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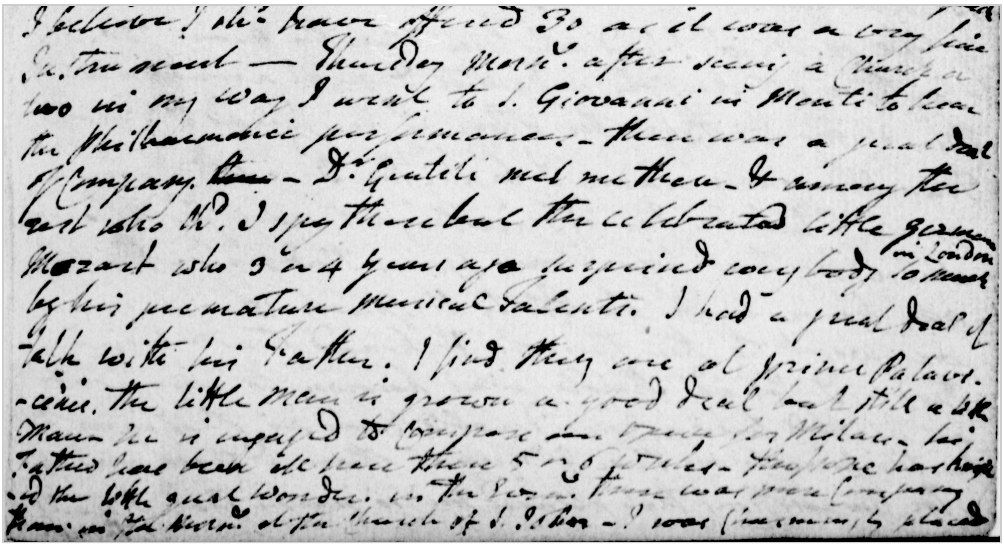
Burney and Mozart in Bologna (correction) (30 Aug 1770)

Dexter Edge

Charles Burney, “Journal of a tour through France and Italy in 1770 [...]”
London, British Library, Add. MS. 35122, 75r

[...] — Thursday Morn. after seeing a Church or
two in my way I went to S. Giovanni in Monti to hear
the Philharmonic performances. There was a great deal
of company. ~~there~~. D.r Gentili met me there & among the
rest who sh.d I spy there but the celebrated little German
Mozart who 3 or 4 years ago surprised everybody in London so much
by his premature musical talents. I had a great deal of
talk with his Father. I find they are at Prince Palavi-
-cinis. The little man is grown a good deal but still a little
Mann. He is engaged to compose an opera for Milan. His
Father has been ill here these 5 or 6 weeks. The Pope has knight-
-ed the little great wonder. *[...]*



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Commentary

Charles Burney made a tour of France and Italy in 1770 to gather material for a planned history of music, eventually published in four volumes as *A General History of Music* (1776–1789). Burney was in Bologna from 21 to 31 Aug 1770. On the day before his departure, he attended a concert in the church of San Giovanni in Monte. There he ran into Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart, who at that time were staying at the estate of Count Gian Luca Pallavicini outside the city, where Wolfgang was working on *Mitridate*, which would be premiered in Milan in December, and Leopold was recovering from a serious leg injury suffered in a carriage accident during their trip from Naples to Rome at the end of July. Burney knew the Mozarts from their sojourn in London in 1764 and 1765, but he had not seen them since.

During his tour, Burney kept a journal, which in turn provided the framework and much of the material for his book *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, first published in 1771. In that book, he describes his encounter with the Mozarts as follows:

> *[222]*
> By the advice of P. Martini I staid at
> Bologna two days longer than I intended,
> in order to be present at a kind of trial
> of skill among such composers of this
> city as are members of the celebrated
> Philharmonic Society, founded in 1666.
> There is an annual exhibition, or pub-
> lic performance, morning and evening,
> on the thirtieth of August, in the church
> of *S. Johanni in Monte**. This year the
> *Principe*, or President, was Signor Petro-
> nio Lanzi. The band was very nume-
> rous, consisting of near a hundred voices
> and instruments. *[...]*
>
> * This church is rendered famous by the posses-
> sion of two of the best pictures in Bologna, or, per-
> haps, in the world, the St Cecilia of Raphael, and
> the Madonna of the Rosary of Dominichini. They
> are placed in two chapels, opposite to each other,
> between which, and in full view of these charming
> paintings, I had the advantage of sitting to hear
> the music.
>
> *[227]*
>
> *[...]*

