

V Summary of Results

The examination of the late-Baroque stage decorations in the collection of the Schlosstheater Ludwigsburg was carried out against the background of the theatrical events at the Württemberg court in the second half of the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th century, the development of the courtly venues and their stage furnishings as well as the activity and artistic profile of the set decorators responsible for them. The examination of the individual scenery elements with regard to their depiction, property and artistic design included a wide range of source information on the history of their creation and use as well as restoration findings. On this basis, it is now possible to determine the provenance of almost every object under consideration, to attribute it to one of the head set decorators in question and to date it either to the exact year or to a period of a few years.

An essential result of the investigations is the realisation that, contrary to previous research opinion, a large proportion of the late-Baroque decorative pieces date back to the time when theatrical architect Innocente Colomba worked at the Württemberg court. It was under his direction that the three versions of *Elysian Fields*, from which the stage set preserved today is composed, were created. Two of the flats from the set can be dated to 1760 and are the oldest pieces in the entire collection. Six pieces were probably produced in 1763 – the year in which the expenditures for theatrical and festive events reached its peak, and also a phase in which there was fruitful collaboration between Innocente Colomba and the ballet master Jean Georges Noverre, who was highly respected at court. Four flats and the backdrop can be traced back to 1766 and thus to the late phase of Colomba's activity in Stuttgart. At that time the considerable budget cutbacks already loomed that were to put a temporary end to the high standard of Württemberg theatre. With regard to the backdrop of the *Elysian Fields* this was reflected by the partial use of washed-out canvas panels from older decorations.

Apart from a few later additions, the components of the *Forest Landscape* scenery can also be linked to Colomba. The magnificently composed backdrop dates from 1761 and thus from a time when the court was able to draw on generous resources for the production of stage sets. The majority of the added flats, in turn, were probably created in 1766/67 and are characterised by the unadorned depiction of natural conditions. The three frame flats of a lost mountain decoration now belonging to the *Rocks scene* can be dated about one year earlier, and the many traces of reworking indicate that they were used extensively on various court stages. From the existing *Street scene*, the section of an enclosing wall dating from 1762 and the two unusual arcade flats with a transformation function, which were created in 1765/66, can be attributed to Colomba's oeuvre, as well as the three set pieces, probably produced in the early 1760s, depicting a ship, a

throne and a balustrade. This gives us an unexpectedly far-reaching insight into the practical stage design work of the theatre architect, particularly with regard to the realisation of natural subjects. The main curtain of the Schlosstheater with its depiction of *Apollo and the Muses* at the foot of the Helicon, can also be traced back to Colomba in its draft and at least partially in its execution, whereby significant aspects in the design of the landscape and in the formation of the figures refer back to the Ticinese artist.

In his work as a stage designer, Innocente Colomba strove from the beginning for a deceptively realistic imitation of nature. Several testimonies show that he was highly skilled in this field. The panel paintings he left behind prove his intensive preoccupation with landscape themes, which he approached with meticulous attention to detail. He brought these skills to his work at the Württemberg court, and maybe this was one of the reasons why his decorations were so well received by the public. In addition, the elaborate functionality of the two transformation flats demonstrates the set decorator's striving for the most illusionistic design of the stage space possible on the basis of technical achievements, and it reveals his desire to impress the audience with surprising visual effects. The fact that elements of set decoration were used as a means of interpreting the stage action with a dynamic quality testifies to the great importance that was attached to scenery in the theatrical event, and it proves the decisive role of the set designer in the development of the overall concept.

It is regrettable that the surviving collection does not provide us with any significant insight into Colomba's work in the field of architectural representation – here we have to rely on the few design drawings from Stuttgart and Turin (formerly Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart and Pogliaghi Collection, Varese), which have only survived in reproduction. These testimonials show that Colomba received inspiration from the court architect Philippe de La Guépière, whose works in the early neoclassicist style probably suited Colomba's inclination towards clear spatial dispositions. However, the conscious use of antique décor as epitomized in the *goût grec* in Colomba's work probably only came about after the appearance of Jean Nicolas Servandoni, whose use of quotations from antiquity in the design of scenes met with great acclaim at court. In the Stuttgart drafts, which were created during Colomba's late period at the Württemberg court, as well as in the sheets created a few years later for the Teatro Regio in Turin, the artist showed great skill in the use of such stylistic devices, which established his reputation as an important representative of late-Baroque classicism. For Colomba, however, it was a priority to implement such formal specifications in an individual manner. His efforts were directed towards the constant development of new design ideas with which he was able to "surprise" ("surprennieren") the public at court.

