

On the fundamentals of battuto-pizzicato: alternative versions of guitar music by Angelo Michele Bartolotti in a manuscript source

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A large manuscript with guitar tablature has recently surfaced in the Biblioteca de Santa Cecilia in Rome (I-Rama-A-Ms. 4912), containing some 25 works from Angelo Michele Bartolotti's *Secondo libro* (c.1655), next to a few unknown works that are presumably also by this composer. In addition, there is a smaller number of works by Francesco Corbetta that are known from various printed books. In 2015 this manuscript was digitised by the library and made accessible online.¹

The manuscript comprises 238 pages, ruled with six staves each. On these staves tablatures have been written, by (at least) two different hands. The first of these (scribe A) has copied the works of Bartolotti and Corbetta. The manuscript is divided into sections arranged by key. At the start of a number of these sections, a tab is attached, a small strip of paper with the corresponding *alfabeto* letter on it, such as B, which in the *alfabeto* system of guitar notation denotes C major, D indicating A minor, + meaning E minor, etc. As some of the pages have become illegible, it is no longer possible to ascertain whether there were sections with music in other keys. For example, it seems very likely that there were also works in D minor (alfabeto E), presumably at the beginning of the manuscript.² A considerable number of the pages have remained unused

and contain no music. It is impossible to tell whether the manuscript is still complete, and there may also have been pages, now lost, with music in other keys.

Most sections start with works by Bartolotti or Corbetta (see the table on my website)³, after which a number of pages follow that were originally left blank, in order to leave room for more works in the same key. In a number of cases, these blank pages have later been inscribed with newer compositions, written in 'hand B'. It partly concerns works that have been attributed here to a certain Domenico Rainer.⁴ This music has characteristics of the style of the early 18th century.

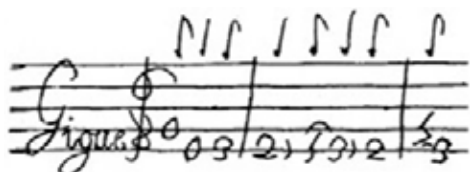
Corbetta and Bartolotti in Ms. 4912 and other manuscripts

Works by Corbetta were copied in a number of manuscripts, such as for example *Pieces de guitarrre de differends auteurs recueillis par Henry François de Gallot* (GB-Ob-Ms.Mus.Sch.C94), and *Pas-sacalles y Obras* (1732) by Santiago de Murcia. The manuscript versions are usually no improvement, with mistakes and crude simplifications etc.

Bartolotti's works were copied only relatively seldom. A substantial number of his works can be found in I-Moe-Mus.E.323 and F.1528, and in the Gallot manuscript. In the latter, there are often considerable differences when compared to the printed version, such as missing bars, and simplified textures and rhythms. Presumably the inconvenient aspects of transcribing from Italian to French tablature played a role in this. The *Secondo libro*, for instance, was written in mixed Italian *alfabeto*-tablature, whereas in the versions from the Gallot manuscript there is no *alfabeto* and those chords are written out in tablature. Bartolotti's advanced notation of *battuto* (see the *colpi* in Example 1) was not adopted by Gallot either. Nevertheless, it gives the impression that the music was copied from the printed book, be it without much understanding of the subtleties that we find in the original (Italian) tablature.

The Gallot manuscript also contains a few pieces by Bartolotti that are not known from the two printed books by this composer. It is quite possible that these would be later works which circulated

because the combination of a descending slur and a trill would have been less clear, as this compound ornament (involving frets 3 and 2) would fall across the bar line. The next ornament is the same, but with no bar line involved. It may be that there was a draft version, which had subsequently been made to fit, when preparing the book to be printed. It is not the kind of adaptation one would easily make when copying from a printed book.



Example 2a: *Secondo libro* p. 7, Gigue in E minor, opening



Example 2b: The same passage in Ms. 4912 p. 56



Transcriptions of the opening of the Gigue in E minor, from
a) *Secondo libro*, b) Ms. 4912

Alfabeto in tablature

In the Corrente in D major (Ms. 4912 p. 113) quite surprisingly the *alfabeto* letter ‘S’ appears, or actually S2, instead of M2+ (*Secondo libro*, p. 46). This is a transposition of chord M+, in second position, which is used here to represent E minor. In the Passacagli in A minor too, (Ms. 4912, p. 150) the letter S is used instead of M2+. In the Passacagli in D minor (Ms. 4912 p. 140–46) we find chord S2, while this chord is written in four voices in tablature in the *Secondo libro*, on p. 78.

