

## Loose Ends and Gordian Knots: The Voyages of Luther Whiting Mason to and from Japan

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If there is anything more frustrating than the existence of factual errors in accounts of historical personages and events, it is the persistence of such errors in the face of contradictory evidence. It would appear that once a mistake finds its way into print, later researchers often seem only too willing to perpetuate the error, whether out of a more or less understandable reliance on previous sources or, less understandably, out of carelessness or the tendency to overlook questionable assumptions.

One theoretical issue that arises from existence of such factual error is where to draw the line between the material and the trivial. It is a question as old as Aristotle, who in his *Poetics* famously argued that to paint a hind with horns is a less serious failing than to paint it inartistically, thus engaging Plato in the “ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy” that continues to this day (Barfield; Gould).

Does the mistranscription of a Japanese name, for example, count as an important mistake? The subject of this paper, Luther Whiting Mason (1818-1896), was an American advisor to the Japanese government who from March 1880 to July 1882 helped to establish instruction in vocal music as part of the standard curriculum in Japanese primary schools. He worked closely with a Japanese official in the Ministry of Education named Isawa Shūji (伊澤修二, 1851-1917). Both Japanese and Western scholars have mistakenly read the Japanese characters for Isawa’s family name as “Izawa” (Yamazumi; Malm; Eppstein; Galliano; Wade; Patterson), when evidence in English from Isawa himself establishes that “Isawa” is the correct form (Jewel 89). Especially perplexing is the continued use of “Izawa” by such

recent scholars as Galliano, Wade, and Patterson despite the current consensus in both Japanese and English that “Isawa” is the correct form.<sup>1</sup> What does it take to provide a consistent reading for a Japanese name after all this time? And what does it matter?

Addressing such prickly issues is not my purpose here, although I think it is worth remembering that at some point factual error does result in distorting the historical narratives we use to construct historical “truth,” and I will have occasion later to draw the reader’s attention to concrete examples of such distortion.<sup>2</sup> My chief aim is more narrowly focused: to examine aspects of the work of two Mason scholars who have been notably scrupulous in their research to identify certain of its limitations, and to demonstrate that establishing historical accuracy is frequently a tedious and ongoing process of confirmation and revision. The scholars are Nakamura Rihei, whose *Yōgaku dōnyūsha no kiseki* (Accounts of the Pioneers Who Introduced Western Music), published in 1993, contains the most thoroughly documented study of Mason’s life and activities available in Japanese; and Sondra Wieland Howe, who in her 1997 monograph *Luther Whiting Mason: International Music Educator* has produced the most thorough empirically based study of Mason’s life in English. The aim is partly corrective, partly augmentative, and partly speculative in nature. I would like, in short, to be able to tie up a few of the loose ends that have been left behind by Nakamura and Howe so that the knots from which they hang can be cut. At the same time, it must be recognized that my attempt to do so runs the risk of simply tightening those knots or, conversely, creating some loose ends of my own.

## **Mason’s Voyage to Japan**

The main obstacle in the path of any would-be Mason biographer is the paucity of first-hand documentation from the man himself. Mason apparently lacked the sort of introspective disposition that would have resulted in a convenient collection of diaries, for none exist. Letters are relatively few in number given Mason’s importance in the field of music education, although

some allowance must be made for the passage of time and the ephemerality of the form. Both Nakamura and Howe do cite letters written by Mason, but very few of those letters pertain to the particular circumstances surrounding Mason's arrival in Japan in March 1880 and his departure in July 1882, which are the circumstances that concern us here. The accounts of friends, family, and associates who benefited from direct access to Mason are also of limited use, largely because of their distance in time from the events they describe, but also because distortion can easily be introduced by either principal or intermediary. Other primary sources—public records, newspapers, archives of documents, and the like—promise a measure of contextual objectivity, but these must be located and collated. This painstaking task has been undertaken by scholars in both Japanese and English (Endō; Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku; Yamazumi; Eppstein; Hartley; Platt). Nakamura and Howe are the ones who currently have the best claim on having synthesized and expanded on such research. Both have addressed the issue of Mason's arrival in Japan, but a comparison of the two presents us with the first of our Gordian knots.

