

Building blocks of the past

In dealing with historical practice, we must always relate ourselves — either by embracing or renouncing the fact — to what was common practice at the time. In historical practices related to musical performances this is indeed difficult, and the earlier the music, the more overwhelming and impossible the task may seem. Attempts to gain some understanding of common practice at a given time is a complex matter and a range of sources must be reviewed together. This is not only true within a given performance tradition, but also in how it is preserved through time. The difficulties relating to Early Modern sources are greatly increased as the scribes did not necessarily have the required competence on the matter they were instructed to document. In Medieval manuscripts and codices, for example, the neumatic notation presents a clear example of this as it gave rise to the *musica ficta*¹ tradition, in which it was left to the performer to alter the written pitch according to the mistakes of the scribe. As an additional layer upon this we also find our own understanding and interpretations of the same sources, but these matters will be delayed until later chapters (particularly Chapter 5). In this chapter, I will present an overview of historical sources directly discussing or indirectly mediating matters related to tone production. From these indications, we are given the necessary building blocks to construct a conceptual understanding of tone production during the course of later chapters. It should be mentioned that my focus in this chapter is more of a practical nature than a theoretical one, and so I have chosen to look at tone production as related to instructions in performance contexts (i.e. introductions presented in

¹ See 'Musica Ficta,' *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved 8 June 2017, URL: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e7078>.

tablatures and lute handbooks), ignoring strictly theoretical works from the period (encyclopedias and music-theoretical works, for instance). This is for two reasons. Those writing about music are not necessarily the same as those performing it, and theory is not automatically the same as practice. Besides, theoretical works are driven to a greater extent by adjectives which are much more difficult to translate for the modern performer (e.g. what is ‘melancholy,’ ‘grace’ and ‘heavenly,’ to whom, and at what period in time?), making directions such as ‘place the finger here’ more fruitful to use as building blocks for the discussion of the remaining chapters of this present book. In this chapter, I will organise the material according to three main perspectives:

1. *Literature*: historical writings on lute-related performance practice, focusing on the right hand.
2. *Visual arts*: statistical developments in visual representation of right-hand positions in works of art.
3. *Fingering*: selected perspectives focusing on tone production.

Literature

The English sources are those which speak most clearly about tone production. Rough times and alteration of practice are good for scholars, because they are reasons which inspire authors to write more clearly about musical performance activities. Indeed, if something is axiomatic, or common practice, one need not write about it. Evidently, the lute had lost some of its favour in the seventeenth century, as several English authors put lute practice into writing. As John Playford (1666), for one, puts it: ‘*Therefore to revive and restore this Harmonious Instrument, I have adventured to publish this little Book of Instructions and Lessons [...]*’.² In fact, the sources discussing right-hand positions and tone production outside of England are so scarce that I have chosen to base this section on the English sources, only to introduce foreign perspectives when surviving literature and tablatures make it relevant. The most detailed

² Playford, J., *Musick's Delight on the Cithren ...* (London: W.G., 1666), Preface (2nd page).

descriptions are, as in many other matters concerning the lute, provided by Thomas Mace (1676) and *The Burwell Lute Tutor* (c. 1670). I will further direct attention to William Barley (1596), who also introduces the Bandora and Orpharion, and one remark by John Playford (1666). Among the sources outside of England, we find some scattered bits and pieces. These include, for instance, Capirola (c. 1517), Kapsberger (1640), Sanz (1697) and Corbetta (1671 and 1674). Note that the sources presented here are all but two from the seventeenth century, when other instruments such as the harpsichord started to gain popularity over the lute.³ What's more, the fragmented nature of the information across all sources — except perhaps that given in *The Burwell Lute Tutor* and Mace — indeed presents us with two realities. One being what is *not* said; in a time where manuscripts, engravings and exclusive printing are expensive and time-consuming processes, one needs not waste time and money to document the obvious, the consensus and standard practice. The other being what *is* said, that is, what is not obvious, what is not standard practice and what is not general consensus. This also applies to the introduction of new ideas where the author wishes to alter standard practice through innovation or for other reasons. In this sense, the decline of traditions is good for scholars as it impels the production of documentation, leaving us something to work with.

The first subject addressed by the sources, which I will present here, is the shape of the instrument; the second is the right-hand position, and the last is how to utilise the right hand.

The shape of instruments

Information regarding the form and shape of instruments remains in various formats, including surviving instruments, encyclopedias and theoretical works, but information about the sonic and performance-related consequences that certain designs afford are rarer. *The Burwell Lute Tutor*, copied from John Rogers by Mary Burwell around the 1670s, presents two

3 Ledbetter, D., *Harpsichord and Lute Music in 17th-Century France* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1987).

major shapes which have their separate benefits. One is better for sound and the other is more comfortable to play on. This distinction between the two is interesting as they are presented as opposites, making the performer choose between execution and aesthetics:

[...] there is a great dispute amongst the moderns concerning the shape of the lute. Some will have it somewhat roundish, the rising in the middle of the back and sloping of each side, as we see [in] the lutes of Monsieur Desmoulins of Paris [...]. The reason is that the lute so framed is capable of moore sound because of his concavity, and that the sound not keeping in the deep and hollow bottom but, contrariwise, being put forth by the straitness of the sides towards the middle and so to the rose, from whence it issues greater and with more impetuosity. The other have for their defence and reason the handsomeness of the pear, [and] the comeliness of it — because, being more flat in the back, they lie better upon the stomach and do not endanger people to grow crooked. Besides all Bologna lutes are in the shape of a pear, and those are the best lutes; but their goodness is not attributed to their figure but to their antiquity [...] The lutes of Padua are something roundish and like those of Monsieur De[s]moulins; therefore their sound is greater than those of Bologna, which are very sweet.⁴

Mace (1676), on the other hand, prefers pearl-shaped lutes as they are both well-sounding and sit comfortably on the performer: ‘The *Shape* generally esteemed, is the *Pearl-Mould*; yet I have known very excellent *Good Ones* of several *Shapes* or *Moulds*: But I do acknowledge for constancy, the *Pearl-Mould* is *Best*, both for *Sound*, and *Comliness*, as also for the more conveniency in *holding* or *using*.⁵ We see numerous inventions during the course of time where new sounds, user experiences and sonic ranges are sought. Examples include Kapsberger’s nineteen-course chitarrone, to which he devoted his *Libro quarto d’intavolatura di chitarone* (1640),⁶ Mace’s double lute, the *dyphone*, presented in *Musick’s Monument* (1676)⁷ and Jacques Gaultier, who promoted the two-headed, twelve-course Baroque lute. The latter is directly mentioned in *The Burwell Lute Tutor*,

4 Dart, *Burwell*, 10–11.

5 Mace, *Monument*, 49.

6 Kapsberger, G.G., *Libro quarto d’intavolatura di chitarone* (Roma, Giosepe Pozzobonelli, 1640).

7 Mace, *Monument*, 203.

where its sonic qualities are criticised. According to what is written, the trouble seems to be due to the inequality between the trebles and basses. It is particularly worth noting the nasal quality of the long basses because of the directions to place the right hand close to the bridge, which causes a more metallic yet woody tone quality. Perhaps this is also the reason behind the following comment, as we can see how the combination of a metallic tone quality and a nasal bass string may not have been a fruitful match, but this we will never know:

English Gaultier [[a contemporary lutenist]] hath been of another opinion and hath caused two heads to be made to the lute. [...] The reasons of English Gaultier are so feeble that they destroy themselves. First, he saith that the length of the strings produce[s] a longer and bigger sound. But all the strings ought to have the same length of sound, and the sound of a string must make room to the other; for besides the confusion that the length of sounds produce, it also causeth a discord (since every bass cannot make a concord with every small string). And this is the first reason. The second evil effect that condemneth this alteration is that the sound of these long strings are no good, and that sound is like that of one that sings in the nose.⁸

Right-hand position

Although authors aside from Burwell and Mace show little interest in the matters concerning lute design, we find slightly more interest directed towards the right-hand position. This may be because the lute performer had little influence on the design of their instrument (perhaps it was second-hand or the luthier only used one or two standard moulds, making the selection rather simple and restricted). In general, there seems to be a consensus about the placement of the right hand, at least in the later seventeenth-century sources (the Renaissance practice will be better unveiled later in this chapter). *The Burwell Lute Tutor* asks for the hand to be placed close to the bridge, using the little finger as support. The wrist should be high to produce an arch and the nails must be short:

8 Dart, *Burwell*, 59.

For the right hand, it must be placed between the rose and the bridge, but nearest to the bridge. Your hand must lie upon the belly of the lute with the little finger only, which must be as if it were glued unto it; and keep the thumb as much as one can leaning upon the bass. That hand must be rising in the middle in the form of an arch, [so] that you may not smother the strings. [...] For the nails, they must be short and smoothly cut (which some do with a little file).⁹

