

Church musicians in France at the end of the eighteenth century: an ambitious prosopographic inquiry

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Dépôt préparé et fait par	Isabelle Langlois (CHEC) pour la collection du Centre d'Histoire « Espaces et Cultures » dans HAL-SHS , ANR Muséfrem.
Résumé	<p>At the beginning of the French Revolution (in 1790), a very large number of musicians employed by capitular churches or abbeys lost their jobs. In order to obtain relief they then wrote down petitions, sometimes assembling a full dossier, in which they presented their situation and pleaded their case. This makes up a corpus of very rich sources, kept in Paris and all over France.</p> <p>In spite of the difficulty coming from this geographical dispersion, a large inquiry is presently conducted by a French research team, under Professor Bernard Dompnier (Université de Clermont-Ferrand), within the framework of a project supported by the A.N.R (Agence Nationale de la Recherche). The aim is to constitute a wide base of prosopographical data, meant to be used for innumerable works branching out of it. It is estimated that this base will in time include some three thousand musicians – both men and women – at work in 1790. The data will also make it possible to have a look backward at the musical life of most of the 18th century.</p> <p>Sylvie Granger (Université du Maine) presents the main sources used and the data base. Then she gives an outline of the first results (2010), particularly as concerns the place of women in this world of church music in the 18th century. To end, a last part presents Philippe Van-Arcken's route, musician born close to Maastricht and which sang in many churches in France of 1770s to Revolution.</p>
Résumé autre(s) langue(s)	Au début de la Révolution française (en 1790), de très nombreux musiciens employés par les églises capitulaires et par les abbayes perdent leur emploi. Afin d'obtenir des secours, ils rédigent alors des requêtes, et parfois constituent des dossiers dans lesquels ils présentent leur cas et plaident leur cause. Cela constitue un corpus de sources très riches, conservées à Paris et sur l'ensemble du territoire français. Malgré la difficulté due à cette dispersion géographique, une vaste enquête est actuellement menée par une équipe française de recherche, sous la direction du professeur Bernard Dompnier (Université de Clermont-Ferrand), dans le cadre d'un projet soutenu par l'Agence Nationale de la Recherche. Le but est de constituer une vaste base de données prosopographiques, qui sera utilisable pour d'innombrables travaux thématiques. On estime que cette base rassemblera à terme trois milliers de musiciens

	et musiciennes actifs en 1790. Elle permet du même coup de jeter un regard rétrospectif sur la vie musicale de l'essentiel du XVIIIe siècle. Sylvie Granger (Université du Maine) présente ici les principales sources utilisées et la base de données, puis donne un aperçu des premiers résultats disponibles fin 2010, en particulier concernant la place des femmes dans ce monde de la musique d'Église du XVIIIe siècle. Une dernière partie présente l'itinéraire de Philippe Van-Arcken, musicien né près de Maastricht et qui a chanté dans de nombreuses églises en France des années 1770 à la Révolution.
Mots-clés	18th century ; France ; church music ; prosopographic inquiry ; woman musician ; Philippe Van-Arcken
Mots-clés autres langues	XVIIIe siècle ; France ; musique d'Église ; enquête prosopographique ; musicienne ; Philippe Van-Arcken

Sylvie GRANGER

**Church musicians in France at the end of the eighteenth century :
an ambitious prosopographic inquiry**

During several decades, after baroque music was re-discovered, a few great composers dominated the repertoire that was practised and propagated. Essentially, those who had composed in the European capitals, that is to say, for France, Versailles and Paris. Nowadays, everywhere in Europe, musical ensembles discover and restore forgotten works, composed by provincial masters. For example, those compositions by the successive masters of the Antwerp churches that we could hear on the occasion of the *Sounds of the city* operation. Indeed, if musical edition in the modern period was highly concentrated – in France, it was essentially Parisian – musical creation, on the contrary, used to be very much decentralized. This is particularly true of religious musical composition, nicely scattered all over the countries.

In the French realm, in the 18th century, there were something like one hundred and thirty five cathedrals and hundreds of collegiate churches. All those cathedrals and a great many collegiate churches financed a musical structure for which the chapters would provide large sums of money. All the musical structures of capitular churches have the same organization: they are directed by a master who forms the choirboys (from four to twelve of them, according to the church), conducts the instrumentalists and the singers, and regularly composes new pieces to accompany the liturgy, thus ensuring a constantly renewed repertoire. Only the smallest collegiate churches do not succeed in maintaining a regular musical structure¹. All over catholic Europe, church music in the 17th and 18th centuries is characterized by a great vitality. It is by far the chief provider of jobs for the professionals of music.

