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▶ To cite this version:

Florence Gétreau. Regional Schools of Instrument-Making in France: Their Representation in Public Collections. Regional traditions in Instrument Making - Challenges to the Museum Community, ICOM Comité International des musées et collections d'instruments de musique (CIMCIM), Sep 1996, Vienne, Austria. pp.35-44. halshs-00117522

HAL Id: halshs-00117522 https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00117522

Submitted on 25 Jul 2016

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Comité International des Musées et Collections d'Instruments de Musique

CIMCIM PUBLICATIONS

International Committee of Musical Instrument Museums & Collections

No. 4 ISSN 1019-9977

REGIONAL TRADITIONS IN INSTRUMENT MAKING

Challenges to the Museum Community

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Leipzig/Halle (Saale) 1999

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Regional Schools of Instrument-making in France: Their Representation in Public Collections

If we take a rapid look at the publications existing on French musical instrument-making, they essentially concern Paris. This has been the case since the last century. Indeed, the administrative organisation of this country, its centralism for about a thousand years, and the high quality of its musical life can explain that the capital gave rise to the most structured organization of instrument makers¹ because of their great number and prospects. The supremacy of its production in number and quality, its crossroad position, its instruments with well-defined features, its high-class manufacturers, its inventions, sometimes internationally diffused, and finally its historical collections can provide an explanation for this prominent situation. For this last point also, Paris played an avant-garde role as early as 1793, being the first city to found a public collection.

The unique museum in France, with a national character since the beginning, fully specialized in musical instruments, the former Musée du Conservatoire and today Musée de la Musique, preserves an overwhelming majority of French items. A systematic analysis of the registers² gives the following proportions: 65% for France, the rest for other countries. For France, we find that 70% are Parisian items. Did the curators of that Museum neglect regional centres of instrument making during 150 years of acquisitions? Is there a sort of low level of inventiveness in French provinces? Was the procedure to create a public heritage smaller elsewhere than in Paris? These are the questions I will try to answer in this paper.

What do we know, first, about the organization and practical aspects of this profession in different regions of France? Until recently, we had at our disposal some biographical articles published in local historical periodicals and studies on some centres with a more developed and internationally famous production. Research by Henry Coutagne, for example about Gaspard Duiffoproucart in Lyon³, two generations later by Léon Vallas⁴ about the same city, by Albert Jacquot about Lorraine⁵, by Thoinan and Mauger about the Hotteterre in La Couture-Boussey and Paris⁶, are symptomatic of a new interest born at the end of the 19th century for regional production centres having generated famous dynasties of makers at the service of aristocratic music. But for the rest of France data were almost non-existent.

In the middle of the 20th century, the work done by French ethnomusicologists like Claudie Marcel-Dubois pays attention to regional organology, mainly anonymous. She studied particular instruments⁷ and

special ensembles⁸ from certain French regions, trying to outline pertinent typological characteristics. But nobody seems to take into account the status of the maker. Is he above all a musician? Or a craftsman only occasionally active as a maker? For the past 30 years, many studies have enabled us to consider the existence of regional schools of instrument making, sometimes of a very high level in some urban centres and disseminated throughout the country, while the context of production and regional features of folk instruments gave rise to a real interest, then to academic and scholarly works supported by regionalistic and folk-music movements.

THE SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE PROFESSION DURING THE ANCIEN RÉGIME

The organization in Paris is unique in France. At the end of the Renaissance, the establishment of a special guild of instrument makers of all sorts has no equivalent elsewhere in France, even if some cities were influenced by it. The Parisian by-laws are well known and were published several times (Pontécoulant, 1861; Pierre, 1893; Loubet de Sceaury, 1949), and their prescriptions are very similar to those in other countries.

Recent research has confirmed that only Mirecourt established, quite late, a specialized profession of instrument makers ("luthiers"), other regional centres having too small a development to need it. In Rouen in the 18th century, for instance, Louis-Jean-Baptiste Fortier, "maker of flutes, oboes, bassoons and other wind instruments", along with four other makers came into conflict beetween 1708 and 1726, with the new by-laws introduced by the dance masters and fiddlers. Fortier and his colleagues lost their lawsuit, and Fortier is afterwards called "instrument player" in official documents9.

