

# The gralla and its origin

by Francesc Rius, musicologist and gralla player

## Summary

The gralla is a musical instrument presently very popular in Catalonia, and is considered as a traditional instrument of the country. We know its history with certain detail, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, specially in association with its use as provider of some tunes for a popular activity known as “castells” (“human towers”), as well as its use in feasts and celebrations. But if we recede in time, we will have to admit that we do not know its former history or origin. If “human towers” did not exist before, its use should have been connected to other activities. The problem is compounded by several facts: we just described function has changed, but also has its name (before 19th century we find text references only to dulzaina or to the “grall” but we do not know if we always refer to the same instrument. On the other hand, the iconography before 18<sup>th</sup> century reflects a courtly or religious use, but not a popular one. Finally we do not have surviving instruments from before 19th century.

This report tries to assembly known facts into one possible history of the gralla, pointing at the same time at the missing facts.

## Introduction

The human being, contrary to animals, uses tools. To work, to eat... and also to produce art. The more appropriate and useful is the tool, the more man appreciates it and values it. Musical instruments are not an exception and a performer musician values highly and takes great care of his/her instrument, and knows very well how to treat it, and often knows where the instrument comes from, and who manufactured it. It is very probable that his/her curiosity extends beyond his/her own instrument, unto the generic type and all instrument varieties, as well as its history, recent and remote.

In this sense, all violinists know who Stradivarius was, and they know how his instruments look like, even as they probably have never had one in their hands.

In fact, we get to know the history and the origin of a specific type of instrument, not only thanks to the research done on instruments preserved to our days, but also with the help of the literary descriptions and the iconography, be it carved on stones, or relevant paintings or other supports. But when the subject is an old instrument that has long fallen into oblivion, it is much more difficult to research, because the thread is interrupted. This way, we have many names of instruments coming from old literary sources that we fail to relate to a specific instrument, and the other way around, we know iconographical representations of instruments for which we do not know its name. On the other hand, in the iconographies the instruments are not often represented with so much detail as we would like to; for example, when the performer has a wind instrument placed in the mouth, how can we know whether it has a reed or not, and if this one is single or double?

And if we speak of the origin of popular instruments, things can get more complicated because there is a problem of concept with these instruments: where do they come from? Were they designed by the genius of a shepherd, or of a peasant (highly romantic vision but still very well accepted at present), or they were originally court or church instruments, produced and perfected by specialized artisans, and the popular instrument is only an imperfect reproduction or adaptation from it? And we could even imagine a simultaneous use, like that of the musicians of last century that played in the morning in the church, concert-vermouth at noon, "sardanas" in the afternoon and dance at night? Always with the same instrument, and changing the repertoire according to the use.

Anyway, when we study earlier times like the Middle Ages, we don't have any iconography or literary description that refers to a popular instrument or usage, and the description of a particular instrument is essentially that of its use in the court or in the church. Therefore, we are always unsure of a possible parallel popular use of that instrument, so that we can equally suppose that the popular use either began later or was already there.

Regarding the most extended instrument of double reed in Europe from the 13th to the 18th centuries, this is the shawm, therefore we will try to settle down if in any moment of its evolution, some of the varieties of this instrument could become the traditional instrument called gralla.

Apart from the chronological problems, we should consider those of the territorial extension of the instrument, and in this sense the Catalan gralla is very similar to the "dulzaina", "gaita", and "xirimita" that exist in several parts of Spain, and maybe not so similar to the popular reed instruments of the mediterranean basin.

Finally, the history that we seek to reconstruct is that of the instrument described in the old documental sources, although these almost always refer to a cultured instrument, and we will go incorporating to this history the fragmentary details that could indicate a popular use.

### **The aulós, reed instrument of the Classic Age**

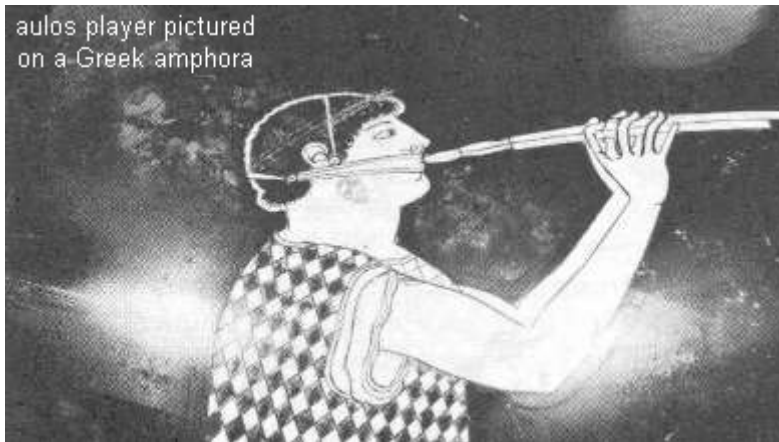
It is impossible to write a history of an instrument peculiar of Catalonia, first, because the more we go back in time, the less specific information is available, and secondly because the history of music and that of the musical instruments in Europe is similar enough as to make it a common history, although pointing out the particularities of each country, if they are known. In Europe there have been double reed instruments for thousands of years. Perhaps the most representative of them have been the greek "aulos" and the roman "tibia", which are very similar, practically the same instrument, which consist of two cylindrical or lightly conical tubes of about 40 cms. long which apparently had 4 fingering holes. The two tubes were made to sound by placing the end of each one into the player's mouth and holding them in divergent position, so that each hand sustains one tube and covers its fingering holes at the same time, as needed.

None of the few instruments that have survived, has arrived to us with the embouchure, and therefore in all the cases the double reed is a probability, not a certainty.

As we explained before, neither the iconographies or the reliefs in stone give us any more certainty or details regarding the embouchure, as the instrument is typically represented with it inside the mouth of the player.

