

## William Berczy in Italy and Switzerland, 1780-1787

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### Résumé de l'article

William Berczy avait 50 ans lorsqu'il arriva au Canada. Sa vie antérieure de même que sa formation et sa carrière artistiques en Europe sont demeurées pour nous presque totalement inconnues. Grâce au don en 1977 d'un livre relié de lettres manuscrites, écrites pour la plupart par Berczy, au Kunsthistorische Institut de Florence, nous pouvons maintenant reconstruire une période importante de la vie de cet artiste. Les lettres sont adressées à une certaine Margaritha Grutier de Berne, en Suisse, où semble-t-il Berczy demeura quelque temps avant d'aller en Italie. Il arriva à Florence à la fin de 1780 et se mit sérieusement, pour la première fois de sa vie semble-t-il, à l'étude de la peinture, allant à la Galerie pour faire des copies, entre autres des autoportraits de Rubens, van Dyck et Mengs. Considérant que l'emploi de la gouache restreignait ses projets et ses ambitions, il se mit à peindre à l'huile. À part des études, il s'appliqua à exécuter différentes commandes. Son patron le plus illustre fut le grand-duc Pierre-Léopold. Il peignit à son intention un portrait de famille présentant le grand-duc, la grande-duchesse et leurs dix enfants vivants, ainsi que des miniatures de quelques membres de cette famille. L'artiste demeurait durant ce temps en rapport avec sa clientèle bernoise, pour laquelle il remplissait différentes commandes. Le premier séjour de Berczy à Florence prit fin en août 1782 et on le retrouve les neuf mois suivants à Berne, où son talent semble avoir été beaucoup sollicité. À partir de juillet 1783, il est en Italie, à Florence et à Naples. Il peint à Naples plusieurs œuvres pour la famille royale, puis retourne en Suisse, cette fois pour y épouser Charlotte Allamand. Le couple s'installe d'abord à Genève, où Berczy y peint une miniature de la jeune princesse de Gloucester, puis déménage à Berne. Mais leur situation se détériore et Berczy ne trouve plus suffisamment de commandes pour subsister. Il retourne avec sa femme à Florence au début de 1787. Les lettres de Berczy contiennent des informations qui ont permis à l'auteur d'identifier cinq miniatures à la gouache et un portrait à l'huile d'un groupe de trois enfants. Ces six tableaux représentent des membres de la famille de Murait : la mère, ses trois enfants et une parente. Le décor architectural du portrait de groupe montre un intérieur caractéristique des maisons aristocratiques de Berne. Mais les deux grosses colonnes (élément étranger au contexte bernois) et la posture des deux garçons indiquent que Berczy s'est largement inspiré du portrait que Rubens fit de ses fils Albert et Nicolas.

## *William Berczy in Italy and Switzerland, 1780-1787*

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*Ottawa*

When the painter William Berczy came to Canada in 1794, he was already fifty years of age. Little has come down to us about his training and career as an artist. Except for a registration of 7 July, 1762 in the records of the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna, his immatriculation in 1766 at the University of Jena, and his participation in 1790 in the exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts in London,<sup>1</sup> little precise biographical information was hitherto available. As John Andre has written, 'although there are some fragments from Europe from 1771-1780, nothing remains from the period 1781-1791, a lamentable loss because of the importance of this decade in Berczy's life.'<sup>2</sup>

These crucial years for Berczy as a painter can now be examined, owing to the discovery of a new source. In 1977, a bound volume of manuscript letters owned by a private family was given to the Kunsthistorische Institut in Florence. It contains an extensive collection of letters written mostly by Berczy himself, but also includes letters by Charlotte Allamand, his fiancée and later wife. Much of this correspondence was written in Florence and Naples in the years 1780-87; a few letters were written from other Italian or from Swiss towns. They are all written in French and addressed to a Mlle Margaritha Gruner of Berne, Switzerland.<sup>3</sup>

Mlle Gruner belonged to an old Bernese family.<sup>4</sup> Her grandfather was the well-known minister, Johann Rudolf Gruner (1680-1761), who was also the author of a detailed genealogy of that family.<sup>5</sup> Her father, Johann Emanuel Gruner (1711-1770), had been a painter, but his income from this occupation was so small that he opened a little millinery shop, selling 'allerhand Weiberzierden' with his wife Maria Margaretha, née Wyss.<sup>5bis</sup>

The family of Johann Emanuel Gruner owned a house in the Kessleigasse. Mlle Gruner inherited this house and lived in it until 1784, continuing to conduct the family business. Then,

ABBREVIATIONS. Berczy = Florence, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz. *Lettres de Guillaume Berczy*. B.B. = Berne, Burgerbibliothek. STAB. = Berne, Staatsarchiv. HHST. = Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv. Rodt = B.B., Bernhard von Rodt, *Genealogien burgerlicher Geschlechter der Stadt Bern*, MS. (Berne, 1950), VI. Thieme/Becker = U. Thieme and F. Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler* (Leipzig: Verlag von F.A. Sceman, 1908-1950), 37 vols. N.B. As Berne was bilingual, proper names appear in either their French or German forms.

- 1 Vienna, Akademie der bildenden Künste, Archiv, *Aufnahms-Protocoll für die academischen Schüler vom Jänner 1738 bis Juli 1785*; Jena, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, *Matrikelbuch 1766*, 9. Oktober; F.S.A. Algeron Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their Work from its Foundation in 1769 to 1904* (London: Henry Graves and Co., 1905), I, 184.
- 2 John Andre, *William Berczy, Co-Founder of Toronto* (Toronto: A Canada Centennial Project of the Borough of York, 1967), 103.
- 3 The collection of Berczy letters in the Kunsthistorische Institut in Florence consists of 712 densely written pages. Pages 1-158 present a mixture of letters from Charlotte Allamand and Berczy, before and after their marriage in 1785, to Mlle Gruner. These date mostly from the year 1785-86; two letters are from 1787. Earlier letters which Berczy had written during his stay in Italy begin on page 159, and this sequence ends with the return to Switzerland in 1785. A few letters (not bound together with the volume) contain excerpts from Charlotte's and Berczy's letters to Mlle Gruner copied out by her, a copy of a letter from Mlle Gruner to Charlotte from Orbe in 1814, a few extracts from documents in connexion with an inheritance of Charlotte in Switzerland, a letter Charlotte wrote from Montreal to Mlle Gruner in the year 1815, two letters from William Berczy, Jr., to Mlle Gruner in the year 1817 and 1820, and a notice by Col. Emile concerning the history of the manuscript of about 1895.
- 4 *Historisch Biographisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (Neuenburg: Administration des Historisch Biographischen Lexikons der Schweiz, 1926), III, 782.
- 5 B.B., MSS. Hist. Helv. VIII, 35; Johann Rudolf Gruner, *Geschlechts Stammbuch der Herren Gruner*, 1745.
- 5<sup>bis</sup> *Ibid.*, 234; B.B., MSS. Hist. Helv. VIII, 16; Johann Rudolf Gruner, *Genealogie Bernischer Geschlechter*, Nachträge 6, 436.

presumably, financial and health problems induced her to sell it and to leave Berne.<sup>6</sup> She then became 'dame de compagnie' of Mlle Henriette Crinsoz de Cottens, who married in 1789 the well-known botanist Emile Davall. Mlle Gruner moved with the young couple to Orbe where she spent the rest of her life with them. After her death her papers passed into the possession of the Davall family, which later on lived in Vevey. In 1894, the widow of Albert Davall sold the letters to the antiquarian Eggimann in Geneva, but Albert's brother, Col. Emile Davall, bought them back in about 1895; they remained in the hands of the descendents of the Davall family until the last owner, Prof. Dr. Werner Hager, presented them in 1977 to the Kunsthistorische Institut in Florence.<sup>7</sup>

William Berczy's series of letters to Mlle Gruner from his sojourn in Italy begin with an undated note from the Oberried, near Berne, which was

presumably written at the end of August, 1780.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the correspondence never suggests a clear reason why Berczy came to Berne; nor do they indicate how long he stayed there before his trip to Italy. A letter from 31 June (*sic*) 1777, and a document, dated 9 January 1779, in which he renounced his claim to his father's estate in favour of his mother and sisters, show him still in Karlstadt (Carlovac), in Croatia.<sup>9</sup> Therefore it is to be assumed that he came to Berne during the year 1779, or at the latest, in 1780. If he did not come for personal or political reasons, he could, as a miniature painter, have been attracted by the prosperity Berne enjoyed at this time. In any case, he was so pleased with the people and the way of life he found in Switzerland, that for a long time he played with the idea of settling there.<sup>10</sup>

