‘Wie das Zeichnen wol zu begreiffen sey?’

The Role of Sculptors’ Drawings in the Seventeenth Century

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Abstract

The early modern sculptor’s education north of the Alps has yet to be thoroughly explored. Three collections of sculptor’s drawings, originating from the Bavarian workshop of Thomas Schwanthaler (1634-1707), found in different locations across central Europe, allow insights into their importance to the early modern sculptor. Use and collection of drawings had mainly practical purposes for instruction and communication inside the workshop. However, inscriptions suggest that sketches were also crafted for personal reasons. The drawings crossed borders not only physically—being taken along on the itinerant craftsmen’s journeys—but also in their functions as media of both professional purpose and personal memorabilia. The article explores the use of drawings in a non-academic environment, presenting examples from the collections.

Keywords: Early modern sculpture, Mobility of Early Modern artists, Sculptor’s drawings.

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In the first part of his extensive historical work, the Teutsche Academie, published first in 1675, the German painter and art writer Joachim von Sandrart included a chapter discussing the
meaning of drawing for the arts of painting and sculpture. Describing the best ways to acquire
drawing skills he states that many sculptors lack practice in sketching on paper and therefore
prefer to produce small-scale models from clay or wax. 2 Scholarship on the importance and role
of drawing for the early modern sculptor is heterogenous: whereas research on early modern
Italian sculptors and their practices has produced a considerable body of literature reaching
from general questions on the development of sculptural concepts, 3 the drawings and models
by Gianlorenzo Bernini and his co-workers 4 to the inner workings of large sculptors’ workshops
such as that of Orazio Marinali; 5 the early modern sculptor’s practices and the structure of his
education north of the Alps are topics that have yet to be thoroughly explored by scholarship.

During the long seventeenth century, the sculptor was perceived as a craftsman more
than as an artist, particularly in rural areas where, through the absence of a royal court, the local
clergy were the main employers for architects, sculptors, stucco plasterers and painters. The
region of Southern Germany and Tirol was divided into small parishes, making influential
monasteries into centres of artistic exchange and progress. 6 While in Italy private academies
such as the workshop of sculptor Baccio Bandinelli 7 developed out of small groups who
practiced drawing after the live model from the sixteenth century, north of the Alps sources
only tell of such informal gatherings at the end of the seventeenth century. 8 Here, academies
were not founded before the second half of the sixteenth century, when informal drawing
circles—so called ‘Zeichenkreise’—dedicated to sketching after the living model, were turned
into institutions, like in Nürnberg 1662. 9 Whereas the early academic curriculum included
practical knowledge as well as drawing, little information has been passed on about the
education of sculptors in a non-academic environment.

By taking a closer look at a number of sculptor’s drawings originating from a
seventeenth century workshop north of the Alps, this article will investigate their diverse
functions: their role for sculptors’ training as well as for the transfer of artistic ideas and their significance as personal memorabilia.

The Sculptor’s Instruction North of the Alps

During the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth century, the sculptor’s education took place in a master’s workshop. An apprentice would start to work with a local craftsman for five years to learn the basic techniques before receiving his first certificate. During the following mandatory ‘Wanderjahre’, a period of eight years, young craftsmen were required to travel from workshop to workshop, joining masters for various periods of time and improving their skills by assisting on current commissions. Only after completing their journeyman’s years, could they complete their education to receive the craftsman’s diploma. In order to develop an idea of early modern sculptors’ everyday working practice it greatly helps to approach this topic from the angle of social history of the arts, including sources like guild’s books, master craftsmen’s certificates and invoices to help reconstruct certain facts on the sculptor’s instruction: the duration of time an apprentice would spend in the masters’ workshop; the tips he would receive if involved in a commission; or the responsibilities a master would face when taking in a young employee, were meticulously stipulated. On the contrary, information on the precise methods sculptors used to teach their apprentices is hard to come by. A handicrafts code from the city of Ulm, dating from the year 1496 states that sculptors in Ulm were obliged to teach their pupils “entwerffen, schneyden und molen,” which roughly translates into ‘designing, cutting and painting’ but gives no further indication on how this task was to be accomplished.
One successful approach in terms of reconstructing sculptors’ techniques and habits while working on commissions is research on small scale sculptural models conducted by art historians like Tomas Hladik or Sylvia Carmellini. Three dimensional models from the workshops of Gianlorenzo Bernini, Giovanni Giuliani or Ignaz Günther offer an exceptional opportunity to reconstruct the artists’ techniques. However, these bozzetti, mostly executed in wax or clay, have often suffered severe damage or have been destroyed altogether over time, so this approach is only suitable for a handful of artists. Another way of taking a closer look at the inner workings of a sculptor’s workshop is to explore their graphic works. Scattered drawings clearly indicate that sketching was part of the daily routine, not only of sculptors, but also goldsmiths or carpenters. Often we only know one or two sketches that can safely be attributed to an artist, which is hardly enough to gain an insight into either a personal style or a whole system of training.

