

## CHAPTER 3

# Present discourse

So far, what we begin to see here is an excellent example of the balance between learning to play from a tutor and from literature. The more important the tutor is for learning the instrument, the less important the literature becomes. Warner Iversen and Michael M. Grant (2016) write, ‘You cannot really learn to play the lute using a book “tutor.” These tutors can be good references, can offer some good material, and may even help a bit with technique but no one can learn from a book tutor alone. To learn the lute you need a teacher.’<sup>1</sup> We also see how collegial consensus impacts on the literature being produced. In the Early Modern period, lute playing was a part of everyday life for many (not necessarily playing themselves, but being acquainted with it); it was culturally integrated as one of the most popular instruments. Today, however, it is not; today it belongs to the dedicated souls who wish to understand the lost tradition better and bring it back to life again. Here we can clearly differentiate between those who play it as if it were a modern Classical guitar and those who play it solely ‘as a lute’ (according to our present understanding of the historical sources). And, as our understanding and interpretations differ among colleagues, we struggle to reach general consensus (not necessarily the general playing positions, but rather the smaller details). In addition to the remarks made in the previous chapter, where we saw an increase in sources describing the details of lute tone production the closer we got to the lute’s decline, this is probably why we are seeing a greater quantity of lute instructions today. With the lack of a clear consensus, we need more

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<sup>1</sup> Iversen, W., and Grant, M.M., *A Beginner’s Guide to the Renaissance Lute: A Helpful Source of Information About your Rental Lute to Answer Your Questions and Get You Started until You Meet with Your Teacher* (n/a.: Lute Society of America, 2016) Online PDF, 10. Retrieved 1 August 2017, URL: <http://lutesocietyofamerica.org/resources/Documents/Beginners%20Guide%20Final.pdf>.

contributions to the general lute-performance discourse. Indeed, we are not describing a present practice alone, as would be the case in the Early Modern times, but we are reconstructing and reconfiguring something distant to us — we are taking pieces of a puzzle of past practice and trying to make modern sense of it (I develop this further in Chapter 5).

In the modern literature, we find various approaches to the subject, ranging from perspectives that start with the Classical guitar point of view, through to anti-guitar perspectives which distance themselves from the instrument entirely; and historically-informed (implicitly or explicitly) to non-historically informed perspectives (i.e. ‘take my word for it’ sort of literature). Although the lute is a centuries old instrument, it is a fairly new phenomenon and practice. The ‘modern’ lute is only about 100 hundred years old. Unlike instruments such as the violin and the flute, where some major schools have been around for ages, the lute is still part of an inventive process in the making. How we understand lute tone production today is based on this modern phenomenon and the present understanding of the historical past. What is interesting to note, as we will see, is that tone production and timbre seem to be somewhat taken for granted among many modern sources. It seems often to be the case that by following the simple steps described, one automatically produces a good tone. This is not the case, however, because a good finger motion by a properly-positioned right and left hand on a properly-strung and maintained instrument can still produce unpleasant noise, for instance, from using too much muscular power. As a result, we cannot write about sound satisfactorily. We can only resort to the use of adjectives and adverbs which are culturally and historically situated. To understand the words properly we also need to understand their context. In this respect, I will not concern myself with the morphological cultural-linguistic development of the terminological practice, but rather look at instructions on how to utilise the hands, the right hand in particular, to produce tone.

One problem with lute performance literature, in general, is the lacking Open Access tradition. Availability is restricted and performers’ access to information is much determined by their personal or institutional economy. This particularly relates to articles being scattered around various publication channels, often only accessible through subscriptions. The

cause of this is, of course, financial since most lute societies are funded through their subscribers in order to maintain any sort of publication to distribute. Although many publishers make literature freely available after a certain quarantine period, often ranging from one to three years, there are still issues related to the material risking being partly, or sometimes even fully, outdated. The discourse is then often addressed collectively in a ‘public’ debate through mailing-lists, but those discourses are almost completely driven and developed by a few dedicated respondents leaving the opinions and thoughts of those silent outside the debate. Some, like myself, prefer to participate inactively in such forums to get updates on the current and past discourses, without necessarily contributing through written responses. Hence, availability of information is a clear issue for those taking up the lute through literature.

In this chapter, I will differentiate between instructions addressing the thumb inside technique, here called the *Renaissance lute approach* for the ease of argument, and the thumb outside technique, or put simply, the *Baroque lute approach*. A clear difference between the two techniques is not that simple because they do not exist in a clear dichotomy, but rather in a morphological relationship. Most of the sources use this distinction themselves, however, and it will therefore serve the argument presented here well enough to separate the two concepts. I address each category of sources chronologically to unveil the development of how lute sound related to the right hand is presented and how the debate unfolds. I will start with articles and then proceed to instruction books, before ending with online sources.

## Instruction articles

There seems to be a clear difference between various sorts of lute journal publications. Peer-reviewed yearbooks seem to be more occupied with history, manuscripts, musical notation, etc. while quarterlies and newsletters more often cover practical topics such as performance technique, often without a proper, academic peer-review process. In this literary environment, there is therefore a practice of separating theory from performance, where articles situated between those two perspectives can

find themselves ‘falling between two stools,’ so to speak. Publishers aside, there are examples of websites that collect various publications for the benefit of the performer and scholar, or at least point the reader in the right direction. One good example is The Lute Society of America, which provides a list of reading materials for beginners,<sup>2</sup> in which eight entries specifically treat the right hand.

As in many instances where forgotten practices are yet to be rediscovered, it is those practices that are the most different and mystical to us that receive the most attention. It is therefore no wonder that the Renaissance *figuetas* approach is the most well-covered topic in modern literature, both in articles and books. Along with the upswing in modern lute practice in the 1970s and 80s, several articles were published treating the Renaissance lute and thumb inside approach. For instance, Catherine Liddell and Robert Strizich (1976) write about what they call the thumb under technique which, according to their account, was quite new in the 70s: ‘[...] many players here in Europe have been experimenting with the “thumb-under” position for the right hand. The current interest in this hand position has been inspired by the playing and teaching of the German lutenist Michael Schäffer [...].<sup>3</sup> They draw attention to several interesting perspectives. Firstly, that the hand should be placed between the bridge and the rosette with the little finger resting on the belly. Secondly, that the thumb should pluck under the fingers: ‘in other words, everything your classical guitar teacher told you *not* [underlined in the original] to do!’ Thirdly, they give directions regarding the thumb technique, where ‘the thumb strikes more or less directly downwards, perpendicular [i.e. at a 90 degree angle] to the strings, while the index finger strikes neither [*sic*] straight up (i.e. along the strings), but in a direction between these two extremes.’ What is notable here is the attempt at detailed instructions, which at the same time are somewhat diffuse. It seems as if the thumb should move alongside the soundboard rather than

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2 The Lute Society of America. ‘LSA Articles for Beginners,’ *lutesocietyofamerica.org*. Retrieved 1 August 2017, URL: <http://lutesocietyofamerica.org/Beginner-Articles>.

3 Liddell, C., and Strizich, R., ‘Technique,’ *LSA Quarterly*, no. 2 (1976): 3–4, 3. Retrieved 1 August 2017, URL: <http://lutesocietyofamerica.org/resources/Documents/Pedagogical%20Articles/Thumb-Under%20Position,%20Lidell%20and%20Strizich%20LSAQ%201976%20No.%202.pdf>.

into it (cf. ‘perpendicular’ and ‘directly downwards’), but the addition of ‘more or less’ makes the instructions less clear. Fourthly, that the index finger should be relaxed and therefore springy, touching both strings of a course with the flesh: ‘[t]he index finger should be relaxed, especially at the tip, and one should strike both the strings of each course, trying to play with as much fleshy area as possible. It is the use of a relatively large area of flesh on the tip of the finger that gives this characteristic ‘round’ tone [...].<sup>4</sup> It is notable that the key to the ‘characteristic “round” tone’ lies in the flesh of the fingers, and taking the perpendicular, more or less directly downward motion of the thumb, into consideration, we see how the sound in practise can produce difficulties. This is something they point to themselves:

The first advantage to be noticed is a definite improvement in tone, for it is now easier to play both strings in a course and to use a larger area of flesh on the fingertip, all of which produce a fuller, rounder, and more ‘fleshy’ sound. [...] On the other hand, a possible disadvantage of the thumb-under technique is that the tone can lack a certain sharpness, depending on the size and shape of the fingers. This is especially true if one is accustomed to the type of tone produced with fingernails; indeed, those who play with nails will probably find this technique unfeasible.<sup>5</sup>

Later, Paul Beier (1979) presents a more in-depth article on right-hand technique in the Renaissance style of playing, but he is mostly focused on the right-hand position. The finger mechanics are given little attention. We do, however, find some primary-source-based clues relating to tone production in his writing, in which the transition from thumb inside to outside is addressed in relation to lute construction and building materials. In his examples, a soft, fleshy technique tames the earlier bright instruments, and a bright, close-to-the-bridge technique compensates for later, duller instruments:

With thumb-under, the fingers were placed quite near the rose and both fingers and thumb had a great deal of contact with the strings; they struck the strings

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4 Liddell and Strizich, *Technique*, 4.

