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„. . . owing to indebtedness of 1,435 Gulden 32 Kreuzer“:
A New Document on Mozart's Financial Plight in November 1791

“. . . and reflect that, without your help, the honor, peace of mind, and perhaps the life itself of your friend and brother Mason will perish. . . .” This closing, with its tone of deep depression, is in the fifth of the twenty surviving letters soliciting loans that Mozart sent to the Viennese tradesman and Freemason, Michael Puchberg. The letter is dated 12 July 1789. In the last four years of his life, Mozart had asked Puchberg for at least 4,000 Gulden but had received only 1,415 from him. In addition to Puchberg, the chancery clerk Franz Hofdemel shows up as one of his lenders in the spring of 1789. Mozart's note to him for a loan of 100 Gulden, signed on 2 April 1789, was assigned three months later to Matthias Anzenberger, owner of a clothing shop. Whether it ever was paid off is not known. At the beginning of May 1790, the owner of a fancy goods shop at the Stock-im-Eisen-Platz was vigorously demanding repayment of an additional long-overdue 100 Gulden.

Mozart's financial situation appears to have become noticeably more critical towards the second half of 1790, leading him to involve himself in a complicated bit of borrowing just before his trip to Frankfurt, something he left for his wife in Vienna to finish up. In this connection, it apparently was important to Mozart that his lender should receive the impression that the loan was for a “speculation” and not to pay off debts. It involved the impressive sum of 2,000 Gulden, the repayment of which was to be guaranteed by his music publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister. The idea evidently was to use fees foreseen from Mozart's future compositions to settle the debt. We do not know if the loan agreement, when it finally was signed, was along these lines. All that has come down to us is an IOU for 1,000 Gulden to the merchant Heinrich Lackenbacher, dated 1 October 1790, in which all of Mozart's furnishings were pledged as security.

The summer months of 1791 were also overshadowed by a financial matter of some sort that seems to have required Mozart's presence in Vienna, thus limiting him to only brief visits to his wife then taking the waters in Baden. From the correspondence of this period we can make out only that Mozart was involved with a man identified (in the letters) merely as “N.N.” whom he constantly had to run after, making him worry whether he would ever be able to bring the “business” to a successful conclusion.

On 6 July 1791, Mozart was writing his wife: “I appreciate your advice not to place my trust completely in N.N.—but in such matters you simply have to concentrate on one person—you involve 2 or 3—and the word gets around—then you look to the others you're not dealing with like a fool

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or an irresponsible person.” Although we cannot tell from the letters just what kind of “business” it was, we probably would not be wrong to assume that a new loan proposal was involved. The outcome of this piece of “business” will remain in the dark so long as there are no new documentary sources.

It could be that all this activity was connected with a hitherto unpublished decision of the Lower Austrian Court, one that could have driven Mozart -- a few weeks before his death and in his already precarious financial situation -- to the brink of his existence. In a communication of 9 November 1791 from the court of justice with jurisdiction for the nobility, the imperial *Hofkammer* (responsible for financial and other administrative matters affecting the imperial court) is directed to bring about the payment of Mozart’s delinquent debt in the amount of 1,423 Gulden 32 Kreuzer to Prince Karl Lichnowsky both by attachment and by withholding half of his salary as court composer. Legal costs of 24 Gulden were likewise to be paid.

The original of the letter, which was registered in the *Hofkammer* on 12 November 1791, has not survived and can only be inferred from the entry in the correspondence ledger preserved in the *Hofkammer* archives in Vienna.¹ The entry reads as follows:

“N.Ö. (Niederösterreichisches = Lower Austrian) Court advises under the date of the 9th and recorded on the 12th of November 1791 that Prince Karl Lichnowsky in his case against *K.K. Hof Kappelmeister* [sic] 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.”

