

Francesco Corbetta - The Best of All

Introduction



In the introduction to his **Instruccion de musica** printed in 1674 Gaspar Sanz refers to Corbetta as “el mejor de todo” – “the best of all” and clearly his contemporaries regarded him as such. Although his music is less popular today than that of Sanz or Santiago de Murcia he is undoubtedly the most significant and prolific composer for the 5-course baroque guitar of the seventeenth century. Five printed books of his music survive today -

1639 De gli scherzi armonici. Bologna : Giacomo Monti & Carlo Zennero, 1639.

1643 Varii capricii per la ghittara spagnuola. Milan : No imprint, 1643.

1648 Varii scherzi di sonate. Brussels : No imprint, 1648.

[1648] No title page. No imprint.

1671 La guitarre royale. Paris : Hierosme Bonneüil, 1671.

1674 La guitarre royale. Paris : Hierosme Bonneüil, 1674.

At least three, possibly four other books may have appeared in print but are now lost.

- 1643/48? Published in Italy or Spain
- 165? Book of Italian tablature. Dedicated to Duke of Brunswick-Luneberg. This includes some pieces by Granata which Corbetta pirated in order to get his revenge on Granata who had earlier included some of Corbetta's pieces in one of his books.
- 165? Book of tablature published in Paris and dedicated to the King Louis XIV. The plates were stolen, reprinted with some other pieces and dedicated to a "foreign prince" ..
- 167? Easie Lessons on the Guittar for young practitioners...By seignior Francisco. Printed in London by John Carr in the 1670s.

An almost unquantifiable amount of music is also attributed to him in contemporary and later manuscript sources. The most significant of these are **GB:Ob Ms.Mus.Sch.C94 - Pieces de Guitarre de differendes Autheurs recueillis Par Henry François de Gallot**, copied in the 1660s and **B:Lc.Ms.245** copied by the Flemish clergyman and amateur guitarist, Jean-Baptiste de Castillion in about 1706.

The only full length study of Corbetta is Richard Pinnell's doctoral dissertation **The role of Francesco Corbetta (1615-1681) in the history of music for the baroque guitar** completed in 1976 and subsequently published by UMI Research Press ca. 1980 with the title **Francesco Corbetta and the baroque guitar with a transcription of his works**. This covers a lot ground in a general way but is now very out of date.

This study is an attempt to give a more focused account of Corbetta's life and work. The main part of it comprises English translations of the introductions to his books with detailed commentaries on the wealth of information which these include.

It is divided into the following sections.

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1. **Biography**

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1. Biography

Early years

Unlike most composers of music for the five-course guitar, Corbetta's life story is quite well documented. He was born in Pavia in about 1615. The legend in the border surrounding the engraved portrait of him on page 3 of his second collection of guitar music, **Varii capricii per la ghittara spagnuola**, printed in 1643, reads:

FRANCESCO CORBETTA PAVESE
ACADEM.CO TRA GL'ERRANTI DI BRESCIA IL CAPRICCIOSO
Di Etta d'Anni 28.
[Academician amongst the Wanderers of Brescia
known as "Il Capriccioso" - at the age of 28.]

His name also appears as Francesco Corbetta Pavese on the title pages of his 1639 and 1648 books and his obituary states that he was born in Pavia.¹ Pavia lies some twenty miles south of Milan and would have been under Spanish rule at the time when Corbetta was born. Sanseverino and Colonna both published their guitar books in Milan in the 1620s and Sfondrino also published a guitar book there in 1637. The music in all of these books is in *alfabeto* and intended to be strummed.

According to his obituary Corbetta was so attached to the guitar that his parents, who had intended him for a different profession, were unable to dissuade him from studying it. From what Corbetta himself says in the preface to **La guitarre royale** (1671), it seems that he played only the guitar and may have been largely self taught.

It is so obvious that the world already knows it, that I have never played this instrument [i.e. the lute], of which I do not know a single chord and that my passion has always been the guitar, which I play for my own pleasure. I have always had a natural talent and have never needed any help to perfect my technique. Many guitar teachers, particularly here in Paris, have held only second place to me, as they themselves have confessed.²

Unlike many of his contemporaries who published music for guitar although they were employed professionally as theorbo players, it seems that he never held a formal musical appointment.

Corbetta's first two collections of guitar music were printed in Italy, **De gli scherzi armonici** in Bologna in 1639 and **Varii capricii per la ghittara spagnuola** in Milan in 1643. He seems to have taught the guitar for a while in Bologna where Giovanni Battista Granata was one of his students. He mentions Granata by name in the introduction to **La guitarre royale (1671)** and accuses him of plagiarism. **De gli scherzi armonici** was printed by the well known printers of tablature, Giacomo Monti and Carlo Zenero; they also printed Alessandro Piccinini's second

¹ Mercure (1681).

² La guitarre royale (1671) p.4.

book of lute music, **Intavolatura di liuto** in 1639. In 1646 Giacomo Monte printed another guitar book in 1646 - **Intavolatura di chitarra, e chitarriglia** which is usually attributed today to Carlo Calvi, who has written the dedication at the beginning of the book. It includes part of the preface from Corbetta's 1639 book and abbreviated versions of thirty-four of his pieces in *alfabeto*. The fact that it is not an original book is acknowledged on the title page which states that the music has been taken from "duo eccellenti professori" – one of whom is Corbetta. Subsequently Monte printed five out of the seven books of guitar music by Granata.

De gli scherzi armonici is dedicated to Count Odoardo Pepoli. The Pepoli were a noble family which first came to prominence in Bologna in the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth century they established an alliance with the new rulers of the town, the Bentivoglio, and held positions of trust in their administration. The two palaces of the Pepoli family still survive in Bologna facing one another on opposite sides of the via Castiglione. The medieval Palazzo Pepoli Vecchio comprises several blocks built in different periods. When Count Odoardo Pepoli was granted the title of senator in 1653, he initiated the building of a new family residence opposite the medieval palace. Two pieces in **De gli scherzi armonici**, the **Corrente detta l'Odoarda** (p.60) and **Sarabanda detta la Pepoli** (p.61) are dedicated specifically to Count Odoardo spelling out his name in *alfabeto*. A third piece, a *corrente* (p.62) is dedicated to Count Oguzone Pepoli, presumably another member of the family. Corbetta may have enjoyed, or hoped to enjoy their patronage. Most the other pieces from page 60 onwards have individual dedications. Amongst these, on page 74, is a piece with the title **La mia donna importuna** dedicated to "Al Molt'illust. Sig. il. Sig. Gioseffo Corbetta". This may be a relative of the composer. Trombetti published two books in Bologna in the same year.

