

## WAS FRANCESCO DA MILANO A VIOLA DA MANO PLAYER?

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'Franciscus de Monza, divine Milanese. Most eminent musician of all, he was superior to Orpheus and to Apollo in playing the lyre and in any instrument whatever.'<sup>1</sup> Lucas Gaurico's testimony in his *Tractatus astrologicus*, published in Venice in 1552, concerning Francesco da Milano's ability to play various kinds of musical instruments, should be treated with caution as a piece of historical evidence because of the analogy with the instruments played by the legendary musician Orpheus and the Greek god Apollo. Yet, there remains the suspicion that Gaurico meant what he actually wrote: Francesco's cultivation of instruments other than the lute.

Some references connect Francesco with the 'viola', but they generally give no indication whether or not he played the *viola da mano* (essentially, an Italian name for the *vihuela de mano*), as often no distinction is made between the bowed and plucked varieties of 'viola'. A letter of 1526 by Francesco Gonzaga, for instance, reported that Francesco da Milano performed music with two other musicians on two lutes and a 'violone' for Pope Clement VII and Isabella d'Este.<sup>2</sup> Cosimo Bartoli in his *Ragionamenti accademici*, published in Venice in 1567, wrote that Francesco and 'Il Siciliano' (Joan Battista Siciliano) were lutenists and violists in the service of Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici (cardinal from 1531 to 1535) and that Francesco was excellent in playing the 'viola' but unexcelled in playing the lute.<sup>3</sup> The Venetian violist and recorder player Silvestro Ganassi in his viol tutor *Letzione seconda pur della prattica di sonare il violone d'arco da tasti*, published in Venice in 1543, mentioned Alfonso della Viola, Joan Battista Siciliano, Francesco da Milano and Roberto d'Avanzini as the virtuosi on the 'violone'.<sup>4</sup> As the title and the contents of the treatise imply, Ganassi meant the bowed viol. In Galeazzo Florimonte's treatise, *I ragionamenti sopra la filosofia morale d'Aristotele*, published in Venice in 1554, the interlocutor agreed that Francesco excelled as a musician and that 'by nature had his hand disposed to play the *viuola*'.<sup>5</sup> It is unlikely that Florimonte, discussing Francesco's social status and musicianship, did not know of Francesco's fame as lutenist. The term 'viuola', instead of the term 'viola' that was more commonly used in Italy, is, however, problematic. Was it a conscious effort on the part of Florimonte to distinguish the instrument from the bowed 'viola', and to indicate the Spanish 'vihuela de mano', or it is just another example of loosely applied nomenclature often found in renaissance writings when describing musical instruments?

Perhaps the most significant reference to Francesco da Milano's cultivation of the viola da mano is in the title of Johannes Sultzbach's two books of tablature published in Naples in 1536. The full titles read: *Intavolatura de viola overo lauto cioe ricercare, canzone francese, mottete, composto par lo eccellente & unico musico Francesco Milanese, non mai piu stampata, libro primo della fortuna* and *Intavolatura de viola overo lauto composto per lo eccellente & unico musico Francesco Milanese non mai stampata, libro secondo della fortuna*.<sup>6</sup> These two books contain ricercari and intabulations by Francesco da Milano, and the title announces that the compositions were to be played either on the lute or the 'viola'. Were these works originally composed on, or for, the viola da mano, confirming that Francesco played that instrument? How much reliance should be placed on Sultzbach's titles? Clues might come from Sultzbach's closeness to his source. Was this publication in some sense 'authorised' or was it a 'pirate' edition?

Francesco da Milano's compositions and intabulations for lute survive in a wide range of variants, reworkings and parodies, in many sources in a number of countries, from throughout the sixteenth century. The locality, chronology and notation sometimes help us determine the original versions (if such can be recognised) and how they were transmitted. The editorial changes and typographical errors need to be analysed in context rather than simply taken as mistakes, and different interpretations of the evidence are possible. On the title page of the *libro primo* and the *libro secondo*, Sultzbach stated that the works in his two books were never printed before ('non mai piu stampata'). It would be dangerous to accept his statement at face value, for the concordances found in other lute books published in Italy contradict Sultzbach's claim (if he meant all the works) and indicate that Sultzbach knew of other lute publications appeared in or around 1536.<sup>7</sup>

