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Hugh Elliot on *La finta giardiniera* in Munich (17 Jan 1775)

Dexter Edge

Notes from Minto Manuscripts. **Privately printed [Edinburgh, 1862]**

[28]
[...] In Munich
itself, the amusements were not fewer:—"La
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nitz, "la plus galante et la plus polie de l'Alle-
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[footnote]

* In 1774 they had an opera too, for on the 17th January of that year my grandfather writes that he is just "come home from hearing an Opera Buffa composed by the famous Mozart, whom you may remember when only eight years old in England. He is now *maître de chapelle* to the Bishop of Salzburg, and receives about three guineas a month salary. I never felt the power of music before, but am now a convert, and have already begun to play upon the flute."

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Commentary

In 1862, under the title *Notes from Minto Manuscripts*, the Countess of Minto privately published a biography of the early life of her grandfather, Hugh Elliot (1752–1830), based on Elliot's own letters and other family documents. The reference to Mozart in the passage transcribed above is implied to have come from a letter written by Elliot during his period as a diplomat at the Bavarian court in Munich, a position he held from 1774 until 1776. The opera to which Elliot is referring is *La finta giardiniera*, which premiered in Munich on 13 Jan 1775 (not 17 Jan 1774, as implied in the extract). The document was discovered on Google Books by John Rice and was first described in his article in the *Newsletter of the Mozart Society of America* in Jan 2014. It is an interesting example of a significant subclass of Mozart documents: references to Mozart or his works in eighteenth-century documents first published in nineteenth-century sources.

Hugh Elliot was an adventurer, mid-level British diplomat, and later Governor of the Leeward Islands (1809–1813) and Madras (1814–1820). He was born in Edinburgh, the second son of Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 3rd Baronet. Hugh's elder brother was Gilbert Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, 1st Earl of Minto. Hugh and his brother were educated in France and the Universities of Edinburgh and Oxford; Hugh is said to have gone on to study military science in Metz and Strasbourg. His exploits fighting for the Russian Army in 1773 toward the end of the Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774) drew favorable attention in Britain, and in 1774, at the age of just 22, Hugh was appointed "envoy-extraordinary" to the Bavarian Court of Prince-Elector Maximilian III Joseph. Although Hugh's father first informed him of this appointment on 27 Sep 1773, it became official only on 29 Apr 1774 (Minto 1862, 20–21); Hugh's first dispatch from Munich was dated 23 Jun 1774 (Minto 1862, 22). He remained in Munich until 1776, going on to become envoy-extraordinary to the court of Frederick the Great in Berlin from 1777 until 1782, and later holding similar positions in Denmark, Saxony, and Naples.

The "Countess of Minto," Emma Eleanor Elizabeth Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound (née Hislop, ca. 1824–1882) was Hugh Elliot's granddaughter. Her mother, Hugh's daughter Emma Elliot, married Sir Thomas Hislop, and Emma Eleanor Elizabeth married her second cousin William Hugh Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, 3rd Earl of Minto, the grandson of Hugh's brother Gilbert. "As a result of her marriage," it is written at thepeerage.com, "Emma Eleanor Elizabeth Hislop was styled as Countess of Minto on 31 July 1859."

The extract from Hugh Elliot's letter referring to Mozart's opera is found in a footnote to a short description of the amusements at the Munich court quoted from the "*Lettres du Baron Pollnitz*." Karl Ludwig von Pöllnitz (1692–1775) was an adventurer and writer who spent time at several European courts (including the one in Munich) before returning home to Berlin in 1735. His memoirs, assembled from letters written during his travels, were first published in the years around 1730; they quickly became quite popular and were subsequently issued in numerous editions and translations, some revised and expanded, under various titles referring to "letters", "memoirs", or both. Pöllnitz was also author of the popular (if less respectable) *La Saxe galante* (1734), an erotic history of Augustus II the Strong (1670–1733), Elector of Saxony and King of Poland.

The inclusion of the quote from Pöllnitz in *Notes from Minto Manuscripts* is evidently an inspiration of the countess herself; it does not come from one of Hugh Elliot's letters. The precise edition of Pöllnitz that the countess used is unclear (in a footnote she gives the citation "*Lettres du Baron Pollnitz*, tom. i. p. 328"), but the passage she quotes can be found in most editions (for example, this one from 1744, vol. 1, 301).

