

# GUITAR, VIHUELA, LUTE, ARCHLUTE & THEORBO

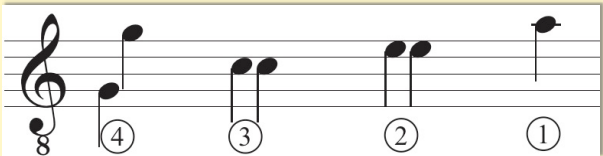
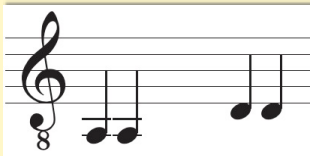
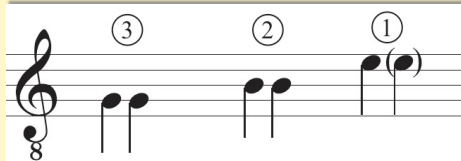
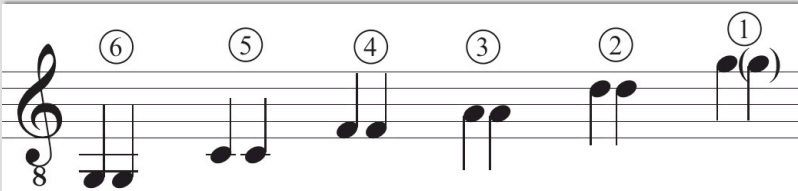
Chronological Table and basic information,  
from Les Cahiers de la Guitare n°29, © Gérard REBOURS 1989, revision 2020

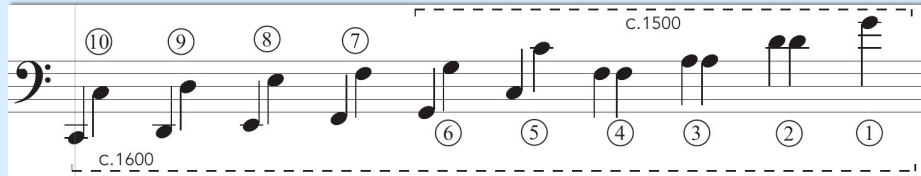
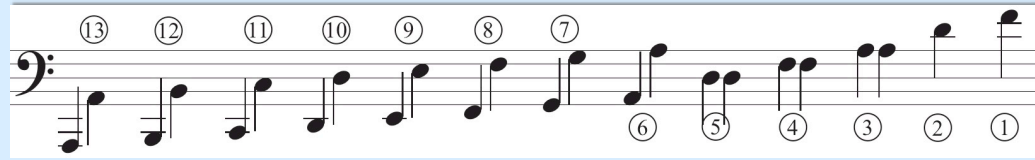
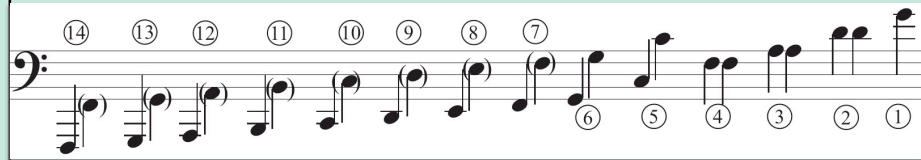
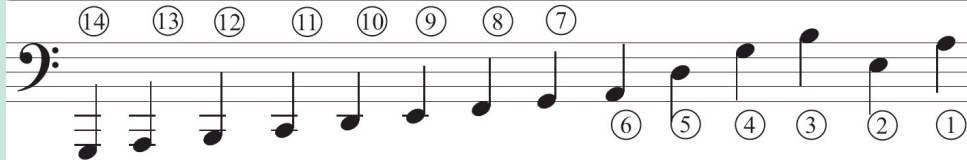
## NOTES:

- ♦ For more clarity, the guitar and vihuela tuning is noted in the "tenor" key of G, one octave above true pitch, and that of the lute family in F and G keys, the real pitches.
- ♦ It is impossible to condense in two pages all the breadth of the repertoire, techniques, tuning and organological variants of these instruments: this table, originally intended for readers of the *Cahiers de la Guitare*, is only an overview designed as an introduction to the subject. For more detailed information, please refer to the bibliography below, as well as the sources these books make reference to.
- ♦ Guitar, Vihuela and Lute were the main plucked-stringed instruments at the time, whilst not being the only ones: *cittern*, *mandora*, *pandora*, *orphanion*, *colascione*, *angélique*, *chitarra atiorbata*, *chitarra battente* were also in use.
- ♦ There is an invisible "repertoire" associated with the practice of these instruments: improvised music - to whatever degree. Lully, for example, "*played a hundred Menuets and a hundred Courantes on [the guitar] that he never wrote down*," relates Lecerf de la Vieville, who added lucidly: "*so much lost*" ([\*Comparaison de la Musique Italienne et de la Musique Française\*](#), Bruxelles, 1705, p.188).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- ♦ **Guitare:** [\*The Guitar and its Music\*](#). James Tyler & Paul Sparks. Oxford University Press  
*Italian Guitar Music of the Seventeenth Century*. Lex Eisenhardt. University of Rochester Press.  
[\*Baroque Guitar Research\*](#) by Monica Hall.  
[More articles](#) on Renaissance and baroque guitar by Gérard Rebours.
- ♦ **Vihuela:** François Dry's 700-page thesis on the Spanish Vihuelists [download: item n° 2, in French](#)  
*Aux Origines de la Guitare: la Vihuela de Mano*. Les Cahiers du Musée de la Musique. Cité de la Musique, Paris  
[La Vihuela website](#) by John Griffiths
- ♦ **Luth:** *The Lute in Europe 2*. Andreas Schlegel & Joachim Lüdtke. The Lute Corner Edition.  
*Luths et Luthistes en Occident*. Actes du colloque 13-15 Mai 1998. Cité de la Musique, Paris.  
*The Chitarrone and its Repertoire in Early sventeenth-Century Italy*. Kevin Mason. Boethius Press, Aberystwyth, Wales.  
[Accords Nouveaux website](#) by Andreas Schlegel & François-Pierre Goy.

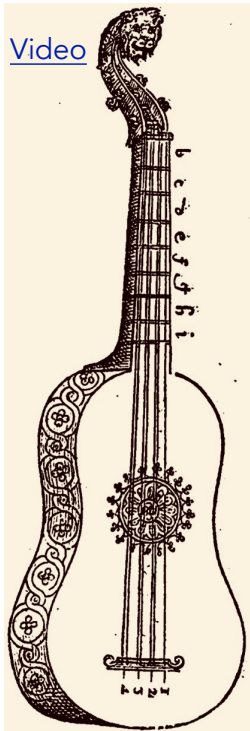
	16th century		17th & 18th centuries
GUITARE	 <p>The 4th course had to be tuned a tone lower to play the Spanish pieces "<i>a los viejos</i>" or the French pieces "<i>a corde avallée</i>", and Morlaye's music sometimes required to "<i>accorder la tierce ung ton plus bas</i>". (tune the third course a [half] tone lower)</p> <p>The bulk of the repertoire is French (Le Roy, Brayssing, Morlaye, Gorlier, de Rippe). In Spain, we find six pieces by Mudarra and nine by Fuenllana. The guitar was also used in other countries: Italy, Great Britain, Flanders,... Amat in 1596 and Millioni in 1627 still mentioned the four-course instrument in their collection for the most recent five-course guitar.</p>	GUITARE	 <p>The first three courses were usually tuned as below:</p>  <p>while the other two could be tuned as shown in a, b, c and d beside. (see the article "How to string the Baroque Guitar" for more details: dates, countries, composers.)</p> <p>Initially based on chord strumming, its music will then gradually made use of the polyphonic technique, that eventually dominated in the 18th c., with variations pieces, repetitive arpeggios, vocal romance accompaniments, etc.</p> <p>Several composers proposed different tunings, as a temporary change - e.g. A - C# - F# - B - E. Gallot and Granata have also composed for a "<i>chitarra atiorbata</i>", a five-course guitar with seven off-the-fingerboard extra bass strings.</p> <p><b>Composers:</b> Corbetta, Granata, Roncalli, Bartolotti in Italy. Sanz, Guerau, Santa-Cruz, Murcia in Spain. Visée, Campion, Merchi in France. Other countries: Derosier, Le Coq, Diesel, Logy. Numerous manuscripts containing arrangements and original pieces. Instructions for the basso continuo, collections with voice (Marini, Kapsberger, Marín, manuscripts) and a "<i>Cantata Spagnuola</i>" for voice and guitar by Haendel. Music for different-sized guitars (up to 12) playing together can also be found in several books. By the end of the 18th c., it could be set with five single strings, but also six courses, and finally six single strings, the tuning of which has remained constant ever since.</p>
	 <p>A seven-course vihuela is mentioned by Bermudo, but the rich existing repertoire is intended for the one with six courses, which could all be in unison - as above - or also, for the lower ones, accompanied by a string one octave higher. According to its size, the instrument - just as the guitars and the lutes - could be tuned to a lower or higher pitch.</p> <p>The written repertoire is essentially savant, religious, sometimes with vocals. <b>Composers:</b> Milan, Narvaéz, Mudarra, Valderràbano, Fuenllana, Pisador, Daza, in Spain. In Italy, the <i>Viola da Mano</i> was played, and musical influences travelled across various countries. En 1555, Bermudo considered the four-course guitar of his period as a vihuela with the two outer courses removed and, a century later, Santa-Cruz called <i>Biguela hordinaria</i> the five-course guitar.</p>		

