

# “In the Homes, the Chambers, and the Honorable Assemblies”: Dedications as a Reflection of the Rise of Bourgeois Music Patronage in 16th and 17th century Southern Low Countries

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## INTRODUCTION

During the early modern period, “Franco-Flemish” composers from the Low Countries contributed to the renown of polyphony throughout Europe. The printing press surely played a crucial and active role in the prominence of these composers, as it allows for a faster, wider, and more affordable production and dissemination of music.

However, composers and printers still must participate in the patronage system to ensure their livelihood. As for them, patrons were also compelled by it, for their prestige partly relied on their liberality, their financial capacities to entertain and promote artists and contribute to cultural and artistic productions associated with their names.

Therefore, dedications are strongly tied to the advent of music printing as well as musical patronage. Yet, they have not received the same attention as the music they introduce. This gap in scholarly focus invites a closer examination of the role of dedications not only as formal acknowledgments or requests but as strategic tools both for composers/printers and for their patrons. They offer valuable insights into the strategies of representation and the dynamics of power and exchange that underpinned the musical patronage system, as well as the transfer of artistic influence to the newly-rising strata of society; the bourgeoisie.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What repertoires are dedicated, to whom, and why?
- What does this tell us about the musical practices (spaces, places, performers, genders) and the dynamics of musical patronage at the time?

## OBJECTIVES

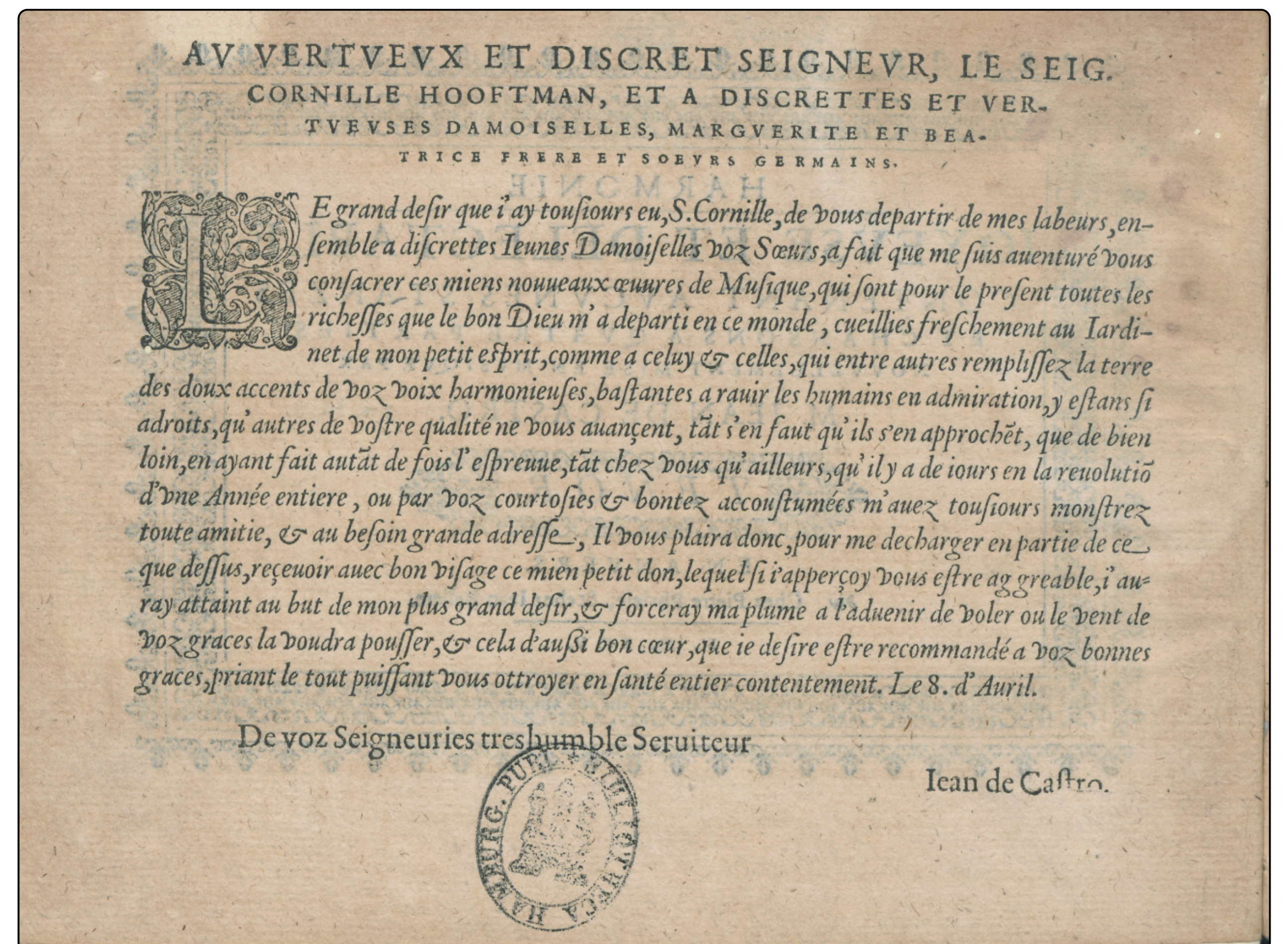
- Define the contours of new profiles of dedicatees (other than the monarchy, clergy, and nobility);
- Contribute to a better understanding of the shift from monarchical, ecclesiastical, and noble to **bourgeois patronage** in early modern music culture in the Low Countries.

