

Introduction

The Holy Sepulcher is unveiled; onstage there is an image of Job surrounded by his afflictions; above him, in the air, a Crucifix, with the motto “In hoc signo vinces”; and above this, a partial image of heavenly Glory with a choir of angels. First there is a sweet, not sad, instrumental introduction; then “Love of God” and “Faith in Christ” appear.

Love of God: Whoever does not love You is indeed ungrateful, /
Anyone is impious who does not adore You, / God, You Who have
given essence to nothingness, / Eternal Creator.

Faith in Christ: Anyone must be made of stone, or have a serpent’s
heart, / who has no faith in these Wounds / whence the incarnate
Redeemer / poured forth all His blood.

a2: Infinite/incarnate all-powerful One,

Love: Without You, Who created it, / Just as before [creation] it was
naught / the world still would be just nothing.

Faith: Without You, Who redeemed them, / souls would still be slaves
/ of the devil and of sin.

a2: Whoever does not love You is indeed ungrateful, / Anyone is
impious who does not adore You, / God, You Who have given
essence to nothingness, / Eternal Creator.

This scene of wonder, with its three-plane set design by Lodovico
Ottavio Burnacini, its theatrical text in Italian by Nicolò Minato, and

its music by Antonio Draghi, was the opening of a central devotional moment for the Habsburg court in Vienna on Good Friday afternoon in 1697. Its emphasis on divine goodness seems at odds with both its set design—the Cross and the afflicted Job—and its ritual context, the aftermath of the morning’s ceremonies for the Adoration of the Cross and the Deposition of Christ. At the same time, the most important audience—and musical contributor of five arias—for the piece, *La Virtù della Croce*, was represented onstage by the biblical sufferer: Emperor Leopold I (1640–1705). He had already reigned for almost forty years, and in the preceding months had lost his sister Mariana of Austria and his second-youngest daughter to death, having previously witnessed his brother, his first two wives, three fathers-in-law, and some nine other children suffer the same fate.

With its “sweet” opening *sinfonia*, such a rounded and duetting moment of meditation on divine infinity, material nihility, and redemption—without any explicit mention of Christ—would also seem an unusual start to Holy Week music theater titled on the power of the Cross. What could have generated this optimism at this most somber moment of the ritual year? Still, the binary patterns of Minato’s text and the hypnotic repetition of the seven-syllable Italian poetic lines confer a communicative stasis suited to the contemplation of God’s nature. In addition, the entire section is musically unified by being pitched on C with two flats, a representation of what for Draghi would have been “church-key [*tuono*] 1” (here transposed down a major second).

The piece is one of about seventy—most but not all in Italian—written for court performance on Holy Thursday and Good Friday between 1660 and 1711. Although many libretti are titled *rappresentazione sacra* (sacred play), music—both vocal and instrumental, as this opening suggests—was essential to all of them. The genre is best known today by the name of its prop unveiled to begin the action, a constructed replica of Christ’s Tomb with a figure of the dead Savior inside, and thus as a *sepolcro*, a term used in a single libretto but otherwise typical only of the modern literature (for convenience’s sake alone, I use this anachronistic term). About forty-seven of the musical scores survive (appendixes 1 and 2), all in manuscript, while the libretti are transmitted largely in print.

This kind of piece had its own norms of genre. From the beginning, its characters were both allegorical and biblical, and dramatic onstage action was sparse; many, if not all, of the texts are set in devotional time after the Entombment. Although the genre seems to have originated at

the behest of the dowager empress Eleonora (II) Gonzaga in winter 1660, it was occasionally imitated in other Viennese churches and even exported elsewhere. But in its essential structural nature, most clearly its unipartite overall form (unlike the two-section oratorio, which was normally interrupted by a sermon and performed earlier in Lent or Advent), and its physical/intellectual connection to the representation of the Tomb and to Holy Week ritual, it was a special product of music theater in early modern central Europe, one linked to sepulchral culture in general. Besides meditation on the dead Christ, the form's thematics also focus on issues from epistemology to economics to aesthetics, in ways beyond that of the court's large operatic repertory.

