

7

The Date of Chopin's Arrival in Paris *

Zofia Helman and Hanna Wróblewska-Straus

The precise date of Chopin's arrival in Paris has until now been the subject of not so much investigation, as guesswork. Although the early biographers did consult the composer's sisters when trying to establish the facts, they did not always receive decisive answers. Liszt, while working on his book about Chopin¹, put a number of questions about the composer's life to Ludwika Jędrzejewiczowa in a questionnaire sent with a letter from Eilsen on 14 November 1849²; he did not, however, express an interest in the date of Chopin's arrival in Paris.

The first putative date, but one not supported by any source data, was put forward by Maurycy Karasowski: '[...] Frederic arrived in Paris in early August 1831'³. However, Karasowski must have had some doubts about this as, prior to the publication of his German monograph on Chopin, he asked Izabella Barcińska in one of the numbered queries in a letter: '3. Do you by any chance remember in which month Frederic arrived in Paris – was it before, or after, the fall of Warsaw?'⁴ Only the rough copy of Izabella Barcińska's reply has survived (dated 6 October 1876), and in it she wrote: 'I don't remember exactly, but it seems that he left for Paris after the fall of Warsaw'⁵. Thus in the later editions of Karasowski's book we find the approximate date given

* The Polish version of this article appeared in *Ruch Muzyczny* (2007 No. 6, pp. 35–38), under the title 'Kiedy Chopin naprawdę przyjechał do Paryża?' ['When did Chopin really arrive in Paris?']

as the end of September 1831⁶. This date was also adopted by Ferdynand Hoesick: 'he arrived there on one of the last days of September'⁷.

When calculating this last date of Chopin's arrival in Paris, the biographers might have been taking into account two things: 1) the fact that the news of the entry of Paskiewicz's army into Warsaw (7 September 1831), and the fall of the November uprising, could not have reached Stuttgart in less than a week, and 2) the duration of the journey by stagecoach to Paris. Moreover, by the time Hoesick was writing his book, he was familiar with Chopin's notes from Stuttgart⁸, from an article published by Stanisław Tarnowski⁹. One might expect that the shock of the news of the national calamity and the emotional state of depression, described by Chopin in his Stuttgart notes, must have additionally delayed his plans for further journey. The end of September might thus have been the earliest likely date. This date recurs in later publications about Chopin, but not in all of them.

The confusion surrounding the date of Chopin's arrival in Paris arose precisely on the one hundredth anniversary of that event. A year earlier, the monthly journal *Muzyka* published for the first time a letter from Chopin to Norbert Alfons Kumelski¹⁰, dated '18/9/1831', which at that time was in the collection of Jadwiga Hoesick, the daughter of Ferdynand. A special issue published by *La Revue Musicale* to celebrate the anniversary included an article by Mateusz Gliński¹¹, which reproduced the autograph of the letter to Kumelski, and carried a French translation of the Polish text. Here we find a strange nonsequitur. The French text of the letter gives the correct date 'le 18 novembre 1831' (9=novem), while Gliński reads the date on the letter, '18/9/31', as 18 September 1831. On this basis he goes on to hypothesis that the composer arrived in Paris in the first half of that month. Presumably the editorial office used the correct date, while Gliński either did not notice it, or decided to stand by his interpretation:

If we thus take into account the beginning of the letter, from which we may conclude that Chopin had received a letter from Kumelski and was then replying to it, and if at the same time we consider the state of postal communications in those days; if we also take into account the fact that the letter contains abundant material of Parisian impressions, impossible to acquire otherwise than through taking long walks around the city – then we have to conclude that Chopin settled in Paris quite a few days

before 18 September; therefore he most probably arrived in Paris as early as the first half of September¹².