This view is also shared by Mace (1676), who mentions the same attributes. What Mace does, however, is to give more detailed information (as is often the case) as to how the strings are indeed to be plucked; an important indicator here is that, as mentioned in *The Burwell Lute Tutor*, the thumb should rest on the bass string. This serves to give support and a necessary reference for the performer to find their way among the many basses (since the subject for discussion in both books is the eleven-course Baroque lute and occasionally the fourteen-course theorbo). With the little finger placed firmly on the lid, the thumb resting on one of the basses, the wrist held high and the whole hand being situated close to the bridge, we get a pretty good idea of the foundation for the later seventeenth-century concept of tone production:

Lastly, That in *This Posture of your Right-Hand, your Right-Hand Wrist, rise up, to a Convenient Roundness; yet not too much, but only to an Indifferency, and to keep it from Flatness, or Lying o long, &c.* [...] And as to that *Work*, it is only (first) keeping your *Thumb straight, and stiff, and gently pressing down that String, (with an easie strength)* so, as your *Thumb* may only *slip Over it, viz. That Pair*, (for you must know, that always the *Pairs, are struck together*) and rest it self upon the *next (or Eleventh) String*, your *Thumb* then standing *ready, to do the like to That String*; and so from *String to String*, till you have serv'd all the row of *Basses* after the *same manner*. [...] But *This* you must *remember, viz. when ever you strike a Bass, be sure, you let your Thumb rest itself, upon the next String, and There let it remain, till you have Use of It elsewhere. // And this is the only way, to draw from a Lute (as we term it) the sweetest Sound, that a Lute is able to yield; which being perfected, you may conclude, half the work of your Right Hand accomplished.* [...] with your *Thumb* ever resting upon some

9 Dart, *Burwell*, 23.

one of the *Basses*, (where you please) put the *End* of your *second Finger*, a *very little* under your *Second String*, (about three Inches above the *Bridge*) as if you did intend only to *feel your String*, having your *Fore-finger* (at the same time) *close adjoining* in readiness, (yet not touching your *second Finger*, or the *String*;) then draw up your *second Finger*, from under the *String*, forcing the *String* with a pritty *smart Twitch*, (yet gently too) to cause it to speak *strong* and *Loud*. [... Repeat until] you can draw a *sweet, smart*, and *pleasant Sound* from *That String*. [...] strive to do the like with your *Fore-finger*, [...].¹⁰

The earlier William Barley, in his *A New Booke of Tabliture ...* (1596), is much more scanty in his documentation, but what he writes supports the same notion as described above:

[...] the stringes must bee stroken beneath on the bellie of the Lute, with the finger of the right hand, as wel as stopped with the fingers of the left.¹¹

This hand position is even further supported by John Playford in his *Musick's Delight on the Cithren ...* (1666). What Playford does is to bring the metal-strung instruments into the discourse, and it is noticeable that he prefers the use of the fingers rather than the quill (cf. the Oriental *rishā* or the modern plectrum, etc.):

[...] For your right hand, rest only your little finger on the belly of your *Cithren*, and to with your Thumb and first finger and sometimes the second strike your strings, as is used on the *Gittar*; that old Fashion of playing with a quill is not good, and therefore my advice is to lay it aside; and be sure you keep your Nails short on the right hand.¹²

The German sources are scarce, but we find that Johann Stobaeus' (or Stobäus') *StammBuch* (c. 1638–1640) promotes a move from the thumb-inside to the thumb-outside technique. The thumb should be stretched out and the fingers should be played inwards to produce a clean, strong sound. The thumb-outside technique is said here to produce a sharper, brighter and purer tone quality which is to be preferred to the previous

¹⁰ Mace, *Monument*, 72–73.

¹¹ Barley, W., *A New Booke of Tabliture ...* (London, n/a., 1596): B3.

¹² Playford, *Cithren*, Brief Instructions to Playing the Cithren (7th page).

thumb-inside technique, which is now referred to as ‘quite rotten and muffled’ (*gar faull u. dümpffig*). Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain the original source myself, but we find quotes from it on a website provided by Wayne Cripps:

1. Von der Rechten Handt.

“Die Rechte Hand soll kurtz für dem Stege gehalten u. d. kleine finger steif aufgesetzt u. gehalten werden. D. daume soll starck ausgestreckt werden, das er fast ein glied den andern fingern vorgehe. Es sollen auch die finger einwertz unter den daumen fein zu sich gezogen werden, dz der *_resonans_* fein starck klinge.

“Der daume soll auswertz nit einwertz, geschlagen werden, wie die Alten zu thun pflegen, u. gemeinlich die Niederländer und Alte Teutschen. Denn es *_probiret_* worden, das es weit besser den daumen auswertz zuschlagen, klinget reiner scherffer u. heller, dz ander klinget gar faull u. dümpffig.

“Auswertz gebrauchen den daumen diese Berümbte Lautenisten, *_In Germania: Gregorius Ruwet [Huwet], d. Dulandus Anglus,_* welcher doch anfänglich einwendig den daumen gebraucht. *_In Italia:_ Zu Rohm *_Laurentinus,_* zu *_Padua Hortensius._* *_In Gallia_ Borquet , Mercurius Polandus_* u. andere mehr.*

“Wenn volle griffe zuschlagen, gebraucht man alle 4 finger.

“Wenn *_Coloraturen,_* bisweilen mit dem daumen und Zeiger, bisweilen d. Zeiger u. mittelste finger wie drunten bey den *_Coloraturen_* soll gedacht werden.”

(1. On the Right Hand.

The right hand is to be held close to the bridge, and the little finger firmly placed and held down. The thumb is to be stretched out strongly, so that it stands out almost as a limb [so that it stands out one knuckle] to the other fingers. The fingers are to be pulled cleanly inwards under the thumb, so that the sound resonates cleanly and strongly. The thumb is to be struck outwards, not inwards like the people in the past used to do, and commonly the Dutch and old Germans. For it has been proved that it is far better to strike the thumb outwards, it sounds purer, sharper, and brighter, the other sounds quite rotten and muffled.

These famous lutenists used the thumb outside: In Germany: Gregorius Ruwet [=Huwet], Dowland the Englishman, who at first used his thumb the other way. In Italy: in Rome Laurencini, in Padua Hortensius. In France, Bocquet, Mercure the Pole, and many more. If you strike full chords, you use all four fingers [=three fingers + thumb]; for divisions, [play] sometimes with the thumb and index finger, sometimes with the index and middle finger, see below under Divisions.) (Translated by Stewart McCoy; amendment by Markus Lutz)¹³

Esaias Reusner, in his *Erfreuliche Lauten-Lust* (1697), mentions the possibility of placing the supporting finger (in this case, the little finger) behind the bridge to produce a strong tone:

An der rechten Hand muß der kleine Finger vor dem Steg gesetzt werden, wann man lieblich spielen wil; soll es aber etwas stärker klingen, kan man auch wol den kleinen Finger hinter dem Steg setzen. Der Daumen muß allezeit, wann er eienen Chor geschlagen, auff dem anderen liegen bleiben. Auff die Verwechselung der Finger muß man auch fleissig Achtung geben.

Was die lincke Hand anbelagt, [...] Ferner sollen auch die Striche, wo man überlegen soll, wol in acht genommen und allezeit die Finger veste aufgedrucket werden, damit es desto reiner klinge [...].¹⁴

(On the right hand, the little finger must be placed before the bridge when you play pleasantly; but if it should sound a bit stronger, you can also put the little finger behind the bridge. The thumb must always lie at the other end [of the bridge], when it is used to pluck. One must be careful not to confuse the fingers.

As for the left hand, [...] the strokes, too, should be taken into consideration, and the fingers must always be plucked [in a manner] that may sound purer.)

Interestingly enough, Reusner (or Reusnern) does not mention the possibility of playing with the supporting finger behind the bridge in his 1676 treatise: ‘First, the small finger must be positioned somewhat before the bridge [direction, rosette], and not behind, whereby one achieves a sweeter sound [...]’ (in Roland H. Stearns’ translation; brackets added

13 Cripps, W., ‘Stobaeus.’ Retrieved 3 April 2018, URL: <http://www.cs.dartmouth.edu/~wbc/hand/Stobaeus.html>.

14 Reusner, E., *Erfreuliche Lauten-Lust*. 1697 (München: Tree Edition, 1998), Hochgeneigter Leser!

by the translator).¹⁵ Philipp Franz LeSage de Richee (1695) gives similar directions: ‘1. The small right [plucking] hand finger must be positioned in front of the bridge [i.e. toward the rosette side], not behind it. // 2. The right [plucking] hand thumb should extend toward the rosette so that the fingers move into the palm of the hand [...]’ (also in Roland H. Stearns’ translation; brackets added by the translator).¹⁶

French sources are even more scarce. Without mentioning the position between the rosette and the bridge, Charles Mouton writes in 1698 that the ‘little right [plucking] hand finger must rest on the lute top on the side of the bridge where the strings are tied; the other fingers extend to prepare to play, and the thumb, [further] extends to a position outside the fingers’ (same translator).¹⁷

Clearly sources agree on the high angle of the wrist and, as in the later sources, also the close proximity to the bridge. Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger, in *Libro quarto d’intavolatura di chitarone* (1640), take the matter to extremes and, according to my research, it seems that he is unparalleled in his approach. What he asks for is for the lutenist to place, not the little finger but the ring finger on the bridge itself, thus only utilising the thumb, index finger and middle finger for play:

Si deve tenere il quarto deto della mano destra appoggiato al fondo di quà dal ponticello, et non il quinto: le ragioni di ciò si dichiarano dall’Autore, nel suo libro intitolato il Kapsberger della Musica Dialogo.¹⁸

(One must keep the fourth finger [i.e. the ring finger] of the right hand leaning back to the bottom of the bridge, and not the fifth [i.e. the little finger]: the reasons for this are stated by the Author, in his book entitled *Kapsberger of Musica Dialogo*.)