To begin with Howe's recapitulation of the relevant English-language sources, Mason's arrival in Yokohama is recorded in an unpublished pre-World War II biography by Mason's student and professional collaborator Osborne McConathy as having occurred on 2 March 1880 ("Luther Whiting Mason," cited in Hartley 30). McConathy, who briefly shared a house with Mason in Boston, presumably obtained the date directly from Mason, but the information could only have come to him some 15 years after the fact.<sup>3</sup> The possibility cannot be discounted that Mason may have misremembered the date or that he may have, for example, accorded precedence in his memory to the date he disembarked from his steamer rather than the date it actually arrived in port. Such possibilities are precisely why documentary verification is necessary.

In this respect, Howe offers an exemplary model of the course such verification might take. In her PhD dissertation of 1988, she uncritically accepts the 2 March arrival date, attributing it to McConathy via Hartley (*Contributions* 110). But in her monograph published nine years later, Howe changes

the arrival date to 1 March and adds the name of the steamer Mason took, the *City of Peking*. The change is clearly the result of Howe's determination to substantiate the date independently, which she does in this case by citing the 8 March 1880 edition of *The Japan Daily Herald (International Educator 75)*. As elsewhere in her monograph, we observe her commitment to strengthening her study by incorporating additional primary-source research.

Unfortunately, Howe's revision turns out to be problematic in two respects. Most centrally, it obscures a very real conflict over dating. Nakamura, whose document-based research precedes Howe's by four years, not only cites *The Japan Daily Herald*, but cross-checks this source against three others: *The Japan Weekly Mail*, *The Japan Gazette*, and *L'Echo du Japon* (502). The first extra source confirms the 1 March 1880 arrival date, but the other two place the arrival of the *City of Peking* in Yokohama on 2 March, as originally indicated by McConathy and Hartley. In other words, both 1 March and 2 March can be confirmed by separate primary sources, so simply replacing one date by the other is an unsatisfactory solution.

Nakamura, after noting the discrepancy, adopts 2 March as his preferred alternative on the basis of a report in Japanese submitted by the Minister of Education that the Japanese government considered Mason to be officially employed from that date (505).<sup>4</sup> Nakamura's evidence highlights the second problematic aspect of Howe's research, which is that Howe appears to lack a certain facility in conducting research in the Japanese language. Tellingly, for example, although Nakamura is quite aware of Howe's 1988 dissertation (409, 802), Howe's 1997 monograph fails to mention Nakamura, whose *Yōgaku* appeared four years earlier. This imbalance is hardly trivial, for it suggests that Howe, despite her attention to primary sources (some of which are in fact in Japanese), may have difficulty locating and documenting important material.<sup>5</sup> One hesitates to tax Howe too harshly on this point because every researcher labors under limitations, and Howe is without question conscientious. (One shudders at the thought that there might exist some omnilingual researcher with easy access to all relevant primary-source materials in any

language.) Nevertheless, in an awkward reversal of the expected order of progress, Nakamura proffers more—and more carefully considered—primary-source evidence than Howe. Yet Howe's prominence as an English-language biographer ensures that her account will likely continue to influence scholars and readers who only have access to materials in English. Perhaps heightening an awareness of Nakamura's work among English speakers might therefore count as an advance of sorts.<sup>6</sup>

This is not to say that we must accept Nakamura's preference for 2 March. Factuality is not always a context-free affair. Many of us, after all, will have experienced a situation in which an officially recorded date was simply a matter of expedience. For example, to repeat a previously mentioned possibility, Mason could surely have reported for duty, as it were, the day after arriving on the *City of Peking*. His arrival in port and the official starting date of his contract are not necessarily concomitant. How would we go about expanding the context Nakamura has supplied? What limitations does he exhibit that might prompt a further reevaluation of the historical record?

I must first of all confess that I cannot claim to have discovered documentary evidence that would irrefutably resolve the conflict over Mason's arrival date. In the absence of such irrefutable evidence, that knot appears to resist cutting or even unraveling. What I can do, however, is to summarize my attempts to expose the knot more clearly to view by setting it against an expanded English-language context, which is where Nakamura does seem to offer a little more room to maneuver.

