

Some 18th Century German Sources for Right Hand Placement and Fingering

By Robert Barto

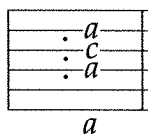
Although there are a few right hand fingerings in the main sources of Sylvius Weiss, he left us no specific instructions with his ideas on right hand technique. We know that the German and French lutenists of the 17th century played at the bridge using exclusively two fingers (*m* and *i*) with the thumb. In the extensively fingered French lute repertoire of the late 17th century, I know of no instances where the ring finger is indicated. There are the occasional ring finger signs in the theorbo music in the Saizenay MS(1699). In the German music of this time, although the pieces are generally not fingered, the instructions are quite clear not to use the ring finger. Chords with four or more voices would be played with a slip stroke, or some combination of sliding the fingers or thumb over several strings. Determining when and in what situations players began to make greater use of the ring finger can help us decide which fingering solutions might have been common in the music of Weiss. In this article I'd like to look at several sources from the first half of the 18th century which may help shed some light on this subject.

Radolt (1701)

The earliest source for baroque lute that I'm familiar with which mentions using three fingers to execute four voice chords is a 1701 publication in Vienna by Wenzel Ludwig Edler von Radolt. He specifically recommends in his introduction that four voice chords be performed with three fingers (*a,m,i*) rather than a brushing motion, as this makes the "consonances or dissonances" of the middle voices clearer. However, after stating this, he still continues the tradition of brushing over the strings in some places. He differentiates, for the most part, between plucking with three fingers and brushing with one finger with the following signs:



for three fingers (although he uses the numbers 3,2, and 1, I assume that he intends *i*, *m* and *a*) and:



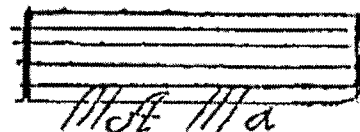
for brushing with the forefinger. (Radolt probably means brush toward the bass, although he does not actually specify in which direction).

The following comments are also of interest:

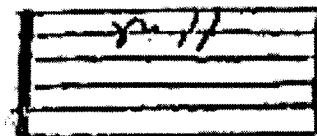
- One must not strike the notes all the same, but as if they were dotted [*inegalité*].
- One should not forget to alternate the fingers of the right-hand.
- One should do a rest stroke with the right hand thumb.
- One should hold the voices in the left hand.
- One should always trill from the note above the note upon which the trill is written and never from the note where the trill is written.

(My translation)

Radolt also uses two signs and customs rarely seen in German music. He often uses divided basses, differentiating between the fundamental and octave with the following signs



He also uses the sign:



to indicate an *etouffement*. (Stopping the note very quickly with another right hand finger.) One can consider how differently we might articulate the music of Weiss if he had used this sign. *

Radolt does not talk about hand position.

I have looked at the music of Radolt only in the context of fingering, but a more detailed study would certainly be of interest. His publication consists of nine suites (or *Parthien*) and several single movements which he says can be performed on solo lute. Many of the pieces have a second lute part (tuned a whole tone lower) and are arranged for several violins, gamba, and a bass. His first *Parthie* when performed as a "concerto" calls for three different size baroque lutes, two violins, viola (3rd violin) or gamba and a bass, but was first conceived as a solo, according to Radolt. I include here one short piece of his as a lute solo.



Sarabande in g minor

Baron (1727)

The two sources most contemporary with Weiss's adult life are Baron's comments in his "Study of the Lute" (1727) and an article about the lute in Majer's musical self-tutor (1732). (MAJER, J. F. B. C.: *Museum musicum*. Schwäbisch Hall 1732) Since Majer quotes Baron almost verbatim, I will just deal with Baron's comments here.



Ernst Gottlieb Baron
Candidatus Juris
A. H. Stein, Jod. Cr. 1727.

Baron states very clearly where one should place the right hand and why. He says, "As to the question of where to strike the strings of the lute so that the tone will be powerful enough, it will serve to know that this must be in the center of the space between the rose and the bridge, for there the contact will have the greatest effect. The further toward the fingerboard the strings are struck with the right hand, the softer and weaker will be the tone — it will lose power, so to speak. However the player can certainly also move back and forth, once he has the necessary skill, when he

wishes to change [the tone] and express something." (translation by D. A. Smith)

Unfortunately there is some confusion caused by another comment of Baron in the previous paragraph where he speaks about how to hold the lute. This is translated by Smith as follows: "the right little finger must be placed by the chanterelle or thinnest string behind the bridge where it is held slightly curved..." On a typical lute of the period it seems that it would be very uncomfortable to place the little finger behind the bridge and then play halfway between the rose and bridge. In addition, all the information we have from the middle of the 17th century onwards would indicate that "behind the bridge" was no longer recommended. I've discussed the original German text with several native speakers, and would like to suggest the following interpretation: What Baron actually says in German, translated as "slightly curved", is: "wo er in eine kleine Rundung zusammen schliesst". This should perhaps be interpreted as describing the place (the small niche formed by the bridge extensions) where one puts the finger, rather than the shape of the finger itself.

I include here the portrait from the frontispiece of Baron's "Study". Unfortunately, it is unclear where the bridge is in the picture, and he does seem to be closer to the bridge than halfway to the rose.