Mantua

Corbetta's second guitar book, **Varii capricii per la ghittara spagnuola** has no imprint but the dedication to Carlo II, Duke of Mantua and Monferrato is dated Milan, 30th October, 1643. The extinction of the male line of the senior branch of the Gonzaga family, descendants of Vincenzo I, lead to war (1626-31) between France, who supported the claim of Carlo, Duke of Nevers (1580-1637), the grandson of Federico I, Duke of Mantua, and Spain, who supported Cesare Gonzaga, Duke of Guastalla, grandson of Federico's brother. The peace of Cherasco (1631) granted the Duchy to Carlo. On his death in 1637 the Duchy passed to his grandson Carlo II (b.1620) who ruled from 1637- 1665.³

Slightly earlier on 31st May 1643 Corbetta had been admitted as a member of the Accademia degli Erranti in Brescia. Brescia lies some thirty miles north-east of Milan and had been ruled by the Republic of Venice since 1421. The Accademia was founded in 1620 by the fathers Lattanzio and Silvio Stella, both religious of the Cassinese Order. It was inaugurated in 1626 in the monastery of the Padri Cassinensi and Biagio Marini was appointed its music director.⁴ Apparently members of this particular *accademia* had to be conversant not only with music, painting and dance but also fencing and riding. On the right hand side of the engraved portrait of Corbetta on p.3 is a coat of arms depicting the moon shining upon a well surrounded by the motto

³ Kamen (2000) p.131-2. Entry for Gonzaga. Sometimes known as Carlo III as his father Carlo II died before 1637.

⁴ I-BRas, Archivo antico municipale, Accademi Erranti, b.142, mazzo 13, f. 18v. [Fontijn (2006) p.22, n.34].

SEMBRA CAPRICCIO MA NE TRAGO IL VERO
It may seem capricious but it gets to the heart of the matter
[literally “pierces the truth”].

Corbetta was attached in some capacity to the court in Mantua over a number of years but he seems to have enjoyed frequent leaves of absence in order to pursue a career as a freelance musician, touring the courts of Europe. On December 10th 1644 he was granted an *attestazione* to travel abroad freely.⁵ Although there are references to his trips abroad in several sources it is not possible to date these with any certainty as he seems to have travelled back and forth from Italy on a regular basis between 1644-1654. According to his obituary he visited Spain where he was heard at the Court “playing such things as before him had been believed impossible on the guitar”.⁶ At the time the idea of using the guitar for anything other than mainly strummed music may have been something of a novelty in Spain. As far as we know the only guitar book printed there in the first half of the seventeenth century was Amat’s **Guitarra española** which explains how to play the twelve major and minor common chords and how to use them to accompany vocal music. The Spanish king, Philip IV (1605-65) who acceded to the throne in 1621 was also Duke of Milan which may account for Corbetta’s visit. He himself mentions visiting Spain in the preface to **La guitarre royale (1671)** when giving an account of his grievance against Granata.

I must speak of someone else in Italy, in Bologna, a certain guitar player named Granata, who, besides stealing my sonatas, also took ideas from my printed books and published them under his name, as I saw in one of his books in Venice, on my return from Spain.⁷

The book which he refers to is most probably Granata’s **Capricci armonici sopra la chittarriglia spagnuola** printed by Giacomo Monti in Bologna in 1646. If this were the case Corbetta’s trip to Spain probably took place between 1645–1647. Corbetta seems to have been a regular visitor to Venice.

The obituary goes on to say that

From there [Spain] he passed to the Emperor and all the Courts of Germany where he was made welcome by the greatest Princes. Having returned to Italy to defend the glory that certain envious people wished to tarnish, by claiming his work as their own, (another possible reference to his dispute with Granata) he attended the Duke of Mantua who was pleased indeed to have such a man to present to his Majesty (Louis XIV of France).⁸

In January 1648 Corbetta was in Brussels, where he dedicated his third surviving book, **Varii scherzi di sonate** to the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria, son of Emperor Ferdinand II and Mariana of Bavaria. In 1646 Philip IV nominated the Archduke governor of the Spanish Netherlands, a position which he held until 1656. As the book is described as “Libro quarto” on title page. Corbetta must have had another book printed between 1643-1648. No copies of such a book have come to light to date. There is a record dated 8th December, 1652 of a payment to

⁵ I-MAa, Archivio Gonzaga, *Mandati* 52 1644, 10 December. [Fontijn (2006) p.22, n.33].

⁶ Mercure (1681).

⁷ La guitarre royale (1671) p.4.

⁸ Mercure (1681).

“Giovanni” Francesco Corbetta of a gratuity of 240 florins from Archduke Leopold William. “pour avois joué quelques fois en ma chambre”.⁹

Corbetta apparently did not find working for the Duke of Mantua congenial. In a letter dated from Venice, 12th March 1652, he asked to be relieved of his post because he was so poorly paid.

Captain Luca, on the order of Your Highness, has written to ask me to return to your service and I offer humble thanks to Your Most Serene Highness for the honour. But because of my previous meagre earnings it has been necessary for me to work with the Prince of Lüneberg, who has granted me many favours, both there and in Paris. I beg your Highness to excuse me for I have tried many times to work for Your Most Serene Highness with little success.¹⁰

The Prince of Lüneberg referred to is presumably George William, Duke of Zell (1624- 1705)¹¹. He was the eldest of three brothers who, following a family dispute, divided the rulership of the Electorate of Hanover between them. The second brother, John Frederick, also known as the Duke of Brunswick Lüneberg, married Bénédicte Henriette, a daughter of Duke Carlo’s sister, Anna de Gonzaga. From the mid 1650s the brothers were in the habit of paying annual visits to Venice during Carneval, the season preceding Lent. Maria Mancini, a niece of Mazarin, refers in her memoirs to having spent time in the company of the Duke of Brunswick Lüneberg and the Duke of Mantua during Carneval in Venice. Corbetta may have come to their attention in Venice or during visits to Paris. The Hanover court registers document a payment to Corbetta of 160 Thalern for the year 1652-63.¹² It is not clear whether he was actually resident in Hanover during that time. In the preface to **La guitarre royale (1671)** Corbetta says that he had dedicated a book to Georg Wilhelm but no copies of this have so far come to light to date.¹³

Corbetta is mentioned in two letters written in 1654 to the Duke of Mantua by Antonio Bosso, the “residente” or Mantuan envoy in Venice. These relate to negotiations over the possible employment of the singer, Antonia Padoani Bembo, at the Mantuan Court. The first letter, dated 14th July, mentions that Corbetta is about to leave for Germany by way Mantua and that the Duke will hear from him about the “father of the girl who sings.”

Before leaving for Germany, Signore Francesco Corbetta will come to the feet of Your Most Serene Highness to greet you humbly. Your Highness will certainly hear more from him about the father of the girl who sings, and likewise I trust that by now Your Highness will have been informed by me, or otherwise concerning the matter which I wrote about in my last letter.¹⁴

⁹ Thieffry (2002) p. 159-173.

¹⁰ I-MAa, Archivio Gonzaga, Carteggi esteri, Carteggi ad inviati (Venezia) Busta 1571 Diversi 1652. [Fontijn (2006) p. 23/281].

¹¹ George William subsequently contracted a morganatic marriage with a French woman, Eleanor d’Olbreuse and their daughter, Sophie Dorothea married George I of England.

¹² Sievers (1961) p.46/134. [Pinnell (1980) p.176 Note 50].

¹³ La guitarre royale (1671) p.4.

¹⁴ I-Maa, Archivio Gonzaga, Carteggi esteri, Carteggi ad inviati (Venezia) Busta 1571, Bosso Residente 1654. [Fontijn (2006) p.21/280].

A second letter dated July 21st refers to the fact that Antonia's father has handed her over in marriage to Corbetta.

