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Waste paper as a music source: fragments preserved with the incunabula at the University Library in Wrocław

ABSTRACT: Preserved with the incunabula at the University Library in Wrocław are eighty-five fragments of music manuscripts. Alongside numerous antiphonaries, notated breviaries and missals, they also include a fragment with polyphonic music (PL-WRu XV Q 1066). This contains three compositions typical of fifteenth-century Central European repertory. There are grounds for supposing that this fragment was written in Silesia during the second quarter of that century.

Research into the music fragments from the University Library in Wrocław has provided the author with a point of departure for discussing methodological issues. Questions are raised regarding the nature of fragmentary sources, with reference to the classification of historical sources proposed by Jerzy Topolski. The status of fragments differs from that of sources preserved intact, and this should be reflected in research procedures, such as the method of establishing provenance. The adoption of new methodological principles requires a critical re-examination of the interpretation of some musical fragments, including the sources preserved in Poland.

KEYWORDS: University Library in Wrocław; music manuscripts; fragmentary sources; chant music; fifteenth-century polyphony

Every historian conducts his or her research in the belief that what serves to reconstruct the past – that is, the sources – constitutes only the meagre remnants of former times. Jerzy Topolski, an author of classic works on the methodology of historical studies, distinguishes between *addressed sources*, intended to communicate with people and often given a permanent form meant to last for centuries, and *non-addressed sources*, which were never expected to fulfil such a function.¹ Even if the sources belonging to the first group were characterised by durability, what is available to us today for reconstructing the past is, to a significant degree, an accidental selection, particularly as regards the more distant epochs. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, Abbot Johannes Trithemius recommended the copying of printed texts on parchment, on the grounds that typography, linked

¹ Jerzy Topolski, 'Refleksje na temat źródła historycznego' [Reflections on the historical source], *Historyka. Studia metodologiczne*, 6 (1976), 23–30.

to a less durable material, namely paper, was incapable of preserving those texts for posterity: according to him, parchment could last even a thousand years, while the estimated life of a paper print might be as little as two hundred years.² In spite of the desire to archive important texts, which intensified even further during subsequent periods, many of these texts were undoubtedly lost. This adds flavour to the work of a historian searching for and discovering unknown sources, piecing the scattered elements together to form a picture of the past; a picture which – as we need to be aware – will never be either complete or fully understood.

Estimates of lost sources and texts from the late Middle Ages and early modern period give us an interesting picture. The German bibliologist Uwe Neddermeyer estimates that at present we have access to less than seven per cent of the manuscripts produced during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.³ Applying this estimate to the area of music sources, given that 110 manuscripts with mensural music survive from the second half of the fifteenth century,⁴ we may assume that their original number must have been around 1570 copies. Where sixteenth-century music prints are concerned, only one per cent of the copies of first editions have survived, and, in the case of at least ten per cent of prints, no copies at all.⁵ The losses are enormous, but they relate to the sources more than to the actual music repertory. Using a statistical model, Michael Scott Cuthberg calculates that, in the case of the polyphonic repertory of the Italian trecento, only around twenty-five per cent of works composed during that period have been lost, and the losses are greater in the case of liturgical compositions than ballads or madrigals.⁶ One only needs to remember the discoveries made within recent years to note that the majority of the works contained in ‘new’ sources of this repertory are already familiar from other manuscripts, and it is increasingly difficult to come across previously unknown compositions. It is even more difficult to find new compositions in the chant repertory: discoveries here concern unique versions, liturgical functions or notational details rather than previously unknown hymns or sequences.

We gain some idea about the nature of the lost sources by investigating musical fragments. These are manuscripts which became waste paper, used as bookbind-

² Noel L. Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius (1462–1516). The Renaissance of Monastic Humanism* (Leiden, 1981), 157.

³ Uwe Neddermeyer, *Von der Handschrift zum gedruckten Buch. Schriftlichkeit und Lesinteresse im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit. Quantitative und qualitative Aspekte*, i (Wiesbaden, 1998), 79–81.

⁴ Pawel Gancarczyk, *Musica scripto. Kodeksy menzuralne II połowy XV wieku na wschodzie Europy Łacińskiej* [*Musica scripto. Mensural codices in Eastern Latin Europe in the second half of the fifteenth century*] (Warsaw, 2001), 13.

