Het Gruuthusehandschrift

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The polyphonic potential of Gruuthuse melodies from a Central European perspective: an experimental musicological exploration

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1. Introduction

In the late middle ages, between the last decade of the 14th and the first quarter of the 15th century, we find three large collections of songs building on the European monophonic song tradition: the songs of the Mönch von Salzburg, the Oswald von Wolkenstein songs and the Gruuthuse-collection (Strohm 1993, p. 345-346). These collections were the last ones of their kind. Monophonic art song had become an exception in the musical spectrum of the period and faded away in most parts of Europe, although in the area north of the Alps it continued to appear in several circles of musical society throughout the 15th century. We find for instance the Meistersinger with their reworked collections of the former Minnesänger and the typical Central European Cantionalia containing non-liturgical sacred songs in both Latin and the vernacular. Last but not least we find monophonic songs by the Mönch and by Wolkenstein that were adapted in instrumental polyphony showing us a sign of their lasting popularity.

The songs of the Mönch von Salzburg (Waechter & Spechtler eds. 2004) have survived in many manuscripts; most of them dating from some decades after the period in which the songs are supposed to have originated, the late 14th century, the period in which the obscure figure of the Mönch had been active. The song corpus consists of secular and sacred songs: the sacred songs are divided into a group of songs by the Mönch himself, and a group of translated songs based on already existing material, which I will not consider here.

The songs by Oswald von Wolkenstein are transmitted in basically two manuscripts dating from 1425 and 1432 respectively and produced during the lifetime of Wolkenstein. The Wolkenstein repertoire consists of monophonic songs and so called

* I am grateful to Christopher Kale for correcting the English text and for his critical comments.
1 The largest song collection of the Mönch is found in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2856 (Mondsee-Wiener Liederhandschrift)(Heger ed. 1969).
2 Manuscript A (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2777 (Delbono ed.1977)) and manuscript B (Innsbruck, Universität- und Landesbibliothek, Cod. ohne Sign. (Moser & Müller eds. 1972)).
simple polyphony on the one hand and new textual arrangements of international polyphony on the other. The arrangements of international polyphony were not part of our exploration either. Although being a child of the late middle ages, the personal touch of this last singer-poet is clearly present in both his texts and melodies.

When I started to work on the Gruuthuse songs (Brinkman & De Loos eds. 2015), the Mönch and Wolkenstein songs were already familiar to me and it was inevitable not to be reminded of this repertoire. And, of course the Gruuthuse songs share elements from both the French and Germanic cultures, as many people have stated (Strohm 1993, p. 346; De Loos 2010, p. 114).

One reason for my being interested in a comparison of the Mönch and Wolkenstein songs on the one hand and the Gruuthuse songs on the other was the relation between text and notes, the greatest challenge to every performer of the Gruuthuse songs. If the melodies of the Gruuthuse songs would turn out to be comparable to those in the Central European sources, then, perhaps, we could use the way the text was notated in relation to the melodies in these contemporary Central European manuscripts as a model for the relation between text and notes of the Gruuthuse songs.

In the following I will report on the performance practice-based research Aventure did on the melodies of the Gruuthuse songs from a Central European perspective.

2. Mönch and Gruuthuse songs

In comparing the melodies of the Gruuthuse songs with the ones from the Central European collections mentioned above, I mainly focused on the Mönch melodies (Waechter & Spechtler eds. 2004). I compared their modality and melodic cadence formulas with the modal orientation and cadence formulas of the Gruuthuse songs, as I will explain below. Subsequently I will show how melodies in Central European sources were transformed into rhythmically organized tenores, ready to use in a polyphonic setting. Finally we will visit the Gruuthuse melodies again and see what happens if we follow the same procedure of transforming some of those melodies into a rhythmically organized tenor.

Looking at the Mönch songs we are often confronted with melismas at the beginning, the end and even in between phrases of a song. Except for the melismas – normally

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4 The idea of looking at the Mönch and Wolkenstein songs as a model for placing the text in the Gruuthuse songs has already been suggested by among others Kees Vellekoop and Ike de Loos (De Loos 2010).
on the first syllable and occasionally on the last syllable of a phrase – the text syllables are placed directly beneath the notes upon which they should be sung. As a result, the phrases of the text seem to be framed into the modal structure of the melody.\textsuperscript{5} This is not an exception in the Central European monophonic repertoire. We could think of the songs by Wolkenstein, by his contemporary Hugo von Montfort (Spechtler ed. 1988) with his melody-writer Burk Mangolt or, later in the 15th century, of several non-liturgical songs in collections like the \textit{Neumarkter Cantionale} (Schmitz 1936) with a similar phrasing structure.\textsuperscript{6} All these characteristics are present in one of the most famous songs (see ill. 1) of the Mönch: \textit{Allmächtig got}, Mondsee-Wiener Liederhandschrift, f.189v (Waechter & Spechtler eds. 2004, G42).

