

Mathieu Gascongne – Nigra sum

A manuscript page from the early 16th century, featuring musical notation and Latin lyrics. The page is titled "Nigra sum" and is attributed to Mathieu Gascongne. The music is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are written in a Gothic script below the notes. The page includes a large decorated initial 'N' at the beginning of the first line, and a smaller decorated initial 'E' at the beginning of the last line. The lyrics are: "Nigra sum sed formosa", "filia Iherusalem. Ideo", "dilexit me Rex", "Et intro", and "Et introduxit me." The page is numbered '116' in the top left corner.

116

Nigra sum sed formosa
filia Iherusalem. Ideo
dilexit me Rex Et intro
Et introduxit me.

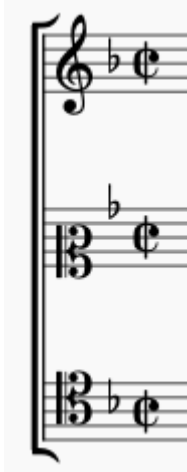
Source: GB-Cmc MS 1760. French origin, early 16th century, now in Magdalene College, Cambridge.

This is the text Gascongne used:

<p>Song of Songs 1:4 Nigra sum sed Formosa Filia Jerusalem Ideo dilexit me Rex Et introduxit me in cubiculum suum</p>	<p>I am black but beautiful, Daughter of Jerusalem Therefore have I pleased the Lord and he hath brought me into his chamber</p>
<p>Song of Songs 1:5 Nolite me considerare quod fusca sim quia decoloravit me sol</p> <p>Posuerunt me custodem in vineis</p>	<p>Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me they made me the keeper of the vineyards</p>
<p>Song of Songs 2:5 Fulcite me floribus, stipate me malis, quia amore languedo.</p>	<p>Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love.</p>

Note that in the third line Gascongne used the singular *filia* instead of the original *filiae*.

Original clefs:



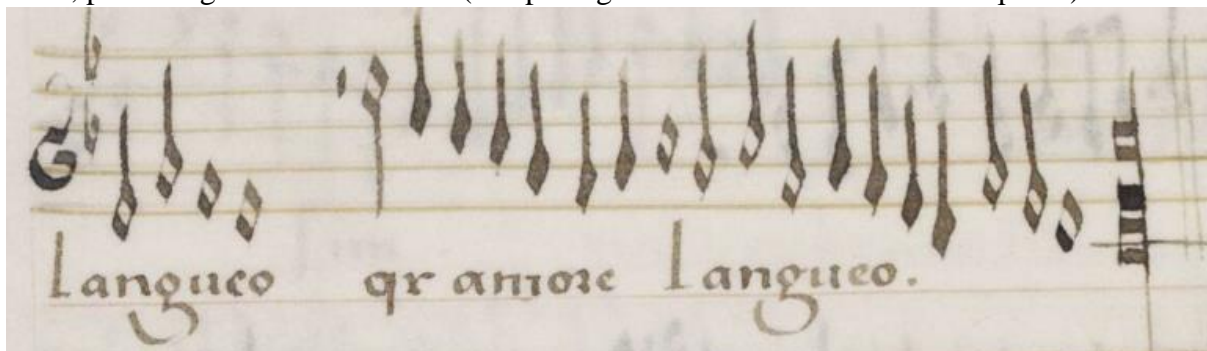
Ligatures are indicated by a bracket above the notes.

Text placement was not easy in this piece: in several instances the rhythms don't present a clear match for the text fragment placed below the notes. Especially the bit from bar 61 onwards, where *quod fusca sim* has to fit (too) many notes:



This is the tenor part; *quod* is a minim f at the end of the previous line. To begin with, the words *quod fusca sim* suggest to me a syllabic treatment, as do the opening four notes. In that case you have reached the final syllable *sim* on the b-flat. What next? Repeat the words? How many times before it begins to sound silly? Or make a long melisma, or a few shorter ones; you could also start with a melisma at the beginning, singing *quod* on the first three notes, and *fus* on the b-flat. And then what? The following notes still don't present a snug fit to these three words. As I couldn't really find a satisfactory way with just these three words, I decided to reuse the previous line of text (*Nolite me considerare*), adding *quod fusca sim*, which provided possibilities for a more natural match between text and rhythm, and to avoid too much *quod fusca sim*.

The ending of this 3-part motet is quite remarkable: the languishing is illustrated by all voices descending to the bottom of their range, but on the final note the top part suddenly is divided into three, producing an A-minor chord (sharpening the C wouldn't suit the atmosphere):



By the way: I ignored the *quia* (*qr*) on the D, in order to have *amore* on the same motif each time.