For all that they have been considered in a separate category of the sacred—situated as a performative addition to the most intense days of the year—the sepolcri also partook in the theatricality that marked the dynasty's self-understanding as well as its self-projection. By today's standards, it might appear that the scholarly issues around the genre are hopelessly dated: allegorical drama in early modern Europe; the all-too-familiar *Pietas austriaca* (a term that could be nuanced); the insularity and self-projection of the Habsburgs, not to mention the dynasty's sheer if understandable morbidity; and the obscure post-Marinist conceptualism of the texts. But their production took place at a time of changing and conflicting devotional approaches, notable political shifts, and subtly varying organizations of knowledge; hence the seemingly antimodern stasis of the court was far from monolithic, and the works reflect this. Indeed, the discourse of death, penance, and redemption sometimes went in unexpected directions. The devotional literature circulating at court included Italian, German, Latin, and Spanish texts, and their resonances in the pieces are traced later in this study.

In a wider sense, the mourning of the inaccessible Christ on display in the Tomb paradoxically raises issues of alterity and grief. The difficulty of consolation in the face of Christ's death recurs in the genre's discourse, and the universal omission of any mention of the forthcoming Resurrection casts a shadow over their final affect, as the royal audience would have departed to their own final meditations on the Passion that day.

Any discussion of grief and allegory in seventeenth-century Europe is obviously indebted to Walter Benjamin's considerations of literary voice and devices in Silesian Protestant "plays of mourning"; although the sepolcri are classic theater of lamentation, their theological heuristics are hard to compare to the ideology of Andreas Gryphius or Daniel von

Lohenstein. One feature of Minato's libretti, at least, is the psychological complexity of the allegorical figures. Although the form maintained strong roots in the late medieval tradition, the epistemology and aesthetics of the texts are decidedly modern. In that sense, they are a parallel to, not a replica of, the German tragic repertory analyzed thematically by Benjamin.

There were other generic features that set the Tomb pieces apart. From 1660 through 1686 (Eleonora Gonzaga would die later that year), there were separate works for Holy Thursday and for Good Friday, the former performed in the physical but also the labor space of the dowager empress's chapel, the latter by Leopold's own musicians, normally in the Hofburgkapelle. For three years between 1677 and 1682, shorter German-language examples for the chapel of Leopold's daughter from his first marriage, Maria Antonia (1669–92), were added to the two other performances. From 1687 until 1711, works were produced only for Friday. Like operas, their texts and music, along with fresh sets, were normally created anew each year; this differs from the frequent repetition of oratorios in Vienna. In many years, there was a thematic link or dialectical contrast between the two pieces in any given Week.

Their essential audience was the royals themselves: Eleonora, her two daughters, and her stepson Leopold, together with his three wives: Margherita Teresa of Spain (r. 1666–73), Claudia Felicitas of Tyrol (1673–76), and Eleonore Magdalene of Neuburg (1676–1705). From the late 1670s, Leopold's various children must also have taken part, including his surviving sons Joseph I and Charles VI plus their spouses. After 1705 (despite his final illness, the emperor seems to have been able not only to experience but also to contribute to the Friday piece that year), Joseph took over, a shift marked by notable changes in thematics and musical style. In the logistical and ritual reconsolidation at court that followed Joseph's death in 1711, the form disappeared, to return as a somewhat different form, the two-part *azione sepolcrale* (play at the Tomb), once Charles had established his own norms of dramatic production around 1715.

The pieces were meant to function in a complex situation. Among the sovereigns, both Leopold and Joseph were trained musician-composers; of the empresses and princesses, Claudia Felicitas seems to have been the most musically talented, but all the women from Eleonora Gonzaga onward would frequently have heard new musical styles. The singers and players seem to have been drawn from the two groups of royal musicians, depending on the day of performance, with the empress's on

Thursdays. In their length and number of singing parts (overall three to twelve, but normally five to eight), the pieces were most like the smaller secular works elsewhere in the court repertory (e.g., serenatas), with one piece from the logistically difficult year 1684 employing only four, and a few in the preceding decades using more. But their topoi of lament, sin, and loss, together with their most somber ritual context, set them apart from these former. The composers—Antonio Bertali, Giuseppe Tricarico, Leopold himself, Giovanni Felice Sances, Johann Heinrich Schmelzer, and most prolifically Antonio Draghi—typically made modest instrumental demands: normally two to five parts of various strings (with occasional use of *cornetti muti* (mute cornets), whose somber timbre befitted the season) plus basso continuo, with trombones in a few pieces, and then a more varied instrumentation after Marc'Antonio Ziani took over their composition in 1701.

