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RIGHT HAND LUTE TECHNIQUE IN THE SIXTEENTH  
CENTURY, A LECTURE RECITAL, TOGETHER  
WITH THREE RECITALS OF SELECTED  
WORKS OF F. MORENO-TORROBA,  
J. DOWLAND, J. S. BACH,  
P. ATTAIGNANT,  
V. CAPIROLA,  
AND OTHERS

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the  
North Texas State University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

By

Michael Duane Craddock, M. M. Ed.

Denton, Texas

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J. M. J.

Craddock, Michael Duane, Right Hand Lute Technique in the Sixteenth Century, a Lecture Recital, Together with Three Recitals of Selected Works of F. Moreno-Torroba, J. Dowland, J. S. Bach, P. Attaignant, V. Capirola, and Others. Doctor of Musical Arts (Performance), December, 1983, 38 pp., 5 examples, bibliography of 39 titles.

Although the present revival of interest in the lute and its music began in the late nineteenth century, it was not until the early 1970s that the historical method of lute playing now known as "thumb-under" was demonstrated in a practical way. The principal sources of information on lute playing in the Renaissance are paintings, woodcuts, old lutes, and lute books. The thumb-under technique itself grew out of the plectrum technique of the Middle Ages and gradually evolved into the "thumb-out" technique of the Baroque period. Important features of the thumb-under technique are ease of legato playing, agility in diminutions, and rhythmic accents which are provided by alternation of the thumb and index finger. Musical examples demonstrate various musical effects which are emphasized through the use of thumb-under fingerings.

Tape recordings of all performances submitted as dissertation requirements are on deposit in the North Texas State University Library.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Recital Programs . . . . .	v
List of Illustrations. . . . .	ix
Introduction . . . . .	1
Origins of the Thumb-Under Technique . . . . .	3
Playing Position . . . . .	10
Thumb-Under Technique. . . . .	12
The Rise of Thumb-Out. . . . .	17
Thumb-Under Fingering and Its Effect . . . . .	23
Lutes. . . . .	30
Conclusion . . . . .	32
Appendix . . . . .	34
Bibliography . . . . .	36

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

School of Music

presents

# Michael Craddock

in a

Recital of Music for Lute and Guitar

Monday, June 4

6:30

Concert Hall

## Program

Kemp's Jig

Alman

Two Dances from the Thesaurus Harmonicus

Two Fantasies

A Fantasie

My Lady Hunsdon's Puffe

The Frog Galliard

Queen Elizabeth Galliard

A Fancy

Anon.

Robert Johnson

J. B. Besard

Francesco da Milano

Gregorio Huwett

John Dowland

## Intermission

Prelude, Fugue and Allegro, BWV 998

J. S. Bach

Prelude No. 4

H. Villa-Lobos

Variations on a Theme of Mozart:

Fernando Sor

Aires de la Mancha

Jeringonza

Ya llega el invierno

Coplilla

La Pastora

La Seguidilla

F. Moreno-Torroba

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Musical Arts



NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

School of Music

presents

# Michael Craddock

in a

Recital of Music for Lute and Guitar

assisted by

Carl Mayers, tenor

Monday, April 7

6:30

Concert Hall

## PROGRAM

Preambel Hans Neusidler  
Ach lieb mit leid  
Hie folget ein welscher tantz Wasch mesa  
Der hupff auff

Lachrimae (A Pavan) John Dowland

Sonata K. 11 Domenico Scarlatti  
Sonata K. 391

Folk Song Arrangements Benjamin Britten  
Master Kilby  
Sailor-boy  
I will give my love an apple  
The Soldier and the Sailor  
The Shooting of his Dear

## INTERMISSION

Five Bagatelles William Walton

Granada Isaac Albéniz  
Córdoba

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Musical Arts

North Texas State University  
School of Music

Graduate Recital

MICHAEL CRADDOCK, Guitarist

Monday, April 25, 1983                      6:30 p.m.                      Concert Hall

Suite IV for Lute, BWV 1006a. . . . . J. S. Bach  
Prélude (1685-1750)  
Loure  
Gavotte en Rondeau  
Menuets I & II  
Bourrée  
Gigue

Introduction, Theme, Variations, and  
Finale, Op. 64. . . . . Luigi Legnani  
(1790-1877)

---

Elogio de la Danza (1964). . . . . Leo Brouwer  
Lento (b. 1939)  
Obstinato

Sonatina Meridional . . . . . Manuel Ponce  
Campo (1882-1948)  
Copla  
Fiesta

Maxixe. . . . . Agustin Barrios  
(1885-1944)

Presented in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts

# North Texas State University School of Music

Lecture Recital

MICHAEL CRADDOCK

"Right Hand Lute Technique in the  
Sixteenth Century"

Wednesday, September 7, 1983 5:00 p.m. Organ Recital Hall

Ricerchar decimo. . . . . Vincenzo Capirola  
Gintil princep (1474-c. 1548)  
Balletto

Calata ala spagnola ditto terzetti. . . . .Joanambrosio Dalza  
(fl. 1508)

Prelude. . . . .Pierre Attaignant  
Tant que vivray (Sermisy) (c. 1494-1552)  
Gaillarde  
Sauterelle

Two Fantasias. . . . .Francesco da Milano  
(1497-1543)

Preambel. . . . .Hans Newsidler  
Elslein liebstes Elslein mein (Senfl) (1508-1563)  
Nach willen dein (Hofhaimer)  
Gassenhawer

