

Aurelio Virgiliano's *Nuova intavolatura di tromboni*

Howard Weiner

Since its first publication in an article by Heinrich Huber in 1975,¹ the trombone slide position chart (and cornetto fingering chart), labeled *Nuova intavolatura di tromboni per sonarli in concerto*, from Aurelio Virgiliano's *Il Dolcimelo* has been one of the most frequently reproduced early trombone sources. Until now, however, trombone scholars, including the present author,² have merely commented on the significance of this chart as the earliest source to show the four diatonic slide positions of the tenor trombone in A. That is to say, attention has been focused almost exclusively on the four-line tablature that stretches across the top, while the rest of the chart has largely gone unmentioned.³ Recently, I received several queries concerning the significance of the other part of the chart, i.e., the two four-part systems showing an ensemble of a cornetto and three trombones, and therefore decided that it was finally time to address this issue.⁴

Nothing is known about Aurelio Virgiliano. The manuscript, which was never completed, is preserved in the Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica in Bologna under the call number Ms. C. 33. The title page reads:

Il Dolcimelo d'Aurelio Virgiliano dove si contengono variati passaggi, e diminutioni così per voce, come per tutte sorte d'instrumenti musicali; con loro accordi, e modi de sonare. [*Il Dolcimelo by Aurelio Virgiliano, containing various passages and diminutions for voice as well as for all kinds of musical instruments; with their chords and modes of playing.*]

On the evidence of the watermarks, the manuscript was written after 1589;⁵ since it contains a viol tuning first documented in Lodovico Zacconi's *Prattica de musica* of 1592, and the instruments are presented in an order similar to that in Agostino Agazzari's *Del sonar sopra il basso* (Siena, 1607), Veronika Gutmann has suggested a time of origin after 1592 and most likely in the first decade of the seventeenth century.⁶ A facsimile edition was published in 1979.⁷

The manuscript is in three parts or *libri*. The first *libro* deals with the performance of diminutions, the second consists of sixteen *ricercars* for a melody instrument (mentioned are *flauto*, *cornetto*, *violino*, *traversa*, *viola bastarda*, and *simili or altri instrumenti*). The third *libro* (fols. 42r–60v)⁸ was to show illustrations of the various instruments and provide information on their use in ensembles and alone,⁹ but a number of pages are blank, some merely have headings that give a hint of what Virgiliano intended to cover, and others display drawings of instruments without any further commentary or information. The cornetto/trombone chart is found on the facing pages 51v–52r (Figure 1).¹⁰

Something not evident from the many reproductions of the *Nuova intavolatura di tromboni* is that the manuscript was written in black *and* red ink. In her discussion of the

NVOVA INTAVOLATVRA DI TROMBO

Scala del Trombone cō la mano.

Soggetti per tutte le parti:~

ORDINE PRIMO

ORDINE SECONDO

Vn Tuon piu alto:~

Alla Quarta:~

Figure 1

“Nuova intavolatura di tromboni” from *Il Dolcimelo* by Aurelio Virgiliano (Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica di Bologna, Ms. C. 33, fol. 51v–52r).

52
51

NI PER SONARLI IN CONCERTO :- ❖ ❖ ❖

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes C, D, E, F, G, A. The G is written with a decorative flourish. There is a decorative flourish at the end of the staff.

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B. The notes are arranged in a sequence: G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B.

In Tuono:-

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B. The notes are arranged in a sequence: G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B.

vn Tuon piu basso

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes E, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A. The notes are arranged in a sequence: E, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A.

Alla Terza:-

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F. The notes are arranged in a sequence: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F.

Alla Quinta :-

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E. The notes are arranged in a sequence: B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E.

Alla sesta :-

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D. The notes are arranged in a sequence: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D.

Alla settima :-

manuscript, Gutmann notes that the red ink “is employed not only as decoration, but rather highlighted by means of it are things related to the content or main titles, subtitles, words, notes, note names, fermatas, clefs, time signatures, and more—depending on the context—that are important for an overall view.”¹¹ In the case of our trombone/cornetto chart, the title “Nuova intavolatura di tromboni per sonarli in concerto” and the four ornaments following it are in red ink as are a number of other elements that I will call attention to during the course of this article (see also Figure 2).

