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Early 16th-Century Manuscripts at Piacenza: A Progress Report

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The musical holdings of the Archivio del Duomo at Piacenza, Italy, were fully catalogued by Francesco Bussi in a volume published in 1967.¹ Attracted by the early 16th-century items, Prof. Martin Picker obtained microfilms from the library and began a personal investigation of the material.² This investigation was widened considerably when he decided to make the filmed part-books the subject of his doctoral seminar held at Rutgers University in the spring of 1972.

The repertoire contained in the manuscripts was divided by genre, and the research was conducted by the group as follows: Patricia Virga investigated the motets, Stephen Fisher the Masses, Jane Weidensaul the polyphonic hymns, and Benito Rivera the lamentations. Miss Weidensaul collected the results of the work and edited the following progress report for publication in this journal.

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As described by Bussi,³ the early 16th-century material includes four part-books containing:

- (1) *Passioni, messe, salmi, magnificat, motetti. . . .*
- (2) F. R. F. e anonimi: *Messe, messa di requiem, antifone, inni, motetti. . . .*
- (3) Adriano Willaert e altri: *Messe, inni, lamentazioni, motetti. . . .*
(2 volumes).

Because Bussi did not assign numbers to the holdings of the library, the numbers given in parentheses above have been adopted in this report to facilitate the identification of the material discussed.

From the titles, it is obvious that the books contain a large and varied repertory of sacred music suitable for the various seasons of the church year, for the celebration of the Mass, and especially for Vespers worship. Only one secular work appears: the dialogue madrigal *Quando nascesti Amore?* of Verdelot (MS. 3, both volumes). Of the original six voices, just two are present, and these sing not the opening text, but rather the first response, "Quando la terra."

Most of the pieces of the Piacenza repertory are incomplete owing to the lack of correspondence among the four part-books. Only small portions of MSS. 1 and 2 belong to the two closely related volumes of MS. 3, or to each other, for that matter. Just two works (motets) were found in all four part-books. This suggests that the books were bound from various fascicles, most of which were independent originally.

Just how this music made its way to Piacenza is one of the many mysteries uncovered by the investigation. The most notable early 16th-century musician from the Piacenza region was Girolamo Parabosco, born there in the 1520's, later a pupil of Willaert, cocontributor with the master to the instrumental *Musica nova* of 1540, active traveler (three visits to his native town are documented during the fifth decade of the century), and, finally, first organist at San Marco.⁴ Parabosco could well be the link between the Piacenza holdings and the pieces of Venetian origin, but no hard evidence has emerged to support this thesis.

I. The Motets:

Motet literature dominates the Piacenza manuscripts and comprises some 149 pieces in all. The works call for a variable number of voices, according to the designations, and at least one piece carries the words "Chorus II," thus indicating a polychoral setting. The second chorus section begins with the text "Donec ponam," verse 2 of Psalm 109, *Dixit dominus* (MS. 1, 66'-67). The composer has remained anonymous to date.

The provenance of much of the music is clearly northern Italian, and the substantial number of works attributed to Willaert suggests ties to Venice. In addition, there is some affinity with manuscripts of Florentine origin. These are Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana *S. Borromeo E.II*,⁵ and Chicago, Newberry Library *MS Case VM 1578 M 91*.⁶ Of the two, the Vallicelliana MS. shows a remarkable relationship to the Piacenza collection: twenty-six motets are concordant, and five motets identified as *unica* in the Rome inventory have now lost their solitary status: *Simile est regnum|Deus qui* (Willaert), *Virgo prudentissima* (Jachet), *Sub tuum presidium* (L'Héritier), *Estote fortes|Vos amici mei* (Arcadelt), and *Mundi christo|Sancti martires* (Maître Jan). Seven concordances were found between the Piacenza collection and the Newberry manuscript, and here, too, a second source turned up for one of the *unica*: *Salve rex pater|Eya ergo* (MS. 2). In addition, eight concordances were discovered between the Piacenza manuscripts and Vatican City, *Cappella Giulia XII, 4*, a choirbook dating from 1536.⁷

The part-books studied by the seminar contain only a slim handful of composer attributions; unmasking the anonymous writers of some 149 motets therefore presented the greatest problem. To date, fifty-eight, or about one-third, of the pieces have been traced to their creators. Nine motets have been tentatively identified from inventories and catalogues lacking musical incipits; more positive attributions await the examination of source materials not presently available. The predominance of composers active in northern Italy appears evident from the list which follows.

