Chapter 1 The musical tradition in the Low Countries in the first half of the 16th century

1.1 The secular and ecclesiastical organisation of the Low Countries

In 1543 Emperor Charles V added the duchy of Guelders to his realm.[58] It was the end of a long period in which the Burgundian-Habsburg dynasty had slowly expanded.[59] 'The Low Countries by the Sea' finally came together under one ruler, although not for long.[60] Charles's empire was large, and therefore in 1518 he delegated the daily government of the Low Countries to his aunt Margaret of Austria, who was Governess until she died in 1530.[61] In 1531 Charles's sister Mary of Hungary took over the government until 1555, when she retired together with him. Just like her aunt Margaret, Mary would stimulate the arts in the Low Countries in a very strong way.[62]

The period between 1492 and 1530 was a relatively peaceful one in the Low Countries.[63] The economy flourished, manifesting itself among others in the art sector. But from around 1520 until 1559 the Burgundian-Habsburg state almost

---

58 Blockmans/Prevenier 1997, p. 253. As we shall see, 's-Hertogenbosch suffered intensively from this war (§ 6.8).

59 On the history of the Burgundian-Habsburg realm, especially on the Low Countries: Blockmans/Prevenier 1997 (an English edition of this book is available: Blockmans/Prevenier 1999) and Blockmans 2010.

60 A map of the Low Countries in 1543 (situation lasting until 1579) is in AGN, volume 5, p. 314; in this volume, the annexation of Tournai and the northern Low Countries (Friesland, Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel and Utrecht) in the first half of the 16th century are described (pp. 492-505).

61 Margaret was already governess from 1506 to 1515 at the request of Charles's grandfather Maximilian, on behalf of Charles, who was still a minor (Blockmans/Prevenier 1997, pp. 234-235).

62 Koldeweij 1993.

63 Blockmans/Prevenier 1997, p. 236.

continuously was in war with France, which weakened both realms. As a consequence, the cities seized their opportunities and slowly became more and more autonomous.[64]

The political, secular power in the Low Countries was interwoven with the ecclesiastical authority. Charles V had a large share in the appointment of clerics in high (and less high) places.[65] The clergy was numerous in medieval Europe, and not all of them functioned or behaved well within a system that became under more and more pressure. The many clerical abuses at all levels grew in the 16th century to the point where new forms of religion were initiated by men like Martin Luther, John Calvin and Menno Simons. The religious troubles led to the iconoclastic fury of 1566, but it would be until the last decades of the 16th century when Protestantism became the dominant faith in the northern Low Countries.[66]

The Catholic Church took measures to change her structures. Also as a result of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), Charles V prepared a redivision of the dioceses in the Low Countries. This resulted in 1559 in the subdivision of the six dioceses (Utrecht, Liège, Cambrai, Tournai, Arras and Thérouanne) into a total of nineteen bishoprics (the existing ones remained, to which among others 's-Hertogenbosch, Bruges, Ieper, Mechelen, Haarlem, Leeuwarden and Groningen were added). The dioceses of Mechelen, Utrecht and Cambrai were the new archbishoprics; Liège (diminished) remained under the direction of Cologne.[67]

Until 1559 the Flemish/Dutch speaking districts of the Low Countries only had one cathedral (the Utrecht Dom). Every town and even many small villages in the 16th-century Low Countries had their own church. In larger communities there were often more churches, one of which was usually a collegiate church.[68] Furthermore, there were separate chapels (founded by guilds, brotherhoods or rich citizens) and convent churches.[69]

---

64 Blockmans/Prevenier 1997, p. 256. In the next chapters, the history of the towns where Gheerkin de Hondt worked – Delft, Bruges and 's-Hertogenbosch – will be briefly sketched, all with their own circumstances.

65 Blockmans/Prevenier 1997, pp. 243-245. For example bishops, but also benefices and prebends for singers. On the assignment of prebends in Flemish chapter churches: Wouters 1998, pp. 16-17.

66 The southern 's-Hertogenbosch came under Protestant rule in 1629.

67 Selderhuis 2006, pp. 268-272, including maps of the situation before and in 1559.

68 An overview of the chapter churches in the separate area's is given in Post 1954, pp. 366-368 and Bouckaert/Schreurs 1998, p. 11. For Flanders specifically: Wouters 1998, pp. 15-16.

