

The self-presentation of the Halle medical professor Friedrich Hoffmann (1660-1742) mirrored by his autobiography

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SUMMARY

The lost autobiography of the famous Halle medical professor Friedrich Hoffmann (1660-1742) was recently located in the *Manuscripta borussica* collection of the Berlin State Library Manuscript Department (*Handschriftenabteilung der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*). The autobiography shows new details about his life and work as well as his strategy to shape the picture of his personality for posterity.

RESUME

Friedrich Hoffmann (1660-1742) était un professeur de médecine célèbre à l'université de Halle. On a découvert que son autobiographie perdue se trouve dans la collection *Manuscripta borussica* au Département des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de l'État à Berlin (*Handschriftenabteilung der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*). Son autobiographie comprend des détails nouveaux en ce qui concerne sa vie, son œuvre et sa stratégie de procurer l'image de sa personnalité pour la postérité.

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Renate Schipke, Berlin State Library, Manuscript Department, for her help concerning the description of the autobiography, as well as Paula E. Chadderton BA(Hons) LLB for her help with the translation into English.

INTRODUCTION

The Halle medical professor Friedrich Hoffmann was one of the most outstanding physicians and scholars in early modern Europe. In medical history, he is traditionally mentioned together with his colleagues Georg Ernst Stahl (1660-1734) and Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738) as one of the three great system-builders of the early eighteenth century.¹ His significance for the history of science is illustrated by his incorporation into the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*¹ as well as the translation of his *Fundamenta medicinae* into English by Lester S. King.¹ Nevertheless, knowledge on Friedrich Hoffmann's work is sparse. Already Karl Eduard Rothschild commented with regret that there are only few biographies about Hoffmann and that no thorough modern biography has been written so far.TM Werner Piechocki who published Hoffmann's testament regretted that Hoffmann's autobiography was lost.TM Recently, this text was located in the *Manuscripta borussica* collection in the Manuscript Department of the Berlin State Library. It contains hitherto unknown material on his life, his family and his work.

The autobiography is mentioned in the standard biography by his pupil Johann Heinrich Schulze (1687-1744) which was published in Latin in 1740^{vi} and in German in 1741.TM Schulze maintained that the autobiography had been made completely accessible to him.TM Also Friedrich Eberhard Rambach (1708-1775) extensively used the autobiography when he prepared the *Kurze Nachricht* about Hoffmann's life,^{1*} which was published in 1760. Rambach had been deacon in Halle from 1740 until 1745 and had known Hoffmann personally.TM How the autobiography then became a part of the collection of the Royal Library, nowadays Berlin

State Library, is unknown. Werner Piechocki mentions that it had been in the possession of the von Bredow family in the late 19th century!¹ However, it is also possible that the autobiography was incorporated into the Royal Library holdings prior to 1818. Then Friedrich Wilken (1777-1840), head of the Royal Library from 1817 until 1840, began indexing the *Manuscripta borussica*TM of which the autobiography is now a part.

The main topics covered in the autobiography are quite typical for 18th century scholarly autobiographies. These include details of ancestors, birth and baptism, youth, education, travel, career, marriage, cases of birth, illness, and death, self-characterisation, constitution, habit and publications.^{**1} The autobiography belongs to the class of autobiographies that demonstrate a growing self-confidence of scholars in the 18th century. The latter is exemplified by bio-bibliographical articles in works such as *Das jetzt lebende gelehrte Deutschland* (1724)^{siv} by Christian Polycarp Leporin and *Das Jetzt-lebende gelehrte Europe* (3 parts, 1735-1740) by Gabriel Wilhelm Gotten.^{**} Gotten incorporated responses by scholars to his request for details of their autobiographies. In the first part of his work about half of the articles were based on autobiographical material.^{***}

As stated in the preface, Hoffmann dictated his autobiography instead of writing it down himself. Accordingly, several different handwriting styles can be found. The first part of the curriculum vitae may have been written down in the 1720s.^{xTM} Obviously, then some space was left for later additions before stating Hoffmann's merits, but not enough. Therefore, his curriculum vitae was written in two parts. Events of the year 1732 and later years are considered in the second part.^{***m} Certainly, there were additions in the early

1740s,** and the final revision of the autobiography is likely to have been taken place around the time of his death. The preface is dated on 3rd September 1742, about two months before Hoffmann died.^x Hoffmann's testament is included as well as the epitaph inscriptions. Table 1 shows a description of the autobiography, whilst table 2 summarizes its contents.

