The purchases of a seventeenth-century librarian

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Accessibility
The Purchases of a Seventeenth-Century Librarian

The letter quoted below (from a collection of autographs deposited in the Harvard College Library) is an interesting document for the history of libraries and of book-collecting. The writer, Antonio Magliabechi (1633-1714), keeper of books for Cosimo III de’ Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, was gifted with a miraculous memory, and possessed an insatiable thirst for learning. His knowledge became so encyclopedic that the most eminent scholars from all parts of Europe sought his advice; but, because of his eccentric habits, his friends were few. Ugly in appearance, he lived in an ill-kept house, so deeply intent on his work that he often failed to eat or undress. He assembled for himself a collection of books which he bequeathed to his patron; this library of more than 30,000 volumes, at Strawberry Hill Press, was written to secure financial support for Robert Hill, a self-taught and judicious tailor and schoolmaster, whose learning and reputation are compared to Magliabechi’s.

*Of many examples, perhaps the most famous is the following, given here in the words of Joseph Spence: “One day the Grand Duke sent for him after he was his librarian, to ask him whether he could get him a book that was particularly scarce. “No, Sir,” answered Magliabechi, “it is impossible, for there is but one in the world; that is in the Grand Signor’s library at Constantinople, and it is the seventh book on the second shelf on the right hand as you go in.” — A Parallel, in the Manner of Phineas, between a Most Celebrated Man of Florence and One, Scarce Ever Heard of, in England (Strawberry-Hill, 1780), pp. 27-28. Spence’s work, one of the early publications of the Strawberry Hill Press, was written to secure financial support for Robert Hill, a self-taught and judicious tailor and schoolmaster, whose learning and reputation are compared to Magliabechi’s.

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known as the Magliabechiana, formed
with the Laurenziana, the nucleus of
the present Biblioteca Nazionale in
Florence.

The letter in question, written on
both sides of a sheet, bears no address
or date. The recipient may have been
the Grand Duke; however, Maglia-
bechi was also custodian of books for
a number of other bibliothèques in Flo-
rence, including the Cardinals Leopoldo
and Francesco Maria de' Medici and
the Canon Lorenzo Panciatichi.

Ill: 26: Sig: A: e Prinz Colandi
Mandai l'altro giorno a V S: Ill: a: il
Catalogo de Libri nuovi, stati alla Fiera
ultima di Francofort, non le potetti già
mandare, l'indice di quelli che dalle detta
Fiera aspetta il Lanoto, che da esso, non
mi fà, come mi aveva promesso, inviato.
Credo bene che me lo debba assoluta-
mente inviato, questa Settimana, et io su-
bbito che Padro ricevuto, prima di mos-
strarlo ad'altri, lo manderà a V S: Ill: a:
Sabato scriverò alctro Lanoto, commen-
tendogli per * V S: Ill: a: l'Invento, e l'O-
pera di Lionardo da Vinci, circa [?] al
prezzo, credo che la donerabbe mandare
assolutamente per fiordini 9, benché la me-
tino 10, e ben vero, che gli scriverò, che
non la mandi, se non è in carta grande,
e come ella mi scrive. Il Ricettario era
veramente tenuto bene, et io già l'avevo
comprato per V S: Ill: a: lire, ma nel
registrarlo, trovo che vi mancava inter-
mente un foglio, cioè il g, onde non lo
volsi. A Stefano non sono dato uno da
vendere, dal . . . il quale ancora esso e
ben tenuto, ma mi pare che la margine sia
più tosto tagliata troppo, oltre che bi-
sognerebbe farvi ripristare le guardie,
con il verderame, poiché incarta grande-
mente, con tanto ciò bò detto a Stefano,
che non lo venda senza mio ordine mi
accenni ella pertanto, quella che vuole

--The abbreviation for this word oc-
curring in the original has been regularly
expanded.

