

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS

3

GIROLAMO MEI

(1519-1594)

LETTERS ON ANCIENT
AND MODERN MUSIC

TO

VINCENZO GALILEI

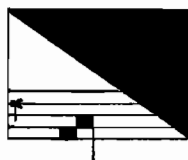
AND

GIOVANNI BARDI

A Study with Annotated Texts

by

CLAUDE V. PALISCA



Second, corrected edition, with Addenda

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MUSICOLOGY

1977

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MUSICOLOGY
ARMEN CARAPETYAN, PH. D., DIRECTOR

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES
AND DOCUMENTS

Copyright © American Institute of Musicology
Hänssler-Verlag, Neuhausen-Stuttgart.

CONTENTS

Preface to the second edition	IX
Preface to the first edition	X
I. Introduction	1
II. History of the Correspondence	7
III. The Life and Studies of Girolamo Mei	15
1. Biography	18
2. Mei's Writings on Music	34
3. Mei's Rediscovery of Greek Theory; its Influence on the Camerata	40
a. Mei's View of the Greek Tonoï	47
b. Mei's Discovery of the Tables of Alypius and the Hymns of Mesomedes	59
c. The Problem of Tuning	63
IV. Historical Significance of the Correspondence	75
V. The Manuscript	82
<i>Letters to Vincenzo Galilei and Giovanni Bardi</i>	
in Vatican Ms Regina lat. 2021	87
Letter no. 1, 8 May 1572 to Galilei	89
Letter no. 2, 22 November 1577 to Galilei	122
Letter no. 3, 17 January 1578 to Galilei	137
Fragment on the Greek Lyre	141
Undated Fragmentary Notes on the History of Greek Music	143
Letter no. 4, 17 January 1578 to Bardi	148
Letter no. 5, 15 May 1579 to Galilei	155
	VII

Letter no. 6, September? 1581 to Galilei	165
Appendix I. Letter, Mei to Vettori, 21 February 1562	180
Appendix II. Letter, Mei to Pinelli, 19 May 1582	183
Manuscripts Cited	186
Bibliography	187
Girolamo Mei: Manuscripts of his Works and Letters	195
Printed Works	201
Addenda to the second edition	203
Index of Subjects Treated in Mei's Letters	213
Index locorum classicorum	216
Index of Names	218

LIST OF PLATES

1a. Beginning of Letter no. 1	<i>Frontispiece</i>
1b. Florence, Uffizi, fresco, from a print in <i>Azioni gloriose degli uomini illustri fiorentini</i> (Florence, 1745)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
2. Letter, Mei to Vettori, 25 January 1567, Paris, B.N., ital. 2035, fol. 281a	<i>Frontispiece</i>
3a. <i>Clangat hodie vox nostra</i>	,, ,, 154
3b. Figure of a Lyre	,, ,, 154
4a. Tables of Alypius, Segni del Ipodorio	,, ,, 164
4b. Segni del Ipofrigio	,, ,, 164
5a. Segni del Ipolidio	} following plate 4b
5b. Segni del Dorio	
6a. Segni del Frigio	
6b. Segni del Lidio	
7a. Segni del Mixolidio	
7b. Segni del Ipermixolidio	
8. Letter, Mei to Pinelli, 19 May 1582, Milan, Ambrosiana, S. 105 sup., fol. 76	<i>-facing page</i> 183

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Among the most valuable documents for the history of music are those that reveal the intellectual roots of the artistic ideals of the past. Yet few such documents have been published in their entirety by contrast with the numerous sources that give us information on performance-practices or methods of composition, on the social setting of musical activity, or on personalities and their interrelations. Because of this paucity of documentation, speculations and generalizations about the philosophical roots of certain esthetic viewpoints do not always rest on solid foundations. Meanwhile critics vainly discuss the "commonwealth of arts" through analogies between superficial stylistic manners appearing in the various media during particular cultural periods, while they often miss the organic connections that underlie parallel styles in the several arts. These parallel manifestations can usually be traced to fundamental esthetic and philosophical beliefs that dominate a given historical epoch. Progress in uncovering the organic connections depends upon having in readable form the primary sources that tell us what men of the past thought about artistic expression and why, and in their own words.

