The Schnitzer Family of Nuremberg and a Newly Rediscovered Trombone

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It is not every day that one “redisCOVERs” a sixteenth-century trombone in a provincial museum (Figure 1), let alone an instrument by Anton Schnitzer the elder, a member of one of the most illustrious families of Nuremberg brass instrument makers. Even more remarkable about our “find” is that this trombone has been openly on display in the southern Bavarian town of Altötting for over a century.1 Besides presenting this “new” old trombone, we would like to take this opportunity to review the available information concerning the Schnitzer family as well as to place the Altötting trombone into the context of the surviving instruments by Anton Schnitzer.

The Schnitzer Family

The Schnitzer family ranks among the most famous dynasties of musical instrument-makers of the sixteenth century.2 Members of this wide-ranging family were musicians, woodwind makers, and trumpet and trombone makers. Fritz Jahn identified two families with this name, without being able to establish a connection between them.3 More recent research by Ekkehard Nickel has uncovered a possible link between what are very likely two branches of the same family: one branch consisting of town musicians and woodwind makers, and the other made up of brass-instrument makers.4

The founder of the dynasty was Albrecht Schnitzer the elder (d. 1524/25), a town musician and woodwind maker in Munich. Of Albrecht’s six sons, four settled in Nuremberg: Sigmund the elder as a town musician in 1503, Hans the elder as a town musician in 1506, Mathes as a town musician in 1522, and Albrecht the younger as a drummer (Trommelschlager) in 1521; Albrecht’s sons Anton and Arsazius remained in Munich, where

Figure 1
The Altötting Schnitzer trombone.
they too were employed as town musicians. Sigmund the elder, Hans the elder, Mathes, and Arsazius were also active as woodwind makers.  

Anton Schnitzer the elder first appears in the documents in 1558, when he was given Nuremberg citizenship. Unequivocal evidence concerning his relationship to the family of Albrecht the elder has yet to come to light. Nevertheless, Nickel has suggested the following scenario: Anton the Elder was the son of Albrecht’s son Anton. After Anton’s death (ca. 1530) his widow Anna moved with their son Anton (the elder) from Munich to Nuremberg and married the brass instrument maker Georg (Jörg) Stengel, called Neuschel. The young Anton apprenticed to his stepfather, succeeded him in 1557, and became master in 1562.

A letter from the Nuremberg town council to Emperor Maximilian II, dated 18 June 1568, would seem to support this supposition. The letter contains the request that Anton Schnitzer be granted permission to use a crown as his maker’s mark, and also states that “his deceased forefathers were for many years trumpet makers here and always employed

Figure 2
Anton Schnitzer’s gravestone in Nuremberg. Photo by Sabine Klaus.
The right to use a crown as maker’s mark had previously been held by the Neuschels, whom Schnitzer obviously considered to be his forebears. Anton’s workshop, which he inherited from Neuschel, was located in Nuremberg’s St. Lorenz district, in the Grasersgasse, which today coincidentally runs alongside the Germanisches Nationalmuseum. It was also in Anton’s house in the Grasersgasse that the former Stadtpfeiffer and flute maker Hans Schnitzer the elder was residing at the time of his death in 1565, surely an indication that the two Schnitzer families had more in common than just their name.

Anton the elder died in 1608, an honored and well-to-do citizen, and was buried in the St. Rochus Cemetery, where his gravestone can still be seen (Figure 2). Whereas the headstones of most Nuremberg craftsmen depict the tools of their trade, Anton Schnitzer’s, which is cast in bronze, resembles those of the town’s nobility. Under a helmet is an impressive display of heraldic emblems: the half-eagle (of Prussia, Brandenburg, Hohenzollern, and imperial Poland), the lion (of Bavaria and Bohemia), the fleur-de-lys (of the Bourbons), and the crossbow (of the Habsburgs), the regalia of Schnitzer’s illustrious customers from all over Europe.

Anton’s sons Anton the younger, Hans, and Jobst, as well as his grandson Eberhard (Anton the younger’s son) also became brass instrument makers. There is no evidence that the Nuremberg trumpet and trombone maker Erasmus Schnitzer was related to the Schnitzer families under discussion here.