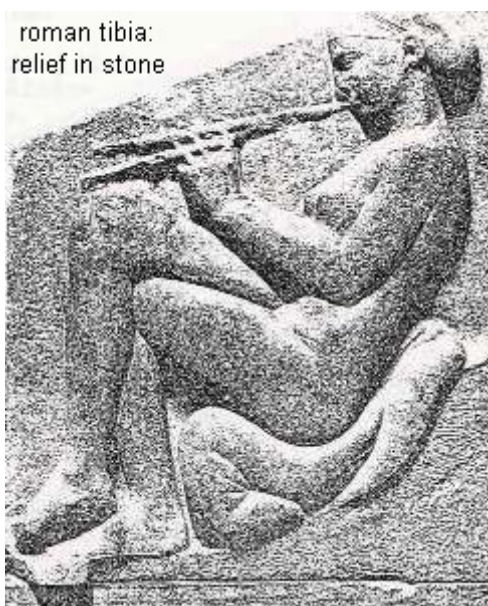
Here we show three iconographical representations of the Greek aulos or Roman tibia:

- 1) aulos in a ceramic two-handed jar (Atica, 480 before Christ)



- 2) a relief in stone of a young woman (Rome, 4th century before Christ)

- 3) a sarcophagus of marble of very later time and where the form of the instrument has changed remarkably (Rome, middle of the 3rd century after Christ):



The study of the wind instruments with reed embouchure, of previous civilizations as the Sumerian, the Egyptian, or the Persian ones, do not bring us any additional precision, therefore we will not mention them in this work.

Regarding the Greek and Roman instruments, after the collapse of the Roman civilization we don't have documented in Europe any other double reed instrument until the 13th century and specially, the 14th century.

Did they remain here, silent and unknown during all those centuries or did they disappear of Europe and were re-introduced later, during the lower Middle Ages? It is a question that many historians tried to answer without any result, but if the instrument continued being used, this was done without leaving any trail.

### **The shawm: an antecedent?**

Anyway, during the XIII century some new instruments entered in Europe. And where those instruments came from? they were introduced in Europe on occasion of the Crusades and of the contact with the Arab civilization. In the 13th century the Arabs and their instruments of double reed extended from the India to Morocco, and these instruments would have been developed in the great courts of the Omeyyas and Abásidas (headquartered in Damask and Bagdad) that flourished in the 7th through 9th centuries. Could they have already entered in Europe through Spain on occasion of the invasion of the territory in the 8th century? Maybe yes, but no trail was left, either.

It has been tried to explain a possible Arab origin for the short instrument of the gralla and dulzaina type, supposing that it could have been introduced in Europe by the Islam through Spain in the 8th century, and that in this country it would have developed a more popular rol at once, while the longer and more evolved instrument, which would later become the European shawm, would have entered more north, through Central Europe, in the 13th century. But if the gralla or dulzaina would have

reached us from Africa, it seems logical to think that where it would be more extended would be in Andalusia and in general in the lands of the south, and not as it is in reality, in Catalonia, Valencia, Basque-Navarrese country, and Castille-Leon.



to the cantiga no. 12.

Anyway we are not sure that it happened this way, since the graphic representations of the 13th century show us a short instrument spreaded into all Europe, which in centuries to come will become longer. A very important iconographical source is the manuscript of the Cantigas de Alfonso X el Sabio, of those from which we have selected the illustration corresponding



during the first half of the XIV century, which at present is kept in Heidelberg (Germany).

At the beginning of the XIV century, the shawm continues being short size. This is demonstrated to us beyond doubt by the illustrations of the "Manesse codex", which it is a collection of courtly poetry of the 12th and 13th centuries, mainly on the subject of love, made by Zürich councillor R. Manesse



Manesse codex,  
picture no. 192



The so-called "Manesse codex" is famous because it contains some 137 miniatures drawn with a lot of precision, of which we reproduce two that have a lot of interest because one can see very well the instrument as well as its reed. We also point out that these shawms are shown in company of string instruments, from what we

deduce that their sound would not be very loud.

Also from the 14th century, we have a very valuable information from Catalonia. This is the gothic choir stalls of the cathedral of Girona, a group of wooden carvings which were made by the middle of the century, but that already in the 16th century were substituted by other less elaborated seats. Most of seats of the original choir stalls have got lost, but luckily the wooden carvings of the backs of these seats were kept by the dust and the forgetfulness in some dependences of the same cathedral, of where they were rescued by the middle of the 20th century (when they were about to be thrown away) by the historian and notary of La Garriga, Mr. Maurí.



Now, in La Garriga, there is the Maurí Foundation which has opened a museum where these carved backs are exposed. It is very worthwhile a visit. Each one of the 34 backs that were salvaged, presents two wooden carvings, one to each side. The topics are diverse, but among them there are 21 carvings of musical instruments, almost a catalog of the instruments of the time, very careful regarding the graphic representation of these instruments, although more imaginative regarding the instrumentalist which is in all cases an angel.



The shawm that appears in one of the backs is a short instrument similar to that of the "Manesse codex", and has clearly marked six holes (the numbers 1, 2, 3 4, and 6 can be clearly seen, while the right hand covers the number 5): the performer inflates the cheeks to play, holds the instrument in horizontal position and if we take into account the relationship of dimensions between her face and the instrument, this one will have about 30-35 cm of length (very similar to the gralla and the keyless dulzaina).



Another angel plays an instrument that we had formerly identified as being a long shaw,, as we can see in the attached picture. This instrument is apparently about 60-70 cm long and it is represented with the bell down (although as the instrumentalist is carved in front view, the vertical slant of the instrument does not get specified, so that we cannot infer the actual length). But the fact that, contrary to the short shawm that we have seen before, this one doesn't have any carved hole (the whole wood piece is however, full of woodworm holes), while the left hand holds the instrument from the end of the bell and therefore, does not do any fingering on the instrument, lends us to think that the instrument in question is a straight natural trumpet.

