ENTRY

Alvise I di Tommaso Mocenigo (1507–1577) was the fourth member of the
Mocenigo family to become doge of Venice. His tenure in office (1570–1577) was
notable for a number of historic events: the victory of the Holy League (Venice,
Spain, and the Papacy) over the Turks in the sea battle of Lepanto in 1571; Venice’s
controversial conclusion of a separate peace with the Turks in 1573; the visit of
Henry III of France to Venice in 1574; a disastrous fire in the Palazzo Ducale in 1574;
and the devastating plague of 1575–1577, which prompted the doge to take a vow
to build the votive church that became Santa Maria della Salute. His ducal
iconography includes his official portrait by Jacopo Tintoretto (versions of which
are now in the Accademia, Venice, and Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin);
his votive painting in the Palazzo Ducale, executed by Tintoretto and his studio
around 1582; an incomplete compositional sketch for that work, painted during
Mocenigo’s lifetime and showing a somewhat different composition (Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York); and a paliotto (altar cloth) for the high altar of the

Jacopo Tintoretto
Venetian, 1518 or 1519 - 1594

Doge Alvise Mocenigo and Family before the Madonna and Child

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basilica of San Marco, traditionally commissioned by each doge, of 1571, the design of which has been attributed to Tintoretto. The commissions of Alvise Mocenigo and his family suggest ambitions to create a ducal dynasty; for example, his votive painting in the Palazzo Ducale is unique in that it includes portraits of the late doge’s two brothers [fig. 1]. [1]

According to Tintoretto’s 17th-century biographer Carlo Ridolfi, “in the house of Signor Toma Mocenigo . . . in a long canvas is the same [Doge Alvise Mocenigo] with his wife adoring the Queen of Heaven, with other portraits of senators and children of the same family, shown as angels at the feet of Our Lady, who play on instruments.” [2] This is unmistakably the Gallery’s painting, in which the kneeling figure of Doge Alvise Mocenigo is identifiable by comparison to his official portraits. Opposite him is his wife, Loredana. [3] The standing older man to the left is the doge’s brother Giovanni (1508–1580), who is also the subject of one of Tintoretto’s finest portraits, probably painted shortly before the subject’s death (Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin) [fig. 2]. [4] The two young men at far right are Giovanni’s sons Tommaso (1551–1592) and Alvise (1554–1591), known as “Alvisetto” to distinguish him from his uncle. These identifications, first proposed by Rodolfo Pallucchini in 1954 and generally accepted, have been confirmed and expanded upon by Tracy E. Cooper, who has explained the painting as a dynastic celebration of the ramo (branch) of the Mocenigo associated with the family’s ancient properties by the church of San Samuele. The doge and Giovanni lived there together with their families in a fraterna, a financial partnership designed to keep the family patrimony from being diluted. After the death of Giovanni’s eldest son Leonardo (1547–1572), according to a codicil of 1574 to the doge’s will, Giovanni’s two surviving sons became the heirs of the two brothers: Tommaso, as Giovanni’s oldest surviving son, became his father’s heir, while Alvisetto was designated as the beneficiary of the childless doge. The painting thus depicts the family dynasty headed by the doge and reflects the disposition of the property he shared with Giovanni. This explains the absence of the doge’s other surviving brother, Nicolò (1512–1588), who had initiated a new ramo of the family at San Stae. [5]

Ridolfi’s statement that the angel musicians represent children of the Mocenigo family was presumably based on family tradition. The youth at the right appears in a separate portrait by Tintoretto or an associate (private collection) [fig. 3], possibly a few years older. [6] The younger child to the left seems to depict a real individual as well: he is represented with considerable specificity, in contrast, for example, to
the generic features of the Christ Child. At the time of Alvise Mocenigo’s death, none of Giovanni’s sons had children. [7] Pallucchini suggested that the musicians are sons of Giovanni’s daughters, but as Cooper noted, this seems unlikely because these grandchildren would not have borne the Mocenigo name.

