

Appendix

Mastering the *dedillo*: Intabulations and Right-Hand Technique

Despite its discussion in the sources as an essential right-hand technique, the *dedillo* technique has remained elusive both as a concept within vihuela history and as a practice among modern players. For today's performer, the incorporation of this technique raises many questions: do the sources provide an adequate description of *dedillo*? To what advantage may this technique be used? How does the use of *dedillo* impact right-hand position? In his book on Luis Milan, Luis Gassar drew attention to this significant problem in modern vihuela performance practice and the failure of the majority of modern performers to adopt this integral skill:

The *dedillo* technique is neither used nor heard in current performances. The sound resulting from these fast up- and down-strokes with the index finger is light and weak, and involves a subtle amount of noise produced when the fingernail hits the string. The avoidance of this authentic aspect of performance - which adds color to the pieces containing the *dedillo* technique - questions whether performers try to recreate historically based principles or prefer to look for a result more suited to their tastes and those of the audience.¹

Emilio Pujol's 1949 edition of Mudarra presented a clear and detailed discussion of *dedillo*, noting its use among present-day Portuguese guitarists, and the subject has received attention from a wide range of musicologists since then, though no one has presented players with either an in-depth study, or a clear approach to its cultivation.²

The problem is further aggravated by several misconceptions regarding its execution:

Diana Poulton's well-known and widely used *A Tutor for the Renaissance Lute* has led

¹ Luis Gassar, *Luis Milan on Sixteenth-Century Performance Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 189 (n.156). In addition to its coloristic potential, *dedillo* tends to result in greater legato. I wish to thank Jacob Herringman for bringing this to my attention.

² Emilio Pujol ed., *Alonso Mudarra: Tres Libros de musica en cifra para vihuela (Sevilla, 1546)*. (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, Instituto Espanol de Musicologia, 1949), 56-9.

many to conclude that *dedillo* passages begin with a downward stroke not unlike modern guitarists using a pick. Charles Jacobs has suggested —not unreasonably— that since *dedillo* is Spanish for “little finger,” it might in fact have been performed using the little finger of the right hand.³ Unfortunately, neither of these solutions offers much in the way of a workable technique and it is perhaps no surprise that most players opt for the more widely used method of thumb-index alternation and avoid *dedillo* altogether, regardless of what may be found in the sources or shown on the page (see Plate A.1).

Plate A.1: Mudarra’s *Fantasia [3] de pasos* with score indications for *dedillo* and *dos dedos*

The image shows a page of a musical score for a lute. At the top, it is labeled 'LIBRO. I.' and 'FO L. III.'. The title 'Fantasia de pasos gauleses e bolber las manos,' is written across the first system. The score consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line and a lute line. The lute line includes various fingerings (e.g., 0-2-3, 3-2-0, 3-1-0) and performance instructions circled in red: 'dedillo', 'dosde.', and 'dedi.'. The notation includes notes, rests, and accidentals, with some notes marked with 'f' for forte. The bottom right corner of the page is marked 'A 14'.

The proper execution of *dedillo* can be best described as follows: when commencing a section of passage-work where *dedillo* has been indicated in the

³ Diana Poulton, *A Tutor for the Renaissance Lute* (London: Schott and Co, Ltd., 1991), 58; Jacobs, *Fuenllana*, xci. The limitations in size and strength of the little finger, as well as the crowding of the right hand that results when a *dedillo* line is accompanied by basses on nearby strings makes this solution seem extremely unlikely.

tablature, or where the passage seems well-suited to this type of articulation, the vihuelist performs an up-stroke with the fleshy side of the index finger on the accented beat. During the subsequent release of the finger to its original starting point the vihuelist articulates the string with the backside of the nail resulting in a strong-weak pattern not unlike that produced using thumb-index alternation.⁴ When sixteenth-century sources describe *dedillo* as an easy technique, they would appear to refer to the simple and efficient nature of this gesture as well as its usefulness in fast passages: in terms of economy, the advantage of *dedillo* is self-evident.

