

**Luc Rombouts, De oorsprong van de beiaard. Voorlopers, ontstaan en ontwikkeling tot 1530, Gent (Skribis) 2019, 372 p. (Historische monografieën Vlaanderen, 4), ISBN, 978-94-929-4481-8 EUR 30,00.**

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»Beiaard« is the Dutch word for carillon, an instrument with a sound that can carry over a town centre, an abbey or a university campus and be heard by many people, intentionally or just while passing by. In the Low Countries, in France, Germany and England, the carillon is a central part of the soundscape of many cities since the Middle Ages. The author of this book about the origins of the carillon, Luc Rombouts, has published a revised Dutch version of his PhD thesis »The Origin of the Carillon. Roots, Conception and Development« until 1530, that he completed in 2016 at the University of Utrecht. Himself an internationally renowned carillonneur<sup>1</sup>, he writes in a very pleasant style and covers equally well history and campanology. While in his earlier book »Zingend Brons« the author had built in 21 chapters a very broad and dense historical and cultural panorama going from Chinese antiquity to contemporary America, here he impressively re-centres his research to the origins of carillons and carillon playing during the late medieval period in the Low Countries which includes present-day Belgium, The Netherlands and Northern France.

The book is divided into three parts, each containing three chapters. The time span is clearly indicated by the subtitle »Development until 1530«. Although the author takes into account written sources and iconography from regions beyond that, the field of investigation after the third chapter is limited to the urban culture of the Low Countries, where the carillon developed into the instrument we know today.

The very first chapter starts with the use of handbells in Egyptian monastic communities and its spreading to Western Europe, as can be seen in early Celtic texts and visual images. Rombouts stipulates here a Celtic rather than a Latin origin of the use of handbells in a monastic context (p. 1–9). The second chapter makes clear in its documentation of different forms of writings (like chronicles, annals, letters, etc.) how the use of bells expanded with monachism all over Western Europe (p. 10–23).

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<sup>1</sup> Rombouts is since 1991 the city-carillonneur of Tienen, as well as permanent carillonneur at Park Abbey and at the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) and a frequently invited solo and duo performer (with Twan Bearda) in Europe and the U. S.



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The geographical focus becomes clear from the third chapter, when the author focuses first on medieval text sources from 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century France and the Low Countries like »Ysengrimus« and »Le Roman du Renard« (p. 25–33). Then, he examines historiographical sources from Flanders and the North of the Netherlands (p. 36–50) in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and discusses musical aspects like the use of bell sets as melodic instruments which were played manually with little hammers. These sets were hosted in bell towers in order to be well-heard during solemn processions in the centre of the town. He provides the particular beautiful example of the Count of Flanders Louis' victorious entrance in Bruges in 1382, apparently accompanied by bell ringing and carillon playing as described in the three-part motet »Comes Flandrie« – »Rector creatorum« – »In cimbali« as follows: »melodias cymbalorum« – »cymbalis inequis« and »in cymbalis benesonantibus laudate dominum« (p. 50–52). The main problem being the absence of surviving instruments from this period, Rombouts concludes his third chapter with the establishment of the carillon as a musical instrument in western Europe (p. 55).

In the second part of this book, the author examines the development from cymbala (chapter four) to small indoor automatic carillons. Whereas scholars like Sachs held on to the earlier interpretation as textual tradition of the cymbala<sup>3</sup>, Rombouts clearly advocates for an actual use as solo-instrument, for accompaniment or didactical purposes (p. 69–72)<sup>4</sup>. In chapters five and six he expands his focus to bell-wheels (p. 73–81) and small automatic carillons, closely linked to hour-ringing chimes (p. 82–132). The author considers in his detailed contextualisation for all the above-mentioned devices their textual sources, specific use, iconographic sources or descriptions and musical aspects (when possible, with melodic reconstruction).

The third part is the longest, with over a hundred pages about the coming of use of carillons as a melodic instrument built with stationary and tuned bronze bells<sup>5</sup>. Chapter seven discusses the first known examples of a mechanism for producing a short melody with two bells as introduction to a time-indicating clockwork. The author continues to provide documents attesting a large number of one, two or three bell mechanisms in the Netherlands and northern France (p. 147–177).

<sup>3</sup> »Über die tatsächliche Verbreitung und den praktischen Gebrauch mittelalterlicher Cymbala im Sinne realer Instrumente lässt sich nur mutmaßen«, Klaus-Jürgen Sachs, Cymbala, in: Laurenz Lütteken (ed.), Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart Online, 2016, <https://www.mgg-online.com/mgg/stable/20308> (09.03.2021).

<sup>4</sup> See also André Lehr, Het middeleeuwse klokkenspel van Bethlehem, in: Klok en klepel 27 (1981), p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> See Luc Rombouts, Art. Carillon, Oxford Music Online (2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.04929> (09.03.2021).



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Then, in chapter eight, Rombouts presents the extended music-producing mechanisms in bell towers in England and the Low Countries between 1460 and 1530, the number of bells growing from four to six (p. 178–224). The melodies played were mostly incipits of well-known plainchant pieces («Salve Regina», «Requiem», «Conditor alme», «Ut queant laxis», etc.). The ninth chapter culminates into the development of a playing mechanism with a keyboard and the rapid spread of the carillon with up to twenty bells over the Low Countries between 1480 and 1530 (p. 225–276).

With this study, Rombouts greatly succeeds in placing the carillon into a specific historical context, concentrating on its much less studied early history of bell-playing-practices such as on handbells and cymbalas as depicted in iconographic, literary and historical sources. The book is very well documented and contains pertinent images in outstanding quality, black and white and also in colours (in the annex). The reader learns much of the origins of the carillons and wants to certainly experience standing or sitting in the vicinity of a bell tower during a carillon concert, preferably played by the author of the book himself.



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