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Playing on the Harp Strings of the Soul Vision and Audition in Medingen Convent

The history of imagination, of conjuring up powerful images and making them come alive for a wider audience, is deeply rooted in medieval spirituality. The nuns of Medingen in Northern Germany drew on a long tradition of divine visions and auditions when they composed and illuminated their prayer-books. After a reform of the convent in the late 15th century they wanted to convey the sense of renewed monastic life by collecting German hymns, commenting on the Latin liturgy of the Mass and making all this accessible by explaining the texts as part of an inner process of staging them as sacred drama.

The inaugural lecture, in its turn, will try to make these beautiful illuminated manuscripts accessible. What do they tell us about the spiritual adventures of the late Middle Ages and how does one play on the harp strings of the soul?

Thank you for the introduction! I am very grateful for the opportunity to stand here in the School of Modern Languages with so many colleagues present, and speak about the project on which I want to focus my main research for the next years to come. I hope to have the opportunity to discuss the progress of it with many of you as time goes on. But before I start to speak about the manuscripts and my future research, I have to thank those who made it possible for me to do this and who encouraged me on my academic way. I am very much touched by how many of my colleagues and friends from Germany, Switzerland and England could come. Thank you for this support and the readiness to celebrate with me! I cannot mention all of you, but I have to point out at least three persons: first of all, my father, Johannes Lähnemann, who together with my whole family gave me the love for knowledge and theological thinking. Secondly, my 'Doktorvater' and senior colleague for many years, Christoph Huber – since the lecture on Minnesang to which I went the very first day of my very first year as an undergraduate, he has won me for the beauty of medieval studies. Last but not least Nigel Palmer, who offered me his hospitality for my first year in England and whose research on German Cistercians and their books is a direct inspiration for what I am doing now.

And with the catch-word of inspiration now over to the topic of the lecture: Vision and Audition in Medingen Convent.

[Slide 2: Hildegard as visionary]. When I was asked a year ago at the job interview what my academic visions were and how my research would inspire my teaching (if I were to get the Chair of German Studies at Newcastle University), I was frankly bewildered. The vocabulary of inspiration and vision didn't seem to tie in with the task I was facing: acronyms like RAE, MOFs etc. [click: RAE-bubble and MOF-inspiration]. This was partly because my understanding of what 'vision' should be was influenced by the German equivalent "Vision" – and that has a much more narrow definition than the English word. In German, Vision is part of a scholarly jargon and what comes to mind are those visionaries of high rank for which Hildegard von Bingen (we just had a paper on her in the German Research Seminar last month by Susanne Ruge from Halle) has become an icon: seers of cosmological revelation, of deep philosophical insights and theological marvels. I then realised, of course, that I was not asked to divine solutions for practical matters of academic day to day business but rather to combine the approaches that are implied in the English term 'vision': watching closely, looking ahead and visualizing solutions in my mind.

And in fact, this practical approach is not that far away from the medieval understanding of vision. It is, of course, presumptuous to speak about "the medieval understanding" but I will just give two examples from the Church Fathers Augustine and Gregory the Great since they represented for the nuns in Medingen the highest spiritual authority, figuring prominently as reference in the margins of their manuscripts.

[Slide 3: Augustine on vision] The Latin term 'visio' has a similar broad range of meaning as the English term. Augustine distinguishes three types of vision: the *visio corporalis* (where you see things with your own eyes; Augustine takes the example of the word "neighbour"; when you read this word in a text, you see it just with the eyes of the body), the *visio spiritualis* (where we conjure up the image of a specific neighbour with the eyes of the mind after having read the word) and finally the *visio intellectualis* (where we fully understand an intellectual concept and can then grasp what is meant by the command: "Love your neighbour like yourself"; here the eyes of the heart and the soul are having the vision). This means that the visionary experience in the stricter sense of the word, that what the seer John the Evangelist or Hildegard von Bingen are describing, is part of a much wider range of visual experience – and it is a challenging process for those that undergo this experience: because vision needs visualization if it is to be communicated. You can actually see it in this image of Hildegard as a visionary: it is not enough to just have the divine inspiration streaming down, it needs the corporeal vision of the monk Volmar watching her to testify to the effects of this vision and it needs writing down – what you see her doing on the preliminary form of the wax tablet while the monk is already clutching a piece of parchment to transfer the fleeting vision on to a more permanent medium. A similar thing could be said about Audition.

