

4. Giovanni Ambrosio Colonna

Introduction

Four guitar books of music in *alfabeto* printed in the 1620s and attributed to **Giovanni Ambrosio Colonna** survive today - **Intavolatura di chitarra alla spagnuola (1620)**, **Il secundo libro d'intavolatura di chitarra alla spagnuola (1620)**, **Il terzo libro de intavolatura di chitarra alla spagnuola (1623)** and **Intavolatura di Chitarra alla Spagnola. Del Primo, Secondo, Terzo, Et Quarto, Libro (1627)**. The second book lacks a title page but the other three were printed in Milan “*dell'her.di Gio. Battista Colonna*” – that is “for the heirs of **Gio. Battista Colonna**”. This raises an interesting question - were the books originally by **Giovanni Ambrosio** or are they reprints of books which **Giovanni. Battista** had had printed earlier? There is a gap of fourteen years between the publication of Montesardo’s **Nuova inventione d'intavolatura** in 1606 and the first of Colonna’s books and it would be rather surprising if nothing (apart from *alfabeto* songbooks which will be considered separately) had appeared in print during that period.

In 1637 a different version of the 1627 book - **Intavolatura di chitarra spagnuola del primo, secondo, terzo, & quarto libro** was printed in Milan by the printer Dionisio Gariboldi. This has been published in facsimile by Forni Editore. From **Il secundo libro** onwards each book includes some pieces from previous books and some pieces which are unique. **Libro Quarto** probably appeared as a separate work before 1627 as different selections appear in the 1627 and 1637 editions.

The 1620 book is dedicated to Conde Iulio Cesare Borromeo, a member of the most distinguished family in Milan which included St. Charles Borromeo and his cousin and successor as Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, Federico Borromeo. Federico was created Marchese d’Angera in 1623, and Iulio Cesare, his nephew, succeeded him as Marchese in 1631. Sanseverino’s **El segundo libro de los ayres** a collection of Spanish and Italian vocal works in with *alfabeto* printed in 1616 is also dedicated to him.

In his dedication Giovanni Ambrosio implies that he was employed by Conde Iulio Cesare as he starts by saying that as the guitar is the instrument most widely used in the city [of Milan] he has decided to have printed some little pieces which he had composed in the Count’s house.

Colonna’s Instructions to the Player (1620)

In his introduction, Colonna also seems to claim that his book is the first of its kind to have appeared in print.

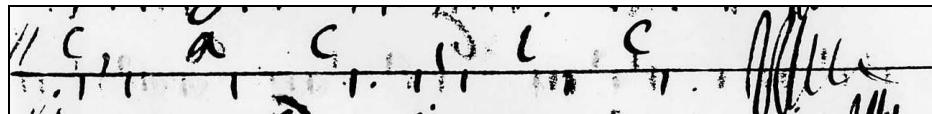
Alli Lettori.

As the world has not yet seen in print this newly discovered easy method of teaching oneself to play the Spanish Guitar, an instrument widely used for its pleasant sweetness, I, as I am always eager to be of help to the public, have therefore resolved to have printed these compositions of mine. And to make matters easier I have included some instructions which must be observed when using this new method of tablature.

What he may mean by this is that his book is the first in which the music is printed using a system of stroke marks above and below the line to indicate the number and direction of the strummed chords.

This method had certainly been used in manuscript sources before 1620. **I:BC Ms. V.280** which was copied in Rome by one Petrus Jacobus Pedruel in 1614 uses this system for most of the pieces. The following is his version of the **Villan di Spagna** and although the “see-through” from the other side of the folio makes it difficult to read, the note values and stroke patterns are similar to those we have already encountered.

Villan di Spagna from I:BC Ms. V.280



After explaining that the *alfabeto* chords must be memorized and played in full – that is including all five courses in the strum - Colonna briefly describes his system of notating rhythm and stroke patterns.

First you must practice diligently the Alfabeto printed below and commit it to memory. Note that all the strokes, whether down or up have to be played in full.

When you find any letter of this Alfabeto you will play the chord which that letter represents in that place, down [from bass to treble] and up [from treble to bass] as many times as you find signs like this $\overline{\overline{A}}$ above or below the line which crosses the page. In this example - A $\overline{\overline{A}}$ the chord represented by the letter A has to be played twice downwards and once upwards.

As with Montesardo a dot beside the stroke mark indicates that it should be held longer.

