MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES & DOCUMENTS

33

FRANCHINUS GAFFURIUS

De Harmonia Musicorum Instrumentorum Opus

Introduction and Translation
by
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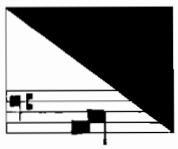

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This edition of *De harmonia musicorum instrumentorum opus* is based primarily on the edition printed in Milan on November 27, 1518,[1] and dedicated to Jean Grolier, the noted French bibliophile. Since the printed edition, however, is based on several manuscripts, three of which are still extant, it is necessary to examine these MSS briefly in order to understand the process by which the printed edition was developed.

The original manuscript of *De harmonia* was completed by Gaffurius in March, 1500, and was dedicated to Bonifacius Simonetta (c. 1441-1502), Cistercian abbot of the monastery of San Stefano del Corno. Simonetta was praised by Gaffurius as a *viro omnium scientiarum studiosissimo*. He was author of *De christianae fidei et romanorum Pontificum persecutionibus opus* (Milan, 1492, with several later editions), which also contained more than 250 letters to clerics, friends, and various rulers. His wide range of interests and humanistic inclinations are shown by the diversity of topics in the letters, which cover astronomy, music, medicine, geography, and other subjects.[2]

The printed edition of 1518 and the original manuscript of 1500, preserved at Lodi,[3] are divergent in numerous ways. At present MS 1500 begins with the table of contents which is followed by a short poem by Meleguli, the biographer of Gaffurius. In the printed edition the poem constitutes the penultimate text. MS 1500 then proceeds to a letter of dedication to Simonetta. The contents of the letter, however, were erased, probably by Gaffurius,[4] although a portrait of the abbot still remains at the head of the letter. The body of the text which follows is different in several respects from the printed edition. Minor changes in words, or word order, or phraseology, occur frequently, and headings of diagrams often differ. But more significant is the lack, in all the MSS, of references to contemporaries of Gaffurius who

[1] A facsimile edition of *De Harmonia* is edited by G. Vecchi (Bologna, 1972), in *Biblioteca Musica Bononiensis* II, 7.

[2] For more on Simonetta see A. Caretta, L. Cremascoli, L. Salamina, *Franchino Gaffurio* (Lodi, 1951), p. 15ff.

[3] In the Biblioteca Comunale Laudense, no. XXVIII A. 9. Hereafter the manuscript will be called MS 1500.

[4] For possible reasons of the erasure see A. Caretta, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

CHAPTER HEADINGS

BOOK I

BOOK II

Chapter

BOOK III

Chapter

BOOK IV

Chapter

Colloquy of Maurus Ugerius of Mantua and the Muses

What chorus awaits here? The Muses. Having left the summit
Of Parnassus is the entire sacred band coming here?
We are all present here, and what reason compels us
To make such a long journey from Helicon?
Do you not see the void in our insignia?
And Apollo is without his own poetic song.
Gaffurius has removed harmonious melodies from all
The Muses; their eloquence now has no sound.
You, Gaffurius, unlock the spirit that entrusts most things to you,
You can restore all things to the Muses.
Do not come to me, Muses, reach out to the grottoes of Grolier,
A thousand songs give utterance to modes in a thousand sweet sounds,
In that way you are said to have formed the temple of the Muses,
But I know that it was in the music of Franchinus.
With it Grolier resides in a splendid abode,
And he is surrounded by learned men.
More godlike among them he speaks with eloquence,
And shines like a precious gem alight in its facets.
He loves them, he refreshes and embraces them with an understanding arm,
And from an ample purse he offers the most noble gifts.
With his aid they agree with whatever you seek
And indeed he cultivates your goddesses.
But what kind of honors will you bring to the author
So that a Muse may not flow without gratitude by stream to his harbor?
Poets will exalt the name of Grolier to the heavens,
And annual festivals will be held in our territories.

BOOK I

The author[1] speaks to the book: Where are you going? Why are you fleeing? Did you hope to be able to leave your master?

Book: A throng of muses is calling me; the distinguished Grolier favors me with a hospitable reception and aids me with his support.

Author: Little book, you will soon be free; go now under his propitious auspices and banish grave cares of the mind. But if you are rejected you will suffer a shameful fate and I will say: never reenter our portals.