69 These two types of churches will be left out here, since professional musicians (singing polyphony) only incidentely performed here, at special requests.

Collegiate churches – also called chapter churches – were ruled by canons,[70] singing the Divine Office and a High Mass every day. There were about twelve to thirty canons in each church, receiving a prebend, but not always residing.[71] The canonical hours were also (even originally) celebrated in convents. In both cases city dwellers had no part in this liturgy; they had their own parish churches, although in some cases a collegiate church also functioned as parish church.[72] However, in the cases where the church had a double function, the official canonical liturgy was performed behind a screen (often a rood screen), only accessible to the canons.

The Divine Office originally consisted of eight hours: Matins (after midnight), Lauds (at dawn), Prime (6 a.m.), Terce (9 a.m.), Sext (midday), None (3 p.m.), Vespers (at sunset) and Compline (before retiring). An important part of the Office was singing the 150 Psalms every week, but also other canticles, both in combination with antiphons, responsories and hymns.[73] Soon, the Matins and Lauds were combined, and hence the eight canonical hours were in fact seven, corresponding to the symbolism of the divine number seven.[74] The daily High Mass was usually celebrated between Terce and Sext (therefore between 9 and 12 a.m.).[75]

In the 15th century, more and more parishioners wanted to celebrate the canonical hours in their own churches. Individuals made foundations for celebrating the Divine Office and from then on the so-called *getijdencolleges* developed, as a kind of surrogate chapters.[76] First, the Divine Office was only sung on special days, like Christmas, but soon foundations made it possible to sing them all year long. Originally a group of priests was responsible for singing the Divine Office, mainly in Gregorian chant and often (at least for parts of the Office) accompanied by

---

70 On canons in Flemish chapter churches: Wouters 1998, pp. 16-19.

71 It was not unusual that canons often had prebends in other churches where they were appointed canon too; they then appointed a replacement (a *vicaris*) to whom they paid a portion of their income from the prebend (Wouters 1998, pp. 18-19).
Bouckaert/Schreurs 1998, p. 11, mention twelve to twenty-four canons, but as we shall see, 's-Hertogenbosch had thirty. Wouters 1998, p. 18 mentions thirty in Sint-Donaas in Bruges and even forty-one in Sint-Servatius in Maastricht.

72 For example – as we shall see – in the case of the 's-Hertogenbosch Sint-Jan.

73 Roche/Lingas, ('Office'); Korteweg 1983, pp. 9-10, 21, 25, 30.

74 Jas 1997, pp. 5-6. The eldest known charter of a college of the seven canonical hours dates from 1424 (Bruges), see § 4.6.

75 Korteweg 1983, p. 10.

76 On the origin and development of the colleges of the Divine Office: Post 1954, pp. 368-383; Jas 1997, pp. 2-29; Selderhuis 2006, p. 88; Nolet/Broeren 1951, pp. 243-247; Declerck 1971. Jas describes specific colleges of the northern Low Countries.

schoolboys. But by the end of the 15th century, professional (non-priestly) singers were hired and polyphony slowly took on an important place in this type of liturgy.[77]

1.2 Liturgy

Singing the Divine Office and a High Mass every day was the basis for the liturgy in collegiate churches and churches with a *zeven-getijdencollege*.[78] But shortly after the foundation of these *colleges*, the liturgy was extended with other Masses, feasts, feasts of saints, processions, *Lof* services, personal foundations, Requiem and memorial services and services related to other 'inhabitants' of churches like brotherhoods and guilds.

The Mass consisted of two parts: the Mass Ordinary and the Mass Proper.[79] The Ordinary contains five parts – Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei – used in every Mass and bearing the same text every time. It was this cycle of Mass items that developed from the 14th century onwards into the polyphonic Mass Ordinary. The texts of the Mass Proper are different in every Mass, typical for the day of the year (for example a feast). These Proper texts were sometimes also set to polyphonic music, but since they could not be used in every Mass and sometimes even only once a year, they were less popular for composers. The chants of both the Ordinary and the Proper differed widely from diocese to diocese, also because of the difference in local saints' days. Consistency was enforced by the Council of Trent with the Roman Order of the Mass; a new missal appeared only in 1570. Still, local differences in feasts of saints were allowed, although considerably less than before the reform.

