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Publication Date
2004

Peer reviewed
Johannes Tinctoris on the Invention of the Spanish Plucked Viola

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The origins of most musical instruments in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are obscure. Many are derivations from and subspecies of even earlier instruments whose ancient origins cannot be traced. Equally problematic is the fact that throughout the ages there were constant changes of constructional details, resulting in an eventual reclassification into distinct instruments. Thus, it is rare in the history of musical instruments to have access to the documents that give the approximate date and circumstances surrounding the invention of an instrument, as well as to contemporary iconographical evidence that supports those documents.

Johannes Tinctoris, the renowned Flemish theorist and composer, described the origin and physiognomy of an instrument called *viola* in his music treatise *De inventione et usu musice*, written in Naples about 1480 and published there between 1481 and 1483. This is what he had to say: "Si quidem: hispanorum invento: ex lyra processit instrumentum quod ipsi ac Itali violam Gallici vero dimidium leutm vocant. Quo quidem viola in hoc a leuto differt: quo leutum multo majus ac testudinum est: ista vero plana: ac (ut plurimum) ex utroque latere incurvata." (Indeed the invention of the Spaniards, the instrument which they and the Italians call *viola* and the French *demi-luth* is descended from the lute. However, it differs from the lute in that the lute is larger and shaped like a tortoise shell whereas it is flat and in most cases curved inwards on each side.)

Tinctoris's interest in the origins of instruments, their developments and derivations, their constructional details, and their contemporary performance practices, is clearly seen in his choice of the title for the treatise, "On the Invention and Practice of Music." It was the most humanistic of Tinctoris's treatises and included references to the works of Ovid, Virgil, Horace, Statius, Seneca, Manlius, Quintilianus, and Cicero. Tinctoris's concept of the *De inventione* is indebted to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* where stories are linked by the common theme of transformation. Indeed, Tinctoris identifies Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as his source for Apollo's lyre playing when he discusses lute technique.²

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Writing about the origins of instruments was not a major concern for music theorists before Tinctoris. If the origin of an instrument was ever mentioned, the source referred to was a quotation, either from Greek or Roman myth or from the Bible. For instance, Paulus Paulirinus in his Liber viginti artium, written at Pilsen between 1459 and 1463, does just that as he cites the legends of Orpheus’s invention and naming of the harp (arpa) and King David’s invention and naming of the psaltery (psalterium). Tinctoris too retells the well-known legend of Mercury inventing the lyra from an empty tortoise shell. In his discussion of contemporary string instruments Tinctoris cites a type of fiddle invented by the Greeks, the rebec invented by the French, the ghterra invented by the Catalans, the celtai invented by the Italians, the sabura invented by the Turks, and the viola invented by the Spaniards. While he offers no information about when and where these instruments were actually invented—or do we know if what little he does say is correct—he is not mistaken when he notes that German alterations to the lute were from his own time. These included the addition of strings, the invention of brass strings, and the development of a polyphonic manner of playing. Tinctoris also praises musicians named Orbus and Henricus as virtuosi in the new lute style.

No other music treatises from the time of the De inventione that deal with musical instruments mention the invention of a plucked string instrument in Spain. Bartolomeus Ramis de Pareja in his treatise Musica practica, published in Bologna in 1482, for instance, briefly discusses several instruments, many of which are keyboard instruments. Ramis describes two methods of tuning for the five-string lyra. In his De inventione Tinctoris uses the term lyra generically to denote string instruments with a fingerboard; specifically, the lute. Ramis may have been following Tinctoris’s classification, for it is possible that he knew Tinctoris’s De inventione in manuscript. It may be for this reason that some scholars suppose that Ramis’s lyra is the lute. The problem with this theory is that the relevant texts contain several crucial textual and typographical errors, and only after the necessary emendations do Ramis’s tunings come close to the tuning of the five-course lute. On the other hand, Ramis’s acquaintance with the newly invented Spanish instrument is also conceivable. He had after all spent more than thirty years in Spain before he came to Italy in the early 1470s, the time when he most likely began writing the Musica practica. Nevertheless, the jury is still out on whether Ramis’s lyra specifically denotes the Spanish plucked viola.

Another ambiguous reference is in a treatise on playing instruments, written by a certain Fulan, “a Moor of the Kingdom of Granada” [inventa à Fulan mauro regni Granatiae], and translated into Latin by an anonymous writer about 1496 or 1497 with the help of a Brother Jayme Salvà. The work deals with “the art of playing

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4 For Ramis’s access to Tinctoris’s treatise, see Howell, “Ramos de Pareja,” 33-34.