5 Liddell and Strizich, *Technique*, 5.

using a relatively large surface area of flesh and string. The effect of this is to produce a rather warm and luscious tone. With thumb-over, the opposite is true. The fingers strike the strings at a sharper angle with little surface area.

The changing styles in lute construction also has a considerable effect on tone. The small, high-pitched, narrow-bodied lutes of the early period were generally made with very hard woods for the ribs and have an inherently bright and piercing tone. The warm sound of the thumb-under is ideally suited to compensate for this [... and vice versa].<sup>6</sup>

This point is further exemplified by Robert Barto who, in his article ‘Some 18th Century German Sources for Right Hand Placement and Fingering’ (2007), draws attention to the writings of Ernst Gottlieb Baron:<sup>7</sup>

Baron states very clearly where one should place the right hand and why. He says, ‘As to the question of where to strike strings of the lute so that the tone will be powerful enough, it will serve to know that this must be in the center of the space between the rose and the bridge, for there the contact will have the greatest effect. The further toward the fingerboard the strings are struck with the right hand, the softer and weaker will be the tone — it will lose power, so to speak. However the player can certainly also move back and forth, once he has the necessary skill, when he wishes to change [the tone] and express something. (cited by Barto, in Douglas Alton Smith’s translation).<sup>8</sup>

In the year following publication of Beier’s article, Pat O’Brien (1980) provides a new perspective on the subject which is more detailed. Here, he emphasises the contact point between the finger and the course, and also introduces a more ergonomic approach. By introducing the use of the weight of the arm, he presents an approach that looks outside the domain of the fingers alone and includes the upper torso in tone production. He

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6 Beier, P., ‘Right Hand Position in Renaissance Lute Technique.’ *Journal of the Lute Society of America* (1979): 5–24. Retrieved 1 August 2017, URL: <http://lutesocietyofamerica.org/resources/Documents/Pedagogical%20Articles/Right%20Hand%20Position%20in%20Renaissance%20Lute%20Technique,%20Beier%20JLSA%201979.pdf>.

7 Barto, R., ‘Some 18th Century German Sources for Right Hand Placement and Fingering’ *LSA Quarterly, February* (2007): 4–10. Retrieved 1 August 2017, URL: <http://lutesocietyofamerica.org/resources/Documents/Pedagogical%20Articles/Right%20Hand%20Fingerings%20from%20Baroque%20Sources,%20Barto%20LSAQ%202007%20.pdf>.

8 Barto, *German Sources*, 5.

further adds that there is a relation between the weight applied and the volume of the tone:

3) Flex index finger as deeply as possible, (toward elbow!) [...] 5) arrange to contact the second [c]ourse, [*sic*] at this lowest point of the finger's arc. [...] 7) At contact with the string, the oval of the fingertip as it is viewed endwise, is bisected diagonally by the strings. / 8) Relax right shoulder and arm so that their weight depresses the course toward the top, without the two strings contacting each other. / 9) Pluck the finger off the course with the deep flexion of the index finger described above. / 10) The amount of depression of the string toward the top just before plucking, determines the volume. [...] 11) At no time can the tip joint of the finger be flexed without, a) bringing the nail dangerously close to the string, b) a tightening of the adjacent finger, c) a loss of tone.<sup>9</sup>

In the last lines, we also see how the nail is addressed once more. This is a clear message that the lute calls for a different approach than the guitar, as the nail should be kept away from the string. Furthermore, one should avoid bringing the nail *dangerously* close. The use of a negative adverb clearly labels the nails not only as a mischief, but also as something to distance oneself from; something that is clearly not good.

This new perspective of introducing mechanical details when describing and constructing a right-hand technique is also present in Ronn McFarlane's 'Right Arm Movement and Follow Through in Thumb-Under Technique' (2008). He draws further attention to weight distribution, particularly the balance between the arm and the fingers. Rather than O'Brien's use of the single word 'volume', McFarlane uses three: 'weight', 'volume' and 'strength'. This focuses more attention on various facets of tone production which, in my interpretation, translate into perceived presence and 'body',<sup>10</sup> tone 'size' (i.e. activation of overtones and

9 O'Brien, P., 'Basic Finger Motions/Basic Right-Hand Exercise for Tone,' dated August 1980. *LSA Quarterly*, Winter (2014): 24–25, 24. Retrieved 1 August 2017, URL: <http://lutesocietyofamerica.org/resources/Documents/Pedagogical%20Articles/Basic%20Finger%20Motions,%20O'Brien%20LSAQ%201980.pdf>.

10 In my experience, this is a term sometimes used by musicians (myself included) to describe a tone that activates its full harmonic register (according to the context) and that can be heard over distance in a concert hall. A tone with insufficient 'body' will appear weak and is only heard by the first few rows of the audience.

experienced fullness) and amplitude (see Chapter 4). It is also noticeable that his approach is more nuanced. Rather than presenting a single *modus operandi*, i.e. ‘produce this tone,’ he directs attention to the possibilities of using weight distribution to change the tone production over time:

The amount of arm vs. finger movement affects the weight, volume and strength of your tone. More arm movement tends to create a louder, deeper and more supported quality of sound. Less arm movement (or use of the fingers alone) creates a lighter, quieter sound. Subtle gradations of the amount of arm vs. fingers can be used to great effect. It is possible to shade the sound of a scale or a long line of divisions by gradually adding and subtracting the amount of arm movement. This is much more effective than trying to strike the string harder or softer to create a dynamic shape. [...] One can also shade the sound of a line by controlling the depth of follow through, which works much the same as right arm movement. A shallow follow through creates a lighter, more shallow tone and less sustain - especially when there is very little string excursion towards the soundboard. A deeper follow through usually creates a deeper, or more supported tone and greater sustain, [*sic*] This deeper follow through is more effective when paired with a greater string excursion toward the soundboard.<sup>11</sup>

McFarlane’s approach includes more descriptive language (louder, deeper, supported, quality, lighter, quieter, etc.), which is a natural development in the act of constructing a musical practice in writing. First, we acknowledge the act that has to be performed (Liddell and Strizich); then, we describe the mechanical details of that act to accommodate for the vagueness of simply saying ‘do this’ (O’Brien); and finally, we use descriptive language to nuance the mechanical process and to direct the reader to what is to be achieved (McFarlane). Parallel to this, we also take historical sources into account (Beier).

The final example is provided by Warner Iversen and Michael M. Grant in their free-to-download PDF document: *A Beginner’s Guide to*

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11 McFarlane, R., ‘Right Arm Movement and Follow Through in Thumb-Under Technique’ *LSA Quarterly*, November (2008): 56. Retrieved 1 August 2017, URL: <http://lutesocietyofamerica.org/resources/Documents/Pedagogical%20Articles/Beyond%20The%20Basics/Beyond%20The%20Basics%20-%20Right%20Arm%20Movement%20and%20Follow%20Through%20in%20Thumb-Under%20Technique,%20McFarlane%20LSAQ%202008%20No.%204.pdf>.



*the Renaissance Lute: A Helpful Source of Information About Your Rental Lute to Answer Your Questions and get You Started Until You Meet with Your Teacher* (2016):

The two basic types of strokes used to set the strings in motion require the arm to move up and down from the elbow. With the pinky [*sic*] finger resting on the face of the lute, the downstroke is initiated from the elbow with the arm moving downwards and the thumb pushing through the string. Conversely, the upstroke is initiated as the arm rebounds back upwards and the index finger is pushed through the string.<sup>12</sup>

What we begin to unveil here is a level of detail and instruction that we never saw in Early Modern times (see Chapter 2). In reality, this level of detail must come from somewhere, and that is not necessarily from the past. The currently-developing canon of lute technique is therefore a modern phenomenon, a modern construct, based on modern values and practices. This is perhaps why it is significant that, for instance, the Renaissance instructions seen so far in this chapter (more examples to come), use descriptive language often utilised in guitar playing stemming from a Romantic tradition (e.g. much flesh, fullness, volume, strength, weight). This is language we do not see at the same frequency in historical sources. This creates a paradox where later language is used to describe earlier practice, and this is also the way it has to be. For language and communication to be successful, the writer and reader must have a common understanding of the language involved. What happens then is that modern lute practice, through its need to explain the unknown, creates itself as something other than historical practice. The modern sense of lute playing is not an embodiment of Early Modern playing; it is not meant to resuscitate the lute, but to reinvent it in more or less close dialogue with the past (at least our understanding of it). The thumb-inside, Renaissance practice serves as a good example, as it (at least in regard to the right hand) is so very different from modern guitar practice, and thus produces more clear material for discussion. When turning to the

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12 Iversen and Grant, *Renaissance Lute*.

Baroque, thumb-outside approach, more is taken for granted and we also find fewer publications.

## Instruction books

Instruction books are more frequent than articles. This has to do with the often, very close relationship between technical instruction and examples, etudes (practice pieces) and exemplification. Here we also see the friction between the lute and the modern guitar more clearly. Examples will be given chronologically and, for copyright reasons, I have excluded photographs and focused on the written word. Where a photograph has played a significant role, I have described it in brackets.

