



Follower of Titian
Anonymous Artist

Titian
Venetian, 1488/1490 - 1576

Girolamo and Cardinal Marco Corner Investing Marco, Abbot of Carrara, with His Benefice

c. 1520/1525

oil on canvas

overall: 99.8 x 132.1 cm (39 5/16 x 52 in.)

framed: 137.8 x 170.2 x 11.6 cm (54 1/4 x 67 x 4 9/16 in.)

Timken Collection 1960.6.38

ENTRY

A label formerly on the back of the frame (now in the curatorial files) carries inscriptions in two different 18th-century hands: “Quadro di Tiziano rappresentante il Padre, e due Fratelli della Regina Cornaro” (Picture by Titian representing the father and two brothers of the Queen [Caterina] Cornaro); and “In segno di vera stima, di gratitudine, e amicizia / All’onorato Suo Signore e Amico / Cav. G.o Hamilton / Antonio Canova” (As a token of true esteem, gratitude and friendship, to his honored friend Cavalier G. Hamilton, from Antonio Canova).

In an unpublished study of the picture of 1972, [1] Douglas Lewis, formerly curator of sculpture at the National Gallery of Art, identified this “G. Hamilton” as the Scottish painter and dealer Gavin Hamilton (1723–1798), who was resident in Rome from 1748, and who played an important part in promoting Canova’s early career.

Almost certainly, however, Canova's dedicatee was William Richard Hamilton (1777–1859), and the initial—the orthography of which indeed appears to read “G.o”—stands for “Guglielmo” (see Provenance).

When the picture first appeared on the art market in 1929, Detlev von Hadeln identified the subject as the conferral of a benefice by an unknown cardinal on a youth in the presence of his father. [2] In his detailed study of 1972, Lewis provided a convincing identification of all three sitters and advanced a range of suggestions regarding the circumstances of the commission. Noting that the inscription on the label on the back identifying the sitters cannot for historical reasons be correct, Lewis nevertheless deduced that they represent members of a subsequent generation of the wealthy and powerful Corner family of Venice. He confirmed this deduction by identifying the cardinal as Marco Corner (1482–1524), nephew of Queen Caterina, on the basis of an anonymous portrait medal [fig. 1]. [3] Since the reverse of the medal carries an inscription describing the subject as Cardinal of San Marco in Rome, a title that he received only seven months before his death in July 1524, the medal must date from this brief period; and since the painted portrait, in strict and archaic profile, is manifestly based on the medal (rather than vice versa), a *terminus ante quem* of 1524, at least for the right side of the painting, is thereby established. Cardinal Marco was the holder of numerous ecclesiastical benefices, the two most lucrative of which were the Benedictine abbeys of San Zeno in Verona and of Carrara Santo Stefano, south of Padua; and in 1519 he formally agreed to pass them on respectively to two of his Corner nephews: Andrea, son of his elder brother Giacomo, and Marco, son of his younger brother Girolamo.

Lewis proposed that the triple portrait commemorates the bestowal of the lucrative abbacy of Carrara on the youthful Marco (1513–1546), [4] in the presence of the boy's father Girolamo (c. 1485–1551). The chief argument against identifying the figures on the left as Giacomo and Andrea Corner is that the former was made senator in 1519 and would thereafter naturally have been portrayed in his official toga; further, Giacomo's possessions, including any family portraits, would have been lost in the devastating fires that consumed each of the family palaces in which he lived, respectively in 1532 and 1535. Girolamo's possessions, by contrast, were housed in a third family palace, the so-called Palazzo Corner della Regina at San Cassiano, where they remained until they were dispersed toward the end of the 18th century. Girolamo spent most of his earlier life in Candia (Crete), where the family had important commercial interests, and returned to live in Venice only in

