

## A Newly Proposed Scheme for Dating All Numbered Wind Instruments by Adolphe Sax

Eugenia Mitroulia

Dating historic instruments is an issue with many problematic aspects for researchers. The problems arise due either to insufficient or lost documentation from the makers' workshops, or even the lack of a standard system of instrument inscriptions and serial numbers. In most cases the inscriptions alone do not provide adequate information. Fortunately, the situation of Adolphe Sax's surviving output has many advantages compared to that of other makers of his time.

Most of Sax's surviving instruments (the majority of brasswinds and saxophones) bear serial numbers that appear to run consecutively. The information from Sax's inscriptions varies from time to time, reflecting various events in his career, such as awards and changes of address. Certain inscriptions can be used as landmarks, since they signify the beginning or end of certain periods of his production. Thanks to Malou Haine's work on Sax's biography, certain events in Sax's professional life can be dated with precision and can be used in combination with the information found in the inscriptions to create a dating system for Sax's production.

The initial work for dating Adolphe Sax's instruments was done by Malou Haine and Ignace De Keyser in 1980 with the publication of the *Catalogue des instruments Sax au Musée Instrumental de Bruxelles*.<sup>1</sup> This work is thorough and well-organized, particularly regarding the information available in 1980 and the Sax instruments that were known at the time. Haine and De Keyser carefully considered all information provided by inscriptions, such as addresses, titles awarded to Sax throughout the years, and additional stamps that appear on a limited number of instruments (denoting in most cases the year a specific instrument entered the possession of a certain organization or a person). Haine also had access to the primary sources she had consulted in completing her doctoral dissertation, which later led to the publication of the first extensive and thorough book on Sax's life, *Adolphe Sax: 1814–1894: sa vie, son oeuvre et ses instruments de musique*, also published in 1980.<sup>2</sup> Haine and De Keyser's dating system identifies specific years for some production runs, but a range of years for others.

In 2003 Robert Howe, in his article "The Invention and Early Production of the Saxophone, 1840–55," suggests a slightly different scheme for dating Sax instruments, based mainly on information from nineteenth-century documents and careful examination of surviving saxophones made by Sax.<sup>3</sup> The present author believes that Howe's scheme has refined the dating of Haine and De Keyser for the very first years of Sax's production, up until the early 1850s. However, new information that has recently come to light shows that this system is not very reliable for the period after about 1853; a discrepancy has also been noticed in the case of one brass instrument made before 1853 (1849). Howe assumed

steady production rates and differentiated between good and bad months. In many cases, the instruments originally dated by additional stamps were not taken into consideration. Moreover, Howe studied saxophone production only, even though Sax used a common numbering system for all instruments he produced.

The present author has considered both schemes, and in combination with new data that has come to light has proposed a new dating scheme for Sax's instruments. A checklist of all of Sax's known wind instruments was first published on the internet by the present author and Arnold Myers in 2006 at <http://homepages.ed.ac.uk/am/gdsl.html>. Since then, much new information regarding extant instruments has been communicated to the authors and the checklist is being updated on a regular basis. This publication has proved to be extremely useful. New entries and especially new information on instrument inscriptions, as well as extensive archival research are the main sources of information that have led to the need for a new dating scheme. In establishing this new dating system, a variety of factors had to be considered, the most important of these being 1) the consistency of the addresses in the inscriptions and the names of various awards; 2) additional stamps on instruments that carry dates; and 3) references to specific instruments and their date of manufacture in original documents from the Sax workshop.

Haine and De Keyser assumed that Sax's numbering system did not start at 1, but around the number 2000.<sup>4</sup> As Howe noted, this does not seem to be the case, and the system most likely started with 1, or at least a number much lower than 2000. Howe therefore assumed 1 to be the starting point. Although in 2003 this appeared to be just an assumption, brass instruments that became known after 2003 have confirmed Howe's theory. The earliest known numbered instrument is an alto saxhorn with serial number 668, in a private collection in France. Some instruments have a date inscribed on the bell. As already mentioned by Haine and De Keyser, the year inscribed does not necessarily represent the exact year of manufacture; rather it usually indicates the year the instrument was acquired by a certain organization or a person, although in many cases this date does indeed coincide with the year of manufacture. This is suggested by the fact that the stamp is usually separate from the main inscription. It is obvious that a stamp with a date later than the suspected year of manufacture is not a problem, but it is an issue when a stamp denotes a year prior to the supposed manufacturing date. In a few cases, the month is also stamped. This additional stamp may be complete, with all four digits for the year, or incomplete, with just the last two digits of the year. Table 1 shows in chronological order the instruments with an inscribed date.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Serial number</b>
1854	10583
1854	11926
1855	12444
1855	12464
1855	12501

