

The Musical and Physical Mobility of Material in Handel Sources

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Writing about the materiality of Handel sources is a fascinating opportunity to demonstrate Handel's practice of recycling his own music, to illustrate his methods and to show the relationships between his works from different periods, which can be detected through the detailed studies of the sources.

What are the Handel sources and how do we evaluate them?¹ The most important manuscripts are Handel's autographs. Most of them are in the British Library in London, especially the more or less complete scores of whole works. Large portions of fragments, sketches and single movements are in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. Some of these items were parts of the performing scores at a certain time, as I will demonstrate later. Several single autographs can be found in other places in Britain, and in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and in the United States. In most cases the autographs are the primary sources for the musical text of the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe (HHA).

The next group of principal sources are Handel's performing scores. They were written by copyists, but Handel also added musical material, made changes to the musical text, inserted singer's names and instructions. They were adapted for each revival. That means one may find entries which are not in the autograph, for instance instructions for transpositions, cuts, new endings for recitatives, changes in the singing text or new movements. For some works there are also scores for the keyboard player. Most of these are currently kept in the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek "Carl von Ossietzky" in Hamburg. The instrumental parts are nearly completely lost. In combination with the word-books for the several performances the performing scores can show the content of the first and the later performances.

Contemporary printed word-books are very precious sources for the content of a performance, since for the first performance, and for all later revivals, individual copies were issued. Unfortunately, not all of them have survived. Sometimes there were leaves inserted with additional texts for certain performances, such as for *Deborah* and *Athalia*,

1 See the article *Sources and collections*, in LANDGRAF/VICKERS, 2009, pp. 604-612.

but they are hard to find. There must have been one for *Esther*, but none of them has been discovered so far. For some oratorios manuscript librettos for the censor have survived. In an ideal case we would have the complete autograph, the complete performing score and a complete set of word-books for all the performances.

Another big group of contemporary manuscripts are the copies made for British collectors – usually friends, patrons and admirers of Handel. They usually mirror the content of a work at a special time.

The most interesting group of sources in respect to physical mobility of material are Handel's performing scores in Hamburg and the fragments in the Fitzwilliam Museum.² For a new composition Handel often reused music he had originally written for a certain work in the past, and later he used it again in a new context with a new or even the old text.³ This leads to the mobility of musical material. Either the musical ideas were mentally moved and written down in their new context, or pages with music were physically moved. They could be shifted from one manuscript to another and sometimes taken out, when they were no longer needed. Occasionally they may have ended up in a convolute with other pieces sharing the same fate. Annotations in the performing scores or autographs may help to identify them, and in such cases it is possible to make really precious findings. In other circumstances, for instance when there were larger alterations, the copyists wrote out the music again, and the new pages were inserted in the manuscript.⁴

There is no difference in Handel's method in working with operas or oratorios. In the pasticcio *Oreste* from 1734,⁵ for example, Handel either transferred suitable movements directly from his former operas without changes to the sung texts, or other arias were provided with new words to suit their new dramatic context. Handel's copyists provided the main portion of the performing score according to Handel's instructions, movements which required more complicated revisions or new composition were written by Handel himself.

I will show the different processes by the example of Handel's oratorio *Esther* HWV 50^b in the versions of 1732 to 1757. Even if it is an oratorio and not an operatic pasticcio, it is an ideal case to show Handel's practice in general.

Handel performed *Esther* in several seasons with different singers and in different places. We know that he produced a bilingual version of the work for 1735 and 1737 because some of his new Italian singers could not sing English.

For the new version of 1732 and onwards, seven wordbooks have survived: for London 1732, London and Oxford 1733, Dublin 1742, London 1751 and 1757. There is documentary evidence that in addition the oratorio has been performed in London in the Covent Garden Theatre in March 1735, April 1736 and April 1737, and in Lincoln's Inn Fields on the 26 March 1740, but for the performances from 1735-1740 no word-books have been found.

