

1 | Mary’s Mother: Devotion, Politics, and Music

Anna floret ut lilium
In summi regis curia,
Thronum adepta regium
Cum immortalī gloria,
Inter matronas rutilans,
Ut sol mundum illuminans.
(MR6, AH 25.19)

Anne blossoms like a lily in the highest court of the king, having obtained the royal throne with immortal glory. Like the sun lighting the world, she is the one shining among mothers.

Anna floret ut lilium, the sixth Matins responsory from a widespread versified office for St. Anne, brings forth in song a rich variety of suggestive images for the intent listener. St. Anne, the apocryphal mother of the Virgin Mary, is celebrated through a series of comparisons that appropriates some of the vocabulary of Marian symbolism. Anne is first compared to a lily, widely understood as signifying the Virgin’s undefiled purity. She is also situated allegorically within an imperial court, “having obtained the royal throne with immortal glory.” This regal imagery co-opts another attribute of her illustrious daughter, who held the epithet “Queen of Heaven” (*Regina caeli*). The responsory closes by casting St. Anne as a beacon for mothers, reflective of her popular status as the “Mother’s mother” (*Mater matris*). As is well known, she was a guiding light for women wishing to conceive and for those already with children, even surpassing her daughter to some extent as an intercessor for matrons. How did Mary’s mother, a woman not mentioned in the New Testament, rise to this lofty status, on par with royalty and well suited to aid in maternity? This study presents several cases from the early fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century that demonstrate the value of musical devotion to St. Anne mainly by female nobles in some of the leading courts in Western Europe of that time. This inimitable Christian saint has received considerable scholarly attention over the past century, but the cultural embrace of her multifaceted character (whether as a wise mother or

powerful progenetrix) has yet to be assessed through the medium of music. The survival of both plainchant and polyphony in her honor indicates that music was an essential component of the devotional life of the nobility and offered an important means of invoking – and indeed, interacting with – the mother of Mary. In focusing on the sonic expressions of devotion to St. Anne in elite court contexts, these cases not only illuminate new ways of understanding Christ's legendary grandmother, a figure known for her remarkable intercessory capacity, but also unveil the values that the saint offered to several unusually powerful noblewomen in this period.

In the history of the Latin Church, the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries represent an intense period of sanctoral devotion, some of which can be attributed to a revived emphasis on salvation. Symptoms of the attention to individual deliverance can be seen at the close of the Hundred Years' War with the growth of clergy and mendicant orders, the rise of confraternities, the economics of indulgences, and the emergence of devotional aids such as the Rosary. These phenomena increased lay anxiety about redemption. Permeating society from the aristocracy to the peasantry, the saints – holy models of Christian living – kept the focus on salvation, providing supplicants valuable intercession with Christ to calm their worries about the hereafter. Saints' lives were retold in widely circulated legends, especially in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* (*Legenda aurea*) from the mid-thirteenth century, an encyclopedia of saints and feasts that became one of the most broadly disseminated books of the late Middle Ages. Key episodes of saints' *vitae* were also the subjects of visual art. Their *historiae* were further highlighted in the celebration of the Divine Office, which set their lives in poetry and song. Works of polyphony in honor of saints, such as choral motets and themed settings of the Mass Ordinary, were more elaborate musical creations available to wealthy patrons and opened up avenues for imprinting saints' merits in the soundscape.¹ This period of high cultural awareness of soteriological matters gave rise to significant artistic production that served to strengthen the movement.²

As suggested by the floral and royal analogies presented here, St. Anne was a figure validated by association with her daughter Mary, whose role as the most powerful *Mediatrice* of Christianity is well known. Marian devotion gained considerable traction in the late Middle Ages, coinciding not just with the renewed emphasis on salvation but also with the establishment of purgatory, the unknown region of waiting where one's sins that had accumulated on earth could be expiated. Because of her sinlessness, Mary could naturally be called upon to help purify sinful lives, and composers played an important part in supplying patrons with bountiful chant

and polyphony for the Virgin.³ Believers thought that an appeal to the very source of Mary – her mother, Anne – could also help secure the redemption of human souls.

