

The Surviving Oeuvre of Girolamo Zenti

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OF ALL THE ITALIAN keyboard-instrument makers known to have been working in the seventeenth century, none enjoyed so great a reputation as Girolamo Zenti. His commissions in Italy included the construction of an organ for the princely Pamphilj family in Rome, and he is known also to have worked at the courts of Queen Christina of Sweden, Louis XIV of France, and Charles II of England. However, for a man who was once so famous, surprisingly little is now known of his life.

Zenti was probably born in the early years of the seventeenth century, possibly in Viterbo. Unfortunately, the Viterbo city archives have not yielded confirmation of these suppositions,¹ which are based on the inscriptions on two surviving instruments and substantiated by documents in the archives at Stockholm and Rome in which Zenti is designated as "from Viterbo." The earliest of these documents, the list of

Italian musicians brought to Sweden by Queen Christina in 1652, refers to Zenti as "the best master of harpsichords and organs"² but makes it clear that the status of instrument builders left something to be desired in the seventeenth century. Zenti's salary was one of the smallest paid to any member of the troupe, amounting to only half that of the highest-paid singer.

Zenti presumably returned to Italy by the time of Christina's abdication in June 1654. He was working in Rome by 1656, as evidenced by the inscription on a harpsichord listed in an inventory of the instruments belonging to Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici forty-four years later.³ In March 1660, Zenti was commissioned by Camillo Pamphilj, nephew of Pope Innocent X, to build a large organ for the Church of Sant'Agnese in Navona, then in process of construction.⁴ The work on this instrument can, however, only just have been begun when Zenti joined the Italian

1. Personal communication from Drssa. Luisa Cervelli, Director of the Museo di Strumenti Musicali, Rome, at whose behest a search of the Viterbo archives was undertaken and at whose suggestion a street in Viterbo has been named for Zenti.

2. Reprinted by Einar Sundström, "Notiser om drottning Kristinas Italienska Musiker," *Svensk tidskrift för musik forskning* 43 (1961) pp. 308–309. The entry for Zenti reads "A Girolamo Zenti da Viterbo ottimo mastro di Clavicembali ed Organi la somma per Ciascun Anno di tre cento Scudi di Roma." I am indebted to Prof. Ernst Emsheimer, Director of the Musikhistoriska Museet, Stockholm, for bringing this document to my attention.

3. Reprinted with modernized spelling, capitalization, and punctuation by Vinicio Gai, *Gli strumenti musicali della corte medicea e il museo del Conservatorio "Luigi Cherubini" di Firenze* (Florence, 1969) pp. 6–22.

4. The contract is preserved in the Archivio di Stato Roma (Not. AC 6675, fols. 424–425) and has been reprinted in part by Gerhard Eimer, *La Fabbrica di S. Agnese in Navona* (Stockholm, 1972) p. 470. The organ was to have been an imposing one by Italian standards, with a keyboard range of six octaves and fifteen stops variously made from "genuine walnut seasoned and worked with the greatest care that Art can bring" and "the finest and most perfect English tin to be found." Unfortunately, this contract (which was kindly examined for me by Father Theodore Cunliffe, S.J.) does not appear to bear Zenti's signature, with the result that it cannot be used to authenticate the handwriting of the inscriptions on the surviving instruments purporting to have been made by Zenti. I am indebted to the Principessa Orietta Doria Pamphilj for her kindness in providing me with the citation for this contract and for referring me to Dr. Eimer's monumental study.

opera company brought to Paris at the behest of Cardinal Mazarin a few months later. He was still in Paris in September 1661 when a dispatch was sent from Nantes to the French ambassador in Rome instructing him to request Prince Pamphilj's permission for Zenti to remain in Paris without incurring a penalty for failing to complete work on the organ by the date originally promised. The dispatch goes on to explain that the Grand Comédie and Grand Ballet celebrating Louis XIV's marriage to Maria Theresa of Spain had been postponed until "the next Carnival," at which time "His Majesty would again require . . . the said Zanti."⁵

Thus, Zenti would probably have been free to leave Paris only after the long-delayed production of Francesco Cavalli's *Ercole Amante*, which took place in the newly completed Salle des Machines in the Tuileries on February 7, 1662. Even then, it is doubtful that he returned to Rome more than briefly. He never completed the Sant'Agnese organ, the work for which was eventually given to a Flemish master, Willem Hermans,⁶ builder of instruments in Como, Genoa, and Pistoia. Instead, Zenti appears to have gone to England. The date of his arrival has not so far been discovered, but he may have come with yet another company of Italian musicians, who are the subject of two documents preserved among the British State Papers and apparently dating from the latter part of 1662.⁷

On January 27, 1664, a payment order was issued by Charles II granting Zenti the sum of £50 a year as "Serv^t in Ord^v in y^e place & quality of Our Virginall-maker."⁸ Only two days later Zenti was given a passport to return to Italy,⁹ strongly suggesting that this payment was for past rather than for future services and that he had been working in London for some time. One condition of Zenti's being allowed to leave Eng-

land appears to have been that he provide a replacement, and it is from a petition submitted by this replacement that we derive our only information concerning the place and date of Zenti's death. Early in 1668 one Andrea Testa, explaining that he had been sent by Zenti "(as one fitly qualified) to supply his place" and that since commencing his employment he had "only had a small sum of money," petitioned the king, asking that he be paid Zenti's salary on the grounds that Zenti had died "at Parris in y^e French King's service."¹⁰

The inventory of the instruments belonging to Ferdinando de' Medici in 1700 is headed by no less than six of Zenti's harpsichords and spinets. The inscriptions on four of these instruments were copied out by the assiduous clerk who took the inventory (Figure 1), and the places and dates they mention give confirmation to the preceding archival evidence. Two of the instruments were made in Rome in 1656 and 1659, one in Stockholm in 1653 and one in Paris in 1668. Moreover, the inventory gives us a valuable insight into the enormous range of Zenti's work. The Italian harpsichord-building tradition is notable for its high degree of standardization; accordingly, it is particularly significant that (as is evident from the following extracts from the inventory entries) no two of the six Zenti instruments belonging to Grand Duke Ferdinando were exactly alike:

A harpsichord by Girolamo Zenti, removable from its case, with three registers, namely, two unisons and a suboctave, with sides and soundboard of cypress, with moldings and jackrail of the same with an ebony stripe, with three soundholes decorated with openwork, . . . with a keyboard of ebony and ivory, . . . without divided keys . . .

5. Henry Prunières, *L'opéra italien en France avant Lulli* (Paris, 1913) p. 243. The part of the dispatch dealing with Zenti reads "Vn certain ouurier de Rome nommé Girolamo Zanti qui fait des Clauessins, a vn Contract avec le Prince Pamfilio de luy faire vne orgue dans vn certain temps qui est prés d'expirer sous peine de payer vne somme considerable à son esgard, & Comme la grande Comedie et le Grand Ballet pour la resjouissance des nopces du Roy a esté différé au Carneual prochain, et que S[a] M[ajesté] a encore besoin icy pour cette feste dud[it] Girolamo Zanti, Elle desire que vous priez, à son nom, ledict Prince de luy accorder puor ce peu de temps la permission de demeurer de deça sans le soubmettre à la peine où il l'a engagé, l'asseurant qu'aussi tost après il se rendra à Rome pour acheuer l'orgue." (Paris, Archives

du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, *Correspondence politique Rome* 139, fol. 279.)