1857	<b>14792</b>
1856	15511
1857	16149
1858	16722
1858	16870
1859	18046
1859	18838
1859	19095
1860	19170
1860	20200
1861	20846
1861	21307
1861	21401
1861	21452
1861	21678
1862	<b>22685</b>
1861	23049
1861	23599
1862	23969
February 1862	24401
1862	24426
1863	26047
1864	28259
1870	<b>30176</b>
1865	30205
1867	<b>31648</b>
1867	32876
July 1865	<b>36458</b>
1866	32114
1867	32876
1868	33355
1870	35504
1880	40663

**Table 1:** Instruments by Sax with an additional inscription containing a date.

Five instruments marked in bold type in Table 1 bear dates that appear not to correspond to the year of production. In the instruments with serial numbers 14792, 22685, 30176, and 31648, this does not cause a major problem, since the inscriptions probably were added subsequent to the respective production year. Instrument 36458, however, is more difficult to explain, since according to the added inscription the instrument was donated to the Société de Musique of Bar-le-Duc in July 1865. Yet, based on the serial number and other information, the regular inscription suggests a date of ca. 1870. This instrument also represents a landmark, since it is the last instrument known to bear the inscription “F<sup>teur</sup> de la M<sup>son</sup> M<sup>re</sup> de l’Empereur” (“Maker to the Military Establishment of the Emperor”). Napoleon III, President of the French Second Republic and Ruler of the Second Empire, awarded Sax this title on 7 April 1854. It is to be expected, therefore, that Sax stopped using this distinction in his inscriptions with the end of the Second Empire, 4 September 1870. The saxophone 36458 bears a third inscription, “MM / 1,” which stands for “Musique Militaire” of the département of Paris. It thus appears that the instrument had been at different times the property of two different organizations. It is therefore possible (since Sax’s official stamp is later than the stamp marking its donation to Bar-le-Duc) that the saxophone initially bore a different serial number and, after leaving the first owner’s possession, was re-stamped, perhaps at the time it was consigned to the military. Alternatively, part of the instrument may have been re-used and the initial stamp was not removed, or an incorrect serial number was initially inscribed on the instrument. Table 2 shows instruments whose dates, though not inscribed, are known through archival documents, or whose dates can be inferred from known events in Sax’s life.

Serial number	Inferred date
7086	1849
13817	1855
20294	20.6.1860
21219	1861
21337	1861
21338	1861
21452	1861
21453	1861
21476	1861
21566	1861
35036	27.9.1869
36458	1870
40151	1878
41655	1885

**Table 2:** Serial numbers of instruments with dates inferred from archival documents, major events, etc.

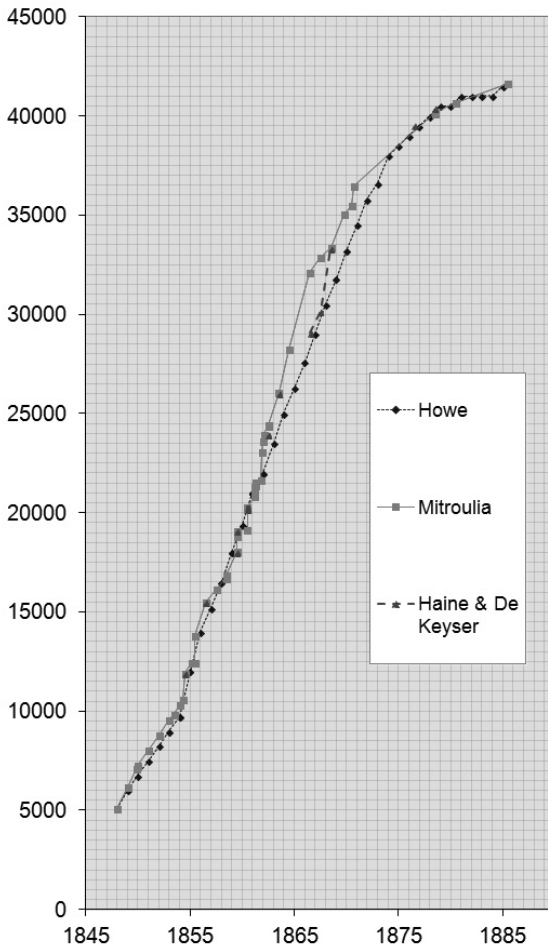
The instrument with serial number 7086 is a four-valve contralto saxhorn that was displayed at the Paris National Exhibition of 1849, as noted in Sax's collection catalogue,<sup>5</sup> while 13817 is the serial number of the saxhorn bourdon in 26-foot E $\flat$  exhibited by Sax during the 1855 Paris International Exhibition. Saxophone 20294 was entered in the workshop books on 20 June 1860, up to which time Sax had manufactured 945 saxophones, according to Haine and De Keyser.<sup>6</sup> Seven contralto saxhorns (serial nos. 21219, 21337, 21338, 21452, 21453, 21476, and 21566) were sent to the Conservatoire for approval, according to a letter preserved in the Département de musique of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (sent from Sax to the Director of the Paris Conservatoire on 13 March 1861).<sup>7</sup> Thus these instruments were made at the beginning of 1861, or a little bit earlier. 36458 (a tenor saxophone in B $\flat$ , mentioned above as carrying a problematic additional inscription) is the latest instrument known to bear the inscription "F<sup>teur</sup> de la M<sup>son</sup> M<sup>re</sup> de l'Empereur"; for reasons stated above, it is considered to have been made around September 1870. The tenor trombone with serial no. 40151 is the earliest numbered item known to bear Sax's new addresses, "26 rue de Rocroy & 39 rue de Dunkerque," and is the first known to display the stamp "Ad. Sax & Cie, Paris." According to Haine and De Keyser, after his 1877 bankruptcy Sax founded a company with his nephew Henri Sax on 11 January 1878.<sup>8</sup> Instruments ensuing from this partnership, which lasted until 1886, are stamped "Sax & Cie" and the address "39 rue de Dunkerque." Sax concurrently established a second company. Instruments from this latter firm were stamped "Ad. Sax & Cie" and have the two addresses, "26 rue de Rocroy & 39 rue de Dunkerque." As mentioned by Haine and De Keyser, a contract for the second firm does not survive.<sup>9</sup> Instrument 40151 comes from this second partnership and, as stated above, is the first item known to bear these two inscriptions; its date of manufacture is therefore assumed to be after January 1878. The latest known instrument to be stamped with Sax's previous address, "50, rue Saint George," is cornet 39913. The gap between these two instruments—39913 and 40151—is not very large, and consequently the error in the calculation of dates of surviving instruments is not considerable.

