

# The Spanish Puzzle

Antonio Stradivari's quartet of decorated instruments  
(Palacio Real de Oriente, Madrid, Spain)

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Few instruments made by Antonio Stradivari have quite so many uncertainties intertwined around their history as have the two violins, the (contralto) viola, and the cello which today are housed at the Palacio Real in Madrid and identified as Stradivari's 'Spanish Quartet'. All four instruments (originally five) are spectacularly (but not uniquely) distinctive because of their extensively decorated bodywork.

The following account attempts to uncover some areas of historical reliability. It is acknowledged that the very many loose ends force the investigative historian, at times, into speculation, but speculation which, at the least, is built upon reasonable deductions derived from the limited amount of verifiable information which still exists.<sup>1</sup>

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## Spanish kings and Spanish conflicts

**Carlos II: reigned 1665-1700**

**Felipe/Philip V: reigned 1700-1724**

When the Habsburg King Carlos II of Spain died in 1700 he was childless and heirless. The Habsburg Archduke Carl<sup>2</sup> – aged just fifteen – was declared King of Spain, as Carlos III. However, it was Philip, Duke of Anjou (a seventeen-year-old grandson of Louis XIV of France) who, as Felipe/Philip V, was placed upon the Spanish throne. This dynastic imposition had the potential to combine the political and military might of France and Spain and thus threaten the balance of power across Europe. England, Austria, and the Dutch Republic joined forces to form the 'Grand Alliance' in support of Carl's Habsburg candidacy and formally declared war on France and Spain in May 1702. This Spanish War of Succession lasted until 1714. In the peace treaties of Utrecht and of Rastatt the Spanish kingdom was retained by Felipe/Philip V but he was obliged to renounce all claim to the French crown.

Between 1705 and 1711 the Habsburg Carl ruled as 'Carlos III' only in the area around Barcelona in north-eastern Spain; in practical terms, at no point did Carl become 'King of Spain' though he and his supporters claimed that title. In 1711 Carl returned to Vienna where he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor, Carl (Charles) VI.

**Luis I (son of Felipe/Philip V): reigned for only a few months in 1724 before his death**

**Felipe/Philip V: reigned for a second period, 1724-1746**

**Fernando/Ferdinand VI (son of Felipe/Philip V): reigned 1746-1759**

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<sup>1</sup> The present author would like to thank Luis López Ruiz for his investigations and researches within the archives of the Royal Palace in Madrid; without his generous help some parts of this account could not have been completed.

<sup>2</sup> Baptised *Carolus, Franz, Joseph, Wenzel, Balthasar, Johann, Anton, Ignaz*.

**Carlos III (son of Felipe/Philip V): reigned 1759-1788**

**Carlos IV (son of Carlos III): reigned 1788-1808.**

In 1807 Napoleon Bonaparte began moving his army through Spain in order to invade Portugal. Following internal turmoil within Spain, King Carlos IV abdicated in March 1808 in favour of his son, Fernando. In April 1808 Napoleon deposed both Carlos and Fernando and, on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1808, placed his own elder brother, Joseph, on the Spanish throne as **Joseph I**. The Spanish War of Independence (a.k.a. the Peninsular War) ensued (1808-1814).

**Fernando/Ferdinand VII (son of Carlos IV): reigned 1813–1833.**

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An oft-cited source of information for the aristocratic and royal commissioners of string instruments from Antonio Stradivari is a document compiled by a monk, Desiderio Arisi (1649-1725), who apparently knew Stradivari and, seemingly, was permitted access to the latter's various letters and documents so that he, Arisi, could compile a list of Stradivari's commissions. The location of this compilation is usually indicated to be within Arisi's *Accademia de' pittori cremonesi con alcuni scultori ed architetti pur cremonesi*, a two-volume draft manuscript with more than 1,000 pages of biographies and evaluations of painters, sculptors, and architects.<sup>3</sup>

The title page of Arisi's first volume identifies the author as:

*Don Desiderio Arisi*  
*Monaco della Congregazione*  
*di*  
*S. Girolamo di Lombardia*

Arisi provides an index of the persons whose biographies appear within his manuscript, an index which is alphabetical by first (given) name rather than by the family name. Under the letter 'S' is listed one Sinibaldo Biondi, whose biography begins on p. 68 of Arisi's Volume 1; on that page, adjacent to Biondi's name, in smaller writing, is written 'Antonio Stradiuario'. Searching the letter 'A' in the index reveals 'Antonio Stradiuario' but this has been struck through with a single inked line and there is no page reference attached to the name. Arisi's entry for Sinibaldo Biondi concludes with:

[Biondi] *si trovò morto in età assai matura l'anno de Contaggio di Cremona del 1630 nell'andito della porta della sua casa sù la Piazza di S. Domenico ove di presente habita Antonio Stradivario eccellentissimo Maestro di tutte sorti d'instromenti da Musica.*<sup>4</sup>

Biondi was found dead, having reached a great age, in the year of the Plague of Cremona, 1630, in the entrance to the door of his house above the Piazza S. Domenico, where presently lives Antonio Stradivari, most excellent master of all sorts of musical instruments.

Arisi apparently edited his draft text into a final edition which was delivered to his brother, Francesco, but this document was then destroyed in a fire. Some 50 pages of Arisi's notes were subsequently recovered from the monastery of S. Sigismondo. Arisi's listing of Stradivari's commissions appears within these notes on folios 36v-38v where the concluding phrase from the draft text for Sinibaldo Biondi (above) is repeated, followed by the details of the commissions:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A digital scan of Arisi's entire two-volume manuscript was accessed (May 2016) at:  
[http://primo.getty.edu/primo\\_library/libweb/action/diDisplay.do?vid=GRI&search\\_scope=default\\_scope&docId=GETTY\\_A\\_LMA21137808540001551&fn=permalink](http://primo.getty.edu/primo_library/libweb/action/diDisplay.do?vid=GRI&search_scope=default_scope&docId=GETTY_A_LMA21137808540001551&fn=permalink)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* (Vol. 1, p. 71).

<sup>5</sup> Biblioteca Statale di Cremona, MS AA.2.21.

*Ove di presente abita Antonio Stradivario mio caro amico ed eccellentissimo maestro in ogni sorte di stromenti da musica [...].*

Where presently lives Antonio Stradivari, my dear friend and most excellent master of every type of musical instrument, about which it is not inappropriate that I speak, and much more, because of the precious and finely-made instruments in which he joins nobility and beauty by embellishing them with well-drawn images – various figures, flowers, fruits, arabesques, and graceful interweavings – not only in black but also in ebony and ivory, elegantly worked and fancifully bordered, these decorative elements being worthy of the important personages to whom the instruments are presented. I have thought it appropriate to list here a few made by this great Master which will bear witness to the great esteem and universal admiration [with which he is regarded].<sup>6</sup>

The dates for the commissions range across the period 1682–1716; internal evidence (see footnote 21) indicates that the listing of commissions was being compiled by Arisi during the year 1720.

The first published transcription of Arisi's text appeared in 1937, in *Antonio Stradivari: Notizie e Documenti*, this 100-page publication being the work of Carlo Bonetti, Agostino Cavalcabò, and Ugo Gualazzini;<sup>7</sup> Arisi is identified as *monaco in S. Sigismondo, chiesa posta fuori le mura di Cremona*.<sup>8</sup> In 1999 the *Notizie e Documenti* publication was translated into English as 'Antonio Stradivari: Reports and documents';<sup>9</sup> Arisi is identified as 'Desiderio Arisi, a monk at S. Sigismondo, a church outside the [Cremona] city walls.'<sup>10</sup>

The earliest publication in English translation of some of the items from Arisi's list is within the first edition of George Hart's *The Violin: its famous makers and their imitators*.<sup>11</sup> Hart writes:

I close this notice with a few interesting items relating to the famous maker [Antonio Stradivari], extracted from manuscripts written by Desderio [*sic*] Arisi in the year 1720. These MSS. are preserved in the Town Museum at Cremona, and I am indebted to Signor [Federico] Sacchi for extracting and translating them. The MSS. of Arisi comprises a series of short biographies of Cremonese worthies. It is said he [Arisi] was intimate with Stradivarius, and would seem to have noted many events which Stradivarius related to him.

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“On the 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1702, the Marquis Giovanni Battista Tozalba, General of Cavalry and Governor of Cremona, sent for Stradiuarius, and commissioned him to make two Violins and a Violoncello, which were sent as presents to the Duke of Alba.”

In the second edition of Hart's *The Violin* (1884) the translation of Arisi's text is slightly different:<sup>12</sup>

“On the 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1702, the Marquis Giovanni Battista Toralba, General of Cavalry and Governor of Cremona, sent for Stradivari, and, after complimenting him on his peculiar genius, ordered two Violins and a Violoncello, which were afterwards sent as a present to the Duke of Alba.”

Neither translation is entirely accurate:

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<sup>6</sup> Translation by the present author. It would be possible to interpret Arisi's text as indicating that all the instruments which he lists are (were) decorated instruments; almost all the recipients are 'important personages'.

<sup>7</sup> A Cura del Comitato Stradivariano, Cremona, 1737-1937 [hereafter Bonetti *et al.* (1937)].

<sup>8</sup> Bonetti *et al.* (1937), p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> Cremonabooks, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>11</sup> Dulau/Schott, London (1875), p. 136 *et seq.*

<sup>12</sup> Dulau/Schott, London (1884), p. 194.

[Arisi] *1702, 10 novembre il marchese generale Toralba governatore in Cremona di Carlo II e del re Luigi di Francia li comandò un violoncello e due violini, i quali li mandò a donar al duca d'Alba.*

[Present author's translation] 1702, 10<sup>th</sup> November, Marchese General Toralba, [previously] Governor in Cremona for Carlos II [of Spain; d. 1700] and [now Governor] for King Louis [XIV] of France [i.e. for Philip V of Spain; see page 1 of this account] ordered a cello and two violins which were sent as a gift to the Duke of Alba.

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“In the year 1707, Marchese Desiderio Cleri wrote by order of King Charles III of Spain commissioning Stradiuarius to make six Violins, two Tenors [violas], and one Cello for the royal orchestra.”

In Hart's 1884 second edition the equivalent text contains an important clarification:\*

“In the year 1707, the Marquis Desiderio Cleri wrote to Stradivari, by order of King Charles III of Spain, \*from Barcelona, ordering for the royal orchestra six Violins, two Tenors, and one Violoncello.”

Unfortunately, Hart repeats the error contained within his 1875 translation: Arisi, quite correctly, does not identify *Rè Carlo III* as being ‘King ... of Spain’:

[Arisi] *Nel 1707, dal Marchese Desiderio Cleri li fù scritto di fare 6 Violini, due Viole, ed un violoncello per comando del Rè Carlo III quando era in Barcellona.*

[Present author's translation] In 1707 by Marchese Desiderio Cleri he [Stradivari] was commissioned to make 6 violins, two violas, and a cello, at the command of King Carlos III when he was in Barcelona.

Hart adds:

This extract refers to the Archduke Charles of Austria, afterwards [Holy Roman] Emperor Charles VI. Charles III [i.e. ‘Carlos III’], aided by the British fleet, occupied Barcelona in 1706 [1705].<sup>13</sup>

The precise date of Cleri's commission is not stated – it is simply ‘1707’. The following chronology is, of course, speculative, but it is also plausible: Cleri's order is received in Cremona at the very end of 1707; Stradivari completes the making of the nine instruments in April 1708 but the varnish then takes months to dry and is not sufficiently stable to allow for the packing and transport of the nine instruments until the very end of 1708; winter storms in the western Mediterranean prevent merchant ships from sailing from Genoa to Barcelona (a voyage of some 400 miles); Stradivari, having anticipated when the instruments would eventually arrive in Barcelona, had glued ‘1709’ labels inside.

Nothing more is known about this order. Were the nine instruments decorated? – were the instruments intended for the (Italian? Austrian? Spanish?) musicians who were employed by ‘Carlos III’? – when Carlos left Barcelona for Vienna in 1711 (the whole of Spain then being ruled from Madrid by King Felipe/Philip V) did his personal musicians travel with him, taking their new Stradivari instruments? – if, for unknown reasons, the instruments were left behind in Barcelona, were they then gathered up and sent to Madrid?

The two decorated violins at the Palacio Real in Madrid have labels which are dated ‘1709’.

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<sup>13</sup> As Hart astutely notes, Stradivari made instruments for two Kings who were on opposing sides in the unending power struggles which plagued Europe during this period (i.e. the Austrian/Habsburg Carl/Carlos III at Barcelona and the French/Bourbon Philip/Felipe V at Madrid).

“Stradiuarius made also a complete set of bow instruments,<sup>14</sup> which he intended to present to King Philip V of Spain, on the occasion of the king passing through Cremona [in 1702], but he was dissuaded, and the instruments are still in his possession.” [Hart adds ‘(1720)’.<sup>15</sup>]

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“In the year 1616 [1686? – see later], his Serene Highness the Duke of Modena instructed Stradiuarius to make a Violoncello.”

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In the 1884 revised and expanded edition of his book, Hart quotes more extensively from Desiderio Arisi (still using, it is assumed, Federico Sacchi's translations). He begins with a translation of Arisi's ‘connecting’ text:

“In Cremona is also living my intimate friend Antonio Stradivari, an excellent maker of all kinds of musical instruments. It will not be out of place to make special mention of his merits. His fame is unequalled as a maker of instruments of the finest qualities, and he has made many of extraordinary beauty, which are richly ornamented with small figures, flowers, fruits, arabesques, and graceful interlaying of fanciful ornaments, all in perfect drawing, which he sometimes paints in black or inlays with ebony and ivory, all of which is executed with the greatest skill, rendering them worthy of the exalted personages to whom they are intended to be presented. I have thought [it] proper, therefore, to mention some works of this great master, in testimony of the high esteem and universal admiration which he enjoys.”<sup>16</sup>

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“In the year 1682, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, the banker Michele Monzi, of Venice, sent him an order for the whole set of Violins, Altos, and Violoncellos which that gentleman sent as a present to King James of England.”<sup>17</sup>

Again, the Sacchi/Hart translation is slightly inaccurate:

[Arisi] *Nell'anno 1682 li 8 settembre li fù ordinato da Michele Monsi banchiere in Venezia tutto il concerto de violini e violoncello che mandò in dono al re Giacomo d'Inghilterra.*

[Present author] In the year 1682, 8<sup>th</sup> September, was ordered by Michele Monsi, a banker in Venice, a complete concerto of violins and a cello, which were sent as a gift to King James of England.

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“In the year 1685, on the 12<sup>th</sup> March, Cardinal Orsini, Archbishop of Benevento, ordered a Violoncello and two Violins, which were sent as a present to the Duke of Natalona, in Spain.<sup>18</sup> The Cardinal, besides paying liberally for the work, wrote an appreciative acknowledgment of their merits, and appointed the artist [i.e. Stradivari] as one of his private attendants.”

More accurately:

[Arisi] *Nel anno 1685 li 12 marzo dal cardinale Orini arcivecscovo di Benvenuto [sic] un violoncello e due violini che mandò in regalo al duca di Natalona in Spagna, oltre il pagamento per agradimento dell'opera li inviò una patente di suo famigliare.*

[Present author] In the year 1685, 12<sup>th</sup> March, from Cardinal [Orsini], archbishop of [Benevento], [an order for] a cello and two violins which were sent as a present to the Duke of Natalona, in

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<sup>14</sup> The expression ‘a complete set’ probably indicates two violins, two violas, and a cello.

<sup>15</sup> Hart (1875), p. 137.

<sup>16</sup> This, and all the subsequent translated quotations from Arisi, are sourced from Hart (1884), p. 175 *et seq.*

<sup>17</sup> James II became King of England (following Charles II) on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1685; he was deposed in 1688.

<sup>18</sup> Cardinal Pietro Francesco Orsini (1649-1730) became Pope Benedict XIII in May 1724. The town of Benevento lies 30 miles north of Naples. The precise geographical location of ‘Natalona’, in Spain, is uncertain.