⁵ Gancarczyk, *Muzyka wobec rewolucji druku. Przemiany w kulturze muzycznej XVI wieku* [Music and the printing revolution. Transformations in the musical culture of the sixteenth century] (Toruń, 2011), 202.

⁶ Michael Scott Cuthberg, ‘Tipping the Iceberg: Missing Italian Polyphony from the Age of Schism’, *Musica Disciplina*, 54 (2009), 39–74, see 47.

ing material. They were used to strengthen the spines of new books, to line the covers, or as book jackets. As the chances of finding unknown complete manuscripts – particularly where polyphonic repertory is concerned – are quite meagre, attention is increasingly being devoted to this waste paper. One damaged sheet or worm-eaten bifolio can sometimes significantly change our interpretation of the musical culture of a particular centre or region, thus enriching our pool of knowledge with new facts, and sometimes even adding new reconstructable compositions to the known repertory. Where musical culture in Poland is concerned, examples of such situations are quite numerous; among Polish sources of polyphony from before 1500, as much as twenty-seven per cent comprises fragments.⁷ I will discuss these sources below, but first I would like to describe the collection of fragments from Wrocław referred to in the title. We can regard this as a point of departure for a discussion of methodology, rather than a description of a collection that is interesting in some respects, and highly typical in others.

To begin with, one should emphasise that the collection of medieval manuscripts held at the University Library in Wrocław is the largest in Poland. As far as manuscripts with musical content are concerned, I have succeeded so far in gathering information regarding some 360 manuscripts, preserved both in complete form and as fragments, from the period extending from the tenth to the middle of the sixteenth century. The majority of these manuscripts are included in a database created as part of a project undertaken by the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Catalogue of Music Sources in Poland) during the years 2007–2009.⁸ For obvious reasons, they are predominantly chant sources: antiphonaries, graduals, missals and breviaries. However, it is an open collection, precisely because of the existence of those fragments which are yet to be catalogued; to date, I have been able to examine and describe only a small part of them. A thorough assessment of the value of this collection will only be possible after it has been systematically investigated, but results of similar projects carried out in a number of European countries encourage one to take an optimistic view.

The collection of musical fragments preserved with the incunabula held at the University Library in Wrocław numbers eighty-five items. With one exception,

⁷ Gancarczyk, 'Polifonia w Polsce do około 1500 roku: źródła i problemy ich interpretacji' [Polyphony in Poland up to c.1500: sources and issues relating to their interpretations], *Muzyka*, 51/1–2 (2006), 89–90.

⁸ The database contains the following information: library, reference, siglum, type of book, number of folios, dimensions, scribes, notation, dating, provenance, bibliography, reproduction, microfilm and comments (including such aspects as the content and state of preservation of the source). The checklist for this database is available on the website of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, see *Checklist of Musical Sources in Poland. Liturgical Manuscripts of the University Library in Wrocław* [2011], www.ispan.pl/pl/wydawnictwa/publikacje-online, accessed 28.01.2012. The database and the checklist also include the fragments preserved with the incunabula discussed in this article (see ref. nos. beginning with 'XV' and ref. nos. Ant. I 246, 4 N 60, 4 N 363). The checklist is updated as research progresses.

these are fragments of liturgical books. Antiphonaries predominate, comprising more than half (56%) the collection, followed by notated breviaries (18%), missals (13%) and graduals (7%). Palaeographic analysis made it possible to link a number of fragments into larger wholes. Eleven of them most probably come from the same (probably Silesian) fifteenth-century antiphonary,⁹ and four from an antiphonary of presumed Italian origin, also dated to the fifteenth century¹⁰. Some idea about the nature of this collection – the dating of the fragments and their provenance – can be gleaned from examining their musical notation. The greatest number of fragments (48%) are written using Messine-German notation, usually on staves of five red lines, as was typical of the Central European region in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In some fragments, one can discern features characteristic of the ‘dialect’ of that notation used in Silesia. Its distinctive features include, in particular, the *podatus* and *scandicus* forms drawn respectively from two or three *puncti* (Figure 1).¹¹ Many fragments (22%)