Of the fifteen sensational set decorations that Jean Nicolas Servandoni left behind after his employment in Stuttgart of just over a year, at least thirteen were

used for many years to come, thus his work can be described as lasting for stage design at the Würtemberg court. The fact that an object designed by Servandoni has been preserved in the Ludwigsburg collection in the double flat depicting a *fountain wall* may also be counted among the special results of the study. The two cleverly coordinated components give us an idea of how the creative set decorator was able to realise his ideas on the stage – a legacy that is all the more valuable as there is very little visual material available on the highly acclaimed stage sets that he created at princely and royal courts throughout Europe. The fact that in the form of the preserved *fountain wall* Servandoni left behind a double flat with a special perspective structure may be considered logical for an artist whose achievements in the field of spatial illusion were universally praised.

The partial inventory of a *Cultural Landscape* which has survived in the collection can be regarded as the work of Giosué Scotti, who thus emerges from the shadow of his predecessor and patron Innocente Colomba. In his conception of the scenery, which was very likely produced for the Kirchheim theatre in autumn 1767, he succeeded – by incorporating stylistic parameters of the Rococo – creating a naturalistic, varied depiction of a rural ambience, which is characterised by picturesque disorder, thus contrasting with the courtly sphere. The components of the decoration were later enlarged for the Opernhaus Stuttgart – presumably under the subsequent head of decoration Nicolas Guibal. In the same period, the group of village house flats was probably created, with which the stage set could be extended to form a spacious rural idyll. The *Vineyard Area*, which has survived to this day, should be seen as a selection from the inventory of this compiled set decoration. Scotti is also likely responsible for two townhouse flats, which probably originate from the large Opernhaus Ludwigsburg. And last but not least, the iconographically interesting main curtain of the Theater Grafeneck can be attributed to him, which demonstrates the ability of the Lombardian painter to skilfully compose a multi-figured scene and subtly shape a humorous event.

In addition to the village house flats already mentioned, two townhouse flats and a rocky flat can be attributed to the period in which Nicolas Guibal was in charge of set decoration at court. For many years the versatile artist, who enjoyed a brilliant career as a decor painter and advisor to Duke Carl Eugen, devoted himself to theatre painting only on special occasions; however, in his mature creative phase he still took on the design of scenery and costumes. In particular, a house façade in the elegant pigtail style can be associated with the taste of the artist trained in Nancy, Paris and Rome, whose work for the court is still present in the form of several significant wall and ceiling paintings, despite numerous war losses. As Guibal was responsible for set decoration only on a part-time basis, it can be assumed that the two scene painters Sebastian Holzhey and Franz Bassmann, who were entrusted with the execution of stage elements, were also active as designers, for example in connection with the production of the picturesque village house flats.

The majority of the late-baroque decorative pieces preserved in Ludwigsburg were created in the 1760s and are therefore older than previously assumed – a smaller number of objects date from the 1770s, possibly even the 1780s. This provides us with an instructive insight into stage design at the Württemberg court under four artistically independent head set decorators. It is true that the compiled stage sets and their components, which were heavily altered for the most part, can only convey a limited idea of the appearance of the original versions and the intentions of the artists responsible. Nevertheless, the high-quality painterly execution of the components and the still fascinating overall effect of the surviving set decorations give us an impression of the splendour that was once displayed on the court stages of Duke Carl Eugen.