The Gallery’s painting must have been executed after Leonardo’s death in 1572. (Otherwise, he would certainly have appeared in it.) Pallucchini and others, assuming that the portrait of Loredana was taken from life, have seen her death in December 1572 as a *terminus ante quem*, and thus dated the painting precisely to that year, during the short period between the death of Leonardo and that of the dogaressa. [8] However, this analysis fails to take into consideration the fact that four of the portraits (Giovanni, Tommaso, the young Alvise, and Loredana) probably came from an earlier painting, which may not have included exactly the same cast of characters. Earlier scholars have assumed that these portraits were painted from life on smaller pieces of canvas and subsequently sewn into the large canvas purely for the convenience of the artist or to speed up production. However, the inserted pieces are extremely irregular, and two of them show significant damage from having been folded. It therefore seems much more likely that they were taken from a preexisting painting, probably one that had somehow been badly damaged. [9] (The face of the doge was probably copied from a studio *ricordo* executed at the time of his official portrait in 1570.) [10]

The current painting may thus have been executed after Loredana’s death. A plausible date would be circa 1575, based on the likelihood that it was commissioned in 1574, at the time Alvise made the codicil to his will, when dynastic concerns were clearly on the minds of the two brothers. Indeed, Giovanni may have been a joint or even the sole patron. The painting was undoubtedly intended to hang in the grand central hall (*portego* or *sala*) of the palace at San Samuele, where Giovanni and his sons lived and where Ridolfi saw it some seven decades later. [11]

The landscape background may be intended to represent the Mocenigo family’s holdings at Villabona on the Venetian *terraferma*. [12] The roses at the Virgin’s feet, while a standard attribute of the Virgin, may also have a further meaning here. The Mocenigo *ramo* at San Samuele was known as “dalle rose,” and the rose appeared on their family *scudo*, or escutcheon. Moreover, roses were regularly associated with the battle of Lepanto: roses had bloomed in Venice in October 1571, the month of the battle, seemingly miraculously, and Pope Pius V subsequently dedicated the victory to the Madonna of the Rosary. [13]
The picture is a variant of the official votive paintings that decorated the Palazzo Ducale and other government buildings in Venice. These are part of a long tradition of Venetian paintings that show the patrons venerating or being presented to the Virgin and Child by their patron saints. Tintoretto's finest votive painting is the *Madonna of the Treasurers* of circa 1567 (originally in the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi; now Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice); he and his studio assistants were also responsible for many of the doges’ votive paintings executed for the Palazzo Ducale in the early 1580s to replace those lost in the fires of 1574 and 1577. Although less common than official votive paintings, other examples of domestic family votive paintings exist, including Titian's *Vendramin Family Venerating a Relic of the True Cross* (National Gallery, London) and Veronese’s *Presentation of the Cuccina Family to the Madonna* of circa 1571 (Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden), similar to Tintoretto’s Mocenigo picture in its monumental scale and once part of an ensemble in the *portego* of the family’s palace. [14] The Gallery's painting is unusually static for Tintoretto and lacks the complex interaction of pose, gesture, and gaze of his characteristic compositions. [15] (The *Madonna of the Treasurers* provides an example of what he could accomplish in this genre.) Its symmetrical arrangement is rare for the period, not only for Tintoretto but for his major contemporaries as well. Wolfgang Wolters suggested the picture may have been designed to match an older ancestral votive painting in the room for which it was painted. [16]

While there is no question of the attribution to Tintoretto, scholars have disagreed as to the level of studio intervention in the picture. Pallucchini and Paola Rossi affirmed it as autograph, as a number of other writers seemed to assume; in contrast, Bernard Berenson called it “studio work”; Fern Rusk Shapley noted that some areas, including the Virgin and Child, are less inspired and well modeled than other parts of the picture, and suggested that they reveal studio participation; W. R. Rearick saw the entire picture as a “workshop assemblage” with a few portraits by Jacopo himself; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman assigned it to “Jacopo and studio.” [17] It seems likely that more than one hand was involved in the painting, particularly given its scale and date, though it is difficult to be more specific. The mid-1570s was a time of transition for the Tintoretto studio, when Jacopo’s children Marietta and Domenico were coming of age. Although Domenico had not yet assumed a major role, Marietta was noted for portraiture, and numerous other assistants seem to have been present in the shop, including landscape and probably other portrait specialists as well. [18] Here the Virgin and Child seem
crude and perfunctory (although Tintoretto himself could be perfunctory at times). The portraits, by contrast, are strong and expressive; the forms of the family members have a sense of weight and presence, and include passages of virtuoso brushwork, such as the representation of the ermine sleeves of the two older men. The beautiful background may be by a landscape specialist.