In order to reconstruct this technique and determine its application, instrumentalists must turn to a handful of sixteenth-century sources. The tablature books of Milan and Mudarra contain valuable insights into the application and cultivation of this technique through specific pedagogical works,⁵ and the descriptions of both Juan Bermudo and Venegas de Henestrosa also confirm its widespread use among players of the period. Some of the most detailed descriptions of its execution come from Fuenllana:

Coming then to the style of *redobles*, I maintain I find no more than three ways [in] which [they] customarily are played on this instrument, the vihuela. The first is [the] *redoble* they commonly call '*dedillo*.'... I grant [it] is easy and agreeable to the ear, but [its] imperfection cannot be denied, since one of the excellences of this instrument is the attack with which the finger strikes the course. And inasmuch as with this kind of *redoble*, the finger, when undertaking to strike the course with [the] attack in leaving, cannot avoid striking [another course - sic] with the fingernail; and this is an imperfection as much because the note is not fully formed, as because there is no complete or true attack. And from this it follows that those who *redoble* with the fingernail will find ease, but not perfection, in what they do. And what I say here is not to

⁴ Previous discussions of *dedillo* include Joan Myers, "Vihuela Technique," *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 1 (1968), 17-8. Also see John Griffiths, "The Vihuela: Performance Practice, Style, and Context," 176-8.

⁵ Milan, *El Maestro*, fol.D3v-D6 (Fantasias X-XII); Mudarra, *Tres libros*, fol.1-6 (Fantasias I-V).

condemn any way of playing, since I hold as very good what sagacious and knowing musicians practice and so approve. I only wish to say that there is good, and [there is] better.⁶

Non-practitioners may take comfort in the fact that Renaissance musicians also had mixed feelings about *dedillo* and its impact on tone production. Fuenllana's proposed alternative, presented later in his preface, is the use of the middle and index fingers in alternation, eliminating the contact of the backside of the nail with the string and allowing for a more perfectly formed note. To what extent his proposal was adopted by other vihuelists is uncertain, though descriptions of this type of alternation can also be found in Venegas de Henestrosa's *Libro de Cifra Nueva*.⁷ In any case, Fuenllana's comments, however cautionary, resolve the question of the direction of the stroke (up or down) and help to confirm the widespread use of *dedillo* until mid century at the very least.

The reluctance of modern players to use *dedillo* may be connected with the more fundamental question of general right hand position. The overwhelming majority of players prefer the method of thumb-under for its full, powerful sound, and easy access to all courses. However, it may not be completely representative of Spanish practices. Consider the comments of Henestrosa:

Also know that there are four ways of doing passage work (*redoblar*): one with the second finger of the right hand, which is called *redoblar de dedillo*; the second is *de figueta castellana*, which is crossing the first finger [thumb] over

⁶ Jacobs, *Miguel de Fuenllana*, xc-xci.

⁷ See Higinio Angles, *La musica en la Corte de Carlos V vol.I* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, Instituto Espanol de Musicologia, 1965), 160: "...la quarta [manera], es con el segundo y tercero dedos..."

the second; the thirdway is *de figueta estranjera*, which is on the contrary, crossing the second finger over the first...⁸

Plate A.2: *Figueta castellana* in vihuela books from left to right: Mudarra (1546), Milan (1536), Narvaez (1538)



While no preference for either thumb position is indicated, the identification of thumb-out as the indigenous (that is, Castilian) manner of playing is unmistakable. It is also clear that the index finger is the one being used for the *dedillo* stroke and not the little finger as previously suggested. The argument for thumb-out is also reinforced by iconographical sources, where the majority of players appear to be using thumb-out (see Plate A.2).

The cultivation of an effective *dedillo* technique is closely bound to the use of thumb-out. In addition to the natural tendency of the hand to assume this position during passages involving wide reaches between bass and melody, a workable *dedillo* stroke relies on a minimal amount of horizontal travel of the finger along the string, and a more localized movement of the index finger at an angle more perpendicular to the string. In contrast, the tendency of thumb-under players is to allow for a subtle

⁸ Quoted in Myers, "Vihuela Technique," 17. Fuenllana also refers to thumb-index alternation as "foreign." See Jacobs, Miguel Fuenllana, xci.

amount of movement in the hand and forearm during thumb-index alternation, enhancing the strong-weak relation of note pairings and encouraging a fluent and relaxed technique. Unfortunately, the localization of movement necessary for the production of clean, accurate passagework using *dedillo* is one that is not easily incorporated into a thumb-under position. Simply put, the execution of *dedillo* is greatly facilitated by the adoption of a thumb-out technique.⁹

Fortunately, the handful of musical models contained in the vihuela books of Milan and Mudarra provide adequate information on how aspiring sixteenth-century players may have cultivated this skill. The first book of Luis Milan's *El Maestro* (1536) - the earliest source of vihuela music in print - commences with a series of fantasias of gradually increasing difficulty, leading to three fantasias (nos.10-12) designed specifically for the introduction of *dedillo*:

[Fantasia 10] The fantasias of these present, fourth and fifth sections, [into] which we are now entering, demonstrate a [type of] music which is like [i.e., which consists of] a touching [tentar][i.e., playing of] consonances mixed with redobles on the vihuela, which [redobles] commonly are spoken [of as] to be effected [by the] index finger [dedillo]...