Apart from its text features, \textit{Allmächtig got} contains almost everything to make it an ideal showcase for our experimental exploration: it was popular throughout the 15th century, several polyphonic instrumental arrangements are known to exist and it shows the typical modal characteristics of many songs of the repertoire.

2.1. Modality

Speaking of modality in monophonic song repertoire is tricky since melodies are flexible and move fluently from one mode to the other (Schmidt 2004). The majority of the melodies share elements of more than one mode and often it is more useful to decide to which sound area a certain part of the melody is oriented rather than to fixate the melody in the frame of a specific mode.

As we can see in \textit{Allmächtig got}, the melody moves between an F and D-orientation, having its main melodic cadences on D. But the syllabic text seems to be related to F and the melismas connect the melody to D. In the mid-15th century instrumental versions of this piece we find those cadences on F and D confirmed.

However, in order to carry out our modest experimental investigation, we first had to explore the modal features of both the Central European and the Gruuthuse collections.

\textsuperscript{5} Those melismas in the Mönch and Wolkenstein repertoire are sometimes mentioned as text-less introductions (De Loos 2008, 119-120; De Loos 2010 p. 129) that should be performed by an instrument, but by far most of them do provide the first syllable or the initial right at the beginning of the opening melisma. As a matter of fact many performers and scholars suggest a vocal performance of those melismas (among others Strohm 1993, p. 349).

\textsuperscript{6} Wrocław, Biblioteka Kapitułna, Cod. 58. I want to express my gratitude to Jan Ciglbauer who kindly shared some of the songs of the unpublished and inaccessible \textit{Neumarkter Cantionale} (Waechter & Spechtler eds. 2004, p. 256) with me in order to perform them.
Ill. 1: Allmächtig got, Mönch von Salzburg, Mondsee-Wiener Liederhandschrift, f. 189v.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mönch</th>
<th>Gruuthuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D 40 %</td>
<td>D 44 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F &lt;4 %</td>
<td>F &lt;9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G 0 %</td>
<td>G 10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E 7 %</td>
<td>E &lt;3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 31 %</td>
<td>C &lt;8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A &lt;2 %</td>
<td>A 2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non stepwise 16 %</td>
<td>non stepwise &lt;8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none</td>
<td>cut off 16 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Comparing modality in Mönch and Gruuthuse songs, categorized according to final cadence and expressed in % of the total of considered melodies.

I compared 55 melodies by the Mönch – viz. his secular songs with melodies and the Allmächtig got-melody – with 141 melodies of the Gruuthuse collection. I categorized the melodies according to their final cadence speaking of endings and modal orientation instead of mode. Most of the pieces with D-endings have strong relations to the F-area in both repertoires. This is – not astonishingly – the largest group. Pieces with F-endings are much more rare in the Mönch group, since they appear often as melodies with 'non-stepwise'-endings and are categorized as such. The preference for C-endings in the Mönch repertoire is significant. Mein traut gesell, Mondsee-Wiener Liederhandschrift f. 189v-190r (Waechter & Spechtler eds. 2004, W6), one of his other famous songs with a polyphonic career, is such a melody. E-endings are exceptional in both repertoires and overlap between C and E is very common. Triadic, or trompetta-like melodies appear in both repertoires, in the Mönch collection often surviving as simple polyphonic versions. A substantial group of Gruuthuse melodies has survived without a visible ending, due to the cutting of the manuscript. For that reason this group is categorized as cut off endings.

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7 By far most of the melodies from the Gruuthuse repertoire are to be read in C4-clef.
8 Simple polyphony is very common in the Central European area. It is in fact much more related to the monophonic repertoire than to polyphony. The technique is sometimes called cantus planus binatim stressing the fact that one does not hear two independent voices (Strohm 1993, p. 333-334).
2.2. Cadences

In addition to the modal observations, we need to examine the melodic cadence formulas used in the Mönch and Gruuthuse melodies.

