

# Harpsichord & fortepiano

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# VERMEER'S RUCKERS MUSELAR VIRGINAL:

## Vermeer's painting of a Ruckers Muselar Virginal in *The Music Lesson* c. 1662-65

by Dominic Eckersley<sup>1</sup>

One of the most famous paintings by Johannes Vermeer (1632-75), *The Music Lesson* (Royal Collection), features a young woman standing with her back to the painter while playing a muselar virginal with a gentleman standing to her right (See Diag. 1, cover).<sup>2</sup> Many people have questioned who might have made the instrument she is playing in the painting, and if it is even plausible to try to track down the maker of an instrument in a painting at all. How accurate can a painting be? Vermeer is often thought to have been very careful with detail in his paintings, which has led to the general acceptance that he probably used a camera obscura, as David Hockney suggested, or some similar optical aid, to assist him in his work. But still, how accurate could that be? Would Vermeer even bother to be accurate to the point that a viewer might be able to recognise the maker of an instrument when the area normally carrying the name of a maker is not visible? How could we even demonstrate such a thing anyway?

In Vermeer's Delft, secular music making took place more often in private homes than in concert venues. This is reflected in Vermeer's work; no less than four paintings attributed to him show muselar virginals, of which *The Music Lesson* is but one. There is also one painting attributed to Vermeer in which a young woman sits at a harpsichord with a lutenist and a singer. No surviving painting by Vermeer shows a normal left-handed "spinet" virginal. (All the virginals he paints are muselar and he could be indicating something subtle in that the women are likewise muses.)

A number of instrument makers made virginals both in Flanders and elsewhere. The most notable were undoubtedly those of the Ruckers. The Ruckers dynasty was made up of three generations: Hans (1540s-1598) and his first son, Ioannes (1578-1642), his second son, Andreas I (1579-1645), and Andreas' son, Andreas II (1607-1667). As the instruments by Andreas Ruckers I and Andreas Ruckers II are virtually indistinguishable, instruments made

by either will simply be referred to here as being by Andreas Ruckers.

Ioannes Couchet (or Jan Couchet) (2 February 1615-30 March 1655) was Hans Ruckers' grandson and the first of the Couchet dynasty. He completed an apprenticeship with his uncle, Ioannes Ruckers, and his family ultimately took over the business and continued to make instruments almost identical to the Ruckers instruments. So desired were the instruments of Ruckers that even into the late eighteenth century they fetched resale prices far in excess of anything anyone else was making. In order to modernise these 16th and 17th -century instruments for 18th -century tastes and needs they were rebuilt and extended by various instrument restorers and builders in various ways, most notably by Nicolas Blanchet and Paskal Taskin in Paris. Few of the harpsichords have survived intact.

As much of a long shot as it may at first seem, it has long been hoped that there would be some identifying element in Vermeer's painting

which could positively identify the virginal he painted, and perhaps even to identify it as a surviving instrument of the present day. There is no visible name on the instrument, as the names on virginals were mostly painted onto the tops of the jack covers and the jack cover is out of view in this painting. Perhaps other elements of the instrument's design or decoration could betray a possible trademark or signature.

The first impression the instrument gives is one of Antwerp manufacture due to the nature of the wood cut block-printed papers glued to the inside of the instrument; the dolphin motif paper (often referred to as "seahorse paper") lining the keywell and the front of the instrument, the printed paper on the interior of the lid, and the arabesque printed paper on the fallboard (the board that is hinged onto the bottom board and flaps down when the instrument is opened to reveal the keyboard area). The original design for many—but not all—of the papers used by the Ruckers makers appear to have been created by Sylvius Pellegrino in 1538 and Balthasar Sylvius in 1554.<sup>3</sup> However, it does seem likely that the woodcut printing blocks were made by an independent person and that these would have been available for purchase to other members of the Guild of St Luke.<sup>4</sup>

The interior lids normally had larger block printed papers applied to them to imitate craftily the appearance perhaps of ash grain wood (sometimes called "Hungarian Ash") or moire (moiré silk). Thinner border papers in arabesque style were then applied around these lid papers and the lid papers were often furnished with a Latin motto. Most of the interior wood was likewise ornamented with various types of paper while the soundboard was decorated with flowers, birds and insects in tempera paint.

