

MUSES AND MUSIC IN A BURIAL CHAPEL
AN INTERPRETATION OF FILIPPINO LIPPI'S WINDOW WALL
IN THE CAPPELLA STROZZI

by Emanuel Winternitz

In Memoriam Fernandae Wittgens

A wealth of musical symbols and allegories depicted in a burial chapel poses certain questions. These questions we shall try to answer in the following essay on one of the most interesting and profound creations of Filippino Lippi — the window wall of the Strozzi Chapel.¹ In it there are several musicians and a number of ancient, or rather pseudo-antique, wind and string instruments; bone plectra draw sound from strings; but not a single singer appears. It seems almost absurd that the musical symbolism of the chapel, and the relation between death and music which it presents, has never been investigated in the literature on Filippino Lippi.² A study of it, we hope, may also throw some new light on the ancient models of some of the musicians depicted and complete our understanding of the numerous inscriptions scattered over the fresco, which have hitherto resisted coherent interpretation.

The design of the Strozzi Chapel's wall has been described repeatedly and therefore our description of it can be brief. As a muralist, Lippi had to take three immutable facts into account: the high Gothic shape of the chapel (Fig. 1); Benedetto da Majano's sarcophagus crowned by a massive semi-circular arch (Fig. 2); and a high, narrow window. Lippi subdivided the available space by providing the strongest possible counterpoint to the Gothic elements, incorporating in his composition the powerful columns from the front of the Arch of Constantine. But only the two inner columns appear to project far out from the wall, as they do in the Arch. Lippi made them flank and frame the window in the chapel, as they do the middle door at the Arch, and here as there they rise from massive pedestals and support large figures above their high entablature. In the Arch of Constantine the pedestals were decorated with winged victories; Filippino adorned those in his fresco with the figures of Caritas and Fides (Fig. 3-4). The entablature projecting over the columns of the Arch carried large statues of captive Dacian princes; in the fresco, giant angels with shields emblazoned with the Strozzi crescents decorate the frieze (Fig. 5-6). The outer columns of the Arch have here become pilasters, scarcely projecting from the wall since now they form the transition to the side walls of the chapel, which are decorated with the depiction of miracles wrought by St. John the Ev. and St. Philip.

¹ This essay is based on research on Filippino Lippi which was done several years ago when I worked on my article, „Instruments de Musique étranges chez Filippino Lippi, Piero di Cosimo et Lorenzo Costa“, for „Les Fêtes de la Renaissance“, I, Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris 1956, pp. 379-395. However, I did not wish to publish it before being able to reconstruct the destroyed sections in the inscription of one tablet and deciphering the meaning of the plaques, „SI SCIRES“ and „DONUM DEI“.

² Some short but admirably precise and substantial comments on the Cappella Strozzi are found in *Peter Halm*, Das unvollendete Fresko des Filippino Lippi in Poggio a Cajano, in: Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz, Bd. III, Heft 7, July 1931, pp. 393-427. Neither *A. Scharf* nor *Kate Neilson's* books on Lippi have focused on the problem of symbolism.

If Lippi's composition is highly original, so also is his color scheme. The only area with glowing colors is the stained-glass window, which seems to rise like a burning flame from the dark sarcophagus. It shows the Madonna (Fig. 7) in its upper, and the two saints, John the Evangelist and Philip (Fig. 8), in its lower part. Jacob Burckhardt has called it the best Florentine window. Its intense luminosity almost suppresses the near-monochrome mural — so much so that one is reminded of the young Burckhardt's warning against concentration on stained glass: that the eye may not be weakened for the observation of murals.³ But after readapting itself to the color of the mural painting, the eye finds the fresco by no means monotonous or pale: brown and blue tones are used — the wings of the figure of Parthenice (Fig. 9) are dark blue, her large musical instrument as well as the plectrum are deep reddish-brown; some of the human figures show faint flesh tones which hold them in the twilight between sculpture and actual life. The gilding, used as highlights on certain small objects, chiefly those of symbolic importance, accentuates them in the design — a golden guide, as it were, for modern iconologists. Among these objects are the chalice, the cross and crown of Fides; the flaming crown of Caritas and the eternal flame at her feet; the large palm tree behind Parthenice; and most of the musical instruments depicted in the lower corners of the wall.

The gilding stimulates interpretation by inviting the eye to focus on points of symbolic interest, but there is a more direct attraction in the distribution all over the fresco of verbal allusions to the spiritual message of the window wall and perhaps of the whole chapel. Four of the inscriptions are connected by an elaborate system of ribbons on either side, which run from the top and go far down towards the allegorical figures. These ribbons or cords begin, garland-like, at the top of the gothic window, continue to the large round plaques (Fig. 11), and go from there through elaborate knots to the large angels standing on the entablatures of the Corinthian columns. Thence again, the ribbons continue diagonally towards two angels crouching on the entablature and from there, now divided into two thinner strands, go on down over the entablatures to hold the bulky oblong stone tablets (Fig. 10) bearing Latin inscriptions. Yet even this is not the end of this suspension. Out of the sides of the tablet frames project harpies or woman-faced birds, holding other cords from which hang decorative objects. Weighty pieces of architecture suspended in mid-air, even if supported by angels, border on the burlesque and Filippino makes it still more fantastic by counteracting the suspended fall with the figure of a grotesque little woman on either side, who seems to support easily the tablets with her outstretched hands while she herself blossoms out of weightless tendrils. The cords are not mere visual fancy however: they connect (another easy guide for the 20th century iconologist) the pieces of verbal revelation with the allegorical imagery in the lower part of the grisaille. The floating ribbons' play, too jocular and airy perhaps for a chapel, clearly reflects Filippino's experience and participation in those magnificent though impermanent architectural displays fashionable in his time as important parts of *feste*: hanging tablets with inscriptions are, for instance, reported for the Possesso of Alexander VI. in 1492 in Rome. I have not pursued the question as to how far Filippino participated in its decor, but since he was working in Rome between 1488 and 1493 in the Caraffa Chapel, it would seem logical to assume that he was familiar with the Possesso and must have drawn on his knowledge of it when he helped to prepare the *feste* given in 1494 in Florence to welcome Charles VIII.⁴

³ Cicerone ed., 1925, p. 809.

⁴ For an analysis of these fêtes and Filippino's participation in them, see the excellent study by *Eve Borsook*, *Decor in Florence for the Entry of Charles VIII of France*, *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, Bd. X, Heft 2, Dezember 1961, p. 106 ff. On musical instruments in fêtes, see my article cited in footnote 1, „Instruments de Musique étranges...“.



