

# The London Manuscript unveiled

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With the help of Markus Lutz for the revision

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## 2. General Context

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Here is the **presentation** of one of the most important volumes of music of all times for solo instrument. While not strictly musicological, the approach has been to reconcile practical aspects and matters of historical concern from the performer's perspective. In what has come to be known as the "London Manuscript", located in the British Library, we find 317 pages of tablature for Baroque Lute containing 237 pieces by Silvius Leopold Weiss (1687-1750). These works are grouped into 26 full solo sonatas with additional material interspersed in the form of 3 preludes, 2 fugues, 1 prelude and fugue, 2 fantasias, 2 tombeaux, a caprice, an overture, a plainte, assorted minuets, gavottes, etc., in addition to five grand duos including the three concertos for lute and transverse flute of four movements each (the flute part is missing) and the two mystery sonatas with neither soprano voice nor title information (believed with a high degree of certainty to be duets). The nomenclature "London Manuscript" is used to distinguish this collection from various other Weiss folios that are housed in Dresden, Salzburg, Vienna, Moscow, Paris, etc. It should be noted that the London Manuscript, despite its extraordinary significance, is representative of less than one half of the total output of this remarkably prolific composer.

The works in the London Manuscript, although having full pagination and partial (although important) piece numbering, do not seem however at first glance to conform to any obvious formal ordering, either chronological, keywise or stylistic, but we will soon observe with a certain degree of fascination that even these aspects have been taken in consideration. (See Description of the works). At any rate, the document should be seen

as a body of works that grew over the years, quite possibly serving as a personal memory aid for the composer, before being the same for the definitive owner, Count Adlersfeld of Prague.

Composed between 1706 and 1730, this massive musical oeuvre was never published during his lifetime. In fact Weiss pre-dated Paganini with his penchant for maintaining exclusive proprietorship, for him and very few friends, of his virtuoso works. Even today, some performers would not publish their compositions or arrangements. Silvius Leopold must have had a high degree of confidence in allowing such an exception, knowing likewise that Adlersfeld was not a lutenist but rather a collector wishing to keep his exclusive treasure forever. From a collector to another, the volume was undoubtedly passed from hand to hand, before being acquired for two pounds Sterling by the British Museum in 1877. In this manuscript, D. A. Smith has accurately identified six different sorts of handwriting, including that of the master (Weiss) himself. From this we can ascertain that the work was extensively revised, most notably in those pieces that were edited by the five other copyists. We now know that the pagination and the piece numbering are contemporaneous with the edition of the works. All this supports a central thesis that the manuscript was meticulously revised by an author who viewed the individual pieces as part of a unified whole, but was not intended to publication. This would explain the contradiction between the musical perfection and the disregard for titles, minute chronology (specific dates are provided for only a few pieces and sonatas) and precise separations between the works. This strong dichotomy should help us, in the end, and contrarily to our first beliefs, to seriously consider the London Manuscript as generally being *musically* the most reliable document in a comparative study of sources, as we will see in the Description of the works.

I would like to mention the trilingual Weiss [website](#) created by Laurent Duroselle and updated by Markus Lutz, in which one can find a maximum of information and links, including the complete Weiss lute recordings Catalogue set by Peter Van Dessel : [www.slweiss.com](http://www.slweiss.com)

At this point it would be useful to make mention of a recent updating concerning the [dates of the composer](#). Thanks to research by the musicologist Frank Legl, it has been established that Weiss was born in 1687 in Grotkau, Silesia (known today as Grodkow in Poland) and not, as had been previously believed, in 1686 in Breslau (presently called Wroclaw), which is 75 kilometres distant. It has also been learned that his stay in Rome, where he was a member of the Academy of the Arcadians conducted by Alessandro and Domenico Scarlatti, began in 1710 and not in 1708. These clarifications were provided by Luise Gottsched, who was a close friend of Weiss, in a Leipzig publication of her husband Johann Christoph Gottsched that appeared in 1760. This same publication also confirms the decisive influence of Weiss regarding the adoption of the 13 course lute as being preferable to the 11 course model. He also was influential in promoting the theorbo lute, which is an instrument that is elongated in the manner of a theorbo.

