

*Introduction*

I

‘Keep close your friend’s letters, for craft and malice never reigned more’.<sup>1</sup> This is the warning that one friend gave to another in 1587, but it would have been good advice at any time in the sixteenth century. Those who sent letters on personal or political business under the Tudors had every reason to fear the ‘craft and malice’ of spies, and some resorted to ciphers and secret tokens. One such was Edward Courtenay, First Earl of Devon. In the winter of 1553–4, when he was widely believed to be the best match for Princess Elizabeth, Courtenay found himself ‘the rallying point for every major conspiracy’ against her half-sister, Queen Mary.<sup>2</sup> To communicate with his allies, Courtenay hit upon a device that was unusually ingenious even by the standards of Elizabethan duplicity. He took a *guitarre* and marked it with a cipher known to his principal associate, Peter Carew. The deceit was soon discovered, however, and became common knowledge at court. The news reached two imperial ambassadors who reported it to their master, Charles V, a ruler with a deep political interest in the fortunes of the restored Catholic monarchy in England. The ambassadors assured the Emperor that Queen Mary and her Privy Council, having interrogated various suspects, now believed

that it was certain the guilt of the said Courtenay was established by several other prisoners, that he was a knowing and consenting participant in the said sworn agreement, [and that] he had a cipher inscribed on a *guitarre* for use with Peter Carew ...<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mildred Burghley to Sir William Fitzwilliam, 24 March 1587, quoted in Daybell, ‘Secret Letters’. I have modernised the spelling.  
<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, “The Misfortune that is wished for him”, 1. For more recent work on Courtenay, see Overell, *Italian Reform and English Reformations*, esp. 61–80, and *ODNB*, ‘Courtenay, Edward’.  
<sup>3</sup> ‘... qu’il estoit certain le dite Cortenai estoit convaincu par plusieurs autres prisonniers, qu’il estoit participant saichant et consentant de la dite conjure, qu’il avoit un ziffre avec pierre caro taillée sur une guitarre ...’. Brussels, National Archives, Audience, n° 384, f. 591v. This episode is mentioned (on the basis of the printed paraphrase in the *Calendar of State Papers*) by Marsh, *Music and Society*, 181. The report was all the more believable since such ‘deceitful traffique’, in the words of Tudor diplomat Sir James Melville, was common. Francis Walsingham, the royal spymaster, often used secret tokens and devices to verify whether couriers were bringing news from trustworthy informants (Alford, *The Watchers*, 82–3, 119 and 197). Plotters devised a range of methods to communicate in

These details ring true, for both of the suspects were musicians. Edward Courtenay was remembered after his death as a talented performer on the lute, and Peter Carew made music with Henry VIII.<sup>4</sup> What is more, the practice of inscribing a guitar with a symbol or *ziffre* of purely personal (as opposed to treasonable) significance was not unusual in the sixteenth century; a poem by Pierre de Ronsard celebrates a *guiterre* marked with his lady's name and his own *en chiffre*.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, as perhaps in others, Edward Courtenay and Peter Carew were guilty as charged.

Their stratagem would never have been considered, let alone attempted, if there were anything unusual or odd about courtiers sharing a *guiterre*, or giving one as a present, during the early 1550s. Courtenay and Carew were hiding their cipher in plain sight. The ambassadors' letter may therefore be said to reveal an indisputably courtly context for the *guiterre* in England, shedding a welcome light on musical life at the Tudor court. But what kind of instrument is meant?<sup>6</sup> In sixteenth-century French, the term *guiterre* was a synonym of both *guiterne* and (a rarer word) *quinterne*. The author of a treatise published in Poitiers in 1556 regarded all three as names for a plucked and fretted instrument with three double courses plus a single top string or *chanterelle*.<sup>7</sup> During the 1550s, two publishing partnerships in Paris issued elegant volumes of tablature for what is undoubtedly the instrument that the author had in mind; Adrian Le Roy and Robert Ballard called it the *guiterre*, the form found in the ambassadors' letter, while Robert Granjon and Michel Fezandat used the term *guiterne*. All four of the prints issued by the latter team depict this *guiterne* as a plucked instrument with incurved sides, a single circular sound-hole, frets and a fixed bridge: a true guitar as that term will be understood in this book (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup>

secret, for example letters sealed in wine bottles with specially marked corks, and notes on black paper left in the dark corner of a privy (Orlin, *Locating Privacy*, 254, n.) An inscribed guitar would not necessarily attract attention, since the men and women of Tudor England were accustomed to seeing symbols and text on walls, beams, pots and other surfaces where they would often now count as graffiti (Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts*).

