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Elizabethan and Jacobean Lute Manuscripts: Types, Characteristics and Compilation

This study examines English manuscripts of music for solo lute from between 1570 and 1630, the period when solo lute music in England enjoyed its brief but most eloquent flowering. Biographical information regarding owners, together with the codicology of the compilations, makes it possible to define the characteristics of different types of usage. This enables a modern reader to understand the contents of the books in their socio-cultural context, as windows into both personal tastes and wider musical practices. Understanding the purpose of these books provides clues to practices such as the contemporary preservation of ephemera, lute lessons and the activities of professional copyists. The broad characteristics of each type of usage are described, with reference to some of the most notable exemplars.

Cet article étudie les manuscrits de musique pour luth solo produits entre 1570 et 1630, période où cette forme de musique a connu un bref mais réel épanouissement. Les informations biographiques sur les propriétaires des manuscrits, ainsi que l'étude codicologique des compilations, permettent de caractériser différents types d'utilisation. Ceci permet aux lecteurs d'aujourd'hui de replacer le contenu des livres dans leur contexte socio-culturel, et de saisir à travers eux les goûts des individus et, plus largement, les pratiques musicales de l'époque. Comprendre la destination de ces livres nous renseigne aussi sur des pratiques telles que la conservation des éphémères, l'apprentissage du luth, et les activités des copistes professionnels. L'article décrit les principales caractéristiques de chaque type d'utilisation, illustré par certains des exemples les plus parlants.

The purpose of a music book is the most defining factor in our ability to assess both the scope of the repertory it contains and the relevance of that repertory to the dating of the manuscript. Many works in the lute repertoire refer to titled individuals providing multiple streams of dating evidence: *Dr Case's Pavan* must have been composed no earlier than 1589 when John Case, the author of *The Praise of Musicke* (London, 1586) became a Doctor of medicine; *Lady Rich's Galliard* was composed after 1581, when Penelope Devereux, elder sister of Robert, Earl of Essex, married Lord Rich; *Mistress Brigid Fleetwood's Pavan* dates from before her marriage to Sir William Smith in 1589; *Lady Hunsdon's Puff* refers

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to Elizabeth, second daughter of Sir John Spenser and wife of George Carey, who became second Lord Hunsdon in 1596.

Dating a book by the ascriptions of its pieces alone is problematic since certain types of collection may consist wholly of repertory composed decades earlier than the copying. Therefore defining what type of source a book represents is essential to its contextualisation. Manuscript sources present quite a different face to the world than do printed books: the print represents the choice of the composer or the publisher of music considered worthy of transmission or, more often, that would sell well, whereas a personal manuscript is the selection of a private collector and/or player of individual works that they wished to own.[1]

The lute was primarily considered an accompaniment instrument for the voice, with numerous lute-song publications emerging during the Elizabethan and early Stuart period; it is found in broken consort music and was certainly widely used as an instrument for accompanying dancing and supporting single-line instrumental ensembles. Lute music is written in tablature—basically, a map of where to put the fingers—and virtually all of the English solo lute music that survives from the period 1575-1630 is found only in manuscripts, which means that our understanding of these books is crucial to this genre. Space does not permit the description of all of the extant manuscripts, nor the large corpus of fragments, but the categories into which they fall based on their intended function can be clearly defined.

Broadly they divide into two categories: books copied by professional copyists (who were also professional musicians, but not necessarily professional lutenists), and those copied by music amateurs who range from young beginners to highly accomplished players. The problem with attempting to define the purpose of any book at such a distance, and with only the inky pool cast by the scribe for evidence, is that we have to rely on probability, what seems to be apparent, and common sense. However, the jigsaw of evidence builds into a believable picture and one in which the basic categories can be sub-divided in more detail. In outline they are defined as follows:

Professional copying

- ***Bespoke copying***: books bought or commissioned from professional copyist(s) by an amateur player to their specifications
- ***Archive collections***
  - Fragments
  - Playing copies
  - Non-playing copies

1. A preliminary examination and listing of lute sources including the various fragments known at the time can be found in Craig-McFeely 1994 (chapter 3), which includes a comparison with Italian lute manuscripts defined in 1989. A list of dateable elements in titles of lute solos is given as Appendix 5.

