

Poulopoulos, Panagiotis. *New Voices in Old Bodies: A Study of “Recycled” Musical Instruments with a Focus on the Hahn Collection in the Deutsches Museum.* **Deutsches Museum Studies, 2. Munich: Deutsches Museum, 2016.**

Panagiotis Poulopoulos is an organologist and musical instrument conservator whose 2011 Ph.D. thesis at the University of Edinburgh, “The Guittar in the British Isles, 1750-1810,” was summarized in an article in *Soundboard*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4 (2012). That year he was awarded a six-month “Scholar in Residence” status at the Deutsches Museum—a relationship that has outlasted his temporary appointment and ultimately led to a number of presentations as well as the present book. The museum, picturesquely situated on an island in the River Isar in Munich, is the world’s largest museum of science and technology, but it also includes collecting and preserving as part of its mission. It claims to have collected over 100,000 objects in 53 categories, one of which is Music.

The Hans Hahn Collection of musical instruments—the focus of the present study—was acquired in 1906, the year the museum opened to the public. The museum originally purchased about 170 instruments from Hahn, who was a Munich instrument maker, dealer, and repairer. The rationale was not to display instruments as works of art but instead “focused on their development from a scientific, technical and historical perspective.” The original exhibit was administered by the museum’s Physics department under the category “Technische Akustik.” Poulopoulos discusses in detail the process of the purchase, documented in the museum’s Verwaltungsarchiv and early publications.

All musical instruments will occasionally require routine repairs, but many extant antique musical instruments have been modified over the years to suit new owners and new musical fashions—a natural and predictable process Poulopoulos calls “recycling.” Modifications were common for stringed instruments from the 16th through 18th centuries, when Renaissance lutes were reborn as Baroque lutes, and five-course Baroque guitars became single-strung “classical” guitars. Guitars were frequently modernized by the addition of wire frets, machine tuners, and so forth, much as a modern guitarist might add a pickup to an acoustic guitar. In one memorable example of drastic transformation, Poulopoulos describes the “Jux-Guitarre” (joke guitar), a small instrument with a pear-shaped body, a soundboard decorated with old coins, and with a carved wooden figure added to the headstock, none of which could possibly be considered improvements. Apparently, it had been once a normal guitar that an owner

had seen fit to transform into a cittern. (Why? Perhaps the guitar’s upper bouts were badly damaged and this was a crude reconstruction; there seems no other excuse for the brutal changes.)

Poulopoulos points out that a study of modifications often provides insight regarding an instrument’s various owners and the evolution of musical fashion as well as technology. Forgery was yet another factor, and Poulopoulos provides an interesting discussion, including examples in the Deutsches Museum. And poor restoration could result in irreversible mutilation, as in the case of the Cristofori fortepiano acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1889, on the assumption that it was the oldest extant piano (1720). It had been “put into playing order” in 1875, however, with major alterations to the hammers, then “drastically restored” in 1938 without adequate documentation.

Poulopoulos concludes with an evaluation of the Hahn Collection. He observes that the original purchase was hurried and authentication was based too much on the advice of antique dealers rather than experts, resulting in a number of acquisitions of dubious authenticity or with unusual features. The ten guitars ultimately purchased in 1906 bore little relationship to the museum’s 1905 “wish list,” and some were not in good repair. But Poulopoulos reminds us that recycled instruments (and forgeries, too) have intrinsic educational value for musicians, organologists, and luthiers. In the words of Rossi Rognoni, they are “important documents of a relevant moment in the history of taste, and [should] be preserved as such, independently from their aesthetic value.” Perhaps, ... but this also serves as a useful rationalization when a museum makes ill-considered acquisitions.

Poulopoulos provides many illustrations, a detailed bibliography, and an appendix with detailed measurements of three guitars. *New Voices in Old Bodies* is published in print form for € 29 but is also available for free downloading at the website of the Deutsches Museum using the link: http://www.deutsches-museum.de/fileadmin/Content/010_DM/050_Forschung/studies-2-gesamtlayout.pdf. The illustrations in the online version are of a lower resolution than in the printed book.

—RICHARD M. LONG