

THE RENAISSANCE THUMB-UNDER LUTE TECHNIQUE

by

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The Renaissance lute has claimed a handsome share of the popularity enjoyed by early music in the twentieth century, but until recently this was at the cost of accurately recreating the building and playing techniques of old. Deciphering exactly how old lutes were built has been difficult since many surviving instruments were cannibalized during the Baroque to make lutes with markedly different proportions and stringing, and the handful of unaltered lutes often need extensive restoration before any measurements can be made. But like most early instruments, the lute was cultivated at first by performers trained on a related modern instrument, which compromised any urgency to understand the original playing techniques. The first Pleyel and Sperrhake harpsichords were designed with the tension and action of a modern piano, were played primarily by pianists, and were only gradually replaced by instruments built with more attention to the qualities of surviving baroque models. In the same way, most modern luthiers who turned to museum lutes for guidance in design were building for modern guitarists, who naturally enough wanted changes in the Renaissance construction to provide the high-tension stringing and dynamic power best suited to their guitar technique. As a result these lutes took on the tonal characteristics of the guitar and were popularized through the personalities and interpretive styles of classical guitarists – with much art, certainly, but in a way that obscured the qualities of the lute that sixteenth-century players prized so much.

It is only in the last decade that the lute of Bream or Ragošniĝ has given ground to lighter instruments built closer to the Renaissance concept, many of them commissioned by players like Eugen Dombois, the late Michael Schaffer, Paul O’Dette or Hopkinson Smith who have also brought the historical playing techniques to a high level of virtuosity. The primary sixteenth-century technique, now commonly called “thumb-under,” has won a number of converts among lutenists, though other musicians have only a general awareness of it. In fact, many of its details are still being worked out through the practical experience of modern lutenists, and through their performances of works in the Renaissance repertory some interpretive features of the sixteenth-century style can tentatively be discerned. But even at this early stage there is much to interest the modern guitarist or lutenist, even if he is not willing to adopt the historical practices themselves. Outlining the research that has gone into reviving the technique illustrates also how many disciplines – instrument building, performance experience, bibliographical and historical studies, analysis of the music itself – contribute to our present idea of early music.

Although some elements of lute technique are consistent for almost three centuries, it is important first of all to distinguish between thumb-under technique, in which the thumb flexes under the hand, and the baroque style of playing with the thumb extended toward the rose, much like a modern guitarist. This distinction is explicit in lute treatises published in the decades before and after 1600 – a date we can take as roughly the time thumb-under declined from fashion. In his *Lautenbuch* of 1592, the Fleming anthologist Matthaus Waissel gives a very coherent exposition of the thumb-under method, mentioning the nascent baroque style only to deplore it. By 1603, however, the French physician and lutenist Jean-Baptiste Besard concluded his huge anthology *Thesaurus Harmonicus* with an extended discussion of technique based, he says, on principles gleaned from many contemporary players: he advocates thumb-out but allows thumb-under as an acceptable alternative for players with small hands. Only a decade later, in 1615, Nicholas Vallet of Amsterdam (in his *Secretum Musarum*, reprinted in

1618 as *Le secret des Muses*) is utterly rigid on the subject, deriding the thumb-under technique as "an ugly and ridiculous fault" and citing a number of contemporary lutenists who play thumb-out to support his view. And in 1632, when the Bolognese theorbo player Alessandro Piccinini published his instructions for lute (in the *Intavolatura di Liuto et di Chitarrone*), the Renaissance practice is not even mentioned. If we take 1600 as the point of transition, however, we must qualify it with evidence that thumb-out was used by German lutenists as early as the middle of the sixteenth century. The portrait engraving of Sebastian Ochsenkun, in his *Tabulaturbuch auff die Lauten* (1558), clearly shows him using it – thumb extended towards the rose, knuckles parallel to the strings, fingers cupped slightly into the palm (see *Figure 1*).²