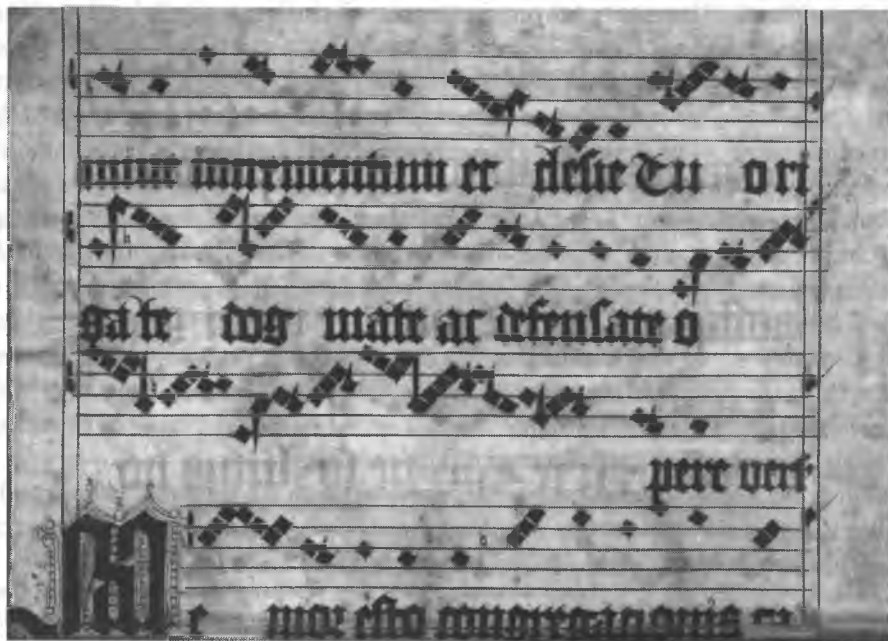


Figure 1. Fragment PL-WRu XV F 492. Silesian notation (late Messine-German notation). Antiphon to St Gregory *O pastor apostolice Gregori* (fragment)

⁹ These fragments are as follows (all PL-WRu): XV F 480, XV F 503, XV F 684, XV F 933, XV F 1095, XV Q 90, XV Q 92, XV Q 435, XV Q 466, XV Q 576, XV Q 677.

¹⁰ These fragments are as follows (PL-WRu): XV F 505, XV F 533, XV F 704, XV F 786.

¹¹ See Janka Szendrei, ‘Staff Notation of Gregorian Chant in Polish Sources from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century’, in Elżbieta Witkowska-Zaremba (ed.), *Notae musicae artis. Musical Notation in Polish Sources 11th–16th Centuries* (Cracow, 2001), 225–228.



Figure 2. Fragment PL-WRu XV F 719. Square notation. Antiphons to St Stephen
Lapidaverunt Stephanum and *Lapides torrentis*

are notated in *nota quadrata* (Figure 2), used in particular in the southern and western areas of Europe, although some monastic scriptoria in Central Europe, including Franciscan and Dominican ones, employed it as well. We also often find German notation: non-diastematic (9%) in fragments from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and diastematic (12%) mainly in fragments from the fourteenth century. As we can see, the types of notation may indicate the period when a manuscript was created, as well as its provenance. The fragments with non-diastematic notation are the oldest; those with Messine-German and square notation are most often dated to the fifteenth century. All the musical notations represented in the collection were used in Central Europe, including Silesia, but only the square, Cistercian and mensural notations were also to be found in southern and western Europe.

Among the analysed fragments, some are of particular significance for research, on account of either the type of notation or the repertory. The group of fragments with non-diastematic notation, which has already been examined by a number of scholars,¹² is of special significance, as relics of this kind are quite rare in Poland and,

¹² Jan Chwałek, 'Zabytki cheironomiczne w Polsce' [Cheironomic relics in Poland], *Acta Mediaevalia*, 1 (1973), 11–24; Chwałek, [contribution to discussion], in Aleksander Gieysztor

being the oldest, particularly attract the attention of musicologists. In some other fragments, one can observe interesting details of notation, although in respect to their repertory they do not bring any important discoveries, such as rare Offices or sequences. Two manuscripts with Cistercian notation (XV F 534, XV F 1142) also deserve a mention. However, one fragment is especially important – a manuscript in mensural notation containing polyphonic repertory.¹³

