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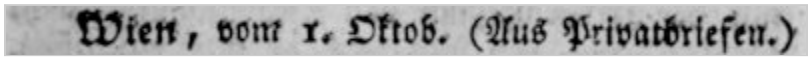
The earliest published report on the premiere of *Die Zauberflöte* (1 Oct 1791)

Dexter Edge

Münchner Zeitung, no. 158, Fri, 7 Oct 1791

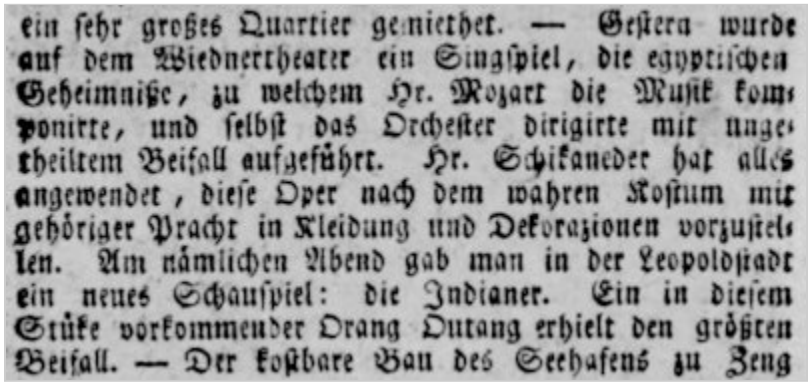
[843]

Wien, vom 1. Oktob. (Aus Privatbriefen.) *[...]*


Wien, vom 1. Oktob. (Aus Privatbriefen.)

[844]

— Gestern wurde
auf dem Wiednertheater ein Singspiel, die egyptischen
Geheimniße, zu welchem Hr. Mozart die Musik kom=
ponirte, und selbst das Orchester dirigirte, mit unge=
theiltem Beifall aufgeführt. Hr. Schikaneder hat alles
angewendet, diese Oper nach dem wahren Kostum mit
gehöriger Pracht in Kleidung und Dekorazionen vorzustel=
len. Am nämlichen Abend gab man in der Leopoldstadt
ein neues Schauspiel: die Indianer. Ein in diesem
Stüke vorkommender Orang Outang erhielt den größten
Beifall. — *[...]*


ein ſehr großes Quartier gemiethet. — Geſtern wurde auf dem Wiednertheater ein Singſpiel, die egyptiſchen Geheimniße, zu welchem Hr. Mozart die Muſik kom= ponirte, und ſelbſt das Orcheſter dirigirte mit unge= theiltem Beifall aufgeführt. Hr. Schikaneder hat alles angewendet, dieſe Oper nach dem wahren Koſtum mit gehöriger Pracht in Kleidung und Dekorazionen vorzuſtel= len. Am nämlichen Abend gab man in der Leopoldſtadt ein neues Schauſpiel: die Indianer. Ein in dieſem Stüke vorkommender Orang Outang erhielt den größten Beifall. — Der koſtbare Bau des Seehafens zu Zeng

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[translation:]

— Yesterday
a singspiel, *Die egyptischen Geheimniße*, for which Hr. Mozart composed the music and himself directed the orchestra, was performed in the Wiednertheater to unanimous acclaim. Hr. Schikaneder went all out to present this opera in accurate costume, with appropriate splendor in dress and scenery. On the same evening in the Leopoldstadt a new play was given, *Die Indianer*. An orangutan that appeared in the piece received the greatest applause. —

Commentary

Die Zauberflöte was first performed on Fri, 30 Sep 1791 in Vienna at the Theater auf der Wieden (also known as the "Wiednertheater"), where it rapidly became the most popular and frequently performed work in the city's theatrical history up to that point. Yet the documentary evidence bearing on its earliest performances is relatively sparse. Posters are known to survive from the premiere and the second performance the following day; these list the cast and announce that Mozart will direct the orchestra. (Regarding these posters, see the *Notes* to our entry for 5 Oct 1791.) Mozart himself writes about the opera in his last three letters to Constanze in Baden, documenting his attendance and the opera's reception on 7, 8, and 13 Oct (*Briefe*, iv:157–63). Indefatigable diarist Count Karl von Zinzendorf, who typically attended theatrical performances in Vienna several times a week, might well have provided us with information about the earliest performances of *Die Zauberflöte*, had he not been out of town between 21 Aug and 26 Oct 1791, traveling first to the coronation in Prague, and then to Bad Mergentheim, the headquarters of the Teutonic Order (Deutscher Orden; for Zinzendorf's travels, see Klingenstein et al. 2009, i:308). Zinzendorf eventually attended Mozart's opera on 6 Nov, noting that it was the 24th performance, a figure he may well have seen on the poster that day. Viennese periodicals from around the time of the premiere contain no references to *Die Zauberflöte*; the opera is first mentioned in the *Wiener Zeitung* on 5 Nov 1791, in an advertisement by music copyist and dealer Lorenz Lausch (*WZ*, 5 Nov 1791, 2848–49; *Dokumente*, 360).

