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Mozart and Count Firmian (4 Apr 1770)

Dexter Edge

Rome, Archivio Doria Pamphilj, Scaffale 93 n. 73

Eccellenza

Venendo in codesta Dominante il Sig.[e] Leopoldo Mozart, col di lui Figlio, ho creduto di non poter fare ad essi maggior favore, che col procu= rar loro l’onore di presentarsi a V[ost]ra Ecc.[za], alla Quale mi prendo la libertà di addrizzarli, e di supplicarla, che voglia degnarli della di Lei protezione. Il Padre è uomo di tutta onestà, e saviezza, ed attuale Maestro di Cappella del Sig.[e] Principe Arcivescovo di Salisburgo: il Figlio è dotato di uno straordinario talento nella Musica, che nell’età sua ancor tenera eguale lo rende per comune giudizio ai primi Maestri, di che V. E. potrà giudicare, se Le piacerà di fargli la grazia di sentirlo.

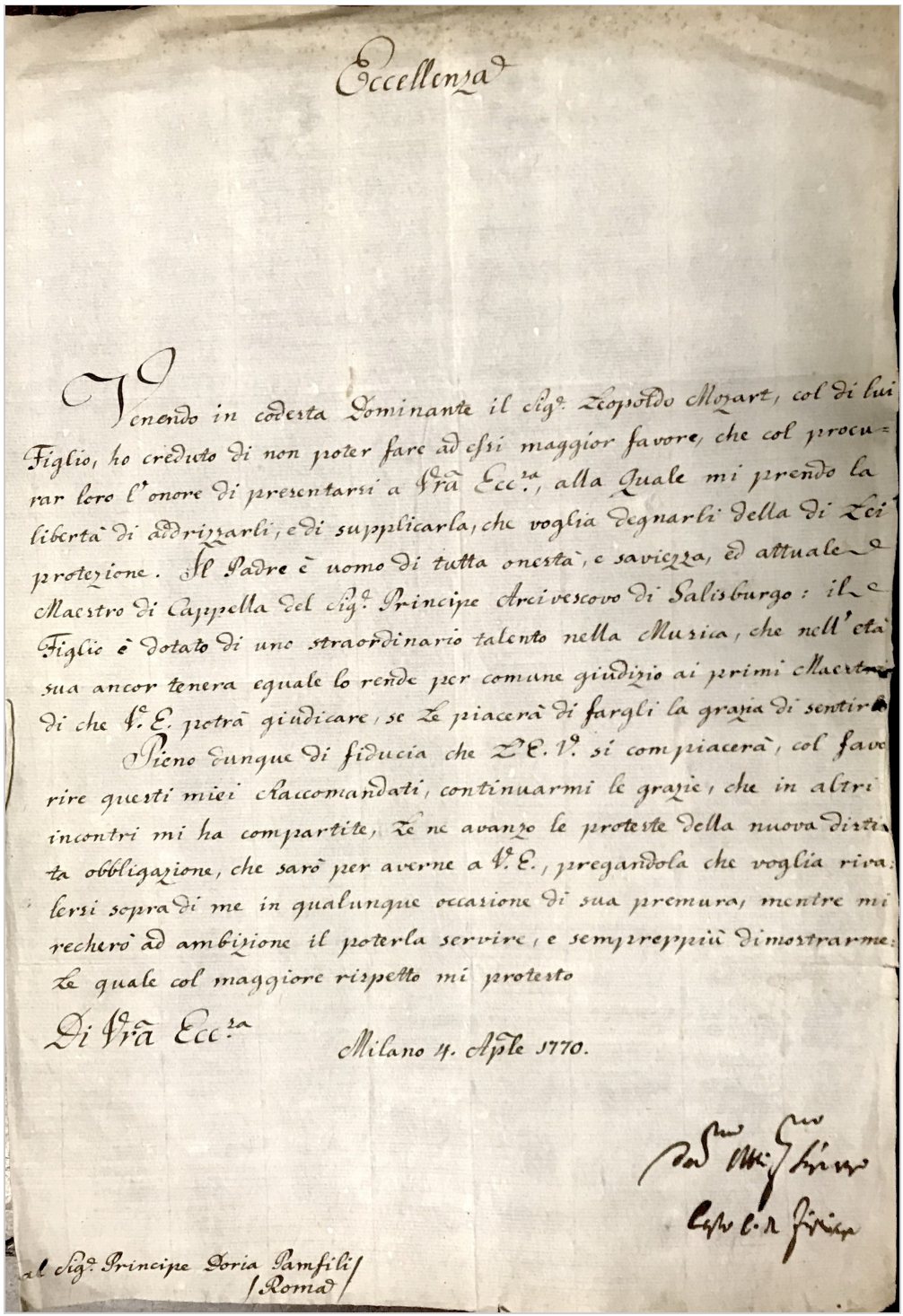
Pieno dunque di fiducia che L’E. V. si compiacerà, col favo= rire questi miei Raccomandati, continuarmi le grazie, che in altri incontri mi ha compartite, Le ne avanzo le proteste della nuova distin= ta obbligazione, che sarò per averne a V. E., pregandola che voglia riva= lersi sopra di me in qualunque occasione di sua premura, mentre mi recherò ad ambizione il poterla servire, e sempreppiù dimostrarme= Le quale col maggiore rispetto mi protesto
Di V[ost]ra Ecc.[za]

Milano 4. Ap[ri]le 1770.

Dev.[mo] Umil.[mo] Servitore
Carlo C[onte] di Firmian

al Sig.[e] Principe Doria Pamfili
/ Roma /

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Pieno dunque di fiducia che V.E. V.a si compiacerà, col favorire questi miei raccomandati, continuarmi le grazie, che in altri incontri mi ha compartite, Le ne avanzo le proteste della nuova dilatata obbligazione, che sarò per averne a V.E., pregandola che voglia rivalersi sopra di me in qualunque occazione di sua premura, mentre mi recherò ad ambizione il poterla servire, e sempreppiù dimostrarmi

Le quale col maggiore rispetto mi protesto

Di V.ra Ecc.za

Milano 4. Aprile 1770.

Dev.mo Obb.mo Servitore
Carlo C.a Firmian

al sig.r Principe Doria Pamfili
Roma

[translation:]

Excellency

As Signor Leopold Mozart is coming to that capital city with his son, I thought that I could do them no greater favor than to secure for them the honor of introducing themselves to Your Excellency, to whom I take the liberty of entrusting them and requesting that you

condescend to give them your protection. The father is a man of complete honesty and prudence, and currently Maestro di Cappella of the Prince Archbishop of Salzburg. The son is endowed with an extraordinary talent in music, which even in his still tender years places him by common consent among the best masters, as Your Excellency will be able to judge, if it will please you to do him the favor of hearing him.

Fully trusting, therefore, that Your Excellency will be pleased, while favoring those I am recommending, to continue to bestow upon me the favors that you have on other occasions, I give you my assurances of the new and distinct obligations I will have toward Your Excellency, praying that you may make use of me whenever you wish, while I will strive to be able to serve you, and evermore to prove to you that I am, with utmost respect,
Your Excellency's

Milan, 4 April 1770.

Most devoted and humble servant
Carlo Count Firmian

to Sig. Prince Doria Pamphilj
/ Rome /

Commentary

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Introduction (⇧)

Count Carlo di Firmian (1718–1782) was one of Mozart's most important aristocratic patrons, and a key figure in his early career as a composer of Italian opera. The count was directly responsible for promoting Wolfgang to the great and good of Milan when the Mozarts first

arrived in 1770, and he intermediated the young composer's three opera contracts for that city: *Mitridate* (1770), *Ascanio in Alba* (1771), and *Lucio Silla* (1772): indeed, it was Firmian who suggested Mozart as composer for the work that became *Ascanio in Alba* (see our entry for 9 Feb 1771). These works trace Mozart's spectacular growth as a composer of theatrical works in Italian, and they are his first dramatic works to be performed multiple times before large audiences. Yet Firmian has been curiously neglected in the Mozart literature, and the count's patronage and advocacy of artists and intellectuals in general has only recently begun to receive the attention it deserves.

Our reassessment of Firmian and his role in Mozart's career is divided across eight commentaries. The present commentary outlines Firmian's biography, examines his passion for the arts and his bibliomania, investigates his role as patron, discusses his homosociality and sexuality, and undertakes to give a balanced assessment of his character and abilities, about which contemporaneous reports conflict. It also looks in detail at Mozart's first visit to Milan from 23 Jan to 15 Mar 1770, and the events leading up to his first opera commission for that city, *Mitridate, re di Ponto*. Subsequent commentaries discuss: a newly discovered second letter by Firmian on 4 Apr 1770 that refers to Mozart; Firmian's recommendation of Mozart to Turin (see 9 Jan 1771); Firmian's role in the commissioning of *Ascanio in Alba* (9 Feb 1771, 7 Mar 1771, 9 Mar 1771, and 19 Aug 1771); and the possibility that Firmian hoped to find a place for Mozart as *maestro di cappella* at the new court that would be established for Archduke Ferdinand in Milan following his marriage to Princess Maria Beatrice d'Este (see our entry for 17 Oct 1771).

The letter of recommendation for the Mozarts transcribed at the top of this page is one of five by Firmian that are known to survive (he is known to have written several others for the Mozarts that have not yet been found). The first, dated 14 Mar 1770, was written to Count Gian Luca Pallavicini-Centurione in Bologna (*Dokumente*, 100–101; on Pallavicini see also our entry for 27 Dec 1769). A similar letter to Guillaume du Tillot in Parma that same day has apparently not yet been published (it is mentioned in *Dokumente*, 101).

Two other letters, although previously published, are not in *Dokumente* or *Neue Folge*, and still not widely known. The letter above, addressed to Prince Andrea IV Doria Pamphilj in Rome, was discovered in the Archivio Doria Pamphilj by Claudio Annibaldi and first made public in 1991. It gained wider notice through an article published in Italian in *Mozart-Jahrbuch 1996* by Cristina Cimagalli, who gave a transcription, but no facsimile. It is published here in facsimile with the permission of the Archivio Doria Pamphilj. Firmian's letter of 9 Jan 1771 recommending Mozart to Count Lascaris di Castellar in Turin was discovered by Harrison James Wignall (Harrison Gradwell Slater) and first published in 1997; it is discussed in our entry for that date. A fifth letter of recommendation for Mozart, from Firmian to Count Giacomo Marulli in Bologna, has only recently come to light (see our second entry for 4 Apr 1770).

Firmian is a complex, fascinating, and still poorly understood figure. After a long period of neglect, he has received increasing attention over the past few decades, most notably from historian Elisabeth Garms, in her many essential articles on Firmian, and more recently from

Stefano Ferrari, on Firmian as art collector and patron. Our emphasis here will be on Firmian as a patron of artists and intellectuals. While Firmian himself sometimes functioned as patron in the classic sense, commissioning works and providing material support, his more frequent role was as advocate and enabler. Throughout his career in Naples and Milan, Firmian's home and dining table provided a meeting place for leading thinkers, talented artists, and distinguished visitors, and he used his position and influence to help them when and how he could. Firmian played key roles in the careers of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Cesare Beccaria, and Giuseppe Parini (the librettist of *Ascanio in Alba*), among many others, and such artists as Martin Knoller, Carlo Bonavia, and (perhaps) Angelika Kauffmann. In this context, Firmian's advocacy for young Mozart is unusual only in that Firmian is not known to have helped any other musician in this way.

Firmian's early life and career (⇧)

Carlo Gottardo di Firmian (often referred to as Karl Joseph von Firmian) was born on 15 Aug 1718 in Trent, the youngest of five sons of Baron Franz Alphons von Firmian and his wife Barbara Elisabeth, *née* Countess Thun-Hohenstein. (For biographical sources on Firmian and a discussion of the discrepant names and dates in the literature, see the *Notes* below. Because Carlo spent his entire professional career in Italy, we will refer to him using the Italian form of his name, which he often used himself.) He was the brother of Franz Laktanz von Firmian (1712–1786), who became Obersthofmeister at the Salzburg court in 1736 and was therefore head of the branch of the court bureaucracy that employed Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart. Carlo's other brothers were Leopold Ernst (1708–1783), who became Bishop of Seckau and then Passau, and was elevated to cardinal in 1772; Vigil Maria (1714–1788), head of the cathedral chapter in Salzburg from 1753; and Jakob, who was mentally disabled, and lived as "Fra Leopoldo" with the Benedictines in Ettal in Bavaria. Their uncle Leopold Anton Eleutherius von Firmian had been Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg from 1727 until his death in 1744. Their father Franz Alphons was elevated to the status of hereditary count in 1749, a title that was henceforth also held by his sons.

Young Carlo received his early education in Ettal (Arco 1783, 14). After studying philosophy and law at the University of Salzburg from 1734 to 1737, he traveled with his brother Vigil to Leyden, where he studied in 1738 and 1739. After a period in Paris, the brothers returned to Salzburg. In 1741, Carlo visited Venice, where he met the English consul Joseph Smith, a great art collector and patron, who may have sparked his interest in these areas and served as a role model. Around 1743 Firmian embarked on an educational tour of Italy, first spending time in Florence, followed by an extended sojourn in Rome from 1744 until Aug 1745, where he is said to have taken minor orders (Garms-Cornides 1997). At that point, Firmian was called to Vienna, where he was appointed to the Reichshofrat (imperial court council), often a springboard to government service for young Habsburg aristocrats. According to Abbé Aimé Guillon, while Firmian was living in Vienna, "il passait toutes ses heures de loisir avec le célèbre Métastase" ("he spent all his leisure hours with the famous Metastasio"; Guillon 1815, 558).

Early in 1754 Firmian was named minister plenipotentiary to the Neapolitan court of King Charles of Bourbon (later King Charles III of Spain), where he acted as Habsburg representative in the lengthy and complex political negotiations—some of which took place in the midst of the Seven Years' War—between the courts of Vienna and Naples. These negotiations led to the treaty of 1759, for which three children of Empress Maria Theresia had served as crucial marital bargaining chips: her daughter Maria Carolina was promised to Ferdinand, Charles's son and successor in Naples; Joseph, the empress's oldest surviving son, agreed to marry Isabella of Parma, daughter of Charles's brother (and rival) Philip, Duke of Parma and granddaughter of Louis XV; and her second surviving son (Karl at the time of the treaty, but following his death in 1761, Leopold at the time of the marriage) was promised to Charles's daughter Maria Luisa (on the treaty, see Benedikt 1951). Firmian's discretion and effectiveness during these negotiations—which included secret meetings with the queen, Maria Amalia of Saxony, whose agenda differed from that of her husband Charles—earned him the highest regard of the empress, which persisted until the end of her life. When Beltrame Cristiani, Habsburg minister plenipotentiary to the Duchy of Milan (Austrian Lombardy), died on 3 Jul 1758, she chose Firmian to replace him. Firmian later said that his time in Naples had been the happiest of his life, but he appears also to have contracted a chronic intestinal ailment there that plagued him for the rest of his life (Garms-Cornides 1970, 141; Garms-Cornides 1997). Firmian left Naples on 27 Nov 1758, first traveling to Vienna by way of Parma, where Maria Theresia had asked him to report on Isabella's suitability as a bride for Joseph (Arneth 1879, 160). Firmian eventually arrived in Milan to take up his new position on 16 Jun 1759.

In the Mozart literature, Firmian is often referred to incorrectly as the "governor" of the Duchy of Milan. From 1754 until 1771, the governor-general of the province was Francesco III d'Este, Duke of Modena. (One of Francesco's predecessors in that position had been Count Gian Luca Pallavicini; see our entry for 27 Dec 1769.) But Francesco had no interest and played no role in governing the province, and the *de facto* head of government was the Habsburg minister plenipotentiary: Cristiani until his death, then Firmian, whom Charles Burney wryly described in his travel diary in 1770 as "a sort of King of Milan" (Burney 1770, 55). Firmian was, in effect, the Habsburg viceroy. Francesco III d'Este was succeeded as governor-general by Archduke Ferdinand, third surviving son of Empress Maria Theresia, upon his majority and his marriage on 15 Oct 1771 to Francesco's granddaughter Maria Beatrice d'Este. (This marriage was the occasion for Mozart's *Ascanio in Alba*.) Firmian retained his position as minister plenipotentiary in Milan until nearly the end of his life, and he died there on 20 Jun 1782 at the age of 63.

Firmian's impressive array of titles often appears in full or in part in the many books dedicated to him during his lifetime (see below). The full list of titles is also given in a footnote to a eulogy published in 1783 by Count Giambattista Gherardo d'Arco, son of Count Francesco Eugenio (see our entry for 11 Dec 1769). Firmian was:

> Signore di Cronmetz, Meggel, Leopoldscron, Cavaliere dell'insigne Ordine del Toson d'Oro, Gentiluomo di Camera, Consigliere Intimo attuale di Stato di Sua Maestà Imperiale, e Regia Appostolica, Generale Soprantendente, e Giudice Supremo della Regie

> Poste d’Italia, Luogotenente, e Vice-Governatoreda’ Ducati di Mantova, Sabioneta, e Principato di Bozolo, Ministro Plenipotenziario della prelodata Maestà Sua presso il Governo Generale della Lombardia Austriaca, e Commessario Imperiale, e Plenipotenziario in Italia. [Arco 1783, 9n]

> Lord of Kronmetz [Mezzocorona], Meggel, and Leopoldskron; Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece; Gentleman of the Chamber; actual Privy State Counselor to His Imperial and Royal Apostolic Majesty; General Superintendent and Supreme Arbitrator of the Royal Italian Post; Lieutenant and Vice-Governor of the Duchy of Mantua, Sabbioneta, and the Principality of Bozzolo; Minister Plenipotentiary of His aforesaid Majesty to the Governor-General of Austrian Lombardy; and Imperial Commissioner and Plenipotentiary in Italy.

This 1781 engraving of Firmian, based on a portrait by his protégé Martin Knoller, shows the count seated at table looking out at the viewer, holding a medallion of Maria Theresia, and wearing the insignia of the Order of the Golden Fleece (Toison d’Or). On the table is a bust of Homer and a clock with figures of Kronos and Veritas (Baumgartl 2004, **D 5**, 309).



Caroli Comitis de Firmian (1781), engraving by Jakob Frey after Martin Knoller (ÖNB)

Firmian and the Mozarts in Milan (⇧)

Wolfgang and Leopold Mozart left Salzburg for their first tour of Italy on 13 Dec 1769. Following a stay in Verona, where they remained from 27 Dec 1769 to 10 Jan 1770, they

continued on to Mantua, arriving there on 10 Jan and leaving on 19 Jan. After stopping briefly in Cremona on 20 Jan, they reached Milan on 23 Jan. It was the first of what eventually became four visits to Milan by the Mozarts over the next three years. (On the early stages of their first trip to Italy and their stays in Verona and Mantua, see our entries for 11 Dec 1769, 27 Dec 1769, 5 Jan 1770, and 8 Jan 1770.)

On 11 Jan 1770 Leopold wrote to his wife from Mantua:

> Sobald wir in Mayland sind, werde dir wieder schreib: und du schreibe mir nach Mayland. Du kannst unten daran setzen: per ricapito del Sigr: Troger Secretario di S: Exllza il Sgr: Comte Carlo de Firmian. *[...]* [*Briefe*, i:304]
>
> As soon as we are in Milan, I will write you again and you write to me in Milan. You can put on it: to be delivered to Signor Troger, secretary to His Excellency Signor Count Carlo di Firmian. *[...]*

The Mozarts evidently had a prior arrangement with Leopold Troger, one of Count Firmian's secretaries, to use him as their forwarding address in Milan (Troger had a sister in Salzburg). This letter and Leopold's first from Milan, written on 26 Jan 1770, can be taken to imply that a meeting with Count Firmian had already been arranged before their arrival. If this is correct, then the meeting would probably have been facilitated at least in part through direct correspondence between Carlo and his brother Franz Laktanz in Salzburg; however, no letters between the brothers regarding the Mozarts are known to survive. Leopold's letter to his wife on 26 Jan 1770 notes that he and Wolfgang were lodging quite close to Firmian's residence, in comparatively lavish accommodations in the Augustinian monastery of San Marco. Leopold writes:

> *[...]* S: Ex: H: Graf sind an einem Catharr unbässlich, und wollten gerne eine Accademia in ihrem Hause geben und den Herzog v Modena dazu einladen, ich konnte demnach die anderen Briefe noch nicht überreichen; weil dieß zuerst geschehen muß. *[...]* [*Briefe*, i:308]
>
> *[...]* His Excellency the Count is indisposed with a cold, and very much wanted to give an academy in his house and to invite the Duke of Modena, so I could not yet present the other letters; because this must happen first. *[...]*

This passage is usually taken to mean that Leopold and Wolfgang had not yet been received by Firmian. But it can also be read as implying that Firmian told them in person that he wanted to arrange a concert to which he would invite Francesco III d'Este, the Duke of Modena, but it had not yet been possible to make these arrangements because of Firmian's cold. The "other" letters that Leopold mentions, to whomever they may have been addressed (perhaps the Duke, among others), are not known to survive. The reference implies that a "first" letter had been delivered. This might have been a letter of recommendation from Count Franz Laktanz to his brother, but no such letter is known.

At the end of a long letter to his sister begun the same day, Wolfgang writes:

> die hausmeisterin des Conte de Firminans *[sic]* ist eine Wienerin, und vergangenen freitag haben wir dort gespeist *[...]* [*Briefe*, i:311]
>
> Count Firminan's housekeeper is Viennese, and we ate there last Friday. *[...]*

(Friday was, in fact, the date of the letter, 26 Jan 1770.) Firmian's housekeeper was Therese Germani, wife of Don Fernando Germani.

A week later, on 3 Feb, Leopold reports to his wife that Firmian was still not over his cold (*Briefe*, i:311–12). However, in a letter of 10 Feb, Leopold writes that the count had finally recovered and that they had been able to dine with him on 7 Feb:

> S: Excl: Graf v. Firmian sind nun wieder besser, und wir hatten die gnade Mittwoch den 7ten das erste mahl bey seiner Tafel zu speisen. S: Excl: haben nach der Tafel dem Wolfg: die 9 Theile der Metastasische Werke verehrt. Est ist eine der schönsten Editionen nähmlich die Turiner=Edition, und sehr schön eingebunden. *[...]* S: Excl: sind durch die geschicklichkeit des Wolfg: auserst gerührt, und distinguiren uns mit besonderer gnade und vorzüglichkeit; und es würde zu weitläufig seyn, dir umständlich zu erzehlen, was der Wolfg: in gegenwart des Maestro Sammartino und einer menge der geschicktesten Leute für Proben seiner Wissenschaft abgelegt, und alle in Erstaunung gesetzt. [*Briefe*, i:312]
>
> His Excellency Count von Firmian is now well again, and we had the honor of dining at his table on Wednesday the 7th for the first time. After the meal His Excellency honored Wolfgang with the 9 volumes of Metastasio's works. It is one of the most beautiful editions, namely the Turin edition, and very beautifully bound. *[...]* His Excellency was extremely moved by Wolfgang's abilities, and treated us with special grace and preference; and it would lead me too far afield to tell you in detail all the various tests of his knowledge that Wolfgang passed in the presence of Maestro Sammartini and a crowd of the most expert people, and astonished everyone.

The reference here is to the distinguished composer Giovanni Battista Sammartini. The count presented Wolfgang with the nine-volume edition of Metastasio's works published in Turin beginning in 1757.





Poesie del Signor Abate Pietro Metastasio (Turin, 1757), vol. 1.
Frontispiece and title page.
(Google Books)

As Anthony Pryer points out, this is not the edition of Metastasio that was in Mozart's possession at the time of his death (Pryer 2004, 268 and note 25): Mozart's estate inventory lists volumes 1, 2, 4, and 5 of the Venice edition of 1782–1784 (although the estate inventory gives "[1]781"; see Konrad & Staehelin 1991, 15 and 85–86). Nor was the Turin edition in Firmian's vast library at the time of his death in 1782: the catalog of his library published the following year lists instead a Paris edition of Metastasio's works (Bibliotheca Firmiana, v:148–49; on Firmian's library, see below). Whether Firmian already owned the Paris edition at the time of the Mozarts' visit in 1770 is unknown, but his gift of the beautifully bound Turin edition was in any case a great honor. It is possible that Firmian gave Wolfgang the set directly out of his own collection.

Firmian seems to have had a particular plan in mind with this gift. As Pryer plausibly argues, the count may have known of Wolfgang's operatic ambitions (Pryer 2004, 268)—or he may have wished to plant the seed of such ambitions, even if the Mozarts had not expressed them. In either case, with this gift Firmian gave the young composer a body of canonical Italian texts that were essential for any aspiring composer of Italian *opera seria*. In fact, Mozart soon mined the edition for material to set: as Pryer argues, all but one of the arias that Mozart composed during his first trip to Italy were drawn directly from the Turin edition of Metastasio (Pryer 2004, 268ff).

On 18 Feb Wolfgang performed at Firmian's for the Duke of Modena and Princess Maria Beatrice, as Leopold reports in a letter to his wife written the day before:

> Morgen Kommen Se: Dl: der Herzog, und die Prinzessin v Modena |: die zukünftige Braut der Erzh: Ferdinand :| zu Sr: Exc: Grafen v Firmian den Wolfg: zu hören *[...]* Komenden freytag [23 Feb] wird *Accademia* fürs ganze Publicum seyn: dann wollen wir sehen, was herauskommt. [*Briefe*, i:315]
>
> Tomorrow [18 Feb] His Highness the Duke and the Princess of Modena (the future bride of Archduke Ferdinand) are coming to His Excellency Count von Firmian's to hear Wolfgang *[...]* This coming Friday [23 Feb] there will be an academy for the entire public: then we'll see what comes from that.