Therefore, in spite of what we thought initially, we don't have the short shawm and the long shawm represented together in one Catalan iconographical source. On the other hand, some written documents of the end of the 14th century certify the existence of a transition time where the European music uses shawms of different sizes to make "consorts" or groups of several voices. In our country, the files of the "Crown of Aragon" show this diversity of sizes in different occasions, as when Joan I –still a



prince— requests in the year 1372 some “xelamies grossa and petita” for his minstrels. These “xelamies grossas” were also known with the name of “bombardes” (it is the German “Pommer”, so spreaded later on), as we can see from a letter of the year 1378 that Joan I adresses to the marquès of Villena where he announces that he sends him by way of his minstrels “una xelamia poca e una bombardarda” (poca, in this case means small).

The latest evidence that we have found of a short shawm is the painting “The glorified Christ”, of Fra Angelico (1400-1455). Here we can see a short shawm on the left side (second row, counting from below), and several long shawms on the right side (first and third rows, counting from below). The five very long instruments that are come in the central part, are right trumpets, the same instrument that we have just found in the seat of the cathedral of Girona.





From then on, the shawms that appear in all iconographical representations throughout Europe are of the long variety.

See this 15th century painting originated in the "Crown of Aragon" (with three shawms and a trumpet; although in the

painting one can only observe with accuracy the size and the length of the shawm more to the right).

Let us also look at two other representations of the 15th century:



"Le jardin d'amour", painting of Italian origin, where we can see three long shawms flanked by a recorder and percussion on the right side, and a natural trumpet on the left side. Just one comment about this trumpet: as it already appeared in the painting of the "Crown of Aragon" that we have just seen, the instrument is no longer straight as it was e.g.

on the "glorified Christ", but bent for two times to facilitate its holding.



long shawm (Hans Memling, triptych of the Last Judgement, 1471)

Next source comes from Hans Memling (ca. 1435-1494), a Flemish painter, and it corresponds to a detail of the triptych of the Last Judgement, an oil on wood painted between 1467 and 1471, and now in the Narodowe muzeum, in Gdansk (Poland). The pictured shawm is maybe a little longer than the precedents, but this is also influenced by the perspective effect generated by a view "from below". See that the trumpet that

accompanies the shawm is equally bent, like in the previous pictures.



shawm (Brussels tapestry, 16th cent.)

As an iconographical example of the 13th century, we can see this tapestry of the beginning of the century, coming from Brussels, where the shawm (long variety) in the center, is played in combination with a harp, and with a string bowed instrument, perhaps a rebec.



And as an illustrative example of some later shawms, by the beginning of the 17th century already, we propose a painting by the Flemish painter Denijs Van Alsloot that represents the feast of the "Ommeganck" of May 31 1615 in Antwerp (Flanders), with the Procession in Honor of Our Lady of Sablon. In particular we will notice the detail of the musicians that go in the procession, six in total of which three play the shawm and the other three



the bassoon, the cornetto, and the sackbut. Of the three shawm performers, the second counting from the left plays a longer instrument than those that go in fourth and fifth place. Therefore this consort uses a richer combination of instruments, both in the sense of timbre or

colour, and of extension of register, as we find bass instruments, tenors, altos and sopranos.

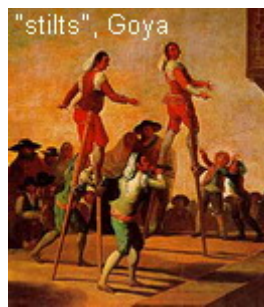
We find a confirmation of the common use of shawms together with a low register instrument, in some scores of church music of the 17th century, written for two shawms and a dulcian.

Lastly, we point out that in regions outside Europe, and specifically in the Arab world, there are at present, both short and long shawms, but we don't know if there the long instrument was an evolution of the short one and anyway when a long instrument appeared in those regions, because it could well be that the European long shawm were not an original development of the 14-15th centuries in Europe but a new import from the Arab world; anyway, the eastern iconography can be of little help because as we know, the Arab world has a preference for the abstract and geometric drawings, and not for the representation of figures or people.

## Substitution of the shawm by the oboe

The golden time of the shawm finishes with the end of the 17th century and the instrument is substituted by the recently developed oboe, specially in the court and civil music, and at a slower path on the church music, where the shawm continued to be used to accompany the singers in the choir. This change was also made more or less quick according to the geographical area, and Spain was quite conservative in this sense. In Catalonia, the luthier Sábat, of Celrá (Girona), manufactured shawms until the end of the 19th century.

In accordance with this change, the double reed instrument that appears in the “cultured” iconography of the 18th century is mainly the oboe, and when exceptionally shawms are shown, they are again of the shorter variety, and they illustrate an atmosphere of popular feast.



As example of this last statement we give some details of two paintings by Goya (1746-1828), Wedding, and Stilts.

Goya also painted a work called “Dulzainero” that proposes a representation of less real, more allegorical type, drawing a long shawm. But on the other hand he refers to it as dulzaina.

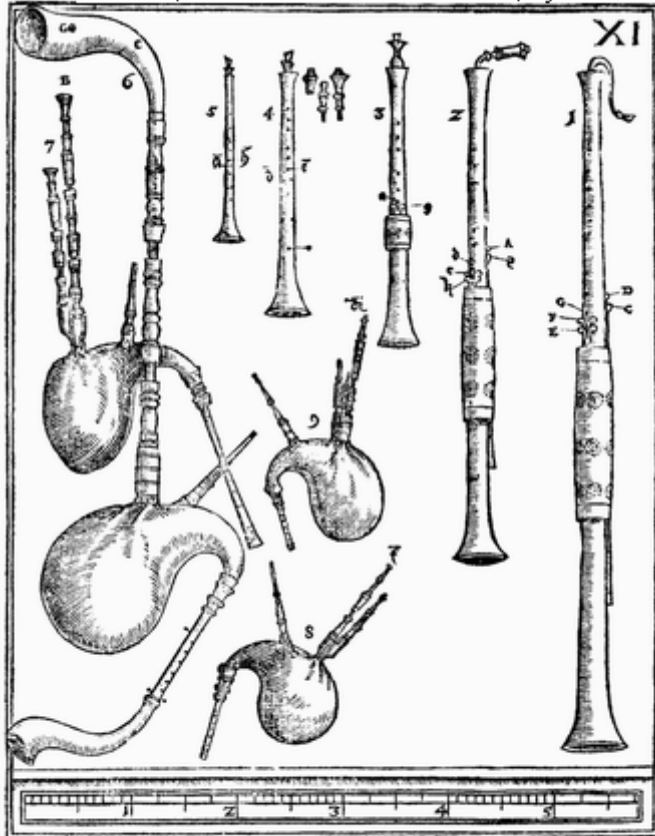


In other European countries, during the 17th century the shawm is also represented again by the shorter variety, in a more popular or more allegorical representation style, just as we see in this Italian engraving that we can find in the book “Il Gabinetto Armonico”, of Filippo Bonanni, of the year 1727.

