

Compare and contrast

The essential significance of Sackman's book is in having adopted the rigorous methods that art historians routinely use. He examines with academic scrupulousness all of the available historical sources, verifying their consistency and any discrepancy. Sackman has done nothing but carry out thorough historical research, using documentary sources and evidence of all kinds, as happens in every other field of art and craft history.

Renato Meucci, *A controversial history and a research opportunity*, in 'The Absolute Stradivari, the Messie violin 1716/2016', Edizione Museo del Violino, 2016, p. 37.

We shall be hearing about some very important new discoveries as well as some wise and sensible opinions today, and I myself am very confident that we shall, amongst other things, find ourselves pushing aside some of the silly, irrelevant, recent theories published by negative and ill-informed experts – so-called experts.

Conclusion of Honorary President's opening address to the audience at the 'Messiah' Study Day, 9th October 2016, Cremona, Italy.

I haven't read the book by Mr Sackman because, from the number of letters I've had from him, in general silly requests, and I didn't feel like forking out quite a lot of money and I thought he ought perhaps to think he owed me a copy. The impression I've had from the beginning with Mr Sackman – whom we heard about for half an hour this morning, virtually – he's one of these people who decides on a theory about a subject that he really doesn't understand and works backwards from saying 'this is what the truth is', and he then goes out of his way to find evidence that somehow fits that truth, but he ignores the wider issues of the obvious evidence to the contrary. Maybe those in the medical profession can help us; there's one here [the speaker does not finish this comment]. I don't treat seriously the opinions of this man. It was felt that he was going to attack the ['Stradivarius'] exhibition three years ago in Oxford [...]. Things that look obvious have been discussed this morning which are obviously difficult for an author who is having fun criticising the trade and everything else. I just can't believe that [the 'Messiah' violin] has been compared with a Vuillaume. People came back from Oxford saying "it's a Vuillaume" but it's not said by people who have studied these things. Honorary President's spoken contribution to a Question and Answer session with members of the audience at the 'Messiah' Study Day, 9th October 2016, Cremona, Italy.

What is needed is an expanded collaboration between historians of art and provenance, violin makers, and scientists, which together could lead to greater and more reliable insights – [this would] indeed [be] possible if there [was] a commensurate willingness and openness of mind by all parties involved [...].

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