The workshop-style symposium on “Sacred Voices”, held at Newcastle University April 9-11, focused on exploring what connection the concept of “Voices” might provide between the different projects going on inside medieval German studies as well as in interdisciplinary studies within the fields of literary and musical research. The event featured sessions on Digital Editions, Liturgy, and Meditation and Dialogue. Papers were given by Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Andres Laubinger (Newcastle University, School of Modern Languages), Magnus Williamson (Newcastle University, Department of Music), Ulrike Hascher-Burger (Utrecht University, Research Institute for Culture and History), Stefan Morent (Tübingen University, Institute of Musicology), Hartmut Möller (Rostock University, Academy of Music and Theatre) and Anka Pinske (Rostock University, Department of German), and Emily Richards (University of York, Centre for Medieval Studies).

So what is the topic of “Sacred Voices” and what does a workshop on this aspect hope to achieve? When the objective is to bring together literary and musical scholars, the concept of “Voice” as an interdisciplinary one clearly is put to the test. After all, the idea of “Voice” generally found in literary studies seems quite different at a first glance from the one established in music. Apart from the perspective, however, both are looking at much the same phenomena; in this case, the workshop focused on the interplay of vernacular text production, liturgy and musical culture in Northern Germany, the Netherlands and England in the 15-16th centuries in manuscripts extant from or connected to monastic convents.

“Sacred Voices”, therefore, as discussed by the participants of the workshop, were generally understood as expressions of faith and devotion, ranging from God’s voice to the response of the congregation and the discourse of individual worship. To the individual believer, however, all too often a single voice did not seem
enough for praising the Lord. In the face of the infinity of God, all the words of one alone would well prove thoroughly insufficient to utter what in essence is unspeakable. So, when not discarding words altogether and exalting in solemn jubilation, often a multiplicity of voices is employed. Discourse with the different roles of one’s self may be a means of approaching godly knowledge, as may the intercourse of many, be it the convent, be it the congregation in liturgy, or be it the personification of the church or, ultimately, a vision of Christ engaging in sacred conversation. The “Sacred Voice” then means one (or several) among many modes and levels of expression, much like what Bakhtin termed polyphony. This evidently would hardly ever lapse into cacophony without losing the status of being sacred. Indeed, “Sacred Voices” rarely seems to be contradictory. Intermingling, complementing and commentating, even responding to one another, they are circumscribing truth in a variety of forms, levels of speech, or articulation.

Digital Editions

Some of the layers and dimensions of sacred voices were demonstrated in the "Introduction and Presentation of the Medingen Project" by Henrike LÄHNEMANN and Andres LAUBINGER (both Newcastle University). Focusing on an extraordinary corpus of nearly 50 manuscripts from the late medieval Cistercian nunnery of Medingen in Germany, near Lüneburg, the project is committed to virtually reuniting this scattered library of the convent by a digital edition of the manuscripts now held by libraries in Germany and Great Britain, involving images as well as transcriptions. Many features of the database (http://research.ncl.ac.uk/medingen/) are already freely accessible, e.g. the bibliography, the list of sigla, short descriptions of the manuscripts and a presentation of the main features of the database.

The project is embracing editing technologies for cataloguing of manuscripts as well as incorporating more specialized technologies for accessing iconographical issues, among others. Not only figuring as part of a polyphony of faith, but also being one in itself, each and every one of the manuscripts is articulating this praise with the voice of its writer. Performing variations on the common theme of the liturgical feasts, meditations are engaging in a dialogue with liturgy, which obviously was meant to be partly internal, but also integrated sung out pieces as indicated by musical notations. These nail-like "neumes", fittingly termed “Hufnagelnotation”, could hardly offer more than a rough indication of melodies known by heart but still they
illustrate the importance of the concept of voice as well as the problems posed by its nature. Voices are transient as a matter of fact, and the transmission and tradition of voices, therefore, evidently poses special problems. Apparent in the manuscripts’ approaches to putting down the voice into musical notation, these problems in turn become even more prominent when undertaking an edition of musical notations in manuscripts. The workshop's opening session on Digital Editions subsequently featured two recent approaches to editions involving musical notation related to the Medingen manuscripts.

