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Grand Tourism: Educational Journeys in 18th Century Europe

by Marion Amblard

The Grand Tour was a journey on the European continent undertaken by 17th and 18th-century British aristocrats to perfect their education. This book underlines the importance, within this trip, of a city until now overlooked by scholarship: Turin, a political and cultural crossroad.

About: Paola Bianchi and Karin Wolfe eds., *Turin and the British in the Age of the Grand Tour*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, 487 p.

In the 18th century, young British gentlemen used to undertake an extended tour of continental Europe in order to complete their education. This journey, now known as the Grand Tour,¹ would take the travellers to France and then to Italy where they would traditionally visit Venice, Florence, Naples and Rome, which was the ultimate goal of their tour. Turin, home to the Savoy court since 1563, was the gateway to Italy for travellers who had crossed the Alps and, during the course of the 18th century, the number of Grand Tourists who flocked to the city increased progressively. With its modernity and cosmopolitanism, Turin had much to attract British travellers. Yet compared to Rome and Venice, Turin has been left on the margin of Grand Tour scholarship and, so far, no in depth-study devoted to this city has been published but the book under review aims to redress the balance. In 2011, D. R. Marshall, S. Russell and K. Wolfe edited *Roma Britannica: Art*

¹ During this Tour, they would traditionally visit Belgium, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and Holland. They would spend more time in Italy where, with the help of a scholarly guide, they studied the remains of classical antiquity and the masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance. Thanks to the Grand Tour, the young aristocrats deepened their knowledge in arts and their language skills in French and Italian. This also gave them the opportunity to polish their social skills by frequenting the polite society of the European continent.

Patronage and Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century Rome (British School at Rome), a selection of articles focusing on British Grand Tourists as patrons and art collectors in Rome and, recently, most of the research and literature on the Grand Tour has arisen from exhibitions on artists and art collectors connected with the Grand Tour.²

Edited by Paola Bianchi and Karin Wolfe, two Grand Tour specialists, *Turin and the British in the Age of the Grand Tour* is composed of six sections including a total of twenty-two lavishly illustrated articles dealing with a wide range of subjects including diplomacy, freemasonry, painting, architecture, silver and gardening. This volume is the result of the conference entitled “Torino Britannica: Political and Cultural Crossroads in the Age of the Grand Tour” held at the British School at Rome and the Reggia di Venaria at Turin in June 2013.

Turin, at the Heart of a Complex Dynastic and Diplomatic European Network

The first two sections of the book present the history of the kingdom of Savoy and investigate the dynastic links and diplomatic relations between the Savoy court and Britain from the reign of the early Stuarts³ to 1798. This period corresponded to a turning point in the history of the House of Savoy who had been raised to the ducal status in the 15th century and was granted the long-coveted title of monarch at the beginning of the 18th century. Indeed, when the peace treaty of Utrecht was signed in 1713 to mark the end of the War of the Spanish Succession,⁴ Victor Amadeus II, Duke of Savoy, obtained the title of King of Sicily. In 1718, the Treaty of London, forced Victor Amadeus II to surrender Sicily but, in exchange, he was given the island of Sardinia which permitted him to retain his royal title. As is demonstrated by the articles composing the first section, the Stuarts’ accession to the British throne marked the beginning of improved relations between Britain and the Sabaudian state, characterised by intense diplomatic and cultural exchanges throughout the

² Carole Paul’s *The Borghese Collections and the Display of Art in the Age of the Grand Tour* (Routledge, 2008), and Edgar Peters Bowron’s *Pompeo Batoni Prince of Painters in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 2007) are some of the studies dealing with British Grand Tourists as collectors and patrons which have been published recently. For a general introduction to the Grand Tour see Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad. The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (St Martin’s Press, 1992).

³ The Stuarts were the first kings of the United Kingdom and they reigned in England and Scotland from 1603 to 1714.

⁴ The War of the Spanish Succession took place between 1701 and 1714. The conflict began at the death of the childless Spanish King Charles II. Philip V, grandson of King Louis XIV, was crowned king of Spain but his accession to the throne was contested by the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, who claimed the succession on behalf of his son. When the war broke out, France was supported by Spain, Bavaria, Portugal and Savoy; Britain, Holland and most of the German states aligned against France. Yet the Savoys rapidly switched sides to assist the Habsburgs.

17th and 18th centuries. For British monarchs, the Savoyard state presented a very valuable strategic position in case of conflict with France: with its territory including the Duchy of Aosta, the Principality of Piedmont, the County of Nice and Sardinia from 1718, the House of Savoy controlled the access to a route into France on the west and to Italy on the east. Before the Glorious Revolution (1688-1689), for the Duke of Savoy, a matrimonial alliance with the Stuarts represented the possibility to secure a royal title. In his article, Andrea Pennini focuses more particularly on the matrimonial negotiations undertaken by Duke Charles Emmanuel I for the marriage of one of his daughters with James I's heir⁵. However the Savoys had to wait until the end of the 17th century to enter into dynastic ties with Britain, when Duke Victor Amadeus married Anne-Marie de Bourbon d'Orléans, James II's niece, in 1684. Thus, at the time of the death of Queen Anne⁶, the Duchess of Savoy could have had a claim to the British throne if James III had died without an heir. Nevertheless, as Professor Edward Corp explains, Victor Amadeus did not support his wife's claim because he did not want to alienate George I who had helped him secure his royal title in 1718 and, throughout the 18th century, Britain represented a powerful ally for the new monarchy.

