



The Lacote *Décacorde* and *Heptacorde*:

Multi-string Guitars, Extended
Range Guitars, Bass Guitars or Harp
Guitars?

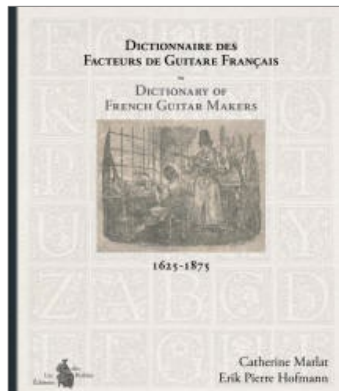


Gregg Miner

Preface

It was with great sadness that I learned of the death of guitar expert Bruno Marlat in December 2019. Though he did not contribute directly to this article, his work is quoted generously throughout. After his death, his wife Catherine finished and published their monograph on Lacote (at right), which is essential reading before or after reading my own article. I will not be duplicating their book material here, only drawing from it.

Additionally, this first PDF revision draws from the new *Dictionary of French Guitar Makers* by Catherine Marlat & Erik Hofmann (below).



My article is meant to serve as a thorough *Appendix* on all Lacote's *non-six-string* guitars, along with similar instruments by others and the modified instruments of Napoléon Coste. Please consider this article an archival "work-in-progress," with plenty of discussion and speculation – one in which I rely on input from many different sources, all better informed and experienced than I (though often, sources who may offer very different opinions). These sources include scholars of every stripe, along with luthiers, dealers and collectors.

Introduction

Historians, collectors, luthiers and players of "classical" and "early romantic" guitar may be nonplussed by my article title. Lacote, the renowned Parisian luthier certainly never made "*harp guitars*," did he?

Well, it's all a matter of semantics and perspective (actually, the answer to the title is "all of the above").¹ Those familiar with my Harp Guitar Organology will recall that the "harp-guitar" term wasn't applied to instruments with floating sub-bass strings until the 1880s or 1890s in America.² In Lacote's time, multi-course (multi-string) or extended range guitars were most often simply called "X-string guitars" ("X" being either 7, 8, 9 or 10). In contrast, Lacote's instruments were specifically named the *Heptacorde* and *Décacorde*.³ Regardless, none of these multi-string guitars were ever "classified" for purposes of organology as we tend to require today. We require them due to the seemingly endless inventions that have occurred throughout historical-to-modern times. For example, while "Early Romantic Guitar" historians may refer to the Lacote floating dropped-D string instruments as "7-string guitars" (when not using the specific historical French name "heptacorde"), the term allows for no distinction between this simplest of recently-classified *harp guitars* and other standard, fully-fretted-across-the-neck 7-string guitars⁴ - ergo my choice (and strong suggestion) on *also* referring to these instruments today as 7-string or 10-string *harp guitars* (particularly in the context of the Harpguitars.net web site and related articles and topics).⁵

While the majority of Lacote instruments are 6-string guitars, a significant number of these extended range versions were made. Unfortunately for researchers, there are many instruments that were later modified into having seven strings or more. Other "original" instruments shown below may be seen as suspect or at least *unproven* by one researcher or another (based on the responses I have received from various experts).



¹ *Multi-string* (or my preference, *Multi-course*) *Guitar* is a commonly used term for guitars with more than six strings – yes, it is technically illogical, as all guitars have "multiple" strings. *Extended Range Guitar* may be a little more logical than the previous, though is also unspecific. *Bass Guitar* is scholar Alex Timmerman's preferred vernacular for guitars with extra bass strings – much like my own *Harp Guitar*, which today most consider both common vernacular and the accepted organological term (see <https://www.harpguitars.net/history/org/hgorg.htm>). Please note that none of these four terms were used historically, and all have one detractor or another.

² <https://www.harpguitars.net/history/org/hgorg.htm>

³ Yes, the literal English translations would be "*seven-string*" and "*ten-string*" respectively, but in this case, I believe that the guitar community agrees (by mutual, if unspoken, consensus) that the French *word* for each of these newly invented instruments acquired a new meaning as a "*multi-language specific name*." Personally, I find this another fascinating semantic topic that has yet to be addressed or discussed among us).

⁴ As most serious readers know, I prefer using "course" in place of "string" (*seven-course*, *ten-course*), but that preference seems a lost cause.

⁵ Indeed, *context is key* when deciding which terms to use (and avoid) within pretty much any topic. I worked through an interesting and hopefully useful exercise using the Phoenix museum's collection and placards as an example of the many options there are – and decisions to be made – in naming conventions in relation to their context (whether in a specific display or appearance in a book or article).

See <https://www.harpguitars.net/articles-pdf.htm#:~:text=%22Harp%20Guitar%22%3A%20What%27s%20In%20a%20Name>

Pierre René Lacote

Widely considered one of the finest French luthiers, if not the 19th Century's most important French guitar maker, there was little biographical material about Pierre René Lacote until the Marlat book.⁶ By the age of twenty, he was working as a silversmith for a merchant. Conscripted into the army, he was declared unfit and discharged the next year. It would be a dozen years between the 1805 military census and the first evidence of his lutherie in Paris. The Marlats postulated that Lacote may have entered lutherie via silversmithing for lyre guitars for makers such as Lejeune, Ory, or Pons. He would subsequently apprentice "under Pons." Of the many males in the extended Pons family, the Marlats deduced that it was Antoine who Lacote would apprentice with, not Joseph as has previously been reported. The first ten years of Lacote's career, addresses and such are discussed in the Marlat book, and don't relate specifically to my topic.

While credited for many innovations to the guitar, most of these can be considered "improvements" to previous inventions, such as new bracing, second soundboards, enharmonic frets and improved friction tuners. Lacote's one true innovation was his sophisticated, encapsulated machine tuners. He worked closely with the best guitarists, including Sor, Carulli, Aguado and Coste, to create optimum instruments to meet their requests. He received awards for his guitars in 1839 and 1844 in the Great National Exhibitions (each time for his heptacorde).

Lacote's birthplace and date of death were not resolved until the Marlat book unveiled the findings from their years of research. We now know he was born on February 5th, 1785, in the small central France town of Bellac. His father Pierre Parinaud would at the time of his marriage become *Pierre Parinaud delacôte* (or *dit Lacote* [alias Lacote]). As the Marlats explain in their book, his son (our luthier) would choose to go by Pierre René Lacote (or just René Lacote), leaving *off* the circumflex above the "o."⁷

Due to economic realities, Lacote relocated to Versailles in 1848, where, to supplement his guitar orders, he opened a linens and haberdashery shop, which he left to his wife to run. In 1859, Lacote closed this shop once both of his children had left home, moving to other shops to continue his occasional lutherie with his partner Eulry, who would pass away in 1864. Lacote would pass away in his newest home on February 10th, 1871.⁸

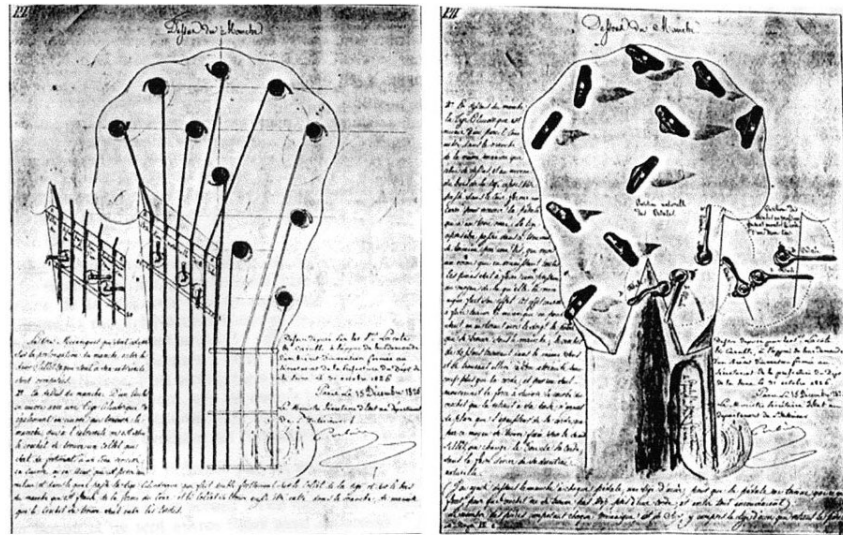


⁶ Again, I don't duplicate the Marlat book material here, I only draw from it. The first thing they clarified was that the luthier's name was Pierre René Lacote, *not* François René Lacote (or René François), as was once stated by many guitar historians.

