

CHRISTOPHER MACKLIN

Email: Macklin_cb@mercuer.edu

PLAGUE, PERFORMANCE AND THE ELUSIVE HISTORY OF THE *STELLA CELI EXTIRPAVIT*

*One of the greatest scourges of the later medieval period was plague. While there is a considerable scholarly literature tracing the impact of the dread disease on literature and art, the impermanence of performance has rendered the extension of such studies to the field of music problematic. These problems are to some extent surmountable in studying the fifteenth-century hymn *Stella celi extirpavit*, a Marian invocation unequivocally phrased as a plea for deliverance from illness. In this essay, it is proposed that the *Stella celi* is representative of the beliefs and skills shared by a broad spectrum of late medieval society in the shadow of the plague. Analysis of musical and textual features, and the contexts of performance, further suggest links with the artistic and intellectual concerns of the Franciscan Order, which may have thus enabled otherwise ephemeral music to be preserved as an enduring response to epidemic calamity.*

INTRODUCTION

In an arresting image in his book *Plagues and Peoples*, the historian William H. McNeill characterised history as the account of the equilibrium between the microparasitism of disease and the macroparasitism of human interaction.¹ While ever in delicate balance, in the late medieval period these scales were tipped by epidemic plague, which from the pandemic of the Black Death of 1347–50 to the middle of the eighteenth century scourged Europe with a ferocity that has in more modern times made it the archetype of biological catastrophe.² Something of a scholarly cottage

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The following abbreviations are used:

BL	London, British Library
BnF	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France
Bodleian	Oxford, Bodleian Library
CUL	Cambridge, University Library
DIAMM	Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music, <www.diamm.ac.uk>
Grove Music Online	<www.oxfordmusiconline.com>
MGG ²	<i>Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> , 2nd edn, ed. Ludwig Finscher
TNA	The National Archives

¹ W. H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York, 1976), p. 5.

² The plague of Marseille in 1721–2 is traditionally considered the last great European plague epidemic; however, epidemics continued unabated further east and some scholars have argued

industry has risen to explore the influence of plague on elements of late medieval society, focused in the cultural sphere primarily on literary classics such as the *Decameron* of Giovanni Boccaccio,³ and on visual art, particularly votive altarpieces of saints such as the Virgin Mary and St Sebastian.⁴ However, such research has largely ignored the field of music, and at present our understanding of the composition and performance of music during historical epidemics is quite limited.⁵

This is regrettable, for the expectation and experience of plague was not simply a pressing reality for the vast majority of people living in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. There is also considerable evidence that music formed an important part of many people's response to the calamity. This can be illustrated through two accounts which though widely divergent in their time and place seem to stress the key role of music. In his introduction to the *Decameron*, Boccaccio described how the threat of impending plague infection 'caused various fears and fantasies to take root in the minds of those who were still alive and well'. While the responses ranged from those who adopted a lifestyle of 'moderate living and the avoidance of all superfluity ... living entirely separate from everybody else ... and passing the time in music and suchlike pleasures' to the immoderate excess of those who 'thought the sure cure for the plague was to drink and be merry, to go about singing and amusing themselves, satisfying every appetite they could, laughing and jesting at what happened', all of the actions he described involved singing and some degree of

that the distinction has less to do with epidemiological reality than with a Francocentric construction of the European narrative. For more information see D. Gordon, 'The City and the Plague in the Age of Enlightenment', *Yale French Studies*, 92 (1997), pp. 67–87.

³ J. Ahern, 'Dioneo's Repertory: Performance and Writing in Boccaccio's *Decameron*', in Evelyn Birge Vitz, Nancy Freeman Regalado and Marilyn Lawrence (eds.), *Performing Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 41–58; D. Steel, 'Plague Writing: From Boccaccio to Camus', *Journal of European Studies*, 1 (1981), pp. 88–110.

⁴ C. M. Boeckl, *Images of Plague and Pestilence*, ed. Raymond A. Mentzer (Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, 53; Kirksville, Mo., 2000); L. Marshall, 'Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 47 (1994), pp. 485–532; Marshall, 'Waiting on the Will of the Lord: Imagery of the Plague' (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1980).

⁵ See C. Macklin, "'Musica sanat corpus per animam': Towards an Understanding of the Use of Music in Response to Plague, 1350–1600" (Ph.D. thesis, University of York, 2008), pp. 9–20. In most of the published research which has touched upon this topic, discussions of music during epidemics have generally been parenthetical observations made in the course of efforts to contextualise the modern discipline of 'music therapy' within both historical concepts of the connection between music and the body and empirical investigations of music in clinical practice. The most valuable exemplar of the genre is W. Kümmel's magisterial *Musik und Medizin: Ihre Wechselbeziehungen in Theorie und Praxis* (Freiburg and Munich, 1977), which charts references to music in theoretical medical writings and medical references in theoretical music writings from AD 900 to 1900 to the benefit of both disciplines. However, Kümmel's discussion is limited to theory and gives no examples of what may have been performed.

deliberate musical activity.⁶ The musical interest is sustained throughout the work, as Boccaccio goes so far as to specify the lyrics with which his ten well-born protagonists ended each of their days in protective isolation, singing to the accompaniment of the lute.⁷ In more recent history, the court records of Henry VIII indicate that when fear of the plague prompted the king to dismiss his entire court and to remain in quarantine at Windsor, the only people who remained with him were his physician, his three favourite gentlemen, and the Italian organ virtuoso Dionisio Memo.⁸ Given that Memo's relationship to the court in other records is described purely on the basis of his musical ability, the assumption must be that he was retained in this capacity, and that, in other words, during a plague epidemic so deadly that the English court was dissolved, the only people the reigning monarch felt he could not do without were his three most trusted courtiers, his doctor, and . . . his musician. What was this music, and why was it deemed so important?

⁶ 'Dalle qua/li cose, et da assai altre ad queste simiglianti o mag/giori nacquero diverse paure et ymaginationi in / quegli che rimanevano vivi, et tutti quasi ad un / fine tiravano assai crudele, cio era di schifare et / di fuggire glinfermi et le lor cose, et cosi facendo / si credeva ciascuno ad se medesimo salute acqui/stare. Et erano alcuni li quali advisavano che il / viver moderatamente et il guardarsi da ogni super/fluita avesse molto ad cosi facto accidente resiste/re, et facta lor brigata da ogni altro separati vive/ano, et in quelle case ricogliendosi et racchiudendosi, / dove niuno infermo fosse, et da viver meglio di/licatissimi cibi, et optimi vini temperatissimamente / usando, et ogni luxuria fuggendo, sença lasciarsi / parlare ad alcuno, o volere di fuori di morte o din/fermi alcuna novella sentire, con suoni, et con que/gli piaceri che aver poteano si dimoravano. Altri / in contraria opinion tracti affermavano il bere / assai et il godere, et landar cantando attorno et solla/çando, et il sodisfare dogni cosa allappetito chessi po/tesse, et di cio che adveniva ridersi et beffarsi esser / medicina certissima ad tanto male, et cosi come / il dicevano il mettevano in opera allor potere, il gi/orno et la nocte hora ad quella taverna hora ad quel/la altra andando, bevendo sença modo et sença mi/sura, et molto piu cio per laltrui case facendo, sola/mente che cose vi sentissero che lor venissero ad / grado o in piacere, et cio potevan far di leggere, per/cio che ciascuno quasi non piu viver dovesse aveva / si come se le sue cose messe in abandono, di che le / piu delle case erano divenute comuni, et cosi lu/sava lo straniere pure che ad esse sadvenisse, come / lavrebbe il propio signore usate.' *Decameron di Giovanni Boccaccio: Edizione diplomatico-interpretativa dell'autografo Hamilton 90*, ed. C. S. Singleton (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 1–2 (fol. 2', lines 23–54 of column I and lines 1–2 of column II). English translation from G. Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. R. Aldington, 2nd edn (Bury St Edmunds, 1982), p. 3.

⁷ See the fascinating account of these songs in H. M. Brown, 'Fantasia on a Theme by Boccaccio', *Early Music*, 5 (1977), pp. 324–39.

⁸ A letter from Sebastian Giustinian to the Council of Ten dated 27 Aug. 1517 reads in part: 'His majesty is at Windsor with his physician, Dionysius Memo, and three favorite gentlemen. No one is admitted, on account of the disease, which is now making great progress. The Cardinal has been ill until now, which is the fourth time.' Later that same year, on 11 Nov., Giustinian wrote to the Doge of Venice that 'The King is abroad, and moves from place to place an account of the plague, which makes great ravages in the royal Household. Some of the pages who slept in his chamber have died. None remain with him except three favorite gentlemen and Memo.' See *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. J. S. Brewer, vol. 2, pt. 2 (London, 1864), pp. 1149, 1188.