The British Residents at the Savoy Court

According to Christopher Storrs, whose contribution charts the evolution of the British presence in the Savoyard state in the 18th century, there was a small but growing British resident community. It was mainly located in Nice and Turin, where thirty-four diplomats represented the Court of St James between 1691 and 1799, thus showing the strength of the Anglo-Savoyard political relations. In Turin, the majority of young British Grand Tourists enrolled at the Royal Academy as is revealed by the list of British attendees compiled by Paola Bianchi (appendix III). Founded between 1677 and 1678, this institution was a kind of finishing school for wealthy gentlemen; regardless of the students' religious beliefs, the Turin Royal Academy provided them with classes of geometry, languages and geography associated with martial arts and riding lessons. Henry Belling, 8th Baron of Arundel, Richard Barry, 6th Earl of Barrymore, John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, and Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester, were among the most notable British students. The latter even visited Turin twice, in 1713 and in 1715 and, as is demonstrated by Andrew Moore's study, Coke—the students of the Academy in general—gained more than military and social etiquette skills as it provided him with a cultural and artistic environment which would inspire him when he built his neo-Palladian country seat, Holkham Hall.

⁵ James I succeeded to the English throne on the death of his cousin Queen Elizabeth I of England, who died childless in 1603. King James I, who belonged to the Stuart dynasty, had been reigning in Scotland as King James VI since 1567. He was the first monarch to combine the two thrones of England and Scotland.

⁶ Daughter of King James II, Queen Anne of England and Scotland was the last monarch of the Stuart dynasty. At her death in 1714, she was succeeded by King George I, first monarch of the House of Hanover.

The Cultural Exchanges Between Britain and Turin

The court of Turin, which had been praised by numerous British diplomats and travellers in the 17th century for its magnificence and excellence in the decorative arts, was even more admired for its architectural and artistic renewal in the 18th century. To celebrate his newly gained status of king, Victor Amadeus II embarked on an ambitious architectural programme in Turin led by the Sicilian architect Filippo Juvarra, whom he appointed as royal architect. Juvarra, who visited London in 1719, was a central figure of Turin's artistic life. Ruggero's study of Juvarra's sketchbook for Lord Burlington is of particular interest as it highlights some of the cultural and artistic exchanges between Britain and Turin. Including two other chapters on Juvarra, sections three to five focus on different aspects of Anglo-Torinese patronage, collections and architectural history; they also investigate the mutual exchanges concerning the latest gardening trends and the aesthetic of Chinoiserie.

The four chapters composing the last section of the book, dealing with what the editors call "the grand tour in reverse", are particularly welcome both for their originality and their emphasis on the way Torinese artists transposed their activities in Britain. The section begins with a study by Alastair Laing dedicated to the Plura family of sculptors who were among the first Piedmontese artists to settle in Britain. Carlo Giuseppe Plura migrated to Yorkshire at the beginning of the 18th century and was succeeded by two other generations of talented sculptors. Several artists and writers followed the Pluras' example and travelled to Britain where they hoped to find fame and financial success. Annarita Colturato contributes a chapter about Piedmontese musicians and composers working in London, including Felice Giardini, Gaetano Pugnagni and Giovanni Battista Viotti. The volume concludes with two chapters on the literary figures, Giuseppe Baretti and Vittorio Alfieri, two great admirers of Britain and British culture who sojourned in London during the second half of the 18th century.

Grand Tour Studies

Turin and the British in the Age of the Grand Tour is the first volume entirely dedicated to the connections between Britain and Turin during the long 18th century. However, because it covers such a broad scope, the book does not always provide the reader with an in-depth study of the subjects under investigation. What is more, the titles of the sections may seem repetitious and confusing to the reader. Yet, despite these points of discussion, this selection of articles by British, American, Italian and German scholars specialised in different fields, is

a remarkable contribution to Grand Tour studies as it offers rare insights into previously overlooked aspects of relationships between Britain and Turin in the period 1600-1800. The authors convincingly demonstrate the cosmopolitanism, modernity and intensity of the political and cultural exchanges between Britain and the Sabaudian capital. Together, their contributions help present Turin as a popular stopping-point for British Grand Tourists even if it was never as attractive as Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples. This essay collection reveals that there is still a lot to discover on the Grand Tour and will hopefully trigger further research on British relations with Turin. With its forty-nine page bibliography and its groundbreaking articles, *Turin and the British in the Age of the Grand Tour* will undoubtedly be an invaluable source of information for scholars.

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