Introduction

This study of iconography and performance practice is divided into two parts. Part I deals with the definition of iconography and its relationship to performance practice. Part II outlines some general principles necessary to the study of medieval music iconography, and deals with specific cases. These principles include balancing visual evidence against written sources, distinguishing between symbol and documentation of contemporary life, and recognizing in art the historical precedents for instrumental groupings in biblical illustration. A discussion of depictions of trecento angel musicians, as opposed to contemporary liturgical scenes, demonstrates that different types of depictions vary in their value as evidence for performance practice. Finally, a study of the instruments the trecento angels play leads into the possible role of the double pipe and the bagpipe in the development of early polyphony.

This paper includes the use of the term iconology, as well as iconography. Iconography, as defined by Erwin Panofsky, is the "branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form." Iconography deals with the description of images. Iconology, on the other hand, involves the study of images and, therefore, involves interpretation. Emanuel Winternitz, one of the most important writers in this discipline, defines the subject as follows: "[Iconology is] the analysis and interpretation, by the historian of music, of pictorial representations of musical instruments, their players, singers, groups of performing musicians, and all other kinds of musical scenes." James McKinnon, twenty years later, refined that definition, stating that iconology "seeks to penetrate to the real meaning of a particular art work after the comparatively prosaic task of determining its conventional or iconographic meaning has been performed." To McKinnon, the essential character of iconography deals with ideas, and its definition in simplest terms is "the identification of subject matter in art works." Its object, however, is musical thought, as opposed to organology—that field which McKinnon feels has dominated American music iconographers.

Another scholar's definition for iconology is "the study of images, their formulation, transmission, transformation and their intrinsic meaning," as distinguished from iconography which to him implies, "the descriptive and classificatory study of images with the aim of understanding the direct or indirect meaning of the subject matter represented." This is in keeping with McKinnon's more recent, broader view: music iconography "in its purest form is simply the iconography of artworks with musicological subject matter, that is to say, the explanation of a musical picture's content." One of music iconology's primary uses is uncovering the performance practices of the past. The term performance practice includes all those techniques that cannot be fixed in a written score, such as how performers hold an instrument, specific hand and finger positions, which instruments are used in ensembles, and their relative placement, and so on. Performance practice includes both the acoustic and the social aspects of a performance's environment: its location (in- or outdoors, for example); its occasion (festival, marriage, etc.); and the size, constituency, and behavior of the audience. Pictures provide evidence for these elements of music-making that words cannot. An artwork depicting an orchestra, for example, will demonstrate how many performers play each part (important in determining scoring), the spatial arrangement of the musicians, whether a continuo group is playing, and what its makeup is; and what accessories are in use.
(music stands, mutes, etc.). Performance practice also encompasses the social status of the musician and the manner in which society views the composer, the performer, and music, in general. For example, a portrait of a court violinist, who wears a satin uniform elaborately bordered in brocade informs us, at least partially, of this performer's status in society. Similarly, a Brueghel townsman cradling a bagpipe and dancing amid other peasant folk can relate many specific details (about the music's milieu, the details of the instrument, etc.) that most written accounts would lack.

A student of music iconography also requires a considerable knowledge of symbolism, political movements, theological doctrines, and allegorical languages that influenced a given artist. Such elements are not remote from performance practice, since the use of music as a theme to illustrate something in many works can distort the reality of the music. All that the artwork has drawn on must, to some extent, be examined if the meaning of the work is to be revealed. Winternitz cites Charles Burney's lack of knowledge of the language of ancient Egypt as evidence that iconologists must attempt to be familiar with all sources for an artwork. In his *General History of Music*, Burney praises Egyptian musicians for inventing the lute. Burney, however, only saw a picture of what he thought was a lute on an Egyptian obelisk. He had, however, confused the hieroglyph for the word "good, which is based on the shape of the windpipe joined to the heart," with the form of a lute.

There is also an elemental distinction between realistic and nonrealistic depiction. "By realistic art most of us mean photographic art—that is, objects drawn in correct perspective and modeled in light and shade to look three-dimensional." Medieval artworks, for example, often show performers and instruments schematically, their details either unclear or obviously unrealistic. An artist's stylistic limitations often limit the depiction of details. For example, an illumination of David with a harp from an eleventh-century manuscript (Plate A) shows a plucking position with crossed fingers that does not seem realistic.
The crossed index and middle fingers of the right hand appear to be wrong from the point of view of performance practice. The position of the performer's left hand is also mysterious: it seems to pluck a single string with four fingers—far more awkward than using a single digit. Another picture of King David from the twelfth-century manuscript *Hortus deliciarum* by Herrad of Landsberg shows a further example of a seemingly unrealistic hand position (see this picture on p. 13 of the *New Grove* article, "Iconography"): A plectrum held in the manner shown would simply fall to the floor. (The artist does not show the thumb, which would hold the plectrum in place.) A third medieval example which shows a realistic depiction is a miniature from the thirteenth-century *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Plate B).
The finger positions of the psaltery player appear to be workable. These examples demonstrate that we cannot trust every medieval artist's work as accurate documentation; rather, the iconographer must assess the possibly useful details of medieval artworks each on their own merits.