Despite some imperfections, the *Respublica Bernensis* (1715-1798) was judged very positively by foreign visitors and in retrospect this period is often considered as Berne's 'Golden Age.'<sup>11</sup> Although the government of the patricians led to a loss of the political power and a consequent passivity on the part of the Burgers, it cannot be denied that it created political stability and financial wealth. The idea of Enlightenment had spread to Berne. Men like Albrecht von Haller and Karl Victor von Bonstetten were active there, while the social life became more cosmopolitan and began to imitate the refined manners of the courtly Europe. This led to a flourishing of the arts on a scale previously unknown. Of course, the town was not to be compared with the long-established centres of the arts, but in the second half of the 18th century Berne seems to have been *the* town in Switzerland in which painting, especially portrait painting, was cultivated and widely supported. The painter Johann Rudolf Studer had, for example, advised his colleague Emanuel Handmann to settle in Berne, calling it the only place in Switzerland where a skilful painter could find patrons and employment.<sup>12</sup>

Handmann came to Berne in the forties, as did others. Johann Ludwig Aberli had come in 1741. Adrian Zingg worked in Berne from 1757 until 1766, when he left to become head of the Dresden Academy. With the arrival of Balthasar Dunker, in 1773, Siegmund Freudenberger and Heinrich Rieter, in 1777, a happy and fruitful collaboration began which found expression in their many works. They created a small academy which became the central meeting point of the local artists and connoisseurs.<sup>13</sup> It seems that Berczy had little or no contact with this circle; his letters show only a loose business connexion with

6 STAB., BXIII 598, *Populations-Tabelle 1764*: Pfisteren Viertel, Kessler und Kilchgasse, Schattenseiten Nr. 102 (today Münsterweg 39); STAB., *Feuerschauer-Rödel 1781-1784 inclus.* Tom V, BII 615: Kesslergass, Schattenseiten hinab Hausnr. 107 (today Münsterweg 39); STAB., *Kontrakten-Manual Bern*: 1780, Vol. 88, p. 64ff; *ibid.*, 1783, Vol. 202, p. 7f; Berczy, 693f.

7 I am indebted for this information to Prof. Dr. Werner Hager, whose mother was a member of the Davall family. See *supra*, n. 3.

8 Berczy, 157. Berczy was at this time a guest at the house of the well-known patron of the arts Goutlieb Fischer von Mutach (1736-1797). He, Bernhard Ludwig von Murali (cf. n. 90), and a certain Manuel, whose identity has not been established, were, as the letters reveal, the artist's best customers during this period. Each bought several works, either of Berczy's invention or copies painted by him. Karl Ludwig Stetler (1741-1798), who himself painted miniatures, seems also to have been a good customer.

9 HHSr., Reichshofrat, Verlassenschaftsakt, Faszikel 132 Nr. 2 (fol. 9) and Ziffer 6 (fol. 72).

10 Berczy, 227, 282, 314, 409, 412.

11 Peter Meyer, ed., *Illustrierte Berner Enzyklopädie, Berner Deine Geschichte* (Wabern/Berne: Bütler Verlag, 1981), 141; Hedwig Waeber, *Die Schweiz des 18. Jahrhunderts in Urteilen ausländischer Reisender. Das staatliche Leben* (Diss. phil., Bern, 1907), 8 ff; Hans Bloesch, 'Die Blütezeit der bernischen Aristokratie,' *Berner Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Heimatkunde* (1953), 104; *Goethes Briefe an Charlotte von Stein*, ed. Jonas Fränkel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1960) I, 157.

12 Wolfgang Friedrich von Mülinen, 'Von ältern bernischen Porträts und Porträtisten. Ein Versuch von W. F. v. Mülinen,' *Neues Berner Taschenbuch für das Jahr 1916*, XXI (Berne: 1915), 42, 48 f; Edward von Rodt, *Berne im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Berne: Verlag Schmid & Franke, 1901), 108.

13 F.C. Lonchamp, J.-L. Aberli (1723-1786), *son temps, sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris/Lausanne: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1927), 49 f.; Mülinen, 76 f.

the sculptor Valentin Sonnenschein<sup>14</sup> and the very mirror painters Jacob Samuel Maurer<sup>15</sup> and Friedrich Rehfeld.<sup>16</sup>

As he wrote to Mlle Gruner upon hearing the news of his death, Berczy had not known Handmann personally. But the Swiss painter seems to have seen a painting by Berczy. It was, according to him, a copy in oil he had made of the 'most famous Flemish picture' (otherwise not identified) in the Grand-ducal Gallery in Florence. Handmann had criticized 'le dessein' of the picture, but Berczy felt untouched by this criticism as the work was merely a copy and he had had to follow the original. After all, he remarked, he was especially good at *dessein* and had been praised for it in Florence.<sup>17</sup>

Berczy had contacted the engraver Dunker from Italy through Mlle Gruner's nephew in 1781, but in the letter there is no sign that the two collaborated, nor can anything be traced in the catalogue of Dunker's works.<sup>18</sup>

'J'ai commencé une nouvelle Carrière, & ma vie passée doit être effacée de ma mémoire autans que possible. il ne m'en doit rester tout au plus qu'autant de souvenir pour régler mes pas dans l'avenir, et pour éviter des fautes qui m'ont servi d'écueils dangereux dans le passé' wrote Berczy on 3 September 1780 when, at the age of 36, he began his Italian journey.<sup>19</sup> This confession, his supposed adventures in Poland<sup>20</sup> and his failure to obtain a military commission<sup>21</sup> all indicate that he had previously been uninterested in becoming a painter and had considered painting as an 'art enchanteur sans être artiste.'<sup>22</sup> Even in Canada – to which he first came as the leader of a group of settlers, not as a painter – he always tried to present himself as a gentleman and 'homme de lettre.'<sup>23</sup>

Having arrived in Florence in 1780, Berczy seems for the first time in his life to have devoted himself wholly to painting. He now strove to improve his art with great zeal and earnestness. He rose early, and by six o'clock he was on his way to the Gallery to copy,<sup>24</sup> among others, paintings of the Flemish masters and the self-portraits by Rubens, Van Dyck,<sup>25</sup> and Mengs. The copies of the Rubens and Van Dyck portraits in gouache were sent to Berne so that they could be sold. He would not part with the copy of Mengs' portrait, for he greatly admired Mengs, considering him the greatest painter of the century and his ideal of the well-educated man.<sup>26</sup>

His serious, uninterrupted studies and the cultural atmosphere of the town exercised a very

positive and stimulating influence on Berczy's work. He became especially aware of this on his return to Florence in 1783, after a stay of several months in Berne. First, there was the presence of great art or, as he explained to Mlle Gruner, the state of being continually surrounded by outstanding works of art. Also, not being so busy with commissions, he could devote more time to study. In consequence, this led him to a more detailed analysis of artistic theory and problems. At least, he wrote, he had a lively contact with the local artists. This communication and exchange of thoughts was always useful, even if, as he admitted, they did not equal the artistic achievement of the preceding generations. In comparison to the artists in Berne, the Florentines still understood theory and 'la marche raisonnée de l'art.'<sup>27</sup>

Although Berczy wrote that he led a very quiet life and worked hard all the time, he soon made the acquaintance of the Court Physician, Freiherr Matthäus von Störck, which with time developed

14 Berczy, 411, 469, 500, 560, 561; Carl Brun, *Schweizerisches Künstler-Lexikon* (Frauenfeld: Verlag von Huber & Co, 1905), III.

15 He called him indifferently Maurer or Murer. Berczy, 244, 283, 362, 367, 406, 419, 442, 528, 539, 561, 563, 577; Brun, II.

16 Berczy, 128, 577, 608, 679, 689; Brun, II.

17 Berczy, 383, 317. It is not easy to see what exactly Berczy meant by 'dessein,' as the word had even in his time various meanings. See Ludwig Schudt, *Italienreisen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Vienna/Munich: Schroll-Verlag, 1959), 332-389, passim.

18 Berczy, 293; Raoul Nicolas, *Balthasar-Antoine Dunker. Ouvrage orné de 24 illustrations hors-texte en héliogravure et suivi du catalogue de l'œuvre gravé de B. A. Dunker* (Geneve: Ciana, 1924).