<sup>4</sup> When Sir Thomas Wilson gave the funerary oration for Courtenay at Padua in 1556 he mentioned the earl's skill with the lute, in a humanistic context, also praising his fluency in Spanish, French and Italian, together with his knowledge of *philosophia* and the art of drawing. Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, vol. i, 550; vol. ii, 420–7, at 422: 'Testudinem vero sonorisque intervallis, et temperata varietate contrectavit, absolutam ut in illo diceret perfectionem.' Peter Carew became a favoured companion of Henry VIII when that king had a mind to sing 'certain songs they called fremen songs, as namely "By the bank as I lay" and "As I walked the wood so wild"'. The source is Hooker's biography of Carew. See Maclean, *The Life and Times of Sir Peter Carew*, 38–40. For Carew's involvement in political events, see Wagner, *The Devon Gentleman*, 153–236.

<sup>5</sup> Céard, Ménager and Simonin, eds., *Pierre de Ronsard*, vol. i, 930.

<sup>6</sup> For the medieval gittern as a pear-shaped, plucked and fretted instrument whose body, neck and peg-box were carved from a single block, see Appendix F.

<sup>7</sup> *La maniere de bien et iustement entoucher les Lucz et Guitermes*, 96–7.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, *Instrumental Music*, 1551<sub>1</sub>, 1552<sub>5</sub>, 1552<sub>6</sub> and 1553<sub>4</sub>. All have been issued in facsimile by Editions Chanterelle (Tyler, ed., *Simon Gorlier and Guillaume Morlaye*). In this book I accept the conclusion of Meucci, 'Da "chitarra italiana" a "chitarrone"', that the *Chitara da sette corde* for which

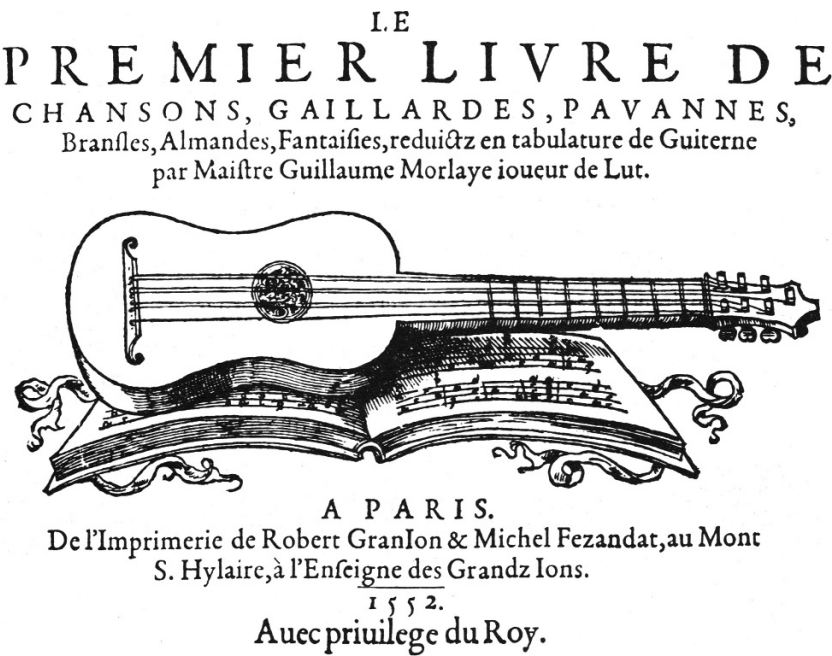


Figure 1. The title page of Robert Granjon and Michel Fezandat, *Le Premier Livre de Chansons, Gaillardes, Pavannes, Bransles, Almandes, Fantaisies, reduictz en tabulature de Guiterne par Maistre Guillaume Morlaye ioueur de Lut*, second edition (Paris, 1552). Brown, *Instrumental Music*, 1552<sub>5</sub>.