(“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 relevant documents of the Lower Austrian Court were destroyed in the burning of the Justice building in Vienna in 1927. For this reason, the court proceedings (the opening and duration of the proceedings, the basis of the suit, the defense of the accused) cannot be reconstructed. The amount of the debt as determined by the court probably reflects the inclusion of compound interest on a rounded principal sum.

Such a drastic cut in Mozart’s income would have meant that the rent for the apartment in the “*Kleinen Kaiserhaus*” in the Rauhensteingasse (put at 330 Gulden) could just barely have been paid out of the half of his estimated yearly income after taxes of 760 Gulden. The actual living expenses of Mozart’s family of four would for the most part have to be met through income from concert appearances as well as fees from pupils, commissions, and music publishers. Certainly not a difficult undertaking for one ready to rein in his style of living. According to the testimony of Mozart’s contemporary Johann Pezzl, you could live quite comfortably in Vienna with 550 Gulden a year at the most.

After Mozart's death on 5 December 1791, it appears that the judgment against him was never implemented. In addition, the unpaid salary amounts for November and December 1791 (mistakenly calculated on the basis of gross annual income as 133 Gulden 20 Kreuzer in the Suspense Order, i.e. the list of the deceased Mozart's assets and liabilities) were later paid to Mozart's widow by the *Hofkammer* in the full amount of 126 Gulden 40 Kreuzer.

The sudden emergence of the name of the latter-day Beethoven patron in the late fall of 1791 is rather surprising, for Lichnowsky appeared to have dropped out of Mozart's sight altogether after the trip to Berlin that they made together in the spring of 1789. In light of this new documentary finding, the circumstances of this trip, which contrary to the usual custom apparently was begun with no prior preparations, not to say precipitately, probably should be reconsidered anew. Was it that Lichnowsky on very short notice offered Mozart the opportunity to earn some money by concertizing on such a trip? Or did Lichnowsky hope that, from the proceeds of the concerts, he could receive directly outstanding sums owed him without the usual empty promises? And wouldn't the 100-Gulden affair that Mozart wrote about in his 23 May 1789 letter from Berlin fit with such a picture: “. . .I had to lend him 100 Gulden because his purse was shrinking—I couldn't well turn him down, you know why. . .”? When Lichnowsky abruptly broke off the trip in Berlin, was it because it had not met his expectations?

However you answer these questions, the major question mark remains why Prince Karl Lichnowsky made use of legal proceedings to recover debts owed him and, in so doing, distanced himself in public from Mozart. Only an examination of the Lichnowsky archives at Schloss Hradec in Czechoslovakia, which were badly damaged in 1945, would offer some slight chance of casting light on the unfortunate circumstances surrounding this legal action.^{2/}

The causes of Mozart's financial difficulties also remain obscure.^{3/} From June 1788 on, the letters to Michael Puchberg speak repeatedly of the unhappy and gloomy situation Mozart finds himself in through no fault of his own, but which threatens to destroy his “honor and credit.” In July 1789, Mozart still thinks his fate in a certain “little matter” would be decided in a couple of months. Apparently there is an understanding about it between him and Puchberg: “this remains the same, as we discussed; either this way or that.” Later, Puchberg is asked to help Mozart out by word and deed “in that matter you know about.” Then in the spring of 1790, the following: “. . .you know how my present circumstances would damage my petition at the Court if they became known—how important it is this remains secret.” In early June 1790, Mozart writes Constanze: “by the way—N.N. (you know who I mean) is a bastard-- . . . he. . .spoke very badly of me here in connection with that certain matter—I know it for sure. . .” And two and a half months before Mozart's death, Count A. K. Razumowsky addressed a letter of recommendation to Prince G. A. Potemkin on 15 September 1791, calling Mozart the premier piano virtuoso and the most competent of the German composers and reporting that he “had had some trouble here” and for this reason was prepared to accept an invitation to the prince's court in Moscow.