1 Burial chapel for Filippo Strozzi in the church of Santa Maria Novella.

As mentioned before, there are four inscriptions strung on the ribbons in the Chapel. High up, flanking the top of the window, we read inside circular tablets: SI SCIRES — DONUM DEI (Fig. 11). These four words being the largest in the fresco and so conspicuously displayed, could be expected to have profound bearing on immortality or another topic suitable for a memorial chapel, but they have never before been explained. The solution, however, is not difficult if we recall the conversation between Jesus and the woman of Samaria as recorded in St. John, IV: Jesus asks the woman for water from the well and when she at first questions him, wondering how a Jew could ask a drink from a Samaritan („for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans“), then (verse 10) *Respondit Jesus, et dixit ei: Si scires donum Dei, et quis est, qui dicit tibi: Da mihi bibere, tu forsitan petiisses ab eo, et dedisset tibi aquam vivam.* The gift of God is the water of Life or, as it is explained soon after, Eternal Life. This highly poetic metaphor of immortality becomes even clearer from the verses which follow: *Dicit ei mulier: Domine, neque in quo haurias habes, et puteus altus est: unde ergo habes aquam vivam? | Numquid tu major es patre nostro Jacob, qui dedit nobis puteum, et ipse ex eo bibit, et filii ejus, et pecora ejus? | Respondit Jesus, et dixit ei: Omnis qui bibit ex aqua hac, sitiet iterum, qui autem biberit ex aqua, quam ego dabo ei, non sitiet in aeternum: | sed aqua, quam ego dabo ei, fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam. | Dicit ad eum mulier: Domine, da mihi hanc aquam, ut non sitiam, neque veniam huc haurire.*

Certainly no briefer or more pregnant motto than the four words, „Si scires donum Dei“, could be found for a burial place. In fact, Lippi himself used a longer quotation from these verses of the Gospel for an inscription on the tablet held by angels beneath his painting, „Christ and the Samaritan Woman“⁵, which is in Museum of the Seminary, Venice (Fig. 12). This inscription combines selections from verses 10 and 15: SI SCIRES DONUM DEI DA MIHI HANC AQUAM (a combination which seems a little strange since the first words; „Si scires donum Dei“ are spoken by Jesus, and the following „Da mihi hanc aquam“ by the woman). Lippi or his learned advisors must have found the condensation into four words in the Strozzi Chapel clear enough for the initiati, and of course this is not the only Renaissance example of an aristocratic preference for addressing the selected few.

Of the lower square stone tablets, that on the left is fully legible: SACRIS — SUPERIS — INITIATI — CANUNT. The one on the right is partially damaged and does not permit complete deciphering.⁶ Here a happy coincidence helps to restore the complete text. An anonymous drawing in the Gabinetto dei Disegni of the Uffizi (n. 14587F), which is a fairly accurate copy of the two female figures in the lower right corner of Lippi's fresco, shows an elaborate inscription engraved on the broad base on which they are standing (Fig. 15). On the fresco there appears only DEO — MAX. The copyist, however, found it appropriate to use a longer inscription: D. M. — QUONDAM. NUNC. DEO. OP. MAX. CANIMUS. There can be no doubt that he borrowed the inscription from the upper stone tablet of the Strozzi chapel mural, which in his time must still have been completely legible. It goes without saying that „canere“ (i. e., „making music“) also implies the playing of instruments.

Before turning to the lower part of the fresco with its allegorical figures, we must mention the two verbal messages in the stained-glass window. One is again on a stone tablet which, suspended with cords, is held by angels over the head of the Blessed Virgin, and it reads: MITIS ESTO (Fig. 7), perhaps best translated as „Be peaceful“ or „Be without suffering.“ The other inscription is on the pages of the book held open, toward the chapel, by St. Philip.

⁵ Painted about 1500 according to *Alfred Scharf*, *Filippino Lippi*, Vienna 1935, p. 107.

⁶ *Halm*, op. cit., p. 416, reads it: „D. M. QUONDAM NVH...CANIMUS“, and considers the last two words illegible.



2 Sarcophagus by Benedetto da Majano in the Cappella Strozzi.

It is not the only book there : St. John the Evangelist holds another of which we can see only the back, and St. Philip reaches over with one hand towards St. John's book. The writing in St. Philip's book today is partly obliterated (Fig. 13). Yet it clearly shows lines from the Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus⁷, or The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach. Actually these lines are a free pasticcio from Ecclesiasticus with interpolations as well as omissions. The reader may compare the left page with Ecclesiasticus 44 : 25, 26 and 27; and the right page with Ecclesiasticus 45 : 3, 4, 6 and 9. Here is the text as far as I can decipher it :

⁷ Ibid., *Halm* mentions, „Ecl. 44 : 25-27 und 45 : 3-9 mit einigen Auslassungen“. The abbreviation „Ecl.“ is a little misleading since it points to the book of Ecclesiastes („The Preacher“), whose skeptical text would hardly have been considered appropriate in a Dominican church.



3 Detail of window wall: Caritas and skull-bearing angel.

Ecclesiasticus 44: 25, 26, 27

BEN(EDICTIONEM) ———
 DOM(INUS) —————
 (SUP)ER —————
 —USTI. IDEO DEDIT
 DOMINUS HERE(DI)
 TATEM, DIVISIT ILLAM
 PARTEM IN TRIBUT(US)
 DUODECIM: ET INV(E)
 NIT GRATIAM IN
 COSPECTU REGU(M)
 ET JUSSIT ILLI C(O)
 (RAM POPULO) SU(O)
 ET OST(ENDIT) ———

Ecclesiasticus 45: 3, 4, 6, 9

————— (SU)AM
 IN FIDE ET (LE)NIT(A)
 TEM (IP)SIUS SAN(C)
 TUM (F)ECIT ILLUM,
 (E)T DE — — EUM EX OM
 NI CARNE. ET DEDIT
 (ILLI CORAM PRAECEPTA)
 (E)T LEGEM VITAE ET DI
 (SCIPL)INAE (ET) EXCEL
 SUM (FE)CIT ILLUM — —
 ————— (TEST)AMENTUM
 ————— (CIRCU)MCI
 ————— (ZON)A



4 Detail of window wall: Fides and skull-bearing angel.

It is obvious that these pages have nothing to do with death and resurrection, but simply show a selection of phrases that seemed appropriate for the glorification of Filippo Strozzi and perhaps alluded to the beginning of Chapter 44: *Laudemus viros gloriosos, et parentes nostros in generatione sua...*

We turn now to the allegorical figures in the lower section of the mural. The area next to the wide marble arch of the tomb represents the mortality of the flesh and its conquest by the Christian virtues. In the inscription over the center of the arch, NI HANC DESPEXERIS / VIVES (Fig. 3), the mysterious „Hanc“ is not as enigmatic as it first appears if we relate it to the DONUM DEI in the right upper circular tablet, or rather to the latter's equivalent, HANC AQUAM. The inscription thus implies a conditional promise: „If you do not shun the water, you will live.“ It is actually a paraphrase of „Spes“, completing the three Christian virtues of which Caritas is shown at the left and Fides at the right. The tablet with this inscription partially covers a wall niche filled with human skulls. Other skulls are displayed by two winged angels: the right one holding a single skull aloft while stepping on another skull and a human bone; the left one holding up a skull and human bone while stepping on a single skull (Fig. 3-4). The beautiful figures of Caritas and Fides, with their conspicuously gilded attributes, form the counterpoint — death overcome by charity and faith.



5 Detail: angels to left of window, holding ribbons.



6 Detail: angels to right of window, holding ribbons.

Beautiful as the personification of the virtues are, and striking as is their contrast to the hard, merciless angels, the iconography of this portion of the window wall does not transcend traditional imagery. How different and how original is the symbolic role of the figures in its extreme corners: — all musicians, as we shall see.

The group at the left is engaged in playing different instruments. Parthenice (Fig. 9), a young woman⁸ conceived *all'antica*, holds a stringed instrument. Two winged putti at her knees try their luck with wind instruments. The instruments represented here are a veritable goldmine for the collector of Renaissance misinterpretations of antiquity. Parthenice's instrument is, in today's terminology, a lyre-guitar, although Filippino himself certainly would have called it a *lira* or *cetra* (the Italian name for the ancient *kithara*).