6. Eimer, *La Fabbbrica*, p. 470.

7. *State Papers, Domestic*, 29/66, fols. 30, 31. These documents unfortunately list only singers, "The Poete" (who apparently was the director of the troupe), and a Signior Vincenzo and "His Brother," without mentioning instrumentalists or anyone else who might be supposed to be Zenti.

8. *State Papers, Domestic*, 29/91, fol. 55; minute in *State Papers, Domestic*, 44/16, fol. 19.

9. Minute in *State Papers, Domestic*, 44/16, fol. 21.

10. *State Papers, Domestic*, 29/233, fol. 244.

No. 1 *in tra' d'auto Hieronimus de Zenti faciebat Romæ
Anno Dñi M.DCLVIII; Lungo B.^o cinque, e velti un.*

No. 2 *è nella fascia d'auanti in tra' d'auto Hieronimus
Zenti faciebat Romæ M.DCLVI; Lungo B.^o quattro,*

No. 3 *a' lettere d'oro con alcuni labrychi Hieronimus de Zenti
Romany faciebat in Guicard Holmiz anno Domini
1600; Lungo B.^o quattro, e velti noue, Largo nel d'*

No. 4 *di Cipresso, ed la quale in tra' d'auto Hieronimus
de Zenti fece Parisijs anno Domini 1608. Con tra:*

FIGURE I

Extracts from an inventory of 1700 that provide transcriptions of the inscriptions on four Zenti instruments belonging to Ferdinando de' Medici (Archivio di Stato, Florence, *Guardaroba Medicea*, 1117, fols. 1, 2, 3)

A harpsichord by Girolamo Zenti, removable from its case, with two unison registers, with sides and soundboard of cypress, with jackrail and moldings of the same with an ebony stripe, without a decorated soundhole but with a single small hole in the soundboard, with a keyboard of boxwood and ebony without divided keys . . .

A harpsichord by Girolamo Zenti, not removable from its case, with three registers, namely, two unisons and a theorbo stop, with a spruce soundboard having a soundhole in the center decorated with gilded openwork, with sides painted on the outside to resemble red-and-white marble with black stripes at the edges and painted black inside, with gilded moldings, with its matching music stand and its boxwood and ebony keyboard with five of the black keys in the center divided . . .

A spinet by Girolamo Zenti, removable from its case, with only a single register, with golden strings, with a spruce soundboard painted with foliage and flowers with a butterfly, with a decorated soundhole in the center around which there is painted a crown and various flowers, with sides, moldings, music stand, and jackrail of cypress, . . . with a keyboard of ebony and ivory with the second key divided . . .

A spinet by Girolamo Zenti, removable from its case, with only a single register, with a spruce soundboard having a decorated soundhole in the center ornamented with gold, with sides, moldings, and jackrail of cypress in which there are two ebony stripes, with a keyboard of boxwood and ebony without divided keys . . .

A portable spinettina by Girolamo Zenti, removable from its case, with a spruce soundboard without a

decorated soundhole, with sides and jackrail of ebony, without moldings, with a keyboard of ebony and ivory without divided keys . . .¹¹

With any builder of Zenti's importance, one must obviously consider the possibility of misattribution or outright forgery among the surviving signed instruments. This question is severely complicated by the diversity of Zenti's output, as evidenced by the preceding inventory entries and by the fact that very few instruments bearing (or purporting to bear) Zenti's

signature have survived into the twentieth century. With so small a corpus to draw upon in attempting to arrive at criteria of authenticity for the work of a man known to have worked in several different styles, the more usual approaches fail, and one must resort to less straightforward methods. This becomes all the more necessary when, as here, one wishes to add a new instrument to the presently recognized oeuvre.

It is most unfortunate in the light of his great importance that so few of Zenti's instruments appear to have survived. No organ by him is known to exist, and Don-

11. Original texts in Archivio di Stato, Florence, *Guardaroba Medicea*, 1117, fols. 1-4: Vn Cimbalo di Girolamo Zenti leuatore di Cassa à trè registri, Cioè due principali unisoni, et ottaua bassa, Con fascie e fondo di Cipresso, con trauersa, e scorniciatura simile Con filetto d'Ebano, Con trè rose traforate, cioè una grande nel mezzo, una mezzana in fondo, et una piccola in cima uicino à salterelli, Con tastatura d'auorio, et Ebano, che comincia in cisolfaut ottaua stesa, e finisce in fafaut, Con n[umer]o cinquanta quattro tasti, trà bianchi, e neri, senza spezzati, e nella fascia d'auanti ui stà scritto Hyeronimus de Zentis faciebat Romæ Anno D[omi]ni M.DCLVIII; lungo B[racci]a cinque, e soldi undici, largo nel d'auanti un braccio e soldi noue Con suo leggio di cipresso, e sua contro cassa foderata p[er] di dentro di tabi Con fondo dorato, e rabeschi cremisi, e p[er] di fuori di tabi cremisi broccato con fiori d'oro, e guarnita di frangie, e passamano d'oro e cremisi, Con bottoncini dorati, e sua toppa, e Chiauistelli laterali Con sua Coperta di Cuoio rosso, foderata di taffetà Cremisi, e orlata di passamano d'oro, e cremisi, Con suoi piedi sciolti dorati, e intagliati, che rappresentano trè arpie, Con Code di Delfino.

Vn Cimbalo di Girolamo Zenti leuatore di Cassa à due registri principali unisoni, Con fascie, e fondo di Cipresso, con trauersa, e scorniciatura simile, con filetto d'Ebano, senza rosa, mà Con un solo buchetto nel fondo, Con tastatura di bossolo, et Ebano, senza spezzati che / comincia in gisolreut ottaua stesa, e finisce in Cisolfaut, con n[umer]o cinquanta trè tasti, trà bianchi, e neri, e nella fascia d'auanti ui stà scritto Hyeronimus Zenti faciebat Romæ M.DCLVI; lungo B[racci]a quattro, e un quarto, largo nel d'auanti B[racci]a uno, e trè ottai con suo leggio di Cipresso, e sua Contro Cassa foderata p[er] di dentro di taffetà uerde, e p[er] di fuori di broccato d'oro fondo raso uerde, Con bullette dorate, e guarnito di frangette e passamano d'oro, e uerde e p[er] di dentro la parte d'auanti, che si alza del Coperchio, e foderata del mede [simo] broccato d'oro uerde; Con sua toppa, e chiauistelli dorati laterali, e sua Coperta di Cuoio rosso foderata di Ermisino uerde, orlata di nastrino d'oro Con suoi piedi sciolti, intagliati, e dorati che anno p[er] finim[ent]a piedi di leone che posano sù un piano scorniciato.

