

The Soft Sounds of Power

The *Rebecchino* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna

Thilo Hirsch & Marina Haiduk

“While it is usually the neck that is touched by the palm of the hand, in this case, the hand finds itself resting on the nude legs of a Venus ...” What could pass as the beginning of an erotic novel is actually the description of the playing position of the so-called *rebecchino*¹ in the Collection of Historic Musical Instruments of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna (KHM), which according to the description in the catalogue originates from Italy and is dated to the 15th century (Hopfner, 2010, pp. 22–232) (Fig. 1).²

In spite of this dating, which would make it one of the earliest preserved European string instruments, the *rebecchino* has attracted very little scientific interest, possibly because it is only a fragment, that is to say, an instrument body without a belly or fingerboard. On the basis of new examinations within the framework of the Swiss National Science Fund research project “Rabab and Rebec” at the Bern Academy of the Arts,³ Thilo Hirsch, in the first part of this article, presents an organological analysis of the instrument in connection with selected pictorial sources and hypotheses concerning its possible practical musical usage. In the second part, Marina Haiduk discusses an art-historical assessment as well as the hypothesis of the instrument’s contextualization in a courtly collection, in which the *rebecchino*, despite its probably rather soft sound, could have served as a representative “instrument of power”.⁴

1 The instrument name *rebecchino* used at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna was first mentioned in 1619 by Michael Praetorius in the *Syntagma musicum* for the designation of a four-string violin: “Deroselben [...] Discantgeig (welche Violino, oder Violetta picciola, auch Rebecchino genennet wird) seynd mit 4. Saiten [...] bezogen.” / “These [...] discant Geigen (which are called violino, violetta picciola and rebecchino) are strung with 4 strings.” (Praetorius, 1619, p. 48). However, in the present chapter we do not use *rebecchino* in the sense of Praetorius, but rather generically as the Italian diminutive of the designation rebec.

2 The corresponding illustration of the *rebecchino* is printed laterally reversed there.

3 <https://www.hkb-interpretation.ch/projekte/rabab-rebec>. Date of Access: 06.01.2024.

4 Apart from the hypothesis of the presentation in the context of a courtly collection, a more detailed German version of this article appeared in the journal *Glareana*: Hirsch & Haiduk, 2020.



Fig. 1: *Rebecchino*, back, front, and side views.

Organological Analysis in Connection with Pictorial Sources and Hypotheses Concerning Practical Musical Usage

The fact that the *rebecchino* has survived to this day is certainly due to its elaborate carvings. This characteristic was already mentioned in the inventory of the patron and art collector Gustav Benda, from whose estate the instrument came to the KHM in 1932 as part of an extensive bequest. Listed under the “main items of the collection” is found: “A Venetian kit (pochette) with a carved female figure in boxwood” (Kunstammer-Archiv, 1932, typescript, p. 13).

This female figure, clad only in a necklace and shoes, decorates in high relief nearly the entire back of the instrument. With regard to the material, it is meanwhile assumed to be a fruitwood, probably pear (Hopfner, 2010, p. 22). The edge area of the instrument’s back displays a bead and reel framing that continues to the rear corners of the pegbox up to its end. Vegetal ornaments in bas-relief can be recognized on the sides of the body. The fluted, sickle-shaped pegbox displays four peg holes in which three pegs with carved heads are

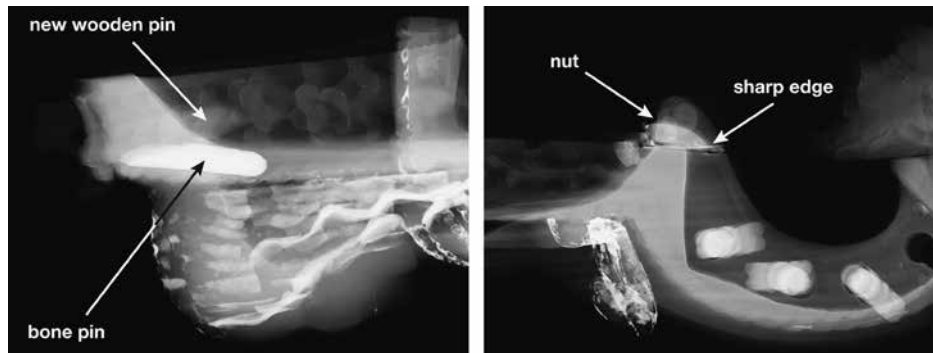


Fig. 2: *Rebecchino*, details of the X-ray image (left: lower end of the body; right: section of the pegbox).