		16th century	17th & 18th centuries
L U T H S		 <p>Plectrum technique, used on the 4 and 5-course medieval lutes, lost ground during the 15th century and gave way to finger playing. The lute of the 1500s, known as "Renaissance lute", initially had six courses, and one to four courses were gradually added in the lower register as the century progressed. It has a large solo, duo and ensemble European repertoire. <b>Composers:</b>  <b>Germany:</b> Newsidler, Besard, Gerle, Reymann,...  <b>Italy:</b> Spinacino, Borrono, Capirola, Dalza, Da Milano,...  <b>France:</b> Attaignant, Paladin, Le Roy, Francisque, Bataille,...  <b>England:</b> Robinson, J. &amp; R. Dowland, T. Campion,...  <b>Other countries:</b> Phalèse, Judenkünig, Bakfark, Adriaenssen, Vallet,..</p> <div>+ numerous handwritten sources</div>	 <p>In the 17th century, Francisque, Mésangeau, Dufault, Dubut and others partly modified the previous tuning, known as "<i>vieil ton</i>": these "<i>accords nouveaux</i>" will then move onto the "<i>nouvel accord ordinaire</i>" the low register of which will range from eleven to thirteen courses depending on the country. In the 18th c., the success of the lute waned, though it persisted longer in the Germanic countries. <b>Composers:</b>  <b>Germany:</b> Reusner, Bach, Weiss, Kellner, Falckenhagen, Scheidler..  <b>France:</b> Gaultier, Dufault, Dubut, Mouton, Gallot, Visée...  <b>England:</b> Mace (partiel) Burwell lute tutor, Roberts lute book...  <b>Other countries:</b> Saint-Luc, Reusner, Le Sage de Richée,...          Note: This "<i>nouvel accord ordinaire</i>" was hardly ever used in Italy.</p> <div>+ numerous handwritten sources</div>
		End of 16th century, 17th & 18th centuries	
A R C H I L U T H	& T H É O R B E	 <p>In the 17th century the <b>Archlute</b>, like the <b>Liuto attiorbato</b>, retained the "<i>vieil ton</i>" of the previous century in its six first courses, with an additional 4 to 8 courses in the low register. The pitch of one or more low strings could be modified according to the key of the music being played - a standard practice on the theorbo and lute. It was often used as a continuo instrument (Praetorius, Schein, Locke, Corelli) but it had a specific repertoire, especially Italian (Kapsberger, Piccinini, Melli, Zamboni...) and also German and English - in handwritten collections.</p>	<p>Appearing in Italy at the end of the 16th c. as the <i>chitarrone</i> or <i>tiorba</i>, the single or double string <b>theorbo</b> was tuned as below. There were also smaller theorbos tuned up a fourth (<i>théorbe de pièces</i>) or up an octave (<i>tiorbino</i>). Mace described a 13-course theorbo with only the first course an octave below; some had 18 courses for a fully chromatic low range, while the German theorbo had a specific tuning. Basically a basso continuo instrument, the theorbo also has a solo repertoire (Piccinini, Castaldi, Kapsberger, Pittoni, Mace, Hurel, Hotman, Visée, Lemoine...), and music from other sources sometimes "<i>mise en tablature</i>" by De Visée.</p> 



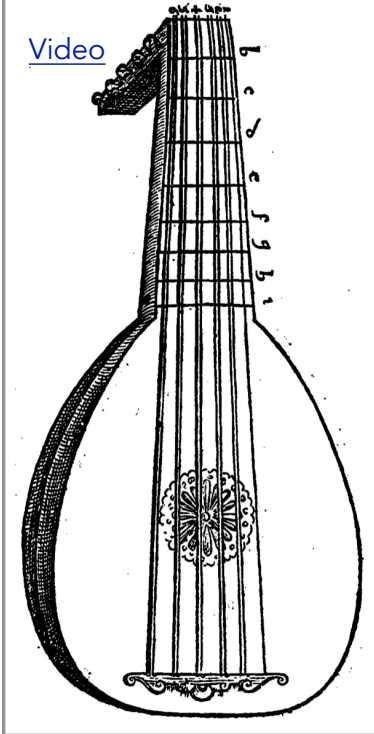
XVth century Guitar

[Video](#)



XVIth century Lute

[Video](#)



Vihuela (da mano)

[Video](#)



