

Fingering Matters

Or

Applicatio

Nigel North, Utrecht
May 2025

*Fingering “Matters”
Nigel North,
Utrecht, May 2025*

*Vingerzetting is belangrijk
of
Kwesties over vingerzetting*

*Left and right-hand fingering rules for the lute,
1500-1750 ~ in 4 parts:*

Prelude.....

Right Instrument for the repertoire

Right Instrument for the repertoire

Stringing and string length

Right Instrument for the repertoire

Stringing and string length

Pitch and temperament

Right Instrument for the repertoire

Stringing

Pitch and temperament

Posture: Standing or sitting

Right Instrument for the repertoire

Stringing

Pitch and temperament

Posture: Standing or sitting

Right hand position - thumb in or out - how near the bridge? (RH Nails or flesh ?)

Right Instrument for the repertoire

Stringing

Pitch and temperament

Posture: Standing or sitting

Right hand position - thumb in or out - how near the bridge?

Sources: Facsimiles/PDFs/editions

Right Instrument for the repertoire

Stringing

Pitch and temperament

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Right hand position - thumb in or out - how near the bridge?

Sources: Facsimiles/PDFs/editions

Ornamentation: Graces and Diminutions

Right Instrument for the repertoire

Stringing

Pitch and temperament

Posture: Standing or sitting

Right hand position - thumb in or out - how near the bridge?

Sources: Facsimiles/PDFs/editions

Ornamentation: Graces and Diminutions

Other Performance Practice issues including tempo,
dynamics, RHETORIC, rubato

And.....fingering.

John Dowland, 1612, from A Pilgrim's Solace "To the Reader":

Which Imputation, me thinkes, the learned sort of Musicians ought not to let passe vnanswered. Moreouer that here are and daily doth come into our most famous kingdome, diuers strangers from beyond the seas, which auerre before our owne faces, that we haue no true methode of application or fingering of the Lute. Now if these gallant yong Lutenists be such as they would haue the world belecue, and of which I make no doubt, let them remember that their skill lyeth not in their fingers endes: *Cucullus non facit Monachum*. I wish for the Honor therefore

4 periods/ Vier periodes:

- c.1500 RH thumb under
- c.1600 RH thumb out
- c.1650-1700 II course RH thumb out
- c.1700-1750 D minor lute

RIGHT HAND / rechterhand

3 things to form a fingering philosophy

- FINGERS

- DIVISIONS

- CHORDS

ALWAYS

Period 1: Summary

Right hand

Thumb – principal finger - thumb INSIDE

Index OR middle finger – indicated by single dot

There are **no fingerings marked with 2 or 3 dots, only one dot**= any finger, not thumb

Ring finger only used for chords.

The faster the music, the more you need to alternate
THUMB & INDEX

Period 1 - Right hand summary

FINGERS

Thumb index or middle index or middle

DIVISIONS

alternating thumb and index

Thumb and index

CHORDS

all fingers

middle or index thumb

5 notes

6 notes

Period 2: Summary

Right hand

Thumb OUT (except Robinson!)

Thumb – principal finger

Index – one dot

Middle – two dots

Ring – three dots?

Thumb rest stroke first described (Piccinini, 1623)

3rd (Ring) finger first notated (Robinson, 1603)

Thumb & Index still used for divisions, esp. courses 4-6

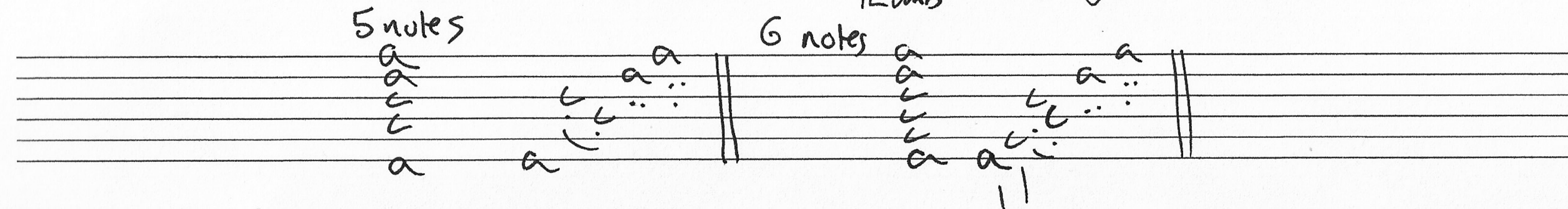
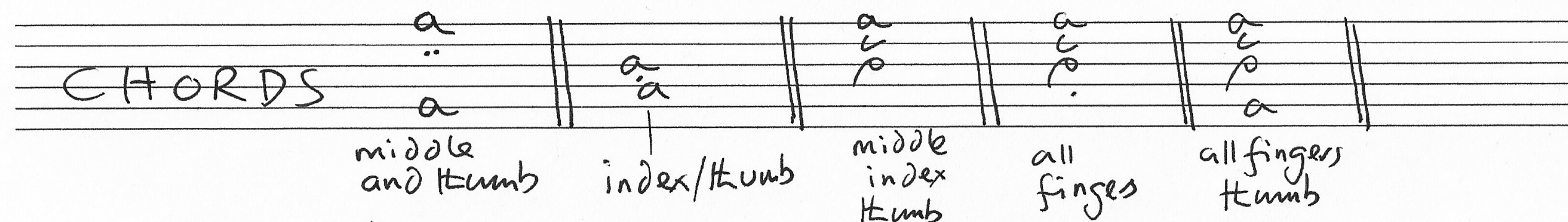
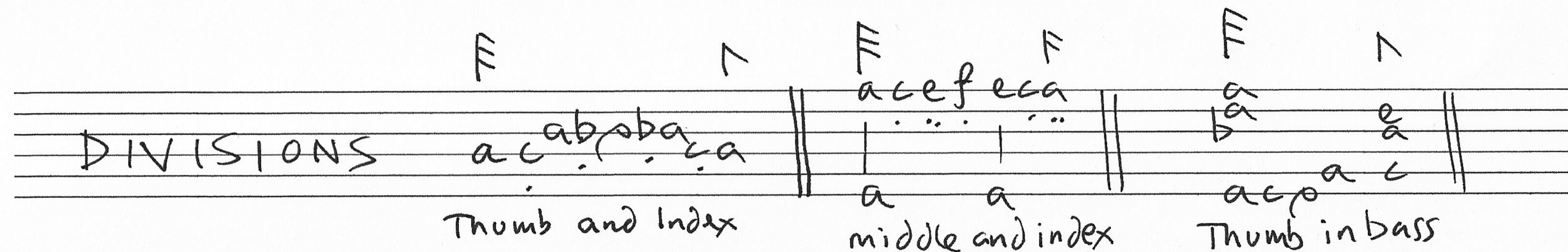
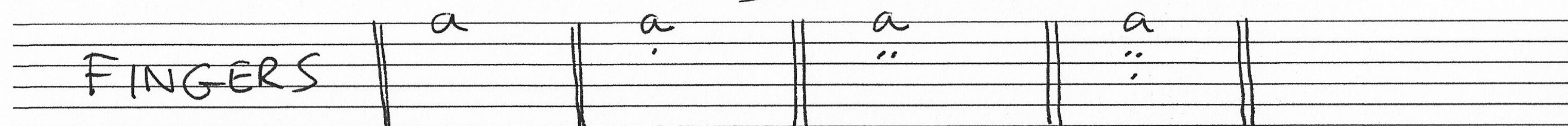
Middle & Index used for divisions when thumb is in the bass

Ring is used mostly for chords - except for Robinson!

Thumb is used alone for slow bass divisions, (Semimimim or fusa).

Period 2 - Right hand summary

Thumb Index only middle only Ring only



Period 3: Summary

Right hand THUMB OUT

Thumb, index, middle used.

RING finger never used (in French style)

Various chord applications invented to use more than 3 notes

Thumb, rested (rest stroke, apoyando)

Index finger used resting across 2 strings for fast end to a trill

Strumming up and down with index is notated

Period 3 c.1650 - c.1700 11 course D minor lute

Right hand Summary.

FINGERS

Thumb index middle or middle cadences
a a a a a a a a

DIVISIONS

Slurs F occasionally F
ace ace ace abp acacabp
middle + index alternation Thumb and Index

CHORDS

middle middle index middle or
a a a a a a a a
Thumb Thumb

Burwell Tutor

Burwell "nipping"