## Informations of the old musical treatises

And if we now research books instead of paintings, a definitive document for

shawms, in *Theatrum Instrumentorum*, by Praetorius



1. Bas Pommer
2. Bassel oder Tenor-Pommer.
3. Alt-Pommer.
4. Discant Schalmei.
5. Klein-Schalmei.
6. Großer Loch.
7. Schayer Pfeiff.
8. Hännelchen.
9. Duden.

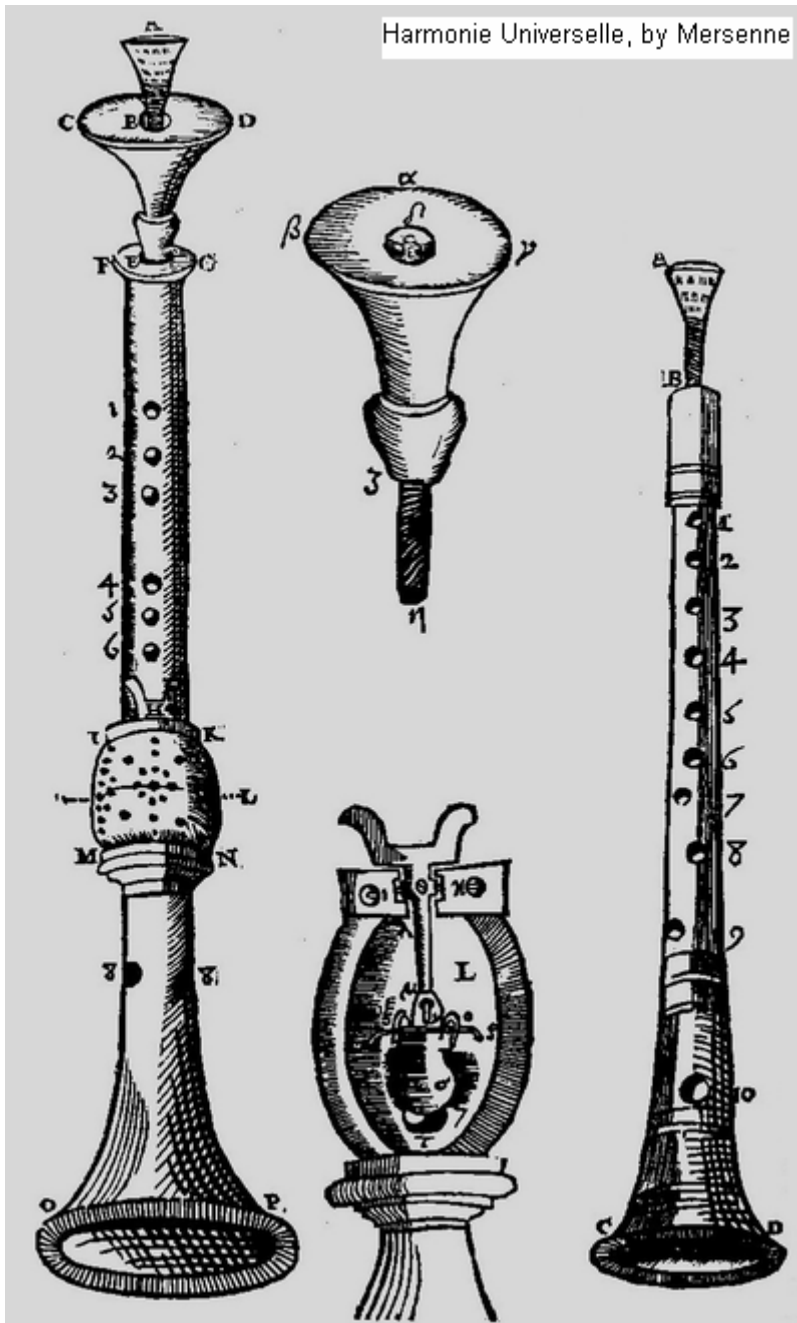
the measures of the European shawms of the 16th and 17th centuries is the *Theatrum Instrumentorum*, written by Michael Praetorius that was published in 1620 as an annex to *Syntagma Musicum, tomus secundus, Organographia*.

In the *Theatrum*, there is a catalog of all known instruments of the time, and in the XI plate that we reproduce here, the shawm appears.

In the lower part of the engraving there is a rule numbered in feet which

allows us to obtain the measures of the instruments. From this we can corroborate that the normal shawm or soprano (pitched in D) of the XVII century, is about 66 cm long and the alto (in G) about 76 cm. The smallest one, not very much in use (in A) is an instrument which is still quite long, about 48 cm., compared to the gralla. Therefore in the cultured music of the 17th century, there was no longer any short double reed instrument, like those that we had identified in the 13th and 14th centuries.





It is accepted that the oboe or "hautbois" was invented in France (maybe by one member of the Hotteterre family) in the last quarter of the 17th century. But in fact, in France the word "hautbois" had been used to designate the shawm (high wood, wood of strong sound) in preference to "chalemie" at least from the 15th century. And therefore when in 1636 the book by Mersenne "Harmonie Universelle"

appears in France, in the chapter that he speaks of the hautbois he shows us two shawms that we reproduce here: to the right an instrument soprano, and to the left, one alto. We can see that, mainly regarding the soprano, this is no longer the shawm of Praetorius but rather it has begun to change to a design nearer to the oboe (we call the attention to the fact that the book of Praetorius is only 16 years older than that of Mersenne), and these changes will be manifold and gradual along by the century, until it will end up becoming a new instrument.