Six Pieces from the Dowland Lutebook (c. 1600): Folger  
Shakespeare Library, V.b. 280 (olim 1610.1)  
The Cobler  
Robin is to the Greene wood Gonn  
Can she excuse  
Go from my windo  
Mall: Symes  
Lord Willoughby's Welcome Home

Presented in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Detail of the Lute Player in Simone Martini's <u>Investiture of St. Martin</u> (1324) . . . . .	5
2. Detail from <u>The Triumph of the Church over the Synagogue</u> by a follower of Jan van Eyck (c. 1430) . . . . .	6
3. Detail of the Lute Player in Hans Memling's <u>Christ with the Angel Musicians</u> (c. 1485). . .	7
4. Detail from a Painting by the Master of the Female Half-Lengths (c. 1520). . . . .	8
5. Woodcut from Judenkunig's <u>Ain schone kunstliche Underweisung</u> (1523) . . . . .	9
6. Woodcut from Agricola's <u>Musica instrumentalis deudsch.</u> . . . . .	11
7. <u>The Lute Player</u> , by Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629). . . . .	18
8. Woodcut from Valentin Bakfark's <u>Intabulatura</u> (1553) . . . . .	19
9. Woodcut from Sebastian Ochsenkun's <u>Tabulaturbuch</u> (1558) . . . . .	20
10. Francois Puget's <u>Reunion des Musiciens en 1688.</u> .	31

## Introduction

The present revival of interest in the lute and its music began in the late nineteenth century with the work of Oscar Chilesotti and Oswald Körte. Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940), an early pioneer of twentieth-century lute playing, was the first to be concerned with historical authenticity in the performance of lute music. It was not until the early 1970s, however, that the late Michael Schäffer began to demonstrate in a practical way the historical method of lute playing now known as "thumb-under." The most conspicuous modern lutenist schooled in this technique is Paul O'Dette, who has achieved excellent results with it.

Early in this modern revival, lute music was most often played by guitarists, either on the guitar or on the lute using guitar technique. Lute music was being rediscovered, but most of the technical aspects of Renaissance lute playing remained lost. Unlike the modern approach to the guitar, Renaissance lute playing was based on a principle of nearly equal usage of the right-hand thumb and fingers over the entire range of the instrument.<sup>1</sup> Since the main difference in sixteenth-century lute technique and modern guitar practice lies in the right hand where the sound is produced, playing

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<sup>1</sup>Marc Southard, "Sixteenth-Century Lute Technique" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1976), 5.

the lute with guitar technique can only produce results that are historically and musically inaccurate.

The principal sources of information on lute playing in the Renaissance are paintings, woodcuts, old lutes, and, of course, lute books--valuable not only for their instructions, but also because the music they contain is helpful in itself. The best instructions on thumb-under technique are found in the following lute books:

The Capirola Lute Book (c. 1517)

Hans Judenkünig: Ain schone kunstliche Underweisung (Vienna, 1523)

Hans Gerle: Musica Teusch (Nuremberg, 1532)

Musica und Tabulatur (Nuremberg, 1546)

Hans Newsidler: Ein Newgeordent Künstlich Lautenbuch (Nuremberg, 1536)

Adrian LeRoy: Instruction (Paris, 1557)

Matthaus Waissel: Lautenbuch (Frankfurt, 1592)

The descriptions of lute technique in these books can be clarified through the study of woodcuts that some of them contain and contemporary paintings. The books of Judenkunig, Gerle, and Newsidler offer the most complete instructions from the first half of the century and are enhanced by information in the Capirola Lute Book and in LeRoy's Instruction (which survives only in three English translations). Lute technique is contrasted with that of the vihuela in Juan Bermudo's Declaración de instrumentos musicales (Osuna, 1555) and Luís Venegas de Henestrosa's Libro de cefra nueva (Alcalá de

Henares, 1557). A somewhat clearer discussion of thumb-under technique is found in Waissel's Lautenbuch (Frankfurt, 1592).

None of the sources alone give a complete picture or even enough information to permit a retrieval of the numerous techniques employed by lutenists during the period. This is partly because of vagueness and partly because the lessons are elementary, having been written with beginners or amateurs in mind. One peculiarity typical of these books is that while they often give quite detailed information on some aspects of playing, they nevertheless fail to promote a thorough understanding because of a lack in overall perspective. Probably the writers assumed everyone had seen a lute played! Even with these shortcomings, the sources when taken as a whole offer a remarkably complete description of lute playing during the sixteenth century, revealing the technique in use and how it changed as the century progressed.

During the period of Renaissance lute practice a gradual change from thumb-under technique to the "thumb-out" style of the Baroque lutenists took place. Evolution in the style of lute music toward thicker texture, faster harmonic movement, and a more active bass line, as well as changes in the lute itself, forced a change in right hand technique by the beginning of the seventeenth century.

#### Origins of the Thumb-Under Technique

The thumb-under technique of the Renaissance was a

natural outgrowth of the plectrum technique of the Middle Ages. As polyphonic playing became increasingly popular during the last quarter of the fifteenth century, the plectrum was gradually discarded in favor of the fingers. The basic hand position that resulted remained standard for the first quarter of the sixteenth century and was not unknown at the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup>

The practice of playing the lute with a plectrum can be dated to the earliest time of European lute playing (early fourteenth century)<sup>3</sup> and was probably inherited from the Arabic culture. In fact, the oud is still played this way. In early pictorial sources, lutenists are shown with a long quill plectrum, usually held between the index and middle fingers of the right hand, and used to pluck single lines in alternating up and down strokes (see Figure 1). The lute itself, usually a small five- or six-course instrument, was held near the player's chest. The right forearm was held in a horizontal position, parallel to the strings, approaching the lute from the base directly below the bridge. Some early illustrations show the arm coming from below, as in Figure 2.<sup>4</sup>

The change to Renaissance thumb-under technique was not

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Nelson Amos, "Lute Practice and Lutenists in Germany between 1500 and 1750" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Iowa, 1975), 16.

