

Fragments from the Grand Tour

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Notes and Documents

Fragments from the Grand Tour

by Jeremy Black

Tourism was one of the principal features of the relationship between the British elite and the Continent in the eighteenth century¹ and the century witnessed a substantial increase in the number of British men and women traveling abroad for pleasure. The principal motives advanced for foreign travel were that it equipped the traveler socially and provided him with useful knowledge and attainments. It was partly for these reasons that a surprising number of individuals spent part of their formal education abroad. There were social benefits for those who returned having been polished by Continental society, and snobbery helped to ensure that a returned tourist appeared part of a charmed, exotic world.

The accounts left by tourists are very disparate. Despite contemporary criticisms that they stayed together excessively and were insufficiently perceptive, there is an astonishing variety in the written remains that such travelers left behind. Far from receiving the same images, storing the same memories, or sharing the same stock of historical commonplaces, many tourists left fresh and informed accounts of what interested them, whether agricultural methods or opera, court society or religious ceremonies. These accounts were often prefaced or concluded by observations on how the situation in Britain was better than any to be found abroad, but such remarks do not vitiate the interesting material that sometimes accompanied them.

Hitherto most of the work on the Grand Tour has been based on printed sources, namely the accounts that tourists such as Joseph Addison, John Andrews, Williams Beckford, William Coxe, Elizabeth Craven, John Moore, Samuel Pratt, Tobias Smollett, Philip Thicknesse, and Arthur

Young published in their lifetimes. These accounts are valuable but they should be approached as travel literature rather than as tourist accounts since there are clear signs of artifice in most of them. Furthermore, the majority of the writers were atypical tourists, atypical not only in that they published accounts but also in that they were not members of the social elite.²

Establishing the attitudes and experience of the latter is not easy. Unpublished material survives but it generally poses serious problems, and it is easy to see why it has been generally ignored. Much of this material has been poorly, if at all, catalogued. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that much tourist correspondence is scattered throughout general political or family correspondence. Much material is incomplete, much anonymous, and some illegible; and much of what survives constitutes isolated pieces of information concerning tourists about whom little else is known.

The Huntington Library contains much material relating to the Grand Tour, but it is generally scattered through various series of correspondence. This note directs attention to a possible topic of research and archival classification, and, as a first step, prints two letters which indicate the strength and value of the Huntington collections in this area. The first is a letter of 1715. It was written from Paris by Lord Dalrymple on 13 February 1715 and sent to the third Earl of Loudon. It can be found in the papers of the latter.³ Apart from the inherent interest of the letter, it is significant that a very recent essay on Regency France seen by British travelers,⁴ which sought to be comprehensive, made no reference to this letter, a serious gap as there are surprisingly few accounts for the period. Dalrymple's letter is as follows.

My Dear Lord

I have not been long enough here, to know, whither London, or Paris, is the most diverting town, the people here are more gay, the Ladies less handsome, and much more painted, love Galantery, more than pleasure, and Cocquetrey more than solid Love, this place, is good for all those, that have more vanity, than real lust, the air here is perfectly good the houses much more noble within than those of London tho not so clien[.] every thing here is very dear and I can assure you two thousand pound here will not go so far as one at London which you know will not be agreeable to me tho I am resolved to live as well as I can in order to which I have bought Mr. Prior coach and horses[.] it was good for me he had but four horses[.] I am to be a great Beaux upon tuesday next. that day is appointed for the audience of the Ambassador Du Roy de

Perse and all that go to court that day are ordered to be mighty fine[.] your humble servant is to have a velvet coat imbrouderd and a very rich west a white feather in my hat and a sword knot[.] I did not believe that ever I should have been so mad tho I always knew I was inclined to be a beaux and I do really believe were I to stay here a year or two I should break[.] I have been introduced to the King and Court[.] the King is a vigorous old man, and in his heart a Baux[.] Warsiles is the noblest house in the world and the beauty of the Parter and Parck and water workes is inexpressable[.] this is the most diverting time to be at Paris because of the foier saint Germain[.] all the ladies go their every night at six a clock and stay till ten[.] all that time they strol about from the fair to the play and rop dancing and the rest of the things to be seen there and I am sure if the people there have a mind to be happy there is no difficulty to loss themselves[.] it is impossible to take more freedome, than that place allowes of, and men and women strol about without ceremony and every body are taken up with their own projects so much that they doe not mind what other people are doing[.] I am sure were shuch opportunitys at London there would be many happy Lovers[.] my brother^s being here makes it easy for me to get into good Company tho I am not as yet in love with any body nor are the Ladies handsome[.] I believe I shall only make love as I use to do to some Chamber maid. I have already had some adventures of that kind[.] I shall let you know from time to time what I am doing[.] pray yet let me heare from you[.] I hope you are pleased with my house[.] I wish it were better[.] give my most humble service to My Lord President and the Advocate[.] be sure to drink a bottle now and then[.] I am mightly improven as to that matter[.] I am My Dear Lord your faithful humble servant