For example, Nakamura restricts his examination of the *City of Peking's* reported arrival date to the newspaper issues closest in time to the arrival itself. A perusal of other issues over the period January to April 1880 does reveal at least one other inconsistency in reports of arriving transpacific steamers: *The Japan Gazette* (3 April 1880, "Shipping: Reports" 143) and *The Japan Weekly Mail* (20 March 1880, "Shipping Intelligence: Reports" 390) give the March arrival date of the British steamship *Gaelic* from San Francisco as occurring on 19 March and 20 March, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Here again, the rea-

son for the discrepancy is unclear, especially since *The Japan Gazette* notes the time of arrival as 5 p.m. on 19 March while *The Japan Weekly Mail* gives it as 5 a.m. on 20 March. Could *The Japan Weekly Mail* simply have been told “five” and mistaken that for a time 12 hours later? Otherwise, I am at a loss to account for the difference.<sup>8</sup> One clear lesson, however, is that even primary sources must be approached with caution: context may be very difficult to establish. Reports in the 6 March issues of both papers fail to mention time of arrival for the *City of Peking*, so drawing inferences from them is a fraught process.

Indeed, Nakamura seems to have used the information in the 6 March 1880 *The Japan Weekly Mail* to reach a rare unwarranted conclusion: he claims, on the basis of reported strong gales at sea (“Shipping Intelligence: Reports” 327), that the *City of Peking’s* voyage from San Francisco took longer than usual (489). However, descriptions of gales and high seas are the common stuff of published shipping reports and have no necessary bearing on timely passage. Extending one’s search to previous issues of the same newspaper, one finds that the “Next Mail Due” section in the issues for 14 February (217), 21 February (255), and 28 February (289) all give 1 March as the expected date of the arrival of the *City of Peking*, and that all specifically refer to the steamer’s departure from San Francisco (as scheduled) on 7 February. Either there was no actual delay or the *City of Peking* nominally arrived a day later than scheduled, a delay that would have been deemed negligible after a transpacific voyage of about three weeks (and it should be remembered that Mason was active ashore on 2 March, so disembarkation would have occurred fairly early).

Obviously, then, primary sources themselves can benefit from contextual elaboration. When a lack of documentation inhibits such elaboration, a certain amount of speculation may be justified—although it, too, should ideally be based on primary sources (including facsimiles and edited materials). Speculation of this sort might ultimately yield little in the way of tangible results, but it may suggest additional paths to follow, help reduce uncertainty, and possibly even result in unexpected discoveries.

Here let us focus on a single speculative possibility, the one broached earlier about a gap between the arrival of the *City of Peking* and Mason's official assumption of duties. Coincidentally, when Mason returned from Japan to San Francisco, the steamer that carried him, the *Arabic*, arrived in port the night before it actually docked and discharged its passengers (*Daily Alta California*, 29 July 1882, "Arrival of the 'Arabic'" 1). In other words, Mason disembarked on 29 July, but his arrival was recorded as having occurred on 28 July (his name appears in the "Passenger Lists" on the same page). Such delays were surely common—after all, what would passengers do ashore after disembarking late at night? This lends a certain amount of weight to the supposition that something similar might have happened when Mason arrived in Yokohama in 1880: a relatively late arrival followed by disembarkation the next day. Add to this the fact that the 6 March issue of *The Japan Weekly* mentions the 1 March arrival date not only in the usual "Shipping Intelligence: Inwards" section (327) but also in the "Notes of the Week" section (305), and furthermore that it carries the article previously mentioned apparently based on an interview with Mason himself ("Editorial Notes" 303-304), and the circumstantial case begins to build. Finally, therefore, while acknowledging the tentative nature of the judgment, I tend to favor Howe's date over Nakamura's as the date of the *City of Peking's* arrival in Japan, with Mason's assumption of his duties taking place on 2 March. Perhaps new evidence (or a more convincing argument) will yet emerge to help us sever this freshly configured version of our first Gordian knot.

To digress somewhat by way of further amplification, let me refer to two delays between arrival and disembarkation that were in fact documented by visitors to Japan in the second half of the 19th century. Clara A. Whitney (1861-1936) and Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), like Mason, both arrived at Yokohama aboard steamships. Whitney arrived on 3 August 1875 and Hearn on 4 April 1890 (the dates can be confirmed in the newspapers already cited). The former recorded her arrival in her diary; Hearn published an account of his in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*.