6 The manuscript seems to have been lost. Henry George Farmer, Historical Facts for the Arabian Musical Influence (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 97-101, includes a reproduction of the text and an English translation. I have also consulted the text reproduced in Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, Historia de las ideas estéticas en España, rev. ed., vol. 1 (Madrid: Consejo superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1962), 525-56. Jaime Villanueva, Viaje literario a las iglesias de España, 14 (Madrid: Impresor de la Real Academia de la
the *lambutum* and other similar instruments* [ars de pulsatione lambuti, et aliorum similium instrumentorum] such as *cytara* and *viola*. These terms may be the Latin rendition for instruments such as the lute, gittern (and/or harp), and fiddle (and/or *rihuela*). The treatise takes up the topics of intabulation and fretting which are explained with illustrations in Arabic musical notation. It is difficult to believe that the original Arabic treatise described the performance practices of some European instruments of the late fifteenth century, even though the anonymous translator used the names of the contemporary instruments.9

In the Renaissance, there were several methods of musical instrument classification because theorists followed the traditional systems and often modified them to fit their own.10 The surviving sections on musical instruments in the *De inventione* consist of a chapter (tercio libro) on the *tibia* and a chapter (libro quarto) on the *lyra*. Tinctoris divided the latter into two parts, one on the origin and structure of several string instruments and another on the contemporary performance practices of those instruments. The instruments described are, in the order of their appearance, the lute, the *viola*, the rebec, the *ghittera*, the *celuta*, and the Turkish *tambura*.11 Their common characteristic is the presence of a fingerboard over which strings are stretched.

There was also a tradition of using terms for musical instruments in both generic and specific senses. Therefore, the correlation of a particular instrument with the terms used in the contemporary documents is a complicated one. We must bear in mind that the identification of the term *viola* is problematic, for the true identity of this instrument may be concealed in the varying terminology used by the writers and theorists of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Tinctoris was conscientious about the terminology he used. For instance, he lists various names for the lute, such as the *lyra*, *testudo*, and *leutum*. Furthermore, he points out that the Spanish *viola* was called the *dimidium leutum* in France, that rebec was a French name but others called it the *marionetta*, and the gittern was spelled either *ghittera* or *ghitterna*. Tinctoris mentions two kinds of *viola*, one invented by the Spaniards and another by the Greeks. In the section on the performance practice of the Spanish *viola*, on the other hand, Tinctoris introduces two new terms: *viola cum arculo* and *viola sine arculo*. The terminology raises several questions. Are these obscure instruments of the Renaissance? Does the terminology adopted by Tinctoris denote instruments more commonly known by other names? Are these two different instruments or the same instrument distinguished by the practice of two different playing techniques?

The term *viola* (or its variations) had been in use long before Tinctoris recorded it in the *De inventione*. One of the earliest occurrences may be in the *Viaticum*, a Latin translation of an Arabic medical treatise of Abu Ja’far ibn al-Jazzar (d. 979) by Constantine the African (d. after 1087). In this, the author recommends that the patients of mental stupor listen to musical instruments such as *viola, campanula* (bell?), and the like to improve

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their condition. References to a variety of instruments with similar names, such as the *viola cum arculo* and the *viola sine arculo*, increased in literary documents of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: *viola* or *viola* in Italian, *viele* or *vielle* in French, *viuella* or *vibuela* in Spanish, *viele* or *fydele* in English, and *vedel* in German. In Spain, a stanza in *Poema de Alfonso Oscano*, written for Alfonso XI of Castile (1311-50) tells us that the coronation ceremonies of the King were celebrated with performances on musical instruments that included la *viulula*, el *laud*, el *roby*, and el *saltario*. Juan Ruiz, archpriest of Hita, in his *El libro de buen amor*, written about 1330 (or 1343), listed thirty-seven musical instruments, among them the *viuella de arco* and the *viuella de pendula*. These instruments are not simply Spanish equivalents of other string instruments such as the lute, harp or gittern, for he mentions them in close proximity to the *viuella*.

A contemporary of Ruiz may offer iconographical evidence showing that Ruiz's *viuella de arco* was a bowed instrument. The drawing of an instrument inscribed with the word *viola* in a manuscript of the second half of the fourteenth century depicts an instrument with an oblong shape, two f-shaped sound-holes, a short raised fingerboard, a raised string-holder with a tailpiece, a f-shaped pegbox with three long pegs, and three or four strings. A bow (inscribed *arcus viola*) is depicted near the *viola*. Ruiz praised the *viuella de arco* because its "sweet sounds lull us asleep at one moment but [its] commanding voice awakens us to lofty thoughts at the next." In remark that recall Ruiz's sentiments about the *viuella de arco*, Tintorius confesses that the *viola cum arculo* and rebeck "induce piety and stir my heart most ardently to the contemplation of heavenly joys."  

