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Polyphonic Hymn Settings in the Strahov Codex[*]

Late-medieval central European music has become a focal point of musicological interest in the past hundred years. Dobroslav Orel's dissertation *Der Mensuralkodex „Speciálník"*, of 1914, was the pioneering study.[1] Although the focus of his work was the Speciálník Codex *CZ-HKm II A 7*, he also commented importantly on other Bohemian sources, including the Strahov Codex *CZ-Ps D.G. IV 47*.[2] Orel was the first musicologist to draw attention to the polyphonic hymns to the local saints Wenceslas and Procopius that occur in that manuscript. These compositions will play an essential role in determining the provenance of the present source.

The Strahov Codex, which contains perhaps the largest number of polyphonic hymn settings of all the surviving sources from Central Europe, had been neglected until recently, but is currently the centre of interest of many European musicologists. After Orel, the first musicologist to examine this codex in any detail was Robert Snow, who compiled the first inventory of its contents in 1969.[3] The inauspicious political situation of the former Czechoslovak Republic did not allow foreign researchers access to Bohemian sources. Similarly, Czech musicologists did not have the opportunity to compare their domestic music repertoire with other European sources or to gain new methodological expertise. The situation became reversed in the late twentieth century, when Czech musicologists, benefiting from the newly opened borders, began to observe a significant rise in international interest in Czech medieval musical culture. Starting from the studies of Reinhard Strohm and Tom R. Ward, the Czech lands have begun to be perceived as a distinct cultural area with huge collections of musical manuscripts.[4] Thanks to the Czech musicologist Jaromír Černý, who identified the central European composer Petrus

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[1] Dobroslav Orel, *Der Mensuralkodex „Speciálník", ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Mensuralmusik und Notenschrift in Böhmen bis 1540*, Ph.D. diss., Universität Wien 1914.
[2] Hereinafter referred to as the Strahov Codex – without signature.
[3] Robert Snow, *The Manuscript Strahov D. G. IV. 47.*, Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois 1969.
[4] See Reinhard Strohm, *The Rise of European Music 1380–1500*, Cambridge 1993; Tom R. Ward, "Polyphonic Music in Central Europe, c. 1300 – c. 1520", in: Reinhard Strohm and Bonnie J. Blackburn (eds.), *Music as Concept and Practice in the Late Middle Ages*, Oxford 2001, pp. 191–243.

Wilhelmi de Grudencz,[5] we have evidence that late-medieval Czech music was not on the periphery in relation to the distinctive musical centres like France or Italy. Furthermore, Tom R. Ward pointed out in his study that late-medieval Bohemian music has some important local characteristics, such as the genre of the Bohemian cantio and a distinctive compositional style.[6] Apart from these studies we have no further detailed knowledge concerning the origin of the Strahov Codex, because we lack a detailed analysis of its repertoire. It is not yet clear where Strahov was compiled, or by whom, or in which environment was used. A significant factor is that the notation is difficult to read and contains many scribal errors. On the other hand, it should be noted that we have a huge collection of comparative repertorial material in other European sources, though the majority of the compositions in Strahov are unique.

The Strahov Codex is a treasury of the type of late-medieval sacred music that swept across Europe, as well as of unique pieces that exhibit local traits. It was evidently for use in a Catholic area.[7] As is generally known, Strahov contains settings for the Mass ordinary and proper, contrafacts of secular repertory, motets, hymns, and *Magnificats*. Although the majority of texts are in Latin, we can identify three German songs in that source.[8] Works by many of the leading composers, such as Johannes Pullois, Johannes Tourout, Walter Frye, and Guillaume Du Fay, are present. The manuscript is housed in the Strahov library in Prague, but it is unclear how it was acquired for this amazing ancient archive. Paweł Gancarczyk's analysis of the paper types suggests that this manuscript might have been compiled around 1467.[9] We do not know where or why the Strahov Codex was written, but several hypotheses have been mooted. Robert Snow located the Strahov Codex in Silesia (Eastern area, near the Bohemian border) because of the presence there of both Czech and German populations.[10] But in fact we can arguably exclude this area since there is no hymn to St Hedwig, patroness of Silesia, in the Strahov Codex. Reinhard Strohm agrees on Olomouc in Moravia as a possible origin.[11] Certainly the Cathedral of St Wenceslas in Olomouc was an important episcopal seat, but we can't yet either confirm or refute its connection with the Strahov Codex. Martin Horyna recently pointed out that it seems to have a close connection with Southern Bohemia, which was a strictly Catholic area in the mainly Utraquist Bohemian

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5   Jaromír Černý, *Petrus Wilhelmi de Grudencz – magister Cracoviensis*, Kraków 1993.
6   Tom R. Ward, "Polyphonic Music" (see fn. 4), pp. 191–243.
7   Reinhard Strohm, *The Rise* (see fn. 4), p. 513.
8   Reinhard Strohm, *The Rise* (see fn. 4), p. 513.
9   Paweł Gancarczyk, *Musica scripto – Kodeksy menzurálne II połowy XV wieku na wschodzie Europy Łacińskiej*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 52–58.
10 Snow, *The Manuscript Strahov* (see fn. 3), p. 2.
11 Strohm, *The Rise* (see fn. 4), p. 513.