[Fantasia 12] ...the redobles of these three fantasias are best played with the index finger [dedillo], since they were composed to foster finger agility ["soltura de dedo"].¹⁰

While Milan's comments offer little in the way of specific instructions, these fantasias present a variety of technical situations to which *dedillo* can be easily applied. For the uninitiated, the challenge lies in the coordination of up- and down-strokes while

⁹ Since the use of thumb-out also produces a brighter sound, it may help support the notion of unison-strung basses. I would like to thank John Griffiths for bringing this to my attention.

¹⁰ Translated in Charles Jacobs, ed., *Luis Milan: El Maestro* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 298.

shifting strings, making the most sensible starting point for the beginner a situation in which shifts from one course to the next are few and easy. The first fantasia in the group (Plate A.3): *Fantasia del primero y segundo tono* (Fantasia No.10) ends with a section of passagework in which string crossings are far apart and occur regularly at the end of every bar. Here, string crossing occurs on the strong beat, allowing the index finger to execute the more easily performed up-stroke.

Plate A.3: Luys Milan: *Fantasia [10] del primero y segundo tono*, mm.69-76 (Strong-beat up-strokes marked with arrows).



In *Fantasia No.11*, Milan progresses to string crossings in both directions as well as passages where more difficult string crossings (those occurring on even-numbered notes, thus requiring a down-stroke) happen in close succession. The last fantasia of the group, *Fantasia del tercero y cuarto tono*, is characterized by elaborate passagework with both ascending and descending string crossings, now ending on chords and introducing a greater level of difficulty.

However vague Milan's performance instructions might seem to appear, these three fantasias exhibit several common, fundamental principles:

- Passages played *dedillo* almost always begin on an upper course - usually the first or second , and in rare instances, the third;
- these passages almost always proceed to the next lower course, regardless of where they begin;
- the use of *dedillo* tends to be confined to the first three courses (when the fourth course is included, it occurs as the final note of the passage);
- *dedillo* passages tend to be preceded and followed by sections of rhythmic repose, allowing the player ample opportunity to adjust the hand.

How might these principles affect instrumental performances of Josquin? Milan's closest contemporary, and the first vihuelist in print to intabulate Josquin, is Narvaez. The intabulations contained in book three of *Los seys libros del Delphin*, some of the most widely played and easily accessible of such works, are presented in order of increasing difficulty and are particularly well-suited to players first learning the technique. Since *dedillo* is most readily applied to brief passages occurring on a single course, the following excerpts from Narváez's *Ossanna de la missa de faisán regres de Josquin* are especially appropriate (Plate A.4):

Plate A.4: Narvaez's *Ossanna de la missa de faisán regres de Josquin* (fol.35, mm.7-8 and mm. 15-16 respectively)

(a)

(b)

Similar passages occur frequently in Narvaez's works and afford players with an easy introduction to the technique. More challenging examples may be found in Narvaez's *Cum sancto spiritu de la missa de la fuga de Josquin* (Plate A.5). Like Milan, string crossings are kept to a minimum, but can be found occurring on both strong and weak beats. Again, passagework is framed by moments of rhythmic repose:

Plate A.5: Narvaez's *Cum sancto spiritu de la missa de la fuga de Josquin* (fol.39, mm.11-13 and mm.17-19 respectively, with string crossings on both strong (a) and weak beats (b)).

(a) Musical notation for measures 11-13, showing string crossings on strong beats. The notation includes a four-line staff with various rhythmic values and string crossings indicated by numbers 1-5 and arrows.

(b) Musical notation for measures 17-19, showing string crossings on weak beats. The notation includes a four-line staff with various rhythmic values and string crossings indicated by numbers 1-5 and arrows.

