

INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS



KALINA NIKOLAEVA TOMOVA

**THE ENGLISH CAROL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE
FIFTEENTH-CENTURY VOCAL REPERTOIRE:
GENRE CHARACTERISTICS, TECHNIQUES,
INTERACTIONS**

ABSTRACT

OF DISSERTATION FOR AWARDING THE EDUCATIONAL AND
SCIENTIFIC DEGREE *DOCTOR* (PhD)

SOFIA,

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The dissertation consists of 413 pages, of which 194 pages main text (introduction, three chapters, and conclusion); bibliography, containing 194 titles in English, Latin, German and Bulgarian language, as well as 29 manuscripts and 10 CDs; an appendix of 198 pages with transcriptions of 119 songs.

The public defense will be held on 27 May 2024 at 11:00 a.m. in Hall 1 of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, at a meeting of a scientific jury consisting of: assoc. prof. Iliya Gramatikov, PhD, National Academy of Music; prof. Kristina Yapova, DSc, Institute of Art Studies; reviewer; prof. Mariyana Buleva, DSc, University of Veliko Tarnovo, reviewer; prof. Rositsa Draganova, PhD (Institute of Art Studies, chair of the jury; prof. Slaviya Barlieva, PhD Cyrillo-Methodian Research Center, BAS.

The materials about the defense are available to interested parties at the Department of Administrative Services of the Institute of Art Studies at 21 Krakra Str.

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SUMMARY

The fifteenth-century carol repertoire consists of around 120 songs preserved in four main manuscripts and a few fragmentary sources. Consisting of a number of stanzas each set to the same music and a refrain called a burden, which is performed before and after each stanza, the carols display a homogeneous musical style. During the last hundred years the repertoire was the subject of research from both philological and musicological points of view. The poetic form was first defined in the late 1920s by Richard L. Greene, who assembled the extant lyrics from before 1550. The research on the repertoire culminated around the middle of the century, when John Stevens edited all of the fifteenth-century carols that survive with music in the fourth volume of *Musica Britannica*, *Mediæval Carols*. After a prolonged lull in research, the topic was reinvestigated in the PhD dissertations by John Zec, Beth Zamzow, Adele Smail and Kathleen Palti from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. These focused on different aspects of the repertoire, including the influence of the mendicant orders on the genre, the connection between carols and the liturgy, the origin of the songs and their performance contexts. The last extensive study on the carols is David Fallows' *Henry V and the Earliest English Carols: 1413–1440* from 2018, which proposed new dates, origins and purposes for the carol sources.

This dissertation is the first attempt to analyze the compositional techniques used in all fifteenth-century carols. This is particularly worthwhile given the homogeneous musical characteristics of the genre. It also reevaluates long-standing views not only on the compositional and notational aspects of the carols, but on rhythmic concepts in general, in this way connecting the repertoire to its wider musical context. The thesis also argues that syncopation is one of the main characteristics of the musical style of the carol and analyses its presence from both a notational and compositional point of view.

The thesis explores for the first time the notational features of the entire repertoire, including problems related to the infringement of fundamental rules of mensural notation concerning alteration, imperfection, and coloration. My analysis of the notational features of the repertoire has implications for how these

pieces should be interpreted rhythmically. The appendix of the dissertation includes new transcriptions of the whole corpus which takes these into account. Based on new interpretations of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century notational theory, these transcriptions at times differ substantially from the currently established versions of some of the carols.

Additionally, the dissertation reexamines the relationship between notational dots and syncopation in theoretical treatises from the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, in this way recontextualizing the way we think about some of the basic premises of musical notation. The dissertation shows how the terminology used by Willi Apel in his influential *The Notation of Polyphonic Music, 900–1600* is not supported by the theory of the time, and his definitions on syncopation require rethinking. This is especially important since his terminology is continued to be used today. The dissertation also showcases for the first time the understanding of syncopation of the fourteenth-century theorist Johannes Vetulus de Anagnia, whose treatise *Liber de musica* presents a unique view on syncopation that is in stark contrast to contemporaneous theory. The thesis also analyses intricate cases of syncopation in the carol repertoire and attempts to delineate the ways in which they could have been perceived by singers during the performance of these songs.

The presence of *faburden* in the fifteenth-century carol is manifested in a few distinct examples, the most explicit one being *Te Deum: O blessed God*, where an inscription stating ‘*ffaburdon Te eternum*’ is present at the end of the burden. But besides this evidence for the use of *faburden* as a technique for improvised singing, there are numerous examples in the carols of both English *faburden* and continental *fauxbourdon* being employed as compositional devices. The dissertation engages in close study of previously neglected instances of carols where *faburden* and *fauxbourdon* are employed, in order to draw conclusions about the creative methods behind these specific songs. The examples, which range from almost mechanical application of the improvisational techniques to their highly ornamented versions, present a fertile ground for the exploration of *faburden* and *fauxbourdon* as both improvisational and compositional methods.

To this point, metrical irregularities in the carols have been accepted as a peculiarity of the repertoire's style, with irregular bars occurring in a number of carols. The placement of the barlines in these cases was an object of debate immediately following the publication of Stevens' edition in 1952, but it has not been revisited since. This dissertation argues that some of these cases are not as irregular as they might at first seem and proposes new interpretations and solutions ranging from the use of off-beat cadences to unsigned changes of mensuration.

Considering the limited amount of research on western European early music written in Bulgarian, this is the first study in Bulgarian that focuses on fifteenth-century repertoire. As such it introduces the principles of mensural notation. Up to now, the lack of such explanatory literature has hindered research in Bulgarian on repertoires notated in this way; the dissertation is thus an important stepping-stone to facilitate further studies on music from these centuries. Considering that music before 1600 does not form a part of music education in Bulgaria, this dissertation is also an opportunity for Bulgarian-language students to familiarize themselves with the main genres, composers, compositional techniques and improvisational practices of the fifteenth century, both from continental Europe and England.

INTRODUCTION

1. Goals and objectives of the study

The current dissertation focuses on the fifteenth-century carol, a polyphonic genre in English or Latin that originated in England in the late Middle Ages. It consists of stanzas performed by a soloist and a choral refrain called a *burden*, which is performed at the beginning of the song and after each stanza. This musical form is similar in structure to other strophic genres of the period, such as the lauda, ballade, virelai, cantiga and rondo, and appears in this form for the first time in manuscripts of the early fifteenth century. Although the majority of carols are religious or moralistic in nature and are usually on themes connected with the Nativity, there are also examples with a variety of secular functions, such as political carols and carols performed at meals.

Before proceeding to the goals and objectives of the thesis, however, it is necessary to make some important clarifications regarding the terminology adopted, the scope and the subject of the study. Although in the English-language literature on the repertoire the term ‘English carols’ usually refers only to those examples that are in English,¹ in the present dissertation the term is used to signify the geographical origin of the songs, and as such is used for the entire corpus of carols, which includes the macaronic examples as well as those entirely in Latin.