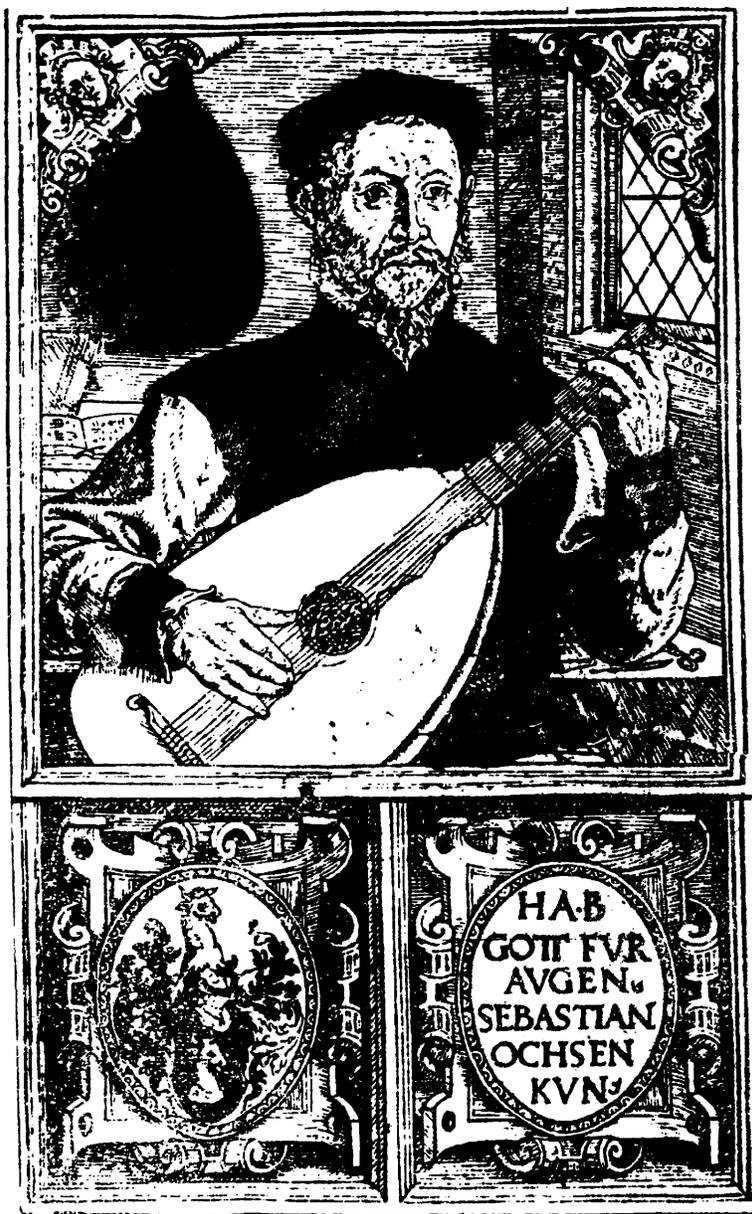


Figure 1.

Unfortunately we have even less evidence to go on in looking for the origins of the thumb-under technique. Certainly it was in use by the end of the fifteenth century, when the monophonic plectrum technique of the Middle Ages was first supplemented and then supplanted by plucking two or more parts with the fingers, but since historical references are sketchy we must fall back on the dates fixed for the earliest surviving lute tablatures (ca. 1475 and ca. 1490) to suggest when this transition began to really gain momentum.³ The Italian poet Paolo Cortese, writing in 1510, credited the invention of polyphonic playing to lutenists “of our generation” (notably the German virtuoso Gian Maria, after 1519 lutenist to Pope Leo X), contrasting their style with the single-line playing of Pietrobono of Ferrara, who died in 1497. But the music theorist and encyclopedist Johannes Tinctoris, in his *De inventione et usu musicae* (ca. 1485), claims that playing “not only in two parts, but what is more difficult, in three or four” was used earlier, by German players. He specifically names among the first a Heinrich at the court of Charles the Bold of Burgundy, who was active several years before the duke died in 1477. Cortese is also contradicted by an account from 1523 that describes Gian Maria himself playing with a plectrum in a four-part ensemble.⁴

These and other historical testimonies (including woodcuts and paintings from the time) can be reconciled if we suppose first that the transition between plectrum and finger plucking was very slow to occur – overlapping the last half of the fifteenth century well into the sixteenth – and second that the techniques were associated with different musical settings. We know that Pietrobono, for instance, was particularly regarded for his skill in improvising variations over the *cantus firmus* repeated by a second player, and nine duets answering very closely to the description we have of Pietrobono’s playing – a single division line traveling over a two- or three-part tenor – were included in the first printed lutebooks edited by Francesco Spinacino (1507) and Joanambrosio Dalza (1508). The ornamental division part characteristic of these first duets persists in Italian ensemble music until the end of the sixteenth century. While by then these parts were certainly not played with a plectrum, the remarkable uniformity of this ensemble ornamentation – probably including the part taken by Gian Maria – suggests this passagework was one of the last preserves of the old plectrum technique.⁵ On the other hand, a significant part of the early repertory consists of settings for voice and lute of lieder, chansons and Italian frottole, almost all reduced to a two-part lute accompaniment, lightly embellished with diminutions between phrases, under the melody to be sung.⁶ The uniformity of these early settings suggests they are in the mold of a conventional style, and given the preponderance of frottola arrangements it seems plausible this was the style used by extemporizing *canterini*, who were associated with the early development of the frottola and whose improvisations would be facilitated by this almost schematic accompaniment.⁷ If we look to accompanied song and recitation as a likely source of finger plucking on the lute, it is possible that the technique developed early, for the lute is used to accompany solo singers at least as far back as the late thirteenth century. At present there is little evidence to corroborate these suppositions; iconography makes it seem that finger plucking was rare before late in the fifteenth century. Yet the first solo intabulations published by Spinacino in 1507, which include highly ornamented arrangements of contemporary ensemble pieces, chansons and motets, are demanding works even for a virtuoso lutenist. It is thus difficult to believe there was not an extended period of effort before 1500, during which guild musicians expanded and passed on the skills they received from earlier players, in order to create such a highly developed solo instrumental style.

