



Titian
Venetian, 1488/1490 - 1576

Ranuccio Farnese

1541-1542

oil on canvas

overall: 89.7 x 73.6 cm (35 5/16 x 29 in.)

framed: 123.83 x 108.9 x 9.53 cm (48 3/4 x 42 7/8 x 3 3/4 in.)

Inscription: center right: TITIANVS / .f.

Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.2.11

ENTRY

Ranuccio Farnese (1530–1565) was the grandson of Pope Paul III (reigned 1534–1549); the third son of Pierluigi Farnese, duke of Castro (1503–1547); and the younger brother of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (1520–1589). [1] As an 11-year-old in 1541, Ranuccio was sent by his family to northeast Italy, where he was looked after by the Venetian prelates Marino Grimani, patriarch of Aquileia, and Andrea Corner, bishop of Brescia, and by the humanist scholar Gianfrancesco Leoni. The main purpose of the trip was for the boy to attend a course of study at the University of Padua, but he was also taken to Venice to visit the church of San Giovanni di Malta in Venice, of which he had recently been made commendatory prior. [2] As was perhaps arranged by Pietro Bembo, [3] while in Venice he sat for the present portrait, in which Titian shows him wearing the black cloak and distinctive eight-pointed silver cross of the Knights of Saint John of Malta.

The fullest contemporary information about the circumstances of the commission is provided by a letter from Leoni in Padua to Cardinal Alessandro in Rome, dated September 22, 1542. Leoni wrote that the bishop of Brescia was about to return to Rome, bringing with him the completed portrait; that the bishop commissioned it as a gift for the boy's mother (Gerolama Orsini, duchess of Castro); and that it demonstrates Titian's extraordinary skill as a portraitist, especially since it was executed partly in the presence of the sitter and partly in his absence. [4] Leoni added that the bishop and the patriarch had been applying pressure on the painter to go to Rome to undertake further commissions for the Farnese family.

As is revealed by a letter from the painter's friend Pietro Aretino to the sculptor Leone Leoni in July 1539, [5] Titian had in fact already been seeking an opportunity

to work for the wealthy and powerful Farneses for a few years. As suggested by Wilhelm Suida, a role as intermediary was perhaps played by Cardinal Bembo, [6] who had sat for Titian shortly before leaving Venice for Rome in October 1539 (see *Cardinal Pietro Bembo*, entry), and who wrote to their mutual Venetian friend Elisabetta Querini to announce Ranuccio's departure from Rome in August 1541. [7] According to Bembo, the plan was for the boy to stay in Venice for two or three weeks before moving on to Padua, and it may have been at this time that at least initial sittings for the portrait took place. Alternatively, as suggested by Gigliola Fragnito, the portrait may have been begun only in the following July, to commemorate Ranuccio's attendance at the annual meeting in Venice of the Knights of Malta. [8] In any case, the evident success of the completed and delivered work resulted in an invitation to Titian to attend the pope in Bologna in the spring of 1543, where he painted the portrait of *Paul III without a Cap* (Capodimonte, Naples), and then to stay with the papal entourage in its progress to a meeting with the emperor at Busseto. These initial contacts with the papal family were then followed by Titian's visit to Rome in 1545–1546, and by the numerous further Farnese commissions that surrounded the trip, including the celebrated portrait of *Paul III with Two Grandsons* (Capodimonte, Naples).

The priorship of San Giovanni di Malta was the first in a succession of ecclesiastical offices and benefices conferred on Ranuccio. In 1544 he was made archbishop of Naples; in 1545 he became cardinal of Santa Lucia in Selci (a title later exchanged for that of Sant'Angelo); in 1549 he was made patriarch of Constantinople and archbishop of Ravenna; and in 1564, shortly before his premature death, he became archbishop of Milan. [9] He was much less active as a patron of art than his brother Alessandro, and he did not exploit the contact with Titian by offering him any commissions of his own; he was, however, involved in overseeing the pictorial and architectural decoration of the Palazzo Farnese and the construction of the Oratorio del Crocefisso di San Marcello in Rome. [10]

After being sent to Rome at the end of 1542, the portrait was presumably hung with other family portraits in the Palazzo Farnese. As pointed out by Francis Kelly, it was used by Taddeo Zuccaro as the basis for the full-length portrait of Ranuccio included in his fresco of 1562–1563, *Pierluigi Farnese Being Made Gonfalonier of the Church*, in the Sala dei Fasti Farnesiani at the Villa Farnese, Caprarola. [11] Anthony van Dyck recorded the portrait in his *Italian Sketchbook* (British Museum, London) of 1622/1623 [fig. 1]. [12] Before the transfer of the Farnese collection to Parma in the mid-17th century, inventories still provided an accurate identification

of the sitter; already by 1680, however, he was described generically as “a boy.”