Spain. In addition to paying for the pleasure which he derived from [Stradivari's] work he [the Cardinal] sent him [Stradivari] a patent of his family.<sup>19</sup>

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“In the same year, on the 12<sup>th</sup> September, Bartolomeo Grandi, called Il Fassina, leader of the Court Orchestra of His Royal Highness the Duke of Savoy, ordered of Stradivari a whole set of instruments for the Court Orchestra.”<sup>20</sup>

A more precise translation of Arisi's Italian text would be: ‘... called Il Fassina, first violin at the Court of HRH the Duke of Savoy, today [also] King of Sardinia [*ora re di Sardegna*] commissioned an entire concerto for the service of this King.’<sup>21</sup>

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“In the year 1686, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, His Serene Highness the Duke of Modena<sup>22</sup> ordered a Violoncello which, by special invitation, Stradivari was requested to take to the Duke himself, who told him how pleased he was to make his personal acquaintance, praised greatly his work, and beyond the sum agreed paid him thirty *pistoles*<sup>23</sup> as a present.”

[Arisi] *Nel 1686, 5 aprile, d'ordine dell'A. S. Regnante di Modena un violoncello, la quale volle che Antonio glielo portasse in persona per conoscerlo di vista, a cui oltre il pagamento li donò 30 doppie.*

[Present author] ... ordered a violoncello which the Duke wanted Antonio to take to him in person so that he might know him by sight, and, in addition to the agreed price, gave him 30 *doppie*.<sup>24</sup>

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“On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1686, Marquis Michele Rodeschini ordered a Viol da Gamba to be sent to King James II of England.”<sup>25</sup>

[Arisi] *Nel 1686, 22 agosto, dal marchese Michele Rodeschini li fù ordinato un violoncello per la corte di Spagna.*

[Present author] In 1686, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, by the Marchese Michele Rodeschini he [Stradivari] was ordered [to make] a cello for the Court of Spain.

The Sacchi/Hart translation is curiously inaccurate.

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In the second edition of *The Violin* George Hart writes:

In the year 1687 [Stradivari] made the set of instruments for the Spanish Court, inlaid with ivory, and having a beautiful scroll work running round the sides and scroll. Arisi evidently refers to this event in the following extract: “On the 19th January, 1687, the Marquis Niccolò Rota ordered a Violoncello for the King of Spain”.<sup>26</sup>

The source of the quoted extract is unclear; the text does not appear in Arisi's document (but surely neither Federico Sacchi nor George Hart would have invented Rota's order for a cello). Marchese Don Niccolò Rota (apparently based in the region of Como, northern Italy) seems to have been an area (or city) representative to the Governor of the Duchy of Milan.

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<sup>19</sup> The patent is dated 25<sup>th</sup> June 1686; see Bonetti *et al.* (1937), p. 72; see also Hill, *Antonio Stradivari: his life and work*, (1902) between p. 244 and p. 245.

<sup>20</sup> Hart adds a footnote: ‘Victor Amadeus II, Duke of Savoy and King of Sardinia, was the Prince for whom Bartolomeo Grandi ordered the concerto of instruments.’

<sup>21</sup> Arisi is here supplementing Stradivari's information with his own knowledge of contemporary events; the Duke of Savoy became King of Sardinia in 1720.

<sup>22</sup> Hart adds: ‘Francesco II D'Este was then twenty-six years of age.’

<sup>23</sup> Hart adds: ‘golden Spanish’; see also Hill (1902), pp. 245-246.

<sup>24</sup> See pp. 11-12 of this account.

<sup>25</sup> Marchese Michele Rodeschini was a witness at the baptism of Giacomo Francesco Stradivari (February 1671).

<sup>26</sup> Hart (1884), p. 181. The King of Spain in 1687 was Carlos II.

Hart appears to have extrapolated an inlaid 'set of instruments for the Spanish Court' from an order for just one (plain?) cello. The Hills dismiss Hart's proposition: '[George] Hart gives the year 1687 as that in which Stradivari made the beautiful set of inlaid instruments for the Spanish Court; but [...] this statement is erroneous.'<sup>27</sup> In Hart's defence, however, is the evidence of the *Spanish/Ole Bull* violin of 1687 which has ivory discs and lozenges set within the double purfling, together with floral arabesques around the ribs and the scroll, and, drawn at the bottom of the rear of the scroll, what might be described as a 'Grecian vase' with bulbous sides which open outwards towards the upper lip (a feature which is also found on the two Palacio Real violins; see p. 16 and p. 32 of this account for further information).

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"On the 7<sup>th</sup> of August of the same year, 1687, the nobleman Don Agostino Daria [Darsa], General-in-Chief of the Spanish Cavalry in Lombardy, while he was residing in Cremona, obtained from [Stradivari] a Violoncello."

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On 19<sup>th</sup> September 1690 Stradivari received a letter from Marchese Bartolomeo Ariberti which related how the latter had presented to the (Medici) Prince of Tuscany 'the two Violins and the Violoncello which you made for me [...] the members of his orchestra [...] were unanimous [...] that they had never heard a Violoncello with such an agreeable tone. For this highly flattering reception [...] I am principally indebted to the care which you have used in the manufacture of the instruments. [...] I have now to request you to begin at once two tenors [violins] – one *Tenor* and the other *Contralto* – which are wanted to complete the concerto.'

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"On the 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1701, Don Antonio Cavezudo, leader of the private orchestra of King Charles II, of Spain<sup>28</sup> wrote a highly complimentary letter to Stradivari from Madrid, assuring him that though he had received bow instruments from several makers, for different courts, yet he had never been able to obtain them of such a refined and beautiful tone as those made by him."

The Sacchi/Hart translation of Arisi's text appears to have been overly edited:

[Arisi] *Nel 1701, 12 Maggio, Lettera da Madrid di Antonio Cavezudo nella quale esprime non aver ricevuto migliori stromenti d'Antonio benchè n'abbia avuto da molte parti, e di questi Stromenti ne hà ricevuto per servizio di tutta la Corte, e di molto Duchi, Principi, e Grandi di Spagna. Questo Sogetto è Maestro della Capella del Rè Carlo II e del presente Duca d'Angio.*

[Present author] 1701, 12<sup>th</sup> May, a letter from Madrid, from Antonio Cavezudo, in which he declares never to have received better instruments [than those] of Antonio (though he has had [instruments] from many [other makers]), and for [Stradivari's] instruments he has had orders from all the Court, and from many Dukes, Princes, and Grandees of Spain. This subject [i.e. Cavezudo] is [was?] Master of the Chapel of King Carlos II and [is now Master of the Chapel?] of the present Duke of Anjou [i.e. Felipe/Philip V of Spain].

With respect to the number of Stradivari instruments in Spain Edward Sainati has written: 'An examination of [Vicente] Assensio's workbook (for the period 1776-92) suggests that about 110 important instruments had entered Spain, among which could be counted 50 Stradivaris, 15 Amatis, six Stainers and two Guarneris.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hill (1902), p. 73. The Hills do not explain why Hart's statement is erroneous.

<sup>28</sup> King Carlos II of Spain died on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1700.

<sup>29</sup> E Sainati, 'The King of Spain Strads', in *The Strad*, December 1993, p. 1189. See later in this account for further information about Vicente Assensio and his workbook.

“In 1715, on the 10<sup>th</sup> June, Giovanni Battista Volème, director of the private orchestra of the King of Poland, arrived in Cremona, by special order of the King, to await the completion of twelve Violins, which had been ordered of Stradivari, and he remained here three months; and when all the instruments were ready he took them with him to Poland.”

Hart adds: ‘Arisi doubtless refers to the Belgian musician Jean Baptiste Volumier who was musical director to Augustus, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, famous as a patron of music and the arts.’ Hart subsequently suggests that the twelve violins were taken to Dresden where Volumier was director of music between 1706 and 1728.

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Lorenzo Zustignan, a Venetian nobleman, wrote (with noticeable politeness) to Stradivari on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1714:

“It is generally known that there is not at the present time in the world a more skilled maker of musical instruments than yourself; and as I wish to preserve a record of such an illustrious man and famous artist, I trouble you with this letter, to ask whether you feel disposed to make me a violin, of the highest quality and finish that you can bestow upon it.”

[Arisi] *Si ha fama non v'esser presentemente nel mondo più perito artefice d'istrumenti manuali del Stradivario di Cremona. Onde è che io Lorenzo Zustignan desideroso di continuar eterna memoria d'un uomo così illustre, d'un autor così celebrato vengo ad incomodarvi con questa mia per vedere se posso esser da voi consolato con un violino ma di tutte le qualità più perfette che si possano immaginare, cioè bello e buono.*

[Present author] It is said that there is no-one presently in the world more skilful in the making of ‘manual’ instruments than Stradivari of Cremona. Therefore I, Lorenzo Zustignan, being desirous to preserve for ever the memory of such an illustrious man, an author [a craftsman] who is so celebrated, come to inconvenience you with this my [request]; to see if it is possible to be comforted by you with a violin which has all the most perfect qualities that can be imagined, thus beautiful and good.

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Arisi's manuscript concludes with:

“From what I have written it can be seen how great is the excellence of Stradivari's art.”<sup>30</sup>

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In the 1884 edition of his book Hart repeats his text of 1875 (see p. 5 of this account) describing Stradivari's aborted presentation of a set of instruments to King Philip V of Spain:

“Stradivari made a complete set of bow instruments, which he intended to present to King Philip V of Spain, on the occasion of the passage of the King through Cremona; and he had prepared a memorial to that effect; but he was dissuaded, and the instruments are still in his possession.”<sup>31</sup>

[Arisi] *Fece Antonio ancor un concerto intiero da presentare a Filippo V in dono quando era in Cremona ed a tale effetto fece il memoriale, ma fù disuaso, li quali conserva ancora presso di sé.*

[Present author] Antonio also made a complete concerto to present to Philip V, as a gift, when he was in Cremona, and to this end he made the memorial, but he was dissuaded, and they [the instruments] are still closely conserved with him.<sup>32</sup>

Hart comments: ‘No date is supplied with regard to the events above named; we are therefore left to assign the period when the presentation was to have taken place by reference to other sources of information.’ Hart cites an ‘official diary of the journey of Philip V to Italy’ for the information that

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<sup>30</sup> All Hart's translated quotations from Arisi's document re-appear in the 1909 edition of Hart's book.

<sup>31</sup> Hart (1884), p. 193.

<sup>32</sup> It is noticeable that Arisi does not specifically indicate that the ‘Philip V’ instruments were decorated; cf. footnote 6.



Philip arrived in Lombardy on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1702 and reached Cremona on 3<sup>rd</sup> July (where he remained for more than two weeks before departing on 20<sup>th</sup> July). Philip returned to Cremona on 3<sup>rd</sup> October but left the next day for Milan. Hart concludes:

It would therefore appear that Stradivari purposed presenting the instruments to Philip either in July or October 1702. The condition of affairs at Cremona at this period apparently serves to explain the cause of Stradivari having been dissuaded from presenting the instruments.<sup>33</sup>

The 'affairs' were likely the military and political issues associated with the War of the Spanish Succession. Given that the war had only just begun, had another twelve years to run, and its eventual outcome unknown, it would have been unwise for Stradivari (both in a personal capacity and as a representative of the town of Cremona) to publicly honour the Spanish king.

The treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (3<sup>rd</sup> April 1559) finally put an end to the 65-year struggle between the French and the Spanish for control of Italy, especially the northern area which is bisected by the river Po; Spain's control of Italy – not entirely negative in its impact – endured for the next 150 years. The start of the War of the Spanish Succession saw France allied with Spain; against them (at least initially) were the Imperial forces of Austria, led by Prince Eugene of Savoy. In 1701 Prince Eugene led the Austrian army across the Alps and into northern Italy where he defeated the French commander Marshal Catinat at the battle of Carpi on 9<sup>th</sup> July. Catinat was replaced by Marshal Villeroi but he, in turn, was also defeated by Prince Eugene, at the battle of Chiari (1<sup>st</sup> September). Suffering from acute shortages of money, men, and provisions, Prince Eugene was forced to alter his strategy in favour of 'lightning strikes' rather than set-piece battles between opposing armies (Eugene's army was significantly out-numbered by the combined forces of France and Spain).

On the night of 31<sup>st</sup> January/1<sup>st</sup> February 1702 Prince Eugene launched a surprise attack against the thousands of French troops stationed in Cremona. The attack ultimately failed (through the late arrival of Austrian reinforcements) but, nonetheless, Eugene captured Marshal Villeroi as well as 500 French soldiers.

In April 1702, King Philip V, aged nineteen – 'being desirous to visit his Italian dominions, and to take part also in the military operations there'<sup>34</sup> – left Spain and sailed to Naples; he arrived in Cremona on 3<sup>rd</sup> July. The Franco-Spanish army was then divided into two; one group kept watch on Eugene's forces which were threatening Mantua; the other group, led by Philip and the Duke of Vendôme, marched east, through Castel Nuovo, Novellara, and Testa, and, on 15<sup>th</sup> August, reached Luzzara; the ensuing battle with Prince Eugene's forces was inconclusive despite its sustained and extreme ferocity. Philip departed from his army on 2<sup>nd</sup> October and, via Cremona and Milan, returned to Madrid. 'The latter part of the campaign in Italy, like the beginning of it, was not marked by any event of a decisive character.'<sup>35</sup> Prince Eugene returned to Vienna in January 1703. At the end of the War, the Duchy of Milan (which included Cremona) was ceded to Austria in the Treaties of Utrecht (1713) and Rastatt (1714).

Perhaps Spanish concerns for the safety of Philip V while he was in Italy meant that news of his forthcoming arrival in Cremona was received by the town authorities only shortly before 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1702. Antonio Stradivari, having learned of the visit too late to make five new instruments (which, in any case, could never have been varnished in time), likely selected five unsold decorated instruments

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<sup>33</sup> Hart (1884), p. 205.

<sup>34</sup> Editorial commentary, written by General The Right Honourable Sir George Murray, in *Letters and Dispatches of John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough*, John Murray, London (1845), Vol. I, p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

from his storeroom<sup>36</sup> – instruments which were already double-purpled (with discs and lozenges inserted inbetween), were already decorated with a rib design, and were already varnished and dated – removed the instruments' top plates and glued mini-labels displaying '1702' on top of the original date-numerals.<sup>37</sup> Stradivari would surely not have risked presenting to the Spanish king a set of instruments which included a contralto viola which was originally label-dated '1696' (as it is today) and a cello which was originally label-dated '1694' (ditto); such an obvious indication that the two instruments had not been made specifically for Philip V's visit – indeed, had been made years before Philip was even created King of Spain – would have been an unforgivable *faux pas*. It is unlikely that anyone in Philip V's entourage would have been aware of the stylistic/constructional changes effected by Stradivari at the turn of the century; there was little likelihood that label-dates of '1702' might be challenged when considered against the physical style of the instruments. In the event, Philip V passed through Cremona, in both directions, without seeing Stradivari's instruments.

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A set of decorated instruments was still in the Cremona workshop when Antonio Stradivari died in 1737, and still in the workshop long after his two eldest sons, Francesco and Omobono, had also died (1743 and 1742 respectively). In 1772 only Paolo Stradivari (the youngest son by Antonio's second marriage) remained, together with Paolo's own son, Antonio (II) Stradivari. In April of that year five decorated instruments – 'with ornamentation on the back, front, and blocks, in ivory, and the ribs inlaid in ebony' – were purchased from Paolo Stradivari by Francesco Brambilla, 'a Cremonese citizen'. Four months later, in August 1772, Francesco Brambilla obliged Paolo to sign a legal declaration – a *charta declarationis* – that all five instruments (as well as two further violins which had been added to the April transaction) were made only by Antonio Stradivari or by Francesco Stradivari and not by any other maker.