Baron does not talk about right hand fingering.

Wroclaw MS 2002 (also known as Kniebandl)

This MS can be found in a facsimile online with notes by Tim Crawford at:

<http://doc.gold.ac.uk/~mas01tc/Wroclaw2002/>

There is also some interesting background information on the MS at:

<http://www.tabulatura.de/Knieban/KNintro.htm>.

There is some controversy as to the dating of this manuscript. It contains a piece by Weiss dated with 1729 or 1739 as well as variants of some of the Kellner pieces which were published in 1747.

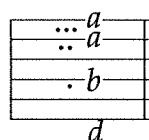
At the beginning of the MS the 17 points of instructions from Le Sage de Richée's 1695 "How beginners should proceed" are quoted in full with two additions for tuning the 12th and 13th courses and an explanation of the different keys. (These revised instructions in Wroclaw were reprinted in an article by Peter Danner and Doug Smith in the LSA Journal of 1976 ["How beginners ... should proceed": The lute instructions of Lesage de Richée, *JLSA IX* (1976), 87-94])

An English translation of these instructions. taken from this article can be found at:

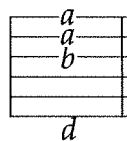
<http://polyhymnion.org/barto/fingerings3.html>



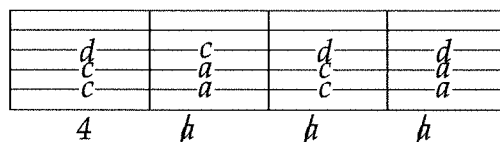
Following the Richée material are the new examples of fingering and execution of various chords and arpeggios. The first of the new instructions states: *Never brush this chord but play it with three fingers:*



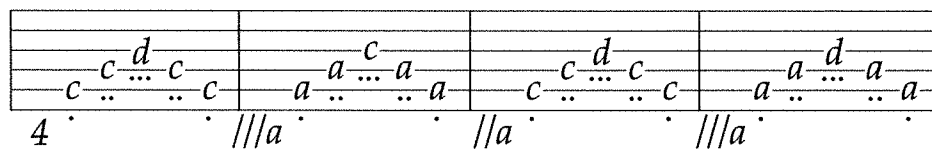
The chord should apparently be:



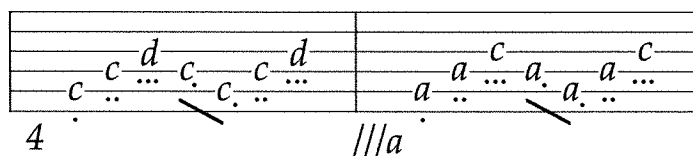
This is followed by arpeggio examples which include the ring finger. These chords:



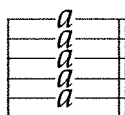
should be executed like this:



or:

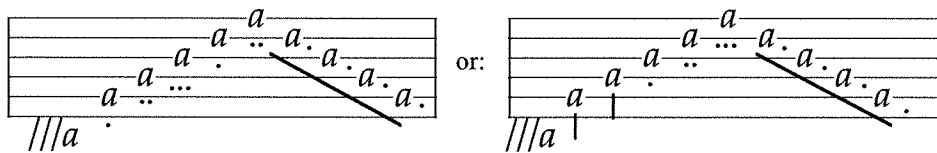


And this chord:

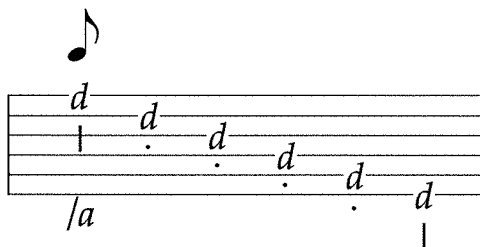


///a

like this:

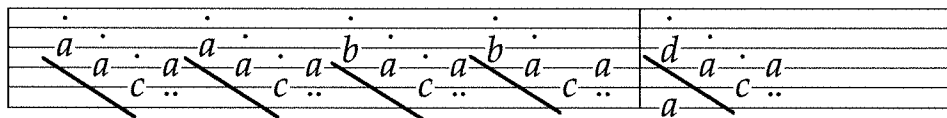


Please note how the author often chooses to slide the forefinger over the strings in the descending arpeggios. One finds similar fingerings in several Weiss pieces:



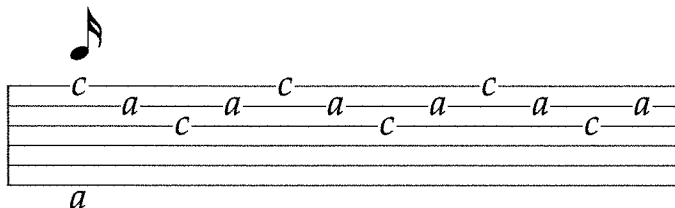
from Gigue, Sonata 21 in f minor, London MS, f. 105r

In conclusion, this very interesting example of what the author calls “good and proper” (Wohl und fuegig) fingering is offered:



One finds this specific fingering written out in several pieces in this MS, but I don't know of any examples in other manuscripts. Here we see very clearly that at this time, although the ring finger was commonly used in arpeggios and four voice chords, certain “special effects” were in use which seem to have evolved from the two finger tradition.

