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## USEFUL LIAISONS: LUKA SORKOČEVIĆ – RUĐER BOŠKOVIĆ – PIETRO METASTASIO\*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article highlights the letter that Pietro Metastasio, poet laureate to the imperial court of Vienna and librettist, wrote to the Ragusan scientist Ruđer Bošković, in which the name of the composer Luka Sorkočević is mentioned. In fact, it is the earliest traceable data on Sorkočević's arrival in Vienna, dispatched by the government of the Dubrovnik Republic upon a diplomatic mission to the court of Joseph II, shortly after the death of Empress Maria Theresa. The letter provides details on Luka's accommodation, but also on his manners and qualities. It affords new insights into his sojourn in Vienna, notably in the light of the hitherto known entries of his Vienna diary.

*Keywords:* Luka Sorgo/Sorkočević, Ruđer Bošković, Pietro Metastasio, Vienna, 1781

The historical figures in the title have been extensively studied so far: Ragusan composer Luka Sorgo (Sorkočević, 1734-1789) was a friend of the Bošković family, he kept regular correspondence with the physicist Ruđer (1711-1787) with regard to certain affairs of the Republic,<sup>1</sup> and after the scholar's death represented the interests of Ruđer's sister Anica as her tutor (1714-1804).

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On the relationship between Luka Sorkočević and poet Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782) we learn only from Luka's diary which he kept from September 1781 to January 1782, during his mission to the court of Joseph II, to which he was assigned by the Dubrovnik Republic.<sup>2</sup> According to these diary notes, he met the old librettist twice, exchanging many compliments. Through Metastasio Luka also made the acquaintance of the composer and singer Marianna Martines (1744-1812), Metastasio's protégée.<sup>3</sup>

The acquaintance of Ruđer Bošković (great traveller) and Pietro Metastasio (ensconced in Vienna) may date from Bošković's early Italian days (which, due to marked age gap, is less plausible),<sup>4</sup> but they could have met during Bošković's visits to Vienna in 1757, and after his long journey from Constantinople to Warsaw, therefore sometime around 1762. The culture of letter writing to which they zealously devoted themselves, best evidenced in the volume of their correspondence, enabled their lasting contact. With respect to the acclaim they had both earned during lifetime, their correspondence, too, soon came into the focus of research and publication. Thus the first edition of Metastasio's letters was compiled by no other than Sebastiano d'Ayala, a "person of confidence", who more than twenty years performed consular duties for the Dubrovnik Republic at the court of Vienna. He published them in Vienna in 1795, thirteen

<sup>1</sup> The Kaznačić legacy (Archive of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb) holds some of Bošković's letters, including those addressed to Luka Sorkočević (XV 2/I-85 from 1780).

<sup>2</sup> The manuscript diary, entitled *Memoriae*, is kept in the State Archives of Dubrovnik, ser. 21.2, vol. 145. On Luka's sojourn in Vienna and his musical contacts, see: Miho Demović, *Glazba i glazbenici u Dubrovačkoj Republici od kraja XVII. do prvog desetljeća XIX. stoljeća*. Zagreb: JAZU, 1985: pp. 187-191; Vjera Katalinić, »Luka Sorkočević's Wiener Tagebuch (1781-1782)«. *Muzikološki zbornik* 40/1-2 (2004): pp. 187-196 and with additions and revisions in Vjera Katalinić, *Sorkočevići – dubrovački plemići i glazbenici*. Zagreb: Muzički informativni centar, 2014: pp. 50-73.

<sup>3</sup> Upon his arrival in Vienna, Metastasio settled with the Martines family, a friend from his days in Rome and Naples. He selflessly devoted himself to the education of Nicolò Martines' children, of Marianna in particular, and organised her music tuition with the young J. Haydn, N. Porpora and others. For more detailed discussion on her (in addition to the articles in both Grove editions) see: Irving Godt, »Marianna in Italy: The International Reputation of Marianna Martines (1744-1812)«. *The Journal of Musicology* 13/4 (1995): pp. 538-561. Here it should be made clear that Demović—while writing on the mentioned Luka's meeting—was mistaken in attributing Ragusan origin to this girl ("giovane ragusea"), whereas Sorgo writes "giovane ragazza" ("young girl"); moreover, Marianna Martines sang to them, accompanying herself, the latest cantata that SHE HERSELF had composed to Metastasio's libretto. That visit of 14 October 1781 is recorded in Sorkočević's diary on the f. 26v. For more on this, see V. Katalinić, *Sorkočevići – dubrovački plemići i glazbenici*: pp. 56-57.