The four-line tablature that stretches across the top is labeled *Schala del Trombone co[n] la mano* (literally, “scale of the trombone with the hand,” but obviously meaning “with its positions”; the *S* of *Schala* is in red ink, as are all of the chart’s other texts and the boxes that enclose them). The four lines of the tablature represent the four diatonic slide positions. The top line (first position) has the note names *A–e–a–c′–e′–g′*, the second line (second position) *G–d–g–b–d′–f′*, the third *F–c–f*, and the fourth *E–B*. The only anomaly is that *g′* is shown exactly in first position, rather than a bit higher, as might be expected for a seventh partial, and *a′* between first and second positions.¹² In red ink on this tablature are the clefs and the tones immediately following them, and the two ornaments on the right end. Also in red ink is the cross on the second line that marks *G* (*Gammaut*), which as *gamma* was the lowest tone of the scale in medieval theory,¹³ although there are two tones lower than that here (*F* and *E*). The *gamma* also comes into play in the indication of the octaves by one, two, or three red dots above the note names, with the one-dot octave ranging from *G–f*, the two-dot octave from *g–f′*, and the three-dot octave from *g′* upward, in contrast to modern pitch-name systems, such as Helmholtz, in which the octaves go from C to C.

The first system, labeled *ordine primo* (first order), has four staves labeled C, A, T, and B, which stand for the four basic voices of Italian polyphony at that time, Canto, Alto, Tenore, and Basso,¹⁴ and two sets of “normal clefs” or *chiavi naturali*—soprano, alto, tenor, and bass, respectively—one with and one without a key signature of one flat (all of this in red ink). The clefs are followed by whole-note scales, labeled above the system as *Soggetti per tutte le parti* (“subjects for all the parts”), for the depicted instruments: a cornetto and three trombones.

Originally, the staves for the *soggetti* in both systems extended ca. 36 mm further to the right, but were pasted over with paper on which the instruments were then drawn.¹⁵ In Figure 1 and in the facsimile edition, the lines of the staves can be seen showing through the upper layer. Huber’s reproduction of the chart—on which all subsequent reproductions, except that in the facsimile edition, have been based—was obviously “cleaned up” to remove ink seepage from the foregoing page and from under the paste-overs, as well as the occasional discoloration of the paper caused by aging.¹⁶

To the right of the instrument drawings are four segments that each employ a cornetto fingering chart and Virgiliano’s slide position tablature to illustrate various transpositions of the *soggetti*: *Un Tuon piu alto* (one tone higher), *In Tuono* (at pitch), *Un Tuon piu basso* (one tone lower), and *Alla Terza* (a third [lower]).

The second system, labeled *ordine secondo* (second order) is structured in the same manner as the first, only with different sets of clefs: treble, mezzo-soprano, alto, and baritone/tenor, again one with and one without a key signature of one flat (here, too, all in red ink). These sets of clefs represent the so-called *chiavette* or high clefs (in two versions, one with baritone clef, the other with tenor clef in the bass part). The possible transpositions indicated here are *Alla Quarta* (a fourth [lower]), *Alla Quinta* (a fifth [lower]), *Alla Sesta* (a sixth [lower]), and *Alla Settima* (a seventh [lower]).¹⁷


The *soggetti* contain varying numbers of notes and were obviously not intended to be played simultaneously by the depicted ensemble. In fact, the number of notes sometimes does not even match the number of note names in the corresponding tablature. Red ink is employed here to establish optical points of reference: *g'* in treble clef, *c'* in the C-clefs, and *f* in the F-clefs are written in red ink in the *soggetti*, as are the corresponding cornetto fingerings and trombone note names (the third trombone of the *ordine secondo* has two notes and two note names in red ink, one each for baritone and tenor clef; the fourth note, *c'*, of the *soggetto* for the first trombone of *ordine secondo* was inadvertently written in black ink and then clumsily penned over with red ink, making it stick out even in a grayscale image). The transposition is always taken into account when indicating the reference note names: for example, the *soggetto* for the first trombone in the *ordine primo* has a red *c'* as its fourth note, which translates as *d'* (red D with two dots) in the tablature segment for *Un Tuon piu alto*.¹⁸

As can be seen from the *In Tuono* tablature segment, as well as those of the various transpositions, all three depicted trombones are tenors in A.¹⁹ Unlike Praetorius at around the same time, Virgiliano was apparently unaware of the possibility of producing “false” or “factual” tones: the first tone of the third trombone’s *soggetto* in the *ordine secondo*, a *c* in baritone clef, does not become a *D* when transposed downward *Alla Settima*, but is replaced by a horizontal line with dots below and above (like the mathematical sign for division) to show that it is not available.

