

Extremities: the Vihuela in Development and Decline

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¹ Discussed in J. B. Trend, *Luis Milán and the Vihuelistas*, Hispanic Notes and Monographs, 11 (Humphry Milford: Oxford University Press, 1925), and more recently in Luis Gásser, *Luis Milán on 16th-century Performance Practice* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996).

² See F. Alberto Gallo, *Musica nel castello: Trovatori, libri, oratori nelle corti italiane dal XII al XV secolo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992).

³ "in Italy and Spain the viola without the bow is more often used. On the other hand over the greater part of the world the viola with a bow is used not only in this way, but also in the recitation of epics." Quoted from Anthony Baines, "15th-century instruments in Tinctoris' *De Inventione et Usu Musicae*". *GSJ* 3 (1950): 19-26.

⁴ Miguel Angel Pallarés Jiménez, "Aportación documental para la historia de la música en Aragón en el último tercio del siglo XV." 5 parts: *Nassarre* 7/1 (1991): 175-212; 7/2 (1991): 171-212; 8/1 (1992) 213-74; 8/2 (1992): 171-244; 9/1 (1993): 227-310.

Like the lute, the vihuela exists in the minds of many as nothing more than a symbol of a distant and romantic past, a multivalent cultural adornment. Within the labyrinth of poetic associations, it is harder to perceive these instruments among the cornerstones of Western musical tradition; even within the musicological discipline they are still seen as marginal to European musical culture of the Renaissance. The present study, however, has no evangelical pretensions, in fact it flees from the central area of the vihuela in 16th-century Spain to explore the extremities of its own tradition, the periods that immediately precede and follow the years of the instrument's written repertory, approximately 1465-1535, and 1575-1625. This contribution represents work in progress, a revision and development of my own previous ideas, and a challenge to some of the commonly accepted views about the vihuela.

The vihuela before Milán

The period prior to the publication of Luis Milán's *El Maestro* in 1536 might easily be referred to as the pre-history of the vihuela, a period in which we are dependent on archaeological relics to reconstruct its development and use, a period where we have little concrete evidence of its music. There are still many unanswered questions concerning the instrument, its repertory and performance practice. I cannot hope here to synthesise the information – much of it recent – into a detailed coherent picture; I will try however, to present some of the facts and some of the issues.

It is now clear that in the half-century that precedes Milán's book, vihuelas were used in diverse strata of society by amateurs and professionals, that they were made by the same makers who made lutes, harps, *rabeles*, and *monacordios*, and that they were used to play a variety of musical styles. Vihuelas and violas were used in Spain, Naples and in other parts of Italy for song accompaniment, solo playing, and playing in ensemble. Songs sung to the accompaniment of the vihuela include diverse styles, ranging from improvised singing in the way that Milán describes in *El Cortesano*,¹ akin to the practices documented in Italy of improvising Latin and vernacular verse to the lute,² through to the singing of *romances* – as Tinctoris reports to have heard³ – using the common harmonic schemes that are transmitted in the *Cancionero de Palacio* and sung by musicians including the professional *oracioneros* who sang prayers and romances to the vihuela, a practice that is most strongly revealed in documents from Zaragoza.⁴ Solo music included free improvisa-

tion of the kind that reached its zenith in the fantasias of Milán;⁵ improvisation on harmonic formulas such as the playing of Ludovico, frozen in time for us by Mudarra's famous fantasia;⁶ pieces based on cantus firmus melodies as shown in the London fragment;⁷ and dances and song arrangements such as the Spanish pieces preserved for us in Dalza's lute book.⁸ Among the documented ensemble playing is at least one instance of a vihuela duo whose repertory may have included embellished versions of art songs such as those conserved in the Segovia manuscript, or Valderrábano's music *para discantar* on two vihuelas.⁹ The evidence for these groups is not substantial, but it tends to suggest practices similar to those elaborated by Keith Polk with respect to the duos of German lutenists active in Italy as well as north of the alps.¹⁰ In most cases they appear to have been musicians who belonged to a tradition of improvisers. In only a few cases, such as that of Luis de Guzmán, do we know of their instrumental music having been notated.¹¹

We need to ask more questions about the identity and social standing of the musicians that played the instruments and more about the kind of vihuelas they played. We have the names now of some fifty vihuelists active in the period between 1465 and 1535. They include titled military officers, poets such as Garcilaso de la Vega, churchmen, amateurs from the urban middle class, as well as lower class professionals including musicians from the Jewish and Arabic communities of cities such as Zaragoza. Similarly, I am aware of documentation concerning at least sixteen *violeros* of the same period.