The work focuses only on fifteenth-century carols, excluding those from the early sixteenth century because of the homogeneous musical style that characterizes the fifteenth-century repertoire. In this way, a relatively limited corpus of around 120 songs is formed, which provides the opportunity for a detailed analysis of the subject of this dissertation – the genre features, compositional techniques and notational problems of the carols, as well as the interactions between the genre and other music of the period. Such in-depth

¹ This trend began with the first major study on the carol repertoire: Greene, Richard Leighton. *The Early English Carols*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935, where Greene for the first time brings together all of the previously known texts of carols composed before 1550, but confines himself only to those in which English is present, and designates those in Latin as *cantilenae*. Subsequently the whole repertoire, irrespective of language, was brought together in the musical edition Stevens, John, ed. *Mediæval Carols*. 1st ed. Vol. 4. London: Stainer & Bell, 1952, 104 vols. *Musica Britannica*.

examination of the repertoire in its entirety has not yet been realized in the scholarly literature on the carols.

The dissertation has the following objectives: to delineate the place of fifteenth-century carols in the context of the polyphonic song repertoire of the period, not only in England, but in Western Europe as a whole; to demonstrate the uniqueness of the genre as a distinctive musical phenomenon by outlining the interactions between carols and other similar genres; to revise the fragmentary knowledge of the musical features of these songs by adding new findings concerning their notational and compositional techniques.

The thesis consists of three chapters, each of which focuses on the individual aims of the thesis. The first chapter situates the English carol and its characteristics within the context of fifteenth-century Western European polyphonic music as a whole, and in doing so outlines the ways in which the genre took shape as a unique phenomenon. The main carol sources and their place among the other manuscripts in England during this century are presented, as well as the other vocal genres of the period, the improvisatory techniques of *faburden*, *fauxbourdon* and English *discant*, and the ways in which English music influenced continental musicians in the fifteenth century. The varied social functions of the carols and the interactions of carols with related genres of the period are also outlined.

The second chapter presents the main notational features of the carols. However, first a necessary introduction into the basic principles and rules of mensural notation is provided. A central part of chapter two is occupied by the problem of the notation of complicated rhythm in the carol repertoire, and in particular the presence of syncopations in the songs. The extent to which the presence of notational dots was necessary for syncopation is examined in detail, since it has not been discussed in the scholarly literature so far, although the available examples in the theoretical sources of the era demonstrate a variety of uses. Through an analysis of the most important musical treatises between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries, a comprehensive view of the problem is presented for the first time, as well as a possible theory of how syncopation was

perceived by the singers in those centuries. At the same time, the presence of particular instances of both syncopations and notational dots in carols proves to be extremely fertile ground for analysis of complicated rhythm in the songs.

Other important aspects of the notation in the carols, which are discussed in Chapter Two, relate to the principle of alteration and its gradual falling out of use within the fifteenth century, which can be traced in the repertoire. Other notational issues in the carols include the varied methods of coloration. By examining specific cases of *minor color*, the usual approach of transcribing such passages in contemporary editions is questioned. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ways in which choral fragments were notated in the stanzas of the carols through the use of insertion signs, and a survey is given of the variety of symbols that were used for this purpose in the repertoire of the period.

The final goal of the dissertation – to examine the compositional techniques used in the carols – is realized in the third chapter. The need for such an in-depth examination is based on the lack of previous studies on the entire carol repertoire, or, when the whole corpus is taken into account, the vivid contrasts and details present in the individual songs are obliterated because of the desire to outline only general trends and conclusions. In contrast to these approaches, the third chapter of this dissertation comprehensively examines the melodic, rhythmic, and contrapuntal language throughout the repertoire, presenting special cases in addition to the most common situations in the carols, in order to demonstrate the multiplicity that is present in the repertoire despite their generally homogeneous expression.

Syncopation is outlined as an important part of the rhythmic profile of the carols, no longer only as a notational feature but also as a compositional technique. By tracing the theoretical thought in the period, this part of the thesis showcases examples from the repertoire that demonstrate the wide and varied use of syncopation among the songs. Substantial attention is also paid to the metrical irregularities in the carols, and possible causes and solutions for some of the more problematic passages in the repertoire are proposed.

The contrapuntal texture of the carols occupies the last part of the third chapter. The role of the contratenor part in the three-voice sections is examined in detail in order to highlight the different types of middle voice present in the songs. The presence of parallel movement is also discussed, namely the use of *faburden* and *fauxbourdon*. Examples from the repertoire, which have so far escaped the attention of other scholars, are examined in an attempt to trace how these techniques are used in the songs not only as techniques for improvised singing but also as compositional methods.

An integral part of the dissertation is the appendix containing transcriptions of 119 carols, which correspond in order to the songs in the *Musica Britannica* volume *Mediæval Carols*². Unless otherwise stated, throughout the work the transcriptions are my own. After the title of each carol, in brackets are noted the place of the song in the original source and then the number under which the full transcription can be found in the appendix. Thus, for example, the carol *Nowell, nowell: Out of your sleep* (S, f. 14v; No. 25) may be found on folio 14v in the manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Arch. Selden B. 26, and its full transcription in modern notation may be found in the appendix under No. 25. The only exception is the source Cambridge, Trinity College Library, O.3.58, which is a roll; instead, the thirteen carols that are present in the manuscript are numbered according to the order of their appearance in it, i.e. the carol *Now make we mirthe* (T, 8; No. 9) is the eighth piece in the manuscript, and its transcription is available as No. 9 in the appendix.

It is important to emphasize that in the present text I have tried to adhere as much as possible to terminology that corresponds to the relevant theoretical thought. However, I have allowed myself, after due deliberation, the use of concepts from later centuries where this would have facilitated expression. One such example is the term ‘6-3 chord’ – such three-voice vertical combinations consisting of a third and a sixth are not infrequently present in the music under discussion. While it is abundantly clear that these vertical events were not

² Stevens, John, ed. *Mediæval Carols*. 3rd revised ed., prepared by David Fallows. Vol. 4. London: Stainer & Bell, 2018, 104 vols. *Musica Britannica*.

conceptualized as 6-3 chords at the time, I have often used this term when discussing the techniques of faburden and fauxbourdon, because it describes in the most concise way the intervals involved, thus preventing unnecessary repetition. This is not to say, however, that the term '6-3 chord' is used in its later meaning.

CHAPTER 1. The carol and its place in the music of Western Europe in the fifteenth century

Carols occupy a unique place among the musical genres in the fifteenth century, not only in England but in Western Europe as a whole for a number of reasons. Although as a form it is related to strophic genres such as the lauda, the ballade, the virelai, the cantiga and the rondeau, it represents an indigenous English phenomenon that has no exact counterpart on the continent. A major reason for this is the fact that the carol is characterized by ‘a consistency of tone that sets it distinctly apart from other music of the time.’³ Added to this is the variety of themes present in the repertoire, which also point to the diverse social functions of the carols, from possible substitutes for *Benedicamus Domino* and processional hymns, to songs commemorating important historical events.

1.1. Musical sources in England from the fifteenth century – main characteristics and content

A study such as this could not begin without an introduction on the carol sources and how they fit into the context of the other surviving musical sources from the fifteenth century. There are four main manuscripts where carols are preserved with music⁴: Cambridge, Trinity College Library, O.3.58⁵, also known as The Trinity Roll; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Arch. Selden B. 26⁶; London, British Library, Egerton 3307⁷ and London, British Library, Add. MS 5665⁸, also known as The Ritson Manuscript. Some 120 carols are present in these four manuscripts, and the main edition in which transcriptions of the songs can be found is the fourth volume of the *Musica Britannica* series, *Mediæval Carols*.⁹ It is important to note that there is a

³ Bukofzer, Manfred F. ‘Holy-Week Music and Carols at Meaux Abbey’. – In: *Studies in Medieval & Renaissance Music*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950, p. 164.

