

Paganini's instrument legacy

with reference to Count Cozio di Salabue, Alessandro Delfino, Vincenzo Merighi,
Niccolò and Achille Paganini, Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume,
and the *Countess of Stainlein* cello

© Nicholas Sackman

www.themessiahviolin.uk

2021

In June 1816 Il Conte Ignazio Alessandro Cozio di Salabue was hard at work at his residence in Milan, writing out the catalogue, or register, in which he describes and measures many of the string instruments that he owned. The catalogue, with 150 folios (300 pages), is today archived at the Biblioteca Statale di Cremona, Libreria Civica (BSCr, LC), and has the identification 'ms. Cozio 47'.

On 5 June 1816 the Count penned a text relating to a 1709 Stradivari cello owned by Alessandro Delfino, a distinguished Italian cellist who was active at the end of the eighteenth century and during the early years of the nineteenth. Within the records archived by Milan's Teatro alla Scala opera house Delfino can be found listed as the *primo Violoncello* for a production of *Telemaco, ossia La Virtu Vincitrice*, composed by Nicola Zingarelli and produced in 1785. In 1793 Delfino travelled to Russia and entered the service of Empress Catherine the Great, at St. Petersburg. By 1804 he was back in Milan, once again as the *Primo Violoncello* for a production of Vincenzo Federici's *Teseo, azione drammatica*. In 1805 he played in the La Scala orchestra for the production of *Il Matrimonio Interrotto* by Francesco Gnecco.

Count Cozio's measurements of Delfino's 1709 cello appear on folio 32v of ms. Cozio 47:

The measurements of the 1709 Antonio Stradivari cello of Signor Prof. Alessandro Delfini [Delfino], known as 'Brescianino'. [...] are made with the Foot of Paris, and taken on the curvatures [archings] [... *sono col piede di Parigi, preso sulle curve*].¹

La total lunghezza del coperchio piedi due, pollici quattro, ponti uno e mezzo coi bordi

Total length of the front plate, including the borders: 2. 4. 1½ = 761.1mm

La minor larghezza nei CC coi bordi pollici otto, ponti otto e mezzo

Centre Bout minimum width, including the borders: 0. 8. 8½ = 235.7mm

La maggior larghezza superiore coi bordi piedi uno, ponti nove e due terzi

Upper Bout maximum width, including the borders: 1. 0. 9²/₃ = 346.6mm

La maggior larghezza inferiore coi bordi piedi uno, pollici quattro, ponti tre e due terzi

Lower Bout maximum width, including the borders: 1. 4. 3²/₃ = 441.2mm

'Point-to-point' (i.e. calliper) equivalents of these 'on the curvatures' front-plate measurements would likely be

Upper Bout maximum 344mm

Centre Bout minimum 232mm

Lower Bout maximum 438mm

Length 758mm

¹ 'Foot of Paris': *piede* = 324.84mm; ÷ 12 = *pollici* = 27.07mm; ÷ 12 = *ponti* = 2.26mm.

and these dimensions strongly suggest that Delfino's cello was an example of Stradivari's *forma B* design, examples of which are:

	Present-day measurements
1707 <i>Boni/Hegar</i>	338.8 / 228.0 / 432.6 / 754.7mm (Thöne; back plate, calliper) ²
1707-1710 <i>Castelbarco/Fau</i>	341.5 / 227.5 / 439.5 / 758.0mm (Thöne; back plate, calliper)
1709 <i>Delfino (Markevitch)</i>	340.0 / 228.0 / 435.7 / 758.0mm (Rattray; back plate, calliper) ³
1710 <i>Gore-Booth</i>	345.8 / ----- / 441.3 / 758.2mm (Hill (1902); back plate, tape measure)
1710 <i>Gore-Booth</i>	342.0 / 229.0 / 438.0 / 756.0mm (Thöne; back plate, calliper) ⁴
1711 <i>Duport</i>	346.1 / ----- / 441.3 / 758.8mm (Hill (1902); back plate, tape measure)
1711 <i>Mara</i>	338.0 / 226.0 / 436.0 / 756.0mm (Thöne; back plate, calliper)
1713 <i>Bass of Spain</i>	340.0 / 227.5 / 435.0 / 755.3mm (Manfredini/Carlson; back plate, calliper) ⁵
1714 <i>Batta</i>	342.0 / 228.0 / 437.0 / 758.0mm (Beare; back plate, calliper) ⁶
1717 <i>Bonamy Dobree/Suggia</i>	338.0 / 227.5 / 433.0 / 758.0mm (Thöne; back plate, calliper)

Count Cozio also compiled a document entitled *Possidenti instrumeti all'estero* ('owners of instruments abroad'). He writes:

*Pietro Burgo [St. Petersburg] Delfini Alessandro detto il Brescianino per violoncello 1822 a Mosca.
Mosca: presso SE[?] monsieur le comte André Goudovich.*

Count Cozio's text indicates that, post 1816, Alessandro Delfino returned to Russia with his Stradivari cello, and, in 1822, moved from St. Petersburg to Moscow; it is quite likely that he died there but the date is unknown. Delfino's cello passed into the hands of Andrei Goudovich and eventually to Senator Andrei Nicolas Markevitch, hence the soubriquet by which the instrument is known today.

The *Delfino/Markevitch* cello appeared in Paris in 1915 and is described by Caressa & Français in their business ledger:⁷

*Sénateur Markevitch, à Petrograd
Basse de A. Stradivarius, 1709*

Fond de 2 pièces à larges ondes droites, fort belles, brisé à la place de l'âme, nombreux petits felipeaux, et tâche noirâtre, en longueur, mince; doublure d'estomac sur le fond; bord du bas usé, refait, talon remis; bouton de procession; éclisses pareilles au fond; brisées et doublées en partie; table de 2 pièces, sapin moyen, régulier, très-beau; quelques cassures; doublure en carré, du joint au bord, côté de l'âme; bords en partie refaits; très-belle tête en érable, larges ondes douces; trous rebouchés; vernis rouge orange doré, transparent, très-beau, très brun là où il reste: taille 750mm; n'a pas été recoupée du haut ni du bas, mais a dû être rétrécie.

Porte sur l'f gauche, gravé en petit, S.M.; a appartenue au Comte Goudovitch, grand-oncle du Sénateur Markevitch, donné en cadeau à ce dernier en 1863, légué par le Sénateur à son fils Nicolas, acheté par nous en 8^{bre} 1915 (rhxx).

La basse a mis 3 mois à venir de Petrograd à Paris, par Tornéa, Tronkje, Hul, Dunkerque.

Vendu hxzx à M^e Rateau, à Paris, en Février 1916.

Courvoisier 1933.

² Jost Thöne and Jan Röhrmann, *Antonius Stradiarius*, Vols, I-VIII, DVD diagrams and measurements.

³ David Rattray, *Masterpieces of Italian Violin Making (1620-1850)*, Outline Press (2000), p. 82.

⁴ The Hill measurements (converted to millimetres) for the *Gore-Booth* cello (*Antonio Stradivari* (1902), p.298), when placed against Jost Thöne's measurements, demonstrate that the Hills used a flexible tape-measure lying on the cello's arching.

⁵ Cinzia Manfredini and Bruce Carlson, *I violoncelli di Antonio Stradivari*, Consorzio Liutai Antonio Stradivari, Cremona (2004), p. 189.

⁶ Charles Beare, *Antonio Stradivari, the Cremona exhibition*, London (1993), p. 318.

⁷ The Jacques Français Rare Violins Inc. Business Records (1845-1938), Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, Box 55, folders 2 and 4, p. 203 (free-to-read at www.themessiahviolin.uk).

Senator Markevitch, from Petrograd [St. Petersburg]
Antonio Stradivari cello, 1709

The back plate is made from two pieces, with wide and straight flames;⁸ really beautiful; broken at the sound-post; numerous small covering pieces of wood, and a blackish stain, longitudinal, thin. There is a doubling of the chest area of the back plate; the lower edge is worn, re-made. Modified neck-foot. A [suspension-strap] button. The wood of the ribs is similar to that of the back plate; breaks and doublings in various places. The front plate is made from two pieces; medium [-width?] spruce, regular, very beautiful; some splits. There is a square-shaped doubling at the edge-joint by the side of the sound-post; the [perimeter] edges have been re-made in places. Very beautiful head, made of maple, with wide and mild flames; the peg-holes have been bushed. The varnish is golden red-orange, transparent, very beautiful, very brown where it remains. The body length is 750mm. The cello has not been cut down at the top or at the bottom but it has been narrowed.⁹

At the bass *f*-hole there is a small engraving, the letters 'S.M.'; [the cello] belonged to Count Goudovitch, great-uncle of Senator Markevitch;¹⁰ given as a present to the last-named in 1863; bequeathed by the Senator to his son Nicolas; bought by us in October 1915 (31,000 [francs]).