The Burwell Lute Tutor also speaks of three fingers only: ‘The right hand useth the thumb and the two next fingers to the thumb only; [...]’

¹⁵ Lundgren, *Baroque Lute*, 25.

¹⁶ Lundgren, *Baroque Lute*, 35.

¹⁷ Lundgren, *Baroque Lute*, 40.

¹⁸ Kapsberger, *Libro quarto*, 2. The book he mentions seems to be lost; see Fabris, D., ‘Lute Tablature Instructions in Italy: A Survey of the *Regole* from 1507 to 1759,’ in Coelho, V.A. (Ed.), *Performance on Lute, Guitar and Vihuela: Historical Practice and Modern Interpretation* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 16–46, 28.

You may raise the little finger when you strike a whole stroke with the thumb, striking as you do on the guitar.¹⁹ However, the use of the little finger instead of the ring finger naturally increases the distance from the bridge.

John Baptisto Besardo of Visconti, on the other hand, presents an essay entitled ‘Necessarie Observations Belonging to the Lute and Lute-Playing,’ in Robert Dowland’s publication *Varietie of Lute Lessons ...* (1610). This is a more detailed description, closer to those of Mace and *The Burwell Lute Tutor*, and except for small variations relating to the Renaissance performance and fingering practice, he too concurs (see further mentions of this in later sections of this chapter):

First, set your little finger on the belly of the LUTE, not towards the Rose, but a little lower, stretch our your Thombe with all the force you can, especially if thy Thombe be short, so that the other fingers may be carryed in a manner of a fist, and let the Thombe be held higher than them, this in the beginning will be hard. Yet they which have a short Thombe may imitate those which strike the strings with the Thombe under the other fingers, which though it be nothing so elegant, yet to them it will be more easie.

Now for choosing one of these kindes, learne first to strike the strings more hard and cleare [*sic*], whether they be one or more that are to be stricken: and that you may strike them with the right fingers, marke whether one string or more strings than one are to be stricken: if more then one, keepe this rule, let two strings which stand close together be stroken with the Thombe and fore fingers: if two strings be distant one from another so that there be one or two strings betwixt them, strike them with the Thombe and middle finger: strike also three strings, with the Thombe, the fore-finger and middle finger: foure [*sic*] strings with all the other fingers (excepting the little finger,) if more be to be stroken (as oft there be) keeping the same order with your fingers, let the Thombe and the fore-finger strike each of them two strings, if so many be to be stroken. [...]²⁰

19 Dart, *Burwell*, 29.

20 Besardo of Visconti, J.B., ‘Necessarie Observations Belonging to the Lute and Lute-Playing,’ in Robert Dowland, *Varietie of Lute Lessons ...* (London, Thomas Adams, 1610): 4–11, 9.

Right-hand plucking

But the placing of the hand is not all, and for sound to be produced something has to move (see Chapter 4), meaning that a string has to be plucked. *The Burwell Lute Tutor* again sets a good example by providing detailed information. Here we read how the strings are to be left untouched when not in use, which on a Baroque lute has much to say for its resonance, and how one must vary one's plucking (close to the bridge) to make it musically interesting. In contradiction to the instructions by Kapsberger, we should never place the little finger upon the bridge:

For the striking of the lute, that concerneth rather the perfection rather than the beginning of the learning; yet in the beginning 'tis to be observed to strike hard and near the bridge. But take heed that you never lay the little finger upon the bridge or behind the bridge, neither strike the strings with the nails, nor so hard as if you would tear them in pieces. But never leave fingers upon the strings (the thumb as much as you please upon the bass. When you begin to play something well, you must alter your way of striking and flatter (as we speak) the lute — that is to strike it sometimes gently. [...] in playing of the lute, in some places you must strike hard and in others so gently that one may hardly hear you.²¹

It is further emphasised later in the book that one should play without nails: 'The grace is in the flesh, and in the touching of it.'²² Thomas Mace (1676) also agrees with this, as he presents a similar approach where the flesh is preferred to the nails. He does, however, accept the use of nails in the consort for the simple reason of being heard over the other instruments:

But in doing of *This*, take notice, that you *strike not your Strings with your Nails*, as some do, [...] because the *Nail cannot draw so sweet a Sound* from a *Lute*, as the *nibble end* of the *Flesh* can do. // I confess in a *Consort*, it might do well enough, where the *Mellowness* (which is the most *Excellent Satisfaction* from a *Lute*) is *lost* in the *Crowd*; but *Alone*, I could never receive so *good Content* from

²¹ Dart, *Burwell*, 23–24.

²² Dart, *Burwell*, 35.

the *Nail*, as from the *Flesh*: However (*This being my Opinion*) let *Others* do, as seems *Best to Themselves*.²³

Thomas Mace (1676) is the only one, however, to clearly describe the motion of the fingers. He describes what must be done for a clear and clean tone, but it is difficult to discern exactly what he means by an ‘upwards’ and ‘not slanting’ movement. It may suggest the difference between the free stroke (*tirando*) and the resting stroke (*appuyando*):

And that you may learn to *strike a String Clear, and Clean*, take notice, that in *your stroke*, you strive to *draw your Finger a little Upwards*, and not *Slanting*, for that will *endanger the hitting of another String, together with That String*, you intend to *Strike Single*. This is called *Clean Striking*.²⁴

William Barley (1596) writes more than Mace on the matter, but seems more concerned with terminology and fingering than with tone production itself:

[...] you have but foure fingers to play, the thumb accounted for one, for note that the little finger serveth to guide the hand upon the bellie of the Lute. [...] And to the end yee shall not be ignorant what these tearmes meane of striking downewarδες, or upwards, or to gripe, I meane by striking downewarδες the stringes is when the thumb playeth alone, and to strike with the fingers is when the letters hath pricks under them, and the stringes are striken upwardes, to gripe is when the fingers and the thumb playeth together and yet not loo- seth their office in striking upwardes and downewarδες, that is to say to strike downward and upward with the fingers.²⁵

It is not until Barley introduces less common instruments, such as the metal-strung orpharion in *A New Booke of Tabliture for the Orpharion ...* (1596?), that he becomes clearer, and suggests that metal strings must be treated differently than those made of gut:

[...] the Orpharion is strong with wire stringes, by reason of which manner of stringing, the Orpharion doth necessarilie require a more gentle & drawing stroke

23 Mace, *Monument*, 73.

24 Mace, *Monument*, 73–74.

25 Barley, *Tabliture*, B4.

than the Lute, I meane the fingers of the right hand must be easilie drawn over the stringes, and not suddenly griped [*sic*], or sharpelie [*sic*] stroken as the lute is: for if yee should doo so, then the wire stringes would clash or iarre together the one against the other; which would cause that the sounde bee harsh and unpleasant: Therefore it is meete that you observe the difference of the stroke.²⁶

Francesco Corbetta seems to take for granted that the performer knows how to strike the strings in general, which is a logical inference as only a trained musician could perform his complex and technically-demanding works as presented in *La guitarre royalle* (1671). Yet, it is interesting to note a small remark that the hand and wrist must perform strumming in a synchronous manner: *‘E batti sempre le consonanti con la mano et il polzo insieme’*²⁷ (And always hit the chords with the hand and the wrist together).

In Italy, however, Vincenzo Capirola’s lute book *Compositione di Meser Vincenzo Capirola* (c. 1517) provides three important directions. The first is that all notes of a chord must be heard clearly; the second is to sustain the notes in the left hand, that is, to hold the fingers to the note until the finger is needed elsewhere in a sort of ‘*tenuto* left-hand technique’ (although I confess, the term is troublesome in the world of tablatures). This can be compared to *The Burwell Lute Tutor*, cited earlier, which may indicate the same: ‘But never leave fingers upon the strings (the thumb as much as you please upon the bass).’²⁸ The third and final direction is that the distance between the string and the nut has much to say for the tone production. Even if Capirola’s right-hand instructions are somewhat fragmented (including the description of a *figuetas* technique not cited here) they are interesting because they present three perspectives not clearly addressed by others:

[...] Le consonantie tu troverai a tre over a quatro, evertisi che quella de mezo se sentra, che molto la tua orech//ia te ingana te par sonar 4 bote, et non se sente nisi 3., et cusi 3 che soni non se sente poi do [...] Nota. il piu bel secreto

26 Barley, W., *A New Booke of Tabliture for the Orpharion ...* (London, n/a., 1596?): B. The following and related publication Barley, W., *A New Booke of Tabliture for the Bandora ...* (London, n/a., n.d.) does not mention tone production.