[13] By the time the picture reached Naples, he was no longer recognized as a member of the Farnese family; and unlike Titian’s various other pictures in the former Farnese collection, the portrait disappeared, presumably onto the market, in the early 19th century.

When the picture resurfaced in the Cook collection toward the end of the 19th century, John Charles Robinson accepted the signature as genuine, and because of the Neapolitan provenance, he accurately conjectured that the sitter was a member of the Farnese family. [14] Meanwhile, Amadeo Ronchini had published documents relating to Ranuccio’s visit to Venice in 1541–1542, and Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle had discussed the episode in their biography of Titian; in 1906, Georg Gronau was able to make the first link between the documents and the portrait. [15] But Gronau did not know the picture in the original, and following the judgment of Herbert Cook, he regarded it, together with other versions in the Berlin Museum and in the Brauer collection, Florence, as a copy, and the signature as false. [16] Cook himself had come to a more positive judgment by 1913, [17] but a majority of critics, including Oskar Fischel, Charles Ricketts, Tancred Borenius, Salomon Reinach, and Bernard Berenson, continued to categorize it as a copy after Titian, or else as a studio work. [18] Suida, however, followed by Hans Tietze, reasserted Cook’s revised opinion; [19] and since the cleaning of the picture in 1949–1950, no further doubts have been raised about its authenticity or high quality.

Following John Pope-Hennessy, [20] more recent critics have tended to emphasize its character, together with the *Clarissa Strozzi*, also of 1542 (Staatliche Museen, Berlin), as one of the outstanding contributions to child portraiture in the history of European art. David Rosand, for example, emphasized the expressive contrast between the trappings of high status, conveyed by the rich costume and the elegant, thigh-length pose, and the gentle innocence and diffidence of the face. [21] Peter Meller similarly pointed out that while the head and proportions are convincingly those of a boy, the neutral background is itself another element that relates the picture to Titian’s portraits of mature sitters. [22] Luba Freedman differentiated between the *Ranuccio* and the *Clarissa Strozzi* to the extent that the latter stresses the sitter’s character as a child (in this case, of only two years old), whereas the former portrays him as the future adult, and as the heir to a great dynasty. However, the writer did not deny Titian’s awareness of the childlike vulnerability of the boy, in contrast to the contemporary court portraits of children

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by Bronzino, where they appear more purely as miniature adults. [23] A comparison between the more rigid, intellectualizing child portraits of central Italian Mannerism, and the appropriately spontaneous character of the *Ranuccio*, was already made by Rodolfo Pallucchini in 1969. [24]

Peter Humfrey

March 21, 2019

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Anthony van Dyck, after Titian, Leaf from *Italian Sketchbook*, with *Ranuccio Farnese*, 1622/1623, pen and brown ink, The British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum

NOTES

- [1] For Ranuccio Farnese's biography, see Gigliola Fragnito, "Ranuccio Farnese," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, ed. Alberto Maria Ghisalberti (Rome, 1995), 45:148–160.
- [2] Also known as San Giovanni dei Furlani, or San Giovanni dei Templari (after its previous owners, the Knights Templar), the church passed in 1312 to the order of the Knights Hospitaller (known after 1530 as the Knights of Malta). See Umberto Franzoi, *Le chiese di Venezia* (Venice, 1975), 495.
- [3] Roberto Zapperi, "Tiziano e i Farnese: Aspetti economici del rapporto di committenza," *Bolletino d'arte* 76 (1991): 39.
- [4] "V. S. Rev.ma et Ill.ma saperà come il Vescovo di Brescia si va preparando al ritorno di Roma, er porterà seco un ritratto del Signor Priore, ch'egli ha fatto fare dal divino Titiano, disignato alla Signora Duchessa, dove si potrà ben ammirare la su virtù, massimamente per haverlo fatto parte in presentia et parte in absentia del Signor Priore." See Celso Fabbro, "Tiziano, i Farnese e l'abbazia di San Pietro in Colle nel Cenedese," *Archivio storico di Belluno, Feltre e Cadore* 38 (1967): 3. A different passage in the same letter was already quoted by Amadeo Ronchini, "Delle relazioni di Tiziano coi Farnesi," *Atti e memorie delle RR Deputazioni di Storia Patria per le Provincie Modenesi e Parmensi* 2 (1864): 130.
- [5] Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Rome, 1998), 2:128–130.
- [6] Wilhelm Suida, "Miscellanea Tizianesca," *Arte veneta* 6 (1952): 38–40.
- [7] Pietro Bembo, *Lettere*, ed. Ernesto Travi (Bologna, 1993), 4:371–372.
- [8] Gigliola Fragnito, "Ranuccio Farnese," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, ed. Alberto Maria Ghisalberti (Rome, 1995), 45:148–160.
- [9] Georg Gronau, "Zwei Tizianische Bildnisse der Berliner Galerie," *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 27 (1906): 3–12.
- [10] Clare Robertson, *Il Gran Cardinale: Alessandro Farnese, Patron of the Arts* (New Haven and London, 1992), 137–139, 142, 177.
- [11] Francis M. Kelly, "Note on an Italian Portrait at Doughty House," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 75 (August 1939): 75–77.
- [12] See Lionel Cust, *A Description of the Sketch-book by Sir Anthony Van Dyck* (London, 1902), 22–23; Gert Adriani, *Anton Van Dyck, Italienisches Skizzenbuch* (Vienna, 1940), 69.
- [13] See Provenance, notes 1, 2.
- [14] John Charles Robinson, "The Gallery of Pictures of Old Masters, formed by Francis Cook, Esq., of Richmond," *The Art Journal* (1885): 134, 136.
- [15] Amadeo Ronchini, "Delle relazioni di Tiziano coi Farnesi," *Atti e memorie*

delle RR Deputazioni di Storia Patria per le Provincie Modenesi e Parmensi 2 (1864): 129–130, 145; Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *Titian, His Life and Times* (London, 1877), 2:75–79; Georg Gronau, “Zwei Tizianische Bildnisse der Berliner Galerie,” *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 27 (1906): 3–7.

- [16] For Cook’s opinion, see Herbert Cook, “La collection de Sir Frederick Cook, Visconde de Monserrate,” *Les Arts* no. 44 (August 1905): 5–6. For the Berlin version, see *Gemäldegalerie Berlin: Gesamtverzeichnis der Gemälde* (London, 1986), 175. Painted on a much-reduced scale on panel, this has sometimes been thought to be a copy by El Greco (for instance, by Ellis Waterhouse, “El Greco’s Italian Period,” *Art Studies* 8, pt. 1 [1930]: 70–71, 85), and sometimes by Francesco Salviati, on the basis of an inscription on the back.
- [17] In a note appended to his corresponding entry in the catalog of the Cook collection, Tancred Borenius rejected the portrait, adding that “the slovenly signature is obviously a forgery.” But Cook disagreed, declaring in the same entry, “I cannot share any doubt as to the authenticity of this portrait; unfortunately its condition leaves much to be wished for, and this must explain its failure to command universal recognition.” See Tancred Borenius, *A Catalogue of the Paintings at Doughty House, Richmond, and Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook Bt.*, vol. 1, *Italian Schools*, ed. Herbert Cook (London, 1913), 170.
- [18] Oskar Fischel, *Tizian: Des Meisters Gemälde*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1907), 99, 236; Charles Ricketts, *Titian* (London, 1910), 107 n. 1; Tancred Borenius, *A Catalogue of the Paintings at Doughty House, Richmond, and Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook Bt.*, vol. 1, *Italian Schools*, ed. Herbert Cook (London, 1913), 170; Salomon Reinach, *Répertoire de peintures du moyen âge et de la Renaissance (1280–1580)* (Paris, 1923), 6:245; Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: A List of the Principal Artists and Their Works with an Index of Places* (Oxford, 1932), 574.
- [19] Wilhelm Suida, *Tizian* (Zurich and Leipzig, 1933), 89–90, 103, 165; Hans Tietze, *Tizian: Leben und Werk* (Vienna, 1936), 1:174, 307.
- [20] John Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance* (London and New York, 1966), 279–280, 326.
- [21] David Rosand, *Titian* (New York, 1978), 114.
- [22] Peter Meller, “Il lessico ritrattistico di Tiziano,” in *Tiziano e Venezia: Convegno internazionale di studi (1976)* (Vicenza, 1980), 332.
- [23] Luba Freedman, “Titian’s Portrait of Clarissa Strozzi: The State Portrait of a Child,” *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 39 (1989): 177.
- [24] Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Tiziano* (Florence, 1969), 1:99, 107, 277.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The plainly woven, medium-weight support, which was last lined during conservation treatment in 1948–1950, is covered with an exceptionally thin layer of white ground. The paint is applied in thin, opaque layers throughout, with some low, textured brushwork in the white collar and in the highlights of the sword hilt and belt. Dark, shadowed areas of the face are modeled wet into wet with the flesh paint of the surface and are not, as might be assumed, areas of dark-colored ground left exposed. Examination of the painting with infrared did not reveal any underdrawing, nor did the x-radiographs indicate any major pentimenti, but both infrared reflectography (Vidicon) [1] and x-radiography indicate a slight change in the edge of the right-hand opening of the coat. A gray underpainted layer observed beneath the hand does not appear to exist below the fleshtones of the face.

