ORGANUM GRUNINGENSE REDIVIVUM

Möge die berühmte Gröninger Orgel
in Halberstadt wieder erstehen

Pour que revive à Halberstadt
le célèbre orgue de Gröningen

May the celebrated Gröningen Organ
revive in Halberstadt

Jean-Charles Ablitzer Organist at Belfort Cathedral, professor at the conservatory of music in Belfort

The David Beck organ in the chapel of Gröningen castle was transferred in 1770 to St Martin's church, Halberstadt

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In 1592 Duke Heinrich Julius of Braunschweig-Lüneburg instructed the organ builder David Beck, who was based in Halberstadt, to make an instrument for the chapel of his castle at Gröningen. The building of the castle, a large and beautiful edifice with four wings and a tower, had been entrusted to the architect Christophe Tendler in 1586. Gröningen is a town about ten kilometres from Halberstadt, going towards Magdeburg. An old castle, the summer residence of the bishops of Halberstadt, already existed where the new castle was to stand.

Heinrich Julius, an artist-prince

Duke Heinrich Julius, named bishop at the age of two (!), had a passion for the theatre, botany, natural sciences and architecture. He was a writer and spoke several ancient languages. He was also a musician and organist. At the age of seven, in 1571, his daily programme of studies involved two organ lessons. They were given by the court organist, Antonius Ammerbach, from noon till 1 pm and from 3.30 pm till 4 pm. Evenings were often also given over to music. During a journey to Flensburg in 1593 a chronicle tells us that "he played the organ using all its stops in a way that amazed everyone". He spent without stint to realize his artistic desires and ambitions. To fill different roles in his court he called on the best European artists, painters, sculptors, actors, musicians and dancers.

The famous lutenist and composer John Dowland stayed and worked at Wolfenbüttel, receiving a solid gold chain from Heinrich Julius on his departure. Another English lutenist, Gregory Huwet, passed his whole life working for the court chapel. In 1594 Heinrich Julius named Michael Prætorius his chamber organist. It is very likely that Prætorius took part as an adviser in the construction of the Gröningen castle chapel organ, because he already had contacts with the Duke even before his official nomination as organist. In the same period Heinrich Julius, keen to rival the most prestigious courts in Germany, had Michael Werner of Landau construct, also for his new castle in Gröningen, the largest wine barrel in the whole country. It could hold 137,050 litres and cost, excluding the price of the wood, more that 6,000 Reichsthalers. It was filled with Rhine wine.

The chapel organ, an unusual instrument

The organ intended for the chapel was to be prestigious. It was to have 59 stops spread over six tonal departments, two manuals and pedals, and the case would be sumptuously designed, exhibiting an exuberance unusual for that period of the declining Renaissance and the first stirrings of the Baroque. This organ was to be a masterpiece. It was meant to arouse amazement and admiration, as much for its tonal capacity as for the work of its case-makers, painters and gilders. It was to be the most important organ in Germany for the number of its stops and the most richly decorated. Working on it required four years, from 1592 to 1596. Ten people were involved in its realisation, the master organ builder and nine co-workers. The price of the instrument rose to ten thousand Reichsthalers. For its inauguration and acceptance on August 2nd 1596 the ceremonies arranged matched the standard of construction. So, in a famous event unique in the history of music, 53 of the most illustrious organists in the world were invited by Duke Heinrich Julius to Gröningen. Coming from all over Germany they displayed their talent and the possibilities of the instrument for a whole week. Michael Prætorius took part in this gathering of organists. The total expense for recompensing the participants came to three

thousand Reichsthalers. The invited organists carried the fame of the organ which they had just tested and received throughout the whole country.

In 1603 the famous organ builder Esaias Compenius entered the service of Duke Heinrich Julius. He was charged with the maintenance of the Gröningen castle organ. It is to be noted that he did not alter it in any way. Named court organ builder in 1605 Compenius found himself entrusted with the building of an instrument for the castle of Hessen situated on the road linking Halberstad to Wolfenbüttel. Heinrich Julius was born in the castle of Hessen. The instrument commissioned was to be a gift for his wife Elisabeth.

The "Compenius organ", a chamber instrument, was to be the pendant to the Gröningen organ. While the pipes of the David Beck organ were entirely made of spotted metal, tin and brass, the organ intended for the castle of Hessen was designed with different types of wood in mind, including the pipes. The front Principal was veneered in ivory with an inlay of motifs in ebony. The drawstops were made of solid silver. Michael Prætorius took part in the design of this instrument in the role of adviser. He gave the composition of the organ in his *Syntagma Musicum*. About the instrument itself he wrote: "its unusual, soft, subtle and delicate sonority cannot be truly described". After the death of the Duke in 1613 Elisabeth gave the instrument to her brother Christian IV, the king of Denmark, a great lover of the organ and music in general. Compenius, commissioned to transfer the organ in 1616, installed it in the chapel of the castle of Frederiksborg. On completing the work he fell seriously ill and died. He was buried there in Hillerød.