Signore Francesco Corbetta is returning to the feet of Your Most Serene Highness. You will hear from his own lips about his dealings in the matter of the girl who sings of what interest I have not been able to understand because I have been completely tricked by him (i.e. Bembo's father?) behind my back; so that neither Bartolo nor Baldo can come close to explaining their strategies.

But at present all this means for Your Highness is that they are a cage of madmen whose interests have only pernicious goals. Furthermore, I call to the attention of Your Highness the fact that as well as the doctor falling into a frenzy (although the most hackneyed expression would be to say that he is possessed by the devil), the girl who sings suffers from epilepsy brought on by frenetic fears of her father, who has handed her over in marriage to Signore Corbetta and it is confirmed in a private letter as a greater sign that they remain attached to one another.¹⁵

A postscript to same letter dated July 22nd also refers to the marriage

After having written the enclosed letter – which was to be consigned to Signore Francesco Corbetta - although he did not wish to pick it up as he was about to miss the hour of his departure – I thought it better to keep it and to send it to your Highness by the shortest possible route to Verona, with the ordinary Saturday courier, so that Your Highness will be advised about the capricious matrimony of the said Corbetta.¹⁶

Although Corbetta was obviously an acquaintance of the family, it seems that the marriage to Antonia did not actually take place as in 1659 she married the Venetian nobleman, Lorenzo Bembo. In 1654 at the advanced age of 39 Corbetta was apparently unmarried although he may have been a widower. There has been much speculation as to whether he remained in contact with Antonia after her marriage to Bembo had broken down and she left Venice to settle in Paris. However it is simply not known whether he helped her to escape from Italy or whether he assisted her in any way in later life. Corbetta's obituary states that Charles II procured a wife for him, presumably some time after 1660.¹⁷ He also had a daughter referred to by Adam Ebert (aka Apulius Apronius)¹⁸ but when and where she was born and who her mother was is not known.

Paris

According to the obituary, the Duke of Mantua recommended Corbetta to the French king, Louis XIV, but although Corbetta may have visited Paris earlier, he probably did not settle there before 1654. During the civil war known as the "Fronde", which was waged in France

¹⁵ I-MAa, Archivio Gonzaga, Carteggi esteri, Carteggi ad inviati (Venezia) Busta 1571 Bosso Residente 1654. [Fontijn (2006) p. 21/280].

¹⁶ I-MAa, Archivio Gonzaga, Carteggi esteri, Carteggi ad inviati (Venezia) Busta 1571 Bosso Residente 1654. [Fontijn (2006) p.24/281].

¹⁷ Mercure (1681).

¹⁸ Ebert (1724) Under Theil – Reise nach Italien.p.11.

between 1650–1653, Italian musicians were expelled from Paris. It has been claimed that Corbetta was guitar teacher to Louis XIV but this is unsupported by documentary evidence. The post was in fact held by Bernard Jourdan de la Salle from about 1652-1695 when he was succeeded by his son.¹⁹

However it is clear that by 1656 Corbetta was in France at the court of Louis XIV. In January-February of that year Jean-Baptiste Lully's ballet **La galanterie du temps** was performed during Carnival – the period preceding Lent. The music for the ballet has not survived but the libretto states that “Corbetti. Les deux La Barre, frères et les petites Violons” accompanied the duet sung by Mademoiselle de la Barre and La Signora Anna Bergerotti.²⁰

The ballet opens with an aria for Venus “Venere io son che vò cerando il riso”. This is followed by *entrées* and a serenade in Italian in the form of a dialogue which was performed by La Barre and Bergerotti.²¹ The Italian singer, Anna Bergerotti, arrived in Paris in 1655 as a member of a group of Italian musicians which had previously spent time at the court of Queen Christina of Sweden and which also included Bartolotti. The well known French singer, Anne Chabanceau de la Barre, with her brothers Joseph and Pierre, had also spent time at the Swedish court. “Les petites Violons” – also known as “La petite bande” was a group of 16 players, (later augmented to 21), subsidiary to the *grand bande* – “24 violons du Roi”. Lully was given permission to conduct them some time before 1656 and they appeared for the first time under his direction in **La galanterie**.²²

In both the French and Italian prefaces to **La guitarrre royale (1671)** Corbetta himself also mentions taking part in Lully's ballet and says that he was allowed by the king, Louis XIV, to compose or arrange an *entrée* for several guitars to be performed during the ballet. He also refers to an incident which took place, apparently in Paris in the same year, when the plates of one of his books were stolen from him and re-used to print another book dedicated to a “foreign prince”. In the Italian preface he says that he had presented Louis XIV with two copies of it but in the French preface he says he dedicated the book to the King, and presented two copies of it to him, but does not specify that it was printed in Paris or the year of publication.

Italian Preface

I would like to tell you – so that it does not happen again – about what happened to some of my sonatas which I had sent for printing; and also about other books which have been patched up. In particular [I would like to tell you what happened] in 1656 here in Paris, to one I had had printed [at the time] when it pleased His Majesty to allow me to take part in an Entrée for several guitars of a ballet composed by the most famous Sr. Gio. Battista Lulli. As an act of respect I presented His Majesty with two copies. As I had to travel, the plates were transported elsewhere and after some other pieces had been added to them they were dedicated to a foreign Prince. As this has been noticed here, without however any indication as to the character responsible for this impudence, I felt obliged to give another [book] for

¹⁹ Benoit (1992) p.320. [Tyler 2002, p.108].

²⁰ F-Pbn Ms.Rés.F.524b p.75.

²¹ Prunières (1910) p.165-6.

²² Anthony (1986) p.3-4.

printing. I am astonished at these composers who have no shame in putting their names to books which they have not made any efforts themselves to compose.²³

French Preface

Amongst these are those who have taken from me the plates of a book which I had left in Paris, after having dedicated it to the King of France, on the occasion of a ballet composed by the most famous composer Jean-Baptiste Lully, Master of the King's Music in 1656. For this I was allowed by His Majesty to make an Entrée for several guitars, having presented two copies of this book of my composition to that great monarch, in recognition of all the favours which I had received from His Majesty. They took advantage of the time of my departure from Paris in order to seize the said plates, throwing in some other pieces and dedicating them afresh in their name to a foreign prince:²⁴

This may be a reference to a pirated edition of his 1648 guitar book which came to light recently.

It seems that during his years in France he also had printed another book which he dedicated to the Duke of Brunswick Lüneberg. It is in connection with this book that he refers to his dispute with Granata. Because Granata had previously taken the liberty of including some of Corbetta's pieces in one of his books, Corbetta seized the opportunity to get his own back by including some of Granata's pieces in his book.

I must speak of someone else in Italy, in Bologna, a certain guitar player named Granata, who, besides stealing my sonatas, also took ideas from my printed books and published them under his name, as I saw in one of his books in Venice, on my return from Spain. Whilst I was attending to some business in Bologna, Granata came to me, and apologised for publishing some of my sonatas in his book. As he had been one of my students, he had taken the liberty of doing so. It is also true to say that I had given him many of my sonatas years ago, but as he offended me several times with his arrogant malice, I resolved to treat him in the same way in a book dedicated to the honourable George William, Duke of Brunswick Lünebergh.