That the public concert took place on 23 Feb is confirmed in Leopold's letter to his wife of 27 Feb; unfortunately he gives no details, and no other report of either concert is known:

> *[...]* Unsere Accademia ist nun vorbey; sie war verflossenen freytag. Es gieng wie aller orten: und braucht keine weitere Erklärung. *[...]* [*Briefe*, i:316]
>
> *[...]* Our academy is now over; it was this past Friday. It went as everywhere else, and needs no further comment. *[...]*

In this same letter Leopold mentions for the first time Count Firmian's intention to host yet one more concert for Wolfgang at Firmian's residence before the Mozarts' departure from Milan:

> *[...]* den Montag oder Dienstag der 2ten fasten woche werden wir mit Gottes Hilfe Mayland verlassen und nach Parma gehen. wir würden ehergehen; allein Se: Ex: Gr: Firmian wollen in der ersten fastenwoche eine grosse Accademie für die Damen in seinem Hause geben: und es sind noch andere Sachen auszumachen. *[...]* [*Briefe*, i:316]
>
> *[...]* With God's help we will leave Milan on the Monday or Tuesday of the second week of Lent and go to Parma. We would leave earlier; but His Excellency Count Firmian wants to give a big academy for the ladies in his house during the first week of Lent; and there are yet other things to arrange. *[...]*

Leopold wrote this on Shrove Tuesday (Faschingsdienstag), the day before the beginning of Lent, Ash Wednesday, 28 Feb; thus "the Monday or Tuesday of the second week of Lent" fell on 12 and 13 Mar that year. As it turned out, Firmian's concert took place on 12 Mar, and it was a grander affair than Leopold had indicated, with a far larger audience than just "the ladies in [Firmian's] house." Leopold describes the concert and the hectic preparations for it in a letter to his wife written the day after the concert:

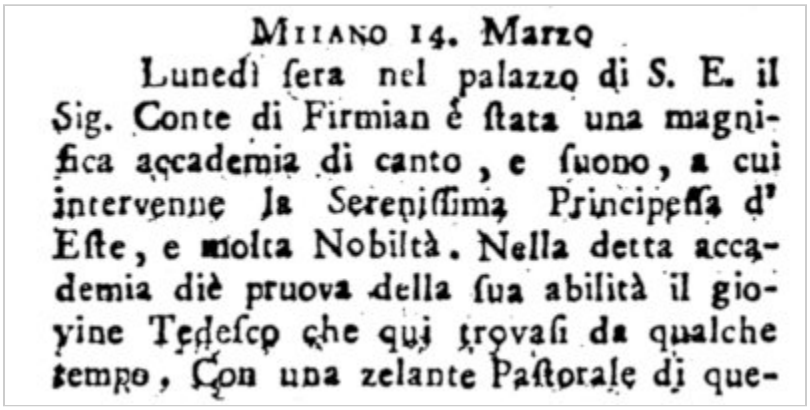
> Verflossenen Sammstag [10 Mar] habe unmöglich schreiben können, weil der Wolfg: zu dem Concert, so gestern in dem graf: Firmianischen Hause war, *3 Arien* und *1 Recit: mit Violinen* hat Componieren müssen: und ich war gezwungen die Violin partes selbst heraus zu schreiben, und dann erst verdoppeln zu lassen, damit sie nicht gestohlen werden. Es waren

über 150 Personen des ersten Adels gegenwärtig, wovon die Hauptpersonen der Herzog, die Prinzessin, und der Cardinal waren. Nun ist es vestgesetzet, mit Gottes Hilfe kommenden Donnerstag, nehmlich übermorgen, Mayland zu verlassen *[...]* [*Briefe*, i:320]

It was impossible for me to write last Saturday *[10 Mar]*, because Wolfgang had to compose *3 arias* and *1 recitative with violins* for the concert that took place yesterday at Count Firmian's residence; and I was forced to write out the violin parts myself and then have them copied, so that they wouldn't be stolen. Over 150 members of the first aristocracy were present, of whom the principals were the Duke, the Princess, and the Cardinal. Now it is set that with God's help we'll leave Milan this coming Thursday, that is the day after tomorrow. *[...]*

Leopold's reference is to Cardinal Giuseppe Pozzobonelli, the Archbishop of Milan. Firmian's concert was reported in *Notizie del Mondo*:

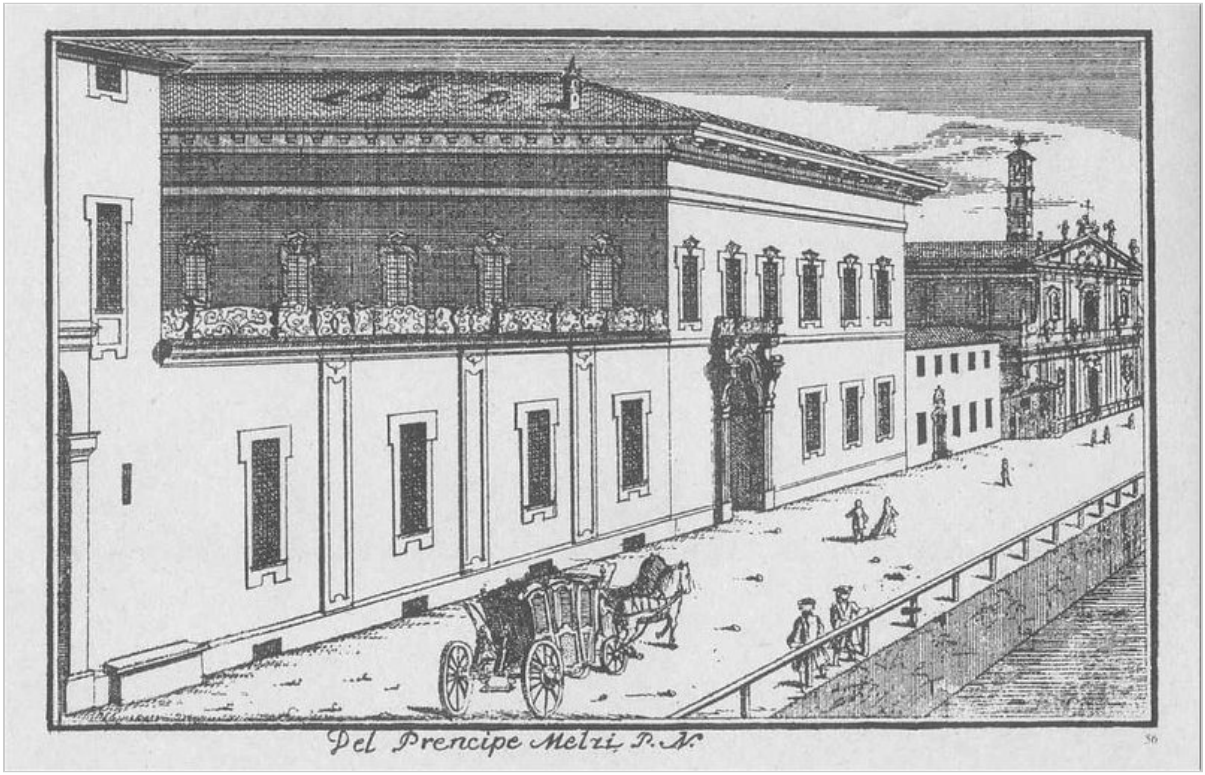
MILANO 14. Marzo
Lunedì sera nel palazzo di S. E. il Sig. Conte di Firmian è stata una magnifica accademia di canto, e suono, a cui intervenne la Serenissima Principessa d' Este, e molta Nobilità. Nella detta accademia diè pruova della sua abilità il giovine Tedesco che qui trovasi da qualche tempo. *[...]*
[*Notizie del mondo*, no. 23, Tue, 20 Mar 1770, 182; *Neue Folge*, 17]


MILANO 14. Marzo
Lunedì ſera nel palazzo di S. E. il Sig. Conte di Firmian è ſtata una magnifica accademia di canto, e ſuono, a cui intervenne la Sereniſſima Principeſſa d' Eſte, e molta Nobiltà. Nella detta accademia diè pruova della ſua abilità il giovine Tedeſco che qui trovaſi da qualche tempo, Con una zelante Paſtorale di que-

MILAN, 14 March
Monday evening in the palace of His Excellency Signor Count Firmian there was a magnificent vocal and instrumental academy, which was attended by Her Highness the Princess d'Este and many nobility. At the

> academy the young German who has been
> here for some time gave proof of his ability.

Firmian's residence was the Palazzo Melzi (also known as the Palazzo Firmian) on the site of what is now via Fatebenefratelli 21 in Milan. The concert on 12 Mar, as well as the Mozarts' meetings and meals with the count and Wolfgang's performance for the Duke and Princess on 18 Feb, would all have taken place here.



Palazzo Melzi, Milan (18th c.)
(Wikimedia Commons)

The palace was destroyed by bombing in 1943. A photograph of the "Salone d'onore" in the palace, with a partial view of its fresco by Firmian's protegé Martin Knoller, is reproduced in Barblan & Della Corte (1956, plate xi, after p. 72); this may have been where Mozart's concert took place. A photo also survives of the full fresco, which depicted the ascent of Hercules to Olympus (Baumgartl 2004, **F II 2**, 220).

There is no doubt that Firmian intended this concert as an audition to demonstrate to the most distinguished Milanese nobility that the fourteen-year-old "German" Mozart could compose at a professional level in all the requisite styles of Italian *opera seria*—with the evident larger aim of showing that Wolfgang was worthy of a commission to compose such an opera for the Regio Ducal Teatro in Milan. Pryer has persuasively argued that the three works that Wolfgang composed for the concert on 12 Mar 1770 were the accompanied recitative and aria for soprano, "Misero me! ... Misero pargoletto," K. 77, probably sung by castrato Giuseppe Aprile; the soprano aria "Se tutti i mali miei," K. 83, probably sung by Antonia Bernasconi; and the tenor aria "Ah, più tremar," K. 71, probably sung by Guglielmo Ettore (Pryer 2004, 282ff). All the texts

are from Metastasio's *Demofoönte*, which is included in volume 3 of the Turin edition of Metastasio's works, which Mozart had received from Firmian on 7 Feb, just 33 days before the concert. The two texts for K. 77 belong to the character Timante (the heir-apparent to Demofoönte's throne)—his accompanied recitative is from Act III scene iv, and his aria from the end of the following scene; the text of K. 83 belongs to Dircea (secretly married to Timante), and comes from Act II scene vi; and the text of K. 71, from Act I scene i, belongs to Matusio (thought to be Dircea's father). The texts for K. 77 and K. 83 as Mozart set them follow the Turin edition. For K. 71, only Mozart's setting of the first quatrain is known to survive, and its text does not follow any known edition of Metastasio. However, Pryer suggests that the differences from the Turin edition are consistent with changes that a singer might have requested in order to have more singable vowels (Pryer 2004, 284).

Whether Leopold Mozart embarked on the tour of Italy with the aim of securing an opera commission for Wolfgang is unclear. It does seem certain that he was seeking a court appointment for his son, but Leopold says nothing in his letters about an opera. It appears, too, that they did not bring any of Wolfgang's earlier vocal works with them, an odd choice if they had been hoping to show off his prowess as a vocal composer. It does seem likely, in any case, that Count Firmian had already conceived the idea—that is, before 7 Feb, when he presented Wolfgang with the Turin edition of Metastasio—of promoting the young Salzburger as a potential composer of an opera for Milan. Whether this idea was Firmian's own or he was inspired by Leopold, by Wolfgang, by Franz Laktanz, or by someone else, we cannot say at present. It is evident, however, that Firmian went to considerable lengths to make the "audition" on 12 Mar as persuasive as possible to the first aristocracy of Milan, whose support of any opera in the Regio Ducal Teatro was essential to its success.

Exactly when Leopold and Wolfgang became aware that Wolfgang was expected to set a representative selection of opera seria arias for the concert on 12 Mar is unknown. Leopold's description in his letter of 13 Mar of the rush in which the pieces had been composed suggests that the Mozarts did not have much advance warning—and this makes sense if Firmian was trying to forestall skeptics who might try to claim that Wolfgang had had time to receive outside help. Leopold's phrasing—"weil der Wolfg: zu dem Concert [...] *3 Arien* und *1 Recit: mit Violinen* hat Componieren müssen" ("because Wolfgang had to compose *3 arias* and *1 recitative with violins* for the concert")—suggests that they were given specific instructions about what Wolfgang was to compose. Even if (although this seems unlikely) Leopold had been in on this plan from the beginning, Wolfgang had the Turin edition of Metastasio for at most only 33 days by the time of the concert. And it seems certain that when Leopold referred, in his letter of 27 Feb (just 13 days before the concert), to "eine grosse Accademie für die Damen in seinem Hause," he had no idea that Firmian intended to invite the social and cultural elite of Milan. Firmian hired for the concert a large orchestra with winds, and (if Pryer is correct) three of the top singers in Italy at the time, castrato Giuseppe Aprile, soprano Antonia Bernasconi, and tenor Guglielmo Ettore, suggesting that the count wanted the test to be realistic as well as persuasive. As it turned out, Bernasconi and Ettore went on to take leading roles in Mozart's *Mitridate, re di Ponto* in Milan at the end of that same year.

In a letter the day after the concert on 12 Mar, Leopold wrote:

> Morgen speisen wir zum Abschied mit S^{r}: Excellenz, welcher uns mit briefen nach Parma, Florenz, Rom und Neapel versiehet. Ich kann dir nicht beschreiben wie gnädig S^{e}: Excel: uns die ganze Zeit unseres Aufenthalts begegnet sind. Ich würde bereits S^{r}: Ex: Obersthofmeister geschrieben haben, wenn ich nicht den morgigen Tag noch abwarten müste, um umständlicher schreiben zu können. [*Briefe*, i:321]
>
> Tomorrow we have a farewell meal with His Excellency, who is providing us with letters for Parma, Florence, Rome, and Naples. I cannot describe to you how graciously His Excellency received us the entire time of our stay. I would already have written to His Excellency the Obersthofmeister, if I did not have to wait until tomorrow in order to be able to write more fully.

It becomes clear in Leopold's next letter to his wife, sent from Bologna on 24 Mar, why he waited until after the meal with Count Firmian on 14 Mar to write to the count's brother Franz Laktanz, the Obersthofmeister in Salzburg:

> Ich habe von Parma aus an S^{e}: Ex: Obersthofmeister geschrieben, und mich so wohl wegen der Gnaden, die wir im Firmianischen hause genossen, bedanket, als auch gebetten S^{r}: hochf: gden zu hinterbringen, daß der Wolfg: die opera in Mayland schreiben solle, und um die Erlaubniß zu bitten. Heute habe von hier mit dieser Post an S^{e}: Hochf: gd geschrieben, meinen gehors: unterthsten Glückwunsch zum höchsten Wahltag abgelegt, und gleichfals wegen der opera um die Erlaubniß gebetten. Erkundige dich demnach, ob diese beyden Briefe richtig angelanget sind, oder nicht. Die Scrittura, oder der schriftliche Contract ist schon gemacht, und gegen einander ausgewechselt. Es kommt demnach nur auf die Erlaubniß S:r Hf: Gden an. der Contract ist im Graf Firmianischen hause gemacht worden, und bekommen wir *100 Cigliati* und *freye Wohnung*. [*Briefe*, i:325]
>
> I wrote from Parma to His Excellency the Obersthofmeister thanking him for the graciousness that we enjoyed in Firmian's house, as well as asking him to bring to His Princely Grace our request for permission for Wolfgang to write the opera for Milan. I wrote to His Princely Grace with today's post conveying my most humble and obedient congratulations on his election day, and likewise asking for permission for the opera. Inquire whether these two letters arrived safely or not. The scrittura, or written contract, is already done, and copies exchanged. So it is now only a matter of His Princely Grace's permission. The contract was made in Count Firmian's residence, and we receive *100 gigliati* and *free accommodation*.

Wolfgang's "audition" on 12 Mar had been successful, and he received a *scrittura* (contract) to write the first opera for the following carnival season in Milan. The *scrittura* (which is not known to survive) was evidently signed at their farewell meeting with Count Firmian on 14 Mar. According to Leopold, the contract required Wolfgang to arrive in Milan by 1 Nov 1770 in order to compose the arias in consultation with the singers and to help rehearse them. He was to be paid 100 gigliati (the more common spelling), and they were to be provided with free lodging. In the Milanese context, a "gigliato" (or "zecchino"; the terms were essentially equivalent) was a gold

coin equivalent in weight, quality, and value to a Kremnitz ducat in the Habsburg realms. At the time of the payment to the Mozarts in late 1770, 100 gigliati would have been worth 420 fl at the current rate set by Habsburg decree (see Edge 2018). With contract in hand, all that remained for the Mozarts was to obtain the necessary permission from "His Princely Grace," the Prince Archbishop of Salzburg, Count Schrattenbach.

In his letter of 24 Mar Leopold also mentions a parting gift from Count Firmian:

> S^{e}: Ex: Gr: Firmian hat dem Wolfg: eine Tabattier in goldgefasst verehrt und in derselben 20 Cigliati. [*Briefe*, i:326]
>
> His Excellency Count Firmian honored Wolfgang with a snuffbox made of gold containing 20 gigliati.

The 20 gigliati would have been worth 84 fl, in addition to the considerable value of the snuffbox itself. Leopold and Wolfgang left Milan on 15 Mar, and probably arrived in Parma the next day, when Leopold wrote immediately to Count Franz Laktanz, Obersthofmeister in Salzburg and Leopold's boss, to thank him for facilitating their warm and successful reception by his brother Count Carlo in Milan.

In his letter of 13 Mar Leopold writes that Count Firmian was providing them with letters of introduction for Parma, Florence Rome, and Naples. Recipients of some of these are known: a letter to Guillaume du Tillot in Parma and another (lost) to Count Franz Xaver Orsini-Rosenberg in Florence. Leopold does not mention Bologna, but a letter of recommendation survives from Firmian to Count Gian Luca Pallavicini in that city (*Dokumente*, 100–101; on Pallavicini, a retired Habsburg field marshal and former governor-general of the Duchy of Milan, see our entry for 27 Dec 1769). No letter of recommendation from Firmian to anyone in Naples is known, but because of his tenure there as Habsburg minister plenipotentiary, the count would have had many useful contacts to whom he could have recommended the Mozarts. One likely possibility—someone Firmian knew intimately and who is named in Leopold Mozart's travel notes for Naples (*Briefe*, i:362)—is Bernardo Tanucci (1698–1783), perhaps the single most powerful figure in the kingdom's government, who would have been the most promising intermediary for the Mozarts to an audience with the king and queen. In 1761, Firmian had written a letter of recommendation to Tanucci for Johann Christian Bach, who was at that time organist in the Milan cathedral (Croce 1891, 495–96), and it seems likely that he would have done the same for the Mozarts. Another possibility is Count Giuseppe Vincenzo Francesco Maria Lascaris di Castellar (1729–1803), the Neapolitan ambassador from the court of Savoy, whose name also appears in Leopold's travel notes for Naples (*Briefe*, i:362). At the end of 1770, Castellar returned to Turin to take up the position of first secretary of state for foreign affairs. When the Mozarts traveled to Turin in Jan 1771 to investigate the possibility of an opera contract for Wolfgang, Firmian gave them a letter of recommendation to Castellar (see our entry for 9 Jan 1771).

Firmian's letter to Prince Doria Pamphilj in Rome is dated 4 Apr 1770, almost three weeks after the Mozarts left Milan, so they cannot have taken it with them, and Firmian may have sent it directly to the prince. It is written in the hand of a secretary (perhaps Leopold Troger?) and signed by Firmian. The content of Firmian's letter to Doria Pamphilj is similar but not identical to that of his letter to Count Pallavicini in Bologna (*Dokumente*, 100–101). Pallavicini had written to Firmian on 28 Mar to thank him for his letter recommending the Mozarts (*Dokumente*, 107); Pallavicini mentions that he in turn had provided them with letters of recommendation for Cardinal Pallavicini and Prince Doria Pamphilj in Rome. The timing suggests that it may have been Count Pallavicini's reference to Doria Pamphilj that inspired Firmian to write to the prince as well. By the time the Mozarts arrived in Rome, they were very well-equipped with letters of recommendation: in his letter to his wife of 14 Apr 1770, Leopold mentions having twenty, and this probably did not include Firmian's letter to Doria Pamphilj (*Briefe*, i:335), which Leopold probably did not know about.

Prince Andrea IV Doria Pamphilj-Landi (30 Oct 1747– 28 Mar 1820) was the heir of the Doria Landi family of Genoa and the Pamphilj family of Rome. His illustrious ancestor Andrea Doria was the eponym of the Italian passenger liner that sank in 1956. Prince Andrea was just 22 at the time of Firmian's letter and had not been in Rome for long: he had moved there from Genoa in June 1767, following his marriage to Leopolda di Savoia Carignano.



Prince Andrea IV Doria Pamphilj-Landi
(Wikimedia Commons)

Claudio Annibaldi has shown that it was Prince Andrea who collected most of the volumes of eighteenth-century music that survive in the family archive (Annibaldi 1982, 308ff). The prince's

interest in music is also documented by payments to Sebastiano Haym (1713–1788) for keyboard lessons, and payments for musical academies, including seven in 1770 (Annibaldi 1982, 314–15), although it seems that none of these included Mozart. The Doria Pamphilj archive contains only two works by Mozart, both composed and published many years later: the arias K. 621/19 and K. 420 (Annibaldi 1982, 326).

It was likely the prince's interest in music that prompted Pallavicini and Firmian to write to him on Mozart's behalf. The prince's answer to Pallavicini survives, dated 21 Apr 1770, ten days after the Mozarts arrived in Rome. The existence of the answer confirms that Leopold delivered Pallavicini's letter, although it does not necessarily imply that the prince received the Mozarts personally. Doria Pamphilj's answer is flowery and rather vague, but its wording may not rule out the possibility that the prince heard Wolfgang give a demonstration of his talents:

> *[...]* Sento i prodigiosi Talenti del Figlio, e la singolare abilità del Padre nella Professione della Musica, e non lasciarò *[sic]* di ammirarli ancor io, tanto chè resterà solo che mi somministrino le occasioni di compiacerli oltre quello, che far potrò lo per Loro dal canto mio. *[...]* [*Dokumente*, 107]
>
> *[...]* I sense the prodigious talents of the son and the singular ability of the father in the profession of music, and I shall not neglect to admire them myself too, and provided that they give me opportunities to oblige them, I will for my part do all that I can for them *[...]*

The word "sento" here is ambiguous: it can mean "I hear" but it can also mean "I sense" (*MDB*, 118, translates it as "I appreciate"), so it does not necessarily imply that the prince had heard Wolfgang by this point, and the future tense of "non lascierò di ammirarli" seems to imply that he had not.

On 5 May 1770, Count Kraft Ernst zu Oettingen-Wallerstein wrote to his mother from Rome:

> Jeudi 3. je fus le soir chez la Princesse Doria, et le Comte Guasco me mena chez une certaine Me. Doria, Bourgeoise, où j'entendi le jeune Mozart, il fait de *[sic]* Choses étonnentes. [*Dokumente*, 110, amended]
>
> Thursday the 3rd, in the evening I was at Princess Doria's, and Count Guasco took me to a certain Madame Doria's, a bourgeoise, where I heard the young Mozart; he does amazing things.

Deutsch actually gives "Comte Gunsco [?]," but this must be a mistranscription; online searches reveal no trace of such a name, which is in any case impossible in Italian. Anne-Louise Luccarini has suggested (private communication) that the name may be "Guasco," an old Piedmontese noble family. One member of the family who lived in Rome at this time was writer and antiquarian Francesco Eugenio Guasco (1725–1798), but he was a marquis (*marchese*) rather than a count. A more likely candidate is Ottaviano Guasco (1712–1781), middle son of Francesco Bartolomeo Guasco. Ottaviano was a writer, and a friend and translator of Montesquieu; in 1747, Ottaviano and his brothers (both prominent military men) were named Counts of Clavières. The peripatetic Ottaviano spent a good deal of time in Rome in the 1760s

researching his *De l'usage des statues chez les anciens. Essai historique* (Brussels, 1768), and he is known to have been in Rome in the early 1770s.

Oettingen-Wallerstein's "Princesse Doria" was probably Prince Andrea's wife, Leopolda. The identity of the "bourgeoise" Madame Doria is uncertain. If she was untitled, as "bourgeoise" implies, it is unlikely that she was a close relative of prince. Linda Govi (2006, 548) has suggested she may have been Maria Angela Matocci, wife of the Roman architect Alessandro Doria. In his travel notes Leopold Mozart names "le Signore Dorie" among the people they met in Rome (*Briefe*, i:346). Leopold was ordinarily meticulous about giving titles of their acquaintances, so the untitled "Signore Dorie" are more likely to have been the bourgeoise Madame Doria, at whose residence Count Oettingen-Wallerstein heard Wolfgang, and perhaps one (or more) of her female relatives. Prince Doria Pamphilj does not appear in Leopold's travel notes, which may suggest that they did not, after all, meet the prince in person.

In a letter to his wife written on 27 Mar 1770, Leopold makes clear his high opinion of Firmian:

> Du kennst Se: Ex: Graf Carl v Firmian; nun wünschte ich, daß du auch Se: Ex: Gr: Pallavicini kennen möchtest, dies sind 2 Cavalier, die in allen Stücken gleiche denkungsart, freundlichkeit, Großmuth, gelassenheit und eine besondere Liebe und Einsicht in alle Gattungen der Wissenschaften besitzten. [*Briefe*, i:327]
>
> You know His Excellency Count Karl von Firmian; now I wish that you could also get to know His Excellency Count Pallavicini. These are two gentlemen who have the same manner of thinking in all things, amicability, generosity, tranquility of mind, and a special love and insight into all branches of knowledge.

In writing "Du kennst Se: Ex: Graf Carl v Firmian," Leopold may simply have meant that his wife already knew of Count Firmian from previous letters. But the passage can also be read to imply that she had met the count personally. This is certainly possible. Carlo studied at the University of Salzburg from 1734 until 1737, the year that Leopold Mozart moved to Salzburg from Augsburg. Even if the two did not overlap at that time, Firmian was apparently based in Salzburg during the years between his studies in Leyden and Paris and his tour of Italy beginning in 1743. Later on, when traveling between Italy and Vienna on official business, he would probably also have gone by way of Salzburg.

Count Firmian was a central figure in all four of Leopold and Wolfgang's visits to Milan. Regarding their second visit (18 Oct 1770 to 14 Jan 1771) for the composition and premiere of Wolfgang's *Mitridate, re di Ponte*, see our entries for 1 Jan 1771 and 16 Jan 1771; on their third visit (21 Aug to 5 Dec 1771) for the composition and premiere of *Ascanio in Alba*, see our entries for 9 Feb 1771, 7 Mar 1771, 9 Mar 1771, 19 Aug 1771, and 17 Oct 1771; on their fourth visit (4 Nov 1772 to the beginning of Mar 1773) see our entry for 29 Dec 1772 on the Mozarts' receipt for *Lucio Silla*.

Firmian as man and patron (⇧)

Firmian's personality and abilities are difficult to assess. He did not leave a body of published work, and most of what we know about him is filtered through the words of others, ranging across a spectrum from hagiography to character assassination. A significant body of his correspondence survives, but in widely scattered archives, and only portions and extracts been published. A comprehensive assessment of Firmian's correspondence would be an essential starting place for any new biography.

Firmian's reputation in the nineteenth century was perhaps unduly colored by the opinions of local historians hostile to his long tenure as Habsburg deputy in Milan. The description of Firmian in Custodi's completion of Pietro Verri's *Storia di Milano* is representative:

> Fu dato in successore al Conte Cristiani nella carica di Ministro Plenipotenziario nella Lombardia il Conte Carlo di Firmian, che giunse in Milano il 16 giugno del 1759. *[...]* Di carattere pusillanime e di scarsi talenti, amava più la rappresentazione che gli affari, ed avea l'arte di coprire le qualità che non possedeva colla compostezza, colle scarse e misurate parole, e con un officioso sussiego. In altri tempi, quando i Governatori erano i despoti e i legislatori del paese, questa mediocrità poteva nuocere; ma dachè il Conte di Kaunitz fu assunto al supremo Ministero della Monarchia, le disposizioni legislative e di buon governo procedevano dall'alto, e i Ministri nelle Provincie divennero semplici referendarj ed esecutori; onde tutto il male che poteva farsi da essi limitavasi a qualche sfavorevole relazione alla Corte, e a qualche abuso di minuta Polizia, della quale erano lasciati arbitri. [Verri & Custodi 1825, iv:240]

> Count Cristiani was succeeded in the position of minister plenipotentiary in Lombardy by Count Carlo di Firmian, who arrived in Milan on 16 Jun 1759. *[...]* Of weak character and lacking in talent, he loved representation more than business; he had the skill of covering those qualities he did not possess with moderation, with few and measured words, and with an officious condescension. In other times, when the Governors were despots and the law-givers of the country, this mediocrity could have caused damage; but after Count Kaunitz was appointed the supreme minister of the monarchy, the instructions for legislation and good government came from on high, and the ministers in the provinces became simply referendaries and executors; hence all the harm they could have done was limited to a few unfavorable reports to the court and a few abuses of the police minutes, which could be arbitrated.

It is unclear the extent to which this assessment is based on material left by Verri, but it accords with what we know of his views. A withering portrait of Firmian is found in Verri's letters to his brother Alessandro following Firmian's death on 20 Jun 1782. Pietro had been a member of the local government in Milan during Firmian's tenure, and had become Firmian's adversary

regarding policy and implementation. On 3 Jul 1782, just two weeks after Firmian's death, Pietro wrote to Alessandro:

> *[...]* Io l'ho frequentato e posso dire che in una cosa sola egli non era volgare, cioè nella prudenza, nella dissimulazione; non ho conosciuto altro uomo al pari circospetto; e posso attestare di non aver mai ascoltata nè una massima nè un sentimento dalla sua bocca, che non proferiva mai se non fatti indifferenti. Nemmeno l'ho mai ascoltato in tante giunte e conferenze a mostrarsi informato d'un affare, prenderne il filo e ragionarvi. Quando era negli affari s'annoiava, s'indispettiva, ed era talmente nuovo come se ieri fosse venuto in questo paese.
>
> Senza adulazione noi viviamo sotto un buon governo dal 1772 a questa parte; il Reale Arciduca quattro mesi dopo che fu qui ne sapeva più del Milanese che il defunto Ministro, il quale ne' dieci anni precedenti inaccessibile, invisibile, avevaabbandonato il destino della provincia nelle più abiette e venali mani sotto lasferza delle quali abbiamo dovuto gemere come sotto l'oppressione. [Seregni 1942, 336–37]

> *[...]* I was often with him and I can say that he was uncommon only in one thing, namely in caution, in dissimulation; I have never known another man so circumspect; and I can attest never to have heard either a maxim or a sentiment from his mouth that was ever uttered with anything other than indifference. Neither have I ever heard him, in so many councils and conferences, be informed about a matter, to take up the thread and to speak about it. When engaged in matters that bored him, that piqued him, he was as much a novice as if he had arrived in this country yesterday.
>
> Without exaggerating, since 1772 we have lived under a good government in these parts; the Royal Archduke knew more about the Milanese after having been here for four months than the late Minister, who in the preceding ten years was inaccessible, invisible, having abandoned the fate of the province to the most abject and venal hands, under the lash of which we had to groan as if under oppression.

