

GEERTEN VERBERKMOES

Benoit Joseph Boussu (1703–1773): Violin Maker and Notary

Benoit Joseph Boussu was active as a violin maker in the middle of the eighteenth century, and his instruments are considered amongst the most remarkable and finest examples produced by any eighteenth-century maker from the Low Countries. Yet, to date, little has been known about his personal life or background. For the current study, as well as examining a selection of Boussu's instruments, archival research has also been undertaken, with the result that new facts concerning this maker's background, life and work have been discovered.

THE INSTRUMENTS

To start with what *is* known and tangible: the instruments made by Boussu. A number of them are preserved in private ownership, but the largest concentration is at the Musical Instruments Museum (MIM) in Brussels, which has a number of violins and two cellos.¹ One violin (MIM inv. no. 2781, see Figures 1(a) to 1(d) in the colour section) and one cello (MIM inv. no. 1372) from this collection are particularly

important since they are preserved in a near original, unaltered condition. Typical of Boussu's instruments is the interesting mixture of local archaic features and foreign contemporary characteristics, first documented in detail by Moens.² Elaborating on the work of Moens, the current study examines six Boussu violins from the MIM collection (inv. nos. 2781-2785, 1338) and one privately-owned Boussu violin from 1759.3 For each of these seven instruments, key dimensions and characteristics were determined; the results are summarized in the Appendix. As can be seen from these results, violin no. 2781 is clearly the most significant, due to its unaltered state. The other six instruments have been modified, although original constructional elements are still present to a greater or lesser extent in each of them.

The most obvious archaic feature of Boussu's work is the 'through-neck' construction, where neck and upper block are made from one single piece of wood, common for Flemish and other northernand mid-European makers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century.⁴ The neck has a slot on each side

¹ The Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels, Belgium. Their collection contains the following instruments attributed to Boussu: MIM inv. nos. 1338 (violin), 1372 (cello), 2781 (violin), 2782 (violin), 2783 (violin), 2784 (violin), 2785 (violin) and 2863 (cello). Three other violins from the MIM collection, inv. nos. 1342, 1351 and 1975.047, have been associated with Boussu. However, based on analysis of dimensions as well as stylistic characteristics, the author believes these three violins were not made by Boussu and they are therefore not included in this study.

² Karel Moens, 'Vioolbouw in de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden', *Arca Lovaniensis* 10/b Jaarboek 1981 (Leuven: Depret, 1983), pp.148–52.

³ The author would like to thank Stephen Freeman for making his instrument available.

⁴ Moens (1983), pp.139–40, p.149; and Karel Moens, 'De viool in de 16e en 17e eeuw. Oorsprong en ontwikkeling van haar vorm- en bouwkenmerken. Deel III: Reminiscenties aan de speelmannen-instrumentenbouw in de 17de-eeuwse vioolbouw', *Musica Antiqua* 2 (1985), pp.85–90.

near the neck root, in which the upper rib parts are fitted, secured from the inside by small wedges. This configuration is preserved in its entirety in violin no. 2781, and the original upper blocks are still present in violins nos. 2784 and 2785, although for these two instruments, the original necks have been modified and raised at the neck root. Figure 2(a) in the colour section shows the upper block of violin no. 2784. Further archaic characteristics are the mitre joints on the rib corners with a central seam instead of an overlap,⁵ and the widening on the inside of the peg box walls, near the nut, to make room for the outer strings running to the pegs. On the other hand, the presence of corner blocks,⁶ linings and a glued-in bass bar⁷ points towards foreign, Italian and Tyrolean, influences.⁸ Judging from violin no. 2781, the neck angle of 85°9 and the neck length of 130mm may be considered innovative by mid eighteenthcentury standards. It is interesting to note, too, that part of this elongated neck length is obtained by the placement of the nut several millimetres up towards the peg box. Violin no. 2781 has a body stop length of 196.5mm. In all examined violins, the sides are glued onto the back plate, instead of being inserted into a channel, which is also a departure from the traditional Flemish manner of working.¹⁰

Stylistically, Boussu seems to be influenced from several directions, although his instruments as a whole possess a homogeneous appearance. The f-holes, for instance, appear to be inspired by Stainer, but are somewhat longer. They are positioned upright in the front plate's arching. The deeply cut scrolls have an abrupt transition between peg box cheeks and volute, a characteristic reminiscent of northern- and mid-European archaic examples.¹¹ Boussu's scrolls further display very regular turns, with an additional half turn, as well as a large flat central eye on each side, which make them highly recognizable. On the central ridge on the back of the peg box, a scribed line is still visible in some examined instruments. The arching for both front and back plates is rather high¹² and full, rising quickly from a pronounced fluting channel. The violin bodies are relatively long, typically 362mm, which gives the instruments an elongated appearance. Purfling is carefully inserted, and some instruments of the MIM collection show a small channel which runs at the base of the back's button, accentuating the perimeter of the body. Boussu thinned the front and back plates of his instruments by using a very similar graduation pattern. A maximum central thickness of between 3.5 and 3.9mm (gradually getting thinner towards the edges) for both front and back plates was observed in MIM violins nos. 2781, 2782, 2784 and 2785.13 A CT scan, performed on the privatelyowned violin from 1759, shows that the plates of this instrument have a similar thickness pattern.14

Regarding the wood of the examined violins, in some cases Boussu's choice of material is in contrast to the quality of the workmanship. The spruce for the fronts is of variable quality, ranging from slowly grown wood with narrow growth rings to wood that had grown relatively quickly with wide annual growth rings. The fronts are in some cases made from two book-matched pieces, but also from two unmatched pieces or even from one single piece of

⁷ Bass bar dimensions for MIM violin no. 2781 are given in the table in the Appendix.

¹² For example, MIM violin no. 2781 shows 18mm for the front plate height and 17mm for the back plate height.

¹³ A Hacklinger thickness gauge was used for these measurements.

¹⁴ The author would like to thank Stephen Freeman for making his instrument available for this scan, and Dr. Berend Stoel (Leiden University Medical Center) for performing the scan and processing and visualizing the data.

⁵ Moens (1983), p.140. In traditional Flemish construction, no corner blocks were used. Instead, the rib parts were joined at the corners in mitre joints with just glue. Elongated corners were used to ensure as large a surface gluing area as possible.

⁶ Since Boussu used corner blocks, the corners of his instruments could have been made considerably shorter. However, he still executed a mitre joint on the rib corners.

⁸ Moens (1983), p.149.

⁹ This value is obtained by measuring the angle between: (1) the vertical line formed by an upper rib part entering the slot in the neck root and (2) the glue joint line between the neck and the fingerboard.

¹⁰ Philip J. Kass, 'Eye, eye', *The Strad* 113, No. 1350 (October 2002), pp.1100–1. In his description of a Boussu violin from 1752, Kass states that the sides are set into a channel in the back plate. Since all violins and cellos examined in the current study do not display this feature, the author believes that either Boussu could have used both methods interchangeably on different instruments (possibly with a strong preference for the method without inserted sides) or that the information in the article by Kass is incorrect. According to Moens (1983), p.150, Boussu did not insert the sides into a channel in the back plate.

¹¹ Wim Raymaekers, 'The art of deduction, violins in art', *The Strad* 123, No. 1464 (April 2012), p.45; and Moens (1983), p.150.

spruce. For the backs, weakly flamed (possibly local) maple to moderately flamed maple is used. While most of the examined violins have book-matched two-piece backs, in one violin (no. 2783), a small third added piece is present in the back plate. Necks, when original, are invariably of plain, unflamed maple, likely to facilitate carving. The varnish on the examined instruments is transparent and the colour can be described as yellow brown or golden brown. Boussu might have used shellac as a finishing material, as concluded from the author's own UV fluorescence investigations of the violins in the MIM collection, as well as from judging the visual appearance of the varnish coatings. This finding is supported by the earlier results of Moens.¹⁵ Using micro-X-ray fluorescence techniques, Caruso et al. have found lead-based components in the varnishes of several Boussu instruments preserved at the MIM collection.¹⁶ From this finding, Caruso et al. concluded that Boussu might have used an oil-based varnish, as lead salts were often used as drying agents for this type of varnishes. However, instrumental organic analyses (gas-chromatography) have yet to be performed to clarify the true nature of Boussu's finishing materials. Violin no. 2781 has a veneered fingerboard (ebony on spruce) with a length of 241mm, a radius of c40mm and a projection at the bridge of 23mm, but it is not certain if this fingerboard is original. Both the top nut and the saddle of this instrument are made of bone. The saddle does not protrude above the front plate edge, and is inserted to half the depth of the front plate only. A similar bone saddle is observed in cello no. 1372. In some of the examined instruments, a narrow strip of dark wood is inlayed at the joint of the lower rib parts. Three of the four pegs of violin no. 2781 seem to be original, but it is unclear whether the tailpiece is authentic. It is important to note that a study of the two cellos in the MIM collection has revealed the same constructional and stylistic features as already described for the violins (Figure 2(b) shows the unaltered upper block of cello no. 1372). Möller¹⁷ mentions and depicts a

Boussu viola, but no results regarding this particular instrument are included in this study.¹⁸ A Boussu kit from the collection of the Musée de la Musique in Paris¹⁹ also awaits investigation.

