

## The Hills' 1891 and 1902 monographs

The Hills' April 1891 monograph – "*The Salabue Stradivari*": *A History of the famous violin known as "Le Messie"* – comprises 31 pages, but deducting the title page, the two pages of Prefatory Note, a page containing a short poem, the page where the violin's 1872 South Kensington Special Exhibition catalogue entry (written by Vuillaume) is reprinted,<sup>1</sup> a page of commentary about Stradivari written by Count Cozio in 1823 but presented in a grammatically-corrected 'fair copy' from (apparently) the hand of Count Cozio's secretary (with another page of translation of same), and three colour portraits of the violin painted by Mr Shirley Slocombe, leaves 24 pages of text and approximately 7,200 words. However, the Hills' own text is rather less than 7,200 words since they quote extensively from Rev H R Haweis (almost the entirety of pp. 27-28), Charles Reade (pp. 29-30), and F-J Fétis (p. 30), and very closely echo Antoine Vidal (pp. 15-16).<sup>2</sup>

Overall, the monograph is notable for its neutral tone of voice and its avoidance of unqualified praise for the *Salabue*<sup>3</sup> violin, a lack of explicit enthusiasm which may have contributed to Robert Crawford's negative reaction to the content of the monograph and the subsequent involvement of lawyers.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the Hills' usage of the 'appreciative description' of the *Messiah* violin written by Rev H R Haweis,<sup>5</sup> rather than a description of their own authorship, is indicative of unease (as might also be the Hills' unacknowledged editing of the former's flowery, but heartfelt, prose):

*We stand reverently before it – fresh from the great master's hand, as though finished yesterday*<sup>6</sup> – it is for the first time unveiled in all its intact glory to the gaze of thousands to whom for years it has been a kind of myth. It is as though the ivory Minerva of Phidias that stood once in the Parthenon, should be discovered hidden away with the utmost care in some deep, dry, and hermetically sealed sepulchre of the East, and brought over scathless to be set up amidst the Elgin fragments, *the only perfect relic of them all*. So stands this matchless new violin amidst its time-worn, rubbed, and fractured brethren. It is of the grand pattern, *and yet, as in Milan Cathedral, beauty rather than power is its distinguishing characteristic*; it is massive without looking massive; its strength is hidden beneath its grace. The back is in two parts, the wood very choice. The fine graining of the flat belly is remarkable. The [*f*] holes are delicately cut, the left *f* a shade lower than the right – a practice so common that it must have been intentional with Stradivarius – his fine eye not tolerating even there the suspicion of mechanical work. We see in this violin *alone* what the perfect Stradivari corners were; in [<sup>7</sup>] every other known specimen the varnish<sup>8</sup> and the wood are both rubbed. In the "*Messiah*"<sup>9</sup> they are untouched and clean-looking, wondrously sharp and wide-awake, yet without vulgarity, and of a perfect finish.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 9.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 7.

<sup>3</sup> The Hills were of the opinion that calling the violin 'the *Messiah*' was sacrilegious, hence their support for the soubriquet *Salabue* for which, they claim, the source was Luigi Tarisio: '[...] we regret that the title conferred upon it by Tarisio, the "*Salabue*," has not been retained' (Hill (1891) p. 29).

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 11.

<sup>5</sup> A description written at the time of the 1872 Special Exhibition (see Hill (1891) p. 27).

<sup>6</sup> All the text which is italicised (by the present author) is omitted by the Hills from their 1891 monograph (pp. 27-28); Haweis's comment – 'as though finished yesterday' – was seemingly not appreciated by the Hills.

<sup>7</sup> Here the Hills insert 'almost'.

<sup>8</sup> Here the Hills replace 'varnish' with 'corners'.

<sup>9</sup> Here the Hills substitute 'Le Messie'.

The ease and neatness of the purfling, *which has, of course, never been repaired*, is incomparable, and over the whole instrument lies a thick, rich, red-brown varnish, wondrous to behold; the washing of it is level and lavish, and unworn by time or use. The brush seems to have left it about a week – *it is hanging up in the warm workshop at Cremona, and has just dried with all the glitter fresh upon it.*<sup>10</sup> The neck has been *skilfully* lengthened by M. Vuillaume; *but in order to avoid touching the fabric he has inserted a piece of wood flat between the heel [foot] and the rib instead of cutting into the internal block: the usual method adopted in lengthening the old fiddle necks for modern use.*

The head is light and graceful rather than heavy or powerful, the scroll thrown off like a ribbon lightly curled around the finger and drawn in; one side of the scroll is slightly lower than the other, the fluting smooth, with a surface like that of clear *and* still water, and the lines of the scroll *are* picked out with a thick rim of brown paint or varnish<sup>11</sup> that serves to accentuate the outlines of the head just as purfling calls attention to the contour of the back and belly. In every<sup>12</sup> other violin this black head-rim has been almost entirely effaced, but in the “Messiah”<sup>13</sup> it remains to show us the maker’s intention. He meant you to take up his violin and to see at a glance its whole outline, traced and emphasized by a sharp purfling carried out in the head by a deep rim of black varnish. This brooding over the beauty of curves, this anxiety that they should be manifest to all men is most instructive and touching; neither the purfling nor the black paint<sup>14</sup> added to the tone, or even the preservation of the instrument, it was the art instinct of the old makers piercing the manufacture.<sup>15</sup>

At the start of their 1891 monograph the Hills provide a general overview of the usual history of the *Salabue* violin, with subsidiary paragraphs focusing on Count Cozio and Luigi Tarisio. They present, without question (and making use of Antoine Vidal’s 1876 text) Vuillaume’s unique account of how he bought the *Le Messie* violin from Tarisio’s heirs, and they provide four pages of information about Vuillaume himself, including extracts from letters written by Vuillaume at the time of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). It is not until page 21 of the monograph that the Hills finally write anything about the *Salabue* violin itself: ‘The *Salabue* violin has several unmistakable characteristics’:

The most original and distinctive is the height and pronounced sharpness of the wave-like ridge, bordering the surfaces of the back and belly close to the outline [purfling].<sup>16</sup>

The sound holes are more slanting than is usual [...]. In fact, we have seen no other Stradivari violin of the years 1715, 1716, 1717, or 1718 with sound holes similarly placed.

The model [arching] of the violin is decidedly flat, especially in the belly, [...].

The Hills also comment on the varying thicknesses of the *Salabue* violin’s top and back plates: ‘The thicknesses of belly and back, a point on which Stradivari appears to have made numerous experiments, are of his stoutest.’<sup>17</sup> In their subsequent 1902 *Antonio Stradivari* monograph the Hills write more generally on the matter of back-plate and front-plate thicknesses, but, in doing so, appear

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<sup>10</sup> In *Old Violins and Violin Lore* (1898) p. 77, Haweis writes: ‘It [the *Le Messie* violin] seemed to have left the workshop only the day before; the anointed glitter of the fresh varnish was upon it, it looked hardly dry.’

<sup>11</sup> Here the Hills change ‘brown paint or varnish’ to ‘black varnish’. Stefan-Peter Greiner (Brandmair and Greiner p. 25) has stated: ‘The colour of this blackening substance suggests the use of lamp black as the most probable pigment. This carbon black was embedded in a binding material which we could not further identify.’

<sup>12</sup> ‘nearly every’ (Hill (1891) p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Le Messie’ (Hill (1891) p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> ‘black varnish’ (Hill (1891) p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Haweis (1884) pp. 302-304; Hill (1891) pp. 27-28.

<sup>16</sup> See also Chapter 3.

