**Listening in the Library: Matthew Parker’s Sonorous Books**

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‘Archbishop’, ‘bibliophile’, ‘antiquarian’, ‘theologian’, ‘history-maker’ and ‘reformer’ – these are all well-known dimensions of the life of Matthew Parker (1504-75), and ones refracted through the manuscripts and printed books he acquired for his precious library. But hidden among the library’s treasures – sometimes quite literally buried in bindings – is another, less familiar history, though paradoxically one that clamours to be heard: that of sound. To some extent, this is an accidental history. Neither Parker nor his book-collecting agents were explicitly intent on building a *music* library (music being the most recognisably audible component of a book). Even those few famous examples of books specifically dedicated to musical practice, such the *Winchester Troper* (**15**) or compilations of medieval European music theory (**3, 14**), reflect conceptions of music very different from our own. In one, sound, made visible in early systems of musical notation, is understood as the vocal facet of sacred, ritual texts of the Christian liturgy; in the other, *musica* is a form of knowledge and part of a medieval liberal arts training. In so far as Parker was invested in scrutinising early church history or genealogies of academic knowledge embodied by such books, we may add ‘music-maker’ to the list of his lofty epithets. But to study these areas of the collection from the perspective of *sound* is also to shine light on a rarely considered dimension of Parker’s life: his own relationship to music as integral to his religious practices, and his interest, too, in the history of ideas regarding the ineffable powers of sacred sound.

While those few books in the Parker Library comprehensively filled with musical notation, or theorising sound’s physical properties, may be contextualised within Parker’s broader fascination with church or intellectual history, sound is also an inadvertent yet ubiquitous passenger in many more volumes. So much so that were it possible to ‘turn up the volume’ on the collection, the library would resound in arresting cacophony. It is present in books retro-fitted for performance, when a scribe added a single song, filling a gap in the parchment as a seeming afterthought. Or when decades or even centuries later, someone slipped a few folios of a decomissioned songbook into a book whose contents were far removed from music. Or when, here and there, musical doodles appear in the margins of an otherwise silent book. Why are they there? To enhance meaning? Or are they simply evidence of wandering minds? Many of Parker’s books, his printed books especially, tell a rather more traumatic tale of sound’s past: of old music books discarded and cannibalised, absorbed into the fabric of bindings and spines as material life-support for new creations. Yet what was trash for earlier book-makers is treasure for modern historians – those crumpled slivers of old melodies reveal snatches of past musical worlds that are otherwise almost entirely extinct. Finally, there are the signs of sound we might be forgiven for missing altogether. The trumpeting of a marginal elephant or of a heavenly emissary, the strum of David’s harp, or the swirl of an angelic speech-scroll – while these might engage modern eyes in silent contemplation, such signs ignited the acoustic imagination of earlier readers, attuned as they were to supplying voices and sounds to what their eyes saw in their books.

*Listening in the Library* traces an aural journey through Matthew Parker’s library. It offers four ‘soundings’ from the collection, exploring a sample of the diverse ways in which sound – musical sound especially – manifests.

**I ‘Syng unto the Lord a song of new accord’: Matthew Parker, music-maker**

What did Matthew Parker’s world sound like? How did his collection reflect and shape his attitudes to music? Born in 1504 and brought up a Catholic on the eve of the English Reformation, one of Parker’s aural staples was sounds of the Latin Christian liturgy. Central among them, the tradition of plainchant, such as that used for recitation of the Psalms, the backbone of daily religious devotion. Indeed, after his ordination as a priest in 1527 and in his role as Chaplain to Anne Boleyn in 1535, incanting Latin liturgical texts would have been engrained in Parker’s vocal vocabulary. It is precisely these traditions, though, that Parker himself would later be instrumental in silencing, before instating new practice for the reformed church. We cannot know what it meant to Parker to unlearn his younger musical habits, and then to overwrite them with new traditions. However, some of his books offer fascinating insights into his musical ‘before’ and ‘after’, including one very personal involvement in replacing old with new musical practices.