--Space left blank in the original.

ch'io faccia. Il Radaro, credo quasi asso-
lutamente chele debba toccare, ma come
ella mi scrive, con il Tani ci vuole pazie-
zenza, io frattono non trattisi d'inten-
dere ogni giorno, quando mi trovo a
Librai, se ci fosse altri che ne avesse
voglia, ma però sottratto, e per adesso,
non sento che ci sia alcuno. Il Sig Dati ha
aunt o appunto oggi una bambina, che
quate nuovo io le poeta dare. Con che
supplicandola a non mi risparmiare, in
quaisivogli cosa, che conosca potere della
mia debolezza restar servita, lo bacio
umilissimamente le mani, e la rive.rieco.

D I V S: Ill: a
Ummiliss: et Obblig: Servitore
Antonio Magliabechi

Monò Nécolò mi ha mostrato un Indice
di Libri che gli vengono di Parigi, trà
quali certamente che ne sono molti
quisiti, e ben verno, che non solamente,
non mi ha voluto concedere, che lo
copii, ma eziandio mi ha istantemente
pregato, a non dire ad alcuno, che egli
aspetti Libri Ultramontani. La ragione
che lo vuole a questo, è veramente ri-
dola, poiché non vuole, per quanto mi
dice, che se i Libri per disgrazia andas-
ero male, la gente lo burlasse. Io però,
o in una maniera, o in una altra, copierò
questo Indice, e lo lo manderà. Se bene i
Libri, non credo che possa arrivare, se
non trà qualche Mese.

Avevo già scritto questa Lettera, quan-
do tornando a Casa per farliggeria, e
portarla a Casa di V S: Ill: a: ho trovato, che
da la mi era stato regalato un mazzo di
tordi, certamente che resto ogni giorno
più obbligato, et insieme più confuso, per
i favori che da lei ricevo, conoscendo
particolarmente, di non avere appresso
V S: Ill: a: merito di sorta alcuno.

This letter may be translated as
follows:

* Very Illustrious Lord and
Most Worshipful Patron

The other day I sent to Your Lordship
the Catalogue of new Books from the
The latest Frankfort Fair.* I could not send the List of those which Lanou* expects to get from this Fair, as he did not send it to me, although he had promised to do so. I trust that he will surely dispatch it to me this week, and as soon as I have received it, I will send it to Your Lordship before showing it to anyone else. Saturday I will write to the said Lanou, commissioning him on behalf of Your Lordship for the Irénæus* and the Work by Leonardo da Vinci,* as for [?] the price, I believe that they should certainly send it for 9 florins, although they put it at 10: be sure I shall write to him, as you told me, not to send it, if it is not a large-paper copy. The Ricettario* was indeed in good condition and I had already bought it for Your Lordship for 2 lire, but in collating it I found that a whole leaf was missing, namely the g, so I didn't want it. Stefano has been given by . . . one copy to sell, which also is in good condition, but it seems to me that the margin has been rather too closely trimmed; besides, the end-papers should be repasted, with verdigris, as it is very much worm-eaten. In spite of all this, I have told Stefano not to sell it without my telling him; therefore could you let me know what I should do? I rather think

*Evidence of a book trade in Frankfort may be found as early as the year 1487. No place was so favorably situated at the crossroads of the intellectual and commercial world. The book trade attracted to Frankfort dealers and publishers from important German towns and from all other countries of Europe, though mainly France, Italy, and the Netherlands. The first catalogue of new books for sale at the fair appeared in 1564 and was issued regularly thereafter. (See James Westfall Thompson, *The Frankfort Book Fair*, Chicago, 1911.)

*Probably a bookdealer, like Stefano and Tani, mentioned below.

*Possibly St. Irénæus, the theologian, Bishop of Lyons, whose works had been published in Base in 1536.

*The 1561 French or Italian edition of the *Trattato della Pittura*.