We are able to add three previously unknown early published reports on *Die Zauberflöte*, all printed in "foreign" newspapers, but all based on information submitted by correspondents in Vienna: the report transcribed above, from the *Münchner Zeitung*, with the dateline 1 Oct 1791; a report from the *Bayreuther Zeitung*, with the dateline 5 Oct; and a second report in the *Münchner Zeitung* with the dateline 8 Oct that is a minor but interesting variant of a previously known report published in Hamburg on 14 Oct.
Prior to our publication of these items, only three press reports on the opera had been known from around the time of the opera's premiere. All likewise appeared in "foreign" (that is, non-Viennese) newspapers, and all were based on letters from private correspondents in Vienna. The

earliest was published on 4 Oct 1791 in the *Staats- und gelehrte Zeitung des hamburgischen unpartheyischen Correspondenten*, under the dateline "Wien, den 24. September," a week before the premiere:

> *[...]* Herr Mozart hat eine neue Oper componirt: Die Egyptischen Geheimnisse, welche der vorzüglichlichsten Compositionen dieses vortrefflichen Künstlers ist. Die neuen Decorationen und Kleidungen zu selbiger kosten 5000 Gulden. [*Neue Folge*, 71]

> *[...]* Herr Mozart has composed a new opera, *Die Egyptischen Geheimniße*, which is one of the most excellent compositions of this outstanding artist. The new scenery and costumes for the opera cost 5000 Gulden. [*NMD*, document 110, translation amended]

Another report was published in the same newspaper on 14 Oct 1791, under the dateline "Schreiben aus Wien, vom 5 October," five days after the premiere:

> *[...]* Auf dem hiesigen Theater ist seit etlichen Tagen eine neue Maschinen Comödie aufgeführt worden, die Zauberflöte genannt. Die Decorationen dazu haben 7000 Gulden gekostet, und der berühmten Kapellmeister Mozart hat die Musik dazu verfertigt. Dieses Umstandes und der schönen Decorationen wegen würde das Stück allgemeinen Beyfall gehabt haben, wenn der Text nur auch im mindesten der Erwartung entsprochen hätte. [*Neue Folge*, 72]

> *[...]* For the past several days at the theater here a new machine comedy called *Die Zauberflöte* has been performed. The scenery cost 7000 Gulden, and the music was produced by the famous Kapellmeister Mozart. On this account and because of the beautiful scenery, the piece would have received universal acclaim, if only the text had met even minimum expectations. [*NMD*, document 111, translation amended]

This report is a variant of one published in the *Münchner Zeitung* that same day, 14 Oct, but under the dateline 8 Oct 1791 (see our entry for that date); the only substantive difference is the Hamburg version's negative appraisal of the opera's libretto, which has no analog in the Munich version.

The third previously known report on *Die Zauberflöte*, with the dateline "Wien, den 9ten Oktob[er]", was published (very belatedly) in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* in Berlin in early Dec 1791:

> Die neue Maschienenkomödie: Die Zauberflöte, mit Musik von unserm Kapellmeister Mozard, die mit grossen Kosten und vieler Pracht in den Dekorationen gegeben wird, findet den gehoften [*sic*] Beifall nicht, weil der Inhalt und die Sprache des Stücks gar zu schlecht sind. [*Dokumente*, 358]

> The new machine comedy *Die Zauberflöte*, with music by our Kapellmeister Mozart, which is being put on at great cost and with much splendor, has not received the hoped-for acclaim, because the content and the language of the piece are much too poor.

(For an overview of the references to Mozart in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*, see the entry on this site for 10 Oct 1791.)

The three previously known reports agree that a great deal of money had been lavished on the production, and the two reports with datelines after the premiere agree that the opera's book was bad—a common theme in subsequent criticism. In contrast, the three newly discovered reports contain no criticism of the libretto, and all state that the opera had been received with universal acclaim.