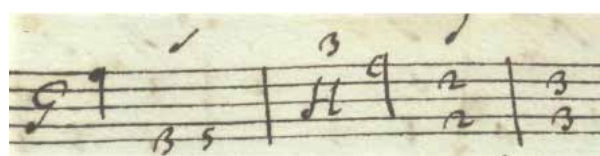
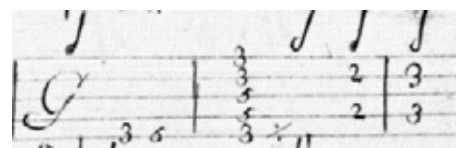
Alfabeto S does not appear at all in the *Primo* and *Secondo libro*, and M2+ is the denomination that is always used in both the music and the *alfabeto* chord charts from Bartolotti’s printed books.⁸ This suggests that letter S had also been used in the (supposed) source, possibly an autograph manuscript, from which these works were copied. Or, if it nevertheless was copied from the *Secondo libro*, that copyist was reverting to an earlier *alfabeto* tradition.

Michele Angelo Bartolotti (c.1615–c.1682) grew up in a time when guitar music was predominantly notated in *alfabeto*. In the middle part of the 17th century, chord S was used in two different ways, representing either a major or a minor chord. In a first draft version of his guitar works, he might—out of habit—have used S2. Later, when preparing the music to be printed, he could have changed this to M+, in order to avoid confusion about minor or major.⁹

In contrast, the chord letter S is completely absent from Corbetta’s works included in Ms. 4912, probably because it did not occur in the originals from which they were copied. Moreover, chord M3

(for F major) appears both in the Alemanda in G minor in Corbetta’s *Varii Capricci* from 1643 (p. 47), and on p. 12 in Ms. 4912.¹⁰ In this Alemanda there are a number of other minor differences compared to the version from Ms. 4912—principally the replacement of *alfabeto* H3 by chord B, which are both C major chords. In most cases chord B is easier to reach in its context, even though the treble (the top note of the chord) will be changed into e’ instead of g’. Even if this does not make the melody line any better, it nevertheless gives the impression that the copyist had a good understanding of guitar technique.

The Sarabanda in F major (Example 3b) is different from the version in Corbetta’s *Varii scherzi di sonate* (1648, p. 50) in further ways; see Example 3:



Example 3: Passage from Sarabanda in F,
above: *Varii Scherzi* (1648), p. 50; below: Ms. 4912 p. 90

Apart from some repeats of short phrases that appear in his 1648 book, but not in Ms. 4912,¹¹ more *alfabeto* chords are used. This is particularly interesting as some of these chords were written out in full in tablature in 1648.¹² Two specific harmonies, chord H3 in bar 10,¹³ and chord N5 in bar 26, appear in a more dissonant form. It has been suggested that the different chord shapes in the 1648 version are there to facilitate the fingering for ornaments.¹⁴ Be that as it may, scribe A seems not to have understood this (or didn’t agree) and he may have had reasons to make use of standard *alfabeto* chords instead, without these obvious dissonances (Example 3).

On the other hand, if we suppose that this Sarabanda was copied from an earlier version (probably also made by Corbetta), and not from the *Varii scherzi*, this could explain why the versions from the Gallot manuscript and Ms. 4912 are largely identical, and both lacking the dissonant chords and the brief repeats that are written out in 1648. If this were indeed the case, Corbetta could have changed his mind about the notation of some of the chords, and the dissonant version from 1648 could then be seen as an afterthought, as the chord shape had to be altered to be able to play a trill on the first course, for which the chord should be re-fingered.¹⁵ When writing these unusually dissonant chords, the composer may still have had the original shape of the five-part *alfabeto* chord in mind, and then changed it to the variant form, by adapting the fingering (the tablature figures) but not reducing the number of courses involved in the barre.