Lands during this time.[12] Unfortunately, we do not have any other convincing evidence to support this enticing surmise.

The Strahov Codex contains sixty 3- and 4-voice polyphonic office hymns, arranged mostly according to the liturgical year. At first glance it is clear that the even-numbered stanzas are normally underlaid to the polyphony, the odd-numbered stanzas being intended to be sung as plainchant. The majority of the hymns – 39 items – were entered by Scribe 1, who probably copied 62 % of the whole manuscript.[13] Apart from two hymns, which might have been composed by Johannes Tourout (*Pange lingua gloriosi*)[14] and Guillaume Du Fay (*Exultet celum laudibus*),[15] all of the settings are anonymous. Thirty eight items seem to be unique and 22 hymns have concordances with other manuscripts, including Trent codices *I-TRbc 88*, *I-TRbc 90*, *I-TRbc 91*, *I-TRcap BL 93*, the Saganer Partbooks *PL-Kj Mus. 40098*, and the Speciálník Codex *CZ-HKm II A 7*. According to Tom R. Ward, the strong similarity among the hymns preserved in the Strahov Codex and in Trent manuscripts *I-TRbc* 88 and *I-TRcap BL* 93 suggests that these three codices stem from a common source.[16] This fact leads us to the conjecture that the Strahov Codex might have had a certain link to the Imperial Chapel in Vienna. It is worth saying that 45 % of the hymns entered by Scribe 1 can be identified in other European sources, including *I-TRbc 88* and *I-TRcap BL 93*. By contrast, Scribe 2 entered settings that belong to a later repertory and have fewer concordances, among them one hymn from the Saganer Partbooks *PL-Kj Mus. 40098*. It should be noted that the hymn texts and melodies present in Strahov relate to the German tradition, though the hymn *Christe redemptor omnium/Conserva* for All Saints was used exclusively in Italy.[17] Among the twenty-four different hymn texts that occur in the Strahov Codex, three – *Confessor Dei lucidus* for St Procopius, *Dies venit victorie* for St Wenceslas, and *O sancta mundi Domina* for the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary – are not present in any other manuscript containing polyphonic music from the Late Middle Ages. Furthermore, two hymns to Bo-

12 Martin Horyna, "Česká polyfonie 1470–1620, hudba v životě konfesijně rozdělené společnosti", in: Jan Baťa, Jiří K. Kroupa and Lenka Mráčková (eds.), *Littera Nigro scripta manet*, Praha 2009, pp. 119–120.

13 Gancarczyk, *Musica scripto* (see fn. 9), p. 49.

14 For more information about this polyphonic hymn see: Jaap van Benthem, "Ein Pange, lingua unter der Tarnkappe", in: Jan Baťa, Lenka Hlávková and Jiří K. Kroupa (eds.), *Musical Culture of the Bohemian Lands and Central Europe before 1620*, Prague 2011, pp. 127–140.

15 For more see: Dragan Plamenac, "Browsing through a Little-Known Manuscript (Prague, Strahov Monastery, D.G.IV.47.)", in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 13, 1960, pp. 102–111.

16 Tom R. Ward, *The Polyphonic Office Hymn From the Late Fourteenth Century Until the Early Sixteenth Century*, Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh 1969, pp. 122–123.

17 The distinctive features of the Italian and German hymn traditions are listed in: Tom R. Ward, "The Polyphonic Office Hymn 1400–1520 – A Descriptive Catalogue", in: Charles Hamm (ed.), *Renaissance Manuscript Studies*, Neuhausen-Stuttgart 1980.

hemian Saints evince strong local traits, using the domestic chant melodies in the upper voice.