⁴ Single carols are also found in the fragmentary manuscripts London, British Library, Add. MS 5666 and Oxford, Bodleian, MS. Ashmole 1393.

⁵ Hereafter Trinity Roll (T).

⁶ Hereafter Selden (S).

⁷ Hereafter Egerton (E).

⁸ Hereafter Ritson (R).

⁹ Stevens, John, ed. *Mediæval Carols*. 3rd revised ed., prepared by David Fallows. Vol. 4. London: Stainer & Bell, 2018, 104 vols. *Musica Britannica*.

disproportionately larger amount of extant carols without music compared to those with music – almost four times as many examples are available of only poetical texts.¹⁰

It could be argued that Selden, Egerton and Ritson are among the central sources of information about music in England during most of the fifteenth century, and they also act as a bridge between the other two important manuscripts of the century: London, British Library, Add. MS 57950¹¹, also known as Old Hall, which collects parts of masses, motets, and antiphons from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and Eton, Eton College Library, MS 178¹², also known as The Eton Choirbook, which is the principal manuscript collecting motets from late fifteenth-century England.

1.2. Vocal genres in fifteenth-century England and the place of the carol among them

Church genres occupy the main portion of music created in England during the fifteenth century – the amount of surviving examples of secular vocal genres is extremely small compared to the number of masses, motets, hymns, litanies, etc.¹³ One of the most widespread, and hence most influential, fifteenth-century compositions is a mass setting on the melisma of the last word ‘caput’ of the antiphon *Venit ad Petrum*, which is attributed to Du Fay in the Trent codices, but which has subsequently been shown to have been composed by an anonymous English composer. Known as Caput Mass, the work is most likely from ca. 1440 and a four-voice texture with a low contratenor, a structure that would establish itself in the second half of the century as the standard format for polyphonic sacred music during the Renaissance. Around the middle of the fifteenth century a large number of masses with a similar structure and on the

¹⁰ The bulk of the carol texts can be found in Greene, Richard Leighton. *The Early English Carols*; Greene, Richard Leighton. *A Selection of English Carols*. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1962. Manuscripts described in recent years which contain carol texts can be found in Griffiths, Jeremy. „Unrecorded Middle English Verse in the Library at Holkham Hall, Norfolk“. – In: *Medium Ævum* 64.2 (1995): 278–284; Camargo, Martin. ‘Two Middle English Carols from the Exeter Manuscript’. – In: *Medium Ævum* 67.1 (1998): 104–111; Edwards, A. S. G., and T. Takamiya. ‘A New Middle English Carol’. – In: *Medium Ævum* 70.1 (2001): 112–115; Palti, Kathleen. ‘An Unpublished Fifteenth-Century Carol Collection: Oxford, Lincoln College MS Lat. 141’. – In: *Medium Ævum* 77.2 (2008): 260–278.

¹¹ Hereafter Old Hall.

¹² Hereafter Eton Choirbook.

¹³ For a list of English church music from the fifteenth century, see Curtis, Gareth, and Andrew Wathey. ‘Fifteenth-Century English Liturgical Music: A List of the Surviving Repertory’. – In: *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 27 (1994): 1–69.

same chant appeared in Western Europe, including by composers such as Johannes Ockeghem and Jacob Obrecht.¹⁴

If in the sacred genres such as the mass English composers proved to be a leading innovative force, in secular music they followed the path blazed by their French colleagues. In the fifteenth century, the chanson experienced a flowering in Western Europe, and English composers contributed examples in French, Italian, and English. Ballades and rondeaux, two of the three fixed refrain forms (the third being virelais) that were strongly present in France in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, have also come down to us in English sources¹⁵. It is not surprising that English composers worked in these genres, given that at the time French was still the language of the educated members of English society and the influence of the French court was palpable.

1.3. The musical style in fifteenth-century England and the musical style of the carol

Manfred Bukofzer described three characteristics as typical of the English style: the frequent presence of a homorhythmic texture, known as English discant, where individual voices move note-against-note; the frequent use of 6-3 harmonies as well as full 5-3 chords; and the prominent use of consonant progressions instead of unprepared dissonances.¹⁶

Another English technique is the improvisational method *faburden*, which, although similar in structure to *fauxbourdon*, originated independently of it and is thought to be the older of the two techniques¹⁷. As explained in the anonymous treatise

¹⁴ Fitch, Fabrice. *Renaissance Polyphony*. Cambridge: University Press, 2020, pp. 5–6.

¹⁵ For a list of sources of fifteenth-century secular music in England, see: Fallows, David. 'English Song Repertories of the Mid-Fifteenth Century'. – In: *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 103 (1976): 61–79.

¹⁶ Bukofzer, Manfred F. 'English Church Music in the Fifteenth Century'. – In: *Ars Nova and the Renaissance 1300–1540*, p. 166.

¹⁷ During the course of the twentieth century an active debate took place about the origins and development of the two techniques and their interaction, but even today the relationship between *fauxbourdon* and *faburden* remains unclear, see Bessler, Heinrich. *Bourdon und Fauxbourdon: Studien zum Ursprung der niederländischen Musik*. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1950; Bukofzer, Manfred F. 'Fauxbourdon Revisited'. – In: *The Musical Quarterly* 38.1 (1952): 22–47; Bessler, Heinrich. 'Das Ergebnis Der Diskussion Über "Fauxbourdon"'. – In: *Acta Musicologica* 29.4 (1957): 185–188; Trowell, Brian. 'Faburden and Fauxbourdon'. – In: *Musica Disciplina* 13 (1959): 43–78; Trumble, Ernest. 'Authentic and Spurious Faburden'. – In: *Revue belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap* 14.1/4 (1960): 3–29.

The Sight of Faburdon, copied around 1430 and found in London, British Library, Lansdowne 763,¹⁸ faburden is achieved when the plainchant is set in the middle voice and the singer of the lowest voice (referred to as ‘faberdener’ in the treatise) sings thirds and fifths, respectively, underneath it, using *sight*: while looking at the notated chant the singer imagines his notes a third above or in unison with the chant but sings them a fifth lower.¹⁹ The treble would supplement this dyad by doubling the plainchant at the fourth above. Thus faburden is a technique of improvised singing, where from one written part a three-part texture is created, which consists of parallel 6-3 chords that alternate with fifths and octaves at the beginning and ends of phrases. This sounds very similar to fauxbourdon, but the main differences between the two lies in the fact that in fauxbourdon the plainchant usually lies in the discant transposed to the upper octave, unlike faburden where it is in the mean. Adding to that is the fact that although fauxbourdon was undoubtedly used for improvisation *super librum*, it is mostly found in sophisticated pieces meant for professional performance, while faburden was primarily a rule of thumb that was mostly used by monks who could not sing elaborate polyphony, although the technique has left a mark in some polyphonic compositions.²⁰

The English carol represents the embodiment of the above listed features of the English style that distinguished it from that of the continent in the fifteenth century. This is why some scholars have suggested the possibility that the carols played a role in the influence that English music had on the development of the compositional practice of continental composers in the fifteenth century.²¹ In his poem *Le Champion des Dames* Martin le Franc (c. 1410-1461) writes that the *contenance angloise* was adopted by the continental singers and composers and, more specifically, that Binchois and Du Fay

¹⁸ A digital version is available here:

https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=lansdowne_ms_763_fl16r (07.05.2023)