Another landmark is Sax's next change of address, to rue Laffitte, in 1885. The earliest known instrument with "56, rue Laffitte" stamped on its bell is a bass saxhorn, with the serial number 41655, in the private collection of Bruno Kampmann in Paris (inventory no. 721). According to Haine and De Keyser (1980) the serial number sequence extends into the 41000 series, and surviving instruments support their findings.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, Haine and De Keyser also considered the saxophone with serial number 29082 to be a landmark, assuming that this was the first instrument without the term "breveté" inscribed after Sax's name, such as "Adolphe Sax facteur breveté," as was the case for earlier saxophones. They presumed that Sax employed the term "breveté" on his saxophone bells during the patent protection period, which ended on 21 March 1866. They therefore opined that 29082 was made around March 1866. We can definitely say now that this is not the case, as some saxophones with higher serial numbers and the inscription "breveté" have since come to light. The latest such instrument is a soprano saxophone with serial number 31473 in a private collection in Spain. The presence or absence of the term "breveté" has

not been taken into consideration by the author in creating the new dating system, since its usage in saxophones after 29082 is not consistent.

After information from all possible sources was gathered, and all the above deliberations taken into consideration, it was plotted in a graph where the x axis shows the year of manufacture and y axis the serial number (Figure 1). When there was additional information regarding the month of manufacture, this was added to the graph. When only the year was known, the instrument bearing the serial number(s) was considered to have been produced in the middle of the year.



**Figure 1:** The three different dating schemes of Haine & De Keyser (1980), Howe (2003), and Mitroulia (2014).

Figure 1 shows the three dating schemes by Haine and De Keyser (1980), Howe (2003), and the present author. This graph enables us to see where major differences arise and where the various schemes coincide. Major deviations occur in the 1860s where the graph indicates a greater divergence from Howe's scheme. Although for some years, such as 1861, there is an abundance of information regarding the dating of instruments, for other years there is no evidence at all. After the existing data values of dated instruments were plotted, the resulting graph was interpolated manually in order to get estimates for serial numbers corresponding to the beginning of each calendar year. The newly proposed scheme for dating all numbered wind instruments by Adolphe Sax can be seen in Table 3.

Year	Serial number
1848	5085
1849	6181
1850	7277
1851	8040
1852	8803
1853	9566
1854	10500
1855	12300
1856	14700
1857	15900
1858	16500
1859	17500
1860	19200
1861	21000
1862	23800
1863	25200
1864	27100
1865	29000
1866	31000
1867	32500
1868	33100
1869	33900
1870	35100
1871	36600
1872	37100

**Table 3:** The new proposed scheme for dating all numbered Adolphe Sax wind instruments after 1848. (cont. next page)

1873	37600
1874	38100
1875	38600
1876	39100
1877	39600
1878	40100
1879	40400
1880	40600
1881	40800
1882	41000
1883	41200
1884	41400
1885	41600