inserted. The end of the pegbox consists of an attached satyr's head, whose style of carving and lacquer differs substantially from the rest of the body. Since the belly and fingerboard are missing, the careful hollowing out of the inside of the instrument is clearly discernible. Visible on the upper edge of the body are eighteen small rectangular notches that were intended as seats for nine crossbars of which only the uppermost has been preserved and to which a small triangular wooden plate is glued.

A carved tailpiece holder, which is fastened by a wooden pin that penetrates the body, is found at the bottom end of the instrument. Surprisingly, under this wooden pin is a second, brighter pin of bone inside the instrument, whose purpose – until now – had remained unclear, but which clearly shows that the instrument was modified over the course of time. Only by means of a newly made X-ray image is it now possible to explain the reason for this alteration. In order to fasten the current tailpiece holder, a new hole was drilled from the outside into the body at the same place where the original, possibly broken-off bone pin had been located. Since the drill channel of the bone pin slants downward (into an area with greater wall thickness), and the new wooden pin points slightly upward, the inner rest of the bone pin remained in the body (Fig. 2).

While the new tailpiece holder seems organologically sensible, this is not the case with the current condition of the nut. The X-ray image clearly shows that the upper end of the nut does not lie on the rim of the pegbox, but juts beyond it and tapers off into a sharp edge which would practically sever any string going to the undermost peg. Without going into too much detail here, it can be said that it is likely that only the body of the instrument (without the satyr's head), the rest of the bone tailpiece pin, the uppermost belly crossbar, and the thin orange-brown (partially worn-away) smooth layer of lacquer as found on the greater part of the body have been preserved from the original substance of the *rebecchino*. But what did the instrument originally look like?



Fig. 3: Circle of Francesco di Giorgio Martini and Neroccio di Bartolomeo de' Landi, *Madonna and Child with music-making Angels*, ca. 1475.

Important information concerning the possible original form is found in two pictorial sources. The first is a *Madonna and Child with music-making Angels*, created ca. 1475, from the circle of the Sienese artists Francesco di Giorgio Martini and Neroccio di Bartolomeo de' Landi, which is in the possession of Siena's Pinacoteca Nazionale (Fig. 3). The other, a southern German pictorial source, is a *Coronation of the Virgin* painted between 1512 and 1516 by Hans Baldung Grien as the middle panel of the high altar in the Cathedral of Freiburg (Fig. 4).

The depicted rebecs clearly display the same body outline as the *rebecchino*. Notable is that the lower part of both instruments, depicted in a lighter colour, is probably parch-



Fig. 4: Hans Baldung Grien, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1512/1516.

ment. The possibility of such a skin belly for the *rebecchino* had – until now – always seemed improbable, since the edge area on the sides of the instrument in its current state is too thin to function as a gluing surface for a skin belly.

An important part of our examination of the *rebecchino* was the creation of a 3-D model by means of photogrammetry. This model made it possible, on the one hand, to depict the geometry of the instrument much more precisely than by manual measurement and, on the other hand, allowed a subsequent detailed non-contact analysis on the computer. It turned out that the belly edge at the lower part of the belly was very probably subsequently altered, both on the treble as well as on the bass side. A reconstruction of the rim shape from the existing cut edge results in a lengthwise slightly concave belly form that can frequently be observed on instruments with skin bellies, which, however, on the *rebecchino* was probably “levelled” over the course of time in favour of a flat wooden belly. The depth of the reconstructed belly edge would have been entirely sufficient as a lateral gluing surface (black-hatching) for a skin (Fig. 5).