There were even more advantages to venerating Mary's mother. As scholarship has emphasized, St. Anne is polysemic, though her image was anchored by several key character attributes that defined her numerous intercessory capabilities. An impressive matriarch over Christ's extended family, which was known as the Holy Kinship, St. Anne was pivotal in establishing the virtuousness of marriage and the value of progeny.⁴ As *Mater matris*, she was also tapped as an intercessor promoting fertility and aiding in the dangerous experience of childbirth. Given Anne's role as nurturer of the Virgin Mary, Christians further revered her as a master teacher, an advocate for female literacy in particular. Although she appealed to supplicants of all social ranks, St. Anne had a physical connection to Mary and to Christ, as well as to generations of distinguished kin, and this network of relationships attracted the attention of the nobility, whose claims to magnificent antecedents defined their place in society. It is these devotees of St. Anne (especially queens and duchesses) who could request – or were showered with – visual and aural works in honor of the “grandmother saint” to help shape their own images as rulers, in addition to earning her protection.

In *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Johan Huizinga observed that late medieval art was essentially functional in nature.⁵ The idea of a masterpiece, a piece of “art for art's sake,” was completely foreign to both the artist or composer and his noble patron. Art instead had a job to perform, one that shifted according to circumstances. This principle would be easily grasped if the texts of the music for St. Anne to be studied simply announced their functional intent. But such music does not exist. What remains instead is a body of liturgical music in commemoration of the *Mater matris*, some of it with detectable political undertones. By focusing on this music for St. Anne prepared for some of the most important sovereigns of Renaissance Europe (many of them female), the reader will witness a wide range of sacred genres under consideration. Motets and more extensive polyphonic settings of the Mass Ordinary, along with newly composed plainchant for the Mass and Office, are all represented in this study. These genres are seemingly bound together by their role in the liturgy, the work or duty of the Church in the service of God; however, such works also offer a glimpse of a devotional atmosphere that may also construct or reinforce noble identities in the declamation of rich texts.⁶

Where are the politics in music geared for liturgies? Importantly, the sonic works for St. Anne were both collected by noble houses and sent

as gifts to courts to curry favor, usually in lavish manuscripts.⁷ The music was likely experienced in private liturgies, but it is also possible that these works simply lay in “coffee table”-type volumes for display, still efficacious for fashioning regal self-images. In possession of music for St. Anne, rulers established their own identities by associating with the powerful mother of Mary. The function of the sacred music identified in this study, I argue, transcended its obvious role in the liturgy. It was an emblem of prestige that reflected the values and ambitions of its patrons or dedicatees, mostly women in uncharacteristically powerful positions.

As Roman Hankeln has written, the celebration of the liturgy, particularly services in honor of saints, has typically mediated between religious ideals on one hand and historical reality on the other.⁸ The components of the liturgy that achieved this balance (namely, the variable texts and music) echoed human values and could have political weight, no matter how veiled that weight may be. Of course, nearly all of the items in the Mass and Office were sung, which draws attention to the multitude of chanted texts and their meaning for the recipients of music for St. Anne. Since the fourteenth century, motets in particular – not exclusively bound to the liturgy – developed a reputation as the genre of choice for ceremony and even for political statements, a feature that was carried through at least to the end of the sixteenth century in the music of William Byrd, whose politically tinged motets are well known.⁹ Over the course of the fifteenth century, the so-called cyclic mass, which draws together the texts of the Mass Ordinary into polyphony, became the most ambitious form of composition for cultural elites, eclipsing the motet as the “highest” genre of sacred music.¹⁰ Plainchant too, as will be shown, cannot be dismissed as incapable of performing cultural work toward political ends, despite (or conversely, because of) its pervasiveness and ancient roots.

