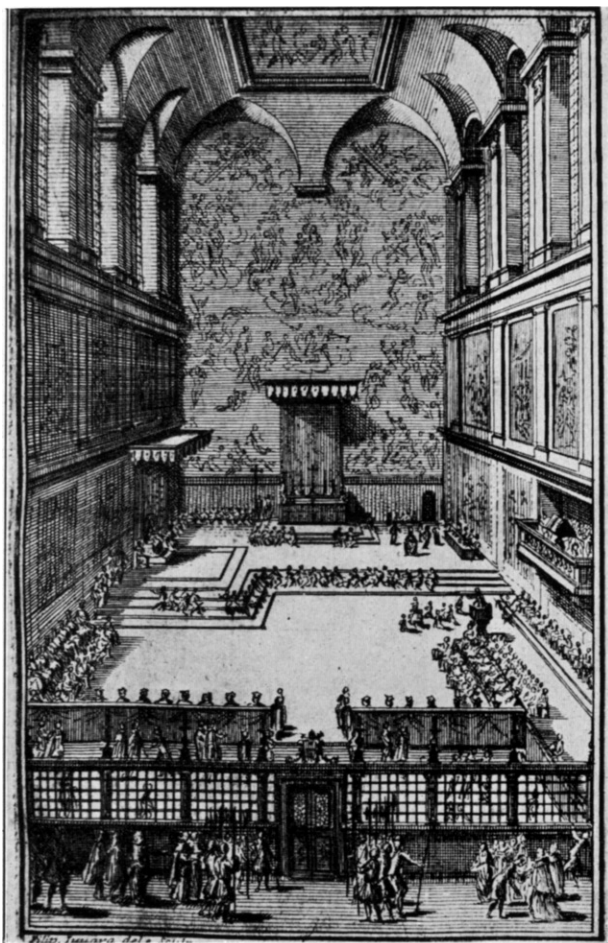


MISERERE MEI, DEUS

GREGORIO ALLEGRI

A Quest for the Holy Grail?

BEN BYRAM-WIGFIELD



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Designed and typeset by
Ben Byram-Wigfield

A performing edition is produced as a companion to
this essay, as the result of the research.

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SE D E N T E
C L E M E N T E XII
P. O. M.

Sub protectione Em̄i, & R̄m̄i D. Petri
CARD. OTTHOBONI
S. R. E. ViceCancellarii
Episcopi Tusculanensis

R. Dño Anfano Bernini
Magistro Cappellæ Pontificiæ
pro tempore existente

Jo: Dominicus de Biondinis^{us} Tusculanus Scribebat

ANNO DOMINI
MDCCXXXI.



Ben Byram-Wigfield was born in Herefordshire in 1970, and first discovered Allegri's *Miserere mei* as a chorister at King's College, Cambridge, where he sang the top C of this famous work. After leaving the King's School, Worcester, he became a choral scholar at St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh whilst studying for a B.Sc. from Heriot Watt University. He subsequently sang as a lay clerk at Gloucester Cathedral, and has since produced many editions of early church music.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and the British Museum for making the manuscripts available; also Philip Colls and Dr. Simon Anderson for their academic insight and help.

Figures:

1. Engraving of the Sistine Chapel by Filippo Juvara, 1711
2. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS 185, f 1
3. Engraved portrait of Gregorio Allegri, 18th c (Anon.)

Introduction

GREGORIO Allegri (1582 - 1652) was a singer in the Papal Chapel from 6th December 1629, until his death on 17th February 1652. He is almost exclusively known for his falsobordone setting of Psalm 51 (Vulgate Psalm 50), the *Miserere mei*, despite numerous other compositions. Most will know this choral work for its haunting top C, sung by a lone voice, and the sweeping harmony of the larger choir, separated by simple plainchant. But Allegri's original is far removed from this received version, so what has happened over the years to transform the work?

History beguiles us with tales of secret ornamentation —the so-called *abbellimenti*— never written down, but simply passed from performer to performer. Many have expounded on the piece's beauty and uniqueness, and legend tells that unauthorised copying of the work was an excommunicable offence. It was *de rigueur* for those on the Grand Tour in the 18th century to hear the work during Holy Week. Mozart is supposed to have copied the work after hearing it performed. However, no copy survives by his hand.

Although rumours of the work's inauthenticity are becoming more common, very few people have heard the work performed differently, and even fewer will be so bold as to suggest exactly what a replacement should be. That having been said, many people will prefer the 'top C' version, and not care whether it is authentic or not.

My intention is to look firstly at the manuscript sources for this work in both the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and the British Library, see how the piece has been written throughout its history, and then draw conclusions from the music. Finally, an authentic edition is produced, to show in modern notation how the work would have been sung. In telling the history of this piece of music, I hope to remove the shroud that has cloaked the work since its inception, and let only the truth remain.

