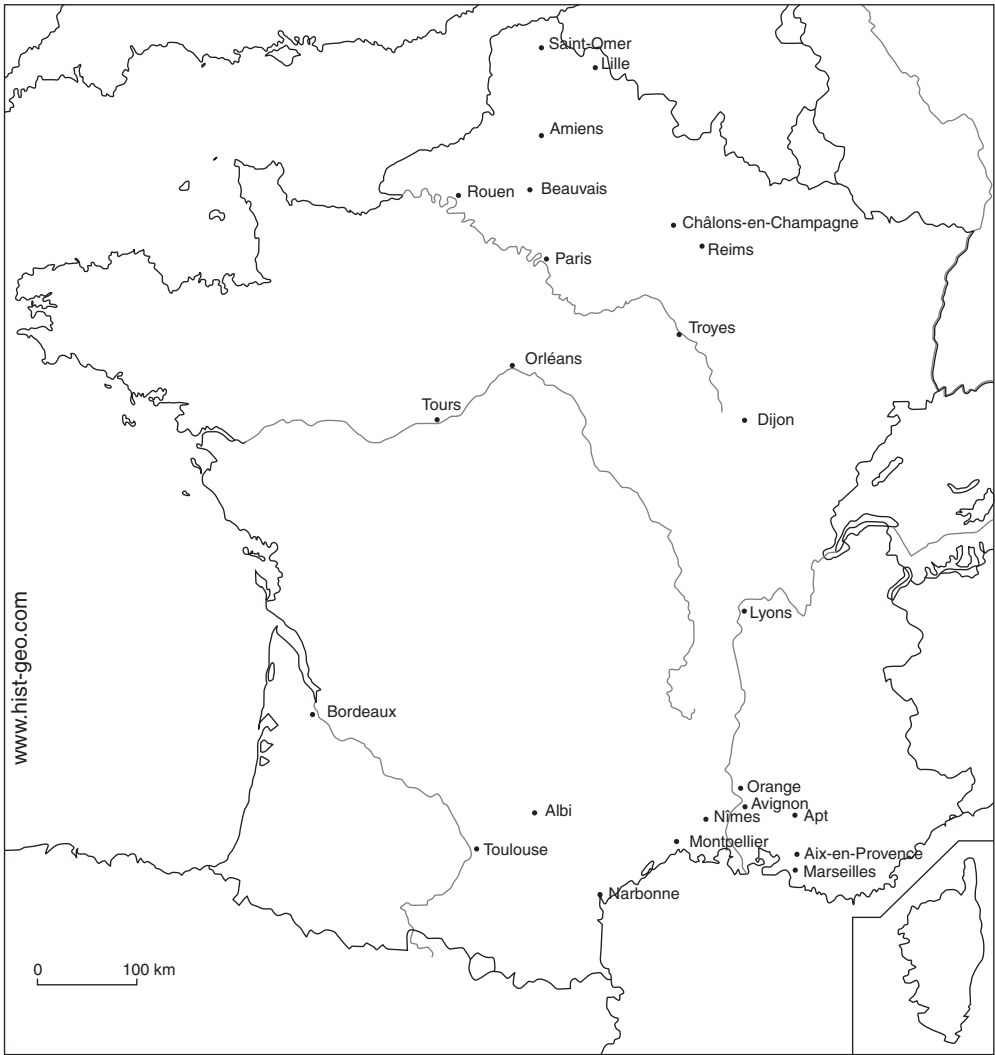


Introduction

Musical sounds organized and gave meaning to life in medieval French towns. Music marked the long work day as it radiated from the central tower with the opening and closing of town gates, music proclaimed weddings as it accompanied a couple to church, and music honored the town’s history as it sanctified relics of local saints in annual processions through the streets. The music of Guillaume de Machaut and Guillaume Dufay, which would have been heard in cathedrals throughout France, is not the focus of this study, but rather the music which would have been heard on the streets following mass. While these are the sounds of everyday life, it is music that has tended to be marginalized in musicological scholarship, in part, no doubt, because this musical culture is not preserved in music manuscripts, but also because it is not unique. With a scholarly tradition that has emphasized the exceptional, the musical world of the medieval urban environment has not been incorporated into this privileged historical construct.