In the case of this instrument the lid motto reads "MUSICA \* LETITIÆ \* COMES \* MEDICINA \* DOLORUM" ("music is the companion of joy and the medicine of sorrows").

Unfortunately, the mottos on keyboard instruments are poor indicators of authorship as various makers used various mottos and it is quite conceivable that any number of makers could have used the same motto as in the Vermeer painting. This same motto, for example, does appear on a double manual Andreas Ruckers harpsichord of 1624.<sup>5</sup> However, the instrument—and particularly the dolphin papers around the front of the virginal—do bear a strong resemblance to the instruments of the Ruckers dynasty.

As the virginal bears no visible name, or other obvious particular idiosyncrasy of any known builder, it has been assumed that the instrument was either an approximate impression Vermeer might have made visiting someone else's house or a generic Antwerp instrument by an unknown maker. Ruckers has been put forward by some as the most likely basis of Vermeer's painting although it is thought that Vermeer probably didn't have so lavish an instrument at his disposal from which to work.

#### *Papers used on name battens and in keywells*

Is it possible that the minute detail of the wood blocks has been represented fully and clearly in Vermeer's painting, indicating that the instrument was indeed by a member of the Ruckers family and that Vermeer must have used a *camera obscura* to enable him give this level of detail? There is evidence of dolphin paper from surviving Ruckers virginals where small *fleur de lys* motifs within the swirling serifs of the design were not identically mirrored although the design was—for the most part—mirrored symmetrically against itself in a book-matched manner. On one side the *fleur de lys* motif displayed three leaves or petals, while the other on the opposite side had only one petal. This is also the case for Vermeer's virginal.

Various members of the Ruckers family used various different printed papers for their

instruments. In addition, each maker used a variety of different designs, and some designs were later replaced by newer versions. Grant O'Brien has established that three dolphin motif printed block papers were used by the Ruckers and Couchet builders. The earliest version O'Brien refers to as "Type 3 earlier type" (diag. 2) and clearly shows the asymmetrical *fleur de lys* elements as expected, one having three petals, and the other—to the right of the facing dolphins—only one. A second more recent block "Type 3 later type" (diag. 3) was used on later instruments. This type of paper is mirrored and has some differences in the boarders and other aspects of the design but the *fleur de lys* differences are also represented. The third version of the dolphin paper, "Type 4" (diag. 5), is in negative; that is the inked and blank areas are reversed.



Diag. 2: O'Brien's example of Ruckers' "Type 3 earlier type" dolphin paper. The left *fleur de lys* example has three points or petals above a bulbous base where the right example has only one. This paper type is found on three instruments by Hans Ruckers (1591, 1594 and 1598), one Ioannes Ruckers (1611) and two Andreas Ruckers (both 1640).



Diag. 3: O'Brien's example of Ruckers' "Type 3 later type" dolphin paper. Here the image is mirrored and the right example now has three points or petals above a bulbous base where the left example has only one and a less bulbous base. Also the upper and lower borders differ from the earlier "Type 3" papers and a number of small details have been changed. This paper type is found on no instruments by Hans Ruckers, one Ioannes

Ruckers (1640) and three Andreas Ruckers (1637, 1648, 1651).



Diag. 4: In this third O'Brien example of a later "Type 4" Ruckers dolphin paper the image is changed into a "negative" version of the earlier "Type 3", where the design is in white against a black background. This paper type is found on one instrument by Hans (and Ioannes?) Ruckers (c. 1600), one Ioannes Ruckers (1623), one Andreas Ruckers (1644) and one Ioannes Couchet (1645).

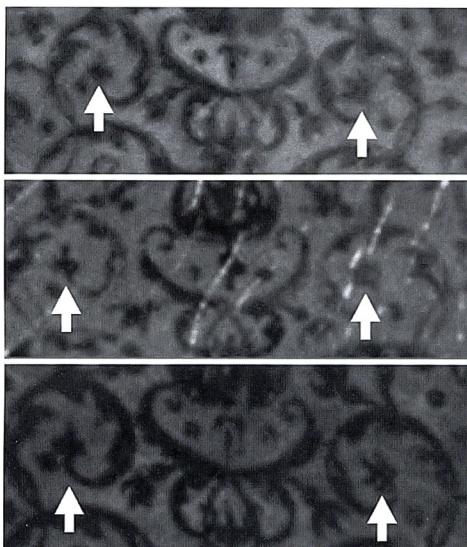
Taking a very close look at the Vermeer painting and the woodblock printed dolphin paper on the front of the Vermeer instrument, we can clearly see that the Ruckers "Type 3 early type" papers have been used.