<i>Composer</i>	<i>Motets Identified</i>
Willaert	15
Verdelot	8
Jachet	6

<i>Composer</i>	<i>Motets Identified</i>
Gombert	5
L'Héritier	4
Festa	3
Consilium	2
Lupus	2
Maître Jan	2
Claudin	1
Arcadelt	1
Mouton	1
Moulu (or LeBrung)	1
De Silva	1
Layolle	1
Anonymous works in other MSS.	5

II. The Masses:

The Piacenza part-books contain several sets of Mass ordinaries; only six of the Masses are present in as many as three parts—there being evidence to suggest that one additional part is missing—and the remaining nine works have been preserved in but one part, usually the bassus. The identified Masses include the following works:

Févin or Divitis:

Missa Dicitis moy toutes vos pensées, a 4 (= *Missa secunda*, MSS. 2 and 3), a parody of a chanson by Compère. The Mass following is by Févin, a point which might swing the evidence for attribution of this work in his favor.

Févin:

Missa O quam glorifica luce, a 4 (= *Missa tertia*, MSS. 2 and 3), probably a paraphrase Mass based on an untraced melody which Clinkscale has been able to isolate.⁸

Jachet Berchem:

Missa super Altro non e il mio amor, a 5 (MS. 3b), a parody of a madrigal by Verdelot.

Festa:

Missa Se congie pris, a 5 (= *Missa octava*, MS. 2), based on a chanson melody as cantus firmus.

The only previously-known source for this last piece was Wolfenbüttel MS. A. The Piacenza version confirms Alexander Main's suspicion that the German source is incomplete,⁹ for three sections have now come to light for the first time: a second *Osanna*, a first *Agnus*, and a second *Agnus* for a reduced number of voices. The sole *Agnus* setting in Wolfenbüttel corresponds to the third *Agnus* in the Piacenza version. The Piacenza voice corresponds in most sections to the *vagans* of the German manuscript, although in two sections in

which the tenor does not have the cantus firmus, the Piacenza voice takes over the part assigned in Wolfenbüttel to the tenor, an arrangement showing greater logic.

There are many differences in textual setting between the two copies, with associated rhythmic variants. The most interesting of these is at the *Et incarnatus*, which in the Piacenza source begins with seven breves, while the Wolfenbüttel version breaks some of them up into semibreves, obviously sacrificing number symbolism for the sake of better declamation. All the evidence suggests that the German manuscript contains a heavily edited version of the work and that the Piacenza source probably gives the original version.

The work in MS. 2 headed “F.R.F. e anonimi *Missa pro defunctis*,” copied complete in four voices, is one of the more intriguing puzzles of the Piacenza manuscripts. It is apparently unique, and possibly the most complete polyphonic setting of the Mass for the Dead written in the first half of the 16th century. Both the texts and the melodies are those of the standard Roman rite, which was current in Italy long before it spread to the North as a result of the reforms of the Council of Trent. Most of the polyphonic settings written before 1540 employ a rite drawn partially from the Sarum usage, in which the gradual and tract are different and the sequence is omitted. All of the Requiem Masses published before 1540, except the Brumel setting (Antico, 1516), use the northern version, and Brumel set fewer sections than “F.R.F.” The style is quite homophonic, perhaps even naïve; the use of chant melodies in the polyphonic sections is minimal, consisting mostly of an allusion in the first notes of the cantus.

Immediately following the *Missa pro defunctis* is a work designated “F.R.F. *Dies Ire*” [sic]. The clefs are rather different from those used in the main body of the Requiem, but not so different that this movement could not be substituted for the *Dies irae* in the Mass itself. This work could also have been intended to serve in connection with movements of another polyphonic Requiem which did not include a setting of the *Dies irae*. The appearance of “F.R.F.” over two works in similar style in the manuscript suggests that these are the initials of the composer rather than those of the dedicatee, although the matter is not settled. The Requiem, with one or the other of the two sequence settings, is the only Mass complete in all parts in the Piacenza collection. Just why the copyist adopted choirbook format for this work is yet another mystery.