The decoration of the Gröningen cases, an incomparable richness

The decoration of the cases of the Gröningen castle organ is quite outstanding. It has a definitely baroque character and strong influences from the Italian tradition. At first sight one could even think that the decor is part of the Counter-Reformation (translator's note: an anomaly at this Protestant court)! This is only at the end of the sixteenth century but some of the sculptured parts even make one think of a profusion worthy of the Rococo. However they also co-exist with sculptured panels and symbolic figures of a totally Renaissance inspiration. The largest pipe in the towers and the flats was surrounded by a sculpted and gilded sheath, a rare type of ornementation. From afar the gilded elements can pass for simple interlacings but they are in fact very fine reproductions of stringed and reed musical instruments and various decorative elements, including many exotic fruits and a hunting trophy. Flutes and cornets are also represented. These different instruments are also found on the outsides of the Pedal towers, this time painted on a wood cut-out. When one looks at the higher parts of the case one can see that there is not the slightest surface which is not sculpted, painted or gilded, portraying a multitude of decorative figures and cherubs. The access doors of the different tonal divisions leading to the small Pedal and the Brustwerk are of a more typically Renaissance decoration. They also represent musician angels playing the lute, a bass viol or a cello, as well as wind instruments in the shape of hunting trumpets. Many varieties of fruits are represented on the entire surface of the case with a predilection for exotic ones. The case of the Rückpositiv, which can be seen at Harsleben, presents the same type of ornamentation, laden with symbolic figures. One might think that this constitutes a replica of the main case. It is nothing of the sort. The motifs are of the same construction but the decor is clearly intended to be independent. The case fairly recently underwent a restoration involving the paintwork, red having replaced the original blue and gold. One needs to imagine a unified colour scheme in order to get an idea of the ensemble of the two cases. Inside the Harsleben organ a magnificent painted panel survives representing a Rauschpfeife player. This is definitely Hermes, with winged feet, wearing a traveller's cap. Re-used just as a board this artistically decorated panel was originally placed behind the Rückpositiv and could only be seen by the organist.

The artist charged with the decoration of the cases must have been very famous because it seems he enjoyed total freedom of expression for its realisation. The plan of the decoration presents Christian and different pagan representations in grotesques which seem to oppose good and evil. The splendour of the Gröningen organ was certainly the result of the wish of Duke Heinrich Julius to strike the imagination, aided by the fame and unassailable quality of the artist's work.

The castle chapel, an artistic marvel

Before the installation of the organ Duke Heinrich Julius had the chapel interior decorated. We possess a fairly complete description of its furnishings, paintings and the sculptures which he had realized. Here too the Duke wanted unparalleled artistic richness. Many frescoes illustrating passages from the Old and New Testaments could be admired here. The pulpit and the altar were of marble. Above the altar beside a painting showing the creation of the world there was a remarkable painting by Adam Offinger of the crucifixion. Offinger was a pupil of Lucas Cranach the Younger. He entered the service of Duke Heinrich Julius from 1580. Today this picture is one of the rare testimonies to the pictoral richness of the chapel. It

can be seen in the church at Hasserode. On the vaults and the walls were painted biblical scenes in marvellous colours. The chapel, organ and barrel were viewed until the middle of the eighteenth century. In one contemporary descriptions it was considered that this ensemble could have been one of the seven wonders of the world! Enthusiasts who had sometimes come from very far away must have admitted that they never or only rarely had ever seen and admired such a masterpiece. The description of these remarkable items is known thanks to Johann Georg Leuckfeld's chronicle which appeared in 1710 and a booklet published in 1641 and reprinted several times subsequently until 1700. The 1695 fascicle bears the title: *Gründliche Beschreibung der wunderschönen Kirche und des kunstbaren Orgelwerks wie auch des grossen Fasses auf dem kurfürstlichen Residenzhause Gröningen* (A Detailed Description of the wonderfully beautiful Church and the artistic Organ as also of the Great Barrel at the Prince-Electoral Residence at Gröningen). This booklet was intended for the visitors who flocked in to admire these famous works of art. In it could also be found the organ's specification and one could learn that the Gröningen instrument, with its 59 stops, was the most complete and richly decorated organ in Germany.

Andreas Werckmeister's expert's report

The composition of this organ is known from two further sources. The first came from Michael Prætorius himself when he described the main instruments in Germany in his theoretical work, the *Syntagma Musicum*. The second comes from an expert's report carried out in 1704 by Andreas Werckmeister, the important theoretician and organist of the Martinikirche in Halberstadt. This report was commissioned by Friedrich I, because after functioning for a century the organ had begun to deteriorate. Dust had got into the instrument and the larger pipes were beginning to buckle. Werckmeister gives the organ's composition, describes its condition, points out what he considered to be faults in its conception and realisation and indicates the work needed to put things right. He also proposed some modifications so that the instrument would respond better to the new trends and musical requirements at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The meantone tuning with eight pure thirds described by Michael Prætorius in his *Syntagma Musicum* is included in the list of faults. Werckmeister also launched a strong attack against the then supporters of the "Prætorius" tuning. He stressed that the Gröningen organ had already undergone a modification in its temperament, but only in the Oberwerk, while the Rückpositiv had remained mesotonic. Thus, according to him, one could immediately become aware by comparison that the new temperament was more acceptable. Werckmeister had indeed put his name to other tuning systems more in agreement with the current development of music writing. He asked for the temperament of the whole organ to be modified. The bass continuo realised on the Hauptwerk accompanied instruments tuned to a lower pitch. Transposition was therefore necessary. He also states that this instrument should allow for pieces to be played written by his contemporaries. He also proposes that the two flute stops be replaced by tierce stops, which were not present in the tonal palette of instruments from the Renaissance and the beginning of the Baroque. In the Hauptwerk a 4' Flute was to be replaced by a Quint. In the Rückpositiv the 8' foundation stop is a Quintaden. A Gedact 4' is to be removed in favour of a Gedact 8' *gantz lieblich zur Music dienlich* (very soft and suitable for continuo). It is to be noted that this tonal scheme which consists of basing the fourteen registers of the Rückpositiv on a Quintaden 8' seems enigmatic. Certainly the art of registration at the end of the sixteenth century, based on the idea of an instrumental consort, must have been far removed from our modern taste, which has been so much influenced by the classical French combinations at the end of the seventeenth century. For Werckmeister, the organ's specification was probably meaningless. One must however remember that the 16' and 8' reeds could also serve as the basis of various combinations. The significant number of 4' stops also allows one to assume that they were often considered essential in polyphony, perhaps above all in duos and trios, thus permitting the left hand to be located more in the centre of the keyboard. Werckmeister also asked for a substantial increase in the wind pressure, thus requiring the voicing of a number of the stops to be re-done. In his description he stresses that all the pipework is of tin and that the reeds are of brass. The work was entrusted to Christoph Contius of Halberstadt. It was not of a nature to transform the instrument in a radical manner, but the spirit of the 1596 tonal scheme was certainly compromised.

