KONSTANTIN SHCHENIKOV-ARKHAROV

Reconstructing pieces from Manuscript Paris BNF, F-Pn Rés Vmd Ms 27 (Thibault Lute Tablature)

Thibault Lute Tablature is an interesting example of the earliest surviving lute manuscripts. Most likely written in the first decade of 16th century, confluent to the first printed lute books, it contains unique repertoire not presented in another sources. There are several modern editions of this manuscript, including Minkoff Facsimile of 1981, in addition to a number of studies concerning it[1]. One may satisfy historical curiosity in this discovery and conjecture over the origin and mysteries of that source. I would rather pay the crucial attention here to the practical points.

The name Thibault assigned to the Manuscript after french musicologist Geneviève Thibault de Chambure who discovered this source and encouraged further studies on it. She found this Manuscript in a bookstore in Florence in 1956. We do not know anything about its history, neither who was the author nor compiler and what was the goal of this book. It might be a lute student's gathering where one wrote down the pieces he or she learned, as an aid to memory.

The collection has 2 sections: 1st contains 23 solo pieces, diverse dance forms and recercari, as well as intabulations of popular songs. 2nd part contains 86 song accompaniments without solo part, most pieces in this section are *frottole* published by Ottaviano Petrucci between 1504 and 1509[2]. And, strangely, *Canzona* by Giovanni Gabrielli written out in 2 lines as keyboard score placed in between, more likely it was entered here lately.

The MS is written in normal Italian tablature carefully enough, aside from some anomalous passages perhaps made in error. The main problem in reconstructing is total absence of rhythm signs and irregular and impractical barring. To reconstruct its music we can use different tools, applying stylistic and counterpoint rules, as well as palaeography or cryptography.

[1] See bibliography

[2] Ottaviano Petrucci, *Frottole, libri 1-9*

Saltarello & Piva

We begin with a short and easy piece to determine some spelling and musical peculiarities of the MS.

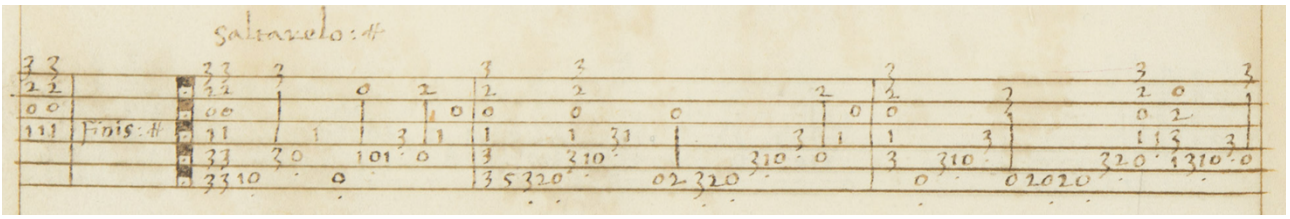


Figure 1

The picture above shows us the very beginning of *Saltarello*. Reviewing the score can reveal information to help clarify the rhythm:

1. First of all, according to the genre attribution the piece, it must definitely be in triple meter.
2. Analysing the harmony we can figure out the smaller sections of 3 beats (eight notes in my edition) which consistently corresponds to the bass notes.

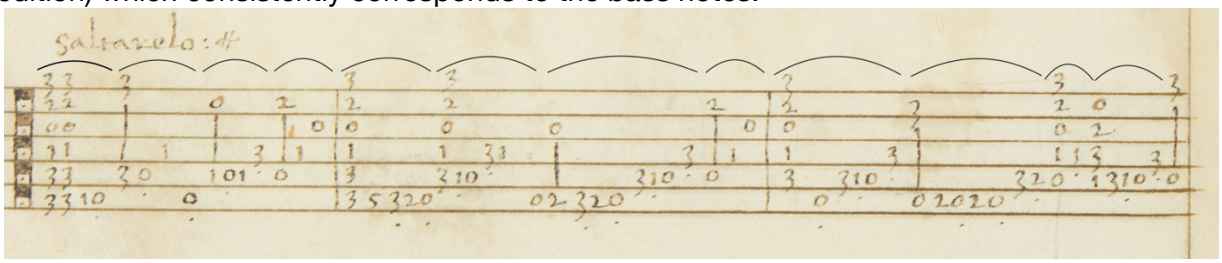


Fig. 1a

3. In order to carefully delineate this section into its smaller note values, we can use the dots, which at the time indicated the fingering and in the musical sense show us the weak notes (i.e. weak beats).

In applying this basic method, we have a much clearer structure with several variants of realisation. Now we are able to recognize some patterns:

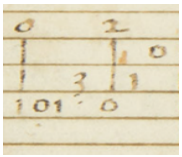


Fig. 2

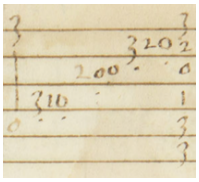


Fig. 3

There are two motifs (Figure 2 & 3) that occur twice in the same way, articulated with the same dots. This does not necessarily indicate that this must be played exactly the same, but for the purposes of accuracy, I have transcribed it as written to prove its efficacy. In performance, of course, the lutenist can treat it in the historical way, i.e. play it differently each time or make diminutions.

Here is an example to demonstrate this technique. If we refer to Figure 2., we can see 2 sections, which I count as 2 bars. Once the second has 3 notes, it fits perfectly in 3-beat bar and looks indistinguishable. The first, on the contrary, has a different interpretation. According to the dots on 2nd and 4th notes, 3rd is definitely somehow on the beat, it gives us only 2 possible variants:

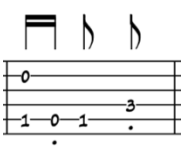


Fig. 4

or:

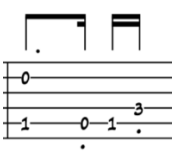


Fig. 5

I took the first for *Saltarello* and used the second several times in *Piva*.

As well, we can see some similar motifs ornamented differently, as below (fig. 6 - 9):

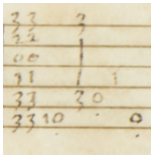


Fig. 6

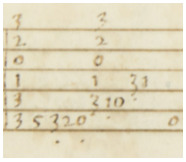


Fig. 7

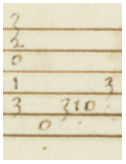


Fig. 8

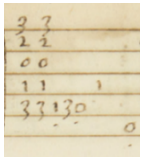


Fig. 9

Treating it, I tried to find a solution according to the common points and the same intention, but within a different context.

With the following passage (*fig.10)*, I faced the problem of setting this quantity of notes in regular 'bars'. The first question: is it one or two sections of ⅜ (one or two bars)? According to the musical context, I found 2 bars is too much of B-flat, counting several B-flat units before. Next step was to observe the tone repetition and set the whole rhythm respecting it. Finally, I found a convincing interpretation and made sure it functioned both times like that.

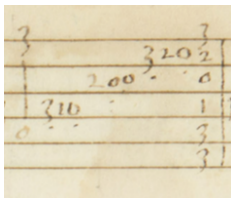


Fig. 10

After all that, I made two musical decisions, which although there is no strong evidence for, neither are there obstacles or contradictions against them. The first was in the very beginning: I transcribed the very first chords (*fig.11*) as an upbeat and long (*fig.12*), instead of starting directly from the first beat. A pair of such big chords does not suit the *Saltarello* movement, as they are too heavy to correspond to the dance. Comparing the very beginning with the similar phrase later in the piece, I found obvious correlations and realised that my decision worked in both cases, and made much more natural phrasing the second time. (*fig. 13 & 14*)

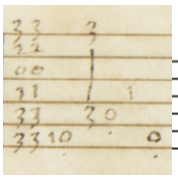


Fig. 11

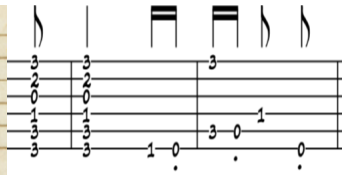


Fig. 12

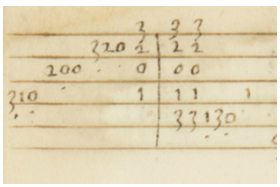


Fig. 13

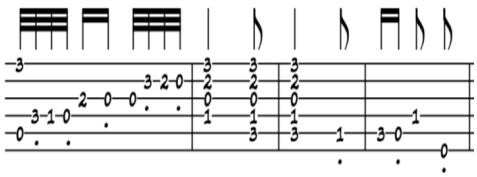


Fig. 14

The second decision was just before this fast cadencial passage (fig.14). The c-minor chord (for G-lute) I wrote as a hemiola which is not obligatory decision, but only the musical one, just to add some irregularity to the rhythm and make the piece more interesting. The passage leading into the cadence was a natural place for the hemiola to fall.

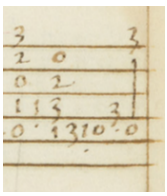


Fig. 14

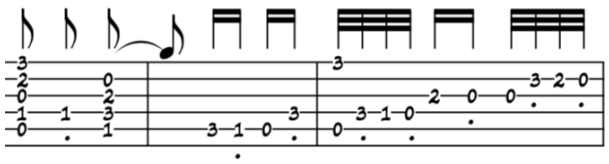


Fig. 15

The other possible solution:

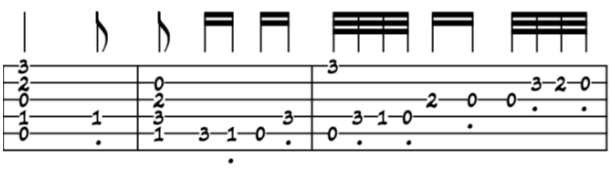


Fig. 16

In a similar place later (bars 18-21, see *fig.17*) it was not as effective, so it was omitted. Bar 18 is identical to bar 4 and fits into 3 beats, so there is no room to hemiola, in this case bars 19-20 looks very similar to the solution in *fig.16.*

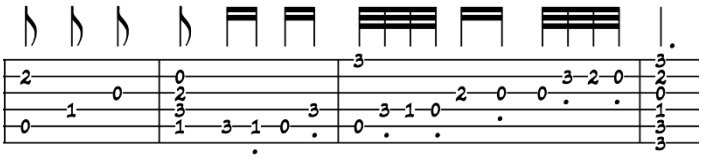


Fig.17

In *Piva,* one can find similar musical material, but as we know it as a faster dance than *Saltarello*, I applied a larger measure of 6/8, with the very beginning reconstructed in similar way to the beginning of *Saltarello,* keeping in mind
The same passage also occurs in *Piva* but interestingly with other fingering:

Saltarello:

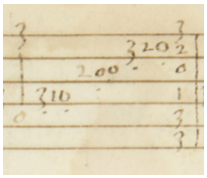


Fig.18

Piva:

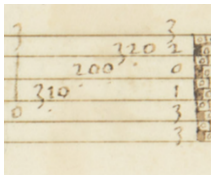


Fig.19

My first attempt was to consider these dots as a mistake, but it is written twice in the same way, it made me doubt and I started to look for another solution. Concerning the faster tempo, I decided to set it into 2 3-beat sections with longer notes. But with the tone repetition for me it still doesn't sound absolutely convincing.