The "Royal Archduke" was Ferdinand, who had become Governor-General of Austrian Lombardy in late 1771. "Most abject and venal hands" refers especially to the *Ferma*, the system of tax-farming in Lombardy, popular with those whom it had enriched, but (at least according to Verri) loathed by everyone else. The system had been instituted by Pallavicini (Arneth 1879, 174), and it was lifted by decree of Maria Theresia on 28 Dec 1770, probably as a consequence of Joseph's visit to Milan in 1769.

A few weeks later, on 28 Aug 1782, Pietro wrote to Alessandro even more cuttingly about Firmian—and insulted the late Empress Maria Theresia to boot:

> *[...]* Le poche persone che brigavano sotto il passato regno *[...]* e che godevano tuttora de' resti ora si vedono abbattute e tristi. In quel decennio noi fummo interamente dominati da secretari abiettissimi con un dispotismo violento, senza poter mai parlare al Ministro arbitro del destino o senza poterci mai far capire da lui, che veramente aveva pochissimo ingegno unito alla smania di essere creduto un letterato, per il che l'udienza essendo per lui un pericolosissimo cimento da scomparire, nessun altro sentimento gli eccitava che la noia e talvolta la rabbia, e così prendeva per mancanza di subordinazione e cabala repubblicana

> ogni rimostranza contro gli ordini emanati in di lui nome.
>
> L’Imperatrice Regina animata contro degli Italiani in genere e prevenuta particolarmente contro de’ Milanesi creduti di animo alieno dalla sua dominazione, sedotta da questa ingiustissima calunnia che non potè smascherare nemmeno l’Imperatore che scrisse a quest’oggetto ed io l’ho veduto, l’Imperatrice, dico, aveva per massima di tenerci bassi e qualunque lamento sarebbe stato preso per cabala o spirito sedizioso. Il Conte di Firmian, che per organica struttura era insensibile alle donne e per vanità lo *[sic]* era a raccorre libri e quadri, doveva essere benissimo nel di lei animo, e le piacque molto il detto di uno che considerando il Conte di Firmian Ministro Plenipotenziario a Milano lo paragonò alla Terra Santa in mano de’ Turchi. *[Seregni 1942, 369–70]*

> *[…]* The few people who intrigued under the past reign *[…]* and who enjoyed the spoils now are seen to be dejected and sad. In that decade we were entirely dominated by the most despicable secretaries with a violent despotism, without ever being able to speak to the Minister, the arbiter of fate, and without ever being able to be understood by him, who truly had very little talent, united with the yearning to be thought a learned man—for which reason an audience was for him the most dangerous trial of comparison, arousing in him no feeling other than vexation and sometimes anger, and thus he took as insubordination and republican cabal every counsel against the orders issued in his name.
>
> The Empress Queen, hostile to Italians in general and particularly predisposed against the Milanese, believing them alienated by her rule, was so seduced by this unjust calumny that it could not even be dislodged by the Emperor, who wrote on this point, and I saw it; the Empress, I say, kept us down by decree, and any complaint would have been taken for a plot or seditious spirit. Count Firmian, who was organically insensible to women and out of vanity amassed books and paintings, must have been perfect in her mind; she was very pleased by the statement of someone who, evaluating Count Firmian as Minister Plenipotentiary to Milan, compared it to the Holy Land in the hands of the Turks.

Verri’s opinion must be taken with more than a grain of salt: he had a personal grudge against Firmian dating back at least to the late 1760s, when he attempted to go over Firmian’s head regarding governmental reforms in Lombardy by appealing directly to Emperor Joseph II and Joseph von Sperges, director of the Dipartimento d’Italia in Vienna (Garms-Cornides 1970, 131). Possibly in retaliation, Firmian made (according to Verri) unjust allegations against him (see Verri’s letter to his brother, 3 Jul 1782 in Seregni 1942, 336). Cesare Cantù remarked already in 1854 that Verri’s statements about Firmian were exaggerated to the point of defamation (Cantù 1854, 200n21).

During his career as Habsburg diplomat in Naples and administrator in Milan, Firmian worked longest and most closely with Prince Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg (1711–1794), Habsburg Staatskanzler throughout the period. The correspondence between Kaunitz and Firmian on matters of state shows mutual respect and a productive working relationship during the long process of bringing needed reforms to the government of Lombardy (see Maaß 1948). Only around 1770 did strain develop in their relationship over disagreements regarding policy toward the church (Maaß 1948, 313ff). For her part, Empress Maria Theresia continued to think so highly of Firmian that she proposed transferring him to Florence in 1765 after her second son, Archduke Leopold, had assumed rule in Tuscany. Firmian and Kaunitz both pleaded that

Firmian be allowed to remain in Milan, and in the end, she appointed Count Orsini-Rosenberg to the position (Arneth 1879, 160–61).

Young Emperor Joseph II, who visited Milan from 24 Jun to 13 Jul 1769, was evidently less impressed. Joseph lodged at Firmian's residence during his stay, but apparently kept aloof from the household. Even before arriving in Milan, Joseph may have been persuaded to a skeptical view; on 8 Jun while visiting Pavia, he wrote in his diary:

> *[...]* Firmian, quoique honnete, n'etoit ni aimé à cause de ses manieres, preventions et peu d'accessibilité, ni estimé à cause de la faiblesse avec laquelle il se laisse mener par ses secretaires Castelli et Salvador qui sont vendus aux fermiers et dont le dernier a une tres-mauvaise reputation du cote de l'interest. il veut s'occuper de toutes les bagatelles, est peu laborieux et tres lent. il etudie continuelment les belles lettres, s'occupe de tous les livres et veut passer des heures en compagnie; tout cella l'empeche et lui prend le temps à l'ouvrage. [quoted in Arneth 1879, 776n250]
>
> Firmian, although honest, was neither loved, because of his manners, prejudices, and inaccessibility, nor esteemed, because of the weakness with which he allows himself to be led by his secretaries Castelli and Salvadori, who are sold to the fermiers, and the latter of whom has a very bad reputation where his interests are concerned. He [Firmian] wants to concern himself with every triviality, he is not a hard worker, and very slow. He continually studies *belles lettres*, busies himself with all his books, and wants to spend hours in company; all of this detains him and takes away time for work.

The references are to Abate Angelo Salvadori, who appears in Leopold Mozart's travel notes for Milan (*Briefe*, i:321), and (perhaps) Abate Guiliano Castelli. Although Joseph had not yet reached Milan by this point, he had already met Firmian in Mantua on 29 May 1769 (Arneth 1879, 161).

During his sojourn in Milan, Joseph attended governmental meetings every day for several hours, and his jottings from these meetings survive. Of Firmian he writes merely: "non parla, s'arrabbia" ("doesn't speak, gets angry"; Arneth 1879, 776n252). This is consistent with Verri's later description. Of Joseph's visit, Verri himself wrote:

> Quando Cesare trovava Firmian in qualche sito pubblico, andava sempre parlare a qualcuno vicino a lui, perchè ognuno l'accorgesse che lo vedeva, ma che non volea parlargli. [Quoted in Garms-Cornides 1970, 141n63]
>
> When the emperor met Firmian in a public place, he always proceeded to talk to someone next to him, such that everyone understood that he saw him, but did not want to talk to him.

But we know from a private letter that Maria Theresia wrote to Firmian dated 6 Jul 1769 that the count was ill at this time, so even if Verri is correct, it may be that this was why Joseph kept himself aloof (see below and Arneth 1881, iv:91–92). For his part, Firmian's report to Maria Theresia on Joseph noted that all were impressed by his clarity of thought (Arneth 1879, 166).

In an article published in 1970, Elisabeth Garms-Cornides showed that marginalia in copies in the University of Vienna library of two eulogies for Firmian—Arco's *Elogio di Carlo Conte di Firmian* and Theodoro Villa's *Caroli Comitis Firmiani Vita*, both published in 1783—are in the hand of Joseph von Sperges. These annotations were obviously made after the books were published and probably after 1787 (Garms-Cornides 1970, 130), thus nearly twenty years after Sperges and Firmian had a falling out, possibly over the same issues that caused the rift with Verri. While Sperges acknowledges some of Firmian's accomplishments, he criticizes the count's tenure as ambassador in Naples, calling him "un ozio letterario, bastando per il servizio della Corte di Vienna un pajo lettere al mese sulle novità del paese" ("a lazy *letterario*, making do in his service to the court in Vienna with a couple of letters a month on news of the country"; Garms-Cornides 1970, 139). Sperges, as head of the Dipartimento d'Italia in Vienna, also felt that the eulogists gave Firmian too much credit for reforms in Lombardy, and he echoed Verri and Joseph II in complaining of Firmian's "indolenza" and "torpidezza" ("indolence" and "torpor"; Garms-Cornides 1970, 140). That Sperges once held Firmian in higher regard is suggested by the Latin dedication of his opus *Tyrolische Bergwerkgeschichte*, published in 1765:

VIRO . GENERE . MVNERIBUS
SVISQUE . MERITIS . ILLVSTRISSIMO
CAROLO . COMITI . A . FIRMIANO . AVR[EI]. VELLERIS . EQ.
AVG[VSTIS]. A . SECRETIORIBVS . CONSILIIS . ET . CVIBICVLIS
RERVM . AVSTRIAE . IN . INSVBRIA . MODERATORI
MANTVAEQ[UE]. PRAEFECTO
BONARVM . LITERARVM . CVLTORI . ET . PATRONO
GENTIS . SVAE . ET . PATRIAE . SVMMO . ORNAMENTO
HOC . HISTORIAE . MINERALOG. TYROLENSIS . SPECIMEN
D[EDIT]. D[ONAVIT]. D[EDICAVIT].
AVCTOR . PVBLICE . PRIVATIMQVE . DEVOTVS
EIVS . NOMINI . ET. VIRTVTIBUS
IOS. SPERGESIVS . OENIP[ONTANVS]
[transcribed in *Bibliotheca Firmiana*, iii/1: 69]

To a man, by his family, his gifts
and his merits most illustrious,
Carlo, Count Firmian, Knight of the Golden Fleece,
Gentleman of the august Privy Council and the Chamber,
Austrian minister plenipotentiary in the Duchy of Milan
and prefect of Mantua,
cultivator and patron of literature,
most excellent ornament of his noble family and fatherland,
this conspectus of Tyrolean mining history
was given, donated, and dedicated by
the author, devoted in public and private

to His Lordship's name and virtues,
Joseph v. Sperges of Innsbruck.

[Translation by Ian Allan]

Sperges's marginalia also shed light on two otherwise obscure aspects of Firmian's life and family background: Sperges notes the existence of the mentally retarded brother Jakob, who was otherwise long written out of family histories; and he notes that Carlo had originally been intended for the clergy and had long worn a "collarino" (Garms-Cornides 1970, 136).

Archduke Leopold, Emperor Joseph's younger brother and eventual successor, closely echoed his brother's sentiments about Firmian:

> Ministro Conte Firmian onesto abile capace, ma indolente, non vuole lavorare, non ascolta nessuno, lascia andare tutto per non averne brighe ne fastidi, ora è invecchiato, è troppo dedito alle belle lettere, e attorniato di gente di servizio e segreteria che abusano della sua bontà e spesso prendono denari per gli affari.
> [Undated assessment in HHStA, Familienarchiv Sammelbände 15, quoted in Garms-Cornides 1970, 144]

> Minister Count Firmian, honest, able, capable, but indolent, does not want to work, listens to no one, lets everything go by in order to have neither quarrels nor complaints. He is now aged, is too dedicated to belles lettres, and surrounded by servants and secretaries who abuse his generosity and often take money for their own affairs.

The criticisms of Verri, Sperges, Joseph, and Leopold all have to do with Firmian as the representative and chief administrator of Habsburg rule in Lombardy, and the criticisms seem ultimately to be rooted in events around and following Joseph's visit to Milan in 1769. Verri, a central intellectual figure in the Lombard Enlightenment, felt that governmental reforms—which had already been considerable and far reaching during Firmian's first ten years in Milan—were not progressing as quickly as he wanted. Joseph, Leopold, and Sperges found Firmian slow and less industrious than they would have liked. Verri and Joseph both seem to have felt a degree of personal animosity toward Firmian. The conclusion to this commentary will consider other potential reasons, perhaps unspoken, that might have contributed to this dislike. But even if Firmian was, as they complained, culpably slow and lazy as an administrator, this would at worst suggest only that—whatever his diplomatic skills, which seem to have been considerable—he was not cut out to be a bureaucrat.

Those who experienced Firmian as host and patron were universally positive in their assessments. As we have seen, Leopold Mozart, in his comparison of Firmian and Pallavicini, praised their "freundlichkeit, Großmuth, gelassenheit und eine besondere Liebe und Einsicht in alle Gattungen der Wissenschafte" ("amicability, generosity, tranquility of mind, and a special love and insight into all branches of knowledge"; letter of 27 Mar 1770, *Briefe*, i:327). Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who came to know Firmian in Naples during the first months of 1758, verged on hagiography in letters to friends, repeatedly calling him "eine der würdigsten Menschen unserer

Nation" ("one of the worthiest men of our nation") and referring to him as "mein bester Freund" ("my best friend"). Winckelmann's evident intellectual crush on Firmian, which may have exceeded the platonic, will be discussed in greater detail below, in the section "Firmian's sexuality and homosociality."

Charles Pinot Duclos (1704–1772), author of *Considérations sur les mœurs de ce siècle* (1751), visited Firmian in Milan on Thu, 28 May 1767. He describes his visit at length in his posthumously published *Voyage en Italie* (1791):

> Le mercredi, je me rendis à Milan,où je n'avois d'autre connoissance que le P. Frisi, théatin, professeur de ma-thématique. Je l'avois vu à Paris, où ilavoit reçu des gens de lettres l'accueilqu'il méritoit; & il usa de représaille à mon égard, & voulut me présenter auxpersonnes les plus considérables de Mi-lan, en commençant par le comte de Firmian, grand d'Espagne, & gouver-neur du Milanois *[...]*
>
> Le lendemain, jour de l'Ascension,j'allai chez le comte de Firmian, dontle palais, sur le bord du canal, est très-beau, & meublé avec autant de goûtque de magnificence. Je le trouvai aumilieu d'une cour aussi brillante quenombreuse, & lui présentai ma lettre.Il la reçut poliment, & plus obligeam-ment encore la mit dans sa poche, sansl'ouvrir, en me disant: ces sortes delettres ne sont pas faites pour vous.Nous étions prévenus de votre arrivée;vous n'avez aucun besoin de recomman-dation; j'espère que vous voudrez biendiner avec moi. Il ajouta que M. Leduc de Modène étoit absent; mais ques'il eût été à Milan, il m'auroit vu avecplaisir, me connoissant de réputation.Il n'y eut point de bontés dont il mecomblat. Comme on ne devoit se met-tre à table que dans une heure ou deux,j'eus le tems de voir ses appartemens,& sur-tout sa bibliothèque, en très bonordre, & fournie des meilleurs livres, tant anciens que nouveaux. Quand onvint nous avertir qu'on alloit servir, jeme rendis auprès du comte, qui avoitretenu une vingtaine de ceux qui étoientvenus lui faire leur cour. Après un ex-cellent diner, il y eut une heure deconversation générale, & le comte s'é-tant retiré, pour faire ses dépêches, deuxdes convives, le marquis Carpani & leP. Frisi, me proposèrent d'aller voir le dôme *[...]* [Duclos 1791, 229–31]

[translation:]

> On Wednesday I went to Milan, where I had no acquaintance other than Padre Frisi, Theatiner and professor of mathematics. I had seen him in Paris, where he received the welcome he deserved from men of letters; & to repay me, he wanted to introduce me to the most important people in Milan, beginning with Count Firmian, grandee of Spain *[sic]* & governor of Milan *[...]*
>
> The next day, the Feast of Ascension, I went to Count Firmian's, whose palace,on the bank of a canal, is very beautiful, & furnished with as much taste as magnificence. I found him in the middle of a court both brilliant and numerous, & presented my letter to him. He received it politely & more obligingly still put it into his pocket, without opening it, saying to me: these sorts of letters are not made for you. We were given advance notice of your arrival; you have no need of recommendation; I hope that you will be so good as to dine with me. He added that the Duke of Modena was away; but if he had been in Milan, he would have been pleased to see me, knowing my reputation. As we did not have to sit down at table for an hour or two, I had the time to view his apartments, & above all his library,

> very well arranged, and furnished with the best books, both ancient and modern. When someone came to announce that dinner was served, I was seated next to the Count, who had invited around twenty of those who had come to pay their respects. After an excellent dinner, there was an hour of general conversation, & the Count having retired to make his dispatches, two of the guests, Marquis Carpani and Pater Frisi, suggested to me to go see the cathedral *[...]*

Firmian was not, of course, a “grand d’Espagne”; Duclos’ memory of Firmian’s background may have become confused because of the count’s former position as envoy to the Neapolitan court of Charles of Bourbon, who by the time Duclos visited Milan had been King Charles III of Spain for nearly a decade. Duclos gives a vivid depiction of Firmian’s hospitality and his openness to men of letters like Duclos who were visiting from out of town. “Pater Frisi” was the distinguished mathematician and astronomer Paolo Frisi (1728–1784), and a member of Firmian’s circle (on Frisi see also Donà 1974, 270ff).

The Swiss philosopher and aesthetician Johann Georg Sulzer published a glowing report on Firmian, whom he visited during his stay in Milan from 23 to 31 May 1776:

> Mein erster Gedanke war hier, dem kaiserlichenbevollmächtigten Minister, **Grafen von Firmian**, aufzuwarten, und einen Mann kennen zu lernen, dersich sowohl durch seinen Charakter als durch eine für=treffliche Staatsverwaltung, und so viel herrliche Anstalten einen so glänzenden Ruhm erworben hat. Ichhatte ein Empfehlungsschreiben von dem Baron von **Swieten**, kaiserl. königl. Minister am preußischenHofe, an diesen Herrn. Er nahm mich nicht nurmit seiner gegen jedermann gewöhnlichen Leutseligkeit, sondern mit so vorzüglicher Ehrenbezeugung auf, daßich, ohne mich einer Unbescheidenheit verdächtig zu machen, nichts weiter davon anführen kann. Diesesaber kann ich versichern, daß das, was ich nun gegenwärtig von den großen Einsichten, von den ausgebreiteten gelehrten Kenntnissen, von der erstaunlichenArbeitsamkeit, der edlen Sinnesart, den in jedem Zweige der Staatsverwaltung getroffenen herrlichen Anstalten dieses großen Ministers gesehen und erfahren habe, meine nicht geringen Erwartungen noch weitübertroffen hat. [Sulzer 1780, 326–27]
>
> My first thought here was to wait upon the imperial minister plenipotentiary, **Count von Firmian**, and to become acquainted with a man who had achieved such brilliant fame, both through his character and through excellent governance and so many magnificent institutions. I had a letter of recommendation to this man from Baron van **Swieten**, imperial-royal minister to the Prussian court. He [Firmian] received me not only with the amiability that he habitually shows to all, but also with such a particular display of honor, that I cannot repeat it without arousing suspicion of immodesty. This I can say with assurance, however, that what I have presently seen and experienced of the extensive intellectual knowledge, of the astonishing industry, the noble disposition of the magnificent institutionsin every branch of the government, far exceeded my expectations, which were not small.

Charles Burney was in Milan from 16 to 25 Jul 1770. In his travel notes, he left a detailed depiction of Firmian as host. On Tue, 24 Jul, after visiting Giovenale Sacchi and then the library and paintings of the late Count Carlo Pertusati, Burney went to dine at Firmian's:

> From hence to Count Firmians *[sic]* where everything breaths *[sic]* taste and affluence. We were shewn into a drawing room where a great deal of company was waiting for his Excellence.

As he awaits the arrival of the count, Burney converses with "2 reverend fathers," an unnamed "great mathematician" (perhaps Paolo Frisi?) and the mathematician and music theorist Francesco Venini (1737–1820).

> The conversation with these 2 fathers entertained me very much till the arrival of the great man, and indeed without a sneer he seems to me to have all the marks of a truely great man. His person, inclinable to corpulent is full of dignity and his address full of graceful ease. He accosted me in French in a most condescending and engaging manner, thanked me very much for trouble I had taken in bringing M. Strange's charming prints to him—and then spoke for half an hour in their and his praise *[...]*
>
> Dinner was served and we dined in a magnificent hall, full of good pictures and elegant furniture—je me place entre votre nation—says the Count to me in making me sit on one side of him, and a young English officer Mr Fothergal, on the other. A plate of everything at the table was offered by a servant to all the guests, and wines of all sorts, and after dinner fruits and coffee in the same manner. There were upwards of 20 at table—all men—the Count had never been married. The conversation was very general and agreeable. Rousseau and his little opera were part of it. *[...]*

The reference is to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and (probably) *Le Devin du village*.

> After dinner the company got up and went into another room to wash their mouths—water being offered in salvers—and then we were called in to a still different room for conversation—no drinking. A gentleman who had dined with us, a man of taste in painting and literature, who I found read English and could speak a little, was desired by his Excellence to show me his pictures and books—exquisite—charming paintings by Spagnoletto, Vinci, Guido, Coreggio, Titian, Paul Veronese, Salvator Rosa, Guercini, Rubens, Vandyke, Claude Lauraine etc etc. The books chosen and classed with great taste: theology in one room, law in a second, history in a third, poetry in a fourth, the beaux art *[sic]* and criticism in a fifth, English books of which a great quantity, in a sixth etc. I was told that the Count both reads and speaks English. Upon taking my leave his Excellence told me that I used them very ill in going away so soon and pressed me very much to stay longer at Milan. [Burney 1770, 59–60]

As we shall see, Firmian often held such dinners with "a great deal of company" in Milan, and probably also in Naples; they were the principal forum in which he brought together and fostered interaction among artists and intellectuals, both local and visiting. (On Burney's meeting with the Mozarts in Bologna, see our entry for 30 Aug 1770.)

Firmian's library is said to have contained 40,000 books. An annotated catalog was published after his death under the general title *Bibliotheca Firmiana*, consisting of five numbered volumes (one in two parts), with separate unnumbered volumes for books in English, manuscripts, and his collection of medallions. The volumes mirror the rooms that Burney mentions:

vol. 1, Theologia
vol. 2, Jurisprudentia, et politica
vol. 3, Philosophia
  Pars I. Philosophia prop. dict. Physica. Mathem. Artes
  Pars II. Historia natural., Medicina
vol. 4, Historia
vol. 5, Literæ humaniores. Auctores classici antiqui, et Polygraphia
Libri Anglico Sermone Conscripti
Manuscripta
Appendix (Medaglie)

Firmian had very little notated music in his collection: there are just six items in the catalogs, all vocal: Handel's *Messiah* and *Acis and Galatea* in the English catalog (*Libri Anglico*, 201–202), and four items in the second part of volume 3, under the heading "Poetica varia, cum notis musicis" (*Bibliotheca Firmiana*, iii/2:177). The preceding section of that same volume lists his somewhat larger collection of books on music history and music theory, including 32 individual titles (*Bibliotheca Firmiana*, iii/2:173–77). Among these is the 1756 first edition of Leopold Mozart's *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*, which (one imagines) Firmian could have received from Leopold directly or which Leopold may have had sent to him later on. Also in Firmian's library at the time of his death were three books by Giovenale Sacchi: *Della divisione del tempo nella musica nel ballo e nella poesia* (1770), *Della natura e perfezione della antica musica de' Greci* (1778), and *Delle quinte successive nel contrappunto, e delle regole deglia accompagnamenti* (1780), which is framed as a letter to composer Wenzel Pichl. The first and second of these mention Mozart's visit to Milan in 1770 (see our entries "Giovenale Sacchi on Mozart the prodigy (1770)" and "Giovenale Sacchi on Mozart in Milan (1778); the second is dedicated to Firmian). The catalog of English books in Firmian's library includes Burney's *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (1771) and *General History of Music* (1776; *Libri Anglico*, 201).

Firmian's large collection of paintings and prints was cataloged in two separate published volumes under the combined title *Gabinetto Firmiano* (*Pitture* and *Stampe*). According to Stefano Ferrari, the printed catalog of paintings includes 162 items (Ferrari 2012, 93). Entries are alphabetical by artist, with separate sections at the end for works of unknown attribution and copies. Entries describe the paintings, assess the attributions, and give dimensions. Ferrari writes that it was intended as a sales catalog: Firmian was in considerable debt at the time of his death, and his assets were sold off to help cover them. Ferrari also notes that the catalog of paintings includes only those items judged to be the best; he has discovered a manuscript that gives a much more complete inventory of 669 items: "Catalogo delle Pitture, e Sculture dello Stato del fù Eccellentissimo Signor Conte Carlo De Firmian" (Ferrari 2012).

Pietro Verri was characteristically dismissive of the quality of Firmian's art collection:

> *[...]* la somma de' debiti è grandiosa, fatta più per spensieratezza che per generosità o passione per le arti. I suoi quadri la maggior parte sono mediocri e vendutigli per mezzo di mance date ai camerieri, giacchè egli da sè non ne giudicava. *[...]* [Letter of 28 Aug 1782, Seregni 1942, 368]
>
> *[...]* the sum of his debts is great, made greater by the heedlessness of his generosity and his passion for the arts. The majority of his paintings are mediocre and were sold to him by means of gratuities given to servants, since he could not judge on his own. *[...]*

But this is too harsh. Burney, who was knowledgeable about art, was evidently more impressed. (On the discrepancies between the artists mentioned by Burney, and those in the printed and manuscript catalogs of Firmian's collection, see the *Notes* below.) Although Firmian's collection of paintings has received a good deal of scholarly attention in recent years (see esp. Ferrari ed. 2015), there seems not yet to be a single comprehensive modern list of the paintings that were in his collection at the time of his death or are known ever to have been in his possession, with modern assessments of attributions and information about current locations. Well-known names that appear as accepted attributions in the *Gabinetto* in 1783 include Bronzino, Dürer, Holbein, Claude Lorrain, Parmigiano, del Sarto, Spagnoletto, Titian, and Van Dyck, among others, along with good copies of works by such painters as Raphael and Giorgione. Firmian's collection also contained an impressive number of works by living artists, including Martin Knoller (a protégé of Firmian's), Carlo Bonavia (another protégé), Antonio Joli, and Giambettino Cignaroli, as well as ancient and modern statues, drawings, Byzantine icons, and bas-reliefs.

The catalog of Firmian's collection of prints has received less attention, but these were evidently a major collecting passion: according to the running totals in the three sections of the catalog, at the time of the count's death, he owned 20,617 prints, including 2,847 portraits. His collection did not, however, include an exemplar of the famous Delafosse engraving of Carmontelle's portrait of the Mozarts in Paris (see our entries for 21 Jan 1765 and 9–10 Aug 1765). This absence suggests that Leopold had not brought any of the prints with him in 1770, and he may no longer have been actively soliciting interest in them. In any case, Firmian's print collection had only a handful of portraits of musicians (Farinelli, Corelli, Manzoli, and Rameau); this again seems to confirm Firmian's relative lack of interest in music, which makes his strong support of Mozart all the more noteworthy.

Whatever the quality of Firmian's collections from a modern point of view, they must have been impressive to visitors. It is also evident that he intended his collections to be not only decorative, but also useful and educational. His household in Milan was, in effect, a combination of private art museum and research library. To give one example: the entry in *Bibliotheca Firmiana* for

Thomas Wildman’s *Treatise on the Management of Bees* (1768) includes the (charmingly unidiomatic) annotation in English:

> *N. B. This Author made some Stay, at Milan studied in the Library of the Late Count of Firmian, and made in his House many experiences relative to this Work.* [*Libri Anglico*, 48–49]

The kinds of gatherings described by Duclos and Burney—assemblies of around 20 men of diverse interests and backgrounds—had been a staple of Firmian’s domestic social life since at least his years in Naples. On 5 Jul 1755, the philosopher and political economist Antonio Genovesi (1713–1769) wrote from Naples to a friend:

> *[...]* Tra gli amici, che ho acquistato quest’ anno, è il Conte Firmian. Qual’ uomo ! è il più gentile, e amabile uomo, ch’io conosco. Io sono spesso a riverirlo, ed egli mi fa l’onore di trattarmi colle piùdistinte accoglienze del mondo. La sua conversazio-ne è composta di 15., o 20 de’ più begli spiriti, chequì sono. Sopra tutto è molto inteso dello stato pre-sente di Europa, nè fallo per ciò, che appartiene alcommercio, alle scienze, e alle arti. *[...]* Io l’amo,e lo stimo sinceramente. *[...]* [Genovesi 1787, 69]

> *[...]* Among the friends I have acquired this year is Count Firmian. What a man! He is the kindest and most amiable man that I know. I have often paid my respects,and he does me the honor of receiving me with the most refined hospitality in the world. His conversazione consists of 15 or 20 of the finest minds that there are. Above all, much attention is given to the present state of Europe, nor do they neglect whatever pertains to commerce, the sciences, and the arts.*[...]* I love and esteem him sincerely. *[...]*

Genovesi’s word “conversazione” is telling: Firmian’s get-togethers were not quite salons like those he may have attended in Paris, and they did not have the structural formality of a group like the Accademia dei Trasformati in Milan. During his years in Milan, if not earlier, Firmian’s gatherings were typically centered around meals at his residence; we might simply call them dinner parties, to which Firmian invited anyone he thought might provide stimulating conversation.