All middle and thumb together

Lute Society of America

Period 4: Summary

Right hand THUMB OUT

Thumb shown with line under tablature letter

Index – one dot

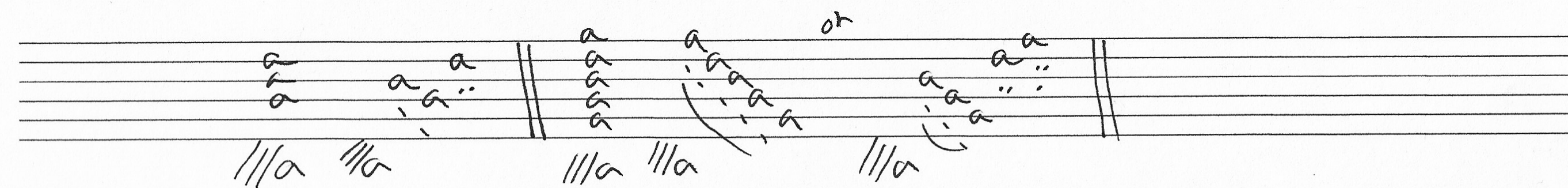
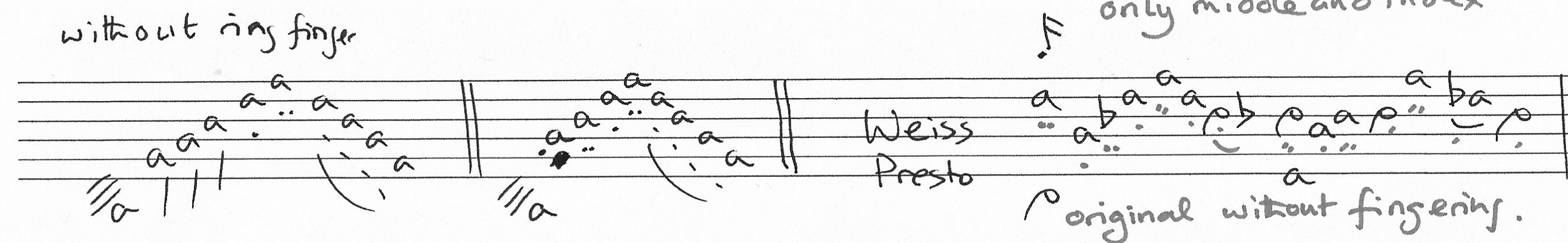
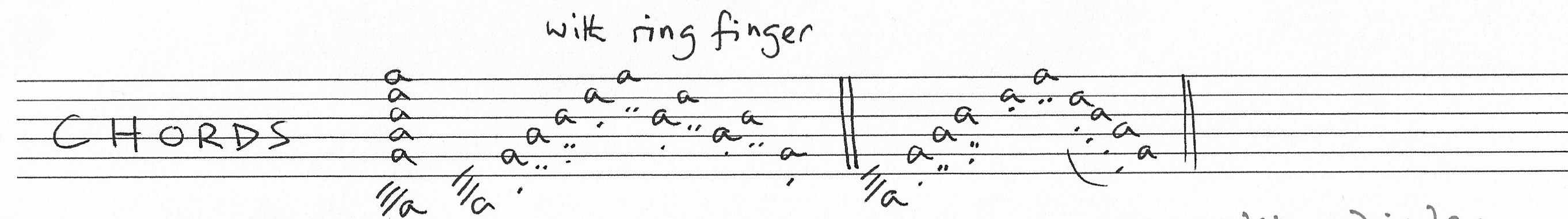
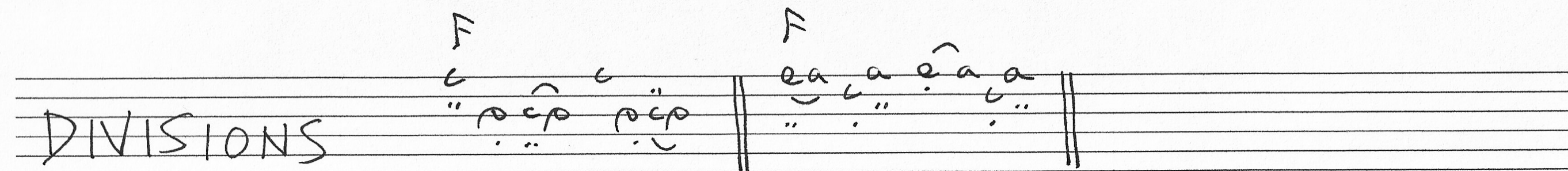
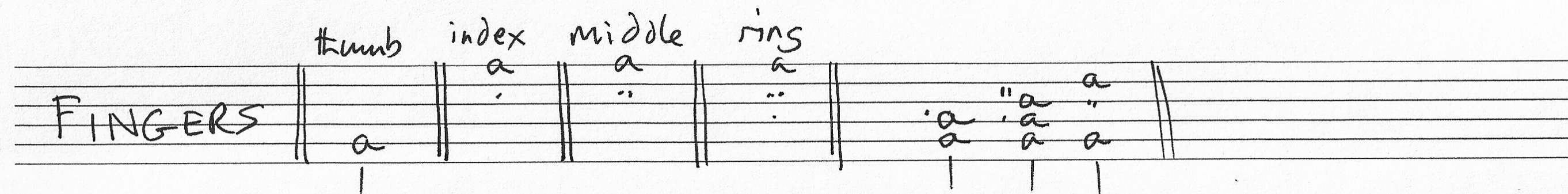
Middle – two dots

Ring – three dots - used for chords and arpeggios

Index and middle used for string crossing

Index often brushed back from treble to bass.

Period 4 - Right hand summary D minor Lute c.1700 - 1760



Period 1

1500-1600

Period 1 1500-1600 Sources cited:

CAPIROLA

Compositione di meser Vincenzo capiola
Venice, c.1517

NEWSIDLER

Hans Newsidler
Ein Newgeordent künstlich Lautenbuch
Nürnberg, 1536

JUDENKÖNIG

Hans Judenkönig
Ain Schone Künstliche Underweisung
Nürnberg, 1523

LE ROY

Adrian le Roy
A Briefe and easye instruction to learne the tablature
London, 1568

WAISSEL

Matthaeus Waissel
Lautenbuch, 1592

BARLEY

William Barley
A new Booke of Tabliture
London, 1596
An Instruction to the Lute

Capirola: Right hand instructions quotes:

Alternating, middle& index, or more often thumb&index:

When you have to pluck two notes upwards, one after the other. Pluck the first with a finger, the second with another finger and the following one as they are written. Most of the time there will be (a succession of) downwards and upwards strokes. Keep the thumb of the right hand under the second finger², otherwise the two fingers, when plucking up and down, will clash with each other.

The left hand is also very important. Capirola: On left hand tenuto:

you can while you prepare (a piece).

The most beautiful secret in preparing and playing a piece is found in a rule given by Aristotle to which great importance must be given: when you play, be careful to hold the notes, keeping the fingers (of the left hand) on the finger-board, until you have to play other notes (with the same fingers). Do not move them until you have to; be careful always to observe this rule while you are playing through the pieces. Not everybody understands this as I do, so I had to explain it.

I must also explain to you why some figures 3, 4 etc. are sometimes written

Later, he says the same:

beautiful to see. Not everybody understands how important this is, therefore, hold the notes as much as you can until you are obliged to leave them.

