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New polyphonic fragments from 15th-century Spain: a preliminary report

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1 Anonymous three-voice composition (New York, Columbia University Library, Lodge Ms.13, upper pastedown);
see ex.1 for transcription

New polyphonic fragments from 15th-century Spain: a preliminary report

THE discovery of fragments of polyphony from the 14th and 15th centuries can make a significant contribution to our understanding of music from that period, especially in countries where, as is the case with Spain, the surviving musical sources are few.¹ A number of fragments of early sacred music from eastern Spain have recently been discovered and studied by Maricarmen Gómez,² but it is rare to come across new sources, however fragmentary, for secular polyphony of the 15th century. Such fragments are, by their nature, almost invariably found outside or divorced from their original context, turning up as stiffening for bindings or strengthening for spines, making it extremely difficult to establish their provenance or dating, let alone authorship. In this case three pieces, two of them incomplete, have been copied into the blank spaces of an existing text manuscript, and as yet it is only possible to draw some tentative conclusions. Their incomplete state and air of abandonment perhaps suggests that they were drafts of pieces that were reworked and polished elsewhere: the jottings, perhaps, of an amateur composer or the first attempt at notating a polyphonic piece by a young or untrained musician. We need to know much more about the early history and ownership of the host book, a 15th-century copy of Valerius Maximus's *Factorem et dictorum memorabilium libri novem*, before the pieces can be securely dated or further contextualized: this article gives notice of their existence and offers some preliminary observations.

The musical fragments are found in a manuscript copy of the translation into Castilian of Valerius Maximus's *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri novem* (AD 30) now held as Lodge Ms.13 in Columbia

University Library. It is clear that the music was copied once the manuscript was complete, as it is found not only on the previously blank upper and lower endpapers,³ but also on an inner page left only partially blank by the copyist of the original text. As was so often the case in an era when paper was both scarce and relatively expensive, the person who copied these pieces took advantage of the blank spaces to attempt to write out or compose some music.

The early history of the book itself is not known,⁴ but by the 19th century it belonged to Sir Thomas Phillips (1792–1872), and was subsequently bought by Columbia University Library with the financial support of González Lodge (1863–1942). It is not known exactly when the manuscript was copied, although it almost certainly dates from the mid-15th century, a dating suggested by the watermarks and the copying tradition for the work.⁵ The earliest translation of Valerius Maximus's work known in the Iberian Peninsula was made in Catalan by the monk Antoni Canals before 1 December 1395, when a copy was sent by the Cardinal of Valencia to the *consellers* of Barcelona.⁶ Many translations into Castilian followed during the 15th century, reflecting its wide dissemination throughout the peninsula.⁷ The prologue to the copies held at Columbia and the Biblioteca Colombina in Seville reveal the identity of the translator: Juan Alfonso de Zamora (1422–1500).⁸ However precocious Zamora's skills as a translator, his Castilian version of Valerius Maximus's *Factorum et dictorum* cannot date much before about 1445; the copy in Columbus's library in Seville is dated c.1450, and all the other surviving translations in Castilian date from between about 1427 and 1460.

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Ex.1 Anonymous three-voice composition (see illus.1)

The music found on the endpapers stuck down to the inside upper and lower covers of the book and on f.292v cannot, therefore, have been copied before the middle of the 15th century. The music hand and notation, as well as the style of the pieces, would suggest some time in the second half of the century, although it is difficult to be more precise at present.⁹ The piece on the upper pastedown, copied immediately below the inscription 'Valerio Maximo', is for three voices and is textless (illus.1; ex.1). I have not been able to find a musical concordance, and it does not appear among the textless songs listed by David Fallows in his catalogue of polyphonic songs up to 1480.¹⁰ Further, it is incomplete,

so it is difficult to ascertain the genre, although the length and idiom of the superius might suggest a *canción*. There are many reasons why it might have been left incomplete, but it is possible that the version copied here represents an intermediate step in the compositional process; it would not be the only example of a draft or abandoned version in the surviving repertory.¹¹ The errors and multiple corrections made by the copyist, as well as the not entirely satisfactory musical solutions reached, serve to reinforce this hypothesis. The fact that more of the superius was copied may give some indication as to the way in which the song was composed: first the melodic line, and then the two supporting voices.

