

ANGELO SOLIMAN

* CA. 1720/1721, † 1796 IN VIENNA

The first records about black people in Europe we have since the times of the Roman Empire, when the officer Maurice, a soldier of the *Legio Thebaica*, became a martyr and very soon Saint and Protector of the Holy Roman German Empire in the 7th century. People got more acquainted with so-called *Moors* in the train of the crusades in the 11th/12th century and a little later since the reign of Friedrich II. von Hohenstaufen (1212–1250) who was extremely fond of the oriental lifestyle. In the 18th century it became a fashion for the European aristocracy to have black servants, male and female, and this was taken as a sign of wealth, refinement and luxury. Personalities like the philosopher Amo from Ghana (West Africa) teaching in Germany and the renowned Hanibal, born in Logone (North Cameroon), god-child of Peter the Great of Russia, later fortification engineer, general and governor of Reval (Tallin), great-grandfather of the poet Alexander Pushkin, are known, let aside the many unknown blacks at the various glamorous households all over Europe, but none of them of reputation had such a queer fate as Angelo Soliman in Vienna.

Angelo Soliman was born about 1720/21 in Africa in a country his first biographer in 1807 – Karoline Pichler – recorded to us as Pangut-siglang, a land one cannot find on the map but it is reminding somehow about Jonathan Swift's (1667–1745) *Gullivers Travels to Liliput and Brobdingnag* (1726). He was raped by slave traders as a child of about 7 years and at last came to Messina (Sicily) into the aristocratic house of a marquise who liked him very much. Very soon he was baptized and got the name of Angelo Soliman instead of his original name Mmadi Make. This name is known in the Sokoto Province of Nigeria as a princely name. Today he is held for a Wandala or Mandara, a Muslim ethnic group in the Mandara Hills of Northern Cameroon but also in Bornu State (Nigeria), liv-

zu zitieren nach:

Sommerauer, Erich (2010): Angelo Soliman. Verfügbar unter http://www.afrikanistik.at/pdf/personen/soliman_angelo.pdf

ing in close association with local Arabs. Other say he could be a Kanuri or Borno who live south and west of Lake Chad in the Bornu State (Nigeria). In the 14th–16th century the Bornu or Kanuri Empire was a major power in West Africa.

Soliman got a good education, learning Latin and Italian. In 1732/34 Prince Johann Christian von Lobkowitz (1686–1753) – the house Lobkowitz is of Czech origin – was General Field Marshall of the Austrian Army and governor of Sicily. He often visited the marquise, became very fond of young Angelo and so he urged the lady to hand the clever boy over to him, which the lady – quite heartbroken – did at last. Angelo now became the prince's travelling companion, learnt Czech and German and even participated in some battles where in one of them he saved the prince's life, becoming his close confident thereof. Growing old, the prince thought about Angelo's future after his death and so he came to terms with the wealthiest and most influential personality in the Empire, Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein (1696–1772) to accept Angelo Soliman as a member of his household and after Lobkowitz's death, Angelo soon became chief of the princely servants with the title of 1st valet.

Soliman soon was very popular among petitionists, widows and orphans who called for princely support because he did not reject anybody but bade his master's princely grace for them. Angelo Soliman had outstanding talents: in linguistics because he spoke 6 languages: Czech, English, French, German, Italian and Latin; in social competence and last but not least in mathematics, because he was a wonderful chess-player who won against the so-called *Turk*, a chess-play-automat, mostly winning, invented by Wolfgang von Kempelen in 1769 with which he toured through Europe. The automat looked very mechanical but hidden inside there was a very good chess player sitting who moved the figures!

Kempelen was acclaimed by the press as a great scientist.

In 1764 Soliman won the enormous sum of 20.000 guilders when playing the popular card-play “Pharaoh” in Frankfurt/Main (Germany) where he stayed in Liechtenstein’s suite on behalf of the coronation ceremonies of Joseph II. as Roman-German king.

It seems that Soliman invested a large amount of this money in two mining shares out of 128 in a Styrian Cobalt Mine but failed with this capital invest because of a decline in this mining sector and difficulties in the administration.

In 1768 Soliman married secretly – without permission of prince Liechtenstein – the widow Magdalena Christiani, born von Kellermann, sister of the Napoleonic general Kellermann, Duc de Valmy (1808), in Vienna’s St. Stephan’s Cathedral with the benediction of Archbishop Cardinal Count Migazzi. Very soon Liechtenstein got to know about this marriage because of an involuntary indiscretion of Joseph II. and he dismissed Soliman. It is unknown whether he was personally disappointed because of his deep affection to Soliman or that he only feared to have to pay more for Soliman’s survivors in the case to be.

Soliman moved to a little house with garden in the Viennese suburb “Weissgerber”, which belonged to his wife, – conditions which weren’t that splendid at all. But he was a learned man and so he dived into scientific, mostly historical, studies.