Fig. 1 shows a summary of melodic endings – cadences – in the monophonic appearance of the melodies of both the Mönch and the Gruuthuse songs. As we can observe, in both repertoires, the melodies show what is to be considered as the basic tenor formula: the stepwise descending of the melody to the root of the mode. Although in both repertoires we find a group of pieces with non-stepwise endings, we can state that the majority shows this type of cadence. This movement is independent of the mode, but the longer melodic monophonic cadence formulas are more closely related to a specific mode. They express some characteristics of the mode and they demonstrate which underlying sound area in the monophonic melody is preferred. Along those lines we can get a view at the modal orientation of a certain melody. The underlying sound areas that the formulas are derived from are depicted at the bottom line of Fig. 1.

The sound areas used in the melodies of both repertoires are comparable and all areas appear in both repertoires. But there are differences in preference of sound area, as we will see in the next tables.

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9 We can observe this tenor formula in the many examples given by Johannes Tinctoris in his Liber de arte contrapuncti of 1477 (Seay 1961). Andreas Orintoparca is even more explicit about this movement in his Musice active micrologus of 1517. Although polyphony is treated here, the late medieval theorists agree on the fact that the outline of the tenor dictates the cadences (Polk 1992, p.172-173).
In Fig. 2 we see a collection of cadences and formulas as found in the above mentioned melodies by the Mönch. The Mönch melodies show for instance a lot of variety in the strong Gegenklang (Schmidt 2004, especially p.15; p.26) confirming the Hauptklang, the D-sound in the lower area of the mode.

As can be observed in Fig. 3, the Gruuthuse melodies prefer to confirm the Hauptklang with a large selection of melodic formulas in the F-D area. Chains of thirds encompassing a large range like a 7th or an octave is known to both repertoires, but again, we can observe preferences.
Summarizing, we found more similarities than differences in modal orientation of the melodies and we found similarities in monophonic melodic cadence formulas with different accents in preference. We did not discuss the obvious difference in formal structure of the melodies based on the structure of the texts. Simply stated: we find a lot of ouvert- and clos-endings in the Gruuthuse songs, which we rarely find in the Mönch songs and other Central European monophonic repertoire. Of course this is a major difference between the repertoires but not decisive for the polyphonic potential of a melody.10

3. Instrumental polyphonic arrangements of Mönch and Wolkenstein songs

As mentioned above, around the middle of the 15th century, the melodies of the Mönch and Wolkenstein repertoire were still popular and well-known. As a matter of fact they showed up as rhythmically organized tenores in instrumental polyphonic arrangements in the Lochamer Liederbuch (Ameln ed. 1925; Salmen & Petzch eds. 1972) and the Buxheimer Orgelbuch (Wallner ed. 1955; Wallner ed. 1958/1959).11 Instrumental versions of already existing pieces, either polyphonic or monophonic, demonstrate that almost everything in a piece could be changed except for its cadence places (Hijmans 2005, p.210). They define the identity of a piece and belong to the compositional part of it. As pointed out shortly in paragraph 2.1, the polyphonic instrumental versions of Allmächtig got confirmed in this way the cadence places we observed in the monophonic melody, framing the text into the modal outlines of the piece.

Adding further to our understanding of the metamorphosis from a monophonic melody into a polyphonic (instrumental) version is the fact that Loch contains a series of monophonic rhythmically organized tenores, ready for use in a polyphonic practice. Among those tenores we find both the Wolkenstein song Wach auf mein hort, Loch, f. 2 and the Mönch’s Allmächtig got, Loch, f. 32. Since the original song melodies of those tenores are also known we actually get a practical demonstration of a first step in the process

10 In the below mentioned Buxheimer Orgelbuch (Wallner ed. 1955;1958/1959) we find several pieces with ouvert- and clos-endings incorporated.

11 The Lochamer Liederbuch, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Mus. Ms 40613, consists of two basically independent parts bound together, the first containing rhythmically organized monophonic melodies and some three-part pieces; the second part contains the Fundamentum organisandi by Conrad Paumann and instrumental arrangements of well-known songs, some of them appearing in the songbook part. The collection originated most probably in Nuremberg between 1452 and 1460. The Buxheimer Orgelbuch, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cim. 352b, is a huge collection of instrumental arrangements and again the Fundamenta Organisandi and was copied in the Munich area around 1460.
from monophony to (instrumental) polyphony as Johannes Tinctoris referred to in his *Liber de arte contrapuncti*.\(^\text{12}\)

In Fig. 4 one can find the basic cadence-pattern on the top line, then the *Wach auf*-cadence as it appears in the simple polyphonic settings by Wolkenstein, and finally the same cadence, now as the structured tenor formula as used in polyphonic practice. The next lines show how the tenor has been modified in several polyphonic versions.