Another striking characteristic of Boussu's violins is revealed when the dimensions of the individual instruments are compared. Within the seven examined violins, it appears that there is generally very little variation in their key dimensions, including body lengths and widths, scroll widths, f-hole placing and dimensions (see Appendix). The uniformity of these dimensions must be the result of a meticulous and systematic way of working, which corresponds with the carefully executed workmanship and the displayed attention to detail.

Kass²⁰ has shown that Boussu used a label as well as a handwritten inscription (with information like his name, place, date and sometimes the instrument number) inside the body, on the back plate close to the upper block, to identify his instruments. When investigating the Boussu instruments from the MIM collection with the use of an endoscope, it was found that some of these instruments contained just such an internal text (or additional label) near the upper block as well. Moreover, based on the internal inscription in one of the instruments from the MIM collection (violin no. 2785, previously undated), this instrument can now be ascribed to the year 1751. Label texts and internal inscriptions present in the examined MIM instruments are included in Table 1. It is noteworthy that the violins have a numbering system that is different from the cellos, and that numbering appears only on instruments which were made in Etterbeek. Figure 3 shows the labels of five instruments from the MIM collection. The earlier ones are handwritten, while from 1753 onwards, they are printed. Interestingly, the label of violin no. 2781 does not give a location. Instead, a line of several dots seems to be written in front of the year. The main label of cello no. 1372 is most likely not authentic, it rather is a handwritten copy of the printed, original label which is glued in near

¹⁵ Moens (1983), p.152.

¹⁶ Francesco Caruso, Steven Saverwyns, Marina Van Bos, Delia Francesca Chillura Martino, Anne-Emmanuelle Ceulemans, Joris de Valck, Eugenio Caponetti, 'Micro-X-Ray Fluorescence and the Old Masters', *Applied Physics A* 107 (2012), pp.197–202.

¹⁷ Max Möller, The violin-makers of the Low Countries (Amsterdam: Max Möller N.V., 1955), p.35, p.135.

¹⁸ The viola depicted by Möller was tracked down and investigated during this study, but only briefly. Therefore, no results regarding this instrument (with printed label 'BENOÎT-JOSEPH BOUSSU, Me. / Luthier à Bruxelles 175..') are included in this article. The author would like to thank the owner of the viola for making the instrument available.

¹⁹ Musée de la Musique, Paris, France, inv. no. D.E.Cl.2045.

²⁰ Kass (2002), pp.1100–1. Kass describes and depicts a Boussu violin with the internal inscription 'B.I.Boufsu, a / Etterbeecke, / fauxbourg de / Bruxelles / Le 30. aoust 1752 / nº. 32'.

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Instrument	Text label	Text inside body, on back at upper block (written, unless indicated otherwise)
Violin no. 2781	Boussu, a / 1750 (handwritten)	No text found
Violin no. 2785	No label	Boussu, a / Bruxell / 1751.
Cello no. 2863	Boussu , a Etterbeecke, / fauxbourg de Bruxelles / Le 27. janvier 1752. Nº. 6. (handwritten)	Boussu, a / Etterbeecke fauxbourg / de Bruxelles Le 27 janv / 1752 Nº. 6.
Violin no. 2782	BI Boussu , a Etterbeecke / pres de Bruxelles, Le / 20. 8 ^{bre.} 1752. nº. 36. (handwritten)	Remaining fragment: Le 20.8
Violin no. 2783	B.J. Boussu a Etterbeecke / contre Bruxelles Le 11 fevrier / 1753. nº. 37. (handwritten)	B.J.Boufsu a / Etterbeecke, pres / Bruxelles, Le 12. / fevrier 1753
Violin no. 2784	Benoît Jofeph BOUSSU, / Maître Luthier à Bruxel- / les 1753. (printed, except digit 3 handwritten)	B.J.Boussu , a / Bruxelles , Le 5. juin / 1753.
Cello no. 1372	Benoit Joseph Boussu Me / luthier à Bruxelles 1757 (handwritten copy of printed label near upper block, authenticity doubtful)	Label glued in near upper block: Benoît-Joseph Boussu, Me. / Luthier à Bruxelles 1757 (printed, except digit 7 handwritten)
Violin no. 1338	Вемоîт-Josepн Boussu, Me. / Luthier à Bruxelles . 1760 (printed, except digit 0 handwritten and digit 6 handwritten over printed digit 5)	No text found

Table 1. Label texts and internal inscriptions of eight Boussu instruments from the MIM collection.

the upper block. The internal inscription of violin no. 2785 is shown in Figure 4 in the colour section.

Judging from the information provided in Table 1, by February 1753 Boussu had already made 37 violins, and in early 1752 he completed his sixth cello. Assuming he started making in the late 1740s or early 1750s (as will be explained below), his initial output must have been at least ten to 15 violins and one or more cellos a year. Therefore, it can be concluded that Boussu worked relatively quickly; he certainly had a professional output during the start of his active period.

BOUSSU'S CONSTRUCTION METHODS

By considering several of the features of Boussu's violins, it is possible to deduce a working method for this maker. From the fact that the upper block is an integral part of the neck, as well as the upper block's rounded shape and the presence of a (small) extended foot on the upper block towards the back

plate (see Figure 2 in the colour section), it can be concluded that Boussu probably did not make use of an inside mould. Had Boussu used an inside mould, the sides of the upper block would initially have been straight and square to allow temporary gluing to the mould. Only after completion of the rib structure, addition of the back plate and removal of the mould could the upper block have been shaped to its final form. Shaping the hardwood upper block at this stage is not an easy task; moreover, one would expect some resulting tool marks on the back plate. As can be seen in Figure 2(c) in the colour section, the example of cello no. 1372 illustrates that no such marks are present. The view that Boussu did not use an inside mould has also been put forward by Moens²¹ and Awouters.²² The use of an outside mould is unlikely too, since a full outside mould is not compatible with the 'through-neck' construction method. Instead, Boussu probably started the building process by making the back plate. Of the

²¹ Moens (1983), p.149.

²² Mia Awouters, 'Les instruments à cordes', in Malou Haine and Nicolas Meeùs (scientific direction), *Instruments de musique anciens à Bruxelles et en Wallonie - 17*^e–20^e siècles (Liège/Bruxelles: Mardaga, 1985), p.16.



Figure 3. Several labels of Boussu instruments from the MIM collection: (top to bottom) (a) violin no.2781; (b) cello no.2863; (c) violin no.2782; (d) violin no.2784; (e) violin no.1338. (Reproduced by permission of the Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels).

violins examined, a high degree of symmetry along the length-axis is observed within each of the backs, as well as a strong uniformity between the outlines of several backs,²³ which suggests the use of a halftemplate to mark the back's outline (see Figure 5(a)). After completing the back (see Figure 5(b)), the lower block and the neck/upper block combination were glued on (see Figure 5(c)). Correct alignment of the neck could have been achieved by projecting the centre line of the neck onto the lower block by using a ruler or stick. It might even be possible that Boussu employed an internally applied small pin or nail to secure the position of the neck on the back plate, facilitating correct alignment and gluing of the neck.²⁴ After attachment of the neck and lower block, the four pre-shaped corner blocks were glued in place (see Figure 5(d)). The sides of these blocks

facing the inside of the instrument were probably left square initially, to allow clamping of the ribs during gluing. Next, the six ribs were bent and assembled onto the back (see Figure 5(e)). Judging from all examined instruments, these parts were not inserted into a channel in the back plate;²⁵ however, the upper rib parts were inserted into slots in the sides of the neck, and the joints secured by small wedges, inserted sideways from the inside of the instrument. The pre-installed neck (with slots), lower block and corner blocks served as guides for the placement of the ribs, making it easier to achieve a uniform overhang of the back plate.²⁶ A mitre joint, instead of an overlap, was executed at the four rib corners. With the ribs in place, small linings (probably beech, typically *c*2mm x 4–5mm and cut to a tapered point at the sides adjacent to the corner blocks) were glued in on both the front plate and the back plate side (see Figure 5(f)). Boussu did not insert the linings of the centre bouts into the corner blocks, but instead glued them in between the blocks, as observed in the examined violins and cellos. Finally, the finished front plate was glued on (see Figure 5(g)). While this method proved comfortable when tried by the author in the making of several copies, a small variation would be to preform the six parts of the rib structure individually on 'partial moulds', subsequently applying the linings to secure the shape (see Figure 5(h)), and then place these pre-assembled parts onto the back plate (again after neck and blocks were glued on).

EXISTING BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

Observing his instruments already gives us some clues about the personality and approach to work of Benoit Joseph Boussu. The intriguing precision and refined execution of his instruments show that he was probably an accurate man, who wanted to demonstrate that he possessed the skills to make well crafted instruments. Did he receive a formal training as an instrument maker at an early age, or was he schooled as a furniture maker, who in later life became a violin maker? Or, was he educated for an entirely different profession, and did he start violin making later in life, maybe as result of amateur musicianship? An attempt to answer some of these

²³ This was investigated by the author by tracing the outlines of several backs and checking for internal symmetry and mutual uniformity.

²⁴ The existence of such a pin, invisible from the outside of the instrument, can be proved in an X-ray or CT study, which has not yet been performed on a Boussu instrument with unaltered neck/upper block configuration.

²⁵ See the remark in the previous section, regarding whether or not Boussu inserted the sides in a channel in the back plate.

²⁶ The overhang of the back plates on the examined violins is fairly regular, between 1.5 and 2.0mm.