Bearing in mind the simplicity of the notation, the lack of concern for motivic unity, and the near lack of significant imitation and rests, one can contrast the Requiem with all of the other Masses, even those present in only one voice. None of the other Masses shows this same naïveté: almost all of them have some sort of obvious motivic structure, and many of them show imitation or rests which signify imitation, the use of ligatures and of notes longer than a semibreve, mensural changes, canons, expansions or reductions of the original texture, and other devices typical of the more sophisticated

composers of the period. It thus seems likely that the Requiem was one of a few pieces of local origin copied into a set of manuscripts which contained, basically, an imported repertory.

III. The Polyphonic Hymns:

The two volumes of MS. 3 contain, by happy chance, all four parts of a polyphonic hymn cycle, substantially by Willaert. This is apparently the sole manuscript source for the master's hymns yet discovered. Two printed collections, the *Hymnorum musica* (Scotto, 1542) and *I sacri e santi salmi* (Gardane, 1555), both issued during the lifetime of the composer, contain all of Willaert's previously-known works in the genre. Three pieces attributed to Willaert in the manuscripts are certainly *unica*: *Conscendit jubilans* (*Festum nunc celebre*), *Impar ancilla* (*Maria mater domini*), and *Sumens illud* (*Ave maris stella*). In addition, no concordances have been discovered for the four hymns of anonymous authorship, two of which are unistrophic and two of which, following Willaert's custom, are designed for *alternatim* performance with new music for each polyphonic strophe. The first strophe of most Willaert hymns is assigned to the chant choir, a matter which leaves the scholar in possession of the texts to only the even-numbered verses. A page-by-page search of the *Analecta hymnica*¹⁰ finally revealed the proper titles of all of the hymns in the Piacenza manuscripts.

After one puts aside the two unistrophic hymns, pieces well separated from the Willaert cycle, there remain twenty-one works of which nineteen are attributed to Willaert by the scribe, sixteen being concordant with the settings of the *Hymnorum musica*. The concordances bear out the accuracy of the attributions without exception: there is thus no reason to doubt the ascription of the three *unica* to the master.

A lucky find among the hymns offers some worthwhile clues regarding the dating and history of the cycle. Hymn No. 6, *Quo sanctum Marchum* (*Hodie festum pie celebremus*) is musically identical with Willaert's multistrophic setting of *Ut queant laxis* in the *Hymnorum musica*. Since the hymn honors St. Mark, the patron saint of Venice, and since the only source for the text is given by Dreves as "Cod. Marcian L II 93,"¹¹ a holding of the Biblioteca Marciana of the same city, it seems fair to conclude that the cycle under consideration was brought to Piacenza at some point following Willaert's employment at San Marco in 1527.¹² Notational differences between the manuscripts and the printed *Hymnorum musica* demonstrate that the former was not copied from the latter. Assuming that a scribe working in Venice after 1542 would have had access to the more accurate printed part-books (the manuscripts contain many errors) and would have used them, one may tentatively date the hymn cycle, at least, as having been copied between 1527 and 1542.

Surely much manuscript material has been lost since the 16th century, material which might offer assistance in the establishment of a chronology of Willaert's works. That such manuscripts existed in 1533 is documented in

the correspondence on theoretical matters between Spataro and Aron in August of that year. Spataro states in his letter that he owns *many* hymns of Willaert and wonders whether Aron could induce the master to compose three strophes of a hymn to honor St. Petronio, whose feast was to be celebrated at the end of September.¹³

The weight of all of the evidence suggests that the hymns in the Piacenza manuscripts form an earlier corpus, perhaps composed and compiled by Willaert for St. Mark's within a few years of his appointment there, then revised—some pieces added, others dropped, and one given another text—for publication in 1542. Several of the pieces must predate Willaert's Venetian tenure. *Festum nunc celebre*, for instance, was the standard Ascension hymn in the North; it was rarely, if ever, set by Italian composers. A search for stylistic clues yields little of a concrete nature: Willaert's mastery is evident in all of these pieces, even in those suspected of being youthful works. In any case, it would be illogical to think that he suddenly turned to hymn composition only in the fourth decade of his life.