Faults identified

It is useful to look at the faults identified by Werckmeister, or at least what he considered to be such, to gain an idea of David Beck's instrument. First of all the rather low pressure of 28°, equivalent to about 66mm, seems to be in keeping with voicing adapted to the volume of the chapel, which was, as the descriptive booklet of 1696 indicates, small (*und ob zwar die Kapelle klein…/* and although the chapel is indeed small…) Thanks to old plans of the castle it is possible to know the dimensions of the building. The chapel was contained in a rectangle of about 23m by 11m. Three galleries go along the sides and the rear of the building,

further reducing its interior volume. The height of about ten metres occupies two floors of the building, the ground and the first floors. The instrument's very rich composition was certainly the object of soft and delicate voicing, in a style typical of this part of Central Germany. Why, in these restricted acoustical conditions, did Werckmeister have the wind pressure increased, to 36°, or about 85mm? Besides the fact that at that time the taste in voicing had no doubt changed this is also a pressure which he recommended in general for the building of organs. The registration style at the beginning of the eighteenth century was probably also the reason for this. The entire organ was fed by eight large wedge bellows with several folds, but Werckmeister underlines that the Rückpositiv wind channel is too narrow, with the consequence of insufficient and unstable wind. He requested that this be improved. Here too the desire to mix several foundation stops and reeds at the same tessitura, particularly those at 8' and 4', a practice unknown at the end of the sixteenth century, may explain a possible lack of wind. It seems clear that Werckmeister was trying to adapt a Renaissance style organ to the ideals of the moment. Thus his remarks do not constitute an assessment of the conception of David Beck's organ as bad. According to the historic monuments expert Christian Lutz, an organ such as the Compenius organ in Frederiksborg, considered to be perfect in its conception and construction, can present faults in the wind supply and tuning if one departs from the musical conditions for which it was intended. Werckmeister's judgment, as well as the alterations which he favoured, are all close to the attitude of organ builders of all ages when they are led to pronounce on the work of their predecessors and commissioned to adapt instruments to new musical requirements. The work carried out by Contius in 1704 does not seem to have assured the organ unusual longevity. Johann Andreas Silbermann, on his way to Berlin, visited Gröningen on June 12th 1741 to see this very famous instrument. He discovered from an organist in the area that it was in a very poor condition and more or less unplayable. Silbermann then decided to devote his visit to other attractions in the castle.

In conclusion it seems that the instrument of 1596 was to be a synthesis of the artistic expression of the moment, as much for its tonal concept and decoration as well as a move towards the Baroque. With its very rich composition it brought together practically all the stops and timbres invented since the medieval period. This could explain the desire to place 59 stops in an instrument intended to sound in a relatively small space. With soft and delicate voicing obtained with moderate wind pressure this organ was probably conceived as a very large "chamber" instrument. It was not really a question of power, more of the quality and diversity of timbres. It is certain that Andreas Werckmeister, a century later, could not understand the meaning of such an instrument and felt that it should be altered. The spirit of synthesis which characterised David Beck's organ is the mirror of the humanist work of the musician and theorist Michael Prætorius bringing together and presenting all the musical practices of his day. Without any doubt the exceptional tonal richness of the Gröningen instrument was the result of his meeting and collaboration with Duke Heinrich Julius, himself an accomplished artist, organist of talent and patron, moved by a desire for power and magnificence and determined to promote artistic expression to the highest degree and in all its forms.

The castle of Gröningen abandoned

From the middle of the eighteenth century the castle was gradually dismantled. In October 1770 the organ was moved on the orders of Friedrich II of Prussia to the Martinikirche in Halberstadt, where Michael Prætorius had been organist half a century earlier. The organ builder Johann Christoph Wiedemann was commissioned to move the organ. Nine new stops were installed in the instrument as well as a Glockenspiel, two drum players and some decorative elements such as the "ears" situated on either side of the main case. The new organ took the place of one built by David Beck around 1590, sold to Derenburg, where part of the case may still be seen, though considerably transformed by Ladegast. At Gröningen the absence of the organ was a death-blow to the fame of the artistic ensemble and from then on the dispersal of individual items became ineluctable. In 1782 the wine barrel was transported to Halberstadt as well as an entry portal to the armoury of Duke Heinrich Julius. These two unique items were conveyed to a hunting pavilion, the property of Ernst Ludwig Christoph Spiegel, where they can still be seen today. After its re-installation in Halberstadt the organ underwent significant modifications. In 1837 the organ builder Johann Friedrich Schulze intervened. David Beck's organ gave way to a new construction at this time. In an instrument of a new design and a probably more Romantic colour, the Rückpositiv had no place and no doubt interfered with arrangements for musical performance in the tribune. Confronted with the rare beauty of its decoration the organ builders could not bring themselves to destroy it and so it was that this wonderful case came to serve as the decoration for a new instrument built by Schulze at Harsleben, a village situated a few kilometres from Halberstadt.

