

# THE BAROQUE GUITAR IN FRANCE

## AND ITS TWO MAIN FIGURES:

### ROBERT DE VISÉE & FRANÇOIS CAMPION

An article published in the Michaelsteiner Konferenzberichte, band 66, following the lecture given in Nov. 2001 at the 22. Musikinstrumentenbau-Symposium, "Gitarre und Zister - Bauweise, Spieltechnik und Geschichte bis 1800"

Gérard REBOURS © 2001, revision 2019

The baroque guitar in France is a wide-ranging subject, and although theses and dissertations have already been written about it, much still remains to be said. The following is merely a synthesis of what seems to have been the course of the instrument in France, from the 1600s to the end of the eighteenth century.

The four-course "Renaissance guitar" was quite well developed in France in the mid-sixteenth century, where it had reached a very high musical level, often requiring quite a skilled playing technique. But, astonishingly enough, there does not seem to be a link, in France, between this four-course guitar and the five-course instrument, the so called "baroque guitar". In fact the latter does not appear to be a continuation of its predecessor: it is like an entirely new guitar, which continued to survive for around two centuries. And although this instrument's construction, stringing, technique and musical style often changed throughout these 180 or 200 years, it remained basically an instrument with five courses tuned: 4th-4th-3rd-4th.

Below are the main points that will be developed during this article: some are peculiar to France, whereas some can also be observed in other countries.

1 - As far as we can rely on theorists, surviving music and tutors, literature and iconography, the five-course guitar was initially used only for strumming chords and, at the end of its life, was purely a plucked string instrument - therefore having a restricted technique at both ends, we could say. It is between the two, around 1700, that the widest range of its possibilities were used.

2 - During the first decades, let us say until 1675, although just one guitar was appropriate for solo playing or voice accompaniment, groups of two to eight or more guitar players, often associated with other instruments, were not unusual, especially in ballets and comedies. That trend seems to have disappeared by the end of the seventeenth century.

3 - During this first half of the seventeenth century, the guitar in France was mainly a Spanish and Italian sub-product. At the end of the century, it acquired a strong personality of its own, and in its turn influenced foreign guitar music and players.

### **The guitar style and its foreign connotation, according to theorists and composers.**

During the first decades of the seventeenth century, the guitar was known, played and made in France. Pierre Trichet asserted then that it was "very much in use in France and Italy"<sup>1</sup>; but guitar

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<sup>1</sup> "grandement usité parmi les François et Italiens", in *Traité des instruments*. Ms, c.1640, p.98.

music publishing did not begin as early in France as in Italy, so it is difficult to find a truly French musical publication or manuscript from that time.

In 1626 we find Luis de Briceño's *Metodo mui facilissimo*,<sup>2</sup> a book of chord strumming accompaniment only, whose title, introduction, explanations, music and lyrics are all in Spanish. Even the name of the French publisher, Pierre Ballard, becomes *Pedro Ballard*<sup>3</sup>.

In his 1629 third book of *Airs de Cour*<sup>4</sup>, Etienne Moulinié used the lute for twenty-six French airs, and one in Italian. He also used the guitar instead of the lute for accompanying twelve pieces: one in French, five in Italian, five in Spanish, one in Gascon. The guitar tablature (music example 1) shows chords only, which cannot be anything but strummed, whereas the lute plays in the usual lute style (music example 2).

Music example 1: guitar tablature in Etienne Moulinié, *Airs de Cour*

Music example 2: lute tablature in Etienne Moulinié, *Airs de Cour*

<sup>2</sup> Luis de Briceño, *Metodo Mui Facilissimo*... Paris 1626.

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in a Segovia edition, Robert de Visée became *Roberto de Viseo*...

<sup>4</sup> Etienne Moulinié, *Airs de Cour*, Paris 1629.

Marin Mersenne, in his 1636 *Harmonie Universelle*<sup>5</sup>, thoroughly describes guitar technique, but only in strumming style. Talking about the repertoire, he quotes four musicians: two Italian guitarists (Pietro Milioni and Giovanni Ambrosio Colonna) one Spanish - the "seigneur Louys" (de Briceño) - and the unknown Frenchman, Monsieur Martin<sup>6</sup>.

A few years later, in his *Traité des instruments de musique*, Pierre Trichet<sup>7</sup> names only two authors: Colonna and Briceño. He confirms that the fashion for guitar playing came from Spain, and protests against this Spanish playing style, calling it "weird and confused"; and he criticizes the fact that French people are now taking it up and are thus pushing their national noble lute - "the nicest musical instrument" - into the background. Furthermore, in the first aforementioned Moulinié's *Air de Cour* with guitar (*Dialogue*), a Spaniard is paying court to a French lady who rebuffs him because he stinks, he is poor, his clothes are dirty, and much more: that may be understood as a veiled way of disparaging and rejecting the Spanish guitar and its playing, and maybe Briceño himself!<sup>8</sup>

## The guitar style and its foreign connotation, in practice.

And indeed, when the guitar appears on stage, in ballets or at the theatre, it is very often associated with Spain: "the Spanish chaconne players" (including King Louis XIII) in the 1625 *Ballet des fées des forests de St Germain*; and, in other ballets of the first half of the century, a group of "grenadians" guitar players<sup>9</sup>, "a Spanish servant with a guitar"<sup>10</sup>, "three musicians with guitar and castanets"<sup>11</sup>, "a Spanish character singing with castanets accompanied by eight guitars"<sup>12</sup>, "a Spanish concert with harps and guitars"<sup>13</sup>, etc. Or else it is associated with exotic characters: "several Africans playing the guitar"<sup>14</sup>, "eight Moorish slaves playing the guitar"<sup>15</sup>, "characters from the cold northern countries"<sup>16</sup>, "an Egyptian (meaning gipsy) accompanied by guitars"<sup>17</sup> - without forgetting the Italian theatre character, "Scaramouche", inseparable from his guitar, who appears in several of Lully's works, sometimes played by guitarist Jean-Baptiste Lully himself, as in the 1661 *Ballet de l'Impatience*.

The situation was similar in the theatre: the guitar appeared in "charivaris", in comical and grotesque situations, associated with Spaniards or Italian characters like Harlequin, Brighella, Pantalone, the Ziarlatini and Salt'in banco<sup>18</sup>. And that was not all: the guitar players sometimes came down amongst the public, moved, sang, and danced. The instrument was, in fact, perfectly adapted to these situations: light, not too big, transportable, generally flat-backed and so more stable and easier to handle than the viola da gamba or the theorbo.<sup>19</sup> And the guitar players were doing more, as we can see on a famous drawing of the *Spanish guitar players* from the 1625 *Ballet des Fées des forests de Saint-Germain*: a tambourine, with metal discs, is hanging just under the

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<sup>5</sup> Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle*, Paris 1636, Reprint Paris 1963, p. 95-97.