There were present at this exhibition
all the critics of Bologna, and the neighbouring cities, and the church was extremely crowded. Upon the whole, I
was very well entertained; and the variety of stile, and masterly composition
were such as reflected honour, not only

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upon the Philharmonic Society, but upon
the city of Bologna itself, which has, at
all times, been fertile in genius, and has
given birth to a great number of men
of abilities in all the arts.
I must acquaint my musical reader,
that at the performance just mentioned,
I met with M. Mozart and his son, the
little German, whose premature and almost supernatural talents astonished us in
London a few years ago, when he had
scarce quitted his infant state. Since his
arrival in Italy he has been much admired at Rome and Naples; has been
honoured with the order of the *Speron d'Oro*, or Golden Spur, by his Holiness,
and was engaged to compose an opera at
Milan for the next Carnival. *[...]*
[Burney 1771, 222ff]

Burney's original manuscript journal of his 1770 tour survives in the collection of the British Library (Add. MS. 35122). At the top of this page we give the passage from that manuscript corresponding to the passage in blue from *Present State*.

Neither of these versions appears in *Dokumente*. The version in Deutsch (113) comes, rather, from *An Eighteenth-Century Musical Tour in France and Italy,* published by Percy Scholes in 1959; Deutsch gives the passage under the heading: "Aus Charles Burneys Reisenotizen" ("From Charles Burney's Travel Notes"); it is also reproduced in the English edition, *Mozart: A Documentary Biography* (125), and has been widely quoted elsewhere.

It is not, however, what Burney wrote in 1770. Scholes is drawing on a substantially modified version that Burney adapted and expanded from his original travel notes later in life, with the

intention of incorporating this material into his memoirs, which he did not complete before his death. Scholes gives the following:

> *Thurs. Aug. 30* [...] [[After seeing a Church or two on my way, I went to S. Giovanni in Monte to hear the Philharmonic performances. There was a great deal of Company. Dr. Gentili met me there; and among the rest who should I meet but the celebrated little German, Mozart, who in 1766 astonished all hearers in London ~~[so much]~~ by his premature musical talent. I had a long conversation with his father. I find they are inmates of the Palace of Prince Palavicini. The little man is grown considerably but is still a little man. He has been at Rome and Naples, where he was much admired. At Rome the Pope has conferred on him the Order of the Speron d'Oro, or gold Spur, the only civil or military order in the gift of his Holiness. He astonished the Italian Musicians wherever he stopt. He is now at the age of 12, ingaged to compose an Opera for Milan, on occasion of the marriage of the Principessina of Modena, with one of the Arch-Dukes of Austria. There are to be 3 new operas composed on this occasion. I know not yet who are his concurrents; but shall be curious to know how this extraordinary boy acquits himself on setting words in a language not his own. But there is no musical excellence which I do not expect from his extraordinary quickness and talents, under the guidance of so able a man as his father, who, I was informed, had been ill ~~[here these]~~ five or six weeks at Bologna. [Scholes 1959, 161–62; *Dokumente*, 113]

Passages in green are more or less a they appear in Burney's journal from 1770, with differences shown in red. The two sentences in blue appear in *The Present State*, although these too are edited, and the order of the phrases in the first sentence is reversed. The rest seems to have been drawn from Burney's later manuscript, which (at least in this case) seems to have been more like a draft of what he planned to write in his memoirs.

Scholes glosses over the differences: in his Preface, he describes his procedure as follows:

> The present edition */...]* represents a collation of five texts—the two English editions (1771 and 1773), the two manuscript copies of the omitted portions, and the German translation of 1772 */...]* [Scholes 1959, ix]

By "the two manuscript copies of the omitted portions," Scholes means Burney's original notes from 1770 and the later modified and expanded version. For the passage on Burney's encounter with the Mozarts in Bologna, what Scholes gives is in no sense a "collation," but rather a confused patchwork that bears only a passing resemblance to what Burney wrote in 1770.