⁷ I thus had to go back through my entire article to remove every instance of that "ô"!

⁸ As James Westbrook once pointed out, "*One person (probably Bone, or some violin dictionary) wrote the date of Lacote's death as 1855 and everyone took it as gospel, which I know is incorrect. For decades then, people either wrote that or 'after 1855,' which, while accurate, wasn't much help!*" Sinier and Françoise de Ridder finally told us that Lacote lived at least until he was 83 with "*his last known guitar...dated 1868.*" The Marlats once again settled the matter with their 1871 date.

The Décacorde



Though "ten-string" could be considered the literal English translation, Lacote's first extended range guitar - developed and patented in 1826 in collaboration with famed guitarist Fernando Carulli - was not a standard "ten-string" floating-bass guitar, as would soon become popular in Vienna. In fact, the inventors sought to *distance* their creation from the "guitar" itself.⁹ Besides the unique headstock, neck design and sharpening levers, this fascinating, though short-lived, instrument had a unique and distinctive tuning. Only the top *five* guitar strings were tuned to standard and fretted. From there the floating basses descended (from the A rather than an E) diatonically down to C. Only the C, F & G strings would have the half-step sharpening lever "ditals." I find this a rather interesting early "harp guitar concept" – and have long wondered what it was used for, and why no one has ever duplicated or resurrected it to this day.¹⁰

⁹ Per Marlat, the décacorde was Carulli's idea that he brought to Lacote. Lacote devised the sharpening dital levers and design, including the full length cut out trough for the thumb. Curiously, only the C, F and G strings of the five basses would have sharpening levers for different keys. Carulli and Lacote jointly submitted the patent on Oct 31, 1826, which was granted Dec 15 of the same year. They exhibited the instrument at the Exhibition of Products of French Industry in 1827, but it went unrewarded. In 1831 a Paris teacher, Mr. Amory placed an ad extolling its virtues – this was its very last gasp. The "failed" invention nevertheless brought Lacote's name to both amateur and professional guitarists.

¹⁰ In fact, I am continually surprised to find that virtually every guitar researcher and writer lumps the décacorde in with other "10-string guitars," when it is such a distinctly different, specific instrument. It is casually lumped in with the original Viennese 10-string harp (bass) guitars, and even more disconcertingly, with today's' fully-fretted 10-string guitars (in all tuning configurations, Yepes or other) – as if the simple coincidence that it has ten strings is proof of some sort of ancestry or commonality. I find this as laughable as all the Wikipedia entries that try to "define" various guitar "types" simply by number of strings - but was encouraged by the author of the Yepes section of the Wikipedia "10-string guitar" entry, who succinctly states, "One cannot consider as synonymous (just because they have the same number of strings) different instruments that do not have a commonly accessible original repertoire, that approach music through different performance practices (different techniques, especially with respect to the use of the 7th string, open and stopped strings), different instruments that are not only tuned differently but strung differently. The true modern 10-string guitar is as little defined by its number of strings for their own sake, divorced from their singular tuning, as a piano is defined by its number of keys."

While I originally assumed that it was intended as some new harp guitar variant to enable Carulli to reach new heights of virtuosity, I soon learned that almost the exact opposite was the intention. It became clear that it was aimed more at the amateur or non-professional guitar player as something “easier to play than the guitar.”¹¹ More on this in a moment, after we look at the instrument(s).

My information from the patent comes from the Marlat book and a recent (1985) analysis of the patent in an article by Danielle Ribouillault.¹² Both tell us that Carulli was presenting the *décacorde* as an improvement of the standard guitar of the time, much louder because of its tuning (with its additional number of resonant bass strings). Specifically, he meant that the sympathetic, oscillating effect of the instrument had the effect of changing the sound and raising the general volume.¹³ The patent states that *“The seven open notes enter in resonance when one of the fretted strings are plucked and that with the fundamental, third, fifth and octave that’s very pleasant to the ear and makes the instrument sound much louder. The sound of the instrument is fuller and nicer than the one of the regular guitar.”*

The “seven resonant open notes” in the sentence above are all seven *lowest strings* which are wound strings. Five are the unfretted bass (harp) strings; two are on the neck and fretted (see this tuning diagram below).



In most specimens, as described and shown in the patent (illustration on previous page), three levers were provided that could be turned to raise the pitch of certain bass strings a half step. Additionally, in his method, Carulli allows that the tenth (C) string can be tuned down to B on occasion (*Ophee*), and other notes can be tuned to play in the flat keys (*Verrett*).

¹¹ In his method, Carulli pointed out that his instrument was designed for amateurs, being easier to play chords "to accompany romances or ariettas." He also highlighted the tone of the open strings, saying that they helped increase the "instrument's volume nearly by half and at the same time renders it more harmonious and richer than the ordinary Guitar." I further noted that the inventors seem to have rarely said "than the regular or six-string guitar – just "Guitar," to further demonstrate that their *décacorde* was a different instrument than the now-standard 6-string guitar.

¹² Translated from the French for me by colleague Benoît Meulle-Stef.

¹³ This, of course, is the same boast – and usually a legitimate argument – used by most inventors and builders of harp guitars.

I have not examined any in person, but it is clear from the patent drawing and recent images from guitar experts Daniel Sinier and Françoise de Ridder that the levers pull the string down against the head to "fret" against the lower second nut. While the patent drawing shows strings C, F & G in sharp position (and specifically mentions only these notes) Benoit Meulle-Stef examined a specimen in a Paris music shop and found that the levers rotated in *both* directions so that all floating bass strings could ostensibly be raised.

Sinier and de Ridder have pointed out that the *décacorde* was made in three different stringing configurations:

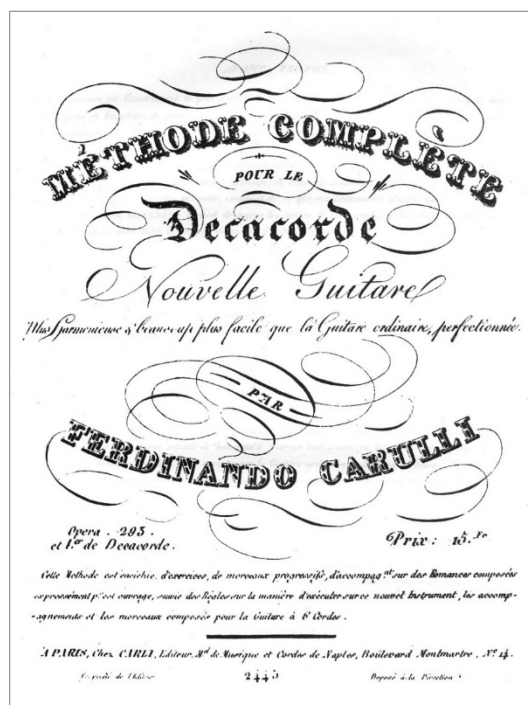
- Those instruments that adhere to the Carulli patent have 5 strings on the fingerboard and 5 floating basses (1st row below).
- Other specimens that do not bear the patent stamp are known with:
 - 6 strings on the fingerboard and 4 floating basses, and
 - 7 strings on the fingerboard and 3 floating basses.