Most of what I have asserted in the preceding few sentences draws from documentation that is already known. It relies both on material that has been published by musicologists, many of whom have presented the information in contexts peripheral to their main purpose, and from my own reading of early sources. If it has any particular value it is merely that it makes a few general remarks that form the outline of a synthesis of the musical and social situation of the vihuela in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In the case of instruments the situation is different. Recent scholarship and iconographical study has been much more active in this field. It is perhaps here that I can enter the debate concerning the origins and early development of the vihuela.

What were these early vihuelas? Much scholarship on early vihuelas is fundamentally deficient because scholars have not satisfactorily resolved this question. To the 15th-century Spaniard, a vihuela was a stringed instrument that comprised a flat soundbox with incurved sides (usually either waisted or cornered), a neck and pegbox – nothing more and nothing less. Its other elements could take a variety of forms, but they were not central to its identity. It was a multi-purpose instrument that could be played in a number of ways – plucked or bowed – plucked with the fingers or with a plectrum, held on the shoulder and bowed overhand, or held between the legs and bowed underhand the same way as the *rabel*. In short, the 15th-century vihuela might well be described as the “multi-purpose vihuela”. Two principal obstacles have hindered our understanding the truly generic

⁵ See John Griffiths, “The Vihuela Fantasia: A Comparative Study of Forms and Styles”, Ph.D. diss., Monash University, 1983, chap. 2.

⁶ The relation of this work to the improvisatory tradition is explained in John Griffiths, “La ‘Fantasia que contrahaze la harpa’ de Alonso Mudarra: estudio histórico-analítico”, *Revista de Musicología* 9 (1986): 29-40. Further biographical details are in Egoberto Bermúdez, “Sobre la identidad de Ludovico”, *Nassarre* 10 (1994): 9-16.

⁷ This fragment is examined in Antonio Corona-Alcalde, “The earliest vihuela tablature: a recent discovery” *Early Music* 20 (1992): 594-600.

⁸ Joan Ambrosio Dalza, *Intabulatura de Lauto* (Venice: Petrucci, 1508). See in particular the works *Caldibi castigliano* and the several *Calate ala spagnola*.

⁹ Enriquez de Valderrábano, *Libro de Musica de Vihuela, intitulado Silva de sirenas* (Valladolid, 1547). “Musica para discantar sobre un punto”, fol 103v.

¹⁰ Keith Polk, *German instrumental music of the late Middle Ages: players, patrons, and performance practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹¹ Juan Miguel Ruiz Jiménez: “Luis de Narváez and Music Publishing in 16th-century Spain”, *JLSA* 26-27 (1993-94): 1-16.

nature of this instrument. Firstly, we have all been too bound by modern classification systems to be able to admit that the one instrument could have been simultaneously a "fiddle", a "viol" and a "guitar". Secondly, we have been too ready to divide early vihuelas into categories of *vihuela de mano* and *vihuela de arco*, terms that are relevant to the purpose-built instruments that started to appear in the 1490s or thereabouts, but not pertinent to earlier instruments. 15th-century iconography is full of virtually identical vihuelas that can only be designated as "*de mano*" or "*de arco*" by the way they are being played, not by their physical characteristics.

¹² D. Juan Fernández de Oviedo, *Gobierno y oficios de la casa del señor príncipe D. Juan, hijo de los muy altos Reyes Católicos D. Fernando y Doña Isabel*. (Sevilla, 1548). The passage refers to the prince's chamber in the period before his death in 1497.