## Renaissance Lute

One of the earlier examples of instruction books treating the thumb-in-side technique is the *Method for the Renaissance Lute* by Stanley Buetens (1969). It seems promising, as it boldly states on the cover: '[...] toward the development of a lute technique based on historical principles And [sic] including pieces from the lute literature, photographs, drawings, and information on many aspects of lute playing.'<sup>13</sup> But the book presents no such evidence from the original sources to the reader (only in paraphrasing according to Buetens understanding of it) and some of the historical 'facts' presented we now know to be inaccurate. (This is, of course, understandable given the early publication year and the natural course of knowledge development.) The right-hand technique that is presented here through photographs displays a somewhat exaggerated version of the more recent Classical guitar, right-hand technique that is similar to performers such as John Mills<sup>14</sup> and Andrés Segovia.<sup>15</sup> This is the early

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13 Buetens, S., *Method for the Renaissance Lute*, fifth printing 1983 (n/a: Instrumenta Antiqua, 1969).

14 See for instance 'John Mills Discusses Tone Colour on the Classical Guitar,' YouTube video, 1'28", posted by 'DPJFILMS,' retrieved 9 August 2017, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZAnV3Q6QMY>.

15 See for instance 'Andrés Segovia demonstrates different timbres of the guitar,' YouTube video, 2'04", posted by 'aasddzxc,' retrieved 9 August 2017, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJrEl4Nsmg>

stage of modern lute practice, when practice was more diffuse. Simply playing the lute constituted lute technique because it was technique performed on the lute. Indeed, he writes: ‘As far as I know, there is no other tutor, past or present, for the Renaissance lute which presents the technique of the lute as the technique of other instruments is presented.’ In this early attempt to present a lute school, it seems that Buetens confuses the Baroque, Renaissance and modern Classical guitar approaches:

Set the little finger on the soundboard of the lute about two inches from the bridge and as close to the first string as possible without touching it. Stretch out the thumb so it is well in front of the other fingers [... photographs display the Classical guitar, thumb out technique with the thumb seemingly 2 cm or more away from the index finger, and playing with nails on double strung courses.] The thumb moves as a unit, but most of the movement of the index finger is from the middle joint towards the tip. [...] When plucking a double course (all but the top string), both strings can be played if the nails are short and if the angle of attack is correct. [...] Both strings of a course are touched by the flesh of the fingers, and the nail strikes one or both of them for brilliance. Less nail will give less brilliance, and how much nail is to be used must depend on the taste of each lutenist. Nails that are too long prevent the playing of both strings of a pair and give a harsh, unpleasant quality. [...] The classical guitarist have [*sic*] proven that the lute, too, can be played with no [little] finger down [on the lid], and since maintaining the finger on the belly has no positive acoustical value, you should have no qualms about lifting it as your technique develops [...]. The fingers should be held perpendicularly to the strings, and a slight twist of the wrist may be necessary to accomplish this [...].<sup>16</sup>

This is a good example of the point I made earlier, that the modern lute canon (in a wider sense) is a product of present practice in dialogue with the constantly unveiling past, rather than a re-establishing of it. As more sources, research and artistic work develop we find later efforts to present new lute schools that are more informed and reflected.

Twenty-two years later, Diana Poulton published her work *A Tutor for the Renaissance Lute* (1991), in which she presents an approach more

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16 Buetens, *Renaissance Lute*, 5–7.

like lute performance as it is regarded today. Indeed, she has been an important figure in the development of the modern understanding of the entire field of study. Here she constructs her argument in constant dialogue with primary sources. She argues that it was unusual to make colour changes by moving back and forth between the rose and the bridge while playing. She concurs with previously-mentioned literature when promoting a fleshy tone, as the thumb is to touch the strings with the ‘side of the thumb and not the tip,’ with all fingers touching both strings of each course. In her writing, she positions herself alongside those who distance themselves from the Classical guitar, when she instructs us to avoid direct contact between the nail and the strings because it leads to unauthentic sound (cf. O’Brien’s ‘dangerously close’ above; authenticity is discussed in Chapter 6):

The finger nails must be short and must not touch the courses in playing. Except for one Italian teacher, Alessandro Piccinini, in 1623, this point is constantly emphasized, and even he only advocates that the nail should be gently rounded to coincide with the tip of the finger. Thomas Mace, in 1676, suggests they may be used in consort playing. The long nails of the present-day guitar player will produce an entirely unauthentic sound.

[...] The hand is held obliquely across the strings continuing the line of the arm and, in the technique now being described, not at a right angle across the strings. [...] It [the supporting little finger] will lie with the side, and not the tip, touching the soundboard. Although, with this type of technique, the thumb and first finger may touch the courses across the lower end of the rose, it is not usual for the hand to be held directly over the rose as in modern guitar playing [there are examples, however; see Chapter 2].

The movement of the hand up and down the strings in order to change the kind of tone produced is only mentioned by one writer, Piccinini, who appears to have been somewhat eccentric in his time. Other writers, in describing how the little finger is laid on the soundboard use such phrases as ‘this is its constant position’ or ‘as if [it]<sup>17</sup> were glued unto it.’

[...] The thumb must always take the accented note. [...] With the thumb held low and almost parallel with the sixth course, it should move forward and

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17 Poulton’s addition.

downward as if it were going to touch the second finger; the course will then be touched with the side of the thumb and not the tip. This movement should bring the thumb to rest on the course immediately next to it [...].

[...] The [index] finger should be slightly curved and the tip must be laid on the course that both strings are touched. The movement of the finger is not carried through to touch the next course.<sup>18</sup>

Another contributor to the lute performance discourse is Stefan Lundgren. His first book, *Method for the Renaissance Lute* (1991), makes grand assumptions without any explicit, historical grounding. The reader is left to take his word for it. He provides some insight into the mechanics of tone production, but uses little descriptive language to mediate the desired result, except for some examples, such as asking us to obtain a ‘clear, clean and, at the same time, strong sound.’ He does, however, introduce surroundings into the tone-production debate when mentioning the instrument, strings, tuning, actual pitch, acoustics of the room, temperature and humidity. (He gives no further explanation as to how these aspects influence tone production. I will treat these topics in Chapter 4.):

THUMB UNDER: the hand and the fingers are held parallel or nearly parallel to the strings. The thumb is used to pluck the strings behind the fingers in [sic] direction of the palm of the hand and the fingers go around and to the outside of the thumb. In this technique, the little finger supports itself on the sound-board and the strings are plucked with the fingertips.

THUMB OVER: the hand and the fingers are held held [sic] vertical or almost vertical to the strings. The thumb is used to pluck the strings before the fingers and the fingers pluck the strings in the direction of the palm of the hand.

[... In Renaissance music] the alternating stroke between the thumb and forefinger dominated. Because the thumb was always the strongest, it played the first note in each pair of notes. That is how the stylistic effect ‘strong/weak [sic] – strong/weak [sic],’ that predominated the instrumental music of the Renaissance, came about.

[...] How the lute sounds, depends upon many things; the instrument, the strings, the tuning and the actual pitch. The surroundings also influence the

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18 Poulton, *A Tutor*, 7.

sound; the acoustics of the room in which one is playing; even the temperature and humidity etc.

A very important detail in the training of a lute student is the ATTACK. This point is so necessary that it should be given extra time during the practice period.

The stroke takes place in two phases. Fig. 3 [not included here, but it depicts the 'THUMB UNDER' position] shows the first phase. the [*sic*] tip of the forefinger takes hold of both strings of the 2nd course and puts pressure diagonally downwards in the direction of the belly. Up to this point one may only move the finger from the third joint [i.e. metacarpophalangeal joint].

Fig. 4 [not included here, but it is similar to fig. 3 only with the forefinger slightly more bent] shows the finger just after it has left the course. Here [*sic*] the first and second joint [i.e. proximal and distal interphalangeal joints] are bent to keep the finger away from the next course. During these two phases, the finger should not slide over the strings unnecessarily.

One should concentrate upon obtaining a clear, clean and at the same time strong sound [...].

Fig. 5 [not included here] shows the thumb in the first phase. The straight thumb has taken hold of both strings of the second course and puts on pressure diagonally downwards in the direction of the belly.

Fig. 6 [not included here] shows the thumb just after it has left the course. here [*sic*] the first joint is bent to keep the thumb away from the first course.<sup>19</sup>

In his following reworking of the book, *New Method for the Renaissance Lute* (1991), Lundgren provides a clearer historical foundation. The technical and mechanical directions presented in this book do not differ from the previous work, but he now introduces more historical references and puts more focus on tone production (although he does not provide much more detail, he devotes more space to the subject). Again, he promotes a 'clear, clean and strong sound' and draws attention to the environment. The 'striking technique' is divided into two phases: 1) preparation and approaching the course, and 2) pluck and return. He asks us to prioritise the tone before speed: 'Be careful not to sacrifice sound quality to haste.'

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19 Lundgren, S., *Method for the Renaissance Lute*, 5th printing (München: Tree Edition, 1991), 5 and 16–17.

It is implied that he uses wound strings (see Chapter 4 for further discussion) when he tells us that '[t]o avoid unwanted string noises do not slide along the strings when leaving them.'

The sound of the lute depends on many things. The quality of the instrument itself, the strings, the tuning and the pitch. The environment also exerts an influence on the sound; the acoustics of the room in which one plays, the temperature etc. In spite of so many variables it is necessary [*sic*] for the player to master completely the 'striking technique' so that he is able to consistently produce a clear, clean and strong sound. Not enough time can be spent practicing this all-important technique.

