

The Other Citterns, part 1.

My previous articles were about building the four-course instrument with either chromatic or diatonic fretting, its top string tuned to e', and a string length of around 43 - 45 cm. These two articles will outline other citterns for which only a small repertoire exists, but may be worth reconstructing. Part 1 will cover citterns built from pieces mostly in a similar manner to those already described; part 2 will cover carved citterns and their imitations.

A smaller four-course chromatic instrument with a string length around 35 - 37 cm and tuned a fourth higher could be used both for playing the English consort music at a high pitch and for some of Holborne's solo music which requires a long left-hand stretch. Playford's music for gittern needs a similarly-sized instrument but with four unison courses tuned a/f a/e a/f, top course at g' or a', and the little cittern now in the National Music Museum in Vermillion is a suitable model with a string length of 34.5 cm, and a drawing available from the



museum. One is shown of a similar size to a kit, both hanging on the wall in this engraving from his 1666 *'Musick's Delight on the Cithren'*. By the middle of the 17th century both cittern and treble cittern/gittern had lost their octave strings. James Talbot at the end of the century lists the cittern's strings as two double courses of iron wire and two of twisted brass. These are clearly shown in a detail from a painting by Edward Collier, *'Still life with a volume of Wither's*



“Emblems”, 1696, in Tate Britain. (Though otherwise there are some problems with the painting. The cittern has several characteristics of a bowed string instrument and seven pegs for the eight strings!) In Dutch paintings during the 17th century, octave strings disappear, firstly from the fourth course, then followed by the third. This may be due to lower quality in the iron wire available, or possibly a change in taste, preferring the robust sound without octaves over the silvery sound with them.

Guillaume Morlaye’s fourth book of tablature for the guitar, 1552, also contains nine short dances for a diatonic cittern which has the first, as well as the fourth fret absent, suggesting an earlier state and supporting Louis Grijp’s assertion that frets were added as needed. It seems simpler to rewrite the tablature rather than make a special instrument.

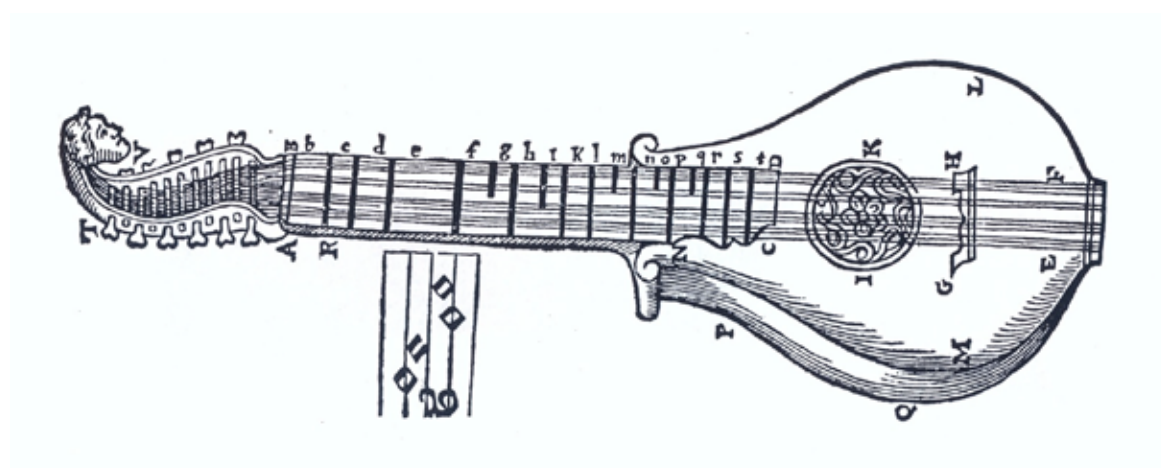
For the typical 6 course instrument of Brescia, tuned e’,d’,g,b,f,d, we only have Paolo Virchi’s 1574 ‘Primo Libro’ which also includes music for a 7 course cittern. The fingered 7th course at G is used in only one piece, and could possibly be of gold wire. This is quite valuable music, comparable with Holborne and Robinson’s, so merits available instruments, which could also be used in consort. The finest suitable models were made by his father Girolamo with examples in Oxford, Paris and Vienna, and a drawing is available from the Ashmolean museum in Oxford. These are mostly elaborate instruments. Simpler examples would be the Paolo Maggini in Vienna, or an extra peg added to the Gasparo da Salo cittern in Oxford which has a drawing available (usefully including the barring.) Both makers are now known primarily for their violins, and their citterns have one-piece backs, lightly arched laterally and

longitudinally, which suggests the possibility of using the back itself as the mould, perhaps combined with a simple outline of the front. The eleven pegs of the Gasparo must be for a five course cittern with octaves on its lowest course, representing an intermediate step between the four course English cittern and the 6 course Italian cittern without octaves. It also has a peg-box, whilst most Italian citterns have pegs inserted from above into a peg-block or head. Unfortunately the fingerboard has been replaced with 18 frets in equal temperament. It would



