

The flames are rising

(or: yet another document-supported reason why Count Cozio's
1716 Stradivari violin is not the present-day *Messiah* violin)

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This article is partly extracted from my 2015 book *The 'Messiah' violin: a reliable history?*;
herein the documentary evidence has been extended and developed more conclusively.

On 26th February 1774 Il Conte Ignazio Alessandro Cozio di Salabue, aged 18, wrote out a descriptive inventory of instruments in his possession: *Nuovo inventario de stromenti* ('New inventory of instruments').¹ This document – a single, folded, sheet of paper – includes descriptions of eight violins made by the Amatis and by Gioffredo Cappa (1644-1717); violins made by Antonio Stradivari are not listed.

Sixteen months later, on 18th June 1775, the Count wrote out a brief listing of the Stradivari instruments which he had by then acquired:

<i>Stradivari: violini di forma</i>	<i>grande</i>	<i>11</i>	Stradivari: violins of	large form	11
	<i>mezzana</i>	<i>1</i>		medium	1
	<i>piciola vechio</i>	<i>1</i>		small, old	<u>1</u>
		<i>13</i> ²			13

It is very probable that these are the violins which the Count had bought from Paolo Stradivari between the autumn of 1773 and the spring of 1775.

Eight months later, on 26th February 1776, the Count updated his 18th June 1775 inventory; again, a single sheet of paper. Amongst the additions – *Agiunta* – are:

<i>Stradivari violini:</i>	<i>Forma grande con coperchio Amatis vechio</i>	<i>1</i>			
	<i>Piciola nuove</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>15</i> ³	
Stradivari violins:	Large size with Amati front plate, old	1			
	Small, new				1; [sub-total] 2; [Total] 15.

This 1776 update further indicates that the Count, aged 20, also owned another sixty-three violins, five cellos, and a small double bass.⁴ Forty-two of these violins were made by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini.⁵

The first Cozio document – a single, folded, sheet of paper – which includes a description of a Stradivari violin of 1716 is an undated inventory, simply entitled *Stradivari*, which begins with descriptions of six violins, label-dated 1731, 1716, 1724, 1730, 1717 and 1720.⁶ The Biblioteca's numbering for this manuscript – ms. Cozio 41 – suggests that it was created during 1801 since the immediately-following manuscript, ms. Cozio 42, is clearly dated by Count Cozio, 1801. However, at

¹ Biblioteca Statale di Cremona, Libreria Civica (BSCr, LC) ms. Cozio 25; see also Count Cozio di Salabue, *Carteggio*, transcr. and ed. Renzo Bacchetta; pub. Antonio Cordani, Milano, 1950; pp. 169-172 (hereafter 'Cozio/Bacchetta').

² BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 26; see also Cozio/Bacchetta, p. 173.

³ BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 28; see also Cozio/Bacchetta p. 178.

⁴ Renzo Bacchetta's transcription (Cozio/Bacchetta p. 178) specifies 48 violins in total but either he has misread the Count's numerical notations or there has been a typographical error.

⁵ Count Cozio had initiated a commercial relationship with Guadagnini in 1771, when the Count, aged 16, was enrolled at the military academy in Turin.

⁶ BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 41; see also Cozio/Bacchetta pp. 199-200.

the top-left corner of the first page of ms. Cozio 41 the Count has added *Ricognizione giugno 1801: Milano – questo era già in Milano dal 1797 e fu venduto* ('Verified, June 1801: Milan – this [violin of 1731] was already in Milan from 1797, and was sold'); i.e. the date of the verification was June 1801 but the main body of descriptive text was written prior to that year.⁷

The Count's handwriting in this ms. Cozio 41 inventory is very similar not only to the aforementioned 'New inventory' of 26th February 1774 (ms. Cozio 25) but also to that of the 18th June 1775 'brief listing' inventory (ms. Cozio 26) as well as the 26th February 1776 update (ms. Cozio 28). In addition to the similar handwriting, the inventories also display a high level of similarity in the layout of the text, and it is here suggested that the ms. Cozio 41 inventory is closely related, chronologically, to the 26th February 1774 inventory (ms. Cozio 25); i.e. the ms. Cozio 41 inventory probably dates from late 1774 or early 1775, and the six violins described therein are part of the group of thirteen Stradivari instruments listed in the brief document drawn up by Count Cozio on 18th June 1775 (ms. Cozio 26). The likelihood is that these six violins comprise the first group of 'left over' instruments purchased from Paolo Stradivari.⁸

