

WILLIAM MUNDY'S 'VOX PATRIS CAELESTIS' AND THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

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THE POLYPHONIC VOTIVE ANTIPHON belongs to a distinctive and peculiarly English genre. These large-scale paraliturgical pieces, generally in honour of the Virgin, were sung by the highly trained singers of collegiate and similar choirs as acts of communal devotion and recreation, most often as a votive observance after Compline.¹ The tradition reached its high-water mark around 1500, with some of the most famous surviving examples found in the Eton Choirbook. As Magnus Williamson has pointed out while discussing the Eton pieces and their ritual context, it is no less than 'miraculous' that any of these works has been preserved to the present day.² Votive antiphons were in the first layer of English musical practice affected by the Reformation: devotion to Mary and other saints was one of the most bitterly contested issues of the time, and music of this sort was revised, censored, and discarded even before substantial changes were made to the Mass.³ When older forms of public worship were restored under Queen Mary Tudor in the mid-1550s, the votive antiphon enjoyed a correspondingly rapid if short-lived revival. Although it fell into more or less permanent disfavour at the accession of Elizabeth, it left its mark on the style of the mid-century psalm motet (which featured subject matter more congenial to reformed ears) and even on the forms of vernacular paraliturgical music.⁴ It is no coincidence that the English anthem, still flourishing after four and a half centuries as a freely chosen conclusion to the daily evening service in cathedrals and college chapels, is the exact verbal cognate of the late medieval *antiphona*.

William Mundy's *Vox patris caelestis* is almost certainly a product of the brief Marian restoration of the votive antiphon, and among the very last examples of its genre.⁵ Its subject matter appears at first glance to be out of step with some trends of its day. Unlike Tallis's *Gaude gloriosa*, a comparable work and perhaps the best known of the

¹ Recent work on the repertory includes Noel Bisson, 'English Polyphony for the Virgin Mary: The Votive Antiphon, 1420–1500' (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1998); David J. Allinson, 'The Rhetoric of Devotion: Some Neglected Elements in the Context of the Early Tudor Motet' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Exeter, 1999); and Peter M. Lefferts, 'Cantilena and Antiphon: Music for Marian Services in Late Medieval England', *Current Musicology*, 45–7 (1988–9), 247–82.

² Magnus Williamson, 'Pictura et scriptura: The Eton Choirbook in its Iconographical Context', *Early Music*, 28 (2000), 359–80 at 359.

³ See e.g. Taverner's votive antiphon *Christe Jesu pastor bone*, whose text in the surviving manuscripts is an altered version of a prayer ('O Wilhelme pastor bone') to St William of York. The original version asked for St William's intercession on behalf of Cardinal Wolsey, the original founder of Cardinal College; when Henry VIII refounded the institution as Christ Church in 1546, the piece was kept in the repertory but the words were altered, with the name of the beneficiary changed to *Regem Henricum*. See *John Taverner II: Votive Antiphons*, ed. Hugh Benham (Early English Church Music, 25; London, 1981), p. xii.

⁴ *Robert White II: Six-Part Latin Psalms and Votive Antiphons*, ed. David Mateer (Early English Church Music, 29; London, 1983), p. xii.

⁵ A modern edition of *Vox patris caelestis* can be found in *William Mundy: Latin Antiphons and Psalms*, ed. Frank Ll. Harrison (Early English Church Music, 2; London, 1963), 33–70.

late votive antiphons, it appears nowhere to call for a politicized reading: there are no pointed references in the text to the teaching office of the Church, liberation from error, nor, for that matter, the topic of repentance and supplication that runs through so much devotional polyphony of these years.⁶ *Vox patris* instead offers a long series of invocations to the Virgin, in elaborate and sometimes frankly erotic language, speaking as the voice of God (hence the incipit) inviting her to ascend to the joys of heaven. It recalls the relatively untroubled extravagances of the Eton generation more than the upheavals of the mid-sixteenth century.

Its reception has been mixed in more recent times. A *Grove Dictionary* article in the not-so-distant past characterized the piece as somewhat ponderous and lacking in musical interest. It is noted, along with Mundy's related votive antiphon *Maria virgo sanctissima*, for its 'overall effect . . . of thick, heavy scoring, lacking any strong directional melodic or rhythmic impetus. Cadence points usually confirm only the progenitor mode: in *Vox Patris caelestis* the music centres on D consistently over a span of 261 bars.'⁷ Discussing Mundy's rather slender Latin output in more general terms, Hugh Benham remarked that 'although it commands considerable respect, it is likely to inspire little positive enthusiasm'.⁸

Vox patris is one of the largest single works, excluding cyclic mass ordinaries, in the English repertory of its day: it is scored for six-voice choir, with nine substantial sections and an unusually elaborate final Amen, the whole taking nearly twenty minutes in performance.⁹ Its text goes on at length in a prose style that many readers will follow Benham in calling 'very extravagant if rather undistinguished Latin'.¹⁰ It is tempting to consider such a work, however impressive, as essentially a period piece, a flamboyant, somewhat fussy musical parallel to the final sixteenth-century flowering of English Perpendicular architecture. Its historical moment was a brief and circumscribed one. According to David Wulstan, *Vox patris* 'was the apogee of the grandiose Marian antiphon: its days were now numbered'.¹¹

The present study aims to explore this unusual work and its background in detail, using a number of intersecting approaches. I will begin by investigating Mundy's engagement with what was by the 1550s a markedly archaic genre, and the numerous precedents and techniques on which the piece draws. I will then go on to discuss archival sources related to Mundy and his singers that point to a precise context for the composition and performance of the piece.

Vox patris is not dated in any of its manuscript sources, but what we know of Mundy's biography points to a date of composition in the mid-1550s, when he was

⁶ The Marian vogue for music with a political message is perhaps epitomized in Mundy's own anti-heretical screed *Exsurge Christe*, which Daniel Page calls 'one of the most aggressively partisan pieces surviving from Tudor England'; Page, 'Uniform and Catholic: Church Music in the Reign of Mary Tudor' (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1996), 392. For examples of large-scale works in the introverted, penitential vein, see Tye's *Peccavimus cum patribus nostris*, Sheppard's *Media vita*, or Tallis's *Suscipe quaeso Domine* (though the last may well be a retrospective Elizabethan work rather than a topical Marian one: see my letter in *Early Music*, 28 (2000), 329, and David Humphreys's response, *ibid.* 508–9).

⁷ The 2001 version of *Grove*, unlike the 1980 edition cited above, gives a quite different account: '*Vox patris* and *Maria virgo*, with their sure architectural sense and ornate yet vocally grateful lines, are among the crowning glories of Tudor polyphony.' Tastes and perceptions can change substantially over twenty years, now as in the Tudor era.

