Jurij Snoj

Gregorian Chant in Medieval Manuscripts in the Slovenian Lands

Jurij Snoj. *Gregorijanski koral v srednjeveških rokopisih na Slovenskem (Gregorian Chant in Medieval Manuscripts in the Slovenian Lands)*. Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, Založba ZRC, 2018. 480 pages. 29 €. ISBN 978-961-05-0098-8.

As an astute researcher of the musical heritage in medieval codices, the Slovenian musicologist Jurij Snoj condensed in one book his life's work, which he pursued both professionally (as well as privately) at the Institute for Musicology of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences, Ljubljana, between 1980 and 2018. Eight years after commencing his research, in 1988, he received his doctorate in the field of Gregorian chant with a discussion of partially preserved medieval codices in Ljubljana. He remained faithful to this field of expertise until today, but has deepened his knowledge consistently through codicological analyses of sources within the Slovenian national and cultural space, yet simultaneously looking for answers and connections to the musical traditions of neighbouring countries, especially those of Italian and Germanic origin. It is of no small importance that the author has been attending the symposia of the group Cantus Planus for more than twenty years: a study group of the International Musicological Society that concentrates on specialist questions about medieval Latin monody.

As to the content of the book, and regarding the Slovenian research and cultural space more broadly, Snoj's *Gregorian Chant in Medieval Manuscripts in the Slovenian Lands* is in many ways a precious original study in musicology. Besides the introductory chapter, the chapter on the general presentation of the depositories of Gregorian plainchants across Slovenia and the catalogue of manuscripts, the book comprises twenty-two thematic chapters, organised in a loosely chronological fashion. The individual chapters are studies about plainchant manuscripts from Slovenian depositories. Some of these were earlier given as presentations in foreign languages and were reworked and updated for the publication of this book, while others are the author's revised and refreshed older Slovenian studies. Thus the book consolidates the author's important bibliography in the field of medieval musical manuscripts that were preserved in Slovenian libraries and archives. The Slovenian national space is replete with manuscripts containing medieval Latin monody (i.e. plainchant), which by their very nature occupy numerous specific disciplines their study also demands a synthesis of findings from sciences related to musicology, including codicology, palaeography, art history and history. This interdisciplinarity, which enables the reader and/or researcher to deepen and widen their insights to include other research disciplines, is central to this monograph, and adds to its value.

Certainly, with his collected studies compiled into a single book, Jurij Snoj has filled a research gap in the Slovenian space, given that only a few scholars had adequately covered this important topic before him, namely Janez Höfler, as well as Nataša Golob in the field of the arts. The author refers to them and cites them accordingly where their findings are well-founded, but his book also brings plenty of new insights. For the first time in Slovenian, there are descriptions of rare sources that had been waiting too long for a suitable form of publication. Alongside only one other known document of this kind, there is, for example, a first description of a precious and rare fragment of a Glagolitic plainchant manuscript from the Slovenian National and University Library (NUK), the four-part antiphonary from Izola, and also a discussion of the previously unknown divine office for the name day of Maurus of Parentium. Partially, Snoj successfully continues the work of his predecessors, for instance in the reconstruction of the sequence repertoire, where he very reasonably continues the earlier work by Janez Höfler. In short: the studies collected in the book offer both a summary of well-known and newly conceptualized insights. What is more, the book also brings brand new findings from the vast musical field of medieval manuscripts, stored in Slovenia.

From the methodological standpoint, Snoj's monograph is consistent with relevant contemporary approaches that are necessary while researching the oldest European musical history. The author shows and proves that he is familiar with all the research methods developed in this field from the second half of the nineteenth century to the present. This is especially evident in the chapters "Semiotics of Early Music Literacy/Character Use," "Special Neumatic Signs in the Nameless Fragment of the Gradual" and "Late Gothic Notation as a Sign System." However, semiotic insights are logically inserted in almost every page of this book. The chapter "Catalogue of Medieval Musical Manuscripts in Slovenian Locations" is especially valuable as it functions as a unique subject index for individual chapters of the monograph, and acts as both a compact supplement as well as a springboard for further research into the contents of the manuscript.

It is also necessary to at least mention the highly valuable refreshed Slovenian collection of terms that were either well translated or newly added. With this, the author fills another gap in the Slovenian musicological and cultural space, and at the same time undertakes the task set by national legislation regarding preservation of the Slovenian terminological vocabulary.

To conclude, Snoj's content-rich book with its 480 pages is conceived as a musicological "*metaphysics*" of the extant heritage of Slovenian medieval manuscripts. Namely, the book guides the reader with the help of a meticulously and comprehensively researched and written survey of material sources, and extends to research fields beyond the codicological hand-written sources, into the world of deep insights and meanings beyond the physical appearance of individual manuscripts. The aim of Snoj's "*metaphysics*" are to act as a bridge, which in Snoj's own words is "where scientific thinking can carry us to the limits of the known" (p. 7). The value of Snoj's research is precisely in his demonstrable latent consciousness that the handwritten medieval plainchants, although physically tangible, are only silent and futile traces of "something immaterial" (ibid.), which has lived within the daily rhythm of worship in the power of the human

voice, and as an audible *musica instrumentalis*, offers “physical access” to the inaudible *musica mundana* and *musica humana*.

Snoj’s book will definitely further stimulate the perception of the importance of the musical heritage in the Slovenian lands, that is in the whole of the Slovenian cultural space, both within its national borders and beyond. The book will function as a welcome manual for researchers, historiographers and art historians who will in the future study the sources described in the monograph, and who will further enlighten these underresearched areas. With this work, Snoj has illuminated the field of research for the younger generation of researchers, keen to embark on the presented topics. But foremost, Snoj’s book will prove very useful and be of practical value for musicians. All the music of the published sources, elaborated and printed in the book, can indeed be performed, and the monograph with its transcribed parts will surely point out the richness of the entire repertoire to potential performers as well as composers who search for inspiration in Slovenian music from the Middle Ages.

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