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Visible and Invisible Musical Paths in Federico da Montefeltro's Gubbio Studiolo

Nicoletta Guidobaldi*

The studiolo commissioned by Federico da Montefeltro for his palace in Gubbio, a few years later than the studiolo in Urbino, not only constitutes an exceptional witness to the meanings assigned to music by Federico—both from an institutional and a symbolic point of view—but also, in its singularity, it offers an exemplary case study of a sophisticated conceptual and iconographic programme on the celebratory theme of harmony as a reflection of and prerequisite for good ducal government.

In the context of the neoplatonism that characterised the culture of the Montefeltro court, the identification of Federico with the Perfect Ruler, a philosopher and therefore a “musician” in the Platonic sense of the term—espoused by Marsilio Ficino in his own writings and reprised, at various levels of sophistication, in the copious literary and poetic production in Federico’s honour—came also to be visualised, in diverse forms, in the principal decorative cycles destined for his residences. As I have shown across several studies on the distinctive “image of music” developed by Federico’s highly cultured entourage, the guiding themes of his celebration as duke prompted the creation of complex iconographic programs, characterised by the erudite use of musical themes, figures and metaphors. In the palace of Urbino, unprecedented musical images and emblems mark out real and symbolic paths, culminating in the studiolo and then in the so-called *Tempietto delle Muse*; and it is in the Gubbio studiolo, completed at the end of Federico’s life, that they give rise to a final, precious iconographic “variation” on the central theme of the duke as “musician,” and on the musical foundation of his reign.¹

The Gubbio studiolo—the second-oldest surviving example within the context of the humanist studiolo tradition—was greatly inspired by that of Urbino, and like its model was conceived as a place of meditation but also as a room to inspire wonder in selected visitors.² The small trapezoidal space, located on the first floor of the palace, was capped by a coffered wooden ceiling, and was originally decorated with intarsiated panels (covering the walls up to two thirds of their height) and with paintings, the latter documented only by the synoptic inventory compiled at the death of the final duke of Urbino (fig. 10.1).³

* I am deeply grateful to Tim Shephard for his prompt and elegant translation of my contribution from Italian.

¹ Guidobaldi 1995; for an initial exploration of the Gubbio studiolo: Guidobaldi 1996.

² Cieri Via 1988, VII–XXX; Cheles 1991.

³ The *Relazione degli stabili della Principessa Vittoria di Urbino*, published in 1631 by Nicola Cerretani, records the presence in the studiolo of “scansie intarsiate e pitture:” see Budinich, 12–13.

At the current state of research, it has been established that the preparation of this “place of mind and memory” and ideal heart of the court was completed whilst the construction of the palace was in progress, under the direction of Francesco di Giorgio Martini, to whom both the designs for the intarsias (later executed by the Florentine workshop of Giuliano and Benedetto da Maiano) and the overall supervision of the project are now unanimously attributed.⁴ The wooden panels, detached in 1874, were acquired by Prince Filippo Massimo Lancellotti with the intention of using them in his villa at Frascati, where however they were never installed and remained, unused, until 1938, when his heirs sold them to the German art dealer and antiquarian Adolph Loewi. After emigrating to the United States in 1939, Loewi in turn sold them to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, where they can now be seen, displayed in an appropriate exhibition space, following careful restoration completed in 1996.⁵ In 2009 an exquisite copy of the wainscotting, made by expert cabinetmakers from Gubbio, was installed in their original architectural setting in the ducal palace, which previously had remained completely bare for many decades.⁶

The presence of musical themes and figures on the intarsiated walls, whose remarkable interest was first highlighted by Emanuel Winternitz,⁷ was the subject of detailed research in the course of a digital and sonic reconstruction project in 2019, resulting in an innovative museum installation in the Palazzo Ducale.⁸ Taking into account these recent findings, this essay proposes a new reading of the decorative programme, with particular attention to the “Iconographic genealogy” of the intarsia images, which, thanks to their particular interweaving of philosophical and musical concepts and visual communication, constitute important sources not only for the reconstruction of lost instruments and repertoire, but also for our understanding of the distinctive meanings assigned to music in Federico’s circle. The reconstruction of the Iconographic program of the studiolo is made particularly difficult by the absence of records concerning its original appearance, or descriptions of the paintings—the room having been dismantled relatively early in its history. Nonetheless, in the context of a unified and erudite project, there is no doubt that the intarsias and the paintings must have been linked together thematically, and also connected with the Latin inscription, in golden letters on an azure background, which runs around the upper cornice of the wainscotting. It is this inscription—yet to be read in relation to the intarsia images—which constitutes an essential point of connection between the two registers of the studiolo,

⁴ On the role of Francesco di Giorgio, documented by a contract made in 1477 with the painter Bernardino (published by Menichetti, 239), see Fiore and Martines. For a detailed study of the intarsias and a rigorous review of the critical fortunes of the different elements of the studiolo see Raggio 2007, 152–157.