BEN BYRAM-WIGFIELD

The Manuscripts

VATICAN MSS 205 & 206 (SEE APPENDICES I & 2)

The idea of setting this particular text as a *falsobordone*, alternating two choirs of five and four voices between verses of plainsong was coined by Constanzo Festa, (c. 1490 - 1545) in 1514. Subsequently, the format was attempted by Palestrina, Anerio, Nanino, Guerrero and others, before Allegri composed his version. These companion volumes are a compilation of twelve such settings, and are dated by a mention of the reigning pontiff, Alexander VII, (1655 - 1667). Ms 205 gives the year more precisely as 1661, nine years after Allegri's death. Alfieri (*see below*) gives a date for the composition of 1638. Ms 205 contains verses 1, 5, 9, 13 and 17 of each different setting, with MS 206 containing verses 3, 7, 11, 15, and 19. The last verse, 20, is contained in both, as all nine voices sing together in this verse.

The work is a *falsobordone*, alternating between a five part and four part choir, each separated by plainsong. The original part requirement, taken from the clefs is SATTB and SSAB, and would be performed one voice to each part. The clefs give no indication of transposition, and the work is essentially homophonic, with some rhythmic interest. The first chord of each verse is speech rhythm, sung to as many words as necessary. The first 5vv choir contains a number of suspensions which lead towards the final cadence, as does the second 4vv choir, whose other main feature is the striking 4th chord, with a diminished 5th between the upper parts, eventually resolving into D Major. The second choir contains no top C, but merely a slow descent from a treble E flat to the final cadence. The last verse has all nine voices singing together. The work has always been associated with Holy Week, as Psalm 51 features in the Liturgy for Lauds on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, commonly called *Tenebrae* —darkness— from Luke's Gospel, 23:44: 'and there was a darkness over all the earth'.

VATICAN MS 185 (SEE APPENDIX 5)

Almost one hundred years after the conception of Allegri's original, this manuscript appears in a volume dated 1731, scribed by Johannes Dominic de Biondini. Three other people are also mentioned; Clement XII, Pope from 1730 to 1740; Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni (1667-1740), the well-known patron of musicians; and Ansano Bernini, Master of the Papal Chapel.

The work is clearly marked with Allegri's name on the first page of music, yet there are a number of differences. The first tenor part has become another treble part, and some of the bass notes are changed to provide a more effective harmony. There is also more movement in the harmony, and some ornamentation, including a curious C# at one point. It is here that the marvellous chord of C minor with a minor 7th and 9th is introduced, before the cascade of treble thirds. This matches Allegri's own discordant moment in the second choir. The work also takes on a much more polyphonic character, but the speech rhythm is retained. Allegri's original part requirement returns for the last verse. The style of print is relatively archaic, and the music is written out in parts. Curiously, no parts exist for the second choir. Biondini was also to write MSS 340 & 341 in 1748. These contain the 4vv and 5vv choirs, respectively, of both Bai's and Allegri's settings.

CHARLES BURNEY (1726 - 1814)

La musica che si canta annualmente nelle Funzioni della Settimana Santa nella Cappella Pontificale. 1771 (SEE APPENDICES 3 & 4)

This printed book is important, as it shows a variation from any of the MSS. The first choir is a further reworking of MS 185, 40 years later, with the harmony slightly more complex than before. However, the second choir is simpler than Allegri's original, and does not include the *abbellimenti*. The legend *Si Canto il Mercoledì e Venerdì Santo Miserere del Signor Gregorio Allegri* is visible on the first page of music, showing that it was sung on Wednesday and Friday of Holy Week.

Each verse of each choir is harmonically identical, whereas MS 185 has a number of differences between verses. An attempt to notate the speech rhythm is made only in the first verse of each choir; after that, subsequent verses give the indication *Canto Fermo* above the speech rhythm. The second choir is even more bare than Allegri's original, omitting some suspensions and the striking 4th chord. In the last verse we find the instruction *Questo ultimo verso si canta Adagio e Piano, smorzando a poco a poco l'Armonia*.

The book also contains Bai's setting of the same text, sung on Maundy Thursday, which is remarkably similar to other eighteenth century sources, as well as Palestrina's *Stabat Mater*, *Improperia* (Reproaches) and *Fratres ego*, which were sung as a psalm in Mass, at the Adoration of the Cross, and on Tuesday of Holy Week respectively.

BRITISH LIBRARY MS 31395

Bought by me at Rome in the Corso, 1841. Frederick Blaydes, Ch. Ch. Oxon.

This copy is all but identical to Vatican MSS 185 and 206, but scored and collated. The only difference is that the speech rhythm has been written out in a very deliberate style in all but a few verses. Interestingly enough, the speech rhythm here is consistent with that present elsewhere. Allegri's authorship is clearly stated.

BRITISH LIBRARY MS 24291

Musica Clasica [sic] by several Maestri della Cappella Vaticana, copied by or for Giovanni Jubilli.

This scored MS starts off as before, with the first verse a copy of Vatican MS 185, and the 4vv choir is in keeping with Allegri's original. However, the copy is not complete: he allows one more first choir verse, and then a quite different second choir verse before the last 9 part verse. This 4vv verse is verse eleven of Tommaso Bai's setting of the *Miserere*. An organ part is written out for each verse, being a simple *reductio partiturae*.

