

Il musicista THOMAS LEPORIS a Milano

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Papal Patronage and the Music of St. Peter's, 1380-15-13

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In the 1470s Cornuel sent a verse letter to Nicholas Rembert in Rome, in which his ties to France are plainly stated. Pleading for assistance in procuring benefices, Cornuel reveals that he and Rembert were both from Boullenois. He also mentioned two other French musicians; Michault and **Leporis**. Michault is most likely Michault Sauvage de le Lutin, a singer in the French Royal Chapel from 1461-62 to 1469-70. And **Leporis** is surely the singer Thomas **Leporis**, in the papal chapel from 1458 to 1472 (thus he and Cornuel were in Rome at the same time). In the 1470s **Leporis** went to Paris and Savoy recruiting singers for Milan, implying that he also had some more stable connection with Paris. Michault's dates are in Perkins, "Musical Patronage at the Royal Court of France under Charles VII and Louis XI (1422-83)," 554; on **Leporis** see Starr, "Music and Music Patronage," 191-96. For Cornuel, there is André Pirro, "Jean Cornuel, vicaire à Cambrai"; and E. Droz, "Notes sur Me Jean Cornuel, dit Verjus."

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Da: Starr, "Music and Music Patronage," 191-96

THOMAS LEPORIS (LE LIBVRE). In October 1472, Leporis arrived at the court of Galeazzo Sforza, Duke of Milan, armed with the following testimonial from Branda da Castiglione, Bishop of Como and advisor to the Duke:

...Yesterday, the bearer, Magister Thomas, arrived here [in Milan]; he is a Frenchman, just come from Rome, and having obtained certain benefices, was returning to France--to Rouen, where he has a benefice. Being on terms of great intimacy and friendship with me, and learning that I was here, he paid me a visit. I know him to be an excellent singer, both as a performer and in matters theoretical. By virtue of having been educated in the chapel of the Duke of Burgundy from childhood, and then having performed to great praise in the papal chapel, he has arrived at such perfection in his art, that truly, I believe that were one to search all of France, it would be difficult to find his like. For this reason, as the news that Your Lordship wants to establish a notable and most worthy chapel becomes more widespread each day, I have advised Magister Thomas to present himself to Your Sublimity, in order that, should it please you to hear him perform with your other singers, you might do as you see fit. I remind Your Lordship that he is known to all the good singers in France and at the Roman court, and that he knows all of them; so that he would be able to administer and direct a chapel as well as anyone. He is compliant, extremely affable, and would do everything necessary to please Your Lordship. Therefore, it occurred to me to send him on, so that you might, if it pleases you, hear him and either retain him, or send him on his way.²⁵²

Contemporary records confirm all of the biographical particulars of this

²⁵⁰...arrivò qui Magistro Thomaxo, franzoso, exhibitore presente, quale vene da Roma, et ottenuti certi beneficii se ne ritornava in Franza, ad Roharo dove ei è beneficiato. Costui havendo con mi grande domestichezza et amicitia, et sentendo che jo era qui, me è venuto ad visitare. Et jo conoscendolo excellentissimo cantore, si in pratica como etiamdio in theorica, et per essere fin da sua pueritia allevato in la Cappella del duca de Borgogna, et poy praticato et stato con gran sua laude in la Cappella del papa, è venuto de tale perfectione in la sua facultà che veramente jo stimo, che chi cercasse tutta la Franza, sarebbe difficile cosa de trovare un suo simile. Et per questo divulgandose ogni di più la fama che V. Sig.ria vole fare una notabile et degnissima Cappella, ho confortato il dicto Magistro Thomaxo ad venire alla presentia della sublimità vostra, addiochè piacendogli ad quella de odirlo insieme con li altri suoi Cantori, possa fare como gli pare. Ricordando ad V. Sig.ria che costuy è cognosciuto da tutti li boni cantori de Franza et de Corte da Roma; et luy similmente cognosca li altri, per modo che per derizare et governare una cappella, sarebbe

letter. In 1444, Duke Philip of Burgundy did audition a Thomas Le Lièvre, "chanteur de Rouen", for which trial the singer was paid 10 fl. Three years later a singer with the same name was appointed to the ducal chapel; he was to retain this appointment until 1453.²³¹ Castiglione's letter implies that the singer transferred directly to the papal chapel from Burgundy; in fact, there is a five-year lacuna in Leporis' *curriculum vitae*. The documents are silent about his whereabouts between 1453 and 1458.²³²

