ENTRY

This portrait is known in at least four other contemporary versions or copies: in the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia[fig. 1]; [1] in the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg [fig. 2]; [2] in the Seminario Vescovile, Padua; [3] and in the Koelikker collection, Milan. [4] According to John Shearman, x-radiographs have revealed that yet another version was originally painted under the Titian workshop picture *Titian and His Friends* at Hampton Court (illustrated under Andrea de’ Franceschi). [5] Of these versions, the Gallery’s picture is now generally accepted as the earliest and the finest, and before it entered the Kress collection in 1954, the identity of the sitter, established by Victor Lasareff in 1923 with reference to the Hermitage version, has never subsequently been doubted. [6] Lasareff retained a traditional attribution to Tintoretto, and Rodolfo Pallucchini and W. R. Rearick upheld a similarly traditional attribution to Tintoretto of the present version. [7] But as argued by Wilhelm Suida in 1933 with reference to the Chrysler version (then in Munich), and by Fern Rusk Shapley and Harold Wethey with reference to the present version, an attribution to Titian is more likely. [8] Consistent with the latter
attribution is the frequent identification of the picture with a documented portrait of Cappello by Titian, recorded in a eulogistic letter and sonnet sent by Pietro Aretino to the sitter’s nephew Niccolò Molin on Christmas Day 1540. [9]

Vincenzo di Niccolò Cappello (1469–1541) was a member of a Venetian patrician family, several of whose members pursued distinguished careers in the navy. [10] Vincenzo himself served five times as Capitano Generale da Mar, an achievement that is noted in the inscription QUINQUIES DUX on the Chrysler version of the portrait. His authority as a naval commander also brought him political honors and responsibilities: in 1504 he was knighted by Henry VII of England; from 1515 to 1519, he was governor of Famagosta in Cyprus; in 1522 he was nominated as ambassador to the papal court; in 1539 he was made procurator of San Marco. His high reputation and popularity at home suffered a setback following his defeat by the Turks at the battle of Prevesa, off Epirus, in 1538, but in the final, difficult years of his life, he also found a stout public defender in Pietro Aretino, whose letter of 1540 lavishes praise on his military valor in the glorious defense of the Christian religion. Aretino also mentions the majesty of aspect conveyed by Titian’s portrait; by showing Cappello in full armor and grasping the baton of command, this was clearly designed to express the authority of a venerable military leader who had passed a lifetime in the faithful service of the Venetian state. Under the terms of his will, a full-length standing statue of Cappello was placed above the main portal of his parish church of Santa Maria Formosa. Executed by Domenico di Pietro Grazioli da Salò, it again shows the admiral holding a baton, but this time dressed in a military costume all’antica. [11]

Cappello’s celebrity as a military commander led to a demand for painted portraits of him, from both within and beyond Venice. In 1560, for example, the magistracy of the Procuratia de Supra paid for a portrait for its office in the Piazza di San Marco, a work that was still recorded there by Fulgenzio Manfredi in 1602 and Giovanni Stringa in 1604. [12] At least a decade earlier, the eminent humanist Paolo Giovio must have acquired a portrait for his celebrated gallery in Como, and as the owner pointed out, the sitter was portrayed in the very armor that he had worn at the Battle of Prevesa. [13] Giovio’s picture was clearly based on the original by Titian, since a bust-length copy of it, inscribed VINCENTIUS CAPPELLO, made on commission from Grand Duke Cosimo I by his court painter Cristofano dell’Altissimo, remains in the Uffizi in Florence. A woodcut version by Tobias Stimmer is also included in the 1575 Basel edition of Giovio’s Elagio Virorum Bellica Virtute Illustrium. [14] As pointed out by Lasareff, the Como version of
Giovio’s portrait of Cappello—and hence also the original—must have been painted before 1552, the date of Giovio’s death. [15]

Lasareff, who identified the Hermitage version (fig. 2) as the original, and who also assumed that it was painted in the sitter’s lifetime, concluded that it was one of Tintoretto’s earliest works. But other critics who have upheld the attribution to Tintoretto have forgotten Lasareff’s firmly established terminus ante quem of 1552. In particular, Rearick suggested a date of circa 1572/1575, contemporary with a number of other official portraits by Tintoretto of Venetian admirals, including the Sebastiano Venier (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) and the Tommaso Contarini (Musée de la Ville, Narbonne). [16] Unlike these sitters, Cappello had died 30 years earlier, and Rearick saw his portrait as a posthumous commission by his family, as part of an effort to rehabilitate his memory. In support of this theory, Rearick quoted a will of 1601 dictated by Vincenzo di Domenico Cappello, nephew and heir to Vincenzo di Niccolò, in which he speaks of four family portraits. These were named as of his grandfather Niccolò, by Palma; of himself and his father, by Titian; and of his uncle Vincenzo, by Tintoretto. For Rearick, the first of these portraits is perhaps identifiable with a full-length portrait of Niccolò Cappello at Chatsworth, attributed by Bernard Berenson to Palma Giovane (in which case, it, too, would be posthumous); [17] the pair by Titian must be lost; and the last, by Tintoretto, is identifiable with the present picture.

Rearick did not, however, develop the stylistic comparison with the portraits of admirals by Tintoretto that he considered similar to the Vincenzo Cappello; and, in fact, although these may be seen as deriving from it, the resemblances remain superficial. Characteristic of Tintoretto’s treatment of highlights are the rapid slashes of unblended white paint that criss-cross the sitter’s armor in the Sebastiano Venier, whereas the more varied brushwork and richer range of textural effects in the Vincenzo Cappello are equally characteristic of Titian. The portrait by Tintoretto mentioned in the will of 1601 was probably instead a copy or variant of the present picture, which by this date had already passed out of the family’s possession. A likely candidate, in fact, for Tintoretto’s version of Titian’s original is provided by the picture now in the Chrysler collection (fig. 1), in which the much finer, more linear treatment of the hair and beard, the unblended white highlights of the cloak, and the taller dome of the balding head, all seem typical, despite the contrary opinion of Suida and Bertina Suida Manning, and of Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, of the younger master. [18]
Confirmation that the Gallery’s picture precedes these other known versions is provided by the design changes revealed in the x-radiograph [fig. 3]. This is not necessarily, however, to conclude that it is identical with the portrait of 1540 recorded by Aretino. Comparison with Titian’s portraits of this period—including the Cardinal Pietro Bembo of 1539/1540 and the Ranuccio Farnese of 1541–1542, which hang close to it in the National Gallery of Art—show that they are compositionally more compact and pictorially more precise, while the very broad brushwork of the Vincenzo Cappello implies a date of a good decade later. If the present picture indeed dates from the 1550s—as was already implied by Diane H. Bodart [19]—its composition is nevertheless likely to have followed, or to have been elaborated from, that of the lost original of 1540, especially since the sitter died in the following year, and there would have been no opportunity to paint a portrait with a new composition from life. Titian was likely to have been aided in this task by his workshop—as already concluded respectively by Tamara Fomicheva and Stefania Mason Rinaldi—which would then have been entirely responsible for the versions in the Hermitage (fig. 2) and Padua, [20] and also for the one in Milan. It remains an open question whether the version owned by Paolo Giovio was based on the lost original of 1540 or the present version, but in the latter case the Washington portrait would have to date from before 1552.

As pointed out by Lasareff, the composition of the Gallery’s picture, like that of its presumed prototype, develops that of Titian’s Francesco Maria della Rovere (Uffizi, Florence) of 1536–1538, in which a military commander is similarly portrayed standing in knee-length, wearing gleaming armor, holding a baton in his right hand, and in front of a shelf displaying his helmet and further batons. In pose and accoutrements, the Vincenzo Cappello may also be compared with several of Titian’s portraits of Eleven Caesars, painted for the duke of Mantua in 1536–1540 (lost, but recorded in the engravings of Aegedius Sadeler). It is natural that Titian, commissioned to paint a Venetian military hero in or just before 1540, should have adapted a formula recently devised for similarly martial images for the dukes of Urbino and Mantua. In turn, it provided the inspiration for Venetian warrior portraits of the later 16th century, including Tintoretto’s Sebastiano Venier, Veronese’s Agostino Barbarigo, and Palma Giovane’s Niccolò Cappello. [21]

Peter Humfrey
March 21, 2019
COMPARATIVE FIGURES

NOTES

[1] Published by Wilhelm Suida, Tizian (Zurich and Leipzig, 1933), 81–82, 160–161, 184, pl. 143, when in the Schnackenberg collection, Munich; sold Sotheby’s, London, Nov. 28, 1956, no. 19 (with confused provenance).