1537. [5] He is known, however, from the copious diaries of Marin Sanudo to have spent three years on a return visit to the city between 1517 and 1520—at the very time, in other words, that his brother Cardinal Marco conferred the benefice of Carrara on Girolamo's eldest son, Marco. Since Girolamo would not have been available to sit for his portrait after July 1520, Lewis proposed that the central figure—qualitatively the finest of the three—dates from the summer of that year; and consistent with this proposal is the fact that, as pointed out by Hadeln, the style of his costume and hair corresponds to the fashion of the second decade, and would already have been completely outmoded by the mid-1520s. [6] Lewis accordingly concluded that the group portrait, although planned from the beginning to commemorate the event of 1519, was painted in two phases, with the figure of Girolamo painted on the eve of his return to Crete, and that of the cardinal, who was in Rome throughout the period of his brother's visit, added posthumously in 1524 or soon afterward. Young Marco did not accompany his father back to Crete, but remained in Venice under the guardianship of his grandfather Zorzi Corner; and since he appears in the portrait as an adolescent rather than as a seven-year-old child, it may be assumed that his present figure was executed contemporaneously with that of his uncle and namesake. Consistent with Lewis's conclusion that the portrait was worked on in more than one phase are the extensive pentimenti revealed by the x-radiographs [fig. 2], including a radical change to the head of the boy. A portrait medal of Girolamo in classicizing profile, made much later, in 1540, by Giovanni da Cavino, shows features that are at least consistent with those of the central figure [fig. 3]. [7] No other portrait of the younger Marco is known.

Girolamo did not return from Crete until 1537. Soon afterward he was elected a member of the powerful magistracy of the Council of Ten, and in 1539–1540 he served as *capitano* of Padua. At this time he commissioned an important fresco cycle from Domenico Campagnola, Stefano della Arzere, and others in the Sala dei Giganti in the Palazzo del Capitaniato, and the construction by the architect Michele Sanmicheli of the bastion on the city walls that still bears the Corner name. [8]

The attribution of the portrait is controversial. When first publishing it in 1929, Hadeln attributed it to Titian, and dated it to circa 1520. [9] Walter Heil, Wilhelm Suida, Lionello Venturi, and Burton Fredericksen and Federico Zeri agreed with this opinion. [10] However, the picture was ignored by Hans Tietze, Francesco Valcanover, Rodolfo Pallucchini, and most other writers, and Harold Wethey

explicitly rejected it, describing it as “the work of a minor master” of circa 1530. [11] Lewis reasserted the view of Hadeln and drew attention to the traditional attribution to Titian recorded on the 18th-century label on the back. Basing his opinion largely on his investigation of the identities and biographies of the sitters, Lewis also claimed the central figure of Girolamo Corner now represented Titian’s earliest dated portrait. Lewis explained the unsatisfactory aspects of the portrait, and in particular the uncharacteristically disjointed composition and the stilted, uncommunicative expression of Cardinal Marco, with reference to the unfavorable circumstances surrounding the commission, and also to its present abraded and overpainted condition; but he also emphasized the high quality of certain areas, and especially of the figure of Girolamo.

More recently, and without access to Lewis’s paper, Paul Joannides has attributed the painting to an “Associate of Titian,” circa 1520. [12] Also noting the disjointed composition, he suggested that each of the three heads was based on a separate portrait by Titian and that they were combined in the present unsatisfactory way in the manner of a much-later painting from Titian’s workshop, the so-called *Titian and His Friends* in the Royal Collection at Hampton Court (see illustration in entry on *Andrea de’ Franceschi*). [13] As has been seen, the head of Cardinal Marco must date from after 1524; and if the figure of Girolamo is not by Titian himself, as suggested by Lewis, but a copy after an independent portrait, painted between 1517 and 1520 but now lost, then the picture as a whole is likely to date from the mid- to late 1520s. The present badly abraded condition of the painting makes the authorship of the central figure almost impossible to determine; but against Lewis it may be argued that it is difficult to imagine Titian bringing the central figure of a triple portrait to a high level of completion while leaving the figure on the right a complete blank. In favor, however, of at least some direct involvement by Titian in the commission, even if he delegated the execution to an assistant, is the fact that the Corner family was one of the wealthiest and most influential in Venice. It may also be noted that the original idea for a monumental column in the left background corresponds to similar motifs in other works of the early 1520s, notably the Ca’ Pesaro altarpiece of 1519–1526 (Frari, Venice). Lewis suggested that the work was commissioned by the powerful cavalier and procurator of San Marco, Giorgio (Zorzi) Corner (1454–1527), brother to the queen of Cyprus, father of Cardinal Marco and Girolamo, and guardian of the younger Marco; but it is perhaps equally likely that it was commissioned by Girolamo in 1519, at the time of the conferral of the benefice. In that case, the return of Girolamo to Crete in 1520, and the continuing absence of Marco, would have removed the pressure on Titian to

CC NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century

complete the painting himself, especially at a moment when he was under siege from numerous other important patrons, from within Venice and especially from elsewhere in northern Italy.

