

### Confirmation of the Bassanos' maker's mark

The Bassano family are now recognized as important wind musicians and instrument-makers in both Venice and London in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Let me first summarize what we already know about their instrument-making.

The patriarch of the family, Jeronimo I (d. ?1546–50), is first documented in Bassano del Grappa, about 65 km north-west of Venice. In a notarial deed from the city in 1481, the prior of the Sancte Crucis (Holy Cross) monastery gave 'about four fields' of forested land near Crespano (a town 15 km east of Bassano) to Baptista Piva, son of the late Andree Crespano, Baptista's unnamed wife, and their sons Zanantonio and Hieronimo.<sup>2</sup> This document establishes the names of Jeronimo's brother, father and grandfather, previously unknown, and suggests that the family was living in Crespano.

In 1502, the Council of Bassano hired 'Magister Hieronymus Piva' or his son, 'Magister Jacob Piva', to tune and keep in good repair the organs of the church of San Francesco in Bassano, without having to pay tax on the income.<sup>3</sup> A Venetian doctor called Lorenzo Marucini, writing about the city of Bassano in 1577, described Jeronimo this way:

Maestro Gieronimo, called 'il Piva', inventor of a new bass wind instrument, excellent *pifaro*, and employed by the Most Illustrious Signoria of Venice ... and his excellence also in making recorders was great; whence those instruments marked with his stamp are held in high esteem among musicians and are very expensive when they are found.<sup>4</sup>

The new instrument was probably the curtal.<sup>5</sup> He seems to have made the move to Venice in the early years of the sixteenth century and was apparently the 'Ser Jheronimo trombon' who worked in the *trombe e piffari* of the Doge of Venice around 1506–12. Several other documents call him 'maestro', probably indicating the leader of an ensemble or an instrument maker (or both).

Jeronimo had six sons. At least five were wind players; most or all were also instrument-makers. Alvise (d. 1554) worked for the Scuola di San Marco, Venice, in 1515, and the Concerto Palatino in Bologna between 1519 and 1521. He and his brothers Jasper [Gasparo] (d. 1577), John [Zuane] (d. 1570) and Anthony [Antonio] I (d. 1574) served in the sackbut consort at the English Court in 1531 but soon went back to Venice. Anthony returned to England in 1538 and was appointed 'maker of divers instruments' to the Court. The eldest brother Jacomo (Jacopo) (b. before 1488; d. 1559–66) came with him but was not appointed to the court and apparently went back to Venice between 1542 and 1545. His descendants formed the Venetian branch of the family.

Alvise, Jasper and John emigrated to England in 1539–40 with the youngest brother, Baptista (d. 1576); they and Anthony were appointed 'brothers in the art or science of music' to the Court, and Anthony gave up his separate position as instrument maker. In 1531 the brothers had used the surname 'de Jeronimo'; on their return to England they adopted Bassani or Bassano, and later generations used Bassano exclusively. As musicians, the five brothers in England formed a consort of 'recorders', and seven of their descendants also served in that consort. Other descendants served in the sackbut, flute and viol consorts until 1665.

Besides a 'dwelling house', Alvise had a 'working house' for making instruments at the brothers' first residence in the dissolved monastery of the Charterhouse, London. John had a 'fraterna Compagnia' (brotherly company) with his instrument-making brother Jacomo and perhaps also Anthony and Jasper in Venice, mentioned in a law suit in 1571.<sup>6</sup> Giulio Ongaro suggests that Jacomo 'served as the other brothers' agent in Venice, providing them with

instruments and probably also with music for their use in London, and perhaps for resale in England'.<sup>7</sup> Since there were at least three instrument-maker brothers in England and only one in Venice, and sales were more likely in Italy than in England, the traffic could well have been largely the other way round.

An inventory made about 1571 by Johann Jakob Fugger, superintendent of the music at the Bavarian court, of a chest of 'beautiful and good' instruments 'made by the Bassani brothers' in London lists 45 wind instruments: six unidentified (perhaps bombards, quiet shawms or bassanelli), seven *Pfeiffen* (perhaps flutes), ten cornetts and a fife considered as a set, twelve crumhorns and nine recorders, all tuned to organ pitch; an accompanying letter mentions a chest of six large viols and a chest of three lutes.