However, these musical structures are still far from being well known to day. Analyzing them can combine different approaches. Social history will study the organization of the profession, its internal hierarchies, the professional and geographical mobility animating it... Cultural history will spotlight the geography of movements, focal points and artistic spaces (the links between Paris and the provinces, the hierarchy of posts, the way works circulate...) and help to answer the questions asked by musicologists about points of musical aesthetics (the number of musicians in each choir, how voices and instruments were balanced, how church music and lay music interpenetrated...) Lastly, looking at the question through gender-history, one must find out about the place of women inside this group and try to delineate their status and their condition as musicians.

In order to treat these various questions, beyond a few fine well-documented and constantly treated examples, it seemed to us it was important to try to know the whole of the group of church musicians, men and women, by putting together serial data concerning the largest possible number. The prosopographical inquiry, by multiplying biographies, or fragments of individual biographies, enables us to understand in depth the professional group, its nuances and internal logic. From this common will was born the collective inquiry here presented to you. First will be shown, briefly, the genesis and the actors of it. Then will be shown the main sources on which it is founded, as well as the data base at present being constituted. Lastly, I shall mention some of the first results of the inquiry, particularly those about women musicians – a subject I am particularly concerned with – as well as the example of a musician who came from the Netherlands to sing in French churches.

* * *

¹ In the lesser churches, very small collegiate or parish churches, the choir was limited to a few part time, poorly paid choristers and sometimes one organist or lady organist. If, in monastic establishments, the singing was generally done by the members of the community, the organist, on the other hand, was fairly frequently recruited specifically, at any rate when the abbey church boasted a workable organ.

The genesis and the actors of the inquiry

2001: A conference (arranged by Professor Bernard Dompnier, of Clermont-Ferrand University) enabled historians and a few musicologists – especially from the Versailles *Centre de Musique Baroque* (CMBV) – to gather together ². Here was tested a first experiment based on some musicians of 1790. This study concerned only a hundred musicians practising in ten churches in five towns of middle-west France, from Le Mans to Poitiers, but it already showed that an enormous amount of information could be extracted from the 1790 sources ³.

This experiment brought about a first collective work started later on at the University of Clermont-Ferrand: in 2005, an article showed the results based on an initial corpus of 900 musicians... and seven lady musicians ⁴. This collective article treated the information collected in the course of the *in extenso* study of the three cartons entitled “musicians and officers attached to chapters and churches”, keeping (we thought) the essential of the records sent to Paris in 1790-1791 and kept in the Archives Nationales ⁵.

During the following years, an informal research group was constituted, with teacher-researchers from various French universities (Clermont-Ferrand, Le Mans, Montpellier, Dijon...), Doctorate and Master students, colleagues from secondary schools or Music Schools, even a few retired people. This group meets on the occasion of colloquies or symposia, and communicates intensively through an internet forum, the chief means of sharing the knowledge being accumulated. Under the ægis of the CHEC ⁶, laboratory of Clermont University, and the Baroque Music Center at Versailles, conferences have brought together these researchers working on the project in October 2005, 2007 and 2010.

In 2008, a special issue of the *Revue de Musicologie* presented an important intermediate report, in fifteen articles and 300 pages ⁷. Three years after the 2005 article, it was indeed necessary to take stock of the advancement of the work, and especially to test more precisely the possibilities which the data base opened to research. On the one hand, for the biographical knowledge of some individuals, e.g. Étienne-Bonaventure Laurier, counter-tenor, serpent-player and composer ⁸, Jean-Baptiste Métoyen, a musician of the Royal Chapel ⁹, or again Jacques Foncès, an Albi music master ¹⁰. On the other hand, for local or regional studies, like, for instance, those on Brittany ¹¹, Moulins ¹² or Toulouse ¹³, as well as

² Bernard DOMPNIER [ed.] *Maîtrises & Chapelles aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles, Des Institutions au service de Dieu [Choir schools & Chapels in the 17th and 18th centuries. Musical institutions in the service of God]*, Colloque, Le Puy-en-Velay, October 2001, Presses Universitaires Blaise-Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, 2003, 568 pages.

³ Sylvie GRANGER, “Tours et détours des musiciens d’Église dans la France du centre-ouest aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles” [Ups and downs of church musicians in mid-west France in the 17th and 18th centuries], *Maîtrises et Chapelles...*, pp. 291-314.

⁴ Groupe de Prosopographie des Musiciens, “Les musiciens d’Église en 1790. Premier état d’une enquête sur un groupe professionnel” [Church Musicians in 1790. First state of an inquiry on a professional group], *Annales historiques de la Révolution Française*, 2005, pp. 57-82.

⁵ Archives Nationales : DXIX 90, 91 and 92. Michel LE MOËL, “La situation des musiciens d’Église en France à la veille de la Révolution” [The Situation of Church Musicians in France on the eve of the Revolution], *Recherches sur la musique française classique*, Paris, Picard, 1975, pp. 191-243.

⁶ CHEC : Centre d’Histoire “Espaces et Cultures”, Université Blaise-Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand (France).