The report from the *Münchner Zeitung* transcribed here is now the earliest known published reference to *Die Zauberflöte* following its premiere on 30 Sep 1791; in fact, if the dateline is to be believed, the correspondent in Vienna sent the report off to Munich the very next day. Unfortunately, the report provides no substantial new information, and it lacks sufficient detail for us even to be able to say with certainty that the correspondent attended; it states merely that the theater spent lavishly on the scenery and costumes, and that Mozart himself directed the first performance. The correspondent need not have been at the premiere to be aware of either of these points.

Of particular interest is the reference to the alternative title *Die egyptischen Geheimnisse (*The Egyptian Mysteries). This title also appears in the report published in Hamburg under the dateline 24 Sep, six days before the premiere, and it turns up again nearly eleven weeks later in a letter dated 10 Dec 1791, from Jakob Haibel in Vienna to Wolfgang Heribert von Dalberg in Mannheim:

> Betreffend die Egyptischen Geheimnisen [*sic*], die unter dem Namen der Zauberflöte hier bekannt sind, muß ich die Ehre haben, zu berichten, daß ich bis izt die Oper noch nicht erhalten kann, indem H. Mozart gestorben, und er bey seinen Lebzeiten noch die Partitur davon auf 100 Dukaten angeschlagen, indessen werd ich Euer Excellenz das Buch davon überschicken. [Walter 1899, 460, note 1; *Neue Folge*, 75]
>
> Concerning the *Egyptische Geheimnisse*, which is known here as *Die Zauberflöte*, I must respectfully report that I have not been able to obtain the opera inasmuch as Herr Mozart has died and during his lifetime he valued the score at 100 ducats. In the meantime I will send Your Excellency the libretto. [*NMD*, document 117, translation amended]

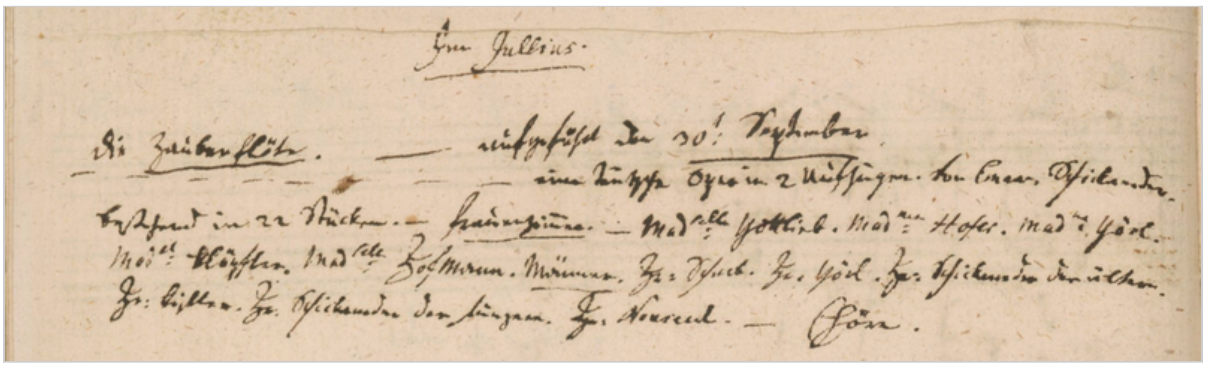
(On the asking price of 100 ducats, see the discussion of Mozart's compensation for the opera in the commentary to our entry for 5 Oct 1791.)

Tenor, actor, and composer Johann Petrus Jakob Haibel (1762–1826) was a member of Emanuel Schikaneder's company at the Theater auf der Wieden, although he seems not to have been in the cast of *Die Zauberflöte*, at least not at this point. In 1807, Haibel married Constanze Mozart's younger sister Sophie Weber. As a composer, he is perhaps best known to music historians today for his popular singspiel *Der Tyroler Wastel*, which premiered at the Theater auf der Wieden on 14 May 1796 (on Haibel as a composer, see also Blažeković & Stipčević 1995). Wolfgang Heribert von Dalberg (1750–1806) was intendant of the Nationaltheater in Mannheim from 1778 to

1803 (on Dalberg, see also our commentary "Intrigues against *Idomeneo* in Munich"). According to Walter (1899, 460–61), between Jul 1791 and Nov 1796 Haibel provided Dalberg with numerous opera scores, including *Die Zauberflöte*, which he was finally able to send to Dalberg on 30 Mar 1792.