<sup>17</sup> Hill (1891) p. 24. As indicated in Chapter 1, if any of the Stradivari violins measured by the Hills had previously passed through the hands of Count Cozio, or the Mantegazza brothers, or G B Guadagnini, then the likelihood is that the plate thicknesses were altered, or ‘re-graduated’. The Hills’ belief in Stradivari ‘experiments’ may be misplaced.

to revise their 1891 comment: ‘In Stradivari’s earlier works we meet with the stoutest proportions he made use of; as he grew older his tendency was to lighten them.’<sup>18</sup> The Hills provide measurements from eighteen violins<sup>19</sup> which ‘prove this statement’ since the thickness of the wood at the centre of their eighteen back plates decreases from 5.55mm in 1672 to 3.57mm in 1736. However, interleaving the Hills’ measurements with 1) data from Rudolf Hopfner,<sup>20</sup> and 2) data from five more Stradivari violins, including the *Messiah* violin (the data being provided in poster supplements from *The Strad*) reveals the anomalous nature of the centre-thickness measurements from the 1672 and 1680/84 violins, and little evidence of a deliberate long-term strategy, on Stradivari’s part, to lighten his ‘proportions’:

1672 (Hill)	5.55mm at back-plate centre, graduating to 1.98mm ‘at flanks’
1680/84 period violin (Hill)	6.35mm at back-plate centre, graduating to 2.38mm
1686 (Hill)	4.7mm graduating to 2.38mm
1689 (Hill)	4.36mm graduating to 2.38mm
1690 (Hill)	4.36mm graduating to 2.77mm
1693 (Hill)	4.7mm graduating to 2.77mm
1698 (Hill)	4.36mm graduating to 2.77mm
1698 <i>Rouse-Boughton</i> (Hopfner)	4.3mm graduating to 2.3mm
1700 (Hill)	4.7mm graduating to 3.17mm
1704 (Hill)	3.9mm graduating to 2.38mm
1707 <i>Brüstlein</i> (Hopfner)	4.3mm graduating to 2.5mm
1709 (Hill)	3.57mm graduating to 2.38mm
1709 <i>Hämmerle</i> (Hopfner)	3.8mm graduating to 1.7mm
1709 <i>Viotti</i> ( <i>The Strad</i> )	3.3mm graduating to 2.6mm <sup>21</sup>
1711 (Hill)	3.9mm graduating to 2.38mm
1713 <i>Huberman</i> ( <i>The Strad</i> )	4.0mm graduating to 2.2mm <sup>22</sup>
1714 (Hill)	4.36mm graduating to 2.38mm
1714 <i>Smith-Quersin</i> (Hopfner)	4.1mm graduating to 2.2mm
1715 <i>Titian</i> ( <i>The Strad</i> )	4.4mm graduating to 2.2mm <sup>23</sup>
1715 (Hill)	3.9mm graduating to 2.38mm
1716 (Hill) (the <i>Le Messie</i> ?)	4.36mm graduating to 2.38mm
1716 <i>Messiah</i> ( <i>The Strad</i> )	4.3mm graduating to 2.4mm <sup>24</sup>
1716 <i>Baron Oppenheim</i> (Hopfner)	3.6mm graduating to 2.0mm
1721 <i>Kruse</i> ( <i>The Strad</i> )	3.7mm graduating to 2.4mm <sup>25</sup>
1722 (Hill)	4.36mm graduating to 2.38mm
1724 <i>Rawark</i> (Hopfner)	4.3mm graduating to 1.9mm
1725 <i>Chaconne</i> (Hopfner)	3.6mm graduating to 2.4mm

<sup>18</sup> Hill (1902) p. 185. ‘Proportions’ refers to the thickness of the wood, not the shape of the instrument. See later in this chapter for the Hills’ comment regarding the ‘lightness of build’ of the *Le Messie* violin.

<sup>19</sup> Hill (1902) pp. 185-186. The soubriquet identities of the Hills’ violins are not given, despite their being ‘without exception, of noted specimens’. The Hills’ imperial measurements – ‘ $\frac{5}{64}$ ” for example – have been converted to millimetres by the present author.

<sup>20</sup> Hopfner pp. 53-83.

<sup>21</sup> *The Strad*, March 2006.

<sup>22</sup> *The Strad*, November 2013.

<sup>23</sup> *The Strad*, February 2009.

<sup>24</sup> *The Strad*, March 2011.

<sup>25</sup> *The Strad*, June 2006.

1727 (Hill)	3.57mm	graduating to 1.98mm
1733 (Hill)	3.57mm	graduating to 2.38mm
1736 (Hill)	3.57mm	graduating to 2.38mm

The back-plate centre-thickness average is 4.07mm; all twenty-eight such measurements are encompassed by a  $\pm 0.7$ mm variation of this average. The *Messiah* violin's back-plate centre thickness of 4.3/4.36mm is entirely consistent with the evidence from the other violins apart from the two earliest. Indeed, allowing for the possible re-graduating interventions of 'restorers', post Cremona, the back-plate centre-thickness measurements are remarkably consistent.<sup>26</sup>

The Hills also provide information regarding the thickness of the front plates from their eighteen violins:

- 1672 'belly all over' between 1.98mm and 2.38mm (undefined centre thickness)
- 1686 'belly centre' 2.77mm, graduating to 2.38mm
- 1693 2.38mm 'all over' (centre thickness therefore assumed to be 2.38mm)
- 1704 'belly varies' between 1.98 and 2.77mm (undefined centre thickness)
- 1711 2.38mm 'all over' (centre thickness assumed to be 2.38mm)
- 1714 'belly between' 2.38 and 2.77mm (undefined centre thickness)
- 1715 'belly between' 2.38 and 2.77mm (undefined centre thickness)
- 1716 belly 2.38mm 'all over' (centre thickness assumed to be 2.38mm)
- 1722 belly 2.38mm 'all over' (centre thickness assumed to be 2.38mm)
- 1727 'belly varies from' 2.38 to 2.77mm (undefined centre thickness)
- 1733 'belly varies from' 2.38 to 2.77mm (undefined centre thickness)<sup>27</sup>

The Hills' repetitive front-plate thickness measurements can be compared with 1) the data provided by Rudolf Hopfner – who provides more than forty thickness measurements for each of his seven violins – and 2) the data (at a similar level of precision) obtained from the five Stradivari poster-supplements published by *The Strad*:

	Front-plate thickness	Centre thickness
1698 <i>Rouse-Boughton</i> (Hopfner)	between 1.9 and 3.0mm	2.1mm
1707 <i>Brüstlein</i> (Hopfner)	between 2.0 and 2.8mm	2.2mm
1709 <i>Hämmerle</i> (Hopfner)	between 1.9 and 3.0mm	2.6mm
1709 <i>Viotti</i> ( <i>The Strad</i> )	between 2.1 and 3.6mm	2.2mm
1713 <i>Huberman</i> ( <i>The Strad</i> )	between 1.8 and 3.2mm	2.4mm
1714 <i>Smith-Quersin</i> (Hopfner)	between 1.3 and 2.8mm	2.8mm
1715 <i>Titian</i> ( <i>The Strad</i> )	between 2.2 and 3.2mm	2.5mm
1716 <i>Baron Oppenheim</i> (Hopfner)	between 1.6 and 3.1mm	2.9mm
1716 <i>Messiah</i> ( <i>The Strad</i> )	between 2.0 and 3.5mm	2.0mm
1721 <i>Kruse</i> ( <i>The Strad</i> )	between 2.1 and 3.3mm	2.4mm
1724 <i>Rawark</i> (Hopfner)	between 1.9 and 2.8mm	2.3mm
1725 <i>Chaconne</i> (Hopfner)	between 1.9 and 3.5mm	2.2mm

In their 1902 monograph the Hills advance a commentary which suggests that Stradivari, in 1716, 'seems to have awakened to the fact that his work had assumed an air of breadth and solidity

<sup>26</sup> It is curious that twelve of the Hills' eighteen violins should graduate, at the flanks, to exactly the same thickness of 2.38mm.