Musical examples

Dalza 1508

Calata ala Spagnola

Hans Newsidler
Nach Willen Dein

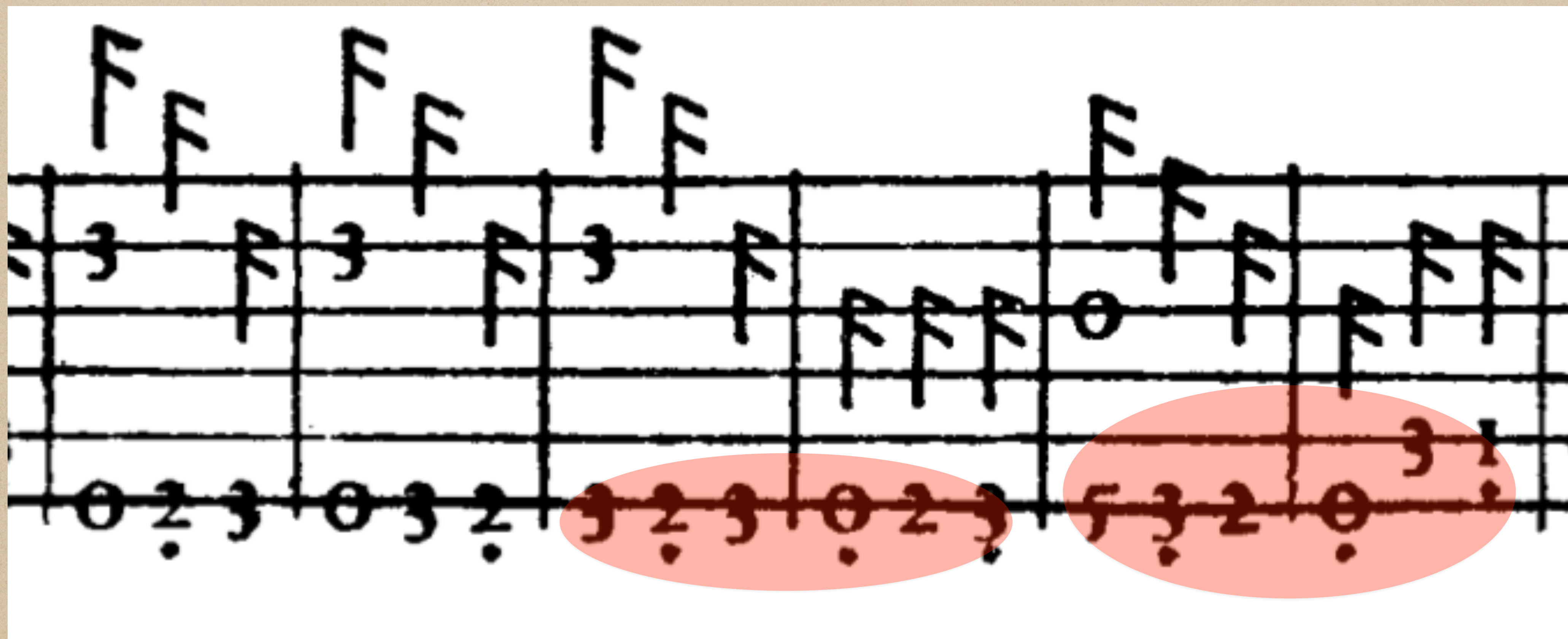
Dalza 1508
Calata ala Spagnola



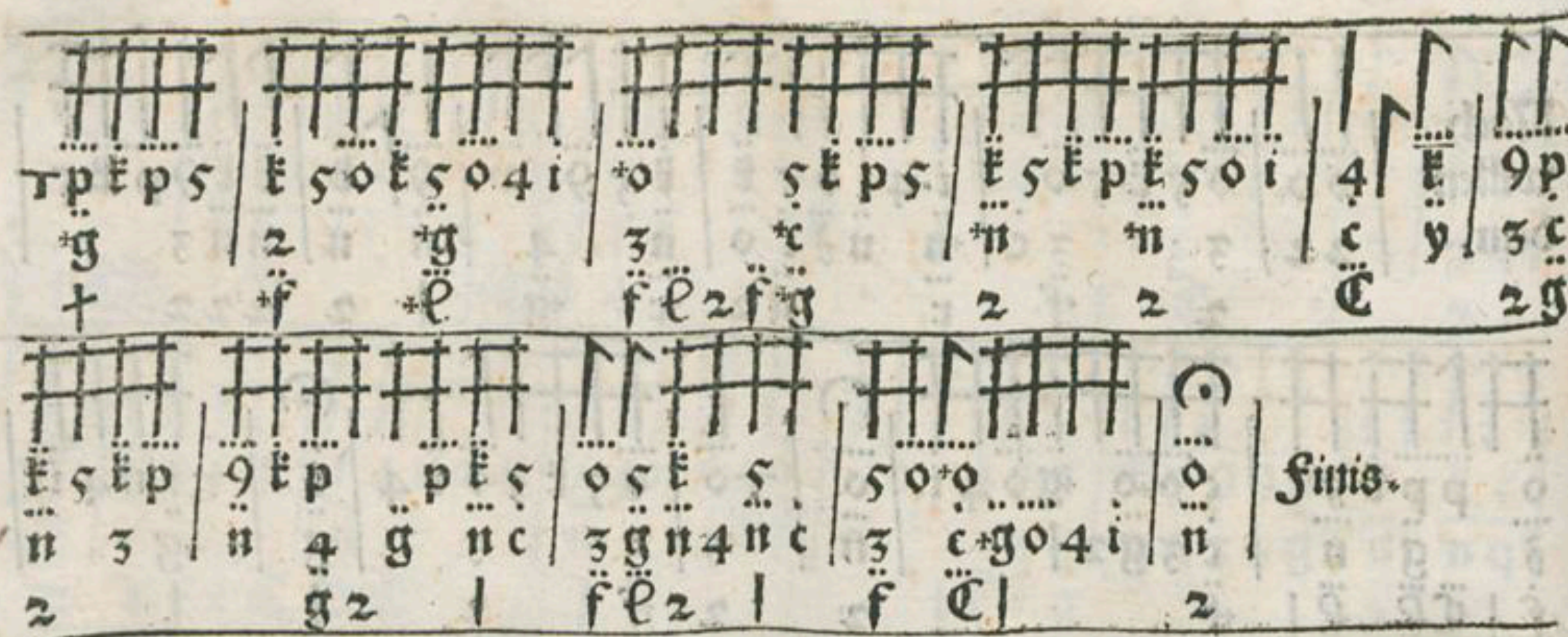
Dalza Calata - detail 2



Dalza Calata - detail 2



Nach willen dein.						
	o o	o s t s o	i 4 i o s t	t s 9 v	9 t	t t 9 p t s
	2 2	3 3 c	n n d i o	n 4	n n	n n 3
		2 f r	g 2 r	g	2	2 2 2
			o		o	
	o p p t s	s o o g o 4 i	o	o s t s o i 4	i	t i n 4 i
	d g n	c 3 g 2	n	3 3 3	g	g
	f t t e	f	2 2	f 2		
						o
	o s t s s o i 4	n n	o s t o s t o s	t s t p 9 p	t s t o s	t
	2 r	r r	3 c	n o 4	4 n 3 c	3
	f +	B B	f g	2 g	f 2 g	f

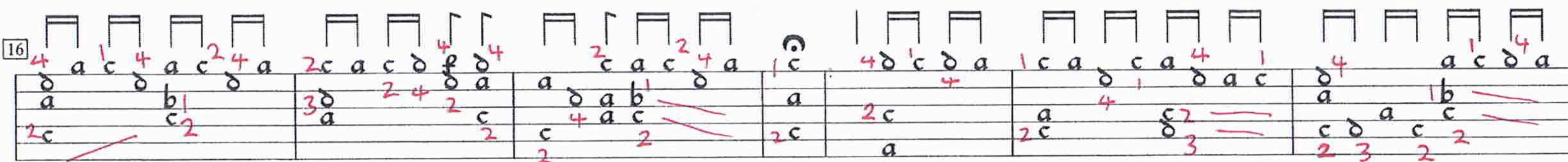
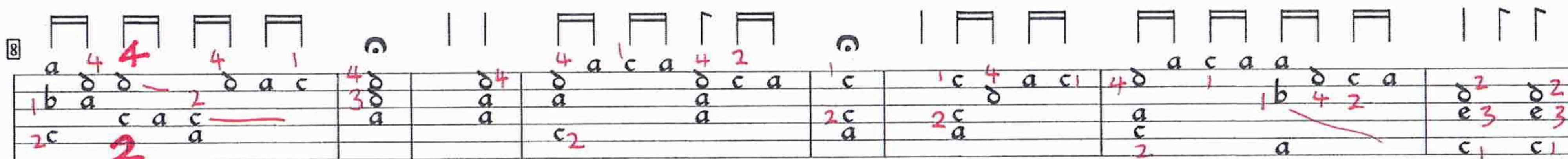
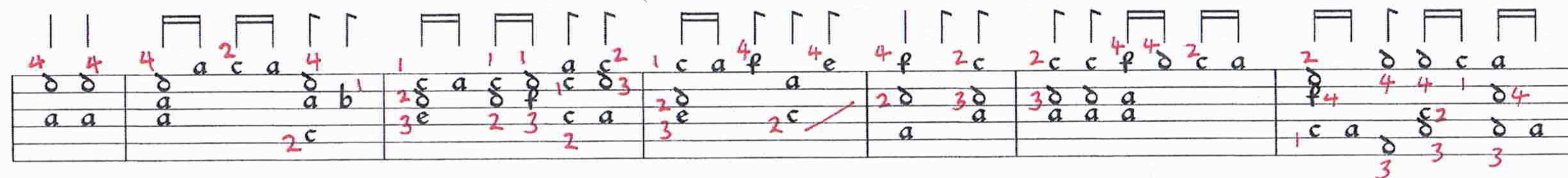


Hie enden sich die zehen bezeichneten stuck / mit den pünctlein / als eins / zwey / drey
 vnd vier / als da / vnd folgen andere zehen stuck hernach / die sind mit dem
 einigen punctlein vnd Creutzlein bezeichnet / Da merck nun ein yeder selbs auff sich /
 wohin er greyssen soll / vnd wie im die punctlein vor angezeigt haben / soll er die sel-
 ben griff fein mercken vnd im kopff behalten.

Nach Willen Dein

transcribed from German to French tablature

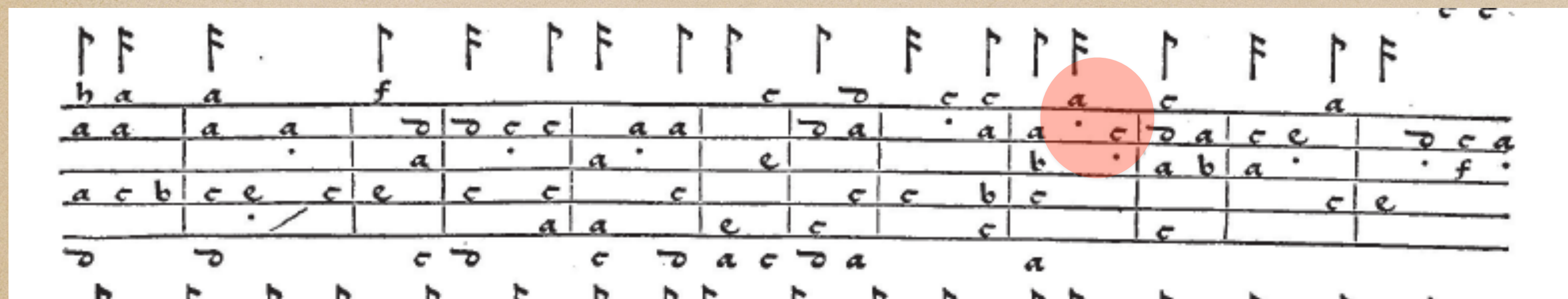
Newsidler 1536



Examples from printed books of de Rippe.

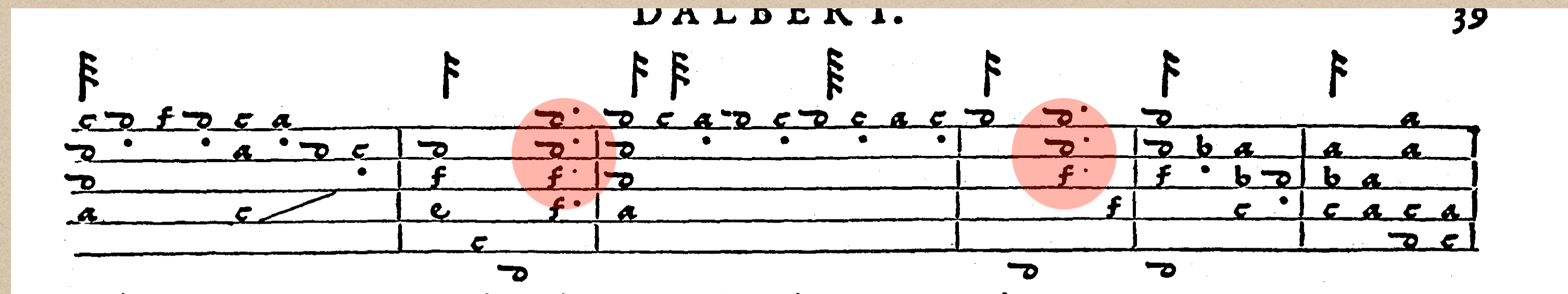
Example 1:

Two consecutive notes with dots, indicating middle followed by index (1st and 2nd courses)