Close examination of the signature with a binocular microscope did not reveal any cause to question its authenticity. The paint surface suffers from moderate general abrasion, particularly in the face, and elsewhere throughout the composition, the paint is abraded down to the tops of the dark-colored threads of the fabric support. Records indicate that the painting was lined by Stephen Pichetto in 1948 and cleaned and restored by Mario Modestini in 1949–1950.

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination report by Paula De Cristofaro

March 21, 2019

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Infrared reflectography was performed with a Hamamatsu c/1000-03 Vidicon camera and a Kodak Wratten 87A filter.

PROVENANCE

Ranuccio Farnese

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Farnese family, Parma, by 1644;^[1] Farnese family, Palazzo del Giardino, Parma, by 1680;^[2] Farnese family, Palazzo della Pilotta, Parma, by 1708;^[3] by inheritance 1734 to the Bourbon collection, Naples;^[4] Bourbon collection, Palazzo di Capodimonte, Naples, by 1765;^[5] Bourbon collection, Palazzo Francavilla, Naples, by 1802;^[6] Bourbon collection, Palazzo degli Studi, Naples, by 1816.^[7] brought from Naples to London by Sir George Donaldson [1845-1925], London;^[8] sold May 1880 to Sir John Charles Robinson [1824-1913], London; sold to Sir Francis Cook, 1st bt. [1817-1901], Doughty House, Richmond, Surrey, by 1885;^[9] by inheritance to his son, Sir Frederick Lucas Cook, 2nd bt. [1844-1920], Doughty House; by inheritance to his son, Sir Herbert Frederick Cook, 3rd bt. [1868-1939], Doughty House; by inheritance to his son, Sir Francis Ferdinand Maurice Cook, 4th bt. [1907-1978], Doughty House, and Cothay Manor, Somerset; sold June or July 1947 to (Gualtiero Volterra, London) for (Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi, Florence);^[10] sold July 1948 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;^[11] gift 1952 to NGA.

[1] The portrait is recorded in an inventory of the pictures in the Palazzo Farnese drawn up in 1644 as follows: “4324. Un quadro in tela con cornice grande intagliata a basso rilievo et indorata, con il ritratto del S.r cardinale S. Angelo giovanetto con l’habito di Malta, mano di Tiziano.” See Bertrand Jestaz, ed., *L’inventaire du Palais et des propriétés Farnèse à Rome en 1644, Vol. 3, Pt. 3: Le Palais Farnèse*, Rome, 1994: 171. It is again recorded there in an inventory of 1653: see Giuseppe Bertini, *La Galleria del Duca di Parma: Storia di una collezione*, Bologna, 1987: 89.

[2] A Farnese inventory of 1680 describes the picture as follows: “Ritratto di un giovinetto vestito di rosso con sopravveste nera sopra della quale la croce di Cavaliere di Malta: tiene nella destra un guanto di Tiziano.” See: Amadeo Ronchini, “Delle relazioni di Tiziano coi Farnesi,” *Atti e memorie delle RR Deputazioni di Storia Patria per le Provincie Modenesi e Parmensi 2* (1864): 145; Giuseppe Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventarii inediti*, Modena, 1870: 239; Giuseppe Bertini, *La Galleria del Duca di Parma: Storia di una collezione*, Bologna, 1987: 89.

