

GESINA LIEDMEIER AND MICHAEL LATCHAM

## TWO BASS VIOLS LABELLED JOHN ROOS AT THE GEMEENTEMUSEUM, THE HAGUE

The viols in the collection of musical instruments at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague include some with labels bearing the names of well-known makers. These include Rombouts, Jacobs, Tieffenbrucker and Roos.<sup>1</sup> The authenticity of the two Rombouts viols is not doubted but whether those with the names Jacobs and Tieffenbrucker are by those makers is uncertain. This article discusses the two bass viols labelled 'John Roos'.<sup>2</sup> The scanty literature about them is reviewed and their possible origins are discussed. No firm conclusions are reached. Because both viols bear labels including the name 'Roos' and because it is also the name under which they are registered at the museum, that name will be used here.

Until recently, both of the Roos viols were in a sorry state. Their opaque varnish made them unattractive. However, they have both been the object of conservation work. For example, cracks have been repaired (or at least prevented from increasing), and the instruments have been cleaned. In order to make both instruments presentable — and thereby to attract the respect they much deserve — both have been supplied with strings and one has been given a new bridge. These parts have only a cosmetic function, however; the fragile state of both instruments prevents them being brought back to playable condition.

### DESCRIPTION

#### 1. History

In 1952 four viols, including the two bearing the name Roos, came to the Gemeentemuseum, all on long loan from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.<sup>3</sup> One of the four, the six-string Roos viol, was on loan to the Rijksmuseum from the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst.<sup>4</sup> The other three, including the seven-string Roos viol, were at the Rijksmuseum on loan from the Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap, Amsterdam.<sup>5</sup>

An old photograph of all four viols in their display case at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam shows the two Roos instruments with their bellies towards the photographer (Figure 1). The seven-string viol looks in reasonable condition and has seven strings. The six-string instrument has only three strings with room for possibly only one more. The peg box is not visible. A piece between the treble sound hole and the side of the instrument appears to have broken away. This piece must have been glued back at some unknown date, perhaps before the instruments left for The Hague.

Since they arrived at the Gemeentemuseum in 1952, both instruments have been considerably damaged. The six-string viol suffered the most: its back was open and broken. The seven-string instrument had a broken heel and the head on the

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors are much indebted to Michael Fleming for his suggestions and guidance in writing up this work.

<sup>2</sup> Gemeentemuseum, object numbers 0841154 (6 strings) 0841155 (7 strings).

<sup>3</sup> The four comprised one with seven strings and no label but now attributed to Tielke (obj. no. 0841087), one with a label including the name Barak Norman and the date 1705 (obj. no. 0841153), and the two with labels including the name John Roos with the dates 1587 (obj. no. 0841154) and 1585 (obj. no. 0841155).

<sup>4</sup> National Service for Visual Arts.

<sup>5</sup> Royal Antiquarian Society.



Figure 1. *Display case at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam showing the two Roos viols (with their bellies facing forward) and other viols. Photo courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.*

peg box was damaged. The sides were also badly cracked and damaged. Exactly how or when all this occurred is not known.

The viol case illustrated here (Figure 2 in the colour

section) came to the Gemeentemuseum with the loan of instruments from the Rijksmuseum, presumably with a viol inside. The normal policy at the time was to separate instruments and their cases and

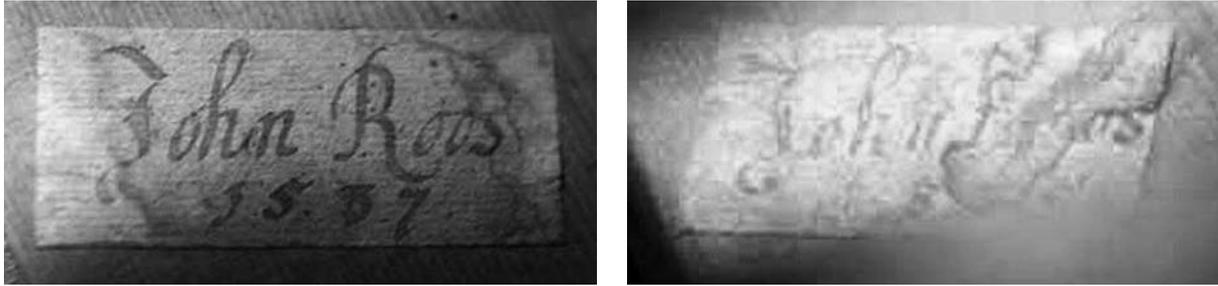


Figure 3 and Figure 4. *Labels of the two Roos viols.*

(left) *Six-string (object number 0841154).* (right) *Seven-string (object number 0841155).* Photos G. Liedmeier.

register only the instruments. Until the early 1990s, all instrument cases were regarded as packaging and stored *en masse* elsewhere. As the seven-string Roos viol is the only one of the four that fits the case it seemed safe to assume that this instrument and the case belonged to each other. This has now been confirmed by the number 276, painted in red on the outside of the case. 276 was the number under which the seven-string instrument was formerly registered at the Rijksmuseum.

The case is made of coniferous wood, covered on the inside with a thick layer of green felt and on the outside with dark leather decorated with tooling that was probably once gilt. In total, the curved parts of the case are about 12mm thick (including the lining and the leather) while the straight parts are about 18mm thick. Nothing about the case, including the decorative iron lock, contradicts the suggestion that it could have been made in the seventeenth century.

## 2. Labels

The six-string Roos viol bears a rectangular paper label, written by hand in ink (Figure 3):

John Roos  
15.87

The seven-string Roos viol has a remarkably similar manuscript label (Figure 4):

John Roos  
1.5.8.5.

The handwriting is very similar on both labels except for the capital letter J, which is more florid in the six-string instrument than in the seven-string one, and the presence of more dots in the date of the seven-string instrument. The two capital letters R are difficult to compare because of water damage to the label in the seven-string instrument. The

labels are of about the same size as each other and are each glued diagonally on the soundpost plate on the bass side in both instruments. The spelling 'Roos' is characteristically Dutch (it means rose in English) while the spelling of 'John' would be normal in English but not in Dutch. The Dutch name would be Johannes, Johan or less commonly today, Joan. It should be noted that neither label includes any mention of a town or city; only the name and the date are given.

To an observer who has seen many antique viols, the general appearance of both instruments is late seventeenth century. The discrepancy between this and the dates on the labels casts doubt on the authenticity of the labels, or at least on their relationship to these instruments.

## 3. External features

Illustrations of both Roos instruments are to be found in the colour section (Figures 5 and 6) and the measurements of the two viols are given in Table 1.

The back and sides of both viols are of walnut. The shapes of the bodies are very similar, although the body of the six-string viol is a little shorter. The difference lies in the area at the top by the neck. The shoulders of the six-string viol are a little lower with respect to the middle bout and the part of the body that joins the neck is shorter.

In the six-string viol there is some run-out of the purfling on the edge, especially towards the top on the treble side where only one line of the two remains and towards the bottom on the bass side, but nothing that would imply that the instrument had been shortened; the run-out could easily have occurred when the top was taken off for repairs and then refitted to the body.

The way the very short neck joins both the body and the pegbox on the six-string viol makes clear that the neck is not original to the instrument, although the pegbox and the head (together a contiguous whole) may be the original ones, re-used when the

		6-string viol		7-string viol	
Total length		1136		1225	
Body length		681		710	
String length		636		737	
Body width front	upper bout	324		324	
	middle bout	241		240	
	lower bout	395		409	
Body width back	upper bout	321		325	
	middle bout	231		237	
	lower bout	395		406	
Height of ribs		treble	bass	treble	bass
	top block	78	78	74	74
	fold	125	127	126	125
	upper bout	126	131	128	128
	middle bout	129	129	132	128
	lower bout	130	130	128	132
	bottom block	132	131	131	132

Table 1. *Measurements of the two Roos viols (mm).*

new neck was fitted. The neck of the seven-string viol appears to be old and there are no signs that it has been renewed; it is thin in cross-section and wide, measuring 57mm across at the nut. There are also no signs that the peg box and the head are other than original on the seven-string instrument.

The head on the seven-string viol is beautifully carved and the peg box is embellished with carving in relief (Figure 8 in the colour section). The carved head on the six-string viol is very different (Figure 7 in the colour section). Obviously old, the fine carving is still clear despite the damage it has suffered.

The soundholes of the two instruments are very similar, both in shape and position; they are widely spaced and have large round eyes. Their measurements are given in Table 2. Further external differences and similarities can be summarized as follows:

- On both instruments the bellies are made of three parts, a narrow middle section and two wider side pieces.
- In both instruments the arching of the belly is very low.
- Both viols have a double purfling on the belly, total width 3½mm on the six-string instrument, 5mm on the seven-string instrument. On the seven-string instrument, each of the two lines comprises three strips that presumably once appeared as two black lines with a white line between. The two black lines

on the six-string instrument are less clear.

- There is no purfling on the back of either viol.
- The seven-string viol has a long narrow hook-bar tapered in width towards the tail-piece. The hook-bar of the six-string viol is missing; it has a groove in which the tail-pillar was held but that the groove is now filled with wood and the tail-piece is attached to a button in the bottom of the instrument by means of a gut string.
- Both instruments have a brown, opaque varnish, which is more reddish on the six-string.

#### 4. Internal features

The bodies of both instruments, well made by a sure hand, are substantially original inside; that of the seven-string instrument has hardly been touched. Other internal similarities and differences may be summarized as follows:

- Both instruments have bars glued inside across the back, clamped at the ends by the small wooden blocks sketched in Figure 9. These bars appear to be original in both cases.
- At least one of the bars of the seven-string viol has the growth rings parallel to the horizontal surface.
- Both instruments have a quite long bass bar, narrow and low, glued along the join between two sections of the belly as if to strengthen the join. The other join is reinforced with linen.

	Six-string viol		Seven-string viol	
	Bass	Treble	Bass	Treble
Length	137	136	136	136
Width top eye	18	18	18	18
Width bottom eye	25	25	24	24
Width channel at centre	14	14	13	13
Distance between the outside edges of the eyes	top	220		219
	bottom	279		274

Table 2. *Measurements of the soundholes of the two viols labelled Roos (mm).*

- In both instruments, the sound-post plate, a broad flat reinforcement across the inside of the back on which the sound-post rests, runs across the width of the back and abutts the lower and ribs on both sides of the instrument. In both viols, the plate is glued to the ribs as well as to the back.
- Both instruments show tothing-plane marks over much of the inside surfaces of the sides and back. In both instruments the marks are evenly spaced with approximately 2 millimetres between each line. Those on the seven-string viol are clearly visible. Those on the six-string viol have been planed or scraped away, especially on the inside of the back.
- Linen is glued along the joins between the sides and the back in both viols. In the seven-string viol some of the extra length of the linen extends over the upper block, suggesting the block is original.
- The break in the back where the plane of the topmost section is angled in towards the neck is reinforced with parchment in both instruments.
- The seven-string viol has linen reinforcements at the joins between the ribs, but the six-string viol has corner blocks of modern appearance.
- The top block of the six-string viol does not look old, but the top block of the seven-string viol does. The latter block is narrow and made of coniferous wood. A modern nail fixes the neck to this block.
- The lower blocks are small (about 5 cm wide) and both appear to be original. They are approximately semi-circular in cross section. The visible surface is roughly cut, vertically and with a gouge. Each block thus has the appearance of half of a section of a roughly fluted column.
- The joins between the bellies and the ribs do not have linings, but in both viols there are a few small wooden reinforcement blocks.

Overall, the two instruments are clearly similar, both externally and internally, and the main differences appear to be due to modifications made to the six-string viol.

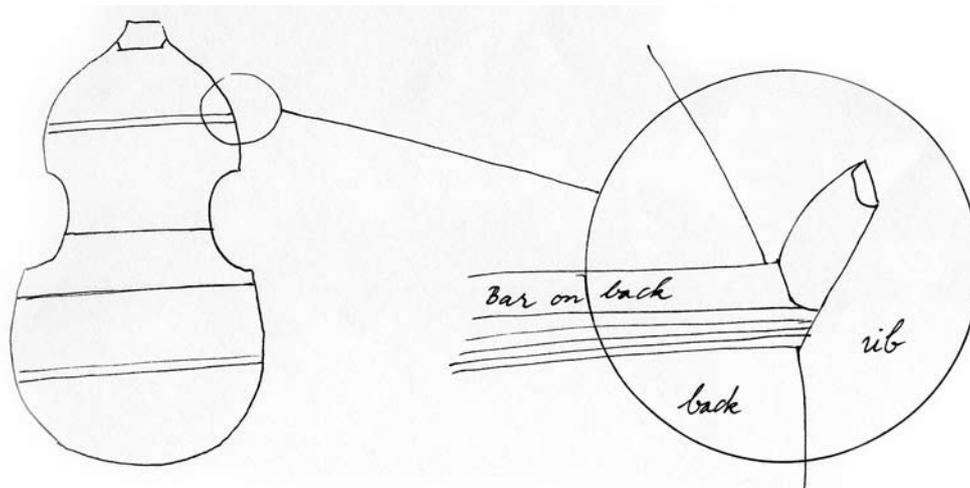


Figure 9. *Drawing showing how the bars on the backs of both instruments are clamped at their ends. Drawing by G. Liedmeier.*

## CARBON DATING

In order to research the date of the neck of the seven-string viol, a chip of wood from the neck was carbon dated.<sup>6</sup> The results may be summarized by stating that the wood comes from a tree that, with a probability of 95%, was cut down in one of four periods: between 1659 and 1694; between 1726 and 1814; between 1840 and 1844; or after 1917. After 1917 is impossible; the history of the instrument from before that date is known. Between 1726 and 1814 and between 1840 and 1844 are possibilities but unlikely; the style of the neck is typically seventeenth century. So the most likely period is that between 1659 and 1694. It should be emphasized that these dates are for the felling of the tree, not the dates when the wood was used. The period between felling and use can of course not be determined. In some circumstances freshly cut wood is used, in others the wood is used many years after felling.

It might be suggested that the neck of the seven-string viol could be part of a later alteration to the instrument. The instrument could thus be older than the neck, allowing a date for the instrument of before the late seventeenth century. The neck appears not to be a replacement however, so that the carbon dating of the neck may be applied to the instrument as a whole. If this is true, the seven-string Roos viol cannot be dated earlier than 1660, allowing only one year between felling the tree and using its wood. This contradicts the label and supports the idea that the instrument dates from the end of the seventeenth century.

## LITERATURE

Until recently, the Gemeentemuseum cited Amsterdam as the city of origin of the two instruments. Amsterdam is however not mentioned on either of their labels. Traditionally, the double purfling of both instruments might suggest English origins. The name 'John Roos' could also easily appeal to anyone interested in John Rose the younger, who

died in 1611.<sup>7</sup> Such suggestions are hardly helpful in an objective enquiry, however. The suggestion that the instruments were made in Amsterdam seems not to be based on any objective criteria but rather on the myth that both or at least one of the labels bears the name of that city. In 1939 Dirk Balfoort wrote:

ROOS, John – Amsterdam – 16<sup>th</sup> century, a violinmaker, about whose life I have not been able to obtain any data. That he existed is evidenced by two viole da gamba the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam has on loan from the Royal Antiquarian Society, given to them by J. Kneppelhout, who had a collection of antiquities in Leiden. The instruments are roughly made, and in no way fulfil artistic standards. Both bear a label: 'John Roos Amsterdam', one with the year 1585, the other dated 1587.<sup>8</sup>

Balfoort was wrong about the common origin of the two instruments. While it is true that both were on loan to the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, they belonged, and still do belong, to two different authorities; only the seven-string viol belongs to the Royal Antiquarian Society. Furthermore, on neither label is the name 'John Roos' followed by 'Amsterdam'. The labels could have been changed since Balfoort saw them, but it is more likely that the inclusion of 'Amsterdam' was a product of his imagination. Balfoort's desultory remarks about the lack of quality may perhaps be understood as an inability to see beauty and fine craftsmanship even when these qualities are veiled by neglect and dirt. Balfoort continues:

For the second and last time I found a trace of John Roos. A certain Willem van Loon of Amsterdam, left in his will of 1740 a viol by Roos in a black case to a man called Rensdorp. Whether this instrument is the same as one of the instruments now in the Rijksmuseum, I have not been able to determine.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The heel was broken. A modern nail was the only thing that kept everything together. Removing the nail and glueing up the heel inevitably resulted in some splinters. One of these was sent to the Centrum voor Isotopenonderzoek at the University of Groningen. Prof. dr. ir. J. van der Plicht was kind enough to do the research and send the results.

<sup>7</sup> See J. Pringle, 'John Rose, the founder of English viol-making', *Early Music*, vi (1978), p. 501; Michael Fleming, 'Viol-making in England c.1580-1660', PhD thesis, Open University (Milton Keynes, 2001), p.181 and n.879.

<sup>8</sup> 'ROOS, John – Amsterdam-16de eeuw, een vioolmaker, over wiens leven ik geen enkel gegeven heb kunnen bemachtigen. Dat hij bestaan heeft, blijkt uit twee viole da gamba die het Rijksmuseum te Amsterdam in bruikleen heeft van het Kon. Oudh. Genootschap, dat ze weer in 1868 ten geschenke ontvangen had van den Heer J. Kneppelhout, die te Leiden een verzameling van oudheden heeft gehad. Het zijn grof gebouwde instrumenten, die in geen enkel opzicht aan artistieke eischen voldoen, beide met een etiket: 'John Roos Amsterdam', het eene met het jaartal 1585, het andere gedateerd 1587.' Dirk Balfoort, *De Hollandsche vioolmakers*, (Amsterdam, 1939), pp. 34-5.

<sup>9</sup> 'Voor de tweede en laatste maal heb ik het spoor van John Roos gevonden in het testament van een zekeren Willem

This could be the seven-string viol in its black case. If it is true, the seven-string Roos viol was in Holland in 1740.

Only one of the two Roos instruments is mentioned in *Four hundred years of violin building in The Netherlands* (1999):

the oldest bowed stringed instrument of the Northern Netherlands: an unsightly looking tenor viola da gamba by John/Johan Roos (Amsterdam 1587).<sup>10</sup>

Johan Giskes appears not to have examined the label on the instrument himself and appears to have taken it upon himself to add the name Johan as an alternative to John and to have followed Balfoort by including the name Amsterdam. In a footnote Giskes does indeed quote Balfoort as his source.<sup>11</sup>

Fred Lindeman also appears to have assumed that the inclusion of the name Amsterdam was a fact even though he did inspect both instruments himself on a visit to the museum. Lindeman mentions only one of the two viols and also gives the spurious name Johan, putting the correct name John in brackets:

'The earliest bowed instrument from the Northern Netherlands we know is a viol, made by Johan (John) Roos, Amsterdam 1587, an instrument in deplorable condition and kept in the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague.'<sup>12</sup>

Max Möller's *The violinmakers of the low countries* (Amsterdam 1955), concentrates on violins of the seventeenth century and it is probably for this reason that the book does not mention the Roos viols, traditionally noted as sixteenth century. They are also not mentioned in W.L. Lütgendorff's standard reference work *Die Geigen- und Lautenmacher vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main, 1922). William Henley's *Universal Dictionary of Violin and Bow Makers* (Brighton, 1959, page 985) has the following:

Roos, Johan. Worked at Amsterdam, 1580-1592. Six-stringed viol-da-gamba of immature workmanship, dark reddish brown varnish in the local museum. Label: Johan Roos, Amsterdam. 1585.

The confusion increases; not only does John become definitively Johan, without his English first name, but the word Amsterdam now appears to be on the label with the date 1585, whereas in the Dutch literature it was said to be on the label with the date 1587. Like Lindemann and Giskes, Henley only mentions one of the two instruments. It seems that even when these writers saw the instruments, they relied for their writing on previous sources, though altering them in some details, apparently according to whim. The truth of the matter is that there are two viols, both of which have labels that specify the name 'John Roos' one with date 1585, the other with the date 1587. Neither label gives the name 'Johan' and neither gives either London or Amsterdam.

The authors cited above would have done well to consult the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam regarding these two viols. The records there include a brief description, apparently made in 1952, of object number 1347b. This description summarises previous ones that date back to the acquisition of the instrument as a gift from J. Kneppelhout in 1868.<sup>13</sup>

Viola da Gamba in antique pressed leather case. Marked and dated John Roos 1585 (according to the typed inventory the mark is fake and the instrument must be of later date), the similarity with the viola da gamba marked John Roos 1587 (converted to a 'cello) in the Rijksmuseum (no 5869) is however very great as far as the colour of the varnish and the shape are concerned.

7-stringed bass viol in normal viol shape. On the fingerboard, a woman's head decorated with a laurel wreath with original gilding. Peg box decorated on the back and sides with carved tendrils. Fingerboard black, ivory nut. Clear traces of 7 frets on the front

<sup>9</sup>(continued) van Loon te Amsterdam, die in 1740 aan den Heer Rensdorp o.a. een 'viool de gamba van Roos in een swarte kas' vermaakt heeft. Of dit instrument identiek is met een der instrumenten uit het Rijksmuseum, heb ik niet kunnen vaststellen.' Balfoort, *De Hollandsche vioolmakers*, op. cit., p.35.

<sup>10</sup> 'het oudste strijkinstrument uit de Noordelijke Nederlanden: een onooglijk uitzierende tenor viola da gamba van John/Johan Roos (Amsterdam 1587)'. Johan Giskes et al., *400 years of violin making in The Netherlands*, (Abcoude, 1999), p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 45, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> 'Het allervroegste strijkinstrument uit de Noordelijke Nederlanden dat wij nu nog kennen, is een gamba, gemaakt door Johan (John) Roos, Amsterdam 1587, een instrument in deplorabele staat en bewaard in het Haags Gemeentemuseum.' *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>13</sup> Records of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, kindly placed at the disposal of the authors by Miekie Donner of the Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap.

and the back of the fingerboard. Dark varnish in bad condition.<sup>14</sup>

This description, especially when compared with those in the published literature, is remarkable for its dispassionate accuracy and lack of subjective judgement. Its suggestion that the dates on the labels are too early is supported by the carbon dating. One minor error may nevertheless be noted: the head on the top of the peg box is that of a man, not of a woman.

#### POSSIBLE ORIGINS OF THE TWO ROOS VIOLS

There seems little doubt that the Rijksmuseum was right in suggesting that the two Roos viols are by the same maker, that the labels do not belong to them and that the instruments are later than their labels imply. Although the origin of the two viols is still unclear, it is worth examining some of the possibilities.

#### 1. England

An attribution to either John Rose senior or John Rose junior is untenable because the two viols almost certainly date from after their deaths. The general appearance of the two instruments suggests an origin in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, not the sixteenth century, a hypothesis considerably strengthened by the carbon dating of the neck of the seven-string instrument. Furthermore, the two Roos viols are most likely not even English; their sides and backs are of walnut while no English viols made of walnut are known.<sup>15</sup> Walnut was widely used in England for furniture, especially after 1650, but does not appear to have been used for viols. Not only that, the surviving late seventeenth-century English viols, for example those of Barak Norman, are generally of smaller dimensions than the two Roos instruments.

#### 2. The Netherlands

Dutch paintings showing viols might at first be thought to provide criteria for attributing instruments to Dutch makers. This turns out not to be the case. The viols that appear in Dutch paintings

are not only extremely varied, but there is no means of knowing which of them are Dutch instruments. Some could be English or German. For instance, the viols (or perhaps the viol) shown in two of Vermeer's paintings (National Gallery, London, inv. no. 2568 and The Royal Collection, Windsor Castle) could well be English. There is no reason why an instrument appearing in a painting necessarily comes from the country where the painting was made.

Similar problems arise with the idea that the 1740 will of Willem van Loon might provide a link between the maker of the two viols and The Netherlands. The presence in his will of an instrument that might be the seven-string Roos viol only implies that it would have been used in the Netherlands before 1740, not that it was made in The Netherlands. Musicians travelled extensively and in their hands instruments may have passed from one country to another. For instance, a viol by 'John Rose in Brattwell 1599' (by coincidence) is cited in an auction catalogue published in The Hague in 1759.<sup>16</sup> Brattwell is almost certainly another spelling of Bridewell (London) where John Rose worked. In short, neither the fact that an instrument is depicted in a Dutch painting nor the possibility that an instrument found a home in The Netherlands is proof that the instrument in question is Dutch.

To determine whether the two Roos viols might nevertheless be Dutch, comparisons may be made with viols known to be from The Netherlands. However, few instruments of this category survive. There is a Boumeester bass viol in the Musikmuseet of Stockholm and the remains of a Boumeester treble viol in the USA in the Swan collection at Cornell University, Ithaca, USA. There are three viols attributed to Jacobs: two in private possession and one in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC (but the latter is more recently attributed to Rombouts). There are a further eight viols by Rombouts: two basses at the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; one bass at the Conservatorio Nacional, Lisbon; another bass at the Library of Congress, Washington DC; another bass at the University of California, Los Angeles; another bass at the Schola

<sup>14</sup> 'Viola da Gamba in antiek geperst leeren kast. Gemerkt en gedateerd John Roos 1585 (volgens getypte inventaris is het merk vals en moet het instrument van latere datum zijn), de overeenkomst met de tot violoncel verbouwde viola da gamba gemerkt John Roos 1587 in het Rijksmuseum (no 5869) is echter zeer groot wat vorm en kleur van het lak betreft.' '7-snarige basgamba in gewone gamba vorm. Vrouwenkopje op toets met lauwerkranen met oorspr. verguldsel. Haak aan zij- en achterkanten versierd met gesneden ornament ranken. Toets zwart, brug ivoor. Op toets duidelijk de strepen van 7 baren op voor- en achterkant. Donkere lak in slechte toestand.'

<sup>15</sup> The viols in the viola da gamba Database 'MacViols' of Thomas MacCracken, Oakton, Virginia, that are described as made of walnut are in fact probably made of other woods.

<sup>16</sup> See Michael Fleming, 'Viol-making', op. cit., p.182.

		Roos		Barak Norman	
		Gemeentemuseum No. 0841154		Gemeentemuseum No. No. 0841153	
Total length		1136*		1204	
Body length		681		653	
String length		635*		684	
Body width front	upper bout	324		300	
	middle bout	241		223	
	lower bout	395		363	
Body width back	upper bout	321		298	
	middle bout	231		221	
	lower bout	395		363	
Height of ribs		treble	bass	treble	bass
	top block	78	78	70	71
	fold	125	127	117	116
	upper bout	126	131	119	119
	middle bout	129	129	121	121
	lower bout	130	130	120	121
	bottom block	132	131	119	119

\*These remarkably short lengths are due to the later neck

Table 3. Comparative measurements of two 6-string instruments, one by Barak Norman of 1705 the other labelled Roos, both in the collection of the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague (mm).

Cantorum Basiliensis in Basel; a treble in the Musée des Instruments de Musique in Brussels; and another treble in the collection of the University of Leipzig). Finally, there is a bass viol by Pieter Bochs in a private collection.<sup>17</sup> Altogether, therefore, no more than fourteen viols by Dutch makers are known to exist. These must represent only a tiny proportion of the viols made in The Netherlands and can hardly provide firm grounds for comparison. Rather than trying to specify some exclusively Dutch characteristics according to this group of fourteen therefore, comparisons between the two Roos instruments and some of the individual viols are now made.

Although the head of the six-string Roos instrument has been damaged and might not belong to the instrument, and although the 'Jacobs' viol in the Gemeentemuseum might not be by Jacobs, there is a strong possibility that both these heads are Dutch. In any case, the carving of the heads themselves and the relief carving, including the acorns and oak leaves on the peg box, is so similar that it strongly suggests that



Figures 10 and 11. (left) *The head on the six-string viol labelled Roos.* (right) *The head on the six-string viol labelled Jacobs.* Photos Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

<sup>17</sup> These details were kindly supplied by Thomas McCracken, personal communication, November, 2005. The viol with a Jacobs label in the collection of the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, the subject of a recent paper by Jacobi in *The Strad*, (December 2006), pp. 72-3, should not be attributed to Jacobs, according to Karel Moens (private communication with Michael Latcham, May 1990).



Figure 12. *The head on the seven-string viol labelled Roos.*  
 Photo Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.



Figure 13. *The heads on the seven-string and six-string viols by Rombouts, 1708 and 1726 in the Gemeentemuseum.*  
 Photo Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

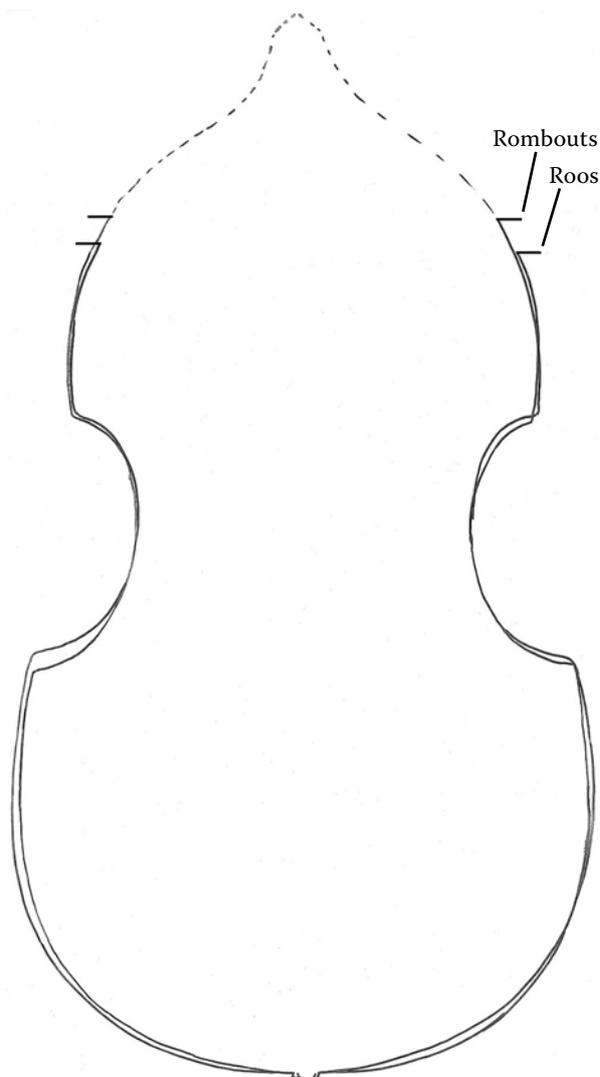


Figure 14. *The outlines of the backs of two seven-string viols, one labelled Roos, the other by Rombouts, 1708. The similarity of the body shapes is remarkable. Drawing by G. Liedmeier.*

the two heads and their peg boxes have a common origin. It may be that the heads on these instruments were standardized in some way, perhaps carved by different carvers who followed traditional patterns transmitted through pattern books. Something of a similar tradition certainly existed in the harpsichord-making trade in Antwerp. There, wood carvers used pattern books to carve the blocks used for the printed papers for decorating harpsichords and virginals.<sup>18</sup>

The above evidence for a Dutch tradition of head carving is however only circumstantial. The seven-string and six-string viols by Rombouts, also in the Gemeentemuseum, dated respectively 1708 and 1726, provide much firmer evidence.<sup>19</sup> These two

<sup>18</sup> See Grant O'Brien, *Ruckers, a harpsichord and virginal building tradition*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 130.

<sup>19</sup> Object nos. 0840198 (seven-string) and 0840376 (six-string).

		<b>Rombouts</b>		<b>Roos</b>	
Total length		1303		1225	
Body length		713		710	
String length		713		737	
Body width front	upper bout	326		324	
	middle bout	236		240	
	lower bout	404		409	
Body width back	upper bout	326		325	
	middle bout	236		237	
	lower bout	404		406	
Height of ribs		treble	bass	treble	bass
	top block	79	80	74	74
	fold	137	135	126	125
	upper bout	134	134	128	128
	middle bout	136	136	132	128
	lower bout	135	135	128	132
	bottom block	138	138	131	132

Table 4. Measurements of the two 7-string instruments, one by Rombouts of 1708, the other labelled Roos (mm).

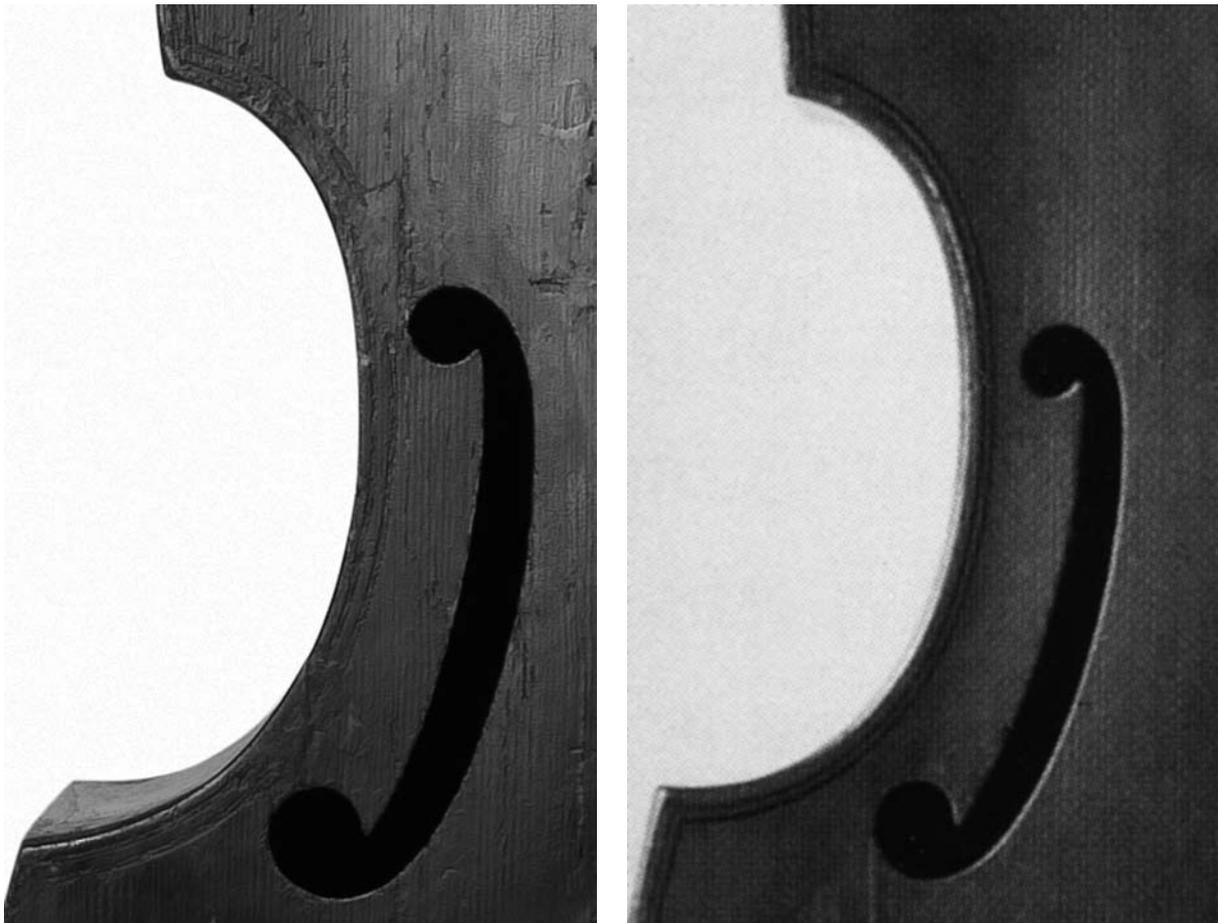


Figure 15. The sound holes of two seven-string viols, one labelled Roos (left), the other by Rombouts (right).  
Photos Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

	Rombouts		Roos viol	
	Bass	Treble	Bass	Treble
Length	136	136	136	136
Width top eye	17	17	18	18
Width bottom eye	21	21	24	24
Width channel at centre	12	14	13	13
Distance between the outside edges of the eyes	top	210		219
	bottom	279		274

Table 5. Measurements of the sound holes of the two 7-string instruments, one of 1708 by Rombouts, the other labelled Roos (mm).

heads belong to instruments that are not doubted as the work of Rombouts, a Dutch maker who worked in Amsterdam. Even though the head on the seven-string Roos viol is clearly by a different carver from the carver of the heads of the two Rombouts viols, the heads of these three are very alike. The relief carving on the peg boxes are also very alike. The Rombouts viols are definitely Dutch so the similarity of the heads and peg boxes to those on the seven-string Roos viol suggests that the latter also belongs to the same Dutch tradition. The fact that the head on the seven-string Roos viol is similar to those on the two Rombouts viols is of course still not enough to attribute them all to the same Dutch school of viol making. Nonetheless, other external features do point in this direction, especially when the seven-string instruments, one by Rombouts, the other labelled Roos (both with necks almost certainly original) are compared (Figure 14).