[Slide 4: Gregory the Great dictating Gregorian chant while listening to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit in the figure of a dove] The audition I am talking about with regard to Medingen is part of a practical process. It is not only the sublime otherworldly sound, the gibberish of speaking in strange tongues, but it is a first of all the process of listening carefully and making this accessible to a wider audience. You see here Pope Gregory the Great in one of the manuscripts of St. Gallen, one of the most famous of the German speaking monasteries founded by the Irish monks who in fact came over to the continent by way of Northumbria. The Gregorian chant was named after him, and this was the basis for liturgical singing and hymns practised in the monastic houses all over Europe. But he is not shown as an author or inventor: [click: text-box coming down] He stands here as part of a chain of communication, linking the Holy Ghost, symbolised by the dove that whispers the inspiration in Gregory's ear, with Paulus Diaconus, his secretary who notes it down and thus makes it permanent and accessible for those without the immediate experience of audition. Again, divine inspiration has to be transmitted to become effective. It doesn't do, as the Letter of St. James reminds us, to be just *auditores* but the divine word requires action, requires communication.

It is this practical approach to vision and audition which dominates the Medingen manuscripts and which make them so appealing to us today: they do not deal in arcane mysteries but have a rather down-to-earth attitude to it – and they are eager to share it. Before I give you examples for that, I first have to tell you at least shortly at what sort of place and what period of time we are looking.

[Slide 5: Map of Germany and the Lüneburg territory] Medingen today is part of the tiny spa town Bad Bevensen in the Eastern part of Lower Saxony – but that is a modern classification. What is relevant for the Medingen Nunnery is on the one hand the old bishopric of Magdeburg to the South-East, nowadays in Sachsen-Anhalt, from whence the founding nuns came, and even more important Lüneburg to the North-West, hub of the local network of convents. One of the major Hanseatic towns, Lüneburg was rich, thanks to its local salt stocks which were shipped via the Elbe to Lübeck and from there traded all over the Baltic sea and certainly also to Britain. Lüneburg could afford to support generously several nunneries that educated their daughters. In fact, many of the surviving manuscripts from Medingen were ordered by noble-women from among the patricians in Lüneburg. For them, the nuns who for their own literary production wrote predominately Latin, would turn to the vernacular, that is: Middle Low German (as opposed to the Middle High German that was written and spoken in the Southern parts of Ger-

many). Low German as the language of the Hanseatic trade was very close to medieval Dutch, the language of the Low Countries – and also the language of the *devotio moderna*, the most influential spiritual movement of the later Middle Ages in that part of Europe. There were close contacts between the different convents situated on the Lüneburg heath: beside Medingen notably Lüne, Ebstorf and Wienhausen. This collaboration can be seen especially in the documents and artefacts from the end of the 15th century, after all these convents had undergone a major reform. It is with this reform in 1479 that Medingen becomes a prolific centre of prayer-book-production.

[Slide 6: Matthäus Merian: *Topographia Der Hertzogthumer Braunschweig und Lüneburg* (1654)] For all the other convents on the Lüneburg heath I could show you contemporary photographs that show the medieval inheritance still dominant but since in Medingen nearly all the buildings were destroyed in a big fire in the late 18th century we have to resort to earlier reproductions. The engraving in Merian's *Topography of the Duchies of Brunswick and Lüneburg* doesn't give many details but a general impression of the place. You see an ensemble of differently sized houses, much less formally arranged than in a monastery, and with only two ridge turrets to distinguish the church from the surrounding buildings; within easy reach of visitors but clearly set apart as a dwelling of its own in the woods.

[Slide 7: Aerial photography of Medingen today] With regard to the location, not much has changed. The only Gothic building left is the brewery, now converted into a conference venue where in October we will hold a workshop on the manuscripts which will then (for the first time since the Lutheran reformation) return to their origins – although I doubt they were ever exposed to the brewery in their day. The stately late Baroque buildings of the convent itself are impressive but to learn where and how the daily life and worship of the community in the later Middle Ages took place, we have to turn to other documents. Fortunately, just before the fire, Johann Ludolf Lyßmann, the local minister, had published all the archival material he could lay his hands on.

