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The earliest dated report of Mozart’s death (6 Dec 1791)

Dexter Edge

***Bayreuther Zeitung*, no. 148, Tue, 13 Dec 1791**

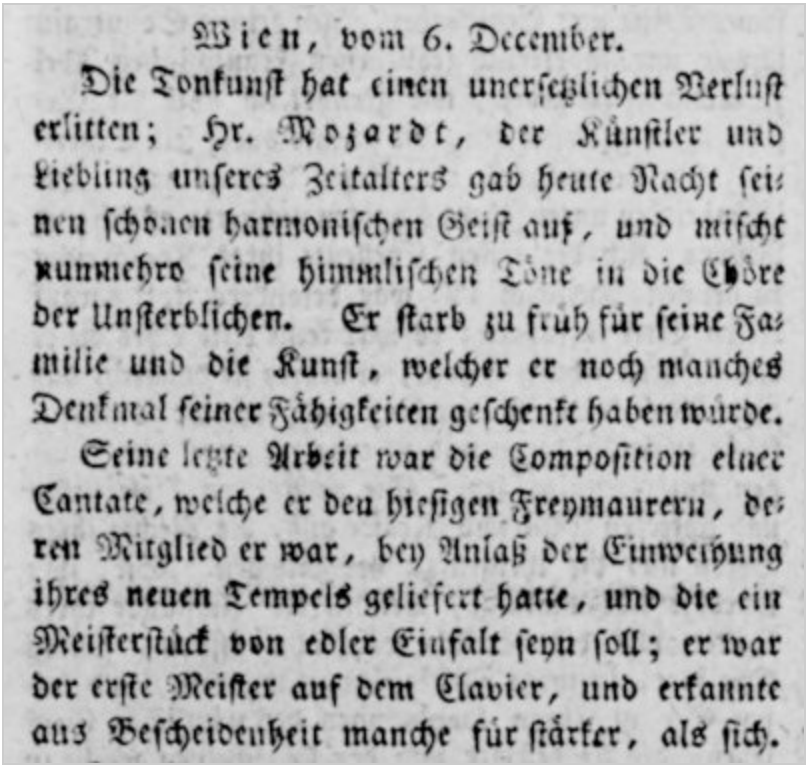
[1089]

Wien, vom 6. December.

Die Tonkunst hat einen unersetzlichen Verlust erlitten; Hr. Mozardt, der Künstler und Liebling unseres Zeitalters gab heute Nacht sei= nen schönen harmonischen Geist auf, und mischt nunmehro seine himmlischen Töne in die Chöre der Unsterblichen. Er starb zu früh für seine Fa= milie und die Kunst, welcher er noch manches Denkmal seiner Fähigkeiten geschenkt haben würde.

Seine letzte Arbeit war die Composition einer Cantate, welche er den hiesigen Freymaurern, de= ren Mitglied er war, bey Anlaß der Einweihung ihres neuen Tempels geliefert hatte, und die ein Meisterstück von edler Einfalt seyn soll; er war der erste Meister auf dem Clavier, und erkannte aus Bescheidenheit manche für stärker, als sich.

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[translation:]

Vienna, 6 December.

Music has suffered an irreplaceable loss: Herr Mozart, the artist and darling of our age, surrendered up this past night his beautiful, harmonious spirit, and now mixes his heavenly tones with the choir of the immortals. He died too soon for his family and for art, to which he would have offered many more monuments of his abilities.

His last work was the composition of a cantata, which he provided here to the Masons, of which he was a member, on the occasion of the dedication of their new temple, and which is said to be a masterpiece of noble simplicity; he was the foremost master on the keyboard, and out of modesty recognized many as stronger than himself.

Commentary

Although not published until 13 Dec, the dateline of this report is 6 Dec 1791, the day after Mozart died. It is thus the earliest dated newspaper report of his death. (The earliest to be

published was the notice in the *Wiener Zeitung* the following day, 7 Dec; see *Dokumente*, 369.)

The correspondent's quick filing of the report may suggest that he or she had contacts in the composer's circle. It is also striking that the report is the lead item in that issue of the *Bayreuther Zeitung*; the paper's editors seem to have considered Mozart's death an event of the highest importance. The effusive rhetoric of the report and its prominent place in that issue is yet another confirmation that Mozart, far from being neglected by his contemporaries, was already widely recognized as one of the great composers of his age.

The cantata mentioned in the report is *Laut verkünde unsre Freude*, K. 623, the so-called *Kleine Freimaurer Cantata*. Mozart had entered the cantata into his catalog of his own works under the date 15 Nov 1791; it was first performed at the new Masonic lodge, *Zur neugekrönten Hoffnung* on 17 Nov 1791. According to a report of that performance in the *Brünner Zeitung* on 19 Nov 1791, the performance had been public, with printed tickets; thus the mention of the cantata in the *Bayreuther Zeitung* does not necessarily imply that the paper's correspondent was a Mason or had knowledge of private Masonic events in Vienna.

Also unusual in this report is the reference to Mozart's modesty about his keyboard playing: ". . . he was the foremost master on the keyboard, and out of modesty recognized many as stronger than himself."

Notes (⇧)

Piontek (2009, 138–39, crediting Habermann) mentions this report, but cites only snippets. He points out a similarity of wording between the report in the *Bayreuther Zeitung* and the one in the *Wiener Zeitung*: the first line of the former is "Die Tonkunst hat einen **unersetzlichen Verlust erlitten**," whereas the last line of the latter is ". . . und diese geben das Maß des **unersetzlichen Verlustes**, den die Tonkust durch seinen Tod **erleidet**." This is, however, a common trope in German-language obituaries and other writings about death, as one can easily verify by doing a Google search on the quoted words "unersetzlichen Verlust." It is the only similarity between the two reports, and thus too slender a thread to support an argument for a direct relationship between the two. Piontek seems not to have realized that the item in the *Bayreuther Zeitung* is the earliest known dated public report of Mozart's death.

It has not yet been possible to consult Habermann's original article, which appeared in a monthly supplement to a regional German newspaper in 1991.

On the report in *Brünner Zeitung*, see Brauneis 1993 and *Neue Folge*, 73. The date of the performance at *Zur neugekrönten Hoffnung* was first published in *NMD,* 71, based on a pre-publication copy of Edge 1992, 161, which cites a slightly later publication of the same report in *Das Wienerblättchen* on 26 Nov 1791.

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Credit: DE (following Piontek and Habermann)

Author: Dexter Edge

Link(s): Google Books

Search Term: tonkunst, mozardt

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