BRITISH LIBRARY MS 2468

The structure of this Miserere is the same as that of Allegri's, being in the same key & with a similar modulation, although not so much filled internally, and is probably the incorrect copy mentioned by Hawkins, vol. 4 p. 90. See the original by Burney.

The above remark is contained in the British Library catalogue. Indeed, it is unquestionably a similar work to Allegri's, but rather than being a wrong copy, I would suggest that it is a deliberate translation for the needs of a less resourceful choir. The piece is now four-part throughout, being scored SATB in every verse. The music has also reverted to a more chordal nature. The reference to Hawkins is to *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, published in 1776 by Sir John Hawkins (1719 - 1789). In it, he mentions that most copies of the Allegri are incorrect, but I take this to mean that they lack the *abbellimenti*.

BRITISH LIBRARY MS 2470

Collection of Compositions written for the church of Rome in the same hand.

This MS is a 19th century copy belonging to Rev. Edward Goddard, believed

to be in the hand of Santini. Surprisingly for so late a copy, it is identical, save for a slight change in underlay to the Vatican mss 185 and 206, scored and collated. It is significant that this version should still be punted about in the 19th century, at a time when the more contrived *abbellimenti* were all the rage. (See *Other Sources*.)

BRITISH LIBRARY MS 31525 (SEE APPENDIX 6)

This scored source is listed as an 18th century ms of Bai's setting, copied by Benedetto Morganti, brought back from Rome by Joseph Warren, although the catalogue notes that it is different from Bai's setting as reported by Burney. A swift glance shows it to be infinitely more than that. It is clearly not Bai's setting, but Allegri's. The music resembles mss 185 and 206 as all other 18th century sources have done. However, both choirs are highly ornamented with trills, runs, and other adornments, and there are also some extreme dynamic indications. In the first choir, they elaborate on the movement already present in MS 185, and in the second choir, they run amongst the held notes in the two treble parts, each taking his trill in turn.

The ornaments, are clear in their effect and intention, if a little uncertain in their notation. However, the first half of this choir clearly mirrors the top C version, which is taken from Alfieri's 1840 notation (*see below*). The *slentando* indication in this first half is matched in Alfieri by an elongation of the lower parts to accommodate the first treble's run, which include a C# in both, echoing the similar ornament in the first choir. Each verse of each choir displays identical ornaments. However, the last verse is totally unadorned, and is identical to Allegri's original.

On the next folio, a second version follows which is a similar version of the same thing. The ornaments are very similar, and in all the same places, with a few slight variations, but the final verse has been adapted, with only one tenor part. This version is worse calligraphically but clearer musically.

PIETRO ALFIERI (1801 - 1863)

In 1840, Alessandro Geminiani, a *nom de plume* for Pietro Alfieri, published *Il Salmo Miserere posto in musica da Gregorio Allegri e da Tommaso Bai, Publicato cogli Abbellimenti per la prima volta*. A priest in Rome, he taught Gregorian chant and consistently tried to save the musical heritage of the Vatican from modern influences. His failure at this task, in his eyes, and the

Church's refusal to publish his plainsong books, made him lose his mind towards the end of his life. However, this volume should be thought of as a successful attempt to save the past. A lengthy introduction announces that these works are two of the most beautiful sacred compositions ever written, and as such, should be made public, especially because of 'inexact copies... without explanations'. Alfieri believes himself to be 'doing a kindness to lovers of sacred music'.

He further informs the reader that the works are presented unadorned, with the *abbellimenti* in appendices, marked A, B, C, D & E, each letter being placed in the score at the relevant points. Breves at the starts of verses should not be taken literally, but sung to the nature of the words, and he also tells us that the Papal Choir 'convert G into B diapason'. I take this to mean that the works are transposed up a third, supported by Mendelssohn's transcription of 1831, which suggests that they sang it up a fourth. In recent years, he confides, they have sung mixtures of both works, as follows. For both works, Bai's first verse was followed by Allegri's *Amplius* (verse 3). The other verses were sung as intended in each, although Bai's 8-part *tunc impo- nent* (the last verse) follows that of Allegri's in Allegri's version. This mixing of the two works must be the cause of the confusion between them.

Allegri's version is presented straightforwardly, and is, again, as in Vatican MSS 185 and 206. The first choir is not ornamented at all, and the second choir ornaments contains similar elements to those found in MS 31525. Appendices A & B give the ornaments for the first and second half of each verse in Allegri's version respectively, whilst all the appendices feature in Bai's version. A, C & D are all similar renditions for the first half; B & E are similar endings for the second half of both settings. All the ornaments are essentially similar, and all follow those in MS 31525.

JULIUS AMANN

Julius Amann's commendable study, *Allegri's Miserere und die Aufführungspraxis in der Sixtina*, (1935) is a detailed record of all sources of Allegri's *Miserere*, variations in ornamentation and notation of speech rhythm. Despite this record, he only produced one edition of the work, a rendering of Allegri's original composition without ornamentation from MSS 205 & 206, with note values halved. The book gives a German source for its record of the ornamentation, which is almost identical to that found in MS 31525.