Until the middle of the 15th century, before the emergence of early academies dedicated to drawing, workshops often referred to model-books presenting collections of iconographic motifs for their compositions, followed by engraved model-sheets that were sold as single pages. Subsequently, preparatory sketches made by the artists themselves became predominant. Facing the scarce amount of drawings preserved from sculptors’ workshops, the existence of three collections of sculptor’s drawings, originating from the workshop of Bavarian sculptor Thomas Schwanthaler (Ried im Innkreis, 1634-1707), dating from 1667-1700 presents an unexpected opportunity to achieve deeper comprehension of their role for the early modern sculptor. The collections, comprising over five hundred and thirty sheets all together, have been preserved in different locations: Ried im Innkreis (former Bavaria), Imst (Austria) and Pécs (Hungary). The majority of the drawings are red chalk on paper of similar size, measuring roughly 160 by 210 millimetres, completed by fewer drawings in pen and wash.
Assembled by several generations of sculptors, the collections have one thing in common; the earliest sheets of each album can be traced back to the sculptor Thomas Schwanthaler himself by signature, date and style and hence form a common ground for subsequently added drawings. Apart from Schwanthaler, five hands can be distinguished. Whereas the drawings that remained in Ried im Innkreis were originally created for the local Schwanthaler workshop and handed on to the family members who continued to work as sculptors until the middle of the nineteenth century, the collections found in Tirol and Hungary had a more adventurous history.

The Imst sketchbook contains sketches by Andreas Thamasch (1639-1697), one of Schwanthaler’s most outstanding pupils, studying in his workshop from 1671-1674 before continuing his work in the monasteries of Stams in Tirol (1674-1697) and Kaisheim, Bavaria. A number of drawings can also be attributed to Paulin Tschiderer (1662-1720), apprentice of Andreas Thamasch until 1695 and Andreas Kölle (1680-1755) who worked with Thamasch in Stams until 1697 and later on with Paulin Tschiderer in Kaisheim from 1697-1702.\textsuperscript{18}

The Pécs sketchbook, found in a minor Hungarian parish, comprises drawings by Schwanthaler and Thamasch, as well as a number of sketches by Matthias Winterhalder who had been working in Kaisheim around 1685 with Andreas Thamasch. The largest group of signed drawings mostly dated between 1690-1698 in this collection were contributed by the sculptor Georg Hoffer, who had been studying with Winterhalder from 1690-1694. Hoffer was also the last owner of the Pécs sketchbook.\textsuperscript{19}

The collections of Imst and Pécs offer great possibilities for new research on sculptors’ drawings: the large number of sketches display a range of motifs and techniques and reflect what can be called a “drawn dialogue” between the masters and their pupils.\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, their mutual origin in the Schwanthaler workshop makes them more comparable and even
allows one to observe parallels in their ways of dissemination. The reason for the dissemination of drawings that obviously had a common origin in the workshop of Thomas Schwanthaler lies in the nature of the sculptors’ training. Apprentices, living in the master’s household where lodging and food were provided, were themselves taught to draw and received drawings for instructional purposes, before they started their mandatory journeyman’s years. The preservation of the collections in Tirol and Hungary—the sketchbooks of Imst and Pécs—proves that young sculptors not only collected drawings and added their own studies to the bundle, but also passed them on to their apprentices after their death, developing a culture of safekeeping: The collections were not formed by external collectors, but by inheritance and choice.

The itinerant craftsmen’s movement between commissions is thus of central importance to the existence of the two collections of Imst and Pécs: Both have been travelling with their respective owners—one from Ried to Southern Germany and further on to Tirol, the other probably even to Salzburg, Croatia and eventually to Hungary.21

