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Johannes Wolf, in his monumental study on musical notation, *Handbuch der Notationskunde*, categorized lute tablature into four types: German lute tablature (die deutschen Lautentabulatur), Italian lute tablature (die italienische Lautentabulatur), French lute tablature (die französische Lautentabulatur), and Spanish lute tablature (die spanische Lautentabulatur). The nomenclature, "Spanish lute tablature" is problematic, possibly a misnomer, as the name may imply that it was invented to notate lute music. This study attempts to argue that Spanish "lute tablature" was invented for the *vihuela de mano* and was used exclusively by *vihuela de mano* players.

Flemish theorist and composer, Johannes Tinctoris, in his treatise, *De inventione et usu musicæ*, written in Naples ca. 1480 and published there between 1481 and 1483, described the origin and physiognomy of an instrument he called viola thus:

> Indeed, the invention of the Spaniards, the instrument which they and the Italians call viola, and the French demi-luth, is descended from the lute. However, it differs from the lute in that the lute is larger and shaped like a tortoise-shell whereas it [the viola] is flat and in most cases curved inwards on each side.

The artists from the kingdom of Aragon in Valencia began to depict such stringed instrument from the mid-fifteenth century onwards. The original type of Spanish viola appeared from the mid-fifteenth century. Representations show the body of an instrument with a curved waist, a sound-hole, and double-strong strings attached to a flat bridge. Another type, *vihuela de mano*, became more popular from the late fifteenth century and became standard in the sixteenth century. If the Spanish paintings of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are to be trusted, the right-hand technique of the Spanish viola at the time of its invention was the plectrum-plucking style. The finger-plucking technique on the *vihuela de mano* began to be cultivated from the late fifteenth century. This new technique enabled the player to pluck multiple strings simultaneously, and therefore was capable of producing several polyphonic voices on a single instrument. The *vihuela de mano* players made arrangements of polyphonic voices and invented a notation system (tablature) for this new musical style.

Luís de Milán’s collection of his compositions and arrangements, entitled *Libro de musica de vihuela de mano intitulado El maestro*, published in Valencia in 1536, is the earliest extant printed music specifically for the *vihuela de mano* and the sole surviving source in print that uses Spanish lute tablature. Milán included in *El maestro* detailed information on the *vihuela de mano*, its notation, its tuning, modes, rhythm, and tempus. He described the tablature system he used in the book. It consists solely of horizontal lines that represent the order of strings, and Arabic numerals that indicate the division of frets in semitone intervals. For the order of the lines, Milán explains that the highest line in the tablature represents the highest sounding course of the *vihuela de mano*. For the division of frets, Milán explains that the Arabic numeral “0” denotes the open course. Therefore, his system differs from Italian, French, German, and Neapolitan tablatures.

Is Spanish lute tablature a hybrid of some other tablature systems (for instance, more popular Italian lute tablature and French tablature)? When Milán’s book appeared in 1536, other kinds of tablature had already been in circulation in Europe for quite some time. It is highly likely that Milán had some knowledge of Italian lute tablature. His acquaintance with Italian culture is evidenced by his publication of *El cortesano*, the book based on Baldessare Castiglione’s *Il cortegiano*. Moreover, in *El maestro* Milán included settings of Italian poems by Petrarch, Sannazaro, and others for voice and vihuela and explained the Italian origin of the melodies used for the pavans. Why did Milán choose Spanish lute tablatures?

One peculiar phenomenon in the history of the *vihuela de mano* music in Spain is the lack of use of Spanish lute tablature by other vihuelist-composers. Luis de Narváez, Alonso Mudarra, Enrique de Valderrábano, Diego Pisador, Miguel de Fuenllana, and Esteban Daza, all used Italian lute tablature. All were active far from Valencia and published the *vihuela de mano* books either in Valladolid, Seville, or Salamanca. Any evidence for the transmission of Milán’s El Maestro to other parts of Spain is almost nonexistent. There is no concordance of Milán’s compositions in the later *vihuela de mano* books. Nor did the books of Pierre Paletse who transcribed in French lute tablature several works by Narváez and Valderrábano include any compositions by Milán. When Luys Venegas de Henestrosa published his *Libro de cifra nueva para tecla, harpa y vihuela* in Alcalá de Henares in 1557 (keyboard arrangements of *vihuela de mano* pieces), Venegas selected pieces by Narváez, Mudarra, Valderrábano and Pisador. Milán’s name is conspicuously absent from the list of the vihuelists in Juan Bermudo’s *Declaracion de instrumentos musicales*, published in Osuna in 1555, the treatise that comprehensively deals with both theoretical and practical aspects of music, including detailed descriptions of matters concerning the *vihuela de mano*. The
vihuelists Bermudo considered as the best in Spain were, in his order, Narváez, Martín de Jaén, Hernando de Jaén, Lopez, Fuenllana, Mudarra, and Valderrábano. Interestingly, Narváez considered his book of 1538 to be the first vihuela de mano book ever published in Spain.