While the Hufnagelnotation appears to be a reduction of choral notation as used in the Medingen processional and in appendices to some of the prayer-books, it was pointed out that it also has to be perceived as being part of a tradition in its own right, monodic singing. Indeed, the Hufnagelnotation is being displayed alongside other modes of musical notation in the Rostock Songbook. Ongoing preparations for "Editing the Rostock Songbook" were presented by Anka PINSKE (Rostock University). Concerned on the one hand with the single tradition of a considerable number of melodies contained in the Rostock Songbook and on the other with a broad and diverse tradition of other collections, the project is addressing apparent problems of single voices as opposed to and integrated into polyphony.

The different types of notational systems echoes the wide spread of the songs collected and noted down in the course of the 15th century, some of them several times. It has traditionally been assumed that the manuscript was produced in the sphere of Rostock University (founded in 1419) where it is kept today. The manuscript is placed firmly into the Hanseatic sphere of what today is Lower Saxony, as are the Medingen prayer-books. The Rostock Songbook embeds the northern monastic reform movements of the 15th century into a broader secular context, where a multitude of predominately secular voices prevailed. In the middle of the 16th century, the Rostock Songbook was used as material for bindings, in was retrieved in the early 20th century. The project (http://www.rostocker-liederbuch.de) builds on the edition by Ranke and Müller-Blattau, a scholarly milestone of music edition, taking a much broader view on the parallel transmission of all the songs. With a facsimile of the Rostock Songbook accessible via the project’s website, this presents also a complete revision of the special problems posed by this manuscript. Apart from taking into account variants of text tradition, special care has to be given to the editing of the diversified musical notation.
A fully-featured approach for the digital editing of variations of voices in musical notation was introduced by Stefan MORENT (Tübingen University). The XML-encoded format for description of musical neumes notation developed by the TüBingen project of Digital Music Edition (DiMusEd) is due to be included into the next major release of MEI (Musical Encoding Initiative), now probably the most favourable candidate for an extension of the TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) encoding guidelines towards musical notation as far as medieval studies are concerned.

Focussing on Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), versatile abbess, mystic and visionary, and also composer of music, the TüBingen project (http://www.dimused.uni-tuebingen.de/) is faced with a rather scarce and fickle transmission of musical neumes notation. Additional problems are posed by variant readings of neumes possible even in cases where the tradition seems unambiguous. In extending the mark-up established by MEI, the module meiNeumes handles such multiple variant readings as well as evident discrepancies in transmission. The paper also demonstrated recent development in the visualization of the encoded musical notation employing SVG technologies.

Already a powerful framework for the digital editing of neumes, a further extension of TüBingen’s meiNeumes towards other ways of musical notation seems feasible, thereby offering an advanced technology which would at the same time be established as a standard for digital editing of medieval musical notation. Enhancing such editing by making the voices audible, named as a common goal by all projects, is also planned for the TüBingen project and already well under way at the Centrum für Musik der Devotio moderna, founded by Ulrike Hascher-Burger (http://www.musicadevota.nl/).

Ulrike HASCHER-BURGER (Utrecht University) discussed the importance of music in the "Devotio moderna", a monastic reform movement spreading from the Netherlands to the north of Germany in the 15th century which eventually led to the reform of the Medingen convent. The major role of music in meditation "between iubilus and canticum" is evident, e.g. from the popular Rosetum exercitiorum spiritualium of Johannes Mauburnus. This involves melodies sung out loud as well as inner tunes; both obviously are perceived as utterances of faith. However, while the latter seems apt to mystical revelation, the voiced melody is apparently more closely connected to asceticism. The growing preponderance of text may, therefore, be interpreted in the broader terms of the favouring of asceticism over mysticism. In the long run, the text finally takes priority over the tune.
Liturgy

The formalized exchange of voices singing out loud in the liturgy came to be a distinct feature of the Bursfelde Congregation, as Hartmut Möller (Rostock University) pointed out in opening the workshop’s section on Liturgy. "In search for the Corvey Antiphonar", Möller ended by comparing the liturgical songbooks of a set of convents reformed by Bursfelde, itself a product of the Devotio moderna.