The concept of mobility

According to a seventeenth-century apprenticeship certificate from the town of Überlingen, west of Munich, a sculptor’s apprentice would leave the master’s workshop after an average of five years for the journeyman’s years, continuing his education by travelling between commissions, a period that mostly took another eight years.22 This was not an exceptional phenomenon in early modern society—many individuals like pilgrims, soldiers, merchants or diplomats led a very mobile life.23 Seen from the angle of social history though, the mobility of craftsmen was not only a means of education aiming to broaden the individuals’ horizon, but
also a consequence of social and economic circumstances that forced artists to take on commissions abroad: Sources show extensive migration of artists—sculptors, but also painters and plasterers—who could not find suitable workshops for their education or rely on a sufficient number of commissions even after their training. Especially after the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648 with its catastrophic effects on economy, many artists from the area of North Tirol moved to Southern Germany, the Rhineland or Bohemia. The mandatory journeys thus helped to balance the market and to increase the craftsmen’s knowledge at the same time. The average duration of these journeys and the routes craftsmen would frequently use can be traced by their appearance in diaries, guilds books, invoices—or also, dedicated drawings. Often apprentices would carry an Album Amicorum with them, inviting fellow craftsmen and other acquaintances they met on their journeys to leave memorabilia such as quotes, personal notes or drawings.

An important example is the Album Amicorum of a young Swiss apprentice called Johannes Carl Zay (ca. 1654-1734) who travelled Bavaria, Austria and Northern Germany during his journeyman’s years. His Album, found in a private collection in Switzerland and now part of the Pierpont Morgan Library’s Department of Drawings and Prints, has remained intact and in very good condition. The entries show that Zay started his journey in 1678, travelling from Ulm via Augsburg and Salzburg to the North of Germany until 1682, assembling twenty-two drawings by young sculptors, painters and goldsmiths – one of them the now well-known Giovanni Giuliani—also moving between workshops. Zay even visited the Schwanthaler workshop in Ried im Innkreis in 1679 and asked the master for an entry, documented by a sketch by Thomas Schwanthaler in the Album, completed by a dated and signed inscription on the opposite page [fig. 1].
The Workshop of Thomas Schwanthaler

The Schwanthaler workshop in Ried im Innkreis offers a view of the inner workings of a small-town business, including the working conditions and regulations that were largely determined by local craft guilds. In many aspects, its history resembles that of other family-based workshops of the time: Thomas Schwanthaler took over his father’s workshop in 1656, aged twenty-two. Whereas his latter commissions are documented by drawings, church records and bills, his early years remain obscure. He probably received his initial training in his father’s workshop before continuing his education during his journeyman years. During his career he employed several of his brothers, sons and nephews and educated numerous pupils, some of whom are known to us by name. After his death in 1707, the workshop in Ried was continued by his sons and descendants until the 1750s, which is one reason for the preservation and good...
condition of the surviving drawings from his workshop. Schwanthaler was mostly commissioned by the local catholic clergy, working for parishes and monasteries in Bavaria and Salzburg. Works in wood, stone, ivory and metal show that he was familiar with a broad range of techniques, although the majority of his sculptures were executed in lime- and maple wood. One of his best known works is without doubt the large scale double altar in St. Wolfgang, Salzburg which he completed in 1675 [fig. 2].

Although we have no proof of where Schwanthaler received his training, it is very likely that his journeyman years took him to the area around Munich and Augsburg, a very popular route for travelling craftsmen of the time. Through the synopsis of the collections in Ried, Imst and Pécs his style as a draughtsman can be comprehended for the first time, allowing conclusions on his inspirations. Mostly in very good condition, the signed and dated drawings
can be related to projects in the early days of his career—some might have served as preparatory studies, but another important role was to build a pool of examples and templates to be used by the trainees in his workshop.

A particularly striking and well-preserved double page in the Pécs sketchbook features the evangelists Luke and John with their respective symbol animals, the calf and the eagle [fig. 3]. The signature of Thomas Schwanthaler, a ligature of the letters T and S, has been placed just below the right big toe of St. John, on the corner of the narrow pedestal he is standing on and again in the left bottom corner of the page, intertwined with the delicate shrubs on the ground [fig. 4]. The drawing shows a clear focus on contours using distinctive lines, completed by skilfully crafted hatching. The powerful, yet elegant, almost dancing poses are characteristic for both Schwanthaler’s drawings and his sculptures during the period between 1660-1675.
Schwanthaler was familiar with the works of his contemporaries and with collections at monasteries and also drew inspiration from engravings after French and Italian artists that were diffused by art dealers. The use of red chalk was possibly inspired by the well-known German sculptor Georg Petel (1602-1634), who had spent some time in the atelier of Peter Paul Rubens and travelled Italy before settling down in Augsburg. Petel also used red chalk for his drawings, although so far only two single sketches can safely be attributed to him by signature [fig. 5].
Another influence on Schwanthaler might have been the German engraver, painter and art writer Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688). His large scale altarpieces at the Benedictine monastery of Lambach and the Cathedral of Salzburg—including his preparatory studies in red chalk – both about a day's journey from Ried im Innkreis, were prominent works of the time [fig. 6].