Ex.2 Anonymous fragment (see illus.2)

Ex.3 Anonymous two-voice composition (see illus.3)

[Superius]

Non slo - vy - - - da nin des -

Tenor

Non sol - vy - - - da nin des -

9

-py - de me - mo - ria quien me da pe - na por ques

- py - - de me - mo - ria quien me da pe - na por -

18

ley nin jus - ta y bue - - na

- ques ley nin jus - ta bue - - na que

26

que nol - - vy - - - da

- - nol - vy - - da [que nol - vy - da a - -

35

- a quien ol - vy - - - - - de

- - quien ol - vy - de [a - quien ol - vy - de ol - vy - de]

(1) Semibreve rest in the MS

It is noticeable, however, that while the superius and tenor parts work together, the contra as notated does not fit well with either of the upper voices.

Only a fragment of a single voice is copied on f.292v, and this, too, is textless, making identification impossible (illus.2; ex.2). The problem is accentuated by the loss and replacement of the upper left-hand corner of the page and the subsequent lack of the beginning of the voice part and

also of the mensuration sign. The transcription in ex.2 attempts to reconstruct the part as far as is possible. The third piece, on the lower pastedown, is a work for two voices (superius and tenor) that is apparently complete (illus.3; ex.3).¹² No concordance has yet been found for the poem copied immediately below the music,¹³ although it is keyed to the voice parts by the incipit and fits well enough:

non solvyda nin despyde
 memoria q[ui]en me da pena
 porq[u]es ley nin justa y buena
 q[ui]e[n] nolvyda [a] quien olyvde

q[ui]en estraña su memoria
 por otro ajeno sentido
 es su devyda victoria
 q[ue] le paguen con olyvido

pues dacordarse despyde
 de my pena q[ui]en me pena
 tal paga lo [...] buena
 por la medida que myde.

No painful memory
 is forgotten or dismissed,
 because the law is neither just nor good
 for he who who does not forget the one who forgets.

He who alienates his memory
 for another alien sense,
 will be paid his deserved reward
 of being forgotten.

For to remember sees off
 the one who torments me
 such payment ...
 measure for measure.

The musical setting of this text, a *canción*, is straightforward, even though there are various minor errors,¹⁴ which might suggest that the composer was relatively assured when writing two-voice polyphony, certainly more so than when he tried to write in three parts.

The pieces cannot have been copied before about 1450, but the style of the music and the notation would suggest that they were entered into the book not that long afterwards. Very few Castilian-texted polyphonic songs have survived before the much more substantial *cancioneros* of the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Until now, it would seem that only the propagandist *Lealtat, o lealtat*, which is dated 1466 by Stevenson, survives in a manuscript of

Spanish origin copied before those *cancioneros* were compiled.¹⁵ As Fallows has noted, a few Castilian-texted songs are found in non-Iberian sources from before 1500;¹⁶ and some of those found in the Spanish *cancioneros* surely date from the 1460s and 70s.¹⁷ The three pieces copied into a mid-15th-century Spanish manuscript probably date from around this period, and thus add to the few early examples we have of polyphonic songs notated in Spain. They may well represent an early and not entirely successful attempt to notate secular polyphony, reflecting a period of transition from a semi-improvised song tradition to one that was composed, or at least written down.

Translated by Tess Knighton

1 R. Bowers and A. Wathey, 'New sources of English fifteenth- and sixteenth-century polyphony', *Early music history*, iv (1984), pp.297–346.