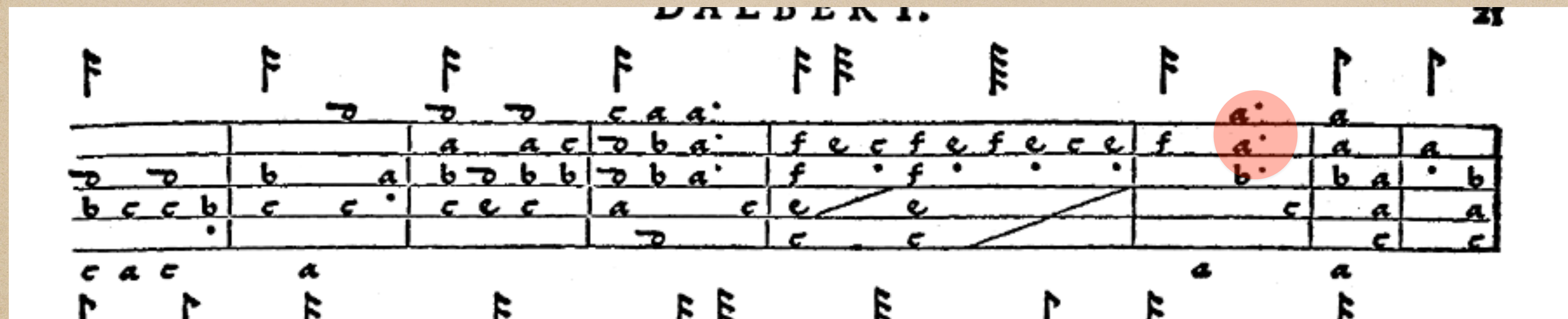
Example 2:

Chords of 3 AND 4 notes without the thumb:



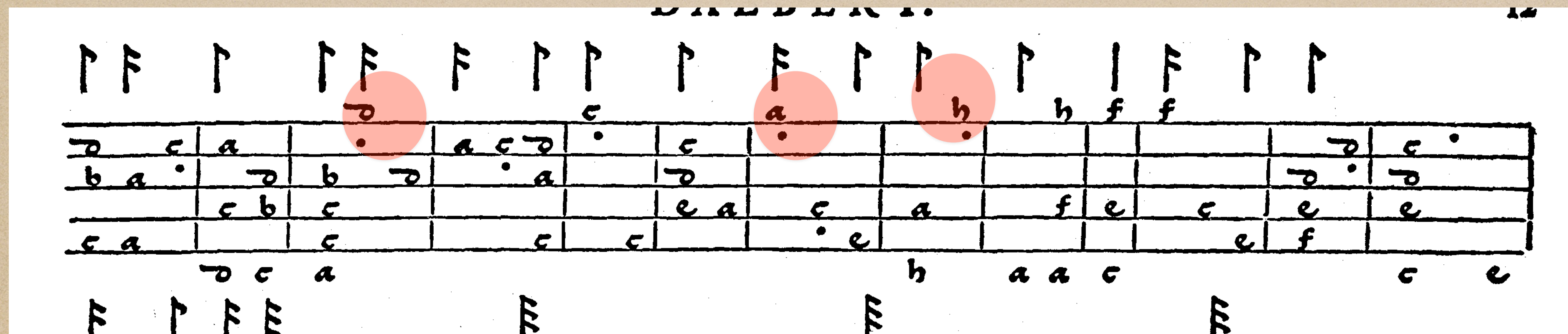
Example 3:

Chords of 3 notes, without thumb: 2nd
course note with dot = middle or index,
not thumb.



Example 4:

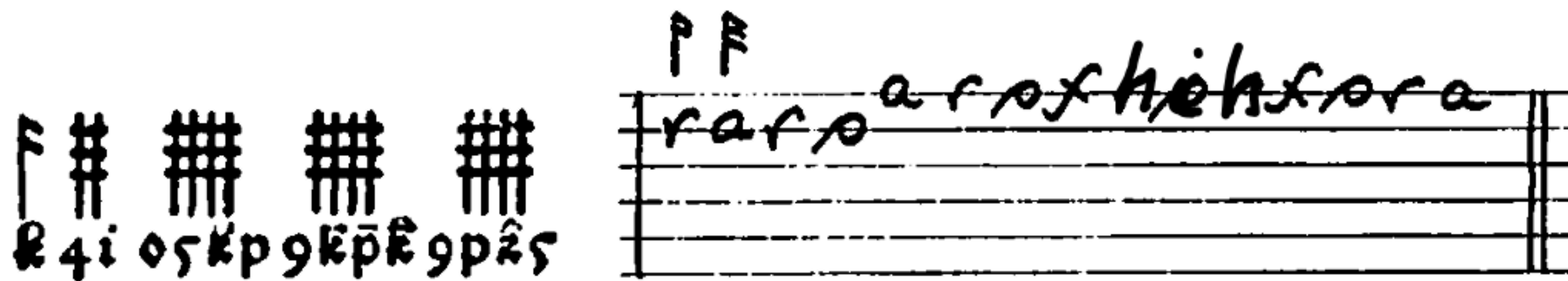
Treble notes (not divisions) with dots, indicating middle or index = not thumb



WAISSEL: LH fingering for higher positions, sliding the little finger

Ex. 16

5 7 8 7



In this run use the middle finger on the second fret, the little finger on the third, and anything past the third fret you must stop with the little finger sliding up and down.

Period 2

c. 1600

Period 2 c. 1600 Sources cited:

ROBINSON

Thomas Robinson
The Schoole of Musicke
London, 1603

BESARD

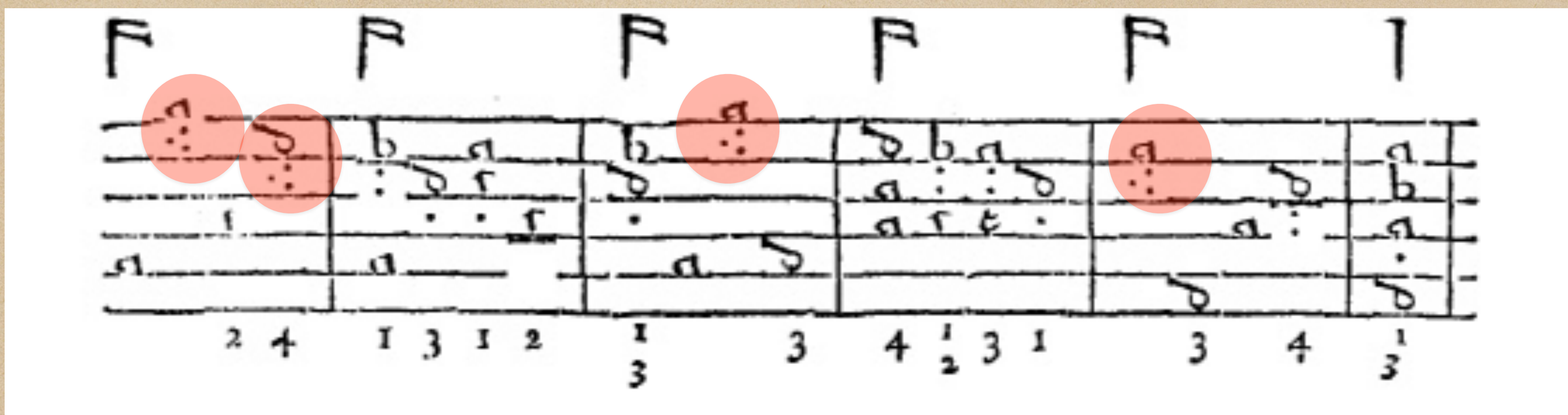
J B Besard
*Necessarie Observations
belonging to the Lute and
Lute-playing*
Pub. Robert Dowland,
London, 1610

VALLET

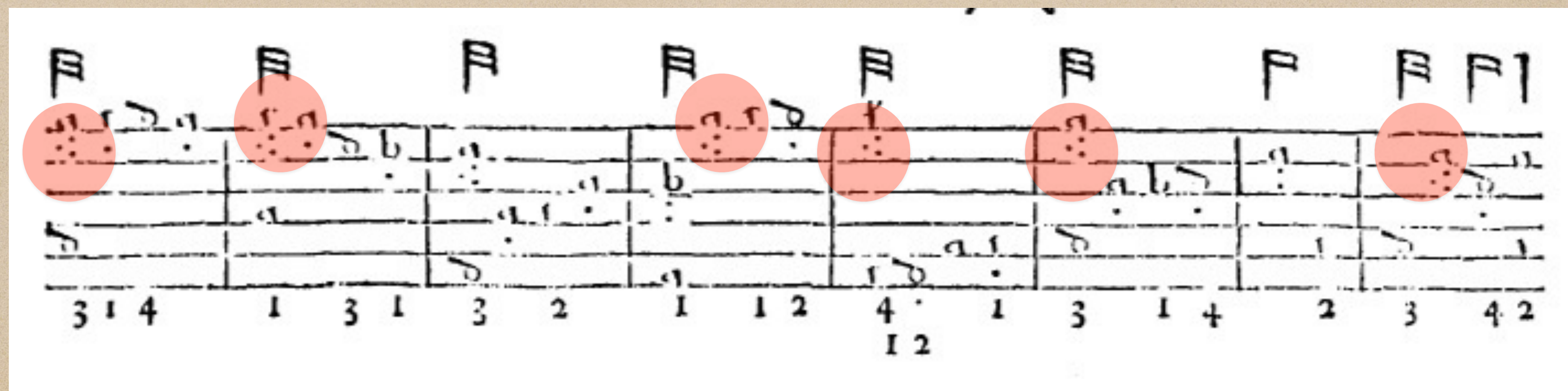
Nicholas Vallet
PETIT DISCOURS
Le Secret des Muses,
Amsterdam, 1618

PICCININI

Alessandro
Piccinini
*Intavolatura di
Liuto, et di
Chitarrone/Libro
Primo*
"A Gli Studioso
Del Liuto"
Bologna, 1623



Examples of RH fingering from Robinson



Robinson,

Treble showing

RH&LH

Fingering

The Schoole of Musicke.

T

He Queenes
good Night.