About research on [iconography](#), a fascinating painting of the Nuremberg Germanisches Nationalmuseum, *The Concert* by Johann Georg Platzer (1704-1761),

receives strong attention (see Jean-Luc Bresson's article *Weiss or Questenberg?*, LSA Quarterly Volume XXXX, N°3, September 2005, which explains in detail the setting genesis of this picture), because it might include, among others, S.L.Weiss himself. However, a portrait of Johann Adam Questenberg (1685/78-1752) having been obviously copied to represent Weiss's hands, there are doubts about the character. Still who else than Weiss, the most praised musician of the Saxon court, could be placed just besides August the Strong in such a flamboyant painting? Controversy continues but the Bresson thesis of somebody being used to represent another character seems to be the best explanation, notably by his illuminating description of the engraving process at the time and the argument of the non copied Questenberg face, contrarily to the hands.

Until recently, the origin of the coat of arms painted on the binding of the London Manuscript has remained a mystery. Thanks to research by Claire Madl, we can now ascertain that they belong to Johann Christian Anthoni von Adlersfeld, an eccentric merchant, music lover and collector from Prague, mentioned by Stölzel in Mattheson's *Grundlagen einer Ehrenpforte*, published in 1740. This document also contains references to the Prague Academy of Music and its spiritual leader, the Baron of Hartig, brother of the one whom Weiss dedicated a *Tombeau* after his untimely death in a riding accident in his 33<sup>rd</sup> year.

Careful examination of the original manuscript, which has been astonishingly well preserved within the British Library, reveals certain details that the most sophisticated photocopyers cannot reproduce. The colour of the ink, for example, is of a uniformly dark tint (probably caused by the aging process) with the exception of a few paler corrected notes. Some of these corrections were typically made by scraping with a knife, occasionally leaving small holes in the paper. Each folio, on the other hand, is made of very thick pages - an indication that the highest quality of paper was sought for this compilation. Tim Crawford, who took over from Douglas Alton Smith the task of continuing the edition of the complete works of Weiss, has furnished many explanations of the genesis of the London Manuscript in his latest research (The works will henceforth be referred to by their Smith-Crawford numberings.) It seems increasingly plausible that this volume was compiled in Prague in three distinct phases with the collaboration of Weiss in 1717, 1719 and 1723. During the third of these sessions, Weiss made minor corrections and provided missing pages that were lost by the owner of the manuscript. This would explain why certain calligraphic changes correspond systematically to various folio changes. Also, from page 293 onward (the last 25 pages) the general appearance of the manuscript changes quite dramatically. The paper becomes thinner, with nine staves of tablature per page instead of eight, and the pieces are no longer numbered as were 184 of them in the first editing phase.

As an explanation for the addition of certain preludes in a second phase of the manuscript, Tim Crawford offers the interesting observation that if the performers didn't improvise the prelude of a sonata, they could stretch out what Weiss had quickly composed, usually within a restricted page space. Indeed Weiss's preludes often fill all in the space accorded to them, occasionally small as it may be. This suggests a spontaneous desire to give, after the fact, an example-prelude that was not included in the first phase of the compilation since it was assumed that the performer would improvise one before

playing the sonata. Weiss's preludes were to serve as examples or backgrounds upon which one could embellish or elaborate musical material. This would explain the lack of concern regarding the possibility of exceeding allocated space. Thus, in a sonata without a prelude, it would be quite natural to concoct one from ideas taken from the other movements. This is a procedure that is gaining favour with contemporary lutenists and will almost certainly become commonplace with future generations of performers. I have been, in my view, ending my series of recordings in the way that it was begun - faithfully documenting works that were left in manuscript form within this great collection. This will not, however, hinder the possibility of some day adding improvised preludes to the sonatas that need them, or prolonging certain preludes in the manner outlined previously, during live performance. Of course, the manuscript does contain some preludes such as the one found in Sonata S-C 26 in D major which is of unalterably perfect construction.