Non-professional copying

- ***Pedagogical books compiled by pupils while learning to play***
  Learning music as part of the social panoply
  Acquiring musical skill for social advancement or employment
- ***Household or personal anthologies***, repertory compiled by individuals or related groups
  Single-scribe collections
  Multiple-scribe collections

Professional copying

These are manuscripts written by professional copyists. Because of the specialist nature of music copying—where a degree of music literacy is essential to accuracy—professional music copyists were also musicians. Singingmen of choral foundations are known to have worked as professional copyists and probably formed the backbone of a music-copying industry during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Craig-McFeely - forthcoming). None of the known professional music copyists were employed as lutenists, nor were they composers of lute music. While apprenticed lutenists must have been able to write in order to build their own collections, their apprenticeships did not involve the formal training in writing given to choristers (see Flynn 1996). The few hands of professional lutenists who can be identified were often quite wayward and irregular: John Dowland's tablature hand in particular was surprisingly scratchy.

Bespoke copying

Although there may have been an active trade in the sale of books with lute music already copied into them by a professional scribe, only one of the surviving books, the Welde lutebook (full references for manuscripts are provided in the Bibliography below), appears to be the offspring of that putative tradition since the copyist is neither one of the composers represented in the book nor a member of the family who owned it. The contents of such books were more likely to have been selected for copying by the purchaser than previously chosen by the bookseller, who could not guarantee sale of a random selection of music: hence the term "bespoke copying."

The lute manuscripts of Edward Paston (1550–1630) were copied by his secretary and fit this category since they were copied by a professional scribe under instruction from the future owner, but in this case the professional scribe was a household servant with the appropriate skills (Brett 2006).

Constructing a descriptive picture of this type of book is difficult with so few potential witnesses, but there are aspects of the Welde book that set it apart from others and we have the example of Paston's collection of lute and vocal music, which was also professionally copied. These books were each the work of a single scribe in a neat, regular and well-formed hand. As many of the "amateur" copyists also have neat hands

this alone is not a defining characteristic, but crucially in these books the hand is not that of the owner. These books were probably bound after copying: much of the music trade of booksellers was in printed ruled paper,[2] and a book such as Welde was most likely copied in-house, then bound up by the bookseller in leather boards. The new owner's initials or name may have been stamped on the covers at this point along with some standard tooling. The modern reassembly of Paston's music books relied in some cases on the evidence of the binder's stamps. Each piece in the Welde book starts on a new page, even if doing this leaves blank staves on the previous page and each is well fitted to the staves without overruns. The Welde book was also bound with several sections of blank ruled paper, the implication being that the collection would be expanded by the purchaser, although in this case the blank leaves remained pristine. Codicologically, one would not expect in this type of book to find odd numbers of leaves in quires or mixed papers. The repertory is more likely to be contemporary with the copying than retrospective.

Archive collections

Archive collections seem to have been created for the preservation of large quantities of music by multiple composers: no single-composer collections survive.

Professional lutenists had to maintain both a repertory of current popular works and a written corpus for teaching and exchanging with other players. The most logical form for this corpus would be single sheets or small sections of unbound sheets, more portable and less risky to lend than a complete bound book, but also vulnerable to loss. No lutebooks survive that belonged to lute composers such as Dowland, Holborne, Bacheler, or any of those known to have been employed as professional players either at court or in households where the accounts list musicians. Present day lutenists rely on photocopies or hand copies of single pieces for a recital or teaching; they do not carry facsimiles or multi-work collections from which they intend to play only one or two pieces. Their practical solution to the management of a large playing repertory probably mirrors the practice of early-modern lutenists. A teacher would have been reluctant to leave his entire valuable collection of music in the hands of a pupil for any period of time, and doing so would have been impractical anyway if he had more than one pupil. The explanation for the absence of masters' books among the surviving manuscripts *may* be that these books disintegrated because they were hard worked. However, a more practical explanation is possibly also the more likely one: the lutebooks of the masters do not survive because they simply never existed.

2. The sale of printed ruled paper was the only thing standing between Tallis and Byrd and bankruptcy in 1577. See Fenlon and Milsom 1984.

