

Joseph P. Ponte—*Aureliani Reomensis, Musica disciplina: A Revised Text, Translation, and Commentary*

Ann Arbor: University Microfilms (UM order no. 62-1207, 1961.
666 pp. in 3 vols., Brandeis University diss.)

Lawrence A. Gushee—*The Musica disciplina of Aurelian of Réôme: A Critical Text and Commentary*

Ann Arbor: University Microfilms (UM order no. 64-11,873, 1963.
406 pp. in 2 vols., Yale University diss.)

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Until the discovery some twenty years ago of a small tonary which can be dated from the 790's, the *Musica disciplina* of Aurelian of Réôme was the oldest known practical work on music to survive from the Middle Ages. It remains the first work in the great series of summaries of both ancient and modern musical knowledge that continued for over seven hundred years, including such works as Hucbald's *De institutione harmonica* and Walter Odington's *Summa de speculatione musica*, and ending with Zarlino's *Le institutioni armoniche* of 1558. Martin Gerbert first printed the treatise in his *Scriptores* of 1784, establishing its date and provenance, but until Joseph Ponte and Lawrence Gushee chose the *Musica disciplina* as a dissertation topic almost simultaneously and without knowledge of one another, no one had attempted a really searching study of the work. As it happened, the two employed such different approaches for their research that the dissertations have surprisingly little in common. Taken together, they give us a quite complete picture of our knowledge of music in the 9th century as seen by Aurelian of Réôme.

The most complete manuscripts of the *Musica disciplina* begin and end with eulogies on Abbot Bernard of Réôme, noblest of men, archsinger, and future archbishop. These are followed by numerous edifying examples of the virtue of forgiveness, and the whole work is presented to Bernard by his humble exiled servant Aurelian as a token of esteem. Evidently Aurelian had been a monk of the abbey of St. John of Réôme near the town of Moutier-St. Jean in central France (the only portion of the abbey now standing is a splendid late medieval doorway, which can be found in the Cloisters in New York City); he had been banished for some unknown offense and was writing a treatise on music (at some nearby monastery?) in order to regain favor with Abbot Bernard. The rest of the story is shrouded in a fog of hyperbole and hidden by the mists of time. By examining lists of abbots of Réôme, Gerbert was able to date the work with almost unbelievable precision to the early 840's, probably the year 843, marking the end of the short abbacy of Bernard II. This is the only Abbot Bernard who fits Aurelian's

description as a descendant of Charlemagne and yet is early enough to predate the oldest manuscript sources of the treatise. No one questions this dating. Unfortunately, it does not appear that Bernard ever became an archbishop, and we have no further information whatever about Aurelian. Dr. Ponte and especially Dr. Gushee attempt to shed some light on these shadowy figures, but neither is very successful.

The body of the *Musica disciplina* consists of twenty chapters, the first seven on the ancient and Biblical heritage of music, the last thirteen on the chant of the Church, especially on the concept of mode. As Gushee points out, this is not an elementary work but a treatise on topics of interest primarily to the skilled musician. Unlike the treatises that were to follow it, the *Musica disciplina* does not attempt to integrate the traditional and practical sides of musical knowledge or even to find an approach common to both topics. As Gushee makes clear, the first part of the work deals with music primarily from the Boethian arithmetical point of view, while the second section treats the subject from the standpoint of grammar. The present writer might extrapolate from this to suggest that a change in attitude might have occurred as a result of the increasing use of musical notation after 850. In addition, the appearance of the music on the page with the text might have lent more weight to the arithmetical aspects of practical music, this situation making possible the reconciliation of ancient and modern musical theory to some degree. (What is needed, however, for a resolution of such hypotheticals is a study of the influence of notation on the other aspects of music.) The first half-chapter of the section on modal theory is found in a number of sources as a separate treatise, *De octo tonis*, appearing in Gerbert just before the *Musica disciplina* proper and with an ascription to Alcuin. Several other portions of the *Musica disciplina* occur in the manuscript tradition as separate entities. Of five manuscripts that evidently once contained the complete text, two are only fragments and another, Gerbert's source (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, *Pluteus 29.48*), is not quite complete. Drs. Ponte and Gushee both base their editions on the 9th-century Valenciennes manuscript 148, but the differences among the three printed versions of the work are slight.

Proceeding from this common basis, Ponte and Gushee take quite opposite directions. Ponte is concerned with making the treatise available to the modern scholar interested in musical tradition and chant theory in the 9th century and treats the other aspects of the work, often rightly, as subsidiary issues. Gushee, devoting himself to an examination of the background of the work, discusses only a few of the most interesting points raised in the treatise itself.

Ponte writes his dissertation from the center outward. The second of his three volumes is the critical text, with translation on facing pages; strangely enough, however, he uses the text of the Valenciennes manuscript while emending the translation with readings from the other sources. The third volume is an almost line-by-line commentary on the work and gives extensive references to early manuscript sources of the chants Aurelian discusses, as

well as elaborations on the import of Aurelian's comments. Ponte writes his first volume to reorganize the material of the third part on a topical basis, with a particular eye toward helping those who would use the dissertation on microfilm. Probably in order to proceed as quickly as possible to the musical aspects of the treatise, Ponte dismisses some of the other considerations rather hastily. He takes the treatise at face value as an original work written by Aurelian for Abbot Bernard. Aurelian's lament that none in that benighted age, save Bernard, could compare with the wonderful musicians of the past makes the author conclude that Aurelian might be an old man writing a treatise which reflects the musical practice of the early part of the century.