This study is a culmination of archival work conducted in over twenty cities that lie within the borders of contemporary France. It began with culling of the municipal and departmental archives of major cities in Provence and Languedoc, including Montpellier, Marseilles, Avignon, and Aix-en-Provence. A more complete picture of urban music in southern France was later sought, with archival work in the major cities of Toulouse and Narbonne, but also in the smaller towns of Nîmes, Albi, Béziers, and Orange. With the goal of placing southern France in greater context, the archives of Lyons, Dijon, Orléans, Tours, Troyes, Châlons-en-Champagne, Reims, Rouen, Beauvais, Amiens, Lille, and Saint-Omer were explored to achieve geographic balance and to include most cities in France with a population over 10,000 prior to the Black Death with substantial medieval holdings. The obvious omission in this study is Paris. While studies on French culture are often centralized around Paris, the unfortunate destruction of its archives in the devastating fire attached to the commune of 1871 prevents its inclusion. All of these cities fell under French rule at some point during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, though, as national boundaries were in constant flux, few remained under the French crown throughout this period. (See Map 1 for cities addressed in this study.)



Map 1. Cities in France included in this study.

This study brings to light extensive archival evidence from urban institutions, including city governments, confraternities, and guilds. Diverse records attached to the administration of daily urban life have proven to be directly relevant, such as statutes and city contracts defining the roles and duties of civic-employed musicians, ordinances restricting the activities and behavior of musicians, chronicles describing receptions in honor of visiting royalty, and deliberations of the city council detailing preparations for processions and other civic ceremonies. Records of financial administration of the city have generally been the most accessible and yielded the greatest

quantity of information; besides the compensation for musicians, payment records document the size and types of civic-employed ensembles and the occasions for which they were hired, and tax records and property listings have provided substantial information on the socio-economic status of musicians. The records of minstrel guilds provide details of professional organization and activities, while those of confraternities offer details of social organization among minstrels, as well as professional opportunities. Private notarial contracts, such as wills, property transactions, and business arrangements, offer glimpses into the professional and personal lives of minstrels rarely gleaned from other sources.

The time period from which most of the evidence dates, 1300–1500, is a difficult one in French history. French cities were decimated by the Black Death in 1348, populations typically plummeting by half, along with the tax base, and socio-economic problems were compounded by unusual weather patterns, failing crops, and famines. Further destruction and economic pressures from the Hundred Years' War wreaked havoc on the stability and wealth of French cities. Almost invariably, city records emerge in significant numbers in the second half of the fourteenth century, following the devastation and disruption of the Black Death, when cities began to document their civic practices and customs with greater diligence, emphasizing and fostering tradition and a sense of permanence. Devastated cities' lack of revenue did not allow for any expenditures considered inessential, and only musical traditions considered integral to their well-being could receive support during this period of destruction and slow recovery.

While the medieval archival holdings of French cities have yielded extensive and valuable information concerning urban musical culture, many research challenges have been encountered with this approach. One is the limitless number of potentially relevant documents; to facilitate future research in the area by other scholars, the specific series and documents that have been examined are carefully identified for each city. Presenting another challenge, substantial interruptions occur within series, such as for Montpellier, where only three annual account books are extant for the second half of the fourteenth century, forcing at times conclusions to remain tentative and comparisons of cities impossible. Documents involving musicians commonly remain silent concerning the information most sought, such as payment records to minstrels that often neglect to mention the size or nature of the ensemble and never describe or even refer to the sound of the music. The city, as well as other institutions, tended not to be concerned with the music itself so much as the effect it created, and so the records emphasize and elaborate upon the ritual surrounding the music.

These records tend to prescribe what was supposed to occur, rather than what actually happened, with only the rare acknowledgment of the difference. In addition, these records often result in a distorted image of this musical world, as the musicians who appear most often in city records, quite predictably, are permanent residents of the city and particularly those hired by the city. Civic records offer us a particular perspective of the city, with the musician who operated in a freelance setting rarely appearing in these records, and certain groups of individuals, like women, being almost entirely missing.

Notarial contracts have offered a special allure because of their diverse perspectives, but they also offered special challenges. While these private contracts are recognized as a rich source of evidence for the social historian, they have not yet been significantly exploited in musicological scholarship on medieval urban culture. This is due, no doubt, to the tedium in locating relevant contracts, as detailed inventories of notarial registers generally do not exist, and because the value of these records varies considerably. A day's work with notarial records commonly resulted in the mere determination of a mundane detail, such as the acquisition of a common wine vat by a minstrel. The strong allure of these records, however, is that occasionally tucked among them are agreements of apprenticeships and partnerships between musicians, purchases of musical instruments, or wills of minstrels. The question always when working with these series was how many hours could be allocated with no reward. The research process for this study has often felt like the construction of an enormous jigsaw puzzle with pieces scattered far and wide and many irretrievably lost. Despite the overriding impression through this process that urban musicians are only marginally represented in the archives of French cities, after putting together the pieces, an image of a complex and active musical world has emerged.

