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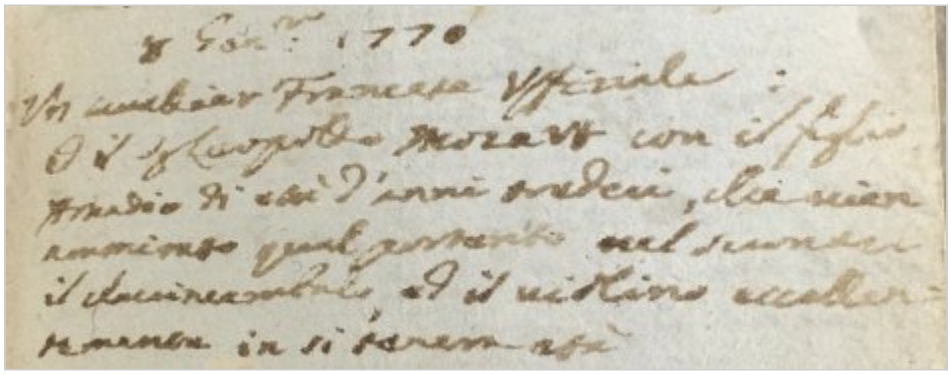
Mozart in the diary of Veronese painter Giambettino Cignaroli (8 Jan 1770)

Matteo Magarotto

Giambettino Cignaroli, *Memorie* [1754–1770]. Manuscript, Verona, Archivio eredi Monga, no. 416

8 Gen:^{io} 1770

[...]
ed il Sg Leopoldo Mozart con il figlio
Amadio di età d'anni tredici, che viene
ammirato qual portento nel suonare
il clavicembalo ed il violino eccellen=
temente in sì tenera età.



[translation:]

8 Jan 1770

[...]
and Mr. Leopold Mozart with his
thirteen-year-old son Amadio, who is
admired as a prodigy in playing the

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harpsichord and the violin so excellently
at such a tender age.

Commentary

Giambettino Cignaroli (1706–1770) was the foremost Veronese painter in the central decades of the eighteenth century. His output consisted mainly of sacred paintings and altarpieces, which he sold to churches and patrician houses in Verona and northern Italy (Bevilacqua 1771, 71–87). His personal diary, titled *Memorie*, was discovered in the private Archivio eredi Monga in Verona by Bruno Chiappa in the late 1990s (Chiappa 2011). On that occasion, Chiappa found another interesting document, which also bears on this discussion, the *Esatta nota distinta di tutti li quadri da me Saverio Dalla Rosa dipinti* (Precise and clear account of all the pictures painted by me, Saverio Dalla Rosa; Dalla Rosa 2011). Dalla Rosa was a pupil of Cignaroli and also his half-nephew.

Cignaroli's diary records notable visitors to his studio and their words of appreciation for his work. It appears that his fame was such that visitors to Verona were almost obliged to pay him homage; even Emperor Joseph II did so on 21 Jul 1769 (Chiappa 2011, 251). In this light, the Mozarts' visit is unsurprising.

However, both the document presented here and Dalla Rosa's *Esatta nota* are significant in relation to a portrait of Mozart painted (or at least begun) in Verona on Sat and Sun, 6–7 Jan 1770, at the home of the "Commissario Generale" of Venice, Pietro Lugiati—the Mozarts' Veronese host. (On the Mozarts in Verona, see also our entry for 5 Jan 1770.) The portrait, now in a private collection, shows Mozart wearing his favorite crimson coat with his fingers pressing the keys of a harpsichord and his head turned toward the observer (for a discussion of the sixteenth-century Celestini harpsichord in the painting, see Libin 2016). The legible score depicted on the stand shows the first 35 measures of an Allegro Molto in G major, generally thought to be by Mozart; the piece is not otherwise known and was listed as K. 72a by Alfred Einstein in his 1937 revision of the Köchel catalogue (see Eisen 2011 for a cautious perspective on Mozart's possible authorship of the piece and Magarotto 2017 for a hypothesis on the origins of the music).