A special category is that of the votive Masses, Masses that were not part of the official liturgical year, but were celebrated for a special intention. Examples are Masses of the Holy Cross, the Holy Sacrament, the Virgin Mary, patron saints, and Masses for special occasions like the conquest of Emperor Charles V, peace or a disease like the plague.[80] The Requiem Mass (often called the *Missa pro fidelibus*

---

77 See below under Singers and Musicians and see the chapters on Delft and Bruges for specific examples.

78 On the different manuscripts used for these services: Hughes 2004 and Korteweg 1983.

79 This paragraph is based on McKinnon ('Mass').

80 Haggh 1988, pp. 383-384.

defunctis) also is a votive Mass, sung at funerals, but also during memorial services.[81] A standard version of the Requiem Mass – like the polyphonic Mass Ordinary – was only developed after the Council of Trent.[82]

The medieval liturgical calendar counted many feasts: fixed feasts (for example Christmas), movable feasts (Easter and the cycle linked to it) and feasts of saints (for example St John the Evangelist or St Donatian). On the high feast days the labourers were not allowed to work and people had to attend Mass.[83] The number of feast days and the importance of the same feasts differed from diocese to diocese, but on average, there were about seventy days a year.[84] On some of these days so-called mystery plays were performed: for example on Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday and Easter.[85] Mystery plays were also presented during processions. Processions were held in or outside the church. Every medieval town had at least one big yearly procession, organised by the government of the town and the church(es) together and often combined with an annual fair.[86] These processions attracted many people from the entire region.

The liturgy in churches was often given extra lustre by foundations made by (rich) parishioners. In many church archives we find fine examples of foundations for the seven canonical hours or other feasts (in the early existence of a *zeven-getijdencollege*), but also (in a later stage) for extra pomp on feasts that were already celebrated.[87] It was no exception that different people made foundations for the same liturgical event. Sometimes even private chapels with personal altars were furnished in a church, at which daily Masses were read and sometimes even sung in polyphony. Important in the category of personal foundations are the memorial services, which could come in many varieties, differing from region to region, but also from church to church; even within one church it was possible to put together one's own service: with or without bell tolling, (polyphonic) music, extra psalms, et

---

81 Death, life after death and remembrance were important issues in the Middle Ages. In this thesis only the musical features will be considered. For other aspects see, for example, Van Bueren 1999, Van Bueren 2005 and Ariès 2003.

82 Bergé/Christiaens 2011, p. 54. See there on the history of the Requiem Mass in general. Also: Fitch ('Requiem Mass').

83 Post 1954, p. 389.

84 In chapters 3, 5 and 7 calendars with feast days will be given for Delft, Bruges and 's-Hertogenbosch.

85 Post 1954, pp. 391-392. As we shall see, we find examples of mystery plays in all cities where Gheerkin de Hondt worked.

86 Post 1954, pp. 393-396.

87 The archives of the Sint-Jacobskerk in Bruges contain many foundation charters in which, for example, extra candles or bell ringing were ordered, and even polyphonic music was specifically mentioned.

cetera.[88] Remarkable is that other major personal events in Christian life, like weddings and baptisms, seem to have been much less or even not at all important.[89]

Besides the individual foundations, there were groups of people who had their own altar or even chapel in a church, where they had Mass celebrated regularly: the guilds and brotherhoods. Guilds were very characteristic for medieval towns; they united craftsmen of the same profession, but sometimes also craftsmen of different lines of work. The regulation of the workflow was their most important purpose. Every guild of craftsmen had its own patron, a saint connected to the craft, who was honoured by celebrating his feast(s) every year. Furthermore, the deceased members were remembered once or more times a year.[90] Contrary to the guilds, brotherhoods solely had a religious goal. A brotherhood or confraternity honoured, for example, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy Sacrament, the Holy Blood, or a saint, or prayed for the faithful souls in purgatory.[91] A brotherhood celebrated services every week, sometimes even every day. Here too, deceased members were remembered on special days.

