

The *ars subtilior*

During the 14th century, a new style of polyphony developed in France. This new style, called *ars nova*, was characterized by a new system of rhythmic notation allowing the use of duple and triple division of note values, as well as complex syncopations. Around 1370, several composers in Avignon and southern France moved away from the style of the *ars nova* motet to develop a highly refined and intricate style distinguished by extremely complex rhythmic notation. The new trend soon spread into northern Italy, northern Spain, and as far as Cyprus. In his *Tractatus cantus mensurabilis*, Philippus de Caserta, one of the composers of the *ars nova* period, described that later style as an *artem magis subtiliter*, or a “more subtle art.”

Musicologist Ursula Günther was the first, in 1950, to use the term “*ars subtilior*” to refer that complex musical style, which is the term widely used by musicologists today.

Musicologists predating Ursula Günther used different terms to refer to the *ars subtilior*. Musicologist Willi Apel, for instance, talks about “mannered notation,” or “manneristic style.” Other authors just mention the extreme complexity of the “late *ars nova*,” with no specific reference to either “manneristic style” or *ars subtilior*. Once I had identified all sources directly related to the terms *ars subtilior* or “manneristic style,” I directed my research toward the main primary sources for the *ars subtilior*: the Chantilly and Modena manuscripts, as well as the Torino manuscript. I also searched sources on Philippus da Caserta, Johannes Ciconia, Matteo da Perugia, Solage, and other composers directly associated with the *ars subtilior*.

Most of the sources I found are grounded in historical research (they focus primarily on manuscripts and other primary sources). Other sources adopted a more analytical approach, with emphasis on the tonal language and formal organization of *ars subtilior* works.

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