

Viol fingerboards, a response to Comm 2143

Thomas Munck's Comm 2143 on early 17th century viols makes very interesting claims about the shape of the fingerboard. Yet he doesn't mention Christopher Simpson's two explicit diagrams of the relative shapes of the curves of bridge, fingerboard, and nut which seem to contradict his claims. First the 1659 version which just deals with the fingerboard:

A String of thirty Arches from the Bridge (duely placed) to the Nutt. The Sound, quick, and sprightly, like a *Violin*; and *Viols* of that shape (the Bellies being digged out of the Planck) do commonly render such a Sound. It must be accommodated with six Strings; and seven Frets, like those of a *Lute*, but something thicker. The *Strings*, a little bigger than those of a *Lyra-Viol*, which must be laid at the like nearness to the Finger-board, for ease and convenience of Stopping. The *Bridge*, as round as that of a *Consort-Basse*, that so each several String may be hit with a bolder touch of the Bow. The *Plate* or *Finger-board*, exactly smooth, and even. Its *Length*, full two parts of three from the Nutt to the Bridge. It must also be of a *proportionate* roundness to the Bridge, so that each String may lie at an equal nearness to it.

As for Example.



If the roundness of the Bridge be as the Arch *A. B.* then I would have the low end of the Finger-board, to be as *C. D.* and the top of it as *E. F.*

Let Viol-makers take notice hereof.

The Bow.

Then the 1665 version where Simpson adds in the bridge curve to make his point even clearer.

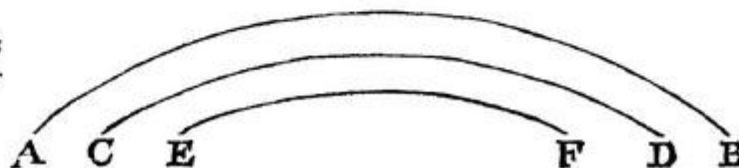
The Bridge, as round as that of a *Confort Bass*; that so each several String may be hit with a bolder touch of the Bow.

The Plate, or Finger-board, exactly smooth and even. Its length, full two parts of three, from the Nut to the Bridge. It must also be of a proportionate roundness to the Bridge; so, that each String may lye at an equal nearness to it. As for example: If the Roundness of the Bridge, be as the Arch *A. B.* then I would have the low end of the Finger-board to be as *C. D.* and the top of it, as *E. F.*

*distinēte fidentique pleūro absque ullā anxietate vibrari queant.*

*Canon sit levis & æquabilis. Ejus longitudo duas tertias partes spatii occupet, quod inter ponticulum superioremq; Chordotomum interjacet. Ponticulum declivi utrimq; flexu æmuletur; ut chordæ singulæ manubrio, quemadmodum dictum est, æqualiter superemineant. Si Ponticuli curvatura fuerit ut Arcus *A. B.* Canonis ima pars sit ut *C. D.* summa, ut *E. F.**

Viol-makers may take notice hereof.



Hæc Chelyum fabricis proportio Commendatur.

Thomas Munck's thesis seems to rest entirely on a conjectured shape of the top curve of the bridge and yet by his own account those which have survived can neither be linked to a specific instrument nor can be assumed to be unaltered. So I'm wondering exactly what was the basis for his observation; was it specific measurements of the 1619 Jaye bass fingerboard which he cites as having a demonstrably unaltered fingerboard shape? If so, I think we need chapter and verse.

His further point about the need for a slight concave curve through the length of the fingerboard for optimal low action is coincidentally confirmed by Peter Forrester's careful discussion of bandora fingerboards in Comm 2138. This is also routine for setting up modern guitar and violin family instruments and does not rest on any curious reverse conical shape of the string band. It is usually explained by the idea of allowing for the curvature of the string vibration amplitude. However more careful analysis of these matters has been done by Adrian Geisow, who I hope will submit his workings as a comm soon.