2 On the Fitzwilliam Museum see GARDNER, 2009, p. 234.

3 See ROBERTS, 2009, pp. 100f.

4 For the sources see BEST, 1993; BURROWS/RONISH, 1994; CLAUSEN, 1972; LARSEN, 1957.

5 HÄNDEL, 1991.

In 1732 Handel had a performing score made by his assistant Christopher Smith senior. The composer himself wrote the first *accompagnato* “Breathe soft ye gales”. This performing score has been adapted for every season, some of the original folios have been replaced. As a result, many of them are lost and with them has been lost much important information about earlier performances. Some of the detached folios of the original performing score are in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (GB-Cfm, MU MS 251).

Very valuable are marks from the different performances like singer’s names, changes, traces of paste-overs which have been removed later, fold marks and stitches. Most of the instructions and names have been written in pencil, and some have faded. Other indications are hardly visible, nearly illegible, sometimes one can only guess what they could mean.

Moreover, Handel has obviously composed a bundle of Italian arias for the 1735 season for the soprano castrato Giovanni Carestini, which he could insert in the places of the different scores where he needed them.

He used the same practice in 1734/35 for the set of *Balli* for *Alcina*, *Arianna*, *Ariodante*, *Pastor fido* and *Oreste*. For these operas Handel wrote a variety of dance movements and inserted them in suitable places. Later the *Balli* were removed for reuse in another work. The same must have happened with the Italian arias for the oratorios, which he also used for the pasticcio *Oratorio* in 1738⁶ and at least the second performance of *Israel in Egypt* in 1739. Some of the instructions for the bilingual versions have survived.

Now I will demonstrate on the basis of the performing score of *Esther* HWV 50^b, when, how and why it has been changed between 1732 and 1757. This will give you an insight into the practice and working method of Handel and his copyists, adapting a score to new needs.

The content of the performing score as it has been originally written in 1732 was complete until 1742. No pages have been removed or added. The only changes that have been made were names of the singers for each season, and some movements were given to a different role, for instance there were exchanges between the roles of Esther and Israelite Woman. The movements which were not performed in 1733 remained in the manuscript. There were only pencil marks, or pages folded together at the corners or sawn together, which indicate the cuts and changes (Figure 1).

6 HWV deest, see BURROWS, 1995, pp. 11-38.

Figure 1: Performing score, D-Hs, M C/261, fol. 62r, end of the duet “Blessings descend”, stitches and fold marks.



Figure 2: Performing score, D-Hs, M C/261, fol. 115v, Italian text “I favor del primo autore”, written by Handel 1737.

The image shows a page of a handwritten musical score. At the top left, it is marked "Violini pianissimo". The score consists of two systems of music. The first system includes a vocal line with the Italian text "I favor del primo autore" and the English translation "I'll proclaim the wondrous story of the mercies I receive". Below the vocal line is a string part for "Violini" and "Violoncelli e Contrabbassi" with the instruction "Cantabile e con Basso". The second system includes a vocal line with the Italian text "e sic' de' li nel suo amore" and the English translation "from the Day springs dawning glory dawning glo-". Below this is another string part with the instruction "Haulto piano". The score is written in a cursive hand with various musical notations including notes, rests, and clefs. The page number "114" is visible at the bottom right.

Folding the corners together allowed to turn all the superfluous pages quickly at once. The section containing the recitative “I go the power of grief to prove”, the aria “Tears assist me” and the chorus “Save us O Lord”, fols. 62 to 64 were sewn together. In 1735 and 1737 Handel adapted the score for his Italian singers. Some of the arias were supplied with an additional Italian text in the score, some movements were marked with the instruction “in Italian”, Handel also wrote annotations for transpositions. For instance, the air “Watchful angels” was given the text “Pure menti” (this material is now in Cambridge), or Handel wrote in the duet “I’ll proclaim the wondrous story” for 1737 the alternative Italian text “I favor del primo autore” in the part of the performing score which is now kept in Hamburg (Figure 2).

For the recitatives, new material with the Italian text must have been provided. This was possibly only in the parts of the singers. Since nearly no performing material has survived, the Italian versions of the recitatives have got lost.