I have concluded that the striking technique is best learned if one divides the movement into two phases. The goal of the four-levelled exercises below (a, b, c, d [omitted here]) is to achieve a clear, clean, full and strong sound.

[...] Place your little finger with the first joint laying sideways between the bridge and the rose, approx. 2–4 centimeters away from the first string. [...] *Phase 1.* The thumb is a short distance away from the strings (1–2 cm, [...]). The movement is a combined action of the forearm and the fully stretched thumb. When striking, the left tip of the thumb will hit both strings of the third course and exert a slight pressure towards the sound-board [...]. *Phase 2.* Thumb and forearm will now repel from the strings [...] and take their initial position before the stroke [...]. The tip of the thumb should follow an elliptic [*sic*] line. To avoid unwanted string noises do not slide along the strings when leaving them [...] Be careful not to sacrifice sound quality to haste.<sup>20</sup> (Underlined subheadings in the original have been changed to italics here).

So far, he has not contributed much more knowledge about tone production than in his previous book, but a few pages later he returns to the two-phase approach of the fingers. This time, he promotes more mechanical perspectives by turning our focus to the activities of the joints. Fingers are to move into the instrument ('exert a gentle pressure towards [the] sound-board') which will affect the sound as the strings will move with

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20 Lundgren, S., *Neue schule für die renaissance-laute/New Method for the Renaissance Lute*, 2nd edition (München: Lundgren Music Edition, 1991), 14–16.

the soundboard as it is designed to move (I return to the physics of sound in Chapter 4):

The striking movement of the finger is also divided into two phases. // *Phase 1.* The index finger is a short distance away from the strings (1–2 cm [...]). In a combined movement, which is produced by the forearm and the third joint of the finger, the stretched index finger will hit the third course. The right side of the fingertip will touch the strings and exert a gentle pressure towards [the] sound-board [...]. // *Phase 2.* The finger and the forearm will now repel from the course and describe the aforementioned elliptic line, whereby the first and second joint of the finger are slightly bent [...].<sup>21</sup> (Underlined subheadings in the original have been changed to italics here).

In Frank De Groodt's very brief instructions (2001), we also learn that we should play with the flesh and make contact with both strings of each course.

While holding the instrument, place the right arm and hand parallel to the strings near the back of the rose. [...] Notes are played by alternating the thumb and index finger with an up and down motion so that the flesh of the fingertips contact both courses equally [...].<sup>22</sup>

Andrea Damiani's (1999) instructions are much more detailed than De Groodt's and they concur with many other publications as to how the right hand should be placed. What is interesting to note is the level of detail presented. Perhaps not in what is described, but in how. Included in the book, we find titles such as 'Right-hand position,' 'Right-hand functions' and 'Sound production'; clearly, tone production has been brought to the agenda in a more deliberate manner. The writing is detailed and extensive so I will not dedicate full attention to all of the text, but rather highlight particular cues relating to sound production. First, he divides the stroke into two mechanical functions: one based on the forearm and one on the fingers:<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lundgren, *Neue schule*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> De Groodt, F., *Learning to Play the Lute: Lute Lessons for the Beginner* (n/a.: n/a, 2001), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Damiani, *Renaissance Lute*.



[... I]t is important to understand that the *r-h* [i.e. the right hand] uses two different techniques:

- *A technique based on forearm movement* that initiates at the elbow joint. In this technique, the wrist, the hand and fingers form an entire unit; the movement that makes the stroke start from the forearm [...]. The rhythmic, percussive sound of the plectrum is typical of this technique.
- *A technique based on finger movement* in which the forearm remains still while the fingers move [...].<sup>24</sup>

These two approaches are further divided into sub-actions where we find cues such as the ‘lower part of the tip’ suggesting flesh, and that the thumb should be stretched out and not bent. Damiani uses a more scientific-sounding language when using words like ‘axis’ and ‘degrees’:

[...] POSITIONING *p* [i.e. the right-hand thumb]

- a) A simple adjustment of the wrist position (in or out) and an equally small turning of the forearm will regulate the angle of *p* on the string; *p* should strike the string with the lower part of the tip. The wrist will often be lower than in the normal hand position [...].
- b) The angle between the *p* axis and the plane of the strings should be around 30 degrees. If necessary, turn the wrist so that you can see the palm of your hand.
- c) *P* should be as straight as possible, but not rigid. Some players may find it more comfortable to bend *p* at the last joint: as this often hides negative tension, it is better to keep *p* stretched and relaxed, as the second joint does not take part in this stroke [...].<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the thumb movement is not only located in the thumb, but in the whole forearm. With cues such as ‘moving towards the right leg,’ the whole body enters the tone production discourse and the weight of the arm plays a key role in producing sound:

[...] FOREARM MOVEMENT

- a) Keeping the little finger on the soundboard [...], touch the strings lightly with *p*, keeping *p* still – the movement should come from the forearm.

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<sup>24</sup> Damiani, *Renaissance Lute*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Damiani, *Renaissance Lute*, 16.

Trusting exclusively in the weight of the arm, the hand can then move in an arc, with the elbow at its centre and *p* moving towards the right leg [...] <sup>26</sup>

Damiani then writes explicitly about the attack, i.e. the beginning of a tone. Rather than looking at spectral features, the discourse again evolves through mechanical procedures. Our attention is now brought to the contact point between fingertip and string. The instructions provided on the nails are much more detailed than previous examples. Although nails are to be avoided in producing the sound, similar to Classical guitar traditions, they can be used deliberately to support the flesh of the fingertip to provide enough friction for the plucked course. This brings previous mentions of fleshy sound into a perspective where some sort of distinction between ‘fleshy’ and ‘too fleshy’ is brought to the agenda. Where the line between the two is to be drawn is left unmarked. Some sort of cue is given when we read that ‘[t]he meaty part of the fingertip will have a negative effect on the attack,’ but how negative it is, and when the effect becomes negative, are left untold. What is interesting about this is not necessarily that it is not described, (how can we describe this in writing?), but rather that it is not even attempted. There is no descriptive language giving hints as to what is to be achieved (e.g. clean, soft, strong, fleshy, bold, etc.); it is left to the eye (*or ear*) of the beholder and what constitutes good tone production is taken somewhat for granted:

[...] ATTACK

This term denotes the contact between the fingertip and the string to obtain the best sound. It should go without saying that fingernails should be kept short so as not to disturb the touch of the fingertips. Where fingertips are particularly meaty, it will be best not to cut the nails too short, but to cut them around the shape of the fingertip to enable the nail to support it. The meaty part of the fingertip will have a negative effect on the attack.

a) Once the hand position has been established, rest *p* on the 2nd course, pressing down on it vertically, toward the soundboard. Make sure you are touching both strings. [...] Normally, the point of contact in making the stroke

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<sup>26</sup> Damiani, *Renaissance Lute*, 17.

will be on the lower part of *p*, right next to the nail; a more central position on the meatier part of *p* normally makes the stroke slower and clumsier [...].

In relation to the lack of description of what is to be achieved, it is interesting to read words like ‘best sound.’ This provokes discursive perspectives on the hierarchy between performance technique and sound; that is, whether we are to regard tone production from the bottom-up or top-down perspective. Is the ‘best sound’ a simple, natural product of properly-executed mechanics, thus emphasising technique? Or is the ‘best sound’ in all its subjectivity, ambivalence and cultural context, the primary focus for which the mechanics are constructed and adapted to achieve, thus emphasising aesthetics? If the latter applies, can it be taken for granted? It seems as if Damiani, like many of his colleagues, prefers the bottom-up perspective, but the argument is not entirely consistent. We notice, for instance, that when speaking about the ‘[p]ositioning of *i*’ (i.e. the index finger) it does not say whether the performer is to pluck both the strings of each course with all fingers or if some are only to hit one of the pairs (I return to this idea in Chapter 4).<sup>27</sup> Finally, in terms of the Classical guitar/lute debate, Damiani includes a section on guitarists and their process of starting to play the lute and learning and getting accustomed to play without nails, thus acknowledging the Classical guitar audience.<sup>28</sup>

Another lengthy discussion on tone production can be found in Pascale Boquet’s writing (2008).<sup>29</sup> In a section called ‘Evolution de l’esthétique sonore des différents luths’ (‘Evolution of the Aesthetics of Sound of Different Lutes’) we find a discussion on what characterises the various lute instruments’ sonic qualities and characteristics *per se*, but not how tones are to be produced by the performer.<sup>30</sup> Later on, when writing about the use of various fingers, she explains that both the thumb and index finger should make contact with and pluck both strings of each course, as we have seen before. We also learn that:

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27 Damiani, *Renaissance Lute*, 17.

28 Damiani, *Renaissance Lute*, 18.

29 Boquet, P., *Le secret des muses: Méthode de luth renaissance*, Volume M-1, Nouvelle édition (Paris: Société Française de luth, 2008).