This publication of the extant letters of Girolamo Mei to Vincenzo Galilei and Giovanni Bardi aims to serve this end. Since the six letters printed here are only a small part, but probably the most important part, of a more extensive correspondence, I have endeavored in the study and notes to reconstruct their context in Mei's thought. The extant letters themselves strikingly show the antiquarian, Aristotelian and humanistic bases of his thinking. When to the letters are added the facts of his career and the content of his other writings, the importance of these origins becomes all the more apparent.

The introductory study aims to bring this out rather than to

addressed, he said, to a Sig. Agostino, actually Agostino del Nero. We may assume it was similar in content to Mei's *Discorso sopra la musica antica e moderna*, of which several versions must have been extant at that time, one of them in the first letter to Galilei published here ⁵.

In his *Trattato della Musica Scenica*, Doni again praised Mei and pointed out the significance of his discoveries:

Galilei in his erudite Dialogue concerning the ancient and modern music affirms not without cause that our modes are all of one color, odor and taste; because, truly, as they are practiced today, almost no diversity can be observed in them. Now it should be noted that among the modern practical musicians no one better understood this truth than he, thanks to his long collaboration and familiarity with Sig. Giovanni Bardi, mentioned above, and with Sig. Girolamo Mei, who was also a very literate nobleman and a lover of the good and erudite music, and very experienced in musical theory as well as other parts of mathematics and in philosophy. Both these men, therefore, were of great aid to Galilei in the composition of that work. Of Mei, one may read the Latin treatise, *de Modis*, addressed to Pier Vittorio, his teacher, in which he subtly demonstrated that the modes or tones of the ancients principally differed from ours in that theirs consisted of total transpositions of the system to higher or lower pitches.

Agostino . . . di VS. Ill.^{ma} come da una lettera a lui indirizzata, che v`a a torno, si vede. Questa essendomi gi`a stata cortesemente comunicata in mia giovent`u dalla b.m. di Monsig. Francesco Nori, primo Vescovo di S. Miniato, fu quasi una scintilla, che m'accese un ardente desiderio d'impossessarmi dell'antica Musica, e d'illustrarla con le mie fatiche, il quale vie maggiormente poi si accrebbe dalla lettura del Dialogo del Galilei (dove il Mei, di cui parlo, ebbe la maggior parte) e molto pi`u da un Trattato *de Modis Musicae* dell' istesso Autore, scritto a penna, e dal dottissimo Monsig. Guarengo donato alla Libreria Vaticana, ch'io feci copiare per bene intenderlo, e valermene in questi ameni studj . . .”

⁵ Concerning this essay and letter to Agostino del Nero, see below p. 10.

codices of the Vatican Library⁹³. Practically every theoretical source known to present day specialists on Greek music appears on the list of writings Mei sent to Galilei⁹⁴. Among them are named the two books of the *Harmonics* and fragments of the *Rhythmical Elements* of Aristoxenus, the three books *Concerning Music* of Aristeides Quintilianus, the tables of Alypius (these he said were incomplete), the *Introduction to the Art of Music* by Bacchius the Elder, the *Introduction to Harmonics*, sometimes attributed to Cleonides and sometimes to Euclid (actually of Cleonides), the *Introduction to Harmonics* of Gaudentius, the introduction, as he calls it, of Nicomachus, the *Harmonics* of Claudius Ptolemy, and the three books of *Commentary* on part of Ptolemy's work by Porphyry. Mei listed also Plutarch, *Concerning Music*, which he noted was printed, three books of Bryennius, and an introduction by Psellus. Also listed are Theon of Smyrna's compilation, Joseffo Racendito's Compendium, and some anonymous fragments⁹⁵. The Latin authors listed are: St. Augustine, Boethius, Censorinus, Martianus Capella, Guido of Arezzo, Jacob Faber, Franchino Gaffurio, Lodovico Fogliano and Henricus Glareanus; as Italian authors, Pietro Aron and Zarlino. He also mentioned among the Latin works, "four introductions partly anonymous and partly by authors who are not known." When he could, Mei compared several copies of the same work. For example, he studied eight copies of Ptolemy, three of Porphyry and two of Aristoxenus.

In none of Mei's writings are the fruits of this erudition so

⁹³ *Termini di mezzo rilievo*, p. 17, quoted in Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 67. Filippo Valori, son of Mei's close friend, Baccio Valori, was, like his father, a member of the Alterati.

⁹⁴ Letter no. 1, p. 118, fol. 24v.

