

Schola Cantorum

A place for the teaching and practice of ecclesiastical chant, or a body of singers banded together for the purpose of rendering the music in church. In the primitive Church the singing was done by the clergy, but, in order to set them free from this and enable them to give their attention more to what strictly pertained to their office, trained singers for the musical part of the liturgy were introduced. Pope Hilary (d. 438) is sometimes credited with having inaugurated the first *schola cantorum*, but it was Gregory the Great, as we are told in his life by John the Deacon, who established the school on a firm basis and endowed it. The house in which the *schola* was lodged was rebuilt in 844 by Pope Sergius II, who had himself been trained in it, as were also the popes Sergius I, Gregory II, Stephen III, and Paul I. This Roman school furnished the choir at most of the papal functions and was governed by an official called *prior scholae cantorum* or simply *cantor*. From Cardinal Thomasi's preface to the twelfth-century Vatican antiphony, we learn that, amongst his other duties, he had "to point out to each individual, the day before, what responsory he was to sing in the night office". From Rome the institution spread to other parts of the Church. Pepin, the father of Charlemagne, first introduced Roman chanters into France, placing them at Lyons. Charlemagne encouraged the work, and through his influence several other schools were established in his empire. That of Metz became one of the most famous; other well-known ones were at Hirschau Corbie, and St. Gall. In England the diffusion of the Roman chant was due chiefly to St. Benet Biscop and St. Wilfrid. Several of the cathedrals (e.g. York, Sarum, Hereford, and Worcester) and many of the abbeys (e.g. Glastonbury and Malmesbury) had important *scholae cantorum* attached to them. The Protestant Reformation put an end to the English schools, while abroad they seem to have died out when paid singers began to be employed in the churches, though perhaps the *maîtrise* or cathedral choir-school of to-day may be regarded as their legitimate successor. In monasteries at the present day the name *schola cantorum* is often applied to certain selected monks whose duty it is to chant the more elaborate portions of the liturgical music, such as the graduals and alleluias at Mass, the rest of the community joining only in the simpler parts. The official in charge of such a *schola* is usually called the "precentor". In recent times the chief schools of ecclesiastical chant have been at Ratisbon, Mechlin, Einsiedeln, Beuron, and, greatest of all, Solesmes. In these the study of the manuscripts and the work of restoring the traditional chant of the Church have been pursued with much success. The *schola* of Solesmes was commenced by Dom Gueranger and has been ably carried on by his successors, DD. Pothier and Mocquereau. The latter is precentor at Solesmes (now in the Isle of Wight, England), while the papal commission entrusted with the work of preparing the official Vatican edition of the Chant is presided over by Abbot Pothier. (See GUERANGER, PROSPER LOUIS PASCHAL; SOLESMES).