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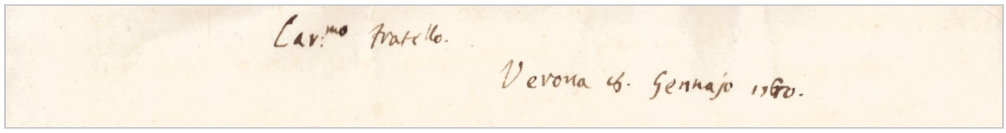
Ottaviano Dionisi on Mozart in Verona (5 Jan 1770)

Dexter Edge and Stefano Frega

Verona, Archivio di Stato di Verona, Fondo Dionisi Piomarta, b 680

Car:[mo] fratello.

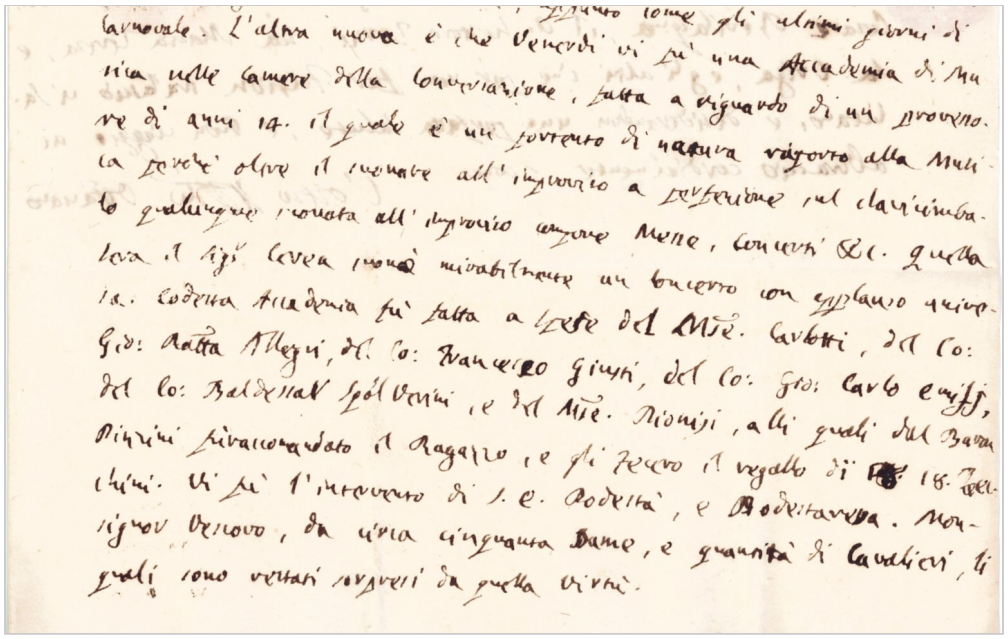
Verona 8. Gennajo 1770.



[...]

L’altra nuova è che venerdi vi fù una Accademia di Mu[-]
sica nelle Camere della Conversazione, fatta a riguardo di un provesso-
re di anni 14. il quale è un portento di natura raporto alla Musi-
ca perchè oltre il suonare all’improviso a perfezione sul clavicemba-
lo qualunque suonata all’improviso compone Messe, Concerti ecc. quella
sera il Sig:[r] Cerea suonò mirabilmente un Concerto con applauso unive-
sa. Codesta Accademia fù fatta a spese del M[arche]se Carlotti, del Co:
Gio: Batt[ist]a Allegri, d[e]l Co: Francesco Giusti, del Co: Carlo Emilj,
del Co: Baldessar Spolverini, e del M[arche]se Dionisi, alli quali dal Baron
Pizzini fù raccomandato il Ragazzo, e gli fecero il regallo di xx 18 Zec-
chini. Vi fù l’intervento di S. E. Podestà, e Podestaressa. Mon-
signor Vescovo, da circa cinquanta Dame, e quantità di Cavalieri, li
quali sono restati sorpresi da quella virtù.