This fragment, ref. XV Q 1066, was used as lining in a Venetian incunabulum dating from c.1485, which was probably in use in Silesia as late as the end of the fifteenth century. It contains three compositions: one of the parts of a two – or three-part motet and two *cantiones* preserved almost in full: a conductus song *Ex stirpe paganorum* known from later Czech sources, and a cantilena song *Manarunt facule*, which is a unique item (Figure 3). These works display features typical of the local Central European repertory, familiar from Silesian sources, among others. Codicological features also allow us to link the fragment to Silesia (or to Central Europe generally) and to be specific about the dating – the second quarter of the fifteenth century. Similarities to this fragmentary manuscript can be found in other Silesian sources (see Table), in a fragment from Gdańsk (PL-GD 2153a),¹⁴ in the so-called Spiš fragments (H-Bn Cod. lat. 534)¹⁵ and in the local layer of the repertory of the St Emmeram Codex (D-Mbs Clm 14274)¹⁶. The table below presents the state of the documentation of polyphony in Silesia in the first half of the fifteenth century; as we can see, the sources are not abundant and consist of either fragments or entries of single compositions in manuscripts devoted to other subjects. Hence the unique character of the newly discovered source.

(ed.), *Historia kultury średniowiecznej w Polsce* [A history of mediaeval culture in Poland], ii (Warsaw, 1974), 203–215; Nino Albarosa, 'Reperti Gregoriani in campo aperto in Polonia', in Witkowska-Zaremba (ed.), *Notae musicae artis*, passim; Jerzy Morawski, *The Middle Ages, part 1: up to 1320*, tr. John Comber [The History of Music in Poland, vol. 1], (Warsaw, 2003) 184, 430–442.

¹³ A more detailed description of this fragment will be found in Gancarczyk, 'A New Fragment of 15th-century Polyphony in Silesia and the Tradition of the Central-European Repertory', in Paweł Gancarczyk, Lenka Hlávková-Mráčková and Remigiusz Pośpiech (eds), *The Musical Culture of Silesia before 1742: New Contexts – New Perspectives* (Frankfurt a.M., 2013), 45–54.

¹⁴ Elżbieta Zwolińska, 'Fragmente mit mehrstimmiger Musik des 15. Jahrhunderts aus dem Zistersienser kloster in Oliwa', in *Musica Baltica. Danzig und die Musikkultur Europas* (Gdańsk, 2000), 53–60.

¹⁵ Benjamin Rajeczky, 'Ein neuer Fund zur mehrstimmigen Praxis Ungarns im 15. Jahrhundert', *Studia Musicologica*, 14 (1972), 147–168.

¹⁶ *Der Mensuralcodex St. Emmeram: Faksimile der Handschrift Clm 14274 der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München. Kommentar und Inventar von Ian Rumbold unter Mitarbeit von Peter Wright. Einführung von Martin Staehelin* [Elementa musicae, 2], eds. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek and Lorenz Welker (Wiesbaden, 2006).