⁵ Remington; for a meticulous reconstruction of the various phases in the transfer of the panels from Gubbio to New York, see Raggio 2007.

⁶ Ambrogi.

⁷ Winternitz 1942.

⁸ The innovative museum installation, opened in 2019, was realised within the scope of a large project coordinated by the Dipartimento di Beni culturali of the Università di Bologna and by Polo Museale dell’Umbria-Palazzo Ducale di Gubbio, in collaboration with: Politecnico di Torino, Università di Perugia, Metropolitan Museum and Research Center for Musical Iconography (New York), Museo Galileo di Firenze, and Ensemble *Micrologus*.

offering important indications as to the conceptual horizons of reference and providing a valuable key for the interpretation of the program (fig. 10.2).

The Latin text, attributed to Federico da Montefeltro's librarian Federico Veterano, is composed of three elegiac distichs:

ASPICIS AETERNOS VENERANDAE MATRIS ALUMNOS/ DOCTRINA
EXCELSOS INGENIOQUE VIROS/ UT NUDA CERVICE CADANT ANTE [ORA
PARENTIS. SUPPLIC]ITER FLEXO PROCUBUERE GENU/ IUSTITIA PIETAS
VINCIT REVERENDA NEC ULLUM/ POENITET ALTRICI SUCCUBUISSE
SUAE.⁹

See the eternal nurselings of the venerable mother,/ Men pre-eminent in learning and intellect,/ How they fall with bared neck[, in the presence of their mother./ Bent] at the knee, they prostrate themselves in supplication./ Thanks to justice, venerable devotion triumphs, and no one/ Repents having yielded to his foster mother.

The invitation of the first lines to *watch* “men pre-eminent in learning and culture, bending the knee with bared neck before their venerable nurse-mother,” already understood by Nachod as an exhortation to the visitor to the studiolo to lift their gaze towards the images that adorn the upper part of the walls, has been connected with a series of Liberal Arts now usually attributed to Justus of Ghent and collaborators, in which each Art is represented with a supplicant, kneeling and with bared neck.¹⁰ The fortunes of these oil-on-panel paintings, rediscovered in Florence at the beginning of the nineteenth century and perhaps part of a larger cycle that suffered early dispersal, remain unclear. Uncertain above all is the original number of the Arts, of which only four are now known: the *Dialectic* and *Astronomy* previously held in the Kaiser Museum of Berlin and destroyed during the Second World War, and the *Rhetoric* and *Music*, still visible today at the National Gallery in London.¹¹ The hypothesis that these “Federican”¹² Arts were located above the intarsias and that the enigmatic verses of the inscription refer to them specifically gains credibility from the presence, on the reverse of the panels, of elaborate devices that must have served to fix them to larger supports, correlating with a description of the laborious removal of otherwise unidentified “portions of painting on panel” from the wooden wainscoting into which they were integrated, at the hands of carpenters sent to Gubbio by the Medici in 1673.¹³ The hypothetical Gubbian provenance of the paintings, currently accepted by the majority of scholars, has given rise to varied suggestions concerning their arrangement in the second register of the studiolo, which

⁹ Nachod; on the restoration of the inscription, re-created on the basis of the sixteenth-century transcription by Gabriele Gabrielli, see Raggio 2007, 93–100.

¹⁰ The link with the cycle of the Liberal Arts was argued by Martin Davies (Davies, 157–167), who was also the first to suggest a hypothetical arrangement of the paintings.

¹¹ The attribution of the Arts, debated since the time of their rediscovery amongst Melozzo da Forlì, Justus of Ghent and Pedro Berruguete, is given to Justus of Ghent and workshop by Campbell 1998; see also Baker and Henry, 359: inv. NG 756 (Music) and 755 (Rhetoric); Raggio 2007, 157–167.

¹² On the sophisticated reinterpretation “in chiave federiciana” of the traditional medieval iconographic scheme of the Arts and their mythical inventors, see Guidobaldi 1995, 79–80.