Later artworks (beginning with the Flemish) show almost an obsession with the portrayal of details. This does not mean, however, that they are accurate. Grunewald's Isenheim Altarpiece (early sixteenth century), for example, shows musicians performing on three-dimensional instruments, but the artist has distorted these instruments and the musicians' playing technique. A painting or drawing style that shows many clear details can easily lead to a common pitfall—trusting details merely because they are shown.

The iconographer must bear in mind the symbolism in artworks. An example of the importance of a knowledge of symbols is an interpretation of Hieronymous Bosch's Ship of Fools, in which a nun and a monk sit at table, singing and playing the lute. The unknowledgeable viewer might interpret this work as portraying nothing more than the musical tastes of two clerics of Bosch's time. Leppert shows, however, that Ship of Fools symbolizes the lust of a corrupt clergy. Similarly, one interpretation of the instruments in the same artist's complex Garden of Delights holds that they become implements of torture for those who would destroy the world's natural harmony, and the instruments themselves are distorted. Seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings, many of which include chamber music performances, have the quality of painted snapshots. These works, however, carry hidden allegorical meaning. Jan Molenaer's Allegory of Fidelity in Marriage, for example, uses string instruments as symbols of temperance. The man watering his wine is another symbol of moderation. Moderation and temperance are appropriate to the theme of marital fidelity, but, as Jane Stevens has so aptly put it, "if the music-making . . . has a largely symbolic purpose, can it be trusted as a realistic reflection of actual performance practice?"
Depictions of eighteenth-century musical ensembles present a similar problem. According to Christoph-Hellmut Mahling, these works are intended to show a family's rank in society, and because many of these artworks agree in the details of performance, Mahling considers them useful in questions of performance practice. Mahling further demonstrates the value of these works for the study of performance practice by showing that the spatial arrangements in many ensembles are those prescribed by Joachim Quantz in his *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen.* In other words, these written contemporary instructions to the performers corroborate, in this case, the pictorial documentation.

II

In examining matters of performance practice in music iconography of the Middle Ages, a few basic conditions must be kept in mind. Frank L. Harrison stated in 1978 that, "unlike musicologists concerned with some later eras . . . medievalists have as yet barely broached the subject known in Germany as Aufführungspraxis." On the other hand, the pictorial arts of the Middle Ages demonstrate a special interest in depicting musicians with their instruments. If there are so many visual sources of performers and musical instruments, why then is performance practice of early music so little understood? One reason has to do with the instruments, themselves, few of which are still in existence today. According to Harrison,

The history of instruments is too often dealt with as if there were indeed an entity that could be called medieval organology—an idea just as invalid as the supposition that the history of post-1500 instruments could be treated as an undivided whole.

Whenever possible, it is of value to balance visual evidence with written source material. If there is an account of payments to musicians in a procession, for example, these should be studied next to an artist's depiction of such a procession. An example of this principle exists in an artist's depiction of the coronation of Henry IV of England (Plate C). The artist recorded trumpets sounding at the moment Henry is crowned. This corroborates exactly the written sources.

Plate C
The coronation of King Henry IV of England; from Jean de Wavrin, Anchiennes cronicques d'Engleterre, French, mid-15th century. (MS fr. 75, folio 308). Photograph provided by the Bibliothèque Nationale.

An example showing the importance of a knowledge of symbolism is the interpretation of a Flemish picture from the Breviary of Queen Isabella of Spain (ca. 1497, Plate D), which has been variously labeled over time.

Plate D
Levitical musicians playing on the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem while King David mounts steps; Flemish, late 15th century (MS. Additional 18851, Isabella Breviary, folio 184v.). By permission of the British Library.

Bowles, in 1983, calls it "Musicians performing on the church steps," while another caption, from 1968, is "Musicians in the Square Before a Church." In a particularly incisive study, McKinnon shows that the best caption would be "An introductory illustration to the gradual psalms; Levitical musicians play on the steps of the Temple of Jerusalem, while King David looks on and David as pilgrim mounts the steps." McKinnon shows that the performers in this work are not meant to represent twelve medieval musicians performing together. Rather, they illustrate a theological point with medieval costumes and instruments. Therefore, one must weigh the "foreground" visual evidence against the "background," hidden meaning in looking for matters of performance practice in music iconography of the Middle Ages.

