

NETWORK

A Complex Cross-Disciplinary Metaphor

Even the most casual examination of the various essays in this section of the MappaMundi project conjures a complex image of the Mediterranean premodern—diverse outposts scattered across the globe and linked by networks of trade and exchange, crisscrossing, ricocheting from continent-to-continent across vast maritime and terrestrial distances.

As this picture is somewhat unaccustomed, a model for such interconnections might be desirable. At ready hand is a pioneering volume by musicologist Luisa Nardini – a study of “Neo-Gregorian Chant Propers” appropriately entitled “Interlacing Traditions”. By this, the author invites us to consider how various musical forms interrelate, transform, and sustain local as well as transnational tradition. “Texts and melodies of liturgical chance reflect the movements of the people across the territory between the 7th and the 13th century,” she says. She means to “suggest the interlacing of formal, stylistic, and thematic elements originating in different locales” (*Traditions* 356).

This concept is captured visually in an image of an historiated initial that “represents a grotesque figure that combines anthropomorphic and phytomorphic elements. It is composed of two bearded male heads looking in opposite directions, with their stylized bodies twisting around two vertical poles and forming two almost perfectly symmetric spirals. Horizontal blocks unite the poles at the top and bottom and create a sense of wholeness and inextricability between bodily and decorative elements.

This image is a perfect metaphor to represent the interlacing of the various cultural components of the neo-Gregorian chant [in the premodern]. . . , in which multiple needs and aesthetics merge into a unified liturgical body.

The image also works as a metaphor for the collective identity of liturgical chants, in which the individualities of single cantors are interlaced into communal modes of expression.” (*Ibid.*)

Now, what does all this have to do with global ivory?

In the epilogue to her study, Nardini says “the metaphor of the interlacing grotesque bodies . . . [implies] the co-existence of a multilayered aesthetic within a unified structural whole.” (*Ibid.* 367)



Taking her example, we need to be cognizant of the multiple narratives that drive and explain the peregrinations of ivory artifacts in the thousand year period of the premodern. As a sort of guiding principle, we should not accept the presence of an ivory artifact without questioning its provenience, its existence as *object* that—while comprising and contributing to the visual and physical panoply that remains to us from this distant time—also has diverse narratives to relate that explain both culture and historical moment. We need to tease out these various narratives in our research.

So does Nardini’s musical metaphor alert us to the need to explicate the cultural presence of any given object.