the Mass chants and the Office. Cf. Michel HUGLO, and David HILEY. "Antiphoner, § 1 Origins," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, eds. Stanley Sadie, and John Tyrrell (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 482.

[12] "In the meantime, however, it happens that a priest from Githmedia recently destroyed by the Normans has come to us, bringing his antiphonary with him."

[13] William G. SMITH, *The Use of Hereford. The Sources of a Medieval English Diocesan Rite* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 531-532.

[14] "As pleased as I was to see them, I was discouraged by the taste."

At this point, the story of the sequence begins. So true to form, a new poetic and soon musical form was born out of a mnemonic tool. It is noteworthy that Notker operates all the time with *Alleluia* chants – with these 'longest melodies' attached. The sequence was born when the melody, joined to the last syllable, already with a new text, broke away and began to function as an independent genre, which – one can assume – happened in the 11th century.

Ekkehard IV, historiographer of the monastery of St Gallen (d. after 1057), recorded in the *Casus Santi Galli* (c. 1040–1050) that Notker composed fifty sequences. For this reason, he was previously regarded as the founder of this new genre of religious lyric. Today it is certain that Ekkehard IV was rather cavalier in his use of historical methodology and hence his chronicle should be treated with increased attention, although it is undoubtedly to Notker's credit that the sequence was introduced into Germanic lands and it is true that Notker can be regarded as the first known author of the sequence by name.

Notker was not the only one to take advantage of the favourable circumstance of the arrival of an unnamed monk from Jumièges to St Gallen. Another Benedictine monk at the local monastery, Tuotilo (c. 850–c. 915), of Irish origin, a friend of Notker's with whom they had studied together at the monastery school under Marcello (Irish Moengal),[15] also came up with the idea of overtone (adding text) to the long chains of notes in the vocalises. The difference between Notker's and Tuotilo's achievements is that Notker did this in Alleluia verses, giving a significant impetus to the development of the sequence, while Tuotilo did the same with antiphons, giving rise to tropes as one of the new musical genres of the Carolingian era. Again, that nugatory monastic historian Ekkehardt IV testifies in his chronicle that Tuotilo is the creator of the trope for the introit antiphon for Christmas, *Hodie cantandus est puer nobis*, which may correspond to the truth.

It is downright improbable that two new creative initiatives – sequences and tropes – would emerge independently at the same time, in the same place, in addition to growing out of a single technique of troping.[16] Clearly, the two composers – Notker and Tuotilo – must have been discussing an idea they had picked up from the Jumièges manuscript. Thus, the origins of both the sequence and

---

[15] Susan RANKIN, "The earliest sources of Notker's sequences. St Gallen, Vadiana 317, and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Lat. 10587," in *Early Music History. Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Music*, vol. 10, ed. Iain Fenlon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 202.

[16] Troping refers to an interference with ornamental singing involving the insertion of syllables of a new text under the single notes of the melismatic. The procedure has the effect of transforming it into a simple, syllabic chant in which each note corresponds to one syllable of the text.

the tropes can be traced to Northern French Benedictine circles (Jumièges?) around the middle of the ninth century, in any case before 862.

At this point it is necessary to stop the historical narrative and return to the sequence. A careful reading of the famous letter to Bishop Liutward reveals one of the key structural principles of the genre, rather slyly hidden in the later part of the text of the letter, but to which (principle) attention must necessarily be drawn.

Well, Notker states that he composed other Alleluia verses using a technique he assimilated from his analysis of the chants in the Jumièges manuscript: *ad imitationem tamen eorumdem coepi scribere: "Laudes Deo concinat, orbis undique totus, qui gratias est et liberator." Et infra: "Coluber Adae deceptor."*[17] And further: Notker, in today's language, asked Ison, his teacher, to review his first attempts at composition: *Quos cum magistro meo Hysoni optulissem, ille studio meo gratulatus, imperitique aeque compassus, que placuerant laudauit, que autem minus emendare curavit.* In these sentences hides *the nucleus of* the issue. As can be seen from the content, Ison praised the compositions in those places that were, in his opinion, good, while he advised corrections in places that were weaker in terms of technique. And now you can see which places in the compositions the teacher recommended to improve. Ison recommended the principle of *singuli motus cantilenae singulas syllabas debent habere*,[18] i.e. that one note of the melody should correspond to one syllable of the text. This principle Notker will adhere to from now until the end. And this is one of the two guiding rules of the classical sequence.

