

# INTERPRETING LATIN LITURGICAL PSALTERS

## Outlines of the Research

A survey of the liturgical Psalter may be conducted from three perspectives:

(1) As a phenomenon of medieval book production, the Psalter can be evaluated as to its content and composition.

(2) The set of textual and melodic items, their arrangement and variability, i.e. the assignation of each item to an exact place within the weekly cycle, a “hard structure”, can be submitted to an analysis similar to the one used for Office Propers.

(3) The methods for the so-called Office Ordinary and its supplements, i.e. the parts which belong to the daily cycle of the Divine Office and cannot be described in terms of strict assignations, are rather similar to the ones applied to the *ordines* beyond the Mass and the Office, the “soft structures”.

In the following, a methodology will be outlined with some key points where a preliminary research has been sufficient to describe the main tasks and possible outcomes of a more comprehensive study.

## CONTENT AND COMPOSITION

The Psalter, albeit a self-evident phenomenon in actual practice, was rather difficult to define already in the Middle Ages. Men of worship were familiar with terms like Ordinary, Temporal, or Sanctoral parts, all of them present in books both for Mass and Office. However, in the Divine Office there was something in-between, a borderline layer between the unchangeable daily order of the Ordinary and the variable yearly order of the Propers: a weekly order, unchangeable from the view-point of the liturgical year but variable from that of the basic daily arrangement of each Office Hour.

Both the phenomenon itself and also the book-type that stored and transmitted its texts, melodies, and regulations constituted a borderline genre. Its two extremities feature as a biblical Psalter on the one hand, with all the 150 psalms in their original order, supplemented with liturgical accessories in the margins, in the small empty spaces left between the psalms, or on inserted tags, all incorporated successively into the body of one volume; and a strictly liturgical Psalter on the other hand, where the psalms are inserted into the weekly cycle of the everyday Office, either in an ordinary-like system that also comprises seasonal elements for Advent, Christmastide, Septuagesima, Lent, Eastertide, etc., or in the body of the Temporal, at the week beginning with the Sunday after the octave of Epiphany, the first time where the everyday Office can expand to its full breadth.

Of course, there are several transitory stages between the two, and in effect, these transitory stages bear witness to the most wide-spread editorial strategies to compose a Psalter. An average medieval and early modern Psalter is a compromise between Bible and liturgy. The massive blocks of continuous recitation (the so-called *psalmodia currens*) always define the basic structure: first the series of Matins, from Sunday to Saturday, including Psalms 1–108, and then the series of Vespers, from Sunday to Saturday too, including theoretically Psalms 109–150. This basic arrangement remains stable until the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Matins are never joined with Vespers or other Office Hours of the same day. The questions that really emerge in such a context are the following:

What happens with the psalms that are omitted from the continuous recitation for they are sung in a different place, namely at Lauds or the Lesser Hours? Do they stay in their original place without any comment so that only a trained liturgist may know that they have to be overlooked while praying Matins or Vespers? Do they stay along with clarifying rubrics that inform the reader that they should be skipped? Are some or all of them transposed to their exact liturgical place, upsetting the numerical order of the Psalter? If not all of them are transposed, which ones are and which ones are not? Is there any logic in this process?

A very special case is the opening part of Sunday Prime, the so-called *longa* or *magna prima* which continues the psalmody of the Sunday Matins in a numerical order (21–25) and links it to Monday Matins. Since it follows Sunday Matins, it is in the right place, and so there would be no need for any transposition. However, this first part of the Prime is actually inseparable from the next, everyday part of it which is determined by the position of Psalm 118, as are all the Lesser Hours. How do editors manage this split within the numerical order itself, the tension between the attraction of Sunday Matins and the everyday Lesser Hours? Do they insert the whole Prime after Sunday Matins? Do they transpose the related psalms to the Lesser Hours, wherever they are? Or do they divide Sunday Prime into a first and a next part, separated by the robust block of weekday Matins?