<sup>27</sup> Hills (1902) pp. 185-186.

throughout [...]’,<sup>28</sup> an awakening which, the Hills suggest, led Stradivari ‘to retrace his steps, and [he] immediately gives us, amongst others,<sup>29</sup> an example [the *Le Messie* violin] which for lightness of build takes us back ten years [i.e. 1706].’<sup>30</sup> The Hills then suggest that the 1716 *Medici* violin<sup>31</sup> is ‘the most appropriate for present comparison’ [with the *Le Messie*] yet they acknowledge that the *Medici* violin ‘differs in form, dimensions, model, sound-holes, edges, and varnish’. Nonetheless, ‘to the casual observer it would be taken for the “Salabue’s” brother, as it presents a close resemblance, whether as regards the back, which is in two pieces, the wood, which is similarly figured, or the varnish, which, though of thicker texture and somewhat deeper colour, has the same bright, unworn surface.’<sup>32</sup>

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Writing in their 1891 monograph about the ribs of the *Salabue* violin, the Hills state:

The model [arching] of the violin is decidedly flat, especially in the belly, but the genius of the master asserts itself in the compensation he has provided in the height of the sides [ribs].<sup>33</sup>

At the end of their 1891 monograph the Hills define the height of the ribs ‘at the bottom’ of the *Salabue* violin (at the tail-piece button) as 1¼ inches whereas ‘at the top’ (at the side of the neck-foot) the height is defined as 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches; thus the ribs reduce in height by 1/<sub>16</sub> of one inch (1.58mm) from the bottom to the top of the instrument. The data provided by the Hills at the end of their 1902 monograph<sup>34</sup> indicates that exactly the same rib heights are found in Stradivari violins label-dated 1700, 1702, 1704, 1708, 1709 (twice), 1710, 1712, 1713, 1716 (twice), 1718, 1720, 1722, 1727, 1732, and 1736. Thus there is nothing unusual about the *Salabue* rib heights, and no evidence of any unique ‘compensation’ being applied to the ribs of this particular instrument.

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In their 1891 monograph the Hills elaborate their point about the ‘pronounced sharpness of the wave-like ridge’ by comparing the *Salabue* violin with instruments from Brescian violin makers, and follow this with comments about modern copies of the *Salabue* violin. They then offer some comparative comments (which likely did not please Robert Crawford):

The year 1716 appears not to have been prolific of great works from Stradivari, as we know at present of only one fine violin of that year beside the *Salabue*. This is the one known as the *Cessol* [...]. The previous year, 1715, produced five famous violins [...]. The year 1717 again produced two notable instruments [...].<sup>35</sup>

There is a noticeable reluctance on the part of the Hills to say anything overly enthusiastic about the *Salabue* violin which, in their opinion, is simply a ‘fine’ violin. In their 1902 monograph the Hills describe the *Le Messie* as ‘remarkable’ but this appears to be an evaluation related only to the violin’s ‘unrivalled condition’.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Hills’ phraseology suggests that they regarded this ‘breadth and solidity’ as a negative feature of the violins made by Stradivari in the years immediately preceding 1716.

<sup>29</sup> No identification of these ‘other’ violins is provided.

<sup>30</sup> Hill (1902) p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 11 for further information about this violin, including, in footnote 51, the present author’s proposition that the label-date is actually 1710.

<sup>32</sup> Hill (1902) p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> Hill (1891) p. 22. In the 1902 monograph (p. 65) the Hills write: ‘the model is flat, that of the belly most noticeably so’.

<sup>34</sup> Hill (1902) pp. 293-295.

<sup>35</sup> Hill (1891) p. 26. Was there an intentional qualitative differentiation between ‘fine’, ‘famous’, and ‘notable’?

<sup>36</sup> See Hill (1902) pp. 63-64.

One omission from the Hills' 1891 monograph is that there is no mention of the longitudinal resin-pocket infill lying next to the treble side of the *Salabue* violin's fingerboard; perhaps the Hills did not want to draw attention to what might have been noted by Robert Crawford as a physical flaw in the instrument. The Hills also dismiss Charles Reade's comments about the crack in the front plate.<sup>37</sup> Sensitive, perhaps, to the probability that Crawford had read Reade's four *Letters to the Pall Mall Gazette*, the Hills might have been attempting to deflect potential trouble by writing:

Mr. Charles Reade [...] refers to what he calls a crack in the violin. The mark which has given rise to his statement is in reality one of three insignificant and almost imperceptible shakes in the wood, such as frequently appear during the seasoning of the pine blocks [wedges] used for bellies. These shakes are easily glued and then become invisible; but are opened again by exposure to the sun during the drying of the varnish. They are, however, in no sense defects.<sup>38</sup>

Thus Reade's 'crack' becomes a 'mark' which becomes 'three [...] almost imperceptible shakes'. The three clearly-visible cracks on the *Messiah* violin – to the left and right of the fingerboard – all begin at the edge of the front plate and, despite the obstruction of the purfling, continue down into the body of the belly, the cracks being between 20 and 50mm in length.<sup>39</sup> Did the Hills use the less alarming terminology of 'shakes', rather than 'cracks', in order to deflect possible protestations from Mr Crawford (to whom they had previously enthused about the violin's 'fabulous newness of appearance and state of preservation')?<sup>40</sup>

With respect to the cracks, and the varnish, on an entirely different violin (in an oft-quoted letter of 12<sup>th</sup> August 1708 to an unidentified client) Antonio Stradivari wrote:

*Compatira l'tardanza del violino per che è statto la causa per la vernice per le gran crepate che il solo non le facia aprire.*<sup>41</sup>

The Hills translate this text as:

I beg you will forgive the delay with the violin, occasioned by the varnishing of the large cracks, that the sun may not re-open them.<sup>42</sup>

An explanation for Stradivari's apology might be that the violin's varnish was of a type which only dried very slowly, over many days, possibly weeks, in warm and dry conditions (but not under the direct rays of the Italian sun in mid-summer). If the violin was exposed to direct, glaring, sunlight before the protective varnish had reached a state of stability and resilience the glued-together cracks would re-open. The Hills refer to correspondence, dating from late 1637 and early 1638 – thus seventy years earlier than the Stradivari letter cited above – between the scientist Galileo Galilei and Father Micanzio (of Venice) concerning Galileo's desire to purchase, for his nephew, a new Cremonese violin. The correspondence indicates that delivery of this violin was continually delayed. In a letter of 20<sup>th</sup> March 1638 to Galileo, Father Micanzio writes: 'Every day I am shown letters which

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<sup>37</sup> *Fourth Letter to the Pall Mall Gazette*, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1872. See Chapter 9 for details of Reade's *Letters*.

<sup>38</sup> Hill (1891) p. 23. The Hills do not identify the position of these 'shakes' on their *Salabue* violin.

<sup>39</sup> The ultra-violet photograph of the *Messiah* violin's front plate, in Brandmair and Greiner, p. 280, clearly reveals these cracks.

<sup>40</sup> See letter of 4<sup>th</sup> April 1890 to Robert Crawford (Chapter 10).

<sup>41</sup> The quoted text is reproduced verbatim. The manuscript letter is currently housed at Cremona's Museo del Violino (previously at the Museo Stradivariano) on loan from the Stauffer Foundation. See also Chiesa and Rosengard p. 48, and Hill (1902) opposite p. 174.