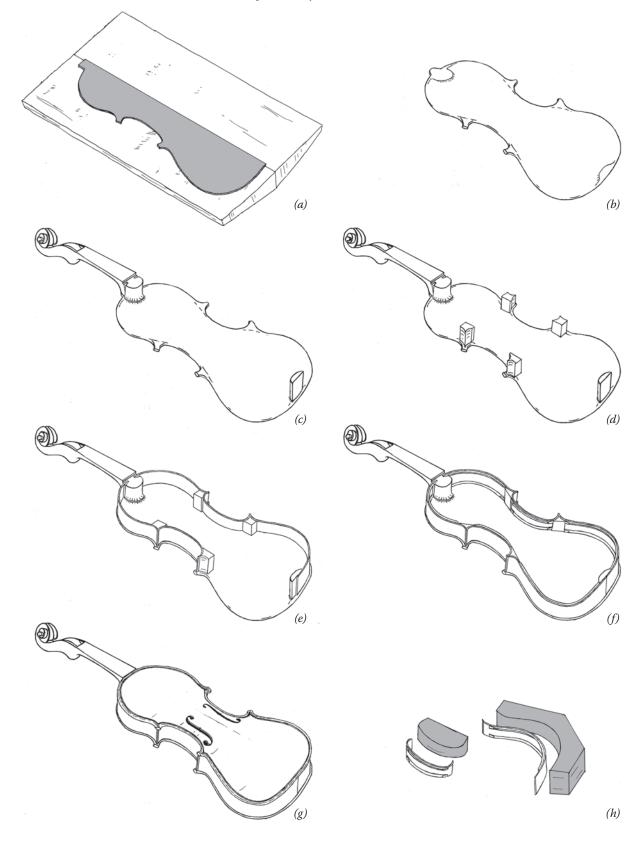


Figure 5. Various steps in a proposed construction sequence for Benoit Joseph Boussu. For explanation of the steps, see the main text. (Drawings made by the author).

questions was begun by consulting the current literature. However, as will be seen, until now little biographical information has been known.

Vidal,²⁷ Stainer,²⁸ Henley,²⁹ von Lütgendorff,³⁰ Vannes³¹ and Lindeman and Stam³² all write that Boussu worked between 1750 and 1780 in Brussels and/or Etterbeek (a Brussels suburb). According to Möller,³³ Boussu worked during the period c1740-1780 in Brussels. It appears that all these authors based their information on instrument labels, or on each other's information, since no archival references are given. Kolneder³⁴ reports that Boussu died in 1780, but again gives no primary source; Drescher³⁵ provides no additional information on Boussu in his supplementary volume to the books by von Lütgendorff. Kass³⁶ states that little is known about Boussu's career, other than that he worked in Etterbeek and then in Brussels from the 1750s to the early 1760s. According to Awouters,³⁷ Boussu worked in Brussels, and known instruments are dated between 1747 and 1760. The same active period is given by Moens.³⁸ The information provided by Raspé³⁹ again focuses on the active period, but is more extensive, and must have been largely based on his personal research in the Brussels archives.

He tells us that Boussu was probably of Walloon origin, but he does not give a birth place or birth date. According to Raspé, Boussu was active in Brussels between 1747 and 1760, with a short stay in Etterbeek in 1752 and 1753. Raspé further explains that Boussu became well known and respected as a maker rather quickly, which he concludes from local contemporary publications.⁴⁰

Unlike other earlier and contemporary Brussels makers, Boussu was not employed by the Brussels court,⁴¹ so his instruments were probably not exclusively used by court musicians. Who then were Boussu's customers? Cornaz⁴² explains that in the mid-eighteenth century, the Brussels bourgeoisie started to play musical instruments, a pastime previously associated with the nobility. Her conclusions are based on the advertisements of various makers⁴³ in the newspaper Gazette de Bruxelles and its successor Gazette des Pays-Bas, as well as on the announcements of property sales (which often included musical instruments) following the death of a member of a middle class family. Thus, Boussu's customers could also have been from this social class. Indeed, the music publisher and dancing master Joseph-Claude

³⁰ Willibald Leo Frh. von Lütgendorff, *Die Geigen- und Lautenmacher vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1975), vol.2, p.55.

³⁶ Kass (2002), p.1100.

³⁸ Moens (1983), p.149.

²⁷ Antoine Vidal, *La lutherie et les luthiers* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1889), p.162.

²⁸ C. Stainer, A dictionary of violin makers (London: Novello, 1896), p.12.

²⁹ William Henley, *Universal dictionary of violin and bow makers* (Brighton: Amati Publishing, 1959), vol.1, p.156.

³¹ René Vannes, *Dictionnaire universelle des luthiers* (Bruxelles: Les Amis de la Musique, 1979), p.40.

³² Fred Lindeman and Serge Stam, 'Well-known Dutch violin makers', in Jaap Bolink *et al., 400 jaar vioolbouwkunst in Nederland* (Amsterdam: NGV/Papyrus, 1999), p.179.

³³ Möller (1955), p.18, p.135.

³⁴ Walter Kolneder, *The Amadeus book of the violin*, ed. and trans. Reinhard G. Pauly (Cambridge: Amadeus Press, 2003), p.164.

³⁵ Thomas Drescher and Willibald Leo Frh. von Lütgendorff, *Die Geigen- und Lautenmacher vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, 3.Ergänzungsband (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1990), vol.3.

³⁷ Awouters (1985), p.16.

³⁹ Paul Raspé, 'La lutherie', in Robert Wangermée and Philippe Mercier (scientific direction), *La musique* en Wallonie et à Bruxelles (Bruxelles: La renaissance du livre, 1980), vol.1: Des origines au XVIIIe siècle, p.278, p.280; and Paul Raspé, 'BOUSSU, Benoît-Joseph', in Malou Haine and Nicolas Meeùs (scientific direction), Dictionnaire des facteurs d'instruments de musique en Wallonie et à Bruxelles du 9e siècle à nos jours (Liege/Bruxelles: Mardaga, 1986), p.64.

⁴⁰ It is unknown to which local contemporary publications Raspé refers.

⁴¹ Moens (1983), pp.146–52; Malou Haine and Nicolas Meeùs (scientific direction), *Instruments de musique anciens* à *Bruxelles et en Wallonie - 17*e–20e siècles (Liège/Bruxelles: Mardaga, 1985), pp.52–54; and Awouters (1985), p.16.

⁴² Marie Cornaz, 'La vie musicale à Bruxelles entre 1741 et 1780 vue par le biais de la Gazette de Bruxelles et de la Gazette des Pays-Bas', in Roland Mortier and Hervé Hasquin, ed., *Etudes sur le XVIII^e siècle, Musiques et spectacles à Bruxelles au XVIII^e siècle* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1992), vol.XIX, p.42.

⁴³ Cornaz (1992), p.42. Cornaz does not specifically mention advertisements by Boussu.

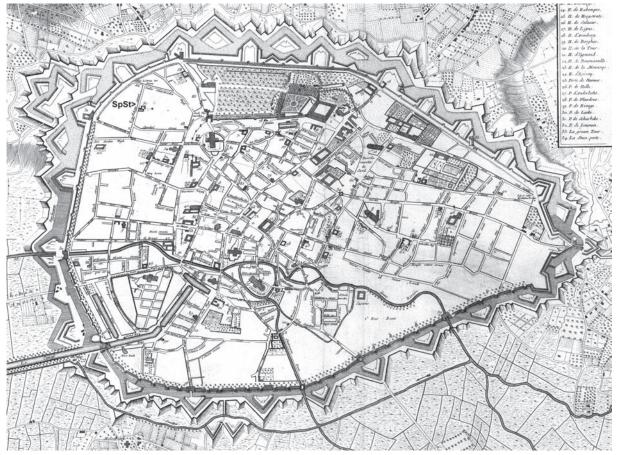


Figure 6. Map of the city of Brussels in 1745, oriented towards the east (Le Rouge, Paris, 1745). (Reproduced by permission of the National Archives of Belgium, Brussels). Spellekens Street (French translation: Rue des Epingles) is marked 'SpSt'.

Rousselet from Brussels (*d*1760) was in possession of a 'basse de Bossu'.⁴⁴ Professional players, including those associated with the court, might have used Boussu's instruments too. Further, it is known that the church of St Gudula owned, among other bowed instruments, a violin, cello and double bass by Boussu,⁴⁵ which suggests that Boussu's instruments were also played by church musicians. Raspé reports that Boussu's workshop in Brussels was located in the area of Notre-Dame-aux-Neiges, in the Rue des Epingles.⁴⁶ This street was located north-east inside the city walls, near the Schaerbeek gate⁴⁷ (see Figure 6⁴⁸). Raspé further writes that Boussu was married to Anne-Marie Jugier, who gave birth to a number of children, several of the boys dying in infancy, thereby preventing the

⁴⁶ Raspé (1980), p.278; and Raspé (1986), p.64. Raspé uses the French translated name 'Rue des Epingles', but during Boussu's time this street was known by its Dutch name 'Spellekens Straet'.

⁴⁷ Jean d'Osta, *Les rues disparues de Bruxelles* (Bruxelles: Rossel, 1979), p.67. During the nineteenth century, the area was completely rebuilt, streets were enlarged and renamed. Rue des Epingles is currently known as Rue du Gouvernement Provisoire. The current author believes that Boussu's house does not survive.