<sup>4</sup>Paul Beier, "Right Hand Position in Renaissance Lute Technique," Journal of the Lute Society of America XII, (1979), 7.

Figure 1. Detail of the Lute Player in Simone Martini's Investiture of St. Martin (1324).



a sudden one. Famous players used plectra well into the sixteenth century (it is mentioned as late as 1523), while Tinctoris described playing with the fingers in his De Inventione et usu



Figure 2. Detail from The Triumph of the Church over the Synagogue by a follower of Jan van Eyck (c. 1430).



musicae (c. 1487).<sup>5</sup> At any rate, the transition was slow and must have started quite early, judging from the difficulty of the music in the earliest printed lute books (1507), which is in a highly developed, solo instrumental style. Apparently, lutenists began to use the fingers to enable them to play their own tenors over which to improvise, the right hand

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<sup>5</sup>Peter Danner, "Before Petrucci: The Lute in the Fifteenth Century," Journal of the Lute Society of America V (1972), 13.



position being changed very little. This early period of plucking with the fingers is described by Dorfmueller as "plectrum technique without a plectrum."<sup>6</sup> Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the similarity of the two positions.

One of the most famous plectrum-style players was Pietrobono, a singer and lutenist prominent in the musical

Figure 3. Detail of the Lute Player in Hans Memling's Christ with the Angel Musicians (c. 1485).

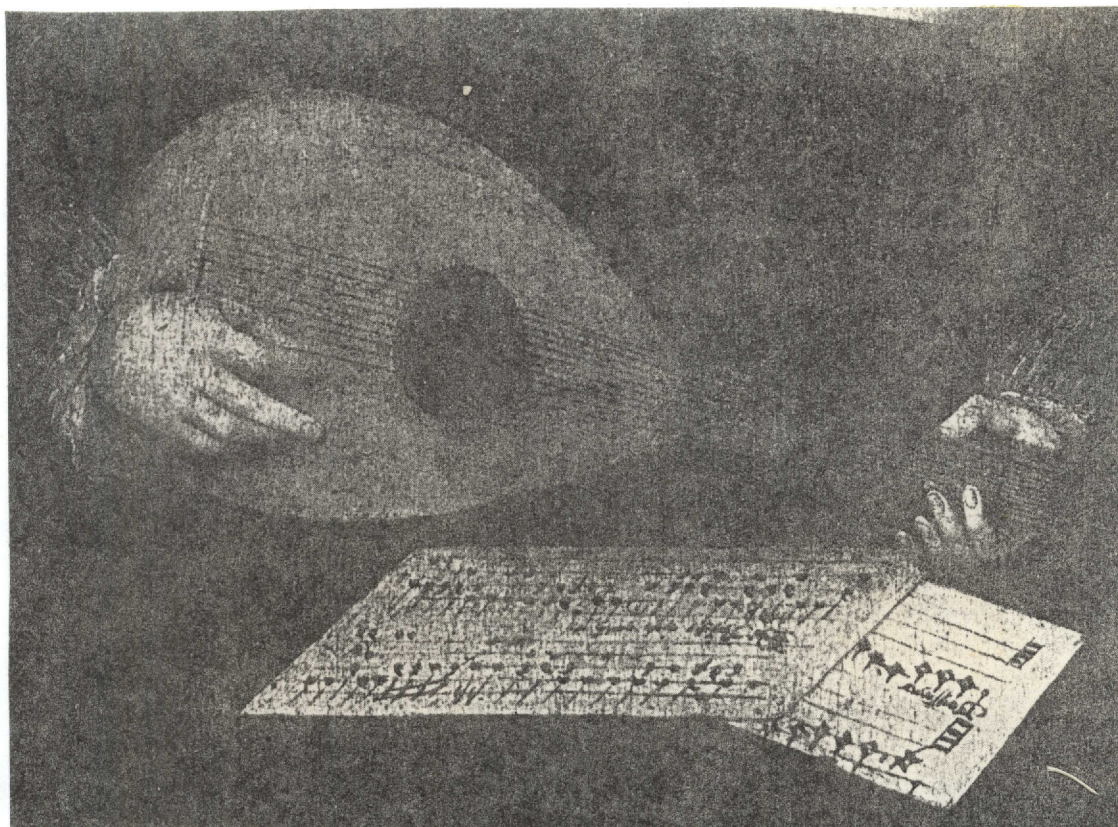


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<sup>6</sup>Kurt Dorfmueller, Studien zur Lautenmusik in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1967), 52, cited in Amos, op. cit., 17.