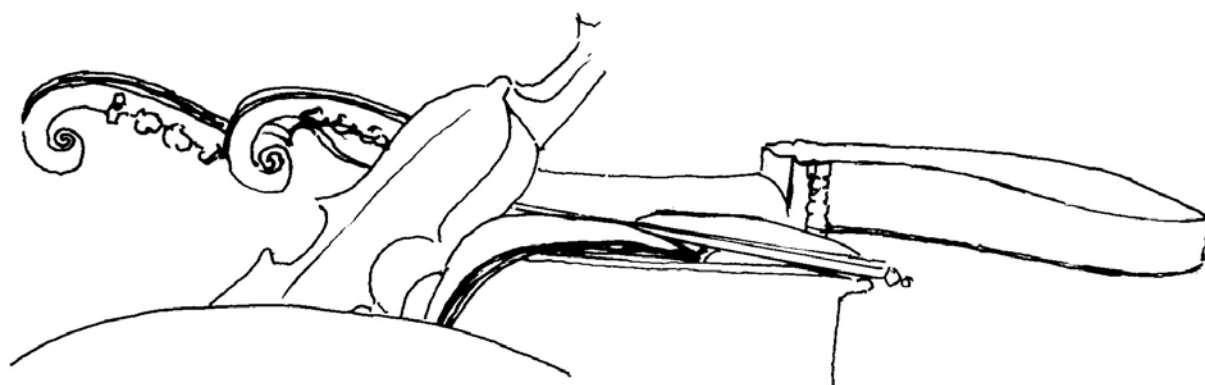
have had 19, with the 18th omitted, as other citterns, making the string length 2 or 3 mm shorter than the present 45.3 cm. Generally Brescian citterns are slightly longer than their northern European counterparts at the same pitch, due to their lack of octave strings. An exception is one of the Girolamo Virchis in Paris, string length 42.5 cm - Paolo's music contains some longish left-hand stretches.

(Another cittern with eleven pegs is the 1602 Abraham Tilman in Berlin. Here though, the likely fretting is for four courses, with a low octave added to the first



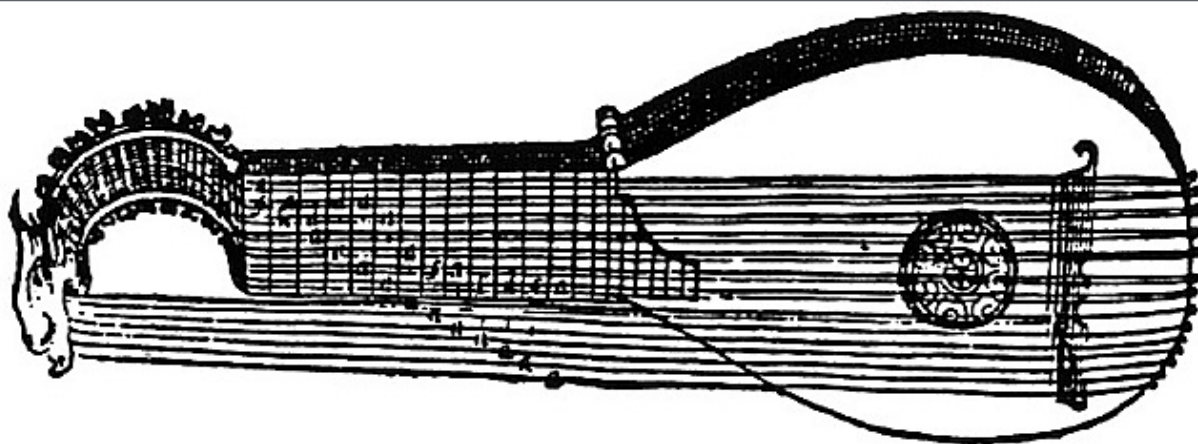
course - as is sometimes used today on the saz - and shown in the illustration above from Mersenne.)