30 Boquet, *Le secret*, 5.

‘[...] Dans tous les cas: prendre les cordes avec un maximum de pulpe (donc avec le pouce plus à plat que de côté), et ne jamais le casser au niveau de la première ou de la deuxième phalange. [...] *L’index*: [...] Il doit être bien détendu, surtout au niveau de la dernière phalange, l’impulsion du mouvement venant des deux premières et de l’avant-bras. // Pour pincer une corde, poser le doigt le plus à plat possible, bien sentir les deux cordes du cœur, *appuyer* vers l’intérieur des cordes, et relâcher en visant une direction diagonale vers le coude (l’index ne doit pas déraiper sur la longueur de la corde). // Le bout du doigt doit toujours être très souple, jamais crochu, le doigt se pliant simplement à 90° environ. Paradoxalement on pourrait presque dire que c’est la corde qui ébranle le doigt, plutôt que l’inverse. Tout aussi paradoxalement, pour obtenir un son bien rond, clair, qui a du ‘corps’ et de la puissance, il faut appuyer sur la corde plutôt que tirer dessus. // Ne pas ‘gratouiller’ la corde trop superficiellement, cela donne un son grêle, sans corps et quasi inaudible.<sup>31</sup> (underline removed from original, replaced with italics)

([...] In all cases: Touch the strings with a maximum of pulp (i.e. with the thumb being flat rather than on the side), and never bend it at the level of the first or second phalanx. [...] [The index finger ...] must be relaxed, especially at the level of the last phalanx [i.e. the distal joint], the impulse of the movement comes from the first two [joints] and the forearm. // To pluck a string, hold your finger as flat as possible, feel the two strings of the course, press the strings inward, and relax by aiming diagonally towards the elbow (the index finger should not slide along the length of the string). // The tip of the finger must always be very soft, never hooked, the finger simply folding to 90°. Paradoxically one could almost say that it is the string that shakes the finger, rather than the reverse. Equally paradoxically, to get a well-rounded, clear sound, which has ‘body’ and power, it is necessary to depress the string rather than to pull it. // Do not ‘scrape’ the rope too superficially; it gives a small sound, without body and is almost inaudible.)

A more interesting remark can be found regarding the right-hand *figuetas* technique, emphasising the weight of the arm and the ampleness of the fingers:

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<sup>31</sup> Boquet, *Le secret*, 32.

Ne pas éviter la différence de dynamique entre ces deux doigts [i.e. le pouce et l'index], c'est elle qui donnera du relief aux mélodies [...] Enfin, ne pas hésiter à faire des mouvements très amples: un mouvement étiqué donnera un son étiqué et petit, un mouvement ample donnera une sonorité généreuse. // Bien sentir, dans ce geste, le poids de l'avant-bras. // Attention: pas de rotation du poignet, seulement un mouvement latéral descendant.<sup>32</sup>

(Do not avoid the difference in dynamics between these two fingers [i.e. the thumb and forefinger], this is what will impart the contour and shape to the melodies [...] Finally, do not hesitate to make very ample movements: A narrow movement will give a narrow and small sound, ample movement will give a generous sound. // Feel the weight of the forearm in this gesture. // Attention: No rotation in the wrist, only a lateral downward movement.)

In Xavier Cauhépé's *The Secrets of the Lute* (2009),<sup>33</sup> Volume 1,<sup>34</sup> we see yet another example of someone distancing themselves from the Classical guitar by stating that it is better to have never played it at all: 'Though apparently similar, the lute and the guitar are worlds apart. The best lutenists to come will be those who will never have played the guitar because, otherwise their fingers will have developed irreversible habits to the detriment of the lute.'<sup>35</sup> When compared to O'Brien's 'dangerously' and Poulton's 'unauthentic [nail] sound' this is the most clear distinction between lute and guitar practice. Lute practice is then argued to be so different that a background within Classical guitar performance will only be confusing and set the wrong premises. This is somewhat interesting because the instructions presented in Cauhépé's book are more detailed and precise than what we see in historical material (cf. Chapter 2) which means that somewhere along the way, he must have added his own additions and assumptions to the lute technique.

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32 Boquet, *Le secret*, 33.

33 Cauhépé, X., *The Secrets of the Lute*, Volume 1 (France: Editions Robert Martin, 2009).

34 Volume II of the same work (2010) makes no new points on the mechanics of tone production, but focuses more on advanced fingering; see Cauhépé, X., *The secrets of the lute*, Volume 2 (France: Editions Robert Martin, 2010).

35 Cauhépé, *The Secrets I*, 11.

Nonetheless, he agrees with earlier literature that the right hand should be placed between the rose and the bridge. Unlike the others, he draws attention to the strings' tension and presents more detailed instructions on the pathway of the thumb. He also uses descriptive words such as 'clarity' (cf. earlier mentions of 'clear'), but adds 'presence' to the discourse and asks us to consider tone production from three perspectives: 1) fullness, clarity and presence; 2) accentuation or attack where relaxation plays an important role in creating projection, leading to; 3) intensity and applied pressure:

We are convinced that lute players composing highly elaborate polyphony on their lutes, in order to emphasize the different voice entries, had to compensate the absence of timbre change in a vocal quartet through a marked stress on voice entries. From a physical point of view this strong accentual value is best obtained with the thumb outside because it balances the index, middle finger and ring finger, which is the best way to render with precision the difference in stress; this favours the independence of polyphonic parts or the stressing of a given note [...]. It [i.e. the right hand] should be located between the rose and the bridge of the lute, not too close to the latter because the vibration nodes of the courses will give the string more rigidity, hence, a harder feel under the fingers [...]. Remember that, on a [Renaissance] lute, the tension of each string is about 3.2 kilograms for the treble and 2.6 kilograms for the other strings. So with such light tension the pressure from the last phalange of each right-hand finger will be sufficient, even to provide each note with a wide variety of accentual weight [...]. If the thumb rests on the fifth course and you draw a virtual line from the base of the thumb to the soundboard, the line will intersect the fourth course. This gives you a much better rest-stroke. Playing the thumb this way affects positively the clarity and presence of the sound. [...] You apply pressure on both strings of the fifth course. [...] Check the following points:

- a) The fullness of the note (its clarity and presence)
- b) Its accentual value (the swifter the thumb leaves the course, the more the sound is projected)
- c) The intensity (it depends on the pressure applied to each string). [...] <sup>36</sup>

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36 Cauhépé, *The Secrets I*, 35–36 and 41–43.

Rather than Lundgren's two-phase plucking approach, Cauhépé proceeds to divide the mechanical activity of tone production into three stages: 1) preparation; 2) action; and 3) return. He continues to draw attention to the mechanical process of plucking strings, similar to his earlier-mentioned colleagues, but introduces the concept of a 'spring-like' index finger. While his colleagues have spoken of returning the finger to its original place, this 'spring-like' reference also directs attention to the relaxation involved, because a spring-like effect is not achievable with muscular tension as the finger would move too slowly. Thus, with previous mentions of light pressure and this spring-like motion, we can form a practical understanding of lute technique: relaxation and balance. Tone production must balance the act of producing enough force in the right place (there are different ideas of where that might be) with the act of relaxing to increase rapidity and flexibility:

- a) *Getting ready*. You [*sic*] ears can already anticipate the sound, you imagine it as beautiful as possible (i.e., fullness, flowing quality, presence, clarity, elegance) when you apply pressure to the strings.
- b) *Creating sound*. The pressure applied by the last phalange of the thumb or other fingers is released without the least stiffness. The more relaxed and loose you are the more you will project the sound for the benefit of the melodic lines.
- c) *Contemplative phase*. The lute is a plucked-string instrument. This means that once the sound has been created there is no way you can control it. So you appreciate it while it lasts by assessing how you wanted it to come across as to accentuation, sonority, timbre, emotional and spiritual dimension, gaiety or melancholy and so forth. [...] Once the index is in place, the last phalange will apply pressure onto course 1. It must be very supple, spring-like [...]. Press the string so that the tendons of your phalange are stretched out to full capacity. The string is depressed towards the soundboard — at this stage there is an accumulation of energy and weight of the phalange in proportion to the accentual value you want to impart to the note. Releasing the index finger depends on the initial weight applied on the string. The faster your index finger leaves the string, the more sound is projected. Your index finger will have to be repositioned using the same portion of flesh of the last phalange, exactly where you have perfect control

of pressure and poise in order to release the string [...]. As for the sounds produced with your thumb you must master the three phases — preparation and generation of sound, contemplation — then the results — fullness, clarity, presence and accentual value.<sup>37</sup>

Another point brought to our attention in this section is tone consistency. Whereas we earlier encountered Poulton's remark that it was unusual to make colour changes while playing, Cauhépé now writes about 'using the same portion of flesh of the last phalange, exactly where you have perfect control of pressure and poise in order to release the string.' This strongly implies tone consistency.

## Baroque lute

As with the articles, the thumb-outside technique associated with, for instance, the Baroque lute, is much under-represented in the literature. Franz Julius Giesbert, in his *Schule für die Barocklaute* (1940),<sup>38</sup> presents the earliest modern Baroque lute school according to my investigations. This early attempt to present a school for the Baroque lute is, naturally, more concerned with establishing basic lute practice (such as shifting between bass courses with the thumb, fingering and exercises) than with tone production *per se*.

