

<http://notker-balbulus.leperlily.org>

Notker Balbulus
The Hymnbook

Introduction
[N.02]

When I was still a young monk and the very long melodies, as often as they were committed to memory, would escape my unstable little mind, I began quietly to consider to myself how I might tie them down.

Meanwhile, however, it happened that a certain priest from Jumièges, which had recently been laid waste by the Vikings, came to us, bearing with him his antiphony. There were in this some verses set to sequences, but even then damaged excessively. I was as delighted by the sight of these as I was disgusted by their taste. However, I began to write in their imitation: *Laudes deo concinat orbis universus, qui gratis est redemptus*, and then: *Coluber Adae deceptor*. When I had brought these to my master Iso, he congratulated me on my enthusiasm and shewed sympathy for my inexperience, he praised what pleased him, what he liked less he took care to correct, saying: The individual notes of the melody must have individual syllables. When I heard this, I corrected those which fell on *ia* easily: but those on *le* or *lu* I failed even to attempt, as it seemed impossible, although I later learned how to do it with ease, as, for example, “*Dominus in Syra*” and “*Mater*”. On receipt of this advice I soon composed in this new fashion: *Psallat ecclesia mater illibata*.

When I presented these little verses to my master Marcellus, he was filled with joy and copied them on scrolls; he gave different boys different verses to sing. However, when he told me that I should compile them into a little book and present it as gift to one of my superiors, I held back out of modesty and could in no way be persuaded.

However, when I was asked recently by my friend Otharius to set myself to write something in your honour, and I judged myself not without reason to be unequal to the task, at last, reluctantly and by slow degrees, I took heart that I should presume to dedicate this smallest and least of little books to Your Highness. If I discover that it has so far pleased Your Piety that you might be of assistance to my brother before the Lord Emperor, I will make haste to send you the verse life of Saint Gallus that I am completing slowly but surely, although I had promised it earlier to my brother Salomon, to peruse, possess and expound.

Richard L. Hewitt
Notker's Hymnbook in Three Languages

Kamuzu Academy, Malawi
2020 – 2022

<http://notker-balbulus.leperlily.org>