<sup>6</sup> It may have been François Martin, who later wrote a guitar book, dated 1663; but Martin is a very common name in France: I have at least five unrelated musician friends called Martin, including three François Martin!

<sup>7</sup> op. cit., see footnote 1

<sup>8</sup> cf my article *Espagnol, je te supplie!* in the Articles section of the website [GerardRebours.com](http://GerardRebours.com)

<sup>9</sup> in *Grand Bal de la Douairiere de Billebahaut*, 1626.

<sup>10</sup> in *Ballet du Chateau de Bissestre*, 1632.

<sup>11</sup> in *Ballet des deux magiciens*, 1636.

<sup>12</sup> in *Ballet de la Raillerie*, 1659.

<sup>13</sup> in *Ballet des Muses*, 1666.

<sup>14</sup> in *Cadmus et Hermione*, 1674.

<sup>15</sup> in *Ballet Royal d'Alcidiane*, 1658.

<sup>16</sup> in *Grand Bal de la Douairiere de Billebahaut*, 1626.

<sup>17</sup> in *Ballet des Ballets*, 1671

<sup>18</sup> meaning Charlatans and Tumblers

<sup>19</sup> Although we can also see - still in the *Ballet des Fées* - theorbo players playing in standing position, as well as viola da gamba players holding their instrument upside down.

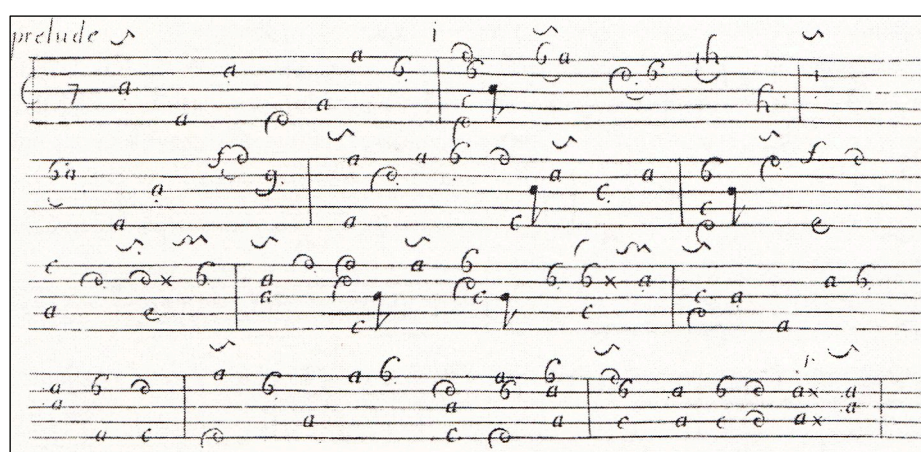


guitar, ready to be hit or shaken (Fig. 1). We can imagine it was fun and exciting, for both players and public, to play the guitar in a band, and walk, dance the sarabande, sing, and dress with extravagant costumes, probably making such body movements that Pierre Trichet described as "ridiculous and grotesque" and - to crown it all - striking a tambourine while strumming the guitar, or making it jingle by jumping or shaking one's body, and maybe tapping one's foot as well.



Fig. 1: Detail from the drawing *Spanish guitar players*, attributed to Daniel Rabel, c.1637.

But that was not to everyone's taste and, in his 1640 guitar chapter, Pierre Trichet also showed remarkable foresight by saying that probably, in the future, a new and better music would be produced on the guitar. Indeed, a few decades later, the scene had gradually changed: we more often find guitar music using a wider array of instrumental and musical techniques, like sections using mixed or alternate strumming and plucking, strummed chords with melodic movement, plus the lovely campanella effect (from a few notes to long passages), slurs on two or more notes, even on two strings at the same time, arpeggios, single and combined ornaments, vibrato, refined right-hand strummings, counterpoint, imitation, etc. Most of this appears, for example, in this short Prelude by Remi Médard :



Music example 3: Remi Médard, *Prelude*, from *Pieces de Guitarre*, Paris 1676, p. 1

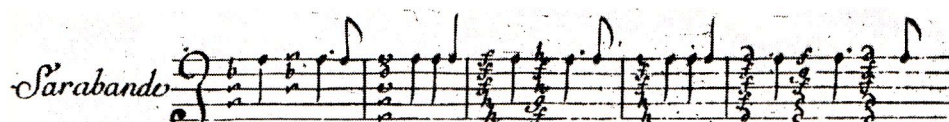
## The first seventeenth-century French guitar publications.

A French solo repertoire finally began to appear around 1660, and when we reach the end of the century and the beginning of the eighteenth, the scene is quite different: for various reasons - including fashion, politics, and also due to its high quality - French culture in its whole, and French

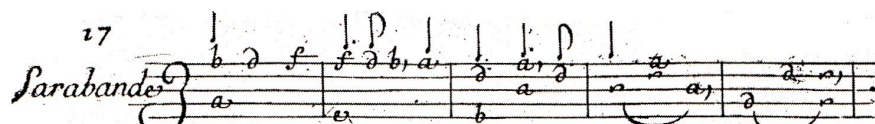
music and dance in particular, became the model to follow in Europe. For the guitar, the direction of influence was now reversed, and we find French guitar pieces (Médard, Robert de Visée, François Campion, Nicolas Derosier), as well as French dance and opera music settings in English, Austrian, Belgian, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish manuscripts or publications. And when we look at French manuscripts, such as the huge *Recueil d'airs de guitare*<sup>20</sup>, with its 350 pages containing 540 pieces, we see almost nothing typically Spanish or Italian: no Gaspar Sanz, no Francisco Guerau, no Ludovico Roncalli<sup>21</sup>, but lots of pieces by Robert de Visée, Gautier, Jean-Baptiste Lully, Jean-Philippe Rameau, François Couperin, Marin Marais, André Campra, French songs, dances and airs.

In the 1670s, under his French name "Francisque Corbet"<sup>22</sup>, Francesco Corbetta published his two famous books, *La Guitarre Royale*, dedicated to the kings of Great Britain (1671) and France (1674). But it seems difficult to consider these works as genuinely French music: they are music by an expert Italian guitarist who tries to write in the French style and, in my opinion, is somewhat awkward in the process. His influence may have encouraged French guitarists to publish their music, but I would rather not include his works amongst French guitar music.