Figure 4. Detail from a Painting by the Master of the Female Half-Lengths (c. 1520).



life of Ferrara from about 1440 to the end of the century. Hailed by humanist writers at the time as a "rarissimo citharista," he was raised to the rank of cavaliere in 1484 (rare for a musician).<sup>7</sup> Pietrobono was described as improvising variations over a cantus firmus played by a second player or tenorista. It is significant that many of the duets in the lute books of Spinacino and Dalza (Petrucci: 1507-1508) are in a similar style: single division lines over a two- or

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<sup>7</sup>Lewis Lockwood, "Pietrobono and the Instrumental Tradition at Ferrara in the Fifteenth Century," Rivista Italiana di musicologia X (1975), 115-227.

three-part tenor. In fact, the similarity of thumb-under technique to the plectrum style is most obvious in single-line playing, where alternating downward strokes with the thumb and upward strokes with the forefinger replace the alternating plucking action of the plectrum. Division pieces, then, were a last stronghold of the old plectrum style.<sup>8</sup>

### Playing Position

The playing position for thumb-under technique is basically the same as that used with a plectrum during the Middle Ages: the lute is held horizontally; the forearm approaches the strings from below the bridge; and the arm, hand, and fingers are roughly parallel to the strings. In most sixteenth-century woodcuts and paintings, lute players are shown plucking near the rose, though occasionally they are seen plucking nearer the bridge. Figure 5, a woodcut from Judenkünig's Ain schone kunstliche Underweisung (1523), shows a lutenist (presumably Judenkünig himself) in a typical playing position. Figure 6 from Martin Agricola's Musica instrumentalis deudsch (Wittenberg, 1545), is similar.

It is clear from the detail of his instructions that Waissel believed the position of the right arm to be extremely important:

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<sup>8</sup>Bruce MacEvoy, "The Renaissance Thumb-Under Lute Technique," Divisions I/3 (July 1979), 7-8.

Figure 5. Woodcut from Judenkönig's Ain schone kunstliche Underweisung (1523).



Figure 6. Woodcut from Agricola's Musica instrumentalis deusch (1545).



The right arm is placed not too high, but almost in the middle behind the bridge, so that the hand is stretched out somewhat lengthwise, resting firmly on the little finger, which is placed on the top of the lute and held motionless.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Douglas Alton Smith, "The Instructions in Mattheus Waissel's Lautenbuch," Journal of the Lute Society of America VIII (1975), 57.



The placement of the little finger on the belly of the instrument was a prevalent feature of lute playing. This was common practice throughout the history of the lute and is mentioned in the majority of instruction books that discuss technique. Ludwig Iselin's instruction in his manuscript from about 1575 is typical:

Hold the little finger firmly on the belly.<sup>10</sup>  
 Earlier Gerle had described resting both the third and fourth fingers, a position sometimes seen in contemporary paintings:

. . . put the little finger and the ring  
 finger of the right hand on the [sound-  
 board], not on the [rose], a little behind  
 it.<sup>11</sup>

The position of the little finger on the soundboard is somewhat adjustable--the scarred bellies of old lutes verify its movement--but is normally about halfway between the rose and the bridge.<sup>12</sup>

### Thumb-Under Technique

Thumb-under was clearly the most common technique used during the period of Renaissance lute playing. The earliest description which could be interpreted as meaning thumb-under

<sup>10</sup>Beier, op. cit., 12.

<sup>11</sup>Jane Illingworth Pierce, "Hans Gerle: Sixteenth-Century Lutenist and Pedagogue" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1973), 216.

<sup>12</sup>MacEvoy, op. cit., 10-11.

is found in the Capirola Lute Book, an Italian collection from about 1517 compiled by a student of Capirola who identifies himself as "Vitale":

And the thumb of the right hand should be placed under the second [index] finger so that one finger does not meet the other in beating the strokes, one up and one down, etc.<sup>13</sup>

Hans Gerle, in Musica Teusch (1532), also implies thumb-under, however vaguely:

Thus one finger goes around the other, one downwards, the other upwards.<sup>14</sup>

The instructions in Hans Newsidler's Ein Newgeordent Underweisung (1536) are similar:

One strikes with the two aforementioned fingers moving around one another, the first downwards, the other upwards until the run is finished.<sup>15</sup>

. . . strike with the thumb and index fingers of the right hand moving around one another. The thumb begins and strikes downwards, and the index finger strikes upwards . . . .<sup>16</sup>

Any uncertainties about the proper use of the right hand are finally dispelled by Iselin:

Also, pay close attention that you accustom the fingers to strike and embellish by moving the index finger merrily up and back, and the thumb

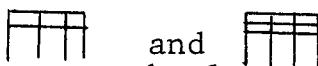

<sup>13</sup> Beier, op. cit., 10, translated by Otto Gombosi.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 10-11, translated by Paul O'Dette.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 11, translated by O'Dette.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., translated by O'Dette.

inwards into the hand. This gives the agility needed to play diminutions.

The runs or diminutions,  and  respectively, should be done on the lute with the thumb and index finger, one going around the other.<sup>17</sup>

Two books from the end of the thumb-under period, Matthäus Waissel's Lautenbuch (1592) and Thomas Robinson's Schoole of Musicke (1603), give the clearest explanations of the technique. In general, Waissel's instructions are the most exhaustive in the sixteenth century. His account of right hand technique is as follows:

The index finger strikes over the thumb, the thumb into the hand. This is better and contributes more to speed than when the index finger moves under the thumb into the hand.<sup>18</sup>

Thomas Robinson's book is the only original English source from this period (other English lute instruction books were translations of LeRoy's book of 1557). He is also quite specific about thumb-under technique:

. . . then with the thumb of your right hand (houlding the rest of the fingers straight forth before your thumb) neither to neere the strings nor too farre off, begin to strike the first string downward with the thumb onelie, and also striking with your thumb behind your fingers . . . then begin at the Trebles and so go upward viz., backward, striking them string by string with your forefinger

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 12, translated by O'Dette.