It took three months for the cello to travel from Petrograd to Paris, via Tornio [northern Finland], Trondheim [Norway], Hull [England], and Dunkerque [France].

Sold for 100,000 [francs] to Monsieur Rateau, from Paris, in February 1916.¹¹
[Sold to Jean-Louis] Courvoisier, 1933.

Note that the body length of the *Markevitch* cello, as defined by Caressa & Français in 1915 – 750mm – is quite unlike the measurement of the *Delfino* cello as defined by Count Cozio 100 years earlier – 761.1 mm 'on the arching'. It seems likely that '750' was a momentary error and the C&F writer intended to write '760' (cf. David Rattray's calliper specification of 758mm).

On 8 June 1816 Count Cozio penned a further text, on folio 39r of his catalogue, relating to a Stradivari cello of 1707 which belonged to the cellist Vincenzo Merighi (b. 1795) who graduated from the Milan Conservatory in 1815.¹² By 1816 Vincenzo was a cellist in the orchestra of the La Scala opera house in Milan (and, clearly, already owned a Stradivari cello) and subsequently became the cello-section principal. At the Conservatory he taught Alfredo Piatti¹³ (between 1832 and 1837), Guglielmo Quarenghi (1839-1842), and Alessandro Pezze (1846-1849). Vincenzo Merighi died in 1849.

Merighi's 1707 Stradivari cello, according to some, is the present-day *Countess of Stainlein* cello.

Count Cozio's text (ms. Cozio 47, folio 39r):

Veduto il bonissimo e forte violoncello di forma mezzana B dell'Ant^o Stradivari del 1707 app^{te} [appartente] il figlio Vincenzo dell'Ant^o Merighi buon suonatore alievo dell Sturioni nel concert^o [concertino] di Milano (ma senza garbo). Esso stromento e [è] eguale in tutte le sue misure vernice

⁸ The flames on the back plate of the 1709 *Delfino*/*Markevitch* cello are neither wide nor straight; the medium-width flames slope downwards from the centre-joint, the slight angle of descent being a little more pronounced in the upper half of the body.

⁹ 'Narrowed' refers to the lowering of the rib heights, not the transverse dimensions of the plates; see David Rattray p. 82.

¹⁰ The small engraving is not visible in the photographs provided by Rattray.

¹¹ Caressa & Français *Grand Livre* for 1912-1920 (Musée de la Musique, Paris, E.981.8.47, p. 187): 1916 *Février 4: Rateau: Un violoncelle de Antonius Stradivarius (N^o 2187) à Crème, année 1709, ex-Marcovitch de Petrograd, 100,000 francs*. Monsieur Rateau settled the bill with two payments of 50,000 francs – on 7 March and 7 June 1916.

¹² Vincenzo was the son of the violin maker Antonio Merighi (1756-1833).

¹³ b. 1822.

rossa, e lavoro di quello del Signor Professore Alessandro Delfini detto Brescianino fuori questo del Merighi è più grande nel petto fra le CC di due bordi di quello che è del 1709 del Brescianino.
[continued below, at §]

Saw the really excellent and strong cello, of form medium B, of Antonio Stradivari, of 1707, owned by Antonio Merighi's son – Vincenzo – a good player, a pupil of [Giuseppe] Sturioni, in the orchestra at Milan (but lacking in refinement). This instrument is equal in all its measurements, in its red varnish, in its workmanship, to that of Signor Professor Alessandro Delfino, known as 'Brescianino', except that this [cello] of Merighi is wider in the chest area between the two edges of the C-bouts than that which is of 1709 of 'Brescianino'.

§ *Le misure di quello del Brescianino sono a pollici di Milano prese superficialmente (vedeli retro fol. 32). E stante quanto sopra essendo la minor largh^a [larghezza] del petto delli CC:*

pieci 0. 8. 8³/₆

agionta dei due bordi: pieci 0. 0. 10³/₆

Sarà la totale larg^a di quello di Merighi, esclusi li orli: pieci 0. 9. 7

Li altri due bordi del d^o [detto] 1807: pieci 0. 0. 10

Sarà in totale larg^a ivi: pieci 0. 10. 5 [i.e. 0. 9. 7 + 0. 0. 10]

[continued overleaf at §§]

The measurements of that of Brescianino are in Milanese *pollici*, taken over the surface (refer back to folio 32 [32v]). And, given that the above [i.e. the Brescianino/Delfino cello] being the smaller width across the chest, 235.7mm [see p.1 of this account], adding the two borders, 23.73mm.

Thus the total width of that of Merighi[?], excluding the brims [borders]: 259.4mm

The other two borders of that named 1807 [?1707 Merighi?]: 22.6mm

Thus the total width there: 282mm.

Regrettably, on this occasion Count Cozio's texts and measurements are unclear and confusing:

1. The measurement (shown above) of 235.7mm across the chest of the *Delfino/Brescianino* cello is a repetition of the measurement shown on p.1 of the present account, a measurement which was established by Count Cozio using a flexible tape lying on the surface of the arching; the measurement included the borders – *coi bordi*.

The transverse chest measurement shown above was also 'taken over the surface', and the identical result indicates that, as before, the border widths are included, but now the Count seems to increase the measurement by adding border widths of 23.73mm (= 259.4mm) and indicating that this dimension is derived from Merighi's cello rather than Delfino's.

2. The *Delfino/Brescianino* measurements provided on p.1 are stated to be according to the Foot of Paris; the measurements presented above are specified as being *pollici di Milano*. Since the result of 235.7mm appears in both texts the two measuring systems must be one and the same although why Count Cozio cites Milanese *pollici* rather than the Paris *Foot* is unknown.

3. On 5 June 1816, Count Cozio had entered into his catalogue – ms. Cozio 47, folio 31v – the first of the two texts relating to the 1707 Stradivari cello belonging to Vincenzo Merighi.¹⁴ At folio 31v the Count specifies the centre-bout width of Vincenzo's cello as 252.6mm and this is stated to be a 'flat' measurement, 'without the curvatures', and according to the Parisian 'Foot' – *misure piane e così senza le curve col piede parigino*. It is unclear why the *Delfino/Brescianino* centre-bout width was not measured in the same point-to-point manner.

4. For comparison, note that the centre-bout width of the large, and unaltered, *Medici* cello of 1690 is 248mm; on the 1696 *Lord Aylesford* cello the measurement is 255mm; measurements (above) of 259.4mm and 282mm are implausible.

¹⁴ The second text is that which is dated 8 June 1816, appears on folio 39r of ms. Cozio 47, and begins on p.3 of this account.

If, as is claimed, Merighi's cello is the present-day *Countess of Stainlein* cello, then, following Count Cozio's statement that the chest of Merighi's cello is wider than Delfino's, a dimensional comparison between the *Countess of Stainlein* cello and the *Delfino/Markevitch* cello should show that the C-bout of the former is wider than that of the latter. Present-day calliper/back-plate measurements of the 1707 *Countess of Stainlein* cello are defined by Jost Thöne and Jan Röhrmann as:

UB 338.5mm CB 228.0mm LB 434.5mm Length 756.0mm¹⁵

Calliper/back-plate measurements of the 1709 *Delfino/Markevitch* cello are defined by David Rattray as:

UB 340.0mm CB 228.0mm LB 435.7mm Length 758.0mm

Is it really possible that Count Cozio thought he could see a difference in centre-bout width when none actually existed? Perhaps Vincenzo Merighi's 1707 cello is not today's *Countess of Stainlein* cello.

§§ *Questo del Merighi è di bellissimo acero vena larga fondo fascie, e manico, ed il fondo unito a meta [metà] colle vene discendenti da [... space ...] in [... space ...] e sano d° [detto] fondo).*

Nelle fascie alcune rotture.

Nel coperchio pure qualcune ben agiustata

Le ff sono bellissime

Il manico è dell'autore ritrovato pure a Parma che però era fatto per la viola da Gamba da sei corde, come si vedano [vedono] li primi due buchi stati tagliati ed unitovi il riccio dal d'Ant° Merighi.

This [cello] of Merighi is made from the most beautiful maple, with wide flames on the back plate, on the ribs, and on the neck, and the back plate jointed at the middle with the flames descending from [... space ...] to [... space ...] and the back is in good condition.