Despite France's prominent role in medieval music history, scholarship concerning its urban musical culture is still generally limited to publications by nineteenth-century local historians.¹ While these studies contain valuable information and frequently provide interesting excerpts from city records, they were not intended as comprehensive and systematic studies of music in a particular urban center. Furthermore, the musical life of certain French cities, including such prominent ones as Troyes and

¹ For example, the short bulletin by Barthélemy remains the sole, and highly valuable, study on urban minstrels for Marseilles: Louis Barthélemy, "Notice historique sur l'industrie des ménétriers," *Revue de Marseille et de Provence* 32 (1886): 99–108; for Avignon, the primary work on the topic is Pierre Pansier, "Les Débuts du théâtre à Avignon à la fin du XVe siècle," *Annales d'Avignon et du Comtat-Venaissin* 6 (1919): 5–52.

Montpellier, has never received the attention of scholars, even in the nineteenth century. For most cities, this study is the first discussion of urban minstrels since the early twentieth century. Rare recent scholarship addressing the urban minstrel in medieval France has been prompted by the statutes of the important minstrel guilds in Toulouse and Paris.²

Existing studies of urban minstrelsy have primarily focused on Italy, Germany, and the Low Countries, with the most recent contributions continuing to build on earlier scholarship dating back to the nineteenth century. Recent studies on urban musical culture during the late Middle Ages have focused on a specific city, such as Lewis Lockwood's *Music in Renaissance Ferrara* (1984), Reinhard Strohm's *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (1985), and Frank D'Accone's *The Civic Muse: Music and Musicians in Siena during the Middle Ages* (1997). Central to these studies are the sacred institutions of these cities: the cathedrals, collegiate churches, and confraternities. In contrast, while comparing numerous cities, this study focuses upon music specifically attached to the secular urban environment. This distinction, however, can be ambiguous, as minstrels performed in sacred processions to highlight holy relics and even at times were hired by churches. While fully acknowledging the overlap of the sacred and secular in medieval urban environments, the archives of religious institutions in French cities have not been researched systematically for the employment of minstrels due to the magnitude of such an undertaking.

This study aims to be relevant to urban historians, as well as musicologists, by establishing how integrally related music is to a city's history. In spite of the historical connection between a city's institutions and its music, and music's ability to shape the urban environment, recent books on medieval urban history tend not to mention music.³ Archival work in multiple cities in distinct regions in France has allowed for the consideration of diverse factors affecting urban musical practices, such as demographics, politics, and economics. Whether the music was part of highly anticipated elaborate performances or barely noticed mundane activities, it provides

² Luc Charles-Dominique, *Les Ménestriers français sous l'ancien régime* (Toulouse: Klincksieck, 1994); Kay Brainerd Slocum, "Confrérie, Bruderschaft and Guild: The Formation of Musicians' Fraternal Organisations in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Europe," *Early Music History* 14 (1995): 257–74. While Charles-Dominique's book is a valuable discussion on the evolving social status of the minstrel in France, he does not attempt to unearth new archival evidence on the minstrel.

³ Some examples are David Nicholas, *The Later Medieval City, 1300–1500* (London: Longman, 1997); Keith Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages, 1000–1450* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Marc Boone, "Urban Space and Political Conflict in Late Medieval Flanders," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 32 (2002): 621–40.

insights into the status, power, and inner workings of the city. Indeed, a central question throughout this research is how the political history of a city has affected its musical practices.⁴

The opening three chapters of this study address the patronage offered to musicians by civic governments on either an ad hoc or regularly contracted basis to perform in urban ritual. Each city, organized into three broad geographic areas in France, as well as local regions, is discussed by itself in detail to allow for the greatest use by scholars who often have research interests in specific urban areas. While many municipal governments throughout France became regular sources of employment for musicians during the second half of the fourteenth century, cities offered musicians in France, with few exceptions, only a portion of a full-time income. Chapter 4 establishes how minstrels could have pieced together diverse performances in the urban environment ranging from prestigious engagements contracted months in advance to impromptu performances where any compensation must have been tenuous. Chapter 5 focuses upon the organization of the profession of minstrelsy, from international schools and citywide guilds to individual relationships that were formed for both professional and personal reasons. Finally, how freelance minstrels fared economically and socially in the urban environment is discussed, recognizing the diversity within this body of musicians in the Middle Ages from itinerant outcasts to the wealthy and respected town musicians.