As much as secular works, sacred music participated in the formation of identities for patrons, sometimes mapping their personal and political concerns onto pieces as communicated by composers. This added subjective layer of meaning and the reception of the music (whether performed in private or in public) intensified what some may perceive as a humble act of devotion. As difficult as it may be for the modern mind to admit politics into the sacrality of the liturgical ritual, this book demonstrates that the boundary between ecclesiastical conventions and secular wishes was as porous as ever in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It is in this light that the case studies ahead must be viewed to unlock fully the perceived potency of Mary's mother in the soundscape of Western Europe's noble courts. This study endeavors not only to determine those aspects of St. Anne's character that were being proclaimed in the sound world, but

also to address the impact of this music on the rulers who requested, sent, received, or experienced it. Only a few of the nobles under consideration were women named Anne, thus suggesting that devotion to Mary's mother was not as simple as an invocation of a patron namesake.¹¹ The political value surrounding St. Anne undoubtedly extended into the sound world as a complement to – or sometimes in conflict with – the impressions from visual culture and devotional life. In addition to a wide social view of sacred musical settings, materials of their construction will also be investigated, often shedding light on their political capacity, whether it is a musical gesture in plainchant underlining a particular word, a freshly identified cantus firmus that brings a new interpretive dimension to a Mass Ordinary setting, or the network of associations unfolded in a polytextual motet.

St. Anne and Her Family

The Gospels reveal very little about the life of the Virgin Mary, and so it comes as no surprise that her mother, Anne, receives no mention in canonical sources. In this way, Mary's mother survives as a "constructed" saint, as nothing was officially known about Jesus' historical grandmother. However, some details of the life of Anne and her husband Joachim are documented in the second-century *Protoevangelium of James*, which enjoyed widespread circulation in the early Christian world. Responding to the silence in the New Testament on the subject of Mary's childhood, this apocryphal account supplied Christians with minutiae on the Virgin's early life.¹²

According to the *Protoevangelium*, Anne and Joachim, a rich man from the tribe of Judah, lived for many years without offspring and made a vow to God that if granted progeny, they would dedicate the child to the service of God. The righteous Anne and Joachim gave generously of their possessions, keeping only one-third of their wealth for themselves. Another third of their assets was given to the poor, and the remaining third was earmarked for the temple and its servants. While Joachim was at the temple one day, a priest criticized him about his childless marriage. Reflecting contemporary associations of fertility with heavenly approbation, the priest argued that a sterile man should not be in the company of those blessed with children. The humiliated Joachim fled to the desert. There, he was visited by an angel, who announced that his wife would bear an extraordinary daughter named Mary. The same angel then appeared to Anne and proclaimed the glorious news. Anne and Joachim reunited at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem and returned home in anticipation of the divine promise to receive Mary.¹³ This legend of Mary's parents remained strongly in the Christian collective

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memory for at least the next millennium and a half, and the figures of Anne and Joachim, if not the particulars of the story, have survived to the present day. Places like Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, a major pilgrimage site in Quebec, Canada, continue to sustain the legend around St. Anne and testify to the power of her intercession.

The chronicle of Anne in the *Protoevangelium* follows a common Hebrew narrative of a barren woman who pledges a long-awaited child to God and then miraculously conceives at an old age. The account most closely resembles the Old Testament story of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, who issued a plea to God at the temple and conceived after remaining childless for a long time. The orthographical and aural proximity in the name (Anna/Hannah) strengthens the analogy between the two mothers. Anne's circumstances may also be compared to those of Sarah, the wife of Abraham from the book of Genesis.¹⁴ The legend also finds a parallel in the New Testament: the angel's announcement of the birth of John the Baptist to Elizabeth and Zechariah echoes the angel's declaration of the conception of Mary to Anne and Joachim.¹⁵ As shown later in this study, the modeling of Anne on the ancient Hebrew mothers was not only reinforced in the texts of musical works but also provided noblewomen – and men – with a potent social use for the saint.