On the page following the *Nuova Intavolatura* is yet another line of trombone tablature (fol. 52v; Figure 3). This is just a strip of paper pasted by one end vertically onto the page.²⁰ Like the tablatures on the full chart, it is divided into four segments. In terms of the tones indicated, it is very similar to and in the same range as the second trombone of the *ordine primo*, with the same reference note names in red ink, but lacking one tone on the low end, and with two (or, in one case, only one) additional tones on the upper end (highest tone *b'*). The lines of the tablature are conspicuously wobbly and unequally spaced here, in contrast to those on the full chart. The most mysterious aspect, however, is the inscription on the back: *Contrabasso dei tromboni. Parte del Contrabasso*.²¹ This attribution hardly seems plausible, but, lacking further information or context, it is impossible to suggest an alternative explanation.

The unfinished state of Aurelio Virgiliano’s *Il Dolcimelo*, and especially of its third section, makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, it is obvious from the *Nuova intavolatura di tromboni* and the other more or less complete pages of the third *libro*²² that the mastery of transposition was an important aspect of Virgiliano’s

Scala del Trombone cō la mano.



NVOVA INTAVOLATVRA DI TROMBO

Soggetti per tutte le parti:~

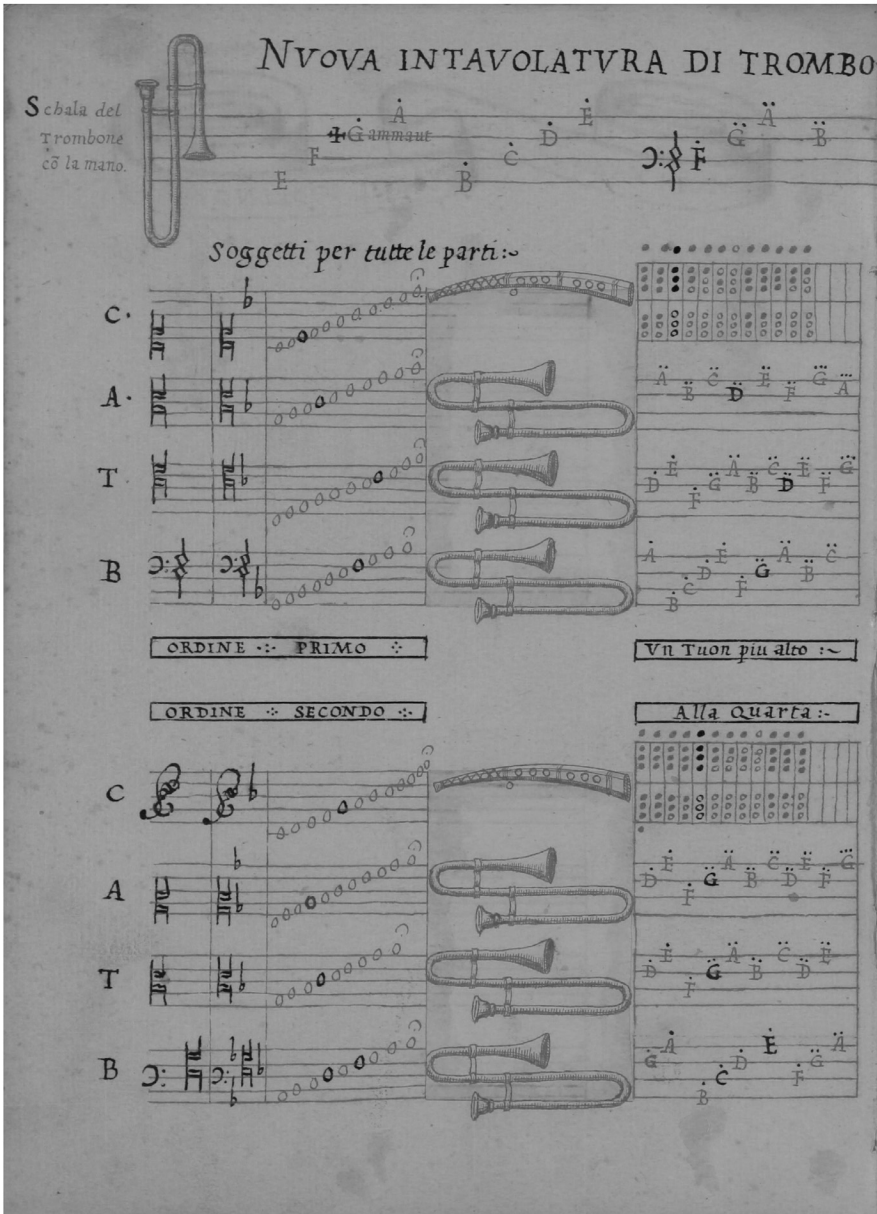
C. A. T. B.

