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The Autograph of Aida and the New Verdi Edition

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The Autograph of AIDA and the New Verdi Edition

David Lawton

The editorial guidelines for The Works of Giuseppe Verdi establish the final authority of the composer's autograph as a fundamental premise of the new critical edition:

It was normally Verdi's habit through most of his career to leave his autograph manuscripts in a form he considered definitive for the work in question.1 This principle is undeniably valid for the two operas that have been published to date (Rigoletto, edited by Martin Chusid, and Ernani, edited by Claudio Gallico) and for two currently in preparation (Nabucco, edited by Roger Parker, and I l trovatore, edited by the present writer).2 Aida poses special problems, however, because Verdi played a more active role in the early publication and performance history of the work than ever before.

The composer reviewed and corrected two of the earliest manuscript copies of the full score.3 One of these was used for the world premiere of the opera in Cairo. Unfortunately, this precious manuscript was destroyed by a fire that consumed the Cairo opera house in 1971.4 The other score was presumably intended for the composer's use; its whereabouts are not currently known.5 In addition, Verdi read the proofs of both the libretto and the piano-vocal score.6 The piano-vocal score he corrected has been preserved in the archives of the Villa Verdi at St. Agata, and is of great importance. Verdi acknowledged the receipt of it in a letter to Giulio Ricordi dated 17 November 1871:

I received Radames' part, but why did you send the entire score? Let's avoid the useless then, and send me a part in which there are only the numbers for Radames. The score you sent can be used to correct the remaining errors.7

The St. Agata score, marked "Per Radames," is a complete copy of the earliest edition of the piano-vocal score in octavo format, plate number 42602.8 It contains a number of corrections in the composer's hand, which correspond to those mentioned in his letters to Ricordi of 23 and 26 November 1871.9 The score presumably represents the version of the piece performed in Cairo, and thus compensates to some extent for the loss of the full score. It contains the earliest versions of several passages to be discussed in this essay, as well as the original version of the stretta for the Aida-Amneris duet in Act II.

In addition to supervising the printing of early editions of the libretto and the piano-vocal score, Verdi also staged the first performances of the opera in Milan and Parma (1872) and in Naples (1873), and conducted the work in Vienna (1875) and in Paris (Théâtre Italien, 1876; Opéra, 1880).10 The manuscript score from which he conducted the Opéra production is housed in the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra, and contains many annotations in his hand. Finally Verdi assisted Nu ùtter in the preparation of the French translation published in Escudier's piano-vocal score, pl. no. 3603.11

To be sure, there are cases where the principle of the final authority of the autograph holds good also for Aida; we shall look at three of the most interesting ones. The first is from Aida's Scena in Act I (P. R. 153, p. 69/2/1-5).12 Instead of the duet for Violins I and II that foreshadows the dominant preparation for "Numi pieta" (70/2/1-4), Verdi originally wrote a single E-flat for two flutes in unison (autograph, f. 75v; see example 1).13 Next to the sign on f. 75v is a note, not in Verdi's hand: "da qui al foglio staccato per l'aggiunta di quattro battute."14 Folio 76, to which the note refers, contains the revision (example 1b); it is an insert, in Verdi's hand, but on paper of a different size and tint. The verso is blank, and the original paper resumes with f. 77. The only other source I have found that contains the first version of this transition is the St. Agata piano-vocal score.15 The remaining sources I've consulted, including a copy with the same plate numbers, have the revision.16
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Example 1

a) autograph, f. 75u

\[ \text{Fl.} \]

b) autograph, f. 76

\[ \text{Vi. I, II} \]

Probably at the composer's request, for the La Scala production of 1872 (the first in Italy), Antonio Ghislanzoni revised *Aida*’s lines in the final duet of Act IV from:

Presago il core della tua condanna,
Qui da tre di ti attendo,
E qui lontana da ogni umano sguardo
Nelle tue braccia desiai morire.

to:

Presago il core della tua condanna
In questa tomba che per te si apriva
lo penetrai furtiva...
E qui, lontana da ogni umano sguardo,
Nelle tue braccia desiai morire.\(^{17}\)