In 1663, we find François Martin's printed book called *Pièces de Guitairre à battre et à pincer* (*Guitar pieces for strumming and plucking*). This is very interesting because it shows in two suites, in two groups of dances, the old and the new guitar playing fashions: strumming (but somewhat refined, sometimes with passing notes, slurs, ornaments; see music example 4) and plucking (without the slightest "batterie"; see music example 5).

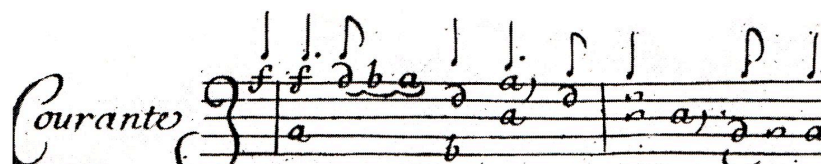


Music example 4: François Martin, *Sarabande* from *Pièces de guitairre à battre et à pincer*, 1663, p. 6



Music example 5: François Martin, *Sarabande* from *Pièces de guitairre à battre et à pincer*, 1663, p. 17

Although far from being of stunning inspiration, its music really displays features typical of French style, such as we will find twenty years later, approaching perfection in Robert de Visée's tablatures. Martin wrote, for example, a typically French courante (music example 6) whose beginning will also be found in Médard (music example 7) and De Visée's tablatures (music example 8).



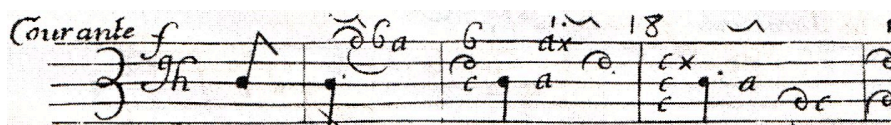
Music example 6: François Martin, *Courante* from *Pièces de guitairre à battre et à pincer*, 1663, p. 15

<sup>20</sup> reference F:Pn, Res. f 844, or other French manuscripts such as the eighty-page F:Pn, Vm7 675.

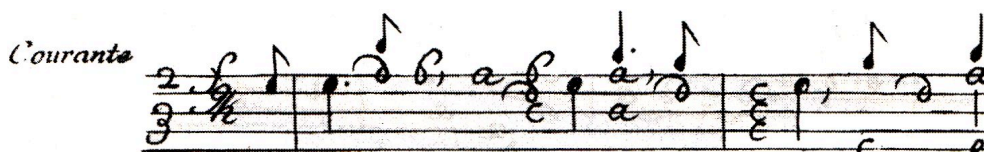
<sup>21</sup> only a few pieces by Angelo Mikielo and Francisque (Bartolotti and Corbetta, then active in France) and also Luigi appear in these French manuscripts.

<sup>22</sup> please note that from now on the French names are no longer being adapted as foreign names, but that the contrary happens.



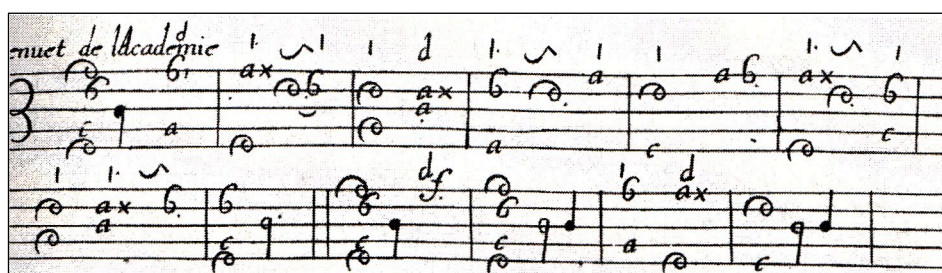


Music example 7: Remi Médard, Courante, from *Pieces de Guitarre*, Paris 1676, p. 18

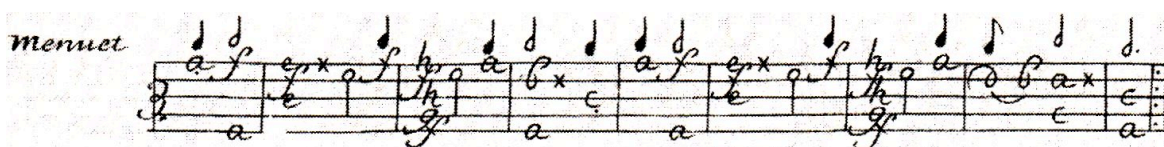


Music example 8: Robert de Visée, Courante, from *Livre de Guittarre*, Paris 1682, p. 20

Antoine Carré De Lagrange published a small book in 1670, and another one that is undated.<sup>23</sup> Remi Médard, who declares having studied with Corbetta, published one in 1676<sup>24</sup>, and Henri Grenerin's guitar music appeared in 1680.<sup>25</sup> There is a consistency amongst these three books: they are quite small, they contain music of varying quality, and although they still display some Italian influence, we notice that pure contemporary French music, with its typically simple and clear-cut, straightforward melody, harmony and rhythms, is the main influence. These menuets by Médard and Grenerin, for example, cannot be anything but French music. Grenerin's, by the way, quotes here the famous *Menuet pour les faunes et les dryades* - also known as *Menuet du Bourgeois Gentilhomme* - by Lully<sup>26</sup>:



Music example 9: Remi Médard, Menuet de l'Academie, from *Pieces de Guitarre*, Paris 1676, p. 9



Music example 10: Henri Grenerin, Menuet, from: *Livre de Guitarre*, Paris 1680, p. 35.

Of course, even with the background of the Spanish guitar influence and the sporadic presence of Corbetta, these musicians were also consistently in contact with music for lute, orchestra and harpsichord by French composers such as Jacques Gautier, Germain Pinel, Jacques Gallot, Guillaume Dufaut, Louis Couperin, Jean-Baptiste Lully, Jacques Champion de Chambonnières, or Jean-Nicolas Geoffroy, and that could not help but make a mark upon their music. However, perhaps because of its strummed-only background, the guitar still had some difficulties in being considered as a serious instrument. Thus Carré seems to be engaged in defending the guitar against its detractors, and Médard too. Probably to disassociate his music from the strumming style, he informs

<sup>23</sup> Antoine Carré De Lagrange, *Livre de Guitarre contenant plusieurs pièces*, Paris 1671, and *Livre de Pieces de Guitarre et de Musique*. [n.d.]

<sup>24</sup> Remi Médard, *Pieces de Guitarre*. Paris, 1676.

<sup>25</sup> Henri Grenerin, *Livre de Guitarre et autres pieces de musique*. Paris, 1680.

