

Music and Musicians at the Collegiate Church of St Omer

Music played a key role in late medieval devotional life – articulating people’s social, psychological and eschatological needs. The process began with the training of choirboys whose skill was key to institutional identity. That skill was closely cultivated and directly sought by kings and emperors, who intervened directly in the recruitment of choirboys and older singers in order to build and articulate their self-image and perceived status. Using the documentation of an exceptionally well-preserved archive, this book focuses on music’s functioning in an important church in late medieval northern France. It explores a period when musicians from this region set the agenda across Europe, developing what is still some of the most sophisticated music in the Western musical tradition. The book allows a close focus not on the great compositional achievements of those who cultivated this music, but on the personal motivations that shaped their life and work.

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Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83972-3 — Music and Musicians at the Collegiate Church of St Omer
Andrew Kirkman
Frontmatter
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Crucible of Song, 1350–1550

ANDREW KIRKMAN
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108839723

DOI: 10.1017/9781108884990

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First published 2020

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kirkman, Andrew, 1961– author.

Title: Music and musicians at the collegiate church of St-Omer : crucible of song, 1350–1550 / Andrew Kirkman.

Description: [1.] | New York : Cambridge University Press, 2020. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020014105 (print) | LCCN 2020014106 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108839723 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781108813655 (paperback) | ISBN 9781108884990 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Church music–France–Saint-Omer (Pas-de-Calais)–History–To 1400. | Church music–France–Saint-Omer (Pas-de-Calais)–History–15th century. | Church music–France–Saint-Omer (Pas-de-Calais)–History–16th century. | Church music–Catholic Church–History–To 1400. | Church music–Catholic Church–History–15th century. | Church music–Catholic Church–History–16th century.

Classification: LCC ML3027.8.S26 K57 2020 (print) | LCC ML3027.8.S26 (ebook) | DDC 781.71/200944272–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020014105>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020014106>

ISBN 978-1-108-83972-3 Hardback

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*Philippe, qui ducit me,
ducit et discipulos suos.
In piam memoriam Philippi Welleri
12.2.58.–1.12.18.*

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Acknowledgements

This book has been a long time in the making. Its origins date back to the early 1990s, when I was toying with the idea of an archival project and Rob Wegman, recalling a footnote in an article by Jeremy Noble, suggested Saint-Omer.¹ I set off to this town, then unknown to me, almost on a whim, the extent of my planning such that I spent the first night there sleeping in my car. But my lack of general preparation was as nothing compared with my unpreparedness for the task I had set myself. Installing myself in the Bibliothèque de l'Agglomération de Saint-Omer and experiencing for the first time the sense of fear (which has never entirely left me) when confronted by strange, unfamiliar handwriting, I persevered anyway. Patient and kind early assistance with reading my first haul of photocopies came from Rob himself, from Bonnie Blackburn and Barbara Haggh-Huglo.

Since that halting start and over an intermittent and long-term 'holiday project' I have come to know this lovely town and its surroundings well, and to forge many friendships and contacts there. The library itself quickly introduced me to a cast of characters almost as colourful as those whose lives were unfolding before me in the documents. My fellow 'archive rats' Ludovic Nys and Sarah Staats (their own volumes now long-since completed)² offered companionship, 'street smarts' and humour. Françoise Patschkowski, for many years the archive's guardian angel and now a dear friend, gave invaluable support in negotiating a collection that, in the early days, was a good deal less organised and accessible than it is today. The

¹ Noble's article discusses a St-Omer canonry listed in papal documents as having been conferred on Josquin, but that was clearly not taken up. See 'New Light on Josquin's Benefices', in Edward E. Lowinsky and Bonnie J. Blackburn (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Josquin Festival-Conference* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 76–102, at 80–4 and 90. Noble notes 'The remaining archives of Notre Dame [St Omer] are preserved . . . in the Bibliothèque Municipale [now the Bibliothèque de l'Agglomération de Saint-Omer]. The chapter acts for the relevant period . . . might well repay detailed examination' (p. 84).

² Marc Gil and Ludovic Nys, *Saint-Omer gothique* (Valenciennes: Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 2004); Sarah Staats, with the collaboration of Caroline Heid, Donatella Nebbiai and Patricia Stirnemann, *Le catalogue médiéval de l'abbaye cistercienne de Clairmarais et les manuscrits conservés* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2016).

unique sparkle and kindness of Olivier Ferlin has added a brightness and sense of joy that, on his impending retirement, will be sadly missed. The late Jacques Engrand and the indefatigable local historian Dr Philippe Derieux provided insights and details that I would have been unlikely to trace on my own.

