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The Liturgical Drama in the Middle Ages as the Music-Drama

The liturgical drama was one of the dramatic-and-theatrical genres of the Middle Ages. Together with mystery, miracle and morality plays, elegiac comedy and farce, it formed the basis for modern theatre; at the same time, as a musical phenomenon, it constituted an important stage in the development of musical drama. The term "liturgical drama" was used for the first time in the 19th century by F. Clement and E. de Coussemaker, and soon afterwards it gained widespread popularity and was common worldwide in literature about the theatre. The term is usually understood to encompass such church performances which, on the one hand, already fell within the drama convention and, on the other, were still fully subordinated to the liturgy. Such performances depicted selected events from the Old or New Testament, connected mainly with the two most important incidents in Christ's life: Christmas and Resurrection. Apart from the Holy Scripture, other sources of inspiration, with a significantly more modest provenance, such as sermons, legends or apocrypha, were also used. These half-spoken, half-sung forms were partly taken from the liturgical forms common in church services (responsories, verses, antiphons, hymns, sequences) and partly specially created to meet the needs of the drama (tropes); they were sung, more rarely spoken, in Latin (the vernacular began to be used only in the transitory phenomena, and only to a limited extent). The subordination of the drama to the liturgy meant that they were performed at a strictly defined time and place, and that their duration was also subject to restrictions. In their classic form, such dramas had 15-100 lines each, which translated into 10-20 minutes' worth of performance time. Performers included priests, sometimes clerics, monks or *schola cantorum* students. All of them made free use of mimic, gesture and the so-called stage movement. Liturgical vestments and objects functioned as theatrical costumes and props, and performances were staged exclusively in churches.

This paper is based on the following sources: all of the liturgical drama texts surviving in Poland and selected European manuscripts, including the renown code of Fleury. Most attention is paid to various editions of the drama *Visitation Sepulchri*, which was performed on Easter Sunday, as well as to the development of dramas for Christmas influenced by it. A particularly thorough analysis was conducted of the two Wrocław versions of *Visitatio Sepulchri*: the trope *Quem queritis* from the end-paper at the end of a manuscript devoted to medicine and *Visitatio* of the second type from *Antiphonarium Bregense*.

The evolution of drama and its links with the liturgy have already been discussed on many occasions. There is no doubt that the liturgical drama, and so also modern European drama, originates from the four-line dialogue trope *Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, o Christicolae?*, staged before the Introit *Resurrexi, et ad huc tecum sum* of the Mass on Easter Sunday. Its oldest sources are to be found in the manuscripts of Limoges and St. Gallen[1].

The further development of the liturgical drama was connected not with the mass, but with the Resurrection Matins, as the placement of *Quem quaeritis* at the end of *mutatinum* (after the third responsory *Cum transisset Sabbatum* and before the hymn *Te Deum laudamas*) contributed to the appearance of the classical liturgical drama *Visitatio Sepulchri*. Very numerous surviving accounts of the performance attest to its exceptional popularity. Carl Lange talks about three types of this drama: the first, already including the Angel's dialogue with the women at Christ's tomb; the second, which has been extended with the scene with Peter and John, who go to the grave to verify the women's story, to take the shrouds – the testimony to the miracle – and to show them to people (cf. *The Gospel According to St Luke* 24, 9-12; *The Gospel According to St John* 20, 2-20); and the third, which supplements the drama with the scene in which Christ, dressed as a gardener, shows himself to Mary Magdalene (cf. *The Gospel According to St John 20, 11-17*)[2].

Using *Visitatio* as an example, one can talk already about an important role of the trope in the development of the liturgical drama. In contrast to original choral compositions, the dialogue in *Quem quaeritis* dramatizes the flow of action, results in an exchange of thoughts, a clash of positions, and action. From all the singings in *Visitatio* it was *Quem quaeritis* which was subject to the most profound modifications and went a long way from its original form. Other

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[1] According to K. Young and J. Smits van Waesberghe it was written by Tuotil in the second half of the 9th c.; however, H. Husmann challenges this claim, maintaining that the trope was created as late as the 11th c. (cf. K. Young: *The Drama of the Mediaeval Church*. Oxford 1933. Ed. 2: 1962. Vol. 1; about the views of J. Smits van Waesberghe and H. Husmann see: W. Lipphardt: *Liturgische Dramen des Mittelalters* in: *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik*. Vol. 8. Kassel-Basel-London-New York 1960, col. 1013).

