

(10) Right now I must relate something the men of our time will actually find hard to believe, for I who write these words would barely believe it, on account of the immense difference in singing between the Romans and ourselves, except that the truth of the fathers is more credible than the falsity occasioned by the laziness of modern times.¹⁹ Therefore Charles, that indefatigable lover of divine service, although he was grateful that he had achieved as much as he could in the knowledge of letters, was nevertheless sad that all the provinces, regions, and cities differed from one another in divine praises, that is, in the strict measures of their singing. So he asked Pope Stephen III of blessed memory, the very one who deposed and cut the hair of that most inactive king of the Franks, Childeric [III], and who had anointed him to the governance of the realm according to the ancient custom of his people, to send some clerics who were particularly accomplished in divine song.²⁰ The pope readily assented to his divinely inspired good wish and zeal, and he sent to him in Francia from the apostolic see twelve clerics, according to the number of the apostles, who were deeply knowledgeable about singing. Now then, what I have named Francia is all the cisalpine provinces, for, as it is written, “in those days ten men from all the tongues of the gentiles shall take hold of the fringes of a Jewish man,” so in those days, on account of the excellence of the most glorious Charles, the Gauls and Aquitainians, the Aeduans²¹ and the Spanish, the Alemans and the Bavarians, rejoiced at being so favored that they deserved to be called by the name “servants of the Franks.”²² When the above-mentioned clerics were setting out from Rome, they were overcome by envy of the glory of the Franks, as all Greeks and Romans always are, and they plotted among themselves how they might so vary their instruction in song that unity and agreement would bring no rejoicing in his kingdom and province. When they reached Charles, they were received honorably and dispatched to highly distinguished places. Each one in his own place was able to contrive as corruptly as possible, and they strove to sing and to teach others in many different ways. When the most perceptive Charles was celebrating the feasts of

16. Translators have usually supplied Alcuin's name here, but only two manuscripts give it; the rest have no name, making the sentence appear to relate to Charles himself. This reading, however, makes what follows difficult to understand.

17. This must mean Grimald, abbot of St. Gall (841–72), even though some manuscripts give Gallus, the famous seventh-century monk after whom the monastery is named. It is unlikely that Grimald was a pupil of Alcuin. Notker is thinking rather liberally of the “school” of Alcuin. It is possible that this Grimald was the third of Notker's informants.

18. An important monastery in northwestern Italy founded in 612 by Columbanus, an Irish monk who, after coming to the Continent, argued with Merovingian rulers, promoted church reform, and founded monasteries.

19. Compare Einhard's prologue on the ancients and the moderns.

20. The account given here is severely confused. In July 754 at St.-Denis, Pope Stephen II (752–57) anointed Pippin III, Charles's father, and likewise anointed Pippin's sons Charles and Carloman. The pope also forbade the Franks ever to choose a king from another family. This was not an ancient custom of the Franks, although Pippin had been made king in 751 perhaps with the approval of Pope Zachary (741–52) and certainly on the election of the Franks. Pippin's was the first royal anointing among the Franks. Pippin did indeed request Roman chant masters, from Pope Paul I (757–67). There does not seem to be any reason to connect this story with Pope Stephen III (768–72), who was indeed reigning when Charles became king in 768. Charles himself sought chant masters from Rome in the 780s. When Zachary died in 751, a man was elected pope, took the name Stephen, and immediately died. A new election produced the Stephen II who is the subject here. Right down to modern times there has sometimes been confusion about the numbering of the Stephens. Usually, the momentary pope in 751 is not counted; when he is, each subsequent Stephen is, as it were, one number higher. It is difficult to say how Notker was enumerating his Stephens.

21. The Aeduans were Celtic inhabitants of central Gaul. It is not clear why Notker used contemporary names for everyone but them.

22. The biblical quotation is from Zechariah 8:23. Notker makes a hash of it. Compare: “In those days, wherein ten men of all the languages of the Gentiles shall take hold and shall hold fast the skirt of one that is a Jew [saying: We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you].” The point is ideological, of course. Notker's *fibriam* I have translated as “fringes,” from the fringes, or tassels, that Deuteronomy 22:12 required all Jewish men to affix to the edges of their outer garments. Modern biblical translations use “garment,” “sleeve,” and “skirt.”

Christmas and Epiphany²³ at Trier and Metz, he most vigilantly, indeed acutely, paid attention to, or rather reflected deeply on, the force of the singing. In the next year he passed these same solemnities at Paris and Tours, and he heard nothing that sounded like what he had listened to so intently the year before in the above-mentioned places, and as time went by, he discovered that those whom he had sent to other places also differed from each other. He brought the matter to the attention of Pope Leo of holy memory, Stephen's successor.²⁴ Leo called them back to Rome, condemned them to exile or perpetual imprisonment, and said to Charles, "If I send you others, they will be blinded by envy like the earlier ones, and they will not neglect to deceive you. But I shall take care to satisfy your zeal in this fashion: give me two exceptionally discreet clerics who will not tip off the people around me to the fact that they belong to you, and they will attain, God willing, a perfect knowledge in respect of that learning you have requested." Behold, after a little while, he sent them back to Charles superbly instructed. Charles kept one with himself and on the request of his son Drogo, the bishop of Metz, sent the other to that very church.²⁵ Not only did his hard work accomplish much in that city, but it began to have an impact through all of Francia, such that right down to our own days, among those who use the Latin language, ecclesiastical singing is called "of Metz," whereas, among us who speak the Teutonic, or German, language, it is called *mettisca*, either from the vernacular *met* or *mette*, or by using a word derived from Greek.²⁶

23. December 25 and January 6.

24. Leo III (795–816).

25. Drogo (801–855) was an illegitimate son of Charles, but he did not become bishop of Metz until 823, nine years after Charles died. His birth is mentioned in Einhard, c. 15. Metz did indeed become a major school of musical studies, and this story is a garbled account of that school's beginning.

26. Readers familiar with earlier translations would expect here several lines on the second chant master, Peter, who was allegedly sent to St. Gall to institute a school of musical studies. That passage is a later interpolation.

27. Vespers followed the ninth hour of the day; thus the Lenten fast would normally have extended well into the evening.