February 13 1715

Paris

The second letter comes from a collection that is very rich in material for the Grand Tour, the Montagu collection. Elizabeth Montagu, "the Queen of the Bluestockings," was an avid correspondent and her letters reflect the ease and popularity of travel after the Seven Years' War ended in 1763. The letter in question was written by George, Lord Lyttelton to Mrs. Montagu and though undated and incomplete it can be dated to 1763. Lyttelton had himself been on the Grand Tour in 1728-1730 and he proceeded to offer Mrs. Montagu advice on the route she should follow. The surviving portion of the letter starts in mid-sentence, as follows:

. . . Tivoli, Frascati etc. go from thence through Umbria, and along the beautifull coast of the Adriatick to Venice, see the Doge espouse the Gulph at the Feast of the Ascension, and then follow my Route through the southern parts of Germany and the Swiss Cantons to Geneva; from whence you may go to Paris, which in your journey to Italy you must only see *en passant*. If you can't be so long from your business or pleasure in England, you must give up the thoughts of seeing Rome; for without great danger to your life, it can't be visited in hot weather, nor can you pass the Alps in winter or early in the spring. But you may set out next year about the middle of May, stay at Paris a fortnight, and pass Mount Cenis about the middle of June, and then go by Genoa and Lucca to Florence, where I hope to join you before the end of July. From thence, after I have staid about a week in that City and its charming *Environs*, we will go together through Parma and Piacenza to Milan, and make excursions from thence as far as to Vicenza, till about the last week in August, at which time my son and I must take our leaves of you, if you propose seeing Rome; and your best course will be, to stay in the Milanese all the month of September, return to Florence in October, and stay there, or at Sienna, till the cold of November makes it safe for you to go to Rome. But if you find it not convenient to pass the Winter out of England, then we will go all together from Vicenza to Venice, from thence to Munich and so to Ausbourg, omitting the tour of Passau, Vienna, Prague, and Nuremberg, or any parts of the Swiss Cantons which may perhaps not be easily accessible to a Lady. By this Plan the great Heats of summer and autumn will be past in the coolest parts of Italy, and the whole Tour will be made with as little Inconvenience as a Lady can suffer in so long a journey. But if this Scheme should fail you must promise to make me amends by coming with me to Hagley⁶ about the middle of next May, and staying there till about the tenth of June, when I shall turn my face towards France. Or, if I am hindered by any accident from going abroad to pass some part of the Autumn with me at Hagley, I say of the Autumn, because I think it the finest season for this Place. . . .

A letter is just come to me from my son,⁷ dated the 14th of this Month, which says he had been three days at Paris, had seen Colonel Drumgold, the Duke of Nivernois, and some *very pretty Frenchwomen*, but intended to set out the next morning for Lyons, which he hoped to reach in three days. NB. Lyons is three hundred miles from Paris; so he means to travel at the rate of a hundred miles a day. I love his ardour, but it frights me: he will get a fever or break his neck. If no ill accident has befall'n him from the

impetuosity of his course, he has by this time past Mount Cenis, and in very fine Weather. . . .

If your heart is set upon seeing Rome without passing a Winter out of England it will be possible to do it thus, Be at Calais the first of March, go as fast as you can from thence to Nice, embark there for Genoa, at which place you may arrive by the beginning of April, in part of which Month, and in May, you may see Rome and Naples tolerably well. But the worst difficulty is to secure a good passage from Nice to Genoa at that time of the year. To trust yourself in a Felucca I think is too dangerous, and an English or French Ship may not easily be found. I therefore revert to my former Plan, which is safe, easy, and delightfull. Look into the Maps of Italy and Germany, and let your Imagination travel there over the ground I have markt.⁸

After some general remarks on mutual acquaintances and compliments, here the surviving part of the letter ends.

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NOTES

1. The most recent guide is Jeremy Black, *The British and the Grand Tour* (London, 1985).
2. Black, "Tourism and Cultural Challenge, Travel Literature and Xenophobia: The Changing Scene in the Eighteenth Century," in J. McVeagh, ed., *All Before Them: English Literature and the Wider World 1660-1780* (London, 1990), 185-202.
3. Dalrymple to Loudon, 143 February 1715, HL LO 11333.
4. J. Lough, "Regency France seen by British travellers," in G. Barber, ed., *Enlightenment Essays in Memory of Robert Shackleton* (Oxford, 1988), 145-161.
5. John Dalrymple, Earl of Stair, British envoy in Paris, 1715-1720. He had arrived in January.
6. Lyttelton's seat.
7. The Hon. Thomas Lyttelton, who went on the Grand Tour to France and Italy in 1763-1765 with John and George Damer.
8. Lord Lyttelton to Mrs. Montagu [1763], HL MO 1316.