The next question concerns the Lesser Hours themselves. As it has been explained above, beyond the Prime their psalm-material is provided exclusively by the eleven divisions of Psalm 118 (preceded by the introductory Psalm 53 in order to result in the well divisible number twelve). These are the so-called major divisions of western secular sources, each consisting of sixteen verses, in contrast to the original minor divisions which are twenty two in number, and consist of eight abecedarian verses, used by the Hebrew Bible and western monastic sources. Be that as it may, Lesser Hours tend to be placed where Psalm 118 comes in the numerical order, but this means the formation of a large foreign body inside Monday Vespers, otherwise the shortest one of the entire week, shorter than the very series of the Lesser Hours. Do the Lesser Hours really feature within Monday Vespers, between Psalms 116 and 119? If not, where are they inserted into the cycle of psalms and Office Hours? One typical arrangement can be their placement after Sunday Matins, influenced by Sunday Prime and “a rule of first occurrences”, i.e. that repeated liturgical items tend to

be written out in full where they occur at the first time. Another possibility is to give them between the block of Matins and that of Vespers, given that in the order of the Office Hours they are recited between sunrise and sunset. Is there any alternative position besides these three?

The way to handle Compline is even more complex. It borrows psalms from different parts of the Psalter (4, 90, 133), and in the second place, it repeats the first six verses of Psalm 30, sung in its entirety at Monday Matins. Therefore, Compline is the most latent element of the Office; indeed, it is sometimes difficult to find it in the Psalter. Probable positions are after Sunday Vespers, according to the rule of first occurrences, or after the whole block of Vespers, at the end of the Psalter, according to the daily series of Office Hours (Matins, Lesser Hours, Vespers, Compline). Anyhow, there are sources that separate it from the Psalter and place it somewhere in the Temporal part, especially in Uses where Compline is equipped with variable items; in technical terms it is more “properised”. It would be interesting to analyse how medieval editors solved this problem and why they did so.

Structurally, Lauds is the most heterogeneous Hour of the Office. It combines an arrangement which is also known from Vespers with a thematic choice of psalms, known from the Lesser Hours and Compline; but in contrast to the latter, Lauds have partly different psalms for each day. They fit neither the numerical order, nor can they be placed according to the rule of first occurrences or among the large blocks of the times of the day. As for medieval service book redaction, Lauds posed an almost unsolvable problem since without the repetition of some items they could not be presented comfortably from a user’s point of view, but repetition was something that medieval scribes endeavoured to avoid. Different as they are, Matins and Lauds were treated as one, as a single Office Hour so that the changing items of Lauds always followed the previous Matins. The question is whether the repeated psalms (50, 62, 66, 148, 149, 150) are given in the numerical order, at their first occurrences (on Sunday and Monday, respectively), or anywhere else. In addition to this, one may find also the changing psalms (92, 99, 117, 5, 42, 64, 89, 142, 91) in the numerical order or within the related Lauds.

A further question emerges in connection with the seven canticles of the Old Testament that are recited as the fourth “psalm” of each Lauds. Not being psalms in the strict sense but perfectly suitable to the formal criteria of psalm recitation, they can stand both in the respective Lauds and in a separate group together with the three canticles of the New Testament (sung before the conclusions of Lauds, Vespers and Compline) usually at the end of the Psalter. The Sunday canticle *Benedicite* is sometimes lifted from this group because of its manifold use within and beyond the Office. Canticles have much in common with two chants that are not biblical but used to feature in the same series at the end of some Psalters: the *Te Deum*, sung after Sunday Matins except during penitential seasons, and the *Quicumque* (Athanasian Creed), a quasi-canticle after the psalmody of Sunday Prime. Both may be placed where they are really performed but their more common position is among the canti-

cles. Practical needs explain why the psalm set of Sunday Matins that is recited on feast days alike, can complete this series of canticles.

Most of the Office books did not contain a distinct chapter for an Ordinary before the promulgation of St Pius X's reform Breviary. The items and ceremonies that belong to this category are the beginning and the conclusion of the Hours, the blessings of the reader before lessons, the various series of *preces*, the *officium capituli* (rite of the chapter) after Prime, the votive commemorations, the Marian antiphons, the gradual and penitential psalms. All these are difficult to locate even in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Breviaries. Theoretically, they formed parts of the Psalter insofar as the Psalter was something like an extended Ordinary, but due to their more or less frequent use (e.g. blessings before lessons were necessary for each Matins, while the *preces* in many Uses were only used on Lenten weekdays), they might feature independently on the first or last pages of the book, at its fundamental divisions (e.g. between the Psalter and the Temporal), or in the Temporal according to the rule of first occurrences, especially on the first Sunday of Advent, Ash Wednesday etc. Elements of the Office Ordinary are sometimes followed by material that does not pertain to the substance of the Office: litanies, devotional prayers, formulas for confession, monastic meal, etc. In this context, the Psalter meant a basic booklet that clerics always had at hand. On its flyleaves one could find the most important texts, and in the course of transmission they became gradually incorporated into the body of the book. These phenomena are important not only because the documentation of medieval Office Ordinaries is rather scarce, but equally from an editorial point of view.