Although the thumb-under technique was evidently prevalent throughout Europe for more than a century (excluding Spain, where the vihuela was played in the thumb-out style), the historical discussions of the method, besides the eighteen pages of text in Waissel’s anthology, are primarily the work of German lutenists in the first decades of the sixteenth century. These include the eleven pages of text in Hans Judenkünig’s *Ain schone kunstliche underweisung* (Vienna, 1523), the copious

instructions in Hans Gerle's *Musica Teusch* (1532) and *Musica und Tabulatur...* (Nuremberg, 1546), and the seven pages of text in Hans Newsidler's *Ein Newgeordent Künstlich Lautenbuch* (Nuremberg, 1536).⁸ These are augmented by the five handwritten pages in the Italian manuscript "Capirola Lutebook" (ca. 1517), a valuable source of information not touched on by the German texts, the twenty-six pages of text on intabulating music for lute in Adrian LeRoy's *A briefe and plaine Instruction...* (1574), and incidental comments contrasting lute and vihuela technique by the Spanish theorists Juan Bermudo (*Declaracion de instrumentos musicales*, 1555) and Luis Venegas de Henestrosa (*Libro de Cifra Nueva...*, 1557).⁹ These technical descriptions usually must be clarified using contemporary illustrations. Aside from the rather crude woodcuts in the lutebooks themselves (such as the portrait of Hans Judenkünig, *Figure 2*), some of the clearest representations of the thumb-under hand position are found in the series of "Magdalen portraits" painted in around 1520 by the anonymous French Master of the Half-Lengths.¹⁰



Figure 2.

The modern player will find two general shortcomings in these treatises. They were, first of all, written primarily for amateur or beginning players – “die anfähenden Schüler,” as Newsidler calls them – so that, beyond instructions for tuning the lute and reading music in tablature, the technical lessons are very rudimentary. All the tutors, for instance, in order to get across the need to sustain voices in a polyphonic composition, no more than tell the lutenist to hold down notes with the left hand until he is forced to release them to finger a new note, a rule he must keep, according to the Capirola manuscript, “like a maxim of Aristotle.” Experienced players will see that this glosses over a number of exceptions; sustaining the parts of an intricate passage would require comparing several alternate fingerings and weighing which were the most important voices to sustain rather than mechanically shifting the fingers as demanded by the music in the first position that came to hand. Besard, in 1603, is in fact the first author to amplify on this point – describing position shifts with the left hand, dampening successive notes in diminutions, sustaining a note until it is followed by another in the same voice, releasing notes in the tenor parts if necessary rather than notes in the bass, and so forth.¹¹

Besides their desire to keep things simple for the beginning reader, the early writers are vague about the exact movements of the hands because Renaissance pedagogy was less analytical than our own, reflecting a flexible approach to instrumental technique that relied on the common sense of the individual reader rather than on the highly rationalized, orthodox methods we expect from tutors written since the Baroque. The authors do little more than ask the lutenist to take up the instrument in his lap, place the little finger of the right hand on the soundboard near the rose, then adjust the hand so that the index finger and thumb do not hinder each other when playing. These are to flex, as Waissel says, so that “the index finger strikes over the thumb, the thumb into the hand.”¹² At times, by adding a helpful qualification, the writer only confuses the issue. The Capirola manuscript explains that “the thumb of the right hand should be placed under the index finger so that one finger does not meet the other (while playing),” but adds that “if you do not use the thumb, it is more beautiful if it is seen on the fingerboard.”¹³ But when would the thumb not be used? Apparently the author means the thumb can be brought from under the hand (*toward* the fingerboard) if it is not used in playing diminutions (when the index finger and thumb must alternate) but in chords (when the fingers and thumb pluck in opposition). Such confusion has also been compounded by inaccurate translations. In his unpublished thesis on German lutenists, Nelson Amos digresses on the placement of the right-hand little finger in terms that are misinterpreted from the German. And in their translation of the Newsidler text, Southard and Cooper render a colloquialism for “start off” as “lift up,” commenting in a footnote on the hand position this misreading implies.¹⁴

