

Reverse Engineering the Dean Castle Colascione - or Tiorba?

Further to Comms 2027 and 2042.

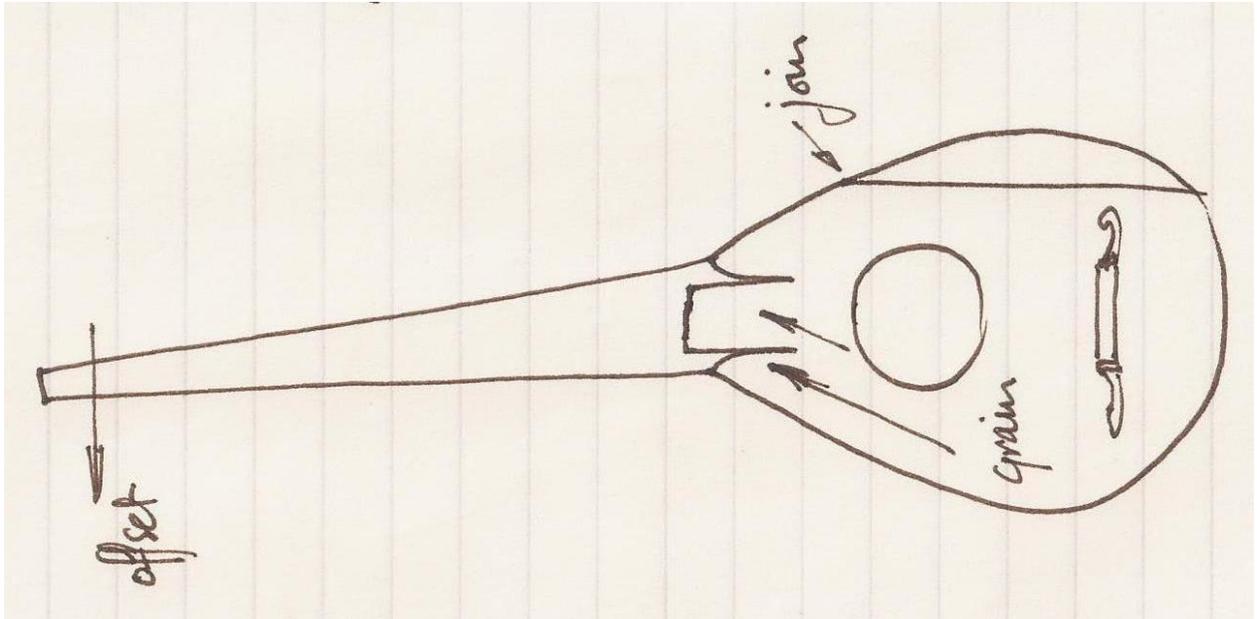
In 1980 I had the opportunity to examine and measure some of the lutes and guitars in the Van Raalte collection housed at the Dean Castle museum, Kilmarnock, Scotland (Note 1). Among the instruments is a three single course, long necked lute labelled 'Colascione', accession no. MI/A30 - a fancy decorative instrument made from ivory and ebony with a fine carved ivory pegbox finial in the shape of a lion or dog's head and with engraved ivory panels on the fingerboard. As the instrument seemed convincing enough, some time was spent recording its details and dimensions.



Colascione – Dean Castle, Scotland

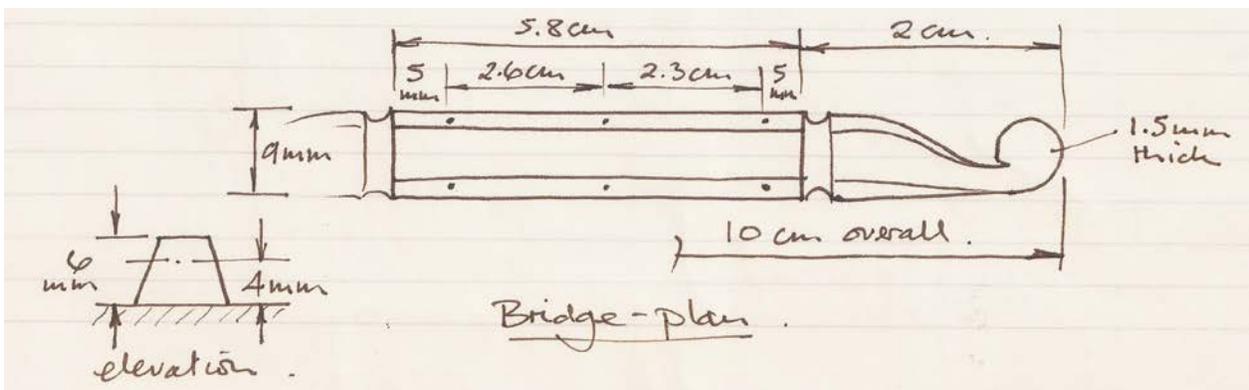
There are at least two other colascioni of similar appearance preserved in the European collections (Note 2).

