

Pablo Sarasate and his Stradivari violins

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Pablo Sarasate (baptised Martín Melitón) was born 10 March 1844 in Pamplona (Navarre).¹ Demonstrating an extraordinary talent for playing the violin, Pablo was sent for tuition at the Madrid Conservatoire. In 1855 it was decided that he should complete his studies at the Paris Conservatoire under the guidance of Jean-Delphin Alard.² In July of that year Pablo and his mother, Javiera Antonia, set off on the long journey to Paris. In Bayonne Javiera contracted cholera, rapidly succumbed, and died.³ It was arranged that Pablo would be taken to Paris where he was welcomed into the home of Théodore and Amélie Lassabathie. Théodore (d.1871) was the administrator of the Conservatoire; he and Amélie (d.1872), being childless, treated Pablo as if he was the son they never had. In due course Pablo referred to Mme. Lassabathie as his ‘mother’ and Mme. Lassabathie, in turn, referred to Pablo as ‘the Baby’.

In 1857 the Paris Conservatoire awarded Sarasate a *Premier Prix* for performance on the violin. As was always the case, the prize brought with it a new violin made by the Paris violin dealers, *Gand frères*. Within the Gand/Bernardel/Caressa & Français business ledgers there are the following documents:⁴

[Directory] *Répertoire 1854-1861*⁵

Conservatoire; page-references 22, 50, 104, 150, 188, 224, 280, 344, 396, 478.

[General Ledger] *Grand Livre 1854-1864*⁶

Page 224, *Conservatoire*; entries beginning 20 October 1857

1857 Décembre 8: *Un violon neuf, N^o 270, donné en P^e [Premier] prix à M^r Sarazate [sic], 240 [francs].*

There was nothing unique about this violin – it was just another instrument which emerged from the Gand workshop; all such violins were priced at 240 francs. An inscription, in gold paint, was applied to the ribs of the violin: *au premier prix du Conservatoire de Paris en l'année 1857*. A further G/B/C&F document confirms the sale of this violin to the Conservatoire:

*Registre de ventes; instruments neufs et anciens*⁷

1857, [N^o] 270, *Vendu au Conservatoire p^r le prix de M^r Sarazatte [altered to Sarasate] 240 [francs].*

¹ In later years ‘Pablo’ was a self-chosen replacement for ‘Martín’.

² Alard was the son-in-law of the violin-maker and dealer Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume.

³ Some accounts state that Javiera Antonia died of a heart attack.

⁴ The Musée de la musique, in Paris, has placed online more than 40 free-to-access digital files, the files containing an image 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 during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: <http://archivesmusee.citedelamusique.fr/en/gand/archives.html>. The ledgers are paired together: 1) 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 2) the General Ledger (*Grand Livre*) which usually covers the same chronological period as the Directory. Code numbers for all these digitised files follow a consistent format: E.981.8.xx.

⁵ E.981.8.3

⁶ E.981.8.36

⁷ E.981.8.38

According to Julio Altadill this prize violin was destroyed in a fire at the ‘teatro de la Opera de la calle de Pelletier.’⁸ Altadill is here referring to the ‘Salle Le Peletier’ which was the home of the Paris Opera from 1821 until 29 October 1873 when the entire building was destroyed by fire. The reason why Sarasate’s prize violin should have been left at the theatre is unclear; it has been suggested that Sarasate loaned the violin to a friend who was a member of the Opera orchestra. Altadill continues by stating that Gand & Bernardel frères made another ‘identical’ violin, as a replacement, which was presented to Sarasate; the violin is today exhibited at the Museo de Sarasate in Pamplona.⁹

In the years immediately following Sarasate’s success at the Paris Conservatoire he made only occasional purchases from Gand frères:

*Grand Livre 1854-1864*¹⁰

Monsieur Sarazate [sic]; transactions between June 1859 and November 1866

There are just nine entries during this seven-year period, identifying only the purchase of strings and bow-hair; total cost of these purchases was 23 francs and 55 centimes.

**The Antonio Stradivari instruments which are associated with Pablo Sarasate are
(1) a 1724 violin known today as the *Sarasate*, and (2) a 1713 violin, the *Boissier*.**

Antonio Stradivari 1724 violin: the *Sarasate*¹¹

It has been stated that the present-day *Sarasate* violin was owned by Il Conte Cozio di Salabue (1755-1840) and was sold by the Count to Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840).¹² Count Cozio’s documentation¹³ shows that the one and only instrument which he sold to Paganini (the sale taking place in July 1817) was a 1724 Stradivari violin which had dimensions entirely different from those of the *Sarasate* violin.

The 1724 Cozio/Paganini violin was built around Stradivari’s now-lost *P.G.* mould – not the much smaller *PG* mould of June 1689 – which would have generated a violin with basic dimensions of:

170.6mm (upper-bout maximum width)
111.3mm (centre-bout minimum width)
209.6mm (lower-bout maximum width)
361mm (soundbox length).¹⁴

Confirmation of the existence of the *P.G.* mould is found in the index which appears at the end of ms. Cozio 47, an index written out by the Count Cozio himself:

Violino Ant^o Strad^o mio più bello P.G. 1716 fol. 14

V^o d’Strad^o f^a [forma] P.G. mio come s^a [sopra] 1724 fol. 15

Count Cozio’s measurements (ms. Cozio 47, folio 15) of his 1724 (Paganini) violin demonstrate that the width of the upper bout (plate-edge to plate-edge) was 170.7mm, the width of the lower bout was

⁸ Julio Altadill, *Memorias de Sarasate*, Armendía y Onsalo (Pamplona, 1909), p. 517.

⁹ It would seem that G&B also applied the inscription, in gold paint, to the replacement instrument.

¹⁰ E.981.8.36

¹¹ The violin is exhibited at the Musée de la musique, in Paris.

¹² See J Dilworth, *An Overlooked Wonder (The Strad)*, November 2018, p. 39).

¹³ Biblioteca Statale di Cremona, Libreria Civica, mss. Cozio 41, 42, 46, and 47.

¹⁴ For full details see the present author’s article *The case of the missing mould (The Strad)*, June 2018, pp. 54-58).

210.6mm, and the body length was 361mm. The violin's centre-bout minimum width – 111.3mm – can be safely deduced from the Count's commentary.¹⁵ These measurements do not match the dimensions of the 1724 *Sarasate* violin:

UB front	167.7mm	back	167.8mm
CB	109.2mm		108.7mm
LB	207.0mm		207.7mm
Length	355.3mm		356.5mm ¹⁶

Paganini described the 1724 Stradivari violin which he bought from Count Cozio as 'the father of all violins; [it] has a tone almost as big as that of a contrabass, so distinguished is it by its power.'¹⁷ Paganini's assessment of his violin's tone echoes the descriptive comments previously written by Count Cozio:

fortissimo di voce
fortissimo di voce e quasi tenore ['and like a viola']
questo ha la voce più forte, e da tenore

Conversely, note the Hills' description of the delicate tone of the *Sarasate* violin:

Sarasate's Stradivari, made in 1724, stands by itself in both tone and style; and all who have listened to this delightful master of the art of coaxing forth pure and beautiful tone must have been struck by the ethereal and sparkling quality of his "Strad" – never sonorous, yet always clear and distinct, even when passages of the most extreme rapidity and delicacy are being rendered on it.¹⁸

In his autobiography, the American violinist Albert Spalding writes of Sarasate's performance style:

He played Beethoven with the perfumed polish of a courtier who doesn't quite believe what he is saying to Majesty. But when he reached a piece like *La Fée d'amour* by Raff [...] or his own *Spanish Dances* he was completely in his element. The violin sang like a thrush and his incomparable ease tossed aside difficulties with a grace and insouciance that affected even his gestures. There was a kind of studied sophistication in the way he tripped onto the stage aping the airs and graces of Watteau's *L'Indifférent*. I don't think I ever heard a *forte* passage from his bow; his palette held pastel shades only.¹⁹

The 1724 violin which Count Cozio sold to Paganini in July 1817 cannot be the 1724 *Sarasate* violin. Count Cozio can be excluded from the history of the *Sarasate* violin.

Niccolò Paganini died on 27 May 1840. An inventory of his posthumous estate indicated the ownership of seven Antonio Stradivari violins, two by Giuseppe Guarneri *del Gesù*, one Giuseppe Guarneri (*filius Andreae?*), one Andrea Guarneri, two Niccolò Amati, one Carlo Tononi, and one Ruggieri – 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 and a Pietro Rogeri cello. Paganini's seven Stradivari violins are dated by Geraldine de Courcy to 1680, 1692, 1695, 1724 (two such violins), 1725, and 1726.²⁰

¹⁵ See the present author's detailed article *Fortissimo di voce e quasi tenore*, free-to-read at www.themessiahviolin.uk.

¹⁶ Measurements from the Musée de la musique website.

¹⁷ J M Schottky, *Paganini's Leben und Treiben* (Prague, 1830), pp. 281-282.

¹⁸ Hill, *Antonio Stradivari* (1902), p. 157.

¹⁹ *Rise to Follow*, Henry Holt (New York, 1943), p. 36.

²⁰ G I C de Courcy, *Paganini, the Genoese*, University of Oklahoma Press (1957), Vol. II, p. 388-389, *List of Instruments in Paganini's possession at the time of his death*.

In the years immediately following Niccolò's death all his instrumental possessions were in the hands of his son, Achille (b.1825). Achille's commercial strategies during these years are largely unknown but it is documented that in 1846 he took (or sent) a quartet of his father's Stradivari instruments – two violins, a viola, and a cello – to Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume in Paris for restoration and sale. Achille's proposed price for all four instruments (which were to be sold in one transaction) was 20,000 francs, an extremely high price for the time. In both 1849 and 1850 Vuillaume reported to Achille that no offers had been received for the quartet. 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 was dissolved in favour of each instrument being for sale individually. The cello was valued at 5,000 francs; the viola and the two violins were valued at 2,500 francs each. Note that the 'value' simply indicated the sum of money which Vuillaume contracted to send to Achille if and when each of the instruments was sold; the agreement did not require Vuillaume to sell the instruments at the 'value' price; he could sell the instruments at the highest price obtainable and then pocket the difference.²¹

Nine letters sent by Vuillaume to Achille Paganini between 12 December 1846 and 12 September 1851 have survived.²² Only in the earliest letter does Vuillaume provide any details of the repairs and restoration work which he carried out on the four instruments; he says nothing about the construction or quality of the plates, ribs, or scrolls, and just one split is mentioned. Noticeably, the two violins are identified solely by their varnish colour: *violon jaune* and *violon rouge*; the label-dates of the four instruments are not mentioned.

Vuillaume's repairs to Achille's *violon jaune* – repairs for which he charged 20 francs – are:

*Remis la cassure à la table du violon jaune, l'avoir rebarrée, allongé et élevé le manche, mis une touche, refait la poignée, fourni chevilles, queue, chevalet et monture.*²³

Repair the split in the front plate of the yellow violin, re-bar it, lengthen and lift the neck [by fitting a neck-foot wedge], fit a [new] fingerboard, re-shape the 'handle' [neck], provide pegs, tailpiece, bridge and strings.

Vuillaume's repairs to Achille's *violon rouge* – 30 francs – are:

*Fait revenir la voûte de la table du violon rouge, l'avoir rebarrée, mis une enture, touche, chevilles, chevalet et monture.*²⁴

Restore the arching of the front plate of the red violin, re-bar it, insert a neck-foot wedge, fingerboard, pegs, bridge and strings.

Perhaps Vuillaume's references to the two violins in terms only of their varnish colour – 'yellow' and 'red' – was necessitated because both violins exhibited the same label-date, i.e. 1724; two such violins are identified by Geraldine de Courcy (see previous page). Perhaps Achille believed that the uniqueness of a Stradivari quartet which featured two violins made in the same year would justify (at least in part) the high price he was specifying for a 'one transaction' sale; the fact that all four instruments had been in his father's possession would surely be a further attractant. Nonetheless, Vuillaume was unable to sell the quartet, which might suggest that the undistinguished physical/visual condition of the instruments outweighed their provenance. Vuillaume's generally negative assessment of Achille's instruments is demonstrated by the comments which he makes in his 22 March 1851 letter:

²¹ See the text quoted from Julio Altadill (p. 5 of this account) with respect to the price paid for the *Sarasate* violin.

²² See C Lebet, *Le Quatuor Stradivarius "Niccolò Paganini"*, Les Amis de la Musique (1994), pp. 41-69.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

You [Achille] exaggerate the beauty of your instruments. If they were as you assess them I would long ago have obtained the contracted sum by selling them separately. Your assessment is not at all realistic; only the viola is a first class [instrument].

In 1866 Vuillaume sold a 1724 Stradivari violin to Pablo Sarasate. Julio Altadill writes:

*El Stradivarius construido en 1724 por el famoso é insuperado luthier, vino á manos de Sarasate el año 1866, mediante la cesión de otro violín italiano, regular, que hasta entonces era el predilecto, más cinco mil francos. [...] La compra se hizo á Vuillaume, constructor celebrado del siglo XIX que ha producido notabilísimos ejemplares.*²⁵

The Stradivari violin constructed in 1724 by the famous and peerless violin-maker came into the hands of Sarasate in 1866.²⁶ Sarasate handed over his ordinary Italian violin which, until then, had been his favourite instrument, as well as 5,000 francs. [...] The purchase was from the house of Vuillaume, the celebrated violin-maker of the nineteenth century who [himself] produced remarkable specimens [of violins].

From a letter written by Sarasate in 1872 (see later, p.8) it is learned that Vuillaume had supplied him with a certificate which identified Niccolò Paganini as the previous owner of the 1724 violin; either Sarasate bought one of the *ex-Achille* violins – the *rouge* or the *jaune* – or, less likely, he bought another Stradivari violin (also with a Paganini provenance and a 1724 label) which J-BV had in his stock.

A Stradivari violin belonging to Sarasate is itemised in the Gand & Bernardel ledgers in 1866 and 1869:

*Grand Livre 1866-1876*²⁷

M^r Sarrasate [sic]

1866 Octobre 3 *Pour réparation d'un violon (St.^{us}) [Stradivarius], 6 francs*

1869 Décembre 1 *Visité le violon Stradivarius, 3 francs*

These inspections and minor repairs by G&B continue throughout the 1870s and 1880s; it is curious that it was they, rather than Vuillaume, who carried out the repairs.²⁸ The label-date of the Stradivari violin is never mentioned by G&B but it is reasonable to assume that the violin is the 1724 instrument which Sarasate had bought from Vuillaume. Vuillaume had closed the doors of his shop in the rue Croix des Petits Champs in 1858 before ‘retiring’ to his mansion on the outskirts of Paris but he was still making and selling instruments, and Sarasate surely went to Vuillaume’s address – 3 rue Demours aux Ternes – to buy the 1724 Stradivari violin. Vuillaume did not die until 1875.

In 1870 Charles-Nicolas-Eugène Gand described Pablo Sarasate’s 1724 Stradivari violin in his *Catalogue descriptif des Instruments de Stradivarius et J. Guarnerius* (p.37):²⁹

(année 1870) M^r Sarasate, Paris

Violon Stradivarius, 13 pouces 2 lignes, année 1724

Fond de 2 pièces assez beau, veines remontant, trous de vers rebouchés dans le haut à gauche principalement, belles éclisses veines un peu plus serrées, table de 2 pièces, sapin serré au milieu et s'élargissant sur les bords, cassure partant du haut de l'f gauche et allant jusqu'au bord; 2 petites fentes sous la main et une à droite du cordier, belle tête, manche original. Vernis rouge pâle décoloré.

(1870) Mr Sarasate, Paris

Antonio Stradivari violin, 13 pouces 2 lignes [356.4mm], year 1724

²⁵ Altadill, *op. cit.*, p. 512.

²⁶ W Henley (*Antonio Stradivari: Master Luthier*) states ‘1864’ (p. 74) but does not provide any evidence.

²⁷ E.981.8.14

²⁸ Had there been a serious falling-out between Sarasate and Vuillaume? Grange Woolley, in *Pablo de Sarasate: his historical significance*, Music & Letters, Vol. 36. No. 3 (July 1955), p. 238, states: ‘As a man Sarasate was proud and aloof towards strangers, sometimes condescending and sarcastic with his friends [...]’

²⁹ Facsimile published by Les Amis de la Musique, Spa, 1994.

The back plate is made from two pieces, fairly attractive, the flames rising [from the centre-joint];³⁰ worm tracks – principally in the upper bout, on the left – have been plugged. Beautiful ribs with flames which are slightly tighter/narrower [than on the back plate]. The front plate is made from two pieces; the spruce [growth-rings are] tight/narrow in the middle, widening towards the edges. There is a split from the top of the bass *f*-hole extending to the [upper] edge; two small splits under the hand [i.e. top-right of the front plate] and one to the right of the tail-piece. Beautiful head, original neck. The varnish is pale red, faded.³¹

Roberto Jardón Rico³² states that Sarasate christened his 1724 violin as “the yellow” because of the striking colour of its varnish’, yet the Hills of London characterise the *Sarasate* violin as ‘unattractive in appearance’.³³ Vuillaume’s opinion of both *ex-Achille* Paganini violins was that they were ‘well preserved but do not have the brilliance of varnish and the richness of wood which attracts connoisseurs and high prices.’³⁴

The *Sarasate* violin, as exhibited today at the Musée de la musique, in Paris, has two vertical strips of purfling inserted in the rib below the tail-piece ‘saddle’, presumably to restore the structural shape of the lower rib following shrinkage. Charles Gand makes no mention of this distinctive feature; perhaps the rib was restored post-Gand. Gand also makes no mention of the block-capital letters ‘PG’ which, today, can be seen inked inside the violin’s peg-box cavity.

At an unknown date the neck fitted by Stradivari was detached from the sound-box of the *Sarasate* violin and wedges were fitted to its ‘foot’ in order to raise, re-angle, and lengthen the neck; the various wooden inserts can be seen in the photographs posted by the Musée de la musique on its website (inventory number E.1729).³⁵ Vuillaume, in his 12 December 1846 letter to Achille Paganini acknowledges his fitting of just such a neck-graft – *mis une enture* – to the *violon rouge*.

Jean-Philippe Echard³⁶ identifies within the 1724 *Sarasate* violin ‘a large trapezoidal patch [which] reinforces the middle of the back’ and ‘another large rectangular patch [which] reinforces the belly between the *f*-holes’; Vuillaume (see earlier, p.4) identifies his ‘restor[ation of] the arching of the front plate of the red violin’. The evidence points towards Vuillaume’s *ex-Achille* Paganini ‘red’ violin being that which became the present-day *Sarasate* violin.

Further:

The joints and various cracks are supported by a series of round or square patches, and some of the edges have been replaced. The instrument was opened up in around 1960 for further repairs; the bass bar was probably changed again during this procedure.³⁷

³⁰ Count Cozio’s descriptions of his large 1724 (Paganini) violin identify it as having back-plate flames ‘which are rather wide and beautiful’ – ‘the most beautiful wide flames’ – ‘wide bright flames’. These enthusiastically positive descriptions sit against Gand’s commentary regarding the visual appearance of the back plate of the *Sarasate* violin: *assez beau*.

³¹ The photographs of the *Sarasate* violin which appear in Jost Thöne’s *Antonius Stradiuarius*, Vol.VIII, pp.44-51, show a varnish colour which is nearer to red-brown than to ‘pale red’.

³² *Sarasate’s Capricho*, ‘The Strad’, January 2024, p.27.

³³ *Antonio Stradivari* (1902), p. 69.

³⁴ Letter to Achille Paganini, 22 March 1851; *Les violons sont bien conservés ...*

³⁵ Inventory number E.1729; in the Musée’s collection of *Sarasate* photographs the most revealing is the last in Jan Röhrmann’s set.

³⁶ Curator, Musée de la musique, Paris.

³⁷ J-P Echard, writing in Jost Thöne *Antonius Stradiuarius*, Vol.VIII, p.44.

In November 1869 Gand & Bernardel inspected a violin belonging to Sarasate which had been made by Vuillaume (or at least made in Vuillaume's workshop):

*Grand Livre 1866-1876*³⁸

M^r Sarrasate [sic]

1869 Novembre 12 *Visité, nettoyé etc. le violon Wuillaume, 3 francs*

Vuillaume's violin accompanied Sarasate when he was on tour, it being a worthy replacement should climatic conditions or an accident prevent him from using his 1724 Stradivari. In a letter sent by Sarasate on 28 July 1871 from Newport (Rhode Island, USA) to Mme. Lassabathie in Paris his opening phrase indicates that it was she who paid for the Vuillaume violin:³⁹

Ton Vuillaume a subi une grande amélioration. C'est aujourd'hui un très beau Violon qui a eu l'honneur de combattre avec son maître, déjà plusieurs fois devant des auditoires magnifiques. J'ai fait debuter ce monsieur à Lima, au Bénéfice de la Patti. Maintenant il n'a plus peur.

Your Vuillaume has undergone a profound improvement [in tonal quality?]. It is now a very beautiful violin that has had the honour of going into [musical] battle with its master, several times already, in front of magnificent audiences. I 'baptised' this gentleman [i.e. the violin] in Lima [Peru], at a benefit concert for Patti.⁴⁰ He no longer has any fear.

This Vuillaume violin was still in Sarasate's possession when he died in 1908 and must therefore be the 'excellent' violin identified by Otto Goldschmidt (see later in this account).

In New York, at the recently-opened Steinway Hall, while carrying his 1724 Stradivari violin as he climbed a staircase to the concert stage, Sarasate slipped and fell. He described the accident in a letter, dated 22 April 1870, to Mme. Lassabathie:

Chère Mère,

[...] Un accident m'est arrivé à ce Concert, qui aurait pu me couter bien des larmes, mais heureusement le tout a fini pas des frictions. En montant l'escalier qui conduit à l'estrade, et sur la dernière marche mon pied gauche a faibli, et j'ai dégringolé jusqu'en bas (une vingtaine de marches) avec mon Stradivarius⁴¹ que je n'ai pas lâché (plustôt la mort) et qui n'a eu que ses cordes cassées, et son chevalet renversé – dans le premier moment j'ai cru qu'il était en morceaux, et je me sentais mourir, mais quelle joie après! ... on m'a frictionné au foyer, et après dix minutes d'entre'acte j'ai joué sur le Wuillaume un duo sur 'Les Huguenots', ma jambe est enflée, et je boite [...].

Dear Mother,

[...] An accident befell me at this concert, [an accident] which could have caused me many tears but fortunately ended with only minor injuries. While climbing the staircase which leads to the stage – on the very last step – my left foot gave way underneath me and I tumbled to the bottom (about twenty steps) with my Stradivarius which I didn't let go of (death is preferable) and which suffered only broken strings and a collapsed bridge – at first I thought that the violin was in pieces and I felt myself dying, but this was followed by such joy! ... after being attended to in the foyer, and after a delay of just ten minutes, I performed a duo on [themes from] 'Les Huguenots'⁴² using my [V]uillaume violin. My leg is swollen, and I limp [...].

³⁸ E.981.8.14

³⁹ A collection of 29 letters, sent by Sarasate to his adoptive mother, Mme. Lassabathie, is archived at the Sibley Library, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, USA; complete transcriptions and translations are free-to-read at www.themessiahviolin.uk.

⁴⁰ Carlotta Patti (c.1840-1889); operatic soprano and sister to Adelina Patti.

⁴¹ Underscores are as they appear in the manuscript letter.

⁴² Opera composed by Giacomo Meyerbeer; first production in 1836 (Salle le Peletier, Paris).

In another letter, one which has no date nor any indication of Sarasate's location, he makes an urgent plea to Mme. Lassabathie:

[...] *Veux tu m'envoyer le Certificat de Vuillaume que spécifie que mon Stradivarius à appartenu à Paganini ? Je ne puis te dire quel service tu me rendrais en me l'adressant, ou en m'en faisant avoir un autre par le dit M^r Vuillaume.*

Would you send me the Vuillaume certificate which states that my Stradivari belonged to Paganini? You would be doing me a huge favour by sending it to me or by obtaining another [i.e. a copy-certificate] from the aforementioned Mons. Vuillaume.

Sarasate's letter continues with news of *un grand succès avec le Max Bruch accompagné par 100 musiciens de la Société Philharmonique*. Sarasate gave the first performance in America of Bruch's Violin Concerto, with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Carl Bergmann, on 3 February 1872; Sarasate's letter to Mme. Lassabathie (above) was probably written immediately thereafter. The reason why he so urgently needed Vuillaume's certificate is unknown; perhaps, during a conversation with someone in New York, Sarasate had indicated a connection between his violin and Niccolò Paganini, this claim being met with expressions of doubt from his interlocutor. The current location of Vuillaume's certificate is unknown; it is not archived at the Musée de la musique in Paris.

Having concluded his tour of both north and south America, Sarasate arrived back in Paris at the end of May 1872 and immediately hurried to Gand & Bernardel – not to Vuillaume – for repairs to his violins:

*Grand Livre 1866-1876*⁴³

M^r Sarrasate [sic]

<i>1872 Juin 18</i>	<i>réparation du Stradivarius</i>	<i>15 francs</i>
[same date]	<i>réparation du violon Vuillaume</i>	<i>1 franc</i> [!]

Gand & Bernardel continued to be Sarasate's favoured dealers; e.g.:

*Grand Livre 1881-1887*⁴⁴

M^r Sarasate

<i>1885 Septembre 29</i>	<i>Visité et remonté le Stradivarius, repoli la touche</i> [... cleaned the fingerboard]
	<i>Visité le Vuillaume, repoli la touche, repassé les chevilles</i> [... re-set the pegs]
	<i>Visité et recollé le violon Suedois</i> [Swedish] ⁴⁵
<i>1887 Octobre 15</i>	<i>Visité et recollé Stradivarius, redressé la touche, réparé les chevilles et remonté.</i>
	<i>Visité le Vuillaume.</i>

In 1893 Pablo Sarasate bought a viola from Gustave Bernardel; he bought another in 1894:

*Grand Livre 1892-1899*⁴⁶

Sarasate

<i>1892 Septembre 17</i>	<i>Dressé la touche du violon Vuillaume</i>
	<i>Revu, nettoyé, arrangé les chevilles et monture des 2 Stradivarius</i>
<i>1893 Avril 13</i>	<i>Un alto</i> [viola] <i>G. et B^{el} N^o 192, avec étui</i>
<i>1894 Janvier 29</i>	<i>Un alto Gand et Bernardel frères, N^o 160</i>

⁴³ E.981.8.14

⁴⁴ E.981.8.4

⁴⁵ Altadill, p. 517, identifies a 'Norwegian' violin.