In addition to short appendices, other items were often attached to Psalters. In each Use, there were also more extensive parts that were traditionally combined with the Psalter, perhaps because an average volume could include somewhat more than the 150 psalms with their basic accessories. Such annexes could be: hymns for the whole liturgical year, regarded by some traditions as a corpus of lower prestige (similarly to the separate Sequentials of Mass books), the Office of the Dead or the Hours of the Blessed Virgin (sometimes both). Occasionally a small extract from the Ritual might follow: in this case it is difficult to distinguish between the shorter, randomly added items and the deliberate linking of variable material.

Beyond the precisely itemised questions of composition, the practical and symbolic role of the Psalter should also be examined. It is obvious that medieval Psalters tended to be books of a relatively large format, elaborate decoration, careful script, and musical notation. Many of the owners of extant handwritten Psalters can be identified, they were usually high-ranking prelates. It seems that Psalters meant something similar within clerical society as Books of Hours within secular circles: a representative object of affluence and power, a status symbol. But how does one reconcile this statement with the fundamental role of this book type in the daily Office? Ideally, each member of the choir needed a Psalter, hence it should not have been a book of luxury but a most essential tool of recitation. For an appropriate answer, the role of orality must be taken into consideration. It is unlikely that each member of a large monastic convent or a cathedral chapter had his own book. Neither the surviving

book lists, nor the illustrations depicting monks or clerics in choir endorse such a hypothesis. Psalms were probably recited by heart by the majority of the participants, and only the assigned singers and some higher authorities had a book to follow in order to assure the correctness of the Office. Luxury normally means to possess something that is beyond functionality: to have a Psalter in a primarily oral environment meant exactly that.

At last, one has to compare sources of the same Use from different periods and institutions to see if compositional features are deeply rooted in individual traditions or they are haphazard decisions of single scribes or their patrons. Are there any trends of modernisation, i.e. a shift from a sternly biblical Psalter to the direction of a “user friendly” Psalter? Or are the local – in the case of religious orders, the institutional – patterns a more determining and durable factor than historical development? If the latter is true, as some of our previous case studies suggested, is it realised on a “micro-level”, i.e. for smaller groups of related sources below the entirety of a liturgical Use, or on an even larger scale: are regions and landscapes characterised by editorial customs?

As far as our present knowledge and expertise extends, these are the first questions to be answered by a more comprehensive sampling and a more detailed analysis. It is only after this that our treatise may cover the topic of the set and arrangement of liturgical items.

### **THE HARD STRUCTURE: CHOICE AND ORDER OF VARIABLE PARTS**

Comparable changing parts of the Psalter are especially informative because they form a pure, nearly unconscious level of the liturgy, untouched by arbitrary encroachments and historical fashions. The more privileged bodies of the Temporal and the Sanctoral have practically overshadowed the Psalter. Considering medieval calendars, one will find that in those times it was a rare prerogative to celebrate a simple weekday, thus the Psalter constituted a somewhat theoretical background of the actual liturgical life.

The arrangement of the psalms and canticles is the same everywhere in the secular Uses of the Roman Rite which means that what actually differs or can differ is the layer above the psalms and canticles: the repertory of antiphons, responsories, versicles, hymns on the one hand, and that of the lessons, chapters and orations on the other. It is significant that the corpus of chants and prayers should be treated independently. Short readings of the celebrant are closer to the latter category as they have an obvious hortative or benedictory character. This separation is supported by the fact that the books used in solemn worship sorted these genres into an Antiphonal and a Collectary, respectively. Although both were peculiar to the Use they belonged to, the concept of their composition could differ significantly. There are Uses with an austere archaic Antiphonal and a highly elaborate Collectary, and inversely:

defective, monotonous Collectaries can join with richly equipped Antiphonals. In the following, the two layers will be marked by their original book types, even if they are actually merged within a Psalter or Breviary.

