Three Nürnberg Compassmacher

Hans Troschel the Elder, Hans Troschel the Younger, and David Beringer

BRUCE CHANDLER
Associate Professor of Mathematics, New York University

CLARE VINCENT
Assistant Curator of Western European Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

THE DATING of four sundials in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art poses certain problems concerning the identification of their makers. The first two of these instruments (Figure 1) are signed “Hans Tröschel Nürnberg” and “Hanns Troschel Anno 1620.” The former bears the maker’s stamp, a bird on a twig (Figure 2),1 on the bottom of the lower leaf. It is undated, but a table of epacts on the lower leaf was usable during the years 1598–1610. The maker’s mark on the latter dial, also to be found on the bottom of the lower leaf, is a six-pointed star (Figure 3). Hans Troschel’s dates are given by Ernst Zinner as 1549–1612.2 Zinner also mentions the existence of sundials signed and dated by a Hans Troschel between 1616 and 1631. To account for their dates, he conjectures that the former Hans’s son Johannes, an engraver, known to have died in Rome in 1628, was the maker of these later instruments.3

As yet unpublished material in the Nürnberg Archives provides a solution to the problem of the identity of the two Troschels.4 In the following list of significant items from the records in these Archives, it should be noted that compassmacher refers to membership in the craft in Nürnberg to which sundial makers usually belonged.

1578 October 4. Hans Tröschel, compassmacher, was made a burgher of Nürnberg.5
1579 January 4. The banns were proclaimed in the parish of St. Sebaldis for the marriage of Hans Trössl from Bamberg and Barbara Rottnperger.6
1579 February 3. Hans Drossl, compassmacher, and Barbara Rottnperger were married.7
1582 February 20. “Barbara Hans Troschin Compasssten macherrin auff dem neuen haus in der Grenzgasse” died.8
1582 May 28. Hans Dröschel married Barbara Lienhard Kraus, or Krause.9

1. The choice of the bird on a twig probably derives from the name of the maker. Drossel, as Hans is often referred to in the Nürnberg Archives, means wood thrush in German.
3. For a biography of Johannes, or Hans, Troschel the printmaker, see the entry by Frederick Thöne for Hans Troschel in Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler, ed. Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker, XXXIII (Leipzig, 1939) pp. 429–430.
4. We wish to thank Dr. L. Veit, Director of the Landeskirchliches Archiv Nürnberg, Dr. Otto Puchner, Director of the Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, and Dr. Werner Schultheis, Director of the Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, for their kind cooperation in making the material in their respective archives available to us.
FIGURE I
Portable ivory diptych sundial by Hans Troschel the Elder (at left), German (Nürnberg), about 1598. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Stephen D. Tucker, 03.21.38. Portable ivory diptych sundial by Hans Troschel the Younger (at right), German (Nürnberg), dated 1620. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Stephen D. Tucker, 03.21.53
FIGURE 2
Details of the sundial at left in Figure 1, showing the name and maker’s mark of Hans Troschel the Elder

1585 September 21. Hans Drossel and Barbara were parents of an infant Johannes.10
1599 January 16. Hanns Drössel and Barbara were parents of twins, Hanns and Anna.11
1612 June 1. Hans Troschel died.12
1618 Hans Troschel, compassmacher, bought a house in the Grasergasse in Nürnberg.14
1620 February. Hans Tröschel bought a house in the Ledergasse.15
1634 August 19. Frau Ursula, widow of Hanns Droschel, compassmacher, died.16

15. Stadtarchiv, Grundverbriefnsbücher, CXXXII, p. 9 verso.
18. It must be remembered that Hans is a shortened form of Johannes, and there might be some question, therefore, as to whether two living sons in the same family would have borne the names Hans and Johannes respectively. In the case of Hans Troschel’s sons, the evidence that the sundial maker and the engraver were not the same person is strong. In the entry in

Allgemeines Lexikon, p. 430, Thöne documents an engraved portrait of Christian Matthias signed “Hanns Tröschel ad vivem delin. et sculp., Nör. 1622” and another of a bagpipe player and an old man signed “Joh. Troschel fecit Romae, 1627.” Thöne says that the engraver died in Rome in 1628 and was buried there at S. Maria del Popolo. On the other hand, Zinner, Instrumente, p. 554, lists a surviving instrument signed and dated by Hans Troschel in 1628 and another signed “Hans Troschel Nurnemberg 1691.” In addition, L. K. A. records the birth of a daughter, Sibylla, to Hans Troschel, compassmacher, on October 23, 1628, (Taufbuch, L. 398). Clearly the engraver and the sundial maker were two different people. Finally, Thöne believes that the engraver’s first work was an engraving of Emperor Maximilian’s entrance into Nürnberg on July 3, 1612. If the engraving were contemporary with the event, the engraver could not have been born in 1599.

FIGURE 3
Details of the sundial at right in Figure 1, showing the name and maker’s mark of Hans Troschel the Younger

It is clear from these excerpts that there were two sundial makers named Hans Troschel. The older died in 1612. As one can see from Zinner’s catalogue, he used a bird on a twig as his maker’s mark. The majority of his surviving sundials bear this mark, and many are also dated.12 No dial marked with a bird on a twig is dated later than 1612, and no dial marked with a six-pointed star is dated earlier than 1612.

Hans Troschel the Younger, the sundial maker, was either the Johannes born in 1585, or the Hanns born in 1599.18 Frederick Thöne, author of the entry for the engraver in Thieme and Becker’s Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler, gives his birth date as 1585, but Thöne probably had no knowledge of the Hanns born...
in 1599. There are slight difficulties in accepting 1599 as the year of the sundial maker’s birth. If born in 1599, Hans would have been married at the age of fifteen. However, this age for marriage was certainly not unheard-of in the burgher class in seventeenth-century Germany. In addition, the Archives do not record the date when Hans became a master compassmacher. Because there exists an instrument signed

“Hans Troschel 1616,” the latest he could have become master would have been in his seventeenth year. Although most apprentices became masters in the sundial makers’ craft after the age of nineteen, the circumstance of the death of Hans Troschel the Elder in 1612 could have facilitated the younger Troschel’s attainment of the master’s position at an unusually early age.

The situation is still further complicated by the fact that the engraver is known to have signed his works both as Hans and as Johannes. Here the evidence rests. At any rate, a second Hans Troschel, son of the first, emerges as a compassmacher working independently from about 1616 until at least 1631. He died before August 1634. There is some evidence, although slight, that he was the Hans Troschel born in 1599. His mark, rarely recognized as such, is a six-pointed star.

The next problem concerns two sundials by David Beringer (Figures 4, 5). The first is a portable diptych sundial, bearing the printed signature “Verfertigt von David Beringer”; the second is a cube sundial marked simply “D. Beringer.” Neither is dated, but stylistically neither appears to have been made much before 1800. Once more, records found in the Archives at Nürnberg are of assistance. The data concerning David Beringer follows:

1756 January 12. David born to Friedrich Beringer, ironsmith, and his wife Anna.
1777 April 29. David Beringer was made a master compassmacher in Nürnberg.
1798 David Beringer was a householder in the district of St. Lorenz (Lorenzseite) in Nürnberg.

19. For example, see Maximilian Bobinger, Alt-Augsburger Kompassmacher (Augsburg, 1966) p. 174, where the marriage of Jonas I Heckinger at fifteen is documented.
22. Stadtarchiv, Rugamt 1, Meisterliste 1, 1700–1782, p. 19.
24. Stadtarchiv, L. 1002, Quartierliste, 1798, p. 56.
FIGURE 5
Portable cube sundial of fruitwood and paper by David Beringer, German (Nürnberg), about 1777–1821. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Stephen D. Tucker, 03.21.8
In Zinner's catalogue, instruments said to have been made in 1725, 1736, and 1776 in places as various as Dieppe and Augsburg are given to David Beringer, "Mechaniker in Nürnberg."26 Certainly these instruments are dated much too early to be the work of the David Beringer documented in the Nürnberg Archives. Furthermore, a number of cube dials signed "D. Beringer G. P. Seyfried" are given the date of 1736 by Zinner.27 The Nürnberg Meisterliste, 1700-1782, lists Georg Paul Seyfried as a master compassmacher on November 26, 1776,28 and there is no further mention of Seyfried in the Nürnberg Archives. It is evident that none of the cube dials signed "D. Beringer G. P. Seyfried" should be dated before 1777, when both Beringer and Seyfried were masters.

On the other hand, according to the records mentioned above, sundials similar in form to the cube dial in Figure 5, which bear the signature of Beringer, should be generally dated between 1777 and 1821. There is nothing in the Nürnberg Archives to indicate that Beringer's workshop continued after his death in 1821. Some evidence for more exact dating of the dials in this class may be suggested by their ornamental vocabulary. Thus, printed paper dials on some of the Beringer and Seyfried cube sundials are decorated with rococo scrolls,29 which contrast sharply with the chaste neoclassical swags of the two instruments in Figures 4 and 5. Although there is no documentary basis for doing so, the Beringer and Seyfried sundials can on stylistic grounds be placed closer to 1777, while the two sundials in the Metropolitan Museum probably belong to a later phase of Beringer's career.

28. Stadtarchiv, Ragamt 1, Meisterliste 1, 1700-1782, p. 19.
29. For example, see the cube dial by Beringer and Seyfried in the collection of the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza in Florence, illustrated in Henri Michel, Instruments des sciences (Paris, 1966) pl. 68. The biography of Beringer given by Michel is inaccurate.