Thus most of the practical information we have about thumb-under technique is based on the experimentation of modern performers, using the early texts as a point of departure. As no modern tutor for the method has yet been published, the description presented here combines my observations of the technique as used in concert by Paul O’Dette and Catherine Liddell with their comments to students in lectures and master classes. To play thumb-under, the forearm is brought around the base of the lute as it is held in the lap of the seated player, the neck of the lute raised slightly from the horizontal, though not as much as a guitar. Some lutenists bring the arm almost parallel to the strings, while most seem to favor an angle from above of about twenty degrees. The hand should be relaxed, the wrist only slightly bent – it helps first to lay the hand fully open over the courses with the fingers extended, then lift it up onto the little finger, bringing the fingers together and the thumb under the arch they form. The placement of the little finger can be adjusted to whatever feels most comfortable; most players set it about halfway between the rose and bridge, an inch or so below the chanterelle, though the scarred varnish on a few old lutes shows the finger was moved freely within a large area centered on this point.

Held in this way, the hand naturally pivots at the wrist and elbow in the kind of bobbing motion that would carry a plectrum swiftly back and forth across the courses; for finger plucking the thumb and index finger replace the pick. In diminutions these strike the courses in strict alternation, the thumb always starting off on the beat and flexing from the first two knuckles toward the palm with a downward motion of the hand and arm. In the almost elastic rebound of the hand upwards, the index finger catches the string on weak notes in the line flexing outside the thumb from the first two joints. Just enough pressure is put on the little finger to keep it from sliding around on the face of the lute. Ideally the hand and arm contribute a large part of the energy to each stroke, the fingers acting to position the fingertips precisely on both strings of the course, control the moment of release, and clear the way for strokes in the opposite direction; how movement is actually divided among the fingers, hand and arm, however, seems to vary widely with the individual and his confidence with the technique. The fingers and thumb contact the courses at the lowest point of their arc, both pressing the strings down toward the belly and brushing across them with each stroke. The path described by the index finger is oblique to the strings – leading back outside the player’s right shoulder, over the wide bout in the body of the lute.

Chords are plucked with appreciably less arm movement; the index and middle fingers curl over the thumb with an economical twist of the wrist and the third finger, if it is used, meets the thumb almost tip to tip as it flexes under the hand. The source documents emphasize the fingers and thumb pluck simultaneously, implying chords were not “rolled” or arpeggiated with the right hand. Unlike guitar technique the fingers never come to rest on the adjacent string; the thumb normally does so in baroque technique only when playing notes in the basses.

One of the most striking qualities of a lute played in this way is its rounder, transparent tone, quite different from the dry, nasal tone of lutes played with the thumb-out technique. The low-lying position of the hand in thumb-under, which brings a large part of the pad at the end of the finger equally in contact with both strings in each course – not just the tip of the finger at the end of the bone – is what produces this purer tone, combined with the fact that in thumb-out the hand usually plays much closer to the bridge. The baroque writers all comment on this difference in tone, indicating they preferred the more metallic, penetrating quality of the thumb-out position; for them the thumb-under tone was soggy or soft.¹⁵ Spanish writers, including the vihuelist Enríquez de Valderrábano (in *Sylva de sirenas*, 1547), state that the vihuela was played thumb-out for similar reasons – because thumb-under could not bring out the tone of this relatively less resonant instrument.¹⁶ On a light lute, however, the tone is ringing and clear – bell-like in its lack of overtones and its ability to carry, particularly in the upper courses. The mallet-like quality of the attack is also in contrast to the more cutting, plucked sound of the thumb-out technique; it brings to mind with a new meaning all the Renaissance metaphors for the lute’s tone as gentle, sweet and soothing. It also contrasts with the grating, harsh sound of a light lute played with nails, where the delicate tone of the note itself is almost wholly colored by the metallic twang of the attack.