Works attributable to Bartolotti or Corbetta

In Ms. 4912 there is one unidentified Alemanda in A minor (on pp. 28–9), which has many features of the style of Bartolotti’s *Secondo libro*. Extended campanella passage work, such as in bars 3–4, without any displaced notes, together with a hint of the innovative French lute style (the so-called *stile brisé*)¹⁶ are relatively rare in the works of other contemporary guitar composers. We could



Example 4: Sarabanda in G major Ms. 4912, p. 130.

speculate that this piece too had been present in the source from which the works by Bartolotti were copied. In Ms. 4912 it appears after the Preludio (p. 26), which is on p. 54 of the printed book. There could be several possible reasons why it was not included in the *Secondo libro*.

In the Sarabanda in G major on p. 130 (Example 4 above), which may also be by Bartolotti, there are stroke signs placed on the fourth line of the tablature staff, indicating that the fifth course should be left out of the strum.¹⁷ This is typical of the system of notation which appeared probably for the first time in Bartolotti's *Secondo libro*, possibly the only printed source in which it was used. In that book there are many *alfabeto* chords, originally in five parts, which are reduced to four, or even three parts, by a stroke sign placed on the fourth or third line of the tablature system. It is very likely that this particular Sarabanda was copied by someone with close knowledge of Bartolotti's work.

Also in Corbetta's Prelude and Allemande in F major (Ms. 4912, pp. 92 and 94 / *La guitare royale*, p. 22) there are stroke signs on lines other than the fifth (of the tablature staff). Here they are—correctly, if compared to the original in French tablature—indicated on the fourth course, now making use of Bartolotti's notational system for battuto chords. It raises the question of whether these two pieces from Corbetta's 1671 book were transcribed from French to Italian tablature, or whether they could have been copied (verbatim) from another (pre-1671?) source, possibly also by Corbetta, in Italian tablature.

Similarly, the Sarabanda in B minor (p. 134), which may have been composed by Corbetta,¹⁸ has stroke signs placed on the third line. In the Allemande in B minor (p. 136), in bar 4, there is a descending campanella scale with a displaced note g (the open third course) instead of using the g⁷ on the fifth fret of the high octave string of the fourth course. This is something we never find in the (printed) works of Bartolotti.¹⁹

Bartolotti's Alemanda and Corrente in D major

In these two pieces, the differences are particularly apparent with respect to the battuto chords. Bartolotti probably used the conventional stringing with two bourdons, and therefore it would make a fundamental difference for the chord inversions whether we strike five courses or four, whereas with the French tuning this would not be the case. While at the beginning of the Alemanda (Example 5 below) we find four-part chords in Ms. 4912—so, in root position, which certainly makes sense here—in the *Libro secondo* those same chords have stroke signs over all five courses. Although this could have been a matter of deliberate choice, we might also assume that on many occasions Bartolotti was not very precise in the use of his new method of battuto notation.

In the *Libro secondo* (p. 49), in bars 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 18, there are strummed chords that do not appear in Ms. 4912 (p. 110). Those in bars 5, 9, 11, 12, and 18 in particular obscure the voice leading of the underlying counterpoint, as the treble voice will often not be the same as the highest sounding notes of the battuto chords. The same applies for bars 18–20 of the Courante (*Secondo libro*, p. 46; Ms. 4912, p. 112).

In bar 5 of the Alemanda, the manuscript version gives more clarity in the treble melody. The middle voice goes down to a[#], and the treble has a characteristic descending motif f[#]–f[#]–e', which is repeated a fourth higher in bar 6 (b⁷–b⁷–a⁷). In the printed book, this motif is somewhat obscured by the strummed chords. The two-part writing in bar 9, with the first melody note c[#] (Ms. 4912) and the repeated a's on the third course clarifying the counterpoint, gives vital information that is lacking with the strummed chord from the *Secondo libro*. The bass line g[#]–a–C[#], which is obscured by the battuto chord in the *Secondo libro*, adds much interest to this fragment. In a similar vein, the two-part writing in bars 11 and 12 of the manuscript gives a straightforward picture of the voice leading, while with the strummed chords from the *Secondo libro* this will not be clear.

