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Count Firmian recommends Mozart to Count Lascaris di Castellar (9 Jan 1771)

Dexter Edge

Turin, Archivio di Stato, Corte; Paesi, Milanese, Lettere diverse, m. 13

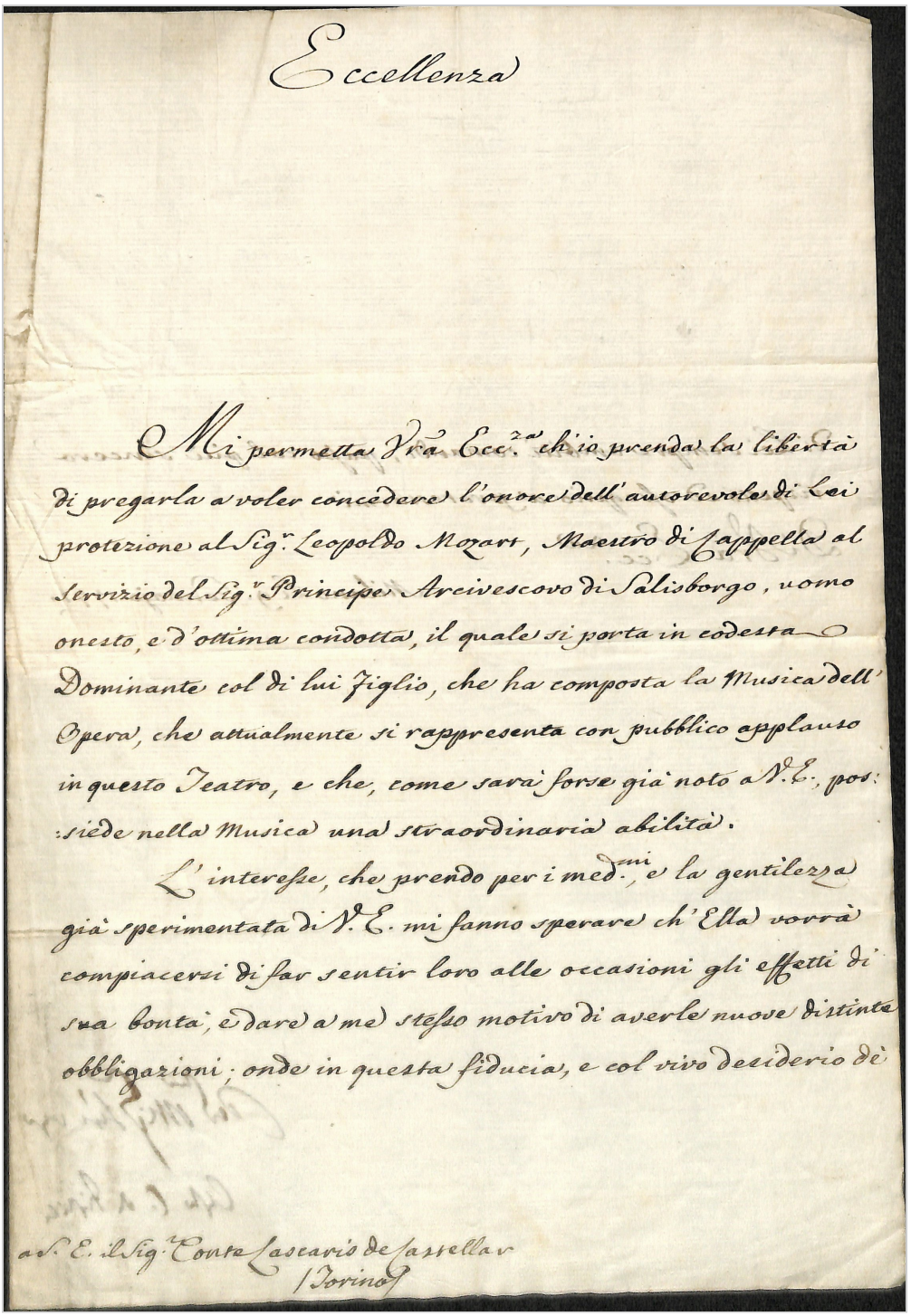
[1]

