

Musicians and their Commerce in Galeazzo's Court

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In an extended research project on musicians and musical patronage in Milan during the period of the Sforza family, many hundreds of documents have emerged pertaining to the biography of musicians, payment, benefices, recruitment, travel, diplomacy, provisions, instruments, and performances¹. In most studies musical patronage is measured by salaries and benefices, but the Milanese documents have enabled us to go much further, and to study musical patronage more extensively than has previously been possible in this period. One of the striking features of Galeazzo Sforza's patronage of music is the rapid escalation of salaries, benefices, and other elements that greatly enhanced the material standing of the ultramontane singers in his chapel; in the space of a few years several fortunate singers saw their economic and social position rise to staggering heights. Among the most favored we may mention Jean Cordier, the celebrated tenorist, Antonio Guinati, the Savoyard abbot of the chapel, Pietro Holi, who became a ducal familiar, and Gaspar Weerbecke, the vice-abbot of the chapel and an important composer of sacred music². It has been possible to trace their progress, not only in the accrual of wealth, but in their participation in Milanese society. The subject of the present paper is not their salaries and benefices, but the commercial activities in which the duke's generosity permitted some of them to engage. Documents of these ventures illuminate ducal patronage, the private lives of the singers, their standing at court, and the relationship between them and the duchy in which they worked.

Of course what one ruler could do another could imitate. Galeazzo's tactic of offering greater salaries and promises of better conditions and other considerations proved an effective way to lure singers from the court chapels

of Savoy, Naples, and elsewhere, but it was another matter to keep these stars in Milan, since most of the singers were ultramontane and had no permanent ties to Italian courts. Higher salaries could be offered by other patrons. Ecclesiastical benefices within the diocese of Milan could anchor a singer temporarily, but the singers rapidly acquired the habit of trading these for other benefices in their home countries³.

In one of his *facezie*, Piovano Arlotto, the real-life and literary chaplain of Florentine ships (1396-1484) was asked by the King of Naples whether it was true that he had recorded foolish deeds in his book⁴. Piovano Arlotto replied that it was true and, when asked, read that the most foolish man in the world was the King of Naples, because he had given a subject of modest means a large sum of money to purchase horses far from the kingdom; the man's property that might have induced him to return to Naples was of far less value than the money with which he had been entrusted. The king, indignant at the suggestion, asked what Arlotto would do if the subject returned with the horses, and the witty chaplain replied that in that case he would cross out the name of the King of Naples and write in the name of the subject.

Certainly Galeazzo Sforza used benefices, salaries, and suits of clothes to keep his treasured singers tied to Milan. To some he also gave houses, usually without the right to sell them. For some of the singers he felt that even these inducements were not enough; after all he had successfully stolen most of his singers from other chapels, so it was not inconceivable that another ruler could serve him in kind. For this reason Galeazzo made use also of state monopolies and patents.

The wealthiest of the ducal singers, and also the one with the most business

activities was undoubtedly Antonio Guinati, recruited to Milan from the chapel of Yolanda of Savoy in the first of Galeazzo's raids on the chapels of his allies. A doctor of law and the head of the Savoyard chapel, Guinati was first mentioned in Milanese documents in a letter from Galeazzo to Antonio Appiano, the Milanese ambassador to the court of Savoy, on 16 November 1472, when the duke asked for a copy (with musical notation) of a work that he had heard Guinati sing⁵.

Guinati managed to maintain some ties with the Savoyard ruler and court, but his departure, and his efforts to persuade his former colleagues to join him in Milan, caused friction there. On 5 January 1473 Galeazzo wrote to the Duchess of Savoy, asking her to help Guinati with a legal struggle for a benefice he held in her domain. Appiano, answered on 13 January 1473 that according to the Duchess, Guinati's adversary held papal bulls for the position, but the Bishop of Vercelli urged her not to side against Guinati just because he had left her service⁶. Appiano sought support for this position among the Savoyard courtiers, but their opinion and that of the duchess was against Guinati; it was not enough that he had left in the way that he did, but he had also written to the organist and some of the Savoyard singers in an attempt to recruit them for Milan.