Diag. 5: Vermeer's example of Ruckers' "Type 3 early type" style dolphin paper (greatly enlarged). The left *fleur de lys* example has, again, three points or petals above a bulbous base where the right example has only one.

Comparing the Vermeer paper example to two different known Ruckers examples demonstrates that Vermeer has painted a very accurate copy of one of the types of paper used by the Ruckers builders and without a doubt painted the instrument not from memory but from life and probably using a device like the *camera obscura* to enable this kind of precision.

Date	Maker using it	O'Brien name	Features
1591-1640	Hans (1591, 1594 and 1598), Ioannes (1611) and two Andreas (both 1640).	Type 3 earlier	Left of facing dolphins: 3 points/Right of facing dolphins: 1 point. as seen in Vermeer painting
1637-1651	Ioannes (1640) and three Andreas (1637, 1648, 1651).	Type 3 later	Right: 3 points/Left of facing dolphins: 1 point
1600-1645	Hans (and Ioannes?) (c. 1600), Ioannes (1623), one Andreas (1644) and one Ioannes Couchet (1645).	Later Type 4	Left: 3 points/Right: 1 point but with inverted colours



Diag. 6: Top to bottom; Ioannes Ruckers 1598,  
Johannes Vermeer 1622-65, Ioannes 1622-65,  
Ioannes Ruckers 1622

The Hans Ruckers instrument of 1598 is signed "IOANNES RVCKERS FECIT ANTVERPIAE" yet although it carries a soundboard rose with the initials "H.R." the rose is of papier mâché, typical of later Ioannes Ruckers instruments. Therefore it will be referred to as "Ioannes Ruckers 1598".

There are a number of other harpsichords found in the iconography of the period which do show wood cut block-printing in the interior playing or sounding areas. A smaller number, perhaps only three, seem to have dolphin motif paper similar to that in the Vermeer painting. Of great interest is that two paintings by Jan Steen<sup>6</sup> appear to use the same instrument. In his

paintings *The Harpsichord Lesson* (1660-69) and *A Young Woman playing a Harpsichord*, one can see the presence of the dolphin papers, although a closer look does not afford us a particularly good view.<sup>7</sup> In addition is Steen's humour in writing his own name on the name batten of one of the painted instruments reading "Johanis Steen Fecit 1671". (The date, though unclear, could read "1641".)



Diag. 7: Jan Steen, *A Young Woman playing a*



Diag. 8: Steen, Detail

*Harpsichord to a Young Man*, Probably 1659,  
National Gallery, London.

Likewise we find in the painting by Godaert Kamper (1614-79) "Woman at a Virginal" a young woman sitting at what is quite probably a Ruckers harpsichord (not virginal) where the stand has been removed, as have a number of paintings from her walls, perhaps sold due to hard times. In this painting, the dolphin papers in the key well are clearly recognisable as being similar to the Ruckers style of papers.<sup>8</sup> The "Type 3 earlier type" papers can also be seen on the C. R."

virginal in Namur and the virginal by Ioannes Bos, now in Spain.<sup>9</sup>



Diag. 9: Godaert Kamper (1614-79), *Woman sitting at a Virginal*. Detail

It is unlikely that the instrument in Steen's paintings is by Ruckers because of the vertical edge of the faux marble paint work on the near outside edge of the case. The white line at the top of the marble section gives the impression of marble slabs having been affixed to the case. Ruckers instruments are not known to have been decorated in this way, but rather to have intended to give the impression of slabs of marble affixed with flat iron strips at top and bottom. The white line on Ruckers instruments therefore tends to be on the lower iron strip's upper surface to give the impression that it stands proud of the marble. The marble paint work on Ruckers instruments is continuous around the case without interruption. Marble paint work of the Steen type can be seen in the Gommaar van Everbroeck, Antwerp, 1659 instrument in the National Music Museum at South Dakota.<sup>10</sup>