¹³ On the documents concerning the operation to remove the paintings originally located in the studiolo but not listed in the Relazione of 1631 among the portable effects of the palazzo ducale, see Raggio 2007, 157–159.

according to Clough (later followed by other scholars) also included Justus of Ghent's so-called *Oration*.¹⁴

Further noteworthy elements of the inscription lie in the peculiar choice of words in the last two verses, which make reference to themes and texts that were central to the Ficinian neoplatonism which dominated the cultural choices of the court,¹⁵ especially from the mid-1470s, and are seen reflected in the principal iconographic programs of Federico's reign.¹⁶ As demonstrated by Marcin Fabiański, who was the first to explore the significance of the inscription in relation to the iconographic program of the studiolo, in the context of Ficino's Platonic academy the terms *iustitia* and *reverenda pietas* designated the virtues that oversee the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* respectively. The term *iustitia* is used in this sense by Cristoforo Landino in his *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, dedicated to Federico as the exemplary embodiment of excellence in both lives,¹⁷ a work central to the celebration of the duke and already used a reference-point for the design of the iconographic program of the studiolo at Urbino.¹⁸ In several of his writings completed before 1480, Marsilio Ficino himself speaks of *Iustitia* as the quality (founded in action informed by reason) which oversees the *vita activa*, and of *Reveranda Pietas*, later explicitly identified with wisdom, as the attitude of soul at the foundation of pure contemplation—which is to say the attitude proper to the philosopher. Fabiański underlines the perfect alignment of these themes both in respect of the cycle of the Arts—in which Federico himself, in the guise of a philosopher, is portrayed at the feet of *Dialectic* (fig. 10.3)—and in the so-called *Oration*, in which the duke, illuminated by a light from above, with a book in his hand and the little Guidobaldo at his side, listens to an oration together with three other people.¹⁹ The link identified by Fabiański is very convincing; and in fact it can be argued that the theme of the *vita contemplativa* and of wisdom as the key to the contemplation of the invisible, evoked in the inscription, can be related not only to the paintings but to the whole iconographic program of the studiolo, including the intarsias appearing below them on the wall.

¹⁴ The diverse hypotheses on the original location of the panels (according to some coming from the Palazzo di Urbino or even from Castel Durante) are summarised and discussed by, among others, Cheles 1991, 28–32; subsequent to that of Davies, the main hypotheses on the arrangement of the paintings (none of which seem entirely satisfactory) are found in: Clough 1967; Clough 1986, 287–300; Clough 1995, 21–22; Fabiański, 201–204; Raggio 1996.

¹⁵ Chastel 1981, 359–372; Castelli. Ficino himself, in a famous letter to Dolce, recalls how Federico had all his works and translations copied for the ducal library, see Kristeller, 107 and 121; on Ficino's dedications to Federico: Ficino 1990, CXV e CXIX.

¹⁶ Cieri Via 1986, 57–62; Pernis 1992; Pernis 1993, 155–158; Guidobaldi 2018.

¹⁷ The copy dedicated to Federico is now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Urb. lat. 508); for a critical edition of the text: Landino.

¹⁸ Guidobaldi 1995, 29–47.

¹⁹ Fabiański, 206–208. On the *Oration* (Hampton Court Palace, London), whose iconography has not yet been satisfactorily explained, see Campbell 1985, 59–95; the hypothesis that the scene is inspired by an oration actually delivered in the presence of Federico and his close entourage has led both Mary Aronberg Lavin (1967) and Clough (1967), independently, to identify the orator as Antonio Bonfini.

The intarsiated walls, punctuated by a series of fluted mock pilasters with capitals supporting an architrave, simulate the furnishings which might actually be found in a study, articulated in three bands: benches with folding panels (some of which lie open to serve as desks resting on elegantly turned legs); a middle band decorated with ornamental motifs and the noble insignia and honours with which Federico had been invested by the Pope, the King of Aragon and the King of England;²⁰ and an upper band comprising 12 cupboards with lattice doors (open or half-closed at diverse angles), in which are objects evoking the boundless intellectual horizons of the duke and proudly demonstrating the high level reached by his court in every domain of culture and the arts (fig. 10.4).