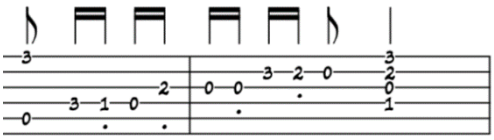
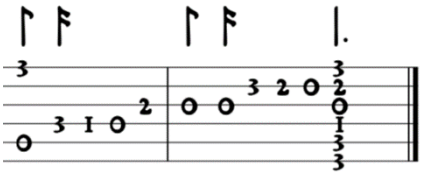


Fig.20

In Ricardo Leitão Pedro's transcription I found musically reasonable solution, though it disregards the dots in last section of the passage:



On the other hand, we can meet similar passages with tone repetitions in Capirola lute book[3] (see *fig.22 & 23*), so it might be intended originally in Thibault as well.

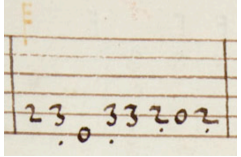


Fig.22

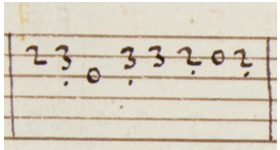
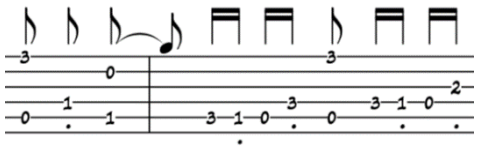


Fig.23

And last, in the second phrase of *Piva* I used the opportunity to fit in the hemiola similar to *Saltarello:*

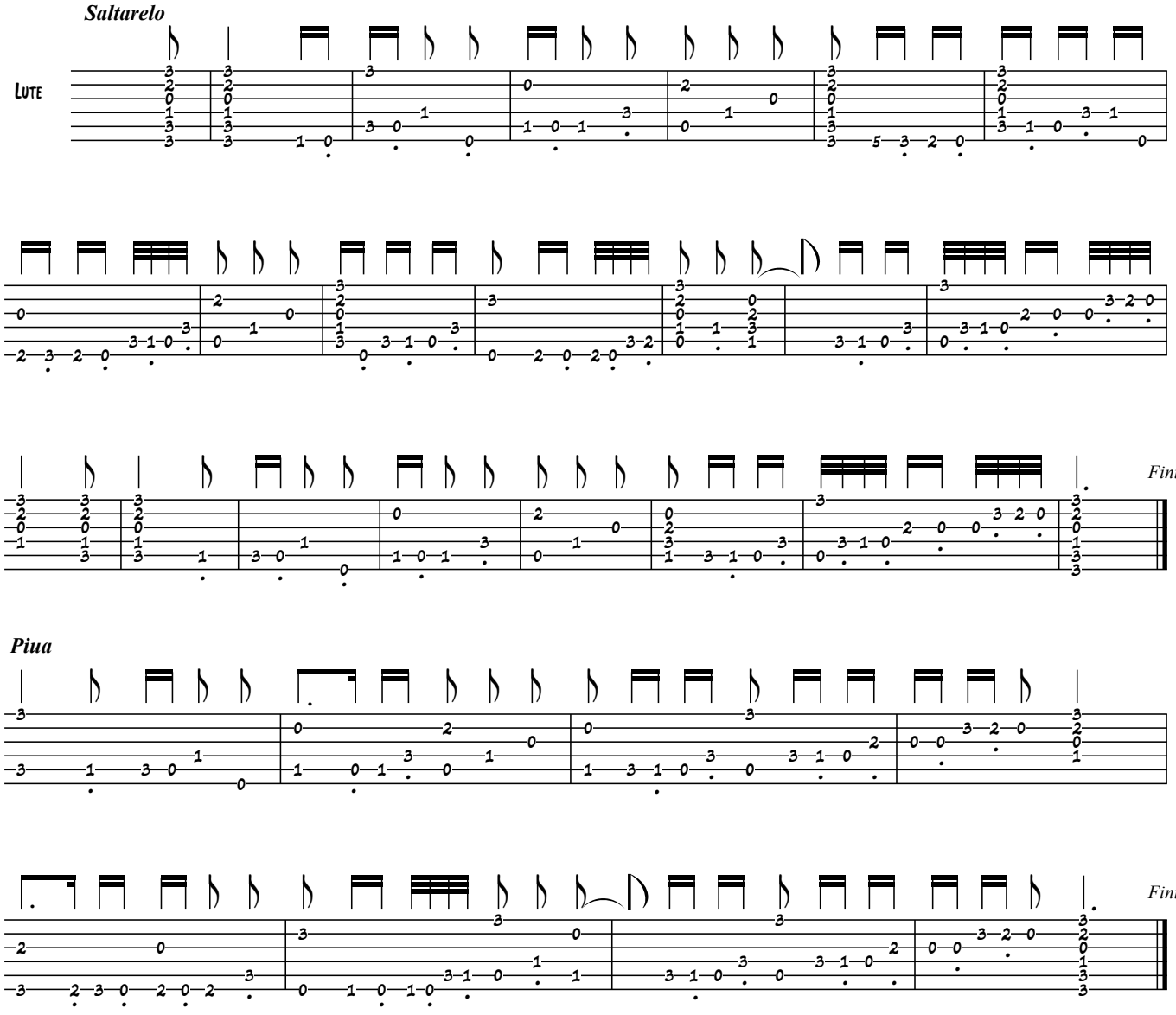
[3] Vincenzo Capirola Lute Book, Italy ca. 1517



After these studies, I believe, I have reconstructed the probable version of the piece.

Saltarello e Piva

from Thibault MS
transcr. K.Shchenikov



Non pigliar tanto ardimento

The next simple piece is an intabulation of *frottola* by **Bartolomeo Tromboncino.** The first step of reconstructing this piece was to find the original and reconstruct it first, i.e. make a score. After comparing the original with lute tablature, I've observed that they cleanly coincide and found no serious questions or doubts in realisation - clear vocal model accompanying with careful dotting of Thibault shows us a possible variation of performance.

The more interesting feature, in this case, is the very way of intabulating, showing us once again how that process works and how vocal music has been assimilated on the instrument and made idiomatic. I pay some attention to particular points.

Quantity and quality of voices.
The 4-part texture has been freely reduced down to 2-3 voices. The soprano part was the most intact from this arrangement, next the tenor, the alto omitted most frequently, and surprisingly the bass was written sporadically, disappearing in some crucial moments and making the tenor lowest voice in the score.

In the example below (*fig.1*), notice how the cadence in bars 5-6 is organized. Tenor makes *tenor clausula* and bass makes octave jump, typical for the 15th. century *Burgundian school* countertatenor bassus cadence:

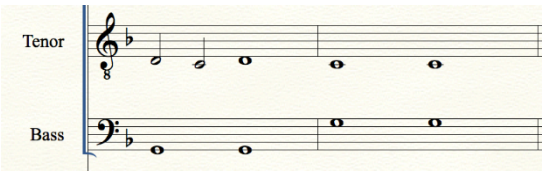


Fig.1

Comparing full vocal score and intabulation we can observe that low G is omitted in the lute part. Technically, on a 6-course lute in relative A tuning there is no low G, so the lutenist would have 'cheat' it. According to the counterpoint style of the period, *soprano clausula* and *tenor clausula* are the most important structural element in the hierarchy, so it is little surprise that the author of the intabulation chose those two voices to save and sacrificed bass line as a secondary one without trouble. With the absence of low G, adding alto voice became impossible, because it makes unprepared 4th (tenor *d* - alto *g*) between two low voices on a strong beat which is strongly forbidden.

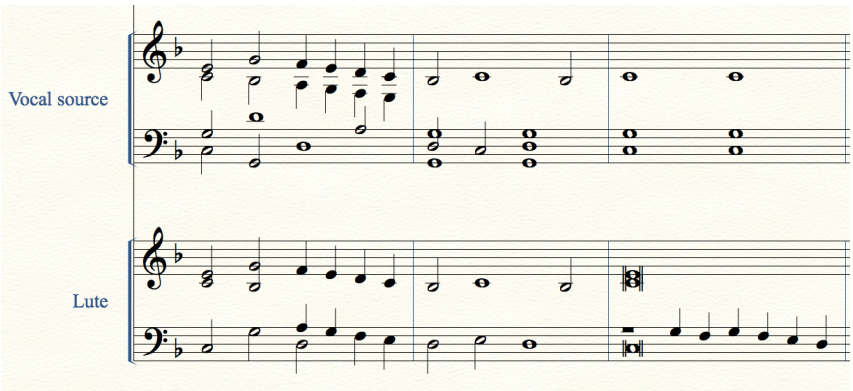


Fig.2

As we study the next example (fig.3), we can see the same technique of erasing the voices: as in bar 5 (*fig.2*), in bar 19 (*fig.3*), the basso and alto are withheld for the same reasons. In bar 20, the

bass could be added: the note F could be played on the lute an octave higher to maintain the bass function, but would have made a hidden parallel with the soprano, so the bass entered with the next note. This would indicate the author's knowledge and proficiency in counterpoint.

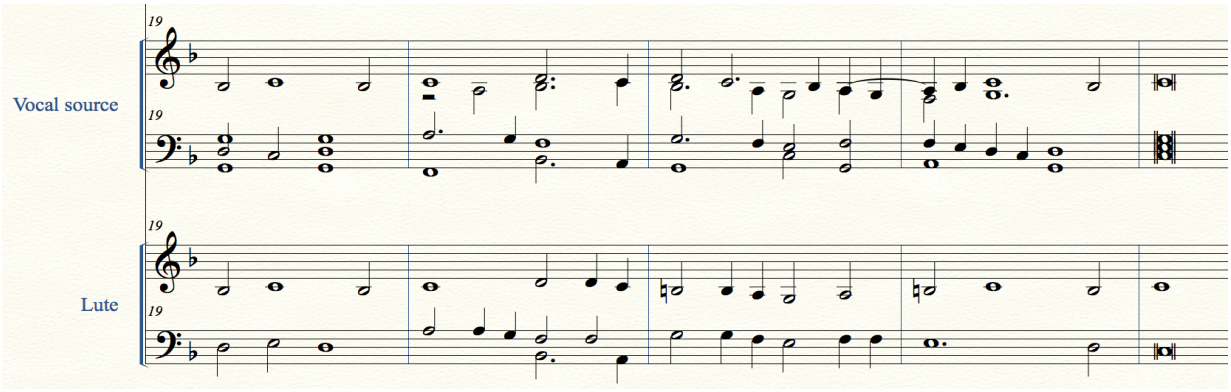


Fig.3

The next bars (21-22) look slightly messy with the cross voicing and passing notes, while the next example (*fig.4*) can help us understand what are soprano and alto are doing:

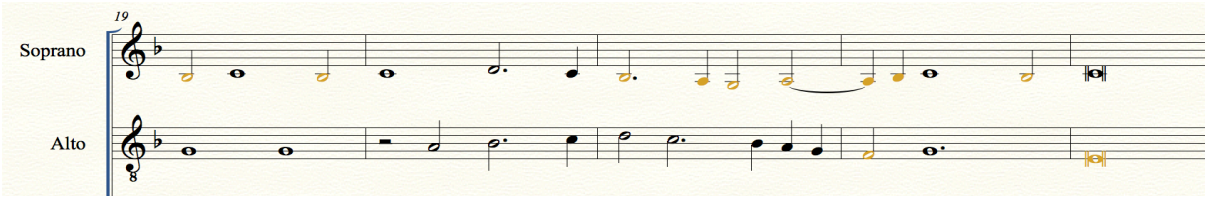


Fig.4

Observe that the basso and alto are consequently omitted in the tablature and the cadence simplified by reducing the passing notes.