These questions are difficult to answer, in part because accounts such as these suggest that one of the major functions of music was to serve as a transitory diversion and relief. Indeed, the evanescence of the medium may have seemed a particularly fitting tribute to the plague; in his *Musica* of 1490 Adam von Fulda described music as continual *meditatio mortis*,⁹ probably in reference to the quality that Leonardo da Vinci referred to as the ‘mortal ill’ of music, ‘ever allied with the instant which follows that of the music’s utterance’.¹⁰ Without other factors at work, there would appear to be little reason to write such music down, and even less to preserve it. By the same token, however, anything which was transmitted long enough to be available for modern scrutiny was likely to have found additional uses besides the roles played during epidemics, and might well hint at large bodies of music and musical practices otherwise obscured.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *STELLA CELI EXTIRPAVIT*

One set of pieces which seems to offer precisely this rare opportunity is that which makes use of the Marian hymn now known as the *Stella celi extirpavit*, a text which is unequivocally phrased as a plea for divine clemency in the face of illness in general and plague in particular. The most common version, printed as it appears in the late medieval *Horae Eboracenses* at York Minster, reads:

Stella celi extirpavit
 que lactavit Dominum
 mortis pestem, quam plantavit
 primus parens hominum.
 Ipsa stella nunc dignetur
 sydera compescere;
 quorum bella plebem cedunt
 dire mortis ulcere.
 O gloriosa stella maris,
 a peste succurre nobis.
 Audi nos: nam Filius tuus
 nihil negans te honorat.
 Salva nos, Jesu, pro quibus
 virgo mater te orat.¹¹

Star of Heaven,
 who nourished the Lord
 and rooted up the plague of death
 which our first parents planted;
 may that star now deign
 to hold in check the constellations
 whose strife grants the people
 the ulcers of a terrible death.
 O glorious star of the sea,
 save us from the plague.
 Hear us: for your Son
 who honours you denies you nothing.
 Jesus, save us, for whom
 the Virgin Mother prays to you.¹²

⁹ ‘Nam musica est etiam philosophia, sed vera philosophia, meditatio mortis continua.’ Adam von Fulda, *Musica*, in *Scriptores Ecclesiastici de Musica Sacra Potissimum*, ed. M. Gerbert (St. Blaise, 1784; repr. Hildesheim, 1963), iii, pp. 329–81, at 335.

¹⁰ *The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci*, ed. E. MacCurdy (New York, 1956), p. 1052.

¹¹ Spelling and punctuation regularised; Latin in *Horae Eboracenses: The Prymer or Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary, according to the Use of the Illustrious Church of York with Other Devotions as They Were Used by the Lay-Folk in the Northern Province in the XVth and XVIth Centuries*, ed. C. Wordsworth (Publications of the Surtees Society, 132; 1920), p. 69.

¹² English translation adapted from *The Black Death*, ed. R. Horrox (Manchester, 1994), p. 124.

Although individual settings of the *Stella celi* have been discussed in isolation in the scholarly literature (most often in the context of using its reference to plague as a way to localise or date the composition of a musical setting or the copying of a manuscript through correlation with the reporting of disease in chronicles),¹³ the history of its use as a whole has yet to receive a dedicated study.¹⁴ Based on analysis of musical and textural features across different versions of the hymn, and references to performance in a variety of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century historical records, it is here proposed that the *Stella celi* is representative of the beliefs and skills shared by a broad spectrum of late medieval society in the shadow of the plague. Furthermore, the hymn's composition and subsequent transmission share many links with the artistic and intellectual concerns of the Franciscan order, which may have thus enabled otherwise ephemeral music to be preserved as an enduring response to epidemic calamity.

The apparent popularity and flexibility of use granted the *Stella celi* can be seen in the widely contrasting views of its significance held by modern scholars. In 1909 Samuel Hemingway drew attention to the reference in the rubricated stage directions for the 'Adoration of the Shepherds' play of the mid-fifteenth-century 'N-Town Cycle', where after the shepherds make the decision to seek the Christ Child in Bethlehem the anonymous scribe indicated that they were first to sing 'Stella celi extirpavit'.¹⁵ Though Hemingway described the *Stella celi* as a 'very little known' piece which merited a mention in Chevalier's 1892 *Repertorium Hymnologicum* only as part of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in a small number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French missals,¹⁶ scholars such as

¹³ Cf. A. Hughes and M. Bent, 'The Old Hall Manuscript – A Re-Appraisal and an Inventory', *Musica Disciplina*, 21 (1967), pp. 97–147, esp. 104.

¹⁴ To date, the most substantial treatment of the history of the *Stella celi* in print has been the appendix in Margaret Bent's doctoral thesis, 'The Old Hall Manuscript: A Paleographic Study' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1969), 329–33, and the extended footnote summarising her findings on pp. 147–8 of her 1968 article 'New and Little-Known Fragments of English Medieval Polyphony', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 21 (1968), pp. 137–56.

¹⁵ The reference in the N-Town Shepherds play appears at the top of fol. 90^r of the sole manuscript copy of the N-Town cycle (BL Cotton Vespasian D. viii), where after the shepherds have decided to 'go fforthe fast on hye / And honowre þat babe wurthylye' in Bethlehem, the anonymous scribe indicates that they first sing 'Stella celi extirpavit' ('tunc pastores cantabunt · stella celi extirpavit · quo facto ibunt ad querendum christum'). See *The N-Town Plays*, ed. D. Sugano (Middle English Texts Series; Kalamazoo, Mich., 2007), p. 144.

¹⁶ *English Nativity Plays*, ed. S. B. Hemingway (New York, 1909), p. 261; U. Chevalier, *Repertorium Hymnologicum: Catalogue des chants, hymnes, proses, séquences, tropes en usage dans l'église latine depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, vol. ii (Louvain, 1897), p. 601. Such nonchalance has apparently persisted among scholars of drama, as in discussing the same play Gibson characterised the *Stella celi* as 'an obscure hymn rarely found in service books either in England or on the Continent': G. M. Gibson, 'Bury St. Edmunds, Lydgate, and the N-Town Cycle', *Speculum*, 56 (1981), pp. 56–90, at 88.

Eamon Duffy have cited the prayer as a ‘frequently recurring’ element in late medieval English books of hours.¹⁷ To this we can add that archival searches have also revealed editions of the *Stella celi* hymn featuring musical notation which had been copied in the margins and pastedown pages of collegiate and monastic manuscripts,¹⁸ and fully notated polyphonic editions figure in three of the most significant surviving collections of pre-Reformation English vocal music: the Old Hall Manuscript (BL Add. MS 57950), the Eton Choirbook (Eton College Library, MS 178) and twice in the Ritson Manuscript (BL Add. MS 5665).¹⁹ In other words, the *Stella celi* hymn figures simultaneously in works of fifteenth-century literature, music, and drama – an exceptional range of use, particularly for a non-biblical text, which, as Margaret Bent noted, ‘occupied no official place in the liturgical books of the principal rites’.²⁰ Yet, given the possibility raised above that music associated with plague would need to find a variety of uses in order to be preserved, this may come as less of a surprise.

Let us now turn to examine the earliest known history of the hymn. All known editions of and references to musical settings of the *Stella celi* in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century sources are listed in the Appendix. When a text enjoys distribution both as an autonomous verbal composition and as the underlay of a piece of vocal music (a madrigal is a good example), the general assumption is that the text was written first as a poem and subsequently selected for musical elaboration. Such a pattern, if it held here, would posit that the *Stella celi* was originally conceived as an unadorned verbal prayer whose popularity and applicability in the lives of laity led to its copying in books of hours, which then were mined as a

¹⁷ E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–1580* (New Haven, 1992), p. 257.

¹⁸ Noted for the first time by W. B. Squire, ‘Notes on an Undescribed Collection of English 15th Century Music’, *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*, 2, no. 3 (1901), pp. 342–92, at 351. This work was greatly expanded and refined in Bent’s 1968 *JAMS* publication cited above, and since that time other settings have been described in A. Barratt, ‘Two Middle English Lyrics in the Bibliothèque Mazarine’, *Notes and Queries*, 31 (1984), pp. 24–7, at 24; A. Wathey, ‘Newly Discovered Fifteenth-Century English Polyphony at Oxford’, *Music & Letters*, 64 (1983), pp. 56–66, at 62; N. Sandon, ‘Mary, Meditations, Monks and Music: Poetry, Prose, Processions and Plagues in a Durham Cathedral Manuscript’, *Early Music*, 10 (1982), pp. 43–55, at 53–4; *Selections from Motetti A Numero Trentatre*, ed. R. Sherr (The Sixteenth-Century Motet, 1; New York, 1991), pp. 67–73; and *Sacred Music from the Cathedral at Trent: Trent, Museo Provinciale d’Arte, Codex 1375 (Olim 88)*, ed. R. L. Gerber (Monuments of Renaissance Music, 12; Chicago, 2007), pp. 163–8.

¹⁹ These works have been published and edited in the following volumes: *Old Hall Manuscript*, ed. A. Hughes and M. Bent, 3 vols. (Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae, 46; Rome, 1969); *The Eton Choirbook*, ed. F. L. Harrison, vol. 3 (London, 1956); *The Ritson Manuscript: Liturgical Compositions, Votive Antiphons, Te Deum*, ed. N. Sandon, C. Bayliss and E. Lane (Newton Abbot, 2001).

