



# Captain Miša Anastasijević – The Great Socially Responsible Personality and Leader from the Past of Serbia and Romania

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Received: February 13, 2025

Accepted: June 18, 2025

Published: November 3, 2025

## Keywords:

Captain Miša Anastasijević;  
Socially responsible  
personality;  
Leader;  
Benefactions



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**Abstract:** *The paper will explore the character and work of Captain Miša Anastasijević, his business and benefactions in Serbia and Romania. Prince Miloš Obrenović appointed him as Danube captain, and with that position, he entered the sphere of diplomacy and international justice. His benefactions are numerous. He donated his magnificent building in Belgrade, today known as the Captain-Miša building, to “his fatherland” for educational purposes. He financed the Belgrade Reading Room and gave many charitable contributions to the National Theatre in Belgrade, as well as to churches, schools, writers and the poor in Serbia and Romania. Today, more than ever, we need such leaders and socially responsible personalities, that is why Captain Miša Anastasijević should be promoted as an example to current and future generations and cultural heritage should be nurtured through institutional support and projects, which the authors will point out and give suggestions.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *socially responsible personality* means living and working following ethical principles in business practices that have a direct impact on the social community. The *leader* is a personality who has leadership skills to effectively lead an organization and has an indirect impact on the social community.

*Captain Miša Anastasijević* sets an example of a great socially responsible personality and leader from the past of Serbia and Romania. He was a great merchant, a rich man, a patriot and a benefactor. He believed that through the development of education, the nation also rises. His *benefactions in Serbia and Romania* are numerous.

“To be born poor is the most ordinary thing in the world; to be born poor and then to become rich is as desirable as it is rare; but to be born poor and to become rich, and in the midst of this immeasurable treasure not to forget benefaction, this most beautiful human virtue, is the highest degree of happiness to which a mortal can exalt himself. This was achieved by the Poreč merchant Miša Anastasijević” (Stanisavljević, 2001, p. 5).

The paper will explore the character and his work, business, and benefactions, like a great socially responsible personality and leader.

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## 2. THE BIOGRAPHY OF CAPTAIN MIŠA ANASTASIJEVIĆ

Mihajlo Anastasijević was born on February 24, 1803, on the Danube island of Poreč, at almost the same distance between Serbia and Wallachia (today's Romania). The island of Poreč (which no longer exists) was flooded in 1971, during the construction of the Djerdap Hydroelectric Power Plant, whose population moved to the coast (today's Donji Milanovac in Serbia) (Nadoveza, 2022, p. 248).

Miša was named after his father Anastas, who was a farmer and a small merchant in Poreč. Mother Rose was a housewife, and she died shortly after giving birth. After his father Anastas died, when Miša was three years old, his stepmother, Milja continued to take care of him. His father left Miša from the estate on the island of Poreč: a small vineyard, 10 acres of ploughed land with a plot house in which there was a small shop. The widow (stepmother), Milja and the orphan Miša, stayed together to live, and she accepted him as her child. They were saved from misery by the merchant Stojan Matrošlija, who ran half of their shop and cultivated their land for several years (Wikipedia, 2024).

An elementary school was founded in Poreč in 1807, as part of the educational system designed and implemented by Dositej Obradović (Mirković, 2013, p. 336). His stepmother, Milja, as a wise woman ahead of her time, enrolled Miša in elementary school in Poreč in 1808, one of the first in Karadjordje's Serbia, and thus acquired his first "capital". Miša completed his entire education in two years, from 1808 to 1809, studying in Poreč the spelling book, the psalter and calculus - those subjects that were the only subjects that were taught. Thanks to the acquired knowledge, at the age of eleven, he was a teacher in Poreč (in the school he attended), replacing a priest who had been absent for several months (who was a teacher). He had 15 students at the school, from which he received a total of 8 groschen per month. For this reason, because he was literate, Barjaš-aga, Duke of Ada Kale, took Miša as his scribe. However, although he had a monthly salary of 10 groschen and food, he fled at the first opportunity, fearing the Turks. As a boy, in 1814, Miša started trading, first as a servant in the shop of Tenko Dinulović, where he cooked and sold soap, and then as a cellar keeper for Aga Vule Gligorijević, the head of Poreč. It was then served for 6 groschen a month. He received his first major salary of 100 groschen in 1816 for towing boats along the Danube through the Djerdap gorge. That is how it began, and in his mature age, Miša Anastasijević was extremely rich, allegedly even richer than Prince Miloš Obrenović.

