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Chapter 12 Authenticity problem

In three manuscripts and four printed sources, dating from the period 1535–1556, works are attributed to Gheerkin de Hondt or plain Gheerkin.¹⁵⁵⁶ The question is if all these works could indeed be ascribed to Gheerkin de Hondt. In one case, there is a clear conflicting attribution: the chanson *A vous me rends* has been credited to both Gheerkin and Willaert. In addition to this, there is a motet attributed to Gheerkin Corael, but in the index it bears the name of De Wale. Finally, another motet has been successively attributed to Clemens non Papa, Gheerkin, Thomas Crecquillon and Clemens non Papa again.

There is just one source giving Gheerkin's full name: the superius and tenor partbooks written and owned by Zeghere van Male. Only on one page in each partbook the name Gheerkin de Hondt appears;¹⁵⁵⁷ in the Contratenor and Bassus, the attribution is to 'Gheerkin'. Because of this combined use of names, the other fourteen compositions in these books (Masses, motets, chansons and lied) simply bearing the name 'Gheerkin' are collectively ascribed to Gheerkin de Hondt. Since the writer and owner of the partbooks, Zeghere van Male, was a parishioner of the Sint-Jacobskerk where Gheerkin worked, and the partbooks were written directly after Gheerkin had left (and were probably compiled during his stay in Bruges), there is no reason to doubt this ascription. We may even add to this that the attributions Zeghere made were almost all correct.¹⁵⁵⁸

Zeghere van Male's partbooks also contain another 'Gheerkin': the motet *Dum penderet, Petrus in cruce / Gracias ago tibi* is attributed to

¹⁵⁵⁶ The list of works in Appendix 15 contains the spelling variants of all attributions. Remarkable is that there is a consequent use of the name variant 'Gheerkin', nowhere Gheerkin's official name 'Gheeraert' or 'Gerit' is used (on the spelling variants see note 2 in the Introduction). It looks like Gheerkin used this 'stage name' to distinguish himself from singers/composers with the name Gerard as first or family name (for example Jan Gerard, Gerardus Mes, Derrick Gerarde, Gheeraert Obrecht, Gerardus van Turnhout).

¹⁵⁵⁷ Fol. 48v of the *Missa Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Gabriëls 2010², pp. 159-162, 233-244.

‘Gheerkin Corael’ above the music and to ‘De Wale’ in the index.¹⁵⁵⁹ The fact that there seems to be a clear distinction between this ‘Gheerkin Corael’ and the ‘Gheerkin’ who is represented in the partbooks with fifteen works suggests that they are two different men. If we interpret the name ‘Gheerkin Corael’ in the most obvious way, it would mean that a choirboy named Gheerkin was the youthful composer of the work and that his full and official name was Gheeraert de Wale.¹⁵⁶⁰ The documents of the Sint-Jacobskerk do not mention a Gheeraert de Wale as a choirboy during the years Gheerkin de Hondt was the *zangmeester* of the Sint-Jacobskerk, but that proves nothing, since many of the boys have remained anonymous. However, the accounts of the church fabric do mention the funeral of a child of a Gheeraert de Wale in April 1559.¹⁵⁶¹ This Gheeraert de Wale could indeed have been a choirboy during the compilation of the partbooks (before 1540) and he might even have been a choirboy in the Sint-Jacobskerk or another church in Bruges.¹⁵⁶² Another possibility is that he was a former choirboy and the name ‘corael’ is added to make a distinction between Gheerkin de Hondt and Gheerkin de Wale.¹⁵⁶³ (Former) choirboy Gheeraert de Wale probably did not continue his musical career, because no more works have come down to us.¹⁵⁶⁴ But the distinction made by Zeghere van Male between Gheerkin de Hondt (Gheerkin) and Gheerkin de Wale (Gheerkin Corael) seems to be correct.

Pierre Phalèse ascribed the chanson *Oncques ne sceu avoir* in his 1553 print of five- and six-voice chansons to ‘Gheerkin’.¹⁵⁶⁵ It is the youngest ‘newly’ published work by Gheerkin de Hondt we know so far. Since there only seems to have been one composer named ‘Gheerkin’, this work has been normally acknowledged as being by Gheerkin de Hondt. Only a stylistic comparison could shed more light as to whether this work can indeed belong to the oeuvre of Gheerkin de Hondt.

¹⁵⁵⁹ CambraiBM 125-8, fol. 79v-80r.

¹⁵⁶⁰ In the official documents in Bruges Gheerkin de Hondt is always called Gheeraert, in Delft and 's-Hertogenbosch Gerrit/Gerit. Therefore, the official name of Gheerkin de Wale would be Gheeraert de Wale.

¹⁵⁶¹ RAB 88, No. 28, Rekening kerkfabriek 1559, fol. 354r.

¹⁵⁶² Gabriëls 2010², p. 151 suggests he was a choirboy at Sint-Donaas, but she did not know the reference in the accounts of the Sint-Jacobskerk.

¹⁵⁶³ As we shall see in § 14.4 Gheerkin de Wale favours a through-composed technique.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Eitner 1900-1904, volume 10, p. 158, Fétis 1865, p. 407 and De Coussemaker 1975², p. 85 do mention him as one of the composers of the Zeghere van Male partbooks (De Coussemaker even gives a transcription of the Prima Pars of the motet in his Supplement), but Gheerkin de Wale did not make it into any music encyclopedia.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Several spellings: Gheerkin/Gheerken/Geerkin/Cheerkin.