The second principle strictly concerns the form of singing. It is necessary to take into account that two terms were and are used to describe it: "sequence" and "prose." The first, used so far in this study, refers primarily to the musical aspect, to the melisma. This is the melisma attached to the *Alleluia*, which Notker borrowed to deal with the problem of memorising the repertoire. The second term – prose – refers to the text underlaying the subsequent notes of this melisma. This dichotomy is reflected in the intitulation of collections of such compositions. Separate parts of graduals containing sequences (with melodies) or even separate music books containing such repertoire are called sequencers, while *prosaria* are analogous books or parts of e.g. missals containing only the texts of sequences, without melodies.

Either way, the construction of the genre exhibits a characteristic feature: stanza parallelism. The essence of the sequence is a common melody for one pair of

---

[17] "In their likeness, however, I began to write 'Laudes Deo concinat, orbis undique totus, qui gratias est et liberator.' And further: 'Coluber Adae deceptor.'

[18] "Single movements of the melody should be given single syllables."

stanzas, but different from the next pair. In other words, the stanzas are grouped into pairs, with adjacent pairs given alternating different melodic patterns. Within each pair of stanzas, however, the melody is common. This principle can be illustrated very generally with a diagram:

1 Ia
  Ib
2 IIc
  IId
3 Ie
  If
4 IIg
  IIh…,

in which Arabic numerals denote consecutive pairs of stanzas, Roman numerals denote the melodic scheme, and letters denote the stanzas of the text.[19]

The classical sequence is a product of the first epoch in the history of the sequence (850–1050). During this period, the foundations of the East and West Franconian repertoire are established in the Benedictine monasteries of St Gallen, Reichenau and the Abbey of St Martial in Limoges. The most important representatives, besides Notker Balbulus, are: Ekkehard I (d. 973) Herman Contractus (d. 1054), Berne of Reichenau (d. 1048) and Wipo of Burgundy (d. 1050). In the early and even later period, the first and last stanzas were not paired. The idea of strophe parallelism was introduced when composers noticed repeated melodic segments in a long chain of notes (in some compositions, of course, not all).[20] In a classical sequence, the alternating performance of strophes by two choirs perfectly reflects a structure set over several – several pairs of strophes lambasted by single strophes performed by both choirs together. There were also works without parallelism of strophes, with irregular structure – as is generally the case when the creative spirit of a person breaks through the limiting framework and rules.

The peak of the development of the sequence occurred in the 1st half of the 12th century, a time when Adamic compositions appear on the historical

---

[19] The diagram above is intended to understand the musical structure of the sequence. In scholarly studies dealing specifically with sequence texts, the notation used is: 1a, 1b; 2a, 2b; 3a, 3b… etc. It does not imply a repetition of the text, but indicates a pairing of stanzas. To refer to the text of a particular stanza, it is sufficient to give an abbreviated distinguishing mark, e.g. 5b, denoting here the second stanza of the fifth pair. Each pair of stanzas has a melody, different from its neighbouring pair. In the scheme presented here, there are two melodies (Roman numerals), used alternately. There may have been more than two melodies in a sequence, e.g. *Dies irae* operates with three plus a fourth functioning as a coda.