Last, but not least, the coda is of particular note. The *Figure 5* shows how it appears in the original score, but the lute tablature (*fig.6*) diverges from that in ways that cannot be explained simply by referring to the counterpoint rules and impossibility of lute fingering.

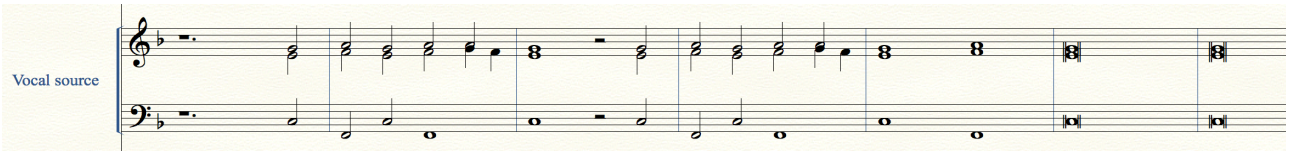


Fig.5

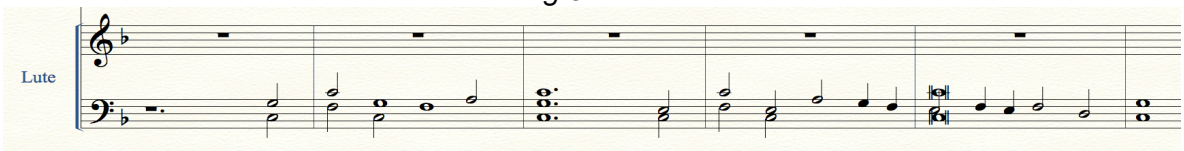


Fig.6

It can, however, be explained by the lute setting. If we assume that the low courses were fashionably octaved, including the 4th, it makes another melodious plot which has much more to do with the original (see *fig.7*), again, discarding the alto line in favour of tenor. The soprano is tacet in vocal score.

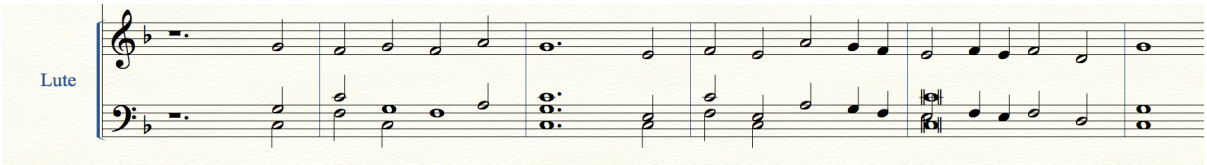


Fig.7

To summarize, I must say that the author of the pieces (whether or not they were the book's anthologist) was knowledgeable enough in counterpoint and made good editions. The compiler at his or her side was careful in the matter of scribing: I found no considerable mistakes in these small pieces and the dots yielded accurate information to indicate fingering and rhythm.

A mystery remains. I found a signs I cannot currently explain:

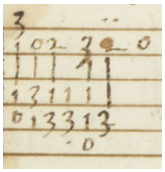


Fig.8

Two dots "..". This sign looks familiar for lute players as indication of middle finger of right hand, but it was not in use at the time.

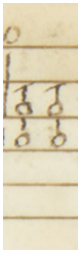


Fig.9

And strange tail above "0" sign, looks similar to T-sign using in this source.

Distinction between ".", ".." and "…" as indication of *different* fingers begins almost 100 years later,in "The Schoole of Musicke" by Thomas Robinson (1603), and sources of 16th century considered a dot as a command to play either up-stroke or use *any* finger against a thumb. In a sense, these dots are wrongly positioned - written down on a bass side, not on the descant as was customary. I can only surmise that it must mean something else. Curiouser still, it occurs only once, the scribe did not repeat it in a similar passage later (fig. 10).

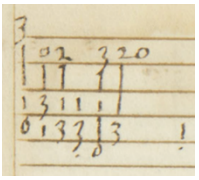


Fig.10

I have left this question unanswered, hoping that other manuscripts or clues left within this one, may hold the key to it.

Stylistical observations.

The author exchanged long notes for smaller note values (for example in the second half of bar 1 below), while excluding the ends of the phrases (bar 3):

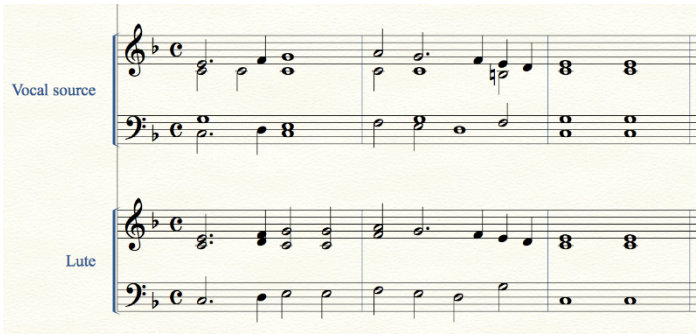


Fig.11

Often dotted rhythms and syncopation varied tone repetition:

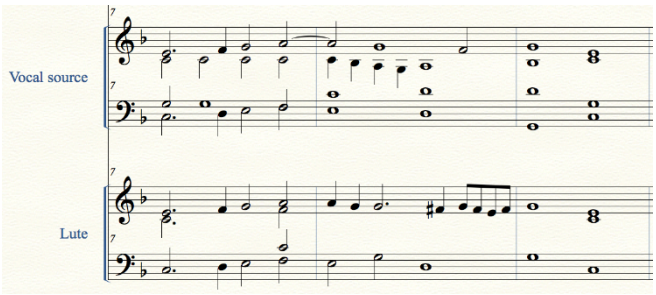


Fig. 12

or:

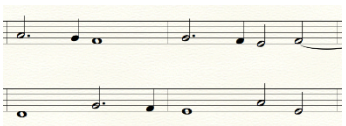


Fig.13

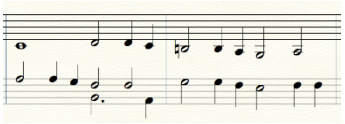


Fig.14

Similar techniques were also employed in other sources of the same period, such as the Blindhammer tablature[4] and Hungersperger tablature[5].

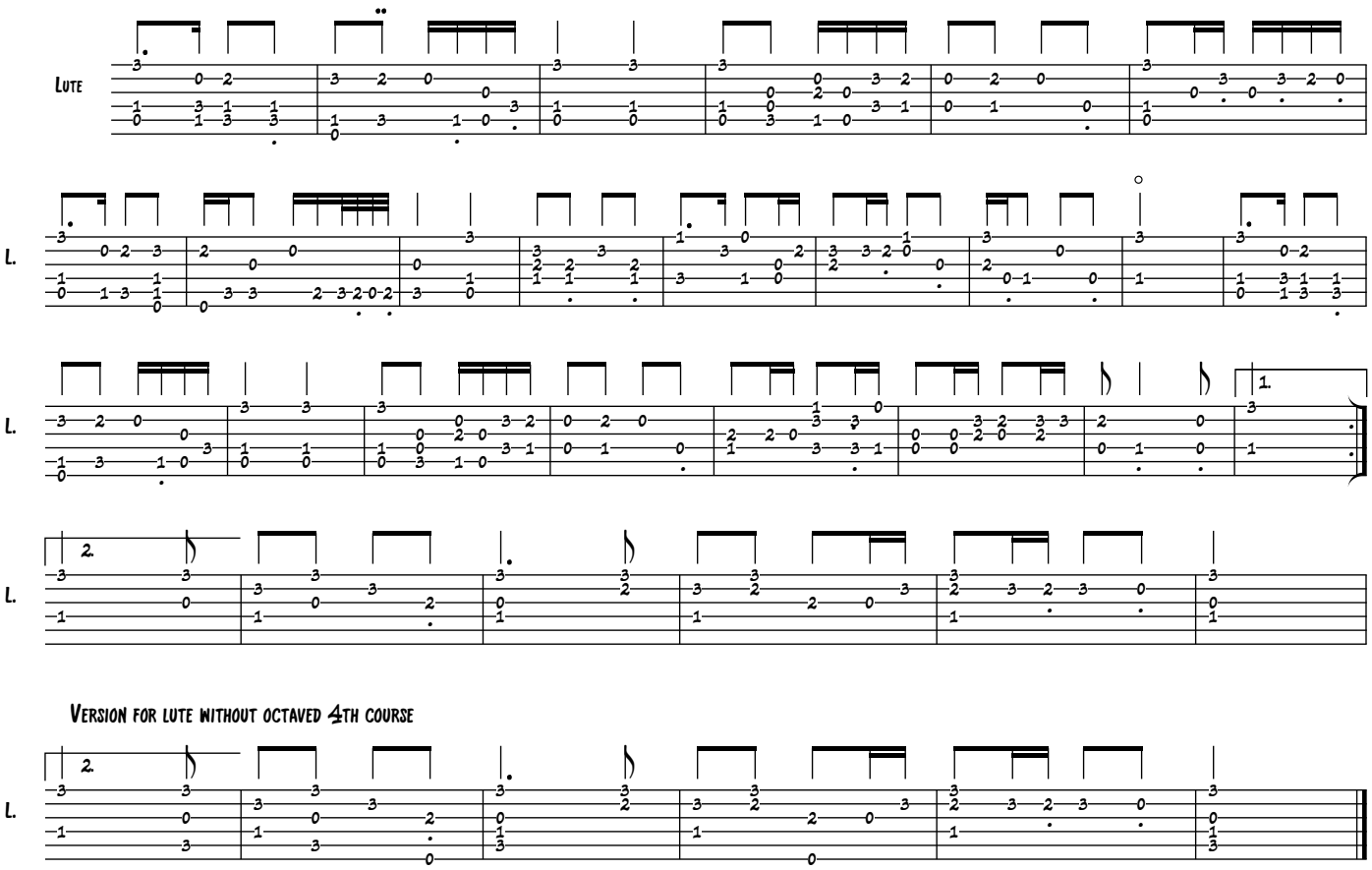
[4] Adolf Blindhammer Tabulatur, A-Wn Mus. Hs. 41950
[5] Felix Hungersperger Tabulatur, PL-Kj 40154

Non pigliar tanto ardimento

(B.Tromboncino)

from Thibault Lute Tabulature

transcr. K.Shchenikov



Version for lute without octaved 4th course

Basadanza

The most mysterious piece in the manuscript evokes an earlier style, a genre and improvisational model made popular in 15th century, the *Bassadanza*. It bears similarity to *Basadanza* from the *Pesaro* manuscript[6], but with some unexpected and unexplained twists. Research by Crawford Young contains an analysis of a *Pesaro* piece and a possible explanation of *Thibault*'s strangeness. Young's points are as follows:

- Whether both *Bassadanzas* are the same piece copied from one and the same source is now unknown.
- Both are settings of the famous tenor *La Spagna* reproduced in Antonio Cornazano's treatise[7].
- *Pesaro* has copied it precisely, while in *Thibault* huge mistakes occur. Young depicts this as a simple misreading by *Thibault*'s compiler, that he or she made an error in going through the lines and pages in the wrong way, which gave us the sections very close to *Pesaro*, but completely in the wrong order[8].