The music master and songwriter Thomas Whythorne (d. 1595) relates in his remarkable autobiography that he learned the ‘Gyttern’ while a young man in London during the late 1540s and into the 1550s. At the time, he maintains, the instrument known by that name was still considered ‘stranz’, meaning that it was unusual and probably also foreign.<sup>9</sup> Whythorne’s testimony is indirectly supported by many documents from the second half of the sixteenth century, the period when references to the ‘gittern’ (in various spellings) begin to proliferate in a wide range of English documents. Import records, for example, show that the government did not levy a duty on ‘gitternes’ in 1545 but decided it should do so thirteen years later, suggesting that the trade in legally imported gitterns rose to the level where it came to official notice at some point between 1545 and 1558. Inventories of property drawn up for probate show gitterns appearing among the possessions of Cambridge

Melchior de Barberiis published four tablatures in 1549 was a small instrument with a lute-shaped body, not a four-course guitar (Brown, *Instrumental Music*, 1549<sub>2</sub>).

<sup>9</sup> Osborn, ed., *The Autobiography*, 19. For further discussion of the term, see 160.

scholars for the first time in 1559–60, even though such inventories are available (and rich in references to instruments) from the mid-1530s. Perhaps the choice document, however, is the record that shows Queen Elizabeth received a boxed set of three ‘Getternes’ as a New Year present in 1559. The gift was offered on behalf of the most famous instrument maker of early Elizabethan England, and (better still) the Queen asked for the instruments to be brought to her rather than simply stored or passed on to another. She evidently wished to see the three gitterns, and even perhaps to play them.

At about the time when the Queen received these three ‘Getternes’ we begin to find music in English sources, written in French lute tablature, for a four-course or four-string instrument tuned guitar-wise to a rising fourth, major third and fourth. This is the string arrangement and tuning of the *guitarre* and *guiterne* for which the French publishers issued their books in the 1550s. The pieces in the English sources show no lack of panache, as a saltarello from the Osborn commonplace Book of c. 1560, with its florid play on the upper strings or ‘fine, minikin fingering’, demonstrates (Example 1).<sup>10</sup> As if to complement the appearance of such confident music, images of relatively small guitars begin to appear by the late 1560s in works of art produced for English patrons, mostly by continental artists and craftsmen, including two of the most opulent depictions of a renaissance guitar to survive from sixteenth-century Europe (see Chapter 1).

By far the simplest explanation for what we find in documents, musical sources and works of art is that the new ‘gittern’ of the late 1540s onwards in England was the *guiterne/guitarre* of contemporary France, namely the four-course guitar. We shall soon encounter an English gentleman, of high rank in the Tudor government, who bought a ‘gyttron’ after a diplomatic visit to France in 1550. A tutor for the four-course guitar, probably published in 1569, bears the running title ‘An instruction to the *Gitterne*’ (emphasis mine) on most of its surviving pages, following its French model. As the latest Parisian fashion in amateur musicianship, the four-course guitar would have commended itself to gentlemen and others in England with an avid taste for imported French goods and fashions. This does not mean, however, that the term ‘gittern’ implies a guitar of the kind shown in Figure 1 whenever it appears in a sixteenth-century source; it would be contrary to common sense (and to the nature of Tudor documents) to assume so. There are, to be sure, some sources where the meaning is assured, but in general we do better to interpret the documents in terms of shared

<sup>10</sup> Ascham, *Toxophilus*, Sig. Cij<sup>v</sup>.

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Example 1. ‘Salt[a]rello’, from the Osborn Commonplace Book (Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University, Osborn Music MS 13), f. 42 (old foliation), f. 46 (new foliation). The original can be viewed in the Digital Library of the Beinecke at <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu>. For the first four notes of measure 3, the tablature indicates a-g-a-bb, which seems unidiomatic for this repertory and has no counterpart in the ‘galliard to salt[a]rello’ which immediately follows in the MS and has exactly the reading given here at the corresponding place. I assume that the scribe inadvertently wrote the tablature letters on the third course instead of the second, with the result that the phrase appears in the manuscript a major third too low.

The musical score for 'Salt[a]rello' is presented in a standard Western notation format. It features a treble and bass staff for each system. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The melody is primarily in the treble staff, while the bass staff provides a simple harmonic accompaniment. The score is divided into six systems, with measure numbers 5, 8, 11, 13, and (15) indicating the start of new systems. The word 'bis' appears below the first measure of the first, second, and fifth systems. The score concludes with a double bar line.

themes and concerns without pressing any single source too hard for what it may reveal about the guitar.<sup>11</sup>