The two Masses in the 's-Hertogenbosch choirbook attributed to 'Gheerken' are generally accepted as being by Gheerkin de Hondt. As with the Cambrai partbooks, there is no reason to doubt the ascription, since the manuscript was most likely written during the time Gheerkin de Hondt was *zangmeester* in 's-Hertogenbosch. Besides, there are clear relations between the repertoire in this book and the biography of Gheerkin de Hondt, representing his personal taste.¹⁵⁶⁶ Finally, all the attributions in the manuscript are the complete names of the composers (first and family name; first name of Pierre de Manchicourt in abbreviation), except for the two Masses by 'Gheerken'. This suggests that he was well known to the scribe of the Broederschap, even 'one of their own', at least during the time of compiling and writing the manuscript.

Two works on Gheerkin's worklist have conflicting attributions: *A vous me rends* and *Het was my van te voren gheseyt*. The case of *Het was my van te voren gheseyt* is not that complicated, since the attribution to 'Geerhart' by Susato is easily explained as a name variant of Gheerkin. The situation with *A vous me rends* is different, because it is ascribed to Adriaen Willaert in the Scotto print of 1535/1536. However, several points of view have been considered on how a chanson by Gheerkin de Hondt could turn up in an Italian print attributed to Adriaen Willaert.¹⁵⁶⁷ But the best argument in these two cases is that both works are also part of the Cambrai partbooks.¹⁵⁶⁸

An interesting situation appears in one of the Leiden choirbooks, manuscript 1442 (also called book E), dated approximately 1567.¹⁵⁶⁹ The manuscript contains an *Ave Maria* that bears the names of no fewer than three composers.¹⁵⁷⁰ The scribe first attributed the motet to 'Clemens non papa', which was crossed out and replaced by 'Gheerkin'. Then 'Gheerkin' was crossed out and changed to 'Tho. Cruquillon'. Finally, the name of

¹⁵⁶⁶ See § 11.2.

¹⁵⁶⁷ § 11.4.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Both *A vous me rends* and *Het was my van te voren gheseyt* are listed in the *Grove Online* in the work lists of respectively Adriaen Willaert and Jan Gerard, without mentioning the conflicting attribution to Gheerkin de Hondt in CambraiBM 125-8. The website www.adriaenwillaert.be does mention the ascription to Gheerkin de Hondt.

¹⁵⁶⁹ On this manuscript: Jas 1997, especially pp. 82-85 and 191-197.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Regionaal Archief Leiden, Kerken, nummer toegang 502, inventarisnummer 1442, fol. 65v-66r. All the Leiden choirbooks are available online: <http://www.archiefleiden.nl/home/collecties/verhalen/koorboeken/bladeren-in-koorboeken>. Edition: Bernet Kempers 1951-1976, volume XXI, pp. XII, 93-95. Recording: Egidius Kwartet 2014.

Crecquillon was scratched off (but is still very legible), and someone wrote 'Ita est Clemens non papa' on the opposite folio.¹⁵⁷¹

The main question is how the scribe of the Leiden choirbook got acquainted with Gheerkin's music. This is not too hard: Gheerkin visited the city at least twice: in the early 1530s when he was *zangmeester* in Delft and in May 1543 when he fulfilled the same position in 's-Hertogenbosch, both times to look for new singers for his employer.¹⁵⁷² This last journey is especially interesting, since Gheerkin worked for a Marian confraternity at the time and the composition in question is an *Ave Maria*. Of course, Marian devotion ran rampant in the mid-sixteenth century, but the accounts of the 's-Hertogenbosch Broederschap especially mention two facts: 1) Gheerkin wrote four motets for them, which have not been kept in the confraternity collection;¹⁵⁷³ 2) *Ave Marias* were sung on many occasions in 's-Hertogenbosch, but six *Ave Marias* were sung by the singers during the banquets the Broederschap held about nine times a year.¹⁵⁷⁴ Therefore, strictly biographically speaking, it is no surprise to find an *Ave Maria* which has Gheerkin's name above the music in a choirbook originating in a city he professionally visited.¹⁵⁷⁵

Albert Smijers suggested that the four motets Gheerkin wrote for the Broederschap are among the anonymous compositions in the 's-Hertogenbosch codex today bearing Smijers' name.¹⁵⁷⁶ He does have a point, all the more since Philippus de Spina left out the ascriptions to the composers in the majority of his scribal work. But in my opinion, in the present time ascribing anonymous compositions to sixteenth-century composers is a difficult and dangerous task, especially when 'style' is the only available tool.

However, it is possible to say something about the oeuvre of Gheerkin de Hondt now available. Considering the sources in relation to Gheerkin's biography, there is no reason to doubt the ascriptions to Gheerkin (de Hondt) in the Cambrai partbooks, the 's-Hertogenbosch choirbook and the Phalèse print of 1553. But closer study of the music itself will be needed to show if this can be confirmed by the compositions themselves.

¹⁵⁷¹ First discovered by Jas 1997, p. 193.

¹⁵⁷² Part I, respectively § 3.4 and § 7.1.

¹⁵⁷³ § 7.1.

¹⁵⁷⁴ § 6.3.2 and Roelvink 2002, pp. 53 and 241 (no. 3).

¹⁵⁷⁵ I want to stress again that so far, there are no indications that there is another composer using the name Gheerkin.

¹⁵⁷⁶ Smijers 1946, p. 29.