A complete list of the historical [sources](#) related to the works of Silvius Leopold Weiss is provided here, since we will be continuously making comparisons with the London source and the many concordances. Regular updating of this list is available on the Weiss web site. If the London, Dresden and Moscow folios are excluded, the remaining manuscripts consist, for the most part, of tablature notation featuring numerous pieces by other lutenists-composers who remain little known, or, as is more often the case, anonymous. Weiss pieces are to be found sprinkled throughout these collections of compositions by various composers. Though the total number of pieces known to be composed by Weiss exceeds 600 works, it is a certainty that others have either been lost or are awaiting authentication. It is difficult to avoid a certain wistfulness when contemplating the existence of 34 partitas mentioned in the Breitkopf catalogue of 1769 that have eluded re-discovery - a body of work containing more than 200 pieces. If it is true that these works disappeared in the 1945 bombardment of Dresden along with other important documents and the entire city with its architectural marvels, this being added to the human atrocity of it (250 000 dead), one stands astounded by such a sorrowful event. We are lucky that the six Dresden tablature books could be saved from the catastrophe.

In order to give an idea of the quantity of Weiss pieces among the other composers' works, I give the names of manuscripts and publications which contain Weiss's work followed by two numbers; the first being the number of Weiss pieces found only in this source, and the second being the number of concordant works also found in other versions elsewhere. The initials on the extreme left are the usual library abbreviations.

## SOURCES OF S.L. WEISS WORKS

### I. MANUSCRIPTS

<i>Agö I</i>	<i>Göttweig Abbey, Austria (No Weiss piece found. To be re-examined; mixed maybe with Agö II ?)</i>
<i>Agö II</i>	<i>Göttweig Abbey, Austria (1,12)</i>
<i>As</i>	<i>Stadtbibliothek von Augsburg, Germany (0,1)</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblioteca Nacional de Buenos Aires, Argentina (0,7)</i>
<i>BBc 5</i>	<i>Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles, Belgium (0,1)</i>

- BBc 15 *Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles, Belgium (0,2)*  
BBc 27 *Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles, Belgium (6,0)*  
BBr 4087 *Bibliothèque Royale de Bruxelles, Belgium (0,4)*  
BBr 4089 *Bibliothèque Royale de Bruxelles, Belgium (0,1)*  
Brno *Oddeleni Hudebne Historicke Moravskeho Muzea of Brno (Brünn), Czech Republic (7,2)*  
Dl *Sächsische Landesbibliothek von Dresden, Germany (113,137) (containing 5 books of solos and one ensemble book (duets))*  
EbLP *The Library of Count Goëss, Ebenthal Castle, Karnsten, Austria (0,1)*  
Gö *Niedersächsische Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek von Göttingen, Germany (0,2)*  
Ha *The Library of Carl Dolmetsch, Haslemere, England (19,33)*  
Haag *The Den Haag Gementemuseum, The Netherlands (0,6)*  
KNU *Universitäts-und Stadtbibliothek von Köln, Germany. (1,2)*  
Lbm I *British Library of London, England (102, 132)*  
Lbm II *British Library of London, England, the notebook of lutenist Straube (0,1)*  
Mbs *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek von München, Germany (8,26)*  
Mcm *The Glinka Museum of Moscow, Russia (40,10)*  
Nü *Germanisches Nationalmuseum von Nürnberg (? , 2 ?)*  
NYPL *New York Public Library, USA (0,8)*  
Pnm *Knibovny Národního Musea of Prague, Czech Republic (1,2)*  
Po *Helichovo Muzeum of Pödebrady, Czech Republic (3,14)*  
Pth I *Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France (from the ex-library of G. Thibault, Countess of Chambure), "Fantaisies et Préludes composés par Mr Weiss à Rome" (4,4)*  
Pth II *Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France (from the ex-library of G. Thibault, Countess of Chambure), "Venetiis 7 Zbr. 1712" (22,15)*  
Roh *Library of the Harrach family Castle, Rohrau, Austria (c.30, c.70)*  
Ros *.....Rosani (0,1)*  
Rou I *Universitätsbibliothek von Rostock, Germany (7,13)*  
Rou II *Universitätsbibliothek von Rostock, Germany (0,4)*  
Rou III *Universitätsbibliothek von Rostock, Germany (0,3)*  
Rou (IV) *Universitätsbibliothek von Rostock, Germany (0,1)*  
SEI *Stiftsbibliothek von Seitenstetten, Austria (1,4)*  
Sst *Studienbibliothek von Salzburg, Austria (17,23)*  
St *Bibliothèque de l'Institut de Musicologie de l'Universite de Strasbourg, France, "Baltic Lute Book" (pending authentication) ( ?,1)*  
V 18761 *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek von Vienna, Austria (22,4)*  
V 18829 *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek von Vienna, Austria (1,23)*  
V 1078 *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek von Vienna, Austria (1,8)*  
Wru (W2002) *The University of Wroclaw Library, Poland (10,19)*  
W 2003 *The University of Warsaw Library, Poland (10,51)*  
W 2004 *The University of Warsaw Library, Poland (11,39)*  
W 2005 *The University of Warsaw Library, Poland (2,46)*  
W 2006 *The University of Warsaw Library, Poland (0,2)*  
W 2008 *The University of Warsaw Library, Poland (0,7)*  
W 2009 *The University of Warsaw Library, Poland (0,7)*