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A broad complex of fragments survives from the decades around 1600, which may be remnants of bound collections or just items that were never part of a larger whole and were ephemeral by nature: several show from their pattern of folds that they were originally enclosed in a letter. Some of these fragments could be survivors of the working corpus of professional lutenists. The music was the professional lutenist's wealth, and the vulnerability of the copies must have been of concern. Both composers and players needed to find a way of ensuring their collections did not disperse and disappear; archive manuscripts seem to meet that requirement and may be the closest we can come to the books of professional lutenists.

Most archive books were bound after ruling and copying if they were bound at all during their early lives, and they are usually large folio format and extensive in content. The technical standard is uniformly high and they are primarily written by a single scribe, although occasionally a group of scribes is working under a primary scribe responsible for the bulk of the copying and "overseeing" the activity of the others (e.g. by writing incipits, with the remainder of the work completed by another scribe). Sections added by later scribes are almost unknown and the sort of marginalia that tend to accumulate in the books copied by amateurs is absent. The format generally appears uncluttered, but the space is efficiently utilised.

One peculiarity of the archive sources that may simply be coincidental is that they are all written on printed music paper (while all of the other sources are hand-ruled). This may have been an economy: buying printed paper may have been cheaper than paying the copyist to rule his own. Using printed paper may also have been a time-saving strategy: one feature of archive books is the obvious speed at which they were written, sometimes occasioning "shorthand" elements in the rendering of the tablature. Ruling new sheets would have been time-consuming, but despite the speed of writing, the scripts are uniform, fluent and very legible, characteristic of an experienced copyist.

There seem to be two classes of archive collections: one that could be played from and one that could not, which may have been due to differing levels of understanding among copyists of the special requirements of the repertory as much as to the intended end use.

In the first class, where performing needs seem to have been kept in mind, the repertory is almost entirely contemporary with the copying time. These "playing" copies are laid out with occasional blank lines or even, though rarely, whole folios left unused in order to avoid awkward page-turns. Even so the copying is fairly dense as the scribe returns to blocks of empty lines to fill them with short pieces that exactly fit the space. This type of tailoring betrays both a practised copyist and the use of an exemplar. Speed is evidenced by generalised untidiness and rapid crossing out to manage miscopying, but the result remains clearly legible. Sections of blank leaves at the end of the book are unknown, indicating either that all the available space was used, or that only completed gatherings were eventually bound. The level of accuracy is high but there

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may be minor corrections indicating post-copying checking, perhaps in a different hand; there are few titles and ascriptions. These sources may record divisions (written-out ornamented section-repeats) to well-known works that are not found among concordant sources, and these may have been the work of the copyist. Codicologically, the quires may be chaotic with odd numbers of leaves, insertions and cancels.

In the class which cannot have been used for playing, the relationship between the quantity of old and new music is reversed: the contents of the manuscripts seem to pre-date the copying period by as much as several decades, although more modern music is always included. Performing indications are far less common in these than in the "playing" manuscripts and accuracy may be patchy, suggesting that the music was copied without checking. The Marsh Lutebook includes *passim* blank pages but this appears to be because the scribe had an organisational plan that is no longer discernible, rather than for the avoidance of awkward page-turns; some pieces of considerable length involve page-turns, but many other pieces that if copied more thoughtfully would not run beyond an opening are also copied over page-turns and even involve awkward jumps through several pages, indicating the material record was prioritised over performing needs. Aside from the blank folios the space is carefully filled, just as in the "playing" sources. The unmediated musical errors and inclusions of turns that would have been impossible in performance suggest these types of book were never used for playing.

Professionally-copied books are few in number, and even fewer if we consider that most of them were written by the same scribe, Matthew Holmes (d. 1621). Holmes's books are the most important source for all the great English Renaissance lute composers, preserving over 500 individual works that are a complete cross-section of the repertoire as it emerged and developed in England between 1580 and 1620, when the books were copied. As Precentor and singingman at two major musical hubs (Christ Church, Oxford, 1588–1597 and then Westminster Abbey until his death), Holmes was ideally placed to obtain music that was extremely current. The few older pieces scattered through his copying allow us to judge the longevity of their popularity.