Some hymns, among them *Ut queant laxis* for St John Baptist, have a different cantus firmus from that used in other settings of the same texts in European sources. These variants of melodies and even of the texts are symptomatic of other local characteristics present in this codex. It is worth emphasizing, though, that musicologists have not hitherto paid close attention to the monophonic sources of these cantus firmi as they occur in Bohemian chant manuscripts. The identification of the chant melodies and their comparison with monophonic hymns in other domestic sources can, of course, help us not only to determine the origin of the Strahov Codex, but also to identify distinctive features of Bohemian music in general.

Let us turn to a problem concerning the common and local traits present in the hymns of the Strahov Codex. The majority of the hymn settings preserved here demonstrate traits that were characteristic of the German tradition.[18] On the other hand, some strong local traits can be identified in the hymns of the Strahov Codex. As previously mentioned, the hymns *Confessor Dei lucidus*, *Dies venit victorie* and *O sancta mundi Domina* do not occur in any other European sources containing polyphonic music. They do, however, occur in monophonic hymn collections from Bohemia.

The hymn *Confessor Dei lucidus* for the Bohemian patron St Procopius survived as a monophonic hymn in other, exclusively Bohemian sources of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such as the Roudnice Psalter *CZ-Pak Cim 7*, as well as the Speciálník Codex *CZ-HKm II A 7*. Apart from this, the polyphonic hymn to St Procopius in Strahov (259ʳ) uses as its cantus firmus the chant melody *Stäblein* 752,[19] which came originally from Italy, but gained a significant variant that is present only in Bohemian sources, listed above. The first occurrence of tune *Stäblein* 752 is in a Breviary *D-Ma Cmm 1* from an unidentified Franciscan priory in Rome from the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Incidentally, this melody was transferred from Italy to Spain, Austria, Germany, Poland, as well as to Bohemia, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[20] A comparison of different sources makes it clear that there are two main families of this tune, which are set apart by significant variants (see figure 1). I shall label the first group as "Franciscan", because it occurs predominantly in Franciscan sources. Notably, these manuscripts show the same melodic variants of that tune, such as the absence of

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18 Compare to the catalogue: Ward, *The Polyphonic Office Hymn* (see fn. 17).

19 Bruno Stäblein, "Hymnen. Die mittelalterlichen Hymnenmelodien des Abendlandes" in: *Monumenta Monodica Medii Aevi*, Regensburg 1956, p. 443.

20 For more see: Veronika M. Mráčková, "The Transmission of Hymn Tune Stäblein 752 in Europe during the Late Middle Ages", in: *Hudební věda* 49, no. 1–2, 2012, pp. 19–32.

"Franciscan" type of melody:

D-Ma Cmm 1 (around 1235): Hymn for St Francis

Pro - les de ce - lo pro - di - it, no - vis u - tens pro - di - gi - is, ce - lum ce-cis a - pe - ru - is, sic-cis ma - re ve - sti - gi - is.

PL-KIk 1 (1372): Hymn for St Francis

Pro - les de ce - lo pro-di - it, no - vis u - tens pro - di - gi - is, ce - lum ce-cis a - pe - ru - it, sic-cis ma - re ve - sti - gi - is.

PL-WRu I F 437 and *PL-WRu I F 438* (1485): Hymn for St Francis

Pro - les de ce - lo pro-di - it, no - vis u - tens pro - di - gi - is, ce - lum ce-cis a - pe - ru - it, sic-cis ma - re ve - sti - gi - is.

D-Mbs Clm. 23089 (15th century): Hymn for St Anne

An - ne sac-re so-lem - ni - a fe - stis co - la - mus lau-di-bus, ym-nos ca-na-mus tyn-nu-los ex in - ti - mis pre - cor-di - is.
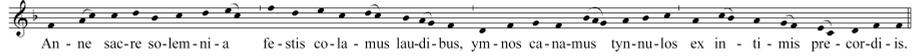
D-KNd 1157 (15th century): Hymn for Easter

Ad ce - nam ag-ni pro - vi-di, et sto-lis al - bis can-di - di, post tran-si-tum ma - ris Ru - bri Chri - sto ca - na - mus prin-ci-pi.

CZ-Pf Ni 7 (15th century): Hymn for St Francis

Pro - les de ce - lo pro-di - it, no - vis u - tens pro - di - gi - is, ce - lum ce-cis a - pe - ru - it, sic - cis ma - re ve - sti - gi - is.

Local characteristics:

CZ-Pu VI G 3a (14th century): Hymn for Ten Thousand Martyrs

O, Rex e - ter-ne glo-ri - e fi - de - li-um-que Re - dem-ptor, fac nos de-vo - te co - le - re mar-ti-rum fe - sta ho - di - e.