⁸ Hugh Benham, *Latin Church Music in England, c. 1460–1575* (London, 1977), 218.

⁹ Although John Sheppard's *Media vita* can take longer to sing because of its elaborate structure of internal repetitions (21' 33" versus 19' 16" for *Vox patris*, both as recorded by the Tallis Scholars under Peter Phillips), the former is, in its written form, a much shorter piece of music.

¹⁰ Benham's reference here is to the texts of Tudor votive antiphons in general: *John Tavener II: Votive Antiphons*, p. ix.

¹¹ David Wulstan, *Tudor Music* (London, 1985), 298.

parish clerk at the London church of St Mary at Hill.¹² He was born around 1528, and so was almost certainly too young to have composed it under Henry VIII. Both its topic and its style would have been unacceptable under the Edwardian reforms during Mundy's late teens and early twenties. He is recorded as having taken the Protestant Oath of Supremacy as a vicar at St Paul's shortly after the coronation of Elizabeth, which further dispels suspicions that he wrote the piece in later life as an act of subversion or Catholic nostalgia.¹³ This leaves the five years of Mary's reign.

The manuscript evidence of the piece supports this dating: it is transmitted in the Baldwin partbooks, Oxford, Christ Church 979–83, the most extensive source of large-scale English festal polyphony from this period.¹⁴ Its arrangement of voices is also entirely characteristic of London musical culture during the brief Counter-Reformation years. Roger Bowers has identified this six-part layout (Tr/M/Ct1/Ct2/T/B), which he notes for its 'opulence' and 'richness', as most typical of the Chapel Royal music of John Sheppard and his colleagues under Queen Mary.¹⁵ He points out that Sheppard, like his associate Tallis, had an unequalled group of voices at his disposal, both adult professionals and highly trained boys, and that his consistent choice of a six-part ensemble reflects the embarrassment of vocal riches at hand. It is somewhat surprising to see Mundy at a London parish church (with no boy choristers) undertaking composition on the same scale. The musical establishment of St Mary at Hill was certainly no ordinary parish choir: it had a long and distinguished tradition by the middle of the sixteenth century, and spared few efforts to cultivate it further, as will become clear in the second part of this study. Nonetheless, the six-part scoring of *Vox patris*, with free use of *divisi*, was a notable gesture on Mundy's part at a time when the privations of the Edwardian years were still fresh in parish account books and in the memory of every musician.

The subject matter of *Vox patris* provides another link to the musical preoccupations of the time. Unlike the great majority of earlier votive antiphons, it pertains to a specific liturgical event, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Its text is in fact an extended trope on the Assumption office antiphon *Tota pulchra es*.¹⁶ This locates it comfortably alongside the central repertory of English festal polyphony from the 1550s: a cycle of music for the major feasts of the church year in the restored Sarum rite, written for the Chapel Royal by Sheppard and Tallis, with some collaboration by more peripheral figures (the young William Byrd very likely among them).¹⁷ The

¹² The parish of St Mary at Hill is located in the south-east of the City, up a small incline (as the name implies) from the Thames. The medieval parish church that Mundy knew was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666; the present building is the work of Sir Christopher Wren.

¹³ Mundy subscribed to the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity in 1559. Daniel Page, 'Uniform and Catholic', 298.

¹⁴ Most notably the collaborative cycle of festal Office music composed for the Chapel Royal by Tallis and Sheppard: Roger Bray, 'The Part-Books Oxford, Christ Church, MSS 979–983: An Index and Commentary', *Musica Disciplina*, 25 (1971), 179–97.

¹⁵ Roger Bowers, 'To Chorus from Quartet', in John Morehen (ed.), *English Choral Practice 1400–1650* (Cambridge, 1995), 1–47 at 42–3.

¹⁶ *Breviarium ad usum Sarum*, ed. Francis Procter and Christopher Wordsworth (Cambridge, 1886), iii. 684.

¹⁷ Paul Doe, *Tallis* (London, 1976), 34. The *Similes illis fiant* attributed to 'Byrd' in the Gyffard partbooks is part of a collaborative setting, with Sheppard and Mundy, of the long processional psalm *In exitu Israel*. A clear *terminus ante quem* for this piece is 1558, given Sheppard's death in December of that year (or, arguably, in Jan. 1559: see Roger Bowers, 'The Chapel Royal, the First Edwardian Prayer Book, and Elizabeth I's Settlement of Religion, 1559', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), 317–44 at 329). In the light of the recent revision of William Byrd's birthdate to 1539/40 rather than 1543, and the continuing absence of any identifiable compositions by Thomas Byrd, the attribution of *Similes illis fiant* to the well-known composer continues to gain in credibility. See John Harley, *William Byrd: Gentleman of the Chapel Royal* (Aldershot, 1997), 158–61.

best composers of the era expended much of their energy on music—responsories, hymns, and office antiphons—to adorn a series of liturgical observances, often in the presence of the monarch.¹⁸ The feast of the Assumption, it should be said, appears nowhere in this series. Although it was certainly an important date in the calendar, it is not provided for in this repertory because the royal court, and thus the musical establishment of the Chapel, was out of session in August. I shall return to this anomaly shortly when discussing a possible context for the performance of *Vox patris*.

Votive antiphons of the generations before Mundy most often consisted of elaborate praises directed to the Virgin, or sometimes to other saints, without much direct reference to liturgical events. There are a handful of exceptions: Richard Davy's *In honore summae matris*, for example, addresses the conception and nativity of Christ, though in somewhat general terms.¹⁹ Some of these earlier pieces did incorporate a liturgical or paraliturgical subtext through their cantus-firmus melody. One notable example is Taverner's *Ave Dei patris filia*. This text is a long amplification of the fourfold medieval praises of Mary as 'daughter of the Father, mother of the Son, spouse of the Holy Spirit, and handmaiden of the Trinity'. Taverner underscores this in his setting by using the Trinitarian hymn *Te Deum laudamus* as a tenor cantus firmus, even borrowing its famous intonation formula as a point of imitation in the other voices.²⁰ It balances the extravagant Marian piety of the text with a subtle but constant reminder that the singers are ultimately praising the Trinity through whom Mary is glorified. In *Vox patris*, there is no cantus firmus, no outside musical material, and no imported subtext: the composition is all of a piece.

The first and most basic layer of the text is the Assumption antiphon *Tota pulchra es*:

Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te: favus distillans labia tua, mel et lac sub lingua tua, odor unguentorum tuorum super omnia aromata: iam enim hiems transiit, imber abiit et recessit; flores apparuerunt, vineae florentes odorem dederunt, et vox turturis audita est in terra nostra. Surge, propera, amica mea, veni de Libano, veni, coronaberis.