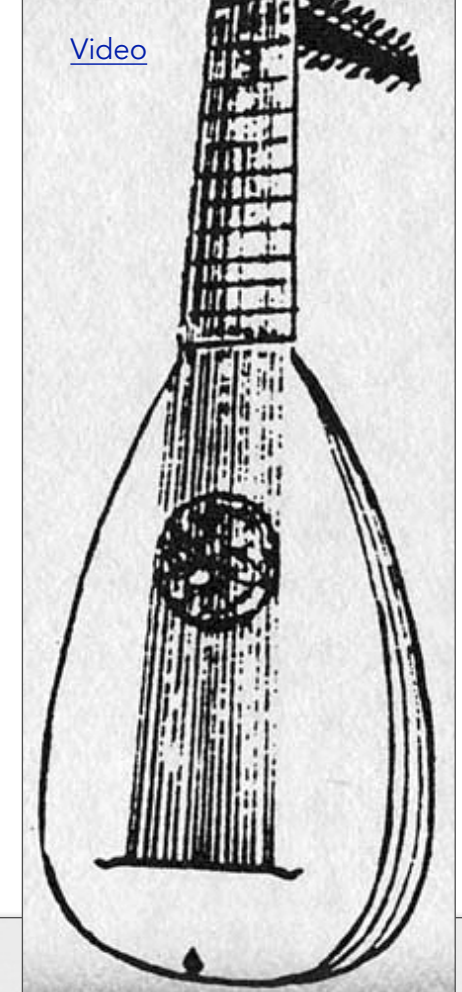
XVII & XVIIIth c. Guitar

[Video](#)



XVII & XVIIIth c. Lute

[Video](#)



XVIIth c. Chitarrone, or Theorbo

[Video](#)

[+ Video Archiluth.](#)

**"The lute ain't my grand'father !" - cried the guitar, in anger.  
"And I've fair had enough, of always playing Bach's stuff"**

As we know, the guitar is not always a good-natured instrument. And nothing makes it lose its temper quicker than reading in the press about a new young talent showing a remarkable display of ignorance by declaring, for example, that "J.S. Bach was interested in the lute. If he had known the guitar, he would certainly have written for that instrument since it's the evolution of the lute", or to hear the presenter of France-Musique (radio programme) who, while repeating what she has read in the press without checking its validity, informs her listeners that "the lute has been replaced by the guitar and the piano."

A quick look at the above chronological table will quickly convince you - should it be necessary - that the guitar has almost nothing in common with the lute in the time of Bach, save a neck, a sound box and strings... and that it never replaced it: however wonderful it may have been, the lute unfortunately fell into disuse because it had become unfit to express new musical trends, which the guitar had partly succeeded in doing.

"Lucs and quinternes" (lutes and guitars) already co-existed long before the years 1500<sup>1</sup> But, from the 16th century onwards, texts and iconography - backed up by the presence of surviving music - confirm these parallel existences. The chronological table above illustrates, for the sixteenth century and for the "baroque" period (seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries), the situation of the main plucked string instruments<sup>2</sup>: number of double strings (or courses), tunings, publications, iconography.

Obviously, we have kept to the main lines, without taking into account the many variations that can be found in tunings, single vs double strings, and the varying instrument sizes resulting in lower or higher open strings pitch. This document is a basic guide for those who are new to the subject, but it is no substitute for reading more comprehensive books such as *The Early Guitar* or the more recent *The Guitar and its Music* by James Tyler and Paul Sparks<sup>3</sup>, *The Chitarrone* by Kevin Mason<sup>4</sup>, *The Lute in Europe - 2* by Andreas Schlegel & Joachim Lüdtke<sup>5</sup>, the *Stringing of the 5-course guitar* article by Monica Hall<sup>6</sup>, *Performing Baroque Music on the Lute and Theorbo* by Peter Croton<sup>7</sup> ou the 700-page dissertation on Vihuelists by François Dry sur les Vihuelistes<sup>8</sup>, to name just a few.

Excerpt from *Les Cahiers de la Guitare*, n°29, January 1989. Revised in 2020.

[www.GerardRebours.com](http://www.GerardRebours.com)

<sup>1</sup> see [this picture](#) from the *Cantigas de Sancta-Maria* (XIIIe c.)

<sup>2</sup> There were many others, although less widespread: cittern, mandora, pandora, angelique, colascione, chitarra atiorbata, chitarra battente,...

<sup>3</sup> both books published at Oxford University Press

<sup>4</sup> published by Boethius Press, Aberystwyth, Wales, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> published by The Lute Corner, 2011. [www.lutecorner.ch](http://www.lutecorner.ch)

<sup>6</sup> That can be downloaded [here](#)

<sup>7</sup> © Peter Croton 2016

<sup>8</sup> to be downloaded via my own website [Articles](#) page, item n° 18.