In Lyon, the situation is quite different. As an established crossroad, this city attracted a great number of skilled makers because of its prosperity, its international fame, and mainly because of its special status as a free city, open to the free exercise of trade for natives as well as foreigners. These dispositions were confirmed in 1486 by King Charles VIII and once more by Louis XII in 1511, long before the establishment of the Parisian by-laws. As Claude de Rubys noted in his booklet about the rights of the inhabitants of Lyon, this freedom allowed a real endeavor to bring local skills to a very high level, even to perfection¹⁰. This freedom gave rise, for example, to a brilliant production in the field of harpsichords¹¹.

In Toulouse there was no special guild for makers. According to their speciality, makers were part of a different trade. Flute makers were, for example, members of the turners' guild, which registered their by-laws in 1464. Modified in 1581, these include not only all turned domestic objects but also recorders, flutes, fifes etc.¹². Shortly afterwards, Toulouse set up a guild for string instrument makers, which after 1690 was stimulated by two Italian

specialists who settled there and created a sort of dynastic monopoly until the end of the 18th century¹³. It is interesting to note that Vincent Tibaut, from whom we know three remarkable harpsichords demonstrating a great understanding of sound production and remarkable technical skill, was accepted into the guild of cabinet makers of Toulouse in January 1673. Throughout the course of his professional life, in official documents he bears the title of cabinet maker, which probably indicates that he could hardly live from building only instruments¹⁴.

Several other big cities like Marseille¹⁵, Montpellier, Le Havre, Rouen¹⁶, Orléans¹⁷, and Rennes¹⁸ had string instrument makers during the 17th and 18th centuries, without, however, any guild. In **Strasbourg**, it seems that string instrument makers were part of the carpenters' guild until the Revolution¹⁹.

Mirecourt is a special case. In fact, as demonstrated recently by Noëlle Gouillard²⁰, it was only belatedly, in May 1732, that a guild for violin makers was established there. We know of only eight active makers before these bylaws, 30 between 1741 and 1750, and then about 70 in the last quarter of the century. In tax registers the word "luthier" appears only in 1736, and "archetier" (bow maker) only in 1758.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRODUCTION IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Big production centres are those which are capable of mass production. First of all, Mirecourt. A recent sociological research by David Charasse²¹ shows how ancestral training by family tradition or from master to apprentice has declined during the 19th century, when the rigid structure of the guild no longer existed and industrial production took over. Indeed, new technologies were used, for instance, by the firms Thibouville (1860-1968), Laberte (1780-1969) and Couesnon (1919-1967). Even where instruments were handmade by the same craftsmen, these firms divided the labour among them, and produced instruments in very large quantities, the soundboard being arched with steam and necks mass-produced. The training was very brief and therefore fragmented. Even if the factories produced "white" violins to be varnished at home by specialized craftmen, many workers from the factories were also real makers working privately during their free time. On the other hand, the top hierarchy of the firms stemmed from the great dynasties of makers. But some firms also had "artistic workshops", where instruments were built completely by the same craftsmen, left unvarnished and neckless for Parisian dealers to complete the work before adding their signatures. Violin makers in Mirecourt, even if there were some exceptions, remained at the bottom of the hierarchy: they were only workers.

In La Couture-Boussey, the situation was quite similar. While three of the major makers born and trained there later settled in Paris, where they brought their experience²², makers working in this large village of Normandy

during the 19th century produced a great number of second-class instruments for widely expanding military music and bands.

Other regional centres also increased their fame during this century. Marseille, for example, with pianos. The firm Boisselot²³, inventive and dynamic in trade (doing a lot of business with Spain) was quite competitive compared with the most famous Parisian firms, and captured the attention of virtuosos such as Liszt during their stays in the south of France. In Nice, the regional production of guitars and violins met the demand of numerous amateurs²⁴. In Lille, the Hel dynasty for a long time held first place in the field of string-quartet instruments.