Having no basis in Scripture, the apocryphal life of St. Anne as transmitted in the *Protoevangelium of James* was unacceptable to the Church Fathers, and their disapproval delayed Anne's immediate acceptance into the sanctoral canon.¹⁶ Amid the slow and uneven reception history of St. Anne in the early Middle Ages, one of the Church Fathers, Jerome, was indirectly drawn into the apocryphal legend in his writings on Mary's lineage, specifically in his explanation of the "brothers" of Christ named in the gospels of Mark and Matthew.¹⁷ Jerome assumed Jesus' "brothers" to be the sons of Mary's sisters (i.e., his cousins), and not the sons of Joseph by some other woman.¹⁸ The ninth-century biblical commentator Haimo of Auxerre (d. 853) went a step further, connecting these presumed sisters with women named "Mary" mentioned in the Gospels at the scenes of the sepulcher and the resurrection.¹⁹ His theory gave rise to Anne's "three marriages" (known as the *trinubium*), and the saint was henceforth held up as the mother of the "Three Marys." According to the popular *trinubium* belief, Joachim must have died soon after Mary was born, so that Anne – already eighty years old in some versions of the legend – could marry her second husband, Cleophas (sometimes called Jacob or James), by whom she bore "Mary Cleophas" (also known as "Mary Iacobi"). Anne then married a third man, named Salome, following Cleophas's death. By Salome, she bore the

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third Mary, known as “Mary Salome.” From these three Marys, the theory continued, came Jesus and all six of his “brothers” or cousins named in the Gospels. James the Less, Joseph the Just, Simon, and Jude were positioned as the sons of Mary Cleophas, who had married a man named Alphaeus, while James the Greater and John the Evangelist were said to be the sons of Mary Salome, who had married Zebedee. In this way, Anne became the grandmother to some of Jesus’ most prominent disciples, all members of the Holy Kinship.

Depictions of the Holy Kinship were common in northern continental Europe in the fifteenth century. A book of hours from Rouen dated around the turn of the sixteenth century shows the core members of the Kinship (Figure 1.1). St. Anne and the Virgin Mary (with the Christ Child) occupy a central position flanked by Mary’s two sisters, who hold open books. Four men stand behind the throne, their undifferentiated representation – what Pamela Sheingorn has aptly described as an “awkward clump” – typical of the male figures in Holy Kinship iconography.²⁰ Presumably, the background features an arrangement of Joachim and the husbands of the Three Marys (Joseph, Alphaeus, and Zebedee), though technically one or more of the men could instead be a husband of Anne (Cleophas or Salome).

The theory of the trinubium took some time getting off the ground. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) for one rejected the idea of Anne’s three marriages.²¹ But Jacobus de Voragine secured St. Anne and the “Three Marys” in the pantheon of holy figures in his *Golden Legend*. By the thirteenth century, a tradition had developed associating St. Anne with Mary’s early childhood, and Voragine followed suit, providing her legend as part of his entry on the Nativity of Mary (September 8). Reflecting a cultural appetite for the lineage of the Virgin in particular, he offered a mnemonic for the reader to keep track of the Holy Kinship, of which Anne and Mary were crucial members:

Anna solet dici tres concepisse Marias,
 Quas genuere viri Joachim, Cleophas, Salomeque.
 Has duxere viri Joseph, Alpheus, Zebedeus.
 Prima parit Christum, Jacobum secunda minorem,
 Et Joseph justum peperit cum Simone Judam,
 Tertia majorem Jacobum volucremque Joannem.²²

Anne is usually said to have conceived three Marys, / Whom her husbands Joachim, Cleophas, and Salome begot. / The Marys were taken in marriage by Joseph, Alpheus, and Zebedee. / The first Mary bore Christ, the second bore James the Less, / Joseph the Just with Simon and Jude, / the third, James the Greater and John the Wingèd [the Evangelist].



Figure 1.1 *The Holy Kinship* from an Anonymous Book of Hours (Rouen, Use of Paris), ca. 1500. Photo: The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MS M.175, fol. 17v. Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913) in 1902.

In addition to his validation of Jesus' extended family in the *aide-mémoire*, Voragine took a bolder step of criticizing the evangelists Matthew and Luke for tracing Jesus' lineage through Joseph instead of Mary.²³ The *Golden Legend* did much to raise the status of St. Anne, and she would be celebrated with unusually fervent devotion during the three centuries following.