## **Differences between the shawm and the oboe:**

- ◆ The reed of the oboe is smaller and much less triangular.
- ◆ The oboe no longer has a pirouette (this is a piece of lathed wood, where the lips rest), as opposite to the shawm.
- ◆ The shawm has all the fingering holes in the upper half, while in the oboe the holes extend lower towards the bell.
- ◆ These fingering holes are smaller in the oboe, and the instrument incorporates two keys (in the shawm, only the alto instrument has a key)
- ◆ The shawm has in total 5 holes of resonance on the lower part, the oboe only 2.
- ◆ The walls of the shawm are 1 cm thick, those of the oboe one third of it, but in certain places the thickness increases, giving it a more undulated profile.
- ◆ The shawm is made in one piece, the oboe separates in three parts.

Anyway, both are “cultured” instruments with many similarities, and they present two fundamental differences in respect to the popular or traditional instruments,

1) that the fingering holes are much bigger in the popular instrument than in the shawm, and less still in the oboe, and

2) that the perforation or interior diameter is, in its more narrow part, of 6 mm or less for the shawm and the oboe, while the popular instruments are around 8, 9 or more mm. wide, in all the researched European areas. By way of summary, we present here a chart (incomplete, of course!) where we have picked up all the data that it has been possible, of measures that have some cultured and popular instruments.

<b>Tradicional or popular Instruments</b>	Length in cm.	Diameter inside, narrower part, mm
"Grall" [melodic pipe] of the bagpipe in C (Sans)	28,5	
"Grall" of the bagpipe in B b (Sans)	30	
keyless "Tarota" seca C <sub>3</sub> -A <sub>4</sub> (Sans)	58	
1 key "Tarota" (Sans)	58	
"Tarota" with 4, 5, 7 keys (Sans)	61	
keyless Gralla (Sans)	34	7,5
Gralla with 2, 4, 5, 8 keys (Sans)	39	
short Gralla Casellas (Materials, p 87)	30	
long Gralla Casellas (Materials, p 87)	55	
Gralla 2 keys, Xavi Orriols	366	8
keyless Gralla from Sitges	364	8,5
Grall of the bagpipe, according to Biel Ferré	25	
Tarota in F, Pau Orriols	58,5	6
Gaita (dolçaina) from Baix Ebre (n° 1, Biel	31,75	
Gaita (dolçaina) from Baix Ebre (n° 2, Biel	31,4	
Gaita (dolçaina) from Baix Ebre (n° 3, Biel	31,1	
aubois from Llenguadoc (average value)	48,5	9,2

<b>Cultured instruments</b>	Length in cm.	Diameter inside narrower part, mm
Praetorius – small shawm (Klein Schalmei)	48	
Praetorius –soprano shawm (Discant Schalmei)	66	
Praetorius –alto shawm (Alt Pommer)	76	
Praetorius –tenor shawm (Tenor Pommer)	112	
Praetorius – bass shawm or bombardarda (Pommer)	180	
Praetorius – grall from bagpipe n° 7	43	
Praetorius – grall from bagpipe n° 8	17	
Praetorius – grall from bagpipe n° 9	15	
Stanesby baroque oboe made by M Ponseele	58,3	6
Shawm soprano in D, Brussels 16th century (info Argelaga)		5 (bell=90)
Shawm soprano end of 18th century (info Argelaga)		5,5
Salamanca Shawm soprano	74	
Salamanca Shawm soprano	65,3	
Salamanca bombardarda	75,1	
Salamanca bombardarda tenor	132,4	

Another thing to keep in mind with these instruments, specifically referring to the fingering holes, is the existence or not of the octave hole on the back side of the instrument, a hole that you cover with the thumb. It is not a characteristic that differentiates the cultured and popular instruments, but rather it differentiates the short instruments that do have it, from the long ones that don't have it.

Why? Because because in a long instrument it is easier to produce the jump to the second overtone just by increase of the air pressure (overblow). This is a phenomenon exploited to the maximum on the –very long- brass instruments, e.g. the Baroque trumpet, with more than 2 meters of length

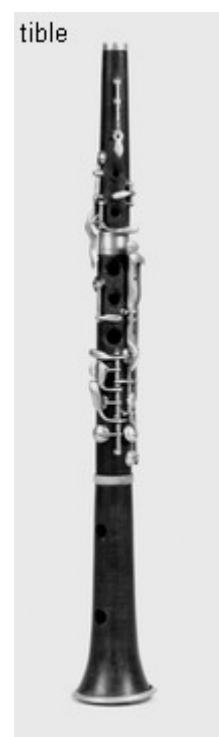
of the tube, could produce sounds up to the overtone 16. But in a short instrument if we don't help by half-opening the back hole, it will be difficult to produce the high notes just by overblowing. On the other hand, it seems that opening a back hole affects the positions where we drill the front holes, which become more separated, so that the position of the fingers in the hand becomes less comfortable, a fact that can be critical on longer instruments, therefore the long instrument usually doesn't have a back hole for the thumb.

## The tarota



As we reach this point we want to refer to the tarota, a Catalan instrument that was part of groups of popular music in the XIX century, as the so-called "cobla of three quartans" but that it lost popularity and finally disappeared at the end of that century.

What kind of instrument was the tarota? An exam of their characteristics and dimensions make us to conclude that the tarota is in fact a shawm, that is to say, an instrument with the characteristics of the cultured instrument (compare the characteristics, mainly the inside, quite



narrow diameter) but of popular use. Or said otherwise, the tarota was basically the same church shawm of the 19th century, although it was called this new way as it was devoted to a popular and festive use.