Because this obscure reprimand was evidently unclear to him, I was forced to make a more explicit clarification during my stay in England following a discourse in one of his books in which he accused me of plagiarizing authors of both guitar music and lute music. This was clearly the awkward stupidity of a senseless person in view of the fact that he himself had stolen and published some of my sonatas and other pieces, and moreover that he had requested his friends here to send him lute sonatas by Gaultier, Dufaut and others.²⁵

No copies of a book dedicated to the Duke of Brunswick Lüneberg have come to light so far but it is possible that music attributed to Corbetta in a much later manuscript source, **B-LcMs.245** copied by the Flemish clergyman and amateur guitarist, Jean-Baptiste de Castillion in about 1706, is from this source. This includes fifty pieces not found in any of his surviving printed books. In addition there are a further twenty pieces which Castillion has attributed to Corbetta

²³ La guitarre royale (1671) p.4.

²⁴ La guitarre royale (1671) p.8.

²⁵ La guitarre royale (1671) p. 4.

which also appear in Granata's "Novi capricci armonici musical" (1674). These may be the pieces which Corbetta pirated.

England

Early years at Court

At some point during the 1650s Corbetta came to the attention of members of the English royal family and in particular the king, Charles II, in exile since 1645 following the defeat of the royalists in the English Civil War. Although Charles was initially resident in France, from July 1654 he led a nomadic existence, living from hand to mouth mainly in the Low Countries, until the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660. Corbetta seems to have followed Charles first to the Netherlands and thence to England. The Dutch scholar Huygens refers to him in a letter which he wrote to Lady Swann dated 7th May, 1660.²⁶

I hope you will have your ears feasted at Breda with the excellent guitar of Sig.ita [sic] Corbetta, which indeed is worthy of your hearing and admiration, as I can testify by the favour of her Royal Highness.

Lady Swanne is probably the wife of Sir Wolfgang William de Swan, a diplomat employed by Charles whilst in exile.²⁷ "Her Royal Highness" probably refers to Princess Mary, Daughter of Charles I and sister of Charles II married to William II, Prince of Orange. She was certainly part of her brother's entourage when he proceeded from Breda to the Hague early in May.²⁸ The meaning of the title "*Sig.ita*" is unclear.

Charles had by this date moved his court to Breda in anticipation of his return to England and on 23rd May he finally set sail from the Netherlands to reclaim his throne. He arrived at Dover two days later and proceeded to London via Canterbury and Rochester where he spent the night. Whether or not Corbetta was in his entourage at this time, or whether he arrived in England later, his subsequent career at the Court in London during the 1660s and 1670s is well documented both in Official State Papers and private letters and journals. However he continued to make regular visits to Paris and further a field during the last twenty years of his life.

The earliest references to Corbetta at this time are in connection with the controversy over the patenting of various "lotteries" - actually games of chance in which the player had little chance of winning. The first of these was known as "L'oca di Catalonia". Most of the information about this dispute is found in the papers accumulated by the Secretaries of State in their domestic capacity throughout the reign of Charles II. These consist of letters, papers and petitions of one kind or another. They are "calandared" - that is to say listed in chronological order in the **Calendar of State Papers** which was published in 1860s. In most cases this reproduces the relevant text. Unfortunately not all the documents are dated so that the precise sequence of events is difficult to determine. Other less reliable accounts of the controversy are found in some other sources.

²⁶ Huygens (1916) p. 335.

²⁷ Fraser (1997) p.82.

²⁸ Fraser (1997) p.174.

Corbetta's name appears for the first time in a petition to the King in January, 1661.

Petition of Francisco Corbett to the King, for an order for a patent, prohibiting any other person from setting up the game of "L'Acca di Catalonia", the privilege of which His Majesty is pleased to grant him.²⁹

The petition was granted on February 22nd 1661.

On November 14th in the same year he petitioned for a prohibition for anyone else to exercise a similar game without his consent.

Petition of Francesco Corbet to the King. Notwithstanding his sole warrant for practicing the game L'Oca di Catalonia, Gio, Franc. Finochelli, formerly practicing the same by his consent, but dismissed for his scandalous life, made a society with Jas. Roche and his cousin, for a newly invented lottery called the royal Oak, and got leave from Sir Edw. Ford to practice it though it is only the same game disguised and the name changed; begs a prohibition for any to exercise a game approaching his, without his consent.³⁰

On November 23rd an order was issued forbidding Francisco Finochelli from exercising the same lottery and James Roche petitioned not to be prevented from exercising a new, presumably different, lottery.

Order forbidding a lottery carried out by Francisco Finochelli, as being the same with the L'Oca de Catalonia, for which the sole license was granted to Francesco Corbet.³¹

Petition of James Roche and his Associates to the King not to prevent them from exercising a new lottery etc....³²

In August, 1663 Corbetta and James Roche were granted licenses for further games of chance referred to as "The Royale Oake and Queenes Nosegay"

License to Capt. James Roche, Adjutant of our Gard and Francis Corbett Gent to set up and exercise the lotteries of the Royale Oake and Queenes Nosegay etc.....³³

About the same time (August 1663) there is a "Memoire des affaires du Sr. Jean fran: finochelli"

A ete mis la lotterie du Royal Oka a la foire de Smithfield de compagnie avec Monsr le Capne Roche, Sr. Francois Corbetta et Sr Jean franc. Finochelli....

The Royal Oak lottery was held at the Smithfield Fair with the company of Monsr le Capne Roche, Sr. Francois Corbetta et Sr Jean franc. Finochelli....³⁴

²⁹ Calandar (1860) 1660-1661 p. 494 Vol. XXIX, no. 79, January (?) 1661.

³⁰ Calandar (1860) 1661-1662 p. 146 Vol. XLIV, no. 50, November 14th 1661,

³¹ Calandar (1860) 1661-1662 p. 156 Vol. XLIV, no. ??? November 23rd 1661,

³² Calandar (1860) 1661-1662 p. 157 Vol. XLIV, no. ??? November 23rd 1661,

³³ Calandar (1860) 1663-1664 p. 253 Vol. LXXIX, no. 74 August 25th 1663,

³⁴ Roberts (1991) Part 1. Source unclear.

The Smithfield Fair, more properly known as the Bartholomew Fair because it took place in the precincts of the Priory Church of St. Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield in the City of London, was held on or about the Feast of St. Bartholomew on 24th August. Originally the principal fair for the sale of cloth in England. it expanded to include various forms of entertainment including sideshows, prize-fighters, musicians, acrobats and lotteries.

On December 23rd Corbetta was granted yet another license for games called “The Royal Oak and Il Trionfo Imperiale”.

Grant to Fras. Corbett of license to set up lotteries of a new invention called the Royal Oak and Trionfo Imperiale³⁵

On receipt of this license Corbetta writes in a petition that

he travels to France for his health. But no sooner gone but this was likewise prohibited to his very great prejudice and almost loss of life in a strange country³⁶

Presumably these lotteries were important sources of income for him aside from his musical activities.