Fig. 6
Joachim von Sandrart, Baptism of Christ, Study in red chalk for the lost altar painting at the cathedral of Salzburg, 1658, © Kupferstichkabinett. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Inv. Nr. 8314.

Combined with the previously mentioned coloured drawing that Schwanthaler dedicated to the young apprentice Johann Carl Zay in his Album Amicorum, the range of his skills becomes apparent. Whereas the majority of his drawings were executed in red chalk, a medium allowing a certain spontaneity and minor corrections, the illustration in the Album Amicorum represents one of his rare works in pen and wash, showing that he was handling colours skilfully and bringing painterly qualities to his drawings. The great care with which he executed this dedicated drawing suggests an awareness for the audience it might reach, being taken away on the journey of Johann Carl Zay, and an interest to demonstrate his refined professional abilities.
Drawing in the Sculptor’s Workshop

The transmission of artistic knowledge between master and apprentice was accomplished through the medium of the drawing. This effect however was multiplied by the mobility of travelling sculptors, who journeyed along well-established routes using a community of master craftsmen. The network of sculptors and workshops they visited would ultimately be reflected in the drawings or notes in their albums, which helped to transfer visual knowledge over great distances. The communication network included precise information on technology, for example, detailed measurements described on the drawings, enabling sculptors to (re)create works based on the sketches. Neither the Imst nor the Pécs Sketchbook give clear indications on the importance of drawing after the live model, since the majority of sketches show a high level of completion, unlike the open, sometimes impulsive or imperfect style one would seek when looking for preparatory studies. Considering the sketches have not been preserved for contemplation in artists’ private sketchbooks but selected for their quality and passed on to apprentices to help improve their skills, this is not an entirely surprising observation.

The circulation of knowledge through this communication network led to an intellectual discourse and eventually, a visual dialogue between artists.38 The imitation and emulation of existing topics, not necessarily the originality of ideas was a very common strategy in baroque artistic practice and can be described more precisely as a “competitive repetition of eternal tropes.”39 Due to this practice-based form of education pupils would imitate the style and figural types of a master, but at the same time alter them to their own needs, or those of a patron. This fact is strikingly illustrated by a drawing of the previously mentioned Matthias Winterhalder, a sculptor who probably never personally worked at the Schwanthaler workshop, but who got to know his drawings while being employed at the monastery of Kaisheim.
Fig. 7

Fig. 8
Winterhalder, whose style can be identified by signed drawings in the Pécs sketchbook, made a sketch of the evangelist St. John [fig. 7], obviously using one of Schwanthaler’s drawings as a model [fig. 8]. The similarities between the two compositions are striking. It is not only the elegant pose and the interaction between the evangelist and the eagle that Winterhalder tries to capture, he even copies details like the hatching around the knee or the single curl of hair that falls onto St. John’s shoulder. Winterhalder’s version is mirror-inverted, suggesting that he might have referred not to the original sketch by Schwanthaler, but to a third version, maybe a copy of the original made by impression. Both the Imst and the Pécs Sketchbooks contain a number of impressions that can be identified by a slightly blurry appearance and sometimes by mirror-inverted signatures and inscriptions. These reproduced motifs could easily be handed on to pupils, as could be the case here, enabling the artists to keep the original for further use.

Even though the data concerning Winterhalder’s life is scarce—seven of his drawings date from the time between 1682-1685, which is most likely the time he spent at Kaisheim—this sketch testifies to his great appreciation for the style of Thomas Schwanthaler, whom he probably never met in person, but whose influence was enhanced by the mobility of his drawings.

**Professional Purpose – Personal Memorabilia**

The link between the two sculptors is an apprentice of Schwanthaler, whose presence in the workshop and town of Ried can be traced by court records starting in 1671. Andreas Thamasch (1639-1697), spent four years in Schwanthaler’s workshop between 1671-1674, before continuing his work travelling back and forth between the monasteries of Stams in Tirol (1674-1697) and Kaisheim, Bavaria. During his time in Ried, he received a very personal gift;
a drawing showing his namesake St. Andrew, carefully complemented by an inscription in ink [fig. 9].

![Image of a drawing showing St. Andrew]

Inscription:
‘Ich Johannes Schwanthaller verehre dem Andre Tomäs an seinen geburts-tag zur gedechnus ano 1673’

Fig. 9
Johannes Schwanthaler, St. Andrew, 1673, red chalk, 15 x 10.5 cm, Imst Sketchbook, no Inv. Nr., Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck, © Museum Innviertler Volkskundehaus, Ried im Innkreis.