Pietro Verri, in a letter to his brother on 28 Aug 1782, implied that Firmian had held such “tables” daily, paid for (Verri evidently believed) using a combination of government monies and the ill-gotten gains of the *Ferma*:

> Il defunto Ministro Plenipotenziario riceveva circa diecimila zecchini all’anno dall’erario. *[...]* Sin che durò la Ferma, il Sig. Conte di Firmian ogni giorno del l’anno aveva una gran tavola servita superbamente a gelati, a vini preziosi, a pesci di mare, a selvatici, e ogni giorno accresceva la libreria o la galleria. Coll’abolizione della Ferma venne accresciuta allo stipendio la pensione di diecimila fiorini, cioè più di tremila zecchini annui, e da quel momento accadde una riforma tale che i convitati non avevano di che sfamarsi. Vedi cosa significasse la Ferma, e a quai rischi sia stato il tuo Pietro, solo e contraddetto da tutto quanto il ministero per sostener la tesi e somministrare i mezzi per abolire quel flagello, come è accaduto con insigne beneficio e della Camera e del paese. [Seregni 1942, 368]

> The late Minister Plenipotentiary received around ten thousand zecchini per year from the treasury. *[...]* As long as the Ferma lasted, Signor Count Firmian held a grand table every day of the year that was sumptuously supplied with ices, exquisite wines, fish of the sea, wild game, and every day his library or gallery increased. With the abolition of the *Ferma* the stipend for his pension grew by ten thousand florins, that is by three thousand zecchini annually, and from that moment a reform occurred such that the guests at the table did not have the wherewithal to satisfy their hunger. You see what the Ferma meant, and what risks your Pietro ran in speaking alone against all the ministers in supporting the idea and providing the means for abolishing that scourge that had befallen the chamber and the country to such famous advantage. *[...]*

At the time Verri was writing, 10,000 zecchini would have been equivalent to 43,000 fl, and 3000 zecchini to 12,900 fl (not 10,000, as Verri writes).

From a modern point of view, Verri's implied accusation would amount to malfeasance: using government funds for private purposes. And the accusation is by no means implausible. It is reasonable to wonder how Firmian paid for his collections and his lavish dinner parties. He was the youngest son of a noble family that did not have huge estates and was not extravagantly wealthy, so Carlo likely had to earn his living. The truth is, however, that we currently know very little about Firmian's personal finances, except that he is said to have been in considerable debt late in life and had asked Maria Theresia for a loan of 100,000 fl (more on this below). Verri seems to assume that Firmian paid for everything out of his budget as minister plenipotentiary to Austrian Lombardy, perhaps supplemented through some sort of income (or graft) from the Ferma. On the other hand, the full list of Firmian's titles given in Arco's eulogy includes several other positions that might have brought additional salary or compensation. So far as we know, the basic research on Firmian's finances and that of Austrian Lombardy under his tenure remains to be done. It may be, too, that Firmian felt, rightly or wrongly, that his collections and dinner parties were part of his job, which he saw as contributing to the improvement of intellectual and cultural life in Lombardy. In any case and however he may have paid for it, Firmian did indeed make his residences in Naples and Milan important centers for the networking of intellectuals, writers, and artists, and he gave practical support to many of them at crucial stages of their careers. One of the most important of these was the art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768).

Firmian arrived in Naples to take up his position as Habsburg minister plenipotentiary on 4 Mar 1754, and remained there until 27 Nov 1758. Already by mid 1755 he had visited the remote and still little-known Greek ruins at Paestum, as he wrote to Lorenzo Mehus:

> J'ai été a Presto [sic]: j'y ai été frappé de la magnificence des vestiges de l'antiquité, e le grand goût de l'Architecture Dorique m'en a rendu amoureux: si vous savés quelque chose de Presto *fac ne ig[n]orem* [Letter of 18 Jun 1755, quoted in Justi 1872, 219n]

> I visited Paestum: I was struck by the magnificence of the remains from antiquity, and I fell in love with the grand taste of the Doric architecture. If you know something more about Paestum, enlighten me.

Winckelmann arrived in Naples near the end of Feb 1758, and soon settled into lodgings in nearby Portici, because of its proximity to the ongoing excavations at Herculaneum. However, according to a letter of 20 May 1758 (written after he had returned to Rome), he had traveled into Naples "ein paar Mahl die Woche" (a couple of times a week), always dining with Firmian (Winckelmann 1952, i:371). In a letter from Naples dated 11 Mar 1758 to the painter Anton Raphael Mengs, Winckelmann left his first known description of Firmian:

> Il conte di Firmian, da cui vado a pranzare ogni volta, che passo a Napoli, è un compitissimo cavaliere, ed un uomo, che oltre la sua gran dottrina, buon gusto, retto discernimento, e passione per le belle arti, può esser chiamato amabilissimo. Egli fa tale stima di voi, quanto non vi saprò dire. Il mio libro, che gli ho regalato, ha incontrato il suo genio, e ne fa mille encomi. [Winckelmann 1952, i:337]
>
> Count Firmian, with whom I dine every time I go to Naples, is a very accomplished gentleman, and a man, who in addition to his great erudition, good taste, precise judgment, and passion for the fine arts, can be called very amiable. He has such esteem for you that I do not know how to tell you. My book, which I gave to him as a gift, met with his approval, and he gave it a thousand praises.

The book that Winckelmann gave the count would have been *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755; 2nd ed. 1756), his first publication.

Winckelmann had optimistically assumed that he would be well received in Naples because of his reputation as a scholar, but in fact the authorities in charge of antiquities were alarmed by him, even before his arrival (Justi 1872, 167; Parslow 1998, 215ff). Bernardo Tanucci, the *de facto* premier of the kingdom, had been given charge over all matters having to do with Herculaneum, and had founded the *accademia* for its study. Initially Winckelmann had no luck breaking into Tanucci's circle. It seems to have been Firmian, the Austrian minister plenipotentiary, who helped intermediate Winckelmann's access to Tanucci, and thus to the excavations at Herculaneum and the treasures that had so far been recovered from them (Justi 1872, 173).

Firmian also arranged for Winckelmann to travel to Paestum. On 15 May 1758, Winckelmann wrote from Rome to his intimate friend Hieronymus Dietrich Berendis about Firmian and the trip:

> [Firmian] ist ein Mann von 40 Jahren von großen Verstande und unglaublich großer Wissenschaft: er hat in Leiden, Siena, Rom und Paris studiret und hat mehr Englische Bücher gelesen, als ich fast gesehen. Mit demselben habe ich besondere Freundschaft errichtet: denn er ist ein Mann nach meinem Herzen.
>
> *[...]*
>
> Ich [habe] von Neapel aus verschiedene Reisen gethan. *[...]*
>
> Die größte Reise habe ich in Gesellschaft 2 Cammerherren des Churfürsten von Cölln

> nach Pesto am Salernitanischen Meer=Busen gemacht. Es ist eine wüste verlaßene Gegend, wo man so weit das Auge gehet nur etliche Hirten=Häuser siehet *[…]* niemand ist vor 6 Jahren dahingegangen. Vielleicht bin ich und meine Gesellschaft der erste Deutsche der da gewesen. Diese beyde Patrons denen nicht viel an dergleichen gelegen war, wurden durch den Graf von Firmian um mir diese Reise zu erleichtern, so lange zugesetzt, bis sie sich entschloßen. Denn man muß mit allen versehen dahin gehen, und es wurde in Neapel auf etliche Tage dazu die Küche gemacht. [Winckelmann 1952, i:365–66]

[translation:]

> [Firmian] is a 40-year-old man of great understanding and unbelievably great knowledge: he studied in Leiden, Siena, Rome, and Paris, and has read more English books almost than I have seen. I have forged a special friendship with him: for he is a man after my own heart.
>
> *[…]*
>
> I made various trips from Naples. *[…]*
>
> The biggest trip I made was to Paestum on the Salernian sea coast in the company of two chamberlains of the Elector of Cologne. It is a region that has been left wild, where so far as the eye can see there are only some shepherds’ houses *[…]* No one went there until six years ago. Perhaps I and my companions are the first Germans to have been there. These two escorts, who were not much interested in such things, were pressed by Count Firmian until they agreed, in order to make the trip easier for me. For one must go there with everything one needs, and the food for several days was made in Naples.

(In 1758, the Elector and Archbishop of Cologne was Clemens August von Bayern.)

Winckelmann had also written about Firmian and Paestum in a letter to Count Heinrich von Bünau, sent from Naples on 26 Apr 1758:

> [Firmian] ist einer der würdigsten Menschen unserer Nation und bekennet, daß er aus keinem Buche mehr gelernet, als aus der Bünauischen Reichs=Historie, und da ich einige Wochen mit ihm vertraulich umgegangen und viel Höflichkeiten genoßen, und ich mir merken ließ, daß mich E. Excellenz zur Arbeit an Dero Werken gebraucht, so schien der vorige Begriff von mir nichts gegen den, welchen ihn diese Nachricht gab. Er macht sich groß mit E. Excellenz gegen die Welsche Nation, und sein Wort gilt, denn er ist ein Mann von großer gründlicher Gelehrsamkeit und allenthalben liebenswürdig. *[…]*
>
> Ich habe verschiedene Reisen weit ins Land hinein gethan, um alles zu sehen: unter andern bin ich nach nach Pesto an Salernitanischen Meerbusen gegangen, um 3 alte dorische Tempel oder Portici, welche fast gantz erhalten sind, zu sehen *[…]* [Winckelmann 1952, i: 350]

[translation:]

> [Firmian] is one of the worthiest men of our nation, and he acknowledges that he has learned more from Bünau's *Reichs=Historie* than from any other book. And because I was on intimate terms with him for several weeks and enjoyed many kindnesses, and I permitted myself to remark that Your Excellency needed me for help on your works, the foregoing idea from me seemed not to be news to him to whom I gave it. He is making you famous among the Italian nation, and his word has authority, because he is a man of great fundamental erudition and worthy of love everywhere. *[...]*
>
> I made various trips far into the region in order to see everything: among other things, I went to Paestum on the Salernian sea coast to see 3 old Doric temples or porticos, which are preserved almost completely *[...]*

Winckelmann is referring to Bünau's *Genaue und umständliche Teutsche Kayser= und Reichs=Historie aus den bewehrtesten Geschicht=schreibern und Urkunden zusammen getragen* (4 vols., 1728–1743). Winckelmann had worked as Bünau's librarian from 1748 until 1754, when he left to become librarian for Cardinal Alberico Archinto, first in Dresden, then in Rome. Winckelmann uses the very same phrase to describe Firmian—"eine[r] der würdigsten Menschen unserer Nation" ("one of the worthiest men of our nation")—in a letter to Johann Georg Wille from Naples written around the same time (Winckelmann 1952, i:348). We shall return to Winckelmann's relationship with Firmian below, in the section "Firmian's sexuality and homosociality."



Antonio Joli, *A view of Paestum* (1759)
(Wikimedia Commons)

Firmian also provided encouragement as well as protection and practical support to Cesare Beccaria (Marchese Cesare Beccaria Bonesana, 1738–1794), one of the most important figures of the Italian Enlightenment. The oldest son of a Milanese noble family, Beccaria was a member—along with Pietro and Alessandro Verri, Paolo Frisi, and others—of the so-called "Accademia dei Pugni" (the Academy of Fists, or Academy of Fisticuffs), nursery of the Lombard Enlightenment, and he was a contributor to the group's short-lived journal *Il Caffè* (1764–1766). In 1764, just after turning 26, Beccaria published his most famous and influential book, *Dei delitti e delle pene*, widely considered the first work of modern penology, which argues on rational and pragmatic grounds against the death penalty and the use of torture. The book rapidly became famous throughout Europe, appearing in numerous editions and translations, but it also met with resistance and was put on the index of prohibited books by the Catholic Church. (For a survey of the book's early publication history and reception, see Venturi 1970.) Beccaria, shy by nature, had evidently expected controversy and initially published the book anonymously, although his authorship would certainly have been known among his circle in Milan.

When Beccaria's book came under attack, Firmian defended it in a note dated 3 Feb 1765:

> J'ai lu le livre des Délits et des Peines. Ce qu'on y dit de la question m'a beaucoup plu. Ma vanité en était flattée par ce que mon sentiment a été toujours de même sur ce point. Le livre me parait écrit avec beaucoup d'amour de l'humanité et beaucoup d'imagination. [Cantù 1854, 242n20]
>
> I have read the book *Dei delitti e delle pene*. I was very pleased by what is said there on the question. My vanity was flattered because my feeling on this point has always been the same. The book seems to me written with much love of humanity and much imagination.

When Catherine the Great attempted to poach Beccaria for Russia in 1767, Firmian argued persuasively to Kaunitz that he should be kept in Milan (Cantù 1862,166ff). At the end of the following year, following Firmian's recommendation, Beccaria was appointed to the new chair of political economy at the Scuole Palatine in Milan, and Firmian attended his inaugural lectures. Beccaria wrote in thanks:

> Dall' E. V. riconosco la benigna approvazione della Corte alla nomina fatta in mio favore alla cattedra di scienze camerali, per un effetto di quella particolare protezione e bontà, con cui l' E. V. mi ha sempre riguardato. Procurerò con tutti gli sforzi possibili di non demeritarmi la confidenza, di cui la Corte e l' E. V. mi onorano nell' appoggiarmi una cattedra di tale importanza. [Cantù 1862, 170n]
>
> I acknowledge to Your Excellency the benevolent approval of the court in my successful appointment to the chair of political science, a consequence of that special protection and goodness with which Your Excellency has always regarded me. I will endeavor with all possible effort not to be unworthy of the trust with which the court and Your Excellency have honored me in appointing me to a chair of such importance.

Beccaria also dedicated his next book to Firmian, *Ricerche intorno alla natura dello stile* (1770). The preface opens:

> ECCELLENZA.
>
> Io consacro a V. E. quest'opera
> mia, come un pubblico testimonio
> della più giusta riconoscenza ad un
> mio Benefattore, e Mecenate, e di
> quel vero rispetto, che inspirano
> alle anime sensibili le anime grandi.
> *[...]*
>
> EXCELLENCY.
>
> I dedicate to Your Excellency this
> my work, as a public testimony of
> fitting recognition to my benefactor
> and patron, and the true respect
> that great spirits inspire in sensitive
> spirits *[...]*

Two critical responses to *Dei delitte e delle pene* were also dedicated to Firmian: Paolo Risi's *Animadversiones ad criminalem jurisprudentiam pertinentes* (Milan, 1766), with a long dedicatory preface in Latin; and Antonio Montanari's *La necessità della pena di morte nella criminal legislazione* (Verona, 1770).

In the nineteenth century, it was suggested that *Il bibliomane*, a satirical poem by Beccaria, might refer to Firmian (Ugoni 1856, 239–40). The poem survives in Beccaria's autograph and was first published in full by Cantù (1862, 156n1). It consists of fifteen stanzas of sesta rima; in the fourth and fifth, the poet writes that the eponymous bibliomane believes Newton's *Method of Fluxions* is a book on medicine (it is actually on differential calculus):

> Quivi il fior delle stampe è radunato,
> quanto ha di novo in Londra od in Parigi.
> – Vedi quel libro?– disse il letterato,
> – costommi più di tredici luigi,–
> e si leggeva in fronte all'edizione
> *Geometricæ fluxiones* di Neutone.
>
> E mi soggiunse poi che lo credeva
> in medecina un'opera eccelente,
> che un rimedio certissimo porgeva
> contro le ree flussioni all' egra gente.
> Io per frenare il provocato riso

> soffiando il naso mi copersi il viso.
> [Firpo et al. 1984, 238; Cantù 1862, 157–58]

[translation:]

> Here are collected the cream of publications
> that are new in London or Paris.
> “Do you see that book?” says the littérateur,
> “It cost me more than thirteen louis”;
> On the front of the edition it reads
> *Geometricæ Fluxiones* by Newton.
>
> And then he tells me that he thinks
> it is an excellent medical work,
> that offers a sure remedy for afflicted
> persons against noxious fluctuations.
> To stifle the laugh this provokes,
> blowing my nose, I cover my face.

In other words, the bibliomane is convinced that Newton’s book contains a remedy for “noxious fluxuations,” perhaps a gastrointestinal ailment such as Firmian is said to have suffered. If the poem was meant to refer to Firmian, this passage would imply that he avidly collected books while having no idea what they were about.

The final two stanzas read:

> Non è stupor se giacciasi negletta
> la libreria per mesi ed anni interi,
> se tutt’il dì lo specchio e la toletta
> lo tien fisso in più nobili pensieri,
> se gli passano intere le mattine
> architettando l’incomposto crine.
>
> Poco gli monta l’essere una zucca
> senza dottrina, senza sale in testa
> purché una linda e nobile parrucca,
> una brillante ricamata vesta
> e sopra d’un dipinto ed aureo cocchio
> del curïoso volgo attragga l’occhio.
> [Firpo et al. 1984, 241; Cantù 1862, 159n]

[translation:]

> It is not surprising that the library
> lies neglected for entire months and years,
> as every day he is transfixed in nobler
> thought by the mirror and his *toilette*,

as entire mornings pass with him
constructing his unaffected coiffure.

Little does it matter that he is without
a thought, without an idea in his head,
provided he has a fine and noble peruque,
a brilliant and embroidered vest,
and mounts a painted and gilded coach,
drawing the eyes of the curious rabble.

The claim that the poem refers to Firmian was at least plausible. Newton’s posthumously published *Method of Fluxions* (1736), an English translation from a manuscript in Latin, was in Firmian’s prodigious library at the time of his death (*Libri anglico*, 32). And two portrait engravings of Firmian from around the time of the Mozarts’ first visit to Milan show a hairstyle that one might call “architecturally natural,” perhaps of the sort the poet was trying to suggest.



Giovanni Montanari, portrait engraving of Count Firmian
Frontispiece, Stanislao Bardetti, *De’ primi abitatori dell’Italia* (1769)
(Biblioteca Digitale Trentina)



Cristoforo Dall'Acqua, portrait engraving of Count Firmian
Frontispiece, Valeriano Canati, *I sacri salmi trasportati in versi italiani* (1770)
(Biblioteca Digitale Trentina)

It is now generally thought, however, that Beccaria's poem dates from 1757 or 1758 (Firpo et al. 1984, 401), and since Firmian did not arrive in Milan to take up his position as minister plenipotentiary of Austrian Lombardy until 16 Jun 1759, it is unlikely that Beccaria meant the poem to refer to him. In any case, another Beccaria poem from around 1760, *Della relazione che hanno l'osterie con il commercio*, contains a passage that certainly refers to Firmian:

> Ma qual paese è quello, ove oggi possa,
> magnanimo signor, correre a gara
> il forestier? Certo è l'Insubria mia,
> di cui la cura, che sul trono sempre
> de' sovrani s'asside, a te si affida.
> [Firpo et al. 1984, 248]

> But what land is this, magnanimous
> lord, where the foreigner can run the race?
> Certainly it is my Lombardy, whose care
> has been entrusted to you by the
> sovereigns who ever sit upon the throne.

Leopold Mozart's travel notes from their first visit to Milan list "Marchese Beccaria e moglie" ("Marchese Beccaria and wife", *Briefe*, i:322); Beccaria's wife was the former Teresa Blasco, whom he married against his family's wishes and at the cost of his primogeniture. Although we do not

know exactly when and where the Mozarts met the couple, it is possible they became acquainted at Firmian's, or perhaps via contacts made there.

Another literary figure in Firmian's circle was Gian Carlo Passeroni (1713–1803), best remembered today for his long satirical poem *Il Cicerone*, the first two volumes of which were published in 1755, followed by four further volumes up to 1774. As English Wikipedia aptly summarizes, the poem "purports to be a biography of Cicero … but contains lengthy satirical and ironic digressions" on a wide variety of topics much more relevant to Passeroni's time than to Cicero's. The broad similarities to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*—which began to appear in 1759, four years after *Il Cicerone*—were already obvious to Passeroni's contemporaries.

In *Biographie universelle* in 1823, Guillon writes of Passeroni meeting Sterne at Firmian's in Milan, as well as of Firmian's offers of support for Passeroni:

> Il [Passeroni] refusa plus d'une fois le logement et la table, que des patriciens milanais lui offraient dans leur hôtel. Le comte de Firmian, plénipotentiare de l'Autriche en Lombardie, et protecteur empressé des gens de lettres *[…]*, ne put même le décider à accepter des emplois compatibles avec son état et ses goûts, qu'il avait imaginé de lui offrir pour lui procurer une existence moins misérable. Comme il aimait à le voir, et l'obligeait à venir souvent causer avec lui, Passeroni avait conçu pour ce Mécène, d'un naturel si aimable, un attachement non moins sincère que dèsintéressé; et le comte avait coutume de dire, en parlant de lui: «Je l'aime, et je l'aime beaucoup, parce qu'il n'aime que moi dans mon pouvoir et ma dignité. Il n'est point comme ceux qui m'aiment à cause de ma table qu'ils viennent partager avec moi, ou à cause des places que je peux leur donner. Ma puissance lui est indifférente: il ne porte son attention que sur ma personne.» Laurent Sterne, à qui plusieurs Italiens croient que le *Cicerone* de Passeroni avait suggéré l'idée de son *Tristram Shandy […]*, étant venu à Milan, et ayant rencontré l'abbé Passeroni chez le comte de Firmian, lui exprima, de la manière la plus flatteuse, l'estime qu'il avait pour ses talents, et le plaisir qu'il éprouvait en faisant connaissance avec lui. Jugeant trop légèrement, d'après ce qui se passe en Angleterre, que l'édition du *Cicerone* avait dû enrichir son auteur, il lui demande combien elle lui a rapporté; et Passeroni lui répond avec une paisible simplicité qu'il n'a pas encore donné grand cours à cette édition. Sterne, lui voyant l'extérieur d'une trop basse médiocrité, et, s'indignant de ce que ce poème ne lui avait pas valu une sorte de fortune, lui fit des offres généreuses. Passeroni répondit, avec sa modestie ordinaire, qu'il n'avait besoin de rien. Cependant il ne put se dispenser d'accepter une pension de 500 livres milanaises *[…]*, que le comte de Firmian lui assigna sur les fonds de l'impératrice Marie-Thérèse, encore vivante. *[…]* [Guillon 1823, 103]

[translation:]

> He [Passeroni] more than once refused lodging and board that the Milanese nobility offered him in their residences. Count Firmian, plenipotentiary of Austria in Lombardy and assiduous protector of literary men *[…]* could not convince him

> to accept an employment compatible with his condition and his tastes, which he had thought to offer him to provide him with a less miserable existence. Because he [Firmian] liked to see him and obliged him to come often to chat with him, Passeroni felt for this Maecenas, so amiable by nature, an attachment no less sincere than it was disinterested; and the Count was in the habit of saying, in speaking of him: "I love him and and I love him greatly, because he loves me only for my ability and my dignity. He is not at all like those who love me because of my table, which they can share with me, or because of the positions I can give them. He is indifferent to my power: he gives attention only to my person." Laurence Sterne—to whom, many Italians believe, Passeroni's *Il Cicerone* had suggested the idea for his *Tristram Shandy [...]*—having come to Milan and upon meeting the abbé Passeroni at Count Firmian's, expressed to him in the most flattering manner the esteem he had for his talents and the pleasure he felt in making his acquaintance. Judging too quickly, after what had happened in England, that the publication of *Il Cicerone* must have enriched its author, he asked him how much it had brought him; and Passeroni answered him with calm simplicity that he had not yet circulated this edition widely. Sterne, seeing his exterior of such base poverty, and indignant that this poem had not made him some sort of fortune, made him generous offers. Passeroni replied, with his usual modesty, that he needed nothing. Nevertheless, he could not refrain from accepting a pension of 500 Milanese livres *[...]* that Count Firmian awarded him from the funds of Empress Maria Theresia, who was still living. *[...]*

Guillon gives no source for these anecdotes, and we have not been able to locate primary sources for them. However, Sterne was indeed in Italy in 1765, during the travels that provided material for *A Sentimental Journey*. Unfortunately, he published only one volume of that work before his death in 1768, taking his alter-ego Yorick only as far as Lyon. But Sterne himself traveled as far south as Naples. If, as seems likely, he stopped in Milan, he would almost certainly have met and dined with Firmian, a keen anglophile who would not have missed the opportunity to play host to such a famous author. So Guillon's anecdote is entirely plausible.

Both the fifth and the seventh editions of *Tristram Shandy* were in Firmian's library at the time of his death (*Libri anglico*, 30), as were several other works by Sterne. According to the *Bibliotheca Firmiana*, the first edition of Passeroni's *Favole Esopiane* (1779–1780)—a translation of Aesop's fables into anacreontic verse—is dedicated to Firmian (*Bibliotheca Firmiana*, v:158; we have not been able to find this edition online). The catalog also notes that Firmian's copy of volume 6 of *Il Cicerone* (Milan, 1774) includes a verse dedication to Firmian (*Bibliotheca Firmiana*, v:213); because volume 6 contains no printed dedication, this dedication was probably handwritten.

A great many books are dedicated to Firmian. Luigi Benvenuti, in his 1872 biography of Firmian, writes of knowing around 100 published books dedicated to the count and as many again in manuscript (Benvenuti 1872, 33). We have so far located around 75 dedications to Firmian, mostly in printed books (see separate table). This commentary has already mentioned dedications by Sperges, Beccaria, Passeroni, Giovenale Sacchi, Paolo Risi, and Antonio Montanari. The two profile engravings above also come from books dedicated to Firmian: Stanislao Bardetti's *De'*

primi abitatori dell'Italia (1769) and Valeriano Canati's *I sacri salmi trasportati in versi italiani* (1770).

The earliest dedication to Firmian we have found in a printed book is the anthology *Poesie scelte di vario genere*, published in Florence in 1754, the year that Firmian took up his position in Naples; the book's anonymous dedicatory preface is by the compiler, "un socio colombario" (Anton Filippo Adami). A selection of subsequent dedications may serve to illustrate their laudatory, often warm, and occasionally obsequious tone—as well as the extraordinary range of topics of the dedicated volumes.

In 1759, Giambattisti Zenobetti dedicated to Firmian his Latin translation of Meleager, *In Ver Idyllion*. Following the conceit of many such dedications (as that of Sperges above), Zenobetti's is laid out as if it were a Roman inscription, in capital letters, using 'V' for 'U':

GENIO. SAPIENTI
CAROLI
COMITIS. DE. FIRMIAN
NOBILITATE. INGENIO
LITTERARVM SCIENTIA. PIETATE
VRBANITATE. PRVDENTIA
GESTIS. MVNERIBVS. LAVDATISSIMO
HAEC. GRAECAE. ELEGANTIAE
MONVMENTA
CVRIS. SVIS. ILLVSTRATA
NON. GENERI. TRIBVENS
SED. VIRTVTI. GLORIAM
IOANNES. BAPTISTA. ZENOBETTIVS
D[edit]. D[onavit]. D[edicavit].

***

DIGNITAS. GERMANORVM

HABEAS. SEMPER. AMICVM. CAESAREM
ILLIVSQVE. INVICTISSIMAM. CONIVGEM
VIVAS. VALEAS. FELICITE

To the wise Genius
of Charles, Count Firmian,
for his nobility, character,
literacy, piety,
cultivated lifestyle, foresight,

accomplishments and services rendered most highly praised,
these elegant Grecian
monuments,
illuminated by the writer's care, to honor
not the lineage but the manliness of their recipient, are
given, donated and dedicated
by Giovanni Battista Zenobietto.