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12 See Burnett, "European Knowledge," 2-3, for the text and translation. Burnett translates "viola" as "fiddle.”


15 See Wright, "The Medieval Gittern and Cithole," 39; and Stevenson, *Spanish Music*, 45. The exact nature of the *viuella de pendula* is uncertain; the term implies that it was played with a plectrum. The absence of the term *viuella de mano* may imply that the finger-plucking technique on the *viuella* was not cultivated at that time. Tintorius's distinction of the *viola cum arculo* and the *viola sine arculo* is similar to Ruiz's classification.

16 Reproduced in Albert P. de Mirimonde, *Astrologie et musique* (Geneva: Editions Minkoff, 1977), 219, pl. 138. Compare this *viola* with two other instruments, one in the same plate and another in pl. 139 (both are inscribed "viola."). On the problems of transmission of the illustrations of the musical instruments in the Middle Ages, see Zdravo Blašković, "The Understanding and Misunderstanding the Terminology and Iconography of Instruments in Pendulini's Abridgment of *Introductorium Matis in Astronomiam*", *Music in Art: International Journal for Music Iconography* 23, nos. 1-2 (1998): 23-32. I am grateful to Professor Blašković for making available his article to me.


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On the whole, Tinctoris uses the term *viola* in a generic sense, though he makes efforts to classify this instrument by its origin and by its playing techniques. From his emphasis on the use of the bow, we can infer that he regarded the term *viola* principally as denoting a bowed instrument. His remark about the universal use of the *viola cum arculo* in every sort of composition and in the recitation of epics implies that it was a widely cultivated instrument. In the *De inventione*, Tinctoris specifically mentions that he was impressed by the performance of the brothers Carolus and Johannes Orbis of Bruges on the *viola cum arculo*. Tinctoris’s “Orbus brothers” may be the Burgundian instrumentalists Jean and Charles Fernandez, sons of the blind lute and *vielle* player Jehan Fernandez. This identification suggests that the *viola cum arculo* is the instrument called *vielle* in Burgundian documents and thus most likely a medieval fiddle.

When sections on physiognomy and performance practices on the *viola cum arculo* are compared with corresponding sections on the *viola sine arculo*, it becomes clear that the latter is a plucked instrument. Tinctoris remarks that in France the new Spanish *viola* was called *dimidum leutum*, a nomenclature indicating its association with the lute, a plucked string instrument. The adjective *dimidum* implies a smallness of size and highness of pitch—features that correspond with Tinctoris’s statement that the Spanish *viola* was smaller than the lute. Documentary and iconographical sources indicate the existence and use of several sizes of lute, including the soprano lute, throughout the sixteenth century, a practice that may go back to the previous century. Some lutenists may have equated the soprano lute with the Spanish plucked *viola* because of their similarity in pitch; they may have even substituted the new Spanish instrument for the soprano lute in ensemble performance once it became available to them. Therefore, it is conceivable that the French (perhaps denoting musicians from the Low Countries as well), noticing similarities in playing techniques and size, applied the term more familiar to them.19

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20 Tinctoris’s mention of the French name for the Spanish plucked *viola* implies its dissemination to the northern countries shortly after its invention. A search for the appearance of the term *dimidum leutum* and iconographical evidence of the Spanish plucked *viola* in France and Burgundy in the second half of the fifteenth century has, however, failed to confirm Tinctoris’s testimony. Wright, “The Medieval Gittern and Citeole,” 21, states that the term does not appear in any French dictionary and suggests that it may be a local expression from Tinctoris’s homeland of Flanders. There is the depiction of an instrument that resembles *viuela de mano*, dated 1514, in the Eddebo Church in Uppland, Sweden; see Kenneth Sparr, “Die Gitarre in Schweden bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Gitarre & Lauten* 14 (1992): 58. A plucked instrument with a slightly incurving waist is depicted in the Church of St. Sebalus, Nuremberg, attributed to Peter Vischer the Younger (1487-1528); reproduced in Freerster. V. Grunfeld, *The Art and Times of the Guitar: An Illustrated History of Guitars and Guitarists* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 53, pl. 33. Two depictions of an instrument with an incurving waist and a tail piece (one played with a bow and another with fingers) can be found in the church of St. Pierre-St. Paul of Gonesse (dated about 1508); reproduced and discussed in Joel Dugot, “Parcours, décrets et pièces,” *Imago Musicae* 4 (1987): 240-42, figs. 1, 2, and 3.