The present state of the organ

Since its removal to the Martinikirche in Halberstadt David Beck's organ has been constantly altered. The last modification dates from 1921. Behind the magnificent façade a pneumatic instrument was installed, built by Röver in 1902. Today, apart from the central pipes in the front of the main case, and the entire Principal 4' of the Rückpositiv, no tonal element of the 1596 organ remains. By contrast it seems that the exceptional case of this instrument has always inspired the greatest respect. Conscious of its artistic value and its history later builders rejected any idea of modification or destruction. Its present state is deplorable. This is because of the bombardments of the town in April 1945 which severely damaged the church. Very luckily the organ had been taken down and stored before this destruction. Since then long years of neglect through lack of financial resources have rendered this delicate work of art fragile in the extreme. The church roof has now been entirely renewed. For years water seeping in dripped onto the case. People of good will in the area did all that was in their power, after the destruction of a large part of the town, to save the ruined church, its furnishings and the organ. As for Gröningen castle it was gradually demolished at the end of the eighteenth century. The wing situated to the East was pulled down and its materials sold. Finally the whole building was razed to the ground in 1817. Nothing remains except a few old stones. The plans and some representations of the building survive, of which one is given in an engraving realised by Andre Sohn around 1700.

What is to become of this mythic case?

It is now becoming urgent to take measures to conserve and protect the organ case. Work is in progress to restore the towers and the vaults of the Martinikirche, but nothing has been planned for the restoration of the case. In the framework of cultural exchanges between the General Council of the Territory of Belfort and the Halberstadt Regional Authority a comment on the future of the organ has caused the formation of a working group arising from the religious community of Halberstadt, the owners of the instrument. A survey has been carried out by Dr Holger Brülls, the expert in the protection of historic monuments and archaeology in Sachsen-Anhalt. The report highlights the exceptional and unique character of this historic monument and proposes its complete restoration. This is an excellent initiative because it is not certain that the case can survive for long in its present condition. All the sculptures have decayed and parts are missing. The polychrome and gilding are in an alarming state. Everything is covered in a thick layer of dust. The sculpted and gilded sheaths which surround the large pipes are decaying and buckling. The case is full of old electric cables which represent a real danger. As far as a possible restoration is concerned an international collaboration should be considered. The rehabilitation of the organ could take place in three stages:

1. Immediate protection measures to avoid any further degradation. A large part of this measure would be taken care of by the Lutheran community who are the owners of the organ, by the support of an action group on behalf of the instrument.

2. Restoration of the case through national or European financing, possibly involving patrons or sponsors.

3. Reconstructing David Beck's organ to its original condition and in the restored case could be a large international cultural project. The work could be the object of a collaboration between the best specialists in Renaissance organ building. This reconstruction would proceed to a preliminary study including an inventory of all the tonal material still present in different instruments typical of this era and style. The existence of this extraordinary case and the musical and historical context of this region of Central Germany truly represent a unique opportunity to reconstruct a large organ from the end of the sixteenth century.

The church of St Martin in Halberstadt could thus become a centre for research on organ music from the beginning of the Baroque, forming a pendant to John Cage's project which is taking place over a time span of six centuries. Halberstadt is unquestionably a symbolic town where the organ is concerned. The cathedral's medieval organ, described by Michael Prætorius, in 1361 for the first time produced a keyboard with twelve keys, both full- and semitones, the "modern" arrangement still in use today (John Cage's composition is the longest piece in the history of music, "as slow as possible". Its execution will last 639 years, the time which separates the construction of the medieval organ from the year 2000).

Translation: Andrew Henry Williams

Christian Lutz Historic Monuments expert

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What remains of the Gröningen Beck organ?

As has been stated above, the Beck organ constructed for Gröningen castle, which was transferred in 1770 to the Martinikirche in Halberstadt, was separated into two parts in 1838, the main organ remaining in Halberstadt and the Positiv was taken to Harsleben. In these two places the following parts have survived:

Cases

The front of the main case, which can be seen at Halberstadt, is well conserved, with its original proportions. The only uncertainty could concern the positioning of the Pedal towers, even if it is known that they were originally attached to the main organ, not standing apart, as in the Hamburg tradition. The lower case contains six perforated doors, two for the Brustwerk in the centre, two for the Brustwerk Pedal on each side and two for access to the gallery. The console keyboard surround has disappeared. The original side walls are conserved in the case´s initial depth, which was 1.87m/6 ft. They are provided with doors opening at the first level to gain access to the main organ tuning gangway. They were extended by 2.40m to the rear when the organ was moved to Halberstadt. All the rear ceilings and panels have disappeared.

The façade of the Positiv is equally well conserved, it is 2,333mm/7½ ft wide. Only the base of the three towers, perhaps consisting of angel heads, as with the triangular towers of the main case, has disappeared. The side walls, the tower angle returns and their ceilings are conserved to a depth of 746mm, which is not the original depth of the structure. Nothing remains of the back wall.

A stratigraphic study of the polychrome surface has still to be undertaken, but it can already be seen that the non-sculpted or gilded surfaces, at present a creamy-white colour, were painted in light *faux marbre* and the base of the friezes, now red at Harsleben, were painted blue, the same as the cases of the Brustwerk, seen when the doors were open.

An old panel was re-used at Harsleben to form the side enclosure of the Pedal, 1,745mm tall x 605mm wide. On its inner side, not visible from the gallery, a winged male figure is painted (the god Mercury?), playing a Rauschpfeife. From its colouring and decorative motifs it can be seen to be undeniably an integral part of the case, even if its original placing remains uncertain.