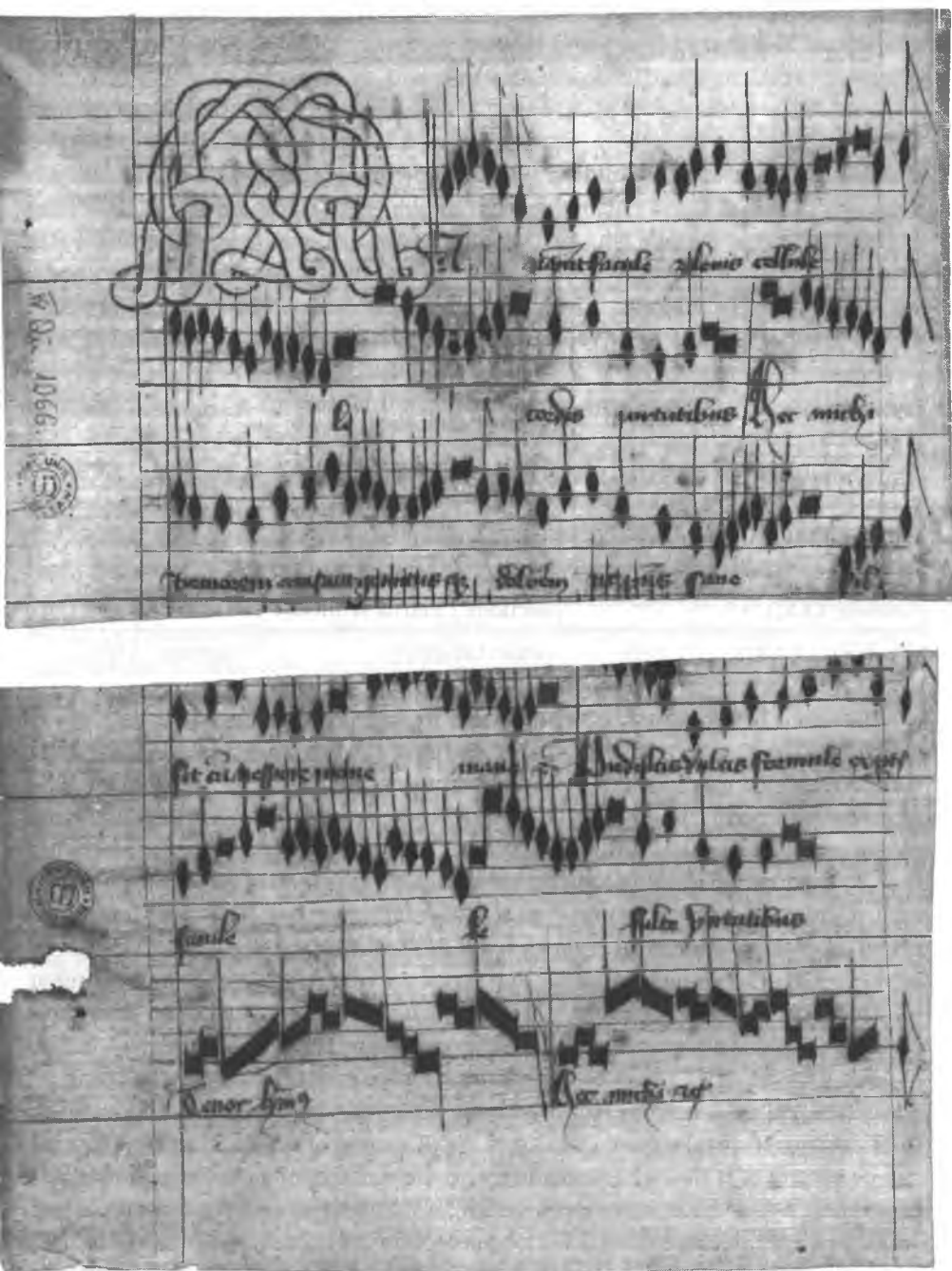


Figure 3. Fragment PL-WRu XV Q 1066 (verso). Black mensural notation.
Cantio Manarunt facule.

Table. Sources of mensural polyphony in Silesia, 1400–1450

Siglum	Date	Contents	Remarks
PL-WRu I Q 466	1414–1423	Credos	mensural polyphony on fols. 25v–27v; the provenance of the folios is not clear
PL-WRu I Q 132	c.1423	cantio, rotulum	polyphony on fols. 1v–3r
PL-WRu I Q 438a	c.1425	organ tablature	fragment (1 fol.)
PL-Wn 2082	c.1430	organ tablature	fragment (1 fol.)
PL-WRu I F 269	c.1430	cantiones, rotulum / Petrus Wilhelmi	fragment (2 fols.)
PL-WRu IV Q 223	c.1440	textless compositions (cantiones?)	fragment (2 fols.)
PL-WRu XV Q 1066	1425–1450	motet, cantiones	fragment (1 fol.)
D-Gs Nachlaß Ludwig XXX,1	c.1450	cantiones, motets, mass sections / Petrus Wilhelmi	fragment (30 fols.)
PL-WRu I F 687a	c.1450	organ tablature	fragment (5 fols.)

Research into manuscripts preserved in fragmentary form presents many problems. The question arises as to the status of these sources: methodologically, should they be approached in the same manner as manuscripts preserved in full? At the beginning of this article, we referred to one of the classifications of historical sources, the division into addressed and non-addressed sources. Among the first, by their very nature, belong music manuscripts intended for communicating with people and serving to preserve a particular repertory. The most important fifteenth-century mensural codices from Central Europe are interpreted as repositories of polyphonic repertory; that is, a form of musical archives. Parchment books of liturgy were intended to preserve chants for centuries, and thus their creation involved an enormous expenditure of resources. Clearly, the destruction of such a manuscript removed its communicative function: instead of being an addressed source, it became a non-addressed source, with serious methodological implications. If we take damaged sheets out of a cover of a book, the only thing we can be certain of is that we are dealing with the remains of a manuscript that was unwanted, out-of-date, incomprehensible; a manuscript that from a useful and valuable object became something obsolete, only fit for recycling: to strengthen a cover or make a cheap book jacket. So we should ask ourselves first of all why a given manuscript became waste paper, what caused it to undergo such a degree of devaluation.