The Bassano brothers presumably also made some of the cornetts, crumhorns, dulcians (probably curtals), fifes, flutes, recorders, shawms and a tabor pipe listed in the inventories of Henry VIII's collection (1542 and 1547). Edward Seymour, the Lord Protector, bought shawms from Anthony in 1539. Raimund Fugger, an Augsburg banker, listed a case of 27 recorders 'made in England', presumably by the Bassanos, in 1566. In the following year, Ciudad Rodrigo Cathedral in the province of Salamanca bought recorders, crumhorns and other instruments for its minstrels 'from England', where the Bassanos were the only known makers. In 1567, Burgos Cathedral agreed to buy in England certain (unspecified) instruments needed by the minstrels.

Some of the brothers' descendants made and repaired instruments. In 1576, the Earl of Oxford took a singer named Orazio Cuoco, aged about 16, back to England with him from Venice.<sup>8</sup> Cuoco stayed with Oxford for eleven months as a page, then returned home, where he was summoned to the Holy Inquisition and questioned the next year. When Cuoco was asked, 'Was there anyone in England who wanted to make you read prohibited books and to teach you the doctrine of heretics?' he answered: '... there are also five Venetian brothers who are musicians of the Queen and make recorders and bowed stringed instruments'.<sup>9</sup> These brothers were presumably the sons of Antonio I: Mark Anthony (1546/7–1599), Arthur (1547–1624), Edward I (1551–1615), Andrea (1554–1626) and Jeronimo II (1559–1635).

The Duke of Medina Sidonia obtained cornetts from England in 1584. Arthur sold 'rare wind instruments' (apparently cornetts) to Brussels in 1608. Andrea jointly held (with Robert Henlake, then Edward Norgate) the office of keeper and repairer of keyboard and wind instruments at the court from 1603 until his death.

In the succeeding generation only Arthur's son Anthony II (1579–1658), who had been willed instruments and tools by his father, seems to have made instruments. It may have been him, rather than a member of the previous generations, who made the famous large recorders depicted in Marin Mersenne's *Harmonie universelle* (Paris, 1636) which 'have been sent from England to one of our kings'; Mersenne also apparently knew the Bassanos' crumhorns. In 1626, Huesca Cathedral owned a case of eight recorders and a separate great bass 'bought from England'.

Jacomo's daughter Orsetta married the wind-instrument maker Santo Griti, who seems to have changed his name to Santo Bassano (d. 1586). Santo and Jacomo entered into a business partnership with three musicians of the Doge in 1559, in which the latter became in effect their salesmen, in Venice and abroad, in return for a large loan; the agreement mentions cornetts, curtals (*bassoni curti*), flutes, recorders and shawms. Santo took out a patent in 1582 to make and sell a new wind instrument, almost certainly the bassanello, although it might well have been invented by Jeronimo I.

The maker's mark or marks of the Bassano family have been the subject of much speculation. I surmised in 1983–95 that the main mark was what had hitherto been called the 'rabbit's foot' (!! ) mark found single, double, and triple on about 150 surviving woodwind instruments, including cornetts, crumhorns, curtals, flutes, recorders and shawms, and that this mark in fact represents silkworm moths, as found on the family coat of arms.<sup>10</sup> I shall leave for another day a consideration of whether Jerononimo Bassano I used the HIERS or HIES maker's marks, found on twenty-nine surviving cornetts, crumhorns, curtals and recorders.

The cornetts at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford are known to have been bought for that cathedral in 1605, presumably from cornett-makers in England.<sup>11</sup> The Oxford cornetts have the triple version of the !! mark. So too does a cornett in the Castle Museum, Norwich, that is likely to be of English provenance (perhaps it was used by the Norwich waits?).

In 1999, Kilbey (then Maggie Lyndon-Jones) travelled around European collections and made an inventory of all instruments with the !! marks: cornetts, crumhorns, curtals, flutes, recorders and shawms.<sup>12</sup> She classified the !! instruments by type of mark—no fewer than eighteen different types (plus some unclassified because they were too faint, unique, or unseen by her), illustrated with photographs. Forty-two percent of the !! instruments belong to the first four types: A (before 1628; twenty-two examples), B (c. 1559–1608, twenty-seven examples), C (before 1596, ten examples), and D (three examples). She also made a series of useful 'conclusions and observations', the most important of which would be '[t]here is no evidence that [!!] was the exclusive mark of the Bassano family', except that she found no evidence it *was not* the exclusive mark of the Bassano family.