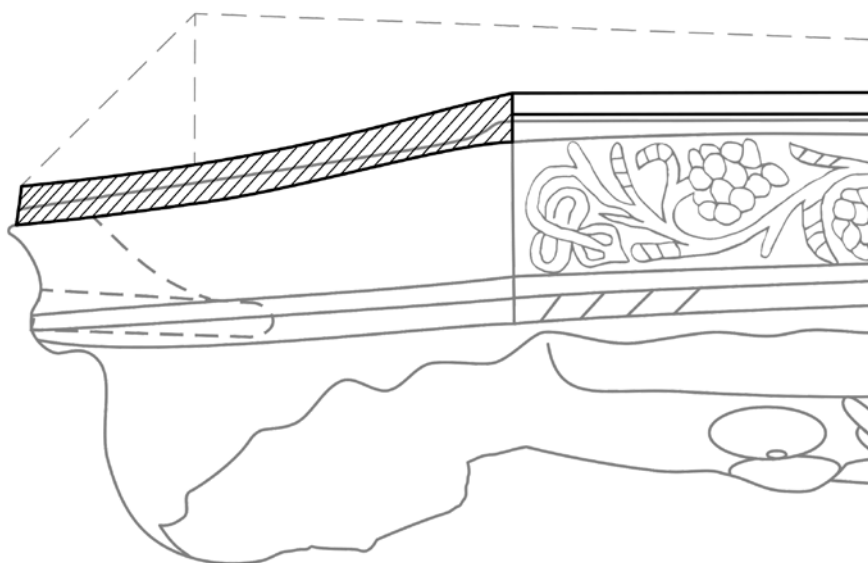


Fig. 5: Plan of the *rebecchino*, detail of the side view with reconstructed belly edge (black-hatching).

Therefore, the *rebecchino* in the KHM could actually be a small version of a rebec with a skin belly as depicted in the abovementioned pictorial sources from the 15th and early 16th centuries (from Italy and southern Germany). While this particular instrument type is not documented by later pictorial sources, a dating to this time period seems sensible from an organological point of view. Moreover, besides Italy, southern Germany would come into question as a possible provenience.

The preparation of the *rebecchino* body with partially extremely thin wall thicknesses is a clear indication of how important it was for the instrument builder to make the acoustically relevant inner resonance space as large as possible. In spite of its intricate external design, it was apparently a functioning musical instrument. But how was it set up? What musical function did it have? And what repertoire could be played on it?

We can only speculate about the tuning of the *rebecchino*, since from the 15th and 16th centuries, only tuning instructions for “normal” treble rebecs have been preserved, but none for the even smaller four-string *rebecchini*. Most likely it was a relatively high tuning in fifths, which could, however, also have been made up of two courses (each two double strings tuned in unison) or two single strings and a course.⁵

5 One of the earliest known references to rebec tunings is found in Hans Gerle’s 1532 tutor *Musica Teusch*. Mentioned there are both three-string as well as four-string rebecs (called “die kleynen Geigleyñ”), which are tuned in two or three consecutive fifths. The tuning there for the treble rebec is: g,

Johannes Tinctoris mentioned in his treatise *De inventione et usu musicae*, written in 1481/1483 in Naples, that the “rebecum” was a very small instrument invented in France. He emphasized the importance of a skilful artist (“sonitor artifex et expertus”)⁶ and counted the “rebecum” among his favourite instruments: “I would rather reserve them solely for sacred music and the secret consolations of the soul, than have them sometimes used for profane occasions and public festivities” (Baines, 1950, pp. 23–25).⁷ This possible use in a sacred context is certainly also reflected in the pictorial sources shown above, in which the rebecs are played by angels; however, we should not make the mistake of interpreting these concerts of angels as concrete instrumental settings. On the other hand, the frequent appearance of “new” instruments in musical iconography suggests that in many cases it was important to the artists to depict a “contemporary” instrumentarium in order to approximate the lifeworld of the beholders.⁸

The only musical works explicitly notated for a polyphonic rebec ensemble are found in Gerle’s *Musica Teusch* of 1532. These are intabulations of so-called tenor songs in which the treble rebec plays the uppermost of the four vocal parts.⁹ This is an important indication that rebecs – and probably also *rebecchini* – were used, if anything, for the playing of individual melody lines, which, as the abovementioned sources have shown, could be secular or sacred.

d', a' (Gerle, 1532, fols. Hijv-Jijr; ill. fol. Hiiiijr).

6 In 1511 Sebastian Virdung also mentioned in his *Musica getuscht* that, due to the lack of frets, rebec playing can be learned only through “a great deal of practice”, for which reason he included it among the “useless instruments” (Virdung, 1511, fol. Biiv).