When this sign, whether down or up has a dot beside it, it should be given a little more time in the same way as is observed in the dots of musical notes.

He then comments on the tempo at which the pieces should be played

Apart from this you will not find here any more instructions except that all must be played in the same tempo as you would expect, with the exception of the Passacalli, Follie, Aria sopra le Follie, Spagnolette, Gagliarde & Correnti, which are played in proportion. (quali vano sonate in proportione).

This paragraph has been expanded in the 1637 version to read as follows

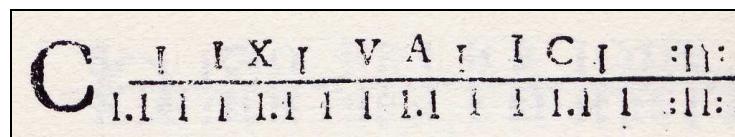
When this sign, whether down or up has a dot beside it – I. - it should be given a little more time and when there are two I: a little [more] as it may be. The single dot has the length of a crotchet and the two dots that of a minim. Apart from this you will not find here any more instructions except that all must be played in the same tempo as you would expect, with the exception of the sonatas which have sign of triple metre at the beginning which are played in triple time, that is to say more quickly. The galliard is an exception which is played in tripola maggiore, and more slowly.

This is not quite as incomprehensible as it might seem at first. In the music itself the pieces in triple time have a time signature at the beginning – 3; otherwise they are in common time. However, in mensural notation time signatures indicated not only how many beats there should be in bar or measure but also to some extent the **tempo** with which the music should be played. Pieces in what he refers to as *tripola maggiore* will be played in a slow triple time, whereas pieces in *tripola minore* will be played quickly.

There is just one problem with what he has said here – he seems to imply that the basic unit of time represented by the stroke mark is a **quaver** rather than as one might expect, a **crotchet**. This may be the case in the pieces from his first book, but in the later book(s) where he uses actual note values it is clear that the basic unit is a crotchet.

Mus. ex. 1 is in **common time** – the stroke marks followed by a dot are crotchets.

Mus. Ex. 1 - Aria di Firenze.p. 30



Mus.ex. 2 is has the time signature for **triple time** but is really in 6/8 time

Mus. Ex. 2 - Spagnollette, p.23

3 E I B I G I H I B I G I :II:

Mus. Ex. 3 is in what he calls *tripola maggiore* – the dotted stroke marks are crotchets.

Mus. Ex. 3 - Gagliarde, p.35

Gagliarde de' Pass'e mezz'i.

3 O I I G I I O I L C I I H I

Mus. Ex. 4 which is from Book 4 is also in *tripola maggiore* but with a minim for the basic unit of time.

Mus. ex. 4 - Gagliarda, p.69

O I C I E I D I F I Gagliarda. I I



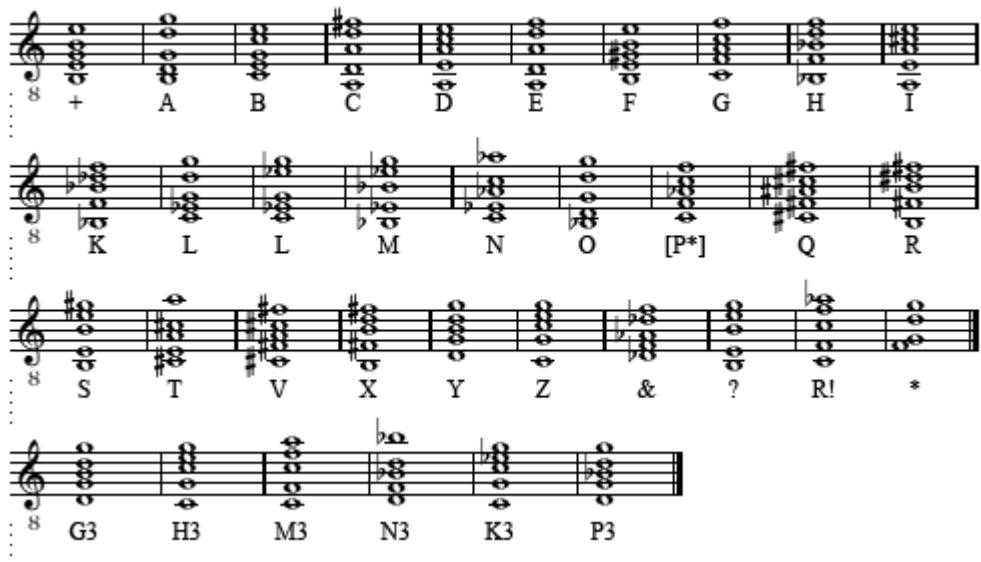
His system works reasonably well although it would be more helpful if there were bar lines. Unfortunately it is not always clearly or accurately printed.

