

## The PRINCE LICHNOWSKY Newsletter

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Our Motto: *All the news that fits the Prince!*

### Broken Context: Problems in Mozart Research

With the publication in the *Mozart-Jahrbuch 1993/94* of the article, "A Newly Discovered Piece of Paper in Mozart's Handwriting," prepared jointly by Volkmar Braunbehrens and Ulrich Drüner, Mozart research is now confronted with not one but two problems of broken context: recently unearthed pieces of hard (i.e., documentary) evidence unambiguously associated with the mature Wolfgang Mozart, that is, the composer in those most thoroughly researched Vienna years, for which we have as yet no satisfactory explanation or interpretation.

Against the background of our general understanding of the life Mozart led in Vienna from 1782 until his death in 1791, these two new pieces of evidence potentially add something not previously known to our attempt to form a more complete appreciation of the composer, his life and his achievements. But what do they mean? Where do they fit into the picture? Are they important, or merely interesting? Given all that we know (or think we know) about Wolfgang and Constanze Mozart and their friends and associates in the Vienna years, why are we unable to find persuasive explanations or interpretations for them? They erupt like raw, misshapen stones into the mosaic of our knowledge. They exist; they reflect aspects of the life of Wolfgang Mozart; but their context is broken and not (yet) understood.

#### The Prince Lichnowsky lawsuit

Let us begin with a short review of that piece of evidence which gave this sometime Newsletter its name.

With the publication of his article, "'Following to indebtedness of 1,435 Gulden 32 Kreuzer': A New Document on Mozart's Financial Plight in November 1791," in the July 1991 issue of the ISM *Mitteilungen*, Walther Brauneis of Vienna made the world of Mozart research aware of an event that had gone fully unnoticed for 200 years: Prince Karl Lichnowsky had successfully sued Wolfgang Amadé Mozart for a substantial sum of money, the court decision being handed down in November 1791, not long before Mozart died. The evidence unearthed by Brauneis consists of an entry in the correspondence ledger of the *Hofkammer* in Vienna, noting the receipt (on 12 November 1791) of a memorandum with the date of 9 November from the Lower Austrian Court.

As transliterated and reproduced by Brauneis in his article, the entry reads as follows:

"N:Ö: Landrecht errinert unterm 9ten et prs: 12.9mb:791, Daß Karl Fürst v: Lichnowsky Ca dem K:K: Hof Kappelmeister Wolfgang Amade Mozart wegen schuldigen 1435 f 32 xr samt 24 f Gerichts Kösten sowohl die Pfändung, als auch die Erfolglassung dessen Besoldungs Hälfte bewürkt habe."

[The Lower Austrian Court advises under the date of the 9<sup>th</sup> and recorded on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 1791 that Prince Karl Lichnowsky in his case against K.K. Hof Kappelmeister Wolfgang Amade Mozart, owing to indebtedness of 1,435 Gulden 32 Kreuzer along with court costs of 24 Gulden, has shown cause for both attachment and withholding of the half of his salary.]

All previous issues of the *Newsletter* have concerned themselves, in one respect or another, with these two inextricably entwined research questions -- what really happened, and how did Mozart biographical research miss it for 200 years -- and the reader is referred to them. It has been almost two years since *Newsletter No. 5* appeared and no additional analysis fitting the Brauneis discovery into the broader framework of Mozart's biography has come to my attention since.

In a new development, the Braunbehrens-Drüner article referred to above provides the initial publication of the text of a piece of paper in Mozart's handwriting and suggests (at least conceptually) a possible relationship to the Lichnowsky affair. The following paragraphs draw on a translation of a draft of the article as prepared for publication in the *Mozart-Jahrbuch*.

#### The Newly Discovered Piece of Paper

The existence of the piece of paper (in German, *ein Zettel*) has been known for many years. It is referred to, for example, in Volume IV (Item 1203/7, page 174) of the collected Mozart family letters, edited by W.A. Bauer and O.E. Deutsch. But the autograph only recently was offered for sale in an auction of manuscripts and holographic documents, thus making its full text known.

The text on the front of the *Zettel*, in Mozart's hand, is reproduced on the following page. (Notes written by other persons on the reverse side are discussed in the Braunbehrens-Drüner article but are not relevant here.)