Young took great strides in his study of the *Pesaro Bassadanza* in determining a tenor-basis according to Cornazano (fig. 1), and his work was also a perfect starting point for me. As we can glean from Young's article, every tenor note was organized in 12 beats: it fits into 2 measures of bassadanza, 6 beats each.

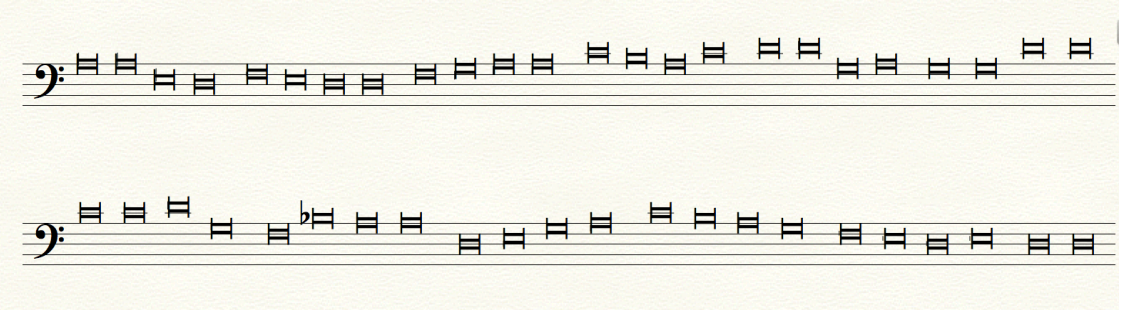


Fig. 1

After analysing the structure (Fig. 2), I started to set the shorter notes into the structure of a regular bar (fig. 3).

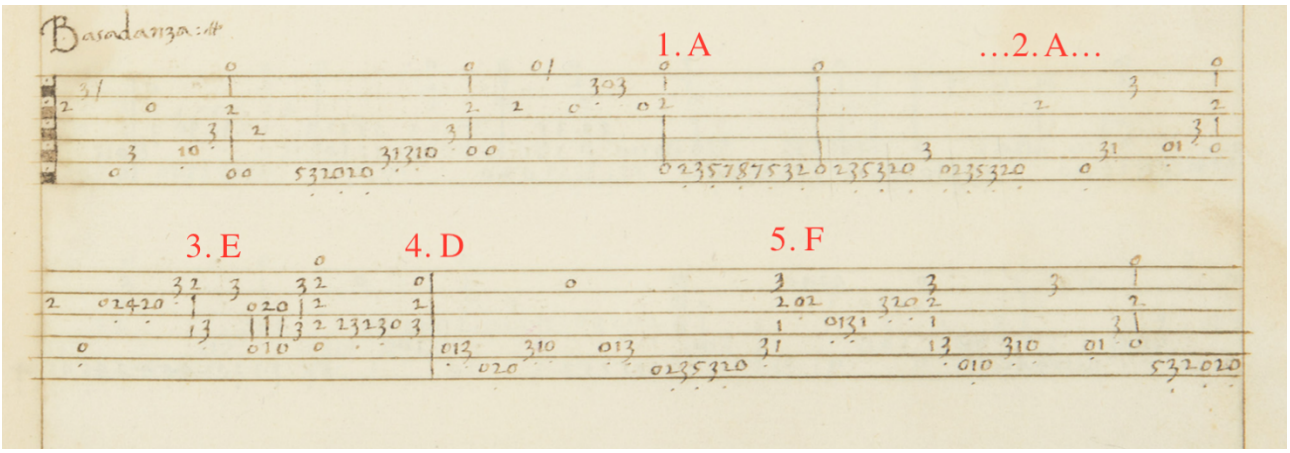


Fig. 2

[6] Pesaro Ms.1144
[7] Antonio Cornazano 'Il libro dell'Arte del danzare' (1465)
[8] see more in appendix of [2]

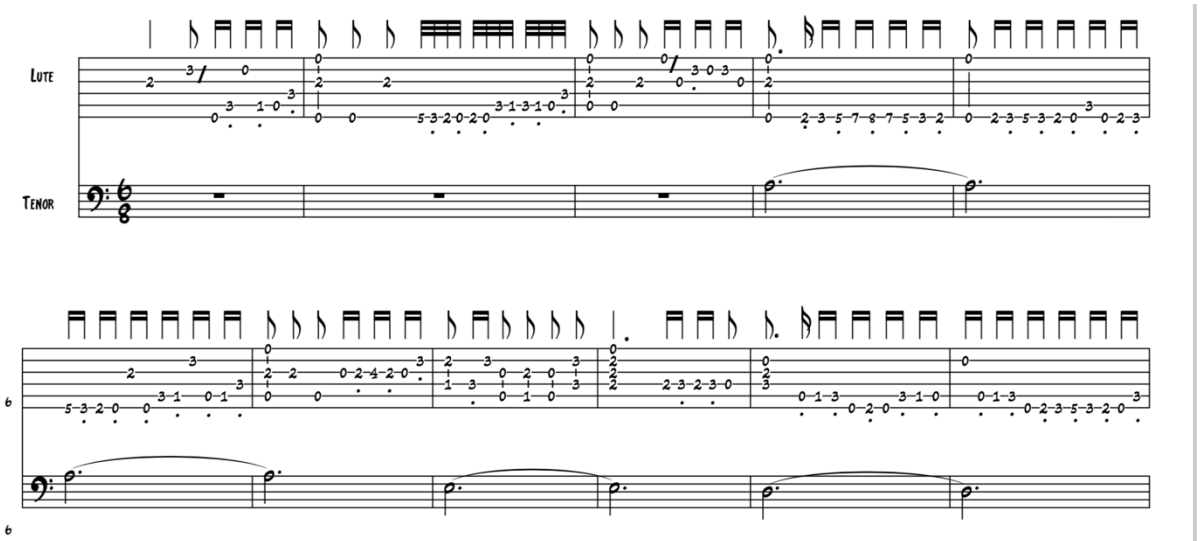


Fig. 3

I started to recognize the similar patterns and formulas in the piece, presuming it to be, if not the same, closely related. Initially, I used the same process I did in the *Saltarello* and this method was fruitful.

For instance, this passage (*fig.4-6*) occured 5 times in the piece, ending with a similar chord in the 1st (*fig.1*), 2nd, 4th (*fig.2*) and 5th appearances, the only distinction being the number of notes in the chord. Once again, I have been looking for a solution which could be satisfying in all these cases, with respect to the structure and musical context of each one[9].

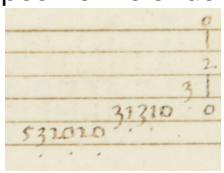


Fig.4

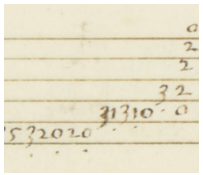


Fig.5

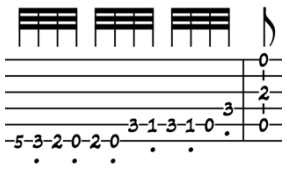


Fig.6

The third time this passage occured in different circumstances (see *fig.7*), but I found common solution (right below), which I found musically reasonable (*fig.8*):

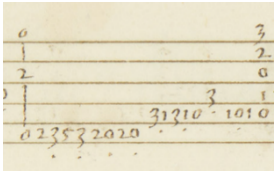


Fig.7

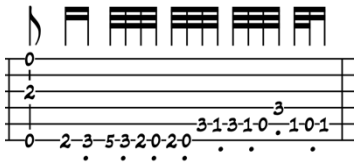


Fig.8

The next pattern led me to doubt this, as it appears twice in almost the same way, but set the tenor differently. The first time it set the tenor perfectly (*fig.9-10*):

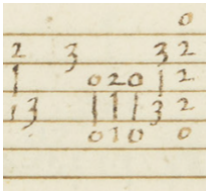


Fig.9

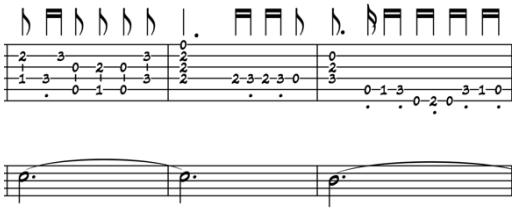


Fig.10

[9] I'm not giving the bar numbers most of the time because it's different in different arrangements.

The second (*fig.11-12*), however, brings irregularity to the tenor:

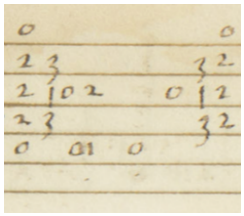


Fig.11

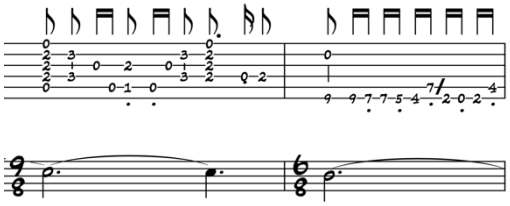


Fig.12

To make it fit the tenor perfectly, I tried to squeeze the tenor into faster notes, but the musical results were unconvincing; and further, it would make sense to speed up the tenor for the first time, where is actually no reason to do it, but the second is already made more rapid through its splitting of parallel sixths into consecutive ones. So, I agreed with Crawford Young, who faced the same problem, to keep irregularity in this place to make musical sense.

Another example of similarity meets in fig.13 & 14 (bar 16 and 70 of my edition) with little difference.