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Menuet pour les faunes et les dryades*, from *Les Amants Magnifiques*. Paris, 1670.

the reader: "I do warn those who enjoy noise that they will not find any satisfaction here"<sup>27</sup>; and indeed, he offers quite a refined set of compositions, as we have seen. Nevertheless, a few years later Michel de Pure made quite scathing comments about the guitar: "& concerning the guitar, I would quite easily do without it, and would only like to use it to rip off my ears or tear out my entrails. Be this said only in passing, and without any ill wish".<sup>28</sup>

## From Marquess to Princess, Prince and King.

These guitar books have different levels, too, as far as dedications are concerned: Carré dedicated his books to the Princesse Palatine and the Princesse d'Orange, Médard to the Marquise de Monferer, Grenerin to the Prince de Conty. And finally, Robert de Visée wrote his 1682 and 1686 guitar books for the king of France, Louis XIV, the "Sun King". Furthermore, he claims to take his inspiration from Lully: there cannot be a closer connection to the top personalities!

## Robert de Visée.

With de Visée, Spanish and Italian influences are definitively a thing of the past, and we now have a genuine French guitar music. On hearing it, the harpsichord player and musicologist Antoine Geoffroy-Dechaume exclaimed: "It sounds like Lully!"; and, more recently, somebody hearing me play some of his pieces associated it with Danglebert's harpsichord music<sup>29</sup>.

We know that de Visée was a high-ranking musician who taught the king and was called to play privately for him, and who used to perform at the court with the best musicians such as François Couperin, Philidor, Marin Marais or Antoine Forqueray. But his music was also quite successful outside the royal circle: he wrote at least 186 pieces - some now found only in manuscript form - and these pieces were copied several times afterwards. I have found so far 820 versions of the de Visée pieces, that is to say that each of his 186 original compositions exist in an average of 4,4 versions.

Of course, some exist in only one version, whereas others can reach 12, 16, or even 20 versions, such as a gavotte appearing in four guitar tablatures, three settings for treble and bass, four versions for lute, six for theorbo, and even two keyboard and one viola tablatures<sup>30</sup>. And that is not all: one of the manuscript guitar versions bears the title *j'aurai beau pleurer, hélas*<sup>31</sup> [*Sadly, however much I might weep*], that is the incipit of (now lost) words for singing this gavotte - a fact which means it was a very famous tune, as it was not always common practice for songs to be made from instrumental pieces<sup>32</sup>, and especially from guitar music. But the best acknowledgement came from great François Couperin who, deliberately or not, quoted this piece at the beginning of one of his gavottes (music example 11a) and went on with a shorter quotation from the 1682 A minor gavotte R 5.01<sup>33</sup> (music examples 11b and 11c).

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<sup>27</sup> "j'avertis ceux qui ayment le bruit qu'ils ne trouveront pas icy leur compte", in the foreword "A Tous les honnestes gens" op.cit., see footnote 24.

<sup>28</sup> "& pour la guitare, je m'en passeray bien, & ne m'en voudrois servir que pour m'arracher les oreilles ou pour me déchirer les entrailles. Cela soit dit en passant, & sans aucun malin vouloir" in Michel de Pure, in *Idées des Spectacles anciens et nouveaux*. Paris, 1668, p. 273.

<sup>29</sup> Jean Henry Danglebert (1628-1691) published his *Pieces de clavecin* in Paris in 1689, a few years after De Visée's *Pieces de Guittarre*.

<sup>30</sup> Precise references can be found in Gérard Rebours: *Robert de Visée. Thematic Index with a Table of Concordance*. The original printing (Ed. Symétrie, Lyon 2000) is now discontinued. A new version, the first of a three-volume set, is planned for 2020.

<sup>31</sup> in F: Pn Res F 844, p.153

<sup>32</sup> Lyrics were also added to the upper melodic line of orchestral pieces, and out of the original work context. See, for example, Lully's *Ouverture de la Grotte de Versailles*, an impressive five-part piece, arranged for just voice and continuo, with the title *Non, trop aimable Iris* (in F: Pn, Res. Vm2 85, p.73).

<sup>33</sup> References such as R 5.01 or R 5.04 refers to the classification of my *Thematic Index with a Table of Concordance* (see footnote 30)



Music example 11a: François Couperin, Gavotte, in *Pièces de Clavecin*, Paris 1713, 1er Ordre, p. 5

Music example 11b: Robert de Visée, Gavotte R 5.04.

Music example 11c: Robert de Visée, Gavotte R 5.01

The most interesting thing is that most of these multiple versions do not duplicate exactly the basic one, but offer various degrees of rhythmic, melodic, harmonic and ornamental differences. This is a real mine for stylistic study, and very rewarding to explore in depth, as I do experience almost daily. One might say that these discrepancies are simply due to the copyists' vagaries, but they are not: Robert de Visée himself quite often introduced these variants from one version to another, while the overall music remained the same<sup>34</sup>.

Music example 12: Robert de Visée, beginning of Sarabande R 3.13 in the 1682 and 1716 editions.

<sup>34</sup> For a deeper study on this subject, see my article "Robert de Visée's corpus: a stylistic tutor" in *Quarterly*, fall 2012 (the Lute Society of America) on the website [www.GerardRebours.com](http://www.GerardRebours.com)



## More observations on de Visée.

We could divide de Visée's music into two categories: first the idiomatic pieces, that perfectly fit the range of the instrument's potential and second, the rest of his music, which seems to have been initially designed for treble and bass, but in such a way that it could as well be performed on the guitar, the lute or the theorbo.

In the first category we find the *Preludes*, *Passacailles* and *Chaconnes*. Their average number of versions is naturally low, because a guitar prelude does not easily fit the theorbo, for example, and a theorbo prelude can very seldom be written on two staves for treble and bass. There are 24 preludes, and only two of them have the double instrumentation guitar/treble and bass. Oddly enough, there is none for the lute.

In the second category, we find the other pieces such as *Gavottes*, *Courantes*, *Allemandes*, *Gigues*... (see Fig. 2). Unlike the preludes, only 4 courantes out of 22 are found in single instrumentation, 6 gigues out of 27, etc. And that may be another reason for the widespread appeal of de Visée's works: first of all his music is very attractive, and furthermore it is composed in such a way that it can generally fit the guitar, the lute, the theorbo, the harpsichord, the viola, the accompanied flute or violin, and it very often have a clear-cut melody that easily invites to put lyrics on it. There are just a few other composers in this situation, and De Visée is quite unique in offering the same music, the same style, even the same pieces to play on the guitar, lute and theorbo, three instruments that have very different origins and paths.