New evidence has now turned up that clinches the !! mark for the Bassano family. First, a few more links between Spain and England. At an unspecified date in the second half of the sixteenth century, the royal musician Gaspar de Camargo wrote to Felipe II noting 'the need for shawms, recorders, cornetts and curtals in these Kingdoms of Spain, [which] come from England, Italy and Flanders, and cost a lot of money'.<sup>13</sup> Besides the cathedrals in Ciudad Rodrigo, Burgos, and Huesca mentioned above, Seville owned a set of twelve recorders and two curtals from England in 1614, apparently bought in 1607.<sup>14</sup>

Hot off the (digital) press, a story that sheds some light on how Bassano instruments made their way abroad: In 1618, Rodrigo Calderón, 1st Marquis of Siete Iglesias, was patron of the Porta Coeli convent of the Order of the Immaculate Conception, in Valladolid. He commissioned the purchase of recorders and cornetti for the convent through Fray Diego de la Fuente, confessor of Diego Sarmiento de Acuña, 1st Count of Gondomar, who was the Spanish ambassador in London at that time.<sup>15</sup> The Count made the purchase himself and was in charge of bringing the instruments from England, as he was on the verge of returning home to Valladolid on medical leave. The instruments cost an amazingly high 400–500 ducats, or 600 ducats with the shipping, although some music seems to have been included. By way of comparison, the salary of a minstrel at the Valladolid Cathedral in the early seventeenth century was 27–54 ducats a year; of the curtal and cornetto players, who had more work to do, 100–180 ducats a year.<sup>16</sup> The Count wrote: 'I tried to make sure that the instruments were all those that Your Highness ordered, and the best and most finely finished they could be'.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps because he did not return home directly even when back in Spain, he wrote that he had left the instruments in Saldañuela, the palace near Burgos, with orders for the mayor to ship 'the chest in which they come' to Valladolid.<sup>18</sup>

Second, another link that seals the deal. Toledo Cathedral bought instruments for its minstrels in 1562, as unearthed by François Reynaud in his book about polyphonic music in

Toledo as long ago as 1996 and recently quoted in full by Julia Miller: ‘a case of recorders that holds eight instruments that were made in England and have the mark of a fly’s wings. This case holds two altos, four tenors and two basses’.<sup>19</sup> A fly is a reasonable interpretation of a silkworm moth, and the instruments came from England, where the Bassanos had clearly created a reputation for themselves in Spain.

I am delighted that my theory about the Bassanos’ maker’s mark, first aired in 1983 and based on an accumulation of circumstantial evidence, has now been confirmed. Inserting the ‘missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle’ is one of the most exciting and gratifying steps of my research career of more than 50 years.

#### Postscript: The Bassano Mark in Seventeenth-century Inventories

In Padua in 1696, an addendum to an inventory made by Andrea Mantova Benavides lists: ‘a consort of four pipes or recorders, all stored in a case of black leather, of which the small one is lacking. All were made by an outstanding and celebrated maker, who marked them with his sign *ji*. Only three remain’. Clearly, *ji* was an attempt to render the !! mark, and perhaps the maker’s or makers’ fame had indeed come down to the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup>

In 1700 the Court of Prince Ferdinando of Tuscany in Florence owned two different sets of recorders.<sup>21</sup> The first set, of sixteen instruments, was made by the well-known Dutch maker Richard Haka (d. 1705), and presumably in Baroque style. The second set has the following elaborate description:

A consort of eleven recorders, consisting of two descants, three altos, four tenors and two basses, which basses are marked *with the mark of the fly* and are of maple, with a spring of brass to open and close the last hole and are bell-shaped at the bottom; the tenors are entirely marked with the same mark and are of boxwood; the altos are of new boxwood with the bell of black bone; and the sopranos are also of new boxwood without mark, and the above-mentioned consort is united with its divisions in a case covered on the outside with black leather, and the lid on the inside is lined with marbled paper with hinges of brass and its bell to attach all the case and its iron hinge to close it.<sup>22</sup>

There is evidence that establishments in Italy could hold on to Renaissance-style recorders for a long time: as late as 1716, the Accademia Filarmonica in Verona inventoried some recorders it had bought in 1548, and some of these (bearing three different types of !! mark) have even survived to the present day.<sup>23</sup> So the recorders in Florence in 1700 could have partly been instruments made by the Bassanos in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century.

#### Notes

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1. See especially David Lasocki, ‘Professional Recorder Players in England, 1540–1740’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1983); and David Lasocki with Roger Prior, *The Bassanos: Venetian Musicians and Instrument Makers in England, 1531–1665* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995; e-book, Portland, Oregon: Instant Harmony, 2013, together with Lasocki, *Research on the Bassano Family, 1995–2012*).

