

Reviews

A Paradise of Priests: Singing the Civic and Episcopal Hagiography of Medieval Liège, by Catherine Saucier. Eastman Studies in Music. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press; Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2014. xv, 299 pp.

The music history of the Low Countries remains unevenly charted territory. A great deal of attention has been lavished, often with outstanding results, on the composers and polyphonic works of what was once called the “Netherlandish school” of the late fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. From the mid-1600s onward, however, there is a historiographic gap in the general public’s as well as musicologists’ consciousness, caused mainly by the absence of composers of internationally recognized stature. The gap extends well into the twentieth century and started to close only after World War II, with the arrival of composers such as Henri Pousseur, Karel Goeyvaerts, or Louis Andriessen. Working in the Low Countries one quickly learns that this narrative is misleading—the region offers a uniquely rich, complex, and diverse landscape to the historian of music.

Given the historically engrained bias in favor of polyphony, it might be argued that there is an even more critical historiographic gap in the history of monophonically notated repertoires in the region, which to this day claim the attention of but a few dedicated scholars.¹ Even defining what exactly is

1. See, in particular and most recently, the work of the late Ike de Loos, collected in *Patronen ontrafeld: Studies over gregoriaanse gezangen en Middelnederlandse liederen*, ed. José van Aelst et al. (Hilversum: Verloren, 2012). See also Pieter Mannaerts and Eugeen Schreurs, eds., *Cantus tungrensis: Inventaris van het middeleeuws muzikaal erfgoed uit Tongeren en omgeving* (Leuven and Neerpelt: Alamire, 2006), and Barbara Hagg, “Musique et rituel à l’Abbaye Saint-Bavon: structure et développement du rituel, le chant, les livres du rite et les imprimés,” in *La cathédrale Saint-Bavon de Gand: Du moyen âge au baroque*, ed. Bruno Bouckaert (Ghent: Ludion, 2000), 47–85. In the field of secular monophony mention must be made of the recent excellent edition of the Gruuthuse songs by Herman Brinkman and Ike de Loos, *Het Gruuthuse-handschrift: Hs. Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 79 K 10* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2015); see also the related essay volumes curated by Frank Willaert, *Het Gruuthuse-handschrift in woord en klank: Nieuwe inzichten, nieuwe vragen* (Ghent: KANTL, 2010) and (with Jos Koldewey and Johan Oosterman) *Het Gruuthusehandschrift: Literatuur, muziek, devotie rond 1400* (Ghent: KANTL, 2015). See also Dieuwke van der Poel, Louis Peter Grijp, et al., *Het Antwerps Liedboek* (Tiel: Lannoo, 2004); Frank Willaert and Louis Peter Grijp, *De fiere nachtegaal: Het Nederlandse lied in de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008); and Veerle Fraeters, Frank Willaert, and Louis Peter Grijp, eds., *Hadewijch: Lieder* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2009). For the music of the Modern Devotion, see Ulrike Hascher-Burger, *Singen für die Seligkeit: Studien zu einer Liedersammlung der Devotio moderna*: Zwolle, *Historisch Centrum, Overijssel*, coll.

to be understood by the term “Low Countries” is not without its challenges. The most neutral option is to resort to geography, and define the Low Countries as the landscape formed by the delta of the Rhine, Meuse, Scheldt, and Ems rivers and their hinterlands; in modern terms, this covers the territories of today’s nation-states of Belgium and the Netherlands, together with stretches of northern France, western Germany, and Luxemburg.

Against this background Catherine Saucier’s monograph on chant in medieval Liège stands out as one of the few studies dedicated (first and foremost) to plainchant from the eastern and southeastern Low Countries. Saucier’s study adopts a longitudinal approach, tracing the development of the liturgies for three local bishop-saints—the two bishop-martyrs Theodard and Lambert and their immediate successor, Hubert—from their earliest sources to the sixteenth century. She anchors her narrative through references to key historical events, such as the twists and turns of Merovingian and early Carolingian politics, the gradual establishment of Liège as the political center of the region under Bishop Hubert in the eighth century (the see was initially located in nearby Tongeren and Maastricht), and the subsequent gradual endowment of the city’s seven collegiate churches, which reached a high-water mark around the year 1000. The brutal destruction of the city by Burgundian forces under Charles the Bold (1468) provides a historical landmark in late medieval times, followed by the return of prosperity during the extended and peaceful rule of Prince-Bishop Érarard de la Marck (reigned 1506–38).

Saucier introduces Liège as the capital city of the prince-bishopric of the same name, and one in which the ratio of clergy to lay people was exceptionally high, such that it was characterized by Petrarch as “*insignem clero locum*” (a place noted for its clergy, p. 4). For Saucier, the extraordinary density of its clerical landscape makes Liège a city in which clerical and civic identity became almost indistinguishable from one another, thereby setting up the central topic of the ensuing narrative. Chapter 1 familiarizes the reader with the hagiographic tradition of Liège as expressed in the work of Sigebert of Gembloux (written most likely in the decade between 1071 and 1081, p. 33). The intertwined cults of the bishop-martyrs Saints Theodard and Lambert at the cathedral, which had been built on the site of Lambert’s martyrdom in 708, are examined in detail in Chapter 2. Next, Saucier turns to the cult of Saint Hubert, Lambert’s immediate successor as bishop. Perhaps more familiar to readers as the patron saint of hunters or as the apostle of the nearby Ardennes region, Hubert was seen in the Liégeois liturgy as the founder (“*conditor*”) of the city of Liège (“*urbs Legia*”), since he was principally responsible for consolidating Liège as the region’s spiritual and political capital—something he accomplished

