

Abstract

The Introduction outlines the basic problems which face a musicologist studying the English secular music of the Middle Ages. It suggests that it is necessary to study the place of minstrelsy in medieval society before the surviving manuscripts can be understood: a statement is made of the part to be played by the present thesis in this task. Then follows a discussion of certain categories of source-material which are to be used.

Chapters I and II examine the place of minstrelsy in the secular life of the 14th and 15th centuries. The first chapter describes the methods by which land-owners and civic authorities attempted to control minstrelsy, and divides these methods into the categories of court-administration and gild-administration; a second section examines the office of Minstrel-King. Chapter II deals with those occasions on which the common man came into contact with organised minstrelsy.

Chapter III examines the place of minstrelsy in the life of the Church, with special reference to the attitude of the clergy towards minstrelsy. The conclusion is reached that, although the relations between the two were generally good, only a very small range of instruments was used liturgically, and that rarely.

Against the background of the first three chapters, the next four make a more detailed study of minstrels and minstrelsy in the context of the secular household. Chapter IV deals with the royal minstrels, and Chapter V with the players of specific instruments, ending with a discussion of the instruments that seem to have been played in consort: Chapter VI examines the office of the Waferer. Minstrelsy in other households is discussed briefly in chapter VII: the findings are correlated with those of the previous three chapters, and features of special interest in each household are noted.

Chapter VIII is a study of the civic minstrels, or town waits. An attempt is made to correct some misunderstandings about their origins, and to describe the social context in which they were established. A discussion of their early history leads to an assessment of their professional capabilities.