In early November 1458, Leporis, along with Monstrocul, Cernier, and Beau noir, was among a group of musicians who had been recruited to the new pope's chapel.²³³ He remained a papal singer for nearly fourteen years,

²³¹Marix, *Histoire*, pp. 202 and 249-52. Marix concludes, as does the author, that the "chanteur de Rouen" auditioned in 1444 and the singer finally engaged for the ducal chapel are the same person. "Leporis" is simply a version of Lepraha, the Latin for the town of Le Lièvre, in the province of Haute-Rhin in Eastern France. (*Orbus latinus*, v. 2, p. 365). At some point, the musician--or his ancestors--must have settled in the diocese of Rouen.

²³²It is impossible that Leporis should have left the Burgundian chapel for anything less than employment in another chapel of the first rank. The letter of recommendation for Leporis suggests that he had spent considerable time in France ("he is known to all of the good singers in France...and he knows all of them"). Unfortunately, Leporis' name does not figure in the published rosters of the major secular chapels in France and Savoy during this period. (That is, in the royal chapels, the Sainte-Chapelle of Bourges, the chapel of René d'Anjou, and the ducal chapel of Savoy). A "Messire Thomas, chanteur", however, was among the highest-paid singers of the chapel of Charles, duc d'Orleans in 1455. A colleague of messire Thomas was none other than Guillaume le Rouge (a.k.a. Guillaume Ruby), for many years a singer in the Burgundian chapel. It is at least possible that Leporis transferred, two years after le Rouge, from the chapel of Philip the Good to that of his ally and relative by marriage, Charles d'Orleans. (For the relationship between the two dukes, see Vaughan, *Philip the Good*, pp. 123-25; on "messire Thomas" see Dahnk, "Musikausübung", p. 184).

²³³Although Leporis was not officially entered onto the chapel roster until December, he was included among the chapel singers who received a subvention for the purchase of a horse, in a payment dated 13 November 1458. (ASR MC 834, f. 45r).

until the autumn of 1472.²²⁸

During this time, Leporis of course did as the majority of his colleagues did: he sought the present financial reward and future security of ecclesiastical preferment. And like his colleagues, Leporis aimed at benefices located in or near Rouen, the diocese of his affiliation. The pope received and assented to Leporis' petitions for canonries in Lisieux and Rouen, and for the rectorship of a parish church in that diocese. Pius' successor was to grant Leporis another canonry, in Laon. Again like so many other papal musicians, Leporis made the seemingly obligatory, and almost invariably unsuccessful bid for a canonry at the cathedral of Cambrai.²²⁹

The most arresting petition by far--one that places Leporis in a rather different light from his colleagues--was his first supplication to Pius II, dated 8 May 1460.²³⁰ Beginning uncharacteristically, not with the usual description of a desired benefice, but with a rhetorical allusion to scripture, "Cum psalmista dicat venite et reddite", Leporis goes on to request a leave of absence in order to fulfill a vow to visit the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It must have taken a great deal of courage for a cleric thus to propose to venture into the Eastern Mediterranean at a time when the pope's armada against the Turks was beginning to assemble in the

²²⁸Leporis was a member of the *cappella* of Paul II at the pontiff's death in July 1471. (ASR MC 844, f. 214v). The *Mandati Camerali* for the early years of the reign of Sixtus IV have been lost, but we may assume that Leporis remained in papal service until his departure for France, in October 1472. (In a letter of 1473 the Duke of Milan describes Leporis as having been "a singer in the Apostolic Chapel under four [i.e., three] popes". Galeazzo must have been referring to popes Pius II, Paul II, and Sixtus IV; he erred in counting in their predecessor, Calixtus III). Cf. Motta, "Musici", p. 306.