⁴⁸ National Archives of Belgium, Brussels, *Plan de la ville de Bruxelles* (Paris: Le Rouge, 1745), engraved and printed maps and plans (gegraveerde en gedrukte kaarten en plattegronden), no. 544.

⁴⁴ Cornaz (1992), p.41. Rousselet's widow advertised this instrument for sale along with other instruments and household goods in 1765.

⁴⁵ Lewis Reece Baratz, 'Les oeuvres de Joseph Hector Fiocco (1703–1741) dans la Bibliotheque du Chanoine Vanden Boom (1688–1769)', in Roland Mortier and Hervé Hasquin, ed., *Etudes sur le XVIII^e siècle, Musiques et spectacles à Bruxelles au XVIII^e siècle* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1992), vol.XIX, p.48, p.58. Baratz cites a document from the archive of the St Gudula church (State Archive of Belgium, location Anderlecht, Oud archief van de kapittelkerk van Sint Michiel en Sint Goedele te Brussel, inventory number 10125), saying that church canon Vanden Boom (*d*1769) had donated during his lifetime to the church '[...] seven Violen waer van een van Bossù, vier Violoncellen waer van een van Bossù, twee alto violen, twee dobbel Bassen waer van eenen van Bossù [...]'.

Le 4 auril 1703 fui bapuse Benoit Joseph Broufin fils de Robert et de marie Catherine matien parain Benoit Joseph de forge maraine louise 61.15 . . 1

Figure 7. Baptismal record of Benoit Joseph Boussu, Fourmies parish baptismal register, April 7 or 8, 1703. (Reproduced by permission of Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France).

continuation of the workshop.⁴⁹ Remarkably, Boussu is mentioned by Lindeman and Stam as the possible tutor of the Dutch violin maker Johannes Theodorus Cuypers and a violin attributed to Boussu labelled simply 'Leiden 176...', discovered around 1999, is used as evidence for this alleged Dutch connection.⁵⁰ Moreover, Raspé mentions an instrument (type not specified) with the label 'Boussu à Amsterdam 1771', although he states that he was unable to find any archival proof for attributing this instrument to the Brussels maker Benoit Joseph Boussu.⁵¹

INITIAL ARCHIVE RESEARCH

So, from examining the instruments and studying the available literature, a picture of Boussu's life and work may be formed, mainly regarding his period as a violin maker. Yet other aspects of his life are not clarified by these sources. Where was he born, and where did he die? What kind of education did he receive and at what age did he start making instruments? Why was his working period so relatively short, and did Boussu really have a connection with the northern Low Countries? In order to answer these questions, a thorough archival search was undertaken as part of this study. The first step was to search for 'Benoit Joseph Boussu' in a well-known online genealogical database.⁵² This search returned the entry for a person named 'Benoit Joseph Boussu', who was baptised on April 7, 1703 in Fourmies, a small town⁵³ in the north of France, close to the current Belgium border. A copy of the original birth record was requested and received from the town hall of Fourmies,⁵⁴ see Figure 7. Of course, this instant result immediately gave rise to an important question: was this Fourmies-born Benoit Joseph the same person as the violin maker Boussu? And if so, this would imply that Boussu only had started making instruments in his 40s, assuming that he started making in the late 1740s or early 1750s, as the available literature and instrument labels suggest. Was there any possibility that, at some moment during his life, this Benoit Joseph Boussu had exchanged his quiet native ground for the busy life of Brussels, 100km north? To prove that the French Benoit Joseph Boussu was indeed the violin maker Boussu, the lifeline of this Fourmiesborn Boussu had to be followed, to such extend that a connection could be made with the information provided by Raspé.⁵⁵

THE PERIOD 1703-1749

From searching the French Archives Départementales du Nord,⁵⁶ more specifically the parish registers of Fourmies, it became clear that the father of the Fourmies-born Benoit Joseph Boussu, Robert Boussu, was born in 1673 in Fourmies,⁵⁷ and that he

⁴⁹ Raspé (1980), p.278.

⁵⁰ Lindeman, Stam (1999), p.179. It seems unlikely that Boussu was the tutor of Johannes Theodorus Cuypers, however, since Cuypers was already established as a violin maker in 1750.

⁵¹ Raspé (1980), p.278, p.280; and Raspé (1986), p.64.

⁵² www.familysearch.org, consulted May 2009.

⁵³ http://cassini.ehess.fr, consulted May 2012. In 1793, Fourmies had 1474 inhabitants.

⁵⁴ Email and postal mail communication in November 2009 between the author and Ms Céline Fauconnier of the Fourmies town hall office.

⁵⁵ Raspé (1980), p.278, p.280; and Raspé (1986), p.64.

⁵⁶ www.archivesdepartementales.cg59.fr, consulted March 2012.

⁵⁷ Fourmies parish, baptismal register, September 11, 1673.

married one Marie Catherine Mahieu in 1701.⁵⁸ In 1702, the couple's first child was born, a daughter named Marie Joseph,⁵⁹ followed in 1703 by Benoit Joseph,⁶⁰ who was baptized on either April 7 or 8, the digit is not clear in the baptismal record (see Figure 7).

Soon after the birth of Benoit Joseph, the family was disrupted by the successive deaths of mother Marie Catherine⁶¹ and 'un enfant a Robert Boussu'.⁶² This child was probably the daughter Marie Joseph, since she is not found in later archive records, whereas Benoit Joseph is. Thus, in early 1704 the family consisted solely of father Robert and son Benoit Joseph. In 1708, the widower Robert remarried, his second wife being Anne Fontaine.⁶³ The family now lived in the nearby village of Wignehies, and between 1709 and 1728 at least ten children were born from this second marriage.⁶⁴ In several of the baptismal records, the earliest from 1721, father Robert Boussu is referred to as 'Notaire', 'Notaire Royal' or 'Notaire Royal de la terre d'Avesnes en haijnaut'. The French Archives Départementales du Nord preserves the archive of the notary Robert Boussu,⁶⁵ consisting of documents notarized in Fourmies between September 1701 and December 1728. In addition, Robert Boussu's signature appears on many documents from 1684 to 1701, notarized by notary Philippe Boussu, his father.⁶⁶ It seems, therefore, that Robert Boussu was an apprentice in the notary office of his father, and that he initially often signed documents as a witness before practising as a notary himself. In 1729, at the age of 56, Robert Boussu died in Wignehies.67

Returning to the Fourmies-born Benoit Joseph Boussu, his signature (see Figure 8(a)) is found for



Figure 8. (a - above) Signature of Benoit Joseph Boussu on a document notarized by Robert Boussu, January 3, 1718; (b - below) Signature of Benoit Joseph Boussu, Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish baptismal register, November 9, 1732. (Both reproduced by permission of Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France).

the first time on a document dated January 3, 1718, notarized by his father Robert Boussu.⁶⁸ His role was as a witness and according to the document he was living in Wignehies. After this, his signature regularly appears on documents notarized by his father during the period July 1719–March 1725.⁶⁹ It is likely that he worked as an apprentice in his father's office during this period. In the following years, between March 1725 and the end of 1732, the name Benoit Joseph Boussu is not found in the archives of notary Robert Boussu, nor in the parish registers of Wignehies or Fourmies. It appears that Benoit Joseph temporarily left the area, perhaps to receive a formal education as a notary.⁷⁰ By the end of 1732, the name of the

⁶⁰ Fourmies parish, baptismal register, April 7 or 8, 1703. In the baptismal record, the first name is written as 'Benoit', instead of 'Benoît', therefore the former spelling is used throughout this article.

⁶¹ Fourmies parish, death register, December 17, 1703.

⁶⁴ Wignehies parish, baptismal register, various baptismal records from 1709 until 1728.

⁶⁵ Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France, boxes J792/382 through J792/391. Each of these ten boxes contains several hundred documents.

⁶⁶ Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France, boxes J792/374 through J792/382.

⁶⁷ Wignehies parish, burial register, January 23, 1729.

⁶⁹ Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France, boxes J792/388 through J792/391. In the earliest of these documents, Benoit Joseph Boussu is referred to as 'Joseph Boussu', whereas his signature is 'B. J. Boussu'; from November 1721 onwards, he is referred to as 'Benoit Joseph Boussu'.

⁷⁰ The University of Douai, 100 kilometres northwest of Fourmies, had a faculty of Law, so this may have been the place where Boussu studied. Future research will have to provide evidence for this premature assumption.

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⁵⁸ Fourmies parish, marriage register, April 12, 1701.

⁵⁹ Fourmies parish, baptismal register, February 24, 1702.

 $^{^{\}rm 62}$ Fourmies parish, death register, February 10, 1704.

⁶³ Wignehies parish, marriage register, February 14, 1708.

⁶⁸ Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France, box J792/388.

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Figure 9. Burial record of Louis Benoist Joseph Boussu, Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish burial register, February 5, 1734. (Reproduced by permission of Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France).

Fourmies-born Benoit Joseph starts to appear in the parish church registers of Avesnes-sur-Helpe, a small town⁷¹ located about 20km from Fourmies. In a baptismal record from November 1732, for instance, Boussu is mentioned as godfather and is said to be from the parish of Avesnes-sur-Helpe.⁷² He must have been 29 years of age at the time. On this record, we can again see his signature (see Figure 8(b)). It is executed more maturely now and it resembles that of his father and some other family members. Also, it is rather flamboyant and easily stands out from other signatures in the register. Later in November 1732, Boussu signed an agreement, notarized by notary Gossuin⁷³ from Avesnes-sur-Helpe, describing an arrangement between him and his stepmother Anne Fontaine, regarding the inheritance of Robert Boussu. In this document, Benoit Joseph Boussu is referred to as 'notaire royal' in Avesnes.