Vn Cimbalo di Girolamo Zenti, non leuatore di Cassa, à trè registri, cioè due principali unisoni, e tiorbino, Con fondo di Abeto, e rosa nel mezzo traforata, e dorata, Con fascie p[er] di fuori tinte à imitazione di marmo rosso, e bianco, con striscie nere all' estremità e p[er] di dentro, tinto di nero Con il Corniciame

dorato, Con suo leggio simile, e sua tastatura di bossolo, et Ebano, con cinque spezzati nei neri di mezzo, che Comincia in Gisolreut ottaua stesa e finisce in Cisolfaut, con n[umer]o cinquanta noue tasti, trà bianchi, e neri, e spezzati, e nella fascia d'auanti ui stà scritto / à lettere d'oro con alcuni rabeschi Hyeronimus de Zentis Romanus faciebat in Civitate Holmiæ anno Domini 1653; lungo B[racci]a quattro, e soldi noue, largo nel d'auanti B[racci]a uno, e soldi dieci Con sua contro cassa di Abeto pura, e sua Coperta di Cuoio rosso foderata di taffetà uerde orlata di nastrino d'oro.

Vna Spinetta di Girolamo Zenti leuatore di Cassa à un registro solo, con le corde d'oro, Con fondo di Abeto tutto dipinto di foliami, e fiori Con una farfalla, Con rosa traforata nel mezzo, dipintoui à torno una Corona di diuersi fiori, con fascie, scorniciatura, leggio, e trauersa di Cipresso, sù la quale ui stà scritto Hyeronimus de Zentis fecit Parisijs anno Domini 1668. Con tastatura di Ebano, et auorio, con il secondo tasto spezzato, che serue di ottaua à Elami bimolle, che Comincia in Gisolreut in sesta, e finisce in cisolfaut con n[umer]o cinquanta uno tasti, trà neri, bianchi, e spezzati, Con sua Contro cassa d'Abeto coperta p[er] di fuori di sommacco rosso stampato d'oro, e p[er] di dentro del Colore del legname; la d[ett]a spinetta è di forma bislunga; mà la fa diuentare quadra una Cassetina che è p[er] di dentro, Con sua Coperta di Cuoio giallo; foderata di Canauaccio, e orlata di nastro di filaticcio giallo.

Vna Spinetta di Girolamo Zenti, leuatore di Cassa a à un registro solo, con fondo di Abeto, e rosa traforata nel mezzo tocca d'oro, con fascie, scorniciatura, e trauersa di Cipresso, sù la quale ui sono due filetti d'Ebano / con tastatura di Bossolo, et Ebano, senza spezzati Che Comincia in Gisolreut in sesta, e finisce in cisolfaut, con n[umer]o cinquanta tasti trà bianchi, e neri, Con sua Contro cassa tinta di rosso p[er] di dentro, e p[er] di fuori fondo nero, con filetti e rabeschi gialli, et il coperchio è rifatto di nuouo di Albero puro.

Vna Spinettina da Collo di Girolamo Zenti, leuatore di Cassa, Con fondo di Abeto senza rosa, Con fascie, e trauersa di Ebano, senza scorniciatura, Con tastatura di Auorio, et Ebano senza spezzati, che Comincia in Gisolreut ottaua stesa, e finisce in Cisolfaut Con n[umer]o trenta tasti, trà bianchi, e neri, Con sua Contro Cassa tutta foderata p[er] di dentro, e p[er] di fuori di Domasco Cremisi, guarnita p[er] di fuori di nastrino d'oro Con bottoncini dorati, e sotto ui è un' assicina incanalata, che serve p[er] appoggiarsi allo stomaco quando si suona.



FIGURE 2

Harpsichord signed Hieronimus de Zentis, 1633. Collection Alexandre Mottu, Geneva (from catalogue of *L'exposition internationale de musique*, Geneva, 1927). Present whereabouts unknown

ald Boalch¹² lists only one extant spinet and five harpsichords.¹³ One of the latter may be eliminated at the outset. It is signed GZ on a key and dated 1672 in the same hand. Since Zenti died in 1668, this signature cannot be his, and there would appear to be no other grounds for believing that he had any hand in making the instrument.

Of the remaining five instruments listed by Boalch, the first, a harpsichord dated 1633 (Figure 2), has dropped from sight since it was exhibited in Geneva in 1927. Presumably this was the same instrument as that offered for sale by the Florentine dealer and forger, Leopoldo Franciolini, in three catalogs issued between 1897 and about 1908. Franciolini describes it as a “painted harpsichord showing a seacoast with scenery,

figures, and architecture, with the outer case painted with foliage on a light background, having boxwood and black keys, and signed *Hieronimus de Zentis Viterbiensis faciebat 1633. Laudate-Evm-In Cordis-et-organo-per-sempre-secole*. Length 2 m. Width 0.8 m.”¹⁴ Despite the garbled tag from Psalm 150 (one of Franciolini’s favorite “improvements” to instruments passing through his hands), it is possible that this harpsichord is otherwise wholly genuine. The inscription ascribing the instrument to Zenti takes the same form as that on a clearly genuine spinet of 1637 that will be discussed below. On the other hand, it is at least equally possible that this portion of the inscription was simply modeled on the one on the spinet. (The 1637 spinet now has virtually the identical garbled Latin on the front of its nameboard; this strongly suggests that it was at one time in Franciolini’s shop, so that the form of its signature could have been known to him.) In any event, only an examination of the harpsichord itself, if it ever again comes to light, could eliminate this possibility, and until that time the attribution to Zenti must be considered doubtful at best.

The 1637 spinet (Figure 3) in the Musée Instrumental of the Royal Conservatory, Brussels, is somewhat disfigured by the ugly and clumsy inscription on its nameboard (Figure 4), but this nameboard is wholly redeemed by the inscription on its back: *Hieronimus de Zentis Viterbiensis faciebat 1637* (Figure 5). This is one of the very few undoubted examples of Zenti’s signa-

12. *Makers of the Harpsichord and Clavichord* (London, 1959) p. 133.

13. A seventh instrument cited by Boalch is a small harpsichord in the Musée Instrumental of the Royal Conservatory, Brussels. The instrument is unsigned but according to Victor-Charles Mahillon (*Catalogue descriptif et analytique du Musée Instrumental du Conservatoire Royal de Musique de Bruxelles III* [Gand, 1900] p. 167, No. 1600) “Attribué à Jeronimus de Tenbe, à Rome (vers 1656).” Boalch (p. 123) is almost certainly correct in stating that “this is clearly a mistake for Girolamo Zenti,” but, in addition to this error, there seems to be no evidence to support an attribution of

this anonymous instrument to Zenti or any other known maker.