In order to understand this instrument and its role in Italy around 1500, we must go a little deeper into organology, especially since connoisseurs of art are not always familiar with the radical metamorphoses of musical instruments, their changes of form and function and name since late antiquity, and the puzzling renaissances and pseudo-renaissances to which they were subjected. One of the salient facts in the history of stringed instruments was the introduction

⁸ *André Chastel*, *Art et humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, Paris 1959 (p. 391, f. n. 2), was the first to point out, in relation to Filippino's Parthenice, that this name had been used as the title of one of the poems of G. B. Mantovano — celebrating the Mother of Christ (1488).



7 Upper part of window : the Madonna.



8 Lower part of window : St. John the Evangelist and St. Philip.

of the finger board for the purpose of stopping strings, thus shortening their length and raising the pitch. Every musician or musical amateur is familiar with this device through knowledge of the violin and its family, or from the lute, guitar, or similar instruments. One of the great advantages of the finger board is that each string can be made to produce several tones. Yet in Greek and Roman antiquity the finger board technique did not exist or, at any rate, was exceedingly rare (confined largely to some long-necked instruments which we find occasionally represented on sarcophagi and anachronistically called lutes by archaeologists). The stringed instruments that were most common by far, the kithara and the lira, had no finger boards (Fig. 16). They had sound boxes — a turtle shell or wooden bowl, or a box artfully constructed — from which sprang two arms carrying a yoke. The lower ends of the strings were fastened to the sound box and their upper ends to the yoke. Thus they ran freely through the air and could not be stopped against any surface.

Not before the Utrecht Psalter, written in the ninth century but based on models of the sixth or possibly even the fifth century⁹, do we find stringed instruments with finger boards firmly established; they have the shape of kitharas but their arms are non-functional, they have no yoke, and all their strings run over a long finger board and are fastened to its head. Significantly, these pseudo-kitharas with finger boards are frequently depicted side by side with real kitharas (Fig. 18). In 1960, through a fortunate accident¹⁰, I became acquainted with a Roman mosaic from Qasr el-Lebia that includes a representation of a finger board instrument with rudimentary lyre arms (Fig. 17). It is played by a youth among animals, probably a representation of Orpheus. We may call such pseudo-lyres (with a finger board), „lyre-guitars,“ not for want of a better name or in ignorance of their ancient one, but because of the French *Lyre-guitarres* of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which became fashionable as ladies' instruments in the French Empire and throughout the Biedermeier period; they posed as ancient because of their lyre shape but were actually played like guitars.

Between this Napoleonic Renaissance and the Carolingian Renaissance which produced the Utrecht Psalter had occurred the Renaissance of the Quattro- and Cinquecento, with their intense and immediate concern with the artifacts of Greco-Roman civilization. Absurdly enough, precisely this sincere archaeological concern, not to say passion, also produced a „lyre-guitar.“ It occurs frequently in paintings, prints and sculpture with mythological and religious topics. One may ask why the ancient models, abundantly available in statues, reliefs and frescos, were not strictly copied; strict adherence to the ancient models seems to have been the exception (one of the rare cases is the beautiful ancient kithara in the hands of Erato in Raphael's „Parnassus“ — an instrument taken over with admirable accuracy in every detail, from the Sarcophagus of the Muses which was once in the Mattei Collection and is now in the Museo Nazionale in Roma¹¹).

The misinterpretation of ancient instruments by Renaissance artists was favored by several circumstances, and their modification in pictures was hardly intentional. The ancient sculptures and reliefs could not, for obvious technical reasons, represent in marble the free-running strings of lyres, and thus the artist often resorted to making bands in which the strings were marked by incised lines. No wonder then that the Cinquecento artists, in their drawings of statues or reliefs from sarcophagi, interpreted these bands as the solid finger boards which were familiar to them from contemporary instruments, and in line with the predominant playing technique of their time. Thus the lyres, copied with archaeological intention from ancient works of art, became „lyre-guitars“ by inevitable misunderstanding.¹²

The wind instruments of the two putti are both *all'antica*. The syrinx, so big for the little musician that Parthenice must help him to hold it, is represented faithfully according to ancient models, with its seven pipes whose sacred number alludes to the planets and the harmony of the universe.

More problematic is the instrument of the other putto. It is a fantastic blending of various models, evidently influenced by ancient representations of the *aulos (tibia)*. The two tubes with flaring bells vaguely recall the *diaulos* which, contrary to the terminology still common

⁹ Emanuel Winternitz, *The Survival of the Kithara and the Evolution of the English Cittern: A Study in Morphology*, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. XXIV, 1961, pp. 222-229.

¹⁰ Thanks to the courtesy of Professor *John Ward Perkins* of the British Institute of Archaeology in Rome.

¹¹ Emanuel Winternitz, *Archeologia musicale del Rinascimento nel Parnaso di Raffaello*, in: *Rendiconti. Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, vol. XXVII, 1951-54, pp. 359-388.

¹² On lyre-guitars represented by Lorenzo Costa, see Emanuel Winternitz, *op. cit.*, „*Instruments de Musique étranges...*“, p. 393 ff.; also, a beautiful pseudo-kithara with finger board is shown in Raffaellino del Garbo's „*Madonna*“ (Berlin, Staatliche Museen).



9 Detail: Parthenice, with palm tree in the background, and putti with instruments.



10 Left tablet with inscription, SACRIS SUPPERIS INI TIATI CANUNT.

in archaeological literature, is not a double flute but a double oboe — that is, an instrument with double reeds. The unequal length of the two pipes, and the curving of one of them, recalls the Phrygian aulos. Also interesting to note are the little projections on the upper side of the main tube, which are seemingly operated by the left hand of the putto. The type of aulos usually represented on Roman sarcophagi, the tibia, had a special mechanism for adjusting the instrument to play in different modes; the finger holes on the tube were covered by adjustable rings which also had holes. By turning the rings, one could close the finger holes either partially or entirely. In many tibiae there were small cup-shaped projections attached to the ring-holes which could enlarge the vibrating air column in the instrument by a small fraction and thereby lower the tone. One can see such cups in all well-preserved tibiae in Roman sarcophagi. Raphael copied this device for the instrument of Euterpe, in his „Parnassus.“¹³

Unlike Raphael, Filippino — for all his archaeological penchant — could not have been a practicing musician, for his pseudo-aulos is entirely non-functional. The putto blows into the tube between the finger holes and the lower ends of the pipe. It is curious that an analogous misunderstanding occurs in another contem-

porary Florentine representation of a fantastic instrument, the plucked and blown instrument in Pietro di Cosimo's „Liberation of Andromeda“ (in the Uffizi).

Finally, one notices another wind instrument at the foot of the putto on the right. Only a small part of the tube and the bell are visible, but the strong shadow on the stone base makes it conspicuous. It was probably meant to be another tibia.¹⁴

One could profitably compare the instruments in the Parthenice group with Filippino's so-called „Allegory of Music“, now in the Berlin Museum (Fig. 19). Here we again find the seven-pipe syrinx and, beneath it, what must have been intended to be a tibia. Here, with greater archaeological fidelity than in the Strozzi Chapel, two of the rings that close the side holes are shown, and each ring carries the little cup-shaped projections explained above. There is also a lyre, one of the numerous stag-head lyres of the Cinquecento. Here we find the mixture of elements borrowed from ancient models with pseudo-archaeological elements. Archaeologically faithful are both the shape of the cross bars (although only one cross bar was employed in ancient lyres and kitharas) and the sacred number seven of the strings. But of

¹³ Emanuel Winternitz, op. cit., „Archeologia musicale...“, pp. 364, 376, 377.