On the wainscoting, in an effective three-dimensional rendering, are images representative of Federican “mythology:” armour alluding to the “age of arms” in which Federico distinguished himself in the early part of his life, and “instruments” of the arts and of study, emblems of the *vita contemplativa* which he continually cultivated and to which he dedicated himself entirely after the capture of Volterra in 1472.²¹ The books, among which is the *Aeneid* open on a lectern,²² evoke the celebrated library containing “all the books of heaven and earth”—the foundation of the perfect government of the wise duke,²³ whose dedication to study and the Muses is manifested also in his liberality in dealings with scholars from across Italy, who corresponded with him and offered him the dedications of their works.²⁴ It is no coincidence that Cristoforo Landino, praising Federico’s hospitality towards the most illustrious thinkers of his time who had turned his court into a new Athens, recalls also how the duke had dedicated his library to Pallas, Apollo and the nine Muses, comparing him to Ptolemy, the founder of the library of Alexandria, and to other mythical bibliophiles of antiquity.²⁵ Alongside the books, instruments of writing and of measurement and calculation are depicted in the intarsias: the quadrant and the armillary sphere, the hourglass, and musical instruments and notation, to which the task is especially assigned of visualizing that harmony which—in all its manifestations, visible and invisible—constitutes the guiding theme of the iconographic program (fig. 10.5).

²⁰ Over the course of 1474 Federico da Montefeltro was named duke, knight of the Order of St Peter, General of the new Vatican League and Gonfaloniere of Pope Sixtus IV, and was awarded the Order of the Ermine by Ferdinando d’Aragona and that of the Garter by Edward IV of York.

²¹ On the theme of Federico’s excellence in the “two lives,” recurrent in contemporary celebrations of the duke in poetry and prose, see: Baldassarri; Scrivano.

²² The prominent position of the *Aeneid*—perhaps also to be understood as a reference to the third and fourth parts of the *Disputationes camaldulenses*, in which Landino discusses Virgil’s allegories—reflects the role assigned to Virgil by Federico’s entourage, and is matched by the presence in the ducal library of books containing all the works of Virgil: see the two illuminated manuscripts now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Urb. lat. 350 e Urb. lat. 642).

²³ The increasing identification of Federico as learned is reflected also in the numerous portraits (painted and miniature) in which he is invariably represented holding a book: see Guidobaldi 1995, 15–16; see also Sangiorgi.

²⁴ Peruzzi, 152–158.

²⁵ Landino, 53 and 115–116 ; see also Bianca.

Thanks to the rigorous application in the intarsias of perspective and of the new technique of geometrical projection, the wood lends itself to representing the varied aspects of the visible world—the reflections of the light, the shadows, and even the evanescent sounds of the Federican age. The illusionistic effects of the intarsia, accentuated by the virtuosic *trompe-l'oeil* representation, constitute in themselves a homage to the study of perspective, the principles of which had been elaborated and formalised by authors closely connected to the Federican orbit: from Leon Battista Alberti, the protagonist alongside Lorenzo de' Medici of the first dialogue of the *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (on the *vita activa* and *contemplativa*) and bound to Federico by brotherly affection,²⁶ to Piero della Francesca, who had dedicated to Federico his *De prospectiva pingendi*, the first systematic treatise on perspective,²⁷ and the source of the *mazzocchio* (combining the regular bodies of Platonic cosmogony) intarsiated at the center of the main wall.²⁸ The intarsia decoration recalls that of the studiolo in Urbino both in its general layout and in certain details, such as the doors of the cabinets, as well as in the repetition of several images (the armour, the parrot, the *mazzocchio* and above all the emblems, the books and the musical instruments). But the intarsias of Gubbio—which, unlike those of Urbino, do not contain portraits or allegories and are characterised by the highest coherence in their perspective design—define an ideal space which evokes the “perfect beauty” of abstract forms discussed by Ficino in his translation of Plato’s *Philebus*.²⁹ In the context of this environment dominated by geometrical and musical images, objects and symbols redolent of the Federican microcosm are juxtaposed according to patterns which suggest emblematic associations and which reveal, to the most attentive observers, connections between apparently distant ideas and meanings. In this context, in which literal and metaphorical meanings constantly overlap, the musical images play a primary role.

At a first level of interpretation (that of the *inventio*), the intarsias depict, in an intentionally realistic manner, the instruments of the duke, marking out a musical path visible along the walls of the studiolo, and providing us with an iconographic corpus rich in information on the material, performing, and sonic history of Federico’s time. The rebec and the fiddle, the cetra and the lutes, the portative organ, the harp and the tambourine, the horn, the pipe and the drum,³⁰ evoke the variety of repertoires practised at court—where every moment, quotidian or occasional, was accompanied by a suitable musical performance—and give substance to Vespasiano da Bisticci’s celebrated description:

Della musica s’era dilettrato assai et intendevane benissimo del canto e del suono... et aveva una degna cappella di musica dove erano musici intendentissimi. ..Non era

²⁶ In his letter to Landino thanking him for sending the *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, Federico himself writes: “nihil fuit familiarius neque amantius amicitia qua Baptista et ego eramus conjuncti mihi:” Alatri, 102–103 (letter 87). On the presence of Alberti in Federico’s court see also Morolli, 220–223.