Also descending from the centre-joint are the back-plate flames on the 1709 *Delfino/Markevitch* cello. However, the back-plate flames on the 1707 *Countess of Stainlein* cello ascend from the centre-joint.

There are some cracks in the ribs

Some cracks also in the front plate; well repaired

The *f*-holes are really beautiful

Il manico è dell'autore ritrovato pure a Parma che però era fatto per la viola da Gamba da sei corde, come si vedono li primi due buchi stati tagliati ed unitovi il riccio dal d'Ant° Merighi.

The neck is by the maker, found also at Parma. That, however, was made for the Viola da Gamba with six strings; as can be seen, the first two holes have been cut and joined to the scroll by the aforementioned Antonio Merighi.

The present writer's proposed paraphrase of Count Cozio's final comment is: *The peg-box/scroll of Vincenzo's cello was made by Stradivari; this type of peg-box/scroll found also at Parma.*¹⁶ *That example, however, was made for the six-string Viola da Gamba. What we have here is a VdG peg-box/scroll attached by Antonio Merighi to the neck of Vincenzo's cello. As can be seen, the wood surrounding the first two of the six VdG peg-holes (i.e. at the neck end of the peg-box) has been cut off and the upper/remaining portion of the peg-box/scroll has been joined to the neck of the cello.*

Clearly, there is something unusual about the scroll/peg-box of Vincenzo Merighi's cello which prompts Count Cozio's commentary. Perhaps the cello's original scroll/peg-box had suffered some non-repairable damage and it was easier for Antonio Merighi to modify and fit a pre-existing Viola da Gamba head (made by Stradivari) rather than start carving a cello head from scratch. Because a VdG

¹⁵ Thöne/Röhrmann, *Antonius Stradiuarius*, Vol. VI, DVD diagrams and measurements.

¹⁶ Vincenzo Merighi's father, Antonio, was born in Parma but subsequently moved to Milan; the immediately-following entry in Count Cozio's catalogue/register (folio 40r of ms. Cozio 47) is titled *Violino del Merighi di Parma*.

has six strings the width of its peg-box – where it reaches the start of the neck/fingerboard – is significantly wider (c.50mm) than is needed for a standard four-string cello neck (c.30mm). The Count concludes that Antonio Merighi has taken a VdG head, has shortened its 6-hole peg-box by cutting through both walls just above the first two peg-holes (i.e. cutting at the point where the width of the box has narrowed to the dimension which is required for a cello), and has taper-jointed this truncated scroll/peg-box to the neck of his son's Stradivari cello.

There is no specific evidence that Count Cozio is describing a scroll/peg-box with the back of the box cut away so that the viewer can look straight through (this being the condition of the peg-box on the present-day *Countess of Stainlein* cello).¹⁷ Nonetheless, there are examples of *viole da gamba* (likewise *viole d'amore*) where the back of the peg-box has been cut away in order to aid the lacing of all the strings onto the pegs. If Merighi's cello had a peg-box of this type perhaps Count Cozio, having alluded to its VdG-type head, saw no need to draw attention to the as-would-be-expected cut-through.

In early 1828, before setting out for Vienna and the start of a concert tour, Niccolò Paganini stored seven string instruments with Signor Carlo Carli, a Milanese banker (and accomplished violinist) who also acted as the commercial agent for Count Cozio; the receipt sent by Carli to Paganini on 4 March 1828 identified the following instruments:

*Un Violino di Antonio Stradivario di forma grande, vernice gialla col biglietto del 1724.*¹⁸

*Un Violino con vernice rossa col biglietto di Giuseppe Guarnerio del 17[?]4, con arco in una cassa da due.*¹⁹

Un Violino di Andrea Guarnerio col biglietto del 1675, in una cassa da uno, quadrata, dipinta in verde, con arco.

Una Viola di Antonio e Girolamo Amati col biglietto del 1612, in cassa da uno, coperta di bulgaro.

Un Violino piccolo senza biglietto con arco, borsa, e cassa di legno in bianco.

Una Chitarra di Napoli con cassa di legno.

*Un Violoncello con vernice rossa col biglietto di Antonio Stradivario del 1728, in cassa usata.*²⁰

These instruments are evaluated by Paganini within the information which he conveyed to Julius M Schottky in 1830:

[I possess] a veritable treasure-hoard of valuable instruments, of which I take only the smallest part with me on my travels. The [1724?] Stradivari which I have left in Italy [Milan], and which I consider to be the father of all violins, has a tone almost as big as that of a contrabass, so

¹⁷ For photographs see Thöne/Röhrmann, *Antonius Stradiuarius*, Vol. VI, pp. 256-267. A 1725 Stradivari cello belonging to Jules Gallay ('ex Vaslin') was described in 1872 by C N E Gand in his *Catalogue descriptif des Instruments de Stradivarius et J. Guarnerius* as having a cut-through peg-box; *Très-belle tête ayant eu la mortaise percée à jour* ('Very beautiful head having had the mortice cut right through'). Strangely, photographs of the 'c.1725' *Gallay/Vaslin/La Belle Blonde* cello (Tarisio.com ID 40285) do not show a cut-through peg-box.

¹⁸ It is this violin which Paganini bought from Il Conte Ignazio Alessandro Cozio di Salabue in July 1817 (with Carlo Carli acting as the go-between). On two occasions within his documents Count Cozio describes the tone of this 1724 violin: *Fortissimo di voce, e quasi tenore* ('extremely powerful voice, and viola-like') and *Questo ha la voce più forte, e da tenore*. See the present author's historical study of this violin – '*Fortissimo di voce, e quasi tenore*' – which is free-to-read at www.themessiahviolin.uk.

¹⁹ Carlo Carli's handwriting suggests that the third numeral in the label-date for the 'Giuseppe Guarnerio' violin with red varnish is a zero, i.e. '1704', but the numeral may be an incomplete '2', i.e. '1724'. If the label-date is '1724' then 'Giuseppe Guarnerio' could just as easily be Giuseppe Guarneri *filius Andreae* (father, 1666-1740) as Giuseppe Guarneri *del Gesù* (son, 1698-1744).

²⁰ The original manuscript of Carli's receipt is archived at the Biblioteca Comunale di Trento (Fondo Anzoletti MA 62).

distinguished is it by its power.²¹ I would not part with it at any price – not even for the 3800 francs that was paid for Viotti's violin in 1824. Side by side with this I place my excellent cello, also by Stradivari [1728]. At Milan I have also left a beautiful Amati [1612] and a Guarneri [*del Gesù* or Andrea?], the latter a little on the small side, but still possessing a charming tone.²²

The evidence from a subsequent letter suggests that at an unknown date Paganini sent a second Stradivari violin to Carlo Carli for safe-keeping (see letter of 18 January 1840, p.12 of this account).

By the summer of 1837 Paganini's deteriorating health had put paid to his concert-hall career and he began to use some of his wealth for the purchase of a collection of valuable string instruments. It seems that Paganini had no interest in becoming a connoisseur of string instruments or a stylistic expert; the impression is given that his interest was simply financial, and that he regarded violins, violas, and cellos as tools of the trade rather than as rare and irreplaceable examples of Cremonese craftsmanship which should be protected at all times. His casual attitude towards the instruments in his possession is perhaps illuminated through a letter of 15 February 1840 to Luigi Geremi in which he identifies his ownership of an Amati viola and 'My Amati cello, or Rugeri, or whatever make it is [...]'.²³

Geraldine de Courcy comments:

In purchasing his instruments Paganini wisely preferred to work through a middleman because he knew that if any dealer or individual suspected a lively interest on his part, the prices immediately would soar. Paganini had a number of colleagues at various nodal points with whom he now opened an active correspondence on the subject, among them the [cellist] Vincenzo Merighi in Milan, Filippo Zaffarini in Ferrara, Pacini in Paris, and his former London factotum Urbani, who was to scan the markets in the British Isles.²⁴

The published editions of much of Paganini's extant correspondence cannot obscure the fact that, over time, many of his letters have disappeared from public view. As a result, continuity of narrative is difficult to establish; there are many loose ends within the one-sided documents which have appeared in print.

Paganini (Paris) to Vincenzo Merighi (Milan), 12 January 1838

My dear Signor Merighi,
Happy to hear from M. Pagni that you are reunited with your charming family, I congratulate you. I saw you being born in Parma.