Also noteworthy in the report in the *Münchner Zeitung* is the phrase "nach dem wahren Kostum [*sic*]," which suggests that Schikaneder went to some lengths and expense to create "authentic" costumes (presumably intended to be Egyptian or at least to be taken as such by his audience). In contrast to the reports in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* and the *Staats- und gelehrte Zeitung des hamburgischen unpartheyischen Correspondenten*, which complain about the poor quality of the libretto and imply that the opera's reception was mixed or lukewarm, the report in the *Münchner Zeitung* states that the premiere of *Die Zauberflöte* was received with "unanimous acclaim."

Not surprisingly, the alternative title *Die egyptischen Geheimnisse* has given encouragement to those bent on reading secret meanings into *Die Zauberflöte*. One example is van den Berk (2004), who ingeniously but implausibly reads the opera as an alchemical allegory. After referring to Haibel's use of the alternative title and noting its appearance in the Hamburg paper (he misleadingly attributes the report to "a journalist for a Hamburg newspaper"), van den Berk writes that as late as 10 Dec 1791, the date of Haibel's letter, "*people* still referred to the opera as the *Egyptische Geheimnisse*!" (van den Berk 2004, 176, my emphasis). Van den Berk does not consider the possibility that Haibel himself might have been the Hamburg paper's correspondent, and that it might have been only Haibel, rather than "people," who still used this title in December. Van den Berk does make the interesting observation that Mozart, in his *Verzeichnüß*, seems initially to have left the title of the opera blank, writing instead a series of dashes, and it may be that the title of the opera was not yet decided when Mozart entered the opera into the *Verzeichnüß* in July. But van den Berk certainly reads far too much into this apparent omission: the fact that the title was originally left blank is not evidence that the opera's title at that point was *Die egyptischen Geheimnisse*.



Mozart's entry for *Die Zauberflöte* in his *Verzeichnüß*, 28v
(British Library, Zweig MS 63)

The report in the *Münchner Zeitung* gives a seemingly incorrect title for the play in the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, calling it "Die Indianer": the play was published as *Der Orang Outang, oder das Tigerfest* by Karl Friedrich Hensler (see our entry for 5 Oct 1791). The title given in the

report, if it is indeed a mistake, could be taken to suggest that the correspondent had not attended the play—but it should be kept in mind that the advertised title on posters for performances may have differed from the title of the published text. The play—which is set (implausibly, given the orangutan and the "tiger festival") among the Incas—does indeed refer very frequently to "Indianer," so an audience member might well have formed the impression that "Die Indianer" was the title, even if it did not appear on the poster. That *Der Orang Outang* had its premiere the same night as *Die Zauberflöte*—and was thus in direct competition with it—is confirmed by Wenzel Müller, music director of the Theater in der Leopoldstadt (Angermüller 2009, 116).

The identity of the correspondent who submitted this report to the *Münchner Zeitung* is unknown. The dateline reads "aus Privatbriefen" in the plural, but the heading covers many other Viennese stories in addition to this one, and the dateline should not be taken to imply that the report on Mozart's opera was based on multiple sources (in fact, the brevity of the report makes this seem unlikely). In any case, Jakob Haibel cannot be ruled out as the Munich paper's informant on *Die Zauberflöte*: for one thing, he is the only person known by name to have referred to *Die Zauberflöte* using the alternative title *Die egyptischen Geheimnisse*. Given that Haibel was a member of Schikaneder's theatrical company, it seems likely that he was present for the premiere, even though he wasn't in the cast. Jakob Haibel should also come into consideration as a possible source for the story dated 24 Sep in the Hamburg paper, which uses the alternative title.

Notes (⇧)

Jakob Haibel's letters to Dalberg were formerly in the archive of the Nationaltheater in Mannheim, but apparently did not survive the Second World War. Extracts referring to *Die Zauberflöte* are transcribed in Walter (1899, 460, note 1).

The translation in *NMD* of the report of 24 Sep 1791 in the *Staats- und gelehrte Zeitung des hamburgischen unparteyischen Correspondenten* gives the title as "Die Egyptische Geheimnisse", incorrectly omitting the final 'n' for the adjective "egyptisch" in the nominative plural. That error has been silently corrected in the translation above, which has also been amended to clarify the correspondences with the version published in the *Münchner Zeitung*.

We would like to thank David Buch, John Rice, and Steven Whiting for their comments on this commentary.

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