A devotional service that was popular among brotherhoods was the so-called *Lof* service.[92] This service probably originated in a solemn series of songs of praise in honour of the Blessed Virgin, sung after Vespers. Later on, the number of hymns was extended and a separate service created.[93] Other types of *Lof* services came into being, for example in honour of the Holy Cross, the Holy Sacrament or a saint.[94]

To coordinate all these activities in one building, there were several church organisations, in larger churches usually three. First, there was the church fabric, responsible for the building (especially the building activities) and the interior, including for example the organ. Another organisation was in charge of the liturgy, for example the *zeven-getijdencollege* (in Bruges called *Commuun*[95]), under which

---

88 As we shall see in Chapter 5 on Bruges (§ 5.5.4) and Chapter 6 on 's-Hertogenbosch (§ 6.3.2).

89 There are no references to these occasions in the accounts of the Sint-Jacobskerk in Bruges, nor in the accounts of the Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap in 's-Hertogenbosch.

90 Post 1954, pp. 383-384; Blockmans/Prevenier 1997, pp. 245-246; Van Bueren 1999, pp. 57, 59-60.

91 Post 1954, pp. 384-386.

92 There is no proper English translation for this word, since *Lauds* or *Salve* could also refer to other services.

93 Post 1954, pp. 381-382.

94 Haggh 1988, pp. 397-421.

95 Probably dirived from *communitas chori*, the choir of priests singing the Divine Office.

the group of singers fell.[96] Finally there was a group of men taking care of poor relief, called *armentafel*, *Tafel van de Heilige Geest* or *Dis*. In some churches there was a separate organisation for the memorial services.[97] The administrators were mostly men coming from the higher social echelon of the community, and they did not have to be priests.

Of course, there were many clergy working in the churches, according to a system that was common in most of the churches, with slight differences.[98] First, there was a parish priest, who was not always actually in residence, and therefore had substitutes, called, for example, *(vice)cureiten* or *vicarii*. Then there were several *cappellani* (chaplains), responsible for services at special altars, but never the high altar; they did not have any obligation of spiritual care. Furthermore, every church had a sexton; some brotherhoods even had their own. Another important position was that of the schoolmaster, taking care of the education of boys, who were obliged to sing during the liturgy. By the end of the Middle Ages, we see that tasks originally fulfilled within a church were taken over by local city governments, for example education and poor relief.[99]

1.3 Music, especially polyphony

The collegiate churches and the parish churches with *zeven-getijdencolleges* became the centres of the development of polyphony in the Low Countries.[100] In towns like Cambrai, Brussels, Bruges, Antwerp, Ghent, Leiden and 's-Hertogenbosch music played an important role in the everyday liturgy celebrated in houses of worship. Daily liturgy was also celebrated with professional singers at princely courts, for example that of Emperor Charles V. The rich archives of these institutions tell us about the highly trained singers and musicians performing music on a day-to-day basis.[101]

---

96 In many church accounts, the organist is paid by the church fabric, probably because the organ was the responsibility of the church masters.

97 Nolet/Boeren 1951, pp. 337, 346-349.

98 Nolet/Boeren 1951, pp. 333-346; Kuys 2004.

99 This will be demonstrated in the chapters on the churches in Delft, Bruges and 's-Hertogenbosch.

100 Bouckaert/Schreurs 1998, p. 10.

101 Many publications on music in various cities have seen the light. To name a few: Wright 1978 (Cambrai); Haggh 1988 (Brussels); Dewitte 1962, 1967, 1970, 1971, 1972a, 1972b, 1973, 1974, 1977, 1979, 1985, 1991, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b (Bruges); Strohm 1990[2]

During Gheerkin's lifetime, there were roughly three main musical genres in the Low Countries, all three of them set by Gheerkin the composer: Mass, motet and chanson.[102] The first two belonged to the category of ecclesiastical music, the third to the secular type.

The polyphonic Mass Ordinary was the most popular and widespread genre. The unity between the five standard parts of this Mass was often formed by using pre-existing musical models of which (parts of) the material returned in every piece. Models could be chant melodies or complete polyphonic compositions like motets and chansons, in which case the Mass is called a parody Mass. If an existing melody (chant or monophonic chanson) is used in long note values in one of the voices (usually the tenor), the Mass is called a cantus firmus Mass; if the melody is used in different, smaller note values it is called a cantus prius factus Mass.[103] Masses were often named after their model, for example a *Missa L'homme armé* (after the famous chanson model *L'homme armé*) or a *Missa Alma Redemptoris Mater* (after the Marian antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater*), or after the feast they were written for, like the *Missa de Sancta Maria Magdalena* (for the feast of St Mary Magdalene). It was not unusual, however, for a Mass to have more than one name, depending on the scribe who had copied it or the occasion for which it was intended.[104] The fact that sacred Masses were based on secular chansons, sometimes even with rude texts, seems to derive from the 15th-century courtly environments in which the Virgin Mary was the model for ladies at the court (Mary as the Queen of the heavenly