Assuming the simplest imaginable textual history for the work, Ponte suggests that most of the known manuscript sources are closely related to the Valenciennes text. Although he attempts to reconstruct a melody from a verbal description given by Aurelian, he is not very successful. Where Ponte is interested in his topic, however, he brings some very useful material to light. One of his most intriguing discussions concerns a remark Aurelian makes about certain bad musicians who evidently were singing the offertory verses to newly composed melodies. If Ponte's suggested interpretation is correct, the offertory verses originally had been sung to a set of tones which were going out of use in the early 9th century because singers preferred to invent free melodies rather than perform the more demanding task of fitting the often unwieldy verse lengths to the tones.

Ponte also faces the problem of Aurelian's often careless use of language; for instance, the word "tonus" may refer to the Greek *tonos*, to a church mode, to tone of voice, to the whole tone, or it may simply mean "pitch." The concepts are seemingly interchangeable, so that Aurelian can begin a paragraph on the fifteen Greek modes and end it with the list of fifteen tones of voice given by Isidore as a list of examples. Unfortunately, in the recent publication of Ponte's revised translation (Aurelian of Réôme, *The Discipline of Music*, Colorado Springs: Colorado College Music Press Translations, III, 1968), the commentary is almost completely omitted, except for a set of emendations to Gerbert, in order to facilitate comparison between the text and translation. The volumes of commentary in the microfilmed dissertation are likely to be the best guide to the scholar working on the *Musica disciplina* for a long time to come.

Gushee, who had the benefit of seeing what Ponte had done while he was still writing his commentary on the treatise, chose to concentrate on the investigation of the things Ponte had taken for granted or simply ignored. His dissertation shows a higher caliber of critical thinking than does Ponte's, and his writing demonstrates far more personality. Since he was not tied to the order of events in the treatise, his volume of commentary is better organized than even the first volume of Ponte's dissertation. In considering the meager documentary evidence concerning Aurelian and Bernard, he brings few new facts to light, but he does find room for several speculations about Bernard's prospective archbishopric, and even more space for the

consideration of the possibility that Aurelian himself became an archbishop. There was an Archbishop Aurelian of Lyons, the archdiocese where Réôme was located, who held office from 876 to 895. In 843 he would have presumably been a young man and therefore (says Gushee with perhaps a touch of glee) the proper age to have committed some infraction of ecclesiastical discipline which merited punishment by exile. Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence to support this identification, since no surviving record shows that Archbishop Aurelian had at any time a particular interest in either music or the abbey of Réôme, although he was once archdeacon for an adjacent region. To strengthen the argument for the identification, Gushee points out that Aurelian is not a common name in this period; however, he tells us elsewhere that the father of the Archbishop was also named Aurelian, which would indicate that the name was in use in at least one of the great families of the realm. Citing an ecclesiastical decree from the early part of the century commanding good singers to teach others, Gushee makes the more plausible suggestion that Aurelian's offense was his failure to share his knowledge with other musicians.

Gushee's greatest contribution to our understanding of the background of the work is his determination of the filiation of the manuscripts, in which he upsets the entire conception that previous scholarship had held of the history of the text of the *Musica disciplina*. While a number of the family trees that the present writer has seen drawn by musicologists in source studies have seemed to be more the result of reading tea leaves than of textual analysis, Gushee's examination of the scribal variants is sufficiently thorough to substantiate a new picture of considerable complexity. The large number of partial manuscripts of the treatise fall for the most part into patterns which indicate an extremely strong possibility that the work first existed as separate units which were then combined into a first version of the *Musica disciplina*, and that Aurelian made the final version by augmenting the earlier treatise with interpolations and by adding the passages referring to Bernard. Whether Aurelian did more than this final revision of the work is not certain, although Gushee establishes enough of a difference of content and style between the probable original and the additions of Aurelian to make it seem likely that the first complete version was the work of another hand (or other hands). The entire problem is complicated by the apparent collation of different branches of the manuscript tradition in the preparation of some of the presently known sources, but the weight of evidence is such that Gushee's version seems eminently reasonable. Interesting as it may be to speculate upon these matters, however, one question does emerge: how much of the treatise was written by Aurelian of Réôme. Whether he was the same Aurelian who became Archbishop of Lyons in his old age has little real bearing on what the treatise tells us about music.

For his own reasons, dubious though they may be, Ponte comes to the same conclusion as Gushee about the earlier date for the practice covered by the treatise. While Gushee's reasons are more substantial for this assumption

than are Ponte's, as long as the treatise remains isolated in time and space, the precise decade of its composition is not terribly important. Perhaps the next major study of the *Musica disciplina* will be an attempt to unravel the problem of separate authorships of various sections to the extent that different points of view can be established for different writers and that some of the obscurities in the work can be clarified. The task, if it is at all feasible, would be monumental, and one can certainly not fault Gushee for not having attempted it. But until it is tried, Gushee's work on the history of the text will have little relevance to what the treatise actually says. Perhaps the most useful parts of the dissertation under the present circumstances are the short discussions Gushee presents on a number of topics raised in and by the treatise, such as the Greek Noeane formulas and the presence of notation in the best manuscripts, which leads Gushee to conclude that Aurelian did use notation, although his references to it in the text are not very explicit. If Gushee's dissertation seems at times to go to great lengths to explore issues that have little to do with the content of the *Musica disciplina*, his general study of the background and many of the matters he clarifies are extremely valuable for coming to terms with the treatise. Furthermore, if looked at as just a study in methodology, this dissertation will prove quite illuminating to almost every student who intends to do source work in the history of music.