W 2010      *The University of Warsaw Library, Poland (0,11)*

## II. PUBLICATIONS

- BDG/Ven*      *The Cini Foundation of Venice, Italy. A lost work from which two pieces were transcribed by Oscar Chilesotti in Rivista musicale italiana 19, 1912 (0,2)*
- Bk*              *Breitkopf thematic catalogue, Supplement IV, 1769, including 66 Incipit of 66 partitas by S.L.Weiss, from which 34 are lost (?,32)*
- Tel*              *Georg Philipp Telemann, Der Getreue Music Meister, 1729, Hamburg, Germany: a piece, in fact the only piece, that Weiss agreed to publish (0,1)*

\*

We usually take up the question of nomenclature and numberings according to Douglas Alton Smith, who begun the unabridged edition of Weiss's works in 1984 (Peters: Frankfurt). Smith undertook a thematic analysis and a master list of all the sonatas identified in this time, including solos and music for ensemble. Because of ongoing discoveries, and the passing of the torch from D.A. Smith (including over 580 Smith numbers in his thesis/compilation of 1977) to Tim Crawford with respect to the edition, it is now necessary to speak of Smith-Crawford numbers. Since there are several sources for the same work, many containing variable movement content, and since certain ensemble works can be played by various optional groupings - even sometimes staying as solo works in sources presenting them as such - reference to the numerical S-C system is necessary for precise identification. I must, for my part, in the interest of performance usage and in order to help the recording publications, present the works in three sections:

1. The 26 complete solo sonatas, as they appear in the original manuscript (a full 80% of the work).
2. The 35 isolated pieces or sonata sections, again following the order of appearance.
3. The 5 chamber music works (duos): the 3 *Concerts* for lute and flute, the 2 "mystery sonatas" (duos) including the *Largo* p.117 (duo that fits perfectly in the second mystery sonata).

This practical grouping by genre necessitates two enumerations that will stand together efficiently, following standard practice. We will use for example London Sonata no 20, S-C 26 as we find for example in the work of Haydn The London Symphony no 5, Hob.1:97. We should be aware that the discrepancy between our enumeration and that of Smith-Crawford is due not only to their inclusion of the five duet sonatas, but also to my personal choice to keep as they are four pieces in B flat, rather than calling them sonata, the real sonata being complete in the Dresden manuscript. The missing movements in London are the minuet and the gavotte, and Dresden bears a different prelude. Another discrepancy is that the Dresden bourree is a sufficiently expanded variant of the London one to make it an independent piece. This leaves us with only two common pieces: the overture and the courante. Since there are in London four pieces in C and four pieces in D (towards the end of the manuscript) that seem also to be incomplete sonatas, one could wonder why these groupings are not considered as well sonatas in



their own right. Nevertheless, D.A.Smith chose not to call sonata the pieces in C and those in D but he did for these problematic pieces in B flat, probably to establish a concordance with Dresden. With only two real concordant movements, I have chosen personally to identify in my analysis the S-C 4 pieces like the C major and the D major pieces, that is, as individual pieces. I would have also stretched things for my recording by including the two missing pieces whilst omitting, of necessity, one of the two preludes. For a performer, it would seem awkward to record “entirely” a London sonata coming from Dresden and skip it in a recording of Dresden, including only orphaned movements of an actual complete sonata. Influenced by this logical necessity and as my intention was to remain as faithful as possible to the originals, I have decided to refrain from changing the presentation of the London version.