The image shows a handwritten musical score on aged paper. The title 'The Schoole of Musicke.' is written at the top in a cursive hand. Below the title, the piece is identified as 'He Queenes good Night.' The score is written on six staves. The first staff is the Treble clef, and the second staff is the Bass clef. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and fingerings. Two red circles highlight specific notes in the Treble staff: one on the first staff and one on the second staff. The score is written in a historical style with a large 'T' at the beginning of the first staff.

Besard (1610) summary of fingering instructions:

RH fingering

Thumb OUT!

Chords: use all fingers, and for 5 & 6 note chords, the usual doubling of thumb and index.

Divisions:

Thumb & index as normal

Middle & Index when thumb is in the Bass.

Thumb and Index when on course 4,5,& 6

THUMB ALONE when bass is not too fast.

LH Fingering

Hold notes as long as possible (as in all previous Instructions)

If there is any need of choice, hold the BASS more than any other voice

LH flat index (Barrè) used in single line passages and in chords.

On course 1 & 2 use 4th finger on 3rd fret

On courses 3 -6 use 3rd finger on 3rd fret

Besard on holding LH notes but for diminutions we must let go:

And if you may, hold the Base and the Treble together, if there be certaine middle Notes to be expressed: but if you may not for want of more fingers, take away that finger for the most part which stops the Treble: for it were better that Note perish then a Base. Generally take this for a Rule, the fingers must not be taken from the strings, without it be necessary: yet take heed whilst you play Diminutions, that one Note giue place to another, and be not held with the Note following. Thus much for the staying of the fingers on a string,

Besard on the use of the thumb alone in the bass:

you to use the two fore-fingers, if you be to proceede (that is to runne) into the fourth, fifth or sixth string with Diminutions set also with some parts. Besides you shall know that low letters A good Note, placed in the Bases, from the fourth *Chorus* to the ninth, if they be noted with this time **F** may more fitly, nay must all be strooke with the Thombe, and most commonly so they are stroken, although this time **F** be put to them, as you shall more easily see in the example following:



VALLET

Nicholas Vallet

PETIT DISCOURS

Le Secret des Muses, Amsterdam, 1618

Summary of fingering instructions:

- RH Hand - THUMB OUT -
- RH middle and index often notated, and used for divisions
- Thumb for bass and sometimes thumb and index divisions, like Besard
- Chords played by all 3 fingers without bass are indicated.
- Middle finger used repeatedly if the tempo is slow enough (eg in the Carillon de villages).

Alessandro Piccinini

Intavolatura di Liuto, et di Chitarrone/Libro Primo

Bologna, 1623

Summary of Instructions

RH Thumb out

Single note without dot = Thumb

2 notes: Middle and Thumb

Index, one dot

Divisions have 4 techniques:

- Thumb and Index
- Middle and Index
- Dedillo – index used up and down
- Tirate are sometimes notated with LH Slurs (the 1st notation in Lute Music?)

LH comments

Tenuto is important to conserve the counterpoint

Period 2:

Musical examples

John Dowland:

Preludium (Boord ms.)

Frog Galliard (Folger ms.)







Finis frog Galliard
Ho Conlundo

Period 3: c. 1630 -70 II course in France

Sources cited:

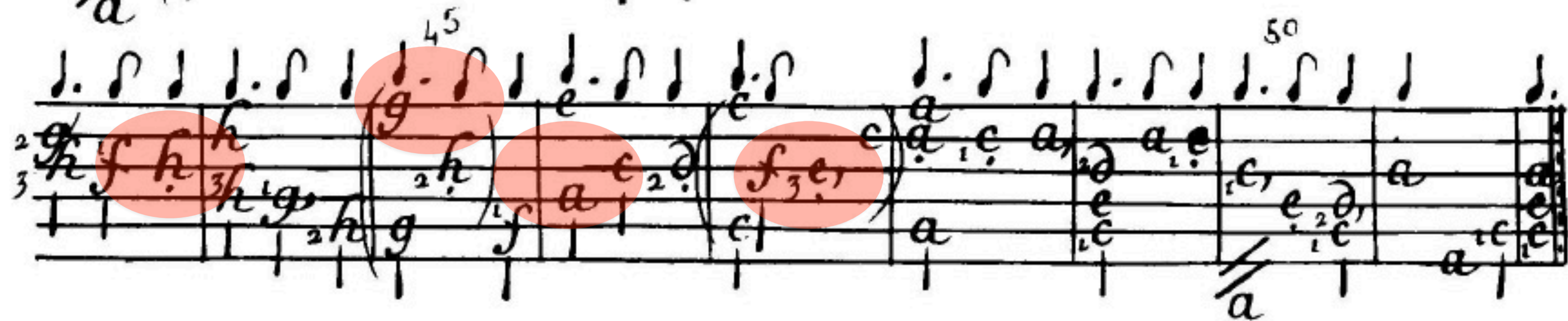
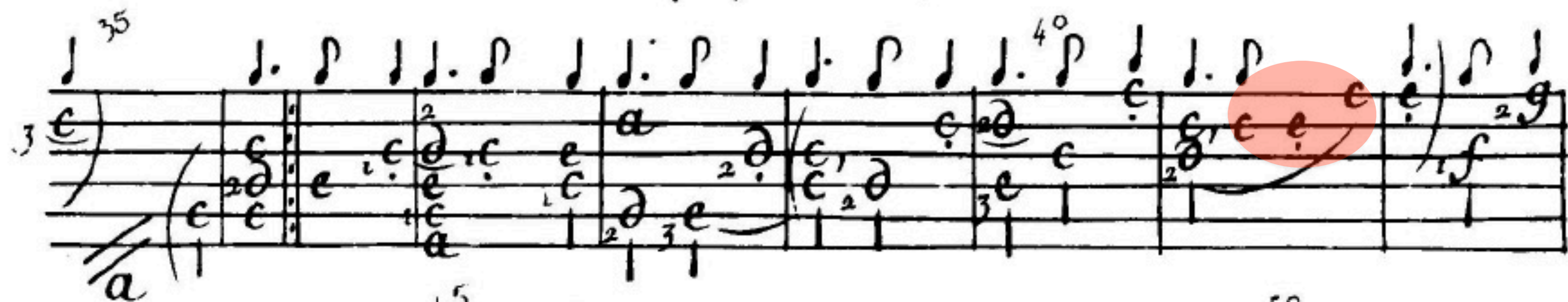
- Mary Burwell Lute Tutor c.1660.
- Denis Gaultier: *Pièces de luth* c.1670.
- Denis Gaultier: *Livre de tablature* .c 1672.
- Jacques Gallot, *Pièces de luth*, 1684.
- Charles Mouton: *Pieces de Luth*, 1698.

Mouton,
Canaries

Handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Canaries" by Mouton. The score is written on three systems of staves, with measures numbered 10, 15, 20, and 25. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Several measures are highlighted with red circles, indicating specific musical features or errors. The score is written in a historical style, likely from a 16th or 17th-century manuscript.

Canarie.

Measures 10, 15, 20, and 25 are marked. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Red circles highlight specific measures in each system.



Period 4: D minor lute

11 & 13 course, 1700-1750

Period 4: D minor lute 11 & 13 course, 1700-1750

Sources cited:

Philip Franz Le Sage de Richee

Cabinet der Lauten, Breslau, 1695

Grissau ms. Poland, Warsaw 2002,

c.1720 containing the same instructions of Le Sage de Richee (#1-15)

with some extra instructions for 13c lute and later fingering (#16-22)

E G Baron *Untersuchung des Instruments der Lauten*

Nürnberg, 1727

(and translation, *A Study of the Lute*, Douglas Alton Smith, 1975)

S L Weiss – extracts from the London and Dresden mss.

J G Conradi, Frankfurt, 1724, *Neue Lauten Stücke*

J C Beyer *Anweisung* from *Oden, Lieder und Fabeln*

Leipzig 1760

Grissau ms. Poland, Warsaw 2002

maßen mit einem finger streichen, sondern man muß den dritten darzu gebrauchen, als

im Arpeggio also:

1. Wenn ein Satz soll zwey, drey oder 4 mahl arpeggiert werden, wirdes mit diesem notirt:

2. Wenn man so arpeggiert werden wie folget:

3. Folgender Satz muß also arpeggiert werden:

4. Folget endlich, wie man die finger wohl und süßlich appliciren soll:

Ms M274 Hs 254

Ornament table

2nd version:

Die vorkommenden Zeichen der Cantate Manner sind folgende.

Application auf Ligand. Appl. C. G. Darinnen Vylag Abzug

gepultes Abzug eine finfall der gepulten finfall eine beyderley Art zu
sammen

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eine 3 Abzug eine 3 Tremplement Mordanten Semi Mord. Vylag für