<sup>18</sup>Smith, op. cit., 57.

before your thumb, that is, houlding  
 down your thumb behind your fingers  
 . . . .<sup>19</sup>

It is significant that both Iselin and Waissel mention speed as an important function of lute playing, and that they believe thumb-under technique to be an important resource for its acquisition.

The practice of playing the lute thumb-under was prevalent everywhere in Europe with the exception of Spain, where the vihuela was played thumb-out. The only mention of thumb-under technique in a Spanish source is in Henestrosa's Libro in cifra nueva of 1557:

. . . there are four ways to make diminutions: one with the index finger of the right hand, which is called redoblar de dedillo [with the index finger going back and forth across the string], the second is the Castilian style, in which the thumb crosses over the index finger; the third way is the foreign style [figueta estranjera], which is the opposite, bending the index finger over the thumb; the fourth is with the index and middle fingers . . . .<sup>20</sup>

In practice, the forearm, wrist, and hand tend to move up and down when alternating thumb and index strokes--a movement that would also carry a plectrum quite quickly. The thumb, being shorter than the fingers, goes under them when

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<sup>19</sup>Thomas Robinson, The Schoole of Musicke (London, 1603), 2nd reprint ed. (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Ltd., 1975), fol. Bii.

<sup>20</sup>Beier, op. cit., 14, translated by Peter Danner.

plucking, and they go over ("around") it. The fingers move little by themselves, being carried through the strings by the motion of the arm. Besard later objected to this motion in his Thesaurus Harmonicus of 1603:

. . . that unseemly motion of the whole arm, which we cannot guard against too carefully . . . .<sup>21</sup>

Most lute books say little about the playing of chords. Usually a dot under a two-note chord indicates use of the fingers only, as LeRoy points out:

. . . although there be but one point or prick under one, two, or three letters, they must all be stricken with the fingers without the thumb.<sup>22</sup>

For five-note chords, LeRoy advises using the thumb for the two lowest notes if they are on adjacent strings.<sup>23</sup> In a similar situation Waissel, who gives the most complete instructions, says to use the index finger for two of the notes in a five-part chord.<sup>24</sup> Waissel also mentions the use of the ring finger:

If the chord has four voices, play it with the thumb, index, middle, and ring finger . . . .<sup>25</sup>

There is appreciably less arm movement when playing chords. Here the fingers do most of the work.

<sup>21</sup>Beier, op. cit., 19, translated by Julia Sutton.

<sup>22</sup>Southard, op. cit., 64.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>25</sup>Amos, op. cit., 56.

One other technique of Renaissance lute playing is what Judenkünig calls "Durchstreichen," or strumming through all the strings with a sweeping motion of the right hand thumb:

And when you are ready to learn the dances you will see four or five letters or numbers in a vertical chord. Stroke these with the thumb throughout.<sup>26</sup>

Stylistic features of lute music changed during the century. Especially influential on lute technique was a more active bass line. Since the thumb was more and more occupied there, the fingers were assigned the treble strings and the result was the eventual discontinuation of thumb-under technique. Iconographical evidence shows, however, that a few thumb-under players remained into the second or third decade of the seventeenth century.

#### The Rise of Thumb-Out

A chief difference between Renaissance and Baroque right-hand lute technique is the organization of fingerings. This was largely a matter of rhythm in the sixteenth century (as will be seen later), but by the early seventeenth century fingerings were determined by function and physical location--bass notes were played with the thumb, melodic and harmonic notes with the fingers. The thumb, which had been flexing under the hand, must now reach toward the rose and the arm must assume a slightly

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<sup>26</sup>Martha Blackman, "A Translation of Hans Judenkünig's Ain Schone Künstliche Underweisung . . . (1523), "Lute Society Journal XIV (1972), 36.



more vertical position to allow the thumb to reach a growing number of bass strings.

In the thumb-out position, then, the arm approaches the lute from above the bridge on the bass side, not from behind the bridge as in thumb-under position. Furthermore, the thumb is held stretched out so that it is closer to the rose than the fingers and moves outside them when alternating with the index finger, as it still sometimes must (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. The Lute Player, by Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629).



The change to thumb-out technique occurred around 1600, the new position being favored throughout the Baroque. The thumb actually began to move ahead of the fingers as early as mid-sixteenth century, as can be seen in woodcuts from Valentin Bakfark's Intabulatura of 1553 and Sebastian Ochsenkun's Tabulaturbuch of 1558 (Figures 8 and 9). The thumb-under posi-

Figure 8. Woodcut from Valentin Bakfark's Intabulatura (1553).



tion, however, was still favored as late as 1592 by Waissel, who warned against holding the thumb out. By 1603, Besard was recommending the thumb-out style in his Thesaurus Harmonicus, although the old technique was acceptable under certain circumstances:

. . . stretch out your Thombe with all the force you can, especially if thy Thombe be short, so that the other fingers may be carryed in a manner of a fist, and let the Thombe be held higher then them, this in



the beginning will be hard. Yet they which haue a short Thombe may imitate those which strike the strings with the Thombe vnder the other fingers, which though it be nothing so elegant, yet to them it will be more easie . . . .<sup>27</sup>

Figure 9. Woodcut for Sebastian Ochsenkun's Tabulaturbuch (1558).




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<sup>27</sup>Robert Dowland, A Varietie of Lute-Lessons (London, 1610), facsimile reprint ed. with notes by Edgar Hunt (London: Schott and Co., Ltd., 1958), fol. C.