Your Stradivari cello, which you have 'educated', must be excellent. So, since my son [Achille] is inclined to play music on that instrument, although the price of two hundred *Luigi* is a little high, I will buy it as a keepsake by which to remember you.²⁵

And if you look favourably upon me, you just have to reply [to this letter], and I, via my banker L B Migone, of Genoa, will send you the aforementioned sum, and you will deliver to the payer the instrument, together with a Merighi bow wrapped in [protective] furs, [both being] placed in a strong box, which, should it should fall from the roof of a carriage, or from a wagon, will prevent the instrument being damaged.

²¹ Cf. Paganini's letter of 28 March 1838, on p.8 of this account.

²² Schottky, *Paganini's Leben und Treiben*, Prague, 1830, pp. 281-282, translated in Pulver, p. 320 (see fn.60).

²³ G I C de Courcy, *Paganini, the Genoese*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1957, Vol. II, p. 312.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 294.

²⁵ 20-franc *Louis d'or* (*Luigi*) coin × 200 = 4,000 Francs.

If you find two violins by Giuseppe Guarneri called *del Gesù*, large and in good condition, I would ask you to buy them on my behalf, but [ensure] that the price does not exceed 1,200 or 1,400 Francs [60-70 *Luigi*]; this is to favor two artists of my acquaintance.²⁶

It is unclear why Vincenzo Merighi, notwithstanding his long-term friendship with Paganini, should be willing to sell his Stradivari cello [assumed to be that of 1707]. In 1838 Vincenzo was just 43 years of age and had another 11 years of life ahead of him, but perhaps being 'reunited with his family' indicates that he had been seriously ill, and, as a result, his performing career (but not his teaching career) had ended; might Paganini's 'congratulations', and his comment about seeing Vincenzo being born, be an allusion to a recent flirtation with mortality? If so, then acting as Paganini's purchasing agent would, at the least, generate some income for Vincenzo – see Paganini's letter of 20 March 1839 (p.10).

Paganini (Paris) to Vincenzo Merighi (Milan), 13 March 1838

Please put my mind at rest by clarifying if you want to sell your Stradivari cello – or if you can let me have it for the 200 *Luigi* that I have [already] offered. I would be making the purchase for my son's use. Also, let me know if you are able to obtain for me two violins by Giuseppe Guarneri *del Gesù*, which you will easily find if you go to Signori Cavinati and Zanaboni, greeting them, begging them on my behalf. I would like these instruments to be healthy and harmonious, and of moderate price; they are for the use of two artists who are friends of mine.²⁷

Paganini's 'two artists' were likely an invention.

It seems that at an unknown date prior to Paganini's letter of 28 March 1838 (below) the Carlis, in Milan, had transferred the 1724 Stradivari violin into Luigi Geremi's custody in Genoa.²⁸ As already shown in footnote 18, Count Cozio twice describes his 1724 violin as having a viola-like tone; Paganini told Schottky that the violin 'has a tone almost as big as that of a contrabass'; in his 28 March 1838 letter (below) the comparison is with the tone of a cello. It is surely the case that the violin with the ugly notes is the 1724 instrument:

Paganini (Paris) to Luigi Geremi (Genoa), 28 March 1838

My Stradivari [violin] will be honoured if it is exercised by my friend Geremi, so please make use of it. Since the instrument has the tonal timbre of a cello I don't believe that even changing the soundpost and bridge would be able to rectify the ugliness of certain notes.²⁹ My intention would be to sell all my instruments in Paris. What do you say?³⁰

Paganini (Paris) to Vincenzo Merighi (Milan), 15 April 1838

I am really pleased to learn that you are willing to help me in my commercial enterprise regarding instruments, and, since I have every confidence in you, please act as you see fit in buying them, always checking that they are legitimate [genuine?], sound, and strong wooden instruments.

The two violins of Stradivarius for 60 *Luigi* each – if they are as above [i.e. legitimate, sound, and strong] – buy them and send them to me in Genoa, and when you are packing them could you remove the soundpost and the bridge as a precaution and place [those items] in one of the small boxes [inside the violin case?] with the number [label-date?] of the violin to which they belong.

²⁶ E Neill, *Paganini: Epistolario*; Edizione speciale per il Comune di Genova, Siag Editore, Genova, (1982?), p. 242. All translations are by the present writer.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

²⁸ Luigi Geremi was Paganini's lawyer and confidante; he was also a talented violinist and owned violins by Giuseppe Guarneri, Gasparo da Salò, and Giofreddo Cappa.

²⁹ *Detto strumento avendo un timbro di voce di violoncello, non credo anche cambiando anima e ponticello di poterlo perfezionare in certe note che riescono crude.*

³⁰ E Neill, p. 244.

If Andrea Guarneri's two violins are in good condition, and beautiful, for 40 *Luigi*, buy them both. With respect to the Guarneri *del Gesù* violin owned by the widow Rovelli, its appearance doesn't matter so long as it is healthy and strong. Regarding the prices, I repeat that I have every confidence in you. And if I can buy Signor Carli's four *del Gesù* violins[!] I will be pleased. I repeat – I have every confidence that you will buy at the most advantageous price.³¹

Paganini (Paris) to Luigi Germe (Genoa), 23 July 1838

For a long time I have been meaning to retrieve my Stradivarius cello [the 1728 cello is assumed], which is at the [offices of the] late Carlo Carli in Milan, and I warmly ask you to immediately write to that family asking them to send this instrument to you, taking care to ensure that it is well protected in a trunk, in such a way that [should it] fall from the roof of a carriage it is not damaged; then ship it from Genoa and deliver it to [my] friend Monsieur [Camillo] Brun in Marseille; I ask that this be done as quickly as possible.³²

Paganini (Marseille) to Vincenzo Merighi (Milan), 14 January 1839

I would like you to tell me the definitive price of your cello.

Please try to obtain a discount on the 140 *Luigi* which is being asked for the Stradivari violin and the Amati, which I would buy if the latter was also of large shape, strong on the E-string and on the G-string.

I also hope that you will not fail to get me some violins by Guarneri *del Gesù*, strong in wood, in good condition, and powerful on the E- and G-strings.³³

Paganini (Marseille) to Vincenzo Merighi (Milan), 3 February 1839

In response to your very kind letter of January 26, I hasten to share with you that I am happy to buy your cello for 250 *Luigi d'oro*³⁴ and the two violins for 135 *Luigi*.³⁵ Now I am going to write to my banker Signor L B Migone of Genoa in order to have the total sum of three hundred and eighty-five *Luigi* transferred as soon as possible, knowing that he is in touch with Mr. Pettinati, banker in Milan.³⁶

Paganini (Marseille) to Luigi Migone (Genoa), 3 February 1839

Having bought three bow instruments in Milan, I ask you to pay three hundred and eighty-five *Luigi d'oro* to Signor Vincenzo Merighi, first cellist in that city, as quickly as possible; and at the same time, following the information that you will be gracious to take from my notary, Signor Luigi Germe, to indicate to the aforementioned [i.e. Vincenzo Merighi] the [identity of the] person to whom he must deliver these well-packed instruments which are to be shipped to Genoa so that Germe can see them [i.e. check their condition], and then I will see them [when they arrive] in Marseille.³⁷

Paganini (Marseille) to Luigi Germe (Genoa), 3 February 1839

I am going to buy the Stradivari cello belonging to professor Merighi from Milan, and two violins, one by the same author and the other by Amati.³⁸

³¹ E Neill, p. 245.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 253.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

³⁴ Earlier, the price of 200 *Luigi* was 'a little too high'.

³⁵ Evidently a discount of five *Luigi* was given; see previous letter (14 January 1839).

³⁶ E Neill, p. 268.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

Paganini (Marseille) to Luigi Germinio (Genoa), 19 March 1839

i sei strumenti sono giunti sani, ma perché il tuo Giuseppe Guarneri in luogo del mio Andrea?

The six instruments are safely received, but why is your Giuseppe Guarneri [violin] in place of my Andrea?³⁹

The newly-purchased Merighi cello and the Stradivari and Amati violins were certainly included in this group of six instruments (see letter of 20 March, below), along with three other instruments. As can be deduced from the Postscript which Paganini added to his letter to Germinio dated 8 April 1839 (see overleaf) one of the three additional instruments was a Guarneri *del Gesù* violin which had been given to Paganini by General Pino. A further violin, which should have been part of the delivery but was missing, was Paganini's Andrea Guarneri violin; such a violin, label-dated 1675, had been stored with Carlo Carli in 1828.

Paganini (Marseille) to Vincenzo Merighi (Milan), 20 March 1839

Now that I am able to hold a pen it's a pleasure to advise you that the three instruments arrived safely – and I thank you for having packed them so well.