Et solicitando io questa expeditione, la prefata Madama et alcuni de questi principali cortesani me hanno dicto: hor vedeti Antonio, non basta al Abbé ch'el sia partito nela facione ch'el è partito, ché anche ha scripto doe volte al nostro organista et ad alcun'altri di nostri chiantri [cantori] che se vogliono andare ove esso è, el loco loro sarà parechiato in modo starano bene contenti.

Apparently the Savoyard courtiers found fault with the manner in which Guinati had left the court — he probably left Yolanda's service without asking her permission — and they took a dim view of his efforts to recruit musicians from his old patron's court for his new patron's chapel. The customs and protocol of leaving a ruler's service are an important issue in the study of musical patronage, and it appears that these may have been in transition in Italy in the 1470s. Documents tell us clearly that it was considered an act of

ingratitude to leave a patron without asking permission, but it is evident that the customs of a more genteel time were being strained to the breaking point in an environment of aggressive recruitment of singers and rivalry between courts⁷. Although no more documents of the above dispute have surfaced, it appears that Guinati lost the benefice in question. On 27 October 1474 a notary recorded his appointment of procurators to take possession of a gift from the ducal camera, income from property in Valtellina⁸. After Galeazzo's death, 26 December 1476, he made a supplication to Gian Galeazzo Sforza for help in collecting the same income, four hundred ducats annually, that the former duke had given to him from the confiscated property of a banished citizen of Valtellina, «as compensation for his losses in Savoy»⁹.

Illustrissimo et excellentissimo Signore, per confidarse lo vostro fidelissimo cantore messer Antonio Guinato, maestro de la ducale capela, che la Excellentia vostra non li debrà mancare de intrata, imò debrà providere ala providentia sua, circa li ducati 400 annali donatoli per la recolenda bona memoria del quondam illustrissimo Signore Duca Galeazzo, sopra li beni de Antonio Baxy de Valtelina banito. Et hoc in recompensatione de li soy beni perduti in Savoya.

The chapel of ultramontane singers began in 1473, and by 1475 it was the 'jewel of Europe'. Antonio Guinati asked Galeazzo for a monopoly on mining in the Lombard duchy, and on 11 and 15 January 1476 Galeazzo informed his *magistri intratarum* that he intended to grant Guinati's petition for permission to mine in the duchy; and he asked their opinion on the wording and terms of the licence, the first of its kind in Milan, «suscepit curam exquirendorum mineralium intra fines nostros latentium spectabilis doctor dominus Antonius Guinati magister capelle nostre cui ut id facere possit facultatem, et vis libenter concessum sumus»¹⁰. The singer took full advantage of this lucrative opportunity and undertook mining and refining operations across the duchy.

His privilege did not end with the death of Galeazzo. Among a list of petitions dated 15 June 1478 there is one from Guinati to have his mining patent renewed¹¹. Apparently the petition was granted, since on 5 September 1477 it was recorded that «Antonio Guynati, magister capelle nostre», had successfully petitioned for the rights to «omnes mineras, sive mineralia [...] et illis compertis aurum, argentum, cuprium, plumbum, ferrum: ac cetera metalli». In the same document it was noted that the singer was exempted from excise taxes¹².

The monopoly was an ongoing ducal favor, and the Milanese rulers did not hesitate to support it. On 5 April 1479 Bona granted Guinati's request for aid from ducal officials in

obtaining wood and coal for his mining and metal operations¹³, «significavit nobis egregius, ac sapiens doctor dominus Antonius Guynati nostre capelle se edificari et constari fecisse, ac velle facere in Valle Siorde [?] nonnullas officinas, aurarias, argentarias, cerarias, ac ferrarias quibus metuit, ne carbones et ligna desint». On 15 of July of the same year a safe conduct was issued for a German mining silver for Guinati, because of hostilities that had broken out with the Swiss¹⁴. There is also an undated supplication from Guinati to the duke to punish someone who has infringed on his mining operations and assaulted his workers¹⁵.