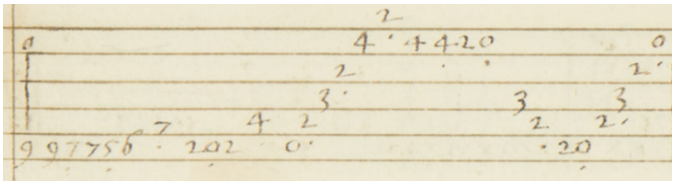


Fig.13

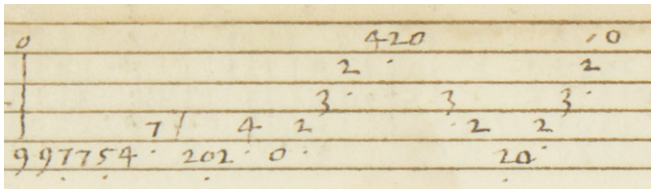


Fig.14

The strange final phrygean cadence (*fig.15*) on **a** (relatively, for lute in A-tuning), which does not correspond to the dorian a-mode of entire piece, was copied from a prior passage (*fig.16*), bars 22-23 in my performance edition (*fig.17*).

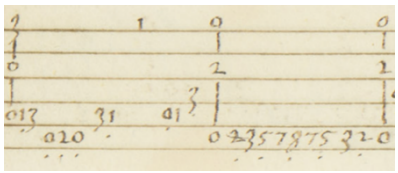


Fig.15

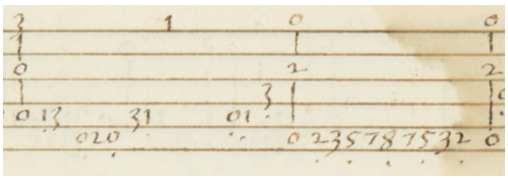


Fig.16

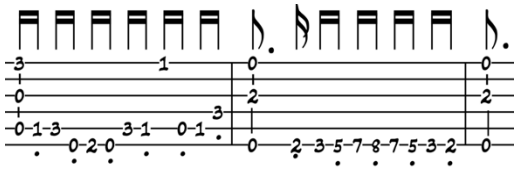
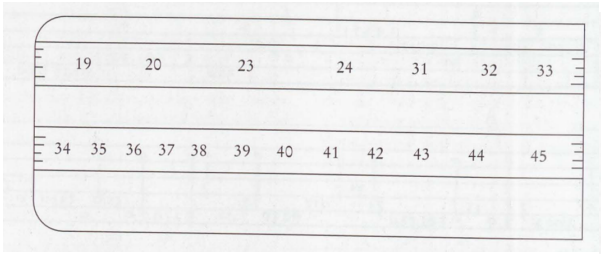


Fig.17

Putting things together, I moved in two simultaneous contrasting directions, and prepared a different edition of the piece which would allow people to compare and make their own decisions.

The first way was inspired by Crawford Young and his research, his hypothesis explains the misreading in the following way: originally the piece was written down on wide sheets, one of which was cut at some point to 3 different pages or just bend the same way (see fig. 18 & 19). During the process of scribing, Thibault's compiler, instead of reading it across, read each separate page down, confusing the order of sections.
I presumed to fix Thibault's scriber misread and re-order the piece. You can see this edition marked as 'acc. to CY'.



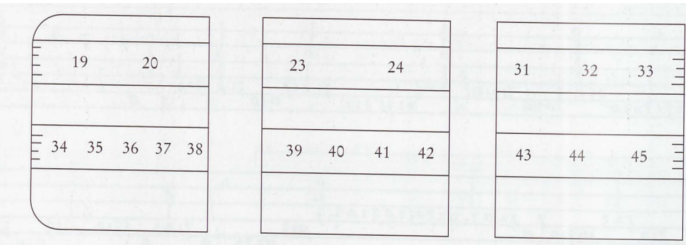


Fig.18 *Fig.19*

C.Young's possible reconstruction of the process. Picture from his article [2].

The second edition supposes Thibault as an independent source and, despite the correlations, counts this Bassadanza as, if not completely different piece, merely another version. Young's hypothesis is convincing, but still cannot explain new material in *Thibault,* which does not appear in *Pesaro* (See bars 62-65 and from bar 74 through to the end in this version.)
So, it is not re-ordered and I tried to treat it carefully with full respect to the indications within the manuscript, trying to find a reason for any musical twists. It is marked 'as is'. In both editions you can follow the tenor and see all correspondences and gaps in comparison to the lute part.

The third edition is my own version of this piece, based on *CY* ideas and with some minor corrections. It marked as "performance edition".

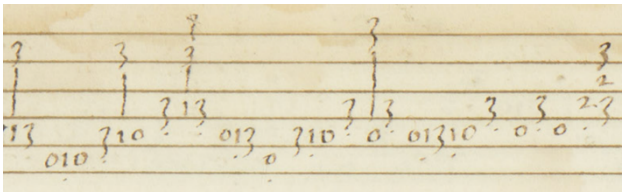


Fig.20

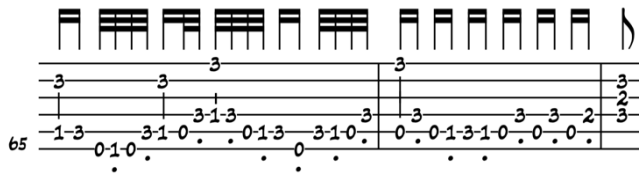


Fig.21

In bars 65 – 66 (fig. 20 & 21), I altered the bassline. As you can see in the original, there is a sign on the 6th course, on 4th beat of bar 65, which is unfinished and almost scratched, correcting it to "3" on fifth course. It sounds incorrect in terms of counterpoint, making strange dissonances on the strong notes, but sounds more 'correct' with bass note "3" on sixth course. It is also possible in the next bar (66) to play open sixth course instead of "3" on a first note, I think originally it made a weird progression in the end of the bar and beginning of the next one, but I see no obvious incorrectness in the source. Another solution to play it as is, and to stop the bass "3" on the 4th beat of bar.

Bar 65 (4th-6th beats) as it written (*fig.22*) and with my correction (*fig.23*) with intervallic structure:

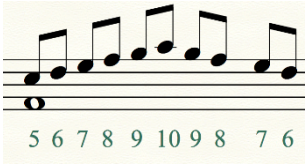


Fig.22

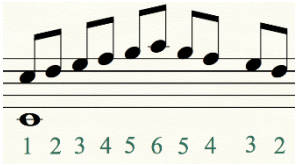


Fig.23

Some other small corrections I also did are shown in bars below:

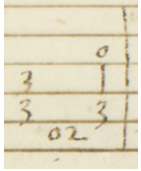


Fig.24

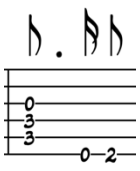


Fig.25

Bar 36 (*fig.24*) sounds really bizarre without this "missing" bass note (open 4th course), it makes the unprepared and unresolved 4th between lowest voices, which seems almost impossible in this period.

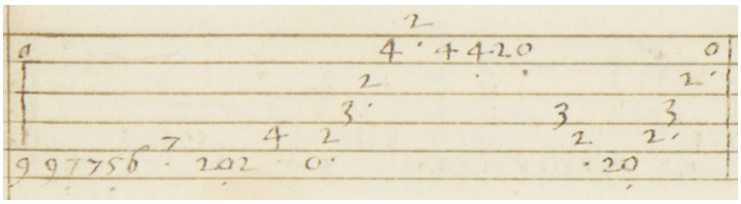


Fig.26

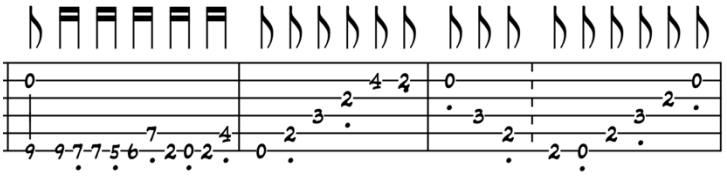


Fig.27

The last odd place I found is in bars 70 – 72 (fig. 26 & 27). It is almost similar to bars 16-17, but it takes a strange turn in the bass part, as can be seen around the "2" sign on sixth course. I cannot explain this choice in terms of counterpoint and the style of the era and see no reasons for it. Taking this into account, it is the end of the long piece and line before is obscured - there are two visible corrections and a few unclear places in the line before (and obvious mistake in bar before – "6" on top string), which may be ascribed to the compiler losing concentration at the end of a long work. In my edition I make this place to correspond with bars 32-38.

Last piece of curiosity is in the special signs. The first of all, oblique line (fig.28-31):

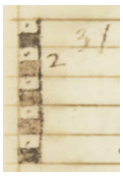


Fig.28

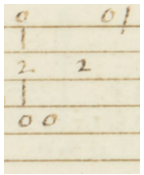


Fig.29

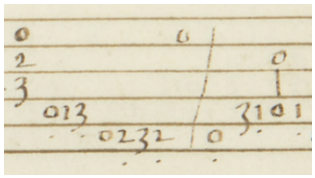


Fig.30

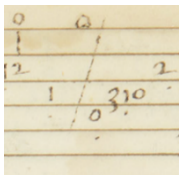


Fig.31

It does not align with barlines in an obvious way. We can find the same sign in Capirola lute book[10] (*fig.32 & 33*), where it indicates holding a note. The sign in Thibault could take the same role, as it comes in similar circumstances.

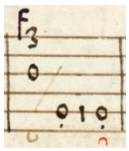


Fig.32

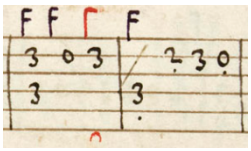


Fig.33

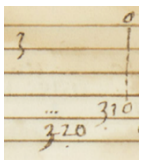


Fig. 34

And last special sign is a "…" (*fig.34*) which is found only once in that piece. As the sign ".." in *Non pigliar* it appears on the wrong side, but here I can find the reason: to avoid it being confused with the sign next to it. Here also, I cannot find a purpose, but right fingering does not contradict this place, despite it's very early appearance in this role.

All rare signs we met I'm trying to reproduce in all my editions.