27 Corbetta, F., *La guitarre royalle* (Paris, Bonneüil, 1671), 3.

28 Dart, *Burwell*, 23–24.

et arte che, e, nel meter suxo una cosa, et sonar, abi questo per una masima de aristotille, et fali gran fundamento: avertisi nel sonar sempre tenir ferme le bote col deo, over dei sul manego fina che trovi altre bote che te sia forza lasarlle, cusi sempre farai de man, in man, per che limporta asai, e tuti non livrende, come desoto, forza sera ne parli [...] et nota un miraculo che io viti a un lauto che solena aver: il scagnelin era un poco inzo piu che[?] dover che canto andava inciso, et pareva il lauto muto il fisi andare insu al suo luoco respiro il lauto cosa danno creder [...]²⁹

([...] When you find chords with three or four notes, be careful that the middle one is audible, as often your ears will cheat you. You will think you are playing four notes, but actually only three of them will be sounding, or when you play three, only two will be heard.[...] The most beautiful secret in preparing and playing a piece is found in a rule given by Aristotle to which great importance must be given: when you play, be careful to hold the notes, keeping the fingers (of the left hand) on the fingerboard, until you have to play other notes (with the same fingers). Do not move them until you have to; be careful always to observe this rule while you are playing through the pieces. Not everybody understands this as I do, so I had to explain it. [...] Witness the miracle I saw in a lute that I had: the nut was slightly lower than it should have been, the ‘canto’ (1st string) was too low (on the fingerboard), and the lute sounded mute. I raised it to the proper height and amazingly, the lute came alive.)³⁰

Similarly, we can also find other perspectives given in Gaspar Sanz’ *Instruccion de Musica Sobre la Guitarra Española ...* (1697) in which the thumb is specially mentioned:

Del pulgar de la mano derecha, es necessario tener grande cuidado, porque como siempre toca la voz baxa, si hallaren dos numeros, aunque sea en las dos

29 Capirola, V., *Composizione di meser Vincenzo Capirola* (na., na., c. 1517), ff. 2 and 4r.

30 I have transcribed the original handwriting here as close to the original as I could manage. Due to the complexity of the text, however, I chose to use Federico Marincola’s contextual adaptation of the text into modern English for the translation. I agree with his solutions, and I find it to better convey the content to the modern reader than a direct translation from the original would have done, especially since more specialised linguistic perspectives are not the focus here, but the subject-related content of the text itself; see Marincola, F., ‘Capirola Lute Book (1517)’ in *Lute-Bot Quarterly* No. 1, Winter (1998). Retrieved 7 June 2017, URL: http://www.gerbode.net/sources/capirola_compositione/luteboti.txt.

rayas mas baxas, procuren que el pulgar toque el bagete, porque le pertenece à èl explicar aquella voz, para que tenga mas cuerpo, y porque no suena tambien la segunda herida àzia arriba con el indice, como con el pulgar àzia abaxo, y pueden probar esta regla en la tercera diferencia de la Xacara, al quarto compàs, y experimentaràs, que alli es mejor tañer la segunda con el pulgar, que con otro dedo, y alsimismo en otros casos.³¹

(Of the thumb of the right hand, it is necessary to take great care, because as always the low voice sounds, if they find two numbers, even in the two smallest lines, try to have the thumb touch the course (?; *bagete*), because it belongs to him to explain that voice, so that it has more body, and because the second wound [string] does not also sound up with the index, as with the thumb below, and can prove this rule in the third variation of the Xacara, to the fourth beat, and you will experience, that it is better to play the second with the thumb, than with another finger, and likewise in other cases.)

As my final example, Alessandro Piccinini (1623) emphasises a clean and clear tone production and directs the reader to play over the rose to render the best sound:

Dico dunque, che frà le parti principali le quali si ricercano al buon suonatore, l'una & molto importante è il suonare netto, & polito; Di maniera che ogni minimo tocco di corda sia schietto, come Perla, & chi non tocca in questa maniera è poco da stimarsi; E certamente gran diligenza conviene usarsi, per suonare cosi; & in particolare in Francia, dove non si stima alcuno, il quale non suoni netto, e delicate. [...] Rende il Liuto, e cosi ancor il Chitarrone miglior armonia in mezo frà la Rosa, e lo scanello; e però in quell luoco si deve tenere la mano destra.³²

(So, I say, what is the main role that is being sought by the good player, one very important [task] is to play clearly, & clean; In such a way that every little touch of [a] string is fine, like [a] pearl, and they who do not touch it in this manner is of little esteem; And, certainly, great diligence should be payed to play thusly; & particularly so in France, where no one is esteemed, who does not[, through

31 Sanz, G., *Instruccion de musica sobre la guitarra española ...* (Zaragoza, Diego Dormer, 1697), 7–8.

32 Piccinini, A., *Intavolatura di liuto, et di chitarrone. Libro primo* (Bologna: Gio. Paolo Moscatelli, 1623), 1.

their playing,] sound clear, and delicate. [...] It makes the Lute, and also the Chitarrone[, produce the] best harmony [when placing the right hand] in the middle of the rose, and on top of it; and therefore, you must hold your right hand in that place.)

A key to producing proper sound, according to Piccinini, is to have the nails short and egg-shaped, yet long enough to provide support for the fleshy part of the fingertips, and that the fingers move towards, that is, into the soundboard. Both strings of each course should be plucked with the flesh.³³

Per imparare di tener ben la mano destra, chiuderai il pugno, e poi l'aprirai un poco, tanto, che le punte delle dita siano incontra alle corde, & il deto Police stia lungo; & l'Auricolare stia posato sopra il fondo [...] Il deto Police, il qual io non approve, che habbia l'ugna molto longa, s'adopra in questa maniera, cioè che ogni volta, che suonerà la corda, dovrà mandarsi verso il fondo, so che caschi sempre sopra, la corda, che li farà sotto, & iui si fermi sin tanto, che di nuovo dovrà porsi in opera. E quando si suona una pizzicata (che pizzicato intend, quando si suona più d'una corda insieme) anche il Police deve fare il medesimo movimento, e questo molto importa, prima per la buona armonia, che faranno li Bassi toccata à quell modo, & ancora perche apporta commodità grandissima [...]. Le altre tre Dita, cioè Indice, Medio, & Anulare, I quali certamente debbono havere le ungue tanto longhe, che avanzino la carne, e non più, & che habbiano dell'ovato, cioè; che siano più alti ein mezzo; s'adopereranno in questa maniera, cioè; che quando si farà una pizzicata, ovvero, si suonerà una corda sola [...].³⁴

(To learn to hold your right hand, you will close your fist, and then open it a little, so that the tips of your fingers meet the strings, and the thumb is long [i.e. stretched out]; and the little finger is rested at the bottom [i.e. the soundboard] [...] The thumb, of which I do not approve when it has a very long nail. U]se it in this way, that is, that every time it plays the course it has to move towards the soundboard [...]. And when you play a *pizzicata* (i.e., when playing more than one course together), the thumb must do the same movement, and this is very important, first for the good harmony, that they will pluck the basses in this way, and also because it provides great convenience [...]. The other

33 Piccinini, *Intavolatura*, 2.

34 Piccinini, *Intavolatura*, 2.

three fingers, that is, the index, medium, and ring finger, must surely have their nails so long that they supports the flesh, and no longer, and that they are egg-shaped, that is, that they are higher in the middle[. W]hen used in this way, that is; when plucking is made, a single course will sound [...].)