Diag. 10: instrument by Gommaar van Everbroeck, Antwerp, 1659. National Music Museum, Vermilion, South Dakota (Stand not original)

#### Interior Lid Papers, Pigments and Mottoes.

On the inside of the lid of the virginal in Vermeer's painting the sign-written motto can be clearly seen. O'Brien describes three types of lid paper, the oldest being "Winkelreidhaus" (c. 1560) named after a papered ceiling from a building referred to as the "Winkelhaus" from Stans in Switzerland, and two others which succeed the "Winkelreidhaus" paper. The older of these latter two was used on the Ioannes Ruckers 1598 virginal and the most recent of the three on instruments after 1623. The lid papers of earlier Ruckers instruments (before 1623) appear today to have been printed using brown pigment. Ruckers' later instruments (after 1623) have paper printed in green, perhaps using *terre-verte*.<sup>11</sup> On comparing the colour of the Vermeer instrument with that of the Ioannes Ruckers 1598, the Vermeer does appear more ochre, somewhere between brown and green. The darker colour of the 1598 instrument might perhaps be the result of ageing of both the pigments and the discolouration of the paper beneath it. It could be that all the instruments were intended to have a green colour and that the pigment used after 1623 was different from the earlier pigment, and was less sensitive to light and to fading. Only careful microscopic analysis of the various pigments would shed more light on this issue. Of note is how the "grain" of the Vermeer paper bears a strong similarity to the Ioannes Ruckers virginal of 1598 (See Diag. 11, Inside back cover. Also see Diag. 12a-b, inside back cover.)

The initial letters of the motto phrase painted upon the lid papers are not enlarged (as they are on some other Ruckers instruments) and remain the same size as the other letters. There are "bullets" between the words on the Vermeer instrument which are to be found also on the Ioannes Ruckers 1598 instrument. Comparing this lettering to the lettering of other

Ruckers instruments, some conclusions can be drawn. Due to the paper pattern and colour itself, and the use of small "bullets" separating words, a closer match might be drawn between the Vermeer painting and the Ioannes virginal of 1598. The pigment used for the Vermeer virginal likely contained some *terre-verte* (earth green) as perhaps did the Ioannes Ruckers 1598 instrument. It seems probable then that the paper was printed before 1623.

Regarding ochre and *terra verte* Cennino Cennini writes, probably in the 14th century, "[t]his colour is found in the earth in the mountains, where there are found certain seams resembling sulphur; and where the seams are, there is found *sinoper*, and *terre-verte*, and other kinds of colour... And these colours showed up in this earth just the way a wrinkle shows up in the face of a man or woman.... I picked out the wrinkle of this colour with a pen knife, and I do assure you that there never was a better colour. And know that this ochre is an all-round colour, especially for work in fresco; for it is used, with other mixtures, as I shall explain to you, for flesh colours, for draperies, for painted mountains, and buildings and horses, and in general for many purposes."<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the earlier Ruckers lid papers attempted to imitate "drapery." (See *Diag. 12 c, inside back cover*). The lid papers have been applied in different orientations on the Ruckers 1598 and the Vermeer instruments.

#### *Border papers with Bust Motif*

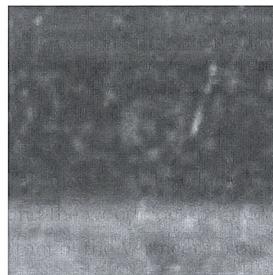
Around the ochre *terre-verte* drapery printed lid papers the maker of the virginal has also used border papers which appear much darker. These papers ("Type 24")<sup>13</sup> are found on four surviving Ruckers instruments: Hans Ruckers 1610 and Ioannes Ruckers 1627, 1637 and 1638. On the Vermeer instrument the small head bust portrayals are only just visible but they are clearly taken from "Type 24" papers.