ORDINE :: PRIMO ::

ORDINE :: SECONDO ::

Vn Tuon piu alto :-

Alla Quarta :-



Detailed description of Figure 2: This is a historical musical manuscript page titled "NVOVA INTAVOLATVRA DI TROMBO". At the top left, it features a small illustration of a trombone and the text "Scala del Trombone cō la mano." followed by a musical staff with notes and a treble clef. The main title is "NVOVA INTAVOLATVRA DI TROMBO". Below this, the text "Soggetti per tutte le parti:~" is written. The page is divided into two main sections: "ORDINE :: PRIMO ::" and "ORDINE :: SECONDO ::". Each section contains four staves labeled C. (Corni), A. (Trombe), T. (Tromboni), and B. (Tromboni). To the right of these staves are illustrations of the instruments: a cornet for C., two trumpets for A., two trombones for T., and two trombones for B. Further to the right is a large fingering chart with a grid of dots and letters. Below the chart, there are two more sections: "Vn Tuon piu alto :-" and "Alla Quarta :-", each with its own fingering chart. The manuscript is written in an old Italian style with various clefs and note values.

Figure 2
“Nuova intavolatura di tromboni”
digitally manipulated to highlight the elements written in red ink.

NI PER SONARLI IN CONCERTO :- ❖ ❖ ❖

52
51

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes C, D, E, F, G, A. The G and A notes are written with a stylized, decorative flourish.

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B. The notes are arranged in a sequence that suggests a specific harmonic or melodic pattern.

In Tuono:-

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B. The notes are arranged in a sequence that suggests a specific harmonic or melodic pattern.

vn Tuon piu ballò

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A. The notes are arranged in a sequence that suggests a specific harmonic or melodic pattern.

Alla Terza:-

Alla Quinta:-

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G. The notes are arranged in a sequence that suggests a specific harmonic or melodic pattern.

Alla sesta:-

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G. The notes are arranged in a sequence that suggests a specific harmonic or melodic pattern.

Alla settima:-

A musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains the notes A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G. The notes are arranged in a sequence that suggests a specific harmonic or melodic pattern.

