

## 13<sup>th</sup> Century Citole

### History:

There are only 8 existing necked instruments that I am aware of. Only 2 of them are still set up to be plucked. The only existing citole is in the British Museum and was converted into a violin during the reign of Elizabeth I as a gift to the Earl of Leicester. Therefore, it currently has a curved soundboard. It is carved all over quite deeply and, as a result, its use as a playable instrument is somewhat suspect. Illuminations found in various types of iconography show many different shapes of body, often with an elaborately carved head. The body shape of this instrument is based on The Cantigas de santa maria and a number of pieces of Spanish church iconography.

All of the existing instruments share the same construction details. They are carved from a single block of wood and a soundboard and, if present, fingerboard are applied to the body. The bodies are made of a hardwood and the soundboards all appear to be spruce.

The general description that has come from the conference held on the British Museum citole is as follows: A Monoxylon constructed body with a tapered, somewhat shovel shape and a thumbhole. A carved head and an applied sound board and fingerboard.

### Construction:

I started with a very thick block of American Black Walnut. Getting an appropriate species of European hardwood would have been prohibitive and I had the walnut on hand. I happened to have some European spruce for the soundboard. The fingerboard and bridge are also a local maple. The nut is made of boxwood and the frets are ebony. The strings are Nylgut, a synthetic substitute for gut. This instrument spends some time outdoors, and gut strings are extremely sensitive to changes in heat and humidity and I am lazy. The body shape is based on a number of different pieces of iconography: The Cantigas de Santa Maria, the cathedral in Burgos, cathedral in Leon, cathedral de Sasmon and others. Though not clear in these pictures, there is evidence of a carved head in higher resolution pictures.

I used as many power tools as possible, but a great deal of handwork was still necessary with chisels scrapes and files getting quite a workout. For this piece, I chose to carve a unicorn. Medieval unicorns are based on goats rather than the more modern horse based ones. I thought that the contrast of the beard, cowlick and horn suited the project. They are made of maple. The tuning pegs are made of boxwood.

Bibliography:

The British Museum Citole: New Perspectives. 2015 (collection of papers from the conference)

Musical Instruments through the Ages, Dr. Alexander Buchner, 1961