In more recent times I have benefited greatly from the encyclopedic knowledge and invaluable assistance of the library's *responsable des fonds anciens* Rémy Cordonnier. Mme Rose-Marie Pasquier of the Bibliothèque des antiquaires de la Morinie has been unfailingly thoughtful and helpful, even photographing and sending me many images of rare materials from that remarkable collection. Carl Peterolff's generosity and promptness in sharing his exquisite photographs has greatly enriched not just the appearance of the book but also the vividness of the history it recounts. Another recent pleasure has been the infectious passion for the former collegiate church and (now) *cathédrale*³ of its wonderful sacristan Benoît Meens: through Benoît I have had access to dark corners of the building whose treasures I could never have suspected, much less seen. Mutual love of the *cathédrale* has also led recently to burgeoning friendships with Jean Luc Montois and Anne Piérard, who have also provided useful historical detail. Claude and Marie-Laure Galamez have given my stays in the region (and in particular in their lovely smallholding) a warm glow that I reconnect with every time I return.

This book would have been frankly impossible in the absence of two people. Without the microfilms made in connection with Ludovic Nys's own book project and which he made available to me, the necessarily intensive study of the deliberations of the St Omer chapter (henceforth 'chapter acts') would have been effectively impossible. The brilliance and sheer tenaciousness of Henry Howard's engagement with my Latin documents has gone far beyond what could possibly be encompassed by the word 'translator'.

The broad frame of reference of a book of this nature carries with it many pitfalls, from many of which I have undoubtedly been saved by the generosity of colleagues to whom I shall be forever grateful. Barbara Hagg-Huglo and Robert Nosow kindly read the entire script in an earlier iteration; their continuing expertise and enthusiasm has been a gift that I can only hope, over time, to be able to repay. John Harper's input in all

³ Although known as *la cathédrale*, the building was only actually an episcopal seat between 1561, following the destruction of Thérouanne, and 1801, when Saint-Omer was incorporated into the diocese of Arras.

things ritual and liturgical has gone far beyond what the word ‘colleague’ could possibly encompass: his acuity, fund of knowledge and the remarkable speed of his responses have added immeasurably to the finished product; truly a friend-colleague in a million.

Having no expertise myself as an organist, I have drawn, for Chapter 4, on the feedback of a wide range of authorities. I must first express my deep thanks to Robert Bates, who has with unfailing generosity placed at my disposal his extraordinary range of knowledge of organ-building and organ practice in this period and region. Other friends and colleagues who have commented in detail on this chapter have been John Caldwell, Dominic Gwynne, Barbara Hagg-Huglo, John Harper, Franz Körndle, Kimberly Marshall, Robert Nosow, Jonathan Wainwright and Magnus Williamson. Alison Adams has given wonderful and prompt expert feedback on my French translations, while Douglas Brine’s insights have provided valuable enrichment in the area of funerary monuments. Darwin Smith has shared with me his writings and insights concerning Jean Thorion and Florence, while David Fiala has supplied prosopographical data as well as responding to sundry questions concerning obscure (at least to me) expressions in French.

Heartfelt thanks are due to Kate Brett and Eilidh Burrett of Cambridge University Press for their kindness and efficiency in the whole process of shepherding this book through to publication.

My wife Amy and children, William and Dave, have put up with long periods of distraction from me as this book has come into being, especially and perhaps inevitably in the later stages.

Finally I cannot end this litany of thanks without acknowledging the input, over decades, of my dear friend Philip Weller. As I think back over many wonderful times in Saint-Omer across what is at this point a large chunk of my life, Philip is a presence in many of the very best, sharing the joy of discovery not just in the archive and in the great building around which this story revolves, but over wonderful meals, wine (of course), views, walks and almost everything else that makes life worth living. I know I share feelings of gratitude with many whose lives he so richly touched; I can only hope that what I, and they, do in our turn can be in some way worthy of the enrichment he so selflessly gave to those he left behind.

Note on Editorial Policy, Currency and Dates

It is in the nature of a narrative about life as lived in a particular time and location to draw in a wide range of quotations from original documents. In citing these I have aimed to preserve the tenor of the original ‘voices’ to as great an extent as seems consistent with coherence and clear comprehension. Hence I have avoided wholesale rationalisation to modern orthography and punctuation, maintaining, for example, local dialectical practices in French (‘le’ in certain circumstances where the modern norm would be ‘la’, for example) and avoiding the accents and punctuation of modern French. Rationalisation has been applied, however, to capitalisation and to certain orthographic variants (‘ii’ for ‘ij’ for example), and editorial expansion of standard abbreviations has not been indicated, square brackets being reserved for instances of ambiguity. Non-consecutive quotation and the beginning or ending of quotations in the midst of sentences have been signalled by use of ‘...’.