In 1817, Miša became a customs officer on a scaffolding. After a few years of doing this profession and a certain amount of money that he saved, Miša decided to go into trade. As a twenty-year-old, he became one of the richest people, becoming a successful merchant. However, he soon left the "retail" trade and began trading livestock, and later salt, which proved to be profitable. Soon, he bought his first boat for 7,000 groschen and became one of the richest men in Serbia.

In 1825, he married Hristina Urošević, the younger daughter of the priest Ilija Urošević, from the village of Brzaska, on the Austro-Romanian side of the Danube. He then moved with his family from Poreč to Milanovac (today's Donji Milanovac in Serbia). In his marriage to Hristina, he had an only son, Miloš, and five daughters: Jelena (married to Garašanin), Ružica (married to Čarnojević), Persida (married to Marinović), Sara (married to Karadjordjević) and Anka (married to Damjanović).

Through his wife's brother, Sima Urošević, who was the scribe of Prince Miloš Obrenović, he came into personal contact with the ruler of Serbia, as well as with the largest merchants. Prince Miloš appointed him captain of the helmsman at Djerdap for Poreč. He made good use of the opportunity he was given, and brought order to the shipping business, gaining a great reputation, valuable acquaintances, and earnings along the way. Specifically, when the Hatisherif from 1833 resolved the territorial and economic position of Serbia, and received Djerdap and Krajina under its administration, Serbia

increased its population, as well as the turnover of goods. After the unification of the new districts, Prince Miloš Obrenović visited them and on that occasion appointed Miša Anastasijević as the Danube Captain (for Djerdap), giving him the title of major with a supervisory and arbitration function. With his new position, Captain Miša thus enters the sphere of diplomacy and international justice. With the accession of Aleksandar Karađorđević to the throne in 1842, Miša Anastasijević established friendly relations with him.

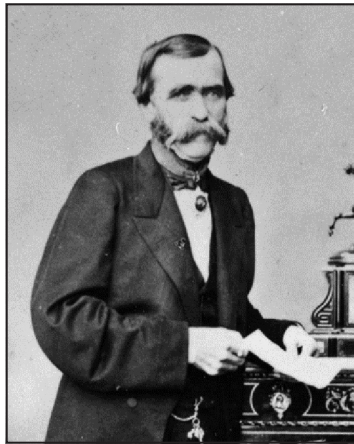
What is significant is that in 1842, Captain Miša moved to Belgrade with his family. In 1843, his only son, Miloš, died suddenly in Belgrade at the age of six. The death of his son affected him deeply; he was disappointed and stopped working, but his miraculous inertia, desire and perhaps spite to continue, tore him away from the tragic situation.

Miša first came to Wallachia (today's Romania) for salt in 1843, during the reign of Prince Jovan Bibescu. In 1847, he took a lease (monopoly) on the export of salt from the principality of Wallachia and Moldavia for seven years, and later on the import of salt from Austria-Hungary. When he paid off all his partners, he became one of the largest salt merchants in the Balkans. The business flourished for the next fifteen years, until 1865. Thus, Captain Miša's "empire" or "the first Serbian multinational company", as we would call it today, numbered about 10,000 people, 23 branches or warehouses in various places on the Sava and Danube and at least 74 ships for the transport of salt, as well as 9 large estates in Wallachia. The main office of the "empire" was in Bucharest, and the administration was in Belgrade ([Univerzitet u Beogradu, 2024](#)). At one point, he owned 1.5 million ducats of cash, which secured him the position of one of the richest men in the Balkan Peninsula.

Captain Miša got involved in politics by coincidence. He married all five of his daughters to people who, at the time, were either already important political figures or were on the verge of a successful political career. So, by marrying his daughters, he connected with political circles, that is, through his sons-in-law: Jovan Marinović, Prime Minister, Radovan Damjanović, the manager of the town of Belgrade and a minister, Arsen Čarnojević, an Austro-Hungarian nobleman, Djordje Karađorđević, a member of the Karađorđević dynasty, then with his uncle Ilija Garašanin, then the godfather of his daughter Anka, Toma Vučić Perišić, etc.

After the St. Andrew's Assembly, which began on St. Andrew's Day on November 30/ December 12, 1858, and ended on January 31/February 12, 1859, Miša, somewhat disappointed with politics, left Serbia and went to live in Wallachia (today's Romania). And the second part of his life, from 1859, Captain Miša Anastasijević (Figure 1), he spent in Wallachia, where he spent less time in Bucharest and more on his largest estate (spahiluk) in Clejani (in the district of Giurgiu), where he had a palace. There were great luxuries in the palace, such as the use of only silver furnishings and the finest furniture. To the Church of St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel in Clejani, next to the school, which he built himself, there was a special passage from the courtyard - a green alley, so that Captain Miša Anastasijević would not be disturbed. His security was taken care of in Wallachia by the Arnauts, and in Serbia by the Serbs, 12 armed bodyguards dressed in national attire. Although he had many palaces and houses in addition to those in Bucharest, Vienna, and Belgrade, he mostly stayed in Clejani, living in the countryside in a classy style.