[Slide 8: First copperplate: Founding Audition in 1228] Especially valuable are the engravings he commissioned to reproduce the painted wooden boards that hung in the cloisters. These panels were commissioned in 1499, recounting remarkable events from the past. They represent the history of the convent from the viewpoint of the reform that had just taken place. To make them accessible to all visitors each event is portrayed three times: as picture, in a Latin description and in a Low German narrative. If one looks along the series, it becomes obvious that the nuns wanted their history to be commemorated as a series of divine interventions. Already the first plate recounts the foundation initiative not as an institutional act done by a noble prince or any other temporal power but as an audition. The history of the convent starts with the Cistercian lay-brother Johannes and a practical sign to make the divine revelation creditable. When Johannes asserts – as all good prophets and leaders in biblical history have done – that he is unworthy and ill-fitted to do the job [click to show speech] *wente ick byn en arm ungeleret man,*¹ God, as always, is not impressed by this but urges him to an experiment that is reminiscent of Abraham² being asked to count the stars to see how many offspring he will have – only that it is peas and beans here that show how numerous the nuns will be in the new convent [click to show speech]: *Gha und kope erweten und bonen und vülle twe grote secke. und so vele der synt in dem talle. so mennich utherkoren persone schal in dat nye Closter dat ick wil ghebuwet werden laten. du scholt dis syn en anbeghin, und ick wil dat vullenbringhen.*³

¹ How is this supposed to happen since I am a poor, uneducated man?

² Genesis 15:5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

³ Go and buy peas and beans and fill two big bags: and as many as there are in this number as many chosen persons shall be in the new convent which I will have be built. You shall start it and I will fulfill it.

[Slide 9: The journey to Magdeburg and beyond] And the experiment works: We see Johannes walking with the permission of his abbot and his peas and beans to Magdeburg, stopping at the nunnery Wolmirstedt and exchanging his two bags for four nuns with whom he takes off to Redekestorp, where the first attempt to build this new convent was undertaken.⁴ I cannot go into the ins and outs of a series of attempts to establish the nunnery which is punctuated by further divine intervention by Mary, the patron saint of the Cistercian order, and St. John the Baptist, patron saint of the major parish of Lüneburg. But I want to draw your attention to one detail of the second of this travel series.

[Slide 10: Mauritius as exported patron saint] The four Wolmirstedt nuns *brochten mit sick eren hövetheren Stm Mauricium eyn holten bilde.*⁵ The statue you see on the right hand side is still in Medingen today. It is, in fact, from the 15th century but the actual age of the wooden image didn't bother the nuns: St. Maurice, the patron saint of the diocese Magdeburg, came with them in more ways than just as an idol. This becomes apparent when he figures prominently in one of the next visions reported in the course of the convent history:

[Slide 11: Saint Maurice appears at Christmas Eve in the Mass] This vision supposedly took place in 1380, a century before these panels were commissioned, *sub missa que cantatur in galli cantu infra Kyrieleyson*: during the earliest mass, at the time of the first cock crow at Christmas Eve, just when the finishing *Kyrieleyon* was sung. The provost Dyderick Brant whom you see kneeling at the right hand side, had refused to hand out the *prövene* (prebend) to the nuns, a kind of pocket money endowed to them in care of the nunnery for buying some special Christmas treats. Now, when the sacred ceremony was drawing to a close with the deprived nuns calling to God for mercy, they suddenly saw the provost falling on his knees: He had seen St. Maurice [click] *mit enen openbaren swerde*— holding up the unsheathed sword — and saying [click]: *Giff mynen Kynderen wes du jüm plichtig bist* — hand over to my children what is due to them. The nuns didn't see him but they saw the provost kneeling down and followed suite — and afterwards they got their Christmas dinner which proved that the vision was true. What is remarkable about this is not the pre-occupation with a food but rather the close bond that exists between the patron saint and the nuns. St. Maurice was a very fashionable saint for convents of noble-women in Northern Germany, being among others also patron saint at the neighbouring convents of Ebstorf and Wienhausen. As a true knight he would look after all his protégées, as this episode on Christmas night shows. It is the sense of a personal relationship to the heavenly realm that pervades everything the nuns express in their manuscripts, history and tapestries.