Whitney begins by describing the passengers on the deck of the still-mov-

ing steamer, the *Oceanic*, at around 5 a.m., gazing at the approaching coastline. Currents prevent the steamer from entering port at the expected time of noon, so it anchors and waits. Later in the afternoon, the steamer anchors again in port and, after taking dinner onboard (still in the afternoon, of course), Whitney and her family are ferried about a mile to the dock by tender, a “stormy passage” of perhaps 20 minutes (25-26). This firsthand account is essentially mirrored by Hearn’s more impressionistic piece. Hearn’s steamer, the *Abyssinia*, approaches the coast “at earliest dawn,” skirts the shoreline, and anchors in port about a mile from shore. After breakfast onboard, Hearn and his baggage are carried to “the *Hatoba*” by “sampan” (867-68). The timing is rather less precise than Whitney’s, but it is clear that hours have passed between anchoring and disembarkation.

In 1880, the *City of Peking*, with Mason on board, would surely have followed the same protocol, and assuming a late-afternoon arrival in port, next-day disembarkation seems even more likely—although again, no “smoking gun” has yet surfaced to settle the dispute once and for all, and there remains the possibility that Mason may have even disembarked on 1 March and officially assumed his duties the next day after spending the night in Tokyo (or elsewhere). This is the point at which my own limitations make it advisable to put an end to further speculation for the time being.

Incidentally, it is interesting to note that in the case of Hearn, a troubling discrepancy exists not over the date of his arrival in Yokohama but over the date of his departure from Vancouver, British Columbia. Several standard biographies in English (Stevenson; Cott; Murray) state that the *Abyssinia* left Vancouver on 17 March 1890. Granted that 17 March was the originally scheduled departure date,<sup>9</sup> one suspects that the writers of these biographies—acutely aware of Hearn’s Irish background—were seduced by the thought of Hearn’s having set out for Japan on St. Patrick’s Day, for not only do they fail to document their chosen date, they also ignore a previously published date of 18 March that appears in McWilliams’s 1946 biography (264).

McWilliams, too, fails to cite a source, but her date is in fact confirmed by

multiple contemporary accounts of the departure of George Francis Train (1829-1904) aboard the *Abyssinia*. Train was a genuine (if somewhat notorious) celebrity who, under the sponsorship of *The Tacoma Daily Ledger* newspaper, was attempting to set a round-the-world speed record—a fascinating story in itself. It appears that the *Abyssinia*'s departure was delayed by a day to accommodate Train, who boarded a coastal steamer from Tacoma early in the morning of 18 March to rendezvous with the *Abyssinia*, which had left Vancouver at 7 a.m. and anchored off the coast of Victoria, waiting to receive him.<sup>10</sup>

It might be thought odd at first that Hearn, so given to detailed reportage of sensational events, would not mention the presence of such a celebrity on board, especially since Hearn chooses to open his own article with details about the increasing speed of modern travel. But Hearn's details are always selected in a way that allows him to filter them through his own sensibility: the focus remains on Hearn. This is what should give readers pause about accepting his accounts as complete or even factual; he embellishes and invents as necessary to produce the impression he wishes to achieve. It seems quite possible that Hearn, in his eagerness to remain the center of attention, deliberately omits any description of the hoopla surrounding the departure of the *Abyssinia* even while drawing inspiration from Train's quest to establish a new speed record. Not only that, despite Hearn's failure (or refusal) to acknowledge Train, Train in his autobiography takes notice of Hearn: "Lafcadio Hearn, the distinguished writer, was on the same ship, on his way to Japan. He was so ill that he did not leave his stateroom during the voyage" (336). If we are to credit Train, what else in Hearn's impressionistic account of the voyage in might be other than it appears? At any rate, the date of the *Abyssinia*'s departure (or its arrival in Yokohama, for that matter) is certainly not forthcoming from Hearn himself.

Although it may appear that we have diverged rather sharply from a consideration of Luther Whiting Mason's arrival in Japan, I believe that this lengthy digression has served three useful purposes: it echoes previous cautionary notes about the careful handling of primary sources; it casts doubt

on the supposed reliability of even firsthand accounts; and it demonstrates just how stubbornly errors of fact (or omission) can persist. Similar lessons are likely to apply as we turn to an examination of the ambiguities attending Mason's return from Japan in 1882.

### **Mason's Departure from Japan**

Both Nakamura and Howe—along with their sources—are in accord about the date of Mason's departure from Yokohama: 14 July 1882, aboard the British steamer *Arabic* (*Yōgaku* 528, 537, 538, 549; *International Educator* 110). But disagreement and a perhaps unavoidable ambiguity do emerge in their descriptions of the route Mason took. We begin again with Howe, who this time ends up at a clear disadvantage. The caveat is that this section will be significantly shorter than the previous one, precisely because the number of loose ends is overwhelming and because no major digressions are involved.