In the 19th century, we have also to take into account a special traditional production for dance musicians, developed as a sign of regional identification at the time of large-scale migrations of workers. Hurdy-gurdy making was predominant in three main centres, each with very specific characteristics. In the centre of France, in the village of Jenzat (Allier), there was a revival of instrument making after 1820, with many makers (the dynasty of Pajot and Pimpard, Angioux, Decante, the Cailhe, Tixier, and the Nigout), perfecting a lute-shaped model with large proportions and gay decoration, very easily identified and widely disseminated. In Bourg-en-Bresse, in the mid-19th century, another centre appears with makers such as Bas, Convers, Clerc, and Blanc et Desmaris, some of them imitating with real refinement the style of baroque Parisian makers. In Mirecourt, people like Colson produced more diversified hurdy-gurdies.

In addition, very distinctive types of bagpipes were developed in the centre of France (Allier, Puy-de-Dôme), producing instruments not only for various areas of France, but also for Parisian dance parties held by the numerous provincial immigrants. At least seven major makers, with very personal styles, often living on the proceeds of another profession (Joseph Béchonnet, Jean Dechaud, Félix Débardat, Jean-Baptiste Pajot called Pajot fils, Joseph Pajot called Pajot jeune, being the most famous), were active throughout the 19th century long up to the 1930s²⁷. In a similar way, the production of the tambourin/galoubet was notable in Marseille, Aix, and Arles during the 19th century²⁸.

CREATING A HERITAGE WITH THIS REGIONAL PRODUCTION

As early as 1861, a museum of musical instruments was founded in the Conservatoire de Paris. Because at first it reflected the eclectic taste of Louis Clapisson, an enthusiast for precious and decorative baroque instruments from all countries, without consideration of the makers, the collection only began to show the development of musical instrument-making under the directorate of Gustave Chouquet. Even so, the predominant interest was for Paris and other foreign capitals.

One generation later, in La Couture-Boussey, a very original project was set up. Here, a modest society of woodwind-instrument turners reacted in 1885 to a brutal reduction in prices: the workers who specialized in finishing the instruments founded a syndicate in October 1887. Three months later, they decided to create a "Professional Museum for Training". Its aims were to "preserve all woodwind instruments, spare parts, raw material, to re-establish (or restore) the history of instrument making in La Couture and other places, in a way to facilitate the study of theory and practical professional training for workers and employers"²⁹.

This museum was intended to collect and preserve models (originals or replicas) of the 17th and 18th centuries to establish the historical basis of making in La Couture; modern instruments from the 19th century were to serve to establish improvements and "stimulate solutions to modern difficulties". The founding board planned that "objects could be made accessible to professionals wishing to copy or study them; instruments should be in playing or testing order; it could be also possible to have a systematic registration of copyright for technical drawings, models, and improvements".

Symptomatically created after the first real economic depression in this profession, this small museum collected about 200 pieces, including several replicas of baroque models (no originals being available) and mainly instruments from the selling-off of the famous Lot firm, as well as pieces from the production of other firms whose proprietors, as members of the board, offered them in a sort of final burst of energy to preserve this fragile heritage.

On the other hand, at the end of the century, several provincial string quartetists' collections preserved elements of this provincial production. An example is that of Antoine Gautier (1825–1904), a lawyer working in Nice³⁰ since 1856, then in Naples up to 1866, who was a violin player and a friend of the violin maker François Bovis. Among the instruments he collected we find four guitars by François Bastien (c. 1819–1826); one guitar by Pierre Pacherel; a violin by Pacherel, 1840; and a viola by the same, 1858. In addition to many Italian instruments, he had an *arpiguitar* by Pacquet in Marseille, 1875; a cornet A. Guérin, Marseille, 19th century; and a violin by Richelme, Marseille, 1869. Today, more than 200 instruments from his collection are preserved in the *Musée Massémo* in Nice.

In a similar way in Marseille, Louis Grobet, an amateur violinist and collector of art objects, had interest in the old production of Marseille and its surroundings. In 1919, his widow gave to the city of Marseille the complete collection and the hôtel where it is still housed. Among some 60 instruments there are several *galoubets* by A. Guérin, Long and Grasset; a *pardessus* by Barthélémy Vaillan, made in Marseille in 1704; and a bass viol by Valler in Aix, 1679. But none of the violin makers working in Marseille at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century is represented.