Parker’s interest in Anglo-Saxon church history resulted in the survival of several early liturgical books in his library, some with exceptionally rare examples of medieval music notation. While their status as relics of England’s authentic church bid these books free pass into the reformed future, the collection, by contrast, has very few examples reflecting the contemporary Roman practice of Parker’s youth since this was the history he and other reformers systematically erased. A rare exception is a Sarum *Manuale* of chants and prayers printed in 1506 (**2**), which includes centuries-old chants for Latin rites such as baptism, marriage, and burial. Why it was acquired is unclear. But as well as recording Parker’s earlier soundworld, it also bears witness to its censure: throughout there are erasures and whole-sale excision of pages that reference the Roman church and pope – a microcosm the bibliographic iconoclasm that befell so many other such books. The *Manuale* stands in stark contrast to Parker’s unique contribution to the new Church of England rituals: his English metrical translation of the Psalms, *The vvhole Psalter translated into English Metre*, completed in 1557 and printed in 1567 (**1**). Use of native English was a requirement for all services of the new church to ensure transparency of meaning. So while the Psalms remained the mainstay of new rituals, they were voiced now in English, not Latin: literally a ‘new song’ for a new church. Parker’s collection further supported such an initiative, preserving medieval precedents for use of vernacular in England’s religious past. Among the Psalters Parker acquired were vernacular Psalm translations and commentaries. Richard Rolle’s commentary dating c. 1348 (**4**) shows the Latin psalm text underlined in red, dwarfed on the page by his English commentary. In a Psalter containing a Middle English translation (**5**) Parker’s occasional notes are visible, one translator conversing with another across the centuries.

Parker’s *Psalter* is also a reminder that the sacred words were intended to be heard, and most often sung. It was moreover a requirement of the reformed church that music be a medium of access, not obfuscation of words: ‘setting thereunto a plain and distinct note, for every syllable one’ (from the 1548 injunctions from Lincoln Cathedral). Thus, Parker’s volume is bookended with *music*. It opens with a learned preamble, citing ancient authorities, on music’s ineffable power and relationship to words. And it concludes with musical settings for his translation, in harmonisations of the eight psalm tunes (tones or modes, a type of musical scale) by Thomas Tallis (c. 1505-1585). Direct in delivery and affect, each tune is introduced with a short description: the third, for instance, ‘doth rage: and roughly brayth’ (centuries later Vaughan Williams used this as basis for his *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*). That system of organising melodies into eight modes, and attributing emotions to each, has precedent in the tradition of medieval music theory. Among Parker’s manuscripts is English theorist Walter Odington’s *De speculatione musicae* (c.1300) which likewise examines the practice of Latin psalmody through the lens of the eight modes (**3**).

**II Amplified books**

Very few manuscripts in Parker’s library are devoted solely to music. However, there are numerous instances where music makes a fleeting guest appearance: where just one or two songs appear in books otherwise devoid of obvious musical themes or content. It is easy to overlook music’s role in such cases as secondary or incidental to a particular compilation’s primary thematic emphasis. But Parker’s collection offers several examples which together reveal how an isolated musical turn in a manuscript could serve to amplify a book’s message, and in some cases add ritual gravity to the texts.

Three such examples may be found in books to which Parker himself may have felt special connection, owing to the ties forged through their music to three early archbishops of Canterbury – a position to which Parker was appointed in 1559. In each case, the music was included, or added shortly after completion, drawn from the liturgical offices associated with a different archbishop, each hailing from a time in the English church that Parker sought to revive. The first example is inclusion of a liturgical Latin prose for the Feast of St. Dunstan (archbishop from 959-988), in a manuscript containing a compilation of texts devoted to various Canterbury saints (Dunstan included), and produced at Canterbury in the eleventh century (**6**). The second, dating a little later, was likewise produced at Canterbury and contains notated Latin chants from the Office of St. Mellitus (archbishop from 619-624), these added in a contemporary hand to a historical text by Frechulf of Lisieux (**7**). Finally, we find Latin liturgical chants for the first archbishop of Canterbury, St. Augustine, copied in a miscellany of texts to that saint in a manuscript likely copied at Canterbury in the twelfth century (**8**). In all three cases, given the connections of texts or the books’ production to Canterbury, it is not hard to see why such musical additions fit the context. The musical additions, occupying no more than a page or two, are in one sense equivalent in function to an illumination – painting through sound the Canterbury associations. But in each case, the music selected for inclusion is from the liturgical services used to commemorate each of the archbishops, so that music’s presence imbues the books with deeper spiritual meaning: not just an illumination, then, but a form of aural icon.