[11] Domenico’s statue is usually dated to soon after Cappello’s death in 1541, but as pointed out by Martin, it could equally date from the 1550s or later. See Thomas Martin, Alessandro Vittoria and the Portrait Bust in Renaissance Venice (Oxford, 1998), 40 n. 55.

[12] For the documented portrait commission in 1560, see Wilhelm von Bode, Georg Gronau, and Detlev von Hadeln, Archivalische Beiträge zur Geschichte der venezianischen Kunst aus dem Nachlass Gustav Ludwigs (Berlin, 1911), 128. It is recorded in the second room of the Procuratia de Supra by Fulgenzio Manfredi, Dignità Procuratoria di San Marco di Venetia (Venice, 1602); and Giovanni Stringa, in Francesco Sansovino, Venetia città nobilissima et singolare (1581) . . . et hora con molta dilienza corretta, emendata, e più d’un terzo di cose nuove ampliata dal M. R. D. Giovanni Stringa (Venice, 1604), 217r. The painter is not mentioned either by the document or by Stringa; according to Manfredi most of the portraits in the room were by Tintoretto, but a few were by Titian. Hadeln reasoned that on balance of probability, this version of the portrait was by Tintoretto. Detlev von Hadeln, “Beiträge zur Tintorettoforschung,” Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen 32 (1911): 43–44.


[14] Paolo Giovio, Elogia Vironem Bellicae Virtute Illustrium (Basel, 1575), 6:329. The portrait owned by Giovio was still in the possession of his family in 1881, but it has since disappeared. See Giovanni Giovio, Lari artistici: Collezioni (Como, 1881), 85.


The support is a moderate-weight twill fabric. It has been lined. The paint is fractured around the edges of the painting, and the x-radiographs show only faint evidence of cusping along the top and bottom edges. This indicates that the painting is by Titian.

[17] The portrait is inscribed NICOLAUS/ CAPPELLUS/ TER CLASI/ PRAEFECTUS. A half-length portrait, apparently of the same sitter, formerly in the Schlichting collection in Paris and now in the Louvre, was supposed by Emil Schäffer, “Noch einmal das Bildnis des Vincenzo Capello,” Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft 2 (1909): 158–160, followed by Victor Lasareff, “Ein Bildnis des Vincenzo Capello von Tintoretto,” Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen 44 (1923): 172–177, to be Titian’s portrait of Vincenzo Cappello; but it, too, was convincingly reattributed to Palma Giovane by Bernard Berenson, “While on Tintoretto,” in Festschrift für Max J. Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstage (Leipzig, 1927), 226, fig. 2. For these portraits, see Stefania Mason Rinaldi, Palma il Giovane: L’opera completa (Milan, 1984), 80, no. 57, and 101, no. 207; the author plausibly identifies the sitter as Niccolò di Vincenzo Cappello (born 1547), rather than as the 15th-century Niccolò Cappello.

[18] Wilhelm Suida, Tizian (Zurich and Leipzig, 1933), 81–82; Bertina Suida Manning, “Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto in the Collection of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.,” Arte veneta 16 (1962): 49–50; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, in Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice (Boston, 2009), 284 n. 60. Although the Chrysler portrait may well be identical with that mentioned in the will of Vincenzo di Domenico Cappello in 1601, it is equally possible that it is the one commissioned in 1560 for the Procuratia de Supra, and recorded there by Manfredi (1602) and Stringa (1604) (see Entry note 12). Both writers mentioned that Cappello is shown, as in the Chrysler picture, with five batons of command rather than the three shown by Titian.


TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a moderate-weight twill fabric. It has been lined. The paint is fractured around the edges of the painting, and the x-radiographs show only faint evidence of cusping along the top and bottom edges. This indicates that the painting is by Titian.
original support was trimmed slightly, though probably not significantly.