Spellbound by this seeming discovery, Gliński ignored the fact that only ten days could have elapsed between the capitulation of Warsaw on the evening of 7 September, and the apparent date of 18 September on the letter. It would have been quite impossible that during that period Chopin should learn from the Stuttgart press about the fall of the uprising, compose *Etude in C minor* ('*Revolutionary Etude*') (op. 10 No.12) and *Prelude in D minor* (op. 28 No. 24) referred to by the author on p. 25, make the journey between Stuttgart and Paris, and then spend at least a week in that city, becoming acquainted with the important personages from the world of music and gathering 'abundant material of Parisian impressions'. Neither did the author confront his conclusions (or else he did not check) with the fact that, according to Chopin's note in Karłowicz's publication, on 15 September the composer was still in Stuttgart¹³.

Gliński's dating is all the more surprising in view of the fact that Chopin's address, written on the back of his letter to Kumelski, together with the stamp of the postal services, is reproduced on page 215 of that issue of *Muzyka*. The name of the month, *Nov.[embre]* and the year 1831, when the letter was sent from Paris *poste restante* to Berlin, are clearly legible on the stamp.

In the anniversary issues of *La Revue Musicale* and *Muzyka* already referred to, Eduard Ganche, in spite of being familiar with Kumelski's letter and Gliński's article from *La Revue Musicale*, clearly states that Chopin arrived in Paris 'during the last days of September 1831'¹⁴. Surprisingly, however, the incorrect date, as well as wrong initial 'K' of Kumelski's Christian name, have been repeated without any reservations by a number of authors, such as Henryk Opieński¹⁵, and, writing after the Second World War, Zdzisław Jachimecki¹⁶. In a book by Hedley we also read that, a week after the concert in Munich (28 August 1831), Chopin reached Stuttgart, 'when the news of the fall of Warsaw (8 September) arrived. [...] He left Stuttgart forthwith, and in the middle of September arrived in Paris'¹⁷. Bronisław Sydow, while dating the letter to 18 November 1831¹⁸, states in a footnote that the mistaken reading of the digit '9' in the date of the letter to Kumelski as the ninth

month (September) ‘while that 9 is an abbreviation of *novem*=*novembre*, or November (as Chopin often wrote it)’, is due to Hedley (without giving a source, which might have been oral information)¹⁹. As has been said earlier, this correct date had already appeared in the French translation of the letter to Kumelski in *La Revue Musicale*, and was also visible in the address.

However, Sydow’s explanation did not stop Gliński’s improbable hypothesis appearing again in a book by Mieczysław Tomaszewski, who concluded that Chopin reached Paris as early as 11 September, and only changed this information in the second edition, making a more general claim of Chopin’s arrival in September²⁰.

The results of source research carried out during the last twelve years by Henryk F. Nowaczyk, Zbigniew Skowron and the author[s] of this article allow us not only to verify our current knowledge, but also to add to it, and to put forward a new, fully documented, hypothesis.

Research carried out by Nowaczyk and Skowron pursued a number of directions; these concerned the dates of Chopin’s stay in Munich, Stuttgart and Strassbourg, the addresses where the composer stayed in these cities, his contacts with local musicians, the full programme of a vocal-instrumental concert in Munich in which Chopin took part, and the route which he had to take from Strassbourg to Paris.

Zbigniew Skowron established²¹ that Chopin (together with the naturalist Alfons Norbert Kumelski, whom he met in Vienna) arrived in Munich from Salzburg on 30 July 1831 and, in accordance with the permission given by the police authorities, was allowed to stay there until 2 September of that year. He lodged with Kumelski in the centre of the city, at Briennerstrasse No. 1661 (third floor), which still exists today. They were staying with a court musician, the cellist Carl Schönche. On 28 August at 12 o’clock Chopin gave a concert at the Philharmonic Society at No. 617 Wittelsbacherplatz. He played his *Concerto in E minor* op. 11 and *Fantasia in A major on Polish Airs* op. 13, with the orchestra conducted by Joseph Stuntz, one of the musicians whom he met in Munich. Skowron also located a concert poster, which allowed him to identify the names and the detailed programme of the other concert participants²².

