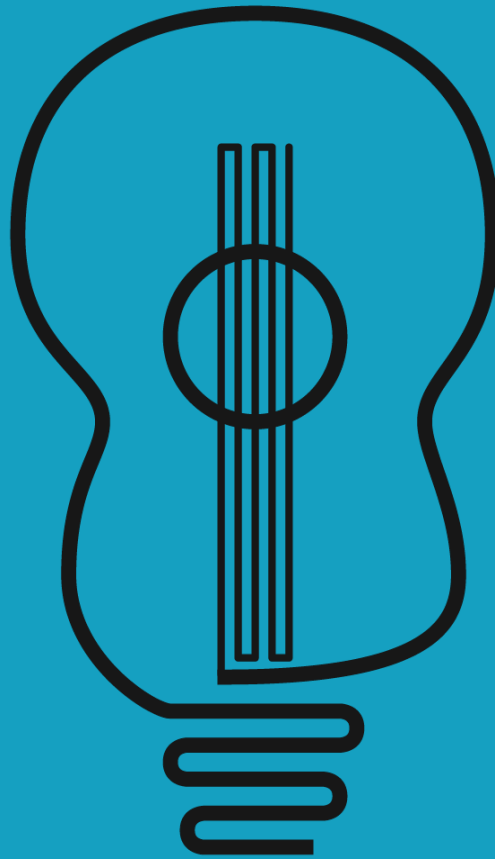


Gracia Baptista

CONDITOR ALME (1557)

Transcribed by Momčilo (Moma) Aleksandrić

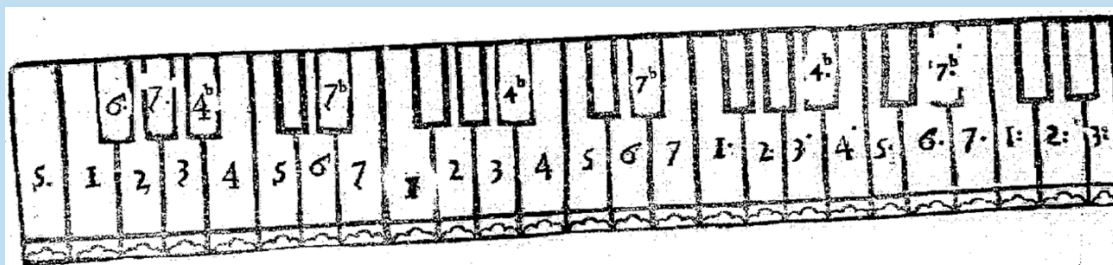


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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Conditor Alme was published in 1557 and is considered one of the earliest pieces for keyboard instruments attributed to a female composer—Gracia Baptista. It appears in a collection of tablatures for keyboard, harp, and vihuela, compiled by Luis Venegas de Henestrosa and printed in Alcalá de Henares, a major intellectual and printing center of Renaissance Spain, home to the prestigious University of Alcalá (founded in 1499), which played a central role in the dissemination of humanist thought and scholarly publications.

The book, titled *Libro de cifra nueva para tecla, harpa y vihuela* (A New Tablature Book for Keyboard, Harp, and Vihuela), is fundamentally pedagogical in nature. Through its prefaces and prologue, Henestrosa advocates for a new, simplified system of tablature (“cifra nueva”) designed to make music more accessible and efficient to learn, allowing even beginners to acquire practical skills quickly while still benefiting more advanced musicians.



Numerical representation of the keyboard in the *cifra nueva* system

TRANSCRIPTION

I transcribed *Conditor Alme* from the original tablature, written in three lines representing three contrapuntal voices. I aimed to preserve the original voicings and registers of the voices whenever possible, although the entire piece needed to be placed an octave lower.

Although this was not part of historical practice, I begin the transcription with a harmonic at the 12th fret on the 6th string in order to emphasize the sonority of the E Phrygian mode. Similarly, the transcription emphasizes the Phrygian cadence (B \flat –A) at the end of the piece, where one of the final notes may be performed as a harmonic at the 7th fret on the 4th string.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for 'Conditor Alme' in cifra nueva notation. It consists of six systems of staves. The notation includes various rhythmic values (e.g., 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) and melodic lines. The score is written in a style typical of early modern lute tablature, with letters and numbers indicating fret positions and rhythmic patterns. The title 'Conditor Alme.' is written in the center of the second system.

Complete *Conditor Alme* (1557) in *cifra nueva* notation

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

I refrained from adding performance instructions, with the exception of one crescendo marking and three fermata markings. Since the passage marked with a crescendo is intended to be played using rest stroke, I have also indicated that the bass note (open 4th string D) is optional.

My general approach to performing this piece is not strictly guided by historical practice, but rather adopts a more experimental perspective. I first performed the piece in 2025 on electric bass guitar with an electronic backing track, followed by *Zyryab* by Paco de Lucia, which features a similarly Phrygian modal atmosphere to *Conditor Alme*.

Momčilo (Moma) Aleksandrić | D.M.A.

CONDITOR ALME

Published in 1557
Transcribed by Momčilo (Moma) Aleksandrić

The piece begins in the E Phrygian mode, and the harmony is modal as well.

Gracia Baptista
(16th-Century Spain)

The first system of musical notation for 'Conditor Alme' consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with various rhythmic values and fingerings (0, 1, 2, 3, 4). The bass staff provides harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. A circled '6' with 'XII (harmonic)' is written below the first measure. Above the treble staff, there are circled numbers 3, 2, and 3 indicating fingerings for specific notes. A circled '5' is written below the bass staff in the third measure.

Pay attention to the minor second that characterizes the E Phrygian mode (E-F), and how it is later applied to the A Phrygian mode (A-B \flat), together with the corresponding harmonies Am-B \flat -Am.

The second system of musical notation starts with a measure number '5' above the treble clef. It continues with the melodic and harmonic lines from the first system. Fingerings (0, 1, 2, 3) are indicated throughout the system.

The third system of musical notation starts with a measure number '9' above the treble clef. It continues with the melodic and harmonic lines. A circled '2' is written above the treble staff in the final measure.

The fourth system of musical notation starts with a measure number '13' above the treble clef. The first measure is marked with 'rit.' (ritardando). The system continues with the melodic and harmonic lines. Above the treble staff, there are circled numbers 2 and 3. Below the bass staff, there is a circled '6'.

17

21

Optionally, you can play the open 4th string when playing the melody with the right-hand free stroke.

24

27

31

Optionally, the Phrygian cadence may be emphasized by performing the final note A of the passage as a harmonic at the 7th fret on the 4th string.