Personally, I wonder if any of these latter instruments may have been configured, *not* as true Carulli Patent *Décacordes*, but as similar-appearing Lacote ten-strings tuned more traditionally, and perhaps, played "professionally." This is just my own theory (but a good one!), with no way yet to answer.

By contrast, the Carulli Patent form of the *décacorde* was clearly created for the amateur guitarist, as stated by Carulli himself. It wasn't intended for the professional guitar player at all, but for students, as something *easier to play* than a normal guitar. Enthusiast Len Verrett wrote on his website that in Carulli's time, the guitar had very recently changed from a five-course instrument to a six-course instrument, and so having the top five strings the same may have seemed natural to many guitarists of the day.¹⁴ I disagree. From my (admittedly less) experience, I would say that by the mid-1820's the guitar – both amateur and professional – had fully transitioned to 6 single strings, having at least five decades to slowly, then increasingly rapidly, make this segue. From my analysis, Carulli was not *adding* to the five-course guitar, but "inventing" a new instrument that *removed* the added sixth fretted string (a seeming throwback to the older tuning, but in truth a "red herring") in order to "dumb down" (my words) the "extremely-difficult-to-play guitar" (Carulli's words). With only five remaining fretted strings, and adding new additional open basses, he was essentially revisiting the "easy-to-play" concept of the (English) *guittar* and the later harp-lute family, i.e.: a stringing/tuning configuration that required less effort and training to utilize than the "difficult" six-string guitar utilized by the virtuosos. He was also adding the then already-common practice of adding additional floating (open) bass strings, like most harp guitars known today.

¹⁴ earlyromanticguitar.com

While it might seem to many six-string guitar players that ten strings would be harder to play than six, Carulli's premise was much the same as that of modern 20-string concert harp guitarist John Doan – that it actually required *reduced* effort, with comparatively less left-hand work. In fact, this was the key point of the patent further demonstrated in the *Méthode*. Carulli wrote that, while “*the guitar is extremely difficult to play and requires a very long time of study and work*,” in the *décacorde* the use of the left hand is simpler; with “*the need to use just one or two fingers of the left hand, rarely three, never four*” – due to many notes being instead played on the open strings and not fretted, thus making chords and arpeggios “*extremely easy*.” Carulli was pointing out that his instrument offers voicings impossible on the guitar, including full chords using only a finger or two on the neck. Indeed, modern harp guitarists do that all the time!



Carulli's 1826 *Méthode* is surprisingly skimpy on additional details of the instrument. The gist of it is like that already discussed. “Easier to play” arpeggios and accompaniments are the selling point. It begins with extremely rudimentary scales, chords and exercises, and progresses to more advanced pieces. Included are a couple that require flipping the C and F levers during the piece. To date, I don't know anyone who has attempted these pieces on an actual *décacorde*. There doesn't seem to be much time within the musical phrases to change some of these accidentals from natural to sharp and back “on the fly.” Regarding the sharpening levers, Ribouillault points out this caveat from Carulli:

“If in a piece, there are some tonal changes which require a sharpening of any of the basses, you have to use silence, or the end of a phrase, to move the sharpening lever. If you can't find the time to do so, you have to play the note on the fretted strings.”

Meaning, one may have to arbitrarily switch octaves, a somewhat amateurish musical undesirability, that limits the quality of the music and keys used in Carulli's *Méthode*.

I have included the pertinent introduction pages next:

AVANT PROPOS.

La Guitare est l'instrument le plus agréable pour accompagner la voix: il est le seul qui donne une belle pose et beaucoup de grace au corps et au bras: il est très facile à transporter et extrêmement moins couteux qu'un Piano ou une Harpe. Il soutient très bien le chant par la quantité d'accords et d'arpèges que l'on peut y faire successivement.

La Guitare à six cordes, dont on joue ordinairement, est très bonne pour exécuter toutes sortes de morceaux; mais elle est extrêmement difficile, et demande beaucoup d'étude et de travail. Les plus grandes difficultés qu'elle présente, viennent de ce que cet instrument n'offre que trois seules notes de basse à vide. MI, LA, RÉ; à l'égard de toutes les autres, il faut employer les doigts pour les faire, et comme on ne peut faire usage que de quatre doigts, la succession des accords ou la continuation des basses, devient excessivement difficile, surtout pour les personnes qui ont une petite main et qui sont obligées d'employer trois et quatre doigts à la fois; autrement la musique devient maigre et stérile de basses.

Comme le plus grand nombre de ceux qui apprennent la Guitare, n'ont généralement d'autre but que de s'accompagner une romance ou une ariette, et d'exécuter quelques petits morceaux, j'ai voulu leur abréger l'étude de cet instrument et le rendre à la fois plus facile et plus harmonieux.

J'ai imaginé de faire construire des Guitares, à dix cordes, dont cinq seulement se doignent, et les cinq autres, réunies à deux de celles que l'on doigte, forment sept notes de basse à vide.

Pour se servir de ces notes à vide en différents tons, j'ai appliqué au cheviller trois petites mécaniques qui servent à diézer à volonté l'UT le FA et le SOL.

Par ce moyen les accords deviennent extrêmement faciles, attendu qu'on n'a besoin d'employer qu'un ou deux doigts, très rarement trois, et presque jamais quatre: ces morceaux sont d'ailleurs plus harmonieux et plus brillants, ayant autant de basse qu'il leur en faut à vide, et la mélodie n'est point interceptée par le manque de doigts qu'on éprouve sur la Guitare ordinaire, pour faire la basse.

Les sept notes à vide reçoivent une percussion, lorsqu'on pince sur les autres DOIGTÉES leurs tierces, quintes ou octaves, et cette percussion produit un retentissement très agréable, qui augmente presque de la moitié le son de l'instrument, et le rend en même temps plus harmonieux et plus moëlleux que celui de la Guitare ordinaire.

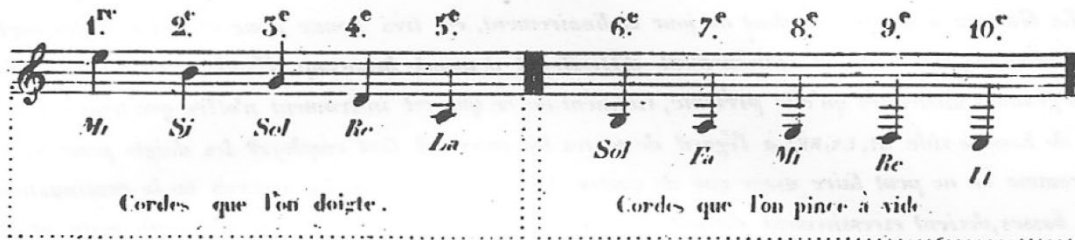
Le plus grand avantage que ce nouvel instrument offre, est qu'on y peut exécuter avec beaucoup plus de facilité les accompagnements, et la plus grande partie des morceaux composés pour la Guitare ordinaire, moyennant quelque changement par des règles qu'on trouve à la fin de cette Méthode, que je publie.

On joue aussi très facilement dans les tons hemols, en bémolisant d'avance les basses à vide ce qui est très difficile sur la Guitare à six cordes.

Cet Instrument qui est construit d'une manière bien simple, quoiqu'élégante, ne coulera que la somme de cent francs, y compris les trois mécaniques. On le trouve chez M. LACOTE Luthier, place des Victoires, N.º 5. ou chez l'Auteur, rue Grange Batelière, N.º 1.

PREMIERE PARTIE

J'ai donné le nom de DÉCACORDE à cette nouvelle Guitare, parcequ'elle a dix cordes. De ces dix cordes, il y en a cinq que l'on doigte et cinq que l'on pince à vide, savoir :



Les trois premières sont en boyaux; les sept autres sont filées.