As in the case of the *Hofkammer* correspondence ledger entry, we now have a hitherto-unknown text related directly to Wolfgang Mozart. Indeed, it is something he himself wrote. To all appearances, the text opens with a kind of income statement (various currencies and monetary instruments -- *banco zettel* -- in various amounts are itemized), followed by a statement of outgo, ending up with the notation that the difference between the two was divided in five parts and asking how much went to each person.

[The text continues on page 4]

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|  | <u>Line</u> |
|--|-------------|
| <i>Meine Cassa bestund verflossenes Jahr aus</i>   | 1           |
| <i>                  kayserlich und Cremnizer                  Salzburger</i><br><i>295 Duckaten zu 4 fl:30x. – aus 119 Ducaten zu 4 fl:20x.</i><br><i>                  Holländer</i><br><i>aus 88 ducaten zu 4 fl:18x:</i> | 2           |
| <i>aus 101 Souvrain zu 13 fl.20s:-aus 250 Thaler zu 2 fl.30x:</i><br><i>- aus 25 banco zettel zu 50 fl.</i>  | 3           |
| <i>aus 18 banco zettel zu 25 fl.-aus 50 banco zettel zu 10 fl.</i><br><i>und aus 90 banco zettel zu 5 fl: -</i>  | 4           |
| <i>- Dieses Jahr durch habe ausgegeben wie folgt. -</i>  | 5           |
| <i>99 kayserliche Ducaten. -55 Salzburger. -33 Holländer. – 66 Souvrains.</i><br><i>-88 thaler</i>   | 6           |
| <i>zu 2 fl:30. – und überdies noch 539 fl:56x:.. –Den Rest dann habe</i><br><i>in 5 theile getheilt.</i>   | 7           |
| <i>Nun ist die frage wie viel Jeder bekommen hat?-</i>   | 8           |

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A translation of lines 1, 5, 7 and 8 where it does not concern currencies and amounts:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>In the past year my cash situation consisted of</i>       | 1 |
| <i>- In the course of this year have spent as follows. -</i> | 5 |
| <i>. . .Have divided the remainder into 5 parts.</i>         | 7 |
| <i>Now the question is how much did each one get?</i>        | 8 |

Regarding currencies and amounts:

*fl.* = florin; the same as gulden.

*x.* = kreuzer; there are 60 kreuzer in one florin or one gulden.

*ducat* = consists of 4 ½ florins or gulden; 100 ducats would be 450 florins or gulden.

*banco zettel* = comparable to a cashier's check, that is, a check drawn by a bank upon its own funds.

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And so the problem begins: when did Mozart write it, why did he write it, and what is it all about? How does it fit to the life he lived and what does it tell us that did not know before? These are, of course, questions which Messrs Braunbehrens and Drüner addressed themselves to.

For reasons of internal evidence, there is a strong presumption that Mozart wrote the *Zettel* some time in the period between early February 1786 and the end of February 1788. That's the easy part. The more difficult part lies in coming to an understanding of just what was going on in Mozart's life when he carefully wrote out this income-outgo balance. Was he gleefully concocting a *Gesellschaftsspiel*, something to test the arithmetical abilities of his friends? Or was he engaged in a serious effort to add up assets and liabilities, driven, say, by the pressure of creditors?

The Braunbehrens-Drüner article suggests "three possible interpretations:

"1. Mozart's text involves an arithmetical problem using completely made-up (i.e., fictitious) numbers.

"2. It involves an arithmetical problem but with numbers drawn from Mozart's actual life.

"3. It involves a document reflecting actual financial concerns."

Of the three possible interpretations, the burden of the Braunbehrens-Drüner analysis tends to favor the last:

"According to this interpretation, Mozart prepared a kind of memorandum for the record, for himself or for others, which lays out his financial situation, deducts on-going expenses, and indicates the remainder is to be divided in five parts while not specifying which five persons share in the remainder. This interpretation gives considerable weight to the fact that the entire formulation of the text bespeaks actuality and is directed to a matter of the past. . . .the evident care Mozart took in writing the paper speaks more for its being a document of quasi-official character than some quickly composed memorandum or simply the account of some numerical pastime. . . .the slip of paper can be read as the record of the outcome of a meeting of creditors at which Mozart was obligated to swear an insolvent debtor's oath. Of course we can only speculate as to the likely validity of such a reading. While we cannot completely exclude the possibility, there is for now no further circumstantial evidence, one way or another. But surprises in this context are always possible; we need only mention, for example, the (recently discovered) court proceeding for non-payment of debt in which Mozart was involved in November 1791: in this case, strange to say, Prince Karl Lichnowsky, Mozart's travelling companion on the trip to Berlin in the spring of 1789, had appeared as creditor and plaintiff."