¹⁹ This is just one method of singing through sight. Each voice part (known as ‘degree’) follows a different rule about what interval is imagined while looking at the chant and what to actually sing, such as mean sight, treble sight, quatreble sight and counter sight. More in Trowell, Brian. ‘Sight, Sighting’. Grove Music Online, 2001. DOI: <https://doi-org.nls.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25738> (07.05.2023)

²⁰ Trowell, Brian. ‘Faburden’. Grove Music Online, 2001. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.09199>

²¹ For example, Kenney, Sylvia W. *Walter Frye and the ‘Contenance Angloise’*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1964. *Yale Studies in the History of Music* 3, pp. 181-182; Wright, Peter. “Binchois and England: Some Questions of Style, Influence, and Attribution in his Sacred Works”. – In: *Binchois Studies*. Kirkman, Andrew, and Dennis Slavin, eds. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 88-89; Fallows, David. *Henry V and the Earliest English Carols: 1413 – 1440*. London: Routledge, 2018, p. 174.

follow Dunstaple in the new way of composing with ‘lively consonances’²². Adding to this is Tinctoris’ account from the 1470s where he states that ‘... the possibilities of our music have been so marvelously increased that there appears to be a new art, if I may so call it, whose fount and origin is held to be among the English, of whom Dunstaple stood forth as chief.’²³

1.4. Social applications of the English carol

1.4.1. Possible usage within the worship

Some of the Ritson manuscript carols contain rubrics indicating the feast for which the carol is intended, and these include the designations *de sancta Maria*, *de sancto Johanne (de Johanne)*, *de innocentibus*, *in die nativitatis (de nativitate)*, *in die circumcissionis*, *Sancti Stephani*, *de sancto Thoma ꝛ Epiphanie*, but there are also songs designated as *ad placitum*. Given that these carols were copied alongside masses and processional hymns, it is plausible to assume that they were performed in a liturgical setting. Adding to this is the fact that musical borrowings from chants have been identified in about 35% of the entire repertoire of carols.²⁴ Frank Harrison’s theory that the carols were used as *Benedicamus Domino* substitutes²⁵ is supported mainly by the fact that there are six songs in the repertoire where the words ‘*Benedicamus Domino*’ or its answer ‘*Deo gracias*’ are present.²⁶ Another theory linking some of the carols to worship is that of Rossell Hope Robbins, namely that they were performed during processions.²⁷ As in the case of *Benedicamus Domino*, the carol repertoire includes textual and musical quotations from chants used to accompany the processions, and these include antiphons, responsories and sequences in addition to hymns.

²² For different English translations of the verses where Martin le Franc discusses music, see Bent, Margaret. ‘The Musical Stanzas in Martin Le Franc’s “Le Champion Des Dames”’. – In: *Music and Medieval Manuscripts, Paleography and Performance: Essays Dedicated to Andrew Hughes*. John Haines and Randall Rosenfeld, eds. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, pp. 97-99 and pp. 123-127.

²³ Strunk, William Oliver, ed. *Source Readings in Music History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1965, p. 5.

²⁴ Zamzow, Beth Ann. ‘The Influence of the Liturgy on the Fifteenth-Century English Carols’. *The University of Iowa*, 2000, p. 394.

²⁵ Harrison, Frank Ll. ‘*Benedicamus, Conductus, Carol: A Newly-Discovered Source*’.

²⁶ Harrison, Frank Ll. *Music in Medieval Britain*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958, pp. 417-418. A complete list of all carols, whether with or without music, that demonstrate textual borrowing from *Benedicamus Domino* or its tropes is available in Smaill, Adele Margaret. ‘*Medieval Carols: Origins, Forms, and Performance Contexts*’, p. 289.

²⁷ Robbins, Rossell Hope. ‘*Middle English Carols as Processional Hymns*’.

1.4.2. Moralistic carols

Among the carol repertoire is a small group of songs that demonstrate a moralistic character – often presenting Christian advice or depicting examples of righteous living. For some of these carols, Adele Smaill proposes the theory that they may have been part of Corpus Christi play-cycles, because of the presence of the two genres side by side in fifteenth-century sources.²⁸ Outside of Corpus Christi play-cycles, these songs were probably performed in the home during celebrations or gatherings, as well as by monks outside of worship.

1.4.3. Carols performed during meals

Among the polyphonic carols, two stand out that explicitly denote their performance at mealtime. The Latin carol *Comedentes convenite* (E, ff. 70v-71; no. 71) is the only one among the carols with extant music that addresses a female audience. The other song in the polyphonic carol repertoire, which attests to the genre's role at mealtimes, is *Nowell, nowell: The boares head* (R, ff. 7v-8; no. 79). It describes the tradition of slaughtering a boar for Christmas and serving its head during the festive meal, a practice with pagan roots that was part of the celebration of the winter festival of Yule before Christianity reached the British isles.

1.4.4. Political carols

During the fifteenth century, processes associated with the gradual formation of national thinking and self-identification began to develop in English society. To some extent, these were provoked by the Hundred Years' War – the prolonged conflict with France provided the necessary impetus for England to shake off the long-standing association with its southern neighbour and the French royal family²⁹. This shaping of national consciousness in English society is reflected in the carols, among which there are a total of 11 political songs.

²⁸ Smaill, Adele Margaret. 'Medieval Carols: Origins, Forms, and Performance Contexts', p. 123.

²⁹ Petrina, Alessandra. *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England: The Case of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004, p. 1.

1.5. The carol and related genres

The carol is often placed alongside the French *formes fixes* – the rondeau, ballade and virelai – which appeared around 1300 and dominated the European song tradition in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Like the carols, they are poetic forms whose characteristics directly determine the musical structure³⁰. But unlike the carols, rondeaux, ballades and virelais are fundamentally secular genres that were never used during worship. For the most part, they present love stories, but, like carols, there are also extant examples praising certain nobles and royalty, describing historical events, or suggesting moral values. An exception to the secular nature of the fixed forms are a small number of rondeaux from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that were part of religious dramas, and it is thought that these were most likely contrafacta of secular rondeaux whose texts were replaced by religious poems³¹. When it comes to the religious themes in the carols, they are more similar to the Italian lauda. Like the carols, the laude are related to the preaching activities of the mendicant orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, but there is no surviving evidence that they were ever performed in a courtly setting, instead having a distinctly urban character. Another continental genre that corresponds to the spiritual themes in the carols is the cantio. A parallel with the carols is the fact that the repertoire is heavily influenced by Christmas themes and veneration of the Virgin Mary, with some cantione continuing to be popular songs for the Christmas period in central Europe well into the twentieth century.³² When discussing the European Christmas song tradition, it is impossible to miss the French Noël. The need for its mention in this thesis is further reinforced by the presence of the exclamation ‘nowell’ in a number of fifteenth-century polyphonic carols. Although there is no evidence that Noël’s were ever performed during worship, some of them are based

³⁰ For a schematic representation of the three fixed forms, and for numerous examples from the fourteenth-century repertoire, see Apel, Willi, ed. *French Secular Music of the Late Fourteenth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1950, p. 5.