The Altötting Schnitzer trombone

Provenance

Altötting is a small town in Bavaria, located approximately ninety kilometers east of Munich, near the Austrian border. With its Gnadenkapelle (Chapel of the Miraculous Image), Altötting has been a popular place of pilgrimage since the end of the fifteenth century. Among the buildings surrounding the Gnadenkapelle on the central Kapellplatz is the late-Gothic Stiftskirche (collegiate church), which was built between 1499 and 1511. It was in the Stiftskirche that the Schnitzer trombone was discovered—inside the case of the organ, which dates from 1725, when it was dismantled in 1903. The trombone was initially placed on display in the church’s Schatzkammer (treasure chamber) and later in the Wallfahrt- und Heimatmuseum (Museum of Pilgrimage and Local History), also located on Kapellplatz, where it can be viewed today.

Description

The narrow, conical bell of the Altötting trombone displays the characteristic features of a Renaissance instrument. The inscription on the garland reads (from the player’s position): “MACHT ANTONI SCHNITZER [crown] A MDLXXVI” (Figures 3, 4). Engraved in upper-case letters on an obliquely hatched background, the inscription was probably done by a specialized engraver called a Posaunenstecher, who was likely also responsible for the
ornaments on the flat bell stay. Like the comparable instruments in Verona, Edinburgh, and Nice, the Altötting instrument is a tenor trombone.

Figure 3
Crown (maker’s mark) on garland.

Figure 4
Schnitzer’s name on garland.
Measurements:
Length (without mouthpiece) 2608 mm
Diameter of the bell: 97-98 mm
Pitch: probably B♭ (a=440Hz)\(^{11}\)

The bell seam exhibits small square tabs cut at equal distance, and as customary was made using silver solder. The bell bow has a ring soldered to a heart-shaped brass saddle with a zigzag pattern along its edge. The bell stay is flat, and is engraved with floral ornaments (Figure 5) similar those on the Edinburgh instrument from twenty years later;\(^{12}\) the ornamentation on both instruments seems to have been done by the same engraver. Both the inner and outer slides have round stays (Figure 6), decorated with a floral pattern that appears to have been stamped, or more likely, embossed.

The ferrules covering the loose tube connections, with the exception of those at the bow of the slide, display the fish-scale pattern characteristic of Nuremberg brass instruments of the period. The fish-scale pattern is framed by a lathe-turned, banded edge on one side and a crown-like motif on the other (Figure 7). As on the bell, the seams are clearly visible. The punch-work fish scales were executed using at least three tools: a semicircular punch and two punches with different sets of parallel lines.\(^{13}\)

The slide bow is reinforced with a brass cap. A loop or ring is lacking on the slide bow and there is no trace of solder where it would have been attached. A mouthpiece, probably dating from the eighteenth century, is currently inserted in the instrument (Figure 6).

Figure 5
Flat bell brace.
A particularly beautiful iconographical confirmation for the design of this instrument is the painting *Il paradiso* by Lodovico Carracci, dated ca. 1616, which is preserved in the church of S. Paolo in Bologna (Figure 8). The bass trombone illustrated here not only clearly illustrates the flat stays with the ornamental lion-head hooks, but also the orientation and organization of the ferrules. In this painting it is even possible to recognize engraving on the mouthpiece that appears to be similar to that on the mouthpiece of the Schnitzer instrument in Nice. Judging from the realistic depiction, it seems likely that the artist had at his disposal an actual instrument as a model, and indeed an instrument from Nuremberg.
Figure 8

Lodovico Carracci, *Il paradiso* (ca. 1616)
With the kind permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali – Soprintendenza PSAE – Bologna.
Alterations
The year 1576 engraved on the garland of the Altötting trombone would seemingly make it the earliest dated instrument by Anton Schnitzer, and indeed the third oldest signed trombone. It should be kept in mind, however, that most surviving early brass instruments have been extensively repaired and/or altered over the years. The Altötting Schnitzer trombone is no exception, although the intact patina over its whole surface suggests that it has not been tampered with in the recent past.

Stays
The most obvious alteration is that of the slide stays. At the time the instrument was built only flat stays were employed—secured by hooks that usually have the form of lions’ heads. The round stays on the slide of the Altötting trombone are most likely replacements from the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

Ferrules
The ferrules too have clearly been altered. While it can be assumed that the ferrules were originally of the same design throughout the instrument, four different ferrule forms can be identified here (Figure 9). The two ferrules between the bell and bell bow (A) are most
likely original, since they are practically identical to those on the Schnitzer trombones from 1581 (Nice) and 1594 (Edinburgh). The small deviations in the ornaments can easily be explained by a substitution of punches as tools became worn out. The ferrules at the slide end of the bell section (B1) and the bell bow (B2) display a similar fish-scale pattern and have been shortened slightly. A different fish-scale pattern is found on the ferrules of the slide stays (C). Finally, the ferrules at the slide bow (D) are of an entirely different type; these date from the nineteenth century, as do the bow itself and the protective brass cap, which is embossed with floral motifs. It is not yet possible to ascribe the ferrules B, C, and D to a known maker.