¹⁴ Although we cannot be sure whether or not Filippino knew it, wind music, especially as represented by tibiae, was a fitting accompaniment to funerals: see, for instance, Ovid, *Fast VI*, 659: *cantabat sanis, cantabat tibia ludis, cantabat moestis tibia funeribus*.



11 Window wall showing round plaques at the top : SI SCIRES and DONUM DEI.

course ancient lyres had — for acoustical reasons — sound boxes. In Filippino's lyre the strings never reach the stag head which, in any case, could not have functioned to reinforce the sound. The *raison d'être* of the stag head is a symbolical one; as a symbol of the velocity of sound, the stag appears commonly with the *allegorica Musica*.

Coming back to the Strozzi Chapel fresco, we find that Parthenice, whose left hand assists one of the putti to blow the syrinx, holds with her right hand the lyre-guitar and a *plectrum*. This plectrum is quite different from those seen in the hands of Muses on Roman sarcophagi. It is made of bone, specifically the bone of a goat or deer foot; the hoof is clearly visible. Bone plectra occur occasionally in mythological paintings of the Renaissance. In the one mentioned before, Filippino's „Allegory of Music“, a bone plectrum lies beneath the stag-head lyre.¹⁵

An interesting Florentine comment on this plectrum and on Filippino's faithfulness to the decorative language of the ancients is found, perhaps surprisingly, in a musical treatise of the 16th century — Vincenzo Galilei's *Dialogo della Musica Antica et Moderna* (Florence, 1581). Vincenzo, the father of Galileo Galilei, was a fertile, brilliant and witty writer, and was steeped in the ancient authorities on music. His *Dialogo* is full of quotations from Aristoxenos, Aristides Quintilianus, Polibios, Plinius, Plutarch and others. The book includes a detailed discussion of the difference between the modern bow and the ancient plectrum (p. 130 ff): he illustrates the regular form of the plectrum by a woodcut, and explains the use of the deer-foot plectrum and the way it is fashioned, and then he reminds the reader of a good opportunity to see one: „If you want to see a good likeness, which I can never look at without great amazement, remember the church of Santa Maria Novella and the chapel of one of our forefathers decorated with paintings by Filippo di Fra Filippo; there on the main wall on the left one can see two women; one of them sings and the other upholds with her hand an ancient lyre made according to what I have explained above; and in her right hand she grips an object similar to the design of the plectrum which I have shown above, in shape and function; from this one can draw conclusions about the expert knowledge of our excellent painter; unless he was in this matter helped by some scholar of the rank of a Poliziano, who was flourishing at that time and in that place, and who easily could have had some information about such an instrument

¹⁵ On this and other attributes of *Musica*, see Emanuel Winternitz, „Instruments de Musique étranges...“, p. 391 ff. A deer-foot plectrum can also be seen in a Florentine engraving of about 1470, showing a fat, vine-leaf-crowned lute player with a large deer-foot plectrum (*Arthur Hind, Early Italian Engravings, A.IV.22, Vol. 2, Plate 150*).



12 Filippino Lippi, *Jesus and the Woman of Samaria* (Detail). Seminary, Venice.



13 Detail of the book held by St. Philip (cf. Fig. 8).

since he was learned and left us various important statements about music which he might have communicated to our Filippo...¹⁶

Of this account we must say that Vincenzo, in spite of his Florentine, local pride, must have neglected to refresh his memory by a visit to the chapel: the „two women“ are on the right side, and neither of them sings; but he obviously did mean that the figure on the left holds the *plettro alla zampetta*, described so vividly by him. The reference to Poliziano, as an expert in the musical practice of the ancient world, is not badly taken. Poliziano's *Fabula d'Orfeo* is full of stage directions as to the music to be sung and played during the performance, especially with reference to Orpheus playing the lira — although the latter, in the famous performances at Mantua, was without doubt a *lira da braccio*, that is, a bowed instrument.¹⁷ The plectrum in Poliziano's *Fabula* acquires symbolical power when it rivals Pluto's scepter. In the words of Pluto: *I son contento che a si dolce plectro / S'inchini la potenza del mio scettro*.¹⁸

The two figures in the right lower corner of the chapel wall (Fig. 14) are no doubt patterned after Muses from Roman sarcophagi, but no concrete model has ever been suggested.¹⁹ The general type of these figures occurs, in slightly different versions, in numerous sarcophagi.²⁰ However, there is in my belief only one sarcophagus that offers an exact correspondence to our two figures. It is the Sarcophagus with Muses, Apollo, and Minerva, from the Collection Giu-

¹⁶ See Appendix.

¹⁷ Emanuel Winternitz, „Lira da Braccio“, in: *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol. 8, Basle 1960.

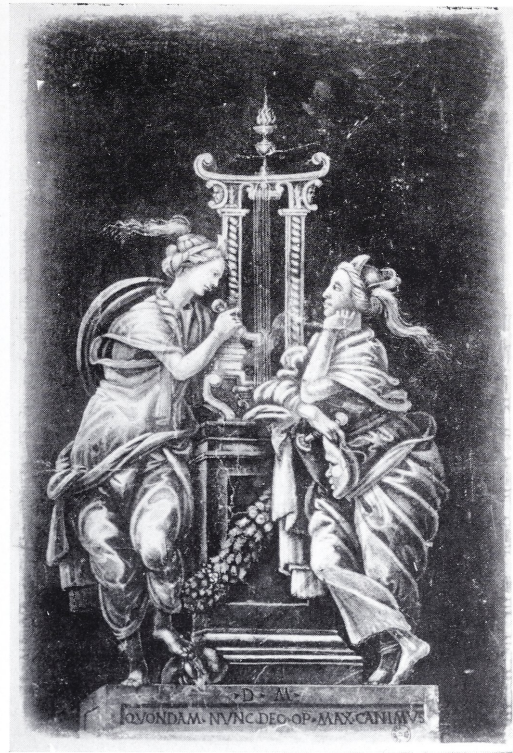
¹⁸ On musical symbolism in Poliziano's *Fabula*, see Emanuel Winternitz, „Orpheus als Musikallegorie in Renaissance und Frühbarock“, in: *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol. 10, Basle 1962.

¹⁹ If one considers how long and zealously historians of Renaissance art have searched for instances in which artists have borrowed literally from ancient models, it seems astonishing how little exact „imitation“ has been found in the works of the great antichizzante such as Mantegna, Filippino Lippi, or Raphael. Fischel's *Raphaels Zeichnungen*, for instance, does not establish any clear case. As for the Muses, I discovered one such case: the accurate transference of all the musical instruments and many other details from the Sarcophago delle Muse of the Mattei Collection (now in the Museo Nazionale), into Raphael's „Parnassus“, and I have discussed this in my article mentioned above, „*Archaeologia Musicale del Rinascimento*...“.