³¹ Wilkins, Nigel. ‘Rondeau (i)’. *Grove Music Online* 2001. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.23782> (17.04.2023)

³² For example the cantio *In dulci iubilo*: Ameln, Konrad. ‘Die Cantio „In Dulci Iubilo”’: In *Memoriam Waldtraud Ingeborg Sauer-Geppert*. Enid Luff and Alan Luff, trans. – In: *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 29 (1985): 23–78.

on chants (for example *Letabundus*³³) and it has been proposed that some macaronic noëls, which borrow texts from processional hymns, might have been performed to the same music.³⁴

1.6. The performance practice of the carols

The presence of a burden, which is repeated both at the beginning of the song and after each stanza, constitutes the main characteristic of the carol, but given the diverse influences of other genres and practices that have been described so far, it is not surprising that there are different ways in which the stanzas and the burden are treated. When it comes to the performance of carols, particularly problematic is the presence of two burdens – one in two parts and one in three parts – in many of the later songs. Whether both burdens should be performed at the beginning of the song and after each stanza is a question on which there is a general lack of agreement among scholars, but it also creates a possibility for interpretative decisions on part of the performers.

This chapter presents the main features of the fifteenth-century carol repertoire: its sources, musical style, themes and possible social functions, its parallels with similar genres of the period, and the problems of its performance practice. In this way, not only is the place of the carol in fifteenth-century music delineated, but the ground is also prepared for the later part of the study, where Chapter Two will discuss the notational characteristics of the repertoire, before moving on to a detailed examination of the compositional techniques in the songs, which have been presented in broad strokes in the present chapter.

³³ Dobbins, Frank. 'Noël'. Grove Music Online 2001. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.20020> (18.04.2023)

³⁴ Block, Adrienne F. *The Early French Parody Noel*. 2 vols. Michigan: Ann Arbor UMI Research Press, 1983, p. 32. Qu. By Smaill, Adele Margaret. 'Medieval Carols: Origins, Forms, and Performance Contexts', p. 132.

CHAPTER 2. The notation of the carol repertoire

Among the more interesting characteristics of the notation in the carols are features related to the application of notation dots, infringements of the mensural rules of imperfection, alteration, and *similis ante similem*, the ways coloration is transcribed into modern notation and the way the music is organized in the sources.

2.1. Introduction to the basic rules and principles of mensural notation

An introduction to the basic rules of mensural notation is particularly necessary in Bulgarian due to the fact that this notation has so far not been the focus of Bulgarian musicologists, because the repertoire that is notated in this way has also escaped the attention of the researchers in the country. At the same time, such an introduction is of key importance for ensuring wider accessibility to the musical sources of these centuries for Bulgarian musicologists. Therefore, the dissertation presents the basic rules of this notation, using examples from the carol repertoire for illustration, but this exposition will be omitted here due to the limited length of the present abstract.³⁵

2.2. Syncopation and dots in the carol

Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries the term ‘syncopation’ referred to the split of a perfection into two parts, with one or more mensural groups inserted between the two parts, in other words a note forms a perfection with another note or other notes not directly adjacent to it. The notational designation of such a rhythm presents a complex issue³⁶.

2.2.1. The problematic *punctus syncopationis*

Over the past 80 years Willi Apel’s monumental work *The Notation of Polyphonic Music, 900-1600* has influenced generations of students, musicians and scholars of the music of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. To this day, the work is an

³⁵ For an article dedicated to the subject, see Томова, Калина. Въведение в мензуралната нотация чрез примери от английския керъл репертоар от XV век. – В: Българско музикознание, 03/2022, с. 96–119.

³⁶ For a thorough discussion of the methods by which dots were used to break up perfections in fourteenth-century mensural notation, see the sixth chapter of Desmond, Karen. *Music and the Moderni, 1300-1350: The Ars Nova in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: University Press, 2018.

essential reference for musicologists working on early notations³⁷, and as such it forms the basic knowledge on the subject. It is important to emphasize, however, that like any study that is at a significant temporal distance from the contemporary moment, Apel's work includes not insignificant amount of assertions that have been proven incorrect over the past several decades. Nevertheless, many of these inaccuracies persist in the contemporary research literature precisely because of the strong influence the textbook still exerts.

An example of this is the term *punctus syncopationis*, which Apel uses to designate a special type of notational dot which indicates that a perfection has been split up. But a survey of the music treatises of the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has shown that no such name was ever employed. Although an array of names can be found in the treatises, *punctus syncopationis* is not among them. For example, the fourteenth-century treatise *Liber musicalium*, ascribed to Philippe de Vitry, states that there are four types of notational dots – *punctus perfectionis*, *punctus divisionis*, *punctus additionis* and *punctus demonstrationis*. The author explains this last type – the dot of demonstration – in this way: ‘The dot of demonstration is placed in major prolation at a minim, and it is placed twice, that is, the minim stands between the two dots, and after that minim, a semibreve or semibreves should follow. And after the semibreve or semibreves two minims must follow with the same dot or without a dot. But it is necessary that at least the first or the last minim have that dot. And that dot demonstrates that the first minim goes with the two last; therefore it is called a point of demonstration.’³⁸ Here the author explains the splitting up of the perfection and the insertion of another mensural group between the two parts, but does not refer to this effect as syncopation; later in the same treatise he calls it *transpositio*.³⁹ This is also the only treatise that does not include the special dot as a type of the dot of division.

The *punctus reductionis* first appears in the treatise *Ars discantus secundum Johannem de Muris* exactly as a type of the dot of division: ‘And sometimes this dot of

³⁷ Testifying to this is also the conference ‘New Perspectives in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Music Notations’ in Leuven/Brussels, 4th-7th May 2022, which marked the 80th anniversary of the first edition of the book.

³⁸ Vitry, Philippe de. *Liber musicalium*. Edmond de Coussemaker, ed. *Scriptorum de musica medii aevi nova series a Gerbertina altera*, 4 vols. Paris, 1864-76, vol. 3, p. 42.

³⁹ Vitry, *Liber musicalium*. Coussemaker, ed. *Scriptorum de musica medii aevi*. vol. 3, p. 44.

division may be called a *punctus reductionis* (dot of bringing-back), and this is when one figure or note is brought back to another by the force of this dot.⁴⁰ In the fifteenth century, Guilielmus Monachus would also use the same term,⁴¹ while the anonymous treatise from the same century *Tractatus de musica figurata et de contrapuncto*, notes that the ancients called a *punctus reductionis* a point that appears on both sides of a note.⁴²

Franchinus Gaffurius introduces the *punctus transportationis* (or *translationis*) in his *Practica musice*, where he says that the dot of division is two-fold, namely indirect and direct, the first type being the dot of transportation, because the note to which the dot is attached is counted with notes that are not directly next to it.⁴³

Regardless of this multiplicity in the terms used, I could not locate the term ‘punctus syncopationis’. It seems that the term first appears in Johannes Wolf’s *Handbuch der Notationskunde*, where he adds *syncopationis* as a function of the dot: ‘Eine wichtige Rolle spielen in der ars nova die Punkte. An die Stelle der alten Taktpunkte tritt nunmehr der Punkt in den Funktionen des punctus divisionis, perfectionis, imperfectionis, alterationis und syncopationis.’⁴⁴ From the way he phrases this, it appears that he meant that the dot also had the function of producing syncopation, i.e. splitting a perfection, but because he lists it alongside the various names given in treatises, it creates the impression that the term ‘punctus syncopationis’ was also used by theorists. He does not employ the term elsewhere in the *Handbuch* nor in his earlier *Geschichte der Mensural-Notation*, where he traces the theoretical understanding of notational dots in a comprehensive chapter.⁴⁵ This sentence in Wolf’s *Handbuch* is probably where Apel heard the term *punctus syncopationis*, and it is true that it is a name that does spring to mind rather organically – after all it describes exactly the effect

⁴⁰ Muris, Johannes de. *Ars discantus*. Coussemaker, ed. *Scriptorum de musica medii aevi*. vol. 3, p. 92.