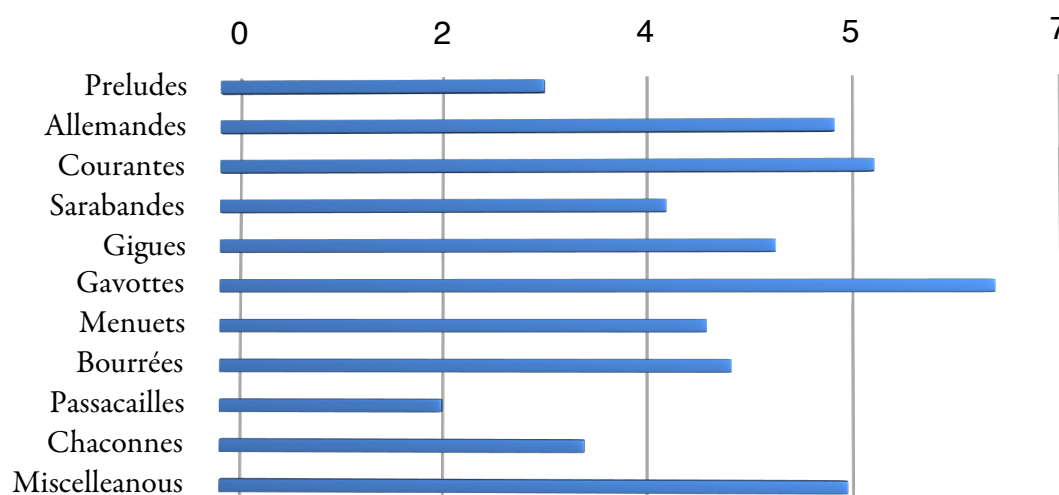


Fig. 2: Average version number for each type of piece in de Visée's work.

There seems to have been a great deal of activity around de Visée's music: having written a piece, he, or others, transposed it and adapted it for one or more other instruments. Then it was copied here and there, sometimes partially, sometimes distorted or just quoted, sometimes with words added. This is another similarity with Lully's music, in that it had the same kind of popularity. And it has seldom been emphasized that more than half of de Visée's work can be, and probably was intended to be, played on any solo instrument (lute, guitar, theorbo, harpsichord), or any treble instrument (violin, flute, oboe etc.) accompanied by any bass instrument (viola, violoncello, bassoon etc.) with any harmonic instrument playing the thorough bass (harpsichord, harp, guitar, lute, theorbo etc.). There are also a few manuscript offering settings for theorbo, guitar or viol duets. To consider de Visée as a guitar composer only is a very restricted and false opinion indeed!

## De Visée's "Greatest Hits".

The most popular of de Visée's pieces during his lifetime, seem to have been:

1. Gavotte R 5.04: 20 versions
2. Allemande R 1.21 *La Royale* and Gigue R 4.04: 16 versions
3. Gavotte R 5.16: 15 versions
4. Gavotte R 5.09: 13 versions
5. Allemande R 1.03 *La Conversation* and Courante R 2.05: 12 versions

The *Muzette en rondeau* (R 10.03) was also quite popular, with eleven versions, and also the Vilanelle (R 10.05) with ten versions. This last piece, in which we can find three complete "couplets" of his Passacaille R 8.01, is attributed only once to him: it had very quickly become out of copyright, could we say!

## De Visée's production.

There is something striking about Robert de Visée's production. He first published a guitar and music book in 1682, then another four years later and, according to Fétis, he published a third one in 1689<sup>35</sup>. Although Fétis seems to be the only person to have seen it, that is not so surprising as it was quite usual for a good composer, at that time, to issue music regularly<sup>36</sup>. But the third and last de Visée publication in existence today, called *Pieces de Theorbe et de Luth Mises en Partition, Dessus & Baße*, appeared exactly 30 years after the 1686 *Livre de pieces pour la Guittarre*, in 1716. What happened, then? Have books been lost? Did he become lazy, or ill? Of course there are manuscript pieces that prove he did not stop composing, but between 1686 and his death we find only 94 pieces. That gives an average of less than two pieces a year, and that is not much!

The other striking thing is that the music he offered after 1686 is just the same kind of music as he composed as a young man: preludes, allemandes, courantes and the other current dances (of an astonishing quality, fortunately) but no descriptive pieces, nothing longer than two pages, no music for events such as a won battle or the death of a duke, and no derivative dances such as canaries, passepieds or rigaudons. Only a handful of his compositions are not included in the basic suite form<sup>37</sup>, and very few examples such as the air *Que la bouteille a d'attraits* with its dense bass line, or this lovely *Muzette en Rondeau*, with its static harmony and bourdon effect, display an opening toward the 18th century tendencies:



<sup>35</sup> François Joseph Fétis, *Robert de Visée*, in *Biographie universelle des musiciens*. Paris 2/1865, p.365-366.

<sup>36</sup> Giovanni Battista Granata, Francesco Corbetta, Marin Marais, François Couperin, to name only a few, had their music issued every.

<sup>37</sup> Seven pieces, in which one relates to the gavotte style (*la Montfermeil Rondeau*, R 10.02) and another to the menuet (*Pastorale*, R 10.01).



Robert de Visée appears to have been quite conservative, musically speaking and more prone to retrospection than to innovation. To make a daring comparison I could mention B.B. King, the acclaimed Blues master who had got his own sound, his unique phrasing, his Gibson "Lucille" guitar, all of which people love. So he did not care about new music trends, new amps, new techniques such as sweeping, super-picking or tapping, and much less electronic gimmicks: he just played his own blues music perfectly, decade after decade. In the same way, the old Robert de Visée was offering the same kind of music as the young one. But he was also obviously at his best with it. And the kings, the court and the public loved it. So, why should he be trying something else?

## Robert de Visée versus François Campion.



Louis-Roland Trinquesse (c.1745- c.1800) (detail)

The Grove Dictionary indicates that de Visée "exploited the instrument to the fullest extent"<sup>38</sup>, but that statement seems more appropriate to the guitarist, composer and theorist François Campion (? - 1748). Paying the greatest attention to the right conduct of the main voices - the bass and the treble - Robert de Visée used campanellas, arpeggios, slurs, imitation, indeed all of the resources available to him on the guitar, but quite parsimoniously, avoiding all kind of italian-like extravagance. More than once, Campion indulged in technical fireworks. De Visée remained closely connected to Lully's style. Campion proved that he could, too, but he also displayed much more versatility. He was probably younger, he was on another track.