As to the Antiphonal, the starting point is always a simple and ancient layer that textually comprises psalm-excerpts, while musically consists of short and typical, tone-like melodies. This applies pre-eminently to the antiphons and short responsories but equally to versicles and syllabic hymns. Historically, the series of the so-called “psalm-responsories” also belongs here, although, superseded later by proper chants, it has been transmitted not in the Psalter, but in the Temporal at the week after the octave of Epiphany. For this primordial layer we use the term “psalmic”. Its inherent logic is that each psalm has a series of related items. After being sung at Matins, the psalm is concluded by an antiphon which has been chosen from the psalm’s text, then after the psalmody comes a versicle, taken again from the text of one of the preceding psalms, and finally the responsories of the Nocturn recall the previous psalms anew.

It is a common feature of psalmic items that they make up a more or less abundant chrestomathy without rigid assignments: there are usually more items for one liturgical position than needed by a single Use. This is why the first and most primitive point where traditions may deviate is the choice of psalmic items to an exact position from a set of possibilities. Of course, the majority of psalmic items correspond everywhere in Europe but there are assignments where variability rises. One can conclude that the above-mentioned chrestomathy was not proportionate: some psalms were provided with plenty of items, others with only one. However, the first task for this phase of research is to highlight the notable positions and to assess the items, beginning with the antiphons, which used to fill them in. Repeated psalms necessitate a sensible treatment, as in this case their position does not always mean a specific point in a single day’s Office, but sometimes they are part of a weekly cycle of five to seven items whose order is rather irrelevant. This is especially suitable to the antiphons of the last psalm-group of Lauds (148, 149, 150), in a lesser degree to the invitatories (antiphons to the opening psalm of Matins, 94), and to the other unchanging psalms of Lauds (50, 62, 66).

Applying paraphrases or non-biblical texts is a second degree of individuation. A few of them occur already as an alternative of psalmic antiphons but the bulk of the material is linked to a circumscribed group of assignments. Even in this case, there is a difference between chrestomathy-like sets and sets of fixed assignments. Obviously, the former ones are older. These items accompany the most illustrious chants within the psalmody, the canticles taken from the Gospel (*Benedictus*, *Magnificat*, *Nunc dimittis*), the Old Testament canticle of Sunday Lauds, the *Benedicite*, and the Athanasian Creed (*Quicumque*). Some of them present an intermediary stage. They are longer and more particular than the psalmic antiphons but shorter and simpler than those of the Office Propers. It seems that there was a creative wave of producing such antiphons sometime in the prehistory of the Divine Office, but later than the consolidation of the psalmic layer. A large amount of Gospel-antiphons has been created

– all of them extracts or paraphrases from the canticle itself –, far more than a single Use can support. In the surviving sources some of them are quite wide-spread, others are curiosities. Both their choice and order differ from one Use to another, thus they are easily recognisable markers of liturgical traditions.

Antiphons to the *Benedicite* represent a somewhat different case. Apparently later compositions and limited to a smaller cluster of Uses, they have been composed to substitute an older item or to lend variety to it. The same can be said about the set of changing antiphons to the *Nunc dimittis* and the *Quicumque*. All of them are relatively rare and, therefore, highly characteristic of Uses and regions, their text is usually non-biblical and longer than that of the Gospel-antiphons, their melody is complex and new-fashioned, at least in medieval terms.

Stylistically, the antiphons for Sunday Lauds are a similar phenomenon but they are more modern in the sense that they were designed as a real series to fit well-defined liturgical positions. They are always five, always in the same order. Some Uses have preserved a more archaic state of affairs: Sunday Lauds is framed only by an *Alleluia* antiphon, except the proper antiphon of the *Benedicite*, and somewhere a further third antiphon for the concluding *Laudate* psalms. It means that the five-antiphon-series were innovations as compared to the original setting.

The latest layer is made up by lengthy metric or rhymed antiphons for Sunday Matins. These were also thought to be a series, as they always contain nine verses of the same structure, befitting the triple psalmody of the three Sunday Nocturns. Nevertheless, such series are far from being universally adopted, and their composers were moderate enough not to eliminate completely their older, psalmic equals.