Eccellenza

Mi permetta V[ost]ra Ecc.[za] ch’io prenda la libertà
di pregarla a voler concedere l’onore dell’autorevole di Lei
protezione al Sig.[r] Leopoldo Mozart, Maestro di Cappella al
Servizio del Sig.[r] Principe Arcivescovo di Salisborgo, uomo
onesto, e d’ottima condotta, il quale si porta in codesta
Dominante col di lui Figlio, che ha composta la Musica dell’
Opera, che attualmente si rappresenta con pubblico applauso
in questo Teatro, e che, come sarà forse già noto a V. E., pos=
siede nella Musica una straordinaria abilità.

L’interesse, che prendo per i med.[mi], e la gentilezza
già sperimentata di V. E. mi fanno sperare ch’Ella vorrà
compiacersi di far sentir loro alle occasioni gli effetti di
sua bontà, e dare a me stesso motivo di averle nuove distinte
obbligazioni; onde in questa fiducia, e col vivo desiderio di

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Eccellenza

Mi permetta Vra. Ecc.za ch'io prenda la libertà di pregarla a voler concedere l'onore dell'autorevole di Lei protezione al Sig.r Leopoldo Mozart, Maestro di Cappella al servizio del Sig.r Principe Arcivescovo di Salisborgo, uomo onesto, e d'ottima condotta, il quale si porta in codesta Dominante col di lui figlio, che ha composta la Musica dell'Opera, che attualmente si rappresenta con pubblico applauso in questo Teatro, e che, come sarà forse già noto a V.E., possiede nella Musica una straordinaria abilità.

L'interesse, che prendo per i med.mi, e la gentilezza già sperimentata di V.E. mi fanno sperare ch'Ella vorrà compiacersi di far sentir loro alle occasioni gli effetti di sua bontà, e dare a me stesso motivo di averle nuove distinte obbligazioni; onde in questa fiducia, e col vivo desiderio di

a V.E. il Sig.r Conte Lascaris de Castellar
Torino

[2]

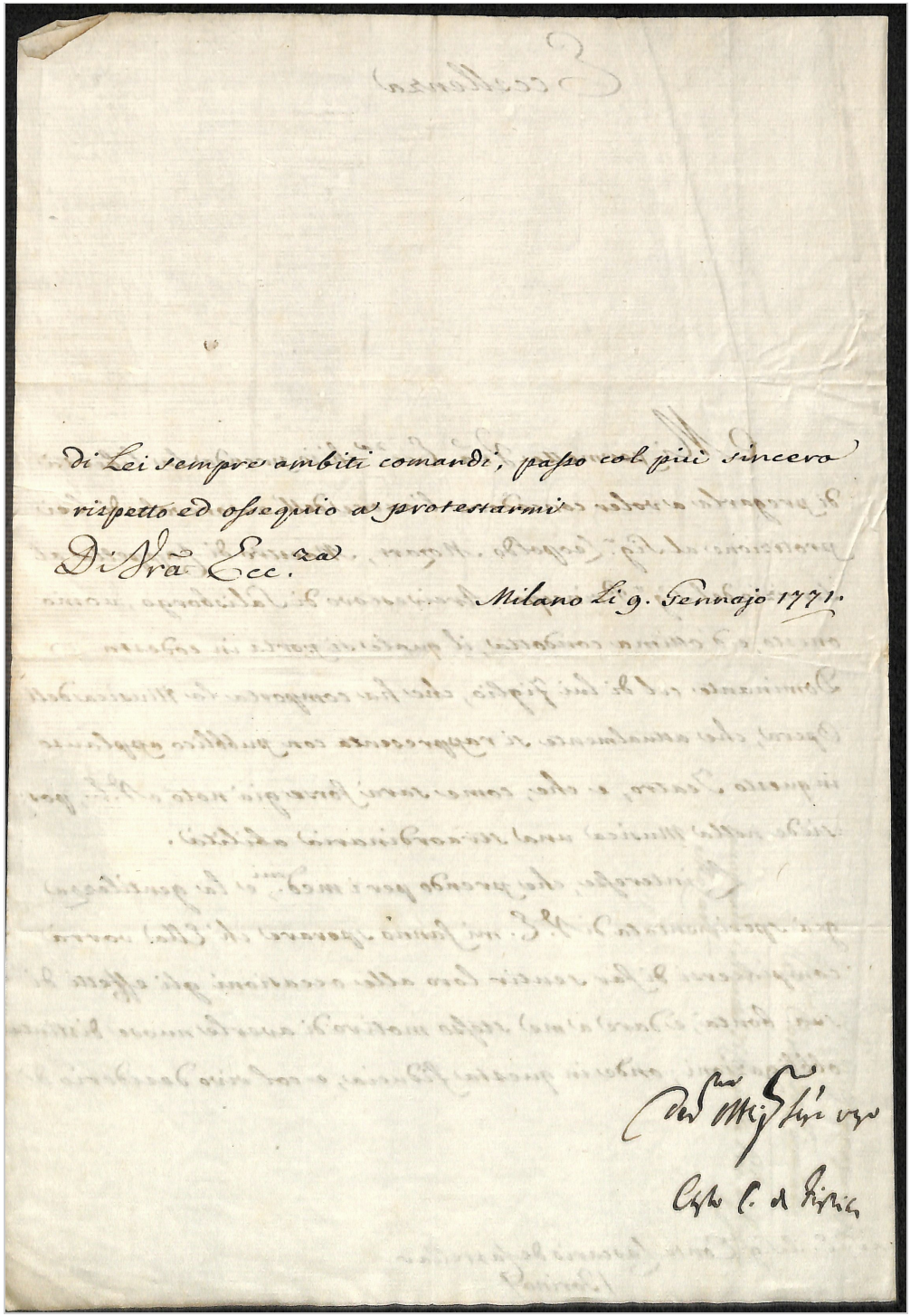
di Lei sempre ambiti comandi, passo col più sincero
rispetto ed ossequio a protestarmi

