

Preliminary Analysis of Viols from the Peripheral Countries of Europe  
by Place Made, Maker, Date, Size, and Current Location

Each of the previous installments uploaded to the Online Database of Historical Viols has focused on a single country, starting in 2011 with England and continuing in subsequent years with France, Italy, Germany, and Austria. Now, in autumn 2018, it is time to finish the process by adding instruments made in other European countries, as well as those (to be discussed separately) for which no place of origin is presently known or surmised.

The “other countries” in question are located mainly to the north and east of the five that produced the great majority of extant viols, for the most part forming a large arc running from Belgium through the Netherlands, Sweden, and Poland to Bohemia. From each of these countries there are between 20 and 35 extant viols, except for Poland with only a dozen; additionally, there are one or two viols each that were made in Ireland, Denmark, Norway, and Spain. (This is in contrast to anywhere from 75 to more than 400 viols originating in the five more centrally-located countries of England, France, Italy, Germany, and Austria.)

The following discussion will proceed in alphabetical order by country name rather than by geographical proximity.

In beginning with **Belgium** we must first acknowledge the unusual fact that nearly half of the 32 viols made there and included in the database date from the end of the 19th century and earliest years of the 20th, just as the modern revival of interest in performing on old instruments was getting started. Most of these are basses and were presumably made for cellists interested in exploring the historical repertoire. Quite a few of them have sympathetic strings, suggesting they might well be classified as a kind of *basse de viole d’amour* suitable for pairing with the viola d’amore, which, unlike the viol, never fell completely out of fashion during the 19th century. No fewer than nine of these late viols (three pardessus, five basses, and a violone) were made by Hilaire Darce in Brussels, mostly after the turn of the century; despite falling after the nominal cut-off date for this database, they have been included in order to give a more complete picture of his activity in this area, which began as early as 1890.

Among viols made during the historical period in the area now known as Belgium, there are three basses by the Borbon family of Brussels in the 17th century (one by Gaspar and two by his son Peeter) and two basses plus a pardessus by Ambroise De Comble in Tournai during the third quarter of the 18th century. Otherwise, there are only a few attributable instruments: a tenor (1642) by Jooris Willems and a pardessus (1738) by Hyacinte Lorret, both made in Ghent, and another tenor by a mysterious maker named Lucx or Luck who may have worked in 17th-century Liège. There are also a few instruments that are anonymous but thought to be Belgian.

Considering the older and more recent groups together, only half a dozen of these 32 viols are privately owned. Most of the rest reside in museums, especially (and not unexpectedly) the Musical Instruments Museum in Brussels, which owns nearly a dozen Belgian-made viols of all sizes from the 17th, 18th, and early 20th centuries.

The database includes 29 instruments thought to have been made in **Bohemia** (formerly a kingdom within the Holy Roman Empire and now a region included in the Czech Republic), ten of them in Prague and seven in other cities. The rest are anonymous and therefore of unknown origin, though their characteristics suggest they belong to the same general school of lutherie. Sixteen, or slightly more than half, are basses, with the rest classified (at least provisionally) as trebles, tenors, and violones. However, many of the treble-sized instruments are likely to have been made originally as violas d’amore, while the ancestry of both violones is open to question as to type as well as to maker. Most Bohemian viols of known authorship were made during the 18th century, with one just a few years earlier (1695) and another seemingly from the mid-19th century (1863), though its label is more likely to identify a dealer rather than the original maker. Nearly a dozen are privately owned, mostly basses belonging to professional gambists, including two in the United States. The rest are in museums of various countries, both in Europe (notably Prague itself) and elsewhere, except for three auctioned during the decade from 1977 to 1987, whose current location is unknown.

Three viols made in **Denmark** during the first half of the 18th century are known to exist today: one treble, one tenor, and one bass. The treble was made in 1730 by Johann Karp (no known relation of Gregor Karpp in Königsberg) and shows signs of French influence, notably in its striped back and ribs. The tenor, made by Jesper Gotfredsen in 1752, is one of only three known instruments by this maker, the others being a violin and a pochette; although relatively small, it is unquestionably a tenor viol rather than any kind of viola d’amore. The bass was made in 1708 by Peter Nielsen Baas, a luthier about whom nothing further is known. All three men worked in Copenhagen, and all three instruments are now in museum collections.

