

This book ("*The Scala Papers*") is an account of an aspect of the history of the Teatro alla Scala from its construction to the Unification of Italy in 1860. (The book stops at that point, because then ended the particular combination of circumstances that gave rise to the substantial "meat" of its narrative). It is different from the usual run of operatic history books in that it deals almost exclusively with the practical aspects of the Scala theatre, both of its construction and of its continuing management which latter was effected by leases ("*appalti*") granted, subject to strict contract, to lessees ("*appaltatori*"). It thus reflects in large measure the relations between the "back office" of the Scala and the "*Lieutenant of the Holy Roman Empire, Governor and Captain General in Austrian Lombardy*" with not infrequent references back to Vienna, to "*Maria Theresia, by the Grace of God, Roman Empress, Queen of Hungary, of Bohemia etc., Duke of Milan, of Mantua etc...etc*" and her successors as the Imperial rulers of Lombardy.

As we read here the tortured chronicle of the lease, some points are made very abundantly clear. The lease of the Scala was not an enterprise to be taken lightly, for the theatre enjoyed a particularly affectionate place in the hearts of all Lombardy's rulers (both French and Austrian) who expected that their subvention (the "*dote*") should be reflected in the very highest quality standards. In this view the milanesi concurred - they would seem then as now to have been a most exigent clientèle. There was first the "dead weight" of the non income-producing boxes of the founder-builders of the theatre (the "*Noble Knights in partnership*" - *Nobili Cavalieri Associati*) who ran the theatre in its early years. Add also the prohibition, or at best severe constraints on, sidelines such a gambling, and the requirement - invariably stipulated in contracts - that the singers, set designers and so on, be "*di cartello*" (ie of known good quality).

Thus it comes as no surprise that, with the single exception of Bartolomeo Merelli of Bergamo, who lasted fifteen years, the book is a chronicle of continuous change-overs of the lease. Not untypically, the lease goes out to tender, no offers are received, a lessee turns up at the last minute and the whole "*Scala nexus*" breaks him both financially and in spirit within a couple of years.

One is also struck too about the sophistication and modernity of the Scala lease system. Sophistication - the rigour of the contract with up to 80 plus clauses, the minute examination clause-by-clause of the same by the Imperial Lieutenants, to say nothing of all the ancillary activities that grew up in close proximity to the theatre - Dancing Academy, the "*House of Ricordi*" - which started out as a copyist - within the Scala precincts, such as to make the Scala the focus of the Milanese cultural life of its time. Modernity - was this contract not, in effect, "*privatisation*" of the Imperial Royal Theatre, with "*markey forces*" determining the financial outcome for the lessee? (One might note the modernity of sending in the auditors to "*advise*" on the state of the books!). A thought for our times, too, that the chronic instability of this "*privatisation*" was due, in part, to insufficient funding vis-