Visual arts

Other valuable sources on the concept of tone production can be found in the visual arts, but they must be treated with care in this context. Paintings are certainly full of uncertainties as they are not photographs, and we are subject to the eye of the artist creating them. A person depicted playing the lute in a certain fashion does not automatically mean that that certain way of playing is what was actually done. The performer may have chosen a more comfortable position to be able to sit for the artist over a long period of time; the performer may not even have been a musician at all, only finding the lute to look good in the painting; the artist may have adjusted, or even changed, the reality according to taste, memory or for many other reasons. Indeed, whatever the actual course of events, we cannot rely on works of art alone, but we can use them to get a better understanding of how they (the musician, the artist or the person who commissioned the painting) *wanted* something to be perceived. Not only are the visual arts important sources for understanding contemporary culture, politics and propaganda, but they are also sources for *seeing* sound. Richard Leppert has presented important research in this respect, where he argues that visual arts can be an important source for understanding music's social function and how it was used to convey meaning:

When people hear a musical performance, they see it as an embodied activity. While they hear, they also witness: how the performers look and gesture, how they regard the audience, how listeners heed the performers. Thus the musical event is perceived as a socialized activity [...] Visual art cannot replicate musical acoustics, but it can provide an invaluable hortatory account of what, how, and why a given society heard and hence in part what the sounds meant.³⁵

35 Leppert, R., *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (USA: University of California Press, 1993), xxii.

We can therefore use visual works of art when trying to understand what constitutes a certain idea or concept. This will prove helpful when trying to understand a historically-distant musical activity from a sonic perspective. Because of the scarcity of written documentation (which again is subject to the reader's interpretation) and the completely non-existent corpora of recordings from the time, we must seek additional information elsewhere. Visual art can in such cases prove quite enlightening. Leppert further argues that what appears in a visual work of art is there for a reason, to convey meaning to the perceiver and to take part in social interaction at more complex levels:

The only purpose in preserving — making replicable — sounds is that they mean something; [...] It is no accident that the early history of notation coincides with the codification (regularization for ideological and political purposes) of the liturgy in the medieval Church. It is no accident that musical manuscripts were often elaborate, visually stunning productions or that much of the printed art music of the nineteenth century carried dedications to rich patrons. The issue of dedications goes beyond the mere economic gain hoped for by impoverished composers. It begs the question why the commission of manuscripts and dedications in printed music might matter to patrons. The value implied exceeds that of physically possessing notated music, which cannot, like a painting, be hung up and looked at. The value instead comes with the faith, sometimes *not* justified, that the experiential sonoric phenomena promised by the score have transliterated a particular world order into the properly aestheticized aural form.³⁶

Following his argument, the actual sound of a performance and how sound is represented are closely linked. In such a context that I present in this book, where original sources are relatively scarce, it is therefore possible to turn to works of art to find meanings which can fill some of the gaps or even contextualise the written primary sources already presented. I will do this from two perspectives: firstly, focusing on how the physical hand position is represented, ranging from the Renaissance to

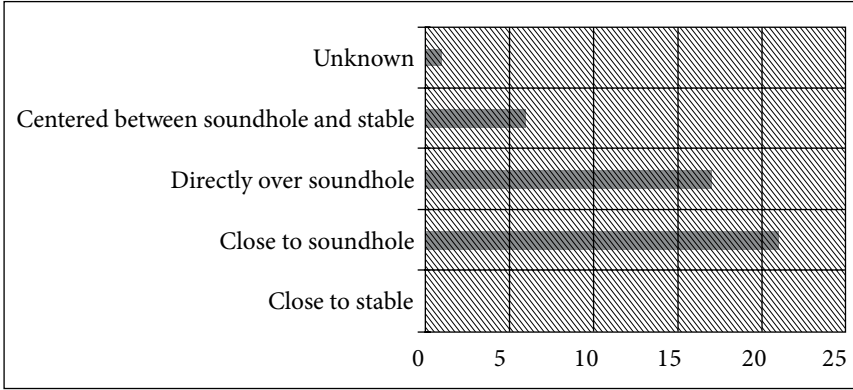
36 Leppert, R., *Sight of Sound*, 11–12.

the Baroque; and secondly, looking at the depicted bodies' extroverted or introverted postures.

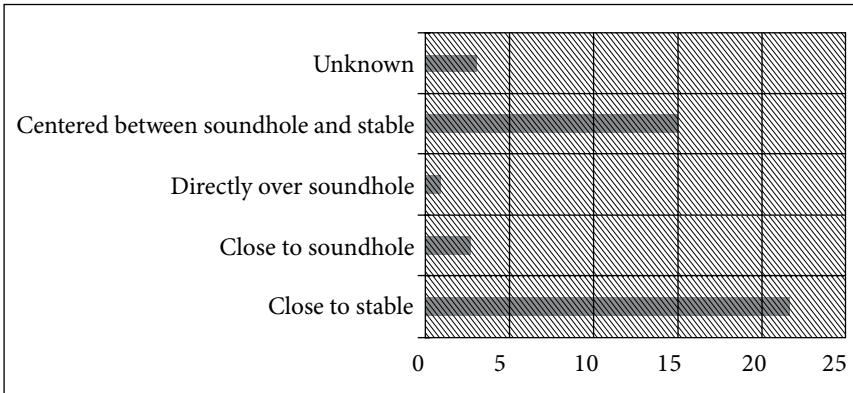
Jean-Marie Poirier has collected numerous historical paintings on a website illustrating the left and right-hand positions.³⁷ In an attempt to make my argument effective and clear, I have chosen to represent these paintings statistically rather than showing and discussing them individually. During my investigation, I focused on the right hand and placed all images in the following categories: 1) those with the right hand centred between the soundhole and the bridge; 2) those where the right hand is placed directly over the soundhole; 3) those where the right hand is in close proximity to the sound hole; and 4) those where the right hand is close to the bridge. I chose to keep Poirier's categorisation between 'La Renaissance, 1490–1650' (hereafter Renaissance), 'L'âge baroque (17e siècle)' (hereafter seventeenth century) and 'La fin du baroque (18e siècle)' (hereafter eighteenth century) to make it easier for the reader to visit his site and study the data. It should be noted that it can sometimes be difficult to decide which category a particular hand position belongs to. In such cases, I chose to use the plucking position of the fingers to decide. Sometimes the hands are widely stretched and at other times contracted, meaning that the fingers are not always well represented by the hand itself. Images where the hand is hidden or at a distance from the instrument have been labelled 'unknown.' The total foundation for this statistical overview includes 119 paintings; 45 being categorised as Renaissance, 44 as seventeenth century and 30 as eighteenth century.

What the study revealed is that the visual aesthetics of tone production changed in art from the sixteenth century, where the right hand was depicted closer or directly over the soundhole (see Graph 2.1 below), to the seventeenth century, where close proximity to the bridge had gained favour (see Graph 2.2 below), and even more so in the eighteenth century (see Graph 2.3). This trend is furthermore interesting to see in conjunction with David Ledbetter, who argues that the lute lost favour to the harpsichord during the seventeenth century, and that the two instruments were

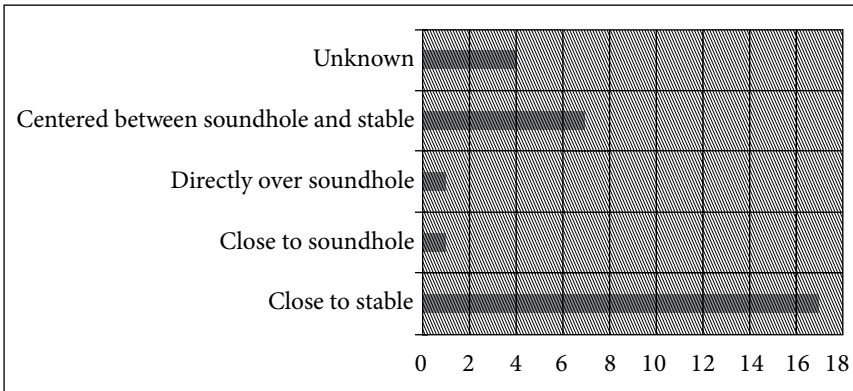
37 Poirier, J.-M., 'Le luth,' *le.luth.free.fr/*. Retrieved 6 September 2017, URL: <http://le.luth.free.fr/index.htm>.



Graph 2.1. The right-hand position between the bridge and soundhole in the Renaissance category.



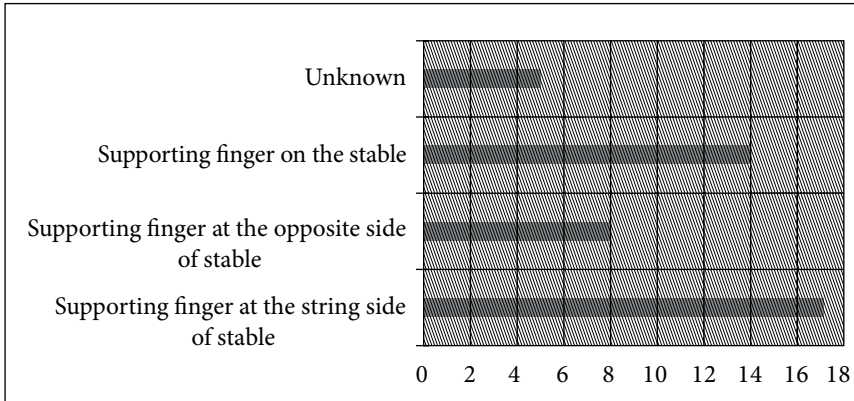
Graph 2.2. The right-hand position between the bridge and soundhole in the seventeenth-century category.