<sup>42</sup> Hill (1902) printed on inserted tissue paper adjacent to p. 174. The Hills' translation closely echoes that which is provided in Fétis (Fétis (Bishop, 1864) Appendix II, p. 128): 'Pardon the delay of the Violin, occasioned by the varnishing of the large cracks, that the sun may not re-open them.' An alternative translation is provided by Claudio Rampini (*The Strad*, March 1995, pp. 279-281): 'I beg you to forgive the delay in delivering the violin, which is due to the varnish (which needs sunlight to dry). We must take care that the instrument does not split apart due to the sun's heat.'

explain that in order to construct a perfect instrument it has been found necessary to wait until the cold weather has passed away [...].<sup>43</sup> In a subsequent letter of 24<sup>th</sup> April 1638 Father Micanzio conveys to Galileo what he (Micanzio) has been told by the nephew of Claudio Monteverdi (Monteverdi's nephew living in Cremona and having been given the responsibility for buying the (Nicolò Amati?) violin): that the violin 'cannot be brought to perfection without *the strong heat of the sun*.'<sup>44</sup> Note that Father Micanzio's phrase refers only to the heat of the sun, not the direct glare of the sun in the open air. The Hills unfortunately juxtapose Father Micanzio's 1638 comments against Stradivari's 12<sup>th</sup> August 1708 letter:

That drying [of the varnish] was at times tedious and troublesome, even under the favourable conditions of the Italian climate, is shown by the testimony of Stradivari himself. In one of the only two letters of the master known to exist, he apologises for delay about his work, *because of the non-drying of the varnish*.<sup>45</sup> Very instructive is a letter written from Cremona in 1638 wherein we read, "The violin cannot be brought to perfection without the strong heat of the sun."<sup>46</sup>

Simone Sacconi offers a quite different interpretation of Stradivari's 1708 letter, one which ignores Stradivari's own clear reference to cracks:

[Stradivari] clearly confirms that the lateness in the delivery of a violin was because of the varnish, which, before drying, needed to be exposed to a strong sun, so that it would become soft, and spread uniformly, thus making the brushmarks disappear.<sup>47</sup> If it remained exposed to the sun for too long it softened excessively, expanded, and then contracted into clots, or islands, as happened to a [Stradivari] violin of 1718. Here the varnish first expanded, then contracted, afterwards accumulating in long islands, these being separated by up to 3 millimetres.<sup>48</sup>

Stefan-Peter Greiner echoes Sacconi's opinion:

An important [feature of Stradivari's varnish] is its pronounced thermoplasticity. Heat causes the varnish to soften and expand. When it subsequently cools, it flows, so to speak, over the surface contracting vertically and forming small islands.<sup>49</sup>

The characteristics of Stradivari's varnish are summarised by Sacconi:

a substance which does not stifle the instrument, that lies on top of the preparation [undercoat] without penetrating it

susceptible to knocks because of its softness, and adhering to the preparation [only] by anchorage, not by penetration or incorporation<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hill (1902) p. 242.

<sup>44</sup> Hill (1902) p. 242. Father Micanzio's phrase '*the strong heat of the sun*' is italicised in the Hills' translation-text. The correspondence suggests, perhaps, that instruments made between October and April were only varnished from May onwards, when temperatures would be steadily rising (note the earlier comment from Father Micanzio regarding waiting 'until the cold weather has passed away'). Unvarnished instruments – 'in the white' – could be hung up in the open air (but under cover) and seasoned by the sun's heat; airborne dust and dirt would not adhere to plain, untreated, wood. When this seasoning process was completed the instruments could be brought indoors, brushed down, and varnished in the relatively dust-free environment of an internal room.

<sup>45</sup> Stradivari does not say this in his 12<sup>th</sup> August 1708 letter. The quotation's italicised text is as printed.

<sup>46</sup> Hill (1902) p. 177.

<sup>47</sup> Stefan-Peter Greiner (Brandmair and Greiner p. 41) comments: 'Although we assume that the varnish was applied with a brush, no brush strokes or embedded brush fibres or bristles could be found [in the Stradivari instruments which were analysed] to demonstrate this.'

<sup>48</sup> Translated from Sacconi (1972) p. 168. Sacconi does not supply any further identification for this 1718 violin.

<sup>49</sup> Brandmair and Greiner p. 42.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Reade (*Fourth Letter to the Pall Mall Gazette*) proposes that Stradivari used an oil-based 'undercoat', covered with 'a spirit varnish consisting of a different gum, less chippy, but even more tender and wearable [...]. The spirit evaporated and left pure gum lying on a rich oil varnish, from which it chips by its dry nature *and its utter want of chemical*

thin and porous, thus filtering oil and retaining dirt

malleable to the point of being very sensitive to varied atmospheric temperatures, especially in summer, and susceptible to soften with simply the warmth of the hand.<sup>51</sup>

The fragility of Stradivari's varnish is described by Charles Beare, writing in 2013 of the 1712 *Fontaine* dancing-master's violin:<sup>52</sup>

The varnish was particularly admired by Charles Reade in his *Pall Mall Gazette* commentary on the 1872 exhibition at the South Kensington Museum.<sup>53</sup> It is still in the same state today, and the wear on the back [and at the end-pin] shows that the varnish must have more or less crumbled away when the wear occurred. This in turn suggests that with Cremonese instruments made after 1690, and sometimes before, a vital feature of the varnish's drying process would have been that the delicate coloured mass dried before its undercoat had adhered firmly to the grounded wood beneath. In other words, the beautiful wear patterns seen here at the Ashmolean [*Stradivarius* exhibition, 2013] would for the most part have come about very early on, probably within the first ten or twenty years of use, perhaps even sooner.<sup>54</sup>

Stefan-Peter Greiner makes the same point:

From the look of Stradivari's instruments, it seems that [the] varnish wore off from use and storage relatively quickly, a noticeable amount even within the first decades after the instrument's production.<sup>55</sup>

However, writing in 1891 about the varnish on the *Salabue/Le Messie* violin, the Hills comment:

The varnish is a study in itself, for it is untouched and unrubbed, as if it had been laid on yesterday. It has not perhaps the luscious richness of some of Stradivari's instruments, and it appears drier and less thickly laid on than usual in violins of the same period.<sup>56</sup>

The current 'untouched and unrubbed' condition of the *Messiah* violin's varnish suggests an extraordinarily charmed existence, despite the playing of the violin whilst it was owned by Count Cozio (if such ownership is believed), despite the playing of the violin during the period when it was owned by Vuillaume, and despite further playing of the violin between 1890 and 1904 when it was owned by Robert Crawford. Perhaps the varnish on the *Messiah* violin has different properties to that of the aforementioned *Fontaine* violin, or the varnish as described, in more general terms, by Reade, Sacconi, and Greiner. Stefan-Peter Greiner's commentary on *Cremonese varnishing procedure after 1740* includes the following:

The most remarkable aspect [of this post-1740 procedure] is that this new varnishing technique behaves quite differently in terms of wear compare to traditional Cremonese varnish. The new varnish seems to be less thermoplastic and considerably more durable, the molecules in these varnishes apparently more tightly linked to one another.

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*affinity to the substratum*' (emphasis by the present author). The Hills (Hill (1891) pp. 29-30) quote, without comment, more of Reade's text regarding Stradivari's varnish. In their 1902 monograph (p. 174) the Hills describe Reade's argument as 'unsound'.

<sup>51</sup> Translated from Sacconi (1972) p. 169.

<sup>52</sup> Exhibit 88 at the 1872 Special Exhibition.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Reade's *Fourth Letter to the Pall Mall Gazette*: 'The purest specimen of Stradiuarius's red varnish in the room is, perhaps, Mr. Fontaine's kit. Look at the back of it by the light of these remarks. What can be plainer than the clear oil varnish with not the ghost of a chip in it, and the glossy top varnish so charged with colour, and so ready to chip from the varnish below, for want of chemical affinity between the varnishes.'