¹³ Ian Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Studies of these earlier instruments have produced all manner of confused categorisations and descriptions by the applications of erroneous terminology or descriptors. It should be noted that the term *vihuela de arco* is used in Spanish literature long before the vihuela played *da gamba* emerged, and probably originally described what in English we call a fiddle. Most of the literary and documentary references to early vihuelas add no qualifiers, and the earliest specific reference to the *vihuela de mano* dates only from the early 1490s, in Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's account of the musical instruments in the chamber of crown prince Juan, son of the Reyes Católicos.¹²

While numerous scholars have contributed recently to the expansion of our knowledge of individual iconographical representations of the vihuela, the most substantial attempt to explain the early history of the vihuela has been Ian Woodfield's *Early History of the Viol*.¹³ It is evident to me, however, that Woodfield's view of the vihuela is in need of revision, particularly in relation to plucked instruments. To give him credit, he has provided the most coherent global account to date of the vihuela, and within a context of the viol in general, much broader than the isolated Spanish context. He provided many astute observations such as the interchangeability of plucked and bowed vihuelas. However, like nearly all others, he made the serious error of simply excluding the instruments played on the shoulder from his category of vihuelas. He argued categorically to exclude "fiddles" from consideration. The vocabulary of any 15th-century Spaniard, however, would not have included any "fiddle" terms such as *fidula*, *lira da braccio* or *vielle* to describe instruments played on the shoulder, they would have been designated as vihuelas. Furthermore, these instruments depicted *da braccio* exhibit the same fundamental form as all other vihuelas, and display exactly the same range of variables in their style of construction. These vihuelas were undoubtedly built by the same makers who produced the other vihuelas that we see depicted being bowed on the knees or plucked with the fingers. They form part of the process of experimentation and development that encompasses all vihuelas, and this needs to be reflected in future scholarship. The most significant consequence of this for research is that it immediately doubles the amount of iconographical material at our disposal and allows the evolution of the vihuela to be traced with considerably more precision. Of the nearly 120 iconographical representations of early vihuelas that I have catalogued, almost half of these are played *da braccio*.

A second criticism of Woodfield's treatment of Spanish instruments is that his information base is too small. He relied exclusively on iconographical materials without invoking any literary or documentary sources. His iconographical sample itself is far too limited and almost entirely restricted to artworks of Aragonese provenance. When the vihuelas played *da braccio* and the substantial Castilian iconography are added, the situation broadens considerably, and the path of development of the so-called "Valencian viol" is not as solitary as might otherwise be implied, although his conclusion that Valencia was the centre of development of the long-necked, downward held, bowed vihuela with cornered waists holds valid.

¹⁴ Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol*, 38.

¹⁵ Woodfield, see *ibid.*, 40.

The third area in which Woodfield's account warrants revision relates specifically to the *vihuela de mano*, and follows directly from the previous two points. Again, he made many valid observations but his explanation of the process by which the exclusively plucked *vihuela de mano* became separate from the earlier multi-purpose vihuela is untenable. Firstly, he excludes some plucked instruments from his discussion on the basis that they are plucked fiddles rather than vihuelas, or *violas da mano* in the case of Italian examples. He offers the fallacious argument that "One of the problems of discussing the growth of the *vihuela* in the latter part of the 15th-century is knowing how to distinguish between early examples of the true renaissance *vihuela* and depictions of medieval fiddles being plucked".¹⁴ On this basis, he precludes from consideration the highly instructive iconography such as the Florentine illustration (Florence, Bibl. Riccardiana ms 492, Aeneid 745-7, fol 75), an instrument that certainly would have been described by any contemporary Spanish commentator as a plucked vihuela.¹⁵

One of Woodfield's conclusions is that the momentum for the development of the separate *vihuela de mano* was also a Valencian achievement. This is too narrow a view. It is certainly true that the greatest percentage of artworks are of Valencian origin, but the representations of instruments are spread throughout the Spanish territory, including the Aragonese dominions in Italy and the areas strongly connected with the Papacy. Considering other kinds of evidence as well, other Spanish centres were also prolific and, on the basis of current research, also include Zaragoza, Toledo and Seville. These, too, must be included among the locations where *hazedores de vihuelas* were experimenting with instrument design. Further, given the itinerancy of Spanish makers and players, developments in instruments probably involved a cross-fertilisation of the ideas of numerous makers from various locations.