Besides taking into account what a scene represents, it is important to realize that an artist's intentions are not always literal. One must be mindful of the degree of conventionality underlying the production of images at different periods of Western art. The Middle Ages and the earlier Renaissance demonstrate this tendency at its extreme.
The grouping of angels in trecento artwork—which derives from artistic, not musical sources—illustrates this concept. When trecento artists depict Mary surrounded by four angel musicians, for example, the latter do not indicate a grouping of four medieval musicians in an ensemble. Trecento artists, rather, turned to the motif of David (Plates E and F) surrounded by his four musical assistants as their model. This was . . . the best means of showing Mary . . . being adored by the angelic choirs. What better source of praise than the psalms, and what better way to show angels singing—that is, playing instruments—than to borrow the most obvious and common image of the praise for heavenly things, namely, David with four assistants.

Plate E

Christ in Majesty (MS m.742 recto). Photograph provided by the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

Plate F
Despite the artistic conventions, what do trecento frescoes, sculpture, and manuscript illuminations say about the instruments the musicians—mostly angels—play? “Did the artist paint these musical instruments purely from his imagination, or do they correspond to actual instruments of the period?” This question is asked by Federico Ghisi in his study of scenes from the life of Mary encircled by angel musicians with instruments in the apse of a Romanesque church at San Leonardo al Lago near Sienna. He judges that “their forms as shown are certainly of instruments that were played.” In another study of trecento angels, Brown determines that though the grouping of angel instrumentalists is not necessarily indicative of the medieval ensemble, nevertheless, the painters painted instruments they knew from real life. Though he qualifies this as being difficult to prove, he believes that the artworks show biblical stories without, however, showing influence of the ancient world on the costumes: that is, the biblical characters are in contemporary dress. Brown postulates, therefore, that there is not an influence of biblical times on the details of the instruments, themselves. This conclusion is also in keeping with Bowles’s opinion that the sacred genre is of little value in performance practice questions, but that it may be of value for organology. Whether trecento artists help the musicologist to determine instrumental ensemble practice or not, they at least allow us to see what instruments were played. The naming of those instruments is something else altogether, a problem discussed below.

The discussion, so far, has dealt with angel musicians. Angels make up the largest body of performers in medieval art, and biblical illustration accounts for most of the subject matter. What about human beings involved in the liturgy? Why have illustrations of liturgical practice received little attention? There are, in fact, extant liturgical depictions. Les Très riches heures (1415-17) by the Limbourg Brothers contains an illumination of a Christmas Mass. A Commentary on the Pater Noster translated by Jean Miélot (fifteenth-century) in the
Bibliothèque Royale of Brussels contains a depiction of Philip the Good at Mass.36 There are, however, "tens of thousands of angel musicians, elders, and Psalter instrumentalists" in comparison to "these few mass scenes [which] are isolated examples rather than representatives of established iconographic types." Yet there is a "substantial body of medieval and Renaissance liturgical representation extant, even if existing biblical illustration forms a greater amount by far." There is even enough illustration to distinguish the mass from the office. A depiction of the liturgy from a fifteenth-century Dutch missal (Plate G) is one illustration from this substantial body of works.

Plate G

Performing a liturgical service; from a Dutch missal, 15th century (MS K.2.32, folio 160). By permission of the Board of Trinity College.

Iconography can also assist in assessing the problem of whether instruments were used in the liturgy. Brown maintains that "the extent and nature of instrumental participation in sacred music of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries are by no means clear."37 Harrison, on the other hand, defines two distinct contexts in which instruments found acceptance in the ecclesiastical tradition. Pedagogically, the monochord, organistrum, and tuned bells were integral to the teaching of music, especially in the larger churches. A twelfth-century relief of Lady Music shows the tuned bells (Plate H).
Music with psaltery, fiddle, and carillon; from the king's door at Chartres Cathedral, 12th century. Photograph provided by Chartres Cathedral.

By 1400, however, these pedagogical instruments were replaced by instruments with keys. In the ceremonial context, "the organ was associated with certain new interpolations in the ritual . . . as an essential concomitant in the performance of the Sequence."\textsuperscript{38} The organ stood on a small screen in the gallery; its musical participation, in addition to the Sequence, consisted of alternating with the plainsong of the choir, according to Harrison. Many questions remain, however, in the area of instrumental participation in the liturgy. Brown states that,

To investigate the conventions of scoring, particularly in liturgical music, remains one of the most important and pressing tasks for the historian of [medieval] performing practice.\textsuperscript{39}

And McKinnon suggests that there are enough extant liturgical representations to realize such an investigation.\textsuperscript{40}

With regard to instruments, let us return to the trecento angel musician. Trecento angels differ from those depicted in earlier centuries:

Thirteenth-century angels were content merely to hold up drapery or to stand silently by. But shortly after 1300 heavenly messengers can be seen to weep for the crucified Christ, to offer flowers to the Virgin and Child, or to
play musical instruments.  

For the next two centuries, these messengers from heaven form the most important class of performers—through sheer numbers—in Italian art, so it is important to examine the instruments they play. Ghisi, as mentioned above, has made a careful iconographic study of angel musicians encircling the Marian frescoes in the church at San Leonardo al Lago. He describes the musicians in the frescoes of each vault of the apse. In one vault, angels form a bas ensemble with voice, including plucked and bowed string instruments (two psalteries, two lutes, and a fiddle), a portative organ, and a solo singer. Three angels sing together in the next vault; their trio suggests a polyphonic *lau da*. The final two frescoes include percussion, woodwind, and brass instruments. In one, angels play long straight trumpets, a kettledrum, a bombard, and a pipe and tabor. In the other, the celestial musicians play two kinds of trumpet (cylindrical and conical), cymbals, kettledrums, a tambourine with jingles, a shawm or a bombard, and an aulos. To this double straight oboe, as Ghisi first describes the aulos, we now turn our attention.

In his study of angels, Brown states that the double recorder is the main soft instrument of the trecento, the bas instrument seen most often in paintings. A detail from a Siennese painting (ca. 1340) of the Assumption of the Virgin (Plate I) shows an angel playing this instrument in the left center of the foreground.

Plate I

Mary Ascending into Heaven by the Master of Siena; ca. 1340. Used with the permission of the Alte
Plate J shows two double pipe players from the Cantigas de Santa Maria.

Two men playing double pipes; from Cantigas de Santa Maria, late 13th century (E-E b.1.2 folio 323v). Photograph provided and authorized by the Patrimonio Nacional.

With regard to Brown's study, McKinnon comments,

. . . the portative organ must have figured prominently in contemporary music; while one is both convinced of and surprised at the reality of dual-pipe playing during the period. We note further the total absence of the transverse flute and the virtual absence of the recorder . . . .

McKinnon speaks of a double-pipe, Brown a double-recorder. Ghisi, in turn, gives three designative options for the one instrument depicted in the San Leonardo fresco: double straight oboe, double aulos, and diaulos. All these terms—McKinnon's, Brown's, and Ghisi's—refer to an instrument that, in the various paintings, looks the same. The obvious problem is that of an accurate terminology. The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments provides no guidance in the matter. It lists the aulos only as an instrument used in classical antiquity; none of the other nomenclature—diaulos, double recorder, etc.—appear as entries in this dictionary. Winternitz, at least, makes some helpful distinction by identifying double pipes with a disclaimer that he will not discuss whether all the double pipes illustrated in his article are double reed pipes. Winternitz, thus, coins a generic term, double pipe. This name is adopted for the present discussion. This multiplicity of terms proves Gerald Hayes’s observation concerning the history of reed instruments between the early Christian years and the high Renaissance; he writes, "It is in examining these [reed instruments] that we notice the only real
weakness of instrumental music before the fifteenth century."46

The heir of the double pipe is the bagpipe, a set of double, triple, or quadruple pipes in mechanized form. The string counterpart of the bagpipe is the organistrum. This line from the double pipe to the bagpipe and the organistrum is important when considering that

Simultaneous occurrences of both these specialized drone instruments [bagpipe and organistrum] can be documented in pictures through the centuries, in both the mainstream and side currents of music, in sacred art and folk art, in court entertainment and fête champêtres, up and down the social ladder. This evidence is particularly interesting for the study of the Middle Ages, when the organum and its instrumental vehicle, the drone, were important elements in the origin of Occidental polyphony."47

An English angel with bagpipe rendered in sculpture (1377, Plate K) shows this instrument in a sacred artwork.

Plate K

Angel playing bagpipe; English, 14th century. Used with the permission of Timothy Eckersley.

An anonymous Italian representation of three musicians and two dancers (fourteenth-century, Plate L) documents its secular use; the performer nearer the dance plays the bagpipe. Neither instrumentalist plays from music. Performers generally improvised polyphonic dance music.48 Even in medieval depictions of instrumentalists and singers together, only the vocalists read from music; instrumental musicians perform without it.

Plate L
The double pipe, the bagpipe, and the organistrum, as drone instruments, fall into a larger historical context in relation to performance practice. Winternitz points out, "the importance of drone music in the face of developing polyphony," an early expression of which is the Notre Dame style with its long melismas over a held tone or drone, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: School of Notre Dame, two-voice organum; Historical Anthology of Music, Harvard University Press, 1/28c (excerpt).
What inspired the Notre Dame composers to write in this style? Did the bagpipe, with its capability of playing two lines similar to the tenor and discant parts in Figure 1, inspire two-voice organum? If the sculpted angel in Plate L suddenly had lungs and a real bagpipe, would the angel's music resemble that which is notated in Figure 1? In other words, does the performance of instrumental music that we see (but do not hear) in artists' representations influence the notated sacred vocal music which we can hear? Examples of vocal polyphony imitating music for brass exist in the late fourteenth century, and some mid-fourteenth-century music, sacred and secular, imitates the sound of instruments. In folk song, the imitation of bagpipes and drums is common. Did Leonin, Perotin, and their colleagues imitate instrumental music in the vocal works they composed for Notre Dame around 1200? The potential to pose such a hypothesis exists through music iconography.

As predecessor of the bagpipe, the double pipe "existed in Europe after the fifth century," according to Ghisi. How it was played, however, is not evident since artists' depictions are like still photographs rather than moving pictures with sound. A fresco by Martini shows a double pipe player whose finger position of the right hand is very clear; the left hand looks similar but is partially obstructed by the shoulder of another musician. It is not evident whether the instrumentalist played one of the pipes as a drone, or sounded two melodies together simultaneously. If the double pipe sounded two melodies together, then its music could have been an instrumental precedent for the discant clausula. If such is the case, then the double pipe could have played both parts of a clausula like the thirteenth-century "Hec Dies" shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Clausula for "Hec Dies," *Historical Anthology of Music*, Harvard University Press, 1/30 (excerpt).

This hypothesis, arrived at through music iconography, is, of course, only speculative. A video cassette of these early performances will never be unearthed in an archeological dig. Music iconography, however, does provide a window to the past, and as such, it gives us the potential to see the fundamental difference between music-making in the Middle Ages and now. It is essential to understand that early music was performed at a time when instruments, people, and conditions, especially the role of theology and politics, were totally different from what musicians experience today. If one of the musicologist's major tasks is to "remove misconceptions about musical practice in the past before recording," as Harrison emphasizes, then scholars of
medieval performance practice must "suggest at least general criteria for performance in the inevitably different circumstances of today." But first, the musical practice must be studied as closely as possible through written and visual sources, that is, through manuscripts, frescoes, paintings, architecture, and sculpture. These visual historical documents form a rich encyclopedic display of musical life in the Middle Ages, and, as such, should be mandatory classroom material for even the most basic of today's courses in medieval music.

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Francke, 1980.


3James W. McKinnon, "Musical Iconography: A Definition," RIdIM/RCMI Newsletter II/2 (Spring 1977): 17. This article contains a clear explanation of the difference between iconology and iconography.


10Burney, General History of Music, as cited in Winternitz, 82.

11Winternitz, 82.
The crossed fingers might be the artist’s way of showing fingers in motion. The left hand may actually be damping the strings.


The lute is especially associated with temperance and, therefore, is painted in a prominent, central position. See Figure 1 in Jane R. Stevens, "Hands, Music, and Meaning in Some Seventeenth-Century Dutch Paintings," Imago Musicae I (1984): 76.


For further reference to literary sources only, see Edmund A. Bowles, "Haut and Bas: The Grouping of Musical Instruments in the Middle Ages," Publications in the Humanities from the Department of Humanities, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1955): 115-40.

century, see Plate F.


34 Brown, 128.


36 James W. McKinnon, "Representations of the Mass in Medieval and Renaissance Art," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* XXXI/1 (1978): 25. Quotations from the rest of this paragraph are from this same source, p. 25. The Christmas Mass is illustrated in Figure 6c on p. 37 of McKinnon's article; Philip the Good at Mass is illustrated in Figure 4c on p. 33.


41 Brown, 112.

42 The article by Ghisi is, itself, a good illustration of iconography vs. iconology.

43 See Ghisi, Plates 18a-d.

44 Brown, 128.


47 Winternitz, 85.

48 Winternitz, 85.

49 Winternitz, 83.

50 See Harrison, 331 for further treatment of this subject.

51 See Harrison, 333-34 for musical examples.
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