At this point, a common solution has to be introduced into the discourse. Already in the Middle Ages, there was a tension between liturgical conservatism and desire for variety and novelties. As to the Psalter, the two were reconciled by splitting the ordinary time of the yearly cycle, i.e. the time when psalmic antiphons were effectively recited. The split resulted in a winter season that extended from the Sunday after the Octave of Epiphany to Septuagesima, and a summer season beginning with the First Ordinary Sunday after Whitsun (it could occur anywhere from Trinity Sunday to the Sunday after the Octave of Corpus Christi). Since the winter season was far shorter, and in case of an early Easter might be extremely brief or even non-existent, some Uses expanded it by adding a few weeks from the First Sunday of October or November to the beginning of Advent. It became something like an asylum for outdated liturgical elements; improvements were peculiar to the summer season while archaic, psalmic items rested in their “winter camp”. Not only the psalm-responsories and the psalmic antiphons of Sunday Matins followed this arrangement, but e.g. the Sunday invitatories or the hymns for the first Vespers (on Saturday) and the next Lauds varied in a similar fashion. In all these cases, it was typically the winter items that preserved the older, partly superseded material.

Traditionally, the choice of the antiphons for the Lesser Hours on Sundays was unstable. For weekdays there was an established set of very simple, psalmic items or archaic *Alleluia*-antiphons, but Sundays required something more dignified. In the

Temporal or in the Sanctoral, the Lesser Hours used to recycle four antiphons of the related Lauds, omitting the fourth antiphon, i.e. that of the *Benedicite*. However, it was only true when the textual and melodic heritage of the season or the feast did not provide superabundant antiphons. If it did, still unused solemn antiphons took the place after the psalmody of Prime, Tierce, and so on. According to this pattern, these Hours could be provided either with already existing items, e.g. from Trinity Sunday, or with special ones designed properly for ordinary Sundays.

Antiphons for psalms 21–25 within the long Sunday Prime represent another ambiguity. In many Uses, there is no antiphon at all. In certain places the first psalms were simply connected to the following psalmody under one and the same antiphon. Again, in a few cases a peculiar antiphon accompanies the first psalms or a set of psalmic antiphons – similarly to the weekday Matins – comes after each two psalms.

Although it is primarily the antiphons that characterise the Psalter of a given Use, both because of their amount and variability, other liturgical genres need to be examined, as well. As to the hymns, the most solid layer of the Roman rite is that of the hymns for the Lesser Hours. The series *Iam lucis orto sidere*, *Nunc Sancte nobis Spiritus*, *Rector potens verax Deus*, *Rerum Deus tenax vigor*, and *Te lucis ante terminum* is present almost everywhere, and it is extremely rare to find any alternative. Yet if there is any, it is usually to be found in Compline. The series of six hymns *de creatione* for Vespers, from Sunday to Saturday, which reflects the days of the world's creation and begins with *Lucis creator optime*, is likewise omnipresent.

A double choice characterises the hymns of Sunday Matins, Sunday Lauds, and Saturday Vespers, respectively. In all three cases two possibilities emerge, an older, longer, strictly Ambrosian variant for the winter season, and a relatively more recent, shorter one for the summer season. Contrary to Vespers, however, the hymns of the weekday Matins and Lauds do not form an inherent, homogenous series, although there is a wide-spread and well-established order for both sets. Interestingly, there exists a somewhat puritanical treatment, marked by the repetition of the shorter Sunday hymns on each following day of the week. Due to the aversion of the Old Roman discipline to non-biblical texts, hymns may also be completely omitted, but from the high Middle Ages only a few Uses consent to such a practice (and mostly when Matins is concerned).

Versicles for Matins are linked to the previous psalmody while other versicles are assigned to the respective Hours on a thematic basis. Their variability is scant, barely ever exceeding two possibilities, but even these variants may be markers of wider liturgical regions. A special kind of versicles, the *versiculus ante laudes* or *sacerdotalis* practically fell into oblivion in the modern era, as it is missing from the Use of the Roman Curia and has been transmitted only by some religious orders. It was almost omnipresent in medieval diocesan Uses, and although of later origin than the other versicles, represent a larger variety and might diverge from the pure psalmic texts.

Apart from the instances already described, there is only one point of the Psalter where structural differences can be detected within the Roman rite: the middle section of the Compline. In the first group, the chapter comes after the hymn, followed

(or not) by a short responsory; in the second group an analogy with Lauds and Vespers prevails, and the chapter precedes the hymn, accompanied by a short responsory. Like many other twofold distinctions, this also divides the liturgical world of Latin Europe into a south-western and a north-eastern hemisphere.