Pipework

Not a single inner pipe by Beck remains, some of the façade pipes are original. At Halberstadt even the façade pipes have disappeared, except for the central pipes in the different compartments (5 pipes for the Great and 2 for the Pedal), which are covered in a gilded design. All the other façade pipes were renewed in zinc, the original pipes probably being requisitioned in 1917.

At Harsleben all the façade pipes are old, those which are decorated and those which are not. These pipes have been silent since their move in 1838, but they sound very well when blown by mouth. They have retained, if not the sound of 1596, at least that of 1704 or 1770. The 47 façade pipes correspond exactly to the 47 notes of the keyboard (4 octaves without the first c# or d#), which means that the Positive Principal 4' was entirely in the façade, as was the Great Principal 8', and that it has been completely preserved.

The construction of the front pipes is exactly the same for the Great as for the Positiv.

These beautifully made pipes were completed in tin, the metal being protected by the red paint which has only partially been washed off the rear of the pipes. The mouths are half round. The tower pipes are held in by small metal hooks embedded in notches cut out in the wood of the crossbars, those in the flats have pipe hooks attached to the points of the crossbars. Tuning is carried out using a semi-circular flap at the rear of the pipe, without tongues, which should allow the pitch to be recovered exactly, as well as the temperament set by Contius.

Windchests

To wind the instrument's 57 stops (52 complete and 5 borrowed), 7 chests were necessary:

- 1 windchest with 15 off-note blocks, shared between the Great and 3 Pedal stops
- 1 windchest with 7 off-note blocks for the Brustwerk
- 1 windchest with 14 off-note blocks for the Rückpositiv
- 2 windchests with 10 off-note blocks for the main Pedal, in the side Pedal towers
- 2 windchests with 6 off-note blocks for the small Pedal, placed in the Brustwerk

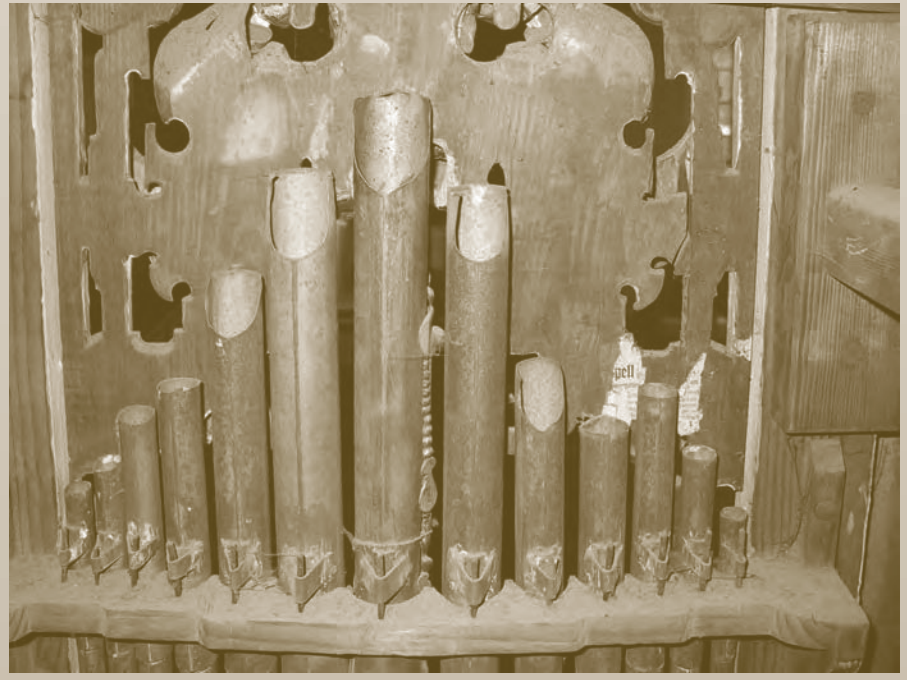
Although no original material part of Beck´s windchests has survived, various information can be obtained from an examination of the two cases.

In the Great organ, Postiv and Pedal the windchests were glued to the case façade. The grooved parts of the towers, which have all survived, were glued to the first off-note block of the chest (Principal 4' in the Positiv, Principal 8' in the Great, Principal 16' in the Pedal). Thus there were no conveyances to feed the façade pipes. If the grooved parts of the flats are not old, either at Halberstadt or Harsleben, it is because the small pipes were placed directly on the windchest off-note block, without conveyances or grooves. This means that the layout of the windchests, i.e. the distribution of notes along the width of the chests, can easily be rediscovered.

For the Brustwerk the case which contained it is well preserved. On examination one can deduce that the division of this small chest was that of the keyboard, in other words the band of trackers which went up towards the Great windchest, because the Brustwerk was played from the same keyboard as the Great. Also the 7 stops were drawn by levers outside the case, without stop shanks, and the register holes are well preserved (3 on the left for the reed stops and 4 on the right for the flues). So the layout of this chest can be recovered on the basis of these details.

Finally, for the 2 last chests, those of the Pedal placed in the Brustwerk on each side of the Brustwerk manual stops, the elements are rather less clear, but it seems that the off-note blocks of the 3 reeds were placed in steps at the front of the windchest, as in the Compenius organ at Frederiksborg.

Translation: Andrew Henry Williams



Façade of the positiv – pipes by David Beck (1596)

Dr Holger Brülls

Provincial Authority (Landesamt) for the Care of Historic Monuments and Archaeology in Sachsen-Anhalt

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The case of the David Beck organ in the Martinikirche in Halberstadt: its meaning and place in the history of art and the organ

The case of the 1596 Beck organ is interesting both from the point of view of the history of art and of the history of the organ. It is one of the most luxurious cases in the Northern Europe of the sixteenth century and reveals an unrivalled artistic ambition. Its wealth of ornaments and decorative figures makes a great impression on the observer. It reflects the need for display of a Renaissance prince obsessed with art and music. With this instrument, initially constructed for the chapel of his castle in Gröningen, Duke Heinrich Julius of Braunschweig-Lüneburg created the ideal type of princely organ in the age of mannerism. The construction of this organ, soon known world-wide, was one of the Duke's most audacious undertakings. Demands concerning sonority and decoration would result in the realisation of an organ not the most imposing but the most grandiose of the age. Beck's opulent and lavish creation is a kind of encyclopaedia of all the sonorities one could imagine and desire around 1600.

However one cannot grasp the total architecture of the organ in its overwhelming beauty without including the Rückpositiv, in the mind at least. Separated from the organ in the nineteenth century it is now to be found in the church at Harsleben. The imposing position of the Pedal towers, which descend to the lower level of the tribune below, shows the largest pipes in all their length and magnificence. The Pedal specification is a significant element in the history of the organ. Generally known by the term "Hamburg case", the structure of Beck's organ is an early and immensely grand example of its type.

The 1610 organ by Esaias Compenius in Frederiksborg castle chapel near Hillerød, in Denmark, also realized at the behest of Duke Heinrich Julius, and originally intended for the castle of Hessen halfway between Halberstadt and Wolfenbüttel, is considered to be the most important tonal monument of Central German organ building around 1600. In the same way the case of Beck's organ is a unique symbol of what organ building could best produce in terms of architectural and sculptural splendour between the end of the Renaissance and the beginning of the Baroque. At this level it can only be compared to the most magnificent Italian, French, Dutch and Spanish cases of the era.

This precious work of art is in a seriously deteriorated condition, especially in its colours and decorations. It is in a very dangerous state. It is imperative that it be conserved and that a detailed examination of it is made for restoration purposes. The restoration of the case as well as the construction of a new organ which would be adapted to and make reference to the exuberant specification (desired by Michael Prætorius?) of David Beck's organ, will make the Martinikirche organ by far the most resplendent vision of examples of the art of organ building in the sixteenth century and, more generally, in the era of the Reformation, in Sachsen-Anhalt.

The Romantic Röver organ

Behind the case of the Beck organ is now situated a most valuable organ in Romantic style, requiring restoration. Its creator was the organ builder Ernst Röver, who led one of the best firms of his time near Hausneindorf, equalling those of Walcker, Sauer and Steinmeyer in repute. Röver was also the creator of sensational and enormous instruments, which have sadly disappeared today, such as those of the cathedrals of Halberstadt, Magdeburg and the Nikolaikirche in Hamburg. The Röver organ was built in 1898 for the Municipal Hall of Barmen. It contained 44 registers on three manuals and pedals and was bought in 1921 for the Martinikirche and installed behind the historic case. In relation to the Beck organ project a convincing view towards the future must be found at Halberstadt, both from the point of view of liturgical music as for the protection of historic monuments, for this valuable instrument, a fine example of the art of Romantic organ building.

Translation: Andrew Henry Williams

Mads Kjersgaard organ-builder, Uppsala

The David Beck organ at Gröningen and the Compenius organ from Hessen at Frederiksborg – a comparison

When a close look is taken at these two distinctly unique instruments in the history of organ building, it turns out that they are in fact closely related links of a specific tradition now largely forgotten. While the famous Compenius organ in the Frederiksborg Castle in Denmark on one side, having its original specification and technology, only connoisseurs and specialists can imagine the musical splendour of the Gröningen organ, of which merely the front is extant today. Both organs were engendered by the experimental imagination of the organ-minded Duke Heinrich Julius who commissioned them.

The legendary Gröningen organ has reached us only in literary form, mainly in the writings of Andreas Werckmeister in 1704 which include the account of the famous "Organists' Conference" in 1596 attended by more than fifty renowned organists from all German-speaking countries. At Frederiksborg, on the contrary, one needs no particular historic knowledge to experience – as in a sort of "time machine" – the magic of the court music of Heinrich Julius.

Werckmeister's writings yield a strikingly contradictory impression of the Gröningen organ – there is much praise for its magnificent structure, its wealth of sounds and the quality of the materials used, and at the same time there is harsh criticism of its defects, insufficient wind pressure, certain stops that are unsatisfactory, old-fashioned temperament and the lamentable condition of the whole instrument. The praise is very likely a gambit to silence those critics who questioned the advisability of restoring an outdated instrument: and the criticism is certainly designed to justify the considerable expense involved. To-day, when it is not longer possible to inspect this instrument, a number of Werckmeister's statements seem enigmatic: however, inspection of the present state of the Compenius organ throws a great deal of light on the question. Inversely, contemporary descriptions of the Gröningen organ are very enlightening as to certain specific points which can be observed in the Compenius organ. We can conclude that even if the latter is definitely unique, it is clear that some features of it may well have come from the extraordinary Gröningen organ which Compenius revised in 1603. This was certainly entirely in line with Duke Heinrich Julius' desire to raise artistic creation to an ever higher level.

The aim of the first project may have been to construct an organ with pipes exclusively made of the purest possible tin, the only exception being the outside of the resonators of the reed stops which were to be made of brass. When the idea – possibly the result of discussions between the Duke, his court Kapellmeister Michael Prætorius and the organ builder Esaias Compenius – of building an organ entirely with wooden pipes was considered, it was seen that certain parts of the reed resonators should be made of brass (as at Gröningen), and that the necessary technology of hard-soldering had been developed.

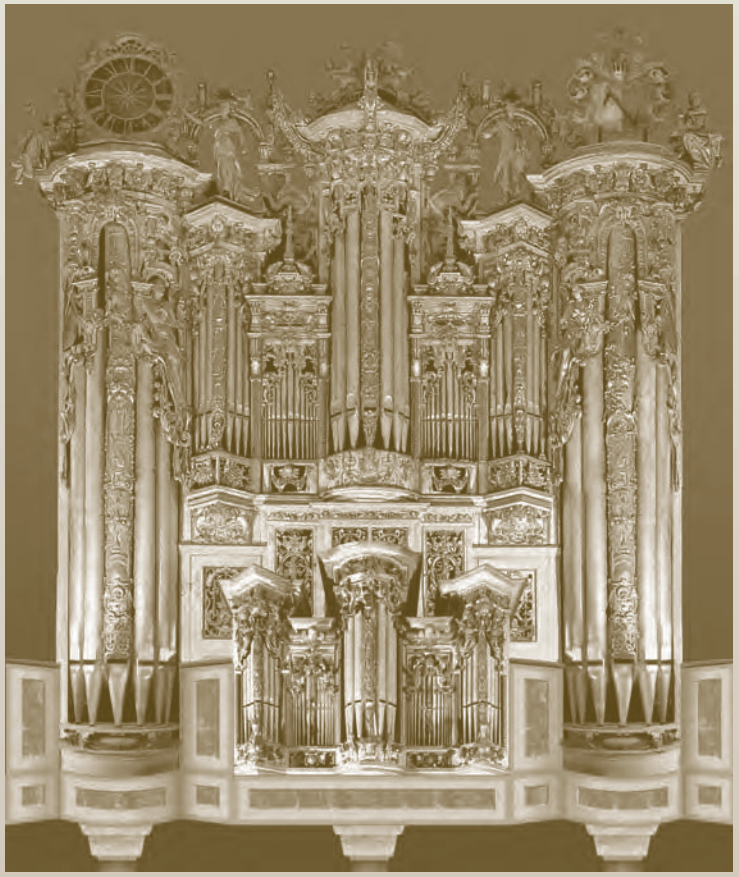
Contemporary use of great numbers of stops and sonorities was to imitate "consorts" rather than to produce massive volumes of "full-organ" sound. This meant that

the problems encountered a hundred years later -due to the large number of stops accomodated on each of the somewhat undersized soundboards -could not be originally perceived. The Compenius organ enables us to understand why Werckmeister decided to have the lengths of the tone channels in the Pedal organ divided into two, and have additional actions and pallets inserted in order to separate the sensitive reeds from the large flue stops with their high wind consumption.

According to Werckmeister, the overblowing harmonic flute stops in Gröningen were a failure and of no use anymore (he had them sacrificed to accomodate new Quint- and Tierce-stops in accordance with modern taste). Indeed, constructing a harmonic stop at this time was by no means within the reach of all and every organ builder, and this is evident even to-day in the Compenius organ. Even if Compenius carefully disguised any slight failure, it is still possible for a "detective" to observe faint traces of corrections, and it can be seen that the gentle Querflöte 4-feet in the Pedal department was in fact foreseen for the Oberwerck. Situated on the Oberwerck chest between two 8-feet stops, and when played in chords, the speech of the treble pipes can not have been absolutely reliable, and this may be the reason why they were discarded, the bass part of the stop being transferred to the Pedal organ (on a toe-board probably intended for an Octaven Bass 4-feet) where this stop will only be played one-part and never in chords.

Organ scholars of our time are now faced with the exalting task of imagining the past magic of this former musical wonder, and enabling the world to share the grandiose total experience of the ORGANUM GRUNINGENSE.

Translation: Mads Kjersgaard / Lois Belton



Disposition der David-Beck-Orgel (1596)
Composition de l'orgue de David Beck (1596)
Specification of David Beck's organ (1596)

Nach Michael Prætorius und Andreas Werckmeister: Die im Syntagma Musicum abgedruckte Liste ist fehlerhaft. Eine Korrektur ist durch die Angaben bei Werckmeister möglich.
D'après Michael Prætorius et Andreas Werckmeister : la liste des jeux imprimée dans le Syntagma Musicum comporte des fautes. La correction est rendue possible par le relevé de Werckmeister.
According to Michael Prætorius and Andreas Werckmeister: the stoplist printed in the Syntagma Musicum contains faults which can be corrected following Werckmeister's account.

Im Ober Werck Manual

12 Stimmen / jeux / stops

Groß Quintadhena 16′
Principal 8′
Grobgedact 8′
Groß Querflöite 8′
Gemßhorn 8′
Octava 4′
Klein Querflöite 4′
Nachthorn 4′
Quinta 3′
Holflöiten 2′
Mixtur 6.7.8 fach
Zimbel doppelt 2 fach

Fornen in der Brust zum Manual

7 Stimmen / jeux / stops

Klein Gedact 2′
Klein Octava 1′
Klein Mixtur 3 fach
Zimbel doppelt 2 fach
Rancket 8′
Regal 8′
Zimbel Regal 2 fach

Im Rückpositiff

14 Stimmen / jeux / stops

Quintadehn 8′
Principal 4′
Gedact 4′
Gemßhorn 4′
Octava 2′
Spitzflöite 2′
Quinta anderthalb 1′½
Subflöite 1′
Mixtur 4 fach
Zimbel 3 fach
Sordunen 16′
Trommet 8′
Krumbhorn 8′
Klein Regal 4′