Captain Miša Anastasijević died on St. Sava day on January 27, 1885 in his palace in Bucharest, of pneumonia, after three days of lying, and rests in the Church of St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel Church of St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel (Figure 2) on his estate in Clejani (in the district of Giurgiu) in Romania. According to his wishes, his body was embalmed and placed in a hermetically sealed space ([Comoara mumiei din Clejani, 2007](#)).



**Figure 1.**

Captain Miša Anastasijević

**Source:** [Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts \(n.d.\)](#)



**Figure 2.** Church of St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel in Clejani, 2013

**Source:** [Embassy of the Republic of Serbia in Bucharest \(n.d.\)](#)

Starting from 1910, and even between the two world wars, there were initiatives in the public to transfer the remains of the educational benefactor Captain Miša to Serbia, but it did not come to fruition. His favourite daughter Sara, made a special effort and asked for something to be done for years. Also, a great interest in the transfer of the remains of the great benefactor at that time was shown by young academics, compatriots from Timok and Krajina, educated people who were educated in Captain Miša's building.

The biography of Miša Anastasijević is, in fact, the story of a man who, barely literate, more self-taught than educated, in a difficult struggle for survival in a time in which he lived, so to speak, out of nothing, through persistent work and guided by his own talent, managed not only to create a huge fortune, which included him among the richest people not only in Serbia, in Central Europe, but also to rise to the most important social spheres and play an important role in them. It attracts and intrigues that such a man, without any prior preparation, could have emerged from our midst at all, at the very time when such people were needed for the affirmation of the nation and the organization of the state ([Milosavljević, 1988, pp. 7-8](#)).

In this paper, the emphasis is placed on socially responsible business and the benefactions of Captain Miša Anastasijević.

### **3. THE BENEFACIONS OF CAPTAIN MIŠA ANASTASIJEVIĆ**

The benefactions of Captain Miša Anastasijević are numerous. Even as a young man, he did many good deeds and helped the poor, and was grateful to everyone who helped him at some point in his life. He gave clothes to the women of Donji Milanovac every time he got there, gave dowries to girls, saved merchants from ruin by forgiving their debts or giving loans and similar. In his old age, Miša became even more generous, so he gave his favourite boat "Simka" to a humanitarian society without thinking. There are many of his known benefactions, and it is considered that even more are unknown.

It should be noted that Captain Miša was a rich man with style, generosity, and a certain mission, who never forgot his poor origins. He believed that through the development of education, the people are also elevated, and since our people are poor, they should be helped by wealthy people.

And he did it. He financed the Belgrade Reading Room, of which he was one of the founders in 1846. He gave charitable contributions on several occasions for the National Theatre in Belgrade, as well as for churches, schools and the poor in Serbia and Romania. He also helped many writers by paying their printing costs for publishing books or giving them monetary gifts ([Univerzitet u Beogradu, 2024](#)).

What is important is that Captain Miša built his magnificent building in Belgrade, today known as the Captain-Miša building (Figure 3), donated to “his fatherland” for educational purposes ([Univerzitet u Beogradu, 2024](#)). Otherwise, the construction of the building began in 1857. Captain Miša Anastasijević donated the magnificent building to “his fatherland” exactly on February 12/24, 1863. The construction of the building itself lasted a relatively long time, until 1864, because they were waiting for the marble from Italy to arrive. Along with the building, all the furniture and equipment for educational and scientific work were donated. On behalf of the state, Prince Mihailo Obrenović thanked the donor, i.e., Captain Miša Anastasijević, in a letter dated February 13/25, 1863. The building houses the Great School, the Gymnasium, the Ministry of Education, the National Library, and the Museum. Today, it is located the Rectorate of the University of Belgrade.



**Figure 3.** Captain Miša’s building, 1867

Source: [Diplomacy&Commerce \(n.d.\)](#)

It is no coincidence that Wallachia (today’s Romania) was the second homeland of Captain Miša Anastasijević. Miša’s Serbian-Wallachian duality began with his birth on the Danube island of Poreč, at an almost equal distance between Serbia and Wallachia, almost in neither of them, but equally in both. This was, one might say, the first “buckle”. Also, with his knowledge of the Wallachian language (today’s Romanian), as well as Ottoman Turkish language, Captain Miša felt at home in Wallachia, so it is not surprising that as his wealth grew, he bought large estates in Wallachia ([Milosavljević, 1988, p. 95](#)).