²⁰ Bent, ‘New and Little-Known Fragments’, p. 147.

source of texts by composers who perhaps ‘were searching for texts of greater variety and a more personal expression’.²¹ Chronologically, the earliest known appearance of the *Stella celi* is its use as the underlay of a three-voice descant motet attributed to John Cooke in the Old Hall Manuscript. After a long period of study at King’s Hall, Cambridge,²² Cooke is first recorded as a member of Henry V’s household chapel in 1413,²³ and he accompanied the King to Harfleur and the historic victory over the French at Agincourt in 1415.²⁴ Bent’s palaeographic analysis suggests that some of the pieces attributed to Cooke in the Old Hall manuscript (along with those of his colleagues John Burrell, Thomas Damett and Nicholas Sturgeon) may be autograph,²⁵ which if true offers a potential *terminus ante quem* for the composition and copying of the Old Hall *Stella celi* at Cooke’s death.²⁶ At the same time, the earliest known appearance of the *Stella celi* without musical notation which can be datable with some accuracy is on fol. 231^v of a wide-ranging collection owned by the warrior and poet Duke Charles d’Orléans (BnF lat. 1196). Charles was one of Henry’s most famous hostages after the battle of Agincourt,²⁷ and during his English captivity (perhaps as early as 1417–24) the French

- ²¹ B. J. Blackburn, ‘“Te Matrem Dei Laudamus”: A Study in the Musical Veneration of Mary’, *Musical Quarterly*, 53 (1967), pp. 53–76, at 58.
- ²² Cooke was sent to study at Cambridge in 1402/3 after probably serving as a chorister in the Chapel Royal, and he apparently did not formally vacate his fellowship at King’s Hall until January of 1414. See Bent, ‘The Old Hall Manuscript: A Paleographic Study’, p. 289.
- ²³ TNA, E.101.406.21, fol. 53 lists a ‘John Coke’ among Henry V’s Chapel Royal chaplains and clerks, along with fellow Old Hall composers ‘John Burrell’ and ‘Nicholas Sturion’. A transcription of all of the records pertaining to the Chapel Royal in the reigns of the later Plantagenets can be found in B. Trowell, ‘Music under the Later Plantagenets’ (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1960), Appendix III.
- ²⁴ TNA E101/45/5, m. 11 lists a ‘Johanni Cook’ as a member of the retinue who departed for Harfleur on 6 June, and given that the names of fellow chaplain musicians Damett, Burrell and Sturgeon are included in the same list, the identification is plausible.
- ²⁵ M. Bent, ‘Sources of the Old Hall Music’, *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, Session 94 (1967–8), pp. 19–35, at 22; Bent, ‘The Old Hall Manuscript: A Paleographic Study’, p. 177.
- ²⁶ The patent rolls for 25 July 1419 note the presentation of Thomas Gyles for the prebendary in the free chapel of Hastings recently occupied by ‘John Cook, late clerk of the chapel of the household’, which may well refer to the composer. However, as John Cooke (or Cook, or Coke) was a common name in fifteenth-century England, this citation is hardly conclusive. See Public Record Office, *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: Henry V*, vol. 2 (London, 1910–11), p. 219. For an overview of the conflicting references to John Cooke in the court records, see R. Bowers, ‘John Cooke’, in *MGG*², iv, pp. 1526–7.
- ²⁷ As seen by the fact that most of the chronicles of the battle single him out by name in accounts of the numbers of prisoners taken, and by anecdotes such as those in the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* and the chronicles of Jean le Fèvre and Jean Waurin, which tell how Charles’s life was spared when the English massacred many prisoners, and how King Henry V rode with him on the return to England. These and other many accounts relating to the battle have been collected and translated in *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. A. Curry (Warfare in History; Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), pp. 37 and 165–6.

nobleman arranged for the production of this lavishly illustrated and illuminated volume of devotional texts of personal significance.²⁸ As several other pieces in the Old Hall manuscript (including one by Cooke) have texts which have been linked to the celebrations after the Agincourt victory,²⁹ and it was an established practice in the fifteenth century for composers of vocal music to mine prayer books as sources, as noted above, it is tempting to hypothesise that *Stella celi* was itself either known to Charles in France or composed anew by him, and then ‘captured’ by Cooke and as a motet made to serve as a testament to the glory of Henry’s court, much as Charles himself was. Additional evidence for a special association between the *Stella celi* text and Charles d’Orléans comes from the fact that after his ransom was paid and the duke returned to France in 1440, he cultivated a household chapel of his own which from 1451 until the duke’s death in 1465 employed a singer and composer named Guillaume le Rouge, who composed a four-voice setting of the hymn which is now in Trent, Museo Provinciale d’Arte, Codex 1375 (*olim* 88), fols. 11^v–13.

However, there are many other reasons to conclude that this model of linear transmission from poet to a pool of composers is insufficient as an explanation of the origins of the *Stella celi*, or even that the *Stella celi* was created in one stroke between 1415 and 1430. First, the dating of Cooke’s composition in Old Hall to the first decades of the fifteenth century is based on a larger body of evidence than the arguments for dating the text in Charles d’Orléans’s prayerbook prior to 1430, which means we cannot rule out the possibility that the polyphonic setting was written before the non-musical setting. Second, even given the fact that some of the music in

²⁸ As Gilbert Ouy said after over fifty years of study of BnF lat. 1196, ‘ce n’est pas un banal livre de prières, mais une construction patiemment édifiée à partir d’éléments recueillis – ou, pour certains, très probablement composés – avec amour’. G. Ouy, *La Librairie des frères captifs: Les manuscrits de Charles d’Orléans et Jean d’Angoulême* (Turnhout, 2007), p. 9. The precise age of the manuscript and its contents are still a matter of debate. Based on characteristics of the illuminations and changes in Charles’s financial fortunes after 1427 Scott (1996) proposed a date of *c.* 1420, while Ouy (2007) has argued from an analysis of the included texts that the manuscript could not have been produced before 1430, the year that Charles d’Orléans was reunited in England with his brother and fellow hostage Jean d’Angoulême. However, Ouy also demonstrated that two other MSS (BnF lat. 1203 and 3638) are solely in the hands of Charles and Jean, respectively, and contain many of the texts in BnF 1196, including *Stella celi*. Although it is thus highly likely that lat. 1203 and 3638 were written in preparation for the finished anthology, the assembly of the texts within each volume could have occurred at any time after 1415. As even with a later date of 1430 Charles’s *Stella celi* is still the earliest known non-musical version of the hymn, this ongoing debate does not substantially affect the conclusions presented in this essay. For more information see K. L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390–1490*, 2 vols. (A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles, 6; London, 1996), ii, pp. 178–82; and Ouy, *La Librairie des frères captifs*, pp. 9–13 and 83.

²⁹ See Bent, ‘Sources of the Old Hall Music’, pp. 22–5.

Plague, Performance and the *Stella celi extirpavit*

Triplex
Stel - la - ce - li ex - tir - pa - vit

Tenor
Stel - la - ce - li ex - tir - pa - vit

Counter
Stel - la - ce - li ex - tir - pa - vit

5
que la - cta - vit Do - mi - num, mor - tis - pe - stem

8
que la - cta - vit Do - mi - num, mor - tis - pe - stem

8
que la - cta - vit Do - mi - num, mor - tis - pe - stem

10
quam plan - ta - vit pri - mus pa - rens ho - mi -

8
quam plan - ta - vit pri - mus pa - rens ho - mi -

8
quam plan - ta - vit pri - mus pa - rens ho - mi -

15
num I - psa stel - la - nunc di - gne - tur si - de - ra com - pe - sce -

8
num I - psa stel - la - nunc di - gne - tur si - de - ra com - pe - sce -

8
num I - psa stel - la - nunc di - gne - tur si - de - ra com - pe - sce -

Example 1 John Cooke, *Stella celi*, in BL Add. MS 57950, fol. 40^v

the Old Hall manuscript repertory is characterised by a conservative style, perhaps composed as much as several decades prior to the manuscript's compilation, Cooke's three-voice setting of the *Stella celi* appears retrospective and anomalous (see Example 1). Most striking is its adherence to rigid homophony in all three voices, and the very short melodic distance

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20

re quo - rum bel - la ple - bem

re quo - rum bel - la ple - bem

re quo - rum bel - la ple - bem

23

ce - dunt di - re mor - tis ul - ce - re.

ce - dunt di - re mor - tis ul - ce - re.

ce - dunt di - re mor - tis ul - ce - re.

Example 1 *Continued*

between major cadences.³⁰ This is a far cry from the compositional aesthetic of the post-Dunstaple generation, as indeed the opening phrases of the piece on the facing page of the manuscript, Damett's *Salve porta paradisi*, illustrate (see Example 2). In Damett's motet, the only times all three voices employ the same metric values are at the beginning of the work, and at the ends of structurally important sections (see bb. 13 and 20). In between, the voices enjoy considerable rhythmic independence. The phrases are also more expansive, with an average of ten beats of the tactus between major cadences.³¹ Even Cooke's other music in the Old Hall MS more closely resembles that of Damett's *Salve porta* than his own *Stella celi*.³² While several theories have been proposed to explain this discrepancy,³³ external corroborating evidence for them has not been found.

³⁰ Assuming a breve pulse (reduced in the example by four to minims, following the practice of Bent and Hughes), the average phrase of Cooke's *Stella celi* is between four and five beats of the tactus.

³¹ Using a similar calculation to that performed above.

³² See e.g. Cooke's *Ave regina* on fol. 39^v of the MS.

³³ For example, Andrew Hughes suggested that the *Stella celi*'s composition or addition to the household chapel's repertory occurred earlier than the rest of the music in the second layer of Old Hall, perhaps for an occasion such as 'Henry IV's physical precautions in 1407 to avoid the plague centre of London'. Others, including Margaret Bent, accept a later date of composition and argue that the rigidity of its composition instead implies Cooke's setting was intended for pedagogical use, pointing to the exceptional amount of notated *musica ficta* present in the score. See Bent, 'Sources of the Old Hall Music', pp. 28–9; Hughes and Bent, 'The Old Hall Manuscript – A Re-Appraisal and an Inventory', p. 104.

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Triplex
 Tenor
 Counter

6
 pec - ca - tis sunt il - le - si fe - ras

11
 his so - la - ci - um. Et qui

15
 men - te te fi - de - li lau - dat iu - bi - lan - do ce - li

Sal - ve por - ta pa - ra - di - si qui
 Sal - ve por - ta pa - ra - di - si qui
 Sal - ve por - ta pa - ra - di - si qui
 pec - ca - tis sunt il - le - si fe - ras
 pec - ca - tis sunt il - le - si fe - ras
 his so - la - ci - um. Et qui men
 his so - la - ci - um. Et qui
 men - te te fi - de - li lau - dat iu - bi - lan - do ce - li le -
 - te te fi - de - li lau - dat iu - bi - lan - do ce - li le -

Example 2 Thomas Damett, *Salve porta paradisi*, in BL Add. MS 57950, fol. 40^r

Third, although their exact dates of provenance are unknown, a number of additional early- to mid-fifteenth-century English manuscripts unconnected to the court of Henry V also contain the hymn. These include a plainsong melody in a *Liber Cantus* now in Cambridge,³⁴ a

³⁴ CUL Add. 6668, fol. 112^{r-v}. See also Bent, 'New and Little-Known Fragments', p. 147.