II

The guitar in Tudor England has never before been made the sole subject of a monograph.<sup>12</sup> That is not altogether surprising; the sources of music for the instrument are sparse and there seems to be no evidence that it was ever used in consort, like the cittern. Yet the ambassadors' letter quoted above captures much that gives the history of the Tudor guitar its special character and interest.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the lute, the guitar was never dependably gentle in the Elizabethan sense of possessing an assured lineage or a right to respect. Its allure arose from the competing attractions of the decent and the disreputable, the simple and the sophisticated. The *guitarre* of Edward Courtenay and Peter Carew was used (if not necessarily played) by two of the highest courtiers in the land, and yet the guitar can also be found in the hands of apprentices fleeing their masters, of impoverished tricksters, of Inns of Court gallants and alehouse wastrels. It yielded readily to players who wished to do little more than strum chords, but it could also accommodate musicians who sought a more demanding repertoire. To the higher gentry and nobility, the guitar was a fashionable object with some appealingly low associations, rather like a printed translation of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. To those lower down the social scale it was a relatively inexpensive purchase, but one whose connections were enticingly select, like a pair of scented gloves.

The period from the accession of Edward VI in 1547 to the end of Elizabeth's reign in 1603 encloses, with some neatness, a distinct phase in the history of the renaissance guitar. As mentioned above, the sixteenth-century instrument was generally equipped with seven strings disposed as

<sup>11</sup> According to *La maniere de bien et iustement entoucher les Lucz et Guiterres*, published in 1556, at 96, 'depuis douze ou quinze ans en ça, tout nostre monde s'est mis a Guiterner', which places the beginnings of the craze in the early 1540s. Facsimile in Saint-Arroman and Dugot, *Méthodes et Traités, Luth*, vol. 1, 25–53. In a series of studies, John Ward maintained that the gittern of Tudor documents might equally well be the wire-strung gittern, effectively a treble cittern tuned guitar-wise, mentioned in seventeenth-century sources. See *Sprightly and Cheerful Musick*, 6–16, and *Music for Elizabethan Lutes*, vol. 1, 24–9. In a review of the latter, Sayce (in my view rightly) deems that Ward 'gets into a tangle that transcends the boundaries of common sense ...' with this proposal. Ward's argument is dismissed (perhaps somewhat briskly) by Tyler in Tyler and Sparks, *The Guitar and its Music*, 25, n. See here Appendix F.

<sup>12</sup> For previous scholarship on the renaissance guitar in England, see Ward, *Sprightly and Cheerful Musick*, 6–21, 107–8 and 109–29, and *Music for Elizabethan Lutes*, vol. 1, *passim*, but esp. 24–9; Heartz, 'An Elizabethan Tutor for the Guitar'; Tyler and Sparks, *ibid.*, 24–9. Gill, *Gut-Strung Plucked Instruments*, 4–8, mentions some essentials, albeit without much documentation, and his account is not confined to England. One of the principal iconographical sources, the Eglantine Table now at Hardwick Hall, is usefully studied (but before cleaning) in Collins, 'A 16th-Century Manuscript in Wood'.

<sup>13</sup> The modern term 'renaissance guitar' is to my mind satisfactory. No special problems have been created by the passage of the term into widespread use.

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three double courses and a single *chanterelle*. By the 1620s, many players in England, as elsewhere in Europe, had adopted the five-course guitar. One may speak of ‘Europe’ advisedly here, for the social and musical history of the guitar in early modern England belongs in a European context. According to John Milsom, most accounts of Tudor music,

especially those written by English-born authorities, proceed as if sixteenth-century England were a country largely untouched by the music of continental Europe, at least until the generation of William Byrd and Thomas Morley. They pay little attention to the cohort of foreign musicians that has long been known to have served the Tudor court from the reign of Henry VII onwards, and they do not consider the easy access English musicians must have had to foreign repertoires through the burgeoning medium of print.<sup>14</sup>

The first traces of the guitar in England include the inventory by a *Netherlandish* lute player of instruments in the royal keeping called ‘*Spanishe vialles*’ and an inlaid table produced by craftsmen who were probably *Germans* or *Flemings* serving an *English* patron. The most sophisticated playing in *England*, insofar as we can reconstruct it, was partly an emanation of *French* practice. The cultivation of the guitar under the Tudors can only be understood in relation to ‘the music of continental Europe’, the influence of ‘foreign musicians’ and ‘the burgeoning medium of print’ evoked by Milsom.