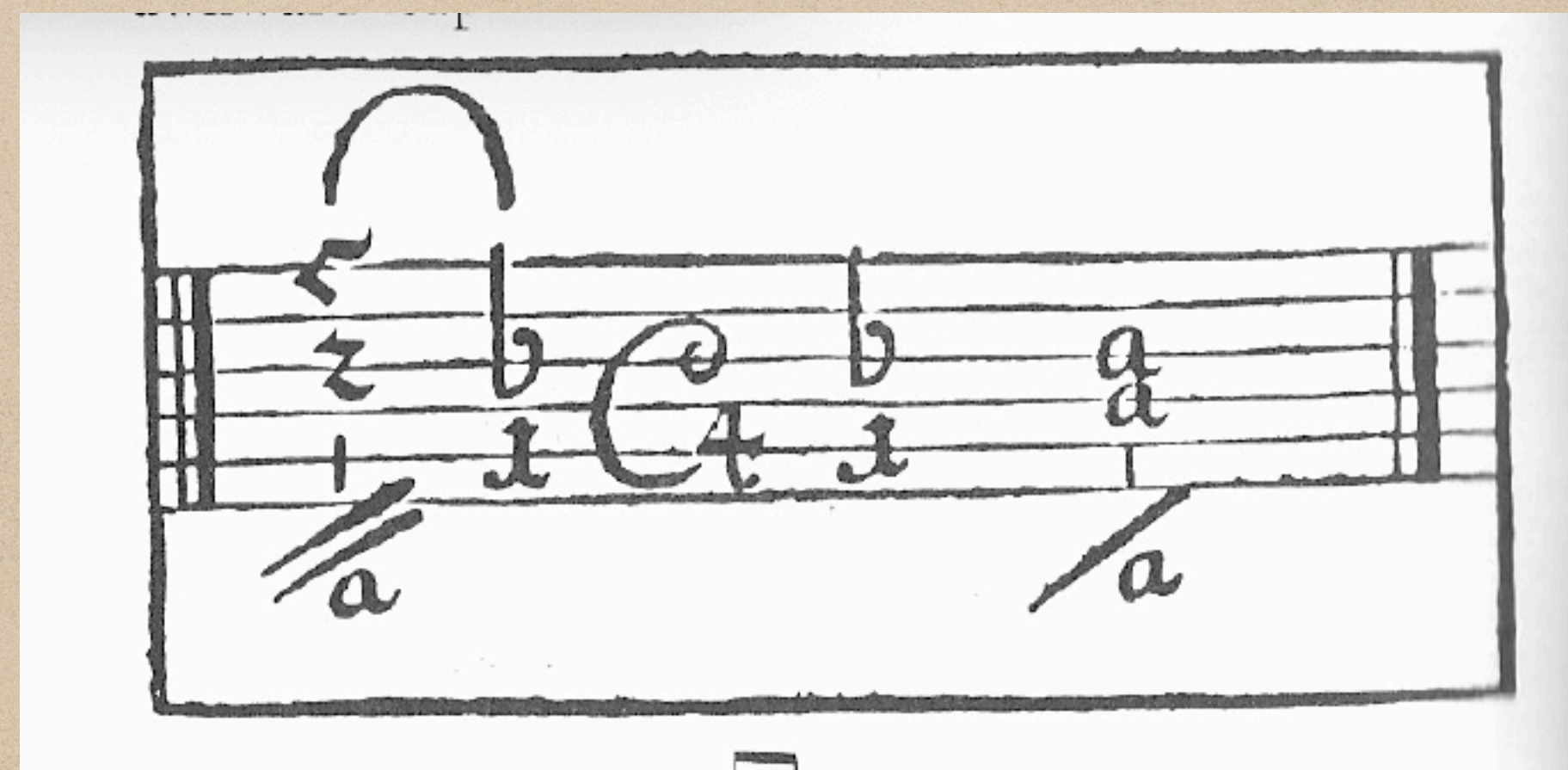
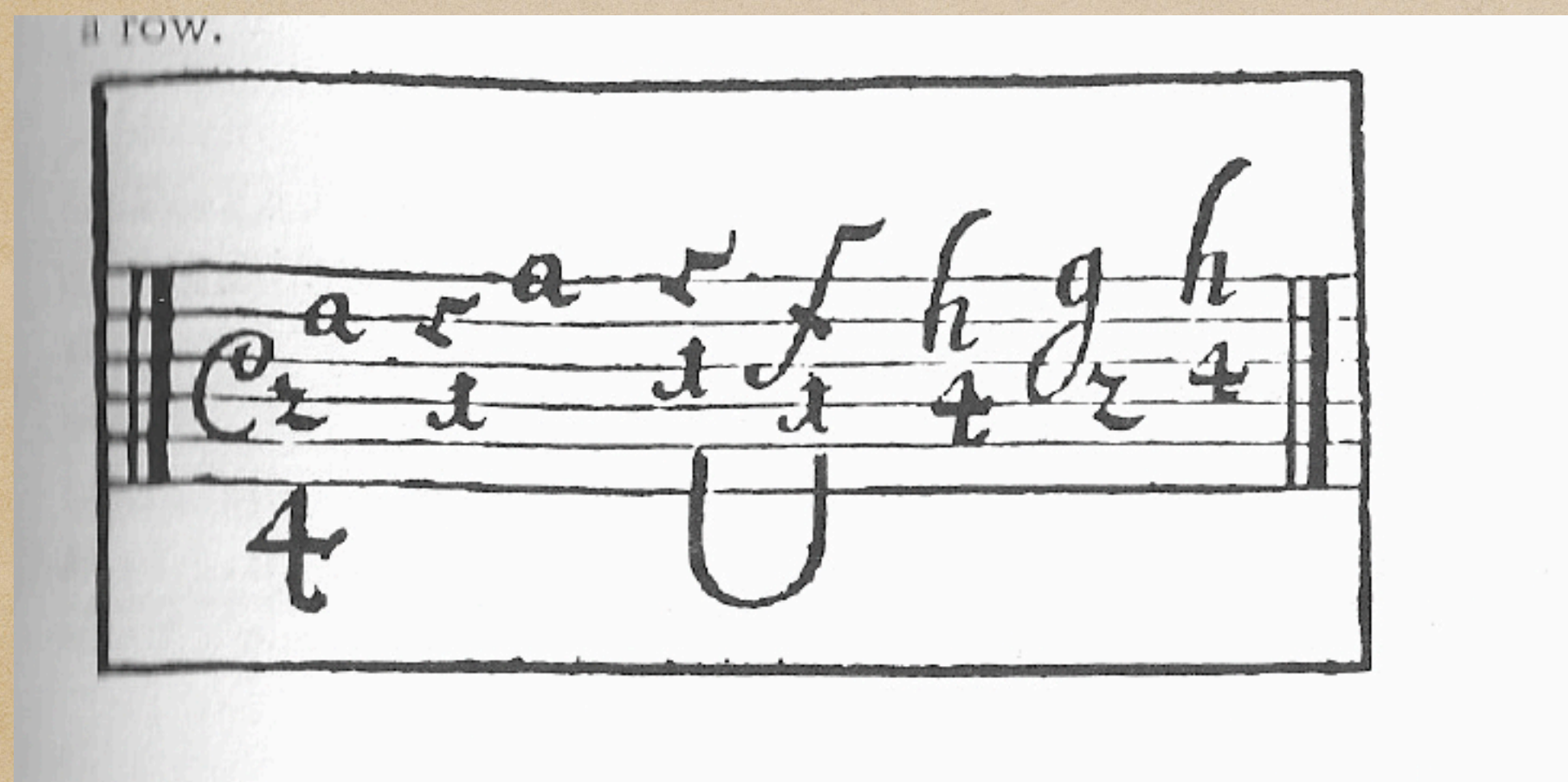
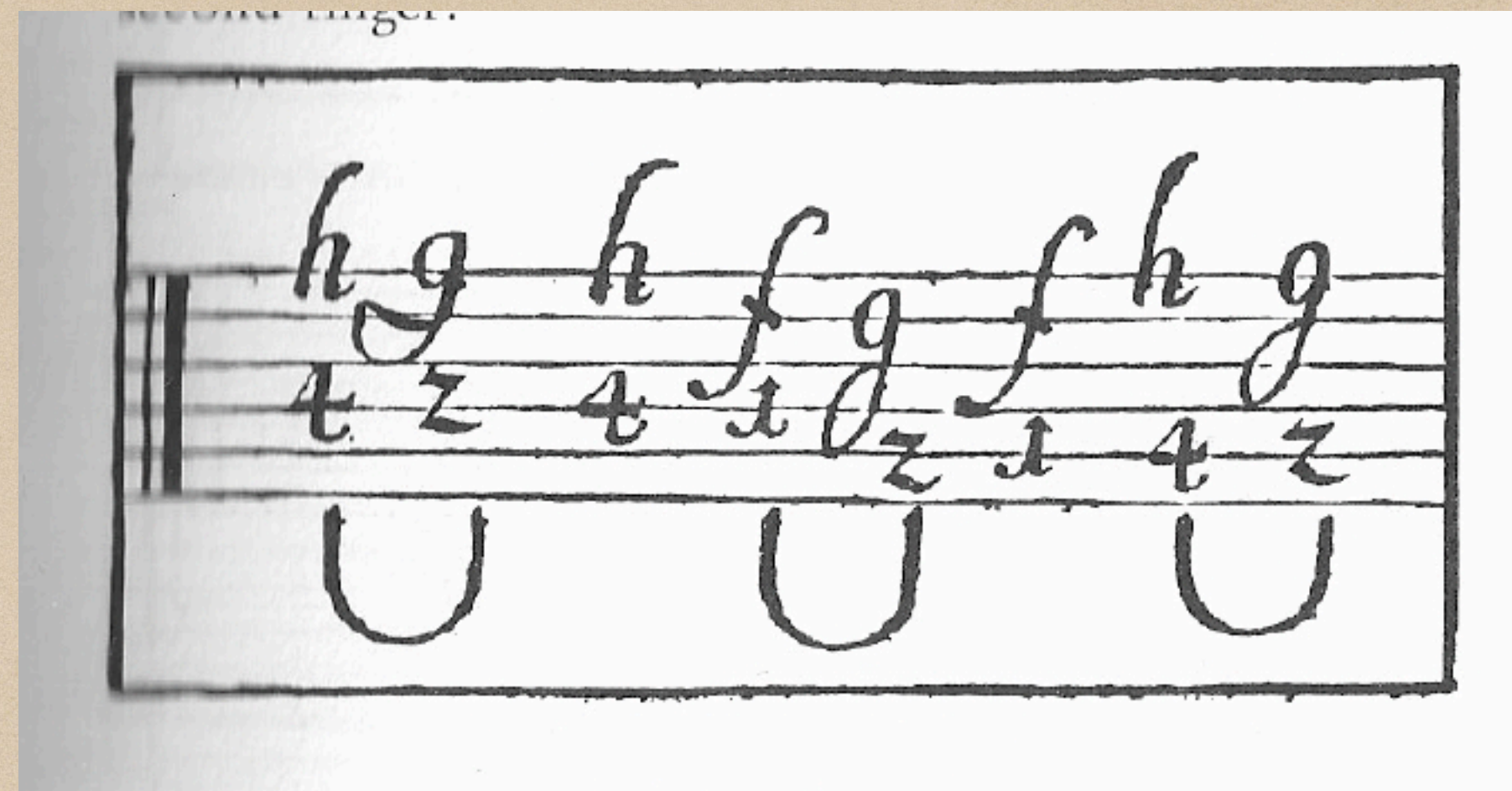
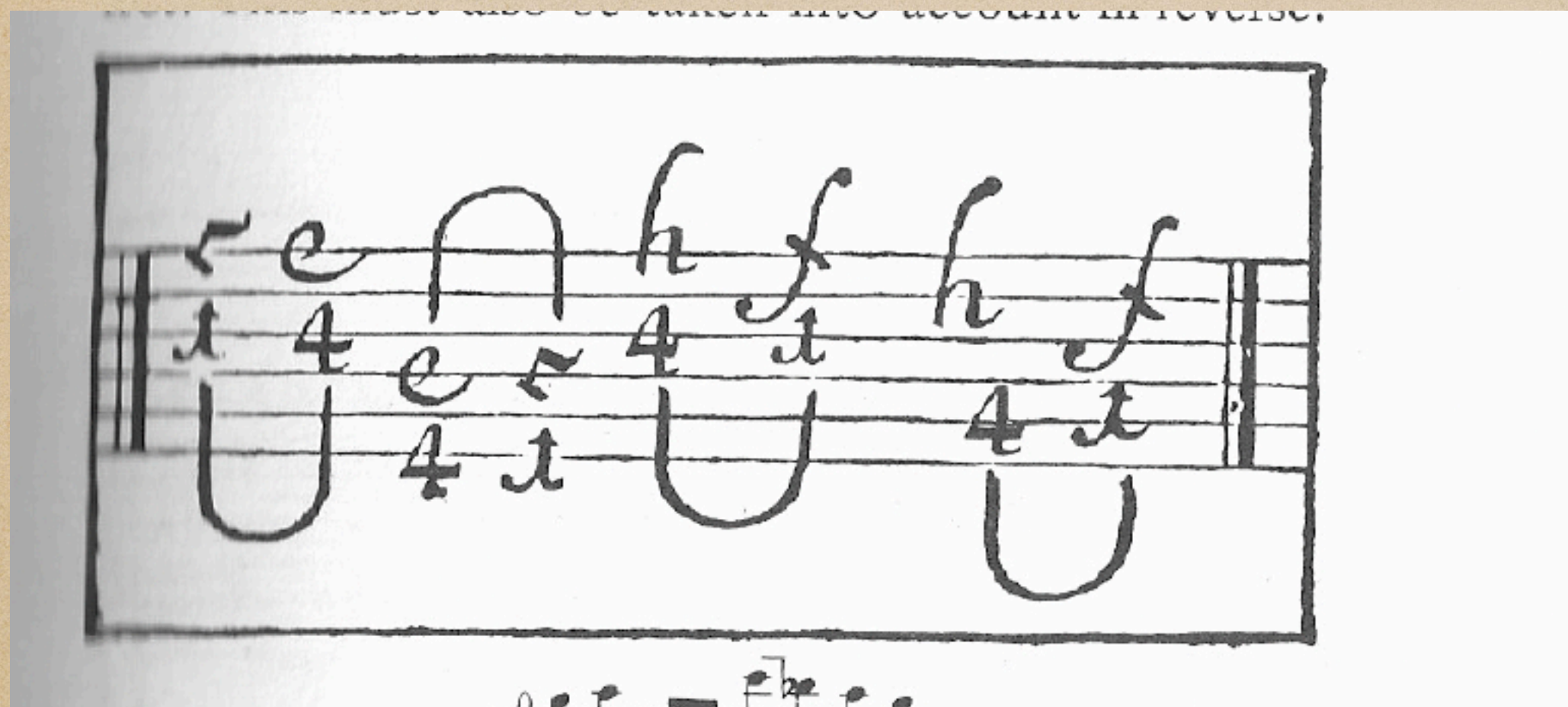
Trillo Semi Trillo gepult Trillo Fortgang des Trillo. Sincupist i gebrauch