---

(Bruges); Andriessen 2002 (Bruges); Van den Nieuwenhuizen 1978 (Antwerp); Persoons 1978 (Antwerp); Forney 1987 (Antwerp); Wegman 1989 (Bergen op Zoom); Jas 1997 (Leiden); Bouckaert 2000c (Ghent); Roelvink 2002 ('s-Hertogenbosch); Bouwstenen (several cities); Wegman 1996 (several cities); Haggh/Daelemans/Vanrie 1994 (several cities).

102 In those days, instrumental music had not yet developed in the independent form we know from later ages. Since we do not know any instrumental pieces by Gheerkin and he was above all a singer, instrumental music is not considered here. On the subject: Elders 1985, pp. 104-112, Polk 2005 (late 15th century up to 1575), Polk 1968 (especially the 15th century) and Polk 2008 (especially Bruges).

103 On the terminology: Elders 1985, especially pp. 26-31, 45-46, 177 and http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.

104 Meconi 2004. Jas 1999, p. 32 gives the beautiful example of a Mass by Josquin des Prez, which was originally composed for Ercole I d'Este and named *Missa Hercules dux Ferrarie*; when it was written into a manuscript intended for Philip the Fair and Juana of Spain, it was 'renamed' *Missa Philippus rex Castilie*; the same Mass also appears as *Missa Fridericus dux Saxsonie* in a choirbook copied for Frederick the Wise of Saxony.

court). Sometimes, however, Masses based on naughty chansons were not accepted.[105]

By the early 16th century, the motet had become a very popular genre. The motet is a polyphonic composition with a sacred Latin text. Polyphonic psalms and sometimes hymns, for example, are usually gathered under the musical denominator motet. A 16th-century motet usually consisted of two parts: a Prima Pars and a Secunda Pars, but sometimes there was only one part (for example Gheerkin's *Benedicite Dominus*). Motets could be used in church (during the Divine Office, Mass, and memorial and *Lof* services), but also outside the church, for example during processions.[106]

Together with the motet, the 16th-century French chanson had developed into a popular genre in which well-known poetry, for example by Jean and Clément Marot and poetry from text books like *Le Jardin de Plaisance*, *Le Manuscrit Bayeux* and *La Fleur des Chansons* was set to polyphonic music.[107] Far less popular was the Dutch/Flemish equivalent: the lied or song. Not many Dutch songs have stood the test of time, also because of the fact that the great composers from the Low Countries around 1500 were not highly interested in the genre.[108] Both the chanson and the Dutch lied had a wide variety of subjects: love was of course an important theme, but also sacred topics were used, for example Psalm translations, and everything in between.

In 16th-century churches polyphonic music was sung on many occasions. Originally, the Divine Office in the collegiate churches was sung in Gregorian chant. But in the course of time polyphony entered the liturgy, together with professional singers. In the collegiate churches this group often had its place on the rood loft.[109] However, it is not that easy to determine when exactly which polyphony was sung. Since the professional singers were listed in the archival sources with different voice-types, one would expect that polyphony was sung on every day they had to perform. But this can only incidentally be confirmed from the same archival sources. Vague terms like 'solemneel' (solemn), 'singen' (to sing) and 'decantare' are sometimes to

---

105 Bloxam 2004.

106 On the development of the motet: Elders 1985, pp. 22-25 and http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com ('Motet').

107 On the general history of the chanson: Brown/Fallows/Freedman ('Chanson').

108 An extensive study on the history of the polyphonic Dutch song in the 15th and 16th century is Bonda 1996. Dutch songs from the Middle Ages until the present time can be found online: http://www.liederenbank.nl.