Like all vocal music of the time, though, the settings were meant to deliver the text with affect and persuasion, above all the omnipresent call to penance. The seeming disjunction between the texts' importance and their quickly changing librettists in the 1660s will be investigated presently. From Minato's arrival in Vienna in autumn 1669, this Venetian opera professional would take over writing most texts for the two days, imparting not only his European renown and remarkable status for a court servant, but also a conceptual complexity verging on the hermetic, especially after 1690. This aspect was reinforced by Burnacini's sets, documentable from about 1671 but possibly in place earlier, and continued by his son as late as 1709 (the very first ones for any secular theatrical work date back as far as 1659). Insofar as they often do not relate explicitly to the intellectual trajectory of the texts, the sets thus create the kind of emblem culture of which the genre was a dramatic manifestation (appendix 3). Minato also wrote most of the texts for the major court operas and important, if shorter, secular pieces, but both these forms sometimes lack the intellectual virtuosity of the *sepolcri*.

For all that the pieces might seem aimed at the royal family, and to the degree that the viewing space in the chapels could accommodate them, other courtiers, local nobles, and European ambassadors were among their audience, and the printing of almost all the libretti, followed by the posthumous reprint of Minato's "collected sacred works" in 1700 after the poet's death, shows the public nature of the texts. One mark of the Habsburgs' desire to make them comprehensible to local nobility was the publication of—surprisingly well-wrought—German

translations from about 1685 onward. Still, it was the sovereigns themselves who were at the center of the pieces' messages: the various case studies at the end of each chapter here attempt to convey what a given member of the family might have heard in a given piece in a given year, and issues of the Habsburgs' social identity were constantly on display.

The circulation of the libretti also publicized the dynasty's role as custodians of the Passion and of its relics, including a Nail from the Cross, a Thorn from Christ's Crown, and a particle of the Cross (the copy of Veronica's veil now in the Vienna Schatzkammer would not make its way to the court until later in the eighteenth century). These material proofs of Christ's suffering were instantiations of salvational agency, and in Minato's libretti they were joined by two numerical conceits: prime-number symbolism (Three Nails, Five Wounds, Seven Sorrows) and astronomical/temporal mechanics (the eclipse at Christ's death or biblical stoppages of time), particularly in the works of the 1670s.

The central theme linking the Passiontide pieces to other Lenten and Advent works was the Incarnation, or "Dio humanato" as it appears in some ten of Minato's texts. The degree to which this idea of Christ's two natures—technically, the Hypostatic Union—was also an attack on Islam is not explicit in the libretti, although the political situation with the Ottomans could be quite pressing (e.g., in 1660, 1663, 1683–84, and 1687). In terms of differentiating Christianity from another Abrahamic faith, there is a recurrent—revoltingly so, to modern sensibilities—amount of anti-Judaism in the sepolcri texts, no matter what their temporal origin or destination, with multiple mentions of Hebraic "guilt" in about half the libretti. These ideological issues are discussed further in a later chapter.

The performances happened amid busy Holy Week ritual in Vienna itself, not least the Tomb installations in some thirty churches outside the court. The sepolcri were acts of recollection of Christ's life and the Passion; only in a few are the events of Good Friday narrated in anything like real time. In most, the Savior is presumed already deposed and buried. They thus look toward the past, in their performance of memory (not for nothing was a sepolcro by Minato and Schmelzer of 1678 entitled *Le Memorie dolorose*), and toward the future, in their call for personal penance. Their degree of textual intersection with the ritual readings of the week thus deserves examination; from the libretti of Francesco Sbarra in the mid-1660s onward, there is some liturgical/biblical citation, and this is footnoted—and massively extended to both patristic and classical literature—in Minato's works.

For all the fascination of the devotional and literary aspects of the texts, still the theatrical music of the Viennese court has suffered music-analytical neglect. In the widest sense, it is not easily comparable to Lully's far more extrovert and tractable work, and even in terms of contemporary Italian opera north and south, the Viennese pieces take a midcentury aesthetic as their foundation. Perhaps the most evident sign of this is the moment of emotional stasis embodied in the normal lyrical form of the two-stanza aria, sung by a single character or shared by two (there are some cases of single- and three-stanza arias; da capo forms make their appearance only late in the repertory). In this form, textual parallelisms between the stanzas are underscored by the music's repetition, normally with an intervening instrumental ritornello. Much of the musical projection of the texts was in standard recitational delivery, the *stile recitativo*, with only a few ensemble numbers. It was in this mid-century school that Leopold himself had been trained, and his own aesthetics seem to have continued unchanged. Thus it is difficult to isolate an unusually good—or bad—passage or aria in, for example, Draghi's output at first hearing, and the uniformity of the musical surface, largely recitational with a respectable number of arias, reinforces the seeming predictability of the texts.

Although musical means changed sooner in the Viennese opera and oratorio repertory, it was only with the switch in court composers to Ziani that sepolcrici took on a different shape, more like other stage works of that decade. Scores for eight of this composer's works between 1704 and 1711 survive and mark the changes, spanning the dynastic break as well as the transition in librettists from Minato's self-proclaimed follower Donato Cupeda to Pietro Antonio Bernardoni.

Clearly the interaction between the play of poetic meters and their musical projection is important, as are the tonal dichotomies often applied to this repertory. Indeed, the *cantus durus/mollis* (pitch systems based around natural/flat sonorities) binary, as found in the works of Athanasius Kircher seems to have relevance to the Viennese repertory, given the Jesuit scholar's close relationship to the Habsburg court. Still, the overall pitch structures have their parallels in north Italian theories of "church-keys," combinations of pitch centers and inflections. For all the different structures that appear in the sepolcrici—and here the operatic repertory runs parallel—many can be explained as transpositions of these *tuoni* according to various Seicento schemes (the opening of *La Virtù della Croce* is in one such organization). In this study, two different systems are used to get at the overall pitch structure of sepolcrici:



FIGURE 1. Frans Luyckx, *Crucifixion with Habsburg Mourners*, c. 1662, Vienna, Kirche am Hof. (Photo: UNIDAM database, University of Vienna, by permission.)

G. B. degli Antonii's 1687 list of eight church-keys and their transpositions, along with Angelo Berardi's 1689 idea of twelve modes, plus his later examples of these constructs' possible transpositions (see appendix 2). Even as late as Ziani's 1707 *Il sacrificio d'Isaac*, the use of a hexachord device in a modern aria shows the genre's debt to tradition.

In some ways, sepolcri are epiphenomenal of the ways in which Habsburg culture seems both overdetermined and understudied. Although they have a timeless quality, due to both their generic norms and the events of the Passion, they are also linked to specific moments of devotion, royal self-portrayal, and conceptualist aesthetics. Given the money and effort that evidently went into their production, they should be taken as moments of the spectacle that, on many fronts, was central to the dynasty's ideology. In a wider European sense, though, the Austrian Habsburgs' musical reenactment of Passion memories in front of the Tomb was, in its details, unlike anything else to be found in the nexus of royal devotion and hegemony that characterized the century.

An image not directly related to the genre's sets summarizes the centrality of the Cross to this combination. One of Eleonora Gonzaga's evidently few commissions in the visual arts, executed at the beginning of Leopold's reign (c. 1662 and thus just after the first sepolcri), shows the Virgin, the Magdalen, St. John, and the living royals (Leopold, Eleonora and her two daughters plus her stepson Karl Joseph) as co-spectators at the Crucifixion, complete with its darkened sun, earthquake, and tearing of the Temple's veil (figure 1; this altarpiece must originally have been meant for a court setting, although it now resides in the Kirche am Hof). In addition, two young cherubs in the space behind the dowager empress might represent her infant sons deceased in the 1650s. If such a design is medieval, Frans Luycx's brilliant brushstrokes and somberly differentiated palette mark the image as modern. This sign of Habsburg desire for co-participation on Calvary and at the Tomb is embodied in the music theater, the subject of what follows.