A citara tiorbata is called for in Pietro Paolo Melii's Libro Quarto of 1616. It one of a consort consisting of three sizes of lute, double harp, bass viol, violin, flute and harpsichord. The tablature is headed *Citara Tiorbata. Cordatura del Signor Paolo Virgo*. The 7th course seems to be a G course, fingered as in Virchi's tablature, or possibly an open string tuned to Bb, the 8th is not used, a 9th could be at A or F. The body of the instrument must be the same size as the six course instruments, with an extended neck to carry the extra courses. No models remain. A missing painting by Evaristo Baschenis exists in the form of at least seven copies from his studio. Most are in private collections, but one is listed as



being in the Museo della Basilica, Gandino. The citara tiorbata is seen at the back of the picture, partly obscured by other instruments, and perhaps losing accuracy due to repeated copying. It also appears in a painting by Evaristo in the Accademia Carrara, Bergamo, but is even more obscured with almost nothing of the peg-boxes visible. None of the paintings seem to show the peg ends. This may be due to the copyists, but the one remaining ceterone (a subject of part 2) has apparently blind peg holes in its lower pegbox and perhaps originally in the upper. This would have been a continuation of the peg-head tradition. The bend in the back of the neck exists in all the paintings and in several is considerably more pronounced than here. Perhaps a tracing or a template was used by a copyist for positioning individual instruments and became misplaced, or the neck was shortened to tidy the composition. None of the reproductions that I have been able to find have been in colour, so parts of the instrument are hidden in shadow and are omitted in this outline tracing. The four pegs shown in the upper peg-box suggest that double courses are used for the basses, and that this particular instrument had ten courses. Given a 45 cm string length for the fingered string length, 65 cm should be ample for the basses.

Thomas Robinson's 'New Citharen Lessons' of 1609 contains in the message to the Reader, ... *'withall a third Citharen; (which invention was first begun by an Italian in Italy, but altered, and strings augmented by me.) Containing fourteene*



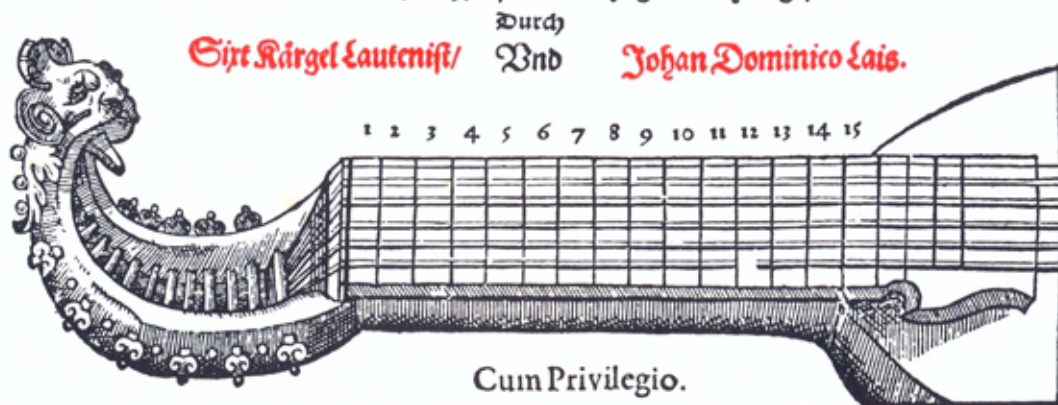
course of strings: most full, sweete and easie,...'

Robinson gives a tuning in tablature on the woodcut, confusingly distinguishing between '*unisons/diapasons/diapasons*' above the cittern, and '*These seven with frets are double strung/al the other single/twisted*' below. His seven quite worthwhile compositions for the instrument do not actually make much use of the open basses, or even the 7th course, and some of the left-hand stretches suggest that large hands would be required if the cittern was based on the usual 43-45 cm instrument. The tablature of course does not indicate the actual pitches used. (John Ward notes three instances where an 'f' is substituted for a 'c'.) Ephraim Segerman suggested a tuning: e'', d'', g', b' flat, f', d', g, f, e, d, C, B flat, A, G. I would prefer a tuning a fifth lower, top string at a', matching the size of the contemporary treble cittern for which some of Robinson and Holborne's music seems to have been written. String lengths of 35-36 cm and 55-56 cm should fit.

Sixt Kargel & Johan Domenico Lais's '*Toppel Cythar*' of 1575 has a total of 63 pieces in Italian tablature. The cittern and its tuning are unlike any others, and there seem to be none in contemporary paintings. The tuning is 'toppel' - double - consisting of three quarters of each of two citterns - e', d', g(+g'?) and d(+d'?), g + G, b + B. The instrument is '*Lautengemasse*' in that uniquely the top course is single, there is no cut-away to the neck apparent on the title page, and the little shown of the body has a lute-like outline. Like the first course, the octave strings are single, so that the usual cittern's doubled strings must be replaced by harpsichord-like loops, and perhaps a fixed bridge like a lute or orpharion. Its cittern character remains, presumably, in its wire stringing, the raised fingerboard and nineteen frets.