ASPECTS OF HOFFMANN'S SELF-PRESENTATION

Even if an autobiographer does his best to report his life honestly, the inherent feature of this writing genre is that the person concerned reflects on the main events of his life thereby interpreting and making sense of them. The author often wants to present his life coherently, pointing out its essential features. This is clearly shown by Ingrid Aid-linger^{**1} - to cite just one example from the abundant literature on autobiographies. Hoffmann obviously took a great effort to pass his merits to posterity as completely as possible.^{**11} His family history as well as his life, works and merits are considered in great detail. At least parts of it, such as some of the statements given in the chapter on the six greatest adversities of his life were not intended for later publication. Rather, they served as a justification for his actions. Generally, the autobiography emphasises his success as a physician and scholar and portrays him as a good Christian. It also shows his strategy to transmit a picture of his life to posterity.

HOFFMANN AS A SUCCESSFUL MEDICAL PRACTITIONER AND SCHOLAR

Hoffmann's undoubted success as a physician allowed him to present himself as a model for others. Aside from his well-known education and career, the autobiography covers his character, principles of medical practice, and his experiences.

Hoffmann characterised himself as an ambitious^{**1n} personality who had no disposition for poetry, music, oration, travel or painting. Instead, he had felt more attracted to profound studies such as mathematics, medicine, theology and metaphysics, and especially great zeal for the study of medicine.^{**1n}

Hoffmann reiterated principles that he had also stated similarly before in lectures to his students.^{***} His life served as advice to follow his example - never to treat or advise patients without examination and consideration of their medical history,^{***} not to accept patients who changed doctors easily and did not differentiate between a physician and an empiricist,^{**TM} who did not pay appropriately,^{**TM} or those with incurable diseases.^{***} Hoffmann stated that he had never

turned his medicine into subservience to patients (servitium).^{***} From Hoffmann's point of view, it was worthwhile relying on few self-prepared drugs whose effects he knew well instead of precarious treatment procedures.^{***1} The appropriate conduct of life often helped more than drugs. Wells and spas also played an important role. Hoffmann emphasised that he had visited the most famous wells in Germany and been an expert in chronic diseases.^{***n}

Hoffmann portrayed his colleague Andreas Gundelsheimer (died 1715) as his antagonist and as a real scoundrel. Gundelsheimer had been his worst enemy at the Prussian court between 1709 and 1712. According to Hoffmann, Gundelsheimer's treatment included bloodletting, purging and giving vomitories repeatedly in acute as well as in chronic diseases, sometimes all together on one day, so that the patients who were already weak, were weakened even further.^{***8} Of great concern to him was that Gundelsheimer had contributed to the death of a patient during his time at the Prussian court by prescribing an incorrect treatment. Hoffmann's version of the conflict, as given in his autobiography, states that he had felt the necessity to intervene according to the best of his knowledge and conscience. Gundelsheimer, however, bribed experts from three universities who had been asked for their opinion, and achieved that Hoffmann was sent back to Halle University.^{***TM}

Hoffmann pointed out his high reputation amongst the nobility and upper classes in society who could choose whom they consulted. In order to demonstrate his success as a doctor, he drew up a list of ten pages with nobles who had consulted him. Hoffmann arranged their names by rank commencing with emperor Charles VI (1685-1740) before naming numerous kings, electors, dukes, princes and earls. Thus, the list was comprised of more than hundred names. Similar lists exist in order to demonstrate his scientific network - more than hundred erudited and famous scholars with whom he had been in professional contact,^{***n1} including Herman Boerhaave^{***TM} and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716).^{***n1n} Furthermore, Hoffmann listed numerous scholarly works where his theories were acclaimed,^{***1*} and the names of several pupils who served as his assistants.^{*1} The international scientific network as well as the reception of Hoffmann's theories and the future career of Hoffmann's pupils merit further research.