Di V[ost]ra Ecc.za.

Milano Li 9. Gennajo 1771.
Dev[otissi]^mo Osseq[uientissi]mo Servitor Vostro
Conte C. d Firmian

[bottom of page 1]

a S. E. il Sig.r Conte Lascaris di Castellar
/ Torino /



[translation:]

[translation by DE:]

Excellency

If Your Excellency will permit me to take the liberty of requesting that you will grant the honor of the authority of Your protection to Sig. Leopold Mozart, Maestro di Cappella in the service of the Prince Archbishop of Salzburg, an honest man of very good conduct, who is coming to that capital city with his son, who has composed the music of the opera that is currently being performed to public applause in this theater, and who, as Your Excellency may already be aware, possesses an extraordinary ability in music.

The interest that I take in them and the kindness already experienced from Your Excellency give me hope that You will be pleased to make them feel on this occasion the effects of your goodness, and give me cause for new distinct obligations to you; therefore in this confidence, and with genuine desire always to be at at your command, I close with the most sincere respect and humility in declaring myself

Your Excellency's

Milan, 9 January 1771.
Most devoted and humble Servant
Count C[arlo] di Firmian

To His Excellency Sig. Count Lascaris di Castellar
/ Turin /

Commentary

After the successful premiere of *Mitridate* in Milan on 26 Dec 1770, Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart traveled to Turin, departing on 14 Jan 1771 and returning on 31 Jan. Because Leopold sent no letters from Turin and wrote little about the trip before or after, its purpose was long obscure. In the mid 1990s, Harrison James Wignall (later Harrison Gradwell Slater) published two newly discovered letters showing that the principal reason for the trip may have been to try to secure a contract for Wolfgang to compose a carnival opera for the Teatro Regio in Turin. This goal is documented most clearly in a letter dated 26 Jan 1771 from Carlo Flaminio Raiberti in Turin responding to one from Antonio Greppi in Milan (see our entry for that date). The other letter, transcribed above, from Count Carlo di Firmian in Milan to Count Lascaris di Castellar in Turin, does not explicitly mention an opera commission, but Raiberti's letter of 26 Jan suggests that Castellar, too, may have played a role in these negotiations. Firmian's letter to Castellar was first transcribed and published in facsimile by Wignall in *Mozart Studien* in 1997. As was his

usual practice, Firmian's letter was written out by one of his secretaries, but signed by him personally.