The inscription identifies the artist as Johannes Schwanthaler, the younger brother of Thomas, who dedicated the drawing to Andreas Thamasch on his birthday in 1673. Due to the fragility of the red chalk, Saint Andrew can only be identified by the big cross he is carrying, but the underlying message is clear. Andreas Thamasch, by then possibly an esteemed member of the Schwanthaler household, received a gift for his birthday, which he took with him upon his departure from Ried. During his time in Stams as well as in Kaisheim he trained several pupils himself and passed on his collection of drawings. The sketch of St. Andrew was eventually found in the Imst sketchbook, resulting from his time in the monastery of Stams in Tirol. Whereas Schwanthaler himself remained in Ried, pupils like Andreas Thamasch played a...
crucial role in the dissemination of the drawings and the foundation for the collections in Tirol and Hungary.

In the beginning it seemed that due to their roots in craftsmanship, the purpose of the three collections previously mentioned was mainly professional and educational. However, some sketches show a different approach, bearing dedications and inscriptions indicating that they were crafted for personal reasons, or simply for pleasure. A single drawing can combine several facets, showing a design for a sculpture, but at the same time bearing an inscription concerning its measurements, or a note stating the sculptor’s location and a date at the time of drawing. Sketches like Thomas Schwanthaler’s drawing in the Album Amicorum of the itinerate Johann Carl Zay and the dedicated drawing Andreas Thamasch received for his birthday in 1673, used as memorabilia, form a special group within this topic.

**Conclusion**

Sculptors as craftsmen were obliged to lead a mobile life, partly due to the customs of their trade, but also due to economic circumstances. The ‘Wanderjahre’ as part of their education were spent on the road, travelling between workshops. Additionally, after they successfully completed their training, master craftsmen were often forced to move between commissions for economic reasons. As displayed in the collections of drawings in Imst and Pécs, their use and collection had mainly practical purposes; to create a pool of ideas and possible formal solutions that all members of the workshop could rely upon. Thus, drawings were an important medium for both the communication inside a workshop and the education of apprentices. Initially a means of education and technique, the drawings served versatile purposes during the time of their existence. Apart from begin used as a tool within the workshop, the sketches were
transformed into personal memorabilia. By adding personal notes or creating sketches especially as presents, sculptors also used them as mementos, documenting important events in their lives, such as the beginning or the end of an apprenticeship, much like the Albums carried by travelling craftsmen.

Together with the itinerant sculptors, the drawings crossed borders: geographically, travelling between Austria, Germany, Croatia and Hungary, transferring information on technique, sculptural style and possibly also strategies of planning sculptural projects, which then could be adapted and altered by their fellow craftsmen. By being turned into memorabilia, the drawings received a second layer of information, sometimes meant for the artist’s own use, but also intended as a means of communication, turning them into ‘open letters’ – still to be read.

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Notes
2 Joachim von Sandrart, Teutsche Academie, (Nürnberg 1675), I, Volume 3: 60: Weil aber manche Bildhauere in Umrißen und liniren nicht allerdings erfahren sind/ und daher auf das Papier nicht wol zeichnen können/ als machen sie/ an statt dessen/ mit guter proportion und Maß/ von Erde oder Wachs/ Männlein/ Thiere/ und andere erhobne Modellen/ was sie zu bilden haben/ und stellen solche auf das Papier oder andere flache Ebne/ welche dann auch Zeichnungen von ihnen genennet worden.


László Boros, ‘Österreichische Bildhauerskizzen des 17. Jahrhunderts in Baranya’, in: *Archivhefte von Baranya* Nr. 65, (Péc 1985): 231-255. We assume that Georg Hoffer joined the Franciscan Order in Salzburg and subsequently travelled to Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary with his team – the so called ‘Ljubljaener franziskanische Bildhauerwerkstätte’ to execute church interiors for the order.


The drawings are now stored at the Volkskundehaus Ried im Innkreis, the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck and the Archive of the Diocese of Pécs, Pécs.

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The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, Dept. of Drawings and Prints, Call Number: B3 032 A06.


The family workshops of Zürn (Überlingen), Winterhalder (Vöhenbacht im Schwarzwald) or Straub (Wiesensteig) have been conducted in very similar fashion.


Johannes Schwanthaler was baptised on 15.9.1637, so he was aged 36 when he dedicated the drawing to Andreas Thamasch, who was just a little younger than him. Johannes was probably trained by his brother Thomas, using red chalk for his drawings. See Brigitte Heinzl, *Der Bildhauer Thomas Schwanthaler (1634 - 1707)*, (Ried im Innkreis: Moserbauer, 2007): 82.