Another key problem arising from research into fragments is establishing their provenance. There is no doubt that one should resist the temptation of identifying the provenance of a damaged manuscript with the provenance of the volume with which it was found. Unfortunately, this happens quite frequently, and some of the fragments from the University Library in Wrocław provide a perfect illustration of the fallibility of such an approach. For example, we find there volumes of a Talmud published in Lublin at the beginning of the seventeenth century bound in sheets of a Silesian gradual from the fifteenth century.¹⁷ One should bear in mind that a book might have been bound in a place or a community different from the one where it was created or used. In the collection of fragments from Wrocław, we have copies of Italian incunabula bound while they were still in Italy, as well as others which, most probably, were bound only after reaching Silesia, as is indicated by the palaeographic features of the waste paper used. Moreover, we know that the waste paper itself might have been transported from place to place. Used parchment was not cheap or universally available, but was a commodity that was traded and distributed. We can be quite certain that Silesian Jews were not using Catholic graduals at the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁸ It is also hardly likely that the collegiate church in Głogów made use of an antiphonary written in square notation, remnants of which were found in the cover of a print containing works by Johannes Gerson (PL-WRu XV F 458/IV) that was held there. The liturgical books of Wrocław diocese were written in Messine-German notation, and the sheets with *nota quadrata* found in this print may at most confirm the existence of that practice, rather than provide a convincing refutation of it.

The provenance of a fragment should thus be established on the basis of its palaeographic features and repertory, while the provenance of the book from which it came may at most indicate the period and the place where it functioned as a non-addressed source. Applying this principle to our newly discovered relic of polyphony at the University Library in Wrocław, we may assume – precisely because of the detailed research devoted to it¹⁹ – that it was created in Silesia during the second quarter of the fifteenth century, as is indicated by, among other things, the analogies between it and other Silesian manuscripts from that period. On the other hand, finding it in the cover of an incunabulum from the end of the fifteenth century, which by then was most probably in use in Silesia, indicates that

¹⁷ These are the fragments (PL-WRu) 552735/1–5, 552735/7–10. One of the volumes of this Talmud was bound in a fifteenth-century antiphonary, perhaps also of Silesian provenance (PL-WRu 552735/6).

¹⁸ Of interest in this context is a note from 1673 in the chronicle of the monastery of Canons Regular at Kazimierz, near Cracow, which mentions the punishment of some months' detention for a brother who sold more than thirty sheets from a parchment antiphonary to a Jew; see Jakub Kubieniec, *Uniwersalizm i swoistość w średniowiecznych antyfonarzach krakowskich* [Universalism and peculiarity in mediaeval antiphonaries from Cracow] (Cracow, 2006), 23.

¹⁹ See n.13.

by that time and in that place our manuscript had lost its communicative function. What might have been the reason for that? The answer lies in the trend, apparent in Central Europe from the middle of the fifteenth century, of moving away from the local repertory of motets and *cantiones* whose origins went back to at least the fourteenth century. This probably came about because of the availability of more modern works in the Burgundian or Franco-Flemish styles, as well as a shift from black mensural notation to white mensural notation. Moreover, the manuscript from which the sheet came was not produced with any particular care and was not expensive; it probably served for private use. This type of book, which in addition contained repertory that was outdated and difficult to read, might have become superfluous and unserviceable just a few decades after it was written. The manuscript was destroyed towards the end of the fifteenth century, as were many similar ones retrieved from covers with such dating. This was the fate of a number of analogous fragments from the area of Poland, but also, for example, of the Spiš fragments (H-Bn Cod. lat. 534) found with an incunabulum from the Dominican Monastery in Kassa (Košice). There is only one region of Central Europe where old repertory in black mensural notation survived for longer: in the mid-fifteenth century, it found its way into the books of the Czech Utraquists, who continued to copy it until as late as the early seventeenth century.