Further renunciation of the old style of playing is found in Nicolas Vallet's Paradisius Musicus Testudinis of 1618:

You must also avoid using the thumb all the time touching the courses, and especially bending it toward the inside of the hand, as many inept players are still doing today, which is a clumsy and ridiculous mistake. For the thumb must always bend outwards and not into the hand; here is what causes the motion of the entire body and many violent grimaces.<sup>28</sup>

In his lute book (London, British Library, MS Sloane 1021), Johann Stobäus also advises using the thumb-out style:

The thumb should strike outwards, not inwards as the older generation does, and commonly the Netherlanders and elder Germans. For it has been demonstrated to be much better to strike with the thumb outwards. This sounds clearer, crisper, and brighter. The other sounds very dull [faull] and muffled.<sup>29</sup>

The concept of tone quality was not mentioned in lute treatises of the Renaissance but was important to Stobäus and other Baroque writers. Besard, Mersenne, and Mace all recommended playing closer to the bridge, which tends to produce a brighter sound. In addition to a position close to the bridge, the thumb-out hand position has an inherently clearer tone because of the sharper angle at which the fingers contact the strings. In contrast, the tone produced with thumb-under technique is considerably rounder and warmer, since more surface area of a fingertip

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<sup>28</sup>Peter Danner, "Lute Technique and the Guitar: A Further Look at Historical Background," Soundboard VII/2 (May 1980), 62.

<sup>29</sup>Beier, op. cit., 20, translated by O'Dette.

hits the string. Enriquez Valderrábano, in his Sylva de Sirenas (Valladolid, 1547), said that the vihuela was also played thumb-out for this reason--the vihuela is not as resonant as the lute.<sup>30</sup> Stobäus' book is also noteworthy because it tells us that John Dowland, probably the most famous lutenist of his day, began playing with thumb-under technique but later changed to the thumb-out position.<sup>31</sup>

The demise of the older style of playing was evident by 1632 when Piccinini failed even to mention it in his Intavolatura di Liuto e di Chitarrone, Libro Primo.

To do groppi and tirate in the ordinary way, you must stretch out the thumb holding the index finger under it at right angles (come una croce).<sup>32</sup>

Burwell and Mace, later in the century, had this to say:

. . . it [the thumb] must be before all the rest of the hand marching as the Captaine of the fingers . . . .<sup>33</sup>

. . . span out your Thumb amongst the basses . . . .<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup>MacEvoy, op. cit., 12.

<sup>31</sup>Danner, "Lute Technique," 62.

<sup>32</sup>Stanley Buetens "The Instructions of Alessandro Piccinini," Journal of the Lute Society of America II (1969), 10.

<sup>33</sup>The Burwell Lute Tutor (c. 1660-1672), facsimile ed. with notes by Robert Spencer (Leeds: Boethius Press, 1974), 16.

<sup>34</sup>Thomas Mace, Musick's Monument . . . (London, 1676, facsimile ed. (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, (1966), 72.

### Thumb-Under Fingering and Its Effect

Since Renaissance lute music reflects the influence of the earlier plectrum style--much of it consisting of single-line passages interspersed with a few chords--right hand fingering plays an important role in its interpretation. Single-line runs, which had been played with a plectrum during the fifteenth century, became a prominent feature of sixteenth-century lute style, and thumb-index alternation, partly because of the agility it contributes, was considered most beneficial to this style.

Even lute books with the scantiest of instructions usually include a discussion of thumb-index alternation in the playing of single-line passages. Also, surviving lute music generally contains at least some right hand fingerings. Most of the early sources indicate these fingerings clearly, although the marks may be placed only in diminutions. Most often they indicate when the thumb is not to be used.

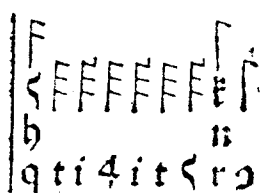
Single lines, then, (with the exception of long notes--semibreves or longer), were fingered with only the thumb and index finger. Strong beats or strong subdivisions of beats were played downward with the thumb, while weak notes were played upward with the index finger. The fingering for each note was therefore determined by its metrical position. This results in alternately strong and weak strokes, which reflects a stylistic tradition proper for most Renaissance instrumental music: that of articulating notes in groups of two, with

greater emphasis on the first note of each pair. Similar articulation patterns were common in recorder and viol practice, as described in Sylvestro Ganassi's Opera Intitulata Fontegara (1535) and Regola Rubertina (1542). Tomas de Sancta Maria discusses corresponding keyboard fingerings in Arte de Tañer Fantasia . . . (1565).

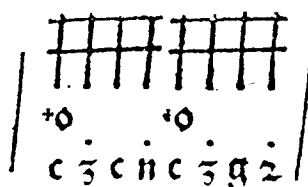
Right-hand fingerings were indicated in lute tablatures in several ways. In French and Italian tablatures, notes to be played with the index fingers were marked with dots:



In early German tablatures, such as that of Judenkunig, index finger strokes were indicated by hooks attached to the flags:



Later German lutenists indicated the index finger strokes with dots under the rhythmic "ladders":



The fingering instructions in the lute books printed by Petrucci between 1507 and 1511 read:

Note also that all notes without a dot written underneath are to be played downward; and those with a dot written underneath are to be plucked upward. An exception is made when more than one note must be plucked; in such cases, the dot calling for an upward stroke will not be found.<sup>35</sup>

Judenkunig and Attaignant had similar advice:

And when the letters are written one after the other with fusae [two flags] over them, strike the first downwards with the thumb, the next upwards with the index finger of the right hand. Note that each fusa which has a line [hook] above it should always be struck upwards.<sup>36</sup>

Also note that those [notes] where there is a dot under must be touched with the finger and the others with the thumb.<sup>37</sup>

Newsidler's book is particularly valuable for its fingering indications, having dots in many pieces. He is particularly strict about thumb-index alternation and mentions it several times:

Each time you see a dot . . ., strike upward with the forefinger, making certain you begin with the thumb first.<sup>38</sup>


<sup>35</sup>Claudio Sartori, "A Little-Known Petrucci Publication: The Second Book of Lute Tablatures by Francesco Bossinensis," Musical Quarterly XXXIV/2 (April 1948), 239.