[2] C. Lange: *Die lateinischen Osterfeiern*, München 1887.

uses of tropes can be seen in the drama *Ordo ad peregrinum*, which developed as a result of a further expansion of the Resurrection theme (cf. *The Gospel According to St Luke* 24, 13-32)[3]. One of its most characteristic features seems to be the fact that it is very liberal in its treatment of liturgical texts: when the dramatic situation, determined by the Gospel story, calls for it the Gregorian Chant is stopped and dialogue choral-like compositions (tropes), based on the text by St Luke, are used instead. Drama is introduced at the very beginning of the work, when the hymn *Jesu, nostra redemptio*, sung by two disciples on their way to Emaus, is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Jesus as a pilgrim.

The further development of staging elements took place already in another group of dramas. After working out the Easter rite efforts focused on preparing a similar performance for Christmas. Also in this case the development started from a dialogue trope. "*Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, o Christicolae?*" was used as a model for "*Quem quaeritis in praesepe, pastores, dicite?*" The new trope was performed before the Introit "*Puer natus est nobis*" of the third Mass on Christmas Day. Apart from it, "*Hodie cantandus est nobis Puer*", another dialogue trope, which is ascribed to Tuotilo, was performed to the same Introit in the Middle Ages. In the course of time both tropes found their place in the Matins service, and because this did not result in doing away with the performance to the Introit, two different Christmas-related dramas were created: *Officium Pastorum* (performed before the Introit) and *Officium Stellae*, also known as *Officium Trium Regum* (performed during the Matins). As the Mass structure did not allow for the trope to be developed very much, *Officium Pastorum* in all its versions known to us, remained very simple. On the other hand, *Officium Stallae* expanded into large theatrical shows, especially rich in terms of stage design. Also the following dramas: *Ludus Innocentium* (*The Gospel According to St Matthew 2, 16-18*), *Ordo Rachelis* (*The Gospel According to St Matthew 2, 18*) and *Ordo Prophetarum* (prophecies of the *Old Testament* prophets) are related to Christmas themes. *Ludus Innocentium* is a staging of the *New Testament* Massacre of the Innocent. It contains, among others, Rachel's lament for her sons killed on Herod's orders. The development of this motive contributed to the creation of a separate drama, known as *Ordo Rachelis*. In terms of music, Rachel's lament falls within the category of the recitative and is an original composition. Until that time such works were restricted to dialogue structures (tropes); with time, when skills in using them were acquired, efforts were made to add dramatic elements to the monologue parts. This led to the creation of the second, apart from the dialogue, basic formal category of the drama – the monologue.

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[3] The drama *Ordo ad peregrinum* was performed in the 12th c. at Beauvais during the vespers service on the Thursday following Easter Sunday.

This fact was of much importance, as it resulted in the loosening of relations with the biblical-ritual canon. Consequently, the development of the dramatic recitative was one of the symptoms of the separation of the drama from the liturgy.

In the 12th-14th centuries, when Easter and Christmas performances were at their peak, a number of dramas appeared which show their evolution towards mystery performances. In contrast to *Visitatio Sepulchri* and *Officium Stellae*, in most cases we know them from single sources only; inspiration for them was found not only in *The New Testament*. Because they had rather loose links with the liturgy, they are commonly referred to as "semi-liturgical dramas".