[Slide 12: Prayer-book with Mauritius-officium] When they refer to saints in their prayer-books, but especially to St. Maurice, they address them like friends and honoured guests. This prayer-book is one of several of those written by the nuns for the use in the convent itself and has a full cycle of prayers and meditations centred around all the different Hours and Masses to be said on a saint's day, starting with the vigil, the service on the evening before the day itself, when the saint is made welcome. It starts rather formally with the nun being advised to make a deep bow before the approaching guest of honour, the *fidelissimus patronus*.⁶ Through the following day it gets more

⁴ Text on the slide: *De leybroder ghinck tho synem Abbete, und geff eme tho vorstande, wot eme gesecht was. Also gaff eme syn abbet enen waghin mit perden und dar lede he de twe secke mit den erweten und bonen uff, vnd vörde in dat stichte tho Meyeborch tho dem Closter Wolmirstede, vnd bath daruth veer personen upp dat dorch jüm mochte gode tho eren en nye Kloster ghybuwet werden.* The lay brother went to his abbot and informed him what he had been told. Therefore, his abbot gave him a horse-carriage; on that he laid the two bags with the peas and the beans and brought it to the diocese of Magdeburg, to the convent Wolmirstadt, and asked for four persons so that by them might be built a new convent to the glory of God.

⁵ ... brought along their patron saint, Saint Maurice, a wooden image.

⁶ *Tunc corue ad pedes eius et dic: Bene veneris O illustrissime et preclarissime dux ac fidelissime patrone sancte Mauriti gloriosissime. Aduenisti O excellentissime princeps legionis thebee signifer spendidissime Aduenisti martir egregie...* Then bow down to his feet and say: Welcome to you, most famous and loyal patron, reknown saint Maurice. You have come, o most excellent leader of the Thebean legion, glorious standard-bearer. You have come, outstanding martyr...

and more informal: attending mass on the saints day is like taking a stroll with your bosom friend in a beautiful garden; when finally, when the day is over, you have to take leave with sweet words, wishes of a happy return and endearments. Since one of the main points of the conventual reform of the late 15th century, which prompted all this manuscript production, was to re-establish a strict form of enclosure for the nuns, preventing them from going spontaneously to see their family and friends in Lüneburg, the imaginary strolls with the saint take the character of a spiritual day-out. This is not a vision in the strict sense of the word but rather a strategy of visualization. The proposed exercise of intellectual intercourse with Christ and the saints kept the window open between the realms of divine and mundane, facilitated by constant use. One feature of the prayer-books (which is discernable in this image because I had no other means than my finger to hold back the stiff parchment that tended to bounce back when not held firmly in its place) is that nearly all of them are tiny, even smaller than a modern paperback. These are not books for public display like the huge liturgical folios of earlier centuries but for personal devotion, to be taken into church for the service and then to read on in private.

The same practical applicability of good links to the heavenly realm we have seen in St. Maurice's appearance at Christmas can also be seen in a further audition from the history of the convent which took place a generation earlier.

[Slide 13: Angels sing vernacular songs when the nunnery is built]: When, in 1336, the new convent of Medingen was built, the lay workmen noted in the morning that the work was farther advanced than when they had left it. Then, during the nights, they had a special audition [click for highlighting the angels]: *Ock wart dar vaken eyn sang ghehört na de Wyse so men synget in alle godes hilghe daghe. „Segget loff gode userm heren“. So dat den sang unghelerte liude konden synghen.* The remarkable thing about this supposedly angelic sound is precisely that it involves no otherworldly, celestial harmonies but rather Low German hymns to a well-known tune. The consideration the angels show for lay-people without formal education and without the means of learning Latin hymns by reading, is the model of what we see in the prayer-books which the nuns of Medingen wrote for the lay-women of Lüneburg: to communicate the spiritual experience of vision and audition and make them imitable by singing vernacular hymns.

[Slide 14: Reform in Medingen] But what was the incentive for the nuns to embark on this venture and to follow the lead of the angels in passing on vernacular hymns? This can be seen by the last panel from the series about the history of the convent which I am going to show you: this is a snapshot of the reformed convent in 1479. There are three features of it I want to point out to you: one is the renewed sense of community which is represented by the communal meal. Before the reform, meals used to be cooked for the single nuns by personal maids. Now, instead of eating separately, all the nuns are gathered around the table in the refectory. You can see the *mater celleraria*, the nun responsible for the domestic affairs, tasting with a wooden spoon the stew prepared by a lay-sister in the so-called *grapen*, a huge communal bowl. The conventual meal also meant shared listening to the traditional table reading delivered from the lectern by the youngest member of the convent: meditations and saints' lives which would provide the nuns with narrative examples of former visions and audition. More books are held by the then provost of the convent, Tylemann von Bavenstetten, whose figure is larger than life to point to his important role as driving force behind the reform and major benefactor. As the subscription on the panel told the visitors, he invested a major part of his inheritance to commission seven new liturgical manuscripts especially for the nuns. This points to a second feature of the reform: the renewed emphasis on liturgy and the observation of all the canonical hours like it used to be in monasteries – a practice which had fallen into disuse. The Medingen nuns were fortunate to receive this gift: in the neighbouring convent of Ebstorf the chronicle of the convent tells how in the first weeks after the conventual reform – which took place just a few years earlier – those nuns who were capable of writing down the complex new liturgical settings sometimes were up all night to