Elia Santoro transcribes the lengthy text of Paolo's legal declaration, dated 8<sup>th</sup> August 1772, from which the following text is extracted:<sup>38</sup>

*... il signor Paolo Stradivari, publico negoziante di drappi d'oro, d'argento e di seta, panni ed altro, figlio del fu signor Antonio della vicinia maggiore di questa città di Cremona, spontaneamente etc., ad interrogazione ed istanza del signor Francesco Brambilla cittadino cremonese [...] esso signor Paolo Stradivario non ha mai fatta mercanzia di altra sorte d'instromenti se non di quelli che sono stati lavorati di propria mano dal detto fu signor Antonio di lui padre, e dal fu signor Francesco Stradivari di lui fratello, delli quali è stao unico erede; che il concerto consistente in due violini, due viole ed un violoncello di tutta perfezione ed armonia, con ornamento nel fondo, coperchio e toppe d'avorio e le fascie intarsiate d'ebano, con sue casse di conserva, stato comprato dal signor Francesco Brambilla, unitamente ad altri due violini al di più di detto concerto, a nome del molto reverendo padre Giovanni Domenico Brambilla di lui fratello, abitante nella città di Madrid, da esso signor Paolo Stradivari fatto riporre in due casse da viaggio, e per mandato a Piacenza il giorno 15 Aprile prossimo passato allo spedizionere signor Michel Angelo Tabarino, con ordine di spedirlo a Genova, e da Genova a Madrid al detto padre Brambilla, è stato lavorato e perfezionato di propria mano dal detto fu signor Antonio di lui padre, ed è quel medesimo concerto che è stato veduto e provato da tanti professori, cavaglieri, e persone grandi e del quale ha sempre pretteso il prezzo di doppie centoventi di Spagna, come possono fare testimonianza diversi professori e cavaglieri anche abitanti in Cremona, che hanno avuto commissione di comprarlo.*

<sup>36</sup> Stradivari had already made at least four decorated violins: 1677 *Sunrise*, 1679 *Hellier*, 1683 *Cipriani Potter*, and 1687 *Spanish/Ole Bull*, together with the 1694 cello and the 1696 viola which are now in Madrid.

<sup>37</sup> See p. 21 of this account for the 'mini-label' evidence found on the original label of the Palacio Real decorated cello.

<sup>38</sup> Elia Santoro, *Traffici e falsificazione dei violini di Antonio Stradivari*, Cremona (1973), p. 24.

*Ha pure protestato e dichiarato come suo giuramento, come sopra protesta e dichiara, che li sudetti due violini al di più del detto concerto stati da esso spediti come sopra, sono stati fatti di propria mano, uno cioè dal suddetto fu signor Antonio e l'altro dal suddetto fu signor Francesco Stradivari di lui rispettivi padre e fratello, e non da altro artefice, e così ha detto e dice, protestato e protesta in ogni miglior modo [...].*

[...] signor Paolo Stradivari, retail merchant in gold and silver cloth, silk, woollen cloth, and other types, son of the late signor Antonio, of the central parish of this city of Cremona, freely [responds?] to the interrogation and petition of signor Francesco Brambilla, Cremonese citizen<sup>39</sup> [...] this signor Paolo Stradivari has never sold any instruments other than those personally made by the late signor Antonio his father and by the late signor Francesco Stradivari his brother – Paolo being the sole heir of these two persons. The ‘concerto’ consisted of two violins, two violas, and a cello [*ed un violoncello*] all of perfect and harmonious manufacture, with ornamentation on the back, front, and blocks, in ivory, and the ribs inlaid in ebony, with protective cases, everything being bought by Francesco Brambilla – and also two further violins (in addition to those of the concerto) – all bought on behalf of the Most Reverend Father Giovanni Domenico Brambilla (brother of Francesco) who lives in the city of Madrid. Signor Paolo Stradivari packed everything in two heavy-duty trunks and consigned them to Piacenza on 15<sup>th</sup> April last, to the care of Michel Angelo Tabarino, who was ordered to forward the trunks to Genoa, and from Genoa to Madrid, to the aforementioned Father Brambilla, this perfect work [i.e. the instruments] being truly from the hand of the aforementioned late signor Antonio, his father [i.e. Paolo's father], and it is this person's concerto that has been seen and confirmed by so many professors, ‘gentlemen’, and grand persons, and which has always been priced at 120 *doppie* of Spain, as can be found in the testimony of various professors and gentlemen, also living in Cremona, who have been commissioned [by persons unknown] to buy [the concerto].

[Paolo Stradivari] also protests and declares his guarantee (as with the guarantee stated above) that the aforementioned two violins [those that were additional to the ‘concerto’] were sent as described above, and personally made – one by the late Antonio, the other by the late Francesco, respectively father and brother [to Paolo] – and [these two violins] were not made by any other maker, and this [Paolo] has said, protested, and declared in the most certain manner.<sup>40</sup>

Paolo's declaration was witnessed by Giovanni Giacomo Dalla Noce, a merchant, and by Giovanni Battista Poli (1694-1776), ‘professor of violin and Master of the Chapel in Cremona’. Poli's own declaration confirms every element of Paolo's account. In addition:

He [Poli] states to have complete knowledge of this concerto since he has seen it in Antonio's workshop and he was present when a certain Monsieur Peglion della Faré, from Avignon [France], who served as a colonel in the troops of His Catholic Majesty in the war of 1733 [the War of the Polish Succession], tried to buy the concerto of this signor Antonio Stradivari but was not able to complete the negotiation because the aforementioned Signor Antonio, having been offered 300 *zecchini*, would not sell it for less than 120 French or Spanish *doppie*.<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, 120 *doppie* was a much greater quantity of money than even the 300 *zecchini* (a.k.a. *giliati*) offered by Monsieur Peglion della Faré; quite simply, while Antonio Stradivari was alive, no-one would be allowed to buy the decorated set of instruments for less than 120 *doppie*. Stradivari was approximately 84 years of age in 1733; for him, at that great age, to adopt a non-negotiable position with regard to the price says much about the importance which he still attached to his decorated

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<sup>39</sup> Further identification of Francesco Brambilla has not been located. It is noticeable that Brambilla's name does not appear in Vincenzo Lancetti's *Biografia Cremonese, ossia Dizionario Storico*. The second volume of Lancetti's biographical dictionary, which listed Cremonese citizens whose family names began with the letter B, was published in 1820.

<sup>40</sup> Translation by the present author. Note that Paolo does not indicate that the decorated instruments were those which had originally been intended for Philip V (but note also that Paolo was not born until 1708).

<sup>41</sup> It would seem that this attempted purchase must have taken place between 1733 and 1737.

quintet. The Italian term *doppia* refers to the Spanish *doblón* which was a gold coin with a value equivalent to 60 Spanish *reales de vellón*.<sup>42</sup> Thus Stradivari's price for the quintet – 120 *doppie* – was equivalent to 7,200 *reales*.

The website of Madrid's Palacio Real states that it was King Carlos III of Spain (reigned 1759-1788) who commissioned 'Padre Brambilla' to acquire a five-piece set of instruments for the King's son (i.e. Prince Carlos, the future King Carlos IV) 'on his trip [Padre Brambilla's trip] to Cremona',<sup>43</sup> but the evidence of Paolo's *charta declarationis* suggests that Brambilla sub-contracted his commission to his brother, Francesco. It would appear that all seven instruments bought by Francesco in April 1772 were safely delivered to his brother, in Madrid, since a document within the archives of the Royal Palace, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1772, indicates a payment by the Treasury of 7,500 *reales de vellón* to Padre Brambilla for a quintet of Stradivari instruments:<sup>44</sup>

*Año de 1772*

*Data para la cuenta de la Tesorería del Príncipe Nuestro Señor*

*Clase de [gastos] extraordinarios*

*Entrada n.º 36: Coste de 5 instrumentos músicos para S.A.*

*En 23 del mismo mes de junio se libraron al Padre Branvila que asiste al Hospital general de esta Corte 7500 reales de vellón que han tenido de coste dos violines, dos violas y un violón con sus cajas correspondientes, su autor Antonio Estradivaro [sic], hechos en el año de 1709, que han venido de Cremona para el servicio de S.A.*<sup>45</sup>

In the year 1772

Information from the account at the Treasury of our Prince [Carlos]

Category: extraordinary expenses

Entry no. 36: cost of 5 musical instruments for His Highness

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the same month of June was issued to Father Branvila [Brambilla], who attends at the general Hospital of this Court, 7,500 *reales de vellón* that have been the cost of two violins, two violas, and a double-bass[?]<sup>46</sup> with their corresponding cases, their author [maker] Antonio Stradivari, made in the year 1709, that have been brought from Cremona for the service of His Highness.

A further payment document exists within the Royal Palace archives, a document which is signed on the reverse by 'P[adre?] Juan Domingo Brambilla' to indicate receipt of 7,500 *reales*.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See *Diccionario de la lengua castellana*, Real Academia, Madrid, 3rd ed., 1791, p. 343.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.patrimonionacional.es/coleccion-reales/coleccion-instrumentos-musicales/cuarteto-palatino-o-cuarteto-decorado> (accessed July 2017). The archival location of such a document of commission is unknown, and for a King to commission a priest to buy instruments for the Royal Court seems a curious strategy (notwithstanding the presence in Cremona of the priest's brother). By comparison, 'Carlos III' of Barcelona sent his 1707 order to Stradivari through a nobleman – Marchese Desiderio Cleri.

<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the payment included 300 *reales* in recognition of the efforts made by the Brambilla brothers.

<sup>45</sup> AGP [Archivo General de Palacio], Reinados, Carlos IV Príncipe, leg. 12<sup>1</sup>, Exp. 13 (Pliegos de data de la Tesorería (1772)). The original Spanish text has been modernised with respect to spellings, and the frequent abbreviations have been expanded. The payment document which is identified by C Bordas Ibáñez ('The Stradivari of the Royal Palace in Madrid', in *Antonio Stradivari: l'estetica sublime*, Cremona (2011), p. 102) is presented in that publication in Italian and in English; the original Spanish text is not provided; in addition, there is no identification of the document's archival identity and/or location. In the otherwise identical article written by C Bordas Ibáñez for the 2002 publication *The Decorated Instruments of Antonio Stradivari* (photographs by Shinichi Yokoyama, Nihon Art Plaza, Tokyo, pp. 166-171) – 'The Stradivari of the Royal Palace in Madrid' – the archival location of the document is specified as 'Archivo General del Palacio Real (AGPR), Sección Carlos IV Príncipe, Leg. 12.'

<sup>46</sup> Paolo Stradivari's *charta declarationis* unambiguously identifies a *violoncello*, as does Antonio (II) Stradivari in his letter of 1776 (see later in this account).

<sup>47</sup> AGP, Reinados, Carlos IV, Príncipe, leg. 6<sup>2</sup>, Exp. 2 (Cuarto del Príncipe don Carlos y los Infantes Gabriel, Antonio Pascual, y Francisco Javier. Cuentas. Gastos extraordinarios (1772)).

If the decision to buy a set of Stradivari decorated instruments was made by King Carlos III, and if that decision was made because it was believed that the set in Cremona was that which, in 1702, had been intended for a previous king of Spain (i.e. Philip V, the father of Carlos III), and if a set of five Stradivari decorated instruments arrived in Madrid in June 1772 it would be understandable if initial excitement with the instruments themselves was quickly followed by questions and suspicion with regard to the instruments' '1709' label-dates. Perhaps it was as a result of these concerns that Padre Brambilla was instructed to urgently secure, via his brother in Cremona, a *charta declarationis* from Paolo Stradivari. The necessity for Paolo to employ an expensive Cremonese notary to draw up a lengthy and detailed declaration in the presence of two independent and authoritative witnesses is perhaps indicative of the level of doubt in Madrid.

If the five decorated instruments had been re-dated '1702' by Stradivari (see p. 10 of this account) what benefit could have accrued to him if, after the departure of King Philip V from Cremona, he had opened up the instruments for a second time and glued yet another mini-label on top of the previous (or replaced the previous) thus re-dating them all as '1709'? It seems more likely that when Antonio died in 1737 his five cherished instruments were still label-dated as they had been in the days just prior to the arrival in Cremona of Philip V (and as they still were on the date between 1733 and 1737 when M. Peglion della Faré came calling). It is implausible that either of Antonio's sons, Francesco and Omobono, would have re-dated the labels from '1702' to '1709' – again, to what end? – and even more implausible that Paolo, a cloth merchant, would have done so post-1743 (i.e. after Francesco's death). It is clear that the five Stradivari instruments which were delivered to the Palacio Real were dated '1709' but perhaps they were not so dated when they arrived (a few weeks earlier?) at Padre Brambilla's house in Madrid.

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The content of Paolo Stradivari's *charta declarationis* is confirmed in a letter written on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1776 by Antonio (II) Stradivari (whose father, Paolo, had died the previous October). Antonio's letter is in response to a letter, now lost, sent to him on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1775 but only arriving in Cremona on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1776; the writer of the 7<sup>th</sup> December letter is not identified within Antonio's reply but, almost certainly, it was Giovanni Michele Anselmi (acting as the intermediary for Il Conte Ignazio Alessandro Cozio di Salabue who, in 1775 – and at just 20 years of age – had completed the purchase of twelve 'left-over' violins from the Stradivari workshop).

The text of Antonio's 16<sup>th</sup> January 1776 letter is:

*Carissimo amico,*

*In riscontro alla cara vostra il di 7 dicembre anno scorso, rice[v]uta solo il giorno 6 genaro anno corrente, vi dico che il concerto che è in Spagna è l'apres[s]o il padre Brambilla vendutogli l'anno 1772, quale consiste in uno violoncello, due viole, due violini lavorati a tutta politezza e perfezione con le loro casse di conserva, e più due altri violini, in tutto d'acordo zechini giliati cento venti quattro, e di spesa di imbalagi a giliati cinque, che formano in tutto giliati cento venti cinque, e se li posse averli al istesso prezzo averò piacere che così averete un bello concerto. Le casse son tutte fodrate di fuori di vitello rosso con sue manette e serature d'otone e di dentro fodrate di mocagliata [...].*

*1776 a 16 genaro, Cremona*

*Vostro servo*

*Antonio Stradivari*<sup>48</sup>

Dearest friend,

<sup>48</sup> *Carteggio* (Count Cozio di Salabue), ed. R. Bacchetta; A. Cordani, Milano (1950), pp. 371-372. See also Elia Santoro (1973), pp. 27-28.

Replying to your much-valued [letter] of 7<sup>th</sup> December last year [1775], received only on 6<sup>th</sup> January of this year [1776], I say that the concerto that is in Spain is owned by Father Brambilla, sold [to him] in 1772, and it consists of one cello, two violas, and two violins, made with the greatest skill and perfection, with their protective cases; in addition, two other violins. The agreed price for all the instruments was 124 *zecchini giliati*, with another 5 *giliati* for the cost of the packing, giving a grand total of 125 [129] *giliati*, and if you are able to obtain them for this same price I would be very pleased, for you would then have a beautiful set of instruments. The protective cases are all covered with red leather, with their handles and locks made of brass, and the insides covered in 'mocagliata' [...].

1776, 16<sup>th</sup> January, Cremona

Your servant

Antonio [II] Stradivari<sup>49</sup>

Antonio (II) Stradivari was born in 1738 and therefore was 34 years of age in 1772. There is every reason to suppose that he was present at the negotiations between his father (aged 64) and Francesco Brambilla, and therefore his specification of 124 *zecchini/giliati* is surely entirely trustworthy. If the 300 *giliati* offered by M. della Faré could not buy Stradivari's decorated quintet then 124 *giliati* – for the quintet plus two additional violins – was a 'bargain-basement' price.

Antonio (II) evidently believed that all the instruments were owned by 'Father Brambilla', in Madrid, hence his advice that an offer to buy, at the same price as had been paid four years earlier, might well be successful. Antonio does not associate Brambilla with the Royal Court at Madrid. If Antonio (II) had known that the instruments were with Prince Carlos, he would surely have advised that the instruments were not available; why would the Royal Court of Spain consider selling some of their instruments?

An annotation, in Count Cozio's handwriting, is added to Antonio's letter:

*1772 a 10 aprile venduto al signor Francesco Brambilla, deve dare a Pavolo Stradivari per spedire in Spagna al Padre Brambilla vendutoli.*<sup>50</sup>

1772, 10<sup>th</sup> April; sold to Francesco Brambilla [of Cremona]; he must pay Paolo Stradivari for shipment [of the instruments] to Spain, to Padre Brambilla [of Madrid]; sold to him.

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The Hill brothers provide a slightly inaccurate summary of the historical chronology:

[The concerto] consisted of two violins, two violas (one a "tenore"), and a violoncello. They were still in Stradivari's possession at his death in 1737, and then passed to his son Francesco, who, dying in 1742 [1743], left them to his [half-] brother Paolo, by whom they were sold in the year 1775 [1772] to a priest of the name of Padre Brambilla, for the sum of 125 *giliati*.<sup>51</sup> Padre Brambilla took them to Madrid, and there disposed of them to the Spanish Monarch [King Carlos III of Spain], thus possibly fulfilling the maker's original intention with regard to their destination.<sup>52</sup>

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In light of the uncertainty which flows from the (apparent) non-existence of any document of commission issued by King Carlos III the present author proposes the following alternative narrative:

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<sup>49</sup> Translation by the present author.

<sup>50</sup> *Carteggio* (Cozio/Bacchetta), p. 372, footnote 4.

<sup>51</sup> The Hills add a footnote: 'Two additional violins were included in this transaction.'

<sup>52</sup> Hill (1902), p. 75. The Hills add a footnote: 'We say "possibly" because we have no conclusive proof of the fact. We believe, however, that this concerto of instruments is the identical set that Stradivari wished to present to King Philip.'

1. Padre Brambilla, in Madrid, observing how musical performance within the court of Prince Carlos has become an activity of ever-increasing importance (and an activity which is centred upon the instruments of the violin family) writes – on his own initiative – to his brother, Francesco, in Cremona, suggesting that Francesco should enquire of Paolo Stradivari whether any Antonio Stradivari instruments are still available.

2. Francesco learns from Paolo that there are approximately fifteen violins in the storeroom<sup>53</sup> together with a decorated quintet of instruments. Francesco reports back to his brother that, despite it being widely known that Antonio Stradivari's price for the quintet was always a non-negotiable 120 *doppie*, Paolo (35 years after Antonio's death) is now willing to sell the quintet for 100 *zecchini/giliati*.<sup>54</sup>

3. April 1772. On the instruction of Padre Brambilla, Francesco buys the quintet and also buys two additional (undecorated?) violins;<sup>55</sup> the price for the seven instruments is 124 *giliati*. Francesco pays a further 5 *giliati* for the instruments to be sent to his brother in Madrid; the total cost is 129 *giliati*.

4. Padre Brambilla receives the instruments (in June 1772?) and offers the quintet to the Spanish Court; on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1772 the Palace Treasury pays out 7,500 *reales de vellón* for the five instruments. There is (apparently) no known archival document which identifies receipt of the two additional violins nor a document which identifies a payment made for them.

5. The problematic label-date of '1709' inside each of the five decorated instruments prompts the officials in Madrid to order Padre Brambilla to secure, from Paolo Stradivari, a *charta declarationis*. It is assumed that Paolo's Cremonese notary made two copies of the 8<sup>th</sup> August 1772 *charta* – one copy for Paolo and the other for Francesco who surely would have immediately sent his copy to his brother in Madrid, who, in turn, would have passed it to the Spanish Royal Court (?at the end of August 1772). From Francesco's copy of the *charta* the Palace officials would have learned that:

a) although there are repeated assurances that the five decorated instruments were made either by Antonio Stradivari or by his son, Francesco, there is no indication that they were those which had originally been intended for King Philip V in 1702, nor any indication of the instruments' label-dates.

b) the only price mentioned within the *charta* is that which is for all five decorated instruments, i.e. 120 Spanish *doppie* (this price confirming the correctness of the payment of 7,500 *reales* which the Royal Court Treasury made to Padre Brambilla on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1772).

As far as is known, a copy of the *charta declarationis* (i.e. Francesco Brambilla's copy, as proposed above) has not been located within the Royal archives in Madrid.

6. If, in June 1772, the Palace officials were unaware of Francesco Brambilla's purchase of the two additional violins this deficiency would have been rectified once the *charta* was received. The (apparent) lack of archival documentation for these two violins suggests that they were never offered to the Court. Perhaps Padre Brambilla kept them for himself and sold them when convenient; perhaps 'Herr Rorats' was a purchaser (see p. 33 of this account).

7. The actual price paid by Francesco Brambilla (129 *giliati*) is identified only in the letter written by Antonio (II) Stradivari in 1776; the officials in Madrid, in 1772, would have known nothing of this 'bargain-basement' price.

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<sup>53</sup> Twelve of these violin would be bought by Il Conte Cozio di Salabue in 1775.

<sup>54</sup> Paolo was possibly valuing the five instruments as 15+15 *giliati* (the violins), 20+20 (the violas), and 30 (the cello).

<sup>55</sup> 12+12 *giliati*?

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Brambilla brothers deceived the Royal Court in Madrid with respect to the price paid for Stradivari's decorated quintet.

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### **Antonio Stradivari's decorated instruments at the Palacio Real, Madrid**

The two Antonio Stradivari decorated **violins** at the Palacio Real in Madrid are of differing size and proportion; the smaller violin is designated *chico*, the larger *grande*. Calliper measurements (back plate) are:

*Chico*: Body length is 351.5mm; the bout widths are 160.3mm (upper), 103mm (middle), 199.5mm (lower).

*Grande*: Body length is 353mm; the bout widths are 166.5mm (upper), 108.5mm (middle), 206mm (lower).<sup>56</sup>

Each violin has a one-piece front plate (with pronounced arching) and a one-piece back plate. The back-plate flames on both violins rise gently from left to right. Each violin has double purfling on the front and back plates, with, in the space between the purflings, a continuous sequence of tiny ivory discs and lozenges inserted into a bed of resinous black shellac. At each of the eight C-bout corners the first ivory insert is always a disc. Both violins have the same decorative design around the ribs, comprising dogs (perhaps greyhounds, or hunting dogs) alternating with large birds with outstretched wings (perhaps eagles), surrounded by floral arabesques; the arabesques are continued on the peg-box and the scroll. On both violins, at the rear of the scroll, at the bottom, is a drawing of the aforementioned 'Grecian vase' (see p. 7 of this account); the same vase appears on the *Sunrise*, the *Hellier*, and the *Spanish/Ole Bull* violins (see p. 30 *et seq.*).

The rib design is more complex and, indeed, more cluttered than that which is found on the *Sunrise*, *Hellier*, *Cipriani Potter* and *Spanish/Ole Bull* violins. The dog-and-eagle design is also found on Stradivari's *Greffulhe* violin (see p. 33).<sup>57</sup>

The two violins have the same label-text:

Antonius Stradiuarius Cremonensis  
Faciebat Anno 1709<sup>58</sup>

Cristina Bordas Ibáñez reports (2001, p. 165) that the hand-drawn 709 numerals on the label inside the large violin are partially framed by a right-angled black line, the line running horizontally above the 709 numerals and then descending vertically to the right of the numeral 9. It seems that no such line can be observed on the label of the small violin.<sup>59</sup>

The Hill brothers write of these two violins:

Possibly Stradivari did make a whole concerto in 1696, but afterwards disposed of the two violins, replacing them at a later date. The fact, however, of the varnish of these examples being yellow and their general character much more in accordance with that of his pre-1700 work [...].<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> S Yokoyama, *The Decorated Instruments of Antonio Stradivari* (2002).

<sup>57</sup> Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, USA, catalogue no. 2000.0013.01. For high-quality photographs of the *Greffulhe* violin see Jost Thöne, *Antonius Stradiuarius*, (2010), Vol. III, pp. 4-11.

<sup>58</sup> C Bordas Ibáñez, *Instrumentos Musicales en Colecciones Españolas*, (2001), Vol. II, pp. 165 and 166.

<sup>59</sup> Official photographs of the labels within the two violins and the viola are apparently not available to researchers.

<sup>60</sup> Hill (1902), pp. 78-79. See p. 22 of this account for a complete presentation of the Hills' commentary.



From the evidence of the violins as displayed at the Palacio Real, and the photographic evidence within the *Antonio Stradivari: l'estetica sublime* publication (Cremona, 2011) it is difficult to understand how the varnish colour of the two violins could be described as 'yellow'; 'golden brown' would seem much more appropriate. It is regrettable that the Hills do not provide more specific information about the 'general character' of the two Madrid violins, i.e. descriptive and stylistic information which could help to locate the creation of the violins within the final decade of the seventeenth century rather than within the first decade of the eighteenth century.

Both violins were restored by W. E. Hill & Sons, in London, in 1899.

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The decorated **contralto viola** of the Palacio Real quartet (with a one-piece back plate but a two-piece front plate) also has double purfling on both plates, with inlaid discs and lozenges; the floral rib decoration features storks and hares. According to Edward Sainati the decorations were created using 'Chinese ink'.<sup>61</sup>

George Hart (1839-1891) writes: 'The viola belonging to this [Palacio Real] quatuor has lost its ivory work, a blemish which is to be regretted, destroying as it does the completeness of the set.'<sup>62</sup> Hart does not explain how or when he was able to see the viola of the 'quatuor', and, indeed, see the other three instruments as well (for comparison against the viola), but, clearly, his inspection must have taken place before the publication of his book in 1875. If the viola had lost its ivory discs and lozenges then someone subsequently fitted a new set (see below) since the viola, as now exhibited at the Palacio Real in Madrid, has a full front and back complement (which look noticeably cleaner and brighter than those on the two violins).

According to the Hills:

The inlaid tenor [the surviving Palacio Real 'contralto' viola] [...] exhibits a masterly combination of choice material, appropriate ornamentation, and refined style. The figure of the maple used for back, sides, and head is charming, and homogenous throughout; the beauty of the slender and wavy curls being shown up by the delicate golden varnish of perfect transparency and lightness of texture. The freshness of this instrument's appearance and its state of preservation are extraordinary; the sound-holes and head convey the impression of their having been wrought but yesterday; even the black lines with which Stradivari outlined the curves of the head are unworn, and the original neck remains.<sup>63</sup>

Cristina Bordas Ibáñez states that there is an annotation, hand-written in ink, on the underside of the viola's front plate:

Restored to its pristine condition by us in 1891. W. E. Hill & Sons  
This Stradivarius viola was bought from Koleker of Paris by J. V. Rivaz Esq. in 1819, sold by him to W. Curtis in 1825 for £125 [GBP].<sup>64</sup> The ivory inlaying was removed and replaced by wood in June 1823, probably executed by Dodd or Betts. This act of vandalism was no doubt instigated by the owner [i.e. Rivaz]. After various ownerships it became the property of John Adam Esq. At the dispersal of his fine collection it again crossed 'La Manche' and was purchased by the Duc de

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<sup>61</sup> Sainati (*op. cit.*), p. 1189. Other commentators specify 'India ink'.

<sup>62</sup> Hart (1875), p. 129.

<sup>63</sup> Hill (1902), p. 101. The present author's inspection (October 2016) of the four decorated instruments at the Palacio Real – the instruments displayed within their glass cabinets – revealed that much of the black-paint edging of the viola's scroll has now disappeared.

<sup>64</sup> Jean-Gabriel Koliker was a violin dealer who was active in Paris between c.1780 and 1820; Vincent Francis Rivaz (1766-1834) was a wealthy merchant in London; Sir William Curtis (1752-1829) was an English businessman, banker, and politician.

Camposelice for £800. At his death [1887] and consequent dispersal of the collection to W. E. Hill & Sons [1891] it again returned to London and passed into the hands of C. Oldham Esq. of Brighton, 1891.<sup>65</sup>

The very precise date supplied by the Hills for the removal of the ivory discs and lozenges – June 1823 – provides chronological support for George Hart's comment about the viola having 'lost its ivory work'. A convincing reason which would justify the removal of the viola's ivory inlay is difficult to formulate; did Rivaz genuinely believe that the viola would look better without the inlays? The Hills' 1891 restoration of the viola – 'to its pristine condition' – evidently included the removal of the purfling's central wooden 'filler' on both the front and back plates and the insertion of a new set of ivory discs and lozenges. This would explain their cleaner and brighter appearance when compared to the equivalents on the two violins (those ivories being approximately 200 years older).

In their 1902 *Stradivari* monograph the Hills provide a commentary which reiterates the viola's existence 'in the market' in 1819 and its label-date:

1819. A viola dated 1696, purchased by Mr. F. V. Rivaz in 1819 from Koliker, of Paris, passed in 1825 into the hands of Sir William Curtis for £120. In 1876 this instrument was purchased by Mr. John Adam; and at the dispersal of his fine collection in 1881 it was sold to the Duc de Camposelice for £800. We purchased it in 1891 for £900.<sup>66</sup>

On Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1827 the eleven Cremonese instruments owned by Sir William Curtis were auctioned in London: one violin, three violas, and seven celli, made variously by members of the Amati family, by Antonio Stradivari, and by 'Joseph & Andrew Guanarius' [*sic*]. The Stradivari viola was described in the auction catalogue as:

Lot VI. A Tenor [viola] by "Antonius Straduarius [*sic*], Cremonensis faciebat, Anno 1696 ATS". The beauty and high state of preservation of this Instrument, constitute it as one of the most valuable specimens of this celebrated Artist's work; its Tone may be rivalled, but cannot be surpassed.

According to William Sandys and Simon Andrew Forster the viola 'was put up at 150 guineas, but no offer was made for it.'<sup>67</sup> The auction catalogue's reference to 'ATS' is simply a misunderstanding of the Stradivari monogram wherein the letters A and S are separated by a religious cross.

To clarify the chronology for the Palacio Real decorated viola:

- 1819 The '1696' viola is owned by Jean-Gabriel Koliker, in Paris; Koliker obtained the viola from person or persons unknown (but see p. 28 *et seq.* of this account).
- 1819 Koliker sells the viola to Vincent Francis Rivaz.
- 1823 Rivaz has the ivory discs and lozenges removed and replaced with a wooden 'filler'.
- 1825 Rivaz sells the viola to Sir William Curtis.
- 1827 The viola is put up for auction but is not sold.
- 1829 Sir Curtis dies; the subsequent location of the viola is unknown.
- 1876 The viola is bought by John Adam (from?)
- 1881 Some of Adam's instruments, including the decorated viola, are sold to David Laurie; the viola is bought from Laurie by the Duc de Camposelice.

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<sup>65</sup> C Bordas Ibáñez (2001), p. 20. Bordas's information is sourced from the report written by the French luthier Etienne Vatelot, who restored the four Royal Palace Stradivari instruments during 1989 and 1990. Despite enquiries being made at the Palace it proved impossible to gain access to this report.

<sup>66</sup> Hill (1902), p. 269.

<sup>67</sup> William Sandys and Simon Andrew Forster, *The History of the Violin, and other instruments played on with the bow from the remotest times to the present*, John Russell Smith, London (1864), p. 229.

1891 W. E. Hill & Sons purchase the viola from the estate of the Duc de Camposelice.

The decorated viola is described within Charles Gand's *Catalogue descriptif des Instruments de Stradivarius et J. Guarnerius* (p. 104). Gand's 1882 text confirms the viola's label-date of 1696:

*M<sup>e</sup> le Duc de Campo Selice, Paris  
(1882) Alto Stradivarius, Amatisé, 15p. 3l., année 1696  
Fond d'une pièce ondes moyennes descendant un peu à droite. Eclisses (hauteur 16 et 17 lignes)  
ondes plus vives, avec rinceaux peints en noir. Table de 2 pièces, sapin très fin avec deux côtes  
visibles dans toute la longueur de chaque côté. Diapason du cran des f au bord, 8 pouces 2 lignes.  
Double filet à la table et au fond. Très-belle tête. Vernis jaune doré. Très-bien conservé.  
ex Adams, 30,000.*

M. le Duc de Campo Selice, Paris  
(1882) Antonio Stradivari viola, *Amatisé*, 15 pouces 3 lignes [412.8mm],<sup>68</sup> 1696  
The back plate is in one piece, medium [-width] flames, descending slightly to the right. The height of the ribs is 16 and 17 *lignes*;<sup>69</sup> the [rib] flames are brighter [than on the back plate], with floral designs painted in black. The front plate is made from two pieces, the spruce [growth-rings] are very narrow, with two [darker-coloured] 'strips' visible along the length of each half-width. The diapason – from the notches of the *f*-holes to the [upper] edge [of the plate] – is 8 *pouces* 2 *lignes* [221mm]. Double purflings on the front and back plates. Very beautiful head. The varnish is golden yellow. Very well conserved.  
ex [John] Adam, 30,000 [*French francs*].

Gand's specification of a 'golden yellow' varnish on the viola seems not to match the current golden-brown colour (albeit a colour which is slightly paler than that found on the two violins).

Clearly, in 1882 (when Gand wrote his description), the viola still had the wooden 'filler' within the purfling on both plates; Gand evidently knew nothing about the viola previously having been embellished with ivory discs and lozenges. Equally, Gand had apparently not seen the other decorated instruments; if he had he would surely have realised that the viola's discs and lozenges were missing, and would surely have noted this loss in his descriptive text. Curiously, Gand makes no mention of the storks and hares within the rib decoration, just the floral designs (and makes no reference to the Spanish Royal Court).

According to the Tarisio.com website (Cozio Archive ID 40261) the post-1891 history of the viola is:

1891 sold by W. E. Hill & Sons to Charles James Oldham  
???? Baron Johann Knoop  
1913 sold by W. E. Hill & Sons to Richard Bennett  
[1919 the viola is restored, again, by the Hills]<sup>70</sup>  
1925 sold by W. E. Hill & Sons (the name of the purchaser is not indicated)  
2002 Royal Palace in Madrid.

Edward Sainati comments:

In 1926 the Spanish king, Alfonso XIII [reigned 1886-1931] saw the viola in London at Hill's and began to negotiate for its return. The Spanish Consul, Juan Tornos, also intervened; yet it was not until 1945, during the Franco era, that the viola reappeared in the Spanish capital.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> C Bordas Ibáñez (2001), p. 171, specifies the body length of the viola as 414mm.

<sup>69</sup> 36.1mm at the neck foot, and 38.4mm at the tail-piece end pin.

<sup>70</sup> C Bordas Ibáñez (2011), p. 102.

<sup>71</sup> Sainati, p. 1191.

The historical information – that the Hills sold the viola in 1925 yet the instrument was at the Hills' New Bond Street shop in 1926 when King Alfonso XIII of Spain visited – seems unlikely. Cristina Bordas Ibáñez identifies the 'many years of negotiations' which were needed before the viola – 'restored to its pristine condition' – returned to Madrid in 1951 (cf. Sainati's '1945') to create the Stradivari Quartet at the Palacio Real. The date of 1951 is clearly implied in an anonymous article which appeared in *The Strad* in June 1951: 'The "Spanish" Inlaid Stradivari Viola'. The article begins with:

An event unique in the history of the violin took place on May 4 at the Spanish Embassy [in London] when the Spanish Ambassador, the Duke of Primo de Rivera took delivery from Mr. A. Phillips Hill, senior partner of Messrs. William E. Hill & Sons of New Bond Street, of the inlaid "Spanish" Stradivari viola and handed it over to the keeping of Señor Juan Casaux, head of the music section of the Patrimonio Nacional, Madrid, who had flown to London the previous day from Spain in order personally to take the viola back to Madrid.

The article continues:

Also present was Major Juan de Tornos, First Secretary of the Embassy and Spanish Consul at Southampton. Major de Tornos, who is an enthusiastic amateur violinist, must be credited with a principal part in reaching a successful conclusion to the lengthy and complicated negotiations between the various parties concerned which has resulted in the safe return to Madrid of the inlaid Stradivari viola after its absence for nearly one hundred and fifty years.

Both Mr. Hill and Señor Casaux have now achieved a long cherished ambition which was to bring together once more the complete quartet of inlaid instruments which were made nearly three hundred years ago by Antonio Stradivari for presentation to King Philip V of Spain on the occasion of the passage of the King through Cremona.

The un-named writer of the article identifies 'Richard Bennett of Aldenham' as 'the last owner':

The last owner had declined many tempting offers from America and the Continent to sell the instrument in the hope that one day it could be restored to the Spanish National Collection in accordance with a wish expressed by the late King Alfonso who paid a special visit to Messrs. Hill & Sons' premises to see this viola when he was in London in 1926.

At one period this viola was on the point of passing into other hands at a higher price than that paid by the Spanish Government, but Messrs. Hill, acting for its owner, waited in the hope that the Spanish Government would be able to acquire the instrument.<sup>72</sup> It is not an easy matter in these difficult days for a government department to obtain permission to spend a substantial sum of money outside its own country on the acquisition of an art treasure, however desirable it may be, and negotiations resulting in the present change of ownership were first originated over ten years ago [c.1940?] by Señor Juan Ruiz Casaux whose ambition for many years has been to obtain this viola to complete the Stradivari set in his charge.

The reader is left with the suspicion that many aspects (especially the financial aspects) of the long-term negotiations surrounding this viola are being left unexplained by the writer of the article.

The label inside the viola has the following text:

Antonius Stradiuarius Cremonensis  
Faciebat Anno 1696

Cristina Bordas Ibáñez states that the final '6' is hand-drawn while the '9' seems to have been a printed '6' from which the upper 'tail' was erased and a hand-drawn lower 'tail' added. The viola's label does not show a right-angled black line around the numerals.

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<sup>72</sup> Richard Bennett died in 1930.

At the bottom of this label – written *on* the label – is an annotation which identifies the Palacio Real employee who, in 1785, carried out a restoration of this contralto viola:

*Vincs Assensio Presbr in m [space] Añ 1785*<sup>73</sup>  
Vicente Assensio, priest, [...] [space] in the year 1785

On 16<sup>th</sup> December 1785 Vicente Assensio produced a report for Prince Carlos itemising the corrective alterations which he had made to a ‘small, or normal, viola’; Assensio clearly identifies the viola as being part of the ‘Quintet of decorated instruments of Antonio Stradivari, dated 1709’.<sup>74</sup> The probability, therefore, is that someone, between 1785 and 1819, removed from within the viola a ‘1709’ pasted-over mini-label, thus exposing Stradivari’s date of ‘1696’. It is unlikely that Assensio, as an employee of the Spanish Royal Court, would have done this without authorisation (and, if he was instructed to remove the mini-label from within the contralto viola, why did he not remove the ‘1709’ mini-label from inside the cello?).

Perhaps it was Jean-Gabriel Koliker, in Paris, who, having received what he either knew, or suspected, was an instrument which had been stolen by his countrymen from the Spanish Court in 1812 (see p. 28 *et seq.* of this account), removed the viola’s ‘1709’ mini-label, thus thwarting any awkward questions regarding the source of the instrument (which was not only an extremely rare Stradivari viola but a uniquely rare Stradivari decorated viola).

As shown below, it is clear that the current date which is visible on the label inside the decorated *cello* – ‘1694’ – was formerly covered up by a small pasted-over piece of paper on which was inked the date of ‘1709’. It is likely that this mini-label was removed by the Hill brothers, in London, in 1925.

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On the decorated **cello** each rib-segment decoration is created with ink and features cupids preparing to fire arrows at horned deer (perhaps goats), again surrounded by floral arabesques.<sup>75</sup> The label inside the decorated cello has the following text:

Antonins Stradiuarius Cremonensis  
Faciebat Anno 1694<sup>76</sup>

Note the incorrect spelling of what should be ‘Antonius’. The numeral ‘9’ was seemingly created as described above for the viola; the final numeral ‘4’ is hand-drawn. A good-quality photograph of the label (supplied to the present author by the Royal Palace in Madrid) demonstrates that the area of the label-paper on which the four date-numerals are inked is significantly paler in colour than any other area – light brown rather than dark brown. Evidently a ‘mini date-label’, pasted on top of the original, has protected the paper underneath from discolouration. There is no ‘cut-out’ in the paper of the original label (such a cut-out being indicated by the Hills; see the quotation below).

Close study of the Royal Palace photograph indicates that the numerals which were inked on the mini-label were hand-drawn and slanted in italic fashion; the ink used for these numerals bled through the paper and left a faint trace on the main label underneath (but only the numerals ‘1’ and ‘7’ are distinguishable).

<sup>73</sup> C Bordas Ibáñez (2001), p. 171. According to a Tarisio.com article written by Jorge Pozas (web-published on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015) the given name was ‘Vicente’. ‘*Presbr*’ expands to ‘*Presbitero*’ (priest).

<sup>74</sup> See p. 23 *et seq.* of this account for further details.

<sup>75</sup> This design was stencil-copied by René Morel onto the 1688 *Marylebone* cello in order to complete the decorated quartet of instruments which had been ordered by Herbert Axelrod from Jacques Francais; see Francais, *The Dr. Herbert Axelrod Stradivari Quartet*, (1985), pp. 3, 29, and 32.

<sup>76</sup> The label is photographed in C Bordas Ibáñez (2001), p. 176.

The Tarisio.com (Cozio Archive) ID for the Palacio Real cello is 40659. On the website it is stated that the decorated cello was owned by Paolo Stradivari until 1772, then by Padre Brambilla (in that same year), then by 'Don Carlos (King Charles IV)' from 1772 to an unknown date thereafter. The next owner is specified as W E Hill & Sons who, having restored the cello in 1925, apparently sold it; the identity of the purchaser is not indicated.

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Edward Sainati provides a comment about the label-date of the viola and the cello:

[The Hills] also established authentic dates of these instruments as 1696 and 1694 respectively.<sup>77</sup> At one time all four (possibly five) instruments carried a 1709 label applied by Stradivari to give them a common 'birthday' and create the impression that they were made entirely and expressly for the Spanish court.<sup>78</sup>

The Hills provide a convoluted commentary regarding the labels inside the decorated instruments:

Curiously enough, Stradivari does not appear to have made or finished this concerto of instruments at one and the same time, as the still-existing tenor [i.e. the contralto viola] is dated 1696, and the two violins 1709. The violoncello was certainly made at the same time as the tenor; its proportions and style are of pre-1700 date, and its original label also:<sup>79</sup> but some vandal, probably Ortega, deliberately cut out Stradivari's figures, substituting 1709 in their place;<sup>80</sup> the object of this being, apparently, to make the date [of the cello] agree with that of the violins which alone remained of the set.<sup>81</sup> Possibly Stradivari did make a whole concerto in 1696,<sup>82</sup> but afterwards [after Philip V's departure from Cremona in October 1702] disposed of the two violins replacing them at a later date.<sup>83</sup> The fact, however, of the varnish of these examples being yellow and their general character much more in accordance with that of his pre-1700 work, adds weight to our belief that they were made about the same time as the other instruments of the set, though they were not actually completed and labelled until 1709.<sup>84</sup>

Harold P Geerdes states that with respect to 'certain of the Spanish instruments' 'the label overlays were discovered [by the Hills] and removed to reveal the correct dates.' Geerdes then refers specifically to the two violins (rather than to the viola and the cello): '[...] the authorities there [Madrid] now indeed post the 1694-1696 dates for their violins, correcting the former oft-published dates of 1709'. As already indicated, the two violins currently exhibit label-dates of '1709' and

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<sup>77</sup> As already indicated, the contralto viola was known to be dated '1696' as long ago as 1819.

<sup>78</sup> Sainati, p. 1191. Sainati's commentary appears to have been influenced by that written by Jacques Francais in 1985. Sainati's article in *The Strad* (December 1993) is unreliable.

<sup>79</sup> The Hills' comment regarding the cello's label is curious: 'its original label also' (having pre-1700 proportions and style). Excluding the four numerals of the year-date, all the other printed elements of Stradivari's pre-1700 and post-1700 labels are the same; not until 1730 did Stradivari alter the spelling of his family name from 'Stradiarius' to 'Stradivarius'. With the date-numerals it is the case that the initial '1' – printed in Roman form, i.e. 'I' – is the same on both types of label.

<sup>80</sup> Silverio Ortega could not have altered the cello's label-date to '1709' if that was the label-date inside the cello when it was received in Madrid in June 1772. As already indicated, the cello's label does not display any sign of having been cut. The inaccuracy of the Hills' commentary is disconcerting.

<sup>81</sup> See later in this account for information concerning Silverio Ortega and his son, Mariano. The Hills' text – 'the violins which alone remained of the set' – perhaps was intended to be understood as: 'the two decorated violins which alone remained from the set of four (the two decorated plus the two 'extras' which were included in the Paolo Stradivari/Francesco Brambilla transaction of 1772).

<sup>82</sup> The Hills' date of 1696 appears to be predicated on the example of the contralto viola.

<sup>83</sup> Antonio Stradivari's stubbornness – refusing any offer-to-buy which was less than 120 French or Spanish *doppie* – suggests that the creative unity of the concerto was, for him, paramount. This unity would have been undermined if Stradivari had sold off the two 'Philip V' violins, replacing them at a later date with two others.

<sup>84</sup> Hill (1902), pp. 78-79. Identical text appears in the 1909 second edition of the Hills' publication. See later in this account for a very similar historical narrative proposed by J G Marcellán.

nowhere do the Hills suggest that the violin's labels are anything other than those which were glued inside by Antonio Stradivari. Label-dates of '1694' and '1696' refer to the cello and the viola, not the violins. The commentary written by H P Geerdes is unreliable.<sup>85</sup>

Yet another layer of uncertainty is created by Jacques Francais:

All the instruments in Spain at one time were dated 1709 until it was discovered by Hill & Son in London, while the cello and the viola were in their shop for repair, that their labels had been altered to read 1709 by inserting a small piece of paper on top of the two last digits to read respectively 1696 and 1694.<sup>86</sup>

It is assumed that Francais's intended meaning was:

... their labels had been altered to read '1709' by someone glueing a small piece of paper on top of the third and fourth digits of each label's *original* year-date (i.e. the date which was printed and inked by Antonio Stradivari) these original labels then being found, after the removal of the small pieces of paper, to be showing the dates of '1696' (viola) and '1694' (cello).

To repeat: with respect to the present-day 'small or normal' (contralto) viola, its original label-date was known to be '1696' as far back as 1819.

With respect to the decorated cello: if Antonio Stradivari glued a '1694' label inside his decorated cello, someone subsequently covering 'the two last digits' with a small piece of paper on which were inked the numerals '09' would create a new (ridiculous) date of '1609', not '1709'.

The Jacques Francais commentary, like that of Harold Geerdes, is unreliable.

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Vicente Assensio (1730–c.1793) entered the service of the Spanish royal household in 1776.<sup>87</sup> He worked as a violin maker and repairer as well as an optician and astronomer to Prince Carlos (subsequently King Carlos IV) and was appointed to the post of Master of Violins.

In his 1919 publication – *Historia de los instrumentos de Música contruidos por Stradivarius y Amati que en la actualidad posee la real capilla de S.M.* – José García Marcellán provides a transcription of some of the documents in which Assensio itemised the repairs he made to the instruments owned by the Prince. Marcellán states that 'some of these notes have been copied from the manuscripts which are conserved in the library of Don Luis Albacete y Gil de Zárate, these manuscripts being part of the diary maintained by the *luthier* at the Royal House, Don Vicente Assensio.' Marcellán assures the reader that 'We have checked their authenticity and supplemented their historical content with further information gained from both the general accounts of His Majesty King Carlos III, and the personal-expense accounts of His Royal Highness Prince Carlos.'<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> 'The 1709 Greffuhle Stradivari', in *The Strad*, February 1978, pp. 889-899.

<sup>86</sup> Francais (1985), p. 13. Having listed the two instruments in the order 'cello and viola', Francais incorrectly allocates the 'respective' dates.

<sup>87</sup> Documents from the Royal Palace consistently spell the family name as 'Asensio'.

<sup>88</sup> C Bordas Ibáñez has stated that the current location of Assensio's manuscript workbook is unknown (*Music in Spain during the eighteenth century*, ed. Boyd and Carreras, Cambridge University Press (1998), p. 187, footnote 44). Nonetheless, Bordas is able to report (*ibid.*) that 'The predominance of Italian instruments in the Madrid market is evident from the repairs carried out by the violin maker Vicente Assensio between 1775 and 1784: twenty-three Stradivaris, fifteen Amatis, [...] two Guarneris, two Gaglianos [...].'

Assensio's texts begin:<sup>89</sup>

*Cuenta que yo D.<sup>n</sup> Vicente Assensio, Pbro., de Madrid, doy al Principe nro. S.<sup>or</sup> (que Dios guarde) de todas las obras de instrumentos de música que tengo compuestos y trabajados à S. A. por mandato y orden comunicado a mi por D.<sup>n</sup> Cayetano Brunetti, primer violin de cámara y Maestro de S. A.*

*Madrid, Dcbre. 16 de mil setecientos y ochenta y cinco.*

Account which I, Don Vicente Assensio, priest, of Madrid, submit to our Lord Prince (whom God protect) [to show] all the work I did on the musical instruments [owned by] the Prince, being ordered to do this work by Don Cayetano Brunetti, first violinist of the chamber and maestro to His Royal Highness the Prince.<sup>90</sup>

Madrid, December 16<sup>th</sup> 1785.

In said year 1785. For the correction, refurbishment [*'reforma'*], and improvement of the small violin of the Quintet, with decorations, of *Ant.<sup>o</sup> Stradivario*, of the year 1709 (the property of His Royal Highness the Prince) which was useless and unusable [*inútil é intocable*] as a result of the damage already done by some unskilled person. I have repaired, as necessary, some parts with patches, [these being] added by me with the greatest care, correcting at the same time other [parts] which the maker left 'out of proportions'.<sup>91</sup> I have perfected the neck and added a new fingerboard, tailpiece, bridge, pegs, and button.<sup>92</sup> With that, the violin is now good, fine, and restored. The cost for these repairs is 350 *reales de vellón*.

In said year 1785. For the similar correction, refurbishment, and improvement of the large violin, with decorations, of the same Quintet by *Stradivario*, of the year 1709, also the property of His Highness the Prince. [As a result of my work] this instrument is now of equal merit and quality as the preceding [violin]. The time and work is worth 350 *reales [de vellón]*.

In said year 1785. For the correction, refurbishment, and improvement of the small, or normal, viola [*chica o regular*] of the same Quintet of decorated instruments of *Ant.<sup>o</sup> Stradiv.<sup>o</sup>*, of the year 1709, also belonging to His Royal Highness the Prince. I have repaired the thickness of the front and back plates, corrected the imperfections and applied patches. I have added a new fingerboard, tailpiece, bridge, pegs, end-pin, button, and other items. As a result, the viola is now of extraordinary quality. This work occupied me for thirty days, and the repairs are equally worth 350 *reales*.

In said year 1785. For the similar correction, refurbishment, and improvement of the large viola, with decorations, of the same Quintet by *Ant.<sup>o</sup> Stradivario*, of the year 1709, also the property of His Royal Highness the Prince. [This large viola] was similarly ruined by an unskilled hand. I have improved it with similar work and care as with the previously-described [instrument], and [as a result] it is now of equal merit – equally good and equally beautiful. The repairs are worth 350 *reales*. I advise that this viola is extremely large, and, for this reason, it cannot be used [in a musical performance] in the same way as the previous 'regular' viola.

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<sup>89</sup> The present author wishes to thank Dr Esperanza Rodriguez-Garcia for her help in translating the texts as transcribed by J G Marcellán.

<sup>90</sup> Gaetano (Cayetano) Brunetti (1744-1798) entered the service of King Carlos III of Spain in 1767. He taught music and the violin to the King's son, Prince Carlos. In 1788, when Prince Carlos became King Carlos IV, Brunetti was appointed director of the royal chamber orchestra.

<sup>91</sup> ... *otras que su autor dejó fuera de proporciones*. It is difficult to believe that Stradivari made mistakes of proportion when building this violin.

<sup>92</sup> It is uncertain whether the Spanish word *botón* refers to the tail-piece end pin (frequently identified as the 'button') or the semi-circular projection of the back plate underneath the foot of the neck (this projection also often being identified as the 'button'). If the latter, then it is possible that Assensio was lifting, lengthening, and re-angling the neck of the violin – in accordance with the performance-necessities of the period – by fitting a triangular wedge inbetween the foot of the neck and the body of the violin at the upper block. Such a modification would certainly require the subsequent fitting of a new fingerboard.



Note that, in 1785, both of the decorated violins and both of the decorated violas are identified by Assensio as having '1709' labels; see later in this account for Assensio's written statement that identifies the decorated cello also as having a '1709' label.

In their 1902 *Stradivari* monograph the Hills provide alternative translations of Assensio's texts: 'We were fortunate enough to meet, at Madrid, the gentleman [?Don Luis Albacete y Gil de Zárate] who owns the account-book so carefully and minutely kept by this priest, a perusal of which throws still further light on the history of the above-named instruments.'<sup>93</sup> The identity of the person who translated Assensio's texts from eighteenth-century Spanish into English is unknown.

On March 5<sup>th</sup> 1783 Don Cajetano Brunetti, custodian of the Royal instruments, brought me, by order of H.R.H. the Prince a Stradivari violin of the year 1709, and requested me to improve the quality of the tone which was bad.

The precisely-defined date of 5<sup>th</sup> March 1783 is not that which is reported by J G Marcellán from Assensio's manuscript: 16<sup>th</sup> December 1785.

The Hills comment that Assensio 'took the violin to pieces', and that he enumerated 'various more or less injudicious alterations'.<sup>94</sup>

He [Assensio] tells us that the [violin's] tone was [thereby] rendered excellent according to the opinion of Brunetti, Christobel, and Andreasi (Court musicians) – so much so that the first-named player entrusted him with the second violin of the quintet, to be treated in similar manner.

"For this exact and extensive restoration [of both violins] taking all circumstances into account and seeing especially that the violins were intractable and unplayable, I consider the repairs to each worth 700 reals."

Clearly, the expression – 'intractable and unplayable' – connects with Assensio's descriptive text for the small decorated violin (*inútil é intocable*, 'useless and unusable'; see earlier) and thus it is almost certain that the text which was perused by the Hills and used in their 1902 monograph is the same text as that which is transcribed by Marcellán. However, the cost for repairs to each violin (as reported by the Hills) is the cost which is identified by Marcellán for both violins, and the difference in the dates – March 1783 as against December 1785 – is too significant to be interpreted as a simple error of transcription and/or translation.

The Hills quote further from Assensio's account-book: namely that on 17<sup>th</sup> July (1783?) "Don Cajetano Brunetti gave me the key of the cases which contained the instruments of H.R.H., in order that I could see to anything they required." Three weeks later, on 6<sup>th</sup> August, a large case, which "contained the Quintet of inlaid Stradivaris" was delivered to Assensio so that he could "arrange the instruments according to the desires of Señor Brunetti" (but two years later, in 1785, Assensio was carrying out substantial repairs and restoration on the five Stradivari decorated instruments which comprised 'the Quintet').<sup>95</sup>

"The smaller viola belonging to the Quintet I took to pieces, and replaced the [bass-] bar. I also removed the parchment, which oppressed the tone of the instrument, from the sides, and thinned the neck. The viola of large size I treated likewise."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Hill (1902), p. 75 *et seq.* The date of the Hills' visit to Madrid is uncertain, but probably 1898.

<sup>94</sup> The Hills do not identify any of these alterations (and note that they were all 'injudicious').

<sup>95</sup> On 19<sup>th</sup> August 1783 Assensio received a payment of 642 *reales de vellón* for 'repairs to two bows and a violin belonging to His Highness.' Source: AGP, Reinados, Carlos IV Principe, leg. 12<sup>2</sup>, Exp. 24 (Pliegos de data de la Tesoreria (1783), Clase de oficios y mercaderes).

<sup>96</sup> Hill (1902), p. 77. J G Marcellán's version of Assensio's text makes no mention of the latter replacing the small viola's bass-bar, nor any mention of Assensio removing the parchment from the internal face of the ribs (repeating both operations, it seems, with the large viola).

The Hills here add a footnote: 'Stradivari fixed parchment to the sides [the internal vertical face of the ribs] in order that they should not give: they were rendered a shade weak by the cutting for inlaying the design. This explanation is a general one; it does not apply to this [smaller] viola, as the design is painted on only, and is not inlaid.' Vicente Assensio would surely not have reported removing the parchment (for a specified, if implausible, reason) if there had not been any parchment.

According to J G Marcellán, Assensio then continues his text by introducing a *Violón del Quinteto*:

This *violón* is extremely large [*'Este Violón es extremadam.<sup>te</sup> grande'*] greater than the normal size adopted by this maker.<sup>97</sup> I wanted to re-shape it, shortening both the length and the width of the body in order to make it the same size as the Stradivari which belongs to Don Francesco Brunetti (and I had the same intention with respect to the large viola of the said Quintet).<sup>98</sup> But, before starting this work [on either instrument], I decided to communicate my thoughts, through Don Cayetano Brunetti, to His Royal Highness the Prince. [Brunetti] informed His Royal Highness who answered that he did not want this work to be carried out. Instead [he wanted both instruments] to be restored in the best way possible but without their dimensions being altered. I obeyed this order and the [large] viola was restored as already reported [see earlier in this account]. The *violón* was restored as follows:

*Violón* from the Quintet of Stradivarius – year of 1785.

Front plate: first, having dismantled this *Violón*, with decorations on the ribs and a pattern at the border of both the front and back plates, made by *Antonio Stradivario* in the year 1709, I discovered that the top plate was too thin in the area between the *f*-holes, and I put there – with my usual skill – a thin piece of old pine measuring  $7\frac{1}{2}$  *pulgadas* in length and 4 *pulgadas* and 3 *lineas* in width. I also put a new *cadena* to the front plate, in the style of the maker, and proportioned with respect to the body [of the instrument].<sup>99</sup> Some pieces of pine have been added where the [front plate] leans over the ribs. The front plate [and] the whole body have been restored to their exact measurements. The triangular corner blocks [*rinconeras de los ángulos*] have been enlarged in proportion to the instrument's size. The linen that the maker applied to the [internal face of the] ribs has been repaired.<sup>100</sup> Then I re-attached the front plate.

Back plate: I removed the back plate and put in the middle a thin piece of curly maple, 7 *pulgadas* and 8 *lineas* in length and 3 *pulgadas* and 11 *lineas* in width, of oval shape, in order to restore the thickness (the plate had undoubtedly been badly thinned). The rest of the back plate was repaired according to its size. A new neck was made and the back-plate button adjusted to match [see footnote 92]. This neck has been attached to the head [i.e. the pegbox/scroll] by means of a hidden steel screw, for longevity, with craftsmanship never seen before. New jujube pegs, fingerboard, tailpiece, an ivory nut, two mended bridges, good-quality strings – all have been fixed. The [new] neck, together with scuff marks in the ribs and the plates, all have been varnished; but, before doing so, parts of the rib decorations were re-drawn and restored.<sup>101</sup> In this way I have used in the said work (and in other [works] which I omit to mention) more than seventy days, having started

<sup>97</sup> Assensio's 'extremely large' *violón* suggests an instrument larger even than Stradivari's pre-1700 celli (which had body-lengths of approximately 790mm). Stradivari's 'forma B' celli (made from approximately 1707 onwards) had body lengths of approximately 760mm. Strangely, Assensio does not acknowledge a discrepancy between the size of his *violón* and the instrument's label-date of 1709 (this date being identified in his second paragraph).

<sup>98</sup> Francesco Brunetti – a cellist in the royal orchestra – was the son (born c.1770) of Gaetano (Cayetano) Brunetti.

<sup>99</sup> *Cadena* means 'chain'; Assensio's text seems to suggest that he renewed the disc/lozenge 'chain' of decoration on the front plate (or, perhaps, renewed parts of the decoration which had fallen out).

<sup>100</sup> If the cello's rib decorations – like those of the contralto viola – were created with Chinese ink no internal support for the ribs would have been needed. However, the Hills (1902, p. 128) draw attention to the 'as thin as possible' condition of the ribs on Stradivari's celli, and 'the tendency [for these thin ribs] to buckle, which is so often the case with the sides of Italian violoncellos. [Stradivari therefore] reinforced them with small strips of canvas.'

<sup>101</sup> It is likely that the inked decorations around the cello's lower ribs had been worn away as a result of the cello being steadied and supported inbetween the player's legs (i.e. no floor-spike was fitted).

work on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the past October.<sup>102</sup> So, my judgement is that the restoration of this *Violón* is worth 1,000 *reales*.

The Hills' translated presentation of Assensio's account-book text which refers to the 'violoncello' of the Quintet is:

"The violoncello, which is of very large proportions – larger than those Stradivari usually adopted – I wished to reform so that it might be of the same size as the one belonging to Brunetti. I also proposed to do the same to the large viola; but before carrying out these changes I determined to consult the wishes of H.R.H. the Prince. He, however, would not agree to it, and simply wished to have the instruments put in good playing order. I obeyed, and arranged the viola as already stated, and did as follows to the violoncello: I pieced [patched] the centre, replaced the bar by one adjusted to mathematical proportions based on that of Stradivari. I corrected the thicknesses, pieced [patched] the four corner-blocks, took the back off and inserted a piece in the centre, as it was too thin. I had to replace the neck, which I did in the most careful manner. I then adjusted the instrument, the tone of which was rendered excellent by all these changes. It took me three months to do [cf. 'more than seventy days'] and I consider the repair worth 1,000 reals."<sup>103</sup>

Again, there are reassuring points of agreement with Assensio's text as reported by Marcellán but also some curious discrepancies.

Marcellán reports that, just two years later, in 1787, 'the [decorated] cello was repaired by Francisco Gand'.<sup>104</sup> This person's family name might suggest that he was a (distant?) relation to the Gand family of violin makers (from Mirecourt, and then established in Paris); Francisco worked in Madrid during the second half of the eighteenth century. Three years after Gand's repair Assensio was obliged to repair the cello again; the Hills report Assensio as writing: "I took to pieces the violoncello belonging to the Quintet, and mended a crack in the belly on the [sound-] post side."<sup>105</sup> Marcellán's version of Assensio's text is more detailed:

Firstly, the *violón* of the Stradivari Quintet was opened up in order to mend a crack in the top plate, from top to bottom, next to the '*prima*' [the cello's A-string (which is 'on the sound-post side')] and to rectify the unskilled reconstruction that Francisco Gand carried out in 1787, securing the joints with dovetailed patches. Then the neck was repaired, followed by re-varnishing the neck and the top plate in the style of the maker.<sup>106</sup> Cost: 400 *reales*.

Was it Francisco Gand who, prior to 1785, effected 'unskilled' repairs to the small violin and the large viola (as reported by Assensio; see p. 24 of this account)?

According to J G Marcellán further repairs to the decorated cello were carried out by Matías Valenzano in 1865, and yet more by Diego Sánchez in 1882.

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Assensio's position as *luthier* to the Royal household was subsequently held by Silverio Ortega (1765-1846) and Silverio was followed by his son, Mariano (1803-1855). According to the Hills, it was Silverio who, at an unknown date, reduced the size of the decorated cello:

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<sup>102</sup> This information suggests that Assensio's report, submitted to the Prince, was compiled in the middle of December 1785. On 31<sup>st</sup> December 1785 Assensio received a payment of 2,892 *reales de vellón* for 'repairs made to various musical instruments belonging to His Highness.' Source: AGP, Reinados, Carlos IV Principe, leg. 12<sup>3</sup>, Exp. 26 (Pliegos de data de la Tesoreria (1785), Clase de oficios y mercaderes).

<sup>103</sup> Hill (1902), pp. 77-78.

<sup>104</sup> Why not repaired by Assensio? Cristina Bordas Ibáñez (2002 and 2011) specifies 'Francisco Grand'.

<sup>105</sup> Hill (1902), p. 78.

<sup>106</sup> The information that Assensio re-varnished the top plate of the *violón* may explain the deep golden-brown colour which, today, is found on the decorated cello at the Palacio Real.

[...] [Silverio] Ortega, the pupil and successor of Dom Vicenzo Ascensio, performed this ever-delicate operation in the most drastic and barbarous manner conceivable, and the instrument, ill-conditioned and uncared-for, a ruin of its former self, is to-day to be seen reclining against the wall of the organ-loft of the Chapel Royal at Madrid. The head alone remains to speak of its original grandeur.<sup>107</sup>

What more shocking evidence of the truth of the charge<sup>108</sup> could present itself than is afforded by the fate of the unique violoncello made by Stradivari for the ornamental set which he intended to present to the Spanish monarch, Philip V.! With how much love and pride must the master have laboured during weeks upon such an instrument! And how grievous it is now to contemplate the destruction wrought by a man who proved himself to have been devoid of the slightest feeling which is inborn in the true craftsman! We regret to have to add that the culprit, Ortega, who as a mere workman was very good, was in this respect not one whit worse than the majority of his brother-makers in other countries.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps the Hills' decision, in 1902, to publicise their despair at the condition of the decorated cello prompted the Spanish authorities to consider sending the cello abroad for restoration. Thirteen years earlier, in 1889, they had sent their 'plain' Stradivari cello of 1700 to Gand & Bernardel, in Paris;<sup>110</sup> assuming that the French restoration was judged satisfactory by the officials in Madrid one might have expected that the decorated cello would have been sent to the same *luthiers*.<sup>111</sup> However, it was to the Hills, in London, that the decorated cello was sent for restoration, but not until 1925. According to the Tarisio.com information (which surely must be incorrect) the Hills sold the decorated cello in that year, to an unknown purchaser. The date when the cello was returned to Madrid is unknown.

Edward Sainati comments:

Much denigration has fallen on the Spanish luthiers Assensio and Ortega for the allegedly disastrous repairs they 'inflicted' on their priceless charges. But it is difficult to reconcile such negative assessments, including the Hills', with the actual state of the instruments today. They are perfectly playable [...] and in excellent condition according to two outstanding contemporary makers, Etienne Vatelot and Ramón Pinto, who have examined the instruments recently.<sup>112</sup>

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As indicated earlier, the Spanish Peninsular War erupted in 1808. At the beginning of August 1812 the Duke of Wellington's army prepared to enter Madrid as conquerors, and King Joseph I fled the city:

As Wellington approached, the French struggled to evacuate the trappings of their four-year occupation: the Royal household, innumerable officials, masses of paperwork, the treasury, art collections, tons of *matériel* and dozens of *Afrancesados* [Spanish supporters of the French cause].<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Hill (1902), p. 78. It is unclear how the decorated cello could have become a 'ruin of its former self' in the 16(?) years between 1882 (when Diego Sánchez repaired the cello) and the Hills' visit to Madrid (probably in 1898). No further information for Matías Valenzano or for Diego Sánchez has been located.

<sup>108</sup> The 'charge' is that made by Charles Reade in 1872, complaining about the thoughtless reduction in size of the large violas which had been made by the Amati brothers.

<sup>109</sup> Hill (1902), p. 236.

<sup>110</sup> See p. 36 of the present account for details.

<sup>111</sup> By 1902 (when the Hills' monograph was published) the firm of Gand & Bernardel was in the hands of Albert Caressa and Henri Français.

<sup>112</sup> Sainati, p. 1191. Ramón Pinto was President of the *Entente Internationale des Maîtres Luthiers et Archetiers* between 2003 and 2005.

<sup>113</sup> David Gates, *The Spanish Ulcer: a history of the Peninsular war*, Allen & Unwin (1986), p. 360.

Within the documents written by Il Conte Ignazio Alessandro Cozio di Salabue there is a brief note – an *aide memoire* perhaps – which illuminates the events of 1812:

*Notizia data da M. Durand al cav. Carlo Carli e da questo a me in sua lettera 25 Agosto 1812.*<sup>114</sup>

*M Crochard, pagatore Gen.le in Spagna, che abbia avuto in dono dal Re Bonaparte il famoso quartetto violini, viola e violoncello di Antonio Stradivari (con sue casse) che aveva accomperato il Padre Brambilla nel 1773 dall'erede nipote Stradivari. Già Pariggi.*

*Più un quartetto d'Amati, che esisteva a detta Corte e che il sonatore Rechel da violoncello li abbia veduti. Vi devon esser ivi le due viole di Stradivari che avea Folli Odoardo e quella d'amore fattovi il fondo e riescita migliore.*<sup>115</sup>

News from M. Durand to Signor Carlo Carli, and from this person [Carli] to me in his letter 25<sup>th</sup> August 1812.

M. Crochard, Paymaster General in Spain, who received as a gift from King Bonaparte [assumed to be King Joseph I] the famous quartet – violins, viola, and cello – of Antonio Stradivari (with their cases) which were acquired by Father Brambilla in 1773 [1772] from the heir – the Stradivari grandson.<sup>116</sup> [These instruments are] already in Paris [with M. Durand?].

Also a quartet [of instruments] by [Nicolò?] Amati, which existed at that Court, and which the cellist Rechel has seen [?the four missing Amati violins which are mentioned by Marcellán – see below\*]. There must [also] be the two Stradivari violas which were with Odoardo Folli, and the viola d'amore which was improved with a new back plate.

If the French were evacuating Madrid at the beginning of August 1812 then M. Crochard apparently managed to move his gifted instruments to Paris (to M. Durand?) with considerable speed since, by 25<sup>th</sup> August, M. Durand had informed Carlo Carli (in Milan) that the instruments had arrived in Paris and Carli had relayed Durand's information to Count Cozio. A question would be: *why* did Durand inform Carlo Carli about the instruments? Was Durand aware that Count Cozio had inquired about the decorated instruments, 36 years earlier, in 1776? There are no documents at the Biblioteca Statale di Cremona which indicate that Count Cozio ever owned any of the decorated instruments, and the 'small, or normal' viola, at least, seemingly remained in Paris, being subsequently owned (in 1819) by Jean-Gabriel Koliker (see p. 17 for the continuation of this history).

Note that M. Crochard apparently received a complete *quartet* of instruments, yet J G Marcellán states that, in 1814, following the restoration of Fernando VII to the Spanish throne, an inventory revealed that 'only the two violins and the cello remained [from the decorated quintet]. [...] I have not found any information relating to the [disappearance of the] two violas.' The inventory also revealed that two violins and violas by Stainer, \*four Amati violins, two Guarneri violins, two Stradivari violins, two Assensio violins, and a violin and a viola by 'Gabrielis' (Giovanni Battista Gabrielli, 1716-1771) were also missing.

Marcellán concludes:

As there might be some doubts between the date that [Desiderio] Arisi specifies [for the Stradivari decorated instruments] and the actual label-dates of the instruments it is necessary that I provide some clarification. The [two] violins and the cello each has a label which is dated 1709. Nonetheless, [...] it can be affirmed that they were built ten or more years earlier [...] and the labels were fitted later on.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> M. Durand was a French violin dealer and string-instrument enthusiast with whom Count Cozio had already had commercial dealings. Carlo Carli was Count Cozio's banker, based in Milan.

<sup>115</sup> Biblioteca Statale di Cremona, Libreria Civica, ms. Cozio 47, folio 92r.

<sup>116</sup> The purchase was from Paolo, not Antonio (II) Stradivari.

<sup>117</sup> Marcellán's commentary appears to have been influenced by that written by the Hills in 1902; see p. 22 of this account.

If, immediately prior to the publication of Marcellán's article in 1919, the label inside the decorated cello showed '1709', then the exposure of the original '1694' label-date (hidden underneath a pasted-over mini-label) can reasonably be dated to 1925 when the instrument was being restored by the Hills, in London. It is surprising that the Hills were able to dissolve the glue used for the mini-label and remove the label without damaging the original paper and the original inked numerals underneath, especially if the mini-label had been glued in place for approximately 150 years.

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### Summary

There are very few certainties associated with any of the four decorated instruments displayed at Madrid's Palacio Real.

There can be no dispute that Paolo Stradivari sold a set of five decorated instruments to Francesco Brambilla in April 1772; it is likely (but not certain) that the set was that which had been intended by Antonio Stradivari for King Philip V of Spain in 1702 and thus it is plausible that all five instruments were label-dated '1702' (but the instruments were not necessarily made in 1702). Along with two extra violins (of unknown date of creation and unknown label-date) all seven instruments were sent to Piacenza, then to the port of Genoa, and, to avoid sending the goods by road over the Pyrenées, from Genoa to Spain by sailing ship, probably landing at Alicante. The instruments – label-dated '1709' – were safely delivered to Padre Brambilla in Madrid who sold the decorated quintet to the Royal Court in June 1772.

Today the two decorated violins still exhibit labels of 1709 (but such a date appears to sit against the instruments' pre-1700 constructional style), the contralto viola is dated 1696 (and has been from as long ago as 1819), and the cello is dated 1694 (this date seemingly being found (in 1925?) underneath a '1709' mini-label); the tenor viola was also dated 1709 according to Assensio but the instrument has been lost.

The two violins and the contralto viola were repaired and restored by the Hills, in London, in 1899 and 1891 respectively. The two violins were returned to Madrid (on an unknown date but presumably around 1900) but the contralto viola, which, during previous decades, had passed through various hands and thus its historical connection with the Spanish Royal family had become very distant, only returned to Madrid (after lengthy negotiations with the Hills) in 1951. As indicated earlier, there is no certainty for the date when the decorated cello returned to Madrid after being restored by the Hills in 1925.

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### Stradivari's other decorated instruments

From the period 1677-1687 there exist four Stradivari decorated violins which, between them, have many similarities of appearance; some of these similarities can also be found on a fifth instrument, the '1709' *Greffulhe* violin.

#### 1. The *Sunrise (Le Lever du Soleil)* violin, dated 1677

Tiny discs and lozenges of ivory are laid inbetween double purfling on both the front and back plates; the distinctive flames (of variable width) on the one-piece back plate rise slightly from left to right; the front plate is in one piece; the growth-rings are extremely narrow on the bass side, steadily increasing in width across the whole plate; the violin exhibits pronounced arching of the plates; the slightly cluttered floral design on the ribs includes a snake-like shape (one such in each rib segment); the floral design continues on the peg-box and scroll; the mirror-image design drawn on the rear face

of the scroll – flowers and arabesques – includes, at the bottom, the aforementioned ‘Grecian vase’ (see p. 7 of this account). Exactly the same vase appears on the rear of the scroll of the *Hellier* violin, the *Spanish/Ole Bull* violin, and on both of the Palacio Real violins. The varnish on the *Sunrise* violin (on the evidence of the photographs in Jost Thöne, *Antonius Stradiuarius*, Vol. I, pp. 96-103) is yellow-golden brown; the back plate and the ribs appear to display their colour-tint more strongly than does the front plate; the wood of the scroll is particularly pale. The major measurements (callipers) are:

Upper Bout maximum width	163mm
Centre Bout minimum	104mm
Lower Bout maximum	203.5mm
Body Length	354mm.

Alternative photographs are in *Antonio Stradivari: l'estetica sublime* (Cremona, 2011), pp. 46-53.

## 2. The *Hellier* violin, dated 1679

The inlay of ivory discs and lozenges within the double purfling on the front and back plates is identical to that of the *Sunrise*; the distinctive flames (of variable width) on the one-piece back plate descend from left to right; the front plate has a conventional arrangement of the two half-widths so that the widest rings are at the plate edges, the narrowest rings packed towards the centre-joint; the plate-arching is somewhat less when compared to the *Sunrise* violin; the design on the ribs, peg-box, and scroll, in all essentials, is identical to that found on the *Sunrise* violin and the *Spanish/Ole Bull* violin. The varnish on the *Hellier* is a more robust red-golden brown than on the *Sunrise*; conversely, the colour-tint found on the ribs seems paler. The head is adequately coloured. The major measurements are:

Upper Bout maximum width	168.75mm
Centre Bout minimum	111.25mm
Lower Bout maximum	209.5mm
Body Length	355.5mm.

The violin is much wider than the *Sunrise* but the body length is only marginally longer. If the *Sunrise* violin, face on, presents a slender, almost thin appearance, the *Hellier*, by comparison, is squat, ‘grounded’, and purposeful. High quality photographs are provided in Jost Thöne, *Antonius Stradiuarius*, Vol. I, pp. 104-111, and in *l'estetica sublime*, pp. 54-63.

The violin is described by Alfred James Hipkins in his publication *Musical Instruments, Historic, Rare and Unique*, published in 1888 by A & C Black, Ltd. The publication consists of a set of 48 colour plates with commentaries. Plate XXV presents the *Hellier* violin together with the following commentary:

This is the beautiful “Hellier” Stradivarius Violin made in 1679 and bought by Sir Samuel Hellier of Womborne, Staffordshire, about the year 1734, from the maker himself. [...] A letter of Stradivarius, recording the price (£40) Sir Samuel Hellier paid for it, was forthcoming until a few years ago, when it was unfortunately lost. We are not informed why Stradivarius should have kept this instrument in his own possession for fifty-five years – it seems likely that it had another owner before Sir Samuel Hellier, and that Stradivarius had taken it back.

## 3. The $\frac{7}{8}$ <sup>ths</sup>-size *Cipriani Potter* violin, dated 1683

Inlaid discs and lozenges on the front and back plates; double purfling; one-piece back plate with fairly narrow flames which descend from left to right; the front plate has the growth rings arranged in mirror-image; the plate arching is substantial; a much-simplified floral design on the ribs, peg-box,

and scroll – the most elegant decoration of all; the design on the rear of the scroll does not include the ‘Grecian vase’. The varnish is noticeably more red in tint than on either of the preceding violins.

Upper Bout maximum width 152.2mm  
Centre Bout minimum 102.3mm  
Lower Bout maximum 191mm  
Body Length 338mm  
(Back plate measurements, with callipers)

#### 4. The *Spanish/Ole Bull* violin, dated 1687

For photographs see Thöne, *Stradiuarius*, Vol. I, pp. 176-183, and *l'estetica sublime*, pp. 66-83.

The appearance of this violin lies mid-way between that of the *Sunrise* and the *Hellier* instruments; inlaid discs and lozenges; double-purfling; one-piece back plate with flames which slightly descend from left to right; one piece front plate with the rings constantly widening from left to right; very substantial arching; the rib design, in all essentials, is identical to that found on the *Sunrise* and *Hellier*. The varnish colour – golden brown – is very similar to that on the *Sunrise* violin.

Upper Bout maximum width 168.75mm  
Centre Bout minimum 109mm  
Lower Bout maximum 208.75mm  
Body Length 355.25mm.

These measurements are very close to those of the *Hellier* violin.

As already indicated, George Hart, in his *The Violin: Its Famous Makers and their Imitators*, writes:

In the year 1687 [Stradivari] made the quatuor of instruments for the Spanish Court, inlaid with ivory, and having a beautiful scroll work running round the sides and scroll. On Plate 18 is one of the instruments mentioned, which was originally in the possession of Ole Bull [Norwegian violinist, 1810-1880] and afterwards in the collection of Mr. Charles Plowden.<sup>118</sup>

In the 1884 revised edition of Hart's book the word ‘quatuor’ is changed to ‘set’ and the subsequent text is: ‘One of the violins of this set is that given on Plate 18, which instrument was purchased in Madrid about thirty years since by Ole Bull.’

The Hills, in 1902, responded with:

The year 1687 gives us a violin which has hitherto been known as one of the instruments of the Spanish set, mentioned as such by [George] Hart in his book; but [...] it could not have formed part of that concerto.<sup>119</sup> Ole Bull, from whom it was purchased by the late John Hart [1805-1874], who sold it to Mr. Plowden in 1861, bought it in Budapest, and not in Madrid, as stated by [George] Hart. Mention is made of this instrument in Ole Bull's Memoirs; and no doubt the legend that it came from the Spanish Court emanated from that violinist, the reliability of whose statements may be judged when we read his assertion that this is the only violin that the master made inlaid with ivory and ebony.<sup>120</sup>

Elsewhere, the Hills further indicate their antipathy towards Bull by adding: ‘Paganini also bought and sold a number of instruments, and Ole Bull was quite notorious for such dealings in his day.’<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Hart (1875), pp. 128-129. Hart's Plate 18 appears opposite p. 230 in the 1875 edition. The two wood-engraved illustrations of the 1687 *Bull/Plowden* violin, front and back views (but with the violin slightly rotated), do not reveal any evidence of ‘beautiful scroll work running round the sides’, but perhaps it was technically impossible to replicate the decoration in the engraving.

<sup>119</sup> The evidential justification for the Hills' statement is not indicated.

<sup>120</sup> Hill (1902), pp. 79-80.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.



Factually, what the Hills call 'Ole Bull's Memoirs' was a biography of Bull's life and work, written and compiled by his second wife, Sara Chapman Bull, née Thorp (1850-1911) – *Ole Bull: a memoir* – published by Houghton, Mifflin and Co., Boston, in 1882; the volume consists of 325 pages of historical biography followed by a 75-page Appendix. Sara Bull writes of events in 1844:

From Vienna Ole Bull went to Hungary, giving concerts in Pesth, Raab, and Presburg. He purchased a rare violin in Pesth labelled "Antonius Stradivarius Cremonesius [*sic*] faciebat, anno 1687." This instrument was unique, being the only one which the master had inlaid with ebony and ivory. It had been made to order for Philip the Sixth of Spain, and remained in the possession of the Kings of Spain until the reign of Charles the Fourth, when it was stolen by the French. Ole Bull bought it of Herr Rorats, an amateur, who had purchased it because of its beautiful appearance, its tone not recommending it. But in Ole Bull's hands its noble and pure tone was soon restored.<sup>122</sup>

'Pesth' is the eastern area of the city of Budapest; 'Raab' is the German-language name for Győr, a city in north-west Hungary; 'Presburg' is today's Bratislava. Sara Bull's references to Philip the Sixth of Spain and Charles the Fourth are erroneous.

Sara Bull briefly quotes her husband's personal experience with Stradivari violins:

[...] although the tone is wonderfully even and full, it is tintured with a peculiar nasal quality. For this reason, though I have owned several fine specimens of this maker, among them one of a quartette made for the court of Spain, I have never played on them in public.<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps Bull's opinion of Stradivarian tone goes some way towards explaining the Hills' attitude towards him. Nonetheless, it is worth noting the Hills' acknowledgement that some Stradivari violins exhibit a metallic tonal element:

During 1720-22 Stradivari, still indefatigable, was most actively occupied in 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 quality slightly metallic [...].<sup>124</sup>

In his 1985 publication – *The Dr. Herbert Axelrod Stradivari Quartet* – Jacques Francais initially states (probably following the Hills' information) that Ole Bull obtained his 1687 violin in Budapest, but subsequently writes:

We do not know how [the violin] reached Prague [*sic*], and for what reason, but it is quite certain that it was never part of the Spanish Concerto [...].<sup>125</sup>

## 5. The *Greffulhe* violin, dated 1709[?]<sup>126</sup>

Ivory discs and lozenges are laid inbetween double purfling on both the front and back plates; the narrow flames on the one-piece back plate descend very slightly from left to right. The front plate is in two pieces, the extremely narrow growth-rings at the centre-joint only expanding very slightly towards the bout-edges; the violin exhibits pronounced arching of the plates. As with the two decorated violins at Madrid, the overly-complex floral design on the ribs of the *Greffulhe* includes dogs and large birds; however, the mirror-image floral design drawn on the rear face of the scroll does

<sup>122</sup> Bull, p. 111.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>124</sup> Hill (1902), p. 156.

<sup>125</sup> Francais (1985), pp. 22-23. The *Ole Bull* violin is now exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution, catalogue number 2000.0013.02. As with the Hills, Francais does not justify his 'never part of the Spanish Concerto' comment.

<sup>126</sup> See B Frohlich, E Frohlich, G Sturm, J Hinton, *The secrets of the Stradivari string instruments*, for 'plate thickness' evidence (their Figs. 8b and 8g, also their Figs. 9b and 9g) which suggests that the *Greffulhe* violin may date from between 1679 and 1687. See <http://www.materialise.com/en/system/files/uploads/resources/cat.3pdf> (accessed May 2017).

not include the 'Grecian vase'. The varnish (on the evidence of the photographs in Thöne, *Stradiuarius*, Vol. III, pp. 4-11 and in *l'estetica sublime*, pp. 76-83, especially pp. 80 and 81) is red-orange; the back plate has a colour-tint which is nearer to yellow; the colour of the wood of the scroll is particularly pale as a result of constant handling. The major measurements are:

Upper Bout maximum width	(front) 165mm; (back) 167.5mm
Centre Bout minimum	107.5mm
Lower Bout maximum	(front) 204mm; (back) 207.5mm
Body Length	355.5mm.

The date on the label inside the *Greffulhe* violin is 1709, but information received (January 2016) by the present author from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, USA, states:

[...] though obviously a great deal of care has been taken to mask the differences, under strong light one can indeed readily see that *the entire date "1709" is on a separate piece of label stock which has been cleverly pasted over (or inserted into) the rest of the label.*<sup>127</sup>

The only known photograph of the lower line of the *Greffulhe* label appears in *l'estetica sublime*, p. 42. While the quality of the photograph is not ideal a faint vertical line (?indicating the joint where a small piece of paper has been inserted into a cut-out) can be seen to the left of the numeral '1', a black-ish horizontal line can be seen underneath the numerals, and the faintest trace of a vertical line can be seen to the right of the numeral '9'. The numeral '1' is presented in neither Arabic nor Roman form, but rather an unconvincing amalgam of both styles. The numerals '709' appear to have been hand-drawn very carefully and neatly but whether the initial '1' is printed or drawn cannot be detected from the photograph.

Jacques Francais writes:<sup>128</sup>

Unfortunately, this [*Greffulhe*] label has been altered in the course of the life of the instrument, and the original [unknown] date has been cut out very carefully and replaced by a new cut-out, most likely to make [the new date of 1709] fit with the one of 1709 [which is found in] the two violins of the Concerto in Madrid, with these dates themselves having been altered by Paolo Stradivari most likely.<sup>129</sup> As you will see later, we would place the correct date [of the *Greffulhe* violin] as 1698.

However, in the same publication Francais subsequently states: '[...] *the last three digits were cut out* and a small inset inserted in its place with the date 1709.'<sup>130</sup>

According to Alessandra Barabaschi (Thöne, Vol. III, p. 4) 'The violin bears an original label that reads 'Antonius Stradivarius [Stradiuarius] Cremonensis Faciebat Anno 1709' of which the last three digits are handwritten.' It would seem that Barabaschi did not observe any discontinuities in the area of the paper label where the date-numerals appear but it is unclear whether she is reporting what she herself saw inside the violin (in Washington DC, USA?) or what has previously been stated by others and publicised elsewhere.<sup>131</sup>

The *Greffulhe* violin is described in the *Catalogue descriptif des Instruments de Stradivarius et J. Guarnerius* (p. 108) compiled by Charles Gand. Gand does not question the violin's label-date:

<sup>127</sup> Present author's italics.

<sup>128</sup> Francais (1985), p. 6.

<sup>129</sup> Francais does not provide any supportive evidence for this claim.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14; present author's italics.

<sup>131</sup> A photograph of the word 'Stradiuarius', from the upper line of the label, appears as 'Fig. 13' in Frohlich, Sturm, Hinton (*op. cit.*).

(année 1882) Monsieur le Vicomte Greffulhe, Paris  
Violon Stradivarius, 13 pouces 3 lignes, année 1709  
Fond d'une pièce, veines presque droites pas très larges, inclinant un peu à droite. Eclisses veines plus larges avec incrustations en noir, griffons, biches, et daims. Table de 2 pièces sapin très fin, ayant des cassures à l'âme, au menton, sous l'f droite, et dans le haut à gauche de la touche. Incrustations de ronds et lozanges d'ivoire sur fond noir, dans un double filet en bordure au fond et à la table. Très belle tête avec rinceaux incrustés en noir. Vernis rouge orange.

(1882) M. le Vicomte Greffulhe, Paris  
Antonio Stradivari violin, 13 pouces 3 lignes [358.7mm], 1709  
The back plate is in one piece, the flames almost straight [horizontal?], not very wide, inclined slightly to the right. The flames of the ribs are wider, with inlaid decorations in black: griffins, and deer (male and female). The front plate is made from two pieces, the spruce [growth rings] are very thin, having splits at the sound-post, at the chin, underneath the [treble-side] f-hole, and in the upper bout to the left of the fingerboard. Inlaid decorations of ivory discs and lozenges on a black base, within a double purfling at the edges of both back and front plates. Very beautiful head with floral designs inlaid in black. The varnish is red-orange.

Charles Gand's decriptive text was subsequently copied, annotated, and extended by Albert Caressa and Henri Francais.<sup>132</sup> After Gand's closing '*Vernis rouge orange*' the following information is added:

23,000<sup>f</sup>  
Ex John Blowe: Révérend: violiniste amateur, puis collection J. Adam: Laurie: Gand & B<sup>el</sup>: Greffulhe: C.F.  
Cédé à Hamma à Stuttgart en 1910: muxzx, qui l'a vendu à M<sup>e</sup> Walter de Vienne en 1910 pour 75,000 Kronen  
Racheté par la maison Hug de Zurich en 1923 pour [no further text]  
Mars 1932, appartient à M<sup>me</sup> Charles Loeser à Florence, pianiste, qui l'a confié à Lehner pour le jouer.  
Renseignement Hahnloser 18/3/32, exact en 1934.

23,000 francs  
ex John Blowe, Reverend, amateur violinist, then in the collections of John Adam, David Laurie, Gand & Bernardel, Greffulhe, and Caressa & Français.  
Made over to Hamma, from Stuttgart, in 1910, 49,000 [francs], who sold it to M. Walter of Vienna in 1910 for 75,000 Kronen.  
Bought back by the firm of Hug, of Zurich, in 1923, for [no further text].  
March 1932, owned by Mme. Charles Loeser, from Florence, pianist, who entrusted it to Lehner for his use.<sup>133</sup>  
This information from Hahnloser, 18 March 1932, correct in 1934.

In their 1902 *Stradivari* monograph the Hills comment on the *Greffulhe* violin; like Gand they do not question the violin's label-date:<sup>134</sup>

1709 is the next date in order, and that year furnishes three inlaid violins: the two [...] still preserved in the Royal Palace at Madrid; the third belonged for many years to a well-known amateur player, the late Rev. John Blow. It afterwards passed into the collection of Mr. J. Adam,

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<sup>132</sup> See the Jacques Francais Rare Violins Inc. sales ledgers (Smithsonian Institution, Museum of American History, Archives Center) which can be accessed through a link from [www.themessiahviolin.uk](http://www.themessiahviolin.uk); the Caressa/Francais descriptive texts are transcribed and translated (and a commentary provided for each) by the present author.

<sup>133</sup> Jenő Léner, 1<sup>st</sup> Violin in the Léner Quartet.

<sup>134</sup> Hill (1902), p. 54 and p. 80.

on the dispersal of which it found its way abroad. Its present owner is the Vicomte de Greffuhle.<sup>135</sup>

It would seem that neither Charles Gand nor the Hill brothers noticed that the date-numerals on the label inside the *Greffulhe* violin were the result of a cut-out and insert (or a paste-over). In November 1960 the Hills wrote an historical account of the *Greffulhe* violin, the account being sent to the dealers Messrs. Hug & Co. of Zurich, Switzerland:

The history of the Stradivari violin dated 1709, known as the "Greffuhle", is, as far as it is known to us, as follows. [...] *This violin bears the original label dated 1709.*<sup>136</sup> The earliest record we have of it is when in the possession of Dr. Camidge, organist at York Cathedral ca. 1830-40. From him it passed to the Reverend Blow of Layer Breton, Essex. [...] He was a frequent visitor to the business premises of the late William Ebsworth Hill and it was thus that the late Mr. Alfred became well acquainted with the instrument, ca. 1870. [...].<sup>137</sup>

In the historical narrative provided by Alessandra Barabaschi (Jost Thöne, Vol. III, p. 4) the *Greffulhe* violin is stated to have been

... part of a commission Stradivari received in 1707 from King Charles IV of Spain (1685-1740), who briefly ruled parts of Spain as Charles III during the War of the Spanish Succession.<sup>138</sup> The request of the King, which consisted of six violins, two tenor violas and a cello for the Royal Orchestra, was outlined by the Marquis Desiderio Cleri in a letter to the Cremonese master.

The evidence which demonstrates that the *Greffulhe* violin was part of the Barcelona order is not identified.

Jacques Francais comments: 'The fact that the ornamentation of the *Greffuhle* is identical to the [ornamentation] of the concerto in Madrid may be incidental, or it [the *Greffulhe*] may have been originally planned for that concerto [...].'<sup>139</sup>

Whether the *Greffulhe* was one of the six Barcelona violins, or one of the two violins from the set of five decorated instruments which Paolo Stradivari sold to Francesco Brambilla, or one of the two 'extra' violins, a question remains: how did the violin leave Madrid and arrive in the hands of Dr Camidge, at York Cathedral, c.1830-40? Was the *Greffulhe* another instrument which was stolen by the retreating French in August 1812?

#### **and in addition:**

**1. A Stradivari cello, dated 1700**, is also part of the Palacio Real collection but is not decorated. According to J G Marcellán this cello was repaired in 1785 by José Contreras '*el Granadino*',<sup>140</sup> and then by Vicente Assensio in 1792. Marcellán continues: 'In 1889 a substantial repair was carried out in Paris by Gand & Bernardel; to this end the cello was taken to Paris by Don Victor de Mirecki, professor of the Royal Chapel.'<sup>141</sup> The Hill brothers write:

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<sup>135</sup> Vicomte Henry Jules Charles Emmanuel Greffulhe (1848-1932) was a French aristocrat. Between 1882 and 1910 he owned the Stradivari violin which now bears his name.

<sup>136</sup> Present author's italics; note that the Hills write '*the original label*'.

<sup>137</sup> The Hills' letter to Messrs. Hug & Co. is reproduced in Francais (1985), p. 42. Note that Alfred Hill was born in 1862.

<sup>138</sup> See p. 1 and p. 4 of the present account for factually correct information.

<sup>139</sup> Francais (1985), p. 13. The *Greffulhe* violin does not display the 'Grecian vase', and the two violins, viola, and cello at the Palacio Real have differing rib decorations.

<sup>140</sup> The life-span for José Contreras is variously defined as 1710-1782 (Grove Music Online), 1710-1775 (Amati.com), 1710-1780 (Tarisio.com).

<sup>141</sup> See also p. 28 of this account.

The other [cello, undecorated, of 1700] is the property of the Spanish Court, and is preserved in the Chapel of the Royal Palace in Madrid, where it is played upon by Señor Victor de Mirecki, an excellent artiste, who, after repeated solicitations, prevailed upon the Court authorities to allow the instrument to be sent to Paris in 1889 for sorely needed restoration. We have been unsuccessful in obtaining any information concerning the early history of this violoncello; it does not figure among the Court instruments recorded by [Vicente] As[s]ensio in his account book as having been entrusted to him for necessary repairs, as the others were, between the years 1770 and 1790 (approximately).<sup>142</sup>

This cello is also described in Gand's *Catalogue descriptif* (p. 125):

*Chapelle Royale de Madrid*

*Violoncelle Stradivarius, année 1700; 28 pouces 5 lignes*

*Diapason 15 pouces 4 lignes. Fond de 2 pièces, très-belles, ondes remontant. Eclisses pareilles; hauteur en haut 4 pouces 1 ligne, en bas 4 pouces 3 lignes. Ecart des f 3 pouces 8 lignes ½. Table de 2 pièces, beau sapin, ayant des tournants, plusieurs cassures du côté de l'âme et en bas à gauche. Très-belle tête; trou de la cheville de la chanterelle rebouché. Vernis rouge doré, très-beau.*

Chapel Royal, Madrid

Antonio Stradivari cello, 1700; 28 *pouces 5 lignes* [769.3mm]

The 'stop' length is 15 *pouces 4 lignes* [415mm]. The back plate is made from two pieces, very beautiful, the flames rising [from the centre-joint]. The [wood of the] ribs is similar; the height of the rib at the upper bout is 4 *pouces 1 ligne* [110.5mm], at the lower bout 4 *pouces 3 lignes* [115mm]. The distance between the upper eyes of the *f*-holes is 3 *pouces 8½ lignes* [100.4mm]. The front plate is made from two pieces, beautiful spruce, with ripples; several splits on the side of the sound-post and in the lower left [bass] side. Very beautiful head; the holes for the A-string peg have been re-bushed. The varnish is golden red, very beautiful.

It is for this undecorated cello – '1700 Spanish Court' – that the Hills provide measurements.<sup>143</sup>

**2. The Axelrod viola, dated 1695.** Double purfling on the front and back with miniature *f*-hole shapes inked between the lines of purfling; the inked shapes have been worn away in some areas; entirely plain ribs and head. An unidentifiable coat of arms can be seen in the centre of the viola's front plate. The viola is said to have been reduced in size in the early nineteenth century. Doubts have been expressed as to whether the entire viola was made by Stradivari.

**3. The Rode violin, dated 1722.** Inlay of discs and lozenges on the front and back; back-plate flames which rise quite steeply from left to right; a floral design (wrapped around gulls(?) and serpents(?)) painted on the ribs, peg-box, and scroll; the execution of the design lacks the elegant precision seen elsewhere. For high-quality photographs see Thöne, Vol. III, pp. 314-319, and *l'estetica sublime*, pp. 142-147.

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<sup>142</sup> Hill (1902), pp. 120-121.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.