

Philippe de Monte was born in Mechelen in Flanders in 1521. His family name was most certainly a more Flemish version of the Italianate one he adopted during his several stays in Italy. In his thirties, de Monte joined the chapel of Prince Philip of Spain and accompanied the royal retinue to England for the marriage of Philip to Mary Tudor. There he met the Byrds, young William in the company of his father. Although de Monte left England after only a year, he apparently kept in contact with William.

De Monte's concern over the persecution of his fellow Catholics in England under Elizabeth, who had succeeded Mary on the throne, caused him eventually to send to **William Byrd** a motet, ***Super flumina Babylonis***, really an encrypted message, wondering how his Catholic friend could serve under such oppression.

De Monte, in his motet for 8 voices, rearranged the order of the verses of psalm 136 (137), thus lamenting more sharply the fate of Catholics, including his friend, Byrd, and even challenging resistance.

1 Super flumina Babylonis illic sedimus et flevimus, cum recordaremur Sion.

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered thee, O Sion.

3 quia illic interrogaverunt nos, qui captivos duxerunt nos, verba cantionum; et qui abduxerunt nos: Hymnum cantate nobis de canticis Sion.

For they that led us away captive required of us then a song, and melody, in our heaviness: Sing us one of the songs of Sion.

4 Quomodo cantabimus canticum Domini in terra aliena?

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

2 In salicibus in medio ejus suspendimus organa nostra:

As for our harps, we hanged them up upon the trees that are therein.

Performance by The Sixteen, conducted by Harry Christopher

[text/YouTube]