⁹⁵ This list may be compared to that in Gustave Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages*, pp. 17-19, which gives all the presently known theoretical sources. Keeping in mind Mei's intention, to exclude works which deal with music only incidentally, we find that Mei's list lacks only one source, Bellermann's Anonymous, and he probably reckoned this among the "anonymous fragments" (cf. Letter no. 1, p. 120, note 73).

Girolamo Mei

Ecce: et mio osser^{mo} ¹

A le cerimonie e scuse de le due vostre ho proposto non rispondere cosa alcuna; perche io con le prime non mi son ancor punto ben saputo addimesticare se bene ormai cortigiano di qualche decina d'anni. et à le seconde non è mestier di replica, essendo che senza loro sarei restato sodisfatissimo, con un sol verso di vostra mano che semplicemente mi havesse detto la prima esser veramente sua; conciossiache da la bontà e sincerità de l'animo vostro m'haveva fatto certissimo prima M. Pirro ² medesimo, e poi il nostro M. Damiano ³: quello ne lo scusare il caso: et questo nel esser domandato in quei di da me de le condizioni vostre, le quali tutte, da tutti mi furono largamente confermate esser da un gentilhuomo veramente degno di ogni bene.

Circa i quesiti fattimi da voi risponderò per capi pju distintamente e speditamente che io sapro, per esser ben inteso, e pju succintamente che io potro, per non esser tedioso; tenendo in far cio quel ordine che mi tornerà pju comodo, senza altro rispetto di esser essi stati fatti prima ò dopo, ò ne la prima, ò ne la seconda lettera. Dissi adunque à M. Pirro à bocca, si come egli vi fece

¹ *Eccellente et mio osservandissimo*. Although this letter lacks the name of the addressee, it was undoubtedly intended for Galilei and written in reply to two letters of unknown date.

² This may refer to Pirro del Bene, who was a member of the Alterati in Florence, an academy to which both Mei and Giovanni Bardi belonged. He died while still a young man, and Alessandro Rinuccini pronounced in the academy in his honor an oration printed in *Prose fiorentine raccolte dallo Smarrito*, Part I, Vol. III, pp. 247-262.

³ It has not been possible to identify M. Damiano.

*

ADDENDA TO THE SECOND EDITION

The following addenda refers to the places in the body of the book and of the appendices that are marked by an asterisk in the margin.

Pp. 9 to 11.

A version of Mei's first letter to Galilei in an uncatalogued collection of the Bibliotheca Nazionale Centrale in Florence throws some light on the transition between the original letter and the Piero del Nero publication. The new source is Fondo Rinuccini, Filza 17, which contains as the last of a number of short treatises one labeled: "G.M. della musica antica e mod^a al I.S.B.V. / P. del N." (Girolamo Mei della musica antica e moderna al Illustre Signor Baccio Valori / Piero del Nero). Some of the other material in the folder pertains to or is by Baccio Valori. The Mei fascicle consists of twenty-seven folios written in the sixteenth century. It begins with the words "Dissi adunque a M. Pirro" and ends at "che nove chiarezza". Thus it leaves out the greeting, the first few sentences, the last paragraph and the signature of the letter, converting it into an independent little treatise. Aside from these omissions, this version improves the punctuation, orthography and often the grammar of the original and introduces paragraphing. Thus it represents a stage between the Vatican text and del Nero's edition, for while del Nero's printed version is usually faithful to the emendations in the Rinuccini manuscript, especially as to paragraphing, it introduces further revisions and refinements. The Rinuccini Ms is not as free of scribal errors as the Vatican Ms, but it fails to repeat the errors of the Vatican copyist, so it must stem from another, perhaps autograph, source. The Rinuccini Ms would seem to be a copy of Mei's own revision of the letter prepared for possible publication or circulation. This revision then was further edited and cut at about the half-way point to produce the printed *Discorso*.

The Rinuccini Ms has been valuable also in permitting the restoration of the marginal insertion on fol. 22v of the Vat. Ms, cut off by the binder, as well as the correction of a number of errors made by its copyist. These are indicated below opposite the appropriate page references.

P. 18, note 33.

Fols. 46r-47v, 50r of this Ms duplicate almost exactly a report in Rome, Bibl. Apost. Vat., Ms. Barberini lat. 3990, fols. 1-2, entitled "Relazione della Vita del Sig^o. Girolamo Mei fatta dal Sig. Zenobio Mei."