CZ-Pak Cim 7 (The last decade of the 14th century): Hymn for St Procopius

Con-fes - sor De-i lu - ci-dus, De - o et gen-ti pla - ci - dus, re - ful-sit ut to - pa - si-us, be - a - tus vir Pro - co - pi - us.
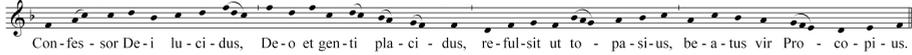
CZ-Ps DA III 17 (The last decade of the 14th century): Hymn for the Sunday of the year

Iam lu - cis or-to si - de - re, De-um pre-ce-mur sup - pli - ces, ut in di - ur-nis ac - ti-bus, nos ser-vet a no - cen-ti - bus.

CZ-Pu I A 58 (15th century): Hymn for the Visitation of Blessed Virgin

As - sunt fe-sta iu - bi - le - a, in Ma-ri - e nunc gau-di - a to - ta psal-lat ec - cle - si - a de-vo-ta lau - dum dra - ma - ta.

CZ-HKm II A 7 (1485-1500): Hymn for Visitation of Blessed Virgin

As - sunt fe-sta iu - bi - le - a, in Ma-ri - e nunc gau-di - a to - ta psal-lat ec - cle - si - a de-vo-ta lau-dum dra - ma - ta.

PL-Kk 35 (15th century): Hymn for St Anne

De stel - la sol o - ri - tu-rus, stel-le Ma-trem pro-fert pu - rus, ut ra-di-um lu - cis no-ve, sum-me De - us cle - men-ci - e.

D-Mbs Clm 8171 (15th century): Hymn for Corpus Christi

Ver - bum su-per-num pro-di - ens, nec pa-tris lin-quens de-xte-ram, ad o - pus su-um e - xi-ens, ve-nit ad vi - te ve - spe-ram
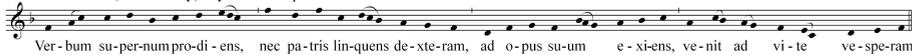
A-Gu 387 (15th century): Hymn for St John Baptist

Ba - pti - sta Chri-sti pre-vi-us, no-stris fa-ve - to pre-ci-bus, tu no-stra Chri-sto pec-to-ra vi - am per-fec-tam pre - pa - ra.
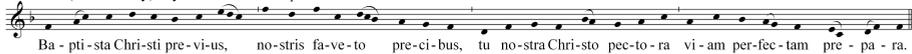
Figure 1: Synoptic table – two main families and particular variants of the melody *Stäblein* 752

Figure 2: The hymn settings *Dies venit victorie – Qui dum pro fide moritur* Praha, Knihovna Královské kanonie premonstrátů na Strahově, Ms. D.G. IV 47 (Strahov Codex), folio 262ᵛ
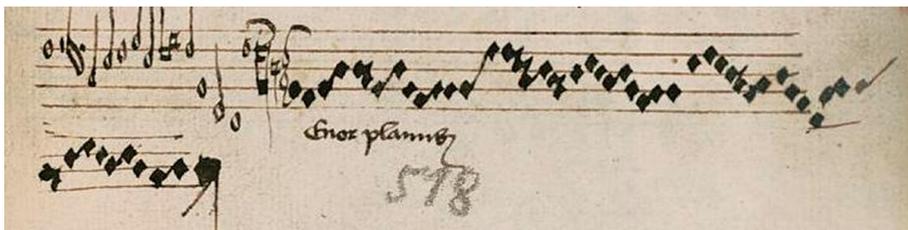
Figure 3: Czech staff notation in the hymn *O sancta mundi Domina* Praha, Knihovna Královské kanonie premonstrátů na Strahově, Ms. D.G. IV 47 (Strahov Codex), folio 260ʳ

the first note in the descending melisma and the lower pitch of the third note of the second verse, which is usually higher in the sources of Central European origin. The second group shows the local characteristics of this tune. The main feature that distinguishes this set of Franciscan sources is the first descending melisma, which consists of three notes instead of two. It is a marvellous instance of a common melody that adopts local traits that may be associated with the area in which it was used.

To continue with our investigation of the hymns in the Strahov Codex, *Dies venit victorie* for St Wenceslas was widespread not only in Bohemia and Moravia, but also in Silesia. The hymn tune identified in the polyphonic hymn to St Wenceslas in the Strahov Codex (fol. 262ᵛ–263ʳ) occurs with the same text in other Bohemian or Silesian manuscripts, including the Speciálník Codex *CZ-HKm II A 7*. Surprisingly, both the odd- and the even-numbered stanzas of the hymn *Dies venit victorie – Qui dum pro fide moritur* for St Wenceslas are present in Strahov (figure 2). Each stanza has different music. The reason for this arrangement could be that the whole hymn was sung polyphonically by two choirs alternating.