In 1772 his only child Josephine was born and in the same year prince Wenzel von Liechtenstein died.

His nephew and heir Prince Franz Joseph (1726–1781) renewed Soliman’s service at Liechtenstein Palais 1773 with the special task to oversee the education of his son and heir Prince Alois Joseph (1759–1805) with a yearly income of 600 guilders, which then was a very good salary.

Between 1781–1786 Soliman was a member of the prestigious Viennese free masonry lodge “True Harmony” [“Zur wahren Eintracht”] (until 1785) by recommendation of the Great-Grandmaster Ritter von Born, a renowned geologist, and thereafter “The Truth” [“Zur Wahrheit”], becoming Masonic brother of W. A. Mozart and Joseph Haydn in this convent, having the function of “Frater terribilis” [“Frère terri-

ble”]; “Vorbereitender Bruder”] and “Vice-Grand-Master of Ceremony”.

In his recent book about Mozart’s “Magic Flute”, Jan Assman refers to the figure of “Monostatos” as the idealised Soliman in this opera, but this is not proofed. In this function he helped changing the Lodge’s ritual by including the reading of serious academic and scientific papers, a practice that eventually spread to lodges throughout Europe and enhanced freemasonry’s reputation for intellectual rigor. That Angelo Soliman became such a high-ranking member within his brotherhood is the proof of the freemasons’ egalitarianism, – all in all a famous example of Masonic progressive thought.

Angelo Soliman himself was extremely devoted to historical studies we have heard and so it is no wonder that he chose the name “Massinissa” for his Masonic name, referring to the Numidic king (240–148 BC) who was the founder of the Numidic national state and a new North-African culture with Carthaginic-Hellenistic roots. The inscription below Soliman’s copperplate engraving portrait distributed by Artaria Publications in Vienna referred to Soliman’s (false) descent of the Numidic kings, especially of Yugurtha, Massinissa’s grandson. Besides, Pasquale Artaria also was a brother of the Masonic Lodge “The Crowned Hope”.

There are many rumors about Mozarts excessive life-style, drunken with sex and his wasting of money. Maybe, – but little is known about what his Masonic brothers knew: that he was a benefactor of widows and orphans in Vienna and to soften their needs he spent thousands, like Soliman maybe: we don’t know but it could be very probable!

In 1783 Soliman’s house was seized because of debts and he and his family had to move house to the Liechtenstein Palais in Herrengasse, a building which doesn’t exist any more. Although retired, Soliman was fully paid.

In 1786 his wife died and Soliman concentrated on his daughter’s education. Josepha married 1797 Baron Ernst von Feuchtersleben, but died early in 1801. From her two sons Eduard lived as sub-director of the salt-works in Bad Aussee (Styria) a respected life, only sometimes mocked by society because of his African heritage.

Very often Soliman could be seen walking through Vienna’s streets, arm in arm with Joseph

II., deeply involved in conversation, admired by the public.

One can take it for granted that nearly nobody had the privilege to be that near to the emperor, except his family.

Joseph II. suffered from an eye problem and could not be cured by his personal ophthalmologist Ritter von Barth, who too was a Masonic brother.

In course of an expedition which Joseph sent to America the ship had a break in Maurice Island, then known as Isle de France, where a renowned botanical garden, "Jardin des Pamplemousses", was situated. Joseph II., who himself was a learnt gardener, had sent his head-gardener of Schönbrunn, Franz Boos, with this ship to collect special plants. Boos brought an officinal herb to Austria which cured Joseph II. from his eye-sickness. Maybe this was a connection more for the emperor to Africa and to Soliman as an African.

One day, it was November 21st 1796, Soliman was strolling around in the streets of Vienna, which he liked to do, when he suddenly got a stroke and died by apoplexy near St. Stephen's Cathedral.

His corpse was brought to his home where a death-mask was prepared and later transferred to the Faculty of Medicine in Vienna's old university with the anatomical theatre, where he was bereaved of his intestines. His skeleton and skin was held back and only the other remains were buried two days later at the cemetery of Währing, an outskirt of Vienna. The sculptor Franz Thaller stretched Soliman's skin over a wooden model which afterwards was padded. Ten years long until 1806, Soliman stood in a chest to be shown on request in the *K.K. Naturalienkabinett* in the left wing of the Imperial Library under the roof, later in an exotic setting with padded wild animals and a little African girl as well as with the also stuffed ex-keeper of animals in the Schönbrunn Zoological Garden, named Hammer, of African origin like Soliman. A new director of the collection let this macabre show disappear in a magazine where in 1848, in progress of the battles against students and workers, general Prince Windisch-Graetz ordered to use bombs against them to overcome their resistance. One of these failed their aim and incended the magazine and so Soliman and his companions of dreadfulness were cremated and

this inglorious chapter of Old Vienna came to an end at last.