109 Wouters 1998, pp. 20-21; Bouckaert/Schreurs 1998, pp. 11-18.

be interpreted in more than one way, certainly before the 16th century.[110] The question if and when polyphony was sung during the Divine Office is even harder to answer, but as the most important parts, Compline and especially Vespers were the favourite services to adorn with polyphony.[111] Nevertheless, the terms 'in discante' and 'in musycke' usually mean that polyphony was sung,[112] and 'simpelen sanck' normally refers to chant. Based on the repertoire that has come down to us,[113] it would be safe to conclude that polyphony had entered the liturgy of Mass and Divine Office during Gheerkin's career as singer/composer, although how much polyphony was sung and when could be different in every church.

We can be sure that polyphonic music sounded on special days, like feasts. In calendars of churches in the Low Countries, feasts are given different ranks. In general the distinction was made between simplex, duplex and triplex, but we also find divisions into semi-duplex, duplex and totum duplex (or magnum duplex), depending on the church.[114] The rank determined many aspects of a feast: the robes that had to be worn, the candles that had to be lit, the number of bells to be rung, the decoration of the church, but also the kind of music: chant or polyphony, or a combination of both.[115] For some churches statutes have come down to us with information on how we have to interpret the ranks.[116] In other cases we know from accounts when polyphony was sung, for example for the Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap in 's-Hertogenbosch, where a polyphonic Mass was sung every week on Wednesday. The collection of choirbooks of the same Broederschap shows us that also during the Vespers (celebrated every week on Tuesday and on special feasts) polyphony sounded.[117] In general we may assume that feasts of at least the duplex rank were adorned with polyphony.[118]

---

110 Haggh 1988, pp. 98-100.

111 Jas 1997, pp. 118-132.

112 See also Wright 1978, p. 298.

113 In the Netherlands today only two (incomplete) collections have been preserved: the Leiden choirbooks (Jas 1997) and the 's-Hertogenbosch choirbooks (Roelvink 2002).

114 More different names in: Grotefend 1970, Band 1, 'Festgrad'; also available online: http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/gaeste/grotefend/grotefend.htm (accessed May 2013).

115 Bouckaert/Schreurs 1998, p. 36.

116 For example for Brussels (Haggh 1988, from p. 257 onwards).

117 See Chapters 6 and 7. The polyphony for the Vespers that has come down to us was especially for feasts that were celebrated by the Broederschap, but there is also a group of Magnificat settings in this collection.

118 An assumption made by Wright 1978, p. 298, which will be confirmed by the collection of music of the Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap in 's-Hertogenbosch (see § 7.5).

On feast days paraliturgical events like processions and mystery plays also took place. On both occasions polyphony was sung.[119] The so-called *Lof* services that were often held on a daily or at least weekly basis were the liturgical moments for polyphony par excellence.[120] If polyphony sounded during funerals and memorial services, seems to have depended on the church: in some churches polyphonic Requiem and memorial services were allowed, in others they were not appropriate. Furthermore, the compilation of the service could strongly differ, even at the social level of the deceased.[121]

Sixteenth-century polyphony was usually written down in two formats: a choirbook or a series of partbooks. In the large choirbooks all the voices that sounded together were notated on two facing pages, such that if the book was open, all the singers could read their own part, every part forming a separate unit on the page. All voices ended at the same time, and if more space were required, signs were given on how to continue (like the word *verte* (turn) or a symbol which reappeared on the same or the next page). In the much smaller partbooks, the separate voice units were written in different books, each book containing one voice.[122] Both choirbooks and partbooks were written in luxurious fashion on parchment, but there were also much cheaper paper books (for daily use).

With the rise of printing in general, publishers started to print music. Officially, the first polyphonic music print dates from 1501 and is a series of partbooks by the Venetian printer Ottaviano Petrucci.[123] Many printers would follow in his footsteps, printing mainly partbooks, but also large choirbooks. It would, however, take a long time for the printed books to dispel manuscripts and in Gheerkin's time they existed side by side.

---

119 A beautiful example will be given in the chapter on Bruges (§ 5.5.3.4).

120 Examples will be given in Chapter 6.

121 Wright 1978, p. 303 states that polyphonic Requiem Masses were performed in the cathedral of Cambrai, but that the tradition of the monophonic Requiem was also continued well into the 16th century. See also the discussion in Haggh 1988, pp. 338-348, 355. In the chapters on Bruges and 's-Hertogenbosch the local customs in the churches where Gheerkin de Hondt worked will be considered.

122 In some cases two voices were written down in one book, for example when a composition had five voices instead of the four of the majority of the compositions. Then – like in a choirbook – two of the voices were on two facing pages in one book, in a way that they could be sung at the same time.