This suggests that a number of parallel strands of development were in operation, each progressing at its own rate. Oblivious to this, Woodfield suggests the linear argument that Valencian makers developed instruments with cornered waists, that these were initially both plucked and bowed, and that these makers later "reverted" to an older design using incurved waists in order to produce the definitive *vihuela de mano*. This is methodologi-

cally and historically naive. The evidence – including the “fiddles” and the documentary sources – tends to suggest that during the period c.1460-c.1500 both cornered and incurved waists were used, that instruments were made in a variety of ways and in a variety of places, and that there were many simultaneous experiments underway. These would eventually lead to a consensus, almost a process of standardisation, whereby one particular combination of constructional elements would become dominant, judged, as it were, as producing the best design of plucked vihuela. The standard 16th-century pattern of the *vihuela de mano* emerged, therefore, from multi-faceted experimentation. We can no longer accept the conceptual validity of the linear argument nor the historiographical notion that Valencian makers “reverted to the guitar shape and abandoned the use of corners” in order to develop the *vihuela de mano*.¹⁶

¹⁶ Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol*, 49.

¹⁷ Cristina Bordás, “La construcción de vihuelas y guitarras en Madrid en los siglos XVI y XVII” *La guitarra en la historia* 6 (1995): 47-67.

¹⁸ José Luis Romanillos, “The Vihuela Makers of Toledo, 1617”, *American Lutherie*, 32 (Winter, 1992): 48-51.

¹⁹ François Reynaud, *La Polyphonie tolédane et son milieu des premiers témoignages aux environs de 1600* (Paris: CNRS, 1996).

The decline of the vihuela

Bypassing the *siglo d'oro* of the vihuela tradition, I wish now to address some unresolved questions concerning the years around 1600 when the popularity of the vihuela began to wane. It is accepted that the vihuela went into decline in the closing years of the 16th-century, rapidly supplanted by the guitar with its newly added fifth string, an instrument, a music, a performance style and an aesthetic vastly different to the vihuela. No scholarly study has been directed towards the question of how and why that particular change took place. There has been no serious attempt to account for the phenomenon of change, no attempt to catalogue, synthesise and interpret the information at our disposal. I would like to offer some preliminary insights into the questions surrounding the demise of the vihuela.

There are various sources of evidence that begin to fill the void, many of them fairly new and diverse, never previously drawn together into a coherent synthesis. There is a small body of music, as well as documentary evidence about instruments, players and music making. Concerning instruments and makers, the published studies by Bordás,¹⁷ Romanillos,¹⁸ and Reynaud,¹⁹ as well as further information that I have gathered makes it clear that by the last decades of the 16th-century, guitars and vihuelas were being made by the same makers, that they were essentially the same in design and construction as well as decoration, although they differed in stringing, and possibly also in size. In fact, new information makes it clear that vihuelas of the 1580s and 1590s probably looked identical to baroque guitars – probably similar to the Quito instrument – possibly with similar bridges, definitely with deep parchment roses, and sometimes with the same curved, ribbed backs as the famous Belchior Dias guitar or the Italian *chitarra battente*. The identity of some forty vihuelists is known in the period following the printing of Daza's *El Parnaso* in 1576 up until c. 1625. It is a small number, but in documentary terms it is fairly significant. In addition, eight of these players (20%) played or owned both guitars and vihuelas. These numbers are obviously not representative in real terms because details

survive concerning more than sixty *violeros* active during the same period, as well as numerous stringmakers. The documentation indicates a similar proportion of makers specifically involved in the manufacture of both guitars and vihuelas, although I would expect this in reality to have been true of the vast majority.

A small repertory of music for vihuela is conserved in manuscript which post-dates the printed sources: Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional MS 6001 "Ramillete de flores" (1593),²⁰ and Cracow MS Mus. 40032 compiled largely in Naples c. 1580-1611,²¹ can be safely considered as later, as well as the manuscript additions to the Vienna exemplar of Valderrábano's *Silva de sirenas*.²² Together with other manuscript fragments of earlier date these contain a repertory notably different from the music contained in the printed sources.²³ More than a decade ago, in a study of the aesthetic and sociological question of taste in the vihuela repertory, I proposed that the published vihuela repertory probably only represents one facet of instrumental practice in 16th-century Spain. It represents, in general, the formal side of the vihuela, the one that is both closest to the musical mainstream of vocal polyphony and also satisfies the moral codes associated with book publication.²⁴ On the other hand, the manuscript sources provide a different scenario, perhaps orientated more openly towards recreational diversion. The predominant musical genre in these sources are variation sets, music that is more idiomatic in style, much lighter in character and less intellectually demanding. On the one hand, these manuscript sources dating in the main from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries might represent a changing aesthetic, however, it is equally possible that they represent a current that existed alongside the more formalised published music throughout the 16th-century. Since advancing this argument, I have found considerable additional evidence to support it and little contradiction.