<sup>54</sup> Beare *et al.* (2013), p. 138.

<sup>55</sup> Brandmair and Greiner p. 20. For further consideration of wear-through-usage, see Brandmair and Greiner pp. 45-47.

<sup>56</sup> Hill (1891) p. 23.



This also means that the varnish on these instruments generally wore off to a significantly lesser extent than their Stradivari counterparts.

The varnish's adhesion to the subsurface also seems better. The wear profile tends to be broad, which means that the transition between the areas with and without varnish is more spread out. Only rarely can the breakage edges so typically seen on Stradivari's instruments (where the varnish has detached from the subsurface in whole pieces) be found.<sup>57</sup>

David Laurie provides a sober and thoughtful commentary on the quality of varnish achieved by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume:

It was more like a paint than a varnish, very delicate and easily peeled, when exposed even to a mild heat. I have seen it curl up like brown paper when near, although not really close to a fire. Now and then he had a superior quality which was only used on special instruments and this was generally, although not invariably, magnificent in its suppleness, purity and colour. It had no resemblance to that which he ordinarily used [...]. With one solitary exception, I never saw in the house of Vuillaume any instruments with this special varnish but I have seen them in the possession of amateurs who always admitted having paid an extra price for them. [...] I often asked him to make me similar ones. He readily undertook to do so, but although I was quite willing as he well knew to pay any extra price for them, I never got more than the one referred to above from him. He always declared that his success with them was more or less accidental; this might quite well be the case, but the difference in the quality of the two coverings was not accidental.<sup>58</sup>

On 4<sup>th</sup> October 1864 Vuillaume wrote to Charles Plowden:

*Je suis arrivé au vernis du Messie. Les derniers violons que j'ai si bien réussis sont si beaux que je veux les conserver pour moi.*<sup>59</sup>

I have arrived at [equalled, replicated] the varnish of *Le Messie*. The last violins, [with which] I have been so successful, are so beautiful that I want to keep them for myself.

The implication of Vuillaume's comment is that his violins made before 1864 did not have a quality of varnish equal to that on the *Le Messie* violin. However, as indicated in Chapter 8, Vuillaume's 1856 copy-violin has varnish which is every bit as fine.

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Illumination of a Cremonese violin's back plate by ultra-violet light can reveal the extent of disintegration of the outer layer of varnish. David Rubio provides two photographs of the back plate of a 1731 Guarneri *del Gesù* violin,<sup>60</sup> the first taken under normal light and apparently only indicating slightly 'dulled' areas of varnish, the second taken under ultra-violet light which reveals that the outer varnish layer has entirely disappeared across the entire width of the back-plate lower bout and also in the upper part of the upper bout. Guarneri's original top-coat varnish survives only around the back-plate C-bouts and on the lower part of the upper bout. Rubio describes Cremonese varnish as fluorescing 'a bright salmon colour under long-wave ultraviolet light (also called 'black light')'.<sup>61</sup> In Brandmair and Greiner's *Stradivari Varnish* the back plates of Stradivari violins which are chronologically relevant to the *Messiah* violin are photographed, life-size, under ultra-violet light:

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<sup>57</sup> Brandmair and Greiner p. 48.

<sup>58</sup> Laurie pp. 50-51.

<sup>59</sup> vV/Campos p. 187; alternatively translated in vV/Campos/tr. p. 187.

<sup>60</sup> Rubio p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36.

1. the back plate of the 1709 *Viotti* violin<sup>62</sup> shows a wear pattern which is almost identical to that of the Guarneri violin illustrated by David Rubio. There is a faint pinkish tinge within the surviving coloured varnish (which is of a ‘Sienna’ shade). The lower end of the back plate, where the wear and abrasion has been most severe, reveals a blue-grey colour with tinges of pale green
2. the back plate of the 1714 *Smith-Quersin* violin<sup>63</sup> has a much more intense salmon-pink colour around the C-bouts, mixed with blue-grey shadings in the centre where the varnish has worn away
3. the back plate of the 1724 *Sarasate* violin,<sup>64</sup> like the Viotti, replicates the Guarneri violin’s extensive wear pattern, with grey-green shadings at the lower (tail-pin) end. The *Sarasate* has pink colouring around the C-bout corners and to the left and right of the upper bout/neck intersection
4. the back plate of the *Messiah* violin,<sup>65</sup> under UV light, presents a dull yellow generality – a light shade of raw umber – with isolated pink tinges. The UV photograph also clearly shows, in the centre of the back plate, the extent of chipping, scuff marks, and scratches, but shows no sign of any wear at the lower end of the back plate (where the violin would have come into contact with a player’s clothing).

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The full text of the 1891 observation made by the Hills concerning the outward-sloping *f*-holes on their *Salabue/Le Messie* violin is:

The sound holes are more slanting<sup>66</sup> than is usual in instruments of this period, although this was less rare in those of earlier date. In fact, we have seen no other Stradivari violin of the years 1715, 1716, 1717, or 1718 with sound holes similarly placed.<sup>67</sup>

The (probable) intended meaning of the Hills’ somewhat opaque commentary might be established by considering their two sentences in reverse order:

- by 1891, the Hills had seen no other Stradivari violin label-dated between 1715 and 1718 (inclusive) on which the *f*-holes were ‘placed’ (slanted) in the same manner as on the *Salabue* violin. Therefore the slant of the *f*-holes on the *Salabue* violin is anomalous
- Stradivari’s normal placement for *f*-holes was therefore upright, or, if slanted, only very slightly
- however, there were earlier violins known to the Hills which, not infrequently, had slanted *f*-holes (but no instrument-identification details are given, and the degree of slant in these instruments ‘of earlier date’ is not indicated).

Charles Beare has stated:

It is true that the slant on the sound holes of the *Messie* is a degree or two more slanted than any other instrument of that period. I have here photographs of the 1715 [violin], which we recently had[,] which is in Doring’s book, I think, as the Joachim D’Aranyi of 1715.<sup>68</sup> [...] The front has these slanted sound holes pretty much. I think that’s the nearest I’ve seen to the *Messie*. I haven’t

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<sup>62</sup> Brandmair and Greiner p. 262.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 272.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. 328.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 282.

<sup>66</sup> Is the expressive emphasis on ‘more’ or on ‘slanting’?

<sup>67</sup> Hill (1891) p. 22. The 1902 monograph has: ‘Sound-holes, edges, and corners are treated differently to anything we have hitherto seen or shall hereafter see’.