The *libro primo* contains twenty-one works all composed or intabulated by Francesco da Milano: eight ricercari, ten intabulations of chansons and three intabulations of motets (counting the intabulations of Josquin's 'Pater Noster' and 'Ave Maria' as one). All these pieces also appear in an anonymous publisher's *Intabolutura de leuto* (a print without date or place of publication) and in Francesco Marcolini's *Intabolutura di liuto*, published in Venice in 1536.<sup>8</sup> But these two volumes contain more music than Sultzbach's publication: eleven ricercari and three intabulations by Francesco which are not in the *libro primo*. Aside from the absence of these fourteen pieces, the order of the ricercari and the intabulations in all three editions are quite similar (the exception is the first ricercar in Sultzbach that corresponds to the nineteenth ricercar in the anonymous publisher's print and Marcolini). All this makes it seem unlikely that Sultzbach's *libro primo* is the source for the anonymous publisher and Marcolini; rather, the latter might be Sultzbach's source.<sup>9</sup>

Sultzbach's *libro secondo* contains thirty-three ricercari by Francesco da Milano, all notated in Italian tablature, and once again the concordances are numerous; twenty-four ricercari have concordances. This figure, however, is misleading, for there are duplicates within the *libro secondo*. There are six pairs of ricercari that occur twice, in somewhat different versions of their respective counterparts (four of which appear in three versions, one version in the *libro primo* and two versions in the *libro secondo*). Excluding this double counting then, eighteen ricercari have direct associations with the anonymous publisher and with the *libro primo* (which is based on the anonymous publisher); the anonymous publisher may be the source for ten ricercari, and the *libro primo* for eight ricercari.<sup>10</sup>

One strong argument for Sultzbach's two books of tablature being intended for the viola da mano is the use of so-called 'Neapolitan tablature' in the *libro secondo*. This tablature system (which I prefer to call Neapolitan viola da mano tablature) was invented in Naples in the late fifteenth century.<sup>11</sup> The kind of mistakes found in the *libro secondo*, however, strongly suggest that some of Francesco's works were originally enciphered in Italian lute tablature and that Sultzbach's editor transcribed them into Neapolitan tablature. The most significant mistakes are of the kind made when transcribing from one tablature system to another. What the editor (or the typesetter) has to keep in mind when transcribing from Italian lute tablature to Neapolitan tablature are both the choice of the Arabic numerals used to denote the frets and the order of the six horizontal lines that represent the strings of the instrument. The open course is indicated by the number '0' in Italian lute tablature, but by a '1' in Neapolitan tablature; and the highest tablature line designates the lowest sounding course of the instrument in Italian lute tablature while the highest tablature line denotes the highest sounding course in Neapolitan tablature. Some notes in the ricercari in Sultzbach's *libro secondo* are notated a semitone too low to make an acceptable counterpoint, that is, the ciphers were not changed between Italian lute tablature and Neapolitan tablature.

What was Sultzbach's reason for advertising that his two volumes of tablature could be played on the viola da mano, despite the fact that the compositions were probably composed for lute? The Spanish vihuela was invented in the mid-fifteenth century, in Valencia, and developed into two distinct types in the late fifteenth century, plucked and bowed.<sup>12</sup> From the last two decades of the fifteenth century and the first two decades of the sixteenth, there are abundant references to the plucked viola, referred to by various names (for instance, 'viola da mano', 'viola ala napolitana', 'viola spagnola', or 'lyra hispanica'), from several major Italian courts such as those of Naples, Rome, Mantua, Ferrara, and Urbino.<sup>13</sup> Two political powers seem to have played a vital role in the importation and dissemination of the viola da mano in Italy: the Borgias in papal Rome and the Aragons in the



Kingdom of Naples. The vogue for this instrument suddenly ceased in the mid 1520s at most of the courts where it had once been enthusiastically sought, perhaps reflecting the declining political power of the Borgias and Aragons. The exception was the Kingdom of Naples, governed by the vice-royalty of Hapsburg Spain. The key to understanding Sultzbach's editorial peculiarities (the choice of the instrument and notation) is the dedication to Pietro de Toledo, Viceroy of Naples between 1532 and 1553, who had great political and cultural influence. This Neapolitan connection was surely the reason Sultzbach specified the then less popular viola da mano and using a seemingly less commonly used notation like Neapolitan tablature. It was Sultzbach's conscious marketing strategy to attract Neapolitan musicians who may have preferred the viola da mano.