Both the tarota and the shawm disappeared at the end of the 19th century, that is to say, they got out of use when the cobla of three quartans no longer made the people to dance, and the church songs were not any longer accompanied with wind instruments. But the instrument adapted to another use, being produced in two sizes and becoming the initial nucleus of the cobla of sardanas and other popular dances of the 19th century that

outlived well unto the 20th. To achieve this, it had to be modernized in successive stages and to incorporate a complete system of fingering keys. To higher pitched instrument was called tible, and the lower pitched, tenora, and at present they are considered the most genuinely Catalan instruments.

On the other hand and after one century of disuse, the tarota (the older model without keys, or with few keys) was "reinvented" 20-30 years ago, retouching and "improving" more than copying the historical instrument, but notwithstanding this the "new tarota" has become again a popular instrument of festive use.

### **The names of these instruments along the history**

We have seen the indiscriminate use of the words xirimia, xelamia, chalemie, dolsaina or dolçaina, dulzaina, to indicate a shawm, cultured or popular. Nevertheless, in the literary texts we don't always know with accuracy to which instrument corresponds each name, so that similar names can describe different instruments or the other way around.

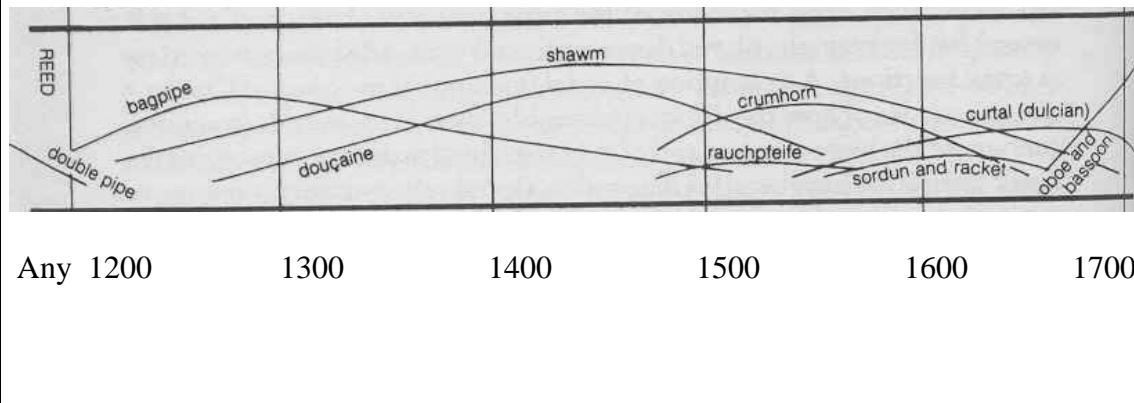
Therefore the names dulcian, dolcian, dolzian, dolzana (the same as curtal) in spite of its resemblance to dulzaina, would indicate not an old shawm but an old bassoon.

On the other hand, the names dulcina, doussaines, douçaine, douchaines, dolzaina, duçayna, and dulzaina, could have designated a somewhat mysterious instrument that was in vogue in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages, in fact from the 14th to the 17th century, but especially during the 15th century, just as we can see in the table of popularity by Myers that we attach in the following page. This instrument however, according to the New Grove dictionary, was not similar to a shawm but to a crumhorn or orlos, that is to say that was not played with the reed between the lips but blowing inside a wooden cover where the reed was encapsulated, and it had a soft sound (and this would explain the etymology of the word, derived of dulzaina=dulce, or "sweet", or soft). But there are many contradictions and even some people say that this instrument never existed in fact. In any case we have to state that at present a lot of points still remain unclear.



## Reed musical instruments from 1200 to 1700

extracted from the “table of popularity in Europe of the musical instruments during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance”, according to Myers (mentioned by McGee: Medieval and Renaissance Music, University of Toronto Press, 1985)



## General characteristics of present day Spanish dulzainas

The different models of dulzainas or grallas show some common characteristics which are: short instruments of between 30 and 40 cms, with a centrally drilled perforation of conical shape, with a fingering back hole and 7 front fingering holes which are of larger diameter compared with the shawms.

There are a few exceptions to this common characteristic of the seven holes, so that a few instruments have only 6 front holes, and these are: the smaller size of the Castilian dulzaina called Requinto, some xirimitas from Alicante, the so-called “gaitas” of the districts around the Ebre river (south of Cataluña), and the gralla.

Anyway, the “tonality” of the instrument doesn't get modified with either 6 or 7 holes, since in this last case, the lower last two holes raise the pitch only a halftone each one. This is, in the valencian dulzaina, to switch from Re (all holes stopped) to Mi we will rise two fingers (be warned that the note to which the dulzaina players call Re, sounds in fact tuned as A).

For all these reasons we can suppose a common origin for all the variants

- ◆ gralla = Catalan
- ◆ pipe = Castilian
- ◆ dolsaina, dolçaina = Valencian
- ◆ xirimita = From Alicante
- ◆ bagpipe = Navarrese, Aragonese, Catalan districts of the Ebre
- ◆ palheta = Portuguese

of this instrument so extended in the Iberian peninsula. Again we are not sure of its origin: as we mentioned previously it was either brought by the Arabs in the 8th century (just a guessing), or else, it is derived of the early short shawms that we have documented in the 13th and 14th centuries.

### **Literary references to the gralla and the dulzaina**

The newspaper of Tarragona "La Cruz" of the day of Santa Tecla of the year 1933, gives the notice of a competition of coblas, dances, and musicians with this sentence: "Here we have the Memorials of the coblas and dances of Sta Tecla in the year 1687 (from a loose paper in the Municipal Archives that was copied a couple of years ago), and now we have decided to bring it to the public light."

The description of the competition points out that this consisted of several varieties: competition of coblas, competition of dances, competition of trumpeters, and competition of other music players. In this last category 29 musicians participated with very diverse instruments, among them, "el grall de la gaita", an instrument with which two groups, one from La Pobla of Bufumet (sic) and the other from Alcover, competed. We know that the old players of bagpipes, ("sacs de gemecs" in Catalan) sometimes disconnected the melodic tube (the "grall") from the airbag and they made it to sound like an independent instrument, as they played it from the mouth; so the grall de la gaita could well be the cornamuse played in that way.