The 1627 introductions end with a note advising the player to find a teacher if he can – always a good idea! It is interesting that he refers to playing in the true Spanish and Neapolitan manner.

But whoever wishes to play well and quickly will do better with his time if he has a wise teacher, who shows him how to carry the hand well, how to play in the correct tempo and how to play with grace and charm; playing now softly, now loudly, in the true Spanish or Neapolitan manner.

Colonna's Table of Chords

A L F A B E T T O,							
*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
I	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
0	1	2	3	2	1	2	3
2	2	3	2	2	1	2	3
2	2	3	2	2	1	2	3
2	2	3	2	2	1	2	3
S	T	V	X	Y	Z	&	R ²
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
G	H	M	N	1	K	P	
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	

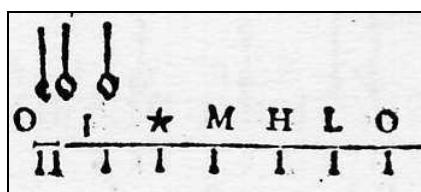


Colonna's basic table includes the letters A-X which represent the chords at the **first** and **second frets** and Y and Z which represent G and H at the **third fret**. Chord + has moved to the beginning of the sequence and Chord A is the form which became standard with the second course stopped at the 3rd fret. Chord P is misprinted – the fourth course should be fretted at the 3rd fret. Two versions of Chord L are included. This is a particularly awkward chord to play in the correct manner and a dissonant note "D" played at the 3rd fret on the second course was therefore often substituted for the E flat. At the end there are four additional chords. The first three are the same as those found in Montesardo. Chord & is the same as Montesardo's Chord U. The Chord represented by the cedilla ç (con) is a minor form of Chord M at the 2nd fret i.e. an E minor chord rather than an E flat minor chord which is not included in the main sequence. Chord R! (ron) is Chord M at the 3rd fret.

Open courses – to include or not to include?

Clearly the open courses are intended to be included in all the chords except the last one in the table. The fifth course is to be omitted – there is no zero on the relevant line. This additional chord, represented by the star, is a dissonance. This is used to introduce a passing note between two chords as in the following example.

Mus. ex. 5 – Romanesca, p.40





Transposed chords

Colonna gives six further chords which he explains as follows

...Note that in the sonatas to make it easier, when any letter has a number above it, for example 2 or 3 or 5, the same letter is played moving the hand 2, 3 or 5 frets further down the fingerboard according to the number above. And this is to make it easier for those who do not understand lute tablature.

Each of these is the same as the corresponding letter in the main table, but played at the 3rd fret. [Chord H3 is misprinted as H5].

At the end of the book there are instructions on how to tune three guitars of different sizes to play in unison. (This follows *A'Letteri* in the 1637 version of the book).

Rule for stringing the guitar in order to play in concert

First the largest guitar is tuned to any note you wish, and then the medium guitar one note higher, that is to say the fifth string of the large guitar makes a unison with the third string of the medium guitar.

The fourth string of the little guitar has to make a unison with the third string of the medium guitar and thus it will be tuned a fourth higher.

Chord I on the largest guitar, Chord A on the medium sized one and Chord C on the little one will sound the same chord when played altogether.

Large guitar **g**[G] c'c f a d'

Medium guitar a[A] d'd **g** b e'

Small guitar d'[d] g'**g** c' e' a'

Large Medium Small

It is not made clear which string of a course makes the unison but the large guitar must have a high octave string on the fifth course if this is to be in unison with the third course of the medium one and the small guitar must have a low octave string on the fourth course if this is to be in unison with the third course of the medium one. The instructions are probably not intended to be taken literally. There is no music specifically for three guitars in any of Colonna's surviving books.

Conclusion

Colonna is quite forward looking. His table of chords is the one which became standard. Although he has only included additional chords played at the 3rd fret, his way of indicating these by placing the figure above the letter also became standard; it may of course already have been use before he published his book. It includes a early example of a dissonant chord involving fewer than five courses. In later versions of the book note values are used to give a clearer idea of the rhythm. Unfortunately the pieces suffer from being badly printed but it is possible to get some idea as to how they should be played.