Diag. 13: Border papers with bust motif, Vermeer



Diag. 14: Border papers with bust motif, Hans Ruckers 1610, Ioannes Ruckers 1627, 1637 and 1638



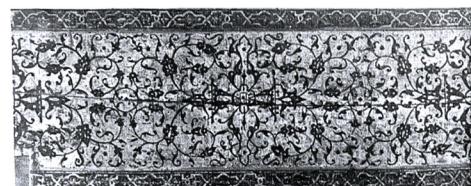
Diag. 15: Left, Vermeer enlarged.  
Right, Hans Ruckers 1610, Ioannes Ruckers 1627, 1637 and 1638

#### *Fallboard papers*

Vermeer's painting of the papers glued to the fallboard can be matched with one surviving instrument; the Ioannes Ruckers virginal of 1598 at Paris. Both the painting and the 1598 instrument carry the same two papers, the main central white page and the outer and darker border paper ("Type 15" and "Type 30").<sup>14</sup>



Diag. 16: Fallboard of Vermeer's virginal



Diag. 17 "Type 15" and "Type 30" papers on the Ioannes Ruckers 1598, Paris (Photos by Grant O'Brien).<sup>15</sup>

### *Other details: Key Front Mouldings, Dates, and Lid Strings*

If we accept that the level of accuracy in Vermeer's painting of the printed papers is as high as we are supposing, then can we not extend this notion to other parts of the instrument such as the mouldings on the fronts of the keys? These mouldings were carried out by Ruckers by recycling used parchment. The parchment often had Hebrew lettering on it, perhaps recycled from a printer in Jodenstraat ("Jewish Street") in Antwerp where Ruckers later had his workshop. This would be dyed red and glued to the key fronts once an embossed, pierced and arcaded piece of heavy paper had been applied to it. The red dye appears to have been highly light sensitive and faded quickly. Comparing the Vermeer key fronts with those of Hans Ruckers from his virginal of 1581, the similarity is convincing. Although it is not as clear in the painting as we might hope, one can make out two darker patches in the right most key front at upper right and upper left of centre which bear resemblance with darker patches in the keys of the Ruckers instrument. Likewise, an elliptical lower area is discernible in both cases towards the bottom of the key front. With most of the red pigment faded already at the time of painting, perhaps, one could possibly ascribe the arcades to the earlier period used by Hans, Ioannes Ruckers and Jan Couchet.

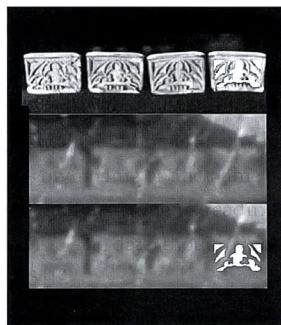


Diag. 18: Keyfronts: left, Vermeer; right, Hans Ruckers 1581, New York



Diag. 19: Left: Early Ruckers key fronts used only by Hans, Ioannes and Jan Couchet. Right: Late Ruckers key fronts only used by the two Andreas Ruckers.<sup>16</sup>

By uploading the photograph of the earlier key front arcades into a photo processing application and colouring white the approximate areas of the larger piercings of the original paper to imitate the red dyed parchment behind, it is possible to create a template which can be superimposed upon the key fronts from the Vermeer painting which does demonstrate well that the key front arcades are indeed those of the earlier Ruckers workshop.



Diag. 20: Key front arcades with red pigment replaced by white areas to backing parchment. Above: Older style, Hans Ruckers, Ioannes Ruckers, Jan Couchet. Centre: Vermeer without added pigment. Below Right: Vermeer with added white pigment.

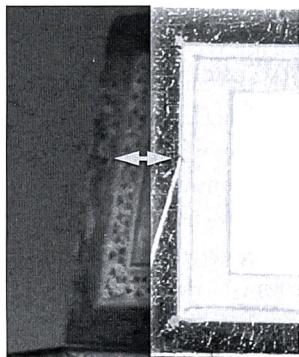
The motto writing on the lid of the Vermeer painting does appear to stop rather short of the right end of the lid. Normally one would expect such lid mottos to be spaced centrally within the area provided. Where one line must be longer than another there are sometimes buttons or stars to make up the extra space. However, in the case of the Vermeer painting there is a large amount of space with no words at the right of the lid. The letter "S" is seen directly to the right of the player's head at the end of what would be the top line of text. This area at the far right, then, would probably once have carried two ornamental motifs, one above the other, with a date between, much as in the Ioannes Ruckers virginal of 1598 at Paris.