Only the St. Agata piano-vocal score has preserved Verdi’s setting of the first version of these lines. Example 2 a) is copied from page 277 of that score. Verdi erased this version and wrote the revision, example 2 b), directly into the autograph, ff. 371-371v; the new version appears in subsequent printings of the libretto and the score.\(^{18}\)

Andrew Porter and Julian Budden have pointed out that Verdi added the ballet music between rehearsal letters H and HF in the second-act finale (P. R. 153, pp. 172-189) for the Paris production of 1880.\(^{19}\) Although he had first resisted Vaucorbeil's request to lengthen the ballet,\(^{20}\) in the end he considered the revision definitive, for he had the new music bound into the autograph,\(^{21}\) and it appears in editions published after 1880.

Given the complexity of the opera's publication and performance history, and the composer's role in it, it is perhaps not surprising that the discrepancies between the autograph and the current Ricordi score (P. R. 153) are more numerous, more extensive and more problematic than those for any Verdi opera that this writer has studied.\(^{22}\) Although space does not permit an account of all these variants, the present article examines a few of the most significant ones together with their implications for the critical edition. They can be classified into three groups: a) readings in the autograph that are definitive, but have not been carried into the printed score; b) passages for which the autograph does not represent Verdi's final intentions; and c) discrepancies for which there is no satisfactory explanation at this time.

The end of "Numi pietà" and the beginning of the following consecration scene (marked "Finale I.o" in the autograph) will serve as representative of category a). The last page of *Aida*’s scena "Ritornar vincitor" falls on f. 84r in Verdi's manuscript. The notation of this page, which contains only the final measure of the piece, is remarkably suggestive: after the last notes of the clarinet and the violoncellos (P. R. 153, 72/3/5) Verdi wrote a series of dots, followed by the instruction "segue." There is no bar line at the end of f. 84r, and f. 84v is blank. I have not seen a single printed source that respects this unusual notation. The indication "segue" is found only in manuscript full scores.\(^{23}\) Yet
Example 2

a) St. Agata p.v., p. 277.

Andante ($J = 63$)

Presago il core del tua condanna qui da tre di t'at-

b) autograph, ff. 371-371v

Andante ($J = 63$)

Presago il core del tua condanna, in quest-a

tomba che per-te s'apri va io penetrai fur-ti va... e qui lon [etc.]
it is clear that this instruction represents Verdi's final intentions, not only from its retention in the manuscript sources, but above all from the language in Giulio Ricordi's *Disposizione Scenica*:

**NOTE:** During Aida's scene the **entire male chorus must change to priests' costumes** [...]. The stage director must arrange everything to avoid confusion, so that the choristers will be ready and in their positions in time. A delay in the scene change would spoil the musical effect.24

A note in Verdi's hand at the beginning of the following number is found only in the autograph, and is apparently a later addition: "N.B. Si prega l'artista che eseguirà la parte d'Aida a voler cantare queste prime strofe della Gran Sacerdotessa" (f. 85: "N.B. the artist who performs the role of Aida is requested to sing these first verses of the High Priestess"). Originally Verdi had planned on a separate singer for this role. In a letter to Paul Draneht, dated 1 September 1871, the composer wrote: "The parts should be distributed as follows: [..] Great Priestess N.N., second soprano."25 The cast list of the Cairo libretto reads: "TERMUTHIS, gran Sacerdotessa Sig.ra M. Allievi."26 Later, Verdi seems to have changed his mind: in a letter to Giulio Ricordi of 23 December 1873, he expressed his doubts about a certain soprano being considered for the role of Aida in these terms: "What about the Invocation, which requires a big voice, one that carries?"27 This confirms the note in the autograph, as does the following statement from the *Disposizione Scenica*: "Offstage left two harps accompany the offstage women's chorus; the solo lines of the invocation are sung by the prima donna soprano."28 Curiously, none of the other scores I have seen reproduces this instruction, so crucial to Verdi's conception of the dramatic and musical pacing between the two scenes.