The most significant source after Milan is Alonso Mudarra's *Tres Libros de Musica* (1546). Like *El Maestro*, Mudarra's book follows the plan of a vihuela tutor, and his preface contains what might be best described as a textbook introduction to the technique:

Regarding the *redoble* I wish to state my view. And it is that I regard the [stroke with] two fingers as good: and he who wishes to play well should take my advice and use it because it is the most secure, and [the one] which gives the best style to passages. Of *dedillo* I shall not speak ill. He who practices both manner of *redoble* will not encounter difficulties for both are necessary at times. *Dedillo* [is] for passages that are played from the first towards the sixth [course] which is from top to bottom, and *dos dedos* for ascending [passages] and for cadencing.¹¹

¹¹ Translated in Griffiths, "The Vihuela: Performance Practice, Style, and Context," 177.

At first glance, Mudarra's remarks would seem to offer little more than a confirmation of what has already been drawn from Milan's fantasias. Furthermore, his preference for *dos dedos* (thumb-index) is reflected not only in his comments, but also in the composer's own right-hand instructions (thirty-six indications for *dos dedos*, as opposed to twenty-seven for *dedillo*), and one might easily conclude that his feelings on the subject were no less mixed than Fuellana's. Nevertheless, an examination of Mudarra's score indications can afford players with some of the clearest solutions for analogous passages of intabulation. Compare, for example, the opening of *Fantasia [III] de pasos para desenboluer las manos* and similar passagework encountered in Mudarra's *Glosa sobre el Cum Sancto Spiritu de la missa de Beata Virgine de Josquin* (Plate A.6). Like his predecessor Milan, Mudarra's example suggests the use of *dedillo* on passagework confined to a single string and *dos dedos* for scales proceeding from lower to higher courses:

Plate A.6: Mudarra, *Fantasia [3] de pasos para desenboluer las manos* (a) and *Glosa sobre el Cum Sancto Spiritu de la missa de Beata Virgine de Josquin* (b)

a)

The image shows the beginning of a lute piece. It features a five-line staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The notation includes rhythmic values (minims and crotchets) and fingerings indicated by numbers 1-3. Above the staff, there are several pairs of downward-pointing arrows, likely indicating string crossings. Below the staff, there are two lines of text: 'dedi:' and 'dosde.', which are likely shorthand for 'dedillo' and 'dos dedos' respectively. The piece begins with a series of notes on a single string, followed by a scale-like passage.

b)

The image shows the beginning of a lute piece. It features a five-line staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The notation includes rhythmic values (minims and crotchets) and fingerings indicated by numbers 1-3. Above the staff, there are several pairs of downward-pointing arrows, likely indicating string crossings. Below the staff, there is a line of text: 'glosa'. The piece begins with a series of notes on a single string, followed by a scale-like passage.

Milan's guidelines are further reinforced in Plate A.7, where extension of the two-finger *dos dedos* stroke to include a cadence suggests, along with the composer's opening comments, a preference for a firmly articulated close:¹²

Plate A.7: Mudarra's *Fantasia [2] para desenboluer las manos* (a) and *La segunda parte de la gloria de la misa de faysan regres de losquin* (b)

a)

b)

In any event, a comprehensive survey of Mudarra's application of *dedillo* demonstrates an extremely imaginative and versatile approach to its uses and can be readily applied to works by other intabulators. Mudarra's opening *Fantasia [I] de pasos largos para desenboluer las manos* ("Fantasia of long passages for loosening the hands,") expands on the concepts of Milan's *El Maestro* by extending the use of *dedillo* to encompass all six courses of the instrument, and in *Fantasia II* the player is often required to perform both ascending and descending scales *dedillo*.

¹² Mudarra is consistent in his preference for strong cadences articulated *dos dedos*. Whether or not any of his contemporaries shared his view is unknown.