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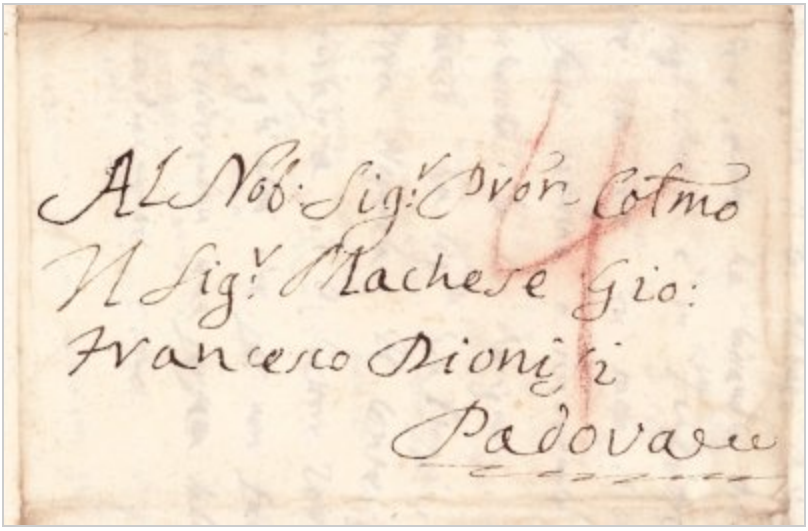
[...]

Vostro [Fratello?] Ottaviano



[wrapper:]

Al No[bile] Sig[nor] P[ad]ron Col[endissim]moIl
Sig[nor] Machese [sic] Gio[vanni]
Francesco Dionisi
Padova



[translation:]

Dearest Brother.

Verona, 8 January 1770.

[...]

The other news is that on Friday we had a musical academy in the Camere di Conversazione, given by a 14-year-old professor who is a prodigy of nature, because in addition to playing perfectly at sight any sonatas on the harpsichord, he also composes on the spot masses, concertos etc. That night Sig. Cerea played a concerto admirably to general applause. This academy was underwritten by Marchese Carlotti, Count Giovanni Battista Allegri, Count Francesco Giusti, Count Carlo Emili, Count Baldassare Spolverini, and Marchese Dionisi, to all of whom the boy was recommended by Baron Pizzini, and who gave him a gift of 18 zecchini. His Excellency the podestà and his wife were also present, as were the Monsignor Bishop, fifty ladies, and many gentlemen, who were all astonished by such talent.

[...]

Your [Brother?] Ottaviano

[wrapper:]

To Noble Signor Lord Most Worshipful
Signor Marchese Giovanni

Francesco Dionisi
Padua

Commentary

Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart spent Christmas 1769 in Rovereto, arriving there on Christmas Eve. On 27 Dec they continued on to Verona, making the entire trip, around 75 km (45 mi) by road, that same day. Before leaving Rovereto, the Mozarts had acquired a letter of recommendation from Count Domenico Lodron to Count Gian Luca Pallavicini in Bologna (see our entry for 27 Dec 1769), and at least one other letter addressed to prominent members of the Veronese nobility. Leopold Mozart names the nobles in a letter to his wife dated 7 Jan 1770:

> Die Cavagliers an die wir recommendirt waren, sind *il Marquese Carlotti*, il *Conte Carlo Emilij*. *Il Marquese Spolverini*. *Il Marquese Dionisio St: Fermo. Il Sgr. Conte Justi del Giardino. Il: Sgr: Conte Allegri*. [*Briefe*, i:299]
>
> The gentlemen to whom we were recommended are *the Marchese Carlotti*, the *Count Emilei*, the *Marchese Spolverini*, the *Marchese Dionisio St: Fermo*, the *Signor Count Giusti di Giardino*, the *Signor Count Allegri*.

"Il Marchese Dionisio" was Marchese Gabriele Melchiore Zeno Dionisi, whose son Ottaviano is the author of the letter given in extract above. The letter, dated 8 Jan 1770, is written to Ottaviano's brother Giovanni Francesco in Padua. The letter reports recent news, including a concert given in Verona on 5 Jan at which an unnamed "portento di natura" (prodigy of nature) astonished the aristocratic audience with his musical skill. The prodigy was Wolfgang Mozart, who would turn fourteen just a little over three weeks later. The reference to Mozart in Ottaviano's letter was discovered by Paolo Rigoli, librarian of the conservatory in Verona, and the extract referring to Mozart was first published by Carlo Bologna the following year (Bologna 1991, 19); Bologna's transcription is reproduced in Basso's *I Mozart in Italia* (2006, 59). Dionisi's letter is not in *Dokumente* or *Neue Folge*, and remains little known to Mozart scholars. However, it adds new details to what was already known about Wolfgang's Verona concert.