Peter Humfrey

March 21, 2019

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Anonymous portrait medal of Marco Corner (Bibliothèque nationale de France), from George Francis Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance before Cellini*, vol. 2 (London, 1930), plate 96, no. 528. Photograph courtesy of National Gallery of Art Library



fig. 2 X-radiograph, Follower of Titian, *Girolamo and Cardinal Marco Corner Investing Marco, Abbot of Carrara, with His Benefice*, c. 1520/1525, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Timken Collection

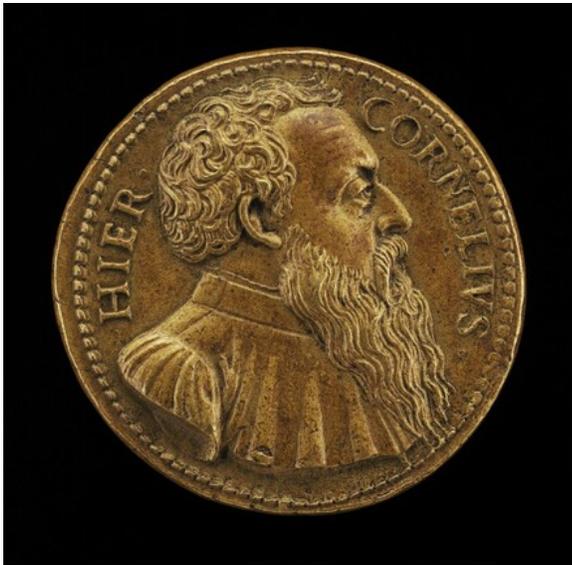


fig. 3 Giovanni da Cavino, *Girolamo Cornaro*, c. 1486–1551, Venetian Patrician, 1540, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

NOTES

- [1] In NGA curatorial files.
- [2] Detlev von Hadeln, “Ein Gruppenbildnis von Tizian,” *Pantheon* 3 (1929): 10–11.
- [3] For this medal, see George Francis Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance before Cellini*, 2 vols. (London, 1930), 136, no. 528. For a biography of Cardinal Marco, see Giuseppe Gullino, “Marco Corner,” in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, ed. Alberto Maria Ghisalberti (Rome, 1983), 29:255–257.
- [4] Although the Barbaro genealogies of Venetian patrician families in the Archivio di Stato, Venice, do not record any son of Girolamo named Marco, Lewis cites a number of other documents and sources, including the diaries of Marin Sanudo, which together make up a skeleton biography.
- [5] For a further summary biography of Girolamo, see Giulio Bodon, *Heroum imagines: La sala dei giganti a Padova. Un monumento della tradizione classica e della cultura antiquaria*, foreword by Irene Favaretto, with

interventions by Elisabetta Saccomani and Carla Ravazzolo (Venice, 2009), 30–37, with an acceptance of Lewis’s identification of the subject of the present painting.

- [6] Detlev von Hadeln, “Ein Gruppenbildnis von Tizian,” *Pantheon* 3 (1929): 10–11.
- [7] *Girolamo Cornaro, c. 1486–1551, Venetian Patrician*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1957.14.984.a. At least two other candidates for portraits of Girolamo by Titian have been advanced in recent years. Joannides thought that he was the sitter for a portrait of c. 1512 that he calls *The Commander* (private collection), but as is clear from Sanudo’s diaries, Girolamo was absent from Venice throughout the period 1510–1517. Hochmann tentatively suggested that the *Man with a Hawk* of c. 1529 in the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, apparently a member of the Corner family, is Girolamo; but again, the fact that he was away in Candia throughout the 1520s and early 1530s precludes this identification. See Paul Joannides, “A Portrait by Titian of Girolamo Cornaro,” *Artibus et Historiae* 34, no. 67 (2013): 247; and Michel Hochmann, “Les collections des familles papalistes à Venise et à Rome du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle,” in *Geografia del collezionismo: Italia e Francia tra il XVI e il XVIII secolo*, ed. Olivier Bonfait et al. (Paris, 2001), 210–211.
- [8] See Giulio Bodon, *Heroum imagines: La sala dei giganti a Padova. Un monumento della tradizione classica e della cultura antiquaria*, foreword by Irene Favaretto, with interventions by Elisabetta Saccomani and Carla Ravazzolo (Venice, 2009), especially 33, 45, 177, 188.
- [9] Detlev von Hadeln, “Ein Gruppenbildnis von Tizian,” *Pantheon* 3 (1929): 10–11.
- [10] Walter Heil, “A Titian Portrait Painted about 1520,” *International Studio* 95 (1930): 21, 88; Wilhelm Suida, *Tizian* (Zurich and Leipzig, 1933), 78, 148; Lionello Venturi, *Italian Paintings in America, Vol. 3: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century* (New York and Milan, 1933), no. 512; Burton Fredericksen and Federico Zeri, *Census of Pre-Nineteenth-Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 203, 522, 647.
- [11] Hans Tietze, *Tizian: Leben und Werk*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1936); Hans Tietze, *Titian: The Paintings and Drawings* (London, 1950); Francesco Valcanover, *Tutta la pittura di Tiziano*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1960); Francesco Valcanover, *L’opera completa di Tiziano* (Milan, 1969); Francesco Valcanover, *Tiziano: I suoi pennelli sempre partorirono espressioni di vita* (Florence, 1999); Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Tiziano*, 2 vols. (Florence, 1969); Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1971), 2:170.
- [12] Paul Joannides, “A Portrait by Titian of Girolamo Cornaro,” *Artibus et Historiae* 34, no. 67 (2013): 247.
- [13] See John Shearman, *The Early Italian Pictures in the Collection of Her*