7 “Extractum est et lyra: aliud instrumentum valde minus: ab allis Gallicorum qui id excogitarunt: rebecum: et ab aliis marionetta nuncupatum. Quod instar leuti testudineum: chordas que vel arculo tanguntur (ut predicta viola) tenet adaptatas. [...] Et quia rebecum (si sonitor artifex et expertus fuerit) modulos illis quam simillimos emittat: quibuslibet affectus spiritus mei (occulta quadam familiaritate) ad leticiam quam simillime excitantur. Hec itaque duo instrumenta mea sunt: mea inquam: hoc est quibus inter cetera: animus meus ad affectum pietatis assurgit: quaeque ad contemplationem gaudiorum supernorum: ardentissime cor meum inflammant. Quo mallet ea potius ad res sacras: et secreta animi solamina semper reservari: quam ad res prophanas et publica festa interdum applicari.” / “Also derived from the lyre is a very small instrument called the *rebec* by the French, who invented it, and by others the *marionetta*. This, like the last-mentioned viola, is also strung for bowing, but, like the lute, it is tortoise-shaped. [...] And I am similarly pleased by the rebec, my predilection for which I will not conceal, provided that it is played by a skilful artist, since its strains are very much like those of the viola. Accordingly, the viola and the rebec are my two instruments; I repeat, my chosen instruments, those that induce piety and stir my heart most ardently to the contemplation of heavenly joys. For these reasons I would rather reserve them solely for sacred music and the secret consolations of the soul, than have them sometimes used for profane occasions and public festivities.” (Translation: Baines).

8 See also Hammerstein, 1962, pp. 239–257.

9 Gerle, 1532, fols. Jr and Jv.

Art-Historical Analysis and Contextualization of the Instrument Within a Courtly Collection

After these reflections concerning the original form and the musical function of the *rebecchino*, the dating manifested by means of organological criteria will be compared to the style and the iconography of the female nude on the back of the body. Stylistic comparisons with wooden sculptures of the 15th and 16th centuries as well as representational depictions of instruments suggest that the maker of the *rebecchino* was not a first-rate wood carver. At work here was probably an artistically talented instrument maker, who presumably took recourse to a two-dimensional model – a print or even a painting.¹⁰

The question arises as to the iconographic type on which his depiction is based. Only a few elements can serve for the identification of the figure: its nudity and hairstyle, as well as its jewellery and footwear. In their combination, they do not correspond to any known type. Known, however, is the implied prudish impulse in the gesture of protecting the exposed body from gazes with the hands. This corresponds to the *Venus pudica*, the modest Venus, a traditional type in art since antiquity.¹¹ Accordingly, we are dealing here with a representation of the goddess of love, which was a very popular subject in the art of the Renaissance and Baroque. Paradoxically, however, the gesture suggesting shame with which the Venus on the *rebecchino* attempts to cover her nakedness underscores the potentially offensive representation of ostentatious nudity inasmuch as both breasts as well as the labia remain clearly visible.

In accordance with her nature as the Goddess of Love, Venus is frequently shown nude in the pictorial sources of antiquity and even predominantly in those of the Renaissance. Along with her nudity, Venus is often depicted barefoot. However, Venus is also shown wearing shoes, for example, while untying her sandals, which in some cases also display raised soles.¹² The footwear of the Venus depiction of the *rebecchino* with high soles and the tied side sections leaving the toes free does not correspond in terms of its design to the

10 When the parts are compared with each other, only the oblique view of the right side of the body is convincing in terms of perspective and proportion, which possibly can be explained by a two-dimensional model.

11 In 1873 the Basel archaeologist Johann Jacob Bernoulli coined the term *Venus pudica*, which has commonly been used since then: “Brust und Schooss deckende Aphrodite” (Bernoulli, 1873, p. 220).