Three exterior pieces must be included as added pieces in the London Manuscript because they are temperamentally linked to the volume. These works are: The fantasy of the solo sonata no 7 S-C11, the prelude of the solo sonata no 8 S-C12 and the bourree Double of the solo sonata no 9 S-C13. This brings the total of pieces being played or discussed to 240.

On the other hand, the Largo from this ninth sonata should be excluded from the solos and contained instead within the duo works. This exclusion is striking as it is the principal reason why the Smith-Peters edition contains reconstructions of the flute parts, not only in the case of the five large duos but also in the Largo. Of course, other versions and instrumentations remain possible (with violin for example, or the participation of the harpsichord and gamba combination). Six or seven other pieces from the manuscript have seemed so far to most lutenists and musicologists to be “hidden” duos. While remaining possible duos indeed, these are still quite playable as solos and would confirm my idea that sometimes musical compositions of the Baroque, as in the Renaissance, could have been used as both. This holds also for the approximatively eight pieces that “were not” written by Weiss. At first reading one believes that the writing and technical styles are foreign to Silvius, but serious practicing again disproves at a rather high degree this hypothesis due to a lack of instrumental analysis. In the best of conjectures, strong doubts remain in these cases except for the *Allegro* p.38 and the *Courente Royale* p.40, which really look like being not from him. This is a different situation than that of the second *Concert* with flute, which is clearly attributed to Leopold’s brother, Johann Sigismund. The same goes for the “Unfortunate Lover” (p. 132), a still well known work written previously by Gallot that Weiss took up admiringly and admirably, as did Liszt and Busoni with Paganini and Bach.

There is no continuous numbering for the 26 solo sonatas, but six of them bear the title *Parte* with a strange number: *Parte 11*, *Parte 13*, *Parte 6<sub>10</sub>*, *Parte 15*, *Parte 10* and *Parte 4<sub>10</sub>* appear sporadically and inexplicably at the beginnings of five preludes and a fantasy. This also holds for *N:16*, *N:4*, *N:6*, *N:9*, *N:6*, *N:4*, *N.4*. and *N.16*, inscribed, seemingly by the same hand at the beginnings of other pieces with varying musical character. This strange nomenclature has not been hitherto discussed by analysts. At first glance, no connection seems possible with the Breitkopf Catalogue (1769) numeration containing incipits of 66 Weiss partitas, nor with any other known source. One possible

explanation for this numbering could be that it corresponded to somebody else's collection or reference, whatever it would be.

The sonatas contain six or seven movements each with the exception of three eight-movement sonatas and one that extends to a full ten movements. This last-mentioned work bears the [title](#) *Divertimento à solo*. There are also two with purely literary titles: *The Infidel* and *The Celebrated Pirate*. To these three titled works are added the above mentioned 6 groupings bearing the title *Parte* (supposedly meaning *partie* or *partita*). But none is identified as a suite or sonata. Although the term suite would appear to be the most fitting way of identifying these instrumental collections (following the 17<sup>th</sup> century lutenists - this is why I used it in my recording of the London Manuscript), the term sonata was officially attributed by D.A.Smith since Dresden bears seven times the title *Suonata*, four of them being concordant with London. Nevertheless, realising that *Partita* or *Partie* are the most often encountered titles in all Weiss's manuscripts, one is wondering why D.A.Smith didn't choose, instead of sonata, the term *Parte* (or *Partita*) since it appears six times in London. This might be because the Dresden inscriptions *Suonata* are sometimes by Weiss himself, and the titles *Parte* in London are considered as being added by an unknown person.

We should specify that each of the six hundred odd works by Weiss has an individual number. The 580 [Smith numbers](#) of his thesis/compilation of 1977 are now augmented and under continuous revision. It will be necessary to readjust these numbers after careful examination of all sources and concordances have been made. What is most fascinating is the knowledge that there are manuscripts in European libraries containing hundreds of lute pieces that remain unperformed, unanalysed and even unidentified! How many of those pieces are or could be attributable to Weiss? It is equally true that some pieces supposedly composed by Weiss could possibly not have been written by him. The decantation is going to be very long, necessitating a complete knowledge of the sources. While scrolling through those microfilms one becomes aware of a musical Eldorado, a new "cultural continent" waiting for exploration, a task that will require the efforts of generations of scholars and performers, possibly for centuries.