prepare the service-sheets for the next morning. The nuns of Medingen were also fortunate in this because it provided them with a stock of liturgical texts and Latin hymns on which they could draw when they started writing their own prayer-books and translate texts into Low German, to pass on their new enthusiasm for the divine service to a lay-audience. The third consequence of the reform was a new habit. You see the pointed veil of the first abbess after the reform, Margareta Puffen, on the etching as well as on her tombstone. This meant again a strengthening of the community – and it also allowed for added meaning.

[Slide 15: Medingen nun in the Erfurt Psalter] In this colour version you can see the distinguishing feature of the new dress: a white, pointed veil on which a red cross is sewn, the so called *corona*, as logo of the corporate design that represented the identity of the reformed convent. I just found an explanation for the *corona* three weeks ago in one of the five prayer-books from Medingen that are in England (there are two manuscripts in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, one in Keble College, Oxford, one in the University Library in Cambridge and one in the Guildhall Library in London). In the Guildhall manuscript which gives mainly Latin prayers for the time after Pentecost, there is one Low German poem inserted in an account of the importance of the feast of Corpus Christi. The nuns are told to have a good meal with Jesus, their bridegroom, and to recount during that feast dinner *in mentali júbilo quasi gloriando* the reasons for the special bond between Christ and his spouses. The poem finishes with the lines *He heft sík my vertruwet / myt enen ghulden vingherlin. / vnd heft mi ciret myt deme duren blode sin. / vnd ik dreghe an dem bouede myn en rot siden crucelin. / dar an schal ik dechdich sin dat he allene myn leuken si.*⁷ Now the youth with his rosy cheeks and flower wreath who blesses the kneeling nun is St. John, the Evangelist, not Christ, the bridegroom, or any of the saints like St. Maurice with a special connection to Medingen. The reason for this is that the leaf belongs to a Psalter that originally was written in Erfurt. It seems to have come to Medingen together with the liturgical books ordered by the provost, to get the nuns started on their new book regime. We can spot the process of re-assigning an older manuscript to the use of the reformed convent by a piece of patchwork that took place: the veil of the kneeling nun with its pointed top and its red cross is in fact painted on paper and stuck behind the original parchment that has been carefully cut to allow the woman to be transformed into a Medingen nun in the reformed habit. This stands symptomatically for the changes after 1479: The nuns took to book-production as a form especially apt to fulfil the Benedictine motto of praying and working at one go – through producing prayer-books.

[Slide 16 Berlin Ms on the Easter Mass] Here you see a typical page of one of the prayer-books, now in Berlin. More than 40 manuscripts have been identified as being written in Medingen by the first generation after the reform, in the last two decades of the 15th century. It seems as if nearly the whole convent went into the scriptorium! We have similar phenomena in the neighbouring nunneries, for example in Lüne where more than half of the convent was involved in producing huge tapestries where several nuns could stitch along at different corners of the cloth at the same time. In Medingen, the nuns seem to have taken to producing single-handed illuminated manuscripts from start to finish, meaning that the same nun would write with black, blue and red ink and sometimes to make the pages look like precious tapestries and also do the illuminations, contrary to the practice in professional workshops. The use of manuscript-writing as a monastic exercise also explains the huge artistic difference between the same motif in different manuscripts. The illustrations range from crude pencil-drawing to elaborate old-style miniatures; some manuscripts even have paper-cutting from prints stuck into them (for example in one of the Bodleian manuscript), thus combining a very conservative layout with Gothic script on

⁷ Say with jubulations of the mind as if rejoicing: [...] He has wed me /with a golden ring for my finger / and he has adorned me with his precious blood / and I wear on my head / a little red silk cross /which will remind me / that he alone is my beloved.

parchment with the modern medium of illustrated prints. Upon closer inspection, also the text assembled on this page shows its very diverse nature and origins.