⁷ “Musiciens d’Église en Révolution” [Church Musicians in Revolution], *Revue de Musicologie*, tome 94, 2008, n^o2, pp. 271-573.

⁸ Bernard DOMPNIER, “Étienne-Bonaventure Laurier, haute-contre, serpentiste et compositeur : itinéraire d’un musicien d’Église” [Étienne-Bonaventure Laurier, counter-tenor, serpent-player and composer, itinerary of a Church musician], *Revue de Musicologie*, t.94, 2008, n^o2, pp. 387-401; and Jean DURON, “Les *Mélanges* de Laurier” [Laurier *Miscellanies*], *Revue de Musicologie*, t.94, 2008, n^o2, pp. 403-421.

⁹ Hervé AUDÉON & Cécile DAVY-RIGAUD, “Jean-Baptiste Métoyen (1733-1822), Parcours et œuvre d’un musicien de la Chapelle royale, de l’Ancien Régime au début de la Restauration” [Jean-Baptiste Métoyen (1733-1822), the Life and Work of a Musician of the Royal Chapel, from the Ancien Régime to the beginning of the Restoration], *Revue de Musicologie*, t.94, 2008, n^o2, pp. 347-385.

¹⁰ Françoise TALVARD, “Être musicien pendant la Révolution : Jacques Foncès (1744-1813), maître de musique de la cathédrale d’Albi” [Being a Musician during the Revolution: Jacques Foncès (1744-1813), Music master in Albi Cathedral], *Revue de Musicologie*, t.94, 2008, n^o2, pp. 513-530.

¹¹ Marie-Claire MUSSAT, “Les musiciens d’Église en Bretagne, des citoyens-musiciens” [Church musicians in Brittany, musician-citizens], *Revue de Musicologie*, t.94, 2008, n^o2, pp. 423-430.

for research in depth on some specific themes, such as the musicians who were priests or clerics ¹⁴, and women-musicians ¹⁵.

Since 2009, the inquiry has taken a more official turn, the National Agency for Research having recognized the MUSÉFREM project (MUSique d'Église en France à l'Époque Moderne) [Church Music in France in Modern Times], a project including the prosopographic inquiry on the musicians of 1790. This means that pursuing the field inquiry and constituting the data base are being financially helped during the 2009-2012 period.

Around 1790: an exceptional moment for documents

Now is the time to explain why we have chosen to focus the inquiry on the “1790 generation”. In order to obtain a global vision of the musical profession, one had to be able to obtain a cross section, presenting a full picture at a precise time for the whole of the French realm. So, the date when we had to place this cross section imposed itself, strongly and evidently. Only one moment in history has left a homogeneous documentation potentially concerning all church musicians: the turning-point between the Old Regime and the beginning of the French Revolution, a turning-point symbolized by the year 1790.

Indeed, starting in the summer of 1789, came a series of decisions that modified in depth the aspect of the Church in France. As a reminder, first the abolition of privileges during the famous “Night of August 4th” [1789], meaning especially the abolition of tithes, and, consequently, the drying up of part of the financing of the Church; a little later, the secularization of clergy property (November 2nd 1789), then the suppression of monastic orders (February 1790) and lastly, the “Civil Constitution of the Clergy” (voted on July 12th 1790), which makes vicars and curates servants of the state. In a few months’ time, all the chapters are consequently dissolved, the abbeys are closed and sold, small parishes are amalgamated, and the dioceses are made to coincide with the newly created departments, which brings down the number of cathedrals from 135 to 83. For the towns that are no longer Episcopal cities, it means an immediate drop in their income. In the whole of the religious world, even if one considers only the material aspects, many people see their conditions of life badly upset. Jean Quéniart speaks of hopes threatened or ruined, “priests who had so far been unable to obtain a curacy, curates expecting preferment” ¹⁶. It is obviously the same for the lay people employed by the Church, who, almost overnight, find themselves in their thousands without a livelihood, whether they were beadles in a cathedral, game-keepers for an abbey, gardeners in a convent... or musicians!

As early as the middle of 1790, those former employees of religious bodies begin to take steps to obtain succour. Facing them, the administration wavers, hesitates, first starts the enormous task of taking a census of the people concerned, grants provisional help, then, in several stages, passes laws. The law of 1st July 1792 “concerning the clerical and lay Singers, Musicians, Officers and Employees of the suppressed Chapters” establishes clear criteria grading succour according to a double scale of age and length of career: to the older ones and/or those who have worked longer, a life pension, to the younger ones or the beginners, a mere “gratification”, “paid once”, what might nowadays be called “laying-off benefit”. From that time, the situation becomes stable and the musicians, like the other

¹² Jean-François HEINTZEN, “Entre église et concert, la pluri-activité des musiciens moulinois au XVIII^e siècle” [Between Church and Concert, the two-sided Activity of the Moulins Musicians in the 18th century], *Revue de Musicologie*, t.94, 2008, n^o2, pp. 309-324.