The only viol presently known to have been made in **Ireland** is a bass with a label reading “Made by Thomas Molineux in Christ Church Yard Dublin 1739.” Molineux (or Molyneux) does not appear in the usual reference books, but a website devoted to documenting the Dublin music trade gives 1739–57 as the dates of his known activity there. When the instrument was auctioned by Sotheby’s in 1973 it had been converted into a cello; it was subsequently restored as a viol and resold, but its current ownership is unknown, so additional information is unavailable.

From the **Netherlands** there are 20 extant viols, all either trebles or basses. All of those by identifiable makers were made in Amsterdam, including nine by Pieter Rombouts (though one may be an unwitting duplicate), four more by his step-father Hendrik Jacobs, and three by Jan Boumeester. Apart from a unique bass by Pieter Bochs, made in 1625 and thus the oldest of this group by several decades, the remainder are anonymous, most of them with only a speculative claim to having been made in the Netherlands. A quarter of these Dutch viols are privately owned; except for two whose whereabouts is unknown, the rest belong to various museums or schools of music, mostly in Europe though with one example each by Boumeester, Jacobs, and Rombouts here in the United States.

The only evidence of viol-making at any time in **Norway** is a bass viol bearing the name of Gulbrand Lind, though without any place or date. Descriptions of it published at the time of its acquisition by the Copenhagen museum more than a century ago called it Norwegian work and suggested a date of about 1815, and indeed a person by this name lived in an area west of Oslo from 1776 to 1859. It remains unknown why anyone would have wanted to make (or purchase) a viol in that place and at that time, or what Lund would have used as a model.

Extant viols made in **Poland** can be divided into two equal-sized groups: six made in Gdansk (better known in the 17th and 18th centuries by its German name, Danzig) and six made in Krakow. All of the latter, namely two tenors and four basses, are either signed by or attributed to Marcin Groblicz, a name that some have claimed was held by as many as five or even six successive members of the same family; however, more recent research suggests that there was only one maker, active in the first half of the 18th century. From Danzig there are four trebles and two basses, made in the late 17th and early 18th centuries by four different luthiers, one of them the father of a harpsichordist best known today as the supposed recipient of J. S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*. (Viols made by Gregor Karpp in Königsberg, a hundred miles east of Danzig along the coastline of the Baltic Sea and today known as Kaliningrad, Russia, have been classified as German because during his lifetime that city was part of Brandenburg-Prussia.)

In addition to the above dozen, the label of a treble viol in the Copenhagen museum is said to read “Alexander Ender. Im Mezeritz 1722.” However, this maker is unknown to scholarship, and while the place name may represent an alternate spelling of Meseritz, the German equivalent of Międzyrzec, this name is used by two different towns, one in the west and the other in the far east of modern-day Poland

The database contains only two viols made in **Spain**. One is a treble-sized instrument made in 1744 by José Contreras of Madrid, who is sometimes called the Spanish Stradivari because his violin-family instruments show clear signs of Cremonese influence. Since it has only five strings, it may originally have been intended as a viola d’amore without sympathetic strings; no further information is available, because its current ownership is unknown following an auction sale in the early 1980s. The second is a bass viol with an unusually narrow body, made in Barcelona at the late date of 1778 by Juan Matabosch, who is better known for his guitars although he also made violin-family instruments. It is privately owned in the city of its origin, having recently returned there from elsewhere in Europe.

Viols were made in **Sweden** during the first half of the 18th century, a period from which 21 examples survive, all of them basses except for a single late quinton and a seven-stringed treble that is more likely to be a viola d’amore. Four makers are responsible for nearly all of these instruments: Jonas Elg and Petter Hellstedt in Stockholm, and Johannes Georg Mothe and Arwitt Rönnegren in the southern city of Ängelholm, only about 60 miles north of Copenhagen (Denmark). Ten Swedish viols remain in the country of their origin, with the rest scattered by ones and twos across six other European countries plus the United States. Ownership is almost evenly divided between private individuals and museums.

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(revised 10/2018)