

Manu propria - Source descriptions as metadata in MEI

Source descriptions of musical manuscripts are highly individual and the way sources are described in research is always linked to questions concerning those who produced the manuscripts. Whether it is a matter of codices of the 12th century, lute tablatures of the 16th century, orchestral scores of the 19th century or graphic notation of the 20th century, the focus of the description is determined as much by the conventions that prevail in the respective branch of research as by the content. Nevertheless, basic information on these types of manuscripts follow standardised bibliographical and editorial practices: author and title – if known, the manner of binding, order of layers, foliation and pagination of a manuscript or the writer's hands identified therein, printed stamps or ownership and provenance. The degree to which a manuscript can be comprehensively indexed is usually regulated and determined by the project-specific or institutional conditions and possibilities. It is obvious that an philological autopsy of a musical manuscript usually reveals a manuscript description, more comprehensive than a bibliographic record in a library catalogue or a listing of the manuscript in a catalogue of works or sources. In contrast, library catalogues or catalogues of sources or works offer quick access to, or an overview of, the sources and their localisation. Due to the different requirement profiles and user interests, standards of metadata acquisition and archiving are a fundamental prerequisite for the exchange and interoperability of the collected data sets.

With MEI 4.0.1 and its schema updates, new possibilities for manuscript description are now available, – partly adapted from TEI, – still to be tested on larger source corpora in the context of musical manuscripts. The current contribution will therefore demonstrate options for encoding source descriptions and the possibilities for linking them to already-existing digitized material, because the combination of digitally reproduced manuscript and the accompanying descriptive text changes the structure, form, and detail of the manuscript. With the musical manuscripts of the works of Franz Schubert and Anton Bruckner, two source corpora are presented in the poster as a basis for MEI-coded source descriptions, which are to a certain extent easily comparable in terms of musical content, genre-specific conventions and the writing situation and material. However, due to the project-related requirement profile – the description of the sources in Bruckner's work was carried out in the course of the listing within the catalogue of works, whereas the source descriptions for Schubert will run in a specially conceived, digitally retrievable source catalogue – a divergent depth of description of the manuscripts becomes apparent. Conclusions can be drawn about minimum requirements, which are equally appropriate for source and work catalogues as for edition reports or library catalogues. Based on the examples presented in the poster, a future minimal description of musical manuscripts and the exchange of such source information – independent of previous and future MEI versions – would be feasible. The considerations of a minimal description are also followed, by questions about a future interface through which project-based MEI metadata can be merged.