¹³ Benoît MICHEL, “Les maîtrises et chapelles toulousaines de la Révolution au Concordat” [The Choir-Schools and Chapels in Toulouse, from the Revolution to the Concordat], *Revue de Musicologie*, t.94, 2008, n^o2, pp. 531-557.

¹⁴ Stéphane GOMIS, «Les “clercs-musiciens” en France à la fin du XVIII^e siècle» [The “clerics-cum-musicians” in France at the end of the 18th century], *Revue de Musicologie*, t.94, 2008, n^o2, pp. 275-287.

¹⁵ Sylvie GRANGER, “Les Musiciennes de 1790, Aperçus sur l’invisibilité” [The Women Musicians of 1790, a Glimpse at Invisibility], *Revue de Musicologie*, t.94, 2008, n^o2, pp.289-308.

¹⁶ Jean QUÉNIART, *Le Clergé déchiré, Fidèle ou rebelle ?* [The torn clergy, Faithful or rebellious ?], Rennes, Ouest-France edition, 1988, 134 pages, p.29.

former dependants of the churches and abbeys, receive the promised sums from the nation. All these diverse steps of the proces have, of course, multiplied the traces left in the archives.

Part of those traces can be found in the papers of the *Comité ecclésiastique* in the Archives Nationales. What is the *Comité ecclésiastique*? It is a working party created by the Constituante Assembly, as early as the 12th of August 1789, on a proposal made by Charles-Antoine Chasset, elected as deputy to the *États Généraux* [the States General] by the Villefranche-en-Beaujolais senechalsy. Its task was to organize the concrete consequences of the various changes touching the Church in France.

During a little more than two years, the *Comité ecclésiastique* works very hard, as appears in the 103 cartons and 12 registers of sub-series DXIX in the *Archives Nationales*. So, this very ample fund goes much beyond the three “Musicians” cartons in which the most “visible” musicians had been filed in the course of a first selection, no doubt very soon after the *Comité ecclésiastique* had ceased operating. The leaf by leaf analysis of the 115 cartons and registers of DXIX by the researchers of the inquiry group has enabled us to find hundreds of other musicians.

When the *Comité ecclésiastique* ceased operating, towards the end of 1791, naturally not all the problems of the former officers of the Church were settled, and dossiers of the same kind kept arriving in Paris. They seem to have been dealt with by various ministerial commissions, and they form a part of the F19 sub-series of the *Archives Nationales*, now being studied by the MUSÉFREM prosopographers.

In spite of the fair progress of the operations on the Parisian fund, there remained obscure zones on the French territory. The most striking case in point is that of the Sarthe department, for which not one musician or place of music has so far been met with in the records kept in Paris. Now, it so happens that, having worked at length on the local sources, I have identified nearly 70 musicians working in 1790 in the towns of this department, chiefly in Le Mans and La Flèche¹⁷. Fairly soon, it became clear that the resources of the Parisian archives alone would not achieve the aimed at exhaustiveness. So, it was mandatory to dig into the archives kept in the provinces! And delve into each of the departmental archives, deep into the ocean of the L series.

Indeed, in 1790-1791, the former officers of the churches often take the necessary steps through the local administrations, municipalities, districts and departments, administrations that act tirelessly too, but which do not always send up to Paris the dossiers entrusted to them, or keep a copy before sending them. Hence, the traces of many petitioners are to be found today in the departmental archives presently being explored by the members of the group¹⁸. The dossiers found in the provinces are sometimes also found in the *Archives Nationales*, but, far more often, they complete or replace them. Their contribution is matchless, though this enrichment is achieved at the cost of making the inquiry considerably heavier than when it was originally planned.

The main types of available documents

Whether in the *Archives Nationales* or in the departments, one finds to a considerable extent the same type of documents. The more readily usable are the statements and tables that each administrative district was to draw up and send to Paris. This means large tables set up in columns, giving the names of all the “ecclesiastical pensioners”¹⁹ of a town, district or department, with more or less detailed information (function, age, length of service, address, family situation...) with, sometimes, an interesting column: “observations”.

¹⁷ Sylvie GRANGER, *Les métiers de la musique en pays manceau et fléchois du XVII^e au XIX^e siècle (1661-1850)* [*The Musical Professions in the Le Mans and La Flèche districts, from the 17th to the 19th centuries (1661-1850)*], History Doctorate Thesis, directed by Anne Fillon, Université du Maine (1997), Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2000, 3 volumes, 1 612 pages.

¹⁸ It is also possible punctually to find traces of them in municipal archives. But this is an ocean beyond the forces of the team in the inquiry.

¹⁹ “*Pensionné ecclésiastique*” means any person receiving a pension (or gratification) on account of his — or her — former activity in church service, as a cleric in the proper meaning of the word, or otherwise. Most of the musicians are laymen — or women.