I cannot support the theory of Monika Firla that Soliman, supposedly influenced by his Masonic friends, spent his own skin to be stuffed and exhibited as a special example of mankind. On the contrary – all sources say that his friends were setback when they got to know about his unworthy and bizarre fate to be flayed and padded.

One can take it for sure that Franz II. gave an order to do so, thus incorporating Angelo Soliman into his collection.

Very often powerful men act subconsciously and so it could have been that Franz II. – who, with the help of his henchman Prince Metternich, completely changed the policy of Joseph II., abolishing all progressive measures which took place in the course of the enlightenment ideas, liked to punish Soliman. Besides, it is handed down that Franz II. had a queer affinity to human skin, he really was a somehow perverse skin addict, very similar to some Nazi bigbugs with their predilection for bookbindings and lamp – shades made of the human skin of their murdered victims in the concentration camps.

There was no possible contradiction against the emperor's will and that explains why not even the nearly almighty Roman Catholic Church in the person of Cardinal Migazzi had no chance of intervening in favor of Soliman's daughter Josepha who was deeply concerned to bury her father's uninjured corpse and not only the clippings of his mutilated body.

Two years ago, on a sunny afternoon, a beautiful young lady stepped into the library for African studies in Vienna and said to me: "Mr. Sommerauer, I presume" (what a familiar question for an africanist!). "You are right", I answered, "what can I do for You?" "I have heard", she said, "that You know everything about Angelo Soliman and I want to write a master's thesis about him". "Oh, my god, let it be", said I, "everything has been written about him, there's nothing new and the dark spots in his curriculum we cannot clear."

I was wrong. Searching new things in Soliman's life is going on. I forgot that it is inherent for scientific research that it is always preliminary.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bauer, Wilhelm A. (Neuauf. 1993, ¹1922): Angelo Soliman. der hochfürstliche Mohr. Ein exotisches Kapitel Alt-Wien, Hg. und eingeleitet Monika Firla-Forkl. Berlin: Ost

- Firla, Monika/Forkl, Hermann (1996): Neue Details zur Biographie von Angelo Soliman (um 1721–1796). In: *Etudes Germano-Africaines* 14: 119–136
- Firla, Monika (2001): Verkörpert uns Soliman? Oder: Hat er seine Haut selbst gespendet? Eine Provokation zu „Station*Corpus“. Wien: Tanz*Hotel/Art*Act Kunstverein
- Firla, Monika (2003): „Segen, Segen auf Dich, guter Mann!“ Angelo Soliman und seine Freunde Graf Moritz von Lacy, Ignaz von Born, Johannes Anton Mertens und Ferenc Kazinczy. Wien: Tanz*Hotel/Art*Act Kunstverein
- Neri, Moreno (2004): Angelo Soliman. Il primo Venerabile africano. In: *Hiram. Rivista del Grande Oriente d'Italia* 1: 81–89
- Pichler, K. (1808): „Der Neger Angelo Soliman“. In: *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* 210 (01.09.): 837–838 und 211 (02.09.): 842–843
- Sauer, Walter (1996): Auf der Suche nach dem afrikanischen Wien. In: *Das afrikanische Wien. Ein Führer zu*
- Bieber, Malangatana, Soliman (=Studien zum südlichen Afrika Bd. 2). Hg. Walter Sauer. Wien: Sadocc: 10–40
- Sauer, Walter (2005): Gewerke Angelo Soliman. Eine Wiener Miscelle zur Geschichte des Schladminger Bergbaus. In: *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 60/4: 29–34
- Sauer, Walter (2007): Angelo Soliman. Mythos und Wirklichkeit. In: *Von Soliman zu Omofuma. Geschichte der afrikanischen Diaspora in Österreich 17. Bis 20. Jahrhundert*, Hg. Walter Sauer. Innsbruck, Wien, Bozen: 59–96
- Sommerauer, Erich (2003): Solimans Besuch in Auggenthal. Frau Jasmin Schakfeh gewidmet. Wien (Unveröffentlichtes Manuskript)
- Weiss, Alfred (2003): Angelo Soliman. „Der hochfürstliche Mohr“ als Gewerke beim Schladminger Kobalterybergbau. In: *Da Schau Her. Kulturzeitschrift aus Österreichs Mitte* 24/1 (Februar): 3–5

verfasst von: Erich Sommerauer

* letzte Änderung: 11.02.2010

zu zitieren nach:

Sommerauer, Erich (2010): Angelo Soliman. Verfügbar unter http://www.afrikanistik.at/pdf/personen/soliman_angelo.pdf (Zugriff Datum, Seite)

* = geringfügig bearbeitete Fassung des Beitrages (this paper is based on): Sommerauer, Erich (2006): Angelo Soliman. An exotic Viennese personality in the times of W. A. Mozart. In: *Egypt and Austria, Vol. 2*, eds. Johann Holaubek and Hana Navratilova. Prague. Set Out: 123–129

Wiederveröffentlicht mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Herausgeberinnen / republished with kind permission of the editors