There is one ambiguous term relating to the Spanish plucked *viola*. Juan Bermudo in his *Declaracion de instrumentos musicales* (Osuna, 1555), f. 96, makes a passing mention of an instrument he called *viuela de Flandes.* The most accepted opinion in the current musicological literature is to identify it with the lute, for the term appears in the phrase “el laud, o viuela de Flandes”; see Robert Stevenson, *Juan Bermudo* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 5; and John Roberts, “Some Notes on the Music of the Viueldists,” *Lute Society Journal* 7 (1965): 24. If this interpretation is correct, the lute was a foreign instrument in the eyes of at least one authoritative Spanish theorist. It is not known why the lute was called the *viuela de Flandes.* The lute appears to have evolved from the Arabic oud in Spain in the mid-thirteenth century.
Tintorinis's detailed information on the physiognomical peculiarity of the Spanish plucked viola in the De inventione suggests that he had firsthand knowledge of the instrument. Still open to question is when and where Tintorinis became familiar with the latest developments in musical instrument making in Spain. When he writes in his treatise of having heard the Catalanian women play the gittern, he may be referring to a trip he made to Spain shortly before he compiled the De inventione in Naples around 1480. After his stay in the northeastern part of the Iberian Peninsula, Tintorinis may have visited Valencia from which come the earliest iconographical sources depicting an instrument whose constructional features match with Tintorinis's description of the Spanish plucked viola.

Throughout the Middle Ages, geographical and political situations in the Iberian Peninsula enriched the mixture of different cultures. Some Muslim and Christian rulers are known to have been patrons both of the wandering troubadours and jongleurs as well as of Arab, Jewish, and Christian scholars from many European and non-European countries. This cultural exchange created a rich and colorful instrumental heritage that stimulated the transmission of instruments and the craft of instrument making. Many musical instruments must have spread from Spain to other European countries, and vice versa, considering Spain's position as the crossroads between Europe, Africa, and the East.

The cultivation of a variety of musical instruments from both East and West in medieval Spain may be seen in the manuscript of Cantigas de Santa Maria, the renowned collection of monophonic songs assembled at the court of Alfonso the Wise, King of Castile and Léon (1252-84). It contains forty miniatures depicting over

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22 The presence of Arabs in the Iberian Peninsula and their cultivation of Arabic musical instruments during the Middle Ages suggest that such instruments were made by Arab craftsmen in Spain. A list of instruments made by al-Shaqqandi (d. 1231) in Seville gives an indication of what was then in vogue in early thirteenth-century Spain. Among twenty instruments he cites, there appear to be several string instruments: kathara, qaraa, rukub, rita, and ud. Al-Shaqqandi testifies that the center for the manufacture of instruments was Seville, from where many instruments were exported to other parts of Spain as well as to North Africa. The flourishing craft of musical instrument making by the Arabs in the thirteenth century is also described by Ibn Sa'id al-Maghribi (d. 1280). For these documents, see Stevenson, Spanish Music, 22. The classic study of Arabic music is Henry George Farmer, A History of Arabian Music to the Xth Century, reprint ed. (London: Luzac and Company, 1973). See also Francesco Salvadore-Daniel, The Music and Musical Instruments of the Arab, reprint ed. (Portland, Maine: Longwood Press, 1976). For the Arabic treatises, see Farmer, The Sources of Arabian Music (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965). Farmer also discusses Arabic musical instruments in his Studies in Oriental Musical Instruments, unabridged republication (Boston: Longwood Press, 1978).

23 Possibly the earliest surviving document written in Spain by a Spaniard that categorizes musical instruments organologically is the seventh-century treatise Symposiaca by Isidore of Seville (ca. 559-636). There, musical instruments are divided into two types, organica and rhythmica. The instruments classified as rhythmica are "barbites," "ciubara," "fides," "fulcila," "indica," "ylla," "pecten," "phoeemic," and "psalterium." All of these appear to have been string instruments, although the identification and the exact nature of some of them remain unclear. The instruments are listed and discussed in Stevenson, Spanish Music, 6-8.