The sound-holes of the two seven-string viols are also similar, both in shape and in their positions. Their measurements are given in Table 5.

There are however many differences in the ways these two seven-string instruments are constructed, for example in the archings and in the type of woods used. Similarly, there are many differences in the construction of the six-string Roos viol and the six-string Jacobs viol. While the manner in which the Rombouts and Jacobs viols are made has much in common with Northern Netherlands violins, the Roos viols are constructed differently. For instance, the Rombouts viols have carved, two-part bellies with pronounced arching, corner blocks and wooden linings. Both the Roos viols have three-part bellies (probably bent) with much lower arching, no flutings, no corner blocks and no linings, perhaps more

reminiscent of lute making more than violin making. Still, because of the similarities between the heads, the body outlines and the sound holes — all external features — it seems that Rombouts could at least have known of the work of the maker of the Roos viols, or (perhaps less likely) that the maker of the two Roos viols — if it was one person — could have known of the work of Rombouts.

The single surviving viol (now in private ownership) by Pieter Bochs, also of Amsterdam, provides more grounds for questioning whether the Roos viols belong to a Dutch school. The Bochs viol has a label inscribed: *PIETER BOCHS, Amsterdam / Anno 1625*. Pieter Bosch is probably just a variant spelling of Pieter Bosch. According to the authors of *400 jaar vioolbouwkunst in Nederland* the Amsterdam City Archives mention an instrument maker or cittern maker called Pieter Bosch, active between 1604 and 1640 after which he changed profession and went to serve in the West Indies Company.<sup>20</sup>

*400 jaar vioolbouwkunst in Nederland* mentions only one 'finely made' viol by Bochs and regrets that no more of his work has survived.<sup>21</sup> However, Max Möller wrote that his father had seen 'several of Bochs viola da gambas which still had the beautiful varnish of the old Amsterdam maker'.<sup>22</sup> Möller was drawing on his father's notes when he made this remark. However, no further trace of these 'several' instruments remains and only the one Bochs viol is known to survive. Lütgendorff nonetheless followed Möller's mention of a plurality of Bochs instruments, although he wrote that Bochs joined the West Indies Company in 1631 rather than in 1640.<sup>23</sup> Henley asserted that Bochs worked in Amsterdam until 1650, does not mention the West Indies Company, and wrote that Bochs was:

<sup>20</sup> Giskes et al., *400 years*, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Max Möller, *The violin makers*, (Amsterdam, 1955), p. 133.

<sup>23</sup> W. L. F. Lütgendorff, *Die Geigen- und Lautenmacher*, 3 vols., (Tutzing, 1990), III, p. 58.



Figure 16. A seven-string viol by Pieter Bochs. Private collection. Photo by S. Stam.

Known for fine viol-da-gambas; very delicately refined workmanship and lovely textured varnish. Some with lion-heads of ingenious carving.<sup>24</sup>

The Bochs instrument and the two Roos instruments have two important features in common: both have

a walnut back and a three-piece belly. But there the similarities end. Neither the outline nor the carving of the Bochs is similar to the outline and carving of the two Roos instruments. Furthermore, the sides of the Bochs viol are probably of fruitwood rather than walnut. Although the back of the Bochs viol is of walnut, like those of the two Roos instruments, it appears to have been replaced during a nineteenth-century restoration; originally it was probably made of the same woods as the ribs: maple and what appears to be a fruitwood.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Other possibilities

Some English viols, including some instruments by Barak Norman, have three-piece bellies like those of the Roos viols, but this feature is by no means found only in English viols. The same is true of the Bochs viol, a Dutch instrument, mentioned above. Some Northern German instruments by Tielke and Karpp also have three-piece bellies. A possible German origin may be narrowed down: walnut was used in Germany for viols, not by Tielke and Karpp in the North, but by Lang and Busch in Nuremberg. Nevertheless, other differences in the outlines, the sizes and the construction techniques make Nuremberg unlikely as the origin of the two Roos viols.<sup>26</sup>

Instruments by Regensburg of Vienna and the viols made by some Scandinavian makers sometimes have three-part bellies and also back bars that are clamped at the ends using little blocks, as in the two Roos instruments. Otherwise however, these Austrian and Scandinavian instruments differ from the two labelled Roos.

Walnut backs and sides have been claimed for a number of viols made in France including an instrument by De Lannoy of 1761, a bass viol by Colichon of 1691, a dessus by J. Ouvrard of 1726, a pardessus by Barbey of 1745 and a pardessus by B. Fleury of 1752.<sup>27</sup> But if this suggests French origins

<sup>24</sup> W. Henley, *Universal Dictionary of violin and bow makers*, (Brighton, 1973), p.137. Henley's judgment that the Bochs viol is of 'very delicately refined workmanship... ingenious carving' could certainly be applied to the Roos viols instead of Balfort's description of them as of 'immature workmanship'.

<sup>25</sup> Fred Lindeman, in *400 jaar vioolbouwkunst* (p.122) describes the ribs and back as made of strips of maple and walnut and does not mention that the back was replaced. As far as the ribs are concerned, the present authors concur with the maple, but they believe the darker strips to be of some fruitwood. The back, according to a personal communication of Fred Lindeman with the present owners, kindly passed on by them to the present authors, is a later replacement. In the authors' opinion, the back is of recent date.

<sup>26</sup> The specific information and measurements to justify this are too detailed for this paper.

