

Tsugami, E. (2021). *Girolamo Mei: A Belated Humanist and Premature Aesthetician*.

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Thirty years after his critical edition of *De modis musicis antiquorum* by Girolamo Mei, Eisuke Tsugami devotes (and dedicates!) this new work to the Florentine gentleman whose half-millennium he commemorated from Tokyo in 2019. In the tradition of Piero del Nero, Giovanni Battista Doni, Father Martini, or even Charles Burney, the Japanese musicologist is certainly one of the few but significant personalities who have worked to transmit Girolamo Mei through the centuries, but also the continents. Having long remained discreet in the musicological landscape, Mei was rehabilitated in the second half of the 20th century thanks to Claude V. Palisca. In 1954, a pioneering article highlighted his role as a ‘mentor’ to the Camerata Fiorentina.¹ In 1990, the study by Donatella Restani, based on various archival documents and on the correspondence between Girolamo Mei and his former master, Piero Vettori, shed light on the biographical and intellectual ‘itinerary’ of the Florentine.² Since 1991 Mei has had in some sense a ‘disciple’ in Eisuke Tsugami, as loyal as he is assiduous.

Following a series of contributions in Japanese (see list below), this book fills the gap left by the absence of a study specifically devoted to Mei’s thought and his contributions to music theory. Rather than a monograph, this is a volume of *Kleine Schriften*, where the author has brought together several of his previous contributions, published for the first time in English translation. The only material not previously published is found in chapters 4 and 10. Divided into four parts, the eleven chapters are more or less independent of each other. They are, however, underpinned by the common thread of the subtitle, which proposes to consider Mei as “a belated humanist and premature aesthetician”. If the framework is provided by the *De modis musicis antiquorum*, in which Mei develops the essence of his musical thought, E. Tsugami does not however deprive himself, on occasion, of a few incursions into his other writings, in Italian, as well only in his correspondence. All the extracts are in English translation, mostly unpublished, with the original text, Latin or Italian, cited in the footnotes.

The first part is devoted to the theory of modes. Chapter 1 (2–16), whose contribution is not fundamentally new, returns to the erroneous reading that Mei presents of Ptolemy’s *tonoi*, previously highlighted by Claude V. Palisca.³ Faced

1 Palisca 1954.

2 Restani 1990.

3 Palisca 1977, 47–59.

with this technical musical question, the clarity and didactic qualities of the presentation by E. Tsugami is to be commended, particularly in his presentation of the Ptolemaic concepts of *thesis* and *dynamis*. This preliminary chapter serves as the basis for the second (17–25), which correlates this biased reading of the Ptolemaic system with the general conception of ancient music according to Mei. This question also allows us to reflect on the fine line between the discourse of the ‘harmonicist’, in the ancient sense of the term, and that of the ‘aesthetician’. Chapter 3 (26–34) returns to Mei’s criticism of the polyphonists of his time, to whom he opposes the ideal of ancient music “simple, monodic, and suitable for conveying the emotion expressed in the lyrics” (33). In this chapter, Tsugami notably compares Mei’s discourse with that of three of his contemporaries, Gioseffo Zarlino, Giovanni Animuccia and Vincenzo Galilei. The example of Animuccia, although developed very briefly, has the merit of a certain originality and of freeing itself more than the other two from the authority of Claude V. Palisca which, fully claimed by the author, remains ubiquitous throughout the chapter. The fourth and last chapter of this part (35–69) focuses on the transmission of the melodic notation tables of Alypius rediscovered by Mei. Tsugami devotes himself to a very fine comparison between the versions provided by the ancient sources preserving these tables, which is preserved among the correspondence of Mei and Galilei (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Reg. lat. 2021), and the first edition provided by Galilei in his *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna* (Florence 1581). The author comments on the discrepancies noted between these versions.

Leaving aside Ptolemy, Alypius, and other musicographic sources, the second part focuses on the influence of Aristotle’s *Poetics* on the conception of ancient dramaturgy according to Mei. Taken from his previous monograph (cf. Tsugami 2015a) which correlated the Aristotelian influence and the birth of the first operas, chapters 5 and 6 are designed in pairs. The question of the downstream repercussion of Mei’s thought on the genesis of the opera is left aside here. Chapter 5 (72–92) shows to what extent Aristotelian thought is interpreted by Mei through the filter of Piero Vettori’s *Commentary on the Poetics* (*Petri Victorii Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de arte poetarum*, Florence 1560). In this respect, a long development relating to the Greek concept of *ῥυθμός* (*rhythmos*), which should, in the tradition of Vettori, be understood as ‘dance’, in Mei, when it is mobilized in connection with tragedy, goes through these two chapters.