On his main spahiluk (large estate) in Clejani (in the district of Giurgiu) in Wallachia (today’s Romania), he founded a school for male and female children. The school was attended by about 152 pupils, who came from Wallachian (Romanian), Serbian, Bulgarian, Polish and Greek families. All students had free education, books and stationery, and 32 students also had housing, food and clothing. A predestined educator, from an early age, Miša not only helped the students materially, but also constantly took an interest in the progress of teaching and the success of the students. Miša also helped good students from his school in further education, and they became famous professors, engineers, agronomists, doctors, teachers, etc. ([Vanku, 2003, p. 21](#)). Both the students and teachers, as well as the higher education authorities, the ministers themselves, were paying

tribute and gratitude to Major Miša (as he was called in Wallachia, and still today in Romania) for his material assistance and wise management of the school (Brătulescu, 1925, p. 276).

Captain Miša Anastasijević used the Danube not only for commercial purposes, but as a link between the Romanian and Serbian people. He had a strong influence on the economic development of Serbia, but he also contributed a lot in the political field. Captain Miša played an important role in the development of diplomatic relations between Serbia and Romania in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a connoisseur of all political factors in Romania, he managed to secure the support of the Romanian state in the struggle of the Serbian people for independence from the Ottoman Empire, which resulted in the recognition of Serbia's independence at the Berlin Congress in 1878 (Nadoveza, 2022, p. 247).

He remained in the memories of his contemporaries that he was neither strict nor reactionary, and the trait of hardness did not exist in him at all. He was a gentle father to all members of his family, and just as good to those who lived on his property. He was a man of broad spirit and a noble heart. He knew how to live like a great gentleman and do good deeds. He subordinated his interests to the general ones, and loved Serbia and Romania equally, and did benefactions in both countries. He was a good teacher for everyone, and above all a great socially responsible personality and leader of the past and present era.

#### 4. RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

In order to improve and develop the cultural heritage of Serbia, as well as to promote the character and work of Captain Miša Anastasijević - a great socially responsible personality and leader from the past of Serbia and Romania, research was conducted in the period from December 9 to 29, 2024, in Belgrade, using the Survey methodology. The survey included 300 respondents. The survey was anonymous and contained 8 questions:

1. *Do you know who donated the magnificent building to "his fatherland" in which the Rectorate of the University of Belgrade is now located? YES / NO*

Regarding question number 1, by data processing was determined that 219 respondents (73%) gave a positive answer, while 81 respondents (27%) gave a negative answer.

Based on the total positive responses of 73%, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents know who donated the magnificent building to "his fatherland" in which the Rectorate of the University of Belgrade is now located.

Among the respondents, there were comments that the public and the media do not talk enough about our benefactors.

2. *Do you think that such a benefactor as Captain Miša Anastasijević should have a memorial room in the building that he donated to "his fatherland" for educational purposes? YES / NO*

Regarding question number 2, by data processing was determined that 261 respondents (87%) gave a positive answer, while 39 respondents (13%) gave a negative answer.

Based on the total positive responses of 87%, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents think that a benefactor such as Captain Miša Anastasijević should have a memorial room in the building that he donated to "his fatherland" for educational purposes.

Among the respondents, there were comments with amazement at why that has not been done so far.

3. *Do you know that Captain Miša Anastasijević was a great educational benefactor in both countries, Serbia and Romania? YES / NO*

Regarding question number 3, by data processing was determined that 168 respondents (56%) gave a positive answer, while 132 respondents (44%) gave a negative answer.

Based on the total positive responses of 56%, it can be concluded that a little more than half of the respondents know that Captain Miša Anastasijević was a great educational benefactor in both countries, Serbia and Romania.

Among the respondents, there were comments that little is said and written about the benefactor Captain Miša Anastasijević and what he did in Serbia and Romania, and that should be changed.

4. *Do you know that Captain Miša Anastasijević has done many other benefactions in Serbia and Romania? YES / NO*

Regarding question number 4, by data processing was determined that 96 respondents (32%) gave a positive answer, while 204 respondents (68%) gave a negative answer.

Based on the total negative responses of 68%, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents do not know that Captain Miša Anastasijević has done many other benefactions in Serbia and Romania.

Among the respondents, there were comments that the character and work of Captain Miša Anastasijević and his numerous benefactions that he has done in Serbia and Romania should be more seriously promoted.