19 Berczy, 159.

20 Andre, 48; Université de Montréal, Services des Archives, Collection Baby, p. 58, *William Berczy Papers*, Series S No 14, Box 99. Berczy wrote in Canada a series of fictional letters, presumably to be published as a novel, in which the hero goes through a series of adventures in Poland. These may have had some basis in Berczy's own experience since he seems to have been little given to fantasy. (Berczy material in Montréal had not been catalogued at the time I consulted it, so the box number can not be regarded as definite.)

21 HHSr., Reichshofrat, Verlassenschaftsakten, Faszikel 132 Nr. 2 (fol. 10).

22 *Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec pour 1940-1941* (Québec: R. Paradis, 1941), 23.

23 *Rapport de l'Archiviste*, 24. He was very successful in keeping up this image. Even in his death notice in the *Gazette de Québec* of 11 May, 1813, he is not mentioned as painter but as 'inhabitant ... highly respected for his literary acquirement.'

24 Berczy, 205, 241, 168, 317, 619 (it is not clear whether this copy was made by Berczy himself).

25 Berczy, 282, 285.

26 Berczy, 291.

27 Berczy, 524, 525.

into a friendly relationship. Very likely the little-known painter received the commission to paint a portrait of the Grand-ducal Family through the good offices of Baron von Störck and his wife, who was governess to the archduchesses.<sup>28</sup> This was ordered in gouache and was intended as a gift for King Charles IV of Spain,<sup>29</sup> father of the Grand Duchess. But the painting somehow remained in Florence and in the last few years has hung in the Palazzo Pitti. The family portrait also has an impressive architectural setting, for it was during work on this picture that Berczy became conscious how important it was for a 'peintre compositeur' to master architecture and its painterly representation if one were to avoid dependence upon others. Having learned in his youth the rudiments of this art, he immediately plunged into the study of Vitruvius, Palladio, and Vignola.<sup>30</sup>

He also began to be interested in oil painting. Only a few months after his arrival in Florence, he told Mlle Gruner that he had *begun* to paint in oil and that the first attempts were very encouraging.<sup>31</sup> It seems that Berczy had begun this exercise only with the intention of improving his ability in miniatures. But the more he advanced in his studies, the more he became aware of the limitations imposed by the lack of mastery of painting in oils, and soon decided to abandon miniature painting completely. Miniature painting, particularly in gouache, was no longer sufficient for his growing demands.<sup>32</sup>

First, he declared, one could not become a 'real celebrity' with miniatures, also, gouache technique was unfit for great compositions (history painting, for example); finally, it was opposed to an organised workshop such as those of Rubens and Raphael. Had he turned to oil painting, he could have the paintings begun by assistants according to his sketches. Only at the very end would he complete the paintings by his corrections and finishing touches. Portrait painting, which sometimes led to trouble with

clients, he would do only now and then 'as a favour,' he told Mlle Gruner. He was so determined to attain this mastery that he pursued his studies day and night. Soon he felt strong enough in the new technique to paint a self-portrait in oil which he decided to present to the Grand-ducal Gallery.<sup>33</sup> In the same technique he did a painting with several figures for a needy colleague at the Academy.<sup>34</sup>

But this was not enough. Berczy projected more and more extensive plans for the future. Like Aberli and Freudenberger in Berne, he considered producing coloured engravings. He would make the design as well as the engraving, but the illumination would be left to others.<sup>35</sup> He was interested in knowing the price of Aberli's *Costume des la suisse ... gravé et illuminés* (sic) and asked Mlle Gruner to send him some prints as examples.<sup>36</sup>

Aberli's works arrived in Florence in June 1781,<sup>37</sup> as Berczy was already busy in promoting engravings made from his designs. He planned a series of four sets of engravings, with each to contain four sheets. The subject was 'Costumes des paisans d'alentour de Florence,' wherein two to four figures posed in an open landscape with a distant city view.<sup>38</sup> Two coloured drawings with three and five figures respectively which belong today to the National Gallery of Canada could well be from this period and were very likely drawn for this series (Figs. 1-2). Still, as *none* of the engravings from this series has come to light, it may well be that the project, as so many others of its type, never came to fruition. In other respects, too, it seems that Berczy was not very lucky in his attempts to have his work replicated. A self-portrait in gouache that he had given to be engraved, failed to satisfy him despite repeated attempts on the part of the engraver.<sup>39</sup>

As for the Grand-ducal family portrait, Berczy wanted it done by the celebrated Bartolozzi in London. After having heard the conditions (a high price and a long waiting period), he changed his mind and, upon Mlle Gruner's advice, contacted Dunker in Berne. If they could come to terms, he decided, Dunker would get the commission for the family portrait and also a half-portrait as well (without hands) of the Archduke Franz. The portrait of the Grand Duchess, however, was to be done by an engraver resident in Florence.<sup>40</sup> Again, no proof has yet been found that any of these projects were realized.

28 Berczy, 213, 268, 315, 353; 315-316, 412-414.

29 Berczy, 258.

30 Berczy, 289.

31 Berczy, 261, 282.

32 Berczy, 318, 406, 525, 526.

33 Berczy, 394, 395, 583.

34 Berczy, 406.

35 Berczy, 576.

36 Berczy, 282.

37 Berczy, 319, 322.

38 Berczy, 285, 286.

39 Berczy, 393, 405, 406, 421, 454.

40 Berczy, 287, 385, 293.



FIGURE 1. William Berczy, *Three Standing Figures in a Landscape near Florence*, 1781-82. Watercolour, pen and black ink, 42.4 × 31.1 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, No. 16559.

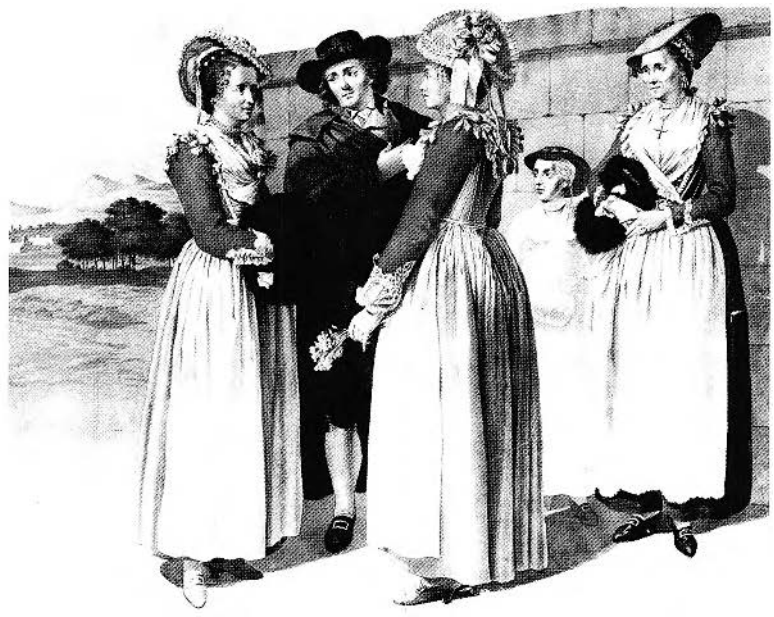


FIGURE 2. William Berczy, *A Family Group with Five Figures*, 1781-82. Watercolour, pen and black ink, 42 × 53.3 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, No. 23396.

Berczy was a many-sided and well-educated man, knowing how to behave in society and how to make useful contacts. He was well aware of this ability, claiming that his success was as much due to his 'usage du grand monde' and the 'souplesse' of his character as to his knowledge.<sup>41</sup> As his ability as a painter increased, so did his reputation and acceptance in the Tuscan capital. He was esteemed by his colleagues and they asked him for advice. He prepared architectural settings for their pictures and corrected their perspectives, as he wrote Mlle Gruner. Further, he continued, he had for one colleague made the cartoons for a large painting of a church interior, with much architecture and almost forty persons.<sup>42</sup>

As the Grand-ducal family portrait approached completion, he was daily called on by visitors and he had commissions for a year ahead.<sup>43</sup> He was appointed a member of the Academy and thereby gained for himself and his descendants the right of citizenship in the Grand-Duchy of Tuscany with all its privileges.<sup>44</sup> In accordance with the general practice, he made, as a result of this appointment, a self-portrait for the Academy. He even had the intention of giving another self-portrait (a copy?) to the Grand-ducal Gallery, as we have already seen.<sup>45</sup>

Under Peter Leopold, the Gallery had been completely reorganized. In keeping with his liberal views, the Grand Duke had generously opened the collection to students for study and for copying. The commission which selected the portraits to hang in the Gallery had been enlarged, and members of the Academy had been invited to join.<sup>46</sup> It is not clear whether Berczy was invited to join this commission, but it is suggested by the fact that he served as intermediary in 1787 in the negotiations which led to the purchase of Sandrart's self-portrait for the *Galleria degli uomini illustri*. This portrait had been in the possession of Aberli in Berne.<sup>47</sup> Not only in Florence

41 Berczy, 647, 648.

42 Berczy, 384, 406.

43 Berczy, 428, 442.

44 Fabia Borroni Salvadori, 'Memoralisti E Diaristi A Firenze Nel Periodo Leopoldino. 1765-1790. Spigolature D'Arte E Di Costume,' *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, Serie III, Vol. IX, 3 (Pisa, 1979), 1271; Berczy, 347.