The last topic that should be examined is the euchological aspect of the Divine Office, i.e. the corpus of chapters and prayers recited by the celebrant. It seems that in its archaic state this layer was extremely limited: chapters were few, short and recurrent, and prayers were identical with the collect of the daily Mass, except those of the Hours of Prime and Compline which had their own unchanging orations. However, in a few Uses the traces of a “euchological upheaval” can be detected. Already in the ancient and prestigious sacramentaries we see a lengthy series of mostly bimem-beric, thematically very general orations without any liturgical assignation except for the very title: *orationes matutinales et vespertinales*. This basic set tended to be supplemented by longer and thematically more specified items which alluded to the cosmic dimensions of the day (night, dawn, noon, evening), together with their moral consequences or their role in the history of salvation, especially in the passion of Christ and the compassion of the Virgin Mary. All these could supplement or replace the monotonous recurrence of the collect on weekdays while on Sundays the latter remained untouched. Accordingly, Uses impressed by this euchological richness were ready to improve their assortment of chapters alike, assigning different ones to each Hour of each weekday.

### THE “SOFT STRUCTURE”: TOWARDS AN OFFICE ORDINARY

It is more difficult to reconstruct the invariable elements of a medieval Office Hour than its changing parts. While the latter were more or less carefully prescribed in the service books, the former were usually determined by local custom and entrusted to oral transmission. Furthermore, there was nothing like an *Ordinarium Officii Divini* until the reformed editions of the Roman Breviary in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This layer consists of texts and their tones or melodies which have to be recited daily in the same way at a certain point of a given hour, or at least daily in specific seasons of the liturgical year.

The least documented elements are the introductory and concluding verses. Until the present day, the central item of an Hour’s beginning was the invocation *Deus in adiutorium meum intende* and its response *Domine ad adiuvandam me festina*. However, it might have been preceded by many other prayers, obligatory or devotional. Such could be versicles like the *Domine labia mea aperies* which broke the so-called *profundum silentium* at the end of the night, the variable “sacerdotal” verse before Lauds, and the versicle *Convertere ad nos* before Compline. Even in the Roman practice of the modern era, each hour had to be prepared by the silent recitation of the Lord’s Prayer (*Pater noster*) and the Angelic Salutation (*Ave Maria*), followed also by

the Apostolic Creed (*Credo in Deum*) before Matins and Prime. Some prayers were designed as spiritual attunement to the whole Office, as was the *Aperi Domine*. Evidence survived that in certain monastic communities some psalms and orations were said either already during procession to the choir, or while waiting for the sign of the provost to signal the start of the Hour. This so-called *trina oratio* was comprised of groups of highlighted psalms (penitential or gradual), followed by Kyrie, the Our Father, versicles and intercessory orations for different intentions.

After the closing prayer, there came another scarcely documented series of prayers. Here the central element was the acclamation *Benedicamus Domino* with its response *Deo gratias*. Its melody varied according to the type of the Hour, the rank of the day, and the season of the year, and often served as a basis for tropes. The *Benedicamus* was usually introduced by *Dominus vobiscum* or – in the choirs of female religious – by *Domine exaudi*, and followed by short verses for the deceased or absent members (*Fidelium animae, Divinum auxilium*). These, however, or any of these could either be omitted or supplemented with other prayers of the same kind.

The whole Office might have been concluded by an oration with the intention of offering the series of Hours to God, and of attaining forgiveness for the negligence or failures during recitation. Special cases of these closing prayers were poems on the passion of Christ or the compassion of the Virgin Mary. They consisted of stanzas parallel with the single Hours of the Office. Their purpose was to recall to mind the respective events of the Good Friday narrative, and to offer the efforts of each present in relation to the suffering of Jesus and Mary.

As these devotional stanzas were accompanied by versicles and orations, they formally resembled the commemorations, memories, or suffrages (*commemoratio, memoria, suffragium*). Such prayers, usually including an antiphon, a versicle and an oration, came obligatorily after the main oration which concluded the proper parts of Lauds and Vespers. They varied seasonally and reflected the special devotions of a given community. In many Uses the opening commemoration was that of the Holy Trinity, and the last was invariably a prayer for peace. In between, universally venerated saints and general intentions were addressed: angels, All Saints, Sts Peter and Paul, the Holy Cross; only after these came mention of local patrons and intercessors. Commemorations about the Virgin Mary and the faithfully departed were not omnipresent, but only because both were honoured by an entire, although somewhat shortened duplication of each Hour (the *Officium Parvum* or the *Officium Defunctorum*).

