

# The failure of Brotherly love?

IN THE SECOND PART OF HIS STUDY INTO THE BROTHERS AMATI,  
ROGER HARGRAVE EXAMINES NEWLY

TRANSLATED DOCUMENTS WHICH THROW THE SPLIT BETWEEN AN-  
TONIO & HIERONYMUS INTO FOCUS.

As kids, my brother and I would fight, like violin teachers over a commission, whenever we felt that one had been given a bigger portion than the other. Until, that is, my mother, sublime in her pragmatism, set new rules for the game. We were devastated by the simplicity of her stratagem one divides the other chooses. Although we agonised over the process every time, we had to suffer in silence; there were no grounds left for argument. Readers who have been waiting with baited breath for the final installment of the Amati saga will be wondering what kind of 'preamble to a tale' this is...

On the 20 and 23 December 1588, the family Amati sat down together to ratify two documents, both of which were drawn up by the notary Ippolito Bianchi di Cantarini. These seemingly illegible documents have recently been translated, first into Latin and then into English by Eric Poole of Canterbury. Unfortunately and this is no reflection on Mr Poole the text in any language is 'lawspeak'. In other words it is full of commas and never quite gets to the point. Graciously Mr Poole agreed to make a further colloquial translation for the benefit of myself and other simple STRAD readers.

These documents are quite extensive. The first is 22 pages long and the second ten. They are not entirely new to Amati archivists. They have, however, only been fleetingly referred to in various publications in the past. Because of the poor quality of the original papers there are still a number of gaps in the text and some work still needs to be done to try and fill these spaces. I do not intend, therefore, to reproduce the entire text here, much of which is, in any case, relatively unimportant to the context of this article. However, several interesting details have emerged.

I have compiled a list of events surrounding the lives of the Amati brothers, which may help us to understand some of the idiosyncrasies of the work manufactured under the 'Brothers' label. The details recorded here have been prepared using information gleaned from the two 1588 documents, to which I have also added some of the previously available information.

Until recently what we knew about the Amati family has been based upon the works of three long dead researchers. The first was Monsignor Gaetano Bazzi, secretary to the Archbishop of Cremona, who did the archival researches for Giovanni Piccolelli's work *Liutai Antichi a Moderni* (pub. Florence 1885). Unfortunately, Bazzi confused two separate Amati families: the noble de Amatis and the Amati family of liutari fame. Nonetheless, Piccolelli's book laid the foundations.

The Hill researchers for the Violin makers of the Guarneri family pub. 1931, touched on the Amatis while looking into the question of Andrea Guarneri's apprenticeship. This work was done by Giovanni Livi.

The third researcher was Carlo Bonetti. Bonetti's book *La Geneologia degli Amati Liutai a It Primato della Scula Liutistica Cremona* was published in Cremona in 1938.<sup>1</sup> He corrected many of the mistakes made by Bazzi in mixing up the two families of Amati. Bonetti also knew of and quoted pieces of the two 1588 documents. However, as I pointed out in my previous articles, Bonetti was something of a fanatical patriot and this may have tainted some of his observations.

Understandably, the researches of these three worthies mostly relate to Nicola Amati. This is simply be-

cause more documentary evidence is available for these later years. I shall discuss the work of modern researchers at the end of this article. However, I should point out that their work has been invaluable in the compilation of this series.

Andrea Amati was born before 1505 and died on December 26, 1577. His two sons Antonio and Girolamo were named as his heirs. We do not yet know the name of Andrea's wife nor the exact location of his shop. Andrea had three daughters. We know little about these daughters other than their names and the dates of their marriages: Appolonia Amati was married in July 1553 at the age of at least 17. Elisabetta Amati was married in 1556 and Valeria was married three times in 1580, 1587 and 1593. The dates of these marriages are important because they give some indication as to the ages of these sisters of the 'Brothers' Amati. Their ages are particularly important in connection with Girolamo Amati's age.

Antonio Amati, the first of the brothers, was born circa 1540. Bonetti states that Antonio was described as a lute maker in 1556. 'He must have been at least 16 years old and born in 1540 at the latest and probably a few years earlier, between 1537 and 1540, after Appolonia...'

Antonio's older sister Appolonia was at least 17 years old in 1553, according to Bonetti: 'If we perform calculations, Appolonia was at least 17 years old in 1553; the nine months of pregnancy gives 18. But since 1553 - 18 = 1535, we must conclude that she was born in 1535 and that Antonio, her brother, was already married in 1535 or at least of marriageable age.'