In her PhD dissertation, Howe once again follows Hartley, who—without citing a specific source (most likely McConathy)—merely states that “Mason departed for America by way of Europe in July of 1882” (*Life and Works* 40). Shifting her attention from Mason's work in Japan to his later work in Europe, Howe, too, asserts that Mason “did not go directly home. He traveled to Europe to collect material to revise his *National Music Course*” (*Contributions* 161). Howe repeats the claim a dozen pages later: “When Mason left Japan in July 1882, he traveled to Europe before returning to America” (173). No specific departure date is provided, either here or in the chronology in “Appendix A” (200-202).

This impreciseness evidently bothered Howe, for in her monograph she makes use of documentary evidence from *The Japan Weekly Mail* and *The Japan Daily Herald* to provide information about Mason's departure date and the vessel name (*International Educator* 110). Although Howe has again been anticipated by Nakamura (*Yōgaku* 537), the revision is characteristic of the higher standard of verification found in her monograph. Yet as we have already seen in the case of Nakamura, it is possible to extrapolate too far on the basis of

documentary evidence, and Howe proceeds, quite carelessly, to do just that:

Mason traveled to Europe before returning to the United States. He left Yokohama on the British steamer *Arabic* with a cargo of mail, tea, and silk. Thirty passengers were listed in cabins, plus eight Europeans and 1,181 Chinese in steerage. The steamer left Hong Kong on July 4 and arrived in Yokohama July 10. After leaving Yokohama on July 14, the steamer traveled to San Francisco, around Cape Horn, to New York, and Europe. Mason is listed as a passenger in a cabin, traveling to Hamburg, Germany. (*International Educator* 110)

Howe has taken the destination provided by Mason and assumed that this must coincide with the destination (or one of the way ports) of the *Arabic*. She has then also assumed that the steamer must have sailed to New York and Europe by way of Cape Horn. Both assumptions are mistaken, as is clearly evident from published shipping information. For example, here is the item in the 15 July 1882 edition of *The Japan Weekly Mail* that Howe herself cites in connection with Mason's departure:

**PASSENGERS.**

Per Japanese steamer *Nagoya Maru* for Shanghai and ports :—  
Revd. Mr. and Mrs. Long and 2 children, Miss Braess, Captain Black, Bishop Williams, Mr. and Mrs. Aston, Messrs. Ishimatsu, Mitakwai, Yada, Matusmura, Nakagawa, Okoshi, Ashida, Wakiu, Sarada, T. Hako, Matsui, Takata, Nakai, and Kawada and family in cabin.

Per British steamer *Arabic* for San Francisco :—For Liverpool :  
Mr. A. Strevenson, and Dr. B. Christiarsson in cabin. For Paris :  
Mr. Georgieffsky in cabin. For New York : Miss Parmalee, Miss True, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Heinemann, 4 children and servant, Commodore Schuefeldt and Miss Schuefeldt in cabin. For San Francisco :  
Mrs. L. G. Ross, Miss Sargent, Messrs. J. H. Wills, E. E. French, S. Sato, S. Arakawa, Suzuki, L. Ozawa, and Mons. P. Lasserne in cabin ; 8 Europeans and 1,181 Chinese in steerage. For Glasgow :  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dyer, 4 children and servant in cabin. For Hamburg :  
Mr. L. W. Mason in cabin. ,

Per Japanese steamer *Toyoshima Maru* for Hakodate :—Revd. W. C. Davisson in cabin.

(“Shipping Intelligence” 878)

Mason may have ultimately been bound for Hamburg, but the steamer's destination is clearly stated as San Francisco. If the destinations provided for the other passengers are any indication, the *Arabic* would also have had to sail to Liverpool, Paris, and Glasgow as well as to New York and San Francisco—plainly impossible in the case of Paris and highly unlikely for the other far-flung ports. In fact, the *Arabic* was operated by the Occidental and Oriental Steamship Company on a standard transpacific route that ran between San Francisco and Hong Kong (the same route was served by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, which operated the *City of Peking*). A roughly contemporary (from 1883) newspaper advertisement of the time indicates that departures on the route from San Francisco were scheduled to occur about every two weeks, and the *Arabic* was definitely part of that regular schedule (Tate 30).