<sup>68</sup> The *Joachim d’Aranyi* violin is itemised in Doring p. 182. No photographs are provided. The Cozio.com website identification number was 56. Freely viewable photographs were provided on the website but were not ideally informative.

done measurements of angles, so I don't know whether one is more slanted than the other, but I can show you the photographs.<sup>69</sup>

With respect to the *Baron Knoop-ex Bevan* Stradivari violin of 1715, Beare continues:

You can't but be aware that you're looking at an instrument that was made only very shortly before the *Messie*, because it has many of the same features in its workmanship, including slanting soundholes. They're certainly not quite as much as the *Messie*.<sup>70</sup>

More recently, John Dilworth and Carlo Chiesa have commented:

The soundholes [of the *Messiah* violin] are very striking: broadly cut and swept across the front, the lower circle seeming to come closer to the edge than is usual. This is often thought of as a stylistic anomaly of the 'Messie', but in fact the layout is common to a group of instruments from the Golden Period, including several of Stradivari's recognised masterpieces such as the 'Soil' of 1714 [...], the 'ex-Joachim' of 1715, the 'San Lorenzo' of 1718, the 'Zahn' of 1719, and most particularly the wonderful 'Viotti' of 1709.<sup>71</sup>

Charles Beare, in his 1993 catalogue of the 1987 Cremona Exhibition of Stradivari instruments, provides calliper measurements for *f*-hole eye-gaps for all the instruments displayed at the Exhibition. His data reveals that the *Messiah* violin has not only the widest horizontal measurement between the inside edges of the lower *f*-hole eyes but also the greatest differential between the upper-eye gap and the lower-eye gap:

		Upper gap	Lower gap	Difference
1670	<i>Tullaye</i>	32.9mm	102.6mm	69.7mm
1679	<i>Hellier</i>	37.7	107.3	69.6
1685	<i>Guyot</i>	37.5	105.9	68.4
1690	<i>Tuscan</i>	37.9	106.2	68.3
1691	<i>Hilton</i>	38	107.8	69.8
1692	<i>Bennett</i>	37.8	109.5	71.7
1693	<i>Harrison</i>	39.9	108.6	68.7
1698	<i>Baron Knoop</i>	34	107	73
1702	<i>Fontana</i>	38.9	108.1	69.2
1703	<i>Emiliani</i>	40.1	110.6	70.5
1707	<i>La Cathédrale</i>	39.8	107.35	67.5
1709	<i>Engelman</i>	38.8	110.5	71.7
1709	<i>Viotti</i>	40.75	114.5 <sup>72</sup>	73.7
1711	<i>Parke</i>	40.2	114.6	74.4
1713	<i>Gibson/Huberman</i>	37.8	110.5	72.7
1714	<i>Soil</i>	38.6	112.2	73.6
1715	<i>Cremonese</i>	43.1	112.7	69.6
1715	<i>Titian</i>	40	108	68
1716	<i>Medici</i>	42.3	113.3	71
1716	<i>Provigny</i>	40.6	110	69.4
1716	<i>Messiah</i>	41.9	116.7 <sup>73</sup>	74.8

<sup>69</sup> JoVSA (XVII, 3) p. 202.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> MIAM:CC/Milnes pp. 162-163. The 1709 *Viotti ex-Bruce* violin is owned by the Royal Academy of Music in London.

<sup>72</sup> Measurements from the March 2006 *Viotti* poster published by *The Strad*.

<sup>73</sup> Measurements from the March 2011 *Messiah* poster published by *The Strad*.

1716	Count Cozio	42.9	115.8	72.9
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These are the results obtained by Count Cozio from the 1716 (*P.G.*) Stradivari violin which he measured on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1816: *Misure per le FF* ('Measurements for the *f*-holes'):

*Distanza fra li due occhietti superiori polici uno e ponti sette*  
Distance between the two upper eyes: *pollici* one and *ponti* seven. [42.89mm]

*Distanza inf[erio]<sup>ri</sup> fra le due ponte inferiori delle FF: polici quattro, e ponti tre ed un terzo*<sup>74</sup>  
Lower distance between the two [equivalent] lower points of the *f*-holes: *pollici* four, and *ponti* three and one third. [115.80mm]

1719	<i>Zahn</i>	40	109.5	69.5 <sup>75</sup>
1721	<i>Lady Blunt</i>	44.1	111	66.9
1724	<i>Sarasate</i>	44.9	111	66.1
1727	<i>Reynier</i>	41.8	107.4	65.6
1733	<i>Sassoon</i>	38.8	110.5	71.7
1734	<i>Habeneck</i>	46.5	110.4	63.9
1735	<i>Samazeuilh</i>	43.7	108	64.3
1736	<i>Muntz</i>	40.7	109.9	69.2

In general, the gap-differences in Beare's tabulation can be seen to increase shortly after the turn of the century and then narrow once more towards the end of Stradivari's life.<sup>76</sup> Within this data sequence the *Messiah* violin has the widest gap between the lower eyes – 2.1mm and 2.2mm wider than, respectively, the *Parke* and the *Viotti* violins – and, as shown, the *Messiah* violin's eye-gap measurements do not agree with the measurements made by Count Cozio.

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With respect to the label inside the *Salabue* violin the Hills, in 1891, write:

The whiteness of the label, and the variance of the instrument in some features from the characteristic style of that period of Stradivari's work, have given rise on different occasions<sup>77</sup> to the supposition that the label was not genuine, and that the violin was of a later date; but the careful examination which we made of the interior when the belly was removed, has enabled us to finally dispose of this idea. The label has never been moved since Stradivari fixed it in its place, nor have the figures upon it been tampered with in any way.<sup>78</sup>

It is noticeable that the Hills, having raised the issue of the *Salabue* violin's label – its whiteness – do not provide any explanation for that whiteness; the issue is ignored. The phrase 'has enabled us to finally dispose of this idea' is apparently related only to 'the supposition that the label was not genuine and that the violin was of a later date', but neither the Hills, nor anyone else, could determine whether or not the violin's label was glued in its place by Stradivari. The physical reality of a label can only indicate that the lettering, the monogram stamp, the date numerals, and the glued position are

<sup>74</sup> BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 47, folio 14r; see also Cozio/Bacchetta, p. 242. While it is possible for the upper-eye gap on Count Cozio's violin – 42.9mm – to have shrunk to the *Messiah* violin's current gap of 41.9mm it is not possible for the lower-eye gap of 115.8mm to have expanded to 116.7mm.

<sup>75</sup> From the tabulated evidence it is difficult to see how the 1719 *Zahn* violin falls into the same layout category as the *Messiah* violin.

<sup>76</sup> It has not been possible to determine the eye-gap dimensions for the 1715 *ex-Joachim* and the 1718 *San Lorenzo* violins.

<sup>77</sup> No details are supplied. The 'different occasions' when detailed inspection of the label could have taken place (inspections which prompted concerns about the genuineness of the label, these concerns then being communicated to the Hills) are difficult to identify.

<sup>78</sup> Hill (1891) pp. 24-25.

all consistent (or not) with other Stradivari examples; a label cannot identify the person who glued it inside the instrument.

Nevertheless, someone had raised concerns about the label's whiteness, for otherwise the Hills would not have sought to allay suspicions through their 1891 statement. Not until the 2011 publication of *Musical Instruments in the Ashmolean Museum: The Complete Collection* had any photographs of the *Messiah* violin's label appeared in print, and in that publication the label has been photographed in two overlapping half-portions;<sup>79</sup> a further single photograph of the complete label subsequently appeared in the 2013 Ashmolean Museum *Stradivarius* exhibition catalogue.<sup>80</sup> The cream/light-brown colour of the label-paper in the MIAM:CC/Milnes photograph can be confirmed by the present author as being true to life, but if, according to the Hills, the label was white in May 1890, then today's colour is the result of 120 years of slow discolouration.<sup>81</sup> If the *Messiah* label is genuinely from 1716 then at least the same amount of discolouration should have taken place during the 174 years between 1716 and 1890; i.e. by 1890 the label should not have been white. The label inside the Stradivari *Lady Blunt* violin of 1721, on the evidence of the photograph included in the 2011 Tarisio auction booklet, is of a much deeper yellow/brown colour than the label inside the *Messiah* violin. According to Vuillaume, the *Lady Blunt* violin had been forgotten about – had been untouched – for more than one hundred years prior to its arrival in Paris in 1864.<sup>82</sup> Forgotten the violin may have been, but it almost certainly sat inside a closed case, protected from atmospheric dust and dirt, protected from discharges of bow-hair resin, protected from warm moist breath, and perspiration, when being played. Despite this isolation from everyday atmospheric pollution, the label inside the *Lady Blunt* has apparently discoloured more than the label inside the *Messiah* violin. If these two labels are genuinely from 1716 and from 1721, but the latter label was cocooned for more than 100 years, one might expect to find it displaying a paler colour than the 1716 label; the present-day reality (according to the photographs) is the reverse.