The purpose of this book is to frame a social and musical history of the guitar in Tudor England by gathering the relevant literary, archival and pictorial documents in a more comprehensive manner than has yet been attempted. This is to claim a good deal, for the late John Ward marshalled an impressive array of material in his *Sprightly and Cheerful Musick* (1978–81) and later in *Music for Elizabethan Lutes* (1992).<sup>15</sup> Ward’s expertise and interests, however, and his encyclopaedic (if sometimes confusingly disposed) knowledge, lay principally in the domain of tablature sources for stringed instruments, together with Elizabethan verse, song and balladry, so it is understandable that he did not look far into the unpublished wills and probate inventories found in many County Record Offices. Such documents are our principal source for the ownership of musical instruments, and major repositories (such as those at Leicester and Norwich) house many hundreds of them. Nor did the depth of Ward’s studies, in his chosen fields, give him frequent opportunity to delve into what was then

<sup>14</sup> ‘Causton’s Contrafacta’, 30. Milsom was writing in 2007, since when the situation has changed in ways that make the cosmopolitan history of the guitar in Tudor England more comprehensible. See, for example, Dumitrescu, *The Early Tudor Court and International Musical Relations*.

<sup>15</sup> These studies, notably the latter, were generally very well received by members of Ward’s own constituency, the musicological fraternity. The view from at least one scholar-performer, however, although as erudite as any the book received, was notably different. See the trenchant review of *Music for Elizabethan Lutes* by Sayce. For a preliminary report on a source that Ward missed, see Goodwin, ‘The Earliest English Lute Manuscript?’ Goodwin is preparing a further study of this manuscript.

the Public Records Office, now The National Archives at Kew. Documents from The National Archives (TNA) such as letters, lists of imports by shipment and inventories of property have all yielded information that has been deployed in the following chapters. One might add that Ward never saw, because he could not, the principal iconographical source for the Elizabethan guitar in all its splendour, shown in marquetry on the Eglantine Table of c. 1567. For this, Ward used a very accomplished but fallible nineteenth-century drawing.<sup>16</sup> It is also of account that Ward was only able to give passing notice to two further leaves from the only known Elizabethan tutor for the four-course guitar, ‘An instruction to the Gitterne’, which came to light very late in his studies. Four folios of this book survive in all, two of them in the United States, two of them in England, and together they form the earliest surviving material from any European book actually published as a guitar tutor.<sup>17</sup>

When those printed leaves are placed with the corpus of music for the guitar in English manuscript sources, the total repertoire is still decidedly modest. Fortunately, we may add the five guitar books published in the 1550s by the partnership of Adrian Le Roy and Robert Ballard, for these elegant volumes made their way to England as a set some time in the second half of the sixteenth century. Yet despite this modest store of material, the music in certain sources preserved in England – the Osborn Commonplace Book of c. 1560 and ‘An instruction to the Gitterne’ – is of considerable musical and historical interest. While the tablatures for the guitar printed in sixteenth-century France and Spain mostly treat the instrument as a reduced and miniaturised lute, the Osborn Commonplace Book and ‘An instruction to the Gitterne’ both offer music that suggests how a great deal of guitar playing was conducted in the sixteenth century and in a mostly unwritten tradition, namely by the player strumming sequences of block chords.

This requires a brief sketch of the continental context. The fashion for intricate finger-style music on the four-course guitar in the manner of the lute, as far as the four courses of the instrument would allow, and as far as notated sources reveal it, arose on the continent in the 1540s and lasted until at least the 1570s when it gradually faded away.<sup>18</sup> The subsequent spread of the *five*-course guitar throughout Europe facilitated (and no

<sup>16</sup> Ward used the best available substitute: Jewitt’s drawing of 1882, which he reproduces in *Music for Elizabethan Lutes*, vol. 1, Fig. 11. The drawing, in many ways an impressive piece of work since it was made long before the table was cleaned, nonetheless (1) underestimates the depth of the instrument, (2) suppresses all surface details showing the grain and nature of the woods used, (3) redraws the design of the rose, (4) places the fixed bridge at an incorrect angle and makes it appear too massive, (5) leaves the viewer uncertain as to whether or not the original shows the seven strings in courses and (6) as reproduced by Ward, occludes the place of the guitar in the overall decorative scheme.

<sup>17</sup> Ward mentioned these leaves in his correspondence, and I gladly acknowledge the assistance I have received from these letters, copies of which were kindly passed to me by Peter Duckers and Joyce Tyler.

<sup>18</sup> No music for any kind of guitar survives from the sixteenth century in printed form later than the 1570s. Brown, *Instrumental Music*, *passim*.