One finds also fairly numerous collective petitions, with a flood of rather general grievances concerning the difficulties the petitioners have to face. But these collective petitions end with fine series of signatures, sometimes accompanied by the professional qualifications (“XXX, singer & musician”) thus giving, in one document, a full view of the musical structure of a church.

However, the richest among the available documents are without a doubt the individual requests. Most often beginning by “humbly beseech”, these requests put forward the situation of one complainant. The less normative texts are particularly fascinating because they approach the tales of real life which the historians of everyday life love. Being rich in details that cannot be found elsewhere, expressed in the author’s own words, they enable us to realize many facets of his mentality²⁰. Very logically, in order to increase his chances of having his full claim recognized, the musician stresses the length of his experience. So, he sets forth a real reconstruction of his career, often buttressed by attestations of past employers. He may also include extracts – duly authenticated – of capitular deliberations, from far in the past or more recent, that had ratified his appointment or his establishment, even his successive pay increases. He also often produces a copy of his baptism certificate to prove his age.

Put side by side these reconstructions of individual careers enable us to outline an analysis covering several decades of the *Ancien Régime*. Indeed the oldest of the musicians performing in 1790 were born under Louis 14th. So, in their collective petition, the musicians attached to Verdun cathedral proclaim that, among them, “there are octogenarians”²¹. Among the aged musicians whose date of birth is known, let us quote Maurice Dobet organist at Châteaudun in 1790, who had been christened at Chartres on 20 February 1713²². So you will understand that the field is eventually much larger than 1790 strictly speaking.

The major tool: the database

In any inquiry with prosopographic aims, the foundation work is always the making of a database.

Technically, for data acquisition, we have chosen the software developed for the Philidor base of the Baroque Music Center of Versailles, whose experience is already a long one²³. Philidor is evolving towards a more ergonomic and efficient presentation, better adapted to Internet consultation.

The conception of the architecture of the notices has been the purpose of long collective reflection to achieve a “made-to-measure” presentation that could best adapt itself to the documentation at our disposal and to the many historical and musicological problems in view. This led to the model of a notice which is fairly complex, long to fill in, which somewhat slows down the overall progress of the project. But its great asset is that it gives broad views of the texts of the documents themselves, sometimes even entered *in-extenso*. As it is a collective tool and not an individual filing system, as it means the edification of a corpus the limits of which are not known in advance, it was necessary to take a long view, to foresee very diverse and wide-ranging questions, even, possibly, later on, other interrogations from future researchers.

In our view, this data base is not at all the aim of the work we have undertaken: it is only a tool to be used to organize the manifold data we gather, in order to be able later to handle and treat them

²⁰ Sylvie GRANGER, “Un chantre borgne à la voix forte. Mathurin Leprêtre, psalteur dans deux collégiales de Laval au XVIII^e siècle” [A One-eyed Singer with a strong Voice. Mathurin Leprêtre, a Psalm-singer in two Collegiate Churches in Laval in the 18th century], *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, tome 116, n°4, december 2009, pp. 73-90.

²¹ F-An : DXIX/090/743/01, undated collective petition [1790-1791] of the musicians of Verdun Cathedral to the Comité ecclésiastique.

²² François CAILLOU, “Les Musiciens des églises collégiales de Châteaudun à la fin du XVIII^e siècle” [The Musicians of the collegiate Churches of Châteaudun at the end of the 18th century], *Société Dunoise, Archéologie, Histoire*, tome XXIV, n°300, 2010, pp. 36-53.

²³ <http://philidor3.cmbv.fr/>

more easily, so that all the possible lessons can be drawn from them, according to the different angles they are studied from.

Connected with a cartography software, it has already proved an incomparable tool to establish illuminating charts. It enables us on the one hand to draw up the cartography of the “places of music” gradually revealing the close musical network of the French realm in 1790²⁴.

On the other hand, one begins to chart flows and shifts which, we hope, will allow us to identify networks of roads, favoured routes used in preference by the musicians of modern times. Where it can be guessed that Paris is not yet the one supreme goal to be reached at all cost. But the work leading to the exploitation of the internal resources of the database is only beginning, since the inquiry itself is not yet completed.

Where are we now ?

As I said above, the “national” Parisian sources will soon be entirely explored (series DXIX over, series F19 well on the way). In the provinces, the summer of 2010 has been rich in new processing of archives (Alpes de Haute-Provence, Doubs, Drôme, Jura, Haut and Bas-Rhin, Somme...). The chart shows clearly the zones of the departments where the records have been examined and those where they have not been. At the date of writing, that is at the end of October 2010, there remain fewer than about ten departments, all in the eastern third of the country, where the inquiry has not yet started. A dozen departments are being processed, to which Paris must be added²⁵. All the other departments have been examined, either by one researcher or a team (“*col*” on the chart means “*collective*”). This is today about three quarters of the country. One can think that the whole of the country will have been explored in the course of 2011. However, not all the documents already found, photographed and analysed, have been transformed into notices. A number of them are still waiting to be processed. The main bottleneck of the inquiry is the computer processing of the notices.

