

Eugène Cardine and the Roots of his Interpretation: Joseph Pother and André Mocquereau

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Cardine would have been the first to react with surprise if he had learned that an “interpretation” was ascribed to him, and that even 20 years after his death, one referred to it and debated it.

Already when the most convinced of his students – many of them are still present here – were developing the statutes of the future AISCGre, Fr. Cardine categorically rejected having the society bear his name, as many of his first colleagues would have wished.

You know how he handled such things... as he previously did with many such contradictions, he would have countered this with the raising of his eyebrows accompanied by a good big laugh!

That Cardine did not have an interpretation in the sense which we ascribe an interpretation today to this or that important musician, I see confirmed in a small event which transpired at Solesmes in the courses of his painful last years spent in the infirmary.

It was the August 15th in 1986 or 1987. After the conventional Mass, I went to see him and greet him fraternally. He looked at me mischievously and asked, “At the beginning of the verse of the gradual *Audi filia*, at the high neume for “specie tua,” what is the important note there?

I must say that I was not entirely unprepared, for this question had often been the subject of remarks by the choirmaster (Fr. Jean Claire) during rehearsals, concerning this gradual or parallel contexts in the upper register of mode VII.

“It is FA,” I answered without hesitation. And I saw a wonderful smile light up on Fr. Cardine’s face. “Furthermore, the modality clearly shows this,” I elaborated, a bit unwisely. And the smile disappeared instantly, to give way to a clear and precise statement: “Moi, je suis l’homme du signe!” (“As for me, I am a man of the sign.”)

This is why I think that, rather than being a man of an interpretation, Cardine was truly a “man of the sign.” And it is not for nothing that his masterpiece, alongside so many of his articles and academic pieces, remains *Sémiologie Grégorienne*, the reference for so many teachers in the entire world, translated into so many languages: Italian, French, English, German, Spanish, Japanese, Korean...

On the other hand, Fr. Cardine is probably the person who contributed the most in the 20th century to the progress in the interpretation of Gregorian chant. It is this which I desire to show you today, and be assured, this will enable me, in due course, to offer a response to the question posed by the organizers of this congress.

As to be expected, I will make reference above all to the last works by Fr. Cardine, particularly to the last text which he uttered in public, “Les Limites de la Sémiologie en Chant Grégorien” (“The Limits of Semiology in Gregorian Chant”). This was in Luxembourg in 1984. The original text was published in 1989 in *Études Grégoriennes*.

Fr. Cardine himself placed this small but significant phrase at the head of his manifesto: “Ceci est mon testament” (“This is my testament”).

The Neumes and Semiology as the Basis for the Interpretation of Gregorian Chant: The Heritage of Fr. Mocquereau

Fr. Cardine himself said in this text and in many other statements: the neumes are and must be the basis of all truth in the interpretation of Gregorian chant.

He had received this intuition, which guided all his research, from Fr. André Mocquereau, the founder of the *Paléographie Musicale*, who wrote in the preface to volume one:

[The first notated manuscripts] are not old teachers whose teachings we would like to hear, but they are the written transmission of that which these teachers taught and performed, and consequently, for those who know how to read and understand this writing, they are the most perfect expression of the liturgical chants.”¹

Let us note, incidentally, the balanced moderation of such a statement, which already places the medieval neumatic data in a situation very different from that which would later become the musical score:

These neumatic data represent a reference, but presuppose that one knows how to read and understand them.

Curiously, posterity recalled nothing of the immense oeuvre of Fr. Mocquereau except the *Nombre Musical Grégorien*, that theoretical essay on natural rhythm applied to Gregorian chant. Furthermore, few people have had the nerve to read it. They have preferred to speak of it second hand, by means of the very simplified practical presentation popularized over the course of nearly a half century by Fr. Joseph Gajard.

This is to forget that the idea of a *Graduel Neumé* does not come from Fr. Cardine. It was already implemented by Fr. Gajard for the Vatican edition, but especially by Fr. Mocquereau for the Solesmes Gradual of 1883.

Without doubt, the first source for the work of Fr. Cardine, the first one who inspired him as his teacher, is Fr. Mocquereau.

