

Thesis of a Dissertation

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Ockeghem: *Missa Cuiusvis toni* in the light of contemporary  
theories of tonality

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## **I. Antecedents of the Research**

Johannes Ockeghem's *Missa Cuiusvis toni* has been the object of genuine interest of music theorists and historians since the 16th century. It first appears in Glareanus' *Dodecachordon*, than Wilflingseder, Charles Burney, Wilhelm Ambros and Hugo Riemann also mention and interpret them in their writings of music history. Many articles were written in the 19-20th centuries, but the composition had been surrounded by particularly close attention in the 1990s. Naturally, the focus of the research is centered on performance possibilities, the *resolutios*. The analysts of this mysterious, cleffless work made an effort to solve the *canon* originated from Glareanus, *mass all the modes*, (*Missa ad omnem tonum*), using various clef-combinations and key signatures. As the 500. anniversary of Ockeghem's death has approached, scholars increasingly sought to explain the mass in the light of contemporary thinking of music, with several writings on the tonal limitations of the mass. 20th century music theory research - the critical editions of latin texts of music theory from the mediveal and renaissance, as well

as the english translations of them made contemporary music theory more accessible.

All articles written in the 1990s declare important theses of *Missa Cuiusvis toni* and 15th century music theory in general. In the beginning of my research I relied basically on these writings:

- Urquhart, Peter: „The myth of Ockeghem’s *Cuiusvis toni mass*.” (1990, átdolgozva 2011)
- Goldberg, Clemens: „*Cuiusvis toni*. Ansätze zur Analyse einer Messe Johannes Ockeghem.” (1992)
- Perkins, Leeman L.: „Modal Strategies in Ockeghem’s *Missa Cuiusvis toni*.” (1993)
- Dean, Jeffrey: „Ockeghem’s Attitude Towards Modality: Three-mode and Eight-mode Typologies.” (1996)
- Benthem, Jaap van: „Introduction.” In: Benthem, Jaap van (szerk.): Ockeghem, Johannes: *Masses and Mass sections III. Missa Cuiusvis toni upon re and mi*.

Most of these articles are discussing the *resolutios*, the numbers of them, adding the subject of musica ficta, avoiding the tritone both melodically and harmonically. The myth and the overthrow of it determined the subjects of writings on the *Missa Cuiusvis toni*.

The true function of the mass, beyond the tonal determination and *musica ficta* questions were seldom discussed, with the exception of Clemens Goldberg, who examines each voice individually, analysing the piece linearly.

In addition to these, I also relied on János Bali's article *About a possible origin of Ockeghem's Missa Cuiusvis toni* written in 2023. He also suggests linear analysis, defining the discantus as a grandiose gregorian chant.

The most important modern, critical editions of the mass are the followings:

- Plamenac, Dragan (ed.): Ockeghem, Jean de: Collected Works. Masses I-VIII. (1959)
- Benthem, Jaap van: Ockeghem Masses and Mass sections III. *Missa Cuiusvis toni* upon re and mi, valamint IV. *Missa Cuiusvis toni* upon ut, *Missa Prolationum*. (1996)
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Both editions have their values, however, I chose to use the original, earliest sources of the mass.

## **II. Sources**

Analysing the *Missa Cuiusvis toni* I relied on the pieces' earliest known sources, the codex MS Capella Sistina 35 and the Chigi,

that contains the most of the Ockeghem-oeuvre. I also surveyed further contemporary documents:

- Liber Quindecim Missarum. Nürnberg: Petreius 1539
- Glareanus: Dodecachordon 1547
- Wilflingseder: Erotemata musices practicae, 1563
- MS B 57 codex from Bologna (the treatise of Cimello)

Marchetto da Padova's *Lucidarium*, Johannes Tinctoris' *Liber de natura et proprietate tonorum*, and Pietro Aaron's *Trattato della natura e cognizione di tutti gli tuoni di canto figurato* were the most important contemporary treatises, and also their english translations.

- Herlinger, Jan W.: The Lucidarium of Marchetto of Padua. A Critical Edition, Translation and Commentary. (1985)
- Saey, Albert: Concerning the Nature and Propriety of Tones. (1979)
- Strunk, Oliver: Source Readings in Music Hystory. (1950)

### **III. Method**

After reading the sources related to *Missa Cuiusvis toni*, I focused plainly on the musical material, putting aside everything I read in the subject. In the course of my analysis I

found certain motifs, that are characteristic to each voice individually. A system emerged where the returning motifs set the framework of the musical process. The comprehensive, motivic analysis of the mass revealed formal, tonal, and melodic relationships that placed the piece in a new light, distinct from traditional tonal concerns.

It became clear, that while the essays focused on the *resolutios* generally approached the piece vertically, it – like many of Ockeghem’s other works – is primarily interpretable as a linear process, while its compositional roots lie in the tradition of gregorian chant. Furthermore, my analysis also revealed that the melodic structure of *Missa Cuiusvis toni* is defined by the fifth above the final, the fourth below the final, and the fourth above the final - which is referred as „common fourth” by Marchetto da Padova. The melodic lines move within these ambitus.

After analysing the mass I compared it with *Liber de natura et prorietae tonorum* of Johannes Tinctoris. In the aforementioned article of János Bali a possible connection between Ockeghem’s mass and Tinctoris’ treatise is pointed out: some of the melodic examples of Tinctoris’ contains the motif highlighted in my dissertation as one of the main melodic formulas in the mass. Based on Bali’s suggestion I found further evidence that Ockeghem's mass could be seen as a response to

Tinctoris' theoretical work, which was dedicated to him and Antoine Busnoys.

Ockeghem's music and 15th century music in general is rarely performed and it is a less discussed topic in Hungary. Similarly medieval and renaissance music theory receives limited attention. The motivic analysis of *Missa Cuiusvis toni* and species-based analysis following Marchetto da Padova provide new material understanding the style of Ockeghem and 15th century music.

#### **IV. Results**

Ockeghem's unique idea, a piece performable in several ways has been on my mind for a long time. The freedom, the performer's choice of interpretation as expressed in the title of the mass has also been a point of interest. Furthermore, I have been curious about a possible connection of Tinctoris's treatise and Ockeghem's mass. I wanted to examine the work in the context of contemporary music theory, and Tinctoris's writing on modes, dedicated to Ockeghem and Busnoys seemed to be an obvious starting point. Now, the connection between the two works seems to be clear, but the analysis of Ockeghem's mass and the theoretical writings uncovered even more.

The motivic analyses of Ockeghem's mass provided results that go beyond the *cuiusvis*-problem, which is modal determination

and the tritone question. The internal workings of the mass can be interpreted linearly, in accordance with contemporary music theory models. The species of the tones appear in the mass and actually form its internal structure.

In the Appendix I provide my own edition of *Missa Cuiusvis toni* based on the *Chigi* codex in modern notation: the notes are placed in their original position, with key combination for a-phyrgian, added a b-flat as key-signature.

## **V. Documentation of Activities Related to the Thesis**

September 26, 2023: Performance of Ockeghem's *Missa Cuiusvis toni Kyrie, Sanctus, Agnus Dei* movements in *Ut resolutio*, performed by the Premontrei Cantorate choir (artistic director: Farkas Domonkos DLA). The three movements were performed within the mass at the Castle Chapel in Gödöllő.