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19
le - ves ad pa - la - - ci - um ma - - ter
ves ad pa - la - - ci - um ma - ter
ves ad pa - la - - ci - um ma - ter

22
Chri - - - - - sti.
Chri - - - - - sti.
Chri - - - - - sti.

Example 2 *Continued*

separate plainsong in a Sarum processional in Norwich,³⁵ three parts from a probable four-part polyphonic setting in Oxford,³⁶ an isolated tenor part in mensural notation in a Sarum Gradual now in London,³⁷ and two non-musical Middle English verse translations (one with Latin glosses in the margins referencing the hymn text) attributed to John Lydgate.³⁸ In other words, within a single generation of the first surviving written edition, the *Stella celi* plague hymn had been copied in England non-musically in both formal Latin and the English vernacular, and musically in both monophonic and polyphonic vocal arrangements. Such diversity might imply that rather than being newly composed between 1415 and 1430, the *Stella celi* had been in circulation for some time before these initial written records either through now-lost textual exempla or through oral transmission. Further support for text-independent dissemination comes

³⁵ Norwich Castle Museum, MS 158.926.4e, fols. 133^v–134. See also Wathey, ‘Newly Discovered Fifteenth-Century English Polyphony at Oxford’, p. 64.

³⁶ Oxford, University College MS 16, fol. 151.

³⁷ BL Lansdowne 462, fol. 152^v.

³⁸ The first of these poems is BL MS Harley 2255, fol. 103^{r-v}, with copies containing minor emendations in Cambridge, Jesus College 56, fol. 73^{r-v}; BL Add. MS 34360, fols. 132^v–133^r; BL MS Harley 2251, fols. 9^v–10^r, and Cambridge, Trinity Coll R. 3. 21, fols. 168^v–169. The second poem, containing Latin glosses, exists only in a single copy in Bodleian MS Rawlinson C. 48, fols. 133^v–134^r. Both are discussed in H. N. MacCracken, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate* (Early English Text Society, 107; 1910), pp. xxviii, 294–6.

from a comparison of the melodies of the monophonic versions in the Norwich and Cambridge manuscripts. These three melodies share little resemblance beyond their modal classification, as is apparent in Example 3.

Even more far-flung copies of the hymn have been found, without musical notation, on a piece of fifteenth-century parchment preserved amongst the relics of the monastery of Santa Clara of Coimbra in Portugal,³⁹ and copied at the end of the cantus firmus tenor of an unrelated motet (*[N/V]obis iustat carminis odas laudibus*) in a central European codex now in Prague, which probably dates from c. 1460–80.⁴⁰

THE FRANCISCAN ORDER AND THE *STELLA CELI*

Rather than looking for a well-defined compositional lineage arising from the lyrical talents of a John Cooke or a Charles d’Orléans, the evidence above suggests that an alternative account of the history and use of the *Stella celi* is necessary. For this we turn to the order of Friars Minor established by St Francis, a group whose history and theoretical orientation intersects at many key points the concerns and characteristics of the *Stella celi*. The order’s cultivation of the arts of poetry and music is well established. According to an early biography, St Francis himself instructed his followers to be ‘jongleurs of the Lord’ (*joculatores domini*),⁴¹ and in recent years scholars have explored how this mandate shaped a large body of late medieval verse,⁴² song,⁴³ and

³⁹ S. Corbin, *Essai sur la musique religieuse portugaise au Moyen Âge* (Collection Portugaise; Paris, 1952), p. 374.

⁴⁰ Prague, Strahov Monastery Library (Museum of Czech Literature, Strahov Library), D.G. IV 47, pp. 471–2 (fols. 236^v–237). This tenor is, in fact, related to the tenor of the Trento cathedral *Stella celi* as well as the chanson *So ys emprentid*, as discussed below.

⁴¹ According to the *Speculum perfectionis*, which is believed to be the earliest legend of the saint, St Francis ‘wished some friars to be given to him that they should go together with him through the world preaching and singing praises of the Lord. For he said that he wished that he who knew how to preach best among them should first preach to the people, and after the preaching they should all sing together the praises of the Lord like jongleurs of the Lord’ (‘volebat dare sibi aliquos fratres ut irent simul cum eo per mundum praedicando et cantando Laudes Domini. Dicebat enim quod volebat ut ille qui sciret praedicare melius inter illos prius praedicaret populo, et post praedicationem omnes cantarent simul Laudes Domini tanquam jocularores Domini’). Latin in Saint Francis of Assisi, ‘Speculum Perfectionis’, ed. P. Sabatier (Paris, 1898), pp. 197–8; trans. adapted from D. L. Jeffrey, *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1975), p. 122.

⁴² See the discussion of the role of the Franciscans in the development of English and Italian vernacular composition in Jeffrey, *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality*, esp. chs. 4 and 5, and A. G. Little, *Franciscan Papers, Lists, and Documents* (Manchester, 1943).

⁴³ In particular the discussion of the links between the mendicants, the flagellant movement and Italian *laudesi* confraternities in C. Barr, *The Monophonic Lauda and the Lay Religious Confraternities of Tuscany and Umbria in the Late Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1988), esp. ch. 3; J. Henderson, ‘The Flagellant Movement and Flagellant Confraternities in Central Italy, 1260–1400’, in

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(a) Stel - la ce - li ex - tir - pa - vit que la - cta - vit -

(b) Stel - la ce - li ex - tir - pa - vit que la - cta - vit - do -

(c) Stel - la ce - li ex - tir - pa - vit -

do - mi - num. Mor - tis pe - stem quam plan - ta - vit pri - mus pa -

- mi - num; mor - tis pe - stem quam plan - ta - vit pri - mus pa -

que la - cta - vit do - mi - num mor - tis pe -

- rens ho - mi - num. I - psa stel - la nunc di - gne - tur si - de -

rens ho - mi - num. I - psa stel - la nunc di - gne - tur si - de - ra -

- stem quam plan - ta - vit pri - mus pa - rens -

- ra com - pe - sce - re quo - rum bel - la ple - bem ce - dunt di - re mor -

com - pe - sce - re quo rum bel - la ple - bem ce - dunt di - re mor - tis ul - ce - re.

ho - mi - num. I - psa stel - la nunc di - gne - tur sy - de - ra com - pe -

Example 3 Comparison of monophonic *Stella celi* settings in fifteenth-century British MSS: (a) Cambridge, University Library Add. MS 6668, fo. 112^r; (b) Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS 46, fol. 152^v; (c) Norwich Castle MS 1919.158.4e

Derek Baker (ed.), *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems for the Church Historian* (Studies in Church History; Oxford, 1978), pp. 147–60, at 155–7.

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- tis ul - ce - re

O pi - is - si - ma stel - la ma - ri - a a pe - ste suc - cur - re no -

sce - re quo - rum bel - la ple - bem ce - dunt di - re mor -

- bis Au - di nos do - mi - na nam te fi - li - us ni - hil ne - gans ho - no - rat. Sal -

- tis ul - ce - re.

- va nos Je - su, pro qui - bus vir - go ma - ter te o - rat.

Example 3 *Continued*

drama.⁴⁴ One technique enthusiastically adopted by the Franciscans was the art of *contrafactum*, in which the ‘worldly’ lyrics of popular song are replaced with a text of a more devotional slant, either to provide devotional music at short notice or to prevent exposure to spiritually degrading material. Ireland’s Red Book of Ossory, begun by the Franciscan

⁴⁴ In the context of this investigation, one of the most tantalising pieces of evidence is that in the mid- to late-seventeenth century, Robert Bruce Cotton’s first librarian Richard James made a note on the flyleaf of Cotton Vespasian D. viii, the manuscript containing the N-Town cycle and its indication of the singing of *Stella celi* in the Adoration of the Shepherds play. James’s inscription reads that the codex ‘contenta novi testamenti scenicè expressa et acitata olim per monachos sive fratres mendicantes’, though unfortunately the evidence on which he based this claim is not known. For more information, see L. G. Craddock, ‘Franciscan Influence on Early English Drama’, *Franciscan Studies*, 10 (1950), pp. 383–417; and D. L. Jeffrey, ‘Franciscan Spirituality and the Rise of Early English Drama’, *Mosaic*, 8/4 (1975), pp. 17–46.

Richard de Ledrede in 1316, contains a rubric explaining his order's use of the practice, and in many cases places the textual incipits of the replaced secular songs over or near their sacred counterparts.⁴⁵ This Latin versifying was supplemented by composition in the vernacular, and the Friars Minor are strongly associated with the development of both the Italian lauda and the English carol.⁴⁶

More immediately relevant is the fact that Charles d'Orléans is known to have associated with the Franciscans during his English captivity and made copies of poetic works by the Franciscan friar John of Hoveden, which are still extant.⁴⁷ The Franciscan friar James Ryman, whose fame primarily rests on his contribution to the English carol genre, made a vernacular English translation of the hymn in the late fifteenth century,⁴⁸ and the Ritson Manuscript (BL Add. MS 5665), which was apparently compiled at a Franciscan friary in Devon and intended for use at services with lay congregations, contains two separate editions of the hymn as well as forty-four English carols.⁴⁹ Even the rigid, note-against-note homophony of the setting attributed to John Cooke in Old Hall manuscript, which appears so anachronistic and anomalous in the context of fifteenth-century English liturgical music, is unexceptional compared to late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century carols, which developed under the aegis of the Franciscans and which like the *Stella celi* itself could be monophonic or polyphonic, in Latin or the vernacular.⁵⁰ (See Example 4.)