Forty-seven years later, Toyohiko Satoh had his *Method for the Baroque Lute / Schule für die Barocklaute* (1987) published. It clearly presents the perspective of a converted guitarist and addresses readers with previous knowledge of Classical guitar playing. The book appears somehow fragmented, with no historical evidence cited or illustrations. Like some of his colleagues, we are simply asked to trust his word. As we are now speaking of the Baroque lute, we may notice how he asks the performer to place the hand between the rose and the bridge, which is similar to the Renaissance practice but differs from the Baroque aesthetics discussed in Chapter 2. This is made even more clear by his comment that the biggest difference between the Baroque lute technique and the guitar is the supporting little

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<sup>37</sup> Cauhépé, *The Secrets I*, 43–44.

<sup>38</sup> Giesbert, F.J., *Schule für die Barocklaute* (Germany: Schott, 1940).



finger. Although vague on the specifics (i.e. ‘reasonably short’), he opens up for actively using the nails to produce the sound but gives no historical evidence for it. This emphasises and welcomes the Classical guitar approach to the Baroque lute, especially when compared to, for instance, Poulton’s no-nail remarks above and Chapter 2:

Although there was certainly more than one standard right-hand technique throughout the history of the lute, present-day technique on baroque lute is similar to modern classical guitar technique. (See photo.) [He refers to a photograph of his own hand position.] The right hand is normally held between the rose and the bridge, with the thumb extended towards the rose. The row of knuckles forms an oblique angle to the strings, and the little finger rests on the soundboard (the main difference from modern classical guitar technique). [...]

Another essential difference from modern classical guitar technique is that the RH [i.e. the right hand] thumb plays a very important part in the RH technique. The thumb is responsible for the 6th to the 13th courses, as compared to the guitar, where it normally is occupied with only the 4th to the 6th strings.

Although flesh plucking was much [*sic*] common, fingernails were used by some players in the baroque period. Those players with nails should keep them reasonably short, and hold the hand at a more oblique angle, to avoid producing a ‘double-sounding’ note for each stroke [...].<sup>39</sup>

Stefan Lundgren also presented a method for the Baroque lute (1993).<sup>40</sup> He too directs the right hand to be placed between the rose and the bridge but attempts more detailed directions on the finger’s motion. He takes it further than previous examples by including descriptive words alongside technical directions (e.g. ‘slightly,’ ‘firmly,’ ‘roughly,’ ‘slanting,’ and ‘glancing’). Like previous examples, we are asked to present consistent and balanced tone qualities:

[...] Place the end of the first finger on the soundboard between the bridge and rosette with the tip of the small finger resting on the lute soundboard between the bridge and the rosette about 2 centimeters (3/4 inches) away from the

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39 Satoh, T., *Method for the Baroque Lute / Schule für die Barocklaute* (München: Tree-Edition, 1987), 9–10.

40 Lundgren, *Baroque Lute*.

first course. [...] With a small amount of downward pressure, move the [right hand] thumb lightly across the 10th course, coming to rest at the adjacent 9th course. [...] Hold the middle finger tip [*sic*] relaxed and slightly bent over the first course without touching it. Now strike firmly, but not roughly, this course with the finger tip [*sic*] using a first (knuckle) joint movement. This motion begins oblique to the lute top, slanting into the course and glancing outward after the course is struck [...] using a slight bending motion from the 2nd and 3rd joints. [...] Repeat this stroke continuously between the index and middle fingers, always seeking to equalize the evenness of rhythm (here without accents), volume, and tone quality.<sup>41</sup>

Miguel Serdoura (2007 and 2017)<sup>42</sup> presents a refreshing approach, in which not only are the mechanics even more detailed than most of his colleagues, but also where Baroque lute playing is put in more context than before. First, he draws attention to the Baroque lute sonic qualities using words like ‘sweetness’ (*la douceur*) and ‘rich texture’ (*richesse harmonique*), and he promotes an approach emphasising a ‘round (*rond*), precise (*précis, perlé*) and beautiful sound (*beau son*).’ Although the phrasing is no more precise in terms of what it entails in practice than my previous examples, we see new facets of tone production in terms of appearance. Here, we are directed towards ‘harmonic texture’, ‘softness’ and even the aesthetic ‘beauty,’ which takes a more multifaceted and colourful perspective than previous uses of words like ‘clarity’ and ‘presence’:

The Baroque lute’s specific sound quality, its sweetness and the rich texture of its harmonics reside in its double strings, or ‘courses.’ It takes a great deal of patient practice to pluck both strings at the same time in such a way as to produce a round, precise and beautiful sound [...].<sup>43</sup>

La particularité sonore, la douceur et la richesse harmonique du luth baroque résident dans le fait que celui-ci possède des cordes doubles, appelées ‘choeurs.’

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41 Lundgren, *Baroque Lute*, 4–5.

42 The book was initially presented in French in 2007, but appeared in a translation in 2017. I have chosen to present both the published English translation and the French original here.

43 Serdoura, M., *Method for the Baroque Lute: A Practical Guide for Beginning and Advanced Lutemists*. Volume 1, translated by Daniel Ungar. (Italy: Ut Orpheus, 2017), 72.

Pour réussir à avoir un beau son, rond, précis, perlé, nous devons étudier avec grande précision et patience la manière de bien toucher deux cordes à la fois [...].<sup>44</sup>

Serdoura further contextualises the instrument by drawing attention to its limitations, which, as he comments, are obviously subjective and often based on value judgements regarding the instrument's era. Subjectivity and values aside, the more concrete expressive limitations of the Baroque lute are bound up with its volume, which is a product of its small size, relatively low tension and many strings. Similar to Cauhépé, Serdoura also makes a point of relaxation and balance. That is, that tone production must balance the act of producing enough force in the right place (and there are different ideas of where that is) with the act of relaxing, to increase rapidity and flexibility. What is significant in this book is that the so-far standardised cause and effect mechanics are now introduced to a more subjective perspective. Using language such as 'undivided intuition and passion can be unharnessed and we can freely express ourselves, but in such a way as to respect the lute's natural voice, with no obstacles or extraneous influences,' we notice attempts to show more depth and value in regard to the subject. But still we are left to judge for ourselves what this actually means in practical performance. Rhetorically, when do we reach the 'natural voice of the instrument?' (I return to related perspectives in Chapter 4). How do we 'unharness' (in the sense of removing armour) 'intuition and passion?' What are the 'obstacles and extraneous influences?' Clearly, the book format is not capable of mediating fully what tone production is, could or should be, as already discussed. This is where informed play truly comes into practice, because we cannot rely on the performer, book or source alone. We can only create our own understanding of the topic by making the best of each and taking our own informed standpoint:

Every musical instrument has its qualities and limitations. The limitations are obviously subjective, as they are often based on value judgements regarding the instrument's era. The expressive limitations of the baroque lute are bound up

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44 Serdoura, M., *Méthode de luth baroque* (Paris: Éditions de la Société Française de Luth, 2007), 72.

with its volume. The fact that the strings are comparatively slack and come in pairs prevents the lute from having a loud sound in terms of decibels. Therefore, the lutenist must articulate his playing in order to use all expressive nuances available to him. He must seek to render some sort of speech (rhetoric) and a wide range of colors thanks to the lute's deep body, which, with the help of double strings, creates sounds that are rich in harmonics.

The more one uses strength to pluck the strings, the less the lute will sound. This paradox should lead the lutenist to use gentleness in plucking the string.

Certain physical reflexes, such as digital agility, strength, sensitivity of touch, elasticity of arm and finger muscles, back tension, etc., must be developed so that our undivided intuition and passion can be unharnessed and we can freely express ourselves, but in such a way as to respect the lute's natural voice, with no obstacles or extraneous influences.<sup>45</sup> (Bold typeface in subheadings are removed from the original)

Tout instruments de musique a ses limites et ses qualités. Ces limitates sont bien sûr toujours subjectives car souvent liées a un jugement porté sur une époque déterminée. La limite expressive qu'on pourra trouver au luth se situe au niveau de sa puissance sonore. Le fait que les cordes aient [sic!] très peu de tension et qu'on les joue par groupes de deux, empêche l'instrument d'avoir un son puissant au niveau des décibels. Dorénavant, on doit donc chercher à s'exprimer au luth avec toutes les nuances qu'on peut y trouver au niveau de l'articulations, cherchant le discours parlé (rhétorique), et toute une gamme de couleurs grâce a sa caisse de résonance profonde qui, à l'aide des cordes doubles, développe des sonorités remplies d'harmoniques.

Avec le luth, plus on utilise la force sur les cordes, moins il ca sonner. C'est un paradoxe mécanique qui aura pour vertu d'adoucir le toucher du luthiste. Nous devons développer certains mécanismes corporels comme l'agilité des doigts, la force, la sensibilité du toucher, l'élasticité des muscles de nos bras et de nos doigts, la tension exercé par notre dos, etc, afin que toute notre intuition et notre passion puissent voir le jour et s'exprimer véritablement, mais en conformité avec la voix naturelle du luth, sans encombrements ni facteurs parasites.<sup>46</sup> (Bold typeface in subheadings are removed from the original)

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45 Serdoura, *Method*, 74.

