**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:

quick, and ſprightly, like a *Violin*; and *Viols* of that ſhape (the Bellyes being digged out of the Planck) do commonly render ſuch a Sound. It muſt be *accomodated* with ſix Strings; and ſeven Frets, like thoſe of a *Lute*, but ſomthing 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 Conſort 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.*

*diſtinctè fidentique plectro abſque ullâ anxietate vibrari queant.*

*Canon ſit lævis & æquabilis. Ejus longitudo duas tertias partes ſpatii occupet, quod inter ponticulum ſuperioremque Chordotonum 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 fabris proportio Commendatur.*

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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.