Beyond these contrasts in tone, the thumb-under technique implies certain qualities were valued in interpreting the music itself, though as yet only a few points can be generalized: the legato facility of the technique in performing runs and graces, the accents generated by the thumb in single-line and polyphonic playing, and the larger rhythmic pulse behind the movement of the hand as it plucks the strings. I think speed has been overstated as the prime appeal of the technique, though Weissel mentions this specifically as one of its virtues and modern players like Paul O’Dette have achieved mesmerizing results with it. Complementing this speed, however, is a distinct legato quality to diminutions that incidentally does not compromise their dynamic power. Unlike the detached, harpsichord-like attack of guitar technique, which often amplifies the clatter of nails against the strings

as speed is increased, the thumb-under technique produces, even at a fast clip, a fluid effect much like the bursting of stitches in an unraveling seam. In thumb-out much the same fluency is produced when diminutions are played with a thumb-index alternation; because the power of each stroke is communicated through the fingers alone, however, they do not usually match the vigor of runs played thumb-under, which have the energy of the whole hand behind them. On this point it is interesting that Baroque technique (which generally substituted thumb-index alternation in diminutions with notes played by the fingers alone) also supplemented the use of the right-hand fingers with legato slurs in the left hand. It seems to me that, in light of what is possible with thumb-under, the supposed contrast in legato style between Renaissance and Baroque music has been somewhat overstated and looks more to the technical means than the musical end result. The thumb-under speed has made clear, however, that we must be careful in fixing a tempo ceiling for dances or intabulations based solely on the rhythmic complexity of the ornamentation added to them. Increasingly performers are taking solo lute dances at the tempo most attractive to the feet and interpreting intabulations at the tempo at which the model is most effectively sung.

The alternating strong-weak accents of the thumb and index finger in diminutions is an important and widely discussed aspect of performance in nearly all Renaissance instrumental tutors – compare with the fingering guidelines for keyboard players in Tomás de Sancta María's *Arte de tañer Fantasía...* (1565) or the strong-weak tonguing described for wind players by Sylvestro Ganassi (*Opera Intitulata Fontegara*, 1535) and Richardo Rogniono (*Passaggi per potersi essercitare nel diminuire*, 1592), among others.¹⁷ For more complex textures lutenists unfortunately have only the right-hand fingering dots to go by when formulating accent patterns in their interpretations – unfortunately, because these are only placed when an isolated note is *not* to be played by the thumb, though the index finger is intended in scale passages and implied in most polyphonic textures. Many late collections omit these dots altogether, while only diminutions are consistently marked with them in collections at the mid-century. (Some early sources do clarify the fingerings used at the time: Newsidler prints several pieces in his 1536 lutebook with fingerings for either right or left hand completely worked out and notated in a system of dot groups; the dot groups for right hand also appear in some seventeenth-century manuscripts, though the fingering principles they reflect are transitional to the baroque style.) The three surviving collections by Ottaviano Petrucci, the Casteliono anthology of 1536 and the collections published by Antonio Gardane in 1546-1547 do, however, suggest more precise guidelines for using the thumb and fingers in certain contexts – above all the dance volume edited for Petrucci by Joanambrosio Dalza of Milan.¹⁸ His twelve solo *calate* and nine solo dance suites include a variety of interesting metrical or accentual features that can be identified in the music itself (hemiola, triplets, arpeggios, syncopations, and so forth), and for all these, explicit right-hand fingering patterns are indicated. *Example 1* shows some of the guidelines for phrasing and articulation offered by these fingering dots in tablatures by Dalza and Marcolini da Forli. Unfortunately not all of these guidelines are consistent from one lute book to the next. *Example 2* shows the different fingerings for similar two-part sequence passages – all from fantasias by Francesco da Milano and two from the same lutebook – given in editions published by Casteliono and Gardane. This lack of unanimity suggests there was not a standardized approach to fingering polyphonic textures or, if there was one, it was rarely reflected in the fingering indications found in the collections printed for amateur players.

Example 1. Fingering dots from early lute music and the interpretive indications they provide. The normal fingering for three-note measures in early lute music is thumb-index-thumb, notated as blank-dot-blank in the tablature. In A) this fingering is reversed (arrow) in a way that divides the diminutions into clear phrases. In B) this reversed fingering is also used in a cadence to separate the phrase leading to the tonic chord from the dominant chord preceding it; in m. 127 this fingering has even been required in an awkward arpeggio context (compare this cadential syncopation with the use of cadential ornaments, like that in m. 16). In C) a syncopation is accented by the thumb. In D) a repeated chord is first played by the fingers on the weak beat, then the thumb, implying a crescendo towards the end of the phrase. In E) a repeated-note figure and a metrically similar disjunct phrase are figured differently; the repeated fingering implies a staccato interpretation.

Example 2. Varied fingering of similar sequence patterns, all from fantasias by Francesco da Milano.

The fingering in A), from the *Intavolatura di lauto* published by Antonio Gardane (1546₂ sig. G3), uses the thumb for all notes in the tenor part and alternates the thumb and finger for the soprano part, the most common fingering in early lutebooks for this kind of pattern. In B) and C), both from the *Casteliono Intavolatura de leuto de diversi autori* (1536, fols. 3 and 62), the thumb and fingers are either alternated consistently as they pass from one part to the other or allotted to the tenor and soprano parts exclusively – technically a rather awkward fingering that erases any strong-weak accents in the overlapping dotted suspensions.