You are all beautiful, my love, and there is no flaw in you: your lips are a dripping honeycomb, honey and milk are under your tongue, the scent of your perfumes is above all spices: the winter has passed, the rain has ended and gone; the flowers have appeared, the flowering vines have given their scent, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. Come, hasten, my love, come from Lebanon, come, you shall be crowned.

Tota pulchra is itself a pastiche from the Song of Songs, drawing on its long-standing links to the liturgy of the Assumption. In the troped text set by Mundy, this book of Scripture is evoked from the very first word, *Vox*, which recurs so forcefully in it: 'the voice of my beloved'.²¹

¹⁸ Page, 'Uniform and Catholic', 211–13, lists this repertory of more than sixty pieces in calendrical order, showing how fully it covers the major liturgical events of the year and coincides with the Queen's ceremonial appearances at services.

¹⁹ *The Eton Choirbook: III*, ed. Frank Ll. Harrison (Musica Britannica, 12; London, 1961), 175–6.

²⁰ *John Taverner II: Votive Antiphons*, ed. Benham, 168.

²¹ As in the title of a recent study on the book's medieval reception and interpretation: E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1992).

Biblical citations are in italics; material from the antiphon *Tota pulchra* is in bold.

- 1 *Vox* [S. of S. 2: 8, 5: 2] patris caelestis ad sacram virginem Mariam, filii eius genitricem, in eius migratione a corpore mortali, in hiis verbis prorumpens: ***Tota pulchra es, amica mea***, mihi amabilissima Annae prolis, virgo sacratissima Maria, ***et macula*** ab ineunte conceptionis tuae instanti vel usquam ***non est in te***. [S. of S. 4: 7]
- 2 ***Favus distillans labia tua*** [S. of S. 4: 11] ex corde purissimo verba mira dulcedinis spiritualis gratia: ***iam enim hiems*** terreni frigoris et miseria ***transiit*** [S. of S. 2: 11]: ***flores*** aeternae felicitatis et salutis mecum tibi ab aeterna praeparatae olfacere et sentire ***apparuerunt***. [S. of S. 2: 12]
- 3 ***Vineae florentes odorem*** caelestis ambrosianae dulcedinis ***dederunt*** [S. of S. 2: 13], ***et vox turturis***, quae mea, tui dilectissimi amatoris, sola est exoptatio te amplecti, ***audita est in terra nostra*** [S. of S. 2: 12] tali sonante gratia.
- 4 ***Surge, prospera, amica mea, columba mea, formosa mea*** [S. of S.2: 10] de terra longinqua miseriis plena, ***et veni in terram quam monstravero tibi***. [Gen. 12: 1; Acts 7: 3]
- 5 ***Veni*** [S. of S. 2: 13 *et passim*] de corpore mortali, et induam te,²² mea corcula, ***vestitu deaurato circumdata varietate*** [Ps. 44: 10] caelestis gloriae.
- 6 ***Veni*** ad me, dilectissimum amatorem tuum, prae omnibus adamata, [et ponam in te thronum meum, ***quia concupivi speciem tuam***.] {Alleluia verse, Thursday lady mass, Sarum rite} [Ps. 44: 12]
- 7 ***Veni de Libano*** [S. of S. 4: 8], monte mundano quaquam altissimo humanae contemplationis, ***ad montem Sion*** [Heb. 12: 22], ubi ***innocentes manibus et corde ascendere*** [Ps. 23: 3–4] deberent.
- 8 ***Veni*** ad me, Assuerum verum, Esther, mea nobilissima, pro populo tuo oratura, mecum in aeternum manere et delectare. [Esther 14 *et passim*]
- 9 Te omnes caeli cives summo desiderio exoptant videre. ***Veni***, caelesti gloria ***coronaberis*** [S. of S. 4: 8]. Amen.
- 1 The voice of the heavenly Father to the holy virgin Mary, the mother of his Son, at her passing from the mortal body, breaking out in these words: ‘You are all beautiful, my love, daughter of Anne most beloved to me, most holy virgin Mary, and there is, from the moment of your conception or ever, no flaw in you.
- 2 Your lips are a honeycomb, distilling words marvellous in the grace of spiritual sweetness: indeed now the winter of earthly cold and misery has passed: flowers of eternal happiness and salvation have appeared, prepared from eternity for you to smell and perceive with me.
- 3 The flowering vines give forth a smell of heavenly, ambrosial sweetness, and the voice of the turtledove, which is the sole desire of me, your dearest lover, to embrace you, is heard in our land, which resounds with such loveliness.
- 4 Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my fair one, from a far-off land full of miseries, and come into the land that I will show you.
- 5 Come forth from your mortal body, and I will clothe you, my dear heart, in a golden garment embroidered with the variety of heavenly glory.
- 6 Come to me, your dearest lover, O beloved above all others, and I will place my throne in you, for I have desired your beauty.
- 7 Come from Lebanon, the earthly mountain of the highest human contemplation, to the mountain of Zion, where the innocent of hands and heart should ascend.
- 8 Come to me, your true Ahasuerus, my noblest Esther, to pray for your people, to remain and delight with me for eternity.
- 9 All the citizens of heaven long to see you with the greatest desire. Come, you shall be crowned with heavenly glory’. Amen.

²² To correct a mistake common to all modern readings of *Vox patris*, including Harrison’s 1963 EECM edition: Baldwin’s source for the fifth stanza appears to have said *indua te*, with the usual macron over the *a* indicating an *m* or *n*. Baldwin copied it this way in the first countertenor book (and the first time in the second countertenor). In the remaining cases—that is, in both Christ Church 981 and 982—he expanded it incorrectly and wrote the nonsense word

Ninety-five percent of this text is in fact direct speech. What we hear from the middle of the first stanza up to the final word is neither a hymn of praise nor a plea for intercession, but ‘the voice of the Heavenly Father . . . breaking forth in these words’ (‘vox patris caelestis . . . in hiis verbis prorumpens’). William Flynn, in a discussion of troped liturgical texts, identifies the technique of troping as a way of stepping outside the source material, giving the singer or listener a point of perspective and *accessus ad auctores*.²³ Take, for example, the Christmas introit *Puer natus*: ‘unto us a child is born’. A trope on this introit can transform it into a quotation by naming the author: ‘behold him of whom the prophets said: *Unto us a child is born*’. In the case of *Vox patris*, the author is God the Father himself, speaking both through the words of Scripture and various elaborations on them. Notably, the place in the text where the quotation marks begin is the one place where the vocal scoring changes *within* one of the nine sections, with the unexpected entrance of the bass voice beneath the introductory duet. Full triadic sonorities are first heard as the voice of God ‘breaks forth’.