Considered from a stylistic viewpoint, the music of these manuscript sources casts considerable light on the vihuela during its decadence and on its relationship with the tradition of the guitar. By way of broad characterisation, the printed repertory of the vihuela is dominated by the style and aesthetic of vocal music, using through-composed forms based on rhetorical discourse, expressed through imitative polyphony. Dance music, variation sets, and miscellaneous short pieces form less than five per cent of the repertory. The guitar repertory of the 17th-century, on the other hand, is far more idiomatically conceived, using devices such as strummed chords and *campanellas*, and is based predominantly on the texture of accompanied melody. The preferred form is that of variations on popular dance tunes, a feature that corresponds to the compositions in the vihuela manuscripts. These brief observations offer a point of reference for comparison and a useful analytical tool with which to examine some of the music that survive in the late vihuela repertory. Their style reveals them as a transitional repertory that fills something of the void that separates the strongly differentiated vihuela and guitar repertories.

²⁰ Juan José Rey, *Ramillete de flores: Colección inédita de piezas para vihuela (1593)* (Madrid: Alpuerto, 1975).

²¹ Cracow, Biblioteka Jagiellonska (olim Berlin, Preussische Staatsbibliothek) MS Mus 40032. This manuscript is presently being edited by Dinko Fabris and John Griffiths. An inventory is in Dieter Kirsch, *Berliner Lautentabulaturen in Krakau* (Mainz: Schott 1992) and an initial study of its Hispanic context is given in John Griffiths, "Berlin Mus. MS 40032 y otros nuevos hallazgos en el repertorio para vihuela" *España en la Música del Occidente*, ed. E. Casares et al (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1987) I, 323-324.

²² This is the copy held in the Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek.

²³ Regarding the early 16th-century fragment in London see note 7 above; several pieces are copied into the back of the Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional copy of Alonso Mudarra, *Tres Libros de Musica en Cifras para Vihuela* (Seville: Juan de León, 1546; rpt Monaco: Chanterelle, 1980), mainly drawn from Fuenllana's *Orphenica Lyra* (Seville, 1554); and a mid-century manuscript is presented in Antonio Corona-Alcalde, "A Vihuela Manuscript in the Archivo de Simancas" *The Lute* 26 (1986): 3-20;

²⁴ The licences for those vihuela books that contain them all stress their authors to have declared the *provecho* or benefit to be derived from them.

With three representative examples, it is possible to convey something of the character of the late manuscript repertory. The first two are antithetical examples from the Spanish-Neapolitan manuscript Cracow 40032. Example 1 is the opening of what appears to be a setting of an unidentified version of the plainchant *Conditor alme*, attributed to Castillo – possibly the organist Diego de Castillo – active for some time in Naples, or the musician praised by Vicente Espinel in his *Diversas rimas*, although there are strong reasons to doubt either conjecture. Notwithstanding, this piece belongs to the original layer of the manuscript, a copy of another unknown source, the manuscript *Flores de tañer* by the otherwise unknown vihuelist Luys Maymón. The opening of this piece shows that late manuscripts do not altogether exclude music derived from imitation and counterpoint.

²⁵ Gaspar Sanz, *Instrucción de música sobre la guitarra española* (Zaragoza, 1674), lib 2, p. 4.

²⁶ Gaspar Sanz, *Instrucción de música*, lib 2, p. 4.

Example 1. Castillo, *Conditor alme sobre il canto llano*, opening

²⁷ The difference is that in the latter case there is one note of the formula per chord, where as here the melody moves in quavers and has a distinct melodic and rhythmic identity.