The findings on the history of art classification of the Ludwigsburg inventory under consideration now also make it possible to relate it to the stage sets in the palace theatres of Český Krumlov, Drottningholm, and Litomyšl. The Krumlov collection was created in the years 1766/67 as a stylistically homogeneous ensemble, with the exception of a few pieces of set from other provenances. In the theatre at Drottningholm, on the other hand, which was newly established in 1766, set decorations originating from various venues of the Swedish royal court and designed by different hands have been preserved – as in Ludwigsburg. They include a few elements that can be dated to the late 1760s, while the rest were produced in the 1770s to 1790s. The ensemble of stage sets in Litomyšl, on the other hand, was commissioned in its entirety in 1797. It can therefore be stated that those objects in the Ludwigsburg collection that were created before 1766 – eight flats of the *Elysian Fields*, the *Forest Landscape* backdrop, the flat depicting a wall segment, the double flat forming a fountain wall and the rock frames for a mountain scenery – can be regarded as the oldest surviving exterior decorations in European Baroque theatre.¹⁰³⁷ Some of the Ludwigsburg set decorations can be placed in immediate chronological proximity to the fundus in Krumlov, such as the four most recent flats of the *Elysian Fields*, eight flats of the *Forest Landscape* and the flats of the *Cultural Landscape*; thus it is plausible to make comparisons. While the Krumlov forest scenery, for example, is characterised by decoratively stylised, vividly intertwined forms that seem to be indebted to a canon of forms derived from late Baroque and Rococo, among the Ludwigsburg landscape elements the forest flats especially testify to an artistic conception more closely oriented towards nature, which can be associated with the tendencies of emerging neoclassicism. In this respect, the Ludwigsburg examples are comparable to the flats depicting a forest from Gripsholm preserved in Drottningholm, which were created at least fifteen years later. This progressive appearance may also be one of

¹⁰³⁷ Only the interior set of the *Temple de Minerve*, created by the Slodtz brothers for a performance of the opera *Thésée* (Quinault/Lully) in 1754 in the theatre of Fontainebleau, which was transferred to the théâtre de la Reine in Versailles in 1846, is older, see Gousset/Richter, *Les décors de scène*, pp. 23f.

the reasons why the majority of the Ludwigsburg sets have so far been classified as having been created more recently than they actually were. The turn towards more progressive currents is likely to have occurred in the mid-1760s at the latest, a time when the conception of stage design at the Württemberg court had evidently been set in motion. The way in which Innocente Colomba implemented the formal ideas of early neoclassicism in architectural scenery is discernable from the Stuttgart and Turin designs, but we are denied seeing it immediately.

The town backdrop, which was probably created in the early 1770s under Gio-sué Scotti and whose appearance has only been preserved by a historical photograph, shows a certain correspondence in its motifs with designs and objects from the context of the Drottningholm theatre that date from the same years. The village house flats, presumably created in the late 1770s or the 1780s by the court painters Sebastian Holzhey and Franz Bassmann, in turn, reveal references in the choice of motifs both to pieces of stage decoration preserved in Drottningholm and dated to the same period and to objects in Litomyšl, which were created around a decade and a half later. This indicates that under the successors of Innocente Colomba, who had preferred an individually shaped canon of forms, there was an increased use of generally accessible design templates. The more contrasting, more strongly contoured style of painting, which can be observed in the Ludwigsburg village house flats, also finds its counterpart in Drottningholm and Litomyšl and becomes tangible as part of an overarching development in the art of stage design in the last third of the century.

The late Baroque decorations in the Ludwigsburg collection are thus to be regarded as a valuable legacy of the changing conditions in the stage set production of the Württemberg court under Duke Carl Eugene and, at the same time, as rare evidence of an eventful phase in European stage design. Further studies on this topic are desirable, especially as the extensive archival material promises to shed more light on overarching questions, such as workshop organisation and the interaction of the various forces involved in the realisation of decorations. The Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg plan to publish a complete edition of the Ludwigsburg collection, in which both the late-Baroque and the neoclassicistic components will be presented and acknowledged. Therefore, it is to be hoped that this unique monument to historical stage design will be made comprehensively and profoundly accessible to both theatre experts and the public.