***

Ornament of the Germans
May Thou always have Cæsar as a friend
And His most unconquered consort
May Thou live in health and happiness

[translation by Ian Allan]

In 1759, "Cæsar" and "His most unconquered consort" were—in the midst of the Seven Years War—Emperor Francis Stephen and Empress Maria Theresia, who had also remained unconquered in the War of the Austrian Succession of recent memory.

In 1760, the poet Gaetano Guttierez dedicated to Firmian his collection *Le stagioni con altre poesie*. The dedication itself is a six-page poem in *terza rima*. A few verses from near the beginning give the flavor:

> Dunque da che di Voi mi fè il ritratto
> L'Avvocato Montorfani mio amico,
> Io vi so dir, che ne fui preso affatto.
>
> Parlandomi di Napoli, l'aprico
> Misen lodava, e Baja, e i bagni suoi,
> Portici, Cuma, e l' Ercolano antico,
>
> E Nisida, e Posilipo; ma poi
> Tra tante maraviglie la maggiore,
> Sì, la maggior sempre eravate Voi.
>
> Sappi, di Voi dicea, ch' Ei non ha amore,
> Che al suo Principe, e a' libri, e che tra questi
> Due rivali diviso ha propio il core.
>
> Son le belle Scienze i manifesti
> Idoli suoi, ed a formar tesoro
> D' aurei volumi ha sempre i pensier desti.
> [*Le stagioni, dedication*]

[translation:]

Thus ever since my friend, the lawyer
Montorfani, described you to me
I can tell you that I was truly captivated.

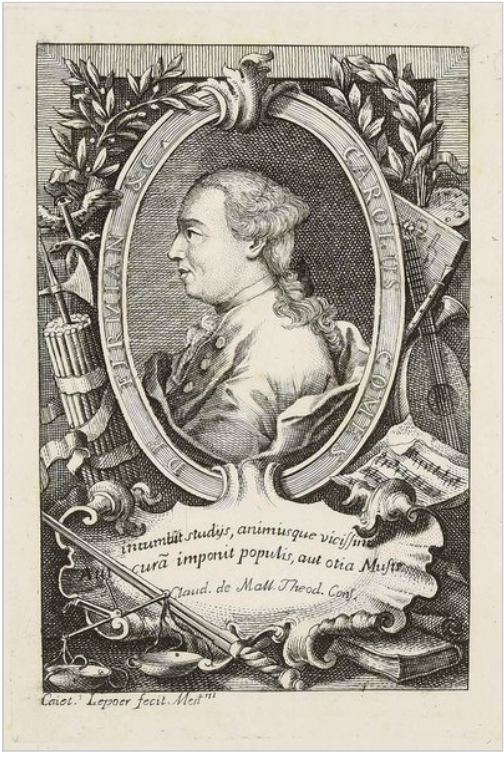
Telling me of Naples, he praised
sunny Miseno, and Baia and its baths,
Portici, Cuma, and ancient Herculaneum

And Nisida and Posillipo; but then
among such wonders, the greatest,
yes, the greatest was always you.

Know that he says of you that you have no other
love than your Prince and books, and between
these two rivals you have justly divided your heart

The liberal arts are manifestly your idols,
and your thoughts are always alert
to lay up treasure of golden volumes.

The reference is to Giovanni Maria Montorfani, who must have known Firmian in Naples. Like many of the volumes dedicated to Firmian, this one by Guttierez includes an engraved medallion profile, here when the count was still relatively young.



(Biblioteca Digitale Trentina)

Bardetti's *De' primi abitatori dell'Italia* (1769) was posthumously published; its dedication is by the publisher Giovanni Montanari:

A SUA ECCELLENZA
IL SIGNORE
CARLO
CONTE, E SIGNORE DI FIRMIAN

[...]
MECENATE DELLE SCIENZE, E DELLE BELLE ARTI,
LA PRESENTE OPERA
SOPRA L'ORIGINE DEI PRIMI ABITATORI DELL'ITALIA
IN ARGOMENTO DI PROFONDA VENERAZIONE
UMILMENTE OFFRE E CONSACRA
[...]

To His Excellency
Lord
Carlo
Count and Lord Firmian

[...]
Patron of the sciences and the fine arts,
the present work
on the origins of the first inhabitants of Italy,
is humbly offered and dedicated
in demonstration of profound veneration.
[...]

In 1771, Antonio Maria Curiazio published his *Tre lettere* on Roman history. His dedication to Firmian reads in part:

[...]
PERSONAGGIO
PER. ILLUSTRE. SANGUE. E. GLORIA. AVITA
CHIARISSIMO
PER. EGREGI. FATTI. E. SUBLIMI. INCOMBENZE
BENEMERITISSIMO
PER. DISTINTE. E. RARE. QUALITÀ
D' ANIMO. VIRTUOSO
COMMENDATISSIMO
DELLE. UMANE. LETTERE. E. DELLE. BUONE. ARTI

ESIMIO. PATROCINATORE
[...]

[...]
[To] a personage
of illustrious blood and ancestral glory
Most highly renowned
for excellent deeds and sublime incumbencies,
Most deserving for his distinguished and rare qualities
of virtuous spirit,
Most highly commended,
esteemed great patron
of humane letters and fine arts
[...]

La Gerusalemme liberata travestita in lingua milanese (1772) by Domenico Balestrieri includes a dedicatory poem to Firmian in Milanese dialect, consisting of 15 stanzas of ottava rima. The fifth stanza is representative:

> SCIOR CONT DE FIRMIAN troeuvi tutt in Lù;
> No stampava sto liber gnanca mò
> Senza quell Nomm famos, che g' ho miss sù,
> Quell Nomm significant come l' è 'l Sò;
> On Soggetton che 'l l' onorass de pù
> Podeva ben cercall, ma trovall nò;
> L' ha ogni elogi in se stess, l' è pien de gloria
> Senza el corteg d' ona Dedicatoria.
> [*La Gerusalemme liberata travestita*, dedication]

> Count Firmian, I find everything in You,
> I could not even have printed this book
> without Your famous Name, which I have given above,
> that important Name such as Yours is.
> A more honorable Person
> I could have searched for, but never would have found.
> Every praise and glory are in You
> even without the flattery of a Dedication.
> [translation: Andrea Lanza and Madeleine Angus]

Paolo Frisi published his *Elogio di Tito Pomponio Attico* in 1780; it is dedicated to Firmian with the evident implication that he is the modern heir to Pomponio, a Roman patron of letters and correspondent of Cicero.

A SUA ECCELLENZA
IL SIG. CONTE CARLO DI FIRMIAN

CAVALIERE DELL'ORDINE DEL TOSON D'ORO
CONSIGLIERE INTIMO ATTUALE DI STATO
DELLE LL. MM. II. E R.A.
MINISTRO PLEN. NELLA LOMBARDIA AUSTRIACA
VICE-GOVERNATORE DI MANTOVA ec. ec. ec.

PER AVERE ANIMATI I BUONI STUDI
COLL' AUTORITÀ E COLL' ESEMPIO
PROVVEDUTE LE SCUOLE PUBBLICHE.
BENEFICATI GLI UOMINI DI LETTERE
L' ELOGIO
DI UN ANTICO PROTETTORE DELLE LETTERE,
COME UN PUBBLICO MONUMENTO
DI STIMA E DI GRATITUDINE,
DEDICA, E DONA
PAOLO FRISI

To His Excellency
Count Carlo di Firmian
Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece
Actual Privy State Counselor
of Their Imperial Majesties and Royal Highness,
Minister Plenipotentiary in Austrian Lombardy
Vice-governor of Mantua, etc. etc. etc.

For having encouraged higher education
with authority and by example,
having assisted the public schools,
and having supported men of letters,
this eulogy
of an ancient protector of letters
is dedicated and given
as a public testament
of esteem and gratitude
Paolo Frisi

Several of the literary men in Firmian's circle were members of the Accademia dei Trasformati, which had been revived by Giuseppe Maria Imbonati and was hosted at Imbonati's palace until his death in 1768. The memorial collection edited by Francesco Carcano, *Componimenti in morte del Conte Giuseppe Maria Imbonati* (1769), is dedicated to Firmian; a sonnet in the collection by Francesco Rezzano salutes Firmian as the man to whom they now turn after Imbonati's death. Giuseppe Colpani's *Poemetti, e Lettere in versi sciolti* (1769) includes a dedicatory preface to Firmian in *versi sciolti*. The naturalist, geologist, and architect Ermenegildo Pini (1739–1825)

dedicated three books to Firmian: *Dell'architettura dialogi* (1770), *Introduzione allo studio della storia naturale* (1773), and *Mémoire sur des nouvelles cristallisations de feldspath et autres singularités renfermées dans les granites des environs de Baveno* (1779). The first volume (1778) of Giuseppe Bozoli's translation of Homer's *Odyssey* into *ottava rima* is dedicated to Firmian. There are many others.

It would be difficult to find another dedicatee in the second half of the eighteenth century with a wider range of topics in the books dedicated to him. Among the volumes dedicated to Firmian were biographies and eulogies; works of art history, ancient history, the history of coinage, and the history of mining; a great many books and references on law; works of natural history; original works of poetry and at least one drama; translations; medical works; and at least one book on music theory, Giovenale Sacchi's *Della natura e perfezione della antica musica de' Greci* (1778; see our entry on that work). The dedications were certainly intended to flatter—that is the principal function of dedications. But it is striking how many of the dedications go beyond the expected minimum: not just elaborate dedication pages flattering and praising the dedicatee, but also fine portrait engravings of him, long dedicatory prefaces, even several long poems. There is an overall sense of genuine gratitude, affection, and even delight in the inspiration drawn from Firmian and the environment he created.

In a footnote to his short article on Firmian in *Collezione d'autografi di famiglie sovrane* (1859), Damiano Muoni names some of the members of Firmian's circle in Milan:

> *[...]* [Firmian] cercò la compagnia di persone dotte e formò di esse un eletto circolo in propria casa(1). *[...]*
>
> (1) Entravano in quella schiera l'Imbonati, il Tanzi, Saverio Quadrio, il consultore Pecis, il Guttierez, Domenico Balestrieri, Giovenale Sacchi, Guido Terrani, Giuseppe Raccagni, Bernardino Ferrario [sic], Carlo Castelli, Giorgio Giulini che raccoglieva le Memorie di Milano *[...]*
> [Muoni 1859, 81n1]
>
> *[...]* [Firmian] sought the company of learned people and formed a select circle in his own house(1). *[...]*
>
> (1) Among that group were Imbonati, Tanzi, Saverio Quadro, counselor Pecis, Guttierez, Domenico Balestrieri, Giovenale Sacchi, Guido Terrani, Giuseppe Raccagni, Bernardino Ferrari, Carlo Castelli, and Giorgio Giulini who assembled the Memoria di Milano *[...]*

We have already had occasion to mention Imbonati, patron of the *Trasformati*; the poets Guttierez and Balestrieri; and the music theorist Giovenale Sacchi. The others are:

- Carlo Antonio Tanzi (1710–1762), poet in Milanese dialect
- Francesco Saverio Quàdrio (1695–1756), literary historian (who died, however, before Firmian came to Milan)
- Giuseppe Pecis (1716–1799), writer and government official
  Giuseppe Raccagni, Rector of the Barnabite College of S. Alessandro in Milan (see Brambilla 2000, 82n79)
- Francesco Bernardino Ferrari (1744–1821), architect
  Probably Abate Carlo Castelli, engineer, inventor of the hydraulic ventilator and the "tromba napoleone," and author of *Piano ragionato del suddetto Carlo Castelli sui provvedimenti richiesti all'asciugamento delle Paludi di Colico* (1786; see Bruschetti 1864, 268).
- Count Giorgio Giulini (1714–1780), historian and composer

(We have not yet been able to identify Guido Terrani.) These men, all based in Milan, might have been among a core group of regulars at Firmian's dinner parties.

Firmian's fame as a host reached far beyond Italy. An article "On Foreign Travel" in the June 1783 issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine* in London included the recommendation:

> *[...]* and if it be a pleasure to see one of the most respectable statesmen in Europe, let the traveller stay some time at Milan: *Count Firmian*, the faithful servant of a distinguished monarch, is uncommonly polite to all strangers who are recommended to him; besides, Milan is as famous for men of letters, as it is distinguished for hospitality *[...]* [*The Gentleman's Magazine*, Jun 1783, 500]

Unfortunately for the prospective traveler, Firmian had died a year earlier. But if Milan had become famous for men of letters by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, it was at least in part because of Firmian's avid encouragement and support since his arrival in 1759.

We have already considered several out-of-town visitors who enjoyed Firmian's hospitality: Genovesi and Winckelmann in Naples; and Duclos, Thomas Wildman (the author of the treatise on bees), Sterne, Burney, and the Mozarts in Milan. Entries in *Bibliotheca Firmiana* occasionally leave hints of other encounters. Firmian's copy of Bolingbroke's *Dissertation on Parties*, for example, carried the inscription:

> *Lord North fils ainè de Mylord Comte de Guilford a fait présent de ce Livre au Comte de Firmian à Vienne 1752.* [*Libri anglico*, 129]
>
> *Lord North, oldest son of Milord Count Guildford made a present of this book to Count Firmian in Vienna, 1752.*

The reference is to Frederick North, 2nd Earl of Guilford (1732–1792), who became prime minister of Great Britain in 1770, a position he held throughout nearly all of America's War of Independence. He would have turned 20 the year he met Firmian in Vienna on his Grand Tour,

after graduating from Oxford. Firmian's copy of William Whitehead's *Poems on several occasions with the Roman Father a Tragedy* (1754) was inscribed:

> *N. B. M. WHITEHEAD presents his respects to Count Firman, and wishes what he has sent may give him any entertainment. Lord Villiers, and Lord Newnham desire their Compliments. Rome April 10.th* [*Libri anglico*, 222–23]

Whitehead (1715–1785) took his Grand Tour together with Lord Villiers and George Harcourt, Viscount Nuneham in the years 1754 to 1756, and they apparently encountered Firmian in Rome; Whitehead was named Poet Laureate at the end of 1757. Firmian's copy of the first edition of Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) was a gift from another Englishman:

> *NB. John Forbes (Fils de Mylord comte de Grannard un des Seigneurs de l'Admirauté* [sic] *de la G. Brétagne, & Amiral de l'Escadre Blini* [sic]*) envoit ce livre à son ami Charles Firmian Ministre de la Cour de Vienna à celle de Naples 1758.* [*Libri anglico*, 210]
>
> *NB. John Forbes (son of Milord Count Granard, a Lord of the Admiralty of Great Britain, & Admiral of the Blini Squadron) sends this book to his friend Charles Firmian, Minister from the Court of Vienna to that of Naples.*

The reference is to John Forbes (1714–1796), son of George Forbes, 3rd Earl of Granard. John Forbes was a Royal Navy officer, and in 1747, he had been made second in command to John Byng, head of the Mediterranean Squadron, taking over command from Byng in 1748 ("Blini" seems to be a corruption or mistranscription of "Byng"). In 1755, Forbes was made a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty.

One of Firmian's most famous visitors during his years in Milan was the English actor David Garrick (1717–1779). Garrick made a tour of France and Italy from 1763 to 1765 (Stone & Kahrl 1979, 297–306); his journal of the tour was published by George Winchester Stone Jr. in 1939. Garrick reached Milan around the beginning of Nov 1763 (he notes decorations in the cathedral for the Feast of St. Charles Borromeo on 4 Nov) and he records his visit to Count Firmian:

> *Milan* did not answer my
> Expectation in y^{e} whole, it is a
> very large old town & not
> agreeably situated: the moment
> We arriv'd at y^{e} tre Re (y^{e} 3 Kings)
> we went to y^{e} great *Cathedral* call'd
> the *Domo*, & I was much struck
> with y^{e} vastness of its parts &
> should have been more so, had not
> the pillars of y^{e} church in y^{e} choir
> been partly cover'd w.th tapistry &

> Pictures for y^e^ feast of St. Charles
> Borromeo *[...]*
>
> *Count Firmian's* reception
> of me was most kind and agreeable.
> He ask'd me to dinner Every
> day — He is one of y^e^ most
> sensible pleasing men I Ever
> beheld with y^e^ most polish'd
> Manners, he understands
> English, has read our best authors
> & tastes 'Em well — I am to send
> him all y^e^ Prints of myself that
> have
> any Character —
> [Garrick 1939, 15–18]

"Prints" probably refers to portrait engravings; two of Garrick are listed in the catalog of Firmian's print collection at the time of his death (*Gabinetto Firmiano. Stampe*, 66). On 30 Nov 1763, Garrick wrote from Florence to the Duke of Devonshire about his encounter with Firmian:

> My Lord
> I had Your Grace's very flattering Commands to give You some Account of our proceedings when we got into Italy: We have hitherto met with no disagreable Accident but the breaking the Perch of our Coach upon Mount Cenis; which retarded us some Days at Turin, where Mr Pitt confer'd all kind of Favours upon Us: from thence we went to Milan, and should I recount to Your Grace the honour I receiv'd from Count Firmian, the first Nobleman in the administration there, You would think, as You Us'd to say to me, that all my Geese were Swans: I had no Letter of recommendation to him, but his Servants were Enquiring after Me long before I came, & when I was there, there was no Civility that I did not receive from him; I cannot forbear Acquainting Your Grace with this Circumstance, as it made my Stay at Milan so very agreeable to Me: Count Firmian understands English, has read most of our best Authors; has an unaffected regard for the English Nation, and joins the Strongest Sense to the most Elegant Manners. [Garrick 1963, i:393]

On 11 Apr 1764, Garrick wrote to George Colman from Rome, thanking him for sending Firmian the books that he had requested:

> I must thank you again for the trouble & Care you have had about Count Firmian's books —He is very happy at y^e^ Execution of y^e^ Commission, and was highly pleas'd with your sending your own matters to him gratis—it pleas'd me much— *[...]* [Garrick 1963, i:411]

We do not know exactly which books Colman had been commissioned to send, but Firmian's library included an impressive collection of English plays, including the third edition of Colman's

own *Plays and Farces* (1763; *Libri Anglico*, 226). On 1 Jun 1764 Garrick wrote to Lady Spencer that he had even begun a poem in which Firmian was a character:

> The Poem of Which I had written a part, & in Which I had introduc'd the Character of Count Firmian had possess'd me so much when I had the honour of conversing with the Marquise of Ligneville, that I could not doubt of being able to finish the Picture I had begun, in a few days—but whether the Subject was too Much for Me, or my fears of not ansewring *[sic]* the Marquise's expectations had taken too strong hold upon Me, I cannot tell, but I have not yet been able with all the Struggles I have had with my froward Mind to perform my promise—*[...]*
> [Garrick 1963, i:413]

Around the time of his retirement from management of the Drury Lane theater (and less than three years before his death), Garrick wrote to James Caldwell on 14 May 1776:

> *[...]* I long to talk over Count Firmian & my pleasures with him at Milan *[...]*
> [Garrick 1963, i:1099]

Clearly Firmian made a lasting impression on the great actor.

Firmian also had close relationships with several contemporaneous artists. According to Ferrari, Firmian got to know the work of painter and scenographer Antonio Joli (1700–1777) through James Gray, British envoy to the court in Naples from 1753 to 1763 (Ferrari 2012, 108). Joli himself was in Naples during roughly the first half of Firmian's tenure there, leaving in 1756 and returning in 1759, after Firmian had departed to take up his position in Milan. The full inventory of Firmian's art collection (the *Catalogo* discussed earlier) shows that Firmian had 21 paintings by Joli, including (as Ferrari argues) Joli's four views of Paestum, one of which is reproduced above. It seems likely that Firmian himself commissioned at least some (and perhaps all) of the paintings by Joli in his collection.

Another artist closely associated with Firmian during his years in Naples was landscape painter Carlo Bonavia (d. after 1788), who produced 21 paintings for Firmian in the years 1754 to 1758; as Ferrari writes (2012, 104), "appare indiscutibile che Firmian sia stato il suo più importante collezionista e mecenate" ("[it] appears indisputable that Firmian was one of his most important collectors and patrons"). Seventeen of Bonavia's paintings are described in the *Gabinetto Firmiano* (under the spelling "Bonaria"; *Pitture*, xii–xv). Because Bonavia sometimes created multiple paintings of the same or similar scenes, and his work seems not to have been closely studied, it is still difficult in most cases to make accurate identifications of particular paintings mentioned in the *Gabinetto Firmiano* or the *Catalogo*. However, as an example of Bonavia's style, this view of Baia with the Temple of Diana corresponds to a description in *Gabinetto Firmiano*:



Carlo Bonavia, *View of Baia with the Temple of Diana*
(image: Galleria Carlo Virgilio)

BONARIA CARLO. *[...]*
Due vedute di mare con luoghi vicini a Napoli *[...]*
La più serena
ci fa vedere in lontananza l'isola d'Ischia, e l'altra il
tempio di Diana a Pozzuolo, e più addietro il castello di
Baja *[...]* [*Gabinetto Firmiano, Pitture*, xv]

BONARIA CARLO. *[...]*
Two views of the sea in places near Naples *[...]*
The sunnier one
shows the island of Ischia in the distance, and the other
the temple of Diana at Pozzuolo, and in the distance the
castle of Baia *[...]*

Firmian's closest artistic relationship was with the Austrian painter Martin Knoller (1725–1804; de.wikipedia, it.wikipedia). Exactly when Firmian first met Knoller remains unclear. Knoller studied with Paul Troger in Vienna during the years 1751 to 1753 (Kronbichler 2003); since Firmian was living in Vienna at the time, the two might have met then, although there seems to be no evidence that they did. It has even been suggested (see, for example, Glausen 1838, 14–15) that Firmian underwrote Knoller's first study trip to Rome in 1755, but there seems to be no evidence for this either. Whatever the case, Knoller did go to Rome in 1755, where he was in the circle around Mengs, and in Jan 1758 he went on to Naples; if Knoller did not already know Firmian by that point, he certainly met him there (Baumgartl 2004, 21; see also Popp 1904, 27). Knoller also met Winckelmann in Naples in the spring of 1758, and the two later corresponded: three letters from Winckelmann to Knoller survive on the topic of the correct clothing for Roman senators (see Baumgartl 2004, 407–409, and Ferrari 2015, 296ff).

Most of the known images of Firmian are by Knoller, or engravings of originals by him. One of the best and most vivid of these images is a painting of Firmian seated at the center of a group of six men among the ruins of the ancient Greek colony of Cuma on the coast west of Naples (Baumgartl 2004, **P 2**, 261 and plate 49, 177



Martin Knoller, *Carlo Firmian with a group of friends near Cuma* (c1758)
(Innsbruck, Sammlung Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum)

Firmian is flanked by two gentlemen (to judge by their attire and bearing), perhaps aristocrats. Martin Knoller, with his sketchpad, is behind Firmian, looking out at the viewer, and three other men are at the sides, two to the left and one to the right. According to an early inventory of Knoller's paintings (Baumgartl 2004, **Q 1**, 414), two of these men—presumably those looking out at the viewer—are secretaries, but the source for this claim is unclear. The inventory describes (as do most subsequent writers) only five men in the painting in addition to Firmian, but this omits the man at the lower left gazing reverentially toward the count. We will have more to say about this painting below.

When Firmian left Naples at the end of Nov 1758, he commissioned Knoller to go on ahead to Milan to decorate his residence there, the Palazzo Melzi. (A letter dated 3 Jan 1759 from Firmian to Antonio Greppi in Milan asks him to prepare for Knoller's arrival; Baumgartl 2004, 21). Unfortunately Knoller's work on the Palazzo Melzi was not well documented prior to the palace's destruction in 1943, but it is known to have included nine ceiling frescoes by Knoller (Baumgartl 2004, **F II 1–9**, 220–21). From 1760 to 1765 Knoller again studied Rome, this time with Firmian's blessing and possibly his financial support; Firmian also seems to have underwritten Knoller's first two altar paintings for Ettal in 1762 (Baumgartl 2004, 24; **A 5 a** and **b**, plates 36 a and b). From 1765 onward, Knoller was based in Milan, where he was, in effect, Firmian's court painter, albeit one with the freedom to take commissions elsewhere, including the many frescos in Austria and Germany for which he is best known today. According to Glausen (1838, 23n1), in a letter to the Bishop of Trent in 1781, Firmian refers to Knoller as "Il mio pittore" ("my painter"), and Knoller referred to himself in one instance as "Excellentissimi D[omini] Ministri Cæsarei Comitis de Firmian pictor aulicus" ("court painter of his Most Excellent Lord Imperial Minister Count Firmian"). An early biographical sketch of the painter states that he received an annual salary of 800 fl from Firmian, plus room and board (Peter Denifle 1804, cited in Baumgartl 2004, 24).

During his early years in Milan, Knoller lived in the Palazzo Melzi. On 27 Feb 1767 he married Annunciata Cardani, and it was probably around this time or not long after that he moved to his own apartment in the Via Senato (Baumgartl 2004, 24).

Leopold Mozart refers to Knoller's mailing address in a letter to his wife from Milan on 17 Feb 1770:

> Nun muß dir auf deine fragen antworten. H: *Martin Knoller* ist hier in Mayland, wenn H: Deibl schreiben will, darf er nur unten setzen: *in Casa di S: Ex: di C: di Firmian*: *[...]*
> [*Briefe*, i:315]
>
> Now I must answer your question. Herr *Martin Knoller* is here in Milan. If Herr Deibl wants to write to him, he merely has to write underneath: *in Casa S: Ex: di C: di Firmian* ["in the House of His Excellency Count Firmian"]

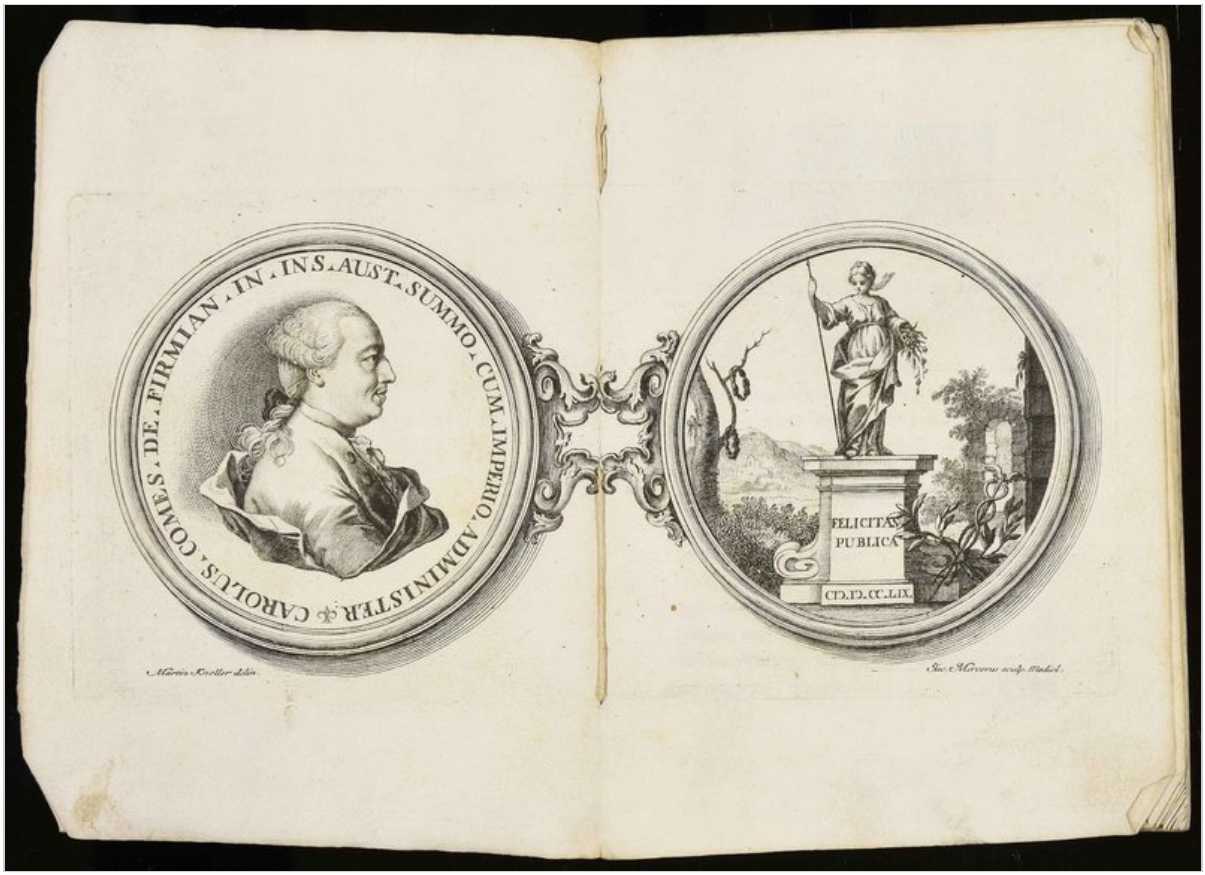
This might be taken to suggest that Knoller was still living at Firmian's at the time of the Mozarts' visit, but it is more likely that the painter was simply continuing to receive his mail at the palace

after he moved into a place of his own, as the palace remained the base of his working life. When Knoller completed a foreign commission for an altar painting, he was in the habit of displaying the work in Firmian's palace for a time before sending it off (Baumgartl 2004, 25), and one wonders whether he might even have maintained a studio in the palace. Knoller was often away from Milan for long periods working on ceiling frescos in Austria and Germany, sometimes taking his family along. But his apartment in Milan did not always remain empty during these absences. Near the end of the Mozarts' fourth and final visit to Milan (for *Lucio Silla*), Leopold wrote to his wife on 13 Feb 1773:

> H: Leutgeb ist heut vor 8 täg abends spät angekommen. den sonntag darauf kam er zu uns, dann hab ich ihn 2 Täg nicht mehr gesehen, denn er wohnt in dem Quartier des Mahlers H: Martin knollers, eine starke viertlstund von unserm Quartier entfernt, wo ihn die Wohnung nichts kostet. [*Briefe*, i:481]
>
> Herr Leutgeb arrived a week ago today, late in the evening. The following Sunday he came to us, then I did not see him again for 2days, for he is living in the quarters of painter Martin Knoller, a good quarter hour distant from our quarters, where the accommodation does not cost him anything.