Even more to the point, according to the 29 July 1882 issue of the San Francisco-based *Daily Alta California*, the *Arabic* arrived on 28 July 1882 (“Shipping Intelligence” 4), and according to the 13 August 1882 issue of the same newspaper, it sailed again for Yokohama and Hong Kong on 12 August (“Shipping Intelligence” 4).<sup>11</sup> In other words, Mason quite simply could not have taken that particular steamer around Cape Horn.

The question (our second Gordian knot) therefore becomes, Where did Mason go from San Francisco? Here is where the documentary trail starts to grow cold, with the important exception (discussed below) that evidence exists that Mason did in fact visit Maine before sailing to Europe, thereby rendering Howe's account doubly invalid. (On the other hand, Nakamura has nothing at all to say about Mason's arrival in San Francisco or the means by which he reached Maine, leaving a substantial gap in his own account.) Speculation must once again suffice until a more determined effort can be made to locate the sources that would allow us to trace Mason's route with more confidence. Still, such speculation need not occur in the complete absence of evidence.

For one thing, by the 1880s, shipboard passengers were typically taking steamers down the coast to Panama, crossing the Isthmus of Panama on the

Panama Railway (which started full-length operations in 1855), and boarding different steamers at Aspinall (Colón) for destinations farther north. Sail-rigged cargo ships may have journeyed around Cape Horn, but the difference in time of passage could be measured in months, and for passengers who could afford it, the savings in time would have been decisive. In fact, the *Daily Alta California* lists no steamers departing for destinations farther south than Panama for the month of August 1882. The Cape Horn route in general must be considered highly unlikely.

Most compellingly, Nakamura refers to a Japanese translation of a letter sent by Mason to Isawa (the English original has been lost, but a translation intended for official use was archived), in which Mason reports that he left New York for Hamburg on 30 August and arrived in Hamburg on 15 September (538, 550).<sup>12</sup> The same letter relates that Mason visited his family in Maine prior to his departure. This evidence (a primary source, if indirect and reliant on Mason's veracity) calls into question even the Panama route to the East Coast. Instead, one strongly suspects that Mason returned to Boston by the same method he had traveled to San Francisco in 1880: the transcontinental railroad.

Regarding that earlier trip, I have been able to locate reports in the *Daily Alta California* of Mason's progress between Omaha, Nebraska (neighboring the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific Railway in Council Bluffs, Iowa), and San Francisco (the western terminus of the Central Pacific Railroad). Specifically, Mason is reported to have passed through Omaha on 17 January 1880 (18 January 1880, "Passenger Lists" 5) and to have passed through Carlin, Nevada, on 21 January "to arrive in San Francisco to-morrow" (22 January 1880, "Passenger Lists" 4).<sup>13</sup> Six days, inclusive, that is, between Omaha (and Council Bluffs) and San Francisco. Mason is subsequently reported to be in residence at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco (3 February 1880, "Hotel Personals" 1). This information partially fills a gap left by both Nakamura and Howe regarding Mason's activities between 13 December 1879 and 7 February 1880,<sup>14</sup> but more pertinently here, it also suggests the immense reduction in time to be gained by taking the train across the conti-

ment (the entire journey would have taken no more than about ten days without extra stops). With barely over one month between his arrival in San Francisco and his departure from New York, it is hard to imagine that Mason did not simply retrace his earlier route in the opposite direction.

### **Conclusion: Sisyphus as Role Model**

Has our second Gordian knot thus been cut? Well, no. Not only is documentary evidence still lacking for Mason personally, the pertinent circumstantial evidence of train schedules, steamer schedules, advertisements, and other contextual material has scarcely been touched. That evidence is geographically scattered and vast. My own suppositions are just that—suppositions—and my conclusions provisional. I believe that I have successfully consolidated and corrected existing materials related to Mason’s voyages to and from Japan, but I cannot be sure that I have not overlooked something important, and it is quite possible that I have made some careless assumption—or committed some careless error—of my own. Directions for future research have been suggested, but some will prove to be dead ends, and I would like to have advanced a greater distance in several of those directions myself. The knot is still too nebulous to be amenable to severing.