eighty instruments. The instruments are roughly categorized into two groups: string and wind (with a few additional percussion instruments). There are several types of string instruments that carry a fingerboard, played either with a bow or plectrum. Since the Cantigas is the earliest source that depicts many of the instruments, some of which show physiognomical and constructional features that are different from the later "Western" counterparts, we should consider the possibility of classifying them either as Eastern instruments, prototypes of later Western instruments, or as representing transitional stages in the development of Western instruments. 25

The existence of Western musical instruments in medieval Spain and the close similarity in structure and construction between some of the Arab instruments and Western ones lead us to suppose that Spanish instrument makers had access to the constructional methods and physiognomical details of Arabic musical instruments as well as to those of the European musical instruments that had been developed during the Roman Empire and the early Middle Ages (some of them based on the Greek, Egyptian, and Arab prototypes). The cultivation of a wide variety of string instruments by the Spaniards in the Iberian Peninsula during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries fostered the invention of a new instrument.

From the mid-fifteenth century onward, artists from the Kingdom of Aragon in Valencia began to depict a string instrument with an elliptically shaped soundboard with a sharply incurving waist, a thin body with a flat side and flat back, a flat bridge, a long fingerboard, and a reverse lutelike pegbox or a sickle-shaped pegbox. One of the earliest depictions of such an instrument may be found in an anonymous Madonna and Child painting from the province of Aragon in the mid-fifteenth century (it is in the hands of the second figure in the upper left row). 26 A miniature in a Spanish Book of Hours of about 1480 depicts an instrument with an incurving waist, a long fingerboard, a reverse lutelike pegbox, two decorations (sound-holes), a flat bridge, and three strings; the strings are being plucked, though it cannot be ascertained whether with a plectrum or with fingers. 27 An anonymous painting of a "Madonna and Child with angel musicians" from Valencia in the mid- or late-fifteenth century shows the body of an instrument with a sharply curved waist, a sound-hole and two decorations on the soundboard, flat sides, a long fingerboard, several frets, and a lutelike reverse pegbox; this is being played with a plectrum. 28

Questions about the invention of the Spanish plucked viola such as its derivation from a prototype (if there were any structural changes from the prototype), the purpose of its invention, and the precise places and social milieu in which it emerged still remain to be investigated. Tinctoris's statement that the Spanish plucked viola "is descended from the lute" (ex lyra processit) should not be treated as evidence that he believed the lute

25 Among several types of plucked stringed instruments in the Cantigas, there are two illustrations of what might be called the medieval citole because of the cornered "wing" at the upper end of the soundboard (one of them having a less incurving waist), a sickle-shaped pegbox, and frets; the instrument is played with the plectrum. The instrument with an oval-shaped soundboard, a short fingerboard, and a sickle-shaped pegbox with an animal head could be the medieval gittern, provided that the back, invisible in the miniature, is vaulted. One instrument, depicted three times, may be the Arabic oud. Its constructional features are an elliptically shaped body, a sloping shoulder which directly connects to the soundboard, a long and narrow fingerboard (a half of the entire string length), a reverse pegbox, long pegs, decorations, a plate, and a bridge on the soundboard. The Libros de los juegos by Alfonso the Wise includes the illustration of an instrument similar to the later Western lute. The instrument does not have the sloping shoulders as the Arabic ud but a distinct joint that separates the soundboard from the fingerboard. It has seven strings stretched over a wide fingerboard. A feature that differs from the later Western lute is the presence of two I-shaped soundholes; the lute usually has a round soundhole at the center of the soundboard. The illustration is reproduced in Ribera, La musica de las cantigas, "Escenas musicales del Libro de los juegos," no plate number.


27 Reproduced in Mary Remnant, Musical Instruments: An Illustrated History from Antiquity to the Present (London: B. T. Batsford, 1989), 40, pl. 28.

28 Reproduced in Woodfield, The Early History of the Viol, 43, pl. 20. Other depictions of a similar instrument from late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Spain are reproduced on pls. 19, 21, and 32.
was the prototype of the Spanish plucked viola, for his statement is based on his classification of the Spanish viola in the category of the lyra, a term he used generically to denote string instruments with fingerboard. In fact, the flat back of the Spanish plucked viola eliminates the lute as its immediate model because of the lute’s characteristic vaulted back, a structural difference Tintinoris specifically mentions in his De inventione.

If we were to rely on the nomenclature used by Tintinoris, the medieval fiddle is the most obvious choice for the prototype of the Spanish plucked viola. The medieval fiddle has a thin body and a flat back, often with a smooth-cornered or shallow-incurving waist. Moreover, there are some (though isolated) iconographical examples of a medieval-fiddlelike instrument played with a plectrum, for example, the one found in the so-called Tarocchi cards of about 1467. Arguments against the medieval fiddle being the prototype of the Spanish viola, however, cite the absence of a deeply incurving waist and an arched bridge.