A feature of all professional books is that some pieces appear more than once through the collection. In Holmes's case the simple bulk of the collection and its obvious currency make duplication unsurprising: some 200 works appear more than once, which is a surprising level of repetition. Tables of contents are not particularly common in any English lute manuscript, and none of the Holmes lutebooks have an index. This is probably symptomatic of both the speed of compilation and the nature of archive copying. Holmes wrote a visibly speedy, uniform tablature script, but it lacks the elegance and meticulous care in execution seen in the amateur copying of the books written by Margaret Board and Jane Pickeringe, for example (see below). As his series of books progresses there are signs of increased copying speed with composers' names reduced to initials and the introduction of abbreviated rhythm notation in the later manuscripts.

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Responding to a research paper in 2014, Mr William St Clair suggested that Holmes may have been acting as an archivist for works in circulation among an informal (or secret) "guild" of lutenists. The idea makes sense of this extraordinary collection of music that was not copied by someone known as a lutenist but that was clearly a repository of a vast quantity of high-quality, technically-difficult music. Holmes also copied consort music and Ian Harwood has found evidence that he played the viol; as a professional musician he may have played other instruments too. Harwood suggests Holmes's books were commissioned by Dr John Case,[3] but equally Holmes may have been recruited by John Dowland when he went to Oxford to receive his BMus in 1588, the same year Holmes took up his singing post at Christ Church.

If Matthew Holmes was indeed acting as archivist for professional lutenists this might explain the recurrence of several works throughout his books. If his job was simply to copy anything sent to him there is no reason to suppose his depositors might not have sent the same piece more than once over the extended lifetime of their relationship with Holmes. Indeed, if his employer was a "guild," with multiple lutenists sending him music, this would have been more than likely. Rather than checking to see if the piece had already been included, he simply copied it, as was his job, and by the time he reached the last book, he only bothered to indicate composers' names with initials that would have been sufficient for his clients.

John Baldwin (d. 1615), was a singingman at St George's Chapel, Windsor and the inscriptions to his extensive collections of vocal music indicate that he was copying to preserve music that he considered might be lost to time: he also duplicated works.[4] If Holmes was simply a collector like Baldwin, presumably he was unconcerned about duplication because it was quicker to copy and then return the exemplar to its owner than to worry about whether he already had the work. One fact of note though, is the absence of any references to music books in Holmes's will, which supports the proposition that these books were not his personal collection.

Non-professional copying

As the title suggests, these books were copied by amateurs, both amateur musicians and amateur copyists. They were almost all of a higher social class than the musicians involved with the professional books, and many of them were women. This group of books provides a rare insight into

3. Considerable detail regarding Holmes's life and work in relation to the establishment of a music curriculum at Oxford may be found in Harwood 2005. In this paper Harwood describes a close examination of the copying that led Stewart McCoy to suggest that the otherwise-unknown divisions in Holmes's manuscripts may have been written by Holmes himself.
4. Baldwin and his copying are detailed (among other sources) in Bray 1975; Gaskin 1985.

domestic music-making by women and the high standard of musicianship they reached. Pedagogical books were predominantly copied by women and large numbers of compositions were dedicated to women, evidence of the extent to which they were associated with this instrument.[5]

Pedagogical books

Pedagogical books were written by students of the lute for whom copying appears to have been a part of the process of learning to play, a practice that seems to have been peculiar to the lute. Professional lutenists apparently did not write elegant hands, which may be one reason why the practice of the pupil copying their own book evolved. Musicianship was part of the broader education of the higher classes (Robert Cecil expressed concern that his son's time was being taken up too much by academic study when it would have been better spent in acquiring skill in "languages, mathematics, music and other gentlemanly qualities," see Hulse 1991, 35) and there is widespread evidence of the aspirant middle classes educating their children in the same way. The lute seems to have been particularly useful to unmarried women, providing an explanation for the significant proportion of pedagogical manuscripts compiled by women. Mary Burwell's lute tutor was written some decades after the main body of surviving books, but unlike earlier pedagogical books hers includes a lengthy discourse about the instrument and its magical and affective properties:

> The beauty of the arm, of the hands and of the neck are advantageously displayed in playing of the lute. […] Nothing represents so well the consort of angelical choirs and give[s] more foretastes of heavenly joys and of everlasting happiness. […] Some hath believed that they should possess an angel incarnate, if they could unite themselves by a marriage to a person that enjoys this rare quality. (fol. 43v)

Drawing on the contents of pedagogical books and descriptions of teaching in non-musical subjects, the widely-accepted view is that lute lessons took the form of personal tuition sessions in between which the student would copy music left by the teacher into his or her personal collection and practice the previous lesson's exercise. We have an insight into John Dowland's activity as the teacher of the scribes of the Board and Folger manuscripts: he copied single pieces into each of their books.