Five of the six descriptive entries at the start of ms. Cozio 41 are crossed through with pen strokes. The sale details for each instrument (the details being added to the page margins during the succeeding decades) are:

- the 1731 Antonio Stradivari violin was sold to *Cesare Rovida*, and then to *Pietro Bertuzzi*
- the 1724 violin – *il più forte* ('the strongest' [in tone]) – was sold through the Count's banker, Carlo Carli, *al celebre suonatore genovese Paganini* ('to the celebrated Genoese player, Paganini')
- the 1730 violin was sold to *Francesco Molere* of Milan
- the 1717 Francesco Stradivari violin was sold, in 1805, to *Monsieur Durand*⁹
- the 1720 violin was sold to *Pasquale Odoardo Folli*.

The descriptive entry for the 1716 violin has not been crossed through; this violin was not sold. An annotation written by Count Cozio in the left margin of the paper – *si hà e nel 1823 posto in Collez[ion]e principale* ('I have [it] and in 1823 [it was] placed in [my] principal collection') – cannot have been added before 1823:

Fondo giunto, vena¹⁰ larga e viva al più che si possa vedere, il covino picciolo e più del semicircolo, le fasse, e manico tutto dell'istesso bosco¹¹ il contorno del rizzo negro¹² lavorazione piuttosto piatta e della maggior finezza possibile, con un tasello¹³ sopra l'anima sotto il

⁷ The aforementioned 26th February 1774 inventory (ms. Cozio 25) also has an annotation in the top-left corner: *Ricognizione 12 Luglio [July] 1801: Milano*.

⁸ A subsequent inventory within ms. Cozio 41 lists another five Antonio Stradivari violins, label-dated 1730, 1715, 1730(34?), 1730, and 1730, as well as a Francesco Stradivari violin dated 1730 – *questo è del Francesco figlio*. All the descriptive entries are crossed through apart from that for Francesco's violin. If these six violins represent the second, final, group of instruments purchased from Paolo then the total is twelve.

⁹ The descriptive entry for this 1717 violin ends with *è del figlio* ('is of the son'), which indicates Francesco rather than Omobono.

¹⁰ The Count's *vena* literally means 'vein', but, figuratively, can mean a 'streak' – thus the back-plate 'flames'.

¹¹ Count Cozio's use of *bosco* – 'a forest', 'a wood', or 'a copse' – instead of *legno* – is curious. Since maple wood was imported from the Balkans, through Venice, it is unlikely that the Count would have been able to identify the wood used for the ribs and neck of the violin as being sourced from a specific arboreal location. His comment, more likely, simply indicates his recognition that the ribs and the neck use the same wood.

¹² Count Cozio's manuscript has *rizzo* rather than the modern *riccio*. The Italian-English dictionary compiled by Giuseppe Baretta (*Dizionario delle Lingue Italiana ed Inglese*, 8th ed., London, 1831) offers 'curled, or frizzled lock' for *riccio*: thus 'the outline of the curl [scroll] black'.

¹³ Giuseppe Baretta translates *tassello* as 'a piece of wood to stop a hole', suggesting either (a) a custom-shaped piece of wood – perhaps circular – inserted through the entire thickness of the wood, or (b) an infill for a (resin) pocket within the

*scagnello*¹⁴ per forza stato messo dal autore alla costruzione stessa del violino con biglietto come sopra dell'anno 1716 bolate.

Subsequently added by Count Cozio in the left margin:

*Più bello ed intatto 1° il primo d'uguaglianza e bellezza si hà e nel 1823 posto in collezione principale.*¹⁵

Joined [two-piece] back, the flames are wide, as lively [vivid?] as one could [hope to] see. The neck button is small and more than a semicircle.¹⁶ The ribs and the neck – all are of the same wood. The outline of the scroll is black. The working [of the plate arching] is rather flat and of the finest possible quality. With a patch above the sound-post, under the bridge, for strength, placed there by the maker during construction of the violin. With label as above,¹⁷ 1716, stamped.¹⁸

The most beautiful,¹⁹ and undamaged;²⁰ number one; the best in consistency [of tone?] and beauty.