123 Boorman ('Printing and publishing of music, §I: Printing').

1.4 Singers and musicians

The singers and musicians working in churches and at courts were highly trained professionals. They were paid by church and court administrations, but were also hired by private institutions and persons, for example guilds, brotherhoods and rich men and women, mostly active in the churches. Each ensemble consisted of a leader, several adult singers, choirboys, an organist and sometimes instrumentalists.[124] These instrumentalists were usually players of wind instruments. Their availability and especially the quality of their performances were most of the time the factor determining if they were part of the group. The number of singers could vary from church to church (or court to court), also because of availability, but mainly depending on the financial situation of the employer.

Originally (already around the year 1000), the seven canonical hours in the collegiate churches were sung in Gregorian chant, led by one of the canons who was appointed *cantor*. In the course of time, polyphony entered the liturgy and at the same time professional singers entered the choir, almost always priests. They were more than welcome, since not all canons actually resided in their church and had good voices. The next step was to delegate the musical tasks of the cantor to one of these professional singers, the function of cantor becoming a more ceremonial one. Hence the position of *zangmeester* (also called *sub-cantor*, *magister cantus*, *maître de chant*, *succentor* or *coraelmeester*) came into being, the most important musical function in a collegiate church. The *zangmeester* had the musical supervision of the group of singers, being one of the singers himself. He also became co-responsible for choosing the music – was often a composer himself – and selecting new singers and musicians, and undertaking the training of the choirboys. In the 16th century, many *zangmeesters* and singers were no longer priests.[125] They formed a separate group during the singing of the Divine Office, singing both chant (often solo's) and polyphony; in collegiate churches their place was often on the rood loft.[126]

---

124 Haggh 1988, pp. 139-225.

125 Like other *zangmeesters*, Gheerkin de Hondt was frequently called *Meester*, which is probably a reference to *zangmeester* and not the the title of *Meester* obtained at a university (see also Wegman 1996, p. xxv). If Gheerkin indeed had studied at a university, Leuven would have been the most logical choice in the Low Countries. The list of names of students of this university does not contain Gheerkin's name (Schillings 1962).

126 Haggh 1988, pp. 139-225; Bouckaert/Schreurs 1998, pp. 11-18, 32-33; Wouters 1998, pp. 20-21.

Gheerkin de Hondt only worked in one collegiate church, namely that of Sint-Jan in 's-Hertogenbosch. During his stay there, this chapter still had its own *cantorie* (choir),[127] which was founded on 2 September 1425 by the testament of Albertus Buck (executed by his nephew Arnoldus Buck)[128] as a *simplex beneficium*, a benefice without the obligation of spiritual care. In the foundation act it was determined that the best singer among the canons would act as cantor. This man also had to be a subdeacon, or had to be able to become one within a year. The cantor would lead the singing of the seven canonical hours, standing before a lectern, together with his fellow canons. The last 's-Hertogenbosch cantor left town in 1629.[129] Since the professional singers entered the 's-Hertogenbosch Sint-Jan already in the 14th century,[130] parallel to other churches in the Low Countries, the cantor of the chapter was indeed more a kind of honorary position than a real musical one and the professional singers probably joined the canons singing the Divine Office from their place on the rood loft.

The group of professional singers – also called the *sangeren vander musycke*, *ghezellen vander muzycke* or *discanters* – contained different voice-types. The naming of these voices varies from institution to institution; in the accounts sometimes several names like *hoogconter* and *hoogtenor* indicate the same voice. In general, there were three main types: alto, tenor and bass.[131] The voice-type of the *zangmeester* was normally not indicated, but scholars assume he usually took the tenor part, since that part was the most structural line in a polyphonic composition; it often contained the cantus firmus and the (simple) long notes made it possible to sing and direct the choir at the same time.[132]

The top voice in the choir was usually sung by boys, generally called *bonenfanten*, *choralen* or *pueri*.[133] Here too the financial position of the church determined how many boys would be hired, but normally there were four to six, sometimes even eight or twelve. They almost always came from the town where the church stood or its direct surroundings, but sometimes they came from further away. Already in the 12th century, the Low Countries were famous for their musical education, which probably contributed to the high musical standards in this region