The practice of adding occasional musical items was not unique to manuscripts associated with Canterbury and its saintly archbishops. While in the preceding examples the inclusion of music was part of the original planning, or musical items were added shortly after, in other cases there was a much longer hiatus before the addition of music. One of the Parker’s many Latin sermon collections offers an intriguing case in point (**9**). The original host manuscript dates from the twelfth century and contains a collection of sermons compiled by Paul the Deacon. At least two hundred years later, leaves from a late fourteenth-century manuscript containing English liturgical polyphony was tipped into the end of the book. The circumstances by which the original music manuscript came to be disbanded, and as to why these pages were added to the older manuscript, is impossible to know. Indeed, a pragmatic eye would conclude the music leaves were there primarily to strengthen the binding of the older book. But a closer exploration of the musical contents and the themes of the final sermons in the earlier book reveals unmistakable counterpoint between the two. The sermons make reference to the Virgin Mary, while the musical sheets contain several intact, or partially intact, polyphonic settings once used for devotion to the same. However the two came together, by design or by accident, the addition of music offers new opportunities for engaging with the sermons, and vice versa.

**III Discarded sound**

Historians of the musical past depend heavily on the survival of notated sources to piece together the picture of what people once listened to, performed and composed. Sometimes those stories are preserved in luxurious books, whose material beauty reflects the values attached to their musical contents. Indeed, as we shall see, Parker’s library is home to one or two such stars in the pantheon of European music history. But more often, it is a tattered history – told through a few left-over leaves or fragments from books now otherwise lost, or through shadows left on pages scrapped clean and then overwritten by new text. Such evidence is important, not only for the piece it offers of the larger puzzle of the musical past. It is important, too, as a record of changing values: of how and why certain books – and the music they contained – came to be disposable to some, and sometimes precious enough to others that preserving even a random page was deemed worthwhile. Hidden among the books of the Parker Library is ‘collection within a collection’: of a discarded history that is simultaneously a treasure-trove for our understanding of the musical past.

Many of the Parker’s most celebrated manuscripts and printed books play unwitting host to old music manuscripts: to books that were repurposed in the service of making new books. A remarkable example appears in an early fourteenth-century copy of Vincent of Beauvais’s great world history, his thirteenth-century *Speculum historiale* (**11**). At some point in the manuscript’s history, portions of an earlier English music manuscript, containing polyphonic settings of vernacular and Latin texts, was used to strengthen the book’s physical structures. Largely complete music folios appear a flyleaf; but tiny slivers of other of its parchment leaves are also embedded within the final section of the *Speculum*, barely visible, with just a few musical notes surviving. In this case, repurposing the decommissioned whole of which these music leaves were once part offers a life-line to a part of music history which is now largely lost. The English text of ‘Worldes blisce have god day’ is a rare example of a Middle English lyric set as a motet (a genre of polyphony). There is another recurring pattern of musical repurposing evident in Parker’s collection, notably among the printed books. That is, the reuse of medieval liturgical manuscripts – the hand-written predecessors to the Sarum *Manuale* (2) – as binding matter. The examples seen here, used in the making of sixteenth-century printed books (**10**, **12**, **13**), illustrate a few of the ways old manuscripts were put to work in new settings. Such acts of dismembering and recycling books were commonplace in this period, reflecting changing tastes as certain texts fell out of fashion. But they bear witness, too, to the effects of the Reformation – these older books were not just out of fashion, but actively forbidden, censored and often dismembered. The printed books here, then, actively, if inadvertently, embody the religious ruptures in the world around them at the time of their making – a dimension that cannot have failed to resonate when they joined the ranks of Parker’s collection.