At present, the database comprises over 6000 “document-notices”. The expression “document-notice” deserves a brief explanation. One musician who appears on a great table of servants of the church in his department, who writes a petition (or even several) and who later appears in the accountancy documents for his pension is entitled to as many “document-notices” in the data base. But only one “document-notice” is established for the individual dossier of a musician found wholly made up as such in an archive file, even if this dossier puts together several different documents: here, archivist coherence takes first place.

Almost 9000 proper names are at present entered in the base. But these 9000 names obviously do not mean 9000 musicians: some can be other persons quoted in the same document in company with a musician (e.g. canons or administrators). And above all, among the musicians *stricto sensu* the infinitely changing spelling very often conceals the identities and makes it more difficult to sort out namesakes.

So, how many different musicians? It is today impossible to give a precise number of the musicians found at present. Indeed, they were exactly 907 at the time of the first synthetic article in 2005. At the 2007 symposium about the subject, we had reached almost 1500. But later, when data multiplied and above all when notices could be put on line by several different contributors, it became difficult to go on counting in a centralized manner. The figure given in 2009 at the Bordeaux symposium was already an estimate: about 2000²⁶.

²⁴ See examples about places of music in Auvergne in *Les Bas-choeurs d’Auvergne et du Velay, Le Métier de musicien d’Église aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* [*Low choirs in Auvergne and Velay, The trade of church musician in the 17th and 18th centuries*], dir. Bernard Dompnier, Clermont-Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2010, 404 pages.

²⁵ The processing of the specifically Parisian archives (meaning here those that are outside the “national” series, such as the papers of the *Comité ecclésiastique*) is a lengthy piece of work. It is being coordinated by Dr. François Caillou, a historian teaching at Châteaudun.

²⁶ Bernard DOMPNIER, Sylvie GRANGER, Isabelle LANGLOIS, « Deux mille musiciens et musiciennes d’Église en 1790 », *Célèbres ou obscurs. Biographies et prosopographies : sources et approches nouvelles* [“2000 church musicians, men and women, in 1790”],

Synthesizing these “document-notices” and above all sorting out the namesakes and the various spellings of the same surnames, biographical notices will in time put together the data concerning one and the same individual. They alone will at last enable us to give exact figures for the total “workforce”. We are aiming for 3000 musicians!

Why is the figure of 3000 musicians performing in the churches in 1790 looked forward to for the end of the inquiry in 2012? First because this figure is likely, given the progress observed lately (each department explored brings in many new names, sometimes several dozens). Then because the Parisian institutions have not yet been entered in the accounts (except those appearing in DXIX), which promises a great many extra names. At last because it is the figure estimated at the time. Indeed, in 1789, a musician of Chartres cathedral mentions “the Corps of singers and musicians attached to cathedral and collegiate churches and a few regular communities” and he states “these corps together make an ensemble of over 3000 subjects of the King”²⁷. Of course, as this is a letter whose aims to claim a fair representation of church musicians in the States General, its author may be suspected of some exaggeration – and, moreover, what statistics could support his figure?

However, this figure is not so very far from our own estimation at this stage of the inquiry. An estimation that will be strongly confirmed by the end of 2012. Whatever the case, this prosopographic base will put together the most important corpus ever assembled as regards old musicians.

Among the musicians of 1790, how many are women?

If it is not possible at present to give the exact number of musicians in French churches at the end of the Old Regime, it is on the other hand possible to give the exact figure of the women musicians found presently.

Indeed one of my own fields of research concerns them, and I centralize as they come the ad hoc results of the researches of the group. In the 2005 article, which, you’ll remember, is based on the three cartons of sub-series DXIX, officially dedicated to musicians, only 7 women organists were recorded²⁸. This figure shows clearly how little they were professionally visible: very few women had been considered as fully musicians in the course of the first thematic selection made very early in the papers of the *Comité ecclésiastique*. In 2008, the article dedicated to the women musicians of 1790 in the *Revue de Musicologie* drew sixty women out of invisibility²⁹. There are now more than 110 of them, and one can hope to discover a few more, notably in the Paris convents and churches, which are still being investigated.

This figure may seem low. However, almost all these women were so far totally unknown: about ten of them were already mentioned by the historians having dealt with the theme³⁰. Moreover, they are women really active in a religious establishment in 1790. To them can be added at least as many women organists found as being active in the 18th century before 1790. Almost all of them were also unknown so far, or had never been studied.

An important element can account for the comparatively small number of women brought to light. One thing must always be said again and again, where women in artistic life are concerned: they are frequently invisible in the sources. Substitutes, *locum tenens*, casually employed... women’s professional status is far weaker than men’s. Hence they do not all feel (or they are not felt) concerned

Famous or obscure. Biographies and prosopographies : new sources and approaches], 134^e congrès national du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, Bordeaux, 22 avril 2009 -to be published.