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Basic formula       Hs A       Hs B       Loch
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Opening phrase tenor *Wach auf*, Hs B, f. 40v

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Loch nr. 2, tenor *Wach auf* as an organized monophonic tenor
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Loch nr. 64, tenor *Wach auf* from a polyphonic version
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Bux nr. 100, tenor *Wach auf* from a polyphonic version
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Figure 4: Transformed tenors of the first phrase of *Wach auf mein hort*.

Figure 5 gives the last phrase of *Allmächtig got*, in notes of equal length on the first line. The next line presents the same melody, now as the rhythmically organized tenor, as we find it in *Bux* number 68, fol 37r.

\(^{12}\) Keith Polk has given an inspiring analysis of how 15th century musicians could have improvised counterpoint mainly based on the *Liber de arte contrapuncti* of Tinctoris and the *Fundamenta organisandi* of Conrad Paumann (Polk 1992, 163-213). This assumption forms the fundament of our performance practice, but stays outside the scope of this paper.
4. The polyphonic potential of Gruuthuse songs

From the transformations of the Mönch and Wolkenstein melodies into rhythmically organized tenors, we can distil a basic recipe for making a polyphonic piece out of a monophonic melody in the style of the late 15th century Central European instrumental polyphony. We learned that the modal-melodic structure of the Mönch and Wolkenstein melodies was appropriate for that. As an experimental musicological exploration, we applied this recipe to some Gruuthuse melodies.

The recipe says: take a melody that descends stepwise to the root of the mode and exposes the basic tenor formula in its course. Organize the tenor rhythmically. Modify the cadences of the monophonic melody into the idiomatic cadential formulas from the
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repertoire of *Bux* and *Loch*. And an important tip from Johannes Tinctoris: do not cadence on places conflicting with the modal landscape of the melody (Seay ed. & transl. 1961, p. 135-136)! Now, the organized tenor is ready for use and a discant and contratenor could be added.
Cadences in Dijn troost allein, GR II 79

Organized Tenor: note 9-14

Organized Tenor: note 17-ouvert

clos

last 6 notes with cadence on F and finalis D

Fig. 7: Gruuthuse II 79: Dijn troost allein, cadence options and polyphonic versions.
Two examples may illustrate this process. When we look at Scinc her den wijn, Gruuthuse II.56, we find many opportunities to cadence. The first one being right in the beginning at the descending movement from E to D, followed by an even stronger descending movement to D. Then the melody moves to the F sound, and we get cadences on F and return to cadences on D. The melody turns to the Gegenklang G and E; back to F and D; passing by an option on A and finally descends stepwise towards F. The options are numerous and we may not necessarily need them all, but they are essential for the polyphonic potential of a melody. Accordingly, we modified the cadence points into structured cadential formulas, added a discantus and contratenor, and one of many possible results for an instrumental polyphonic version based on the idiom of Bux and Loch was there (fig. 6).

We treated Dijn troost allein, Gruuthuse II.79 in a similar way. This song shows a clear ouvert-clos structure at the end of the first line in figure 7 and at the end of the middle section, both times on E (ouvert) and D (clos). The C area functions as a well- pronounced Gegenklang in the melody and offers the first cadence options. Since cadences define the length of phrases in a polyphonic version, we might have a problem in only cadencing on note 9-10 of the piece. Although less ideal than the stepwise cadences in the original melody, it is allowed to build in an extra cadence. Here it would be best to do so in the F-D area on note 5-6, in order to underline the Hauptklang of the melody.

After applying the recipe to the Gruuthuse songs and providing them with an idiomatic discant and contratenor, the new versions did not essentially differ from the Central European repertoire. The polyphonic cadences in the arrangements confirmed the monophonic ones in a similar way as in our 15th century models in the Central European repertoire.

5. Conclusion

Although the Central European sources are distant from the Bruges collection, they originated in the same period and are among the last representatives of the monophonic song tradition. The question of how the Gruuthuse songs compare to the Central European

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13 See some examples in the Fundamentum organisandi by Conrad Paumann (Wallner ed. 1958/1959, p. 294 or 296) and the discussion (Polk 1992, p.182-183).
ones rose and made us deeply investigate the characteristics of the melodies of both repertoires.

In our experimental exploration we applied the transformation recipe used for the contemporary Central European melodies to the Bruges melodies. This was worth trying since the modal orientation and melodic cadence formulas of the melodies were comparable.

The Gruuthuse melodies could also be transformed into rhythmically organized *tenores* ready for use in polyphonic instrumental arrangements. Subsequently, the polyphonic experiment confirmed the observed similarities in the monophonic melodies, which led us to the conclusion that the Central European songs could be used as a contemporary monophonic model for the Gruuthuse repertoire.

**Bibliography**