2. ‘Venerabilis in Christo Pater Dominus Domnus Andrea de Carpi ordinis Sancti Benedicti ... prior monasterii Sancte crucis ... investivit ser Baptistam Piva quondam Andree de

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Crespano ibidem presentem et nec nomine et vice Domne Bonae eius uxoris et Zantantonii et Hieronimi filiorum suorum ... de una pezia terrae boschivae quae potest esse circe quator campos positos in pertinentiis villae Crespani in contrada de legumis'. Notaio Giorgio dell'Amico, 24 March 1481. Quoted in Alessio Ruffatti, 'La famiglia Piva–Bassano nei documenti degli archivi di Bassano del Grappa', *Musica e storia* 6, no. 2 (December 1998): 354.

3. 'Quod magister Hieronymus Piva habeat onus concordandi organos suprascriptos et exemptetur ab ominibus oneribus personalibus'. 'Item ponit partem quod exemptetur Magister Jacob Piva sive Magister Hieronymus eius pater ab oneribus personalibus pro suis mercedibus concordandi organos in ecclesia Sancti Francisci et ipsos tenendi in concio'. Bassano del Grappa, Archivio del Museo Civico, Delibere del Consiglio comunale, 10 and 11 February 1502. Quoted in Ruffatti, 'Famiglia', 353.

4. 'Mastro Gieronimo, detto il Piva, inventore di un nuovo instromento di basso à fiato, Pifaro eccellentissimo, & salariato dalla Illustriss. Sig. di Venetia; il quale hebbe tre figliuoli Musici, disciplinati da lui, che con il padre insieme furono poi condotti dalla Serenissima Regina d'Inghilterra con gran stipendio, & molto suo honore; & fù la eccellenza di questi grande ancora nel far di sua mano flauti, onde li segnati del suo segno, sono tenuti in gran venerazione appresso Musici, & vengono ben pagati dove si trovano'. Lorenzo Marucini, *Il Bassano* (Venice: Gratoso Perchacino, 1577), quoted in Alessio Ruffatti, 'La famiglia Piva–Bassano nei documenti degli archivi di Bassano del Grappa', *Musica e storia* 6, no. 2 (December 1998): 351.

5. Maggie Kilbey, *Curtal, Dulcian, Bajón: A History of the Precursor to the Bassoon* (St Albans: the author, 2002), 32.

6. Giulio Ongaro, 'New Documents on the Bassano Family', *Early Music* 20, no. 3 (August 1992): 411.

7. Ibid.

8. See Noemi Magri, 'Orazio v. Nelson', *De Vere Society Newsletter* (April 2006): 6–11; <http://www.deveresociety.co.uk/articles/NL-2006april-magri-orazio.pdf>; and 'Testimony of Orazio Cogno [sic] before the Venice Inquisition on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1577'; <http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/?p=79>.

9. 'Stato alcuno che in Inghilterra te habi voluto far lezer libri proibiti e insegnar la dotrina de eretici? ... Et vi sono anchora cinque venetiani fratelli i quali son musici della Rezina et fano flauti et viole....' Quoted in Magri, 'Orazio v. Nelson'.

10. Lasocki, 'Professional Recorder Players'; Lasocki with Prior, *The Bassanos*; Lasocki, 'The Anglo-Venetian Bassano Family as Instrument Makers and Repairers', *Galpin Society Journal* 38 (1985): 112–32; Lasocki, 'The Bassanos: Anglo-Venetian and Venetian', *Early Music* 14, no. 4 (November 1986): 558–60; Lasocki, 'The Bassanos' Maker's Mark Revisited', *Galpin Society Journal* 46 (1993): 114–19.

11. Julian Drake, 'The Christ Church Cornetts, and the Ivory Cornett in the Royal College of Music, London', *Galpin Society Journal* 34(1981): 44–50.

12. Maggie Lyndon-Jones, 'A Checklist of Woodwind Instruments Marked !!', *Galpin Society Journal* 52 (1999): 243–80.

13. AGS, Cámara de Castilla (CCA), Personas (PER), Leg. 5, no. 243; quoted in Ana López Suero, 'The Network of Professional Musicians in Valladolid, 1540–1621' (doctoral thesis, de Valladolid, forthcoming in 2021).