²⁷ Piero himself, in the introduction to *De quinque corporibus regularibus*, dedicated to Guidobaldo and now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Urb. lat. 632), recalls having dedicated his *De prospectiva pingendi* to Federico; see Piero della Francesca.

²⁸ Berardi; Gamba.

²⁹ Ficino 1975.

³⁰ Winternitz 1982, 36–41

strumento che sua signoria non avessi in casa et deletavasi assai del suono, et aveva in casa suonatori perfettissimi di più instrumenti, diletavasi più d'instrumenti sotili che grossi, trombe et instrumenti grossi non se ne dilettaua molto, ma organi e istrumenti sotili gli piacevano assai.³¹

He took great delight in music and understood singing and playing very well... and he had a worthy musical chapel where there were very expert musicians. There was not an instrument that his lordship did not have in his house and delight greatly in the sound thereof, and he had in his house most perfect players of many instruments, delighting more in soft than in loud instruments; trumpets and loud instruments did not delight him much, but organs and soft instruments pleased him well.

The fabulous instruments that Baldassare Castiglione included in the list of things “most rare and excellent” that adorned the court and illustrated the refinement of the duke’s tastes,³² are reflected in the intarsia images, outlining a veritable visual “manifesto” of the predilections and cultural orientations of the duke’s circle. Among the first Italian princes to be educated in music, Federico was moulded in the Ca’ Gioiosa at Mantua, the school in which Vittorino da Feltre—himself a capable singer to the lira—taught the role of music in the pursuit of inner perfection and, “imitating in this as in other things the Greek educators,” hired tutors who instructed his students in accompanied song and dance. Of Federico, who had learned to sing “to the lyre,” contemporaries record the pronounced musical inclinations and praise the beauty of his voice: “a voice playful and sonorous, a voice of a swan.”³³ In the context of the celebration of the duke, preferences for song *all’antica*, aristocratic dance and instrumental music are distinctive signs of his education, and recognisable indications of his qualities as a perfect Philosopher-Ruler who revives the models of ancient Greece not only in his performance practices, but in his political, diplomatic and cultural actions.³⁴

Accompanied song—true and proper emblem of the humanist aesthetic and of Apollo Musagete, tutelary deity of the duke—is evoked in the Gubbio intarsias by the rebec, viella, cetra and lute, which were particularly prized for their capacity to accompany song and to play in concert with voices and with other instruments. It is no accident that the regulations concerning the musical organisation of the court recommended the presence of players expert

³¹ See the modern edition of *Comentario de la vita del signore Federico, duca d’Urbino*, in Vespasiano da Bisticci, 1:355–416, at 383–384.

³² In the prologue to his *Cortegiano*, dedicated to Guidubaldo da Montefeltro, Castiglione sings Federico’s praises and counts the instruments among the “meraviglie” of his court; see the modern edition: Castiglione, 83–84.

³³ In his *De vita Victorini Feltrensis commentariolus*, Bartolomeo Platina, like all the biographers of Vittorino, dwells on the importance he attributed to music and dance and emphasises the ideal thread from ancient Greece, revived in his school in Mantua, and then, thanks to his much-loved student Federico, again in the Montefeltro court: see the modern edition of the text in Garin, 668–699.

³⁴ On references to Greece in the celebration of Federico—in which love of classical culture, the material recovery of ancient texts, and the political value assumed by the reconquest of Greece following the fall of Constantinople, come together in a single perspective—see Guidobaldi 1995.

in singing “softly and sweetly and who know how to play lutes and cetras.”³⁵ The intarsias of harp, tambourine with jingles, and pipe and drum evoke dance and attest to the high opinion assigned by the context to that art which, uniting sounds and movements, space and time, constitutes the most complete manifestation of the harmony of the world. Moreover, the real and symbolic importance of the *danza nobile* which delighted ladies and knights, praised by the poets of the court and depicted in various contexts (fig. 10.6), is demonstrated by the presence at court of Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro, the most illustrious dance theorist and dancing-master of the fifteenth century,³⁶ whose story is closely linked, right from the beginning, with Federico’s court.³⁷ Recorded among the “Maestri di danzare” from at least 1471, and responsible for the arrangements for the principal festivals and spectacular events of Federico’s court, Guglielmo is also the author of the fundamental text on dance,³⁸ dedicated to Federico under the name Giovanni Ambrosio following his conversion to Christianity.³⁹