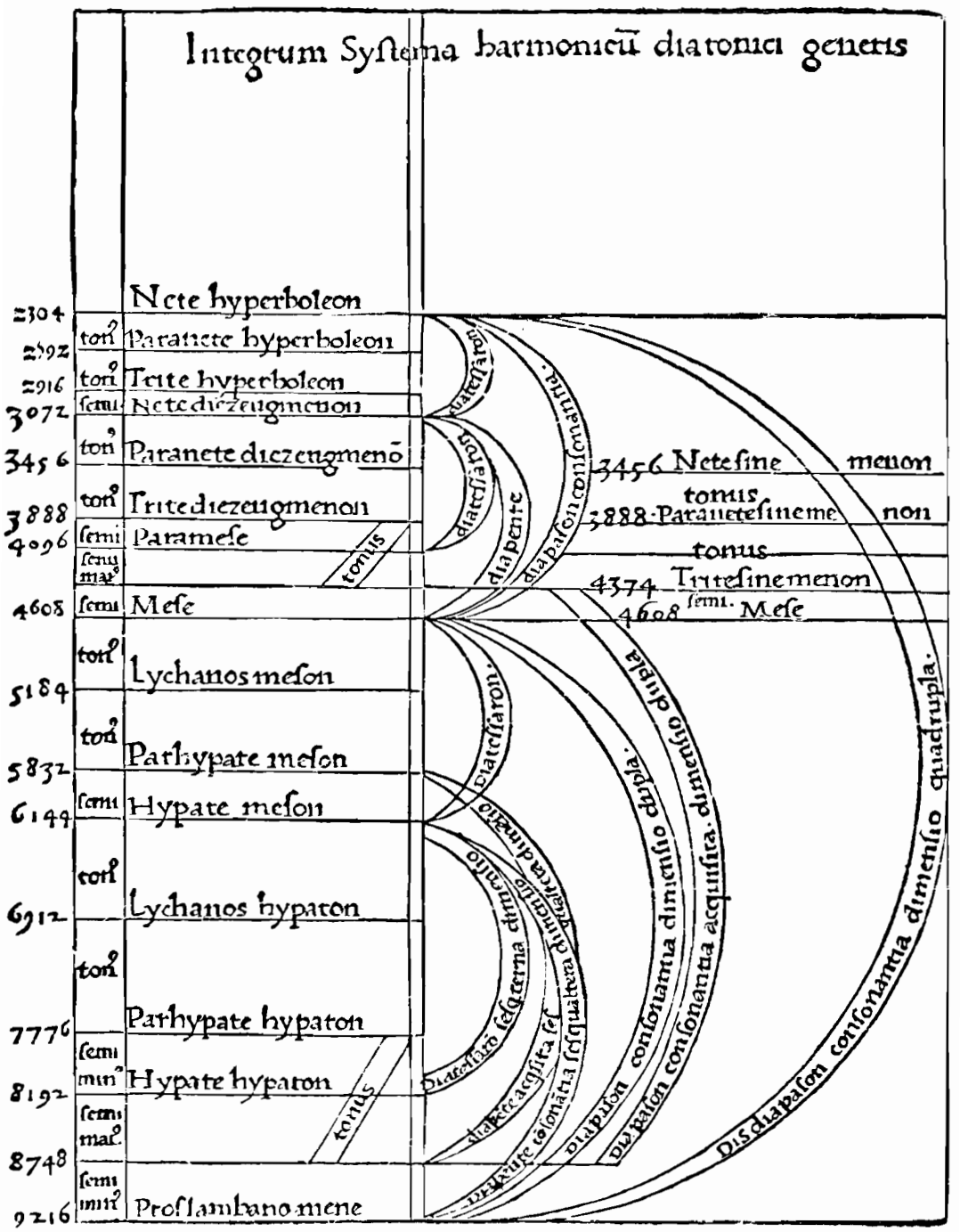
Franchinus Gaffurius sends best greetings to Jean Grolier of Lyons, chief Treasurer of Milan for the Most Christian king of France.

Most generous Sir: Among the ancients there was a custom handed down by tradition which posterity has preserved up to the present; according to this custom learned men offered their lucubrations to some illustrious person so that the authority of such a man would deliver their works from malicious and scurrilous attacks. Thus they dedicated the results of their labors to notable men, as Dioscorides of Anazarbus to Mark Antony (according to Suidas), Plutarch to Trajan, Pollux of Naucratis to Commodus, Aristotle to Alexander of Macedonia, Oppian to Marcus Aurelius and Philostratus to Severus. This is indeed the right thing to do, for the good fruits of the earth could not be shared with mortals, as with Triptolemus,[2] unless some severe deity would protest the seeds from becoming the food of insects and other animals. I, following their authoritative example, have written the work *De Harmonia* and have found no one greater than you to whom to dedicate it. For men of acute judgment eagerly praise, extol, and honor you with almost divine veneration in every kind of discourse, although your brilliant light stands out through your virtue alone. You are the guardian of liberal studies; for a long time you have aroused the muses to tumult and tempest, and you support, cherish, and honor them with a hospitable reception. I omit both your

[1] As a model for this opening poetic section Gaffurius used Horace, *Epistles*, I, 20. For a study of this section see A. Caretta, "Gaffurius Minore", in *Franchino Gaffurio* (Lodi, 1951), p. 167.

[2] An Attic hero, son of Celsus, king of Eleusis. Triptolemus is credited with bringing agriculture to mankind.

Complete harmonic system of the diatonic genus[12]



[12] *VNB* has the ratio numbers also divided by 4, as: 576 2304 Nete hyperbolaeon.

remove 9:8 from 32:27 by multiplying 32 and 8 to make 256 and 27 and 9 to make 243, the semitone proportion 256:243 will remain.

CHAPTER 22

The proportions which form a large semitone and a comma

Since it is established that a small semitone consists of 256:243, as an indication of a large semitone we will arrange three numbers whose extremes form 9:8, a whole tone. The median number to the smallest makes a small semitone, and to the largest a large semitone or apotome. The numbers are 1944, 2048, and 2187. 2187:1944 makes 9:8, a whole tone; 2187:2048, with 139 as remainder, makes a large semitone. The median number to the smallest, 2048:1944, makes 256:243, a small semitone. Thus 2187:2048 forms an apotome, which exceeds half of a whole tone. But a small semitone, arranged in the primary numbers 256:243, does not fill out half of a whole tone, as the description shows.

2187:1944 = 9:8, a whole tone
2048:1944 = a small semitone
2187:2048 = a large semitone

The excess and difference of a large semitone in relation to a small semitone is easily seen when the numbers of both proportions are arranged so that the larger number of the larger proportion is multiplied by the smaller number of the smaller proportion, and the smaller number of the larger proportion is multiplied by the larger number of the smaller proportion. The result of such a computation is called a comma, which is a proportion drawn from the multiplication of the opposite parts of the principal numbers, or 531441:524288, which is called 524288 with 7153 as a remainder. For these numbers, taken eight times, produce the total sum formed from the multiplication of these proportions, as this example shows:

2187:2048 = large semitone
256:243 = small semitone
531441:524288 = comma