But there is not any reference either to "grallas" or "dulzainas" a fact which indicates that probably the instrument didn't still exist, or it was not known with these names. Another early reference to the word "grall" is a document of 1793 in Vilafranca del Penedés (as it is explained in the program of the Festa Major of Vilafranca of the year 1979), while the first reference to the word "gralla" there is from the XIX century.

Then is it possible that the grall had originated the gralla or the dulzaina? And what is exactly a grall?

As we explained before, some performers used sometimes the melodic tube of a bagpipe playing it from the mouth in the same way as an independent dulzaina or short shawm, and that not only in Catalonia but also in other spanish regions. In all these cases the melodic tube has a conical shape and produces the sound with a double reed (contrary to the ones of the east of Europe which are cylindrical and with single reed), although in some cases the bell is wider than in others, and in the Catalan case the bell is minimum.

Anyway, when a melodic tube from a "gaita" (spanich name for cornamuse) was played separately from the bag, it is possible that it would still be called gaita, taking the name of the whole for the part, and by similarity a dulzaina would be called also "gaita"; that could be the explanation of this name in same areas in Spain.

It is also possible that in Catalonia the melodic tube called grall could still be called grall when played disconnected from the bag (grall de la gaita) and by analogy, give its name to the slightly bigger, dulzaina type of instrument which would start to be called "gralla". This is more probable than the straight development of the gralla from the grall, as the two instruments are contemporary and documented in Europe in the same period.

We found two references to facts happened in the XVIII century where the word gralla appears, but they should be taken with reservation because as they were written at the end of the XIX century and so, speak of facts very much receeded in time.

Jaume Ramón i Vidales, a chronicler at the end of the 19th century wrote in 1885 referring to the year 1784 that the bachelors of El Vendrell went to Vilanova to pick up an angel sculpture to be installed on the top of the

church tower of El Vendrell "and from there, they took it on their shoulders, walking with it at the arrival to the village, preceded by the «grallas» ..."

And Narcís Bas in 1900, refers to an even older fact of the year 1715, occurred in the hermitage of San Salvador (near El Vendrell), and says: "it was four in the afternoon when two groups of "grallers" (players of gralla) began to fling their strident notes..." however, as these texts were written in the time of splendor of the gralla, it is very possible that their authors used this name instead of the ones that would have been used at the time of the facts, namely dulzaina or grall.

We don't find any reference to the gralla either in the book "Miscel·lània de Viatges i Festes Majors" (Miscellany of Journeys and Main Feasts) written by Rafael d'Amat i de Cortada, Baron of Maldá, in spite of the fact that his books are famous for their meticulous descriptions, or in other writings of the Baron, as the chronicle of the Festa Major of Vilafranca in the year 1771, neither in the chronicles of the Festes Majors of Vilafranca, Tarragona, and Reus of the year 1782. However the same Baron of Maldá, document the feasts of San Josep Oriol in Barcelona in the 18th century (I got this information as a verbal communication and have not been able to check the text or to confirm the year) where some "Verses for chirimias" were played, and some musicians from Valencia were hired.

The first dictionary in which the name gralla appears, is the "Lavernia", of 1840, and in fact it is not until later towards the last quarter of the 19th century that the name "gralla" becomes common; however the reference to the instrument begins before, already in the 18th century but mainly during the 19th century, we find many reports of the instrument, describing it as a double reed, popular oboe of the short type, but calling it either grall or dulzaina (as the texts were almost always written in Castilian = Spanish).

In the year 1770, in El Arboç (Tarragona) we find four groups of "Balls de Valencians" gathered for the feasts: one from La Riera, one from "Els Monjos", one from "El Vendrell" and one from "El Catllar", and according to a text of the time, this last one built a "castle" of six sotres (sic) accompanied by the dulzaina and it was reputed to be the best."

As it is known, the "Balls de Valencians" (dance of the people from Valencia) originated, at the beginning of the 18th century, the well-known activity of "castells" of the "Xiquets of Valls" (human towers which are accompanied with music from "gralles"), therefore we can conclude that gralla relates to dulzaina in the same way as "castells" relates to "Balls de Valencians", i.e. the same instrument for the same activity.

Also, the gralla (or dulzaina) accompanied other dances or popular representations as those of "Moixigangues", and the "Ball de Gitanes", as well as other elements of the feasts. In Reus we find the first reference to the instrument in a religious procession of the year 1792 where "los gigantes y tarasca" (the giants and the monster) "opened the march accompanied by the dulzaina and tamboril" (short shawm and small drum). Biel Ferré refers to a document of the Municipal Archive of history in Reus where mention is made that in the year 1839, 80 "reales de vellon" are granted for the dulzaina and drum players which will accompany the "giants" of the city during the feasts of that year. Also in Reus, in the year 1845, Andreu of Bofarull points out in the "historical Annals of Reus from its foundation until our days" that "its players have achieved such dexterity that they are able to play in concerts of four up to six dulzainas". And in El Vendrell, in the program of the Main Feast of 1859, it can be read that the first day there will be the "dulzaina."

Finally, we point out that in the Dictionary of Musical Instruments, of Ramón Andrés, 1995, and in the voice "gralla", he mentions the visit the king of Spain paid to Zaragoza in the year 1629, and explains that the musicians that played in the festive reception organized for this event were, "two coblas of minstrels, and four of Catalan gaitillas". Andrés gives the reference of the original source that is Pedro Calahorra's book (1978), *The music in Zaragoza in the XV-XVII centuries*. But which kind of instrument would the Catalan gaitillas be? Because if the chronicle doesn't mention the origin of those two coblas of minstrels, it is probably because they would be local, and they would play the habitual shawms. Would the Catalan go to also to play with shawms or, like Andrés interprets, they went there with grallas (but we are in 1629!), or with gralls (grall de la dulzaina)?