De Visée, as we have seen, composed 186 original pieces of a consistently high quality, over a period of about 50 years. Campion left us 121 compositions; 70 were published in the 1705 *Nouvelles découvertes Sur la Guitarre*, and the remainder was added afterwards, over the years, in a copy intended by testimony to the king's library<sup>39</sup>. The first 58 pieces he proposed in 1705 require the use of no less than seven scordaturas (or "Accord Nouveau") and only the last 12 pieces were designed for the standard tuning<sup>40</sup>: as de Visée and other guitarists used to do just the contrary, that reveals a somewhat provocative attitude!

<sup>38</sup> cf Robert de Visée, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 20, London 1980, p.14

<sup>39</sup> There is also his now lost *Premiers Principes en tablature pour les pièces de Guitare*, a title he himself put in his own list of works. He also added *Premier Oeuvre* on the title page. See François Campion, *Ouvrages de Campion*, in *Nouvelles Découvertes sur la Guitarre*. Minkoff Reprint, Genève, 1977, p. 17.

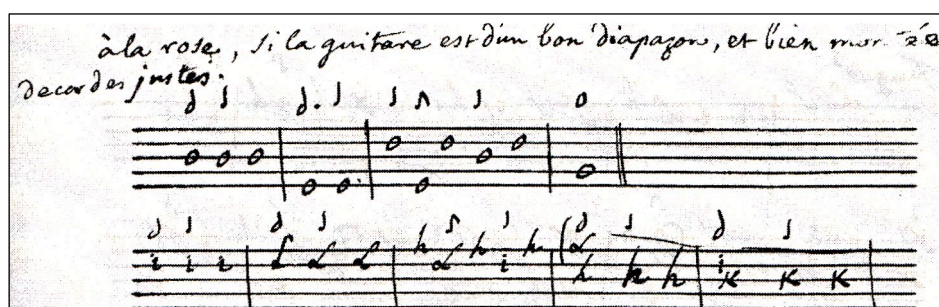
<sup>40</sup> The manuscript pieces offer a reverse statistic of 12 pieces in scordatura, and 39 in standard tuning.



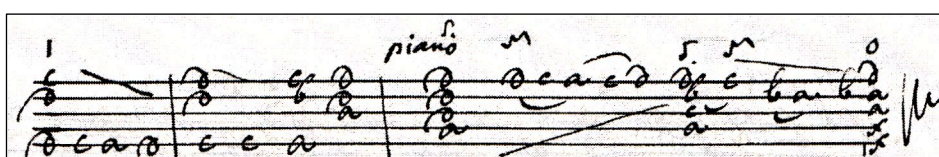
Campion offers a large choice of the usual preludes, allemandes, courantes, sarabandes, gavottes, gigue and minuets, but he seldom sets it in the orderly fashion as De Visée most often did. Pieces which are not usually included in the dance suite, such as an *Italienne*, a *Trompette*, a *Simphonie*, can also be found. If he displays a bit of conservatism, he can also be perfectly in tune with Couperin, Marais, Rameau or Forqueray when composing descriptive pieces, ranging from the introspective mood of *Les Soupîrs*, the joyful and flowing arpeggio of *Les Ramages* to the daring, demanding and impressive *Allemande La furieuse* - this last one already appearing in the 1705 printed version.

Amongst the 51 manuscript pieces, we can also find an astonishing *Passacaille* with more than 30 variations, a real showcase of the baroque guitar expressive and technical potential: very precise counterpoint, chromatic passages, light and dense harmonic sequences, orchestral contrasts, chord strumming, ornaments and slurs on two courses, imitations, fast series of slurred notes combined with campanellas, a long arpeggio section, and a very clever combination of campanellas and arpeggio. This masterpiece can really be said to be exploiting the instrument to the fullest extent, as are Vitali and Bach *Ciaconnas* or Biber *Passaglia* for the violin.

Along with descriptive pieces, the manuscript also include a surprising *Bransle* and a *Brunette* with lyrics, six *airs*, and two *sonatinas* and seven *fugues* in which he was obviously searching for a new musical and structural language; and he succeeded, although these long pieces in which he seems to be trying to push the imitative counterpoint process to its utmost often give the impression of going round in circles. As a matter of interest, he also used right-hand harmonic notes (music example 14a) and quite often wrote ornamental passages in full (music example 14b).



Music example 14a: François Campion, manuscript Fugue, [n.d.],



Music example 14b: François Campion, manuscript Fugue, [n.d.].

Dance pieces seem to lose his favour after the 1705 printing<sup>41</sup>, and the imitative compositional style which Campion already seemed to cherish pervades even more his late gigue, allemandes, courantes, sarabandes and minuets. If sometimes a real tour de force, that process also tends to become a poor substitute for strong ideas. De Visée used the imitational process in his music too, but more parsimoniously, for stylistic reasons and never as an easy option.

Like Campion, de Visée was a fine continuo player, but unlike Campion he did not write any instructions for the thorough bass<sup>42</sup>. Like de Visée, Campion published his guitar tablature in

<sup>41</sup> For an overall view on his compositions, see *F. Campion: Listing, Concordances & Statistics* in the *Tables* section of my website GerardRebours.com.

<sup>42</sup> François Campion, *Traité d'accompagnement et de composition*, Paris 1716, and *Addition au traité d'accompagnement*, Paris 1730. Corbetta, Generin or Carré included continuo instructions in their guitar piece collections.

standard notation, as revealed in the *Extrait du Privilège du Roy* from the 1705 edition. Whether the pieces were arranged for treble and bass, or whether it was exactly the same music written in staff notation, we just do not know because this book has never been found. And, as Campion did not include it in the list of his works that he established in the king's library copy, we may even doubt its existence<sup>43</sup>.

Unlike de Visée, Campion had - musically speaking - one foot in each century. He pushed the "baroque" aspect of the guitar quite far, and then (thinking he could go no further, or trying to keep pace with the latest musical developments) he searched in other directions, escaped the dance form to finally focus on pure writing, thus depriving the five-course guitar of most of the features that made it such a unique instrument.