## CORPUS

- +/- 300 editions of vocal music (secular and sacred) printed in Antwerp and Leuven between ca. 1540 and ca. 1630 (up to 400 including reprints)
- +/- half of the corpus bear a dedication
- +/- 70% of the dedications are addressed to the bourgeoisie

## CONCLUSION

In the early modern Southern Low Countries, a major hub of commerce and print culture, dedications in vocal music books offer **unique insights** into the socio-cultural dynamics of musical patronage. Rather than appealing exclusively to monarchs, princes or clerics, many dedications were addressed to merchants and civic officials. These texts reveal how music printing was embedded in the **emerging culture of urban elites**, and how dedicatory strategies reflected evolving and new networks of influence, power and prestige.



Composer Jean de Castro to Corneille, Marguerite and Béatrice Hooftman, children of Gillis Hooftman, Dutch and wealthy merchant, trader, banker and shipbuilder established in Antwerp in the 16th century (“Harmonie joyeuse et delectable contenant aucunes stanzes et chansons a quatre parties”, Antwerp, Pierre Phalèse and Jean Bellère, 1595, RISM A/I C 1492)

## METHODOLOGY

- **Textual Analysis:** Close reading of the dedications to uncover recurring tropes, rhetorical devices, and names.
- **Prosopographical Research:** Reconstruction of biographical dedicatees' profiles (profession, social status, origin) using printed and archival sources.
- **Network analysis:**
  - Mapping connections between composers, printers, and dedicatees using tools like Gephi.
  - Identifying clusters and central figures to reveal patterns of influence and circulation.

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- Successful repertoires = secular vocal music (chansons, madrigals)
- Dedicated to **urban elites**: Merchants, magistrates, and civic officials
- **Shift in musical patronage:** Urban bourgeoisie becomes a major actor and patron in the musical life of cities at the time, thanks to its influence and power in a market-oriented city like Antwerp
  - Patronage that is more centered on networks, reputation, and symbolic capital than on formal patron-client hierarchies.
- **Shift in musical practices:**
  - **Spaces:** Music circulates in private homes and circles and among literate, non-aristocratic elites  
→ **domestic spaces**
  - **Performers:** Not only professional anymore, but also educated citizens, amateurs, non-professional singers (dedicatees and their circles, entourage, networks)
  - **Gender:** Mostly male figures but also a few women, actively involved in the commissioning, performing, or promoting of music, thus highlighting their significant role in the cultural dynamics of the time.