In further records in the register of the parish of Avesnes-sur-Helpe, Benoit Joseph Boussu is mentioned regularly from 1732 onwards. On April 13, 1733, Benoit Joseph ('fils de Robert et de Marie Catherine Mahieu') married Marie Charlotte Heisne.⁷⁴ Soon after, a son named Louis Benoist Joseph was born,⁷⁵ but this child died just ten days old in February 1734.⁷⁶ On the child's burial record (see Figure 9) father Benoit Joseph is again referred to as 'notaire', so it is clear that he had chosen the Boussu family profession. Indeed, Benoit Joseph Boussu's notarial archive is preserved in the French Archives Départementales du Nord, and it contains documents notarized in Avesnes-sur-Helpe between January 4, 1733 and August 15, 1748.⁷⁷ Given the amount of documents notarized by Boussu (between approximately 100 and 200 per annum), it is most likely that he practised as a notary full time during this period.

The birth of several other children followed: daughter Marie Gabriel Joseph⁷⁸ (1735); son Louis Joseph Constantin⁷⁹ (1736, probably died at an early age); daughter Marie Catherine⁸⁰ (1738, died at the age of two days⁸¹); son Pierre Antoine⁸² (1739, on this occasion the father is referred to as 'notaire au baillage d'avesnes'); daughter Françoise Louise⁸³ (1741); and son Jean François Joseph Marie⁸⁴ (baptized on August 15, 1742). Judging from several parish register records from the early 1740s, the Fourmies-born Benoit Joseph Boussu was by now a respected member of the community, since he is referred to as 'M^{tre'} or 'sieur'. However, at this high

⁷¹ http://cassini.ehess.fr, consulted May 2012. In 1793, Avesnes-sur-Helpe had 2702 inhabitants.

⁷² Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, November 9, 1732. Baptismal record of Marie Joseph Benoite Frique.

⁷³ Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France, box J792/54, archive of notary C.L. Gossuin, Avesnes-sur-Helpe. Date of the act: November 14, 1732.

⁷⁴ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, mariage register, April 13, 1733. Since Boussu is not described as a widower in this record, it can be assumed that this was his first marriage.

 $^{^{75}}$ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, January 27, 1734.

⁷⁶ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, burial register, February 5, 1734.

⁷⁷ Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France, boxes J792/80 through J792/87. Each of these eight boxes contains several hundred documents.

⁷⁸ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, June 5, 1735.

⁷⁹ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, November 22, 1736.

⁸⁰ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, March 7, 1738.

⁸¹ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, burial register, March 10, 1738.

⁸² Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, March 5, 1739. In the record, Pierre Antoine is referred to as 'veille fils'.

⁸³ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, January 18, 1741.

⁸⁴ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, August 15, 1742.

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Figure 10. Marriage record of Benoit Joseph Boussu and Marie Anne Jugier, Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish marriage register, July 11, 1744. (Reproduced by permission of Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France).

point in his professional career, his personal life became very difficult. Soon after having given birth to their son Jean François Joseph Marie, Benoit Joseph's wife died at the age of 39, and was buried on August 26, 1742.⁸⁵ In the burial record, Benoit Joseph Boussu's profession is recorded as 'notaire & procureur au baillage roial d'avesnes'. Boussu, responsible for several young children, became a widower at the age of 39.

Two years later, in 1744, a remarkable event is recorded in the baptismal register of the parish of Avesnes-sur-Helpe: the baptism on June 19, 1744 of a child named Jean Baptiste Louis.⁸⁶ The record states that the mother's name was Marie Anne Jugier, and refers to the father in the following terms: '[...] la mere marie anne jugier a declaré dans les douleurs de l'enfantement etre de benoit joseph bossüe [...]'. Just below the baptism entry is written: 'Legitimé par le mariage en datte du onze juillet 1744'. This record is remarkable for two reasons: firstly, because the child was born out of wedlock; and secondly, because the name of the mother is recorded as 'Marie Anne Jugier'. This is very similar to the name 'Anne-Marie Jugier' given by Raspé⁸⁷ for the wife of the violin maker Boussu from Brussels, thus providing direct evidence that the Fourmies-born Benoit Joseph

⁸⁵ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, burial register, August 26, 1742.

⁸⁶ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, June 19, 1744.

⁸⁷ Raspé (1980), p.278.

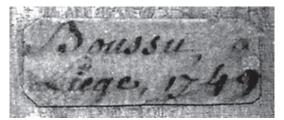


Figure 11. Cello label 'Boussu, a / Liege, 1749'. (Photo courtesy of C. Strouken).

Boussu was indeed the violin maker B. J. Boussu, who in his later life worked in Brussels. The marriage between Benoit Joseph Boussu ('agé de 41 ans, fils de robert et de marie catherine mahieu morts, veuve de Delle marie caroline haijne') and Marie Anne Jugier ('ageé de 25 ans, fille de phillipe mort et de gillette haudrij') was registered on July 11, 1744,88 the same date as that given in the amendment to the baptismal record of their son Jean Baptiste Louis. Interestingly, one of the witnesses at the marriage, as well as being godfather to the new-born child, was Louis Joseph Heisne, who seems to have been related to Boussu's first wife Marie Charlotte Heisne;89 his presence may indicate his family's approval of the second marriage. Figure 10 shows the marriage record of Benoit Joseph Boussu and Marie Anne Jugier.

Two more sons were born in Avesnes-sur-Helpe from this second marriage: Alexandre⁹⁰ (1745); and Benoit Joseph⁹¹ (1747, probably died at an early age). In the years following 1748, no further entries for the Boussu family are found in the parish registers of Avesnes-sur-Helpe. Also, the last preserved document notarized by Boussu at his Avesnes-sur-Helpe office is dated August 15, 1748.⁹² It would appear, therefore, that the Boussu family left Avesnes-sur-Helpe in 1748, which closely equates with Raspé's date of 1747 for the start of Boussu's Brussels period.⁹³ However, although it is likely that the Boussu family left Avesnes-sur-Helpe soon after August 1748, they might not have moved directly to the Brussels area, but to Liège first. Indeed, a Boussu

soufin et marroe annoes con: fus: Henrico Josepho Boulsi

Figure 12. Baptismal record of Henricus (Henri) Joseph Boussu, baptismal register of parish Notre-Dame-aux-Fonts, Liège, May 8, 1749. (Reproduced by permission of the State Archives of Belgium, Anderlecht/Brussels).

cello, now in private hands,⁹⁴ bears the label 'Boussu, a / Liege, 1749' (see Figure 11). Importantly, this cello label looks very similar, both in handwriting as well as in appearance, to the label of MIM violin no. 2781 (see Figure 3(a)). Moreover, a son of Benoit Joseph Boussu and Marie Anne Jugier, named Henri Joseph Boussu, was baptized in Liège in May 1749⁹⁵ (see Figure 12).

What was the reason for Boussu's departure from Avesnes-sur-Helpe? Was his reputation damaged by the birth of an illegitimate child? Or did he have the opportunity of working as a notary in Liège or Brussels? The reason(s) for Boussu's departure remain unclear, but within a couple of years of leaving Avesnes-sur-Helpe he had changed profession from notary to musical instrument maker, a radical career switch by eighteenth-century standards. From the dating and numbering of known instruments from 1752 and 1753, it can be concluded that violin making had become a full-time occupation by the early 1750s.

LIFE IN ETTERBEEK AND BRUSSELS

The family's stay in Liège must have been short, since a new-born son Benoit Joseph was baptised on February 1, 1751 in Etterbeek, a suburb of Brussels.⁹⁶ Then, from the label and internal inscription of the MIM violin no. 2783, it may be concluded that Boussu and his family lived in Etterbeek until at

⁸⁸ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, marriage register, July 11, 1744.

⁸⁹ Louis Joseph Heisne is called 'cousin' to Boussu in the marriage record of 1744. He was also godfather to one of the children, Françoise Louise, from the first marriage, see: Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, January 18, 1741. Furthermore, Heisne often co-signed documents notarized by Benoit Joseph Boussu, indicating that he was also a colleague.

⁹⁰ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, July 13, 1745.

⁹¹ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish, baptismal register, September 30, 1747.

⁹² Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France, box J792/87.

⁹³ Raspé (1980), p.278; and Raspé (1986), p.64.

⁹⁴ The author would like to thank Ceciel Strouken for making her instrument available.

⁹⁵ Notre-Dame-aux-Fonts parish Liège, baptismal register, May 8, 1749.

⁹⁶ St Gertrude parish Etterbeek, baptismal register, February 1, 1751.

least February 1753.97 From the internal inscription of MIM violin no. 2784, it would appear that by June 1753, they were living within the city walls of Brussels. The short stay in Etterbeek may have been guild related, since Boussu, a recent immigrant, is unlikely to have been allowed to work as violin maker within Brussels immediately. Indeed, it is noteworthy that he only started using the title 'Maitre Luthier' or 'Me. Luthier' on his labels after he moved from Etterbeek to Brussels in 1753. Furthermore, the Brussels labels are printed, instead of handwritten, suggesting a more professional approach. On the other hand, a search of the Brussels guild books of the 'Stoeldreijers' (turners of chairs), the guild for Brussels instruments makers,98 available for the period 1758 until 1795, has not yielded any record of the name 'Boussu'.99 Possibly, Boussu was member of another guild, but this has not yet been fully investigated. Under the category of instrument makers, his name isn't included either in the Brussels almanacs Le Guide Fidele for the years 1758 to 1765,100 whereas other makers like Snoeck and Rottenburgh are.