46 Serdoura, *Méthode*, 74.

Later, we are asked to play close to the rose (which conflicts somewhat with the results seen in Chapter 2). Once there, Serdoura instructs us to divide physical contact between the designated finger and the courses into two steps: 1) approaching the top string, before 2) touching the lower string. We notice how he goes into more detail than his colleagues. Rather than merely speaking of the course as one entity, he also differentiates between the two strings of each course. This innovatively gives the two strings of each pair a separate function and role, combining ‘the clarity of a single string [...] with the resonance of the lute’s double strings.’ Furthermore, Serdoura is the first to explicitly relate the return of the finger (cf. Cauhépé’s third phase and Lundgren’s second phase) with relaxation (‘relax the finger totally’), which is necessary to ‘produce a sound which is neither rough nor harsh’:

[...] and place your right hand at a distance of two fingers’ widths from the rose [... Photograph excluded]. [...] The courses [: ...] The soft outer edge of the index finger tip [*sic*] will first make contact with the first of the two strings that make up each course. [Photograph excluded. ...] Next, turn your finger a little more toward you in order to feel the second string as well. [...] This technique will enable you to combine the clarity of a single string (like a violin) with the resonance of the lute’s double strings! [Photograph excluded. ...]

The mechanics of the finger movement [...] When the finger touches the course, as described above ... [Photograph excluded. ...] ... you will bend the first joint very slightly toward the soundboard. [Photograph excluded. ...] You will then press the course down toward the soundboard, bending the strings somewhat. [...] In actual fact, the mere pressure caused by the right hand’s weight is sufficient. [Photograph excluded. ...] You should sense that the (very moderate) strength exerted on the course comes, not from the finger’s joints, but rather from the third (metacarpophalangeal) joint toward the top of your hand. [...] The last stage in right-hand finger movement is to relax the finger totally. Its movement should be ample, in order to gain flexibility and thus produce a sound which is neither rough nor harsh. [...] The thumb [: ...] As you did with the index finger, you should first press the first of the two strings that form a course with the outer edge of the soft part of the thumb tip (press downward). [Photograph excluded. ...] Next, turn the thumb a little (downward) in order to feel the second string. [Photograph excluded. ...] The thumb should

be rather straight, but the first joint is slightly bent. [Photograph excluded. ...] Next, use the weight of your hand to let the thumb fall onto the adjacent course, while effecting a small movement with the first joint. [Photograph excluded. ...] (Bold typeface in subheadings are removed from the original)<sup>47</sup>

[...] placez ensuite la main à 2 doigts de distance de la rosace [... Photograph excluded]. [...] Les choeurs[: ...] L'index va d'abord appuyer sur la première des 2 cordes qui forment 1 choeur, avec le coté extérieur de la pulpe. [Photograph excluded. ...] Ensuite, le doigt se tourne un peu plus (vers vous) pour sentir également la deuxième corde. [...] Cette technique vous permettra d'avoir la clarté de la corde simple d'un violon et la résonance des doubles cordes d'un luth ! [Photograph excluded. ...]

Mécanisme des doigts [...] Au moment où le doigt touche le choeur comme décrit précédemment ... [Photograph excluded.] ... vous pliez très légèrement la première phalange vers la table d'harmonie. [Photograph excluded. ...] Vous devrez ensuite exercer une pression sur le choeur vers la table d'harmonie, afin que la corde devienne un peu élastique. [...] En réalité, il suffit d'une simple pression causée par le poids même de la main. [Photograph excluded.] Vous devez sentir que la force (très modérée) que vous exercez sur le choeur vient, non pas de différentes phalanges du doigt, mais de la 3ème articulation situé dans le haut de la main (métacarpo phalangienne). [...] Enfin, la dernière étape du mouvement à effectuer avec les doigts de la main droite, consiste à relâcher le doigt, sans aucune force. Celui-ci devra faire un mouvement ample, pour avoir de la flexibilité, ce qui donnera une sonorité qui ne sera ni raide ni dure. [...] Le pouce[: ...] Tout comme l'index, vous devez appuyer d'abord sur la première des 2 cordes qui forment 1 choeur, avec le coté extérieur de la pulpe [...]. [Photograph excluded.] Ensuite, le doigt se tourne un peu plus (vers le bas du luth) pour sentir aussi la deuxième corde. [Photograph excluded. ...] Quand vous jouez les derniers choeurs, do, si et la, vous devez plier un peu plus la première phalange du pouce [i.e. through the distal interphalangeal joint] afin de ne pas trop crisp-er ni le poignet ni la paume de la main droite. [Photographs excluded. ...]<sup>48</sup> (Bold typeface in subheadings are removed from the original).

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47 Serdoura, *Method*, 77.

48 Serdoura, *Méthode*, 77–81 and 83.

Other authors bring the Baroque guitar into the lute discourse. James Tyler for one, in *A Guide to Playing the Baroque Guitar* (2011), argues that the right-hand technique is the same for the baroque guitar as it is for the [Baroque?] lute (cf. ‘the thumb slightly extended toward the rosette’). What is particularly interesting to note here is that Tyler anticipates future musical periods as well, while most of his colleagues are only concerned with establishing the past. He does this by asking the reader to study Fernando Sor’s *Méthode pour la Guitarre* from 1830, because of its excellent detailed instructions. It is to ‘be studied by all guitarists, even those specializing in the baroque instrument[.]’ This is a rare case, when the author not only acknowledges the Classical guitar discourse, but also includes it as a means of understanding earlier practices rather than how to differentiate it from the lute. From my own personal experience, this is a standpoint that seems to be more accepted within the field of the Baroque guitar than the lute, and perhaps this is a natural outcome given the close relationship not only between the two physical instruments themselves, but also in their names (Baroque *guitar* and Classical *guitar*):

Right-hand technique is essentially the same for the baroque guitar as for the [Baroque?] lute. Most players held their right hand in a position with the thumb slightly extended toward the rosette and the little finger resting on the soundboard about two inches in front of the bridge, except when they played strummed chords. [...] Few technical instructions are provided in the music sources for baroque guitar [...]. But it seems as if the traditional, lute-like technique described above survived not only through the Baroque period, but also, as Fernando Sor’s *Méthode pour la Guitarre* (Paris, 1830) attests, through the Classical. It is therefore recommended that Sor’s excellent detailed instructions, which include several diagrams, be studied by all guitarists, even those specializing in the baroque instrument. [...] As many contemporary lute sources verify, most lutenists and guitarists of the Baroque period did not play with fingernails. This apparently held true during the Classical era as well [...].<sup>49</sup>

Finally, Kind (2014) provides another detailed description of the right-hand technique which he links to tone production. Unlike most of the

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49 Tyler, J., *A Guide to Playing the Baroque Guitar* (USA, Indiana University Press, 2011), 6.

other examples here, this book is only published as an e-book, in Kindle format. Kind provides no historical account or foundation for his methodology, nor does he position his lute-playing approach among other artists and traditions. The sole focus is how to utilise the Alexander Technique based on his own personal account. He focuses on the mechanical aspects of playing too, but his main focus lies more in the execution of music from an ergonomic perspective rather than a sound production perspective. Another difference is that, while most of his colleagues focus on how lute performance should be done, Kind often takes the perspective of why it may not happen and what the performer (possibly) is doing wrong:

If the performer is incapable of producing volume without a harsh tone, then something is wrong with the right-hand technique. This usually happens because the performer is hooking the strings with the middle joint of the fingers and, as more force is applied, the strings slap against the fingerboard. The strings should be struck and not hooked. The finger moves through the course from the main knuckle of the right hand, aiming for the back of the palm instead of hooking the finger into itself. In this process there is some curling in the middle joint, which helps move the finger into the palm at an even reflexive rate. The movement needs to be executed at a naturally reflexive speed so that excessive tension is not caused by trying to force the finger to go faster through the course. You can only move as quickly as your reflexes allow, so you need to trust your reflexes. [...] With the execution and return of the stroke being reflexive, excessive tension is avoided at high tempos and the quality of tone is clear, losing any hint of sounding labored.<sup>50</sup>

Kind also emphasises a similar spring-effect to that we have seen before. Through descriptive words such as ‘fuzzy or indistinct’ and ‘controlled sound,’ he joins the same linguistic pathway as many of the earlier examples given here. Note how he asks us to achieve a balance in tone production between the thumb and the fingers:

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<sup>50</sup> Kind, E., *An Alexander Technique Approach to Lute Technique*. (n/a.: n/a., 2014), Kindle Edition, Lute Technique Specifics, second paragraph.



