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FRYDERYK CHOPIN AND GEORGE SAND’S STAY IN GENOA IN MAY 1839
IN THE LIGHT OF NEWLY DISCOVERED DOCUMENTS

Unlike many coryphaei of the Romantic era in music, to mention but Ferenc Liszt and Richard Wagner, who travelled to Italy and stayed there for quite some time, Chopin made only one brief visit to Italy. It came at the initiative of George Sand, towards the end of a period of convalescence lasting several months in Marseille, following the couple’s ill-fated expedition to Majorca around the turn of 1839. George Sand, noting an improvement in Chopin’s health, decided to travel with him and her two children by sea to Genoa, on 3 May 1839, where they stayed for less than two weeks. Existing information about that sojourn, taken from the correspondence of George Sand and from Chopin’s rather perfunctory mentions in a letter to Wojciech Grzymała of 21 May 1839, has focussed on the dramatic circumstances surrounding their seabound return to Marseille, with no attempt made to establish any details of the actual visit to the Ligurian capital. This article traces the motivation behind that stay and the circumstances surrounding it through more extensive reference to letters sent by George Sand and Chopin to various addressees, and also to information contained in the Genoese press of the time, as well as to hitherto unknown archive documents relating to the health check passed by George Sand, her children and Chopin when leaving Genoa on 16 May 1839.

The laconic information about their sojourn contained in the aforementioned letters affords us no details. One source that could help us to establish what the couple might have learned about the city’s history and architecture before travelling, in order to subsequently follow up that information *in situ*, is the *Nouveau guide du voyageur en Italie* published in 1836 in Milan. This guidebook makes it possible to reconstruct details of a stay in Genoa, such as planned trips around the city. Although such a reconstruction is of a purely hypothetical character, we may assume that George Sand, as an enthusiast of Italy, had this guidebook in her library at home – its fourth edition from 1836, to be precise.

For George Sand, the trip to Genoa in Chopin’s company represented a sentimental *déjà vu*, since she had stayed there for a few days towards the end of 1833 on a journey with another of her loves, Alfred de Musset, as is also recorded by documents held in the Archivio di Stato di Genova.