

Brief update on the workshop of Lambert - Paris and Mirecourt, circa 1735-1790. Modification of a lute made by Tiefembruiker in 1575.



Jean Nicolas Lambert was born in 1708 near Epinal (Vosges); he moved to Paris where he started his activity as early as 1735. He married Anne Charlotte Caron in 1743 and died in 1759. His widow went on with the activity under his name with the companion workers until 1790, when she retired after growing her 6 children; she was recognized by her peers as “maitre-juré” and managed the workshop for 30 years. It was an extremely prolific workshop, during Jean-Nicolas’ time as well as Anne-Charlotte’s; a large number of important and varied instruments were constructed.

We have often noted two distinct types of instruments, especially with guitars, the instrument of interest to us. Of course, in a workshop with 6 benches, that is 6 working posts, it is rather normal to note different “ touches” in the realization of the instruments, but in general the moulds used by the colleagues of a same workshop were the same, as well as the purflings, the varnish or the inlays and in particular the scroll patterns that are often the luthier’s signature.

But with Lambert the bars, the blocks, the “moustaches” the bridges, the varnish, the adjustments, and the peculiar way of drawing the position for the bars are the same and with a steady continuity for 50 years. We have always been surprised by the diversity of patterns used for the guitars’ head profiles. We know at least 3 main models, differently declined according to the instruments.

A quite interesting document – found recently – tells us that one of the two younger brothers of Jean-Nicolas - whether Nicolas born in 1710 or Joseph born in 1712 - worked in the Parisian workshop during several years before going back to Mirecourt after his brother’s death. According to the commercial regulation applied at that

time, the workshop's manager, the *boss*, was officially declared and made a living with his work, the younger brother (perhaps even the two) was not listed in the records. This could be a satisfactory explanation of the two - very different - models used for the guitar heads that the Lambert workshop offered its clientele: those of Jean-Nicolas, and those of his brother, who probably enjoyed a more important status, higher than an ordinary worker, and had the opportunity of drawing his own profile.

In the Parisian workshop, Lambert constructed and offered all kinds of instruments "in the fashion": guitars, violins and cellos, hurdy-gurdies, quintons, mandolins, and even marine trumpets. He was a "generalist" luthier helped by his companion workers. Lambert's production was enormous and cannot be the result of only one man, drawing, constructing, varnishing, setting up, selling, delivering to the aristocratic clientele and at the same time receiving customers, listening to musicians, renting numerous instruments, maintaining them, making ordinary repairs as well as extra-ordinary ones.

It is in an "extra-ordinary" repair that we found this rare and magnificent document: a simple hand written label that says: "*mended by Lambert in Mirecourt "ci-devant" in Paris in 1778*". This label was glued in the box of an antique lute build by Tiefembrucker in 1575, re-arranged in guitar. It tells us that a Lambert was in activity in Mirecourt in 1778. The words "ci-devant", used a long time before the French Revolution of 1789, indicated the anteriority of an information. In this case, that a certain Lambert was active in Mirecourt in 1778, that he came from Paris and was proud of it, and wanted to precise this fact. This instrument re-arranged by a Lambert - who is not Jean-Nicolas, dead 20 years before -, had all the elements to authenticate the work of Lambert's workshop: bars, purflings, the rose, and the particular drawing of the head. This label tells us that a long time after Jean-Nicolas' death, *one* Lambert went on with the same "workshop touch", the same patterns, the same models, to construct or commission the construction of guitars in Mirecourt. It also allows us to extrapolate on the habit of the Parisian luthiers of going to Mirecourt to look for the qualified labour force for their workshops and the fact that seldom these workers could sign their work.

We can suppose that Anne-Charlotte, managing the important and prolific Parisian workshop, might have discreetly delegated her defunct husband's younger brother to Mirecourt to organize and commission the construction of instruments that were sold in Paris afterwards. These commercial transactions between Paris and Mirecourt lasted until the factories were shut in the 60s.

This great lute is one of the few surviving instrument made by this prestigious luthier, nicknamed during his life "the venerated" by enthusiast musicians. The body is made of willow, in excellent condition, including the interior construction. There are still some lutes of the Dynasty Tiefembrucker preserved, here and there, around the world, more or less good condition, modified and processed as has always required

the development of musical practices and ways to time. This instrument and historical heritage has been offered for sale in a public auction by M° Lawrent, in Vichy, the 14th of December 2009, and a restorer "authorized" of the Museum of Music in Paris, "La Villette", purchased it.