The final interpretive aspect suggested by the thumb-under technique is more ephemeral than the tone, legato speed or accent of the method – that of the rhythmic pulse behind the whole fabric of the music. This is admittedly an area bounded by speculation and reasoning by analogy, for although many tantalizing bits of evidence are at hand – Sancta Maria’s inclusion of “steady rhythm” among the points of a good performance of a fantasia, the remarks by Judenkünig and Newsidler that only strict alternation of the fingers and thumb will allow the player to “keep the mensuration,” the number of contemporary paintings of ensemble players led by one visibly beating the *tactus* with his hand or finger – the use of variations in tempo to shape phrases or add expression to an interpretation remains one area where modern taste has little challenge from historical guidelines. Contemporary players have abandoned most romantic liberties in interpreting Renaissance music – lingering over a vibrato-shaped note in the melody, contrasting phrases at different tempos and tonal colors, dividing phrases with broad *accelerandos* and *ritardandos*. But with the thumb-under technique the insistent up-and-down motion of the hand in any repetitive plucking pattern creates an irresistible buoyancy that tends to erode further any temptation to vary the underlying pulse, excepting a slight *ritard* at cadences where the slackening of the tempo is compensated by the increased rhythmic activity of a cadential ornament. Dances commonly accent this hand movement of the arm by bringing the thumb up from the bass to play the third note in a four-note group of divisions, returning it to the bass to play the bottom part of the next beat, and many early *ricercars* are written in this dance-like diminution texture and in two-part sequence patterns that are fingered in the same way. This is a consistent answer to plucking the notes, since the thumb was alternated with the fingers wherever possible, but the rhythmical movement of the arm it creates should not be dismissed as purely incidental. These observations suggest that many modern interpretations of *ricercars* or fantasias are too free rhythmically – particularly of pieces written before 1540, which are largely composed of sequence patterns, *stretto* imitations, phrases repeated at the octave and diminutions over a metrically regular bass. Such pieces contrast very clearly with the more *toccata-like* *tastar de corde* by Dalza and *ricercars* by Spinacino in which unaccompanied diminutions, cadence figures closing on a fermata-marked chord and a lack of sequence figures do suggest a more flexible rhythmic rendering.

Performers may want to pursue these topics further either to take up the Renaissance technique or merely apply some of its lessons to their interpretation on a guitar or high-tension lute. For the latter, a sense of what is possible in the style can be acquired by attending concerts by players using the thumb-under method. Paul O'Dette has recently released an album of solo lute music (*The English Lute*, Nonesuch H-71363) which, though devoted to music late in the Renaissance repertory, gives a lively illustration of what the technique can achieve. Guitarists should attempt to play diminutions as legato as possible even though each note is sounded by an individual stroke of the right hand, concentrating more on achieving a fluttering smoothness in runs than on duplicating the strong-weak accents of Renaissance fingering. However, these accents come easily when diminutions in the middle strings of the guitar or lute are played using the thumb-index alternation. Where he has recourse to the original tablatures, the player should examine the fingering dots carefully and attempt to reproduce any accentual patterns they imply. He may want to reserve rest-strokes for accented notes rather than using them more freely to bring out particular voices or round out the tone on the upper strings. Experimentation and personal taste are the best guides, informed if possible by a lutenist familiar with Renaissance style.

Lutenists interested in at least trying the thumb-under technique should follow more specific steps. First, it is important to try the technique on a light lute. There are a number of construction characteristics of early lutes that seem to be associated with thumb-under playing – a wider than normal inter- and intra-course spacing, a lower action on the fretboard and a lighter string tension, primarily – that the player may want to discuss with his luthier (if he is ordering a new instrument) or, if possible, with other players who already use and like the technique.¹⁹ Luthiers have contributed much to clarifying the possibilities of the Renaissance technique through their reconstructions of the instruments on which it was used – just as dance reconstructions are informed by accurate costume research and ensemble instrumentation is clarified by Renaissance iconography. The adjustment of the instrument will influence how comfortable the player feels with this unfamiliar method, and an instrument adjusted to accommodate thumb-under technique will prove a surprisingly reliable guide in his early efforts.

The player will need a good instructor both to offer individual attention to technical difficulties and the all-important encouragement to keep trying. Cutting off nails and using the hand in ways that every guitar teacher condemns are difficult for most players, but if one is highly trained in guitar technique or has a professional schedule to honor the experience can be very hard indeed. Some teachers have had good results with paring the nails down on the heel-side of the finger only, so that by leaning the fingers toward the thumb nails can still be used for thumb-out performances. Here personal preference and the inclinations of the teacher will influence which course is decided upon.

