

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS

21

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THE SIX ANONYMOUS
L'HOMME ARMÉ MASSES

IN

NAPLES, BIBLIOTECA NAZIONALE, MS VI E 40



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General Editor

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by

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FOREWORD

The folio manuscript VI E 40 of the *Biblioteca Nazionale*, Naples, was discovered by Dragan Plamenac¹. It contains a cycle of six connected Masses on the *cantus firmus* (c.f.) *L'Homme armé*². Notation and style of composition point to the second half of the 15th century and the Franco-Flemish circle³.

The enormous popularity of the *L'Homme armé* melody in the 15th and 16th centuries is evident from its frequent use by the leading composers of this epoch. The tune appears as c.f. in more than 30 Masses from Dufay to Carissimi, and many chansons, double chansons, quodlibets and even instrumental dances are based on this melody⁴. Plamenac's discovery of the Neapolitan Codex was of great importance, because it was thus that the text of the famous chanson first became known. This emerged from

an unusual method of writing, whereby the tenor was invariably noted down twice: once as a quotation from the original chanson, with the French secular text set to the music precisely, syllable by syllable; and once as the tenor part constituting the c.f. of the Mass section, with its corresponding liturgical textual incipit. Thus it was possible to reconstruct at least the first stanza of the chanson *L'Homme armé*⁵. (See ex. 1, p. 9).

The importance of the MS from a musical point of view lies in the fact that it contains a Mass cycle of great dimensions. The six Masses do not stand apart but are combined into a cycle by a comprehensive plan. The original *L'Homme armé* melody is divided into five sections, each forming the basis for the c.f. of one whole Mass. A canon code in Latin

¹ D. Plamenac, "La chanson de *L'Homme armé* et le manuscrit VI E 40 de la Bibliothèque nationale de Naples", *Annales de la Fédération archéologique et historique de Belgique, Congrès jubilaire* (1925), 229 ff.

² The four first Masses of the cycle have appeared in *MPLSER*, series I, vol. iii: no. 1, 2, Rome 1957, no. 3, 4, Rome 1965 (ed. by L. Feininger).

³ Cf. D. Plamenac, *op. cit.*; D. Gombosi, "Vita musicale alla Corte de Re Mattia", *Corvina XII* (1929), 128; G. Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*, New York 1954, 149-50.

⁴ See the list of *L'Homme armé* compositions at the appendix.

B. THE L'HOMME ARMÉ CHANSON AND ITS FUNCTION IN THE CYCLE

No exact facts are known about the origin of the *L'Homme armé* chanson. The earliest source known to date is an anonymous three part song in the *Mellon Chansonnier*, in which the *L'Homme armé* chanson appears in the tenor part¹⁵. The three parts in this version are identical with the *cantus*, alto and tenor parts of a *L'Homme armé* chanson in four parts by the Burgundian court composer Morton¹⁶, except that in Morton's chanson the cadences are altered by the addition of the bass part. It is therefore assumed that Morton's chanson is a later version of the anonymous rendering in the *Mellon Chansonnier* and that the latter dates from the 15th century.

The *L'Homme armé* chanson in the Mellon rendering is a double chanson. Its tenor is set to a text of the *L'Homme armé* chanson which differs slightly from the text of the Neapolitan source:

“L'ome, l'ome, l'ome armé
L'ome armé doibt on doubter
On a fait par tout crier
A l'assault, a l'assault
D'un aubregon de fer.
L'ome, l'ome, l'ome armé.
L'ome armé doibt on doubter.”

The text of the Cantus is particularly revealing:

“Il sera pour vous combatu
Le doubté turcq, Maistre Symon;
Certainement ce sera non?
Et de crocq de ache abatu.

¹⁵ Cf. M. Bukofzer, “An unknown Chansonnier of the 15th Century”, *MQ* XXVIII (1942), 14 ff.

¹⁶ Ed. by J. Marix, *Les musiciens de la cour de Bourgogne au XVe siècle (1420-1467)*, Paris 1939, 96.

The melodic sequences examined here still have an empirical air; they play with the tone material and experiment with melodic combinations. They appear more as means of driving the final cadence of a section, as an architectonic principle which, to speak with R. Lach, is used "wo die besondere Wichtigkeit einer Stelle für den Bau des Ganzen . . . ein scharfes Hervortreten solcher Dispositionsangelpunkte wünschenswert macht" ⁴⁸.

IV. MELODIC STRUCTURE

The following examination was made on the basis of the melodic movement of the *superius* — melodically the leading voice.

The melodic line of these Masses is determined, as was usual in the 15th and 16th centuries, by stereotyped melodic formulae, which do not belong to the personal style of a single composer but to a whole generation. These are e.g. scales, *cambiate*, leaps in thirds, fourths and fifths and diverse cadence formulae.

Generally, the *superius* moves along broad melodic lines, often, in longer phrases encompassing as much as an octave. The movement may be downwards from a high point, or upwards (frequently in Mass 1) or even start from a central note expanding in both directions (as in Masses 2 and 3). The direction of movement is usually determined by the mode of the *superius* in each Mass. The melodic movement of the *superius* of Mass 1 is that of an authentic, of Mass 2 and 3 of a plagal mode.

All the Masses maintain a careful equilibrium between the direction of the movement and the position of the melody:

Ex. 22

Et in ter-ra pax ho-mi-ni-bus bo-ne
vo-lun-ta-tis.

Mass 1. Gloria, m. 1-8

In most cases the upward motion is rapid, a high note is reached in a leap, while the downward movement takes up more time, putting a restraint, as it were, on the dynamic energy:

⁴⁸ Studien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der ornamentalen Melopöie, Vienna 1902, 9.