With the Vermeer instrument one can even make out what could be the tantalising remains of a smudged ornamental motif and date. These may have become smudged before the painting

was done or, more likely, Vermeer thought these devices intrusive, especially as they would appear right between the faces of the two main subjects of the painting and would also date the instrument perhaps awkwardly. Perhaps this is the same reason that Jan Steen disguised the decade of the date on the name batten in his own painting.

*Please see Diag 21a and 21b (which are in colour on the inside back page of this magazine.)*

Perhaps our last visual clue, and a rather charming but simple Ruckers problem solving solution, is the matter of Ruckers' lid strings. Rather than use a stick to prop things open, as we tend to use today, Ruckers and other builders in Flanders tended to use strings affixed through holes in the bodies and lids of their instruments. The Vermeer instrument is no different and Vermeer places his lid string at the same position as did Ruckers.



Diag. 23: Ioannes Ruckers virginal, 1598, Paris and Vermeer 1662-65. A photograph of the Vermeer instrument has been digitally superimposed upon a photograph of the Paris Ruckers, 1598, and the result was bleached to highlight the string in the Vermeer instrument and the hole for the string in the Ruckers instrument at Paris.

### Conclusions

Having used photographic evidence from original harpsichords and virginals of the Ruckers shop we have established that Vermeer's

painting shows papers from the keywell area which are identical to O'Brien's "Type 3 earlier type" paper and that Ruckers' use of this paper ceased around 1640, when the last known instrument, made by Andreas Ruckers in 1640 (now at Yale University), was made with this paper.<sup>17</sup> The earliest of these instruments was a virginal made in 1591, by Hans. In 1637 Andreas Ruckers started using a new and mirrored dolphin paper which Ioannes also used once in 1640. Hence there is a brief overlap of the two styles of "Type 3" papers.

The new paper was probably introduced by Andreas the Younger around 1637 and was used concurrently with the older paper until Ioannes' death in 1642, at which point it was likely discontinued. Perhaps Ioannes still had old stock which the printer no longer made and which was then unavailable to Andreas Ruckers. Although time accumulated damage to the original woodblocks used for the keywell dolphin paper has been used by others to detect which Ruckers instruments are older or newer, the detail in the Vermeer painting does unfortunately disappoint us here.

The printed lid paper of the Vermeer painting with the motto written upon it was printed using an ochre or *terre-verte* based pigment. This pigment seems to have been discontinued by Ruckers as of 1623 with a greener pigment used in its place thereafter. The patterns of the lid papers of Vermeer's instrument have more in common with earlier rather than later Ruckers instruments, which are mirror images of the papers in the Vermeer painting and on the lid of the Ioannes Ruckers 1598 instrument. The "bullets" between the words of the motto most closely resemble those of the Ioannes Ruckers of 1598. The papers bordering the lid paper are known to have been used by Ioannes between 1610 and 1638 and may have been used earlier.

Vermeer's key front arcades are identical to those used only by Hans Ruckers, Ioannes

Ruckers and Jan Couchet. As Couchet was not yet a member of the guild in 1637, only joining the guild in 1642/43, it would be reasonable to count him out as the maker, unless he made the instrument while working for Ioannes from 1625 after the death of his mother in May of that year.<sup>18</sup>

Although any maker in Antwerp during this time period might have had access to the printed papers the Ruckers family normally used and could plausibly have made the instrument in the Vermeer painting, the combination of so many elements which are so common to Hans Ruckers instruments, ranging from the lid paper print pattern and pigments to the border papers of the lid, the bare wood surrounding these borders and the front and keywell papers in their high level of detail and in their conforming with Ruckers examples, the matching of the fallboard paper and fallboard border papers along with the clearly early Ruckers-styled key front arcades and, finally, the albeit missing or illegible date and ornamental motif at the right of the lid, it does seem clear that this instrument was made somewhere between 1583 (the date of the oldest non-papered Ruckers instrument) and 1623 after which the greener papers were used, by at least one of the Ruckers.