All those point to the theory that the publication of El maestro was a local affair appreciated only at the court of Valencia and its immediate surroundings. The reason for this phenomenon may lie in Milán’s social status and the purpose of his publishing El maestro. Milán was a courtier who was responsible for the cultural life of the court of Valencia. He was a prolific writer; he published El juego de mandor (a parlor-game book) in 1535, and El cortesano (an imitation of Castiglione’s Il Cortegiano) in 1561. Learning courtly ideals and behaviors was an important part for the education of young courtiers. Music was an essential part of this culture. In his introduction to El maestro, Milán emphasized that his purpose for publishing the book was to offer the fruit of his labor and to educate amateurs how to play the vihuela de mano by self-instruction (thus the title “The Teacher”). Milán to teach how to cope with the canto de órgano (mensural notation), how to play the vihuela de mano, and how to read tablature notation. Milán’s requirements for the student conform to Castiglione’s view of the music education of the courtier that comprised general appreciation of music, skill in sight-singing, and proficiency in playing various instruments. Thus Milán’s El maestro is a part of his attempt to educate the courtier who is supposed to cultivate his artistic proficiencies as part of an all-comprehensive education.

The isolation of Milán’s El maestro compels us to assume that Spanish lute tablature was used in a limited area where it was invented. Milán’s refined notational system also compels us to assume that there was some kind of precursors or preparatory phase for the development of Spanish lute tablature. A newly discovered fragment of music written on the flyleaf of a copy of Lucius Marineus Siculus’s Epistolarum familiarum, published in Valladolid in 1514, is noted in Spanish lute tablature. Antonio Corona-Alcalde proposes the origin of the music to Valencian, based on the fact that the book was once a part of Valencian humanist Gregorio Mayans y Siccar and that the tablature is similar to Milán’s whose book was published in Valencia. Corona-Alcalde estimates the fragment to have been written a decade or two before Milán’s El maestro, pointing out the similarity in musical style between the composition in the Siculus fragment and one of Milán’s fantasias.

Although the systems of the highest line corresponding to the highest sounding course of the vihuela de mano and of the Arabic numeral “0” denoting the open course are identical, there are some minor differences. The Siculus fragment uses the alphabet “Y” to indicate the first fret and the rhythmic signs that look like the alphabet “n” or “m” to indicate tactus (the former for two beats and the latter for three). Milán uses the Arabic numeral “1” to denote the first fret and adapts the note heads resemble those in mensural notation. There is no doubt that Milán avoided any ambiguity in notation, since his tablature was destined for publication. The tablature in the Siculus fragment may be an example of an undeveloped stage of Spanish lute tablature or of a shorthand system that was perfectly legible to the initiated.
The discovery of the Siculus fragment supports the following assumptions: (1) Spanish lute tablature was not Milán's invention; (2) the system had already been developed by the early sixteenth century; (3) Valencia was the key place for its invention; (4) its development was closely associated with the cultivation of the vihuela de mano at the time the performance of polyphonic compositions with the finger-plucking technique of the solo vihuela de mano became standard. Therefore, the possible place of its invention and the intended performance medium suggest we rename Spanish lute tablature "Valencian vihuela de mano tablature."  

End Notes


8These books are listed and described in Howard Mayer Brown, Instrumental Music Printed before 1600: A Bibliography (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).

9Milán dedicated El maestro to the King of Portugal Joao. According to J. B. Trend, Luis Milán y la Víuèuella, Hispanic Notes and Monographs, 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), (unavailable), Joao III awarded Milán a pension of 7,000 cruzados as dedication fee. If this can be substantiated, Milán's book was disseminated to Portugal. Madorra mentions in his book that there were "two other libros de cifra for vihuela printed in Spain." Milán's and Narváez's are the only extant printed vihuela books before Madorra's, Antonio Corona- Alcalde, "The Viola da mano and the Vihuela, Evidence and Suggestions about Their Construction", The Lute: The Journal of the Lute Society 24 (1984): 10, suggests that it was not Milán's but a lost print.

10See Brown, Instrumental Music, item 1536/5.


14"Luys de Narváez, Los seis libros del Delphin de musica de cifra para tăñer vihuela (Valladolid, 1538), f. 2 "Prologo" reprinted by Emilio Pujol, ed., Luys de Narváez: Los seis libros del Delphin de musica de cifra para tăñer vihuela, Monumentos de la Musica Española, 3 (Barcelona: Instituto Espanol de Musicologia, 1945), 18.

15Milán's El cortesano may have been written as early as 1538, for Juan Bosca's Spanish translation of Cattigione's II cortesiano was published in 1534; see Ward, "The Vihuela de mano," 371-75. See also Peter Burke, The Fortunes of the Courtier (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990).


17The point has been made in Leo Schrade, "Luys Milán the Vihuelista," The Guitar Review 9 (1949): 79-80.


19The copy of Adrian Denys's Florilegium (Köln: Volk, 1594), now preserved in Munich Bayerisches Staatsbibliothek (with the call number 20, Mus pr. 53), has a number of handwritten additions of lute or vihuela music. There are twenty-five pieces that are notated in Valencian vihuela de mano tablature. Some were transcribed from late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century German and Netherlandsprints and manuscripts. I am very much indebted to Dr. Arthur J. Ness for drawing my attention to this source, to Dr. John H. Robinson for providing me a photocopy of all the manuscript additions, and to Professor Dieter Kirsch for providing me valuable information and suggestions.