45 Berczy, 282, 393, 395. See n. 33.

46 Nicolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art. Past and Present* (Cambridge: University Press, 1940), 50, 53 f.

47 Wolfram Prinz, *Die Sammlungen der Selbstbildnisse in den Uffizien. Geschichte der Sammlung* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1971), I, 215; *Gli Uffizi, Catalogo Generale* (Florence: Centro Di, 1979), 986.

was Berczy elected a member of the Academy, but also in Cortona, for 'L'accademi des Ciencias et beaux arts,' as he calls it (presumably the Accademia Etrusca), had approached him and offered membership. This he accepted, writing a treatise on composition in painting in recognition of the honour and to show himself worthy of it.<sup>48</sup>

Berczy's most important commission, and one with far-reaching consequences, was the portrait of the Grand-ducal Family. As already mentioned, it seems the contact had been made through the Court Physician, Baron von Störck. Four months after his arrival, in April, 1781, Berczy reported to Berne that he had been asked to submit a preliminary sketch for the family portrait. This first sketch had been approved by the Grand Duke, he wrote two weeks later, and he had immediately begun with the preparations. His first study was of the Archduke Franz, the eldest son of Peter Leopold.<sup>49</sup> For each person in the Grand-ducal Family (the Grand Duke, his wife the Grand Duchess, and their ten children) he made single portrait studies. By the beginning of August this work had been done, and he started work on the painting itself. He had already begun spending his evenings making costume studies, architectural sketches, and a prospect of Florence for the background.<sup>50</sup>

The execution of the family portrait took much more time than planned. At the beginning Berczy had estimated about three months would be required, but he was able to report its completion only a full year later, in June, 1782.<sup>51</sup> This long period was required partly because of the temporary absence or indisposition of one or another of the persons portrayed. Then there was the technique – gouache, for a picture 55.6 × 64.2 cm with twelve persons in a considerable architectural setting done in the painstaking technique of miniature painting, took much time. In addition,

Berczy became more selfcritical as he worked and set himself ever higher standards.<sup>52</sup> Finally, other commissions kept him from concentrating exclusively on the family portrait.

For the Court alone, he painted at least five other miniatures,<sup>53</sup> among them two of the Archduke Franz. These two miniatures were intended as gifts to the Princess Elisabeth von Württemberg-Mömpelgard, later Franz' first wife, and to her eldest sister, Maria Fjodorowa, the wife of the Grand Duke Paul, heir to the Russian throne. The two sisters and the Grand Duke were in Florence from 18 March to 9 April, 1782.<sup>54</sup> Finally, despite delays, Berczy finished his commission and was at last able to realize his long-planned visit to Berne. At the end of August he left Florence; the following nine months were spent in Switzerland.

With a letter of 11 June, 1783, from Payerne, a town in Canton Vaud, the second part of the Berczy correspondence begins. In July the artist was already back in Florence.<sup>55</sup> These letters give us less information about Berczy's life. Evidently this visit to Switzerland had deepened the relationship of Berczy and Charlotte Allamand, who was to become his wife. He had known her since his arrival in Berne, and she now became the person to whom he reported in detail his activities and confided his hopes and plans for the future. This, however, suggests no neglect of Mlle Gruner, as Charlotte Allamand lived at the time in Mlle Gruner's house and they shared Berczy's letters. (Charlotte, who came from Lausanne,<sup>56</sup> had presumably spent part of her youth in the care of Mlle Gruner, who was now a motherly friend to her. Only in the course of 1784, when failing health and other problems made Mlle Gruner decide to leave Berne, did they separate.) The letters to Charlotte Allamand, which have not been found, would be especially interesting as she had begun to draw under Berczy's influence and he now gave her advice and instruction from afar.<sup>57</sup> However, from letters to Mlle Gruner we learn, at least in outline, something of his further undertakings.

Soon after his first success in Florence, Berczy formed the plan of travelling to other courts to increase his reputation. Once known to the Grand Duke and Duchess, he had good reason to believe that he could obtain recommendations for their Habsburg and Bourbon relations in Naples, Paris, Brussels, Vienna, Parma, and Madrid.<sup>58</sup>

He first went from Florence to Naples, arriving in March, 1784.<sup>59</sup> It would not be very difficult

48 Berczy, 462.

49 Berczy, 258, 267.

50 Berczy, 321.

51 Berczy, 258, 449.

52 Berczy, 376.

53 Berczy, 428 (Grand Duke, Archdukes Franz and Joseph, Archduchess Therese), 293, 459 (Grand Duchess).

54 Berczy, 241; Adam Wandruszka, *Leopold II* (Vienna/Munich: Verlag Herold, 1965), II, 41, 47.

55 Berczy, 469, 481.

56 Lausanne, Archives Cantonales Vaudoises. Information supplied by the Archives.

57 Berczy, 495, 526, 555, 594, 604, 621, 627.

58 Berczy, 342, 275.

59 Berczy, 625.

for him to get commissions from the Court of King Ferdinand IV and Queen Maria Carolina, he wrote on 19 April. (This royal couple was doubly related to the Grand-ducal Family in Florence. The Bourbon brother and sister, Ferdinand IV and Maria Luisa, had married the Habsburgs Maria Carolina and Peter Leopold, who were also brother and sister.) At first, however, Berczy showed little interest in approaching the Court. But then, after long consideration, he explained, he had decided to present himself to the Queen and reported proudly of the favourable impression he had made.<sup>60</sup> Now the commissions followed. He first made portraits of Maria Carolina's two eldest daughters.<sup>61</sup> The Queen, he said, he would paint only in Caserta, when the Court moved there in October.<sup>62</sup> Berczy followed the Court to Caserta and spent two months there. Despite having been the object of a number of intrigues, he experienced considerable success. At the end of his stay, the portrait he had painted was praised by the King and Queen in the presence of the whole Court. Berczy tells us that this half-portrait was life size but neglects to identify the sitter. This could have been the previously-announced portrait of the Queen. Indeed, the circumstance of being praised in public by the royal couple suggests this, although one cannot exclude the possibility that the portrait was of another member of the royal family.<sup>63</sup>

Berczy was now eager to leave Naples and was under considerable pressure from Mlle Gruner and Charlotte to return to Switzerland.<sup>64</sup> At the latest he had returned by July, 1785, and on 1 November he and Charlotte were married in Cuarnans, a small town in the Canton of Vaud.<sup>65</sup> A special dispensation was needed from the normal requirement that he produce papers showing that he had always been registered as bachelor from all his places of residence in the preceding ten years. Berczy complained, with some justice, that he had neither time nor money to collect all these documents, as he had travelled during this time over much of Europe.<sup>66</sup> In November the newly-married couple settled in Geneva, where Berczy thought he could obtain enough commissions to support himself and Charlotte for some time. Instinctively, however, he felt it would have been better to go immediately to either Brussels or Paris, where he could again hope for Habsburg patronage from other sisters of Peter Leopold and Maria Carolina<sup>67</sup> (Maria Christina in Brussels, Marie Antoinette in Paris). Berczy's portrait of the young Princess Sophia Matilda of Gloucester<sup>68</sup> dates from this period, although circumstantial details are lacking. It found general

approval and a good number of further commissions resulted from it.<sup>69</sup> In this light, it is difficult to see why Berczy left Geneva for Berne in March, 1786.<sup>70</sup>

In any event this was not a happy decision, for the situation in Berne had changed considerably, and much to Berczy's disadvantage. Whereas during his earlier stay (1782/83) he had mentioned the possibility of about thirty commissions,<sup>71</sup> so few were now available that Berczy's financial position became increasingly difficult. We learn from letters Charlotte wrote to Mlle Gruner that the couple was finally forced to give up their rooms in the central Neuenstadt and seek cheaper lodging outside the town.<sup>72</sup>

