

the table, this book remains an invaluable first step towards some very fertile future ideas.

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Music, Piety, and Propaganda: The Soundscapes of Counter-Reformation Bavaria

Alexander J. Fisher

Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2014. Hardcover, 384 pages, 23 black and white line drawings, and 8 black and white halftone images. RRP US\$55, ISBN: 9780199764648

In style and ambit, *Music, Piety, & Propaganda: The Soundscapes of Counter-Reformation Bavaria* is a surprising and modern historical book that takes the notoriously difficult path of interdisciplinarity but actually delivers what it sets out to do. Undergirded by a level of research that should satisfy musicologists, historians and scholars of Christian religion alike, Alexander J. Fisher describes the soundscape of Counter-Reformation Bavaria, homing in upon those sonic outputs – particularly music, bells, guns, and silence – that can be understood to be direct responses to the challenge of Protestantism in a realm that is defiantly Catholic. Beginning with the public spaces of religious worship in Counter-Reformation Bavaria, Fisher moves to the more private spaces of devotion, then to the civic spaces in which religious spectacles, processions and pilgrimages are manipulated to reinforce the determination of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Bavarian rulers to impose Catholic doctrine and morality upon all elements of life, whether every-day or festive. While the propagandist angle is explored, Fisher does not deny the genuine piety of participants at all levels of society, accepting that pilgrims were motivated by a genuine desire to view the relics of saints, that the transubstantiated Eucharist, or Host, was perceived as a genuinely mysterious and awesome evocation of the triune God's love, and that the rulers of Bavaria were not only motivated by a desire to assert their earthly power, but also by a genuine faith in the Catholic teachings.

Always coming back to sound, Fisher writes about canons that are fired by Bavarian troops accompanying a Corpus Christi procession in Protestant-sympathising, officially Catholic, Weiden, the reverberations breaking windows in an inadvertently symbolic gesture of violence against heresy. The singing for alms of itinerant beggars and children is eventually prohibited to avoid immoderate sounds and to protect the incomes of duly accredited (and duly inculcated) student church choristers. The chattering noise of everyday life is silenced by the requirement to kneel and pray when the Turk bell, mimicking the Call to Prayer of the religion it is designed to warn against,

rings out. Civic musicians in pipers' towers perform motets and other religious songs on Sundays, facing outwards in all four directions to maximise their ability to sacralise otherwise secular space. A great bronze bell peals at 4am on the day that the new St Michaels' Jesuit Church in Munich is consecrated. Followed by salvos of gunfire and the discharge of canons, it calls the faithful to proceed to the church where five choruses of singers and instrumentalists provide the music of a high mass in accordance with the dictates of the Counter-reformative Council of Trent. A great feast follows and leads into an eight-hour drama involving 900 participants (including musicians), which concludes with St Michael the Archangel slaying a dragon, the latter symbolic of both Satan and heresy.

These are but a small sprinkling of the rich panoply of sounds and occasions covered by Fisher in order to make his point that auralty transcends the boundaries of sight. The ability of sound to travel through walls and across great distances enables the temporary transformation of entire cities and their surrounding countryside into sacred, Catholic-indoctrinated spaces.

Leaving aside the arguments and the content of the book, another of its surprising features relates to the potentially risky decision to write a book that is not only interdisciplinary, but also acceptable to both academic and general readers. What is surprising is that it, in most aspects, it succeeds. Certainly, the Catholic theologian might balk at the title's reiteration of the out-dated idea of a Catholic Counter Reformation, arguing that the Church was not directly countering the Protestant movement, but rather was engaged in an ongoing process of reform that dealt with issues that the Protestants may well have highlighted, but of which the Church was already well aware and working towards finding appropriate solutions. Similarly, the academic reader may wish for a more circumspect use of words like "opulent" and "sumptuous", and the general reader might skip over some of the more detailed archival information; nevertheless, the quality of the content and the easy, enthusiastic writing style exhibited throughout countermand any tendency to make such criticisms. The book is always engaging and always reliant upon a formidable level of research. Further, with roughly seventy percent of the references cited being in the German language, Fisher brings to the English-speaking world a wealth of knowledge held in otherwise inaccessible primary and secondary sources.

For these, and for the English-language texts, Fisher provides the expected citations in the book itself, but Oxford has taken advantage of modern technology to give the scholarly reader access to further information. Taking the form of extended references, tabular data, an extended bibliography, and transcriptions of the texts of various songs (in both German and English), these items can be accessed via the book's promotional webpage on the publisher's website. While such resources do cater to the needs of experienced scholars, and the writing style is accessible to the generalist, these factors make it particularly suitable for any undergraduate student interested in early-modern European history, who has yet to gain a broad understanding of the role religion and

music played in the cultural and devotional life of the various stratum of societies at the time. While Fisher deals with a very specific place and time, and local variances do matter, the book provides an excellent entrée into the types of religious events and sounds that are encountered across Europe, giving the reader a visual and aural model into which knowledge acquired later can be inserted.

Mitigating a little against this suggestion, however, is the final surprising element of the book, albeit a less positive one. Oxford appears to have put the book to press without a conclusion. It stops with a “reconstruction” of a four-day pilgrimage of parishioners from St Martin’s in Landshut to the shrine of St Benno in Munich in 1603. Comprising a raft of suggestions and surmises, the story of the pilgrimage simply peters out. Even as a chapter ending it seems incomplete. This is disappointing because it leaves the reader having to try to pull all of the threads of Fisher’s argument together for her/ himself. Having found the book entirely satisfying to that point, it simply feels as if the final chapter was accidentally left out of the book.

Admittedly, Fisher does begin the book with a gripping anecdote of Protestants infiltrating a Catholic mass in 1558, and perhaps he was trying to conclude in a similarly anecdotal vein. But whereas the opening anecdote is dramatic and leads to an exposition of the conceptual framework and scope of the book, thereby providing the expected introductory chapter, the reconstructed pilgrimage is not a gripping tale, and, unlike the sacred walking journey it describes, leads the reader nowhere. Perhaps Fisher could write a conclusion now, and upload it to the website that contains all of his excellent extended reference material. Readers would surely thank him for doing so.

Nonetheless, whether he does this or not, the book’s contribution to the field of early modern scholarship transcends the omission. Fisher’s book may be an un-iced cake, but the cake itself is delicious.

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Once, Only the Swallows Were Free: A Memoir

Gabrielle Gouch

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Once, Only the Swallows Were Free is a memoir by Gabrielle Gouch of her Jewish family’s struggle in post-war communist Romania as they seek to imagine a new life in Israel. It is a narrative about life in two systems, communism and capitalism, but Gouch