



**THE OBJECT IN CONTEXT:
CROSSING CONSERVATION BOUNDARIES**

Contributions to the Munich Congress
28 August – 1 September 2006



Munich

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Published by

The International Institute for Conservation
of Historic and Artistic Works
6 Buckingham Street, London WC2N 6BA, UK

TRADE IN ARTISTS' MATERIALS: THE VENINO MERCHANTS IN WÜRZBURG

Stefanie Gerzer and Andreas Burmester

INTRODUCTION

The selection of materials used by artists or craftsmen is based not only upon their quality, price, compatibility, intended use, user-friendliness, and on technological progress, but also on regulations laid down by the commissioner of the object, or on the individual preferences of the artist or craftsman. Independently of these criteria, the availability of a certain material is a factor of central importance. This puts the art object and its creation into the context of trade and commerce. During the last decade or so, art technological research has focused on several questions:

- What kind of materials could an artist or craftsman use?
- Which material was available at a certain time and place?
- Who was trading and selling artists' materials?
- How much did they cost, and most importantly, what is the trade chain for such materials?

On account of its geographical location, Germany played a key role within historical European trade routes. Just as happens today, these trade routes were used to transport all kinds of goods across Germany, between the Alps and the Baltic Sea, and between the Hungarian mining areas and the Atlantic. Many goods were sent to wealthy cities, such as Augsburg, Nuremberg or Frankfurt. A reliable method of mirroring the historic trade with artists' materials is to explore primary documentary sources related to a single merchant company, such as the Venino merchants, located in Würzburg in northern Bavaria.

THE VENINO MERCHANTS AND THEIR TRADE NETWORK

Recently, new primary archival material was discovered, related to the trade with artists' materials in Franconia, focused around the 1790s. As has been shown in earlier publications, apothecaries played an important role in this trade, at least in German-speaking countries [1]. However, later in the nineteenth century, artists' materials were increasingly traded by specialised shops. Situated between these two scenarios, the Venino merchants expanded their stock and also started to trade in art- and craft-related materials in the early eighteenth century, until they specialised in the tobacco trade in the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1716, Carl Anton Venino became a member of the Würzburg Chamber of Commerce. His stock included pigments, dyestuffs, coloured lakes, resins, waxes, glues and oils. His company 'Carl Anton Venino', renamed 'Veninos Erben' (Venino's Heirs) after his death, existed up to the early twentieth century. Some of his business correspondence and related material has been acquired, which reveals valuable information about materials sold to artists and craftsmen: these documents include price lists, waybills (consignment notes), custom tickets, and hand-written orders to German and foreign merchants with close trade relationships with the Veninos. A detailed study of the bills, waybills and orders enables us to discover the business relationships of the Veninos. For example, J.E. Roeder from Mainz delivered '1 Fäßel Farbwaar' (one barrel of pigments) to Veninos Erben by ship in 1792. There is also a hand-written order for pigments from the well-known Ebrach Cistercian cloister to the Veninos in Würzburg from the same period. These two documents indicate a possible link between a pigment supplier and the final consumer.

This extraordinary archival resource allows us to uncover information not only on trade chains, availability and prices, but also on transactions between single stations on the trade

routes. The Veninos traded with artists' materials in Franconia and in neighbouring regions and foreign countries, including the Netherlands, France and Italy. Obviously, their central position within the trade chain allowed the Veninos to have a commercial relationship with production sites and large trading companies. Interestingly, at the same time, they interacted with small shopkeepers and final consumers. Furthermore, these documents allow us to analyse the nomenclature and meaning of various professions involved in trading, most of which are unknown today. The role of traders and wholesalers (*Grossisten*), grocers (*Krämer*, *Minutierer*), suppliers of materials (*Materialisten*), spice traders (*Spezereihändler*), druggists (*Drogisten*) and apothecaries (*Apotheker*) can be clarified.

In economic history, price lists are regarded as being one of the most valuable sources of information to flesh out the understanding of European trade in former times. In combination with the waybills, these lists give a clear indication of the range of products traded. The bulk of the Venino documents includes several hundred German and foreign price lists. To date, data on artists' materials from these lists has been collected and evaluated for the years 1791, 1792, 1795, 1799, 1809 and 1810. This includes important price lists from Amsterdam (van Gulin), Frankfurt (Augstell & Schefer, Franz Brentano, Gebrüder Ettling, Fingerlin & Voltz, Christian Humser), Nuremberg (Gebrüder Bub, Fördereiter, Johann Michael Leuchs, Johann Conrad Roscher, Carl Kiessling), and Triest (Franz Spielmann, Ramoser Mayregger e Comp., Johann Dobler).

RESULTS

At present, the information collected is stored in a database that permits evaluation of the information according to the pigment's nomenclature, price, origin, and availability. From the Venino documents it should be possible not only to describe the full range of artists' materials used in the area of Franconia between at least 1750 and 1850, but also to obtain a picture of the trade network and the amounts of artists' materials traded. This will influence current understanding of art technology during that period. The Venino documents will be compared with apothecaries' *Taxae* and inventories. Moreover, understanding of the trade chain and the position of the apothecary and other merchants within this chain [2] will be extended. The sources used in these studies will include other archival material from the mining, trade and travel literature. Finally, prominent art objects or ensembles will be placed into the context of the conclusions drawn from this exhaustive study of the Venino documents.

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