Thomas Aquinas uses the same imagery while discussing music in the prologue to his *Commentary on the Psalms*. The parallel with the opening of *Vox patris* is striking; Mundy’s anonymous librettist may well have had this passage in mind when beginning the antiphon text:

Hymnus est laus Dei cum cantico; canticum autem exultatio mentis de aeternis habita, *prorumpens in vocem*.

A hymn is the praise of God with song; a song is the exultation of the mind dwelling on eternal things, *breaking forth in the voice*.

The ‘exultation of the mind’ proceeds from here in considerable detail. The tropes in the remainder of Mundy’s piece are convoluted enough to have led even an intelligent copyist astray. Baldwin took the *lectio facilior* and wrote ‘immacula’ instead of ‘macula’ in all three voices of stanza 1; he was apparently unable to navigate the whole commentary on Mary’s immaculate conception and reach the end of the biblical passage, which simply says ‘macula non est in te’—‘there is no flaw in you’.

Alongside the repetitions of ‘veni’, or ‘come’, also characteristic of the Song of Songs, the text develops a series of biblical topoi associated with the Virgin and her Assumption: the invitation to Abraham to leave his old life and come dwell in a new land; the bridal poetry of Psalm 44, *Eruclavit cor meum*, the most ubiquitous of Marian liturgical texts; the image of the holy mountain to which the righteous will ascend; and, finally, the biblical heroine Queen Esther, so often read as a prefiguration of the Virgin in her espousal to the King and subsequent intercession for her people.²⁴ This web of scriptural references becomes more elaborate, takes up a larger proportion of the text, and ranges further afield from the original antiphon as the piece develops and becomes more complicated.

Many of these themes and quotations recur in other devotional treatments of the Assumption. Notable among these is the *Golden Legend*, a volume of saints’ lives and associated materials compiled by Jacobus de Voragine in the thirteenth century. The book was among the uncontested best-sellers of the late medieval era—Caxton translated it into English and printed it in 1483—and Voragine’s chapter on the *induante*. The mistake is consistent with his other minor slips in the text of the piece: *exceptacio* for *exoptacio*, *adamator* for *adamata*, *vinea* for *vinea*, *immacula* for *macula*, *monstavero* for *monstravero*, etc.

²³ William T. Flynn, *Medieval Music as Medieval Exegesis* (Lanham, Md., 1999), 152.

²⁴ Esther was also cited in contemporary preaching and propaganda as a figure of Queen Mary Tudor: see e.g. the sermon of John Harpsfield at her first convocation in Oct. 1553, praising her as the new Esther, the heroic restorer of the faith in England. Page, ‘Uniform and Catholic’, 173.

Assumption, like Mundy's text, is little more in places than an elaborate pastiche of biblical and liturgical texts associated with the day:

Circa vero horam noctis tertiam Ihesus advenit cum angelorum ordinibus, patriarcharum cetibus, martyrum agminibus, confessorum acie, virginumque choro, et ante torum virginis acies ordinantur et dulcia cantica frequentantur . . . Nam prior ipse Ihesus inchoavit et dixit: Veni electa mea et ponam in te thronum meum, quia concupivi speciem tuam. Et illa: Paratum domine cor meum, paratum cor meum. Tunc omnes qui cum Ihesu venerant dulciter intonant dicentes: Hec est que nescivit torum in delictis: habebit fructum in refectione animarum sanctarum . . . Tunc cantor cantorum omnibus excellentius intonavit: Veni de Libano, sponsa, veni de Libano, veni, coronaberis . . . Surge proxima mea, columba mea, tabernaculum glorie, vascula vite, templum celeste.²⁵

Around the third hour of the night Jesus came with the orders of angels, the assemblies of patriarchs, the armies of martyrs, the ranks of confessors, and the choir of virgins, and before the bed of the Virgin they were set in order and sang sweet songs . . . First of all Jesus began and said: Come, my chosen one, and I will place my throne in you, for I have desired your beauty. And she said: My heart is ready, Lord, my heart is ready. Then all those who had come with Jesus intoned sweetly, saying: This is she who has not known the bed of defilement: she shall bear fruit in the refreshment of holy souls . . . Then the singer of singers, most excellent above all others, intoned: Come from Lebanon, my bride, come from Lebanon, come, you shall be crowned . . . Arise, my companion, my dove, tabernacle of glory, vessel of life, celestial temple.

Notably, it is God himself, the 'singer of singers, most excellent above all others', who 'intones' here in the same words as the antiphon *Tota pulchra* and its elaboration in *Vox patris*. The events surrounding the Assumption are dramatized by Voragine in what amounts to a polyphonic musical dialogue, in which the various ranks of angels and saints 'were set in order and sang sweet songs', culminating in the insistent refrain of 'veni' that colours the last half of Mundy's text.

The so-called *N-Town* Assumption play, an English work dating from the late fifteenth century, portrays Christ as intoning similar words, also as part of the 'heavenly choir' that sings the exequies of the Virgin:

In propire persone, moder, I wyl ben here reddy,
Wyth the hefnely quer yowre dirige to rede.
Veni tu, electa mea, et ponam in te thronum meum,
Quia concupiuit rex speciem tuam . . .
Veni de Libano, sponsa mea; veni, coronaberis.²⁶

The York cycle of plays even sets these and related passages to notated polyphonic music, which is something of a rarity in the surviving tradition of English mystery plays but follows logically from the elaborate descriptions of singing and music-making.²⁷

Similar parallels with the text of *Vox patris* are found in the later medieval tradition of preaching on the Virgin Mary. One particularly rich source is the *Speculum Beatae Mariae Virginis*, a well-known homiletic treatise attributed to Bonaventure (though in fact written by his fellow-Franciscan Conrad of Saxony).²⁸ It was read and distributed

²⁵ Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea: edizione critica*, ed. Giovanni Paolo Maggioni (Florence, 1998), 782; 785.

²⁶ *The N-Town Play, Cotton MS Vespasian D.8*, ed. Stephen Spector (Early English Text Society, SS 11/12; Oxford, 1991), 400.

²⁷ *Six Songs from the York Mystery Play 'The Assumption of the Virgin'*, ed. Richard Rastall (North Harton, 1985).