The ground, applied with a trowel, is now tan in color, but presumably was originally white. The x-radiographs [fig. 1] and examination with infrared reflectography [1] reveal that the sitter’s proper left shoulder and arm may have extended farther to the right. Since the sitter’s shoulders could not possibly have been so broad, this suggests that the composition originally may have been conceived with the sitter’s body facing front. The x-radiographs also reveal a puzzling series of forms beneath the mantel at the right edge and a narrow sash hung down from the sitter’s waist.

The figure was held in reserve, with the background elements painted around him. The underpainting was executed in an exceptionally broad, vigorous, and rapid manner, with strong brushmarking, but the face was more smoothly modeled in the upper paint layers. The artist used a deep red glaze to create the shadows of the folds of the cloak.

The paint layer is not well preserved, and the impasto has been flattened by lining. There is generalized abrasion throughout, with severe abrasion in the background at the top right and bottom left. In the face, the shadowed eye is abraded and repainted. There is a 32-centimeter vertical line of paint loss through the bottom center of the painting.

Joanna Dunn based on the examination reports by Carol Christensen and Joanna Dunn

March 21, 2019

TECHNICAL COMPARATIVE FIGURES

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Infrared reflectography was performed with a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.
PROVENANCE


As a possible alternative early provenance, it is worth noting that the inventory of the collection of Bartolomeo della Nave, Venice, acquired by the Marquess of Hamilton in 1638, includes an item described as “A Picture of General Capello Pal 2 & 1 Titian.” Hamilton (later 1st Duke) was an ancestor of the 10th Duke; and although the bulk of the ex-Della Nave collection was sold to the archduke Leopold Wilhelm after Hamilton’s execution in 1649, it is possible that this particular picture remained in the family until the 19th century. (This possibility is not disproved by a marginal note on the inventory, implying that the ex-Della Nave portrait of Cappello passed from the Hamilton collection to that of the Duke of Devonshire, since as pointed out by Ellis Waterhouse, “Paintings from Venice for Seventeenth-Century England,” *Italian Studies* 7 ([1952]): 7, these marginal notes are highly unreliable.) On the other hand, there is no trace of anything corresponding to the Gallery’s picture in the various Hamilton inventories of the 17th and 18th centuries; see Waterhouse 1952, 7, and the Shapley-Hutchison correspondence cited above. Furthermore, the dimensions given in the Della Nave inventory (2 x 1 palms = c. 44 x 22 cm) do not correspond; and although the measurements given in the inventory are often very inaccurate, the reference here appears to be to a much smaller picture.

Shapley 1979, 1:485-488, also hypothetically identified the Gallery’s picture with one recorded by Ridolfi, a work by Titian then in the collection of Senator Domenico Ruzzino in Venice: “Il ritratto di Vicenzo Cappello General di Mare, in arme brunite tocche con belle osservationi di lumi, nelle quale reflette il manto purpureo, che gli attraversa alle spalle, affibitato co’ globbi d’oro, celebratissimo per il soggetto e per l’Autore;” Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell’arte, overo Le vite de g’illustri pittori veneti, e dello stato* (Venice, 1648), ed. Detlev von Hadeln, 2 vols., Berlin, 1914-1924: 1(1914):200. But the reference to the fixing of the cloak with “globbi d’oro” does not correspond to the present picture, and suggests rather the arrangement seen in Palma Giovane’s later portraits of Niccolò Cappello (Stefania Mason Rinaldi, *Palma il Giovane: L’opera completa*, Milan, 1984: 80, no. 57; 101, no. 207).

painting was included in a Wildenstein bill of sale for fourteen paintings (copy in NGA curatorial files, see also The Kress Collection Digital Archive, https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/2447), dated February 10, 1954; payments by the Foundation continued to March 1957.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1883 Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, and by Deceased Masters of the British School. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, no. 180, as by Tintoretto.

1894 Exhibition of Venetian Art, The New Gallery, London, 1894-1895, no. 219, as by Tintoretto.

1997 Venezia Da Stato a Mito [Venice: From a State to a Myth], Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 1997, no. 22, repro., as by Tintoretto.


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2013 Evans, Godfrey. “‘Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself’: The Dukes of Hamilton and Titian.” In The Reception of Titian in Britain: From Reynolds to Ruskin. Edited by Peter Humfrey. Turnhout, 2013: 148, 149.