HOFFMANN AS A FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN

Although Halle was a stronghold of Pietism,^{*11} and Hoffmann himself has been numbered among the Pietists, the autobiography does not show the structure

of a Pietist autobiography with features such as a time before conversion, the event of conversion and life in grace afterwards.

Hoffmann's foreword at the beginning as well as the epitaph inscription at the end of the autobiography dedicate his life to God. Typically for 18th century autobiographies, the motivation given in the foreword was not to praise himself, but to praise and glorify God's kindness, mercy and grace, and to give his descendants an example. They also were to trust in God alone in all circumstances during their life.¹⁰ Hoffmann maintained that he had held the Bible in higher esteem than all other theological and moral writings¹¹ and had abstained from joining any particular separate religious group (*sectirung*).¹² As his favourite theological authors he mentioned the Protestant writers Martin Luther (1483-1546), Philipp Melancthon (1497-1546), Johannes Brenz (1499-1570), Georg Calixt (1586-1656), Johann Arndt (1555-1621) and Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705).*

A very important motive for him was that episodes of suffering were the best medicine for human mind and nature (*medicina animae et corrumpitae humanae naturae*). He had borne them in his devotion to God.^{xlvi} Hoffmann mentioned six episodes of suffering - the death of his parents and eldest sister, his conflict with the Jena medical faculty after his graduation in medicine leading to his relocation to Minden, his brother-in-law falling into disgrace at the Prussian court, the conflicts with his colleagues Christian Thomasius and Georg Ernst Stahl, and finally, most importantly, the intrigues by his colleague Gundelsheimer at the Prussian court leading to the most devastating defeat of his career. In Hoffmann's interpretation, all these events finally served

to lead him closer to God, and they had positive consequences for his future life.

A PICTURE FOR POSTERITY

Hoffmann's autobiography gives an impression how he orchestrated the picture of his life for posterity. The autobiography was the main source for the official biography written by his pupil Johann Heinrich Schulze. It was published whilst Hoffmann was still alive. Thus we can safely assume that the biography did not contain anything contrary to Hoffmann's wishes.

Two decades after his death, the picture for posterity was again shaped by confidants. In large parts, Rambach's *Kurze Nachricht* in 1760 closely follows the autobiography in many details. The jealousy of senior professors at the Jena Medical Faculty in 1681¹³ and the events at the Prussian court between 1709 and 1712 were not seen appropriate for publication by Rambach. The conflict with the philosophy professor Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) is mentioned, but only the scientific part about the foundations of mechanical philosophy, not the personal side of the conflict.¹⁴ Rambach left out that Hoffmann derogatorily remarked on Thomasius' envy and that Thomasius finally received a rebuke by the Prussian court.¹⁵ The autobiography can be seen as the foundation for a successful strategy to shape the memory of posterity. Later authors could choose which parts of the extensively published material they wanted to include into their contribution. If found, a critical assessment of Hoffmann's life by contemporaries would give us better insight into less pleasant features of his character. Until now, a successful life and career has been complemented by a successful implementation of a picture for posterity

Table I
Description of the autobiography

location	Berlin State Library, Manuscript Department
signature	Ms. boruss. quart. 108
author	Friedrich Hoffmann (1660-1742)
title	<i>Particularia vitae et familiae meae</i>
language	German, partly Latin technical terms
foliation	leaves Mil , 1-128 inserted slip 20a old foliation: leaves 1-19, 34-138, 140-143 text loss leaves 21-33 wrong old foliation: 103 on the back of leaf 102
location of origin	probably Halle/Saale
time	18th century, foreword dated 3 September 1742
size	22,5 x 16,5 cm
writing	several hands German current style, 18th century
binder	dark brown calf leather with decoration frame gilt edged text block spine with paper tag: <i>Nachrichten von der Hoffman[^] - schen Familie</i>
pictures	leaf IIr: copper engraving: Friedrich Hoffmann, age 66 years leaf IIIr: coloured copper engraving: coat of arms of Wolfgang Hoffmann in 1607 (pasted in, numbered 70)
literature	Schulze, Rambach, Piechocki (see notes)