²⁸ Conrad of Saxony, *Speculum seu salutatio Beatae Mariae Virginis ac sermones Mariani*, ed. Petrus de Alcantara Martínez, OFM (Bibliotheca Franciscana Ascetica Medii Aevi, 11; Grottaferrata, 1975). A fully indexed and searchable English version is now available online at <http://www.intratext.com/ixt/eng0025/> as part of the IntraText Digital Library.

in England as well as on the Continent; no fewer than seven English copies have survived from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁹ The work is organized as a commentary on the *Ave Maria*, but the text is a rich and complicated catena of glosses on the original prayer, reflections on various biblical passages as allegories of the Virgin, and quotations from (pseudo-)patristic sources on her virtues and glories.³⁰ It is an imaginative world in which the author of the *Vox patris* text would have been at home, saturated with the same scriptural references and unabashed erotic imagery.

Conrad elaborates in several places on the theme of Mundy's eighth stanza: the figure of Mary as the new Esther, invited to share the delights of the heavenly King, as her predecessor was taken in by King Ahasuerus:

Ipsa bene significata est per Esther reginam, de qua legitur quod ducta ad cubiculum regis Assueri, habuit gratiam et misericordiam coram eo super omnes mulieres, et posuit diadema regni in capite eius. Esther interpretatur elevata. Hoc optime convenit Mariae, de qua beatus Hieronymus ait: Elevatur super choros angelorum, ut possit speciem vultumque videre Salvatoris, quem amaverat, quem cupierat ex toto desiderio cordis. Ista Esther regina, beata virgo Maria, ducta est in eius assumptione in cubiculum regis Assueri, in cubiculum regis aeterni, in cubiculum utique, de quo Augustinus, Mariam alloquens, ait: Tu in cubicoli regii beatitudine gemmis ac margaritis ornata consistis. Ducta itaque in hoc cubiculum quietis aeternae regina Maria, gratiam regis Assueri, gratiam regis veri, habet super omnes mulieres, id est super omnes intelligentias angelicas et super omnes beatas animas, ut sit in Maria gratia super gratiam omnium beatorum.³¹

She is well signified by Queen Esther, of whom it is read that, being led to the nuptial chamber of King Ahasuerus, she found grace and mercy before him above all women, and he placed the crown of the kingdom upon her head. This is best suited to Mary, of whom blessed Jerome says: 'She is exalted above the choirs of angels, that she may see the beauty and the face of the Saviour, whom she had loved, whom she had longed for with all the desire of her heart.' This Queen Esther, the blessed Virgin Mary, was led at her Assumption into the bridal chamber of the King Ahasuerus, into the bridal chamber of the Eternal King, of which Augustine, addressing Mary, says: 'The Queen Mary, being led into the bridal chamber of everlasting rest, possesses the favour and grace of King Ahasuerus, that is, the grace of the True King above all women, that is, above all angelical intelligences, and above all beatified souls, so that in Mary there should be grace above that of all the blessed.'

And again, in language that strongly recalls both stanzas 7 and 8 of *Vox patris*:

²⁹ Conrad, *Speculum . . . ac sermones Mariani*, 129.

³⁰ A younger contemporary of Conrad, the abbess Cunegunda of the monastery of St George in Prague, writes that the volume 'continet expositiones super Ave Maria, super mel et favum dulcia et omni legenti et audienti ad devotionem provocanda' (It contains expositions on the *Ave Maria*, sweeter than honey and honeycomb, and exciting all who read and hear it to devotion). Conrad, *Speculum . . . ac sermones Mariani*, 77 n. 44; the biblical reference is to Ps. 18: 11.

³¹ Conrad, *Speculum . . . ac sermones Mariani*, 263–4. (The patristic attributions are fanciful; the two quotations are from Paschasius Radbertus, 9th-c. abbot of Corbie, and Ambrose Autpertus, tutor to the young Charlemagne.) On the parallel figures of Esther and Mary, see also p. 236, a sentiment of the type that had considerable political significance in the era of Mary Tudor: 'Item gratia Mariae liberat a morte aeterna universos qui liberantur. Hoc bene significatum est in Esther, de qua legitur sic: Adamavit eam rex plus quam omnes mulieres, habuitque gratiam et misericordiam coram eo super omnes mulieres et posuit diadema regni in capite eius. Huius autem gratiae, quam Esther coram rege habuit, duplex legitur fuisse utilitas: una, quod ipsa diadema regni obtinuit; alia, quod ipsa gentem suam, morti addictam, a morte eripuit. Sic certe Esther nostra, beata Maria, tantam coram rege aeterno gratiam invenit, quod per hanc non solum ipsa ad coronam pervenit, sed etiam generi humano, morti addicto, subvenit' (Likewise the favour of Mary sets free from eternal death all those who are so set free. This is well signified by Esther, of whom we read thus: The king loved her above all women, showed her favour and mercy above all women, and placed the crown of his kingdom on her head. We read that the favour Esther found before the king had two purposes: one, that she obtained the royal crown; the other, that she delivered her people, who had been handed over to death. Thus our Esther, blessed Mary, obtained such favour with the eternal king that by it she not only attained to the crown herself, but delivered the human race, which had been condemned to death).

Esther interpretatur elevata vel abscondita, et significat animam contemplativam, quam in contemplatione elevat Deus et abscondit in abscondito faciei suae a conturbatione hominum. Ista per contemplationem ingreditur ad regem Assuerum, ad regem Christum.³²

Esther means ‘raised up’ or ‘hidden’, and signifies the contemplative soul, which God raises up in contemplation and hides in the secret place of his face from the commotion of men. This soul through contemplation goes in to King Ahasuerus, to Christ the King.

The figure in stanza 6, of Mary as both the beloved spouse and the royal throne room of God, is also taken up at length by Conrad, as in this passage:

De plenitudine ista intelligere possumus illud Is. 6: Vidi Dominum sedentem super solium excelsum et elevatum, et plena erat domus a maiestate eius. Domus ista, in cuius solio Dominus sedit, est beata Virgo, in cuius mentis solium Deus requievit. O vere beatissimum, o vere stabilissimum solium, sicut dicitur III Reg. 8: Firmissimum solium tuum in aeternum. Hoc solium excelsum est in intellectu, elevatum in affectu; excelsum quoque est super homines, elevatum super angelos; excelsum insuper in gratia, elevatum in gloria. In solio ergo Maria, in solio inquam mentis eius, Dominus sedebat, et domus corporis eius maiestate Verbi incarnati plena erat.³³

Of this plenitude we may understand that word of Isaiah, chapter 6: ‘I saw the Lord sitting upon a high and elevated throne, and the house was full of his majesty.’ That house on the throne of which God sits is the blessed Virgin, on the throne of whose mind the Lord rested. O truly blessed, O truly stable throne, as it is said in the third book of Kings, chapter 8: ‘Your throne is most firm for all eternity.’ This throne is exalted in intellect, raised up in affection; it is high above men, raised above the angels; exalted in grace, raised up in glory. On this throne of Mary, therefore, on the throne of her mind, the Lord was seated, and the house of her body was full of the majesty of the incarnate Word.