One can only try to explain the fact that the situation had changed for the worse as the letters contain no definite reason. Charlotte complained of an accumulation of unhappy circumstances, and Berczy of the loss of all his papers (probably securities) in a disastrous fire that had changed his situation completely.<sup>73</sup> There were also difficulties with unsatisfied clients. The family of the well-known writer Karl Victor von Bonstetten was one of the most important in Berne. Berczy had already done a portrait of the author's wife, Maria Marianne von Bonstetten, née Wattenwil, during his earlier stay and this portrait was poorly received by members of the family. The sitter's mother, Gabriele von Wattenwil, expressed her dissatisfaction in an almost insulting letter which she had sent Berczy during his stay in Florence. Although Berczy had defended his work firmly,<sup>74</sup> it seems that the dissatisfaction of this leading

60 Berczy, 633, 653, 655.

61 Berczy, 655, 661, 675.

62 Berczy, 675, 676.

63 Berczy, 691.

64 Berczy, 701, 703, 707.

65 Andre, 154, n. 159; Berczy, 81, 83.

66 STAB., BIII 725, p. 573, 24 October, 1785; Berczy, 70.

67 Berczy, 684, 699.

68 Sophia Matilda, daughter of William Henry, Duke of Gloucester, and Maria, Dowager Countess of Waldegrave, was born 29 May, 1773. She was then about twelve years old in 1785 when Berczy painted her.

69 Berczy, 69, 83.

70 IHST., Hintersässen Rödel 1786 A 285 (148); B.B., MSS. Hist. Helv. XLV, 127.30, pp. 313, 327; Berczy, 86.

71 Berczy, 569.

72 Berczy, 135.

73 Berczy, 96, 99. The fire presumably occurred in 1784 at Mlle Gruner's house, where Berczy had deposited all his papers. Mlle Gruner wrote Berczy of a catastrophe, and this could well be one of the causes of the financial difficulties which eventually forced her to sell her house.

74 Berczy, 567-569, 583.



patrician family made further commissions difficult to obtain. Now, too, Berczy was faced with more competition from other painters. Charlotte wrote of several new painters settling in Berne, although she loyally declared that their talents could not match those of her husband.<sup>75</sup> We know that Anton Graff visited Berne in the summer of 1786 and that Anton Hickel was there for some time in the years 1786 and 1787.<sup>76</sup>

Toward the end of 1786 Berczy and Charlotte left Berne. Despite their earlier intention of visiting another court, they settled in Florence.<sup>77</sup> How long they stayed there and what further travels they undertook during the next three years remain unknown. They reappear in London in 1790.<sup>78</sup>

Study of the Berczy letters and the information provided by them has made it possible to identify several Berczy works dating from the early 1780s. One of these is the Grand-ducal family portrait in Florence which has already been discussed. This picture was shown to have been painted by Berczy by Dr. Annelic De Palma of the Kunsthistorische Institut in Florence shortly after the donation of the Berczy letters in 1977.<sup>79</sup> Six other works – five miniatures in gouache and one oil painting – were identified by the present writer in Berne in 1982.<sup>80</sup> The oil is a group portrait of the three eldest children of Bernhard Ludwig von Muralt of Berne. Three of the five miniatures are of his children, the fourth showing their mother, and the fifth a female relative of the von Muralt family.

All previous treatments of Berczy by art historians have considered by and large the works of his Canadian period, naturally in Canadian context. The discovery of the six European works demands that, for the first time, some effort be made to discuss Berczy as an European artist of the late 18th century. This is no easy task. First of all, like most minor artists, he was disposed to adopt the style of successful contemporaries and to accommodate himself to current trends without developing a markedly personal style of his own. Then, too, the huge gaps still remaining in our knowledge of Berczy's training and career make detailed appraisal very difficult. The above-mentioned works, discovered only in the last few years, must represent but a tiny fraction of the artist's considerable output as miniaturist.

Our first knowledge of Berczy's training as an artist comes with his entry in the Vienna Kaiserliche Königliche Hof-Academie der Mahler-, Bildhauer- und Baukunst in the year 1762.<sup>81</sup> He was then eighteen years old. This Academy, in its modern form, had been founded in 1726 by Jakob van Schuppen in imitation of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris. This is shown not only in its rules, organisation, and programme, but most especially in its choice of artistic models.<sup>82</sup> This means that those Austrian painters whom we consider today the most prominent of their time, such as Paul Troger, Martin Johann Schmidt ('Kremser-Schmidt') and Franz Anton Maulpertsch, did not have the overwhelming influence in the Academy that one might be led to believe. These painters were seldom employed directly by the Imperial Court and received most of their commissions from the Church. To judge from his later work, it seems that Berczy was more influenced by painters such as Martin van Meytens. Meytens, truly international in his family background, birth and training, was born in Stockholm of Dutch parents and had worked in Holland, London, Paris, Dresden and Italy before he finally settled in Vienna in 1730. He became Director of its Academy in 1759. Meytens had been first trained as an enamel painter and miniaturist, and his later work in larger forms continues to show signs of this training. His paintings are always conceived for close examination and he delighted in minute detail and the exact reproduction of his subject-matter, such as the jewellery, lace and clothing of the sitter.<sup>83</sup> These qualities we find also in the work of Berczy. Another favourite of the Imperial Court was Jean-Etienne Liotard. He made three visits to Vienna (1743-45, 1762, 1777), and had considerable influence on the painters of that city.<sup>84</sup>

75 Berczy, 96.

76 Müllinen, 62f, 66.

77 Berczy, 139.

78 *Supra*, n. 1; Andre, 19-20.

79 *Cunosita di una veggia. Vicende della quadrovola di Palazzo Pitti* (Palazzo Pitti, Florence, January-September 1979), 124.

80 The writer wishes to thank Dr. Hans Haeblerli of the Burgerbibliothek, Berne, for his help in locating the Berczy portraits in three private collections. For more on Bernese portraiture see his 'Ein bernischer Porträtkatalog' in *Von Angesicht zu Angesicht. Porträtstudien. Festschrift für Michael Stettler* (Berne: Verlag Stämpfli & Cie, 1983), 246-268.

81 *Supra*, n. 1.

82 Carl von Lützow, *Geschichte der Kaiserlich Königlichen Akademie der Bildenden Künste* (Vienna: Gerold, 1877).

83 Günther Heinz, 'Bemerkungen zur Geschichte der Malerei zur Zeit Maria Theresias' in *Maria Theresia und ihre Zeit. Eine Darstellung der Epoche von 1740-1780 aus Anlass der 200. Wiederkehr des Todestages der Kaiserin*, ed. Walter Koschatzky (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 1979), 277-293. I am greatly indebted to Prof. Günther Heinz of the University of Vienna, who is a specialist in portraits of the Imperial Family, for his advice.

84 Walter Koschatzky, 'Jean-Etienne Liotard in Wien' in *Maria Theresia und ihre Zeit*, 308-319.

In 1766 we find Berczy studying at the University of Jena.<sup>85</sup> This city was not a great art centre and had no art academy of its own, but it profited from its relative proximity to Leipzig and Dresden, both of which did. We can safely presume from the natural curiosity and love of travel that Berczy later showed, that he visited these cities. In the same year that Berczy came to Jena, the etcher and engraver Adrian Zingg settled in Dresden. He had been a student of Aberli in Berne and had spent the previous fifteen years in Paris. The painter Adam Friedrich Oeser, who had studied in the 1730s in Vienna under van Schuppen, van Meytens, and Georg Raphael Donner had come to Leipzig in 1759 and became Director of its Academy in 1764. While Oeser's work shows clearly baroque influences, he was, as a teacher, a forerunner of the protoclassical style and had great influence on Johann Joachim Winckelmann and the development of the latter's theories. Among Oeser's students was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.<sup>86</sup> Alas, there is no evidence of contact between Berczy and either Zingg or Oeser. We can only surmise that a person with the intellectual curiosity of Berczy would have had knowledge of, if not contact with, Saxony's leading artists.

Upon his arrival in Florence in 1780, Berczy was again on Habsburg territory. The city had long lost its position as a great centre of the arts and, in artistic matters, its Grand Duke, Peter Leopold, tended to turn to his native Vienna. There under the enlightened rule of his brother, the Emperor Joseph II, early classicism, as exemplified by the works of Anton Maron and Anton Raphael Mengs, was gaining more and more acceptance.

