



Opinion

Volume 9 Issue 1 - May 2019
DOI: 10.19080/GJAA.2019.09.555754

Glob J Arch & Anthropol

Copyright © All rights are reserved by Giuseppe Severini

Psalteries of the Royal Door Gate (1144) of the Cathedral of our Lady of Chartres



Giuseppe Severini*

Casa della Musica in Randazzo, Italy Sicilian Archeoastronomy Institute, Italy

Submission: April 24, 2019; **Published:** May 02, 2019

***Corresponding author:** Giuseppe Severini, Casa della Musica in Randazzo, Italy Sicilian Archeoastronomy Institute, via S. Caterinella 1995036 Randazzo-Ct, Italy

Opinion



Figure 1



Figure 2

In the south door gate of Chartres Cathedral, called Royal, there are four depictions of Psalteries. The first instrument, very damaged, has 5 strings passing over two almost parallel bridges (Figure 1). The second psalterium has ten strings, the angles between the bridges and the strings being of 72° (Figure 2). The two main psalteries, that of the first Elder of the Apocalypse (Figure 3) and that of the Music (Figure 4), share the same structure: nine pairs of strings form with the bridges a regular trapezium, the angles at the base of 72° [1]. The first psalterium has a tenth pair of strings, well hidden under the mantle of the Elder, invisible from below (Figure 5). The other psalterium has nine pairs of strings, although there would be room for a tenth (Figure 6).



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

In contemporary texts the name *Psalterium decachordum*, from the Old Testament, Psalm 32 is frequently used. Saint Jerome (*Epistula ad Dardanum*) states that the adjective *decachordum* refers to the moral law: the Decalogue. One wonders why to represent with nine strings instruments which as usual had ten, in addition to put them in great evidence in the hands of the first Elder of the Apocalypse and in the allegory of the Music represented among the Liberal Arts. To answer this question, one must consider the different points of view of the medieval public. Illiterate visitors see instruments and do think about Celestial Music. The illiterate musicians recognize the instruments and perhaps count the strings: they think of an error or a novelty in the music. Visitors trained into the Liberal Arts know that the Nine can have different meanings. The Orthodox Catholic vision as the successor of Isidore de Séville, considered the Nine to be imperfect compared to the Ten (*Liber numerorum qui in sanctis scripturis occurrunt* 10.52.PL 83: 190). In this case, the nine strings could be related to the imperfection of our musical knowledge, mentioned by *Musica enchiriadis* (XIX, 10-12) and *Micrologus* (XIV, 16-19). Pythagoras, who was sitting close, had stated the perfection of Ten in Tetraktys. Nevertheless, in musical tradition the Nine, in the fundamental ratio $9/8$, is considered “*omnium musicorum sonorum mensura communis*” (Boethius, *Arithmetica* 2,54, CCL 94 A: 224). $9/8$ is the fundamental cosmological ratio in Plato’s *Timaeus*, whose ideas were transmitted by Cicero, Macrobius and Calcidius. Marcianus Capella affirms that number Nine “*harmoniae ultima pars est*” (*Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* 7.741). In the twelfth century Magister Johannes of Seville in his *Liber Alchorismi de pratica arismetice*, translation of the lost book of Muhammad ibn Musa al-Kwarizmi, introduces the Indian numeration. He explains that “*ergo constat unumquemque limitem 9 numeros continere*”, he recalls that nine are the celestial spheres and nine the angelic choruses [2]. William of Conches in his work *Philosophia* gives no importance to the Ten, while nine are the invisible circles of heaven (Liber II, V, 13) and nine months of human gestation (Liber IV, XIV, 22-23). Finally, the most awesome visitor could have observed that the ratio between the first and the last pair of strings (hidden or virtual) is $3/2$, the right Fifth, the fundamental harmonic ratio in pythagorean musical theory. Thus, the learned man could interpret the nine strings of the psalteries as a symbol of the foundation of harmonic science and at the same time of the imperfection of our musical knowledge.

References

1. Olivier Feraud (2015) Later psalteries, for example the one carved in the south door gate, XIII century, of the same cathedral are essentially isosceles triangles with the angles at the base of 45° , which allows 15 strings to approach much to the theoretical measures of the diatonic scale. See: *Lecture croisée du monochorde et du psaltérion à travers leur reconstitution*. In: *L'Instrumentarium du Moyen age. La restitution du son*. Sous la direction de Welleda Muller. Paris, l'Harmattan.
2. Kurt Lampe (2006) A twelfth-century text on the number nine and divine creation: a new interpretation of boethian cosmology? In: PIMS.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License
DOI: [10.19080/GJAA.2019.09.555754](https://doi.org/10.19080/GJAA.2019.09.555754)

**Your next submission with Juniper Publishers
will reach you the below assets**

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats
(Pdf, E-pub, Full Text, Audio)
- Unceasing customer service

Track the below URL for one-step submission
<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>