Corbetta petitioned the King again in January (?) 1664,

Francis Corbett to the King. Was joined in a patent for the game of Royal Oak with Capt. Roche, who has separated from him & associated himself with Sir [Ant] Des Marces. Bgs the profits of the patent for six months, or some satisfaction therefor; also leave to sell his place as ‘valet de chambre’ to the queen as ill health obliges him to go abroad; and he wants money for his journey and medical treatment.³⁷

This seems to be the earliest reference to his travelling abroad, apparently due to ill health. It gives no inkling of what ailed him nor why it was necessary for him to go abroad for treatment.

In about 1664 Corbetta wrote to the King from Paris about the matter

To the sacred and royal majesty of the King of Great Britain

Francesco Corbetta, Your Majesty’s most humble and faithful servant, says that after being ill en route, he has arrived in Paris, where Madame (the king’s sister, Henrietta Anne, wife of the Duke of Orléans) wishes to see him, but he has been unable to visit her as he has had to take to his bed because he is still unwell. He says that the good hope that Your Majesty promised him sustains him until such time as he can take advantage of the letter of exchange which it pleased Your Majesty to promise him. Because of the impediments which Sir Henry Benett has placed in the way of the game he does not want to have any profit from it. The supplicant believed that he would find some financial assistance in Paris whilst awaiting Your Majesty’s pleasure but says that he found only letters bearing bad news. He therefore

³⁵ Calandar (1860) 1663-1664, p. 361 vol. LXXXV, no. 11 December 2nd 1663.

³⁶ Roberts (1991) Part 1. Source unclear.

³⁷ Calandar (1860) 1663-1664 p. 454 vol. XCI, no. 45 January (?) 1664,

humbly begs Your Majesty to be gracious enough not to allow him to be wronged in the favour which your Majesty has granted him and begs you to send him help in the form of a letter of exchange as quickly as possible as he hopes to come to the feet of Your Majesty and do his utmost to meet with the satisfaction of Your Majesty, to whom devotedly and deeply he bows.³⁸

It seems that Corbetta was employed initially as “Groom of the Privy Chamber to the Queen” - Catherine of Braganza whom Charles had married in May 1662. His obituary states that Charles II bestowed upon him the title of “Gentilhomme de la Reyne”.³⁹ From 1665 there is a “Warrant for an immediate livery for Francesco Corbetta, Groom of the Privy Chamber to the Queen [Doquet]”.⁴⁰

However in May 1665 he petitioned for a place in the King’s household.

Petition of Francesco Corbetto, to the King. Having refused the proffers of several foreign princes in order to serve His Majesty, he wishes to exchange his place of Groom of the Privy Chamber to the Queen for that of Page of the Backstairs to the King, for the better convenience of showing his proper talent and to be admitted as a supernumary until a place is vacant; in the meantime he will live on the pension provided him.⁴¹

The Privy Chamber was the private apartment of a royal residence; grooms of the Privy Chamber waited on members of the royal family during their various leisure activities. Pages of the Backstairs were fairly junior servants who also waited on royalty in private. Both positions would presumably have allowed Corbetta ready access to the King and Queen - the obituary states that Charles gave him “une Clef de sa Chambre”.⁴² His musical activities on the whole were probably on a private, informal level rather than as part of the regular musical establishment which performed in public.

There are references to him performing for other various dignitaries. In 1663/4(?) he took part in a performance referred to by the French ambassador.

The King of Great Britain with twelve of the principal Lords of his Court did me the honour of having supper with me the other Monday...The meal was merry and the time after supper was employed in listening to music, the violins and the Sieur Francisque, the great guitar player.⁴³

The French Ambassador at the time was the Comte de Comminges; **La guitarrre royale (1671)** includes a sarabande on p. 21 subtitled “La Cominge” which is presumably dedicated to him. The entry in Pepys’ Diary for 29th October 1663 mentions that the French Ambassador was

³⁸ Mabbett (1986) p. 245. citing State Papers 29/109-9. Abbreviated version in Calendar (1860) vol. IV, p.139. See also Ashbee (1986) vol. 8, p.337. Italian text and translation in full in Mabbett.

³⁹ Mercure (1681).

⁴⁰ Calendar (1860) Chas II, V, p.169 . See also Ashbee (1986) Vol. 8 p.337. State papers38).

⁴¹ Calendar (1860) 1665-1666, p. 143 vol. ???, no. ?? Date??? **See also** Ashbee (1986), vol. 8, p.337).

⁴² Mercure (1681).

⁴³ Roberts (1991) Part 2, p. 18. Roberts gives a footnote in Pepys as his source without identifying the date of the entry or the edition in which the footnote appears..

present at a dinner held at the Guildhall on the Lord Mayor's Day and was affronted by the way he was treated. He gave an account of this affair in a letter to Louis XIV dated 9th November 1663.⁴⁴ He had apparently expected there to be music and was disappointed that there was none except for trumpets and drums.

In his memoirs of life at the Court of Charles II, the Comte de Gramont refers to Corbetta and a sarabande which he had composed. This was a hit amongst the numerous amateur guitarists at court, including Charles's younger brother, the Duke of York, later James II.

There was a certain Italian at Court, famous for the guitar. He had a genius for music, and he was the only man who could make anything of the guitar. His music was so graceful and tender that he would have made harmony with the most ungrateful of instruments. In truth, nothing was more difficult than to play the same way as he. The King's taste for his compositions had made this instrument so fashionable that everyone played it, well or ill..... The Duke of York played passably and the Count of Arran⁴⁵ as well as Francisque himself. This Francisque had composed a sarabande which charmed or enraptured the whole world. Every guitarist at court tried to play it and God only knows what universal strumming there was.⁴⁶

Presumably this was one of the sarabandes included in **La guitarrre royale (1671)** although it is not clear which one. Anthony, Comte de Gramont, was the son of Sir George Hamilton, younger son of James, Earl of Abercorn; his mother was sister to the 1st Duke of Ormond. He was born in Ireland but grew up in France during the Commonwealth. His memoirs were published posthumously in 1713. Gramont goes on to describe the amorous intrigues between various people at court.

Corbetta may have travelled abroad again in 1665 as there is a note in the Treasury Book stating that "being disirous to pass beyond the seas" Corbetta asks for arrears from 16th June 1663 to 1st Nov. 1665, board wages – at three and fourpence a day.⁴⁷

On May 29th, 1667 Charles II wrote to his sister, Henriette-Anne, wife to the younger brother of Louis XIV, Philippe, Duc d'Orleans

I have heere sent you some lessons for the guittar, which I hope will please you. The Comte de Gramont did carry over with him others, which maybe you have; and as Franeisco makes any more that pleases me, I will send them to you.⁴⁸

Presumably these were also pieces in manuscript, which Corbetta later published in **La guitarrre royale (1671)**. During the 1660s Corbettta seems to have enjoyed the support of Madame

⁴⁴ This is mentioned in a note for the entry on p. 301 of Vol. 3 of the edition of the diary edited by Henry B. Wheatley [Pepys (1946)].

⁴⁵ In 1656, Anne Hamilton, 3rd Duchess of Hamilton married William Douglas, 1st Earl of Selkirk. He changed his surname to "Hamilton", and on 20 September 1660 was created Duke of Hamilton, Marquis of Clydesdale, Earl of Arran, Lanark and Selkirk and Lord Aven,

⁴⁶ Memoirs of the court of Charles the second...edited by Sir. Walter Scott. London : Bonn, 1846. p. 26.