Latin was not longer obligatory; fragments in vernacular languages, initially small (*Danielis ludus*), entirely new in respect of the binding corpus of the Gregorian Chant and written for specific plays, were gradually introduced. Changes were also made to music. No longer entire antiphons, responsories, sequences or hymns, but often only certain selected melodic formulas were borrowed from the chorale repertoire; the chorale-singing rule was only preserved for drama endings. Troping was replaced with recitative forms. It is characteristic that the means and forms developed within the chorale, and also known from monodic secular music, came to be used in a completely different way. A particularly interesting structure, for instance, can be seen in the 12th-century *Sponsus*, which is based on the parable from *The Gospel According to St Matthew* (25, 1-13) about wise and foolish virgins. Separate melodies were here assigned to the virgins and to oil traders, and by grouping them into repeated pairs the rules of sequences with a double *cursus* (ab ccab ab ccab ab ab) were applied. The whole drama, with the music from the introduction returning in the epilogue, follows the pattern of an extended *lai*. A *lai* form of enormous dimensions is also to be found in *Danielis ludus* (*The Old Testament: Daniel's Prophecy* 5, 1-31; 6, 1-28), one of the most extended medieval dramas, in which nearly four hundred verses received musical treatment. None of the ninety melodies – except, of course, for the parallel stanzas – is repeated, apart from the biblical greeting formula: "*Rex in aeternum vive*", which is used as a refrain throughout the drama. Each song is composed of double verses or repetitions of larger strophic structures and corresponds to the form *retrouenge*. There are many *conducti*, which accompany the appearance of the kings Belshazzar and Darius, which were probably performed to the accompaniment of musical instruments. The anonymous author showed an extraordinary melodic ingenuity and mastery in building musical dramatic tension. *Danielis ludis* is a representative example in the history of drama and one can only regret that we know the

second surviving theatrical interpretation of the drama, *[H]istoria de Daniel representanda* by Hilarius, without its musical text.

The artistic problems of the liturgical drama are determined by its genre identity. The form of the liturgical drama is determined by the following three elements: word, sound and miming. The first two were copied from the available mass-and-breviary (the Gregorian Chant) repertoire[4]; the selection was determined by the dramatic effect of the Gospel description, from which also the need to compose additional pieces resulted. Apart from word and sound, drama authors also concentrated on the broadly-understood gestic action, i.e. the so-called mimetic.

The word structure of the liturgical drama is made up by over twenty liturgical forms with a varied structure and function. From the dramatic point of view they may be divided into monologue ones (antiphon, canticle, hymn, sequence, oration, minor doxology) and dialogue ones (responsory, verse, acclamation). Of most importance to the development of the liturgical drama are: responsory, verse, antiphon, sequence and hymn.

The sequence is represented by *Victimae paschali laudes*. As attested by the dialogue between the faithful and Mary Magdalene, which is a part of its text:

Dic nobis, Maria, quid vidisti in via? Sepulchrum Christi viventis et gloriam vidi resurgentis. Angelicos testes, sudarium et vestes

it was borrowed from the Easter Mass liturgy. When the missal was reformed under Pius V (1570), the original seven-strophe structure was shortened by deleting the sixth ("*Credendum est magis soli Mariae veraci, quam Judaeorum turbae fallaci*"), as a result of which the sequence lost its regular structure. In this form it is used in today's version of *Graduale Romanum*. Because the known versions of *Visitatio Sepulchri* are older, they contain the complete text of the sequence, which is written out for parts (for instance, one of the Paris manuscripts[5]). All the liturgical dramas performed during the Matins service, however, use the hymn *Te Deum laudamus*. The placement of the liturgical performance before this particular work attests to the significant dramatic sense of its authors.

In terms of music, liturgical dramas are based on the Gregorian Chant. The above-listed types of text are put here in the form of monologue and dialogue singing, which is classified as lyrico-musical forms (monologue singing) and dramatic forms (dialogue singing), with epic singing (the commenting singing by the chorus) and the so-called *Siletegesang* (the silencing

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[4] For this reason the liturgical drama is undoubtedly a centonate, as it evolved by borrowing songs (centonization).

[5] Manuscript from Paris, 13th c. (London, The British Museum, ms. No. add. 37399, fol. 236v-237.

performance of the choir of angels: "*Silete, silete, silentium habete*")[6] also differentiated. The Gregorian melodies borrowed from the chorale repertoire, were not subject to any significant alterations in the dramas. More often than not they differ territorially and result from the habits or customs popular in a given environment or centre.