Andreas Ruckers can be ruled out if only because of the key front arcades which are found only on Ioannes Ruckers and Jan Couchet's instruments. Couchet can likewise be ruled out as he was not yet a member of the Guild of St Luke and would not have been able to work under his own name. Couchet probably did not start to work for Ioannes until after his mother died on 30 May 1625. There is further information about soundboard roses, however as we cannot view the one in the Vermeer painting it cannot give us a conclusive answer.<sup>19</sup>

With the exception of the wording of the motto and the border papers around the lid papers, the Vermeer instrument appears to be a muselar virginal version of the Ioannes

"spinet" (or "left-handed") virginal of 1598 now at Paris, and was likely made at around the same time and is otherwise identical to it. The most sustainable attribution of maker for the Vermeer muselar virginal must then be Ioannes Ruckers. The instrument was probably made around 1598 and possibly still under his father Hans' supervision.

It is interesting, therefore, that Vermeer acquired not only one of the most expensive musical instruments available but that it was as much as 60 or more years old at the time he painted it. Vermeer must have been aware of its value as he transported it to his studio. We can be reasonably certain that Vermeer could not have afforded to own such an instrument himself. It is also incredibly interesting to see a Ruckers instrument in a relatively new state even if at 60 years old it might have seemed quite antique to Vermeer.

A number of interesting questions are raised by the antiquity of the virginal at the time Vermeer painted it. The standing position of the player, for instance, is not unusual in paintings, particularly of women. Perhaps painters enjoyed luxuriating in the long dresses. However, in most instances where people are painted standing at instruments, the keyboards tend to be so low as to make the hand assume a very awkward playing position, even given that thumbs—particularly of the right hand—were not generally used much in keyboard playing during Vermeer's life. Keyboard instruments generally appear to have been on reasonably high stands which would have required high seated chairs but this instrument does appear rather taller than average.

It is marvellous, remarkable, almost unimaginable, to be able to have before us a time machine with which we can compare two almost identical instruments, the Ioannes Ruckers 1598 spinet virginal now at Paris and the Ioannes Ruckers c.1598 muselar virginal then at Delft but now in Buckingham Palace at London, made

at more or less the same point in time, by one and the same maker. Yet one is almost new—a trifling 60 years old—while the other is over 400 years old. Here we have an unprecedented view into the workings of time and the ravages it brings to things of such wonder as a virginal.

We have literally gone back to look at the future and can see how the spinet virginal sister of Vermeer's muselar virginal will fare in 350 years time. But back in the present one can't help feeling just a little sad that one of the sisters didn't make it this far.

This letter to the editor arrived just prior to publication of this issue:

*Dear Friends and Colleagues,*

Giuseppe Clericetti, editor of Andrea Gabrieli's keyboard works (Doblinger) has just published a book which contains transcriptions of what he claims to be letters written by Andrea Gabrieli in what he states that he presumes is the hand of the author. No such manuscript exists and the whole is an elaborate conceit. As such it is perhaps an entertaining read *but all interested should take note that the letters do not exist. They are written by Clericetii himself.*

My complaint to the publisher remains unanswered. It was passed on to the author who simply accuses me of not having a sense of humour.

Please pass on this information to anyone you know likely to order what claims to be a piece of serious scholarship which it is not.

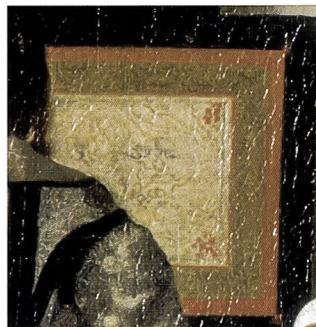
(The advert can be found at [www.zecchini.com](http://www.zecchini.com)).

--Christopher Stembridge

- <sup>1</sup> The possibility of being realistically able to demonstrate who built the virginals and how to go about it was presented to the author by Willem Kroesbergen and this became the basis for the research.
- <sup>2</sup> We believe this photo to be in the public domain. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Music\\_Lesson#mediaviewer/File:Jan\\_Vermeer\\_van\\_Delft\\_014.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Music_Lesson#mediaviewer/File:Jan_Vermeer_van_Delft_014.jpg)
- <sup>3</sup> Grant O'Brien, *Ruckers: A Harpsichord and Virginal Building Tradition; Doctor of Philosophy Thesis* (Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh, 1983), 391. We would like to thank Dr. Grant O'Brien for permission to use the photos from his dissertation. Volume 1 may be viewed online at [www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/](http://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/) using a search of the title.
- <sup>4</sup> O'Brien, 395.
- <sup>5</sup> O'Brien, 728.
- <sup>6</sup> Those able to visit London may wish to visit the following exhibit at the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace: "Masters of the Everyday: Dutch Artists in the Age of Vermeer", Friday, 13 November 2015 to Sunday, 14 February 2016.
- <sup>7</sup> The pictured item is used by permission of the National Gallery, London. Interested readers may wish to view the other Steen painting as follows: Jan Steen, *The Harpsichord Lesson*, 1660-69. The Wallace Collection, London. P154  
<http://wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=65088&viewType=detailView>
- <sup>8</sup> The Kamper painting appears to be privately owned. The work is Godaert Kamper (1614 - 79), *Woman by a Virginal*, with kind permission to reproduce from Rafael Valls Limited.
- <sup>9</sup> O'Brien, 407.
- <sup>10</sup> Gommaar van Everbroeck may well have been one of the employees of Ioannes Ruckers or Jan Couchet, given that the wife of Couchet, Angela van den Brandt, became the godmother of Gommaar van Everbroeck's twins and also given that the soundboard painting of his surviving instrument was executed by the same anonymous painter who did those of Ioannes Ruckers and Jan Couchet. The instrument is housed at the National Music Museum, Vermilion, South Dakota, USA. Kind permission was given to reproduce this photograph.
- <sup>11</sup> O'Brien, 396.
- <sup>12</sup> Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, *The Craftsman Handbook, Il Libro dell' Arte*, Translation, Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. (Mineola, New York, Dover, 1960), 27.
- <sup>13</sup> O'Brien, 414.
- <sup>14</sup> O'Brien, 410.
- <sup>15</sup> Grant O'Brien. We would like to thank Dr. Grant O'Brien for permission to use the photos from his dissertation. Volume 1 may be viewed online at [www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/](http://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/) using a search of the title.
- <sup>16</sup> O'Brien, 234.
- <sup>17</sup> O'Brien, 406.
- <sup>18</sup> O'Brien, 25.
- <sup>19</sup> As Hans and Ioannes were working in the same shop under Hans' name and using an "H.R." soundboard rose until Hans' death in 1598, it is tempting to attribute these instruments to Hans. However, the 1598 Ioannes Ruckers spinet virginal now at Paris, carries an "H.R." soundboard rose of papier mâché and is missing the angel's right wing, typical of Ioannes Ruckers instruments. Instruments whose roses have a missing right angel wing in addition to those made of papier mâché, start to appear in 1595. Hans died in 1598 and left Ioannes working in the same workshop using Hans' soundboard rose but signing instruments with his own name. Ioannes joined the Guild of St Luke in 1611 and only then did he start to make instruments with his own initials of "I.R." in his soundboard rose.



Diag. 11: Instrument by Joannes Ruckers, 1598, Musée de la Musique, Paris.<sup>20</sup>



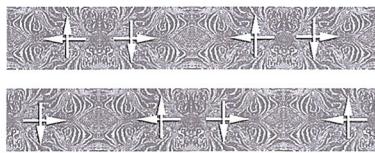
Diag. 21a. Vermeer, 1662-65. Detail



Diag. 12a: Left: Vermeer's virginal. Detail;  
Right: Joannes Ruckers 1598. Detail



Diag. 21b Left: Joannes Ruckers 1598 lid date  
Right: Vermeer lid area



Diag. 12b. Orientation of lid papers.  
Above, Vermeer. Below, Ruckers 1598



Diag. 12c: Vermeer, 1662-65. Detail

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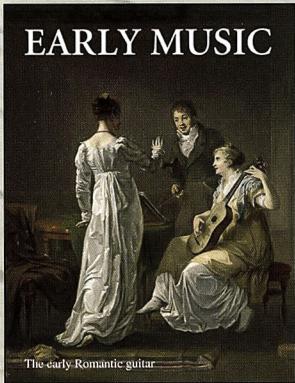
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