The action of the fingertip is very important to tone production. The fingertip needs to give backward. If not, the sound will be harsh. Find a position that allows the finger the freedom to strike from the main knuckle and to give at the tip. Imagine the fingertip as a harpsichord quill. As the finger goes through the course like a door on a hinge, allow the fingertip to give backward like the quill of a harpsichord. Giving at the fingertips is the mechanism behind volume control. No matter how softly the performer plays, the speed of attack should not lessen. If the attack slows down, then the tone loses its quality and becomes fuzzy or indistinct. Something is also lost rhythmically, because, if the attack is slowed, then the exact point when the course is released becomes indistinct. Since the speed of attack is not changed, then something else has to change to reduce volume, and this should be the fingertip. I think of the fingertips as guitar picks. When I want a louder sound, it is like using a stiffer pick, and for a softer sound, a more flexible one. The fingertips are allowed more flexibility, backward as the performer produces softer and softer sounds. If the speed of attack is maintained at a reflexive rate, then the release of the notes is precise. Because fingertips give only so far, their release at a high speed maintains the integrity of the note. When using the thumb, allow it the freedom to break downward from the first joint, and do it as reflexively as the fingers. The sound produced by the thumb bending at the tip is a more controlled sound and closer in quality to that produced by the fingers. Imagine the reverse of shooting marbles with the thumb. When shooting marbles, the thumb tip pops out of the index finger to shoot the marble. Let the thumb do the reverse. With the extra control afforded by the thumb tip, the performer can avoid the danger of overpowering treble production with the superior strength of the thumb. If a stronger, fuller sound is desired, then the thumb is used as a single unit whether playing free or rest stroke [...].<sup>51</sup>

## Online resources

We start to see that there is indeed some consensus on how to play the lute in the various books and articles. Obviously, the book genre has been dominating the discourse. This is particularly true as much of the

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51 Kind, *Alexander Technique*, Lute Technique Specifics, fourth to seventh paragraph.

literature is driven by a mechanical understanding of the subject which needs a certain amount of space to unfold properly, with all the necessary pedagogical aids. It is possible to assume that online sources could provide enough space (arguably infinite space, in fact) to have a similar discourse unveiled, also including audio-visual material. Indeed, we do find several online sources treating lute music manuscripts, but surprisingly few direct themselves explicitly towards tone production. Those of interest in the present context are those sources where we can both see and hear how tone is produced. I will name a few of them here to exemplify.

Stefan Lundgren, mentioned several times above, provides a website called *luteonline.se* containing ‘six short lute lessons,’ but these contribute little compared to his written works. In the second lesson on the right hand we read that one should ‘[h]old the lute from the end of the body. Place the tip of the little finger on the soundboard between the bridge and rosette about two centimeters away from the first course. The fingers are held more or less parallel to the strings [...]’.<sup>52</sup>

David van Ooijen also presents his perspectives on tone production on his YouTube channel. Among numerous films of performed music, we find three films directed at playing technique. The notable film related to the right hand is a sort of recorded ‘slideshow,’ with interchanging texts, photographs and audio-visual material. In the transcription below we find instructions that conforms with earlier presented literature. Here we are asked to play both strings of each course with all fingers:

This is about making a good tone on your lute. Make sure you feel *both* strings of a course, when you touch a course. Make sure you press *both* strings towards the top of the lute. Make sure you release *both* strings at the same time. Place the lute on your lap, top upwards, facing you. [Photograph.] Put your index finger on both strings of the second course. [Photograph.] Press both strings towards the top. [Photograph.] When your finger is almost touching the top, release both strings by turning the finger in the direction of the third course. [Film.] Do the same with the thumb. [Photograph.] Move the thumb in the direction of the first course. [Films.] Only then hold the lute in your usual way. Play slowly with alternating finger and thumb, producing the

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52 Lundgren, *Lesson Two*.

tone you just made. [Film.] *Tone Production on Renaissance Lute*, David van Ooijen, lute, [www.davidvanooijen.nl](http://www.davidvanooijen.nl).<sup>53</sup>

Elisabeth Pallet presents a lute tutorial on her *luteweb.com*. With only a few hints on tone production (e.g. ‘It is important to have control over the sound, allowing the player to express a warmth and intimacy in terms of a musical expression<sup>54</sup>), she only directs the reader to the basic concept of lute technique and some historical quotes.

## They all agree? Then what?

Apparently, most of the literature mentioned in this chapter is in agreement (with few exceptions). This is highly interesting. Clearly, the Renaissance lute has been given most attention and the Baroque lute has been comparatively left more aside. When comparing the treatises to the material unveiled in Chapter 2, we notice how much has been added to the discourse according to modern taste and logic, and that the Renaissance sources are closer to the historical sources than the later Baroque lute instructions (cf. placing the hand between the rose and the bridge in most modern literature versus close to the bridge in historical sources). Modern practice, then, is distinct from historical practice not only in temporal location and situation, but also in their parallel development with each other, without necessarily being equally related at all times. Based on everything that I have discussed so far, and from what the science of interpretation has taught us through time, this is no surprise, but what is noticeable is how much modern literature gives an authoritative impression of the past. What I mean by this is that we can easily get the impression that what is described in present instruction books is how it actually was. We soon get a comforting sense that, by following the text of the authors (whoever we choose to follow), we are indeed learning historically-correct practices rather than modern interpretations and

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53 van Ooijen, D., ‘Tone Production on Renaissance Lute,’ YouTube video, 56’42”, posted by ‘Lute Lessons,’ 13 May, 2012, URL: <https://youtu.be/eAiLyTW3Dzs>.

54 Pallett, E., ‘Tutorial,’ *luteweb.com*. Retrieved 6 September 2017, URL: <https://luteweb.com/lute-tutorial/tutorial/>.

re-contextualisation of historical sources. Here, we can further identify two strands of literature. Firstly, the ‘this is my opinion regardless of (explicitly presented) history’ approach; and secondly, the ‘this is a historical stance without problematising or openly re-contextualising in relation to modern play’ approach.

From a publisher’s perspective, it is also interesting to notice how the presentation of these materials does not get the same amount of editorial attention as other literature traditions. Several examples of the literature presented here are self-published, with spelling mistakes and linguistic inconsistencies (in addition to what has been shown in this chapter) that a larger publication machinery would have edited out. This is not interesting *per se*, but it does say something about the process it underwent before being published, because spelling and grammar are easy matters to detect in the traditional editorial and peer-review processes. The statements and approaches presented are more directly transmitted from the author to the reader and, in that sense, more personalised. This is even more true for online resources where there may be no external editorial work whatsoever, such as YouTube-channels, personal websites, blogs, etc.

What is often offered are truths, codes of conduct in which the receiver is to have a certain understanding of the theme to gain a new ‘correct way of doing things.’ It is an offering from one musician to the other, and it is practical in the sense of the performing conditions rather than the sonic. There is little criticism amongst the sources. Even if Poulton and Serdoura, for instance, provide good historical foundations for their arguments, they only present sources which seemingly support their school of thought. There seems to be no tradition of constructive thinking where a ‘truth’ is built piece by piece, but rather a manner of stating ‘the proper way’ and which selected sources support that practice. There is suspiciously little contradiction presented. ‘The finger is to be placed here’ one source may state boldly, but on the grounds presented in the previous chapter we see that practices were varied within the assigned epochs, as well as between them. What happens is a pedagogical upbringing into ‘my way of doing things’ rather than giving the reader different perspectives from which they can form their own, informed approach. In this way, they also speak to a certain social group. This is where it

becomes interesting to see how some literature uses the Classical guitar to guide the performer over to the lute, based on previous experiences and common bases of knowledge. Others seem to deliberately reject speaking about the classical guitar, to show that this is, indeed, something else. It is a practice of its own, not to be confused with the modern guitar. Not talking about the guitar is also a way to distance oneself from it; 'the guitar is not even part of the lute discourse, because ...' Already at this level, the reader is being guided towards a certain understanding of the relation between modern and historical practice, and how we approach it today (according to each individual author). (Of course, when looking at the publishing tradition critically, I also acknowledge that this book that I am writing also offers a certain world view based on my perspective on matters and is, in this respect, no better than others.)

One of the greatest obstacles to writing about tone production, as we have seen, is the nature of literature itself. It is troublesome to write about and 'read' sound because we cannot ensure that the reader understands our words exactly how we intend. Signs and signifiers are culturally and linguistically dependent, and words can be understood differently by various readers, even when resorting to onomatopoeia. Rhetorically, what timbre and tone colour does 'BAAAANG' have? How loud is it? Is it a positive sort of sound, such as a balloon exploding during children's play at a party? Or the more alarming sound of a gas explosion? This is, of course, an old discussion in theory, treated by prominent authors such as Barthes, Derrida and others, but it presents important perspectives to tone production mediated through literature. Here we find a prominent difficulty in our discourse; we have to ask ourselves what is *not* being said, and what is being taken for granted or neglected. Theoretically, what appears in-between literature and sound, theory and practice, are perhaps the most important aspects to address; that is, how the in-betweens shape the discourse and the artistic value of the undecidable. This is where a meta-discussion, above the Classical-guitar-or-not-perspective, is needed.

Both the Early Modern period and the present time have witnessed the introduction of new sound ideologies. The harpsichord made its entrance in the Early Modern period, around the same time that tone production

became richer in transients and ‘metallic’ (see Chapter 2), and the modern Classical guitar appeared, which made a kind of stance against the popular and folk music approach, which again preceded today’s lutenists. Here we find two very different aesthetics which set the standard for what we perceive as tone production and, as written in some of the sources above, ‘beautiful sound.’ This is a particularly important distinction, as Early Modern musicians seem to have dedicated themselves to the prevailing musical tradition of using the contemporary instruments at hand, while modern musicians often attempt to grasp a larger historical timeline using various techniques and instruments, from different countries. (Seen from a historical perspective, the interest in reconstructing the past anew is rather a modern phenomenon.) How we relate to this information when constructing our own informed sense of tone production will be treated in Chapter 5, but first it is necessary to look at tone production from a physical perspective with the aim of gaining an understanding of how lute sound is constituted by physics and material selections.