I am glad to have [your] beautiful cello which I always keep with me, together with the Stradivari violin [?the violin bought with the Amati?] which completes the Quartet. This inspires me with the desire to buy some beautiful instruments with the purpose of re-selling them, given the likely demand for them. Therefore, since you so kindly offer to do so, try to obtain for me some Stradivari cellos, violins, and violas – but at a price that will leave a profitable margin when re-selling them. There is little demand for Amati violins, but get me some Giuseppe Guarneri *del Gesù*. The instruments must be in perfect condition and of good strong wood. It's only fair that I divide any profit with you, to repay you for your pains and kind efforts on my behalf, likewise for any efforts you may make in the future.⁴⁰

[...] You recommend two Stradivari violins 'one in good condition, the other not'. For God's sake don't talk to me of repaired violins with visible cracks – negotiate [only] for good violins, of strong wood that hasn't sunk at the bridge. For example, the Amati violin I received from you will be very difficult to sell because the sounding board is too damaged and also because Amatis do not have a high standing. But, as I said before, I am more than satisfied.

The belly of the Stradivari violin has given way round the bridge but it's not too bad and it's a beautiful instrument.

NB: cf. p.15 You may not be aware that your cello has been repaired by reinforcing it [doubling the thickness of the wood?] from the end of the fingerboard up to [down to?] the tailpiece,⁴¹ which takes away that metallic vibration which is characteristic of the maker.⁴² But it's excellent and very beautiful and I love it.

Therefore, try to get me the most beautiful Stradivari and Guarneri cellos, violas, and violins, as above [i.e. their physical qualities as specified above], since I want to succeed as a dealer in string instruments. But don't let anyone know what you are doing because if they hear that Paganini wants to buy them they'll charge exorbitant prices.⁴³

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 271; 'your Giuseppe Guarneri' is surely a reference to the Guarneri violin belonging to Germinio about which Paganini had enthused in 1823; see pp. 4-5 of the present author's article 'Niccolò Paganini's 'Cannone' violin and David Laurie's "Canon" violin: some considerations' (free-to-read at www.themessiahviolin.uk).

⁴⁰ It is curious that Paganini seems to be re-initiating his instrument-buying ambition (which had commenced in January 1838).

⁴¹ *Ella forse non saprà che il suo violoncello è stato riparato con una fortezza dal fine della tastiera sino alla cordiera*. It is assumed that Paganini observed the reinforcing piece of wood by inserting a tiny mirror through one of the lower/larger *f*-hole eyes, or by pulling out the wooden pin which held the loop of gut securing the tailpiece.

⁴² 'During 1720-22 Stradivari [...] making yet another type of violin [...] special features of the tone are a vigorous and incisive power, less flexible and less easy of production, and a [tonal] quality slightly metallic [...]' (Hill (1902), p. 156); but Vincenzo's cello was dated 1707.

⁴³ G I C de Courcy, Vol. II, pp. 294-5.

Three weeks later (8 April 1839) Paganini wrote again to Germi, concluding his letter with a corrective postscript:

*P.S. Il violino che trovi in luogo dell'Andrea Guarneri, è un violino che mi fu dato dal Generale Pino, e che ora riconosco essere di Giuseppe Guarneri di Gesù: ma che fu del mio Andrea? Che sia a Parma o che sia presso i Carli? A Parma vi deve essere il violini di Vuillaume copiato dal mio violino; e non so se ho ritirato dai Carli il suddetto Andrea. Se tu ne sai qualche cosa dimmi, prima che lo domandi ai Carli inutilmente.*⁴⁴

The violin that I find in place of the Andrea Guarneri is a violin that was given to me by General Pino and now I see that it's a Giuseppe Guarneri *del Gesù*; but what has become of my Andrea? Perhaps it's in Parma [with Achille?], or perhaps with the Carlis [in Milan]. Vuillaume's copy of my violin must be at Parma; I don't know whether or not I retrieved the Andrea from Carli. If you know anything, tell me before you ask the Carlis, unnecessarily.⁴⁵

Paganini's postscript demonstrates his realisation that the Guarneri violin which he thought was Germi's instrument was actually the violin given to Niccolò (on an unknown occasion) by Domenico Pino (d. 1826). Paganini is able to recognise the violin despite not having seen it since 1828 (assuming that Pino's violin is the second item in Carlo Carli's inventory – see p.6) but only now, in 1839, does Paganini identify it as a *del Gesù* instrument (of unspecified date). The manner in which Paganini immediately passes on from the Pino/*del Gesù* violin to his missing Andrea Guarneri violin suggests that, for him, the unknown location of the latter was a matter of greater concern; seemingly he held his Andrea Guarneri violin in higher esteem than his Pino/*del Gesù* violin.

Paganini (Marseille) to Luigi Germi (Genoa), 16 April 1839

Examine the violins which Filippino is selling; see if he has any by G. Guarneri *del Gesù* and by Stradivari and ask for the prices.⁴⁶

Paganini (Marseille) to Luigi Alliani, 26 April 1839

I am making you another request: in endeavouring to satisfy the desire of an artist who would like to possess violins by Giuseppe Guarneri known as *del Gesù*, and by Stradivari, as well as a cello by Stradivari, I beg you to investigate the dealers in Milan and see what they have; you can negotiate the prices. But please ensure that these instruments are sound, legitimate and strong in wood.⁴⁷

Paganini (Marseille) to Vincenzo Merighi (Milan), 15 June 1839

I received the seven violins[!] and I am quite happy with them [the source and/or identity of these seven violins is unknown]: but what does it mean that the front plate of the red Stradivari is as thin as paper? ... there is only one by Andrea Guarneri, the other is by Amati, and since the latter has no voice it seems to me that you could return it to the seller since it is difficult to re-sell; but I leave this to you.

I await that of Barbò, together with the other [violin?] that is said not to be entirely by that author; I would regret this imperfection [if true] but we can hope that it will [turn out to] be a shopkeeper's lie.⁴⁸

Here there are many music-lovers who play the cello and they are already equipped with instruments; nonetheless, if you can find legitimate cellos with beautiful varnish, well preserved, and with a good playing voice, and above all at a low price, we could sell several here. Ruggieri's [cello] seems suitable and excellent; send it to Genoa.

Send the list of the other [instruments] to me at Baleruc.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ E Neill, p. 274.

⁴⁵ An alternative translation can be found in de Courcy, Vol. II, p. 297.

⁴⁶ E Neill, p. 275.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Francesco Branzo-Barbaro, of Padua?

⁴⁹ Balaruc-les-Bains, France; 100 miles to the west of Marseille; a thermal spa, famed for its hydrotherapy, hot springs, etc.

And later I will ask you to buy some violins by Giuseppe Guarneri *del Gesù*. Don't forget about Stradivari's cellos, but don't pay as much for them as I paid you for yours.⁵⁰

Paganini (Marseille) to Luigi Germe (Genoa), 16 June 1839

Please give my thanks to Signor Migone for sending the seven violins now received.

I leave Wednesday or Thursday for Baleruc to immerse myself in the waters and muds; I hope to be restored.⁵¹

In the final few months of his life, Paganini, with his son Achille, took up residence in Nice (under Italian control until 1860 when it was ceded to France) where he was befriended by Comte Hilarion Spitalieri de Cessole (1776-1845).

Paganini (Nice) to Luigi Germe (Genoa), 17 January 1840

As regards those rascally thieves or pirates in Paris, could they possibly sequester the instruments that are at M. Brun's in Marseille? Think about the matter seriously and we'll write to the latter. In case he can't guarantee [their safety] let's write to Signor Borelli to find a way to remove the instruments [from Brun] and prove that they [previously] belonged to me but now belong to him [Borelli], I having sold them to him. He should suggest to me some way to save a not inconsiderable capital. There are eleven violins, one viola, and four cellos – all at fancy prices. Count Cessole doesn't want to pay me more than 4,000 francs for the Stradivari violin, and I've agreed to it, seeing that it's rather small.⁵²

The definitive information – that there were eleven violins, one viola, and four cellos stored with M Brun – is noteworthy, but this was surely not the only secret hoard created by Paganini.

Paganini (Nice) to Luigi Germe (Genoa), 18 January 1840

I have touched neither my music nor an instrument, other than the two Stradivari violins recently received from Milan via Genoa – one of which cost me 95 *Luigi*⁵³ which I shall have to let Count Cessole (a great enthusiast) have for 4,500 francs, though I could get 5,000 for it in Paris. But it is necessary to make a sacrifice for such a friend.⁵⁴

Clearly, the aforementioned 1724 Stradivari violin with the 'ugly notes' (to be 'sacrificed' by Paganini to Count Cessole for 4,500 francs) is not the same instrument as the 'rather small' violin priced at 4,000 francs which is identified in Paganini's letter of 17 January 1840. For detailed information regarding the dimensions of the large 1724 violin see the present writer's article *Fortissimo di voce, e quasi tenore* (www.themessiahviolin.uk) and/or *The case of the missing P.G. mould* (pub. *The Strad*, June 2018).