In 1976, Uwe Kraemer undertook to demonstrate that Mozart, a passionate player of billiards, had gambling debts.^{4/} An enticing hypothesis, because a player who is hooked on gambling -- particularly by the card game "Pharao" which had been Empress Maria Theresa's favourite and, since then, had remained the most fashionable of games -- could lose extremely large sums in a very short time. *Pharao* (also *Pharo* or *Faro*) was a game of chance for two persons played with 52 French cards. Even Leopold Mozart in Salzburg in 1785/86 would mention this form of gambling in letters to his daughter in St. Gilgen.

Although there is no irrefutable source for this gambling hypothesis, still it is not to be excluded completely. Oddly enough, the gambling game of *Pharao* figures in a "theatrical conversation" between two characters, "Mozart" and "Schikaneder", written by Joachim Perinet in 1802.^{5/} In this fictitious dialog (with the grotesque touch of taking place on Mozart's grave), "Schikaneder" is telling about his successful sale of the Theater an der Wien which he had newly built shortly before and is urgently warned by "Mozart" not to risk his fortune by playing *Pharao*:

"Do be careful, for heaven's sake!
And don't go in for playing Pharao;
For you know that the Pharao and all his troops
Were drowned in the Red Sea."

Joachim Perinet wrote the book for the Singspiel, *Kaspar der Fagottist, oder Die Zauberzither*, produced by Wenzel Müller at the Leopoldstädter Theater in the summer of 1791 and can be regarded as one of the Vienna theater scene's insiders. Supposed gambling debts of Mozart would have been a titillating topic of conversation in these circles. And in the audience with Emperor Leopold II, Mozart's widow was in fact confronted with the rumor of debts amounting to 30,000 Gulden, which she was able to convince the Emperor did not exceed 3,000 Gulden. In any case, following the notice to creditors published in the *Wiener Zeitung* on 7 March 1791, no further financial claims were surfaced. The fact that Michael Puchberg did not publicly submit the debts owed him may fairly be understood in light of Constanze Mozart's intention to name him as guardian to Mozart's two sons. And for Prince Karl Lichnowsky to take such a step against a widow with two destitute children was obviously not the thing to do.

Given the present state of our knowledge, Mozart's management of his finances can only be described as chaotic. Certain debts owed him, such as the 300 Gulden that he had loaned to "Windmacher" Franz Anton Gilowsky earlier in 1785 and the 500 Gulden handed over to friend and clarinet player Anton Stadler as late as 1791, proved to be irrecoverable for lack of appropriate security.

Awareness of the hopelessness of his financial plight may have been one -- perhaps even the determining -- reason for the "melancholia", the "dark depression", and "mournful imaginings" attributed to Mozart's state of mind in his last months by Franz Xaver Niemetschek, who probably got his information from Constanze Mozart. Depression shows up in the clinical picture of various groups at risk, including compulsive gamblers with suicidal tendencies.

Footnotes

1. Hofkammerarchiv Wien, Camerale 1791, Fasciculatur 16, Registraturnummer 560/4384 ex November 1791, fol. 1586v, 1587r. I would like to thank the archive director Hofrat DDr. Gottfried Mraz for his help in locating this documentary record.
2. Jaroslave Celeda, *Mozart, Beethoven a Lichnowski*, Prag 1967. (Examination of the typescript held in the *Archiv des Tschechischen Musikfonds* was not possible in November 1990.)
3. Rudolpf Angermüller, "Auf Ehre und Credit" – Die Finanzen des W.A. Mozart. Ausstellungskatalog Salzburg 1983. Rüdiger Wolf, *Mozart und das Geld*. Eigenverlag der Chemofux GesmbH Wien 1991.
4. Uwe Kraemer, *Wer hat Mozart verhungern lassen?*, in: *Musica* 1976, Heft 3, page 203ff.
5. J(oachim Perine)t, *Theatralisches Gespräch zwischen Mozart und Schikaneder über den Verkauf des Theaters* Wien 1802, page 20f.

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