The Mozarts' first visit to Milan lasted from 23 Jan to 15 Mar 1770 (see our entry for 4 Apr 1770). After signing a contract on 14 Mar to compose the first carnival opera for the following season—the opera that became *Mitridate*—Leopold and Wolfgang departed the following day. Following stops in Parma, Modena, Bologna, and Florence, they continued south to Rome, arriving there on 11 Apr (Wednesday of Holy Week) and leaving on 8 May. They then went on to Naples, remaining there six weeks (14 May–25 Jun), before returning for a brief second visit to Rome (27 Jun–10 Jul), where Pope Clement XIV made Wolfgang a Knight of the Order of the Golden Spur. The Mozarts continued north via an indirect scenic route to Bologna. They stayed around seven weeks at the estate of Count Gian Luca Pallavicini-Centurione outside that city (on Pallavicini, see our entry for 27 Dec 1769). At Pallavicini's, Wolfgang began work on *Mitridate* and Leopold slowly recovered from a serious leg injury that he had suffered in a carriage accident during their rapid trip from Naples to Rome at the end of July. The Mozarts returned to Milan on 18 Oct 1770, where Wolfgang completed *Mitridate*, in preparation for its premiere on 2 Dec (on *Mitridate* and its reception, see our entry for 16 Jan 1771). Firmian's letter of recommendation to Castellar refers to the opera's reception in Milan:

> [Mozart] ha composta la Musica dell' Opera, che attualmente si rappresenta con pubblico applauso in questo Teatro *[...]*
>
> [Mozart] composed the music of the opera that is currently being performed to public applause in the theater here *[...]*

Until Wignall's discovery, all that was known about the Mozarts' trip to Turin came from brief references in Leopold's letters before and after the trip, and from his travel notes. Leopold had originally planned to go to Turin earlier in their Italian journey, but he ended up postponing that trip so that they would be able to arrive in Rome during Holy Week (Easter fell on 15 Apr in 1770). On 10 Feb 1770 he wrote to his wife from Milan:

> Nun verdrüsst mich, daß ich nicht weis, ob wir noch nach Turin gehen werden. denn, wenn wir auf die Heilige Woche in Rom seyn wollen, so muß die Turiner= reise zurückbleiben, weil wir uns auf dem Weeg nach Rom, in Parma, Bologna und Florenz aufhalten, und ich vorsehe, daß vor der ersten fastenwoche nicht von hier wegkommen kann. [*Briefe*, i:313]
>
> Now it vexes me that I do not know whether we will still go to Turin. For if we want to be in Rome by Holy Week, then the Turin trip must be left behind, because on the way to Rome we are stopping in Parma, Bologna, and Florence, and I foresee that we will not be able to get away from here before the first week in Lent.

Turin is about 140 km (85 miles) west-southwest of Milan, and (crucially for Leopold's planning) not at all on their way to Rome, which required them first to travel southeast from Milan to Parma and Bologna, before heading south to Florence, and then on to Rome.

The idea of a trip to Turin may not have been revived until after the premiere of *Mitridate*. On 5 Jan 1771, the day after Wolfgang performed at a small concert at Count Firmian's, Leopold wrote to his wife from Milan:

> Heute speisen wir wiederum bey Sr: Excll; und kommenden 11ten oder 12ten werden wir nach Turin gehen, uns aber nur etwa 8 Tage alda aufhalten und dann nach Mayland zurücke kehren, wo wir erst alles recht zusamm packen, und nach Venedig gehen werden. Es wird aber unser Aufenthalt in Mayland alsdann doch über 4 Täge sich nicht erstrecken: und dann werden wir die 2:te Opera hier aufführen sehen. [*Briefe*, i:414]
>
> Today we dined once again at His Excellency's; and this coming 11th or 12th we will go to Turin, but will stay there only around a week and then return to Milan, where we then have to pack up everything properly, and go to Venice. But then our stay in Milan will not last more than 4 days: and then we will see the 2nd opera performed here.