Other settings display evidence of being *contrafacta* settings: Manfred Bukofzer noted that the tenor of the *Stella celi* setting attributed to Guillaume le Rouge in the Trent codex is identical to that of the chanson *So ys emprentid*.⁵¹ One of the few additional compositions attributed to Le

⁴⁵ For a good introduction, see John Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050–1350* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 183–5.

⁴⁶ Barr, *The Monophonic Lauda*, esp. p. 67; *The Early English Carols*, ed. R. L. Greene, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1977); Jeffrey, *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality*, pp. 116–230.

⁴⁷ G. Ouy, 'Recherches sur la librairie de Charles d'Orléans et de Jean d'Angoulême pendant leur captivité en Angleterre, et étude de deux manuscrits autographes de Charles d'Orléans récemment identifiés', *Comptes rendus des Séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1955), pp. 273–88, at 284–5.

⁴⁸ J. Zupitza, 'Die Gedichte des Franziskaners Jakob Ryman', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 89 (1892), pp. 167–338, at 248.

⁴⁹ C. K. Miller, 'A Fifteenth-Century Record of English Choir Repertory: B.M. Add. Ms. 5665: A Transcription and Commentary' (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1948); *The Ritson Manuscript*, ed. Sandon, Bayliss and Lane.

⁵⁰ The bibliographies of *The Early English Carols*, ed. Greene, and F. Liuzzi, *La lauda e i primordi della melodia italiana*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Rome, 1935) are an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the history of these important musical forms.

⁵¹ M. F. Bukofzer, 'Popular and Secular Music in England (to c. 1470)', in *Ars Nova and the Renaissance, 1300–1540*, ed. D. A. Hughes and G. Abraham (New Oxford History of Music; London, 1960), pp. 131–2. The melody itself associated with the chanson and the Prague tenor appears in some manuscripts attributed to Walter Frye (d. before 1475), in others

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Lul - lay lul - low lul - ly lul - lay bew - y bew - y
 - y lul - ly bew - y lul - ly lul - low lul - ly lul -
 lay baw baw my bar - nē, sleep soft - ly now

Example 4 Descant homophony in a 15th-century English carol, Anon., *Lullay, I saw*, BL Add. MS 5666, fol. 4^v)

Rouge, whom we have already encountered as a musician in the chapel of Charles d'Orléans, is a three-voiced mass on the same melody,⁵² and both are similar to the tenor line of the motet [*N/V*] *Jobis iustat carminis odas laudibus* in Prague, Strahov, D.G. IV 47, which as noted above has the words *Stella celi* ... *ulcere* copied at the end of the music.⁵³ In the light of these concordances, we might also wonder whether Franciscan *contrafacta* of other melodies explains the variety in the monophonic settings such as those in Cambridge University Library Add. MS 6668, Fitzwilliam Museum MS 46 and Norwich Castle Museum MS 158.926.4e.

Furthermore, in addition to their musical ministry, the Friars Minor were intimately involved in caring for the sick during the Black Death and in subsequent epidemics. According to the chronicle of the Sicilian Franciscan Michele da Piazza, 'the Franciscans and Dominicans, and [those] of other orders who were willing to visit the sick to hear their confession and impose penance, died in such large numbers that their

attributed to Johannes Bedyngym (d. 1459–60), and in still others without any compositional ascription, or indeed any text at all. See the critical commentary in Walter Frye, *Collected Works*, ed. S. W. Kenney (Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae, 19; Rome, 1960), p. viii, and the additional sources listed in Trowell's article on Frye in Grove Music Online (accessed 23 Feb. 2008).

⁵² J. Dean, 'Le Rouge, G.', Grove Music Online (accessed 23 Feb. 2008).

⁵³ Noted by Bent, 'New and Little-Known Fragments', 148.

priorities were all but deserted'.⁵⁴ It has been estimated that 42.5 per cent of all the Franciscans in England died during the Black Death,⁵⁵ and their reported mortality in Europe as a whole was catastrophic.⁵⁶ This was probably due to their willingness to minister in unsavoury conditions, and a dedication to caring for the sick during the Black Death which apparently exceeded that of their ecclesiastical colleagues. As Moorman notes, the fact that in mid-fourteenth-century London the Franciscan friary was located on a street so notorious for its unhealthy atmosphere it bore the name 'Stynkynglane' is suggestive,⁵⁷ and the Franciscan labouring in the miasmas of plague did not go unnoticed. After the Black Death, a letter from Pope Clement VI to diocesan leaders who had complained about the mendicants' disproportionate receipt of donations after the epidemic upheld the friars' claims to increased wealth, on the grounds that that where 'so many of the parish priests took flight and abandoned their parishoners, the mendicants cared for and buried them'.⁵⁸ In addition, there is ample evidence that the order cultivated knowledge of natural philosophy and medicine. The first master of the Franciscan school at Oxford from 1229/30 to 1235 was the renowned theologian and natural philosopher Robert Grosseteste,⁵⁹ and a decree enacted at the Franciscan General Chapter in Paris in 1292 formally permitted friars to study medicine and law.⁶⁰ Other testaments to the

⁵⁴ 'Fratres vero Ordinis minorum et Predicatorum et aliorum ordinum accedere volentes ad domos infirmorum predictorum, et confitentes eisdem de eorum peccatis, et dantes eis penitentiam iuxta velle sermus divinam justitia [sic], adeo letalis mors ipsos infecit, quod fere in eorum cellulis de eis aliqui remanserunt.' M. da Piazza, *Cronaca*, ed. A. Giuffrida (Palermo, 1980), p. 83; trans. in *The Black Death*, ed. Horrox, p. 36.

⁵⁵ Calculated from the figures provided in Jeffrey, *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality*, p. 273.

⁵⁶ Indeed, some of the rates are so high as to strain credibility. According to accounts consulted by the Franciscan historian François de Sessevalle, every Franciscan in Marseille and Carcassone died, and Perdrizet calculated that between 1347 and 1350 the order as a whole (including the lower orders) lost 124,430 members. F. de Sessevalle, *Histoire générale de l'ordre de saint François*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris, 1935), pp. 144–5. P. Perdrizet, *La Vierge de miséricorde: Étude d'un thème iconographique* (Paris, 1908), p. 139.

⁵⁷ J. R. H. Moorman, *The Grey Friars in Cambridge, 1225–1538* (The Birkbeck Lectures, 1948–9; Cambridge, 1952), p. 79.

⁵⁸ Sessevalle, *Histoire*, p. 146. English translation in *The Black Death*, ed. Horrox, p. 36.

⁵⁹ The account of Grosseteste's ascension to the Lincoln episcopate in 1235 in the Lanercost Chronicle notes that 'Vir iste primus cathedram scholarum fratrum Minorum rexit Oxoniae, unde et assumptus fuit ad cathedram praelatae'. See *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. J. Stevenson (Edinburgh, 1839), p. 45. Grosseteste's own natural philosophy made room for the Boethian idea that the proportions of music were related to the humoral balance necessary for healthy living, and in his *De artibus liberalibus* he said that 'every sickness . . . is healable through musical knowledge and sound'. *Die philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste, Bischofs von Lincoln*, ed. L. Bauer (Münster, 1912), pp. 4–5. The implications of this are discussed more fully in Macklin, "'Musica sanat corpus per animam'", p. 65.

⁶⁰ In many copies of the ordinances passed at the 1279 Franciscan general chapter, statue 11d reads: 'lura vero et phisica in scholis theologiae ab eodem lectore et eodem tempore non legantur, sed alibi et alias, ubi fuerit opportunum.' P. M. Bihl, OFM, 'Statuta Generalia

Franciscans' commitment to education include the biblical commentaries of William Woodford in 1373, which reveal a deep understanding of contemporary theories of natural philosophy, apparently acquired in his time spent in London Greyfriars,⁶¹ and friar Michael Dawnay's testimony in an early-fifteenth century church court case that while living in a Franciscan house in Hartlepool he studied 'arithmetic, domification and other [subjects] which are studied for the science of astronomy'.⁶² By the middle of the fourteenth century the Franciscans had developed a large hierarchically organised network of *studia* with the convent schools of Oxford and Cambridge at the apex, in which schools a friar could receive an education equivalent or superior to those available to secular students anywhere in Europe.⁶³ These schools (probably including the house in Hartlepool attended by Dawnay) were accessible to friars from all across Europe through assignation by the order's Chapter General,⁶⁴ which in addition to explaining how the piece could be quickly transported from England to regions as far afield as Coimbra and Prague, helps explain the association between the hymn and the upper echelons of English society. As noted above, prior to joining the Chapel Royal Cooke spent a lengthy period of study at King's Hall, Cambridge, and the *Stella celi* was one of the five antiphons whose performance was required in the fifteenth century at the ringing of the curfew bell for students living in the Oxford halls (and thus not affiliated with colleges) on vigils for the five feasts of the Virgin Mary.⁶⁵ In a similar vein, in 1487–8 Magdalen College, Oxford purchased two boards (*tablete*; now lost) indicating the notes of *Stella celi*, which were repaired in 1538 and presumably used in the performance of the Marian

Ordinis Edita in Capitulis Generalibus Celebratis Narbonae An. 1260, Assisii An. 1279 Atque Parisiis An. 1292', *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 34 (1941), pp. 5–162, at 76.

⁶¹ J. Catto, 'Franciscan Learning in England, 1450–1540', in J. G. Clark (ed.), *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 99–100.

⁶² B. Kane, 'Return of the Native: Franciscan Education and Astrological Practice in the Medieval North of England', in M. Robson and J. Rohrkasten (eds.), *Franciscan Education in England* (in press). Astronomical ideas were intimately connected with medicine and specifically with plague aetiology, as will be discussed below. I am grateful to Dr Kane for allowing me to view a copy of this chapter in advance of publication.

⁶³ Catto, 'Franciscan Learning in England', 99–100.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ 'Item, quod quilibet specialiter assit in aula singulis diebus sabati et quinque vigilis beate Marie immediate post primam pulsacionem ignitegii in ecclesia beate Marie quando cantatur antiphona *Beate Marie*, omni excusacione postposita, nisi grauis infirmitas aut alia racionabilis causa prius per propriam personam alligata [*sic*] et per principalem approbata eum excusauerit, sub pena quadrantis. Et si venerit post inpcionem clausule *Funde preces* etc. quando cantatur *Aue regina*, vel post inpcionem clausule *Per illud aue* quando cantatur *Benedicta*, vel post inpcionem clausule *Resurrexit* quando cantatur *Regina celi*, seu post inpcionem clausule *Ipsa stella* quando cantatur *Stella celi*; vel post inpcionem clausule *Quia genuisti* quando cantatur *Sancta Maria* consimiliter ut absens puniatur.' *Statuta Antiqua Universitatis Oxoniensis*, ed. S. Gibson (Oxford, 1931), p. 575.

antiphon by the entire college after Compline on Saturdays and vigils of the Virgin specified in their college statutes.⁶⁶

Within the text itself, the integration of theology with pre-Christian natural philosophy also suggests a degree of erudition explicable with this theory. The primary image of the poem is astrological, as the author calls upon the *stella celi* and *gloriosa stella maris* that is the Virgin Mary to hold in check or restrain (*compescere*) the stars or constellations (*sidera*) whose strife (in the words of the hymn) ‘brings the people the ulcers of a terrible death’ later identified as plague (*quorum bella plebem cedunt / dire mortis ulcere*). Metaphors likening the Virgin to a star in the heavens are nothing new, of course.⁶⁷ What is noteworthy is that here that star is placed in explicit opposition to the actions of another star in the heavens, this one not metaphorical but quite literal. Medieval natural philosophy ultimately owed a large debt to the Hellenistic astronomer and mathematician Ptolemy (fl. mid-2nd c. AD), whose works were first translated from Greek into Arabic in the seventh and eighth centuries and from Arabic into Latin between the late eleventh and early thirteenth centuries.⁶⁸ Though Ptolemy’s theories exercised an enormous influence across the continuum

⁶⁶ ‘Solut. xxix Decembris [1487] pro factura duarum tabellarum in quibus figuntur rotulae antiphonicae, Stella celi, iii^a, iiiii^a’; W. D. Macray, *A Register of the Members of St. Mary Magdalen College, Oxford*, NS, vol. 1 (London, 1894), p. 16. In vol. 2 of his publication of the Magdalen register (1897), Macray also called attention to how ‘tables hanging in the hall with antiphons were repaired, and the organs in the chapel’ (p. 18). He also notes that both of these payments occurred in years where there was documented concern for the ravages of plague, as in 1486–7 the fellows and scholars of Magdalen were sent to Witney and Harwell to avoid the epidemic in Oxford (vol. 1, p. 17), and in 1538 beds were carried from Magdalen to the village of Water-Eaton and back, probably on account of plague-fear (vol. 2, p. 18). The antiphon was also evidently part of the repertory of at least the college chapel of New College by 1528, as their records indicate a payment to the precentor for the ‘noting’ of the piece, though whether this was in the form of boards as at Magdalen, or of more standard choirbook pages, remains unclear as none of the existing copies of the *Stella celi* has been linked with this institution. This and the other details concerning the evidence of performance were highlighted in the magisterial work by F. Ll. Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain* (Studies in the History of Music; London, 1963), pp. 85–8, 158.

⁶⁷ According to Pelikan, the Marian epithet *stella maris* (star of the sea) derives from Jerome’s epithet for Mary as a *stilla maris* (drop of sea water), altered by Isidore of Seville to *stella maris* perhaps to bring it into congruence with the prophecy that ‘a star shall come forth out of Jacob’ in Numbers 24:17. J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 3: *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600–1300)* (Chicago, 1978), p. 162.

⁶⁸ Ptolemy’s reputation in the Middle Ages was founded upon two main works: the *Almagest* and the *Tetrabiblos* (‘Four Books’) or *Quadripartitum*. In the *Almagest* he described a model of the cosmos with the earth placed in the middle of the universe and the seven heavenly bodies (the Moon, the Sun, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn) orbiting in concentric circles around it. The *Almagest* also included tables of all the data necessary for calculating the positions of the Sun, Moon and planets, which could then be used by knowledgeable astronomers to determine the relative positions of the planets at any given time. The *Quadripartitum* elaborates on these principles, describing the effects that the celestial motion described in the cosmogony of the *Almagest* had on the Earth based on their ability to heat, cool, moisten and dry and thus to affect the humoric complexion of living things. For more

of medieval medical practice, from the highly educated university-trained physician to the ‘rough-and-ready’ empiricism of barbers, surgeons and other lay practitioners,⁶⁹ their influence was particularly acute in the aftermath of the Black Death. Learned explanations of the epidemic often followed the example set by the medical faculty of the University of Paris, who in chapter 1 of their report of 1348 stated that ‘the distant and first cause of this pestilence was and is the configuration of the heavens’, for which they called particular attention to a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn amplified by the position of Mars in 1345.⁷⁰ The significance of this event was elaborated by Simon de Covino of Liège, whose poem ‘On the Judgement of the Sun at the Feasts of Saturn’ (*De Judicio Solis in Conviviis Saturni*) of 1350 described the plague as the result of ‘the strife and conflict between these two planets’,⁷¹ and by Geoffrey of Meaux, who in his treatise written at Oxford calls attention to Mars’ association with ‘illnesses entailing fevers and the spitting of blood . . . and ulcers’.⁷² The language of the *Stella celi* hymn thus echoes the educated astrological explanations of the Black Death, and suggests equal familiarity with the constructs of natural philosophy and the doctrine of intercession, even going so far as to have the one check or curb (*compescere*) the other.⁷³

However erudite its origins, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the hymn had found a place at both ends of the social spectrum. Walter

information, see C. Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society in Later Medieval England* (London, 1999); N. G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine* (Chicago, 1990).

⁶⁹ One of the key texts of officially prescribed university instruction was a simplified textbook of Ptolemaic planetary theory, and generally a ‘measure of astrological competence was indeed one of the marks separating an educated practitioner from an empiric’ (Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, pp. 67–8). However, as Faye Marie Getz has pointed out, ‘interest in “university medicine” was not solely the province of the graduate physician’ and that ‘graduate physicians . . . owned fifteenth-century medical texts in English, and their less formally educated brothers had texts containing large chunks of medical material in Latin’. F. M. Getz, ‘Gilbertus Anglicus Anglicized’, *Medical History*, 26 (1982), pp. 436–42, at 437.

⁷⁰ See in particular ch. 1 of the report, which begins ‘Dicamus igitur quod remota et primeua causa istius pestilentie fuit et est aliqua constellatio celestis’. R. Hoeniger, *Der Schwarze Tod in Deutschland: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1882), pp. 152–6, at 153–4; trans. in *The Black Death*, ed. Horrox, pp. 158–63, at 159–60.

⁷¹ In Simon’s prefatory summary of the ‘plot’ of the work, the ‘lite et controversia istorum duorum planetarum’ (Simon de Covino, ‘De Judicio Solis in Conviviis Saturni’, ed. E. Littre, *Bibliothèque de l’école des Chartes*, 2 (1840–1), p. 217; trans. in *The Black Death*, ed. Horrox, p. 164), while in the poem itself he describes how ‘Judicis officium validis clamoribus urgens, / Et contra vitam rogat committere bellum, / Pesteque mortifera vitalia fata minatur’. The inventory of books taken by Charles d’Orléans from England back to France in 1440 indicates that he owned a copy of the work while in captivity, which has subsequently been identified as BnF lat. 8369. See Ouy, *La Librairie des frères captifs*, pp. 50 and 94–5.

⁷² Trans. in *The Black Death*, ed. Horrox, p. 172.

⁷³ To my knowledge, this is unparalleled in medieval art; even the so-called ‘Plague Madonna of Mercy’ illustrates the Virgin protecting her supplicants from plague arrows loosed by vengeful angels, not vengeful planets! For more information on the Plague Madonna, see Marshall, ‘Waiting on the Will of the Lord’, pp. 235–72; Perdrizet, *La Vierge de miséricorde*, pp. 137–49.

Lambe's sumptuous four-voice setting in the Eton Choirbook, composed sometime before he died in 1499, indicates its performance in the rarefied air of the college, while in humbler surroundings the prayer was added without music to dozens of books of hours and apparently recited as a private devotion at the elevation of the host during the Mass.⁷⁴ Whether in the symbolic form of the shepherds at the Nativity in the Adoration play of the N-town cycle (where the fact that the denotation of the bare incipit of the hymn was deemed sufficient to evoke performance by the scribe of the N-Town 'Adoration of the Shepherd's' play strongly indicates that the tune was well known to the performers), or literally in the academic communities of Magdalen College and the Oxford Halls, it is the sense of an inclusive, 'congregational' performance aesthetic that comes through most strongly from the study of this repertory. This also comes through in the fragments of polyphonic settings of the *Stella celi* found in Oxford, Lincoln College MS 64, BL Royal 7.A.VI, and BL Lansdowne 462. All three are of fifteenth-century provenance, although little else is known about their origins.⁷⁵ All three depict the same melodic line, which Nick Sandon described as 'having no melodic integrity of its own but leaping about as if to produce a counterpoint below another voice which moved largely by step; in fact it behaves like a typical early 15th-century supporting part below a melodic *cantus firmus* which was presumably so well-known as to make notation superfluous'.⁷⁶ Tellingly, while the fragment in Lansdowne 462 is in ordinary fifteenth-century measured notation, the fragments in both Lincoln College MS 64 and in Royal 7.A.VI are in stroke notation, a graphological technique used in late medieval England to enable singers who might not be familiar with the conventions of mensural notation to sing polyphonic music (see Figure 1 and Example 5).⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Representative of the latter usage is its appearance in CUL ii 6 2, which is a mass-produced book of hours owned in the later fifteenth and early sixteenth century by the Roberts family of Middlesex. On fol. 102^r in an early sixteenth-century hand someone has written 'Stela celi' over a prayer against pestilence, and then in English to the right 'At y^e levation tyme say Stella celi extirpavit'. For a facsimile of the page, and discussion of its provenance, see E. Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers 1240–1570* (New Haven, 2006), pp. 83–4 and 88.

⁷⁵ This is particularly true of the Lincoln College notation, for which the only chronological information comes from the handwriting since the music was found on the back of a piece of endpaper used to strengthen the binding of another manuscript. See the description of the manuscript in A. Wathey, 'Oxford, Lincoln College Ms Lat. 64', *DIAMM*, 6 Jan. 2008; accessed 23 Feb. 2008. Slightly more is known about the other two sources; Lansdowne 462 is a Sarum Gradual which may have belonged to Norwich Cathedral, while Royal 7.A.VI is a devotional collection compiled at the Benedictine Cathedral Priory of St Cuthbert in Durham, with the *Stella celi* one of the last things entered in the manuscript in the first half of the fifteenth century. See Sandon, 'Mary, Meditations, Monks and Music', p. 47.

⁷⁶ Sandon, 'Mary, Meditations, Monks and Music', p. 53.

⁷⁷ Bent, 'New and Little-Known Fragments', p. 149; Sandon, 'Mary, Meditations, Monks and Music', p. 53. All images of manuscripts in Figures 1 and 2 are available through DIAMM.

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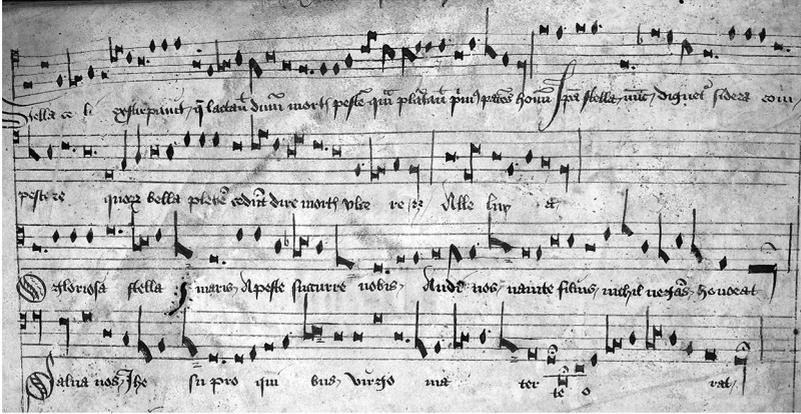


Figure 1(a) The melody of *Stella celi extirpavit* in (a) BL Lansdowne 462, fol. 152^v; (b) Oxford, Lincoln College, Lat. 64, fol. i^v; (c) BL Royal 7.A.VI, fol.127^v. Used by permission of the British Library Board (a and c) and © Lincoln College, Oxford, MS Lat. 64 (b)

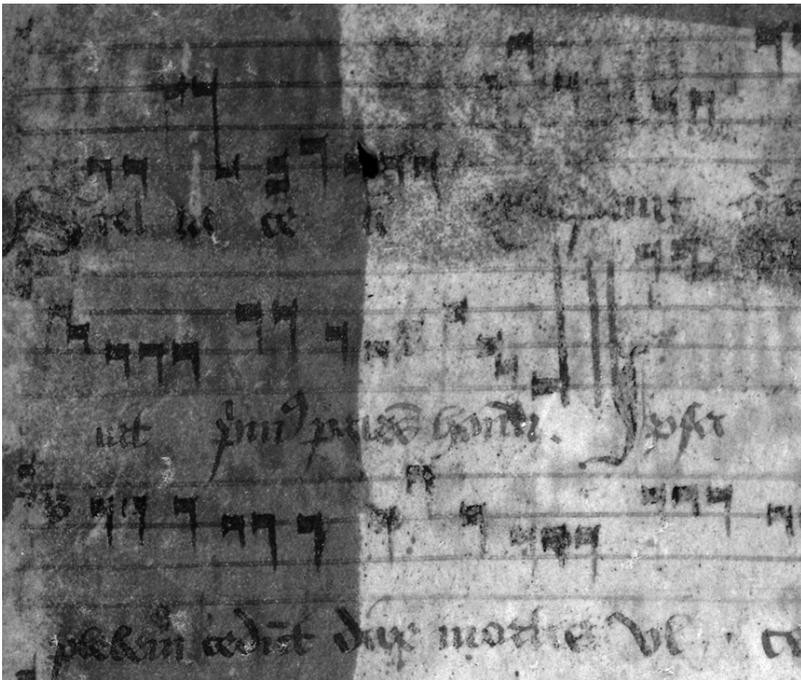


Figure 1(b)

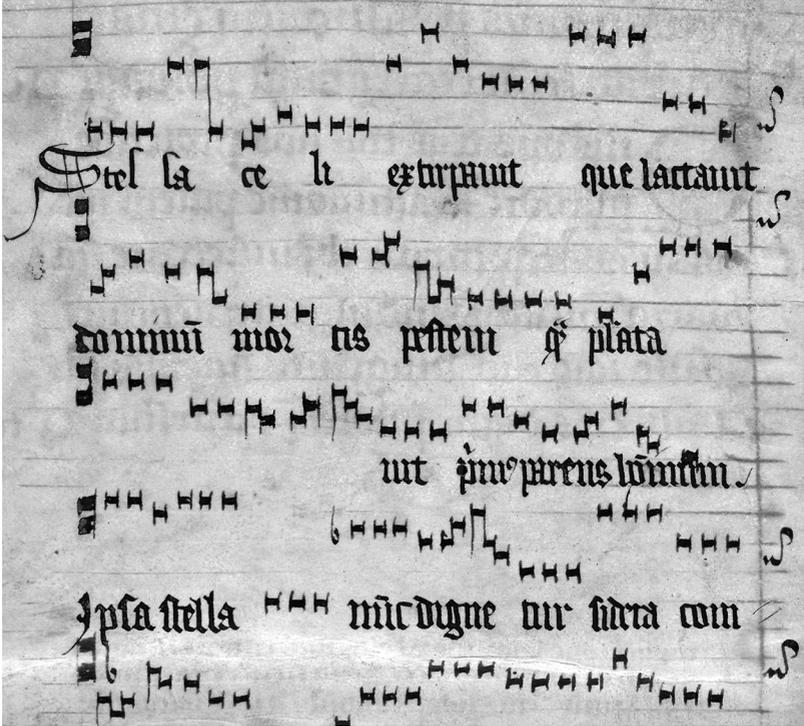


Figure 1(c)

These two notational styles are combined in another fragmentary polyphonic *Stella celi*, unrelated to these three settings and surviving only by virtue of its being recycled as binding reinforcement for a copy of St Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, in which the bass part is written in a white mensural notation, while the tenor part (which follows the bass part immediately on the staff) is in stroke notation (see Figure 2).⁷⁸ Moreover, the single manuscript which contains the greatest number of pieces written in this notation is none other than the Ritson Manuscript (BL Add. MS 5665), a collection to which we have already called attention for its distinction of holding two *Stella celi* settings, its association with the Franciscans, and its intimation of use in lay devotional contexts.⁷⁹ This

⁷⁸ Oxford, Christ Church Okes 253, back pastedown. See Bent, 'New and Little-Known Fragments', pp. 143–4, Pl. III.

⁷⁹ Ritson manuscript pieces in stroke notation (what Hughes termed 'playsong' notation) include the cycle of the Ordinary of a Mass lacking the Kyrie (fols. 111^v ff.), *Salve festa dies* (fol. 119), [*Sancta*] *Maria virgo intercede* (fol. 119^v), *Salve regina misericordie* (fol. 121^v), *Anima mea liquefacta* (fol. 126^v), and *Nunc Jesu te petimus* (fol. 128^v). A. Hughes, 'The Choir in Fifteenth-Century

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Stel - la ce - li ex - tir - pa - vit que la - cta - vit do - mi -
num - mor - tis pe - stem quam plan - ta - - -
- - - vit pri - mus pa - rens ho - mi - num.
I - psa stel - la nunc di - gne - tur si - de - ra com - pe -
- sce - re quo - rum bel - la ple - bem ce - dunt -
di - re mor - tis ul - - - ce - re.

Example 5 The *Stella celi* melody in the three sources in Figure 1

observation was first made by Andrew Hughes, and based on his study of these and other exempla he argued that the use of stroke notation to craft ‘a beginner’s style of polyphony’ reflects the democratisation of multivocal performance, enabling singers with a non-specialist set of skills to engage with polyphonic repertory.⁸⁰

CONCLUSIONS

Ironically, the characteristics that facilitated the ability of the *Stella celi* to cross national, economic and educational boundaries and appeal to a broad spectrum of society in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries may have contributed to its relative obscurity in our own time. Its apparent ubiquity in milieux such as the N-Town mystery plays and the Oxford Halls lessened the imperative to make durable written editions. Many of the musical copies that do survive, like the stroke notation itself used in producing them, owed their appeal less to standards of beauty than to their ability to address a pressing need. In the case of the *Stella celi*, that need related to the doctrine of intercession invoked for protection against plague, and the wide range of records that contain the hymn is an eloquent

English Music: Non-Mensural Polyphony’, in Gustave Reese and Robert J. Snow (eds.), *Essays in Musicology in Honor of Dragan Plamenac on his 70th Birthday* (New York, 1977), pp. 127–45.