THE 'TOP C' VERSION

The received version, as it is widely held today, is a mix of Burney's first choir with a bizarre second choir, congealed into life in the first edition of Grove's *Dictionary of Music & Musicians* in 1880. As an illustrated example, W.S. Rockstro showed the first half of the four-part verse as indicated by Alfieri, but then sticks Mendelssohn's 1831 record of the first half —up a fourth— on the second half of the verse. Ivor Atkins, for his edition of 1951, took Burney's first choir and final verse, adding this second choir from Grove's. The problem is that the Mendelssohn *abbellimenti* is also a record of the first half, apparently sung a fourth higher than written at the time of his visit. It is this that causes musicologists to squirm with the bass jumping from an F# up to a C, followed by the swift gear change into C minor. This error has been repeated in two subsequent editions, produced by respected academics.

The result is strangely beautiful, and probably here to stay. It is, after all, one of the most popular pieces of sacred music. However, it is neither a representation of the performance practice of the Sistine Chapel choir, nor a true reflection of how the piece was ever sung there.

OTHER SOURCES

There are a great many manuscripts of the *Miserere* in libraries across Europe; perhaps that is half the problem. The Vatican, however, is the place to which we should draw our attention. Ms 263, is an autograph collection of compositions by Johannes Biordi (1691 - 1748), Master of the Papal Chapel from 1737 until 1742, which also includes Allegri's *Miserere* for 5 voices, before his own setting of the text, which has two choirs of 4 voices before a final 8 voice last verse. The second choir is found in MS 354, a book of Masses, Motets, Hymns and Psalms of 1705.

There are a number of Italian sources, which stem from outside the Vatican, dating from c. 1820 onwards that are completely removed from anything inside the Vatican, and owe more to contemporary influences. Whilst ranging in style, from the modest to the hugely operatic, they all claim to contain the famous *abbellimenti*. However, these versions are so elaborate as to render them bastard sons, with no claim to their father's title. Some are orchestrated, some contain many more parts, and nearly all have a musical language that can only belong to the 19th century. The decline of the Papal Choir during

the 19th century casts further doubt on such sources, particularly whilst earlier, more truthful sources abound.

PLAINSONG

Whilst the Vatican sources make no reference to the plainsong verses, all of the British Library MSS indicate the plainsong only by the first few words of each verse, without any clue as to the chant. Ms 31525 states *Il Populo risponde altro verso*, whilst other MSS variously mention that they are to be sung *sotto voce*, and also *in coro*, which might even suggest a separate body responsible for the plainsong verses.

The music is based on the *tonus peregrinus*, or wandering tone, and so would have originally alternated between this chant and the harmony. However, over the span of time through which this piece was performed, a great many chants will have been used, including those now found in the *liber usualis*. The appropriate Tones for Psalm 50 in the Liturgy for Lauds on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday are VIII 1 and VII 2, respectively, and the latter has been used in many modern editions. It is also thought that in the nineteenth century, the plainchant was simply recited on a single note.

TOMMASO BAI (1650 - 1718)

Vatican MS 203 contains Tommaso Bai's setting, written shortly after its composition, and was copied by Thomas Altavilla in 1713, who cites Hieronimo Bigello as Master of the Papal Chapel at that time. Bai's setting of the same text is based upon Allegri's, being harmonically similar in its structure. However, there is more variation and harmonic elaboration, with each verse showing differences. The piece is written for the same voices as Allegri's original, SATTB & SSAB, but is more modern than Allegri's slightly archaic setting. Most of the speech rhythm has been written out in full, and the work takes a more chordal nature with underlying polyphonic movement. The notation of the speech rhythm is consistent with that used in later versions of Allegri's. The last verse becomes an antiphonal double choir of SSAATTBB, but again holds Allegri's original structure within it. This setting was doubtless designed by Bai to use the same *abbellimenti* found in Allegri's version, and in time, the two pieces were merged together, as Alfieri notes.

Other works by Allegri, such as his *Lamentations*, are occasionally misattributed to Bai.

It is also worth mentioning that Bai's first verse is different still from the 18th century 're-writing' of Allegri's five-part choir.

19TH CENTURY AND BEYOND

The latest Vatican source is MS 375, dated 1892, and was written by the last full-time Master of the Papal Chapel, Dominico Mustafa. The catalogue describes it as *Bai et Allegri Psalmus 50; ff 1 - 10v*, and indeed, it does appear to be a hybrid of the two, with occasional second choir verses taken from Allegri. The setting is ornamented, and Mustafa urges the Pope not to let anyone outside the Cappella Sistina Choir view the work.