Scholars familiar with the Verdi autographs will not be surprised by the examples given for category a), because they will have encountered similar situations in other Verdi operas. In *Aida*, though, there are passages for which there is strong evidence that the autograph has been superseded by revisions that appear only in later, non-autograph sources. the most extensive changes of this type (category b) are found in the Prelude. With respect to this piece, Denis Vaughan has written: "Because of the considerable differences between the manuscript of the *Preludio* and the printed edition [..] I suspect that Verdi has reworked it, and there was once an intermediate source."29 Verdi did indeed rework it, and there was once an intermediate source, as we shall see; let us first examine the differences between the autograph and the current scores.

There are numerous discrepancies in phrasing and articulation. This topic is too complex to tackle here; the reader is referred to Vaughan's above-mentioned article, p. 92 (cf. Plate XXXII on p. 134). We must limit our discussion to: 1) the Violin I parts, mm. 4-5; 2) the mute indications for the strings; and 3) the timpani and trumpet parts at the first climax of the piece (P.R. 153, p.3).

1) Example 3a shows mm. 4 and 5 as they appear in the autograph. Notice the two quarters in the upper part, m. 4; the lower part shows signs of an earlier layer that is no longer decipherable. The only source I know that duplicates the autograph reading of the Violin I parts in mm. 4-5 is the Bologna manuscript. Example 3b is the final version as printed in P.R. 153. Most sources follow 3b. Fortunately, the original version has survived in the St. Agata piano-vocal score, example 4. It is now clear that the autograph and the Bologna manuscript represent an intermediate stage between the original version (found only in the St. Agata piano-vocal score) and the final version.30 The last step in the revision of these two measures was the change in the rhythm of the upper part in m. 4 from two quarters to a dotted quarter and an eighth. It is impossible to say exactly when this happened, but the earliest printed Violin I part (plate number 42480) already has what has become the accepted reading.31

2) As far as the mutes are concerned, in the autograph Verdi requires them for
Violin I on f. Ir, and for Violin II and Viola on f. 2v. There is no indication for mutes at the Violoncello entrance on f. 2v (rehearsal letter A), and nowhere does the composer instruct the Violins and Violas to remove their mutes. The 1913 score and P.R. 153 are contradictory on this point; the former calls for mutes for the Violoncellos at letter A, and does not specify where any of the strings are to take off the mutes. The latter respects the autograph for the Violoncellos at A, but calls for the removal of mutes at the successive entrances of Violas, Violins II and Violins I after A.

This problem can be resolved fairly easily. Verdi sent the autographs of the Prelude and of Act IV to Tito Ricordi on ca. 27 August 1871. On 2 September 1871, Giulio Ricordi informed the composer:

> The string parts of the orchestra are almost entirely engraved [. . .] The head copyist asks if in the Prelude the mutes are never to be removed, not even in the forte sections.33

Although the string parts (pl. nos. 42480-83) were assigned to the engravers on 8 August, it is clear that work on the Prelude cannot have commenced before the end of the month, since Verdi had not yet sent it. Significantly, no publication date is given in the libroni. Copies of the earliest printed string parts are preserved in the archives of the Metropolitan Opera in New York City.
The mute instructions in them fully correspond with the solution of P.R. 153, and the reading is further confirmed by the Bologna, Washington and Paris manuscripts. Perhaps Verdi replied to the head copyist's question about the mutes in a letter that has not survived. Since the mute instructions are in final form in the Paris manuscript, there can be no doubt as to their authenticity. For some reason, these clarifying directions were never entered into the autograph.

3) With respect to the first climax of the Prelude, the Timpani part found on page 3 of P.R. 153 is lacking in the autograph, and the trumpet parts on the last four measures of the page differ from those in Verdi's manuscript. Example 5a shows the autograph reading, ff. 3v–4; example 5b is the commonly accepted final version as printed in P.R. 153: Once again, the correspondence offers an explanation for the variants. On 28 December Verdi wrote to Giulio Ricordi:

I am sending you an overture (the ink is still wet) with which we may perhaps precede Aida. I say 'perhaps' because I have hardly looked it over and it may be a big mess. By keeping it out of my sight for a few days, I shall be able to look at it when I arrive in Milan, judge it, and tell you if it's worth the expense of having it copied. In any event, we always have the Prelude; I have made some changes in it, and so you can now correct the plates. Watch out for the sheet indicating these changes.34

The whereabouts of the "sheet" mentioned in Verdi's last sentence is unknown, but it is undoubtedly the "intermediate source" whose existence Vaughan suspected.35 The earliest printed wind and percussion parts, pl. nos. 46359–VII (Trumpet) and 46359–XI (Timpani) have the revised version as in P.R. 153.36

The Bologna and Paris manuscript scores also have the definitive reading. The Washington MS lacks the added Timpani part, but since the Trumpet parts are in final form, the omission of the Timpani is probably an oversight. The 1913 score agrees with P.R. 153. In conclusion, for these various passages in the Prelude, the autograph does not represent Verdi's final intentions.

