

WOLFGANG FUHRMANN and CRISTINA URCHUEGUÍA (eds), *The Segovia Manuscript: A European Musical Repertory in Spain, c. 1500*. Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music 20. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press. 2019. xxviii + 349 pp.

The manuscript of late fifteenth-century polyphonic music in the Archivo Capítular of Segovia Cathedral which is the subject of this book is one of the most intriguing early musical sources in the Peninsula. As the editors note at the end of their Preambulum, the book has been ‘recalcitrant in disclosing all its mysteries’ (p. 6), and in particular questions concerning its genesis: where and for whom it was compiled, and for what purposes. Such questions have been sparked particularly by the unusual nature of its contents within the Iberian context, dominated by northern-European repertoire (but with significant numbers of works from Spain), and highly eclectic, encompassing both secular and sacred works, the latter with French, Flemish, Italian, and Spanish texts or incipits. The presence here of so many works attributed to the most prominent Northern composers of the era, such as Josquin and Obrecht, has meant that – while other Iberian musical sources have tended to attract the attention primarily or exclusively of specialists in Peninsula music – the Segovia manuscript has appeared frequently on the radar of the broader community of musicologists working on this period. However, scrutiny of the source has typically been piecemeal, with the notable exception of Norma Klein Baker’s doctoral thesis of 1978, and restricted in the main to scrutiny of whichever element of its repertoire is of concern to the scholar concerned, so that the manuscript has been ‘hard to see fairly and whole’, as Kenneth Kreitner puts it (p. 130).

This volume of nine essays, originating as a conference session in 2007, attempts a comprehensive investigation of the source, while (as the editors state) letting ‘the dissenting voices stand’ (p. 5) among the contributions, for example with regard to the manuscript’s likely origins. The balance and breadth of coverage of the various repertoires within the source is a notable strength of the book, and the publication of such a thorough new study of the manuscript is most welcome. One wonders if there might have been opportunities for contributors’ differing views, hypotheses, and insights on particular aspects to be allowed to interact with – and be evaluated in relation to – one another rather more fully than has been ventured here. There are certainly quite numerous cross-references to others’ arguments, but means might have been devised of allowing points of contention and conflicting opinions to be more directly debated within these pages. The tendency towards compartmentalisation is reflected also in one practical aspect: the provision of several separate inventories or partial inventories of the manuscript’s contents, scattered through the book as appendixes to chapters 3, 6, and 9, as well as a full inventory presented as chapter 10. There is significant overlap of information between these inventories, but they are inconsistent in systems of presentation and reference, and leave the reader having to work out where to look for particular information relevant to a piece, for example regarding concordances or secondary literature.

Various chapters contribute substantively to debates about the origins of the manuscript, its functions, and the mixture of Northern- and Southern-European connections which it reflects. Emilio Ros-Fábregas adduces watermark evidence which points to 1498–1500 as the likely period of compilation, and which corroborates the belief that the book originated in Spain. He further proposes that the Rodrigo Manrique named on an inscription on the last folio may have been an early owner, and identifies the third Count of Paredes (1482–1536) as the most convincing candidate, thus placing the book in a noble context and one with firm connections to the royal court. Rob Wegman’s close study of the copyist’s treatment of Flemish texts reinforces the identification of the copyist as a Fleming, and Leofranc Holford-Strevens shows that his Spanish was better than his French. Wegman sees the book as essentially one intended for the personal use of its compiler, a position supported by Bonnie Blackburn, while Kenneth Kreitner posits a ‘pedagogical and/or recreational purpose at or near the Castilian court’ (p. 143), considering that it may have been compiled for a younger member of that court. Kreitner highlights the likelihood of a link between the manuscript and the composer Juan de Anchieta, well represented in the source, whereas

Wolfgang Fuhrmann emphasises another putative composer connection, proposing that ‘the compiler of Segovia had a direct or indirect relationship with Obrecht’ (p. 116). In contrast to the arguments advanced by Ros Fábregas and Kreitner, Cristina Urchueguía seeks to pull the manuscript definitively away from the Spanish royal context (proposing the Estudio General in Segovia as an alternative – educational – milieu), as part of her vigorous dismissal of the approach to the manuscript advanced by its discoverer, Higinio Anglés, who presented it as connected to the courts of the Catholic Monarchs. While it is indeed revealing to interrogate Anglés’s motives as Urchueguía does, his biases do not necessarily render his theory of royal connections erroneous. Honey Meconi and Tess Knighton contextualise respectively the copying of Italian/Italianate and Spanish-texted works into the book, Knighton’s contribution situating this section of the Segovia manuscript within a broader consideration of how notated sources reflect and reveal aspects of repertory-formation and the transition from oral to written transmission of polyphonic song in the period.

The Segovia manuscript offers a cornucopia not only of types of repertory but also of lines of scholarly enquiry, which are richly represented and – in various ways – significantly advanced in this stimulating collection of essays.