²⁰ For instance: two sarcophagi in the Palazzo Mattei (Figs. I and II, *Monumenta Matthaeciana*); and one in the Palazzo Farnese, the Louvre, the Berlin Museum, the British Museum (Cat. 2305), and the Museo Nazionale in Rome — the last two of the Sidamara type.



14 Detail of window wall : two Muses with pedestal lyre.



15 Copy after the two Muses, by an unknown draftsman. Uffizi, no. 14587 F.

stiniani²¹, now in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum (Fig. 20 and 21), which was once in Rome where it was drawn by the draftsman of the *Codex Coburgensis*.

On its long side, this sarcophagus shows the nine Muses, Minerva, and Apollo. Minerva, in profile, is the central figure; to her left are five Muses, on her right four, and at the extreme right Apollo. The Muses which interest us are the first and third ones from the left. The third one has been directly taken over by Filippino Lippi. He has repeated her pose, with the elegant turn of the upper body towards her left, and the gracefully turned left leg. Lippi's figure bends the head lower, towards the instrument, and her hair and robes flow in the wind. The plectrum in her right hand, which has the conventional Roman form on the sarcophagus, here becomes a bone. On the sarcophagus, her lyre rests in symmetrical position on a base²², which is only suggested in flat relief. The Muse furthest to the left on the sarcophagus, with crossed legs

²¹ Reproduced in an engraving in *Galleria del Marchese V. Giustiniani*, 1681, II, Tav. 40, the sarcophagus has also been described and illustrated by *Ed. Freiherr v. Sacken*, *Die antiken Skulpturen des k. k. Muenz- und Antiken-Cabinets in Wien*, and (p. 41) „the artistic value of the relief“ judged as „not considerable“ („nicht erheblich“).

²² Of the other sarcophagi enumerated in the list above, only one — that in the Berlin Museum — shows a base for the lyre of a Muse which resembles the one copied by Lippi. The second Muse on the Berlin sarcophagus, with chin in hand, is much less similar to the corresponding Lippi Muse than the one on the Vienna sarcophagus.



16 Apollo playing the kithara. From the Casa dei Vettii, Pompeii.



17 Detail showing musician with a stringed instrument. From Qasr el-Lebia mosaic.

and chin in hand — pensively listening — again is taken over by Filippino in precisely the same pose except that the figure is reversed; hair and robes, as in the other figure, are dramatized. The rotulus in the left hand of the Muse on the sarcophagus is reinterpreted by Lippi into a bone plectrum, so that in the fresco both figures become musicians with plectra.

An enormous transformation takes place from the sarcophagus to the fresco, however, in the representation of the musical instrument. In the relief it is the traditional kithara of the time, less than one-third the height of the player. In the fresco, between the two Muses, we find a magnificent lyre of gigantic dimensions on a high marble pedestal. It is strange that no attention has even been paid to this conspicuous instrument in the literature on Filippino, and that it has not ever been recognized as a musical instrument.²³ This is even more curious in view of the fact that this lyre is distinguished, more than any other section of the fresco, by extensive gilding. Two high, round columns carry a fantastic superstructure²⁴ crowned by a

²³ *Peter Halm*, op. cit., p. 414, and *Alfred Scharf*, op. cit., p. 65, both speak of an altar.

²⁴ A similar superstructure on a fantastic lyre is shown in a drawing in the sketchbook of Amico Aspertini, in the British Museum. It is illustrated on Pl. XLVIII, fig. 111 in *Phyllis Pray Bober's* invaluable book, *Drawings After the Antique* by Amico Aspertini, London, 1957 (Mrs. Bober speaks tentatively of a putto „sitting on a skull before a fountain [?]“). The object and superstructure appears behind a putto sitting on a skull, opposite another mourning putto and beneath three Muses. The combination of mourning, skulls, Muses, and an instrument is too significant not to be compared with our fresco. The



18 Detail with kithara and lyre-guitar (incorporating elements of kithara shape). From the Utrecht Psalter, Psalm 150.

flaming lamp which, perhaps, has given cause for misinterpreting the whole instrument as an altar. Only six strings are represented, not the sacred seven, and again Filippino reveals himself as uninterested in the acoustical and functional construction of instruments: the sound box, necessary of course for a stringed instrument, is suggested only by the sweeping curve on which the left column rests, and no real yoke holds the upper ends of the strings. In short, the whole thing is non-functional. But apart from these whimsical decorative details, the general design is solidly based on ancient models. Large lyres or kitharas on pedestals were frequent, and are often found represented on sarcophagi.²⁵ The famous ivory diptych of the 6th century, in Monza, with the poet and the Muse, shows the Muse with a large kithara on a base. And, at about the same time, Ammianus Marcellinus tells of lyres as large as horse carriages (*lyrae ad speciem carpentorum ingentes*).²⁶

identification of the object with a fantastic lyre becomes even clearer if one compares it with an almost identical instrument held by one of the musicians surrounding King David, from the Bible of Charles the Bald, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Lat. I, fol. 215v (Fig. 22). Without at all stressing a historical connection, this shows that non-functional elements in instruments easily became an opportunity for fanciful decoration. One should at least mention here Robetta's free fantastic version of Filippino's two musicians with the lyre, Robetta's lyre having a superstructure ornamented by grotesque half-moon faces and gryphons.

²⁵ For instance: in the Villa Medici (*M. Cagianò de Azevedo, Le Antichità di Villa Medici, Rome 1951, Pl. XXIX, 45 [57]*); the Palazzo Mattei — two sarcophagi, one with the Muses and Pallas and another with the Muses and a poet (both represented in the *Monumenta Matthaiana, Tav. XLIV*); the sarcophagus with Muses in the Berlin Museum which shows two pedestal lyres, one of them played by the third figure from the left (a Muse) and the other by the Muse on the extreme right. Pedestal lyres also occur in such representations as the statue of a Muse (Uffizi No. 209) drawn by G. Dosio (cp. *Chr. Huelsen, I lavori archeologici di Giovannantonio Dosio, in: „Ausonia”, Rivista della Soc. Ital. di Archeologia, Anno VII, MCMXII, 1913, p. 41*; and: *Das Skizzenbuch des Giovannantonio Dosio, Berlin 1933, p. 28, Taf. LXXVIII*); and in one of the medallions of the Arch of Constantine, so well-known to Filippino, shown with an Apollo.

²⁶ *Ammianus Marcellinus, Rerum Gestarum Libri XIV, 6, 18.*

But examining the single inscriptions and allegorical figures is one thing; searching for a comprehensive and unified interpretation of the whole window wall is another. And thus we have to take up the question posed at the beginning of this study, and face the most unconventional aspect of the fresco — the proximity of death and music, the presence of Muses and instruments in the face of death. The appropriation by Renaissance artists of ancient images and mythological figures such as the Muses requires no comment here.²⁷ Libraries have been written about it. But was this absorption of ancient works of art always accompanied by a clear awareness of their ancient symbolism and of the spiritual atmosphere which had produced them? To what extent were the borrowings from ancient art paralleled by investigations into ancient literature? Our fresco here seems to present a good test case; for only a knowledge of ancient thought connecting death and music could vindicate a juxtaposition which otherwise must have been shocking to the visitors to the Cappella Strozzi. Dirges and other sacred vocal music in church were not only acceptable but common; likewise, angels with instruments, surrounding the dying or ascending Madonna (such as in Carpaccio's „Death of the Virgin“, Venice Accademia). But in a memorial chapel, inviting one to meditation, near to the tomb and the skull-bearing angels and the Christian virtues, what message could be conveyed by musicians and instruments?