Among the string instruments that have a fingerboard, the medieval cithole also resembles the Spanish plucked viola in its constructional physiognomy, particularly the deep incurving waist, flat back, and flat bridge, features that do not appear together in any other plucked string instruments of the Middle Ages. Moreover, the medieval cithole has a sickle-shaped pegbox, a feature that is sometimes found in depictions of the Spanish plucked viola from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Aside from the similarity in general physiognomy, however, there is no further evidence to support the hypothesis that either the medieval fiddle or the medieval cithole was indeed the prototype of the Spanish plucked viola.

Tintinoris’s statement that the waist of the Spanish viola was “in most cases curved inwards on each side” implies that some earlier Spanish viola did not have a sharply cornered waist. This suggests that there was no conformity in constructional details and that the instrument was in the process of constant modification. If we trust the artists’ sensibility to the idea of reproducing the exact features of a real instrument, the available paintings from the second half of the fifteenth century show varieties of constructional characteristics peculiar to each instrument. Variations occur in the size of the body (ranging from quite small to larger than that of the lute), the length of the fingerboard (usually longer than that of the lute), the shape of the pegbox (either a reverse lutelike type or a sickle gitternlike one), the number of sound-holes and decorations on the soundboard, the number of strings and frets, and most important, the depth of the corner of the waist (either shallow or sharp-cornered).

While the Spanish viola with a deeply incurving waist dominates the iconography when it appears for the first time in mid-fifteenth-century paintings, another type of the Spanish viola with a gently incurving waist begins to appear in increasing numbers in Spanish paintings of the late fifteenth century. “The Coronation of the Virgin,” an early sixteenth-century Valencian painting, for instance, shows an instrument with a thin body, a sound-hole with a small decoration near the joint, a reverse lutelike pegbox, several tied frets, a long fingerboard with seven strings, and a flat bridge to which the strings are tied. The player plucks the strings with the thumb and index finger, indicating a polyphonic manner of playing.

What prompted Spanish instrument makers of the late fifteenth century to abandon the cithole-shaped instrument and to change to the fiddle-shaped one? A hint may be found by considering changes in playing

29 Grunfield, The Art and Times of the Guitar, 28-29, pls. 21-22, regards this instrument as a guitar; and James Tyler, The Early Guitar: A History and Handbook (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 16, pl. 1, classifies it as “ceteni” (cittern). Another example of a fiddlelike instrument with a round pegbox from the mid-fifteenth century may be found in a miniature in Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence, Ms. 492; reproduced in Woodfield, The Early History of the Viol, 40, pl. 17.


32 Reproduced in Woodfield, The Early History of the Viol, 58, pl. 36. Other depictions of a similar instrument from the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Spain are reproduced ibid., pls. 25, 26, and 34.
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...technique and in musical taste. The Spanish viola appears to have originally been conceived as a dual-purpose instrument, considering that the players of these instruments are depicted in the act of either plucking the strings with a plectrum or playing with a bow. As Ian Woodfield points out, it is difficult to imagine what kind of music the earlier type of flat-bridged Spanish viola played with the bow could produce; single melodies could be played on the outer strings, and simple chords could be played in arpeggios. It would seem that players' desire to explore the capabilities of the Spanish viola and to expand their repertoire led to the development of two distinct types of instruments, a plucked instrument and a bowed instrument. For the plucked variety, playing techniques also began to fall clearly into two distinct practices, plucking with a plectrum and plucking with the fingers.

While the constructional details (such as sharply cornered waist, curved bridge, raised fingerboard, and tailpiece) help the player to cope with the bowing of each string individually, these features, especially the cornered waist, provide no practical function for the player who produces the sound by plucking the strings with plectrum or fingers. Moreover, the curved bridge, the tailpiece, and the raised fingerboard may obstruct the right-hand plucking motion. Therefore, the change of playing method from the plectrum-plucking technique to the finger-plucking technique and the change of musical style from the medieval ensemble practice to the Renaissance solo practice may have triggered the structural change. These may also have triggered the increase in the instrument's size in order to accommodate more strings and frets so as to cope with several polyphonic voices and to increase the sound volume required by solo players who pluck the strings with the bare fingers.

Iconographical sources of the second half of the fifteenth century depicting the Spanish plucked viola show us several important physiognomical features of the instrument, including the shape of the soundboard, the depth of the body, the width and length of the fingerboard, the type of string-holder, the shape and number of sound-holes, and the shape and angle of the pegbox. However, the number of strings and the way they are grouped together, as well as the number of frets and how they are tied around the fingerboard vary from instrument to instrument in paintings known to me.