The reference is to the famous hornist Joseph Leutgeb, for whom Wolfgang later wrote his horn concertos.

Several profile engravings of Firmian used as frontispieces in books dedicated to the count are based on the same original by Knoller. The earliest and arguably the most elegantly executed version dates from 1759, from Giovanni Parravicini's *Dissertationes ex physica, ex psycologia metaphysica atque animastica* (Baumgartl 2004, **D 2**, 308; the book itself seems currently not to be available online).



Carolus Comes de Firmian, Jakob Mercoli after an original by Martin Knoller, Giovanni Parravicini, *Dissertationes ex physica, ex psycologia metaphysica atque animastica* (1759), frontispiece (Biblioteca Digitale Trentina)

The engraver has signed below the right-hand medallion "Jac. Mercorus sculp. Mediol." This appears to be the Swiss engraver Jakob (or Giacomo) Mercoli, in Milan. (Biblioteca Digitale Trentina gives "Jacopo Marcora," but this seems to be incorrect.) Mercoli's dates are generally given as 1745 to 1827, which would imply that he made this fine engraving at the age of 15—not impossible perhaps, but certainly implausible. So this remains an unexplained oddity.

This same profile appears in at least three versions of an oval vignette used as a frontispiece: the earliest, in Ermenegildo Pini's *Dell'architettura dialogi* (1770) with an empty cartouche; and the other two (1772, 1773) with different Latin mottoes. The engraving is again attributed to Mercoli.







Three versions of a profile engraving of Firmian by Jakob Mercoli, after Martin Knoller
(a) Eremengildo Pini, Dell'architettura dialogi (Milan, 1770), frontispiece;
(b) Francescantonio Mainoni, *Il congresso di Pindo sopra l'efficacia della poesia nel promovere la pubblica felicità* (1772), frontispiece;

(c) Ermenegildo Pini, *Introduzione allo studio della storia naturale* (1773), frontispiece
(All three images Biblioteca Digitale Trentina)

The version from 1772 has the motto "Et eris mihi magnus Apollo" from Virgil ("and to me be great Apollo", *Eclogue* 3.104). The version from 1773, in Pini's *Introduzione allo studio della storia naturale* (Baumgartl 2004, **D 2**), has what one correspondent has called "a third-rate piece of elegiac doggerel," presumably original (perhaps by Pini):

> Artificis depicta manu tua fulget imago,
> ast animum nostro in pectore sculpsit Amor.
>
> Pictured by the artist's hand gloweth thy likeness,
> but Love carved thy spirit in our breast.
> [translation by Ian Allan]

Two other profile engravings based on this same original by Knoller appear in books published in 1775, one unattributed and the other again attributed to Mercoli:





Two versions of a profile engraving of Firmian (1775)
(a) Antonio Arrigoni, *Jasimeccanica o trattato dei rimedj naturali meccanici*, frontispiece;
(b) Anton Luigi de Carli, *La scultura, versi sciolti*, frontispiece
(Both images Biblioteca Digitale Trentina)

Yet another engraving by Mercoli based on this same profile exists as a separate print, with a more elaborately decorated oval frame on a surbase (Baumgartl 2004, **D 4**).

Knoller's skill as a painter is evident in this self portrait from 1803:



Martin Knoller, Self Portrait (1803)
Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera
(Wikimedia Commons)

Knoller was one of four men associated with the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera who prepared and signed the inventory (the *Catalogo*) of Firmian's collection after his death, along with the painter Giuliano Traballesi, the sculptor Giuseppe Franchi, and the academy's secretary Carlo Bianconi (Ferrari 2012, 94). The *Catalogo* includes 11 paintings by Knoller, two of them copies of works by other artists (one of these is not explicitly attributed to Knoller in the *Catalogo* but is believed to be by him; see Ferrari 2012, 106ff). Although five of Knoller's paintings are in the "A" section of the *Catalogo*—those paintings deemed of higher quality (and thus more salable)—the only one of Knoller's paintings that is in the *Gabinetto*, which was compiled by Bianconi, is Knoller's unattributed copy of a work by Raphael. This exclusion of Knoller from the *Gabinetto* suggests that Bianconi had little respect for Knoller's work or person, or perhaps bore him a grudge. According to Ferrari, all of the paintings that Firmian is known to have given away (and are thus not in the *Catalogo*) are by Knoller (Ferrari 2012, 99). Three were given to Prince Kaunitz, who, like Firmian, apparently appreciated Knoller's talent. All three are today in Kaunitz's palace in Slavkov (Austerlitz) near Brno (Ferrari 2012, 99).

Firmian also supported the sculptor Giuseppe Ceracchi (1751–1801) at an early stage of his career; Ceracchi later had much success in Britain and the young United States. Ferrari writes:

> Firmian ha inoltre incoraggiato e protetto lo scultore romano Giuseppe Ceracchi all'inizio della sua fortunata carriera. Questi realizza per il ministro tra il 1773 e il 1775, oltre il busto-ritratto, oggi conservato in collezione privata a Roma, anche due statue rappresentanti *Alcibiade e Flora* e due bassorilievi con *Giunone che adora Giove e Marte presta il suo cocchio a Venere*, la cui ubicazione attualmente risulta ignota. [Ferrari 2012, 113]

> Firmian also encouraged and protected the Roman sculptor Giuseppe Ceracchi at the beginning of his successful career. Between 1773 and 1775 he created for the count, in addition to the bust portrait today preserved in a private collection in Rome, also two statues representing Alcibiades and Flora, and two bas-reliefs with Juno adoring Jove, and Mars giving his chariot to Venus, the present locations of which are unknown.

Angelika Kauffmann (1741–1801, Treccani, de.wikipedia) came to Milan with her father in 1754, the year she turned 13, and they remained in the city, where Angelika studied voice and painting, until 1757. They are said to have lived in the Milanese residence of Francesco III d'Este, Duke of Modena and governor-general of Lombardy (see Baumgärtel 2020); as we shall see, his residence when in Milan seems to have been the Palazzo Melzi, future home of Count Firmian. In a chronology at the site of the *Angelika Kauffmann Research Project*, Baumgärtel writes of this period:

> **1754-1757** First trip to Italy. Based in Milan at the court of Duke Modena d'Este, paints portraits of the Duchess of Modena, Archbishop of Milan Cardinal Pozzobonelli, and the Austrian diplomat Count Karl Joseph von Firmian; makes first copies after Old Masters. [Baumgärtel 2020]

However, Firmian did not arrive in Milan to take up his position as minister plenipotentiary until Jun 1759, so it is unlikely that Angelika painted a portrait of him before that date, unless he made a trip to Milan that we currently know nothing about. After the death of her mother in Mar 1757, Kauffmann and her father returned to his house in Schwarzenberg in what is now Vorarlberg. They came back to Italy around 1760, the year Angelika turned 19, first spending time in Milan. If she met and painted Firmian, it would most likely have been during this second sojourn in the city.

Although we have yet to see any primary evidence to support the claim, it seems to be generally believed that Kauffmann was a protégée of Firmian. Already in 1810, Giovanni Gherardo De Rossi wrote in his biography of Kauffmann:

> L'Arcivescovo di Milano Cardinal Pozzobonelli, ed il Conte di Firmian ebbero per lei [Kauffmann] una particolare affezione; ed incantati delle sue dolci maniere si fecero ambedue protettori de' suoi studj, e per mezzo loro non vi fu privata, o pubblica pittura, che non servisse ai progressi di Angelica; e tutti facevansi pregio di animare gli avanzamenti di un ingegno così singolare. [De Rossi 1810, 11]

> The Archbishop of Milan Cardinal Pozzobonelli, and Count Firmian had a special affection for her [Kauffmann]; and enchanted by her sweet manners, both became supporters of her studies, and through them, there was no private or public painting here that was not at the service of Angelika's progress; and all had the honor of encouraging such a singular talent.

(This is the only time that Firmian's name appears in De Rossi's book.) By the middle of the nineteenth century, the notion was firmly embedded in the reference literature that Kauffmann had been Firmian's protégée. It is highlighted, for example, in the single sentence on Firmian in the *Conversations-Lexicon für bildende Kunst* in 1846:

> Graf Karl Josef [Firmian], geb. 1719 [sic] zu Deutschmetz, gest. 1782, weihte der Belebung der Künste und Wissenschaften sein ganzes Leben, war correspondirender Freund Winckelmanns und Albrechts von Haller und der Nothhelfer vieler Kunstgenossen, von welchen wir nur Angelika Kaufmann *[sic]* nennen. [Romberg & Faber 1846, iii:62]

> Count Karl Josef [Firmian], born 1719 in Deutschmetz, died 1782, devoted his entire life to the encouragement of the arts and sciences, was a friend and correspondent of Winckelmann and Albrecht von Haller, and a friend in need to many contemporaneous artists, of whom we mention only Angelika Kauffmann.

The *Conversations-Lexikon* may have been Wurzbach's source in calling Firmian "ein Freund Winckelmanns und ein Gönner der Angelika Kaufmann" ("a friend of Winckelmann and a patron of Angelika Kaufmann"; Wurzbach 1858, iv:232). Hosch also writes of the tradition that it was Giuseppe (Joseph) Troger—said to be Firmian's house chaplain and the brother of Firmian's secretary Leopold Troger—who persuaded Angelika to choose painting over singing as a career (Hosch 2008, 8 and 20). Again, we have not yet been able to find any primary source for this claim.

If Kauffmann was indeed Firmian's protégée, it would be the only known case of his supporting a female in any field.

In a letter to his brother on 22 Jun 1782, just shortly after Firmian's death, Pietro Verri immediately undercuts one of his few positive comments about the count:

> La protezione ch'egli palesò per le scienze e per le arti ha fatto del bene al paese e dell'onore alla memoria di lui; sarebbe maggiore d'ogni critica, se il discernimento l'avesse accompagnata. La Casa di Correzione è il solo monumento d'architettura innalzato al suo tempo. Il Cenacolo di Leonardo da Vinci deturpato dal pennello di certo Mazza per ordine suo è pure il monumento unico che ci rimanga pel gusto della pittura. [Seregni 1942, 327]

> The support he provided to the sciences and the arts has been a boon to the country and does honor to his memory; it would have been beyond all criticism had it been accompanied by judgment. The Casa di Correzione is the sole architectural monument begun during his time. *The Last Supper* of Leonardo da Vinci, defiled on his order by the brush of a certain Mazza, is moreover the only monument that remains to us of his taste for painting.

The Last Supper has suffered greatly over time, not only from deterioration, but from the neglect of its stewards and the poor choices of those who tried to restore it. Of Mazza, English Wikipedia writes:

> Giuseppe Mazza was hired by the priests of Santa Maria delle Grazie in 1770, to work on restoring and conserving The Last Supper. Mazza attempted to remove Michelangelo Bellotti's additions by using an iron scraping tool. After this, Mazza started to fill in areas with an oil paint mixture and repainted the work as he chose. Mazza also, thinking the work was a true fresco, washed the wall with a caustic soda. This action led to his being fired from the restoration job, as well as the removal, to another convent[,] of the priest who had hired him. [en.wikipedia]

Whether Firmian was responsible for any of this remains unclear.

This survey of Firmian as patron should be seen as the opening up of a new area of investigation, not a definitive final statement. Many uncertainties remain, and much remains to be discovered. Firmian was long neglected by scholars, and his patronage has received scarcely any attention until quite recently.

Even given our current incomplete and imperfect knowledge, however, certain trends are clear. Firmian provided support to artists, writers, and intellectuals in a variety of ways: he personally commissioned works (Joli, Bonavia, Knoller, Cerrachi) or intermediated commissions from other institutions (Mozart, Knoller); he arranged stipends or jobs (Passeroni, Beccaria, Knoller); he may sometimes have provided direct support for the studies of young artists (Knoller, perhaps Kauffmann); he wrote positive evaluations (Beccaria) or letters of recommendation (J. C. Bach, Mozart); and he "greased the wheels" in negotiating access to resources for study (Winckelmann, possibly Kauffmann). He was uncommonly welcoming to visitors, and he seems to have used a network of contacts to keep himself informed about notable travelers who might visit Milan, often becoming aware of their arrival long before they presented themselves at his residence (Duclos, Garrick). His dinner parties, which he seems to have held almost daily when he was at home, provided a site for artists and intellectuals from a wide spectrum of fields to socialize and converse, and to meet and mingle with notable visitors from out of town. Firmian's activities as patron have been so little studied that there may be entire areas of his patronage about which little or nothing is known. For example, Firmian had a huge collection of prints and a substantial collection of medallions, so it may be worth investigating whether he commissioned works in those genres.

The motives for Firmian's patronage were probably a mixture of personal and professional. He was, even from his student days, an eighteenth-century culture vulture, continually seeking out, in particular, the company of important writers and thinkers. He seems to have been a compulsive collector of books, prints, paintings, medallions, and even antiquities, and he enjoyed showing off his collections and making them available to researchers and artists for study. Firmian likely (justifiably) imagined himself among the company of great patrons ancient and modern, from Pomponio to Imbonati. Firmian's many dinner guests, both local and visiting, were

important sources for the books and other items in his collections. It is difficult to escape the impression, too, that Firmian was simply lonely, craving company. In his position as de facto head of the government in Milan and Austrian Lombardy, Firmian could justify his patronage as promoting Milan's status as a cultural and intellectual center—and it certainly did this.

Among those Firmian supported or may have supported, we know of only one woman, young Angelika Kauffmann—and her association with the count remains unverified. At present, the only musician other than Mozart to whom Firmian is known to have provided support of any kind is Johann Christian Bach, for whom the count wrote a letter of recommendation to Tanucci in Naples. This suggests that Firmian's support for Mozart as a composer and performer was something out of the ordinary.

Leopold Mozart, in his travel notes from their first visit to Milan (23 Jan to 15 Mar 1770) records 97 individuals. If we take into account the various occurrences in his list of et cetera and "e la Famiglia," Leopold and Wolfgang became acquainted with well over 100 people in Milan over slightly more than seven weeks in the city, and they probably met many others whose names Leopold does not record. While we do not know precisely which people on Leopold's list they met at Firmian's, it would certainly have been a substantial proportion. Many others unnamed by Leopold would have heard Wolfgang perform at the two private concerts at Firmian's residence. One person who almost certainly heard Mozart perform in Milan in 1770, quite likely at Firmian's, but whose name does not appear in Leopold's notes, was the music theorist Giovenale Sacchi, a member of Firmian's circle, who refers to Mozart in two of his books (see our entries "Giovenale Sacchi on Mozart the prodigy (1770)" and "Giovenale Sacchi on Mozart in Milan (1778)").

Leopold reports only two meals with Firmian during their first visit to Milan; but in light of reports from other visitors who dined with the count frequently or even daily (Winckelmann, for example), we should not rule out the possibility that the Mozarts dined with him on other occasions that Leopold does not mention in letters to his wife.

Firmian's sexuality and homosociality (⇧)

The notion that Firmian might have been homosexual seems first to have been suggested by Harrison James Wignall (later Harrison Gradwell Slater) in his 1995 Brandeis dissertation on Mozart's *Mitridate* (Wignall 1995, 120–21). So far as we know, the idea was not taken up again until quite recently, by Stefano Ferrari in his 2019 article on Winckelmann and Firmian (Ferrari 2019).

The primary evidence for Firmian's sexuality is thin, if suggestive. Charles Burney, in his travel journal, writes of his visit to Firmian in 1770:

> There were upwards of 20 at table—all men—the Count had never been married. [Burney 1770, 59]

In Wignall's reading, "Burney casually implied that Count Firmian was a homosexual" (Wignall 1995, 120), but this conclusion reads more into an offhand remark than it can support on its own. It does suggest that Burney believed that Firmian preferred the company of men, but this in itself does not necessarily imply he thought Firmian was actively homosexual (a "sodomite," to use the term of the time), something Burney might well have found shocking—homosexual sex was still a capital crime in Britain and elsewhere, potentially punishable in some places by burning at the stake (see Crompton 2003 and *infra*).

A stronger hint of Firmian's sexuality is a passing phrase in Pietro Verri's letter to his brother on 28 Aug 1782 shortly after Firmian's death:

> Il Conte di Firmian, che per organica struttura era insensibile alle donne *[...]* [Seregni 1942, 369]
>
> Count Firmian, who was organically insensible to women *[...]*

Our translation of this phrase is borrowed from Hansell (1979, 101), but more literally it can be rendered: "who by organic structure was insensible to women." It is tempting to take Verri's comment as positive evidence of Firmian's desire for men, but it might instead imply, perhaps, a physical or genetic condition that rendered him essentially asexual. It is, in any case, evidence that he was not heterosexual—although Verri's loathing for Firmian needs to be kept in mind, so he is not necessarily a reliable witness.

Some of Winckelmann's statements about Firmian in letters to friends suggest that his feelings for the count transcended simple admiration. Ferrari has interpreted these statements as pointing to what he calls an "intesa omosessuale" (homosexual understanding) between the two (Ferrari 2019, 65), but evidence for this *intesa* is mostly indirect and equivocal. We know from Winckelmann's references in other letters that he and Firmian corresponded after Winckelmann left Naples, but none of their letters are known to survive. Thus the evidence of their relationship, whatever its nature, comes from a handful of passages in Winckelmann's letters to others.



Angelika Kauffmann, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann*
(Wikimedia commons)

That Winckelmann was homosexual in the modern sense is beyond doubt: his sexual attraction was exclusively to men; he was proudly open about this in letters to close friends; he was passionately in love with at least two young men during the course of his life, his tutee Peter Lamprecht and later Friedrich Reinhold von Berg; and he had certainly engaged in homosexual sex, although probably not with Lamprecht or Berg (on Winckelmann’s sexuality, see Sweet 1989, Richter & McGrath 1994, Tobin 2017, and Harloe & Russell 2019). Tobin exaggerates perhaps only slightly in writing that Winckelmann seems to have lived a life comparable to that of a modern homosexual in New York or Berlin:

> *[...]* große tragische Lieben, kleinere Affären, wohlhabende kunstbesessene Freunde und alte gesprächige Vertraute. [Tobin 2017, 13]
>
> *[...]* grand tragic loves, smaller affairs, well-to-do, art-obsessed friends, and talkative old confidants.

Firmian certainly belonged to the category of “well-to-do, art-obsessed friend” and he might also have been a “talkative old confidant.” The two were close in age: Winckelmann was born on 9 Dec 1717 and Firmian on 15 Aug 1718, so Winckelmann was just over eight months older. They met in Feb 1758, when Winckelmann had just turned 40 and Firmian was still 39. We have already surveyed Winckelmann’s references to Firmian in letters written during his first sojourn in

Naples and immediately after his return to Rome. While warmly admiring, these passages are not very sexy:

- *Letter to Anton Raphael Mengs, 11 Mar 1758:*

> "Il conte di Firmian, da cui vado a pranzare ogni volta, che passo a Napoli, è un compitissimo cavaliere, ed un uomo, che oltre la sua gran dottrina, buon gusto, retto discernimento, e passione per le belle arti, può esser chiamato amabilissimo." [Winckelmann 1952, i:337]
>
> ("Count Firmian, with whom I dine every time I go to Naples, is a very accomplished gentleman, and a man, who in addition to his great erudition, good taste, precise judgment, and passion for the fine arts, can be called very amiable.")

- *Letter to Johann Georg Wille, after mid Apr 1758:*

> "Ihr Schreiben ist gelesen und hochgeschätzt, von einem der würdigsten Menschen unserer Nation, Herren Grafen von Firmian, Kaiserl. gevollmächtigten Minister allhier; er hat eine Abschrift von demselben verlanget." [Winckelmann 1952, i:348]
>
> ("Your letter was read and greatly esteemed by one of the worthiest men of our nation, Count Firmian, imperial minister plenipotentiary here; he has asked for a copy of it.")

- *Letter to Heinrich von Bünau, 26 Apr 1758:*

> "[Firmian] ist einer der würdigsten Menschen unserer Nation *[...]* und da ich einige Wochen mit ihm vertraulich umgegangen und viel Höflichkeiten genoßen *[...]* [Winckelmann 1952, i:350]
>
> ("[Firmian] is one of the worthiest men of our nation *[...]* And because I was on intimate terms with him for several weeks and enjoyed many kindnesses *[...]*")

A modern English-speaking reader might take "intimate terms" to imply something sexual, but "vertraulich umgegangen" does not necessarily have this connotation, particularly in the wider context of the letter, where Winckelmann uses the phrase to reassure Bünau that Winckelmann knows what he is talking about when he says that Firmian was a great fan of Bünau's *Genaue und umständliche Teutsche Kayser= und Reichs=Historie*.

These three passages are the only ones in which Winckelmann writes anything personal about Firmian during the relatively brief period when they saw each other frequently in Naples. Shortly after his return to Rome, Winckelmann makes a similar reference to the count.

- *Letter to Hieronymus Dietrich Berendis, 15 May 1758:*

> "[Firmian] ist ein Mann von 40 Jahren von großen Verstande und unglaublich großer Wissenschaft: er hat in Leiden, *Siena*, Rom und Paris studiret und hat mehr Englische Bücher gelesen, als ich fast gesehen. Mit demselben habe ich besondere Freundschaft errichtet: denn er ist ein Mann nach meinem Herzen." [Winckelmann 1952, i:365]

> ("[Firmian] is a 40-year-old man of great understanding and unbelievably great knowledge: he studied in Leyden, Siena, Rome, and Paris, and has read more English books almost than I have seen. I have forged a particular friendship with him: for he is a man after my own heart.")

Again, this suggests that Winckelmann had great respect for Firmian and treasured his company, but there is nothing especially heated about it, unless one reads more into "besondere Freundschaft" ("particular friendship") than it can probably bear. In any case, Berendis was perhaps Winckelmann's closest confidant in sexual matters (Tobin 2017, 16), and if Winckelmann's relationship with Firmian had become physical, one suspects that he would have mentioned it here or at least alluded to it.

On 27 Jul 1758, Winckelmann wrote from Rome to his friend Johann Caspar Füssli that he intended to return to Naples "wenn die Zeit der üblen Luft vorüber ist, das ist, im September" ("when the time of bad bad is past, that is, in September"). But he also notes that Firmian will be leaving Naples:

> Mein bester Freund daselbst aber, der Graf von *Firmian* Minister des Wienerischen Hofes gehet ab von da als ernenneter Groß=Canzler in Mayland. Durch denselben, oder durch den Nuntius in der Schweitz, wird vielleicht ohne Kosten künftig unser Briefwechsel gehen können. [Winckelmann 1952, i:399]
>
> My best friend there, however, Count Firmian, minister of the court in Vienna, is going away, as he has been named Grand Chancellor in Milan. Our correspondence can perhaps in the future go through him without cost, or through the Nuncio in Switzerland.

The count did not leave Naples until 27 Nov 1758, so he and Winckelmann might have met again in person had Winckelmann carried through with his plan to travel to Naples in September. But he did not, instead leaving Rome early that month for Florence, as he reported to Giovanni Lodovico Bianconi in a letter of 26 Aug 1758. In that same letter—in a passage discussing his attempt to find relevant evidence in ancient writings about whether the ancients used glass in their windows—Winckelmann remarks:

> Voltandosi poi il discorso sopra questa materia col Ministro della Corte di Vienna à Napoli il Conte di Firmian, questo Cavaliere profondamente versato in ogni genere d'erudizione, e dotato di gran discernimento e d'alto intelletto senza la minima lega d'affettazione, mi andava additando il Libro de Legatione ad Cajum Caesarem s. de Virtutibus dell'istesso Filone. Io rimasi su questa notizia non trovata mai allegata e poco mancava che la parola di questo gran Letterato non mi servisse in questa relazione a fondarmici sopra. [Winckelmann 1952, i:408]
>
> Turning then to the discussion of this subject with the minister from the Viennese court to Naples, Count Firmian (this gentleman so profoundly versed in every area of scholarship and endowed with great discernment, and of high intellect without the least hint of affectation) pointed me toward the book *Legatione ad Caium Cæsarem sive de Virtutibus* by the same Philo. For me this intelligence remains unverified and second hand, and I would almost be prepared to take the word of this great scholar as sufficient grounds.

On 30 Sep 1758, soon after arriving in Florence, Winkelmann wrote in quite similar terms about Firmian to Johann Michael Franke:

> Florenz ist der schönste Ort, den ich in meinem Leben gesehen, und sehr vorzüglich vor Neapel. Ich kann besser, als ein anderer Reisender davon urtheilen; denn ich war in Neapel bey dem Kaiserl. Minister, Grafen von Firmian, dem größten und gelehrtesten Manne von allen großen Leuten hoher Geburt, die ich kenne, gleichsam wie zu Hause, und ich habe mehrentheils bey ihm, oder dem Marchese Galiani, dem Uebersetzer des Vitruvius, gegessen, und hier bin ich wiederum besser als selbst in Rom. [Winckelmann 1952, i:421–22]
>
> Florence is the most beautiful place I have seen in my life, and much preferable to Naples. I can judge this better than other travelers, for in Naples I felt as if I were at home with the imperial minister Count Firmian, the greatest and most educated man of all people of high birth that I know, and I dined mostly with him or with Marchese Galiani, the translator of Vitruvius; and here I am even better off than in Rome.

One again sees Winckelmann's great admiration for Firmian and senses his comfort and happiness in dining with him, but nothing stronger than that. Two months later, Winckelmann again referred to Firmian in comparable terms, in a letter from Florence to Christian Ludwig von Hagedorn on 25 Nov 1758:

> Wir erwarten hier den bisherigen Wienerischen Minister Hrn. Grafen von Firmian, der als Großcanzler nach Mayland gehet, einen der würdigsten Menschen in der Welt, von großer Gelehrsamkeit und Tugend, meinen großen Freund. [Winckelmann 1952, i:439]
>
> We expect here the former Viennese minister Herr Count Firmian, who is going to Milan as Grand Chancellor, one of the worthiest men in the world, of great erudition and virtue, my great friend.

Wincklemann and Firmian met when the count passed through Florence on 1 Jan 1759. Winckelmann wrote to Francke that day:

> Dieser Tag ist hier mein alter Freund von Neapel (denn so nennet er mich) der Herr Graf von Firmian, erklärter Groß=Canzler des Herzogthums Mayland und Statthalter des Herzogthums Mantua, durchgegangen, dem ich mein Vorhaben bekannt gemacht. Von allen Menschen, die ich noch bisher in der Welt kennen lernen, ist dieses einer der größten, weisesten, menschlichsten und gelehrtesten Männer. Er hat mir nach und nach die besten Stellen aus meiner Schrift abschriftlich abgelockt. Ich glaube, wenn ich es einmal sollte müde seyn in Rom, wie ich noch nicht hoffe, so könnte ich mich entschliéßen, den Sitz meiner Ruhe bey ihm zu erwählen. Denn wir sind nicht sehr unterschieden im Alter, und er wird schwerlich heyrathen. [Winckelmann 1952, i:443]
>
> Today my old friend from Naples (for thus he calls me) Count Firmian, appointed Grand Chancellor of the Duchy of Milan and Governor of Modena, passed through here, and I let him know of my plan. Of all the men I have met in the world up to now, he is the greatest, wisest, most humane, and most educated. He had me copy for him little by little the best

> passages drawn from my manuscript. I think, if I should ever become tired of Rome (which I hope I am not yet), then I could decide to choose to be near him as my place of retirement. For we are not far apart in age, and he will hardly marry.