Finally, pieces from the early lute repertory are specially suitable for training in the new technique. Many *ricercars* by Spinacino, Marco Pietro Paulo Borrono and Francesco da Milano, and dances by Dalza, Borrono and Pierre Attaignant are conceived in the diminution writing that quickly accustoms the hand to ranging easily back and forth between the bass and treble. Besides their intrinsic beauty, the dances by Dalza and Borrono typically vary a repeated dance strain with a delightful number of diminution and arpeggio figurations, making each in itself an exercise in the vocabulary of right-hand fingering combinations.



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NOTES

- ¹The lute treatises published during this period of transition are discussed by Paul Beier in his “Right-Hand Position in Renaissance Lute Technique,” to be published in the forthcoming *Journal of the Lute Society of America* [JLSA] XII (1979). The instructions by Matthaeus Weissel are translated by Douglas A. Smith in his “The Instructions in Mathaeus Weissel’s *Lautenbuch*.” *JLSA* VIII (1975), 49-79. An English translation of the text by Jean-Baptiste Besard was published by Robert Dowland in his *Varietie of Lute-Lessons* (1610), available in a facsimile reprint by Schott & Co., Ltd. The Vallet is printed in facsimile in *Oeuvres de Nicholas Vallet pour luth seul* (Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique [CNRS], 1970); the Piccinini is translated by Stan Buetens in the *JLSA* II (1969), 31.
- ²The engraving appears on folio 88v; it is reprinted in Marc Southard’s unpublished thesis, “Sixteenth-Century Lute Technique” (University of Iowa, 1976), p. 44. This study is an excellent general survey of both the surviving treatises and iconography important in detailing Renaissance left- and right-hand lute technique.
- ³All the surviving lute manuscripts from the fifteenth century are described in David Fallows, “Fifteenth-Century Tablatures for Plucked Instruments: A Summary, A Revision and A Suggestion,” *Lute Society Journal* [LSJ] XIX (1977), 7. Fallows briefly weighs the technical implications of these often rudimentary compositions and points out the similarities between early lute compositions and surviving organ intabulations from the fifteenth century, such as those in the Buxheim Organbook, ca. 1460, suggesting the importance of the keyboard intabulations as early models for solo lute arrangements.
- ⁴The early history of the lute is admirably summarized by Peter Danner, “Before Petrucci: The Lute in the Fifteenth Century,” *JLSA* V (1972), 4. He also points out connections between early lute music and the keyboard repertory, notably through the famous German organist and lutenist Konrad Paumann (died ca. 1470), who traditionally is credited with inventing German tablature. This study in turn draws on Nino Pirrotta, “Musical and Cultural Tendencies in 15th-Century Italy,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* [JAMS] XIX (1966), 127, and Anthony Baines, “Fifteenth-Century Instruments in Tinctoris’ *De inventione et usu musicae*,” *Galpin Society Journal* III (1950), 19.
- ⁵For more on Pietrobono, see Danner, and Lewis Lockwood, “Pietrobono and the Instrumental Tradition at Ferrara in the 15th Century,” *Revista Italiana de Musicologica* X (1975), 115. The first division-ground duets are inventoried in Howard Mayer Brown’s *Instrumental Music Printed Before 1600: A Bibliography* (Harvard University Press, 1967) under 1507₁, 1507₂ and 1508₁. Duets in the same style include a *Spagna* by Francesco da Milano (see *The Lute Music of Francesco Canova da Milano* (1497-1543), ed. Arthur Ness (Harvard University Press, 1970, No. 94); *Pavana Milanese* and *Saltarello Primo* by Pietro Paolo Borrono (1546₈ fols. 19v and 20v); several dances in Wolf Heckel’s *Lautenbuch* (1562₃, p. 85ff.); dances in Pierre Phalèse’s *Hortus Musarum* (1552₁₁, cf. *La Lodesana*, p. 94); two *contrapuncti* by Vincenzo Galilei (1584₅, p. 178f); two pass’emezo-gagliarda suites by Giulio Barbetta (1585₁, p. 26ff); and numerous duet arrangements by Giovanni Terzi of ensemble canzone and madrigals with a *contraponto* that may also be used for lute “in concerto” with other performers (1593₇ and 1599₁₁). The virtuosic division parts in the Terzi arrangements incidentally resemble the diminution part for lute in broken consort lessons published in England by Thomas Morley (1599₈; cf. *The Quadro Pavin*). The description of Gian Maria, which only says he played “most wonderfully,” is reprinted in Danner, p. 12.
- ⁶Over 250 frottole arranged by Franciscus Bossinensis (1509₁, 1511₁), an undated collection of 37 frottole (1527₁), twelve lieder set by Arnolt Schlick (1512₁), over ninety frottole in an anonymous Italian manuscript ca. 1510 (see Genevieve Thibault, “Un manuscrit italien pour luth des premières années du XVIe siècle” in *Le Luth et sa musique*, ed. Jean Jacquot (Centre Nationale des Recherches Scientifiques, 1958, p. 37)); and the more complex chanson settings by Pierre Attaignant (1529₃).
- ⁷The connections between fifteenth-century improvisers and the frottola are discussed in Howard Mayer Brown’s *Music in the Renaissance* (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 99ff.
- ⁸For further discussion and excerpts of these instructions see Beier and Southard. The *Judenkünig* is translated by Martha Blackman in “A Translation of Hans Judenkünig’s *Ain schone kunstliche underweisung...* (1523),”