Pour que l'Élève puisse distinguer facilement les notes à vide, j'ai fait filer l'*UT*, le *MI*, le *SOL* et le *RE*, avec un trait argenté et le gros *RE*, le *FA* et le *SI*, avec un trait doré.

Lorsque l'on joue en *Mi*, ce qui n'arrive pas souvent, on baisse la dixième corde d'un demi-ton, ce qui fait un  note très essentielle en jouant dans ce ton.

Pour se servir de ces notes à vide, en différents tons, j'ai posé au chevalet trois petites mécaniques qui servent pour diézer l'*UT*, le *FA* et le *SOL*.

Lorsqu'on trouvera un, deux ou trois dièzes à la clef on doit les accrocher avant de commencer le morceau, et quand on en trouvera parmi les notes, j'aurai le soin d'indiquer ce signe, $\sharp$ quand il faut le mettre, et avec celui-ci $\flat$ lorsqu'il faut l'ôter.

MANIÈRE DE TENIR L'INSTRUMENT.

On doit être assis très commodément, ni trop haut, ni trop bas. On doit appuyer le pied gauche sur un tabouret, à moins de vouloir suspendre le Décacorde sur l'épaule par un cordon, ou ruban, ce qui est très favorable à la main droite, parcequ'alors on a moins d'écart à faire pour pincer la 8^e, 9^e et 10^e Corde.

Le corps de l'instrument doit être appuyé sur la cuisse gauche; le manche, *bien élevé* doit se poser entre le demi-cercle que forment le pouce et l'index de la main gauche.

Le bras droit doit être appuyé sur le coin de l'instrument, et la main droite doit pincer les cordes au milieu de la distance du chevalet à la rosette, sans que le petit doigt soit

appuyé sur la table d'harmonie elle aura plus de grâce et les personnes qui ont une petite main, atteindront plus facilement les dernières cordes.

MANIÈRE DE PINCER.

On pince les sept notes de basse avec le pouce de la main droite, et les trois autres cordes avec l'index et le médium, en changeant alternativement de doigt à chaque note.

On ne se sert du doigt annulaire que dans les accords et les arpèges: cependant dans différents passages de sixtes et octaves, et dans certains accords et arpèges, on est obligé de pincer la 4^e et 5^e corde avec l'index et le médium, et la 2^e et 3^e avec le pouce.

MANIÈRE D'ACCORDER LE DÉCACORDE.

Les cinq premières cordes que l'on doigte s'accordent par quarts et par tierces, de la manière suivante.

MANIÈRE D'ACCORDER A L'OCTAVE.

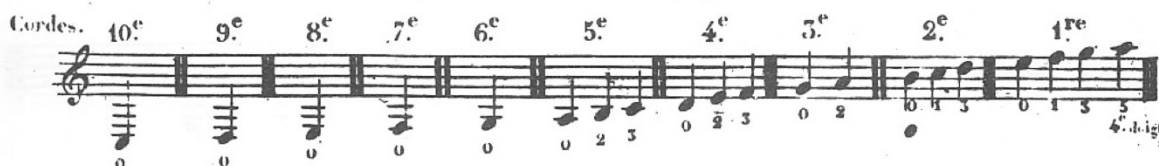
On accorde la cinquième corde, qui doit être un *La*, avec le Diapason ou avec un autre instrument qui a été accordé avec le Diapason; ensuite on pose un doigt à la seconde case de cette même corde, ce qui fait un *Si*, et on y accorde la seconde corde à l'octave. On pose un doigt à la troisième case de cette seconde corde, ce qui produit un *Re*, et on y accorde la quatrième à l'octave: en posant ensuite un doigt à la seconde case de cette quatrième corde, on produit un *Mi*, et on y accorde la chanterelle à l'octave: en posant un doigt sur la troisième case de cette première corde on produit un *Sol*, et on y accorde la troisième à l'octave.

Les cinq autres cordes à vide, on les accorde par octave avec les cordes qu'on a déjà accordées, ou après avoir accordé la dixième corde *La*, par octave avec l'ut qui est à la troisième case de la cinquième corde. On accorde les quatre autres par gamme, *Re, Mi, Fa, Sol*.

GAMME A LA PREMIÈRE POSITION.

Les chiffres indiquent les doigts de la main gauche et les cases où il faut les poser, savoir, 1^o l'index à la 1^{re} case, 2^o le médium à la 2^{me} case, 3^o l'annulaire à la 3^e case, et 4^o le petit doigt à la 4^e case.

Les notes à vide sont indiquées par un (0).



All in all, the *décacorde* may have quickly come and gone because it was somewhat of a “marketing gimmick.” As Ribouillault wrote, “the inventors were monetarily dependent on the amateur customers of the time, who wanted something undemanding to provide some pleasant effects without any great effort.”

For all its hoopla, it was rarely, if ever, used in concert by Carulli. How *could* he personally promote it? Surely, he did not intend to perform for the rest of his career using only his first two left hand fingers! Yet he went all out on this invention, enlisting the services of Lacote, the finest luthier in Paris. Clearly, he was not creating another Edward Light-style instrument intended for parlor novices, but a high-class instrument capable of professional use. And despite his patent and *Méthode* verbiage about easy-to-play arpeggios and accompaniments, Carulli *did* write some legitimate pieces for the instrument. Narcisco Yepes recorded the final *Méthode* pieces, the *Diversissements largo* and *poco allegro*, which Ribouillault describes as “music made to be played in the rich Parisian parlors of the era. The compositions are very similar to those for guitar of the same period – very classic, but already delicate with an awakening sensibility of the romantic period.”¹⁵

So, the *décacorde* *did* skirt with legitimacy. Still, there are almost no historical music players today with an interest in exploring this instrument and its repertoire. Len Verrett and Michael Patilla (who went so far as to have a reproduction *décacorde* built by Jack Sanders) looked long and hard for additional pieces that Carulli or others may have written for the instrument, but to no avail.



At left, Gordon Ferries performs a piece from the *Méthode* on Edinburgh University Museum’s restored Lacote in St Cecilia’s Hall.

While it perfectly demonstrates the tuning and capabilities of Carulli’s invention, it does little to excite the listener regarding its compositional or performance abilities.¹⁶

¹⁵ It is a *complete coincidence* that Carulli’s and Yepes’ instruments were both ten-string guitars. Yepes’ was founded on a much different (and obviously more acceptable) concept, with a totally different tuning configuration, which just happened to have the exact range (down to C) required for the Carulli pieces. However, the pieces would have a somewhat different sonority when played on the two instruments, due to the different open strings.

¹⁶ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guitar_Decacorde.webm

Ferries' performed Carulli piece as written in the Méthode:



Surviving Décacordes

Originality of the specimens that follow: That question has come up many times, and I expect it to linger. The Marlat book may now offer additional clues concerning body plantilla, heads, bridges, rosettes and other clues. Some experts maintain that the headstock *must* have the Lacote stamp on the headstock (several do not). I have no idea, but I can think of reasons why the iron stamp could be "missing." Frankly, I'm more interested in the many variations of the head (fully original?) and bridges (replacement?).