Bell
A sleeve has been attached below the bell stay to stabilize a damaged area on the bell. The original bezel or rim (Figure 3) is missing from the Altötting instrument, like those on most of the other trombones by Schnitzer, and has been replaced. Because of earlier repair work, the edge of the garland, which was originally bent back over the rim of the bell, is no longer present; this crimped edge was apparently cut off before the garland was reattached. Apart from this, the bell seems to be original.

Although a ring is present on the bell bow, it is not original. If the saddle were original, we would expect it to be engraved and asymmetrical in form. The present heart-shaped saddle, with zigzag pattern, represents a typical nineteenth-century design. In this context it should be noted that the Altötting collection also has three brass instruments made by Saurle of Munich. It is conceivable that during the nineteenth century this famous Munich family of instrument makers was responsible for the maintenance of Altötting’s brass instruments, including the venerable Nuremberg trombone.

Surviving instruments of Anton Schnitzer

The following list identifies the surviving instruments ascribed to Anton Schnitzer. Since Anton “the Elder” and Anton “the Younger” both employed the same maker’s mark, a crown, instruments dated after 1591, the year in which Anton the Younger became master, are attributable to either.19


Trumpet, 1581
MACHT. ANTON. SCHNITZER [crown] A. MDLXXXI.
Silver, partly gilded, engraved.
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, no. 248 (A 258).

Trumpet, 1585
MACHT ANTON SCHNICZER ZV NVRMBE [crown]
MDLXXXV.
Verona, Accademia Filarmonica, no. 13303.

Bass trombone 1593
MACHT ANTON SCHNITZER [crown]
Kassel, Staatliche Museen/Hessisches Landesmuseum,
no. 1905/161.

Tenor trombone, 1594
MACHT ANTONI SCHNITZE [crown] MDLXXXXIII.
Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Collection of Historic
Musical Instruments, no. 2695.

Trumpet, 1598
MACHT ANTONI SCHNITZER IN NVRMBERG 1598.
brass, gilded.

Bass trombone, 1598
MACHT ANTONI SCHNITZ [crown] MDLXXXXVIII.
Ingolstadt, Bayerisches Armeemuseum, no. 10 699.

Trumpet, 1599
ANTONI SCHNITZER A: MDLXXXXIX
Paris. Museé la Musique, no. 519

Parts of trombones presumed to be by Schnitzer:

Outer slide
unsigned.
Hamburg, Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte.

Inner slide + stay of outer slide parts of an instrument otherwise by Anton
Drewelwecz.
Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, no. MI 167

Instruments in written documents

Trombone, before 1575
Cited in an inventory of the Nuremberg Frauenkirche: “Item ein kurze Toppel
Posaunen ist Ao. 87 dem Anthoni Schnitzer, dem sie gehören, wider gegeben worden. Stuckh 1.：“Further, a short double-trombone was returned in 1587 to Anton Schnitzer, to whom it belongs. One piece.”)  

Trombone, 1579
Formerly in the Innsbruck Musikkamer of Archduke Ferdinand. “Macht Antoni Schnitzer zu Nurnberg 1579.” This instrument is first cited in an inventory compiled after the death of the Archduke in 1596, and is described as “ain kupferne pusaun, die absecz vergult” (“a copper trombone, with gilded ferrules”). In a later inventory dated 1788, the instrument is again cited–here with the above inscription. An inventory compiled in 1806 no longer lists this instrument, and its current location is unknown.  

The following documents from the Munich Court show that Anton Schnitzer not only took over Georg (Jörg) Neuschel’s workshop, but also continued to deliver instruments to his customers:

1554
138a Item den 27isten Nouembris bezalt Jörg Neischl T rumettenmacher zw Nürmberg vmb 10 groß welsch T rumetten vnnd ein Possthorn 142 fl. 6 ß. (Further: the 27th November, Jörg Neischl trumpet maker of Nuremberg was paid 142 fl 6 s for 10 large Italian trumpets and one posthorn.)

1567
357a. Anthonien Schnizer T rumettenmacher In Niernberg vmb 12 T rumetten für iede 10 thaler Mer für Zerung 12 fl. Vnnd Allhie Auflösung 6 fl. 17 d. thuet in Allem 155 fl. 1 ß. 17 d. (Anton Schnitzer trumpet maker in Nuremberg received 10 thalers each for 12 trumpets. An additional 12 fl for delivery, and 6 fl. 17d. for attendant costs, making in total 155 fl. 1 s. 17d.)