As if the mining monopoly were not enough, Guinati was also given part of the income from large tracts of land in the community of Tirano. Some of the tenants felt oppressed by the toll that the singer exacted, and on 7 January 1492 a ducal official made a complaint for them in a letter to Bartolomeo Calco, first ducal secretary¹⁶. It is noteworthy that these extraordinary ducal favors continued for at least sixteen years.

[...] alchuni de li homi da Tirano che sono citati devante alla vostra Magnificentia ad instantia de Messer l'Abbe, cantator, che redeno sia per quella sua controversia vechia me hano constreto scrivere ad quella, si degna ponerli uno debito fine, et che più non sieno frustati de intollerabile spexe, per che costuy gli è ale spalle ogni tracto.

Guinati asked for still more favors. In an undated supplication he asked to be given the «travacho di la città vostra de Pavia che tene adesso di presente messer Perotto cantarino de vostra Excellentia»¹⁷. Perotto Gallo, or Perotto Bernardo, sang in the chapel from 1473 (on 8 October 1473 Galeazzo invited Perotto and his wife to dinner) until his release with other singers on 6 February 1477. Bona of Savoy and Gian Galeazzo gave him letters of good service on 11 April 1477¹⁸. It seems most likely that Guinati's supplication was made at that time. Just what it meant by the term «travacho» is clarified by a notarial document of 24 August 1475 that records the duke's original privilege¹⁹.

Spectabilis vir dominus Perotus de Bernardis cantor ducalis [...] titulo donationis sibi facte per Illustrissimum et Excellentissimum dominum Galeazmaria Sfortiam Vicecomite duce Mediolani [...] nostro commodo ut aqua navigii nostri Papie usque ad ipsam Papie civitate perfluere debeat, cumque in navigio ipso sit travachatorium quodam propter antedictae civitatem [...]. Considerantibus nobis in quam valitate ipsarum trasferiamus [...] nobilis cantor noster dilectus Perotus de Bernardis, qui, propter artis musicae peritia ea probitate [...] omnem intratam emolumentam et valitatem ex predicto travachatorio nobis et camere nostre qualibet subscriptura donamus.

Du Cange defines «travacha» as a large wall, like the wall that defends a *castrum*. In this document the duke referred to the water in the canal to Pavia. Perhaps this «travachatorium» was a dam to regulate the level of the water. The text of the above document specifies that the singer had the rights to income from any use of water flowing from the dam, including on water used for milling grain. The income must have been substantial, since Perotto rented out only a portion of the rights for 50 gold ducats annually.

Another singer who made his fortune in Galeazzo's court was Pietro Holi. Like other singers he was given a house, and, later, under Bona, permission to sell it²⁰, but more significantly there is a ducal missive of 26 January 1473 that records the gift of cameral property in Morbio to the singer, and contains instructions for the referendary of Como to place Holi's procurator, the singer Donato Cagnola, in possession of the property so that Holi could receive the income from it²¹.

Nuy habiamo donato novamente a Pietro da Oli, nostro camarero de camera et cantore, la possessione de Morbio de quello vescovato la qual è ora della camera nostra como per lettere delli nostri magisteri intenderay. Et perché esso Pietro manda là Donato Cagnola nostro cantore et procuratore suo exhibitore di questa per tore la tenuta d'essa possessione in nome d'esso Pietro, volemo, et te comettiamo, lo faci mettere alla tenuta d'essa et possessione d'essi beni, con quelle solemmitate se richiede in simile cose, facendoli rispondere deli fructi et intrate de quelli, eo modo et forma se faciva alla camera nostra, et del tutto fare et desponere como de cosa sua, secondo li dicti nostri.

It is noteworthy that Galeazzo gave Holi this property very near the beginning of his ultramontane chapel, at about the same time he gave gifts to Guinati and sought benefices for many singers, including Cardino Bosco and Josquin, both of whom transferred from the chapel of the *biscantori* in the Milanese Duomo to the ducal chapel. The singers were taken on rapidly and the duke moved quickly to provide for them. The choice of procurator for the above transaction was logical. The powerful Cagnola family had interests in Como, the ducal singer and familiar Donato would have had contacts in the district.