Among the “portraits” of the music of the court immortalised in the studiolo, appearing in a prominent position on the principal wall, is an open music book, on the pages of which was intarsiated *O rosa bella*, still visible at the end of the nineteenth century, but unfortunately erased through successive phases of dismantling and cleaning of the wood panels (fig. 10.7). The monostrophic ballata *O rosa bella*, traditionally attributed to Leonardo Giustinian, enjoyed great musical success throughout the fifteenth century—giving rise to paraphrases, spiritual adaptations, and instrumental transcriptions—and survives also in two polyphonic versions: the first by Johannes Ciconia, and the other ascribed in the sources to Dunstable or Bedingham, and certainly by an English composer of the early fifteenth century.⁴⁰ It seems no coincidence that both these polyphonic versions are transmitted by the only music manuscript known today to be connected with Federico’s court: a small codex of Florentine origin, in use in the Medici circle during the 1460s, which had been given by Piero de’ Medici to Piero d’Arcangelo, a diplomat and Federico’s ambassador to Pius II, who may perhaps have furnished a musical model for the *intarsiatore* (fig. 10.8).⁴¹ It is impossible to say with certainty which version was selected for the intarsia, since now every trace of notation is gone and the rare descriptions dating from the times in which it remained legible are inconclusive. A summary description of the intarsia, sent in 1843 by a correspondent to James Dennistoun, who had not been able to visit the studiolo, limits itself to referring to a

³⁵ On the *Ordine et officij de casa de lo illustrissimo signor duca de Urbino*, compiled during the reign of Guidobaldo and now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Urb. lat. 1248), see Guidobaldi 1995, 24–26 and 38; see also the modern edition: Eiche.

³⁶ Gallo 1983.

³⁷ Guidobaldi 1995, 85–98.

³⁸ Gallo 1979, 62–63; on the *De pratica seu arte tripudii* (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, f. italien 973) see also the modern English translation: Guglielmo Ebreo.

³⁹ The copy dedicated to Federico, once held in his library, is lost; another copy, prepared in Naples, is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (f. italien 476).

⁴⁰ Pirrotta; see also Fallows.

⁴¹ On the manuscript, listed in the inventory of the ducal library and now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, see the facsimile edition: Roth; on its musical contents and on the various attributions of *O rosa bella* see Haar.

book “containing music with the word ROSABELLA inscribed on its pages.”⁴² The notated pages were still at least partially visible between 1899 and 1900, when the English musicologist W. Barclay Squire, on a visit to the Villa of Frascati, took photographs of them (unclear and today lost), on the basis of which Cecie Stainer transcribed an incipit which bears some resemblance to the English version,⁴³ by far the most widely distributed among the Italian courts of the fifteenth century.⁴⁴ There is no doubt, in any case, that *O rosa bella*, like the two compositions intarsiated in the earlier studiolo of Urbino,⁴⁵ held a particular significance for the court, and that amidst the play of words, images and sounds that characterised the entire decoration, it alluded to themes or events directly connected with the celebration of the duke, and perhaps to occasions during which it had been sung as an “air,” according to the usage attested in cultural environments contiguous to that of Federico.⁴⁶

The musical intarsias, which immortalise salient aspects of the soundscape of Federico’s time, at the same time are also true *imprese* of Federico, who Ficino himself, in dedicating to the duke his Latin translation of Plato’s *Politicus*, had compared to a musician for his capacity to compose in harmony the different parts of his state, and for his constant search for proportion, harmony and concord.⁴⁷ In the multiplicity of iconographic and conceptual games which, as before in Urbino,⁴⁸ characterise the decoration of the Gubbio studiolo, starting from those that are visible, other paths are intertwined such that, by effect of a kind of ideal anamorphosis, the instruments progressively reveal further meanings. Depicted in such a manner as to be always only partially visible (sometimes obscured by doors or protruding from shelves, lying on their side or upside down), the musical instruments take on the role of unstable visual metaphors (or, according to Leonardo’s definition, “images of invisible things”), which allows them to refer from the perceptible to the intelligible, from the visible and audible sphere of *musica instrumentalis* to the invisible and inaudible sphere of the *harmonia mundi*, in a constant oscillation among levels of reality and meaning.