Francke was one of the correspondents with whom Winckelmann was candid about sexual matters, reporting in the very same letter about having just read *L'Alcibiade fanciullo*, a defense of anal sex, and *Fanny Hill* (which, perhaps unexpectedly, he preferred over the first, finding it better written; see Harloe & Russell 2019, 14). This is the first letter in which Winckelmann gives a clear sense that his feelings for Firmian go beyond intellectual admiration and friendship. He imagines that he would be happy living "near" Firmian (on this reading of "bey," see below), and his statement that Firmian "wird schwerlich heyrathen" ("will hardly marry") implies that Winckelmann and Francke both knew that Firmian was not heterosexual. But there is no hint of sexual passion here, rather a sense, at most, that Winckelmann feels that he and Firmian could settle into a life like that of a compatible old married couple. The manuscript to which Winckelmann refers is probably his *magnum opus* in progress, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, which was not published until 1764.

Winckelmann does not refer to Firmian again except in passing in any known letter until 3 Jun 1761, when he writes from Rome to his Swiss confidant Leonhard Usteri:

> Mein Liebster theurer Usteri
>
> Die Aufnahme bey dem Hrn. Grafen Firmian kann Ihnen nicht mehr als mir angenehm seyn und zur Ehre gereichen. Ich war davon vorher überzeugt, und ich wünschte daß Sie ihn, wie ich, hätten können genauer kennen lernen. Dieses ist der vollkommenste Mann welchen Sie auf allen Ihren Reisen und vielleicht in Ihrem ganzen Leben werden kennen lernen, und wenn ich von seinem langen Leben, welches ich zur Ehre der Menschheit wünsche, könnte gewiß seyn, so würde ich alles in der Welt ausschlagen, um bey ihm zu leben. Ich kann sagen, es wurde eine sehr genaue Freundschaft unter uns gestiftet, welche durch öftere Briefe unterhalten wurde, und dieses würde noch itzo geschehen, wenn ich nicht in dem Hause wäre, wo ich bin. Denn da er suchet, wie ich merke, so wenig als möglich an den Hrn. Cardinal zu schreiben, so muß ich darunter leiden. Ich würde sagen können: "Er war mein Freund, der beste Freund auf Erden" wenn ich hätte an einem Orte mit ihm leben können. Ich weiß er hat auf seiner Seite alles versuchet, um mir dieses Glück auf anständige Weise zu verschaffen: er arbeitete stark an dem Vorschlag in *Mantua* eine Mahler und Bildhauer=Akademie zu errichten, und ich würde die Einrichtung und Aufsicht derselben bekommen haben. Ich denke, wie Critobulus vom Clinias beym Xenophon saget, Tag und Nacht an ihn, und die erste Schrift, welche ihm würdig seyn kann, soll ihm zugeeignet werden mit einer wahren Lobschrift, und ich seufze nach dieser Gelegenheit, um einen so vollkommenen Mann öffentlich meinen Freund nennen zu können, wenn er es erlaubet.
>
> Sie werden einen Brief an Sie bey demselben gefunden haben. *[...]*
> [Winckelmann 1952, ii:151]

[translation:]

> My dearest treasured Usteri,
>
> Your reception by Count Firmian cannot be more pleasing to you than it is to me, and it does you honor. I was convinced of it ahead of time, and I wish that you had been able to become better acquainted with him, as I have. He is the most accomplished man you will meet in all your travels and perhaps in your entire life, and if I could be certain of his long life, which I wish for the honor of mankind, then I would give everything in the world to be able to live near him. I can say that a very particular friendship formed between us, which was maintained through frequent correspondence, and this would be going on right now, were I not in the house where I am. For since, as I have observed, he tries to write as little as possible to the Herr Cardinal, thus I must suffer for this. I would be able to say “He was my friend, the best friend on earth,” had I been able to live in a place [*Ort*] with him. I know that for his part he has done everything to make this happen for me in a fitting way: he is working hard on the proposal to found an academy of painting and sculpture in *Mantua*, and I would have been given the direction and oversight of this. As Critobulus says of Clinias in Xenophon, I think of him day and night, and my first writing that is worthy of him will be dedicated to him with a true tribute; and I sigh for this opportunity to be able publicly to name such an accomplished man my friend, if he allows it.
>
> You will have found a letter to you at his residence *[…]*

This is by far Winckelmann’s most emotional utterance about Firmian, and it is also apparently his last such: by the second half of 1763, their relationship, whatever its nature, had soured. At the time he wrote this letter, Winckelmann was working in Rome as librarian to Cardinal Alessandro Albani (1692–1779), whom Firmian evidently did not like. For Winckelmann, on the other hand, Albani seems to have served as a “talkative old confidant”; on 28 Sep 1781, Winckelmann wrote to Berendis:

> *[…]* der Cardinal von 70 Jahren ist mein Vertrauter, und ich unterhalte ihn öfters von meinen Amours. [quoted in Tobin 2017, 18]
>
> *[…]* the 70-year-old cardinal is my confidant, and I entertain him often with my *amours*.

Winckelmann did in fact have “amours” in Rome, including a wigmaker (as he wrote to Heinrich Wilhelm Muzell-Stosch) and Niccolò Castellani (as he wrote to Usteri)—although that relationship cooled when, according to Winckelmann, Castellani lost his youthful beauty (Tobin 2017, 19). Casanova writes of having walked in on Winckelmann in Rome with a boy *in flagrante delicto*. After the boy quickly dressed and fled, Winckelmann attempted, rather lamely, to persuade Casanova that the episode was merely an experiment to attempt to understand what the ancient Greeks saw in the practice (Casanova 2015, 736–37).

Once again in his letter to Berendis Winckelmann expresses in this letter the desire to live “bey” Firmian, but the context of the letter suggests that Winckelmann actually means “near” the count, not literally “with” him, as we might otherwise be inclined to think. Mantua is 130 km

(80 mi) from Milan, so if Winckelmann had become director of the proposed academy in Mantua, he could not easily have commuted between the two cities in the eighteenth century.

In 1762 Winckelmann published *Sendschreiben von der Herculanischen Entdeckungen*, a report on the excavations at Herculaneum. He had already mentioned in a letter to Bünau the idea of writing such a report as early as 26 Apr 1758, while still in Naples (Winckelmann 1952, i:350). But as it turned out, Winckelmann did not have the opportunity to return to Naples and Herculaneum for further study until early in 1762. Following that visit, he quickly completed and published his long-planned report. On 17 Dec 1762 Winckelmann wrote to Usteri from Rome:

> Sie werden dem Hrn. Grafen Firmian eine Freude machen, wenn Sie ihm ein Exemplar von meinem Sendschreiben übermachen: es kann lange währen, ehe die meinigen ankommen. Es bezeuget derselbe ein großes Verlangen darnach. [Winckelmann 1952, ii:278–79]
>
> You will make Count Firmian very happy if you send him an exemplar of my *Sendschreiben*: it can take a long time for mine to arrive. He has expressed a great desire for one.

This is yet another indication that Firmian and Winckelmann were still corresponding at that point. Firmian did indeed receive the copy from Usteri, writing to thank him on 15 Jan 1763:

> HochEdelgebohrnerHochgeehrtester Herr!
>
> Samt Dero schätzbarstem Schreiben vom 8ten dieses erhalte zugleich die gelehrte Schrift unseres Freundes des Hrn. Winckelmanns, wofür Euer HochEdelgebohrn all ersinnlichen Danck erstatte. Ich habe solche mit Vergnügen durchgelesen, und wünschte nur zu größerem Ruhm des Hrn. Verfassers, daß er verschiedene darinnen vorkommende Stellen vermieden, und sich aller Stahl-Worte enthalten hätte. *[...]* [Winckelmann 1952, iv:128]
>
> Worthy,Most honored sir!
>
> Along with your most precious letter of the 8th of this month, I received at the same time the learned publication of our friend Herr Winckelmann, for which I extend to Your Worthiness every possible thanks. I have read through it with pleasure, and wish only that to the greater fame of the Author, he had avoided some of the various passages that are in it, and had refrained from all harsh words. *[...]*

(“Hochedelgeboren” in the salutation literally means “nobly born,” but by the second half of the eighteenth century it was often used as a conventional form of address to persons of distinction who were not nobly born, as Usteri was not.)


Johann Winckelmanns
Sendschreiben
von den
Herculanischen Entdeckungen.
An den
Hochgebohrnen Herrn,
Herrn
Heinrich Reichsgrafen von Brühl,
Staroſten von Bolynow, Rittern des hieroſolymitaniſchen Ordens von Maltha,
Sr. Königl. Majeſt. in Pohlen und Churfürſtl. Durchl. zu Sachſen hochbeſtallten Cammerherrn ꝛc. ꝛc.
Dreßden 1762,
Verlegts George Conrad Walther,
Königlicher Hof-Buchhändler.

Most of the *Sendschreiben* consists of detailed descriptions of the excavations at Herculaneum and items recovered from them, in Winckelmann’s characteristically meticulous style. But in a few passages, those in charge of the excavations come in for harsh criticism. Most memorably, Winckelmann writes of Rocque Joaquín de Alcubierre, the head of the excavations:

> Dieser Mann, welcher mit den Alterthümern so wenig zu thun gehabt hatte, als der Mond mit den Krebsen, nach dem Welschen Sprichworten, war durch seine Unerfahrenheit Schuld an vielem Schaden und an dem Verluste vieler schönen Sachen. [Winckelmann 1762, 19]
>
> This man, who had as little to do with antiquities as the moon with crabs (as the Italians say) was responsible through his lack of experience for much damage and the loss of many beautiful things.

Winckelmann also laid the ultimate blame for all this on the Bourbon court in Naples (see Parslow 1998, 1–2 and 219ff). These are likely the “Stahl-Worte” (literally “steel-words”) to which Firmian was referring in his letter to Usteri.

By 6 Aug 1763, Winckelmann had broken off correspondence with Firmian, as we know from a letter to Füssli on that date:

> *[...]* Sie haben vergeßen mich über der vermutheten Firmianischen Lügen zu überzeugen; ich habe unterdeßen von der Zeit an keine Zeile an denselben geschrieben. *[...]*
> [Winckelmann 1762, ii:332]

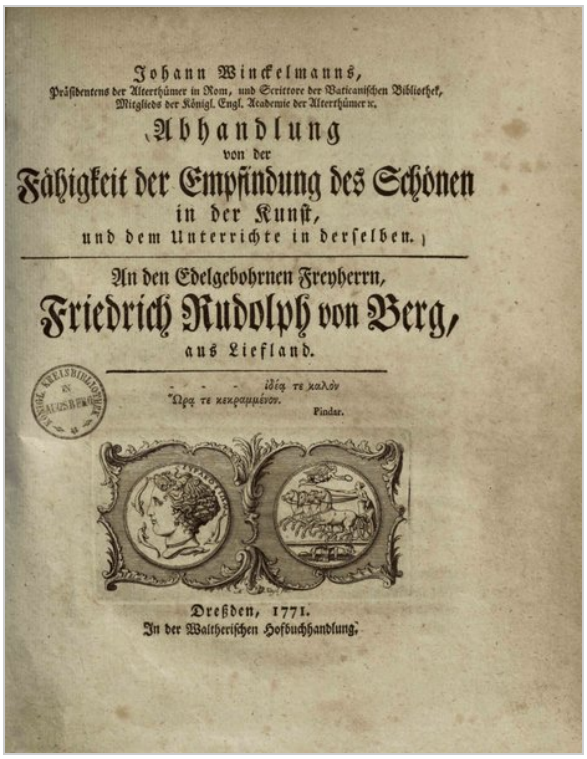
> *[...]* You forgot to persuade me about Firmian’s presumed lies; in the meantime, from that time on I have not written a single line to him.

What these “presumed lies” may have been in Winckelmann’s eyes we do not currently know. Nor do we know whether the break in communication was permanent, although Ferrari assumes that it was. Even so, Winckelmann continued to make sure that his books were sent to Firmian: in a letter written on 3 Dec 1763, he asked his Dresden publisher Georg Conrad Walther to send his new *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* to Firmian:

> Dem Hrn Grafen von Firmian bitte ich unverzüglich das [ihm] zugedachte Exemplar, nebst einem Stücke von der Bergischen Schrift unter der gegebenen Addresse, über Wien an Hrn. Kaufmann Schülern abzuschicken. *[...]* [Winckelmann 1952, ii:359]
>
> Please immediately send Count Firmian the exemplar intended for him, and a copy of the Berg book to the given address via Vienna to merchant Schüler. *[...]*

Ferrari believes that the apparent break between Firmian and Winckelmann was caused by the latter’s harsh words and his criticism of the Neapolitan court in the *Sendschreiben*—and this is certainly plausible (Ferrari 2019, 72–73). But Ferrari does not consider another possibility. In 1762, Winckelmann had fallen passionately in love with 25-year-old Livonian aristocrat Friedrich Reinhold von Berg (1736–1809) during the latter’s visit to Italy during his Grand Tour. (On Winckelmann and Berg, see Richter & McGrath 1994, and Tobin 2017.) Winckelmann immortalized his passion in the short book *Abhandlung von der Fähigkeit der Empfindung der Schönen in der Kunst*, published in Dresden by Walther the following year, and dedicated to Berg (this is the “Bergische Schrift” referred to in Winckelmann’s letter to Walther). Richter and McGrath argue persuasively that the *Abhandlung* was intended to make a case for, in their words, “homosocial friendship as aesthetic education” (Richter & McGrath 1994, 46–47). They continue:

> Winckelmann was engaged in nothing less than an effort to give a name, a profile, and a dignity to his desire; today, we would say he was coming out. *[...]* Indeed, we believe that Winckelmann’s Abhandlung was designed to be instrumental in establishing a European homosocial network.



Johann Winckelmanns,
Präsidentens der Alterthümer in Rom, und Scrittore der Vaticanischen Bibliothek,
Mitglieds der Königl. Engl. Academie der Alterthümer ꝛc.

Abhandlung
von der
Fähigkeit der Empfindung des Schönen
in der Kunst,
und dem Unterrichte in derselben.

An den Edelgebohrnen Freyherrn,
Friedrich Rudolph von Berg,
aus Liefland.

- - - ἰδέᾳ τε καλὸν
Πρός τε κεκραμένον. Pindar.

Dreßden, 1771.
In der Waltherischen Hofbuchhandlung.

The *Abhandlung* was one of six books by Winckelmann in Firmian’s library at the time of his death in 1782 (*Bibliotheca Firmiana*, iii/2:134), and one of only two first editions of Winckelmann’s books in the library at that point. (The other was *Description des Pierre gravées du feu Baron de Stosch*, published in Florence in French in 1760; *Bibliotheca Firmiana*, iv:189.) Although we know that Usteri had sent Firmian a copy of the original German edition of the *Sendschreiben* at the beginning of 1763, the count no longer had it in 1782, when his library included only the French translation published in 1764 (*Bibliotheca Firmiana*, iv:167). Nor did Firmian still have the original 1764 German edition of *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, even though Walther had presumably sent him the copy that Winckelmann had requested at the time of publication; at his death, Firmian’s library included only the French translation published in Amsterdam in 1766 (*Bibliotheca Firmiana*, iii/2:136). If one accepts Ferrari’s theory that Firmian and Winckelmann broke off their correspondence because of Firmian’s disapproval of what he perceived as indiscrete comments in the *Sendschreiben*, one could easily imagine that Firmian might have discarded his first copy in disgust. But this would be mere speculation; we know that Firmian was uncommonly generous, and he might simply have given away his original copies of the *Sendschreiben* and the *Geschichte*, just as we have suggested he might have done with the set of the Turin Metastasio that he gave to Mozart in 1770.

Firmian’s letter to Usteri does indeed express a degree of unhappiness at some of what Winckelmann had written in the *Sendschreiben*, but the count’s characteristic diplomacy and reticence in expressing that unhappiness makes it difficult to judge its strength or whether it might have been sufficient to provoke the “lies” that Winckelmann evidently thought Firmian had told about him. Perhaps instead the rupture between them had something to do with Winckelmann’s relationship with Berg or with the *Abhandlung*.

It is attractive to think that Firmian might have been one of Winckelmann's "talkative old confidants," with whom he shared details of his amours, as he did with Cardinal Albani. But we currently have no evidence that Firmian was aware that Winckelmann was actively homosexual, and it is possible that he would have disapproved. If word of Winckelmann's affairs in Rome had reached him, he might even have been scandalized. Alternatively, if Firmian had received and read the *Abhandlung* before 6 Aug 1763 (the date of Winckelmann's letter to Füssli), that book's content might well have scandalized him, or he might have found it unforgivably indiscreet. Alternatively it could well have been Winckelmann, rather than Firmian, who broke off the correspondence because of the perceived "lies" that he believed Firmian had told about him, whatever these may have been. At present, we simply do not have enough evidence to know.

It is clear, in any case, that Winckelmann's sexual interest was aroused primarily by beautiful young men—and Firmian was neither. It seems unlikely, then, that the two had a physical relationship during their relatively brief times together.

Winckelmann was stabbed to death in Trieste on 8 Jun 1768 by the cook Francesco Arcangeli, with whom he was probably having a sexual liaison. The motive was the theft of Winckelmann's collection of four gold and silver medallions that he had received from Maria Theresia at an audience in Vienna not long before going to Trieste. He was just 51 years old.

In the preface of a new Italian translation of Winckelmann's *Geschichte* published in 1779, the editors thanked Firmian for making items in his collection available to the project:

> Merita tra questi a tutt'i titoli il primo luogoS. E. il sig. Conte di Firmian Ministro Plenipoten-ziario de S. M. I. R. A. presso il Serenissimo Gover-no della Lombardia Austriaca, il quale non solo per-mise che si disegnassero le due belle statue d'Andro-meda e di Jole, che fra moltissime altre opere dell'arte antica e moderna ornano la sua abitazione, cara sempre ai genj ed alle muse; ma ci ha datimolti altri argomenti di suo patrocinio: e noi benvolentieri cogliamo questa occasione per professar-gliene pubblicamente la più viva riconoscenza. [*Storia delle arti del disegno presso gli antichi* (1779), vol. 1, x–xi]
>
> Among all those titled, the first place belongs to His Excellency Count Firmian, Minister Plenipotentiaryof Her Majesty the Imperial Royal Highness to the Most Serene Governor of Austrian Lombardy, who not only allowed drawings to be made of his two beautiful statues of Andromeda and Iole, which among very many other works of ancient and modern art adorn his residence, always welcoming to genius and the muses; but also has given us many other particulars of his patronage: and so we gladly take this opportunity to profess to him publicly our most lively appreciation.

Whatever may have happened between them when Winckelmann was alive, Firmian seems not to have held a posthumous grudge. The count's name does not appear in the list of the project's supporters at the end of volume 1 (*Storia delle arti*, unpaginated), but Ferrari points out (2019, 75) that his debts may well have caught up with him by that point, making it impossible for him to provide financial support.

Firmian, whatever his sexuality, was certainly homosocial. All evidence suggests that he preferred the company of men—seemingly exclusively in his daily life at home: no woman is known to have attended any of his dinner parties. In Martin Knoller's painting of Firmian with a group of six men (and a small dog) among the ruins at Cuma, the poses are relaxed and informal, and Firmian looks serenely satisfied. His left arm appears almost to be resting on the knee of the man to his left. As one wag has noted (private communication), there are "a lot of sticks" in this painting: four walking sticks, to be precise, and a broken branch thrusting stiffly upward into the picture at the far right, at the level of Knoller's head. But it is easy to read too much into such potential symbols, particularly if one is inclined to find them: sometimes a walking stick is just a walking stick.

Knoller himself was Firmian's longtime protégé, and (in this self portrait) a youthful and attractive 32-year-old in 1758, the time of the painting. Knoller probably lived in Firmian's residence in Milan during his early years in the city, and so he could be considered a candidate to have been a boyfriend of Firmian's (if the count ever had any). Yet there is no known evidence for this, and in 1767 Knoller married the beautiful Annunciata Cardani, a merchant's daughter in Milan, with whom he had three sons and two daughters (Baumgartl 2004, 24).

The most important women in Firmian's life were all connected with his day job as Habsburg minister. Most prominent of all was Empress Maria Theresia, whom he would probably first have met during his years as Reichshofrat in Vienna in the late 1740s and early 1750s. By 1754 she trusted him enough to dispatch him to the court of King Charles of Bourbon in Naples as minister plenipotentiary, with the crucial job of representing Habsburg interests in the long, delicate, and contentious negotiations leading to the treaty of 1759 and the resulting "triple marriage" of Archduchess Maria Carolina to Charles's son and successor Ferdinand, Archduke Joseph to Isabella of Parma, and Archduke Leopold to Charles's daughter Maria Luisa.

Firmian's tact and discretion also won the trust of Maria Amalia of Saxony, Charles's queen, who engaged in confidential discussions with Firmian in order to protect Saxon interests, which aligned with Vienna's but diverged from her husband's. (On the negotiations leading to the treaty of 1759, see Benedikt 1951.) Maria Theresia was so happy with Firmian's work in Naples that she elevated him to the more powerful posts of minister plenipotentiary in Austrian Lombardy and Vice-Governor of the Duchy of Mantua. When Firmian left Naples at the end of 1758 to travel to Vienna before taking up these positions, she sent him by way Parma to assess Isabella's suitability as a wife for Joseph.

In 1881 Arneth published six private letters from Maria Theresia to Firmian (Arrneth 1881, iv: 91–94), three from the middle of 1769, and one each from 1777, 1778, and 1779. The three from 1769 all have to do with a delicate family matter: the marriage of Archduchess Maria Amalia (1746–1804)—Maria Theresia's eighth child and sixth daughter—to Ferdinand of Parma (1751–1802). Maria Amalia was in love with Charles of Zweibrücken, and had expressed her desire to marry him, but was forced by her mother, in the interest of political alliance, to marry Ferdinand. Maria Theresia's letters to Firmian in 1769 are dated 6 and 11 Jul (a third is undated, but is from

this same time). The Archduchess was on her way to Parma—the marriage took place on 19 Jul—and the empress was concerned for her daughter's psychological state, trusting Firmian to report truthfully and take appropriate action if necessary.

These letters also date from precisely the period of Joseph's sojourn in Milan, 24 Jun to 13 Jul 1769. It is from Maria Theresia's letter to Firmian on 6 Jul 1769 that we know he was ill during Joseph's visit. The letter attests both to her concern for the count's health and her genuine affection:

> Comte Firmian. Je suis bien affectée de votre incommodité; il faut bien se ménager et ne rien hazarder. Vous pouvez m'être fort utile dans votre chambre avec vos conseils, et ne plus faire des courses à Mantoue, dont j'attribue absolument votre incommodité, quoique vous l'avez fait rayer à la lettre du fidèle Pichler. Vous tiendrez prêts deux mille sequins pour ma fille de Parme, si elle vous les demande; je vous les ferai rembourser par Mayer. Marie Thérèse. [Arneth 1881, iv:91–92]
>
> Count Firmian. I am greatly affected by your indisposition; you must not strain yourself and take no risks. You can be greatly useful to me with your counsels from your bedroom, and do not continue with business in Mantua, to which I attribute your indisposition, even though you crossed it out from the letter of faithful Pichler. Please have two thousand zecchini ready for my Parma daughter, if she requests them from you; I will have you reimbursed by Mayer. Marie Thérèse.

A few years later she again expresses concern for Firmian's health, in a letter from Oct 1777:

> Je suis inquiète pour votre santé. *[...]* Je suis aussi attaquée d'un rhume et mal de gorge, mais déjà mieux, et à cette heure sans fièvre. Je suis impatiente de savoir des nouvelles de votre santé. [Arneth 1881, iv:93]
>
> I am worried for your health.*[...]* I am also suffering from a cold and sore throat, but I am already better, and without fever at this hour. I am impatient to have news about your health.

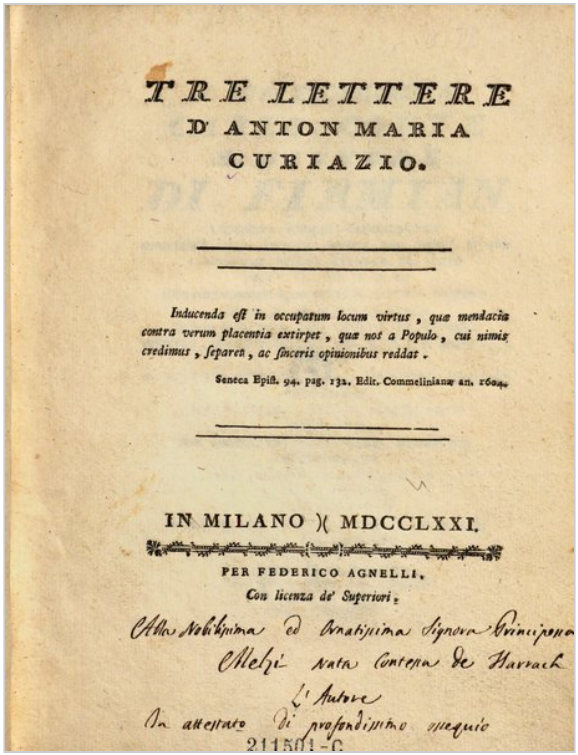
Four of the empress's six letters to Firmian are signed "Croyez-moi toujours votre bien affectionnée Marie Thérèse" ("Always believe me to be your most affectionate Marie Thérèse"), and while that was a conventional formula, the sentiment was evidently entirely genuine. The empress also trusted Firmian's advice on the formation of Archduke Ferdinand's household (Hofstaat) in Milan, following the archduke's marriage in 1771. For example, she had suggested purchasing Farinelli's table silver for Ferdinand, but accepted Firmian's counsel that it would be more politic to have new silver made for Ferdinand in Milan (Arneth 1879, 181). The empress was, then, by far the most important woman in Firmian's life: she trusted him greatly in matters concerning her children and felt genuine affection for him. (On Firmian and Maria Beatrice d'Este, see our entry for 17 Oct 1771.)

In his letter from Milan on 27 Feb 1770, Leopold Mozart wrote:

> *[...]* allein Se: Ex: Gr: Firmian wollen in der ersten fastenwoche eine grosse Accademie für die Damen in seinem Hause geben *[...]* [*Briefe*, i:316]

> *[...]* but His Excellency Count Firmian wants to give a big academy for the ladies in his house during the first week of Lent *[...]*

The "ladies in his house" would have been the essentially separate household of Princess Melzi, born Renata Teresa d'Harrach (1721–1788). Her first marriage had been to a Count Melzi, who died in 1748 (on the identity of Count Melzi, see the *Notes* below). She later entered a morganatic marriage with Francesco III d'Este, Duke of Modena, grandfather of Maria Beatrice, Archduke Ferdinand's designated wife. Renata continued to be styled Princess Melzi, and she lived in the Palazzo Melzi (also Firmian's residence), technically Francesco's base in Milan, although he seems to have spent very little time there. The exemplar of Curiazio's Tre lettere (a book dedicated to Firmian) in the Austrian National Library carries on its title page a manuscript dedication from the author to Princess Melzi:



TRE LETTERE
D' ANTON MARIA
CURIAZIO.

Inducenda est in occupatum locum virtus, quæ mendacia contra verum placentia extirpet, quæ nos a Populo, cui nimis credimus, separet, ac sinceris opinionibus reddat.

Seneca Epist. 94. pag. 132. Edit. Commelinianæ an. 1604.

IN MILANO)(MDCCLXXI.

PER FEDERICO AGNELLI.
Con licenza de' Superiori.

Alla Nobilissima ed Ornatissima Signora Principessa
Melzi nata Contessa de Harrach
L'Autore
In attestato di profondissimo ossequio

211501-C

Curiazio, *Tre lettere* (1771), title page and dedication page (ÖNB)

Alla Nobilissima ed Ornatissima Signora Principessa
Melzi nata Contessa de Harrach
L'Autore
In attestato di profondissimo ossequio

To the most noble and elegant Madame Princess
Melzi, née Countess Harrach,
[From] the Author
In affirmation of his deepest respect

The last of Maria Theresia's six published letters to Firmian, from the end of 1779, concerns Princess Melzi. The empress has learned that old Duke Francesco, sensing that the end was near (he died on 22 Feb 1780), wished to separate from the princess so that he would not have to leave her anything. Maria Theresia was appalled by this and noted that her "children" (Archduke Ferdinand and Maria Beatrice) had asked her to intercede, so she asked Firmian to reassure the princess that she could remain in "son quartier de cour" (that is, her apartments in the palace) as long as necessary after Francesco's death (Arneth 1881, iv:94; on Renata d'Harrach, see Barblan & Della Corte 1956, 72n1, and Mortarotti 2006).