<sup>4</sup> Bošković arrived in Rome in 1727 as a fifteen-year-old boy (where he remained more permanently until the late 1750s) when Metastasio was almost thirty. Three years later Metastasio left the city for good.

years after the poet's death, along with several letters addressed to Metastasio.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, d'Ayala selected some of the representative samples, and besides Metastasio's correspondence with his relatives we find among his addressees the librettist Raniero Calzabigi (in Paris at the time),<sup>6</sup> Trautsohn, archbishop of Vienna, as well as many clerics, noblemen, actors and singers, such as "Signora Hasse" in Dresden, i.e. Hasse's wife and famous singer Faustina Bordoni,<sup>7</sup> theoretician Francesco Algarotti in Venice<sup>8</sup> and others. Bošković's letters are mainly known, especially after the most recent publications occasioning the 300th birth anniversary of the celebrated scientist.<sup>9</sup>

In the second volume of his voluminous chronicle *Notizie storico-critiche sulle antichità storia e letteratura de' Ragusei*, Francesco Maria Appendini draws attention to the letter Pietro Metastasio penned to Ruder Bošković: "However, another [Sorgo] by the name of Luca, of whose talent the memory is still very fresh, was extremely appreciated in Vienna, and especially lately by the great Kauniz. The beautiful letter may be seen in the collections of Metastasio's letters as a response to Bošković".<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Metastasio's reply to Bošković does exist, but apparently Bošković's letter that preceded it has not been found, although Metastasio mentions it. Yet, from this extant document (presented here in facsimile) some important data are available.

From the letter sent from Vienna to Paris on 18 August 1781, we learn the following:

1) Shortly before this, Metastasio had received a letter from Bošković, which made him unusually cheerful and by which he was extremely honoured since he highly appreciated Bošković. Their correspondence, it seems, was not regular.

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<sup>5</sup> *Opere postume del signor abate Pietro Metastasio date alla luce dall'Abate Conte d'Ayala*, vols. I-III. In *Vienna, Nella Stamperia Alberti. MDCCXCV*. At the beginning of each volume: *Lettere scelte dell'Abate Metastasio tra le quali se ne trovano alcune scritte da altri al medesimo*.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the letter from Vienna of 15 October 1754, *Opere postume del signor abate Pietro Metastasio*, vol. II: pp. 184-187 et seq.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Vienna of 7 January 1756, *ibidem*: pp. 221-223.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Vienna of 9 February 1756, *ibidem*: pp. 223-225.

<sup>9</sup> Among these works, noteworthy is an extensive collection Ruder Josip Bošković, *Pisma, pjesme i rasprave*, ed. Stipe Kutleša. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> "Un altro pure di nome *LUCA*, la memoria dei di cui grandi talenti è ancora freschissima, fu ammiratissimo in Vienna, e specialmente dal grande Kaunitz in questi ultimi tempi. Si può vedere una bella lettera fra le scelte del Metastasio in risposta al Boscovich (*c.*)" (Francesco Maria Appendini, *Notizie storico-critiche sulle antichità, storia e letteratura de' Ragusei*, vol. II. Ragusa: Stampe di Antonio Martecchini, 1803: p. 115).

2) In the third paragraph Metastasio replies to Bošković's appeal which obviously concerned the provision of assistance to Luka Sorgo while in Vienna, and the establishment of prospective diplomatic, cultural and social contacts. From this we grasp that Sorkočević arrived in Vienna in early August 1781, if not even a week or two earlier.

3) Metastasio was delighted with Luka's politeness and erudition, and deemed that most of the people Luka had met by then were charmed by his fine manners and noble and reasonable representation, the rest would just as well soon be charmed.<sup>11</sup> As confirmation of the mutual good impression is Luka's description of Metastasio after their meeting of 12 October 1781, as he considers him sincere, natural and sharp-minded, and above all convincing, as his courtesy derives from the goodness of his character.<sup>12</sup>

4) The fourth paragraph refers to their remote residence. Upon his arrival in Vienna, Metastasio settled with the Martines in the very centre of the city, "in Michaelerhaus, stately building still standing in the Kohlmarkt adjoining the Michaelerkirche, the court parish church".<sup>13</sup> He complains in the letter that Sorgo accommodated himself in a palace of his own choice, at a half-an-hour's walk from him. That proved highly impractical for his feeble body unaccustomed to such demanding activities, particularly in summer. This seemed to have been the reason for their infrequent contacts. However, the palace that Sorkočević rented was not to his liking either. At the very beginning of the diary, on 5 September 1781,<sup>14</sup> he remarks that his accommodation "in *Giardino*" (in the Garden)<sup>15</sup> is troublesome in terms of city visits, especially during bad weather, as he loses much of the valuable time which instead he could employ for the