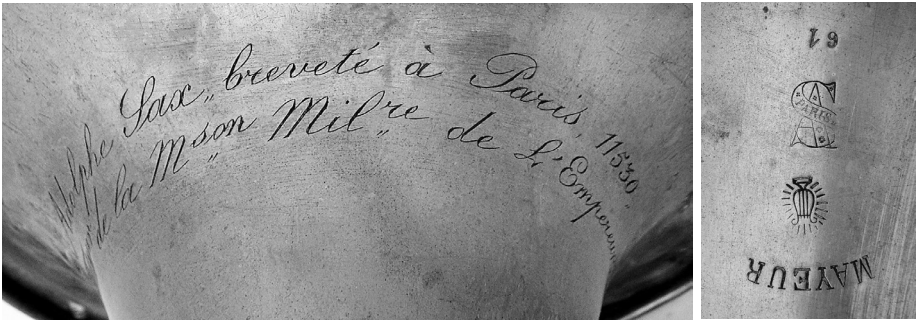
As Table 3 shows, Sax's production reached its peak around 1860, remaining at that level throughout the 1860s. This was to be expected, considering the issuance of the military decree of 26 March 1860, in which Sax's instruments (brass and woodwinds) were declared suitable for use both in infantry and cavalry bands. The drop in production numbers is obvious after 1871. Sax went bankrupt for a second time in 1873. His third bankruptcy, in 1877, is also apparent in the table, where the production numbers drop even more dramatically than after 1871.

As new information comes to light and new surviving instruments are found, the proposed dating scheme can be further refined and the online catalogue of surviving Adolphe Sax instruments will be updated and expanded accordingly.

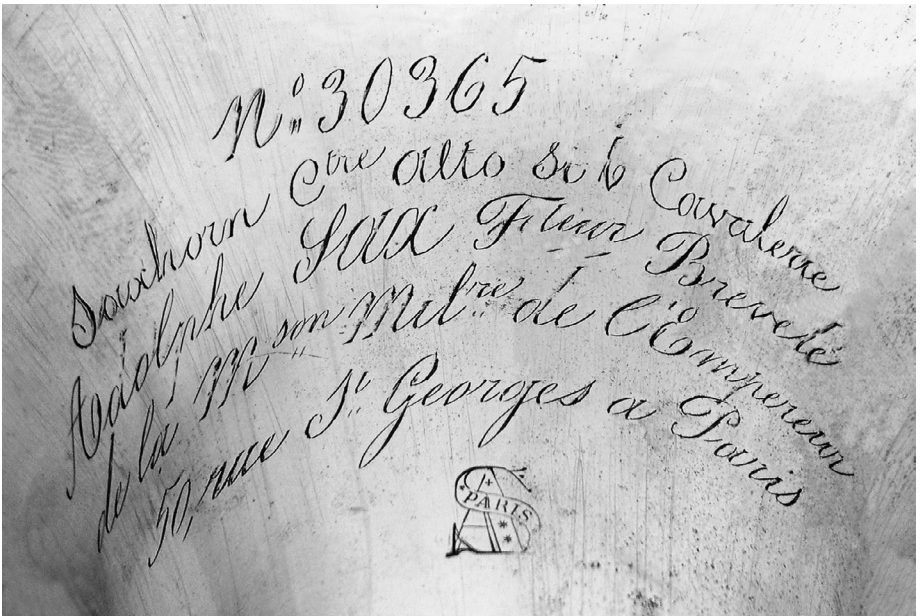


**Figure 2:** Left: early-style inscription. Right: Adolphe Sax's monogram trademark (initials AS with "Paris" on stem of S). Contrabass saxhorn in  $E_b$  made by Adolphe Sax in 1846. Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments (inventory no. 4545). Photographs by Raymond Parks.





**Figure 3:** Left: inscription on an alto saxhorn in E $\flat$  made by Adolphe Sax in 1854. Right: Sax's monogram trademark and additional inscription, probably stamped by the dealer. Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments (inventory no. 4620). Photographs by Raymond Parks.



**Figure 4:** Contralto saxhorn in B $\flat$  made by Adolphe Sax in 1865, with the model type, pitch, and “cavalerie” designation included in its inscription. Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments (inventory no. 4253). Photograph by Raymond Parks.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Malou Haine and Ignace De Keyser, *Catalogue des instruments Sax au Musée Instrumental de Bruxelles* (Brussels: Musée Instrumental, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 29 (2003): 97–180.

<sup>4</sup> Haine and De Keyser, *Catalogue*, 221.

<sup>5</sup> Information deriving from the catalogue of Sax's private collection is usually accurate, although some mistakes have been noticed.

<sup>6</sup> Haine and De Keyser, *Catalogue*, 222.

<sup>7</sup> See *Dossier d'artiste Adolphe Sax*.

<sup>8</sup> Haine and De Keyser, *Catalogue*, 221.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.