12 Footwear with raised platform soles has existed since antiquity. Examples with a connection to the iconography of Aphrodite/Venus are, for example, the sandals of a terracotta statuette from Ephesus: Hellenistic, Aphrodite, removing her sandals, with Eros, clay, 30.8 x 18 x 10 cm (maximum extensions), Selçuk, Efes Müzesi, inv. 34/75/92. The motif likewise appears in connection with the subject known as “Venus at her Toilette”. Textual sources such as Lilio Gregorio Giraldi’s *De Deis Gentium* also mention, with recourse to antique sources such as Philostrat’s *Epistulae* (37, 21), the “sandals” or “slippers of Venus”: “sandalia & crepidas Veneris” (Giraldi, 1548, p. 62).

ancient sandal, but rather to a variant of the so-called chopines.¹³ In textual and pictorial sources, chopines appear increasingly in Venetian venues where, among other things, they are depicted as footwear for courtesans. The general erotic connotation could however trace back above all to the circumstance that chopines, worn also by socially high-ranking Venetian women under their long skirts, were clothing hidden from view while the wearer was in a dressed state.¹⁴ Accordingly, the chopines in Vittore Carpaccio's painting fragment with the depiction of two Venetian women are not worn by them, but rather seen somewhat away from them in the left margin of the picture.¹⁵ In terms of form and colour, they correspond to the footwear worn by the Venus of the *rebecchino*, and thus a type that was widespread in Italy at least until the end of the 16th century.¹⁶ The chopines of the Venus in a painting made in 1630/1634 by Giovanni Lanfranco provide an iconographical connection to Venus even into the 17th century.¹⁷

While Venus as a standing nude figure had been popular in Italy since the late 15th century, Lucas Cranach the Elder was the first artist north of the Alps to have realized Venus as an autonomous motif. In 1509 he showed the standing, naked Venus with loosened hair and a double-row pearl necklace along with Cupid wearing a coral necklace (Fig. 6). On the *rebecchino*, Venus is likewise shown with loosened hair that exhibits traces of gilding, which enhances, in equal measure, the material and the depiction. The red colour of her double-row pearl necklace suggests a material imitation of coral. This is confirmed by a pendant on the necklace, which is nothing other than a coral branch. In paintings of the Renaissance, the coral branch is often given to the infant Jesus as an attribute (Brückner, 1994, col. 556);¹⁸ however, as jewellery for Venus, it is not customary. That coral in general is nevertheless probably an attribute of Venus has to do with the myth of the foam-born *Venus Anadyomene* – and thus originating from the sea.

13 The multitude of synonyms for the footwear of the Renaissance subsumed under the term chopines can be explained by the long tradition with regional and temporal differences that defy today's attempts at classification. Concerning terminology and history of this type of shoe, see Semmelhack, 2009.

14 Semmelhack, 2009, compares the status of the chopines from the viewpoint of intimacy with that of underwear. They are therefore also absent in the portrait genre, but shown in depictions of women "in various states of undress or *dishabille*" (p. 51).

15 Vittore Carpaccio, *Two Venetian Women*, ca. 1490/1495, tempera and oil on panel (94.5 x 63.5 cm; fragment), Venice, Museo Correr, inv. Cl. I n. 0046 (Fortini Brown, 2004, p. 91; Semmelhack, 2009, p. 55).

16 Italian chopines of red velvet, open in front, with shoelaces, dated to the time between 1580 and 1600, have been preserved in the collection of the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto (inv. P88.60) (Semmelhack, 2009, p. 55, ill. 40).

17 Concerning the painting made for the harpist Marco Marazzoli, see Haiduk, 2019, pp. 92–93, no. 6.

18 Maurice Saß was able to convincingly show that the symbolic power of the coral as an attribute of the infant Jesus is not limited to its apotropaic effect. Concerning sacrificial-blood, transubstantiation, and resurrection connotations of coral, see Saß, 2012.



Fig. 6: Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Venus and Cupid*, 1509.

Corals belong to the *naturalia* that in their artistic setting were sought-after collectors' items in the courtly *Kunstammer* of the Renaissance. Even a *Venus Anadyomene* made completely of coral and provided with a pearl necklace, for example, can be seen in the midst of the so-called *Korallenkabinett* of the *Kunstammer* of Ambras Castle (Hofer, 2019) (Fig. 7). Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol collected *mirabilia* of different genres there – alongside *naturalia*, also small-format works of art, the *artificialia*. Common to all items on display was their representative role in a microcosm portraying the macrocosm. This concept had also been pursued by Ferdinand's father (also named Ferdinand), the later Emperor Ferdinand I, who in the 1530s had already established a collection conforming to these considerations in Vienna's Hofburg, while the term *Kunstammer* is documented for it for the first time in the 1550s (Syndram, 2019, p. 36).