This imagery contrasts with the language of Tallis’s *Gaude gloriosa*, which praises the Virgin for having reached the heavenly throne (‘in gloria super caelos exaltata adepta es thronum’); for Conrad, she is herself the throne, hailed in the most corporeal of terms. The recurring theme here is one of plenitude. A single phrase of a well-known prayer, ‘gratia plena’ (full of grace), is gradually spun out through this chapter of the *Speculum* into an intricate panegyric taking in numerous other texts and layers of imagery.³⁴

This model of progressive elaboration and variation is worth keeping in mind as we consider Mundy’s musical setting of *Vox patris*. Although no cantus firmus is present—another divergence from the mainstream of the older votive-antiphon model—the piece is just as modally anchored and tonally conservative as a strongly chant-based piece would be.³⁵ All nine of the major sectional cadences are indeed on D, as are most of the subsidiary ones, and the narrow harmonic compass gives the music a persistent effect of long-term elaboration on set thematic material. The objection in *Grove* is correct: there is no real development in tonal terms. Mundy instead devotes his energies to building up complexity within a rather static framework. The architecture of the piece reflects the richness of the text, ‘resounding with loveliness’ and ‘embroidered with the variety of heavenly glory’. The latter of course refers to the

³² Ibid. 356.

³³ Ibid. 278–9. See also 170, 173, 297, 385–6.

³⁴ Conrad’s entire second sermon on the Assumption is in fact an elaboration on the same image of God enthroned in Mary, not only in physical form with the incarnation of Christ but also in mystical form after she is taken up into heaven. Ibid. 533–41.

³⁵ Given (for example) Sheppard’s talent for finding strikingly unusual harmonies to even the most undistinguished homorhythmic cantus-firmus passages—the first large sectional cadence of his *Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria virgo*, at ‘permansisti’, comes immediately to mind—the modal horizons of *Vox patris* were probably more conservative than much of the festal music Mundy was hearing during these years. For more on the matter of creative chant harmonization in 16th-c. England, see Peter le Huray, ‘Some Thoughts about Cantus Firmus Composition, and a Plea for Byrd’s *Christus resurgens*’, in Alan Brown and Richard Turbet (eds.), *Byrd Studies* (Cambridge, 1992), 1–23.

embroidered wedding garment from Psalm 44; the composition evokes it, and all the other sensuous imagery, by cultivating the *varietas* named in the text through more and more elaborate vocal scorings and melismatic writing.

When and how was this piece in fact sung? Its tone and dimensions seem to call for an occasion of some gravity, but the manuscript sources reveal little: it was preserved by Baldwin for what seem to have been largely antiquarian reasons, and various three-part sections were copied by other scribes as attractive musical miniatures, with little or no regard for their context. The churchwardens' records of Mundy's parish, St Mary at Hill, shed some further light on the matter.

The Assumption of the Virgin, 15 August, was the patronal feast of the parish. Existing records show that it was celebrated there with considerable flourish during the brief revival of traditional worship under Mary Tudor.³⁶ The church had been known for its music through several generations: parishioners, clergy, and professional musicians worked together to support polyphonic singing and organ playing at what appears to have been a quite refined level. The parish cultivated close ties with the Chapel Royal and other London choirs. They invited Cornysh as a guest musician in 1511 (treating him to a fish dinner after the service), employed Tallis in the 1530s, and made continuous efforts to bring in the best singers and organ builders available.³⁷ The church's patronal feast day was an occasion for especially lavish music-making and associated festivities, which often extended past the boundaries of the parish and its own musical establishment. Daniel Page cites the following 1556 entry from St Mary as an example of creative collaboration among London choirs:

Item payed on the summcyon of our Ladys daye which is our churche holy daye for drynkyng over nyght at mr haywards with certen of the parishe and certen of the chappell and other syngynge men in wyne peares and sugar and other chargis viii s i d.³⁸

The next item in the record reveals even more about the occasion: 'Item payed for a dynnar of our Ladys daye for all the syngynge men and syngynge children xx s'.³⁹ There were no boys in Mundy's own choir: he had clearly imported these 'syngynge children' for the occasion. The parish had run a choir school earlier in the sixteenth century, a project apparently begun from scratch in the 1520s by an ambitious choirmaster, and supported by local enthusiasm, chantry donations, and links to several wealthy musical institutions, among them Waltham Abbey.⁴⁰ These connections ended up being a liability under the new policies of the Reformation. The choir school was abolished after the dissolution of the monasteries and the passage of the Chantries Act, and the choir was reduced to a male-voice ensemble of moderate size: seven singers, plus whatever reinforcements Mundy could hire from outside.⁴¹

Mundy was working in the aftermath of these changes, and during his whole tenure at St Mary the hire of boy singers is only recorded on one day of the year: the feast of

³⁶ As Hugh Baillie points out in 'A London Church in Early Tudor Times', *Music & Letters*, 36 (1955), 55–64 at 55, 'the most important entries' of the St Mary at Hill accounts for these years were transcribed by Henry Littlehales in *Medieval Records of a London City Church: St Mary at Hill AD 1420–AD 1559* (London, 1904). All quotations here, however, are taken from the original churchwardens' records, Guildhall MS 1239/1/3.

³⁷ Baillie, 'A London Church', 56–8, 61; see also Richard Lloyd, 'Music at the Parish Church of St Mary at Hill, London', *Early Music*, 25 (1997), 221–6.

³⁸ Page, 'Uniform and Catholic', 299; the entry is in Guildhall MS 1239/1/3, fo. 792^r.

³⁹ Guildhall 1239/1/3, fo. 792^r.

⁴⁰ Lloyd, 'Music at the Parish Church of St Mary at Hill', 224; Baillie, 'A London Church', 61–2, cites the transfer of a young singer (perhaps after his voice had broken?) from St Mary at Hill to Waltham. The latter was, incidentally, the very last monastery to surrender at the Dissolution.

⁴¹ Robert Reeve, 'The Life and Works of William Mundy' (Ph.D. diss., Royal Holloway College, University of London, 1980), 52.

the Assumption. These singers were borrowed annually from the neighbouring church of St Magnus the Martyr, as the records for Assumption 1556 go on to make clear: 'Item payed to viii syngynge men and for the chyldern of saynte magnus vi s viii d'.⁴² St Magnus was the obvious choice for such a collaboration. Its choir did include boys, and its location was ideal, being the parish immediately adjacent to Mundy's in the south-east corner of the City. There is a record of four boy choristers from St Magnus visiting St Mary at Hill for the celebration of Corpus Christi as early as 1478, nearly fifty years before the ill-fated choir school experiment.⁴³ With Mundy, this appears to have become an annual tradition; he repeated his unusual hire for Assumption 1557 ('Item payed to the syngynge men and for the syngynge children of Saint Magnus and for ther paynes uppon the summpcion of our lady vi s viii d') and Assumption 1558 ('paid for the children of saynte magnus vi s xiii d').⁴⁴ This practice ended abruptly in 1559, when the Elizabethan religious settlement and the new Book of Common Prayer did away with the observance of the feast.