Majesty the Queen (Cambridge, 1983), 268–271.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The picture, which is in very poor condition, was executed on a plain-weave fabric prepared with a gray ground. It has been lined, and cusping is only visible along the top and bottom edges. Although no underdrawing was detected in the infrared examination, marks made during the course of execution to reassess the design are visible in the x-radiographs [fig. 1]. These are notational arabesques, made with thick paint dragged across the canvas, and are found in the arm of the young man and the hand of the cardinal holding the letter. Significant pentimenti, unrelated to these arabesques, range from a reduction in the size of the young man's head, to extensive alterations in the top left corner, where architectural features consisting of a column and its base, drawn as if from below, lie beneath the sky.

Discrepancies in condition and execution make each face appear different in the x-radiograph. That of the central figure is the best preserved and is painted boldly within a predefined area. The young man's chin was once lower, with more of his neck visible. The cardinal, whose profile was tightly drawn, is very worn, so that the handling is confused by the multiple losses and small strokes of overpaint that litter this area.

The painting bears signs of old cupping and delamination problems, possibly exacerbated by the lining. The surface has been crushed, and numerous small triangular losses give the painting a speckled appearance. The larger losses have been filled and inpainted, but elsewhere retouching is restrained, and little attempt has been made to disguise the wear.

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination report by Mary Bustin

March 21, 2019

TECHNICAL COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 X-radiograph, Follower of Titian, *Girolamo and Cardinal Marco Corner Investing Marco, Abbot of Carrara, with His Benefice*, c. 1520/1525, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Timken Collection

PROVENANCE

Corner (Cornaro) family, Venice; John Udny [1757-1800], British Resident in Venice; Angelica Kauffmann [1741-1807], painter, Rome;[1] probably acquired from her estate by Antonio Canova [1757-1822], sculptor, Rome; gift 1816 to William Richard Hamilton [1777-1859], London;[2] his descendants until the early twentieth century.[3] (P. and D. Colnaghi, London). (Howard Young Galleries, New York), in 1930. William R. Timken [1866-1949], New York, by 1933;[4] by inheritance to his widow, Lillian Guyer Timken [1881-1959], New York; bequest 1960 to NGA.

[1] The transfer of ownership from the Corner family to Kauffmann by way of Udny is documented by a letter of 1788 from Gavin Hamilton to the dealer G.M. Sasso in Venice. Hamilton mentions that Angelica Kauffmann (Zucchi) owned “un bel quadro di ritratti di casa Cornaro di Tiziano. Ha sofferto ed è molto ridipinto, ma è stato bello. Era di mister Udny, e facilmente è uscito da questa casa” (A beautiful

portrait of members of the Corner family by Titian. It is very damaged and has been much repainted, but it has been beautiful. It formerly belonged to Mr Udny, who acquired it without difficulty from the family); see Francesca Del Torre, "Gavin Hamilton a Giovanni Maria Sasso," in *Lettere artistiche del Settecento veneziano*, ed. Alessandro Bettagno and Marina Magrini, 4 vols., Vicenza, 2002-2009: 1(2002):450-451. Kauffmann herself mentions the picture in her will of 1803: "A fine painting by Titian, three half-figures, portraits of the old family Cornaro of Venice" (Victoria Manners and George Charles Williamson, *Angelica Kauffman, R. A.: Her Life and Her Works*, London, 1924: 244). The identification of the subject as three members of the Corner family in half-length, the attribution to Titian, and the mention of the poor condition of the picture together make it virtually certain that it is identical with the Gallery's picture.