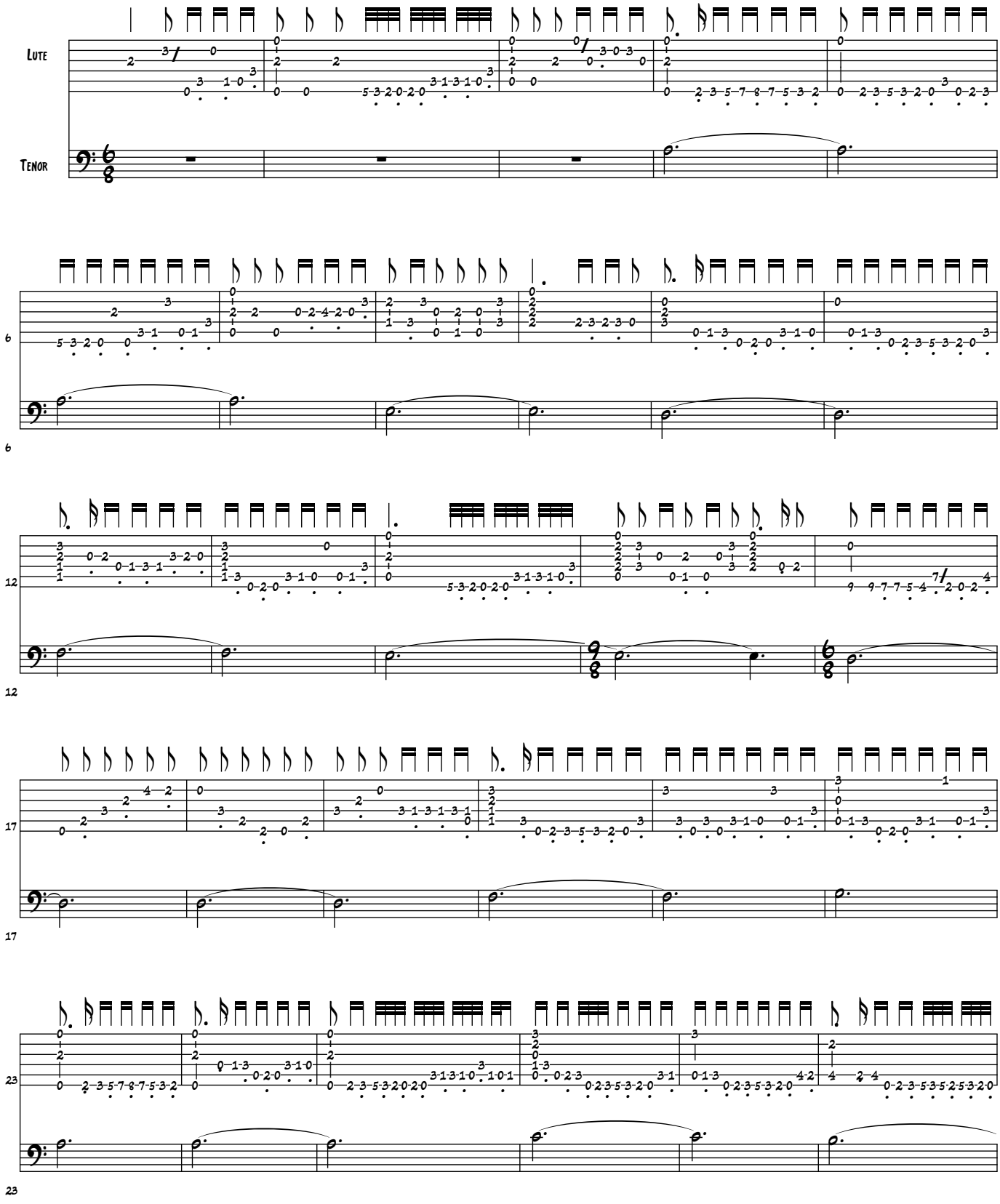
[10] Vincenzo Capirola Lutebook, 1517

Basadanza

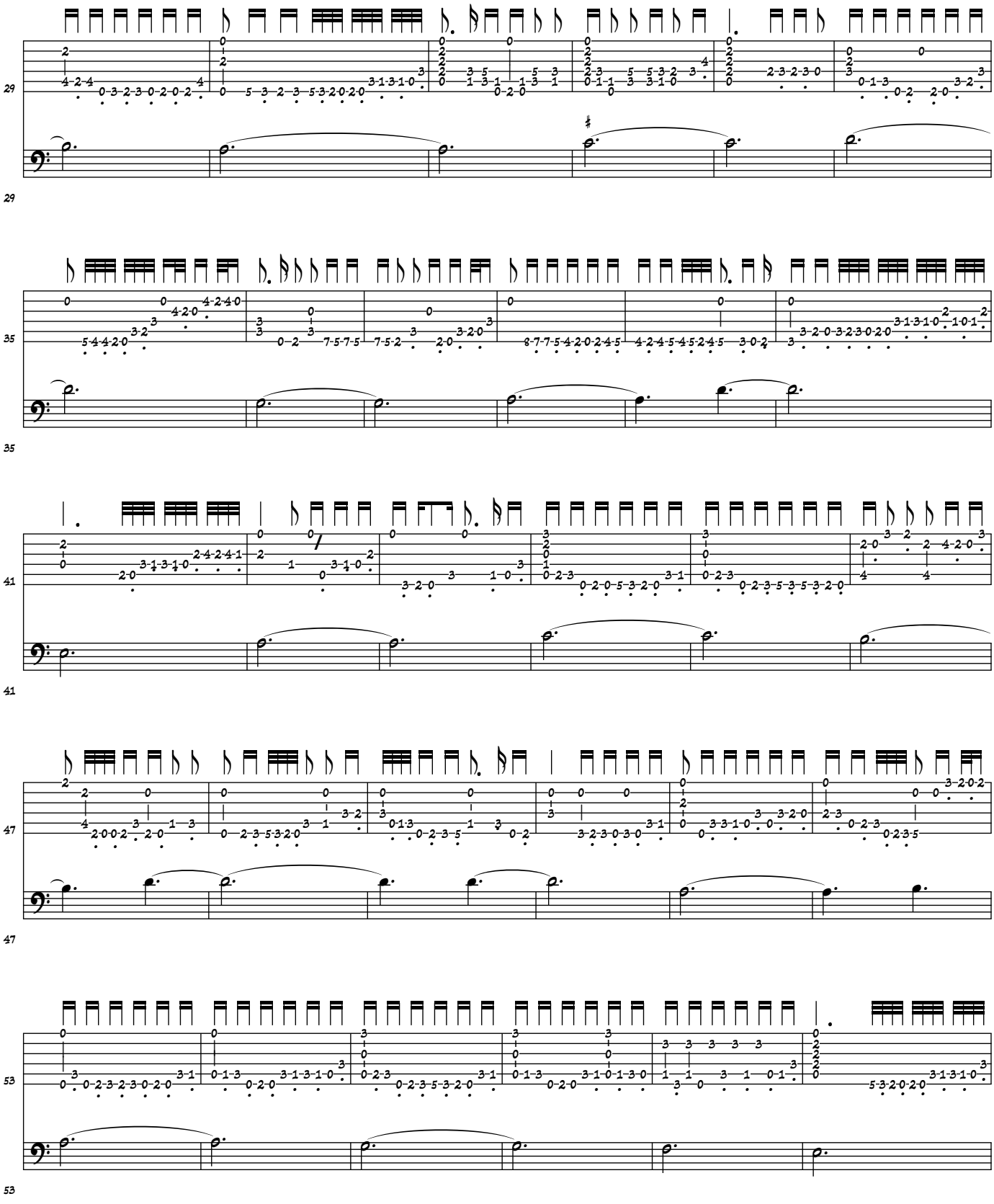
as is

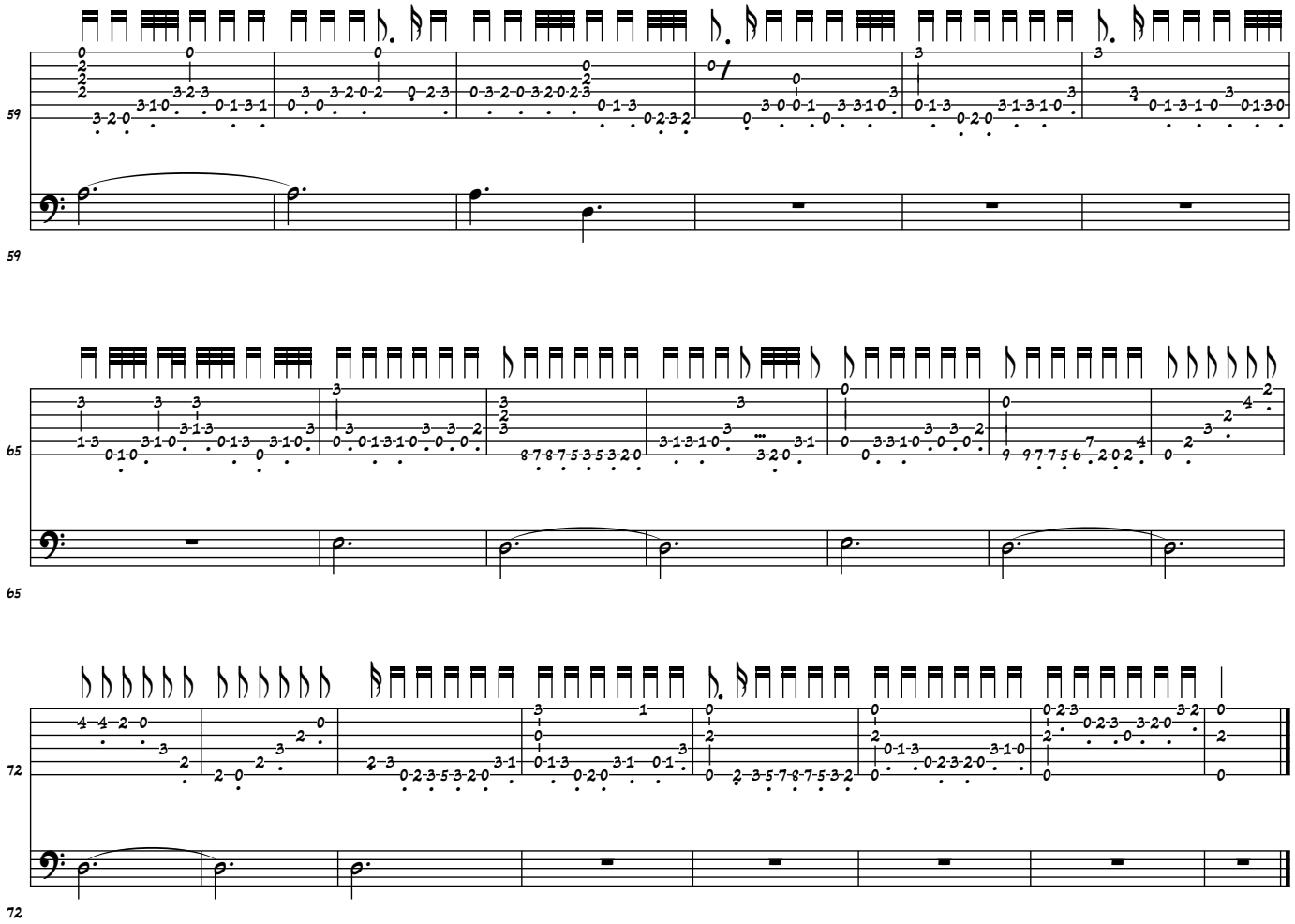
from Thibault MS

transcr. K.Shchenikov



Basadanza



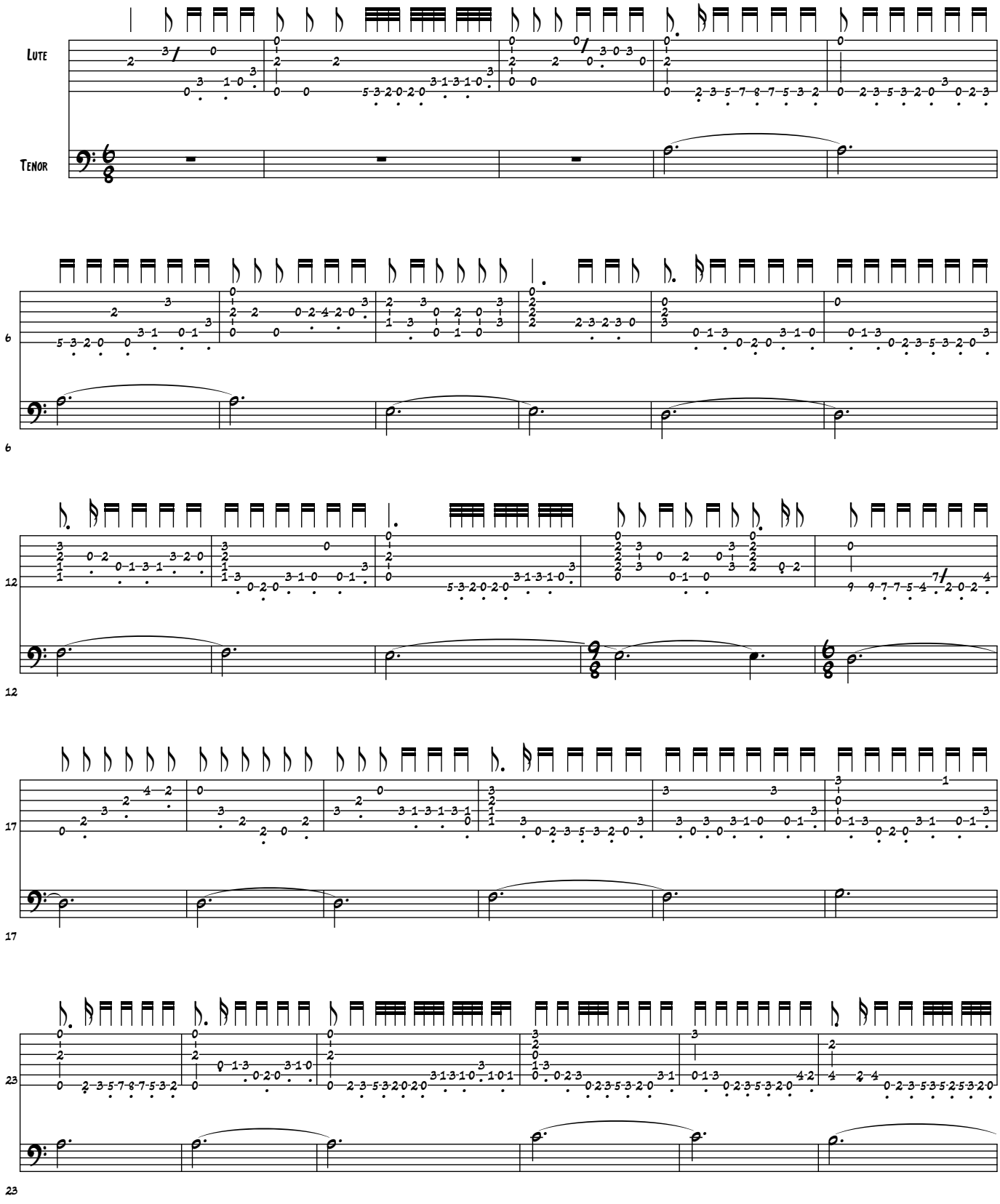

59
59
65
65
72
72

Basadanza

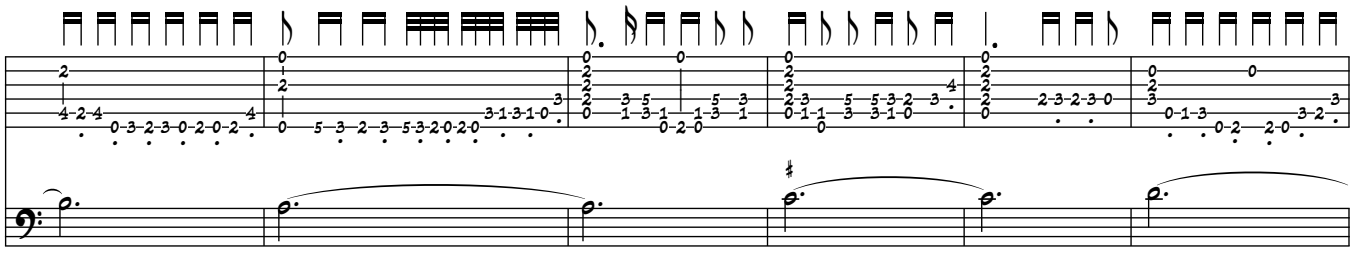
ACC. TO CY

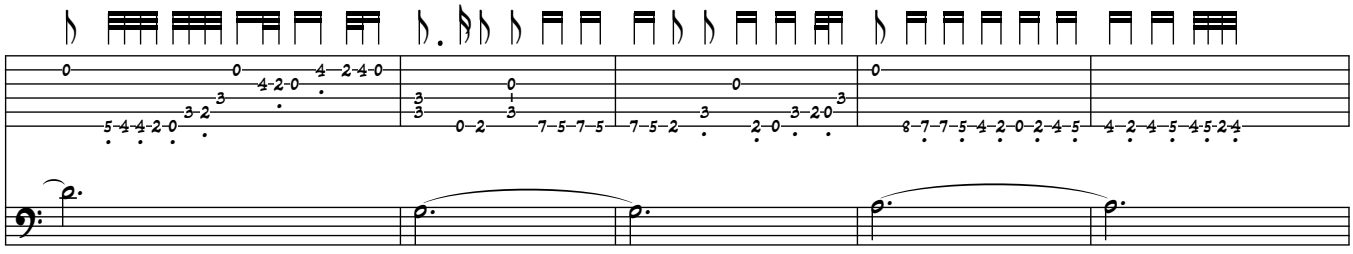
from Thibault MS

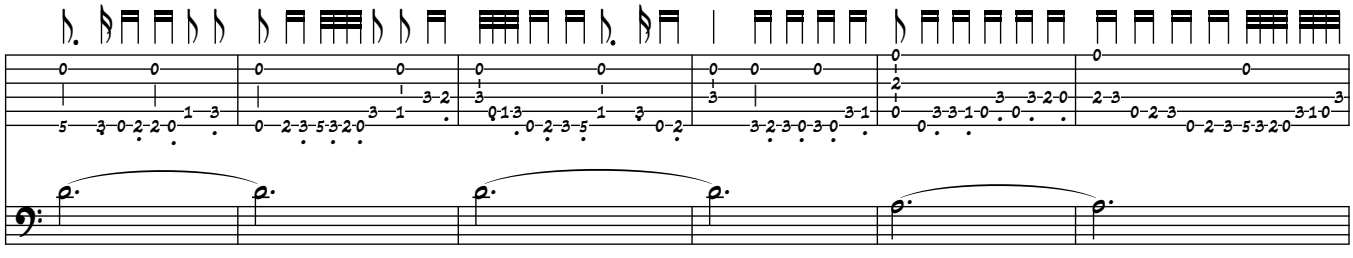
transcr. K.Shchenikov

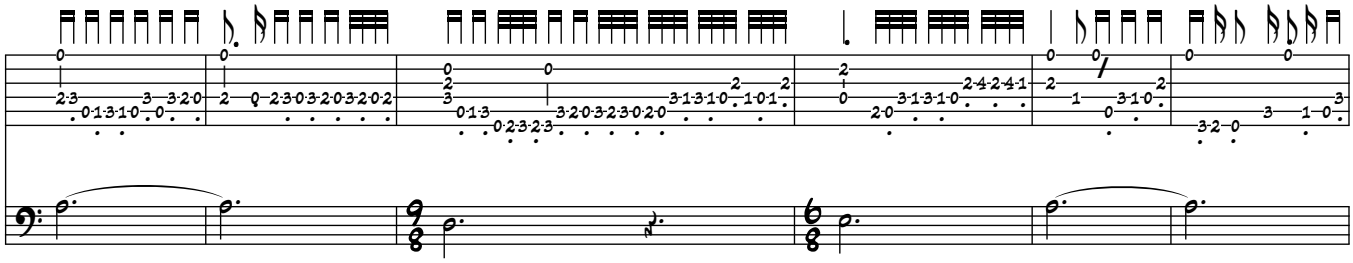