⁴⁷ Roberts (1991) Part 1, p. 15. No source of reference given.

⁴⁸ Charles II p. 117.

D'Orleans during his visits to Paris. His obituary refers to her patronage and more generally to the esteem in which he was held by the nobility.

People of the first rank always held him in the same esteem and above all he received many impressionable marks of kindness from Her Royal Highness, Madame in her last day.⁴⁹

Madame died unexpectedly on 29th June 1670 and Corbetta dedicated to her the exquisite *Tombeau* in C minor in **La guitarre royale (1671)**.⁵⁰

On 5th August, 1667 Samuel Pepys describes hearing Corbetta play in the private apartments of the Duke of York.

After done with the Duke of York and coming out through his dressing-room, I there espied seignor Francisco, tuning his guitar, and Monsieur de Puy with him, who did make him play to me; which he did so admirably that I was mightily troubled that all that pains should have been taken upon so bad an instrument.⁵¹

Pepys was employed as an officer of the Navy Board in which capacity he attended on the Duke of York, Lord High Admiral, once a week on Monday mornings. August 5th was a Monday according to the Julian calendar in use in England until 1752.

Visits to Paris and relationship with Antoine Carré

In the Fall of 1670 Corbetta was in Paris making arrangements for the printing of **La guitarre royale (1671)**. At the beginning of the Italian preface he says

I arrived in Paris last year in order to live there for some months and as I had begun this work in London, I brought the plates with me in order to finish it.⁵²

As the preface is undated it is uncertain exactly which year he arrived in Paris. It seems that he was involved in legal proceedings of some kind with the French guitarist, Antoine Carré, Sieur de la Grange, who also published his **Livre de guitarre** in 1671. The nature of these proceedings is at present unknown but it may have had something to do with plagiarism as Carré included a piece from Corbetta's 1648 book in this book and in his later book, **Livre de pieces de guitarre et de musique** printed between 1677-1687, he included pieces from **La guitarre royale (1671)**. Corbetta's privilege to publish '**La guitarre royale** is dated 21 September 1670 which suggests his book was ready for printing by that date. According to the "Registres de privilèges" Corbetta registered his privilege on 20th December 1670 after Carré had obtained some kind of judgement in his favour at the Chatelet (the principal court of common law jurisdiction in France at the time) on 6th November. The entry is as follows

20th December, 1670 Monsieur Corbetta has presented to us a privilege obtained by him from His Majesty for many pieces to play on the guitar etc. which Monsieur Bonneuil must enjoy following the sentence obtained at the Chatelet and dated Wednesday 6th November 1670

⁴⁹ Mercure 1681.

⁵⁰ La guitarre royale (1671) p. 10.

⁵¹ Pepys (1946) Entry for 5th August, 1667.

⁵² La guitarre royale (1671) p. 3.

*for the benefit of [or on behalf of] Antoine Carré sieur de La Grange, and this for a period of five years, dated the 21st September.*⁵³

It is evident from this that Carré and Corbetta were acquainted. Bonneüil was the printer to whom Corbetta ceded his rights to publish **La guitarrre royale**. The book was not finally printed until 1st October 1671 but delays of this kind were not unusual. It may have been due to technical problems with printing rather than from any delay on Corbetta's part. In France engraving seems to have been viewed at first as an alternative to the typography which was controlled by the Ballard patent. Most of the engraved music is instrumental and Corbetta's book is one of the earliest if not the earliest to have been printed by Bonneüil.

La guitarrre royale (1671) is one of the most interesting and challenging collections of seventeenth century guitar music. Corbetta himself clearly regarded it as his masterpiece and it includes his finest music. It probably circulated quite widely – the English composer, William Boyce owned a copy of it which was sold at auction after his death in 1779.⁵⁴

In March 1673 the Test Act was signed by Charles II requiring every office holder at Court to take Communion in the Church of England. This included all household staff, amongst them many musicians. An exodus of catholic musicians ensued and Corbetta may have been one of them. In any event he was probably in Paris during the Fall of that year as the privilege of his final surviving book also titled **La guitarrre royale** is dated 21st December 1673. As before Corbetta ceded his privilege to the printer Bonneüil and the book was finally printed on the 12th January 1674.

Calisto

Corbetta's absence from court was evidently shortlived as later in 1674 he was involved in rehearsals for the English masque **Calisto** by John Crowne. These took place regularly three times a week beginning in November 1674. Corbetta is cited amongst the four guitarists hired for the occasion listed in the records of the Lord Chamberlain now preserved in the Record Office.

Musicians in the Mask Gittars. 4

Mr. Frasico [sic] Corbett,
Mr. Cutom

Mr. Deloney
Mr. Delloney⁵⁵

The exact dates of performances are difficult to determine. John Evelyn refers to attending performances on 15th and 22nd December but these may have been of the spoken part of the play only without the participation of the musicians.⁵⁶ The masque was finally performed on Shrove Monday and Tuesday, 15th and 16th February 1675 in the Hall Theatre, which had been

⁵³ Brenet (1906) p. 414 quoting from F-Pn Ms. Fr. 21945, the French equivalent of the Stationers' Registers.

⁵⁴ Bruce (2014) p. ???

⁵⁵ Ashbee (1986) Vol. 1 p. 146. Source Lord Chamberlain. Vol. 745, pp. 547, 548

⁵⁶ Evelyn (1955) vol.iv p49-51.

specially renovated for the occasion.⁵⁷ There may have been further performances in April, May or June.

Calisto is not really a masque, but a play with a musical introduction and *intermedii* or interludes. Because of a literary feud between the poet laureate, John Dryden, and the Earl of Rochester,⁵⁸ Dryden was passed over and the commission given to John Crowne. The roles in the play itself were taken by amateurs, including the daughters of the Duke of York, Princess Mary and Princess Anne; other members of the court also took part as dancers and attendants. The *intermedii* featured professional singers from the Chapel Royal, the King's Private Musick and the public stage.

The Dramatis personae

Calisto, a chaste and favourite Nymph of Diana, beloved of Jupiter	Lady Mary (aged 13)
Nyphe, a chaste young Nymph, friend to Calisto	Lady Anne (aged 10)
Jupiter	Lady Henrietta Wentworth ⁵⁹
Juno	Lady Anne Fitzroy, Countess of Sussex (aged 14) ⁶⁰
Diana	Margaret Blagg
Psecas	Lady Mary Mordaunt
Mercury	Sarah Jennings (Later Duchess of Marlborough) ⁶¹

In the myth on which the play is based Jupiter falls in love with Calisto, a nymph of Diana. He rapes her and then turns her into a bear. Calisto later escapes death at the hand of her son by being transformed into a star. Crowne altered the story extensively to make it suitable for the young princesses. Jupiter is unsuccessful in his attempts on Calisto's virtue, comes to her rescue when she is accused of misconduct by Juno and finally offers her and her sister sovereignty of a star.