Even more remarkably, Mudarra's *Fantasia [IV] de pasos de cotado (A de yr el copas muy apriesa)* calls for *dedillo* applied to passages in the bass.¹³ This unusual direction is not mentioned in the book's closing *Correccion*, and a similar (though much shorter) example is found in Mudarra's fifth fantasia, an oddity that seems to have gone completely unnoticed in scholarly discussions. While it is entirely possible to perform the passage with down-strokes in the thumb, such a reading tends to produce a somewhat heavy series of equally accented notes, rather than the strong-weak relationship one would normally expect, to say nothing of imposing serious limits on tempo and rendering Mudarra's directions redundant. The distance between courses makes it extremely unlikely that the lower part would be executed solely by the index finger, with another finger on the upper line. A more likely interpretation would call for alternating strokes by the thumb alone. This interpretation is not as unusual as it first appears: Sylvestro Ganassi's *Regola Rubertina* (1542-43) describes a variety of situations in which a lutenists might arpeggiate chords using up-strokes with the thumb, recent research suggests the possibility of a similar technique by the baroque guitarist Giovanni Paolo Foscarini (*fl.*1629-1647), and the use of down and up thumb-strokes still exists among flamenco guitarists today.¹⁴ Plates A.8 and A.9 compare a sampling of Mudarra's extended use of *dedillo* as presented in his pedagogical fantasias with passages of contemporaneous works that lend themselves equally well to the technique.

¹³ The use of either *dedillo* or index-middle alternation over a cantus firmus is also described by Venegas. See Angles, *La musica en la Corte*, 160.

¹⁴ Hildemarie Peter, ed., *Sylvestro Ganassi: Regola Rubertina*, Daphne and Stephen Sylvester, trans. (Berlin-Lichterfeld: Robert Lienau, 1977), 73-4; for Foscari see Monica Hall's unpublished paper "Giovanni Paolo Foscari –Plagiarist or Pioneer?" available at www.monicaHall.co.uk

Plate A.8: Mudarra's indication for ascending *dedillo* passages, proceeding from inner to outer courses, in *Fantasia II* [fol.2, mm.18-19: a) upper left]; ascending and descending passages in *Fantasia I* [fol.1^v, mm.18-19: b) lower left].¹⁵

a) *dedi*

b)

c)

d) *dedi*

e)

f)

Plate A.9: Mudarra's *Fantasia* [4], with indication for *dedillo* in the bass (a) [fol.4, mm.11-14].¹⁶

a) *dedi*

b)

c)

¹⁵ Contrary to his prefatory remarks, Mudarra demonstrates the flexibility with which the technique was applied. Compare with similar passages in Valderrabano's *Fantasia acomodada de cierta parte de la missa de Aue maristella de Iosquin*, (fol.75v, mm.24-25 (upper middle); mm.52-54 (lower middle)) and Fuenllana's *Primero kyrie de la missa de La sol fa re mi, a quarto, de Iosquin* (fol.93, mm.33-34 (upper right); mm.12-13 (lower right)).

¹⁶ The technique is particularly well-suited to short bursts of passagework such as the center excerpt, once again drawn from Valderrabano's *Fantasia acomodada de cierta parte de la missa de Aue maristella de Iosquin*, (fol.75v, mm.54-55). Here, the use of *dedillo* in both upper and lower voice serves to enhance the imitation between parts (see previous example). The *dedillo* thumb-stroke also lends itself well to slower passages where a lighter, more legato articulation is called for, such as in Pisador's *Missa sobre la sol fa re mi de Iusquin: Benedictus* (fol.56v, mm.81-85, (right)).

So how do modern performance attitudes reflect what was once such a widely practiced technique, and what might encourage the players of today to adopt it? The CD liner notes of one leading artists quipped that:

While the vihuela de mano has been somewhat of an enigma in the historical instrument movement of the past few decades, its music for the most part is very straightforward. Many performers have felt they have too few historical references on which to base a stylistic performance. What exactly is *dedillo*? How were ornaments used? What was the vihuela's place in society? What exactly is the difference between a vihuela and a guitar? These questions have never held much interest for me. The music speaks for itself.¹⁷

While this may be true, a closer look at the sources provides ample material for the development of this skill. Perhaps the most compelling argument for the incorporation of *dedillo* into the skill-set of today's player may lie in its expedience. Once mastered, the use of *dedillo* greatly reduces the amount of vertical movement in the right hand, and results in a simpler, more efficient gesture. The fact that today's leading players have overlooked such a well-known and widespread style of playing is unfortunate: clearly, the instructions of sixteenth-century musicians provide an adequate basis for the formation of this important technique. And given the pragmatic and flexible approach of those original practitioners, the incorporation of this important aspect of performance practice into the arsenal of the modern vihuelist should be embraced rather than ignored.

¹⁷ http://www.gyremusic.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=30 , accessed June 3, 2008, 3:55 pm.