Patent Configuration

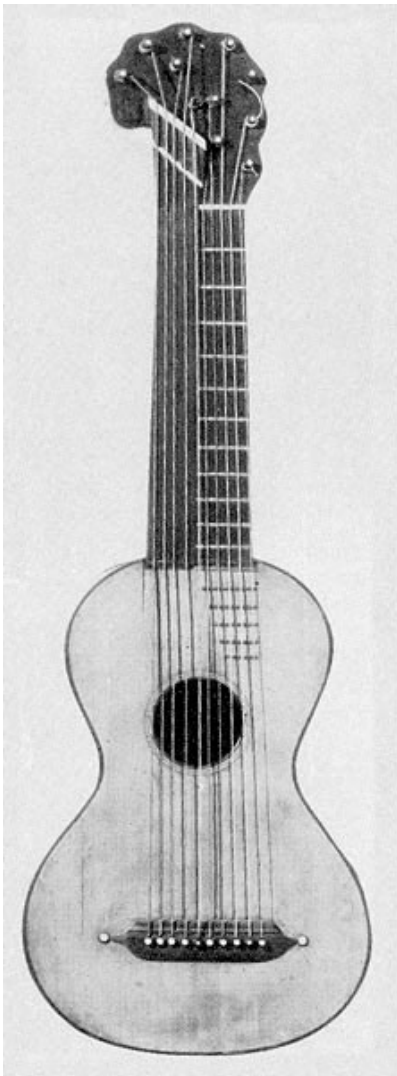


By "patent configuration" I mean those strung with 5 open and 5 fretted, along with 3 dital sharpening levers. (In many cases, I am unable to tell whether the ditals were originally there or not or are just missing.) The Marlats further stated that (stringing aside) around 1828 the headstock became straighter, without the obvious protruding bass side lobe. Personally, I see other shapes, not just a lobed and straight version. Following are the extant specimens in the order of the previous thumbnail group image.



Décacorde, 1826 (5+5) (images are not proportional)
Private collection: Sabine L. (Germany) Head and Label detail below





Décacorde

182-

(5+5)

Collection: Ann Arbor, University of
Michigan,
Stearns Collection (*Baines*)



Décacorde, c. 1826

(5+5)

Restored with reproduction tuners

Collection: University of Edinburgh



Decacorde

c. 1828

(5+5)

Collection: Brussels MIM





Décacorde
1828
 (5+5)

Collection: Giovanni Accornero

Photos from *Guitare* (Sinier de Ridder)



Decacorde

c. 1828

(5+5)

The most recent specimen, offered by Vichy Auctions in late 2024. Experts disagree on whether this is a fully authentic Lacote due to the strange heel and lack of additional neck on the bass side, along with other qualities. One has deemed the interior unaltered.



Décacorde

1830

(5+5)

Collection : Cité de la Musique

E.986.5.1

Photos from Rene' Lacote (Marlat)



Décacorde
c. 1831-c. 1835 ?
(5+5)

Collection : R. Broux (Belgium)

Non-Patent Configuration



Décacorde

c. 1826 ?

(4+6)

Collection : Cité de la Musique #E.1040



Décacorde
c. 1830
(3+7)

From *La Guitare* (Sinier de Ridder)
See: "Featured Harp Guitar 11/08"¹⁷

¹⁷ https://www.harpguitars.net/history/month_hg/month-hg-11-08.htm

The interesting instrument below is now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts collection. As stated on their site, it was: "Purchased from Tony Bingham of London. Bingham purchased the instrument from a dealer in Paris, who had purchased it at auction at the Hotel Drouot. It had formerly belonged to Eugène Peletin of Paris, a student of the French guitar virtuoso Napoleon Coste." This instrument was part of Coste's collection (or inventory) at the time of his widow's death, and most assume Coste installed the bridge/tailpiece system and finger rest on all these instruments. This is one of the four Hotel Drouot 1995 auction instruments discussed (three pictured) in Sinier de Ridder's *La Guitare*, pp 55-56, where it is mistakenly identified as a *décacorde* (see below).



9-course (modified), 1827

Collection: Boston Museum of Fine Arts



Modified 9-string before sale at Paris auction

While an original custom 9-string Lacote instrument does not sound outside the realm of possibility, such does not seem to be the case in this instance. Scholar Alex Timmernan (in the Guitar Summit forum) wrote this about the unusual 9-string:

"A case of ... modifications that are not that well executed (or) precise as one would expect Lacote himself (to) have done is a 9-string Lacote example currently in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (USA). Years before it was sold to the MFA, I had the chance to measure, describe and photograph it.

It shows alterations at the headstock, fingerboard and (to the) side of the fingerboard on the (soundboard). In fact, the ... model of this instrument looks (more like one that originally had) less (sic) bass strings. Therefore it is likely that the bridge/tailpiece device is also a later addition to the instrument (Coste?)."

Interestingly, an 8-string Lacote is specifically mentioned (with appraisal for the 1900 "vintage guitar" market!) by one Robert Fissore in *Les maîtres Luthiers of 1900*.¹⁸

¹⁸ Westbrook: *The Century That Shaped the Guitar*

Sidebar

I think everyone agrees that the *earlier bissex* headstock was the inspiration for the Carulli/Lacote Décacorde.

It even had similar sharpening levers. In this light, how much credit is really due Lacote for the Décacorde design?

Naderman, a harp maker, created this unique instrument that some consider the first dated "harp guitar."

With its lute shape and staved back, I consider it a hybrid harp guitar-like invention.¹⁹



Naderman Bissex, 1773
Collection : Cité de la Musique

¹⁹ See "Mixed Family Hybrids & Other Related Forms:" <https://www.harpguitars.net/history/org/org-hybrids.htm>

Napoléon Coste and the Heptacorde



By 1835, when the *décacorde* had fallen out of favor, Lacote next began building heptacordes, at the suggestion of Napoléon Coste (1805-1883). Coste – shown on these two pages with his two different 7-string Lacotes – was born in France in 1805 and moved to Paris in 1830, where he quickly established himself as the leading French virtuoso guitarist.

Unlike the *décacorde*, these instruments were fairly standard guitars with an extra floating string tuned to D (occasionally C). The late expert Bruno Marlat provided evidence that Coste himself dubbed the instrument the "*heptacorde*," and gives 1835 as the first confirmed date of Coste's use of the instrument (though suspects it was in use earlier).

Elsewhere (Phillip Bone: *The Guitar and Mandolin*), Fernando Sor was said to have

requested the 7th string, but this has long since been completely debunked and scholars agree that there is much suspect information in Bone's book.²⁰ Sor, along with famed fellow Spaniard Aguado, *did* work with Lacote on certain other details regarding the guitar's sound (its bridge, and internal second soundboard and external stand, respectively).

²⁰ To this day, the Wikipedia "Harp Guitar" entry includes Sor, and there seems to be little we can do about it! In fact, other than (rather ironically) his famed use of the *harpolyre*, Sor appears to have been a critic of extra strings, writing in his Method:

"à employer toutes les facultés de la main gauche pour la mélodie (...) fait éprouver aux guitarists de grandes difficultés lorsqu'il s'agit d'y ajouter une basse correcte, si elle ne se trouve dans les cordes à vide (...). On a cru remédier à cet inconvénient en ajoutant à la guitare un nombre de cordes filées, mais ne serait-il pas plus simple d'apprendre à se servir des six? Ajoutez des ressources à un instrument lorsque vous aurez tiré autant de parti que possible de celles qu'il vous offre; mais ne lui attribuez pas ce que vous devriez vous attribuer à vous-même."

("By employing all the possibilities of the left hand for the melody (...) makes the guitar player feel a great difficulty when he has to add a correct bass when it is not on the open strings (...) it has been tried to correct that by adding to the guitar several bass strings - but wouldn't it be easier just to learn how to use the six? Add resources to an instrument when you have used all the ones it has to offer. But don't project on it what you should expect from yourself.")

A good introduction to Coste and his music is the complete preface by Brian Jeffery (1982) in *La Source du Lyson, op. 47 for solo guitar*.²¹ Unfortunately, there is no mention of the heptacorde nor the floating string, other than one reference to a single low D that "can easily be put up an octave." (Indeed, Coste's "meets-minimum-requirements harp guitar" is all too often viewed today as an unnecessary option). Tecla also sells a new small French/English book on Coste.