Though painstaking research has been undertaken bringing together the diversified traditions of antiphonars, the resulting digests have as yet not been exploited for modelling the antiphonal traditions of clusters of monastic communities such as the Bursfelde Congregation. As it turns out, the group of Cistercian and Bursfelde antiphonary songbooks is neatly set apart from the rest by their use of antiphons, shedding some light on the notion of one of the Medingen manuscripts, that liturgy should be performed alternatively to Cistercian usage or to the use of the diocese of Verden. With their special focus on Saint Maurice, the patron saint of the convent, the Medingen manuscripts feature distinct variations on the common theme. While the general frame apparently was defined by filiation it was evidently adjusted to local usage. As yet, it is impossible to identify the specific form used by the monks of Corvey, but it seems highly probable that enthusiasm for later reform movements may have led to the abolishment of the older antiphonars.

Such loss of manuscripts seems a common fate when it comes to "Service books from late medieval England". Magnus Williamson’s paper, delivered by Richard Wistreich (both Newcastle University), gave an overview of the development of English liturgical books, offering a profound insight into the sacred voices of liturgy.

Given the care taken with the destruction as well as the distribution of musical manuscripts, uttering one’s faith in liturgy and song clearly was perceived as being a central means of expressing one’s belief. In England, as well as on the continent, religious reform headed straight away for the rearrangement of liturgical chant, which functioned at the same time as the score for the polyphony of faith as well as a point of departure for individual meditation and revelation. However, the latter aspect seems to be more abundant on the continent. Since music was crucial for meditation in the line of the Devotio moderna, the nuns of the Medingen convent tied in their musing with the lays accompanying the liturgy. Indeed, one of their favourite predecessors
in the Cistercian order, Mechthild of Magdeburg, had successfully established liturgy as a starting point for revelations.

**Meditations and Dialogue**

Using the approach to holiness in polyphonic voices as featured by liturgy, Mechthild of Magdeburg (c. 1210-1285) staged her revelations as "Meditation & Drama". The talk by Elizabeth ANDERSEN and Henrike LÄHNEMANN (both Newcastle University), opening the session on Meditations and Dialogue, exposed Mechthild’s variations by comparing them to the visions of the influential Bridget of Sweden (1302/1303 - 1373). While the latter was to become the more popular, Mechthild’s of Magdeburg mystical meditations display a most skillful play on the topic of the workshop when engaging in a "Gespräch mit dem unvergleichlichen Partner" (Walter Haug). This "dialogue with the totally different other" inevitably features the most sacred of voices imaginable. The Holy Trinity, however, at the same time resembles a polyphony in much the same way Mechthild’s own voice does. In her revelations, Mechthild can be shown to speak in different perspectives according to her different roles such as beguine or nun. All of them offering modified modes of expression, they combine to a sacred dialogue, offering insights evidently beyond the scope of individual revelation.

Much the same obviously could be said of the revelations of Bridget of Sweden, her vision of the Lord’s nativity soon coming to be established as the sole formula for picturing the Nativity Scene in the Late Middle Ages. Interwoven into the liturgical context of the Medingen Antependium, which was hung in front of the altar, the influence of Bridget’s revelations can also be traced in detail in the Medingen Prayer Books. Both the manuscripts and the drapery lucidly demonstrate how the sacred voices of the visionary wife, widow and *reclusa* in turn become part of the performance of liturgy in the Medingen convent, adding to the new layer of polyphony of faith in the liturgy of the nunnery.

An inherent relation to female convents was also discussed in the "Body-Soul debates" presented by Emily RICHARDS (University of York), comparing a range of German manuscripts from the tradition of the *Visio Philiberti* widespread throughout Germany, France and England.