At the time of the Mozarts' visit, Verona was part of the Republic of Venice. The composers Giuseppe Torelli (1658–1709), Evaristo Felice Dall'Abaco (1675–1742), and soon-to-be famous opera composer Giuseppe Gazzaniga (1743–1818) were all born in Verona; Antonio Salieri (1750–1825) was born in nearby Legnago. The city's Accademia filarmonica, established in 1543, was the oldest such musical academy in Europe.

Leopold and Wolfgang stayed in Verona from 27 Dec 1769 to 10 Jan 1770. Wolfgang's concert took place nine days after their arrival; according to Leopold (in his letter of 7 Jan 1770), it was not possible to hold the concert sooner "because there is opera every day" ("weil täglich opera ist"; *Briefe*, i:299). Leopold does not mention who had recommended them to the Veronese nobility, but Ottaviano Dionisi clarifies that the recommendation came from Baron Pizzini in

Rovereto, whose wife was related to the Dionisis (Bologna 1991, 14). The concert at the Accademia filarmonica in Verona on 5 Jan took place in the Sala della Conversazione (now the Sala Maffeiana).



Sala Maffeiana, Verona
(Wikmedia Commons)

This concert has long been known to Mozart scholars from Leopold's letter of 7 Jan and from a report published in the *Gazzetta di Mantova* on 12 Jan (*Dokumente*, 95–96):

> VERONA 9. Gennajo.
>
> Questa Città non può non annunziare il valor portentoso, che in età di non ancor 13. anni, ha nella musica il giovanetto Tedesco Sig. Amadeo Wolfango Motzzart, nativo di Salisburgo, e figlio dell'attuale Maestro di Cappella di Sua Altezza Rma Monsig. Arcivescovo Principe di Salisburgo suddetto. Esso giovane nello scorso Venerdì, 5. dell'andante, in una sala della Nobile Accademia Filarmonica, in faccia alla pubblica Rappresentanza, ed a copiosissimo concorso di Nobilità dell'uno, e l' altro sesso, ha date tali prove di sua perizia nell' arte predetta, che ha fatto stordire. Egli, fra una scelta adunanza di valenti Professori, ha saputo, prima d'ogn'altra cosa, esporre una bellissima sinfonia d' introduzione di

composizion sua, che ha meritato tutto l’ applauso. Indi ha egregiamente sonato a prima vista un concerto di cembalo, e successivamente altre sonate a lui novissime. Poi sopra quattro versi esibitigli ha composta sul fatto un’ aria d’ ottimo gusto nell’ atto stesso di cantarla. Un Soggetto, ed un Finale progettatogli, egli mirabilmente concertò sulle migliori leggi dell’arte. Suonò all’ improvviso assai bene un Trio del Bocherini. Compose benissimo in partitura un Sentimento datogli sul violino da un Professore. In somma sì in questa, che in altre occasioni, esposto a’ più ardui cimenti, gli ha tutti superati con indicibil valore, e quindi con universale ammirazione specialmente de’ Dilettanti; tra’ quali i Signori Lugiati, che, dopo aver goduti, e fatti ad altri godere più saggi maravigliosi dell’abilità di tal giovine, hanno infino voluto farlo ritrarre in tela al naturale, per serbarne eterna memoria. Nè è già nuovo questo pensiero; imperciocchè, da che egli va girando per entro l’Europa col Padre suo, per dare pruova di se, ha tanta meraviglia eccitata in ogni parte, fino dalla tenera età di 7. anni, che se ne serba tuttavia il ritratto in Vienna, in Parigi, dove sono anche i ritratti di tutta la sua Famiglia, in Olanda, ed in Londra, in cui si collocò esto ritratto suo nell’ insigne Museo Britannico con una iscrizione, che celebrava la stupenda sua bravura nella musica nella verde età d’ anni 8. che soli allora contava. Noi per tanto non dubitiamo, che nel proseguimento del suo viaggio, che ora fa per l’Italia, non sia per apportare eguale stupore dovunque si recherà, massimamente agli Esperti, ed Intelligenti.
[*Gazzetta di Mantova*, no. 2, 12 Jan 1770, [4]]