The "2nd opera" was Monza's *La Nitteti*. A week later, on 12 Jan, he wrote:

> Wir gehen erst den kommenden Montag nach Turin. *[...]*
>
> S:r Ex: Gr: Firmian sind nach Parma verreiset, und da H: Troger mit ihm ist, und wir itzt nach Tourin gehen, so werden wir wohl deine Briefe späth in die Hände bekommen. *[...]* [*Briefe*, i:415]
>
> We are not going to Turin until this coming Monday. *[...]*
>
> His Excellency Count Firmian has gone to Parma, and Herr Troger is with him, so we will probably receive your letters late. *[...]*

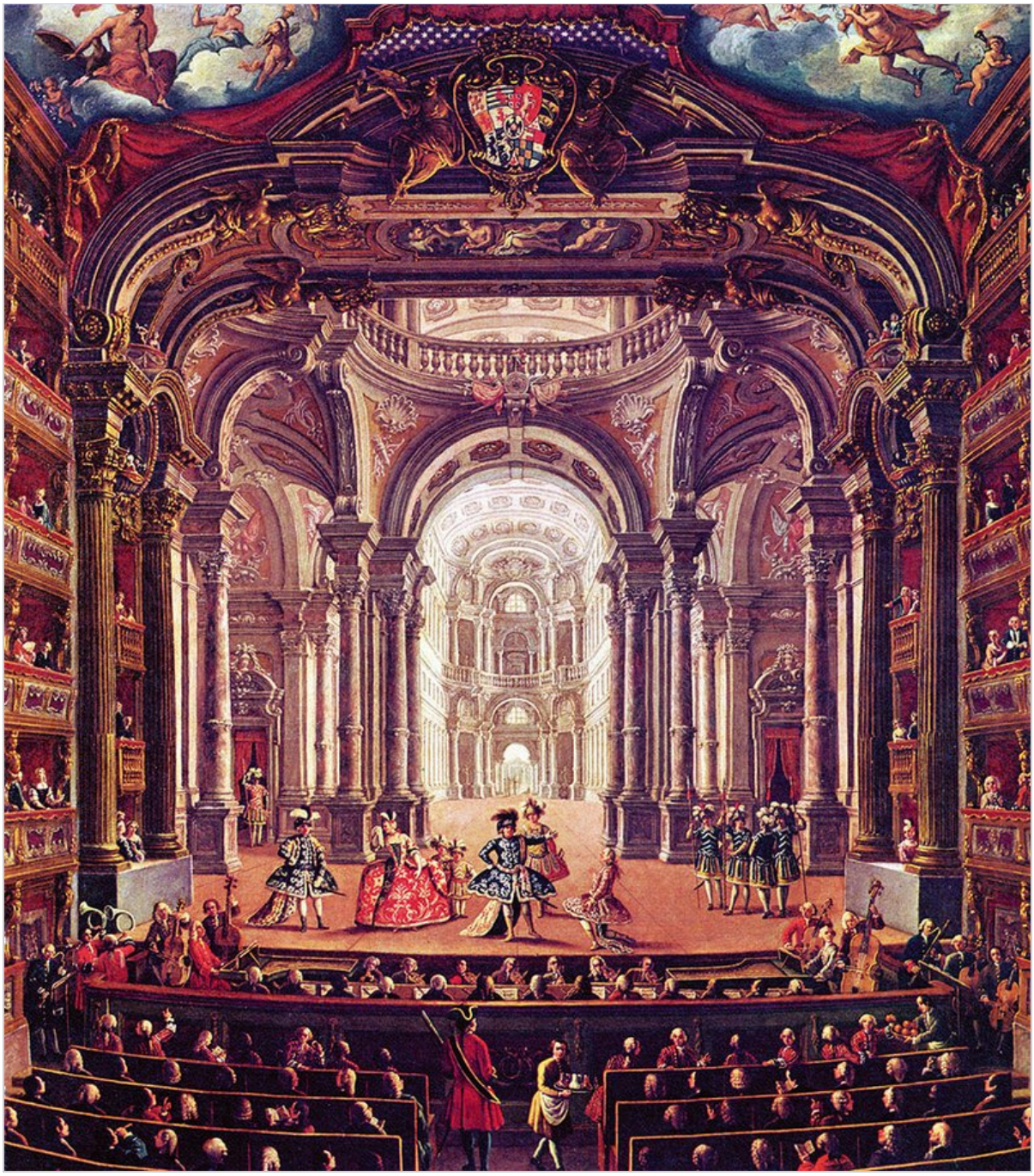
"This coming Monday" was 14 Jan 1770. Leopold is implying that Firmian's secretary Leopold Troger would otherwise have been receiving Maria Anna Mozart's letters and perhaps forwarding them on to Leopold and Wolfgang—but because Troger was away, he would not be doing this. Leopold's letter also shows that Firmian had left for Parma before 12 Jan, and this explains the slightly early date of Firmian's letter of recommendation to Castellar, 9 Jan, five days before the Mozarts left for Turin.