Among Firmian's servants we know from Wolfgang Mozart himself that the count's "Hausmeisterin" was a Viennese woman, Therese Germani [*Briefe*, i:311]. As we have seen, it has long been claimed that painter Angelika Kauffmann was a protégée of Firmian, but evidence for this is unclear. If true, she would have been the only female that Firmian is known to have taken under his wing. In contrast, Pietro Verri, in a letter to his brother on 22 Jun 1782, shortly after Firmian's death, complains that the count never honored the brilliant Milanese female mathematician Maria Gaetana Agnesi (1718–1799):

> Sotto di lui ebbimo Frisi, Boskovich, Spallanzani, Tissot nel ruolo de' professori; ma confusi e indistintamente trattati con una folla di mediocri che ingrossano il ruolo della Università. Maria Agnesi non è stata nemmeno per onore nominata, e doveva essere la prima a partecipare delle largizioni destinate alle scienze. [Seregni 1942, 327]
>
> Frisi, Boscovich, Spallanzani, Tissot were professors under him, but muddled together and treated indifferently with a throng of mediocrities who bloat the roster of the university. Maria Agnesi was never nominated for an honor, and she should have been the first to participate in his [Firmian's] largesse to the sciences.

The implication is that in Verri's view, Firmian was even "insensible" to women of talent.

It seems fitting to close this section with the influential and oft-quoted paragraph on homosexual sex from *Dei delitti e delle pene*, by Firmian's protégé Cesare Beccaria. The passage appears in the section "Delitti di prova difficile" ("Crimes difficult of proof"), where it is placed between discussions of adultery and infanticide:

> L'Attica Venere così severamente punitadalle Leggi, e così facilmente sottoposta ai tormenti vincitori dell'innocenza, ha meno il suofondamento su i bisogni dell'uomo isolato, elibero, che sulle passioni dell'uomo sociabile,e schiavo. Essa prende la sua forza non tan-to dalla sazietà dei piaceri, quanto da quellaeducazione, che comincia per render gli uo-mini inutili a se stessi per farli utili ad altri, in quelle case, dove si condensa l'ardente gioven-tù, dove essendovi un argine insormontabile adogni altro commercio, tutto il vigore della na-

> tura, che si sviluppa, si consuma inutilmente perl’umanità, anzi ne anticipa la vecchiaja. [Beccaria, *Dei delitti e delle pene*, 80]

> Pederasty, so severely punished by the laws, and so readily subjected to the tortures that triumph overinnocence, is founded less on the necessities of man, when living in a state of isolation and freedom, than on his passions when living in a state of society and slavery. It derives its force not so much from satiety of pleasure as from the system of education now in vogue, which, beginning by making men useless to themselves in order to make them useful to others, causes, by its too strict seclusion, a waste of all vigorous development, and accelerates the approach of old age. [translation from Farrer 1880, 230]

Beccaria’s point is that the punishments for “Attic venery” (his term for homosexual sex)—a capital crime in some places—were far too severe given the ease with which false confessions could be extracted under torture. Although Beccaria clearly disapproved of homosexual acts, he felt that in a modern context they arose from defects in the education of young men, not necessarily from individual moral turptitude. In the context of eighteenth-century law, this was a remarkably enlightened view and led directly to the lessening of the severity of the punishments for the “crime” in many places. (On this passage, see also Crompton 2003, 503–4.)

Conclusion (⇧)

Count Firmian had suffered from bouts of ill health from at least his years in Naples, where he is said to have contracted a chronic gastrointestinal ailment. Maria Theresia expressed her concern over the count’s health in at least two letters to him, one in 1769 and one in 1779. Leopold Mozart, in his letter from Milan of 26 Jan 1770, wrote that Firmian was suffering from a “Catharr”; while this may have been a simple cold, we should not rule out the possibility that it might have been Firmian’s convenient fiction for an episode of his chronic ailment. Garms-Cornides has suggested that the count’s tendency to corpulence—his face even looks rather bloated in the 1781 engraving of Knoller’s portrait—might have been related to his illness (see Garms-Cornides 1970, 141 and note 64; we have not been able to see the 1760 medical report on Firmian that she mentions).

Late in his life Firmian was heavily in debt, perhaps (as Verri believed) because of overspending on patronage and his collections. In the last years of his life he asked Maria Theresia for 100,000 fl to cover his debts. Although she declined to make a direct payment, she planned to give him the sum out of lottery income from the Austrian Netherlands. But she died before this plan could be implemented, and Joseph II scrapped the idea (Garms-Cornides 1970, 142).

Firmian died in Milan on 20 Jun 1782. Pietro Verri, in a letter to his brother two days later, described the count’s sad end:

> Alle ore nove del giorno 20 à spirato il Sig. Conte di Firmian. Egli ha obbedito a questa inevitabile condizione con pacatezza, senza inquietudine, e in modo che gli fa onore. Fu saccheggiato e abbandonato nelle ultime ore da’ suoi domestici e non aveva un sorso

> d’acqua. Il giorno avanti chiese che gli lavassero gli occhi e adoperarono storditamente dell’aceto senza che egli malgrado il bruciore facesse un rimprovero. Si fece leggere *Quesnel* dove tratta dell’amore di Dio. Sarà tumulato siccome ha disposto in S. Bartolomeo, la chiesa sua vicina e parrocchiale. Egli lascia molti debiti; si dovranno vendere la libreria, i quadri, e quanto possedeva di mobili. Così ha terminato il suo corso fisico il signor Conte di Firmian, che da dieci anni si può dire che avesse terminato il corso del luminoso suo ministero, non avendo egli più in quest’ultimo periodo influenza vera e reale negli affari d’una provincia, di cui è stato vero e reale sovrano dal 1761 al 1771. [Seregni 1942, 326–27]
>
> At the ninth hour on the 20th day [of June] Signor Count Firmian expired. He conceded to this inevitable condition with tranquility, without disquiet, and in a manner that does him honor. He was plundered and abandoned in his last hours by his familiars and had not even a sip of water. The day before, he asked that they wash his eyes and they thoughtlessly used vinegar without his reproaching them in spite of the stinging. He had *Quesnel* read to him where it talks of God’s love. He will be buried as he had arranged in San Bartolomeo, his nearest parish church. He left many debts; his library, paintings, and what furniture he had will have to be sold. Thus has ended the physical course of Signor Count Firmian, who, it can be said, had ended the luminous course of his ministry ten years earlier, not having any further real influence in this final period in the affairs of the province, of which he had been the true and royal sovereign from 1761 to 1771.

Verri probably means here that after the arrival of Archduke Ferdinand as governor of Austrian Lombardy in 1771, Firmian merely executed orders coming from Vienna (Verri’s “luminoso” is meant ironically). But Ferdinand’s arrival did not in itself reduce Firmian’s powers; as Arneth writes:

> Der Erzherzog las zwar mit anerkennenswerthen Fleiße alle Geschäftsstücke, welche Firmian ihm vorlegte, aber auf die eigentliche Entscheidung nahm er nur sehr wenig Einfluß, und auch sonst war er durchaus kein Freund einer ernsten Beschäftigung. Unmöglich sei es, sagt ein Vertrauensmann der Kaiserin, Graf Rosenberg, über den Erzherzog, ihn ein Buch zur Hand nehmen zu machen. [Arneth 1879, 184]
>
> The Archduke read every official document that Firmian laid before him with commendable industry, but he had only very little influence on the actual decisions; and otherwise he was definitely no friend of serious employment. It was impossible, a confidant of the empress, Count Rosenberg, said of the Archduke, to make him consult a book.

Verri mentioned Firmian’s debts again in a letter to his brother on 3 Jul 1782:

> Non si sa ancora qual somma di debito abbia lasciata; si crede che non rimarrà di che soddisfarla interamente; e certamente questa spensierata generosità dell’altrui non fa onore alla sua memoria. [Seregni 1942, 337]
>
> The sum of the debts that he left is not yet known; it is thought that not enough remains to satisfy them entirely; and certainly this negligent generosity to others does no honor to his memory.

In retrospect, however, Firmian's generosity seems anything but negligent, given the historical prominence of some of his protégés. But Verri was not among them, so perhaps he was bitter. However, the sale of Firmian's collections does seem to have been necessary to cover his debts. The *Bibliotheca Firmiana* and *Gabinetto* were intended as sales catalogs, and his paintings were dispersed. His large print collection was acquired by the court in Naples and is now in the Museo di Capodimonte, and the books were purchased by the government of Milan and divided among three libraries: the Biblioteca di Brera (today the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense), the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, and the Biblioteca Trivulziana (Baumgartl 2004, 23 and 35n94).

Baumgartl transcribes two letters from Knoller to Firmian's successor and executor Count Johann Joseph Wilczek, in which the painter tries to recoup several years of unpaid lodging expenses (which Firmian apparently owed Knoller under contract), as well as reimbursement for three paintings that Knoller had bought for Firmian in Germany, and payment for two large paintings that he had executed at Firmian's behest to give to Prince Kaunitz. The first of these letters is undated, but was written not long after Firmian's death; it reads:

> Es seindt 14 Jahr daß ich aus den Palast S.r Excellenz meines Hochsellignen gnädigen Herrn in meine gegenwerthige wohnung eingezogen bin, welche Hochselbe mir [illegible] haben, aber nur zweÿ Jahre ist mir selbe bezahlt worden. Seith 12 Jahren Habe ich es von meinem Eignen bestreiten mißen, und auch sonsten aller hilf entzogen worden, und mit villen gnädigen versprechen imer getröst bin worden. Auch hab ich 3 bilder aus Comision in teischland erkauft, nemblichen zweÿ kichenstikhe vor 7. ducaten, ein kopf von albrecht dierer. Hab ich ein anderes bildt davor gemahlen. Die zweÿ großen vor den firsten v. Kaunniz, welche auch in kleinen in Palast aufgemacht sein. Finden Euer Excellenz dise meine forderung vor billich, so bite ich Hochdieselben underthenigst umb hilfe *[...]*
> [Milan, Archivio di Stato, Uff. regi, p. a., 79, transcribed in Baumgartl 2004, **B 19**, 340]
>
> It has been 14 years since I moved out of the palace of His Excellency my late gracious lord to my present apartments, for which His Grace paid me for only two years. For twelve years I have had to pay it out of my own pocket and without any other help, and I was always consoled with many gracious promises. I also purchased 3 paintings on commission in Germany, namely two church pieces for 7 ducats, [and] a head of Albrecht Dürer. I painted a copy of this. The two large ones for Prince von Kaunitz, which I also made in smaller copies for the palace. If Your Excellency finds my claims justified, then I most humbly ask You for help *[...]*

If we assume this letter was written no later than 1783, Knoller's "14 Jahr" would imply he moved out of Firmian's palace in 1769, before the Mozarts' first visit to Milan. This in turn implies that Firmian stopped paying Knoller's lodging costs around 1771, around the same time that Verri claimed that Firmian's budget was considerably decreased. In a follow-up letter to Wilczek dated 8 Nov 1785, Knoller writes that he had expected to be paid 200 ducats for the Kaunitz paintings, around 866 fl at the rates in force at the time (Baumgartl 2004, **B 42**, 350–51). These letters show that Knoller was persistent in attempting to collect what he felt he was owed, but also that he was loyal, in that he did not desert Firmian in the 1770s when the count's finances began to deteriorate.

Firmian's death is also reported at length in the *Diario estero* (the title at that time of the *Diario ordinario*), in its issue of 19 Jul 1782; one paragraph includes information on his autopsy:

> Fu aperto il cadaver, e si èritrovato nel ventricolo destrodel cuore un polipo notabile impacciato da altre produzioni polipose, ed una grandissima quantità di sostanza pinguedinosa; ed indi imbalsamato futrasportato incognito nella seradel dì seguente nella Chiesa Parrochiale di S. Bartolommeo. [*Diario estero*, no. 1787, 19 Jul 1782, 5]

> The cadaver was opened, and in the right ventricle of the heart was found a notable polyp impacted by other polypoid growths, and a very great quantity of fatty substance; and from there he was embalmed and taken privately the following evening to the parish church of SanBartolomeo.

Firmian was beloved by nearly everyone for his kindness, his generosity, and his love of learning and the arts. Maria Theresia held great affection for him and trusted him with crucial matters involving her children. He enjoyed a close and productive working relationship with Kaunitz for many years based on mutual respect and friendship. Winckelmann was dazzled by his erudition, repeatedly calling him one of the great men of the German nation. Leopold Mozart also praised him highly. But Pietro Verri despised him, claiming that Firmian's erudition and artistic taste were superficial and his mind mediocre, and implying that he was corrupt. Joseph II and his brother Leopold had a low opinion of him, finding him lazy. Joseph von Sperges, director of the Dipartimento d'Italia in Vienna, was also skeptical. The opinions of Verri and Joseph in particular shadowed Firmian's reputation throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and continue to do so even today, if to a lesser extent.

The reasons for Verri's contempt were probably complex. He had evidently clashed with Firmian over the pace and implementation of reform in Milan, and their relationship soured further still when Verri went over Firmian's head to the emperor, to which Firmian (according to Verri) retaliated with unfounded accusations. But Verri may also have been jealous of Firmian's support for other Milanese intellectuals and writers. Joseph's low opinion of Firmian seems to have arisen as a consequence of his Italian visit in 1769, when (again according to Verri) the emperor pointedly snubbed Firmian at public events in Milan. Yet we also know from Maria Theresia's letters at this time that Firmian was ill during Joseph's visit, seriously enough that she recommended he stay at home to rest rather than going about his public duties. It may be, then, that if Joseph kept his distance from Firmian in public, as Verri reports, he did this in part from fear of contagion.

It is worth considering another potential factor that might have contributed to Verri and Joseph's dislike. Perhaps Firmian came across as somewhat effeminate, or at least outside the range of what they felt to be acceptable masculine behavior: in other words, perhaps Firmian presented as gay, in something like a modern sense. He need not have been actively homosexual for this to have been the case, and there could well have been a contributing biological basis for such behavior. In any case, it is not difficult to imagine that Joseph in particular—perhaps rather insecure in his own masculinity—would have found any hint of softness and flamboyance repellent in a man.

This is speculative, of course, but at least plausible. On the other hand, if Firmian did come across this way, it might well have contributed to the affection others felt for him.

Verri claimed that Firmian accomplished very little for Milan and Austrian Lombardy during his more than 20 years as de facto head of government. But this assessment is unjust. Over his long tenure, Firmian collaborated closely with Kaunitz in planning and implementing a wide range of reforms in a province still suffering from the long-term consequences of harsh and neglectful Spanish rule. Firmian played a role in instigating enlightened legal reforms, based in part on the ideas of Beccaria, and for a time Milan was even ahead of Vienna in its enlightened approach to crime and punishment. He also oversaw the reform of coinage and brought about improvements in instruction and faculty at the University of Pavia. When the Regio Ducal Teatro—the site of the premieres of Mozart's *Mitridate*, *Ascanio in Alba*, and *Lucio Silla*—burned down at the end of carnival season in 1776, it was under Firmian's government that La Scala was built to replace it. (On Firmian's accomplishments, see Arneth 1879, 192ff, and Garms-Cornides 1997.)

Verri, in a letter to his brother on 19 Sep 1772, implied that before the arrival of Archduke Ferdinand, Firmian had taken little part in Milanese public and social life, preferring to remain at home alone in his palace:

> Il signor conte di Firmian non vive più tanto solitario, va a Casa Litta, in Teatro si vede in qualche palco; questo è un bene, vedrà i Milanesi quali sono, non quali glieli dipingevano, si acquisterà sempre più l'affezione, che merita e dal canto suo si addomesticherà a noi. [Greppi & Giulini 1926, v:177]
>
> The Signor Count Firmian no longer lives such a solitary life. He goes to the Casa Litta and he is seen in several boxes at the theater. This is a good thing: he will see the Milanese as they are, not how they are depicted to him, he will acquire ever more affection, which he merits, and for his part he will grow accustomed to us.

Verri implies that for the previous thirteen years since Firmian's arrival in Milan, he had not been seeing the Milanese as they were because of his isolation. After Firmian's death, Verri's criticism became more direct; in a letter to his brother on 3 Jul 1782 (already quoted above), he wrote:

> Senza adulazione noi viviamo sotto un buon governo dal 1772 a questa parte; il Reale Arciduca quattro mesi dopo che fu qui ne sapeva più del Milanese che il defunto Ministro, il quale ne' dieci anni precedenti inaccessibile, invisibile, aveva abbandonato il destino della provincia nelle più abiette e venali mani sotto la sferza delle quali abbiamo dovuto gemere come sotto l'oppressione. [Seregni 1942, 337]
>
> Without exaggerating, since 1772 we have lived under a good government in these parts; the Royal Archduke knew more about the Milanese after having been here for four months than the late Minister, who in the preceding ten years was inaccessible, invisible, having abandoned the fate of the province to the most abject and venal hands, under the lash of which we had to groan as if under oppression.

But one suspects that Firmian avoided going out in public and socializing at least in part because of his chronic medical condition—and this may be one reason he developed an active social life in his own home, both in Milan and earlier in Naples. He may not have gone out often, but he was very often in company.

Firmian seems to have traveled little after settling in Italy, but he was remarkably cosmopolitan. He spoke and wrote in Italian, French, and German, almost certainly read Latin and ancient Greek, and was unusually widely read in English, although it is unclear whether he spoke the language. At his dinner parties, he regularly hosted visitors from England, France, Germany, and other regions of Italy. Although the point has received little attention, one of the most extraordinary aspects of his domestic social life is that his guests were predominantly non-aristocratic. Although a small number of those in his circle, such as Beccaria and Count Giorgio Giulini, were aristocrats by birth, the vast majority of those we know about were not. Firmian preferred the company of intellectuals, writers, and artists over that of his own class. This preference, rather radical in the context of the time, combined with his cosmopolitanism and hospitality to foreign guests, made Firmian an important local node in the wider network of the European enlightenment and a key figure in establishing Milan as a significant outpost of that enlightenment.

Firmian encouraged and provided practical support to some of the most important figures of the late eighteenth century, including Winckelmann, Beccaria, and Mozart. In a few cases, he went out of his way to take young talent under his wing, notably Knoller, Bonavia, Mozart, Ceracchi, and perhaps Angelika Kauffmann. Spotting and nurturing talent is itself a talent, and it may have been Firmian's greatest gift. Given that he is otherwise known to have shown relatively little interest in music, it is all the more remarkable that he so ardently took up Mozart's cause, and he arguably became the young composer's most proactive early supporter after Leopold Mozart. Firmian hosted several concerts for Mozart at his residence, he intermediated the contracts for *Mitridate*, *Ascanio in Alba*, and possibly also *Lucio Silla*, and it is likely that he promoted to Archduke Ferdinand the idea of hiring Mozart as his *maestro di capella*. That Ferdinand's mother Maria Theresia—apparently miffed that Mozart's *Ascanio* had outshone Hasse's opera at Ferdinand's wedding—ultimately undercut this last effort was not Firmian's fault. (On Mozart and Ferdinand, see our entry on *Ascanio in Alba*.) The article on Firmian in Grove Music Online (Wignall 2001) calls Firmian an "Austrian patron of music," but this is too broad: he was, from the standpoint of music history, a patron of *Mozart*.

At Firmian's, Mozart would have been exposed to leading intellectuals and writers of the Lombard Enlightenment and their conversations and concerns. He would also have been surrounded by the count's magnificent library and art collection. Perhaps most importantly, Firmian's support would have nurtured Mozart's sense of himself as a professional composer of Italian opera, one worthy of taking a place among the best in the genre. It is perhaps not too farfetched to imagine that Mozart's formative experiences under Firmian's wing in enlightened Milan were the seeds of the transcendental humanity of his later operas. What impact, if any, Firmian's homosociality may have had on Mozart remains unknown.

Giambattista Gherardo d’Arco, in his eulogy for Firmian published in 1783, described the count as:

> *[...]* quel compiuto Cavaliere, quel verace e sincero Mecenate, quell’Uomo di Stato zelante dotto e benefico; in una parola quel Ministro Sapiente che da tutti sempre e per ogni dove si è udito celebrare *[...]* [Arco 1783, 7]

> *[...]* that accomplished gentleman, that genuine and sincere patron, that zealous statesman, learned and liberal; in a word, that wise minister, who is celebrated by everyone always and everywhere *[...]*

It is hard to disagree.



(WienMuseum)

Notes (⇧)

Firmian’s letter to Doria Pamphilj was discovered by Claudio Annibaldi and first made public in 1991 (it is not mentioned in Annibaldi 1982). The letter is transcribed and discussed in Cimagalli 1996, and her transcription has subsequently been reproduced in various places, including Basso (2006, 72) and *Mozart & Material Culture*.

It is symptomatic of Firmian’s neglect by historians that his year of birth is most commonly given in reference works as 1716 when he was actually born in 1718. This error is found at least as early as Wurzbach (1858), and it is still propagated in *Grove Online* (Wignall 2001) and the *Salzburger Mozart Lexikon* (2005)—to name only two prominent musicological sources—even though the correct year is already given in Arco’s eulogy (Arco 1783, 9). Reference works nearly universally say that Firmian died on 20 Jul 1782, but he actually died on 20 *Jun* of that year. This error likewise goes back at least to Wurzbach, and is still found in the articles on Firmian in *Enciclopedia Italiana* (Ettore Rota, 1932, on Treccani), *Neue*

Deutsche Biographie (which, however, has the correct birth year), and all three Wikipedia articles on Firmian (it.wikipedia, de.wikipedia, en.wikipedia), among many others. There is also widespread confusion over Firmian’s first names: one most often sees “Karl Joseph” (or “Carlo Giuseppe”), but Garms-Cornides (1997 and elsewhere) gives “Carlo Gottardo,” and Arneth (1879, 159) gives “Karl Gotthard.” All of Firmian’s signatures that we have seen give simply “Carlo,” “Charles” (when he is writing in French), and “Carl” (when he is writing in German). The only fully reliable biographical reference on Firmian is Garms-Cornides 1997.

There is no full-scale biography of Firmian. Several previous writers have drawn on the extensive unpublished work on Firmian by Antonio Mazzetti in the Archivi Storici del Trentino. Mazzetti’s work was already mentioned by Glausen (1838, 17n1), and it has been referenced by Cantù (1854, 200–201n21), Benvenuti (1872, 5), Garms-Cornides, and others. The immediate inspiration for our present commentary is the “excursus” on Firmian in Wignall (1995, 110ff), “Mozart’s ‘Milanese Maecenas’.” Wignall writes (111–12): “A detailed biography of Firmian from the perspective of his crucial importance in the life of Mozart is long overdue.” Finding it still overdue in 2020, we have made an attempt here.

One of the most challenging aspects of working on Firmian is the lack of his own voice. He published nothing himself. Although a good deal of his correspondence survives, it is widely scattered, and most of what has been published consists of formal or professional correspondence, such as his letter of recommendation to Doria Pamphilj or his working correspondence with Kaunitz. It is unclear how many of Firmian’s personal letters survive. None of his correspondence with Winckelmann, which appears to have been frequent in the years 1758 to 1762, is known. A crucial starting place for any further work on Firmian would be a proper inventory of his letters.

At present, five letters of recommendation by Firmian for Mozart are known to survive:

- A letter of recommendation written on 14 Mar 1770 to Count Gian Luca Pallavicini-Centurione in Bologna (*Dokumente*, 100–101). Bologna, Archivio di Stato, Fondo Pallavicini, Serie III c), Busta 287, anno 1770.
- A similar letter of recommendation the same day to Guillaume de Tillot in Parma (mentioned in *Dokumente*, 101), apparently unpublished.
- The letter of recommendation transcribed here to Prince Doria Pamphilj in Rome, dated 4 Apr 1770.
- A newly discovered letter written that same day (subject of a future commentary on this site).
- A letter of recommendation dated 9 Jan 1771 to Count Lascaris di Castellar in Turin.

Mozart is also mentioned in four drafts of letters by Firmian involving the commission for *Ascanio in Alba* in 1771. All are discussed on this site:

- A letter dated 9 Feb 1771 to Count Sporck in Vienna suggesting Mozart as the composer for the serenata planned for the wedding of Archduke Ferdinand and Princess Beatrice d'Este.
- A letter dated 7 Mar 1771 to Count Salazar instructing him to write to Mozart in Verona informing him of the commission.
- A letter dated 9 Mar 1771 to Count Sporck in Vienna informing him that he is engaging Mozart for the composition of the serenata, and naming Giuseppe Parini as Frimian's choice to write the libretto.
- A letter date 19 Aug 1771 to Parini, asking him to make cuts to the libretto quickly, so that it will be ready when the Mozarts arrive in Milan.

There are references to several other letters by Firmian referring to Mozart that have not yet been found, although it seems likely that at least some survive. For example, Leopold Mozart refers to other letters of recommendation by Firmian in 1770 (including at least one to Naples), as well as a letter sent to Rome at the end of 1772 (*Briefe*, i:470).

The nature of Firmian's chronic illness, said by Garms-Cornides to be gastrointestinal, remains unknown; we have not yet been able to see the unpublished principal source that she mentions (1970, 141n64), a report on Firmian's health by Bolognese doctor Giacomo Bartolomeo Beccari, dated 21 Mar 1760 (Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 3491). The brief passage regarding Firmian's autopsy (quoted in the conclusion above from *Diario estero*) refers to polyps in the heart.

There are at least four additional portraits of Firmian by Martin Knoller, in addition to those discussed in the main text, all oil paintings. Baumgartl's **P 13** (reproduced as Baumgartl's plate 52d) is in the Castello del Buonconsiglio in Trent; the portrait, which is undated, shows Firmian with a much thinner face than other portraits, but the facial structure is recognizably the same and the identification seems certain. Baumgartl does not include images of the portraits **P 14** (in Innsbruck, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum) or **P 45** (private collection). The portrait **P 33b** is in the Museo di Palazzo Ducale in Mantua.



Martin Knoller, portrait of Count Firmian
Mantua, Palazzo Ducale
(LombardiaBeniCulturali)

It is one of a set, along with portraits of Kaunitz and Sperges, and it was probably painted after Firmian’s death.

Burney, in describing his tour of Firmian’s art collection, mentions having seen paintings by “Spagnoletto, Vinci, Guido, Coreggio, Titian, Paul Veronese, Salvator Rosa, Guercini, Rubens, Vandyke, Claude Lauraine etc etc” (Burney 1770, 60). The references are to Jusepa de Ribera (Spagnoletto), Leonardo da Vinci, Guido Reni, Correggio, Titian, Paolo Veronese, Salvator Rosa, Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (Guercino), Rubens, Anthony van Dyck, and Claude Lorrain. Of these, neither the *Gabinetto* nor the more complete “Catalogo” mention any original or copy of a painting by Correggio. An unidentified painting by Van Dyck is mentioned in the “Catalogo” as having been left to Count Wilczek (Ferrari 2012, 99).

In the main text, we quote a Latin dedication to Firmian from the book *Tyrolische Bergwerkgeschichte* by Joseph von Sperges. The dedication is transcribed from the entry in *Biblioteca Firmiana* (iii/1: 69). The only copy of this book that we have been able to find online, in the ÖNB, has no printed dedication, so it may be that the dedication reproduced in *Biblioteca Firmiana* was written by Sperges into Firmian’s personal copy.

Some sources give the name of Renata d’Harrach’s first husband as Count Antonio Maria Melzi d’Eyrl (Barblan & Della Croce 1956, 72; and here), others as Count Francesco Saverio Melzi (Treccani and Brambilla 1874). We have not tried to unravel this discrepancy here.

A detailed biography of Count Carlo Firmian’s brother Count Franz Laktanz from the perspective of his crucial importance in the life of Mozart is likewise long overdue. Franz Laktanz was a talented amateur artist, as well as a passionate art collector like his brother, and his creative streak could well have made him especially sympathetic to the Mozarts. (On Franz Laktanz as artist, see Husty 2008.)





Count Franz Laktanz von Firmian, (a) *Man with Red Wine*, (b) Self-portrait (etching) (Wikimedia Commons)

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This commentary is dedicated to the memory of Harrison Gradwell Slater.

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