5. *Do you know that he was born on the Danube island of Poreč, whose population later moved to the coast (today's Donji Milanovac in Serbia)? YES / NO*

Regarding question number 5, by data processing was determined that 87 respondents (29%) gave a positive answer, while 213 respondents (71%) gave a negative answer.

Based on the total negative responses of 71%, it can be concluded that most of the respondents do not know that Captain Miša Anastasijević was born on the Danube island of Poreč, whose population later moved to the coast (today's Donji Milanovac in Serbia).

6. *Do you know that he rests in Romania and that his body was embalmed and placed in a hermetically sealed space in the church he built in Clejani? YES / NO*

Regarding question number 6, by data processing was determined that 54 respondents (18%) gave a positive answer, while 246 respondents (82%) gave a negative answer.

Based on the total negative responses of 82%, it can be concluded that most of the respondents do not know that Captain Miša Anastasijević rests in Romania and that his body was embalmed and placed in a hermetically sealed space in the church he built in Clejani.

7. *Do you think that a tourist tour “On the Paths of Captain Miša Anastasijević” should be organized as a form of educational pilgrimage from Belgrade through Donji Milanovac to Clejani?* YES / NO

Regarding question number 7, by data processing was determined that 231 respondents (77%) gave a positive answer, while 69 respondents (23%) gave a negative answer.

Based on the total positive responses of 77%, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents think that a tourist tour “On the Paths of Captain Miša Anastasijević” should be organized as a form of educational pilgrimage from Belgrade through Donji Milanovac to Clejani.

Among the respondents, there were comments that such a tourist tour should contribute to the promotion of the character and work of Captain Miša Anastasijević.

8. *Do you think that Serbia and other countries in the world need such socially responsible personalities and leaders more than ever?* YES / NO

Regarding question number 8, by data processing was determined that 276 respondents (92%) gave a positive answer, while 24 respondents (8%) gave a negative answer.

Based on the total positive responses of 92%, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents think that Serbia and other countries in the world need such socially responsible personalities and leaders more than ever.

Among the respondents, there were comments that socially responsible personalities and leaders should contribute to the social community and do good deeds (benefactions), because kindness itself (as well as doing benefactions) is the highest level of life development.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Today, more than ever, we need such leaders and socially responsible personalities; that is why Captain Miša Anastasijević should be promoted as an example to current and future generations and cultural heritage should be nurtured through institutional support and projects.

In Serbia, the national award “Captain Miša Anastasijević” is awarded as an annual award for the most successful individuals, entrepreneurs and institutions. This award is given to encourage and affirm entrepreneurship in Serbia. The award is implemented by Media-invent doo Novi Sad, Radio Television of Vojvodina, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Vojvodina, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Belgrade, University of Novi Sad and University of Belgrade, etc. (Wikipedia, 2024). In Romania, Captain Miša Anastasijević is present in the history of Romanian education, as well as in the folklore festivities in Clejani.

For everything he did, Mihajlo Anastasijević - Captain Miša was awarded with: the Serbian Order of the Cross of Takovo, 2<sup>nd</sup> Class; the Russian Order of St. Stanislaus; the Ottoman Turkish Order of Nichan-Iftikar; the Romanian Order of the Star; and the German Order of Waldeck.

“Miša outlived himself with his spirit” (Stanisavljević, 1995, p. 274). He lives his second life in his building on the Student Square, where the Rectorate of the University of Belgrade is located, and his bust in the courtyard of the building. Near the Student Square, there is also a street in Belgrade - Captain Miša’s Street, which is located in the City Municipality of Stari Grad. Too, in

order to promote the character and work of Captain Miša Anastasijević, a memorial room should be opened in his building in Belgrade as an example for future leaders.

It is also necessary to organize a tourist tour “On the Paths of Captain Miša Anastasijević” as a form of educational pilgrimage, where it will start from his building in Belgrade, then continue along the Danube through the Djerdap Gorge to Donji Milanovac in Eastern Serbia, where Captain Miša was born, and further to Clejani in Romania, where he rests in his church, and return.

The authors also considered the idea of proposing to the Association of people from Timok and Krajina in Belgrade (UtikBGD, n.d.) the initiative to finally transfer the remains of the educational benefactor Captain Miša Anastasijević to Serbia, i.e., Belgrade. So perhaps the current Association should deal with and realize the initiative that was started in the past. Because such a socially responsible personality and leader as Captain Miša Anastasijević was, and what benefactions he left, deserve it.

Future leaders should be shown that in business, it is not only profit and market expansion that are important, but also being socially responsible in the community, as Captain Miša Anastasijević was.

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