**IV Visualising sound**

How did medieval readers ‘listen’ to their books? What were the visual signs for sound and how were readers encouraged to respond to them? Taken in the round, Parker’s library offers a rich snapshot of the variety of ways in which medieval people engaged with their books as sonorous objects. Some cues for sound are recognisable to modern eyes. The most obvious are those seen in the Sarum *Manuale* (**2**), for example, and decipherable in the musical scraps in the printed books (**10**, **12**, **13**): black squares (notes) on red lines (staves) – a system of musical notation which is still commonly used in many quarters today. Indeed, anyone versed in reading music should feel emboldened to have a go at singing what’s on those pages, since the system offers precise information about the pitches to be sung, their order and relationship to words. But the same is not true of many earlier notated manuscripts in Parker’s collection. In fact, when Parker and his agents were scouring England’s monasteries for sources of Anglo-Saxon church practices, they were also, unwittingly, responsible for preserving some of the earliest examples of European musical notation, known as neumatic notation, used to record the melodies (plainchants) of the liturgy. Though genetically linked to those later systems, neumes operate without the anchor of staves, and depict pitches within the patterns of melody shapes, rather than atomised notes, and often worked in dynamic relationship with the musical memory of singers and scribes. The *Winchester Troper* (**15**), copied at Winchester in the 1020s and containing liturgical music used at the Old Minster, is a stunning showcase of the system in action. But the *Troper* is famous not only for the exquisite and extensive use of neumes, but also for the music they record: it contains among of the first ever examples of notated polyphony (*organum*), music where an additional voice was added as embellishment to the original liturgical chant. While the neumatic system was most widely used to notate liturgical chant and *organum*, the Parker Library also contains another rare example of an early effort to visualise *organum*, in a set of treatises, the *Musica* and *Scolica enchiriadis*, in a manuscript copied in Canterbury in the late tenth century, intended for the schooling of church singers (**14**). The system (known as Daseian notation) visualises the sound of two, three or four-part polyphony moving in parallel by mapping the passage of individual voices through time along a horizonal axis, and their relationships to one another expressed on the vertical axis.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, neumatic notation was reserved almost exclusively for liturgical use: the notation was understood as the visualisation of the sound of the sacred texts. However, among Parker’s collection is a manuscript where neumes make a rather baffling appearance. They appear in the margins of a book whose contents are emphatically not liturgical: a tenth-century compilation on orthography (**16**). It is not clear what relationship these ‘notes’ had to the main text – they are not obviously commentary, in the way marginal notes often are. It is possible they are pen-trials – a doodle intended to prime the quill. But read against the *Winchester Troper*, the shapes are recognisable as neumes, and the possibility remains we are eavesdropping on a snippet of melody the anonymous scribe had in mind – a medieval earworm, perhaps?

Music is as extreme among the many aural cues in medieval books. Indeed, for earlier readers, any text, with or without notation, was understood to have a ‘voice’, and for many, to read was to read aloud. It was also true that illuminations depicting sound would have registered as audible signals. Indeed, artists often delight not only in depicting sound, but also reactions to it: in an Anglo-Norman *Apocalypse* (c. 1300), an owl looks aghast as an angel trumpets from heaven (**17**). Sometimes sonic representations are harmonious with their texts: such as the image of King David, author of the Psalms, strumming his harp in Rolle’s Psalter (**4**). In other cases, the cacophony implied acts as a distraction – an interlude in the act of reading, perhaps, such as in the joyful mix of human and elephant sounds that stagger across Matthew Paris’s thirteenth-century *Chronica maiora* (**18**).

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