On the other hand, the opening bars of the *Matachin con sus diferencias* (Example 2) show a vastly different musical aesthetic. Even though attributed by a later hand in the manuscript to Lorenzino, it is conspicuous that the title is in Spanish rather than Italian. Based on a repeated two-bar tonic-dominant sequence, the piece is characterised by a dotted rhythmic figure, and the regular use of the note E as the main melodic note used in conjunction with the change to the dominant chord of C. Even though *Matachines* such as the one given by the Sanz has no strong harmonic or melodic filiation, there are remarkably similar with regard to the dotted rhythmic motives, and their textures which favour the highest sounding voice, even when this is in fact the bass or an inner part.²⁵

The anonymous *Diferencias de la çarabanda* (Example 3) from the manuscript additions to the Vienna copy of Valderrábano's *Silva de sirenas* comprise eleven variations on an evidently well-known Spanish *zarabanda* tune, the same one that is found in Gaspar Sanz's guitar book presumably more than half a century later (Example 4).²⁶ In this piece we find many of the ingredients that were to become the essence of the baroque guitar style, and few of the typical textures of earlier vihuela music. The treatment of the tune itself (variation 1) is set as an accompanied melody. Unlike 16th-century vihuela music, the model to be varied is a harmonised melody, rather than a chord scheme supporting a melodic formula.²⁷ This melody recurs several times, in variation 7 for example, with its opening phrase repeated at the lower octave, but even so as the highest sounding part of the texture. The other

variations included in the example are those that most closely approximate the style of guitar music. Variations 6 and 11 are single-voiced sequences derived from a single melodic cell, while variation 10 derives from motion in parallel thirds with a few connecting flourishes. None of these devices is found in the 16th-century vihuela books.

Example 2. Anon. *Matachin con sus diferencias*, opening

The image displays a musical score for the opening of 'Matachin con sus diferencias'. It consists of five systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 6/8. The score begins with a treble staff containing a melodic line and a bass staff with a rhythmic accompaniment of chords and single notes. Measure numbers 7, 12, 18, and 24 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and dynamic markings like '7' (pizzicato).

On the basis of the music discussed here, supported by the information on instruments and players, the decline of the vihuela can be traced with greater precision and subtlety. At the very least, we can get considerably further than the simple unquestioned and unexplained acceptance of its demise. My work on the vihuela fantasia probably offered the first brief attempt to account for this demise suggesting that the vihuela became a cultural irrelevance, and that the change of taste that coincided with the rise of the guitar was by reaction to an older set of aesthetic values.²⁸

In more recent studies I have attempted to promote a reevaluation of the vihuela in the 16th-century, changing its image from that of primarily courtly instrument to a much broader social base: an instrument played among the middle classes as well as the nobility, an instrument that broadened the base for a repertory that was once more exclusively restricted to the uppermost social elite.

Example 3. Anon. *Diferencias de la çarabanda*, extracts

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7

10

11

28 "The rapid decline of the vihuela in the closing years of the sixteenth century is evidence that vihuelists remained impervious to new trends, unable to respond to changing conditions. Vihuela music had reached its pinnacles of perfection and complexity. The fantasia had developed into a sophisticated genre within technical reach of only a few advanced performers. It grew beyond reform and was unable to respond to any new cultural or artistic impetus. No development similar to that of the *canzona* in Italy was able to transform the vihuela fantasia and redirect its energies. The response was by reaction instead: the courtly tradition of the vihuela was supplanted by its kindred five-course guitar with a simple, vertically-based music of popular spirit. After a vigorous development, the fantasia achieved perfection, only to die of conservatism, obsolescence, and cultural irrelevance." Griffiths, "The Vihuela Fantasia", 538-39

Example 4. G. Sanz *Zarabanda*, opening

What support is there for the argument that it was stylistic reaction that spelt death to the vihuela? In addition to the decline in the composition of new works, the most influential evidence has been the definition of the vihuela offered by Sebastián de Covarrubias in his *Tesoro de la lengua Castellana o Española* (Madrid, 1611). In his highly colourful lexicographical style, he tells us that

This instrument has been highly esteemed until the present time, and it has had excellent players: but since the invention of the guitar, only very few people give themselves to the study of the vihuela. It has been a great loss, because on it one could put all kinds of noted music, and now, the guitar is nothing more than a harness bell, so easy to play, especially in the strummed style that there isn't a stable boy who isn't a guitarist.