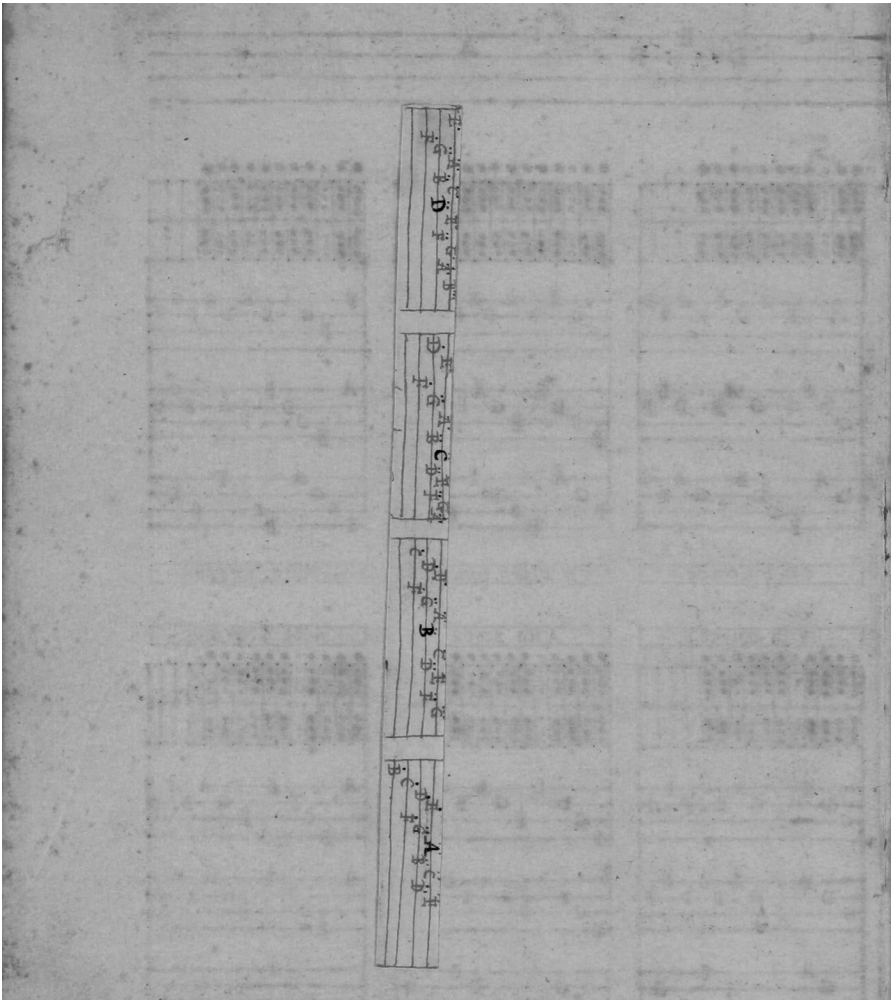


Figure 3

Surplus line of tablature pasted on fol. 52v, and labeled on the back
 “*Contrabasso dei tromboni. Parte del Contrabasso*”
 (image digitally manipulated to highlight the elements written in red ink).

pedagogical concept. Thus, in addition to being the earliest source for the trombone in A with four diatonic slide positions, the *Nuova intavolatura di tromboni* also provides unequivocal evidence for the late-Renaissance and early Baroque practice of *chiavette*, the transposition of ensemble music signaled by the use of a combination of high clefs. In this context it is interesting to note that the well-known collection *Canzoni per sonare con*

ogni sorte di stromenti published in Venice in 1608 by Alessandro Raverij, which contains thirty-six works by some of the most prominent Italian composers of the turn of the sixteen to seventeenth century, reveals an abundance of pieces in high clefs. Indeed, of the seventeen four-part canzonas in the collection, eleven display one of Virgiliano's sets of high clefs, and the other six, including the four famous canzonas à 4 by Giovanni Gabrieli, slightly different variants of the *chiavette*.²³ Perhaps this reappraisal of Virgiliano's *Nuova intavolatura* will inspire trombonists and cornettists to start reconsidering their approach to some of the staples of their repertoire.²⁴

NOTES

¹ Heinrich Huber, "Die Posaunenzuege im Wandel der Zeit," *Brass Bulletin* 11 (1975): 90–94, here 93.

² Howard Weiner, "The Trombone: Changing Times, Changing Slide Positions," *Brass Bulletin* 36 (1981): 52–63, here 55.

³ Exceptions being Huber, who wrote: "The major part of Virgiliano's table deals with various transpositions of a scale. I leave it up to the reader to decipher this section, since it does not concern us directly in the present discussion" (Huber, "Die Posaunenzuege," 94); and Sluchin and Lapie, who noted: "Il est vraisemblable que les instrumentistes devaient, de plus, savoir transposer de manière à intervenir dans des tons conformes à la hauteur des orgues ou des clavecins en usage. Cette pratique est confirmée par Virgiliano, qui fait suivre son tableau de positions d'un autre tableau, représentant huit transpositions possibles pouvant être réalisées par un ensemble de cornets et de trombones" (Benny Sluchin and Raymond Lapie, *Le trombone à travers les âges* [Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 2001], 93).

⁴ I would like to thank Brian Plitnik for suggesting that I write this article.

⁵ See Veronika Gutmann, "Il Dolcimelo von Aurelio Virgiliano: eine handschriftliche Quelle zur musikalischen Praxis um 1600," in *Basler Studien zur Interpretation der Alten Musik*, ed. Veronika Gutmann, Forum Musicologicum 2 (Winterthur: Amadeus, 1980), 107–39; here 108.

⁶ However, she then hedges her bets, stating that "the early, if not the first quarter of the seventeenth century is to be assumed." See *ibid.*, 124–26 and 138–39.

⁷ Aurelio Virgiliano, *Il Dolcimelo*, facs. edn., ed. Marcello Castellani, Archivum musicum 11, (Florence: Studio per edizioni scelte, 1979).

⁸ The manuscript displays two foliations. The foliation employed in the present article corresponds to that used in Gutmann, "Il Dolcimelo."