Table 2
Contents of the autobiography

heading	foliation	foliation (old)	comment
<i>Particularia vitae et familiae meae</i>			title
foreword [no heading]	lv	lv	foreword dated 3rd September 1742
portrait	Mr	llr	copper engraving: Friedrich Hoffmann, age 66 years
coat of arms	lllr	lllr	coloured coat of arms of Wolfgang Hoffmann in 1607
<i>Grundliche Nachricht vom Geschlechte und Verwandschafft derer Hoffmanner</i>	1 r-18r	1 r-18r	family history
<i>Nachricht von meinem seeligen Bruder Herrn Augusto Hoffmann</i>	19r-20v	19r-[20v]	report on the life of Hoffmann's brother August Hoffmann
rebound note <i>P.M.</i> [pro memoria]	20a		note that the reports on the Knorre family [Friedrich Hoffmann's maternal relations] were taken out text loss leaves 21-33 (old foliation)
<i>Leben und Wandel Herrn Friedrich Hoffmann Konigl. PreuB. Hoffraths und Professoris Medicinae Primarii aufder Universitaet zu Halle</i>	21r-37v	34r-50v	first part of Hoffmann's curriculum vitae (until 1732)
<i>Merita in Academiam Fridericianam</i>	38r-39v	51r-52v	merits concerning the administration of Halle University
<i>Merita mea exigua in rem medicam et physicam</i>	40Y-41 v	53r-54v	miscellaneous discoveries and achievements
<i>Elogia quibus a laudatis viris, maxime medicis scripta mea passim laudata sunt</i>	42r-45v	55r-58v	list of works of famous scholars where Hoffmann's writings were praised
<i>Recensitio locorum ex scriptis quibusdam publicis ubi de nostris tractatibus honorifica fit mentio</i>	46r-48r	59r-61 r	references of works where Hoffmann's writings were praised, includes copy of letter <i>Litterae Leibnitii ad Dn. De Fuchs mei commendatitiae</i> [47v]
<i>Besondere Nachricht von meinem seel. GroB-Vater Andreas Hoffmann</i>	49r-51 r	62r-64r	report over the deceased grandfather Andreas Hoffmann
<i>Von Verwandschafft meiner lieben Frauen</i>	52r-53v	65r-66r	report on the relations of Hoffmann's wife
<i>Von meinem Ehestand</i>	54r-56r	67r-69r	report on Hoffmann's marriage
<i>Kurtze Nachricht von meiner lieben seel. altesten Tochter Johanna Dorothea Hoffmannin Leben und Wandel auf dieser Welt</i>	57r-60r	70r-73r	report on the deceased eldest daughter Dorothea Hoffmann