⁸⁰ Hughes, ‘The Choir in Fifteenth-Century English Music’, pp. 128–33, 139.

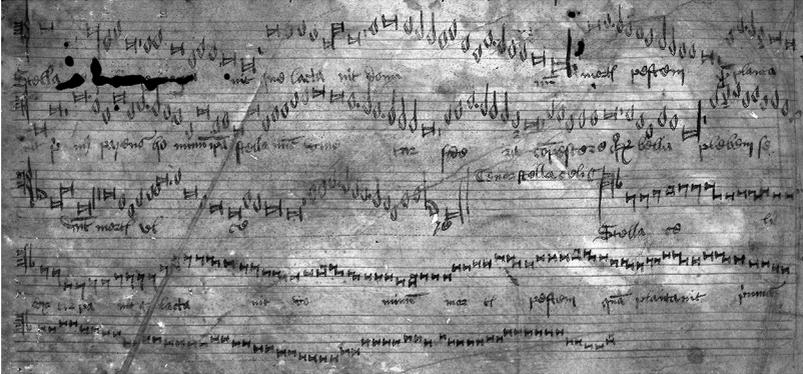


Figure 2 Back pastedown of Oxford, Christ Church Okes 253, verso. Copyright The Governing Body of Christ Church, Oxford

testament to its great resonance in late medieval society. From the elaborate filigree of Lambe's setting in the Eton Choirbook to the note to recite the hymn at the elevation of the Host jotted in the Roberts family primer, the *Stella celi* echoes through the records as a poignant reminder of the precarious nature of life and art in the fifteenth century.

Tracing the fortunes of the *Stella celi* also illustrates some of the methodological difficulties of working with pieces which are, strictly speaking, neither entirely learned nor vernacular exercises. This is typified in the Franciscan use of *contrafacta*, which in this case may have facilitated the integration of an unknown number of existing melodies into the Franciscans' framework for responding to plague's perceived significance and aetiology. In such cases it is difficult, if not impossible, to construct a single well-defined compositional lineage; indeed, seeking to do so may be to miss the greater significance of the work, as attempts to unravel the works of John Cooke and Charles d'Orléans illustrate.

Like the images of a kaleidoscope, which are created through the application of simple principles of light and gravity on a small number of objects, the *Stella celi* may productively be viewed as a product of the Franciscans' concern to reconcile the benefits of the communal performance of music with ideals of spiritual well-being in their flocks. These simple principles could then give rise to the large array of music, verse and drama discussed above, which are united not only in their text but in their intimations of group performance. Peering at the past through the *Stella celi* is thus to turn Adam von Fulda's *meditatio mortis* on its head – the fleeting performances hinted at in these works speak less about death than about life in the shadow of the plague.

Mercer University, Macon, Ga.

APPENDIX

Musical Settings and Performances of Stella celi in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Sources

No.	Date	Remarks	Country of origin	Composer/author	MS location (if different from published commentary cited in footnote)
PLAINSONG SETTINGS					
1 ^a	early 15th c.		England	anonymous (in a Sarum Gradual)	GB Norwich, Castle Museum MS 158.926.4c, fols. 133 ^v –134
2 ^b	c. 1460–80	plainsong? (words written in tenor of an otherwise unrelated motet)	Bohemia or Moravia	anonymous	Czech Republic Prague, Strahov Monastery Library (Museum of Czech Literature, Strahov Library), D.G. IV 47, pp. 471–2 (fols. 236 ^v –237)
3 ^b	15th c.?		England?	anonymous	GB CUL Add. 6668, fol. 112 ^{r-v}
4 ^b	late 15th–early 16th c.		Netherlands	anonymous	GB Cambridge, Fitzwilliam MS 46, fols. 152 ^v –153 ^v
5 ^c	16th c.		Portugal	anonymous	Portugal Coimbra, Musco Machado de Castro, Antiphoner 5
6 ^c	?? (in a theory book published in 1685)		Portugal	Nuñes da Silva	<i>Summa da Arte de Canto-chaô</i> (Lisbon, 1685)
POLYPHONIC SETTINGS					
7 ^d	before 1450	only contratenor survives	England	anonymous	GB BL Royal MS 7.A.VI, fol. 127 ^v

No.	Date	Remarks	Country of origin	Composer/author	MS location (if different from published commentary cited in footnote)
8 ^c	before 1420	3 voices	England	John Cooke	GB BL Add. MS 57590, fol. 40 ^v
9 ^a	15th c., c. 1430?	fragments of 3 voices of a likely 4-part setting	England	anonymous	GB Oxford, University College MS 16, fols. 151 ^v and 152
10 ^{a,b}	15th c.	countertenor?	England	anonymous	GB BL MS Lansdowne 462, fol. 152 ^v
11 ^a	15th c.	countertenor? appears to be the same melody as that in BL Royal 7.A.VI and BL Lansdowne 462	England	anonymous	GB Oxford, Lincolh College MS Lat. 64, fol. 1 ^v
12 ^b	c. 1450?	at least 3 voices, bass and incomplete tenor surviving	England	anonymous	GB Oxford, Christ Church Okes 253, back pastedown
13 ^f	c. 1479	4 voices	England	Walter Lambe	GB Eton College, MS 178, fols. 97 ^v –98
14 ^g	late 15th c.	3 voices	England	Sir William Hawte	GB BL Add. MS 5665, fols. 64 ^v –65
15 ^{g,h}	late 15th c.	3 voices	England	anonymous	GB BL Add. MS 5665, fols. 3 ^v –4
16 ^{b,i}	late 15th c.?	4 voices	Italy	anonymous	Petrucchi, <i>Motetti A numero trattate</i> (Venice, 1502) and Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Panc. 27, fols. 69 ^v –70

No.	Date	Remarks	Country of origin	Composer/author	MS location (if different from published commentary cited in footnote)
17 ^{b,j}	late 15th c.	4 voices	England?	Guillaume Le Rouge	Italy Trento, Museo Provinciale d'Arte, Codex 1375 (<i>olim</i> 88), fols. 11 ^v –13
18 ^k	late 15th/ early 16th c.	3 voices	England	Robert Cowper	GB BL R.M. 24.d.2, fols. 162 ^v –164 ^r
19 ^l	early 16th c.	5 voices	Italy	Pie(oro da Lodi	Petrucci, <i>Laudes Libro Secondo</i> (pub. 1507), fols. 37 ^v –38 ^r
20 ^b	c. 1515–40?	only medius part survives	England	anonymous	GB BL Royal App. 58, fol. 26 ^{r-v}
21 ^m	c. 1551	3 voices	England	John Thorne	GB BL R.M. 24.d.2, fols. 161 ^v –163 ^r
REFERENCES TO PERFORMANCE					
22 ^{n,o}	15th c.	public performance	England	(anonymous) reference to its singing by students in the Oxford Halls	N/A
23 ^p	mid-15th c.	public performance	England	anonymous (direction for performance by the Shepherds in the N-Town Cycle's 'Adoration of the Shepherds')	GB BL Cotton Vespasian D.viii, fol. 90.
24 ^{n,q}	1487	implication of public performance	England	anonymous; boards with it were made for Magdalen College, Oxford	N/A

No.	Date	Remarks	Country of origin	Composer/author	MS location (if different from published commentary cited in footnote)
25 ^m	1527-8	implication of public performance	England	anonymous; payment made to the precursor of New College, Oxford for 'noting' the piece	N/A
26 ^{n,r}	1538	implication of public performance	England	anonymous; 'Boards' with it were repaired at Magdalen College, Oxford	N/A
27 ^s	early 16th c.	implication of private recitation	England	anonymous (addition in book of hours); superscript of 'Stella celi' added to autonomous prayer against plague and famine, and on facing page note in English reading 'At the levation time say "Stella celi extirpavit"'.	GB CUL Ii.6.2, fol. 102 ^v

^a Watheyl, 'Newly Discovered Fifteenth-Century English Polyphony at Oxford', p. 62.

^b Bent, 'New and Little-Known Fragments', pp. 145-8.

^c Corbin, *Essai sur la musique religieuse portugaise*, pp. 374-8.

^d Sandon, 'Mary, Meditations, Monks and Music', pp. 47-53.

^e Hughes and Bent, 'The Old Hall Manuscript', p. 104.

^f *The Eton Chorbok*, ed. Harrison, vol. 3, pp. 32-6.

^g Miller, 'A Fifteenth-Century Record of English Choir Repertory', pp. 15-23.

^h *The Rison Manuscript*, ed. Sandon, Bayliss and Lane, pp. 2-3.

ⁱ *Selections from Motetti 4*, ed. Sherr, pp. 67-73.

^j *Sacred Music from the Cathedral at Treni*, ed. Gerber, pp. 42, 163-8.

^k D. Greer, 'Cowper, Robert', *Grove Music Online* (accessed 26 Nov. 2007).

- ¹ *Die Mehrstimmige Italienische Laude um 1500*, ed. K. Jeppesen and V. Brondal (Leipzig, 1935), pp. 60–1.
^m *The Music of York Minster*, ed. P. Aston and J. Thom (London and New York, 1972), pp. 1–3.
ⁿ Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain*, pp. 85–8, 158.
^o Gibson, *Statuta Antiqua Universitatis Oxoniensis*, p. 575.
^p *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Sugano, p. 144.
^q *A Register of the Members of St. Mary Magdalen College, Oxford*, ed. Macray, p. 16.
^r *Ibid.*, p. 18.
^s Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, p. 88.