These Muses certainly provide no dirge, nor would the instruments be suitable for consoling the bereaved. The meaning of the Muses here is on another plane and, we surmise, intimately connected with the topic of immortality.²⁸ It seems quite significant that behind Parthenice stands one of the symbols of eternity, the palm tree.²⁹ We can safely assume that Filippino and his advisors in the Florence of Ficino and his Platonic academy, were familiar with the Platonic and neo-Platonic doctrine of the survival of the soul.³⁰ Immortality, according to Platonic doctrine, was not granted to every soul but only to a certain selection. Plato's choice was the philosopher.³¹ He had, by virtue of his profession, an intimate relation with death — in fact, pursuing death and dying (Phaedo 64). His tendency to disengage himself from the body

²⁷ On Filippino as an imaginative heir of ancient imagery, see *Chastel's* excellent and comprehensive observations in his chapter, „Filippino Lippi: Les 'Singularités' du Paganisme“ (*Chastel*, op. cit. [footnote 8], pp. 386-392).

²⁸ For musical symbolism in Greek and Roman sarcophagi, see *M. Henri Marrou*, MOYCIKOC ANHP, Thèse Univ. de Paris, Grenoble, 1937; and *Franz Cumont's* standard work, *Recherches sur le Symbolisme Funéraire des Romains*, Paris, 1942.

²⁹ *Pierius Valerianus*, in his *Hieroglyphica* (Basle, 1567, p. 369), devotes a whole section, „Temporis Diuturnitas“, based on Hesiod and Quintilian, to this topic. Also, the palm tree, no doubt as a symbol of resurrection, is frequently found on sepulchral urns, especially kantharoi, of which there are several examples in the British Museum.

³⁰ „... Is it likely that the soul, which is invisible, in passing the place of the true Hades which like her is invisible, and pure, and noble, and on her way to the good and wise God... will be blown away and destroyed immediately on quitting the body...? This can never be...“ (Phaedo 80).

³¹ „The soul, herself invisible, departs to the invisible world — to the divine and immortal and rational... and forever dwells, as they say of the initiated, in the company of the gods“ (Phaedo 81). „... No one who has not studied philosophy and who is not entirely pure at the time of his departure is allowed to enter the company of the Gods, but the lover of knowledge only“ (Phaedo 82). And Virgil in his grandiose panorama of the netherworld, *The Aeneid* (VI), states: ... *Pauci, quos aequus amavit | Juppiter aut ardens exesit ad aethera virtus, | dis geniti potuere...* Plotinus expands the group of the selected in line with the Pythagorean doctrine of the harmony of the spheres and Plato's conception of love in his *Phaedrus*. Thus Plotinus says (I,3): „The souls capable of ascending and escaping the realm of the senses are those of the musician, of the lover (ἐρωπιζόμενος) and the philosopher“. The Pythagorean heritage, with its doctrine of the harmony of the spheres, made its impact on Filippino's time above all through the „Dream of Scipio“ in Cicero's *De Republica*, Book VI, which through many copies, reprints, and comments became one of the most famous and influential treatises of the Renaissance; and in art inspired the representation of the choirs of angels in Marianic topics (see *Emanuel Winternitz*, *On Angel Concerts in the 15th Century: A critical Approach to Realism and Symbolism in Sacred Painting*, in: *Musical Quarterly*, Oct. 1963).



19 Filippino Lippi, *Allegory of Music*. Staatliche Museen, Berlin (Detail).

would make him rejoice in death (Phaedo 68). His soul „departs to the invisible world — to the divine and immortal and *rational* (φρόνημος) and forever dwells, as they say of the *initiated* (μεμνημένων), in company with the Gods.“ I should like to point to the emphasis on the words „rational“³² and „initiated“ — to the latter in view of the „initiati“ in our fresco; to the former because it clarifies the principle according to which the choice is made. If the knowing ones, an intellectual elite, are chosen for eternal life, the role of the Muses as allegories of immortality, becomes clear at once. For they, the daughters of Jupiter and Memory and the companions of Apollo-Logos, are the givers and protectors of knowledge³³, the connoisseurs of the laws of the universe. It is for this quality that they are represented on sarcophagi, often together with Apollo and Minerva, as sponsors of eternal life for the souls of the knowing ones.

The ardent interest in Roman archaeology and recently excavated works of art among which many sarcophagi were found coincided with the intense revival of Plato's doctrine of the soul, above all in Ficino's *Theologia Platonica de Immortalitate Animarum* (1480). One of the inevitable problems of the time was a convincing reconciliation between the pagan and the Christian doctrines of immortality. The first centered on intellectual merit; the second on moral conduct and religion. The Christian Platonist, Ficino, attempted to reconcile these concepts through his theory of contemplation, i.e., the act of contemplation as a state of the soul that prepares for future existence.³⁴ But even this emphasis on contemplation retains the notion of the elite, the knowing, or in terms of Filippino's fresco, the „initiati canunt.“³⁵

One may argue that such a design, subtly blending pagan and Christian symbolism, may have been too complex for the understanding of the worshippers entering S. Maria Novella.

³² According to Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 1, 1070a, 26: „Reason, not all of the soul, can survive death“.

³³ Virgil, *Georgics*, II, 489.

³⁴ *Op. omn.*, pp. 306, 385.

³⁵ *André Chastel*, in *Art et Humanisme à Florence* (Paris, 1959), p. 391, relates this „mystic“ inscription to a passage in Ficino (*Op. Ep. V*, p. 787): „Les mystères sacrés sont livrés à la foule sous des voiles et révélés aux disciples élus“. On pp. 165-166, *Chastel* gives an interesting survey of the traditional styles of Tuscan funerary chapels, leading up to the Strozzi Chapel, but he does not attempt to solve the puzzle of the interrelation of the inscriptions in this chapel, nor of their combination with musical symbols into a homogeneous meditation in immortality.



20 Sarcophagus of the Muses : left part of front. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

But easy intelligibility was certainly the least concern of the originator of this scheme which was addressed to the initiati. This is borne out by the character of the inscriptions which, far from being explanatory labels, border on enigmas. Actually, subtle and unconventional iconological designs were generally admissible in chapels. They aimed at the humanist, the intellectual elite. Raphael once tried to endow one and the same object, the wind instrument in the hands of Euterpe in his „Parnassus“, with a double meaning : one for the humanist concerned with the ancient monuments and one for the naive beholder.³⁶ The combination of pagan Muses and ancient instruments with the Christian virtues and the promise of the water of life may seem a trifle too pagan for a church under Dominican jurisdiction, especially in the days of Savonarola. But such an incompatibility simply did not exist. The Christian heaven had been widely opened to the invasion of pagan myths and images ever since Petrarch's time. Petrarch himself had not mentioned the Bible when he based his hope for immortality on the „Dream of Scipio“, and it was not cynicism but the prevailing spirit of the times when he said that he did not hesitate as a Catholic to entertain a hope that he found proclaimed by the pagan authorities. And as for the Muses as sponsors of immortality, there was the authority of that great *anima naturaliter Christiana*, Virgil, who invokes the Muses³⁷ as the great connoisseurs of stars and heaven, the guardians of the knowledge of the causes of things, a knowledge that conquers fear and fate and the noise of Acheron:

*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,
Atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, strepitum Acherontis avari.*

³⁶ See Emanuel Winternitz, op. cit. „Archaeologia musicale del Rinascimento“... .