14. “Cimbalo pitturato, rappresentante una Marina, paesaggio figure e architettura con cassa dipinta a rames fondo chiaro con tasti de legno bossolo e neri Firmato: *Hieronimus de Zentis Viterbiensis faciebat 1633. Laudate-Evm-In Cordis-et-organo-per-sempre-secole*. Lungo m. 2. Largo 0,80.” (The text given is the version found in the catalog of c. 1908.) An earlier Franciolini catalog, c. 1895, lists another purported Zenti instrument; since its date is given as 1676, this inscription cannot have been genuine. I am soon reprinting in facsimile all of the known Franciolini catalogs as Vol. VII of the series *Music Indexes and Bibliographies*.

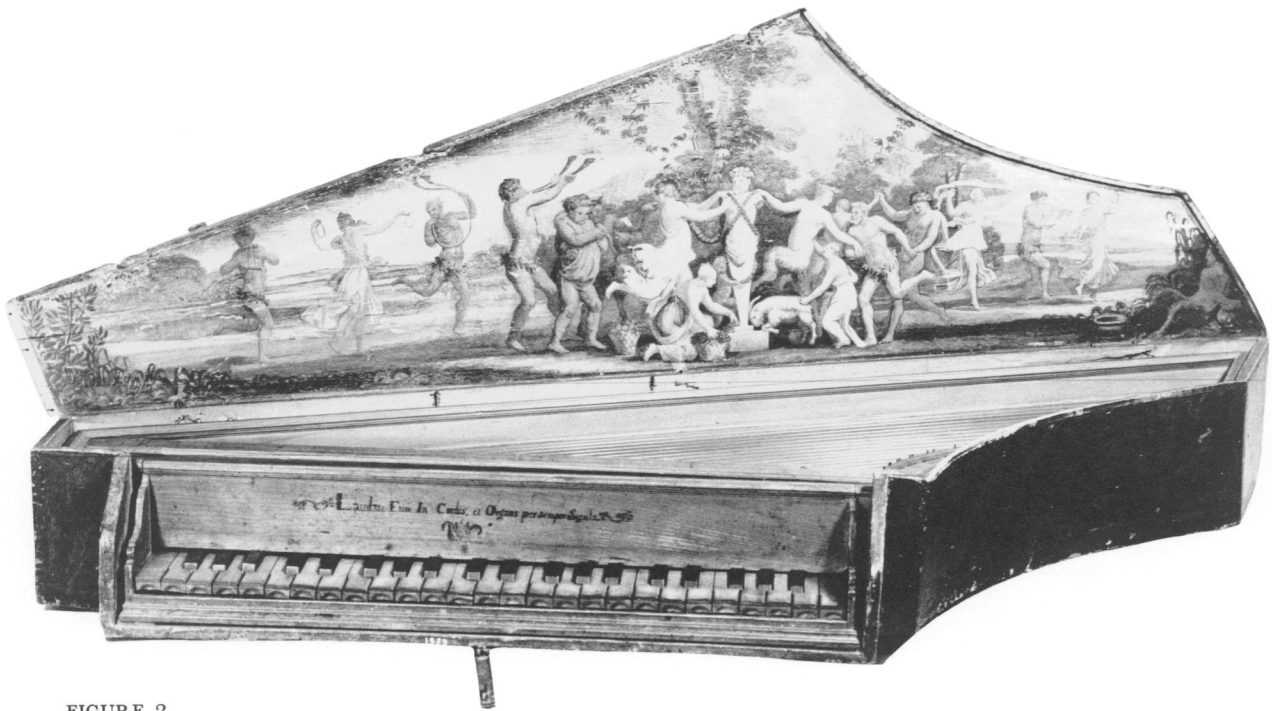


FIGURE 3

Spinet signed Hieronimus de Zentis, 1637. Musée Instrumental du Conservatoire Royal de Musique, Brussels, Catalogue No. 1583 (photo: Patrick Lorette, Brussels)



FIGURE 4

Inscription on nameboard of the spinet shown in Figure 3 (photo: Patrick Lorette, Brussels)

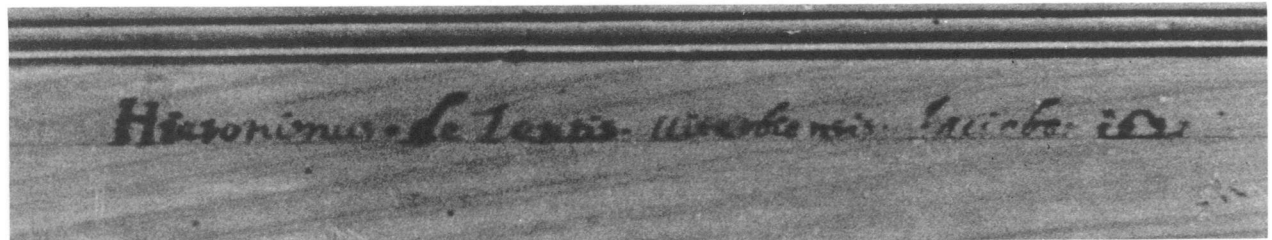


FIGURE 5

Inscription on the back of the nameboard (photo: Giancarlo Sponga, Milan)



FIGURE 6

Top view of the spinet shown in Figure 3 (photo: Patrick Lorette, Brussels)

ture. The inscription shows no sign of having been tampered with, and, in fact, the entire instrument is in a remarkably fresh and unaltered state. For this reason, the Brussels spinet must be taken as the primary document for establishing any criteria of Zenti's personal style.

The Brussels spinet is not, however, of importance merely because it is the earliest example of Zenti's work presently available for study; it is also the earliest known example of this type of spinet in existence. Such so-called "bentside" spinets were called "épinettes italiennes" in France and became the standard domestic keyboard instrument in England in the latter part of the seventeenth century; and it is tempting to suppose that Zenti introduced the design in both countries in the early 1660s. It is even eminently possible, as suggested by Frank Hubbard,¹⁵ that Zenti actually invented the design. This certainly seems to be the most plausible interpretation of Giovanni Bontempi's statement, a quarter-century after Zenti's death, that "the most modern [harpsichords] were invented by Girolamo Zenti, made in the form of a not quite equilateral triangle."¹⁶ Bontempi goes on to discuss the dimensions of such instruments having two keyboards and two

or three sets of strings, and although no such instrument by Zenti has survived, it is not impossible that he may have built them, especially since harpsichords with two keyboards (while always extremely rare in Italy) were well known in France and probably also in England by the time of Zenti's French and English visits.

The Brussels spinet is housed in a softwood case painted black on the outside, the inside of whose lid is decorated with a scene of a sacrifice to Priapus showing nymphs, shepherds, and satyrs dancing, playing instruments, and draping garlands on a herm of the god. The instrument itself is made of thin cypress, undecorated except for delicate moldings at the top and bottom of the case and scroll-sawn cheekpieces at the ends of the keyboard. A top view, showing the instrument removed from its outer case (Figure 6), reveals the visually satisfying and spatially economical aspects of the bentside spinet's design. Unlike those of a harpsichord, the strings of a spinet run at an oblique angle to the keyboard. This permits the instrument to assume a particularly graceful shape, since it is both slimmer and shorter than a harpsichord having a keyboard of the same range and bass strings of the same length. Both its pleasing shape and its compactness doubtless contributed to the bentside spinet's great popularity in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, an added bonus being that, when the instrument was placed with its long side against a wall, additional space did not need to be left along the wall for the musician's bench.

15. *Three Centuries of Harpsichord Making* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965) p. 25.

16. *Historia musica* . . . (Perugia, 1695) p. 47: "I più moderni [clavicembali] sono stato ritrouati da Girolamo Zenti, fatti in figura di Triangolo non giustamente equicure . . ."



FIGURE 7

Harpsichord attributed to Zenti. Musikinstrumenten-Museum der Karl-Marx-Universität, Leipzig, Catalogue No. 75 (photo: Sheridan Germann, Boston)

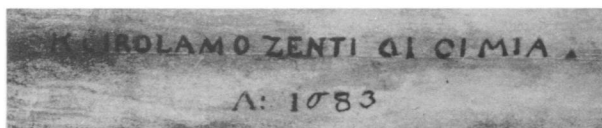
fully thirty years after Zenti was in Stockholm and fifteen years after his death need not necessarily mean that the entire inscription is false. However, the clumsy capital letters bear no resemblance to the somewhat crabbed cursive hand on the back of the Brussels spinet's nameboard. Furthermore, the form of the inscription has nothing in common with that of the Stockholm-made Zenti harpsichord in the Medici inventory,¹⁷ *Hieronimus de Zentis Romanus faciebat in Civitate Holmiae anno Domini 1653* (Figure 1, No. 3), where Stockholm is called "Civitate Holmiae," not "Olmia," and where Zenti proudly refers to himself as a Roman rather than as "of Stockholm." Adding to these problems, there are distinct remains on the nameboard of what appears to be a capital K before "Girolamo," for which there seems no reasonable explanation whatever.

In this sea of doubt, one fact can be stated with assurance: the Leipzig harpsichord cannot be the same as the third one described in the Medici inventory. It is smaller, has a shorter keyboard, and unlike the Medici instrument is made of cypress.¹⁸ This last fact

The third instrument purportedly bearing Zenti's signature is in the Musikinstrumenten-Museum of the Karl Marx University at Leipzig (Figure 7). The back of its nameboard bears an inscription that has been interpreted as GIROLAMO ZENTI DI OLMIA / A: 1683 (Figure 8). The last three digits of the date appear to be in a shakier hand than the rest of the inscription, so the fact that it suggests that the instrument was made

FIGURE 8

Inscription on the back of the nameboard of the harpsichord shown in Figure 7 (from Georg Kinsky, *Katalog des Musikhistorischen Museums von Wilhelm Heyer in Köln*, Cologne, 1910)



17. The presence of a Stockholm-made instrument in Italy is not as surprising as it might at first seem. Queen Christina settled in Rome after her abdication, and it is recorded that "Cinq épinettes grandes" belonging to her were in Antwerp in May 1656, awaiting shipment "par exprès à Rome." (Quoted by Jeannine Lambrechts-Douillez, "Documents Dealing with the Ruckers Family and Antwerp Harpsichord-building," in E. M. Ripin [ed.], *Keyboard Instruments* [Edinburgh, 1971] p. 40.)

18. The Medici harpsichord is specifically described as not being removable from its case and having sides painted on the outside to resemble marble. It had a keyboard with a range of GG-c''', 4½ octaves, without a short octave in the bass and including five divided keys "in the center," and was over 8 feet long (see the third entry in footnote 11 above). The Leipzig harpsichord is less than 7 feet long. Its present keyboard has an apparent range of D-c''', less than 4 octaves, but the D key is divided to yield low C. There are in addition six divided sharps, two of which are also in the bass. (See Georg Kinsky, *Katalog des Musikhistorischen Museums von Wilhelm Heyer in Köln I* [Cologne, 1910] pp. 94-95.) The unusual range of this keyboard suggests that it is not original; presumably the original keyboard had three fewer keys and provided a range of 4 octaves C-c''' with a short octave in the bass. I am indebted to Friedemann Hellwig of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, for his kindness in providing me with photographs and additional information on the Leipzig instrument.

is perhaps the most damning of all. The Leipzig harpsichord is a fairly typical Italian instrument, whereas the Medici harpsichord is described in terms that (except for its boxwood keys) make it sound almost like a Flemish instrument of the time, complete with a gilded soundhole ornament and thick marbled case. This kind of harpsichord is in fact very much what one would expect a builder to make under the influence of north European instruments and at a great remove from his normal supply of Italian wood.

The remaining Zenti instruments listed by Boalch date from 1658 and 1666. Both are in the Metropolitan Museum. The earlier one (Figure 9) is an extraordinarily beautiful harpsichord of a decidedly unusual type. The most common variety of Italian harpsichord, like the 1637 spinet in Brussels, was constructed of thin cypress and housed in a stout softwood case. As a rule, such instruments were undecorated except for finely profiled moldings and scroll-sawn cheekpieces at the ends of the keyboard; the outer case lacked moldings but was often decorated with paintings. The other common variety of Italian harpsichord presents a similar appearance at first glance, but the harpsichord cannot in fact be removed from the outer case. Instead, there are only cypress linings and half-moldings applied to the inside of the thick softwood case to give the illusion that it holds a removable cypress instrument.

The Metropolitan's harpsichord falls into neither of these categories. It is constructed in a single massive case, but this case is decorated on the outside as well as the inside with cypress moldings. The resulting framed panels serve as spaces for paintings. Both the inside and outside of the lid and the outside of the long side of the case are decorated with landscapes, and the rest of the case is decorated with groups of putti interspersed with classical masks and garlands. Even the outside of the nameboard and of the hinged board that closes over the keyboard are painted with masks and garlands. (This hinged board is a feature otherwise unknown in seventeenth-century harpsichords, as is the upward curve of the bottom below the keys.) The paintings appear to date at the earliest from the eighteenth century. However, this fact need not in any way reflect on the instrument's attribution to Zenti, since it was common practice to repaint harpsichords to suit changing styles of decoration; thus, a seventeenth-century Ruckers harpsichord that started life with a marbled

case might pass through one or more intermediate stages before attaining its apotheosis in brilliant chinoiserie in an eighteenth-century Paris salon.

Zenti is known to have built thick-cased instruments (the Medici inventory states that the instrument made in Stockholm in 1653 was not removable from its case), and there is no reason for supposing that he could not have made an instrument with such unusual features or of such outstanding beauty as this one. Unfortunately, the ascription of this harpsichord to Zenti rests on grounds that are far from ideal. The elegantly lettered inscription on the jackrail, *HIERONYMUS DE ZENTIS VITERBIENSIS F ROMAE ANNO DOM MDCLVIII* (Figure 10), takes a somewhat different form from the one on a Medici instrument (Figure 1, No. 1) made only a year after this one purports to have been made. Note, for example, the use of "Viterbiensis," which is found on the 1637 spinet (Figure 5) but is entirely absent from the Medici inscriptions, all of which date from much the same period in which this instrument's inscription proclaims it was built. One's feeling of uncertainty is only deepened by the clumsily lettered inscription *HIERONIMVS DE ZENTIS FECIT ANNO 1647* on the lowest key (Figure 11). The spelling of "Hieronymus" and the date do not agree with those on the jackrail. Hence, it is not surprising that ultraviolet light reveals that the present inscription overlies other writing (Figure 12). This earlier writing appears to have been in a slanted, thin-stroked cursive hand, but only a few strokes of it are visible, the remainder being obscured by the thick, unslanted strokes of the present inscription. What little can be seen of the earlier writing fails so completely to correspond with the readable inscription that one must conclude that the present inscription represents an alteration or substitution rather than a freshening of the older one.

As with the Leipzig harpsichord, the failure of the inscriptions to fall into the pattern of the undoubtedly genuine ones in the Medici inventory seems crucial. In the case of the Leipzig instrument, one may suppose that the inscription derives from a later owner's knowledge that Zenti had at one time worked in Stockholm, even though he did not know when, or even in what year Zenti died. Quite possibly that inscription got its primary inspiration from Bontempi, where Zenti is referred to as "Girolamo," although there is no record that he ever signed a nameboard with anything but



FIGURE 9

Harpsichord signed Hieronymus de Zentis, 1658. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Funds from Various Donors, 86.20. The hinged board that covers the keys is raised, concealing the painted nameboard



FIGURE 10

Jackrail of the harpsichord shown in Figure 9



FIGURE 11

Inscription on the lowest key of the harpsichord shown in Figure 9, viewed in visible light



FIGURE 12

Photograph by ultraviolet light of the inscription

“Hieronymus.” In the case of the 1658 harpsichord, one may suppose that the inscription on the jackrail may derive from knowledge of that on the Brussels spinet where “Viterbiensis” also appears. It may well date from a period after the existing paintings were applied to the nameboard, covering any inscription corresponding to the written-over one on the lowest key that might originally have been present in this more usual location. (The back of the nameboard is blank.) All in all, this harpsichord, like the one in Leipzig, can be attributed to Zenti only very tentatively indeed, and its inscription probably represents the attempt of an unscrupulous builder or dealer to

trade on Zenti’s great reputation, much as in northern Europe countless instruments were equipped with bogus signatures falsely proclaiming that they had been made by one or another member of the Ruckers family.

The second Metropolitan Museum harpsichord (Figure 13) is an entirely different matter. It is a typical thin-cased instrument made of cypress, and its attribution to Zenti rests on the neatly lettered inscription *HIERONYMVS ZENTI FECIT ROMAE A.S. MDCLXVI / JOANNES FERRINI FLORENTINVS RESTAVRAVIT MDCCCLV* appearing on the nameboard (Figure 14). The entire inscription seems to be in the same hand and therefore to date from 1755; hence it is not too



FIGURE 13

Harpsichord signed Hieronymus Zenti, 1666, and restored by Giovanni Ferrini, 1755. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Crosby Brown Collection, 89.4.1220

FIGURE 14

Inscription on the nameboard of the harpsichord shown in Figure 13



worrisome that the part ascribing the instrument to Zenti does not correspond in form to the inscriptions copied out in the Medici inventory. It is not clear whether this harpsichord's present state dates from Ferrini's restoration or from subsequent alteration. The wrestplank bridge has been moved closer to the jacks than it was originally, and the instrument's range was at some point increased by three notes to yield the present compass of AA-f^{'''}. The existing keyboard has obviously come from another instrument and appears to be dated 1659, although the third digit is unclear.¹⁹ Thus, one cannot look for confirmation or refutation of Zenti's authorship on the keys.

At this point, one would normally try to establish or refute the attribution of the 1666 harpsichord to Zenti by comparing it with the known corpus of unarguably genuine Zenti instruments. However, as the reader will doubtless have gathered, this corpus consists of only a single instrument, the Brussels spinet, made some twenty-nine years earlier, which is in addition conceived on a totally different scale. Whereas the spinet is only four feet long, the harpsichord is nearly eight

feet long, and its bottom moldings, bridge cross-sections, and other features reflect this difference in scale.

At least one highly suggestive correspondence does, however, seem to be present. A molding used on the outside of the harpsichord as part of the three-piece top molding is identical with the bottom molding on the spinet (Figure 15)²⁰ and would appear actually to have been shaped by the same plane. The overall handling of the moldings on the harpsichord is, of course, far more sophisticated than on the spinet, but one would expect this in an instrument made only two years before Zenti's death. On the spinet the balance between the top and bottom moldings on the outside is not aesthetically pleasing, and the top molding, when seen across the open instrument, appears too bulky. This problem is almost inevitable, however, since in one instance the top molding is seen as the top of the relatively low rim above the soundboard and in the other instance as the upper edge of the instrument as a whole. The solution employed in the harpsichord is highly ingenious. Instead of creating a symmetrical molding by attaching identically formed strips to the inside and

19. This keyboard originally had 53 keys. The lowest key was discarded and five new keys were added in the treble to change the range from the original GG-c^{'''} (without GG#) to the present AA-f^{'''}. Zenti's keyboard probably had a range of GG-c^{'''}, although C-f^{'''} is also a possibility.

20. I am indebted to Dr. Nicolas Meeùs of the Musée Instrumental for providing me with measurements and drawings upon which the left-hand part of Figure 15 is based. In addition, his generous assistance during my examination of the 1637 spinet and his procuring of the special photographs of it required for this study are herewith gratefully acknowledged.

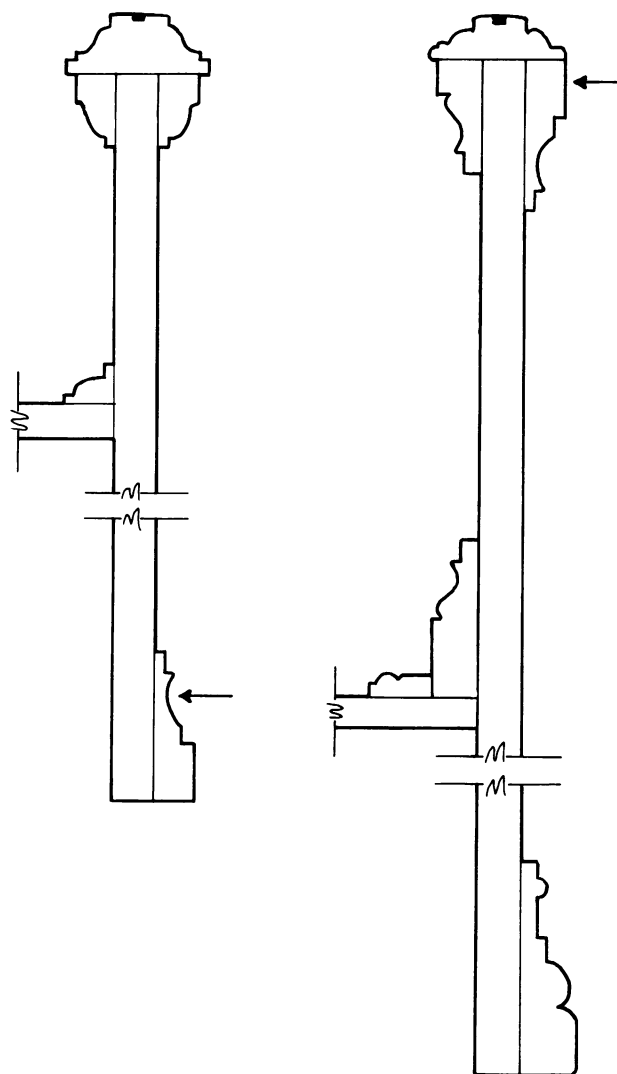


FIGURE 15
Comparison of moldings on the 1637 spinet shown in Figure 3 (left) and the 1666 harpsichord shown in Figure 13 (right). Arrows indicate the molding used on both instruments.



FIGURE 16
Cheekpiece of the 1637 spinet (photo: Patrick Lorette, Brussels)



FIGURE 17
Cheekpiece of the 1666 harpsichord

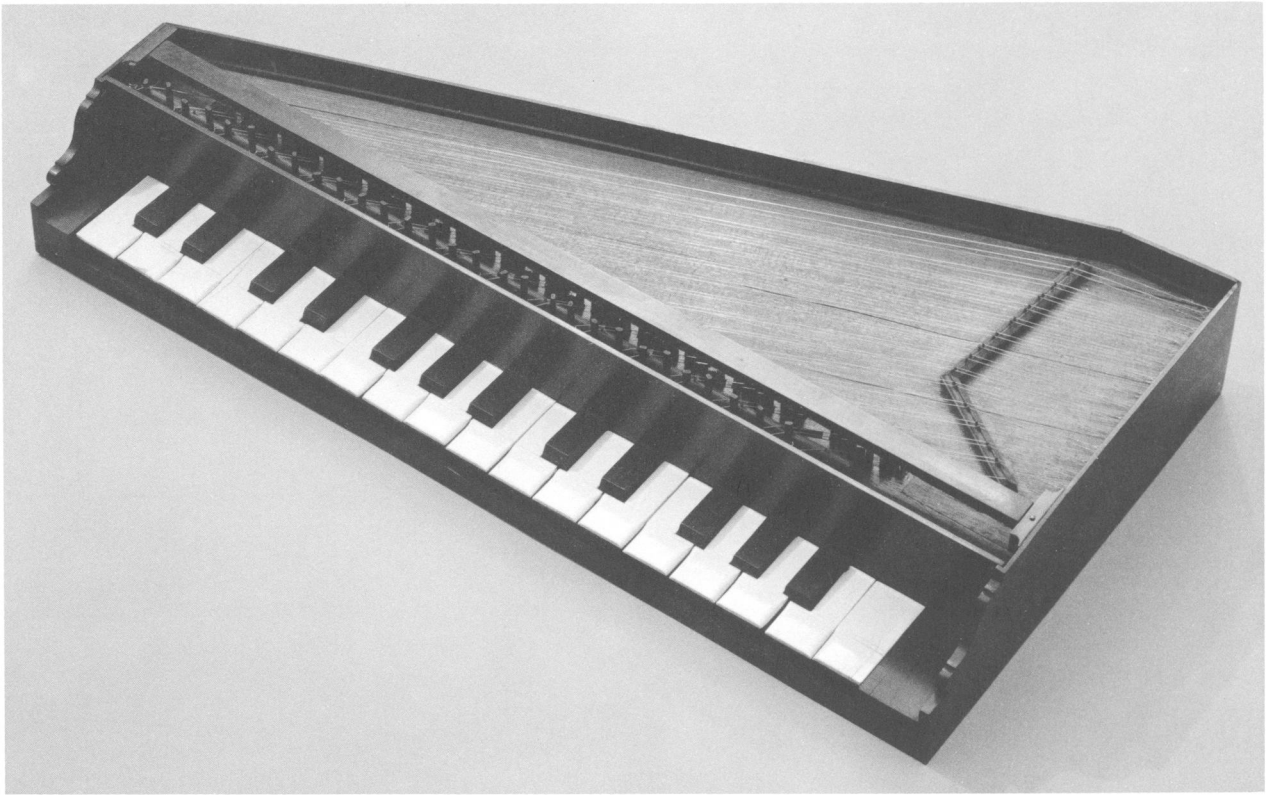


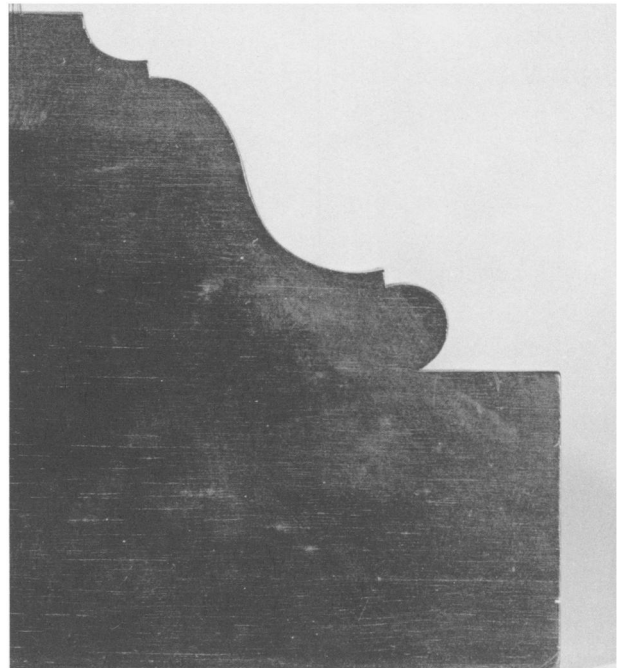
FIGURE 18

Octave spinet signed G°Zi. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Crosby Brown Collection, 89.4.1227

FIGURE 19

Cheekpiece of the octave spinet shown in Figure 18

outside of the case below the cap molding, the strips have different profiles, that on the outside being the relatively tall molding already mentioned as having been used as the bottom molding on the spinet and that on the inside being a shorter molding, much better proportioned to the smaller space between the cap molding and the top of the soundboard. (The same molding is then inverted and used at the point at which the soundboard meets the side of the case, creating a complex yet unified decorative pattern.) The asymmetrical profile of the top molding as a whole is not disturbing on the instrument itself because the profile cannot be seen unless the nameboard is removed so as to permit viewing the molding end-on. When the nameboard is in place, the form of the molding can only be imagined,



and the obvious imbalance resulting from the cap molding's off-center placement goes unnoticed.

A second noteworthy correspondence between the 1637 spinet and the 1666 harpsichord is in the scroll-sawn cheekpieces at the ends of the keyboards (Figures 16, 17). Although it was standard Italian practice to provide the cheekpieces of thin-cased harpsichords with a scroll-sawn outline, the patterns used were not standardized. The particular combination of only a few simple curves terminating in a horizontal ledge that is found in these two instruments is not common, and the fact that it occurs in two instruments that may reasonably be attributed to Zenti suggests that it may be a valid criterion in attempting to authenticate his work.