2 M. C. Gómez Muntané, *La música medieval en España* (Kassel, 2001), esp. pp.254–6.

3 These have been pasted down to the binding and no text is visible on the side that has been stuck down.

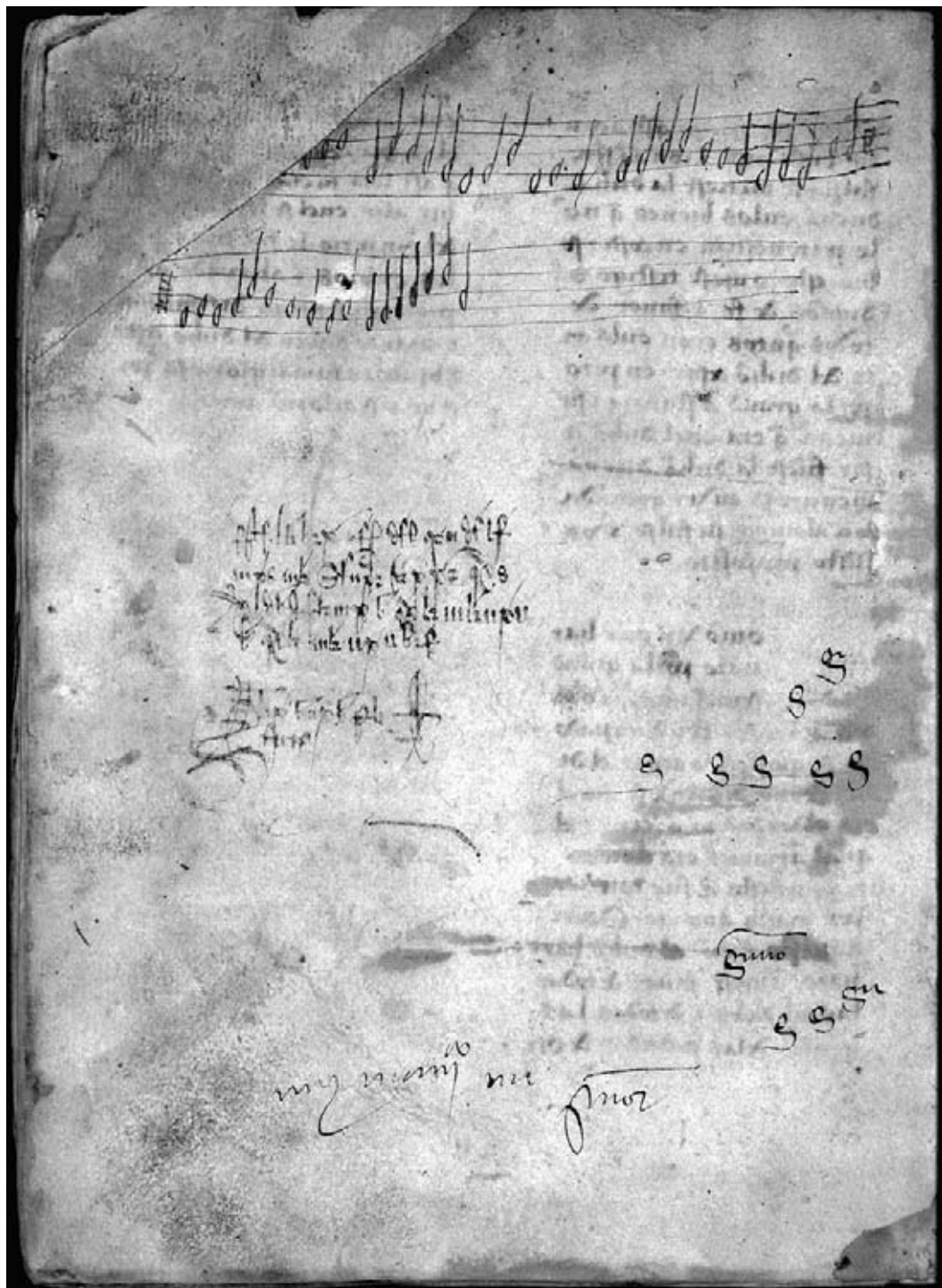
4 The book measures 285 × 216 mm and has 292 paper folios. The text is presented in two columns of between 30 and 37 lines ruled in lead (quires 1–23) or in dry point (quires 24–35), except on ff.15v–16v and 215v, where it is written in a single column of 11–21 lines surrounded by a formal gloss. In addition to these illuminations, decorated initials in red or

purple ink and of various sizes are also found up to f.247, where space has been left for initials that were never copied. The binding is of bevelled wooden boards in contemporary blind-stamped brown morocco, and the remains of green ties can be seen on the upper cover. The spine has been repaired. This physical description of the book is based on that offered by Columbia University Library: (<http://dpg.lib.berkeley.edu/scripts/idc/idc/ds/msimage2.idc?MsID=100980>).

5 The watermarks are: two tulips similar to Briquet 6646 and 6649; the letter 'S' (Briquet 9026), and *Monts* similar to Briquet 11902. C. M. Briquet, *Les filigranes: dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600* (Amsterdam, 1968). Briquet 6646: Perpignan, 1456;

Briquet 6649: Bologna, 1472; Briquet 9026: Marseille, 1445, Palermo, 1446–1453, and Gênes, 1450–2; Briquet 11902: Pistoie, 1421.