The first time that sections of material have been removed from the performing score was for the performance in Dublin in 1742. Some folios are in Cambridge, most of them are missing. Fortunately, there are some secondary copies of the arias. They are in manuscript volumes of some collections, sometimes as an appendix to *Esther* HWV 50^a, which was composed about 1718 to 1720 for Cannons.

The complete set of new arias which were not in *Esther* HWV 50^a – the new English and the Italian movements for *Esther* HWV 50^b – is in a manuscript source in the Aylesford Collection of the British Library with the shelf mark R.M.18.c.5. It has been copied by the copyist S4 (Smith circle) c. 1735. The *Esther* movements in GB-Lbl, R.M.19.d.11 have been copied from GB-Lbl, R.M.18.c.5 in about 1750 to 1760 by the copyist S13.⁷ Both sources may be based on the contents of the performing score before 1751. The manuscript MU MS 800 in the Barrett Lennard Collection in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge was copied by the copyist S5 c. 1736 to 1741. It contains the first version of *Esther*, most of the arias for 1732 and the Italian arias for 1735 to 1740. “Angelico splendor” is missing. If there was a separate set of arias, the folios with “Angelico splendor” have possibly been detached at one point. Around the same time, c. 1738 to 1741, S5 also copied the manuscript which is now in the Shaftesbury Collection. Another similar source is the manuscript in the Granville Collection, GB-Lbl, Eg. 2931, written by Smith senior at the beginning of the 1740s, possibly before Handel performed *Esther* in Dublin 1742. This manuscript does not seem to be directly related to the manuscripts in the Barrett Lennard Collection or the one in the Shaftesbury Collection.

The first serious losses of sections of the original performing score have happened in 1742, when the two Anthems – HWV 261 *My heart is inditing* and HWV 258 *Zadok the priest* with the first movement on the new text “God is our hope” and the chorus “God save the King” were – removed.

The more significant changes were made in 1751, when Handel performed with a completely new ensemble of singers. Many of the arias and recitatives had to be transposed and were therefore newly written and the original pages were replaced. The

7 For the two manuscripts see BURROWS, 1993, pp. 231-247.

choruses of the anthems were reinstated, but the original folios must have been lost. Therefore, the copyist had to write them again. Some sections of movements and some recitatives have been newly copied for technical reasons, so that the new folios would fit together with the following original ones which could be kept. Finally, Handel inserted new recitatives and arias from previous works, sometimes even with the same text. This leaves us with a huge gap of information because nearly all the annotations and instructions for the previous performances are lost, apart from those on the folios which are now preserved in Cambridge.

Already for the first version of *Esther* in 1718⁸ Handel had reused nine movements from the *Brockes Passion* which he composed in London 1716. In most cases he substituted the original text and made a few adjustments to the melody and instrumentation, later he has worked in the same way with the pieces for *Esther* HWV 50^b. Normally Handel made use of specific works at a certain period. For *Esther* in 1732 he went back to HWV 242 *Silete venti* (London 1724), some music from the *Coronation Anthems* (London 1727) and HWV 74 *Birthday Ode for Queen Anne* (London 1714) – the air “Thro’ the nation” was the air “Let the rolling streams”, and the chorus “All applauding crowds” was the chorus “The day that gave great Anna birth”. Other movements from the *Coronation Anthems* were also used for *Deborah* (1733), and the *Occasional Oratorio* (1746).⁹ Some of the Italian arias, which Handel inserted in the bilingual versions were also placed in the two latter works, sometimes with a different text. A number of the original movements from the 1732 version of *Esther* were used again in *Deborah* in the following year.¹⁰

“Breathe soft, ye gales” goes partly back to the *accompagnato* “Silete venti” from the same work. The “Alleluja” was taken over from there completely.

In 1735 Handel integrated more music from HWV 242: the aria “Dulcis amor” became “Cor fedele”, “Date certa” became “Bianco giglio” (and before “Meine Seele hört im Sehen” HWV 207), and its B section was turned into “Spira un aura”. For this Handel’s copyist Smith senior has written the alternative text above the system of the voice in the autograph of *Silete venti* (GB-Lbl, R.M.20.g.9). The bundle of arias I have mentioned earlier includes also the solo section for Carestini for the final chorus on three pages (GB-Cfm, MU MS 251, pp. 40-42).

