

Tracking the Consumers and Patrons of Antwerp's Music Books Through Dedicatory Epistles and Archival Traces

Understanding who used and interacted with music books in early modern Europe remains challenging, especially when direct marks of use are scarce. In sixteenth-century Antwerp, however, dedicatory epistles offer a distinctive perspective on the sociocultural world of printed music. Unlike other centers where patronage was dominated by royalty or the church, many of the dedicatees here belonged to the burgeoning and wealthy bourgeoisie. By naming individuals who supported, purchased, or were expected to value a publication, these epistles open a window onto those who might be considered its first readers or intended users.

This paper explores whether these dedicatees were merely patrons and/or active consumers who collected, used, and engaged with music books. To do so, it combines a corpus of Antwerp dedicatory epistles (*ca.* 1540-1600) with complementary archival evidence, notably Antwerp's notarial probate inventories and the Plantin-Moretus sales ledgers. These sources make it possible to trace concrete patterns of ownership, to identify books present in households, and to link named dedicatees to actual material practices.

By bringing together paratextual and archival traces, the paper reassesses the place of dedicatees within the broader field of book usage. It argues that their roles blur traditional distinctions between patronage, possession, reading, and musical practice, and thus sheds new light on the users of music books in a major early modern print centre.

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