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Disconcertingly, Antoine Vidal provides a photographic illustration of the *Le Messie* violin and, underneath, an image of the violin's label, clearly dated '1715' (see Plate 31); the same date is stated in Vidal's description of the illustrative plates contained within his 1889 volume:

*Planche IV. – Violon de A. STRADIVARI, 1715 (le Messie). Ce magnifique violon, unique en son genre, absolument neuf, resta pendant soixante ans dans la collection du comte Cozio de Salabue, à Milan. Il fut acheté par Tarisio en 1824. [...] A la mort de Tarisio, en 1854, ce magnifique instrument se trouvait au nombre de ceux laissés par le défunt, et achetés en bloc par J.-B. Vuillaume en 1855. Il est resté la propriété de M<sup>me</sup> V<sup>ve</sup> Alard.*<sup>83</sup>

Plate IV. – Violin of A. Stradivari, 1715 (*Le Messie*). This magnificent violin, one of a kind, absolutely new, remained for sixty years in the collection of Count Cozio di Salabue, in Milan. It was bought by Tarisio in 1824. [...] At Tarisio's death, in 1854, this magnificent instrument was found amongst those left behind by the deceased, and all were bought by J.-B. Vuillaume in 1855. It is currently the property of Madame Alard.

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<sup>79</sup> See MIAM:CC/Milnes p. 154.

<sup>80</sup> Beare *et al.* (2013) p. 178.

<sup>81</sup> The 2013 Ashmolean catalogue photograph has a slightly darker tinge than the photograph in MIAM:CC/Milnes.

<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 7 for further consideration of the *Lady Blunt* violin.

<sup>83</sup> Vidal (1889) pp. 341-342. 'V<sup>ve</sup>' is the abbreviated form of 'veuve' (widowed); Jeanne-Emilie Alard's husband, Delphin Alard, had died in February 1888.

Vidal adds:

*Tous les violons ci-dessus mentionnés ont été reproduits directement sur les originaux.*  
All the violins listed above have been reproduced [illustrated] directly from the originals.<sup>84</sup>



Plate 31: Antoine Vidal, *La Lutherie et les Luthiers* (1889)  
Plate IV, opposite p. 44: The *Le Messie* violin (1715).

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In their 1902 *Antonio Stradivari* monograph the Hills include 'Facsimile Labels (Two Plates)'.<sup>85</sup> Their commentary draws attention to the increasingly 'coarse' quality of the printed text on Stradivari labels:

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<sup>84</sup> The appearance of the numerals on Vidal's 1715 label, especially the third and fourth, indicate that this label is a hand-drawn approximation. Harvey S Whistler (Whistler and Doring p. 10) identifies the date of the Stradivari *Le Messie* violin as 1714.

<sup>85</sup> Hill (1902) between pp. 216 and 217. It is unclear whether these are photographs taken of the labels *in situ* or are hand-drawn copy-illustrations; the many small illustrations showing just the year-date and the monogram reveal no presence of what should have been the closely-adjacent word 'Anno'. It is also noticeable that the beige-coloured label paper is of the same tint in every illustration, and there is no visual evidence of the paper having undergone 'foxing' (which is clearly seen in the various Guarneri labels reproduced in the Hills' 1931 Guarneri-family monograph).

It is curious to note that the type [letter shapes] of the labels followed the same course as his work: the finer is found in the early work, the coarser in that of his old age. To some extent this may be attributed to the fact of Stradivari's hand losing the steadiness for printing; the very shaky monogram found on the labels of the late period affords striking evidence of this.<sup>86</sup>

This incremental process of deterioration can be seen in four of the Hills' illustrations of complete labels, dated 1667, 1694, 1699, and 1717:

1. the 1667 label has crisp, clean, precise printing, with plenty of space between each letter
2. the subsequent 1694 label (with its 'Antonins' spelling, described by the Hills as a 'curious mistake')<sup>87</sup> still has firm outlines to the letters, but there is a very slight deterioration; the letter-shapes are very slightly thicker. It is noticeable that some of the individual letter-shapes on this label are not the same as the equivalents on the 1667 label, which suggests that one of these labels may not be authentic (compare the two 'a' letters of 'Stradiuarius' in each label). The Hills do not identify this 1694 instrument but it is likely to be the 1694 *Muir-MacKenzie* violin (which is confirmed by Ernest Doring as having an 'Antonins' label).<sup>88</sup>
3. in the 1699 label the lettering has 'grown', especially noticeable in the word 'Cremonenfis'
4. in the 1717 label the lettering has 'grown' slightly more.<sup>89</sup>

Alongside the Hills' evidence can be placed the present author's inspection of Stradivari labels in three other violins:

1. The label inside the *Kustendyke* violin of 1698<sup>90</sup> is printed on paper which now is medium-brown in colour. The lettering is cleanly printed, with no evidence of any 'growth'. The *Kustendyke* label is another of the pre-1700 labels in which the word 'Antonius' has been printed as 'Antonins'.<sup>91</sup>
2. The label inside the *Archinto* viola (1696)<sup>92</sup> is of an even darker brown colour than that of the *Kustendyke*, but, again, the letter-printing is clean and crisp (although faded). It is noticeable that the *Archinto* viola, chronologically situated between the 1694 *Muir-MacKenzie* violin and the 1698 *Kustendyke* violin, does not have an 'Antonins' label.
3. The label inside the *Viotti-Bruce* violin of 1709<sup>93</sup> is slightly lighter in colour than the *Kustendyke* (but not as light as the label inside the *Messiah* violin). The letter-shapes are slightly thicker than those of the two instruments listed above.

The obvious discolouration, through age, of the label-paper within these instruments is very noticeable, and again raises questions about the anomalous whiteness of the *Messiah* violin's label in 1890. If the label was genuinely from 1716 the Hills, in 1890, might reasonably have expected to see

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<sup>86</sup> Hill (1902) p. 219.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p. 217.

<sup>88</sup> See Doring p. 331.

<sup>89</sup> The reproduction of these labels in the Dover Publications 1963 re-print of the Hills' 1902 monograph exaggerates the blackness, and thickness, of the lettering.

<sup>90</sup> Owned by the Royal Academy of Music in London. Reference books state that the label date of this violin is 1699, but the fourth numeral is much more likely an '8' than a '9'. This label has only the first two numerals – '16' – printed; the subsequent '98' numerals are drawn with pen and ink.

<sup>91</sup> The 1690 *Medici* cello (owned by the Istituto Cherubini in Florence) also has an 'Antonins' label. Either Stradivari did not notice the mis-spelling on his cello label (unlikely), or did notice it but was not bothered about it (even more unlikely given that he was making instruments for Prince Ferdinand, son of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo III de' Medici), or someone subsequently inserted into the cello a counterfeit label which had been produced with a printing error (likely). According to the Hills (Hill, (1902) p. 96) yet another 'Antonins' label is to be found within the 1672 *Mahler* viola.

<sup>92</sup> Royal Academy of Music, London.

<sup>93</sup> Royal Academy of Music, London.

brown speckles and stains such as are visible on the sheet of paper on which Stradivari wrote his 12<sup>th</sup> August 1708 letter apologising for the late delivery of a violin (see earlier). The only unarguable strategy with the label inside the *Messiah* violin (and perhaps also the label inside the *Lady Blunt* violin) would be to subject a minuscule portion of the paper, and the ink, to forensic chemical analysis.