[Slide 17: Detail from the double-page BE2] This text portion about the liturgical events at the early Mass on Easter Sunday shows how the vernacular hymns were put into perspective by explaining their significance in the framework of what the clergy did: *Wanne synget 'Victime paschali laudes', so offert dat volk dem pasche cruce vnd bekennen sik dat se mit synem duren blode vorloset syn. Offere du eme ok den penning des ynnigen betes vnd der danck segginge. Tho der sequencien synget dat volk de loysen: 'Crist is vppstande van syner marter alle des scholle ny vro syn god wel vnse drost syn. Kryoleis' So moege we wol vrolick syn wan ny den trost godes hebben so kan vns nicht bed syn.* The vernacular hymn, *Christ is upstande*, is a so-called "Leise", i.e. a hymn that ends in the *kyrieleison* – the significance of which we have already seen in the Christmas-vision where Mauritius appeared when the *Kyrieleison* was sung. In fact, the first vernacular hymns, short praises as answer to lines sung by the clergy in the service or in a procession, seem to have risen out of these short responses and this particular *Leise* had been round for centuries since its first line is mentioned in manuscripts from the 13th century. The nuns certainly did not invent the vernacular hymns they included in their prayer-books but for many of these orally transmitted pieces they provided for the first time the full text and – even more important – a full context. Here it is first the appropriate liturgical place, at the offertory of the Easter mass, and then the appropriate sentiment: gratefulness for the resurrection which protects from all harm.

[Slide 18: Neumes over 'Christ ist erstanden'] Here you see the same passage in the Gotha manuscript with the full *Leise* marked like the Latin hymns by notes above the line with the *kyrieleis* as the finishing word. If you compare it with the notation in the current German protestant hymn-book you see that to interpret the notes you would have to know the tune first. It is a notation for making you image the public performance of the congregation rather than an actual hymn-book for sight-readers. It allows the performance on the harp-strings of the soul as it is explicitly said about its origin, the *Kyrieleison*.

[Slide 19] The *Kyrieleison* keeps a central place in the devotion, standing short for all the possible praise of lay-people. In the Trier Manuscript, the sweet *Kyrieleison* is recommended for rendering it on the harp-strings of the soul for the vesper of the Easter Day: *singhe deme koninghe der ere vppe der herpen diner sele dat vrolike Kyrieleyson.* You see the musical notation above the *Kyrieleison* and the following Latin hymn. Of the Latin hymn, only the beginning is noted down, followed by a full German translation – but that is a literal translation which could not be rendered in singing. When the nuns were looking at material which was adaptable for a devotion that could make the harp-strings of the soul sing, the direct translation of Latin hymns was not a proper device; but the *Leisen* were an already established form of vernacular devotional music and they readily took to it.

[Slide 20: Choral notation in HV1 for 'Also heylig'] On this picture from a predominately Latin prayer-book from Medingen – meaning: one of the books the nuns wrote for their own use rather than for a lay-woman – one can see that the *Leisen* were also integrated in the nun's own devotion, inserted at crucial moments of the liturgical celebration. Here it is the *Leise Also heylig is desse dag* (this day is so holy) which is an Easter hymn second in popularity only to the *Christ ist erstanden*. This also shows that the musical notation in the form of red notes and note-clusters above the line which we saw in the Hanover manuscript are in fact the reduced version of the full choral notation to which the nuns turned as soon as they run out of space as on this page at the last line on the right hand side. For the nuns who knew their hymns, this is not sheet music but a kind of shorthand that indicates: "here comes the music" and by this encouraged them to put their mind in a hymnic mode.

[Slide 21: 'Also heylig' in O1 in the Latin context] Here you have the same part of the Easter-celebration around the *Leise* *Also heylig is desse dag*, now with the reduced musical notation which looks like the ancient form of neumes but which here just indicate what is the hymn-part and what the instruction for meditation. The *Leise* comes in together with other hymns at the transitional point when leaving the *chorus*, i.e. the nuns' gallery in the church, after the earliest service, the matutin. This moment is used to reflect by means of the "jubilee of the heart" the significance of the Easter Day with hymns and prayer.