## The names of the popular oboes in France

In France all wind double reed instruments are called oboe (hautbois), this is, the word oboe stands for the modern oboe, that of the Baroque time, and even the shawm, and in general, all the traditional instruments of double reed, which are called popular oboes ("hautbois populaires").

These french popular instruments have all an approximate length of 50 centimeters and they don't have any back hole to be actuated with the thumb, therefore we can assume that they derived from a longer shawm that the variant that originated the Spanish instruments.



We said that all these popular oboes are called "hautbois", but there is an exception: in fact the instrument of the geographical area near Carcassone, isn't called hautbois but **graille**, which is a word from the occitan language (spoken in the area of Languedoc) and which is probably the origin of the name "grall" i later "gralla" that designates the Catalan instrument, (although the graille doesn't look at all like the catalan gralla, as we can see from this image).

The graille was played in this geographical area: Monts of Lacaune, Monts d'Alban, Montagne d'Anglès (Tarn), and partially in the neighboring departments of the Aveyron and of the Herault. This area is a part of the Languedoc, about 60-100 kms to the east of Toulouse and about 50-80 kms to the northeast of Carcassone. At the beginning of the 20th century only 70 musicians were counted on the census of graille players, but all of them disappeared later, not being able to withstand the competition of the dance orchestras and that of the modern bands.

The instrument is generally built of three parts in box, it is 47-53 cms long, and has 7 fingering holes (no back hole). Another, smaller model has been identified in Couffouleux (Tarn) that has only 6 holes.



The term graille exists in the languages and dialects of the region from at least the Middle Ages, since we find it in several literary works, as for example in the romance of the 12th century, "Flamenca" written in occitan language and attributed to a clergyman of Nant (south of Aveyron, about 60 kms north of Beziers). You can see below the fragment where the word graille appears, as we reproduce the text in original version and in its English translation:

*"Lo ben matí, quan le soleils  
quais vergoinos parec vermeilz,  
apres lo sein de las matinas,  
ausiras trombas e bozinas,  
grailles e corns, cembolz, tabors  
e flaütz, non ges de pastors  
mai (de) celz que la mouta sonon  
dels torneis e volontat donon  
a cavalliers et a cavals  
d'anar de galops e de sals"*

*Early in the morning, when the sun  
really shy seems to be red,  
after the sound of the church bells,  
you will hear trumpets and horns,  
gralles, cymbals, drums, and flutes,  
not the ones of the shepperds  
but the ones calling to  
tournaments, and bring the urge  
for horsemen and horses  
to go galloping and jumping*

On the other hand, the word graille is found in some variants: in the "Monts of Alban" (Tarn) it becomes "graulhe", while in the "Monts of Lacaune" the word can sometimes designate other instruments, like the oboe made of tree bark (a shepperds' instrument), or the oboe or melodic tube of the bagpipe (that is to say, the Catalan "grall").

Another particularity related to the graille is the different names given to the double reed with which the instrument is played: while in a certain area it is called caramèlas (and caramèlas is also applied to the double reed of the bagpipe), in another area of the same region it is called "uncha" (we should remember that in the gralla the double reed is called "inxà"). As for the form of these reeds, some 15 reeds have survived, without counting those of bagpipe, and all of them are carved in the inner part of the cane, like those of the Catalan grallas.

We can still point out to another popular instrument, the popular **aboè** of Gascogne, and in it we find again that the name of the double reed is "incha", not only similar but the same as the Catalan name (inxà), therefore it is probable that the Catalan reed would get the name from here. Next we give a brief description of the instrument.



Geographical area of extension of the instrument: the gascon part of the Ariège, about 80 kms to the south of Toulouse. Names of villages where the musicians were going to play: Sentein, Moulis, Saint Girons.

The performers of this instrument disappeared completely by the middle of the 20th century.

The aboé is generally made of three parts in box, about 47-53 cms long, with 6 fingering holes, plus another one of resonance, larger and located closer to the bell, which is called "ear".

The interior diameter varies according to the instrument, but it measures between 6 and 9 mm. in the narrower part which is almost cylindrical. Then it gets wider gradually, ending up with a bell of 60 mm.

"Era incha" is the expression used by the locals to designate the double reed pictured here. All the "inchas" that have been retained of these aboès, are squared and carved inside in the mass of a thick cane, (the same as the "inxà" of a gralla), and therefore it was considered a very difficult thing to be able to make these "inchas", so much so that they rose admiration. A text that refers to a very well-known performer, says that he made the inchas the day before playing... *"mes finas que las hasiam e*



considered a very difficult thing to be able to make these "inchas", so much so that they rose admiration. A text that refers to a very well-known performer, says that he made the inchas the day before playing... *"mes finas que las hasiam e*

*milhor que anavan... finas coma de paper*" (thinner than we did it, better than they played, as thin as a sheet of paper), and said, "I make them specially for my lips". In fact, we already know that the more fine the reed, more one can play without getting tired but the risk of producing false notes increases, and therefore you need to use more the column of air and less to pinch with the lips, to produce the sound.

The aboist usually played alone in the feast. He should play from 5 o'clock to 7 in the afternoon, and later in the evening from 9 o'clock to 12 o'clock, which we find a prowess! Apart of playing for the feasts, they played in Carnival, in the weddings, and accompanying groups of folkloric dances. Recently, one of these aboès has been produced in series and is now being taught at the Conservatory of music of Toulouse.

## **Conclusions**

With our current knowledge, we consider probable that the gralla and the dulzaina of the Iberian peninsula, come from the short shawm that we find in Europe from the 13th century on.

In the 15th century the short chirimia disappeared of the courtly and ecclesiastical use, being substituted by a longer instrument.

Anyway, the use of the dulzaina-grall-gralla as a popular instrument for use in feasts is documented in texts from the 17th century on, and in pictures as a short double reed instrument of festive use, from the 18th century on, when the long shawm was disappearing of the cultured music.

Was this instrument recovered in the 18th century for popular use, after 300 years of their disappearance, or it had existed as popular instrument during all this time? I find more probable this second possibility.

As for the names, "grall", "gralla", and "inxà" they originated in Languedoc.

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