³⁷ *Georgics*, II, 489.



21 Sarcophagus of the Muses. Engraving in the „Galleria Giustiniana“.

The long contract of 1487 entrusting Filippino with the work says nothing of the questions that interest us in this essay. Thus we may never know how strictly the artist was bound to a scheme devised by a *litterato come da un pari del Poliziano* to quote again Vincenzo Galilei. But even if a humanist program had prescribed many details, there are countless ways, of course, of translating a verbal scheme into the realm of the visually concrete. For this, a poet was required — a poet with a painter's brush. And here Filippino, who was often no more than an imaginative story teller, surpassed himself. He certainly employed the Muses and their instruments in full awareness of their allegorical importance in antiquity and their relation to the doctrine of immortality. He spared no effort in designing them as faithfully and „ancient“ in style as possible. Instruments seemed the surest way to characterize the Muses; possibly the employment of a majestic giant lyre was suggested to him. One likes to think that perhaps one among the Dominican³⁸ superiors of Santa Maria Novella, though officially committed to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, was a Platonist and treasured *Phaedo*, and recalled the passage there about the lyre³⁹ and its incorporeal divine harmony as a metaphor of the soul; or perhaps he was under the spell of Ficino's astrological studies and thought of the Muses as fitting allegories of the harmony of the spheres.

However this may be, one must admire how Filippino succeeded in fusing all the allegories and symbolic requisites into a convincing artistic whole, a homogeneous visual meditation of profound poetry. He also added poetic touches which are not based on humanist archaeological tradition: the Muses have plectra made of human bones and it is these bones that draw music from the golden strings of the lyre, near to other bones held up or trodden upon by the angels of death. It is the music of the Muses, the harmony of the spheres, the music for the initiated, that confirms the Christian promise of the *DONUM DEI* and the *NI HANC DESPEXERIS VIVES*.⁴⁰

³⁸ Filippo Strozzi had been Prior of Santa Maria Novella for two years before commissioning his funerary chapel there. Filippino must have had excellent relations with the Dominicans since the Caraffa chapel decorated by him is in the principal Dominican church of Rome, Santa Maria sopra Minerva.

³⁹ *Phaedo*, 86, 88, 92.

⁴⁰ I know of only one other Renaissance chapel in which the relation between music and death is symbolized: it is Lorenzo Costa's „The Triumph of Death“ in the fresco of the Bentivoglio Chapel in San Petronio, Bologna. There, in front of the conventional procession of the dead, is a separate group of large figures standing (not marching) and listening in deep meditation to an Oriental (Orpheus?) who plays the *lira da braccio*. The quiet faces of the listeners are of unforgettable individuality. It would seem that here, in this counterpoint between music and death, an artist of little depth was inspired to outdo himself.

APPENDIX

(From Vincenzo Galilei, *Dialogo della Musica Antica et Moderna* [1581], reproduced 1934, Rome, Reale Accademia d'Italia, p. 130 ff.)

BAR. (Signor Giovanni Bardi). In qual maniera fatto & di qual forma credete per fede vostra che fusse il Plettro degli antichi Citharisti & Citharedi?

STR. (Signor Pietro Strozzi). Credo che egli fusse un'Archetto simile à quello che adoperano hoggi i sonatori di Viola da gamba, & da braccio, detta modernamente Lira.

BAR. Qui è tutto l'errore.

STR. Come di gratia.

BAR. Il Plettro degli antichi, era uno strumento lungo un palmo, ò un quarto di braccio in circa, della forma che qui vedete il disegno; di che (per quello ne sente Suida) fu autrice Saffo; la qual cosa non so come possa stare, avvenga che Homero che attribuisce l'inventione à Mercurio, fu avanti a Saffo del Molydio inventrice.

Il quale strumento s'impugnava con la destra, & con la sinistra si reggeva quella parte della Lira dove erano accomodati i bischeri; & l'altra dove erano attaccate le corde, che era come veduto havete al quanto più larga, si appoggiava al petto; à quella parte però che apportava comodità maggiore: ne tempi poi più bassi, quando si cominciò à sonare in consonanza come si disse che usava Epigonio & Aspendio, si posava in piedi sopra una tavola ò sgabello, & con le due linguette che avanzavano sotto & sopra al pugno ò da lati che ci vogliamo dire, si percotevano & non si secavano le corde di essa Lira; nella maniera che vi disse poco fa Vergilio & Ovidio: ha vendo altri & questi stessi Poeti, per mostrare maggior forza nel toccarle, usata questa voce; Ferire le corde, in vece di percuoterle. i quali strumenti si costumarono in quelli primi tempi, fare di quelli ossi che hanno le capre tra le ginocchia & l'ugne delle gambe dinanzi; lavorati & puliti al tornio ò in altra maniera; dādogli gli artefici quella forma che havete veduta come più d'altra conveniente all'ufitio suo: ancora che alcuni altri vogliono, che l'ugna istessa servisse per percuotere le corde, impugnando il Zampetto dopo l'essere staccato dalla capra & secco, & volendo vederne un ritratto molto simile, il quale non vedo mai senza mia meraviglia; ponete mente nel superbo tempio di Santa Maria Nuova, nella cappella d'uno degli Avi nostri, dipinta da Filippo di Fra Filippo; in faccia della quale dalla parte sinistra, si vedono due femmine, una delle quali canta, & l'altra sostiene con la mano una Lira antica fatta secondo che di sopra vi ho dimostrato; & nella destra ha impugnato una cosa simile al disegno del Plettro mostratovi, quanto però alla forma & all'attezza dell'ufitio; dal che si può fare argomento, del gran giuditio di quello eccellente pittore; caso che in quel affare non fusse aiutato da alcuno litterato, come da un pari del Poliziano che fu in fiore nell'istesso tempo & luogo; il quale facilmente potette havere qualche lume di tale strumento, poi che litterato era, & della musica lasciò scritto in diversi suoi propositi alcune cose di momento, & comunicarlo à detto Filippo. & acciò che sappiate, non e più di due anni che tale certezza è pervenuta in cognitione di alcuni pochi particolari; mercè d'un Pilo antichissimo ritrovatosi ultimamente in Roma, il quale è hoggi nel Palazzo del Cardinale Santacroce; dove si vedono scolpite in basso rilievo le Muse, & in mano à una la forma di lui con lo strumento appresso, la cognitione & certezza del quale, fa hoggi che si scorge in più rovesci di medaglie, che era prima conosciuto per ogn'altra cosa che per un Plettro. un'altro ancora simile, se ne vede pur in Roma in una scultura antichissima; la quale è in una nicchia del cortile del Palazzo già del Cardinale Montepulciano, & hoggi de Cievoli Gentilhuomini Pisani; in mano d'una figura in habito di donna con uno strumento à canto. che le corde dell'antica Lira si percotessero ultimamente, & non si secassero, ve lo confermo con l'esempio d'uno Evangelo Nobile Tarentino, raccontatoci da Luciano; ...“.