We can identify three settings of *O sancta mundi Domina* in the Strahov Codex (fol. 259ᵛ–260ʳ). One of these polyphonic hymns uses the Czech staff notation in *Tenor planus* (figure 3). The hymn text for the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is not present in any other polyphonic source, but strikingly it occurs in Bohemian manuscripts. Furthermore the cantus firmus of this hymn in Strahov seems to be identical to the tunes present in the monophonic sources. Interestingly, I was unable to trace this hymn in any Silesian or Polish manuscripts. On the other hand, the hymn text is present in some Austrian monophonic monastic sources of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[21]

Another local characteristic that can be observed in the Strahov hymn settings is the occasional use of different tunes from those customarily used in Europe. Furthermore, these distinct melodies appear in other Bohemian monophonic

21 See in the CANTUS database: http://cantusdatabase.org/node/402274.

manuscripts. This anomaly has also to be considered as we investigate the origin of this codex.

To summarize: in addition to common hymns, such as *Pange lingua gloriosi* for Corpus Christi and *Veni creator Spiritus* for Pentecost, that were sung using the same tune throughout Europe, there are also some in the Strahov Codex that relate to local practices, which may be identified through domestic texts devoted to indigenous Saints, and through the melodies to which they were sung. Sometimes generally known hymn tunes adopted specific characteristics that were local to the particular country in which they were used. It is worth emphasizing that strong local traits can be identified in the hymn settings of the Strahov Codex. Through comparison with manuscripts containing monophonic hymns it can be demonstrated that some of the polyphonic hymns in Strahov originated in Bohemia. Among others, a strong similarity between the hymn tunes in Strahov and those in the Speciálník Codex should be mentioned. The task of identifying new methods of investigation that could further our understanding of the origin of the Strahov Codex is crucial. It could be beneficial to turn our focus from institutions to individuals who formed the backbone of this cultural heritage. Central Europe is undoubtedly an important area that both assimilated the styles of adjacent countries and also created its own. As Reinhard Strohm put it, perhaps not all the roads of communication which fifteenth-century Europe possessed will lead to Rome; however, many have not yet been tried.

List of sources

A-Gu 387	Graz, Universitätbibliothek *MS 387*
CZ-HKm II A 7	Hradec Králové, Muzeum východních Čech *MS II A 7* ("Speciálník Codex")
CZ-Pak Cim 7	Praha, Archiv Pražského hradu, Knihovna Metropolitní kapituly *MS Cim 7* ("Roudnice Psalter")
CZ-Pf Ni 7	Praha, Knihovna františkánského kláštera u P. Marie Sněžné *MS Ni 7*
CZ-Ps DA III 17	Praha, Knihovna Královské kanonie premonstrátů na Strahově *MS DA III 17*
CZ-Ps DG IV 47	Praha, Knihovna Královské kanonie premonstrátů na Strahově *MS DG IV 47* ("Strahov Codex")
CZ-Pu I A 58	Praha, Národní knihovna České republiky *MS I A 58*
CZ-Pu VI G 3a	Praha, Národní knihovna České republiky *MS VI G 3a*
D-KNd 1157	Köln, Erzbischöfliche Diözesen- und Dombibliothek *MS 1157*
D-Ma Cmm 1	München, Franziskanerkloster St. Anna – Bibliothek *MS Cmm 1*
D-Mbs Clm. 8171	München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek *MS Clm. 8171*
D-Mbs Clm. 23089	München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek *MS Clm. 23089*
I-TRbc 88	Trento, Museo Provinciale d'Arte – Castello del Buonconsiglio *MS 1375 (88)*
I-TRbc 90	Trento, Museo Provinciale d'Arte – Castello del Buonconsiglio *MS 1377 (90)*
I-TRbc 91	Trento, Museo Provinciale d'Arte – Castello del Buonconsiglio *MS 1378 (91)*
I-TRcap BL 93	Trento, Museo Diocesano – Biblioteca Capitolare *MS BL 93*
PL-KIk 1	Kielce, Biblioteka Kapituły Katedralnej *MS 1*
PL-Kj Mus. 40098	Kraków, Biblioteka Jagiellonska *MS Mus. 40098* ("Saganer Partbooks")
PL-Kk 35	Kraków, Archivum Krakowskiej Kapituły Katedralnej *MS 35*
PL-WRu I. F. 437	Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka *MS I. F. 437*
PL-WRu I. F. 438	Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka *MS I. F. 438*