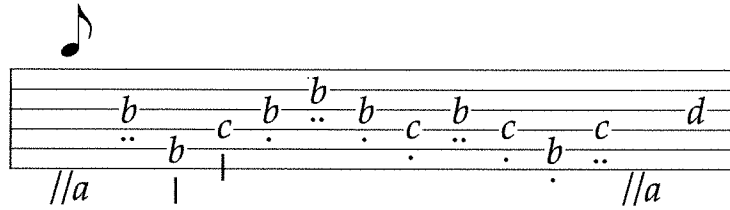
Is it too far a stretch of the imagination to think that Weiss would use this example of “good and proper” fingering as the basis of several of his pieces? One finds several passages similar to the above.



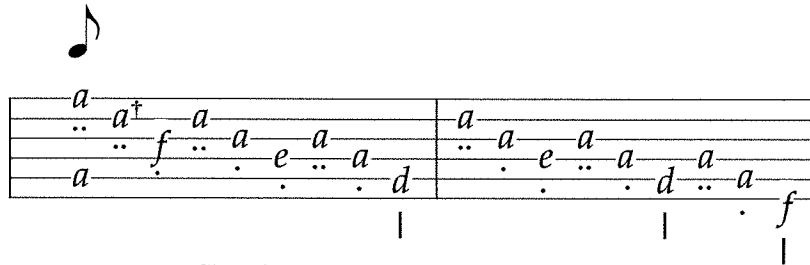
from Courante, Sonata 5 in G, London MS, f. 22v

Although Weiss provides no fingering for this piece, the pattern works well with exactly the same fingering as in the previous example.

There are several fingerings from Weiss which show that he used similar techniques (I am assuming Weiss oversaw the London collection and was responsible for the fingerings):



from Prelude in Eb, London MS, f. 145v



Gigue, Sonata 24 in C major, London MS, f. 121r

Warsaw 2004 (after 1728?)

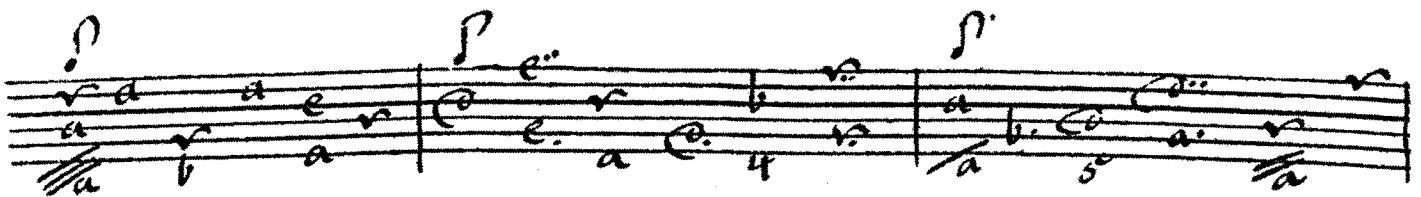
Another little known source is a set of instructions included in the MS Warsaw 2004. This MS contains several major works of Weiss, including the Bb sonata #49, the Presto of which was published by Telemann in 1728. Other than this, and the fact that the instructions and pieces are intended for the 13c lute, it is difficult to date the MS. The author says:

For the placement of the hand and use of the fingers: One puts the little finger of the right hand in the corner or niche (Hoelung) of the bridge next to the Chantrelle... The thumb is only used for the basses. The ring finger (called here the third middle finger) is used between the courses for chords and elaborate passages

(vollstim[m]igen Grieffen). For running passages, the index finger is mostly used, and is helped out by the middle finger. The ring finger is only used in four voiced chords. (my translation)

An illustration of Falckenhagen (shown on the cover of this issue and on page 9) demonstrates this hand position exquisitely (he is playing a C chord with three RH fingers and even hitting the correct bass).

In this manuscript, as in London and Dresden, there are actually very few fingerings in the Weiss pieces. Here we see that great lengths (or stretches and leaps with the middle finger) are taken to avoid using the ring finger in a melodic passage.



Sarabande, Sonata 49 in g minor



rose on a Renaissance lute, there is no reason, other than our expectations, that it should. For someone interested in specializing in baroque lute, it is clear from the overwhelming evidence, that thumb out, somewhere near the bridge was the way they played, and is at least worth a try.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Gerd Soehne, Ulrich Warnecke and Markus Lutz for translation help. Dr. Frank Legl provided a version in modern German of the instructions in Warsaw 2004 as well as translation advice. Tim Crawford helped out as well providing the Radolt in modern German script, and a copy of the Majer article. Some of the sources used came from the library of the late Karl-Ernst Schroeder.

* Though rare, this sign occasionally appears in Austro-Bohemian MSS from around Radolt's time (e.g. Brno HAM 371, an important source of Weichenberger's music).

† The middle finger indication on the second note should perhaps be an index, but this is what is written. Although I have not seen any other examples of sliding the middle finger one could try it and see if it is possible.

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