The instrument may be original apart from the sound board that does not match in quality the construction of the rest of the instrument being varnished with coarse, slanting grain and with a joint well offset to the treble side - so is assumed to be a later addition.. It is about 3mm thick at the rosette tapering to 2 mm around the perimeter. There is a half depth, 1.5 mm wide banding around the edge.. These are hastily made rough sketches from my original notes. The following sketch is exaggerated for clarity.

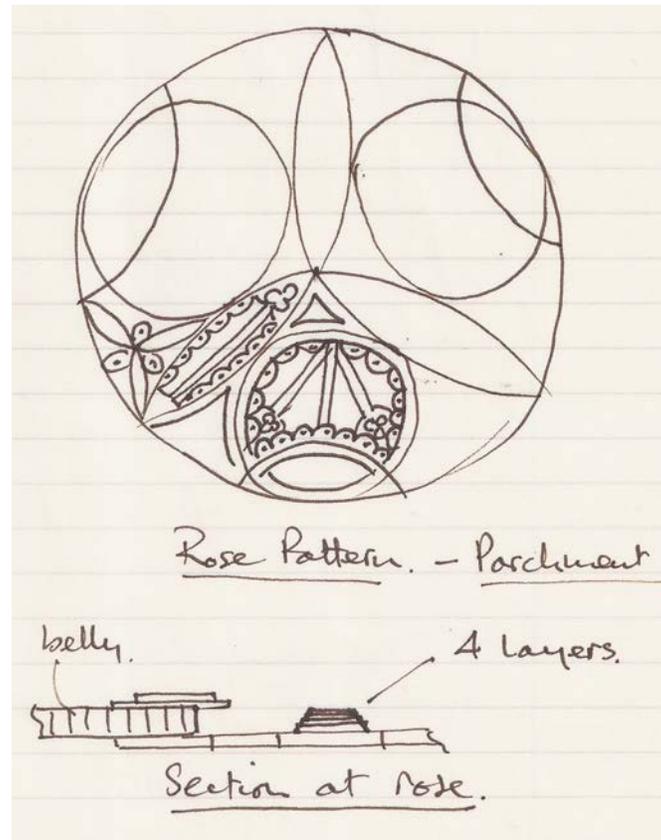


The offset of the neck, towards the bass side, and general slight asymmetry results in a treble string length of 757 mm and bass string length of 755mm.

A curious feature is the relatively wide string spacing at the bridge (and resulting relatively wide neck).



The colascione has a fancy parchment rosette built up in layers (Note 6)
 There is no maker's label visible through the rosette and no other information on the provenance of this instrument is available. Interestingly, a similar style of rosette is found on a lute of strange proportions, #1037 in the Stearns collection, attributed to the workshop of 19th C instrument forger Leopoldo Franciolini (Note 3).



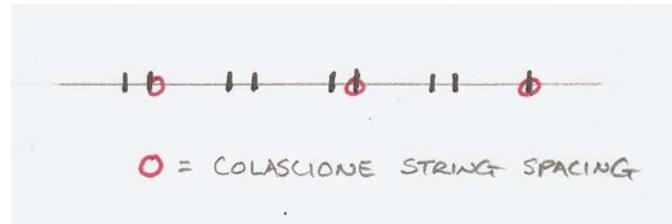
Although the instrument is a colascione, being an Italian (?) long necked lute, it clearly is not an example of the long narrow necked type, of Turkish origin, illustrated by Mersenne and Kircher (See Comm. 2027). The proportional difference between the Dean Castle colascione compared to Kircher's colachon is apparent (**B** in **Fig 1**). Two other examples in the iconography of the latter style of colascione are shown in **Fig 2** and **Fig 3** but there are others.

Kircher claims that the Tiorba was the invention of a Neapolitan street musician who modified a lute by doubling the length of its neck calling it a 'tiorba' (or grinding mill) as a joke. According to Kircher, strings were later added and the instrument was to become the familiar multi course double pegbox instrument that has retained the name Tiorba. (See Comm 2042)

Kircher does not provide an illustration of the street musician's original Tiorba. However, if the Dean Castle colascione is 'reverse engineered' with the neck reduced in length by half, the resultant lute would have the appearance shown in detail **A**, **Fig. 1** – in this case a small treble lute with a string length of about 510 mm and with a fingerboard that might accommodate about 11 frets (Note 4).

Examining the unusually wide spacing of the three single strings at the bridge there is sufficient space to accommodate five courses of a lute – a single treble with four double courses.

To illustrate this point the following sketch, drawn to scale, shows the colascione string spacing superimposed over the string spacing of the first five courses of an original 16th C lute (Note 5)



If Kircher's street musician, for convenience, had left the original bridge intact on his modified lute and then simply fitted three single strings in the appropriate available string holes, this might account for a wide, asymmetric spacing of the strings at the bridge.

In light of these observations, could the Dean Castle colascione be an example of an instrument constructed according to the proportions of the original Neapolitan Tiorba? If so who was it made for? I have yet to find examples depicted in the iconography and it is clearly not a folk instrument of the streets so could this type have been created for rich dilettantes to play among friends in the comfort of their salons - or perhaps later, to serve the lucrative 19th C collectors market?