Table 2 continued

Contents of the autobiography

<i>Nachricht von meines liebsten seel. Sohnes Friedrich Ernst Hoffmanns Leben und Wandel in dieser Welt und freudigen seel. Abschiedhis</i>	61 r-66v	74r-79v	report on the deceased son Friedrich Ernst Hoffmann and death
<i>Nomina, qui in 8. filii mei memoriam quotannis orationes habuerunt, et singuli 10. imperiales acceperunt</i>	67r	80r	names of persons who delivered speeches in memory of Hoffmann's deceased son
<i>Ode Welche der Herr Doctor Jacobus Van den Velde jetziger Professor Med: in MarpurgAo: 1702 aufmich gemacht</i>	68r-68v	81r-81v	ode by Dr. Jacobus van den Velde
<i>Catalogus virorum, natalium splendore et eruditionis gloria conspkuorum, quibuscum commercium litterarum aluit FRIDERICUS HOFFMANNUS</i>	69r-71v	82r-84v	list of scholars with whom Hoffmann stood in professional contact
<i>Specification der mir dedkierten scriptorum und dissertationum</i>	72r-72v	85r-85v	works and dissertations dedicated to Hoffmann
<i>Carmen welches der seel. H. Probst Lkhtscheid auf die Invention meines Lebens-Balsams verfertiget</i>	73r-73v	86r-86v	poems on Friedrich Hoffmann
<i>Nachricht von meinen Scriptis, Bibliothec und curiosis</i>	74r-74v	87r-87v	orders and report concerning printing of catalogues of Hoffmann's books
<i>Von einigen Adversitaeten die mir in meinem Leben zugestoBen</i>	75r-82v	88r-95v	report on some adversities in life (death of parents and sister, conflict with Jena medical faculty, brother-in-law in disgrace, conflicts with Georg Ernst Stahl, Christian Thomasius, Andreas Gundelsheimer)
<i>Nachricht betreffend meine Leibs-Constitution, Studia, VerfaBung des Gemuths, Leben und Wandel</i>	83r-88r	96r-101 r	description of character as well as principles in medicine and religion
<i>Nachfolgende nachdenckl. apophthegmata habe pflegen in die Stammbucher geschrieben</i>	89r-89v	102-103	list of sayings
<i>Continuatio curriculi mei vitae ad p. 50</i>	90r-1 00r	104r-1 14r	second part of curriculum vitae (1732 onward)
[addendum, without title] <i>Ich habe hiermit auch melden wollen ...</i>	101 r	1 15r	supplementary remarks
<i>Ordo Dnn: Pro-Rectorum Academiae Fridericianae a prima eius Fundatione</i>	103r	1 17r	list of pro-rectors since foundation of Halle University until 1741
<i>Specification derer, die mir einige Scripta dediciret</i>	104r-104v	1 18r-118v	works with dedications (continuation of p. 72v)
<i>VerzeichniB der Nahmen derjenigen die sich bey mir aufgehhalten und bey meiner Arbeit mir an die Hand gegangen</i>	105r-105v	1 19r-1 19v	list of names who served as sich Hoffmann's assistants

Table 2 continued

Contents of the autobiography

<i>Benennung einiger vornehmen Personen, theils nicht, theils meine Frau zu Gevattern gebeten</i>	106r-107v	120r-121v	names of persons who asked die Hoffmann to become godfather or Hoffmann's wife to become godmother
<i>Mein Testament, welches ich d. 24 Junii 1738. der Universitaet ubergeben</i>	109r-114v	123r-128v	provisions of the testament handed over to Halle University on 24 June 1738
<i>Nachricht von der Verwandtschaft meines Schwieger Sohnes, des Herrn Geheimten Rath Schmalz</i>	116r-118r	130r-132r	report on the relations of Hoffmann's son in law
<i>Specification derer hohen Standes Personen, die Sich meines Rathes und Kur bedienen</i>	119r-123v	133r-137v	list of nobles who consulted Hoffmann
[without heading] <i>D. Burgmannus in tr. succinctum ...</i>	125r-125v	140r-140v	Hoffmann positively mentioned by Peter Christoph Burgmann, Herman Boerhaave and Johannes Wigan
<i>In dem uralten Holtzwirthischen und Hoffmannischen Erb-Begrabniß auf dem Gottes Acker habe mir ein schbnes epitaphium von Marmor setzen laßen worinne diese Schrift enthalten ist</i>	126r-126v	141r-141v	epitaph inscriptions
<i>In vorbesagten Erb-Begrabniß oder Schwibbogen sind oben an die Decke diese Spruche geschrieben</i>	127r	142r	verses from the Bible at the ceiling of the burial-place
<i>Verzeichniß der in diesem Bande befindlichen Materien</i>	128r-128v	143r-143v	table of contents

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- ^{xvi}Niggel, *Geschichte*, p. 22.
- ^{xvii}On p. 32r, one part of the events of the year 1724 shows a different handwriting. Pages are given according to the new foliation indicated in table I.
- ^{xviii}One part of the year 1732 is treated on leaf 37v, the next part from leaf 90r onwards.
- ^{xix}See for example Hoffmann, *Particularia*, p. 104v. After works covering the years until 1738, additions followed in another handwriting between 1740 and 1742, and a further addition in 1742.
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- ^{xxviii}Hoffmann: *Particularia*, p. 85r.
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"Hoffmann, *Particularia*, p. 75v.

"Rambach, *Kurze Nachricht*, pp. 29-30.

"Hoffmann, *Particularia*, pp. 76r-76v.