Several regional ethnographic museums collected also traditional or historical instruments, for example, those in Marseille (Musée du Vieux Marseille), Aix-en-Provence (Musée du Vieil Aix and Musée Granet), and Arles (Musée Arlaten), all of them with a lot of tambourins and galoubets; Bayonne (Musée basque) and Tarbes (Musée Massey), each preserving 38 regional instruments; Lourdes (Musée Pyrénéen) and Perpignan (Musée de la Casa Païral) with Catalan instruments and instruments of the cobla, an ensemble consisting of a flageolet, a tenora (oboe), and a fiscorn (brass instrument); Brive (Musée Ernest Rubin), having a section on accordions; and Nancy (Musée Lorrain) with serinettes, monocords, zithers, and a precious violin by Nicolas Médard, 1665.

Among decorative arts museum, some have important items of a very high level. Lyon, with the harpsichord by Pierre Donzelague (1711) and Bordeaux, with a spinet by "Basse à Marseille 1791", have thereby a quite typical representation of the brilliant harpsichord making in these cities. Among 30 instruments preserved in the *Musée Paul Dupuy* in Toulouse, we can mention a piano by Uferman in Toulouse, 1840; regals made in the south of France; a mechanical organ by Jeandel in Toulouse; an ottavino by Gautier in Toulouse, c. 1800; a clarinet by Boisselot in Montpellier; a lyre-guitar by Mast in Toulouse, 1803, and another one by Mast, 1805; among the folk instruments, a bagpipe from Gascogne and a "chabrette" from Périgord.

In the same way, in Colmar, aside from precious instruments of a high level of international or national origin, we find a piano by Tritsch in Colmar, c. 1815; a square piano by Frost in Strasbourg, 1837; and a bassoon by Buhner & Keller. Strasbourg has certainly the richest collection among decorative art museums, with about 60 items. It very accurately reflects the local production: a Hans Gaspar Wolff bass viol,1607; a Hans Gaspar Wolff lute, 1651; a theorbo (1661) and a tenor viol (1669) by Matteus Epp; a hurdy gurdy (1702) and a cello (1728) by Johann Christoph Vetter called Cousin; a viola by Johann Friedrich Storck, 1767; a harp (1782), violin and viola by Johann Reinhart Storck, end of the 18th century; an arch-cittern (1791) and guitar by Dietrich Storck; viola by Bernhardt Schwarz, 1796; a lyre-guitar, guitar and violin (1840) by Schwarz frères; a clarinet by Keller frères, c. 1800; a horn and a flute by Buhner & Keller, c. 1800; a bassoon by Lindemann, c. 1810; a flute, violin and saxhorn by Charles Roth; a fragment of a soundboard made by Johann Heinrich Silbermann, 1757; a square piano by Philipp H. Jauch, c. 1790; one by Philipp Schott, c. 1810; another one by Chrétien Loegel, 1812; and an upright piano by Bauer, c. 1860.

Finally, we must not forget collections initiated by violin makers themselves. In the *Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse* in Lille³¹, a selection of the Hel collection (76 items) acquired by the municipality in 1957 has been exhibited since 1989. Pierre-Joseph Hel (1842–1902) opened his workshop in 1865 in Lille. He exhibited instruments in 1882 in Lille (International Exhibition) and in 1889 and 1900 in Paris. His son Pierre (1884–1937) succeeded him. It is quite difficult to know when the collection was initiated. It shows an interest in the violin

family and the production of citizens of the region: citterns by Gilbson, London (1768) and by G. Le Blond, Dunkerque,1777; a guitar by L. Delannoy, Lille, 1833; a clarinet by Jacques Printemps, Lille, c. 1800; an ophicleide by Carpentier, Hondschoote, c. 1820; a violin with an experimental shape by Joseph Pouille, Lille, 1889; a mandolin by Pouille, 1890; and a viola d'amore by Georges Mougenot.