⁴⁶ E.981.8.41

1894 Février 3 *Reparé les chevilles au violon du prix*
 1894 Août 4 *Réparation violon 127-94; 50 francs*

*Grand Livre 1899-1905*⁴⁷
Sarasate
 1901 Octobre 25 *Monture les deux Stradivarius et du Vuillaume, 30 francs*

*Grand Livre 1905-1912*⁴⁸
Sarasate
 1907 Avril 26 *Remonté les 2 Strad, et l'alto, 30 francs*

The final entry in the 1905-1912 ledger is dated *1909 Octobre 21*:

Emballage et frais de douane, transport de la vitrine double, 135 francs
 Packing and customs fee, transport of the double showcase, 135 francs.

It is reasonable to assume that the double showcase was destined for Pamplona and would house the Vuillaume violin and the *Gand frères* prize violin when they came to be put on display in that city.

Antonio Stradivari 1713 violin: the *Boissier*

In October 1888 Sarasate bought from Gand & Bernardel the 1713 Stradivari violin known today as the *Boissier*:

*Grand Livre 1888-1892*⁴⁹
Sarasate
 1888 Octobre 26 *1 violon Stradivarius 1411 [stock number], 20,000 francs*

According to the website of the Real Conservatorio Superior de Música de Madrid⁵⁰ Sarasate's 1713 *Boissier* violin has a label-date in which the third and fourth numerals – *13* – are hand-written. A rather small photograph of the *Boissier* label is included in the aforementioned article by Roberto Jardón Rico (*Sarasate's Capricho*, in 'The Strad'); the second numeral – *7* – is confidently drawn by hand; only the first numeral – 'I' – is printed.

The *Boissier* violin was described either by Charles Gand (d.1892) or by Gustave Bernardel (d.1904) in a document of 1888 which was subsequently copied into the descriptive catalogue compiled by their successors: Caressa & Français:⁵¹

1888: Sarasate
Violon A. Stradivarius, année 1713, 13 pouces 2 lignes
Fond de 2 pièces splendide, ondes descendant, éclisses ondes un peu plus larges, table de 2 pièces superbe sapin plus fin au milieu, cassures à l'âme et à la barre, doublure, très belle tête intacte, vernis rouge doré splendide.
Ex Boissier de Genève, Naegely
légué au Conservatoire de Madrid 1908.

⁴⁷ E.981.8.43

⁴⁸ E.981.8.45

⁴⁹ E.981.8.27

⁵⁰ <http://rcsmm.eu/museo/coleccion/?aid=coleccion&categoria=cuerda-frotada> (accessed December 2018).

⁵¹ See the 'Jacques Français Business Records, sales ledgers 1845-1938'; Smithsonian Institution, USA; Box 55, folder 2, p. 146; a complete transcription, translation, and commentary is free-to-read at www.themessiahviolin.uk. The Gand/Bernardel descriptive text does not appear within C N E Gand's *Catalogue descriptif*, notwithstanding its date of 1888.

1888: Sarasate

Antonio Stradivari violin, 1713, 13 *pouces 2 lignes* [356.4mm]

The back plate is made from two splendid pieces, the flames descending. The flames of the ribs are slightly wider [than on the back plate]. The front plate is made from two pieces; superb; the spruce [rings are] thinner/narrower at the middle; there are splits at the sound-post and at the bass-bar; doubled. Very beautiful head; intact. The varnish is golden red, splendid.

Ex Boissier of Geneva, Naegely

Bequeathed to the Madrid Conservatoire in 1908.

The *Boissier* varnish is a deep rich red – at least in the central area of the front plate (where, perhaps, rosin has been left to accumulate, has reacted with the varnish and has intensified its colour). The back plate of the *Boissier* has some pale-red areas at the flanks but, according to the life-size photograph included in the poster published with the January 2024 issue of *The Strad*, the central area of the back plate shows as golden yellow. Roberto Jardón Rico defines the *Boissier* varnish: ‘The colour of the varnish is a light reddish-brown over Stradivari’s wonderful golden ground’.⁵² Julio Altadill states that the 1713 Stradivari violin was ‘called “red” due to the somewhat reddish colour of the varnish’ (*llamado “rojo” por el color algun tanto rojizo de su barniz*).⁵³

The violin is described by the Hills:

The year 1713 gives us an admirable violin, the “Boissier”, now owned by Señor Sarasate. Fétis mentions it as one of the finest existing Stradivaris, and we can certainly confirm his statement. Its outline is of the 14¹/₁₆-inch form [357.2mm], the model a little fuller, though closely following that of the “Parke” instrument [of 1711]; the edge, corners, and purfling are perhaps a trifle neater, and the sound-holes more lightly cut. The varnish is also of great beauty, its tint being a shade redder than that of the “Parke”, and the whole instrument is in very fine condition.⁵⁴

According to the article *On Old Violins*⁵⁵ ‘Boissier’ was ‘a wealthy citizen of Geneva’ who discovered the violin in the possession of a local blacksmith. Not until after M. Boissier had died was the violin sold (to J-B Vuillaume) from whom it passed to ‘an amateur’ (presumably ‘Naegely’) who kept the violin for twenty years. The violin was then sold ‘to a Parisian violin-maker’ (presumably Gand & Bernardel) who sold it to Sarasate in October 1888.

From the Gand & Bernardel business ledger:

*Grand Livre 1888-1892*⁵⁶

Sarasate

1889 Octobre 10 *Visité l’ancien [1724] Stradivarius, poli la touche, ajusté les chevilles, olives en or, remonté, et remonté l’autre [1713] Stradivarius, fourni 2 chevilles di rechange.*

Sarasate died on 20 September 1908. Shortly thereafter the following letter was published in *Le Ménestrel*:

Communication de M. Otto Goldschmidt, le « manager de Sarasate »:

« Comme exécuteur testamentaire de Sarasate, je fais ici connaître, et cela dans l’intérêt de tous les violonistes et tous les luthiers, que le Stradivarius de l’année 1724, sur lequel Sarasate jouait toujours en public, et qui n’appartenait pas à la couronne d’Espagne et n’avait pas davantage été

⁵² *The Strad*, January 2024, p.32.

⁵³ *Memorias*, p.512.

⁵⁴ *Antonio Stradivari*, p.59.

⁵⁵ L. Greilsamer, J C Freeman, T Baker, *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (July 1927).

⁵⁶ E.981.8.27

donné à l'artiste par la reine Isabelle, a été légué au musée du Conservatoire de Paris. Le deuxième Stradivarius, de l'année 1713, reviendra au musée du Conservatoire de Madrid. Les deux instruments, comme le violon de Paganini, à Gênes, doivent être conservés pour les époques à venir. Si quelque jour, dans les temps futurs, tous les instruments de Stradivarius venaient à être gâtés par les violonistes, ces deux derniers, tout au moins, resteraient et serviraient de modèles. Pour le second [1713] de ces Stradivarius, j'ai décliné une offre de 80,000 francs. En dehors de ces deux instruments, il existe dans la succession de Sarasate un excellent violon de Vuillaume et un autre de Gand. Ce dernier porte la dédicace: 'au premier prix du Conservatoire de Paris en l'année 1857'. Ces deux instruments ont été légués au Musée-Sarasate de l'ampelune. Sarasate ne possédait pas d'autre violons. Agréez etc. Otto Goldschmidt »⁵⁷

A communication received from Mr Otto Goldschmidt, Sarasate's manager:

'As the testamentary executor for Sarasate I here make known, for the benefit of all violinists and violin-makers, that the 1724 Stradivari violin on which Sarasate always played in public – a violin which did not belong to the Spanish crown nor was it given to the artist by Queen Isabella – was bequeathed to the Paris Conservatoire. The second Stradivari violin, of 1713, will go to the museum of the Conservatoire of Madrid. These two instruments, as with Paganini's violin in Genoa, must be conserved for future generations. If, one day in the future, all Stradivari's instruments were to be wrecked by violinists, then at least these two specimens will remain and would serve as models. I have declined an offer of 80,000 francs for the second violin [the *Boissier*]. In addition to these two instruments Sarasate's estate includes an excellent violin by Vuillaume and another by Gand. This last carries a dedication: *au premier prix du Conservatoire de Paris en l'année 1857*. These two instruments have been bequeathed to the Sarasate Museum in Pamplona. Sarasate did not own any other violins.

Yours etc.

Otto Goldschmidt.'

It is noticeable that while Goldschmidt firmly quashes any idea that Sarasate's 1724 violin had a connection with Queen Isabella of Spain he does not identify the person from whom Sarasate obtained the violin (which is curious since he mentions J-B Vuillaume as the maker of an 'excellent violin').

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⁵⁷ *Le Ménestrel*, 31 October 1908.