

Christiane Maria      Watermarks in Viennese Opera Scores: Toward a  
Hornbachner,      Comprehensive Database of Music Paper 1760–  
Constanze Marie      1774  
Köhn

Hundreds of works by Haydn, Gluck, and other Viennese composers are known solely from contemporary copies. These manuscripts, mostly consisting of Italian paper and written by professional copyists, normally remained undated. Thus, determining the chronological position of the works and the significance of the source is difficult. As professional copyists changed papers relatively often, a survey of datable paper allows for dating manuscripts written by Viennese copyists. The aim of the research project “Paper and Copyists in Viennese Opera Scores” is to provide a database for the period 1760 to 1774, analyzing about 300 volumes of opera scores from the Habsburg collections of that time.

To capture the identified watermarks, for the first time in musicology, transmitted light photography is used on a grand scale. With this inexpensive method, which forgoes elaborate equipment, two photos of single pages are made, using front light and transmitted light respectively. By digitally subtracting the images and rescaling the colour hues, the watermark is rendered accurately visible in its form. The procedure is carried out utilizing Matlab and Photoshop for post processing. Using this method, not only the isolated watermark is captured, but the entire paper sheet as well as its twin are depicted.

The resulting images are made available in a database which can also be accessed through the metadatabase Bernstein as well as the International Inventory of Musical Sources (RISM). In addition to the paper, however, the database also records the individual handwritings of copyists and further characteristics of the scores (quires, staff ruling). Rather than single elements, the combination of these features is the most valuable clue to dating. Based on this integrated database, it is also possible, for example, to draw conclusions on the processing and distribution routes of music paper.

Keywords:      music paper, transmitted light photography, online database