Throughout this section and more generally throughout the book, the reader who is unfamiliar with the life of Girolamo Mei might regret the absence of certain elements to support the analysis of his thought particularly in the light of his personal history, which led him from Vettori’s palestra in Florence to

Roman intellectual circles. In fact, Donatella Restani's monograph,⁴ which is a reference on these issues, is only cited very sporadically. The question of the Aristotelian influence on Mei is also a dimension that the Italian philologist had already addressed there, and subsequently examined more deeply in a contribution entitled *Girolamo Mei et l'héritage de la dramaturgie antique dans la culture musicale de la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle*.⁵ In particular, the notion of *rhythmos* in Vettori and Mei is the subject of interesting reflections in this article, which Tsugami does not mention. The establishment of a more balanced Palisca-Restani-Tsugami triangular dialogue could thus have constituted an additional contribution to this work, whose qualities, furthermore, are already numerous.

Chapter 6 (93–123) continues the reflection on the Aristotelian heritage in Mei, in particular through the analysis of extracts from four letters from Mei to Vettori (= Restani no. 19, 21, 27 and 28), of which Tsugami provided an edition as an appendix to his 2015 monograph. In the same chapter, we also wish to highlight the particularly enlightening analysis, on pages 116–21, of the correspondences between two passages of the *Poetics* (1, 1447b24–28 and 6, 1449b30f.) and Book 4 of the *De modis musicis antiquorum*. The latter allows us to glimpse the way in which the reading given by Mei of the Aristotelian work led him to conceive the ancient tragedy as an integral musical representation. A study of the various methods of borrowing or citation implemented by Mei, extended to his other ancient sources, would undeniably be an interesting perspective, making it possible to complete the work that Tsugami primes here for Aristotle. One can think, in particular, of the legacy of the musical treatise of Ps.-Plutarch, whose influence on Mei's thought would certainly deserve to be the subject of an in-depth study. Appearing as an epilogue to the second part, the relatively brief chapter 7 (124–35) focuses on the impact on Jacopo Peri of the conception of tragedy as a complete musical drama. In addition to *De modis musicis antiquorum*, the argument is also based on a few passages from Mei's two treatises on the Tuscan language (*Del verso toscano; Della composizione delle parole*), as well as from his treatise on music in Italian (*Trattato di musica*). These three texts, of which E. Tsugami translates some extracts into English here, remain unpublished to this day.

The third part then raises the question of the impact of Aristotelian theories on the emergence of aesthetic thought in Mei, of which E. Tsugami deepens two dimensions of analysis. Chapter 8 (138–49) begins with the classification of the arts presented in his letter to Vettori of January 20, 1560 (= Restani no. 28),

4 Restani 1990.

5 Restani 2001.

while chapter 9 (150–68) studies his reappropriation of the concept of tragic katharsis, central to his aesthetic theory. The affective power that Mei attributed to ancient music effectively led him to more philosophical-musical considerations which, strongly inspired by the Aristotelian thesis of the purgation of passions, are also marked by Galenic thought.

Each at their own level, the different chapters of the book document an aspect of the return *ad fontes* so dear to Mei, and inherent to his humanist approach. In this sense, the title of the fourth part, “Mei and humanism”, could certainly extend beyond the two final chapters, moreover ideally thought of as a prelude to the conclusions of the work. Chapter 10 (170–6) deepens the study of Mei’s methodology and language. On the basis of a quantitative analysis of the Latin vocabulary of *De modis musicis antiquorum* – the author exploits here the voluminous indexes he had produced for his 1991 edition (cf. Tsugami 1991, 131–247) – Tsugami draws up the observation of the strong Ciceronian coloring of the Latin of Mei. Finally, the eleventh and last chapter (177–85) offers a previously unpublished analysis of the epigram *De Phyllide*, the only poem by Mei preserved to this day. This short piece, identified by Claude V. Palisca in 1977 in the addenda to his second edition of the *Letters*,⁶ was transcribed by Restani on the final page of *Litinerario*, “quale spiraglio per studi futuri”.⁷ This invitation seems to have resolved E. Tsugami to provide here the first ever metrical analysis of the piece, the background and style, and an English translation. From the “premature aesthetician” of the third part to the “belated humanist” with which this fourth section closes, in the conclusion (187–9), whose conciseness reflects the general style of the work, Tsugami asserts that Mei’s thinking was “in some ways too late and in others too early for his time” (188).