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<sup>11</sup> "...ed il comandato cavaliere convince ognuno con le nobili sue obbliganti maniere e con i savii suoi ragionamenti d'esser egli il vero originale di così vivo, ed elegante ritratto. Tutti quelli ch'án seco fin al presente parlato, son già suoi parziali; ed entro arditamente mallevadore che ogni altro il sarà fra poco".

<sup>12</sup> "Questa matina venne a trovarmi amichevolmente il buon vecchio Metastasio, Celebre Poeta del Secolo, ed Eccelente Uomo: la amenità, la dolcezza, e la probità regnano nel suo discorso pieno di arudizione e di spirito, senza pedanteria, né falso brillante. La sua cortesia persuade, e perché nasce dalla bontà di carattere, e non già dalla comune officiosità" (Sorkočević's diary, f. 26, the meeting dated 12 October 1781).

<sup>13</sup> I. Godt, »Marianna in Italy«: p.540. *Grosses Michaelerhaus* is today at the address Kohlmarkt 11, and besides Metastasio, among its residents was also Joseph Haydn; cf. Kurt Dieman, *Musik in Wien*, vol. I. Wien: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1969: p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Sorkočević's diary, f. 2v.

<sup>15</sup> Considering that Sorkočević lived at a considerable distance from the city centre, it is possible that the location was near Prater.

morning sightseeing walks in his informal attire.<sup>16</sup> This prompted him to rent from the beginning of September an entire storey in a palace next to the flat of the French ambassador, in a house once resided by Cardinal Herzan von Harras (1735-1804), a long-term Austrian ambassador to the Holy See.<sup>17</sup> The flat was spacious, with four rooms, the walls were covered with silk brocade wall paper, in addition to five small rooms for servants and a room for the footman. The monthly lease was 130 florins, the bedding for him and servants included.

5) Finally, at the end of the paragraph, Metastasio writes that his inability to be of assistance to the “noble foreigner” is abundantly recompensed by his friend Count d’Ayala.<sup>18</sup> The old poet still takes pleasure in Luka’s sporadic company, which fills him with comfort and honour.

On the basis of this letter and within the context of the early analysis of Luka’s Vienna diary, certain conclusions may be drawn.

Dubrovnik Republic was most wary when choosing envoys for important missions. Similarly, the Ragusans relied on a network of compatriot and other connections for assistance and support when abroad. Thus during his visit to Rome, Luka Sorgo stayed with Benedikt/Benedetto Stay, Ragusan nobleman and professor at the Roman University. In Venice, Luka’s affairs (as well as those of his family) were the responsibility of Rocco Bonfiol. Before Sorgo’s departure for Vienna, Ruder Bošković made all the necessary accommodation and other arrangements for him through his acquaintances abroad. A similar kind of assistance was offered by the Ragusan envoys posted in other centres: on the one hand, they represented a strong foothold and support to the Ragusans who arrived in their city (as d’Ayala was of service to Luka), and on the other, they mediated to the benefit of the Republic with regard to music, too, whether it concerned the acquisition of musical instruments, engagement of good musicians or theatre companies. For this reason the material for the cultural history of Dubrovnik should be sought in the foreign archives and collections.

Luka Sorgo, therefore, did not arrive in Vienna at the beginning of September, as hitherto assumed on the basis of the earliest notes entered into the diary according to its extant state, but at least a month earlier. Have some of the pages from the diary been torn, did Luka make his notes on separate leaves that were

<sup>16</sup> “...e che le matine, in cui si poteva conoscere piu la città caminando a piedi in Negligé, andavano perdute...” (Sorkočević’s diary, f. 2v).

<sup>17</sup> Several lines in the diary are hardly legible; the exact building yet needs to be established.

<sup>18</sup> This concerns the already mentioned Sebastiano d’Ayala, Ragusan consul.

mislaid, or he made no notes whatsoever before he finally “settled in”, is so far unknown.