One more example of category b), in which the autograph does not represent Verdi's final intentions, may be mentioned: the text of Amneris' final couplet at the very end of the opera. Ghislanzoni's draft at St. Agata, Verdi's autograph score, the Cairo libretto, the St. Agata score37 and the Bologna MS all read:

Pace t'imploro
Martire santo,
Eterno il pianto
Sarà per me.38

On 9 January [1872], about a month before the Milanese premiere, Ghislanzoni wrote to Ricordi:

The two lines you sent me for the
ending of the opera seem too dry to me and not very theatrical. I would like to say it like this:

Pace t’imploro—alma adorata...
Isi placata—ti schiuda il ciel.

What if salma were used instead of alma? Perhaps it would be more Egyptian.*39

The new text appears in several subsequent printed sources, among them a libretto in Italian and German published by Ricordi on 15 April 1872, and the libretto of the Théâtre Italien production of 1876, which Verdi conducted.40 That the change met the composer’s approval is proven by his letter to Giulio Ricordi of 6 April 1872: "Note well that in the vocal parts, among other things, the two lines of recitative added for Aida in the final duet have not yet been revised, nor has the final strophe for Amneris."41 This revision, like the changes to the Prelude, never found its way into the autograph.

The last three examples that we will examine illustrate category c)—discrepancies for which there is no satisfactory explanation at present. We begin with Ramfis’ phrase "fatti audaci dal perdono correranno all’armi ancor!" after the concertato in the second act finale (P.R. 153, p. 238). On f. 212v of the autograph, the composer originally notated the phrase as shown in example 6a. The notes are crossed out, and the new version appears on the adjacent staff, in another hand (the text is unchanged)—see example 6b. Since all of the sources I have inspected preserve only the revision, the change should probably be considered authentic, even though it is not in the composer’s hand, and there is no record of it in the correspondence.

In the recitative immediately after the cabaletta of the Aida-Radames duet in Act III (P.R. 153, pp. 333-334), Aida’s first lines are set as follows in Verdi’s autograph (ff. 299r and v), example 7a. In P.R. 153 they read as in example 7b. The Bologna and Washington manuscripts both agree with the autograph, but in the latter, the notes have been corrected in pencil to correspond with the reading of P.R. 153. The point where the change begins is marked "Patti."42 The St. Agata piano reduction also agrees with the autograph, but it is the only printed source that does. Later printings of the same edition have the solution of P.R. 153,43 as do the Paris MS, and the Escudier piano-vocal score, LE 3603, p. 243. Since Verdi was involved in the preparation of the French translation published in Escudier’s score, and since he conducted the Opéra production from the Paris manuscript, it is likely that the revision is definitive. However, I have found no evidence in the correspondence to confirm this supposition.

Example 6

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Example 7

[a] autograph, f. 299 r+v.
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Example 7
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Example 7
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Example 7
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Example 7
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Example 7
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Example 7
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In the judgement scene of Act IV, immediately after the Priests sentence Radames to death, Amneris has a high A shriek on the second beat which I have not seen in any of the printed scores (P.R. I 53, p. 404, first measure). Example 8 reproduces this outburst as notated in the composer's autograph, f. 356. Although this grido is found in all three manuscript scores (Bologna, Washington and Paris), it is already missing in the St. Agata score. The Escudier piano-vocal score likewise excludes it. Did Verdi eliminate this note, or is its absence from the early piano-vocal scores simply an error of the publisher? Unfortunately, there is no way to be certain. The language of the Disposizione scenica suggests that he may ultimately have preferred a visual effect to a vocal one:

Example 8

Amneris un grido

Ah!—

In the absence of any further evidence, the question of which version is definitive must remain unanswered.