I have [it] and in 1823 [it was] placed in [my] principal collection.²¹

The second Cozio inventory which includes a description of a 1716 Stradivari violin begins with a title page:

*1801: 8 Ap[ri]l^e Milano e seguenti*²² *Inventario de Violini, Viole, e Violoncelli*²³

This document is a stitched notebook, rather than loose sheets of paper. Count Cozio provides an index of various violin-makers' names and the folio number on which their details can be found: the entries for Antonio Stradivari begin at *folio 4*, those for Carlo Bergonzi at *folio 20*, Guadagnini at *folio 46*, etc. Being a notebook it suggests the amalgamation into one document of various earlier

thickness of the wood. The piece of wood here described by Count Cozio was glued to the underside of the violin's front plate, extending from the point where the upper end of the sound-post pushed against the underside of the plate to the point where the treble-side leg of the bridge pressed down on the outer surface of the plate. In this case, therefore, Count Cozio appears to be describing a strengthening patch – *pezza*. Perhaps, to the Count, the terms were interchangeable.

¹⁴ *Scagnello* is a dialect word for the bridge of a string instrument; see Angelo Peri, *Vocabolario Cremonese Italiano*, Cremona, 1847.

¹⁵ BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 41; see also Cozio/Bacchetta p. 200. It is noticeable that Count Cozio makes no mention of the dimensions of the violin, nor does he identify a source mould. This non-identification may, in turn, help to confirm the proposed late-1774 or early-1775 date for ms. Cozio 41 since Count Cozio did not obtain the Stradivari moulds until the autumn of 1776.

¹⁶ The fact that Count Cozio describes this neck button as 'small' cannot safely be connected to the small neck button on the *Messiah* violin since it has been shown (John Dilworth, 'Pure thrill', *The Strad*, August 2001, p. 845) that the neck button of the *Messiah* violin was reduced in size when the neck was raised, lengthened, and re-angled (apparently by Vuillaume). The *Strad* magazine's photograph of the neck button (*ibid.*) has unfortunately been reversed, from left to right.

¹⁷ The 'above' descriptive entry is for the 1731 Stradivari violin.

¹⁸ 'Stamped' very likely refers to Stradivari's circular monogram, normally imprinted at the bottom right of the label.

¹⁹ One difficulty with interpreting the Count's descriptions of instruments is when the superlative phraseology – *il più bello* – is suspected to have been the intended understanding but only the comparative form – *più bello* – was written.

²⁰ In describing Paganini's 1724 Stradivari violin (ms. Cozio 42) Count Cozio writes: *con manico dato indietro dal G B Guadagnini: intatto pero con una picciol marca di fissura nel coperchio a destra* ('with the neck tilted backwards by G B Guadagnini: undamaged, but with a small fissure on the top plate to the right'). Count Cozio also, and frequently, uses the word *sano* which translates (in a slightly more generalised manner) as 'in good condition'.

²¹ Count Cozio's 27th February 1823 'principal collection' of instruments – *la Collezione (Primo Inventaro)* – comprised 28 violins, 3 violas, and 3 cellos. Count Cozio had the collection delivered to his Milanese banker, Carlo Carli, to be sold.

²² 'and subsequently'

²³ BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 42; see also Cozio/Bacchetta p. 206.

individual documents – ms. Cozio 25 and ms. Cozio 41 for example – and perhaps one should expect to see some repetition of earlier descriptive texts.²⁴ On page 4²⁵ of this notebook is a subtitle:

*Violini di Stradivario Antonio da molti anni accomperati dal suo nipote a Cremona.*²⁶
Violins of Antonio Stradivari, of various years, obtained from his grandson [Antonio (II)]
in Cremona.

Underneath this title is a description of an Antonio Stradivari 1731 violin, and the description includes the comment (*Parte dei dodeci di forma grande ed uno d'essi di f^a [forma] poco più piccola*) ('Part of the twelve [violins] of large form and one of these of form a little smaller') – which would appear to align this inventory with the aforementioned brief listing of 18th June 1775 (ms. Cozio 26). Following on from the description of the 1731 violin there are eleven further descriptions of Stradivari violins, these violins carrying labels dated 1715, 1716, 1717, 1720, 1724, 1730 (five violins), and 1730/34; thus the label dates from the twelve Stradivari violins which were identified in ms. Cozio 41 reappear within ms. Cozio 42.²⁷ Several of these April 1801 descriptions closely echo the information given in the 1774-75 inventory; the new descriptive entry for the 1716 violin is:

Viglietto stampato come retro col bollo bellissimo²⁸ come retro anno 1716: (il 716: manuscritto) Voce tonda, forte, eguale, e bellissima. Conotati: forma più grande: intatto: Vernice rossa forte, fina tirante nel pastello: Lavoro finissimo in tutte le parti con bellissime profilature: Coperchio e fondo con mezzana elevazione tirata bene ai bordi: Coperchio di vena dritta e gradate di larg^a mezzana con tasello di rinforzo sopra l'anima postovi dall'autore²⁹ fondo gionto Vena larga brillante ed agionto non per vena e risvoltante essa un poco in sù: Covino 2/3 del circolo: fascie, e manico d'egual bel legno:³⁰ Stato dato indietro nel manico e postovi la tavoletta, ed una pezza larga quadrata sopra l'anima per una crepatura che è invisibile, e forse per necessario rinforzo dal G. B. Guadagnini. Riccio bello e profilato di nero al solito Vale almeno zecchini cento cinquanta, 150.

Label printed as above [as previous entry], with beautiful stamp [monogram] as above, anno 1716 (the 716 handwritten). Well-rounded voice, strong, uniform, and beautiful.³¹ Characteristics: larger mould. Undamaged. Varnish deep red, finely shaded into a paler [colour]. Very fine workmanship everywhere with beautiful purfling. The front and back have medium arching, tapering smoothly towards the edges. The front has straight grain expanding to medium width,

²⁴ As already indicated, ms. Cozio 41 was 'verified' in June 1801, and ms. Cozio 25 in July 1801. The spring and summer months of 1801 appear to have been a period when Count Cozio engaged in some serious 'house-keeping' with respect to the documentation of his instrument collection.

²⁵ BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 42 is fully paginated by Count Cozio.

²⁶ Count Cozio's reference to Antonio Stradivari's grandson – Antonio (II), son of Paolo – implies that these violins were purchased after the death of Paolo on 14th October 1775, but, if so, there is no extant correspondence relating to such a purchase. It is probable that Count Cozio, after 25 years, had simply forgotten that his dealings with Antonio Stradivari's grandson related principally to the purchase of the workshop tools and equipment.

²⁷ See p. 2 of this account, and footnote 8.

²⁸ This opening phrase is written as an annotation in the top-left corner of the sheet of paper.

²⁹ The text – *con tasello di rinforzo sopra l'anima postovi dall'autore* – in smaller handwriting, was subsequently(?) squeezed in between the already-written lines of text. Note that the Count writes *ta[s]sello*, but subsequently *pezza larga*, to describe the reinforcing pieces of wood glued to the underside of the front plate.

³⁰ *Bosco*, in the previous description, has now been replaced by *legno*.

³¹ Count Cozio's description of the tonal qualities indicates that he played this violin. But, if this is the same instrument as the *Messiah* violin, he managed to play it without causing any wear to the varnish, either to the left or the right of the tail-piece, or on the back plate, such wear being inevitable before chin rests and shoulder rests were developed. Louis Spohr's invention of the chin rest was not until c1820. The Rev. H. R. Haweis (*Old Violins and Violin Lore*, William Reeves, 1898[?], p. 159) comments: 'Quite within the last thirty years the cult of chin rests has become almost universal.' Shoulder rests have only been commonplace in the last seventy or eighty years.

*with a reinforcing patch above the sound-post inserted by the maker.*³² Joined back. The flame[s] are wide and brilliant, but do not match [across the centre joint] and incline slightly upwards. The neck button is two-thirds of a circle. The ribs and neck are made of equally good [matching?] wood. The neck inclined backwards, the [new, longer?] fingerboard positioned, and a wide square piece [of wood set] above the sound-post for a crack which is invisible, and perhaps for necessary reinforcement, by G. B. Guadagnini. Good scroll and black rim, as usual. Value: at least one hundred and fifty *zecchini*.

In the ms. Cozio 41 description (1774-75) the neck button of the 1716 violin was described as ‘small, but more than a semicircle’; in the subsequent 1801 description the neck button is ‘two-thirds of a circle’. The likelihood is that these very slightly different specifications are nonetheless of the same neck button. In a similar manner:

- the 1774-75 description includes *le fasse e manico tutto dell istesso bosco*
- the 1801 description has *fascie e manico d’equal bel legno*
- the 1774-75 description has *vena larga e viva*
- the 1801 description has *vena larga brillante*
- the 1774-75 description has *con un tasello sopra l’anima sotto il scagnello per fortezza stato messo dal autore*
- the 1801 description has *con tasello di rinforzo sopra l’anima postovi dall’autore*
- the 1774-75 description has *lavoratura [...] della maggior finezza possibile*
- the 1801 description has *lavoro finissimo in tutte le parti.*