<sup>36</sup>Beier, op. cit., 9.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Paul O'Dette, "Communications," Journal of the Lute Society of America XII (1979), 99.



 When you see one of these in a piece it is called a little run (gantz Laiflein), and has to be struck very rapidly with the thumb and forefinger alternating.<sup>39</sup>

The thumb begins and moves downward and the forefinger simply goes upward . . . one has to alternate striking these fingers, one down and the other up until the run is completed.<sup>40</sup>

Gerle's instructions in Musica und Tabulatur read:

Whenever there is a run, you must begin it with the thumb and [strike] the next [note] with the index finger.<sup>41</sup>

Waissel discusses the technique in his Lautenbuch as well, and also points out an exception to the alternation rule:

In coloraturas, only the thumb and the index finger are used, one after the other, the thumb striking downwards and the index finger upwards.<sup>42</sup>

The thumb plucks down and the index finger up, one after the other but in such a manner that all coloraturas, whether short or long, are ended with the index finger.<sup>43</sup>

It also occasionally happens that one must play several letters in succession in the bass with the thumb. This happens only in the semiminims, with four to a beat.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Marc Southard and Suzana Cooper, "A Translation of Hans Newsidler's Ein Newgeordent Künstlich Lautenbuch . . . (1536), Journal of the Lute Society of America XI (1978), 16.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>41</sup>Beier, op. cit., 11.

<sup>42</sup>Smith, op. cit., 70.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 72.

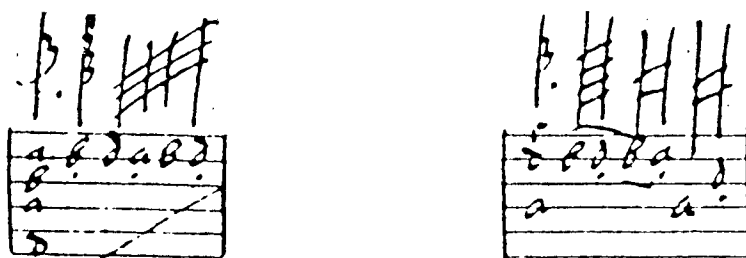
<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

Some lute collections do not have fingering dots.

Melchiorre Barberis includes a rule for such occasions in his Intabulatura di Lauto of 1546:

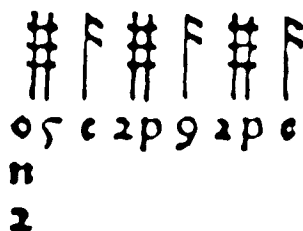
. . . and if you find a book which lacks the dots, note this rule: if the minute are an odd number, the first must be played upwards; if the minute are even, the first must be played downwards, following the order of one stroke upwards and one stroke downwards, those that go upwards always with the finger, that do downwards with the thumb in sequence . . . .<sup>4 5</sup>

Following this rule preserves the thumb-index stroke in dotted rhythms, even at the cost of repeating the thumb:



The alternation of the thumb and index finger is not confined to single-line runs; the thumb may have to alternate between treble and bass as in Example 1:

Example 1. Alternation of thumb between treble and bass.

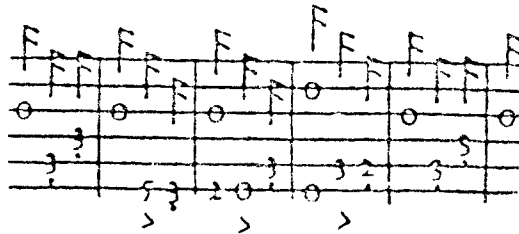


<sup>4 5</sup>Beier, op. cit., 9.

Fingering notation was important not only in single-line passages, but also in polyphonic ones, where each voice was notated, if possible, in the strong-weak pattern. In triple meter, the pattern generally used was thumb-index-thumb, thumb-index-thumb, but on occasion thumb-index-index was used.

Some of the most precise indications of right hand fingerings are found in Petrucci's publications for lute, especially the Libro Quarto of 1508 by Joanambrosio Dalza. Dalza carefully indicated fingerings to emphasize various metrical and accentual features in the music including hemiola, syncopations, triplets, and arpeggios. The "Calata spagnola ditto terzetti" contains numerous examples of these effects:

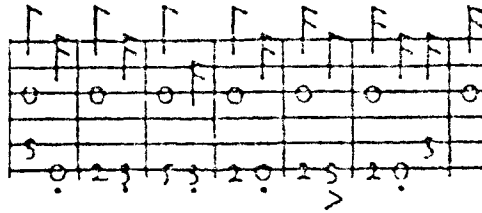
Example 2. Clarification of phrasing.