I suspect the reason for the mixing of the two works is as follows: most of Bai's four-part verses contain the *abbellimenti*, except the first one, *Amplius lava me*; so it makes sense for Allegri's setting of that verse to be transplanted. Similarly Bai's setting does not contain music for the first half of the last verse, *Tunc acceptabis sacrificium iustitiae, oblationes et holocausta*. Because Allegri does set music to this line, Allegri's setting of that text finds its way into Bai's version.

This version is, in essence, the 1731 five-part choir, followed by Allegri's original four-part choir, with the *abbellimenti*. However, the whole work is itself ornamented, somewhat gilding the lily, with late baroque and romantic turns, trills and other effects, often occurring simultaneously in different parts, which practice runs contrary to the spirit of each voice taking its turn.

Mustafa had composed his own six-part setting of the *Miserere*, and as a castrato had sung the *Miserere* himself. As "director in perpetuity" of the Cappella Musicale, he conducted its performance with 'the last castrato' Alessandro Moreschi (1858 - 1922), whose voice could cope with the rigours of the work. The work was now performed up a fourth from written pitch, and so still required a top C, but in the first half of the four-part choir, rather than the second half. In 1903, Pope Pius X banned castratos from the Cappella Musicale Pontificia, with boys taking their place.

For most of the 20th century, choirs have sung and audiences have listened to a version of the *Miserere* that bears little relationship to anything that was sung in the Sistine Chapel.

The Holy Grail

LEGENDS

The mystique of secrecy stemmed, no doubt, from the failure to appreciate the source of the ornaments. The only rite of initiation was the standard musical training of the day. The decree of excommunication, if it were true, can only have served one of two purposes: either as a form of employment protection for the musicians, or to prohibit an already flourishing trade in copies. The number of unauthorised sources, clearly originating from the Vatican during the 1700s, bears testament to the latter. However, few sources included the ornaments.

There were only three authorised copies outside the Vatican, held by the King of Portugal, Padre Giovanni Battista Martini (1706 - 1784) and Emperor Leopold I (1640 - 1705). Leopold had requested the Pope that the imperial choir in Vienna might perform it, and he was duly sent a copy, but it was unornamented, and he complained to the Pope that he had been sent some inferior work. The Pope then sacked his *maestro di cappella*, who tried to explain to his former employer that the beauty of the music was a result of the performance technique of the chapel choir. The Pope, somewhat diplomatically, offered the musician his job back if he could explain his case to the Emperor's satisfaction, and he was eventually re-hired.

Padre Martini was sent one out of the high regard in which he was held throughout Europe as a music scholar. Burney is said to have made his copy from the *maestro di cappella*, Santarelli, and compared it with that of Martini in 1770. It is curious, therefore, that his first 5vv choir is more ornate than the Vatican sources, and his second 4vv choir less so.

Another legend, of course, concerns the boy Mozart. In 1770, Mozart, aged 12, and his father travelled a rather tortuous route to meet Martini, in the hope of receiving tuition from him. On Wednesday of Holy Week, they attended Tenebrae in the Sistine Chapel, and the young prodigy transcribed the music the next day. On Good Friday, he returned to hear the piece again, with his manuscript tucked inside his hat.

Leopold, in a letter to his wife of 14th April, says:

"You have often heard of the famous Miserere in Rome, which is so greatly prized that the performers are forbidden on pain of excommunication to take away a single part of it, copy it or give it to anyone. But we have it already.

Wolfgang has written it down and we would have sent it to Salzburg in this letter, if it were not necessary for us to be there to perform it. But the manner of performance contributes more to its effect than the composition itself. Moreover, as it is one of the secrets of Rome, we do not wish to let it fall into other hands."

However, the details of this story are pure 19th-century invention. There is even doubt about when the Mozarts arrived in Romw and what music they might have actually heard. Mozart then visited Martini in Bologna, where he also met Burney. In the summer of that year, Mozart composed his own *Miserere*, K85, which is thought to have been influenced by what he had heard.

These legends need some tempering. No order of excommunication has been found in papal edicts. Mozart was not the first to copy the work: it had been performed in London twice before he copied it, and copies were widely available to tourists, despite the supposed penalty. Throughout the 18th century, gentlemen could buy copies on the Via del Corso. The details of the young musician tucking the score in his hat to correct his first attempt the following day are likely to be 19th-century invention. There is even some doubt about whether Mozart copied it, or merely obtained a copy.

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

The text of the *Miserere* was first set to music in the reign of Pope Leo X (1513-1521). By Allegri's time, there was already a long tradition associated with the work's structure and performance, and he doubtless composed it with this in mind. It is clear that throughout the eighteenth century Allegri's work was performed as written in MSS 185 & 206, ornamentation aside. It is this that the fourteen year old Mozart would have heard in 1770, and it is from this that the piece's reputation spread.

The biggest legend lies in the practice of the performance itself. The *abbellimenti* themselves come from ornamentation techniques in Renaissance polyphony, and so predate the work itself! The similarity between the ornaments in MS 31525 and those detailed by Alfieri, Amann and Mendelssohn would suggest a certain authority. All sources that show the ornamentation give remarkably similar renditions, no matter what their date or provenance. It is clear that such ornaments were not improvisation, as we would use the term today, but set-pieces which the Sistine Chapel choir learnt by heart, to

place in the music whenever appropriate. Allegri clearly composed this work to show off these musical gambits to their most extravagant degree.