[2] The gift, recorded in the inscription on the back of the painting, was made following Canova's meeting with Hamilton in Paris in 1815. Hamilton, British Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, played a leading role in forcing the French government to return many of the artistic spoils seized by Napoleon from the papal states; and in token of his gratitude, Canova presented to him not only the NGA picture, but one of his *Ideal Heads* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1996.395), and a handsomely bound volume of engravings after Titian (Katherine Eustace, ed., *Canova: Ideal Heads*, Oxford, 1997: 30 n. 76; Giuseppe Pavanello, "La collezione di Antonio Canova: Dipinti e disegni dal Quattrocento all'Ottocento," in *Antonio Canova e il suo ambiente artistico fra Venezia, Roma e Parigi*, ed. Giuseppe Pavanello, Venice, 2000: 334). Presumably Canova acquired the picture from the estate of Kauffmann, who had died in 1807 (see note 1).

[3] In common with the other gifts from Canova to Hamilton (see note 2).

[4]The painting was published in Lionello Venturi, *Italian Paintings in America, Vol. 3: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century*, translated by Countess Vanden Heuvel and Charles Marriott, 3 vols., New York and Milan, 1933: 3:512, as being in the Timken collection.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1967 Loan for display with permanent collection, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, 1967-1971.

1976 Loan for display with permanent collection, Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Florida, 1976-1978.

1981 Extended loan for use by Secretary Casper W. Weinberger, U.S. Department of Defense, Washington, D.C., 1981-1988.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1929 Hadeln, Detlev von. "Ein Gruppenbildnis von Tizian." *Pantheon* 3 (1929): 10-11.
- 1930 Heil, Walter. "A Titian Portrait Painted about 1520." *International Studio* 95 (1930): 21, 88.
- 1933 Suida, Wilhelm. *Tizian*. Zürich and Leipzig, 1933: 78, 148.
- 1933 Venturi, Lionello. *Italian Paintings in America*. Translated by Countess Vanden Heuvel and Charles Marriott. 3 vols. New York and Milan, 1933: 3:no. 512.
- 1965 *Summary Catalogue of European Paintings and Sculpture*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1965: 131, as *Group Portrait*, Attributed to Titian.
- 1968 National Gallery of Art. *European Paintings and Sculpture, Illustrations*. Washington, 1968: 118, repro., as *Group Portrait*, Attributed to Titian.
- 1969 Wethey, Harold. *The Paintings of Titian*. 3 vols. London, 1969-1975: 2(1971):170.
- 1972 Fredericksen, Burton B., and Federico Zeri. *Census of Pre-Nineteenth Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections*. Cambridge, Mass., 1972: 203, 522, 647.
- 1972 Lewis, Douglas. "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family." Unpublished manuscript, 1972. NGA curatorial files.
- 1975 *European Paintings: An Illustrated Summary Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1975: 348, repro., as by Titian and Assistant.
- 1979 Shapley, Fern Rusk. *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings*. 2 vols. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1979: 1:497-498; 2:pl. 350, as Attributed to Titian and Assistant.
- 1985 *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1985: 399, repro.
- 2009 Bodon, Giulio. *Heroum imagines: La sala dei giganti a Padova. Un monumento della tradizione classica e della cultura antiquaria*.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century

Foreword by Irene Favaretto, with interventions by Elisabetta Saccomani and Carla Ravazzolo. Venice, 2009: 31-32.

- 2011 Averett, Matthew Knox. "Becoming Giorgio Cornaro: Titian's 'Portrait of a Man with a Falcon'." *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 4 (2011): 562, 563, fig. 2.
- 2011 Tostmann, Oliver. "Sebastiano del Piombos Bildnis Bendinello Saulis und das Kardinalsporträt im frühen Cinquecento." *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 3 (2011): 344, fig. 25.
- 2013 Joannides, Paul. "Papers dedicated to Peter Humfrey, part I: A Portrait by Titian of Girolamo Cornaro." *Artibus et historiae* 67 (2013): 247, fig. 7.
-

To cite: Peter Humfrey, "Anonymous Artist, Titian/*Girolamo and Cardinal Marco Corner Investing Marco, Abbot of Carrara, with His Benefice*/c. 1520/1525," *Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/46062> (accessed April 16, 2024).