Last but not least, among the objects collected in a *Kunstammer* were musical items, such as music manuscripts and musical instruments.¹⁹ The latter included

those that “were admired as showpieces of the collection rather than played as musical instruments”.²⁰ The precursors of the *Kunstammer*, above all the *studioli* popular at princely

¹⁹ The role of illuminated music manuscripts in the *Kunstammer* is discussed by Gutknecht (2009, p. 47, pp. 55–56). A special case are miniature musical instruments. These were made of more precious materials than the instruments kept in the music chambers for practical use, and correspond, as their miniaturized representations, to the concept of the *Kunstammer* as the microcosm depicting the macrocosm. Several miniatures likewise from Ambras are partially made of ivory and gilded (for example, Vienna, KHM, SAM 280 and 303) (Hopfner, 2017, pp. 334–335).

²⁰ Beatrix Darmstädter observed this on the example of the natural trumpet by Anton Schnitzer (1581, Vienna, SAM 248), one of twenty-two of the thirty-six musical instruments listed in the inventory of the estate of Ferdinand II from 1596, which were stored together in the fourth cabinet, the so-called “weißer Kasten” (white box), and have been preserved to the present day (Darmstädter, 2017, p. 333,

Fig. 7: Southern Germany, Cabinet with corals, so-called *Korallenkabinett*, second half of the 16th century.



courts of the Early and High Renaissance in northern Italy, also display a close connection to music. The room type of the *studioli* developed out of the medieval studies and often displays intarsia panelling that is presented as an optical illusion in perspective. In this kind of “simulated collection room”,²¹ even the seemingly open cabinets and their contents remain only in the mode of artistic depiction. With their multifarious references, they mirror not only the world outside the *studiolo*, but also the honoured aspiration to a humanistic education, which is a part of seigneurial representation. Furnished with such a sophisticated pictorial programme are also the two *studioli* made for Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, in the palaces of Gubbio and Urbino.

The intarsias of the Gubbio *studiolo* (Fig. 8) display representations of musical instruments, which in interaction with other *instrumentaria* or *scientifica* in this room context could be read as a reference to the quadrivium of the *artes liberales*, namely, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.²² This schema also includes the depiction of a rebec with

no. 8.13: “eher als Schaustück der Sammlung bewundert denn als Musikinstrument gespielt”).

²¹ “[...] der simulierte Sammlungsraum” (Parmentier, 2009, p. 55).

²² The intarsia with the depiction of square, plumbline, citole, hourglass, and dividers could serve as an example for a compaction of this reference in a single image. Moreover, in 1476/1482 the Flemish painter Justus van Gent made with his workshop a cycle of paintings, today only partially preserved, for the area above the wood panelling, which shows the personifications of the *artes liberales*. In



Fig. 8: Workshop of Giuliano and Benedetto da Maiano after Francesco di Giorgio Martini, intarsia panelling of the Gubbio *studiolo*, ca. 1478/1482.

a skin belly (Fig. 9). In the research literature, it was likewise seen as a part of a reference system in which the depicted musical instruments stand for the nine Muses, as in the *studiolo* conceived already several years previously in Urbino.²³ Finally, a direct link exists with the series of paintings of Apollo and the Muses in the *tempietto delle muse* located right underneath Federico's *studiolo* in Urbino, presumably a *studiolo* established for his son Guidobaldo. There, the Muse Terpsichore plays a rebec (Fig. 10), which belongs to the instrumentarium used during the Renaissance and was understood as a contemporary

1473/1476 he had already made such a cycle of paintings for the *studiolo* in Urbino – there with representations of *uomini illustri*, a canon of virtuous men in which Federico da Montefeltro had himself included: Raggio, 1999, pp. 43–44 (Urbino), pp. 157–167 (Gubbio).

23 In Gubbio, the rebec stood for the Muse Thalia. See Kirkbride, 2008, p. 119. In Urbino, where a rebec is not depicted, Thalia is however represented by a fiddle, and Terpsichore by a *lira da braccio* (ibid., p. 117). Concerning the ambiguous attribution of the instruments to each of the Muses, see Salmen, 1998, pp. 79–80.



