The purchases of a seventeenth-century librarian

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New Balet Entituled Howel to Wyue Well by Lewys Evans, of which the only known copy is in the library of the Society of Antiquaries. It may be by the schoolmaster Lewis Evans and, if so, is of particular interest, for it is one of the earliest surviving printed ballads which are truly ballads and written in ballad metre. The scholar who corrected and augmented several of the Purfrood editions of John Withal’s Shorte Dictionary was almost certainly the schoolmaster, and it may have been he who wrote The Abridgement of Logique, of which the only recorded copy, lacking the title, is in the Bodleian (attributed by Colonel Frank Isaac, in unpublished notes, to the press of Henry Denham, ca. 1589).

If one of Evans’s two translations had to be lost, it is something of a pity that the second, with its repulsive subject matter and sensational tone, should have been the one to survive—not that Evans’s version of the first, to judge by his treatment of the second, would have been a great addition to the canon of Tudor translations. In any event, the surviving portion of the ‘fyrste twoo Sateres’ is a very welcome foundation piece to the Harvard collection of English translations and editions of Horace.

WILLIAM A. JACKSON

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 (1634-1714), keeper of books for Casino 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, according to the Strawberry Hill Press, was written to secure financial support for Robert Hill, a self-taught and indigent 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 Pindar, between a Most Celebrated Man of Florence and One, Scarce Ever Heard of, in England (Strawberry-Hill, 1776), pp. 39-40. Spence’s work, one of the early publications of the
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, Magliabechi was also custodian of books for a number of other bibliophiles in Florence, including the Cardinals Leopoldo and Francesco Maria de' Medici and the Canon Lorenzo Panciatichi.

Monsignore Niccolò mi ha mostrato un Indice di Libri che gli vengono di Parigi, tra quali certamente che ne sono molti squisiti, e ben vero, che non solamente, non mi ha voluto concedere, che lo lo copi, ma esibendo mi ha istantemente pregato, a non dire ad alcuno, che egli aspetti Libri Olimpomontani. La ragione che lo muove a questo, è veramente ridicola, poiché non vuole, per quanto mi dice, che se i Libri per disgrazia andassero male, la gente lo burlasse. Io però, o in una maniera, o in una altra, copierò questo Indice, e lo lo mandarò. Se bene i Libri, non credo che possano arrivarre, se non tral qualche Mese.

Avevo già scritto questa Lettera, quando tornando a Casa per sigillarla, portarla a Casa di V S: Ill: m', ho trovato, che da lui mi era stato regalato un manzo di tori, certamente che resto ogni giorno più obbligato, et insieme più confuso, per i favori che da lei ricevo, conoscendo particolarmente, di non avere approsso V S: Ill: m', merito di sorta alcuna.

This letter may be translated as follows:

Monsignor Niccolò has shown me an Index of Books that come from Paris, among which there are certainly some very exquisite ones. And it is true that not only did he not give me the opportunity to copy them, but when showing them he instantly begged me not to tell anyone that he was expecting Olimpomontani. The reason that moves him to this is really ridiculous, because he does not want, for whatever reason, that if these books go astray, the people might laugh at him. I, however, in some way or another, will copy this Index, and send it to him. If he does not have these books, I do not believe that they will arrive, unless one day.

The other day I sent to Your Lordship the Catalogue of new Books from the
latest Frankfort Fair. I could not send
the List of those which Lanos* 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 re-
ceived it, I will send it to Your Lordship
before showing it to anyone else. Sat-
urday I will write to the said Lanos, com-
missioning him on behalf of Your Lord-
ship for the Irenaeus* 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 mar-
gin has been rather too closely trimmed;
besides, the end-papers should be re-
posed, 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 1489.
No place was so favorably situated at the
crossroads of the intellectual and com-
mercial world. The book trade attracted to
Frankfort dealers and publishers from im-
portant German towns and from all other
countries of Europe, though mainly France,
Italy, and the Netherlands. The first cata-
logs of new books for sale at the fair ap-
peared in 1566 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. Irenaeus, the theologian,
Bishop of Lyons, whose works had been
published in Basle in 1526.

* The 1561 French or Italian edition of
the Trattato della Pictura?

* 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 pa-
tient; 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 any-
thing whatsoever, 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:

Monsieur Niccolò* 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
Jesus 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 Halley
and Milton. A member of the Accademia
della Crusca, he published in 1667 a Vita de*
Pintori Antichi.

*Monol Niccolò may have been a col-
league, 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. Really I feel every day more obliged, and also overcome, by your kindness, as I know very well I am unworthy of it.

Adriana R. Salem

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,

Ce n'est qu'aujourd'hui que le temps a un peu calmé les premiers transports de ma douleur, que je n'empresse de vous remerci pour l'amour qui 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, bien-veux si nous pouvons par notre obéissance, vous dédommager de l'inestimable perte d'un époux chéri, et nous, d'un père vénéré qui n'est même pas eu la triste joie de mourir prés de son épouse et entouré de sa famille, mais l'Esprit 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 gratifie d'un [sic] semblable, présentez mes respects à Zia Gertrude Minana Saviera et Minana Fesch de votre affectionné,

Napolonne 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 n'empresse de vous témoigner la reconnaissance que m'inspirant 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 bien-veux si nous pouvons, par notre obéissance, vous dédommager un peu de l'inestimable perte d'un époux chéri. Je termine, ma chère mère, ma douleur me l'ordonne, en vous priant de
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