⁴ An important recent study on urban musical culture is Keith Polk's book *German Instrumental Music of the Late Middle Ages: Players, Patrons and Performance Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1992). Polk emphasizes, however, the construction of musical instruments, issues of performance practice, and repertoire, all topics not highlighted in this study.

1 | Playing before the council: civic patronage
in southern France

The musical sounds of daily life in a French medieval city were fused with meaning, some overt and some subtle. The trumpet signals emanating from a central bell-tower or drawing attention to official decrees were common in most cities throughout France, but much about musical practices was distinct from city to city, such as the quality of the instrument used by criers, the musical capabilities of tower-musicians, or the historical significance of the performance venue, which would have all affected the interpretation of these sounds. The musical performances subsidized by the city, whether for a celebration for Corpus Christi or a reception for nobility, were encoded with social significance tied to the nature of the musicians' ensemble, clothing, and placement. The musical sounds of urban life in medieval France entertained and informed their listeners, but these sounds also reflected and reinforced the cities' social organization and political structure.

The marked increase in the appearance of musicians on city payrolls in the mid-fourteenth century is now well documented for much of Europe.¹ Scholars have demonstrated that trumpeters commonly appeared on city payrolls by the beginning of the fourteenth century and that the civic wind band appeared in a few German cities between 1350 and 1370, and then throughout Germany, the Low Countries, and Italy by the late fourteenth century. In contrast, for French cities, civic subsidy of music, and urban musical practices in general, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had yet to be established, despite France's prominent role in the history of medieval secular music.² A central objective of the opening chapters is not

¹ For the Low Countries see Edmond van der Straeten, *Les Ménestrels aux Pays-Bas du XIIIe au XVIIIe siècle* (1878; reprint, Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1972); Keith Polk, "Wind Bands of Medieval Flemish Cities," *Brass and Woodwind Quarterly* 1 (1968): 93–113; Polk, "Municipal Wind Music in Flanders in the Late Middle Ages," *Brass and Woodwind Quarterly* 2 (1969): 1–15; Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). For Germany see Polk, *German Instrumental Music*. For Italy see Lewis Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara, 1400–1505: The Creation of a Musical Center in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Frank D'Accone, *The Civic Muse: Music and Musicians in Siena during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (University of Chicago Press, 1997). For Spain see Kenneth Kreitner, "Music and Civic Ceremony in Late Fifteenth Century Barcelona" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1990).

² Patronage in select southern French cities is addressed by the author in "Civic Subsidy and Musicians in Southern France during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: A Comparison of

only to establish patterns of civic patronage in French urban centers, but also to establish connections between a city's socio-political history and its civic musical practices, ultimately offering greater context and meaning to the medieval "urban soundscape" of France.

French cities began to receive communal charters in the twelfth century, acquiring rights and establishing independence from their overlords. The autonomy acquired by towns varied significantly throughout France, as each one has a unique history of struggle with overlords. While some city governments achieved only basic rights, others in France were in control of the full administration of the town, including taxation, defense, maintenance, and commercial life. The towns with the greatest autonomy even had control over jurisdiction. Members of the city government in France were drawn from the economic elite; the members often acquired a distinguished legal status through the position, though often no salary, despite the considerable time demands.

The city government often assumed the image and ritual of nobility, which was a means to establish and maintain hierarchy within the urban environment.³ With a constant jockeying for power in French medieval cities between royal, religious, and civic authorities, these rituals, which often involved music, served as an important tool to maintain balance or assert greater authority. Demonstrating control over public spaces that were historically and symbolically important to a city was an important function of these rituals. The construction of a consulate, or building where the communal government met, the control over a belfry, and the placement of coat of arms on town gates all reflected a developed sense of political space. According to Marc Boone, integral to the success and independence of medieval cities was "seizing and marking such public and private places as buildings, town halls, belfries, market squares, parish churches, and the like."⁴ Records, such as a city chronicle, were created by the city to document and maintain their ritual. Allmand noted,

There were those parts of France . . . which showed a healthy sense of independence of the centre. They did this not by challenging the royal authority directly; they used more discreet ways of asserting themselves, one of which was to take a leaf out of the royal book and to write their own histories, thereby increasing their own sense of self-awareness and local identity.⁵

Montpellier, Toulouse and Avignon," in *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Cities and Towns*, ed. Fiona Kisby (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 57–69.

³ Nicholas, *The Later Medieval City*, 6 and 116.