In any case, as Metastasio put it, Luka Sorgo left an excellent impression on the nobility of Vienna, the “affinity” being mutual: Luka was overwhelmed by the Viennese/Austrian culture, Enlightenment attitudes and political measures of Emperor Joseph II. This prompted him to propose certain novelties to the Ragusan government, which, however, met with disapproval, as result of which he and his brother Miho were politically isolated, even accused of being Austrophile.<sup>19</sup> Had Sorgo’s ideas been given more attention, the lot of the Republic might not have been sealed.

Appendix. Facsimile of Metastasio’s letter from: *Opere postume del Signor Abate Pietro Metastasio date alla luce dall’Abate Conte d’Ayala*, vol. III. Vienna: Stamperia Alberti, 1795: pp. 277-279.

Source: [http://books.google.hr/books?id=S39BAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=hr&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.hr/books?id=S39BAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=hr&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

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<sup>19</sup> Austrophile attitude of Luka and Miho Sorgo has been recurrently discussed by various authors, as for instance, Žarko Muljačić, »Isabella Teotochi, Marin i Miho Sorkočević – jedno književno prijateljstvo«, in: idem, *Iz dubrovačke prošlosti*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 2006: p. 264.

O P E R E  
P O S T U M E  
DEL SIGNOR ABATE  
P I E T R O  
M E T A S T A S I O

DATE ALLA LUCE

DALL' ABATE CONTE D'AYALA.

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*TOMO TERZO.*

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*IN VIENNA,*  
Nella Stamperia ALBERTI.

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M. DCC. XCV.

## S C E L T E.

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*Al Signor Abate BOSCOWICH.**Parigi.*

NON so qual altra cosa avrebbe potuto avvenirmi meno sperata, e più cara, che il ricevere un così affettuoso foglio dal mio, tanto da tutto il mondo letterario universalmente celebrato, e da me venerato, ed amato, signor abate Boscowich.

La profonda stima, ch'egli, di se, à saputo ispirarmi da tanto tempo, e con gl'immortali suoi scritti, e con l'incanto dell'instruttivo suo vivace commercio da me qui fortunatamente goduto, non à potuto diminuirsi per la nostra ostinata separazione; ma si è andata sempre, e si va in me giornalmente accrescendo dalla frequenza, con la quale io sento risuonarmi da tutte le parti nell'orecchio, con aumento d'applausi il suo nome.

L'oggetto della sua lettera, cioè l'asserire, ed il provar solidamente il raro merito del degnissimo signor conte Sörgo \*, è magistral-

\*Inviato straordinario della repubblica di Ragusi all'imperadore Giuseppe II.



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mente eseguito, ed il comendato cavaliere convince ognuno con le nobili sue obbligate maniere, e con i savj suoi ragionamenti d'esser egli il vero originale di così vivo, ed elegante ritratto. Tutti quelli ch'àn seco fin al presente parlato, son già suoi parziali; ed entro arditamente mallevadore che ogni altro il sarà fra poco.

Spiacemi che il nobile alloggio da lui scelto sia in un borgo mezz'ora in circa dal mio lontano; tragitto poco praticabile per la stanca, ed annosa mia macchinetta, reso meno portabile per l'età, ch'esige da me vigorosamente i suoi diritti, e specialmente quello di andarmi ogni giorno diminuendo l'attività a leggere, ed a scrivere con gli ostinati stiramenti de' nervi, che perseguitano incessantemente l'affaticata mia testa. Supplisce in parte a' miei difetti l'eccesso di cortesia del signor conte d'Ayala mio amico, che conduce da me questo nobile forestiero, facendomi così godere, di tratto in tratto la sua presenza, che tanto mi consola, quanto mi onora.

Creda, amatissimo mio signor abate, ch'io

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sento tutto il peso della gratitudine, di cui mi carica la sua beneficenza nel procurarmi vantaggi così invidiabili; compatisca, non perdoni la mia involontaria brevità, che a me solo è dannosa; continui ad onorar l'umanità gelosamente conservandosi; e non cessi di riamar come à soluto finora a dispetto de' suoi difetti il suo ecc.

Vienna 18 agosto 1781.

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*Al Signor FRANCESCO GRISI.*

*Ala.*

**V**I sono sommamente tenuto, carissimo signor Grisi, del nobil dono, che vi siete compiaciuto di farmi del vago, e meritorio Poemetto del Caso, stimabilissimo e per le valide ingegnose difese della sana dottrina, che il savio autore in esso intraprende, e per il destro artificio, col quale egli impiega i più seducenti allettamenti poetici per render più chiari gli astrusi, ed elevati ragionamenti teologici, e filosofici.

Mi congratulo con esso voi, che siate giunto