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doubt in part inspired) a shift of interest among guitarists towards forms of solo performance and accompaniment using block chords: the player repeatedly swept all or most of the five courses at once, varying the stroke and perhaps interweaving plucked chords of sparser texture. As the sixteenth century passed to the seventeenth, music for the guitar in this brushing style was extensively recorded in manuscript and print as guitarists created a notation-based culture unapologetically geared to the characteristic idioms and instant appeal of their instrument. Means were found to cultivate such brushing play and to sketch its elements either in tablature or in various dedicated one-letter-per-chord systems devised to notate dance music or accompaniments for songs in a simple and succinct manner.<sup>19</sup>

Another way to describe these developments would be to say that highly literate finger-style playing of the kind indicated in the French prints of the 1550s, or the academic counterpoint composed for the guitar by a composer such as Miguel de Fuenllana,<sup>20</sup> was a learned irruption into an existing culture of strumming play that remained in place when the fashion for elaborate music in the finger-style manner faded; the developments of real historical importance towards the end of the century were therefore the rise of the five-course guitar to create richer strummed chordal blocks and the enhanced literacy of that practice by c. 1600. The Osborn Commonplace Book and 'An instruction to the Gitterne' provide very early glimpses of this brushed and chord-based play at a time simultaneous with that of the lute-style tradition.

A final word should be said, about the plan of the book. Chapter 1 explores the pictorial record of instruments that may be unhesitatingly classified as guitars. Chapter 2 seeks to uncover more about the Tudor owners and players of such instruments using material mostly gathered from archives. Chapter 3 considers the ways in which those individuals obtained their instruments from dealers and importers, while Chapter 4 explores how they might learn to play with the aid of a unique survival, 'An instruction to the Gitterne', licensed to be printed in 1568/9. Chapters 5 and 6 turn to music for the four-course instrument that was either copied in England or was known there, dividing the material into purely instrumental items (Chapter 5) and accompanied songs (Chapter 6). This separation is to some extent artificial, but it is nonetheless required by the different patterns of survival in each case. Our access to the

<sup>19</sup> Hall and Yakeley, 'El estilo castellano'; Hill, 'L'accompagnamento *rasgueado* di chitarra'; Tyler and Sparks, *The Guitar and its Music*.

<sup>20</sup> The models for the guitar music published by Fuenllana in his *Libro de Musica para Vihuela* (1554) lie with intabulations of works by such distinguished masters of counterpoint as Morales, Guerrero, Gombert and Josquin, made for the vihuela. Fuenllana accordingly offers music of textbook scrupulosity, with points of imitation and progressive thickening of the texture that are clearly based upon the linear independence and integrity of vocal models. See, for example, the 'musica para guitarra' in *Libro de Musica para Vihuela*, f. 164v.

instrumental music of Tudor guitarists is relatively good; for English song accompanied by the guitar, however, we are in a much less fortunate position. Literary documents nonetheless reveal that such material must once have existed, and the task is therefore to proceed on the basis of hints in tablature and literary texts. Finally, Chapter 7 explores the autobiography of a musician who learned to play the gittern as a young man in London. It is good fortune indeed that the author of the earliest autobiography in English was a Tudor guitarist.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> In a poem on the Battle of Lepanto (1571), James VI of Scotland imagines a Venetian chorus giving thanks for their victory with an ensemble including ‘gutornes’, while a biting satire on Archbishop John Hamilton of St Andrews tells how he fled to France in 1540–3 and learned ‘with guthorne for to dance’. James VI, who later became King of England as James I, is presumably envisaging the court music he knew, while John Hamilton was in France in the very dawn of the fashion for the guitar at the French court. In their different ways, these Scottish sources are of considerable interest, and with such materials to hand the reader of this book is entitled to ask why the account is devoted to England only (I do not read Welsh, so could not venture into the principality). I am not well versed in either the history or the abundant literature of early modern Scotland, whereas I have spent a lifetime as a teacher of medieval English literature and its historical context reaching well into the sixteenth century with authors such as Skelton, More and Surrey. My second reason for omitting Scottish material is that I share the weakness of most writers who, once they have begun a book, find themselves keen to finish it. This project has already taken three times as long as I expected, and work in Scottish archives would have extended it further still. Finally, this book tells an essentially London story, or at least one that moves within the ‘golden triangle’ of London, Oxford and Cambridge. It would be unfortunate indeed if a history of the renaissance guitar in Scotland, with so rich a background in Franco-Scottish contacts and court politics, were to become a satellite to the largely English and metropolitan narrative that unfolds here.