6 See G. Avenoz, 'Antoni de Canals, Simon de Hesdin, Nicolas de Gonesse, Juan Alfonso de Zamora y Hugo de Urriés: lecturas e interpretaciones de un clásico (Valerio Máximo) y de sus comentaristas (Dionisio de Burgo Santo Sepulcro y Fray Lucas)', *Essays on medieval translation in the Iberian Peninsula* (Omaha-Castellón de la Plana, 2001), pp.45–73; G. Avenoz, 'El paper d'Antonio de Canals a la traducció catalana de Valeri Màxim', *Bulletin of Hispanic studies*, lxxvii (2000), pp.339–57; G. Avenoz, 'La recepción de Valerio Máximo en las Coronas de Castilla y Aragón en el medievo', *Evphrosyne*, xxvi (1998),



2 Fragment of a composition (New York, Columbia University Library, Lodge Ms.13, f.292v);
see ex.2 for transcription



3 Anonymous two-part composition (New York, Columbia University Library, Lodge Ms.13, lower pastedown); see ex.3 for transcription

pp.241–52; G. Avenzoa, 'Traducciones y traductores. El libro de Valerio Máximo en romance', *Homenaje a Don Constantino García* (Santiago de Compostela, 1991), pp.221–9.

7 See Avenzoa, 'Antoni de Canals', p.46.

8 A critical edition of Zamora's translation on CD-ROM can be found in *The electronic text and concordances of Juan Alfonso de Zamora's Spanish translation of Los nueve libros de Valerio Máximo (as contained in BNM ms..2208)*, ed. S. D. Johnson, Hispanic Seminary Publications (Madison, 1999).

9 On the earliest surviving Castilian-texted polyphonic songs, see D. Fallows, 'A glimpse of the lost years: Spanish polyphonic song, 1450–70', *New perspectives on music: essays in honor of Eileen Southern*, ed. J. Wright and S. A. Floyd Jr, Detroit Monographs in Musicology/ Studies in Music (Warren, 1992), pp.24–45.

10 D. Fallows, *A catalogue of polyphonic songs, 1415–1480* (Oxford, 1999).

11 On the compositional process at this time, see J. A. Owens, *Composers at work: the craft of musical composition, 1450–1600* (New York, 1997). Another example of an unfinished Castilian-texted song is 'Dinos, madre del doncel', preserved in the so-called Colombina Songbook (SevBC 7-I-28, ff.19v–21). The complete song, attributed to Triana, is found on ff.103v–104, and it seems that the incomplete version found earlier in the manuscript (in which, as here, the superius part is longer than the other voices) was a draft that was abandoned.

12 The musical text in the upper right-hand corner is partially obscured, making it impossible to read (see bar 17 of ex.3).

13 It is not found in Fallows, *A catalogue of polyphonic songs*, nor in B. Dutton and J. Krogstad, *El cancionero del siglo XV, c.1360–1520*, 7 vols, Biblioteca Española del siglo XV (Salamanca, 1991).

14 Text and music is missing from bar 17 as the upper right-hand corner of the page is missing.

15 Fallows, *A catalogue of polyphonic songs*, p.619; R. Stevenson, *Spanish music in the age of Columbus* (The Hague, 1960), pp.204–6. The date of this manuscript is placed a few years earlier in J. de Mata Carriazo, *Colección de Crónicas Españolas*, iii (Madrid, 1940). See also Fallows: 'A glimpse of the lost years', pp.19–20; M. Gómez Muntaner, 'La música laica en el reino de Castilla en tiempo del Condestable Don Miguel Lucas de Iranzo (1458–1473)', *Revista de musicología*, xix (1996), pp.25–45; and T. Knighton, 'Spaces and contexts for listening in 15th-century Castile: the case of the Constable's palace in Jaén', *Early music*, xxv (1997), pp.661–77.

16 Examples are: 'Yerra con poco saber' (Trent 89, c.1470); 'La pena sin ser sabida' (Mellon Chansonnier, 1490–1500); 'La gracia de vos' (Chansonnier Cordiforme, 1470s); 'Pues servicio vos desplace' (Perugia 431, 1490–1500); and 'Viva, viva rey Fernando' (Montecassino 871, 1480s).

17 Fallows, 'A glimpse of the lost years'.

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