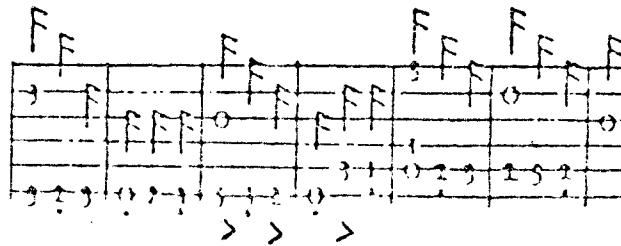
Example 3. Emphasis of cadential figure.



Example 4. Accented syncopation.



Example 5. Hemiola.



The notation of thumb-index alternation is found in the majority of lute tablatures in the Renaissance and continues into the Baroque as late as the Burwell Lute Tutor (c. 1660-1672). Besard advises it generally in the Thesaurus Harmonicus (1603), but much of the music here has a faster moving bass line and so it requires the index and middle fingers to play the upper part since the thumb is otherwise occupied.<sup>46</sup> This naturally gives a less pronounced strong-weak pulse. Even more pieces in the Novus Partus (Besard, 1617) use index and middle, but Besard still qualifies:

If the diminutions are quite fast, then I would not advise you to use the first two fingers, but rather the thumb and index finger.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Beier, op. cit., 19.

<sup>47</sup>Danner, "Lute Technique," 63.

Piccinini, while also recommending thumb-index alternation, does so with this warning:

Be careful not to strike the thumb note more powerfully than the note of the other finger, but rather equally so that you cannot tell any difference between them.<sup>4 8</sup>

Clearly, by this time (1632) the Renaissance ideal of strong-weak pulses had faded completely.

### Lutes

The design of the lute itself is an important factor relating to lute technique. Probably one reason the thumb-under technique has only recently come to light is that proper instruments have not been available. Earlier in this century lutes were not built according to historical design; for example, they were much heavier than their prototypes. In the past few years, luthiers have become more and more attentive to authenticity, and have been building lutes carefully patterned after surviving instruments.

Throughout most of the sixteenth century, lutes generally had six courses, and were small, pear-shaped instruments with relatively narrow shoulders (as in Figure 4). Lutes of Laux Maler and Hans Frei, two famous Bologna makers, were of this type. These lutes are well suited to the thumb-under technique because their size makes the position quite comfortable. The lutes in the woodcuts of Bakfark and Ochsenkun are much larger

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<sup>4 8</sup>Buetens, op. cit., 10.

and rounder--a possible reason they were played thumb-out (see Figures 8 and 9). When such lutes became standard at the beginning of the seventeenth century, thumb-under technique became less prevalent, since it was impossible to put the arm in a position parallel to the strings.

In addition to changes in lute size, more and more strings were added to the lute. By 1600, eight- or nine-course lutes became popular, and ten courses became standard soon after. New instruments such as the theorbo had even more strings (see Figure 10), reflecting the Baroque desire for an expanded range. While

Figure 10. Francois Puget's Réunion des Musiciens en 1688.





many lute backs of popular makers were in use for generations (Mace recommends those of Maler in 1676),<sup>49</sup> the addition of more courses alone would have made the change in hand position necessary.

Tone quality has already been mentioned as a consideration of the early Baroque players, and the instruments themselves play an important role here as well. The small, narrow-bodied lutes of the Renaissance, with shorter string length and, therefore, higher pitch, were usually made of very hard woods and consequently have an inherently bright tone because of their quick response and emphasis of the higher overtones. The lutes of the later period were fashioned more often from softer woods such as yew, and this, plus their larger size and rounder shape, gives them a darker tone. The technique associated with each style of lute tends to compliment the inherent qualities of each type of instrument.<sup>50</sup>

### Conclusion

The proper laying technique for any historical instrument is essential to the understanding of its music. Since thumb-under was the prevailing lute technique during the Renaissance, it is of utmost importance in the performance of

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<sup>49</sup>Mace, op. cit., 48.

<sup>50</sup>Beier, op. cit., 21-22.

lute music from the period, and is an aid to interpreting qualities in the music which must have been obvious and significant to musicians at the time. Thumb-under technique is also a link to the plectrum style of the Middle Ages--much Renaissance lute music, consisting of running passages interspersed with a few chords, reflects this style.

Although thumb-under technique was discussed in sixteenth-century lute treatises time and again, the basics of thumb-under technique have only recently resurfaced. Thus far, traits discovered to be inherent in the technique include ease of legato playing, agility in diminutions, and a clear rhythmic pulse. Dance tempos once thought impossible can now be played, and rhythmic accents are provided by the arm motion associated with the technique. Ornamented intabulations of vocal pieces can also be performed at the proper tempo.

Finally, it should be noted that no one way is necessarily correct. The source documents reveal a limited amount of information, but experimentation by skilled performers based on the documents continues to yield new insights into the technique and the music to which it was applied.

APPENDIX  
TRANSCRIPTION OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example 1.



Musical notation for Example 1, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both staves have a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The top staff contains a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff contains a bass line with a dotted quarter note followed by two quarter notes.

Example 2.



Musical notation for Example 2, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both staves have a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The top staff contains a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a triplet of eighth notes and a quarter note. The bottom staff contains a bass line with a dotted quarter note followed by two quarter notes.

Example 3.



Musical notation for Example 3, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both staves have a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The top staff contains a melodic line with quarter and eighth notes, including a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff contains a bass line with a dotted quarter note followed by two quarter notes.

Example 4.



Example 5.

Example 5 is a short musical exercise in G major (one sharp). It consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff contains a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, followed by a quarter note G4 with an accent (>). The bass staff contains a sequence of quarter notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3.

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