According to Bruno Marlat (in the liner notes to Brigitte Zaczek's 2005 CD *Romantic Guitar Vol. II*, as translated by Steven Edminster), as early as 1835 *"the use of a seventh string puts in an appearance" in Coste's opus 5, "Souvenirs de Flandres* (published by Lacote).²² Marlat astutely noted that *"even though this may simply have involved the exploitation of an older idea, people referred to it as an 'invention'."*

Marlat cited additional provenance, including that Lacote...

"...received a prize in 1839 for a seven-string guitar which was described as 'perfectly crafted, having in addition a very beautiful tone quality.' At the next fair, in 1844, he presented 'several heptacorde guitars which are perfectly crafted and have a beautiful quality of tone, instruments which were awarded top ranking positions in the contest'."

Marlat concluded (as would I) that the specific name "heptacorde" came from Coste since...

"...we read in the appendix on the seventh string which he added to his 'N. Coste's New and Enlarged edition of Sor's Guitar Method' the following statement: 'Some years ago I arranged to have built in the workshop of Mr. Lacote, a maker of stringed instruments in Paris, a guitar designed to yield a larger volume of tone and, above all, a more beautiful quality of tone. [...] I called this new type of guitar a Heptacorde'."

This then is our proof of the origin of the heptacorde, if we take Coste at his word. Unfortunately, Coste also claimed (in the introduction to his "25 Etudes de genre pour la guitare, opus 38" per Marlat) that *"This improvement was immediately adopted and taken further in Vienna, Austria."* This claim seems rather boastful, as numerous players and builders in Vienna and elsewhere had been experimenting with 7, 8, and 9-string guitars from as early as 1809 and possibly before.

²¹ <https://tecla.com/coste-la-source-du-lyson-op-47-for-solo-guitar-the-completepreface/>

²² http://www.harpguitarmusic.com/listings/listing_bz_romantic2.htm

Early Heptacordes



There is not yet full consensus on how many of the surviving c. 1835–c. 1841 heptacordes are fully *original*. Marlat wrote:

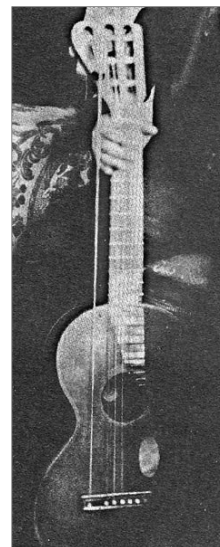
"The first seven-string guitars of Lacote differ little from his six-string models. The additional string is fitted in the theorbo manner as described by Coste: 'The seventh string, much longer than the others, is fitted at a certain distance outside the neck of the instrument and requires no change in playing technique'. In two of the three instruments we are familiar with, the fingerboard has five additional frets – 22 instead of the usual 17 – and reaches over the edge of the sound hole, extending the range to D5. An instrument of this kind, held gracefully by an elegant young woman, provides the frontispiece for the Sor/Coste method. A photograph of Coste...shows him posing with exactly the same model."

Below are shown the illustrated model and Coste's early specimen that Marlat described.



Artist's Interpretation of an early *Heptacorde*

From the frontispiece for the Sor/Coste method, depicting an artist's rendering of an early *Heptacorde*.



Early *Heptacorde* (original or modified?)

Owned by Napoléon Coste. Note the oval finger rest, which Alex Timmerman speculates could be inlaid pearl.

The next few extant instruments shown are believed to be authentic pre-1850 heptacordes. They are roughly arranged by body shape and other features (with help from others). Thus, the listed owners' circa dates might need some tweaking. Some of these have been discovered quite recently ("Ben Mc"s, Hofmann's with its fascinating curling headstock, Renard's, and Coste's original instrument from Marlats' book). The Verrett specimen (since sold) and the Westbrook are similarly believed to be original.



Heptacorde
c. 1835–c. 1838

Collection: Erik Hofmann

An incredible scroll-shaped headstock
on a very early, all-original 7-string!



Heptacorde, 1830s Collection: Jean Michel Renard (France)



Heptacorde, 1839 Collection: Ben Mc.



Formes bien rondes et citronnier moiré pour cet heptacorde fabriqué à la demande de Napoléon Coste. La date n'est pas donnée sur l'étiquette, l'adresse et la marque au fer permettent une estimation.

This heptacorde, with its pronounced curves and figured satinwood, was built to order for Napoléon Coste. Although there is no date on the label, the address and iron brand narrow it down to the years indicated above.

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Heptacorde, 1835-1839

Anonymous owner

From the Marlat book. The authors state that it "was built to order for Napoléon Coste. Although there is no date on the label, the address and iron brand narrow it down to the years" given.



Heptacorde
c. 1836–c. 1839

Collection: Len Verrett > 12th Fret > Austin-Marie



Heptacorde, 1841

Owner James Westbrook writes: "This is the very well-known 1841 Lacote 7-string guitar that was owned by the late Robert Spencer. It is pictured in some Chanterelle editions of Coste's music. It is in excellent condition.²³ For me it is impossible to know whether Lacote built this guitar as a 7-string or if he changed it at a later date."

Collection: The Guitar Museum

²³ https://www.harp guitars.net/history/lacote/lacote-coste_music-westbrook.jpg

The next two 7-string Lacotes have long since been established as "modified." A third has recently been found.



6-string, modified

This well-known c.1820 instrument is an original 6-string later modified to 7.

Collection: Cité de la Musique #E.1044



6-string, modified

Two labels inside this original 1827 6-string list 1879 and 1881 modifications to the fretboard, seven strings and a "Coste" bridge system (see upcoming chapter). Clearly, Coste's influence and inspiration lasted many decades.

From *La Guitare* (Sinier de Ridder)



Original 6-string or 7-string, modified

Still another recent discovery, this early Lacote may have had 6 or 7 strings originally. Regardless, it also was later modified with the "Coste" bridge system. Though not dated, the two labels include "the typical label" and another manuscript one which reads "guitare heptachorde système Napoléon Coste."

Collection: Eric Mry

Later Heptacordes



Heptacorde, 1842

Surprisingly, this heptacorde, built in 1842, appears to have the more "modern" c.1845-c.1855s shape - much different than the 1841 instrument above, though similar to the c.1836-c.1839 instrument (with its short fretboard). When did this plantilla actually first *appear*?!

The left images show the instrument as found by the late Dave Evans, a luthier in Brussels.

The set of images on the next page show the restored instrument, owned now by performer David Jacques

The original bridge was missing. Westbrook believes that Coste did have something to do with this guitar, as it has his signature on the back of the head. Perhaps he raised and extended the fingerboard?







Heptacorde, 1846

The instrument above is an 1846 Lacote. Note that neither the 1842 at left nor this original instrument was modified by Coste, and that both have an extended fretboard with 22 frets.

1846 heptacorde sold by Vichy Auctions in 2015.

Soon after Lacote again won bronze for his heptacordes in 1844, more striking new features appeared, some once again instigated by Coste. As described by Marlat:

"The shape of the body is broader with a less narrow waist than the usual Lacote designs; the fingerboard has 24 frets covering four octaves and the lower part rests on (standoffs) and is not in direct contact with the soundboard; the strings pass over the bridge and are fastened to a tailpiece at the end of the body; a bar of maple is glued on at two contact points parallel to the first string, perhaps as a kind of support for the little finger. The whole instrument seems to be designed with a view to allowing its soundboard to vibrate as freely as possible."



Coste's Bridge System Enters the Picture

Marlat continued:

"This description could well apply also to a Lacote heptacorde kept in the Paris Museum of Music (shown below) where a handwritten note tells us that this is 'the favorite guitar of Mr. Napoléon Coste. The bridge has been applied by the remarkable composer and professor himself'. It would thus seem that Coste was not only the l and designer of this bridge/tailpiece system but actually built it himself."

