

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

Context

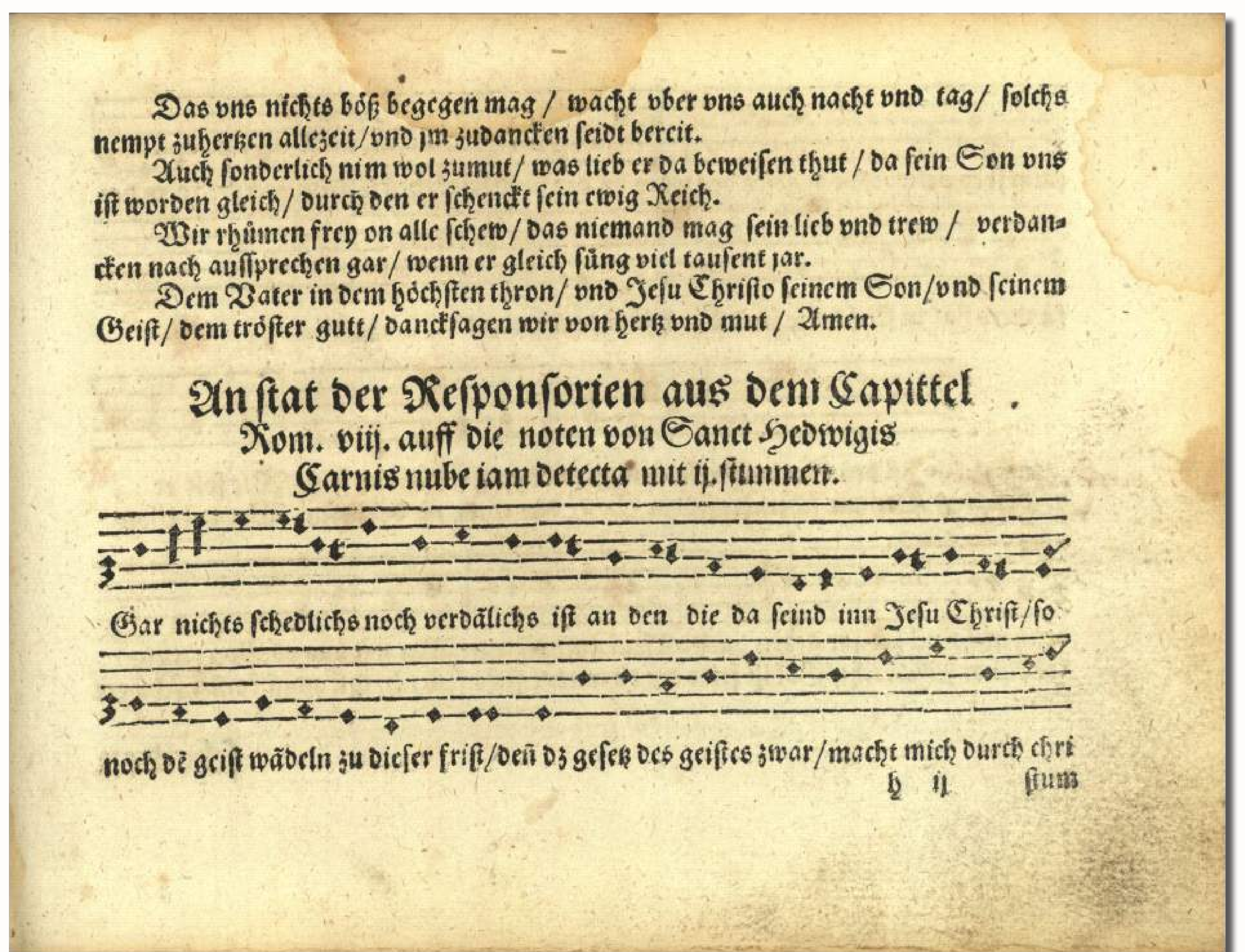
Always a borderland territory, Silesia was a meeting point for different ethnic groups, cultures, and confessions. Notwithstanding its multicultural and multiconfessional character, it developed a strong **territorial and ideological cohesion**. In my research, I focus on a hymnbook that reflects a moment 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 *Gar nichts 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 melody 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

Flash here for a video presentation of the SoundMe project!