²⁷ A.n : B III/45, p. 407 à 411, letter from Edme Dupont, musician of Chartres cathedral, to Necker, general director of finances, 12 March 1789 (research François Caillou).

²⁸ See note 4.

²⁹ See note 15.

³⁰ Norbert DUFOURCQ, *Le Livre de l'orgue français, 1589 – 1789* [*The French organ book, 1589-1789*], Paris, Picard, 1969-1985, 5 tomes. Marcel-Jean VILCOSQUI, *La Femme dans la musique française sous l'Ancien Régime* [*Woman in French music during the Old Regime*], Paris, Panthéon editions, 2001, 238 pages. Sylvie GRANGER, *Musiciens dans la Ville, 1600-1850* [*Musicians in the town, 1600-1850*], Paris, Belin, 2002, 320 pages.

by the steps to be taken in 1790-1791. Being seldom employed by powerful churches (cathedral or collegiate), women are rather organists in parish churches, which have not necessarily been suppressed: the organists of the churches which have been kept have (logically) not petitioned for succour, not, at any rate, at the beginning of the Revolution.

The women musicians whose names we have are to be found scattered all over the realm, from Dunkerque to Alet. However some slight differences can be observed: organ keyboards are less often entrusted to female hands in the southern half of the kingdom, and most of the women found so far were at work in the Parisian Basin taken broadly, from the border of Brittany to Lorraine, from Picardy to the Loire Valley.

So the systematic 1790 inquiry, and the excellent sources on which it is based, have led to the discovery of many previously unknown women musicians. This suggests that the place of women in the musical structures of the modern period is to be revalued. Even if it is felt that the “under water” part is still far from negligible, the inquiry in progress has already deeply renewed our knowledge of the lady musicians of yore.

Philippe Van-Arcken, a voice from the Netherlands singing in France

Presenting this work to the European scientific community through *Sounds of the City* puts a lot at stake: I do not doubt that fecund collaboration will naturally come, round the new resource supplied by the MUSÉFREM data base. Indeed, in time, the data will be put at the disposal of all researchers. First of all in the shape of a printed note – giving only very much abridged notices –, then, in time, the database will be accessible on line ³¹.

Now, even if the territory studied is intentionally limited to the old French kingdom, some lessons of the inquiry can be enlarged beyond the frontiers, since the Church musical structures work in similar ways in the whole of catholic Europe. Moreover, the musical milieu being characterized by its great geographic mobility, all the church musicians in France were not necessarily French. Some of them came from neighbouring countries, and a small portion from the Netherlands or Flanders !

For all these reasons, to end with, I will call up the figure of Philippe Van Arcken. This musician was born in, or about, Maastricht, “diocese of Holland” ³² around 1743. No doubt he was formed somewhere in a church music school in the neighbourhood ? May be a researcher from Northern Europe has found him when he was a choirboy in some church near by in the years 1750/1760 ?

At what date exactly did Philippe Van Arcken arrive in France? The first date known at present is the 6th of February 1773, when he was received at Angers cathedral “as singing bass” to take part in “psalm-singing, plain-chant and music” ³³. Two years later, in February 1775, he is reprimanded, together with two other singers for their haste in leaving the Choir before even the end of the service ³⁴. He probably leaves Angers shortly after this incident. The Angevin capitular register does not say.

The same Van Arcken is met again at Tours at the beginning of 1776, engaged as a singing bass by the powerful Saint-Martin Collegiate, with a generous salary ³⁵. Only “a few weeks after his arrival”, he was scolded for repeatedly arriving late or even failing to attend matins and various services, then for “faulty singing and residence” ³⁶. It is not known if he still sings there after Christmas in 1777 ³⁷.

³¹ The database is already accessible on line, but only contributors can have access to it.

³² Vienne departmental archives: G569, 16 October 1784 (research Sylvie Granger).

³³ Maine-et-Loire departmental archives: G 271, 6 February 1773. Let us point out that, at that time, and since 1728, another musician from the North was singing at Angers cathedral: Antoine-Marie-Joseph DÉDOYART (or Dédoyard), born in the diocese of Liège about 1705. He died at Angers, 5 December 1781.

³⁴ Maine-et-Loire departmental archives: G 271, 8 February 1775 (research Sylvie Granger).

³⁵ Van Arcken receives 900 *livres* a year, that is 500 “*en titre*” (meaning he is a titular incumbent of his post). Tours, Library of Saint-Martin’s Rectorate: capitular register of Saint-Martin’s, 8 February and 4 March 1776 (research Christophe Maillard); Indre-et-Loire departmental archives: G 590, 25 février 1776.