The unique provision for boys' voices on the feast of the Assumption fits well with the scoring of *Vox patris*. The overall range of the piece is more than three octaves, from *F* to *g''*, which effectively rules out any significant downward transposition. It would have been unsuitable for a choir of adult men according to contemporary English practice; there was no tradition of soprano falsettists in English choirs, and even if the *medius*, the second part down, was sung by adult falsettists (a matter still open to some debate), the elaborate high soprano line, ascending constantly to *g''*, clearly calls for skilled trebles. The climactic penultimate section, with its 'gymel' or *divisi* in the upper two parts, in fact requires four separate high voices.⁴⁵

The only other work by Mundy comparable in scoring and texture to *Vox patris* is another large votive antiphon, *Maria virgo sanctissima*, which is copied adjacent to it in the Baldwin partbooks. It praises the Virgin in the most extravagant and prolix terms: at one point, as Hugh Benham observes, it has to remind us that Mary is in fact not a goddess, merely the greatest of the saints and the mediator through whom all good things come to humanity.⁴⁶ *Maria virgo sanctissima* resembles its companion piece in a number of ways: the six-voice arrangement with strategic use of *divisi*, the traditional mensural division between triple and duple time, the tone, scale, and subject matter, and, not least, an identical opening gambit (see Exx. 1 and 2). Mundy uses essentially the same process and the same notes twice in these two votive antiphons, though in two different modes: starting out in absolute unison, proceeding briefly by inversion through the third, fifth, and sixth, then slipping into a more conventional freely imitative texture once things are under way.⁴⁷ This opening figure could indeed be called a shared head-motif between the two pieces.

⁴² Guildhall 1239/1/3, fo. 793^r. It is worth noting that, here as elsewhere, payment was made to the adult singers of St Magnus but for the children: as Bruce Holsinger in *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford, 2001) and others have pointed out, the chorister's life was a strictly regulated and often far from carefree one. ⁴³ Baillie, 'A London Church', 55. ⁴⁴ Guildhall 1239/1/3, fos. 803^r; 811^r.

⁴⁵ On the thorny question of vocal range and assignment of parts in Tudor polyphony, see Bowers, 'To Chorus from Quartet', 43–7, and 'The Vocal Scoring, Choral Balance and Performing Pitch of Latin Church Polyphony in England, c. 1500–58', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 112 (1987), 38–76, advocating performance at written pitch, and David Wulstan, 'Byrd, Tallis and Ferrabosco', in John Morehen (ed.), *English Choral Practice 1400–1650* (Cambridge, 1995), 109–42 at 120–2, and *Tudor Music*, 192–249, advocating upward transposition of a minor third.

⁴⁶ Benham, *Latin Church Music in England*, 218.

⁴⁷ Beginning with two voices in unison and moving outward may have been something of a stock opening device for this final generation of votive antiphons: see e.g. the beginning of Tallis's *Gaude gloriosa*, a passage that, as Joseph Kerman points out, was alluded to half a century later by his pupil Byrd in the very similar opening of his Lady Mass tract *Gaude Maria Virgo*. Kerman, *The Masses and Motets of William Byrd* (Berkeley, 1981), 257. For the editions used in Exx. 1 and 2 see n. 5 above.

Ex. 1. Opening of Mundy, *Vox patris caelestis* (after Mundy: *Latin Antiphons and Psalms*, ed. Harrison, 33)

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These two works also share, along with *Gaude gloriosa*, a distinctive nine-stanza form. This number is significant elsewhere in Marian music of the Tudor era. Robert Wylkynson's nine-voice antiphon *Salve Regina*, based on the Assumption cantus firmus *Assumpta est Maria*, is transmitted in the Eton Choirbook with initial letters showing the nine orders of angels, and a charming if somewhat awkward little poem naming them, from bottom to top, in Latin elegiacs. Magnus Williamson traces this imagery to the Assumption scene in the *Golden Legend*, in which the nine orders of angels are described welcoming the Virgin into heaven with a wealth of musical activity: 'Angels rejoicing, Archangels jubilating, Thrones exalting, Dominations psalming, Principalities harmonizing, Powers lyring, Cherubim and Seraphim hymning . . .'.⁴⁸ The prevalence of nine-stanza texts in the last generation of Marian votive antiphons shows that such symbolic concerns persisted well into the sixteenth century, and the colourful, endlessly varied progression of textures through the nine verses of *Vox patris* could certainly be heard as a musical image of the multifarious heavenly host: *te omnis caeli cives . . . exoptant videre*.

Maria virgo sanctissima obviously has close links to *Vox patris*, and the two may even be a product of the same seasonal collaboration between choirs. From what we can reconstruct of the yearly August celebration at St Mary—a two-day event involving a substantial number of skilled singers—there certainly appears to have been room for more than one large-scale piece of the kind.

The churchwardens' accounts for this celebration under Mundy's tenure are notable for their material evidence as well as their musical evidence. No other single event in the year, even Christmas, merits as many entries. There are numerous outlays for various items of food and drink, the entertaining of parishioners along with musicians, borrowing of silver altar furnishings, even the decoration of the church with seasonal foliage:

⁴⁸ Williamson, 'Pictura et scriptura', 371.

Ex. 2. Opening of Mundy, *Maria virgo sanctissima* (after *Mundy: Latin Antiphons and Psalms*, ed. Harrison, 1)

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Item paid for garlands and strawyng Harbs upon the assumpcion of our Ladys daye ii s iii d.

Item payed for borrowynge of a sylver crosse and ii candelstyckes of sylver and a senser of sylver to occupye of our Ladis daye viii d.

Item payed for other chargis as wyne bread beare and ale and for the ryngers ryngynge one our Ladis even and our Ladis daye viii d.

