



A recently discovered fragment of  
medieval instrumental music

## A RECENTLY DISCOVERED FRAGMENT OF MEDIEVAL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

People who know the few specimen of medieval music that have been preserved through the ages also will be familiar with the famous collection of Istanpitte in the manuscript London BM add. 29987 [LO], dating back to late-medieval Italy. This unique ms has been in the British Museum since 1876, since february 2014 it is in the British Library. Up to now we have regarded the pieces as unica. A newly discovered manuscript teaches us more.

During a stay on the Spanish island La Palma (Canarians) in the spring of 1994 my way brought me to the village of Puntagorda, about twenty miles on the west of the capital Santa Cruz de la Palma. There I've heard an old man playing a tune: the Istanpitta 'Isabella', performed with some small melodic variants and added graces. I was very surprised and bewildered to hear this melody at that very moment and at that remote spot of Europe. The old man once was a book-binder by profession, as well as a musician. As such, he had performed at local celebrations in earlier times. The instrument he used was some kind of recorder. Asking where he knew this music from, he explained that he had inherited it from his preceptor, who had copied it from an old manuscript. We went to his former workshop, where he showed me a paper-manuscript, which dated back to 1862. This manuscript contained some other pieces known from LO: three Istanpitte, two Saltarelli and the 'Lamento di Tristano'. The music was written down in 'modern' notation, provided with a tenorclef and barlines.

Furthermore some fragments of a second manuscript were of great interest. It consisted of about ten to fifteen separate parchment-leaves, which were kept in cardboard wrappers. The music was written down in Trecento-notation: black lozenge-shaped notes on red six-line-staves. Asking where the remaining parts of the manuscript had gone, the old man said that he had used them in order to bind books. I didn't have much time to take a closer look at the two manuscripts. Besides, the workshop was dark and not supplied with electric light, so that a thorough study was impossible. Pleased with my enthusiasm, the old man agreed to leave a page from the parchment-manuscript to me in exchange for two Havanna-cigars.

For about a year the page, which we now shall give the name of LP, has been the subject of several scientific examinations. An analysis of the parchment, carried out with the so-called 'Kohlstoff-14-Methode' by the 'Archivberatungsstelle Abtei Braunweiler' in Pulheim (Germany), has proved that the parchment is 650 to 700 years old. Moreover, the analysis has shown that the parchment had been used several times, that it had been scraped off and washed. The page has not been written on with a metal object. Therefore experts assume that it must have been written in any case before the middle of the nineteenth century.

An examination of the ink, carried through by the 'Centraal Laboratorium voor Onderzoek van Voorwerpen van Kunst en Weten-

schap' in Amsterdam by means of Röntgenfluorescentation gave the following result: the red ink contains neither mercury nor lead, iron or other metals. This means that well-known medieval red pigments like cinnabar, red-lead or metal-oxides have to be left out of account. It is possible, however, that an organic pigment has been used. Ambiguities are caused by the fact that the staves have been regenerated and that underneath the lines older ones were found. The black ink is ordinary carbon-ink, which already was in use in the middle ages and therefore cannot give any indication about the dating of the manuscript. Later research showed that no traces of ink from the older lines have been preserved. Only the places where the lines were pressed into the parchment could be seen.

In addition to these analyses, several palaeographers, musicologists and art-historians examined LP. Their opinions are divergent. In a word, some experts are convinced of the authenticity of LP, whereas others take it for a copy, written on an authentic parchment and prepared not before the nineteenth century.