This musical score is for guitar, written in treble and bass staves. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score consists of 11 measures, grouped into six systems. Measures 1-2 are a full system. Measures 3-4 are a system with a measure rest at the beginning of measure 3. Measures 5-6 are a system with a measure rest at the beginning of measure 5. Measures 7-8 are a system with a measure rest at the beginning of measure 7. Measures 9-10 are a system with a measure rest at the beginning of measure 9. Measure 11 is a single system. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The bass staff often plays chords or sustained notes while the treble staff plays more active lines.

continued on p. 37

Example 5: Transcriptions of the Allemande in D major. Upper stave *Libro Secondo* p. 49, lower stave Ms. 4912 p. 110

Questions regarding the chronology

While most of Bartolotti's works seem to have been copied almost verbatim from the *Secondo libro*, in the Alemanda and Corrente in D major from Ms. 4912 we find textures with a predominantly lute-like pizzicato character, whereas in the *Secondo libro* these same passages are in a more pronounced battuto-pizzicato style.

This raises the question of whether the versions from Ms. 4912 could be later (post c.1655) elaborations of pieces from the *Secondo libro*, or vice versa. Evidently, in some spots the tablatures from Ms. 4912 give a clearer picture of the voice leading from the underlying counterpoint, which would not always be obvious with the strummed chords from the printed book. Although one might be inclined to think that pizzicato always was a step forward when coming from the simpler battuto style, the opposite could as well

be true: it is perfectly conceivable that in the *Libro secondo* we can recognise a development that would point to a further shaping of the very particular post-1650 battuto-pizzicato style, in which strummed chords are applied to give more energy to the music.

Even though the more ambiguous presentation of the counterpoint from the *Secondo libro* could be seen as supporting the idea that the Alemanda in D major from Ms. 4912 might be a later, more sophisticated, version, we should also bear in mind that this mixed style of writing had emerged only recently, and that it was still being perfected by composers such as Corbetta and Bartolotti.

Obviously, in Bartolotti's *Secondo libro* the use of battuto chords was often not prompted by technical necessity. In the more complex counterpoint of some of his dances (in several of the French courantes, and in the gigue in particular) the composer, himself a lutenist, had demonstrated that he was perfectly able to write

in a guitaristic equivalent of lute style, which is characterised by a predominant use of pizzicato, almost completely void of strummed chords. At the same time, other dances (such as some of the sarabandas) are loaded with battuto chords. This discrepancy suggests that in some occasions Bartolotti opted for a more explicit battuto-pizzicato approach, by making use of well-placed strummed chords that mostly appear on metrical points of gravity, (but sometimes also—apparently deliberately—otherwise).

With guitar music, a composer always had the choice between two different modes of writing. In this respect, a comparison with Bartolotti's *Libro primo* (1640) can be revealing. In that book sometimes the abundant use of *alfabeto* chords seems to hamper the musical flow, while in his second book the (now more sparse) battuto chords often fit better into the musical phrases. And also the position of both the bass and treble is taken more into consideration, in three- and four-part chord progressions.

Against the view that the Alemanda and Corrente from Ms. 4912 would be earlier versions, it could be argued that the manuscript also includes later works by Corbetta, in particular the Prelude and Allemande in F major from *La guitare royale* (1671). However, these two works could have been inserted at a later stage, at a time when scribe A's attention might have shifted to other music than that from Bartolotti's *Secondo libro*.

Ms. 4912 and scribe A

This brings us to the question of why scribe A may have created this manuscript. Was it just a collection of interesting pieces, intended for personal use? The division of the manuscript into groups of works in the same key, with each section beginning with compositions by Bartolotti, suggests otherwise. In this regard there are only a few exceptions. At the beginning of the first part that has remained legible (with works in G minor, starting on p. 12) there are only two pieces by Corbetta. However, it seems likely that these were preceded by more compositions (no longer legible) in this same key, and it is quite possible that those were works by Bartolotti too. Further on, there is a section with a few pieces in F major by Corbetta. However, music in this key does not appear at all in Bartolotti's *Secondo libro*, and these pages may have been left blank initially. The same applies to the section with works in B minor, where scribe A has only copied two compositions that are possibly by Corbetta.

