

Il sogno di Scipione [‘The Dream of Scipio’] Libretto by PIETRO METASTASIO, first set by Luca Predieri (1735, Vienna).

Il sogno di Scipione is essentially a dramatization of Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis* which occupies book 6 of his *De Republica*. As a result, this *azione teatrale* takes a step towards a Metastasian *dramma* by including among the *dramatis personae* the following figures from ancient Roman history alongside the two allegorical characters, Costanza and Fortuna:

SCIPIO: Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus, also known as Scipio Aemilianus or Scipio Africanus the Younger. Scipio ended the third and final Punic (Carthaginian) War with the complete destruction of Carthage, having already, as a teenager, fought alongside his father . . .

EMILIO: Lucius Aemilius Paullus Macedonicus. With his son beside him, Lucius Aemilius defeated King Perseus of Macedonia at the battle of Pydna, thus bringing the third Macedonian war to an end.

PUBLIO: Publius Cornelius Scipio was the adoptive father of Scipio Africanus the Younger and the eldest son of Publius Scipio Cornelius Africanus the Elder who, with his defeat of Hannibal at the Battle of Zama (in 202 BC.), ended the second Punic War.

[**MASSINISSA**]: King of Eastern Numidia. Although not a character in Metastasio’s drama, as with Cicero’s account, the dream of Scipio (the Younger) occurs while he is a guest in Masinissa’s house. During the second Punic War, Masinissa routed the forces of Syphax, King of Western Numidia, and so paved the way for the elder Scipio, his close ally, to end the war with the defeat of Hannibal..

Scipio dreams that Fortuna and Costanza demand that he choose one of them as his lifetime companion. Disoriented, confused, and as yet, uninformed, he asks for time to question and consider. Such time Costanza freely grants, but Fortuna, who is fleet of foot and quick to change, urges speed and brevity. To begin, Scipio inquires as to his whereabouts and learns that he is in the starry temple of heaven where the spheres in their orbits produce unique sounds that unite in ordered proportions to produce a harmony of such sublimity that, like other phenomena, exceeds all human perception. Fortuna would put an end to further questions but Scipio’s inquiry regarding other inhabitants is straightway answered by the appearance of the shades of past heroes, from among whom he first recognizes Publio who explains how “the Prime Cause of all reason” has set aside this special dwelling place for the immortal souls of those who on Earth gave all for the good of their country. Suddenly, Emilio is before him, and Scipio wonders why he appears not to share his own ecstatic state. Emilio assures his son that here in heaven, happiness runs far deeper than any surface display could ever show. Indeed, all things earthly fade into insignificance in the tiny speck which is Earth as Scipio is now permitted to see it from the vantage point of heaven. He asks if he may remain, but is told that in order to attain the glory of his ancestors, he still has much to accomplish for the good of Rome, the world and heaven itself. Publius (the Elder) has subjugated Carthage, Scipio has still to destroy it, but he must be prepared to gain strength from setbacks as well as glory from victory. Costanza now joins with Fortuna in declaring that Scipio must choose between them, and that choice must be his, since neither his natural nor his adoptive father will advise him. In response, Scipio takes control, telling each of the allegories to explain why he should choose one over the other. Fortune elaborates on the theme that no situation is so great that she cannot, according to her whim, reverse it. Costanza, however, outlines her powers of opposition, and as one who can derive victory from amidst the worst calamities, she becomes Scipio’s immediate choice. Enraged, and with her worst threats defied, Fortuna commits him to the mercy of disaster and misfortune, the ministers of her indignation. Thus tormented, he awakens to realize that all was a dream except for Costanza who remains with him. With Scipio so disposed, it is fitting in the *licenza* that his role as a mere veil for Charles VI be revealed. Indeed, history can provide a figure of no greater virtue upon whose birthday may dawn break another hundred times.

Although Metastasio described the action of *Il Palladio conservato* as being “allusive to the events of the time,” he was

more specific with *Il sogno di Scipione*, identifying these events as the “unfortunate campaigns of the Austrian army in Italy,” which are outlined in the commentary on *Il Palladio conservato* (q.v.). Both works were performed at the Favorita Palace on the occasion of the Emperor’s birthday on October 01, 1735 and together, they assured the monarch of the continued trust of his subjects in spite of the vicissitudes of fortune and that his steadfastness would hold out against the present reverses Austria had suffered in the course of the War of the Polish Succession. In November of the previous year, Metastasio had already equated Charles with the title role of *La clemenza di Tito* with his life-yielding devotion to the good of Rome. Here, in *Il sogno di Scipione*, with the situation in Italy having deteriorated, he has extended that parallel to two of the most celebrated generals in Roman history. Charles, as one of their kind, has more to accomplish, just as the shade of Anchises predicts for Aeneas in *Il Tempio dell’Eternità*, and as Publius and Emilius here lay it out for Scipio.

Metastasio’s genre designation “azione teatrale” to *Il sogno di Scipione* in the Hérisant edition further emphasizes his same designation to *Le Grazie vendicate* (q.v.) and *Il Palladio conservato* (q.v.) as special cases – a genuine need to elevate them above the typical *componimento drammatico* as exemplified by *Le cinese* (q.v.). *Il sogno di Scipione* presents the *azione* as a genre of lesser scope than the *dramma per musica* and full-scale *fiesta teatrale* and more expanded than the *componimento drammatico* and other *componimenti minori*. In this case, a serious work for five professional singers, each one with the capacity to perform in either the *Galerie* or even the *Comödiensaal* of the Favorita, covering between them ten arias, and adding a chorus of heroes assigned both a significant medial appearance and another at the end of the *licenza* to conclude the encomium to Charles VI sung by the title role.

Settings:

Predieri (Vienna 1735); Porta (as *Der Traum des Scipio* – Munich 1744); Nichelmann (Berlin 1746); Llussa (? 1753); Bernasconi (rev. P. Honory as *Il trionfo della costanza* – Nymphenburg 1755); Hasse (? Warsaw, 1758); Conforto (? ? 1760s); Bonno (unperf., comp. 1763); Uttini (Stockholm 1764); Mango (Eichstätt 1765); Santos (Lisbon 1768); Mozart (Salzburg 1772); Cinque (? c.1800).