New-style dating has been tacitly applied unless otherwise stated.

All monetary sums are quoted in livres, solidi and sous (expressed as £ s. d., or pounds, shillings and pence), the pound in every currency encountered comprising twenty shillings, with each shilling in turn divisible into twelve pence. The local money (‘monnaie courant’) is the livre d’Artois, equal to forty groats of the livre de Flandres. Accounts are often expressed in royal livres parisis, then converted into monnaie courant. To illustrate the prevailing exchange rates I shall enlist the authority of Nicole de Le Salle, receiver of the fabric account at St Omer for the year 1453/4: Nicole announces that his ledger will be entered in royal livres parisis, with each livre, or ‘pound’, worth 22s. 6d. in current money (the livre d’Artois). At the same time, the royal livre parisis equals forty-five groats in money of Flanders, while two groats of Flanders equates to 12d. (= a shilling) in current money, a ratio of 1 : 6.¹ To determine the relationship between the livre d’Artois (‘monnaie courant’) and the royal livre parisis it suffices to

¹ Toute le quele recepte sera mise et avaluee a monnoye parisis, a compter chascune lb. monnaie parisis dessusdit pour xxii sc vi d monnoye courans, qui valent xlv gros monnoye de flandres, [et] deux gros de flandre comptes pour xii d. monnoye courant. (1453/4, f. 1r)

reduce Nicole's comparative sums to their smallest component, the denier or penny. Hence the equation between the 20s. of the pound parisis and 22s 6d. of the pound of Artois boils down to a relationship of 240d. parisis to 270d. Artois, a ratio of 8 : 9, the pound parisis therefore equating to 1.125 (or 11/8) livres d'Artois. This relationship pertains across the documents that will concern us, as can easily be ascertained by comparing any pair of figures expressed in 'money parisis' and 'current money'. In sum:

16 royal livres parisis = 18 livres d'Artois
 16 livres parisis = 3 livres de Flandres
 3 livres de Flandres = 18 livres d'Artois²

Of course the breakdown and relationship of currencies carries little meaning in the abstract: what matters is their relation to income and, by extension, purchasing power. One tangible yardstick is offered by the income of the individuals at the top of the St Omer food chain: the church's canons. While, as will be detailed in the Prologue, the taxable income for a major canonry at St Omer according to the survey of 1362 was £80, the total emoluments were in reality (as Alain Derville observes) closer to £200, and this just for one canonry: a number of St Omer's canons enjoyed multiple benefices. By comparison, Derville notes, a master craftsman, commanding daily remuneration of 4s., would work hard to achieve an annual income of £50.³ Closer to home, the annual salary of the church's organist at least until 1475 was £4, augmented by a further 24s. for playing for the weekly *Salve* devotion at the chapel of Notre-Dame sur le marchiet, home of the icon of Notre Dame des Miracles. Salaried clerics and other employees of the church had access to other piecemeal sources of income and, then as now, in-kind benefits such as accommodation. But the gulf in income between the beneficed canons and the rest of the church's personnel speaks clearly enough.

Documents quoted and referred to belong, unless otherwise stated, to the series II. G. (chapitre de Saint-Omer) of the Bibliothèque de l'agglomération de Saint-Omer. To avoid unnecessarily cumbersome referencing, the annual fabric accounts are here referred to only by year covered (beginning in all cases on All Saints' Day (1 November)). The earliest

² See Peter Spufford, *Monetary Problems and Policies in the Burgundian Netherlands, 1433–1496* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 20–3. My thanks to Robert Nosow for his clarifications on these matters.

³ 'Les chanoines de Saint-Omer aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles', in Nicolette Delanne-Logié and Yves-Marie Hilaire (eds.), *La cathédrale de Saint-Omer: 800 ans de mémoire vive* (Paris: CNRS, 2000), 92–3.

accounts (1378–1410, with gaps), entered on rolls, each receive a separate call number in the archives (II. G. 2797–2814); the pamphlet accounts of subsequent years under consideration (1412–1550) are preserved in bundles of between two and six years per call number (II. G. 2815–40). Specific years' accounts are easily locatable on site via reference to the series catalogue.