The Smith-Peters edition has also assigned numbers to the isolated pieces of this folio (There are 28 in the edition) in addition to the number provided for each sonata. I have decided not to indicate these numbers in the Description of the works, nor, for that matter, the individual numbers of the large Smith catalogue, considering that the pieces can be best identified by their pages.

The current rediscovery of Weiss's [chamber music](#) is both surprising and amazing the musical world of the present. The chamber works seem to reveal the composer's genius with even more aplomb than his works for lute solo, owing to their easier comparison to the chamber music of such composers as Bach, Haendel and Telemann. Weiss's solo works, albeit more and more admired –and with good reason–, tend to disclose little of their intrinsic worth due to of a lack of grounds for comparison, notwithstanding their contemporaneity to Bach's solo lute works. Moreover, there are two additional surprises. Firstly, the second *Concert* of the London Manuscript is composed not by Silvius Leopold but by Sigismund Weiss (c. 1695-1737), the younger



brother of Silvius. Secondly, all the flute parts in the manuscript have been reconstructed, since the originals have disappeared. To our knowledge, Eileen Hadidian is the first to have published, in the Smith-Peters edition (1983-1990), complete reconstructions. This edition has helped performers in considering these works as both valid and playable. According to my personal experience while preparing the complete recording of the London Manuscript, I wished to maintain a certain connection to this edition by making, with the help of flautist Christiane Laflamme, some corrections to nine movements rewritten by Hadidian although leaving them almost untouched. However, acting as a performing musician more concerned with obtaining a closer reproduction of Weiss's lyricism than with adhering to musicological rules, I have deemed it necessary to rewrite fifteen sections myself (of a total of 24). We did the slight corrections of the Hadidian lines with a view to improving the sonic balance and the musical discourse.

Four of the most authoritative [references](#) on Weiss are:

1. The thesis/catalogue of Douglas Alton Smith (1977)
2. The long article on Weiss by Smith which appeared in the January 1980 edition of *Early Music*
3. The Complete Works begun with Peters and Smith in 1984 for the London Manuscript. This work is being continued at present (The Dresden Manuscript, the Moscow manuscript, etc.) by Tim Crawford. The essential parts of these editions are the *Critical commentaries*. For London, there are four volumes. The first two have the facsimile of the tablatures with annotations by Smith, and the last two their transcription in modern two staff notation, which has compelled the transcribers to interpret some note values that were logically left imprecise in the tablature, and to chose precise slurring although many of the slurs are not intended to the notes we think of, since they were made mostly with a suggestive graphic technique. This is why many obvious slurs were parallelly intentionally omitted, in the manner of figured bass. One must know that in these two cases, reference to the original tablature is necessary (See my analysis in Appendix 3)
- 4) Tim Crawford's updated analysis of 2000, to be published in the *Lute Society of America Journal*, which helps to understand the making of the London and the Dresden mss.

In addition to these references the interpreter must procure the fifty or so different Weiss sources, of which it is advisable to consult the regularly enlarged listing by searchers like Frank Legl or Markus Lutz, since there are always new sources being discovered. Updating is available on the Weiss web site. From this departure point it is necessary to order numerous microfilms. (Certain of these are affected by legislation forbidding the sale of microfilms from the library of origin, necessitating in the process the purchase of commercial volumes of these microfilms).

With original sources and the texts by Crawford and Smith in hand, in addition to correct knowledge of Baroque ornamentation, a performer should have all the necessary materials to explore the interpretation of lute music by Weiss and his contemporaries. I speak from personal experience that discoveries in this field are both abundant and fascinating. Due to the quantity of pieces, existing as they do in several versions, a wide

variety of possible interpretations can be noted in the different copies : of the 237 pieces in this London Manuscript, for example, a full 132 are concordant with other (sometimes multiple) sources, even if 105 exist in an unique version. To help understand the immense artistic ampleness of these works, I would like to recommend to anyone interested in Weiss to read the extraordinary poem by a contemporary writer, Johann Ulrich [von König](#) (1688-1744), containing a large section describing the incredible touch of the composer-lutenist. (See Kenneth Sparr's article in the 1986 Journal of the Lute Society of America).

Michel Cardin

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