[3] For the Farnese inventory of 1708, see Giuseppe Bertini, *La Galleria del Duca di Parma: Storia di una collezione*, Bologna, 1987: 89. See also *Descrizione per alfabetto di cento quadri de’ più famosi, e dipinti da i piu insigni pittori del modo, che si osservano nella Galleria Farnese di Parma . . .*, Parma[?], 1725: 46.

[4] The Farnese collection was transferred to Naples in 1734, probably initially to the Palazzo Reale, when it was inherited by Charles of Bourbon, king of Naples.

[5] Jérôme de Lalande, *Voyage d'un français en Italie fait dans les années 1765 et 1766*, 8 vols., Paris, 1769: 6:174; see also Giuseppe Sigismondo, *Descrizione della città di Napoli e suoi borghi*, 3 vols., Naples, 1788-1789: 3(1789):48. As pointed out by M. Utili (*I Farnese: Arte e collezionismo*, eds. Lucia Fornari Schianchi and Nicola Spinosa, exh. cat. Palazzo Ducale, Colorno; Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples; Haus der Kunst, Munich; Milan, 1995: 206), the picture was probably transferred from the Palazzo Reale to the Palazzo di Capodimonte as part of the reorganization of the royal collection undertaken by Padre Giovanni Maria della Torre between 1756 and 1764.

[6] A. Filangieri di Candida, "La galleria nazionale di Napoli," *Le gallerie nazionali italiane* 5 (1902): 304, no. 34. As pointed out by M. Utili (see note 5), the picture is probably identical with a "ritratto di giovane di Tiziano," carried off to Rome in 1799 by French troops, together with other pictures from the royal collection, but returned to Naples before 1802.

[7] According to the inventory compiled by Paterno in 1816, quoted by M. Utili (see note 5). The picture appears to have left the Bourbon collection soon afterwards.

[8] According to Tancred Borenius, Sir Francis Cook acquired the painting through Sir George Donaldson. See: Tancred Borenius, *A Catalogue of the Paintings at Doughty House, Richmond, and Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook Bt.: Italian Schools. Vol. I, Pt. 2*, ed. Herbert Cook, London, 1913: 170.

[9] According to Robinson's account book (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; copy of relevant page in NGA curatorial files). Robinson, in "The Gallery of Pictures of Old Masters, formed by Francis Cook, Esq., of Richmond," *The Art Journal* (1885): 136, records the picture in the Cook collection, and reports that it had been "brought to England a few years ago by an Italian gentleman from Naples."

[10] See copy of correspondence in NGA curatorial files, from the Cook Collection Archive in care of John Somerville, England. Volterra was Contini Bonacossi's agent in London. For the formation and dispersal of the Cook collection, see Elon Danziger, "The Cook Collection, Its Founder and Its Inheritors," *The Burlington Magazine* 146 (2004): 444–458.

[11] The Kress Foundation made an offer to Contini Bonacossi on 7 June 1948 for a group of twenty-eight paintings, including Titian's "Portrait of a Boy;" the offer was accepted on 11 July 1948 (see copies of correspondence in NGA curatorial files, see also The Kress Collection Digital Archive, <https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/1760>).

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1976 Zapadnoevropeiskaia i Amerikanskaia zhivopis is muzeev ssha [West European and American Painting from the Museums of USA], State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad; State Pushkin Museum, Moscow; State Museums, Kiev and Minsk, 1976, unpaginated and unnumbered catalogue.

1983 The Genius of Venice 1500-1600, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1983-1984, no. 121, repro.

1990 Tiziano [NGA title: Titian: Prince of Painters], Palazzo Ducale, Venice; National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1990-1991, no. 33, repro.

1994 A Gift to America: Masterpieces of European Painting from the Samuel H. Kress Collection, four venues, 1994-1995, no. 2, repro. (shown only at first two venues: North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston).

1995 I Farnese: Arte e Collezionismo, Palazzo Ducale di Colorno, Parma; Haus der Kunst, Munich; Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples, 1995-1996, no. 26, repro. (shown only in Munich and Naples).

2003 Titian, The National Gallery, London; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 2003, no. 25 (English catalogue), no. 22 (Spanish catalogue), reprints.

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2013 Tiziano, Scuderie del Quirinale, Rome, 2013, no. 22, repro.

2015 Loan for display with permanent collection, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, 2015.

2021 Remember Me: Renaissance Portraits, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2021, fig. 37, repro.

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