The footnote in the extract above begins in the authorial voice of the countess, who is ostensibly quoting from a letter written by Hugh Elliot during his time in Munich (although she does not explicitly state that she is quoting from a letter). The countess dates the quotation to 17 Jan 1774. But both the date and the year are problematic. We know from Mozart's letter to his father on 14 Jan 1775 (*Briefe,* ii:516–17) that *La finta giardiniera* had its premiere the previous day, 13 Jan 1775; this date is confirmed by an entry in the diary of Christian Gottlieb Unger, counselor of the Saxon legation to the Bavarian court (see the discussion of the primary documents on the first performances of *La finta giardiniera* in the commentary to 1 May 1780). In any case, the countess herself had noted just a few pages earlier that Hugh Elliot's "first dispatch from Munich is dated 23d June 1774" (Minto 1862, 22). So Hugh Elliot's letter must have been written in 1775, and he cannot have written on 17 Jan that he had "just come home" from hearing Mozart's opera, as the performance had taken place four days earlier. Rice gives one plausible explanation:

> Elliot's statement ... that he had just come from a performance of Mozart's opera can probably be best explained by supposing that he attended the premiere on 13 January but wrote his letter over several days, finishing it on 17 January. [Rice 2014, 8]

As Rice points out, it is quite possible that Elliot's original letter survives: many of Elliot's papers are preserved in British archival collections (see the results of a search on "Hugh Elliot" at the National Archives site). If so, the problematic dating could probably be resolved. Unfortunately, the Countess of Minto does not name the recipient of Elliot's letter, which will likely make it considerably more difficult to find.

Wolfgang was not "maître de chapelle" (Kapellmeister) in Salzburg, as Elliot writes, but rather Konzertmeister, a position he held from 21 Aug 1772, and for which he was paid 150 fl yearly (*Dokumente*, 127). This salary was equivalent to 12 ½ fl per month. Elliot states that Mozart was paid 3 guineas per month (probably based on hearsay and Elliot's own conversion to British

currency of whatever figure he had been told). The British guinea was fixed at 21 shillings in 1717, so 3 guineas would have been equivalent to 63 s. Although eighteenth-century exchange rates varied considerably over time and are difficult to pin down for any particular place and date, the web-based "Marteau Early 18th-Century Currency Converter" converts 63 s to 21 fl (gulden), rather higher than Mozart's actual salary. Using the same conversion rate, Wolfgang's salary of 12 ½ fl monthly would have amounted to around 37 s 6 d, or roughly 1 ¾ guineas. By Elliot's inflated estimate, then, Wolfgang's annual salary in Salzburg would have been around 252 fl.

Hugh Elliot is not known to have pursued his flute studies.

Notes (⇧)

We wish to express our thanks to John Rice for informing us of this document before his article went to press (Rice 2014), and for allowing DE to read and comment on an earlier draft of the article.

The extract given here from *Notes from Minto Manuscripts* is reproduced verbatim in *A Memoir of the Right Honourable Hugh Elliot by the Countess of Minto* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1868), 37–38. The reference to Mozart is in footnote 1, beginning on p. 37.

There is some disagreement in the secondary literature regarding Hugh Elliot's dates in Munich, with some sources giving 1773–1776, rather than 1774–1776. However, the narrative in *Notes from Minto Manuscripts* makes clear that Elliot's position became official only on 29 Apr 1774, and that his first dispatch dates from 23 Jun 1774. Rice refers to Elliot as "British Ambassador to the Elector of Bavaria" (Rice 2014, 8), and the Countess of Minto refers to his position in Munich as "plenipotentiary" (Minto 1862, 20). The term used here, "envoy-extraordinary," is from Scott (2004), in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Rice (2014) gives the date of publication for *Notes from Minto Manuscripts* as 1863; it was actually published in 1862. He gives the title as *Notes from the Minto Manuscripts*; "the" is not present, and the title is as given here.

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Credit: John Rice

Author: Dexter Edge

Link(s): *Minto Manuscripts:* Google Books; *Memoir*: Google Books; BSB (BSB has no full-text search of this volume as of 2 Jul 2015)

Search Term: mozart

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