The details of Anne's legend also circulated in *vitae* across the continent, particularly in the Low Countries and in Germany during the fifteenth century. As believers eagerly soaked up as many particulars on the early life of Mary as possible, the legends accrued new layers of biographical trivia related to St. Anne. In some late fifteenth-century *vitae*, Anne was given a mother named Emerentia, a father called Stollanus, and a sister known as Esmeria.²⁴ The creation of these and other ancestors in this period should give an indication of the fascination not just with the saints but specifically with those related to Christ and his mother. As the genetrix of Jesus and his holy relatives, Anne earned a reputation that extended far beyond that of a local or regional saint. And while veneration of Mary's mother took more than a millennium to gain momentum in Western Europe, the value of the "Mother's mother" in the distinguished company of the Holy Kinship spread rapidly throughout the Latin West after the twelfth century. Urban VI's official papal approval of her feast day (July 26) in 1378 recognized formally the value of Jesus' grandmother whom Christians had been celebrating for years.²⁵

Intercessory Flexibility

It is said that one can't be all things to all people, but Christians deployed St. Anne in a surprisingly broad devotional scope in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. Her plasticity as a saint with powerful and wide-ranging intercessory capabilities made her an attractive subject of veneration in this period, particularly for women. For more than two decades, visual representation of St. Anne has drawn the attention of scholars, especially those attuned to issues of cultural meaning and shifting reception contexts for the saint. Her principal areas of intercession, right down to her assistance with salvation itself, derived from the intersection of her apocryphal life story and the social dynamics of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Further, she served gendered and nongendered functions alike, well beyond the warm, matronly role that many Catholics assign to her today. A review of St. Anne's polysemic nature and her functional value in

society will lay the foundation for an investigation into her ability to convey political power.

The central event in the life of Mary's mother is of course the conception and birth of her daughter. The topic of St. Anne often calls to mind the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in particular, a raging debate that peaked in the mid-fifteenth century concerning the precise moment of the Virgin's attainment of sinlessness in her mother's womb (a subject addressed more fully in Chapter 4). Recent scholarship, however, has downplayed a long-held view that St. Anne's cult was a direct product of the late medieval controversy over Mary's purity.²⁶ Rather, studies have emphasized that St. Anne had a hand in the "humanation" or "enfleshing" of Christ, because she gave birth to his earthly mother. While Christ's divinity came from God the Father, he owed his physical presence to his mother, Mary, who in turn owed her existence to her mother (and so on). St. Anne, as much as the Virgin Mary, was a reminder of the corporeality of Christ, the "Word made flesh." In addition to his divine qualities, Christ's bodily nature – a "low Christology," as modern theologians are wont to call his humanity – was a prevalent theme in visual art of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as demonstrated by the countless Renaissance paintings in which Jesus touches his genitals.²⁷ The imagery of the Holy Kinship also went far to capture Jesus' connection to humanity, his grandmother often playing the dominant figure in the "family portrait."

Jesus' physicality and the value of his matrilineage achieved through St. Anne combine in a single iconographic representation known as the St. Anne Trinitarian. Often taking the form of a handheld statue especially popular in the Rhineland, this image features St. Anne holding miniaturized versions of her daughter and grandson in her arms or lap. The German equivalent *Anna Selbdritt* (literally "Anne, herself the third") suggests a subsidiary role for Anne compared to the core figures of Mary and Jesus.²⁸ But the generally oversized mother of Mary is clearly the focal point of the image, ironically making her two glorious descendants seem subordinate to her powerful maternity (Figure 1.2).²⁹ The Anglicized "St. Anne Trinitarian" is a more evenhanded term for this image, though it too fails to capture the idea that Mary and Jesus appear quite diminished in size. The divinity of Christ is hardly in evidence in the St. Anne Trinitarian iconography; rather, the viewer would be attracted to St. Anne as the corporeal source of the Virgin and her most holy son. Together with the Holy Kinship imagery, the St. Anne Trinitarian illustrates the "correction" of Christ's lineage that was issued in Voragine's *Golden Legend*. The image was emblematic of