## The guitar after François Campion.

Did Campion influence other French guitarists, then? Did he give the instrument a new trend? Unfortunately, the void in French guitar music publishing following his *Nouvelles Découvertes* leaves us without answer. Furthermore, his music is hard to find in the eighteenth century manuscript compilations. None of his pieces are included in the selected pieces *des meilleurs maîtres du siècle dix septieme* presented by Castillion at the end of the François Le Coq *Recueil de pieces de guitarre*, dated 1729.<sup>44</sup> Several important manuscripts include 17th and 18th century music pieces, but not his. The intensive use of scordaturas, even if it came from a sane idea of finding new musical atmospheres and new instrumental possibilities, might explain the situation. Only Santiago de Murcia dared including 19 scordatura pieces by Campion in his *Passacalles y Obras* (1732), but he re-arranged them for the standard tuning - a fact that confirms that he is an original and eclectic musician, of a stature comparable to de Visée or Campion; but this breed of guitarists is now becoming scarce and, anyway, it is now too late: the guitar - and the lute family as well - are losing ground in the 18th century musical context. "It was very fashion in France during the reign of Louis XIV", can we read around 1750 in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, where the guitar is also described as "charming" but inappropriate for concert<sup>45</sup>, and thus restricted to playing alone or accompanying a singer - and preferably in a quiet place! Soon after, Ancelet declares having very seldom listened to the guitar<sup>46</sup>, that has "an infinite charm in Ladies' hands, especially when accompanying the voice". He also bans the instrument from concert platforms, but admits it fits "the intimate society music and private suppers".<sup>47</sup> In 1761, Garsault makes unflattering comments and finally includes the guitar amongst the instruments which are "out of use, but which might return".<sup>48</sup> Philippe Macquier's opinion is not so definite, as he recognizes the guitar fashion in Paris "especially amongst women, who do not ignore that the bearing in playing the instrument is an opportunity to show the graces they have been endowed with by Nature"<sup>49</sup> This kind of remark has already been made before - as in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* - and may remind us of Campion who tried to convince the reader that his pieces do not require difficult hand positions by declaring: "The fair sex, on the

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<sup>43</sup> This is unfortunate, as it may have been a good basis for replacing the "accords nouveaux" by standard tuning - as Murcia did in his 1732 *Passacalles y Obras* - or for playing the music on lute, harpsichord etc.

<sup>44</sup> Of course, 1705 is no more in the *siècle dix septieme*, but this is probably not the main reason.

<sup>45</sup> meaning inappropriate to perform in a large group of instruments.

<sup>46</sup> as well as "le Luth, le Téorbe, la Harpe, le Timpanon, & le Psalterion", in *Observations sur la Musique...*, Amsterdam, 1757.

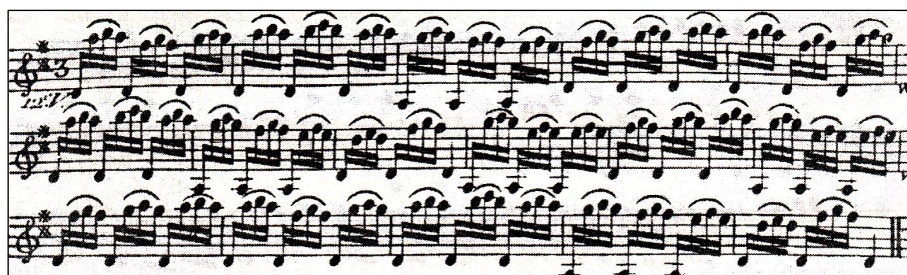
<sup>47</sup> "la petite Musique de Société, & les soupers choisis".

<sup>48</sup> "Instrumens hors d'usage, mais qui peuvent y revenir", in François-Alexandre-Pierre de Garsault, *Notionnaire ou Mémoires raisonnés...*, Paris, 1761.

<sup>49</sup> "La guitare, instrument de fantaisie, propre à accompagner une voix seule, a pris une vogue à Paris, sur-tout parmi les dames, qui n'ignorent point que l'attitude dans laquelle on joue cet instrument leur donne l'occasion de faire remarquer une partie des graces dont la Nature les a douées", in Philippe Macquier, *Dictionnaire Raisonné Universel...nouvelle édition...*, Paris, 1773.

contrary, will find there many suites favourable to graceful hands".<sup>50</sup>

Obviously, the guitar musical role dramatically shifted in the 18th century. The tutors and collections regularly issued after 1750 by authors such as Merchi, Bailleux, Baillon, LeMoine and Porro continued to address the five-course guitar, but in an also dramatically shifted orientation. Their pieces (sonatas, variations, menuets, duets with violin, song accompaniments etc.) now call for a straightforward use of the instrument. Specific baroque guitar features, like strummed chords and campanellas, have completely fallen out of use, and elements like slurs, ornaments or arpeggios, that were the very core of the musical language, now tend to become a repetitive feature, often used as a basis for variations<sup>51</sup>:



Music example 15: Giacomo Merchi, variation from *Traité des Agréments de la Musique*, Paris [1777], p. 36

Merchi claims to have got rid of the "constraint of the tablature", instead of simply admitting that his music is simple enough to not require the efficient musical and technical synthesis that the tablature offers. Nevertheless, tablature remained in use for a few years, sometimes complementing the staff notation - a fine pedagogical idea, indeed, although both notations sometimes have difficulties in displaying a real consistency:



Music example 16: Antoine Bailleux, *Méthode de Guitarre par Musique et tablature*. Paris 1773, p. 16

Quite logically for this kind of music, double stringing would soon be considered awkward and gradually disappear, but - as we enter an important transitional period - consistency on this subject becomes quite difficult to establish: double stringing with octaves on the 4th and 5th courses will resist a few decades, as Bailleux<sup>52</sup> Baillon<sup>53</sup>, Lemoine<sup>54</sup> and even Doisy<sup>55</sup> in 1801 gave us a proof by describing it

<sup>50</sup> "Le beau sexe au contraire y trouvera des suites favorables aux belles mains" in *Nouvelles découvertes Sur la Guitarre*, Paris, 1705, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> This is proof - if any is needed - that, contrary to science, art does not *improve*, does not become *more precise* or *more perfect*: it just changes. It uses different techniques, forms, instruments, etc, but the artistic level does not become better and better. No doubt our current electronic mail is a much more efficient communication device than sending a messenger - even with the fastest horse - but that does not imply that Henze composed better operas than Lully or Haendel, nor that Richter's painting is above Velásquez's or Rembrandt's.

<sup>52</sup> Antoine Bailleux, *Méthode de Guitarre par Musique et tablature*. Paris, 1773.

<sup>53</sup> Pierre-Jean Baillon, *Nouvelle Méthode de Guitarre*. Paris, 1781.

<sup>54</sup> A.M. le Moine, *Nouvelle Méthode courte et facile*. Paris, [s.d.]

<sup>55</sup> Doisy, *Principes Généraux de la Guitar*. Paris, 1801.



first of all. For Guichard, the instrument has five double strings "to be put in unisson."<sup>56</sup> Merchi describes octave stringing for the 5th and 4th courses, but he writes two "bourdons" on the stave illustrating the tuning.<sup>57</sup> In a later publication<sup>58</sup>, he reveals the use of single strings, that are easier to be tuned and to pluck, and "approximate the harp sound". This new fashion, as well as the addition of a sixth string, and more, will soon be mentioned in other publications<sup>59</sup>.