The blackened E at the end is a bit puzzling. Coloration usually means that the note has to be shortened, but on a final chord that doesn't make sense. So it is probably best ignored. In order to have all notes sung, the top parts require at least two singers each, having one alto crossing over on the final note.

Bert Schreuder

Gascongne - Nigra Sum

Mathieu Gascongne

S
A
T

Ni - gra sum,
Ni - gra
Ni - gra sum, sed for -

Detailed description: This block contains the first five measures of the musical score. It features three staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), and Tenor (T). The music is in a minor key (one flat) and common time. The Soprano part begins with a rest, followed by a melodic line starting on the second measure. The Alto part also begins with a rest and then enters in the fifth measure. The Tenor part starts with a rest, followed by a melodic line. The lyrics are: Soprano: "Ni - gra sum,"; Alto: "Ni - gra"; Tenor: "Ni - gra sum, sed for -".

6
S
A
T

sed for - mo - - -
sum, sed for - mo -
mo - - - sa, (sed for - - - mo -

Detailed description: This block contains measures 6 through 10. The Soprano part continues with a melodic line. The Alto part enters in measure 6 and continues with a melodic line. The Tenor part continues with a melodic line. The lyrics are: Soprano: "sed for - mo - - -"; Alto: "sum, sed for - mo -"; Tenor: "mo - - - sa, (sed for - - - mo -".

11
S
A
T

sa, fi - li-a
sa, fi - li-a Je - ru - sa - lem: (fi - li -
sa,) fi - li - a Je - ru - sa - lem: (fi - li - a Je -

Detailed description: This block contains measures 11 through 15. The Soprano part begins with a rest, followed by a melodic line. The Alto part continues with a melodic line. The Tenor part continues with a melodic line. The lyrics are: Soprano: "sa, fi - li-a"; Alto: "sa, fi - li-a Je - ru - sa - lem: (fi - li -"; Tenor: "sa,) fi - li - a Je - ru - sa - lem: (fi - li - a Je -".

17

S Je - ru - sa - lem: i -

A a Je - ru - sa - lem:) i - -

T - ru - sa - lem:) i - -

22

S - - de - o di - le - xit me

A - - de - o di - le - xit

T - - de - o di - le - xit me Rex, (di -

28

S Rex, (di - le - xit me Rex,)

A me Rex, di - le - xit me Rex, 6

T - le - xit me (Rex, di - le - xit

33

S et in - tro - du - xit - me

A et in - tro - du - xit me (et in - tro - du - xit me

T me Rex,) et in - tro - du - xit me (et in - tro - du - xit

39

S in cu - bi - cu - lum su - - um. (su -

A in cu - bi - cu - lum su - -

T me) in cu - bi - cu - lum su - -

45

S - um, su - um,) su - - um, (su -

A um, su - um, (su - um, su -

T um. su -

50

S - um, su - um.) No - li - te me

A - um, su - um.) No - li -

T - um. No - li - te me

55

S con - si - de - ra - re # con - si - de -

A te me con - si - de - ra - re, con -

T - li - te me) con - si - de - ra - re

(No -
(in MS: con-)

60

S ra - - - re (No - li - te

A si - de - ra - re (No - li - te me

T (No - li - te me con - si - de - ra - re quod

65

S me con - si - de-ra-re) quod fus - ca sim qui -

A con si - de-ra - re) quod fus - ca sim,

T fus - ca,) quod fus - ca sim, (quod fus - ca sim,)

70

S a de-co - lo - ra - vit me sol.

A qui-a de - co - lo-ra - vit - me-sol, (de - co - lo-ra - vit

T qui - a de - co - lo -

75

S po - su - e-runt me cu - sto -

A me sol.) po - su-e-runt me cu -

T ra - vit me sol. po -

80

S dem in vi - ne - is (in vi-ne - is, in vi -

A sto - - dem (in vi-ne - is,) in vi -

T - su-e-runt me cu-sto - dem in vi-ne -

85

S - ne-is.) Ful - ci - te me flo - - ri -

A ne - is. Ful - ci - te me flo - ri -

T is. Ful - ci - te me ful - ci - te me flo - ri -

91

S bus, sti - pa - te me ma - lis,

A bus, sti - pa - te me ma - - - lis, qui -

T bus, sti - pa - te me ma - lis, qui -

98

S qui-a a - mo - re lan - gue - o, a - mo -

A a a - mo - re lan - gue - o, qui - a a - mo -

T a a - mo - re lan - gue - o, (a - mo - re lan - gue - o,)

103

S

- - (re, a - mo - re) lan - gue - o.

A

- re lan - gue - o, (lan - gue - o.)

T

qui - a a - mo - re lan - gue - o.