Lindung Wortlegung eine a gebrauch Bass gestrichel gleichniß gestrichel

trillo der die Solennitete hören müssen = durch Signum wird exprimirt

4

Baron: Examples of Left Hand fingering, rarely using the 3rd LH finger



Prelude 1724

L'accordand.

4

7

Harp:

4

4

A handwritten musical score on aged paper. The title 'Prelude' is written in a cursive hand at the top left, followed by the year '1724'. Below the title, the text 'L'accordand.' is written. The score consists of eight staves of music. The first staff begins with a '4' time signature. The notation includes various note values, rests, and slurs. There are several '4' markings throughout the score, possibly indicating fingerings or measures. The word 'Harp:' is written above the sixth staff. The score ends with a double bar line and a final flourish.

Conradi

1724

C major

Prelude with

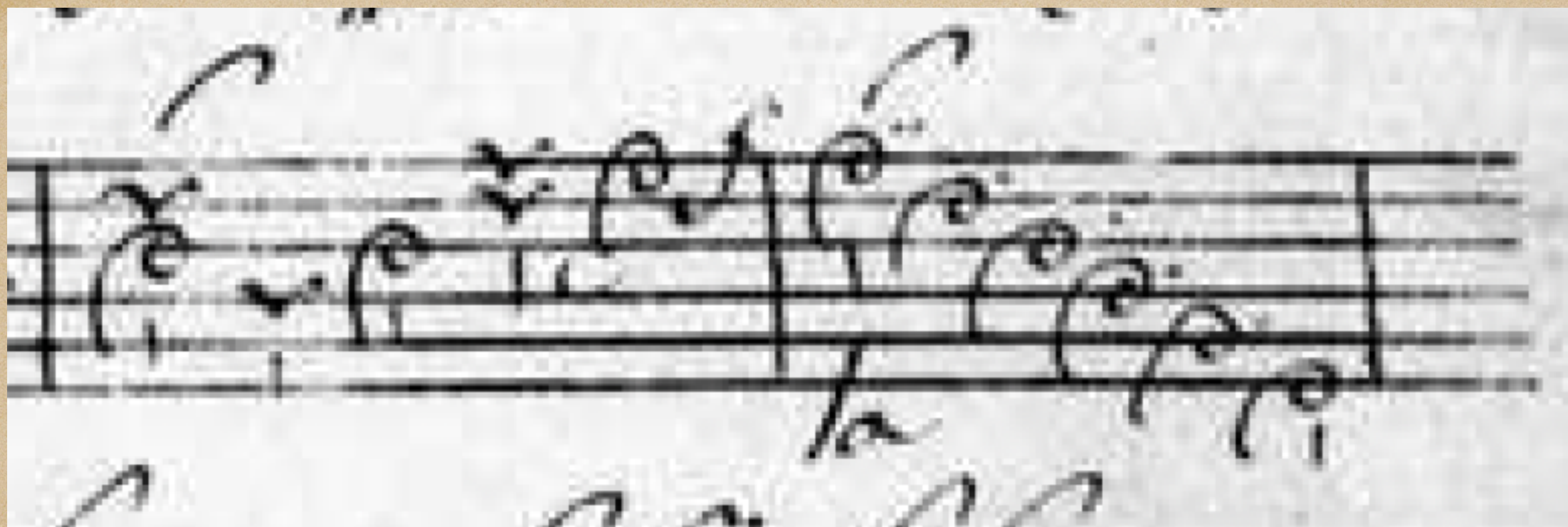
RH fingering

Without using

the ring finger

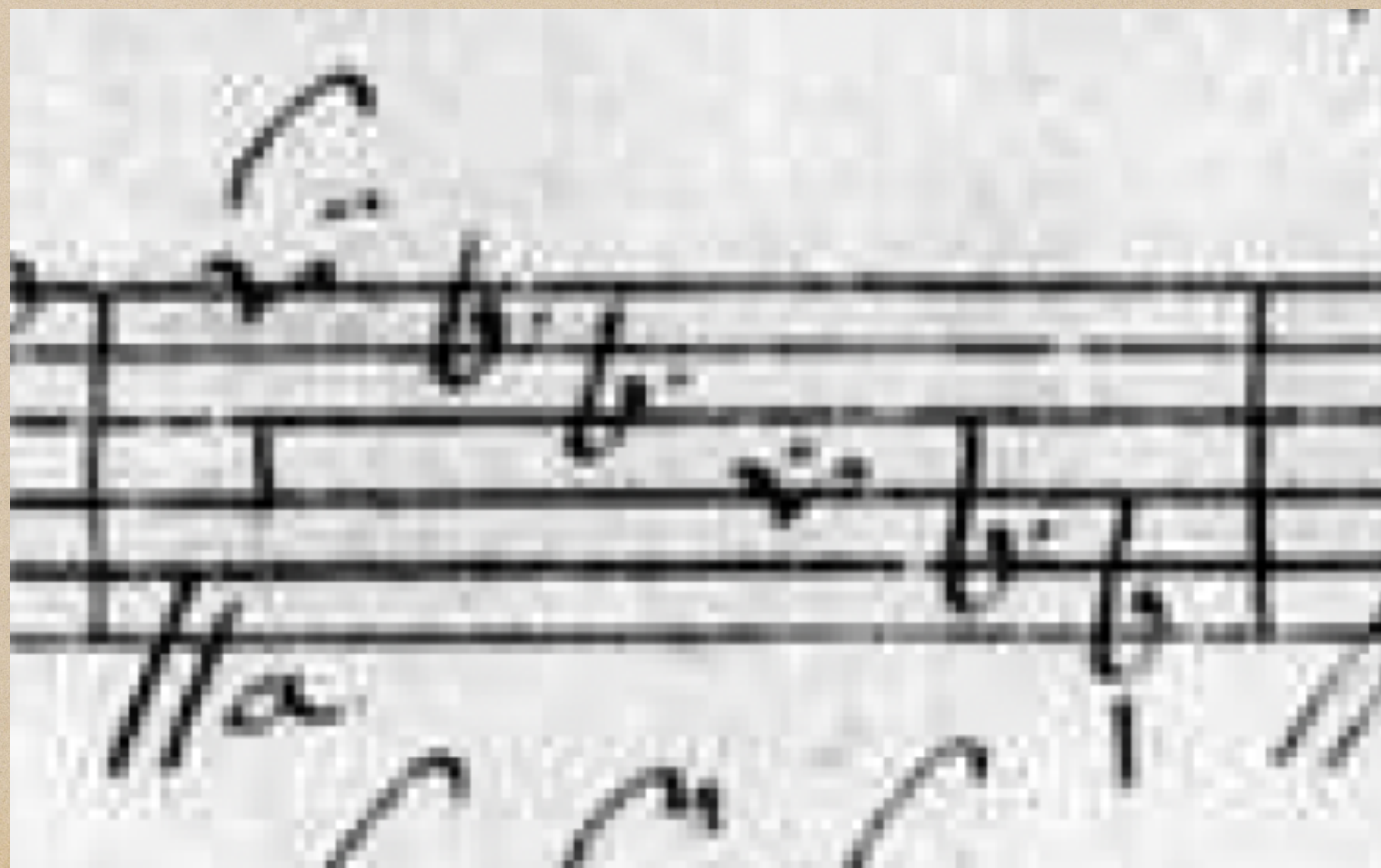
Weiss: B flat major Sarabande, Dresden Ms. - showing the use of thumb and all 3 fingers for arpeggios