To sum up: because of Verdi's deep involvement in the publication and performance history of Aida, the autograph cannot always be regarded as the ultimate authority for the definitive text of the opera. Variant readings in an imposing number of other sources must be carefully researched and documented as to their origin. The preparation of the critical edition will require preliminary research far in excess of what has been done for the operas published to date. The present study has indicated some of the problems that the editor will confront in the preparation of an accurate text that respects Verdi's intentions and is still practical for performance. The task is staggering in its complexity, and the Editorial Board of WGV will need all of the assistance it can muster.45

NOTES


2. The general Preface to the new edition states further that "the main text reflects the definitive state of the work, not necessarily the final state" (Giuseppe Verdi, Ernani, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press and Milano, Ricordi, [1985], p. vii). In a paper delivered at an international Verdi conference in Vienna, March 1983, Martin Chusid stressed the importance of the composer's final thoughts as a fundamental principle for editing, and at the same time cautioned that even these must sometimes be questioned, citing examples from Rigoletto and Un ballo in maschera. His paper will appear in the proceeds of the conference, to be published by the Parma Istituto di studi verdiani.

3. See Eugenio Tornaghi to Verdi, 5 August 1871, in Hans Busch, Verdi's Aida, the history of an opera in documents and letters, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, [1978], (hereafter Busch), p. 194; Verdi to Giulio Ricordi, 2 September 1871, Busch, p. 211; Giulio Ricordi to Verdi, 3 September 1871, ibid., p. 213; and Verdi to Giulio Ricordi, 16 September 1871, ibid., p. 222.

5. The numerous corrections that Verdi sent to Ricordi (Busch, pp. 225-228, 230-233, and 241-242) were probably made from this copy.

6. For the libretto, see Giulio Ricordi to Verdi, 6 September 1871 (Busch, p. 219); Verdi to Giulio Ricordi, 7 September 1871, ibid.; and Giulio Ricordi to Verdi, 12 September 1871 (ibid., pp. 221-222).

7. Ibid., p. 252.

8. According to the Ricordi libroni, engraving of the piano-vocal score was begun on 29 September 1871. On 24 October Giulio Ricordi informed the composer "The opera is almost entirely engraved; I shall send you the proofs in a few days." (Busch, p. 245) It is not clear whether Ricordi was referring to the octavo score (42602), or that in quarto format, which actually has lower plate numbers (42486-42502). According to the libroni, work on the latter began as early as 6 August 1871, but several plate numbers were not assigned until 20 January 1872. I have examined a beautiful copy of the piano-vocal score in quarto format (42486-42502) at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City. In every case, the passages in question are in their final form, although in some cases the engraver code letters around the plate number show that the affected pages have been re-engraved.

9. See Busch, pp. 245-256.


11. Ibid., pp. 397-401.

12. All page references are to the current Ricordi full score of the opera, P. R. 153—"nuova edizione riveduta e corretta." In the citations, the first number indicates the page, the second the system, and the third the measure.

13. For the convenience of the reader, all examples will juxtapose both versions of the passage in question.

14. "From here to the separate sheet for the addition of four measures."

15. Pl. no.: a 42602 a, p. 49.

16. Interestingly enough, a copy of a 42602 a, in the library of the Milan Conservatory, Spartiti 1232 i, has the revision. The plate numbers explain the matter. Those for pp. 48 and 50 read: a 42602 a; whereas that for the new page 49 reads: m 42602 m. The lower case letters on either side of the number refer to the engraver, and show that, because of the revision, this plate had to be newly engraved.
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17. Translation of the first version: "My heart foresaw your sentence; here I have been waiting for you for three days. And here, far from every human gaze, I wanted to die in your arms." The two new lines in the revision mean: "I slipped furtively into this tomb that was being opened for you." See Antonio Ghislanzoni to Giulio Ricordi, [January 1872] (Busch, pp. 274-275). The original version of these lines is preserved in the libretto of the Cairo premiere (Cairo, Tipografia Frances Delbos-Demouret, 1871, p. 90).