Even the earliest surviving instrument showing structural details similar to the Spanish plucked viola with the fiddle-shaped soundboard can be regarded as a typical example only with caution. This instrument, now preserved in the Musée Jacquemart-André of the Institute de France, Paris, may have been constructed around 1500 and once belonged to the monastery of Guadalupe, Extremadura. According to Michael Pryne and Pierre Abondance, the instrument has the following characteristics: 1) the body is shallow in relation to the surface area of the soundboard; 2) the original length of an open string was about 79 cm; 3) the fingerboard could carry ten frets with a short space beyond; 4) the pegbox is flat and set back at a slight angle; and 5) the pegbox has twelve peg-holes, indicating six double-string courses. The large size and elaborate decorations make it likely that the Jacquemart-André instrument was a trial instrument made by one of the would-be master craftsmen who were required to take examination in order to attain the status of an official violero.

No documentary source has yet come to light regarding performance practices for the Spanish plucked viola from the third quarter of the fifteenth century. Even Tintorius's De inventione, which recorded the physiognomical peculiarities of the newly invented instrument, does not say much about aspects of performance practice, despite the fact that performance practice of contemporary instruments was one of his main concerns in the treatise. This is curious, since Tintorius testifies to the popularity of the Spanish plucked viola in Spain...
and Italy; it was in fact more popular than the lute. He writes: "While some play every sort of composition most delightfully on the lute, in Italy and Spain the viola without a bow is more often used." Tintorius gives detailed descriptions of performance practice of some other plucked string instruments, particularly the lute. He may have thought it unnecessary to describe features common to those instruments. Tintorius states that instruments such as the viola, rebeck, ghitterra, cetula, and tambura shared similar methods of stringing and tuning. When stringing or tuning differs from that of the lute, Tintorius explicitly describes the differences. It is therefore conceivable that Tintorius's silence about performance practice on the Spanish plucked viola can be interpreted as a sign that it used the same or a similar method to the lute. At the very least, Tintorius's descriptions of the lyre (that is, the lute) may furnish hints about performance practice on the Spanish plucked viola.

During most of the fifteenth century, the lute was a monophonic instrument that was played with the plectrum. Indeed, Tintorius mentions the plectrum-plucking technique of the lute and singles out Pietrobono de Burzeillis as the preeminent lutenist in the monophonic ensemble style. From what little we know about this practice, we assume that it was ensemble, with each player taking a single part. In this kind of performance, the upper voice is improvised with extensive ornaments and figurations, while the lower part is taken by an accompanist (called tenorista in some Italian documents) who provides an unornamented version of a preexisting polyphonic voice or dance formula. The available depiction of the Spanish plucked viola with the incurring waist shows the player holding a plectrum, a technique apt for producing single notes. Thus, its mode of performance may have been monophonic, played in a manner similar to the one cultivated by lutenists in an ensemble.

The polyphonic manner of playing, on the other hand, enables the player to perform several polyphonic voices on a single instrument. This is made possible by the use of the fingers to pluck several strings simultaneously. The invention of this practice took place in the mid-fifteenth century, most probably during the 1460s. Tintorius, in the De inventione, was the first to document the use of fingers for plucking the strings of the lute. He describes the polyphonic lute style and names, as I noted, Orbis and Henricus as virtuosi in the new lute practice. Tintorius may have been writing around the time that Spanish plucked viola players began cultivating the newly developed polyphonic manner of playing. It was not until the late fifteenth century that the depiction of the finger-plucking technique on the Spanish plucked viola began to appear in Spanish paintings, which show the new technique being used on an instrument with a gently incurring waist.

The invention of tablature was a by-product of the development of the polyphonic manner of playing. The change of musical style and performance practice on the plucked viola in late fifteenth-century Spain made it necessary for composers and players to develop a special notation for this kind of music: original compositions and arrangements of polyphonic compositions for solo performance. So-called Spanish lute tablature (I prefer to call it Valencian vihuela de mano tablature) was possibly invented in Valencia in the late fifteenth century for the Spanish plucked viola, and so-called Neapolitan tablature (I prefer to call it Neapolitan viola da mano tablature) was invented about the same time in Naples after the Spanish plucked viola arrived in Italy.