The play is very long; there are 5 acts, with singing and dancing only in the prologue, epilogue and *intermedii*. The *intermedii* comprised pastoral scenes and dances which have no connection with the play. The Prologue – as was customary – pays homage to King Charles and his consort Catherine of Braganza. Thames, attended by Peace, Plenty, Europe, Asia, Africa and America is alarmed by the distress of Europe's nymphs, but is reassured by the Genius of England who sends two heroes to their aid. All involved are about to offer homage to Fame, but seeing the King and Queen pay homage to them instead. Several sarabands with castanets were danced by

⁵⁷ Boswell (1932) p.200-203.

⁵⁸ John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1648-1680) was a poet noted for his dissolute life style and often obscene verse.

⁵⁹ She later became mistress to James, Duke of Monmouth, Charles II's eldest illegitimate child, who also took part.

⁶⁰ Illegitimate daughter of Charles II and Lady Castelmaine – married to the Earl of Sussex.

⁶¹ Duchess of Marlborough friend and confidante of princess, later Queen Anne.

the two princesses and other ladies in the Prologue.⁶² Duke of Monmouth danced a minuet with several other gentlemen, and also appeared as a hero “crown’d with a “Mural Crown”⁶³.

The music

The music was composed by Nicholas Staggins. He was sworn Master of the King’s Music and leader of the Band of Violins on 29th January, 1674/5 – two weeks before the performance took place, but may have been acting in that capacity for several months previously. The instrumental music probably consisted of dances and accompaniments for the songs although there may have been “symphonies” during the prologue and between the acts. The vocal music was performed by professional singers.

What little survives of the music is found in the manuscript **GB-LblMs. Add. 19759**. This is a collection of 17th century songs including items by Purcell, Blow, Pelham Humphreys, Locke and others mostly in the form of a single treble clef vocal line.

At the beginning of the manuscript there is a note

**Charles Campelman his book
June y^e 9 1681
God give him grace 1682**

The pieces from **Calisto** are found on folios 18 and 18^v. There is a note “Calisto/Catch” in pencil above first song.

f.18

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Augusta is inclined to fears | Prologue |
| 2. | Poor Corydon, thy flame remove | First Intermedio |
| 3. | Kind lovers, love on | First Intermedio |
| 4. | Alas poor Shepherd | Second Intermedio |

f.18v

- | | | |
|----|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | No longer complaine | Third Intermedio |
| 2. | Joy Shepherds joy | Fourth Intermedio |
| 3. | Since all our grief | Fourth Intermedio |

At the end “Mr. Stagings”

The costumes

Some of the players were visible to the audience, probably in a space set at the back of the stage. The rest may have been concealed behind the scenes where there was a “floor with seuerall degrees for y^e Musicke”. Lavish costumes of “taffety” and “avinnion” - thin silk, like sarcenet, possibly made in Avignon - were provided for twenty of the violinists, the four

⁶² Holman (1999) p. 15.

⁶³ Mural crown – crown given to Roman soldiers who first scaled a wall in a seige.

guitarists, two of the recorders players, four trumpeters and a drummer. The princely sum of £18. 2s. 0d was spent on costumes for the guitarists -

“Kittars” (4)

“ffor making a taffety gowne Laced with gawes downe before round the sleeves and neck and bottome with all small ffurniture	10. 0
making gilt leather cap with feathers	4. 0
gilt leather	4. 0
for making 3 more	2. 14. 0
18 ells white taffeta	9. 18. 0
16 yds. broad gold gauze	1. 12. 0
2 yds. broad gold gauze	4. 0
Gytar Master 14 falls (of feathers of severall collours	2. 16. 0

	18. 2. 0

Exactly what the guitarists played is unclear; in particular it is not clear whether they formed part of the regular continuo group or whether they were a separate act accompanying the more popular dance numbers.

Encounter with Aulus Apronius

In December 1676 Corbetta petitioned for leave of absence from his post to travel to France. The pass, which is dated 13th December 1676, reads

Pass for Francesco Corbetti, one of the Italian musicians of the King’s Bedchamber, who is going to France and other foreign parts.⁶⁴

It must have been during this period of absence from the English Court that the incident described by Adam Ebert aka Aulus Apronius took place.

The town of Turin has a cathedral of St. John. At Christmas when the young Duke Victor Amadeus II was on the throne, he came out and attended a celebratory supper with his mother and aunt at which music for theorbos, lutes angeliques and guitars could be heard. But as such music is not very loud and unsuited to open spaces such as churches, it was performed before a small private assembly and the musical works adapted to suit the needs of the voices. The Pilgrim [Peregrinant - the author refers to himself as a pilgrim] was informed that the director was an Italian named Bertelli.

Recently the world-famous guitarist Corbetta, who taught all the Potentates of Europe, came here [to Turin] from England. But because he had the misfortune to break a fingernail (and with old folk these grow again very slowly) it was impossible for him to present himself at the festival with his consort, however much he wanted to. Every foreign musician who performed at court in Turin was given 500 Thlr. and Madame Royale wished to show her generosity by not withholding anything from Signor Corbetto. Corbetta complained bitterly that he had come from England with

⁶⁴Calendar (1860) Vol. XVIII, 1676 p.451 (which cites Home Office, Warrant Book I, p.331). [Pinnell, p.254/300].

great difficulty, and because he had invited people from Italy to come there [to Turin] to play in consort on his guarantee, he had to pay them afterwards out of his own pocket.

He had brought with him a daughter whose acquaintance we made, in order to persuade her to search amongst her Father's possessions for his personal Memoires about the courts he had visited. At a time when her father was bedridden. the Pilgrim gave to the aforementioned Signore a Louis d'Or [a gold coin] to secretly bring the materials to his home; when she reclaimed them he gave her another Pistolette [a smaller coin] for her own use. After his request was successful the "Liber Relationes ex parnasso di variis Europae eventibus" enjoyed no small part of it.⁶⁵

Victor Amadeus was born on the 14th May, 1666. In June 1675 at the age of nine he succeeded his father as Duke of Savoy. His mother, Marie Jeanne of Savoy, a distant cousin of Louis XIV and the second wife of Charles Emmanuel II of Savoy, known as Madame Royale, acted as Regent during his minority. In 1684 Victor Amadeus married Anne-Marie, the elder daughter of Madame d'Orleans, Henriette-Anne, the sister of the English king Charles II.

The passage affords a few interesting snippets of information. Most importantly from a musical point of view, it seems that Corbetta played with his nails; this may have been common practice on the baroque guitar. The well-known portrait of Pellegrini in his **Armoniosi concerti sopra la chitarra spagnuola** shows him with very long right-hand nails. On the other hand John Playford in **Musick's delight on the cithren** seems to imply that nails should be kept short.

Rest only your little finger on the belly of your cithren and so with your thumb and first finger and sometimes the second strike your strings, as is used on the gittar... and be sure you keep your nails short on the right hand.⁶⁶

In spite of the fact that Corbetta was unable to perform with his consort, it seems that he was actually paid, something which does not seem to have been made clear by previous biographers. It is also the only reference to his having a daughter; no further information about her has so far come to light.