Then, in summing up at the end of their article, Braunbehrens and Drüner have this to say:

"The slip of paper described here is the first document stemming directly from Mozart's hand which contains details of his financial circumstances. Dating it to the period 1786-1787 underscores the significance of the new discovery, which suggests that Mozart enjoyed extraordinarily high earnings in the middle Viennese years. At the same time it is only a seeming contradiction when we regard it as conceivable and indeed likely that the paper constitutes early evidence Mozart was also having economic difficulties at this point, and not just after 1788 when the war with Turkey was making life difficult for him and many of his colleagues (including Haydn) as well. There was nothing to protect Mozart's lifestyle against sudden drops and even losses in his income.

"Mozart's text is characterized throughout by a serious intent; it has an inner logic and conforms with the circumstances of Mozart's life (insofar as we know them). It deserves therefore to be taken seriously in all its aspects. To trivialize it as merely a *Rechenexempel* -- a bit of math homework, Mozart playing with numbers -- possibly with no real basis to the numbers he used, would mean doing interpretive violence to the words he wrote.

"There is yet another reason for taking the text in earnest, and that is its indirect internal relationship to the previously mentioned recent documentary discovery of Lichnowsky's lawsuit against Mozart. This too confirms Mozart's substantial economic difficulties -- and there, too, difficulties incontrovertibly linked with his large income, just as in the case of this slip of paper. Both newly discovered documents say essentially the same thing: in the second half of his Viennese years, Mozart must regularly have had very high levels of income, which were obviously matched, for whatever reasons, by still higher expenses. . ."

This view of the significance of the *Zettel* is not without its critics. The same issue of the *Mozart-Jahrbuch* contains a commentary by Ulrich Konrad, who believes Braunbehrens and Drüner have strained the evidence unduly and over-interpreted the *Zettel's* likely import. Konrad suggests the summing-up more properly should be formulated along these lines (as translated from a pre-publication draft):

"The piece of paper described here is concerned with the first document written in Mozart's hand that contains sums in the form of a mathematical problem. With reasonable confidence, the document can be dated to the years 1786 and 1787. The document does not allow us to draw any conclusions, direct or indirect, regarding Mozart's financial circumstances in this period. The text has the appearance of a serious exercise; it is characterized by an inner logic and, so far as the currencies named are concerned, conforms with the circumstances of Mozart's life. It is only the solution to the problem posed that is unrealistic. This last fact could suggest Mozart had written down a text that was meant perhaps as a joke (devised by himself? found elsewhere?) in connection with some occasion (Fasching?) not otherwise known to us. To magnify the text into more than a mathematical problem, possibly with a highly speculative basis for

the numbers used, would mean doing interpretative violence to the words he wrote.”

It is not the purpose of the *Prince Lichnowsky Newsletter* to settle the *Zettel* debate, but rather to call attention to the new piece of information. How justified Braunbehrens and Drüner are in relating it to the Lichnowsky lawsuit against Mozart depends critically on the interpretation one places on why Mozart drew up the set of numbers in the form of an income and expenditures statement in the first place. But as with the entry in the *Hofkammer* correspondence ledger, the *Zettel* is there, it cannot be ignored, and ultimately it must be dealt with. Major biographical works on Mozart are in progress and others are planned. Perhaps in the course of their studies, the authors will discover just how these pieces of evidence fit into the overall pattern, and we will be the richer for it.

In the meantime, this issue of the *Newsletter* closes with the comment Neal Zaslaw made on reading the article by Braunbehrens and Drüner: “Isn’t it amazing that new things keep emerging? You might think that everything had already been turned up by generations of fanatic Mozarteans.”

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