Leopold sent no letters from Turin, perhaps concerned for the privacy of anything he might send from that city, which was something of a police state. In his letter of 2 Feb, the first after their return, he writes:

> Ich habe 4 Brief von dir erhalten, und du wirst 2 Posttäge von mir nichts gesehen, aber dir auch eingebildet haben, daß wir durch die Turinerreise zu schreiben verhindert worden. Den 31ten Jenner sind wir glück: aus dieser schönen Statt zurückgekommen. wo wir eine recht Prächtige opera gesehen. seiner zeit wirst du alles hören. schreibe ins Künftige nach Venedig an H: Wider. Wir speisten heut bey Sr: Excellz Gr: Firmian. *[...]* [*Briefe*, i:416–17]

> I have received 4 letters from you, and you will have seen nothing from me for two post days, but you will have realized that we were prevented from writing by the Turin trip. On 31 January we returned safely from that beautiful city, where we saw a magnificent opera. In due course you will hear everything. In the future, write to Herr Wider in Venice. Today we dined with His Excellency Count Firmian. *[...]*

That is the last we hear from Leopold about the trip to Turin. In his travel notes for that city, the first name Leopold records is "Conte de Lascaris," the addressee of Firmian's letter of recommendation. The second name is "Cavaliere Raiberti"—that is, Carlo Flaminio Raiberti, who responded to a letter from Antonio Greppi about Mozart (see our entry for 26 Jan 1771). Raiberti may have been the Mozarts' principal contact to the Nobile Società dei Cavalieri in Turin, which was responsible for all aspects of the productions in the Teatro Regio, including commissions.



Giovanni Michele Graneri, attr., Interior of the Teatro Regio in Turin
(Wikimedia Commons)

Operas were performed in the Teatro Regio only during carnival season (26 Dec until Shrove Tuesday, the day before the beginning of Lent), and just as in Milan, the theater in Turin programmed only two opere serie each season. The "magnificent opera" that the Mozarts saw in Turin would have been the second carnival opera that season, Paisiello's *Annibale in Torino*, setting a libretto by Jacopo Durandi. (On opera in the Teatro Regio at this time, see principally Butler 2000 and Butler 2001.)


ANNIBALE
IN TORINO
DRAMMA PER MUSICA
DA RAPPRESENTARSI
NEL REGIO TEATRO
DI TORINO
NEL CARNOVALE DEL 1771.
ALLA PRESENZA
DI S. S. R. M.
TORINO. NELLA STAMPERIA MAIRESSE.
A spese di Onorato Derossi Librajo della Società de' Signori Cavalieri sotto i primi Portici. della Contrada di Po.

