

The Danish Royal Chapel's Part-Books from 1541 and Ludwig Mair – once again

By Karsten Christensen

When, in *Music from the Time of Christian III. Selected Compositions from the Part Books of the Royal Chapel (1541), Part One* in *Dania Sonans IV*, København 1978, p.16, Henrik Glahn described the external, physical condition of the old part-books, he remarked in a general way, no doubt more for the sake of completeness than anything else, that it was not possible at the present time to identify an *LM*-signature that appears several times on the contemporary blind-tooled leather binding. The British musicologist Peter Downey thought he had a solution to this problem, however. In a communication to this *Yearbook*, vol. X (1979), p. 223f he proposed that the *LM*-signature must in all probability, by analogy with the signature on Christian III's part-books from 1556, be regarded as the initials of the principal court trumpeter. A glance at the possibilities elsewhere in Europe made it appear natural for Peter Downey to single out Emperor Maximilian I's court trumpeter, Ludwig Mair, as the man behind the *LM*-initials, since it seemed possible to establish by other means that he was alive as late as 1533.

The „conclusive evidence“ for the correctness of this thesis was found by Peter Downey in the National Archives in Copenhagen, where the royal household accounts for 1530 „provides not only a list of trumpeters, many with Italian names, but moreover the following on page 7:

*xc g(ulden) Ludewigen Meyger Vor ring(en) darunter ix g(ulden)
de de hauenmeisterin kreg.*

(the citation follows here the more correct transcription printed in *Meddelelser fra Rentekammeret*, Kbh. 1871, p. 32).

Thus Jørgen Heide's predecessor as head trumpeter at the Danish court was Ludwig Mair....“

This fascinating theory of a direct connection with the Viennese court also provided an admirable explanation of the part-books' otherwise somewhat puzzling dating to 1541, the year before Jørgen Heide, who on paleographic grounds has been identified as the copyist of the books, was appointed trumpeter at the Danish court. Nor did the observation fail to have effect: thus it was incorporated into Glahn's continuation of his edition in *Dania Sonans* V, 1986, and it was later accepted by Gunnar Larsson in his study *Spelmän, trompetare, kantorer och deras musik vid vasakungarnas hov* in *Livrustkammaren, Journal of The Royal Armoury*, vol. 18:5, Stockholm 1990, p. 14.

Nevertheless, Downey's construction is based on sand. None of the indications on which it is built can withstand a closer investigation. The main argument, Ludwig Mair's name in the royal household accounts in Copenhagen, would have been interesting had it occurred in such a way that one could reasonably conclude that it referred to a musician. However, as the citation clearly indicates, all we are told is that a certain Ludwig Mair has been paid 90 guilders for some rings that it must be presumed he has sold to the royal family. It is thus not exactly a court musician of which one thinks first in this connection and the similarity of names is in itself not enough – both Ludwig and Meier are too ordinary for that. It should be added that this entry in the accounts does not occur in the vicinity of the entries which must be supposed to record payments of wages to the court musicians, the names of which, incidentally, are not especially Italian. Finally, we can establish that Ludwig Meiger only appears this one time in the surviving accounts from these years. Had he been engaged over a period of time we would have expected several payments, as is the case with the other musicians.

To return to our starting-point, the *LM*-initials: Carl Roos long ago presented evidence that clearly undermines the theory in his fundamental article, „*Om nogle signerede og nogle ikke signerede danske Bogbind fra det 16. Aarhundrede*“ [Concerning some signed and some unsigned Danish bookbindings from the 16th Century], in *Bogvennen* (1929), which showed that the narrow roll with flower decorations bearing the *LM*-signature has been used to decorate a number of bindings that have no connection with the court. Later investigations have fully substantiated this observation.

It is regrettably necessary to conclude that there is no firm basis for associating the musician Ludwig Mair with the Danish court.

However this does not mean that the bindings of the part-books are entirely without interest. It is of primary importance that the bindings can be related unequivocally to a Copenhagen bookbindery and that it is thereby established that they are not imported. The initiative for making the part-books must in this regard be localized to Copenhagen.

That it would have been agreeable, when rejecting Downey's *LM*-theory, to

have been able to give a complete explanation of what, in that case, the initials stood for is another matter. Carl Roos could not, and unfortunately neither can I. In the normal way of things the signature ought to represent the name of a bookbinder, but not necessarily the Copenhagen bookbinder who bound the 1541 part-books. Bookbinders' tools for decorating were objects to be bought and sold – for example, when a bindery went out of business – so *LM* may well be the initials of a previous owner. However that may be, we have no archival record of a Danish bookbinder from the 1540s with these initials.

A more detailed discussion of the bindings of the „1541 partbooks“ (KB 1872) – and, for that matter, of the „1556 partbooks“ (KB 1873), which Carl Roos unfortunately came to mix together with the earlier set in the above-mentioned article – belongs in another context; however it may be briefly mentioned here that also from the point of view of the book-historian the 1541 dating on KB 1872 is remarkable. None of the half-score other bindings from the same workshop which are known to me can be dated to before 1547 and those which we can determine with exactitude are grouped closely together in the period 1547-52. It must be pointed out, however, that our knowledge of bookbindings and bookbinders in Copenhagen in the 1540s is slender – for example, we seem only to know the name of a single bookbinder, Hans Krampe, who bound 4 „discant books“ for the church in Malmø in 1542 and in 1545 was paid for binding books for the University. His workshop continued active until the late 1550s.

This absence of evidence is clearly insufficient reason to refuse to accept the 1541 dating of the KB 1872 bindings. Four of the five KB 1873 bindings, incidentally, are decorated with, among other things, a broad roll with the arms of Copenhagen and the date 1542 and the master-signature *MP*. Also concerning this well-known bindery, from which many volumes are preserved, one is obliged for the time-being at least to refer the reader to the already-mentioned work by Roos.

Finally, it should be mentioned for the sake of completeness that the „1556 part-books“ (KB 1873) are not, as asserted by Glahn in *Dania Sonans* IV, p. 30, signed *E.H.*, a claim which perhaps misled Peter Downey mistakenly to draw an analogy. The four part-books referred to are all stamped *C K Z D* (that is: *Christian König zu Dänemark*, or something similar) together with the name of the voice-part. Furthermore, vols. 1, 3 and 4 have the year 1556 stamped on the back cover, and vol. 1, the Discant book, *and only this book*, is also stamped with the name *ERHART HERDEGEN*. Vol. 5, *Quinta vox*, is decorated with entirely different, but also contemporary, stamps with the signatures *HW-1531* and *AB*, of which the latter could perhaps represent Augustinus Bogbinder [Bookbinder], who occurs several times in the archives from the 1550s in Copenhagen.