Apart from tropes, for the purposes of the liturgical drama a number of other original works, the more interesting of which include *plancti*, also referred to as *lamentationes*, were composed. One of the surviving examples of *Visitatio Sepulchri* of the third type[7] begins with this kind of nine-strophe *planctus*, which is sung by the three Marys. The most interesting example of a lament, however, is undoubtedly contained in *Ordo Rachelis*, the second part of the drama *Ordo ad interfectionem Puerorum*[8]. The work may be used for a discussion of the problem of the genesis of the recitative as the basic aesthetic category of musical drama. This lamentation lends credibility to all theoretical attempts at proving that vocal music is a function of human speech. Rachel's lament contains such solemn figures, as: *exclamatio* (frequent calls "*heu!*" or "*O dolor! O patrum* [...]"), *interrogatio* (all enquiries, e.g.: "*dum sic commota fuero per viscera tota?*" or "*esset profuturus?*"), as well as *passus duriusculus* (the exclamation "*O dolor! O patrum* [...]", which is filled in with a diatonic procession of seconds within the interval fifth upwards, a major sixth downwards – with an extention to the octave).

The third element directly linked to the form of the liturgical drama is mimetic, which should be understood, in line with the Aristotelian theory of *mimesis*, as the art of expressing feelings and thoughts using movements of the face (facial expression) and appropriate gestures. Manuscript columns provide very much information about this.

One of the most important features determining the dramatic effect of musical drama – and this is how the liturgical drama is regarded in this work – seems to be the degree of synthesis of sound and word (which in the German theory of musical drama is referred to as *Einheit von Ton- under Dichtkunst*). In fact, as shown by history and the poetics of musical drama, this is all about making music as sensitive as possible to the "music" (*melos* and *chronos*) of words. Thus the recitative (and the melic recitative structure) became the principal aesthetic category

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[6] Such *Siletegesang* seems to be very characteristic. The silencing appearance of a choir of angels was probably introduced to draw the audience's attention to the fact that a liturgical drama was beginning. The musical theatre of the Middle Ages did not have bells, gongs, overtures or curtains to mark the start of a performance. *Siletegesang* probably played the role of *principium ante principium*.

[7] *Miscellanea Floriacensia*, 12th/13th c., Orléans, Bibliothèque de la Ville, ms. call number 201, olim 178, fol. 220-225.

[8] *Ibidem*, fol. 218. It is worth noting that the dramatic trope *Lamentatio Rachelis* to the responsory *Sub altare Dei* from the 11th-12th c. (ms., 11th-12th c., Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. call number lat. 1139) survives.

of musical drama. This feature – as shown by the work by Dominicus Johner[9], which is of fundamental importance in this respect – is also a peculiar property of the Gregorian Chant. Of special significance to liturgical drama singing seems to be the rhythmic compliance of melody and word.

This paper discusses the liturgical drama in the medieval Western church from the historical and aesthetic perspective. It describes liturgy-based performances as phenomena sensitive to transformations occurring in many branches of art, literature, public consciousness and ideology, as such shows were deeply embedded in the culture of the epoch in which they originated; they were entirely medieval in character and they died out with the coming of the modern age, which favoured other forms of religious drama.

Because of the attempt to present two mutually dependent processes: the dramatic-and-theatrical development of liturgical dramas and the changes in their approach to the liturgy, the issues related to the genesis of liturgical dramas and their evolution towards mystery plays have acquired appropriate significance. The thesis that the dramatic-and-theatrical development at the same time marked the separation of drama from the liturgy has been advanced in this form for the first time. The most characteristic aspect of the related evidence is that the looser the connection between drama and the liturgy became, the more features of the new genre – mystery – drama acquired. An important part in this process was played by troping, which gradually increased its influence on the liturgical drama form. It was reflected, for instance, in a systematic development of dialogue structures and the emergence of a recitative-like monologue.