LSJ XIV (1972), 29; the Gerle is translated in Jane I. Pierce's unpublished dissertation, "Hans Gerle: Sixteenth-Century Lutenist and Pedagogue" (University of North Carolina, 1973); and the Newsidler is translated by Marc Southard and Suzanna Cooper in "A Translation of Hans Newsidler's *Ein Newgeordent Kunstlich Lautenbuch...*," *JLSA* XI (1978), 5. The volumes cited here are those containing the earliest or most complete version of the instructions.

⁹The Capirola is translated by Otto Gombosi in *Compositione de Meser Vincenzo Capirola. Lute-Book ca. 1517*. (Société de musique d'autrefois, 1955); the LeRoy of 1574 is a London edition, translated by "F. Ke.", of the now lost *Instruction de partir toute musique des huits divers tons en tablature de luth* (1557), reprinted in *Oeuvres de Adrian LeRoy pour luth seul* (CNRS, 1973); no translation of either the Bermudo or Sancta Maria treatises has yet been made.

¹⁰The surviving "Magdalen portraits" are all reprinted in Daniel Hertz, "Mary Magdalene, Lutenist" *JLSA* V (1972), 52. Two other excellent sources of woodcuts or paintings pertinent to reconstructing early lute technique are Kurt Dorfmueller's *Studien zur Lautenmusik in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Tutzing, 1967) and Southard, who also reprints one of the Magdalen portraits.

¹¹See Dowland's *Varietie*, p. 10.

¹²See Gombosi's *Compositione de meser Vincenzo Capirola*, p. XC. In discussing the technical descriptions for right and left hand Southard observes (p. 35) that the source documents exhibit a common trait: "frequent instances of quite detailed information which nevertheless lacks the overall perspective necessary to combine the details into a complete picture."

¹³See Waissel, p. 57.

¹⁴See "Lute Practice and Lutenists in Germany Between 1500 and 1750" (University of Iowa, 1975) by Nelson Amos and Paul Beier's discussion of the misinterpretation in his "Right-Hand Tech – you start off with the thumb first." This advice, which simply means that the accent of the thumb-stroke should always fall on the beat in diminutions, is repeated by both Judenkünig ("If two letters or numbers are written one after the other and [semiminims] are the time value, then strike the first note downward with the thumb and the next with the forefinger upward", Blackman, p. 35) and Gerle ("Every time a run begins you must begin it with the thumb, and the other letters or numbers with the index finger, so that one finger avoids the other, one below, the other above", Pierce, p. 218).

¹⁵See Vallet, p. 2.

¹⁶See Beier, note 14.

¹⁷For more on tonguing accents in Renaissance wind tutors with a bibliography of translations and related studies, see Howard Mayer Brown, *Embellishing 16th-Century Music* (Oxford University Press, 1976), especially p. 68f.

¹⁸These are: Petrucci – *Intabulatura de Lauto, Libro primo* (Spinacino), 1507₁; *Libro secondo* (Spinacino), 1507₂; *Libro quarto* (Dalza), 1508₁. Casteliono, *Intabolutura de leuto de diversi autori*, 1536₉ (Francesco da Milano, Borrono, Albert da Rippe, Marco dall'Aquila). Gardane – *Intabolutura de Lauto* (Bianchini), 1546₅; *Intabolutura de Lauto* (da Milano), 1546₆; *Intabolutura de Lauto* (da Milano and Perino Fiorentino), 1547₂; and *Intabolutura de Lauto* (Simon Gintzler), 1547₃.

¹⁹More information can be obtained from the Guild of American Luthiers, <http://www.luth.org> or through the Lute Society of America, <http://LuteSocietyofAmerica.org>.*

* Note: Contact information has been modernized for this retro-publication. DFH, November 2008