This passage in Scholes ought to have aroused suspicion: when Burney ran into the Mozarts in Bologna on 30 Aug 1770, Wolfgang had not yet been invited to composed a serenata for the wedding festivities of Archduke Ferdinand and Princess Maria Beatrice d'Este, which took place in Oct 1771. Leopold and Wolfgang themselves had confirmation of this invitation only on 16 Mar 1771, in a letter received from Milan while they were in Verona (*Briefe*, i:426). So Burney

cannot have known about the invitation in Aug 1770, and what Scholes gives cannot be a literal rendering of Burney's notes from Aug 1770.

The passage also includes several factual errors. The Mozarts were in London from 23 Apr 1764 to 24 Jul 1765, not in 1766. In his travel journal in 1770, Burney does indeed misremember the elapsed time, writing "3 or 4 years ago" (relative to 1770) when he should have written "5 or 6." In *The Present State*, he avoids the error by changing this to "a few years ago." But he does not write "1766" in either. Wolfgang was not 12 in Aug 1770, and Burney does not say so, either in his travel journal of 1770 or in any edition of *The Present State*. However, Burney does mention this age (incorrectly) in what Oldman (1964a, 75) has aptly characterized as his "slipshod" article on Mozart in Rees's *Cyclopædia*, published in 1819 (after Burney's death). In that article, Burney writes:

> In 1770 we met him at Bologna, on his return from Rome and Naples, when he had astonished all the great professors by his premature knowledge and talents. At Rome he was honoured by the pope with the order of the *Speron d'Oro*. From Bologna he went to Milan, where he was engaged to compose an opera for the marriage of the principessina of Modena with one of the archdukes, *[sic]* Two other composers were employed on this occasion, each of them to set an opera; but that of the little Mozart, composed at twelve years old, was the most applauded. [Burney 1819, n.p.]

Only two operas, Hasse's *Il Ruggiero* and Mozart's *Ascanio*, were commissioned for the wedding of Archduke Ferdinand and Princess Maria Beatrice, not three as Burney implies here, and Wolfgang was 15 when he received the commission, not 12. The opera that Mozart had been "engaged to compose" for Milan when Burney ran into him in 1770 was *Mitridate*, not *Ascanio in Alba*.

In 1969, Edmund Poole published a scholarly edition of Burney's original travel journal (Burney 1770), with a clear explanation of his editorial principles. But this edition is less widely available than Scholes, and it appeared several years after *Dokumente*, which was published in 1961. (Nothing is said about Poole's edition in *Addenda*, published in 1978). Poole clarifies that the two manuscript sources are what he calls Journal B, the original diary from the tour in 1770 (now in the British Library); and Journal O, the later heavily modified version used by Scholes (in the Osborn Collection at the time Poole was writing). As Poole writes:

> Far from their being 'identical' as Scholes suggests, the texts of Journal B, Journal O and the printed Tour, bristle with dissimilarities many of them merely verbal, some substantial and important. [Burney 1770, xxviii]

Among the substantial and important dissimilarities are the passage on Burney's description of his encounter with the Mozarts in Bologna, which appears in an accurate transcription on page 98 of Poole's edition. Our transcription, based on a facsimile of Burney's original, differs from Poole's only in being diplomatic: showing corrections and leaving abbreviations unexpanded. To our knowledge, this is the first time the passage has been published in facsimile.

Notes (⇧)

Oldman (1964a, 75) takes Scholes to be an accurate rendering of Burney's original travel journal, which Oldman seems not to have consulted personally.

Poole does not include folio numbers in his edition of Burney's travel diary, and we are grateful to Fiona McHenry, Research Specialist at the British Library, for tracking down the folio number in the manuscript so that we could order an image of the passage under the difficult conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our thanks also to Anne-Louise Luccarini and Janet Page for their suggestions and corrections, and to Thomas Schmid and Armin Brinzing of the Mozarteum for their help in acquiring secondary sources.

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SECM [Society for Eighteenth-Century Music]. 2020. Transcription of Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*. 2nd corrected edition. London: T. Becket and Co., 1773. Most recently accessed 12 Dec 2020.

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