This peculiar “co-presence” of musical meanings is reflected, in exemplary manner, in the image of the cetra, in which are condensed the multiple values assigned to the Federican instrument *par excellence* (fig. 10.9).⁴⁹ The intarsia depicts all the details of this particular

⁴² Dennistoun, 164.

⁴³ Stainer, 5–7.

⁴⁴ Pirrotta, 201.

⁴⁵ On the two musical works in the Urbino intarsias (*Bella gerit* and *J’ay pris amour*), see Guidobaldi 1995, 49–73.

⁴⁶ On the practice of performing *O rosa bella* “in forma di aire:” Pirrotta, 209; performance to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument is documented in a letter from Ludovico Genovesi to Barbara of Brandenburg describing a banquet held by Cardinal Pietro Riario in Rome in 1473, in the course of which “cantossi in uno chitarrino *O rosa bella*.” see Cruciani, 170.

⁴⁷ Marsilius Ficinus, *In librum Platonis de Regno*, in Ficino 1576, 2:1294–1296.

⁴⁸ Cheles 1986.

⁴⁹ The cetra is symbolic of universal harmony according to Ficino, who in several passages compares the universe to a “mundana cithara;” Cristoforo Landino, meanwhile, considers it a symbol of the “concordia” of the citizens, created from the “accordo” of the actions of each.

example from the ducal collection with extreme precision: from the large hooked hanger, to the six frets of the grooved fingerboard, to the two “winglets” that project from its shoulders—which, as Emanuel Winternitz first noted, are without acoustic function and respond, above all, to demands of a symbolic nature. In this instrument, which probably inspired the cetra intarsiata some twenty years later by Giovanni da Verona, the winglets suggestively evoke the “arms” (shrunken, almost atrophied) of the ancient lyre.⁵⁰ That the reference to the antique, inherent in the form of the cetra and amplified by the “Boethian” tuning of the strings,⁵¹ is anything but casual, and clearly reflects the objective of the ducal entourage to rediscover and revive antiquity in all its forms, finds significant confirmation in the fact that Francesco di Giorgio Martini himself was the first to copy from the life the kithara-playing Muse on the Mattei Sarcophagus, anticipating Raphael by several decades, who would take inspiration from this same relief for his *Parnassus*.⁵²

The image of the cetra juxtaposed with the hourglass, perpendiculum and compass that appear on the same shelf, together define an emblematic composition in their own right, alluding to the proportions that underly all measurable dimensions: not only those of arithmetic and geometry, but also temporal, transposing into images the application of the proportions to the measurement of time, an element that constitutes a novel topic in music theory at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and that is consolidated and affirmed precisely in the humanist sphere and in particular in the work of Leon Battista Alberti.⁵³ The Gubbio intarsia offers, in effect, an early visualisation of concepts built on the foundations of Greek music theory, which would soon be elaborated by Franchino Gaffurio in his “trilogy,” and would achieve widespread distribution thanks to the celebrated woodcuts that illustrated the printed editions of the *Angelicum ac divinum opus musice* and *De Harmonia musicorum instrumentorum* (fig. 10.10).⁵⁴

Not only the cetra, but all the musical instruments intarsiata in the studiolo, in the end, visualise different aspects and suggest further iconographic and conceptual associations with the theme of “concord”—one of the possible “translations” of the Greek term and concept of harmony—understood always both in relation to the ideal sounding concert of voices and instruments, and as a symbol of cosmic harmony reflected in the choir of the Muses directed by Apollo. It is no coincidence, indeed, that the instruments intarsiata on the walls of the studiolo can be understood also as attributes of the Muses, who according to ducal mythology

⁵⁰ Winternitz 1982, 250–262 (“Appendice A: La sopravvivenza dell’antica cetra e l’evoluzione della citola”), at 254–255; on the “all’antica” cetras intarsiata in the choir of Monte Oliveto Maggiore near Siena, and in that of Santa Maria in Organo at Verona, see Bugini.

⁵¹ Young.

⁵² On Francesco di Giorgio’s early interest in the study of antiquity, see Luni. On his drawing of the Muse, now in the Gabinetto delle stampe of the Uffizi, and on Raphael’s elaboration of the sarcophagus of the Muses, then visible in Rome in San Paolo fuori le Mura, see Winternitz 1982, 167–236 (“Archeologia musicale del Rinascimento nel ‘Parnaso’ di Raffaello”).

⁵³ Della Seta, 89–93.