In Mirecourt, thanks to the action of violin makers and the national association called "Groupement des luthiers et archetiers de France", about 200 instruments and documents have gradually been collected recently. This collection has been officially supported by public authorities since 1989. It is developing today according to an acquisition policy devoted not only to the production of Mirecourt but also to makers working elsewhere but native of Mirecourt, and also trying to show the important trade of this place and its specific role in the training of makers.

The Musée des Musiques populaires in Montluçon, in a very different way, first collected, under the initiative of Georges Henri Rivière and Jean Favière, Curator in Bourges, several dozens of hurdy-gurdies since the 1960s. In 1991 it had the opportunity to acquire about 90 European and many French bagpipes also with several other instruments and workshops. But the importance of this collection, twice as big in this field as other major collections in the world (for example, in Paris, Brussels, New York, and Edinburgh) remains in the very good representation of the production of central France (70 items)³². A recent temporary exhibition devoted to the maker Sautivet allows us to appreciate its high level³³. It is the nucleus of a much larger project devoted to all types of traditional and popular music, including contemporary practices, and far exceeding the presentation of regional schools in instrument making. It concerns more the different forms and social uses of music.

In view of all these regional collections, the Musée national des Arts et Traditions populaires, in Paris, has had, since its origins, a synthetic purpose. Devoted to French ethnology, its aims are to give a general view of French traditions. The musical section was initiated by Claudie Marcel-Dubois in 1939 and Marguerite Pichonnet-Andral. They collected field recordings, information and instruments34. Apart from a special interest in the production of Jenzat (several makers were interviewed and prepared for the Museum sequences to demonstrate their production process35), it seems that the general conception of these scholars was to establish a typology, incorporating regional variations and typical musical ensembles. Choices seem to have been made without attention to instrument making per se, in that it does not show the nature of the workshop, or the relationship between master and followers. But visiting the two galleries of this national museum, the visitor can discover the main instruments and musical ensembles considered as emblems of different French regions: for the Vosges, the épinette; for Bretagne, bombarde and biniou koz; for Provence, tambourin and galoubet; for the centre of France, hurdygurdies and several types of bagpipes; for Occitany in Roussillon, the cobla; and for the Pyrénées, the tambourin à cordes and chirula or the drum and txistu.

Even if much work still has to be done to determine the great diversity of regional circumstances and to study their characteristics, after the initial research and collecting done by pioneers, many people in recent years have been engaged in making the public aware of this heritage through many publications³⁶, general articles³⁷, and thematic exhibitions³⁸. Finally, thanks to the Direction du Patrimoine, Ministère de la Culture, a systematic pre-inventory of all the regional museums preserving instruments was initiated fifteen years ago. Even if the results are not known to many, it certainly prepares the way for further collective work to extend this precious database³⁹.