²²⁹ASV RS 363, f. 263v; RV 523, ff. 124-25v (Rouen); DC 32, f. 119 (Laon); RL 340, ff. 102r-4r; RS 553, ff. 223r-6r (Cambrai).

²³⁰ASV RS 529, ff. 278v-79r.

Adriatic harbor of Classe. In the event, prudence moderated piety; Leporis did not actually embark on his pilgrimage until after the death of Pius II and the disbanding of his holy crusade against the Turks.²²⁷ To the usual mixture of reasons for which musicians remained in papal service-- profit and professional pride--we must add, in Leporis' case, a few grains of genuine piety.

Thomas Leporis had left Rome in order to retire, like so many other papal musicians, to a canonry in the cathedral of his native diocese. He allowed himself to be diverted briefly into the ducal chapel of Milan. There he served for perhaps eighteen months. A substantial portion of his responsibilities appears to have been in the area of recruitment. Leporis travelled to Savoy and to Paris in search of qualified singers for the newly formed musical establishment of Galeazzo Sforza.²²⁸ By 1474 Leporis had

²²⁷There is no sign of his absence from regular service in the chapel during Pius' reign. But on 2 June 1466 Leporis received a special payment of his salary for May; the payment bore the additional notation, "qui absens est". From June through August, Leporis' name appears in the rosters with a cross beside it. He is dropped from the lists altogether from September through November. During these same six months, the papal Treasurer ordered the disbursement of a sum sufficient for the salaries of the papal singers, including the missing Leporis. Clearly, the singer was finally discharging the sacred obligation for which a paid leave of absence had been authorized during the preceding papal reign.

²²⁸Leporis must have been dispatched on his recruiting tour almost immediately after having been engaged. On 3 November 1472 the Duke signed formal letters of introduction on Leporis' behalf to the Milanese ambassador to the French court, and to Johannes Ockeghem, Master of the French royal chapel. Leporis also carried a letter of introduction to Yolande, Duchess of Savoy. He served in the chapel of the Sforza for just a little over one year; by 1474 he had been dropped from the roster of singers.

During his engagement in the Milanese court chapel, Leporis attempted to procure one last provision from the Holy See. The Duke wrote to his representative at the Curia, instructing him to attempt to secure the patronage of Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere (the future Julius II) on Leporis' behalf. Apparently the musician had, before leaving Rome, arranged for the assistance of Cardinal Bessarion in

resumed his northward journey to Rouen and retirement. To Brando Castiglione's acute biographical and critical remarks we must add one last observation, that Thomas Leporis, in his long career as a musician, had left his mark on three of the principal musical establishments of his time: those of Burgundy, Milan, and the *cappella pontificia* in Rome.

Da: Archivio storico lombardo

sigliere ducale Branda di Castiglione, ad esempio, aveva avvertito Galeazzo Maria alla fine d'ottobre 1472 che era di passaggio, proveniente da Roma e diretto in Francia, maestro Tomaso Leporis « eccellentissimo cantore, sì in pratica como etiandio in theorica, et per essere fin da sua pueritia allevato in la Cappella del duca di Borgogna, et poy praticato et stato con gran sua laude in la cappella del papa ». Poichè il vescovo è al corrente che il duca « vole fare una notabile et degnissima Cappella », e sa anche che quel tal Leporis è quanto mai adatto « per derizare et governare una capella », si è permesso di consigliare il musicista a

Roma, di passaggio a Milano per la Francia, vi si fermava. Egli aveva cantato, prima che nella cappella papale, in quella del Duca di Borgogna. Ma a meglio imparare a conoscerlo gioverà udire gli elogi dalle penne di Branda da Castiglione, consigliere

Venerabilis amice noster carissime. Mittentes in illas regiones d. Thomam Leporis, clericum et Canonicum Rothomagensem, ac Cardinum de Bosco ad conducendos quosdam cantores ad servitia nostra, commisimus sibi nonnulla Revtie Vestre nomine nostro refferenda. Eam

dux Mediolani etc.

per Philippum

Jacobus.

Questo Leporis, di casato francese forse Lièvre o Le Lièvre (1),