Berczy thus missed by two years the opportunity of meeting his fellow German, Johann Zoffany, who had spent the years 1772-1778 in the Tuscan capital. Zoffany's work for the Grand-ducal Family (a family portrait as well as individual portraits of its members), in many ways paralleled, although on a grander scale, the work that Berczy was now to begin. Berczy would have been especially interested in seeing Zoffany's family portrait, but we know that this had been sent to Vienna as a gift to the Empress Maria Theresa in 1776. (The artist had himself accompanied the portrait to Vienna and had there been rewarded with the title of Baron of the Holy Roman Empire.) Zoffany had, however, naturally been in close contact with the considerable English colony in Florence during his time there.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps Berczy too had contacts with the English colony as well as the Grand-ducal Family,

so it is quite probable that he was able to see works by Zoffany which had remained in Florence. Whatever their personal contacts, Mary Webster's comment applies to the work of both artists: 'Minute exactness in rendering the details of costume was a convention of German eighteenth-century portraiture, and the intricate lace, the ruched ribbons, the gaily embroidered sprigs, the lustrous satins in which the age delighted were themselves an attractive challenge to the painter's imitative skill.'<sup>88</sup>

We can now return to the newly-identified portraits, beginning with the group-portrait of the three eldest children of Bernhard Ludwig von Muralt.<sup>89</sup> For each of the children – the eldest Bernhard Ludwig, his younger brother Bernhard Karl, and their younger sister Henriette Margarethe<sup>90</sup> – he completed an individual miniature portrait. In these, the position and expression of the children are almost identical with their position and expression in the group-portrait, although the eldest is bare-headed in the miniature. The children are vividly portrayed and their ages are clearly differentiated. The freshness and openness of the little Henriette (Fig. 3) is touchingly attractive, the child-like earnestness of Bernhard Karl (Fig. 4), and the thoughtful expression of the eldest son, Bernhard Ludwig (Fig. 5), are persuasively presented.

The children's father must have been happy with the miniatures, for he subsequently ordered copies of them. Berczy had copies made, most probably in oil,<sup>91</sup> by a colleague, himself contributed only a few corrections and finishing touches. These copies were not well received, and a cousin of Mlle Gruner's claimed that the copies were inferior to the originals. Upon hearing of this, Berczy wrote from Naples to Mlle Gruner,

85 *Supra*, n. 1.

86 Thieme/Becker, xxxvi, xxv. Alphons Dürr, *Adam Friedrich Oeser. Ein Beitrag zur Kunstgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Alphons Dürr, 1879); Moriz Wiessner, *Die Akademie der Bildenden Künste zu Dresden von ihrer Gründung 1764 bis zum Tode Hagedorn's 1780* (Dresden: B. G. Teubner, 1864).

87 Mary Webster, *Johan Zoffany 1733-1810* (National Portrait Gallery, London, 14 January-27 March, 1977), Introduction.

88 Webster, 11.

89 Rodt, iv, 192, n° 20; Bernhard Ludwig von Muralt (1749-1816), des Kleinen Rats 1797 and 1804.

90 (Bernhard) Ludwig von Muralt (1777-1858), Grossrat 1803, Oberamtmann zu Wangen 1803, zu Thun 1810, des Kleinen Rats 1817, Seckelmeister 1826. (Bernhard) Karl von Muralt (1778-1802) fell in battle before Alexandria, Egypt. Henriette (Margarethe) von Muralt (1780-1834), married (1805) Albrecht Stettler (1774-1856).

91 Berczy, 611.



FIGURE 3. William Berczy, *Henriette Margarethe Stettler-von Muralt*, 1783. Gouache, 7.5 × 6 cm. Pully, Private Collection (Photo: Burgerbibliothek, Berne)



FIGURE 4. William Berczy, *Bernard Karl von Muralt*, 1783. Gouache, 7.5 × 6 cm. Pully, Private Collection (Photo: Burgerbibliothek, Berne)



FIGURE 5. William Berczy, *Bernard Ludwig von Muralt*, 1783. Gouache, 7.5 × 6 cm. Pully, Private Collection (Photo: Burgerbibliothek, Berne)

who often acted as his agent, that she should take back the copies if M. de Muralt did not wish to keep them.<sup>92</sup>

In the group-portrait (Fig. 6) the faces are more placid and more restrained than in the miniatures. The three children are portrayed in the entrance hall of a patrician house. The large square stones of the flooring lead the viewer's eye into the picture. To the right stand two large columns on a high pedestal. In the middle, two steps lead to a wide landing from which, on the left side of the picture, a vaulted staircase leads to another landing behind which a partially-opened window serves as a light source. Further light comes from an invisible source to the left of the staircase. Except for the large columns and a pilaster, in itself rather unimportant, rising from the first landing, the entrance hall is quite typical of patrician houses in Berne. The Bernese character is

further emphasized by the greenish-gray tone of the sandstone, also very typical of the city.

Why, then, did Berczy introduce the two large columns on a high pedestal which is completely atypical of Bernese entrance halls? Clearly, this motif and the pose of the two boys were taken from Rubens' portrait of his sons Albert and Nicolas. The Rubens picture had been in the Liechtenstein Collection since 1767, so it is not impossible that Berczy had the opportunity of seeing the original, as the Liechtenstein Collection was then in Vienna. A much later letter of Baron Schaffalitzky de Mukodel to Berczy's son William mentions a visit by Berczy to Vienna in the years 1768 and 1769.<sup>93</sup> However, the exact agreement of Berczy's picture with that of Rubens in many small details makes it clear that he had used a *print* after the Rubens as model<sup>94</sup> (Fig. 7).

When one compares Berczy's painting with Rubens', one sees that Berczy set his figures in a much larger setting. In Rubens' the two figures fill the painting and the architectural elements are included only to provide the necessary background. Berczy, on the other hand, gives his picture a much greater spatial impression, with his more elaborate architectural setting a fully constituent element of his composition. Thus he sets a distance between his subject and the onlooker, while Rubens' composition achieves an immediacy and directness. Naturally Berczy has not adopted the clothing of the Rubens picture but has dressed the children elegantly in clothing

<sup>92</sup> Berczy, 643, 653.

<sup>93</sup> Ottawa, Public Archives of Canada, Baby Collection, *Berczy Papers*, MG 24 13, Vol. 26, p. 016578/79.

<sup>94</sup> There were several prints available at the time Berczy did the painting: Eugene Dutilleul, *Manuel de l'amateur d'estampes* (Amsterdam: G. W. Hissink & Co, 1972), iv, 192 f; Didier Bodart, *Rubens e l'incisione nelle collezioni del Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe* (Villa della Farnesina alla Lungara, Rome, 8 February – 30 April 1977), 174 f and 183. Most likely he used the engraving by Gustav Adolph Müller. Max Rooses shows a reproduction of Johann Peter Pichler in his *L'Oeuvre de P. P. Rubens* (Soest: Davaco, 1977), iv, pl. 311. Pichler introduced, like Berczy, a second column. But having been born in 1765, it seems very unlikely that this mezzotint was available to Berczy in 1783.



FIGURE 6. William Berczy, *Bernhard Ludwig von Muralt together with his brother Bernard Karl von Muralt and his sister Henriette Margarethe von Muralt*, 1783-1784. Oil on metal, 51 × 38 cm. Geneva: Private Collection (Photo: Burgerbibliothek, Berne)

of the latest French fashion. Otherwise, he follows his model very closely. The two boys are posed before the double column. The elder of the two, Ludwig, stands with his legs crossed and his right hand on his hip. He rests his left elbow on the pedestal and lays his hand and forearm lightly on his brother's shoulder. Whereas the Rubens model holds in his right hand a book and in his left a glove, the Berczy figure dispenses completely with these, and Ludwig's right hand

lightly fingers part of his brother's costume. Karl, the younger brother, is flying a pet bird on a string as in Rubens. Little Henriette, for whom no model has yet been found, seems to be Berczy's composition. She steps forward, arms outstretched, watching the bird with the greatest interest.

The choice of colours is subtle, with the delicate hues of the children's clothing set against the grey-green sandstone, which in itself is delicately



FIGURE 7. Gustav Adolph Müller after Rubens, *Albert and Nicolas Rubens*. Etching and engraving, 42.2 × 26 cm. (Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

shaded and further varied by the effect of light and shadow. The little girl wears a long white dress of a silky texture, trimmed at the neck-line and the hem with light blue. A wide sash of the same colour is wrapped twice around her waist and tied in a bow. She wears an elaborate head-dress, also blue, decorated with flowers and black and white feathers. Ludwig is dressed in a suit of rich brown, trimmed with green, and a black hat with white feathers. Karl wears a suit of yellow trimmed with pale blue and a sash of the same colour. Both boys wear white blouses with wide decorative collars.

