BARTOLOMEO RAMIS DE PAREIA MUSICA PRACTICA
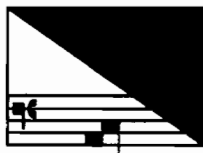
Commentary and Translation

by

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BARTOLOMEO RAMIS DE PAREIA
MUSICA PRACTICA

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COMMENTARY[1]

I

On the prints of *Musica Practica*.

This edition of *Musica Practica* by Bartolomeo Ramis de Pareia uses four prints of Ramis's treatise found in three libraries. These are apparently the only extant copies of *Musica Practica*.

The libraries and their sigla are: Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, A 80 and A 81; Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Incunabuli A. 7. 35; Regensburg, Bischöfliche Zentralbibliothek, Th 29.[2] Also consulted were Johannes Wolf's Latin edition of *Musica Practica*, in Publikationen der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft, Beihefte II (Leipzig, 1901), and the facs. ed. of *Musica Practica* in G. Vecchi, *Biblioteca Musica Bononiensis* II, N. 3 (Bologna, 1969).[3] Although Wolf's edition is generally excellent, it is not free of error. Some modern writers who adhere too closely to Wolf's edition without checking Bologna A 80 and A 81, the sources of this edition, have drawn faulty conclusions; these are indicated in the appropriate places in the present edition.

Just as Bologna A 80 and A 81 are the basis of Wolf's edition, so they are the primary source of the four prints used in the present edition. A 80 is dated 12 May 1482 and A 81 5 June 1482. At first they may seem to be two different editions, but close examination shows that they are, with two exceptions, the same in textual material but in two parallel prints.

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[1] All footnotes in the Commentary are in parentheses to distinguish them from the footnotes in the translation of the text.

[2] I wish to thank Dr. Bonnie J. Blackburn for sending me a copy of the Regensburg print.

[3] There are eight figures or diagrams in *Musica Practica*. Vecchi's facs. ed. of this treatise includes only five figures. The present edition uses facsimile reproductions of the eight figures which are drawn from the four prints of the treatise.

III

On *Musica Practica* (1482) by Bartolomeo Ramis.

The purpose of the comments in this section is to discuss the more important and innovative components of the treatise, and to present a survey of Ramis's versatile, complex, and controversial character.

There is a highly significant principle stated in *Musica Practica* which involves both theorists and composers, and which was a bone of contention among many of the leading musical minds of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This principle, which is a very important aspect of mensural notation, has recently been discussed in detail. In essence the principle relates to the five essential notes, the maxima, long, breve, semibreve, minim, and their interrelationship.

The problem has been studied in depth by Anna Maria Busse Berger, "The Relationship of Perfect and Imperfect Time in Italian Theory of the Renaissance", *Early Music History* 5, (1985), pp. 1-28. Berger found that there was a fundamental difference of opinion concerning the breve as a member of the five essential note values. Some considered the breve as *the* note of unchanging temporal duration, the long and maxima being notes of increasing value and the semibreve and minim being notes of decreasing value; others opposed this view of a breve as a central point of departure and proposed instead an equality of minims. Thus there arose a dichotomy of opinions which might be called equal breves versus equal minims.

As an example of the equal breve principle, if a breve under O is equal in temporal duration to a breve under C, then three semibreves under O are equal to two semibreves under C. Thus the three semibreves under O are equal in speed to the two semibreves under C, and consequently have a *sesquialtera* relationship to the two semibreves. The same results accrue if the equal breve principle is applied to minims, for then six minims will be equal to four, and *sesquialtera* will again result. Those

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PART ONE

Prologue

The study of music found in the five books of Boethius, because it rests upon the most profound foundations of arithmetic and philosophy, cannot be understood indiscriminately by all. By the half-taught singers of our time it appears that the more intricate it is the more useless it is, but by learned and more highly intuitive men the more subtle and credible it is, the more enduring and valuable it is. As a result, just as it is and always has been neglected by the unlearned, so also it is and always has been considered of great value among the more skilled.

Thus we, who are eager to be helpful to all and to produce something of general usefulness, in this short compendium of three books have written a very serviceable work by bringing his [Boethius's] prolixity into conciseness, difficulty into ease, and abstruseness into clarity, while omitting nothing that pertains to art and practice. And to singers whom we all call practitioners and to thinkers whom we call theorists (from the Greek), when they will have read and understood this work they will find themselves receiving a very great recompense and pleasure, and being wonderfully delighted with our new concept of a very splendid art they will acknowledge that in this present labor we have brought very considerable aid to the common erudition of all.

From it, as if from an overflowing communal spring, whatever I, by reading the most excellent authors and learning from the most brilliant teachers, have been able to collect for a long time in many nightly vigils and assiduous lucubrations, one can imbibe it in an exceedingly quick and easy process, and reach the summit of music in a completely uninterrupted movement.

Let no one fear the authority of philosophy, the perplexity of arithmetic, or the intricacies of proportions. For in this subject anyone, even though unskilled in every way, can become a very excellent and skilled musician

Tractate 2

Chapter 1

Wherein the three kinds of proportionality
are fully discussed.

Just as the kinds of proportions overflowed from the multiplication of
related numbers, so proportionality is created from a specific combination
of proportions. For proportion is the mutual relationship of two numbers,
while proportionality is the mutual relationship of two proportions. Since
up to the present we will have examined some things about proportions,
it remains that we discuss certain things about proportionality necessary to
practice according to the contents of this first book.

Proportionality is divided into continuous and separate proportionality.
For it is continuous when the middle number is taken twice in comparison
to the extremes, as 4:6:9. For we say that just as 4 is to 6 so 6 is to 9, for
sesquialtera is in each. But proportionality is called separate or
discontinuous when not one but two numbers are in the middle, so that in
the numbers 4:6:8:12 the relationship is formed in this way: just as 6:4 so
12 is to 8. If we interchange the numbers we conclude in this way: just as
8 is to 4 so 12 is to 6, for in the first comparison sesquialtera is on each
side, while in the last the proportion is duple.

If we then may have wished to proceed in this way with tones, we
should take four tones from a monochord which are related in the same
way. Then let them be *a c d f,* in which we will make a comparison
thusly: just as *a* is to *c* so *d* is to *f.* After interchanging the letters we
conclude: just as *a* is to *d* so *c* is to *f.* In the first case each interval is a
minor third, but in the second the interval of each proportion is a fourth.

Many proportions can also be connected in this disjunct proportionality,
as in the numbers 2:3, 4:6, 8:12, and then the comparison is made in this
way: just as 2 is to 3, so 4 is to 6 and 8 is to 12, for a sesquialtera