Paganini (Nice) to Vincenzo Merighi (Milan), 9 February 1840

Please forgive me for reminding you to ensure that the instruments [you buy] – without exception – must be in absolutely sound condition, with red varnish and with a good strong voice; otherwise they will not sell in Paris, nor anywhere else.

For example, one of the Andrea Guarneri violins cannot be sold, similarly the Ruggeri with the Stradivari label ([Ruggeri being] another follower of Stradivari); likewise the Amati viola with the non-authentic neck. I will not show these instruments to anyone and will return them to [you] in Italy. But all this must not discourage you; on the contrary you must re-double your efforts to make up for this [situation] with the instruments which you are currently buying and those which will be bought in the future.

⁵⁰ E Neill, p. 279.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁵² de Courcy, Vol. II, p. 311; Paganini's Italian-language text can be found in E Neill, p. 296.

⁵³ (i.e. the discounted price of the 1724 Stradivari violin which Paganini bought from Count Cozio in July 1817)

⁵⁴ E Neill, p. 297.

Tealdo's violin is not suitable. I am waiting to hear from Countess Ottolini regarding the merit of her Stradivari violin, similarly from Count Mellerio. It will not be necessary to rely on their opinions – your ear will be enough to judge the voice of the instruments.

And if you find some Maggini [instruments] I will be pleased. I will accept the four Guadagnini violins for 34 *Luigi* [each?] if the sellers will not accept less. There are many violists, for whom you should buy instruments, but pay as little as possible for them. The small violin by Roggeri is not suitable, although the sellers are asking only 8 *Luigi*.

If the Parma cello is authentic, and the other from Castelbarco is not terribly small, evaluate them as described above; see if you can have them for a little while on approval. Please tell me if the Amati double bass that [Giuseppe] Andreoli [1757-1832] used to play [at La Scala] is healthy, and if [the wood] has suffered under the bridge, and how much they would reduce the asking price of 30 *Luigi*.

Violins by other makers are not suitable. I hope to hear that you have found some violins called *del Gesù* when your other obligations allow you the time. You did well not to go to Rome and Naples; there are no instruments by classical makers there. You should be able to reduce the price of the three[!] Ruggeri cellos with red varnish, [together with] the cello claimed to be by Stainer, and the other[?] to 60 *Luigi* instead of 76. But I will go along with whatever you decide regarding the purchase.

The Carli family keeps an Amati viola which belongs to me.⁵⁵ I will write to Signor Giuseppe [Carli] asking him to return it to you so it can be included with the other instruments when you send them to me. [...] ⁵⁶

Paganini (Nice) to Vincenzo Merighi (Milan), 6 May 1840.

Send to Genoa in the most convenient way the six Guadagnini violins, the Ottolini Stradivari, the viola, and the cellos.

The Contrabasso [Giuseppe Andreoli?] could be kept in its box, to be sent to me on another occasion.

I await news of the Giuarneri *del Gesù* violins, I would crave at a good price some cellos by Stradivario, and one by Amati.⁵⁷

Niccolò Paganini died three weeks after writing the above letter, on 27 May 1840. It is not known whether the many instruments identified therein had been despatched from Milan before news arrived of Paganini's death. Whether the instruments had all been paid for (or not) – whether they were diverted to Achille Paganini in Parma – whether they were returned to the sellers – whether they simply 'disappeared' – no further information is currently available.

An inventory of Paganini's estate was compiled on 24 July 1840. Claude Lebet⁵⁸ indicates that the inventory documents are located in the 'Mandozzi Collection' in Locarno, Switzerland; it has not been possible for the present writer to gain access to these documents. The information provided by Jeffrey Pulver in 1936 is:

The full tale of [Paganini's] instruments was told in 1910 when all those not bequeathed by will were sold in Florence:⁵⁹ seven Stradivari violins (1692, 1678, 1695, 1724(×2), 1725, and 1726; one

⁵⁵ ?the 1612 Brothers Amati viola which Paganini stored with Carlo Carli in 1828?

⁵⁶ E Neill, p. 300.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁵⁸ C Lebet, *Le Quatuor Stradivarius 'Niccolò Paganini'*, Les Amis de la Musique, Spa, 1994, p. 18.

⁵⁹ According to the text of Paganini's Will, as presented by Edward Neill in *Niccolò Paganini, il cavaliere filarmonico*, De Ferrari Editore (1990), pp. 266-7, no instruments were bequeathed other than *il mio violino alla Città di Genova*. The present writer has been unable to locate any documents relating to the 1910 sale in Florence.

violin by Giuseppe Guarneri (1734), one by Andrea Guarneri (1670), one by Guarneri del Gesù (1742), two by Nicolas Amati, one by Tononi, and one by Ruggeri. In addition two Stradivari celli (1712 and 1728), and one by Ruggeri (1734); also one Stradivari viola dated 1731.⁶⁰

Geraldine de Courcy's *List of Instruments in Paganini's possession at the time of his death* identifies seven Antonio Stradivari violins (1680, 1692, 1695, 1724^(x2), 1725, 1726); two Giuseppe Guarneri *del Gesù* (1734, 1742); one Giuseppe Guarneri (1734) [counted twice?], one Andrea Guarneri (1670); two Niccolò Amati (1678 and 1771 [1671]); one Carlo Tononi (1729), and one Ruggeri (of uncertain date) – fifteen violins in total. In addition there were two Stradivari violas (1721 and 1731) and two Stradivari cellos (1708 and 1736), as well as an Andrea Guarneri cello (1642) and a Pietro Rogeri cello (1714).⁶¹

Claude Lebet identifies the following instruments as comprising the collection left behind by Paganini:

The Guarneri *Cannone* violin; the four instruments of the Stradivarius quartet; six other violins and a cello by Stradivarius, a violin and cello by Ruggeri, a Nicolas Amati dating from 1671, a Guarnerius del Gesù of 1734, the little violin Paganini played as a child and a viola, both by the Amati brothers, as well as a violin by Carlo Tononi.⁶²

NB: a Stradivari cello label-dated 1707 – i.e. the cello which previously belonged to Vincenzo Merighi – is not included in any of the above lists.

Yet more instruments which are associated with Paganini (the descriptions of the instruments appearing within the sales ledgers of 'Jacques Francais Rare Violins Inc.'⁶³) include a Guarneri violin of 1740 (known as the *Boissier/Paganini/Arbos*) and two Stradivari violins – of 1712 (the *Lebrun*), and 1727.

The Tarisio.com/Cozio Archive identifies as associated with Paganini six violins, one viola, and two cellos by Stradivari, two violins by Giuseppe Guarneri *del Gesù*, two by Giuseppe *Filius Andreae*, one cello by Pietro Rogeri, one by Matteo Goffriller, and one violin by each of Nicolò Amati, Carlo Bergonzi, and Giofreddo Cappa.⁶⁴

Where were all of Paganini's instruments stored? – in Nice with Comte Cessole? – in Marseille with M. Brun? – in Parma with Achille? – in Genoa with Luigi B Migone and/or with Luigi Germi? – in Milan with the Carli family? – with Signor Borelli? – perhaps almost anywhere that might keep the instruments, and their financial value, out of the hands of Paganini's creditors who were pursuing him for monies owed to them following the collapse of the Casino Paganini project in Paris.

In the years immediately following Paganini's death all his instruments were in the hands of his son, Achille. Achille's commercial strategies during this period are unknown but it is documented that in 1846, at the age of 21, he commissioned J-B Vuillaume to sell a quartet of Stradivari instruments which, it must be assumed, Achille claimed to have inherited from his father. The precise identity of these four instruments is unknown although many believe that the cello was that which today is known as the *Countess of Stainlein*.

Achille's proposed price for all four instruments (which were intended to be sold in one transaction) was 20,000 French Francs, an extremely high price for the time. At no point in his letters to Achille does Vuillaume identify the label-date of the cello, nor does he do so for the two violins (which are

⁶⁰ Jeffrey Pulver, *Paganini, the romantic virtuoso*, Herbert Joseph Ltd., 1936; Da Capo Press, New York, 1970, p. 320.

⁶¹ de Courcy, Vol. II, p. 388.

⁶² Lebet, p. 18.

⁶³ Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, USA; available from www.themessiahviolin.uk

⁶⁴ The Cozio Archive accessed March 2021.

simply 'red' and 'yellow'), nor the viola; these label-dates may have been cited in J-BV letters which have not survived.

Vuillaume writes to Achille on 12 December 1846; this is the earliest surviving letter:

*J'ai fait de grandes réparations, surtout à la basse qui a considérablement gagné, si vous vous rappelez dans le malheureux état où elle était. Aujourd'hui elle paraît bien conservée et elle est excellente pour le son.*⁶⁵

I have carried out substantial repairs [on the four instruments], especially to the cello which [as a result] has been considerably improved; as you will remember it was in a sorry state. Now it appears well preserved and the tone is excellent.

In his letter Vuillaume adds the details of his repairs to the cello:

Doublé les éclisses du derrière et une de devant à la basse, mis les tasseaux et contre éclisses, repris diverse cassures à la table, fait revenir la voûte et doublé l'estomac, réparé la tête et le revernir, raccordé le vernis des éclisses, mis une enture, touche, chevalet, queue, et monture; 80 frs.

Doubled [reinforced] the ribs of the back and one of the front of the cello, fitted the blocks and the counter-ribs [upper and lower linings?], repaired various cracks in the front plate, restored the arching and doubled the stomach [chest], repaired the head [scroll/peg-box] and re-varnished it so that it matched the varnish of the ribs, fitted a neck graft, [a new] fingerboard, bridge, tailpiece and strings. 80 francs.

It is unclear what Vuillaume meant by 'the ribs of the back' and 'one of the front'; perhaps the 'back' of the cello was at the neck end, the 'front' at the tailpiece. 'Doubling' the ribs indicates that he glued a second thickness of maple-wood to the inside face of the ribs because they were too thin, too weak, and needed strengthening.⁶⁶ 'Fitted the blocks and the counter-ribs' suggests that Vuillaume extracted the old blocks and linings and fitted newly-made replacements.

NB: cf. p.10 Vuillaume's statement that he 'restored the arching and doubled the stomach [chest]' is particularly significant. As already shown, Niccolò Paganini wrote to Vincenzo Merighi on 28 March 1839, pointing out:

You may not be aware that [the front plate of] your cello has been repaired by reinforcing it [internally, with a thin piece of wood] from the end of the fingerboard up to [down to] the tailpiece.

If someone (Antonio Merighi?) had already reinforced the front plate of Vincenzo Merighi's cello why would Vuillaume need to repeat the procedure? The fact that J-BV, in 1846, itemises his 'restoration of the [front plate] arching' indicates that the front-plate wood of Achille's cello had sunk in the area of the bridge, but Paganini's written evidence, from just seven years earlier, is that the front plate of Merighi's cello was already reinforced. Perhaps the cello restored by J-BV was not Merighi's cello.

Vuillaume's fitting of a neck graft (*mis une enture*) is here understood as indicating that he cut off the scroll/peg-box from the cello's neck (by cutting diagonally down through the peg-box walls), detached the neck from the body of the cello, fitted a new neck (and fingerboard) to the body, and attached the original scroll/peg-box to the tapered walls at the peg-box end of the new neck. This grafting procedure produces a diagonal joint-line which can usually be seen in the top edge of each peg-box wall. The 'from above' photograph of the peg-box walls of the *Countess of Stainlein* cello do not reveal any diagonal joint-lines.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Lebet, p. 46.

⁶⁶ 'The wood of the sides [ribs] is planed as thin as possible; then, as a precaution against breakage, or more probably against the tendency to buckle, which is so often the case with the sides of Italian violoncellos, he [Stradivari] reinforced them with small strips of canvas.' Hill (1902), pp. 128-9.

⁶⁷ See Thöne/Röhrmann, *Antonius Stradivarius*, Vol. VI, pp. 256-267. A close-up photo of the peg-box of the 1707 *Boni, Heger* cello (*ibid.* p. 237) clearly shows the diagonal joint-line in the top edge of each peg-box wall.

If Vincenzo Merighi's 1707 Stradivari cello was fitted with part of a Viola da Gamba scroll/peg-box – and if it was that cello which Vincenzo sold to Niccolò Paganini in 1839 – and if it was that same cello which Achille Paganini consigned to Vuillaume in Paris in 1846 – and if Vuillaume repaired and re-varnished the VdG-style head and then fitted it to a new neck – and if it was this restored cello which Vuillaume sold to Ludwig von Stainlein – why is it that none of these persons mentions the 'cut through' peg-box which is currently a feature of the *Countess of Stainlein* cello?

In both 1849 and 1850 Vuillaume reported to Achille that no offers had been received for the four instruments. In March 1851 Vuillaume offered to buy the instruments himself, for 12,000 francs, but subsequently withdrew his offer. In September 1851 a revised agreement between Vuillaume and Achille was drawn up in which the unity of the quartet of instruments was dissolved in favour of each instrument being for sale individually. The two violins and the viola were priced at 2,500 francs each while the cello was priced at 5,000 francs.⁶⁸

According to the Hills Vuillaume sold Achille's cello in 1854 to 'Count Stanlein' (Ludwig Karl Georg Cornelius von Stainlein-Saalenstein). Following the Count's death in 1867 the cello became the property of a 'Count Chorinsky'; the Count sold the cello in 1909 to the cellist Paul Grümmer, who, in turn, sold it in 1938 to Georg Talbot. In 1959 the cello was bought by Bernard Greenhouse.⁶⁹ The Hill brothers write (in 1902):

The "Stanlein" [*sic*] bass is to-day only a moderate example, as it bears signs of considerable and injudicious restoration. The most interesting fact known to us concerning this instrument is the episode of its purchase early in the last century by Signor Merighi, a violoncellist of Milan, and Piatti's master. We have it on the authority both of Piatti and of Signor [Alessandro] Pezze, also a pupil of Merighi, that in 1822, while the last-named was passing through the streets of Milan, he perceived a working man carrying, among other things, a violoncello on a truck or barrow. Merighi at once accosted him, and ended by becoming the owner of the instrument which was in a dilapidated state, for a sum equivalent to 4 s.! [4 shillings]. Eventually, about 1834-35, Merighi disposed of the 'cello to Paganini, who sold it to J. B. Vuillaume, who resold it in 1854 to the late Count Stanlein.⁷⁰

Duane Rosengard dismisses both Piatti and Pezze as unreliable on the grounds that 'neither Piatti [1822-1901] nor his fellow pupil Alessandro Pezze [1835-1914] were even alive when Antonio and Vincenzo Merighi acquired the future-*Stainlein* cello. Furthermore, Piatti had left Milan, and Pezze was a child of three years of age when Merighi sold his Stradivari cello to Paganini'. Rosengard also refers to the 'factual inconsistency with the notes of Count Cozio.'⁷¹

1. The present writer is unaware of any information which indicates the date when the Merighis, father and/or son, acquired the 1707 Stradivari cello which Count Cozio measured in June 1816. There is no evidence that the cello *belonged* to Count Cozio; the Count frequently borrowed instruments from musicians, dealers, and other owners in order to add the descriptive details to his registers and notebooks.

⁶⁸ See Lebet, p. 46 *et seq.*

⁶⁹ Greenhouse paid \$22,000 in February 1959 to Jacques Francais (in New York) who acted as the intermediary for the dealer Mathias Niessen (of Bad Aachen in western Germany); the sale documents are archived at the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, Jacques Francais Sales Records, Series 4, Box 57, Folder 4.

⁷⁰ Hill (1902), p. 132. Evidently the Hills were unaware of Count Cozio's involvement with Merighi's cello in 1816. How it was that the Hills came to have the *Stainlein* cello in their hands prior to 1902 is unknown.

⁷¹ Duane Rosengard, *The "Paganini, Countess of Stainlein" Stradivari Violoncello of 1707; a 200 Year Musical Journey*, pub. Reuning & Son Violins, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, 2016. The 'factual inconsistency' is not identified.

2. Vincenzo Merighi could have relayed his 'wheelbarrow' account to Alfredo Piatti during the latter's cello lessons (1832-37), similarly with Alessandro Pezze whom Merighi taught at the Milan Conservatory between 1846 and 1849.

3. It may not be implausible to associate the 'dilapidated state' of the wheelbarrow cello with the instrument on which Vuillaume had to carry out 'substantial repairs' – 'As you [Achille] will remember, [the cello] was in a sorry state.'