[20] Cf. PIKULIK, *Klasyczne formy chorału gregoriańskiego*, 23.

arena. In the second epoch, the stylistic features of the sequence were established in the full flowering of the genre: simple melodics, similar to hymnic works, the lengths of the verses in pairs were standardised, rhymes appeared in place of the hitherto assonances, the evenness of the stanzas and the cyclic pattern of the melody, changing every second stanza, and, importantly, melodies high aesthetic value already independent of the *Alleluia.*

The third epoch in the development of the genre occurred in the 13th century, when the stanzaic sequence developed from the rhymed sequence became dominant. The leading representatives are Thomas of Celano (d. 1256) and St Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). Their sequences are already very close to hymnic form, the melodies do not show the principle of even stanzas, and the textual structure itself sometimes shows irregularity.[21]

The first Polish sequences concern St Adalbert. Later (in the 13th century), pieces on St Stanislaus and St Jadwiga are added. And although they do not have original melodies, but rather adapted or creatively reworked to their own texts, this is the beginning of the Polish contribution to European sequence writing.

Sequences, especially those composed in the early style, gained great popularity, as evidenced by their number reaching five thousand. The Tridentine Missal reduced their number to four.[22] A fifth was added in 1727: *Stabat Mater dolorosa*, which is attributed to the composer Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306). Two and a half centuries later, only two were left in Paul VI's missal: for Easter and Pentecost. A third – *Lauda Sion Salvatorem* for Corpus Christi – was recently restored to liturgical use. Unfortunately, the reformers of the liturgy after Vatican II broke the link with tradition, destroying the logic of history and revealing how little understanding they had of the history of liturgical music. Well, from the beginning in the liturgy, the sequence had its place after the *Alleluia* verse because it had been separated from it in the Middle Ages. After Vatican II, it was moved – *iure caducco* – in front of the poem, and this is how it is performed today in the Roman Catholic liturgy.

Finally, it is worth noting the phenomenon of the persistence of certain Gregorian melodies in contemporary, even popular, works. The melody of the *Dies irae* sequence was used by, among others, Hector Berlioz in *his Symphonie*

---

[21] See *Dies irae*, which lacks a parallel for the 17th stanza, and the last three stanzas form a kind of coda.

[22] These are: for Easter, *Veni Sancte Spiritus* for Pentecost, *Lauda Sion Salvatorem* for Corpus Christi and *Dies irae* for All Souls' Day. See "Sekwencja," in *Encyklopedia muzyki PWN*, ed. Andrzej Chodkowski (Warszawa: PWN, 1995) 805. The claim that the Tridentine Reform left 5 sequences in the liturgy is inaccurate. Cf. J. Józef CHOMIŃSKI, and Krystyna WILKOWSKA-CHOMIŃSKA, *Historia muzyki*, vol. 1 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo PWM, 1989), 18-19.

fantastique and Franz Liszt in his *Totentanz* variations. Of course, these are not isolated instances of the borrowing of a Gregorian (better: neo-Gregorian) theme by Romantic and later composers. The *Dies irae* theme can also be heard at the beginning of the Stanley Kubrick-directed thriller *The Shining*, and more recently the music of this sequence has even found its way into computer games as a soundtrack. Interestingly, the melody's darkness stems from its cultural association with funerary rites, rather than its shape, for the melodic intervals are neutral, although variously interpreted in different eras, as is *the ethos* of the key. This connotation causes the melody of this sequence to be linked with eschatological images. The treasury of chorale melodies is almost inexhaustible, and – as we can see – the creators of popular culture do not shy away from drawing on this repertoire. Let us keep it that way.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SOURCES AND EDITIONS

Florence, Bibliotheca Nazionale Centrale, ms. F III 565 (13th century).

St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 381 (c. 930).

"Summae sanctitatis merito, summi sacerdotii decore sublimato, domino dilectissimo Liuthuardo, incomparabilis viri Eusebii Vercellensis episcopi dignissimo successori, abbatique cenobii sanctissimi Columbani ac defensori cellule discipuli eius mitissimi Galli, necnon et archicapellano gloriosissimi imperatoris Karoli, Notkerus cucullariorum sancti Galli novissimus." In *Acta Sanctorum Ordinis s. Benedicti in saeculorum classes distributa. Beati Notkeri monachi s. Galli elogium historicum*, eds. Lucas d'Achery, and Joannes Mabillon, 18-22. Paris: Billaine, 1685.