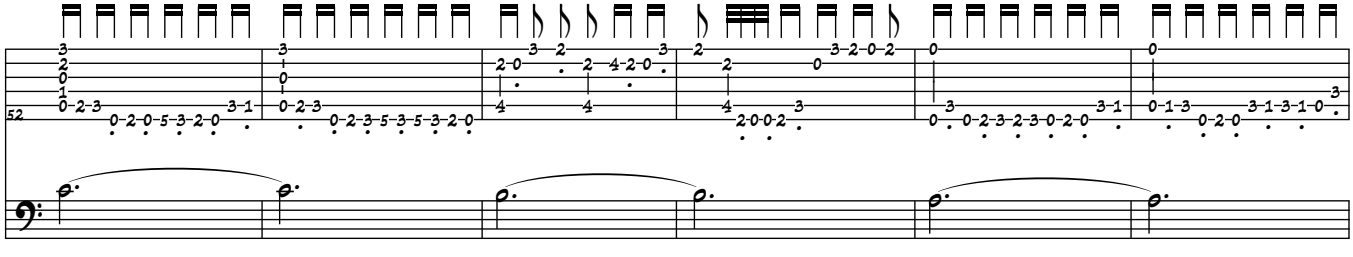
Basadanza

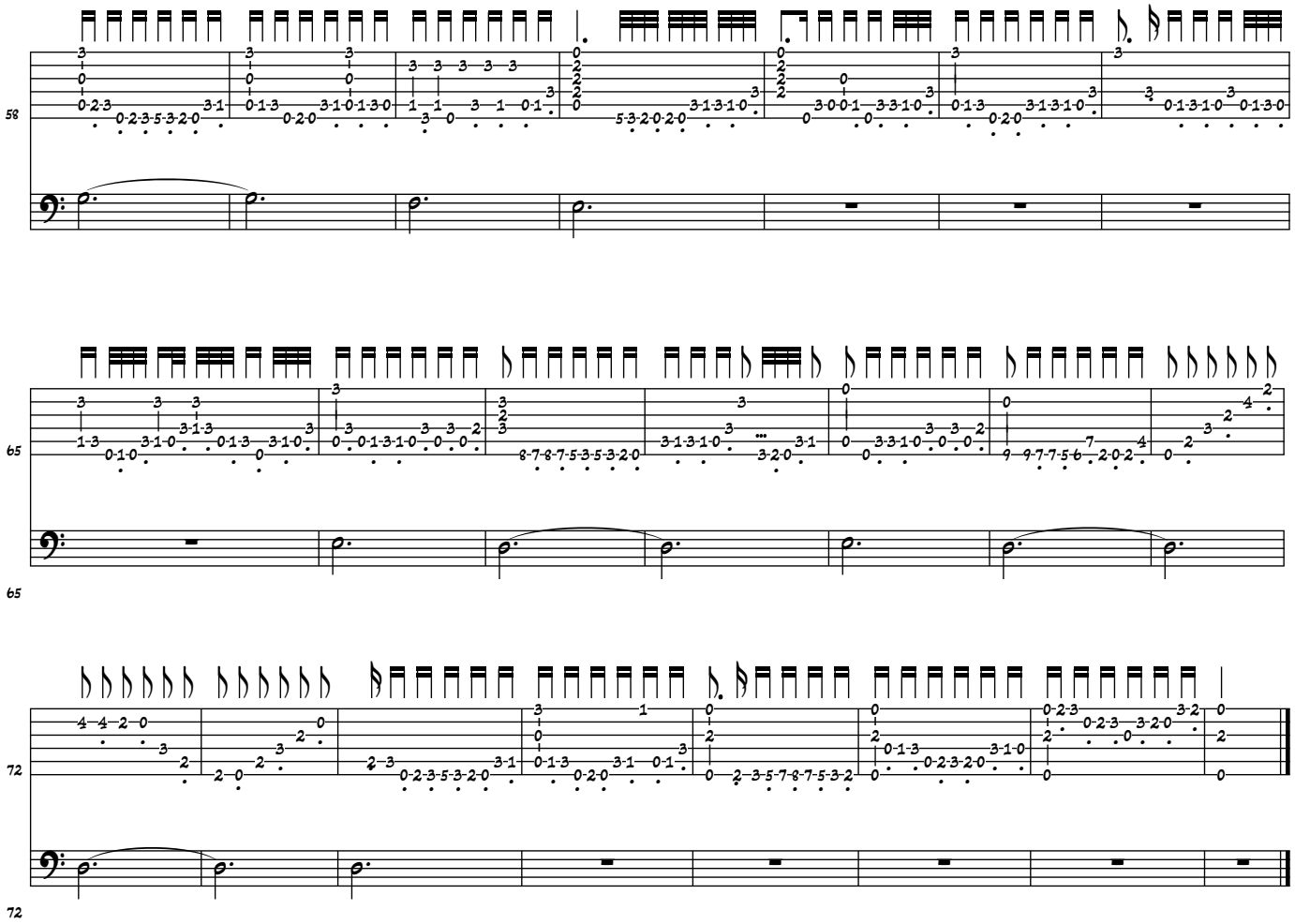








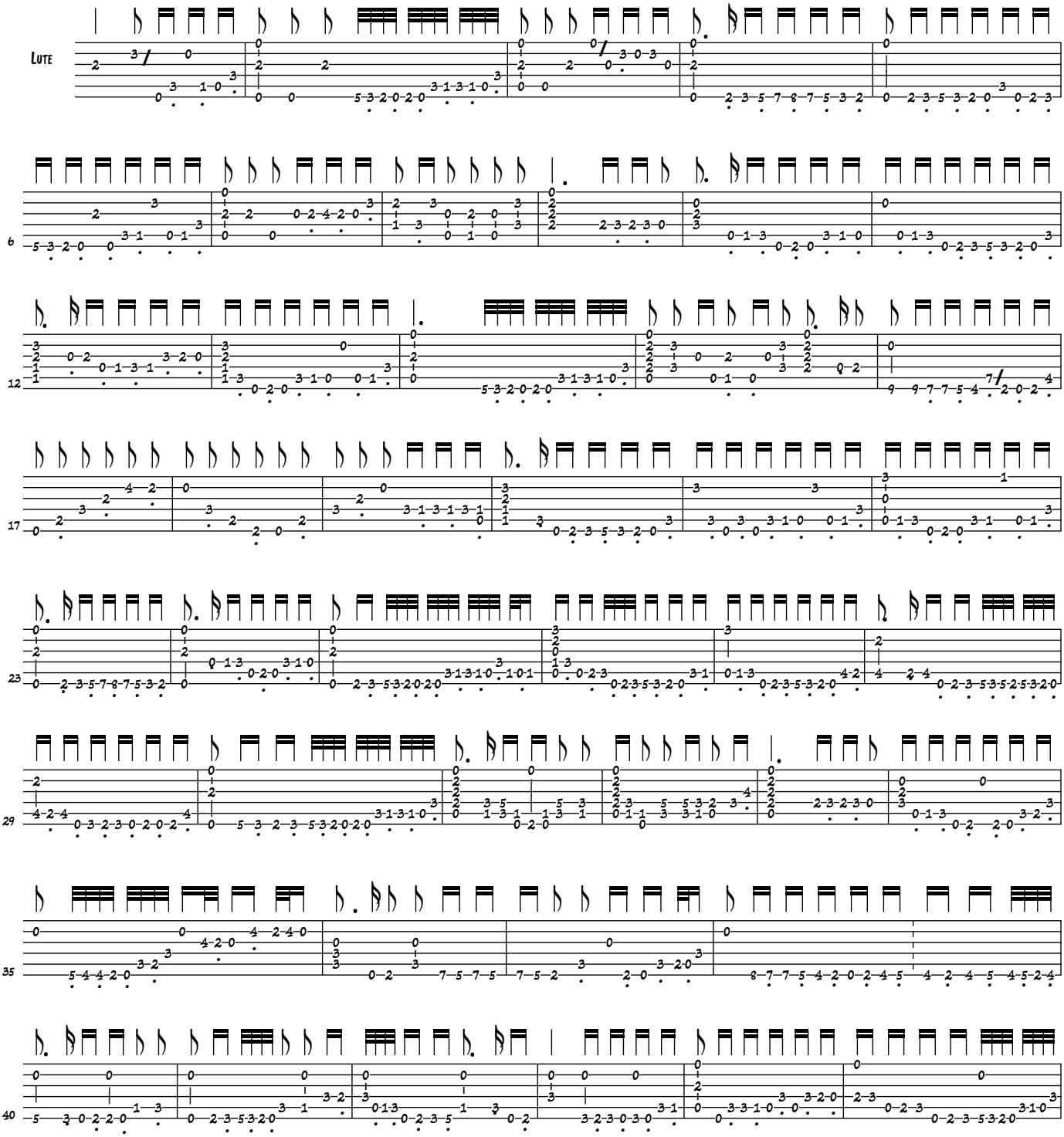



58
65
65
72
72

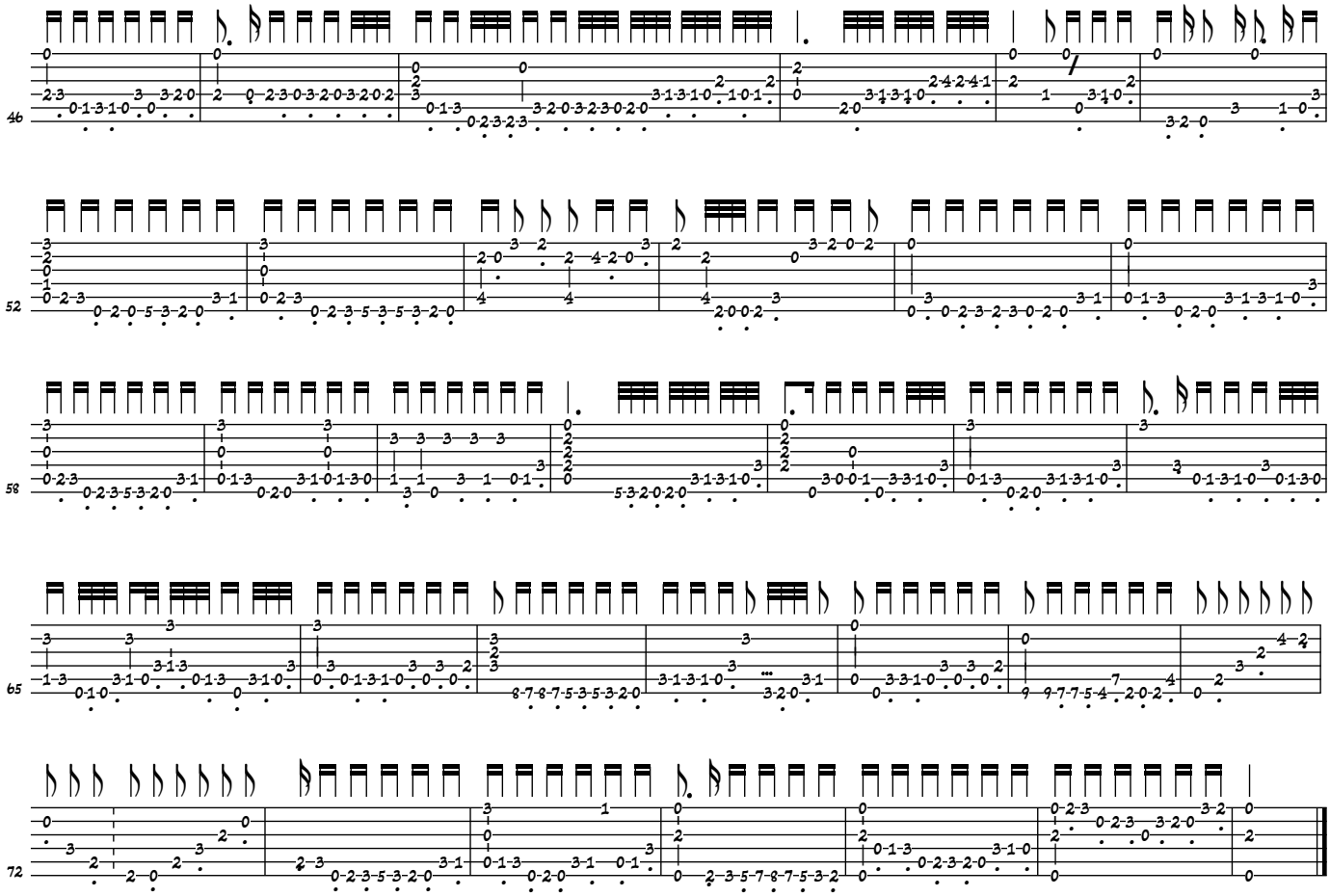
Basadanza

from Thibault MS

transcr. K.Shchenikov



Basadanza



Comma

This Manuscript is still keeping many secrets and I have no hope to open up all of them, I'm only enjoying the process of discovering and finding solutions for each spot, each line and each sign without arrogant conviction to find the only one way, but with desire to understand anything in the end.

One question can come to mind now: why should we deal with such a doubtful source since we have more reliable ones? My answer is: to expand the context and increase the knowledge of the era. Even such a document can shed some new light on the common repertoire and performance practice. Who knows, may be such a sources contents some pieces by Pietrobono or Giovanni Angelo Testagrossa whom we know only from the legends.

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