The unsigned portrait has been attributed to Dalla Rosa (Brenzoni 1954), Cignaroli (Botteri Ottaviani 2006), or a collaboration between them (Heartz 1995). These attributions seem logical: not only was Cignaroli the preeminent artist in Verona, and Dalla Rosa his student, but Cignaroli was Lugiati's first cousin. Moreover, both artists are credible candidates on stylistic bases, as noted by art historian Andrea Tomezzoli of the Università degli Studi di Padova (personal communication). However, if Cignaroli had worked on the portrait on 6 and 7 Jan, why did he record meeting the Mozarts the next day, 8 Jan, in language suggesting this was his first encounter with them? Perhaps the Mozarts went to his studio for an additional sitting; but in such a case, why would Cignaroli fail to mention the portrait in his self-congratulatory diary?

Other arguments have been made against Cignaroli's authorship of the portrait (Brenzoni 1954, Brenzoni 1956): Bevilaqua's biography of Cignaroli (1771) includes a list of five pictures owned by Lugiati and the Mozart portrait is not among them. Given Cignaroli's reputation and his relation to the Veronese patron, it is strange that Lugiati did not mention the painter in his letter of 22 Apr 1770 to Mozart's mother, simply noting "I had [Mozart] painted from life" (*Briefe*, i: 340); likewise, a report of Mozart's Veronese concert of 5 Jan in the *Gazzetta di Mantova* acknowledges only that Lugiati "decided to have Mozart portrayed from life," without specifying a name for the artist (*Gazzetta di Mantova*, 12 Jan 1770; *Dokumente*, 95–96). Leopold Mozart, too, kept silent on the identity of the painter in his letter of 7 Jan 1770 to his wife (*Briefe*, i:299). Furthermore, Bevilacqua describes Cignaroli's aversion to portraiture, which is indeed scarce in his output (Bevilacqua 1771, 13).

There is evidence undermining Dalla Rosa's authorship as well. The "precise" and "clear" list of "all" his paintings lacks any reference to a Mozart portrait, as Botteri Ottaviani has also noted (2006, 114). Finally, two half-brothers of Giambettino Cignaroli—Giandomenico (1722–1793) and Fra' Felice (1726–1796)—were also painters, but their involvement with the Veronese portrait is unlikely for biographical and stylistic reasons (Tomezzoli, personal communication).

The mystery remains unsolved. The document reproduced here adds a piece of circumstantial evidence weakening the Cignaroli hypothesis. If he or his nephew did execute the portrait, it remains to be explained why a "conspiracy of silence" seems to have surrounded them (Heartz 1995, 13).

The meeting of the Mozarts with Cignaroli also explains why Leopold's list of acquaintances in his "Reisenotizen" from Verona includes "Sigr: Cignarolli pittore" (*Briefe*, i:303): the name does not "make it almost certain that the elderly painter did take a major hand in the portrait" (Heartz 1995, 14), but instead suggests simply that the Mozarts paid a visit to the city's artistic celebrity.

Cignaroli died in Dec of the same year, 1770. The Mozarts presumably learned about this in Mar 1771 when they were again hosted by Lugiati on their way back to Salzburg. Leopold added a cross in his travel notes next to the name of the famous painter.

Whoever the painter may have been, this portrait remains one of the most famous images of Wolfgang. Long in the estate of pianist Alfred Cortot, the portrait was sold by Christie's in Paris on 27 Nov 2019 for € 4,031,500.

Notes (⇧)

This document has been quoted in the original Italian by Chiappa (2011, 251) and Paola Marini (Dalla Rosa 2011, 15). That transcription has been slightly amended here, based on the image of the original document reproduced above.

We are grateful to Andrea Tomezzoli for the photograph of Cignaroli's entry on the Mozarts. An edition of Cignaroli's *Memorie* has recently been published (Chiappa & Tomezzoli 2017).

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