

Juliette Récamier, Comte Molitor, and much confusion

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Jeanne-Françoise Julie Adélaïde Bernard – known as Juliette – was born in 1777. She was educated at home –

– and her mother superintended her studies with great care. The love for music that she showed in her childhood developed, as she grew older, into a very decided taste; and when a young lady, she played with the most skilful artists of her day. She performed on both the harp and the piano,¹ and took singing lessons from Boïldieu. Her voice, though not of much volume, was good in tone and expression. She early gave up singing and the harp, but throughout her life took great pleasure in the piano. Her memory was fine, and she was fond of playing without notes at twilight. [...] This happy faculty gave her the power of enjoying music when she was old and blind, and by its help she often drove away sad recollections.²

In 1793, aged 15, Juliette married Jacques Récamier, a financier, aged 42. Mme Lenormant³ indicates that the marriage was never consummated because Juliette felt only repugnance at the physicality of sexual intercourse.⁴ Juliette's crowd-stopping *fleur de lys* beauty, her fragile timidity, her penchance for thin white gowns with low-cut necklines, but equally her captivating charm, her spirit, her sensitivity towards the period's political, intellectual, and artistic tensions – all these elements combined to make her *salon* the most important meeting place in turn-of-the-century Paris.

... from the early days of the consulate to almost the end of the July monarchy [Juliette's] salon in Paris was one of the chief resorts of literary and political society that pretended to fashion.⁵

The most reliable and contemporaneous information about Juliette Récamier is found within the aforementioned *Memoirs and Correspondence*. Amélie Lenormant writes that Juliette met Napoleon Bonaparte, face to face, only once, at a dinner party in the winter of 1799-1800. From Mme Lenormant's report of the event it seems that Napoleon was entranced by Juliette but the two merely exchanged a few words (as the result of a misunderstanding these were slightly frosty words).

In 1800 Juliette's father was appointed Postmaster-General but in 1802 he was dismissed from his post; Juliette writes of this event:

In the month of August 1802, when my father was fulfilling the duties of Postmaster-General, the alarm of the Government was excited by a very active correspondence carried on by the Royalists. Divers pamphlets were circulated without the authorities being able to find out how they were transmitted [...] it was under cover of my father, in fact, that all these clandestine writings were passing.

¹ Note the presence of a harp and a square piano in the 1827 portrait of Juliette by François-Louis Dejuinne.

² *Memoirs and Correspondence of Madame Récamier*, translated from the French of Amélie Lenormant (*Souvenirs et Correspondance tirés des Papiers de Madame Récamier*, Paris, 1859) and edited by Isaphene M. Luyster; Roberts Brothers, Boston, 1878, pp. 4-5.

³ Amélie Lenormant was the widowed niece of Jacques Récamier and was 'adopted' by Juliette.

⁴ Mme Lenormant castigates the overtly sexualised appearance of Juliette in the full-length portrait painted in 1802 by François Gérard; see *Memoirs and Correspondence*, p. 33, footnote 1.

⁵ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1911, Vol. 22, 'Récamier'.

Juliette's father was arrested and sent to prison to await trial and almost certain execution. Juliette hurried to meet with an influential official, who commented:

'This affair of your father is very serious; but I can do nothing about it. See the First Consul this very evening, and get him to promise that the arraignment shall not take place. Tomorrow it will be too late.'

My father's arrest was the news of the day. Interest, curiosity, and even malignity had brought a crowd of people to my house. All Paris was in my drawing-room.

Juliette's father was released the next day following the intervention of General Jean Bernadotte. Juliette comments:

I did not make any outcry, nor did I run to the First Consul or address to him any solicitation, for Bernadotte managed the whole thing. I considered the removal of my father as an inevitable misfortune, and made no complaints.

Juliette's narrative continues:

The following year [1803] Mme [Germaine] de Staël was exiled by the First Consul.⁶ [...] I was witness to her despair. [...] I had a passionate admiration for Mme de Staël and this harsh and arbitrary act showed me despotism under its most odious aspect.

Mme Lenormant's own commentary explores further the increasing tension between Juliette and Napoleon, especially after Juliette was approached by Joseph Fouché, Minister of Police:

[Fouché] expressed the deep regret he felt at the shade of opposition, which, since the arrest of her father, had been deepening, little by little, in her salon. This opposition [...] had, he said, seriously offended Napoleon; and he [Fouché] urgently begged Mme. Récamier to avoid showing an hostility that would only result in irritating the emperor.

Fouché then insisted that Juliette 'should tell him her true sentiments towards the emperor':

She frankly replied that she had been attracted toward him by his glory, the brilliancy of his genius, and the services he had rendered to France; that in meeting him, and observing him closely, the grace and simplicity of his manners had increased her favourable impression; but that his persecution of her friends, the execution of the Duke d'Enghien [1804], the exile of Mme de Staël, the banishment of [Jean-Victor] Moreau, had checked her enthusiasm for him and chilled her sympathy.

Despite Juliette's animosity, Fouché pressed on by offering Juliette a place at court:

Fouché became more and more animated and did not perceive the disgust with which he was listened to.

Subsequently, Fouché confronted Juliette:

'You can no longer refuse. It is not I now, but the emperor who proffers you a place as lady of honour, and I am commissioned to offer it in his name.'

Juliette politely reiterated her refusal, which Fouché characterised as an 'insult' to the emperor.

In 1806 Jacques Récamier's bank suffered financial difficulties; unsurprisingly, the French government refused all support and the bank collapsed; all M. Récamier's business affairs were liquidated.

His noble and courageous wife sold all her jewels. They parted with their plate and advertised their house in the Rue du Mont Blanc.⁷

⁶ Germaine de Staël (1766-1817) was a political activist who opposed Napoleon's tyranny and formed around herself a group of like-minded supporters.

⁷ All quotations are from *Memoirs and Correspondence*.

In 1811 the French government took against Juliette for her peripheral influence on political and social issues (and particularly because of her close friendship with Madame de Staël) and she was banished from Paris; Juliette died in 1849.

It is often stated that First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte gifted a Stradivari violin to Juliette Récamier, a violin which she subsequently sold to one of Napoleon's military commanders – Gabriel Jean Joseph Molitor. If Napoleon did indeed present Juliette with a Stradivari violin there is no knowing where and when he obtained it. Since there is no evidence that Juliette was ever associated with performance on the violin the gift of such an instrument might even seem somewhat perverse.

There is also no knowing why Juliette, *if* she owned a Stradivari violin which was gifted to her by Napoleon, should sell that violin to Gabriel J J Molitor in 1804 (see below). Given the knife-edge politics of the time – and in light of the intensifying hostility evidenced on p.2 of this account – one would think that to sell such a gift would be most unwise; equally, G J J Molitor was acting most imprudently by buying it.

The name 'Molitor' does not appear within the *Memoirs and Correspondence of Madame Récamier*, nor does it appear in Edouard Herriot's exhaustive two-volume study of Juliette's life.⁸

Nonetheless, an annotation written more than 100 years later – in 1917 – by either Albert Caressa or Henri Français (violin dealers in Paris) is attached to Charles Gand's *Catalogue descriptif* text for a 1717 Stradivari violin which belonged to *Comte Molitor*.⁹

Ex de Récamier (cédé en 1804 pour 4,000 f à Molitor)

The source of the Caressa & Français information was surely *Vicomte Molitor* who sold his family's 1717 Stradivari violin to C&F on 10 July 1917 (see p.8 box).

Gabriel Jean Joseph Molitor was born in 1770, and, like Juliette Récamier, died in 1849. Throughout his life he served at various levels within the French military, much of the time under the ultimate command of Napoleon Bonaparte. In 1793 Gabriel Molitor married Marie Barbe Becker (1773-1849) who bore him three girls: Hortense Cécile (who died in infancy), Victoire Elisabeth, and Gabrielle Louise. Three boys were also born:

Charles Marie (who died aged four)
Gabriel François (1795-1870)
Auguste Joseph (1798-1883).

G J J Molitor was made a Count in 1808 – *Comte Molitor* – and, in 1815, a Peer (*Pair*) of France. In October 1823 Molitor was appointed *Maréchal de France* by King Louis XVIII.

Following G J J Molitor's death in 1849 it is assumed by the present writer that his elder son, Gabriel François, then became the second *Comte Molitor*. Gabriel François' eldest son was Pierre Olivier (1831-1897) and it is assumed that Pierre became *Comte Molitor* in 1870 after the death of his father. Pierre's eldest son was Olivier Marie Henri, born in 1859 (?and the fourth *Comte Molitor* on the death of his father in 1897).

⁸ *Madame Récamier et ses amis*, Paris, 1909.

⁹ Charles-N-E Gand, *Catalogue descriptif des Instruments de Stradivarius et J. Guarnerius*, facsimile published by Les Amis de la Musique, Spa, Belgium, 1994. Gand's description of the 1717 Stradivari violin belonging to *Comte Molitor* is on p. 28 of his *Catalogue* (see p.11 in the present account) and his description of Molitor's 1697 violin is on p. 127 (see p.7).

The Cozio Archive of Tarisio.com shows two Stradivari violins:

1. A 1697 instrument which is identified as the ‘Molitor’ (ID 22161). The website states that early owners of this violin were:
 - Madame Juliette Récamier, ‘until 1804’
 - Count Gabriel Jean Joseph Molitor, ‘from 1804’
 - Caressa & Français, ‘until 1917’
 - J Mazeran, ‘from 1917’

2. A 1727 instrument which is identified as the ‘Récamier’ (ID 41534). The website states that early owners of this violin were:
 - Napoleon Bonaparte
 - Madame Juliette Récamier, ‘until 1804’
 - Count Gabriel Jean Joseph Molitor, ‘from 1804’
 - Caressa & Français, ‘until 1917’
 - Jean Louis Courvoisier, ‘from 1917’
 - Caressa & Français, ‘until 1920’
 - José de Ygartua, ‘from 1920’
 - Caressa & Français, ‘until 1925’
 - Mischa Elman, ‘from 1925’.

The following investigative research attempts to clarify the history of these two Stradivari violins.

Documentary sources of information about string instruments and their owners during the 19th and early-20th centuries in France are threefold:

1. The Musée de la Musique, in Paris, has placed online more than 40 free-to-access digital files, the files containing images of each and every page from the business ledgers which were used by the personnel at the Gand/Bernardel/Caressa & Français violin dealership in Paris between 1816 and 1923.¹⁰ The ledgers are paired together:

- a) a Directory (*Répertoire*) showing customers’ names in alphabetical order, each name usually being followed by an address; adjacent to the address are numbers which refer to pages in
- b) a parallel General Ledger (*Grand Livre*), which usually covers the same chronological period as the Directory; the details of every commercial transaction are entered therein.

These online files are identified as E.981.8.xx. Note that there is no *Répertoire* linked to the earliest *Grand Livre* (1816-1831) nor to the last (1920-1923). Within the 713 pages of this final ledger, with barely a handful of exceptions, the transactional recordings actually end in December 1922, usually being terminated with the annotation *Passé au Nouveau Livre*; this follow-on ledger is not available from the Musée de la Musique in Paris.

2. The *Catalogue descriptif des Instruments de Stradivarius et J. Guarnerius* which was compiled by Charles-Nicolas-Eugène Gand in the latter part of the 19th century. This *Catalogue* contains succinct descriptions of instruments, with the name of the then-current owner, and, in some cases, one or two identifications of previous and subsequent owners; a few prices are specified. The *Catalogue* is essentially a semi-private *aide-memoire* (its contents were surely shared with Gand’s subsequent business partner, Gustave Bernardel).

¹⁰ <http://archivesmusee.citedelamusique.fr/en/gand/archives.html>.

3. After the death of Charles Gand in 1892 Gustave Bernardel continued to trade as the sole proprietor of the Paris dealership. During the last years of the 19th century someone working at the firm – perhaps Gustave Bernardel himself – copied the entire 127-page text of Gand’s *Catalogue descriptif* into a large notebook. New descriptions of instruments were written up on further pages of the notebook, together with details of owners and prices; there are entries dated 1893, 1894, 1895, 1896, and 1897, together with other entries which are undated. After Gustave Bernardel retired in 1901 the firm was bought by Albert Caressa and Henri Français but the Gand/Bernardel notebook continued to be used to record descriptions of instruments and details of sales. These post-Gand entries include more than 140 further descriptions of Stradivari and Guarneri instruments (a handful of the descriptions are duplicates or elaborations of earlier entries). Henri Français retired in 1920 whereupon Albert Caressa became the proprietor; Albert retired in 1938 after which the firm was in the hands of Henri’s son, Emile Français (1894-1984).

The Gand/Bernardel/Caressa & Français descriptive notebook is today archived as part of the Jacques Français Rare Violins Inc. Photographic Archive and Business Records, held at the Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, USA; the notebook is within Box 55, Folder 2. When Jacques Français (1924-2004) – Emile’s son – emigrated to the USA in 1948 in order to establish his own violin business he took the notebook with him, for reference purposes. The notebook is hereafter cited as Gand/JF55.2.

Also contained within the same Smithsonian Institution archive is a second handwritten notebook (Box 55, Folder 4) which replicates all of the Gand/JF55.2 descriptions. This second notebook is identified by the following inscription on the first page:

Emile Français, 5 Rue de Copenhague, Paris 8^{ème}

The inscription indicates that this second notebook was retained in Paris. It is surely the case that when Emile Français ceased trading, in 1981, all the firm’s documents and materials were sent to Jacques in New York (which would explain how it is that Emile’s notebook is now archived at the Smithsonian Institution). Emile’s notebook is hereafter cited as Gand/EF55.4; it contains some additional texts and annotations which supplement those found in Gand/JF55.2.

The Gand/Bernardel/Caressa & Français business ledgers

The first appearance of the name ‘Molitor’ within the online files provided by the Musée de la Musique is in the *Grand Livre* for 1816-1831, this ledger (for which there is no *Répertoire*) having been compiled by Charles-François Gand (‘Gand père’). This is the only instance where *Maréchal Molitor* is specifically identified:

M^r le M^{al} Molitor [Monsieur le Maréchal Molitor, i.e. *Comte* Gabriel Jean Joseph Molitor]
1829 Juin 6: *remit une poignée au Stradivarius, une touche, chevilles, monture, et chevalet,*
*36 francs.*¹¹

Fitted a [new] neck to the Stradivarius, [also] fingerboard, pegs, mountings, and bridge, 36 francs.

Perhaps the new neck was fitted to the violin because Stradivari’s original had been damaged in some way, or, possibly, worn down as a result of continuous daily usage.

¹¹ E.981.8.9 The early business ledgers compiled by Charles-François Gand and Charles Adolphe Gand rarely, if ever, identify the label-dates of instruments which were submitted for repair; that crucial identification does not become common within the *Grand Livre* entries until the end of the century.

It is also noticeable that Gand refers to the *Comte's* violin as 'the' Stradivarius rather than using his much more frequent formulation of 'a' Stradivarius: *reparée un violon A. Stradivarius...*, *visité un violon J. Guarnerius...*, *recollée un violon Stradivarius...*, etc. The use of the definite article points towards G J J Molitor being in possession of only one Stradivari violin in 1829.

It is entirely plausible that this 'new neck' violin was the 1717 Stradivari violin sold by Juliette Récamier to G J J Molitor in 1804 for 4,000 francs (see the C&F annotation quoted on p.3).

The next appearance of the name 'Molitor' is in the *Grand Livre* which covers the years 1845-1867. The customer's name is presented as *M^l le B^{on} Molitor* and his address as *44 rue Caumartin, Paris*. It is assumed that this *Baron* was Auguste Joseph Molitor (younger brother of Gabriel François Molitor, *Comte de Molitor* from 1849) who, apparently, played viola, cello, and double-bass:

- 1851 Décembre 19: *Visité partout une Basse* [many small repairs to this cello]
 1852 Décembre 7: *Visité la petite Contrebasse* [a few repairs to this small double-bass]
 1853 Janvier 6: *Visité la Basse* [small repairs]
 1853 Novembre 29: *Visité l'alto* [viola] *Gand, visité l'alto Chanot, visité la Basse* [small repairs to all].¹²

There is no mention of 'the' Stradivari violin.

Five years later, further entries appear:

- M^l le B^{on} de Molitor* [no address is specified]
 1858 Mars 6: *Réparé la Basse*
 1858 Mai 3: [repaired] *un archet de Tourte de Basse* [a Tourte cello bow]
 1858 Décembre 13: *Visité et remonté les deux altos*
 1860 Janvier 6: *Visité et remonté l'alto Chanot*
Visité l'alto Gand
 1860 Mars 19: ~~*Visité le Stradivarius, nettoyé, repassé les chevilles, remonté etc.*~~ (*Porter à M^l le C^{te} Molitor*) [the strike-through is as in the manuscript]
 1860 Avril 26: *Levé la table d'une Contrabasse*
 1860 Décembre 29: *Visité les deux Altos*.¹³

With regard to ~~*le Stradivarius*~~ – 'the Stradivarius' – which is still without an identifying label-date – the reason for the '*take to the Comte Molitor*' annotation is unclear; perhaps Auguste Joseph had taken 'the' Stradivari violin to Charles Gand for a small repair, with an instruction that the violin should subsequently be returned to his older brother, Gabriel François, who, it must be assumed, had inherited 'the' Stradivarius violin from his father, G J J Molitor. The strike-through surely indicates that the 5-franc cost of the repair should be charged to the Count's account, not the Baron's account.

Another set of transactions with *Monsieur le Baron de Molitor* is recorded in 1862:

- 1862 Février 17: [purchase of] *un violon imitation Lupot, 300 francs*
 1862 Avril 12: *Reparé une Contrabasse*
 1862 Septembre 9 – 1863 Décembre 10: purchase of violin, viola, and cello strings; also resin.¹⁴

The next entries are placed alongside the Baron's new address in Paris: *rue Castellane, N^o 12*:

- 1864 Janvier 11 – 1866 Juin 5: purchase of violin, viola, and cello strings, also resin
 1866 Juillet 27 – Août 9: purchase of cello and double-bass strings; also resin

¹² E.981.8.18

¹³ E.981.8.36

¹⁴ E.981.8.35

In the *Grand Livre* covering the year 1864 the name *Monsieur le Vicomte Molitor* appears; perhaps the *Vicomte* at that time was Pierre Olivier, the son of *Comte Gabriel François*.

1864 Juillet 18: Visité le Stradivarius, redressé la touche, ajusté des chevilles neuves, posé du vernis au menton, changé l'attache de la queue, fait un chevalet et remonté; 15 francs.

18 July 1864: Inspected the Stradivarius, restored the fingerboard, adjusted the new pegs, applied varnish to the chin [area], changed the tailpiece loop, made a bridge and re-mounted [it]; 15 francs.

Note, again, the reference to ‘the Stradivarius’, which is still not identified by label-date.

Monsieur le Baron de Molitor is found in the business ledger which covers the period between September 1866 and March 1872.¹⁵ During this period repairs were made to a double-bass (12 francs), to a small double-bass (60 francs), and to a cello (12 francs).¹⁶ These instruments appear to be the same as those itemised in 1851-1853 (see previous page of this account). At the same time, on 7 August 1868, *Monsieur de Molitor* is recorded as purchasing from Charles Gand a Bergonzi-copy violin costing 200 francs.

Chronologically, the next relevant document is a description of a 1697 Stradivari violin belonging to *le Comte Molitor*, the description penned by Charles N E Gand on the final page (p.127) of his *Catalogue descriptif*:

*(année 1870) M^r le Comte Molitor
Violon Stradivarius, 13p. 1l., année 1697*

Fond d'une pièce, petites ondes à contresens, belles éclisses, ondes régulières, cassure à l'éclisse du côté de l'âme et une petite à celle de la main à 6 lignes du manche du côté du fond. Table de 2 pièces, sapin très-fin au milieu et plus large sur les bords. Cassures à l'âme et au menton. Usure faite par l'archet au dessous de l'f gauche. Très-jolie tête, bien caractérisée. Vernis jaune doré.

(1870) Count Molitor [either Gabriel François or Pierre Olivier]
Antonio Stradivari violin, 13 pouces 1 ligne [354.2mm], 1697

The back plate is in one piece; small flames, cut against the grain. Beautiful ribs, regular flames; a split in the rib at the side of the sound-post and a small [split] in the rib of the hand 6 *lignes* [13.5mm] from the neck near the back plate. The front plate is made from two pieces; the spruce [?rings are] very thin in the middle and wider at the edges. Splits at the sound-post and at the chin. Wear and tear caused by the bow below the left [bass] *f*-hole.¹⁷ Very attractive head, very characteristic. The varnish is golden yellow.

Between 1829 and 1864 only one Stradivari violin – ‘the’ Stradivarius – is identified in the Gand & Bernardel business ledgers. Gand’s *Catalogue* text (above) suggests that between 1864 and 1870 *le Comte Molitor* acquired a second Stradivari violin, dated 1697, but, in the relevant ledgers there is no mention of this violin so it must be assumed that *le Comte* bought it from a source other than Gand & Bernardel; since Juliette Récamier died in 1849 she was not the source.

¹⁵ E.981.8.14

¹⁶ The repair to the cello is dated 29 March 1872 which is after the death of Gabriel François Molitor (1870) but within the lifetime of Auguste Joseph (died 1883).

¹⁷ The comment about wear-marks on the 1697 violin ‘below the bass *f*-hole’, these marks apparently being caused by the bow, is not confirmed by high-resolution photographs (Tarisio.com) of the front plate of the 1697 violin (although a few tiny brown specks are visible at each edge of the lower bout). Since a violinist’s bow, when in use, never goes anywhere near the bass-side lower bout of the front plate perhaps what is being indicated in the annotation are scuff marks and abrasions caused by the frog of the bow scraping against the violin’s front-plate bass-side lower bout when both items were placed inside a carrying case and the lid closed.

The next transactions listed in the G&B business ledgers are with *M^r le C^{te} de Molitor*, whose address in Paris is given as *10 rue de la Baume*. On 19 June 1877 the *Comte* – assumed to be Pierre Olivier Molitor – bought a new Gand & Bernardel violin for 300 francs. On 28 December 1882 a cello belonging to the Count was inspected and re-strung.¹⁸

Comte Molitor reappears in the ledgers on 1 December 1890, and, for the first time in a *Grand Livre*, a second Stradivari instrument (violin) is mentioned :

Visité le Stradivarius, redressé la touche, attache, monture etc., 10 francs
*Recollé l'autre Strad., redressé la touche, attache, monture etc., 12 francs.*¹⁹

‘The’ Stradivarius is surely the violin which was identified in 1829 by Charles-François Gand (see p.5), had previously been sold by Juliette Récamier to G J J Molitor in 1804 for 4,000 francs (see p.3), and, very likely, was label-dated ‘1717’. ‘The other Strad.’ can only be the 1697 violin described by C N E Gand in 1870 (see p.7).

On 31 May 1900, *Vicomte Molitor*, of *7 rue Margueritte, Paris*, required the *réparation de deux Stradivarius et 2 archets; 45 francs.*²⁰

During 1917 Caressa & Français bought two Stradivari violins from *Vicomte Molitor* :

1919/7 Janvier 31: Un violon de Antonius Stradivarius 1697, payé 25,000 [francs]*
*Juillet 10: Un violon de A. Stradivarius 1717, payé 50,000 [francs]*²¹

* The year-date was initially recorded as *1919* but the fourth numeral was later overwritten with a 7.

The final appearance of the name *Comte Molitor* is in the same *Grand Livre* as above; his address is simply given as ‘Montsûrs’, a town in the Pays de Loire, south-west of Paris. The only transaction is for the purchase of two E-strings, bought on 28 October 1921.

Gand’s *Catalogue descriptif* and the 1697 violin

The Gand/JF55.2 and Gand/EF55.4 notebooks (p.125 in both) contain a copy of the quoted descriptive text written by Charles Gand in 1870 for a 1697 Stradivari violin. Two brief but important annotations were added to Gand’s text (**Figs. 1a** and **1b**, overleaf):

*Vendu Mazeran, février 1919, oxzsz*²²
Racheté par M et D en 1923.
 Sold to Mazeran in February 1919, 50,000 [francs]
 Bought back by Maucotel & Deschamp in 1923.

¹⁸ E.981.8.6

¹⁹ E.981.8.27

²⁰ E.981.8.43

²¹ E.981.8.47, p. 531.

²² The letters of the word *harmonieux* represent price numerals: *h* = 1, *a* = 2 ... *u* = 9, *x* (and *z*) = 0.

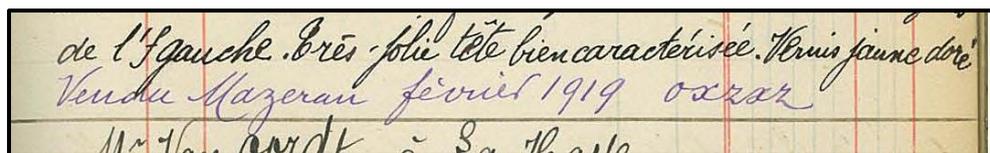


Fig. 1a: Gand/JF55.2 (Smithsonian Institution, Jacques Français archive), p.125.

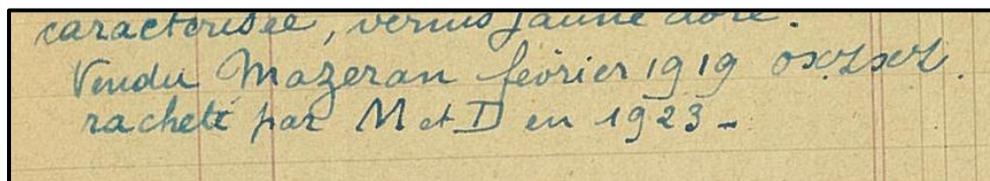


Fig. 1b: Gand/EF55.4 (Smithsonian Institution, Jacques Français archive), p.125.

In the C&F *Répertoire* (Directory) for 1912-1920 Monsieur Mazeran's name is followed by his address: 11 Place de la République.²³ Two page numbers are specified: 311 and 799. The parallel *Grand Livre*, page 311, shows all of Mazeran's purchases during the first six months of 1917:²⁴

- 1917 Janvier 4: *Un violon de P. & H. Silvestre, copie de Stradivarius, 3,000 francs*
Un archet violon Tourte jeune, baguette octogone, garni argent, 1,200 francs
Un archet violon de F. N. Voirin, garni ébène et or, fait pour l'Exposition de Paris 1878, 1,200 francs
Un archet violon de F. N. Voirin, garni argent, Exposition '78, 300 francs
- 1917 Février 10: *Un violon de Guillaume Gand, année 1834, 4,000 francs*
- 1917 Mars 6: *Un violon Ch. F. Gand, 1835, ex 1^{er} Prix Croisilles (avec archet Pageot, garni or (N^o 2006), 5,000 francs*
- 1917 Mars 8: *Archet alto Peccatte, garni argent, N^o 72, 100 francs*
- 1917 Mars 15: *Une basse Gand père, année 1831, ex Marx, N^o 106, 3,500 frs*
- 1917 Mars 26: *Un archet de violoncelle Sartory, imitation Tourte, plagues de tête, bouton et hausse garnis en or, N^o 61, 400 francs*
- 1917 Avril 22: *Un violon ancien de Antonius Stradivarius année 1707 (ex-Gambara et Schörg), vieil étui ancien, 65,000 francs*
- 1917 Avril 28: *Un violon ancien italien de Antonius Stradivarius, année 1697 (ex-Comte Molitor), 50,000 francs*
- 1917 Juin 19: *Une basse de J. B. Vuillaume, ex Lenepveu de Lafont, 8,000 francs*
- 1917 Juin 21: *Un violon Gand & Bernardel, N^o 1413, année 1889, 1,200 francs.*

Note the sequential (and highly profitable) chronology: on 31 January 1917 Caressa & Français bought the 1697 Stradivari violin which belonged to Vicomte Molitor; they paid 25,000 francs (see p.8 box). Three months later, on 28 April 1917 C&F sold the 1697 violin to M. Mazeran; he paid 50,000 francs.

However, a discrepancy arises with respect to the date of sale to M. Mazeran as shown in the **Fig. 1a** and **1b** annotations: 'Sold to Mazeran in February 1919'. It seems likely that this year-date was copied from the '1919 ... bought from Vicomte Molitor' entry in the *Grand Livre*, but, as indicated (p.8 box), the fourth numeral of the '1919' year-date was subsequently overwritten to show as '1917', thus bringing the date into alignment with the purchases made by Mazeran during January-June 1917;

²³ E.981.8.48

²⁴ E.981.8.47

however, the annotations in the Gand/JF55.2 and Gand/EF55.4 notebooks (i.e. **Figs. 1a** and **1b**) were not amended.

The *Grand Livre* for 1912-1920, page 799 (and 800), shows M. Mazeran's ongoing purchases from Caressa & Français:

1917 Juillet 2: *Un violon de Carlo Bergonzi, 1723, 30,000 francs*
Un alto de G. Rocca, 1834, 1,800 francs

1917 Octobre 16: *Un violon J. B. Vuillaume, copie Guarnerius, 1,500 francs*
Un violon J. B. Vuillaume, copie du Messie, 2,000 francs

1917 Octobre 24: *Un violoncelle de Januarius Gagliano, 1736, 18,000 francs*

1918 Mars 12: *Un alto de J. B. Guadagnini, 1775, 10,000 francs*

1918 Mars 29: *Un violon Nicolas Lupot, 1803, 10,000 francs*
Un basse de J. B. Vuillaume, copie Stradivarius, 3,500 francs

1918 Mars 30: *Un violon de J. B. Vuillaume, 1823, 6,000 francs*
Un violon de Gand père, 1828, 5,000 francs
Un violon de J. B. Vuillaume, copie de Stradivarius, 5,500 francs.

In addition, M. Mazeran bought 16 bows, for violin, viola, and cello, made by Tourte, Peccatte, Voirin, etc; a set of five Vuillaume bows was bought on 31 March 1918. After that date M. Mazeran's name is not found again in the 1912-1920 *Grand Livre* nor in the subsequent *Grand Livre* which covers the period 1920-December 1922. Thus there is no mention of any Stradivari violin belonging to M. Mazeran being returned to Caressa & Français for inspection, cleaning, or repair. It might be wondered whether M. Mazeran was discreetly buying on behalf of an American(?) dealer who anticipated lower prices if a Frenchman made the purchases.

As shown in **Fig. 1b** M. Mazeran passed the 1697 violin to the dealers Maucotel & Deschamp in 1923.

In the *Grand Livre* for 1912-1920 are found details of transactions with the violinist Edouard Nadaud (1862-1928). Within these transactions are three sequential entries (shown below) which are preceded by entries dated October 1917 and March/November/December 1918, and followed by entries dated November/December 1919 and January/March/May 1920; thus the repeated identification (below) of the year 1919 cannot be a mistake:

		<i>Doit column</i>	<i>Avoir column</i>
1919 Janvier 31:	Remise Molitor	payé 3,000 francs	3,000 francs
1919 Juillet 10:	Remise Molitor		10,000 francs
1919 Octobre 14:	Payé	10,000 francs	

From these entries (and from other similar entries in the business ledgers) it is clear that Edouard Nadaud frequently acted as an intermediary for owners who wished to sell the rare string instruments for which they had no further use. The date '31 January 1919' is exactly two years after the date when C&F bought the 1697 violin from *Vicomte Molitor* (see p.8, box), likewise with the date '10 July 1919' and the 1717 violin. It is clear that an agreement existed between C&F and Nadaud which allowed the former exactly two years to sell the Molitor instruments which were brought to them by the latter; after two years Nadaud's commission had to be paid whether the instruments were sold or not. It is noticeable that despite selling the 1697 violin on 28 April 1917 to M. Mazeran (just three months after they had bought it) C&F did not pay Nadaud his 3,000-francs commission until the very day it was due in 1919.

Quite why Nadaud's commission of 10,000 francs for the 1717 violin was not fulfilled until 14 October 1919 is a puzzle. Note that the payment does not necessarily demonstrate that the 1717 violin had been sold.

Equally puzzling is some of the mis-information supplied by Alfred Hill in a March 1937 letter which accompanied a Hill certificate for the 1697 violin :

I first became acquainted with the instrument in the 'nineties of the last century, when it was in the possession of Count Molitor of Paris²⁵ – after whom the violin is named “The Molitor”. This nobleman, who was an excellent amateur, owned a second “Stradivari” which is now in the possession of Mischa Elman; the Count gave me to understand that he had inherited both instruments from his father.

Prior to 1914 the Count sold the present violin, through the intermediary of Maucotel, one of my French colleagues, to a Monsieur Mazeran, a Parisian amateur who possessed a small collection of instruments [...].

The Hill certificate states that the 1697 violin

– was made by Antonio Stradivari whose original label dated 1697, the instrument bears. The back, in one piece, is of handsome wood cut on the slab and marked by a small, horizontal curl, that of the sides and head, cut on the quarter, being similar; the table is of pine of very fine grain at centre opening out on the flanks and the varnish of a golden colour.²⁶

Another certificate for the same violin was written on 7 February 1957 by Ernest R Voigt. Voigt's text is an exact copy of that written by the Hills, including the punctuation.

E R Voigt's certificate is cited in the auction catalogue produced by Christie's for their sale of 'Important Musical Instruments' which was held on 31 March 1989 in London. Lot 145 was 'The Molitor' violin:

Lot 145: A very fine and important violin by Antonio Stradivari labelled *Antonius Stradivarius Cremonensis / Faciebat Anno 1697*; the one-piece back of very handsome figure cut on the slab, the ribs and scroll of medium curl, the table of narrow to medium grain, the varnish of a golden colour, the length of back 13¹⁵/₁₆ in. (35.5cm.).

Sold with the certificate and invoice of E. R. Voigt dated 7 February 1957.

The violin was bought by Elmar Oliveira. It is proposed by the present writer that this 1697 violin might beneficially be identified in future as the *Molitor-Mazeran-Oliveira*.

2. Gand's *Catalogue descriptif* and the 1717 violin (1720?, 1727? 1729?²⁷)

The present writer would like to propose *Récamier-Molitor-Elman* as the violin's identifying soubriquet.

In 1870 Charles Gand wrote in his *Catalogue descriptif* (p.28) a description of 'the' 1717 Stradivari violin belonging to *Monsieur le Comte Molitor, Paris*:

(année 1870) M^e le Comte Molitor, Paris
Violon Stradivarius, 13 pouces 2 lignes, année 1717

Fond d'une pièce, veines peu prononcées et inégales descendant un peu à droite, rayure dans le milieu du haut ayant un peu l'apparence d'une cassure. Eclisses bois uni du côté de la barre et plus

²⁵ Pierre Olivier or Olivier Marie Henri? – see p.3 of this account.

²⁶ Cf. Gand's descriptive text on p.7 of this account.

²⁷ According to Jost Thöne (*Antonius Stradiarius*, Vol. VIII, p. 184) the date of 1729 was proposed by Charles Beare.

veiné du côté de l'âme. Table de 2 pièces très bien conservée sauf une petite cassure partant du rond du bas de chaque f et allant au bord du C, tête bois uni, coquille assez fouillée. Vernis rouge brun doré, gras.

(1870) Count Molitor, Paris

Antonio Stradivari violin, 13 pouces 2 lignes [356.4mm], year 1717

The back plate is in one piece; the flames are faint and uneven, descending slightly to the right; there is a scratch in the middle of the upper bout looking a little like a split. The wood of the ribs is plain on the bass-bar side [but] more flamed on the sound-post side. The front plate is made from two pieces; very well conserved except for a small split starting at the lower 'eye' of each *f* and extending [upwards] to the edge of the C. The wood of the head is plain; the scroll is quite ornate. The varnish is golden red-brown, oily.

Gand's description matches the visual evidence provided by the photographs on the Tarisio.com/Cozio Archive website for the violin which is there identified as the *Récamier* (ID 41534). High quality photographs of the violin also appear in Jost Thöne's *Antonius Stradiuarius* publication (Vol. VIII, pp. 184-191).

As already indicated, Charles Gand's descriptive text for the 1717 violin was subsequently copied by Gustave Bernardel into a large notebook, and, in due course, supplementary information was added by Albert Caressa and Henri Français. The following annotation (see **Figs. 2a** and **2b**) appears in both Gand/JF55.2 and in Gand/EF55.4; in Gand/JF55.2 some of the information is written along the left edge of the page, the text rotated and tangled with the already-written text):

Vendu au 1917, haozxx, à M. Courvoisier

Ex de Récamier (cédé en 1804 pour 4,000 f à Molitor)

Vendu en 8bre 1920 à de Ygartua aoxzxx

Repris Ygartua, vendu à Misha Elman 1925 \$26,000.

Sold in 1917, 125,000 [francs], to Monsieur Courvoisier [see overleaf]

Ex de Récamier (passed over in 1804, for 4,000 francs, to Molitor)

Sold in October 1920 to [Julio] de Ygartua, 250,000 [francs]

Re-acquired from Ygartua, sold to Misha Elman 1925 \$26,000 [US dollars].

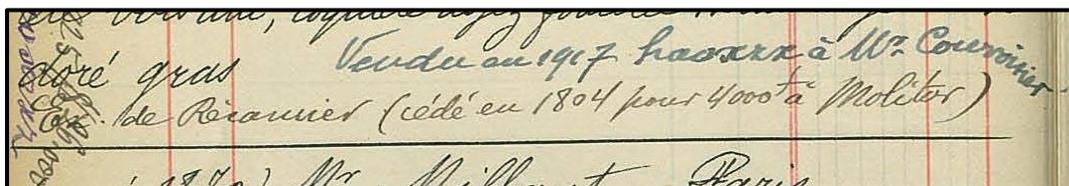


Fig. 2a: Gand/JF55.2 (Smithsonian Institution, Jacques Français archive), p.28.

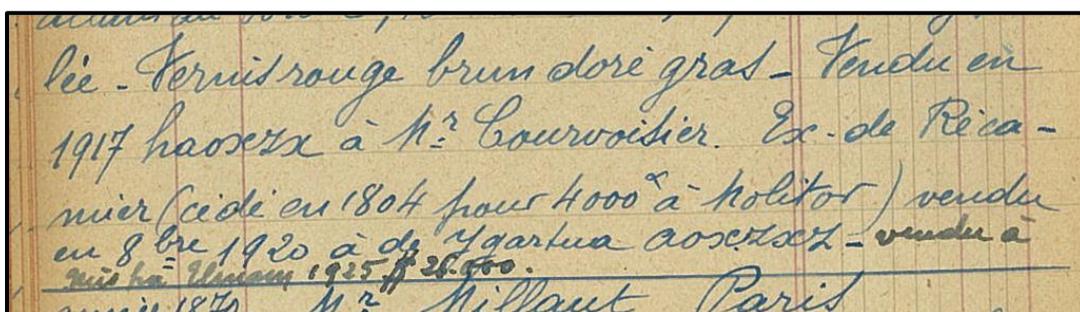


Fig. 2b: Gand/EF55.4 (Smithsonian Institution, Jacques Français archive), p.28.

Disconcertingly, the transactional details which are found in the C&F *Grand Livre* under the name *J. L. Courvoisier* show an uncertain label-date for the sold violin; the *1917 Juin 28* text is presented below as laid out in the ledger:²⁸

1917 Juin 4:	<i>Un alto de J. B. Guadagnini à Turin, année 1774, 12,000 francs</i>		
1917 Juin 5:	<i>Un violon de J. B. Guadagnini, N° 2209, reçu, [valued at] 25,000 francs</i>		
1917 Juin 11:	<i>Un archet violon de Peccatte, garni écaillé et or, N° 121, 800 francs</i>		
1917 Juin 15:	<i>Un violon de D. Montagnana, N° 2261, 25,000 francs</i>		
1917 Juin 28:	<i>Un Violon A. Stradivarius 172(), ex-Récamier [see § below] ex-Molitor ; avec étui-double en cuir jaune, garni en velours bleu et coussin (avec le certificat, a été donné un archet C&F ébène et or, Son cheque</i>	<u>Doit</u> 125.000	<u>Avoir</u> 125.000

M. Courvoisier paid the full price of the violin – 125,000 francs – by cheque, on the day of purchase. Regrettably, it seems that the C&F certificate is no longer in existence.

§ On the page of the *Grand Livre* where the 28 June 1917 transaction is recorded it is immediately noticeable that the last numeral of the violin's label-date has been inked, quite thickly, in two facing segments: *172()*; nowhere else on the page is a zero drawn in this two-segment manner. The words **ex-Récamier** are also written with the same thick pen, as is **un archet C&F ébène et or** and **125.000** [francs]. Close study of the Musée de la Musique's online image of this page of the *Grand Livre* reveals that the original text was erased at all four locations and new information inserted.

From this *Grand Livre* text flows the following critically-important question:

If a label-date of 1717 could be identified by Charles Gand in 1870 (see pp.11-12 of this account), and if the same label-date could be identified in the 'bought from Vicomte Molitor' text of 10 July 1917 (see p.8 box) why should there have been any difficulty, on 28 June 1917, in writing the same label-date in the *Grand Livre* (as shown above)?

The difficulty, of course, is that there is a fundamental conflict in the chronology:

On 28 June 1917, when M. Courvoisier bought and paid for the 172() violin, neither of the Stradivari violins which were previously owned by Vicomte Molitor was for sale.

The 1697 violin had already been sold, on 28 April 1917, to M. Mazeran (see p.9) while the Vicomte's 1717 *ex Récamier* violin did not come into the possession of Caressa & Français until 10 July 1917 (see p.8 box).

Did Albert Caressa and Henri Français sell a falsely-identified violin to M. Courvoisier? Could this explain why the violin which was sold apparently did not have a stock number and why the *Grand Livre* text was altered?

Further profitable transactions with J L Courvoisier are listed on pages 796 and 812 of the 1912-1920 *Grand Livre*:

1918 Mars 25: Un violon Joseph Guarnerius del gesù, 1730, N° 2256, ex Francisque Alday, ex Baron Vitta, 75,000 francs. [Part-payment was by way of a 1707 Stradivari violin, valued at 60,000 francs.]

²⁸ E.981.8.47, p. 796.

1919 Novembre 22: *Un violon de A. Stradivarius 1737 (d'anni 93) « le Chant du Cygne », 175,000 francs.* [Part-payment was by way of the *del Gesù* violin, N° 2256, now valued at 85,000 francs.]

1920 Mars 9: *Un violon de Carlo Tononi (ex Monasterio), N° 2090, 40,000 francs*
[Full payment was by way of handing back a Montagnana violin.]

1920 Mars 17: *Un violon de Tomas Balestrieri, année 1775, N° 1395, 40,000 francs*
[Full payment was by way of handing back the Tononi violin.]

1920 Mai 7: *Un violon de Nicolas Lupot, année 1817, 25,000 francs*
[Part-payment was by way of handing back another Lupot violin, valued at 10,000 francs, plus 15,000 francs.]

In the subsequent (and final) *Grand Livre* further transactions with J. L. Courvoisier are listed, from September 1920 to January 1923. He bought violins by Guadagnini and Landolfi, another by Tononi, a cello by Charles-François Gand, and a viola by Lupot. There is no mention anywhere of an *ex-Récamier* violin being inspected, or repaired, or returned in exchange for yet another violin from the C&F collection.

As already shown on p.12 the Gand/JF55.2 and Gand/EF55.4 notebooks clearly state that Courvoisier's Stradivari violin was sold to Julio de Ygartua in October 1920:

vendu en 8bre 1920 à de Ygartua, aoxzxz
Repris Ygartua, vendu à Misha Elman 1925, \$26,000.

Sold in October 1920 to [Julio] de Ygartua, 250,000 [francs]
Re-acquired from Ygartua, sold to Misha Elman 1925 \$26,000 [US dollars].

The Directory (*Répertoire*) which covers the period 1912-1920²⁹ shows the name 'J. de Ygartua' (of Bilbao) and specifies three pages in the parallel *Grand Livre*:³⁰ 308, 306, and 957. These pages cover the period September 1915–November 1919 and record the repair of Ygartua's Pietro Guarneri violin, followed by his purchase, on 9 May 1917, of a 1717 Stradivari violin *ex Foucault, ex Gariel*, together with a Tubbs bow and a Peccatte bow, for 60,000 francs. On 2 October 1918 he bought a 1715 violin, *ex Baker, ex Comte de Sauzay*, for 100,000 francs (Ygartua returned a 1708 violin as part-payment). On 20 August 1919 he bought *Un violon de A. Stradivarius, année 1720, N° 2134, 90,000 francs* and returned the *ex-Gariel* 1717 violin as part-payment. In November 1919 Ygartua bought a Voirin bow for 1,000 francs.

Within the final *Grand Livre* (1920-1923) the name of Julio de Ygartua appears only on page 107, and at the top of the page it is stated that this new account follows on directly from page 957 in the previous ledger: *report du f^o [folio] 957*. There are just two items in this new account:

1920 Juin 7: *par profits et portes, 9 francs*

1920 Décembre 8: *En dépôt: un violon de Antonius Stradivarius 1715 (ex Comte de Sauzay et Baker).* [This violin, on deposit at 150,000 francs, had been bought by Ygartua two years earlier; see above.]

Thus there is no listing of the sale, during October 1920, of the *Récamier-Molitor* violin to Julio de Ygartua at the stratospheric price of 250,000 francs (as itemised in the annotations; see p.12). It is inconceivable that such a sale would not have been recorded in the 1920-1923 *Grand Livre*. There is no further identification of Julio de Ygartua in this ledger.

If the October 1920 sale did, in fact, take place, Julio de Ygartua must have returned the *ex-Récamier* to C&F at an unknown date between January 1923 and August 1925 so that it was available for

²⁹ E.981.8.48

³⁰ E.981.8.47

evaluation and purchase by Mischa Elman. Regrettably, a post-January 1923 *Grand Livre* is not available from the website of the Musée de la Musique.

The *Récamier-Molitor-Courvoisier-Ygartua-Elman* violin was later in the hands of the New York dealer Emil Herrmann who described its physical details in an undated certificate which today is archived at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, USA. With regard to the violin's label, Herrmann writes:

<i>Zettel: original Jahreszahl 1717</i>	Label: original year-date 1717
<i>verändert</i>	modified
<i>Periode 1724-1727</i>	Period 1724-1727

Herrmann also writes:

*1925 – von Mischa Elman von Caressa & Français in Paris zu ca. \$25-28,000 erworben.
(Seit in Elmans Besitz mindestens schon 6 mal mit neuen Balken und Hälsen versehen worden zum Schaden des Instrumentes.)*

Purchased in 1925 by Mischa Elman from Caressa & Français in Paris for about 25-28,000 dollars. (In the time the violin has been in Elman's possession the bass-bar and the neck have been changed at least six times – to the detriment of the instrument.)

Close study of the Tarisio.com/Cozio Archive photographs of the peg-box of the *Récamier* violin reveals faint evidence of a scarf joint; in addition, the top surface of the peg-box walls has obviously been smoothed down and re-varnished more than once. This visual evidence supports the extraordinary parenthetical statement made by Emil Herrmann.

The portfolio of photographs of the 1717 (1727?) violin which are provided on the Tarisio.com/Cozio Archive website (ID 41534) includes one which shows the instrument's internal label (see overleaf, **Fig. 7**); the only numeral which is unambiguous is the first – a printed Roman **I**. The three following numerals – all handwritten – are almost invisible. Nonetheless, the ghostly outline of the fourth numeral can be viewed as a '7' but it is a curious 7 since it is not drawn in Antonio Stradivari's normal manner.

In the label facsimiles provided by the Hills in their 1902 monograph (between pp. 216 and 217) it can be seen that Stradivari draws the top line of a 7 either horizontally or sloping slightly downwards towards its tip; there are more than 20 examples within the Hills' illustrations. Photographic evidence from labels *in situ* confirms this characteristic (**Figs. 3, 4, 5, 6**):

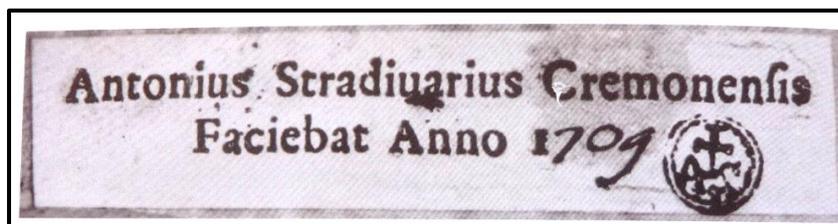


Fig. 3: *La Pucelle* label

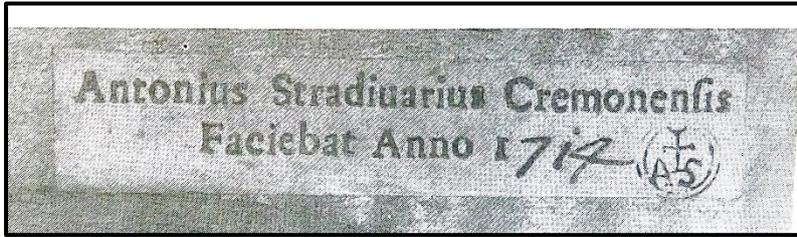


Fig. 4: *Dolphin* label

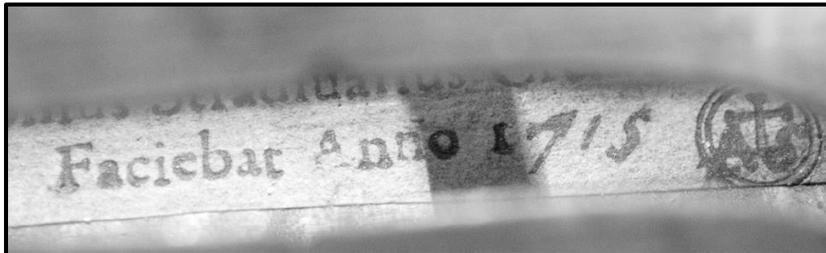


Fig. 5: *Kux/Castelbarco* viola label

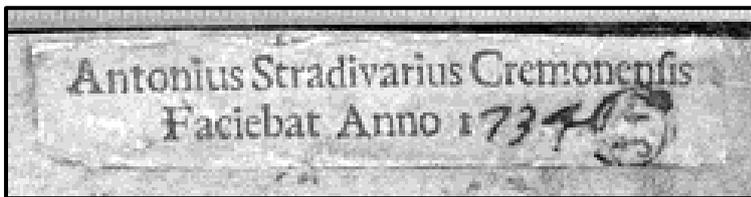


Fig. 6: *Wilmotte* label

However, both of the 7 numerals on the *Récamier-Molitor-Elman* label – albeit very thinly drawn and very faint – show a top line which *rises* diagonally towards its tip, thus creating an obtuse angle between the two segments of the numeral:



Fig. 7: *Récamier-Molitor-Elman* violin label, courtesy of Tarisio.com.

The second 7 numeral, in particular, is almost identical in its shaping to the first 7 shown in **Fig. 8**; the writer of these numerals is unknown:

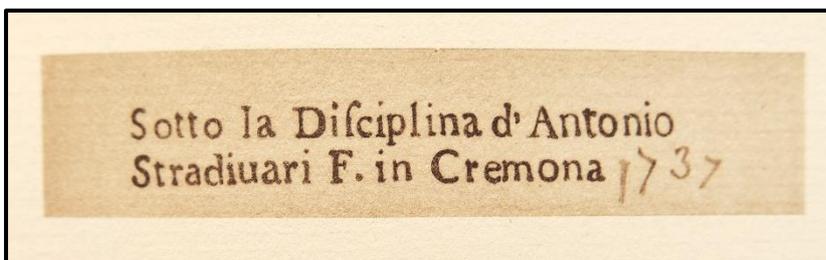


Fig. 8: Hill (1902)

This clear difference in the direction of the top line perhaps raises doubts about the validity of the *Récamier-Molitor-Elman* label. In addition, the relative ease with which the label's fourth numeral can

be identified as a 7 raises more doubts with respect to C&F's presentation of the date as 172() (see p.13).

Inbetween the second and fourth numerals on the *Récamier-Molitor-Elman* label is a width which could easily encompass the drawing of the numeral 2 (and the width is greater than one would need if it was simply a 1 which was being drawn) and the faint outline of curved grooves in the label-paper (curves which could once have been part of a 2 numeral) can be perceived, but C N E Gand, in 1870, read the violin's label-date as '1717', as did Emil Herrmann c.1940(?). Precisely what Herrmann meant by *verändert* (with respect to the violin's label) is unknown.

Mischa Elman has said of his *Récamier-Molitor* violin:

In 1925 I was presented with the *Récamier* Strad (dated 1717) by my wife as a wedding gift and I have been playing on this instrument ever since. It is interesting to note that some experts believe that my 1717 *Récamier* should be labelled 1727.³¹

Elman died in 1967. It seems that his 1717 (1727?) violin was subsequently acquired by the Ueno family in Japan who have loaned it to the young violinist Sayaka Shoji.

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Author of *The Messiah violin: a reliable history?* (2015); see www.themessiahviolin.uk for details. Author of an historical study of the Stradivari *Habeneck* violin, published in the Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society, 2016, and re-published on the aforementioned website. Author of an historical study of the 'original' neck of the Stradivari *Soil* violin (website). Author of a detailed historical study of the two Guarneri *del Gesù* violins which belonged to John Tiplady Carrodus (website). Author of an extensive and detailed investigation into the reality of the 1724 Stradivari violin which Count Cozio di Salabue sold in 1817 to Niccolò Paganini (website). Author of an historical study of the Stradivari *Chant du Cygne* violin (Journal of the Galpin Society, March 2017). Author of a transcription and translation of the complete sales-ledger archive of Jacques Francais (Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC); see website. Author of a detailed historical examination of the Stradivari quartet of decorated instruments exhibited at the Palacio Real in Madrid, Spain; see website. Author of *The case of the missing mould* ('The Strad', June 2018). Author of a detailed examination of issues which surround both the *Cannone* violin in Genoa and the *Canon* violin sold by David Laurie (website). Author (with Bas Terraz) of a study of the 29 letters sent by Pablo Sarasate to his adoptive mother in Paris; a digest of this study appeared in the June 2020 issue of *The Strad*.

Further investigative articles can be found at the author's website (www.themessiahviolin.uk); all are free-to-read.

³¹ *World of Strings*, Spring 1958, p. 2, 'Star gazing'; W. Moennig & Son.