Further research in the Brussels archives was undertaken to complement the work of Raspé.¹⁰¹ In the Brussels census of 1755,¹⁰² under the entry 'Spellekens Straetien' (French translation: Rue des Epingles), the Boussu family is found under the category of 'Vremdelingen' (foreigners). The family is said to consist of 'Benoit Bossú', 'Violmaecker' (violin

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Figure 13. Registration of the Boussu family in the 1755 Brussels census. (Reproduced by permission of the State Archives of Belgium, Anderlecht/Brussels).

maker) from 'Avaine', his wife and nine children, aged between two and 18 years¹⁰³ (see Figure 13). Their house is registered as no. 201 in the Ossendael section (section no. 34),¹⁰⁴ a few houses away from the 'Engels Clooster' (English cloister). Figure 14 shows a detail of a Brussels map from 1748,¹⁰⁵ in which the location of the house is indicated.¹⁰⁶ This illustration gives an impression of the neighbourhood, which

⁹⁷ MIM violin no. 2785 contains the internal inscription: 'Boussu, a / Bruxell... / 1751.', which suggests that the family lived in Brussels in 1751, rather than Etterbeek. However, assuming the internal inscription is authentic, it is likely that Boussu made the instrument in Etterbeek in 1751, but signed it as being made in Brussels. The other investigated instruments from Etterbeek have 'Bruxelles' added to their label or internal text.

⁹⁸ Haine, Meeùs (1985), p.52.

⁹⁹ State Archives of Belgium, location Anderlecht, Tourneurs de Chaises, Comptes du Métier 1758–1795, number 987. While Boussu is not registered, 'Snoek' (until 1761), two persons named 'Rottenbourg' (until 1794, sometimes as 'Instrumentmaker') and 'Michiels' (sometimes as 'Instrumentmaker') are recorded in the guild's annual membership registers.

¹⁰⁰ These almanacs are preserved in the Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels.

¹⁰¹ Raspé (1980), p.278, p.280; and Raspé (1986), p.64. Personal email communication between the author and Mr Raspé in May 2012 did not result in an exchange of information. Mr Raspé has indicated that his research notes on Boussu were lost in a home accident.

¹⁰² State Archive of Belgium, location Anderlecht, Staten van Brabant, Carton 410.

¹⁰³ The information given concerning the ages of the children implies that the daughter Marie Gabriel, who should have been about 20 years old at the time of the census, was no longer living with her parents. Further, it can be concluded that not all of Boussu's children, including the youngest (two-years old), have been identified.

¹⁰⁴ In the eighteenth century, the city of Brussels was divided into 40 sections and houses were numbered in a continuous sequence within one section.

¹⁰⁵ City Archives of Brussels, *Plan de la ville de Bruxelles - Bruxella Nobilissima Brabantiae Civitas. Restauratum AN° 1748* (Martin de Tailly, 1748), section maps, map no. 25.

¹⁰⁶ The location of house no. 201 is derived from information on another Brussels map from *c*1776, which depicts the house lots with their numbers: City Archives of Brussels, *Plan parcellaire manuscrit de Bruxelles, avec indication des rues, des quartiers, des numéros des parcelles et correspondant aux Wijckboeken* (*c*1776), plan de Bruxelles grand

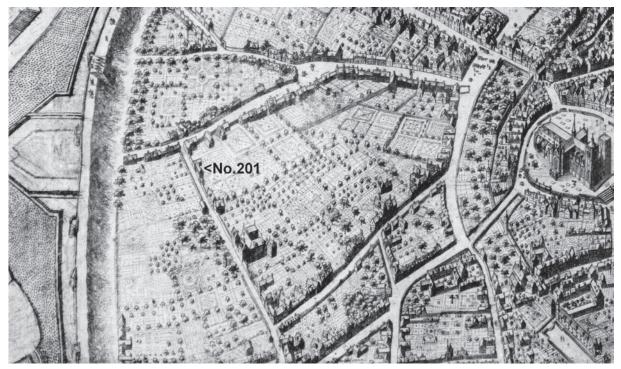


Figure 14. The area of the Spellekens Street, as depicted on a Brussels map of 1748, detail. (Reproduced by permission of the City Archives of Brussels). Boussu's house, no. 201, is indicated by the author; the church of St Michael and St Gudula is clearly shown on the right and the city walls are visible on the left.

included many vegetable gardens and orchards.¹⁰⁷ From the professions of the other people nearby, as registered in the 1755 census, it appears that this was an area for those of limited income.

Baptismal records for two more children of Boussu and Marie Anne Jugier have been identified: a daughter Jeanne Catherine¹⁰⁸ (1756) and a son Jean Baptiste¹⁰⁹ (1758). Burial records for three Boussu children were also found in the register of the Brussels St Gudula cemetery: Jeanne Catherine died in 1758, registered as 10 months old,¹¹⁰ Louis Jean Baptiste died in 1759 at the age of 14,¹¹¹ and Jean Baptiste died in May 1760 at the age of one.¹¹² Moreover, we now know that Boussu's second wife Marie Anne Jugier was buried in St Gudula's cemetery in September 1759¹¹³ (see Figure 15). No profession for Benoit Joseph Boussu is given in these four burial records, whereas professions, at least for master craftsmen, are generally included for records in the same register. This might suggest that around 1760 Boussu was already less active as a violin maker or had given up the profession entirely. In the four burial records, the address for the Boussu family is stated as 'Spellekens Straete' or 'Spellekens Straeten'.

In the Brussels census of 1767 only one person named Bo(u)ssu is mentioned: Petrus Bossu, probably Pierre Antoine, the eldest surviving son

 $^{^{106 \}text{ (continued)}}$ format no.1. Although the *c*1776 map shows more houses in the area of the Spellekens Street than the 1748 map, especially along the road close to the city walls, the author believes that the 1748 map gives a good impression of the neighbourhood at the time Boussu lived there.

¹⁰⁷ Alexandre Henne and Alphonse Wauters, *Histoire de la Ville de Bruxelles* (Bruxelles: Editions Culture et Civilisation, 1975), vol.4, p.196.

¹⁰⁸ St Michael and St Gudula parish Brussels, baptismal register, January 29, 1756.

¹⁰⁹ St Michael and St Gudula parish Brussels, baptismal register, December 10, 1758.

¹¹⁰ St Gudula cemetery Brussels, burial register, February 28, 1758. Her real age should have been two years, assuming she was the Jeanne Catherine baptized on January 29, 1756.

¹¹¹ St Gudula cemetery Brussels, burial register, April 29, 1759. While the burial record states that Louis Jean Baptiste was 12 years of age, since he was born on June 19, 1744, he was actually 14.

¹¹² St Gudula cemetery Brussels, burial register, May 16, 1760.

¹¹³ St Gudula cemetery Brussels, burial register, September 18, 1759.

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Figure 15. Burial record of Marie Anne Jugier, burial register of the cemetery of St Gudula, Brussels, September 18, 1759. (Reproduced by permission of the State Archives of Belgium, Anderlecht/Brussels).

of Benoit Joseph Boussu and his first wife.¹¹⁴ Thus, it can be concluded that the violin maker Benoit Joseph Boussu was no longer living in Brussels at this time. However, no burial record for him has been identified for the period 1760–1767. Perhaps the deaths of his second wife and several children made him give up his profession and encouraged him to leave Brussels.

A DUTCH CONNECTION

To investigate a possible connection with the northern Netherlands, as suggested by alleged Boussu instruments carrying labels 'Leiden 176...'¹¹⁵ and 'Boussu à Amsterdam 1771',¹¹⁶ research has been undertaken in the City Archives of Amsterdam.¹¹⁷ Interestingly, the baptismal register of the Roman Catholic 'Franse Kapel' (French chapel) contains an entry on June 24, 1770 for the baptism of one Marie Jeanne Piront, which includes the name of one 'Marie Joseph Gabriel Bossu' as a godmother.¹¹⁸ Moreover, in the Amsterdam 'pui' register for intended marriages, two marriage banns entries were found, both for April 19, 1771, and concerning two daughters of Benoit Joseph Boussu: Marie Gabriel and Françoise (see Figure 16 for the entry of Marie

Gabriel Boussu).¹¹⁹ The sisters are described as being 34 and 30 years of age, from 'Aven', but at the time of marriage living in Amsterdam, 'Peylsteeg' and 'Prinsegragt' respectively. The grooms were Joannes Roseau (Jean Rousseau, a gun maker from Liège) and Jean Baptist Tetar (a cobbler or shoemaker from Rouchelle).¹²⁰ Most interestingly, both sisters were bringing their father, 'Benois(t) Joseph Boussú', as witness. This is concrete evidence to demonstrate that Benoit Joseph Boussu was still alive in 1771. Marie (Joseph) Gabriel is further recorded in several baptismal records of the French chapel as late as 1787, as either mother or godmother,¹²¹ and she is known to have died in Amsterdam in 1795.122 Her sister Françoise Louise is mentioned in Amsterdam baptismal records up to 1810, also as mother and godmother.¹²³ She died in Amsterdam in 1821.¹²⁴ It seems that the two sisters permanently lived in Amsterdam from at least 1770 or 1771 until they died. From the early 1770s onwards, several other persons named Boussu (or Bossu) are also recorded in various Amsterdam registers on a regular basis.