22 One of the musicians surrounding King David. From the Bible of Charles the Bald, Paris, Bibl. nat. I, fol. 215 v.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Aufsatz versucht eine Deutung der musikalischen Symbole und Allegorien sowie der Inschriften, die sich in dem Fresko von Filippino Lippi an der Fensterwand der Begräbniskapelle des Filippo Strozzi in S. Maria Novella finden. Die Komposition muss auf ein hohes und schmales gotisches Fenster Rücksicht nehmen, dessen Glasmalereien im oberen Teil die Madonna, im unteren die hl. Johannes Ev. und Philippus zeigen und im Raum den stärksten Farbakzent bilden, während die Fresken annähernd monochrom, in braunen und blauen Tönen, gemalt sind und nur durch vereinzelte Goldhörung auf symbolische Gegenstände weisen. Die hohen, das Fenster begleitenden Säulen sind vom Konstantinsbogen entlehnt und werden von einer Sockelzone getragen, in der die Figuren von Caritas und Fides sowie, in den Bogenzwickeln über dem Sarkophag, Engel mit Totenköpfen in Händen erscheinen. In der Hauptzone sieht man unten links „Parthenice“ mit einem Saiteninstrument, umgeben von zwei Putten mit Blasinstrumenten; unten rechts stehen zwei weibliche Gestalten, zwischen ihnen ein hohes Saiteninstrument.

Über diesen beiden Gruppen hängen Inschrifttafeln. Die linke liest man als *Sacris superis initiati canunt*; die rechte, ziemlich beschädigt, kann durch eine in den Uffizien befindliche Zeichnung ergänzt werden zu *Quondam nunc Deo op. max. canimus*, wobei das *canere* in beiden Fällen auch „ein Instrument spielen“ heißen kann (singende Personen sind im Fresko nicht dargestellt). — Die Inschrift über dem Kopf der Madonna im Glasfenster ist *Mitis esto* = „sei friedsam“ zu lesen. Der Text im aufgeschlagenen Buch des Philippus ist ein freies Pasticcio aus Ecclesiasticus Kap. 44-45 und dient offenbar der Verherrlichung des Verstorbenen. In der obersten Region der Wandfläche hängen Rundscheiben mit den Worten *Si scires* und *Donum Dei*, ein Hinweis auf Joh. 4, 10, wo Christus im Gespräch mit der Samariterin das Wort Gottes als das Wasser des Lebens bezeichnet (*Da mihi hanc aquam*, sagt die Samariterin Joh. 4, 15). Die Inschrift steht also hier als Verheissung des Ewigen Lebens. Die Inschrifttafeln sind durch ein kompliziertes System von Bändern miteinander verknüpft. — Über dem Marmorbogen, zwischen den in die Zwickel gemalten Todesengeln, steht auf einer Schrifttafel: *Ni hanc despexeris vives* = „Wenn du dies nicht verschmähst, wirst du leben“, wobei *hanc* sich auf *hanc aquam* (= donum Dei) bezieht und damit diese Tafel, als Paraphrase der Spes, mit den rechts und links personifizierten Caritas und Fides zur Tugendtrias zusammenschliesst.

Das Saiteninstrument in der Hand der Parthenice muss als Lyra-Gitarre bezeichnet werden und ist eine vom Künstler missverstandene antike Lyra, verändert durch die Anbringung eines

Fingerbretts unter den Saiten. Es wird hier mit einem knöchernen Plektrum in Gestalt eines Rehfusses geschlagen, einem Gerät, das wie das Musikinstrument auf die Antike zurückgeht und das archäologische Interesse des Malers beweist. Der eine Putto bläst eine Syrinx mit sieben Pfeifen, der andere ein von antiken Darstellungen des Aulos beeinflusstes, ebenfalls phantasievoll umgestaltetes Instrument. Am Boden liegt noch ein anderes, wohl als Tibia anzusprechendes Gerät. Die Instrumente der „Pathenice“-Gruppe kommen ähnlich auch auf Filippinos „Allegorie der Musik“ in Berlin vor, die Lyra ist dort als Hirschkopf gebildet, wobei der Hirsch die Schnelligkeit des Tons symbolisiert. Das Gemälde zeigt, ähnlich wie das Fresko, eine Mischung von Einzelheiten, die von antiken Vorbildern stammen, mit quattrocentistischen, pseudo-archäologischen Elementen. Die Rolle des knöchernen Plektrums erläutert und kommentiert ein Jahrhundert später, unter Hinweis auf Filippinos Fresko, Vincenzo Galilei in seinem *Dialogo della Musica Antica et Moderna* (siehe Anhang). Als Kenner antiker Musikpraxis könnte Poliziano durch seine *Fabula d'Orfeo* auf Filippino eingewirkt haben. — Die Frauengruppe rechts ist zweifellos entlehnt von einem antiken, ehemals in Rom, heute in Wien befindlichen Sarkophag mit Minerva, Apollo und den neun Muses: die dritte Muse von links ist unmittelbar übernommen, samt ihrem knöchernen Plektrum; die äusserste links seitenverkehrt, wobei sie statt ihrer Schriftrolle ebenfalls ein Plektrum erhielt. Das zwischen beiden Frauen auf einem hohen Sockel aufgestellte Saiteninstrument ist eine Phantasieschöpfung unter Anlehnung an die auf Musensarkophagen vorkommenden Stativ-Kitharas.

Zur Deutung des ganzen Komplexes, dieser Verbindung von Muses und Musikinstrumenten mit den Symbolen des Todes und der Ewigkeit, muss man eine Bekanntschaft des Künstlers oder seines Auftraggebers mit dem Gedankengut der Florentiner platonischen Akademie und dadurch mit der platonischen oder neuplatonischen Lehre von der Unsterblichkeit der Seele (vgl. Marsilio Ficino, *Theologia Platonica de Immortalitate Animarum*, 1480) voraussetzen. Danach waren nur die Seelen der Wissenden (*initiati*), einer intellektuellen Elite, für ein ewiges Leben auserwählt. Die Muses, Töchter von Jupiter und Mnemosyne, Gefährten des Apollon-Logos, schenken und beschützen das Wissen, kennen die Gesetze des Universums und sind — nach dem Zeugnis Virgils — Bürgen für die Unsterblichkeit der Seelen der Eingeweihten. Ficino versucht, den auf rationalem Verdienst beruhenden platonischen Unsterblichkeitsglauben mit dem christlichen, der in Frömmigkeit und ethischer Haltung gegründet ist, zu verbinden: Kontemplation als Zustand der Seele, die sich auf ihr zukünftiges Sein vorbereitet. Das ganze Programm wendet sich an die Initiati, es ist gekennzeichnet durch den enigmatischen Charakter des Dargestellten und der Inschriften. Das humanistisch-literarische Gedankengebäude in eine sichtbare Wirklichkeit zu übertragen, dazu bedurfte es eines Maler-Dichters wie Filippino, der sich in diesem Werk selbst übertroffen hat. Sicher war er sich der allegorischen Bedeutung der Muses und ihrer Instrumente im Altertum sowie ihrer Beziehung zur Lehre von der Unsterblichkeit bewusst, und es ist zu bewundern, wie er die Fülle der Allegorien und symbolischen Requisiten in ein überzeugendes künstlerisches Ganzes umschmolz: die Musik der Muses, die Harmonie der Sphären, die Musik für die Initiati bekräftigen die christliche Verheissung des Ewigen Lebens.