

LEARNING MEDIEVAL NOTATION FROM MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS 1

Cuthbert — 21M.220, March 6, 2007

The attached piece, *Se per dureça* (“If, on account of hardness, you leave me, Lady...”) is an anonymous ballata which survives in exactly one source, a small fragment in the University Library of Padua, Italy (*Padova, Biblioteca Universitaria, manoscritto 1115, folio Ar*). It is written in a type of rhythmic notation called “Italian notation,” unique to trecento Italy. Our modern notation is descended from the French style which is not used in this piece. There is no relation to the rhythmic modes in this source, however, you may find that some notes are ligatures, that is, multiple notes written as one connected figure.

Your assignment for next class is to transcribe the piece **into score**, learning how to read Italian notation along the way. The key fact that you will want to know is that Italian notation descends from the innovations of Petrus de Cruce, who came up with the idea of putting a dot (*punctus*) to show, essentially, the end of a measure.¹ You can use this fact to figure out how many notes of various shapes (◆ ◆ ◆, etc.) fit in a measure, and then you can start to work out the ratios between notes.

N.B., ◆ and ◆ are NOT the same.

Your first task will be to figure out where the voices begin. At the bottom of the page is a contratenor from a piece which, presumably, was on the preceding page (that page is lost). Then figure out what the clefs mean. Note that, for the most part, the text of both voices line up, and dissonance and consonance is close to what we think today (however, parallel 5ths and octaves are still acceptable and common). You must attempt the text even though I know that it’s going to be really hard for the 99% of us who don’t read medieval Italian.

Play through your transcription on the piano. We will sing the piece in class on Thursday.

Higher resolution, color facsimiles are available on the course website.

¹ You will probably notice though that the scribe sometimes omits the dot, especially when there is a note which is equal to a whole measure or is even longer. You will figure out what notes those are...

Archani in Aretini anno 1144
ff. 2. n. 23

E per durezza tu morir me fa y. Dona da cui merce
 tro uero ma y. Sme credea chel mo gran serui
 re. Ta uese uenta se may fosti cri da
 E per durezza tu morir me fa y. Dona da cui merce trouero ma
 y. Sme credea chel mo gran fui re. Ta uese uenta se may
 fusti cri da
 Qui se Ipsi
 Secunda ps.

Hiaronymus Itali Episcopi Aretini Sermones Dominicales et alia moralia.
 Opus inuenerunt Baldus troscensi Episcopo qui fuit successus B. Ineditus, de quo
 uide lauei, seculi 19 in princ. Bachinijs.

I
 ff. 2. n. 23
 A. R. 3.

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