If there is a founder of that school which enjoyed an evident charism for taking research so boldly down a path no one had dreamed of, a path which some – and not only the lesser ones – rejected, it is Fr. Mocquereau in 1888. With the *Paléographie Musicale* he is the sole founder of objective Gregorian scholarship based on the most ancient manuscripts; he prophetically marked out the program which has since developed harmoniously and continually for 100 years. It would suffice if a “son of the prophet” were to rise up in every generation who would stay the good course and continue it with the same energy. Fr. Cardine was magnificently one of these; and God grant that such will never be lacking!²

What differentiates Cardine and Mocquereau is, above all, the context in which their work evolved.

¹ P.M. I, 1889, p. 13.

² J. Claire.

André Mocquereau will ever remain a precursor and a founder. He is the man who comes from classical music and discovers – rather late in the game, and almost under compulsion – the medieval repertoire which was, for all practical purposes, scorned by the musicians of his time.³ He is an explorer who tests, successively and with varying success, different possibilities for understanding and explaining an unknown subject.

Eugène Cardine grew up with the liturgical music of his time, immersed in Gregorian chant since his youth.

Initiated into music in a pedagogically masterful manner by an old Brother while still very young, he quickly became a pianist and organist, albeit not a virtuoso, but at least well trained, and he became choirmaster during his last two years in major seminary at Bayeux.⁴

Having begun his priestly formation before entering the monastery, he quickly became well versed in chant and paleographical study, and he devoted himself passionately to both.

He does not have the breadth of a founder. But he knows how to work, study, and compare the details meticulously.

Furthermore, he was formed in the Solesmes Method, as were all chant students of his time.

Thus, from having practiced and taught it, he knows the Solesmes Method with its inflexible framework. From the time of his entrance in Solesmes in 1928, he was not a little astonished to ascertain that it was applied only with reservation in the monastic choir, and this in the presence of Fr. Mocquereau himself, and under the direction of Fr. Gajard. Already the “rules” were tempered by the “style”... He reports that in chant classes in the novitiate, Fr. Gajard had to modify his rigorousness, a lesson of great significance....⁵

And his reactive temperament will become schooled in this method, and moreover, in the popularization of Fr. Joseph Gajard more than in the theoretical principles of Fr. Mocquereau.

People have too much exaggerated the continuity between André Mocquereau and Joseph Gajard. The fact is, the second is always proclaimed as the faithful continuer of the first. And it is no doubt to him that he owes his career. But the succession was not so simple.⁶ With Fr. Gajard, who was already cantor under the direction of Fr. Mocquereau, the chant was transformed. It probably became slower, less rigorous in its rhythm, and progressively more nuanced vocally. It is to Fr. Gajard that one owes the softening of the rhythmic rules for the sake of what one already termed the “style.”

It is precisely this chant which Cardine discovered at the monastery and which he practiced up until 1952, as second cantor and then as first cantor. It is into this style that Cardine would strive to integrate his research into the neumes. And I insist on the word “integrate.” In a sense, Eugène Cardine never called into question the Solesmes Method.

To be sure, he showed its intrinsic errors. He fought with ardor against its limits. But he did not create another interpretation. For this he had neither the time nor the means. He had simply introduced a new parameter of interpretation: the neumes.

In effect, Fr. Cardine received another inheritance in Fr. Mocquereau and the Solesmes style, into which he strived to integrate his research in the neumes, and the relevance of which is demonstrated by modern research.

³ P. Combe.

⁴ J. Claire.

⁵ J. Claire.

⁶ J. Claire.

Gregorian Chant, Careful and Solemn Declamation of the Latin Word – Joseph Pothier and Canon Augustin Gontier

I am often asked what musical formation the young people receive who enter Solesmes as monks.

For the majority of them, who are mostly not musically trained, in fact it is a matter of traditional monastic formation based on the progressive memorization of the repertoire. In the Middle Ages this was called *recordatio*.

To be sure, there is initiation in solfege and chant classes for the novices and the community. But the principal chant class is the daily celebration of the liturgy.

The young monk, who normally is put in the last place, learns the chant by inserting his voice gradually – and generally with prudent reserve – into the vocal ensemble of his elders. Even before he has been able to learn the rules of chant, the neumes or solfege, he will have taken on the vocal and interpretative conventions which he will observe his entire life.