VERONA 9. *Gennajo.*

Queſta Città non può non annunziare il valor portentoſo, che in età di non ancor 13. anni, ha nella muſica il giovanetto Tedeſco Sig. Amadeo Wolfango Motzzart, nativo di *Salisburgo*, e figlio dell'attuale Maeſtro di Cappella di Sua Altezza Rma Monſig. Arciveſcovo Principe di Salisburgo ſuddetto. Eſſo giovane nello ſcorſo Venerdì, 5. dell'andante, in una ſala della Nobile Accademia Filarmonica, in faccia alla pubblica Rappreſentanza, ed a copioſiſſimo concorſo di Nobiltà dell' uno, e l' altro ſeſſo, ha date tali prove di ſua perizia nell' arte predetta, che ha fatto ſtordire. Egli, fra una ſcelta adunanza di valenti Profeſſori, ha ſaputo, prima d'ogn'altra coſa, eſporre una belliſſima ſinfonia d' introduzione di compoſizion ſua, che ha meritato tutto l'applauſo. Indi ha egregiamente ſonato a prima viſta un concerto di cembalo, e ſucceſſivamente altre ſonate a lui noviſſime. Poi ſopra quattro verſi eſibitigli, ha compoſta ſul fatto un'aria d'ottimo guſto nell' atto ſteſſo di cantarla. Un Soggetto, ed un Finale progettatogli, egli mirabilmente concertò ſulle migliori leggi dell'arte. Suonò all' improvviſo aſſai bene un Trio del Bocherini. Compoſe beniſſimo in partitura un Sentimento datogli ſul violino da un Profeſſore. In ſomma sì in queſta, che in altre occaſioni, eſpoſto a' più ardui cimenti, gli ha tutti ſuperati con indicibil valore, e quindi con univerſale ammirazione ſpecialmente de' Dilettanti; tra' quali i Signori Lugiati, che, dopo aver goduti, e fatti ad altri godere più ſaggi maraviglioſi dell'abilità di tal giovine, hanno infine voluto farlo ritrarre in tela al naturale, per ſerbarne eterna memoria. Nè è già nuovo queſto penſiero; imperciocchè, da che egli va girando per entro l'*Europa* col Padre ſuo, per dar pruova di ſe, ha tanta meraviglia eccitata in ogni parte, fino dalla tenera età di 7. anni, che ſe ne ſerba tuttavia il ritratto in *Vienna*, in *Parigi*, dove ſono anche i ritratti di tutta la ſua Famiglia, in *Olanda*, ed in *Londra*, in cui ſi collocò eſſo ritratto ſuo nell' inſigne Muſeo Britannico con una iſcrizione, che celebrava la ſtupenda ſua bravura nella muſica nella verde età d'anni 8., che ſoli allora contava. Noi per tanto non dubitiamo, che nel proſeguimento del ſuo viaggio, che ora fa per l'*Italia*, non ſia per apportare eguale ſtupore dovunque ſi recherà, maſſimamente agli Eſperti, ed Intelligenti.

[translation:]

VERONA, 9 January.

This city cannot fail to report the prodigious musical merits of the young German boy, Sig. Amadeo Wolfango Mozart, not yet 13 years of age, a native of Salzburg, and son of the current Maestro di Cappella of His Most Reverend Highness Monsignor the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. Last Friday, the 5th of this month, this boy, in a hall of the aristocratic Accademia Filarmonica at a public performance copiously attended by the nobility of both sexes, gave

> such proof of his skill in the previously mentioned art, that the audience was stunned. Before a select assembly of learned professors, he was able to present a most beautiful introductory symphony of his own composition that merited every applause. He then played excellently at sight a cembalo concerto, followed by other sonatas that were new to him. Then he composed on the spot, on four verses that had been shown to him, an aria in excellent taste, while singing himself. A subject and finale were contrived for him, which he combined wonderfully according to the best rules of art. He played quite well an unrehearsed trio of Boccherini. He composed extremely well in score a motive given to him on the violin by a professor. In short, subjected to the most arduous trials, he overcame them all with indescribable merit, and thereby with universal admiration, especially from the music lovers, among whom the Signori Lugiati, who after having enjoyed and having let others enjoy yet more marvelous proofs of the abilities of this youth, went so far as to have him portrayed on canvas from life, to preserve for eternal memory. Nor was this a new idea, because when he was traveling through all of Europe with his father to prove himself, even by the tender age of 7 years, he was always preserved in portrayals in Vienna, in Paris—where his entire family was depicted—in Holland, and in London, where this depiction was deposited in the famous British Museum with an inscription that celebrated his astonishing bravura in music at the youthful age of 8 years, which is how old he was then. We therefore have no doubt that during the continuation of the journey that he is now making through Italy, he will arouse equal astonishment everywhere he goes, especially among the experts and the knowledgeable. [Translation by DE]