The significance of Appolonia's birth date being 1535 and also that of Antonio in 1540 or earlier is very important when we consider the date of birth of Girolamo Amati. Bonetti states that Girolamo was born in 1561. He establishes this date with a document dated 1584:

The document from the Cremona Archives, which was seemingly illegible before Eric Poole deciphered it late last year

'A power of attorney, drawn up in the house of Roberto on June 9, 1584 (notary Pietro Boschetti), gives us the age of Girolamo Amati. He was 23 years old (1584 - 23 = 1561). Thus he was born in 1561, and since he died on 2 November 1630 he lived to be 69 years old. This would mean that Girolamo was born at least 26 years after his elder sister Appolonia and at least 21 years after Antonio.'

I have already pointed out that we do not know the name of Andrea's wife but she must have been a fairly substantial woman to have had children at least 26 years apart! This begs two questions: was Andrea Amati married more than once and if so, were Antonio and Girolamo only half brothers? If they were, this might explain why they were both named heirs to Andrea, even though Antonio was at least 37 years

accepted documents will require re checking. A mammoth job!

Girolamo's first marriage to Lucrezia de Cornetis produced two, possibly three, daughters: Elisabetta (who was recorded as living in Nicola Amati's house in 1641-45 - see THE STRAD poster March 1992) Faustina and/or Caterina Guistina. The a 1588 document refers to Guistina and Elisabetta as the daughters of Girolamo and Lucrezia. Bonetti, however, questions Guistina, referring instead to Faustina (another problem for another day). According to the 1588 document Guistina and Elisabetta were born between 1580-4. Lucrezia, Girolamo's first wife died in 1583. On the 4 May 1584 Girolamo remarried to Laura de Medici Lazzarini.

The first part of the 1588 documents concern the dowries of the two wives of Girolamo to which, it seems, Antonio had a claim. The total for both dowries came to 2,800. On 20 December 1588 Antonio agreed to pay half of this 2,800 to Hieronymus and Laura for the benefit of Hieronymus's two daughters by his first marriage, Guistina and Elisabetta. In consideration of this, Hieronymus conveyed to Antonio his half share in a house also in the tiny parish of San Faustino. (This may yet prove to be Antonio's separate house and workshop.)

The brothers then agreed upon the terms for splitting the workshop. For all his long winded legal jargon, what their notary had to offer my mother would have summed up in five words: One divides, the other chooses: 'And also, subject as aforesaid, the said brothers, on mutual interrogation and at each others' instance, have agreed between themselves that the said Hieronymus shall and ought to make a division in two parts of the tools [and] models of each kind, and of all other things whatsoever for the use of their trade and shop, and also of the movable property and the things which they won jointly, for the whole of Thursday next to come and that the said Antonio also, on the Friday next to come, may choose that part which shall seem pleasing to him and thereupon the other part may and shall remain to the said Hieronymus and thereupon each of them shall have their same portions and may dispose of them at will.'

Apart from the workshop the document refers to the division of '...gold and some other things which they held in common and which were divided.' They further agreed to renounce things '...to which the brothers themselves, stipulating in turn, promised to attend and observe, for each other.' And also 'retrospective dealings and acts'. All of these agreements,



old and Girolamo still only 16 at the time of their father's death.

The question of Girolamo's birth is still far more complicated than might be imagined. Bonetti provides documentary evidence that Girolamo was married to his first wife, Lucrezia de Cornetis, in 1574. He also confirms that Girolamo consummated the marriage. However, if we do our sums we can quickly work out that if Girolamo had been born in 1561 he would only have been 13 years old at the time of his first marriage. Clearly something is not quite right here. It may just be possible that Girolamo's marriage was consummated at the age of 13, but it does not seem likely.

There are further documentary sources, referring to the religious confirmation of Girolamo's daughters, which also indicate that Girolamo must have been born before 1561. I have included this little mix up in order to illustrate just one of the many problems which face archivists. In order to correct this mistake (if indeed there is one) all of the previously



made under the threat of financial penalties, point towards a fairly radical split between the brothers. The division of the tools, patterns and workshop fittings seem to indicate that Antonio intended to continue working and making instruments.

What becomes clear from these documents is that Antonio also sold Hieronymus his rights to the house and workshop which they had previously shared. Earlier authors had concluded that the brothers had continued to work together in this house. This would appear not to have been the case. Antonio was given the right to use the shop and house only for the next two months. In the meantime, Hieronymus could work his trade there but could not sell anything. At the end of the two months, Hieronymus was to have sole ownership and sole use of the shop.

