

Preliminary Analysis of Extant German Bass Viols  
by Maker, Date, Place Made, and Current Location

This fifth segment of the Database of Historical Viols, first made available online in autumn 2016, contains information about 277 bass viols currently thought to have been made in Germany prior to the 20th century. (German viols of smaller and larger sizes were included in a subsequent installment.)

Forty-six of these 277 viols are listed as anonymous, while the remaining 231 are assigned to a maker of the 16th, 17th, or 18th century, based on present knowledge and in some cases with an added question mark to indicate doubt. Of these, no fewer than 91 were made by Joachim Tielke in Hamburg, from whom more viols survive than by any other maker in any country. (His closest rivals in this regard are Louis Guersan in France and Barak Norman in England, each with 60 or more known specimens, though Guersan's are all *pardessus de viole*.) Tielke is thus responsible for almost a third of all German bass viols still in existence, while a further 26 (almost 10%) are the work of Martin Hoffmann and his son Johann Christian Hoffmann in Leipzig.

This leaves 116 additional instruments made by, or attributed to, 51 other known makers, among whom the only ones credited with five or more surviving basses are

Paul Alletsee (Munich) – 9	Thomas Edlinger (Augsburg) – 6
Mathias Hummel (Nuremberg) – 9	Johann Joseph Elsler (Mainz) – 5
Gregor Karpp (Königsberg) – 8	Andreas Jaïs (Tölz) – 5
Jacob Heinrich Goldt (Hamburg) – 6	Jacob Meinertzen (Berlin) – 5
Ernst Busch (Nuremberg) – 6	Johann Heinrich Ruppert (Erfurt) – 5

Together, these ten makers account for more than half (56%) of all German basses not made by Tielke, the Hoffmanns, or persons currently unknown, leaving the remaining 51 instruments as the work of 41 makers, three-quarters of whom are survived by only a single bass viol (though some also made viols in other sizes).

Chronologically, the earliest dated instrument in this entire group of 277 is a unique survivor by Hans Pergette of Munich in 1599. Next comes the only known viol by Rudolf Bossart (Augsburg, 1625), followed by a handful of instruments made in the 1640s and 50s by Ernst Busch and his successor Paul Hiltz in Nuremberg, who also produced tenors and violones. The latest German bass viols come from the final quarter of the 18th century and the workshops of Lorenz Wachter (Bonn, 1775), Johann Casper Göbler (Breslau, 1784), Johann Stephan Thumhardt (Straubing, 1784), and Leopold Widhalm (Nuremberg, with a label bearing his name but dated 1789 and therefore probably the work of his sons, since Leopold himself died in 1776). There are no known examples from the 19th century, in contrast to the situation in England, France, and Italy.

Based on surviving instruments, the most important German centers of viol making were Hamburg (due to the extraordinary number produced by Tielke) and Leipzig (because of the Hoffmann family's prolific output). These two places are followed by Nuremberg and Munich, each with about 20 known examples by a handful of different makers over a period of approximately 150 years; no other city is currently credited with as many as ten.

For 28 of these 277 German basses, their current location is unknown: some are documented only in the catalogues of auctions (whose results are usually confidential) or long-ago exhibitions, while others were lost from museums in Berlin and Leipzig during World War II. (The latter have been retained here for comparative purposes and on the off chance that they may one day come to light, as has repeatedly happened with musical manuscripts "lost" from important German libraries at around the same time.) Of the rest, a significant plurality (104) are still in Germany, while the next-largest group (30) is found in the United States; Switzerland is home to a further 19, with a dozen or fewer each in Denmark, England, the Netherlands, France, and Austria.

As for ownership, slightly more than a third belong to private individuals, with the rest residing in various museums. In neither category is a significantly large number of examples to be found in any one collection: only the museums in Copenhagen and Leipzig have as many as ten, closely followed Nuremberg with eight. Among individuals the late Konrad Ruhland (who specialized in South German instruments) had eight, while the two largest private collections of viols have only five and four, respectively.