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14. Juan Ruiz Jiménez, *La librería de canto de órgano: creación y pervivencia del repertorio del Renacimiento en la actividad musical de la catedral de Sevilla* (Granada: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, 2007; digital edition, 2012), 360.

15. Juan Ruiz Jiménez, 'Instrumentos para el convento de Porta Coeli en Valladolid (1618)', *Paisajes Sonoros Históricos*, 2021.

<http://www.historicalsoundscapes.com/evento/1276/valladolid/es>

16. Ana López Suero, 'The Craft of the Musician in Valladolid, 1550–1650' (doctoral thesis, Universidad de Valladolid, forthcoming in 2021).

17. 'que procuré que fuesen todos los que V. S. mandó y los mejores y más bien acabados que pudiesen ser'.

18. 'la caja en que vienen'.

19. 'un achat de huit flûtes provenant d'Angleterre, marquées "à l'aile de mouche"...'.

François Reynaud, *La polyphonie tolédane et son milieu des les premiers témoignages aux environs de 1600* (Turnhout: CNRS Éditions, Brepols, 1996), 208. 'una caja de flautas que tiene ocho piezas que se labraron en Ynglaterra y son de la marca de ala de mosca. Esta caja tiene dos triples y quatro tenores y dos contrabajos'. Julia Miller, 'Recorder Use in Spanish Churches and Cathedrals in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', *Revista portuguesa de musicologia*, n.s. 5, no. 2 (2018): 343.

20. 'Item: Un Concerto de 4 Subioti seu Flauti tutti posti in una Busta di currame nero de quali manca uno il picciolo: tutti di prestante celebre Auttore marcato segno suo ji. Son restati no 3'. Gerhard Stradner, 'Musical Instruments in an Inventory by Andrea Mantova Benavides, Padua 1696', *Galpin Society Journal* 55 (2002): 101–2.

21. Vinicio Gai, *Gli strumenti musicali della Corte Medicea e il Museo del Conservatorio 'Luigi Cherubini' di Firenze: Cenni storici e catalogo descrittivo* (Florence: Licosa, 1969), 20.

22. 'Un concerto di undici Flauti o Zufoli, consistenti in: due soprani, tre contralti, quattro tenori e due bassi, quali bassi sono marcati con il marco del Mosca e sono di acero, con una molla d'ottone per aprire e serrare l'ultimo buco e sono strombati in fondo; i tenori sono pure marcati con il medesimo marco e sono di bossolo; i contralti sono di bossolo nuovo con la strombatura di osso nero; et i soprani sono anch'essi di bossolo nuovo senza marco, et il suddetto concerto è unito, con i suoi spartimenti, in una custodia coperta per di fuori di cuoio nero, et il coperchio per di dentro è foderato di carta marezata con maschiatura d'ottone et sua campanella per attaccare tuca detta custodia a suo ganghero di ferro per serrarla'. Gai, *Gli strumenti musicali*, 20.

23. Marco Di Pasquale, 'Gli strumenti musicali dell'Accademia filarmonica di Verona: un approccio documentario', *Il flauto dolce*, no. 16–17 (October 1987–April 1988): 8, 12.

The surviving instruments have different !! marks. Research by Adrian Brown in the Accademia Filarmonica of Verona demonstrates that the recorders, 'the survivors of three separate sets, show three different styles of making and have been found to be tuned in three slightly different pitches. The [Lyndon-Jones'] type-G mark is found on a great bass size in *F*, two basses in *Bb*, and four bassets in *f*, tuned around *mezzo punto*, which survive from a case of twenty-two recorders purchased by the Accademia from Paolo Naldi in 1548, but apparently deposited there four years earlier. The type-A great bass and extended basset, among the best surviving Renaissance recorders, apparently belonged to one of two cases, containing ten and eleven recorders, that the Accademia acquired between 1562 and 1569.

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They are at a pitch about 30 cents lower than *mezzo punto*.... The type-H bass and basset, on the other hand, could be considered among the worst surviving recorders and are at a pitch about 50 cents higher than *mezzo punto*. They seem to correspond to the “one black case with nine recorders with a brass crook for the *dolzaina* used as the bass” that the Accademia acquired between 1585 and 1628, the late date suggesting that the Bassanos’ instrument-making ability had declined.... These instruments clearly represent a long period of instrument-making, from the 1540s or earlier to the end of the century and beyond’. See Adrian Brown and David Lasocki, ‘Renaissance Recorders and their Makers’, *American Recorder* 47, no. 1 (January 2006): 29.