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The aforementioned 30<sup>th</sup> September 1804 letter from Count Cozio to Count Maggi (see Chapter 4) indicates the continuing frustration with which Count Cozio viewed the non-delivery of labels as part of his 1776 purchase of the artefacts from the Stradivari workshop:

Also left in the hands of [the heirs] was the seal, or the stamp, used on his labels, and a number of original labels.<sup>94</sup>

The Museo Stradivariano in Cremona exhibited what was implied to be the monogram stamp owned and used by Stradivari (MSCr. exhibit 509). The 1987 Museo catalogue described the item:

*Stampino originale per l'apposizione del marchio di Stradivari sulle etichette.  
Legno di bosso. Coll. G. Fiorini.*<sup>95</sup>  
Original little stamp for applying the brand of Stradivari on the labels.  
Boxwood. Collection G. Fiorini.

Exhibit 510 was described in the Museo Stradivariano catalogue as:

*Copia dello stampino descritto al numero 509. Legno di pero. Coll. G. Fiorini.*<sup>96</sup>  
Copy of the little stamp described in number 509. Pear-wood. Collection G. Fiorini.

Both of these items are photographed by Sacconi;<sup>97</sup> the wooden 'copy' stamp is placed on a piece of paper on which has been handwritten: *Copia del Carlo Mantegazza, Bollo Biglietti dell' Antonio Stradivario*.<sup>98</sup> It is not explained why Carlo Mantegazza needed to make such a copy-stamp.

With respect to labels, Count Cozio was possibly mistaken in believing that there were 'original labels' remaining with Antonio Stradivari's descendants, i.e. pre-printed labels which lacked only the year-date (and, probably, the monogram). Consideration of the manner in which Stradivari printed his labels is made difficult by the shortage of accurate photographs of his labels *in situ*. The label from the 1683 *Cipriani Potter* violin, and that from the *Messiah* violin, are photographically reproduced, in colour, in MIAM:CC/Milnes (pp. 152 and 154) and both are also reproduced in Beare *et al.* (2013), together with the labels from the 1666 *Serdet* violin and the 1709 *La Pucelle* violin.<sup>99</sup> The *Serdet* label, as photographed for the 2013 Ashmolean catalogue, does not entirely correspond with the first 'facsimile' label provided by the Hills in their 1902 monograph<sup>100</sup> – the 2013 photograph shows the circular monogram to be more faintly inked (or more faded and smudged) while the Hills' image

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<sup>94</sup> Translated from BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 90; see also Cozio/Bacchetta, p. 422.

<sup>95</sup> Mosconi and Torresani p. 94. The exhibit is now at the Museo del Violino in Cremona, but, as of May 2014, unlabelled.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> See Sacconi (1972) p. 101.

<sup>98</sup> The caption to Sacconi's photograph of MSCr. 509 (Sacconi (1972) p. 101) incorrectly states (in translation) 'Paolo Mantegazza: copy of the seal of Stradivari and its imprint'.

<sup>99</sup> Beare *et al.* (2013) pp. 48, 56, 122, and 178. The *La Pucelle* label (p. 122) is either anomalously entirely white or the photograph has been reproduced in monochrome.

<sup>100</sup> See the label illustrations in Hill (1902) between pp. 216 and 217. According to Charles Beare (Beare *et al.* (2013) p. 48) Alfred Hill photographed the *Serdet* label in April 1900 'for their [1902] book'. This might suggest that the Hills' facsimiles were created by tracing photographic images of the labels.



shows no staining of the label such as can be seen in the 2013 photograph.<sup>101</sup> The Hills' 1902 facsimiles do not include the *Potter* label, the *Pucelle* label, or the *Messiah* label.

Close examination of all eight complete facsimile labels provided by the Hills – dated 1667, 1694, 1699, 1717, 1732, 1736, 1736, and 1737 – reveals that the horizontal spacing between the three top-line words – ‘Antonius’, ‘Stradiuarius’ (or ‘Stradivarius’) and ‘Cremonensis’ – constantly varies. In addition, the vertical alignment of the lower-line ‘F’ (of ‘Faciebat’) against the upper-line text also varies from label to label:

- in the Hills' 1732 label the left side of the ‘F’ vertical stem is aligned with the centre of the ‘o’ of ‘Antonius’
- in the Hills' two 1736 labels the ‘F’ is slightly further to the right, similarly with the 1737 label
- in the *La Pucelle* label<sup>102</sup> the left-hand side of the ‘F’ vertical stem is aligned with the left-side of the letter ‘i’ of ‘Antonius’, as is the case with the *Cipriani Potter* label<sup>103</sup>
- in the *Messiah* violin the letter ‘F’ is very slightly to the right of the ‘i’.<sup>104</sup>

In addition, the distance between the ‘t’ of ‘Faciebat’ and the ‘A’ of ‘Anno’ also varies slightly from label to label in the Hills' facsimiles. The differing gaps between the five words on these labels suggest that Antonio Stradivari used five different wooden stamps – one for each word.

The distance between the ‘o’ of ‘Anno’ and the adjacent Roman ‘I’ (the first date numeral) is also inconsistent and it would seem, therefore, that the year-date was on a separate stamp block, making six blocks in total. However, the Hills' 1902 illustrations of the 1672, 1684, 1688, 1689, 1693, 1694, and 1698 year-dates reveal varying distances between the initial ‘I’ and the adjacent ‘6’; conversely, the distance between the two ‘6’ numerals (when used within labels from the 1660, 1680, and 1690 decades) remains constant. The evidence points towards Stradivari using an individual block for the ‘I’ and another for the subsequent ‘66’; thus the printing of an individual label required seven wooden blocks, with the letters and numbers carved in relief on the blocks.

In 1670 the individual ‘66’ stamp-block would have required modification if it was to serve for the new decade. It is here suggested that Stradivari carefully sawed (or split) the ‘66’ block in half, leaving two blocks, each one containing the numeral ‘6’. During the 1670s decade he used the ‘I’ block in conjunction with a ‘6’ block, and hand-wrote the final two numerals (70–79) on his labels. In 1680 Stradivari glued the two ‘6’ blocks back together and, on his labels, altered (with pen and ink) the second ‘6’ to become an ‘8’ and then wrote the final numeral by hand. In 1690, on the glued-together ‘66’ block, he trimmed off the upper tail of the second ‘6’ and, having stamped this block onto the paper label, drew a curving lower tail to change the resultant ‘o’ into a ‘9’ (and then wrote the final numeral by hand). From approximately 1700 onwards he used only the single-numeral ‘I’ block and wrote the second, third, and fourth numerals by hand.<sup>105</sup>

The evidence (and a process of reasonable deduction) points towards Antonio Stradivari always making his labels ‘in house’, and as required, and never having them commercially printed. Even if

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<sup>101</sup> Some doubts as to the authenticity of this *Serdet* label are expressed by Bonetti *et al.* pp. 31-32. See also Chapter 2 of the present account.

<sup>102</sup> Beare *et al.* (2013) p. 122.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* p. 178.

<sup>105</sup> See Chapter 7 for information regarding Giuseppe Guarneri's labels, which the Hills describe (Hill (1931) p. 127) as having been ‘printed from wood blocks’.

Count Maggi, at Count Cozio's request, searched Cremona in 1804, he would not have found any 'original labels'.

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The Hills conclude their 1891 *Salabue/Le Messie* monograph with an unenthusiastic comment:

[...] it is our opinion after a careful trial that the instrument would be greatly improved in tone by further use.<sup>106</sup>

No more than 800 words, out of a total of approximately 7,200, had been written by the Hills about Mr Crawford's newly-acquired world-record-price violin – the 'absolutely unique' 'fiddle of Europe'.

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<sup>106</sup> Hill (1891) p. 31.