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«*La musica nell'Impero romano. Testimonianze teoriche e scoperte archeologiche*»

The Delphic Hymn, *Antigone*, and a Brief Revival of Ancient Greek Music

by **Jon Solomon**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
josolomo@illinois.edu

§ In 1893-1894 there was a brief revival of ancient Greek music. Gabriel Fauré composed an accompaniment for Henri Weil's and Théodore Reinach's transcription of the 'first' Delphi hymn, and it was performed both in Greece and in Paris in the spring of 1894. During this same timeframe, Camille Saint-Saëns composed the incidental music to Sophocles' *Antigone*, deriving inspiration from Gevaert's *Histoire et théorie de la musique de l'antiquité*, employing ancient Greek tetrachords, and adapting the musical fragment then thought to be Pindaric.

§ Tra 1893 e 1894 vi fu un breve revival della musica greca antica. Gabriel Fauré compose un accompagnamento per la trascrizione del 'primo' Inno Delfico ad opera di Henri Weil e Théodore Reinach, che fu eseguita sia in Grecia che a Parigi nella primavera del 1894. In questo stesso periodo di tempo, Camille Saint-Saëns compose la musica di scena per l'*Antigone* di Sofocle, prendendo ispirazione dalla *Histoire et théorie de la musique de l'antiquité* di Gevaert, utilizzando gli antichi tetracordi greci e adattando il frammento musicale che allora si riteneva essere pindarico.

As evidenced for the most part by our enlightened scholarly gathering here in Cremona, ancient Greek music for the most part remains under the microscope of scholars interested in music theory, poetry, and instruments. Of several exceptions, today I would like to discuss a short-lived practical application of Greek music in late-nineteenth century France.

The event that sparked this extraordinary period in the reception of ancient Greek music occurred in 1892 after the French School in Athens purchased the Phocian village of Kastrí and began its excavation at Delphi. Within the year archaeologists found two inscribed hymns to Apollo notated with Greek music among the ashlar blocks of the Athenian Treasury at Delphi. The 'first' hymn was soon published by Henri Weil and Théodore Reinach.¹

Reinach worked with Gabriel Fauré, who composed an accompaniment for harp, flute, and two clarinets (1894; op. 63s [bis]) and a version was performed at

¹ CRUSIUS (1894); WEIL (1893) and (1894); REINACH (1893) and (1894a).

the École des Beaux-Arts on April 12, 1894 with the composer himself at the harmonium.² However, this was not the first public performance of the hymn. An earlier version, without Fauré's accompaniment, was performed on March 27 in the presence of the King George I and Queen Olga of Greece.³ The 1894 publication of the hymn contained several errors in assigning labels to its five sections, and a revised version was published in 1914. Fauré rejected the task of harmonizing the second Delphic hymn, which was accomplished by Léon Boëllmann.⁴

Employing Reinach's transcription, Fauré divided the hymn into four sections and repeated one section. Interestingly, Fauré tended to divide his chamber works into multiple sections. He also preferred to use relatively bold and expressive piano accompaniments in his chamber works of the 1880/1890 period, e.g. his first few *Barcarolles* and his contemporary fourth *Valse-caprice* (op. 62).⁵

Fauré's tempo marking is *andante moderato* throughout, and he superimposes only a limited number of dynamic markings. Perhaps it is simplistic on my part, but I would like to assume that Fauré was attempting to create the kind of relatively idyllic ambiance *fin de siècle* Europe associated with ancient Greece, rendered visually just a few years earlier (1888/1890) in the Viennese Gustav Klimt's painting of Sappho. Of the five parts, A introduces glissando chordal accompaniment not unlike that Verdi composed for Act I, scene 2 («Possente Ftha») of *Aida*; B is marked *dolce* to help distinguish it from the rest; C and D are thinly accompanied in Fauré's characteristic counterpoint and late-Romantic harmonies; and E sounds relatively formalistic in its less dissonant quarter-note flourishes. Fauré follows Reinach's time signature of 5/4 to render the cretic meter of the original. Fauré replaces the original modal scheme with a fairly harmonic simple scheme: A begins and ends in A Minor, which progresses to E Major at the end of B; C opens in B^b Major and concludes in E Major, as does D, which consists of only four measures. E returns the piece to A minor and then concludes in E major.

The discovery of the Delphic Hymn, along with the earlier discoveries of the Seikilos inscription the previous decade and the *Orestes* papyrus, as well as the monumental publication of François Auguste Gevaert's *Histoire et théorie de la musique de l'antiquité* (1875/81), had its influence on Fauré's mentor, Camille Saint-Saëns. Born in 1835, the year in which Paris' Place de la Concorde (thanks to a gift from Mohammed Ali) was being adorned with the great obelisk of Ramses II's temple at Luxor, Saint-Saëns would visit Egypt several times late in life and compose most of his Hellenic opera *Hélène* (1904) there. He would later be one of the first European composers to visit Greece.

His incidental music to *Antigone* (1893) was inspired in part by the successful 1888 revival of *Oedipus Rex* at the Orange Roman amphitheater, which

² REINACH (1894b), p. 34.

³ LISTER (1895).

⁴ REINACH – BOËLLMANN (1897).

⁵ ORLEDGE (1979), p. 316.

featured Jean Mounet-Sully. Judging by the subsequent report in «The Century Monthly Magazine», the desired effect was colossal reality.⁶

It was a direct reversal of the ordinary effect in the ordinary theater, where the play loses in realism because a current of necessarily appreciated, but purposely rejected, antagonistic fact underruns the conventional illusion, and compels us to perceive that the palace is but painted canvas, and, even on the largest stage, only four or five times as high as the prince. The palace at Orange—towering up as though it would touch the very heavens, and obviously of veritable stone—was a most peremptory reality.

For *Antigone* Saint-Saëns was asked specifically to replace Mendelssohn's 1841 incidental music with his own. With Greek vases now also held in high esteem, he determined to make «a line drawing, heightened with tinted places whose charm comes from extreme simplicity». To do this he employed archaizing Greek *tonoi* and tetrachords, had the chorus sing in unison, and scored the work for an appropriately Greek-sounding ensemble consisting of four flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, harp, and strings.⁷ In his preface he cites Gevaert and tells us that, among other borrowings, his final chorus is derived from Kircher's 'Pindaric' fragment.

Saint-Saëns replaced Mendelssohn's familiar, nineteenth-century Romantic-style incidental music to Sophocles' *Antigone* with music modeled on ancient Greek structures and fragments. The best example is in the «Prologue», which is constructed of two chromatic tetrachords [d-g; a-d'], *pykna* ["clusters"] of e-e^b-d and b-b^b-a, and the 'fixed' notes d-g-a-d', all according to fourth-century BC Aristoxenian guidelines. I should point out that the music to Euripides' *Orestes*, published in France just the previous year, employed the same chromatic cluster [b-b^b-a].⁸ Thereafter Saint-Saëns freely explores the melodic contours of the tetrachordal format.

⁶ JANVIER (1985), esp. pp. 178-179.

⁷ REES (1999), p. 308.

⁸ WESSELY (1892).

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Jon Solomon è Professore di Civiltà e Cultura occidentali presso il Dipartimento di Discipline Classiche dell'Università dell'Illinois a Urbana-Champaign (USA). Il suo campo di specializzazione è la recezione del mondo classico.

Jon Solomon is the Robert D. Novak Professor of Western Civilization and Culture in the Department of the Classics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the United States. His area of specialization is classical reception.