Este instrumento ha sido hasta nuestros tiempos muy estimado, y ha avido excelentísimos músicos; pero después que se inventaron las guitarras, son muy pocos los que se dan al estudio de la vigüela. Ha sido una gran pérdida, porque en ella se ponía todo género de música puntada, y aora la guitarra no es más que un cencerro, tan fácil de tañer, especialmente en lo rasgado, que no ay moço de cavallos que no sea músico de guitarra.

²⁹ On Espinel as a musician see Alberto Navarro González, *Vicente Espinel: Músico, Poeta y Novelista Andaluz*, Acta salamanticensia, Filosofía y Letras, 101 (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1977); on the cancioneros see Judith Etzion, *El Cancionero de la Sablonara: A Critical Edition* (London: Tamesis Books, 1996).

³⁰ Joël Dugot, "La Vihuela de Paris: Retour aux sources". *I Encuentro Tomás Luis de Victoria y la música española del siglo XVI: Los instrumentos musicales en el siglo XVI, Avila, mayo de 1993* (Avila: Fundación Cultural Sta Teresa, 1997) 113-21.

But what historical authority does Covarrubias have? On the surface he appears to be a reliable source, his *Tesoro* is a venerated book, the work of an academician and as solid and scholarly as any musicologist could hope for. However, we could hardly call Covarrubias an impartial witness. At least in regard to the vihuela, he displays an unabashed prejudice in its favour, hardly the objectivity expected of a lexicographer. Uncorroborated by other contemporary writers, Covarrubias' definition should therefore be interpreted as the conservative testimony of a man who resisted social change and who lamented the dawn of a new age.

There is indeed room for a more subtle interpretation of the decline of the vihuela than that which results from prime reliance on Covarrubias. It would seem that a much more pluralistic musical reality prevailed during the time that he was compiling his dictionary. Covarrubias would appear to represent the stalwarts who did not wish to submit to change, clinging instead to the conservative *stile antico* of the vihuela and the humanistic intellectualism of its polyphony. Contemporaries such as Vicente Espinel had a far more modern outlook and eagerly embraced the novelty of the guitar, its up-market, popular image, and its strumming technique that was so well suited to the reborn courtly-popular song style that dominates the turn-of-the-century *cancioneros*.²⁹

In the marketplace, copies of 16th-century vihuela books continued to be traded during the first decades of the 17th-century, and instrument makers were able to satisfy both ends of the market with vihuelas and guitars built essentially to the same patterns, but strung and played according to different needs. Within the activity of instrument makers it is not far-fetched to consider that some old vihuelas were converted into guitars, most simply achieved by minor modifications to the bridge and pegbox. The Jacquemart-André vihuela is the strongest evidence of this. Its bridge was relocated and, as Joël Dugot has recently shown, its neck was probably shortened.³⁰ The baroque guitar tuning indications inscribed on the soundboard – now significantly less visible than they were

prior to the instrument's restoration – were obviously written to help the owner remember how to tune it. This owner must have been either a former vihuelist who had succumbed to the charms of guitar music, or a later novice player who had inherited an old instrument and who had decided to use it as a guitar.

Between the two extremes characterised by Covarrubias and Espinel there was obviously a middle ground, vihuelists for whom the novelties of the early 17th-century provided no threat to their residual love of the old vihuela repertory. Players like the compiler of the Cracow manuscript – whether in Naples, Valencia or Madrid – were able to continue playing and propagating sophisticated polyphonic music, while also creating or performing new pieces for their instrument that adopted many of the style features of the new age. The owner of the Vienna copy of *Silva de sirenas* was thus able to play variations on the *folía* or *zarabanda* at the same time as being able to play Valderrábano's own music of some fifty years earlier, as well as his transcriptions of Josquin and Morales. Little by little, however, change was to take effect, and players such as these became fewer and fewer. Perhaps by the middle of the 17th-century it would only have been in distant American or Asian colonies that the strains of the vihuela continued to fill the quiet of the evening air.

luths et luthistes en Occident

actes du colloque organisé par la cité de la musique.

13-15 mai 1998

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