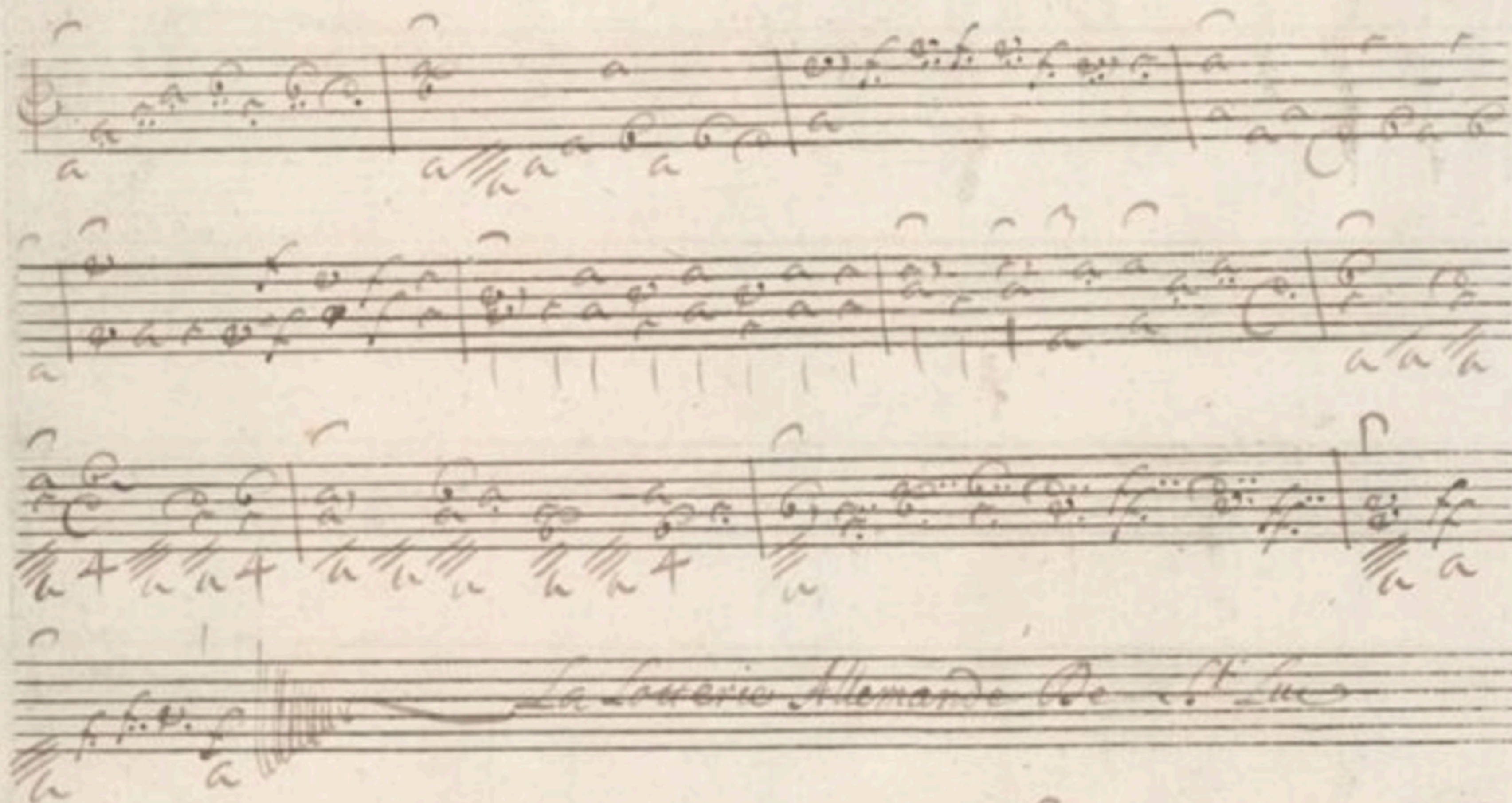


Weiss: F minor Gigue ,
Dresden Ms. Showing RH
index in descending arpeggio.

No ring finger, RH, is indicated



Prelude. Mesure Quatre



J St Luc,

Prelude, Gm

ONB: Mus

Hs.1586

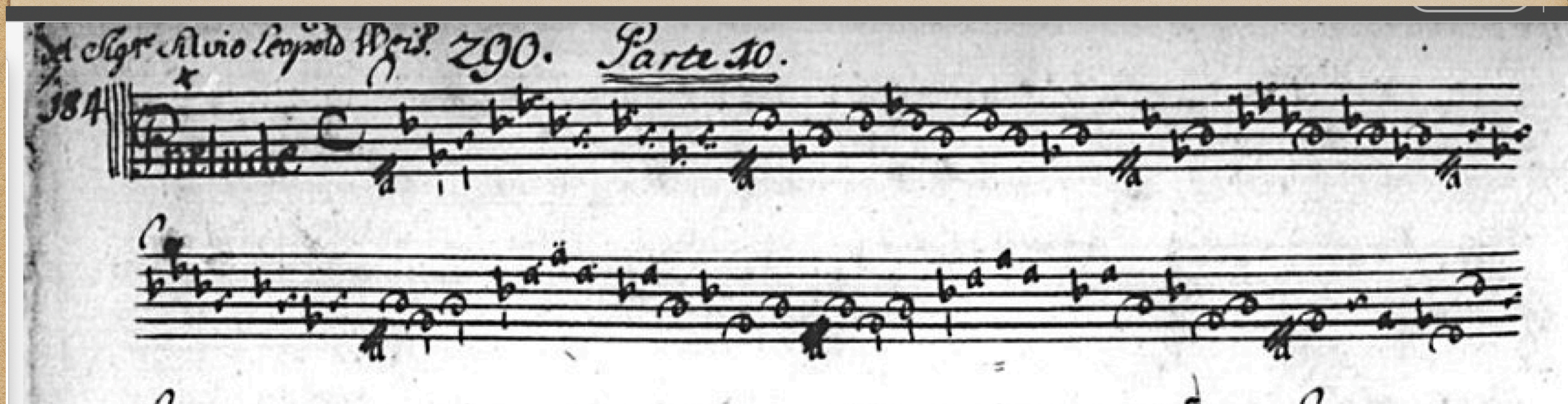
Showing

Arpeggios with

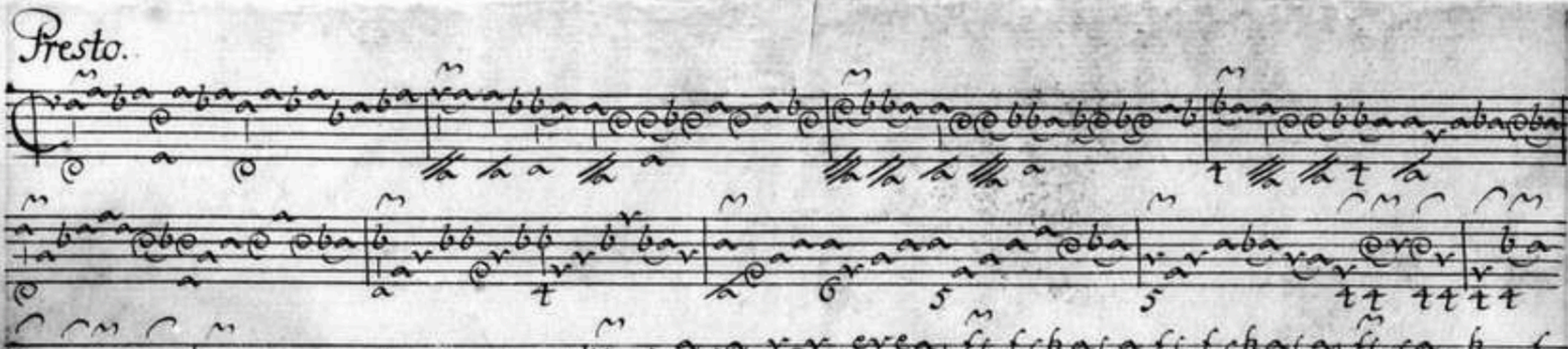
Middle and index

And no ring finger

Weiss, London Ms. E flat major Prelude, RH fingering identical to that in
Conradi, avoiding the ring finger



Weiss: B flat Presto, Dresden & London Mss



this solution uses only middle and index, with thumb (RH)

