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Vermeer Music Manuscript

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Vermeer Music Manuscript

Abstract

Information about the gift of a page from a 16th century illustrated music manuscript which was given to Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, and housed in the John and Louise Hulst Library.

Keywords

music manuscript, Dordt College

Disciplines

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Comments

From the [The Voice](#), Fall 2014: Volume 60, Issue 1, p. 6, please see the related article "500-Year-Old Music Manuscript Given".

Vermeer Music Manuscript
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Dordt College is grateful for the gift of a page of 16th century music manuscript, given by Mrs. Robert (Carolyn) Vermeer. Mrs. Vermeer purchased the framed manuscript in a shop in Spirit Lake, Iowa, in the early 1970's. For twenty-five years this treasure hung over the piano in her home. In the spring of 2014, she chose to donate it to the Music Department of Dordt College, for the benefit of students, faculty, and constituents. This historic document now hangs in the John and Louise Hulst Library at Dordt. It has been re-framed by Lauren Ochsner of Golden Prairie Art and mounted so that it opens like a page in a book, allowing viewers to see both sides of the page.

The document is likely of Italian origin, dating from about 1500. Its authenticity, age, and origin have been verified by Dr. Robert Kendrick of The University of Chicago and Dr. Lucia Marchi of DePaul University, specialists in Medieval and Renaissance manuscripts. The document is written with ink on parchment and measures about 12 by 18 inches.

The manuscript came to Iowa through David and Sheryl Hausmann. During their eleven years in Spain, the Hausmanns purchased several books of manuscripts from the Cathedral and an antique shop in Sanlucar de Barrameda, a town reputed to be Magellan's place of departure. During a summer visit to their home town of Spirit Lake, they provided three of the manuscript pages to the owner of the shop from which Carolyn Vermeer later purchased this page. If the document is indeed of Italian origin, its path between Italy and Spain remains a mystery.

This music manuscript is one page from a choir book—a large book of liturgical chants. Today, every choir member is provided an individual printed copy of the music. But before printing, music was hand-copied, and one large copy sufficed for an entire group. Art work of the time shows choirs, with the director at the center front, gathered around one large copy of the choir book.

The music notation here uses a five-line staff with notes called “neumes,” which indicate the melodic shape but not the rhythm of the chant. Neumes may represent a single pitch or a group of pitches. Extended groups of pitches on a single syllable are called “melismas.” There is a very long melisma on the last syllable of “Alleluia” in the second chant of this manuscript. The rhythm of chant is fluid, following the rhythm of the words.

The small notes with slanted stems at the end of staves are cues for the first pitch in the next line. The figures at the beginning of the staves are moveable clefs; the center of the clef design indicates the location of a specific pitch. The clef for the first chant on this page indicates the location of F, while that in the second chant indicates the location of C. The second chant is in Mode 6, one of the eight scales used in Medieval and Renaissance music.

The text was written without hyphens between syllables. Initial letters of a text, such as the A of *Alleluia* and L of *Laetabitur* here, are usually large and often elaborate, incorporating intricate designs or even pictures representing Bible stories. In this manuscript the initial letters are relatively simple. However, a face or mask peeks out of the initial L of *Laetabitur*.

The first page continues a chant begun on the previous page. The text, *[Desiderium a]nimae eius tribuisti ei, et voluntate labiorum eius non fraudasti eum*, is translated as *You have granted him [the desire] of his heart and have not withheld the request of his lips*. Because Psalm numbering differs between the Latin Vulgate and English translations, this text is from Psalm 21:2 in English Bibles and Psalm 20:3 in the Latin Vulgate.

The second page begins a new chant: *Alleluia. Laetabitur iustus [in Domino et sperabit in eo et laudabuntur omnes recti corde.]* The text is from Psalm 64:10 in English Bibles and Psalm 63:11 in the Latin Vulgate. The Catholic Bible translates it as *The just shall rejoice [in the Lord, and shall hope in him; and all the upright in heart shall be praised.]* The verb “laudabuntur” is in the future passive indicative form and means “(they) shall be praised.” This chant was commonly used in the mass commemorating the martyrs and was sung after the reading of the Gospel.

The Protestant reading of this verse is different. In the late 16th-century Latin translation by Tremellius and Junius (the main Latin translation used by the Reformers), the reading of Ps. 64:10 is: *Laetabitur iustus in Iehova, et recipiet se ad eum, denique gloriabuntur omnes recti animo.* In English Bibles this has been translated “*The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall hope (or trust) in him; and all the upright in heart shall glory (or exult, or glory in him).*” This reading uses the verb *gloriabuntur*, a future indicative deponent verb, which literally means “(they) shall glory.” In this reading, the Lord is the one to receive glory.

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