A similar approach should be adopted when interpreting the fragments with non-diastematic notation preserved at the University Library in Wrocław, the provenance of which was identified by previous researchers with the provenance of the books in which they were found.²⁰ Although one cannot exclude the possibility of these sources originating in Silesia, they may have come from foreign scriptoria which used German notation. Moreover, we cannot be at all certain that they were ever used in this area, since the probability that they arrived there already as waste paper is quite high. Again, we return to the point made at the beginning: the presence of these fragments with the incunabula used in Wrocław or Żagań cannot be regarded as proving their links with those centres. At most, it confirms that, at that time and in that place, these manuscripts were not fulfilling their basic, communicative function. It is also quite understandable: although liturgical books with staffless notation were still being created in some South German scriptoria as late as the fourteenth century,²¹ they may have been regarded as useless in Silesia during the second half of the fifteenth century, in view of the all-pervasive presence of staff notation. It seems that, in the same way that many manuscripts with non-diastematic notation were destroyed during the heyday of incunabula, so manuscripts with diastematic notation became waste paper during the second

²⁰ See Albarosa, 'Reperti Gregoriani', plates II/3, II/4, II/5b-c; a more cautious approach to the question of the provenance of these fragments is adopted by Jerzy Morawski (*The Middle Ages, part 1*, 401–402).

²¹ P. Maurus Pfaff OSB, 'Der gregorianische Gesang', in Robert Münster and Hans Schmid (eds), *Bayerische Musikgeschichte* (Tutzing, 1972), 74–76.

half of the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the former case, this resulted primarily from the change in the notation system; in the latter, from the expansion of the Reformation and the new, 'better', printed books.

The remarks presented here, based on experience gained while working on the fragments from the University Library in Wrocław, make one reconsider in a more critical light the provenance of some other manuscripts preserved in fragments. Returning to the sources of polyphonic music in Poland, one should note that the provenance of what is known as the Lviv fragments (PL-Pu 7022) or the fragments from Stary Sącz (PL-STk Muz. 9–30, PL-Pu 7011) may be open to a number of doubts. The Lviv fragments, dated to the 1480s and found in the account books of the city of Lviv from the third decade of the sixteenth century, may perhaps come not from that centre – a connection made by Mirosław Perz²² – but from some other region of Central Europe. The presence of the motet *Probitate eminentem / Ploditanda exarare* by Petrus Wilhelmi de Grudencz, as well as the five-part *Hodie deus* – both familiar in Silesia – suggest a Silesian provenance as more likely.²³ On the other hand, finding this musical waste paper in a book from Lviv indicates that, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, masses by Dufay, Josquin and Petrus de Domarto notated in this manuscript were not being sung in that city (although the question of whether that was the case only then, or whether they had never been sung at all, remains open). A similar situation exists with regard to the fragments from Stary Sącz; the older literature attempted to link them to the Clarist convent in Stary Sącz,²⁴ but Robert Curry demonstrated convincingly that the manuscript with the repertory *Magnus liber organi*, the remnants of which were found in Poland, was created in France in the 1240s²⁵. Also in this case, we do not know whether the manuscript found its way to Stary Sącz already as waste paper or was used by the local Clare sisters prior to being cut up in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. But would the pious sisters, who guarded their books over centuries with so much care and, at times, self-sacrifice, undertake the destruction of such a beautiful and valuable manuscript?

This is not the place to resolve issues of that kind. The provenance of the majority of fragments preserved in Poland will probably always remain a mystery. However, such questions should be asked, resisting the temptation of facile solutions which, from the methodological point of view, are untenable. It is likely that

²² Mirosław Perz, 'The Lvov Fragments. A Source for Works by Dufay, Josquin, Petrus de Domarto and Petrus de Grudencz in 15th Century Poland', *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis*, 36/1 (1986), 26–51.

²³ See Gancarczyk, *Musica scripto*, 170.

²⁴ *Sources of Polyphony up to c. 1500. Facsimile* [Antiquitates Musicae in Polonia, 13], ed. Mirosław Perz (Warsaw–Graz, 1973), XVII.

²⁵ Robert Michael Curry, 'Fragments of Ars antiqua Music at Stary Sącz and the Evolution of the Clarist Order in Central Europe in the Thirteenth Century', PhD dissertation, Monash University, School of Historical Studies 2003, 179–181.

systematic research will allow us to discover many more fragments of great value in helping to reconstruct early musical culture. Editing waste paper is a tedious and at times desperately hopeless task, but it may lead to important discoveries and interesting observations – observations that are all the more valuable since they concern not only that which the past generations wanted to transmit to us, but also that which was to be consigned to oblivion.