The Papal choir's ability to improvise counterpoint around a *cantus firmus* was well known and this came from ornamentation of certain contrapuntal sequences. Such masters as Ockeghem and Josquin have left records of how they expected specific polyphonic movement to be ornamented, particularly movement up and down the scale. This then is not improvisation, but a regulated system.

I am reminded of the words of Thomas Morley —no stranger to Italian music— in his *Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music* of 1597:

"Some have stood in an opinion, which to me seems very improbable, that men accustomed to descanting can sing together on a plainsong without singing either false chords or forbidden descant, one to another, which, till I see it, I will ever think impossible. For though they should all be most excellent men, and every one of their lessons by itself so well-framed to the ground, yet it is impossible for them to be true, one to another, unless one man should cause all the rest to sing the same as he sang before them."

However, by the eighteenth century, this ability was certainly extinct outside the Vatican, so did the choir still perform in the same way as their forebears, or did they learn the notes by rote? It is not clear whether the Papal Choir were still tutored in such traditions of Palestrina by the eighteenth century. Over the history of the work, it is hard to imagine that this was so rarely consigned to paper. Indeed, the music for *Tenebrae* was rehearsed, a rare treat in those days, because it would be performed in near darkness. The source of the ornaments is beyond doubt from the renaissance teachings of such masters as Palestrina.

THE PERFORMANCE SECRET

By comparing Allegri's original manuscripts with the later versions containing the ornaments, it can clearly be seen what has happened to the piece and how the choir is to sing it. Allegri's original notes are doubled in length, whilst the first treble has elaborated on a simple downward scale. The lower three voices all hold onto their notes, not moving until the first treble gives the very obvious hint of a C followed a C# on two equal notes, thus re-establishing the tempo.

Therefore the first treble may elaborate on the existing ornaments in free time, in the style of a cadenza, while the remaining three parts hold onto their notes, only moving on to the next note only when the treble is ready! It is also worth noting that the top three parts each have ornaments at different times, so allowing each of them to show off their skills while the remaining parts hold onto the chord. Obviously, all the parts cannot extemporise at the same time, as this would lead to chaos.

It is this performance practice which makes the *Miserere* so special, and which also requires a high degree of musicality from its performers.

Remaining Questions

One of the biggest mysteries is how the first choir became altered, as written in MS 185, and by whom? Tommaso Bai's setting of 1713 was produced to echo that of Allegri, and the psalm was later sung as a mixture of these two pieces. The re-worked Allegri is not taken from Bai's own setting, but could Bai have subsequently re-styled Allegri's original verses? He died in 1718, which would seem to rule him out; but Allegri's own music doesn't make it into the Vatican library until some years after his death, either.

Another point concerns the plethora of unadorned manuscripts. Why did no one else gripe, as Leopold I had done, after being shown an unadorned copy if they had heard the piece performed? Did none of these musicologists on the Grand Tour attempt to fill in the gaps after paying through the nose for a manuscript which wasn't all they had hoped? The ability of this Renaissance embellishment was not known outside the Vatican — how then did foreign singers hope to perform it without the notes?

Finally, could Burney's version be that recorded by Mozart? The version published is different from all other sources, being more elaborate and polished. This makes it highly likely that it was Mozart's own construction. But if Mozart had shown Burney his copy, why did Burney not publish the *abbellimenti*? Mozart, as a catholic citizen, was in danger of excommunication; but Burney, as an Englishman, was not. Burney's publication of the work in the following year was supposed to end any notion of secrecy or monopoly by the Vatican. But the *abbellimenti* were not in his edition. Leopold Mozart's claim that he did 'not wish to let it fall into other hands' would suggest that the Mozarts were unwilling to show Burney the *abbellimenti*. But the work could be bought on the streets of Rome, and had been performed in London and elsewhere from unauthorised copies.



Summary and Chronology

- 1514 Constanzo Festa composes the *Miserere* as a *falsobordone* for two choirs, one of 5 voices, the other of 4, for use in Holy Week liturgy.
- 1638 Gregorio Allegri composes his setting of *Miserere* in a similar format, allowing the singers to use a number of ornamentation techniques.
- 1652 Allegri dies.
- 1661 Allegri's setting is written into two books, which contain twelve different settings of the *Miserere*, each a *falsobordone* for two choirs of 5 and 4 voices.
- 1713 Tommaso Bai's setting of the *Miserere*, borrowing heavily from Allegri, is written into the Vatican library.
- 1731 Allegri's first choir appears re-written in a heavily altered form.
- 1735 The work is first performed in London.
- 1770 Mozart hears the Sistine Chapel choir.
- 1770 Charles Burney meets Mozart.
- 1771 Burney publishes the *Miserere*, without *abbellimenti*. Reprints soon appear in Germany, France and Italy.
- 1831 Felix Mendelssohn transcribes the *Miserere*, seemingly performed up a fourth from written pitch.
- 1840 Pietro Alfieri publishes his detailed account of the *abbellimenti*.
- 1880 W.S. Rockstro incorrectly reproduces the second choir to illustrate an article in the first edition of Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Mendelssohn's transcription of the top G ornament, up a fourth, is inserted into the second half of the verse.
- 1932 Robert Haas publishes an edition with *abbellimenti*, copying the error directly from Grove's, producing the 'top C' version.
- 1935 Julius Amann publishes Allegri's *Miserere und die Aufführungspraxis in der Sixtina*, detailing the *abbellimenti* and performance practice in the Sistine Chapel.
- 1951 Ivor Atkins copies Haas' error into his English text edition. Subsequent editions lend authority and credence to the error by repeating it.