Notes

- 1) The collection totals about 90 instruments with about half that number on public display. Some of the plucked stringed instruments appear to be in almost original condition, others had been significantly altered and some would seem to be unplayable fakes. A complete inventory of the Charles van Raalte collection, made in 1975, is listed in Comm. 360.
- 2) Brussels, Conservatoire royal de Musique, 1567 (see Baines #220, European and American Musical Instruments, 1966) and the Gemeente museum, the Hague, early 17th C.
- 3) Leopoldo Franciolini – an Italian fraudster, seller of faked and altered historical musical instruments many finding their way into the great collections of the 19th C. The parchment rosette is a simplified but stylistically similar version of the rosette on lute # 1037 attributed to the Franciolini workshop in the Stearns Collection, University of Michigan.
- 4) A lute of this string length, with gut strings would be tuned in a' (A440). A similar length of neck for an early lute is described by Arnault de Zwolle 15th C.
- 5) The course arrangement shown represents to scale the first five courses of a mid 16th C lute in original condition by Georg Gerle, cat# A35, string length 598 mm, Vienna Kunsthistorisches museum - according to a full scale drawing of the instrument made by Stephen and Miranda Murphy, 1975.
- 6) Images of the rosette can be found at www.futuremuseum.co.uk/collections Search 'colascione'.

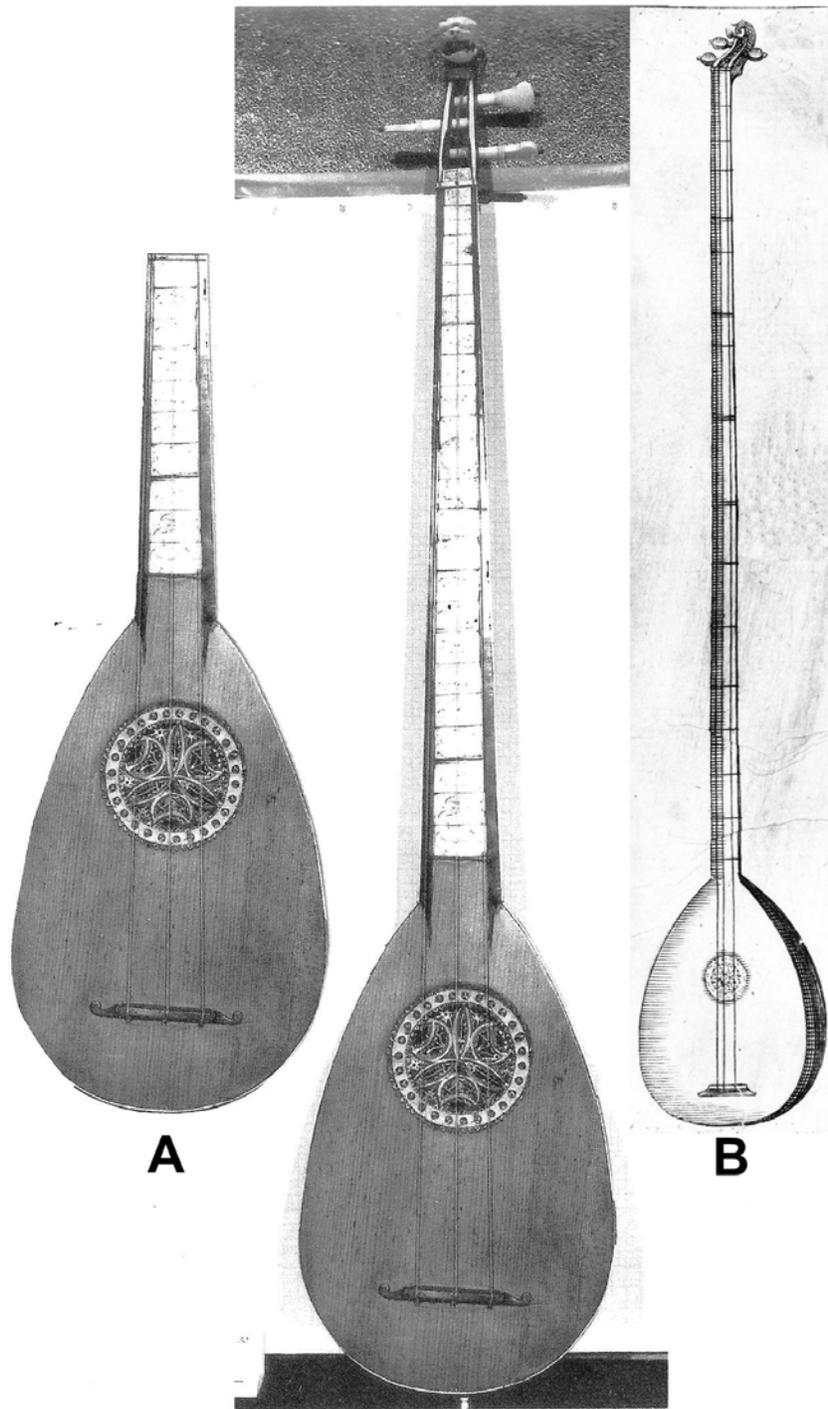


Fig 1



Fig 2

Flippo Bonani 1722/1723



Fig 3

Jaques Callot 1622