Fig. 9: Workshop of Giuliano and Benedetto da Maiano after Francesco di Giorgio Martini, bookcase with rebec, bow and horn, intarsia panelling of the Gubbio *studiolo*.



Fig. 10: Giovanni Santi, Terpsichore, ca. 1480/1490.

equivalent of the ancient *cithara*,²⁴ as shown by the inscription at the picture's bottom edge. Cited here is a poem to the Muses, passed down in various textual sources since antiquity, in which Terpsichore, by playing her *cithara*, moves, dominating and intensifying the affects: "TERPSICHORE AFFECTUS CITHARIS MOVET, I[M]PERAT, AUGET."²⁵ On a frieze still *in situ* today, everyone entering the room – whoever they might be – are requested to show themselves cheerful and innocent to the Muses, and skilled on the *cithara*, since there is nothing there other than pure beauty: "QUISQUIS ADES LAETUS MUSIS ET CANDIDUS ADSIS FACUNDUS CITHARAE NIL NISI CANDOR INEST."

24 Concerning the usual contemporary generic description of string instruments by means of the Latin *cithara*, see Prizer, 1982, p. 107, and Salmen, 1998, p. 82.

25 For example, Ausonius, *Idyllia*, 20, 4, or *Mythographus Vaticanus II*, 24. For an overview of the textual sources, see Strocka, 1977, p. 134, note 471.

Isabella d'Este, the Margravine of Mantua sometimes referred to as the tenth Muse,²⁶ also employed the term *cithara* in her correspondence (Prizer, 1982, p. 107).²⁷ Thanks to a visit to the ducal palace of Urbino in 1494, she was familiar with the arrangement and furnishings of the premises there. It is surely no coincidence that also in Mantua, with Isabella's *studiolo* and *grotta*, two rooms similarly oriented in terms of function, reference each other.²⁸ They are exemplary for the development during the course of the 16th century of the *studiolo* "into a collection room that was also open for selected third parties".²⁹ For the wood panelling of the *grotta*, in 1506 Isabella commissioned Antonio and Paolo di Mola for the intarsia panels, which this time really function as doors for the cabinets hidden behind them. Among the intarsias, three display a clear reference to music through the depiction of musical instruments and notation. Isabella's affinity for music is also shown by the lively exchange over the course of two decades with Lorenzo Gusnasco da Pavia, her preferred instrument maker, and can be traced back to her training "in which musical knowledge and the study of ancient literature were paramount".³⁰ Since the *grotta* was also used as a place for music making – not least by Isabella herself – it would be entirely conceivable that musical instruments were actually kept behind the intarsia doors. In fact, no musical instruments are named in the posthumously made inventory of the *grotta*, but there were indeed statues of Venus and corals (Ferrari, 1994). This combination calls to mind the comparison by contemporaries of Isabella with the *Venus pudica*,³¹ and leads us back to the *rebecchino*.

26 The designation as *decima musa*, used by Battista Guarino (1493), Giulio Cesare Scaligero (Elysium Atestinum, post 1512), and Mario Equicola (Nec spe nec metu, 1513), is with reference to the tenth Muse of antiquity, the poetess Sappho, a sophisticated form of praise of a ruler, honouring Isabella's devoted support of the arts (Campbell, 2004, pp. 199–200).

27 For the letters she exchanged with Lorenzo Gusnasco, see below.

28 A similarly programmatic aspiration as in Urbino can be proclaimed for the sculptured depictions of the Muses on the portal that connects the *studiolo* in the Corte Vecchia of Mantua with the *grotta*. It is only one of many of the works reflecting the origins of the arts that were commissioned by Isabella d'Este. However, the two rooms adjoin one another only since the relocation of Isabella's chambers in 1519/1520. Originally, at their installation in the Castello di San Giorgio in ca. 1500, they were directly above one another – a constellation that Isabella knew from Urbino (Romelli, 2008, p. 74).

29 "[...] zum Sammlungsraum, der auch für ausgesuchte Dritte offen war." (Parmentier, 2009, p. 58).

30 "[...] in der musikalische Kenntnisse und das Studium der antiken Literatur im Vordergrund standen." (Romelli, 2008, p. 37). Concerning Gusnasco, see *ibid.*, p. III, note 64, and Prizer, 1982.