No program of Wolfgang's concert in Verona is known to survive, but judging by the report in the *Gazzetta di Mantova*, it seems to have been quite similar to his concert in Mantua eleven days later, for which a program does survive. Both concerts began with an introductory symphony composed by Wolfgang, after which he performed at sight a keyboard concerto previously unknown to him. After playing other works on the keyboard, he then composed on the spot an aria on a submitted text, singing the aria himself. At both concerts he seems to have improvised a fugue on a submitted subject, and at both he composed on the spot a multi-part instrumental work on a motive played to him on the violin. The report of the Verona concert mentions that he also performed in a trio by Boccherini; the implication seems to be that Wolfgang played violin in the trio; he apparently also performed on violin (as well as keyboard) in Mantua. From Ottaviano

Dionisi's letter, we learn that a "Sig. Cerea" also played a concerto at the concert in Verona; Bologna writes that this was probably Luigi Cerea (b. 1747) or perhaps his brother Alessandro (Bologna 1991, 19).

Ottaviano Dionisi names the six Veronese nobles who had underwritten Wolfgang's concert at the Accademia filarmonica:

> Marchese Alessandro Carlotti (1740–1828)
> Count Giovanni Battista Allegri (1740–1815)
> Count [Ercole] Francesco Giusti di Giardino
> Count Giovanni Carlo Emilei (1705–after 1772)
> Count Baldassare Spolverini
> Marchese Gabriele Dionisi (1719–1808), Ottaviano's father

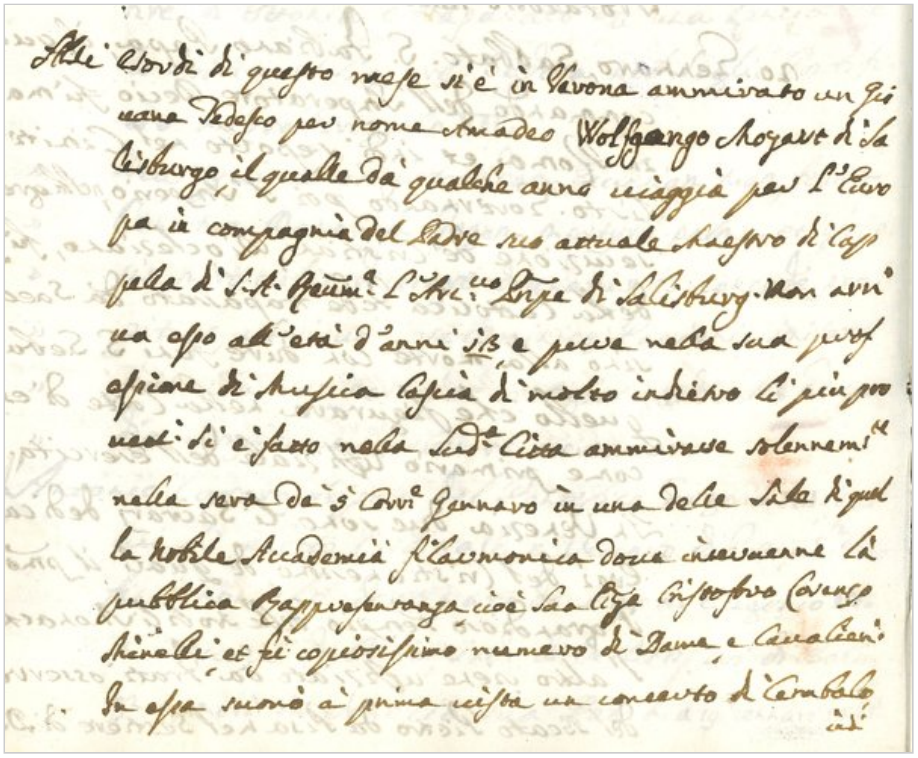
Leopold mentions these same six in a letter to his wife on 7 Jan 1770 (*Briefe*, i:299). On 26 Jan, in a letter to his wife sent from Milan, Leopold points out that neither the concert in Verona nor the one in Mantua had paid admission:

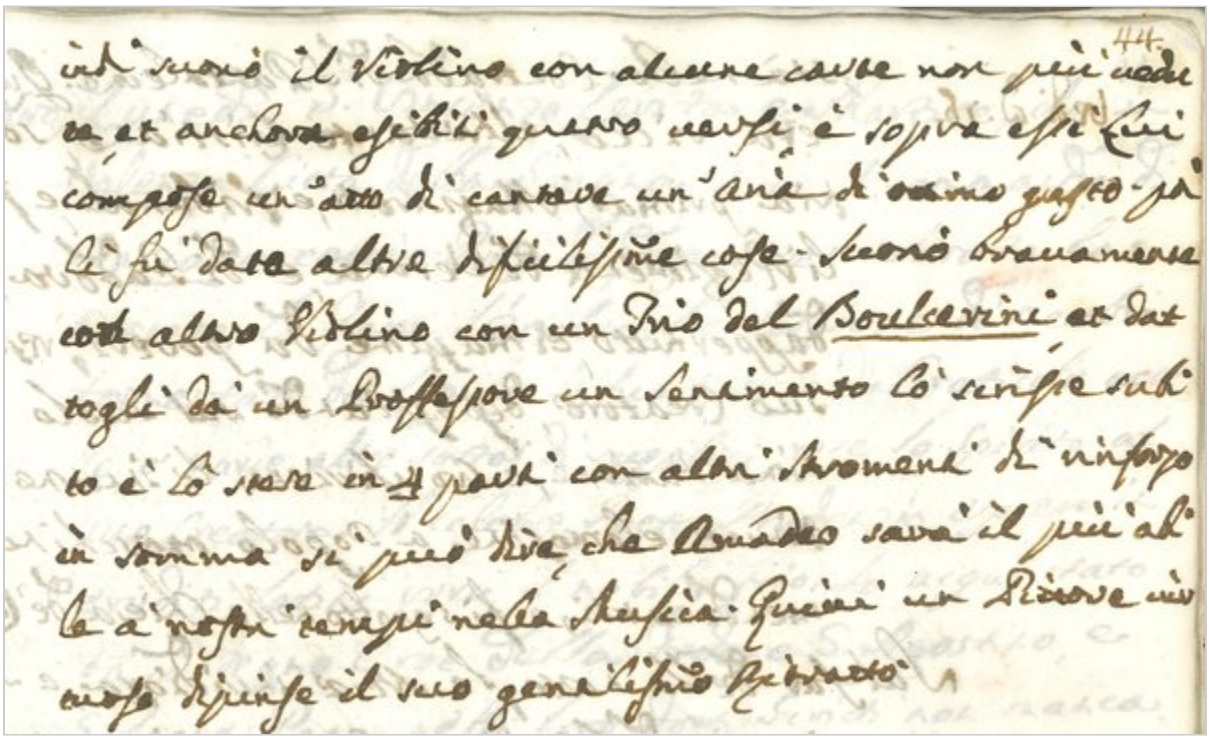
> du must aber wissen, daß weder diese accademia in Mantua, noch die in Verona fürs Geld gemacht wird; sondern alles gehet frey hinein. in Verona nur die Nobleße, weil es von ihnen nur allein unterhalten wird: in Mantua aber, Nobleße, Militaire und ansehnliche Bürgerschaft; weil es von Sr: Mayst. der Kayserin eine Stiftung hat. [*Briefe*, i:307]

> But you must know that neither the academy in Mantua nor the one in Verona were given for money; rather everyone had free entry. In Verona only the nobility, because it is supported by them alone; in Mantua, however, nobility, military, and respectable citizens, because it has an endowment from Her Majesty the Empress.

