Further reading on strings

1. Primary sources, in chronological order


Diagrams clearly show very thick lower strings, implying equal tension. Mentions wire-strung violins – sweeter toned than gut!


Comments on harshness of violin tone, and care in bowing technique required.


Entertaining poem featuring expensive lute-strings and a cat.


First published mention of wound strings.

Burwell, Mary: Instruction Book for the Lute (MS, c1670, facs. Ed., 1974), Chapter 4: ‘Of the strings of the lute, and stringing thereof’

Recommends treble strings from Rome and thicker strings from Lyon. Strings should be smooth, well-twisted, clear, even, strong and of ‘even stiffness’.


Three types of string: Minikins (treble), Venice-Catlins (mid-range and bass – Pistoy is the name for a bass Venice-Catlin), and Lyons (for bass – not as good as Pistoy). No mention of wound strings


Credits Sainte-Colombe with bringing wound strings to France in the 1670s for use on the new 7th string.

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Further reading on strings

1. Primary sources - continued


Talbot, James: (MS, c1694, Oxford, Christ Church Library 1187); partial transcription in Donington (1950).


Describes method for finding true equal tension.

Describes all-gut stringing for violins and relative gauges between instruments. Notes that bass viols and bass violins may occasionally have a wound lowest string.

Italian violins use much thicker strings than the French, and sound twice as loud. Interesting when compared with Mersenne’s remarks on the violin!

Describes overspun G and demi-filée D as alternative to gut; overspun G “a little” thicker than D – implies thick gut core.

Tartini credited with increasing thickness of strings.

Violin should be strung with ‘rather thick’ strings in equal tension.

First evidence of graded tension stringing.

For secondary sources: see next page
Further reading on strings

2. Secondary sources, in alphabetical order


**Segerman**, Ephraim: *The Strad*, ic (1989, no.1173, ‘Strings through the ages’ (pt.1); no.1175, ‘Highly strung’ (pt.2); no.1176, ‘Deep tensions’ (pt.3)).

