

WULFSTAN -

English poet (monk) who lived in Winchester during the late 10thc. In his metrical prologue to a poetic life of St. Swithun (composed 984-1005) *W* makes reference to a large organ at the Old Minster in **Winchester, c994**. The various interpretations of this poem are highly conjectural. A new translation was prepared by James W. Mc Kinnon for **The Organ Yearbook** (1974) together with the original Latin:

talia et auxistis hic organa, qualia nusquam
cernuntur, gemino constabilita solo
bisseni supra sociantur in ordine folles,
inferiusque jacent quattuor atque decem.
flatibus alternis spiracula maxima reddunt.
quos agitant validi septuaginta viri
brachia versantes, multo et sudore madentes,
certatimque suos quique monent socios,
viribus ut totis impellant flamina sursum,
et rugiat pleno kapsa referta sinu,
sola quadringenta, quae sustinet ordine musas,
quas manus organici temperat ingenii:
has aperit clausas iterumque has claudit apertas,
exigit ut varii certa Camena soni
considuntque duo concordi pectore fratres,
et regit alphabetum rector uterque suum,
suntque quaterdenis occulta foramina linguis,
inque suo retinet ordine quaeque decem.
huc aliae currunt, illuc aliaeque recurrunt,
servantes modulis singula puncta suis.
et feriunt jubilum septem discrimina vocum,
permixto lyrici carmine semitoni,
inque modum tonitrus vox ferrea verberat aures
preter ut hunc solum nil capiant sonitum,
concrepat in tantum sonus hinc illincque resultans,
quisque manu patulas claudat ut auriculas,
haudquaquam sufferre valens propiando rugitum,
quem reddunt varii concrepitando soni,
musarumque melos auditur ubique per urbem,
et peragat totam fama volans patriam.

and you enlarged the organs, such as are nowhere
seen, fixed on a double floor.
Twice six bellows are joined above in order
and below lie four and ten.
With alternating breaths they produce much air.
Which [bellows] 70 strong men work
moving their arms and dripping with much sweat.
each eagerly encouraging his companions,
to drive the air upward with all strength
and cause to roar the full chest of ample curve,
which alone supports 400 muses in order,
which the hand controls with organistic skill:
it opens the closed and in turn closes the opened,
as the fixed song of various tones requires,
and two brothers of harmonious spirit sit,
and each, a guide, rules his own alphabet,
and there are hidden holes in the forty tongues,
and each holds ten in its own order.
Hither some tongues run, thence some return,
allocating each pitch to its proper hole.
And they strike the seven separate joyful tones
mixed with the song of the lyric semitone.
Like thunder the iron voice beats upon the ears
that they may receive no sound but this alone;
the sound clamours so, echoing here and there,
that one closes by hand the openings of his ears,
hardly able to bear the roar in drawing near, which
the various sounds render by resonating.
And the muses' melody is heard throughout the city,
and flying fame goes through the whole country.

The lyric semitone (*lyrici ... semitoni*) is probably a reference to the newly-available b^b in what was formerly an exclusively diatonic keyboard; “fixed song” hints at **cantus firmus** practices.