56 See Weinnmann, Johannes Tintorius, 45, for the text; translation from Baines, "Fifteenth-Century Instruments," 24.

57 Ibid. On the biography of Pietrobono, see Lewis Lockwood, "Pietrobono and the Instrumental Tradition at Ferrara in the Fifteenth Century," Rivista italiana di musicologia 10 (1975): 115-33; and idem, Music in Renaissance Ferrara, 98-108. Pietrobono's lute style is discussed in my unpublished study "A Renaissance in Lute?"


59 See Weinnmann, Johannes Tintorius, 45; and Baines, "Fifteenth-Century Instruments," 24. I discuss the reason for the identification of "Orbus" with Conrad Paumann in my "Conrad Paumann," 293-95. My reasons for identifying "Henricus" with Hayne van Ghizeghern are put forth in my unpublished study "A Renaissance in Lute?"

60 See my "Valencian Vihuela de Mano Tablature," Lute Society of America Quarterly 33, 3 (1998): 4-6. A fragment containing examples of Neapolitan tablature (Bologna University Library, Ms. 596 HH. 2/4) that may have been compiled in Naples in the late fifteenth
The number of strings and how they are tuned in part determine the kind of music the Spanish plucked viola players could play. The five-course lute was the standard instrument during most of the fifteenth century. Tinctoris testifies to the recent addition of the sixth course by German lutenists, an addition that expands the range to two octaves and several notes. In the sixteenth century, the standard intervallic relationships between the six courses were, from the lowest course to the highest, a perfect fourth, a perfect fourth, a major third, a perfect fourth, and a perfect fourth. The most commonly used nominal pitches for the lowest course of the six-course lute and vihuela de mano in the sixteenth century were A and G. After the installation of frets on the lute in the early fifteenth century, the determination of temperament on the fretted lute became a more or less predetermined practice. Lutenists and vihuela de mano players had the choice of several temperaments such as equal, mean-tone, and irregular.

As to performers, there are records from the fifteenth century of the activities of a number of minstrels who served the dynasty of the Castilian royal family of Trastámara, especially Fernando I of Aragon (d. 1416) and Alfonso V the Magnanimous (d. 1458) in Castile, Aragon, and Naples. The players of string instruments (ministreros de cuerda) active in Spain include Pedro Alfonso de Sevilla, his son Juan Alfonso, Alfonso de Carrión, Alfonso and Martín de Toledo, Juan de Palencia, Hans de Loge, Rodrigo de la Guitarra, Lope de Valencia, Martín de Mar, Juan de Sevilla, Juan de Escobor, and Martín de Bruna. Jehan de Cordoval and Jehan Fernandez, the players of the vielle and lute who served Philip the Good at the court of Burgundy between 1433 and 1456, were Castilians who must have been in Spain.

These professional minstrels of the courts and other retainers of the nobility provided entertainment at public and private occasions and also served as teachers for the young courtiers. The Catalan chivalric novel Tirant lo Blanc, thought to have been compiled by the Valencian nobleman Joannet Martorell between 1460 and 1468, includes, for instance, a scene in which the hero Tirant is entertained by minstrels who play the viola as well as the lute and harp. Diego Rodriguez de Almela's Compendio historial, written in 1479, recommends that minstrels and singers should serenade kings and princes when they retire for the evening with music on vihuela, lutes and other instruments. Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, who served at the royal court of Ferdinand and Isabella, testified to the young prince Juan's cultivation of music. Juan possessed several vihuelas de mano, the instrument he is alleged to have played.

In conclusion, it seems that the musical instrument Johannes Tinctoris describes in his De inventione of ca. 1480, which he calls the viola (or viola sine circulo) was a new Spanish instrument. Iconographical evidence indicates that it was invented in Valencia in the mid-fifteenth century. At first it had a thin body, a flat back, a long fingerboard, a lute-like reverse pegbox, and a deeply incurving waist. But by the end of the fifteenth century it was subject of my "Neapolitan (Viola da Mano) Tablature," Lute Society of America Quarterly 34, 3 (1999): 8-18, esp. pp. 9-10.


century, a new type "invented" from the earlier model abandoned the sharply cornered waist and featured instead a gently incurving waist. This constructional change was most likely the result of changes in musical tastes. Players' desire to perform polyphonic compositions on a single instrument was aided by using the fingers for plucking, a technique that enabled the simultaneous production of notes on nonadjacent strings. This stylistic change in turn prompted the invention of a tablature notation for solo players in the late fifteenth century. These events led to the increasing popularity of the instrument later called the vihuela de mano in Spain and the viola da mano in Italy, which continued throughout the sixteenth century.\(^{45}\)