This individual cheekpiece form provides part of the grounds for adding a third candidate to the highly select group of surviving instruments that may actually have come from Zenti's hand. An exquisite octave spinet in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 18) has cheekpieces (Figure 19) identical with those on the 1637 spinet and the 1666 harpsichord. The top and bottom keys bear the signature G°Zi (Figure 20). The instrument is very small—less than eighteen inches long by nine inches deep—and the sides of its case are made of ebony boards only $\frac{3}{8}$ inch thick. Despite the fact that this spinet could hardly have been thought of as more than a toy, every care in design and execution was clearly lavished upon it. The notion of constructing an instrument out of solid ebony rather than using ebony veneer on another wood, or simply staining pear or some other reasonably tractable wood to resemble ebony, is in itself mind-boggling. However, there are many other details that point to a designer-craftsman of the highest order. Thus, the keys are bent in order to make the layout of the jacks and strings as compact as possible and are carved away on their undersides to reduce the weighting necessary to make them balance. Again, the blocks that support the ebony jackrail have quarter-circle indentations to echo the indentation at the top of the cheekpieces, and the tiny ovolo molding around the edge of the soundboard presents the reverse of these indentations and simultaneously echoes the front face of the wrestplank bridge.

In addition to the pattern of the cheekpieces, the octave spinet seems to have other clear similarities to the Brussels spinet in such details as bridge profile and

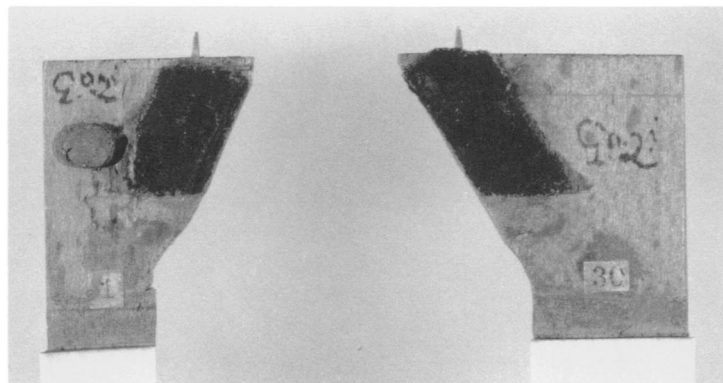


FIGURE 20

Signatures on the top and bottom keys of the octave spinet shown in Figure 18

the shape and the method of making the sharp keys. The profiles of the soundboard and wrestplank bridges in both instruments have different forms, the wrestplank bridges having a curved front, whereas the corresponding part of the soundboard bridges is formed by two planes meeting at an obtuse angle. The sharp keys on both instruments are almost perfectly rectangular in cross section and are made with a very thin ebony veneer on top of black-stained wood rather than being of solid ebony, even though those of the octave spinet are on an instrument made of solid ebony. The octave spinet also shares with the 1637 Brussels instrument the fact that its soundboard is made of spruce, instead of the more usual cypress, and lacks a decorated soundhole. With the exception of the cheekpiece form, none of these shared characteristics can be considered so special as to be reliable as a criterion for assigning the octave spinet to Zenti. However, it is possible to make use of the fact that the instrument has a number of highly individual characteristics *not* found in the Brussels spinet and not found together on any other instrument I have ever seen: it is very small; its case is made of ebony and lacks decorative moldings; its natural keys are covered with ivory rather than the more usual boxwood; and, finally, its keyboard begins on G and extends only $2\frac{1}{2}$ octaves to c''. The Medici inventory that has already proved so valuable in this discussion establishes that Zenti made at least one instrument of exactly this description. The complete entry for the last of the Zenti instruments in the inventory reads:

A portable spinettina by Girolamo Zenti, removable from its case, with a spruce soundboard without a decorated soundhole, with sides and jackrail of ebony without moldings, with a keyboard of ivory and ebony without divided keys, which begins on *gisolreut* extended octave and ends on *cisolfaut* with thirty white and black keys, with an outer case entirely lined on the inside and the outside with crimson damask, trimmed on the outside with a narrow golden ribbon with golden buttons; and underneath there is a small cut-out board used for resting it on the stomach when playing it.²¹

The painted case associated with the Metropolitan's spinet when it was acquired by Mrs. John Crosby Brown and presented to the Museum appears to date from the nineteenth century rather than the seventeenth. Accordingly, it is tempting to suppose that this case is a replacement for the damask-covered one mentioned for the last time in the inventory of 1732²² and that the spinet itself is one of the comparatively few

Medici instruments still in existence.²³ If so, it would appear to be the sole survivor of the six Zenti instruments in the Medici collection and one of only three surviving instruments that may safely be attributed to this celebrated maker, "ottimo mastro di Clavicembali ed Organi."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In addition to my indebtedness for assistance given to me by persons outside the Metropolitan Museum and acknowledged in the notes, I have been generously aided by many colleagues on the Museum staff. Special words of thanks are due Hyatt Mayor, an inexhaustible source of information and encouragement, Everett Fahy for examining the paintings on the 1658 harpsichord, James Parker for examining the outer case of the octave spinet, and Olga Raggio for generously offered advice and valuable information.

21. For the Italian text, see footnote 11. This instrument appears to be the same as that recorded in the inventory dated September 23, 1716, as "A similar [small ebony spinettina] with a case covered with red damask, trimmed with a golden ribbon, and ivory keys, item No. 21." ("Due Spinette piccole . . . Seg[na]ta N: 19. Vna Spinettina minore delle sud[dett]e di ebano . . . Seg[na]ta N: 20. Vna simile con' cassa cop[er]ta di dommasco rosso, guarnita di nastrino d'oro, e tastatura d'auorio Seg[na]ta N: 21." Archivio di Stato, Florence, *Guardaroba Medicea*, 1241 bis, fol. 2 verso.) This entry is repeated verbatim in the inventory dated September 19, 1732 (*Guardaroba Medicea*, 1410, fol. 3), after which there are no further mentions of the instrument in the Florentine archives. It is not among those that are the subject of miscellaneous notations following the inventory in *Guardaroba Medicea*, 1410, and comprising the entire contents of 1411, which cover the period 1732-1765. Thereafter, there seem to be no documents and no

inventories until the instruments remaining in the Pitti Palace were inventoried in preparation for their transfer to the Conservatorio "Luigi Cherubini" in 1863 (Gai, *Gli strumenti*, pp. 25, 34-38). By that time, only 40 of the 173 instruments listed in the inventory of 1732 were to be found, and the ebony spinettina was not among them.

22. See footnote 21 above.

23. The fact that the octave spinet bears no distinctive mark or inventory number that would positively identify it as a Medici instrument does not militate against this suggestion, since no such marks or numbers dating from before the nineteenth century are to be found on the undoubted Medici instruments now preserved in the Collection of the Conservatorio "Luigi Cherubini" in Florence. (Information kindly provided by Prof. Vinicio Gai of the Conservatorio "Luigi Cherubini.")