Postscript

The purpose of this research has been five-fold. Firstly, it is hoped that some light has been shed onto the nature and history of this extraordinary piece and the ornamentation contained within. Correct understanding of the *abbellimenti* as pre-existing Renaissance techniques cannot be over-emphasised.

Hopefully, it will help to redress some of the 'damage' done by twentieth century editions. That such illustrious names as those who have produced editions of this work should blatantly ignore the source evidence, or worse, admit the error without correcting it, is a very peculiar state of affairs indeed.

The research correctly attributes British Library MS 31525 as the setting by Allegri, rather than that by Bai. It is the only manuscript in the British Library which details the *abbellimenti*, and it is therefore of some importance that this catalogue error is corrected.

It is also hoped that, in the true spirit of authenticity, the work will once again be performed as it was intended, and as generations of singers and visitors to the Papal Chapel knew and loved the work.

Finally, it produces a performing edition that gives some idea of how the work was performed during the eighteenth century.

The edition is based on Vatican MS 185 for the first 5vv choir, and Vatican MS 206 for the second 4vv choir. The ornaments have been taken from British Library Add. 31525 and G.539. Note values have been halved, all bar lines are editorial, written pitch has been maintained, although the key signature has been given an extra flat, which incorporates original accidentals. Small accidentals are cautionary.

The final nine part choir is taken from Allegri's original, MSS 205 & 206, with the first tenor part superposed in keeping with the 1731 reworking. The pause on the final note is added from MS 185, and Burney's ultimate direction is included.

The plainsong is taken from the *liber usualis*, and is the *tonus peregrinus*, on which the *falsobordone* is based. The text has been checked against the Vulgate, with spelling and punctuation updated.

Sources

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

205: first choir	1661
206: second choir	1661
185: first choir	1731

British Library

Additional 24291:	f 24b	18th century
Additional 31395:	ff 19 - 27b	18th century
Additional 31525:	ff 1, 21	18th century
Egerton 2468:	f 59	18th century
Egerton 2470:	ff 33 - 41b	19th century
Egerton 2470:	ff 52 - 59	19th century

H. 790: Burney, Charles; *La musica che si canta annualmente nelle Funzioni della Settimana Santa nella Cappella Pontificale*, 1771

Hirsch 2069: Amann, Julius; *Allegris Miserere und die Aufführungspraxis in der Sixtina*, 1935

G.539: Geminiani, Alessandro; *Il Salmo Miserere posto in musica da Gregorio Allegri e da Tommaso Bai*, 1840

Guest, George; Modern performing edition, Chester Music 1976

Appendices

Appendix 1	Allegrì's original first choir, verse 1
Appendix 2	Allegrì's original second choir, verse 3
Appendix 3	Burney's first choir, verse 1
Appendix 4	Burney's second choir, verse 3
Appendix 5	Vatican MS 185, verse 1 (edition)
Appendix 6	Alfieri & Additional 31525, v. 3 (edition)

Appendix I
Allegrì's Original verse I, M S 205

Treble
 Miserere me - i, De - - - - us,

Alto
 Miserere me - - - i, De - - - us,

Tenor 1
 Miserere me - i, De - - - - us,

Tenor 2
 Miserere me - i, De - - - - us,

Bass
 Miserere me - i, De - - - - us,

secundum magnam miseri - cor - di - am tu - - - am.

secundum magnam miseri - cor - di - am tu - - - am.

secundum magnam miseri - cor - di - am tu - - - - am.

secundum magnam miseri - cor - di - am tu - - - am.

secundum magnam miseri - cor - di - am tu - - - am.

Appendix 2
Allegri's Original verse 3, M S 206

Amplius lava me ab iniqui - ta - te me - - - a:

Amplius lava me ab iniqui - ta - te me - - - a:

Amplius lava me ab iniqui - ta - - - te me - - - a:

Amplius lava me ab iniqui - ta - te me - - - a:

This system contains four staves of music. The first three staves are vocal parts with lyrics underneath. The fourth staff is a bass line. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: 'Amplius lava me ab iniquitate me - - - a:'.

et a pec - - ca - - to me - - o mun - da me.

et a pec - - ca - - to me - - - o mun - da me.

et a pec - - ca - - to me - o mun - - da me.

et a pec - - ca - - to me - o mun - - da me.