31 "[...] Venerem sed pudicissimam" (Equicola, 1501, fol. Biiir).

Conclusions Concerning Musical and Extra-musical Functional Interaction

Although a small and probably rather soft musical instrument such as the *rebecchino* seems not to have fit into the much better-known courtly context of representative festivities, in all probability it was part of an even more exclusive staging. On the threshold of becoming an autonomous art object, it allowed the humanistic education and knowledge of its owner to be recognized when the instrument was revealed in a seemingly strictly private ritual. It can therefore by all means have fulfilled secular representational requirements within the context of a collection. The possession of such exquisite collectors' items, which go far beyond the fulfilment of their actual purpose as musical instruments, was a part of a courtly competition that potentially enhanced prestige on the one hand. On the other hand, the possibility of viewing with one's own eyes, because of the exclusive custody in an appropriate intimate room in which the collector's items were revealed to only a few insiders, was consciously limited. In the case of the *rebecchino*, the multisensory experience may have been reserved for an even smaller circle of presumably mostly male visitors. Seeing, as the first sensory impression, is joined by the exclusive haptic experience of anyone who wants to elicit audible sound from the instrument by assuming the playing position. The linguistic metaphors of body and neck, anchored in organology, would already have generated erotic connotations which, under the musician's sensual touch, ultimately transformed the Venus into an enticing "resonating body".³² For this kind of "playing", which serves the eye and the tactile sensation rather than the ear, a "player" would also not necessarily have to have been particularly skilled.

Translation: Howard Weiner

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32 Concerning the erotic connotations of the instrument's playing position, see Dennis, 2010, p. 229.

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Illustration Credits

- Fig. 1: *Rebecchino* (overall length 36.9 cm), back, front, and side views, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. SAM 433, photos: T. Hirsch 2019.
- Fig. 2: *Rebecchino*, details of the X-ray image (left: lower end of the body; right: section of the pegbox). Courtesy of KHM-Museumsverband.
- Fig. 3: Circle of Francesco di Giorgio Martini and Neroccio di Bartolomeo de’ Landi, *Madonna and Child with music-making Angels*, ca. 1475, tempera on panel (75 x 52.3 cm), whole painting and instrumental detail (rotated), Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale, inv. 290. Courtesy of the Ministero della Cultura – Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena, photo: Archivio Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena.
- Fig. 4: Hans Baldung Grien, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1512/1516, tempera on panel (293 x 232.5 cm), whole painting and instrumental details (rotated), Freiburg i. Br., Freiburg Ca-

thedral, photo: Peter Trenkle. Courtesy of the Archbishop's Ordinariate Freiburg i. Br., picture archive.

Fig. 5: Plan of the *rebecchino*, detail of the side view with reconstructed belly edge (black-hatching), image: T. Hirsch.

Fig. 6: Lucas Cranach the Elder, Venus and Cupid, 1509, oil on panel, transferred to canvas (213 x 102 cm), St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, inv. GE-680, photo: Vladimir Terebenin. Courtesy of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

Fig. 7: Cabinet with corals, the so-called *Korallenkabinett*, second half of the 16th century, wood, pearls, mother of pearl, corals, gypsum, mirror glass, velvet, glass, gold trimmings, bronze, lapis lazuli, gilding (66 x 55 x 56.2 cm), Innsbruck, Ambras Castle, inv. PA 961. Courtesy of KHM-Museumsverband.

Fig. 8: Workshop of Giuliano and Benedetto da Maiano after Francesco di Giorgio Martini, intarsia panelling of the Gubbio *studiolo*, ca. 1478/1482, walnut, beech, rosewood, oak and fruitwoods in walnut base (overall dimensions 485 x 518 x 384 cm), New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. 39.153. Courtesy of bpk / The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 9: Workshop of Giuliano and Benedetto da Maiano after Francesco di Giorgio Martini, bookcase with rebec, bow and horn, intarsia panelling of the Gubbio *studiolo*. Courtesy of bpk / The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 10: Giovanni Santi, Terpsichore, ca. 1480/1490, oil on panel (82.7 x 39.8 cm), Florence, Galleria Corsini. Courtesy of Galleria Corsini, Firenze.