On the other hand, Henryk F. Nowaczyk²³ concentrated on establishing the day on which Chopin learnt in Stuttgart about the fall of the November uprising and about Warsaw falling to the Russian army. Nowaczyk consulted the local press of that time, which published extensive reports of the events in Warsaw. By comparing Chopin's Stuttgart notes with the Sunday edition of *Schwäbischer Merkur* dated 18 September (No. 236), Nowaczyk put forward the hypothesis that Chopin did not find out about the fall of Warsaw until 18 September 1831.

Zbigniew Skowron, in another article, entitled 'Chopin w Stuttgarcie. Nowe fakty i znaki zapytania' ['Chopin in Stuttgart. New facts and question marks']²⁴, reported that the 'first news of the Warsaw being taken [...] appeared in a special supplement to *Schwäbischer Merkur* on Friday 16 September 1831 (No. 236, pp. 1408–1410)'. On the other hand, on Sunday 18 September 1831 the same newspaper published 'a detailed description of the final hours of the fighting in Warsaw', based on the reports in *Berliner Staatszeitung*. A more extensive report on this subject appeared also in *Schwäbischer Merkur* two days later, i.e., on 20 September. Since the police registers were destroyed in 1944, the author could not establish the exact dates of Chopin's stay in Stuttgart, while police records in Strasbourg show no trace at all of Chopin's presence in that city.

Nowaczyk suggests that, in order to establish the possible dates of Chopin's departure from Stuttgart and his arrival in Strasbourg, one should consult the stagecoach timetable for this route. The absence of Chopin's name in the police records of Strasbourg suggests that he did not stay there longer than the stagecoach stop, which would involve a period not exceeding 24 hours at the most. The putative longer stay in Strasbourg, and the possible concert given there by Chopin, have been deduced on the basis of a mention in the composer's letter to Tytus Woyciechowski dated 12 December 1831: 'On being presented to Kalkbrenner [...] I played my *E minor*, which the Rhine Lindpaintners, the Bergs, the Stuntzes, and the whole of Bavaria, could not praise enough'²⁵. As Konrad Mathias Berg lived in Strasbourg, it may have been supposed that he made Chopin's acquaintance there, and heard him playing his *Concerto in E minor*²⁶. However, this remark could also be

interepreted as referring to Berg's presence at Chopin's concert in Munich. However, Chopin must have had enough time to do at least a little sightseeing in Strasbourg, since he wrote to Kumelski about the impression Paris made on him 'after Stuttgart and Strasbourg'²⁷.

In his article 'Dylizanssem przez Marainville do Paryża' ['By stagecoach via Marainville to Paris']²⁸, Henryk F. Nowaczyk undertook an interesting attempt at juxtaposing the route with the duration of Chopin's journey from Strasbourg to Paris. The journey by stagecoach, according to *Manuel du voyageur de Paris à Strasbourg* (Paris 1829) quoted by the author, lasted four days and, depending on the route (passengers could choose between two) it took 71 hours (stagecoach 'Messageries Générales de France') or 69 hours (stagecoach 'Messageries Royales'). Stagecoaches from Strasbourg arrived in Paris at a station in Rue du Buloy (now Bouloi street in the 1st District). Chopin, who did not know the city, might have stayed at Hôtel des Fermes, situated in the same street, in 1831.

Since we do not know the exact dates of the composer's departure from Stuttgart and from Strasbourg, the knowledge of the duration of the journey and the route taken from Strasbourg to Paris would still not be sufficient to establish the final and incontrovertible date of Chopin's arrival in Paris. The solution to this puzzle had to be sought in the police records in Paris²⁹.

We found Chopin's name in Archives nationales — centre historique de Paris, in the police records 'Mouvement des voyageurs, permis de poste 1817–1852', in a supplement *Passeports. Enregistrement du 1^{er} 8^{bre}* (for 1831), on page 123. This is only an abbreviated alphabetical list of people arriving in Paris, in chronological order. In the 'octobre' column, in sixth position, we find the following entry: 'Chopin F^{ic}music[ien] polon[ais] Strasb[ourg] 5'³⁰.