A quick look abroad reveals a comparable situation. In Spain, for example, Fernando Ferandiere used 6 courses, with the first one preferably single-strung and only the sixth "bordones" tuned with a low string and its octave companion.<sup>60</sup> But the same year, Federico Moretti declared using seven single strings, although he knew the current Spanish use was of six courses, and still five in Italy<sup>61</sup>.

Several tutors also offer many pages of precise theoretical and technical descriptions. Tuning and stringing, instrument and body position, right hand plucking rules, fingernails, left hand fingering, chords, scales, arpeggios, accompaniment advices, technical exercises, and the precise notation of a whole array of graces, that are still part of the style: appoggiaturas, "martellement ou pincé", trill, "glissades", vibrato, and several types of cadences:



Music example 17: A.M. le Moine, *Nouvelle Méthode courte et facile*. Paris [s.d.], p. 9

These usually appear in the first pages of the book, and are followed by music pieces, but some authors pushed the idea so far that it becomes the main subject. Thus, Merchi offers a *Traité des Agréments de la Musique, Exécutés sur la Guitarre*<sup>62</sup>, with twenty-two pages of theory and fifteen pages of music. Immodest as usual, he adds a subtitle saying: "A work that was lacking to guitar lovers, and that is essential to play, with good taste, the pieces and the singing passages often found in the accompaniments. It contains clear instructions and examples that demonstrate plucking, fingering, arpeggio, [etc]". Doisy went even further by devoting his whole eighty-page *Principes Généraux de la Guitare*<sup>63</sup> to music and guitar history, instrument description, how to choose the strings, how to learn, including a whole treatise on music theory - with tables and lists - a description of the various kind of compositions and music genders, temperament, guitar music

<sup>56</sup> *Méthode pour la guitharre/.../ par le C.<sup>en</sup> Guichard*. Paris [s.d.]

<sup>57</sup> See Merchi, *Guide des Ecoliers de Guitarre*. Paris [1761] p. II.

<sup>58</sup> *Traité des Agréments de la Musique*. Paris [1777], p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Le Moine (op. cit., p. 9) : Lorsque cette Méthode parut, on ne faisait point usage de la sixième corde sur la Guitarre. [When this Method was issued, the sixth guitar string was not in use.]. Doisy (op. cit., p. 9, 10, 69, 70) prefers five single strings, without ignoring the use "6, 7, 8 and sometimes 9 strings", as well as six double and even triple strings used by "a few Italians". But guitars with 5 and 6 single strings were also made in Napoli around 1780, in the workshops of Vinaccia, Fabricatore, Gagliano and Filano.

<sup>60</sup> Fernando Ferandiere, *Arte de tocar la Guitarra Española*, Madrid, 1799, p. 1 & 2. This may have been for enhancing the tone quality of the lowest course.

<sup>61</sup> Federico Moretti, *Principios para tocar la Guitarra de seis órdenes*, Madrid 1799.

<sup>62</sup> *Oeuvre XXXVe*. Paris, [1777].

<sup>63</sup> Op. cit. (see footnote 50). A 26-page Second Part proposed 14 Etudes.

notation, chord sequences for making preludes, graces, and a final chapter about the long-forgotten but then very trendy "Lyre-guitare".



Doisy, *Principes Généraux de la Guitare*. Paris, l'auteur, 1801, p. 14

Although it does not offer any piece of repertoire, it is a really fascinating work, that makes us wonder why - and regret that - Robert de Visée, François Campion and other guitarists from the baroque era were so parsimonious in explanations about technique, fingernails, positions, ornamentation, tempi, and even stringing<sup>64</sup>. Continuo playing has been more than once seriously explained, but we usually must look towards contemporary music treatises and music books for other instruments to try to acquire some of these other necessary pieces of knowledge<sup>65</sup>. But that was a century before, and the attitude toward the transmission of knowledge was quite different. If, musically speaking, this transitional 18th century period can sometimes appear disappointing compared to the glorious years when the guitar was in the main musical trend, it is nevertheless the dawn of a new era in the instrument's history, full of promises, but far too removed from our subject to be discussed more in depth here.

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**Note:** in addition to the books and music collections quoted in the text and footnotes above, I recommend the following:

- **Delume, Caroline:** *Méthodes et Traités 18, série 1 (France 1600-1800), Vol. I & II*. Anne Fuzeau Productions, Courlay, 2003. (presenting all the texts about guitar included in most treatises, encyclopedias, tutors and music collections).
- **Tyler, James, and Sparks, Paul :** *The Guitar and its Music from the Renaissance to the Classical era*. Oxford University Press, 2002. (the classical era, just touched upon in this article, can be deepened by reading Part III).
- More on François Campion: visit the *Tables* and *Articles* pages of my website [GerardRebours.com](http://GerardRebours.com)

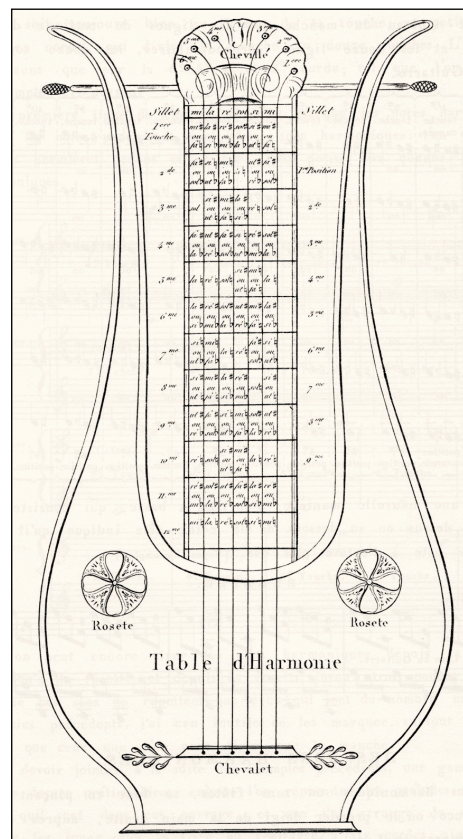
<sup>64</sup> Unlike De Visée, Campion did not give any clue about guitar stringing. His 1716 *Traité d'accompagnement* and the 1730 *Addition* do not help more.

<sup>65</sup> That may also be considered as a good thing, as reading other instruments' music books and treatises is an important source of musical culture.





Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle*, Paris, 1636, f. 95v



Le Moine, *Nouvelle Méthode...*, Paris, [18th c., 2nd half], p. 11