⁴¹ Guilielmus Monachus. *De preceptis artis musicae*. Albert Seay, ed. *American Institute of Musicology*, 1965, p. 16.

⁴² Anonymous. *Tractatus de musica figurata et de contrapuncto*. Coussemaker, ed. *Scriptorum de musica medii aevi*, vol. 4, p. 435.

⁴³ Gaffurius, Franchinus. *Practica musice*. Milan: Le Signerre, Guillermus, 1496, f.42r. For a modern facsimile, see Gaffurius, Franchinus. *Practica musice*. New York: Broude Brothers, 1979. For an English translation, see Gaffurius, Franchinus. *The Practica Musicae of Franchinus Gafurius*. Irwin Young, trans. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.

⁴⁴ Wolf, Johannes. *Handbuch der Notationskunde*, S. 339.

⁴⁵ Wolf, Johannes. *Geschichte der Mensural-Notation von 1250-1460*, S. 103-109.

of the dot. However, it is important to emphasize that this name does not correspond to the terminology used in the theory during these centuries.

2.2.2. The case of *Alma redemptoris mater* (T, 3; № 4)⁴⁶

Notational discrepancies are not uncommon in the manuscripts containing fifteenth-century carols. Problems such as infringements of the mensural rules of imperfection, alteration, and *similis ante similem*, as well as lack of dots can be seen in numerous carols, but most of these do not pose too great of a challenge to the reading of the notation.

But a particularly challenging example from the repertoire is the carol *Alma redemptoris mater* (T, 3; № 4) where the notation has been a subject of debate since the publication of the first edition of John Stevens's *Mediæval Carols* in 1952.⁴⁷ In his review of the volume, Manfred Bukofzer proposed a different transcription based on a different interpretation of the distinct types of notational dots that can be found in the carol.⁴⁸ In the second, revised edition from 1958, Stevens presented a new solution that took some of Bukofzer's ideas into account.⁴⁹ The exploration of the different interpretations of the notation of *Alma redeptoris mater* can illuminate the way notational dots, syncopation, and the *similis ante similem* rule interact in the song, which can have implications for how we perceive these notational characteristics and their performance, as well as how we refer to them as a whole in mensural music from the early fifteenth century.

The main difficulties in interpreting the source arise from the presence of certain notational dots, which change the rhythmic profile of the verse of the carol depending on how they are interpreted. In addition, the manuscript is often difficult to decipher: it is not always clear which dots have notational meaning and which are just

⁴⁶ This is also discussed in full in Tomova, Kalina. Dots, Syncopation, and *Similis ante similem* in the *Alma redemptoris mater* from the Trinity Carol Roll. – In: *European Music Notations in Theory and Practice, 1400-1600*. Paul Kolb, ed. Turnhout: Brepols, 2024 (forthcoming). I wish to express my gratitude to David Fallows for his advice on an earlier draft of this study, to Margaret Bent and Nicholas Bell for their advice on the state of the manuscript, and to Paul Kolb for his active editorial work, without which the text would not have made the same scholarly contribution.

⁴⁷ Stevens, John, ed. *Mediæval Carols*. 1st ed. Vol. 4. London: Stainer & Bell, 1952, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Bukofzer, Manfred F., and Richard L. Greene. 'Review of *Mediæval Carols* by John Stevens'. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 7.1 (1954), p. 70.

⁴⁹ Stevens, John, ed. *Mediæval Carols*. 2nd revised ed. Vol. 4. London: Stainer & Bell, 1958, p. 3.

smudges or scribal mistakes. Another important factor is the presence of infringements of the rule *similis ante similem* in the song. Such infringements of the rule are not uncommon in the carol repertory, and although some of these instances may also be debatable, it is nevertheless clear that the adherence to this rule was not absolute in this repertory. And in the case of *Alma redemptoris mater* the additional presence of dots further complicates the reading of the notation. More specifically, it is the fact that *similis ante similem* might be coupled with syncopation that makes this carol so interesting.

It is not possible to establish a definitive solution for *Alma redeptoris mater* in the current dissertation; instead the thesis uses the song as a springboard in order to start a deeper conversation about how we perceive and talk about dots, syncopation and *similis ante similem* while keeping in mind the performance aspect of these notational characteristics.

2.3. Alteration in the carol repertoire

There are also numerous instances in the carols of infringements of the rule of alteration. While discussing this notational principle, Willi Apel also touches on its exceptions, saying: ‘It must be noticed that occasionally the combination B S S B calls for an interpretation which does not conform with the above principles, namely, for imperfection [...]. According to strict theory, such a meaning ought to be indicated by a *punctus divisionis* [...]. However, examples calling for imperfection but lacking this dot are not unusual in musical documents. The ambiguity in this matter is explained as the result of an evolutionary shift. In the notation of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and early fifteenth centuries the combination B S S B invariably calls for alteration. If in such a group imperfection was intended, this had to be indicated by a *punctus divisionis*. In the late fifteenth century, however, the iambic rhythm resulting from alteration became obsolete and the principle of alteration gradually fell into disuse. At this time, therefore, two S placed between two B were understood normally to imply imperfection, even without the *punctus divisionis*. However, the new interpretation did not completely

supersede the old one; hence, one encounters a certain ambiguity in respect to this combination in the sources of the Ockeghem—Josquin period.⁵⁰

This chronology which Apel presents might need revision because of instances in the carols from the first half of the fifteenth century of two semibreves placed between two breves where imperfection needs to be applied instead of alteration. In Selden, as well as in Ritson which is typically dated from the second half of the fifteenth century, additional numerical designations are present in order to ensure the correct reading of the rhythm by the singers. These notational features of the repertoire further raise questions about the appropriate transcription of the songs into modern notation.

2.4. Coloration in the carol repertoire

2.4.1. *Minor color*

Like the term *punctus syncopationis*, the term *minor color* was first introduced by Willi Apel in the twentieth century and was not present in the music treatises of the era.⁵¹ Regardless of what name we use for the rhythm, however, this group consists of a colored semibreve and a colored minim. In the fifteenth century its meaning was a triplet of minims (or eighth notes in current notation), the first two of which are unified in a semibreve. In the sixteenth century, however, this interpretation was superseded by a dotted rhythm, which is usually transcribed as dotted eighth note and a sixteenth note.⁵²

The question of how to transcribe rhythm into fifteenth-century repertoire is complex. In general, there is no evidence that *minor color* was perceived differently from other instances of coloration before the sixteenth century,⁵³ when the interpretation as a dotted rhythm was permanently established. However, many modern editions prefer to use the dotted version when transcribing *minor color*, and the carol repertoire is no

⁵⁰ Apel, Willi. *The Notation of Polyphonic Music, 900-1600*, pp. 113-114.

⁵¹ Woodley, Ronald. 'Minor Coloration Revisited: Ockeghem's "Ma Bouche Rit" and Beyond'. – In: *Théorie et Analyse Musicales 1450–1650. Music Theory and Analysis. Actes Du Colloque International Louvain-La-Neuve, 23–25 Septembre 1999*. Ed. Emmanuelle Ceulemans and Bonnie J. Blackburn. Louvain-la-Neuve: Département d'Histoire de l'Art et d'Archéologie Collège Érasme, 2001. 39–63.

⁵² Apel, Willi. *The Notation of Polyphonic Music, 900-1600*, p. 128.

⁵³ Woodley, Ronald. 'Minor Coloration Revisited: Ockeghem's "Ma Bouche Rit" and Beyond', (4).

exception to this practice, even though it would follow that in these fifteenth-century sources it should be transcribed as a triplet rhythm. In *Mediæval Carols* every occurrence of minor color is transcribed into modern notation with a dotted eighth note and a sixteenth note with only one exception: the carol *Jesu, fili virginis* (R, ff. 43v-44; No. 111), where the presence of a series of triplets is unique in the repertoire. Added to this is the fact that the number 3 is written below the rhythm. The use of *minor color* in the repertoire deserves further attention in order to arrive at a more definitive transcriptions of the songs.

2.4.2. Special cases of coloration

There are some special cases in the carol repertoire where color is used in order to facilitate the singers' understanding of the notation at problematic moments, often related to the principle of alteration and imperfection.

2.5. Notation of the chorus fragments in the verses of carols

In some of the carols, in addition to the alternation between soloists in the stanza and chorus in the burden, there is also an alternation between the two groups in the stanza itself. In these cases a phrase is first performed by the soloists and then the same text is performed by the chorus but with different music. Usually the chorus fragments also add a third voice to the setting: the stanza is usually in two voices, while the chorus fragments are in three.

This alternation is represented differently in the individual manuscripts. In Selden and Ritson, the three-voice fragments follow their two-voice counterparts immediately after they take place and an additional staff is inserted for the extra voice. This practice shows that the scribes of these two sources were not seeking to conserve space and parchment. This is in stark contrast with the practice in Egerton, where particular care was taken to place the entire two-voice music of each carol (the two-voice burden and the stanza) on the verso of each folio, and all of the three-voice music (the three-voice burden and the three-voice chorus fragments) on the adjacent recto. The scribe indicates the places where the choral fragments should be inserted in the stanza by the sign :|: , in this way optimizing the use of parchment.

The current chapter discusses the main notational characteristics of the English carol repertoire. After the necessary introduction to the rules of mensural notation, newly discovered evidence is presented concerning the relationship between the use of notational dots and syncopated rhythm in both the carol repertoire and in fifteenth-century music in general. This information puts into a new context our perception of some of the basic premises established in the research on mensural notation from the middle of the last century. In addition, the chapter analyses problematic moments in the carol repertoire, related to the application of the rules of alteration, *similis ante similem* and *minor color*, and the ways in which two- and three-voice moments are represented in songs. This in-depth examination of the notational features creates the necessary conditions for the discussion of the compositional characteristics of the repertoire within the third chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3. Compositional features of the fifteenth-century English

carol

3.1. Melodic characteristics

In the middle of the twentieth century, Manfred Bukofzer, while examining the recently discovered Egerton, described the melodic profile of the carols in the source as follows: ‘Carried by a vigorous rhythm, the melody is paradoxically both smooth and angular, and definitely not what would be considered today as a finished vocal line or an easily singable tune. The smooth melodic design is derived from the extensive use of repeated notes or patterns that cover up the reiteration of the same note by turns to the lower and upper second and third. The angularity, on the other hand, is due to the insistence on disjunct motion between structurally important notes of the melody.’⁵⁴

This observation about the melodic line in the Egerton carols can be applied to the repertoire as a whole – the liveliness of the melodic line in the songs is largely due to the balance between the use of stepwise movement and the presence of large leaps. Of these, Bukofzer explains that ‘progressions outlining the triad, skips of the third, fifths, and sevenths are quite common. The latter interval substantially contributes to the modal flavor of the music.’⁵⁵ If the leaps of a third, fourth and fifth do not cause too much surprise, those of a seventh, octave and even ninth might raise not only aesthetic questions, but also doubts as to the extent to which such a melodic line is suitable for vocal performance. Nevertheless, an analysis of the cases where these intervals are present shows that they fit into the general musical practice of the period.

3.2. Rhythmic characteristics

3.2.1. Syncopation as a compositional technique

⁵⁴ Bukofzer, Manfred F. ‘Holy-Week Music and Carols at Meaux Abbey’, pp. 168-169.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

When one moves from earlier to later carols, one can find more and more syncopations that are not marked in a special way by color or notational dots, but instead are the result of the natural linear following of the notation. Thus an overstepping from one perfection to another is produced, which, however, unlike the syncopations outlined in Chapter Two, is usually the result of a single minim.

The theoretical perspective on such syncopation can be found in Hermann Finck's treatise *Practica musica* (1556).⁵⁶ In it, the author, after giving the traditional for those centuries definition for syncopation,⁵⁷ provides several musical examples illustrating the phenomenon in its various manifestations. Considering that Finck's treatise was published a century after the carols were created, one can safely assume that it reflects a later stage in the development of syncopation than that present in the repertoire. Although the rhythm is demonstrated in more complex manifestations in the examples from his treatise, the initial stages of this further development can be seen in the carols from the second half of the fifteenth century, which nevertheless build on the theoretical understanding of syncopation from previous centuries, as can also be seen in the definition that Fink provides.

Craig Monson has proposed that syncopations such as those in the carols were part of the English style from the first half of the fifteenth century, and similar rhythmic complexities were then adopted by Du Fay.⁵⁸ Along with the syncopations that overstep from one perfection to another, Monson emphasizes the frequent presence of alternation between 3x2 and 2x3 rhythmic organization inside the perfection, a trait that is also strongly present in the carol repertoire. Examples from Johannes Vetulus de Anagnia's treatise *Liber de musica* from the second half of the fourteenth century show that such oscillation was perceived as syncopated rhythm, but on a micro-level.

3.2.2. Metrical irregularities in the carols

⁵⁶ For Finck's place in the context of sixteenth-century theory, see Kirby, Frank Eugene. 'Hermann Finck's *Practica Musica*: A Comparative Study in 16th Century German Musical Theory'. Yale University, 1957.

⁵⁷ Finck, Hermann. *Practica Musica*. Vitebergae, 1556, f.Gijr: "Syncopatio est reductio minoris unius notulae ultra maiorem ad aequalism notam, cui connuraeratur: utputa, quando inter duas minimas una aut plures semibreves, contra tactum canuntur aut inter duas semibreves, una, duae, vel tres breves, sic & de caeteris notis iudicandum est."

⁵⁸ Monson, Craig. 'Stylistic Inconsistencies in a Kyrie Attributed to Dufay', p. 262.

Metrical irregularities in the carols have been accepted as a peculiarity of the repertoire's style, with irregular bars occurring in a number of carols. The placement of the barlines in these cases was an object of debate immediately following the publication of Stevens' edition in 1952, but it has not been revisited since. This dissertation argues that some of these cases are not as irregular as they might at first seem and proposes new interpretations and solutions ranging from the use of off-beat cadences to unsigned changes of mensuration.

3.3. The counterpoint in the carols

3.3.1. Dissonance treatment in two-part texture

The counterpoint in the carols consists primarily of consonant contrary motion, which is also among the main ways of creating discant. The use of dissonances in the songs is generally limited to the presence of passing dissonances, and this is expectedly more prevalent in the more florid carols. However, there is also a certain amount of dissonances that occur at the beginning of a perfection and are often reached with a leap.

3.3.2. The role of the contratenor in three-part sections

The development of the contratenor during the fifteenth century can be traced to some extent in the carol repertoire, where the early variety is most widely represented. Almost half of the songs feature a middle voice which demonstrates a range similar to that of the tenor and which (with some exceptions) often passes below the lowest voice. The other features of the contratenor are frequent leaps as well as the fact that it is not necessary for a contrapuntally correct texture: when passing below the lowest voice, the contratenor does not cover fourths between the tenor and the discant, because there are none. The two outer voices form an independent contrapuntal pair, and there are several remaining consonant possibilities for the middle voice: to stand a third below the tenor or to double one of the tones in the other two voices. For this reason the contratenor, while enriching the texture, could be omitted during performance.

It appears that the gradual change in the function of the contratenor in the carols took place along several lines over the course of the century: the delineation of a separate range for the contratenor from that of the tenor, the formation of cadential formulas characteristic of the low contratenor, and the assumption of the counterpoint

function of the tenor when the countertenor is below the tenor. Among the carols, these transitional stages can be found in various songs in the manuscripts, yet the repertoire lacks the final appearance of separate high and low contratenors.

3.3.3. Faburden and fauxbourdon in the carols

As explained in the first chapter of the thesis, faburden was an improvisational technique that was primarily a rule of thumb used by monks who could not read mensural notation. As an unsophisticated improvisational technique, faburden has left traces in ‘unpretentious, functional music’, as Brian Trowell put it, such as conductus-style mass movements, antiphons and carols.⁵⁹ The presence of faburden in the fifteenth-century carol is manifested in a few distinct examples, the most explicit one being *Te Deum: O blessed God* (R, ff.26v-27r; No. 95), where an inscription stating ‘ffaburdon Te eternum’ is present at the end of the burden. But besides this evidence for the use of faburden as a technique for improvised singing, there are numerous examples in the carols of both English faburden and continental fauxbourdon being employed as compositional devices. The dissertation engages in close study of previously neglected instances of carols where faburden and fauxbourdon are employed, in order to draw conclusions about the creative methods behind these specific songs. The examples, which range from almost mechanical application of the improvisational techniques to their highly ornamented versions, present a fertile ground for the exploration of faburden and fauxbourdon as both improvisational and compositional methods.

⁵⁹ Trowell, Brian. ‘Faburden and Fauxbourdon’, p. 55.

CONCLUSION

Considering the limited amount of research on Western European early music written in Bulgarian, this is the first study in Bulgarian that focuses on fifteenth-century repertoire. As such it introduces the characteristics of the English carol which include: typically English compositional and improvisational techniques; the notation of the repertoire; the presence of divergent social applications that include religious, moralistic and political themes, which are, however, realized in a fixed form. All of these features make the carol a fruitful object of study, both in its own right and in juxtaposition with other music of the period.

This dissertation is the first attempt to analyze the compositional techniques used in all fifteenth-century carols. Having placed the features of the genre in the context of the musical practice during the century in Chapter One, the detailed analysis of the notational features of carols has created the opportunity to reconsider the ways in which the repertoire is transcribed into contemporary musical notation, as well as to rethink some of the basic scholarly premises of mensural notation. In turn, this discussion of the notational features of the carols provided the necessary ground for examining the compositional characteristics of the repertoire, addressing previously neglected issues concerning the rhythmic irregularities among carols, as well as the improvisational techniques of *faburden* and *fauxbourdon* which are also used as compositional devices.

The dissertation thus stands out for its important contributions to musicological scholarship:

1. In depth discussion of the notational features of the entire repertoire, including issues related to the infringement of basic rules of mensural notation such as *similis ante similem* and the principles of alteration, imperfection, and coloration.
2. Through a detailed examination of syncopated rhythm in its various manifestations, it is placed in the necessary theoretical context. The relationship between notational dots and syncopation in the fourteenth,

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is outlined, as is the application of these notational features in the carol repertoire. By demonstrating the unfounded use of the term *punctus syncopationis* in the work of Willi Apel, which subsequently influenced many other researchers in the mid-twentieth century, the previous scholarly acceptance of methods for notating syncopated rhythm is called into question. Newfound evidence is presented for Johannes Vetulus' ideas on syncopation in the late fourteenth century, which stand in stark contrast to the definitions of other theorists of the era. Syncopated rhythm is highlighted not only as a notational problem in the carol repertoire (in the second chapter of the dissertation), but also as a compositional feature by drawing on relevant contemporaneous treatises (in the third chapter).

3. Discussion of the compositional features of the entire repertoire of fifteenth-century carols by highlighting the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic characteristics of the songs. These include previously unacknowledged instances of *faburden* and *fauxbourdon* among the carols, which attest to the use of both devices as compositional rather than merely improvisational techniques. Proposed are possible solutions for some of the metrical irregularities in the carols, such as the use of off-beat cadences and a general change of mensuration.
4. Transcriptions of the entire repertoire of fifteenth-century carols, among which stand out new versions of some of the songs that are based on new interpretations of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century notational theory.

Due to the fact that the dissertation was written in Bulgarian, there are also contributions to Bulgarian-language scholarship, including the presentation for the first time in Bulgarian of important phenomena of musical culture in the fifteenth century, such as: the carol repertoire together with all the sources of the repertoire; the peculiarities of English music in the fifteenth century, including the main composers, genres, improvisational and compositional techniques and manuscripts; the rules and principles of mensural notation; a considerable number of music treatises from the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by authors such as Franco de Cologne, Johannes Boen, Walter Odington, Johannes Vetulus,

Prosdocimus de Beldemandis, Sebald Heyden, Stefan Monetaarius, Stefano Vanneo, Hermann Finck, and anonymous theorists.

The field of work on the English carol repertoire is far from exhausted: after many years of stagnation in the research during the second half of the last century, it is only in recent decades that there has been a stirring of interest among musicologists of the Western European Middle Ages and Renaissance. The notational and compositional features of the repertoire are particularly fertile ground, and this dissertation has outlined a number of case studies that have yet to be further studied and which could greatly enrich our perception of music in the fifteenth century.

This dissertation represents an important step towards the creation of more Bulgarian studies on the music of the fifteenth century, because it introduces the main genres, authors, sources and phenomena of this culture in Bulgarian. Moreover, because of the publications and presentations at international conferences that were realized during the work on the thesis, it is also an important opportunity to represent the Bulgarian school of musicology on the international research scene.

PUBLICATIONS ON THE DISSERTATION TOPIC

1. Томова, Калина. Въведение в мензуралната нотация чрез примери от английския керъл репертоар от XV век (Introduction to Mensural Notation Through Examples from the Fifteenth-Century English Carol Repertoire). – In: *Bulgarian Musicology*, 03/2022, с. 96–119
2. Tomova, Kalina. Dots, Syncopation, and *Similis ante similem* in the *Alma redemptoris mater* from the Trinity Carol Roll. – In: *European Music Notations in Theory and Practice, 1400-1600*. Paul Kolb, ed. Turnhout: Brepols, 2024 (forthcoming)
3. Tomova, Kalina. Faburden and Fauxbourdon in the Fifteenth-Century Carol. – In: *Benedicamus Domino Conference Volume*. Catherine Bradley, ed. Turnhout: Brepols, 2024 (forthcoming)
4. Томова, Калина. Английският отпечатък върху западноевропейската музика от XV век (The English Imprint on Western European Music in the Fifteenth Century). – In: *Bulgarian Musicology*, 3/2024 (forthcoming)