This "smoking gun" bit of provenance (that the unique bridge was built by Coste) stirs up a secondary topic and ongoing discussion/study involving Lacote instruments. Specifically:

- Have we identified / can we even identify all the modifications?
- Are any "Coste-style" bridge systems original? Or were all built "after the fact"? Why?
- Who did the modifications: Lacote, Coste, or other?
- How can there be so many of these modified instruments?
- What other modifications did Coste or others make?

Mr. Eugène Petetin

Before we examine the next instruments, I need to briefly mention this man, who figures prominently in the provenance of so many of the surviving Coste instruments. Petetin was a naval officer and amateur guitarist who some believe to have been a close friend of Coste and his wife, and presumably one of Coste's guitar students. On the other hand, the Marlats question this, saying Petetin "likely never actually met Coste prior to the 1870's" (just before his death). Several instruments were apparently given to him by Coste's widow, and perhaps he received others after her own death. Petetin appears to have made handwritten notations (sometimes fairly cryptic) on paper and glued these over the original labels (if present) on the instruments once in his possession. Debatable is whether the information provided by Petetin is worth losing the label

information! The converted 1828 6-string above is one of these. Another four of Petetin's instruments surfaced in 1995 at a Paris auction and were dispersed. Of these, one (missing from the group photo at right) ended up in the Cite de la

Musique museum - the original "smoking gun" instrument mentioned by Marlat (shown two rows below). The 9-string made its way to the Boston MFA (as seen earlier, and the other two are shown below and described by Sinier and de Ridder in *La Guitare*.²⁴



(Above) Three of the four 1995 Auction instruments. The left instrument is the Olry specimen with an exaggerated waist shown in my last section below. The middle and right instruments are Lacotes modified by Coste (the middle heptacorde highlighted directly below.

(Left) Lacote Heptacorde, modified by Coste

This instrument was owned by Coste's wife and *does* have bridge pin holes in the top and a cruder bridge showing that it was modified by Coste.

Sold at Paris auction, current whereabouts unknown.

I already mentioned above that some experts are still not positive that the extant *early* early heptacordes are all fully original. I now ask the question again regarding the *later* heptacordes. Are they original"? Can any be considered original, unless shown that Lacote himself installed the specialized Coste-style bridge system when new? How do we resolve this? As I discuss shortly, perhaps we can't.

²⁴ See *La Guitare* (Sinier de Ridder) p.55

Lacote *Heptacorde*, all original, not modified by Coste, c.1845-c.1849 (Bruno Marlat's "smoking gun" specimen)

Collection : Cité de la Musique E.995.26.1

This is the instrument with Petetin's handwritten note stating the bridge system is "Coste's own invention and work," which is likely not true. As the Marlats point out in their book, this instrument has no string holes in the top under the bridge, verifying that this Coste-style bridge was original to the instrument. It furthermore shows refinements pointing to Lacote himself being the original luthier of its components. Their conclusion is that Petetin was in error when he wrote his inscription "at least thirty years after the instrument's construction."



Petetin's inscription: "Guitare favorite de Monsieur Napoléon / Coste. le chevalet a été inventé & / posé par ce remarquable composi- / teur - professeur. Après la mort de celui-ci, cet instrument a été / cédé à M. Petetin par un des / amis de M. Coste en 1883" * * Etui en bois peint en noir garni de textile rouge * Etiquettes de l'étui : "Fragile / M. C." (manuscrit); "Eugène Petetin"



Heptacorde, 1855, modified by Coste

Collection: Bernhard Kresse

See "Featured Harp Guitar 11/08."²⁵



²⁵ https://www.harp guitars.net/history/month_hg/month-hg-11-08.htm

***Heptacorde*, 1855, modified by Coste**
(pre- and post-restoration)

James Westbrook has pointed out the
unusual rosette, atypical of Lacote.

From *La Guitare* (Sinier de Ridder)



Coste Modified Bridge and Tailpiece System

I am, frankly, out of my element here, and rely on the research and expertise of others, where I do not always find consensus. One thing seems certain. If Coste owned all the instruments that we find with "his" bridges, then he was quite the guitar collector! Coste likely also installed his modifications on instruments destined for his pupils or other patrons, and perhaps the "Coste modification" was duplicated by others. The question of whether *Lacote himself installed such systems* for Coste (and which specimens, and when) is not easily answered. Did Lacote - with Coste's input - in fact build the first such prototype? Some evidence points to yes. As for all the many other instruments shown below (including many makers besides altered Lacotes), Marlats give this quote from Coste himself, speaking of his vast instrument collection: "I can still undertake some of the modifications on my instruments. I have a student who assists me a great deal in this. I have a superb collection of guitars that have undergone such transformations."

Alex Timmerman speculates that Lacote did perhaps construct some of these bridges and was "among the first" to do so, explaining that *"the original Lacote guitars I have seen with this bridge/tailpiece type show good craftsmanship."*

Sinier and de Ridder do not believe that Lacote made these modified bridges himself as none of these features are in *"Lacote's manner, style, techniques, acoustic principles, choice of wood, varnish, etc."* While acknowledging the possibility that Lacote may have constructed the first one or more custom bridges suggested by Coste, they believe that Coste otherwise made all these bridges and tailpieces himself. They are convinced that both the concept and craftsmanship on the examples pictured in Coste's photograph and surviving specimens is Coste's own. Besides the finer details, they point out an obvious clue - that they have never heard of any Lacote guitar with an "original 'Coste' bridge" that has *no holes in the top* - i.e.: the holes from Lacote's original pin bridge are always present. However, an exception can be plainly seen in Kresse's specimen.²⁶ They suggest that Coste modified such guitars for his own use and for the many students, friends, and customers that he had throughout his long career. And indeed, there are far too many such instruments for Coste to have owned them all!

Bruno Marlat: *"While it may seem unlikely that all these modified instruments actually belonged to Coste, one might well imagine that the teacher had a hand in modifying guitars intended for the use of his pupils."*

James Westbrook: *"No doubt Coste had a large amount of instruments, but also a massive following of disciples that needed to acquire 7-string instruments one way or another."*

²⁶ http://www.harp guitars.net/history/month_hg/month-hg-11-08b.htm

Bernhard Kresse (regarding his 1855 specimen): *"There remains the possibility that Lacote did 80% of the work and left for Coste the making and installation of the bridge, tailpiece and finger rest. Possible but unlikely. These additional parts of the guitar are made with the same accuracy as the rest of the instrument. Further, the varnish doesn't show any difference in color under fluorescent light. By the way, the construction of the neck and fingerboard, its final calculation of thickness, respecting the right angle and the difference of treble/bass side requires an early presence of the bridge during the construction process."*

Clearly, we can see from the above discussion (and more below) that there is little consensus on this question - partly because of differing conclusions from the analysis of the same instruments but also largely due to the fact that there are so many different and inconsistent specimens that are being referred to. The only way I can see to resolve it would be to get all of these instruments and experts into the same room and start comparing instruments and notes!

Sinier and de Ridder believe that Coste also sometimes modified the fingerboards and the heads of certain instruments.

Non-Lacote Instruments Known or Suspected to Have Been Modified by Coste

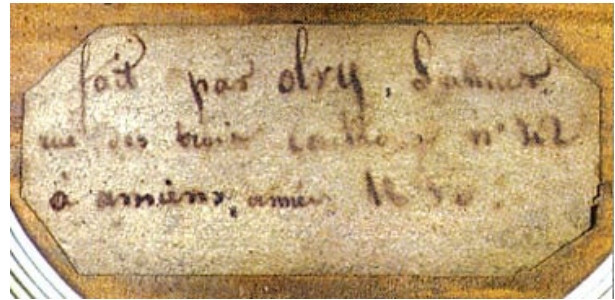


Napoléon Coste seems to have modified nearly every instrument he acquired. Here are a few additional non-Lacote instruments known or suspected to have had the "Coste touch."

At left is the wonderful "baritone" guitar Coste is pictured with in the famous photo, now in the Cite de la Musique museum.