The Muralt children, taken as a group, lack the healthy vitality of Rubens' sons, and reflect rather the courtly ideal of the late eighteenth century.

95 Margarethe von Muralt-von Tavel (1759-1837), married (1775) Bernhard Ludwig von Muralt, cf. *supra*, n. 89.

96 Galerie Jürg Stucker AG, Bern Auktionen 215-227, nos 2374 and 2375. Maria(nne) von Muralt (1730-1803), unmarried, daughter of J.B. von Muralt (1702-1755). Marianne von Muralt was a distant relative of Bernhard Ludwig von Muralt, the children's father. Both were descendants from Johann Bernard von Muralt (1634-1710), Freiherr zu Belp (Rodt, iv, 188, n° 6).

They appear fragile and delicate, their tiny feet resting lightly on the floor. The boys especially show an aristocratic nonchalance hardly in keeping with their youth.

From Berczy's letters, it is evident he also painted a portrait of the children's mother, Madame Margarethe von Muralt, née Tavel<sup>95</sup> (Fig. 8). This miniature was sold at an auction in Berne in November, 1982 together with another Berczy Miniature, Mademoiselle Marianne von Muralt<sup>96</sup> (Fig. 9). The size of the two miniatures is almost identical, as are their carved and gilded Louis XVI frames, made by the well-known Bernese ébéniste Johann Friedrich Funk II. Both ladies are seated facing left before a plain background, relieved only by the curve of the chair back. The colouring of the two miniatures is very similar. The skin tone is pale, shading to rose, and the clothing of the two sitters is predominately in delicate shades of white, light grey and blue. In these two Muralt miniatures Berczy convincingly captures the difference in temperament between the two ladies. Mme de Muralt gives the impression of a gentle and somewhat reserved disposition, while Mlle de Muralt impresses one as having been more self-assured and decisive. Only the head and shoulders of Mme de Muralt are shown, the head itself is almost exactly centred in its oval. Despite the fact that she wears a large hat trimmed with a blue bow, a fur edging, and white ostrich feathers, she does not completely fill the picture. This is emphasised by the dark background.

Berczy's miniature of his wife Charlotte (Fig. 10) shows many similarities, although painted in oil instead of gouache. Its date is not certain; it may have been painted during Berczy's stay in Berne in 1783, or after the couple married in 1785. Like the miniature of Mme de Muralt, it shows only the head and shoulders before a plain background. Charlotte also wears a large hat, decorated with a bow and feathers, but, in place of Mme de Muralt's white *fichu*, her dress shows a white pleated collar. Mme de Muralt looks directly on the viewer while Charlotte seems lost in contemplation.

The miniature of Mlle Marianne von Muralt, however, shows a number of marked differences from the two already discussed. Not only are her head and shoulders presented, but the sitter's folded arms, which seem to be resting on a table just below the curve of the miniature. To find room for this without changing the scale shared with that of Mme de Muralt, the sitter's head is not centred, but placed entirely in the upper half of the oval. In lieu of a hat an elegantly high



FIGURE 8. William Berczy, *Margarethe von Muralt-von Tavel*, 1783. Gouache, 13 × 11 cm. Berne, Private Collection (Photo: Burgerbibliothek, Berne)



FIGURE 9. William Berczy, *Marianne von Muralt* 1783. Gouache, 13.2 × 11.2 cm. Berne, Private Collection (Photo: Burgerbibliothek, Berne)

coiffure fills the upper half of the picture, just as the folded arms fill the lower. The background is considerably lighter. She looks thoughtfully not at the viewer but into the distance. The two von Muralt ladies are painted with great elegance and delicacy and can be numbered among the best works that have so far been identified as being by Berczy.

In general, and this is especially true of his group-portraits, William Berczy occasionally betrays the mannerisms of the minor painter. Nevertheless, he is almost always able to capture the charm inherent in his subjects. His figures are never rough and crude and are far above the clumsy naïveté often found in group-portraits of the period. He always attempted, and usually with success, to capture the character of those he painted. His style, background, training and education, with its strong aristocratic influence, was typical for his class and time. His concern with describing every human being as an individual shows a free spirit inspired by the Enlightenment and his own idealism. Yet Berczy emigrated to Canada, becoming a major artistic personality of the early period. The Berczy letters now afford the basis for a coherent picture of the years im-



FIGURE 10. William Berczy, *Charlotte Berczy, née Allamand*, ca. 1783-1785. Oil on panel, 10.1 × 8.6 cm (sight). Farnham, Private Collection.

mediately preceding. It is only a beginning, of course, but one which, aided by chance, shows the unexpected riches which are to be derived from the study of foreign antecedents of Canadian artists.

#### CATALOGUE OF WORKS CITED IN BERCZY'S LETTERS

The following lists works by William Berczy which are mentioned in his letters. They are given in the original spelling and a comprehensive chronological order, with cross-references for works mentioned several times. In many cases Berczy indicated exactly for which purpose or for what person his works were destined. These indications are given, when possible, in brackets following the dates. (Berne 1 and Berne 11 refer to works painted for Bernese patrons before and after Berczy's sojourn there in 1782-1783.) A few copies are mentioned which cannot be attributed with certainty to Berczy, as he made copies and acted partly as an art dealer, e.g. a copy after Salvatore Rosa. Notices in connexion with the Grand-ducal family portrait are so extensive that only the first mention is retained.

1 Nov 1780, St Blaise (Berne 1)  
Je n'ai pu me refuser à faire ici le Portrait de Monsieur Frischin.

29 Dec 1780, Florence (Berne 1)  
... une très jolie piece de deux figures avec un Chat & un Perroquet.  
Pour Mons: de Muralt j'ai commencé une piece de mon innovation en gouache qui sont deux jolies paisanne dans le costume de Villagoise au alentours de Florence qui est très agréable.

19 Feb 1781, Florence (Berne 1)  
... une boîte avec des peintures pour Monsieur Fischer d'Oberried avec quelques peintures ... 12 Louis deux dessins en clair obscur (M. Fischer) ... 3 Louis neufs la tête d'un Viellard en Gouche ... 5 Louis neuf

27 Mar 1781, Florence (Berne 1)  
Berczy asked if Mons. Fischer d'Oberried and Mons de Muralt were still interested in the paintings they had ordered.

For M. Fischer: ... un tableau haut de 11 pouce du Roi, large 9.P: du R. représentant une femme entierre nue avec un paysage de foret ... 15 Louis

For M. de Muralt: un tableau haut de 9.P. large de 8. representent une jeune femme de Teatre presqu'entiere dormant sur un lit de repos acote d'une table ou il y a des instrumens de Musique etc. dans le Lointain de la Chambre l'on voit une vielle avec un homme qui lui donne de l'argent ... 15 Louis

Ces deux tableaux seronts peint sur Parchemin en Gouache bien finie.

15 Apr 1781, Florence (Grand-ducal Family)  
La grande Duchesse veut envoyer à son pere le Roi d'Espagne un tableau representant toute la famille ... long de 2 1/2 pieds et haut de deux pieds contenant 12 figures.  
... j'ai fait une tête qui est tout afait à mon contentement. (à l'huile).

27 May 1781, Florence (Berne 1, Florence)  
... le portrait de Rubens & l'autre celui de Vandik tous deux copié d'après les orrigineaux fait par eux meme. [See also 4 June 1781.]

... deux tête à l'huile d'après natur. La premiere ... je pretends la conserver toujours pour une memoire. la seconde est mon propre portrait destiné pour l'accademie de Florence qui me l'a demandé.

4 June 1781, Florence (Berne 1)  
... un pasquet de peintures consistant en 5 pieces de 2 mignatures 2. Gouaches et une peinture à l'huile. La peinture No 1. est pour Monsieur Fischer & le reste pour qui les veut.

No 1. mignature pour M. Fischer ... 15. Louis

No 2. mignature d'une peintresse ... 12. Louis

[See also 17 Dec 1781 and 1 Feb 1782.]

No 3. Gouache portrait de Rubens ... 6. Louis

No 4. Gouache portrait de Vandik ... 6. Louis

No 5. Peinture à l'huile ... 12. Louis

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51. Louis

10 June 1781, Florence

Je me suis copié un portrait de cet homme celebre (Mengs) d'après un Orriginale fait par lui même & qui en fait de têtes est peut être son chef d'oeuvre; je l'ai fait de la même grandeur de deux portraits en gouache que je vous ai envoyé le Courier passé.