One other entry in the Amsterdam 'pui' register for intended marriages is noteworthy: the banns between the 27-year old Joseph Boussu of Amsterdam

¹¹⁴ City Archives of Brussels, Table 80: A. Mehauden and M. Vanwelkenhuyzen, *La ville de Bruxelles. Ses habitants, leurs metiers et leurs adresses vers 1767*, second edition (Bruxelles: Archives de la ville de Bruxelles, 2008), p.256; and City Archives of Brussels, historical archive, register 1042. Petrus (Pierre) Bossu's age is not given in the census register but his profession is stated as 'silversmidtsgast' (journeyman silversmith) and his address is given as 'Rose Stratien'.

¹¹⁵ Lindeman, Stam (1999), p.179. The author has tracked down an alleged Boussu violin labelled 'Leiden 176...' but has not been able to examine it, since it was sold to an Asian organisation around 2010 (personal communication with the former owner).

¹¹⁶ Raspé (1980), p.278, p.280; and Raspé (1986), p.64. The author has not been able to track down and examine this instrument.

¹¹⁷ www.stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/, consulted April 2012.

¹¹⁸ Franse Kapel parish Amsterdam, baptismal register, June 24, 1770.

¹¹⁹ Register of intended marriages 'pui' Amsterdam, April 19, 1771.

¹²⁰ City Archives of Amsterdam, poortersboeken. Rousseau is registered as a gunsmith in the Amsterdam 'poorterboek' of 1775 and Tetar is registered as a cobbler or shoemaker in the Amsterdam 'poorterboek' of 1774.

 $^{^{\}rm 121}$ Franse Kapel parish Amsterdam, baptismal register.

¹²² Nieuwe Kerk and Engelse Kerk cemetery Amsterdam, burial register. Marie Joseph Gabriel Broussu (*sic*), wife of 'Jean Rousseau', is buried on April 2, 1795.

¹²³ Franse Kapel parish Amsterdam, baptismal register.

¹²⁴ City Archives of Amsterdam, civil registry, March 12, 1821. Marie Francoise Bousu (*sic*), born in 'Aveijné in Frankrijk' (Avesnes in France) and widow of 'Jean Baptist Tettar', died on March 9, 1821.

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Versoekende hare drie Sondaagie uytroepingen, omme, haar deselve, de voorfz. trouwe te solemniseren, en in alles te voltrekken, so verre daar anders gene wettige verhinderingen voor en valle. En naar dien fy by waarheid verklaaren, dat fy vrye Perfonen waren, en malkanderen in bloede niet en bestonden, waar door een Chriftelyk Huwelyk mochte verhindert worden, zyn hun hare geboden verwilliget.

Figure 16. Marriage banns for Joannes Roseau and Marie Gabriel Boussu, register of intended marriages 'pui', Amsterdam, April 19, 1771. (Reproduced by permission of Stadsarchief Amsterdam/City Archives of Amsterdam).

and Maria de Villairs, published in March 1778.¹²⁵ The witnesses were Jean Rousseau and Jean Baptiste Tetar, the husbands of two of Boussu's daughters. It is thus tempting to suggest that Joseph Boussu is a son of the violin maker B. J. Boussu and his second wife Marie Anne Jugier, born around 1750. Indeed, this is supported by a baptismal record from Amsterdam's French chapel from 1780 for Antoine Bossu,¹²⁶ son of 'Henri Joseph Bossu' and 'Mariane de Villers', showing that the Joseph Boussu who married in 1778 is almost certainly the violin maker's son Henri Joseph Boussu, born in Liège in 1749. According to the 1778 marriage record, both of Joseph's parents had died.¹²⁷ If this assumption is correct, Benoit Joseph Boussu died sometime between April 1771 and March 1778. Joseph Boussu, the proposed son of the violin maker Boussu, died in Amsterdam in 1781, leaving behind two children.¹²⁸

His profession is not recorded.

Finally, a marriage record from January 1800 has been identified in the City Archives of Brussels.¹²⁹ In this record, Pierre Antoine Boussu, aged 60 and from Brussels, is mentioned as a witness, and his profession is recorded as 'compagnon orfèvre' (partner goldsmith). Presuming that this is Benoit Joseph's oldest surviving son, it may be concluded that he did not continue his father's business as notary or violin maker.¹³⁰

FINAL YEARS

There is thus strong archival evidence that several children and other close family members of Benoit Joseph Boussu lived in Amsterdam during the last three decades of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, instruments attributed to Boussu, labelled as being made in Leiden, 176...¹³¹ and Amsterdam, 1771,¹³²

¹²⁵ Register of intended marriages 'pui' Amsterdam, March 6, 1778.

¹²⁶ Franse Kapel parish Amsterdam, baptismal register, June 15, 1780.

¹²⁷ The indication 'oud. dood' (the Dutch abbreviation for 'parents dead') is added to Joseph's entry.

¹²⁸ Heiligewegs- en Leidsche cemetery Amsterdam, burial register, April 11, 1781.

¹²⁹ City Archives of Brussels, civil registry, marriage act, January 30, 1800.

¹³⁰ Franse Kapel parish Amsterdam, baptismal register, September 23, 1800. A person named 'Pierre Antoine Boûssû' is also registered as godfather in the Amsterdam French chapel's baptismal record of Marguerite Henrard, daughter of Lambert Henrard and Marie Juliene Boussu.

¹³¹ Lindeman, Stam (1999), p.179.

¹³² Raspé (1980), p.278, p.280; and Raspé (1986), p.64.

wille.

Figure 17. Burial record of 'benoit joseph boufu', Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish register, September 16, 1773. (Reproduced by permission of Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France).

have been reported. It is possible, therefore, that the violin maker himself also lived in the northern Low Countries after his departure from Brussels, but no firm evidence for this has been found.¹³³ However, somewhere in the 1760s or early 1770s, Benoit Joseph Boussu must have returned to his native region in France, since he died in Avesnes-sur-Helpe in September 1773,¹³⁴ a widower and 70 years of age (see Figure 17).

CONCLUSIONS

Seven violins and two cellos by Benoit Joseph Boussu have been studied, and the preservation of original features of these has enabled a possible working method to be proposed. Eight of his instruments have also been examined internally to identify inscriptions, resulting in one violin (MIM inv. no. 2785), being newly dated to 1751.

New information concerning the life and background of Benoit Joseph Boussu is also presented. We now know that he was born in 1703 in Fourmies and that his father was a notary, a profession he himself practised for a number of years. During the period c1733-48, Boussu was living in Avesnes-sur-Helpe, where he worked as a

notary. The discovery of a marriage record from this period to his second wife Marie Anne Jugier agrees with the earlier research of Raspé.¹³⁵

This study also presents additional evidence that Boussu lived in Liège *c*1749, prior to moving to the Brussels area, thereby confirming the authenticity of a cello label 'Boussu, a / Liege, 1749'. Furthermore, the violin MIM inv. no. 2781, with a label only reading 'Boussu, a / 1750', may have been made in Liège rather than in Brussels (or the Brussels suburb of Etterbeek), as previously argued.¹³⁶ Thus, although he was making instruments in Liège, it is not clear whether Boussu was working professionally on his own or under the guidance of a local maker.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, the remarkable quality of even the earliest examined instruments suggests that Boussu might have gained prior experience in fine woodworking while still living in France, and it is possible that he made his first instrument there.¹³⁸

His highly accurate way of working, as well as his habit of dating his instruments with both label and internal inscription may stem from his personality as well as his experience as a notary. From the dating and numbering of his instruments, it can be concluded that he worked professionally as a violin maker in the Brussels area from the early 1750s until at least the late 1750s or early 1760s. Based on newly found archival evidence, as well as instrument labels, it can be concluded that after leaving Liège, the Boussu family moved first to Etterbeek (a Brussels suburb), before relocating again in 1753, this time within the Brussels city walls.

According to the Brussels census of 1755, the Boussu family was living in the Spellekens Street, and Boussu's profession is given as violin maker. Further, evidence from Brussels St Michael and St Gudula parish registers indicates that Boussu was living in Brussels until at least 1760. His absence from a Brussels census of 1767 may indicate that he had moved from Brussels by that time, possibly to the Amsterdam area, or directly back to his homeland, where he died in Avesnes-sur-Helpe in 1773.

¹³³ Besides research in the City Archives of Amsterdam, research in the City Archives of Leiden has also been undertaken, searching the baptismal, marriage, burial and other registers for the names 'Boussu(s)' and 'Bossu(s)', so far without success.

¹³⁴ Avesnes-sur-Helpe parish register, September 16, 1773.

¹³⁵ Raspé (1980), p.278. Raspé mentions 'Anne-Marie Jugier' as the violin maker's wife during the Brussels period.

¹³⁶ Moens (1983), p.148; and Awouters (1985), p.53.

¹³⁷ Further research will be needed to identify a possible tutor for B. J. Boussu.

¹³⁸ Awouters (1985), p.16, reports that Boussu's earliest known instrument dates from 1747. In this year, Boussu was still living in Avesnes-sur-Helpe (France). No instrument by Boussu from 1747 (or earlier) has been identified during the current study.