We have established that there is no hard evidence to prove that Francesco da Milano was a viola da mano player. References to his cultivation of various kinds of musical instruments exclude specific mention of the viola da mano, and the unique publication of his compositions for the 'viola' appears to consist of works originally composed for lute. Is it safe to conclude then that Lucas Gaurico's testimony with which we began is merely a literary flight of fancy? This was an age when the instrumentalist often played more than one instrument professionally and his choice may naturally have inclined to instruments that can be played with a similar technique to his main instrument; a lutenist, for instance, may have chosen the viola da arco, viola da mano, guitar, cittern, or other plucked or bowed stringed instruments with fingerboard. Since the tuning system and playing techniques of the lute and the viola da mano appear to be so similar, it is very likely that Francesco da Milano would have cultivated the latter instrument if he had chance to do so.

In fact, Francesco lived for some time in Rome, where the viola da mano had been introduced from Spain in the late fifteenth century. It had acquired some popularity among the Roman musicians during the reign of Alexander VI, who employed a number of Spanish musicians in the papal choir. Francesco had ample opportunities to acquaint with the instrumental playing of Giovan Maria Hebreo who was his colleague at the papal court, perhaps between 1519 and 1527.<sup>14</sup> As the depiction of a viola da mano player painted by Bernardino Pinturicchio on a wall of the Borgia Apartments at the Vatican in about 1492 shows, the viola da mano and the polyphonic manner of playing were known in Rome in the late fifteenth century. The link between Pinturicchio, Giovan Maria, and the viola da mano was Paolo Cortesi, an apostolic prothonotary to Alexander VI. Cortesi was an advisor to Pinturicchio, praised Giovan Maria's lute-playing, and discussed the viola da mano in his treatise posthumously published in 1510.<sup>15</sup> The pay register at the court of Ferrara mentions Giovan Maria in connection with a 'viola' and its case ('A Zoan Maria Judio, sonadore, per una casa per mete

dentro le viole'), when he was in the service of Cardinal Ippolito I from 1503 to 1507.<sup>16</sup> It would, however, be premature to conclude that Giovan Maria introduced to or taught Francesco da Milano how to play the viola da mano.

Admittedly no hard evidence has been found to support our hypothesis that Francesco played the viola da mano. But exploring this hypothesis can lead to a deeper understanding of the performance practice of Renaissance instrumentalists in general, and Francesco da Milano in particular.

## Notes

I am indebted to Dr. Arthur J. Ness for his valuable suggestions.

- 1 Translated in H. Colin Slim, 'Francesco da Milano (1497-1543/44): A Bio-bibliographical Study, I', *Musica disciplina* 18 (1964): 65. There is a portrait of a musician 'Francesco del liuto' (believed to be Francesco da Milano) in Museum of Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. The musician's right hand holds a transverse flute. There is the scroll of a bass viol in the lower right hand corner. The painting is discussed and reproduced, *ibid.*, 81-82, Pl. I.
- 2 For the document, see William F. Prizer, 'Lutenists at the Court of Mantua in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', *JLSA* 13 (1980), p. 26 (translation), p. 34 (text).
- 3 The relevant passage is translated in Slim, 'Francesco da Milano', p. 76. On Bartoli, see James Haar, 'Cosimo Bartoli on Music', *Early Music History* 8 (1988), pp. 37-79.
- 4 A facsimile edition in *Biblioteca musica Bononiensis*, series 2, no. 18b (Bologna, 1970). Translated in Richard D. Bodig, 'Ganassi's Regola Rubertina (Conclusion) by Silvestro Ganassi', *Journal of the Viola da Gamba Society of America* 19 (1982), pp. 99-163; and the relevant passage is also translated in Slim, 'Francesco da Milano', p. 76.
- 5 Translated in Slim, 'Francesco da Milano', p. 79.
- 6 Revised facsimile edition with a preface by Arthur J. Ness and an inventory by Claude Chauvel (Geneva: Editions Minkoff, 1988). On the volume, see Yves Giraud, 'Deux livres de tablature inconnus de Francesco da Milano', *Revue de musicologie* 55 (1969), pp. 217-19. Sultzbach was not primarily a publisher of music books. On Sultzbach, see Pietro Manzi, *Annali di Giovanni Sultzbach (Napoli, 1529-1544 — Capua, 1547)*, *Biblioteca di bibliographia italiana*, LVIII (Florence: Leo S. Olshki, 1970). The illustration on the title page of Sultzbach's books is discussed in Hiroyuki Minamino, 'Where Has Fortune Gone?: Music-Iconographical Problems in Sultzbach's Viola da Mano Books', *RidIM Newsletter* 22 (1997):31-35.