Note his same bridge and tailpiece system and the elevated maple finger rest -elongated as needed! It is not labeled, and no one has conjectured as to the builder. Sinier and de Ridder are convinced that it was built by Coste himself.

Olry, c 1850, modified by Coste. This is an instrument from Coste's estate that he also modified. The maker's name, Olry, is handwritten on an affixed label.²⁷ Originally, in their book, Françoise de Ridder conjectured that this Olry might be the same maker as the Eulry heptacorde above. Their reasoning was exacerbated by the late Matanya Ophee, who told them (after their book was published) that "the Russian pronunciation of both *Eulry* and *Olry* are the same (and similar in French), and that it was therefore a transcription error from oral to written language."²⁸ It is now confirmed that this instrument was built by Louis Olry (1808-1866) himself - *not* to be confused with Nicolas Eulry, whose instrument is seen next.²⁹



²⁷ It is interesting to compare the interpretation of the label text by three different examiners. Sinier and de Ridder believe that the label was written by Olry himself and reads "Olry luthier, rue des 3 cailloux, n° 42 (3 pebbles street) à Amiens année 1850." Alex Timmerman examined the instrument at one time as well and presumed also that the label was by Olry himself. However, he read the label as "fait par Olry, Samier / rue des trois Castro no. 42 / a Amiens année 1850" (thinking Samier being Olry's first name). Erik Hofmann confirms that the address is "Rue des 3 cailloux, n°42" ("an address which actually existed and still does") and also sees "Olry, Luthier." Hofmann further provides Olry's first name (Louis). Neither Hofmann nor Catherine Marlat know where "Samier" came from. In the 2025 *Dictionary of French Guitar Makers*, Marlat and Hofmann write "Superior craftsmanship; his models are close to those of Lacote."

²⁸ See *La Guitare* (Sinier de Ridder), p.55-56.

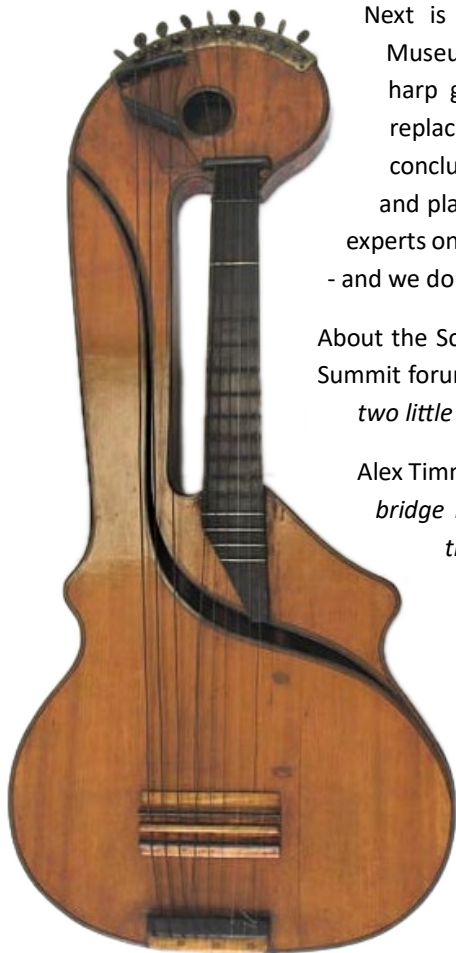
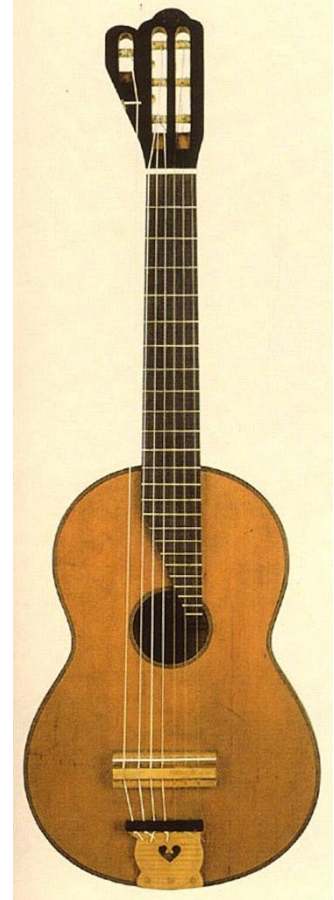
²⁹ Eric Hofmann, pers. comm. 9/24/25.

Eulry, c.1859-c.1864, modified by Coste

Coste's signature is on the back of the headstock, label gives the name "Eulry."

This instrument proved to be one of the most confounding for many years. Though labeled "*Eulry*," this was believed by Sinier de Ridder, Matanya Ophee and perhaps others to have been an oral-to-written transcription error by Petetin meant to indicate *Olry* (the two enigmatic makers being less known at the time).³⁰ It wasn't until Catherine Marlat co-authored with Erik Hofmann the new *Dictionary of French Guitar Makers* in 2025 that all guitar historians finally learned about both *Olry* and Nicholas Eulry (1796-1864). The book's entry states that Eulry partnered with Lacote in 1843, managed his shop beginning in 1848, worked alongside Lacote until the latter's retirement in 1859, and continued working there until his (Eulry's) death in 1864.³¹

Collection: Jun Sugawara (Japan)



Next is a Schenk *bogengitarre* (in the Brussels Museum), one of the well-known hollow arm harp guitars that inspired Mozzani. It has a replaced Coste-style bridge as well. The conclusion some jump to is that Coste owned and played it as well, but as stated by the many experts on this page, there is usually no way to know - and we doubt Coste could have owned all of these!

About the Schenk, Françoise de Ridder (in the Guitar Summit forum) wrote "*Without any doubt, Coste made this bridge, and you can see the two little pins (that) supported the missing piece of wood for the finger (rest).*"

Alex Timmerman replied (also in the forum) "*The Brussels Schenk guitar now shows a bridge made out of two saddles on either side of (what used to be) a tie-block through which the strings are led towards a tailpiece where they are fastened. The finest examples of this bridge design are of course seen on the guitars made by Lacote himself. The idea of replacing the old pin-bridge could be for reasons of spreading the tension that is caused by the extra added strings on Bass guitars. Lacote might have been among the first to install this kind of maple 'bridge/tailpiece' model on his bass guitars. What I can add to this is that among other things the bridge (à la Coste) on the Friedrich Schenk guitar at the MIM in Brussels is again not made to the high quality like those of the same type seen on the Lacote guitars.*"



³⁰ See *La Guitare* (Sinier de Ridder) p.55

³¹ From *Dictionary of French Guitar Makers*.



Valance, Mirecourt, c.1850, 6-string, modified Collection: Sinier de Ridder

In 2008, a 6-string Lacote-style instrument appeared that was built by Valance and modified later - again, possibly by Coste (above and below).



Valance, 6 or 7 originally, modified? Collection: Eric Mry

In 2017, another Valance was seen in the Paris shop of Arguence Lutherie, which is now in the collection of Eric Mry (at right).

Note its headstock; was this also a modification, or was it an original 7-string? Perhaps the clue is that it also has the same Coste-style modifications.



Besides my obvious fascination with the harp guitars, there are a host of other important and fascinating Lacote innovations that can be seen in the Marlat book - including Lacote's custom, enclosed tuners, a double soundboard, and adjustable micro-frets for each string!

See also:

Harp Guitar of the Month Double Feature, November 2008:³²

A Unique Lacote Décacorde
and
Lacote / Coste Heptacorde



³² https://www.harpguitars.net/history/month_hg/month-hg-11-08.htm

Acknowledgments

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About The Author: Gregg Miner is, at various times of the day, a plucked stringed instrument collector, scholar, recording artist and performer. He is widely considered the world's leading authority on harp guitars. His web sites include Harpguitars.net, Harpguitarmusic.com and Minermusic.com.

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