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END NOTE

At a late stage in the editing of this article, the year and place of Boussu's birth were published by John Dilworth in *The Brompton's book of violin and bow makers* (London: Usk Publishing Limited, 2012). The current author would like to emphasize that he independently identified details of Boussu's birth from primary sources in 2009 and that these have previously been presented by him at a conference in Ghent (SCAD, Sustainable Construction & Design, musical instruments session, Ghent University, February 17, 2011) and at the Musical Instrument Museum, Brussels, November 21, 2011.

APPENDIX

Key properties for seven Boussu violins, six from the MIM collection (Brussels), and one privately-owned instrument are shown in the table that occupies the following three pages.

	MIM no. 2781	MIM no. 2785	MIM no. 2782	MIM no. 2783	MIM no. 2784	privately owned	MIM no. 1338
text label	Boussu, a / 1750 (handwritten)	no label	BI Boussu , a Etterbeecke / pres de Bruxelles, Le / 20. 8 ^{bre.} 1752. n ^{o.} 36. (handwritten)	B.J. Boussu a Etterbeecke / contre Bruxelles Le 11 fevrier / 1753. nº 37. (handwritten)	Benoît Jofeph BOUSSU, / Maître Luthier à Bruxel- / les 1753. (printed, digit 3 handwritten)	Benoît-Josepн Boussu, Me. / Luthier à Bruxelles. 1759. (printed, digit 9 handwritten)	BENOÎT-JOSEPH BOUSSU, Me. / Luthier à Bruxelles . 1760 (printed, 0 written, 6 written over printed 5)
internal handwritten text, near upper block	no text found	Boussu, a / Bruxell / 1751.	remaining fragment: Le 20.8	B.J.Boufsu a / Etterbeecke, pres / Bruxelles, Le 12. / fevrier 1753	B.J.Boussu , a / Bruxelles , Le 5, juin / 1753.	according to owner no text present	no text found
other identifications						mark "BOUSSU" near button	
body length back (mm) *	362	361	361	362	363	361	359
width back upper bout (mm) *	168	169	169	169	170	169	166
width back C bout (mm) *	108	108	109	110	110	110	108
width back lower bout (mm) *	205	206	206	207	207	207	206
height ribs at upper block (mm)	32.0	33.0	32.0	32.0	32.0	28.0	29.0
height ribs in C bout (mm)	32.0	32.0	32.0	32.0	31.0–31.5	30.0	30.5-31.0
height ribs at lower block (mm)	32.5	32.0	32.0	32.0	32.0	32.0	32.0
linings?	yes, <i>c</i> 1.5 x 1.5mm (beech) linings not inserted in corner blocks	yes, but likely not original (spruce)	yes, <i>c</i> 2 x 5mm (probably beech) linings not inserted in corner blocks	yes, <i>c</i> 2 x 5mm (probably beech) linings not inserted in corner blocks	yes, <i>c</i> 2 x 4mm (probably beech) linings not inserted in corner blocks	yes, <i>c</i> 2 x 5mm (beech or maple) linings not inserted in corner blocks	yes, c1.5 x 6mm (probably beech) linings not inserted in corner blocks
corner blocks?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
joint at rib corners	mitre, with central seam	mitre, with central seam	mitre, with central seam	mitre, with central seam	mitre, with central seam	not investigated	mitre, with central seam

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MIM no. 1338	c1.5	not original (neck graft, scroll original)	modern (solid)	not original (spruce), remains of platform at back plate	ou	possibly remainder	yes	44.0	62	not investigated
privately owned	1.5–2.0	not original (baroque neck reconstruction, scroll original)	baroque (veneered) (reconstruction)	not original, but remains of platform at back plate	ои	ou	yes	45.5	80	not investigated
MIM no. 2784	<i>c</i> 2.0	original neck (thinned), but cut loose and raised at neck root	modern (solid)	original maple upper block, but no longer integral with neck, wedges still present	ои	no (renewed button)	yes	44.5	62	not investigated
MIM no. 2783	1.5 - 2.0	original neck (thinned), but cut loose and raised at neck root	modern (solid)	not original	ou	no (renewed button)	yes	44.0	78	possibly original (further investigation required)
MIM no. 2782	1.5 - 2.0	not original (neck graft, scroll not original)	modern (solid)	not original (spruce), remains of platform at back plate	ои	ou	yes	44.0	78	not investigated
MIM no. 2785	1.5 - 2.0	original neck (thinned), but raised at neck root	modern (solid)	original maple upper block, possibly still integral with neck, wedges renewed	ou	yes	yes	43.8	78	not investigated
MIM no. 2781	1.5 - 2.0	original neck, unaltered, neck angle: 85°	baroque (veneered) possibly original length: 241mm radius: <i>c</i> 40mm projection: 23mm	integral with neck, upper rib parts inserted in slots and secured by wedges (original construction)	ou	yes	yes	44.0	80	original length (mm): $c240$ width (mm): $c4$ height (mm): $c7$
	overhang back (mm)	neck	fingerboard	upper block	sides inserted in channel in the back?	channel at button base?	typical Boussu f-holes?	distance between upper eyes of f-holes (mm)	distance between f-holes at height of notches (mm)	bassbar

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	MIM no. 2781	MIM no. 2785	MIM no. 2782	MIM no. 2783	MIM no. 2784	privately owned	MIM no. 1338
original Boussu scroll?	yes (width 36.5mm)	yes (width 36.0mm)	no (width 38.8mm) scroll not by Boussu	yes (width 36.0mm)	yes (width 36.5mm)	yes (width 36.5mm)	yes (width 35.8mm)
widening (for outer strings) at inside peg box walls (near nut)?	yes	yes	no (peg box not original)	yes	yes	no (neck graft)	no (neck graft)
varnish (UV fluorescence)	shellac	shellac	shellac	shellac	shellac	not investigated	shellac
colour varnish	yellow brown	golden brown	yellow brown	golden brown	yellow brown	golden brown	yellow brown
wood front plate	spruce, fine to medium grained, two pieces bookmatched	spruce, fine grained	spruce, fine to medium grained, two pieces not bookmatched	spruce, medium grained, one piece	spruce, medium grained (bass-side), wide grained (treble-side), two pieces not bookmatched	spruce, fine grained, two pieces	spruce, medium grained (bass-side), wide grained (treble-side), two pieces not bookmatched
wood back plate	lightly flamed maple, poss. locally grown	medium flamed maple	medium flamed maple	medium flamed maple (three pieces)	medium flamed maple	narrowly flamed maple	lightly flamed maple
wood ribs	weakly flamed maple, poss. locally grown	narrowly flamed maple **	narrowly flamed maple **	narrowly flamed maple **	narrowly flamed maple **	narrowly flamed maple	lightly flamed maple
wood neck / scroll	unflamed maple poss. locally grown	weakly flamed maple	medium flamed maple, neck and scroll not by Boussu	unflamed maple	unflamed maple	scroll unflamed maple, neck (not original) lightly flamed maple	scroll unflamed maple, neck (not original) flamed maple
purfling (mm)	1.5 (0.5-0.5-0.5) slightly irregular	1.3 (0.4-0.5-0.4) slightly irregular	1.5 (0.5-0.5-0.5) slightly irregular	1.5 (0.5-0.5-0.5) slightly irregular	1.3 (0.4-0.5-0.4) slightly irregular	1.3 (0.4-0.5-0.4) slightly irregular	1.4 (0.45-0.5-0.45) slightly irregular
distance purfling- edge (mm)	3.2	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
		* the	ese dimensions where	* these dimensions where obtained by using a calliper	lliper		
	** th	te wood of the ribs of tl	hese instruments look	s very similar, possibly	** the wood of the ribs of these instruments looks very similar, possibly coming from the same tree	e tree	

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Benoit Joseph Boussu (1703–1773): Violin Maker and Notary



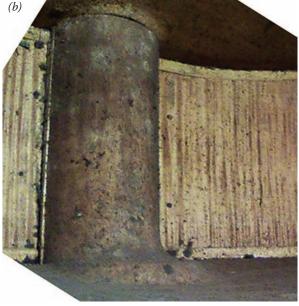


Figure 1 (a) and (b). A Boussu violin from 1750, MIM inv. no. 2781, (a - left) side view; (b - above) scroll side view. (Photos: Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels, © mim).



Figure 1 (c) and (d). A Boussu violin from 1750, MIM inv. no. 2781, (c – left) front view; (d – right) back view. (Photos: Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels, © mim).





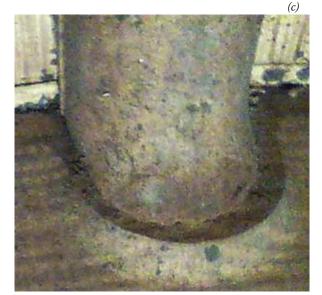


Figure 2. (a - left, top) Endoscopic photo of the upper block of violin MIM inv. no. 2784; (b - above) Endoscopic photo of the upper block of cello MIM inv. no. 1372; (c - left, bottom) Endoscopic photo of upper block and platform on the back plate of cello MIM inv. no. 1372. (Reproduced by permission of the Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels). In all three photos, the extended foot of the upper block towards the back plate, as well as the wedge securing the bass side upper rib part can be seen.



Figure 4. Internal text in violin MIM inv. no. 2785, on the back plate near the upper block, endoscopic photos: (a - left) text to the left of the upper block; (b - right) text to the right of the upper block. (Reproduced by permission of the Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels).