

Prologue of the Antiphonary that he composed Amalarius of Metz¹

Trans. W. L. North, from the edition of J.M. Hannsens, *Amalarii Episcopi Opera Liturgica Omnia I*, Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1958, pp. 361-363.

1. After I had long been vexed because of the antiphonaries² in our province that disagreed with each other—for the modern ones ran in a manner different from the ancient ones—and I did not know which was the better one to retain, it pleased the One Who gives to all in abundance to free me from this worry. For when a multitude of antiphonaries was discovered in the monastery of Corbie, that is, three volumes of the nighttime office and a fourth which only contained the daily office, I struggled to steer my ship from the high seas of curiosity to the port of tranquility. 2. Now then, when I was sent to Rome by our holy and most Christian emperor Louis to the holy and most reverend Pope Gregory IV³, the pope said to me the following [story] about the aforementioned volumes. “I do not have an antiphonary to send to my son the Lord Emperor, because those which we had, Wala⁴ took away with him to Francia when he was carrying out another legation here.” 3. I compared these volumes with our antiphonaries and discovered that they diverged from ours not only in their order but also in the wording and in a multitude of the responsories and antiphons, which we do not sing. Indeed, in many matters I found our volumes to be more reasonably laid out than those were. 4. I wondered how it had happened that mother and daughter diverged so much from one another. I discovered in one volume of the above-mentioned antiphonaries on the basis of what was contained within it that it had been arranged long ago by Pope Hadrian.⁵ I recognized that our volumes are quite a bit more ancient than that volume of the city of Rome.

¹ Amalarius of Metz (bn. late 8th century-died ca. 850) was one of the greatest liturgists of the Middle Ages, although a far from non-controversial figure. He was a student of Alcuin and served as an ambassador under Louis the Pious and held the bishoprics of Trier (which he resigned when sent on an embassy to Constantinople) and Lyon, where he roused the ire of the local clergy with his innovative liturgies and liturgical interpretations. His *Antiphonary* was one of his greatest accomplishments.

² The precise meaning of the term *antiphonary* is hard to pin down. On the one hand, it is definitely a work that contains antiphons, or verses—often of the Psalms—sung as a response to parts of the liturgy. On the other, the volume may also contain other liturgical materials.

³ Pope, 827-844.

⁴ Wala of Corbie (ca. 755 – 31 August 836) was a son of Charles Martel and a close advisor of Charlemagne. He was sent to Corbie by Louis the Pious in 814 but continued to be active in imperial affairs. He appears as abbot of the Italian monastery of Bobbio in 834.

⁵ Pope, 772-795.

5. Nonetheless I also recognized that in some places our books could be corrected by them, and in some ours were set forth more reasonably and suitably, as I said before. I seized therefore upon a middle path between the two so as not to diverge from our [books] when they were better arranged, and I not neglect those places where they were able to be corrected by the volumes of the City⁶, either in their order or language. 6. Where our modern cantors have set down their offices in authoritative words in a more reasonable manner, by dividing the antiphons and responses by days of the week and on feast days and by distributing their antiphons for the feasts of the saints on their individual vigils, I have first written down the Roman order, then that of our cantors. Where I found such an order to be lacking, we have added it from both volumes, just as the days and weeks before Christmas and Easter shall reveal themselves. 7. Where the order of responses and antiphons in the examined volumes seems to be at odds with the order of the books from which they have been taken and from the harmony which reason decrees, I have not hesitated to follow in our antiphonary those things which seemed to agree better with the history or rationale of this or that feast.

8. Where something in the Roman antiphonary seemed to me to be in a better order, there I have written “R” in the margin for the city of Rome; and where it seemed to be so in ours, I have written “M”, for the city of Metz; and where our own wit (*ingenium*) has thought that something could be put in a more reasonable order, [I have written] “I” and “C” for indulgence (*indulgentia*) and love (*caritas*). 9. I therefore entreat cantors that they not despise our [suggestions] before they discuss them in the light of the order of the books and the fullness of reason. And if they should find these things to suit the order of books less well, or [should find] any other reason, let them indulge my inexperience, but let them not despise taking the produce from our garden which a red head offers to them.

10. Upon the verses which one shall find scarcely altered if perchance he considers it worth his while to consult the present volume, the priest of God Helisachar—a person with excellent education, most zealous in reading and divine worship, and the first among the first men of the most excellent emperor Louis—labored and sweated.⁷ And not only did he labor mightily in this present business but whomsoever he was able to assemble around himself from his students. 11. Although the altered verses have been conjoined in a very summary form to their responses, nevertheless those which I have found to be suitable, I have not hesitated to include in our antiphonary, just as I have found them inserted. 12. We must also note that our antiphonary has different verses than the Roman one because we sing our responses in a different order than the

⁶ i.e. Rome.

⁷ Helisachar was abbot of St Maximin in Trier.

Romans do. They begin the response from the beginning, after the verse has been concluded, while we shape the completed verse into our response through its “sides”, as if we are making two bodies one body. It is therefore necessary that we seek out those verses whose sense harmonizes with the middle of the responses, so that there may arise one sense from the words of the response and the words of the verse. **13.** The aforementioned fellow Elisaachar, a most glorious priest, oversaw this; he struggled over it such that he gathered together from different books verses suitable to the responses, which we and many others wish to use in the nighttime office.

14. In all these things, the consent of the highest and most holy Pope Gregory⁸, who satisfied the holy Augustine’s⁹ question [by saying that] wherever he wished to gather ecclesiastical offices and to add or insert them into the Roman order, he might legitimately gather them and give them over to the use of his people. **15.** Whence it was written in the *History of the English*,¹⁰ book one, chapter five:

The question of Augustine: Although the faith is one, the churches have different custom, and one manner of [celebrating] Mass is maintained in the Roman Church and another in the church in Gaul.

*Pope Gregory replies: Your fraternity knows the custom of the Roman church, in which you remember being raised but I will be happy if you carefully choose whatever you find that can best please almighty God, whether it be in the Roman, the Gallic, or any other church, and then infuse whatever you have been able to gather from the many churches into the church of the Anglo-Saxons, which is still new to the faith, with exceptional instruction. For things should be loved not because of their places, but places because of their good things. **16.** From individual churches, therefore, whichever they may be, choose what is pious, which is religious, what is right, and these things, gathered together as if in a bouquet, deposit in the minds of the English as their custom.*

Thus says the blessed Gregory.

17. In many places I have noted in a first column the names of the responses and antiphons according to the order of the antiphonary of the City, and right beside it, in a second column [the names of the responses and antiphons] according to the order of our custom, in order that the singer may have both before his eyes and sing the one that he chooses to be better with his mind’s judgment. **18.** We should note that the book that we call the antiphonary, has three names among the Romans: what we call the

⁸ Gregory I, pope 590-604.

⁹ Augustine of Canterbury, missionary to the Anglo-Saxons, †26 May 604.

¹⁰ Amalarius is here referring to Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

graduale, they call the *cantatorium*¹¹. This is still contained in a single volume in some church among them according to ancient custom. The following part they divide under two titles: the part which contains the responses is called the *responsorial*, while the part which contains the antiphons is called the *antiphonary*. I have followed our usage and have interspersed the responses and antiphons in the order of the seasons in which our solemnities are celebrated.

¹¹ This refers to the book containing the antiphons used during the Mass.