The volume is provided with a list of the cited manuscripts (in which the location of the Bolognese ms. B120 should be adjusted, formerly kept at the “Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale”, and since 2004, at the “Museo internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica” in Bologna). The bibliography refers, in Japanese script and language, to the articles of E. Tsugami having constituted the preliminary versions of the various chapters. Four indexes also make it easy to navigate between the different parts.

While the volume certainly takes up the challenge of shedding light on the thought of Girolamo Mei through a vast sampling of themes, the very concise invoice of the various chapters, never exceeding about ten pages, does not, at times, fail to arouse the curiosity of the reader who would like to see certain developments continued beyond one or two paragraphs. The organization of

6 Palisca 1977, 209.

7 Restani 1990, 96.

the work and the distribution of the four parts remain no less coherent and the reader not versed in Japanese will be grateful to the author for having shared the results of several decades of research on Girolamo Mei, for the first time, in English, and thus facilitate its access to a wider readership. With the work of the Florentine theoretician still providing great prospects for research, E. Tsugami has announced his intention to publish a first English translation of the entire *De modis musicis antiquorum*. Mei, who during his lifetime refused to publish the slightest writing, reserving his texts to a restricted circle of close friends, was undoubtedly far from imagining such a tribute five centuries after his death.

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List of Publications by E. Tsugami Relating to Girolamo Mei and the Themes Developed in the Book

N.B.: For publications in Japanese, I have included between square brackets available English translations provided by the *Répertoire International de la Littérature Musicale* (RILM) and, if applicable, transcriptions and translations made with the valuable help of Mrs. Yurika Ide.

- Tsugami, E. (1987). Jirōramo Mei *Kodai senpōron*: Barokku ongaku yōshiki no seiritsu ni taisuru sono imi [Girolamo Mei, *De modis musicis*, and Its Significance for the Birth of the Baroque Style]. *Bigaku* [*Aesthetics*] 38.2, pp. 24–36.
- Tsugami, E. (1998a). Vincenzo Galilei and Notated Examples of Ancient Music: An Aspect of Classical Tradition in Western Music. *Aesthetics* 8, pp. 93–102.
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- Tsugami, E. (1998c). τὴν τῶν τοιοῦτων παθημάτων/ μαθημάτων κάθαρσιν [*tēn tōn toioutōn pathēmātōn / mathēmātōn katharsin*]: Arisutoterēsu “shigaku” no “katarushisu” [Katharsis of Aristotle’s *Poetics*]. *Seijō bungei* [*The Seijo University Arts and Literature Quarterly*] 161, pp. 212–222.
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- Tsugami, E., ed. (1991). *Girolamo Mei, De Modis*. Tokyo: Keiso Shobo. [A digitized version of the Latin text is available on the *Thesaurus Musicarum Latinarum* (TML), DOI: <http://www.chmtl.indiana.edu/tml/16th/MEIMOD>].
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- Tsugami, E. (2015a). *Mēi no Arisutoterēsu Shigaku kaishaku to opera no tanjō* [*Mei's Interpretation of Aristotle Poetics and the Birth of Opera*]. Tokyo: Keiso Shobo [= earlier versions of chapters 5 and 6].
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- Tsugami, E. (2016). Kijutsu riron kara kihan bigaku e: Mēi no senpō taikai to kodai ongakuzō [From Descriptive Theory to Normative Aesthetics: Mei's System of Modes and His Image of Ancient Music]. *Bigaku* [*Aesthetics*] 67.1, pp. 109–120 [= earlier version of chapter 2].
- Tsugami, E. (2017a). Two Centuries Ahead of Batteux: Girolamo Mei's System of Arts. *e-book Proceedings of ICA 2016*, Seoul National University, pp. 469–473 [= earlier version of chapter 8].
- Tsugami, E. (2017b). 'Hanasu hito o uta de mohō suru': Mēi no kodai higekizō to Pēri no rechitativo riron ['Imitating a Speaker by Singing': Mei's Picture of Ancient Tragedy and Peri's Theory of Recitative]. *Bigaku bijutsushi ronshū* [*Aesthetics: Art History Collection*] 21, pp. 1–24 [= earlier version of chapter 7].
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- Tsugami, E. (2020a). Mēi-saku epigramu *Fyurrisu ni tsuite* [Mei's Epigram *De Phylide*]. *Bigaku bijutsu ronshū* [*Aesthetics: Art History Collection*] 22, pp. 1–23 [= earlier version of chapter 11].
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