It seems then that the brothers did not work together again after 1588 in spite of the labels indicating that this was so. In fact, although Antonio died by accounts quite suddenly in 1607 on 4 March the 'Brothers' labels continued to be used until 1630 when Hieronymus died of the plague. It is always possible that they continued to market their work together, but in the absence of further evidence we can only speculate. There are still many unanswered questions surrounding the work of the curious Brothers Amati. A further 'spanner in the works' comes with the discovery of three other documents referring to a second Andrea Amati who was also a luthier. The first docu-

ment dated 6 May 1610 relates to the baptism of the daughter of this Andrea Amati II. The daughter was born on 4 May and was called Claudia. The death of the same child was registered 29 days later on 2 June. On 10 April 1611 Andrea's 19 year old wife with the beautiful name of Angiola de Miglio also died. These

tragic events are the only evidence of Andrea Amati II's existence. Who he was and what role he played in the Amati saga remains to be discovered.

**In terms of sheer beauty, that beauty which belongs to innocence and youth, the whole Amati family outrank and outshine all others.**



The violino piccolo by the Brothers Amati, 1613, now at the Shrine to Music Museum: probably the most complete, unaltered violin family instrument to have survived from Classical Cremona.

Altogether Hieronymus fathered at least seven daughters and four sons. The first of the known sons, Roberto, died in 1615 aged 27 on a boat on the River Po. He was at the time doing military service. It could well be that Roberto had made some contribution to the Amati workshop, he was certainly old enough. The second son, Francesco Alessandro, was born in 1590 but we have as yet no record of his death. The third son, Nicola, was born on 3 December 1596 and was to become the most famous of the Amati family of violin makers (see THE STRAD March 1992). Faustino Hieronymus, the last of the brothers, was only five years and nine months old when he died. What part Roberto and Francesco Alessandro, or indeed their sisters, might have played in the day to day running of the Amati business may yet be disclosed. Although a clearer picture is slowly beginning to emerge about the lives of the Amatis, there is still a long way to go.

Some have doubts about the value of such documen-

tary evidence. They maintain that it is the instruments themselves which are of importance and not how many daughters each maker had. I would, however, respectfully suggest that such details can help us to understand, appreciate and even appraise the instruments of the great makers in greater depth. All of the great experts agree that several hands are apparent in those works bearing Brothers Amati labels. Perhaps, in the long term, such research will help experts to make more accurate decisions about who made what and why.

It remains to be pointed out that there are a small number of labels, perhaps no more than half a dozen, which bear the name of Hieronymus Amati alone. These labels appear to be from around 1604 to 1607, the time of the death of Antonio. There exists at least one instrument bearing an apparently good Antonio Amati label. Although this instrument appears to be of the Amati school the work is noticeably cruder than any 'normal' Brothers instrument might be expected to be. I would be grateful to hear from readers who know of any similar authentic labels. (I should also be interested to hear from any reader with a fine example of Hieronymus II's work.)

Whoever was responsible for the instruments produced under the Brothers Amati labels between 1580 and 1630 it is certain that a large number and a large variety were made. I included here and in my last article photographs of a strange bass viol with some features of a cello, housed in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. This instrument has the same 'M' shaped brand which I mentioned in the first part of this article. It has a Brothers Amati label dated 1611. Also included here are photographs of the curious violino piccolo dated 1613. This is probably the most complete, unaltered violin family instrument to have survived from Classical Cremona. The purpose of this instrument is still a source of some debate among musicologists; it seems certain that it was not intended as a child's violin<sup>2</sup>. A strange instrument bearing a 1607 Hieronymus Amati label exists which has been set up as a *lira de bratsche* <sup>3</sup>. It probably began life as something else; the body length of this instrument is 36.8cm. From these few examples it is obvious that some experimental work was being carried out by the brothers either individually or in their workshop(s).

Apart from the large tenor violas, as featured in part one of this article, the brothers are usually accredited with the development of the alto viola, the dimensions of which are 'generally' considered ideal

today. There may have been earlier examples of this size of viola in Brescia and even Andrea Amati could have developed some-thing similar.

Even within the confines of the alto viola form we find the brothers trying out new ideas. A truly outstanding viola belonging to Harry Danks, for example, has tiny violin sized sound holes even though it has a body length of 41.3cm. Although very similar in size to the alto violas of Stradivari it has a superbly proportioned violin type head (i.e. without cello type shoulders).

Although the brothers do not seem to have developed a 'standard' sized cello, (this appears to have been the work of Francesco Ruggeri) they did make very small and very large cellos. Charles Beare's collection contains a fine little fivestringed cello with a proper arched back. Unfortunately, all the surviving larger cellos, of the entire Amati family, have been cut down to more 'manageable' proportions. It is impossible to estimate their original dimensions. I expect, however, that they were similar to those of the 'Servais' cello by Stradivari featured in *THE STRAD* (December 1987). The Amatis do not appear to have made any basses which have survived.

The size of the brothers' violins varies considerably although there appear to be three basic sizes. A violin dated 1618, also in the Ashmolean Museum, measures 331mm. Other violins known to me measure 352, 353, 354, 354.5 mm. There are instruments with short corners, long corners, wide and narrow bouts, and the brothers appear to have developed a 'grand' pattern even before the influence of Nicola had established itself in their workshop. Daniel Draley believes that the brothers may have made instruments to measure, although I have my doubts. However, it is certain that Draley has seen more works by the Amati brothers than I have, so I must bow to his better judgement on this. Exactly how many instruments were produced under the Brothers Amati label it is impossible to say, but their combined output must have been very substantial and there is no doubt that their work had an enormous influence on violin making throughout Europe.

The influence of the brothers Amati spread far and wide both in Italy and abroad. They were soon copied, even counterfeited, and were an early source of inspiration in Turin, Venice, Bologna, Milan, Bolzano, Florence and the Netherlands. In England they were much in vogue at the end of the 18th century, the time of Forster and Banks. Since that time, however, the work of Nicola has generally been more

appreciated by violin makers and the brothers are sometimes underrated by comparison.

Whoever might turn out to have been responsible for the brothers' work, it varied in quality only from very good to excellent. Their instruments were never mediocre and at their best they were second to none. They, whoever they were, deserve their place in the violin makers' Hall of Fame. In terms of sheer beauty, unlike the sophistication of Stradivari and the street wise style of the Guarneris, that beauty which belongs to innocence and youth, the whole Amati family outrank and outshine all others.

---

1 English translation: A Genealogy of the Amati Family of Violin Makers 1500 1740. Edited by Daniel Draley and translated by Gertrud Graubart Champe.

2 I was very impressed by a fine copy of this instrument which I saw last year. Anyone wishing to try such an instrument should contact Mark Norfleet of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

3 This appears in the Schambach Kaston Collection catalogue.

I would like to take the opportunity to include a few words of thanks to the unsung heroes of this series of articles on the Amati family. These heroes are the researchers who I briefly mentioned in my last article. Together they have provided me with much of the new information which I have been able to include in this series. Their unselfish help is an example to all those who still cling on to their little secrets in this strange violin business. Their names are Duane Rosengard and Philip Kass, in America and, in Italy, Martin Ferguson and Gloria Bianchi. Over the past few years these people have collected an astounding amount of new information about the great Classical violin makers.

For a number of years it seems that no one has been seriously researching the archives of Northern Italy with reference to violin makers. Perhaps 'would be' archivists believed that no relevant material remained to be found. This has certainly not turned out to be the case. Over the past few years these intrepid explorers have come up with remarkable findings. Some of this material has already been translated and published, forcing a radical rethink about the lives, times and works of several important makers.

They, and Rosengard in particular, have all but rewritten the Bergonzi story, and the life and works of the Cerutis and Storionis. They have found enough material about the Guadagninis to correct Doming's work and add two more volumes. And as has already been seen they have contributed a great deal to the Amati story. Of course, such research is not only happening in Italy; in Britain similar work is being carried out by John Dilworth, a name already familiar to STRAD readers, and in the bow field Paul Childs and Mark Reindorf have given over considerable time and money to their researches in France, to name but two others.

Until now, such work has been done entirely at these researchers' own expense. I mention this because there is no doubt that the time and costs involved in doing such research can prove very difficult to absorb for a simple bread winner in today's penny pinching world. Even well established firms have had their problems in this respect.

When the Hill brothers were compiling their definitive works on Stradivari and the Guarneris, they were also planning to complete the series with a third volume about the Amatis. The trilogy was never completed and with good reason. The completion of the first two books had placed an unacceptable burden upon the Hill brothers business. I know how they must have felt. Over the years, I have produced as many words for THE STRAD magazine alone as there are in both these books and with far less remuneration. I hasten to point out, however, that I am not comparing my magazine articles to the learned works of the Hill brothers. Nevertheless, I am more than used to my wife asking when I am going to do some 'real' work.

I therefore have no shame in suggesting that one or more of the many worthy individuals and/or societies devoted to the violin should not just be paying grateful lip service to these researchers but should be acting now to create a fund, or several funds, which could be used to help underwrite their expenses. Do it! it will make you feel better!

Without help these researchers may not, simply because they cannot, continue to produce this kind of information. Documents are still there to be found, recorded and correlated. Please help them. Who knows, with a little help from STRAD readers that missing volume of the Cremonese trilogy may finally be written.

My thanks also go to Daniel Draley, John Dilworth and Charles Beare for allowing me to pick their respective brains.