STUDIES

Chomiński, Józef, and Krystyna Wiłkowska-Chomińska. *Historia muzyki*, vol. 1. Kraków: Wydawnictwo PWM, 1989.

Hiley, David. *Chorał Kościoła Zachodniego. Podręcznik*, transl. Maciej Kaziński. Kraków: Clarendon Press, 2019.

Hinz, Edward. *Zarys historii muzyki kościelnej*. Pelplin: Wydawnictwo Bernardinum, 2000.

Huglo, Michel, and David Hiley. "Antiphoner, § 1 Origins." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, eds. Stanley Sadie, and John Tyrrell, 482-483. London: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Kobielus, Stanisław. "Concordia novi et veteris testamenti w zestawieniach ilustracji: uderzenia młotków Tubal-Kaina oraz wbijania gwoździ w ręce i nogi Chrystusa podczas krzyżowania." *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 61, no. 4 (2013): 19-20.

Morawski, Jerzy. *Teoria muzyki w średniowieczu*. Warszawa: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, 1979.

Pikulik, Jerzy. "Klasyczne formy chorału gregoriańskiego oraz monodii liturgicznej." In *Muzyka sakralna. Materiały z seminariów Gaude Mater*," ed. Jolanta Masłowska, 17-24. Warszawa: Centrum Animacji Kultury, 1998.

Rankin, Susan. "The earliest sources of Notker's sequences. St Gallen, Vadiana 317, and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Lat. 10587." In *Early Music History. Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Music*, vol. 10, ed. Iain Fenlon, 201-233. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Reichl, Karl. "Plotting the Map of Medieval Oral Literature." In *Medieval oral literature*, ed. Karl Reichl, 3-70. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012.

"Sekwencja." In *Encyklopedia muzyki PWN*, ed. Andrzej Chodkowski, 805. Warszawa: PWN, 1995.

Smith, William G. *The Use of Hereford. The Sources of a Medieval English Diocesan Rite*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015.

Palgrave, Francis, ed. *The Collected Historical Works of Sir Francis Palgrave, K. H*, vol. 1: *The History of Normandy and of England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

ON THE SEQUENCE FOR THE UNINITIATED

Summary

During the Carolingian Renaissance, new initiatives emerged in the field of musical genres. One of these was the sequence—a form that was both literary and musical. Alongside tropes, sequences became genres that contributed to the development of the so-called troping technique, which at the time facilitated the memorization of long chains of notes (melismas). The discovery of this method and the first sequences are described by a Benedictine monk from the Abbey of St. Gallen in his famous letter to Bishop Liutward (*Cum adhuc iuvenculus essem*). The article examines the development of this genre, its structural characteristics, and the transformations it underwent up to the time of the Council of Trent.

Keywords: Notker the Stammerer; Liutward; *Liber Hymnorum*; sequence; Gregorian chant

O SEKWENCJI DLA NIEWTAJEMNICZONYCH

Streszczenie

W epoce renesansu karolińskiego pojawiły się nowe inicjatywy na polu gatunków muzycznych. Jedną z nich była sekwencja – forma zarówno literacka, jak i muzyczna. Sekwencje, obok tropów,

stały się tymi gatunkami, na których wyrosła tzw. technika tropowania, ułatwiająca w tamtym czasie zapamiętywanie długich łańcuchów nut (melizmatów). O odkryciu tego sposobu i pierwszych sekwencjach pisze w słynnym liście do bpa Liutwarda (*Cum adhuc iuvenculus essem*) zakonnik benedyktyński z klasztoru w St. Gallen. Rozwój tego gatunku, jego cechy strukturalne i przemiany, jakie zaszły w nim do czasu Soboru Trydenckiego, są przedmiotem artykułu.

Słowa kluczowe: Notker Balbulus; Liutward; księga hymnów; sekwencja; chorał gregoriański