<sup>27</sup> De Lannoy: Muziekinstrumentenmuseum, Brussels, inv. no. 2884; Colichon: Kessler Collection; Ouvrard: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acc. no. 89.4.946; Barbey: private collection, USA; Fleury: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 1917.1712. All of these have walnut backs and/or sides according to Thomas MacCracken's *Macviols*, the continuation of Peter Tourin's *Viol list* of 1979.

for the two Roos instruments, another feature points away from this idea. The two Roos viols have back bars, clamped at their ends; French viols rarely have bars on the back, and when they do, they are not clamped at their ends. On the other hand, besides the walnut used for the back and the sides, some other characteristics of the two Roos viols, including the low arching in both and the style of the hook bar in the seven-string Roos viol, are reminiscent of the work of one particular French maker, Michel Collichon (1641-c.1695). Furthermore, the outline of the seven-string Roos viol is certainly similar to that of a viol by Collichon dated 1691.<sup>28</sup> Undermining a Collichon attribution is the carving of the head of the seven-string viol and the wood of its neck. The head on the seven-string Roos viol is very different from the heads on Collichon's instruments and although the wood of the neck of the seven-string viol looks like servicewood, which is what Collichon is reported to have used, microscopic investigation shows that it is made of a variety of *acer*.<sup>29</sup> But it is of course also possible that the necks of at least some of Collichon's instruments are also made of similar *acer*. The latter is easily confused with servicewood without a microscope. There are other differences between the viols by Collichon and the seven-string Roos viol:

- The Collichon viols do not have bars inside on the back; the Roos viol does.
- The Collichon viols have a bevel at the part of the neck that extends above the belly towards the fingerboard; the Roos viol does not.
- As far as is known, Collichon viols have five-piece bellies; the Roos viol has a three-piece belly.
- The bass bar on the inside of the belly in each of the viols by Collichon is positioned at a slightly diagonal with respect to the line of the join in the belly that it crosses so that the join is only partially covered; in the Roos viol the bass bar covers one of the joints along its whole length.
- The seven-string Roos viol does not have a 'through' neck, the integral top block and neck construction used on the Collichon viols.

To summarise, the differences between the Roos viols and those by Collichon make clear that the

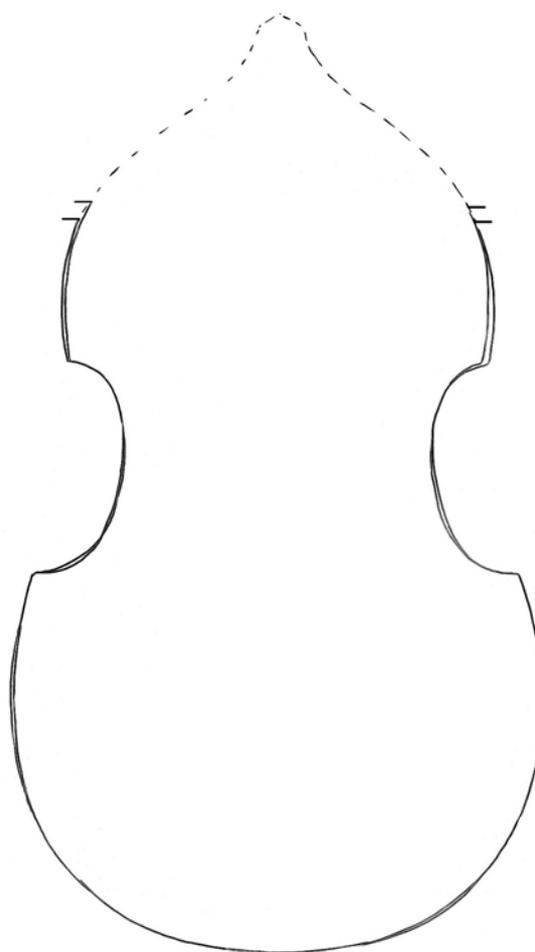


Figure 17. *The outline of the back of the seven-string viol by Michel Collichon, 1691 and that of the seven-string Roos viol superimposed. Drawing by G. Liedmeier.*

Roos instruments are unlikely to be by Collichon. At most, it can be said that the similarities between the seven-string Roos viol and the viols of Collichon suggest that the maker of the Roos viols could have been influenced by Collichon or more likely, as with Rombouts, Collichon was influenced by the maker or makers of the two Roos instruments.

#### CONCLUSION

Schools of viol making are not easy to define as a set of characteristic features. On the other hand, it would be too easy simply to say that there are always exceptions to the rule and that a certain feature

<sup>28</sup> In the Kessler Collection, London.

<sup>29</sup> Report of Iep Wiselius Raadgevend Adviesbureau, Westzaan, The Netherlands. The analysis of the wood strongly suggests *Acer platanoides* (plane) or *Acer pseudoplatanus* (sycamore). Tilman Muthesius, 'Michel Collichon, facteur de violes parisien', *Musique-Images-Instruments* 2, (1996), 41- 52, gives servicewood as the wood of the necks of some Collichon instruments. However, he does not specify his method of identification.

can only give a general indication. But present-day ideas about the particular characteristics of different schools are perhaps passed down from expert to expert in a similar way to that in which the description of the labels of the Roos instruments were adopted and adapted from one important reference work to the next, that is, uncritically and without returning to the instruments themselves for an objective assessment. The idea of whalebone purfling in Dutch instruments makes the same point. It is generally accepted that whalebone purfling is typically Dutch. But not all Dutch instruments have whalebone purfling and probably not all instruments with whalebone purfling are Dutch; some whalebone purfling may even have been added to an instrument in order to make it conform to a modern expectation of how a Dutch instrument should be.

In the literature on the two Roos instruments three points arise. First, it seems to be assumed that the surname Roos requires a first name also spelled in a Dutch way, that is, 'Johann'; second, the myth that the

name 'Amsterdam' was to be found on the label or labels was perpetuated; and third, the two sixteenth-century dates, 1585 and 1587, that are actually given on the labels appear to have been accepted despite obvious indications that the instruments themselves could not be so early. A more objective approach based on some knowledge of the history of the instruments, but above all based on an examination of the instruments themselves and on comparisons with each other and with other surviving instruments shows that the two viols in question were probably made in the late seventeenth century. Their maker may perhaps have influenced Rombouts, suggesting a Dutch attribution. At the same time, various features contradict this and indicate rather a French school and, more specifically, Collichon. Other features again, including some of those that suggest Rombouts, deny a French attribution. Whatever their origins, these two bass viols are of fine quality, in a league to which the instruments of both Rombouts and Collichon belong.

GESINA LIEDMEIER AND MICHAEL LATCHAM

Two Bass Viols labelled John Roos at the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague



Figure 5. *The six-string 'Roos' viol.*



Figure 6. *The seven-string 'Roos' viol.*

*Photos Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.*

Figure 2. *The seven-string viol in its case.*  
*Photo Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.*



Figure 7. *Head and pegbox of the six-string 'Roos' viol.*



Figure 8. *Head and pegbox of the seven-string 'Roos' viol.*

*Photos Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.*