Zoppel Synthar.
**NOVA EAQVE ARTIFICIOSA RA-
 TIO LVDENDAE CYTHARAE, QVAM COMPI-
 LATORES DVPLAM CYTHARAM VOCANT: ALIQVOT
 ELEGANTISSIMIS, ITALICIS, GERMANICIS, ET GALLICIS
 cantionibus & saltationibus, exempli vice ornata.**

**Neue/ Künstliche Tabulatur/ auf die Lautengemäße Zoppel
 Synthar mit sechs Söhren/ von etlichen Italiänischen/ Deutschen vnd Fran-
 zösischen Libern vnd Tansen: baldes für sich selbs vollkommenlich/ vnd auch zu andern
 Instrumenten dinstlich zuspilen vnd zugebrauchen: gestellet**



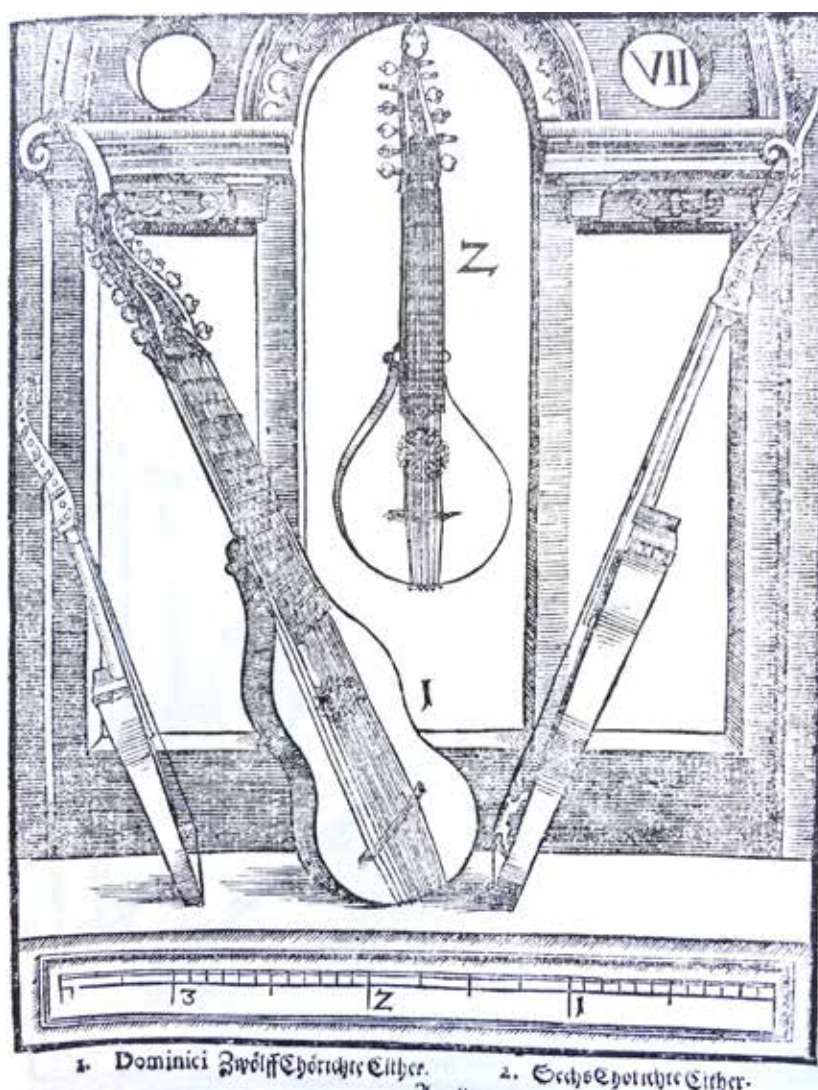
Bei Bernhart Jobin zu Strasburg/ Anno M. D. lxxviij.

The only relevant paintings date from the following century. An ‘Allegory of Hearing’ by Jan van Kessel, private collection, shows part of a cittern with a lute outline and bridge. A painting by Cornelis Bega, 1662, Staatliche Museen Preusscher Kulterbesitz, Berlin, detail, has two views of a lute-like cittern - the one in the background showing the cut-away neck. Bega was from a rich family in Haarlem, which enabled him to spend time travelling in Switzerland and Germany where he may have seen the instrument depicted. It seems to be



developed from that of Kargel and Lais. The back appears flatter than a lute or

mandolin back, and comparatively lower towards the end clasp. It should be a reasonably accurate depiction judging by comparison with Bega's painting of a usual 9 string Dutch cittern in '*Cittern Player (Allegory of Hearing)*', the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Music Department. Reconstruction of the earlier instrument should be straightforward. perhaps using lute-like unisons on the 3rd and 4th courses, octaves on the lowest, with a string length of 43 - 45 cm. The tablature has been published by Minkoff, and may be still available.



Praetorius' Dominici cittern may not have existed, and been a hearsay conflation of ceterone and orpharion, although another guitar outline is shown in Jan Massijs' '*Music-making Company*' or '*The Joyful Reunion*' in Stockholm National Museum. The latter seems to be an incorrectly painted constructional variant of the usual cittern. No music exists - or other mentions - for Praetorius' Dominici cittern.