In den beyden Seit-Thörmen zum Pedal

10 Stimmen / jeux / stops

Groß Principal Baß 16′
Groß Gemßhorn Baß 16′
Groß Querflöiten Baß 8′
Gemßhorn Baß 8′
Klein Gedact Baß 4′
Quintflöiten Baß 3′
Sordunen Baß 16′
Posaunen Baß 16′
Trommeten Baß 8′
Schallmeyen Baß 4′

Im Pedal auff der Oberlade

10 Stimmen / jeux / stops

Untersatz 16′
Quintadeen Baß 16′
Octaven Baß 8′
Klein Octaven Baß 4′
Nachthorn Baß 4′
Rausch Quinten Baß 3′
Klein Quintadeen Baß 8′
Hol Quinten Baß 3′
Holflöiten Baß 2′
Mixtur 5 fach

In der Brust auff beyden Seiten zum Pedal

6 Stimmen / jeux / stops

Quintflöiten Baß 1′ ½
Baurflöiten Baß 1′
Zimbel Baß 3 fach
Rancket Baß 8′
Krumbhorn Baß 8′
Klein Regal Baß 2′

Tremulant / **Tremblant** / Tremulant
Koppel für beide Manuale / **accouplement des deux claviers** / coupler for both manuals
Acht mehrfalten-Keilbälge / **huit soufflets à plusieurs plis** / eight bellows with several folds
Originaler Winddruck: 28 Grad entsprechend ungefär 66 mm / pression d'origine : 28 grad soit environ 66 mm / original wind pressure: 28°, approx. 66 mm
Zwei Manuale / **deux claviers** / two manuals: **C D E F F# G# - c3 (Oberwerk und Brustwerk werden von gleichen Manual gespielt)** / **Oberwerk et Brustwerk se jouent sur le même clavier.** / Oberwerk and Brustwerk are played on the same manual.
Die Manuale mit kurzer Oktave enthalten daher zwei gebrochene Obertasten. / **Les claviers à octave courte comportaient donc deux doubles feintes dans la première octave.** / The manuals and the doubtless short octave pedalboard thus had two double accidentals in the first octave.

Litteratur / Bibliographie / Bibliography

Gründliche Beschreibung der wunderschönen Kirche und des kunstbaren Orgelwerks wie auch des großen Fasses auf dem Kurfürstlichen Residenzhause Gröningen,1695

Faksimileausgabe, Hrsg Ralph-Jürgen Reipsch und Wolf Hobohm

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Michael Prætorius: *Syntagma musicum* – vol II, Wolfenbüttel, 1619

Ralf Staufenbiel: *Schloss Gröningen*

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Kontakt / contact / contact

Ulrich Schäffner
Westendorf 21
D – 38820 Halberstadt
T 0049 (0) 3941 625695
ulrich.schaeffner@gmx.de

Jean-Charles Ablitzer
1 rue du Monceau
F-90300 Valdoie
T 0033 (0)3 84 26 92 11
jean-charles.ablitzer@wanadoo.fr

Liste der 53 Organisten,
die von Herzog Heinrich Julius zu den Einweihungsfeierlichkeiten am 2. August 1596 eingeladen wurden

Liste des 53 organistes
invités par le duc Heinrich Julius pour les cérémonies d'inauguration le 2 août 1596

List of the 53 organists
invited by Duke Heinrich Julius for the inauguration ceremonies on August 2nd 1596

Ulrich Griesstopf (Magdeburg)
Johann Freudemann (Braunschweig)
Hieronymus Mors (Schwerin)
Cajus Schmiedlein (Dantzig)
Casper Hassler (Nuremberg)
Johann Hornburg (Brandenburg)
Heinricus Cuselius (Magdeburg)
Johann Gräfestein (Erfurt)
Matthias Degen (Gotha)
Hermannus Kauffmann (Quedlinburg)
Antonius Schild (Hannover)
Philipp Zimmermann (Gandersheim)
Stephan Grosske (Hildesheim)
Antonius Deiwes (Leipzig)
Nicolaus Behm (Wegeleben)
Christianus Greventhal (Wittenberg)
Johannes Nagelius (Göttingen)
Reinhold Hoffmeister (Aschersleben)
Henricus Compenius (Nordhausen)
Lazarus Schwartze (Helmstädt)
Johann Backhaus (Hameln)
Antonius Juneker (Catelnburg)
Hans Becker (Wernigerode)
Bartholomaeus Riese (Wernigerode)
Arnoldus Löde (Halberstadt)
Martin Abendroth (Eisleben)
Elias Grotekort (Halberstadt)
Johann Lindemann (Goslar)
Jost Lade (Osterode)
Johannes Engelbrecht (Einbeck)
Peter Witte (Einbeck)
Melchior Degen (Gotha)
Andreas Germer (Eisleben)
Andreas Buss (Braunschweig)
Petrus Schröter (Rostock)
Hans Knopp (Bremen)
Paul Knanpp (Verden)
Johann von Ende (Kassel)
Antonius Mors (Rostock)
Johann Leo Hassler (Augsburg)
Wolffgang Eisentraut (Halle)
Johanne Stephanus (Lüneburg)
Hieronymus Prætorius (Hamburg)
Henricus Mans (Lübeck)
Hermannus Eckel (Lübeck)
Johannes Helner (Braunschweig)
Karl Lauff (Gröningen)
Michael Prætorius (Wolfenbüttel)
Georgius Schönmeyer (Schöningen)
Thomas Mancini, Kappelmeisters Sohn
Christianus Koch (Wolfenbüttel)
Christoph Lauff (Gröningen)
Severus Grosse (Hildesheim)