The problematic ambiguity within Count Cozio’s 1801 descriptive text is whether he has defined the orientation of the flames on the back plate of his 1716 violin – ‘incline slightly upwards’ – by starting at the outer edge of the violin’s back plate or by starting at the centre-joint. It is noticeable that the Count’s reference to the flame orientation follows on from his comment that ‘the flames are wide and brilliant, but do not match’ (*ed agionto non per vena*; literally ‘and join not through [the] vein[s]’). Having just referred to the flames which do not neatly sit opposite each other on either side of the centre-joint, the Count immediately refers to the flames’ upwards orientation; his focus is thus on the centre-joint. On balance, the evidence points towards the flames on the back plate of Count Cozio’s 1716 Stradivari violin rising from the centre-joint. Nonetheless, there remains an element of uncertainty about this conclusion, an uncertainty which might be eradicated if further information could be found.

The *Messiah* violin has back-plate flames which descend from the centre-joint.

Further information is found in a description written by Count Cozio on 19th December 1820 of a 1719 Stradivari violin.³³ In 1820 Count Cozio was 65 years of age and quite likely the most experienced and knowledgeable string-instrument *aficionado* in northern Italy:

*Misure del più bel viol^o d’Ant^o Stradivari del P[?] Moler dell’anno 1719
Vernice rossa, lavoro più fino come il mio del 1716 e legno bello, fondo in due pezzi però con
vena larga disuguale che discende infer[ior]^e [...].*

³² ‘Squeezed in’ text. Cf. the aforementioned 1774-75 description: *con un tasello sopra l’anima sotto il scagnello per fortezza stato messo dal autore* (‘with a patch above the sound-post, under the bridge, for strength, placed there by the maker’).

³³ BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 47, folio 111v; see also Cozio/Bacchetta pp. 311-312

Measurements of the most beautiful violin of Antonio Stradivari, belonging to Professor[?] Moler, of the year 1719.

Red varnish, particularly fine workmanship as on mine [my violin] of 1716, and beautiful wood, back plate in two pieces but with wide unequal vein [flames] which slopes downwards [...].³⁴

Count Cozio's use of his own 1716 violin as a point of comparison enables him to link, positively, the workmanship on both violins, link the jointed back plates, link the wide flames (cf. 'the flames are wide and brilliant' on the 1716 violin) and link, perhaps, the colour of the varnish (cf. 'deep red, finely shaded into a paler [colour]'). In this context the Count's vitally-important use of *però* ('but') draws attention to a fundamental difference between Prof. Moler's 1719 violin and Count Cozio's 1716 violin: on the 1719 violin the flames descend (from the centre-joint); logically, therefore, on the Count's 1716 violin the flames must ascend from the centre-joint. This conclusion confirms the present author's interpretation of the comment made by Count Cozio in his 1801 description of his 1716 violin: the flames 'incline slightly upwards'.

The back-plate flames on the *Messiah* violin descend from the centre-joint.

The evidence presented above does not, of course, indicate that the *Messiah* violin was not made by Antonio Stradivari. However, it does demonstrate that within the oft-repeated chronology of ownership of the *Messiah* violin one name (possibly two) can now be deleted:

Firstly, Count Cozio di Salabue – who bought from Paolo Stradivari a 1716 Antonio Stradivari violin which had back-plate flames rising from the centre-joint. This violin, almost certainly, is that which was still owned by the Count when he died in 1840, and that which was sold by the Count's daughter, Matilde, to an unknown purchaser in 1841. If the unknown purchaser was Luigi Tarisio, and if Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, in 1855, located the much-talked-about-but-never-seen 1716 violin at the home in northern Italy of Tarisio's heirs, then Vuillaume obtained from the heirs a violin with rising flames on the back plate. However, the violin which Vuillaume brought to the 1872 Special Exhibition in London – the violin which is today's *Messiah* – had (and still has) downward-slanting flames.

Secondly, Paolo Stradivari – who certainly sold to Count Cozio a 1716 violin made by Paolo's grandfather, Antonio, but this violin had ascending flames on its two-piece back plate.

There is no unequivocal documentary evidence dated between 1716 and 1855 – a period of 140 years – which demonstrates the existence of the violin which today is known as the *Messiah*.

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³⁴ The very next descriptive entry in Count Cozio's manuscript (folio 112r) is for Prof. Moler's 1718 Stradivari violin which is described as *con vena rivolta all'insù* ('with vein[s] which turn upwards').