IV. The Lamentations:

Two part-books of the Piacenza collection (MS. 3) contain, respectively, the tenor and bass parts for three separate lamentation settings for Holy Week. Scoring of these parts has demonstrated that at least two more voices would be required to complete the music. No concordances have resulted from a search of catalogues, early prints, and manuscripts available to the writer.

The first set contains a nearly complete lamentation cycle for the three Holy Week services. The full cycle includes three lessons for each day: this set lacks only the third lesson for Friday. Whether the omission is the fault of the composer or of the scribe is difficult to determine. There are signs of great carelessness in the copying of the text throughout these works. One cannot defend these errors as text variants allowed before the Council of Trent. Indeed, there was room for variety, but this variety involved the choice of verses only. Devices for unification of this cycle are apparent: only two modes are used, the same music is reintroduced at each "Jerusalem" refrain, and the melodic material sometimes shows an affinity with the standard lamentation tone. The latter relationship often ends quickly, however, and is frequently absent altogether.

The second set of lamentations covers only the Wednesday service. The entire work is in the fourth mode with an occasional B \flat ; and connection with the lamentation tone, which is in the sixth mode, is thus impossible. The "Jerusalem" refrain is again set to the same music, and a melodic motif which ascends to C and then returns to B pervades the work. A trait common to the present set and the first set is the use of the *corona*, not only at the end of acrostics and verses but also within verses. This sign occurs on the average of about every eighth measure. While this may merely represent a scribal mannerism, it points up the highly sectional character of the phrasing.

Both sets also omit a final sentence of the Jeremiah verse, "Facti sunt hostes." This is the only case of an incomplete verse setting and may indicate common authorship or at least common local provenance.

The third set has a complete cycle in the tenor part for three days of Holy Week. The bass part is incomplete in two respects: the scribe stopped copying the music after the first lesson for Thursday, and he never copied the text at all. The similarity of choice of verses indicates that the third set may belong to the same local group as the first two. New music is used, however, for the "Jerusalem" refrain, and many sections of the Wednesday service show a relationship to the standard lamentation tone, particularly in the stepwise ascent from F to B \flat . This is the principal unifying force of the music: the same material is merely transposed and expanded for the Thursday service.

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What began as a seminar exercise in preliminary manuscript examination concluded with the disclosure of much new information of considerable scholarly interest. The possibilities for discovery could in no way be exhausted during the course of one semester. Not all concordances, for instance, could be determined, partly because of the unavailability of certain microfilms at the time they were needed, and partly because of the prohibitive expense of obtaining every film the students might have wished to see. It is hoped that these initial findings will spur further research on the Piacenza holdings.

NOTES

¹ Francesco Bussi, *Piacenza: Archivio del Duomo, catalogo del fondo musicale* (Milan: Istituto editoriale italiano, 1967).

² A paper discussing two works was read by Prof. Picker at the International Josquin Festival-Conference of 1971. Entitled "Josquiniana in Some Manuscripts at Piacenza," it will appear in the conference *Proceedings* scheduled for future publication.

³ Bussi, *Piacenza*, pp. 139–51.

⁴ Francesco Bussi, "Girolamo Parabosco," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 10 (Kassel and Basel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1962), cols. 740–42.

⁵ This manuscript was inventoried by Edward Lowinsky in "A Newly-Discovered Sixteenth-Century Motet Manuscript in the Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 3 (1950): 173–232.

⁶ An inventory of this manuscript was in preparation by H. Colin Slim at the time of the seminar.

⁷ Paul Kast, "Römische Handschriften," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 11 (1963), col. 755.

⁸ Edward Clinkscale, "The Complete Works of Antoine de Févin," vol. 1 (Ph. D. diss., New York University, 1965), p. 123.

⁹ Main's modern edition of the incomplete German source is contained in Costanzo Festa's *Opera omnia*, vol. 1 (Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1962).

¹⁰ G. M. Dreves and C. Blume, *Analecta hymnica medii aevi*, 55 vols. (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1886–1922).

¹¹ *Analecta hymnica*, vol. 22, p. 175.

¹² W. Gerstenberg, "Adrian Willaert," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 14 (1968), col. 663.

¹³ Knud Jeppesen, "Eine musiktheoretische Korrespondenz des früheren Cinquecento," *Acta musicologica* 13 (1941): 35.