

Hymns of the Early Church: Being translations from the poetry of the Latin church, arranged in the order of the Christian year

John Brownlie

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The Latin poetry of the Christian Church presents a tempting field for the exercise of scholarship and research. The relation in which it stands on the one hand to the classic poetry of Greece and Italy, and on the other to the Liturgies of the Eastern Church, the placing of accent in the room of quantity, and the rise and growth of rhyme—these and such-like matters will always prove attractive to experts and specialists. They are, however, quite beyond the scope of this brief paper. Those who wish to make an exhaustive study of a subject which has many sides and a copious literature, would do well to betake themselves to such standard works as are noted below. The general reader may find something to profit and to interest him in the following general survey.

The title placed on our Saviour's cross, setting forth His accusation—"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," was written in three languages—in Hebrew and in Greek and in Latin. That collocation of languages gives the order in which the hymnody of the Church developed.

Hebrew hymnody is contained for the most part in the Hebrew Psalter; for the distinction between psalms and hymns is not one that admits of being applied to all Hebrew poetry. Our Lord and His disciples, as they went out to the Mount of Olives after the institution and first observance of the Supper Sacrament, sang a portion of the Great Hallel, which consists of Psalms cxiii. to cxviii. inclusive. Their doing so is described in the New Testament as singing "an hymn," just as the singing of Paul and Silas in the Philippian prison is said to be singing hymns unto God.



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