Sound Memories

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Musical past and regionalism in early modern Silesia: the hymnbook of Valentin Triller (Wrocław 1555)

Always a borderland territory, Silesia was a meeting point for different ethnic groups, cultures, and confessions. Notwithstanding its multicultural and multiconfessional character, it developed a strong **territorial** and ideological cohesion. In my research, I focus on a hymnbook that reflects a moment in this ongoing development, and represents an attempt to forge a specific Lutheran-Silesian regionalism out of a re-appropriation of the Catholic past. The hymnbook, entitled Ein Schlesisch Singebüchlein ('a small Silesian hymnbook'), was published by the Lutheran pastor Valentin Triller in 1555 for the use of Silesian parish churches. Triller did not rely on newly composed music, but on tunes that were, in most cases, already 150 years old!

· · · · · · · · Local musical past · · · ·

- We can interpret Triller's approach to the musical-liturgical past as a mixture of • 'remembering' and 'discarding'. Although Triller was a faithful Lutheran, he consciously
- avoided the Lutheran musical repertoire which was already 'traditional' by the 1550s.
- This Lutheran repertoire of chorales was established by printing houses in Wittenberg
- and Nuremberg; these were the unquestionable intellectual centres of Lutheranism, but
- also places that Triller saw as "ausländisch", as foreign. In order to 'silesianise' Lutheran
- church singing, Triller relied on the 'old' Catholic repertoire which was circulating in
- Silesia before the Reformation. Reading his foreword, we can see how a Silesian regional
- identity stirred the cultivation of what the editor considered a 'local musical past'.

A case study: Triller's "Gar nichts schedlichs noch verdamlichs ist"

Triller's hymn *Garnichts schedlichs noch verdamlichs ist* is a perfect example of such a procedure. The tune was not a new composition, but a Late Medieval hymn traditionally sung for St. Hedwig of Silesia, a 13th-century saint. In light of regional identity, the choice of a hymn for St. Hedwig is quite telling. Since her canonisation in 1267, St. Hedwig had been the patroness of Silesia, and her remains rested in the abbey she had founded in the region (Trzebnica, Lower Silesia). The veneration of local saints was a fundamental ingredient for the construction of regional identities in Catholic Europe, and Triller clearly exploited the momentum of this cult. However, for a Lutheran it was not acceptable anymore to pray to St. Hedwig, since the veneration of saints, especially those not based on Scripture, was strongly frowned upon by the Reformation. Thus, Triller wrote a new text for this melody, a poetic paraphrase of St. Paul's letter to the Romans. By using the old me-

Das uns nichts bis begegen mag / wacht uber uns auch nache und tag/ solchs nempt zuhersen allezeit/und zu zudancken seidt bereit.

Auch sonderlich nim wot zumut/ was lieb er da beweisen thut / da sein Son uns ist worden gleich/ durch den er schenck sein rug Aech.

Bir rhimen frey on alle schem/ das niemand mag sein lieb und trem / verdanseten nach ausprechen gar/ wenn er gleich sing viel tausent zu.

Dem Pater in dem höchsten thron/ und Jesu Ehristo seinem Son/vnd seinem Geist/ dem tröster gutt/ dancksagen wir von herh und mut / Amen.

An stat der Responsorien aus dent Capittel

Nom. viii, ausst die noten von Sance Hedwigis Garnis nube iam detecta mit il. stummen.

Gar nichte schedliche noch verdaliche ist an den die da seind im Jesu Christ/so

dar nichte schedliche noch verdaliche ist an den die da seind im Jesu Christ/so

noch de geist wädeln zu dieser frist/den de geses des geistes zwar/mache mich durch christiums

lody of St. Hedwig's hymn with a new scriptural and Lutheran text, Triller managed to 'smuggle' into Lutheran services the identity-shaping potential of the cult of St. Hedwig while remaining theologically faithful to his Lutheran beliefs.



Flash here to listen to Valentin Triller's hymns performed by the SoundMe Associate Partner Anonymous III