⁹ The title page of the third *libro* reads: "Del Dolcimelo d'Aurelio Virgiliano, libro terzo, dove si contengono tutti modi da sonar qualsivoglia instrumento; con i loro accordi, tanto in concerto, quanto separati." ("Third book of Dolcimelo by Aurelio Virgiliano, containing all modes of playing of every kind of instrument; with their chords, in ensemble as well as separately.")

¹⁰ There is a separate cornetto fingering chart on fol. 53r.

¹¹ Gutmann, "Il Dolcimelo," 107.

¹² Since the placement of g^1 and a^1 is consistent throughout the chart, this is surely not an error. It is possible that the trombone Virgiliano had at his disposal featured an in-tune seventh-partial g and a rather high eighth-partial a , or he simply wanted to indicate that the a^1 could be played in both first *and* second positions.

¹³ It was called *gamma-ut* in Guidonian terminology. See *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, “2nd edn., ed. Willi Apel (Cambridge MA: Belknap, 1969), s.v. “Gamma.”

¹⁴ The statement by Will Kimball that “The instruments in the diagram are labeled C (cornetto), A (alto trombone), T (tenor trombone), and B (bass trombone)” is abstruse. See <http://www.kimballtrombone.com/alto-trombone/treatises-on-alto/> (accessed 31 March 2011).

¹⁵ Veronika Gutmann states that “the drawings of the instruments are pasted in” (“Die Instrumentenabbildungen sind eingeklebt”). This is however unlikely, since the cornetto and the bottommost trombone in each system clearly extend beyond the confines of the paste-overs, and can therefore only have been drawn after they had been glued to the page. See Gutmann, “Il Dolcimelo,” 123.

¹⁶ Gutmann considers “the various corrections by means of pasting over” to be evidence of the “extreme precision” with which the scribe/illustrator worked, in particular in the third section of the manuscript (*ibid.*, 107). This may indeed be true in many instances, but in looking at other pages of the manuscript, one occasionally has the feeling that Virgiliano was experimenting, playing around with his material to order to find the right form of presentation; where he did not find it, he simply pasted over the unsuccessful attempt and tried again. Cf., for example, the twenty-two cornettos that show through the paste-over on fol. 50r (viol tablature) and the seventeen cornettos on fol. 53r. The viol chart, by the way, displays at least two layers of paste-overs.

¹⁷ It is today widely accepted that the use of *chiavette* or high clefs in music of the late Renaissance and early Baroque requires a downward transposition of a fourth or a fifth. For information about *chiavette*, see Kenneth Kreitner, “Renaissance Pitch,” in *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music*, ed. Tess Knighton and David Fallows (London: Dent, 1992), 275–83 (in particular, the section “Clef-codes and transpositions” on pp. 279–81); Andrew Johnstone, “High’ clefs in Composition and Performance,” *Early Music* 34, no. 1 (February 2006): 29–53; and Andrew Parrott, “Transposition in Monteverdi’s Vespers of 1610: An ‘aberration’ defended,” *Early Music* 12, no. 4 (November 1984): 490–516; *idem*, “Monteverdi: onwards and downwards,” *Early Music* 32, no. 2 (May 2004): 303–17 (Parrott refers to Virgiliano’s trombone/cornetto chart in both his articles).

¹⁸ The only other chart of this sort in the manuscript— on fols. 49v–50r for a four-part consort of viols with the same clef combinations and transpositions as on the trombone/cornetto chart, and a six-line tablature—also displays these “points of reference” in red ink in both the *soggetti* and the tablature.

¹⁹ This point obviously escaped Kimball, who reproduces the *Nova Intavolatura* on the “Treatises on Alto” page of his website. See note 14.

²⁰ In the facsimile edition, it has been slightly reduced in size and reproduced in a horizontal position.

²¹ Gutmann, “Il Dolcimelo,” 123.

²² See the chart for viol consort (fols. 49v–50r), the individual charts for cornetto (fol. 53r), traverso (fl. 55r), and recorder (fol. 56r), and the page labeled “Segni per conoscer tutti i Modi da sonar qualsivoglia Instru[ment]to” (“signs to recognize all the modes for playing any desired instrument”; fol. 49r).

²³ The two canzonas for four or five parts, and four of the five five-part canzonas also display high clefs.

²⁴ On a recent recording of pieces from Raverij’s collection by His Majestys Sagbutts & Cornetts, a number of the canzonas were transposed down a fourth or a fifth. (Communication from Jamie Savan, 17 April 2011).