[Slide 22: 'Also heylig' in the Low German context] And here is the same passage again, now in a predominately Low German manuscript for a lay-woman from Luneburg; the lady in question is Beate Wytyck, wife of a town councilor who was also *siilfmeister*, owner of one of the lucrative salt factories. What we see here is an alternative lay-setting for the *Leise*. The *Leise* is presented as an advanced meditation to the acclamation that the simple folk would do that didn't know any other ways of expressing their Easter joy: *de dummen kinderken de anders nicht enkonnt de ropet Heyl. heyl. Osterdach*. The prayer-book that the Medingen nuns wrote for her, gave Beate Wytyck the opportunity to participate more fully in the praise of the Easter festivities that otherwise was the prerogative of the clergy and the monastic houses. The nuns even offered her a solution to the missing setting since she could not sing the hymns when going in and out of the nuns' gallery. Instead, she is told to go in the house of her heart: in imitation of the splendid Easter day, *gha in dat bus dynes herten*; then she would be able to join King David in returning satisfied from the service.

[Slide 23: King David as author of the psalms]⁸ King David, the noble author of the prototypical hymn-book, the Psalms, is a key figure for the devotional work the nuns were doing.

[Slide 24: King David as harper] And he figures prominently in what they envisaged of heaven. Here the *Leise* *Also heylig is desse dach* is sung as hymn of thanksgiving after an imagined dance in heaven for which King David had played the music. But there were even better people to be met with on Easter morning.

[Slide 25: Hortulanus-scene with the lady] We return for a moment to the Berlin manuscript where we have seen the proposal to offer the penny of thanksgiving while singing the *Christ is upstande*. There are more instructions to follow on the right hand side. The addressee, again a lay-woman, is told: *Da metten so cyre dynen licham mit dynen besten klederen tho der ere godes vnd des hochgelaeden pasche dages vnd denck wo schone de is den du hute empfangen scholt vnd bidde ok van eme de cyringe dyner zele...* The soul is involved in the visual Easter preparations as much as in the audible: if the harp has to be tuned to the right pitch so the dress has to be brushed up. And in the marginal image you see why this is so important. It is a variation on the so-called *hortulanus*-scene, the story from St. John's gospel, chapter 20, when Mary Magdalene near Christ's grave sees a man she takes to be the gardener at first glance, and then when he calls her with her name, recognizes as Jesus. It is the first of a series of apparitions of the risen Christ and for the nuns it was a very important fact that He appeared first to a woman. They took to Mary Magdalene as a role model

⁸ Addressing the soul, asking for the praise of God to be done through the inner self, of course nothing the Medingen nun invented or even the Middle Ages but a devise which would be familiar to all Christians since earliest times through the Psalms: Praise, my soul, the king of heaven... What is translated as "soul" (anima in Latin) in Hebrew (*näfäsch*) in fact is the inner self, the identity of a person, the source of all emotions. The soul can be asked with the refrain of the 42nd psalm: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." (Ps 42,5/11) and the lips and the soul combine in the praise of God: (Psalm 71:23) "My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed." This sense of soul as a wide time is transported through the psalms to the medieval literature. In the monastic tradition, the psalms would provide the structure for the day, sung through the day, through the way, through the whole year. As author of most of the psalms, the Old Testament prophet David is therefore an important figure for the nuns who readily took to the singer who also was a king as a role model for praising God.

and identified in their meditations with her. In some of the prayer-books you see a nun in the Medingen habit kneeling before Christ who is showing his red wounds after which the red cross on the white veil was fashioned. Here it is not one of the nuns but still Mary Magdalene as the halo round her headdress shows but since she is shown in costly dresses directly under the passage about adornment, it was easy to identify with her. This is supported by the two angels who play an accompaniment for the scene, turning it into a proper performance. From this image and similar scenes of the prayer-books it would be tempting to look into the history of German mystery plays that had their origin also in the wish to express the joy of the Easter time in more than just reading out the set liturgy. But that is a vast and different field and I want rather to try to bring together the stock of images, sounds and texts from Medingen we have seen so far under the title of vision and audition. For this, I will finish off with two pages from a copy of the Low German version of the Medingen prayer-books for Easter which is especially lavishly and lovingly illustrated and gilded.

[Slide 26: HI1: The nuns and lay-people greet the Easter Day] One could take this page of angels, nuns and lay-people greeting collectively the Easter Morning as a quintessential image of what vision and audition in Medingen was about. In the centre you see the smiling face of the Easter sun which, in fact, is Christ – as the golden text beneath the sun explains. Surrounding it in the blue field which conflates the morning sky with the notion of heaven and on the upper margin are the prime musicians, angels with trumpets, fiddles, bells and, of course, the harp. The scrolls in the hands of the people at the lower margin show that they join in: the nuns, prominently clad in their white habit with the white veils and the red cross, hold the text of a Latin hymn which is quoted in full in the text above the Easter sun and marked as music by the red neumes above it: 'The day that God made, has lighted up. On the right hand side the lay-people are kneeling, with flower-wreaths on their heads to show that it's spring time, the only pretty ring time, clad in their Sunday bests, and holding up a *Leise*, the one which is also sung at the heavenly dance: *Also heyllich is desse dach*.