Perhaps my own chief benefit from conducting a study such as this is a heightened appreciation for those who expend so much time and energy pursuing primary sources to conclusions that so often end up as footnotes in academic studies. Moreover, I have learned that serendipity plays an outsized role in the process. Focus on confirming the arrival date of the *City of Peking* in the “Shipping Intelligence” section of the 6 March 1880 edition of *The Japan Weekly Mail*, and one could easily overlook the lengthy interview with Mason that appears earlier in the “Editor’s Notes.” Knowing that a smallpox infection on the *City of Peking* when it arrived in San Francisco on 19 January 1880 (the very steamer that Mason boarded almost three weeks later) resulted in a quarantine that delayed docking and disembarkation might prompt speculation that a similar inspection may have been responsible for

the reported difference in its arrival time at Yokohama.<sup>15</sup> Both discoveries prompt serious consideration, even if only the first proves material.

It is clear that the process of conducting research in primary (or closely related) sources is painstakingly precise and its effects cumulative over time, which also means that an almost continuous series of corrections and amplifications comes into play. The labor seems endless, prone to error and negligence, and because it involves digressions that often seem futile, frustrating and thankless. To establish a factual basis for historical interpretation, however, there is no discernible alternative: one can only resign oneself to the task and persevere. In the memorable line from Martin Scorsese's 2019 film *The Irishman*, "It is what it is."

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The potential for confusion is evident in an article by Eppstein ("Music Instruction") that adopts "Izawa" in the text but "Isawa" when citing documents written by Isawa. A later monograph resolves this inconsistency in favor of "Isawa" (*Beginnings of Western Music*), but "Izawa" remains unaccountably prevalent. Patterson represents an especially perplexing case because he repeatedly cites Eppstein's corrected monograph yet persists in using "Izawa" (*Music and Words* 20).

Japanese scholars have an advantage over scholars working in English in that they can simply supply the Chinese characters regardless of possible phonetic variants. Yamazumi, however, explicitly uses the hiragana reading "Izawa" on the second title page (immediately preceding the main text) of *Yōgaku kotohajime*, indicating that native speakers often confront the same problems faced by non-Japanese scholars even if they can sometimes conveniently skirt the issue.

<sup>2</sup> See Megill for an example of how the question of historical accuracy can be approached theoretically. Feller offers a stimulating online discussion of some of the practical issues involved.

<sup>3</sup> For details of McConathy's personal and professional association with Mason between 1894 and 1896, see Platt (40-57) and Howe (*International Educator* 135-40); Platt also provides a short description of McConathy's unpublished manuscript (309-10), a copy of which is held in the Luther Whiting Mason Collection in the Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library at the University of Maryland. McConathy published two short articles on Mason ("Luther Whiting Mason" and "'Mason Song' in Japan") that cast doubt on his objectivity as a biographer, but there is no reason to question the accuracy of this date.

- <sup>4</sup> The report—submitted to the government by the new (from 28 February 1880) Minister of Education Kōno Togama—specifies the period of Mason’s engagement as a government advisor from 2 March 1880 to 1 March 1882, at a monthly salary of 250 yen. See Yamazumi for confirmation of the starting date of 2 March (*Yōgaku kotohajime* 11). Howe mentions the minister’s presence at a welcoming banquet for Mason, but mistransliterates his name as “Kawano Tokama” (76).
- <sup>5</sup> For other indications of Howe’s linguistic limitations, see Jewel (91). *International Educator* contains transliteration errors that probably would have been fewer in number had Howe been more familiar with the language (which is not to say that the errors are material, but they hint at the presence of more consequential shortcomings).
- <sup>6</sup> A more pungent criticism of Howe will be found in Ono, who levels a serious charge of inaccuracy against Howe’s cataloguing of the Mason Collection at the University of Maryland (205, note 4).

To note another example of the difference between Nakamura and Howe, because Nakamura examined multiple sources, he discovered in *The Japan Weekly Mail* of 6 March 1880 (“Editorial Notes” 303-304) an article based on an interview with the newly arrived Mason that discusses Mason’s mission at length. Howe seems to be unaware of this article; Nakamura quotes it at length—in his own Japanese translation (*Yōgaku* 503-505). But then by way of signaling one of the alternative perils of primary-source research, Nakamura promptly cites the wrong location in *The Japan Weekly Mail*: 306 instead of the correct 303-304 (*Yōgaku* 529).