While bearing remnants of mystic expression, these debates, featuring the discussion of body and soul of a deceased, are set in contrast to the revelations of Mechthild or Bridget. As some of them
evidently have been produced for female convents, the female anima opposing the male corpus might suggest gender notions; however, the texts can also be perceived in terms of expressing true faith. Indeed, the possibly feminine soul may be perceived as taking over the role of sacred voice in these debates, while in most manuscripts the body contradicts her ambitions with a more worldly view – the most noteworthy exception from the rule being a Basle manuscript where body and soul reveal their need for each other to achieve true salvation. In some cases the body appears to succumb to the soul’s reasoning, while in others the genre displays an unresolved antagonism of body and soul. The genre in Germany appears particularly concerned to refute dualistic tendencies, maintaining the necessity of the body and importance of incarnation in Christian belief. Contexts may emphasise this, too. Besides the body and soul debate, the manuscript held by the Basle University Library, for instance, contains the sermon by Pope Leo IX against Manichaeism. These texts hence provide the human body with the “voice” that it might otherwise lack in medieval textual surroundings where “the body” is frequently an allegorical mystical device or the subject of ascetic mortification.

Disregard of the body and worldly possessions indeed may be a precondition of sacred voices. At least they are explicitly setting the context in the preface of a “Dialogue in a Carthusian monastery”, presented by Andres LAUBINGER (Newcastle University).

The 43 Gespräche by the Carthusian monk Erhart Groß feature the monks of the Nuremberg Charterhouse engaged in a discussion about faith. The monastery – much the same as in Medingen – being in part of patrician offspring, the text may have been aimed at a patrician readership that had funded the Carthusian monastery. It was evidently meant to demonstrate the fidelity of the Carthusian monastery in their daily proceedings as recommended by the Devotio moderna. The faithfulness of interchange is assured by definitely interlinking it to the statutes of the Carthusian order, which would allow for conversation only on special occasions, in turn connecting the setting to Pentecost. Pentecost at the same time would serve as a model of spreading the faith, a task that the text explicitly attempts. It comes as no surprise then that the genre chosen is that of dialogue, entrusted to overcome the problems arising from the alienation of teacher and pupil in literature by modelling an ideal situation of communication. However, the interaction between the monks in conversation seems rather superficial to the modern reader. So, while the text itself suggests an imagined monks’ conversation about Pentecost, the structure of the dialogue itself seems more like a reminder of the way the discussion of saints is pictured in the Sacra
Conversazione, established in the 14th century. When featuring saints accompanying a Maiesta Domini and expressing the faith, such dialogues in the Sacra Conversazione involve a similar failure to interact with one another. The polyphony of their sacred voices turns out to be a multiplication of monologues, providing what apparently cannot be said by one voice alone.

Summary

Being a means of saying what cannot be said, the concept of “Sacred Voices” seems capable of expressing faith, but also of addressing these expressions of faith by modern scholarship. While Gregorian chant may be the one musical “Voice” established as sacred, it seems to function merely as a starting point for the songs of liturgy being perceived as sacred voices. These in turn would be used for variations, playing on the expression of faith in polyphony. As important for meditations and revelations of individuals such as Hildegard or Mechthild as for the identity of communities such as those in Bursfelde, Medingen or the charterhouse in Nuremberg, the impact of these “Sacred Voices” can hardly be overestimated.

Evidently the concept of “Sacred Voices” proves extensively productive. It obviously offers a means of defining a topic and opens it to a multiplicity of approaches and interests. Last but not least, the notion of “Sacred Voices” may also have echoed in the inspired discussion throughout the workshop, demonstrating vividly how the symposium succeeded in bringing together research from different fields of studies of a common subject. It, therefore, is very welcome that this is only the beginning of the Newcastle University “Sacred Voices”-project, led by Elizabeth Andersen and Henrike Lähnemann. Papers of this conference will be published on http://research.ncl.ac.uk/medingen/ . In addition, a printed edition is planned.