... le portrait de la grande Duchesse (Grand-ducal Family)

[See below 26 June 1781.]

26 June 1781, Florence (Grand-ducal Family)

Le portrait de la grande Duchesse est deja fini à moitié ...

[See above 10 June 1781.]

6 Aug 1781, Florence (Grand-ducal Family)

Aiant fini le 12 têtes qui me servent de model pour mon tableau ...

20 Aug 1781, Florence (Berne 1)

... Fischer cède son doit à Muralt sur ma femme dans le paysage; ... je me mettrai peu à peu à la finir.

25 Nov 1781, Florence (Florence)

... je suis à faire les Cartons pour un tableau qu'un d'eux (des collègues à Florence) a à faire dans une eglise long de 12. pieds et haut de 9. Toute la Composition est de mon cru de même que tout est desiné en Carton par moi en grandeur naturelle ... Il y a outre beaucoup d'Architecture près de 40. figures.

17 Dec 1781, Florence (Florence/Naples)

... mon portrait que je donne à l'accademie, peint en Gouache.

Si vous avez encore le portrait de la peintresse je vous prie de l'envoyer incessamment à Neaples. [See also 4 June 1781 and 1 Feb 1781.]

19 Jan 1782, Florence (Florence)

... je commence un nouveau ouvrage pour un assez bon peintre ... c'est un tableau à l'huile de 8 pieds de roi de haut sur 5 de large composé de 9 figures. [See also 25 Mar 1782.]

28 Jan 1782, Florence (Berne 1)

Je vous enverrai ... une mignature dans laquelle j'ai taché de faire tout ce que le plus grand fini peut produire c'est un de ces ouvrages qui ne sont pas fait pour être païé mais que quiconque se mettroit à travailles dans ce genre risqueroit de mourir de faim c'est par Curiosité que je l'ai fait peu à peu. [See also 11 Mar 1782 and 20 Apr 1782.]

- 1 Feb 1782, Florence (Naples)  
J'ai déjà avis de Naples que ma peintresse y est arrivée saine et sauve. [See also 4 June 1781 and 17 Dec 1781.]
- 11 Mar 1782, Florence (Berne 1, Grand-ducal Family)  
... je vous envoie ... la petite mignature, que vous donnerez à mes amis pour Cet à dire Muralt, Manuel, Fischer & Stettler, à ... 4 Louis  
d'autres pour... 10 Louis [See also 28 Jan 1782 and 20 Apr 1782.]  
Outre le tableau de la famille j'ai déjà fini le Grand Duc en demi figure un petit tableau comme cette feuille, l'archiduc françois & Joseph de la grandeur de la moitié de cette feuille, & l'archiduchesse Therese, ... plus de moitié fini de la grandeur du Grand Duc. Je l'ai peinte sur une terrasse avec une Corbeille de fleurs et la vue représente un bocage de Boboli ...  
... le Portrait de la defunte Baronne de Sterck [Störck] qui est de la même grandeur de celui du Grandduc.
- 25 Mar 1782, Florence (Grand-ducal Family)  
L'arrivée des Princes Russes m'a obligé de faire à la hâte deux portraits de l'archiduc François l'un pour la Princesse de Wurtemberg épouse & l'autre pour la grande Duchesse de Russie, & comme ce portrait a parfaitement réussi pour la ressemblance je m'en suis fait le soir un copie en clair-obscur. Le tableau à l'huile est finis et je l'ai rendu au peintre pour qui je l'ai fait ... [See also 19 Jan 1782.]
- 20 Apr 1782, Florence  
... Votre Cousin me dit que l'on trouve beaucoup à redire de ce que j'ai fait une femme en pleurs & avec des cheveux roux & qu'il demanda sur cela l'explication de l'empire pour sauver mon honneur ... [See also 28 Jan 1782 and 11 Mar 1782.]
- 5 May 1782, Florence  
... l'aide de Camp du Grand Duc de Russie qui ne m'a pas donné de repos jusqu'à ce que je lui fait son portrait en Gouache ...
- 8 Aug 1783, Florence (Berne II)  
Je vous expedie ... une boite avec 5 portrait 2. pour Monsieur de Mullinen.  
deux pour Mous. de Muralt ... [each] 5 Louis  
et un pour Madame de bonstette ... 6 Louis
- 23 Oct 1783, Florence (Berne II)  
... le tableau des enfans de Muralt qui est fini a peu près.
- 7 Feb 1784, Florence (Berne II)  
... trois petits tableaux à l'huile pour Muralt ... je vous prie de lui dire que cette semaine ses copies partiront ... (les trois petit tableaux).
- 29 Feb 1784, Florence (Berne II)  
un grand rouleau contenant une peinture grande de Salvator Rosa ... 15-20 Louis  
une plus petite copie d'après Salvator Rosa ... 5 Louis  
un petit representent un sujet de Conversation copie d'après un flamend pour M<sup>r</sup> de Muralt  
Une petite cassette contenen 2. Copies sur planche d'après Miris pour Mons: de Muralt ... 15 Louis
- 15 June 1784, Naples (Berne II)  
... j'enverai à Stettler une Mignature qu'il m'a demandé ...  
18 Louis
- 4 July 1784, Naples (Royal Family of Naples)  
Le Portrait de l'Infente aînée Donna Theresa est actuellement achevé ...
- 20 July 1784, Naples (Royal Family of Naples)  
Je viens de finir le portrait de l'Infente Donne Louise
- 26 Sept 1784, Naples (Royal Family of Naples)  
... je fais un second portrait d'après nature de l'infente Donna Therese.
- 14 Dec 1784, Caserta  
... aiant présenté aux souverains & à toute la Cour un portrait demi figure en grandeur naturelle ...
- 3 Oct 1785, Geneva  
... le portrait de la petite princesse de Clocester ...

## RÉSUMÉ

William Berczy avait 50 ans lorsqu'il arriva au Canada. Sa vie antérieure de même que sa formation et sa carrière artistiques en Europe sont demeurées pour nous presque totalement inconnues. Grâce au don en 1977 d'un livre relié de lettres manuscrites, écrites pour la plupart par Berczy, au Kunsthistorische Institut de Florence, nous pouvons maintenant reconstruire une période importante de la vie de cet artiste. Les lettres sont adressées à une certaine Margaritha Gruner de Berne, en Suisse, où semble-t-il Berczy demeura quelque temps avant d'aller en Italie. Il arriva à Florence à la fin de 1780 et se mit sérieusement, pour la première fois de sa vie semble-t-il, à l'étude de la peinture, allant à la Galerie pour faire des copies, entre autres des autoportraits de Rubens, van Dyck et Mengs. Considérant que l'emploi de la gouache restreignait ses projets et ses ambitions, il se mit à peindre à l'huile. À part des études, il s'appliqua à exécuter différentes commandes. Son patron le plus illustre fut le grand-duc Pierre-Léopold. Il peignit à son intention un portrait de famille présentant le grand-duc, la grande-duchesse et leurs dix enfants vivants, ainsi que des miniatures de quelques membres de cette famille. L'artiste demeurait durant ce temps en rapport avec sa clientèle bernoise, pour laquelle il remplissait différentes commandes. Le premier séjour de Berczy à Florence prit fin en août 1782 et on le retrouve les neuf mois suivants à Berne, où son talent semble avoir été beaucoup sollicité. À partir de juillet 1783, il est en Italie, à Florence et à Naples. Il peint à Naples plusieurs œuvres pour la famille royale, puis retourne en Suisse, cette fois pour y épouser Charlotte Allamand. Le couple s'installe d'abord à Genève, où Berczy y peint une miniature de la jeune princesse de Gloucester, puis déménage à Berne. Mais leur situation se détériore et Berczy ne trouve plus suffisamment de commandes pour subsister. Il retourne avec sa femme à Florence au début de 1787. Les lettres de Berczy contiennent des informations qui ont permis à l'auteur d'identifier cinq miniatures à la gouache et un portrait à l'huile d'un groupe de trois enfants. Ces six tableaux représentent des membres de la famille de Muralt: la mère, ses trois enfants et une parente. Le décor architectural du portrait de groupe montre un intérieur caractéristique des maisons aristocratiques de Berne. Mais les deux grosses colonnes (élément étranger au contexte bernois) et la posture des deux garçons indiquent que Berczy s'est largement inspiré du portrait que Rubens fit de ses fils Albert et Nicolas.