- <sup>7</sup> *The Japan Gazette* also briefly reports the 19 March arrival date in its 20 March 1880 issue (“Summary” 1). Unfortunately, the temporary closure of the Yokohama Archives of History due to the current coronavirus pandemic has hampered my ability to conduct a more extensive examination of all four newspapers cited by Nakamura; as a result, a planned table has been omitted.

Because of the large number of references in this paper to articles in contemporary newspapers—all of which are unattributed and which often appear under the same section title—all direct citations will appear inside the text. When adding a subsection title seems helpful, a colon has been used to separate it from the main section title. Newspapers are listed under a separate heading in the Works Cited.

- <sup>8</sup> One should not underestimate the potential for carelessness on the part of the newspapers. For example, the first two issues of *The Japan Gazette* for 1880 actually print the year as 1879 in the masthead. Talk about the possibility of confusion.
- <sup>9</sup> The scheduled departure date can be found, for example, in articles in the Vancouver-based *The Daily Colonist* newspaper for both 22 February 1890 (“Around the World in Sixty Days” 4) and 6 March 1890 (“Little Locals” 1) about George Francis Train, who will be discussed below.
- <sup>10</sup> A concise account noting the departure of the *Abyssinia* from Vancouver at 7 a.m.

on 18 March will be found in the 19 March 1890 edition of *The Daily Colonist* ("George Francis Train" 1). Other related contemporary newspaper articles are numerous. The 12 April 1890 issue of *The Japan Weekly Mail* itself reports the date of the *Abyssinia's* departure as 18 March ("Shipping Intelligence" 390). Very frustratingly, Robert L. Gale's *A Lafcadio Hearn Companion* of 2002 retains the mistaken departure date (240), even though the Japanese-language *Bungaku arubamu: Koizumi Yakumo*, for example—published two years earlier under the editorship of Koizumi Toki and Koizumi Bon, Hearn's son and grandson—specifies the correct date (73).

<sup>11</sup> Other newspapers in the *California Digital Newspaper Collection* confirm the 28 July arrival date.

<sup>12</sup> Mason's letter was dated 20 November 1882. A published version of the translation in printed form will be found in Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku Hyakunen-shi Henshū Inkaï (238-39). Nakamura appears to have examined the original handwritten version in the archives of Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku (Tokyo University of the Arts). Howe is obviously unaware of its existence.

In another rare (but not insignificant) mistake for Nakamura—ironically embedded in his discussion of Mason's letter—he undoes his own chronology when he cites Hartley's study in order to mention a reception for Mason that was held in Boston after Mason's return. Nakamura characterizes the reception as occurring after Mason's return from Japan but before his departure for Europe (538, 550). Hartley, however, as we have already seen, states that Mason returned to the United States by way of Europe (*Study of the Life* 40). In fact, Hartley unmistakably places the reception after Mason's trip to Europe (41).

<sup>13</sup> The first of these reports adds that Mason was due to reach Sacramento, California, on 21 January. Near-contemporary timetables for the Union Pacific-Central Pacific route, together with a map of all stops, may be found in Allen's *Official Guide* (202-209). The Union Pacific schedule in this source is actually labeled as being from April 1880 and provides for a departure from Council Bluffs at 11:20 a.m. with an arrival at San Francisco at 1:35 p.m. (204). This schedule condenses the full Central Pacific timetable, which in the same edition of the *Official Guide* is for April 1881 and gives 11:35 a.m. as the revised arrival time in San Francisco (208). Mason presumably would have left Chicago on the Chicago & North-Western Railway at around 12:30 p.m. on 16 January (220).

<sup>14</sup> A farewell testimonial for Mason was held in Boston on 13 December 1879 (*Yōgaku* 404, 413-14; *International Educator* 62-63). A biographical gap exists between that date and Mason's departure from San Francisco. Howe cites a letter from Mason to Isawa of 20 November 1879 (which does not appear in Nakamura, despite Howe's reference to a Japanese source) in which Mason declares his intention to leave for Japan aboard the *City of Tokio* on 27 December 1880 (62), remarking a few pages

later, “it is not known why his plans changed” (75).

- <sup>15</sup> See the 6 March 1880 edition *The Japan Weekly Mail* (“Small-Pox on board the *City of Peking*” 301-302). Nakamura, as might be expected, cites the article, but he does not pursue the topic beyond hinting at the travails of sea voyages for a man of Mason’s age (489).

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