Item paid at Mr howorthes at the kynges head on the assummption of our Ladi our patronesse even / upon the parishoners summ of them beyng there / and upon the syngyng men and syngyng children in wyne & bread vi s iii d.⁴⁹

The richness of Mundy's composition is mirrored in such details: remarkably, all five senses are provided for in this short excerpt. St Mary at Hill's celebration of 'our church holy daye' included music-making, prayer, and a wealth of liturgical ornament; it also included feasting on seasonal delicacies such as pears, and what the churchwarden calls a 'drinking over night', which, perhaps significantly, cost more than the combined salaries of the musicians on the occasion. A piece such as Compère's motet *Sile fragor*, whose last lines flow matter-of-factly from the rites of the Virgin into the rites of Bacchus, may remind us that such activities were far from being mutually exclusive among professional singers in the Renaissance.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ These entries are for Assumption 1557: Guildhall 1239/1/3, fo. 802^v.

⁵⁰ The text of Compère's final stanza reads: 'Suscipe deitatis mater vocum praecordia nostra / et nato refunde vota quae psallimus omnes. / Nunc fontem adire decet quo Bacchus insedet ipse / et discedat lympha Liberi dum carpinus rivos. Amen' (Accept, mother of the Deity, our hearts through our voices, and pour out to your Son the prayers which we all sing. Now it is fitting to go to the fountain where Bacchus himself is enthroned, and may plain water depart while we drink from his streams. Amen). Jeffrey Dean has made the logical emendation to 'Liberi' from 'liberos' found in the sources: see Bonnie J. Blackburn, 'Petrucci's Venetian Editor', *Musica Disciplina*, 49 (1995), 15–45 at 36. See also Edward F. Houghton, 'A Close Reading of Compère's Motet *Sile fragor*', in Barbara Haggh (ed.), *Essays on Music and Culture in Honor of Herbert Kellman* (Paris, 2001), 89–103—though Houghton shows some reluctance to take the juxtaposition at face value.

These records provide a snapshot of an ambitious London parish slowly re-fashioning itself after the austerities of the Edwardian Reformation. There was a considerable push to do so during the Marian years—driven not only by enthusiasm for old liturgical forms, but also by persistent (and sometimes violent) pressure to show visible signs of orthodoxy and conformity to the new state religion. The personnel of Mundy's church appear to have been rich in ingenuity and resourcefulness, if not always in the required material goods. (By August 1558, they seem at least to have procured their own silver candlesticks and censer; there is still an expenditure 'for borowenge of ii sylver crosses on our Lady daye'.⁵¹)

There are also multiple expenses during these years for the provision of new music, not only for copying it but also for binding it into volumes: as early as the last months of 1553 payment is made 'for ii quyres of paper for to prycke songs in viii d' and 'for the byndyng of the same bookes viii d'.⁵² None of these manuscripts appears to have survived, but they may well have been a source Baldwin drew on when he copied out Mundy's votive antiphons into his own retrospective anthology. The implication here is one of permanence, though in fact their contents would very soon become obsolete.

Both the tone and the focus of the churchwardens' accounts shift abruptly in 1559, after the accession of Queen Elizabeth and the resulting changes in worship. The most immediate effects have to do with the physical fabric of the church:

pd to a playsterer for whyting the quyex x d.
pd for takyng down the sepulchre xii d.
pd for making of the comunyon table xx d.
pd for taking down the rood / the mary and the john xxi d.
pd for bringging downe of the Imagis . . . and other thinge to be burnt xii d.⁵³

The Crucifixion group over the choir screen ('the rood / the mary and the john') had cost £7 to reinstall in 1556.⁵⁴ This would have been a life-size carved crucifix with the Virgin Mary and John the Evangelist to either side. It was not a trivial addition to the church decor, and £7 was a small fortune at the time. Three years after it was put up, it was torn down again, for a fraction of the amount of money the choir had spent on a single festive meal the previous summer.

Perhaps the most telling detail in the list is that the choir space was whitewashed. We can only guess what was painted there; given the patronal focus of the church, however, it is likely to have included images of the Assumption. Williamson has drawn compelling links between the iconography of Eton College Chapel (which was likewise whitewashed over in 1560, but has since been restored) and the musical repertory of the college.⁵⁵ The surviving records of payment at St Mary—from bound choirbooks and altar furnishings to 'rose garlands for Corpus Christi' and 'Holye and Ivey at Cristmas'—show that Mundy's choir, like the Eton choir, cultivated very close connections between their material surroundings and their musical and devotional life.⁵⁶

The context of this piece in mid-sixteenth-century London is nevertheless subtly different from the context of similar votive antiphons half a century earlier. The music in the Eton Choirbook was compiled by and for a single institution, place, and group,

⁵¹ Guildhall 1239/1/3, fo. 811^r.

⁵² Ibid., fo. 760^r.

⁵³ Ibid., fos. 817^r–818^r. In 1553 a payment of 4 shillings had been made 'for writing agayne of the Inventory of our Church goode by reason that the other was reformed by the kinges maiesties commissions' (fo. 747^r); the churchwarden could hardly have known the same procedure would be repeated six years later.

⁵⁴ Guildhall 1239/1/3, fo. 782^r.

⁵⁵ Williamson, 'Pictura et scriptura', 368–75.

⁵⁶ Guildhall 1239/1/3, fo. 791^r; fo. 789^r.

located firmly in its own space, among its own private devotional practices; connections between a number of those pieces and the iconography of the chapel make that clear. Mundy is working with essentially the same raw materials, but he is building a community across generations, across institutions—St Mary, the Chapel Royal, St Magnus—and around a specific liturgical occasion.⁵⁷ For Daniel Page, this kind of joint effort suggests ‘a customary and even formal process of teaching and of stylistic and liturgical inculturation’ among musicians.⁵⁸ What better context for an extravagant musical homily on, and celebration of, the Assumption of the Virgin?

ABSTRACT

William Mundy composed the votive antiphon *Vox patris caelestis* during the brief English Counter-Reformation under the reign of Mary Tudor (1553–8). Unlike the majority of earlier votive antiphons, *Vox patris* refers to a specific liturgical and theological event, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The text is an elaborate network of tropes on the Song of Songs, interwoven with other scriptural and literary topics traditionally linked to the feast of the Assumption, and finds parallels in Conrad of Saxony’s *Speculum Beatae Mariae Virginis*. *Vox patris* also reflects similar treatments of the Assumption in the *Golden Legend*, English mystery plays, devotional poems, and contemporary sermons. Archival evidence suggests its precise historical context. The activities of Mundy’s own choir at the London church of St Mary at Hill and of other London singers, the musical observance of the Assumption during Queen Mary’s reign, and the manuscript sources of *Vox patris* reveal the likely background for its composition and performance.

⁵⁷ For evidence of other such collaborations, see Richard Lloyd, ‘Provision for Music in the Parish Church in Late-Medieval London’ (Ph.D. thesis, Royal Holloway College, University of London, 2000).

⁵⁸ Page, ‘Uniform and Catholic’, 299.