- 1 Cf. Constant Pierre: La communauté des maîtres faiseurs d'instruments de musique. In: Les facteurs d'instruments de musique. Paris: Sagot 1893 (Reprint Minkoff 1971), pp. 7–60. By-laws, dated 1599.
- 2 Tableau des acquisitions. In: Florence Gétreau: Aux origines du musée de la Musique. Les collections instrumentales du Conservatoire de musique de Paris. 1793–1993. Paris: Klincksieck 1996, pp. 642–753.
- 3 Henry Coutagne: Gaspard Duiffoproucart et les luthiers lyonnais du XVIe siècle. Paris: Fischbacher 1893.
- 4 Léon Vallas: *Un siècle de musique et de théâtre à Lyon (1688–1789)*. Lyon 1932, (Reprint Minkoff 1971).
- 5 Albert Jacquot: Les Médard. Paris: Fischbacher 1896; La lutherie lorraine et française. Paris: Fischbacher 1912 (Reprint Minkoff 1985).
- 6 Ernest Thoinan: Les Hotteterre et les Chédeville: célèbres joueurs et facteurs de flûtes, hautbois, bassons et musettes des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. Paris: Edmond Sagot 1894; Nicolas Mauger: Les Hotteterre: célèbres joueurs et facteurs de flûtes, hautbois, bassons et musettes des XVIIe & XVIIIe siècles. Nouvelles recherches. Paris: Fischbacher 1912.
- 7 Claudie Marcel-Dubois: Instrument musical populaire en France. In: Travaux du Premier Congrès international de folklore. Paris 1937. Tours: Arrault 1938, pp. 377–381; Bombardes et binious. Bretagne, art populaire, ethnographie régionale. (Exhibition catalouge). Paris, Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires 1951, pp. 101–113; articles "Cornemuse", "Alboka", "Bedon", "Cabrette", "Crécelle", "Mirliton", "Tambourin de Gascogne", "Vielle à roue" in: Larousse de la Musique. Paris: Larousse 1957–1958; L'ethnomusicologie. In: Jacques Chailley: Précis de musicologie. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1958, pp. 30–40; article "Musique populaire française" et article "Instrument de musique". In: Encyclopédie de la musique. Paris: Fasquelle 1959.
- 8 Claudie Marcel-Dubois, The type and nature of French instrumental ensembles. In: Studia instrumentorum musicae popularis. II. Bericht über die 3. Internationale Arbeitstagung der Study Group on Folk Musical Instruments des International Folk Music Council in Stockholm 1969 herausgegeben von Erich Stockmann. Stockholm: Musikhistoriska Museet 1972, pp. 173–183.
- 9 Archives de la Seine-Maritime. Cf. Petit journal de l'exposition Musée Instrumental du Conservatoire. Acquisitions récentes. 1982–1984. Paris 1984–1985, p. 2.
- 10 Claude de Rubys: Privilèges des habitans de Lyon. Lyon: A. Grypphe 1574, p. 48.
- 11 Colombe Verlet: Jalons pour une recherche sur la facture de clavecins en province. In: Recherches sur la musique classique en France. 4 (1964), pp. 101–104; Laurent Puissiau: Gilbert Desruisseaux, facteur de clavecins lyonnais. In: Musique–Images–Instruments. N° 2 (1996), pp. 142–169.

- 12 Statuts du corps et communauté des Maîtres tourneurs de Toulouse, Archives municipales de Toulouse, HH 67. Luc Charles-Dominique: Facteurs et marchands d'instruments de musique à Toulouse du XVII au XVIII e siècle. In: Pastel. Musiques et danses traditionnelles en Midi-Pyrénées. N° 28 (1996), pp. 28–36.
- Archives municipales de Toulouse, HH 73. Luc Charles-Dominique: op. cit., pp. 28–30. See also Norbert Dufourcq: Documents sur les Maîtres faiseurs de cordes à Toulouse à la fin du XVIIe siècle. In: Revue de musicologie. 41 (1958), pp.88–95.
- 14 Archives municipales de Toulouse, BB 234. Florence Gétreau: Vincent Tibaut de Toulouse, ébéniste et facteur de clavecins : données biographiques. In: Musique-Images-Instruments. No. 2 (1996), pp. 190-196.
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- 26 La vielle en Bresse. [Exhibition catalogue] Bourg-en-Bresse: Musée de Brou 1985.
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- 30 Michel Foussard: Antoine Gautier. In: Guitares. Chefs-d'oeuvre des collections de France. Paris: La Flûte de Pan 1980, pp. 277-289; Josiane Bran-Ricci: Guitares, luths et mandolines. Une exposition d'instruments de musique de la Ville de Nice. In: Nice historique. Un siècle de musique à Nice. N° 2/3 (1994), pp. 129-163.
- 31 La collection Hel. Instruments de musique anciens réunis par deux luthiers lillois. [Exhibition catalogue] Lille: Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse 1989–1990.
- 32 See specially 10 bagpipes: 2 Sautivet; 11 Béchonnet; 30 parisian *cabrettes*; 2 Gaillard; 6 *chabrettes limousines* or from Périgord; 1 from landes; 1 *veuze*, 3 *binious*; 1 from bresse.
- 33 Les cornemuses de George Sand. Autour de Jean Sautivet, fabricant et joueur de musette dans le Berry (1796–1867). [Exhibition catalogue] Montluçon: Musée des musiques populaires 1996.

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