

Johann Valentin Meder in Gdańsk – A Few Additions

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Abstract

The authors of the most important works concerning Johann Valentin Meder's stay in Gdańsk were Johannes Bolte (1891) and Hermann Rauschnig (1931). Later historians, compiling Meder's biography and verifying facts stated in earlier literature, have added several details, though these have not contributed much to the composer's Gdańsk period. By contrast, the research recently undertaken by Jerzy M. Michalak has shed light on previously unknown facts regarding that time. It concerns three issues which are referred to in the article: the composer's first sojourn in Gdańsk, his family, and certain aspects of his life in that city.

The literature on Johann Valentin Meder is relatively extensive. The most recent studies of his life and music refer to earlier literature (Schaper 2019; Koch 2015: 43–44; Gugnowska 2014; Gugnowska 2013; Schaper 2013; Schaper 2012). The authors of the most important works concerning Meder's stay in Gdańsk were Johannes Bolte (1891) and Hermann Rauschnig (1931: 279–298). Later historians, compiling Meder's biography and verifying facts stated in earlier literature, have added several details, though these have not contributed much to the composer's Gdańsk period. By contrast, the research recently undertaken by Jerzy M. Michalak has shed light on previously unknown facts regarding that time, and this scholar has kindly allowed me to refer to his research below.¹

Arrival in Gdańsk

Johann Valentin Meder was appointed chapel master of the St. Mary's Church ensemble in Gdańsk in 1687. This automatically also made him the chapel master for the Gdańsk City Council. The decision to employ him was made by the City Council, after which the new chapel master was introduced by the city secretary to his office, that is, he was presented to the church authorities and to the musicians employed there. Meder formally took up this position on

24th May 1687.² He was introduced to the office on behalf of the City Council by the secretary, Johann Georg Schimmelpfennig (Zdrenka 1989: 278). This information is recorded in a document entitled "Introductio derer Cappelmeistere", which records the appointment to the post of chapel master not only of Johann Valentin Meder, but also of his successors: Maximilian Dietrich Freislich (who replaced Meder when the latter left Gdańsk in 1699), Johann Balthasar Freislich (from 24th October 1731) and Georg Simon Löhlein (from 10th March 1781).³

Until recently, the date of Johann Valentin Meder's original arrival in Gdańsk was not considered. It was assumed that this occurred in the same year (1687) that he took up the post of chapel master. Currently, however, we know that the composer was actually in the city a year earlier, in 1686. This is proved by an entry in the City Council cash book dated 27th July, stating that "aus gewißen Uhrsachen" ('for certain reasons') Meder was paid 45 thalers.⁴ We are unable to determine how long the composer remained in the city at that time. It is also difficult to establish what the "Uhrsachen" ('reasons') were. However, we can be fairly sure as to what the purpose of the composer's visit was. He most probably came to Gdańsk in search of a post that not only matched his professional aspirations, but also met his financial expectations. This had after all

¹ I would like to thank Jerzy M. Michalak for providing this unpublished information and for his assistance in its interpretation. Some of it I used for the first time at the conference "Stadt- und Hofkultur im Ostseeraum in der Frühen Neuzeit / Urban and Court Culture in the Early Modern Baltic Sea Region", organised in Tallinn by the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre on 2nd–3rd May 2019, and later I also included it in a source critical edition of the works of Meder (see Popinigis, Woźniak 2019: 23–31).

² PL–GD, Ms. 487, f. 535; the date is provided by Anu Schaper, see Schaper 2012: 168.

³ PL–APG 300, R/K, 2, p. 283. Here is found also information about how the introduction to the office was conducted.

⁴ PL–APG 300, 12/120, p. 39.