1576
357a. Anthonien Schnitzer von Nurinberg Per Zwo Pusaunen für Ir f. gn. Instrumentisten Laut der Zetl bezalt fl. 24. (Anton Schnitzer for two trombones for Your Grace’s instrumentalists, paid according to the invoice 24 fl.)

1590
427a. Anthonien Schnitzer Hanndlsmann Zu Nürnberg bezallt Ich Per alheer geschickhte 24 Newe Trommetten lauth der vnderschribnen Zetl fl. 35. (I paid Anton Schnitzer, tradesman from Nuremberg, 35 fl., according to the signed invoice, for the 24 new trumpets sent here.)
1592

461a. Item bezalt dem Cesaro Bendinellj vmb er Inn Nürnberg vonn Ant. Schnizer 18 Neuen trometen erkhaufft vnnd Laut einer vnnterschribnen Zetell ... fl 152. (Further: paid to Cesare Bendinelli for the 18 new trumpets he bought from Anton Schnitzer, according to a signed invoice... 152 fl.)

Conclusion

Although the Altötting Schnitzer trombone has been subjected to various alterations over the centuries, the oldest parts—i.e. the bell, the garland (and the signature on it), as well as a pair of ferrules (A)—can be regarded as original and were thus made by Anton Schnitzer the Elder. The original flat slide stays may have been replaced by round stays relatively soon after the instrument was made, possibly in the seventeenth century. Later alterations and repairs appear to date from the beginning of the nineteenth century (Figure 10), which could be an indication that this instrument remained in use over a period of some 250 years.

All photos by the authors, except as noted.

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NOTES


6 Nickel has surmised that Georg [Jörg] Stengel was the adoptive son, and possibly also the nephew, of Hans Neuschel the younger (d 1533); Stengel officially assumed the name Neuschel in 1537. See Nickel, *Holzblasinstrumentenbau*, 54-55.


11 The pitch was estimated from the total length of the instrument. We did not actually play the Altötting trombone. It should be noted that B♭ would not have been the nominal pitch of the instrument when it was built.


13 On other instruments there occasionally is evidence of the use of yet an additional punching tool to fill the empty space above the upper area of ornaments.


16 See McGowan, “The world of the early trombone player.”

17 It would seem that round stays first appeared toward the middle of the seventeenth century, but this is a point that requires further research.

18 Two valve trumpets in F by Michael Saurle, Munich, dated 1862, of which one is left-handed, the other right-handed, with “catholic” fingering (one is in a contemporary case with several crooks); inventionhorn with ten crooks and its contemporary case, by Georg Saurle, Munich, nineteenth century.


22 *Für Aug’ und Ohr*, Cat. no. 37, 132-33.

23 This is the famous “figure-eight” trumpet that once belonged to the trumpeter Cesare Bendinelli. See Van der Meer and Weber, *Catalogo degli Strumenti*, 66-70.


25 See n. 12.

26 Figure-eight trumpet. See n. 19.

27 Wörthmüller, “Die Instrumente der Nürnberger Trompeten- und Posaunenmacher,” *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg* 46 (1955): 466. Wörthmüller lists the instrument as a tenor trombone, with an incorrect inventory number, 10 966. The damage mentioned in Wörthmüller has since been repaired.


29 Inventory number according to Wörthmüller, “Nürnberger Trompeten- und Posaunenmacher.” We were unable to confirm this number.

30 Wörthmüller, “Instrumente,” 405. Contrary to Wörthmüller, a comparison of the ornamentation on the ferrules, stays, and the engraved parts with that on Schnitzer instruments makes an attribution to Schnitzer more likely than to Drewelwecz. In particular, the fish-scale punch appears to be identical to that of the Nice trombone.

31 The ornamentation of the slide stay, in comparison to the outer stay of the trombone slide by Anton Drewelwecz in Hamburg, would appear to indicate that the slides of the trombones by Anton Drewelwecz und Sebastian Hainlein (GNM inv. no. MI 167 and MI 169) have been interchanged; see also Fischer, “Tenor Trombone,” 67-68. Wörthmüller considers the engraved squirrels to be an argument for the attribution to Drewelwecz; see Wörthmüller, “Instrumente,” 405.

32 Inventory from 1575 (Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, Rep. 2c Nr. 96, f. 1ff); cited after Nickel, *Holzblasinstrumentenbau*, 338.


34 Ibid., 23.