During Lent, the seven penitential psalms had to be recited for the dead at the very end of each Hour, i.e. after the *Benedicamus* and its subsequent accessories. Each penitential psalm was assigned to one of the seven Hours, as Lauds was joined with Matins. The particular way these psalms were introduced or concluded, and whether they were said on their own or came together with orations, litanies, etc., was a matter of local custom.

Marian antiphons were not at all typical in the Middle Ages, contrary to the practice of the modern period when the four seasonal antiphons, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*,

*Ave Regina caelorum*, *Regina caeli*, and *Salve Regina* were (and still belong to) the most popular parts of the Divine Office. Even so, the phenomenon was already in existence. It was not urgent that such reverence be paid to the Blessed Virgin as it was ensured primarily by the *Officium Parvum*, already mentioned above. Marian antiphons resulted rather from an abundance of devotion, often in the context of a procession (upon leaving the choir) that led to one of her altars or the so-called Lady Chapel. Unlike the four “Roman” antiphons, only a few of them were used, and not in the same seasons and functions as seen in the custom of the Papal Curia and the Franciscans, later universally accepted by the Latin rite. A considerable amount of other, traditional antiphons might have augmented this set of items, but it is more intriguing that several newly composed antiphons improved the repertory. These chants were profusely emotional both textually and melodically, highly influenced by the Song of Solomon’s motifs and phrasing. A famous example of them is the Franciscan *Tota pulchra es*, but it is only one of the surviving representatives of a once celebrated genre.

There are only three types of texts that belong to the Ordinary but do not occur at the beginning or end of the Hours. The first is comprised of blessings and absolutions before lessons, the second includes the *preces* before the main oration of Lenten weekdays, and the third is represented by the chapter office (*officium capituli*), an appendix of Prime, which sometimes has shorter equivalents within Compline.

The blessings were usually short, simple, rhymed formulas. Before reciting the readings for Matins, but also before the short lessons of Prime and Compline, or before any other reading that was performed in the presence of the community (e.g. during collations or meals), the reader asked for a blessing with the verse *Iube domne benedicere*, and, having received the benediction, answered *Amen*. It was very heterogeneous to what extent the formulas differed from one day to another, or according to the yearly cycle. It was a widely accepted rule that the nine blessings designed for Sundays or feasts with three nocturnes should be applied three by three to weekdays, i.e. those of the first nocturn to Monday and Thursday, and so on. However, Uses which were supplied with a larger repertory of blessings tended to arrange them in a more elaborate way. The priest might have sung so-called absolutions, too. Absolutions were actually orations but belonged to the series of blessings. Their place was before the first blessing of each nocturn, or at least of the last nocturn.

*Preces* were associated with penitential days and seasons. Their most convenient use concerned Lenten weekdays, but Ember Days, vigils or simple ferias could be involved alike. They started with a triple *Kyrie* formula, continued with the *Pater noster*, and after the Lord’s Prayer’s last audibly recited verses (*Et ne nos inducas in tentationem – Sed libera nos a malo*) came the actual, variable series of verses and their responses. The majority of the verses was taken from the psalms but other, mostly intercessory verses were added, too. Typically, there were three sets of *preces*: one long for Lauds and two shorter for Prime and Compline respectively. The one for Lauds (*preces maiores*) was repeated in all the other Hours. At the end of the *preces*, selected psalms and a confession may have followed. The last verses were identical with the

versicles which otherwise introduced the main oration or collect, *Domine exaudi* and *Dominus vobiscum*, thus the *preces* featured as a penitential insertion between the body of the Hour's propers and its concluding prayer. Though the introductory part and the frame of the genre seem rather constant, when and how these *preces* were said, or the selection and arrangement of their parts are distinctive to individual Uses.

The Chapter Office (*officium capituli*) was originally a liturgically arranged assembly of monks or canons in the morning which tended to be, and soon in fact became, an integral part of Prime. Similarly to the order of celebrating synods, the daily conference had to be prepared by the invocation of God and His saints, by commemorations which reminded the participants of their duties and strengthened the community's identity, followed by instructions and blessings so that they can conduct their day in an appropriate manner. The Chapter Office was organised by four modules: the recitation of the martyrology, i.e. a list of the saints venerated on the following day; the necrology, i.e. a commemoration of those members of the convent who had passed away on that day; the prayers for a just conduct of life before and after the conference; and the collation, i.e. the reading of the rule or other edifying spiritual literature after which the chapter was dismissed. The order of these modules and the texts that accompanied them were different from one Use to another, and so was the survival, transformation, or fall of the rite itself.