This system contains four staves of music. The first three staves are vocal parts with lyrics underneath. The fourth staff is a bass line. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: 'et a peccato meo munda me.'

Appendix 3
Burney's (Mozart?) verse 1

Treble 1
Mi - se - re - re me - i, De - - - - us: se - cun - dum mag - nam

Treble 2
Mi - se - re - re me - i, De - - - - us: se - cun - dum mag - nam

Alto
Mi - se - re - re me - i, De - - - - us: se - cun - dum mag - nam mi -

Tenor
Mi - se - re - re me - i, De - - - - us: se - cun - dum mag - nam

Bass
Mi - se - re - re me - i, De - - - - us: se - cun - dum mag - nam

mi - se - ri - cor - - - - di - am tu - - am.

mi - se - ri - cor - - - - di - am tu - - - - am.

- se - ri - cor - - - di - am, mi - se - ri - cor - di - am tu - - am.

mi - se - ri - cor - di - am, mi - - se - ri - cor - di - am tu - - - - am.

mi - se - ri - cor - - - - - di - am tu - - - - am.

Appendix 4
Burney's (Mozart?) verse 3

Am - pli - us la - va me ab in - i - qui - ta - te me - - - a:
Am - pli - us la - va me ab in - i - qui - ta - te me - - - a:
Am - pli - us la - va me ab in - i - qui - ta - te me - - - a:
Am - pli - us la - va me ab in - i - qui - ta - te me - - - a:

et a pec - ca - to me - o mun - - - da me.
et a pec - ca - to me - o mun - - - da me.
et a pec - ca - to me - o mun - - - da me.
et a pec - ca - to me - o mun - - - da me.

Appendix 5
Reworking of 1731, verse 1, M S 185 (edition)

Treble 1
 Mi - se - re - re me - i, De - - - - us, se - cun - dum mag -

Treble 2
 Mi - se - re - re me - i, De - - - - us, se - cun - dum mag -

Alto
 Mi - se - re - re me - i, De - - - - us, se - cun - dum mag -

Tenor
 Mi - se - re - re me - i, De - - - - us, se - cun - dum mag -

Bass
 Mi - se - re - re me - i, De - - - - us, se - cun - dum mag -

- nam mi - se - ri - cor - di - am tu - - - - am.

- nam mi - se - ri - cor - - di - am tu - - - - am.

- nam mi - se - ri - cor - di - am mi - se - ri - cor - di - am tu - am.

- nam mi - se - ri - cor - di - am tu - - - - am.

- nam mi - se - ri - cor - di - am tu - - - - am.

Appendix 6
verse 3 from Alfieri & Additional 31525 (edition)

Am-pli-us la- va me ab in-i-qui-ta - te me - - - - - a.

Am-pli-us la- va me ab in-i-qui-ta - - te me - - - - - a.

Am-pli-us la-va me ab in-i-qui-ta - - te me - - - - - a.

Am-pli-us la-va me ab in-i-qui-ta - te me - - - - - a.

This system contains four staves of music. The top three staves are vocal lines in treble clef, and the bottom staff is a bass line in bass clef. The lyrics are: "Am-pli-us la- va me ab in-i-qui-ta - te me - - - - - a." The first staff has a final note on a whole note, while the others end with a fermata.

et a pec - ca - - to me - - - o mun - - da me.

et a pec - ca - to me - - - o mun - da me.

et a pec - ca - to me - - o mun - - - da me.

et a pec - ca - to me - - o mun - - - da me.

This system contains four staves of music. The top three staves are vocal lines in treble clef, and the bottom staff is a bass line in bass clef. The lyrics are: "et a pec - ca - - to me - - - o mun - - da me." The first staff has a final note on a whole note, while the others end with a fermata.

Gregorio Allegri

Gregorio Allegri was born in Rome in 1582, and became a chorister at the Papal Chapel in 1591 until 1596, when his voice broke. He subsequently became a tenor at S. Luigi del Francesca for the next 8 years, and studied with Giovanni Maria Nanino from 1600 until 1607. In 1604 he was a singer and composer at Tivoli and Fermi, and then became maestro di cappella at S. Spirito, in Sassia, Rome in 1628. 6th December 1629 saw his appointment as a singer in the Papal Choir, until his death on February 17th, 1652, aged 70. He wrote a large body of work, of both instrumental and sacred choral music, favouring the style of his mentor Nanino, and his before him, Palestrina.



He was buried in the Chiesa Nova at Rome, traditionally the burial place of the Papal Choir, because of its association with the Oratory of San Filippo Neri, echoed by this inscription on the tomb:

CANTORES PONTIFICII
NE QUOS VIVOS
CONCORDS MELODIA JUNXIT
MORTUOS CORPORIS DISCORDS RESOLUTIO DISSOLVERET
HIC UNA CONDI VOLUERE.

The Papal singers,
anxious that those whom Melody united in life
should not be separated in death,
wish this one tomb as their burial place.