Robert Echols
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COMPARATIVE FIGURES

**fig. 1** Jacopo Tintoretto and Workshop, *Doge Alvise Mocenigo Attended by Saint Mark and Other Saints before the Redeemer*, c. 1582, oil on canvas, Palazzo Ducale, Venice. Cameraphoto © Photo Archive - Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

**fig. 2** Jacopo Tintoretto, *Giovanni Mocenigo*, late 1570s, oil on canvas, Staatliche Museen, Berlin. bpk Bildagentur / Staatliche Museen, Berlin / Joerg P. Anders / Art Resource, NY
fig. 3 Jacopo Tintoretto, Portrait of a Boy, c. 1575, oil on canvas, Private Collection. Photo © Christie’s Images / Bridgeman Images

NOTES


Cecilia Gibellini, *L’immagine di Lepanto: La celebrazione della vittoria nella letteratura e nell’arte veneziana* (Venice, 2008), 52–53, argued convincingly that the dogaressa is also pictured in the painting by Jacopo Palma il Giovane of the *Doge Alvise Mocenigo Thanking the Virgin for the Victory at Lepanto* in the church of San Fantin, Venice.


By 1580, when Giovanni died, he had two young grandsons living at San Samuele: Tommaso’s son Giovanni, born in 1578, and Alvise’s son Alvise I, born in 1580, a few months before his grandfather’s death that same year. This information was provided by Tracy E. Cooper.

Technical evidence cannot explain the reason that the four portraits were added to the painting. However, it is consistent with the hypothesis that the portraits came from a damaged preexisting painting and were reused in the current painting. The earlier version might well have included Leonardo, but if the family had simply wanted a new picture without him, it seems more likely that changes would have been made on the original canvas rather than dismembering it. For another example of a Tintoretto work in which a preexisting, apparently damaged painting was reused, see the Nativity (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) in Frederick Ilchman et al., Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice (Boston, 2009), 164–172, cat. no. 26. For examples of other paintings from the Tintoretto studio in which portraits were inserted into larger canvases, see Miguel Falomir, in Tintoretto, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2007), 110, suggesting that the purpose of the practice was primarily for efficiency. See also Fern Rusk Shapley, Catalogue of the Italian Paintings (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:474 n. 7.

See Miguel Falomir, in Tintoretto, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2007), 105.


See Tracy E. Cooper, “Patricians and Citizens,” in Venice and the Veneto, ed. Peter Humfrey (New York, 2007), 155. Cecilia Gibellini, L’immagine di Lepanto: La celebrazione della vittoria nella letteratura e nell’arte veneziana (Venice, 2008), 168–169, argued that an explicit reference to the rosary would be unlikely because the rosary was no longer celebrated in Venice after the collapse of the Holy League in 1573, due to its associations with Rome.

On the Cuccina pictures, see Blake de Maria, Becoming Venetian:


TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting is on moderate- to heavy-weight fabric with a herringbone weave. Seven pieces of canvas were combined to create the painting’s primary support. The top piece is approximately half the height of the painting and runs the entire width of the support. Below are two pieces, joined together vertically at
approximately the center of the support. A narrow horizontal strip along the bottom is made up of four pieces of varying width. Four of the portrait heads, the standing elderly man to the left (identified here as Giovanni Mocenigo), the two younger men to the right (identified as Giovanni’s sons Tommaso and Alvise), and the woman (identified as the Dogaressa Loredana Marcello), are painted on separate, irregularly shaped pieces of canvas of a relatively fine weave and have been pasted onto the main canvas. X-radiographs reveal damages to two of the pieces, those with the portrait of Tommaso (the young man to the left of the pair) and the dogaressa, consistent with their having been folded in half after the paint and ground were dry. The weave and weight of the canvas, as well as weave irregularities visible in x-radiographs, seem to be similar in all four of these added heads, suggesting that they originated in one painting. X-radiographs show that the herringbone canvas continues underneath the additions, though it is obscured in some areas, making it difficult to determine if there is any damage to it under these additions. The technical evidence cannot explain the reason that the four portraits were added to the painting. However, it is consistent with the hypothesis that the portraits came from a preexisting painting and were reused in the current painting (see the discussion in the Entry). The damage done to two of the additions by folding strongly suggests that they were not painted separately especially for incorporation into this painting.

The technique of the painting is generally consistent throughout the main canvas and the additions. There is a warm red-brown ground, which has become visible in abraded areas. There is some wet-into-wet brushwork and some detailing with dry brushes onto a paint film that has been allowed to dry. There is some use of impasto, although its effect has probably been reduced as a result of the lining process. The background was painted before the figures. The aura around the Virgin and Child was painted after the figures were completed. X-radiographs and infrared reflectography at 1.1 to 1.4 microns [1] show numerous artist’s changes. On the left side of the composition, the balustrade originally angled toward the viewer in the area where Giovanni Mocenigo now stands. A checkered floor was painted on the right side of the painting under the dogaressa, and angled lines under the doge indicate the floor was planned for the left side of composition as well. The columns on the right were painted under the figures of Tommaso and Alvise. Subtler changes were made to the figures. The Virgin’s nose and chin were originally shorter, her head was moved to the right, and Christ’s eyes were shifted down. The lute held by the angel on the right was originally smaller and the angel’s body was either enlarged or shifted to the right. Several changes seem to have
been made when the four portraits were added to the larger canvas. The heads of Tommaso and Alvise Mocenigo have been reworked, particularly their ears. The neckline of the dogaressa has been altered from a high ruff to an open collar trimmed with lace, and the underdrawing for her dress continues from the main canvas onto the added portion, suggesting her head was pasted on before her dress and body were drawn. Her lace head covering also appears to be an addition. The shoulders of the young men have been adjusted to make the heads sit more realistically upon them and reserves were not left for their hands. Small adjustments are also apparent in the Virgin’s robe and the tall tree in the background.

The painting appears to have large areas of overpaint and abrasion in the sky and the dark brown areas, as well as scattered smaller losses throughout. What appears to be modern, discolored inpainting is apparent in areas around the head inserts and along the seam lines. The varnish layer is glossy, uneven, and discolored. A few areas of roughened varnish from an older varnish layer also remain. The canvas has been lined. The painting was restored by William Suhr, possibly in the late 1930s. [2] In 1955 Mario Modestini inpainted Suhr’s retouching, which had discolored.

Robert Echols and Joanna Dunn based on the examination reports by Kate Russell and Joanna Dunn

March 21, 2019

TECHNICAL NOTES

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

[2] Photographs in the William Suhr Archives, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, state that they were taken after restoration.

PROVENANCE

Probably originally at the Palazzo Mocenigo at San Samuele, Venice. Alvise I Mocenigo, called "Toma" [b. 1608], Palazzo Mocenigo at San Samuele, Venice, by
1648.[1] Possibly acquired in Italy in the early 19th century by a member of the Gouvello family, France; by inheritance to Pierre-Armand-Jean-Vincent-Hippolyte, marquis de Gouvello de Keriaval (1782-1870), Château de Kerlévénan, Sarzeau (department Morbihan in Brittany), France; by inheritance in his family; sold 1952 through (Landry and de Somylo) to (M. Knoedler and Co., London, New York and Paris) on joint account with (Pinakos, Inc. [Rudolf Heinemann], New York); sold 1953 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;[2] gift 1961 to NGA.


EXHIBITION HISTORY


BIBLIOGRAPHY