According to a regulation issued by the police Préfecture in Paris regarding foreigners, dated 19 November 1831 (one would expect that this also applied two months earlier), owners of inns and hotels and landlords of private lodgings had to deliver to the police commissioner of their district, every day before midday, 'les passeports des voyageurs français et une note des voyageurs étrangers qui seront arrivés dans leurs auberges, hôtels ou maisons garnis'³¹. In view of this, the date of 5 October 1831 noted in the register

should be recognised as the date of Chopin's arrival in Paris, and not the date he presented himself at the police station. The abbreviated entry thus means: Frédéric Chopin, Polish musician, arrived in Paris from Strasbourg on fifth October 1831.

The above information allows us to establish the approximate date of Chopin's departure from Strasbourg for Paris. According to the description of the route given by Nowaczyk³², the journey lasted 69 or 71 hours. Chopin thus must have left Strasbourg on the morning of 2 October.

One hundred and fifty five years after the publication of the first monograph about Chopin, written by Liszt, it has at last been possible to establish accurately the day and the month when the Polish composer took his first steps on the streets of Paris.

Notes

- 1 F. Liszt, *F. Chopin*, Paris 1852.
- 2 Cf. M. Karłowicz *Niewydane dotychczas pamiątki po Chopinie [Unpublished Mementos of Chopin]*, Warszawa 1904, pp. 351–367. Karłowicz misread the name of the place as Pilsen (Pilzno).
- 3 M. Karasowski, 'Młodość Fryderyka Chopina (rok 1830 i następne)' ['The Youth of Frederic Chopin (1830 and the following years)'], *Biblioteka Warszawska* 1869, vol. 1, p. 405. This date was repeated by Marcei Szulc in *Fryderyk Chopin i jego utwory muzyczne [Frederic Chopin and his Musical Compositions]*, Kraków 1986, p. 77 (First edition Poznań 1873).
- 4 Letter from Dresden dated 27 August 1876; the autograph is held at the Chopin Museum in Warsaw; quoted after: W. Kordaczuk, 'Korespondencja Maurycego Karasowskiego z siostrą Chopina w sprawie wydania biografii kompozytora' ['Correspondence between Maurycy Karasowski and Chopin's sister on the matter of publishing the composer's biography'], *Muzyka* 1971, No. 2, p. 107.
- 5 *Ibidem*, p. 108. Autograph held at Chopin's Museum in Warsaw.
- 6 M. Karasowski, *Friedrich Chopin. Sein Leben, seine Werke und Briefe*, Dresden 1877, vol. 2, p. 13, Dresden 1878, p. 201; also by the same author: *Frederic Chopin. His Life, Letters and Works*, translated from German by Emily Hil, London 1879, vol. 1, p. 218; also *Fryderyk Chopin. Życie – Listy – Dzieła*, Warszawa 1882, vol. 2, p. 5: 'Chopin arrived in Paris towards the end of September 1831, with a passport in which the visa entry read: *passant par Paris à Londres*.'
- 7 F. Hoesick, *Chopin. Życie i twórczość [Chopin. Life and Works]*, vol. 1 (1810–1831), Warszawa 1904, p. 805. The author repeats this date in later editions of this book.
- 8 Quoted by Hoesick on pp. 800–805.
- 9 S. Tarnowski, 'Kilka słów o Chopinie' ['A Few Words about Chopin'], *Przegląd Polski*