⁵⁴ On Gaffurio’s theories, and particularly on these two treatises, see Palisca, 161–190, at 161–163; see also Kreyszig.

accompanied Federico with their music from his birth.⁵⁵ In the palace of Urbino was a *tempietto* dedicated to the musical Muses, protectors of study and of memory, where, by virtue of an iconographic program of evident Ficinian inspiration, the custodians of the *vita contemplativa* of the “musician” duke, led by Apollo playing the lira da braccio, are depicted as young women who hold or play various musical instruments,⁵⁶ clearly inspired by surviving and recognisable exemplars, which evoke the “soundscape” of Federico’s court, and, in some cases, find specific concordances with those intarsiated in the studiolo (fig. 10.11). If the identity between the instruments of the court and those of these Muse-spheres reaffirms, from another point of view, the identity between the harmony of the spheres and that produced by the instruments preferred by Federico (and therefore the identity of his court with the Ideal City), the Gubbio musical intarsias, in a completely new way, evoke the invisible presence of the circle of the Muses, whose music resounds “around” the duke who had dedicated his *vita contemplativa* to their cult, achieving the immortality to which the wise are destined.

In conclusion, in the Gubbio studiolo, completed at the end of the reign and indeed the life of Federico da Montefeltro, the thematic nucleus of his celebration as a platonic Perfect Ruler and therefore as a “musician,” set out especially by Ficino in his introduction to the *Politicus*, is transposed into images that refer constantly from Federico’s musical microcosm to the cosmic harmony in which the Ideal City is founded. In the visible and invisible paths that intertwine on the intarsiated walls, the instruments that evoke the sonic panorama of the court reflect that harmony which, “just like that of the soul of the wise man,” according to Ficino, “consists in the concord of many [sounds], so that the more the lyre is in tune, the more the harmony.”⁵⁷ In this context the musical images, pushing the imagination beyond the limits of representation, evoke the sublime dimension achieved by the wise duke, who at the end of his path toward inner refinement has achieved the knowledge and the skill to contemplate things invisible and divine, in a perfect “Ficinian” concordance between philosophy and music.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Gian Mario Filelfo in his *Martianos* recalls how the Muses had been sent by Jove to Federico to teach him the love of the arts and to guide him on his path to inner refinement; Federico’s birth is accompanied by the song of Apollo and the Muses in Santi, 1:49–52.

⁵⁶ The representation of the Muse-spheres as musicians derives from the iconographic scheme condified in the *Tarocchi del Mantegna* and reprised by Ludovico Lazzarelli in his short illustrated mythographic treatise *De gentiliū deorum imaginibus* (Lazzarelli), dedicated to Federico and preserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Urb. lat. 717); on the various components and meanings of the music-iconographic program of the *Tempietto*, see Guidobaldi 2018.

⁵⁷ Ficino 1965, 2:385; Ficino 2002, 257.

⁵⁸ Chastel 1975.

Captions

[* indicates that the image should appear in the colour insert.]

*Figure 10.1: Workshop of Giuliano and Benedetto da Maiano after a design by Francesco di Giorgio Martini, Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio—general view, c.1478-82. Intarsia. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo: Public Domain.

Figure 10.2: Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio—inscription. Photo: Public Domain.

Figure 10.3: Justus of Ghent, *Dialectic(?)*, after 1474. Formerly Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin (destroyed in 1945). Photo: Fondazione Federico Zeri.

Figure 10.4: Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio—north-west wall. Photo: Public Domain.

Figure 10.5: Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio—detail from the south-west wall showing musical instruments. Photo: Public Domain.

*Figure 10.6: Giovanni Santi, *Erato*, c.1480. Tempera on panel, 82 x 39 cm. Galleria Corsini, Florence. Photo: Galleria Corsini.

Figure 10.7: Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio—detail from the north-west wall showing the music book. Photo: Public Domain.

Figure 10.8: Dunstable?, *O rosa bella*. Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Urbinate Latino 1411, fols. 22v-23r. Photo © 2022 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, reproduced by permission of Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved.

Figure 10.9: Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio—detail from the north-east wall showing the cetra. Photo: Public Domain.

Figure 10.10: Franchino Gaffurio, *De harmonia musicorum instrumentorum opus* (Milan: per Gottardo da Ponte, 1518), title page. Photo courtesy of the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica, Bologna.

*Figure 10.11: Giovanni Santi, *Terpsichore*--detail, c.1480. Tempera on panel, 82 x 39 cm (whole painting). Galleria Corsini, Florence. Photo: Galleria Corsini. / Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio—rebec. Photo: Public Domain.

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