The pedagogical purpose of a book is always betrayed by the progressive standard of the music, from simple short pieces and easy duets to more complex works. In almost all cases the principal scribe, the pupil, has written his or her name in the book and often also the date of copying; features that are also found in non-musical pupil's copybooks.[6] The

5. The relationship of women and the lute is examined in detail in Craig-McFeely 2002.
6. Wiman Ramsey wrote his name on almost every page of his writing copybook, Oxford Bodleian Library Rawlinson D. 649.

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identity of the teachers often remains obscure, even if they contribute pieces in their own hand. Other evidence of a learning process includes tables of graces, tunings, rhythms or solmisation and, in the case of the Folger book, techniques for varying a bass pattern. Duets, a commonplace teaching tool, particularly treble-ground types, always appear in pedagogical sources, often laid out in a way that would prevent both parts being read at once (e.g. on reverse sides of the same leaf) implying that at least one part was played from memory.

There are two types of surviving pupil books: the most common is that compiled by a young man or woman acquiring a social skill, where the copying ceased once more important matters (usually marriage) intervened. Thomas Robinson remarked in his *Schoole of Musicke* (1603) that "Many that in their youth could have played […] passing well, in their age—or when they once have been married—have forgotten all." The musical and copying standard of the contents is generally high, generously supplied with grace signs (a more experienced player would have improvised them), and the copious ascriptions are usually accurate, as are the versions of the pieces copied, sometimes in a simplified form compared to versions found elsewhere.

The second type was created by a man of a lower social status such as Richard Mynshall, son of a provincial Mercer, who may have intended to use the skill professionally or simply to enhance their social standing. Though the general attributes of this type of scribe are similar to the first (copious ascriptions, gracing etc.) the copying is untidy, reflecting a poorer standard of penmanship. Numerous textual errors may be attributed to the scribe's youth, lack of musical literacy, inexperience, or less exalted teacher.

Pedagogical books are usually bound after ruling but before copying, so were probably bought as bound-ruled books rather than loose quires. They are primarily written by a single scribe, but as the original layer often leaves the latter part of the manuscript unused there are sometimes subsequent layers of scribes active. In some cases the teacher copies whole pieces or, more commonly, corrects the student copying and adds graces or performing marks. The incidence of a group of concurrent scribes is rare unless the second scribe is the owner's tutor. The music is usually carefully fitted into the available space; new pieces usually start at the top of a page but gaps may be filled with very short pieces, not unlike the archive sources. Non-professional scribes are less good at judging copying than professional ones, which can lead to awkward compressions in the script if the scribe misjudges the amount of music to be fitted into the space. This may have been because the exemplar was irregular. The copying span of the original scribe is likely to be very short, though later layers may continue for some decades as the book evolves into a household or personal anthology, sometimes passed to a different owner.

These sources are chronologically diverse, probably attributable to the teaching material accruing over a substantial period of time or drawing on

a wide chronological repertory to provide works of a suitable standard, the order of difficulty having little to do with its present popularity. In fact, one of the features of these sources is that their repertory is often very old-fashioned, occasionally leading to misdating. A helpful feature of pedagogical sources though is that the owner usually identifies themselves clearly enough to date the book accurately.

In general, it is rare to find fingering in English lute sources but its appearance is not limited to pedagogical sources; neither are graces, which vary from scribe to scribe, as there were no set forms. Hold signs are often added to the copying of a scribe by a teacher, but the pupil does not follow the teacher's example, so these appear to have been added actually during a lesson rather than being general performance marks. Bearing in mind the disparity in the appearance of the hands of pupils and known professional players it is dangerous to assume that a scribe is inexperienced as a lutenist because his or her writing is messy; rather, the opposite appears to be the case.