So it appears to have been designed as a scrapbook, containing a large number of pieces from the *Secondo libro*, and with plenty of room to add more. We can assume that many of the 150-odd works from that book would have been present in one or more personal manuscripts, to serve as examples in the process of engraving. Considering the exceptional quality of handwriting A, virtually without errors or erasures, and the highly interesting alternative versions of the Allemande and Corrente in D major, we could speculate that it was copied directly from one of those—or even that scribe A might have been the composer himself.

We only have these two pieces in alternative versions and this poses the intriguing question of what other works would have looked like if they had been treated in the same way, with pizzicato counterpoint instead of battuto chords.

Notes

- 1 This document is not currently available for consultation on the Library's website. In agreement with Renato Meucci, the director of the library, the manuscript can be consulted temporarily via my website: <http://www.lexeisenhardt.com/file/A-Ms-4912.pdf>.
- 2 On p. 140 of Ms. 4912 there is a (shortened) version of the Passacaglia in D minor from the *Secondo libro* (p. 78). For ease of searching in this manuscript, the pagination of the PDF has been followed. As some 'blank' pages were omitted from the PDF, this is different from the actual foliation of the manuscript.
- 3 http://www.lexeisenhardt.com/file/Santa_Cecilia_manuscript.pdf#page=3
- 4 See the liner notes to my Rainer CD: <http://www.lexeisenhardt.com/file/Rainer.pdf>.
- 5 Prelude, (1671), p. 22: Ms. 4912 p. 92; Allemande, (1671), p. 22: Ms. 4012, p. 94.
- 6 See the Introduction by Claude Chauvel, to the Minkoff reprint edition (1984). The engraving of the plates had to be done in mirror writing.
- 7 See for example the Prelude in E minor, Ms. 4912, p. 48, and *Secondo libro*, p. 1.
- 8 Also the B major chord is different. *Alfabeto* R was used in the Sarabande on p. 3 from the *Secondo libro*, while in Ms. 4912 p. 51 this is H2.
- 9 Usually, *alfabeto* S2 was used for an E major chord in second position, while in Bartolotti's works in Ms. 4912 it represents E minor. Other books in which it is used for E (or Eb) minor are for example Carbonchi (1640 and 1643), Trombetti (1639), Pesori (c.1645), Marchetti (1660 and 1665), and Ricci (1677).
- 10 Although letter S (for an E major chord in second position) is included in the *alfabeto* chart from Corbetta's *Varii capricci* (1643), in his music in tablature it is not used at all, and it is replaced by M2. In his *alfabeto* chord chart however, M is used for a Eb major chord with a barre in the first position, and S for a major chord in the second position. Chord S was no longer included in the *alfabeto* chart from Corbetta's *Varii scherzi di sonate* (1648).
- 11 Which is in agreement with the version in French tablature from the Gallot manuscript (on f. 39^v).
- 12 See <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90100529?rk=42918;4#>
- 13 The bar line between bar 2 and 3 is missing in 1648.
- 14 See site: <https://monicahall2.files.wordpress.com/2019/03/corbetta-section-vi-part-6-i-rsc.as-ams.4912-1.pdf#page=3> (this is p. 318 of Hall's original file).
- 15 Ibid. On p. 4 Monica Hall remarks: 'Each of the two versions works well on its own terms. One can only speculate as to whether the manuscript version is a simplified version of the printed one or whether the printed one is a more elaborate version of an earlier one.'
- 16 Or actually the *stile luthé*, in which parts are played successively rather than simultaneously, spread out as irregularly broken chords, presumably often played with *inégalité*, to evade the gravitational pull of what would commonly be felt as metric accents.
- 17 Monica Hall has identified a possible concordance in GB-Ob. Ms.Mus.Sch. C94 on f. 9^r, to a Sarabande by 'A', which may be Bartolotti. See: <https://monicahall2.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/bartolotti-additional-section-july-2019.pdf#page=3>
- 18 This is what Monica Hall argues. See <https://monicahall2.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/corbetta-section-vi-part-6-i-rama-a-ms.4912.pdf#page=6>.
- 19 Compare my article 'Campanelle in seventeenth-century guitar music, bells and riddles,' www.lexeisenhardt.com/file/Campanelle.pdf.