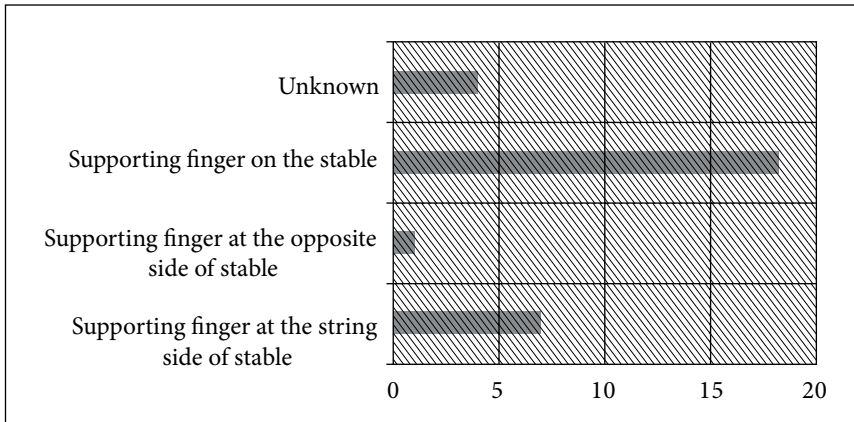
Graph 2.3. The right-hand position between the bridge and soundhole in the eighteenth-century category.

very closely linked in terms of their styles of ornamentation, composition and performance practice.³⁸ Reasons for the decline of the Baroque lute, for instance, may have had to do with the increased size of the orchestras, which made the theorbo, baroque guitar and harpsichord stronger sounding alternatives. But at the same time, it is interesting to note how the right-hand move from the soundhole to the bridge not only makes the tone more piercing and projecting, but also more similar in tone quality to that of the harpsichord. Furthermore, in the seventeenth-century category I found several examples of the supporting finger being placed on the bridge and several others placing the supporting finger behind the bridge, on the opposite side of the strings, which again supports the move towards the bridge as it gives an unmistakable physical point of contact with the lute (see Graph 2.4). This was even more evident in the eighteenth-century category (see Graph 2.5). In the Renaissance category I found no examples at all of the supporting finger being behind the bridge (see Graph 2.6). Visually, this gives us an idea of a tone production aesthetic moving from dull (or ‘warm’) to a tone rich in transients (or ‘metallic’). Furthermore, the angle at which the fingers pluck the strings is very much decided by the height of the wrist. This is because the arm has to have contact with the body of the instrument to keep it in place, and a wider angle between the lid of the instrument and the forearm forces the wrist to compensate for the fingers to reach the strings. If the angle is low (see Fig. 2.1 below), the thumb becomes more parallel to the strings it plucks and therefore has a larger contact area. On the other hand, if the angle is wider, the thumb meets the string vertically and has a smaller contact area (see Fig. 2.2 below). Recall that earlier in this chapter, a statistical study showed how the preference shifted from having the hand close to the sound hole in the Renaissance to close to the bridge in the later Baroque. This would also imply a shift of hand position and plucking angle from that of Figure 2.1 to Figure 2.2. In this respect, it is particularly interesting to note a brief passage in *The Burwell Lute Tutor* which, as stated earlier, promotes a hand position close to the bridge. What is notable in this passage is that the simultaneous plucking of three strings was not supposed to be

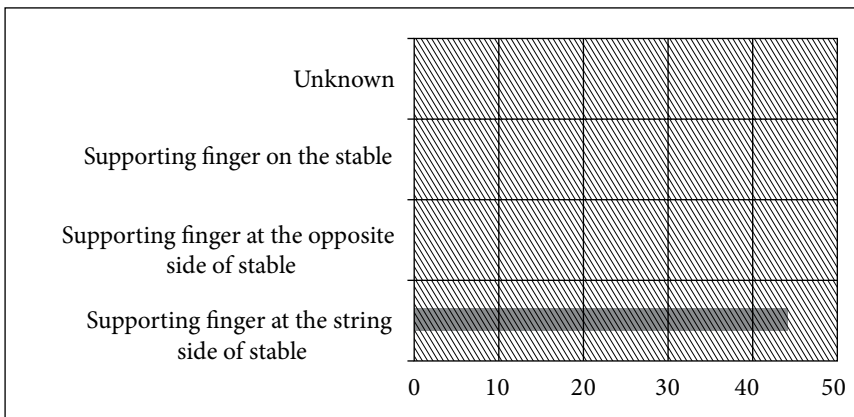
³⁸ Ledbetter, *Harpsichord and Lute*.



Graph 2.4. The placement of the supporting finger in the seventeenth-century category.



Graph 2.5. The placement of the supporting little finger in the eighteenth-century category.



Graph 2.6. The placement of the supporting little finger in the Renaissance category.



Figure 2.1. Low-angle wrist and a large contact area at the thumb. Photo: Robin Rolfhamre.



Figure 2.2. High-angle wrist and a small contact area at the thumb. Photo: Robin Rolfhamre.

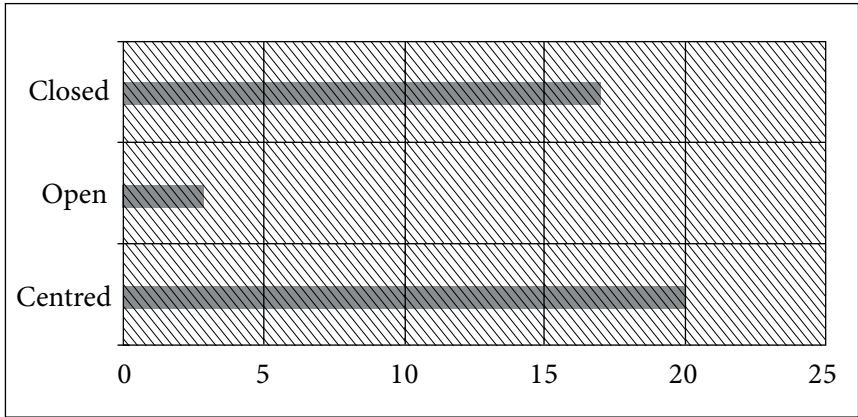
plucked by three separate fingers as had been done in the Renaissance (using the interchanging thumb-index-finger technique, or *figuetas*, promoting the right hand to be placed close to the soundhole). Rather, they should be plucked with one sweeping finger alone to secure that all

strings were used. By comparing the *figuetas* technique to the Baroque technique close to the bridge, we soon notice how the first easily activates the two strings of each pair, while the latter indeed only hits the first of each pair. In this case we can see how the shift in tone production aesthetics from the dull to the hard also has consequences for the fingering and interpretation of lute music; we see how a certain ideology of tone production directly alters a performance practice and the manner in which the lutenist relates to a musical work:

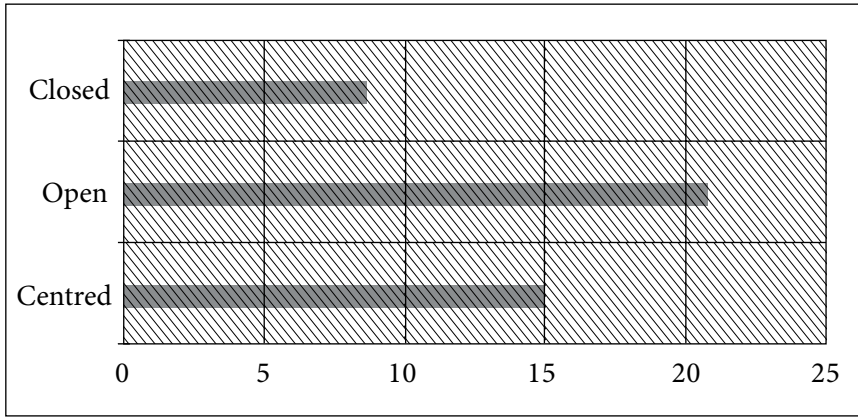
[...] if there be three small strings together you must not strike them as people did formerly with three several fingers, but with the forefinger only, sliding from the treble upwards over the strings and repeating sometimes the treble with the middle finger. The reason why we do not play with three several fingers is that striking thus we miss half of the strings; that is, of every couple of strings we can strike but one.³⁹

In line with Leppert's argument that we can 'see' sound in a visual work of art, it is also interesting to read introversion and extroversion alongside the hand positions discussed above. In this phase of my analysis I revisited the same paintings and categorised them according to the performers' body postures. I labelled them according to bodies playing in a balanced, centred position (where I perceived bodily control, balance and order); bodies in an extroverted, open position (neck bent backwards, looking away, displaying the chest, etc.); and finally, bodies in a closed position (bending forward, looking down, reading some sort of musical notation). The results were intriguing, as they supported the move from the dull and less projecting tone quality (at least over greater distance) of the Renaissance to the more metallic, piercing tone quality of the later Baroque. This is evident because the Renaissance category was overrepresented by centred and closed bodies (see Graph 2.7 below); the seventeenth century favoured open body postures (see Graph 2.8 below); while the eighteenth-century category displayed an overrepresentation of centred bodies (see Graph 2.9 below). In Table 2.1 below, I show how these results align and what becomes apparent, especially when trying out the

