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**BESSARION AND MUSIC
CONCEPTS, THEORETICAL SOURCES AND STYLES
PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING VENICE,
10–11 NOVEMBER 2018**

Edited by Silva Tessari

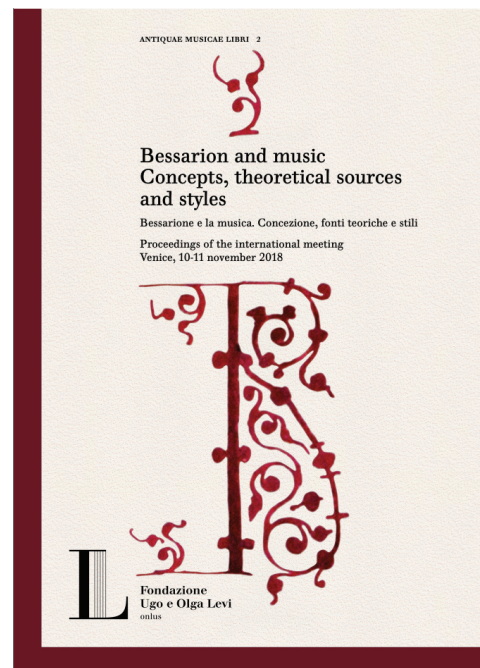
Antiquae Musicae Libri 2

Venice: Fondazione Ugo e Olga Levi, 2021

xiii + 178 pp.

This collection of edited proceedings springs from a Venetian initiative in 2018 commemorating 550 years since the donation to San Marco of the library of Cardinal Bessarion (1403-72). As Silvia Tessari points out in her Preface, Bessarion's legacy necessarily invites discussion from a number of disciplinary and methodological approaches: "the conference aimed to contemplate the historical period in which Bessarion lived, his biography, his Weltanschauung, and his cultural network from an original perspective: musicology." (p. xi) The essential question has to do with the role that Bessarion played as a link between East and West, between the Greek Byzantine world in which originated and the Latin Catholic world in which he became a humanist and was awarded the title of cardinal.

Accordingly, the first chapter, by Daniel Glowotz, "Born of a Series of Misunderstandings: the Reports about Music at the Council of Florence and the Documents of Cardinal Bessarion's Musical Thought", takes us straight to the heart of the question – "While the reports written down by Byzantines about the music performances of the Florentine Council were based on the



misunderstanding of the sacred music of Western Europe, the documents of Bessarion's musical thought were born from the misunderstanding of Plato's writings by the Byzantine emigré scholar and staunch Aristotelian George of Trebizond." (p. 5) Glowotz gives a survey of the performances at the Council, noting the difficulty of establishing exactly what observers from both sides meant by their written observations, in terms of both performance style and rhetoric, and finishes with a survey of Bessarion's opinions on these matters, his library and his legacy. This must certainly now be considered the definitive introductory discussion of this topic, especially because its wider conclusions are founded on a singular grasp of detail.

Silva Tessari then discusses in detail Bessarion's musical manuscript now held in Venice, through which she aims to arrive at a definition of what Bessarion meant by the term "Byzantine music", and Gerda Wolfram provides a chapter on the art of chanting as found in Byzantine theoretical treatises from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, establishing the link between older Byzantine tradition and the work of composers of the diaspora following the Fall of Constantinople.

An unavoidable name in this context is that of Ioannes Plousiadenos, and Christian Troelsgard's chapter places him in what he describes as the axis of Constantinople – Crete – Venice. After a brief presentation of Plousiadenos's life, and of the manuscripts written by him, the majority of the chapter is dedicated to the *Vademecum*, Ms Athos, Dionysios 570 (GR-AOd 70) and a fascinating overview of its contents. There are four appendices, with summaries of Plousiadenos's life and his manuscripts, and musical examples relevant to the manuscript under discussion. And from Plousiadenos it is natural to jump to a discussion of Byzantine polyphony, and Nina-Maria Wanek examines in detail the notational implications of manuscripts containing such music from the period of Bessarion, including, naturally, Plousiadenos, concluding that their work was very much experimental.

Giuseppe Sanfratello takes the discussion further afield, to the Sicilian-Albanian colonies after Bessarion's time, introducing the topic and presenting the result of his research on the way these traditions relate to the Byzantine, something that has hitherto not immediately apprehensible to those without access to Italian-language research. Maria Alexandru's concluding chapter discusses the work of Byzantine composers in the kalophonic style in terms of their use of the hymnology of St Kassia (Kassiane), and includes a vast number of useful tables, plates and illustrative examples.

In all, this is an immensely valuable collection of essays, providing a great many insights into Bessarion's time, his own activities and his legacy. English-language editing is sometimes not all that it should have been, but that is truly a small price to pay for such an innovative and inspiring volume.

Ivan Moody