⁴ Boone, "Urban Space and Political Conflict," 623.

⁵ Christopher Allmand, ed., *War, Government and Power in Late Medieval France* (Liverpool University Press, 2000), xiv.

This chapter focuses on the patronage of music by cities in an area in south-central France with an eastern boundary of Marseilles, located on the coast of the Mediterranean, and a western boundary of Toulouse, located on the Garonne River in the foothills of the Pyrenees. This was a highly urbanized region during the late Middle Ages, tied closely to commerce and trade on the Mediterranean Sea. Montpellier, Toulouse, Avignon, and Narbonne all had estimated populations at their peak ranging from 30,000 to 40,000, and indeed easily fell into a first rank of towns over 20,000 in pre-plague Europe, and four cities included in this chapter, Marseilles, Nîmes, Albi, and Bordeaux (to the north and east of the rest of the cities), had populations between 10,000 and 25,000. For this area in south-central France, not only have most cities over 10,000 been examined, but some smaller cities have been included as well, including Aix-en-Provence, Apt, Béziers, and Orange.

Many of the cities of south-central France established a long history of independence from political rulers during the late Middle Ages. The foundation of independent consular governments spread from Italy to southern France during the twelfth century, and by the first years of the thirteenth century, city councils were established in many cities throughout the region.⁶ Frequently, the city councils in the south had control not only over the maintenance and defense of the city, but also over jurisdiction, a right often denied to cities. Strong independent governments operated for decades in many of these major cities in south-central France before being brought under the centralized force of the French monarch. While remaining loyal to the King of France, these cities found ways to assert themselves and increased “their own sense of self-awareness and local identity.”⁷ Directly related to the political independence of many southern French cities, they tended to support music for the purpose of drawing attention to and formalizing the ritual and ceremony of city governments. Despite this overall pattern, significant variation existed between civic musical practices in southern French cities, which is paralleled in their unique political histories. The cities in southern France with the greatest political independence, and therefore developed civic ritual, subsidized music that met, and frequently surpassed, that in other major European cities.

⁶ Edith Ennen, *The Medieval Town*, trans. Natalie Fryde, vol. 15 of *Europe in the Middle Ages, Selected Studies*, ed. Richard Vaughan (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1979), 124.

⁷ Allmand, *War, Government and Power*, xiv.

Languedoc: Montpellier, Narbonne, Nîmes**Montpellier**

Few towns outside of Italy in late medieval Europe were as economically important or politically independent as Montpellier, and few towns throughout Europe developed such elaborate independent civic rituals embedded with music.⁸ Montpellier's location less than ten kilometers from the Mediterranean Sea, to which it was connected by a small river, as well as its location on principal trade routes, contributed to its development into a major commercial center by the thirteenth century. From the eleventh century, the jurisdiction of Montpellier was divided between two primary feudal powers, the Bishop of Maguelone and the secular overlords of the Guillem family.⁹ During the twelfth century, the Guillem family was successful in gaining control of the city from the bishop and other feudal powers, but it was unable to maintain power over the growing body of wealthy citizens involved in the commerce of the city. Representing an early important stage for towns seeking civic independence, in 1196 the community took charge of the construction, maintenance, and defense of the city wall. The wealthy citizens of Montpellier successfully revolted against the ruling feudal family in 1203, and shortly thereafter, a town government, consisting of twelve representatives from the wealthiest professions in town, including bankers, importers of spices, and cloth merchants, became the primary ruling body. The exceptional power and independence of Montpellier was manifested in the city's acquisition of practical control over the jurisdiction of the city, if not theoretical control, as the town government appointed municipal officials and was instrumental in determining the bailiff and judge.¹⁰ Reyerson writes, "Montpellier was then governed internally by twelve municipal consuls whose bailiff's court was theirs de facto, though in theory it belonged to the king of Aragon and later Majorca."¹¹ Another important symbol of the city's autonomy was the attainment of an official building, the consulate, located in the central

⁸ Kathryn Reyerson, *Business, Banking and Finance in Medieval Montpellier*, Studies and Texts, vol. 75 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1985), 6–7.

⁹ Archibald Ross Lewis, "Seigneurial Administration in Twelfth Century Montpellier," *Speculum* 22 (1947): 563.

¹⁰ Jan Rogozinski, *Power, Caste and Law: Social Conflict in Fourteenth-Century Montpellier* (Cambridge, Mass.: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1982), 39.

¹¹ Kathryn Reyerson, "Public and Private Space in Medieval Montpellier," *Journal of Urban History* 24 (1997): 6.