³⁶ Tours, Library of Saint-Martin’s Rectorate: capitular register of Saint-Martin’s, 28 March, 27 July and 7 September 1776 (research Christophe Maillard).

In December 1783, he is engaged by the chapter of Saintes, after an audition. But here too, his employers were very quickly disappointed. Two months later, he quarrelled with a Swiss soldier stationed in the town, the canons admonish him several times, then, at the beginning of August 1784, they discharge him for “misbehaviour”³⁸.

From Saintes, Van Arcken goes to Limoges, where he receives a gratification for singing a month in the cathedral. In mid-October 1784, “Philippe Wanarcken, from the diocese of Holland” is received as “musician *basso profundo*” at Saint-Hilaire in Poitiers “for the times it will please the Company” and he get a small indemnity “for the expense of his journey”³⁹. Less than five months later, he is already on his way and, before Easter 1785, he again presents himself at Angers. The canons of the cathedral probably remember his first passage, ten years before. So they cautiously agree to keep him “so long as his behaviour is satisfactory”⁴⁰. At the end of the summer 1775, he is still a “musician at Angers cathedral church”⁴¹. But at Easter the next year he is received as a chorister at Rennes cathedral... and dismissed six months later “being forbidden ever to appear again in the choir” on account of “much considerable dissatisfaction”⁴².

Several stages are now missing. No doubt Van Arcken, the man from the North, made purposefully his way southward, because the collective inquiry finds him in 1790 as a chorister “since a year ago” at Aix-en-Provence cathedral. There he receives his salary until 6 April 1791, when he leaves Saint-Sauveur cathedral, probably the town, and even France.

Here at present the trail stops. Philippe Van Arcken is now 47 or 48 years of age. He may have chosen to go back to his native land? If such was the case, it can be hoped that some reader of this article will be able to complete this “life”, still incomplete, to be sure, but already rich in eight successive stages. A man with a fine voice willingly appreciated by chapters, but a difficult temper, perhaps handicapped by a particular problem (drunkenness?) or chronic sense of dissatisfaction... so can be outlined an unstable character, a fine example of the wandering musician sometimes welcomed by the churches of yore.

* * *

On reading this, it will be understood that the exploitation of the database is still in its infancy. We aim presently at finishing the inquiry in the field of the archives reasonably early, which should be done during 2011.

Then will begin the stage of exploitation, under all possible angles, for a global study on the one hand, but also for many multiple thematic studies – the one touched on above, on women musicians, is only one example. It will be possible to know, and compare with one another, all the “places of music”, the number of musicians, the distribution of voices... But it will also be possible to carry on a thousand particular studies, e.g. to study specifically the careers of organists or serpent-players... to compare those of counter-tenors and those of basses... shed light once for all on the migration phenomena and

³⁷ Van Arcken is still at Saint-Martin of Tours at the end of 1777 (Indre-et-Loire departmental archives: G590, 2 April then 6 December 1777). But after this date, no mention of him is made in the Tours sources. See Christophe MAILLARD, *Le chapitre et les chanoines de la “Noble et Insigne Eglise de Saint-Martin de Tours” au XVIII^e siècle (1709-1790)* [Chapter and canons of Tours Saint-Martin’s in 18th century], History Doctorate Thesis, directed by Philippe Loupès, Université Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux III, 2007, 1 627 pages.

³⁸ Charente-Maritime departmental archives : G 251, 12 December 1783, February, March, June and 2 August 1784 (research Bernard Dompnier).

³⁹ Vienne departmental archives : G 569, 16 October 1784 ; G 570, 6 November 1784 (research Sylvie Granger).

⁴⁰ Maine-et-Loire departmental archives: G 272, 7 March 1785 (remuneration from the 1st of March), 27 April et 4 July 1785 (research Sylvie Granger).

⁴¹ This is how he signs his name at the wedding of a dancing master, François Salade, called *La Vigne*, at La Flèche (Sarthe departmental archives: parochial register of La Flèche St-Thomas, 12 September 1785).

⁴² Marie-Claire MUSSAT, *Musique et société à Rennes aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles* [Music and society at Rennes in 17th and 18th centuries], Genève, Minkoff, 1988, 446 pages, p. 41-42 (28 March and 25 September 1786).

delineate more clearly the “routes of music”, all over France, and even Europe; or, on the contrary, concentrate on one region, or one particular age group – choir-boys, or the forty years old of the “1790 generation” –, or one type of church, only cathedrals, or only collegiate or parish churches. It will at last be possible to draw accurate pictures of the musicians for which we have the best dossiers, which will allow an interesting marriage of prosopography and biography, each shedding light on the other.

The prosopographic inquiry on the musicians of 1790 makes it possible to draw out of oblivion hundreds of forgotten musicians, like this Philippe Van Arcken, born in the Netherlands, whose voice sounded in succession in so many French churches. So, it can be hoped we shall soon know in depth, and fully, the professional group of church musicians in a large part of the 18th century.

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