Ebert was born in Frankfurt Oder in 1656, studied law at the University there and died in March 1735. **Reise-Beschreibung** was published under the pseudonym Aulus Apronius. There are two different editions, printed in 1723 and 1724. The earlier edition does not include the full account of Corbetta's visit to Turin with the reference to his Memoirs. The book purports to be an account of Ebert's own travels throughout Europe. It has been suggested that his memoirs are actually those of Corbetta himself which Ebert borrowed from the daughter⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ Adam Ebert aka Aulus Apronius - *Reise-Beschreibung* (Franco Porto, 1724). Under Theil – Reise nach Italien, p10-12.

⁶⁶ Playford (1660).

⁶⁷ The source of this misunderstanding seems to be a handwritten note on the flyleaf of the British Library's copy of *Anecdota sive historia arcana Europae* which reads "In the Bibliotheca Riuchiana it is stated that *Reise-Beschreibung* was not composed by Ebert". "Bibliotheca Riuchiana" refers to the "Bibliotheca Richiana" - books, manuscripts and other antiquarian materials gathered by the early 19th century Oriental linguist, Claudius James Rich. I am indebted to Chris Page for this information.

This seems to be based on a misunderstanding. The **Liber Relationes ex parnasso di variis Europae eventibus** dated 1683 mentioned at the end of the extract quoted above is a different work from **Reise-Beschreibung**. If Ebert did pirate any of Corbetta's memoirs it would have been in **Liber Relationes ex parnasso**. This is an alternative title for the work **Historia Arcana Europae** where there is a brief mention of Corbetta in the following hexameter verse:

**Fidibus illustris ille Corbetto Italus
Voce Mārgharithā Salicōla virgō Boniensis
Venetis tam famosa theatri vicere musas.**

**With the strings of his guitar that illustrious Italian, Corbetto,
By her voice Margharitha Salicola, the most famous maid of Bologna,
Surpassed the muses in the Venetian theatres.⁶⁸**

Margarita Salicola (fl. 1682 – 1706) was a famous opera singer of her time. She came from a family of musicians at the court of Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga, duke of Mantua and performed regularly at the San Giovanni Crisostomo Theatre in the 1680s. Ferdinando Carlo was the only child of Charles II, Duke of Mantua who had employed Corbetta in the early 1650s; he succeeded his father to the Dukedom in 1665. It is possible that Corbetta was acquainted with Margarita or at least with members of her family. There are apparently no other references to him by name in Ebert's work.

Ebert has been accused of plagiarism and it has been suggested that he could not have visited all the places mentioned in **Reise-Beschreibung**. However it is known that he visited England himself in 1678, buying books, making contact with the Royal Society and his account of his visit in **Reise-Beschreibung** is accurate and convincing.

Final years in England

In 1677 Corbetta was employed as guitar teacher to Lady (later Queen) Anne, the younger daughter of James II. The Establishment Book for the Household of James, Duke of York from Christmas 1677 lists payments to the following musicians

<i>Guytarr Master</i>	<i>Mr. Francisco Corbet</i>	<i>£100</i>
<i>Singing Master</i>	<i>Monsieur Robert</i>	<i>£50</i>
<i>Music Master</i>	<i>Mr. John Bannister</i>	<i>£70</i>
<i>Musitian</i>	<i>Mr. Thomas Greeting</i>	<i>£31. 04.00⁶⁹</i>

James had converted to Roman catholicism in 1672 which may explain why Corbetta was attached to his household rather than that of the King towards the end of his time in England.

In the same year Corbetta seems to have published another guitar book now missing. The Term Catalogue for the Michaelmas Term, 1677 includes the following entry –

⁶⁸ Ebert (1715) p.3.

⁶⁹ British Lib. Add. Ms.18958 – f.8v – Establishment Book for the Household of James, Duke of York from Christmas 1677 Ashbee (1986) vol.2, p. 121.

EASIE Lessons on the Guittar for young Practitioners; single, and some of two Parts. By Seignior Francisco. Printed for Jo. Carr in the *Middle Temple* lane. Price 3s 3d.⁷⁰

The Term Catalogue was a trade journal edited by John Starkey and Robert Clavell which claimed to be a “catalogue of books printed and published in London”. It was issued three times a year for the Hilary⁷¹, Easter and Michaelmas terms. John Carr (fl. 1672-95) was a bookseller, music printer and instrument seller who had a shop at Middle Temple Gate near that of John Playford the Elder. The book is also included in a list of “MUSICK Books sold by John Carr at the Middle Temple Gate included in Henry Playford’s “The Theater of Music. The Second Book”, printed in 1685⁷².

Corbetta may also have been a witness at a marriage which took place in the Queen’s Chapel at Somerset House on 19th May 1678. The entry reads as follows

No. 289 May the 19th 1678. In her Ma^{ties} Chappell Royall att Somersett-house, were joined in lawful Wedlock Gerom (Jerome) Servarie and Anne Chapman of St. Martin’s in the ffields in the presence of Howll & ffoster, Peter Novell, x ffracisque is marque, Will. Yarde, by me fr: James a St Bonaventure.⁷³

The comment “x ffracisque is marque” implies that he was unable to sign his name which seems unlikely unless he was by that time – at the age of about 63 - disabled in some way. James a St Bonaventure officiated at marriages between Sept. 29, 1673-May 30, 1678. Will Yarde appears as a witness several times. Somerset House, the residence of Charles II’s Portuguese queen, Catherine of Braganza, was the centre of Catholic life in England at the time.

During this same period a fine portrait of Corbetta was made by the French artist and engraver, Henri Gascar.⁷⁴ Corbetta’s obituary states that Charles II gave him “his portrait [presumably that of Charles himself rather than Corbetta] studded with diamonds, and a considerable pension”.

Corbetta returned to Paris towards the end of his life where he died some time before May 1681 when his obituary appeared in **Mercure galant**. He seems to have regretted not spending more time in the French capital.

Regret at leaving France having come to him too late, he made two or three journeys to Paris, where he was at pains to print several books of his works, as he had done previously in Flanders, Italy, and elsewhere. He finally returned to France, to signify by his death the regret he felt at not having spent all his life there.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Arber (1903) Vol. 1, p.291.

⁷¹ The second term (January-March) of the academic year at Oxford University so called because it begins on the first Sunday after the feast of St. Hilary of Tours celebrated on 14th January.

⁷² Playford (1685).

⁷³ Weale (1941) p. 28, No. 289

⁷⁴ A copy of the print is in the British Museum, no. 1902-10-11-2227.

⁷⁵ Mercure (1681).

It is noteworthy that **Mercure galant** suggests that Corbetta had works printed elsewhere as it is possible that he had a book printed in Spain rather earlier. A fitting epitaph, written by his pupil Remy Médard, is reproduced at the end of the obituary.

*Epitaphe de Francisque Corbet
Here lies the Amphion of our times,
Francisque, so rare a man,
Who made his guitar to speak
The very language of love*

*He won with his harmony,
The hearts of Princes and of Kings,
And many believed that a Genie
Took care to guide his fingers.*

*Passer-by, if you have not heard these marvels
Know that he should never have met his fate
And that he would have charmed Death herself
But alas! Unfortunately she hath not ears.*

De Visée, who presumably knew Corbetta personally, composed a moving Tombeau for him, included in his first guitar book, **Livre de guitarrre**, printed by Bonneüil in 1682. Sadly the exact date of Corbetta's death and his place of burial are unknown.

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