LP consists of a single sheet, 199 by 124 mm, which originally formed part of a series of sheets bound together. The present page shows several fresh cuts: at the top of the page a slip was cut off, above-right a tip-shaped piece (at aper-to), bottom-right a vertical slip and another tip-shaped little piece, having taken the last note of what is left of quinta pars. These cuts probably derive from the hand of the book-binder. The other sheets showed similar injuries. At the right side, as far as it is still extant, a dog-ear can be seen, indicating that the sheet once was bound at that side. In the middle, there is a vertical series of little holes, caused by a needle or a bodkin. The sheet was written on one side and has eight staves in red ink of six lines each. The music is notated on - as it was usual in Italian manuscripts - six-line-staves. As mentioned above, these lines were regenerated. Thus, the parchment already contained six-line-staves which had lost their colour and had been traced. The page also shows a fold (running through the seventh staff), which had been there before the lines were traced. The clefs, notes and legends are written in black ink. At some places a punctus divisionis or a dividing-line is used. The letter 'r' and the 'little hand function' used as repeat-signs. The anonymous copyist wrote down his notes very careful, though he still erred sometimes.

The piece given in LP is the Saltarello which in LO begins at fol. 62v. There are, however, some discrepancies between LO and LP. The most significant ones are that the Saltarello in LO contains four and in LP five partes, the terms 'prima pars' and 'sechunda pars' are missing and the terça pars of LO is identical with the sechunda pars in LP, whereas the terça pars of LP is lacking in LO. This terça pars only differs in a few notes from the quarta pars, which again is identical with the quarta pars in LO: 5th - 8th notes in LP: c'-a'-g'-f'; 5th - 8th notes in LO: e'-f'-e'-d'.

At this point, however, the copyist of LO was mistaken, which is a striking fact when studying the manuscript. Originally he

had written c'-a'-g'-d' which he later changed into e'-f'-e'-d'. The reason for this might have been that the notator of LO first wrote the 'right' notes of the *terça pars*. Subsequently, he started from the 8th note onwards in the then simultaneously sounding *quarta pars* and finally eliminated this error by modifying the 5th, 6th and 7th notes of the *terça pars*, as clearly shown in LO. Due to this modification, a complete *pars* might have been suppressed.

Other discrepancies refer to some musical variants in the *partes* 1 and 5; in 1, staff 2, 6th to 10th note, where a passage appears a minor third lower. Whether this version is a copy-error, cannot be decided here. In any case, the resulting sound of the LP-version would be musically justifiable. Our attention is also drawn to a rhythmic variant in *pars* 5: whereas in LP the 9th note - a *semibrevis* - is followed by a *minim* and a *punctus divisionis*. LO gives the *minim* first. Besides, a *punctus divisionis* is lacking. Although the version in LO does not seem impossible, I would prefer the version of LP because the rhythm given in LO disturbs the smooth character of the piece. It therefore seems possible that the copyist of LO was mistaken here. A potential error in LO might have been caused by the notator having to turn the page right at the point where these notes are, which made him lose his orientation for a moment.

Finally, I would like to make reference to a particularity of the notation in the *chiusso*: the writer of our manuscript notated the flags of the seventh and eighth note incorrectly at the left side. In LO we find them correctly placed at the right side. As we can see in the whole manuscript LO e.g., flags at the left side were customary for triplets. This may indicate that the notator perhaps was not only unfamiliar with the terminology, but also with certain details of the notation.

Because of the discrepancies between LO and LP - among which the extra *pars* can be regarded as the most eminent - it neither seems likely that LO has been the model for LP nor that LP has been the model for LO. Consequently the question arises whether there existed an unknown older source upon which both manuscripts were based. This would lead to the conclusion that the well-known repertoire of LO would be of earlier origin than we were inclined to believe until now.

Many questions remain unanswered. Even the authenticity of LP is not certified. Let us hope that further research will lead to more clarity in the future.

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november 2019

This article was first published in a more elaborate form in Yearbook [2] of the Alamire Foundation Music Fragments and Manuscripts in the Low Countries, pg. 31-38 Leuven - Peer, 1997

# [saltarello]

ms. La Palma 1994

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in 8/8 time, using a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The piece consists of ten staves of music. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together in groups. There are several repeat signs, some with bracketed numbers indicating the number of times a phrase is repeated: [2] at the end of the second staff, [3] above the fifth staff, [4] above the sixth staff, and [5] above the eighth staff. The piece concludes with a double bar line on the tenth staff.