- 7 For Francesco's compositions and concordances, see H. Colin Slim, 'Francesco da Milano (1497-1543/44): A Bio-bibliographical Study, II. Bibliography', *Musica disciplina* 19 (1965), pp. 109-28. Francesco's compositions are transcribed in Arthur J. Ness, ed, *The Lute Music of Francesco Canova da Milano (1497-1543)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970). The discovery of Sultzbach's two books of tablature was made after Ness completed his edition. His new Francesco edition will incorporate some variants found in Sultzbach (private communication).
  
- 8 The volumes are listed and described in Howard Mayer Brown, *Instrumental Music Printed before 1600: A Bibliography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), as items 154?/4, 1536/3, respectively.
  
- 9 See Ness, *The Lute Music of Francesco Canova da Milano*, 12, n. 26. Franco Pavan in his note to Paul Beier's CD on Francesco da Milano wonders if the anonymous publisher's print was the work of Marcolini. Ness in a private communication informed me that Richard Hoban pointed out that one of the pieces appears in Hans Gerle's *Musica teutsch* of 1533 and that this may indicate an earlier date for the anonymous publisher's print. Also see H. Edmund Poole and Donald H. Krummel, 'Printing and Publishing of Music', *New Grove* (London, 1980), vol. 15, p. 248.
  
- 10 We have not found the source or sources for the six *ricercari* that are part of these pairs. Moreover, there are nine *ricercari* that do not appear either in the anonymous print or in the *libro primo* but appear for the first time in the *libro secondo*; three of them reappear in printed books a decade or two after Sultzbach. A mid sixteenth-century German manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque du Conservatoire, Ms. Réserve 429) contains twenty-eight *ricercari* by Francesco da Milano. Arthur J. Ness, 'The Herwarth Lute Manuscripts at the Bavarian State Library, Munich: A Bibliographical Study with Emphasis on the Works of Marco dall'Aquila and Melchior Newsidler' (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1984), 2:151, states that 'the second fascicle of Ms. Rés. 429 (ff. 50-96\* [original foliation 1-51\*] consists of 'reccatas' copied from the Naples, 1536, Francesco da Milano print'. In fact, there are indications that the copyist of the Paris manuscript changed the notation from Neapolitan to Italian lute tablature. Sultzbach's *libro secondo* has concordances with all the twenty-eight *ricercari* in the Paris manuscript, while the anonymous publisher's *Intabolutura de leuso* lacks ten of them. The Paris manuscript contains a pair of *ricercari* that are somewhat different versions of the same piece; this practice can also be found in Sultzbach's *libro secondo*. On the Paris manuscript, see Ness, *The Lute Music of Francesco Canova da Milano*, pp. 17-29; and idem, 'The Herwarth Lute Manuscripts', 1: 41-3, 47, 258-9 (thematic catalogue). The bibliographical problem of Sultzbach's viola/lute books and their relation to the Paris manuscript is discussed in my study 'The Book of Fortune: Sultzbach's Marketing Strategy' (in preparation).
  
- 11 See Hiroyuki Minamino, 'Valencian Vihuela de Mano Tablature', *LSAQ* 33 no. 3 (1998), pp. 4-6. The invention of 'Neapolitan *viola da mano* tablature' is discussed in my study (in preparation).

- 12 On the invention of the Spanish 'viola', see Ian Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), pp. 38–79.
- 13 The early cultivation of the viola da mano in Italy is discussed in my study 'The Spanish Plucked Viola in Renaissance Italy, 1480–1530' (in preparation).
- 14 The 'rivalry' between Giovan Maria and Francesco da Milano is discussed in my study 'Battle of Old and New: Giovan Maria and Francesco da Milano at the Papal Court', (in preparation).
- 15 Pinturicchio's viola da mano player is reproduced in Lewis Lockwood, 'Renaissance', *New Grove* (London, 1980), vol. 15, p. 737. For Cortesi's advice to Pinturicchio, see Sebina Poeschel, 'A Hitherto Unknown Portrait of a Well-known Roman Humanist', *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990), pp. 146–54. For Cortesi on Giovan Maria, see Nino Pirrotta, *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 99–100.
- 16 For the document, see William F. Prizer, 'The Frottola and the Unwritten Tradition', *Studi musicali* 15 (1986), 17, n. 53. For Giovan Maria in Ferrara, see Lewis Lockwood, 'Adrian Willaert and Cardinal Ippolito I d'Este: New Light on Willaert's Early Career in Italy 1515–21', *Early Music History* 5 (1985), pp. 85–112, esp. pp. 96–100.