However, Ottaviano Dionisi writes that the six nobles who underwrote the Verona concert gave the Mozarts "18 Zecchini", equivalent to 400 Venetian lire; Leopold does not mention this gift, which was previously unknown. (A zecchino was a gold coin equivalent in weight and value to a Kremnitz ducat.) Leopold writes that the audience at the concert in Verona was limited to the nobility, whereas the one in Mantua had a socially more diverse audience. Ottaviano mentions in his letter that the concert in Verona was attended by the podestà and his wife; the podestà of Verona during the time of the Mozarts' visit was Cristoforo Minelli, whose last name also appears in Leopold's travel notes for Verona (*Briefe*, i:302). Also in attendance, according to Ottaviano, was "Monsignor Vescovo" ("Monsignor Bishop"): this likely refers to Nicolò Antonio Giustiniani, Bishop of Verona, who is also mentioned in Leopold's travel notes and in his letter of 7 Jan 1770, although not specifically as having attended Wolfgang's concert. Ottaviano writes that "around fifty" ("circa cinquanta") ladies were in attendance, and a large number ("quantità") of gentlemen. No other known source mentions any specific numbers for the audience.

Wolfgang's concert in Verona is also included in the Venetian chronicle of Pietro Gradenigo (see our entry for 24 Feb 1771):





Pietro Gradenigo, chronicle, Sat, 20 Jan 1770
(Venice, Biblioteca del Museo Civico Correr, Ms Gradenigo Dolfin 67.24, ff. 43v–44r)

20. Gennaro, Sabbato *[...]*

Alli esordi di questo mese si è in Verona ammirato un gio / vane Tedesco per nome Amadeo Wolfgango Mozart di Sa / lisburgo, il qualle dà qualche anno viaggia per l’Euro / pa in compagnia del Padre suo attuale Maestro di Cap / pella di S[ua] A[ltissimma] Rev[erendissima] l’Arci[vescovo] P[rinci]pe di Salisburg. Non arri / va esso all’età di anni 13. e pure nella sua prof / essione di Musica lascia di molto indietro li più pro / vetti, si è fatto nella Sud[ett]a Citta ammirare solennem[en]te nella sera de’ 5 Corr[ente] Gennaro in una delle Sale di quel / la Nobile Accademia filarmonica dove intervenne là / pubblica Rappresentanza, cioè Sua E[minen]za Cristoforo Lorenzo / Minelli, et fu’ copiosissimo numero di Dame, e Cavalieri.

In essa suonò a prima vista un concerto di Cembalo // indi suonò il Violino con alcune carte non più vedu / te, et anchora esibiti quattro versi, è sopra essi Lui / compose un' atto di cantare un’aria di ottimo gusto, poi / li fu data altra difficilissima cosa. Suonò bravemente / con altro Violino con un Trio del Boulcerini *[sic]*, e dat / togli dà un Professore un sentimento lò scrisse subi / to è lo stese in 4 pezzi con altri stromenti di rinforzo / in somma si può dire, che Amadeo sarà il più ab / ile à nostri tempi nella Musica. Quinci un Pittore ' vir / tuoso dipinse il suo gentilissimo Ritratto.

[translation:]

20 January, Saturday *[...]*

At the beginning of this month, Verona marveled at a young German by the name of Amadeo Wolfgango Mozart of Salzburg, who some years ago traveled through Europe in the company of his father, the current Maestro di Cappella of His Most Reverend Highness the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. He has not yet reached the age of 13 years, and yet in his profession of music he already leaves far behind the greatest experts. The above-named city marveled greatly over him on the evening of the 5th of this January in one of the rooms of the aristocratic Accademia filarmonica where the public performance took place, with His Eminence Cristoforo Lorenzo Minelli and a very copious number of ladies and gentlemen.

At this he played a keyboard concerto at sight, then played on the violin music that he had never seen before; next he was shown four verses, on which he composed, while singing himself, an aria in excellent taste; he was then given the most difficult other things. He skillfully played, with another violin, a trio of Boccherini, and having been given a motive by a professor, he immediately wrote on this a piece in four parts reinforced by other instruments; in short, it can be said that Amadeo is the most skillful musician of our times. Afterwards a virtuoso painter painted his most refined likeness.