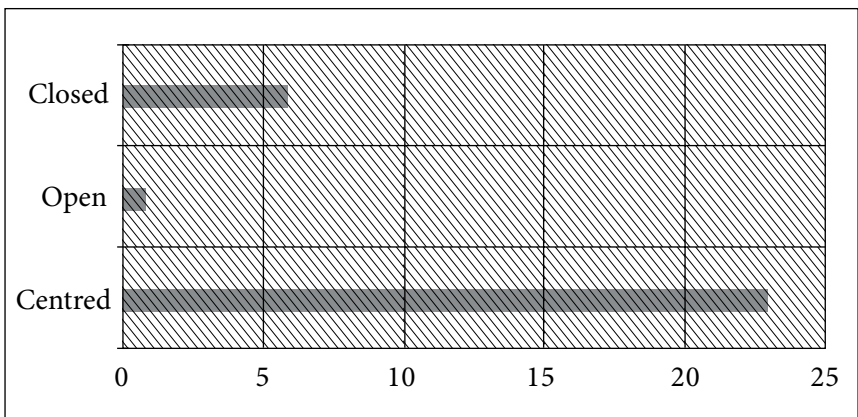
39 Dart, *Burwell*, 29.



Graph 2.7. Body postures in the Renaissance category.



Graph 2.8. Body postures in the seventeenth-century category.



Graph 2.9. Body postures in the eighteenth-century category.

Table 2.1. Suggested reading from comparing the trends revealed by the data.

| Category | Favoured hand position | Favoured body posture | Suggested reading |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Renaissance | Close to or directly above soundhole | Centred/closed | Duller, less percussive, soft and quiet. |
| Seventeenth century | Centred/close to the bridge | Open/centred | More open, extroverted tone quality, more apparent overtone activity. Clearer attack. Louder. |
| Eighteenth century | Close to the bridge | Centred | Very percussive, much more overtone activity, woody sound. Loud and piercing. |

various solutions on an actual instrument, is that the visual concept of tone production seems to have moved from a duller, warmer and softer tone quality in the Renaissance to a percussive, metallic and at the same time woody, more piecing tone in the eighteenth century, with much more overtone activity.

Fingering

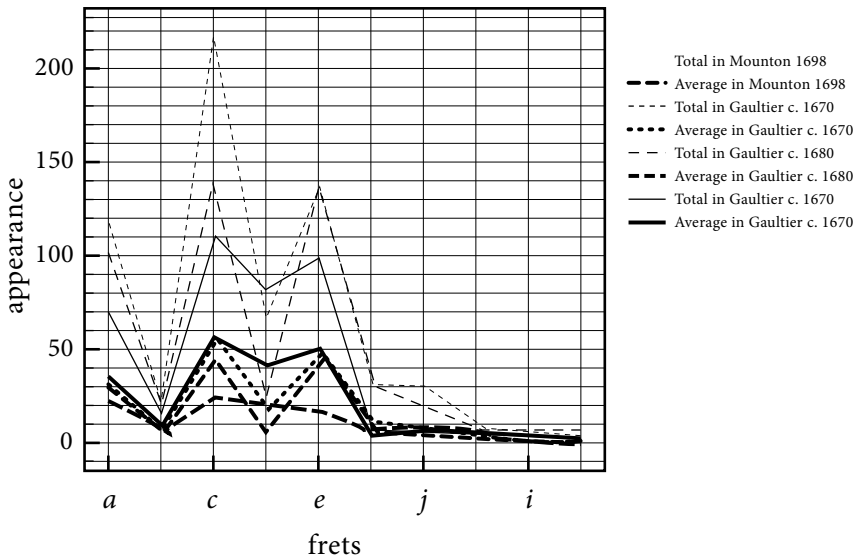
What is covered most regarding the right hand in historical lute sources are fingerings. To various degrees, according to nationality, time period and the intended instrument, we can learn much of performance practice simply by studying fingerings. The subject is vast, and a full-scale inquiry of the matter is not necessary in this present context, but I will, however, draw attention to some specific examples which unveil important perspectives for my development of a conceptual understanding of tone production on lute instruments. The points I wish to make relate to seven key perspectives:

1. The preference for open strings and the first position.
2. The weight distribution of the weak *figuetas* technique.
3. The *figuetas* reminiscence of the French Baroque lute repertoire.
4. The transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque plucked chord.
5. The right-hand strumming mosaic of Francesco Corbetta (1671, 1674).

6. The offbeat slurs of the Baroque repertoire.
7. Silence.

The preference for open strings and the first position

Mace made an interesting observation when he wrote: '[...] because an *Open String* is more *sweet*, and *Freer of Sound*, than a *stopt String*.⁴⁰ Indeed, the part of the corpora emphasising open strings is almost exclusive. Again, we can look at this statistically. Consider the free seventeenth-century preludes presented in the lute tablatures of the Gaultiers (c.1670 and c.1680), Mouton (1698) and Gallot (c. 1670)⁴¹ where we see a clear preference for the first four frets and the open strings (see Graph 2.10 below).



Graph 2.10. Statistics over the total and average number of tones found, and what fret they are played on, in all the preludes by the Gaultiers (c.1670 and c.1680), Mouton (1698) and Gallot (c. 1670).

40 Mace, *Monument*, 68.

41 Gaultier, D., and Gaultier, E., *Pièces de luth, sur trois différent modes nouveaux*, réimpression de l'édition de Paris, c. 1670; and *Livres de tablature des pièces de luth, sur plusieurs différent modes, avec quelques règles qu'il faut observer pour le bien toucher*, réimpression de l'édition de Paris, c. 1680 (Genève, Minkoff Reprint, 1975); Mouton, C., *Pièces de luth sur différent modes; Premier et second livre*, c. 1698, Réimpression de l'édition de Paris, l'auteur, introduction de François Lesure (Genève, Minkoff Reprint, Genève 1978); Gallot, le V., *Stücke für Barocklaute*, c. 1700, Reproduktion der Handschrift im Besitz der Stadt Leipzig Städtische Bibliotheken Musikbibliothek (Signatur II.6.14), Albert Reyer (Germany, Tree edition, 1999).

The weight distribution of the *figuetas* technique

The Renaissance practice of plucking the strings, that is the *figuetas* technique, was based on an alternation between the thumb and index finger (sometimes the middle finger substituted for the thumb when it was otherwise occupied). This is axiomatic and thoroughly supported by both written descriptions and the fingerings of almost every tablature from that period of time. But what is interesting is to note several physical premises of the technique which have great significance for tone production. First of all, it is a weak technique which naturally helps the performer not to overpower the lightly-built instrument. Secondly, it allows the hand to enter an oscillating mode in which the hand easily rotates up and down in a relaxed manner. In addition to the lack of force and its consequent relaxation, this oscillating mechanism makes it much simpler to accommodate the share speed of melodic progression asked for in many Renaissance tablatures. Compare this to Corbetta's instruction to strum chords with the hand and the wrist together cited above, and we see how this mechanical function could perhaps be an integral part of lute technique in general, not only a feature of the *figuetas*. Thirdly, the natural difference between the weight of the thumb and the index finger produces an effortless distinction between strong and weak beats. This is something modern guitarists, for instance, struggle with in their use of all fingers in complex patterns as they must counteract the natural differences of weight and length between the fingers to produce strong and weak tones regardless of which finger plays it. Fourthly, the important difference in angle between the thumb and the index finger when approaching the course. As a result of the *figuetas* technique and the visual representations analysed above, the thumb will naturally produce a resting stroke and thus it incorporates both strings of each course. The index finger, on the contrary, reaches the course from below with much less force and, due to the open-hand position, it emphasises the lower string of the pair and does not force both strings to be played. What is very interesting with this latter perspective is that it possibly allows the upper string to keep ringing even if the lower is plucked or brushed, depending on who is playing, resulting in a very nice legato-like melodic

line.⁴² (This is an ideal that I find very useful in my own practice, but we will see in Chapter 3 that this is not a widely-recognised perspective in today's literature.) This is perhaps also what makes the *figuetas* technique most suitable for double strings, rather than single, and why modern guitarists often struggle to make it sound good with nails, as the nails are now being thought of as part of a two-fold relation between nail and flesh in many present-day traditions of Classical guitar technique. It is difficult to adequately make contact with both nail and flesh from the direction which the index finger approaches the two strings of each pair.