18. The libretto for the Scala premiere already has the definitive version of these lines (*Aida* [ ... ] R. Teatro alla Scala, Carnevale e Quaresima 1871-72, Milano, R. Stabilimento Ricordi, [1871], p. 57).


20. Verdi to Vaucorbeil, 24 November 1879 (Busch, p. 418).

21. The new ballet music is found on ff. 174-181v of the autograph.

22. For a critique of the 1913 Ricordi score (p. no. 113954, reprinted by Broude and Kalmus), see my article "Why bother with the new Verdi edition?" in *The Opera Quarterly* 2/4 (1984), p. 48. Most of the errors and omissions mentioned there have been corrected in the current Ricordi score, P. R. 153, which was revised during the 1960s.

23. Three manuscript full scores, available for consultation on microfilm in the archives of AIVS, have been inspected for the present study: one originally from the Ricordi archives, but now in Bologna, Civico Museo bibliografico "G. B. Martini," dated "28 dicembre 1878;" a second one, with English text only, originally belonging to the "Arthur W. Tams Music Library" (also probably of nineteenth century origin); and the third, from the Paris Bibliothèque de l'Opéra, (A. 635) with French text—certainly the one from which Verdi conducted the Paris productions of 1880, since it contains numerous annotations in his hand.

24. Busch, pp. 565-566. According to the Ricordi libroni, the "Disposizione scenica dell'Aida di Verdi, compilata e regolata," pl. no. 43504, was consigned to the engravers in July of 1873. The document therefore probably reflects the staging worked out by the composer in Milan (February 1872), Parma (April 1872) and Naples (March 1873). I am grateful to Jesse Rosenberg for this information.


26. The name "Thermoutis" is a hold-over from the original scenario: cf. Busch, documents II, p. 441; III, p. 453; and IX, p. 494.


30. The plate number for this page is: h 42602 h. Copies of the same edition that have the definitive version of these two measures, such as the one from the Milan Conservatory mentioned in note 12, have different letters: m 42602 m.

31. According to the libroni, this part was assigned to the engraver on 8 August 1871. As far as the Prelude is concerned, we have seen that Verdi did not send it until the end of the same month. The most likely explanation is that he included this change along with the other Prelude revisions that he sent to Giulio Ricordi on 28 December.

32. Verdi to Tito Ricordi, [27 August 1871], Busch, p. 205.

33. Giulio Ricordi to Verdi, 2 September 1871, Ibid., p. 212.

34. Verdi to Giulio Ricordi, 28 December 1871, Ibid., p. 270.

35. See note 28.

36. According to the libroni, the wind parts were assigned to the engraver on 17 June 1879.

37. Pages 286–288. Subsequent printings of these three pages have the same plate number: a 42602 a, even though the words have been changed. Probably the change could be made directly on the original plate, without the necessity of re-engraving the entire passage.

38. "Peace I implore you, holy martyr; my weeping will be eternal." —Verdi's autograph, ff. 382–383; Cairo libretto, p. 94; Bologna MS, vol. II, ff. 194v–195v.

39. Busch, p. 274. The revised lines mean: "Peace I implore you, adored soul... May Isis, now placated, open heaven for you." "Alma" means "soul," while "salma" means "corpse"; the latter was eventually chosen.

40. Aida [.. ] für die deutsche Bühne bearbeitet von Julius Schanz, Milan. Ricordi, [1872], p. 96; the publication date is from the libroni. The Paris libretto is published by Calmann Lévy, 1876, and the lines are found on p. 60.


42. Adelina Patti sang Aida in New York in 1883 (see Busch, p. 410, note 3). It is possible that the Washington MS was used for those performances.

43. The passage is found on p. 228 of the St. Agata score; the pl. no. is h 42602 h. The plate number for the corresponding page in the Milan Conservatory piano-vocal score mentioned in notes 15 and 34 is exactly the same; presumably the changes were small enough that they could be made on the original plate.

44. Busch, p. 609.

45. All of the sources consulted for this essay are on microfilm in the archives of the American Institute for Verdi Studies at New York University. I am grateful to the Director of the Institute, Martin Chusid, and to its archivist, Jesse Rosenberg, for their advice and assistance.