- 1870/1871, vol. 4, issue 11, pp. 203–239 — reprinted in *Chopin i Grottgér. Dwa szkice* by the same author, Kraków 1892, pp. 7–48.
- 10 ‘Nieznany list Szopena do K. [Norberta Alfonsa] Kumelskiego’ [‘An Unknown Letter from Chopin to K. Kumelski’], *Muzyka* 1930 No. 4, pp. 215–217. Kumelski’s Christian name could be found in the book by M. Karłowicz (op. cit., p. 380), who quotes this entry in Chopin’s album: ‘To Frederic Chopin from his true friend *Norbert Alfons Kumelski* as a memento, written in Vienna on 26 March 1831’. Attention was drawn to this item by B. Sydow (*Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina*, Warszawa 1955, vol. 1, p. 517).
- 11 M. Gliński, ‘Itinéraire de Varsovie à Paris’, *La Revue Musicale* numéro special, Paris décembre 1931, pp. 40–50. The letter to Kumelski is on pp. 48–50, together with a reproduction of the original after p. 48. The Polish text of the article, entitled ‘Fryderyk Szopen w drodze na Zachód’ [‘Chopin en route to the West’] appeared in a special issue of *Muzyka — Szopen* (1932, Nos 7–9, pp. 21–30).
- 12 ‘Fryderyk Szopen w drodze na Zachód’, as above, p. 27.
- 13 ‘P. Lindpaintner gives the address of Mr Schunke during Chopin’s stay in Stuttgart. (Adr. Stuttgart, Waldhorn No. 21; dat. 15.IX.1831)’. M. Karłowicz, op. cit., p. 301.
- 14 E. Ganche, ‘La vie musicale de Frédéric Chopin à Paris’, *La Revue Musicale* op. cit., pp. 53–67; Polish translation ‘Życie muzyczne Fryderyka Chopina w Paryżu’, *Szopen*, special issue of *Muzyka*, as above, pp. 31–43.
- 15 H. Opieński (ed.) *Listy Fryderyka Chopina [Letters of Frederic Chopin]*, Warszawa 1937, p. 111.
- 16 Z. Jachimecki (ed.), *Fryderyk Chopin. Wybór listów [Frederic Chopin. Selected Letters]* Wrocław 1949, p. 93.
- 17 A. Hedley, *Chopin*, London 1947, pp. 41–42.
- 18 B. E. Sydow, op. cit., pp. 186–188.
- 19 Ibidem, footnote on p. 517.
- 20 M. Tomaszewski, *Chopin. Człowiek – Dzieło – Rezonans*, Poznań 1998, p. 54; ²Kraków 2005, p. 54.
- 21 Z. Skowron, ‘Monachijski pobyt Chopina w świetle nowo odkrytych dokumentów’ [‘Chopin’s stay in Munich in the light of newly discovered documents’], *Ruch Muzyczny* 2004 No. 3, pp. 32–37.
- 22 Ibid. a reproduction of the poster on page 34.
- 23 H. F. Nowaczyk, ‘A ja tu bezczynny... boleję na fortepianie’ [‘And I here, idle, pour my grief over the piano’], *Ruch Muzyczny* 1995 No.4, p. 13.
- 24 Z. Skowron, *Ruch Muzyczny* 2006 No. 20, pp. 32–36.
- 25 B. E. Sydow, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 200.
- 26 Marie-Paule Rambeau, *Chopin. L’enchanteur autoritaire*, Paris 2005, p. 242. The author draws the erroneous conclusion that Chopin must have arrived in Paris about 24 September 1831 (p.276, footnote 85).
- 27 B. E. Sydow, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 187.
- 28 H. F. Nowaczyk, *Ruch Muzyczny* 1999, No. 9, pp. 32–35.
- 29 The authors would like to express their gratitude to the following persons who helped them in their research in Paris: Michel Pazdro (*L’Avant Scène-Opéra*), Joël-Marie Fauquet (Centre National des Recherches Scientifiques), Jean-Claude Yon (Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines), Serge Dupradou (Archives nationales).

- 30 A reproduction of the entry will be included in the second volume of a new, critical, source-based edition of *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina [The Correspondence of Frederic Chopin]* (eds. Zofia Helman, Zbigniew Skowron, Hanna Wróblewska-Straus).
- 31 'passports of French travellers and a note about foreign travellers who arrive in their inns, hotels or apartments'. *Préfecture de Police Ordonnance concernant les étrangers à la ville de Paris. Paris, le 19 novembre 1831*, p. 4. This printed document was passed on to us by Claude Charlot — administrateur civil, chef du Service des Archives du Musée, for which we are very grateful.
- 32 Nowaczyk, op. cit. 1999, pp. 34–35.