In our study of musical patronage in Milan we have found the selection of procurators to be indicative of the integration of the singers into Milanese society in documents like the above one, and indicative of transactions between and within the society of singers for the very many documents in which the singers appointed each other as procurators. The latter occurred frequently for benefices, wills, and business outside of the duchy (for example in France or Burgundy). The former, the appointment of prominent Milanese citizens as procurators for singers, took place usually

for large gifts from the ducal camera. In the case of the above gift the transaction put Holi in touch with a prominent, wealthy family with strong ties to the diplomatic community. In later years ambassadors reported conversations with Holi when they encountered him on his travels between Milan and the court of the Holy Roman Emperor. Like many of the other singers Holi had financial interests as well as personal connections in his homeland. On 5 May 1487 he travelled there, bearing a ducal letter of recommendation to the «King of the Romans». He was said to be in that territory for the sake of making financial arrangements for his family, and Ludovico Sforza described him as his favorite of the singers²². On 9 January 1490 the Milanese orators in Rome secured Holi a benefice in his homeland²³. The ducal gift of Morbio was confirmed by Duchess Bona on 18 June 1478²⁴.

As in the case of Guinati, the Sforzas protected the financial interests of Holi. As Leverotti has observed in Milan matters that ought to have pertained to the 'civic' organs of justice were given over to the Senate and Secret Council, both under ducal control²⁵. The Sforzas watched over the legal interests of the singers carefully, and moved aggressively against their opponents. It is therefore not surpris-

ing to see a sentence to leave the duchy immediately on pain of death, made against a monk found guilty of committing fraud against the singer²⁶.

Frate da corte: per li toi demeriti et punitione de la fraude usata contra Pedro da Olii de li nostri cantori, è ordinato nel nostro Senato di Castello et così te comandiamo che per tutto el dì de domane sii ussito del nostro dominio non presumendo di retornarli senza nostra licentia sub pena capitis. Mediolani die XVI Februarii 1481.

Of course the families of these highly favored singers also benefitted from Milanese ducal preferment. Antonio Guinati's brother Enrico was made the sacristan of the ducal chapel and given benefices. He also participated in Antonio's mining ventures. On 4 February 1473 he was given a pass to go to Piedmont to bring his wife to Milan. On 29 July 1473 there is an order to give him a room next to the church of San Gottardo, in which he will sleep, with the vestments and other materials of the ducal chapel²⁷.

I have avoided the fascinating and extensive subject of the singers' benefices in this paper, but one instance must be mentioned in connection with Holi, to demonstrate how far ducal favor extended in his direction, and to underline that the Sforzas used all of the means available to

them within the areas of justice and benefices to promote the interests of the ducal singers. In an exchange, Holi arranged for his five-year old natural son, named Antonio Galeazzo, to be given a canonry in San Vitore de Paderno²⁸.

In the foregoing documents we have seen a glimpse of the use of licences and large amounts of revenue property conferred on singers in the Milanese ducal chapel. These gifts and privileges, to be sure, were given to the most preferred of the singers, but they demonstrate the wealth and standing of these fortunate individuals, and it must be remembered that these were given in addition to large benefices, houses, and salaries. They do a great deal to alter the false image of a musician as an indentured servant. We may suppose that the licences and properties were given as permanent inducement for the singers to serve the Milanese court, and it is evident that in holding them the singers became integrated into the ducal retinue and into the society of prominent Milanese. These documents have enabled us to see another aspect of musical patronage in Milan.

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² On Cordier see P. A. MERKLEY, «Patronage and Clientage in Galeazzo's Court», *Musica e Storia*, IV (1996), 121-154. See also L. MATTHEWS, this journal. He was an ultramontane tenorist, the most celebrated singer in his day, and he served both Galeazzo and Ludovico Sforza. The career of Pietro Holi in Milan was also brilliant. He was among the first singers to be recruited into Galeazzo's chapel and remained in Milanese service after the duke was assassinated, as did Antonio Guinati, head of the ducal chapel in Savoy, whom Galeazzo brought to Milan. The composer Weerbecke, born in Audenarde, became the vice-abbot of Galeazzo's chapel, left Milan in 1481 to sing in the papal chapel, and returned in 1489. Many new documents re-

garding all of the Milanese singers are discussed in our book.