Basso (2006, 60) speculates that Gradenigo's entry, which is not in *Dokumente* or *Neue Folge*, may have been adapted from an otherwise unknown newspaper report, implying a report other than the one published in the *Gazzetta di Mantova*, which Basso reproduces in full. But nearly all of the content of Gradenigo's entry could have come from the *Gazzetta di Mantova*. The only significant differences are Gradenigo's reference to Minelli, the *podestà* of Verona, who is not mentioned in the *Gazzetta*; and Gradenigo's more direct statement that Wolfgang also played violin at the concert. There is no evidence to suggest that Gradenigo attended the concert himself, so it is likely that his information is second hand, whether from the *Gazzetta di Mantova* or some other source.

The *Gazzetta di Mantova* reports that Wolfgang sat for a portrait in Verona. This portrait remains one of the most famous images of Mozart. It has been variousy attributed to Giambettino Cignaroli and Saverio Dalla Rosa (among others), but the attribution remains uncertain (see the entry for 8 Jan 1770 by Matteo Magarotto on our site). The sittings, on 6 and 7 Jan 1770, were arranged (and presumably paid for) by Pietro Lugiati. The portrait was long in the estate of pianist Alfred Cortot; it was sold by Christie's in Paris on 27 Nov 2019 for € 4,031,500.

Leopold and Wolfgang departed from Verona on 10 Jan, and arrived in Mantua later that same day. (See our entry for 11 Dec 1769, Count Georg von Arco's letter of recommendation for the Mozarts to his cousin Count Francesco Eugenio d'Arco in Mantua.)

Notes (⇧)

According to Bologna (1991, 50n19), the reference to Mozart in Dionisi's letter was discovered by Paolo Rigoli, librarian of the Conservatorio di Verona, who reported on it at a conference of the AMIS in 1990. Bologna's transcription is also reproduced (via Basso 2006, 59) in Eisen et al. (2011a, note 10), who likewise gives Basso's transcription of Gradenigo's entry on Mozart's Verona concert (Eisen et al. 2011b).

We have made a handful of adjustments to Bologna's transcription, based on our evaluation of the original. Bologna includes neither Ottaviano's closing salutation nor the address on the wrapper. We have not been able to decipher the abbreviated middle word of the closing salutation: our "Fratello" is only a guess. Ottaviano initially wrote '17**6**–' as the year in the heading of his letter, before remembering that he is in a new decade, crossing out the '6' and replacing it with a '7'. He also cancelled a number before the '8' in "18 Zecchini".

Very few sources have been available to us on the Dionisi family, who have received little attention from Mozart scholars. One helpful source, although lacking in detail, is the article on the Dionisis in Schröder (1830, 290–91). Schröder gives Giovanni Francesco Dionisi's dates as 19 Nov 1749 to 23 Mar 1823. Schröder does not, however, list Ottaviano among the uncles of Giovanni Francesco's children. Basso (2006, 545) gives Ottaviano's birthdate as 28 Oct 1748. If the dates we have for their father Gabriele

(1719–1808) are orrect, Ottaviano's absence from Schröder may suggest that Ottaviano died before his father. Giovanni Francesco would then have became head of the family.

The transcription in *Dokumente* of the report on the Verona concert in the *Gazzetta di Mantova* (*Dokumente*, 95–96) includes one small error: *Dokumente* has "Motzart" instead of "Motz-zart" (the doubled letter is easy to miss across the line break). *Briefe* identifies the "Marquese Spolverini" in Leopold Mozart's letter of 7 Jan 1770 (and in his travel notes) as Marchese Giorgio Spolverini (*Briefe*, v:216), but Ottaviano Dionisi's letter specifies that it was Count Baldessare Spolverini. The intended meaning of "Finale" in the report's "un soggetto, ed un Finale progettatogli" is uncertain; it may refer to a countersubject or a fugal "answer", but this is speculative.

One unexplained oddity: the report on Mozart's Verona concert in *Gazzetta di Mantova* has "i Signori Lugiati", plural, whereas all other sources refer only to one Signor Lugiati (Pietro).

We are very grateful to the Archivio di Stato di Verona for providing the image of Dionisi's letter; to Bruce Brown for vetting the Italian translations; and to Brown and Janet Pagefor their comments on a draft of this commentary. Our special thanks to Catherine Sprague, who first brought to our attention Basso's splendid *I Mozart in Italia* (2006) and the little-known Mozart documents that it contains.

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