4. While Vuillaume certainly never missed an opportunity for self-promotion there is no reason to disbelieve him when he says (having finished his work) that Achille's cello 'now appears well looked after and the tone is excellent', but perhaps it was those extensive repairs which prompted the Hills' comment regarding the cello's 'considerable and injudicious restoration'.

5. The following circumstantial issues need to be considered:

Niccolò Paganini paid a considerable sum of money for Merighi's 1707 Stradivari cello. When it arrived in Marseille Paganini wrote to thank Merighi for packing the instrument so well, and commented on the beauty of the instrument (see letter of 20 March 1839 on p.10 of this account). In that same letter Paganini implored Merighi not to buy any instruments which were not in perfect condition: 'For God's sake don't talk to me of repaired violins with visible cracks – negotiate [only] for good violins, of strong wood that hasn't sunk at the bridge.' Elsewhere in the correspondence he writes: 'The instruments must be in perfect condition and of good strong wood' – and 'Please forgive me for reminding you to ensure that the instruments [you buy] – without exception – must be in absolutely sound condition, with red varnish and with a good strong voice.' Given Paganini's anxiety with regard to the physical integrity of the string instruments which Merighi was buying on his behalf it is inconceivable that Paganini would have allowed Merighi's personal cello – 'which I always keep with me' – to be damaged in any way while it was in his possession: 'it's excellent, and very beautiful, and I love it.'

Achille may not have been as well informed about string instruments as his father, but, in the six years after Niccolò died, he would surely have maintained a careful husbanding of the instruments which represented his future financial comfort. It is difficult to reconcile Vincenzo Merighi's cello – a cello which Count Cozio described in 1816 as 'really excellent and strong' and which Paganini described in 1839 as 'very beautiful' – with a cello which, in 1846, was 'in a sorry state' and needed extensive repair and restoration.

Perhaps the Hills' 1902 narrative – that Merighi sold his 'wheelbarrow' cello to Paganini in 1834-35, and Paganini then sold it to Vuillaume – is correct. Given the cello's poor condition perhaps Vuillaume tucked it away in a corner of his Paris workshop and there it remained until Achille brought (or sent) to Paris two violins and a viola to join with it for sale.⁷² Perhaps, also, the Hills' statement that it was the dilapidated wheelbarrow cello which was sold to Count Stainlein is also correct. Perhaps, finally, the Hills' dismissive evaluation of the *Stainlein* cello – 'a moderate example' – with its 'considerable and injudicious restoration' – suggests that there may have been two lines of provenance, for two different cellos, which have become tangled together.

NB: the Hills' text of 1902, as quoted on the previous page of this account, is repeated, exactly, in the second edition of their *Antonio Stradivari* monograph, published in 1909. This repetition indicates that, as far as the Hills were concerned, their first-edition text did not require amendment or revision – their text was not built upon a misunderstanding or a mis-identification.

⁷² Unfortunately, the earliest extant letter from J-BV to Achille (12 December 1846) makes no reference to the circumstances under which the former received the latter's instruments.

Nonetheless, an unequivocal contradiction of the Hills' information is provided by Jost Thöne's historian who quotes from a certificate of authenticity produced in 1949 by the Stuttgart firm of Hamma & Co for the *Stainlein* cello:

Das Cello zählt zu den schönsten und besterhaltenen Exemplaren
The cello is one of the most beautiful and best preserved examples.⁷³

It becomes difficult to avoid the 'tangled' theory which is proposed above.

With respect to Achille's cello, Claude Lebet states: 'Finally, we know that the last of the instruments of Paganini's Quartet dispersed by Vuillaume was the [*Ladenburg*] cello, sold to the English family Booth with the *Piatti* Stradivarius cello and a violin of Vuillaume's for the total sum of 9,000 FF in 1856.'⁷⁴

According to the Tarisio.com website the *Piatti* cello was owned by 'Reverend Booth' between 1821 and 1831. In 1856 the cello was owned by 'Colonel Oliver'.

The *Ladenburg* was sold in 1840 to M. Le Mire, subsequently owned by M. de Ploos and then, in 1875, by 'Krumholz' of Stuttgart. Caspar Gottlieb Meier was the owner in 1878 when the cello was described by C N E Gand in his *Catalogue descriptif des Instruments de Stradivarius et J. Guarnerius* (p. 77).

(année 1878) Violoncelle Stradivarius, année 1735, d'anni 92
Fond de 2 pièces, veines serrées droites. Cassure à l'âme (pièce intérieure très-bien ajustée),
éclisses en bois semblable. Table 2 pièces, beau sapin, cassures à la barre. Très-belle tête. Vernis
rouge pâle tirant sur le brun.

(1878) Antonio Stradivari cello, year 1735, 'of years 92'

The back plate is made from two pieces; the flames are tight/narrow and straight. There is a split at the sound-post ([with] an internal patch which is very well fitted). The ribs are made of very similar wood [to that of the back plate]. The front plate is made from two pieces; beautiful spruce, with splits at the bass-bar. Very beautiful head. The varnish is pale red, verging towards brown.

The Gand & Bernardel business ledger (Musée de la musique, Paris) lists the repair of a cello belonging to *M. Meier*:

1878 Décembre 3: *Réparation d'un violoncelle, 200 francs*
 Remonté le Stradivarius, 6 francs
 Boite emballage, expédition, 5 francs.

A cheque for 211 francs was received from Meier on 15 January 1879. Clearly, Gand's description of Meier's 1735 Stradivari cello was written in December 1878.

The Tarisio.com website (ID 40050) identifies this cello as the *Paganini/Ladenburg*; the associated photograph of the cello's back plate shows tightly-packed narrow flames which are almost horizontal. The website also provides a photograph of the cello's label, with the date clearly and unambiguously showing as 1736 (the first numeral printed, the remainder hand-drawn). Underneath the words 'Faciebat Anno' is the handwritten annotation, in ink: 'D'AN I 92'. The second 'N' of 'ANNI' has been erased or excised, leaving a curiously wide space where the letter would have been written; in the line of printed text above the handwritten annotation the erasure/excision has also removed part of the 't' of 'Faciebat' and part of the 'A' of 'Anno'. The Hills write:

⁷³ Thöne, *Antonius Stradiuarius*, Vol. VI, p. 257.

⁷⁴ Lebet, p. 69, footnote.

The very interesting example [currently] owned by Herr Robert von Mendelssohn, dated 1736 (?), calls for special remark. It is the only example known to us made later than 1730 [...] As already stated, it bears a label dated, we believe, 1736 (the last figure is unfortunately completely obscured); but as the master says on the margin "D'Anni 92" the year must have been 1735 or '36. Whether this label – which, although tampered with, is undoubtedly original – really belongs to this violoncello we hesitate to affirm or deny; [...].⁷⁵

The Tarisio.com photograph of the *Ladenburg* label suggests that someone – post the Hills – replaced the 'tampered with ... original' label (which had a 'completely obscured' final numeral and a 'D'Anni 92' annotation) with the entirely unambiguous 1736 label (having a 'D'AN I 92' annotation).

The Hills' commentary continues:

[The cello] was purchased from Vuillaume in 1840 by a distinguished German amateur, M. Lemire, for, we believe, 6000 francs, and Vuillaume stated that it came from Paganini. It subsequently passed into the hands of a violoncellist, Krumbholz by name [...]. He died about 1876, when the violoncello was purchased from his heirs by Mr. C. G. Meier for 10,000 marks, and brought to London. It afterwards passed into the possession of M. Ladenburg of Frankfort, who sold it in 1895 to its present owner.

The purchase of the cello, by M. Le Mire from J-B Vuillaume in 1840, is confirmed by Alfred Hill's 'private notes'⁷⁶ and thus the present-day *Ladenburg* cannot be the cello sent by Achille Paganini to Vuillaume in 1846. Vuillaume's statement (as reported by the Hills) regarding Paganini as the previous owner of the cello is open to question.

The following announcement appeared in *Le Guide Musical: Revue Hebdomadaire des Nouvelles musicales de la Belgique et de l'étranger*, 14 January 1875:

The celebrated cello of Stradivari, having been owned by Monsieur Le Mire and then by Monsieur de Ploos, has been bought for 9,000 francs by the cellist Krumholz, of Stuttgart. This instrument – with those of [Auguste-Joseph] Francomme [label-dated 1711], [Karl] Davidoff [1712], and [Adrien-François] Servais [1701] – is the most beautiful Stradivari known; it dates from the best period of the master' (*de la meilleure période du maître*).⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Hill (1902), p. 144.

⁷⁶ see Duane Rosengard, *The 'Paganini, Countess of Stainlein' Stradivari violoncello of 1707*.

⁷⁷ Translation by the present author.