Emmanuelshuizen, cat. VI., mit Edition und Faksimile (Leiden: Brill, 2007) and *Gesungene Innigkeit: Studien zu einer Musikhandschrift der Devotio moderna* (Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, ms. 16 H 34, olim B 113), mit einer Edition der Gesänge (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

in part by endowing the first of what were to become seven collegiate churches in the city. In the following chapter Saucier traces the impact of Bishop Notger (reigned 972–1008), the most prominent of a series of four highly successful bishops of the tenth and early eleventh centuries. Notger stands out as the first bishop of Liège formally to hold secular powers (he was created Count of Huy by Emperor Otto III in 985), and also through his lavish endowments, which included three more of the seven collegiate churches. This chapter also explores the relationships between the cathedral and the collegiate churches in some detail, and includes a discussion of Johannes Brassart's motet "Fortis cum quevis actio" in praise of the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist. Saucier emphasizes the special significance that this piece acquired against the background of the sacred topography of Liège: the relative positions of the cathedral—which was dedicated to the Virgin, together with Saint Lambert—and the collegiate churches of Saint John the Evangelist and the Holy Cross reflected the positioning of John and Mary beneath the Cross (John 19:25–27).

The fifth and final chapter describes how the relics of Saint Lambert acted upon the fighting spirit of Liégeois forces on the battlefield: while Lambert could not prevent the destruction of "his" town in 1468, he nevertheless helped to subvert its complete annihilation, since Charles the Bold issued his troops with a strict injunction that the churches of Liège were to be left intact, thus planting the seeds for the subsequent reconstruction. Charles's lieutenant Guy de Brimeu even developed a distinct affection for Lambert during his time in Liège on account of his miraculous recovery from an injury sustained during the fighting. All this ensured a solid institutional and financial base for the ensuing revival in the early sixteenth century under Prince-Bishop Érard de la Marck. The newly acquired wealth found physical expression in a spectacular reliquary bust of Saint Lambert, making the bishop-martyr once again the focal point of local identity as expressed annually through the texts and melodies sung by the clergy during the feasts of the saint and his companion bishops Theodard and Hubert.

Saucier's study is grounded in detailed readings of the office texts and melodies in conjunction with the *vitae* that were produced at various moments in Liégeois history for the bishops concerned. She traces similarities and allusions in the melodies, their texts, and the *vitae*; highlights the resulting intertextualities; and stresses the coexistence of polyphonic elaborations such as Brassart's motet with the continued and enduring presence of plainchant. Her discussion is aptly supported by an in-depth knowledge of the Liège archives that formed the basis of her doctoral dissertation,² and is rounded out by a deft application of historical and art-historical research findings.

2. Catherine Saucier, "Sacred Music and Musicians at the Cathedral and Collegiate Churches of Liège, 1330–1500" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2005).

If concerns are to be identified they relate to the longitudinal approach that the author has chosen to pursue. The book has a span of almost 1000 years, and it seems obvious that some very basic social parameters would have shifted during such a long period. No one will take exception to Saucier's statement that "local saints played a central role in shaping an identity distinct to each medieval community" (p. 6). But what precisely is the "civic" community that took its identity from the *vitae* and offices discussed by Saucier? Who exactly sang at the cathedral and in the collegiate churches of Liège, and for whom? One would imagine that, in the first instance, the "citizenship" invoked by Saucier was constituted primarily by the members of those very institutions, rather than by the population at large. The lay population of Liège may have lived well as a consequence of the clergy's wealth, as stated by the Liégeois chronicler James of Hemricourt (1333–1403, quoted p. 5). But the battle for control of the municipal government between Prince-Bishop Engelbert III de la Marck and the citizens of Liège that temporarily forced the bishop out of town (1345) would suggest that relations between clergy and laity, or for that matter between bishop and chapter, were not always as harmonious as Saucier implies; nor is the phenomenon of an ecclesiastic ruler at loggerheads with his townspeople unique to Liège in the later Middle Ages. Here further depth might have been added to Saucier's study by a more differentiated perspective on the complex interplay between those bourgeois families who were in a position to ensure the presence of their sons in one of the chapters, the social layers by which the various inhabitants of Liège were distinguished from one another, and the respective roles played by the local aristocracy and the clerics in the "paradise of priests."

These suggestions notwithstanding, Saucier's monograph is a vital contribution to the study of music, politics, and identity construction through the celebration of local saints in the Middle Ages. While such conscious uses of the past are of course not limited to the medieval Low Countries, Saucier offers us a case study that should encourage similar work on other parts of the continent. Her book is fluently written, although anachronisms such as "serenading" the skull of Saint Lambert (p. 182) should (and could easily) have been avoided. The decision to use endnotes, presumably prompted by the requirements of the series, renders the book's documentation less readily accessible than it might have been. A comprehensive bibliography completes the study.³

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