*A book of medical prescriptions or a recipe book.

that you should take the Rader,* but, as you write me, with Tani one must be patient; in the meantime, every day, when I am at the booksellers'. I keep on trying to learn, but inconspicuously, if anyone else might want it, but up to now I haven't heard of anyone. Signor Dati* just today had a baby girl, which is all the news that I can give you. With this, praying that you do not spare me in anything whatever, since you know that my feeble talents are at your service, I kiss your hands very humbly, and I am very respectfully,

Your Lordship's
Most Humble and Obliged Servant
Antonio Magliabechi

The postscript is revealing, as it shows how, in order to get the books he wanted, Magliabechi was ready to use rather doubtful methods:

*Monseigneur Niccolo* has shown me a List of Books he is getting from Paris, among which certainly there are many marvellous ones; indeed, not only did he not want to let me copy it, but he even begged me earnestly not to tell anyone that he is expecting Books from over the Alps. The reason which induces him to do so is really absurd: he says that if, through ill luck, the Books should not turn out well, people would laugh at him. But I, in one way or in another, will copy this List and send it to you. However, I do not believe that the Books can get here for some Months.

I had already written this letter, and gone Home to seal it and take it to Your

*Perhaps a book by Mathias Rader, a Jesuit and a theologian, who died in 1634.

*Carlo Dati, born in 1619, a learned philologist and scientist, pupil of Galileo, was a friend of Magliabechi, and of many other eminent men of his time, such as Heinlein and Milton. A member of the Accademia della Crusca, he published in 1667 a *Vita de* Pintiari Antichi.

*Monseigneur Niccolo may have been a colleague, and possibly French, as his title seems to indicate.
Lordship's House, when I found that you had sent me as a present a bunch of thrushes. ¹² Really I feel every day more obliged, and also overborne, by your Lordship's kindness, as I know very well I am unworthy of it.

Adriana R. Salzm

Napoleon to His Mother: The First Draft
of a Letter Written from School

Among the manuscripts recently acquired by the Harvard College Library through the gift of W. B. O. Field is one of the earliest known documents in Napoleon's handwriting, written to his mother shortly after his father's death, which occurred in February 1785. As the result of some researches concerning this document, it now seems likely that it is not a letter, but rather the first draft of one. An attempt is here made to show how this conclusion was arrived at.

The manuscript reads as follows:

Ma chère Mère,

C'est aujourd'hui, que le temps a un peu calmé les premiers transports de ma douleur, que je m'empresser de vous témoigner l'amour que m'inspirent les bontés que vous avez eues pour nous, consolez-vous, ma chère mère, les circonstances l'exigent; nous redoublerons de soins et de tendresse pour vous, heureux si nous pouvons par notre obéissance, vous dédommager de l'inestimable perte d'un époux cheri, et nous, d'un père vénéré qui n'a même pas eu la triste joie de mourir près de son épouse et entouré de sa famille. Mais l'Eté suprême ne l'a pas permis, et sa volonté [sic] est immuable. Je termine ma chère mère, ma douleur m'y oblige, en vous priant de calmer la vôtre. mon attachement et ma reconnaissance pour tout [sic] vos bienfaits est proportionnelle dans mon cœur, ma santé est parfaite et je prie Dieu tous les jours qu'il vous gracie d'un [sic] semblable, présentez mes respects à Zia Gertruda Minana Savinca et Minana Fesch votre affectionné,
Napoleone de Buonaparte

In various works dealing with Napoleon's youth, though not in any of the major collections of his correspondence, appears a letter closely resembling the text of the Harvard manuscript. The occasion for the printed letter, the death of Napoleon's father, is the same as that of the manuscript, and the wording is in part identical. Nevertheless, the printed letter cannot be a reproduction of the manuscript, as will be clear from an inspection of its contents.

Paris le 29 Mars 1785.

Ma chère mère,

C'est aujourd'hui, que le temps a un peu calmé les premiers transports de ma douleur, que je m'empresser de vous témoigner la reconnaissance que m'inspirent les bontés que vous avez toujours eues pour nous. Consolez-vous, ma chère mère; les circonstances l'exigent. Nous redoublerons nos soins et notre reconnaissance, et heureux si nous pouvons, par notre obéissance, vous dédommager un peu de l'inestimable perte d'un époux cheri. Je termine, ma chère mère; ma douleur me l'ordonne, en vous priant de
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