We are in the context of apprenticeship characteristic of traditional music.

Eugène Cardine was not spared this process, insofar as Fr. Gajard had to teach him, when he joined the schola, to nuance everything he had learned about Gregorian chant before entering Solesmes, i.e., the famous “Solesmes Method.”⁷

In effect, at Solesmes they never sang according to the rules of the famous “Method.”

Under the direction of Abbot Guéranger, thanks to the counsel of a canon of the region, Augustin Gontier, the monks took on very early the custom of treating the sung text in the manner of a reading.

The rule which holds above all rules is that, except in the case of pure melody, the chant is an intelligible reading, well accented, well handled as prosody, well phrased; a reading which makes the liturgical text understood by those who know the ecclesiastical language.⁸

This manner of singing seems to have been very new. Very soon it was to be formulated and laid out in detail in *Les Mélodies Grégoriennes d'après la Tradition* by Fr. Joseph Pothier.

For diverse reasons, especially economic, the book was not to appear until 1880. But careful research has shown that it had been ready at the end of the 1860s.⁹

This “oratorical style” or “oratorical rhythm” is not a theory, as is the *Nombre Musical Grégorien* of Fr. Mocquereau, who was under the strong influence of the German musicologist Hugo Riemann. It is a veritable method of chant, along the lines of the innumerable methods which abounded since the 18th century. But it is a profoundly refurbished chant method in that it grants an important place to historical sources and manuscripts.

Because the rhythm of Fr. Pothier is much suppler than that of Fr. Mocquereau, it has been attacked for being imprecise.

This imprecision is entirely real for a certain conception of music theory which had largely dominated the first half of the 20th century. But for a “public” such as the monks, who are less specialized in music theory, it is on the contrary a supple and rather easy path through which a community is able to arrive at vocal unanimity.

For this method is based on “speaking,” on “reading.”

⁷ J. Claire.

⁸ A. Gontier, *Méthode raisonnée de plain chant*, Le Mans 1859, p. 14.

⁹ P. Combe.

Fr. Cardine did not treat this interpretation at length, but it surfaces everywhere and without exception in his teaching and in the margins of the *Graduel Neumé*.¹⁰ The major themes of his teaching all are connected to it: accentuation, crasis, syllabic articulation, the liquescent, syllabic value, and even the neumatic break, whose interpretation often has recourse to textual concepts.¹¹ By the study of each neume, the textual context emerges as the primary element to be taken into account.

Thus this interpretation, based on the sung declamation of text, reaches back to Fr. Joseph Pothier, Augustin Gontier, and – through their mediation – to Abbot Guéranger himself. It makes up the essentials of that which one consequently termed the “Solesmes style.” It is marked, more than one might think, by the general context of post-Romantic music, and especially French post-Romantic music.

Perhaps it is not well known, but there is an astonishing complicity between the restorers of Gregorian chant and the musicians of the late 19th and early 20th century.

The musicians beheld the medieval melodies with interest and were inspired by them in rejuvenating their own musical vocabulary. The clearest example of this is offered by Claude Debussy, who was even to spend some days at Solesmes just as he was beginning to write his “medieval” opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

On the other hand, Fr. Mocquereau maintained regular correspondence with Vincent d’Indy and undertook to translate some important passages from the German musicologist Hugo Riemann, from whom he borrowed the concepts of *legato* and the equality of the “primary time” (*temps premier*).

Thus it is that the Solesmes interpretation which Eugène Cardine so richly inherited – based principally upon declamation and secondarily upon the medieval neumes – intrinsically contains much from the taste of musical aesthetics of the late 19th century. This was to become clear only later, much later, when history would permit us to view it with a bit of distance...

This element is also one of the roots of the interpretation of Fr. Cardine, without him realizing it!

Conclusion

The question which one is able to pose, in concluding this analysis of the interpretation of Fr. Cardine, is this: was there, for him, contradictions or tensions between these two interpretations?

..... (to be completed)

¹⁰ Sémoi esthétique.

¹¹ This topic was to be developed further by his first student, Luigi Agustoni.