Because of the syncretism of the liturgical drama, which consisted in a simultaneous formation of its three principal components: word, sound and the visible, the liturgical drama shows a characteristic similarity both to ancient Greek drama (especially tragedy) and to modern musical drama (the Florentine *dramma per musica* or the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept of Richard Wagner) and opera. This similarity also concerns the development of the very category of dramaticism. As commonly known, in ancient Greek tragedy, on the one hand dialogue structures (*epejsodia*) were consistently developed, on the other, there was an equally consistent trend to diminish the form-shaping role of successive appearances of the chorus (this mainly concerns *stasima*). This process was accompanied by a characteristic increase in the number of actors (from one to three) and a reduction in the number of chorus performers. In turn, the history of opera, from the Baroque to the early 20th century, was

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[9] D. Johner: *Wort und Ton im Choral. Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik des gregorianischen Gesanges*. Ed. 2. Leipzig 1953.

marked with the concern to make music in drama more of a means than a goal. As a result, solo recitatives were expanded, group recitatives (dialogues) were developed, the conventional schematism of usually exceedingly long arias was done away with by replacing them with short, recomposed – as far as their form is concerned – structures, dominated by the aria-like melody or recitative-like monologues created on the basis of the musical drama. It must be pointed out that the monologue is also one of the most important achievements of modern musical drama.

The paper focuses on such research issues which – due to their considerable importance – should be dealt with before all the others. Above all, it is necessary to revise the manner in which liturgical dramas have been determined, defined and classified. The definition determinants of the notion of "drama" should be formulated and then used to analyse the phenomena referred to as the "liturgical drama". The classification of the liturgical drama - apart from the liturgical, dramatological and philological criteria, which have been preferred to date – should also take account of musicological criteria. The history of musical drama and opera is based, unfortunately, on very imprecise theoretical grounds. What is more, modern historians of musical theatre practically do nothing about it. The very differentiation between "musical theatre" and "opera" seems very illogical. From the perspective of the theory of drama, opera is also a musical drama. The problem regards rather the ratio of dramaticism, expressed – speaking most generally – as the proportion of recitative to aria-like forms. Therefore, pieces referred to as operas are characterized by a low ratio of dramaticism and musical dramas by a high ratio of dramaticism. Based on a general theory of drama one should first formulate a precise theory of the musical drama and only then consider the liturgical drama.

A separate group of issues are problems related to the liturgical drama of the Eastern church, which had a serious share in the genesis and development of the liturgical drama of the Western church. These problems present a much broader research perspective, as they concern not only the mutual relations between various branches of the chorale, but also general relations between the cultures of the East and the West.

The liturgical drama was undoubtedly one of the greatest achievements of the medieval culture. Created in fact "from nothing", in an environment almost completely cut off from the tradition and the legacy of ancient theatre, in an attempt to make the liturgy of the Resurrection, probably the most important feast of Christianity, "more attractive", it reflected all the major cultural transformations of its epoch. It became the second triumph in the history of the theatre, after the ancient Greek drama. It served as an inspiration for all the future

manifestations of the religious theatre: from *sacre rappresentazione* of the Renaissance period to the big, expanded, Romantic and modern mystery performances.

The liturgical drama originated, which in fact seems phenomenal, from Gregorian chant, as a result of troping and centonization. It was, as it were, like *summa cantus gregoriani*, because in fact it combined all the important forms of chorale: from recitative singing to hymns and sequences, from true chorale singing to original, chorale-like compositions. The history of the liturgical drama also shows all the important changes which have affected the chorale over the centuries. Of utmost importance in this respect are the influences of the *profanum* category. The chorale and drama, *sacrum* and *profanum* are aesthetically unusual combinations.

The church has embraced the theatre, offering it its biblical content, philosophy, mysticism, props, interior, word and music. The theatre, on the other hand, has enriched the service with an entertainment aspect, dramaticism and magic. Historically, this unique union of the church with the theatre seems quite natural in fact, as the Greek work *théātron* (theatre) comes from the Greek *theós* – god (!)**.**