The pronounced *figuetas* reminiscence of the French Baroque lute repertoire

It is also noticeable that the thumb keeps playing an important part as the foundation for tone production even after the Renaissance *figuetas* technique had lost its suitability, due to more complex compositional demands of the right hand. The clearest example is perhaps provided by the French, who seemed to take this idea further than their international colleagues (compare Example 2.1). In the example below, as is the case in general, a short line represents the thumb while one dot suggests the index finger and two dots equals the middle finger. Notice how the thumb is used all over the full register of the instruments in Example 2.1. Recall also *The Burwell Lute Tutor* cited above, in which the issue of striking both the strings of each pair had become difficult as the right hand was placed closer to the bridge ('[...] The reason why we do not play with three several fingers is that striking thus we miss half of the strings; that is, of every couple of strings we can strike but one⁴³). This is perhaps another good reason why the *figuetas* mentality lives on in the fingering of French seventeenth-century music, both to have the thumb activate the full courses, producing a richer sound through its resting strokes, and

42 I thank Rolf Lislevand for drawing my attention to this phenomenon during private conversations.

43 Dart, *Burwell*, 29.



Example 2.1. Extract from ‘La belle homicide, courante de M.’ Gautier’ and ‘Double de la belle homicide,’ *Pièces de luth sur differents modes...* (c. 1698), 15–16. In my own transcription.

to gain from the natural weight distribution discussed above: ‘Sometimes you make a whole passage with the thumb and the finger’ (*The Burwell Lute Tutor*).⁴⁴

The transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque plucked chord

If we compare the traditional Renaissance fingering, where each tone of a chord is plucked by a separate finger (see, for instance, Visconti’s description above), to the sweeping motion of one finger to produce the same chord described in *The Burwell Lute Tutor* above (this is supported by the fingering of multiple tablatures, but for the ease of the argument I will call it ‘the Burwell Solution’), we notice two important perspectives. Firstly, the Renaissance fingering is produced *tirando* (i.e. the finger plucks the intended string without touching any other string) while the Burwell Solution produces an *appoyando* (i.e. a resting stroke, where the finger falls on the string below after plucking the intended string). The practical consequence of this is that the Renaissance solution is more even when the *tirando* is constant, regardless of the context, be it a chord or a single note, while the Burwell Solution’s *appoyando* differentiates itself from the normally-plucked strings, especially considering the close proximity to the bridge. In this latter case, the performer must decide if this difference is something to be embraced or counteracted in each separate context. Secondly, the Renaissance approach gives the performer the advantage of being able to choose whether the chord is to be played broken or synchronized, while the Burwell Solution can only be performed broken.

⁴⁴ Dart, *Burwell*, 32.

The right-hand strumming mosaic of Francesco Corbetta (1671, 1674)

Francesco Corbetta presents another case where fingering provides useful information as to what can be constituted as a concept of tone production. He presents an elaborate right-hand mosaic of a strumming pattern, in which three fingers of the right hand are used according to their natural difference in weight and length to colour each strummed chord individually:

Vedrai lesemplio dun repicco posto in una Ciaconna, doue la nota piu longa significa il polzo, cominciando prima i diti poi con il polzo facendo listesso all in su e osserua che le quatro note legate significano douersi far prima con il secondo dito e poi con il primo appresso, e cosi all in su sotto a un tempo piu presto, e poi seguita con i diti et il polzo [...] Vous uerrez l'exemple d'une batterie, mise sur un caprice de chacone où la note la plus longue signifie le pouce tant au dessous qu'au dessus et remarquez que quand uous uerrez quatre notes liees ensemble, uous deuez uous seruir auparauant du second doigt en descendant, et puis apres du premier doigt uous ferez de mesme en montant dans un tēps plus prompt et continuez tousiours avec les doigts et le pouce suiuant l'exemple que uous y uerrez.⁴⁵

(You will see the example of a *repicco* (i.e. strumming) in a *Ciaconna*, where the longer note [stem] signifies the thumb, starting first [with] the fingers, then with the thumb [and] doing the same [with] all [indicated fingers in an] upwards motion], and observe that the four related notes [marked with a slur] signify to having to be [played] first with the second finger and then with the first close by, and then all [indicated fingers] upwards in a quicker tempo, and then followed with the fingers and the thumb [...] You will see the example of a battery [i.e. strumming section], set to a *caprice de chacone* where the longest note [stem] signifies the thumb, both from below and above, and note that when you see four notes tied together, you first have to serve [i.e. strum] the second finger downward, and then, after the first finger, you will do the same by going up in a faster time, and continue with the fingers and the thumb according to the example that you will see.)

⁴⁵ Corbetta, *Royalle 1671*, 3 and 7.

This is further supported by Corbetta's 1674 version of *La guitarre royalle*: 'Quand à la Batterie la plus longue notte marque le Poulce. / Et couchant le premier doigt sur la touche, Vous touschere les Points marques un a chaque corde.'⁴⁶ (When at the battery [i.e. strumming section of the musical work], the longest note marks the thumb. / And setting the first finger on the fret, you strike each string [of the chord] with the fingers marked). In Table 2.2 below we see how the Italian and French instructions from 1671 and 1674 add up to this complex right-hand mosaic, which is 'plus delicate'⁴⁷ (very delicate). Corbetta must be seen as a special case, as this level of notating a strumming pattern is unparalleled in the Baroque guitar repertoire, even among his own works. But what we can learn from this is that tone production and the design of performed sound mattered to the Early Modern performer beyond the 'simple' production of a generally good tone. In the case of the 'Caprice de chaconne,' we see tone production as something similar to sculpting, which not only bears witness to Corbetta's abilities as a performer, but also shows that there are more subtle levels of tone production in the Early Modern era than what we perceive from the literature alone. It is further noticeable — considering Capirola's remark above to let all the tones of the left-hand ring for as long as possible — that if doing so when performing the 'Caprice de chaconne,' one can create an illusion of a much larger instrument. In fact, not only does the instrument sound larger, but Capirola's idea also emphasises the psychoacoustic effect of a bass line on an instrument severely lacking real basses. In my experience as a performer, this is true for many of the musical works of the Baroque guitar repertoire.

Table 2.2. The right-hand mosaic of Corbetta's 'Caprice de Chaconne.' (1671); (legend: 16 = semiquaver and 32 = demi-semiquaver; m = middle finger, i = index finger; p = thumb; d = down and u = up).

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| Rhythmic value: | 16 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 32 | 32 | 32 | 32 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 16 | |
| Finger: | m | p | p | i | m | i | m | i | i | i | m | p | p | i |
| Finger direction: | d | d | u | u | d | d | u | u | d | u | d | d | u | u |

46 Corbetta, F. *La guitarre royalle* (Paris, Bonneüil, 1674), 4.

47 Corbetta, *Royalle 1671*, 7.

The offbeat slurs of the Baroque repertoire

We find several examples of slurs being organised according to what string they are being performed on rather than according to the beat. This produces an offbeat effect, where the weight difference and variations in tone quality between the initial plucked note and the following, performed by the left hand alone, is emphasised and celebrated. Not only is this a case relating to time and groove, but also a similar perspective of using the various colours and natural modes of the fingers to a musical advantage in a similar, yet more subtle manner, than in the case of Corbetta's mosaic above.



Example 2.2. Extract from 'Caprice de chaconne,' *La guitare royale* (1671), 72. In my own transcription.

Silence

Sound has always related very strongly to its opposite, silence. This we can see in many instances, such as performance traditions where anticipation and detachments have been used to create an illusion of dynamics in instruments that cannot produce such things.⁴⁸ Other obvious examples include pauses and breaks within musical notation, but there are also more lute-related descriptions. In fact, Thomas Mace (1676) introduces silence as an ornament. By slacking the stopping hand [i.e. the left hand] to make the tones 'sob' and to 'dead the sound on a sudden,' one can produce a *Crackle*. Similarly, by stopping the sound suddenly using the right hand, one can produce the *Tut*, '[...]' and if you do it clearly, it will seem to speak the word *Tut*, so plainly, as if it were a *Living Creature*,

⁴⁸ The harpsichord is one such instrument; see Couperin, F., *L'Art de toucher le clavecin*, original 1716. Edited and translated by Margery Halford, An Alfred Masterwork Edition, 2nd ed. (USA: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1995), 34.

Speakable. Lastly, although not considered a grace itself, the pause ‘adds much *Grace*.’⁴⁹

What we have seen throughout this chapter is that we can find important traces of what the historical concept of tone production might have entailed. By comparing various kinds of sources, we can draw lines between indicators hidden from plain sight and, thus, construct an idea of performance technique from a tone production perspective, focusing particularly on the right hand. In its diffuse dissemination over various sources, we see that the idea of a tone production concept for lute instruments was quite detailed and well designed, but it received little explicit attention in contemporary lute instructions. Furthermore, the closer we are to the inevitable decline of the lute, the more detailed the literature becomes, as the authors suddenly see a need for documenting and disseminating the practice. It is therefore difficult to gain a balanced, full understanding of the matter across the ages, but together with visual sources and tablatures, we can indeed get enough information to form a general idea of the matter. What is interesting to note after unveiling these practices is how they sometimes differ from today’s practices among lutenists. In the following chapter, I will look at tone production as it can be understood from today’s practices.

49 Mace, *Monument*, 109.