³ See an article by the same author, «Trading Lombardy for Picardy: Milanese Ducal Musicians and the Cathedral of Saint-Géry», *Musica e Storia*, to appear.

⁴ *Novelle del Quattrocento*, edd. G. G. Ferrero and M. L. Doglio, Torino 1975, Facezia 6, 749.

⁵ Archivio di Stato di Milano (ASMi), *Biblioteca, Sforzesco*, 1606.

⁶ ASMi, *Potenze estere Savoia, Sforzesco*, 490.

⁷ See MERKLEY, 1996, 121-154.

⁸ ASMi, *Notarile*, 1925, Bombelli, Antonio q. Pietro.

⁹ ASMi, *Potenze sovrane (non Sforzesco)*, 124, n. 93, undated.

¹⁰ ASMi, *Registri missive*, 122, ff. 256v and 264. See also E. MOTTA, «Musici alla corte degli Sforza. Ricerche e documenti milanesi», *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, XIV (1887), 29-64, 278-340, and 514-561, rpt. Geneva 1977, 517.

¹¹ ASMi, *Carteggio interno Milano, città e ducato, Sforzesco*, 1081: «... de domino Abé Magistero capelle petente refirmari litteras patentes minerione...».

¹² ASMi, *Registri ducali*, 199.

¹³ ASMi, *Registri ducali*, 110, f. 117.

¹⁴ ASMi, *Registri ducali*, 103, f. 456: «Ne Georgius Unanguener de Neuremberg almanus qui nuper ad fodiendas mineras argenti, quas concessimus domino Antonio Guinati rectori capelle nostre venturus est, timeat...».

¹⁵ ASMi, *Potenze sovrane (non Sforzesco)*, 124, n. 155.

¹⁶ ASMi, *Potenze sovrane (non Sforzesco)*, 124, n. 149.

¹⁷ ASMi, *Potenze sovrane (non Sforzesco)*, 124, n. 159.

¹⁸ ASMi, *Registri missive*, 110, f. 150 (dinner); *Registri ducali*, 28, f. 166 (letters of good service) and f. 60v (the release of several singers, cited in E. LOWINSKY, *Ascanio Sforza's life: a key to Josquin's biography and an aid to the chronology of his works*, in *Josquin des Prez: Proceedings 1971*, edd. E. Lowinsky and B. Blackburn, London 1976, 40-41). For many years scholars have inferred from the latter document that under Bona the chapel was dissolved or greatly diminished and never regained its former splendour. In fact the chapel continued under Bona and flourished under Ludovico Sforza; see L. MATTHEWS, «Reconstruction of the Personnel of the Ducal Choir in Milan 1480-1499», *Musica e Storia*, to appear.

¹⁹ ASMi, *Notarile*, 2145, Rusca, Giorgio q. Andrea. This document was brought to my attention by Grazioso Sironi.

²⁰ ASMi, *Potenze sovrane (non Sforzesco)*, 124, n. 119, in 1477.

²¹ ASMi, *Registri missive*, 110, f. 134v. MOTTA, 1887, 297, mentions this document in connection with Donato Cagnola.

²² ASMi, *Registri missive*, 165, f. 341v.

²³ ASMi, *Potenze estere Roma, Sforzesco*, 101.

²⁴ ASMi, *Registri ducali*, 112, f. 351.

²⁵ LEVEROTTI, 1994.

²⁶ ASMi, *Registri missive*, 152, f. 119.

²⁷ ASMi, *Registri ducali*, 177, f. 345v; *Registri missive*, 110, f. 149.

²⁸ ASMi, *Registri ducali*, 88, f. 268, 28 December 1488.