[Slide 27: HI1: The nuns and lay-people take leave of the Easter Day]⁹: 54 leaves later – that is 108 pages full of Easter praise – we meet them again. You see the same setting with the nuns and the lay-people under the Easter sun but you can tell that it is going to be late: the sun is girdled by the stars and the recurrent word on the page is the *vale*, the good-bye they bid communally to the Easter Day. It is this shared experience of the joy,¹⁰ of sharing a vision of the feast in heaven and the audition of hearing David play up for the dance that makes the prayer-books special.¹¹ When the nuns wrote down the orally transmitted German hymns, matched them up with the Latin context of the Mass and the Book of Hours and commented on how to read them, sing them

⁹ a little scene situated in the joyous feast-tide of Pentecost, the month of maying, the month of Arthur and of Mary (Mante 295-299): Imagine you have been to a magnificent feast; you are back from there and now you have to talk through it: how refined the courses were, how well the musicians played and all the interesting conversation going on. It's the same thing with retracing your steps from the Eucharist where you were invited for feasting with Christ who provided the meal, a divine conversation and heavenly music – played by his own band, the combined forces of angels and archangels. If you want to discuss this with your friends, you will have to resort to more than just words: sing it and scetch it, internally and externally.

¹⁰ Easter includes the full Easter-Tide, namely the weeks in which we now are, before and including Pentecost; and it is no chance that this is also 'the month of maying' because the nature for the nuns reflected the joy of all creature about the risen Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit – the main inspiration for all spiritual production and especially for singing. In fact, last Sunday was the one called 'Cantate', "Sing ye all!" In the prayer-books Easter is called the *brutlachtighe dach Christi*, the day of Christ's wedding with the soul (Ernst, S. 63/ HI f. 69) and the *morgen ghabe*, the dowry, is the Holy Spirit.

¹¹ Externally this was done when the nuns took to producing illuminated manuscripts that included the vernacular hymns they had collected, internally when they instructed their sisters in the convent and the lay-women of the neighbouring town for whom the Low German manuscripts were written how to see these processes with the eyes of their heart and how to play the songs on the harp strings of their souls.

and act upon them,¹² they practice a form of widening participation: they open vision and audition to a group who formally had only little chance of sharing this achievement, the lay-women. For them, the nuns visualize the vision, they communicate the audition.

[Slide 28] In this sense, I am quite happy also to have an academic vision; it is something quite practical: not a christmas dinner provided but a conference organised for next Easter, to bring together the research Elizabeth Andersen has done on the voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg with the Medingen nuns and their prayer-books under the title of "sacred voices". Whoever of you wants to join in: we both hope that today's event is the start of a shared vision.

In this sense, I am ending this inaugural paper with a quote from Tübingen, the place of my farewell lecture a year ago. Friedrich Hölderlin sums up of how to react if you feel the playing of divine sentiments on the heart-strings of the soul: If at spring-time you are moved by visions of far away friends *und tönt von Melodien / Der Seele Saitenspiel, / So such im stillsten Tale / Den blütenreichsten Hain, / Und gieß aus goldner Schale / Den frohen Opferwein!*¹³ I hope many of you will join me for some joyous libations just outside the room. Thank you very much for your attention.

¹² – either physically like running to the Church, singing out the German responses to the Latin sequence sung by the clergy or spiritually: playing those tunes on the harp-strings of the soul and conjure up the image of Christ meeting the soul as loving bridegroom There is a lot to see in church: if you know how to do it, you can travel through all of the Holy Land. At Christmas you can observe Bethlehem and the Christ child when the priest is holding up the host during the silent part of the Mass. The prayer-books describe how one can, for example, run to the Holy Sepulchre on the night before Easter to watch Christ jumping like a panther (this is an image taken from the Physiologus, the medieval handbook on spiritual zoology) – since Christ was present in the Eucharist just before, you can be sure to see a spectacle unfolding.

¹³ If the harp strings of the soul /are ringing with melodies,/ search in the stillest valley for the blossom-richest grove and pour from the golden bowl the glad libation of wine!