Title page of *L'Annibale in Torino* (Turin 1771)
(Library of Congress, Schatz Collection)

The recipient of Firmian's letter of recommendation, Count Giuseppe Vincenzo Francesco Maria Lascaris di Castellar (1729–1793), was a career diplomat for the court in Turin, and later a high official there (on Castellar see Stumpo 1978; also Rizzuti & Mortarotti 2006). While still a student he had been named Sardinian ambassador to the court of Saxony, and he was subsequently ambassador to the court of Hannover, then to the United Provinces. From 1760 to 1770 he was stationed in Naples. On 5 Dec 1770 he was named first secretary for foreign affairs in Turin, replacing Raiberti, who had held that position pro tempore since the death of Count Francesco di Viry in 1766 (Stumpo 1978). Thus Castellar had been in this new job for just a little over a month when the Mozarts arrived in Turin. However, Firmian's letter of recommendation implies (rather circuitously) that Castellar may already have heard Wolfgang ("che, come sarà forse già noto a V. E., possiede nella Musica una straordinaria abilità") before they arrived in Turin, and this is entirely possible: Castellar would have had several opportunities to hear him during the Mozarts' visit to Naples in May and June 1770. Castellar's name appears in Leopold's travel notes for both cities:

Napoli [...]
Il Sgr: Conte Lascario Ministro etc: di S: M: il Ré di Sardegna [*Briefe*, i:362]

Torino [...]
Conte di Lascaris [*Briefe*, i:416]

Firmian is known to have given the Mozarts one or more letters of recommendation to take to Naples (although none have been found), and we have suggested elsewhere that Castellar might have been one possible recipient (see our entry for 4 Apr 1770). So it is possible that Firmian and Castellar had previously been in touch about Wolfgang.

It is unclear whether Firmian knew Castellar personally. Firmian had been Habsburg minister plenipotentiary to the court in Naples from 1754 until Nov 1758, but he did not overlap with Castellar, who arrived there only in 1760. Castellar was a serious *letterato* and published numerous poems and at least one translation over the course of his career, so Firmian might have known him and corresponded with him in that regard. But it may simply be that Firmian wrote to Castellar in Turin on the Mozarts’ behalf because he knew that they had already met Castellar in Naples and he was their most highly-placed contact in Turin.

Firmian does not directly mention an opera commission in his letter to Castellar, but perhaps as a hint he alludes to the success of Wolfgang’s *Mitridate* in Milan. Castellar is not known to have been a member of the Nobile Società dei Cavalieri, the body that decided on opera commissions in Turin, and at the time of the Mozarts’ visit he had not, in any case, been in Turin long enough to become a member. But Raiberti’s letter to Greppi on 26 Jan 1771 implies that Castellar had already spoken to the Società about Wolfgang.

Raiberti’s letter to Greppi states that contracts had already been assigned for the two operas for carnival 1771–1772 in Turin—and this was almost certainly true—but he is encouraging about Wolfgang’s prospects for the \following season. But in the event, Mozart never received a commission from Turin; potential reasons are discussed in our entry for 26 Jan 1771.

Notes (⇧)

Raiberti’s letter to Greppi (see our entry for 26 Jan 1771) refers to Firmian’s letter to Castellar, and this reference was the clue that led Wignall to find it. Firmian’s letter was first published by Wignall in 1997 (154 and plates 5 & 6). It is not in *Neue Folge*, but it has subsequently been republished in various places, including Basso (2006, 84–85). Apart from our treatment of abbreviations, which differs from Wignall’s, and minor issues of punctuation, our transcription is identical to his. The new translation here is by DE.

Castellar, following the usual protocol of the time, would almost certainly have responded to Firmian’s letter of recommendation for Mozart, but no such letter is currently known.

Wignall (1997, 143) places the Mozarts’ departure for Turin on 15 Jan (Tuesday), but there is no evidence to suggest that they did not leave on “Montag,” 14 Jan, as Leopold writes in his letter of 12 Jan (*Briefe*, i: 414). Wignall gives 14 Jan in his dissertation (Wignall 1995, 95).

We are grateful to the Archivio di Stato in Turin for providing the fine color image of Firmian’s letter. We would also like to thank Stefano Frega for his essential research assistance, Anne-Louise Luccarini for

reading a draft of this entry and her advice on the translation of Firmian’s letter, and Janet Page for reading and commenting on the draft.

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Credit: Harrison James Wignall (Harrison Gradwell Slater)

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