---

127 For an overview of the cantors: Coppens 1840, volume 2, pp. 93-95.

128 Peeters 1985, p. 349.

129 Frenken/Pijnenburg 1988.

130 Van Dijck 1973, p. 51.

131 Roelvink 2002, p. 64.

132 Bouckaert/Schreurs 1998, p. 32.

133 In 's-Hertogenbosch there were considerable differences between the *choralen* and the *boni infantes* (see § 7.4). See on the subject also: Post 1954, pp. 442-452 and Post 1957, pp. 306-309.

that lasted for so many generations. Many choirboys lived in the house of the *zangmeester*, who was not only responsible for their singing education (both in chant and polyphony), but also for their clothing and feeding. A proper school education also was part of the package, given by a schoolmaster, usually at the Latin school (often the school of the chapter) in town.[134] Besides singing, the boys also read prayers, carried candles and had other obligations during the liturgy. Once a year they had their own feast: the feast of Holy Innocents (28 December), also called the feast of Boy Bishop, because the boys then took over the tasks of the canons in the chapter and one of them served as bishop. The Bruges composer Lupus Hellinck even wrote a song about this feast (*Nieuwe almanac ende pronosticatie*). After their voice had broken, the boys often became priests, went to university or simply went home, to follow in their father's footsteps, for example.[135]

Every church had at least one organ, but often there were more: a big church organ, a smaller one on the rood loft and a portative organ that could be carried to the place where it was needed.[136] Sometimes there were separate organs in private chapels; in the 1530s the Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap in 's-Hertogenbosch, for example, ordered a new organ. The organs were played by an organist, assisted by a bellows blower (often called *orgelblaser*), who provided the organ with the necessary wind. Contrary to the modern liturgy, the medieval organist was not the accompanist of the polyphonic vocal music. Often music was performed in alternatim practice: vocal and instrumental music succeeded each other.[137]

A special person in church music was the so-called *beierman* (also *beyaerdman*). Originally the *beierman* rhythmically played bells without the activation by a keyboard, therefore by using hammers or clappers directly on the bells or indirectly through strings attached to them. Up to the 16th century it was not uncommon that the large church bells in the towers were also the bells used by the *beierman*, but there were also special smaller bells inside the church. Playing the bells – *beyeren* – was initially used to announce liturgical services. From 1500 onwards, a keyboard was attached to the bells and the so famous carillon, nowadays

---

134 On medieval schools in general: Selderhuis 2006, pp. 194-197. In the chapters on Delft, Bruges and 's-Hertogenbosch the specific situations for those towns will be described.

135 Bouckaert/Schreurs 1998, pp. 23-31; Wouters 1998, p. 22. On the situation in Brussels: Haggh 1988, pp. 149-167, 330-331.

136 On organs in the Low Countries in the Renaissance: Peeters/Vente 1971 and Vente 1963b.

137 See also Haggh 1988, p. 202. Written (or printed) organ music from the period is very rare (Caldwell ('Keyboard music')).

still widely spread in the Low Countries, was born, providing us with polyphonic music.[138]

That the Low Countries so literally set the musical tone in Europe in the Middle Ages and Renaissance period was without a doubt thanks to the well-organised musical education that formed such a strong foundation. Musicians from the Low Countries fanned out all over Europe and a widespread network of singers was responsible for the high musical standards in churches and courts. But even within one town, musicians went from church to church and back, improving their positions.[139] As far as we know, Gheerkin de Hondt never left the Low Countries to go to, for example, Italy, Germany, Spain or France. But even within the Low Countries he continuously found a new challenge and not only because of the very high professional musical level in the different political regions, which were formed into one in 1543. The main challenge was in the fact that the three cities where Gheerkin de Hondt worked – all important in their own region – all originated from different religious areas. Delft (county of Holland) belonged the diocese of Utrecht; Bruges (county of Flanders) was part of the bishopric of Tournai (Doornik) and 's-Hertogenbosch (duchy of Brabant) was a city in the diocese of Liège (Luik). For Gheerkin's work as singer/composer, working in a different diocese was probably more significant than living in another principality, because a different bishopric meant different feasts, a different routine and even different music.

138 Roelvink 2002, pp. 77-79.

139 Beautifully represented in diagram form for Bruges by Pieter Andriessen (Andriessen 2002, pp. 216-219).