None of these pedagogical books can be traced to a noble family despite evidence that many noble men and women played the lute: around 1600 Henry Howard, first Earl of Northampton (1540–1614) wrote to the secretary of William Cecil (Lord Burghley) seeking a teacher of the lute, having time on his hands.[7] Lutes and manuscripts were part of the estates of John, Lord Lumley (c.1534–1609), as suggested by the 1596 inventory which includes 8 lutes and 41 [*sic*] viols. Similarly the 1603 household inventory of the Kytson family of Hengrave Hall, Suffolk, included two leather-bound lute books and four lutes of different sizes. Numerous music manuscripts and books of lute intabulations survive from the collection of Edward Paston, a younger son of minor nobility; several noblewomen's portraits display the lute with prominence (Lady Isabella Rich (1623–1655) immortalised also in poetry; Lady Mary Killigrew (c.1587–1656), famously accused of piracy; Lady Mary Wroth (1587–1651); Lady Anne Clifford (1590–1676); and of course Queen Elizabeth herself is represented playing the lute in a miniature by Nicholas Hilliard, although the iconography of the lute as a symbol of higher sentiments may be responsible for its use in portraiture. The only book of solo music known to survive from a noble household is that of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1582–1648), and it is not a pedagogical book.

The surviving pedagogical books do not appear to have belonged to wealthy gentry so to these families the cost of acquiring the skill would have been significant and the lutebook was accordingly valuable and valued; for wealthier owners it was simply another book in their library. The ladies who compiled books such as the Board, Pickeringe and ML lutebooks appear to have been taught by masters of the calibre of John Dowland; their books are physically larger both in size and extent, reach

7. GB London, British Library, Lansdowne MS 109/51.

a considerably higher standard and are better crafted as a whole than the collections of the young men, Dallis's pupil, Richard Mynshall and Henry Sampson.

Household or personal anthologies

Household and Personal anthologies are the personal collections of amateurs who played the lute as a pastime or social skill, sometimes to a very high standard to judge by their manuscripts. Many pedagogical books ended up as personal anthologies, but the manuscripts in this group were conceived originally as personal collections. As household books, they may have been added to by guests, visiting lutenists, or resident players in a larger household. It is not unusual to find a large number of scribes active, often concurrently, but also in layers if the book changed hands. Thus the scribal activity can be divided into two categories: in the first, the manuscript is the work of a single scribe with any gaps possibly filled in at a later date by a further scribe (or, rarely, scribes); in the second, the manuscript is the work of a group of scribes working together within a fairly short time span, with the activity of each scribe distributed through the work of the others. There is no arrangement in order of technical standard. Significantly, this is the only category of book in which compositions by the owner-scribe are likely to appear, but their works are rarely of a standard to compete with the professional repertory.

The repertory can be extremely diverse, reflecting changing fashions and differing personal tastes. It also includes some unusual features that can only be explained as the work of a visiting lutenist—perhaps an itinerant musician or one in the retinue of a visitor. The source may have been copied over a fairly long period of time and may contain music of multiple chronological layers.

Large sections of ruled but unused folios are commonplace at the back of books in this category. Oddments of additional information also accumulate, scribbled in margins or on end-papers, but pedagogical material is almost unknown apart from the occasional table of graces. Sometimes, the book ended up as a musical or general commonplace book: vocal intabulations make an appearance, particularly if music for other instruments (or combinations of instruments) is also included.

Amateur musicians' hands are often elegant and regular because the amateur has more time to devote to the way a book looks and probably received a higher level of tuition in penmanship than an artisan musician, but they tend to lack the judgement to fit a piece very precisely into a designated space, so works run off the ends of lines or pages or conclude with only one or two bars on the last line. The irregularity and incidence of frequent corrections may indicate that at least some of the works in these books were copied from memory.

Household or personal anthologies make up the largest portion of the surviving English lute manuscripts but most are biographical "black

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holes," a factor that may even be one of their defining characteristics.

The lute enjoyed a unique position as a domestic instrument: being very lightweight and eminently portable it could accompany its owner on social visits; musically a player could execute subtle and complex polyphony (Burwell's "consort of angelic choirs") with a wide range of dynamic nuance without the support of other instruments. It could also provide rhythmic dance accompaniments, take a part in a consort of mixed instruments or accompany a solo voice with subtlety. By the late 1500s the lute had come to symbolise higher sensibilities and was a favourite of the nobility and gentry—and especially of women. Mastering it was a noble skill and was embraced by the aspiring educated but less-wealthy middle classes to demonstrate their good breeding. The lute was the poor man's consort, but it also symbolised gentility and inner sensibility.

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