In 1751 Handel again inserted an aria from *Silete venti*: “Hope, a pure and lasting treasure” (it was “Dulcis amor Jesu care”), which he also used in the 1756/57 versions of *Israel in Egypt*.

The air “Watchful angels”, which was sung with the Italian text “Pure menti” by Conti in 1737, was originally “Ferma l’ali” in *La Resurrezione* HWV 47 (Rome 1708), and the additional air “Angelico splendor” is the air “Viver e non amar” from the cantata HWV 96 *Clori, Tirsi e Fileno* (Rome 1707), which was also used in the bilingual version of *Acis and Galatea*.

8 HÄNDEL, 1995.

9 BASELT, 1984, p. 725.

10 IBID., pp. 99f. and 116f.

In 1751 Handel also inserted the aria “No more disconsolate” from *Deborah*, and from *Solomon* “Sacred raptures” and “Virtue, truth and innocence”, which was originally composed on the text “When the sun o’er yonder hills”. He used both arias again in the late versions of *Israel in Egypt*, as well as the additional air “Tua bellezza” on the text “La speranza, la costanza” and possibly in *Athalia* on the text “L’innocenza, la clemenza”. Also “Cor fedele”, “Bianco giglio” and “Angelico splendor” were inserted in *Athalia*, and again a number of original movements from the 1732 version of *Esther*.

Handel has moved around a large amount of music between the different works, but there is still more to say about the use of this bundle of Italian arias in the 1730s. Handel had created a “Benefit Pasticcio” in 1738.¹¹ This was an oratorio consisting of Anthems, movements from Italian cantatas and mainly movements from *Esther*, *Deborah* and *Athalia*. The Italian arias “La speranza” (= “Tua bellezza”), “Cor fedele”, “Bianco giglio” and “Angelico splendor” were also performed in this context. Finally, all of them have been sung by Elisabeth Duparc (La Francesina) in the second performance of *Israel in Egypt* on 11th April 1737: “Angelico splendor” in B-flat major (orig. A major), “Cor fedele” in G minor (orig. E minor), and “La speranza, la costanza”.

For the revival in 1757 *Esther* was changed again. At that time Handel was as good as blind and his assistant John Christopher Smith junior helped him to prepare the material. Some of the new pieces for 1751 have been removed, some new movements have been added. Some movements from the Cannons version were re-instated, especially because the role of Assuerus, which was originally composed for a castrato (Senesino) in 1732, had been sung by the tenor John Beard. In 1718 the part of Assuerus had also been sung by a tenor. It seems from the late secondary sources that the scribe had simply copied these versions for Beard.

The chorus “Shall we of servitude complain” from HWV 50^a (no. 4) has already been included in Act I in 1751. In the previous versions it was a recitative.¹²

Conclusion

Handel had an excellent memory and an immense knowledge of music,¹³ and he worked in a very economical way, not only through reusing and exploiting his old compositions for new works, or using the same music for several works of a certain period, but also in respect of the consumption of paper, which was expensive.¹⁴ From his autographs, and also from his performing scores, one can see that Handel used every possible space. And so did the copyists from the Smith circle who worked for him. They made only new copies of the pages which had to be replaced. Otherwise Handel or the copyists marked the changes directly in the original score and pasted slips of paper on the sections which

11 BURROWS, 1995, pp. 11-38.

12 For the score and the sources of HWV 50^b see: HÄNDEL, forthcoming.

13 LANDGRAF, 2018, pp. 55-69.

14 HAMBERGER, 2006, p. 43.

were not used for a special performance. Later they were removed if not longer needed. There were also separate music pages for the movements which served in the same period as insertions in different works. Some of them have survived. A great deal of the replaced original folios has been lost.

This description illustrates Handel's method of the use of his musical material in respect of one special work as an example. *Esther*; however, is not a single case, and I think it is clear, that this practice is a general principle of the composer's approach.

Sources

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